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Oral history interview with Gene Crain, 1999 March 7-May 22

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with E. Gene Crain on March 7, 20, 21 and May 22, 1999. The interview took place in Newport Beach, CA, and was conducted by Susan M. Anderson for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

Tape 1, side A [session 1, tape 1; 30-minute tape sides]

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. An interview with Gene Crain on March 7, 1999, at his office in Newport Beach. The interviewer is Susan Anderson. This is Tape 1, Side 1. Mr. Crain, where I think it'd be good for us to begin is for you to tell me about your family background. And maybe you could start by saying when and where you were born.

E. GENE CRAIN: I am one of two children born to Ernest and Minnie Crain. I was born in Oklahoma in 1934. My parents were both teachers. My mother taught at a combined grammar school that had eight classes in it. And my father taught at a college in Weatherford, Oklahoma. And my sister was born in about 1937. And we were the only two children in that family. My father met my mother for the first time when she was his high school teacher. My mother was a very, very ambitious person who loved knowledge, as just a concept, an amorphous thing. She was crazy about learning things. My father, all he ever really wanted to do was be a farmer. But he was a very, very bright man. Got his doctorate degree at Oklahoma State, then Oklahoma University, and finished up his career in Santa Ana, California at Santa Ana College. My mother was a principal at Newport Beach in Costa Mesa until she finished up her career. She was the first female principal of a grammar school in the Newport/Mesa, Newport Beach, Costa Mesa area.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Now where did your ancestors come from?

E. GENE CRAIN: I have no idea.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Really?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah. I have no idea in the world. As far back as I go is my grandparents on either side. And they were from places like New Mexico, Arkansas and Oklahoma.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: When did your family first come to southern California then and why?

E. GENE CRAIN: Good question. My father, as I said, was a teacher at a college in Weatherford, Oklahoma called Southwestern. On December 7, 1941 the Japanese invaded Pearl Harbor or bombed Pearl Harbor. One of my father's peers at the college at which he taught had fought in World War I and had kept up his reserve. And his reserve was in the Air Corp. Not the Air Force. But then it was the Army Air Corp. And when December 7th hit they made him a major immediately and dragged him the next day, almost literally, out of the college at which he was teaching with my father and took him to Santa Ana, California. Because they were instituting or working very hard to make very quick, a pre-flight airbase for cadets who were learning how to fly planes, bombers, Army, Air Force planes. He came out here and he was not here long before he called my father, who was a good friend, and said, "Ernie, they are paying twice as much for civilian teachers to teach Air Force kids, draftees, volunteers, who are going to go fight in World War II. You can make twice as much money out here as you're making teaching college back there. All you have to do is teach these kids how to recognize planes." Well, my father didn't know anything about that. But by May of 1942 he was here at Santa Ana -- Santa Ana Army Airbase -- which is where Orange Coast College is now. Few people remember that at its height it had 35,000 permanent personnel including cadets that were passing through. You can get some ideas if you know what you're looking for. You can still see some of the remnants of the old Santa Ana Army Airbase, which was one of the three largest pre-flight schools in the country. My mother finished up her contract working as this teacher of many grades in Oklahoma. And as soon as school was over she packed me and my sister and we came to California in 1942, and we've been here ever since.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And you were how old then?

E. GENE CRAIN: Eight years old.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And where did you attend school then?

E. GENE CRAIN: When I came to southern California, the city of Costa Mesa had exactly 1100 people in it. The

city of Newport Beach, greater Newport Beach, including all the things east and west had 5,000 people. There was one grammar school in Newport, in Costa Mesa, which is where we lived. My parents bought the third nicest house in Costa Mesa and five and a half acres of land, and they paid $2,500 for the whole thing. And one of my earliest memories of California is watching them agonize over whether or not they wanted to go into debt to buy this. But they eventually did, and bought the place. I attended grammar school at Limbourg School, which was the only grammar school then. And I found out that I wasn't supposed to be a third grader because all the stuff that they were teaching in third grade I had already had in Oklahoma. So I went to the intermediate school in Costa Mesa. And after graduating from there in 1947 I attended Harbor High, which was the only high school in the area. When I entered Harbor in 1947, September, there were 700 students in the school, and when I graduated four years later there were 1,000. There were no other high schools south of Santa Ana or north of Newport Beach.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, do you remember what it was like when you were about eight when you came?

E. GENE CRAIN: Oh, yeah. Oh, I remember.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: What was it like then?

E. GENE CRAIN: I am cursed with a memory that, not only that I can remember a lot of things, but I like to remember. What it was like then was fog, lots of fog, orange groves, tremendous amounts of orange groves, lima beans and sugar beets. And lots and lots and lots of open spaces. In 1957 I remember being astounded at my then boss, who owned a malt shop (no it was 1954) and he was building a home in Corona Del Mar, and everything cost $35,000. The home, the land, the plans, the turnkey. I thought the man is crazy. How could anybody spend this much money? The reason I bring this up was I remember distinctly thinking that you could have bought the whole city of Costa Mesa in 1947, or '56 or '57 in that era, you could have bought the whole city of Costa Mesa for $35,000. There weren't very many people. But it was very rustic. As a matter of fact, it wasn't even called Costa Mesa. It had another name. And it was just a dot on the map. The thing that made Costa Mesa, Costa Mesa, and the thing that made Southern California, so much of Southern California, particularly Orange County what it is today, is World War II. The people would come here and pass through at either the El Toro Base, Santa Ana Army Airbase, Camp Pendelton, San Diego, Los Angeles, the military bases that were around, pass through, and say, "This is a whole lot better in December and January and February than is Syracuse, New York." So back they would come here. And as a result it's just expanded. Costa Mesa incorporated in about 1951, '50, '51, '52, and it had 12,500 people.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, in your early education did you have art instruction?

E. GENE CRAIN: Very little. Very, very little. All my teachers in grammar school are people who now have high, or have grammar schools named after them; Maude Kennedy, Davis, McNalley. All of those people. Ray. They were all my teachers. And it was kind of a set curriculum. You always had your art. I have totally no talent as a performing artist. I took piano lessons for about 17 years. But as far drawing or figures or anything like that, the only thing I had was seventh and eighth grade art appreciation. And I took nothing at Harbor High. No art courses at all. I was involved in drama at Harbor High. But I had that and the regular curriculum and sports activities was all I had. I had no capacity at all to do anything of a drawing or performance- making nature, anything having to do with art.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Were you interested in it then? Or what was your big interest then?

E. GENE CRAIN: Nothing. My big interest then was baseball, as it is today. And until I was about a sophomore in high school, I had taken piano lessons since I was almost preschool. But I was so interested in baseball that I couldn't play the kind of music that I was playing on the piano and also play baseball because my fingers would get calloused up. And so my mother looked at me after all these years and said, "Well, you're going to have to make a choice. Will it be piano or baseball?" And in no time at all I made the choice. So that was that. I was a good student. I was able to get most of the academics done very well. And I was just a typical kid going through high school.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, did you know any artists when you were young?

E. GENE CRAIN: No, none at all. The, the people that I eventually became aware of and acquainted with, friends with, and almost part of my family, they were all around in high school at Harbor High when I was attending. They had instituted the Harbor High Art Show, to which artists were invited to participate and have showings. And there were two purchase awards, one modern and one traditional each year. And that started, I'm guessing, in about 1948, and continued until about 1962. And as a result of those purchases the Ruth Fleming collection at Harbor High is there. And it is wonderful. And it was in large part made up of the work of artists that I didn't know anything about, but later became people that, in my opinion, help define Southern California as a distinct part of the country.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Were those paintings on view in the library and such? And did you see them?

E. GENE CRAIN: The exhibition. The exhibition was on view. And I saw them each year until I started law school. I would go by just to see the exhibition and take a look to see what had been picked as a winning painting, but I have no recollection whatsoever of the artists or who they were. They were people born in the late teens, so in 1946 they were, you know, in their thirties and forties. And they were very important people, and they were past their salad days certainly. But they were active artists, and were people who appreciated, either instinctively or by design, what was unique about Southern California in the late forties and early fifties. As they had learned to appreciate what was distinctive about Southern California and all of their public career, both before the Newport Harbor Art Show and after. These people that were exhibiting then were people who were instinctively aware of the uniqueness of the situation that we had in Southern California.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Now would these have been the generation of the watercolorists?

E. GENE CRAIN: Absolutely. I'm talking about people such as Zornes, Joaquin Smith, Brandt, Sheets. I'm talking about every one of the ones that you would think of when you think of water-based media, people who were very, very active, either as jurors or exhibitors, simply because they lived here.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Now did your class take part in purchasing the work? Do you remember that? And were you involved in that?

E. GENE CRAIN: The class didn't do it. The school did it.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Okay.

E. GENE CRAIN: And the awards were modest by today's standard, but they were pretty good by those standards. A couple of hundred dollars purchase price. One for a "modern painting" and the other for the more traditional painting. And as a result of that some really excellent work by the artists, that subsequently I've become involved with and formed the basis of my collection, are also the basis of the Ruth Fleming collection.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, it sounds like even though you might not have remembered that you had seen that work at Harbor High, perhaps when you met up with it again through Rex Brandt or . . .

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: That it was part of your environment.

E. GENE CRAIN: I suppose. And I do have recollection of Harbor High School with the great murals of the inside patio and things of that nature. But really more important than anything else as far as my early interest in art, was the fact that I went to Claremont. I went to Pomona College in Claremont. And there was a very active group of Southern California artists. Particularly at Scripps College where Millard Sheets had come in the mid to late thirties and had brought Phil Dike away from the Disney Studio. And they were absolutely entrenched and were already legends. They became important both in the thirties and then after the war was over. But they were up there. Milford Zornes was at Pomona when I was there. Millard had left. Dike was still there. The Ames people [Jean and Arthur Ames] were there at Scripps. Marvelous artists. And then the ceramicists were there. And they had brought in people like Roger Kuntz and Robert E. Wood. They were students at the Claremont colleges. I became even more aware of this stuff when I was at Pomona. Having had a shot of it at Harbor with the, with the start of the Newport Harbor Art Show that began, I'm almost sure, about 1947 or '48.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: So you were aware of, of those people being there?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Out at Pomona when you were a student?

E. GENE CRAIN: I'm not saying that they were important parts of my life. I took the art appreciation courses because Pomona College is one of these things where it says, "A liberal education requires that you be able to speak a foreign language, do math problems and appreciate art and music and things of that nature." So I had some concept that Renaissance art was after the early art and I had, like everybody else, had a love affair with the 19th-century French and things of that nature. But it wasn't anything that had in the least bit become a part of my life. I hadn't shut out anything else because of art.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, who do you think, just going back a little bit, who do you think had the most influence on you while you were growing up in your really early years? Did you have any kind of a mentor or . . .?

E. GENE CRAIN: Absolutely. I know what that word means, and I use it consciously. The mentors of my life were my drama teacher at Harbor High, a guy named Bob Wentz. And my English teacher for two years at Harbor

High, a lady named Roscine Feeley. And they, they were indeed Renaissance people. And they expanded my horizons. Not into necessarily the field of art, but they opened up horizons for me to think about other things. Politics, our place in history, geography, all kinds of things that I found to be very, very interesting. I had a very good background in music, because of my piano lessons which had gone on forever. I was playing decent things. I was playing Chopin and I was playing a little Rachmaninoff as well as other less imposing things. So I had a decent background in music. But these two people, Bob Wentz and Roscine Feeley, were, and remain the most important mentors I've ever had in my life.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And did you stay in touch with them through the years?

E. GENE CRAIN: Absolutely. Ros Feeley just died within the last two or three years. And after I got back to California she became a very, very close friend, a very close friend. And she was a cross-over person. She knew all these artists. She was close to these artists. Because her nature was such that she involved herself in everything. Ros Feeley would be a person who not only was a significant teacher of English, but she would go up and read books to Hollywood producers because she was able to take on the characters to see if they could make movies out of them. She was just an incredibly talented human being. And somebody that made a young teenager just in awe of her.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, it sounds like you had a very good grounding in humanities. If not directly in the arts.

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah, I would say that. That's, that's a fair statement.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And were your parents, because they were both teachers, were they also interested in the humanities?

E. GENE CRAIN: Not really. I don't know what my parents were interested in. I know my mother just had a hunger for learning. She got her Master's, she got as far as her Master's degree at USC. As I say, my father had his Doctorate's degree from the University of Oklahoma.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And were those both in education?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yes. Hm-hmm. My parent's main focus in their life was the Baptist religion. Being southerners or quasi- southerners, they were very, very religious people. I had a tremendous background in, in religion. From as young as I possibly can remember I was dragged to church, so I had a good background in religion. I had a good background in music. And a good background in general academics. But no particular background, other than I've talked so far in art.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: It sounds like you had a fairly religious upbringing.

E. GENE CRAIN: A very, very, very strictly religious upbringing. It took me until I was well into my high school years to avoid going to church at least three times a week. And boy, was I glad when I was able to avoid going to church three times a week.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: By then you were going once a week or . . .?

E. GENE CRAIN: I was going not at all. If I could keep from going. I probably can out-bible a whole lot of people who are very biblical. But I reject a great deal of religious stuff now. And I have no interest, other than an academic interest in, in anything of a religious nature.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: So at a certain point did you rebel against it? Well, is there anything in your education or upbringing that you think prepared you for your avocation as a collector? Anything in particular?

E. GENE CRAIN: Sure. Probably the most interesting thing that happened to me was after I finished law school. I went to law school for one reason and one reason only. I did not want to die in Korea. And they were taking people and making them plane people in Korea. And I was looking for a way to avoid going to Korea. And I looked for a law school because it had the longest possibility of deferment.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Really?

E. GENE CRAIN: I had a Woodrow Wilson scholarship to Princeton, but it was only for one year. I could have taken that, but I didn't. And instead I took a scholarship to the University of Chicago Law School because it was three years. And I finished law school there and took a job at Borg Warner Corporation. Well, the interesting thing about Borg Warner was it was right directly across the street at Adams and Michigan Boulevard from the world's great museum, The Art Institute of Chicago. And I wasn't making very much money, but I didn't care. I didn't have to have a lot of money. But just for the sheer heck of it I started spending a lot of time at The Art Institute. You were supposed to donate a quarter, but nobody did much to you if you didn't. So I would just go in many,

many, many days and go in and look. With no background at all. I had no idea what I was looking for. But I do have memories, for example, of Nighthawks being hung over a door some place. (The Rey Hopper picture that Chicago had at a tilted angle and nobody paying any particular attention to it.) This was in the mid fifties. Because I got out of law school in '58. And I would go there, and of course, found some of the original pictures (because they have such a superb collection of 19th century French, particularly impressionists) of things that I'd remembered seeing the slides of when I was at Pomona. And I became really fascinated. And I would buy little pictures for $15 or $20 from artists that had some of that impressionist view. I think that I finally came back to California to stay in 1960. I brought maybe four paintings that I had purchased in Chicago with me.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And now what were these paintings?

E. GENE CRAIN: Nothing. They were just the collective things that I liked.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Impressionist style?

E. GENE CRAIN: Sort of. Sort of impressionist. They weren't really very good paintings. But as far as I was concerned they had two things that interested me; one, I kind of reacted to them, and the second thing was they were cheap.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And where did you get them on the campus of The Art Institute, or . . .?

E. GENE CRAIN: I lived on the south side, near the University of Chicago. And I'd go around to these street fairs and see these particular artists and see something that I liked, that reminded me of something. But I did react. I reacted very, very positively to, to the great Seurat painting at Chicago, which is still my favorite painting in the whole world. I never, ever get within a 1000 miles of Chicago that I don't go by and see it. And I liked the El Grecos. And, I mean, and just the whole thing was fairly overwhelming. And I don't know why it was overwhelming, because I had no background with it at all. It just was fun to look at and it was cheap.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And did you just wander in by yourself?

E. GENE CRAIN: Hm-hmm. Yes.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And just kind of developed your own relationship with it?

E. GENE CRAIN: That's right. I would go sometimes on Saturday and spend two or three hours. But more realistically I'd be eating lunch. I would go across the street and spend an hour at The Art Institute three or four times a week.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: How lucky that you were so close.

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah, yeah. People do not understand what a wonderful museum that is. They say, "Oh, The Art Institute." But my goodness, the background of The Art Institute and its collection of 19th century French paintings is just remarkable. I've never seen anything like it since the Jeu de Paume in Paris as far as impressionism is concerned. The background of the museum is kind of interesting. There were a bunch of meat packers, Swift, Armor and a bunch of other people, who had made a lot of money killing cattle and the rest of it, and this and that and the other thing. They had a lot of money. And one of the people they hired to help them make the collection, what became The Art Institute's collection, was Mary Cassatt. And Mary Cassatt bought paintings she liked. Now she wasn't the only one, there were other ways that it happened. But I've always found it fascinating, the fact that somebody thought this American person was decent in what she could do. So she was given authority to buy the paintings of her friends. Or to buy paintings, and she bought the paintings of her friends. And eventually that became the supplemental core of the 19th century French. The rest of it, of course, is just great art that Chicago as a second city would be very interested in trying to collect because of its efforts to keep up. And always worrying, particularly in those days, always worrying about the influence of New York and why they should be considered the second city.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, it sounds like you had some recognition of certain paintings already when you went there from, from your days at Pomona, the art appreciation class?

E. GENE CRAIN: I suppose, Susan. It's very hard to say. And I'll tell you why. Because you get mixed up. You don't know which came first. The recognition of paintings that you'd seen before or, or seeing paintings and saying, "Well, I must have seen this before." I don't know. I truly, firmly believe that there is no greater joy than seeing something that you've seen before or hearing great music that you have heard before and recognizing it. By the time I came back to California I think art, the viewing of art and seeing a lot of it, was of importance to me. I liked doing it, because having no ability to compose, or to design, or to paint, the one thing that I learned was that the more you see the more you're able to connect with what's good and what's bad simply as a comparative thing. You see? Well, this is wonderful compared to that. And so if you're going to say this is

wonderful as compared to that, then you absolutely must see a great deal. I think in many ways it's been very helpful to me not to be able to put two sticks together and draw a horse, because I've had to rely on my eye, though I don't have a particularly good one. I've had to rely on ear, and I do have a good ear. And I've had to rely on comparison. I've gone to museums all over, all kinds of museums between here and Chicago. And of course, all of the museums in New York. And I just look and try as hard as I can to think about other things that I have seen, to see which is good and which is better. The best work I've ever seen was a Seurat, which is just overwhelming. Of course, that's all I'm talking about here . . .

Tape 1, Side B [session 1, tape 1; 30-minute tape side]

E. GENE CRAIN: . . . the view of the country became the thing that I like to look at most. Although, you know, you can see great Picassos, and things of this nature, particularly the stuff in Chicago. But the thing that influenced me, I think that got to me first, was landscape, I think. Seurat's landscape, El Greco's landscape. And then this stuff that I have collected over the years has been typically landscape. Although not exclusively.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, would you say when you were growing up in Orange County and you were surrounded a lot by fields, agricultural fields and such, that you also had a sense of nature? Of being in nature? Were you attracted to that?

E. GENE CRAIN: No, not particularly. I just was aware of the openness of everything. But as far as the land itself was concerned, that all came back when I returned to California from Chicago and was able then to watch what was happening. I mean, I was not criticizing the fact that the fields were gone, the orange trees were gone, houses were springing up, condominiums were coming in, views were being shortened. I wasn't critical of it, but I was aware that changes were really occurring and had occurred between 1950 and 1960. The most important year, I think, the most important year for anybody to think about in the country, particularly in California, would be 1949. Because before 1949 it was a peculiar kind of world. After 1949 the whole focus changed. It changed between '49 and '59 or '60. And then people know what happened in the sixties as things opened up. The decade of the fifties was a transition. But '49 and before was something you could predict. It was there and you could see it and you could know with some certainty what was going to go on. From '50 to '60 tremendous change. And that was what I saw when in 1960 I returned to California. Because you have to remember that most of the time between 1955 and 1960 I spent in Chicago.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: So it was probably sort of a shock when you came back then? If that much change had occurred?

E. GENE CRAIN: I don't, I don't remember it being a shock. I just remember it being, boy, this is something.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Noticeable.

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah. Absolutely apparent. It was very apparent. And it didn't bother me one way or the other. I was not aware of anything environmental necessarily then. That came much later.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And did you expect change? I mean, was change on the horizon when you left?

E. GENE CRAIN: No. I expected nothing. To expect change would have been to think in terms of philosophical development that I wasn't capable of. I was always a couple of years younger because I didn't go to kindergarten. I went directly to first grade and then I skipped third grade. So I was always two years younger than my peers, my peer group. And in many respects, I didn't think about great, great issues. I'm reminded of one thing that Dike told me many, many, many years later. We were sitting up and Phil and I were going through the kind of thing that you're talking about now, and I was, of course, taking the lead on him to try to find out some things. And I remembered Dike interrupted the conversation and laughed. I said, "What's funny?" Or words to that effect. And he said, "You know, Crain, when you and I get together we talk about philosophy and great issues." He said, "When Brandt and I get together we talk about the cost of paint." And I cannot say that when I was back from Chicago, I had any notice of the environment. That it was just changed. Here I have lived since 1942 and I literally could not find my way around, when I got back in 1960. It had grown up so much. There were so many new developments. So many little towns all around Southern California. People who had found it in World War II had just come back and said, "This is where I want to live."

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, I probably should ask you a little bit more about your years at Pomona. Do you remember what year you started there then?

E. GENE CRAIN: I started in September 1951 and graduated in June 1955.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And you were not in any kind of pre-law? You didn't know you were going to be a lawyer at that point?

E. GENE CRAIN: That's right. I had a triple major. I majored in economics, government and history, which was what I was good at. I was terrible in math, biology and physical sciences. I still am. Didn't care for it at all.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Were you preparing yourself for a particular . . .?

E. GENE CRAIN: Absolutely nothing. If I thought that I was going to do anything it would probably be involved somewhere in the teaching background. Because my whole family, extended family, my uncles, my aunts tended to be in education.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Rather than in business or something?

E. GENE CRAIN: That's correct. I have no business background at all by anybody.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Actually that sort of occurred to me when you said that you had no concept of this change that was on the horizon. It would seem that a family that was oriented towards business or real estate or something like that, you might have been more attuned to that.

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah. No lima beans, no sugar beets, just houses. And they were interesting houses too. They had houses that cost four or five, $6,000 in the mid fifties. And they were well put together. And we all thought in the fifties, when I would come home to visit, and the sixties when I got back here, we all thought this was a good thing. This was progress. This was wonderful. Who cared about all that dirt? Who cared about the Back Bay? Who cared about the coast line? Nobody that I knew. Now the artists themselves may have had a concept of it, but I don't think they had the concept of the importance of the environment, the uniqueness of that which was Southern California at that time. They may have felt it. They may have had some sort of gut reaction that said it was there. But from my conversations with them, they were just enjoying themselves. Like Emil Kosa, Kosa once told Rex Brandt in my presence, he said, "Brandt, this is just absolutely crazy. I can work five days a week. I can come home and go out on Saturday, paint this thing and I can sell it for $100. Have you ever heard of anything so crazy?" You know, they had things that were interesting to them but I don't think that they were interested necessarily in great philosophical issues. Of what was happening to the land or that the land should be protected. They just had a lot of camaraderie. They never had to worry about money coming in. They were always able to make a living thanks to Disney and the studios. So many of these people could get jobs at Disney from the 1930s on. And so the Depression never really hit these artists. The Depression never really hit Southern California.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: In the same way it did other places?

E. GENE CRAIN: Exactly. A lot of people came here, particularly late in the thirties, this is well known, because of devastation, absolute devastation to the part of the world that I came from. My father would have rather voted for Adolph Hitler than any Republican. He hated Republicans with a passion, just a passion beyond notice. Because his job as a college person from 1934, when I was born to the time he came to California, was to go around and see the effect of the Depression on all of the country that he was involved in and see what had happened to human beings. And he rightly or wrongly blamed the Republicans for this. And to the day he died he detested Republicans. Anybody who would style themselves a Republican was just terrible to him because of the things that he had seen. And that had some influence on me, my background, although I didn't know it. My background in the southwestern part, in Oklahoma and that part of the world, I think it probably has influenced me more than I know in how I approach a lot of things, approach the land and things. But it took awhile to get to that.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, do you remember the so-called Depression years in Oklahoma?

E. GENE CRAIN: They were wonderful for me. I was just a kid growing up. Oh, yeah. I remember them. I had no problems at all. We had nothing. There were times that my parents didn't get their paychecks in teaching. But it didn't bother me.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And were you in a rural area? Where were you?

E. GENE CRAIN: We were in a place 75 miles south of, west of Oklahoma City. A little south and west in a college town. And the only thing I wanted was a nickel on Saturday to go to the movies. I was an avid movie goer. I knew every movie that was ever made because with the exception of Gone With the Wind, which lasted too long, my parents let me go to every movie that came in to the movie theater. I could go on Saturday. I had a wonderful time during the Depression. But that was because I was born in '34 so the Depression lasted until what? '41. So that was just seven years. And, and I didn't want for anything because everything was relative. Comparing my life to everybody else's life, they were just the same.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And perhaps your parent's life didn't change that much either being that they both had jobs?

E. GENE CRAIN: I don't know what they went through. They were fairly introspective people. One of my major regrets is that I didn't sit my parents down and find out some of the things that I now wish I knew about their and my early years. So that if nothing else I could just put a timeline on when I did this, when I did that, when something else happened.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Did they both pass away then?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah. My father died in 1988 and my mother died two or three years before that.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And had you ever asked them about your background for example?

E. GENE CRAIN: Regretfully, no. I should have. I just didn't take the time. I wasn't as interested as I am now. Life has speeded up in many respects now. But in many respects also it's slowing down so that I can be interested in things about me, about the country, about the environment, about what it was like. The older you get the faster time goes.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, it's interesting that you ended up in California in a way, where there was so much about the so-called Okies and their treatment here, Vis-a-vis the movie.

E. GENE CRAIN: Grapes of Wrath.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Grapes of Wrath, or the book.

E. GENE CRAIN: Well, I can't say that wasn't a part of me. I was very sensitive to that even as late as 1942 when I got here. I was sensitive to the fact of the Okie tradition, and this, that and the other thing. And I was somewhat reluctant to say that I was from Oklahoma as a young person. Because it was still the object of, you know, some basic laughter, or some sort of put down, or something of that nature. But it was just the kind of thing that every youngster will go through.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And yet your father, it sounds like your father had a real, heart-felt passion in a way, about . . .

E. GENE CRAIN: He certainly did.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: . . . the people that came here escaping all of that.

E. GENE CRAIN: Not necessarily that came here. The people that he saw when he was there.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: That he saw. Right.

E. GENE CRAIN: And who couldn't come here. Who couldn't do anything. He never forgot that. Henry Ford, the Rockefellers, Hoover, people of that nature who he felt were insensitive to what was happening. I mean, people literally were dying in Arkansas. Had nothing to eat. Yet too many people had too much. I'm not going to say my father was a communist or even a socialist or anything like that. But he knew instinctively, because he was a well-educated man, even though he became educated fighting it all the way, he knew instinctively that there was something wrong. There was something wrong with too much being given to too few, and the few who had so much not having any compassion for the people who had so little. Of course there was none of that in Orange County when we got here, because I don't think the Depression ever touched Orange County.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: It wasn't so much the haves and have nots?

E. GENE CRAIN: No. Mostly it was have nots, and the haves kept quiet. It's all relative, all relative, Susan. Having a lot then was not like having a lot now. Having a lot in those days was being on a fixed pension so that you knew you were going to get your money and you could hire people to hang your laundry and clean your house for a dollar a week or something like that. And you knew that the pension was coming in. But there was nothing fanciful. Newport Beach and all of the Newport Beach environment was mainly a summer attraction for people of great wealth. Mainly movie people and people out of Los Angeles. And they would come down and spend the summer. Then they would go home. But the permanent people who were here were much different from the people in Costa Mesa, economically they were more advantaged than the people in Costa Mesa. It didn't make that much difference. When I was in high school, I was aware that there was economically disadvantaged people attending high school, simply because the girls had to wear uniforms. They would wear blue skirts and sweaters or white blouses. But the boys, the men, the boys with whom I hung out, there was no difference at all.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Was it while you were studying at Pomona that you realized you wanted to be a lawyer?

E. GENE CRAIN: I realized I wanted to be a lawyer at Pomona one day in February of the year that I graduated. I was going across the street for my doughnut before I went to the gym to shoot some baskets. And I had a

basketball. I remember it distinctly. I said, "Okay, I'm going to go to law school." I had no background in law. Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Other than the fact that I wanted to stay out of Korea. And I said, "Okay. I think I'll go to law school." The Law School of the University of Chicago. Very conservative place. I was taught by three people who eventually became Attorneys General for the United States. I was taught by a very young fellow named Bork who was a controversial person. He was one of the brightest people I ever met. But they were all bright. The faculty there was just tremendous. But again, I was young. You know, I was only twenty years old. And I had no idea that they were bright or anything like that. I just went along for the ride. Signed up and went to my courses.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: So you had made a decision and then you just followed through on it?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah. And I . . .

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And you didn't find it particularly difficult. Did you find it interesting though? Were you happy that you had gone in that direction?

E. GENE CRAIN: I found it interesting. Work, it was hard. It was very, very hard. When you major in things like government, history and economics in the undergraduate school your thinking becomes fairly sloppy. You read things like you were reading articles of "The Saturday Evening Post" or something. I found that Chicago in law school, particularly at the law school in Chicago, that you can't read that way. And to this day I read so slowly. It takes me forever to read anything. I had to completely turn my way of thinking around because law is such a discipline of things. And you have to think about all those things. It was very difficult, being a sloppy thinker, to try to become a more precise thinker. Although I did all right. I did well in law school eventually. By the time my third year rolled around it was a piece of cake. I knew exactly what was required.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, when you came back you established your law practice here?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yes. Pretty much. I worked for perhaps a year for various people -- a law firm, Douglas Aircraft, Ford Aeroneutronic. But none of those lasted. And I opened up in 1961, October of 1961. I just said, "This is ridiculous." And I just opened up the practice then.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: No partners?

E. GENE CRAIN: No partners. Never have had a partner in my life. Just always been a one person practice.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And did you go directly into divorce law?

E. GENE CRAIN: Gosh, no. I would take anything that would walk in the door. I mean, I was just looking to make a buck. You know, ten bucks an hour, five dollars an hour. Whatever would come in. If it was divorce, fine. Adoption, fine. Corporation, drunk driving. You name it I would take it just in order to try to establish myself. There was some advantage I suppose to the fact that in 1962 I had lived in Southern California the bulk of the time since 1942. So I knew some people. And my parent's church people would come to see me. And I would still attend church because a) it made my mother happy, and b) it gave me some contacts. And then I had some business contacts. In those days if you made $100 a day you could pay your bills and still have a little bit of profit, if you're trying to make $3,000 a month gross. And it was not until about 1976 or '77 that I decided that I wasn't going to do anything except family law and estate planning. Which is what I've done since that time.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: I see.

E. GENE CRAIN: So from '62 to '75, six, seven, you name it, I did it. I was an expert at anything that you had a problem with.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And were you one of few lawyers in the area?

E. GENE CRAIN: There were not many. There were very few. There are more lawyers now in almost any town you could name than there were in the whole County of Orange when I started in 1962. My bar number is 30,335. The bar number now for California is 200,000. So from 1962 until now the bar has gone from 30,000 people who were lawyers in California, or ever had been lawyers in California to 200,000. My office, off the subject just a little bit, but it might show you what a gigantic leap. There is a wonderful gentleman named Hal Hogan. I was born in 1934. He was a practicing lawyer in California four years before I was born, and he is still active. And his bar number is in the 13,000s. So from 1930 to 1962 it went from 13,000 to 30,000. And from 1962 to 2000 it's gone up to 200,000. Too many lawyers. That's another thing that I can talk about.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, did you just discover that that was a need? Is that why you went into family law?

E. GENE CRAIN: No, I found that I had a case involving an attorney in Long Beach who was a lawyer and I represented his wife. And when I finally finished that case I had done everything that it was possible to do in a

family law context, because he was such a jerk. It was just a horrible, horrible case. But I'd done everything that you're supposed to do in family law. And I said, "Well, I might as well keep on doing it." That was, that was the genesis of it.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, being a lawyer must be an extremely demanding profession to be in. And time consuming.

E. GENE CRAIN: Susan, I don't know when it was that I became aware that (and I don't mean this to sound stupid or anything) the law had the capacity to help people. It really did. I mean, very early in my private practice back in the sixties, lawyers were thought of as being good people. People who weren't trying to rob you blind. People who could help. To do that it takes an incredible amount of time. I have suffered in many areas of my life because being a sole practitioner and being somebody who learned that you should try to help people as an attorney. You should try to earn the money they pay you by being some help to them and paying attention to their problems. That it has just been a terrible demand of my time. Some areas of my personal life have probably suffered on account of it simply because with a one person practice you do it yourself. And I still feel the same way 40 years later. I still feel that I'm around here to try to help people. I don't mean to sound supercilious or anything. I certainly don't mean to sound puffy. But I really do have this ingrained idea that if people are going to pay you to do the work that you ought to try to help them, not just rob them. There are too many people around who are looking just to get the money and not to try to help the people that they've taken the money from. And even now, I'm approaching the end of my career as a lawyer, I never have the feeling I should take somebody's money and not try to help them. That's fairly well ingrained in me. And I will let other aspects of my personal life take a second place for the needs of my clients. I really do. And I think I have a reputation in the area in which I work with my peers. I'm pleased that I have the reputation. I'm pleased that I can do it that way. That I can feel that way towards people. But my kind of practice, divorce practice, is such that people always come to you and they're in a miserable situation. And if I can help them and make them feel a little better, and hold hands with them and hug them a little bit and make, make their things go well. And, you know, and with the rest of their life. And give them an understanding why divorce isn't necessarily such a bad thing relative to what they were doing before. And blah, blah, blah. 90, 85 to 90 percent of the people I feel I have helped.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: That's wonderful. Well, it sounds like in spite of you helping people you still have a lot of stresses involved in that. And have you felt that art has been a help in sort of balancing your life?
Tape 2, Side A [session 1, tape 2; 10 minutes]

E. GENE CRAIN: What I learned to do recently is remove myself from my client's problems. I used to identify with them and lose sleep and it was just dreadful. But I have learned gradually to the point now where I very seldom take a client's problem home with me and let it interfere with my life. But, yes, I would say that the interest that I had developed commencing in about 1963 in the art of Southern California, and the art of the west coast, and the art of artists who made a reputation on the west coast, even though they may have had many backgrounds on the east coast, has been something that's opened up an area for me that otherwise I would never, ever have known anything about. And now I know something about it. I know enough about it to know that I don't know very much about it. But then it was Einstein who said that "Nobody ever lived who knew one one millionth of one percent about anything." And I'm aware that I don't. But I am also aware that it's been very fulfilling to me because it's given me an aesthetic that otherwise there's no way I could have had. So, the answer to your question is, yeah, it's just been a path taken that if I hadn't taken that path, I would have had to do something else. Maybe drank a lot. I don't know.

[Laughter]

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Had, had you had a hobby before that? Was there anything that had occupied your, your time?

E. GENE CRAIN: I'm an inveterate collector. I had a wine collection, a coin collection, a record collection. I loved baseball. I probably know as much about baseball since 1946 as anybody alive that doesn't do it for a living. Yeah, I had a lot of interests.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: So you were already developing collections in other areas?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yes. I sure did. Particularly my interest in baseball, which was just overwhelming since 1946, and that's something I could do fairly well. And then later on my son became an incredibly good baseball player.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: How lucky for you.

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah. And, so that more than any given thing since 1946 has been a constant through my life, my just fanatic interest in baseball.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, you know, this is probably a good point for you to tell me something about your

family. Such as when you met Mrs. Crain, your children, things like that.

E. GENE CRAIN: I was going to school at, I was just taking classes, University of California, Irvine. And the class was biblical history or something. I thought it would be very interesting. I had my choice of either going to class or playing bridge with some friends. And I said, "Well, I've signed up for it." So I went to class. And Diane, my wife, was sitting there between two nuns, she too was taking the class. And she was incredibly pretty. A little blonde, perky, heart-shaped face. I remember it. And as much as anything else -- this goes back to what I told you before about -- as much as anything else to show off or impress her I got in an argument with the teacher. But I had had a pretty good background in all of this stuff. And I had had a lot of education courses. And I finally just got fed up with the teacher and his nonsense that he was yelling. And so I got in a huge argument with him, and back and forth. And everybody was sitting and looking. And Diane was furious with me. She didn't know who I was, but she was furious with that person who was arguing with this person that she had taken Shakespeare classes from. He was an ancient man. He may have known Shakespeare as far I know. But she had had lots of course with him and done very well. And she later told me that during the midst of my argument with this idiot teacher that she had told the nuns sitting next to her, "Why this person is just a dreadful person. Why doesn't he shut up?" And both the nuns had said, "We agree with everything he's saying."

[Laughter]

E. GENE CRAIN: So I met Diane. Mostly I got in the argument just to impress her or something. It's hard to remember. But I made a point of meeting Diane and I asked her if she would go to my house in Corona Del Mar and have a cup of tea. And she said, "No, I'm not interested in that. If you have any scotch I might be interested." So she brought her "dueña" with her. And she came to my house. And we began to date. She was not particularly interested in me at the time. But we became interested in each other. About a year, maybe 14 months after we met we married. This was in 1968. Jennifer was born in 1970. And David was born 20 months later in 1971. And Jenny attended Pomona College and is a very, very brilliant girl. And David attended the University, both children graduated, Jenny from Pomona and David from the University of Nebraska where he played on a baseball scholarship. He played ball. And she is now living in Detroit, Jenny is. And David is coaching baseball at Riverside Community College.

Tape 1, Side A [session 2, tape 1; 30 minute tape sides]

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: An interview with Gene Crain on March 20, 1999 at his office in Newport Beach. The interviewer is Susan Anderson. This is session two, tape 1, side A. The last time we talked about your family history and background. Today I'd like to start talking about the history of the collection. So my first question, Mr. Crain, would be, would you please describe the focus of your collection and its scope?

E. GENE CRAIN: The answer that I give to that question may or may not be responsive. The focus of the collection could probably be described in many ways. The focus would be on the artists. But as to subject matter, basically the California land, the land of Southern California between the late 1920s and the current time.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Okay. Rather than looking at it as a collection of a certain school or such, you really look at it as a collection that focuses on the land and landscape?

E. GENE CRAIN: I focus it on the landscape of Southern California as seen through the eyes of a group of artists that have been described variously over the decades, but are generally thought of now as being something called the California School.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And is that how you think of your collection too? Or do you have another way of looking at it that you think is more accurate?

E. GENE CRAIN: Well, I think that's as good as any. The name California School came up very, very early in the 1930s decade. And I think, I think that's appropriate. They had a certain feeling of direct application, spontaneity, a whole lot of Disney influence, in the way that pigment was applied to paper or canvas. And it's very recognizable as a school. And I think the generally well-accepted version of it would be the California School. I remember that the Riverside show of these artists in the early forties focused on it as something called the California School basically of watercolor, but certainly not exclusively. Basically of water-based pigment. But again, certainly not exclusively.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: I know that your collection highlights works by artists that were teachers as well as students of that generation as well. Is that . . .?

E. GENE CRAIN: I think that's a fair statement. I'm thinking about your question now. And two of the artists, well, many of the artists I collect, if not all of them, had teaching backgrounds and experience. And when you say teaching you think in terms of teaching young people, public education, private school education, just a general

liberal arts education. But you also have to think in terms of teaching other artists and painters, groups. And certainly some of the artists had extreme skills in both areas.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, what I was asking about was, I know that you also have work by people like Clarence Hinkle or Roger Kuntz let's say. So you have people that are also from the generation before and the generation after the California School, too? Don't you?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah, I do. And I used to have more, more than that. But I did that, as far as the generation before was concerned, because of the things that were told to me about those painters of the so-called California Impressionist School by the artists that I collect. And they whetted my imagination and got me interested in them. And the artists that I collect were so kind to certain of the people, and so informed of certain about the artists, and were so informative about all of the artists, that I took a, passing fancy to their work and collected some of their things. But not for any reason other than the fact that they were close to the generation that came after them, I think.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: All right. So your real focus and the real scope of the collection is on the California School?

E. GENE CRAIN: Kuntz I collected, and Kuntz is thought of as an Op or Pop post-San Francisco school for want of a better word or something. Anyway, he was very important in some small school of art called Pop or Op or something. And I collected many of his works for a couple of reasons. One, I knew Roger and liked him. And two, I just thought, as much as any artist that I'd ever run across, he had a sense of where paint, in his case oil paint, should go on a canvas. He was a tremendous designer. And he just seemed to know how to apply paint to create what it was he was after. I think he was a remarkable student. And, of course, a remarkable artist. And, of course, he was a student of the Claremont group.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, I do want to come back and ask you some more questions about Roger Kuntz. But I think now I'd like to go back and just ask you more general questions about the collection. How many works are in the collection?

E. GENE CRAIN: Counting prints, maybe somewhere between 750 and 1,000. When I say prints I don't mean calendar art prints, I mean well-recognized print media in limited editions. But it's approaching 1,000, not all of which are things that I would buy today or would acquire today. But they were important to me at the time.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And how is your collection stored and cared for?

E. GENE CRAIN: Many of the works are in drawers that have been specially ordered. And the drawers are parts of cabinets. Many of the works are here in the office building, the office building which has lots of rooms. Many of them are in my home, which has lots of walls. And many of them are juggled from time to time by being shown either in large numbers or in one, two, three to five paintings in whoever or whatever institution might want to have them shown as either part of a show or as a show of its own.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, it's impossible for anyone who will be reading this interview to know that we're sitting in an office that is full, almost from floor to ceiling with works of art. Is the bulk of the collection kept here at your office?

E. GENE CRAIN: About 25 percent. The the file drawers are all here. And I'd say maybe 40 percent is in file drawers. And an equal number are at home, in our home. Relatives have some in their homes. And the rest of them are just juggled around from time to time. We do try to spend some time in curatorial work because you have to watch the paper. You have to make sure that bad things don't happen to the paper on which the pigment is applied.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Right.

E. GENE CRAIN: So we do spend a considerable amount of time and a considerable amount of resources restoring paper and making sure that light, which is a very meaningful enemy of any pigment, does not do too much damage.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And do you circulate the works and that sort of thing?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yes, I do, and it's remarkable the difference in atmosphere that can be created just by taking the paintings and putting them in some place where you're not used to seeing them. It just gives it a whole brand new focus. And it's a pleasant focus.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, now I think it would be good for you to begin talking a little bit about how you started collecting and when.

E. GENE CRAIN: I began to collect about 1963. I think that's probably right, because I know the first painting that I acquired, that became the first painting in what is now the collection, is dated 1963. And it's a small tonalist watercolor by the California artist, one of the leaders of the California art movement, Rex Brandt. At least the leader of the movement that I collect. And I got that painting after spending a day with Rex unannounced. I just went over one day because friends had suggested I do so after I had seen some of his work in his home. I knocked on his door at about 9:00 in the morning. And Rex and I and his wife Joan talked until about 6:00 in the evening. We just talked and hit it off famously I think. Rex has been a good friend and, as has Joan, over the years. As a matter of fact, my son is named after Rex. So that's where it all began. Rex does not style himself as a painter. He styles himself as an artist. And with that in mind, because he has trouble hearing, and his trouble in hearing has gotten worse over the decades, he's quite a talker. But when he talks he has occasional original things to say. He is a fabulous teacher. As good a teacher as anybody I have ever been around, with the possible exception of Robert E. Wood, who might be as good as Rex. But Rex is just a fabulous teacher. Mostly because he's so verbal, because he hides some of the fact that he can't hear others talk so well by talking an awful lot himself. But in saying that you have to understand that the man just has an awful lot to say. And that day that I spent at his home was really a watershed day for me. It was just magnificent in any number of ways, any number of respects. It was just a tremendous day. I don't remember what happened after that. But Rex was a remarkable friend of Phil Dike. Phil Dike and I had no knowledge of each other. But I had a great knowledge of Claremont because of where I had gone to school. And he arranged for me to meet Dike. Dike arranged for me to meet Sheets. And from there on it, it just became a panorama of experiences highlighted by important events, such as shows, that seemed to bring back into meaning for the people of Southern California the works that these artists did.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And so this all began with you casually dropping in on Rex Brandt in the morning?

E. GENE CRAIN: Totally unannounced. Rex has told me that he remembers when I dropped in and he was about ready to slam the door in my face because it was a Saturday. And he literally was not real happy to see me. But I was too young to know any difference and it didn't make any difference to me anyway.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, and that was a watercolor you collected from him?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah, it was. It was a movement picture, but certainly atypical of Brandt. It's almost nonrepresentational, although in the picture itself there are points of representationalism. But it has tremendous sense of movement. It's called The Yacht Race and, as I say, it's very much a tonalist, a dark painting. But it stood up over the years. It's a painting I still enjoy.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And is the greater part of your collection in watercolor?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yes. Even if you count prints as non water-based. Even if you count bronzes and other statuary as non water-based. And, of course, the oils. By far the largest part of the collection is water-based and transparent watercolor. It's the best medium available for capturing that which was the salad days of these artists. The pureness, the beauty, the uniqueness of Southern California. I mean, if you're going to paint water and sunshine, the best medium for it is water.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And that is in some sense what the California School developed and excelled in.

E. GENE CRAIN: I would say so, yeah. I think that with almost no exceptions these artists would consider themselves primarily to be watercolorists from their point of view, and from the point of view of the public that appreciates them. By appreciates I mean knows of them and likes their work. I think the public considers that basically it's a water-based medium of presenting paintings.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, at what point did you realize you had something significant here? At what point did you start to get a sense of the historical value of the art and really sense that you had something special and maybe began to really think of it as a collection?

E. GENE CRAIN: I don't know. I recognized early on that I had something significant. But the significance that I felt that I had was a great rapport and a great understanding of, and a great ability to talk to, and a great love of talking with the artists. I found that I had more satisfaction out of knowing the artists and knowing new artists and different artists of this group long before I thought that acquiring their work was of any major significance. I thought that I was doing myself a personal favor by beginning to see these performers and appreciate them as human beings, appreciate their genius, their capacity, their quality long before. Just getting their art was almost an adjunct to it. There are important things that happened. Dextra Frankel's White Paper show at the Cal State Fullerton Gallery is a thing that I remember that was outside myself as being something that said the public was interested in this. I had had many small shows in places like Redlands, and Fresno, and Coldwell Banker in Newport Beach and things of that nature that people were interested enough to get any place from 40 to 100 pieces of work and put them up. I enjoyed that because I enjoyed seeing them at different locations. It gave them a new view. When I felt I had something, I suppose as best I can recall now, Susan, it would have been

Dextra Frankel's show at Cal State Fullerton, which was really a remarkable event. Just a seminal happening because while some of the artists were getting a little bit long in the tooth, there were all of them still around. And my recollection of the opening of that show is they were full of joy. Just happy to be there. Kosa was gone. But his widow was there. And other than that just a remarkable number of artists were all there. And they were happy to see their work. And because they were happy, and because I had by this time managed to get a number of their pictures that made me happy too, I began to feel more, take deeper and longer looks at the paintings than I had before. Because before I'd just mainly concentrated on getting to know the artists and their families as people.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, that's a really good way to begin collecting, I think.

E. GENE CRAIN: Well, it's more eclectic than it is now. The longer I do this the less I feel I know about this stuff. Early on you think you're just great and you go out and you buy stuff that's not really good. And you have a bunch of that. But it narrows itself down as you begin to focus on what not only interests you but, from a historical perspective, might be of interest to people a hundred years from now.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Right. So aside from you developing your eye, and, it sounds like you realized that you started to develop your eye, your aesthetic taste has probably also changed?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah. I appreciate all kinds of art. I'm reminded of what the collector Raymond Horowitz said when somebody asked him how come he, the great, great collector of American impressionism didn't he collect French impressionism, and he said, "Because I couldn't afford it." And I feel somewhat the same way. These paintings, nobody outside of myself and maybe Helen Zillgitt and one or two others, nobody paid much attention to them. Millard always was out front with his prices. But from my point of view I felt that I could pick up things that interested me and the cost was really, even in days when the dollar was worth a lot more than it is in 1999, even then they were just cheap, cheap as far as the price was concerned. And having lived in Southern California as long as I had, I somehow began to sense that these people had been able to collect some of the uniqueness that was Southern California before World War II, and probably up until about 1950. And I began to like, I began to think that stuff was important because it was important to me, because Southern California was important to me.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, when did you begin to trust your eye do you think?

E. GENE CRAIN: Never.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Never?

E. GENE CRAIN: Never. Never. I still look to see who made the painting. I can tell the difference between a good painting and a not so good painting, even of the people that I collect. But the only way for a person who is untrained as an artist, as am I, to have any kind of perspective at all on what's good, what's bad, I shouldn't even say that, what's better or what's different, is by comparison. You just have to look. And if you look at enough works pretty soon you begin to say, "Well, this one pleases me more than that one." I can tell for example Sheet's painting of San Dimas Station is better than something else, just because it smacks you right between the eyes. And the reason it smacks you between the eyes is simply because you've seen other works of the same quality, the same art school, different artists. And it's just a comparison thing. I don't feel that I have a particularly good eye about anything. I just, you know, you just go in and you grab a handful of things and if you get a whole lot of something then maybe some of the things that you get a whole lot of will turn out to be pretty good.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: So how has the collection evolved then would you say? I mean, you've already spoken about this a little bit. It sounds like you were, you were collecting in a much more broad way before. And maybe grabbing a few more things than you would now?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah. I did get a sense of purpose. The purpose that I got was that I wanted to know (know by knowing from the artist and also having examples of the work) the entire career of three giants of American watercolor who are in the West. That would be Brandt, Dike and Sheets. So the first focus that I ever had that enabled me to just stop getting works was to try to find examples from the late twenties, or from the time that all three of those artists began their public career, through their death. Or in Brandt's case through the decade that ended probably in 1989. Rex hasn't made very many paintings at all since his wife died. Maybe one or two or three. But I have managed in the course of things to accomplish that which I wanted to do, which is to get good examples with good in quotation marks, examples that I find to be representative of the work that all three of these artists were doing throughout the entire of their professional career. And in doing so, other artists have come along. And I've just gotten their stuff. Whereas I may have 150 paintings by each one of those artists, I may have 25 or 30 paintings of their brethren who painted right along with them. So that's how it got.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: That really helps to explain that you've really collected those people in-depth?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And then others, actually with some depth also. I mean, if you have 25 paintings by anybody that's pretty good depth.

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah, I have as much as 40 paintings by a lot of people. But as far as Sheets, and Dike and Brandt are concerned I have them not only in-depth but a whole lot of breadth while collecting that depth.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, I'm not sure but I think Rex Brandt's On the Road to San Jacinto may have been the first historical piece that you bought. I'm not sure. And you bought that in June 1968. And I was wondering if you have any recollection at all of what prompted you to go in that direction at that time? Because up until then I think you were buying just the current work of the artists.

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah, I had seen Road to San Jacinto at two different places actually. The Saddleback Inn in Santa Ana, it was on display there. Not for sale. And at a restaurant in Laguna Beach. Because Rex had had a friend who had had it there. And I asked him, because I recognized the name, Brandt. And I said, "Gee, this is interesting." And he said, "Yes. Oh, this is a fabulous painting, but it's not for sale." And that prompted me to try to find out why it wasn't for sale and what was so fabulous about it. So I asked Rex. And one thing led to another and he got it back. And I'm not sure the mechanics by which I acquired the painting, but, yes, I would say that if you want to talk in terms of historically important paintings that would have been the first. It's a magnificent painting. It's very funny. Brandt doesn't particularly think that it represents him. He doesn't like it because he thinks it's unrepresentative of what he was doing. But he does recognize that other people have liked it tremendously, and it's been a huge success when it was entered in shows, and world's fairs and exhibits and things of that nature.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, did that sort of whet your appetite for buying the early works of the artists then?

E. GENE CRAIN: Possibly. I think that's probably a strong button that was pushed then. Again, I started going to auctions and seeing these people's names and, and I knew the people. And then I would look sometimes and they would have dates of paintings. And sometimes the paintings would be older, which probably happens more often than not at an auction. And, it very well might be that that was a turning point. You see, Road to San Jacinto is a large painting. And other than Sheets, these artists in the thirties did not paint 22/30s -- that is full sheet watercolors. They tended to paint more half sheets and quarter sheets than they did full sheets. And this one was a dramatic full sheet watercolor, and as such, it was unique just because it filled the paper and filled it quite well. It didn't use some of the things that Rex preaches, which is, although it's certainly a dramatic picture, it didn't make dramatic use of the white paper. Rex often used the white paper as a color and he just loves the white paper.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, and then in about 1969, I think, is when you began buying the work of Clarence Hinkle, who again, I'm talking about as being one of the prior generation. One of the primary teachers of the California School.

E. GENE CRAIN: That could be.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And I know you got those out of the Laguna Beach Art Association collection. And those were from the 1920s. And I think you already spoke a little bit about what prompted you to look at the work at Clarence Hinkle. But could you speak a little bit more about that?

E. GENE CRAIN: Sure. Other than Hunt, Thomas Hunt, I liked Hinkle's work better than any of the, the works of artists that preceded the group that I collect. It just happened . . .

Tape 1, Side B [session 2, tape 1; 30-minute tape sides]

E. GENE CRAIN: . . . Millard with all his bombastin', all his great joviality. And Rex the historian of the bunch, without exception they all found him to be the kindest and sweetest and most gentle teacher and the most . . .

[Pause in Tape]

E. GENE CRAIN: . . . The Art Association Museum or Art Association Gallery in Laguna Beach, which was the precursor of the Laguna Beach Museum had, I don't remember how I was able to get a hold of some of the Hinkle's, or at least one of the major Hinkle's. But I just got them because I liked them. And you have to understand, in the time period you're talking about Joan Irvine Smith hadn't done her work. Ruth Westphal hadn't done her work. And Ruth Westphal's work preceded Joan's by quite a lot. And there wasn't a great deal of interest in them. You could find them any place. Gallery owners, sales gallery owners would throw these works by these California impressionists in almost as an afterthought.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: I know. I noticed that you had terrific luck, really, in being able to buy some key works from art associations, foundations, even the Pasadena Art Museum.

E. GENE CRAIN: Oh, yeah.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: I think that would be an interesting story to comment on maybe.

E. GENE CRAIN: The Pasadena Art Museum was really a fine professional museum, with all the qualities you would think of when you think of an art museum. Traditional, fine works, not upper crust. Not certainly something like the Art Institute in Chicago or the major institutions in Cleveland, or the ones in New York. But still a fine place. And these artists tended to give things to Pasadena because it was there. Or Pasadena tended to collect them. Then Pasadena at some time, probably around the late sixties, early seventies, decided that they would shut down their traditional museum and become Museum of Modern Art West. And as a result of that, which by the way failed, and that museum became the Norton Simon Museum, which is a remarkable repository of just tremendous works in Southern California. It's a treasure. But before Norton Simon took over, the modern art museum that had taken over the traditional museum of Pasadena had failed. When the traditional museum decided to go modern, it sold out all its stuff. And I remember a tremendous long line. I'd been invited by my then fiancé to go to Pasadena just to go through it because she knew of my interest in art. So we stood in a long line just to get in. Fantastic number of people just pawing their way through all of this work. Because Pasadena Art Museum was giving it away. And before that, before we even got there the dealers had gone through it all. It was just an absolute chaotic mess. And there was this one table in which they were selling prints for 25 cents a piece. It was a huge table just filled with prints. Print, print, print. And they were good prints. Again, I'm not talking about calendar art. I'm talking about a good print quality that the artist had done that was limited in number. Well, I went through and I found one of the key paintings in my collection on this print table. It was a Millard Sheets painting called Beer for Prosperity. I didn't recognize it as anything other than a Millard Sheets painting that I felt was a pretty darn good painting. Painted about 1933 or '34. I'm sure what had happened was whoever was messing around with it, because it has some of the qualities of Hopper's work, at least superficially you would think it has some of the qualities of Hopper's work, particularly his Nighthawks painting. I think that the people at the museum had just simply thought that this was a Hopper print and thrown it out on the table. So for 25 cents I got one of the really key paintings in the collection. It's a small painting, but it was a prize winner. It had been heavily appreciated. And once I got it I wrote to Millard and asked him about the painting and he replied to me. We were not on the friendly basis that we became, or at least the close basis that we became later on, but he was kind enough to respond to give me something of the history of the painting. And I was just overwhelmed by the quality of the work, not only what I felt was the quality but the success that it had as an award winner. And there I got it for 25 cents. And it's, I think, it's of the quality of, oh, San Dimas Station and a very few others that Millard made in that era. It's just a remarkable small painting.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Wonderful. Now you mentioned that it was your fiancé that took you there. Was that Mrs. Crain?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yes, it was. She lived in San Marino and I was visiting with her up there. And so we just went over to Pasadena.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, what part has she played in the development of the collection over the years? Has she been involved much?

E. GENE CRAIN: She pretty much leaves final determinations to me. She was an art major in college and she knows a great deal more about what it is we're looking at when we look at paintings than I do. But pretty much she leaves acquisition to me. I will say this about her, she has never, ever said anything to me about how much or when or what my commitments or obligations were as far as the work that has been acquired. But she sort of stands off and supports it very well by not bitching about it.

[Laughter]

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Right. She's very supportive even if she's not actively involved in collecting it with you.

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah. She's fairly private. And if she opens up her home to tours it's going to be on her terms. People can come through my office, this building, and people can go see any of the public exhibitions of the art that they want to. But if she lets a group of people into the home to look at what we have at home it will be on her terms.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, I know that for many years you've also had a curator, Janet Blake, assisting you.

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Would you discuss her role and maybe her contribution to the collection and to the field?

E. GENE CRAIN: Well, Janet came to me on a reference. I was looking for somebody for help in '79 or '80. And she was sent over by somebody who's first name is Harvey [Clemans] and his last name has an N in it. But I can't think who it was. From Golden West College. She had her degree in art history, and perhaps even has a Master's, I don't know. But she went to work with me. I won't say for me. She went to work with me, from 1980 to the present time, sometimes more actively than others. But always she has been here curating the collection. And by curating she has put the whole thing, as far as whatever archives I have, it's her doing. She has put it on computers at which she is a whiz. And she has kept it all in order. And has the capacity of talking about it to me when I need either a broad, general statement of what's going on, or when I need a pinpointed piece of information about a particular painting or a particular artist. She is an absolute fountain, she is just a sponge of knowledge. I don't think the person has ever forgotten a thing she ever learned. And she has become probably, now I'm thinking about this, I think she probably knows more about the school of art than anybody that's living now, with the possible exception of Rex who experienced it. But Janet would be even a little bit better than Rex because she's considerably younger and she probably has more perspective on it. She has become a good writer on not only the stuff that I collect, but also a good writer on all of the California art from about 1895, which would mean the impressionists, on. And she just has a tremendous memory, a tremendous facility, and she has a remarkable eye too. She knows what's good stuff. There is no way this collection of paintings would have made any sense in the world without her. But as a result of her being involved with it, I not only have a good orderly presentation of the art, but I also have some very good archival material having to do with printed things: books, magazines, things that have been said by magazines, such as "Life Magazine", such as "American Artist", such as art magazines in general. And I would say that as far as my collection is concerned I have a very valuable archival set of material.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And Janet was instrumental in forming that library collection?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah, she helped. I had the idea of it because I always liked to see my name in print. When "American Artist" would come out and they'd have a picture of one of my paintings in it I'd say, "Gee, it's a collection of Gene Crain." I'd say, "Isn't that great?" I'd go out and buy 200 or 300 issues or something. And it just went from there. And then we began to focus in on what other people had written about a) the artist, and b) the particular paintings of the artist.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Wonderful, that's so helpful. Janet is also very helpful to people interested in your collection.

E. GENE CRAIN: Oh, yeah. She knows this stuff. There's nobody that knows this collection like she does. I don't. I don't. Every once in awhile I wake up at midnight or something and think, whatever happened to . . . And I can't wait until the next day to call her and say, "Where is it?" And she'll tell me. It may take her two or three minutes but she will come up with it. She knows this collection inside and out.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, you know, you started out by saying that one of your primary reasons for collecting or impetuses for collecting in the beginning was your relationship to the artists, most of whom have now passed on. What do you think your motivation is now?

E. GENE CRAIN: Well, right now I'm not like I was ten, fifteen, twenty years ago. Ten or fifteen years ago, good, bad or indifferent, if it was by somebody in whom I was interested, I would make a sincere effort to get it no matter what. Whether I had fifty paintings like it or not. I would make a sincere effort to get it just because it was my friend who had made it. Now several things have converged to make me see that is not a realistic goal. One of which is the paintings just cost too much.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Right. The market.

E. GENE CRAIN: People have discovered the paintings and these artists. And I'm just not prepared to commit, nor do I need to commit, to enhance the collection, the kind of money that it would take if I was just going to get every painting ever painted by every one of these artists. It just doesn't make any sense.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: It would be impossible.

E. GENE CRAIN: So I now know enough about the artists to know that there are key works out there that I certainly would be interested in. And they are key works by my artists. And then secondarily, there are good works by my artists. Not key works, but good works that are available from time to time. And finally, there are paintings that would add to a series that the artist did. Maybe it's a series that lasted ten years. Maybe a painting a year for ten years that the subject made a series of paintings about. Many in one year, many in the next, many, many, many. And sometimes I think that it's fun to get good examples of work that they did in the series so that you can hang them up and see what it is that maybe, I mean, I don't mean to be presumptive, but I will say to see what it is that perhaps the artist was trying to say. The feeling he was, or she, was trying to convey as they made these works. And that is particularly important for these artists because of their interest in the land. Their interest in the air, their interest in the land, the sunshine, the sea, their environment. It's not that

they couldn't paint human figures or interiors or things of this nature. But you have to understand that for the artists that I collect, we're talking West Coast. We're talking outside. We're talking going out in the field. We're talking feeling the sunshine on the back of your head as you're making these things. On the East Coast watercolor tends to be an inside medium, introspective. In California, with the California School you think of summer. Some of the other works, even sensational works -- Prendergast, Homer, Wyeth, incredible artists -- you think of them more in terms of winter. You think that. And the one thing that is unique about the California School is, I think, their involvement with the love they had for the land and the sea and the sunshine, and the idea that when they were painting it was summer. It was an open time and a time of happiness. Again, I get back to the influence that Disney had. Not that it was quick application of paint or done fast or loose or anything like that. But there was a joyousness about the whole thing. And so many of them did work for the studios and Disney would hire almost anybody that could do work for his animation things. And think of the people that worked for the studios and for Disney and there are just a ton of them in this California School. And they would always be able to find work and then on weekends they would go out in the day and paint. Just paint in the field. And paint joyously. And with great regards for their comrades. There was never, that I have ever been able to find in all the years I've been involved with this, any kind of competition, jealousy or bad feelings one against the other. When somebody had success the rest of them were delighted.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: That's remarkable.

E. GENE CRAIN: And, well, you have to understand that in the thirties, up until World War II, these people weren't all that old. Millard was born about 1907. Phil was born in 1906, Phil Dike. Zornes, Phil Paradise, all those people were born then so when you get into the decade between 1932 and 1942 say, they weren't really very old people. And they just, they had a great camaraderie.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: That's wonderful. Well, we've already talked about you really being interested in the landscape. Is there any certain aesthetic approach or technical approach that any of the artists has taken that you have become interested in?

E. GENE CRAIN: The great love of my life is transparent watercolors. I like that as much as anything else. Although, acrylics are fine and oils are fine. But by all odds, transparent watercolors. Because, again, I don't mean to overemphasis this, but the love of the land and the sea and the time that these people were able to capture in their work is best captured by transparent watercolor on white paper.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: You talked about your attempt at trying to be comprehensive with regards to certain artists, like Dike, Sheets and Brandt. And now you're trying to fill in holes, in some sense, of particular works that you feel might be missing from your collection to be comprehensive. What about other artists? Could you just name some of the other artists that are in your collection?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah. I fill in holes, but add, upgrade the quality too. As far as Dike, Sheets and Brandt are concerned, I feel I know everything about them as far as their public career was concerned. Because I'd seen their work from the beginning to the end. And I had a very, very close personal relationship with all of them. I mean, they were intense friends. All of them. And my family and their family were all very close. As to other artists that I appreciate, you have to start, I suppose, with Rex's wife, Joan Irving, who died four or five years ago. A tremendous artist, but an incredible human being. Joan was the youngest female artist in the permanent collection of The Museum of Art in New York, Metropolitan, for many, many years. They bought a painting of hers out of the Riverside Show in the early forties. The things that Joan did -- window shades, children, flowers, things she loved -- she did just as well as anybody could possibly do them. On top of which, she was the wife of a genius, Rex. And Rex could be difficult. Because all geniuses can be difficult, because that's just their nature. He was an unusual person. Joanie was an unusual person too. But she had the capacity to be a remarkable human being. A great, great artist was George Post. He had as much influence on California art as anybody. Everybody admired George's work. Phil Paradise, another early one, an artist of high, high capacity, but tremendous ability. Paradise was lost for a long period of time, and then maybe five to ten years before his death he was rediscovered. And he had a remarkable renaissance. I loved Dong Kingman's work. Particularly the work that he did in California. But the work that he did when he moved to New York is, is just excellent. Bob Wood. I don't know, oh, Barse Miller. I'm very, very impressed with Barse's work. He was, some of the things I have of Barse's are of a quality of John Singer Sargent. Barse was a transitional person in that he was trained in the East, but spent a lot of time out here, and did a lot of soul searching, and went through various stages. But he was a tremendous talent. Milford, Milford Zornes, who is still amongst us, who is just a giant for no other reason that he just keeps on going. My gosh, the guy must be ninety plus years of age now. And he just keeps on painting and making shows and doing remarkable work.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And as you know, he will also be the subject of an oral history.

E. GENE CRAIN: No, I may have known it. But I'd forgotten it.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Yes. He will be a subject soon.

E. GENE CRAIN: Milford's a fantastic person. He's an academic. He taught at Pomona and was well associated with the Claremont School, and I think he lives out there. For decades Milford would take people to Mexico, out from where he taught at University of Oklahoma. I like Keith Crown's work. Keith Crown is a watercolorist, who is a modernist. I just think some of the things that he did are so lush with color, and so full of meaning, such a nice modern approach to landscape painting that he, he is one of my favorite people. And he's certainly anything but a traditional watercolorist.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Have you been as interested in Northern California artists as Southern California?

E. GENE CRAIN: It depends on how you define them. Certainly George Post and Dong Kingman were Northern California artists. Alex Nepote who I had a good relationship with. Before he died, when he was teaching at USF, or Cal State, some place in San Francisco, suddenly discovered the beauty of being a modern artist, a straight edge painter. And I wasn't interested in that because I didn't think he did it very well. But he did. And all I wanted to talk about was some of his wet-into-wet stuff that he had done before. So in our communication and our correspondence back and forth, I kept wanting to see some of the stuff that he had. And he kept getting more and more aggravated at me because he didn't care to talk about the stuff that he had done before. He wanted to talk about the stuff he was doing now and why it wasn't just the greatest thing since sliced bread. And so it was never bitter or mean spirited or anything. It was more comical than anything else. Let's see. Who else? I don't know.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: You've collected some of the so-called Berkeley group, haven't you? Like John Haley?

E. GENE CRAIN: Oh, yeah. I got into Haley and Loran simply because they were Rex's teachers. They were teaching at Berkeley when Rex was attending the University of California. And they interested me because they interested Rex, and I wanted to see what kind of influence they had. And my gosh, Haley's work is just absolutely fantastic. And some of Loran's stuff is as good as it's going to get. But they sort of parallel each other. Yes. Those two are people I have in some depth.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, we've talked a lot about what's in your collection. What have you consciously left out? I mean, can you think of anything that could have been included in here, but you've really consciously decided that it's not meant to be in your collection? Or a group of artists that were maybe tangential to this, but you didn't put it in there?

E. GENE CRAIN: Well, I'm not sure that this answer I'm going to give is appropriate. But I will for the record say that there was a group of artists who were painting in a non- representational way, modern way, that paralleled the California group. Lundeberg? Is that her name?

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Helen Lundeberg.

E. GENE CRAIN: Helen. And others that were out here and they were doing remarkable things. I've left that out simply because I don't understand it very well. And second, I just don't feel that I have either the time or the energy to devote to it. And you have to remember that the bellwether fact of anything that I have collected has to do with the absolute touch point that I knew the artist.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Right.

E. GENE CRAIN: And if I knew the artist and knew what they were doing then there was a connection between a human being and that human being's work. And I didn't know anybody else. So if you're asking did I exclude anybody because I didn't like them, no. I wouldn't, I wouldn't be so bold as to not like any of the artists.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Right.

E. GENE CRAIN: Some of them had better personalities than others. Paradise, at least when I first met him, was hard to get along with. But near the end he was just a pussycat. Kosa I only met twice. I didn't know him. But so many other people did. And so many other people said good things about him. I collected the people I knew. And I'm not saying I know what I like. The conscious effort that I made, at least initially and for a long time, was to get to know the people.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: You told me that there are some particular holes in the collection that you're hoping to fill in. And that you're upgrading. You're constantly upgrading. But you don't sell much off, do you?

E. GENE CRAIN: No. I don't.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Because sometimes people, as they're upgrading, tend to get rid of other things. But I get the feeling that you actually keep the majority of things. Maybe you'll sell off artists that aren't directly related to

the California School? Has that happened?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah, I have, you're right. I don't sell much. I'll tell you, my life is very full with my practice. I'm sixty-five years old. And I've been involved with law now for forty-three years. I started law school in 1955. And my practice keeps me so busy that I don't have the time that it would take to sit down and look objectively at the collection and say, "We can get rid of this because we have better examples of it."

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Right.

E. GENE CRAIN: And frankly, I wouldn't be a good one to do that. Somebody else would be better to do that.

Tape 2, Side A [session 2, tape 2; 30-minute tape side]

E. GENE CRAIN: I forget where I was, but something . . .

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: You were saying it's not only your relationship to the artist that's important but . . .

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah, but the feeling that I had when I thought of the artist, when I acquired the painting, perhaps quite apart from the artist. It might have been at an auction some place. It might have been at a store on Highway 66. It might have been some place else. But you see the work and you think of the artist, and then you think of the time. And so I'm not really a good one to think in terms of, of paring down the collection. Although I am aware it should be done. But now I try to make a conscious effort not to get inventory that I'm not going to keep.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Right. Well, you live with these paintings daily all around you, so you've developed a relationship to the paintings, too. They're almost like friends or something. But what, in living with the paintings daily, what do you get from them? You've already spoken a little bit about this. You get this recall or memories. And joy it sounds like.

E. GENE CRAIN: Well, living with them daily doesn't do much. They're just there. And I see them, and I expect to see them. And I like them. But it doesn't jump start me every day. What does jump start me is when we change them around a little bit and I see them in a different relationship than the one that I'm used to seeing. For example, I love to go to see where the curator in a particular exhibit has put these paintings and how they look. Because they do look different. It's just like seeing a new work when they are hung in a different way than you're used to seeing them. They're just here, and, in some regards, they're like patterned wallpaper. But I would sure miss them if they weren't here. But they do not thrill me every day because I don't think about them every day. I have a lot of other things that I think about.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, if you could have only one painting from this collection, which one would it be?

E. GENE CRAIN: I've asked myself that question too. And I have come to the conclusion that it's an impossible thing to say simply because I feel differently at different times. I know which, in my opinion, are the best paintings in the collection. Paintings that might be the most valuable paintings in the collection. I know all of that. I love Rock Fishing by Dike, which was the first painting of Phil's that I think I ever got. And it was a prize winner and it's a beauty. I love Abandoned by Sheets simply because it's one of his master works and it's undoubtedly the most valuable painting I have. I love Dike's work California Holiday, which is an oil. It would just be an impossible thing to say. But I guess if I had to say one that is probably the most thrilling thing that I never get tired of looking at it would be Barse Miller's painting of Little Eva at Summer School.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: What was your most spectacular purchase?

E. GENE CRAIN: Oh, it was a series of things. Millard had been involved with a very rich collector, and they had made a collection. And Millard was taken off the Board of Directors that was in charge of making the collection. And he was not real happy. So he told the people at the Virginia Steele place, and Virginia had collected a mountain of his work. She loved Millard's work. And she had a tremendous amount of money. And Millard had made a remarkable collection of American art. And he was forced out of it. And Millard was unhappy. So one day Millard and I and my wife went up to Virginia's home, (Virginia was dead). It's Virginia Steele Scott Foundation. But we went to her museum, which was on the grounds of her home. And Millard had laid out every one of his paintings that she had collected. And he was fuming, although well under control. He said, "Which ones do you want?" So I went around and around and around. I made some spectacular decisions. I did make some spectacular faux pas. I should have taken every one that was there. And so, that and acquiring Beer for Prosperity were probably the most interesting purchases I ever made. And the thing about getting all those paintings was that it was all done in a matter of an hour. I had been to Virginia's museum before, because Millard was quite proud of it. It was just a remarkable small collection of American art. And when Millard was put out of control of it, they sold off so much of the stuff. And it just broke his heart.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Is some of that left and now at the Huntington in the Virginia Steele Scott Gallery?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah, but so much of it has been taken away. Millard was a very passionate man. And he knew art. I'll tell you, he knew that stuff inside out. And he had used his influence and used his eye and used his energy to make a just incred- . . . I never tired of going up there and looking because it was a whole history of American, not just California, but of American art that he had collected with her money. And he was proud of it. And when they forced him out they got rid of a great deal of his stuff. The stuff that's at Huntington now is very, very heavily diluted.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Just changing tastes and probably it was too early. Probably American art hadn't come to be appreciated the way that it is now, you know, as a field in art.

E. GENE CRAIN: I'm not sure what you mean.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, I think the interest in regional American art has not been more than over the last, you know, few decades, really.

E. GENE CRAIN: That's interesting. I've . . .

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: The development of scholarship in American art is still young compared to European art.

E. GENE CRAIN: Well, America is young compared to European art. I mean, I guess you start in the what? 1600s. We're 250 years old as a nation. And these people started maybe after the nation had been in existence 175 years. And certainly Southern California, if we're getting back to what I'm interested in, certainly Southern California is not any more than seventy-five years old, the interest in the art of Southern California. There ain't no way that I would be able to have a collection that had a third rate Matisse or a tenth rate Homer. Or something of that nature. But at least here I can carve out a section of time and a section of land, and a section of people that were related to the time and the land and see what it was that they did. And who knows whether it's important or not? It's important to me. And it may be important to people one hundred years from now. I know Texans love cowboy art. And rich Texans go out and buy faux art of cowboys because they can't find any Remingtons or Russels or anything like that. So they just go out and buy things to put over their mantle because they're Texans and they want to do that. Well, I want to find out if people who are from California, who are serious about Southern California, if they are serious about it, and its history, somewhere, some how, some time they will have a look at what it was at a time when Southern California was certainly as close as it's ever going to be to Shangri La.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: So this art that you're collecting really reflects a certain time and place?

E. GENE CRAIN: Absolutely.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And that is definitely a large factor in your wishing to collect it?

E. GENE CRAIN: Absolutely. That's probably, outside of the personal knowledge and acquaintance that I had with and of the artists. We'll let my grand, my children's grandchildren determine whether it has any lasting significance or not. But it's significant to me.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And does the urban growth and disappearance of the locale now make the paintings more precious to you? Is that a factor in this?

E. GENE CRAIN: I haven't thought about it that way. We live in a very unique part of the world. Susan, you live where I live, in Laguna Beach. And if you go from Newport Beach to Dana Point, sure there's been bad things happening. But there have been good things happening too. And I, I don't sit down and rend my skin and cry about what is occurring as far as the land is concerned. What was then, is here now in this group of paintings for people to see if they want to. I think it's important that they see what was here then, but I'm not yet prepared to say that what they, what the Irvine Company and some of the other developers have done to this beautiful, beautiful region in Southern California is turn it into Detroit or something. To me it still looks pretty good.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: So it's not sort of an antidote to the loss of the land or something like that for you? I know it might be for some people. There might be a touch of nostalgia in it, but you don't mourn the loss of the land?

E. GENE CRAIN: No I don't at all. I've lived it and enjoyed it and loved it. But I'm very happy where I live now. I think that there may be places that these paintings represent. I think there may be places that are as good a place to live in the world, but I don't think there's any place any better.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, we're talking about Orange County. Would you speak a little bit about the development of culture or cultural institutions here?

E. GENE CRAIN: I really couldn't. Growing up in Orange County I've always had as much culture as I wanted. And I continue to have it now. I'm not prepared to criticize it one way or the other. As a youngster growing up and going to high school here I had all that I wanted. I saw Death of a Salesman at the Biltmore. I saw everything that the Philharmonic ever had. I'd go into CBS on every night that I could get away and watch Steve Allen. I mean, I had as much culture as I wanted to have. I was full of it. I was active in dramatics in high school. I wasn't aware that this was a wasteland or anything like that because my cup was always full. And I find now that there may be more things, and certainly the museum and the qualities of the museum and the interest in the museum is fascinating. And stuff that didn't always exist, I'm aware of that. But it didn't impact me very much. Heavens, we had the Newport Harbor Art Show from 1947 or '48 to 1962. And that was pretty good. They had lots of entries, lots of interest. And I never thought of us here in Southern California as being culturally deprived. I never thought we had to grow up and catch up with anything.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Now, when I first asked you about it, you mentioned that you used to go to Los Angeles a lot. Do you feel that Orange County itself now has grown culturally?

E. GENE CRAIN: Absolutely.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: So that you don't have to go to LA as much?

E. GENE CRAIN: I didn't have to go then. I guess in the days before 1960 it would be a truism that if you wanted to go see a play or something like that you probably would look to Los Angeles because they were doing the New York plays. But we had them at the Laguna Beach theater. This is a different location than it is now. I'd go to things like that.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Was that the Laguna Playhouse?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah. There was always plenty to do. And now because it's very inconvenient to get from here to Los Angeles, it is very happy that they have cultural possibilities for people who are interested in that kind of thing here in Orange County. I will say this though, maybe it's just the fact that I'm getting older, but it does seem to me that the fast pace of life limits the amount of time that someone who is actively pursuing a career, actively doing other things, can spend with aesthetics. And it is very, very happy. You don't have to spend most of the time driving to the Hollywood Bowl when you can go to something that is just as interesting, just as fabulous, by going to the Center for Performing Arts.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, along with you, there's a rather small group of enthusiasts who collect this art. Nobody probably to the same extent as you. But would you care to comment on some of the other collections being formed? Even if only to name them?

E. GENE CRAIN: Sure. Sally Martin and her husband have a terrific collection. I don't know whether their collections are terrific or not, but they're just terrific people, just very enthusiastic people. Michael Johnson is becoming interested in watercolor work, and is actively pursuing important pieces. I like Mike Verbal's gallery along with David Stary-Sheets' gallery. And along with the Gallery Row in Laguna Beach. Because they help people start to create things. I think Gordon McClelland and most of all Ruth Westphal -- somebody ought to build a monument to her -- because I think that as far as art itself is concerned in California she has probably helped stir as much interest as anybody in her seminal works on the California impressionists and the Plein aire painters in the north and the south. In the books that she's done on this stuff. But I'm not sure who else is collecting.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: I know for awhile Gerald Buck was quite interested in this.

E. GENE CRAIN: Gerald Buck has a wonderful collection. And Gerald is very active in promoting this kind of art. Gerald has got a terrific view toward what is important. Gerald is focused on doing something that would be of lasting aesthetic value. The rest of us it sort of happens. We sort of play with it. But we have other things that probably are more important. Gerald deserves a lot of credit, as does Ruth Westphal and Gordon McClelland.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: What do you think makes these collectors tick? I mean, what makes these people focus in on this body of work as opposed to another body of work? Is there anything that might tie them all together somehow?

E. GENE CRAIN: Well, yeah. Also, you shouldn't, I shouldn't overlook Phil Greene. Phil Greene has a nice collection. Yeah, I think that it's availability as much as anything. You learn something about it and say, "Gosh, this is pretty well-known stuff. I've read about this and duh, duh, duh." And pretty soon you see it around. And it doesn't, I mean, you don't have to make a bank loan in order, necessarily, (well, sometimes you do). But it is not all in museums. It is available. You can make a decent collection of this stuff if you will just get a catalog of all the auction houses. And if you are prepared to have somebody that knows quality, or if you feel you know quality, and can, when you see quality, can bid on it because you want to make a collection and buy it and

acquire it, it can be done. If I wanted to make a collection of 19th-century French, well, that's kind of crazy. You need Bill Gates' money to go out and buy the Chicago Art Institute or buy the Metropolitan Museum of Art, or buy the van Gogh Museum. You can't get it. It's not available. This stuff is available and it's available in quantity. And it's available in quality too if you know how to look for it. So possibly they're doing it because they find a lot of self-realization and a lot of satisfaction in having something to put on the wall that is pleasant. And more than anything, Susan, the thing that I have discovered about the stuff I collect, particularly when it goes out in large quantities to a museum or a university or something, I have discovered that the people that go in and look at it like it. They feel drawn to it and they walk out of the institution feeling pretty good about themselves. They note that a museum has said this stuff is good enough for us to put on the wall. It's not some telephone pole rolling in whitewash that comes to a landing someplace that I don't understand. It's not Jackson Pollock that I don't understand. It's stuff that I can look at. And the museum has said it's pretty good. That must mean I'm pretty good. So they come away looking at something that they have seen, that a museum thinks is quality stuff, that they recognize as leading to a good experience, so they come away feeling pretty good. And that ain't all bad.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: No. Well, what do you think about the recent interest in this art by museums and publishers, collectors?

E. GENE CRAIN: It's fascinating.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: I mean, there has been a change in tide, hasn't there?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah. I don't know how much, I don't know which museums are interested in it. The Cleveland Museum has a dozen of Millard's paintings that were given to the museum by a collector who was sort of the Gertrude Stein of this group around the thirties, whose name was Everett [Mrs. Josephine Everett]. And she gave a number of these works to various museums; San Diego, Cleveland. And the Cleveland Museum, ever since Everett gave them to them, has never shown them. As I say, she was sort of a Gertrude Stein type person in that groups of these artists would gather at her house. She was a lady of some means. Her husband was dead I believe, and left her very well fixed. And so she treated them well. And she acquired their works. And then when she died she gave many of their works away. The attorney Bill Sharnoff and I tried for many years talking with the curator. (I think he was a Chinese gentleman, Chin or whoever the guy was at Cleveland.) We tried for years to get some of them. They have a very important piece of Millard's work. But they say, "No, we're not going to give it to you. And we're not going to show it." So they haven't and they haven't.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, we'll have to borrow it some day.

E. GENE CRAIN: You have. It's called Women of Cartagena, when you had Millard's show.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Oh, that one. Of course. Now where did Mrs. Everett live?

E. GENE CRAIN: Pasadena area. I think. Maybe in Los Angeles County some place. Very important lady. Every once in awhile you see a painting of one of these fellows, and you will recognize it as being part of the Everett collection.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: I think she donated several works to LACMA [Los Angeles County Museum of Art] too. Didn't she?

E. GENE CRAIN: Very possibly. And I guarantee you if she did they've auctioned them off.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: In terms of the recent interest, recent even being as much as 20 years ago, because that's probably about the time it started -- what do you think were the main points at which that interest came forth? I think you already talked about the Riverside exhibition that Dextra . . .

E. GENE CRAIN: In New York?

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: No, I'm sorry. Dextra Frankel's exhibition in Fullerton.

E. GENE CRAIN: Now what was the question?

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: What other exhibitions or happenings do you think have been helpful in getting this work forward?

E. GENE CRAIN: Well, good question. And you're as responsible for this as anything. Your thing had, in Santa Barbara was just a remarkable show.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: The 1988 exhibition that the Santa Barbara Museum organized?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah. And truthfully every once in awhile, it's sort of like Judy Garland and Micky Rooney,

somebody with the capacity and the ho-ho just say, "Let's have a show." And they will. The Fresno show in '78 was very well received. Any time they put these darned things out people come away from it, with the exception of certain critics, come away from it very, very happy. With very pleasant things to say about it. I don't know how seriously they take it yet, but I don't know that that's really important. Let's see how seriously it's taken 100 years from now.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, in 1986 the Gualala Arts Center organized an exhibition of your collection, that was really a pretty significant showing. Did that help to stir up interest?

E. GENE CRAIN: Well, there are certain people that certainly like to say it did. I don't know. You know the person to ask on something like this would be Janet [Blake] or yourself. Museum personnel. Writers of significance who write on the subject. I don't know. I know a lot of people just like to come through the office just to look. It was sure a lot of fun. Gualala is pretty well isolated up in Northern California on the coast on the way to whatever that town is up there.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Was that the most significant showing of your collection?

E. GENE CRAIN: It was the biggest.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And there was a catalog with that, too.

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah, there was. The catalog didn't hold together very well. But it was a decent catalog. And the color was pretty good. It's always been interesting that people would come as far as they would come. I mean, Gualala is a very isolated place to come to, although it's sure a beautiful town if you want to take a trip of four or five days or something like that. And use as the focal point of the trip that show. People I've talked to who have been up in Gualala all the time, say that a lot of people did come over just to see it. But, you know, there's a lot of reasons to because it's such a remarkably beautiful part of the world.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, what do you think was maybe the most important exhibition of your work from the collection?

E. GENE CRAIN: It may surprise you, the Fresno thing in '78. For this reason, Dike, Brandt and Sheets were all there and they all wrote for it and they all helped me pick it. And while the catalog was fairly pedestrian, the reproductions in the catalog were pretty good. And the statements that were made by Dike, Brandt and Sheets, and myself, I like. It was highly regarded in the valley where it was shown. I think I have more fun thinking about that than any other of the shows that they've had.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: You've already talked a little bit about Ruth Westphal's American Scene Painting book. Do you feel that heralded an important moment for this school of artists? Has it helped to create a better understanding and more interest in the group?

E. GENE CRAIN: That's a really good question. And I have an answer for it. The answer is yes. Although the book has not been as popular as I had hoped it would be. The book is sensational. Particularly, the introductory essay by Brandt. It is a marvelous, marvelous bit of writing about these people. There are a dozen paintings in it that I wish hadn't been reproduced. In other words, I think that there were finer examples that could have been used of a particular artist's work. But, yes, it should, and it does help. It didn't have the influence on the watercolor group, or the California scene paintings that Ruth's work on the Plein air had. And I don't know exactly why, other than the fact of the old traditional thought that watercolor is not a legitimate means of expressing art. That the only worthwhile art is in oil. And I'm not saying that in a defensive manner at all. I think for many, many years people thought of watercolor as sketches, with notable exceptions obviously. But I think that Ruth's work on the American scene paintings was as good as her work on the Plein air stuff.

Tape 2, Side B [session 2, tape 2; 25-minute tape side]

E. GENE CRAIN: Paul [Bockhorst] is a remarkable human being in that he is the fastest learner, I think, of anybody I have ever met.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: He's brilliant.

E. GENE CRAIN: And he absorbed this stuff very well and became quite an expert at it. And he was interested in it. He thought that the work that he did for PBS was very important. I never failed to see it. I find that it is really worthwhile. It was just a terrific thing. And one hundred years from now it will be something that people can look back on and find a lot of satisfaction in. Paul's work -- that was a terrific thing.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, after some of these exhibitions and books and documentaries, how has the market for this art changed? Has there been a change in the market as a result of those things? Or had the change

already come much earlier?

E. GENE CRAIN: I don't know about the result, I don't know why people have forced the prices up.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Do you know when it changed?

E. GENE CRAIN: Well, yes. It depends on how you describe change. Paintings that 30 years ago you could pick up for $50.00 now at auction will go for large amounts of money, even minor works are $5,000, and of things of this nature. At two recent auctions, major works, two by Sheets and one by Kosa, a cityscape by Kosa, just went off the charts. And why, Susan, I really don't know. Whether, it may just be a question of supply and demand. These things tend to be more available, and of higher quality than other California art. I don't know. I do know that there seems to be a lot of interest in good stuff. There is a lot of interest in not so good stuff too in the sense that it will cost more to buy not so good stuff. But the truth of the matter is that there is stuff available. I remember talking with Ruth Hatfield of Dal [Dalzell] Hatfield's Gallery before she died. I never knew Dal. But I knew Ruth quite well. She was Millard's dealer. And Ruth had a Gallery in the Ambassador Hotel or the Biltmore in the thirties. And Ruth would tell me about exhibits that she had or abilities that she had to acquire for people who wanted to pay $35,000 or $40,000 or $50,000 for a whole six pack of van Goghs. You want a van Gogh? Fine. You want a Cézanne watercolor? Well, we can get you one of those for $6,000. You can parallel that to now. You can go down to David's, David Stary-Sheets' Gallery in Laguna Beach, and you can acquire a good heart of this stuff. You may have to pay an arm and a leg for it. But it is there for the acquisition. You can go to Ray Redfern's Gallery or Joan Irvine's Gallery and get good art of California of the early part of the century. Impressionism you have to pay a tremendous amount of money for. A William Wendt went off at Christie's for $400,000, when you put the premiere and the taxes on it. Now that's a lot of money for anything. And as far as I'm concerned there are great Wendts and there are not so good Wendts. But most people are going to be put aside because they don't have $400,000 to buy a painting. But if you've got $15,000 or $20,000 you can go to David's place and put the money down and make $1,000 a month payments and buy six or seven paintings maybe. And so you have the start of a collection. And then you have, perhaps, the start of an appreciation of what it is you're collecting. I don't know if I even answered your question. I probably sidestepped it.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: No, I think you did. You've already talked about it a little bit, how the market has changed over the years. I guess it's difficult to sort of pinpoint when it began to happen. But do you think that the prices began to get out of control ten years ago? Five years ago?

E. GENE CRAIN: For my stuff?

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Yeah, for your stuff.

E. GENE CRAIN: It's not out of control.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Even though you used to be able to buy something for $50.00, it still has only gone up to $5,000?

E. GENE CRAIN: I remember when I used to go to Sotheby's when they were at the Pan Pacific in Los Angeles. And I'd hold that paddle up for a painting that I wanted badly. Not that it was a particularly good painting, but I held it. And the numbers would get to $1500 and people would be fainting around me saying, "Oh, my god. He's spending $1500 for that!" Or, you know. And to me, it was well worth it. But now $1500 in the sixties might be $15,000 today. I don't know. I don't go around spending that kind of money just to acquire a bunch of this art. I've already acquired a bunch of this art. If I'm going to spend that kind of money I'm going to get pieces that I feel are important for the reasons I've already expressed.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, do you have to compete with others for particular works of art more now than you may have had to?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yes, but I don't. Because I'm just not going to. There are some paintings, if and when they become available, that I will acquire. I don't care what I have to pay. But as a rule the answer is no. I was interested in this cityscape by Kosa at the recent auction. But it just went way past my interest. Because I was afraid the painting may have been slightly damaged. But I think that by the time it was finished somebody had paid $15,000 for it. A full sheet watercolor. A wonderful, wonderful cityscape by Kosa. But I just wasn't going to pay that. I've got cityscapes by Kosa. I've got twenty or thirty paintings by Emil.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: This is sort of out of the stream, but what do you think was your first big acquisition? Was it Abandoned? Or California Holiday?

E. GENE CRAIN: Road to San Jacinto.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: That was your first big one?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah. I paid one way or another. And I can't remember the circumstances. But I paid a lot of money for it. And I remember thinking, god, I'm glad I've got this painting. It really was a terrific painting. I could give you two tapes on that painting about the fact that a dog had chewed it up and that Rex had rescued it and it was all put back together like a jigsaw puzzle.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: You'd never know it.

E. GENE CRAIN: I know. Well, [inaudible] made even a better painting of this same subject. And nobody knows what happened to it. Those are just incidental things that I could tell you about. Which goes back to the question that you asked before, of why are they important to you? Why don't you sell some and upgrade your collection? There are so many vignettes and incidents about the paintings that make them important to me for other than aesthetic or monetary reasons.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: You've already talked a little bit about this, and I want to go into greater detail later about your relationship to the artists. I know that Rex has been instrumental in helping you to form the collection. Were Dike and Sheets as involved?

E. GENE CRAIN: They weren't. Rex was instrumental in helping form the collection. He was just very supportive and made me feel good about doing it. He didn't say, "Go out . . ." The one that said, "Get it," would be Millard.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Really?

E. GENE CRAIN: The best way I can describe Dike in his approach to that question is this; once when I was talking I said, "Phil, what's your favorite painting? What's the best? When I say painting by Phil Dike, what comes to your mind?" He said, "The last painting I sold." So he was interested, but he didn't push. Rex was grateful for what he felt I was doing for his group. But he didn't push either. The best thing Rex ever said about a Rex Brandt painting was, "Well, it's okay." I mean, he's very reticent in that regard.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: He really is.

E. GENE CRAIN: But Millard, Millard would push. He would say, "Do it. This is good. Get it." And I would follow his advice.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And that with regards to other people's work and work in general by the school?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yes. Millard pushed, Millard pushed his work, his own creations, less than he pushed other people's work.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Interesting.

E. GENE CRAIN: Millard, I think this whole group of people, I don't think California has ever produced anybody that was like them. Because the impressionist group, the 1900s to the 1930s or forties or even fifties group, they had some problems. They had their little groups and their little jealousies. And their little thises and that and the other thing. As well as the ability to co-exist with each other. But this group that I'm interested in, one, it was limited in number, I suppose, at least as far as I'm concerned it's limited. Two, they got along so well. And three, their leader, which is acknowledged to be Millard, was very supportive of everybody. He liked his stuff. He pushed his stuff. I mean, they were selling quarter sheets for $25.00 and Millard said, "Don't give me that. Here's a full sheet. And I'm going to get $250 for it." And he did. Of course, he had a lot of help with that. From the gallery and Arthur Millier and Tony, Antony [Anderson], the guy that was preceding Millier at the "Times". He was critically quite the golden boy. And so what he wanted to do carried a lot of weight. But he carried these guys along. And he helped me form the collection more than anybody.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Was there any particular art dealer that was instrumental? We're just about done. But do you need water?

E. GENE CRAIN: No, I'm okay. Alex Cowie, Dal Hatfield, the guy at the Biltmore Gallery, that big cowboy guy [Steve Rose].

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Stendahl?

E. GENE CRAIN: No, I didn't know [Earl] Stendahl.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Yeah, he was sort of out of the picture by the time you . . .

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah, yeah, he was. I met some of his children or in-laws, but I never knew him. But I do know how important he was. I mean, I've heard how important he was. But as far as galleries . . . the other galleries are manned by people I know that are just my buddies. David and Susan [Stary-Sheets].

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Right.

E. GENE CRAIN: And people like Mike Verbal. And even to an extent Ray Redfern. I acquired a lot of these paintings directly from the artists.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: So it was really their influence that has been much more important than any of the dealers?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah, absolutely. Remember, the genesis of all of this, if anything, was my desire to know the artists.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Right.

E. GENE CRAIN: I didn't desire to know the dealers. Except I did love Ruth Hatfield because she was just an invaluable fountain. I mean, she knew [Alfred] Barnes in Philadelphia. She and her husband and Barnes were intimate. And the stories she . . .

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: I didn't realize that.

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah. Oh, I could tell you stories that she related to me about their experience with Barnes, who was apparently just an absolute unpredictable curmudgeon. He was something. And you had to be very, very careful. She related one time that an Utrillo, he brought an Utrillo down and said, "What do you think of this?" And Dal said, "Oh, I think this is terrific." And he said, "Well, you've just bought it. And here's the price." And he couldn't say no. Dal Hatfield started Norton Simon's collection. Norton Simon had a home in Balboa and his neighbor had some pictures. And he said, "Where did you get your pictures?" And he [the neighbor] said, "Well, I got them from Dal Hatfield." And it so happened that Hunt Foods' office was just down the place from the Ambassador. And he went in and saw Dal and Dal wouldn't sell him anything. He said, "I will sell you something in a year. But in the meantime I'm going to teach you about art." And Simon, being the absolute genius that he was, an incredible man, spent a year with him. And that was how Simon became Norton Simon. I mean, I have all these stories. That's why, yeah, a dealer is important. But a dealer is important not because he sells pictures. A dealer is important because I like her or him. I like Millard's dealer, Kennedy Galleries. I got to know them. And they became friends.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: What is the reaction of the average person who comes to the law offices and discovers what's on the walls?

E. GENE CRAIN: They either ignore them because they don't even see them. Or they're just overwhelmed. There doesn't seem to be, "Hey, there's a nice painting there." There's none of that. They're either overwhelmed because many people come here just for the experience. Some people just don't pay any attention to it at all. But by and large the reaction is so very positive. People will come in, Susan, from time to time, they'll just come in. And this is an active, busy law office with eight or so lawyers in it. And secretaries. And it's phones ringing and they'll just walk around. And somebody will look up and say, "What are you doing here?" And it's as if the people who are looking at the pictures say, "Don't worry. You're not bothering me." And they'll just keep on looking. They'll go into offices of lawyers and just look. They're just simply focused in on it. That's been a fascinating development, to see how people who have heard about this office here will come and see it. And if they make a special effort for it, I've never had anybody that hasn't enjoyed the experience. Never. Not once. Nobody has ever said anything negative, "What do you have all this stuff for?" Or anything like that. But they've all enjoyed the experience.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Has anyone ever developed an interest in the period or started collecting? You know, like another lawyer, say? Or, or somebody that came through?

E. GENE CRAIN: Not that I'm aware of.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Right. Most of the people that come here are here for a specific purpose. But it sounds like some people come, wander in because they've heard about it?

E. GENE CRAIN: Oh, yeah.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And then do you have groups from schools ever come through? I mean, is it open to the public in any way?

E. GENE CRAIN: If somebody will call me I'll get Janet [Blake] to take a group of them through.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: I see.

E. GENE CRAIN: And the answer is yeah. But no school children or anything like that. It would be very

inconvenient for a large group to come through except on a Saturday or a Sunday.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Would you like the collection to be more accessible?

E. GENE CRAIN: I've got to make it more accessible, because I've got to figure out something to do with it. I don't know what to do with it. I've got to figure out where it's going to be some time. Am I going to sell it off piece by piece? I don't think so. My wife and I talked about that. She said, "You didn't make this collection to sell and make money on it. You made it for some other reason." So if that's the case I've got to find a repository for it. Then I've got to find that the repository is one that would treat it as something other than the Cleveland Museum treated its gift from Mrs. whatever her name is.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Everett.

E. GENE CRAIN: Everett. Yeah. Even a full place such as Scripps, they've got a wonderful gift of art. And it's more an annoyance to them than anything else, other than the Mary Cassatt that they like. So you have to be careful.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And so at the moment you don't have any future plans, but you're in the phase of, of trying to figure it out?

E. GENE CRAIN: Trying to figure it out. The LA Museum, for example, has from the California Watercolor Society, it has its prize winners. And that's quite a story in and of itself. How that developed. How that happened. That all the prize winners of the California Watercolor Society are sitting in a basement in Los Angeles County Museum of Art, with nobody even anymore to curate them. I think Nancy Moure was, was aware of it. I'm certainly aware of it.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And I think Eileen Fort, who's there now, is aware of it.

E. GENE CRAIN: Is she?

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And I think she cares about it.

E. GENE CRAIN: Oh, good.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And at least they're together. At least they are kept somewhere. Even if they're not on view very often. I mean, that's too bad, but at least they have been saved for . . . .

E. GENE CRAIN: The Claremont Colleges would be a good place if they could get a plan. And they certainly have the capacity to get the money to get a plan. In fact, I was on a committee that for a year tried to get together a museum for California, this kind of stuff. And combined with the Mexican stuff. But it fell apart. But using the Claremont Colleges as a focal point would be pretty good because they could have a teaching museum, they could have something that would add to that incredible wealthy set of colleges up there. They could use that. And do a good job of teaching and have a museum, if they ever got around to it. But it's hard to know what's important.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, the trend in Southern California among collectors has been to open their own museums. I mean, if you think about it, there's Norton Simon, Armand Hammer, Frederick Weisman, Joan Irvine Smith. Would you like to comment on that trend?

E. GENE CRAIN: I think that's terrific. The fellow over in Arizona too.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Fleischer?

E. GENE CRAIN: Fleischer, yeah. I think that's terrific. I might be able to do it but it takes such a base of money. I don't have that kind of capital. I would need the cooperation of . . . . I mean, I'd be delighted to give them the paintings. But as far as supporting it is concerned, I don't have that kind of capital. Norton Simon and I are not in the same league.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: But could you see it maybe as an adjunct wing or an adjunct collection to one that's already formed?

E. GENE CRAIN: Absolutely. There's some people at Pomona College, my alma mater, who have connections both with the college and with, for example, the museum up in Malibu, I mean, the Getty. And I'm thinking of trying to find some time to get in touch with them to see what happened. I've got a show going into Pomona sometime, maybe next March. I don't know. I keep in touch with those people. And I would be delighted to have this stuff up. Not as a whole, I mean, I'm certainly not a dictator about it. But there are enough quality pieces here, that I think there ought to be someone or some institution that would be pleased to have it up. And the archives are important, too, and they'll be more important, you know, as time passes.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, the fact that you have both an extensive and in-depth collection of a certain school, and also an extensive library and archive makes it a very attractive collection for any institution that's interested in the history of California art. And for making it available as a study collection, like you said. I mean, it's a perfect . . .

E. GENE CRAIN: I would hope so. I would hope so. I don't see any reason why not.

Tape 1, Side A [session 3, tape 1; 30-minute tape side]

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. An interview with Gene Crain on March 21, 1999 at his office in Newport Beach. The interviewer is Susan Anderson. This is session three, tape 1, side A. Mr. Crain, today I wanted to talk about your interaction with California School artists. And I know that many collectors and even curators become interested in the art of a particular group of artists because they create personal friendships with those artists. And I know that a lot of that is at work here. Would you talk a little bit about that?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah, I would never, ever have thought to buy paintings just because of some aesthetic spirit overwhelming me. Far and away the most important thing to me, as I had mentioned before, was the opportunity to get to know these people. I early formed an opinion that genius is genius and just the way that it is expressed is different. I felt that these painters, once I got to know Rex and through Rex, Dike, and through Dike, Sheets, and through Sheets, the rest of them, I felt that they had touches of genius. They had touches of original thoughts. Touches of things that they wished to express and that they had just chosen as a method of expressing it a paint brush and white paper. Perhaps I sensed that my opportunity to talk with and get to know people of genius was limited. And so I concentrated very heavily on getting to know these people. Not just objectively as, oh, you have genius and I would sure like to see how you tick, like I'm surgically operating on them. But subjectively, just simply because I found that I could communicate with them at some level or the other. And the more I got to know them the better I could communicate with them. And it just grew and grew and grew. They didn't disappoint me. And I've spent a good deal of my non professional career, or my non professional time during the last thirty or thirty-five years developing that relationship with them. Hopefully, the fact that I've made a collection of their work has been of some satisfaction to them. Clearly, the fact that I've got to know them well has added an incredible dimension to my life, that I can say that subjectively and I don't mean to sound in any way boring or overly state something. I'm just talking as to my own persona. My own reason for being around. It's added a dimension that I otherwise never would have had except for the fact that I had this relationship with these men and with Joan Irving, obviously, a woman.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, in speaking about that genius, were you interested in learning about a sort of different lifestyle or world view? I mean, did you . . .

E. GENE CRAIN: Absolutely not. I was just interested in seeing what it was they had to say. What it was, how they viewed life. As I've said several times throughout the course of this interview, I was interested in hearing from them an occasional, original thought. And they did have original thoughts. They were able to express their feeling for the land, the sunshine, the area in which they lived with other people. Particularly, Dike. The interrelationship of man and his environment. They were able to express that through the method they had chosen to express their own capacity. I've used the word genius. I didn't try to insinuate into their lives anything more than was just there, simply because as far as I personally was concerned, what they had to tell me was so much more than I already knew that I was satisfied with whatever it was they had to say. And I never tried to draw them out into some cosmic anything. Brandt had a great deal of Eastern religion. His mother was very involved in Eastern religion. Brandt was a conscientious objector of World War II. He, Dike and Sheets, different type people. Dike was a poet. I've never, ever known anybody that had quite the understanding of the environmental edge-of-the-sea issues with man and his environment that Dike had. Sheets, of course, was just energy personified.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, so in the beginning, your first impulse to seek out these artists was really out of curiosity about them? And buying work from them was really secondary?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah. Curiosity about Brandt really. As I said, I rented a garage apartment in Corona Del Mar and Brandt's printer [Rupert Hendricks] was my landlord. And he had some of Brandt's work. And through my connections or my observations at the Chicago Art Institute, primarily, I had been exposed to some art. And I liked Brandt's work. And so I just went over to see Brandt. With no preconception at all, other than the fact that I thought he made pretty good paintings. My landlord, who was Brandt's printer, said, "Oh, he's a nice guy. He'll be happy to talk to you. Just go over and see him." So I, being young and totally uninvolved and certainly uninhibited, I did just that. I went over and banged on the door and saw him.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: That's great. Well, why don't you talk a little bit about your relationship with Brandt?

E. GENE CRAIN: Well, do you have six months? In 1960 or '61 or '62, well in 1964, since Brandt was born in

1914, he would have been what? Fifty years old? Forty years old? Something like that. So I've known him since he was younger than I am now. And I've known him and his family. Brandt is an incredible teacher. He has a capacity to teach people that is just remarkable. And he's always teaching. Even one on one with me. As I've said before, because of his hearing loss he is a very, very verbal person. And he says good things. He says things that I've never heard before, and still does to this day. Of course, when his wife died some four or five years ago he lost his sounding board. And now when we are together, which we are probably once a week for supper, I just let him talk because he doesn't have anybody else to talk with. He taught me a great deal about the background of this school and did it over a period of time so that it didn't seem like he was teaching me. I found out about this school and this time period of California artists over a good long period of time with Brandt. Because I knew Brandt and his wife, Joan Irving long before (at least a year) I made the acquaintance of the second one of the group, which was Dike. So when I met Dike I had had the advantage of seeing much of Brandt's work through the sixties, whatever his many periods were. His expressionist period or his whatever period. So I had seen his work. Listened to him. And listened and listened and listened so that I wasn't totally devoid of background given to me by Rex and Joan in social situations, friendship situations before I met any of the other artists. I had a relationship with Brandt's dealer in Laguna Beach, Dick Challis, who was by far, by far the most influential Orange County, California dealer of this kind of work that ever was. Professionally I was representing Dick's wife in a divorce. And it turned out that Dick Challis was Rex's dealer.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Just out of coincidence?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah. Just out of total coincidence. And I got to know Richard and we became very good friends. And he was very much an enthusiastic supporter of these people. And over the decade at the Challis Galleries, as it existed in Laguna Beach, I would say that he and Helen Zillgitt, another collector who preceded me, were the people who kept the flame going. Whatever flame there was. You have to understand that there were not people all that crazily interested in buying these artists' work. But I will say that when I began to get the work, I had from any number of directions people saying I was really doing a smart thing. That some day these were going to be very valuable and "Oh, you're, you're really on to something here. Keep on keeping on." Things of that nature. I didn't pay much attention to it, because of the reasons I've already suggested as to why the work was important to me.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, I want to talk to you a little bit more about your patronage in a minute because I think that's interesting. What do you think, getting back to Mr. Brandt, how would you describe his contribution to the art of California? How do you see it? You know, the whole span of his work.

E. GENE CRAIN: Brandt was very, very methodical in that he kept excellent records of the things that he did. But that's not the answer to your question. Brandt, as much as a painting maker, was a book maker. He loved to make books. He loved to do graphic arts. He loved to do, as much as painting, other things connected with this work. And I think that his whole volume of the books and the pamphlets, the prints, as well as the paintings that he made, are the most important asset, or the most important raw material that anybody that would be interested would have. I know people are going to, in the future, if this school means anything to anybody, this school that is my collection, if it is ever going to mean anything to anybody they will look first at Ruth Westphal's book as the keystone of this idea. But there was so much before Ruth's book. It just wasn't pulled together very well. And I would say fifty to sixty to seventy percent of the printed material that had to do with documenting the fact that between 1927 and '28 and now, '99 or 1960 or 1950, whenever you put a time limit on it, had to do with the fact that Rex was a methodical historian who didn't just paint. He wrote books. And he wrote pamphlets. All of which had to do with what it was he was about. But in talking about what it was he was about, he also talked and wrote about others, because he was very generous in his patronage of the other members of the school, and about his own feelings and why it was that he felt not that California was important, not that his work was important, but if you, for want of a better word, the sun was important. The sea was important. And, again, I get back to his Theosophy, the Theosophy of his mother. His father was a dour Swede. His mother was a very, very, very, very bright Theosophist personage who was imbued with the religion of the East. And Rex just took it from there. All his synapses came together very well. He was a very, very, very bright man. A very articulate man. And a very verbal man. If I had one wish that I could have accommodated, it would have been with all the conversations that I had over the decades with Rex to have had a microphone and just recorded everything he said. The man is truly an asset because his vigor and his variety of ways of keeping this thing going were numerous. He's just a very important man. Now Dike, on the other hand, was a very quiet person. A person who thought a lot, a surprisingly droll human being. But he was quiet. He was a poet. He wrote beautiful poetry. And he made paintings. Dike was a paint maker. Now he also was a teacher at Scripps from the time that Sheets brought him from the Disney Studio. People don't realize that Dike was very important to Disney. He was all important in the making of Fantasia for example. He was the color coordinator for it. And several of the scenes from Fantasia were Dike's responsibility. But Sheets lured him to Scripps College in the mid forties and he was a teacher. His students adored him. I never had any classes with him, obviously. But I had lots of classes with Rex. Because every time you sit down and unless you're just going to talk about the weather or something like that, every experience with Rex was a teaching experience with me. Not so much so with Dike. Dike was a very thoughtful man. A man who you pulled things out of gradually. The things that he had to say and the

feelings that he had, make him what I think was probably the most important member of the group. I think he was the best artist, the most sensitive artist, had the most to say. And was intense in his feelings for what it was he was doing as a painting maker.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And when did you meet him? How did you come about meeting him?

E. GENE CRAIN: Dike and Brandt in the early fifties, maybe late forties, had a school that was internationally renowned at Brandt's house in Corona Del Mar. And they got together and ran that school for many, many years before Dike retired from it. Brandt and his wife, Joan, continued to run it.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: It was primarily a summer school, wasn't it?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah. Two sessions when they were young. One session later on. And artists would come and they would take classes from these then young artists. They would make lovely serigraphs. Dike made lovely serigraphs. I happen to have one copy of it. He would take it around and put it in barbershops, drug stores. Anybody want to learn how to paint? Dike/Brandt Painting School, Phone Harbor 1144W. And that, that became a very highly regarded training school. Well, Dike dropped out. But Brandt, because of that close relationship, had a great, almost instinctive love of the work of Dike and love of Dike as a human being. Brandt and his wife, Dike and Betty Dike, Dike's wife, were all instrumental in the early running of that summer school. Well, when I came along in the sixties Dike had long retired. The summer school was still going on. But Brandt was effusive in his praise of everybody, but particularly the work of Dike. And when he had taken me through whatever it was he was going to take me through in order so that I would be prepared to meet the great Dike and the great Sheets and the great lesser people, Barse Millers and Emil Kosas and Phil Paradises and people of that sort. By the time that he had prepared me to meet them probably at least a year, maybe a little more had passed before I finally went up to Claremont and met Dike.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And you just went up by yourself?

E. GENE CRAIN: Went up by myself. I went knowing the area of Claremont as well as I did. I got there early and I remember parking by a park for about forty-five minutes and reading the paper because I was early. And then at exactly the right time I went over and knocked on the door and met Betty and Phil. Dike is a shy person, or seems shy. Particularly until you get to know him. Betty, on the other hand, was very effusive and very easy to know. So she was good in that transfer. I didn't surprise him as I did Brandt. He knew I was coming. But we spent a lot of time together that day. A lot of time together. And as far as I'm aware, as far as the art was concerned, the world of art in which I was involved, or becoming involved, I spent my time between Brandt and Dike on the one hand, and going to Dick Challis' Gallery most of the time on the other hand. And then going in to Ruth Hatfield's Gallery in Los Angeles and Alex Cowie's Gallery in Los Angeles. And that was about it. But I did spend, I began to spend a lot of time, as much time as the logistics of the thing would permit, I would spend in Claremont with Dike.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And when you were with him were you looking at his paintings and talking about his paintings?

E. GENE CRAIN: Every time. Almost every time. He would take me upstairs to his studio and we would look at all of the things that he did. All of them unframed, unmatted. Dike was a terrible framer. God, he used nothing but old chicken slats to frame his stuff. But he had a mountain of inventory. Sheets always sold well. Brandt sold pretty well. But Dike, nobody was beating down the doors to, to buy his stuff. But Brandt had told me that he was important. So I said, "Okay. If he is important let's see if I can look at it and see if I can find some importance in it." Well, it was difficult at first because Dike was expressing his poetry and was expressing his view of nature and nature's relationship to man. And he had a lot of amorphous things in it. And I had to come to learn to appreciate Dike. It wasn't just a sailboat in the wind with somebody having a cocktail in the front end of it and his saying, "Isn't this pretty?" In those days there was a saying amongst the artists that one of the things they had to do was paint things because people from Kansas who came to Laguna Beach or Newport Beach to visit, they always wanted to take a painting home. And they would pay $300 for an oil and $100 for a watercolor. So you had to be sure that there was plenty of that kind of stuff around. I don't think Dike ever did that. First of all, he was in Claremont and that's somewhat further away. Brandt would do that and laugh at it a little bit. Sheets would make his work and if people liked it they would pay his price. And he didn't really care whether they did or not. But Brandt was aware that there was this mentality. This Riviera mentality of people coming in the summer, crowding Newport and Laguna Beach and they wanted to take something back to Kansas to put over the fireplace. They would pay as much as $300 for an oil. No more. And they might, if somebody talked them into it, pay as much as $100 for a watercolor. So you had to be aware of that.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: So he had some small production that he would create for that market do you think?

E. GENE CRAIN: Dike wouldn't. I think.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: But Brandt might have?

E. GENE CRAIN: You see, Brandt had a continuing relationship with Challis. And Challis was down there and Challis says, "Come on, Brandt. Paint me some stuff I can sell to Dorothy. She's going back to Kansas." And so Brandt had that kind of stuff. Joan had that kind of stuff. Now, Dike's dealer was Challis but he didn't have the inventory that Brandt would produce down there. Perhaps because Dick couldn't, Richard Challis couldn't sell it as readily as he could sell Rex's stuff.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, when you met Phil Dike you were looking at the work he was doing then probably. Was he showing you what he was currently working on?

E. GENE CRAIN: It took me awhile, really, to gain an appreciation of Phil's stuff. I had to look. It didn't make any difference whether Phil was doing something now or had done something before. Phil, as did all these artists, went through very many different periods. My goodness. They had such long careers that they had to do things differently. Phil sometimes tended to work in series. There was a period in Phil's work in the late twenties that he showed a lot of the influence of [George Benjamin] Luks, who was his teacher in New York. And a lot of the influence of [Clarence] Hinkle. But they all loved Hinkle. But Clarence and Phil were particularly close. Particularly close together. Millard never would admit that anybody influenced him about anything. Millard influenced people. People didn't influence Millard. Rex was too young, being perhaps ten years younger than either Phil or Millard. Eight to ten years younger. So he didn't have the closeness of the relationship. But Luks and Hinkle, as well as [Henry Lee] McFee and [F.] Tolles Chamberlin were Dike's early mentors when they both went to Chouinard. (Sheets and Dike were roommates at Chouinard's, when they attended school there.) And they both became teachers there very quickly. Dikes' stuff was hard for me to appreciate. Dike was not hard for me to appreciate. I just adored the guy. He was slight of frame. Not a big person at all. The first time I ever met Millard was at Dike's house some years after I'd first known Dike, or some months. I don't know. A period of time. A significant period of time. And Millard, I knew I was going to meet the great Sheets that day for the first time. And I was nervous about it. Because by this time I was fairly into the history of the California School. And as one would suspect Millard was late. And I was sitting there waiting, waiting, waiting in great anticipation for the moment to arrive. And in those days Dike's home was on Forbes Avenue. It was way out in the country. And it was so far out in the country that gravel you could hear it, the end of Forbes Avenue near Phil's house was full of gravel. And I heard the sound of this car on a Saturday come roaring up. A big huge Buick that Millard was driving. He roared up, hit that gravel. Screeching of tires. Slamming of brakes. Opening the door. Grabbed Betty. Threw her up around like she was his long lost sister. Grabbed this little Phil and threw him around. And Phil finally was able to say, "I'd like you to meet Gene Crain." And he grabbed me. He had no idea in the world who I was. But within, I don't know, fifty or sixty seconds I felt like he was my best friend. Because Millard just had this effect on people. Phil was quiet, but he had known Millard for decades and so they were close. And so Millard could get away with doing something like that. Phil was the kind of guy that you wanted to sit, and when he talked, you really wanted to listen to him. As distinguished from Brandt, who was always talking, but always had something good to say. Phil was not always talking. Phil would listen. And Phil would make comment and the comment was, was pure gold.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, do you think that the work you first looked at was more abstract perhaps? And maybe it took you awhile to . . .?

E. GENE CRAIN: Oh, absolutely, beyond any doubt. He was, at the time, the most obtuse artist that I was seriously interested in. And I got seriously interested in his art simply because I wanted seriously to be interested in him. That does not necessarily mean that he didn't make representational pictures. You asked me before what my favorite pictures were and I gave you an answer. It would change from time to time. If you caught me on the right day, my favorite picture would be the first Dike I ever bought. Which is a thing called Rock Fishing, which was very wet, very wet. Very transparent. Very representational. And certainly recognizable as a Dike. So he was not abstract in the least, but he was expressing himself. He was expressing his genius. And he was expressing the views that he had of things that were important to him. And as a teacher in a school setting such as the Claremont Colleges it was very well to have some views. And he had them.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, you started talking about the time that you met Millard.

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah. I'll never forget it. It was just absolutely hilarious. Within five minutes of meeting Millard he was inviting me to his home in Gualala. He was saying all kinds . . . And I'm not even sure he knew my name. But that was . . .

Tape 1, Side B [session 3, tape 1; 30-minute tape side]

E. GENE CRAIN: He was clearly the most commanding of presences of any of the artists of these groups. You couldn't help but be drawn to Millard. Millard had things to say. He tended, his public remarks tended to be built around a single speech, such as a politician's speech, that he would expand off of as the need arose. The public

just adored the man. Not all people liked him. I've never been able to find out, there was some group of people that felt some antagonism toward him. But I have never been able to discover why. He was just such a warm, friendly man. He would give you anything. He would spend as much time with you as he had to. He had his life history, he always had severe migraine headaches. And they lasted and lasted and lasted. One of the things that I'm sure killed him eventually in 1990, in 1988, was the fact that he had taken steroids for his headaches until his body was just hollowed out. There was just nothing left. But these headaches, he had tried for years every conceivable remedy to get rid of. But unless you knew him well you wouldn't know that he was suffering with them. Because he was such a dominating presence. The only artist that I ever met that came close to him would be Kosa and it wasn't even close. Sheets became a great friend almost immediately. And from the first time that I met him I now had a third artist about whom I knew because Brandt had educated me. And then Dike had educated me. So I was getting more and more familiar with not only their work but them as individuals and the school they represented. Now I had a third artist to spend time with.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And when you spent time with Millard, now he had already moved up to Gualala at that point?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yes. Yes, he had.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: So in order for you to sit down and talk about his work to a great extent you must have had to go up and visit him?

E. GENE CRAIN: No, he had also a home in Pasadena. He had an apartment in Pasadena. And Millard, one of the relaxing things that Millard did was drive that car. My Lord, he drove that car. Once he had bought for his palatial estate in Gualala, he had bought some doors in Mexico. And he strapped those doors onto the top of his Buick and headed north. He just loved to drive. He would drive all night. He thought nothing of taking off at 6:00 in the evening and going home to Gualala from Pasadena. He was just an inveterate driver. Maybe it was relaxing to him. But he had so much energy. He was a terribly attractive man. Particularly in his salad days in the thirties. He was just as handsome as a man could be. He was married to a genius, Mary Baskerville Sheets. And she had an IQ of about 160 and she was one of the ladies that was followed by some group that wanted to see what happened to these people with particularly high IQs. But Millard was a man of tremendous passion, tremendous amount of interest, tremendous ability. Although Millard was as much an illustrator in his work as anything else. But every once in awhile he would come up with something that was just out of this world. He made hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of paintings. And when he did something he didn't just do it, he did it with great flare, great elan, great vigor. The mural, the mosaic at Notre Dame, for example, when Millard did that he discovered something like twelve kinds of granite that nobody had ever known existed in putting together that piece at Notre Dame. What everybody calls Touchdown Jesus. I don't know what it's real name is. But it used to be the thing you could see when Notre Dame was playing. They would pull back and you could see the great mosaic on this, on the side of the library. He was very influential on a lot of people. Sue Hertel, God love her, was a great artist who was one of his people. One of the most interesting stories I knew about Millard was the Prometheus story at Frary Hall in Pomona. People come from all over the world to see the mural by the great Mexican muralist.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: [José Clemente] Orozco.

E. GENE CRAIN: Orozco. And it is a tremendous picture. There's some work of Orozco's at Dartmouth and this thing at Pomona College in Frary Dining Hall. What people don't realize is that Millard was pretty much responsible for that. Millard insisted that it be done, bring this guy up here. And what Orozco had agreed to do was put murals on the entire of Frary Dining Hall. Top, side, all over it. But people of not much vision killed that because I think he may have wanted $5,000 to do the whole thing or something. And it just infuriated Millard because we would have had at Pomona then something akin to the Sistine Chapel with this.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Right.

E. GENE CRAIN: Because the mural of Prometheus is so strong, so commanding in any event. And then to have the whole of that rather large dining hall covered with Orozco's work would have been just like the stuff in Guadalajara at the orphanage and at the palace where Orozco did all his work. But that was Millard. That was Millard. He just had grand ideas, grand visions. And tremendous appetites. Tremendous fun to be with. He just made you feel wonderful to be with him.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, aside from people like Sue Hertel, who were more students and not peers, was there a group of peers that clustered around Millard to some extent?

E. GENE CRAIN: No. He didn't have peers. There were a group of people who clustered around Millard. The rest of them were peers. Millard was the leader. And they all acknowledged it. Sometimes grudgingly. Sometimes people like Phil, he didn't care. Sometimes admiringly, Brandt always did. A little bit jealous. But he was ten years younger so he didn't mind so much. People like Paradise, Paradise was grumpy anyway. But Millard had no

peers. The peers that were of Millard's group worshiped at his feet. And there was reason for that. Millard did things that they didn't have the initiative to do. Millard was famous. Millard was the golden boy of art in Southern California. Millard had paintings judged into the Carnegie. The first time that any artist west of the Mississippi had been judged into the Carnegie was one of Millard's paintings, Woman of Cartagena, that's now in the Cleveland Museum. Millard was bold. Millard was out there. And the rest of them just sort of came along. And they will acknowledge that. Millard would sell paintings, he would say, "Nobody is going, I'm not going to sell my paintings for $50.00 or $25.00. Do you want my paintings? You pay $150.00, you pay $250.00 for them." So everybody else instead of getting $5.00 or $10.00 for their work would get $25.00 to $50.00 for their work just because they went along, came along in the trail of Millard. And it was quite a trail to come along in. The man was indefatigable.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, you know, you mentioned before, I did sense every now and then a certain ambivalence on some people's part about Millard. But again, I've never really gotten to the bottom of it. And even with Rex I sensed that.

E. GENE CRAIN: Oh. Rex, well, the first part of your question I can't answer because I don't know. I never was able to figure out. Perhaps it may have had something to do with his lack of patience during the years that he was at Scripps. Perhaps it had to do with that he was very demanding as far as the Art Institute and Chouinard's and how things should be done. They should be done his way. And perhaps he stepped on some people's toes. I don't know. I don't know why people felt the way they did. Rex's ambivalence toward Millard was that he wanted Millard to like his work. He really did. He still does. He wanted to be recognized by Millard. And Millard never did, to me, say anything bad about this California School. But he never was overly effusive about it either. If you want to talk about the California School to Millard you talk about him. The closest that he would come was . . . Oh, Lord. A fairly good contemporary of his . . . .

[Recording Stops]

[Recording Begins Again]

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: We're talking about Tom Craig?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah. Millard liked Tom's work. The thing you have to understand about Millard, as far as he was concerned, everybody else, I don't care who it was, Zornes, whether they were peers or not, with the exception of Dike, everybody else was a student of his. They were students of Millard. And Millard was the master who taught. Who gave. And in a very decent way that is true. Millard painted watercolors. His famous watercolors of the thirties are watercolors that were painted like nobody else ever painted them before. They were just bold shapes of animalistic vitality of things eating at each other, which gave a kind of tension and a kind of romance to his better paintings (his 22/30 full sheet watercolors of the period) that I don't think anybody had ever made before. I haven't, in all the times I've looked at watercolors, I mean, I've looked at the Orientalists. I've looked at the great watercolors by Cézanne. I've looked at the watercolors in the East. And I've never seen anybody handle watercolor, water-based painting in the way that Millard did. It was just big, bold, and unique. It was as if Venus had stepped out fully blown from the half shell. One day he was making little precious watercolors like everybody else did. Quarter sheets. And the next thing you knew out would come something like Old Mill, Big Sur. Out would come something like Forever Moving. Out would come these tremendous feeling paintings that nobody had ever seen before. And as a result he was a favorite of the critics. He was a favorite of the Hollywood crowd. He was well known. And he was very, very active.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Did you have a chance to watch Millard paint ever? Or any of the other artists?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yes. Yes. The answer is yes. I watched. I never watched Dike work. But one of my fondest memories is being in Arles, France with Millard. We were staying at a place that used to be a nunnery. And of course, on this particular Saturday morning he came up and dragged me out of bed. And we were going out to see the wild horses on the Camargue because they were down there near Arles. And he had rented a Mercedes with a driver. And we were off and going. And he was sketching like mad. I remember Millard, finally after driving, and I was sleepy, I was tired, after driving and driving and driving, he told the driver to pull over to the side. And he made a painting. And I watched him make it. I watched the driver act, he was out picking up stuff. I watched Millard slapping at mosquitos and making this painting and mumbling to himself. And I watched how he did it. He did a lot of finish work in his room after he got back. But I watched him make it. I watched Brandt paint because I accompanied Brandt on many of his watercolor schools. I've watched him work. I have seen them apply pigment to paper, yeah.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: So you've been on some of the watercolor workshops with Brandt?

E. GENE CRAIN: Four or five with Brandt. Two with Sheets.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And was that in Arles, France? Were you on a watercolor workshop?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yes.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: But that particular day it sounds like you were just off by yourself with him?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah, yeah. We were just off early. Millard was not a great teacher on those things. He would work with people, but he wouldn't demonstrate necessarily, and just go off and do his own thing. He was a decent critic, but not nearly the critic of work that Brandt and Bob Woods were. He was, he was okay. But he had a tendency to be too kind to people. And he would work with them and he would paint over their stuff and things like that. And be encouraging. But I wouldn't say that his strong forte was teaching. At that level. He apparently was highly regarded when he was at Scripps. I went on watercolor trips with Brandt to Mexico and to New Mexico. And to several places. And then the one trip that I made with Millard was to Arles and Portugal.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Were you attempting to learn how to paint?

E. GENE CRAIN: No. The Thurman Hewett workshops were just a very important part of this whole group. Thurman Hewett was a watercolorist, and he held workshops. But even if you were not an artist you could go along just to watch, be a part of the workshop tours. And that's what I would do. I and my wife would accompany our friends, the teachers, and do whatever we could to make the workshop work better.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: You know, now that I'm asking you about artists, of the Northern California artists, was it George Post that you may have known the best?

E. GENE CRAIN: Far and away.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Would you tell me a little bit about him?

E. GENE CRAIN: If there was ever a St. Francis of Assisi it would be George Post. First of all, he was a tremendous artist. Under appreciated far and away. A tremendous artist. He, with watercolor, was sort of like Kuntz with oil. He knew where to put the paint and more than anybody else that I have ever known in this world, could see a painting from a scene. He would see a view, a vista, and say, "There's a painting there." And he would be able to find it. He was just tremendously competent, yet kind, quiet, walking through life. Everybody loved George. Everybody wanted to take care of George. George needed mothering and everybody wanted to mother George and take good care of him and make sure that he was happy. I was watching him paint once and he was at Brandt's workshop. And one of the students said, "George, would you please speak up? We can't hear you." And without missing a beat he said, "Well, then come closer." Oh, there are so many wonderful Post stories. He was well admired by Brandt. Brandt just thought his work was tremendous. I don't recall any of the other artists saying much about him. But they all knew of him. George was a little bit older. Perhaps he might have been born about 1904, 1905 or something of that nature. So his whole entire career had been, as far as I am aware, as an artist. And he had a good reputation in San Francisco. His work in Southern California was done basically through Brandt's and Dike's workshop as a visiting artist.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: So he would come down and teach during the summer?

E. GENE CRAIN: He would, that is correct. And that's how I got to know him. I won't say that I knew him well. But I knew him well enough. And he was just a kind, kind man who would walk through mine fields and not even know that they were there. The sparrows would just come and perch on his shoulders.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: He sounds charmed.

E. GENE CRAIN: He was. And a wonderful, keen sense of humor. A little bit ribald here and there. But he was a tremendous human being. And a marvelous painter. A highly under appreciated person whose works will last.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Now did you buy works directly from George Post? Or did you usually go through a dealer? Or did you buy subsequently too?

E. GENE CRAIN: I bought two things directly from George. And they're the first two paintings that I ever had. They were paintings that he did when he was a very, very young man going to Europe. And they're excellent paintings. He had given them to his teacher as sort of a thank you, grace note of some sort. And when his teacher died the teacher had given them back to George. And about the first time that I met George I was aware of these paintings. And there was a convergence, a confluence that came together. George had these paintings. I was aware of these paintings. So I was able to get them. By that time I had already bought some, at the encouragement of Brandt, I had bought a number of George's works, primarily from Cowie in Los Angeles who was his dealer.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Okay.

E. GENE CRAIN: I'm fairly certain that those were the only two direct purchases I ever made from George. And he

just happened to have them. And I was delighted to get them. They're just key works in my collection.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, I'd like to talk to you a little bit about your patronage of the artists now. And you've already talked about this, but though they were certainly the most prominent artists of the day in the thirties and forties in Los Angeles, by the time you met them they had been somewhat eclipsed by other art, such as abstract expressionism, which arose in the postwar period. And it occurs to me that perhaps you were one of their most important patrons in the sixties. And maybe even in the early seventies.

E. GENE CRAIN: I suppose. I suppose that's true. Eclipse is a pretty strong word. There had been other developments as far as I can tell. I'm certainly not the historian you are. And I don't mean that to patronize you at all. But I don't have the kind of background that Janet has or you have or a lot of historians have in this area. But I would say that the development of the San Francisco expressionists and the post World War II idea did crowd the work that these people were doing. And the efforts that they made to, to adjust to a more modern approach was by and large not successful. Kosa tried to paint modern and it was just dreadful. Just, just awful stuff that he would try to do in, in order to see if he could do something else. Brandt went into an expressionist mode, but it was purely Brandt. And some of his strong paintings came in the sixties. They were very, very powerful things. What I think, rather than say they were eclipsed, I say they were crowded. If you're making a living as an artist you have to sell art. And there were still people who would buy the paintings, but they wouldn't pay. I mean, it didn't have the rareness. It didn't have the effect on the public generally that has come as a result of events during the last thirty years, and particularly events perhaps during the last ten years. Ten, maybe fifteen years.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: So they were selling works, but they were not at that time any more at the forefront of art? But they were still making a living as artists?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yes. The difference was perhaps in the critics. With the exception of Roger Kuntz the rest of them were sort of pooh-poohed by the critics. There were certain horrible people. Cathy Curtis [LA Times critic] and people of her ilk that just not only didn't know the names of the artists, they didn't care whether they knew the names of the artists. They were thought of as not being cutting edge. Not moving forward. Not being where it is now. They were just these old people who were now beginning to hit their sixties and they were fine people and they deserved to be patted on the head. But they were boring. If anybody ever talked about them they didn't say good things about them. They were patronized, if at all. But notwithstanding that, Sheets would have shows at, [Hatfield] Challis would have shows of Brandt's and Dike's work all throughout this period. And they were very popular. Very, very popular. The paintings, relative to the money value that people put on them now, were not expensive. A Brandt painting would go for $600, $800, maybe $1,000, maybe $1,200 for a really big one. Millard's work started in these sixties period at $1,100 and would go on up to $2,700, $2,800, $2,900, $3,000. But there were shows. Ruth Hatfield's gallery, Challis' galleries, periodically, and of course, Cowie's gallery as long as he was alive, they had shows of these people. And the shows were very well attended and very popular. What was missing was the critical acclaim that had been given to these people before the war by the people of influence who were art critics in the "Herald Examiner". But particularly in the "LA Times", Arthur Millier.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Now you mentioned before a woman, I think her name was Helen Zillgitt?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And you mentioned her as being somebody else that was collecting a lot of this group's work.

E. GENE CRAIN: Yes. Yes.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Could you talk a little bit about her?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yes. Helen was a large woman who was something of an artist, at least she was a student of these people. And she loved their work. Helen would go beyond her means really to have shows and to acquire these things. And to have little storefront exhibits of their work. And do things that were not sales exhibits necessarily. Just exhibits of the work of these people. And she did it at a fairly modest scale. But she had a good collection. She's been gone now for some twenty years. But before I even knew these people existed, Helen was making a conscientious effort to keep these people before the public in a very, very modest way. You have to understand that they hadn't necessarily, when Helen was doing it, achieved the status of icons. American Artist [magazine] referred to Brandt, Dike and Sheets as living legends of American watercolor. And that was in the middle to late sixties or seventies or something. Well, at the time that Helen was doing her thing they were not living legends at all. They were young men. And she just liked their work. And she would do whatever she could do to keep their work in front of the public.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: So are you saying then during the 1950s? Is that when she was . . .

E. GENE CRAIN: Yes. I would say so. Late, post World War II. She was very modest in her efforts at collecting, but all these artists that have become important to me were people that she knew and bought. I got to know her through Rex. She didn't particularly like me. I think she was a little bit jealous of me. I didn't know that at the time. Because I liked her for the same reason I liked them. Here was somebody that was important and I wanted to get to know her better. But she was a little bit off putting as far as her relationship with me was concerned. I think maybe it was because I had such a good relationship with Brandt and his wife, Irving. Such a superb relationship with them. And that was a relationship that she wanted to have and had perhaps imagined that she had enjoyed. And we might have had a better relationship. But I will say this about Helen. I loved her. I mean, I appreciated what she was doing. And I never, ever, except on one occasion when she said something bad about my mother-in-law, I never took umbrage at her at all. I always liked her.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: So you never got the sense in talking to Rex or any of the other artists that they felt that they had been crowded out as you've said?

E. GENE CRAIN: Well, let me answer that question this way. Dike never did care. Millard never did believe it because that was the fault of the critics. If they didn't understand the hell with them. Brandt would have liked a little bit more awareness, I think, of his work. But it was always there. There was always something that would come up that would bring these people to the forefront. I don't think they particularly cared. It was just the fact that was. There was too much competition from other schools, other ways of approaching art, some of which was very, very valid. Some of which has proved over the years to be invalid. Some of which was done by artists of great character, great strength. Jackson Pollock's work is just fascinating to me. But people who try to paint like Jackson Pollock sometimes, their stuff . . .

Tape 2, Side A [session 3, tape 2; 15-minute tape side]

E. GENE CRAIN: These people had, by this time, the strength of their own views. None of them were poor. They were all successful, with the possible exception of Paradise. They all had plenty of work to do. They had plenty of people who would buy their things. And by and large as this time, the period of the sixties arose, the need for critical acclaim, as far as they were concerned, would have been something to boost the ego. It certainly wasn't necessary for them to make a living. They were successful. And Dike, Sheets, Brandt, all of them never wanted for where their next meal was coming from or how they were going to make the mortgage payments. Most of them didn't have mortgages.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And they were all mature artists by this time.

E. GENE CRAIN: Absolutely.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: They weren't the young up and coming artists. And I think artists for the most part understand that there's always a new generation coming up.

E. GENE CRAIN: That's right.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: They had already sort of, I'll use the word, eclipsed the generation before them.

E. GENE CRAIN: That's right.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: I mean, Millard Sheets' name became the important name in the newspapers during his era. Not so much William Wendt.

E. GENE CRAIN: That's right. That's right.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: So they probably understood that.

E. GENE CRAIN: Oh, I think they did. I think there was probably more competition, but it was certainly one sided in the thirties, when they were beginning to make their marks than there was in the sixties and seventies when the marks were beginning to be made by the schools of art that developed in the post World War II period. And the things that critics would say about how important it was. This again helps me to say why, when I have a show of the stuff that I have collected, why people like themselves for liking it if it's given a good imprimatur. Because if they are careful at all about art they will have read perhaps what the critics say. And the critics say that this, some stuff that they don't understand at all, is good art. And they don't understand it so they're tuned out of it because of things that they don't find to be valid. And then when they see something like this that they can recognize and identify with perhaps, it keeps the public more involved. Whereas, the stuff that may have eclipsed these artists keeps the critics more involved.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: So, in the beginning at least, you didn't see your role as a collector as helping to preserve their legacy? Their legacy was alive and being recognized in their own time. To the extent that you didn't feel

that you were helping to right a wrong in any sense. Or to help preserve something that might go away otherwise.

E. GENE CRAIN: Absolutely correct. It was very, very much an introspective personal goal on my part to -- I don't mean this to sound supercilious or anything -- but to better myself. To broaden myself. I found that this was a way to do it. To get into an area that I didn't know anything about. I knew a great deal about making milkshakes. I knew a great deal about baseball. I knew something about practicing law. But as far as aesthetics were concerned I hadn't done anything in the fine arts, so to speak, since about my sophomore year in high school when I stopped taking piano lessons.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, before we stop could you speak a little bit about Roger Kuntz? Because it sounds like you knew him fairly well.

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah. Kind of, what a dear man he was. He, Roger was a young person. He was a post World War II artist. And he was, he was more important than he ever realized. He, he was very self-effacing. Roger had a huge drinking problem. And he had a huge woman problem. He just couldn't stay married. And he married two or three or four different people. And again, I got to know him when he was represented by another attorney in one of his many divorces. And I met him for the first time then. And he was an incredibly likeable guy. And the work that he did was just awesome. Just very, very impressive work. And so I began to cultivate a friendship with Roger for the same reason that I cultivated a friendship with other people. I wanted to find out about him. Well, the tragedy of Roger's life was that he cleaned himself up. He cleaned himself up so wonderfully. He became in great shape, physically great shape. He was happy. There was a young lady who may have been half, perhaps two thirds his age, that just adored him. He was playing tennis and making great works of art. And caught cancer. At a very early age. Because he was sober he was happy. He was making paintings. People liked him. People liked his work. He was a great painter. His Freeway series and things of that nature that were painted after World War II are highly regarded, and they should be. So he was not an unknown artist. But he had cleaned up his personal life when cancer overtook him. And as a direct result of cancer we lost a great artist.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And how old was he more or less?

E. GENE CRAIN: My guess would be that he was in his middle to late forties. Roger didn't die of cancer. He killed himself when he was dying of cancer.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, he was a student of Sheets', wasn't he?

E. GENE CRAIN: He was a student at Scripps.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: But not necessarily of Sheets?

E. GENE CRAIN: Sheets, I never knew who really influenced him. You see, Sheets and Dike and that group up there maybe Zajac, I don't know. That group up there, I was interested in primarily for their watercolor. I don't know of a single watercolor that Roger ever made. He was a great sculptor. He made great drawings out of charcoal. And of course his oil work. If he ever made a watercolor I've never seen it. The bulk of the work of Roger's that I own is in oil, although I do have some terrific charcoal drawings that he did. So I don't put them together. Although Roger was at Scripps studying after World War II when Zornes was at Pomona, when Dike and Sheets were at Scripps.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Do you know much about that group of artists? Zajac and . . .?

E. GENE CRAIN: None other than the fact that I've met them. And I met them because of their connection with Claremont.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: So of that group the person that you've collected is Roger Kuntz?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah. I like Roger's work. I liked it a lot. To me it's just masterful. I have three of, two of his Freeway paintings that I prize very, very highly. And then I have others of Roger's series of work: The Woman in the Bathtub, the Crystal Cove series. I just think he was a masterful painter. I don't like his last works, the works that he was doing in his last days nearly as much as I like some of the stuff that he was doing before. But I liked Roger a lot better in his last days. Up until, of course, he was almost unable to get around except in a wheelchair.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: How sad. Well, do you have any observations on current art?

E. GENE CRAIN: No, not really. I'll tell you something, Susan. You know, I'm sixty-five years old now. And I still have a very, very active law practice. And I get tired. I'm able to accomplish as much as I ever did, but it makes me tired. I don't have time to go out and try to do anything except focus in, I'm a very compartmentalized

person. I don't necessarily feel the need to expand anything. I like what I've done with the people that I've done it with. I like the people that I've gotten to know. I like the fact that I had interaction with . . .

[Recording Stops]

[Recording Begins Again]

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: If you have anything more to say about that would you please?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah, I've had good interaction with them. I tend to think backwards more than forwards somehow. I'm very pleased with the idea of recalling memories and recalling my activities with the people that I've known in the past. That doesn't mean that I don't view the future. I'm very interested in going to auctions. I'm very interested in going to exhibits. But I'm not actively trying to expand and become semi or quasi encyclopedic about anything having to do with art. I'm very pleased with what I have. I'm very pleased with the result of what I have because people such as yourself and your, your spouse [Bolton Colburn] at the museum that he works with [Laguna Art Museum] seem to be interested in it. And that pleases me. It flatters me. I'm very pleased that Pomona College is interested in having shows of my stuff. I'm pleased that people will think enough about these paintings that they want to see them. Will make something, quasi pilgrimages perhaps, just to come into the office to look around. And without trying to be a stuffed shirt or anything, I'm very happy with the result of what people appear to feel, unless they're bulling me, and I don't think they are. I'm very happy with the result of what people feel after they've spent some time looking at this, this stuff. Sometimes they're just overwhelmed with the fact that there's so many of them. But sometimes they're just pleased with the experience because they felt for awhile that maybe they were attuned to something. You know, art. Without art, days would be very gray. Life would be very gray. Art of all sorts, performing art, painting, music, poetry, they give color and they give meaning. They give grace notes to life. And without it it would be a gray existence. Now what to a given person is important art so that they can have the grace, that will vary from person to person. I understand that. But a lot of people do seem to get a large kick out of seeing the kind of stuff that is meaningful to me. Not just because of the aesthetics, but partly. Not just because of what it represents as far as land and California at a very attractive time for California, but partly for that. The sum of it all together is that I'm very proud of the collection. I don't know what the heck I'm going to do with it. I'm very proud of it. Not just for myself, but I'm proud of it because it does seem to have some kind of a positive effect on a large segment of the public. And that there's a part of the public that doesn't appreciate it or doesn't like it, that's fine. More power to them.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, thank you for your comments today. This might be a good place for us to stop.

Tape 1, Side A [session 4, tape 1; 30-minute tape sides]

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. An interview with Gene Crain on May 22, 1999 at his office in Newport Beach. The interviewer is Susan Anderson. This is session four, tape 1, side A. Well, Gene, it's been awhile since we've gotten together to do this. Probably a couple of months. And what I wanted to do today with you was to really talk a bit about the California School itself. Not so much your interaction with the artists, although that will enter in, but some questions about the actual school and its development and how you see it as fitting into the American school of watercolor and of Regionalism. So, I thought maybe we'd do that today.

E. GENE CRAIN: Okay.

[Recording Stops]

[Recording Begins Again]

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, Mr. Crain, you've lived with this art within daily view for many years. And I would expect that your relationship to the paintings may have changed over time. That your insight into them may have deepened. Has that close, daily relationship to the art revealed anything to you over time that you may not have noticed in the beginning?

E. GENE CRAIN: Well, first of all I think you have to understand that I have been focusing on collecting this kind of stuff for thirty-five years. That goes back to about 1964 or at least the early sixties. And one of the things that struck me about that period of time, thirty-five years, is the fact that if you started in 1964 and go backwards from that for thirty-five years, you're getting at what was about the beginning of this school. Now, the school has expanded during the past thirty-five years. Diluted, if you will. Perhaps to a point where some of the founders or some of the people who found themselves being defined as a part of the school wouldn't even recognize it. But when you think about it, as we sit here today, I have been involved with these paintings and with these artists for half the time they've been in existence. Which gives me pause to try to deal with the question you asked. I think more than looking at an individual painting and seeing something different or unique or finding hidden

meaning in it that I had never seen before, the thing that has impressed me most about the artists, particularly the so called founders of the group, is the way that they worked in series, if you will. That is to say, they were never in a situation in which they were afraid to try something new. They worked. If all you wanted to do was make money or sell paintings or this, that and the other thing, you would improve and work on your technique until you really got it right. And then you'd paint a lot of horses, or you'd paint a lot of trees, or you'd paint a lot of whatever. And then just sell them by the hands full. In looking at the paintings, going back to the very late twenties, some of the Millard Sheets paintings, and some of the Phil Dike paintings, too, they go back to the very late twenties, I'm impressed with the seeming lack of self consciousness that the people had about what they were doing. They weren't afraid to try something else. They were very tied up with their environment. And they let their environment, it seems to me, an environment which was really remarkable, both in sunshine and air and sea and just the general topography of Southern California, they let it, that environment, give them direction. And I can see that all the way through their work from their salad days, even into their more mature days, they developed themes. And I marvel at the ability of the artists themselves to let the place they were working in tell them the direction they were to go or should go and that they were able to do that. They were able to take that as almost another dimension of their artistic skills. Because I firmly believe, as I may have said before, that all of these people had touches of genius. Some of them real live living honest to gosh geniuses. No question about it. And they could have expressed their genius in many different ways. These people chose to express their genius through use of canvas, sometimes, but mostly white paper and pigment applied to it. They had something to say and they were saying it. And they were very un-selfconscious about doing it. And that's what I've noticed in looking at the paintings day after day, year after year, literally decade after decade.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, I think that's really significant. Because what it's really saying is it really did come out of the locale.

E. GENE CRAIN: You have to have tremendous ability in order to make a meaningful statement. But that's a given. These people were academicians in the sense that they knew how to paint. They knew composition. They knew design. They knew all of the basic things. But in addition to that, they were able to synthesize within themselves, the environment. And frankly, I think the environment was probably as much an influence as anything. I remember a painting by Matisse I saw called, I think, something like Stairway in Algiers, and I read some comments about it. And as near as I can figure out North Africa has something of the same sunlight quality as does Southern California, or as did Southern California back in the days before so much of it was paved over with concrete. And there were a lot of trees and lima beans and orange groves and things of that nature around. These people right from the beginning were able to understand that almost instinctively and work with it and let it help them express whatever it is that makes these paintings, or this school, or this time significant.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, you know, that really does remind me of something, too. That Millard Sheets was apt to say about the school. And which I have here extracted from that Fresno catalog.

E. GENE CRAIN: Yes.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: This is something that he said in that catalog of your exhibition. "I believe the fine painters I have known during these fifty years are distinguished because they each work out their own aesthetic conviction and in a style suited to their affection for the life around them." Now he said that in many different ways. But I think it's very similar to what you're saying.

E. GENE CRAIN: Sure. I believe that. Because Millard was so popular and so enthusiastic and so well received by the people of his time, his time being the thirties and when he was quite the young man about town, people tend to overlook that he was a really thoughtful person who gave his life, literally, to try to convince people that without art in their lives, without art in our lives, that civilization is just old gray December. That art gives it color. Art gives it meaning. Art gives it grace notes. Art is a very real reason for living rather than just existing.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And actually that's something that Rex Brandt brought up in that same catalog. He pointed out the way in which the school saw all the arts as being one. And how these artists frequently worked in architecture, as planners and decorators, in commercial art and design. They worked for the movie studios. They taught. And how they bridged these various different arts. And really didn't, didn't see such a distinction between perhaps popular culture and fine culture, that kind of thing. How they were able to really work with all of the arts and created fine homes for themselves, too. And brought art into their homes, created almost an installation of their environment.

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah. There's no question at all about that. The one added factor to that is that the movie studios were creating a new art form at about the same time that they were working with traditional instruments, a brush, paper, a palette, in creating what may be found to be in one hundred years a quite unique style of painting. Particularly watercolor paintings. So the two kind of paralleled each other. And they were very complementary to each other in the sense that the, the studios as they were developing their technique were able to provide for the artists a way to make a living. None of these people, as far as I'm concerned, suffered. Of

course, people at that age don't suffer much anyway. If you're twenty or twenty-five or thirty or whatever years old, I think the earliest one was Phil Dike, probably born about 1906, which in 1930 would make him just twenty-four years old. Do you know anybody that suffers when they're twenty-four years old? But at least they had jobs. Either in the academies, or in the art schools, or with the studios or some combination of all three. Millard was appointed head of the art department at Scripps College. Part of the Claremont group in the mid, late thirties. He brought Dike along with him. After Dike had done such tremendous work in color with Disney. And then you see Emil Kosa, you see [George] Gibson, you see all of these people. But all have this tie-in with what then was a developing art form called movies. And, you know, one thing that has impressed me about all of this. First of all, America, America as a country is what? 250 years old. Of course, there were people who painted before there was a Constitution. But we're really not a very old country when you think about it. And nobody thought much about painting in Southern California or in California at all until the Santa Fe Railroads and Dewitt Parshall and some of those people came out here with it, and [Thomas] Moran and some of the others, and found that this was an interesting place. But the point I'm trying to make here is that the connection between the Dewitt Parshalls and the Morans and some of the other people is not that far removed from these people who were making the paintings that I'm interested in now. They started in the late twenties or the thirties and carried on until they died or are carrying on today. But if you go back to the time that California was even found it's a very short time. The history of painting in California, as I know painting, is not. I mean, I'm not talking about Native American painting or culture. I'm talking about painting and art and all the disciplines that I know of as being thought of as being art. It's not very old.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: No.

E. GENE CRAIN: And if you look at it, if you go from say 1929 to 1999, that's a large fraction of the time they've been making paintings on the West Coast.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: It is.

E. GENE CRAIN: Particularly in Southern California. And I keep emphasizing Southern California for one reason and one reason only. It's the weather. It's the climate. It's the sunshine. And see, I don't know any of the artists who ever huddled in their little studios and pulled their cloaks up over their heads and put gloves on with holes in the gloves and took brushes and painted watercolors. These guys all went out with no shirts or with t-shirts or something, out in and amongst the environment that they had. Well, East Coast watercolor was close work, studio work. West coast watercolor was free, it was joyous. I won't say loose. The artists hate that term, loose painting. But it was free painting. And it was an entirely different style. Millard is given credit for making the first of the new style of watercolors, and he is due that credit. But what is less well known is all of these people, Tom Lewis, Rex Brandt, all of these people developed their own style. And they were able to do just amazing things. And I think every one of them without any exception, if you ask them to name five reasons why they were able to do it, in those five, particularly with Brandt, it would be number 1, climate. Sunshine.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: So we're really back around to where we started. Which is that the environment itself helped the artists to develop their own unique style.

E. GENE CRAIN: I think there's no question about that. I think there's no question that people who painted in the Grecian Islands for example, I get back to the painting by Matisse that was so impressive called Stairway in Algiers or wherever it was. And the light that comes is a light that's found few other places in the world.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, and then of course, we're talking also about the importance that nature held for this group of artists. And I think of all of them perhaps Phil Dike spoke about that the most. Maybe because he wrote more than some of the others. Of course, Rex did too. But Phil Dike, I think in particular, seemed to really voice quite well the importance that nature held for the artists.

E. GENE CRAIN: You have to understand that Phil was really, amongst other things, he was illegible because his handwriting was as interesting as any sort of hieroglyphics. But once you translated it, Phil Dike was a poet. Rex was a chronicler. Rex was kind of awe struck by the Dikes and the people who preceded him by maybe ten years. Rex was born in 1914. These people were born in 1906, 1907. George Post maybe a little before that. But Rex felt that it was his duty to chronicle what those people did. Now Phil, more than anybody else, may have been, depending upon your point of view, may have been the finest artist of the bunch. And certainly he was the most thoughtful painter. He had a feeling that, perhaps it grew out of Disney and his work on film, animating screens to make them look like real life, or something of this nature -- particularly his work in Fantasia -- he had a feeling that there was a quality, an almost Eastern religious quality that existed between man and his environment. Some of the finest paintings that he ever did were down at Carlsbad, which is north of San Diego and south of San Clemente, edge of the sea things in which he would work and watch the birds. The sea birds and other life interact with the rocks and the waves and the things that are thought of when you think of coastline elements. And he would attempt to get those things down on paper. And he was not above trying to intertwine with the elements of nature that other element of nature, which is mankind. I always accused Dike of

being somebody who wanted people to know that man and his environment were part of a whole thing. They were a whole and you can't really separate them out. You can't give one undue dominance over the other. Even though you can't control environment totally. And you certainly can't control mankind totally. But the way that Dike viewed his work and tried to say in so many different ways, so many different styles, so many different segments of the paintings that he made, was that take a look at nature and see if man can't work with nature. And he was, he was not only a teacher, he was a great, quiet poet who was an absolutely charming man.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, you said something interesting about his work earlier when we were walking around. That he was "searching for the amorphus property of all objects, either animate or inanimate."

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah. And many of his series try to make that happen. Many, many. Dike worked in series. And he would work on many paintings at the same time, much in the studio after sketching on location. But as much as he would paint he would write. And as much as he would write he would think. And he's expressed some of those thoughts to me. And once you've seen or heard him express his thoughts and looked at his painting you can see that he did try to work mankind into the non-carbonized form of life. And he would work carefully to try to show that they could work together. But as much as anything else he would try very hard to show the beauty of nature, the beauty of the form around the edge of the sea. He worked for and walked for hours and hours on Southern California beaches. And I know that he spent as much time thinking about his environment and his relation to his environment as he did in trying to paint it.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, it's interesting because you just brought up the fact that he was trying to express something that was almost of an Eastern philosophy? Is that what you're saying?

E. GENE CRAIN: It might be. I don't know much about Eastern philosophy. I don't know much about any kind of philosophy. But I've heard other people say that very well might be. That there has to be a reverence for life, as [Albert] Schweitzer said. Life of all sorts. Once you have achieved that ability to appreciate life then, except for an occasional bear that will attack somebody or an occasional wolverine that is just downright mean, then you can try to make mankind as nice as other animals. And fit as nicely into his environment as a perfect world, I guess, according to an Eastern philosophy, would have it. You can't have a good life without interacting with everything that's around you. And I think, I think more than anybody else Dike believed that.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: I know that Rex Brandt would have been interested in Eastern philosophy through the Theosophy possibly. And then Millard Sheets was interested in it through his experiences with Hartley Alexander.

E. GENE CRAIN: At Scripps.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: At Scripps. And I'm just wondering about that, in part because another influence that's talked about often is the Oriental approach to watercolor painting itself, or technique. How much do you think that it did have a play in this?

E. GENE CRAIN: Oh, I think quite a lot. Because even as we sit here today this eastern rim or western rim, we are after all just one ocean away from the East going that way. And I think that a great deal of the form, really, the way that the artists worked, particularly Brandt, was heavily influenced by Eastern paintings. Brandt's two favorite paintings in the world are Greco's View of Toledo and a painting by, I'm going to mispronounce the name, but a Japanese artist who painted monumental landscapes. You can definitely see the fact that the Far East and the West Coast of Los Angeles, or Southern California, which is where we are, have a lot more in common than say Southern California might have with Minnesota.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Did you ever hear the artists, in particular, talk about being interested in those influences?

E. GENE CRAIN: Brandt much, on many occasions, simply because his background with his mother who was a Theosophist and interested in the Indian religion as well as other Oriental philosophies, talked and continues to this day to talk about it. I had supper with Brandt last night. And he brought that up again. For him it's just as much a part of his life as anything else. Brandt did not serve in the military because he was raised a pacifist. This was during World War II. But the tug of reality, of being a Southern Californian versus the pacifist and the Oriental philosophy troubled him a great deal. He was basically a peace loving, non- violent person who worked during the war, made very few paintings during the war, as head designer at a major ship yard here in Southern California, for his part in the war as a pacifist, as he tried to work through this philosophy. The Eastern philosophy had more effect, more obvious, more vocal effect on Brandt than anybody else that I knew well. Dike, it may have been more subtle. But Dike was able to integrate so many of his thoughts. And I'm sure some of those thoughts had to do with the Eastern religious concept. And Eastern art too. I don't want to get too deep in this, because I'm pretty soon going to be talking about something I don't know anything about. But I do know that Dike was a great, great synthesizer in the sense that he was able to bring together, more than any of the artists that I knew, and then bring to full fruition the expression of what it was he was thinking, what his thoughts were, and put them onto paper. When I say put them on paper, I mean paint them on a paper.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Right. Well, you know, I think all one has to really do is look closely at the paintings and you can see the artists' interest in Far Eastern painting. Maybe in particular Chinese painting. For example, even that early Millard Sheets right behind you. I'm afraid I don't have the title at hand. But if you look at the sky you can certainly see the influence of Chinese brush painting or ink painting in the sky. And I think that just looking at the work, especially the early work, probably would tell us a lot.

E. GENE CRAIN: Well, that is an early work. It is an early work. Millard was also heavily influenced, more than anybody else that I'm aware of, by the Mexican artists. He loved the Mexican people. He loved to go to Mexico. And so, you see coming together, you see philosophies of the East coming together with the land of Mexico, which is really just an extension of California. And, and you see all these things coming together by a bunch of very energetic young artists who were able, because they were brilliant, brilliant people, able to make something out of all of these various forces that were available for them. And they were able to find the forces and make something out of their lives really. And the things that they made out of their lives, I think, they would, to a man, one woman, would say that they expressed themselves through their art.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Do you remember any particular conversations with either Dike or Brandt or Sheets about the Mexican School and their experiences having painted with Siqueiros, for example?

E. GENE CRAIN: Just incidental things. Nothing, nothing in which they talked. I know when Siqueiros was here, I remember when the fellow [Orozco] that painted Prometheus at Pomona College was here, Millard was here at the time and he worked closely with them. But the only thing that I can recall would be incidents in those things. There are some wonderful stories that Millard tells. I'm sure in part apocryphal, but they're still wonderful stories, about almost being able to turn Frary Hall at Pomona into another Sistine Chapel. Those are just fun stories. And Millard was a great, great story teller.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, we've talked a little about the influence of the Pacific Rim culture and of Hollywood and the Mexican School. Do you think that also something like the Federal Art Project or the WPA, do you think that those were a catalyst for this art in some way?

E. GENE CRAIN: Sure. They were a catalyst in the sense that they provided a highway down which it could go. FDR and his arts project was really almost magical in fact that it kept the arts going. The fact of the federal programs in the midst of just a horrible Depression on some parts of the country -- I mean, just, just dreadful times for many parts of the country. The Federal Arts Project here in California did two things. One, it never was that bad in California. And two, it provided an entree for these people to continue to develop. After all, in the thirties they were quite young when the Depression was going on. And when FDR started with this, a federal project, they were quite young and it gave them impetus. It gave them reason to continue to work. And it also gave them some bureaucratic training in that somebody had to report back to Washington. And somebody had to be in charge. And somebody had to collect the paintings. So there was quite an interaction there for a period of . . .

Tape 1, Side B [session 4, tape 1; 30-minute tape side]

E. GENE CRAIN: The artists made some comment in their work about what the times were like. They did that. But more than anything else they just used it as a means to continue to develop what became their life work, what became their life focus, or became that which they were about. Which was painters of things basically on, on white paper.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, what do you think contributed most to the emergence of a strong watercolor movement in Southern California?

E. GENE CRAIN: I don't think there's any question in the world. Convenience and climate.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Okay.

E. GENE CRAIN: Absolutely the climate. I mean, this was the world for watercolor. It is a free medium. It is an expressive medium. Watercolor works with water. And we've got a great ocean out here. We've got great sunshine out here. Watercolor is the perfect medium for expressing both.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And what specifically, to your way of thinking, was the California style of watercolor technique used by these artists and that really set them apart? Just a short description.

E. GENE CRAIN: Well, okay. I think that it can be said that these artists, whether they knew it or not, worked with watercolor for convenience. Millard admits that one of his teachers at Chouinard's told him, "Quit lugging that oil stuff around, when you go outside to paint. Here take some of this, it's easier to carry." So he found it that way. So there was an element of convenience. One hundred years from now people will see that the California School did not feel that watercolor was anything but a really meaningful way of painting paintings. They did not feel

that it was a sketch. Or they did not feel that it was a preliminary effort to a major work. They did not feel that it was temporary. They felt that this is it. This is what I do. And this is a completed work. And while others, you know, Winslow Homer, you don't have to go to Europe to find people who worked in watercolor. You can go here in the United States. But I think that as a group they seriously felt that their work in water-based medium was a finished project in and of itself. And I think that's what the California School brought to the world of art. It brought to it a sense of dignity. A sense of accomplishment. A sense of worth for works on paper, that they should not be considered the step-child of oil paintings or of other non water-based work.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Developing that a bit more, sometimes these artists are called "white paper painters".

E. GENE CRAIN: Correct.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Would you talk a little bit about why they're called that?

E. GENE CRAIN: Because they use the white paper as a color, much in the same way, I'm told, that sculptors do with a piece of granite or a piece of whatever it is that they're working on. Or that Sammy Maloof would do to a fine piece of wood. They let the paper be the thing that stands out and tells them where to put their pigment. They use white paper as the most important part of the work. And in many, particularly in the transparent efforts by these artists, in many of them you will see that as much as a quarter of the work is pure white paper.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Especially their early works.

E. GENE CRAIN: Especially the early works. That's right. And, of course, that just re-emphasizes my answer to your question as to what's the importance of this California School. Well, nobody knows. You know, it takes fifty, I mean, fifty years after Brandt dies or fifty years after Zornes dies or these people who are now in their eighties or nineties. Then somebody's going to take a look at this stuff and say, "Was it important? Or is it just a passing fad like op, mop, pop, what have you." It may or may not be important. You can't know until time has passed. But I dare say that my firm belief is that if it is important it will be the use of white paper as kind of a block of stone, or a block of granite, or a block of fine marble, or a block of fine wood that from the basic material comes a finished product. And that product is unique in the sense that it is finished and it is important and it couldn't be done on anything but white paper. This is why you will never see a good watercolor that is matted with greens or blues or oranges or some of those decorator colors. It just won't work. Matted with off white or white, you try to let the fact that the paper has something to say and was important to the artist. And the artist started with plain white paper and whatever is left happens to be the residual from white paper beginning.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: That's really fascinating. Do you think that that lends a certain sense of homogeneity to the work? Do you see a sense of homogeneity to the work?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah, I do. But so much of it has to do not necessarily with the paintings. So much of it has to do with the fact that these people liked each other and they were friends. They were buddies. They interacted. I am aware in the forty, thirty-five years that I've been dealing with this and through my conversations with the artists that made these paintings, I have never, ever been aware of any kind of jealousy. Any kind of anything but personal gratification when somebody else would do well. When Millard, in the thirties, did well nobody said, "I don't know why everybody is pointing toward Millard Sheets as being the great thing." They went along with it and they were happy. They got the positive message out of what it was that Millard was doing. And that positive message was to their advantage. Because as Brandt said when that October edition of "Life" magazine came out, he said he was reminded of the fact that Millard Sheets would go out and sell full sheet watercolors for $50.00. He said he had never made very many full sheet watercolors. But he immediately went out and raised his prices $10.00 or $15.00 a piece. And he thanked Millard for the opportunity. There was a great highway connection. I don't even know what it was because the way of communicating was so different then than it is now. But there was tremendous communication between all of the people who made these paintings. Even in Northern California. Nepote and Erle Loran.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: And they weren't necessarily subject to the leadership of Millard Sheets?

E. GENE CRAIN: That's correct. They were all aware of him. And I don't think they'd ever call him "leader" or anything. They were aware that he was pushing the envelope, in today's speak, a little bit and they were happy to go along with that. I think they were more curious and fascinated by what was happening. Because after all, who was it, who would take artists that seriously really? I mean, that, they were artists. That's what they were. And then all of a sudden they become people recognized as a part of society, as a part of a popular movement. And I'm sure that they found that fascinating. Just as anybody else would be fascinated by it. In too many of the arts I'm told that there is a lot of professional jealousy. If there's one thing that I am certain of about the people who formed this so-called school of art, there was almost none of that in existence. There might be an occasional something where you might be mad at each other. But I'm not aware even of that. And I am also aware that time heals a lot of wounds. Maybe some of it went on. But when I began to know the gentlemen they were nothing but complimentary to each other. They visited each other's homes. They traveled together. They

painted together. They made canvases together. And an interesting thing, too, is when people like Barse Miller or other people would come from the east they were assimilated into that same style -- the style of friendliness if you will. A style of non-jealousy. They just all seemed to get along.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: This is kind of getting back to what we were talking about before. Rex Brandt once told me that the medium of watercolor can influence what you search for to paint. In other words, the very medium that they were using also directed them toward painting certain things.

E. GENE CRAIN: Well, I don't know how to deal with that. Rex is a great painter. Rex is one of the few people I've ever known that has expressed to me an original thought. Not often and not long. But he does have occasional original thoughts. I'm not exactly sure what to say, other than the fact, to get back to what I said before, that the environment, the environment, the topography of Southern California, with the mountains and shielding off the desert heat and the mist coming off the ocean, and being trapped by the mountains. That environment certainly would seem to give a glaze to all the projects that might be appropriate for a paintbrush. And I think from that point of view people just naturally gravitated toward a water-based medium.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, do you think that the California subject matter of that time period differed greatly from what was happening in the rest of the country? Just because of the environment?

E. GENE CRAIN: To the best of my knowledge. I can't get too deeply into this because I don't know. I was born in 1934. To the best of my knowledge, the answer is yes. Because the rest of the country, at that time, was really suffering. Really suffering awfully. The East was suffering, the factories were down, the banks were closing. The Midwest was an absolute disaster area with those awful, awful winds and the dust. I mean, people were shifting. Families were shifting. Society was shifting from a bent toward farming to a bent toward living in cities. And every place just fell apart, except Southern California. And Southern California experienced some of it but not very much. Southern California was really as Carey McWilliams was saying, "It was an island in the land." And I think that that has a lot to do, Susan, with the fact that people from other parts of the country still considered Southern California kind of a la la land. A land that doesn't exist. A land that never was. And they like to think about it. Simply because they have a sense of what went wrong when these guys started painting. I'm talking about the thirties. A sense of the disaster that existed in the rest of the country during the thirties. And yet, they knew the movies came out with Shirley Temple and all the fun little things happening. And the people. They just thought Southern California was a completely different part of the world. And I think that's part of its mystique. And I think that's part of what added to it. I think it might be real, too, to a certain degree.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, that would explain why this group of artists weren't oriented toward making social commentary on the difficulties of the Depression.

E. GENE CRAIN: I think that's right. I have one picture of Rex's, a whole sheet, that all it does is show a WPA worker leaning up against a big oversized tractor. And I've never seen any [others], Ben Messick may have [completed some]. But the commentary was really on society as a whole. The social commentary that they tried to make was not to make a comment that this system is failing us. It was that if they were making a social comment that comment might have to do with a particular failure by a particular class of people who might or might not fail no matter what the rest of the country was doing. I don't think that there was any reason to comment any more deeply than was done a few times by Millard on the "Okies" coming to California. And Biscaluz [phonetic], the Sheriff, the horribly brutal man toward those people who were trying to escape from a situation that was indescribably awful in the Middle West to come here just to pick oranges for $1.00 a week. There was a little bit of the commentary. But even the comments that were made by the artists who cared to comment at all on it were softened somewhat. And it was always with a touch of humor or a touch of humanity. It was a touch of something that was not saying, "Revolution. Revolt. We've got to do something." Because they didn't have to.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: It was more of an optimistic statement overall. Would you see it perhaps as the school reflecting the American Dream to some extent?

E. GENE CRAIN: I wouldn't say so. I would say what the school reflected was an involvement of the painters with their environment. They loved this country. They loved being out in it. Kosa would work in the studios all day and then he would go out and paint on the weekends. Just loving it. Just lugging his stuff around. Seeing the mountains. And they're still there to be seen. A little harder to find. But seeing them in a way that this observer will never look at an Emil Kosa or Millard Sheets' mountain ever again in the same way. Because it was there. They found it. They loved life. They had jobs. And they were young. I think it was not so much the American Dream. They were too young to care much about the American Dream. They didn't dream much. They just had a good time. And they loved the country.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: What about in a painting such as Phil Dike's California Holiday which you own? Which also was in "Life" magazine? In some ways I think these artists may have been responsible for projecting the

California Dream outwards. And you just were talking about that a little bit yourself.

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah, I think they were. But I think they were a part of the whole thing. There's a guy named Smiley out in Redlands who went out and bought a whole lot of land in and around Redlands. And then would advertise it in the East. This was earlier than our people. There had been from the late 1800s on a kind of an interest in trying to get people to California because it was somehow a Shangri La area. Now that was the advertisement. And then of course you had the orange crates. Gordon McClelland has made a wonderful collection of orange crate labels and you see all of those happy little Nubian girls smiling through bunches of oranges. And you see orange trees and orchards against a mountainous background. And this, this was all advertisement for the rest of the country. Long before Florida ever thought in terms of citrus. They were trying to have people come out here to California because it was something of a super place. And I think that whatever the artists did, like Phil in his California Holiday painting and another painting that's owned by Mike Verbal of the same view, I think it was just part of those same responsibilities in a lot of people.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: It wasn't a conscious thing certainly.

E. GENE CRAIN: I don't think so.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: No, no, no. But I think possibly really did contribute to, and perhaps brought up to date, the California Dream.

E. GENE CRAIN: That's right.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: From being something that related to oranges and sunshine and climate, maybe to even a California lifestyle.

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah, I think that's a fair comment. I know that, for example, [El] Greco's great landscape of Toledo was nothing more than a poster, a poster painted by [El] Greco for the fine folks in Toledo who were very worried, and justifiably so, because it happened that the capital of Spain was going to move to Madrid from Toledo. So they hired him to paint this poster. This advertising poster that said, "Hey, the capital should be here. And here's why. Isn't this a glorious, wonderful city?" Well, there was some of that. But I think they did that more, the artists painted those kinds of things that were a conscious advertisement for Southern California. I think they did that more for a buck than anything else. I mean, that was a way to pick up $50.00, $100.00, $300.00 here and there. And some of the paintings are very, very good for those advertising things like Ford Times.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, getting back to this, the artist as being part of something bigger than themselves. We talked a little bit about this. And you do see them as being part of a greater American art movement called the American Scene. You think that that's the right context for them to be in. Do you think they were aware of it? Did they feel an affinity to people like Thomas Hart Benton or Grant Wood?

E. GENE CRAIN: I don't think so. They were aware of them. But as far as Scene Painting is concerned all painting really is scene painting. You paint where you are. I don't think that they were consciously creating a school of painting. They called it the California School in the very early trips, exhibitions that Tom Craig and Brandt and a few of the others put together. And I'm not exactly sure why. They might well have called it anything else. But I'm not aware that they were conscious that they were creating a school. Some of them still would object to the idea that this is what happened. But you can categorize it after the fact. But I don't think while it was going on that they were doing any more than Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney had in a show.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Okay. Well, did you ever hear them talk about those other artists from that period?

E. GENE CRAIN: Oh, constantly. Constantly. Because they were their buddies. They were their friends. They interacted a lot. I never . . .

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: I mean, people like Thomas Hart Benton and Grant Wood.

E. GENE CRAIN: Oh, oh, I see.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: I mean the Midwestern, the great artists from the Midwest who were the American Regionalists.

E. GENE CRAIN: No. Only to contrast and compare the fact that there was a Regionalism in the Midwest and they're trying to create a Regionalism in Southern California now. They had a tremendous amount of respect for those artists. They truly did. And as I say, I can't emphasize too much the belief of these artists that all painting is regional. And so why call it Southern California Regionalist painting? It became such when you get a group of several thousand paintings and they're all painted by artists in Southern California of the same region. So you

call it that. But at the time they were making it I don't think that they would deny that they were consciously trying to create something that was unique. I think that it, the uniqueness of their work that I've spoken about before, that is the ability to make a complete painting with water-based material, I think that that came like Venus on the half shell. It just sprang from their environment, from their lack of fear of trying something, and their age. They were just a bunch of young turks who by and large had the same sad experiences I suppose as many people in society. But I'll tell you, Susan, I think they had more than their share of happy experiences.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, you know, of course we're talking about how these artists developed watercolor as a medium of choice. But they were also equally proficient at oil painting. And, in fact, many of your finest works in your collection are oil paintings. Do you want to just talk a little bit about that?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yeah, you're absolutely right. More than half of Brandt's paintings that have produced awards for him were in oil. Many of the major works that Dike and Sheets produced as well as all of the other fellows, you think of Paradise, you think of . . . except for George Post. I don't think George ever did anything but work in a water-based medium. But, yes, they had tremendous awards and tremendous good results with oil and oil-based paintings. And the monumental works, at least at this day as we sit here about the turn of the century, most people, critics, observers who had anything to say about this group would turn as often to their works in oil as they would to their works on paper as being illustrative of what it is they could do. I've been fortunate enough to see a number of very important paintings. You have to remember that the analogy of having a Kosa work in the studios with paint all week long and then go out with his brushes on the weekend and paint watercolors is pretty apt. These people, they didn't just wake up one morning and say, "Watercolor's the answer. By gosh. Forget all this oil stuff." They were trained as oil painters. Tolles Chamberlin and some of the other people at Chouinard's were people who taught them how to do the academics of the work and that was in oil. Watercolor was something that came along. And it came along because it worked because of the environment, because of what it was they wanted to do. But they were taught primarily in oil. I don't know that. But I'm assuming that. And they gravitated toward watercolor because it was a kick. And you can see that in the spontaneity of so much of their work. And then ten years later, ten years into their work. And Millard was different because Millard just suddenly burst forth with the ability to paint watercolors in a way that I don't know of anybody else that's ever painted them in about 1932 or '33. And he went from very fay little watercolors that he would make that were more traditional sketches and studies and small things, into some big, bold things that were just tremendous. But for the rest of the people the environment made them do it. And once they got the hang of it they loved doing it. And the result is the kind of stuff that you see.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, you just brought up the sense of development among these artists from say 1928 to 1932. There was a tremendous development in their art to something much bolder and more gestural or free. Do you think that there was also a development from say 1932 to 1941 when the war broke out? Have you noticed some particular . . .?

E. GENE CRAIN: I have not. From '32 until the war broke out, you bring up a very interesting thing. And I'm going to talk a little bit about it. But I haven't seen any. All I saw was that their watercolors got better and better and better. My gosh, Millard never painted better than he painted in 1940. Rex, some of his, all of these people. Now, Dike I will modify that. Dike did. Dike always painted beautiful things. And they all painted well afterwards. But when they first got started, say in '32 when they got the idea, and up until the war time, they were just making incredibly good paintings. They wouldn't say so. They got a little bit irritated with me when I wanted to see and collect some of their early work. They would say, "What's wrong with what we're making now? What are you talking about? This is just kid stuff." As Dike said, when I asked him one time, "What was the best painting you ever made?" And he said, "It's the last one I just sold." And so they were interested in people looking at what they were doing now. But you do bring up a point. I never saw it in their work. But I have heard it from several of the artists, that the happenings in Europe, the Fascist movement in Europe, the totalitarian movement in Europe was really bothering these artists. They had a sense that the world was coming quite literally to an end. And I never saw it in their work. But they had individually, not together, particularly Brandt, has expressed the thought that this was the end. That it was because of what was happening in Europe, particularly in central Europe where the Fascist were making the move. I don't think they knew so much about the horrors of . . .

Tape 2, Side A [session 4, tape 2; 15-minute tape side]

E. GENE CRAIN: . . . crusade before the Hollywood [inaudible]. I mean, after all World War II was an event that was propagandized to death by . . . And this is not a criticism. It kept the home fires burning and gave you a whole lot of pizzazz and a whole lot of elan in which to fight World War II. But before they turned it on, people were, the artists that we're talking about here were to a man scared. They were afraid that civilization as we knew it was falling apart. Now I was not, I have not been able to develop that in their work. Perhaps somebody could.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: It might be an interesting thing to do. To look at their work, in particular from that time period, and see how it underwent changes.

E. GENE CRAIN: And then when the war started and Hollywood took over the fighting of the war, it made the home fires burn very well. And it was a great crusade to kill and destroy the Fascist regime and later on the Communist regimes that made it something of a popular happening. But before, it was propagandized to death, to make us feel good about World War II, up until that time the artists that I have known about were very, very, very concerned.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: I wonder if some of that had to do also with the fact that these artists were actually hired to paint the build up to the war. I mean, they were actively involved in the war before it even had happened in some ways.

E. GENE CRAIN: Is that right? I wasn't aware of that. That could very well have been. That's a part of their lives I don't know much about.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, people tend to look at the California School, maybe this is my perspective, as a historical movement that occurred prior to 1950. Considering that you have numerous works by these artists completed in the postwar period, how do you feel about that outlook?

E. GENE CRAIN: Okay. It's wrong. The creative genius, the spontaneity of it, the fact that it was there is attributable to its salad years, the early days, 1928 to the beginning of World War II. But Millard didn't paint, I don't think, particularly well after the war for awhile. But I can understand that. Because the war just influenced the hell out him. He was devastated by the famine and the agony that he saw. And as a result he made some very clever, very illustra. . ., he was a great illustrator. And he made very competent pictures. And there's nothing wrong with illustrations in my view. Illustrative work is as much a part of art as anything else. But eventually he and certainly the rest of them got back to doing what they did well. Which is to say they pushed on in the medium in which they work. Now suddenly there was competition. There was competition from movements in art. There was competition from abstract art. You don't have to go to Jackson Pollock, you can go to San Francisco. And all of a sudden there was this competition that sort of perhaps throws these artists that had been and become so well known before the war out into other areas. And for many, many years, up until 1960, when I started becoming interested in the artists, as distinguished from interested in their work, they were little recognized by the public. But they were still creating very good pieces of work. It was selling to a few people. But it wasn't selling for a great deal of money. They were making a living at it. Or they had made enough of a living so that they didn't have to worry. That's not universally true. Phil Paradise, for example, before he was re-discovered in the eighties was having a very tough time. I suppose that there were others who certainly weren't living high on the hog. But the work that they did from 1950s on was by and large better than the work that they did in the thirties. What makes the work in the thirties unique is that it was unique.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, the way that you feel about your collection and the way you feel about the school is that the early paintings are just a facet of what these people did. To be really true to them you need to look at the whole expanse of their work?

E. GENE CRAIN: Yes. Absolutely right. And when you use and I use the word facet that is not to be used as a denigrating word. It was an important facet. The work that Sheets did in the thirties in the field of watercolor was absolutely amazing. It was historic. It was as unique as anything else that's ever been done in the field of American art, certainly in this century that's about to come to a close.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, it's interesting that you really feel that the later works of Brandt, Dike, Sheets and the others are equal to their earlier works. And even better.

E. GENE CRAIN: Better than. Better than. They knew how to handle the medium. They were confident in what they were doing. They were able. They had suddenly perhaps, this is an assumption on my part, they had perhaps become aware of this is their life. This is what we're about. This is what we do. We make paintings. And if we're any good at all then we will make statements. And we will make, not historic statements, but maybe a better way to put it is, we will make good paintings. We will make paintings that are important statements. Or statements that are as important as we can make them. All of these people had a certain amount of academic background too. They were teaching. Not just art. But they were teaching in institutions. Teaching art by and large in institutions, but they didn't just hold Saturday classes or something like that for a fourth grader to learn how to draw a horse's head or something. They were fine academicians and they were highly regarded. But I think that their con-, I mean, California didn't become an unlikely place overnight. It was a gradual process and it's still a very good place to live. Southern California still presented for these now mature people, who in the thirties were in their twenties and now in their forties and fifties, the opportunity to show that they were gifted artists and painters. Definitely, definitely some of the best things. Their early work is unique and fascinating to look at. And there was never anything like it.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: It has a certain vitality.

E. GENE CRAIN: Absolutely.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: That I think is perhaps difficult to find again.

E. GENE CRAIN: Very, very possibly so. But I've got news for you, Susan, so did we.

[laughter]

E. GENE CRAIN: When we were twenty we had a certain vitality that is very hard to find again.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: We did. Well, you know, maybe this is a question that's been asked too many times, but is there anything else that you'd like to say about the legacy of the California School?

E. GENE CRAIN: Well, I can't remember what I've said. But I will say this. That it's here. And it will always be here. How important it's going to be only time will tell. Probably my grandchildren's children will be able to see whether or not it has any meaning. Certainly the LA County Museum didn't think much of it because they buried it in the basement. From the time that the California Watercolor Society let them store the stuff there. Nancy Moure dug it out. And they may or may not be having some interest in it now. Certainly the Cleveland Museum doesn't have any interest in it. They have eight or ten very good of Millard's watercolors that were given to them by Mrs. Everett. And also one of the seminal paintings called Women of Cartagena. They never show it. I found out within the week that we're talking that an auction occurred of the Ford Times Collection in Detroit, Michigan. And I was fascinated to see the prices that these California artists who had painted the covers for Ford Times, that were at auction, were getting. Any place from $2,000 to $10,000 a copy. Which may or may not be significant as to its permanence as a group. But after all, pigment on paper doesn't cost very much. I mean, you can buy a piece of paper for five bucks and put some pigment on it and it doesn't mean or cost anything. Cost is one way to relate how society feels, the value society holds for a work. So to answer your question, does it have any permanence? I think it's way too early to know. I think that there has been a great deal of interest in it recently. Perhaps within the last twenty years. Maybe in the last fifteen. Of people for good works by important California artists. Of works on paper paying $25,000 for a small painting. I think that's of some significance. I think that they're buying it because they think that it has the value and that most of these artists aren't making paintings anymore. And so, if it's possible, they are making a statement that these paintings are museum quality work, many of them. And that they should be assigned value. And in order to acquire them people are not afraid to spend a lot of money. If that's a statement that says this is an important part of society's drifting or society's movement toward appreciation on this particular school so be it. It's certainly one way of looking at it.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: I wonder if artistically, because you have on occasion collected artists that came after this group, you have a sense, though, of an artistic legacy? The contribution that these artists have made to the world of art? Is that living on in the work of younger artists? Do you think that there's still a spark of interest in painting the natural environment or the life around them that . . .?

E. GENE CRAIN: Maybe.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: That these artists helped contribute to that in some way?

E. GENE CRAIN: Maybe. I frankly found that the artists such as George James and the artists that are around now, at least profess not to be too influenced at all by these people. That they are their own persons. But I think that there was some influence, hidden or not. I mean, everything influences something else. And good for them then they would have to create something of their own. Environmental painting, landscape paintings have always been a part of art. And basically that's what it is. I don't have a lot of nudes. I don't have a lot of portraits. I have basically landscapes. "Edge of the Sea" or just plain old traditional landscape paintings. Yeah, I can see it as part of an ongoing evolution. The work of Keith Crown, the urban works of Roger Kuntz. All of these things, all of these artists build on the legends. And if you ask them they would say, "Oh, sure. Brandt, Dike, Sheets, they're legends." Absolutely. But if you wanted to ask them to go deeply into it as to how these legends influence their work I'm not sure what their answer would be. First of all, these people are a little older. And secondly, you've got to remember that in the thirties in California, when this California group got started, these people were young, they had other jobs. Very few of them made a living exclusively as painters, to sell paintings. With notable exceptions. And they were excited. But most of all they had their youth and they had the environment.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Great. Well, I think we've come to a wonderful place to stop. And I just want to thank you so much for sharing so much of your time and your impressions of your work. It's been very important.

E. GENE CRAIN: Well, a lot of it's probably very brutal. But, and I know a lot of it's very repetitive. But I didn't sit down and think about this until you and I just sat down. I've just tried to respond to what you're asking.

SUSAN M. ANDERSON: Well, thank you very much.

[End of Interview]

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