



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Jennifer Rodrigue,
2000 April 13

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Jennifer Rodrigue on April 13, 2000. The interview took place in San Francisco, California, and was conducted by Paul Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Paul Karlstrom has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

PAUL KARLSTROM: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, an interview with Jennifer Rodrigue on April 13th, the year 2000. Maybe only the second interview I've done—third, in 2000. The subject is artists and models, a series of brief interviews on that subject. The interviewer for the Archives is Paul Karlstrom, and the interview is being conducted at the interviewer's home in San Francisco.

So, Jennifer, thank you for coming here, and I mean that. We did this on short notice, although we've talked about discussing this intriguing subject of artist and the model coming out of an essay I wrote called "Eros in the Studio" which is the signal right off the bat that the focus is on the eroticized or sexualized studio situation. And my big disclaimer in the beginning is always going to be that I don't imagine at all that that's every situation or encounter, but I suspect, and it's been proven that it's the case, that in some situations, this is very much a part of the experience. So with that in mind, what I'm interested in hearing from you—well, first of all, why don't you tell us what you—who you are and what you—how you think of yourself, consider yourself in terms of occupation as a creative person. You're not just an artist's model.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: No, and I haven't—well, that's not true. I've modeled recently, but I'm a writer and I've probably always been a writer and always been an artist at varying levels for each one, at different points and periods in my life. And that's what I continue to do now, both professionally and privately.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I think of you—although I still haven't seen anything, as a poet, and so your writing, chosen form, is poetry. Is that exclusively the case? I mean do you write fiction? Do you write essays? Do you write prose?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: I explore all of those things and I consider poetry to be a subjective experience and not easily defined objectively, so I like to leave that open. I consider myself a poet. I consider much of what I write poetry. Unless I go into something with the decision already made that it's not poetry, I'm disappointed if it's not. So I'm always striving for poetry, and sometimes it happens and sometimes it doesn't.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So let me ask you this. Do you strive for poetry or poetic experience in other aspects of your life? I mean do you think of the world in poetic terms, or your life per se?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: I guess I think of it more as how to understand my life and other people's lives and the universe and how I can use poetry to help communicate that with other people. So I don't necessarily consider my life poetry, but I like to consider describing or exploring my life and other people's lives through poetry.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So do you tend to think in terms of metaphor, one thing standing for something else?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Absolutely, absolutely.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And would you say this is a kind of world view or a personal perspective for you on reality? I don't mean all of the—your own experience?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Absolutely. I use metaphor to understand.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Okay. Well is it possible for you to think of the artist studio then as a kind of metaphor for life in a broader sense and [in terms of] relationships?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: I think it is. I think it can easily be seen as a metaphor, and I think it can be seen as a parallel to exploring the universe mathematically or scientifically or musically or in a loving relationship or in a friendship, in all of those ways.

PAUL KARLSTROM: How did you get involved in modeling? How did it start?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Well, I was in my first year at Mount Holyoke, my first semester of my first year. I was on scholarship there and also worked for the school to make money, and I was told that as a first-semester, first-year student, I was required to work in the kitchen of my dormitory and I didn't like this idea at all and I knew that models made two or three times the amount of money that dish washers make. So without saying anything to anyone, I went directly to the art department and signed up to start modeling, and as soon as I started modeling, I stopped taking on dish-washing shifts and that was a great relief.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So there was no school policy that prevented that? In other words, students, a lot of the models in the art department, their classes, were students?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Absolutely, yeah. It was a student job.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Which, I think, I'm not sure, but that sounds a little unusual, but I'm not sure. I mean most of the—you know, the Art Institute has—they go to the guild. They get outsiders. I'm not sure exactly why, but maybe it's a kind of professionalism or maybe it has to do with avoiding a kind of social connection.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: It was quite common on the East Coast where I went to school.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Maybe that's right.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: And I'm familiar with the artist guild here in San Francisco, and frankly, I have a real problem with it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I know. They totally don't pay enough, right? They take too much out, or something [like that].

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: They require you pay dues. They require you to, what is it, I don't know, you have to pay a certain amount for every hour you work and then it's really ridiculous. And then they have your—part of your application process is this modeling session where you don't get paid and you have to sort of stand there for, you know—modeling, it's grueling work. It's not easy.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I know.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: It's really hard, especially if you're sitting for someone who's requiring a long pose.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: It's tough. It's definitely not easy.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I'm aware of that.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: So I don't have the particulars in my head about the models' guild, but I looked into it and decided that it was definitely not for me.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, here.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Yeah, here, in San Francisco.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And instead, you're keeping body and soul together by waiting tables and—

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: —Venezia [in Berkeley] restaurant?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: That's right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Which is a nice restaurant. I enjoy it. So your motivation then was a very practical one. You wanted to do something that you would find more interesting than working in the kitchen, and also smart, young woman that you were, something that paid more for the time put in. Had you modeled before?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: No.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Okay, so what were your expectations? I mean you've taken care of the practical side of it, but this is not an ordinary type of activity, so—

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: —what else sort of emerged out of maybe even anticipation? What did you think you were

getting into?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Well, you knew, I wish I could remember exactly what that was and I really don't. I'm sure I was, on some level, nervous or concerned or modest in some way maybe a little bit. I mean this was New England. This wasn't another place where nudity is something that's seen without some—

PAUL KARLSTROM: You mean like here?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: —concern. Yeah, San Francisco is a much different interpretation or feeling about nudity. So I don't remember, but I do remember people being extremely kind. And I remember the instructor for the class that I first worked with and she was so sweet to me and so kind with her directions about where I would go to change—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: —and where I could keep my things, and the students were always offering to make me tea during the break or offer me a cigarette, and I would be there in my robe and we'd go out into the hallway or sit at the window and open the window and smoke a cigarette. It was very comfortable. And Mount Holyoke was also an all-women's college.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: So most of the students were women, although the classes were open to students from the colleges that were nearby, and so occasionally, there were men that were a part of the sessions as well.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Did that make any difference for you?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: No, not at all. It was—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Go ahead.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: It was such a known sexual environment that I think the men in the class were probably much more uncomfortable than I was and maybe that's difference in personality or whatever. But, of course, some of these students were first-year students also, so it was their first experience observing a nude model, so we were kind of all in it together, you know.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well they also knew you were one of them; you were a student. It's not my job to speculate too much, but I would imagine that would be factored in to the way they interacted with you. You're not "other".

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: We were peers.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, and models, at least if you don't know too much about them, seem "other", and they always have a whole history of, well, models and actresses and so forth and the kinds of people here—you know.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: People who do that, yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So I would expect that might be a factor, and if you know people—well I should ask you; I shouldn't tell you. If you know people, in your experience, do you find that there is a different kind of—maybe even a bit of embarrassment because this is somebody you know in many other ways. Did you run into that? Because some of your friends were no doubt in the class.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: No, never, never. In fact, I've only recently modeled for someone that I knew which is Tom Marioni [San Francisco conceptual artist], but it wasn't nude. He did a profile of me with clothes on. But, you know, it felt very similar to modeling I've done before.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Being scrutinized, being looked at.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Oh, no, it didn't feel that way at all. There are only two times that I felt scrutinized.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I don't mean that, by the way, in a negative sense.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Right, but I'm saying truly, I've never felt that way excluding those two times. The sessions that I've done have always, in some way, seemed like a collaboration, a searching for the right pose, holding that pose, working with the artist singular or the artist plural, at an expression of which the art was that, became that. That was the residue and the product of the artist work and my helping out in what ways that I could.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Collaboration. Did you—now this is quite poetic, or romantic, at least, think of yourself in terms of the muse, the muse of poetry, the muse of painting, this enabler of creative activity?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: No. I mean not really. I guess—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Inspiration again.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: I guess I was always more fascinated by—I mean it wasn't collaboration in that the work relied on me feeling comfortable and the artist feeling some connection to my expressions, my physical expressions. And when that happened, there was often a connection, a sort of friendship that started to grow. We liked each other, of course. It's like any relationship, you know. If you connect, if you're attracted to each other, if you respond to each other, you start to like each other, but I didn't feel like the muse. I felt more like it either happened or it didn't. We either connected or we didn't and it was sort of like chemistry. You meet someone, you either like them or you don't, and it wasn't a personal thing when it didn't happen. It just didn't happen and it was great when it did.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You talk about this in terms of collaboration and friendship, which is interesting, which is a very professional position to take and you have been paid and, therefore, you are a professional model under slightly different circumstances because you weren't exclusively that and you were posing within your own community.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Well not always because I also posed on Martha's Vineyard in the summer.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, really?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Yeah. I—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Then let's hear about that.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Yeah. I started posing on Martha's Vineyard. I would go there in the summer to work between semesters at school, and so I found an open session listed in the paper and I called them up and asked them if they needed a model and started working for them, and it was great. They were Wednesday morning sessions, the first group that I started working with, and it was outside in someone's backyard and there were painters there and people who drew and it was just like an open session in these persons' back—and they were strangers, but, you know, there were—and another circumstance where they were really kind, they sort of welcomed me in and took care of me, and would spray bug spray on me up if the mosquitoes were getting too bad, and make me tea, or swat the hornets away when the hornets were coming. It was really sweet.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Sounds very sort of familial the way you describe it.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Absolutely, it was absolutely familial. And then the people, of course, that I connected with would start to hire me on their own and then I started posing for a painter, and then I would do private sessions with a smaller group who was a part of that open Wednesday morning group.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I guess what I'm trying to lead us towards is an understanding, I guess, on your part, or a focus on your part, and then leading to an understanding on my part, of the other elements that attracted you. You're a professional; you get paid. Okay, we know that, and this is a job, well, it is a job. But it sounds as if there were other aspects that attracted you to this experience, and I wonder if you can—and you've already suggested, of course, what that is. You felt comfortable. I mean it sounds to me as if you felt sort of nurtured within this protective environment, which that alone is attractive. Are there other things that you can remember that—after all, you went to Martha's Vineyard. You had this new skill, experience, and you were able to ply your trade there in the workshop. But it would seem to me that this is something then, by that time, that you sought out, and so it was something important to you beyond income, making the money. Is that right?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Well, I would say it's something I felt comfortable with, that I knew I could make money with, so it was supplemental income always. There were two different ways that—well there were some different ways that modeling sort of affected my sense of self. Primarily, and in the best circumstances, it gave me a sense of feeling thrilled to have my body in a group of people and have it not be sexual. It was the first time I felt like I could take my clothes off in front of another person and not have to feel like the only part of my body that was being seen was the sexual side. And that was wonderful, especially as a young woman. It was the first time in my life, and that was such—I mean I was so grateful to these people for respecting me in that way and for—I mean it's a very vulnerable position to be in, to take your clothes off in front of a group of people, and then it was almost like this gift. It was like here these people were and they were saying, "Don't worry, you're okay, you know. Everything—it's great to see your body; it's great to respond to your body," and it's not about sex. And growing up Catholic, that was a huge deal for me. That was completely different than everything in my upbringing. And in the worst cases was when I felt as though I was becoming sexualized, and that felt like a real

violation to me because I had come to the studio, the two times that this happened, I had come to these men's studio under what I saw as an agreement that this was going to be about modeling, and then under couched or sort of hidden pursuits, it started to go in another direction, so I felt as though this person was not being entirely honest in both cases and taking advantage of my trust, my coming there with all intentions of taking my clothes off and having it be about that exchange that I was use to, where it wasn't about sex; it was about helping this person find an expression for their creativity.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Presumably, these were men and these two occasions which I'm going to ask you about, of course, heterosexual men, and it was one-on-one, the one-on-one sessions which—well I mean it's pretty obvious that there's more chance there, more potential for it to go in a direction that you didn't want. Is there any time where though it crossed your mind, that it might be interesting to carry this activity in that direction? In other words, were you asked by men you were attracted to?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: No. It never happened; it never happened. You know, there were men who were in some of the group sessions that I had done that maybe I found physically attractive—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: —but it was so not about that for me. It was about something else, and I think it was about how people viewed me. That's what really turned me on. It was like to see—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: As a writer, I'm very interested in perception and to see how people saw me or to see how people would respond to a gesture was exciting for me, and that's what it was about. And I wasn't really interested in how men saw me sexually, not to say that as a human being I wasn't interested in that, but in this particularly occupation, that's not what I wanted. I wanted to feel like I could watch someone watching me which is what I explore in my poetry.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, I've heard that before, "watching somebody watching me." And in this case, in this interview, well this is, of course, a word picture, but in "Eros in the Studio," which is sort of like our default position—this is what we've shared in terms of [our] communication—that thing that I wrote about other women posing and then your response to that. But somebody commented, it's interesting, "It's me—" I can't even do it because it's so complicated, but "It's me watching the artist watching the models watching him watch them," and that's pretty interesting because we're just really observing one another and—do you feel that you're in sync, though, with—to the extent you can tell about it, and maybe even those you even talked about it at some time because you're like that, you're an intellectual, thoughtful person, want to know reasons and—but did you feel, for the most part, that you're on track, parallel, that your experience was—of course, it's the other side—but somehow shared with them?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Absolutely.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You were after the same thing playing different roles.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Absolutely, and that's—you know, you also mentioned control before. That is what I looked for and that is, in the best circumstances, what I experienced, and when I didn't experience it, I terminated the relationship, so that was—there was this one couple who would sit in on some of the open sessions that I was doing. At different times, one of them would be there and the next time the other would, or sometimes they'd be together.

PAUL KARLSTROM: This is Martha's Vineyard?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: This is actually in western Massachusetts at Mount Holyoke.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Okay.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: But they were men and women, a heterosexual couple, and they were both artists and they both liked me as a model, and they started to hire me privately to work for them and we talked about it once and they came up—I had a big room in one of the dorms, so we would do our sessions there, and they were really honest about how—they just connected with me as a person, and that made it easier to do their work. And somehow, you know, the way I connected with them and saw what they were expressing through their work, excited me, so—

PAUL KARLSTROM: But I gather that there are all kinds of excitement and arousals and other terms, and I gather from what you're telling me, in your own experience, it was, on your part, exclusively non-sexual. The excitement was of a different order. One can, of course, can argue that it's a continuum and that all of these

things are related, but I don't think we're going to bother to do that because you're describing your experience. And so far, Eros has played absolutely—Eros was, you know, had gone on holiday or had gone to sleep or something. What you describe as your experience of the studio, Eros was not in the studio, so the obvious question is at any time, did Eros appear? And I think you mentioned that there were two cases that seemed to fall into that. Can you describe those?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Sure.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Or is there something first?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: First, I think that Eros can be in the studio without it being the objective of either the model or the artist. And I am sure, although I don't remember times in particular, I am sure that that happened. But what I'm talking about when I say that that wasn't a part of it for me is that it wasn't my objective and it wasn't the objective of the artist, and except for those two times, and now's a perfect time to talk about it, that's when I felt uncomfortable. There was one time in particular, they were both painters, and each of them I met at different open studio sessions on Martha's Vineyard. The first one was a painter who was very successful, fun actually, and within his circle of painter, whatever, professionally, financially and professionally successful, and he started having me pose for him.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Excuse me, let me interrupt because it looks like we're coming close to the end here. Let's just, so that we don't have to—

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PAUL KARLSTROM: Continuing this one-session interview with Jennifer Rodrigue. We were interrupted just as you were starting to tell one of two anecdotes that presumably will illuminate a bit our topic, so—

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: So this painter, after working privately with him for a couple of times, a winter and fall period of time, interrupted our working together because I spent my summers on Martha's Vineyard. That's where he spent his summers. So I went back to Mount Holyoke and he contacted me before the next summer to say that he had a project in mind that he would like to explore with me. And so we made arrangements when I flew into Martha's Vineyard to meet for dinner and discuss it, and over the course of the evening, it became really obvious that this was not about a project, that this was about exploring a sexual relationship over a period of time with the pretense being this project. But that's not what it was about; it was about something else. And when I realized that, I stopped working with him and stopped communicating with him, and that was pretty much it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you met to discuss this fabulous project—

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: —which was so exciting.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And you probably thought, "Wow! This is great. This is more than just going and doing a session, but there's something larger about it." Did you [inaudible]?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Before I saw him, I thought, "Great! This is like—." Well I mean this sounds really pathetic, but I thought, "Great! This is like an ongoing gig for the whole summer. This is going to be some big money. I'm really psyched about this." And then, of course, you know, it's a little flattering always to think of yourself—

PAUL KARLSTROM: As that special.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: —as being a subject of a project.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Did he describe what it was?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Absolutely, and that was another part of it is that I was—creatively, I thought his project looked ridiculous. He had some sketches of it and I just thought it looked really silly, quite frankly.

PAUL KARLSTROM: How so? How so?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Well, I'm not really sure if I feel comfortable to describe it too much just because I think it's too revealing about who this person is, and out of respect for him, since he did it in privacy, I'd rather not—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Good.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: —reveal him. But I would say creatively, as a creative person, I'm also a critic, and seeing the project, I was uninspired or just didn't respond to it, so that was part of it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Was he serious? I mean he is a serious artist?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: He is a serious artist.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And so one has to suppose that even though there's another agenda, that, in fact, this is his valuable work time and it needs to count, and so this project for him is perfectly legitimate. He was genuinely excited about it.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: I could only assume that he was. It's hard to know. I mean as human beings, we have all sorts of different ways of convincing ourselves that the work we do is important, and sometimes other people think so and sometimes they don't, and we always face that as a creative person. We face—am I bull-shitting myself or is this really a great project? And maybe it would have been for him. I don't know, but—

PAUL KARLSTROM: It's too bad you can't tell a little bit about it just because it sounds to me as if there was some grand concept here that involved, well maybe a narrative, either a huge painting or maybe a series of paintings that make a kind of narrative like woman's progress or something. Was it anything like that? I mean did it have big ideas in it?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: No, and the more I became familiar with this painter, the more I didn't think that anything that he did had any big ideas. It was just about money; it was about money, and, for me, that's not really very exciting.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well that would be disappointing. So this is part of what turned you off. Did you come to view it, though, as a cover? Did you actually get to the point where you said, "Boy, this sounds like a—looks as if it's been invented just to get us together on a regular basis 'cause he's hot for me."

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: No. I mean that's part of—that has already been answered when you asked if I thought he was serious. It's hard to know.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: It's like I'm—on some levels, maybe he wasn't sure or isn't sure or—I mean I'm a little bit more generous than to just say that he was a fool and that's all he was after, and da, da, da. I don't know.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well he liked you. I mean that's a little bit flattering, right?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Yeah, but lots of different people like each other. It's not always—I mean I think unless you really feel something for someone and really want them to want you in that way, it doesn't necessarily feel that flattering. That's a personal thing. It's sort of like—

PAUL KARLSTROM: No, it's very interesting. And, you know, of course, and anybody who listens to these things or reads the transcript is going to eventually figure out that I've talked with other models and that is a very interesting point is how welcome is attention and it varies between my models. Some of them enjoy quite a bit. They don't intend to return it, and this, of course, has to do with vanity. You're probably not a very vain person.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: I'm completely vain. I'm just like anybody else, but my vanity, I mean what I got off on was when people responded to me, like that couple that asked me to model for them. They were really honest about—it, in some way, helped them do their work, being attracted to me, attracted in a non-sexual way. Even if there was some eroticism there, I wasn't aware of it with those two, although there were other times that you'd become more or less aware of someone. I usually could tell by discomfort, if someone felt uncom—

PAUL KARLSTROM: By your discomfort?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: No, by their discomfort.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I see.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Maybe they're just shy.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Nervousness. Yeah, it's possible. That happens, too. I forgot what I was saying. I don't remember.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, it was about vanity and—

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Oh, yeah. The attention, of course, I loved attention. The attention that I loved was in seeing someone interested in viewing me and that wasn't necessarily sexual, and if it was expressed sexually, I felt uncomfortable and not really like I wanted to be there.

PAUL KARLSTROM: It's interesting that with this unnamed prominent or successful anyway New England painter, or maybe a New York painter who spends the summers in Martha's Vineyard, I don't know, that in that one dinner, it became evident to you that this wasn't—it wasn't exclusively about art and you didn't like that and that was enough—then you wisely, I think people would say then—how did that become evident, though? Because I would imagine there was an incentive on your part to try to make it okay. You had this cool gig set up in the summer.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Yeah, but I mean it was evident because he took me out to dinner. It was very much—you know, I think people can pick up on things when someone's interested in something more than what they're saying they're interested in. I think that's completely—and it ended with him trying to kiss me good night, or succeeding in kissing me good night, and it was just really obvious that it wasn't—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Artists are always kissing, though.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Yeah, and you know what?

PAUL KARLSTROM: But not like that.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: It's true, and as a human being, I think we pick up on things that aren't always said. And it's good when you can be honest about what you're feeling and respond to it honestly, and in that way, no one gets angry with each other. It's like I wasn't angry with this guy because he wanted something else. I just realized that that's not, you know, that it wasn't a working relationship anymore.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well I've talked with other models where that's very much the case and it's not always as clear in the beginning as what you describe. In some ways, it's like he did you a favor inadvertently to provide enough information. I know with other—well, in fact, some of them in "Eros in the Studio," it became more and more evident that there was this desire, lust, attention that was unwelcome and made them uncomfortable. And then what is interesting is that that didn't necessarily mean at that moment they stopped, and it's like something that—to turn this kind of into a question, and I don't know if it fits with your experience at all, but is it possible to—you're interested in perception and how we see things and how we interpret. Is it possible to then ignore these kinds of signals, you know, what is really happening and recast it for whatever reason? Maybe you like the person, say, "Oh, well, that's so and so," and do you feel that that is indeed possible? And how is it, from what you said, it sounds to me as if you understood very well the implications and what that would involve for you down the line.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: I think that it has to do with honesty, honesty in what we see in other people, and honesty in what we tell other people. If you're trying to say that something is something it's not, then you're lying. If you're saying that a session is about—

PAUL KARLSTROM: It's tricking people.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: —painting and what it's really about is getting into bed with who your subject is, then you're lying. And that is a problem for me if someone is lying to me. You know, I look for that; I watch for that in people, because I'm as interested in seeing a real person as that person is interested in seeing the real me. And when that happens, it's a beautiful thing when you see each other for who you really are. Sexualizing a creative interaction has been done as art. It happens. People have sex and call it art. That's okay. I'm not opposed to that. I'm not saying that having sex as art is a bad thing, a dirty thing, a wrong thing. And who knows, if it were the right project, maybe even I would agree to be involved in it. What I find problematic is when someone is saying that this session is about painting or is about drawing or it's about photography, and what it's really about is about sex.

PAUL KARLSTROM: It's very interesting, like you're saying, because I can't go into it on this tape. We can talk about it later. I have this model friend whom I've never met who we have a dialogue, a discourse, I suppose. She's written a book. She's real smart, about modeling, and trying to retrieve it from all this erotica. So you can imagine the problems she has with me and my project, and she's very feisty and has a big temper, so I get "flamed" on the e-mail. I've actually gotten use to it. But she talks about that in very much the terms that you use, and I would think that the whole notion of honesty, of directness, is key there because she herself has been engaged, although she protests hugely against the notion, and this is correct, that it's automatically because of nudity, a sexual thing. But I think that we know that that isn't the case. She pretends against that old-fashion way of looking at the activity. She's trying to redeem her field. She's a professional model. On the other hand,

she will allow that there are these instances where however it comes about, it becomes a charge within the situation. Getting back to you and your case, you found this nice male painter whom you seem to like well enough as a person. He lost his credibility, in a sense, vis-a-vis you by the indirection and by the centrifuge. And this is a character trait you're talking about. It's not really about sex at all. At least I'm trying to interpret clearly what you said.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: But I think that this happens over and over again with exploring models and artists. I think that manipulation is used often to discredit what is presented as a purely creative act in the name of painting, in the name of photography, in the name of drawing. It's like I said before, sex has been used as an art medium, and if it's going to be sex, then call it that, and if you want to call it art, call it art as sex, but don't call your sexual exploration painting because that's, you know, it's not real. And that's where the power dynamic comes in. How can two people truly be equal if someone's lying to the other person? Or if someone is presenting themselves as having a goal that's actually not their true goal or intention. There can't really be equality there, and that, ultimately, is what made me feel that I didn't want to work with this man because he's not being honest with me and how can I go in and feel safe if this guy's not telling me the truth?

PAUL KARLSTROM: How, what about this then? What should we call this guy? Let's make up a name.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Do we have to?

PAUL KARLSTROM: That nice man. Now, you've lost out on a marvelous summer opportunity. Anyway, what if he had been honest and more direct?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: I probably would have responded differently. I probably would have felt much more comfortable saying, "Look, this isn't why I'm here" and then see how he responded to that. I mean you can work with people who would have crushes on each other and want to have sex with each other and not follow through on it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: See, that's what I want to get to because it's in your power to respond any way you want and, actually, I think, to control that situation, in effect, control the erotic charge which sometimes some people think actually brings something special to the encounter.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Absolutely.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And this thing that I'm talking about, some degree of honesty where it isn't a scam. Okay, so you were in control; you can control what you do with him or don't do with him, and I gather what you're saying is you don't care that much that he's hot for you, to put it in parlance, and then maybe you don't care one way or another—but not to pretend.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Absolutely, and to not have it be a part of what's being said as something else, not have it be a part of the work in that getting me undressed is not about doing your work; it's about having sex with me.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, what if he said, "Well I can't wait to see you naked again. I really enjoy that and it's great working with you. I have to admit that I really like you and this is good for my work." Is that a possible scenario that you would find acceptable?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Probably not, and if you put it in those terms—

PAUL KARLSTROM: But you know what I mean.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: "I can't wait to see you naked again." I mean I think I generally feel more comfortable with someone who's a little bit more modest than that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: I'll give you an example. I did a long-term modeling session for a sculpture class. They were doing full-size sculptures of the human body, so they were doing me. So there were probably eight women in the class and one man. At the end of the session—now this man and I were the same age, I mean, you know, about, and—

PAUL KARLSTROM: How old were you then?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Probably 21 maybe, 20 or 21.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What, this is the same guy?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: A student.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, no, this is a different—

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Okay.

PAUL KARLSTROM: —okay, this is a different story, all right.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Yeah, yeah. I'm using this as an example of when Eros can be in the studio, but it feels completely comfortable, or in some way, it affects the work, and it affected it in a very funny way. It affected it because when all of the sculptures were done and we were looking at the sculptures, I noticed that his full-size sculpture of me did not have nipples. My breasts did not have nipples. They were the only ones in the whole class and he did not put nipples on the breasts. It was almost like that was too far for him to go. He couldn't realize that detail. It was really interesting.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Now he was attracted to you?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: It was very sweet. I'm not sure if he was attracted to me or not, but I sensed that somehow being a man watching a woman and having—knowing for him, him knowing that I was also watching him watch me, that that affected his work, that there was something about that detail of the nipple that knowing I would see it was too much for him to go beyond. It was like a boundary he couldn't cross.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Would you be willing to interpret that rather interesting response as a function—aspect of who's in control in a way? You know, who indeed wields the power?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: I think that who wields the power changes with every interaction, and for him, maybe he felt as though he was not in power or control enough to cross that boundary, or maybe that was a gesture of respect, a gesture of modesty, a gesture of not wanting to expose that in me.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well it's a record of his having observed and focused and concentrated. It's a document—

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: —of an exchange—

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: And this was a long project. It was like three months. It's not like he didn't have time to work on that. It was definitely a statement.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You know, this is interesting. Maybe this will help sort of the flow of the discussion, but this friend of mine, an artist, but that's not his field right now, portrayed as an artist, and he described an erotic situation with a couple, a little bit older, but not much, and it actually kept up with him for a while. But this doesn't necessarily have anything to do with what you're talking about, your own experience, but there was one, I thought, very interesting detail of his report. The couple pursued him to draw her. They wanted her to pose for him. That can be perfectly okay. It is what it is. In this case, it came to be clear that the husband was as much in that there was something expected beyond that. They were both friends as couples. He was with his wife, but I don't know if they were married at that time. It doesn't matter. So they did [inaudible], and the way he describes this, with a bit of twinkle in his eye of the memory, was with scratching of the charcoal or whatever it was. She was posing. They both agreed like touching, looking and touching, and that they would talk about—she would say, "Well what are you drawing now?" in other words, wanting to experience this focus that you're getting—that young artist in the sculpture class was obviously avoiding. I find that interesting. I hadn't heard quite that description of the experience, but that was part of the exchange. Does that seem sort of usual for you? I mean is that an experience you're familiar with?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: No. I mean it doesn't. I think that that sounds like a beautiful exchange between two people who experienced something beyond the action of drawing, which is fine. It's perfectly fine, and it just happens that that wasn't part of my experience with posing.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Okay. Tell me the second story.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Oh, he was a painter and he had his studio in the same building as one of the open model sessions that I was in, and he saw me at one of the open model sessions and asked for my number and asked me to come and pose for a painting. And it was a large painting over a series of periods of different posing sessions, and pretty much the same thing happened as we started working with each other. It started becoming obvious that he wanted to explore a sexual relationship, and he started by asking me to join him for—he asked me out on a date, basically, and I said yes. He seemed like an interesting guy and I was interested in going out on a date with him and seeing what that would be like. But the studio sessions started—it kind of crept into the sessions, and when I started feeling that happening, I lost interest in him as, you know, and didn't feel like that was really where I wanted to go with this, and so I stopped. That was it. He finished the painting and we didn't

go out on the date and that was it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You stopped posing entirely after that session?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Would it be possible for you, though, with the right person—this is like a famous artist and model connection. And, as a matter of fact, almost all of the famous male artists had things with their models. We're looking at Diego Rivera right now, and I mean it's impossible to divide this; made some pretty good art, don't know if it was necessary to it, but this is the human face and, I suppose, accessibility and so forth. In your describing your own experiences, it sounds as if this other, this erotic connection, simply for you is not part—and you actually strove to make sure it wasn't part—of posing. Is that correct?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: But, see, remember what I said about what first attracted me to modeling was that it was the first time in my life that I could be naked—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: —and someone didn't see that as sexual. I mean that's what I got off on. I got off on someone viewing me and being excited—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: —by me as something other than sexual. So whenever it turns sexual, it's like, you know—as a young woman, you have people express sexual interest in you often, generally, though in many different ways. And so it wasn't as though I needed that from this exchange. In fact, I needed this exchange to explore something that—

PAUL KARLSTROM: I understand.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: And so I don't know if it could happen. Maybe with the right person, it could happen, like maybe, you know, who knows. It just hasn't yet, and I don't model that much anymore so—

PAUL KARLSTROM: No, right.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: —I don't know if it ever will.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I guess partly what I was getting at was to reiterate or underline that this activity from you had a different place in your life.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Absolutely.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And that doesn't preclude the possibility of falling in love with the artist. Believe me, I suspect then they would have gone exactly in that direction. Lucky you, both of you, to have that special kind of intimacy brought to [inaudible], but I think it's pretty clear that that wasn't something you sought at all in that experience. There was other—it's interesting. It's very interesting. Well what about the power thing again. Do you remember—do you remember thinking in retrospect—do you recall viewing the studio in terms of a power relationship? Usually, we think the artist is in control. I've come to think that in some cases, the model can be very much in control. Did you think of it in that way? In other words, as a model, is part of what attracted you to this situation,—

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PAUL KARLSTROM: Here we go again. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, continuing this—what did I call it?—Illuminating, enlightening interview with Jennifer Rodrigue. We were talking about—well, this is Tape 2, Side A, and we were talking about—getting down to the good stuff. I like this notion of a—power dynamic is the term you used—the power dynamic between men and women, something, and I'd like you to say it again, that as a young woman, a product of your time and your society and culture was something you were aware of, very aware of I think you said.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Well I think I was aware of it, but I'm not sure of I was conscious of it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: I think because I was equally a product of my generation and my sex being a woman, I was aware of power dynamics in a way that maybe other women of other generations weren't as aware of, so what I wanted, what I was looking for, were interactions in the studio that acknowledged there was a difference

in—and who was in control and who was in power, but sought to make that more of a balance. So those times when I was in a studio with people with the artists as observer of me, the subject, really wanted to make sure that I felt comfortable with the poses I was doing, wanted to make sure that I was warm enough, that I was not freezing, that I had tea, that I felt safe, or that I felt that this was an environment where I could expose myself physically without being vulnerable. That was what I wanted and what I looked for, and when that didn't happen, I was dissatisfied, and having that happen was such a powerful experience, being nude, being naked virtually, and having the people say, the artists, say, "We're watching you; we're looking at you; we're viewing you; we're seeing you, and you're as much in control in this scenario as we are." That was a beautiful exchange.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So it's probably, in a sense, a gift or a favor to the observers as well as to you, the fact that this, at this moment, within this situation, that kind of equality can exist.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: And they were acknowledging my autonomy as a human being. They were not using me purely for their—they were acknowledging that they were using me and saying "thank you" and saying "You count as a person being beyond my using you to look at."

PAUL KARLSTROM: So it's kind of Utopian, as a matter of fact, it occurs to me. I just hadn't thought of that before. It kicks in very much with the idea that the studio is a separate world, is especially the case if you can achieve that with one-on-one because I think that that's where it is much more likely. You're into one another and I have this—I think I've interviewed artists about, male artists generally. Some people, by the way, don't even want to touch this subject. I can name some Bay area artists, very well known, who work from the figure a lot that just think it's weird, well, I mean offensive and maybe disturbing to even bring up the possibility of this sort of thing. Others are quite honest about it. Nathan Oliveira, for instance, views this as an extremely important source of energy for his work, and that's being attracted, and I don't think he's necessarily dishonest about it, but it's just it's right there and he likes women. He's attracted to them. He desires them, and it's something that you just have to manage and channel, and I guess for him, what he told me was that he generally doesn't work on paintings directly from the model. You know, he does the drawings and so forth and then gets a distance because he says it can be too—there's too much longing there. Unless you control it, it can interfere. And Edward Weston is really famous for this with Charis Wilson, whom I know, and in his Day Books, he talks about this terrific desire he had for this young woman and which was reciprocated and then led to an extremely productive time together where she was one of the most famous models in his work, so there's different ways it can go. And I'm not sure exactly what got me on to that, but I guess it has to do with a number of different ways one can come together. I know what it was, talking about this situation and what you described as sort of a Utopian, by your terms, of how you want the world to be. Utopia is basically what we want the world to be and, of course, if we're generous, we think of others and the creation of a society where people can interact in the best possible way, right?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Well I'm not sure if it's Utopia as much as it's this working together to accept a mutual comfort. That's what turns me on about interacting with people in all different sorts of environments. If I feel respected by people, then that's a compliment. That's where my vanity comes in, and, you know, this whole sexualized artist/model thing, maybe by the time I got around to doing it, seemed so cliché that I didn't even want a part of it. Like I would joke about it with friends. You know, my mom had a real hard time with me modeling when she first found out about it—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: —and I would talk to my friends about it and we would laugh and joke and say, "Oh, yeah, right, like that would be something that I would want to explore is having sex with a man who was, you know, 20 or 30 years older than I was because I'm in his studio taking my clothes off." It was a joke; it was a joke. It seemed too cliché to even—and that's a product—again, that's maybe where I differ from some of these women as a product of my generation and a product of being a woman with a heightened awareness of power dynamic between men and women.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Do you consider yourself a feminist, or let's say a feminist activist? I mean I suspect that most of your generation wouldn't even ask the question so much because it's just a similar stance of being a woman who pays attention to the world.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Well, see, I think there were a time when I would have said I'm a feminist, but now, that means so many different things to so many different people that I really, you know, I don't like to define myself in that way. Do I care about women being respected? Absolutely. Do I demand respect from my individual relationships and from society? Absolutely. But I don't know if that's what a feminist is anymore. I'm totally out of the realm of defining one's self by a term like that. It's not what I do as a writer, let's say that, because I'm an artist and a writer. I find it really difficult to do that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Have you been able to bring any of this experience in a somewhat direct way into your

writing?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Absolutely, yeah. I mean this is experience. You know, I didn't seek this out and I didn't consciously necessarily write about it, but it comes up. It's like it's, you know—how we relate to each other is a big deal to me, like I said at the start, how we view each other, how we see each other, how somebody seems me. And sexuality is a big part of that 'cause I think it's so powerful for so many of us and it has so much to do with how we see ourselves and how we see each other. And I try to be forgiving about it. I'm not going to lay some heavy shit on somebody because they're sexually attracted to me. That's not my gig, you know—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: —to like punish somebody because they express interest in me sexually. But if someone hurts somebody sexually, that's a different issue—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: —but, you know, it's interesting to look at why people want to spend time with each other and sex is a big part of that, especially, you know.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I mean it takes so many different forms. These are the nuances that make life rich and I suspect that—we talked about it earlier, one off the things that I think I discovered from my little researches which are really pretty tiny, just a few individuals, and then being interested in the subject is that it became very clear to me that the only way the artist and the model in this situation truly came together there's this point of overlap, of intersection, where fairly different needs and goals are, to a degree, realized, or at least they're perceived as being realized. There's an awful lot about perception and it's especially interesting to see how it works over time when memory—

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Right, steps in.

PAUL KARLSTROM: —comes in, and this is another complicating factor here. And I'm not saying that the situation you described isn't absolutely the case where you were so in sync, that it was almost as if you with the artist, as I'm understanding it, were working towards that kind of balance because of the kindnesses that were shown. I mean you just described a number of different things that would suggest this was primary. I know other situations where there is maybe even an unwillingness or a strategic avoidance of certain aspects of the dynamic to allow it to continue and to somehow realize personal goals. And I think there's a very complicating thing and this isn't an interview with me, but I've thought about it about as much as anything recently. And I'm not quite—talking with you is really interesting because it provides yet another—I think a very intelligent perceptive one on a potentially loaded situation, and I think we agree that this does carry with it the possibility for raising issues, and trying to sort this out isn't going to be easy. But as I said in the beginning, if I'm going to get anything [inaudible] out of this, if I will use these interviews, it's going to have to revolve around personal needs and an idea of the kind of world we want. I view it very much as another way to get some control. And I don't think control is a bad thing. It's an ordering. It's making it possible in some ways to conduct yourself socially. Am I close in those remarks at all close to what—how you feel about it?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Yeah. I guess when it comes to control, what I see in my personal relationships now and what I see looking back on the relationships I had with the artists that I worked with was that when a relationship or an exchange works for me, it's when we can both give each other permission to have control. It's like I think it's an illusion that only one person can have control. It's like you can exchange it. And if you feel comfortable enough with each other, you can allow one person at one moment to control what's being said. Even in this interview, it's like we give each other—we give up control. There are moments when you have control and you ask me questions and then you release and relinquish control and allow me to wander around. In a relationship, you begin to trust each other and you can give more and more. And I could see that in modeling sessions, there were times when I felt as though I could give up a lot of control in terms of the poses that I would take or the proximity that I would take to another model. There were times when I modeled with other women and that can be a highly charged situation, working with more than one model. And you give up control on some level. I wouldn't necessarily position myself in the proximity of what the artists were asking me to with this other woman who was nude, so I relinquished control because I trusted them and because they gave me control to say when it wasn't comfortable anymore.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What do you think—I guess it's an interesting, at least sophisticated kind of analysis of what must have been happening. For one thing, there's another model in there and this pretty much means, well, you have a more complicated, dynamic going-on, and then automatically, you're going to give up some of the control. But what about the poses? And I think this is very much an individual type of thing, but I mean I wrote about it in that "Eros in the Studio" and every one of the models that I questioned in many of these surveys were [inaudible] to respond to that question. And I'd just be interested to know from you if in terms of some symbolic significance of certain kinds of poses, open poses, for instance, that means your legs are spread more or less

and it gives visual access. How do you feel about that? I mean is it in the poses—is there something in the poses or the type of poses that then moves it to where you really are less comfortable in a sexual way or can you desexualize even that, posing is just posing?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: You know, that's a hard one. That's difficult because I've never been asked by an artist to do an open pose and I don't think that I would do an open pose unless it was something that we discussed beforehand and I thought about. Otherwise, for me, being nude and being asked to reveal myself through an open pose seems like asking to look erotically upon another person. It seems like sex to me in some way because of that dynamic of the voyeur watching a woman and because, historically, I think open poses are sexualized.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: We haven't gotten to a point where they're not yet. Maybe nudity has gotten to a place where we can do it in a desexualized way, and maybe I could desexualize open poses if we talked about it first, we talked about how loaded it was, and sort of agreed that it was loaded, and went from there. But to have it be asked without that pre-discussion would—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, see, this comes to the big question, how do you—and I think maybe you've dealt with, but how do you then allow sex in? Major part of human experience, art is about us, and it's about the world we live in and it's about people, and to so systematically resist the sexual as a subject matter, I suppose, what we're talking about. I don't mean that, in fact, then you walk outside the studio and you have a love affair. But it seems a bit complicated maybe and problematic.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: And as I've said before, sex has been done as art, as a medium of art. People have had sex and said—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Usually not very successfully in my experience.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: —art, but it's been done. And when it's called that, I don't really have a problem with it, and if someone asked me to have sex with them as an art piece, I might consider it. I would consider it. I'm not sure if I'd say yes or if I'd say no, but it's something that I would discuss. And that's like the open pose. I mean it's loaded; it's loaded.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well that's what it's about. I mean there's, you know—

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: But the difference of that and having sex in a gallery with someone and having it be called art, there's a difference to that. Where these two people I've talked about it beforehand, they've decided they're going to do this and they're in mutual agreement that it's going to happen, and then there's a difference between that and then just showing up in a gallery and someone coming up to you and saying, "You know, I'd like you to take your clothes off and have sex with you right now. Would you agree to that?" There's a big difference.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Sure, yeah.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: There's a big difference.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah. Well it's opportunistic and extreme.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: And you're relying on the vulnerability of someone who's sitting in your studio nude and that's a violation of that power dynamic that we were talking about.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well so it really is, in a larger sense, about power for you. In my listening to you, I would say that that seems to be the case and that, you can tell me if this is right or wrong, but in your own life, in your observation, the world in which you live and interest in people and how they interact, you see yourself, I guess especially potentially being put into the vulnerable position of being a model available, in a sense, visually at least available, that it calls the issue of this in a very real way, and we're not that far removed, by the way. Nudity still, for most people, however you are, I don't know, it's a factor. It's like my wife saying—first, she was posing in the '60s and all the other models, including the younger ones who were younger than you are, they said, yeah, you get a naked woman, a nude woman, in a studio especially with a man, especially where there's been acknowledgment of a friendship and they like one another, that it becomes—just the very fact of that has some erotic potential. Then I guess it's a matter of what's done with it and where it goes. But I don't think nudity is neutral. I think that that's a big myth. Maybe in a nudist colony, it is, because that's something else, but in the rest of our society, I would suggest that it isn't neutral. I would say in the art class or studio, art class situation, it's pretty neutral.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: I think there are different levels of neutrality about it, and it depends on how—I mean who's involved, and that's the choices you make about who you surround yourself with.

PAUL KARLSTROM: True, which you've described quite completely and—I think—clearly. There's another interesting question and that has to do with the whole history of art, and probably the main subject more than landscape, I suppose, is the nude, and in our society, western society, it's the female nude primarily, how that came about. I'm not absolutely sure. That wasn't always the case. These nudes very often were symbols for sex for the erotic. In fact, they have certain gods and goddesses that represent that. No problem. And I think it seems that, you know, that whole way of looking at the human body is carried through and it's very much present now. A lot of this confessional art that we have right now, I mean contemporary art, absolutely noted, and it's the nudity and the interaction of the nudes and sexuality that defines much of recent art. So I find it interesting that you've created this sort of counter for you, this counter or alternative way of being.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Well I'm not really that interested in confessional art at all. It's just that simple. This is what I've done because my interests lie in something that's deeper than sex, and sex is something that's a facet of human existence, but it's something that I share privately, and that's my own sexual gig, you know. Everybody has what gets them off and mine is different than somebody else's, but yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well you can only talk about—there are no absolutes here.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And actually no universals and, of course, what I asked you to talk about is your own experience which it seems very consistent. I mean it suggests a world view, frankly, and that there are different ways that we can structure for ourselves the kind of reality that makes us comfortable and that frankly helps us get through and perhaps it even informs usually, I hope, in a positive way the way we interact outside of these situations. But that's more me talking about my views and not you talking about yours. Is there anything else that you've sort of thought about since we first talked and then you read the essay?

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: No. You know, we did a real good job of covering all of it in that hour and a half that we talked, yeah. No.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Great. Well I appreciate it, I really do. It remains fascinating to me, but I'll tell you, I'll say this on tape, the great thing, the great privilege is then in this kind of conversation because it is intimate; this is not the usual type of interview that is conducted and it's approached with mutual respect, exactly the kinds of things that you're describing that you seek in the studio. The great thing is it's another way to get to know somebody else.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Yeah, absolutely.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So anyway, thank you, Jennifer.

JENNIFER RODRIGUE: Thank you, Paul.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And we did it.

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