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Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Naomie Kremer, 2001 Mar. 16

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Naomie Kremer on March 16, 2001. The interview took place in Oakland, California, and was conducted by Paul Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

Tape 1, Side A

PAUL KARLSTROM: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, an interview with painter Naomie Kremer. We're at the artist's studio in Oakland, California. It's March 16, 2001. This interview is going to be brief, part of a series of interviews on the theme of artists and models. For the record, Naomie is first an artist and only maybe incidentally an artist/model, having had some experience in that area. So we will be focusing on that. This is by the way, tape one, side A. But before we talk about models and maybe some of your ideas on the modeling experience or some of your experiences, I think we should get to know a little bit about you as an artist, your life in art, and a little bit about you. So I guess we should start with the really easy part, you know, where you're from, when you were born, where you were born, where you grew up. But always with an eye towards how you entered into it on a career.

NAOMIE KREMER: I was born in Israel just outside Tel Aviv. My parents were East European refugees and both met in Israel in 1948. And my family immigrated from Israel when I was eight years old, so my first years are very based in the desert landscape, the Middle East, I guess. And then, as I said, when I was eight we moved to Brooklyn, New York. And I didn't speak a word of English and I began anew. I grew up in Brooklyn. I don't know what you want to know about all of that. But anyway, I started to do a lot of art, around the age of 10 I became very interested in drawing. And I kept it up and in high school I had a very good teacher, a wonderful artist who really encouraged me and inspired me, and [also] a fellow student who is a good friend of mine and is now the director of Exit Art in New York. So we met in high school and continued from there. And when, actually when I was in high school I went to the Brooklyn Museum for a class, a scholarship class, a life drawing class, and that was my first experience with models. And I went to a religious school and came from a religious Jewish background. My
parents didn't know that I was taking a class with nude models. I never brought my paintings home. I remember being completely shocked at the whole experience, you know, just the way how casual it was. And there was always this kind of subterranean excitement, at least for me, but it all very accepted and kind of natural. And I just really loved the class. Then I went on and went to the University of Rochester where I minored in art because I didn't really believe that, well, my parents raised me to believe that art was not really a viable occupation. So . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: They thought of your education as preparing you for work?

NAOMIE KREMER: Law school, medical school, you know, a profession.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You were very professional?

NAOMIE KREMER: Yes, exactly. And anyway, so I did this minor in studio arts and I had a job as the studio monitor. So I spent hours and hours and did a lot of painting and started to work big at that time, and really discovered . . . I worked a lot from newspaper pictures. I really was interested in the sort of shocking relationships, I guess, is how I would put it. My first real work in college was drawing, or painting from photos. One I remember specifically was one of Allen Ginsberg being arrested for obscenity. And he had his hands in cuffs and some sheriff guy behind him. And so I did a painting of that. Anyway, after college I, actually I got married right at the beginning of college and ended up . . . my husband received a fellowship to study in India. Spent a few months in India, during which time my marriage broke up. And I met my current husband. Traveled all over India with him and three other guys in a LandRover.

PAUL KARLSTROM: How did you meet? What's your current husband's name?

NAOMIE KREMER: Charles.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Charles. That was really early on then?

NAOMIE KREMER: It was. In 1973.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And you hadn't been married that long, right?

NAOMIE KREMER: No, I had been married a couple of years but it seemed like . . . it never really quite seemed like it was going to work. It was mostly a way to leave home and -- I grew up, way too sheltered -- just to leave home and lived by myself so . . . I went to India, like I said, with my husband and left with another man. And we lived in London for three years, during which time I finished my senior year of college, and then I had a year off. I had some jobs, including, at that time I started to do some modeling. That was actually the only time I ever did it professionally, just for some art classes and a few artists kind of just one-on-one in the studio type modeling.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What years were these?

NAOMIE KREMER: That was probably 1974. And then after a year of doing not very much I went back to graduate school and did a masters in art history. And then . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: What was your focus, specialty?

NAOMIE KREMER: Modern period.

PAUL KARLSTROM: European?

NAOMIE KREMER: No, American. American art. I was very interested in the Abstract Expressionists. I did my thesis on Abstract Expressionism. People still accuse me of having some bias towards it, which I do, but I think it's not really exactly that anymore at all. But anyway, I was very interested in the whole, I guess the psychological angle of Abstract Expressionism. But in general, I think, that my work has really derived from the background in art history and the sense of like a molding, a compendium of art history in the last 100 years. Which has seen such a quick change, an array of styles and isms. And I think in a way my work sort of catalogs that and jams it all together and juxtaposes it, and not even in a way that I intend to do. But it's just in there. You know, I think as an artist you work from what's in you and it comes up in different configurations and, you know, I mean, in my work it's gone through, I think it started out with Impressionism and went through Cubism and still includes some references to Cubism and Surrealism, Expressionism, Pop, just right through to the present, which I think is mostly about information. About the sense of information that exists in our time. And I think that in my work it's in a way a reference to the way of experiencing the world that's just full of information.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Too much information?

NAOMIE KREMER: I don't think of it as too much. I mean, I try not to feel like anything is wrong with the way things are. I mean, my basic attitude is how it is, is how it needs to be and how can I understand it or how can I live it as an artist, you know, as a person.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Where did you go to graduate school?

NAOMIE KREMER: I went to CCAC [California College of Arts and Crafts, Oakland] so I had a long hiatus between . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you were out here then. Where did you do the art history?

NAOMIE KREMER: That was at Sussex University in Brighton.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, that was in England?

NAOMIE KREMER: England, yes. And then we left England in 1977 and decided to move to the United States, but we didn't know where. And we bought a van on the East Coast and drove it across the country and ended up where everybody ended up who was going across the country, which is California. Well, not everybody, but the restless types. Anyway, we ended up in San Francisco and we just started living here. We spent a year or so based in the [Central] Valley because Charles got a job there. In Modesto. And while we were in Modesto I took a photography class, which is another very important thing in my training, I feel, my development as an artist. Because a lot of my information comes from photography. And I'm just interested in different types of magic, and to me photography is a certain kind of magic. Also, particularly black and white photography, the way it translates. And abstracts. I just find that very rich and kind of an endless source of information.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So when were you at CCAC?

NAOMIE KREMER: Well, after living in Modesto for a year we decided to base ourselves in the Bay Area. And I worked as a graphic designer for about seven or eight years. And then around, it was 1989 I decided I really wasn't happy with my life as a graphic designer, it was not me, it was not the right world for me, the right work for me. And so I sold my business and rented a studio and started to paint. And after a couple of years of doing that and working a little bit privately with teachers I thought that I needed to just be in the art world a little more directly to meet people to just know how I compared, you know, what was going on. So I applied to graduate schools and I got into CCAC and that was from '91 to '93, I did my masters at CCAC in painting and

drawing.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you're a . . .

NAOMIE KREMER: I'm a recent . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, a recent entrant.

NAOMIE KREMER: I am, yes, as a full time artist and someone who considers themselves to be living and working as an artist that started for me in '89.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But you were doing paintings earlier than that?

NAOMIE KREMER: I was, I did. Yes, I did.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Even though [inaudible]?

NAOMIE KREMER: Yeah, I would say I never really considered myself an artist.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What were you interested in?

NAOMIE KREMER: Yeah, I was interested in information about art. I thought, I was trying to be practical and I thought, well, if I train in art history maybe I can work in a museum or a gallery. I did actually get a job in a gallery in London and I lasted two weeks. I was fired after two weeks.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Why were you fired?

NAOMIE KREMER: Because I didn't have the right attitude I think. And I found . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Did you turn away the customers?

NAOMIE KREMER: [laughs] I think the owner was afraid I would. I just found it sort of intolerably a hierarchic place where I was never going to get anywhere. I mean, I was just the receptionist and nobody cared or wanted to know what I thought. And it was just a ridiculous thing. I realize this is not anything to do with art as far as I was concerned. You know, it was completely unsatisfying. In retrospect, why would an artist want to be in the world of art without being an artist in that world?

PAUL KARLSTROM: I'm interested in this notion of information. And I'm not saying that there's a connection to anything having to do with models or modeling or that experience, except maybe from that standpoint of trying to know the world more fully, and know yourself, and maybe even as an art historian, I should put this as a question of course, but I am wondering about that activity of posing. This is one of the longest traditions in making of art in art history. It's very much a tradition. Really informing practice in a sense, except for some brief periods like the 60s and 70s when there was turning away from life drawing to a certain degree, or so I understand in interviewing certain artists. But it's been pretty much continuous and almost like a defining act, a part of a rite of passage, something one turns to even if your work is abstract. That this is sort of a foundation of painting. Did this, I realize we're reading back into it but I'm just curious to know.

NAOMIE KREMER: Yeah, I'm interested in the first part of the question because really when I started doing modeling, first of all I came from a background that it was completely prohibited and wrong and all of that. So there was that excitement of transgression, I guess. But another part of it was that I started doing a lot of yoga when I was in college, and one of my close friends was a very spiritual person and did yoga, and she also did nude modeling for art classes. And she was someone I really respected and I thought, well, she's not doing it like to get turned on. And she said she did it because, I don't know, maybe she was, but her, the way she put it was that it was really about centering. You know, and as a model you really have to find your center in your body and accept the gaze and just stay in yourself. And so it was a very meditative kind of practice. And so I kind of, since I was doing yoga also I said, "Oh, that's interesting. Maybe I could see what that feels like." And, you know, of course, there's also the kind of weird sense that somehow as a model you're inspiring the creativity of the artist. And so you're somehow a collaborator.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What do you think about that?

NAOMIE KREMER: Well, now that I have done it from the other side as well, because I've done years and years of life drawing myself, you know, drawing from models, and I know that certain models do make you work better. It has a lot to do with one's ability to identify with them. And I think for me having been a model, when I then went and did life drawing myself I found . . . and now I teach drawing and a certain amount of life drawing evolved in it, I don't usually focus on that . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: You do?

NAOMIE KREMER: I teach drawing.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Where?

NAOMIE KREMER: Well, at the moment it's drawing. It's usually painting or drawing. At CCAC.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, okay.

NAOMIE KREMER: I'm teaching a drawing workshop this semester. But anyway, when you teach life drawing one of the things that you tell students is that the reason to do it is that we all have bodies. And so there is no more direct way of connecting with the eye, the hand, the paper, one's own body, the body you're drawing. So for artists it's always a question of can you enter the experience. And when you're doing life drawing you're drawing a bunch of bottles or whatever. Now [Giorgio] Morandi was able to enter that experience of the body as the bottle I guess. But the most direct version is to draw other people's bodies. And even though I'm completely heterosexual I love drawing women, because I find I relate to their bodies better and I understand the way the weight settles, the way the energy moves, you know, just the whole focus of the pose is somehow more empathetic for me with women than with men.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's a very interesting observation. It's very interesting because you're not alone in that among women artists. Those I have spoken with about that, I can't remember if I asked a mutual friend, Judy Dater, about that. We talked about that. But others, yes. And in each case, very heterosexual women. When it comes to the studio and their preference for models and nude models, I think nudes is what they're talking about, invariably women, they prefer the women. So my big generalization, which one has to make very cautiously, is that, at least based from a certain standpoint, women prefer drawing from life a female nude model. It's an interesting topic. Heterosexual men certainly prefer, exclusively sometimes, working from the female. And the only group I can think of that prefers the male are gay men. David Hockney has done beautiful drawings. He's just a fabulous drawer. And he has his friend Celia. Well, actually you've done a pretty good job of explaining, more so than I've heard before, of why that might be.

NAOMIE KREMER: Yeah, well, it's not the case for men obviously. So there must be something . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Go figure.

NAOMIE KREMER: Go figure.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What about this possibility, that the practice of working from the nude, drawing, painting from the nude for women may be distanced a little more from sex. Because when men are honest, I mean, artists are artists and that's not what drives them to do this of course, but there's certainly a presence there. And it seems apparent that what they desire, what they're attracted to is what they want to delineate. Any thoughts about that?

NAOMIE KREMER: Yeah, I have to say that in a certain way I've never found the experience of drawing from the nude to really be exactly erotic. It's more -- or maybe it's erotic but it's not sexual. And I don't find that I prefer to draw very attractive men as opposed to . . . I mean, mostly what I am looking for in drawing the figure is like a specificity, I guess, you know, a uniqueness. And that's usually true of people that are less beautiful. Or what's most interesting is when there is beauty and ugliness and everything all together in some way. And that's what's charged. And it's never exactly about a direct -- like from me to you type of connection to eroticism -- but just the sort of imagination, you know, the eroticism of the imagination, which is aroused, I think, by a whole huge variety of types, not physical types you would necessarily want to have sex with.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

NAOMIE KREMER: I mean, maybe it's not true for men. I mean, I suspect that for men it's a much more direct muse kind of . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: It is an interesting difference though, isn't it?

NAOMIE KREMER: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: This is something that still puzzles me even though I've thought about it and have certainly talked with people about this. I find actually that even aside from nude models making art that many women seem to prefer -- to find the female body more beautiful.

NAOMIE KREMER: Maybe it has something to do with passivity also. Because the model is a very passive role in a way. And maybe as a women to see a man in that passive role is not very arousing really. Whereas it's more of

a stereotypical female role to be sort of a passive, recipient of the gaze. I have to say that I think in a way I found posing more erotic than drawing from the nude. In other words, as a model I found the experience more erotic than as an artist.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Would you describe yourself at all as an exhibitionist? I mean, do you think of yourself as a bit that way?

NAOMIE KREMER: I'd have to say I think I am, yeah. I'd have to say I must be.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, it's not certainly unique to you, gender aside. We just have different ways of doing it. And there are certainly other models I've spoken with when they're pressed on the issue, they say, "Well, I guess so." Ann, the famous Ann, describes it a different way. She doesn't say exhibitionist, her posing. This is my wife, by the way, we're talking about. But she likes the term "display". Display. Like you would display yourself at a particular dress or something.

NAOMIE KREMER: I think it's a little exhibitionist. I mean, you can call it display, you can call it what you want, I mean, maybe exhibitionism is too low a word, but it is the sense of wanting to be seen.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, what about . . .

NAOMIE KREMER: And it applies to everything. It's the physical, the wanting to reveal oneself.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, that's right. That can happen verbally over luncheon conversation for instance.

NAOMIE KREMER: Yeah, exactly. These interviews.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah. I mean, there's no question about it. There's something perhaps in some way, and I don't know what term to use for it, but it's almost reassuring to be recognized for yourself.

NAOMIE KREMER: Well, yeah, exactly.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And certainly I would imagine, I don't think I'd ever pose nude, I'm probably too shy and self-conscious, but at any rate, which you apparently aren't, but I would imagine that there's some of that, there's an acknowledgment of who and what you are, including the package and . . .

NAOMIE KREMER: Well, exactly. I don't know if I mentioned that but, yeah, that's another thing about doing it. When I was young, you know, when I was like my early 20s I felt it had a lot to do with self-acceptance. And at that age everybody, I certainly had all kinds of self-image, body questions, you know, and insecurities, and it is a means of saying, "Well, I'm going to accept myself. I'm going to reveal myself and accept myself."

PAUL KARLSTROM: Which is very brave. I can't -- I guess some people are so pleased with themselves that they think they're doing a big favor to the world. I don't know. But, again, you certainly don't, naturally,[inaudible] other models descriptions of these experiences, but in general the whole question of body image is very much there. And the choice, the women feel -- the professional models, obviously money could be one consideration to continue doing it -- [but] unless you're really down and out, [the choice] suggests other reasons and motivation.

NAOMIE KREMER: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And it seems to me that for many women that perhaps remains a question. And I wonder if you, who I bet thinks about such things, don't feel that this has a bit to do with the way women had been and still are viewed in the world, and that their identity has a great deal to do with how they are formed and having that accepted.

NAOMIE KREMER: Hm-hmm. Hm-hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Was I clear on that?

NAOMIE KREMER: Yeah, I think so. I mean, I guess, but what is the question though?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, it's not so much a direct question. It's just a topic. And it, again, has to do with women being, in our society certainly, defined to a degree, more than men would be by their bodies, their form.

NAOMIE KREMER: Yeah, yeah. Well, it's true. You know, I don't know. It's hard to, I don't know if I would have been so forthcoming if I had felt less good about my body. I guess I feel a certain acceptance. But, obviously -- but not total acceptance. So I was at that funny place where I'm not totally embarrassed to reveal myself but I'm also not completely sure that I'm the most perfect specimen. Not that I'm completely sure. I know I'm not such a perfect specimen so, so that there is that question to be answered, I guess. I think the recent, my most recent

experience with posing was not professionally but just for a friend, Judy [Dater]. We were in a residence together at Djerassi and we knew she took photos of nudes and another resident and myself agreed to pose for her. And she said, "Nude?" And we said, "Sure. Why not?" And so we did. And at that point I was in my mid 40s and I thought, wow, can I really do this? Do I dare do this? And the man was 10, 12 years younger than me. And I felt this is going to be pictures about an older woman and a younger man. And, I mean, is that what the sub-text of these pictures is going to be. And then I just got into it and it was really fun. And then I saw the pictures and I thought this isn't so bad. And I think, so there is something about the periodic checking in with our bodies, I guess, and saying, "Is it still acceptable?" And I hope to feel that it's acceptable until I die in one way or another. But the role of the model is one that that question has to come up. You must accept yourself in some way if you're willing to reveal your body.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right, right.

NAOMIE KREMER: So it's like a testing, you know, a checking in with that. I never know what to do with that feeling. You know, and then there's the whole question of anonymity or not and all of that. And that gets into a whole other loaded question like how will I be judged and what is society, really. But I have a certain rebelliousness against the idea of what's okay and what's not okay. And so I want to stake out this position where I say that, "Why shouldn't I?" And, "I can do this. Why shouldn't I do this? I have a right to live the life I want." It's that whole train of thought.

PAUL KARLSTROM: This is great. Let's turn this [the tape] over, even though we seem to have a few more minutes. Well, let me introduce the question because we do have a little more time and we want to use as much of the tape as possible. I want to talk, of course, about this experience, which was actually how we met. Not there at Djerassi but more recently. I think it's very interesting and I think it does raise a number of questions and not just about modeling but about -- I think what you mentioned points to the direction, and that is a sense of rebelliousness, a kind of making a statement. And what I hope we can talk about when we turn the tape over is to what extent that kind of experience your modeling, posing, but particularly that one occasion, which is really the one that I know about. And I've seen a picture, which is very beautiful, from that session, from what extent it intersects at all with you as an artist, or more to the point, the making of art. Is there a connection? Are you participating in this phenomenon that you found so interesting when you studied art history?

Tape 1, Side B

PAUL KARLSTROM: Continuing the interview with Naomie Kremer this is still tape one, side B. And I asked a question, but it's recent enough that it's okay.

NAOMIE KREMER: So in the case of the photos that Judy Dater took I felt very much like a collaborator. In fact, I'd have to say I felt like I was kind of directing the whole thing and the guy was sort of more sort of a willing accomplice I guess. But I felt like I was coming up with a lot of the, I mean, most of the ideas. Judy decided on the setting and then we kind of started posing. And like I mentioned, I have done yoga and I love to dance, and I consider myself someone who's aware of my body and aware of the visual impact of what a pose is, and where the tension is, where there's excitement and so I felt like I was really composing those pictures in a way. And then, of course, Judy was the one who was framing them and all of that, but in terms of the content I felt like I really had a lot to do with it and it was a very active posing session. And there was a certain amount of tension between me and this man, and so I really felt inclined to show that somehow and to express that. And we had like hair pulling photos and just various twist and turns and bends, and I found it fascinating. It was really a fun thing. It was not at all static. It was just constantly shifting and moving and very inventive. It was a very inventive process for me. And, like I said, being aware and having taken a lot of pictures I'm really aware of what things look like. And so in a sense you could say we were lost in activity, but it's not really true. I mean, I was lost in the activity of posing. I was not lost in the activity of some sort of rapport with this man. It was the activity of posing with him that was so fascinating.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Was he surprised by the choreography, the direction that it took?

NAOMIE KREMER: I think he was surprised and excited. He seemed to really be into it and very open to it. And he was a good model as well. So I think it just worked quite well.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Is he an artist? Well, everybody is at Djerassi.

NAOMIE KREMER: He is a musician.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Musician. Do you think of that particular experience akin to performance art? Or maybe even dancing?

NAOMIE KREMER: It's definitely got versions of all of that. Yeah, absolutely. And I have to admit the voyeur and the form of the photographer was a very important part of that. And Judy was a wonderful voyeur. Because she

was excited and she was encouraging and accepting. And so we felt very safe and playful and fun. And I don't know how she felt but I knew it would only go so far. And it felt very comfortable.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Of course, I have heard her tell this, she volunteered information about this when I was interviewing her on the subject of artists and models. And she recalled it as a pleasure. And we were talking about, pretty frankly about sexuality and eroticism, sensuality and all of this. And she's very forthright about her interest in that. And she described that session with you two as emotionally overwhelming, I think is the term, I mean, literally [that] is what she said. Which can mean a lot of things. But one of the things -- well, maybe this is interesting, to really look at what that means and what such words connote. Because she said at one point, she told me she wanted to put the camera down and jump in with you. And in one way you could see that as like a playpen or sandbox. "I want to play too. I want to play too."

NAOMIE KREMER: Yeah. Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But there's no getting away from the eroticism or even sexual energy that she was feeling, no matter what.

NAOMIE KREMER: Yeah. And it was obvious, you know, and I think the whole energy between the three of us was such that it worked. I mean, I think that that's why, and she's a good photographer and able to stay on top of that enough to capture it in a photo. But definitely she was capturing an energy that was there. She was not posing it or inventing it or pretending or whatever. It was authentic, you know, it was a very exciting experience. We all really enjoyed it. I mean, we were like high afterwards. It was . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, I bet.

NAOMIE KREMER: And then we did it a second time, actually. We did it two sessions. The first time, you know, we really, really enjoyed it. The picture you saw was from the second session.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Was it? Are you, your face is hidden by his head [inaudible].

NAOMIE KREMER: Yeah, I didn't want to show my face in any of the pictures actually.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And I was just wondering about that. Was this by device, by your own request? Or was this Judy?

NAOMIE KREMER: No, that was my, I mean, as I said, I was controlling the posing pretty well, and part of that was I didn't want to have my face in it. Partly because I wanted her to be able to show them freely. And I wanted to even maybe be titillated by showing them to people and they wouldn't even know it was me.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But still for all your transgressive impulses it comes back to certain restrictions or limitations about the way you can behave given your position in life.

NAOMIE KREMER: Exactly.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Professionally and your marriage and so forth.

NAOMIE KREMER: And children and everything. Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And so how do you feel about that? Do you feel that you should be able to be open within this art context? And we're allowing that the art context makes it a bit fundamentally something else. There can be the arousal part. But that isn't primarily what you're after. It's not making erotic photos or anything like that at all. Do you feel that it's unfortunate that you, or more generally, we are limited in terms of how we can express ourselves to a certain extent by our stations?

NAOMIE KREMER: Well, I think that a certain amount of limitation is a very important thing for every artist and every person. And as a matter of fact, it creates a lot of excitement too. There's no excitement about everything being revealed, completely easily, completely openly. So it's always a ballencing act between what you reveal and what you don't reveal. And everybody has their own place of comfort with that. One of the main reasons I didn't want it to be revealed is I am, was, and probably still am at a point in my career that I want to be known as an artist. And certain artists have made themselves known through physical revelation, but that's not my medium really. And I didn't want that to become maybe what I was known for and everything else is sort of on the side. I mean, you know, it's a question, I feel in a way if it was later in my career that I would mind less, actually, being revealed.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, I was wondering about that. Because we have to take into account, I think all of us do, of course, operating as professionals as one kind or another. Artists, I think, have far more latitude than many of the rest of us, even the museum people, or people who work for the Smithsonian. But what is the question here?

I suppose I'm still trying to get this notion of more what we allow ourselves, to what extent do we really then determine and say, "To hell with it." This is . . .

NAOMIE KREMER: I think it depends a lot on consequences, on what the perceived consequences are, and for all that I want to be free and I claim certain rights and all of that I'm also extremely -- would be very, very upset if people judged me negatively for this. Now obviously a certain amount of that I feel, or if certain people were to do it I would feel like well, that's their problem. But it's a very delicate point between being considered, you know, especially for women, you know, a slut or being considered a powerful, bold woman. And that would be okay with me. I mean, I think certain women are afraid of being even considered powerful or bold. I'm not afraid of that, but I don't want to be considered a slut. Now, you know, the way that the world labels women that way I object to it. Hopefully we live in a time when it's more and more ridiculous where it's obvious that it depends on . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: But we're not there yet. You're right.

NAOMIE KREMER: But we're not quite there yet. Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Another interesting thing about this story, this experience for me is the different ways the same image will be viewed or understood. Because we look at an image and in every way -- or so I think, I can't say that with authority -- we want to stretch it out, fill it out. In other words, create those frames that proceeded it and that follow it, because that is the way we experience life. We don't actually experience it in this very artificial freeze-frame. And inevitably looking at a photo like that people are going to speculate, either side. And then the way they do that, and their own views come into the reading of that image. And, actually, I think, determine its meaning. And in that case, it's pretty loaded because you have these two people who appear as if they're making love. And which may be partly true, but it's certainly, as we know in your case wasn't the consequence of that. Nonetheless, the judgment of the artist and the artist's intent and the models and their collaboration actually are to a large extent dependent upon the viewer. Of course, this is true of all art.

NAOMIE KREMER: And painting. Exactly. Abstract painting.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But with different consequences here as you pointed out.

NAOMIE KREMER: Well, you know, I love playing with the titillation of the people wondering, well, is this for real or is it a pose? To what extent is it posed? And let them wonder. I mean . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Let them wonder. But as you do point out, then there's a risk for you as the models anyways, Judy Dater can get away with it for, because the artist really has that kind of liberty. But the models in a sense . . .

NAOMIE KREMER: Well, maybe that's why I didn't want my face in it. And nobody would recognize me in that picture.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And I thought it was very brave when at one point you said, "Why not identify me?"

NAOMIE KREMER: Well, because my face isn't in it. Again, I felt like, well, so what? But, yeah, I had second thoughts about it because . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: I still don't know what you find [inaudible] but that's an open question. I think you were, well, it is interesting because . . .

NAOMIE KREMER: Well, I realized that when I said, "Yes, sure, use my name," I was imagining a very kind of unencumbered kind of context or uninflected kind of context where maybe like in a gallery or something where really there . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: No thesis for . . .?

NAOMIE KREMER: Yeah, exactly. But in the context of this article about Eros in the studio, and how often it does cross over and when it doesn't and the whole thing, I felt that it put it into this whole other world where what was under discussion was did they or didn't they. And that I didn't want.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But that also then speaks again to the question I just asked. That it's inevitable that these images will be looked at that way. They're not looked at as removed from the experience.

NAOMIE KREMER: I'm not sure if that's true because in my experience when I look at photography I don't really necessarily put myself into the moment before or the moment after. I look at the image and I am just interested in that frozen moment. So, you know, maybe it's a different orientation and people are more oriented toward the narrative look at what the story was.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, yeah.

NAOMIE KREMER: I am purely looking mostly, I look at things for not the story but the visual image. And with all its, the gut reaction and all that stuff, but it's very much of a moment.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I think that's -- and I do understand that of course -- but I think that that's rare and it's very unusual.

NAOMIE KREMER: It's naïve?

PAUL KARLSTROM: I think most people think in terms of stories. They understand the world in terms of the stories we hear. And this is almost formalist, it is a completely formalist approach to image, that it stands actually divorced from the reality of the experience. Some of us are much more interested, or as interested, in the others. Not [just] the one that's there.

NAOMIE KREMER: Right, right. Yeah. I enjoy abstraction rather than the concrete. The unknown more than the known. So that's the way I gravitate in my own paintings. I like to get to a place that hovers just between where you can sort of, where you can project something on it but you know that it's your projection. I mean, that is exactly the point I want to be at, not where like you see a little figure in my painting and sure enough it's really a little figure. It's like is it a figure or isn't it a figure? You know, that is exactly what interests me and it's what interests me in other people's art.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Sort of an enigma?

NAOMIE KREMER: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, and uncertainty. The uncertain moment. Not the decisive moment but the uncertain moment in a way.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So what does that have to do with, or in what way is that then a factor in your interest in information? You said earlier that that is what your work is [about]?

NAOMIE KREMER: Uh-huh, yeah. Well, I'm interested in almost like the "soup", you know, the information soup. The fact that since there is so much of it in a way it can be sifted and gathered and interpreted in a million different ways. There is no one single interpretation. There is no one single reading that's correct. And I guess in a way that the more you allow the simultaneity and the synchronicity of information the more ambiguous it becomes, I guess.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You sound very much like a post-modernist painter to me.

NAOMIE KREMER Well, I am influenced by that way of thinking, but I think I came to it with my, I came to it through my own bias and then discovered that it exists out there. I mean, that's my own experience of life. I mean, I feel that there is no one reading of anything. I'm interested in complexity, I guess. That's the other thing about information, you know, multiplicity of information is I experience life as very complex and I relish that complexity as opposed to wanting everything simplified and clarified and made one thing.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You really don't want to bring order to disorder?

NAOMIE KREMER: No, I want to celebrate the disorder.

PAUL KARLSTROM: This is not unlike what we were talking about at lunch.

NAOMIE KREMER: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: This rage for order or this need to construct.

NAOMIE KREMER: Hm-hmm. Now I'm a control freak as much as anybody else, believe me. But I fight it in a way. I fight it with this idea of allowing, you know, just allowing everything.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, and of course, post-modern is a term, it's actually not even used that much. For awhile it seemed to have great significance.

NAOMIE KREMER: When I went to graduate school all you could hear about were deconstruction post-modernists.

PAUL KARLSTROM: In theory there's still quite a bit of that hanging around in certain areas of the art world. But my feeling about it -- what you're describing -- is an ethos, I guess, a world view, or a shared attitude of a time. And it's perfectly understandable with this kind of way your view of the world would appear in your work. I think going back to the artists and models topic that there's ambiguity actually in that image of you posing. Was that in a field or . . .?

NAOMIE KREMER: Yeah, in a barn.

PAUL KARLSTROM: In a barn, that's right. In a barn. Did Judy Dater arrange for that? What you, what the other model -- You imagine, perhaps feel, when you're coming together in a certain way I could guess, a sort of magic moment. I don't know if you'd use that term. But it's very possible the reality is other and you bring very different things to the experience. In other words, what Judy then finally saw there and what . . . Heck, I'm going to have to ask her. I'm going to talk to her about specifically that photograph that you've been describing in your experience, what it means to her, what it is about. I'm just interested to know what she has to say.

NAOMIE KREMER: Hm-hmm. Hm-hmm. I think she experienced or was aware of the, of desire being kind of in the air. And I suspect that that's really what got her, what moved her and what was so charged about the whole experience because there's definitely that. It was in the service of making these photographs, but it was using, obviously, a certain amount of real life feeling and experience, probably very much like an actor. Is an actor acting or are they not? You know, it's very . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Sometimes I understand that they're not even sure.

NAOMIE KREMER: Yeah, exactly. So I think it's very comparable.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Do you see the same thing happening in your paintings, what you just described? I don't want to put it into my words but what exactly did you say?

NAOMIE KREMER: The same thing happening, of desire, something about desire?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, yeah. Tapping into some of the same subconscious, emotional self in your paintings. I mean, you talked about enigma and lack of certainty.

NAOMIE KREMER: Yeah, well, the body is also very much connected in my work. I work large which is a way of engaging the whole body. I work a lot to music. And I certainly fantasize and go through all kinds of thoughts as I'm working. And I think that the whole tension, the struggle between one color and another, one form and another, the whole movement, direction, energy of the painting is very erotic. And I think of it as, I remember someone asking me a few years ago what my paintings were describing and I said, "Orgasm".

PAUL KARLSTROM: Really?

NAOMIE KREMER: In a way. I mean, that sense of pulling all the forces together in such a way that something results. You know, that result is sort of like an explosion frozen in that moment. And my paintings I really work to make paintings that people are drawn to. And I don't mean whether . . . not even just by beauty, because I think the simplistic kind of beauty is not very interesting, but that whole mix. You know, that mix of conflict and opposites and I think that the pleasure, the physical pleasure of looking at paint coming off the brush and what it does next to the paint that's already there, it's a very, it's definitely a sensual pleasure.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Of course, this is one that you experience most directly because you're there for the process. So it's your pleasure and your sensuality that -- presumably you hold it and communicate it, I don't want to say stagnant Ed Harris image, but it is a choice when this is in.

NAOMIE KREMER: Yeah. I mean, painting is notoriously a medium that requires to be entered. If you don't enter a painting then there's no, you know, you can't get the experience. And I know in myself I can walk by something and glance at it and you take in a few things and it doesn't do anything for you. And then there is a whole other way of looking in where you sit there and you really, or you stand there or whatever but you, you enter it. And in my paintings I try to create actually multiple entry points and exit points, so every time you look at it you can choose a different place to go in, or not even choose, but be sucked in [to] a different place. And that's what people tell me and that's what I look for, is the experience that you never see it the same way twice. And that comes through this building of complexity that I was talking about.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You sound like you're describing a universe.

NAOMIE KREMER: Well, I feel like I am. You know, exactly, exactly. That's what I'm creating is a universe every time. I think Rothko said, "You paint the world you want to see."

PAUL KARLSTROM: This is interesting, these connections. And we're talking about, as we know, artists and models, because this is an interview within that series, but it's the connection of that experience and ideas about desire and heightened feeling. And emotion seems quite directly connected as it turns out to the way you feel about your work, which is largely abstract, although I don't know exactly if you would describe it . . . I don't think you have described it exactly, it certainly is not objective thoroughly, because there are references.

NAOMIE KREMER: Hm-hmm. Yeah, and some of them seem to [lean] more to landscape and some more to urban

environments. I think of them as sort of places and a place can include people, it can include objects, it can include [the] natural world.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Is the body a place?

NAOMIE KREMER: The body can be a place, absolutely.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, I think it's a place. That's the place where we live.

NAOMIE KREMER: Exactly. It's the first place.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That is the place.

NAOMIE KREMER: Yeah, yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Especially since most of us are so entirely self-absorbed.

NAOMIE KREMER: Well, those of us who admit it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What about, did you do another series more recently with Judy? Did I understand that correctly?

NAOMIE KREMER: Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, you did. Just me and her. Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, because I think she mentioned, she or you mentioned it the other evening when we met.

NAOMIE KREMER: Yes. Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Judy must be very proud of that because she had to tell me right away. She had to introduce me to you.

NAOMIE KREMER: Yeah, yeah. That was fun too. I mean, it's, I mean, what I like about it is that Judy is very non-directive in a way. But yet I feel she knows what she's looking for when she sees it. But she's open to in a way an unfolding taking place before her. And that's what I'm interested in is the unfolding of impulse. Which is actually exactly the way I paint. It's a kind of unfolding of impulse and layering and a conglomeration of impulses that eventually create something that's as real as life.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Unfolding of impulse.

NAOMIE KREMER: Hm-hmm. And you can't predict the last impulse when you have the first impulse. That's what I really like about it, is you have to go through the steps. And I like that unpredictability, like in painting, I don't want to know where I want to end up. I only want to know where I want to begin. That's all I need to know. And every time it's kind of like a series of beginnings, [that] is the best way for me to see it. It's the most productive way of seeing it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Is this how you describe Jackson Pollock's work?

NAOMIE KREMER: I suspect that was a lot for him, you know, a lot of how it took place for him. It was just an unfolding of impulses strung together.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's the only way I could see it because there's no way to see what the end . . .

NAOMIE KREMER: Hm-hmm. And it's a funny mixture, I think, of trusting yourself and mistrusting yourself. Because the mistrust comes from . . . I mean, in a way when you start out you think, as an artist you think, well, I'm going to visualize something and when I really know how to be an artist, when I'm really a good artist I'll be able to paint what I visualize. And then there's a sort of hopelessness at a certain point where you realize that you never get what you visualized and there's a whole other way of working, which is to work in the moment. And that requires a different kind of faith and security in the fact that something authentic will emerge. You know, that if you string together a series of impulses that are real, it will have to be real. So you see what I mean about this funny kind of contradiction almost in his way of working and my way of working too, I think. Which is built on confidence and insecurity.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

NAOMIE KREMER: Or faith and lack of faith.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, faith and doubt.

NAOMIE KREMER: Faith and doubt, yeah. That's better, yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's a very intellectual way to look at the process. But it's convincing.

NAOMIE KREMER: I think it's instinctive. It's, or more descriptive, I don't know.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Did you see Pollock [the movie]?

NAOMIE KREMER: I did, yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, we're going to see it tonight. And I'm looking forward to it. I understand Ed Harris does a very good job.

NAOMIE KREMER: He does do a good job, but it's a very neat kind of movie, which in a way is appropriate, because he was a very neat kind of person. But if you don't know his story and his relationship with his mother and the whole thing, the movie doesn't really tell you those things. It's almost like if you know the story I think you get more out of it definitely.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's probably true. That's one charge, of course, that's put against fine art in general. That you need to, that it's exclusive and pretty much, with certain art anyway, depending on knowing . . .

NAOMIE KREMER: The context?

PAUL KARLSTROM: The whole context.

NAOMIE KREMER: But everything in life worth doing almost is better once you know about it. I mean, whether it's good wine or food or anything. I mean, and I believe, I deeply believe in the instinctive level and the response, the instinctive response to a painting or anything, a flavor or whatever. But I also know and believe that there's another whole order of experience that happens when you know about, you know, when you're better educated. You can't deny that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's why we study the art.

NAOMIE KREMER: Exactly. And there's no reason for it not to be that way. I mean, why would people expect art to be something you just . . . anybody can get without trying, without a context, without anything. I mean, what in life worthwhile is like that? Nothing.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's [inaudible].

NAOMIE KREMER: Well, that's the definition with popular culture in a way, that you don't need any -- Actually, even in that you need some in. You know, if you study, if you . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Associations?

NAOMIE KREMER: Yeah, I mean, if you are immersed or if you're thrown into popular culture you have no idea about you won't get it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, this is a very fascinating issue to discuss because the reason popular culture is just fine when it grows out of the experience of a society like ours, is that it's the most directly experienced and understood -- and maybe reassuring -- form because all you have to do is live and pay attention and you understand it. But with fine art that's not true at all. But, of course, that is another whole great big question. It has to do with democracy and such. And, gee, we don't have enough time to talk about that now. In fact, we're all over. Thank you.

NAOMIE KREMER: Okay. There it is.

[End of Interview]

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