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Oral history interview with Kerry James  
Marshall, 2008 August 8

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## Transcript

### Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Kerry James Marshall on 2008 August 8. The interview took place at the artist's studio in Birmingham, Alabama, and was conducted by Kathy Goncharov for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Kerry James Marshall and Kathy Goncharov have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

### Interview

KATHY GONCHAROV: We're interviewing Kerry James Marshall in his studio in Chicago [IL].

You were born in Birmingham [AL] in 1955 [October 17]. So tell me about what it was like in Birmingham.

KERRY JAMES MARSHALL: Well, to the degree that I remember what it was like in Birmingham in 1955 – well, it would be probably 1960 when I first started having memories, '59 or '60, because that's when I was probably old enough to be conscious and aware of things that are going on around me, you know.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: And I guess the typical childhood in Birmingham – before we started school, it was certainly – I have a brother who's a year older than I am. So he was already on the scene when I arrived. And so my mother and father – my father worked. My mother was basically a homemaker, you know, stayed at home.

MS. GONCHAROV: What did your father do?

MR. MARSHALL: Well, in Birmingham, he worked in the kitchen at the VA [Veterans Administration] hospital. That's what I subsequently found out, because I didn't know or didn't really care. I just knew that he left to go someplace, and then he came home. [Laughs.] And he always said he was going to work, you know, that kind of thing.

We had the typical kind of childhood. It was great having an older brother who was close enough in age so that we could be more like friends and companions, so we could do things

together. And we went out and played with the other kids in the neighborhood like kids do, you know. We were also fortunate to live across the street from my mother's sister, my aunt and uncle and their children. So I had a cousin, two cousins, who lived across the street from us, when I was old enough to know what that meant. My cousin was more than a few years older than us and was already in school. And one of our great things before we started school was to run down to the corner and wait for him to get out of school so we could carry his book satchel down the street and stuff. So that's the kind of thing I remember.

I also remember, just as children – and people would say stuff like this a lot, that back then it was different – I mean, I remember before we started school, as kids, we were outside in the neighborhood. We ran up and down the block and up and down the street. There was none of this sort of protective, stay-in-the-yard, stay-close-to-home kind of thing. We went out. You went and played with other kids. And if the crowd moved down the block, you moved down the block with them. So we were just all over. It just felt like we were all over the neighborhood. You know, I imagine we stayed pretty close to home, but generally, you went on adventures.

We lived near two creeks in – Ensley was the neighborhood we lived in. There was one they called Big Ditch and Little Ditch, where we went. [Laughs.] And you could go down, and you catch tadpoles and stuff like that in the water. That's the kind of stuff we did, you know, with the other kids in the neighborhood.

MS. GONCHAROV: So when did you start making art, as a kid? And why, and what kind of pictures did you draw?

MR. MARSHALL: You remember, in the mid-'50s, mid- to late '50s, television was big, but it wasn't quite as big as it became. And we were in Birmingham. I think there were only three channels that broadcast at the time in Birmingham. So there were some things that we would run home to see. But for the most part, we stayed outside. And when we weren't outside, we entertained ourselves, my brother and I, by drawing pictures. We used to do what a lot of – draw war. You know, you draw warfare. It was this whole kind of game where, you know, I'd draw. He'd draw a tank and say, "I blew up your" – I'd draw an airplane, "I dropped a bomb on your tank." Like we did that kind of stuff. So that's one of the things we did.

But I know that when I was in kindergarten, I had an experience, I think, that made me really want to make pictures. It wasn't being an artist, because I didn't know what that was. It just was pictures. And it really happened when my kindergarten teacher had a scrapbook of images and stuff that she collected. It was old Valentine's cards, Christmas cards, images she clipped from magazines, postcards, all that stuff she kept in this big scrapbook. And she would let the kid who was best behaved look at that book while everybody else took a nap after recess. And looking through that book really affected me in a pretty powerful way. I remember saying, "I want to do like this. I want to make pictures like these." And that was a moment; it was a kind of special moment for me.

The other thing that I think might have had some impact on it, on my interest in imagery and stuff, is that, see, we were at a Catholic school when I started school, when I finally went to kindergarten. We went to Holy Family School in Birmingham, which was the school my cousin went to. So we went to Holy Family. And when you were in second grade, you got to go to noon mass, you know. But before that, we would be out on the ground, and you kind of peek into the church. And you look in there. And you looked in there, and it's like all those statues and the stained-glass windows, and the gold and the silver, it's like all that stuff in there, the lace, it looked so spectacular.

And you couldn't go to the noon mass until you were second grade, somewhere around there. But I remember this sort of longing to get in there, like to go in there and experience that whole thing. My cousin was an altar boy, and it's like that whole – all of the pageantry, that outfit they wear, and the kid with the candle snuffer and the incense ball.

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: That stuff, it just was – it was out of this world, in a way. It's like there was nothing like it anywhere. It was so extravagant, in a way, and it was impressive. It was really impressive. And so I always wanted to be able to go in there. And then for some reason, I don't know why it's so – because I've not developed into a religious person at all. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: But when I was in school, I became obsessed with collecting rosaries, but for the object. They used to have all these different color beads. And you get the black ones, which were just like the kind of heavy-duty. And then you could have – they came in all these colored, either glass or acrylic sort of beads. So you got the yellow and then the reds and the blue. But I became obsessed with having them. I never learned the rosary.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: But I just wanted that thing.

MS. GONCHAROV: Because it looked like – what did it look like?

MR. MARSHALL: Because it looked like – it was cool. There was something about it.

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.] Yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: And then it had the little cross on the end. So I used to pick up broken ones and try to fix them. Try to put the links back together and stuff like that. I don't know, I just became obsessed with having it.

MS. GONCHAROV: It's interesting. So many artists were Catholic.

MR. MARSHALL: I was never Catholic, though. But we went to Catholic school.

MS. GONCHAROV: You weren't raised Catholic?

MR. MARSHALL: No.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, you weren't raised Catholic, okay.

MR. MARSHALL: No.

MS. GONCHAROV: So the rest of your family wasn't Catholic.

MR. MARSHALL: My parents never went to church. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: But the thing was, the school –

MS. GONCHAROV: – was better, right?

MR. MARSHALL: Right. And since my cousins were already going to school there, that was where we were going to go to school, I guess. As long as my mother thought they could afford it. And since we were living right across the street from them, I guess it made perfect sense. So we went to school.

But the thing was, we went to Catholic school, but when we went to church, we went to Baptist church, because my aunt, who is still a member of the same church she was a member of even then, Lily Grove Baptist Church in Birmingham.

MS. GONCHAROV: Okay.

MR. MARSHALL: So we would go to church with her, because my mother actually – they sent us to church. But my father probably never set foot in a church in his entire life, as far as I know. [Laughs.] Except when my brother got married. He went to his wedding. But other than that, never. And my mother, I never knew to go to church, either. But they sent us. And even when we moved to California, they sent us to church. And then we did – I've done everything. We did Bible study with Jehovah's Witnesses. We went to Baptist church. Went to Catholic school. It was like all of that stuff – because they thought, I guess, it was good for you to do that kind of thing.

MS. GONCHAROV: So speaking of Baptist church, were you still in Birmingham when the church bombing took place?

MR. MARSHALL: That was nineteen – that was – we left, I think, in August of 1963, we left Birmingham and went to California.

MS. GONCHAROV: So it happened just after?

MR. MARSHALL: So I think, just after we left there [September 15, 1963].

MS. GONCHAROV: And why did you go to California?

MR. MARSHALL: Well, one of my mother's sisters had already moved to California with her family. My father was – he was a GI, had been a veteran of the Korean conflict. He was in the army then. So he was out. He's got a family that's growing. And he's working in the kitchen as a dishwasher at the VA hospital. So it was like that. And in Birmingham, if you didn't get a job at the steel mill, which was the – that was the solid, the biggest job – my uncle, who lived across the street, he worked at the steel mill. And his wife was a nurse at Holy Family. So they had the solid middle-class thing. But my father was working in the kitchen.

And so it just looked like there was more opportunity going to be happening in California, I'm sure. And so he went out. My aunt was there, so he went out, stayed with them for a while, to find it, to get a job. And then, you know, they do what they do - go out, get a job, and then send for the family.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah, right. So what did he end up doing out there?

MR. MARSHALL: He ended up in the kitchen at the VA hospital in Los Angeles. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: Because he was a - he's been a government employee all his life, had been a government employee.

MS. GONCHAROV: Is he still alive?

MR. MARSHALL: No. He died about 12 years ago, almost 12 years ago. But that's the thing. He went and - you know, when you can get an apartment in public housing. So we moved to Nickerson Garden projects in Watts.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, what you've painted.

MR. MARSHALL: We went to Nickerson Garden. So he got the apartment, and he got the job at the VA hospital up in Westwood, right out near UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles], on Sawtelle [Boulevard]. That's where he worked at first. And then, when the test opened up, he took the test to get a job at the post office. And he stayed at the post office until he retired.

MS. GONCHAROV: And when you went out there, you were making art the whole time? You were drawing and collecting rosaries?

MR. MARSHALL: Well, I was drawing.

MS. GONCHAROV: You were drawing.

MR. MARSHALL: The thing is, I was drawing. But the kinds of things that I could draw - you know, drawing ray guns. It's a funny thing. Maybe it's just boys have this sort of thing. And so our favorite thing was trying to invent fantastic ray guns. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: So you tried the double-barreled ray gun. That's what we spent a lot of time doing. And I did that - it was my brother and I. We did most of that between us. The only difference was that I sort of - like, I became obsessed with the rosaries. I also, I think, started to become obsessed with drawing.

But with technique, in a funny kind of way, because there was a program - and I can't remember if I watched this at all in Alabama, or if I didn't see it first until we got to California - but there was a program that came on television called "John Nagy's Learn to Draw." And that program opened up a lot of things for me, because it was the key to understanding what it took to make good drawings. And the principle he started with, that basic principle, the circle, the square, and the triangles. That if you can draw these shapes, then you can put these shapes together, and they make up - they are the basis of all the things you see. And so he'd do these exercises on his "Learn to Draw." And I'd sit there in front of the TV and go through the things with John Nagy.

MS. GONCHAROV: So you didn't have, like, after-school art classes or anything?

MR. MARSHALL: Well, not in Birmingham, for sure.

MS. GONCHAROV: No.

MR. MARSHALL: Because I was in second grade. We left that summer after my second-grade year, or during - I can't remember exactly. So it probably was within my second-grade year, because when we got to California, when I enrolled at that 111th Street School, I think I was in second grade. I don't know if they put me back in there or what. And it could have been complicated because my - see, my birthday is in October, which is after the school year starts. And they had these rules about how old you had to be, and dah-dah-dah-dah-dah. When I started school in kindergarten, I was four, because I wasn't going to be five until mid-October. And so I was always younger, it seemed. At least at the beginning of the semester, I was always younger than the other kids who were in the class, because their birthdays - for the ones whose birthdays came before mine, they were already five, and I was still four.

But when I got to California, we spent a year in Watts at the 111th Street School, and then we moved up to South Central, to 48th Street between McKinley [Avenue] and Avalon [Boulevard]. And I went to 49th Street Elementary School. I know I was in third grade when I started school at 49th Street. So I know that for sure, because my third-grade teacher was the one who - this was the teacher who -

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, with the scrapbook?

MR. MARSHALL: No, no.

MS. GONCHAROV: No?

MR. MARSHALL: That was the kindergarten teacher.

MS. GONCHAROV: That was the kindergarten teacher, okay.

MR. MARSHALL: That was back at Holy Family - who actually - when I had the show ["Kerry James Marshall: One True Thing, Meditations on Black Aesthetics." June 20 - September 5, 2004] that I did at the MCA [Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL] that traveled, the last stop was in Birmingham. And I actually got to go to - that kindergarten teacher is still alive. She was still alive. And I'd mentioned her in my - when I was talking to somebody, and somebody said they knew her. And so they went and told her. And she was going to come to my talk. But she couldn't stay till I finished. So I didn't get a chance to see her. So she left her address. So I went out to her house to see her because she said she had something for me.

Because I didn't remember her name, really. But I knew she was the only black woman, the only black person teaching at Holy Family, because all of the nuns and all of the priests were white.

MS. GONCHAROV: How about the students?

MR. MARSHALL: Huh?

MS. GONCHAROV: How about the students?

MR. MARSHALL: All the students were black.

MS. GONCHAROV: Ah.

MR. MARSHALL: But all of the priests and the nuns were white. She was the only person who didn't wear - she was not a nun. But for the kindergarten class - she was a lay person. And so that stood out, not only because she was black, but also because she didn't wear that outfit. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: Maybe they think - I don't know if that's because kids - that kind of thing might be a little intimidating and kind of scary for four- and five-year-olds. [Laughs.] I don't know. And the thing was, she thought she had a picture of her kindergarten class. And she said I was in it. She knew that I was in that picture. And I was to come out to her house, and she was going to give me that picture.

Anyway, I went out there. And she gave me the picture. I opened it up. It was my brother.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh. [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: Since he was a year older than I was, that was that was her very first kindergarten class. He was in the class and not me. I was in the next year. And I have that picture, the roll of film. It's up there. Oh, there it is, right there. But that was my brother.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah. Where is your brother?

MR. MARSHALL: He's in California.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah. Did he end up doing any art ever, or no?

MR. MARSHALL: No. I was the only person in the family, really, who had an interest in it. My mother had wanted to be a singer and a songwriter at one time. And my father is a kind of tinkerer, you know. He liked sort of taking things and fixing electronic things. When he came back from the army - he didn't graduate from high school before he went into the army. But when he came back, they had a high school equivalency thing. So he went and studied auto mechanics and stuff like that. So he would always try to fix stuff, you know.

That was the extent of any kind of activity like that in the family, in the immediate family. They didn't have any particular interest in it, but they didn't discourage me from being interested in it, either. So I was pretty much on my own. And I had my TV programs, you know, so I could watch John Nagy. And then later on, this guy, Will Alexander - I don't know if you ever heard of him - but he had this program on TV called "The Magic of Oil Painting." It's before the Bob Ross era, I guess. But I became sort of obsessed with these how-to programs, because I was trying to learn how to do all of this stuff.

And I guess it's about the time you're in fourth grade, third or fourth grade, when they take you to the library, and they teach you how to use the Dewey Decimal system to look up books. And then they take you on a field trip to the public library so you can get a library card and all that stuff. So I saw in the library there were all these books on art, and then all these how-to books, like how to do Chinese brush painting and stuff like that. I took every one of those books out of the library. And I was doing sumi-e painting and cartoons and taking out the Rembrandt [van Rijn] books, and it's like books on etching and print - all of that stuff, I was just sort of obsessed with all of that.

MS. GONCHAROV: So you spent a lot of time in the library?

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah. I spent a lot of time in the library. And that's taking the maximum number of books you could take, which was 12. You could take 12 books. And so I would take my 12. But you know, poring over all - I took out all of the books that everybody - the books on reptiles, the books on birds, the books on insects. You know, the books on guns, the books on canons - you know, all armor. I just was fascinated with all that stuff. So that's sort of how I did.

But the importance of my third-grade teacher was that - because I don't remember anything happening around art at 111th Street School when I was there. Maybe for us, it was so new. We had just come to California. It was so unfamiliar. You know, we had never seen a palm tree, like those palm trees, before. [Laughs.] So that was all kind of strange. And the light was different. It's like, we come to California; our eyes hurt, you know. And we thought it was because the sun was too bright. We didn't know about smog and stuff like that. So we used to walk around with sunglasses on because we thought, you put the sunglasses on to keep your eyes from burning. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.] So what was it like living in Watts?

MR. MARSHALL: Well, it was interesting.

MS. GONCHAROV: Interesting times, certainly. But you were awfully young.

MR. MARSHALL: Well, we were - yeah. I think I was still seven when we came to California, not quite eight. I wasn't going to be eight until that October. So if we came in the late summer, then I would still have been seven when we got there. But it was interesting.

When we came to California, my aunt, the one who my father had come out to, she and her husband had split up. And so when we moved into the apartment we had in Nickerson Garden, she and her daughter, my cousin Pam, they moved in with us. So it was two families, basically, living in that place. It was split level. You had an upstairs and a downstairs. My aunt Florence and my cousin Pam, and then it was me and my brother and my sister. So there were only three kids who came out from Birmingham. So it was all us there.

Our house was right next to the field, the playing field, and the gymnasium. We were just right there. And at the time, it was really kind of a golden age for public housing, I think, because a lot of people were - I mean, these were desirable places to go. After we moved out of the house we were in, we had moved into a housing project in Birmingham also, you know, for a short time, before we left to come to California.

MS. GONCHAROV: And these were brand-new projects.

MR. MARSHALL: They were all brand new. They were all brand new.

MS. GONCHAROV: Very idealistic at the time.

MR. MARSHALL: Right. And it's like, even in Birmingham and in California, you could go down to the office and just give them your address, and you could check out gardening tools. You could take a lawnmower, an edger, and shears, and stuff like that. And you cut your own grass in front of your place, you know? And for kids, you know, we'd rent - get the lawnmower and stuff, and you'd go around and see if you could make a little bit of money cutting other people's grass, too. So they would do that.

And then when we moved to Watts, they had a toy crib, where you could check out toys like you checked out books from the library. And you got to keep them for a week. So you'd give them your address, and then you'd take a toy. You'd take it for a week, and then you'd bring it back. And then you could check something else out the next week. So that was what it was like when we first got there.

MS. GONCHAROV: So it was pleasant and idealistic and very community based.

MR. MARSHALL: Oh, yeah. It was. And then I don't know what happened. Either we were just getting older, and somehow that changes things, but all of a sudden, we just sort of recognized there was some conflict with the people who lived on the other side of the field. It's like, just because. And so there was a gang of kids, you know, who would sort of chase us and try to beat us up or something. They caught my brother and beat him up one day. Kids would chase us and would shoot at us with slingshots and stuff. And so out of the blue, all of a sudden, now this is what's happening. And that was just different. Something had changed, and it was just different. And that was how it was when we left and moved into South Central, you know.

MS. GONCHAROV: And you moved into a house in South Central?

MR. MARSHALL: We moved into a house, but we were renting a house on 48th Street, 48th between McKinley and Avalon, is where we moved to. But so anyway, so we moved out of the projects. And actually, that was in 1965. We moved out of the projects into South Central. And so then the riot took place. It started right down about where we were before, down on 111th and Imperial Highway, where I think the whole - the altercation with the police thing was supposed to have started, I think, was somewhere down there. And I was 10 years - just about - well, I wouldn't have been 10 yet either, I would have been still nine, but, you know, 10 that year.

But my brother and I were sitting at home, and we heard this news flash that something was going on down in Watts. And so we were sitting out - we'd just sort of hang out. My parents were away. They were out someplace. I don't know where they were. But we were at home, alone. So we heard this thing. And then you could look out. We were on 48th Street, and it started down on 112th or so. But you could look south from our front porch, because our house faced south, and you could see the smoke and stuff in the distance.

And then, while we were sitting there on the porch, it was just funny. It's almost like in a movie. One person ran by on the block. And then two people ran by. Then three people ran by, then four, then five. Then all of a sudden, there were like all these people running around. And we lived on McKinley between Avalon Boulevard, which was west of us, and then Central Avenue, which was east of us, which was two blocks away. So McKinley is - it's McKinley, Wadsworth, and then Central, and then McKinley and then Avalon, if you go the other way. And Avalon was one of the business strip, and then Central is a business strip.

And then all of a sudden, you look down on the corner, and everything is on fire down there, too. Everything is on fire over there. It was like this wild scene. And since we didn't have a key to the house [to lock it], we were just sort of sitting there on the porch, wondering what was going on. And so then we'd do this thing. My brother would say, "Okay, you can stay here. I'm going to go up to the corner and see what's going on."

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, so he wasn't scared. Were you scared?

MR. MARSHALL: Well, we didn't know. You didn't know to be scared. [Laughs.] You don't know. My honest response was that - with the people running around and stuff like that, nobody seemed particularly stressed out. They looked like they were having fun. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: I tell you, it looked like there was a carnival going on or something. And so my brother, he said, "Okay, I'm going to go up here and see." I had to stay at the house to make sure, because we couldn't lock the door. I had to stay. He said, "Yeah, I'm going to go up and see what's going on." And so he went up to Avalon. And then he came back and said, "Oh, everything is on fire. People are breaking into the stores and stuff like that." He said somebody was up there saying, "Ya'll get everything you want to get out of the store, because we're going to burn it down." And so somebody would break the window out. And he'd say, "Go in and get whatever you want, because then we're going to burn it down." And then after they'd make everybody come out, and then they're throw the Molotov cocktail in and set the store on fire. And so he was saying, "That's what's going on down there."

So we kind of would take turns. Like if I wanted to go see, he would stay. And then we'd sort of do it like that. This was our block. And then it sort of went on past us, you know. And then later that afternoon, my parents came home. And then we all went over to a friend of theirs. There were some other people who were from Birmingham who lived near us, too, so we went over to their house. And everybody - you know how people sort of get together, and they sort of sit around and watch the news and sort of figure out what's going on.

And so we were spending the night - we spent the day and the evening over there. And that evening when the sun went down, they were between McKinley and Wadsworth; they were closer to Central Avenue. And on the corner of Verner Avenue and Central was a Jack in the Box, the fast food restaurant. And this friend of the family - they call him Bay Walter. Walter Price was his name, but they called him Bay Walter. [Laughs.] But so they had a two-story house. And so we were over there.

And I remember looking out the window towards Central Avenue that night. A this scene, this had a profound impact on me. I looked at this image for long enough because I wanted to make a picture that captured this sort of feeling, you know, what this was. And it's that – they used to have that Jack in the Box clown on the tall post that used to turn.

MS. GONCHAROV: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MARSHALL: And it's pitch black behind, and a wall of flames. And that Jack in the Box clown just sort of rotating. It's still lit up. That was the only light, was that Jack in the Box thing. Against the wall of flames that were behind it. That image was – it just burned into my memory, into my consciousness. And in some ways, that seemed to encapsulate everything that this whole, the sequence of events that day was about. You know, here it was, like this stupid, goofy clown, rotating with this grin, but against the darkness and this wall of flames. And that just seemed to be to be – that was what the whole thing was about.

MS. GONCHAROV: And did you draw that?

MR. MARSHALL: I've never been able to. I tried. I've never been able to do it so that it could do justice, you know, to the memory of it. And so I had to find other ways to make work that was about it. But I always wanted to make a picture that captured that moment, because it was so poignant, just so intense. And it's the one thing I would never forget, for as long as I live. I can still see it vividly.

And I think – the way people always want to attribute the source of a certain kind of sensibility to certain things – I think in some ways that was the source of a kind of a natural sense of irony that I developed, a way of looking at things where you can see this kind of tragic absurdity of the whole thing all at once.

Because we didn't know anything about what was – nobody knew how this whole thing started. I can guarantee you, probably nobody who was in that neighborhood running up to Central Avenue had a clue.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: Because other people were doing it; everybody sort of – run up there and get a little piece of it. And that's that thing – my father and a group of his – the guys, you know, they went out that night to kind of drive around and see what was happening, in part to see what they could – if there was still stuff to be gotten. But by the evening, it was just like slim pickings. They came back later that night with some boxes of some shoes that nobody would want. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MARSHALL: You know, just trash, just stuff that people would get just to say they got it, you know, kind of stuff. It wasn't anything anybody really wanted. They didn't want it, either. But it's just, they could – or something. I don't know what it was. So that's how that whole – in 1965, that was the thing.

And then it was tense and exciting, because a lot of people got killed that night because they had a shoot-to-kill order for people who were looting. So nobody should have been out there in the first place. But the thing was, nobody really realized the impact of all of this for a couple of days. When you finally realized that, wait a minute, there used to be three stores down at the end of our block. There was one supermarket, a liquor store, and a small sort of family-owned grocery store. Now they had none. [Laughs.] If you wanted to go to the grocery store, now you've got to get in the car, and you've got to drive all the way over to the other side of town. So then it starts to dawn on people. [Laughs.] It's like, whoa, wait a minute.

MS. GONCHAROV: And plus, I mean, I would imagine the police were coming around the neighborhoods and asking questions.

MR. MARSHALL: Well, they started looking. They started going through people's houses, searching people's houses, looking for stuff, looking to see who had taken – because people had taken sofas and stereos and TVs. So they started doing house-to-house searches and stuff like that, to see if they could catch, you know, find people who had taken stuff.

So it was tense. It was tense. But the down side was that now, you got nothing. All the stores in your neighborhood are burned down. There wasn't anyplace to go to get anything, unless you had to drive somewhere. And so that's when it sort of settled in and started to mean something to people. And I think it meant – maybe it meant – I know it meant something to my father, because he was the only one who did the grocery shopping and stuff like that. But for us as kids, it's like, now we don't have a corner store. You used to go down to the corner store to get your little stuff and things. Well, we don't have that now. So anyway, that's how that – so that was 1965.

But that wasn't the end of a lot of that kind of strife. Because over time – in the next couple of years, between '65 and '69, well, a lot of stuff started happening with the schools, with the black students union, with [Martin Luther] King, Jr., and SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] and all these organizations.

MS. GONCHAROV: And you were a teenager at this point, and aware of these things.

MR. MARSHALL: Well, in '65, at the Watts riots, I was still, you know, nine and 10.

MS. GONCHAROV: Nine and 10.

MR. MARSHALL: But when I got to junior high school – I went to Carver Junior High School, which was on – Carver is on McKinley Avenue at – between Vernon [Avenue] and 46th Street.

MS. GONCHAROV: So you stayed in the house in that neighborhood?

MR. MARSHALL: Oh, yeah. And then my family, they bought it. Eventually, they bought a house, but just two blocks up on 46th Street. We were on 46th between McKinley and Avalon. So we stayed. Once we moved to South Central – and my mother still lives in that house on 46th Street between McKinley and Avalon. So that's been the neighborhood. So I went to 49th Street Elementary School and then to Carver Junior High School.

In fact, to go back to the 49th Street School, my third-grade teacher, when I started there, was a woman named Mrs. Foley. And lucky enough for me, she was a woman who wanted to be an artist, you know, liked to paint, and ended up being the teacher who was in charge of doing most of the kind of holiday decorations and stuff like that. And I just happened to get in her class, which was lucky for me, because when she would do these bulletin boards and stuff, I'd stay after school a lot of times and help her do that.

And when we stayed after school sometimes, she would show me how to paint. And she painted flowers. That was her thing. And so she showed me, technically, how to paint pansies, which was her favorite flower to paint. So she showed me how to do the brush to make the petals and how to – you know, to get the petals to overlap and things like that. And then how to do daisies, where you'd take two colors of paint and put it on the brush at the same time. You'd get this stroke that had, you know – she showed me how to do that. So I'd be helping her with the Thanksgiving bulletin board or something like that. And then sometimes she would be painting a flower, and she'd show me: "This is if you want to do this, you know, you should do this," dah-dah-dah. And so that was important.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah. And you still paint flowers. [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: I still paint flowers. Yeah. Somehow people never get too far from – you never get too far from the source. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.] Yes.

MR. MARSHALL: But that was meaningful. And this obsession that I had manifested at the time also – you know, with material, and with drawing material in particular. So I would be – I was in her class. I would do that stuff. And then even when I got out of her class, when I went on to fourth grade, I would come back and help her, you know, after school and sometimes at recess or at lunch. I'd come back and help her do that stuff.

And then they also used to do – and this is something that actually started in Birmingham. At the end of the year, when school was out for summer, and the teachers would clean out the closet and stuff like that, they would ask a kid to help sometimes to clean out the closets. And they would throw out all the old mimeographed pages and stuff like that.

But we would take those mimeographed pages, and you could draw on the back of them. So we'd get like a stack of paper you could take home and use the back. And then we were making paper airplanes, was really big amongst us as kids. So you just had a stack of paper. You could just make airplanes all day long, and all kinds of different designs and see which ones flew what way and all that stuff.

So I did that in Birmingham, but I also used to do that with Mrs. Foley. And I had discovered that those little square sheets of toilet paper you get out of the dispenser in school bathrooms, that you could use those for tracing paper. And so me and another kid – this was, I had a friend. We used to do this insane – we used to excuse or ask for a pass to go to the bathroom. And you could take a hairpin, and you could pick the lock on those toilet paper dispensers. And we'd come back in the class with stacks of that toilet paper in our pocket. It was just me and him.

We'd sit in class. And you'd put your geography book up, or your book up like that. And you'd be behind there. You could be tracing out of your history book, tracing pictures out of the book. It's like this obsession. So I used to have two pockets full sometimes. You'd have two bulging pockets of this toilet paper. Or if it got too big, I'd find a dispenser, and I would stash it somewhere on the campus so I could go get it after school. It's like, what was wrong with me? [Laughs.] I don't know.

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.] Do you still have any of those?

MR. MARSHALL: No.

MS. GONCHAROV: No?

MR. MARSHALL: I don't have any of that. We had a fire at our house once. And so a lot of things - I had a nice comic book collection and stuff like that. And a lot of that - and our room was on the side of - the house next door to our house caught on fire.

MS. GONCHAROV: Right.

MR. MARSHALL: And it burned down.

MS. GONCHAROV: When was that? When you were a kid, or later?

MR. MARSHALL: This was later. I was in junior high when that happened. My parents were looking for a house to move into so they could buy a house. And that happened. I was probably already in seventh grade, probably going into eighth grade when that fire happened, unless I was already in eighth grade, and maybe I was going to go into ninth grade or something. It was somewhere in that period. But I was already at junior high. And the house caught on fire. My aunt who had lived with us before was living further southwest. We moved in with her for a time, while the house that we were supposed to be moving into was going through escrow and things like that. And then we finally moved into that house.

So after I finished at elementary school, went through fourth grade and fifth grade and did all of that stuff with my teacher there, that summer between sixth grade and seventh grade, they had a program at Carver Junior High, a way of keeping kids, giving kids something to do during the summer. So they opened up the shops. And any kid who lived in the neighborhood - you had to be 12 or 13, I think, to sign up - but you could come into the shop. And they'd provide you with material and open access to the tools and some instruction. And they let kids make stuff.

Their plastics shop was open during the summer. And everybody was into that. And so this is where all of the kids - like your friends in the neighborhood - you would sort of meet up with them in the shop at Carver during the summer. And it was free. It was free. And so I did that summer, the sixth grade summer, I did that shop class. And when I finally got to school at Carver, I did the full complement of shop classes at Carver Junior High School. They had everything - plastics, electronics, metal shop, woodshop, and AV [audio-visual].

MS. GONCHAROV: Wow. That's really great. What a program that was.

MR. MARSHALL: But that was the golden age.

MS. GONCHAROV: I was going to say, you wouldn't see that now very much.

MR. MARSHALL: That was the golden age, 1967, '68, '69, somewhere around there.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: Because I think I graduated from junior high school in '69. I graduated from high school in '73. And they also had an art department at the junior high school. And this woman, Mrs. Clarke, was the chairman of the art department. They had an art building.

MS. GONCHAROV: In the high school?

MR. MARSHALL: In the junior high.

MS. GONCHAROV: In the junior high.

MR. MARSHALL: This was the junior high school.

MS. GONCHAROV: Junior.

MR. MARSHALL: This was at Carver Junior High. This was the art building.

MS. GONCHAROV: Now, this was not a wealthy neighborhood we're talking about.

MR. MARSHALL: No. This is South Central Avenue.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah. So how - I mean, there were government programs for this?

MR. MARSHALL: This was back - well, this was what school was back then. It's what school was. You took PE [physical education]. You took shop, you know. And you took the rest of your classes. Shop classes were elective classes, but they had a full complement of shops. Nowadays - and they didn't have any of that fear of liability, I think, that they have now. So they have shops in these junior high schools now; they don't use them because they're afraid some kid might get hurt. They didn't care. Well, they cared. I'm not going to say they didn't care, because they always gave you the - it's like, when you went for orientation in shop class, they always told you about the kid that cut his finger off on the saw. Oh, they scared you into being careful. But they offered the classes.

And so you learned how to make things. You learned how things worked. Those experiences, I think, helped shape me, given the fact that I already had this tendency to be interested in how things worked and how things were done, you know, and what kind of materials could be used for one thing or another. I already had that, and this just really encouraged [me] by having access to the shop classes at Carver, and then having the art building, where they had two showcases, display cases in the building.

And Mrs. Clarke used to host these weekly competitions. They were weekly drawing contests, basically, where you could submit drawings. And if your drawing got selected, they put them up in this showcase. And they would stay for a week. Then they'd change the drawings every week. And so there was a kind of active competition amongst people to get drawings in the showcase. And this is when everybody was copying images out of Marvel comics. So you'd draw superheroes. This was a pastime for a lot of us. We'd sit around trying - you know, do your best so you can get a drawing, or more than one drawing even, in the showcase. And people would go by. It's like, every Monday, you'd go and see what was new in the showcase.

MS. GONCHAROV: And you got in often?

MR. MARSHALL: And see if you - well, the thing was, I didn't get in often.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh.

MR. MARSHALL: Which is the irony, that I didn't get in often. And part of the reason why I didn't get in that often was because I was trying to build my figures out of drawing structure, because of stuff I had seen in some books. I wasn't good at just copying the picture like it was. I had read some things in these books on anatomy. And I used to look at that George Bridgeman's figure-drawing book and all that stuff. And it's like they build these figures out of these blocks and shapes and all that stuff. And I was trying to do that.

And so my drawings had a lot of erasure, a lot of scratches. They were not smooth. And I was trying to figure out how the figures went together. So they didn't look like the pictures that were in the comic books, so much, you know. And that was the reason why I got drawings in infrequently, because I struggled with it, because I was trying to know what I was doing. I was not just trying to copy what I was looking at.

I had a friend, this kid named Ricky Dementer. He was the best at drawing. He could copy pictures out of the comic books; they looked just like them - looked just like them. So - and we both - he was a friend. We both collected. We collected comic books. And so everybody was into doing that. But I was also this - I was a sick kid, I think, on some level, because I would be driven to do things that nobody else did.

Now - and this is, like, when I was in fifth grade - and this said something about the degrees of obsession that I have. So when I was in fifth grade was when I first was introduced to the comic books, like Marvel, and then we sort of - D.C. wasn't as interesting to us as the Marvel stuff was. A friend of ours had turned us onto this comic book store. We lived in South Central, but there was a comic book store in Huntington Park, which was one of the small little towns southeast of L.A. And it was this place where they had back issues. And so you become kind of obsessed with getting the whole - you've got to get the whole series, from number one all the way up and stuff.

So we went there once on our bikes, to this store. And it was a good ways away. But I didn't have any sense of distances or anything like that. This is like when I was in fifth grade, at lunchtime, when everybody - you know, after recess, after lunch, I hid out near the ball box. And when everybody else went back into class, I climbed the fence at school, and I walked to Huntington Park, looking for that comic book store, because I wanted to be able to get the jump on other people [laughs] who might go and get these, you know, it's like, books that I wanted to get, kind of thing.

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: But I didn't have any idea where Huntington Park was. I had no idea how far it was.

MS. GONCHAROV: Did you make it?

MR. MARSHALL: Oh, I made it. But I walked and I walked and I walked and I walked. So I had left here; I had left school; this is at one o'clock in the afternoon. And I walked. I kept walking. I think I got to the store about five, because I had no idea how far it was. And I kept on walking because I had figured, if I keep walking, maybe I'll eventually - I know what street it's on - then I'll get to it.

But I got there about five o'clock. So then now I've got to get home, too. So I get home; it's almost nine o'clock at night. And I've got to come up with some kind of story for where

I've been. And of course, I can't come in the house with the comic books, because then my mother would be suspicious. So I had to leave the comic books outside. I had to stash them in the bushes somewhere. And then I would get them the next morning. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: I was insane. Insane. I don't know what was wrong with me. But you start to get the picture of the degree to which I am willing to kind of go out on a limb to try and get something that has some value to me.

MS. GONCHAROV: Mm-hm [affirmative], right.

MR. MARSHALL: So that was the thing. So I had made up some kind of story about staying after school to help the teacher do something. And then the next morning when I got up to go to school, I went around the back and got my comic books. And I took them with me to school. And then I could bring them in the house when I came home. But that was the thing.

So drawing those pictures from Marvel comics, watching the "John Nagy Learn to Draw" program on television – those things – the John Nagy program established in me the sort of need to know, rather than – because I didn't have any particular raw talent, I guess. I wasn't a facile kind of person. So I needed to know something about what was going on. And I became really obsessed with what it was artists who I was reading about in books, what they knew. Well, how come they were able to do what they were doing? I mean, it either had to be something – either they were magicians, or they had to know something. And John Nagy told me that it was something that they knew, that they understood the structure of things.

So that became really important to me; technique became an obsession of mine. It followed me through elementary school and into junior high. In seventh grade, I had a class with a man named Mr. Romitty, who taught this class called "Art Production." My brother had gone the year before I did; my brother had taken a class with him. And so it was that kind of thing. It's like, because my brother had been in his class, he kind of felt like he knew me, too, because he knew my brother. And so he welcomed me as somebody who was familiar to him.

And so I used to just sort of hang around him a lot. And he started bringing work that he was doing, to show me how he did stuff. He was an illustrator. And he would bring in work of his, and he would show it to me, and we would talk about technique, and he would show me, you know, demonstrations and things like that. And so we became really friendly.

And that following summer – there was a program at the Otis Art Institute [now Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles, CA], where they had a drawing class for junior high school kids. And it was supposed to be for, like, upperclassmen, kind of thing. But since there didn't seem to be anybody else who was as interested as I was, he gave me the opportunity to go. And I took that class at Otis. It was taught by a man named George Degrowth. And see, I remember all those people. I remember every one of those people. [Laughs.]

George Degrowth taught that class, the drawing class for junior high school kids. That was important. But the great thing that happened is that, one day he took us down to the lecture room. And he had this book, *Images of Dignity: the Drawings of Charles White* [Los Angeles: W. Ritchie Press, 1963], and he put that on the opaque projector and showed us – was showing us those drawings. And then after he showed us the drawings, he said, "Charles White teaches here at Otis. He's got a studio upstairs. And he said it was okay if I brought the class up to the studio, to look at work." He wasn't in there, but he took us up, opened the door. And, man, when he opened that door, there it was, all that work in there.

But the amazing thing was that it was unfinished work, work in progress, and work that was finished. And so you could see how, in the beginning, how rough things might look. And then you could see how, over time, it became this other thing. And that was the answer to all of this stuff that I had been looking for. That was it.

MS. GONCHAROV: Is that when you decided you wanted to be an artist?

MR. MARSHALL: Well, I had wanted to be an artist before then.

MS. GONCHAROV: I mean, but as a career.

MR. MARSHALL: I had decided, when I graduated from high school, I was coming to school at Otis, that day. I said, when I graduate from high school, I'm coming to school here. And part of it was Charles White.

MS. GONCHAROV: Did you get to know him then, or not until later?

MR. MARSHALL: Well, that – so anyway, we go back down to our classroom. And I get the book. And I'm copying this drawing of Frederick Douglas out of the Charles White book. And he walked into our classroom. And that was – like, that was the moment. Because prior to that, I had thought Charles White was like a historical figure, you know? I had known of him from a book called *Great Negroes Past and Present* [Russell Adams. Chicago: Afro-Am Publishing Co., 1963]. And I did a little report for Negro History Week once on this artist. I had read about him in that book. And so I thought he was – like anybody in a history book is a dead person, you know. But then he walked in our classroom.

And it was one of those moments where – it was frightening on some level because it's like, here's like an encounter with this famous historic figure. And I was sort of embarrassed and ashamed because I was copying one of his drawings out of the book. And of course, it didn't compare to his. It was like mine was not going to be anything. And so he just sort of strolled through the class, you know. And he took a look at the drawing I was working on, and he sort of nodded. He didn't say anything, really, but he just sort of nodded. And he kind of went and talked to Mr. Degrowth for a little while. And then he introduced him to the class, you know. And then he left, took off.

But I had made up my mind that moment. Said, okay, this – I know this is where I belong. I'm coming here. So that period sort of fixed in my mind – you know, first of all, there's an art school. There's a place you can go where a lot of people are doing this kind of stuff. All the stuff you don't know how to do, they can teach you how to do that. So I was determined to come to school at Otis.

And then I became really kind of single-minded in figuring out a way to make that happen. I didn't have any idea how stuff like that happened, at all. I didn't find out until too late, on the one hand, that to be a full-time student at Otis, you couldn't go there out of high school. I didn't find that out until I was a senior. It was too late by then. You had to transfer into Otis as a junior.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh.

MR. MARSHALL: They had juniors, seniors, and graduate school, was the thing. But they had special education classes for people who wanted to pay for a class on Saturdays and in the evenings and stuff. And this is something that happens later.

So anyway, I find out about Charles White. That's sort of in my head. And then I want to get back to Otis. But I don't get back there until after I'm in 11th grade. I leave junior high school. I go on to high school. And when I was in 11th grade, there's an organization called Operation Bootstrap. And they hosted an art competition, an art contest for high school kids, junior high and high school kids.

They host an art competition. And I enter a drawing into that art competition, and I win a second prize. Another kid in my class, this guy Anthony White – it was this other kid. He wins first prize. I'm at Jefferson High at the time. And I have this teacher, another one of these artists, people who want to be artists but ended up having to teach in school. Mrs. Farantay was her name, who was a relative of the LaBiancas, who were the other people who were killed in the Tate-LaBianca murders with Charles Manson.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, really. Wow.

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah. But I think I'm the only person who knew that, because she told me that. She told me. She was probably the most neurotic person that ever walked the face of the earth. And on some level, I think she was terrified being at Jefferson High School. I think she was terrified.

MS. GONCHAROV: Why?

MR. MARSHALL: Well, because she was a little, skinny white woman, you know, really small, with a lot of the kinds of anxieties that a lot of artists have, you know, like some of that lack of self-confidence that a lot of artists have, but in that environment, you know? And it's an environment in which there seems to be absolutely nobody who was interested in anything she had to talk about. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: Except for you.

MR. MARSHALL: Except for me. So we became friends. I liked her. But she was so neurotic, so neurotic. And some of it justifiably so because I think – and kids are good at this; when they detect a weakness in an adult, they lean on it, you know, with both feet. And she would be over at her desk sometimes, just like with her head in her hands. And I felt sorry for her, really, I did, because she was a really nice person. She really was.

I used to stay after school and talk with her a lot, too. And she did the same thing, too. She started bringing her drawings in to show me how she did work and how her finished work looked, and things like that. And she told me during one of those afternoons about her family, because this was right after the Sharon Tate murders and stuff. She told me she was related to the LaBiancas, who were the other people who had been killed by that group. So we talked about that.

And then she ended up having to leave the school because she almost got into a fight with a student. She just couldn't handle it. It was rough for her. But we worked together to select a drawing out of drawings that I had done to enter into that contest. And my drawing won second prize. And the prize was –

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, what was the drawing of?

MR. MARSHALL: It was a rabbi.

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: [Laughs.] It was an ink-wash drawing, which I still have. It was an ink-wash drawing, yeah. I had drawn it out of a *National Geographic* magazine, I think it was, where I saw the image. And I just sort of made this drawing. Because at that time, I was practicing my brush-and-ink drawings on rice paper. And this is on rice paper. I had become – was into sumi-e brush painting and stuff. And so this was the – was trying that out.

So anyway, that drawing won second prize. And the prize – the first and second prize was a scholarship to Chouinard [Art Institute, Los Angeles, CA], which was the other art school, other than Otis.

[END MD01 TR01.]

And so it's Otis and Chouinard. Chouinard is what became CalArts [California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA]. That's the school that ultimately became CalArts. But at the time, Chouinard was the commercial arts school. Otis was the fine arts school. And because I had been introduced to the whole fine arts thing, and there was something about – when you're on that campus at Otis, back then especially, like in the '60s, that's that period when you get the art students walking down the hall with the big canvasses and stuff like that. There's a beehive of activity. It's like all these art students with their sculpture, pushing them down the hallway and walking around with canvasses, big drawings tacked up on the wall. It was all this stuff. So it was an exciting kind of place to be.

And so that just appealed to me. And that's where I wanted to be. So I didn't take the scholarship to go to Chouinard. Instead, I took my allowance. I had saved my allowance. My father used to give us seven dollars every two weeks. And I had started saving my allowance. I had gotten up a little bit of money. And then he gave me the rest, to make up the difference. And I went, and I paid – at the time, the class was 75 dollars for eight weeks, I think, or something like that, whatever that period. I saved up my money, and I went, and I signed up for a painting class on Saturdays at Otis. I became a paying student right that year. I took a painting class with Sam Clayberger, who was the painting teacher. Instead, I could have gotten a free set of classes, but I wanted to be at Otis. So I went there and took that class with Sam Clayberger.

I was nervous, because I was the only kid, the only person under 18. I was 16.

MS. GONCHAROV: So this was a real course. It wasn't a course for kids.

MR. MARSHALL: It was the real – oh, no.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh.

MR. MARSHALL: This was the class.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, okay.

MR. MARSHALL: They let me sign up.

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: [Laughs.] Nude models and everything. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: That was another one of those things. That's what made me nervous. When I took the drawing class when I was in junior high school, I had walked by one of those classrooms, and somebody came out of the painting class one day. They opened the door, and there was a naked woman standing on the pedestal in there, which was like shocking, shocking. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: So – but anyway, I took that class. And two things happened that were really important to me that also sort of reinforced the idea that I really – this is where I belong. You know, it's like I belong in a place like this, because not only was Sam Clayberger, who taught – he really was welcoming. He looked out for me, in a way. Although when I set up for that first day, I went all the way to the back. And part of it's because, you know, when you've got to look at the naked model up there, you don't want to be caught looking sometimes, that kind of thing. You know this is what you're supposed to be doing, but you don't want to be seen to be looking. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: So anyway, but I'm back over in the corner back there, trying to do my painting. And the art students, they're in and out of the painting studio, and they're kind of wandering the hall and stuff. There was one black student that I know of who – he was a graduate student at Otis, Ray Spears. I was in that room, and he saw me. Huh?

MS. GONCHAROV: I know that name.

MR. MARSHALL: Oh, you know Ray?

MS. GONCHAROV: I don't know him, but I know the name. I think – anyway.

MR. MARSHALL: But anyway, but he saw me in there, and he came over to talk to me, and to look at my painting. And then he says, "Oh, you're having a little bit of trouble developing this form on this breast." So he took my brush, said, "When you really want to create this kind of volume," he said, "this is how you do it." So he took my brush and, you know, worked on my painting and said, "This is how you make it appear to be round." And that guy became my friend, right from that moment. And the amazing thing is, I knew him for as long as I was in L.A., until wherever he went his way. But we knew each other, from that moment. And he treated me like I was a friend, like I was somebody, like I was one of them. And that was so important. It was so important. And that's where I felt like I really belonged in a place like that because encountering – he approached me. It's like, saying, "Yeah, you're one of us; come on in."

And Sam Clayberger, I told him, I said, "When I graduate from high school, I want to come to school at Otis." I said, "What is it like?" And he said, "This is what it's going to be like if you want to be a full-time student at Otis." He had a drawer in the front, like a file drawer. And he pulled out this folder, and he said, "This is what the curriculum for full-time painting students at Otis is going to be like."

And he showed me. He had all these reproductions of paintings, clippings from art history books and stuff like that, all these reproductions. And he said, "This is what you have to do; you have to learn – this whole analytical program. So you put these acetate overlays on this reproduction, and you dissect the painting. Take all of the component parts from it. You take all the color – all the shapes that are red, all the shapes that are blue, all the shapes that are green, and you separate them all out. You take all of the diagonal lines; you take all of the vertical lines; you take all of the curved lines. You put them all on a separate thing. And you piece this – you take it all apart, and then you figure out why these things, how these things all work together." He said, "That's what you're going to have to do if you want to be a full-time painting student at Otis."

And I said, "Yeah." It's like, that's it. That's the whole thing right there. So I had all of this hope that when I finally got out of school, I came to Otis, and then I would go and learn all of this stuff. This was the secret to the Masters kind of thing.

So I took that class with Sam Clayberger, and he became my friend. I mean, literally. He invited me by his studio at the end, when that summer session ended. He invited me by his studio. I used to call him periodically. I can call him up on the phone and just sort of talk, chat. And then I'd go by his studio. I was so independent when I was in high school that I had never talked to a counselor one time in my entire time at high school, except two weeks before graduation, I went to the counselor's office to get my application to apply to school at Otis. [Laughs.]

And when I went in there, she called up the school, and that's when they said, "Well, you can't go to school at Otis when you come out of high school. You have to do two years of school at a junior college or someplace else, and you transfer into Otis as a junior." So I was heartbroken, because I didn't – if I had done what everybody else was doing, like talking to the counselors and stuff a year ahead of time, I would have known that. But of course, I didn't find out until the last minute, and then it was too late to do anything about it. And then when I graduated from school, I had to get a job and do that. So I worked for two years, until the recession of '75, when I was laid off from the job I was working on.

MS. GONCHAROV: What was the job?

MR. MARSHALL: Well, the first job I had out of school was as a dishwasher at Inglewood Park Hospital, in the kitchen. My aunt was the head of housekeeping at Inglewood Park Hospital, so she talked to the dietician in the kitchen, and they got me on, but as a dishwasher.

MS. GONCHAROV: And you were still making art during that time?

MR. MARSHALL: Well, I was still doing my little drawings and stuff like that.



MS. GONCHAROV: It was at home, yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: Well, I'm leaving out a lot of details. Going back to the junior high period, we moved into the house on 46th Street. That house had a garage. And that's where I had my first studio, because, you know, I had been reading all the books, the biographies of [Leonardo] da Vinci and Rembrandt and all that stuff. I had read all the North Light [instructional books] and dah-dah-dah, skylights and all that stuff. And that was - it's like, the garage had two parts. There was the place where you could park the car, and then there was the shed that was like storage area. And then there was a walkway that went from the storage side to the garage side. But it was a narrow passageway.

So I made that into my studio. I went out; I cut a hole in the roof. And I took an old window and stuck it in the roof to make a skylight.

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: I didn't know anything about flashing or sealing it so the water wouldn't come in. So the moment it rained, it just poured into there. But I used to just be in there, just sit in there, just like sitting under the skylight, imagining myself to be Michelangelo or somebody, that kind of stuff. [Laughs.] And having a studio, where I can just put my stuff, that was - all that stuff was important to me. So that was my digression back to that.

MS. GONCHAROV: So you worked for two years after high school?

MR. MARSHALL: So I worked. And then the recession hit in '75, I think it was - yeah, it was '75. They laid off half the people who worked at the plant. I was working for Kentile floors. They made asbestos floor tiles and linoleum. My uncle, my mother's youngest sister's husband, worked there. And so he got me - you know, you get it through family connections. "Oh, they're hiring over here." So I came on down and put in an application. I started there in the labor pool. And then you're in a factory job; you can start to bid up to other jobs and stuff like that.

So I ended up working at the mill, which is the place where all of the powdered ingredients would drop down onto these hot steel rollers. I controlled the conveyor belt that dropped the loads onto the rollers, which was the mill. And then it sort of melted it all in. And then we cut it off into a sheet on the conveyor belt, and it jammed it up to the previous sheet, and that's how you got the continuous roll of linoleum that came out.

So I worked there. And we got laid off. And I immediately went and enrolled at L.A. City College in 1975. So I enrolled. I went and applied for unemployment. And I enrolled in school at L.A. City College, with the goal of finishing that two years, getting those units, and then transferring in at Otis first chance I got. And luckily, when I took that class with Sam Clayberger, I got college credit for that class. I didn't know that. But I took his class, and then I took a drawing class with Charles White. Charles White taught in the evenings on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and Sam Clayberger's class was on Saturday. But when I came and took Sam Clayberger's class, at the end of that, he told me that I can come anytime I wanted to, and I didn't have to ever pay again. I could come and paint in his class anytime I wanted to.

MS. GONCHAROV: So you did that?

MR. MARSHALL: Well, I did, and then I'd feel guilty, and then I'd pay for another - it's like, I'd come one time. And then the next time I would pay because I felt kind of funny just sort of coming.

But before then, I used to come - Charles White taught in the evenings. He taught a figure-drawing class. So I sort of snuck into his class one night. And that same thing - I'm hiding over in - I'm all the way - have a little-bitty sketchbook. It's about three by five, little black sketch book.

And so I sort of slip into the class. I go all the way - it's like behind some easels over in the back. I'm going to sit back there, kind of just do a little sketching and stuff. I didn't ask anybody if I could come or not. And he didn't know me at the time. We didn't know each other personally. I had only seen him that one time when he came into the drawing class.

But I just go back there in the back. And the same thing - if there's a naked model up there, I'm nervous about that, too. So I'm back there. And he sees me over there. And he comes over where I am and says, "You can't see anything from back there. Come on" - he took my arm, said, "Come on up here." And he took my stool and put it on the front row. He said, "Okay, now you come on up here. Now you can see." [Laughs.] And so I sat there and did my little sketches.

And then afterward, when the class took a break, he came over to talk to me. He wanted to look at my sketchbook to see what I was doing. And he did. He said, "Oh" - and so he did this demonstration. He said, "If you want to draw portraits and heads, this is how you set it up structurally." "If you want to do the full front and then from profile," he said, "this is how you divide it." And so he showed me all of that stuff. And then he said, "Come on - you know, anytime, just come on in. If you want to do some drawing, just come on by." So anyway, that was my place. It's like, everybody who I met, nobody, not one person tried to chase me out or told me I couldn't come or told me I was too young or - nobody told me any of that. Everybody just said, "Okay. You come on up."

So anyway, he told me I could come any time I wanted to to his class and draw. And that's when we got to know each other, sort of. You know, it's all that funny thing how it's like, the moment you have a contact, and then all of a sudden you're now, you're just familiar. And so I felt like, okay, I can come up to Otis anytime I want to come up to Otis now, because I know two people up here who say it's okay.

So I did. I started to come periodically, and if I felt guilty about just sort of hanging out, then I would pay for a class, because by then I was - well, after the first Sam Clayberger class, I was still in high school with that first class. But then after I graduated, during that period before I went to L.A. City College, I took a couple of classes. I had paid one year, and then another year I had just sort of come.

And then I finally got to L.A. City College. And literally, I was taking 19 units of credit a semester because I was in a hurry. And so I finished the credit requirements in a year and a half. And then I found out I had - because I had paid for some classes at Otis, I had six college credits that I could apply. And so they took those credits that I had from taking the classes at Otis and then the credits I had earned, and I had enough credits to transfer. And so I got an application and sent in my portfolio and sat around waiting for them to give the word to whether I got in or not.

MS. GONCHAROV: Did you get a scholarship?

MR. MARSHALL: Well, it was so cheap. Otis was a county-run school back at the time. Tuition was only \$440 for a semester. And still, they had scholarships through - the Ford Foundation had a scholarship where they would cover part of the tuition.

MS. GONCHAROV: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MARSHALL: But I figured I could do \$400.

MS. GONCHAROV: And you probably were making some pretty good money if you were in the steel mill, too.

MR. MARSHALL: No, I -

MS. GONCHAROV: I mean -

MR. MARSHALL: At Kentile? No. I was making two dollars and - remember, this was early '70s. [Laughs.] I was making \$2.71 an hour or something like that.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, not more than that? Okay.

MR. MARSHALL: You know.

MS. GONCHAROV: Because I know in Detroit [MI], when I was coming up, the boys, anyway, would work in the factories in the summer and pay for college.

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah, that -

MS. GONCHAROV: And you actually could make enough. It's not the case anymore, but -

MR. MARSHALL: I only worked at Kentile floors for eight months before we got laid off.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, I see. Okay.

MR. MARSHALL: And so, my highest salary, I think, was three dollars and something an hour when I left there. [Laughs.] I started out in the labor pool, which was nothing, basically. But back then, cost of living - gas was only 49¢ a gallon or something, 39¢ sometimes, 29.

MS. GONCHAROV: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: So you could do something with a dollar. You put a dollar's worth of gas in the tank, and you get three or four gallons, you know.

MS. GONCHAROV: I remember. [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: [Laughs.] But anyway, so I went to LACC to get enough credits to transfer into Otis, and I started school at Otis as a full-time student in January of 1977.

MS. GONCHAROV: And who else did you study with there, other than Charles White and Clayberger?

MR. MARSHALL: Well, in terms of regular teachers, in that first year, I studied with – well, Charles White taught second-year drawing. So I had to do with whoever was teaching first-year drawing. I had a printmaking class with Corky Claremont. He taught there. I had a drawing class with Scott Griger; in my second year, I took a collage class with Betye Saar. She taught there. My first-year drawing class I took with Arnold Mesches. I took a mural-painting class with Carlos Alvarez and Frank Romero. They taught when Los Four [Chicano art collective] was –

MS. GONCHAROV: Mm-hm, mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MARSHALL: They were big at the time, so they had them teaching a mural class. I took that class. I had a painting class I took with Emerson Woelffer. I had a painting class with Matsumi Kanemitsu. Those were the teachers I had.

MS. GONCHAROV: So that was a good time?

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah. Right. And then I had – Charles White was there. And the thing is that there were three black students in the graduate program at Otis at the time. And my best friend was – well, I had a couple of people who were really good friends of mine. But when I first took that painting class with Sam Clayberger, there was a guy in the program named Eloy Torres. He's a mural painter, now does a lot of work in L.A. He's still there now.

But I walked into the painting studio once, and I saw this painting in there which was just so amazing to me. It was in the rack. So I used to pull it out every time I came into the painting studio to look at it, just to see – you know, it's like, "Wow, this guy can paint." I used to look at it. It turns out this guy's name was Eloy, Eloy Torres. We became really good friends.

But I also had a friend – Louis Sarano was at school at L.A. City College when I was there. We became really good friends while we were at LACC, and we remain friends to this day. He went from LACC to Otis the year before. He was there the semester before I was, I think. Because since I started in mid-year – I started in January; he had started in September. I was off-track because I started school from work. But he was there when I got there, and Eloy was there.

Eloy was a great painter, really was an excellent painter, so we became really good friends because I admired his work so much. But the teachers – those were the teachers that I took classes with. And I took a ceramics class with this guy named Bob Glover, Robert Glover, who is an excellent ceramicist, excellent ceramicist.

MS. GONCHAROV: And what was your work like at that time? What were you the most interested in?

MR. MARSHALL: Well, when I got to school at Otis, I wanted to be Andrew Wyeth. [Laughs.] I had become fascinated with egg tempera painting. And so I was interested in all of those magic realists, egg tempera painters, George Tooker, Jared French. Paul Cadmus, that work, that technique, that method – I loved it. I loved it. And so I wanted to be an egg tempera painter. Part of my portfolio was egg tempera paintings, when I submitted my portfolio. I was doing still lifes in the mode of Andrew Wyeth. I was doing watercolors and egg tempera paintings in the mode of, or with the tone and the manner of, Andrew Wyeth, but also doing drawings and stuff that were sort of in the mode of Charles White.

So that's what I was doing when I went to Otis. I was trying to do all kinds of things. I also was doing collage work that was sort of like Romare Bearden. [Laughs.] Those were the people who had influenced me a lot. I was wrestling with a lot of this, trying to find myself through doing work that was like the work that other people were doing, in part because I was trying to learn technique and stuff like that. I was a big Ben Shahn fan at the time, a really big Ben Shahn fan, and part of that [was] because he painted in egg tempera, too.

MS. GONCHAROV: Do you ever paint in egg tempera anymore?

MR. MARSHALL: I'm going back to it soon. I haven't painted in egg tempera in a long time. But actually, I mean to do some more egg tempera painting.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah. They're beautiful. I love them.

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah, yeah. And actually, there's a George Tooker survey coming up soon.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: I just saw.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: I'm looking forward to seeing that.

MS. GONCHAROV: Me, too, me, too. [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: [Laughs.] So all those people, I was looking at their work because I was doing egg tempera. And then I found this book. Robert Vickrey is an egg tempera painter. He wrote a book called *New Techniques in Egg Tempera* [New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 1973], where he demonstrated how you don't have to just do the 13th-century method. You know, it doesn't have to always just be cross-hatching and stuff like that. He opened it up so you can use sponges and splashing and splatters. And it was still really tight. But you can achieve all these effects with all these other methods. So that just sort of opened it all up.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah. Because it surprised me when you said egg tempera, because I think of them as small and really tight. And your paintings are so big.

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah. But you know the first image that I did, this black-on-black sort of figure that I was doing?

MS. GONCHAROV: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MARSHALL: That first one, the *Portrait of the Artist as a Shadow of His Former Self* [1980], that's an egg tempera painting.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, I didn't know that.

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah. It doesn't look like it would be an egg tempera painting.

MS. GONCHAROV: No. No, it doesn't.

MR. MARSHALL: Except it's cross-hatched. But that was an egg tempera painting.

MS. GONCHAROV: So when did you find yourself [laughs], decided what you wanted to do, what you wanted to say?

MR. MARSHALL: That painting.

MS. GONCHAROV: That painting? Okay.

MR. MARSHALL: That painting, because I went through that period when I was doing – and I still have a painting. There was an exhibition of artworks by artists when they were young. And I have this one painting that I did when I was 15, 14 or 15. It's an oil painting on a window shade in the manner of Charles White, in which I was trying to make original work using the style of Charles White. And then Charles White, he did these things; they were like oil drawings. He'd use the burnt umber, monochrome sort of paintings. So I did a painting like that, using the formal style of the early Charles White. But I tried to make an original work, using that technique.

So anyway, I don't know why I said that. But that sort of –

MS. GONCHAROV: So from that piece –

MR. MARSHALL: Oh, so when I found myself, yes. I went through a period where I was – I mean, it was doing two things. One, I was just trying to understand the formal language of picture making. So I started out doing cut-paper collages that were sort of like Romare Bearden, but not quite as syncopated, you might say. That's when I first started looking at black on black as a kind of idea, when I started noticing that you go through a magazine, and you cut out these squares of black color, but they were all different colors. Like they are red black, green black. So you've got – temperature started to make a difference. And so playing with the relationships between those different-colored blacks became important.

So I had a lot of space in my collages, where Bearden's were pretty well filled up. So I had a lot of black space, in which I was playing with the edges. From tearing the paper, you get that white line. So I was playing with that, plus the color temperature of the blacks and stuff like that. And then I went through a period when I did abstract collages, mixed media, using casein and collage. And I worked on those abstract ones for a little while.

Then I started to realize that you could put a certain amount of work into those collages, and you could end up with something that was satisfying, but it really wasn't delivering all of what I wanted the work to deliver. And after working abstractly for a while, I really realized I needed to go back to figurative work. And I made that painting, *Portrait of the Artist as a Shadow of my Former Self*, as a black-on-black figure painting, with a stylized, sort of simplified figure, but constructed on the same kind of scale – frame – that classical Renaissance painting was built around. And that's when things changed for me.

MS. GONCHAROV: Okay.

MR. MARSHALL: That's when I first started to be able to apply all of the stuff that I was learning from reading about, you know, classical composition and –

MS. GONCHAROV: So you'd been studying art history all along?

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah, because I'd been sort of –

MS. GONCHAROV: Since you were a kid.

MR. MARSHALL: This obsession with trying to figure out what it was about those artists, what they knew that made it possible for them to make that work. Because I thought, it can't be that they were just sort of born to make it. They have to know something. And when I started reading through a lot of these books, you start understanding how they studied optics. They understood perspective. They worked with space, in terms of the kind of architectonics of the picture plane and stuff like that – they understood that.

So this is going back to that Sam Clayberger thing and something Arnold Mesches had showed me, that if you really analyze – and this is where Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* [1534-41] painting – you can actually see formally why all of those figures are in the position they are in. They're not just there. They're there because they fit into this grid, which means that this is all about designing that space.

So when I did that *Portrait of the Artist as a Shadow of His Former Self*, even though it's a really simplified figure, I designed that space, and I structured it so that every mark, every shape, everything – it fits into a place, because it's supposed to perform a certain kind of function. That was the first time I had really applied all of that information to something that I felt in control of. And I felt in control of it because I felt like I really understood. Now I understand how this works. This is how they do it. And so that was the picture that represents that.

And after that, I didn't do any more abstract work. Then everything sort of developed – the next plateau in my work was when I did the painting of the *Lost Boys* [1993].

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh.

MR. MARSHALL: The big *Lost Boys* painting.

MS. GONCHAROV: Mm-hm, mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MARSHALL: And then a painting called *This Style* [or *De Stijl*?]. That was the other plateau. That's when I was able to apply all of that same stuff to that monumental scale that was the same as the way the big, grand Renaissance narratives were made.

MS. GONCHAROV: And so how long out of school was this, out of Otis?

MR. MARSHALL: Well, I finished in December of 1978. So from January of '77 to December '78, because I was off-track, so I had to come back, you know, in the summer for the graduation ceremony. But I did the two years, four semesters. I did four semesters. But what did you ask me, again?

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, oh. When after Otis that you did this stuff, these breakthroughs?

MR. MARSHALL: Well, that was December of 1978; 1980 was when I did the *Portrait of the Artist as a Shadow of His Former Self*.

MS. GONCHAROV: Okay.

MR. MARSHALL: So that was 1980.

MS. GONCHAROV: Okay. So the next breakthrough, the *Lost Boys*, was –

MR. MARSHALL: Now, that was 13 years later.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh. There must have been something in between the 13 –

MR. MARSHALL: I did a lot of work.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah, yeah. But you didn't think there was the same kind of –

MR. MARSHALL: I think I was fishing around. I was looking for something in between.

MS. GONCHAROV: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MARSHALL: Because the thing is, when I made the *Portrait of the Artist as a Shadow of His Former Self*, I mean, that's a really flat, sort of schematic kind of figure.

MS. GONCHAROV: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MARSHALL: So that was the kind of classical Renaissance thing. But then I did a bunch of works that were – some works that were based on this kind of Minimalist field painting, where I did some –

MS. GONCHAROV: But figurative, also?

MR. MARSHALL: Well, figurative in the sense that some of them had – they were building structures. I did a couple of paintings that were houses or buildings that was like a white-in-white, green monochrome. And then I did a black-on-black, monochrome, but with a building in it. I did a painting, which I still have, called *Oh Dear Dangerfield* [1983]. The building that's in it is the National Guard Armory at Harpers Ferry [WVA], where John Brown and his men raided Harpers Ferry to get the armors, and made their final stand in that building. So I did a painting, the title of which comes from a note that was in the pocket of one of the black men who was with John Brown. Dangerfield Newby was his name. He was killed there. And in his pocket, they found a letter from his wife. And it started out, the first line was, "Oh Dear Dangerfield. I hope you come soon."

It was such a beautiful, poetic line, you know, and the sadness that it represents also. And so I did a painting, sort of an elegiac kind of picture, black on black, with the silhouette of the National Guard Armory. And this is where I've started using that flower kind of pattern in the picture, too, around it. It's white flowers and this black figure against the – black building against the black background. So I was doing that kind of thing.

And then I did a painting called *Two Invisible Men Naked* [1985], which is a black panel and a white panel. And then I did another painting later on called *Invisible Man*, which is a black – it's this black figure against the black ground kind of thing. So I was doing those, which were not fully narrative, in terms of the kind of compositional needs of the work.

And the compositional stuff didn't come back until the *Lost Boys* painting. This is what I started to say. Well, I had done these sort of emblematic paintings. You know, it's just about a figure against the ground. I had done those for a while. But I wanted to do some things that were more complicated than that. I wanted to start to make a kind of equivalency to history paintings, but that had a black subject as this center.

MS. GONCHAROV: So you've moved from Renaissance influence now to, you know, French 18th, 19th century. [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah.

MS. GONCHAROV: Okay.

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah. Well, I feel like I am such a product of art history, really. And it goes all the way back to that first experience at the library. This is third or fourth grade. You go in there and you see they've got all these books. So I could look at this stuff. It's like, it's all this amazing stuff. And this is – I'll make one confession on the tape.

MS. GONCHAROV: Okay.

MR. MARSHALL: I've said it before out loud, so it's not like it's a scoop or anything.

MS. GONCHAROV: Okay. [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: But at least now it will be in a national archive. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: Okay. [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: But this obsession with possessing things that came from the rosaries. It's like collecting those. And then the toilet paper – got to have this material and stuff. It extended itself to images from art history as well. And it goes with this whole thing about process, too, because back then – okay, once I started taking books out of the library, I noticed that, for a lot of those books, I was the only person taking those, because you know, they used to put that card in there.

MS. GONCHAROV: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MARSHALL: You used to sign that card, put your name on it at the school library. But then in the public library, you'd get the card, it had a record of all the people who had taken that book out of the library. So I started noticing, I was the only person taking some of these books out of the library. And the thing is, they were images that I really liked a lot, that I was impressed with.

MS. GONCHAROV: Like what?

MR. MARSHALL: Well, you know what? I loved [Francisco de] Goya's black paintings. I was probably the only kid in fifth grade in the whole United States who had decals on my notebook [that] were Goya's black paintings.

MS. GONCHAROV: You made the decals yourself?

MR. MARSHALL: I made them myself.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah, I was going to say, you don't buy those.

MR. MARSHALL: No, you don't buy it. But this process thing. I saw advertised on television, they had this – and you see it now. This was during that period when decoupage was really big – and so they would advertise this thing on TV, this thing called decoupage. And it's like you can make decoupage furniture and stuff like that at home. They had this stuff called Decal It. You could buy it at Thrifty Drug Store. And you paint this on a photograph, soak it in water, and then you peel off the paper on the back, and the image was stuck to this polymer film. And then you stick that onto any surface. And so I went and got me some Decal It.

MS. GONCHAROV: And some scissors and cut out the books. [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: Well, you didn't need to have scissors.

MS. GONCHAROV: No, for the books, for the pictures.

MR. MARSHALL: You didn't need to have scissors. Remember when they used to do tipped-in illustrations. They were just held in by two little dots of glue. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: So I started – this is my confession there. I started taking out those tipped-in illustrations.

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: And I convinced myself it was okay to do because nobody else seemed to be interested in those books, because I seemed to be the only person who was taking those books out of the library.

MS. GONCHAROV: Did you ever get caught?

MR. MARSHALL: No.

MS. GONCHAROV: No. [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: Never got caught.

MS. GONCHAROV: So what else? What other pictures did you take?

MR. MARSHALL: So I used to go in with a fingernail file. And you'd slide it under that – [laughs].

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: That's my confession to a national archive. So – [laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: So what pictures did you steal?

MR. MARSHALL: So literally, I had –

MS. GONCHAROV: Goya?

MR. MARSHALL: I had all of the black paintings, Goya's black paintings. And I made those into decals, and I had them stuck all over my notebook. I'd take – I was a big [Sandro] Botticelli fan. I was taking Rembrandt. I loved Rembrandt's work. So I was taking those. That was the stuff I was stealing.

MS. GONCHAROV: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: [Laughs.] And I loved [Jean-Honoré] Fragonard.

MS. GONCHAROV: Really? Well, I guess it – yeah, it makes sense.

MR. MARSHALL: I loved Fragonard. And this is the thing. This is where, when we talk about the implications of imagery and the implications of history – the politics of representation – well, it's like, when I was first introduced to art history, and I started looking at those books and things and going to the library and taking out books – well, it's like, who was I – I was taking Raphael, Leonardo, Rembrandt, Franz Hals, Michelangelo.

Those were the artists. And you look through those big survey books, [Giovanni Battista] Tiepolo, all that stuff. [Peter Paul] Rubens – all those images, that was what art was. That's what art looked like. And all those people were white people. All those figures were white figures. All those angels were white angels. All those nudes were white nudes. All the little cherubs, the putti and stuff, they were all little white – and so because I wanted to do art, that's what art looked like.

So when I'm collecting those images, I'm collecting the art images because that's what art looks like. And when I start drawing pictures because I want to aspire to be an artist, those are the images I would draw. I sort of say, there's an art figure. And the art figure looks like the [Théodore] Géricaults – it looks like those drawings. That's what a figure looks like. And when you go to art class, all the models were white models. So that's what you end up drawing.

And so that's why, it's like, yeah, those artists were important, because those are the only ones I could see, you know? [Laughs.] And so in my mind, when you want to make a painting of a figure of a saint or a hero, or a mythical figure, that's what they're supposed to look like, because that's what everybody else was painting. All the people who were important, that's what they were painting.

That's why Fragonard and [François] Boucher and all of – when I looked at art, that was what art was supposed to look like.

MS. GONCHAROV: But that changed once you got to –

MR. MARSHALL: Well, it changed when I found out – when I saw Charles White.

MS. GONCHAROV: Charles White, I was going to say.

MR. MARSHALL: But before then – well, no, it wasn't before then, actually. I was going to say, in, I think it was 1969 or maybe 1970 – so this would have been, actually, after, because if I went in seventh grade – let's see. If I graduated from high school in '73, then if I go back, that would have meant – I went to high school in '69. I was in 10th grade in 1969. I started high school, which meant that three years before, in '66, '67, and '68, I was in junior high school. So I found out about Charles White in about '67, either '67 or '68, somewhere around there, when I took that class at Otis. I'd have to find a transcript somewhere. You'd probably find out when that was.

But then in 1970, I think it was, or '71, Marvel Comics introduced the first black superhero into the comic books.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, who was that?

MR. MARSHALL: It was the Black Panther.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, okay.

MR. MARSHALL: This is after the riots and after 1968-69, you know, the Black Panther shootouts and all that stuff like that. Then they – it's like, we've got to get some other things than white superheroes in here, you know. And so that character sort of came into the comics. And the introduction of that character highlighted the fact that none of the other characters were black. Before then, when I was thinking about art and looking at the figures that you see in the masterpieces, you just think, well, that's what art looks like. When you look in comic books, a superhero – you know, what does a superhero look like?

MS. GONCHAROV: A white guy.

MR. MARSHALL: It's a white guy with a square jaw. That's what a superhero looks like. And we took it for granted, never asked, Where are the black superheroes? Never asked, until after the Black Panther appeared in comic books. Then all of a sudden, now you sort of see, wait a minute. It's possible for there to be some other. It's like, all superheroes are not a white guy with a square jaw.

And then it starts to make a difference. And like with the Charles White thing; when I discovered Charles White, I immediately started to try to make work in the manner of Charles White, because I had never seen a black picture, a picture of a black person represented that way, with that kind of skill and with that kind of power – had never seen it before.

And for me, I can look at that and say, "Well, this is as good as that." You know? That means I can make black figures, too, and they can be good art, too, like the other things.

MS. GONCHAROV: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MARSHALL: So anyway, so anyway. So that's –

MS. GONCHAROV: Makes sense.

MR. MARSHALL: I don't know how we got to that.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah. That was important. So you've started your career in the real world. Did you –

MR. MARSHALL: So anyway, the Otis thing.

MS. GONCHAROV: Out of Otis.

MR. MARSHALL: All that stuff that Sam Clayberger told me – when I got to school at Otis in 1977, that was all finished. They weren't doing that anyway.

MS. GONCHAROV: What do you mean? They weren't doing what anymore?

MR. MARSHALL: They weren't teaching that stuff anymore.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, the figure painting – they were –

MR. MARSHALL: Well, they have figure drawing classes and the kind of classes that –

MS. GONCHAROV: But it was abstract. It was all abstract by that time?

MR. MARSHALL: No, it wasn't even abstract. Conceptual art had finally started, had gained the foothold in the Academy at the time. There was a competition between what people called traditional or conventional artworks and the new things, you know, which was conceptual art, which was advanced.

MS. GONCHAROV: Right.

MR. MARSHALL: And so that was actively trying to dismantle all of those things that looked like traditional art forms. But a consequence of Abstract Expressionism, though, was that this notion that you had to have skill and that you had to actually know something about picture-making and things like that – that started to go out the window with Abstract Expressionism, because then it became about this immediate – the immediacy of a gesture and all of that stuff. And that's not something you can teach anybody.

The field was already prepared for what conceptual art would be, the final assault, in a way, on traditional methods and stuff. And so when I got to school at Otis in 1977, it was frowned upon – it was like, if you were interested in these traditional kinds of forms, that was old-fashioned.

MS. GONCHAROV: Old-fashioned.

MR. MARSHALL: And so there was a tug-of-war going on. Especially during my second year, it got even worse. But when I got to school there, the department was called Intermedia at the time. And that's where you did performance art, conceptual work, installation, and video. That's what people did there. Headed by Miles Forest, if you ever remember who he was.

MS. GONCHAROV: Mm-mm. [Negative.]

MR. MARSHALL: And that was a group of people who were all on the kind of advanced track. There was Cheryl Ikegawa, who was a printmaker. Corky Claremont was a part of that group, too. Gary Lloyd was there at the time. For a short time, Pat Tivia taught at Otis. And everybody was talking about Chris Burden, you know, *Five Day Locker Piece* [1971]. The buzz was about that, and people were doing all kinds of performances and installations and conceptual pieces about time and – you know, it's like walking around with copies of [Ludwig] Wittgenstein. Those were the advanced people.

MS. GONCHAROV: Did you try any of that?

MR. MARSHALL: Well, I did some performance work, with other people, some performance and video work with other people. But I had this – I was really old-fashioned, because my thing was that, well, that's fine. But if you can't paint yet, then to me, it didn't make a lot of sense to adopt these other methods that didn't require you to have any particular skill or ability or knowledge. You had to do this thing first, because that's what I went to school for. I came there because I wanted to learn the secrets of all of those historical – you know, I wanted to know all of that stuff, all the stuff that the Old Masters knew. I wanted to know that.

I had been told that when I got to school there, I would be able to learn it, by Sam Clayberger. But when I got there, since that was all discouraged, and few instructors were leaning on that kind of stuff, it became – the way the classes were taught became a kind of – just a kind of chatting session, in a way. You would do whatever you did. And you'd have your crits. People would set it up, and your classmates would talk about it. But your instructor maybe never came over and said two words to you, like all year.

And nobody could tell you whether this was working or whether it wasn't working, for the most part. One thing, if you take the figure drawing class, like you take Charles White's figure drawing class, now, either you drew the figure right, or you didn't. It's like, well, no, that leg is wrong. You could say that. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: So were you insecure about any of this? Or were you confident enough to –

MR. MARSHALL: Well, I was confident, probably overconfident.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, good.

MR. MARSHALL: Because I thought I knew a thing or two. And this thinking I knew a thing or two led to – this is what led to the friendship I had with Arnold Mesches, because I thought I knew a thing or two. But I detected that there was no pressure being put on anybody to – I mean, you weren't under any pressure to learn anything.

MS. GONCHAROV: Right.

MR. MARSHALL: If you had the skill, you could use it. If you didn't have it, you could do something else. It just kind of didn't seem to matter. So I think I arrived at the conclusion that the game was over, on some level. And art education was a total fraud, because nobody seemed to be pressing you to learn anything in particular. It looked like everybody who was coming through there was graduating, no matter what. [Laughs.] So it just didn't make any sense.

MS. GONCHAROV: Also, it would be harder to have a career if you weren't in the most fashionable mode. So how did you get past that?

MR. MARSHALL: Well, see, now I –

MS. GONCHAROV: How did you think you were going to have a career?

MR. MARSHALL: You know what? I felt like I was always – because I had been reading a lot of this stuff, and I felt like I knew some technique. I tried almost everything. You know, I could paint in egg tempera. I knew how that worked. I could do prints. I was good at printmaking. I could do woodcuts, etchings, aquatints. I knew all of those techniques. I hadn't quite arrived at what to apply it to yet, but I was acquiring all of these skills, and then acquiring a certain amount of knowledge about how composition worked and how color worked and stuff like that. So I was sort of picking this stuff up myself.

And so I say, well, okay. I can just sort of come to school and kind of hang out. I liked a lot of the people who were in all of these areas. I knew people who were in graduate school. I was an undergraduate. But I moved through the school like I owned it, because I had been there from when I was a kid, you know, and I felt like I belonged there. And I knew it. I knew the place. And I knew what I was doing. And I knew I was going to be successful.

MS. GONCHAROV: Wow, you did. Very good. [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: Well, I think it's because I thought, I just belong among these people. So I'm going to be one of them. I know that. And it's whether people around me teach me that or not, I'm going to be one of them. I just felt it. I felt it.

And I think other people treated me as if I felt it, as if I knew it.

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: Maybe some of it has to do with this early introduction, when that guy Ray Spears treated me like I was a peer. He showed me things that I didn't know, but he talked to me like I was already a peer. And Sam Clayberger treated me like I was somebody. And Charles White invited me to just sort of be there, hanging around. And then it's like I would be now hanging out with adults. There were two women in Charles White's drawing class who became friends of mine, you know? And it's like, okay, well, I am one of them. And they treated me like I knew a thing or two.

And I felt - and I acted like I did. I was opinionated. [Laughs.] Highly opinionated.

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: And so I moved through all the - I knew people who were in the Intermedia, conceptual artists, and I knew all the people who were doing ceramics, the people who were doing - it didn't matter to me. The issue was not whether you were doing this or that. The issue was whether whatever you did worked or not. And so I didn't care what people were doing, although I wanted to learn how to paint really well, and I was invested in drawing really well. So I knew all those people. I hung out with the people on both sides of the spectrum. I was just sort of the middle of it all.

So I became student body vice president, and then ultimately I became student body president at Otis. And that's in my second year there. So I'm an undergraduate.

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: So being student body president and sort of acting like I own the place anyway, I took advantage of everything. I had a studio. I was an undergraduate with a studio. [Laughs.] Because I sort of maneuvered myself into a position where I behaved like a graduate student. I didn't go to class all the time. I did all my work at home, but I came to school to hang out with people. I had a little studio, you know, in the apartment I was staying at. I did my work there, and then I brought it in when you had to bring stuff in to turn it in for crits.

So that's how it was. But this is when it all hit the fan, when I became the student body president. This is where you see how the divide between the aspirations of people who were conceptual artists and the aspirations of people who wanted to learn - who were doing traditional work - how they clashed. So over the summer - because, see, I was off-track, so I was a senior for half a semester before summer. And I had one more semester to go before I completed my studies. So that was the summer I was a senior. I became student body president when the former president, student body president was - Dennis Hilgar was the student body president. He was a great guy, who died of AIDS. It was the first person I had known of who died of AIDS.

So he asked me if I would put my name in for student body vice president when the elections were coming up, that first time, because he thought it would be good for me, because I was kind of quiet. There weren't a lot of black people at the school. So he thought, "You know, I think this would be good for you." And I did. And so I became student body [vice] president. Then when he resigned as student body president, and I became the student body president.

The Intermedia group had taken over the student gallery on campus. They wouldn't let people show paintings and drawings and stuff like that in there. And they only showed conceptual work. So they had a show up. It was up for half of the semester. Then over the summer, it was up the entire summer, that show. And when school started back again, some graduate students approached me and said, "Look. The semester is starting, and new people coming in, you know. Some of the donors and people who support the school are coming on campus to see what's happening with the new people and stuff like that. This show has been in the gallery for six months. We should take that show down and put up a show of all of the graduate students, so people can become familiar with whatever everybody else on campus is doing."

MS. GONCHAROV: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MARSHALL: It sounded reasonable to me. But the guys who ran the gallery - there were two guys, the two Davids, who ran the gallery - they didn't come back to school when school started. They were still on vacation in Mexico. So they were going to be coming back in a couple of weeks, which meant the show was going to have to stay up for another couple of weeks. So I thought it made sense to show everybody, to let everybody have some work in there for a show for a period.

And so I went around to all of the people who had work in the conceptual art show, and I asked them if they would mind if we took that show down and put up an exhibition that had all the graduate students' work in it. And everybody agreed, actually. And so we took the show down and put up a show. All the other graduate students put up some work. Everybody got to put a piece in, so it was like a comprehensive thing.

But when those guys came back from vacation, it all hit the fan. So I set up a meeting. They wanted to have a meeting with me. And so I went up to the studio. One of the Davids, when I walked in, he had a notebook. He just dropped the notebook on the table, and he said, "We were trying to run the gallery like a professional gallery. But if ya'll want to start showing stuff like painting and ceramics and all that kind of stuff in there, then we don't want to have anything to do with it." So he dumped - said, "Here's all this stuff. So it's all on you." [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: And then we had - it was a terrorist action on campus. There was a terrorist group called the Bagheads. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: It was a group of students with paper bags over their heads. So they went into the gallery where the graduate students' show [was]. And they started to take the show that I had coordinated, they started to take that show down. And this is when video was big. They were doing this sort of "Otis News." So when the porta-packs and stuff - people were running around with porta-packs. So they were going to run these video news broadcasts.

And so somebody came up and said, "Kerry, there's a group - there are some people down in the gallery taking down the show." It was the Bagheads. And they had this video, because they were on the news: "Kerry James Marshall is going to take down the show; the Bagheads can take down a show, too." And so this was all on the video. They were calling me Idi Amin. It's like I'm being like a dictator. And it's like all this stuff. So somebody called - they come to get me, and I had to come down to the gallery, you know, trying to stop them from taking down this show. And the video cameras all in your face and stuff like that - it was fiasco. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.] Who won?

MR. MARSHALL: I did, in the end.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, good.

MR. MARSHALL: Because I had the whole of the student body. All of the other people had never had had a chance to show any work in the gallery because the other group had taken over the gallery.

So then we end up having this huge student body meeting to talk about what to do. And so then a lot of things sort of came up in that. This whole question of curriculum and teaching and what people are expected to learn and what you're expected to know became an issue, too.

So I had a roommate, who was an undergraduate student there, too. And he and a couple of other people who were in the undergraduate program had applied to graduate school at Otis.

And I got home one evening, and I saw him in his room sort of sitting there. He was really quiet. So I went by the door to see what was going on. He had the letter that he had been turned down for graduate school at Otis. And so he was really sort of upset, you know. And the question ended up being - now all of my professors had encouraged him to apply. He had been getting straight As, you know, in all of his classes. And the same thing with another friend of mine, who also got turned down. They were getting good grades, a lot of encouragement. And then all of a sudden, when they applied to graduate school, they were turned down.

And they were confused by it. There seemed to be no relationship between the things that people were telling them while they were in class and the way their work was being evaluated, and the outcome of this application thing. And so we brought this all to a student body meeting. And everybody decided, we need to have kind of a student committee that would review faculty. Because it's like, you can't have these kinds of weird outcomes, where people think they're doing great, and then when they want to go on to the next level, then for some reason, their stuff is not good enough. But they've been told all the while that they were doing great. There was a disconnect.

And so I was charged with bringing - because the student body president got to sit in on faculty meetings. And so me and my vice president could go to the meetings. So we'd go to the meetings. And when it comes time for me to make my presentation at the meeting, I'd bring this issue up, you know, that there's a problem with the way people are being evaluated. There's something dishonest going on, where people are being told one thing, but then when they try to do something else, it's a completely different thing.

So I say, "Well, the student body has voted to establish this faculty review committee." And the instant I said that - [laughs].

MS. GONCHAROV: Ooh.

MR. MARSHALL: Emerson Woelffer jumped up. He said, "Now, look here, young man." He said, "It will be a cold day in hell before I have students evaluating my" – he went off on me. "Blah-blah-blah-blah-blah." And he said [inaudible], on and on. "Oh, we got into executive session," so they put me out, put me in my – [laughs]. So they threw us out of the meeting, and they went into executive session.

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: And I don't know what became of that. But that was high drama. So I'm going from the students attacking me as being a dictator, trying to take over the school and run it in an unprofessional way because we're showing old-fashioned stuff, want to show old-fashioned stuff, to now the faculty – it's like a faculty member jumping up in my face, telling me "no way in hell" they're going to have students judging whether professors are doing their job well enough or not.

[END MD01 TR02.]

MS. GONCHAROV: Tape two, Kerry James Marshall.

So we're just talking about his first trip to Italy, when he got a grant to go to Civitella [Civitella Ranieri Foundation Residency]. And we're talking about his first visit to the [Gallerie] Uffizi [Florence]. So, go.

MR. MARSHALL: [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: We've got the Cimabue, the Giotto, and the Duccio.

MR. MARSHALL: Right. But what we were talking about was the way in which, when you finally get to go overseas, you go to Italy, and you get to see a lot of this work that you only saw in art history books, on slides and things. When you see it finally for the first time – and it's something that you have to do, because you can't call yourself a properly schooled artist unless you've seen some of the things that you are familiar with, in person, because they are not anything at all like what you think they are when you see them in a book. So that's like going to the Louvre [Paris, France] to see the big – the Géricault and stuff like that.

But at the Uffizi, this is where, I think, where I really understood how the stakes are played out in the history of great painting. It's like, there's a room of Madonna paintings in the Uffizi in which there's the Giotto Madonna, there's a Duccio, there's a Cimabue, and then there's like everybody else who painted a Madonna, too. All the – from Medieval paintings all the way up to maybe, what, some 16th-century, 16th- or 17th-century paintings.

And this is where it really became clear to me, when I walked in that room and looked at those paintings, what the difference between the Masters were – and it's like, why are we so interested in Giotto and Cimabue and Duccio? Why are they the key figures in their time? And I understood from looking at them, where you could see the difference between work that is ambitious and proposes a lot, and work that we would call calendar art. Because it's like, those I could see that it's not only – it wasn't only that the scale of the work was –

MS. GONCHAROV: Just a second. Just testing the microphone. I think that's working.

[END MD02 TR01.]

Okay. Track two. Now I'm hearing it better. Okay. So.

MR. MARSHALL: So anyway, as I was saying, you can see the difference between artists who are really ambitious, who are doing more than just painting a picture of the Madonna. This is where you start to understand, it's not about the subject matter per se. It's about the treatment of the subject matter. And if we think about the Renaissance as a period of painting where everybody was actually painting the same subjects, how do you distinguish, in a field like that, where everybody's doing the same thing, what makes the difference between the work that is exceptional and work that is mediocre?

And I think in that room in the Uffizi where you see the Madonnas, you actually get to see, right in front of you, enough representations of the same subject to be able to distinguish between the ones that are grand and the ones that are mediocre and miniscule, the ones that, as I was saying before, are like calendar art. There's great painting, and then there's calendar art. And it has to do with the way in which the treatment of the subject is embodied in the whole picture, and not just in the image that the picture represents.

And I think, looking at the Giotto painting and the Cimabue painting and the Duccio painting – and then there's a great Medieval painting in that room, too, which is a great painting, but on different terms. I don't actually get to see that they are trying to make the form speak, not just the image speak. And you can compare one with another in that room. And I was drawn to those works even before I knew who had made them.

MS. GONCHAROV: When you saw them in books?

MR. MARSHALL: Well, no. I had never actually really paid – when you're looking at artwork in a book, it's like, those Madonnas. I don't pay attention to those pictures. Those are not important pictures to me.

MS. GONCHAROV: Right. Okay.

MR. MARSHALL: I mean, when you look through the art history books, it's the more magnificent things, the more complicated things, those are the ones that you're really paying attention to. I don't look at pictures of the Virgin Mary, you know, the mother and child, because there are tons of those. And so it's like I never really paid much attention to whether one was more substantial than the other. It never really – because I'm not looking at those works.

When I'm looking at Giotto's work – and Giotto is one of my favorite painters – I'm looking at the Arena Chapel [Cappella Scrovegni, Padua, Italy] cycle. That's the stuff that I'm looking at. I'm looking at the St. Francis paintings. That's the stuff that means something to me, because it's that grand narrative. It's the scope of the narrative, and it's the design of those pictures that you're really looking at. I never really paid much attention to the Giotto Madonnas. That's just – yeah, you got to do those because I'm sure there was some bread and butter connected with those. So I never really paid much attention to those.

And the Duccios, no, I'm not paying much attention to those, either. But because that's all that was in that room, you know, then you – you know, so now you sort of compare. And if they had been individuals, if there had been only a few Madonnas in that room, if it hadn't been the room that was just about the Madonnas, I probably wouldn't have paid much more attention to them there, either.

MS. GONCHAROV: Although they're so big, though.

MR. MARSHALL: Well, they're a decent size, yeah. But the thing is, the only reason I really paid attention to them was because I asked myself when I went in there, okay, well, why these artists? Why are we so invested in – why did people say that Giotto was – why him? And why Cimabue and why Duccio? Why are those three figures sort of key figures in the development of formal sophistication in painting? Why them?

Being in that room gave me a chance to ask that question. Because I'm still sort of into this whole idea of why – what is it about these artists that make them the ones? In the 15th century, I'm sure a whole lot more people were making pictures than just Michelangelo and Raphael and Leonardo. There must have been more people working then. So what happened to those other people, and why these guys? What was so different about what they were doing that it stood out over what everybody else was doing?

And so this gave me a chance to test and compare and hypothesize, at least to try to discern what the differences between those things was. And that's what I noticed, that it has something to do with the way the paintings are about more than just the subject matter that's being represented there. It's about the way they exist as a thing and a subject at the same time.

If you take those three artists, formally, in terms of form, the forms were relatively simple. I mean, there was sort of a big mass. There was kind of a big shape, without a whole lot of intricate detailing and stuff like that in there. But they had a stature that other people who were – people who seemed to be more concerned with inconsequential aspects of the subject – it's knowing really where to focus. It's like the person who focuses on the cufflinks, you know, instead of the shirt. It's like they're expending all their energy making the cufflink look more shiny, you know, but the shirt needs to be ironed. It's that kind of thing.

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: That's what I felt like I recognized when I was standing in that room and comparing. And I went through and looked at all of the pictures in there and tried to see – okay, really it's like, this stuff is about to fall apart, badly. It's like they don't have any idea what they're doing. But they're representing the subject matter because I'm sure they're being paid to.

But these artists seem to be trying to get at more than just a picture of the Virgin Mary and the Child. They seem to be trying to do more than that. And I think it comes through in a kind of scale and scope and ambition in the work. And the bigness – it's not just because it's big. One of the things you see when you go through the Louvre, there are a lot of big pictures in there. But there's a lot of big crap, too. It's not good just because it's big. It's not even impressive because it's big. It's actually big, and it shows off all of the weaknesses in some of the stuff. And you can see it.

So that's what that trip to the Uffizi did.

MS. GONCHAROV: Okay. In Italy and going to the Piero [della Francesca] trail and the whole – yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: And going to Italy – yeah, and the Piero della Francesca. That Piero della Francesca, *Resurrection of Christ* [1463] – it is in the oddest place. [Laughs.] It's not anything at all like I expected. I mean, because they've got it cropped in. When you see it in the book, it's all cropped in; it's like highlighted in the picture. But it's like a little thing, and it's in the lobby of some office building [Palazzo Comunale di Borgo, Sansepolcro, Tuscany]. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: And it's the only thing there. It's like it's the square in the middle of a wall. There's nothing around it. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.] So the Louvre, too, that must – the first time you went to the Louvre.

MR. MARSHALL: Yes, first time.

MS. GONCHAROV: See *Raft of the Medusa* [Théodore Géricault, 1818-19].

MR. MARSHALL: And that painting is such an important painting. That's one of my touchstones of paintings, too, that *Raft of the Medusa*. Plus the *Marriage at Cana* [The Wedding Feast at Cana, 1562-63], the [Paolo] Veronese painting. And Veronese was one of my favorite painters, always, because at the L.A. County Art Museum, they had two great Veronese paintings.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh.

MR. MARSHALL: There are two – it's just two saints. They were probably side panels for some altar pieces. That's probably what they were. There are two, but they're really beautiful pieces. I used to go to see those two paintings all the time when I went to the L.A. County Art Museum. And those were the only two Veronese paintings I had ever seen in person.

MS. GONCHAROV: Okay.

MR. MARSHALL: There's just something about – he had a tone. There's just something about that tone, and then his drawing. Tintoretto was also one of my favorite painters. He was one of the people I liked a lot. But seeing the *Marriage* painting, which was repaired by the time I got to Italy, was really important. And it was odd, because when I saw it, it was out of a frame. It was not in a frame. They had fixed it because it had gotten punctured when they cropped it.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah, when it fell down, yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: Right.

MS. GONCHAROV: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MARSHALL: And so it was there out of the frame. They were going to be probably putting it back into that wing another time. But –

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.] That was quite a story.

MR. MARSHALL: [Laughs.] But that's a magnificent painting, too.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah, yeah. And then the one in Venice, too, the Veronese in Venice [*The Feast in the House of Levi*, 1573, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice].

MR. MARSHALL: That one, I didn't see.

MS. GONCHAROV: It was the Last Supper.

MR. MARSHALL: Oh, that one, too?

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah, mm-hm. [Affirmative.] It's fantastic. In fact –

MR. MARSHALL: What?

MS. GONCHAROV: – when Fred [Wilson] and I did the Venice Biennale [U.S. Pavilion, 2003] –

MR. MARSHALL: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] That's the last time I saw you.

MS. GONCHAROV: Probably so.

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah. That was the last time I saw you.

MS. GONCHAROV: Those figures that were in the window?

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah.

MS. GONCHAROV: They were figures from that painting.

MR. MARSHALL: Oh, yeah.

MS. GONCHAROV: And the small boy in the pink, he's from that painting.

MR. MARSHALL: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

MS. GONCHAROV: Anyway, sorry to digress.

MR. MARSHALL: So anyway, I've been fortunate enough that my career has taken me to a lot of places where I've had a chance to see a lot of the kind of great works that you can only see if you go someplace to see them. And, you know, it's not likely that people would be able to kind of just take a trip to go to all of these places and see some of this work. Going to Berlin, I got to see a lot of the great Flemish paintings, you know, that stuff that you only got to see in books. And certainly they've got a lot of [Albrecht] Durer paintings and stuff there.

Going to Belgium, I saw a lot of big Rubens. [Laughs.] They've got a lot of Rubens stuff in there.

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: And then the great [Johannes] Vermeer paintings and stuff like that. Where was I? In Vienna, I think, there's a museum [Kunsthistorisches Museum]. The museum in Vienna, I think, has these great Vermeer paintings. The self-portrait [*The Artist in his Studio*, 1665-66], the portrait of the artist, with his back. I think that's in Vienna.

MS. GONCHAROV: I can't remember.

MR. MARSHALL: But just to see all those things in person. It means so much for somebody who wants to paint, really.

MS. GONCHAROV: So we've talked a lot about the painting. But can you talk a little bit about other things you do, like videos, sculpture – the Bunraku puppets are right out there, that you just did for the Wexner [Center for the Arts, Ohio State University, Columbus, OH]. So you've branched out from painting?

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah. And this is the great advantage to being at Otis at the time that I was there. Even though I didn't feel like the program was as rigorous as I had hoped it would be, that the pressure to really know and to learn something wasn't so great at the time, but the environment was dynamic, because there was a struggle going on to determine what the proper approach to art-making was supposed to be.

It was one of those things where you either – you had to go toe-to-toe with people who were fighting for something that they believed strongly in. And if you wanted to make paintings, you had to believe in making paintings strongly enough to be able to find the real good justification for continuing to do it. That was a good thing about being at Otis at the time. There was a genuine – what seemed like a genuinely competitive environment, where what you did seemed to matter.

But I left school, left Otis, thinking that going on to further education under those circumstances was a waste of time.

MS. GONCHAROV: So what did you do then?

MR. MARSHALL: So I left school, though, with a mission. And the mission was to prove that you could achieve all of the things that the M.F.A. was supposed to legitimize you for without one. I wasn't going to go to graduate school, because I thought, okay, if it's a fraud and a waste of time, then why would I waste my time? I'd better just get busy. My mission was to prove that you can achieve the levels of success that you aspire to, not based on who you hung out with, who you knew, but you could use in your work alone, and if



you knew something about what it was you were trying to do, you could put yourself in a position where you could achieve all the things that a person who went to school to get an M.F.A. was going to school for, but do it without them.

MS. GONCHAROV: So what was your first step?

MR. MARSHALL: So my – the first step –

MS. GONCHAROV: I mean as a professional. What did you do out of school? Did you have to get a job?

MR. MARSHALL: Well, I got a job. You know, when I got out of school, I got a job. The first job I had out of school was as a teacher's aide at elementary school. Actually, that's not true. Actually, the first thing I did was to work as an independent contractor out of school, doing painting, painting apartments and houses and doing light construction.

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: That's what I did, because that would give you the maximum amount of time. You know, you can kind of set your own schedule, in a way, earn money and do that. And so that was the first thing I did. And some of that came from having had the experiences and the skills that I learned from junior high school in those shop classes. So – and this kind of overconfidence I had, feeling like I can do almost anything.

So I did that for a while. And then I got a job as a teacher's aide in a sixth grade class at Carfay Center Elementary School in L.A. So I worked as a TA. And while I was there, because I was in art, I did some – every year, they did a school play. The sixth grade class did a sixth grade school production. And I did backdrops for *Peter Pan*, which was their first one. And then the next year, the teacher asked me if I would do the backdrops for their salute to Richard Rogers. So I did.

MS. GONCHAROV: So *Peter Pan*, is that related to the Lost Boys series?

MR. MARSHALL: No. The Lost Boys [1988-93] was well after that, long after that.

MS. GONCHAROV: Well after that, but I mean, is that maybe where you got the idea?

MR. MARSHALL: Oh, because, well, when I was in school at L.A. City College, I studied children's literature. I wanted to be a children's book illustrator when I started out.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh. Okay.

MR. MARSHALL: Because I had fallen in love with all of the great American and European children's book illustrators from the golden age. I was a big fan of N. C. Wyeth, Howard Pyle, Maxfield Parrish, Arthur Rackham, Randolph Caldecott. I was a big fan of all that.

MS. GONCHAROV: It's great stuff.

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah. I wanted to be a children's book illustrator. And so I studied children's literature at L.A. City College, and I also took a children's lit class at Santa Monica College. And then I took storytelling, you know, because that's what I wanted to be – the Brandywine School of illustrators, that stuff was great.

See, the thing is, when I was in elementary school and junior high school – the high school, there wasn't a whole lot of encouragement to read. And I didn't start reading the great classics until I was 19, until I was an adult, till I was out of school on my own. So I read *Treasure Island* [Robert Louis Stevenson. Boston: Roberts Bros., 1884], you know, and *Kidnapped* [Robert Louis Stevenson. London: Cassell & Co., 1886], and all that stuff – see, I didn't start reading that stuff until I was out of school. And it's like that combination of those pictures and those stories and those books, you know, that was magical.

MS. GONCHAROV: But after Otis, then you decided to be a professional.

MR. MARSHALL: Well, when I was introduced to Otis, I really wanted to be a fine artist, because that was the art history books. And my aspiration, my goal was to be in the history books. So when I left school at Otis, my mission, essentially, was to figure out how to get in there among all of those other artists, because that's what I was aspiring to, because it's not enough to just be successful as an artist. I had seen that Charles White was successful, to a degree, as an artist, but when I pick up the big surveys of art history, I'd never find Charles White in there.

And so I think, well, what is it? What's wrong? And I kept asking myself, is it something in his work? Or is it something about the perception of the people who are writing the histories? So what's the thing? Because when I looked at his work, I said, that work is as magnificent as anything. So how come it's not making it into the history books?

And because my whole orientation has always been about solving a problem, art, for me, had been a set of problems that needed to be solved, the first of which was, you know, the problem of black representation. That's one. The second of which was the status of the black artist in the history of art-making, and what position black artists occupied and what the implications of the absence of –

[Sound of airplane overhead.]

MS. GONCHAROV: Damn.

MR. MARSHALL: F-16s.

MS. GONCHAROV: From where? Is there a base around here?

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah. Their base is near here – not far. But they may be going – I don't know if there's – White Sox Stadium is right over there. They may be doing a flyover.

MS. GONCHAROV: Geez. [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: [Laughs.] But see, everybody's alarms are going off, because they come down low.

MS. GONCHAROV: I was going to say. I thought they were going to come through the building.

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah. They may be flying – either they're flying over, or they're doing practice flights now, because the air and water show is going to be coming up soon.

MS. GONCHAROV: Okay. Well, I hope they don't come back.

MR. MARSHALL: Oh, I have – it's amazing, though. I have video, because to see F-16s flying around the Sears Tower – these are not things that we are used to seeing.

MS. GONCHAROV: Or we think about a lot now after September 11th and being in New York.

MR. MARSHALL: Right.

MS. GONCHAROV: That freaked me out. [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: I don't live that far from the World Trade Center.

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah. But from here, it's like – there's other people around the world are terrorized by this a lot.

MS. GONCHAROV: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] By us.

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yes, yes.

MR. MARSHALL: I know. For us, it's entertainment. But this is what it sounds like when they're actually coming to drop bombs on you.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: So. Anyway. So that's another thing.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah, I've been fascinated by the sight of these kinds of planes over the city of Chicago.

MS. GONCHAROV: Have you painted them at all?

MR. MARSHALL: No, but I've started shooting video of it. I had a studio down in the South Loop. And that's closer to where the show is. So they actually do their turnarounds around downtown. They used to come right over my studio. It's like, the rattle and the roar and all that stuff. And they're down low. And then for some of them, this is the turnaround. So when the show is on, they come over this studio. They have to go all the way down to about 63rd Street to make the turn, the big turn to go around and get back up to North Avenue Beach, where the audience is supposed to be. But it's intense.

MS. GONCHAROV: It's intense, yes.

MR. MARSHALL: It is. It's intense.

MS. GONCHAROV: So.

MR. MARSHALL: So.

MS. GONCHAROV: So your first career?

MR. MARSHALL: We're talking about my concept of myself -

MS. GONCHAROV: You get out of school, and you want to be in the art history books. So you make a strategy to do that.

MR. MARSHALL: Right. Right. My concept of what it means to be an artist and what's at stake and what the goal is in terms of how to set your ambition. My ambition is always to be in amongst the important artists of the history books. And it has a lot to do with all of these different things that I do. So that if you go from the beginning, when I first picked up the art history - the how-to books and everything and the art history books in the library, and I'm trying to do sumi-e brush painting. I'm trying to do watercolors. I'm trying to do etchings. I'm trying to do woodcuts, and it's like I'm just going through all the materials and the methods and acquiring an understanding of how those things work.

So that I will figure out later on - it's like, when I finally arrive at what I need to do with that skill, then I would have it. And this is why when I started Otis, going to conceptual art was not - dropping the acquisition of the painting skills and knowledge was not an option until after I had acquired it. Then you could go on to the other things and sort of figure out how they work internally. So then you can know what the most appropriate methodology for whatever it is you are trying to present was. And you would choose based on what was most effective for presenting that idea you were trying to present, not just because you were somehow trapped in painting a certain way because that was just the way you painted. Or because you couldn't paint, you did some other kind of work. Or because you couldn't do that, you had to go and sort of pay somebody to fabricate your stuff for you.

I'm always looking at trying to hold the maximum ability to control the decisions that are made, all the way through the creation of a thing. Because if you just make a plan for the thing, and then you send it to somebody to make it, you have to accept what they give you when they send it back. And it may not actually work the way you really want it to, because there's something that you should have seen in the middle of the process that would have let you know that you've got to tweak it this way to get it right, as opposed to going the way you thought it was supposed to go. So I'm interested in that.

So if you look at what's at stake in the whole art historical enterprise, you have to really - oh, so there's a White Sox game. That's why they were flying over.

[Sound of fireworks.]

MR. MARSHALL: Those bombs, they'll be going off. Every time there's a home run, the White Sox hit a home run, they shoot off.

MS. GONCHAROV: Okay. So is that Wrigley - that's not Wrigley Field?

MR. MARSHALL: No, that's - that used to be Comiskey Park [now U.S. Cellular Field].

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, okay, because Wrigley Field is up north.

MR. MARSHALL: That's north, right.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: So anyway, if we go back to this whole thing, a part of what artists have to come to terms with is, who controls, or who decides. Who decides who makes it into the history books, and who decides who is left out? So if Charles White is not making it into the history books, you have to understand, really, what the reason for that is. Otherwise, you'll be operating under a series of assumptions that might not be true, might or might not be true.

So we can say that there aren't a lot of black artists represented in the history books because their work isn't good enough. Or you could say there are a lot of black artists not in the history books because white people are writing the history books, and they are not all that interested in having black artists in the book.

But how do we know which one of those things is true? Well, the only way you can find out which one of those things is true or not, or to what degree it's true, is to understand what the terms are under which the people who are represented in the history books have entered there. And some of that has to do with the experience in the Uffizi, where you look at what the work proposes and - or the scope of the work.

And so I think this acquisition of knowledge internally, in terms of how things work, is a part of what has to be - you have to understand - in order to develop a strategy for controlling whether you enter the art historical discourse yourself, or whether you're at the mercy of people who you don't know. People who you don't know and who don't have your best interests at heart.

If there are people out there who know more about what you're doing than you do, then you have a problem. And my thinking is you cannot allow other people to decide what your levels of success are going to be. It can't be a mystery to you. And it can't just be luck. So that means you've got to figure out exactly what has to be done in order to position yourself to be recognized for certain things.

So anyway, when I left school, that was what I left school trying to do. As a part of proving that you can achieve this success and say, okay, well, if going to school to get an M.F.A. means you're able to teach in the university, then how do you get to teach in the university without having an M.F.A.? What do I have to do with my work that would put me in a position to be able to get a job at the university? So I started to shape my work around that as a goal. And so I have my subject matter that I want to do. These are the things that matter to me in terms of subject matter. But it also matters to me that the work has a chance to get to the places where I think it ought to be.

And then the first goal was, how can I get to see more work in the museum that has black figures represented in a meaningful way? So that's the first goal. And I succeeded at that in the most important way, for me, when the L.A. County Art Museum bought one of those big paintings of mine out of the first big show I had at Koplin Gallery [Los Angeles, CA].

MS. GONCHAROV: So when was that?

MR. MARSHALL: That was 1993, I think it was, '93 or '94.

MS. GONCHAROV: So it took awhile. You got out of Otis at what?

MR. MARSHALL: Seventy-eight.

MS. GONCHAROV: Seventy-eight.

MR. MARSHALL: So December of '78. So it was effectively, like, 1980.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: Seventy-nine - 1979. And it took me until 1993, basically, to produce the work that performed all of the ways that I knew the work needed to perform in order to make it eligible for that museum purchase.

MS. GONCHAROV: So what was your first professional show out of school?

MR. MARSHALL: Well -

MS. GONCHAROV: And how did you do this? I mean, you've got to know the gallerist.

MR. MARSHALL: No.

MS. GONCHAROV: No?

MR. MARSHALL: Well, here's the thing.

MS. GONCHAROV: What was your strategy?

MR. MARSHALL: Well, on one level, my strategy - this is where this overconfidence that I talked about earlier comes in, and this assumption that I belong in the places. I belong in the art world. I'm one of them, you know. And not only am I one of them, but I'm going to be one of those people who work at the top. I just knew it. And because I thought I knew a thing or two, and I was highly opinionated, I acted like [laughs] -

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: - I knew what I was talking about. What is it? You speak with authority. It's like, when you say something, you say it like you know it. That's the key to the first part. And so I didn't believe in taking slides around; like shoot your slides, and you send them off and take them around to the galleries and show them, and stuff like that. But I'd put myself in a place where I was - where I'm just there. I'm a peer.

So one of my work-study jobs at Otis was as a gallery assistant for Hal Glickman in the gallery at the Otis - the main gallery at the Otis Art Institute. That was one of my work-study jobs. One of my other work-study jobs was a shop assistant down in the woodshop. And then one of my work-study [jobs] was a library assistant. Joan Hugo was the librarian at Otis at the time.

And so when I'm in in all of these places, I just say what I say. I talk about the stuff that I talk about. I talk about stuff that I'm interested in. And when I talk about art, I talk about it like I like it, in terms - like I like the art enterprise. And I talk about it like I know what I'm talking about. And so, when I worked with Hal Glickman, you know, we just sort of - you sit around, and you're just having a conversation about stuff. Work comes in for a show, and you just - you say what you think of it. You know, you talk about it.

And then from that job, when I graduated from Otis, one of the early jobs I had was as an exhibition preparator for Jan Baum's gallery in L.A. I worked with Jan Baum for about five years. I never took a slide in. I never showed her anything.

MS. GONCHAROV: But she knew you were an artist?

MR. MARSHALL: She knew I was an artist, yeah. But I never asked her to look at my work or anything. But when I'm in there working - you know, when artists' shows come up there, we're setting the gallery and stuff like that; I have ideas, too, you know. I'm - yeah, I think this will work. You act like you know what you're talking about. And people start assuming you do. So that was my - that's my strategy. And I waited till she asked me to see what I did before I showed her anything.

So - and this is this thing where you kind of - you can't let other people determine - you can't let other people have the power to decide whether you're in or not. And if you're operating in that domain, and it doesn't seem like you want anything from them, you know, you don't need anything from them, you're not trying to sneak in through the side, and get to know them so you can slip your slides in and stuff like that, that's - to me, I think that's important. I'm content to keep making my work, because I see myself as developing. And when the right time comes, people will see what I do when the time is right.

And so I'm comfortable not asking them to see my work. I think that was important. So we had a relationship over a long time before she ever asked to see anything. But in the meantime, you let other people tell people that they ought to see what you did.

And so the first show I had - actually, in 1979, I was in a show called "Newcomers, 1979," at the municipal art gallery at Barnsdall [Art] Park [Los Angeles, CA]. Josine Yonkle-Starles was the curator there. Do you remember her?

MS. GONCHAROV: No. Where is this?

MR. MARSHALL: This was in Barnsdall Park.

MS. GONCHAROV: In L.A.?

MR. MARSHALL: In L.A.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah, see. I don't know L.A., so.

MR. MARSHALL: Well, it was the municipal art gallery. It was the city art gallery. Josine was the curator. And it was right down below the Hollyhock House.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, okay.

MR. MARSHALL: In Barnsdall Park.

MS. GONCHAROV: Okay.

MR. MARSHALL: And her father was Marcel Yonkle.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, really? Oh, okay.

MR. MARSHALL: One of the original Dada group.

MS. GONCHAROV: Okay, I didn't know. Interesting.

MR. MARSHALL: She was the curator there. And every year, it was kind of like a sort of biannual thing. But it was newcomers, so new crop of artists. And so I was in that "Newcomers 1979" show, and that was the year after I graduated from Otis.

MS. GONCHAROV: Okay.

MR. MARSHALL: So I was in that show. And then Arnold Mesches knew the guy who was the curator at Mount St. Mary's College Art Gallery [Los Angeles, CA], and he told this guy Jim something - I can't remember what his name is - because I was making the collages then. This was when I was making the little abstract collages and stuff. So he said, "Oh, you should see these collages." And so this guy came and did a studio visit. And then I was in a show there at Mount St. Mary's, three artists from L.A. So I showed those collages.

And then I had a show at Pepperdine, in the gallery at Pepperdine University [1984, Malibu, CA]. I had started making bigger paintings on paper then. This was right when - oh, this guy James Turcotte was a guy who had seen the work at - either he saw the work at Mount St. Mary's or at the "Newcomers" show. And he was opening a gallery over off - near off of Melrose Avenue, and asked me if I would do a show [1983, James Turcotte Gallery, Los Angeles, CA], which turned out disastrously because he had this gallery done, and - I don't know what possessed him to do this interior design like this. But he had these sort of upholstered walls -

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: - with this sort of muslin or - but it was soft, where you couldn't really hang a picture on the wall, so you have to hang it from hooks from the ceiling.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: And then you had this sort of draped thing in the -

MS. GONCHAROV: Talk about old-fashioned, yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: The 1940s, yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: [Laughs.] And the day of my opening, it poured down raining. The owner of the building had taken the roof off. And it poured water into that place. That fabric took the water like a sponge. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.] So that didn't go well.

MR. MARSHALL: That didn't. Because we ended up going and - like, stick a hole, cut a hole in the fabric to let the water drain down out of there, because it was all just sort of gathered. It was a mess. It was a mess.

MS. GONCHAROV: But the next show went better? [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: Well -

MS. GONCHAROV: What was the next?

MR. MARSHALL: Then I had the show at Pepperdine. It came after that. And Ellie Blankford - do you know who Ellie Blankford is?

MS. GONCHAROV: Mm-mm, mm-mm. [Negative.]

MR. MARSHALL: She was married to Peter Clothier, who was the dean at Otis. When I first went there as an undergraduate, Peter Clothier was the dean. And then he left and became – he was a writer, you know, art historian, something like that. But Ellie Blankford was an art consultant. And Jan Baum – not Jan Baum, but Marty Koplin was new to L.A. She was going to open a gallery and had enlisted Ellie Blankford's assistance, to kind of tell them what they should look at and stuff. And when I had my show at Pepperdine University, Ellie Blankford had gone up and seen that show. And she told Koplin, "You should look at this guy."

And I got a phone call from them asking me if there was anybody representing my work. And there wasn't anybody, really, because James Turcotte, I think, had sort of fallen through. That was my first commercial gallery show, James Turcotte. And so he didn't – he had to move out of that space.

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.] Yes. I would imagine, yes.

MR. MARSHALL: [Laughs.] So that didn't go anywhere. So then Marty Koplin called me. And this was now 1980. And so the "Newcomers" was '79. And in 1980, I had done – I had stopped making the little collages, but yeah, I still had some of them. And actually, some people who had come by the studio had bought a couple of them. And then – you remember Lika [ph]?

MS. GONCHAROV: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah, Lika – they had a show called "Lika Sells Out," where they sold space by the square foot. You know, you could buy – this is anybody. It was an open thing. Anybody could buy some space, and they put up a show. They put up a show. And it was nice and elegant, you know, because it was clean. And Lika had a reputation. I'd bought some space, and I put some of those little collages in there. And they got favorable response from people. Then from the Pepperdine show and everything, Marty Koplin called me up and asked me if anybody was representing the work. And I said no. And they asked, well, if there wasn't anybody, if they could. I said, "Well, we can talk about it."

So I sent a couple of things over for them to have in the back room; you know how they used to do that thing. You put them in the back room. I had made that *Portrait of the Artist as a Shadow of His Former Self*, and I sent that over there. And somebody bought that. And immediately, they called me and said, "Okay, we're going to" – it's like, they sell something, then they start – you start planning for a show. So that was my first big commercial gallery experience. It's the first gallery that sold work, and I got money from it.

MS. GONCHAROV: Great. [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: [Laughs.] But it's still, it's that word of mouth. It's other people saying somebody should go see. It wasn't me sending slides around to people.

MS. GONCHAROV: No.

MR. MARSHALL: And that was always my approach. I'm okay. I was working a job. I was comfortable. I was at the time making more money than I had ever made in my life, you know. I had reached a year – I think I made \$10,000 one year. I was rich. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: That seems so funny.

MS. GONCHAROV: Well, I remember when that was a lot of money.

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah. It's like, that first year on my taxes when I hit the \$10,000 thing, I said, "Wow." It's like – and this was in the '80s. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: It's almost not that long ago. And it's like I had arrived. I went out, and I bought a new stereo component set. I had never had a new thing before then. I bought a new black-and-white television set. [Goncharov laughs.] And I shopped, and I bought a new CD – actually, it wasn't CD at the time.

MS. GONCHAROV: No, no, no.

MR. MARSHALL: It was a new dual-cassette phonograph radio.

MS. GONCHAROV: Mm-hm, mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MARSHALL: I still have it.

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: That was the first piece of equipment that I ever bought new. So this would have been 1981, '82. So I had not made \$10,000 before that year. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: And I felt like I could buy anything I wanted. I wasn't worried about paying my rent. It's like that kind of stuff. That was a new thing for me. So that's how my professional career started. So – and I'm still showing with Koplin.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, okay.

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah. I still show with him. But that was the first. And the great thing about it is that they didn't put any pressure on me to – it's like I had that one show. I didn't have another show with Koplin for six years.

MS. GONCHAROV: Why not? You weren't ready?

MR. MARSHALL: Well, so this is now 1981 or '82. And then I got the residency at the Studio Museum [of Harlem, New York, NY] in '84. So then I went to New York. So now I'm just sort of having all these new experiences and stuff. You know, I'm just soaking up being in New York.

MS. GONCHAROV: How long were you in New York?

MR. MARSHALL: Well, I didn't stay there but for two and a half years, though, because I met Cheryl in New York. I was going to stay in New York. But she's from Chicago, and she needed – we met, and she was needing to come back to Chicago to be nearer to her family. She had a daughter, and she had promised her daughter she wouldn't have to go to high school in New York and all that stuff. Because, you know, there was just the two of them. All their family was here in Chicago. They didn't really know anybody. And they were, you know, getting by in New York.

And then her mother had some operations on her eyes. Her father had some operations on his knees. Her sister developed MS [multiple sclerosis]. So it was all these events; she needed to come back.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: We had been seeing each other, and I said, "Well, hey, what the heck, you know? I can do what I have to do anywhere I am. So let's see how this plays itself out."

MS. GONCHAROV: So when was your first show in New York?

MR. MARSHALL: The first show in New York was with Jack Shainman [1993]. Well, I mean in a gallery.

MS. GONCHAROV: In a gallery.

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah.

MS. GONCHAROV: I mean, obviously, you showed at the Studio Museum [1986].

MR. MARSHALL: Right, the show at the Studio Museum, and then I met a lot of people in New York. And I was in a group show with Charles Abramson and a bunch of people.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: You know, a little artist group.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: Lorenzo Pace and other people.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, yes. I know them all. [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: [Laughs.] Yeah. And then I had met – I forget, what's his name, making Kenkeleba House [New York, NY].

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, yeah, what's his name? Overstreet, Joe Overstreet.

MR. MARSHALL: Joe Overstreet, right, in Kenkeleba House.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah, yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: So there was all that stuff – was going on. And Linda [Goode Bryant] had closed Just Above Midtown Gallery years before. When I was at the Studio Museum, I did an interview with Linda about what happened with Just Above Midtown Gallery, about the ideas and everything.

MS. GONCHAROV: Maybe I could tell you a different story. [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: I'm sure I could.

MR. MARSHALL: Probably. Probably. But anyway, so my first New York show was probably – oh, was it 1991 or something like that? Ninety-two? Somewhere around there, I think.

MS. GONCHAROV: With who? With Jack?

MR. MARSHALL: With Jack Shainman.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, really? You go back with Jack that far?

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah. Yeah.

MS. GONCHAROV: Where was he then? He was in the East Village at that time?

MR. MARSHALL: He was on Broadway, at 560 Broadway.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, he'd already gone there. Okay. He'd already gone to Broadway, okay.

MR. MARSHALL: Right. He was at 560 Broadway. That's where we had the first show. And that was before the Lost Boys. It was '91, I think it was; 1991 was when that show was.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: How we met – he was doing a studio visit at another artist's studio. And he saw a postcard from my show on the bulletin board in this other artist's studio. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: Are you still friends with that artist?

MR. MARSHALL: I don't remember who it was. I don't know who it was. But he was doing a studio visit with somebody, and he saw this. And he said, "Oh, who is that guy?" And he called around, looking for me. And he called somebody who knew that I was in Chicago. Actually, he may have – oh, you know what? He called Brockman Gallery.

MS. GONCHAROV: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MARSHALL: Because I had worked at Brockman for a period. He called, and he ended up – I think he called Alonzo Davis.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, Jesus. [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: And Alonzo said, "He's in Chicago. I think he's in Chicago." And he finally called around and found somebody who had a number for me. And he called me. He was – was he coming for the art fair early on or something? He called, and we had a meeting at Harry Caray's [Italian Steakhouse]. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: And he told me. He said he was at so-and-so's studio, and he saw this picture of mine and, you know, wanted to know if he could show the work.

MS. GONCHAROV: That's great.

MR. MARSHALL: And that's how we met. So we had that meeting. We talked about the possibility. He came by the studio I had. And we set a date for a show, and that was the first show at Jack Shainman.

MS. GONCHAROV: Hey. [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah. So that's how it started. And we've been working together ever since, and I've still been with Koplín. The thing is, I don't do a lot of gallery shows like that, because I had been doing – I got a lot of museum attention, you know.

MS. GONCHAROV: And you got the MacArthur [John D. and Catherine T. Foundation Fellowship]. What year did you get the MacArthur?

MR. MARSHALL: Ninety-eight [1997].

MS. GONCHAROV: Ninety-eight.

MR. MARSHALL: Because it's like '97-'98, I think. But all of this stuff, this mission thing – I have a bigger goal for everything, which in some ways determines how I operate as an artist and all the things that I do.

So I came to Chicago. When I got here, I didn't know anybody but Cheryl. I had had an uncle who lived in Chicago, who I didn't really know. I only saw him once, on my way to New York. I drove to New York from L.A. I stopped in Chicago because I wanted to see him. But he had throat cancer at the time. And so he died within the year after I came through here. So he was dead.

So when we came back here, I only knew Cheryl, and then by extension, sort of her family, I got to know. And then I got a room at the YMCA on 50th Street and Indiana [Avenue]. And Cheryl was staying at her mother's place. My room was six foot by nine foot.

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: And I worked in there. I painted standing on the bed. I made monoprints on a little press I had in there. But I kept working. I did a series of paintings. And some of those paintings are paintings that I showed at Jack Shainman.

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: [Laughs.] I stayed at the Y for a couple of years, and I was working at – when I got to Chicago, I got a job at Anderson Brothers Moving Company. And so that's where I worked when I first got here.

MS. GONCHAROV: Okay.

MR. MARSHALL: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MS. GONCHAROV: And when did you start teaching here at the University of Illinois, right?

MR. MARSHALL: At University of Illinois [Chicago], yeah. And actually, the irony – it's like, when I came here, the very first day I got here, I picked up the phone – I took the phone book, and I looked in the phone book for places that did things that I knew I could do. And since I'd worked at L.A. Packing and Crating, yeah, I had the experience building crates and moving art and things like that. So I saw Anderson Brothers Moving Company listed – the first number I called. And he said, "Come on down." And I called from a pay phone. I had gone to the job center to at least put in an application to the job center where, you know, if jobs came up, then they would call you. But I had looked in the phone book, and I called that number. He said, "You can come put in an application today." I drove up there from the phone booth, put in my application, and I started working at Anderson Brothers the next day.

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: And so I worked there for a while. And moving work is kind of seasonal. So it got to the point where things were kind of slow; it was kind of off and on. You're not really making all that much money. It was a good, decent salary. But when it's intermittent, you've got to do something else. So I had a brief stint as a telemarketer for the Art

Institute [of Chicago] in their boiler room.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, God. [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: [Laughs.] That was awful.

MS. GONCHAROV: Must have been quiet revenge when they bought a painting, though.

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah. But that was awful, for their capital funds. Raising money like that – I mean, they hire these companies that do the telemarketing, and they teach you these techniques for squeezing money out of people. But I didn't have a knack for that, really. And you didn't make a lot of money unless you earned a lot of money. So I did that for a little while.

And then when the art fair came up – I didn't even know it, but I looked in the back of *Art in America* magazine, and they had listings of companies and stuff. And I found the company in Chicago that did art handling, Icon. And I called them up. And I went over and filled out an application for them. And it just happened to be at the time the art fair was coming on, and they needed extra help. And so I worked with them at the art fair that year. And then I stayed on as a full-time employee. Because, you know, I drove a truck when I was in L.A. for L.A. Packing and Crating. I made crates for L.A. Packing and Crating. I did art installations for them, and I had worked for Jan Baum Gallery and all this. So I knew how to do all that stuff.

MS. GONCHAROV: All that stuff, yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: And I was good at it. And so I started working at Icon. I worked at Icon until 1990, when Julie Dash finally raised enough money to do the full shoot of *Daughters of the Dust* [1991]. And I quit at Icon, went down to South Carolina for 14 weeks, worked on *Daughters of the Dust*.

MS. GONCHAROV: That must have been quite an experience.

MR. MARSHALL: Oh, it was great. It was challenging. It was hard. But it was really a great experience. I had a tough, but good, time.

MS. GONCHAROV: What did you do exactly?

MR. MARSHALL: I was the production designer, art director, set maker.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah, everything, everything.

MR. MARSHALL: [Laughs.] It was like I was the one-person art department, because I was the only person who had skills. Everybody else was just a kind of PA [production assistant], under me. So I had to do almost everything. So I did that.

MS. GONCHAROV: And you did another –

MR. MARSHALL: For 14 weeks.

MS. GONCHAROV: That's great. That must have been wonderful. You did another project, too, another film, right?

MR. MARSHALL: I worked on *Sankofa* [1993] with Haile Gerima.

MS. GONCHAROV: I don't know that one.

MR. MARSHALL: That's a film that's about the Maroons [escaped and resettled slaves] and the slavery boats on the island in Jamaica.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh really? What's the name of it again?

MR. MARSHALL: *Sankofa*.

MS. GONCHAROV: *Sankofa*. Okay.

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah. So it's the slave uprising in Jamaica. Well, this would have been – this wouldn't have been exactly when they won independence.

MS. GONCHAROV: But when they drove out the British, yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: Right.

MS. GONCHAROV: Because René Cox has a whole series where she plays Queen Nanny.

MR. MARSHALL: Right, right.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah. I didn't know that was a film, though.

MR. MARSHALL: So yeah, *Sankofa* is that film.

MS. GONCHAROV: *Sankofa* is the film.

MR. MARSHALL: And it's, basically, a young woman who's a model, fashion model, who sort of ends up transported back to slavery.

[END MD02 TR03.]

MS. GONCHAROV: I want to talk about pop culture influences, too, that maybe came from your time in L.A. and the Black Panthers and all that, and installations that have to do with all that popular culture, '60s stuff.

MR. MARSHALL: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] Well, some of it still comes from the times. It's that whole thing, that Jack in the Box thing during the riots. That was important as an image. But it was also important in terms of trying to figure out what the dynamics, the political dynamics and the cultural dynamics, of the time were. If you were born in the 1950s, what we lived through in terms of experience is just – I mean, it's just amazing.

So here we are, with the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the assassination of Martin Luther King, the assassination of Malcolm X, the assassination of Robert Kennedy, Medgar Evers, the bombing at 16th Street Baptist Church [Birmingham, AL], the [Michael] Goodman, [James] Schwerner, and [Andrew] Chaney thing [murders], the shooting of James Meredith – it's like all of that stuff. The Watts riots, and then the student protest on campus for the Black Students Union, BSU. And when I was at Carver, that was like a hot bed. I mean, it was raw in '68 and '69.

The Black Panthers – Carver Junior High School was four blocks from the Black Panthers headquarters on Central Avenue. They had a big shootout. This is where Geronimo Pratt was taken into custody in that shootout with the LAPD [Los Angeles Police Department] on Central Avenue. And so – I'm there. We're in class. And that shootout was going on just blocks away. They used the athletic field at Carver Junior High School as a staging area for the police officers sending reinforcements back and forth up to Central for the shootout. And it sounded like a Vietnam War going on just up the block.

So you see, it's that stuff. During the Black Students Union protest and stuff, at Carver we were out of school for weeks. There were rallies and stuff going on on campus all the time. And what were they arguing for, to start teaching black history as part of the curriculum. [Laughs.] And stuff like that.

You saw teachers being beaten up by students, seeing school, the classrooms and stuff, set on fire. You know, there were walkouts from class and stuff every day. There were big rallies on the field. Going to school was sort of optional, you know, for a period. It was rough. It was raw. Now, all of this stuff is, like, in a five- or six-year time span, from the assassination of John Kennedy up to the shootouts and the killings of Black Panther leaders, Fred Hampton and Mark Clarke and all, in '69. From the end of '63 to '69, it's like, that six years was intense.

And then you've got the '68 [Democratic National] Convention in Chicago. You've got Kent State [University, OH, shootings, 1970]. It's like, what is that, the curse, "May you live in interesting times."

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.] Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MARSHALL: It's like we have lived in some interesting times. And as a generation, I don't know if there's another generation that has experienced what we have had to negotiate, from the Vietnam War through Watergate through – I mean, the assassination attempt on Gerald Ford, the assassination attempt on Ronald Reagan. Man, it's like –

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah. And it continues. I mean, we're still making history, still in historical times.

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah. Yeah. There's been almost nothing but chaos for this generation. And we were aware of these things, as children, because I remember, too, like a lot of people, when JFK was shot.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, yeah. Everybody knows where they were, yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: Well, we're sitting all day long in front of the television, getting every update with the grownups, you know? Looking at the *Life* magazine replay of those shots, frames from the [Abraham] Zapruder films. Like I'm looking at that, too. It's 1963; I'm eight years old. And I know it. I'm aware of that.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah, I was 10.

MR. MARSHALL: And I'm in L.A. when Robert Kennedy was shot at the Ambassador Hotel. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: Those kind of things are things that are not supposed to happen. And when you're a child, they're especially not supposed to happen. It's like, to kill the president? To kill a presidential candidate? To kill the most – one of the most – Martin Luther King is one of the most recognizable people; Malcolm X – it's like – and then George Wallace getting shot, you know, later. It's like, what in the world is going on?

And then with the riots and stuff, it's like, well, this stuff is shaping my sense of what your duty as a person who represents things is supposed to be. And in the midst of all of that, you're supposed to somehow find some pleasant things to do, as well. I mean, you've got to find something to enjoy in this life, as well. And even that was fraught with a lot of complicated kinds of situations, because after the Watts riots, we went to the first Watts festival, my brother and I, with my uncle, my father's brother Calvin, who was in the navy. He spent all of his life in the navy, from the time he was 17; he spent 35 years in the navy.

And we went with him to the first Watts festival. It was held at Jordan High, on the playing field at Jordan High. And chaos broke out. It was just wild. My brother and I, we got separated from our uncle, because the crowds just started surging and pushing. And, you know, maybe there was a fight somewhere, and then it was like people running. It was just out of control. Half the acts – James Brown said he wasn't coming on. "If things don't calm down, I'm not coming on." And they ended up canceling the second half of the thing because they couldn't get order back.

It's like the whole thing was just a kind of maelstrom. And for me, what I was doing was simply observing. I'm just looking at a lot of stuff, just sort of walking through it. What I see are complications in the whole problematic, because – well, on the one hand, you have people protesting on the school campus about the miseducation of black students. But on the other hand, I would say, when I go into the library, I don't see a whole lot of people up in the library, either. It's like, well, they've got all kinds of books in the library. If you want to know some stuff, you can go in the library and get a book. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: But I don't see a whole lot of people in here. And so it's like, okay, well, on the one hand you're protesting about the lack of education. But on the other hand, you're not making any effort to fill in some of the gaps on your own in places where you can. So I'm confused a little about what people want.

Now, there are transitions from the late '60s into the '70s taking place, too, and this is where you're talking about pop culture on some level. Well, my brother and I were among the first kids in our school in the '60s to have what they called the "natural" cut. You know, it's this new hairstyle called the "natural."

MS. GONCHAROV: Right, right, right.

MR. MARSHALL: And I remember when we went to school after – my mother cut our hair like that. But it felt funny, [laughs] because before that, people used to have the crew cut thing.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: So now you're coming with this kind of rounded little thing, and your hair is kind of a little longer. And it felt funny because people were looking at you. Even then, people looked at you because that was different. And then the Afros started to get bigger and bigger. And then it became a big thing to have, like, the big Afro. And then this thing in the '70s, when *Superfly* [1972] and *The Mack* [1973] – these movies came out. [Laughs.] And then the processed hair, which they called the "Superfly," actually, when you have – back then we were having perms. Or you start out by pressing your hair with an iron. But then you advanced from that to a perm.

And then the clothes that people were wearing were these kind of pimp-style outfits. I had a lot of friends who were wannabe hustlers, you know. And the hustler as a kind of hero became a viable character in the neighborhood, because they were coolest people. The leather coats, the trench coats, the Homburg hats, slack suits that you had made – designed yourself and had made down on Sixth Street, at the tailors down on Fifth and Sixth Street in L.A.

So – and I was attracted to that, too, because when I was in high school, we spent a lot of time in pool halls. And we did a lot of gambling amongst the group of guys that I liked hanging around. We shot pool for money. And we played dice for money. And the interesting thing, it's like nothing changes, because I'm watching teenage boys now do exactly the same stuff.

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: Out behind our house, other side of the alley, there are some new rental units and stuff. But actually, just a couple of nights ago, four young teenage boys out behind the house gather. It's like nothing changes. Nothing changes. They're exactly where we were 30 years ago, 40 years ago.

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: They're exactly where we were. The only difference between them and us is that almost all of us graduated from high school. We all graduated from high school. Even the hustlers graduated from high school back then.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah, yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: That's the difference. They're not graduating from high school now, you know. So that was the difference between them. But I'm attracted to that. It's both those sides of the culture. I mean, I like being involved in the art world, but there's something about vernacular street culture at the popular level like that that is also appealing to me. And that has a lot to do with the shape of the comics project that I'm working on.

MS. GONCHAROV: Okay. Oh, you're still working – because I know you –

MR. MARSHALL: Oh, still. It's ongoing. And it's expanded.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh.

MR. MARSHALL: You saw it at *documenta* [12, 2007].

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: Right. So that's a part of the expanded version.

MS. GONCHAROV: So is that turning into a real –

MR. MARSHALL: It ultimately will become a graphic novel.

MS. GONCHAROV: Really?

MR. MARSHALL: Yes. That's one manifestation. It will become a graphic novel. And then I want to make an animated feature film from that. That's what I'm working towards.

MS. GONCHAROV: Okay.

MR. MARSHALL: So right now, it exists as an artwork, because it's fragments. I mean, it's structured so that it can be fragments now.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: But a part of what that –

MS. GONCHAROV: But it has a story? It has a narrative?

MR. MARSHALL: It has a narrative. There are three narratives right now.

MS. GONCHAROV: And there are characters?

MR. MARSHALL: They're overlapping.

MS. GONCHAROV: Okay.

MR. MARSHALL: Three overlapping narratives. It's the Rhythm Master, which is the –

MS. GONCHAROV: Which is the Yoruba –

MR. MARSHALL: The Yoruba, the gods, the African-hero sort of narrative. But that is a parallel narrative to P-Van.

MS. GONCHAROV: What's P-Van? [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: Well, P-Van is "passenger van." It's short for "passenger van."

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, okay, okay, P-Van.

MR. MARSHALL: P-Van – that's what you call it. And that's based on – when I first got this studio here, there were some retired guys, and then some other guys who used to park in a van right out here in front of my studio every single day, seven days a week, from midday till night. And they would just sit in the van, having conversations about all kinds of things. And they were playing music from jazz to blues to R&B. They're going the gamut, you know. And so the P-Van part of the comic narrative is the conversations these guys have in the van. You don't see any people. You just see the van parked down the street. And there's conversation, dialogue taking place. And they talk about everything.

But the important thing about it, for me, is that the language they use is vernacular language. It's crude. It's crude, but it talks about important social and political issues. And then we even talk about art and all kinds of things. Because I think it's important to hear certain kinds of conversations take place in that voice. So you got the vulgarity of the voice, but it's talking about – it's like, what happens when those guys start talking about [Jacques] Derrida?

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.] Brilliant. Brilliant.

MR. MARSHALL: [Laughs.] And this is how they will talk about it. They will talk about [Jacques] Lacan, too. But this is how they will talk about it. And part of that comes from this realization that we really don't know anything about these people. We may have assumptions about who they are and what they are capable of. But we don't know. And especially, when we hear people speak a certain kind of way, we assume certain things about them. And so part of this whole narrative with the Rhythm Master is to undermine these assumptions that you make: because people speak like this, they're not also talking about elevated or complicated things.

And part of it's – there's a guy who's like a street – he's semi-homeless. He does some handy work for me. He cuts my grass in the back and picks up trash sometimes. But I was always struck by the fact that he knows more about everything that's going on in this neighborhood than anybody. And he is a highly intelligent guy, except he's living so close to the edge that you can actually see these cycles of decline and recovery in him. And I don't know that he uses drugs. I've never seen him high or intoxicated. So I don't think it's that.

But when I talk to him, it's like he knows everything. And then he surprised me, saying, "I saw that thing on PBS with you." [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: In *Art21* [ *Art in the Twenty-First Century*, PBS television series]. He said, "I saw that thing. I saw you on PBS." And it was just this weird sort of dynamic way. He seems like he's a homeless guy who you think – it's like next week I won't see him because he won't have made it. But he hangs on. And I pay him. He will take anything I give him. But I pay him reasonably, you know, for what he does. And when he works, he is thorough. He works hard. I asked him one day. I said, "Donald, what is this about?"

MS. GONCHAROV: Why?

MR. MARSHALL: It's like, "Why are you choosing this?" "Because," I said, "when you work, you work hard. You're thorough." He's out from morning till night. And in the evening, it's like 11 o'clock, I'll see him washing somebody's car. I said, "Why are you doing this?" And then he told me this elaborate story. [Laughs.] And I don't know if it's true or not. I have no way of confirming it.

But this elaborate story about, he was a sheriff's deputy. And he had a confrontation with the sheriff, with the Cook County sheriff, who was hitting on his wife. And he confronted the sheriff. And through a series of events, he was trying to press charges, and but it ended up ruining him, essentially, somehow. He was telling me that he's sort of waiting on some kind of settlement from the thing.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh.

MR. MARSHALL: And, I don't know. I don't know. It's just this elaborate sort of thing. Sometimes he would come by, and he would need to make money because he's got a daughter that has asthma, and he needs to get some money to buy an inhaler. And I don't know. I've never seen his daughter. I know he was a squatter in some of these abandoned houses down the block. So I know that's how he was living. But he always talks about having this daughter who needs medical attention and stuff.

And then that story about the sheriff, and he was sort of waiting. His lawyer was trying to get some negotiated settlement or something like that, and nothing's coming – I don't know. But he is so bright. So I said, you can never underestimate because of what people look like and the circumstances you find them in. You don't know what they know. And so that's why I'm putting in the mouths of the people, these are the things that they talk about. And it's more than you ever imagined. And they have insight on these things, too.

There are a lot of things that I thought, in the dialogue and the conversations about race in America, that have gone unsaid that I think need to be said out loud. And so this comic has been a vehicle that's allowed me say some of those things. My thing is that we'll never really have the proper conversation until all these things are heard, because what most people are trying to do is negotiate terrain that preserves a certain level of comfort, while trying to advance the conversation a micro-meter. And I think that's why we keep having to revisit these same issues over and over and over again.

So there's that story. And then there's the story – the narrative, the Ho's Stroll.

MS. GONCHAROV: The what?

MR. MARSHALL: Ho's Stroll.

MS. GONCHAROV: Ho's Stroll, okay.

MR. MARSHALL: Ho's Stroll. It's what prostitutes, it's what they're talking about.

MS. GONCHAROV: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MARSHALL: Because there's prostitution in this neighborhood. On my block, there's been prostitution ever since I've been there.

MS. GONCHAROV: Do you live around here, too?

MR. MARSHALL: Just three, four blocks from here. So anyway, the comic is a vehicle to put all of this kind of dialogue in play and to complicate the issue a lot and to bring this vernacular tone to all of this – the political, cultural, theoretical, historical conversation.

MS. GONCHAROV: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] So how are you going to distribute this comic? I mean, try to look for a publisher that will take it to a wide, wide audience?

MR. MARSHALL: Well, when it's time, yeah. I would like for it to be published as a popular graphic novel, you know. But that also goes to the whole thing with the comic with the Black Panther character.

MS. GONCHAROV: You know Calvin Reid, right?

MR. MARSHALL: Who?

MS. GONCHAROV: Calvin Reid?

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah.

MS. GONCHAROV: Because – does he know about this?

MR. MARSHALL: Probably. I'm sure he knows, because he's familiar with my work.

MS. GONCHAROV: With your work, yeah, but does he actually know you're –



MR. MARSHALL: We've not talked about this. I've met – sat down and talked with him –

MS. GONCHAROV: Because, you know, he knows everybody in the field, so he's the go-to guy. [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: When you want to get it published.

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah. Well, when the time comes. Because the other thing, it's like, when you're talking about pop culture, because a lot of what I do in my work has to do with presence and absence, with the absence of black people in certain domains of popular culture and high culture.

The problem with the Black Panther as a character, and all black superheroes that have ever been introduced into the comics genre, is that few of them have managed to capture the public's imagination in the ways that Batman and Superman and X-Men and all of those characters have. Those characters have longevity.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: Every generation of kids who are interested in comics will have to deal with them in one way or another. They can be – they've been franchised. And they keep making that work in perpetuity. And it's like, when Gil Kane stopped doing Batman, well, they just send somebody else. Other people just pick it up, because the character has achieved mythic status, in which it will always be viable. But you can't say that about black characters in comics. There are no black characters that have achieved that level of viability. And there are certainly none created by black artists who have achieved that kind of viability.

And so this is another one of those problems that has to be solved. When I started the Rhythm Master project, a part of it was to try and begin to see if you can develop a black-centered, black character-driven, black culture-driven comic book that can achieve the same status as X-Men or Batman or something like that.

MS. GONCHAROV: Well, the Yoruba gods are great superheroes.

MR. MARSHALL: A lot of people have tried to do Yoruba-based comics.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, have they? Because I don't follow comics so much.

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah. There are some other black comic artists who have tried to do –

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, really?

MR. MARSHALL: Right. And the Yoruba-based characters are always the one.

MS. GONCHAROV: Of course. Shango [Thunder god in Yoruba religion].

MR. MARSHALL: Right.

MS. GONCHAROV: He just kicks butt. He kicks butt.

MR. MARSHALL: Right, because they've got the Pantheon. Right. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: But none of them have taken hold. None of them – all of the black comic companies that have started up to try to produce comics, they do three, four, five issues – they're gone, because they can't – and this goes back to this other question. What is it in? Is it in the audience? Or is it in the production of the comics themselves? How do black people get into a position where they can compete at the highest level with the confidence that they can actually get in the game and win?

And so this is the challenge. It's the same as getting into the museum as an artist with that image – not getting in there as an abstract artist, where you're kind of masquerading as a conventional, kind of like a generic artist. But can you bring that with a black figure? Because I see, in general, that the black figure is the problem. People say the black body has always been the problem that America has had a difficult time trying to negotiate. It's like, once they got us over here, you know, they had to let us go. [Laughs.] Now they don't know what to do with us.

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: And we're starting to ask for stuff [laughs], you know, that they don't want to give us. And this is the fundamental problem. It's like, well, now what do you do? What's the status of black people in the country? You know, and at what level are we going to be able to compete? Will we always be in just second-tier positions? Or can we compete and win at the top in more domains than just music and sports?

It's like, the moment they opened up the playing field to certain parts of the sports, then black people took over. Couldn't nobody else get in. So the last remaining areas to be challenged are, on one level, I would say intellectual, in the intellectual arena, and in the visual arts as an intellectual arena. For me, it's sort of telling that in the beginning of the arts – like the first artist, the very first black artist to show at the Museum of Modern Art [New York, NY] was William Edmondson.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, my. Really?

MR. MARSHALL: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] Very first show at the Museum of Modern Art.

MS. GONCHAROV: What year was that?

MR. MARSHALL: This was, I think, 1930-something. It was 1930-something.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah, yeah. If I had guessed, I would have said Jacob Lawrence.

MR. MARSHALL: No. They bought the Migration Series [1940-41] of Jacob Lawrence.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah, I know they did that.

MR. MARSHALL: But before that, William Edmondson was the first [black] artist to have a show. But he's a folk artist. He was an outside artist.

MS. GONCHAROV: Of course, of course.

MR. MARSHALL: So then – they split with the Phillips Collection [Washington, DC] on the Migration Series for Jacob Lawrence. But they also at one time talked about that work as if it was folk art, too, because he didn't go to the academy or anything. And then when you talk about the status of artists, there are things that are said by black artists who are Outsider artists, who are naïve and untrained artists, that are never said about black artists who come through the academy. So you have Bill Taylor trading at levels that no trained black artist had been able to achieve until recently.

And then I read where – Michael Kimmelman wrote [in the *New York Times*] a review of the Gee's Bend quilts, the quilts from the women of Gee's Bend [AL].

MS. GONCHAROV: Right.

MR. MARSHALL: And he said something that – I'd never heard him say things like that about black painters. He said, "These quilts – this work – this is the best painting that has been made in America in generations." [Laughs.] But they are also women who are in the Outsider realm.

MS. GONCHAROV: Outsider.

MR. MARSHALL: So it's like all of the black folks who achieve this sort of mythic status as artists are always people who were working as naïves, untrained, kind of natural artists. When the artists who are hanging around with the modernists, with [Robert] Motherwell, or all those people, it's like this Norman Lewis problem. Those artists – Alma Thomas and all those people – they never get talked about. Those kinds of terms never get used for their work.

MS. GONCHAROV: Never for women, either, I mean, white women, either.

MR. MARSHALL: Right.

MS. GONCHAROV: I mean, Louise Bourgeois was the first woman to show at MoMA. And that was in the '80s.

MR. MARSHALL: Right. Yeah. Although Agnes Martin had been a – she didn't have a show at MoMA, I guess, but she –

MS. GONCHAROV: She was shown.

MR. MARSHALL: Right.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah, yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: Right. She had achieved a kind of a status.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah. But just a handful.

MR. MARSHALL: Right, right, a handful of them who sort of operate kind of in - like Helen Frankenthaler, you know.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: Who was present at the creation, you know?

MS. GONCHAROV: And still considered way under -

MR. MARSHALL: And still considered secondary to people like Morris Louis and stuff like that. And my thing is, these are problems that you can't leave to authorities who you can't identify. You can't leave it to them to decide that this work now deserves this kind of treatment. So you've got to find out what the key is to backing these people into a corner where they have to acknowledge the work. There's got to be something beyond the subjectivity of the viewers' response to the work that determines - that forces them to acknowledge that this is something that we've got to deal with. So that's my whole thing.

And so I'm trying to do some of that with this kind of popular imagery. As long as the work remains figurative, it clings to this kind of popular domain. And I'm okay with that because I think the challenge is to be able to get that work into the position that you want it to get into. Then it will have done something. To abandon that would be a failure on my part. Because it's easy to do - I think it's much easier to do abstracted and conceptually oriented work and to have it sort of refer to black culture and the racial thing. It's easy to do that. But it's harder to do it when you've got to have the black figure in there.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah. It always has been hard. I mean, I think about - I shouldn't be talking about this - but just Above Midtown [Gallery], you wouldn't show a black figurative artist.

MR. MARSHALL: I know.

MS. GONCHAROV: But you could show a white figurative artist.

MR. MARSHALL: Right.

MS. GONCHAROV: But not a black figurative artist, because it was too much of that sentimental, the black romanticism.

MR. MARSHALL: Right, right, right.

MS. GONCHAROV: Which is interesting because when I was working there, Linda [Bryant] had promised this young black woman a show. I don't even remember her name. And I think Linda barely knew the woman, obviously didn't know what the work was going to be. And she comes in with these really sappy, almost black-velvet paintings, just exactly that. So it happens. Because I was always the one to start dealing with this kind of stuff. She says, "Well, you're going to have to tell her that she can't show this stuff," where I'm thinking it should be Linda telling her she can't show it. But it's up to me. [Laughs.]

So it was very awkward, but in a way, the stuff was kind of interesting.

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah.

MS. GONCHAROV: I mean, it was still bad. It really wasn't - it was not well done.

MR. MARSHALL: Right.

MS. GONCHAROV: So what she did was, okay, you want a conceptual artist? You want an abstract artist? She went out and bought pig hearts, and she did an installation with the pig hearts that rotted through the month, but practically drove us all out, Linda included.

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah. Same woman?

MS. GONCHAROV: Same woman. She said, "Okay. You want conceptual? You got it, honey." [Laughs.] It was very smart. I don't think she ever ended up having a career at all. I can't even remember her name. But it was a nice revenge. I thought it was good. [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah, yeah. But I've arrived at this notion - at this point - where I think, okay, if we look at this sort of black, popular figurative tradition, and people are repelled by it, there's something wrong with that work in its treatment. And you can expose the differences. But is it the subject matter, meaning that the black figure by itself is problematic? Or is it the treatment of the black figure that's the most problematic? And if it's that, then whatever the problems are with that work, we have to figure out how to solve that problem so that that work with those figures can move up to another level. That's an achievement, to me. That's an achievement.

MS. GONCHAROV: Where in those early days, the achievement was just to try to be part of the mainstream, which meant you had to be conceptual or abstract.

MR. MARSHALL: Well, yeah. And that still is the case.

MS. GONCHAROV: Well, less so, but -

MR. MARSHALL: Well, I think it's still predominantly the case.

MS. GONCHAROV: Really?

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah.

MS. GONCHAROV: Even with so much figurative work being done, I mean, by everybody?

MR. MARSHALL: Well -

MS. GONCHAROV: I mean, it's fashion, too.

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah. I mean, there are moments -

MS. GONCHAROV: There are moments, yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: - in which it comes out. And right now there seems to be a moment in which there is space for black figure representation in the marketplace, because, you know, the marketplace is kind of out of control on some levels.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah.

MR. MARSHALL: So you can have people like Kehinde Wiley operating. And maybe Beverly McIver, you can have doing stuff. Right now, in terms of black figure representation, especially in painting, those are the only two artists other than me who are committed to, or are presenting that kind of work and have achieved a certain amount of recognition. And Whitfield Lovell, but Whitfield Lovell's work is kind of different because that work depends on another kind of patina of sentimentality. And you could kind of say Alison Saar, but I just think Alison Saar is sort of outside.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah, I think of her as more a sculptor anyway. I haven't really seen her work in quite a while.

MR. MARSHALL: Right. She hasn't done any graphic work in a while.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah, I didn't think so.

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah. But that's because on some level, the market kind of allows for a certain kind of thing. But the way the work is talked about and the capacity of the work to enter into a certain level of discourse, there's still a barrier when you have the black figure in there because you have to sort of locate what the work is really about. And at the same time, then, it's about the black figure, it has to be about something else, too. And the something else that it has to be about is the nature of picture making in ways that, in a lot of the work that has black figure representation, it's not. It's usually really about the black figure. But it's not about the black figure in a certain kind of pictorial space. And that's the barrier.

That's the thing that keeps the work from getting to another kind of discourse, and a discourse that the mainstream and the people who get to put things in art history books - that's the discourse that the work never aspires to, for them. That's the way out. Because it's not talking about the nature of figure representation in certain kinds of pictorial genres. It's just talking about the figure, the black figure.

The black figure has narrative subjectivity; it doesn't have formal subjectivity, meaning that being in this space matters because that figure is black, and it's in this kind of picture. That's a more interesting question to people who tend to not respond well to the sentimental kind of black figure representation. The questions end up being, what does that figure mean in this kind of picture? Not, what does the black figure mean, itself?

So that's the question. When I started making the Vignette paintings, and even when I started doing the Garden Project paintings, it was more about that figure - it was as much about that figure being in this kind of picture structure as it was about the narrative of the black figures themselves, per se. That was just the catalyst. That was a way of bringing the black figure into a subject relationship. But the whole thing was about the apparatus that's built up around those black figures, that they're in this figure, but it's because they're in this figure, and you don't find them in figures that are composed with this kind of geometry or with this kind of compositional structure or this kind of thing. That's what that's been about.

And the Vignette paintings have been largely about that same kind of thing. It's like, what kinds of pictures don't you see black figures in when you see into the museum? And so I'm trying to make those kinds of pictures with the black figure in them, but not by copying. I could take a Boucher painting and change those figures into black figures.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yeah, like [Robert] Colescott.

MR. MARSHALL: Right. But that's not it. That's not it. That's not what you do, I think. The idea - for me at least - is to take the logic of that kind of painting and construct a new painting that has those figures in it at the same time.

MS. GONCHAROV: Makes sense.

MR. MARSHALL: The challenge is to do that. How do you make a picture - how do you make things that take, as a point of departure, the logic of Rococo or the logic of a certain kind of painting? Or even, you take Thomas Kinkade. Why do Thomas Kinkade's paintings appeal so widely to the mass audience? What is it about that work? And why does it irritate people who claim to be, you know, in the know in the art world? [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: Why does it irritate them so much? And so if you take both of those things, you could solve the problem of the people who are in the art world who despise that work, and retain the kind of appeal that the work has to the masses of people on that side. And then you will have done something. And that's what I'm trying to do. That's my relationship to popular work.

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.] Okay.

MR. MARSHALL: Can I be a black Thomas Kinkade?

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.] Do you want to be?

MR. MARSHALL: Yeah. I want to be the black Thomas Kinkade.

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. MARSHALL: It's like, to be the black Thomas Kinkade and the black [Andy] Warhol and the black Jeff Koons and the black -

MS. GONCHAROV: I was going to say, all in one.

MR. MARSHALL: All at the same time.

MS. GONCHAROV: That is - mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MARSHALL: That's the thing.

MS. GONCHAROV: Okay. [Laughs.] That's great.

MR. MARSHALL: [Laughs.] It's late.

MS. GONCHAROV: It's late. Yes, okay.

MR. MARSHALL: You missed the opening ceremonies [of the Olympics] - you're missing the opening ceremonies.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, damn. I'm sorry. Okay. Let me turn this thing off.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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