Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Ralph Goings, 2009 Sept. 10-11

Funding for this interview was provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a digitally recorded interview with Ralph L. Goings featuring Shanna Goings on September 10 and 11, 2009. The interview took place at the artist's home and studio in Santa Cruz, California, and was conducted by Judith Olch Richards for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Funding for this interview was provided by a grant from the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Ralph L. Goings and Judith Olch Richards 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

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Ralph Goings on September 10, 2009, in Santa Cruz, California, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc one.

So Ralph, I want to ask you to start with talking about your family: your grandparents, even further back, whatever you'd like to - wherever you would like to start - where they were from and what they did and their names.

RALPH L. GOINGS: Well, it's a little difficult because I've been - you know, I tried to think about or anticipate this very kind of question, and - I was born in a little tiny town in Northern - the name of it is Corning - and I grew up in another - in Northern California.

MS. RICHARDS: On what date?

MR. GOINGS: May 9, 1928. Oh, what was I going to say? I'm trying to think how to describe my family. It's just - you know, we're working-class people. My father, he didn't have a profession. He was sort of like a classic victim of the Great Depression.

MS. RICHARDS: What was his name?

MR. GOINGS: The same as mine, Ralph L. Goings, Sr. He was born in 1904, I'm pretty sure.

SHANNA GOINGS: I'm not sure about -

MR. GOINGS: And I do remember that his birthday was on January 1, because he always figured that New Year's was a celebration of his birthday and not the new year, but that's incidental.

MS. RICHARDS: Where was he born?

MR. GOINGS: Where was he - he was born in Northern California. I'm not sure where. His family, my grandfather's side of - his father's side of the family were ranchers. They raised horses. This was back, you know, at the turn of the century or before, when the horse was the major vehicle for people. Then Henry Ford came along with his cars that everybody could afford ,and put all the horse raisers out of business, and my dad's family was put out of business by the cars that showed up.

He grew up, I think, around - they lived out in the country out on their ranch, but it was near the town of Corning, and I think he grew up and - he went to high school in Corning. He was an outdoor person. He loved to hunt and fish, and he didn't like to work indoors, so he always tried to find jobs that would enable him to be outdoors.

He worked for quite a time - but I was in grade school and high school - for the Standard Oil Company, basically delivering gasoline to farmers in the Northern California area. On a couple of occasions they assigned him to do some office work - it's what he called it - and he hated it. He didn't like being indoors, and he didn't like trying to, you know, keep track of figures and things like that. He wanted to be outdoors. And so he went back to driving the truck, and then, pretty much, that was what it was.

MRS. GOINGS: You should tell her about his father - his grandfather - his grandfather.

MS. RICHARDS: Your great-grandfather.

MR. GOINGS: My dad's father?

MRS. GOINGS: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Your grandfather.

MR. GOINGS: Riley [Goings].

MRS. GOINGS: No, Riley's father.

MR. GOINGS: I don't know anything about him.

MRS. GOINGS: Isn't he the one that moved here from Illinois?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, but I don't even know his name. My family was not very good about keeping track of family history, you know, and it wasn't until I came along and started asking questions, and by then it was too many times too late.

But, anyway, my great-grandfather, that's she's talking about, he brought the Goings family from Illinois - either Illinois or Indiana; I'm not quite sure exactly where they came from. But anyway, he moved the whole family west, looking for - they were apparently farmers, and they were looking for farmland, and they moved to - they settled in Northern California, and they found the Sacramento River up there, which is, you know, a major river.

And the point where they arrived there, my great-grandfather surveyed the situation, and he saw all of this nice, sandy, loamy soil all along the banks of the river, and he said, this is it; this is where we're going to stay; this is perfect farmland.

So they stopped there, and they started pruing [ph] up the land and started getting ready to - and they ultimately planted some crops, I don't know what. Then the winter came. The river flooded its banks and wiped them out completely. And it made him so angry that he had made this kind of mistake that he took the whole family then and moved them way up into the foothills further west, where it was so dry that nothing would grow up there but scrub brush and jackrabbits. And that's when they became horse ranchers and raised horses and made their living that way. So that's -

MS. RICHARDS: What about you mother's side of the family? What was her maiden name?

MR. GOINGS: Her maiden name was McCormick, and her father's name was James McCormick - James Marion McCormick, I think.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you know how to spell that, Marion?

MR. GOINGS: M-A-R-I-O-N, I think. He was born in - oh, I've got it written down someplace. I can't remember. Maybe that was my confusion about Illinois or Indiana. It may have been Indiana where he was born. I'm trying to remember details. This is all sort of way back then, you know. I need to be prompted with another question.

MS. RICHARDS: It's okay. So where did your parents meet? So her family - your mother's family also moved to Northern California?

MR. GOINGS: Okay, okay, yeah, that's the question I needed to have. My grandfather, Jim - James - decided that he was going to be into the - get in the land rush in Oklahoma, which her family did, too, and he and, I think, a brother or some relative, went to Oklahoma and were there for the land rush, but they didn't get in on the first wave, but they finally found some land that they wanted to claim and decided that it was just too much work - or he decided it was too much work.

And so he took his family - by this time my aunt - my mother's sister, older sister, had been born, and so the family, with the older sister, moved to Canada. I don't know why. There was some family joke about maybe he was trying to find the gold rush thing somewhere. He seemed to be a person of opportunity, which didn't seem to work out very much.

Anyway, they went to Canada, and while they were in Canada, my mother was born there in Alberta. Then, when she was about -

MS. RICHARDS: What was your mother's name?

MR. GOINGS: Lucille.

MRS. GOINGS: Lucille Lorena.

MS. RICHARDS: Lucille Lorena?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah.

MRS. GOINGS: Lorena.

MS. RICHARDS: L-O-R-E-N-A?

MR. GOINGS: And when she was, I don't know, less than a year old, they moved back to Northern California, or they moved to California from Canada, and I don't know how it occurred or how he made connections with it, but he became an employee of PG&E, Pacific Gas and Electric Company, which is still the big power company in California.

And at one time he was a director of a power plant, and he did - I don't know what all he did. I was just a little kid, and I didn't understand what he was doing, but I knew that he was - he was sort of a midlevel, probably, employee at PG&E, and he ultimately retired with a pension.

MRS. GOINGS: And you neglected to say both your grandmothers' name - either grandmother's name.

MR. GOINGS: James McCormick was married to Annie - I can't remember what her maiden name was.

MRS. GOINGS: I never knew what it was.

MR. GOINGS: And my grandfather Riley was married to - are you ready for this? - Dillie Grundy - D-I-L-L-I-E.

MS. RICHARDS: Grundy?

MR. GOINGS: Grundy, and I'm pretty sure that that's pretty Irish. If not -

MS. RICHARDS: G-R-U-N-D-E-Y?

MRS. GOINGS: No.

MR. GOINGS: G-R-U-N-D-Y, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: D-Y. So your grandparents, both sets, lived in Northern California.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And your parents met there.

MR. GOINGS: I suspect it may have been - well, yes. Yeah, my mother and my dad both went to high school in Corning but at different times. He was, I think, six years older than my mother, and so while she was in high school, he had already finished high school. I don't know if he graduated or not, but I know he went. And at some point - I don't know how they met or where they met, but it obviously was in that area someplace.

MRS. GOINGS: They met at a skating rink.

MR. GOINGS: Hmm?

MRS. GOINGS: They met at a skating rink.

MR. GOINGS: Oh, really?

MRS. GOINGS: Yes.

MR. GOINGS: You remember that? I don't remember that. [Laughs.]

MRS. GOINGS: She crawled out her bedroom window so her parents wouldn't know she went to the skating rink to skate and meet boys.

MR. GOINGS: Oh, that's right. [Laughs.] I read that story. See, that's why it's handy to have her here.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. Did either of your parents have siblings who lived in the area who you knew?

MR. GOINGS: My dad -

MS. RICHARDS: - who were part of your life?

MR. GOINGS: My dad had a brother named Otto, who lived in the same - well, I'm skipping ahead because by the time I was a teenager, or in grade school and high school, we lived in Willows, which is another small town in California - Northern California - and my dad's brother and his family also lived there. My mother's sister lived in

Roseville.

MS. RICHARDS: That's Lucille?

MRS. GOINGS: Lucille's sister was named Muriel.

MR. GOINGS: Oh, yes, that's right - Muriel.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay.

MR. GOINGS: And she was married to my Uncle George Simon.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were born - so, when you were born, your parents lived in Corning.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And were you - did you have brothers and sisters?

MR. GOINGS: I had a brother who was two years younger than me, and he died when - well, he was in the first grade.

MRS. GOINGS: He died when you were eight.

MR. GOINGS: Hmm?

MRS. GOINGS: He died when you were eight.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: What was his name?

MR. GOINGS: Jimmy - James.

MS. RICHARDS: That must have been extremely upsetting.

MR. GOINGS: Well, it was, because I didn't really understand what had happened.

MS. RICHARDS: He was two years older?

MR. GOINGS: Younger.

MS. RICHARDS: Younger.

MR. GOINGS: Two years younger. There had been a terrible accident. He and I - by this age, by the time when I was at this age, one of the few recreational activities that my family had - my dad and mom and my brother and I - was to go for rides in the car, just go for drives to go places just to look at stuff. And we always had a well-maintained and good car because my dad was a very skilled mechanic and he could - you know, he could take care of things like that. And he always took pride in his cars, and he kept them up.

Anyway, on one of these driving outings - and it wasn't a long distance; I think we were mostly just within a mile or two of town; we would just go out along a road or whatever - but this accident happened, actually, in town. And what happened was my brother and I were both in the back seat of the car, and in those days the four-door cars, the back doors [opened in the] front instead of the back like they do now, so that if the door was open and the car was moving, it would be very easy to fall out, and that's what happened.

My brother leaned on the knob that - the handle that opened the door - and his weight caused the door to open, which fell open, and he fell out of the car and had a very serious head injury. And he never - he was ill for quite a while, but he never seemed to really recover from that. And then he died, and I just didn't really - I couldn't grasp what that was about, why it happened, what it was.

And it really upset my mother, too. She, I guess, verged on a nervous breakdown for a while. She was very upset by it. Well, needless to say, it disrupted our whole family, and shortly after that we moved from Willows to Roseville. My dad took a job there just so that we could get out of the - into a different environment, I think, was primarily what he wanted to do, and work our way out of the - what was a disaster for us, you know?

MS. RICHARDS: When you were that age, were there other family members - grandparents or uncle or -

MR. GOINGS: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: - who were close to you, who you saw?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, my grandmother - well, I have to back up a little bit, because my grandfather on my dad's side -

MS. RICHARDS: Riley.

MR. GOINGS: - Riley, who was married to Dillie Grundy - when my dad and his brother were teenagers, my grandfather and grandmother had got a divorce, and then Dillie remarried, as did Riley. And Riley and his wife then lived in Corning. We lived in Willows. And my grandmother Dillie and her husband that she married, my step-grandfather, lived in Willows just within a block or two from where we lived, and I saw her quite a bit at that early age.

She was a formidable character in our family. Well, just, you know, an aside was that she didn't know how to drive, but she liked to go places, and so it was always somebody else's job in the family to make sure that Dillie had transportation when she needed it, because she knew how to use the telephone, and she would call up and say, you know, this is where I need to go, and you need to come and get me.

My dad's brother, my Uncle Otto, had two children, so I had cousins in the same town.

MRS. GOINGS: And you had a cousin Joe - Joe.

MR. GOINGS: Joe?

MRS. GOINGS: Your cousin Joe.

MR. GOINGS: He lived in Roseville. That was my mother's sister's son, and their family lived in Roseville, and we didn't see them very often, but occasionally.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were elementary school age, what were your favorite pastimes? Did you like school, and what were you good at, and what did you enjoy doing most after school, in the summer? And maybe that's a lot of different questions, but -

MR. GOINGS: Hmm.

MS. RICHARDS: Let's take the school part. Were you good at school? Did you enjoy it? What were your best subjects? Did you draw?

MR. GOINGS: You know, I think in grade school, I liked going there, I think mostly because it was a social situation. I don't think I was a particularly good student. I really don't remember the learning part - I mean, the lessons and that sort of thing. I do remember getting in trouble on a couple of occasions because when I was supposed to be copying spelling words off the board, I was drawing pictures on the paper, and the teacher got upset about that, and so she -

MS. RICHARDS: Did any of your teachers in grade school recognize your artistic ability, or did you recognize it?

MR. GOINGS: No, I didn't recognize it either. Art was never a consideration in my family. I mean, living and growing up in Northern California 150 miles or so from the nearest museum, there was never any access to art, and as far as I know, very little awareness of it, except for, you know, the usual decorative sort of thing that people have.

MS. RICHARDS: What about illustrators - Saturday Evening Post, the -

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, well, later that - yeah, but that's - it wasn't anything that I thought about, or I think my family, either, thought about, as something that a person did as a profession.

MS. RICHARDS: And what about after school and in the summers? What were your favorite -

MR. GOINGS: Oh, you know, the usual things. I loved baseball and - I can remember the - roller skating was also a big thing. I remember doing that a lot. There were - I don't know, this is all sort of trivial stuff, but it's - you know, it's sort of old-timey kid stuff, like there's something called a box scooter that I'll have to explain because it's made with a two-by-four - piece of two-by-four wood that's about four feet long.

On the bottom of this - you take an old roller skate apart, and you put the front wheels on one end of the board and the back wheels on the other end of the board so that you have a board that has skate wheels on it. Then on top of the board, you take a wooden box and nail it to the board, and then you put two boards on it for handlebars. And then you get on this and kick with your foot and scoot, you know. That was a big deal. The other

kids my age in our neighborhood, that was one of the things that we did a lot of.

Then there were the rubber gun wars. Do you know what a rubber gun is?

MS. RICHARDS: No. [Laughter.]

MR. GOINGS: It's another handmade device. It's basically the shape of a pistol carved out of a piece of wood, just, you know, like a barrel and a handle. And on the back of the handle, a wooden clothespin is attached with a nail. This is hard to do because you try to drive a nail into the wooden clothespin, and split it. So you'd have to try and try. Anyway, that clothespin then became, well -

MS. RICHARDS: The trigger?

MR. GOINGS: That was the trigger. The ammunition was an old rubber tire that had been - not a tire but the tube out of a tire. In those days tires had rubber tubes that fit inside the tire itself, and that's what you pumped up to make - you know, so that it didn't have a flat tire.

Anyway, we cut up the rubber tubes, and you end up with a great big rubber band. And you hooked that over the end of the gun and the other end in the clip, in the clothespin, and then, pow. [Laughs.] And everybody had at least two of those; you know, one on each side. And we played cowboys and Indians and all kinds of things.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you listening to radio shows?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, yeah. Oh, gosh, Jack Armstrong -

MRS. GOINGS: Oh, gosh -

MR. GOINGS: Huh?

MRS. GOINGS: I'm trying to remember, too.

MR. GOINGS: Well, yeah, I can't remember the names of all of them.

MS. RICHARDS: Would you say that your family was affected, in what degree, by the Depression? In what degree do you think your family was affected by the Depression? You were growing up in grade school - this was the Depression. You were born in 1928.

Oh, well, mainly my dad always had a hard time getting a job if he - you know, for one reason or another. If we moved, he'd have to find a job somewhere else, or if the job that he had disappeared, or if he got fired, or whatever -

MRS. GOINGS: Didn't you live out in the country in a tent?

MR. GOINGS: Well, yeah, that was one summer. My dad was out of work and - oh, gosh, Jimmy and I were really little kids. I don't have a lot of memory of this except that we did - [laughs] - we did sort of camp out.

He finally found a job caring for herd of turkeys. Well, you know, it's interesting that turkeys were an easily transportable meat source, because they could walk to where you wanted them to go. You didn't have to slaughter them and pack them up and ship them; they'd just walk there. But they also produced eggs, which were edible and, you know, I think much more wholesome than - or richer at least - than chicken eggs. But, anyway, he took a job caring for this herd of turkeys, and I think that eventually they were going to be taken someplace for a food source.

But we had no - we had to move from the house where we had been living, and so we - [laughs] - this sounds really terrible. My memory of it is that my dad made this kind of tent under this great big fig tree, and in Northern California the fig trees grow huge. They're really gigantic trees. And we had - what little furniture we had was under the tent under this tree, and that's where - we lived there for I don't know how long; it wasn't very long, but it was during the summertime, so it was not - you know, Northern California, it's warm - hot, as a matter of fact.

And that was - at some point that job ended, and we went on to somewhere else. I can't remember what - I was really pretty young then. I don't have much memory of what came after that.

MRS. GOINGS: Isn't that when you fell out of the tree?

MR. GOINGS: No, that was a lot later.

MRS. GOINGS: Oh, excuse me.

MS. RICHARDS: After elementary school, when you started high school, that was in Corning?

MR. GOINGS: No. While I was in the - when I was in the sixth grade, we moved from Willows, where - I started elementary school in Willows and went there until, in the sixth grade, we moved to Roseville, and I went to junior high there, and then I went to high school one year in Roseville, and then we moved back to Willows, and I finished high school there.

MS. RICHARDS: So in junior high and high school, did you start thinking at all about art? Did you have anybody who noticed a talent - did you think -

MR. GOINGS: Actually, yes. That's when it really began, because in - well, in the - I guess in the eighth grade, the teacher didn't really - oh, I don't know quite how to put it - she didn't present anything as an art lesson or anything like that. It was just a matter of having materials there available - paper and pencils and pens and that kind of thing - and just sort of free-form - actually, looking back on it, it seems like it was a way for her to kill time until she got to the next real lesson, whatever it happened to be.

But then when I was a freshman in high school, I took a real art class. I mean, that was the name of the class. It was called an art class. And the teacher gave specific assignments of things to do, and that was - I really like that a lot because I could imagine things and I could do them. It surprised me, actually.

And I think that at that point I realized that a lot of my idle time while I was a kid was spent drawing, but I didn't think of it as making art, or I didn't think of it as art. The word "drawing" implies an attempt to create some sort of artistic image, or whatever, and I didn't even really think of it as that; it was just that drawing, for me, at that level, was just a way to figure out how things were - sometimes, how things worked.

And I made a lot of model airplanes. I liked doing that because I liked airplanes. And what I would do is I would get the materials that all came in a box to make the model airplane out of. In those days they were made of balsa wood, so you had to carve it out yourself, and it wasn't the kind of thing you snapped together.

And so I would make drawings of the airplane, of how it would look after it was put together, and then after I put it together, then I'd draw it again. It was more just a confirmation of how the thing was - how it worked, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: Looking back - you know, some people are called visual, some are verbal. It sounds like you used drawing and visual representation to understand things.

MR. GOINGS: I think that's probably right, yeah. I don't know; once I was in high school and had had that one art class experience with a teacher that was intending to have the students make art, then I began finding out that there was art. And I went to the library, and I found, I think - one of the landmark things for me was I found a biography of Rembrandt [van Rijn] in the library.

MS. RICHARDS: The high school library?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah. Well, no, this was the public library in Willows. Their art section probably consisted of four or five books, and that was it. This one about Rembrandt had some reproductions, but they were black and white, and they were little. You know, you almost had to have a magnifying glass to look at them.

But the interesting thing to me was, aside from the fact that this was somebody who made pictures - and that's what he did - there was a text about him and about his art and so on, and that was when I first began to have an awareness that being an artist and making art wasn't something that just happened magically out there by somebody else; it was something that you could do, and you could learn how to do it and, you know, take it from there.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were in high school, if you hadn't had this art course, if they hadn't offered it, and you hadn't been good at it, what were you thinking you would be doing with your life? And did you have a vision when you started high school that you were going to probably, let's say, do a desk job or work with your hands or be a professional? Did you have any sense?

MR. GOINGS: I don't ever remember having any thought about what I wanted to be until I started finding out about art. I mean, you know, I grew up in a working-class family, and people, especially our family and all of the people that we knew - in those times, during the Depression, people didn't make long-term plans about their life and how it was going to be. It was just a struggle to get from one day to the next or get to the next year.

I mean, there are other things that came into my life. Music was a big thing for a while.

MS. RICHARDS: Playing? Playing music?

MR. GOINGS: Yes, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: What did you play?

MR. GOINGS: Reed instruments, but that didn't come along until - well, actually -

MRS. GOINGS: You took violin lessons.

MR. GOINGS: Yes, I did. I did. My Grandfather Riley was a fiddler - a violist, but he called himself a fiddler - and my dad played stringed instruments, banjo and guitar and like that. I suppose that - I said that there was no art in my family, but I suppose you could consider music art, because that was the aesthetic that they were attuned to, rather than visual.

And my grandfather insisted that I take violin lessons because his - my grandfather and my dad, and a cousin of my dad, and a couple of other people played for country dances, at what they call barn dances, and literally some of them took place in barns. And my grandfather's ambition was that I would learn how to play the fiddle, and practice and practice and practice and get good enough so that I could play with them. That would be my test. That would be my way of -

MRS. GOINGS: Getting his approval.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, well, and - I can't think of the term.

MS. RICHARDS: Did it have to do with making money?

MR. GOINGS: Pardon?

MS. RICHARDS: Did it have to do with making money?

MR. GOINGS: No. Oh, no, no, no. No, it had to do with the fun of doing it. They had such a good time. And I took these violin lessons for, oh, I can't remember how long, but it seemed like forever. The teacher showed up every Saturday morning, like at 7:00, and we had these lessons, and I had these exercises that I had to play, and I had to practice.

And my dad made sure that I did all the practicing. And finally, at a certain point, I got so that I could play one of the songs that they played when they played for the country dances. And that's the word I was - I did it. I was able to keep up, and it made my grandfather very happy. I had made my passage. I'd gotten there - I'd gotten up into what he - you know, the level that -

MS. RICHARDS: That was while you were in high school?

MR. GOINGS: No, this was before high school.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MR. GOINGS: No, in high school, I played in the band, the high school band. My freshman year in high school was in Roseville, and then we moved back to Willows. The high school had just burned down the year before, and so they had cleared out all of the debris from the old buildings that had burned and moved in some temporary classrooms. But the gymnasium and the building that was the band room were not touched by the fire. So the band had a nice building to operate in.

And I decided that I - that the violin was not a band instrument. I mean, I could play the violin and a little - I could play the banjo a little bit, but I didn't play a band instrument, and I really wanted to be in the band. So my mother saved her money and then bought me this old, beat-up saxophone and a how-to-play-a-saxophone book, how-to-do-it book. So I sort of taught myself how to play the thing, how to make a sound on it.

And it got to be sort of like when I was taking the violin lessons. The practicing at first was really a chore, but as I got a little better at it, it was more pleasure than chore to do it. And finally I was able to audition for the band and got in, and that was great.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were in high school, you said that, in addition to that first art course, then you took other art courses. Is that right?

MR. GOINGS: No, no. When I got to the high school in Willows, there was a class called "Art" that I signed up for my first year there, when I was a sophomore. And I went to the class, and the woman who was teaching this art

class - let's see, how did she do this? We came into the classroom, and she was sitting at the desk in the front of the room knitting. And after the bell rang, she continued to knit, but she had the roll on the desk in front of her.

So she called the roll, and everybody who was there answered and so on. And then she said, all right, for the boys, on that table over there there's some paper and pencils. Draw something. For the girls, get out your knitting. And that's what it was. It was a knitting class that the boys could sign up for and have some paper and pencils to draw with.

MS. RICHARDS: No instruction.

MR. GOINGS: No, oh, no. Oh, no. She was not a teacher. I mean, she was not an art teacher; she was just a - I don't know what her job designation really was.

MS. RICHARDS: So all through the rest of high school, what was your engagement with drawing or sketching or making -

MR. GOINGS: Well, I stayed with that one - that first semester of my sophomore year, and after that I didn't sign up for it again. It was just a waste of time, I thought. So I just took off on my own. I developed a comic strip for the school newspaper. It got me into a little trouble a couple of times, but - and I just did a lot of drawing, and I decided that -

MS. RICHARDS: When you were doing drawing, were you drawing from life? Were you drawing from your imagination, from magazine illustrations?

MR. GOINGS: No, it was mostly things. Again, you know, I would see something -

MS. RICHARDS: From life or from a photograph?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, yeah - oh, no, I did a lot of, you know, made up stuff, too, just for the heck of it. I mean, the cartooning came out of that. Part of the fun of the cartooning was just coming up with the characters, you know, because they were based on all kids that I knew.

But at one point - and I don't know what's - oh, I know, I know, I know. I think when I was - it may have been in the sophomore year, and maybe when I was - maybe the next year; I don't know - but my Aunt Helen, my dad's brother's wife, she always encouraged me at drawing and doing artistic kind of stuff.

MS. RICHARDS: So the family knew that you had this interest?

MR. GOINGS: Well, I think so, but she was the only one that really made a fuss about it, you know, and she would always ask to see what I had been doing, and she would go on and on about it. And she bought a book of one of those - I don't know, what was that - I think that Hal Foster [Walter Foster], these big paperback books - it was how to draw things, you know, how to draw a horse, how to draw a car, how to draw this, how - whatever.

She bought me one of those and gave it to me for my birthday or something, I don't know what it was - or maybe it was a Christmas present; I don't remember - but I thought, well, hmm, maybe I could do this. So you know, I went through and I did all of the things in that book. And I think, you know, it got kind of boring after a while, and I decided to move on beyond that. But I got to trying out things, and by this time, I had done a little more research in the library, and I had been trying to find out information about paintings, how you make a painting.

And I went to every paint store in Willows trying to find, you know, some kind of paint that I would paint with, and the closest thing that I found - one of the paint stores had these tubes of color they used to mix, you know, wall paint.

I told the guy who was selling it, the clerk at the store, that I wanted to make a painting and I was looking for - I thought it was called oil paint. And he said, well, this is oil based, but I don't think it's what you were looking for, but you can try it if you want to. So he sold me a couple of tubes of it, and the stuff never dries, you know, because it's intended to be mixed with other paint for coloring.

So that slowed me down for a while. I finally did find - I think one of the people in one of the paint stores had a catalogue or something, and he ordered some - I think mainly what it was is they were just little tiny tubes of color, and I think they were intended for tinting photographs. You know, in those days, all photographs were black and white, but there was an art of tinting that people did.

So I took those and I couldn't find any canvas, so I took an old bed sheet that my mother was going to throw away, and I cut a chunk of it off and stretched it over a piece of plywood.

MS. RICHARDS: At this point had you seen more than black-and-white images of Rembrandt paintings?

MR. GOINGS: Oh, yeah, by this time I had seen - you know, by this time I'd seen Norman Rockwell's magazine covers and all of that kind of stuff. It was just that I wanted to try to make a painting, because I knew about - by this time I knew what paintings were.

MS. RICHARDS: And there were no how-to -

MR. GOINGS: But I had not seen a real one in a museum at that point.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MR. GOINGS: So anyway, the -

MS. RICHARDS: And you found brushes?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, I found some brushes. They were pretty crude. Actually, they were basically made for watercolors, you know, the kind that came in those little watercolor pans that -

MS. RICHARDS: Had you thought of doing watercolors?

MR. GOINGS: No, at that point I didn't - I didn't understand what watercolors were. It wasn't until later.

MS. RICHARDS: And your Aunt Helen, she knew you were interested, but she didn't have any personal knowledge of art?

MR. GOINGS: No, no, she didn't. She didn't have any technical awareness of anything.

So that first effort on the bed sheet was pretty much of a mess. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: I can imagine. I'm going to change tapes.

[END CD 1.]

This is Judith Richards with Ralph Goings on September 10, 2009, in Santa Cruz, California, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc two.

So this brings up the question of when did you see an actual painting, or even maybe a very good color reproduction of painting in art history books?

MR. GOINGS: [Coughs] Excuse me. I do remember now - and I'm glad you brought this up, because this had sort of slipped between the cracks. It wasn't until I was in the army -

MS. RICHARDS: So you've graduated high school.

MR. GOINGS: I graduated from high school and went into the army.

MS. RICHARDS: So before you went into the army, did you think to yourself, I'm going to find a way to study art, that I'm going to go to art school, college? Did you think of any of that before you went into the army?

MR. GOINGS: Not in a specific way. At the time when I graduated from high school, World War II was still officially on. The shooting part was pretty much over. It was mostly just occupation, but the draft was still active, and I was ready to be drafted. But I found out that if you enlisted, you'd get to choose, more or less, the training that you got, plus the 18-month service would provide you with the GI Bill for college.

I had no idea what I would study in college, but I thought it would be a good idea to give college a try, because nobody in my family had ever been to college. So I went into the army, and I went to Camp Lee in Virginia for my basic training, and while I was there - there's a lot more to this business of being in the army, and I would like to get back to that, but while I was there in that basic training, the first furlough that I had - I had met this guy who was also in the basic training, too, who was from - hmm - the city that's right next to Washington, D.C.

MS. RICHARDS: Baltimore?

MR. GOINGS: Baltimore, yes. He was from Baltimore, and he invited me to go with him - actually this was right at Christmastime that we got this furlough. He invited me to go home with him to Baltimore since it was, you know, fairly close to Camp Lee, and California was way far away.

So I went, and he was from rather a well-to-do family, and they had a very nice house, and they had real art on

the wall - paintings on the wall. And they were landscapes, and they were sort of - my memory of them as of now is that they were kind of wimpy, but they were real paintings, and I was fascinated by the way the paint was put on and, you know, just the whole physical presence of the painting.

And so it was a great furlough, and it also turned on a light bulb over my head. [Laughs.] And then I had to go back to basic training.

MS. RICHARDS: And where did you end up serving for the rest - after basic training?

MR. GOINGS: Well -

MS. RICHARDS: And what did you choose to be trained in?

MR. GOINGS: Well, that's the next part of the story, and that got a little iffy because - because I had had such a good experience with playing in the band in high school, I had determined that I would sign up to get military band training, which wasn't - well, yes, they did do it there at Fort Lee in Virginia, but it meant that I had to go and interview and, you know, play, so that they could see that I could actually play an instrument.

And they had a schedule of - I had to make an appointment, and I had to wait to a certain time to do it, and in the meantime, I don't know, there was a couple, three weeks before I could actually do the audition. In the meantime, I met some people who were working in a department called Special Services, and they were all doing artwork. And that's all they did all day long. That was their military assignment, and it was for various kinds of military publications - newsletters and all kinds of stuff, and it looked like really a cushy deal.

And the guy said, listen, we can get you into this, but the band has first call because you've already signed up for that, so you've got to go over there and flunk the test, and then we can get you in.

So I went over and I flunked the test. I mean, I really flubbed it up, and went back a few days later to see the same guy, and I said, okay, here I am; I'm ready. And he said, well, gee, I have bad news for you. They're shutting down this whole department, and we can't use you. [Laughs.]

So I had to go back to the band people and beg them to let me interview again, and then I had another interview, and I cooled it and got in the band and took band training there, which was basically learning how to march and play an instrument at the same time and not fall down, you know? Ultimately, I got assigned to the first army band that was stationed at Fort Ord here in California.

MRS. GOINGS: Just down the coast.

MR. GOINGS: Hmm?

MRS. GOINGS: It's just down the coast from here.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, it's just down around the bay. So I was - I spent all of my military career fighting the battle of Ford Ord. [Laughs]

MS. RICHARDS: Well, that was lucky.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, well, as it turned out, I made some goofy choices when I look back on it, because at the point where I left Camp Lee in Virginia, after I got out of the band school, it was time to be assigned somewhere. And so they took all of us into - it was this big auditorium, and some - I don't know, some lieutenant or colonel got up and made this speech about how we were all destined for assignment in various places, and it all had to - we had to decide who was going to go where.

And he said, okay, everybody who wants to go to Germany, go over on this side of the room; everybody that wants to go to California, go over on this side of the room. And it didn't occur to me that I could go to Germany, where I had never been and never thought about even going - I mean, California was home, and I had missed being home, you know, so I went over to the California side. And I've kicked myself ever since. I could have spent probably six months in Berlin seeing a lot of things that I never got to see anyway.

MRS. GOINGS: Except that Berlin was bombed.

MR. GOINGS: Well, yeah, it was probably -

MS. RICHARDS: Museums might not -

MRS. GOINGS: It was a sad place.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, it would have been - it would have been -

MR. GOINGS: Pardon?

MS. RICHARDS: It would have been interesting.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, but I was young, and I was homesick, and I -

MS. RICHARDS: Were there aspects of your military service that you later see affected you as an artist?

MR. GOINGS: No, not really.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you meet people who became longtime friends?

MR. GOINGS: Only because of the music part. After I was discharged from the army, I thought I wanted to be a musician - a commercial musician, jazz musician - and I tried to get myself involved in that. And a couple of the other guys from the band were discharged about the same time, and we worked together for a while, but I finally decided that it was just not the kind of life that I wanted to lead. You know, you're up all night, and you don't ever get any sleep, and you have to travel all the time, and it's just - it was not my thing.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you - were you drawing during the -

MR. GOINGS: Well, I met this young guy who wanted to be a writer, and I don't remember how I met him.

MRS. GOINGS: At school, I think. You met him after you started school.

MR. GOINGS: No, I started school because of him. He was going - I met - oh, I know what it was. I was - hmm. I'm sorry; my memory of details from those years gets a little foggy.

MS. RICHARDS: Little wonder.

MR. GOINGS: At some point - oh, I know what it was. I took a night class at the local high school in -

MRS. GOINGS: Salinas.

MR. GOINGS: - Salinas, and -

MS. RICHARDS: While you were still in the army?

MR. GOINGS: Yes. And I don't remember it as a particularly energizing experience. I didn't like the teacher, and he apparently didn't like me, because he was very critical of everything I did. Or maybe he was being -

MS. RICHARDS: This was a writing class?

MR. GOINGS: Pardon?

MS. RICHARDS: A writing class?

MR. GOINGS: No, no, this was a painting class.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MR. GOINGS: Anyway, it was like - you know, like an adult education sort of thing, and it didn't last very long. But it convinced me that I needed to find some serious teaching, so I went to the junior college, which is called, what? Hartnell [College, Salinas] - I got it.

MRS. GOINGS: Hartnell.

MR. GOINGS: Hartnell.

MS. RICHARDS: Hartnell.

MR. GOINGS: Hartnell in Salinas, where I met two people that changed my whole life.

MS. RICHARDS: Now, is this after the military -

MR. GOINGS: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: - on the GI Bill?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, this is after. And this is when I first started using the GI Bill. But I met these two people who just changed everything for me. The first one I met - now, I'm not sure exactly the order. I think the first one I met was the head of the art department, and the other one was her, my wife.

MS. RICHARDS: So, was the -

MRS. GOINGS: You met him first. You were in school -

MR. GOINGS: Huh?

MRS. GOINGS: You were in school six months before you met me. You went to -

MR. GOINGS: Well, that's what I meant. I met Leon first -

MRS. GOINGS: Yeah, you met - yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: His name is Leon what?

MR. GOINGS: Leon Amyx. He was -

MS. RICHARDS: A-M -

MR. GOINGS: A-M-Y-X - a fairly well-known California watercolorist, actually. He's dead now. Somehow he and I connected right away, and he sort of became my mentor. He made me sort of an assistant. It was a one-man art department in those days. It was a pretty small school. But he made me a sort of assistant, and he would invite several advanced students on weekends to go out with him on sketching trips, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: What do you think he saw in you that made him do that?

MR. GOINGS: I don't know. I don't know.

MS. RICHARDS: He saw your work. You started out in his class -

MR. GOINGS: Yeah - oh, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: - doing paintings?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So he saw some kind of talent.

MR. GOINGS: I guess so, because he started talking to me - I took - I signed up for a semester class with him when I first started there, and by the end of that first semester, he was talking to me about going to art school - of, you know, finishing up in the junior college and going to art school. And he was encouraging me to look into the possibility of what was then called the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland. It's now California College of [the] Art[s].

And, as I said, he sort of gave me a part-time job as assistant to him in the department. And, you know, he just was - I think the thing that really helped me, aside from the technical stuff that I learned from him, was that he - he never talked down to me. I always felt that he was talking to me as another artist, not as a teacher-student situation, because when we would go out on sketching trips and so on, he would always - you know, he would always look at what I was doing, but he talked to me about it as though I was, you know, an artist on the same level as him, not somebody who was a dumb student that had to be told what to do, and I guess that really attracted me to his ideas.

MS. RICHARDS: And did you set up a little studio where you were living at the time, or did you just have your studio in the classroom?

MR. GOINGS: No, I worked in the classroom only. That was another thing. He gave me work - the building that the classes were in, there was a classroom that had easels and things in it, and then there was a sort of back room that was a supply room, and then in back of that there was another - it was just sort of a continuation of that same supply room, but it didn't have much of anything in it.

And at one point he said, if you help me clean all of this stuff out of here, you can come in here and work here this - you can use this as a studio even when a class is going on - which was great, because I didn't take - you know, I took all the classes he offered, but when I finished those, there was no place to go, so that was great to

have him as -

MS. RICHARDS: What town is Hartnell in?

MR. GOINGS: Salinas.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, that's right.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah. What?

MRS. GOINGS: Well, you sort of left out what you did right out of the army.

MR. GOINGS: I can't hear you.

MRS. GOINGS: You left out what you did right out of the army.

MS. RICHARDS: So was there something you did between the army and Hartnell?

MRS. GOINGS: You got married, remember?

MR. GOINGS: Oh. [Laughter.]

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, that's something that we might not -

[Cross talk.]

MRS. GOINGS: Not to me.

MR. GOINGS: Can we make a rest stop here?

MS. RICHARDS: Absolutely.

[Audio break.]

We're going to talk about what you did between the army and Hartnell.

MR. GOINGS: Oh.

MRS. GOINGS: You have to put that in because - well, especially for Jimmy.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah. Well, there was a marriage and a divorce in there and a son. I don't know what to say about it except that -

MS. RICHARDS: You met a woman while you were in the army?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And you were how old, 21?

MRS. GOINGS: No.

MR. GOINGS: Oh, how old was I in the army? I was -

MS. RICHARDS: Twenty?

MRS. GOINGS: You were 21 when you met me, so you must have been 19.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, 18 or 19, you know.

MRS. GOINGS: No, because you graduated from high school at 18. You must have been at least 20, maybe.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, I guess. I don't know.

MRS. GOINGS: I don't know.

MR. GOINGS: It was a marriage that didn't work out, and, sadly, there was a child.

MRS. GOINGS: Maybe you should give her Jimmy's name.

MR. GOINGS: Hmm?

MS. RICHARDS: What was -

MRS. GOINGS: You should give her Jimmy's name.

MR. GOINGS: What?

MRS. GOINGS: You should give her Jim's name.

MR. GOINGS: Oh, well, it's just James.

MS. RICHARDS: James Goings?

MR. GOINGS: No, it's not Goings. After we divorced, she felt that - he was very young. He was, what, like -

MRS. GOINGS: Three.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah. We would - by this time Shanna and I were together.

MS. RICHARDS: Wait, back up. So you got married, and you were living - that's while you were in the army.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, in Salinas.

MS. RICHARDS: In Salinas. And I guess in those days you didn't have to live on base. I mean, you got married; you got your own apartment, right?

MR. GOINGS: No, we didn't live on the base.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, you lived in your own apartment, and you had a baby, whose name was James.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, Jimmy. Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Jimmy. And then you got divorced.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, yeah. I guess we were married for two years, I guess. I can't -

MRS. GOINGS: I know - I'm not sure when you got married, so - I never inquired much into that.

MR. GOINGS: I'm not either, to tell you the truth.

MRS. GOINGS: Anyway, I met him when he was 21 -

MS. RICHARDS: And tell me -

MRS. GOINGS: - and he was in the process of getting a divorce at that age.

MS. RICHARDS: I see. So, how do you spell your name? S-H -

MR. GOINGS: S-H-A-N-N-A.

MS. RICHARDS: And your last -

MRS. GOINGS: - Leslyn Powell.

MS. RICHARDS: What was the middle name?

MRS. GOINGS: Leslyn - L-E-S-L-Y-N.

MS. RICHARDS: Powell.

MRS. GOINGS: And my last name was Powell. And I was 18.

MS. RICHARDS: So, you were living in Salinas, and you still were married when you started Hartnell?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah. Yeah.

MRS. GOINGS: He started Hartnell in the second semester of the year.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, it was mid-year.

MRS. GOINGS: Yeah, and during that time, they applied for a divorce.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So your son then ended up with his mother's last name or -

MRS. GOINGS: Well, he ended up with - he ended up living with his mother exclusively. She, at a certain point, felt that our visiting - by this time Shanna and I were together - our visiting was disruptive and confusing to him, and she didn't like that, and -

MRS. GOINGS: She was also engaged to be married, and her - there was some issues of jealousy there, and it got to be out of control, and we ended up not having him.

MR. GOINGS: And we didn't - we didn't feel that pressing the issue legally would do any good to alleviate the existing problems. So we just sort of lost track of him for quite a few years.

MRS. GOINGS: And he took his - he took his mother's husband's name.

MR. GOINGS: Well, she subsequently remarried, and he - Jimmy is now - I can't even think of their last name. His last name is the same as her husband. Somewhere I have it, but I can't - I don't have it in my memory right now. It may be Inman.

MRS. GOINGS: Inman was Joe's last name, and it could be that they didn't change his name. I think his name is James Inman.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, I think that's it.

MS. RICHARDS: I-N-M-A-N.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah.

MRS. GOINGS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RICHARDS: So, when you were at Hartnell then, first of all you met Leon.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah. First I met Leon Amyx, the painter, and then I met Shanna, my wife. She was dancing with the captain of the basketball team at a school dance.

MS. RICHARDS: You were a student also, right?

MRS. GOINGS: I had just registered two weeks before.

MR. GOINGS: And I cut in on them. And she - and her face went - [laughter]. I mean, this guy was big, tall - good-looking guy, you know.

MRS. GOINGS: It was not just that. It was, I had a friend who was taking art classes the semester before, and I went up to pick her up at school - we had a date - and Ralph was in the supply room putting - he was on a ladder. And so she introduced me to him. And when we left, I said, gee, he's cute. And she said, no, he's not cute; he's married. And so I thought a married man was hitting on me - [laughter] - and I was not nice.

MS. RICHARDS: And you were - and, Shanna, you were there studying what?

MRS. GOINGS: Well, I think I had an English major. My mother is an English teacher, and I couldn't think what else to be except an English teacher. I didn't want to be that, but that's what I was doing.

MS. RICHARDS: So, after that first semester, how long did you stay at Hartnell?

MRS. GOINGS: Just the next semester.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, I think I was there only two semesters.

MS. RICHARDS: So a spring semester and a fall semester.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And then you applied to CCA [California College of the Arts]?

MR. GOINGS: I went to Arts and Crafts in Oakland [California College of Arts and Crafts, now the California College of the Arts], and it was great, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: So you moved - you moved from Salinas to Oakland?

MRS. GOINGS: We were not married.

MS. RICHARDS: No, so you just moved by yourself?

MRS. GOINGS: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And did you know at the beginning that you would be a painter -painting major?

MR. GOINGS: Oh, yes, absolutely. There was no - I mean, as a matter of fact - [laughs] - it's another one of those - you know, I seem to be telling you a whole bunch of stupid decisions that I made in my life, and I guess I did.

Anyway, I got to Arts and Crafts - I got accepted, and I signed up for the teacher education program. I signed up for it. I went to the first class and said, whoa, wait a minute; this is not what I want, because it was all about teaching process and nothing about art. It was no painting, no drawing, nothing like that. It was all about how to do teaching.

And I thought, I don't - you know, I don't want to do that. That's not what I want to learn here. I don't want to - you know, the government is paying all this money to this expensive art school; I want to learn about art. So I changed my major then and there, and finally graduated in three years with a B.F.A. and no prospect for a job.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you graduate in three years because you had had that year at Hartnell or because you speeded up the process?

MR. GOINGS: No, I just took double loads all the way. I took as much stuff as I could get every semester.

MS. RICHARDS: Is that because the GI Bill would run out, or you wanted to finish in three years?

MR. GOINGS: No, no, I just - no, I had no time thing. It was just I was like a big sponge. I wanted to soak up everything that was possible.

MRS. GOINGS: But also because the GI Bill was going to run out, too.

MR. GOINGS: Well, yeah, it probably would have, but that wasn't the push to hurry up because of that.

MS. RICHARDS: And how did you like your experience there?

MR. GOINGS: Oh, I loved it. I loved it.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there any particularly memorable teachers, inspiring teachers, difficult teachers, people who really mattered to you?

MR. GOINGS: There were some - there were some, you know, teachers there that are big names in the painting world, but I don't remember being particularly - yeah, I have to do a little thinking about this.

This may be a question that we should come back to, because first I have to try to remember who some of the name teachers were that were there. I can say that there were two that I remember being particularly involved in the classes that I took from them. One was Leon Goldin.

MS. RICHARDS: Is that Golden, G-O-L-D-E-N?

MR. GOINGS: I-N.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay.

MR. GOINGS: I think - yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: "Involved," you mean good teachers who -

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, yeah, these were men that I found - that I thought I got something from, you know? And the other one - hmm. We may have to come back to this because I'm not remembering names.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there fellow students who you got to know and were important friends, colleagues in the years after school, who remained close as artist friends?

MR. GOINGS: No. Well, I mean, there are a couple of painters who subsequently are connected with the same sort of movement, if you can use that name, for the Photorealists -

MS. RICHARDS: - who were at CCA when you were?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah - not exactly. Bob [Robert] Bechtle was there - I think - I'm not quite sure of the date. I think he was there part of the time when I was there, and then Dick [Richard] McLean

came later - a little later, but I'm not - I'm not certain about those dates. At any rate, these two people I've known for years but not from school. I didn't socialize with them then, or I wasn't - I didn't really know them at school. It wasn't until later that we all began to get some recognition that we got together.

MS. RICHARDS: And realized you had been overlapped in some way, perhaps?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, I guess. It seems to me that I remember being in one class with Bob, a printmaking class with - and Nat [Nathan] Oliveira was also there.

MS. RICHARDS: As a teacher or a student?

MRS. GOINGS: Student.

MR. GOINGS: As the teacher.

MRS. GOINGS: No, he was a student, wasn't he?

MR. GOINGS: Huh? Well, he was also an undergraduate student there, too. He graduated - Nat did - I think, like, the year before I did, or maybe two. I don't remember. Gosh.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, he might be older.

MRS. GOINGS: It doesn't make any difference.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MR. GOINGS: Anyway, he graduated and then took over a printmaking class, and I - it seems to me that I took his class. I knew him, and we had - you know, we had done, sort of, studio hangout together, so I knew him, and it seems to me that I remember that Bob was in the same class. Now, I may be mistaken about that.

MS. RICHARDS: What was the - were most of the teachers teaching something related to Abstract Expressionism or - what was the major -

MR. GOINGS: No, on the contrary.

MS. RICHARDS: Was there a thrust in the school, kind of a look that the teachers - a consistency in any way?

MR. GOINGS: Well, my feeling was that most of the studio teachers were the sort of academic - the drawing teachers - I don't know how else to put it - were more traditional in their approach.

MS. RICHARDS: Traditional? What do you mean? Do you mean realist landscape -

MR. GOINGS: No.

MS. RICHARDS: - California impressionists?

MR. GOINGS: No, not by subject matter but just by approach.

MRS. GOINGS: It was a formal art education with certain -

MR. GOINGS: Yeah. Yeah, you look at something, and you carefully reproduce it, or whatever.

MS. RICHARDS: But in addition to that academic training, which would be a good basis for any future approach, possibly, did you get a sense that they themselves, as professionals, were involved in a certain kind of painting?

MR. GOINGS: Oh -

MS. RICHARDS: So the school had a reputation of a kind of - by the time you were a senior, was there a look - did you feel like when you were in school, there's a kind of expectation to do a certain kind of painting?

MR. GOINGS: Well, that's hard -

MS. RICHARDS: Or was it very open, and you and your friends painted in many different directions?

MR. GOINGS: Well, it's hard because - you know, at the time that I was at Arts and Crafts was right - it was like the peak of Abstract Expressionism. The people that I hung out with, the other students that I hung out with, we were very much anxious to know what was going on in New York - at the first of each month when the art magazines showed up at the library, we were right there to find out, you know, what's going on in *ARTnews* magazine.

MS. RICHARDS: Sure.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, because, I mean, we knew about -

MRS. GOINGS: Jackson Pollock.

MR. GOINGS: Oh, Pollock and, you know, all of the big-time, big-name Abstract Expressionists. And it was - that seemed to be the way that the world was going, as far as we were concerned. But at the same time, the classes that we were in, there was this emphasis, I think, on - I don't want to say - I mean, I can't depict any of the classes as being really experimental. They were more, as Shanna said, formal-based. They were, you know, the more traditional kind of art learning, I guess.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you aware of the Bay Area figurative painters at that point?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah. Yeah. [Richard] Diebenkorn, of course, was around. As a matter of fact, he taught there for a while, I think. I never had a class from him and I've never met him, but I understand he was a real moving force in the Bay Area.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you meet any of the Bay Area - was there access, or did you - I don't know if you had a car - to meet any of - be involved in any way in the Bay Area art world when you were still a student at CCA?

MR. GOINGS: Not really, for me.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you know that Wayne Thiebaud was in Northern California? Did anybody - I don't know how much he was known at that point, in 1952.

MRS. GOINGS: He wasn't.

MR. GOINGS: No, we didn't meet Wayne until we moved back to Sacramento.

MRS. GOINGS: Yeah, we met Wayne in Sacramento. He was teaching at Davis [University of California, Davis], and that was before he had had his big art show in New York.

MS. RICHARDS: So, when you finished - well, is there anything else about your experience at CAA that you want to talk about? What did your paintings look like by the time you were a senior, let's say?

MR. GOINGS: Oh, sort of a marriage of - my mind is going. Two of the Abstract Expressionists that I had a great deal of admiration for -

MS. RICHARDS: [Arshile] Gorky? Gorky?

MR. GOINGS: That's one of them. The other one is -

MS. RICHARDS: [Willem] de Kooning?

MR. GOINGS: De Kooning. What I was doing was sort of -

MS. RICHARDS: [John] Graham?

MR. GOINGS: - a mixture of de Kooning -

MS. RICHARDS: Graham, Gorky?

MR. GOINGS: Gorky and Esteban Vicente. Now, if you can put all that together - [laughs].

MRS. GOINGS: You were also doing those little figures, and the painters -

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, I had a - at just about the time I graduated, I was - for some reason, I began to pull back

from the Abstract Expressionist thing, you know, the big brush and the gigantic gesture and so on, and I sort of went into my Paul Klee period of fantasy. I think the thing that started me on that was that painting I did of your dream. She -

MRS. GOINGS: Well, I think you were doing that before, but -

MR. GOINGS: Was I? She had this dream one night that she told me about. What was it?

MRS. GOINGS: Tom and I were in a rowboat with all the flags - all the American flags in the world - and we had to save them, and we were in the ocean in a rowboat.

MR. GOINGS: So I did this painting of this little man in a rowboat, out in the middle of water of some kind, with an umbrella. The umbrella - flags got translated into an umbrella. And I sent it to the juried art show at the Sacramento State Fair, and I won a prize with it. [Laughs.] And we can't find the painting. We had it for years, and I can't -

MS. RICHARDS: One more question about CAA. When you were there, did you get positive reinforcement, recognition, approval by your teachers? Did you feel that you did well as a student?

MR. GOINGS: Well, I always had pretty good grades, in terms of the grading. Leon Amyx - not Amyx - Leon Goldin, I enjoyed his critiques because, much in the same as with Leon Amyx, he talked to you as though you were another artist, not a student, and I appreciated that.

I think that what I - most of what I did in his class was derivative of his style, which, of course, probably often happens. And it may have been that it was that that led to the - what I mentioned as the Paul Klee period. Goldin's painting at that time was abstract but not severely abstract. There were suggestions of representation, but formalized and abstracted, and I got sort of intrigued with that notion, too.

MS. RICHARDS: Would you say that you were more interested in color than in line? When you thought about the most important components, formally, of what you were using, it was form and color rather than being graphic, or were you attracted to graphic?

It sounds like, when you're describing your work, that it's really more about - you talked about gesture, and when you think about the artists who you talked about being influenced by, it sounds like there was a lot of interesting color and form, and not so much in line. I don't know if that's correct. I'm trying to see if you started to see what your future interests would be when you were there.

MR. GOINGS: I don't really separate those various elements. They all seem to be part of the whole mix. I mean, probably - you know, looking at it technically, when I began to work from photographs, there was a somewhat more linear quality to the work, simply because representing - you know, realistic images depend on a certain accuracy of representation, which seems to involve a line as opposed to defining it by color.

But then, on the other hand, since one of the main characters in - I mean, one of the things that has always attracted me to working from photographs is about light rather than, you know, sharply defined shapes, but the effect that light has on shapes and spaces. So I don't know. It's a mix, I guess.

MS. RICHARDS: When you graduated from CCA, then where did you go?

MR. GOINGS: I went to - [laughs] - I went to work for - well, first I did a semester of graduate work and -

[END CD 2.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards with Ralph Goings on September 10, 2009, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc three.

MR. GOINGS: Well, anyway, the short of it is that I started applying at high schools that seemed like they might have a hard time getting teachers, because there was a shortage of teachers in California at that time. And the word was out that it was easier to get a job with a provisional credential if the school was having a hard time finding qualified, certified teachers. So I applied at several different places and got an interview with a high school in Crescent City, which is the very last California town before you get to the Oregon border.

And I got the job because I could teach art and music. I was hired as an art teacher and a band teacher. [Laughs.] The whole thing turned into a wonderful, wonderland kind of thing, because I took the job, of course, because I needed a job. And we moved up there. And there was one other art teacher already there. So it was a two-man art department, and it turned out a one-man music department. I was the one-man music department.

And I had no - at that point, I had no training, formal training, in music. The only thing I knew about music was

what I could play and what I knew about my experience with the military band when I was in the army. So it was a matter of kind of learning on the job with the band thing.

The art classes - no problem at all, because I knew what I wanted to teach as far as the art was concerned. And the other art teacher and I sort of got along good and ended up sort of helping each other out. We were there for four years. [Laughs.] And my greatest achievement, I think, was not so much in the art department, although there were a few kids that really showed some promise and some development within the time that I was there.

The band - [laughs] - you know, it was one of those - it was almost like a situation comedy kind of thing, you know. The first time the band - the kids who had signed up for band, the first they were together, I had them play something just to see what they could do. It was so bad, so bad. [Laughs.] Every clarinet was out of tune. [Laughs.] The trombone player couldn't figure out how to play E flat, you know. It was just awful. And I thought, what have I gotten myself into?

But, you know, we knuckled down, and we really did some hardtack rehearsing. You know, I really worked them. And the second semester, more kids signed up. I don't know. It got better and better. And finally, we ended up with a really class-A high school band. We went to music tournaments and that kind of thing. And we did band concerts every year. And out of the marching band, I developed a swing band, a jazz band kind of thing, and did concerts with that. And that really went over big in that little town up there.

[Laughs] And at the point where we finally wanted to leave that area and move back to Sacramento - I had taken a job at a school in Sacramento, and we were getting ready to leave - and Shanna called the power company -

MRS. GOINGS: I called the power company, the telephone company, and all of the utilities and got the same response: Oh, no! Mr. Goings isn't going to leave? [Laughs.] It was wonderful. He also got them new school uniforms. We had a drive, and that was heavenly for the town. He was a hero.

MS. RICHARDS: But obviously, as an artist, you wanted to move back to an area that was closer to an art community or closer to museums? Did you feel that it wasn't tenable to -

MR. GOINGS: Well, the job - what?

MRS. GOINGS: Well, you decided to become a musician and a -

MR. GOINGS: Well, yeah. I had -

MS. RICHARDS: So still you had these forks between art and music.

MRS. GOINGS: Well, there were no painting material supplies in that little tiny town. We had to -

MS. RICHARDS: Mail order?

MRS. GOINGS: Well, no, we didn't even do that. We had to - he had to go to school in the summer. And so we went down and lived with my mother, and he bought art supplies then. But he didn't have a studio except for our bedroom. And I kept having babies and taking the bedrooms away from him.

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

MRS. GOINGS: And so he really couldn't paint. He had nobody to talk to. And so it kind of dried up for a little while, and he was totally involved in music. He started composing. So I was the one - I said, okay, we are out of here. [Laughs.]

MR. GOINGS: I had the raw material to work with.

MS. RICHARDS: It would have been death to your life as an artist to stay there.

MR. GOINGS: Well, I don't know. But, you know, by this point, I had a number of kids in the band that were really talented. They could really play. And so I wrote small pieces for them. I wrote a clarinet quartet thing and a thing for a couple of brass instruments. And it was great because, you know, I could try things out with them. And I thought, this is really fun.

It is like making a painting, you know. You take all of these things, and you put them together, and you make them do a separate thing that is something else. And I really liked it. But at one point, Shanna sort of shook me by the shoulders and said, all right, come on now. You have spent all this time in college studying art, and you are going to toss that away - because I was talking about going back to college and taking formal music classes, especially composition classes. And then I realized that she was right, that I needed to make a decision. So I did. And I got a job as a head of an art department in Sacramento.

MS. RICHARDS: Which school in Sacramento?

MR. GOINGS: Pardon?

MS. RICHARDS: Where in Sacramento? At a high school?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, I was at a high school. The high school is a parking lot - it's not there anymore.

MS. RICHARDS: So did you envision ever being able to live off your work? Was that something you could conceive?

MR. GOINGS: Not until -

MS. RICHARDS: You expected when you graduated CCA, let's say, that you would continue working as an artist with some -

MR. GOINGS: That was the plan. That was the plan. Then I found out that artists didn't make any money. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Supporting yourself teaching or whatever you could do.

MR. GOINGS: Well, that was the reality that I think every art major had to face is that you have to find some way to keep yourself alive, because in those days, especially, nobody made a living as an artist unless they were called a commercial artist.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah. So what year did you leave Crescent City? And you said you got a teaching job in Sacramento.

MR. GOINGS: You are going to have to ask Shanna about the date for that.

MS. RICHARDS: Late '50s sometime?

MRS. GOINGS: We left in '59.

MS. RICHARDS: Fifty-nine?

MRS. GOINGS: Fifty-nine.

MS. RICHARDS: And then you moved to Sacramento?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah. And then we were in Sacramento until 1974, when we went to New York.

MS. RICHARDS: So from '59, how long did you teach in that high school in Sacramento?

MRS. GOINGS: Thirteen years.

MS. RICHARDS: From '59 to -

MRS. GOINGS: To '70.

MS. RICHARDS: Seventy-two.

MR. GOINGS: Seventy-four.

MRS. GOINGS: No, we left - it wasn't 13 years.

MR. GOINGS: Oh, that is right. I quit in -

MRS. GOINGS: Fifty-nine to '70.

MS. RICHARDS: Fifty-nine to '70.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah.

MRS. GOINGS: Eleven years.

MR. GOINGS: Eleven years.

MS. RICHARDS: And so during that time, then did you have a studio in your home?

MR. GOINGS: Oh, yes, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: And did you feel that you became involved in the art community in Sacramento?

MR. GOINGS: Oh, yes, yes, very much so.

MS. RICHARDS: Which included teachers at UC-Davis?

MRS. GOINGS: It included Wayne Thiebaud, Mel Ramos, Jack Ogden. Who else?

MR. GOINGS: Can you stop this again? [Laughs.]

[Audio break.]

MS. RICHARDS: So we were talking about your getting involved in the Sacramento art world. And you talked about the artists you met. And so around - and that was from 1959 to '70. So in the early part of that period, in the late '50s, early '60s, what did your work look like? What were you painting? And what were the issues that you were dealing with as a painter?

MR. GOINGS: Well, in the '60s - let me get myself oriented here. I can't put an exact date on it. I am thinking like '60, '61, '62, in there, I started working pretty realistically both in imaginary, fantasy kind of mode and also from photographs - in the beginning, from magazine photographs.

MS. RICHARDS: Now, when you talk about "realistically," it was, of course, out of favor to paint realistically.

MR. GOINGS: I'm sorry?

MS. RICHARDS: It was out of favor, in terms of the art world, except for Pop art, to paint realistically.

MR. GOINGS: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Say, realistically, were you thinking - are you referring to Old Master realism or earlier periods in American art?

MR. GOINGS: No. I think what I am talking about is a kind of style. No, that is not the word either. I am not quite sure how to describe what I mean. I did a number of things - well, quite a few things - from magazine photographs that were - the images were translated accurately. We'll put it that way. And they were a variety of images juxtaposed in the same canvas, but not in the same environment - in other words, like a collage.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] In a way, a surrealist kind of juxtaposition of -

MR. GOINGS: Well, the juxtaposition sometimes implied maybe something political or something social or whatever. But it is a sort of happenstance implication. Whoever is looking at it is going to make out of it what they can, what they will. But that wasn't the issue. The issue was the painting of the image, not what it meant, but what it represented, but what it was, you know.

One painting, I put together a picture of a man bent over a pool table shooting pool, and another picture of some saltine crackers in the wax paper thing, and two or three other images, all from magazine ad pictures and things like that. None of these things were connected with each other directly, except in their juxtaposition. And the title of the painting, Pool Crackers [1966], I mean, I suppose if you were a pool player, you could, you know, when you break the rack is sort of cracking the rack, that kind of thing.

But, you know, if I was just - the titles for me are usually just a means of identification of the painting. It is not - you know, they could be numbers. But the important thing to me was the, I suppose - and here is the dreaded word - the "rendering" of the image because that ultimately is what I have ended up with. That is mostly what I am about, is the painting of the thing.

I moved from the magazine photograph - using the magazine photographs - to a series of paintings that I called California Girls, which were actually students - high school students of mine - just a single figure standing in no environment, just a solid-color background or whatever. And these were from photographs that I took. And the step from using magazine photographs to my own photographs was an important step, I think, because from the painting of the students to then the first of the Pickup Truck series, which was sort of the beginning of the whole thing for me, was really important. I don't know where I am going with this. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: How did you decide to work from a photograph, work from even a magazine ad, work from a photograph instead of drawing the model from life?

MR. GOINGS: There was a period - oh, gosh. It is going to be hard for me to date this. Shanna would be able to help me with this. But there was a period when I stopped - well, there is a period, after we moved back to Sacramento from Crescent City, when I had started painting again after not painting much when we were in Crescent City because I didn't have a studio up there. And I was doing abstract expressionist - abstractions, big ones, lots of paint, really, really gooey.

And after a few months of doing that, I realized that I wasn't going anywhere with it, that it was all art school stuff. It was old - it was old stuff, you know. My head wasn't there anymore. So I just stopped painting and started building little assemblages. By this time, I had a halfway decent studio, and I had a table saw, and I had some tools, and I built these little [Joseph] Cornell-type assemblages out of wood and -

MS. RICHARDS: In boxes like Cornell?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, boxes, and some of them had doors and little windows that you could look through into our places. And I glued stuff on them, you know. And it was all -

MS. RICHARDS: There were some other artists at that time making boxes besides Cornell. Do you remember having seen other artists' work that inspired you, with mirrors inside and -

MR. GOINGS: I don't remember that. I was aware of Cornell, of course. And, you know, those were fun and I really enjoyed making them. But ultimately, they weren't painting. And I wanted to paint. So - [laughs] - at this time, I was teaching in the high school. I had my students doing a lot of stuff with magazine photographs, mostly collages. And I had them collecting photographs. We just had boxes and boxes and boxes of magazine photographs that we would cut out in the class just everywhere.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you seeing artists like [Robert] Rauschenberg in magazines and knowing that he was using this -

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, well, we tried some of those techniques and even developed some techniques of our own. And those were good, kind of, class activities. And so I had all of these photographs, all of these magazines - I have boxes of them in my own studio. And one day, I was just idly looking through this box of pictures. And I pulled out this one that had two figures that had been on the - I think it had been on a cover of Life magazine or something. It was two young people who had participated in some sort of demonstration in Washington, D.C. I can't even remember what it was about. It was an African-American couple. And I thought, I wonder if I could paint them.

And so I just dropped everything else and drew the two of them on a - I had this canvas that had been an attempt at an abstraction that I didn't like, so I just coated it out and started painting this. I said, I am going to paint this as realistic as I can. I am going to go back to the old days of art school, and I am going to render that baby and do the best I can with it and see if I can do it.

And it was so much fun. [Laughs.] It was like I didn't want to go in the house. I didn't want to leave my studio. I didn't want to, you know, get away from it. And so at one point, I finished the two figures. And I thought, hey, this is really terrific. I really like the way they look, but I need to have more stuff in here. And I was still thinking in terms of the collage kind of thing. So I took another photograph and painted it onto the canvas, too. And I think there was a third image, too, but I can't remember what it was. I painted that on.

Anyway, I got that all painted on there, and I really liked the way it looked. [Painted in 1963.] And I think I knew then that that was the direction things were going to go. And that just was the beginning of it then. I really stopped fooling around with all of the other things that I had been playing with and purposely set out to photograph.

At the same time, the idea of painting from a photograph, which was a no-no because only hobby painters did that - they painted, you know, the Arizona highway desert pictures in their hobby classes. But that is the only people who worked from photographs. And the idea of a serious painter painting from a photograph intrigued me. And then, of course, the light went on, and I realized that there had been people in the past that we all know and love - [laughs] - who had been affected by working from photographs.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there any particular artists who you really felt had inspired you to do that - had permitted you to do that?

MR. GOINGS: Well, we can start with [Johannes] Vermeer, and we can work right up to -

MS. RICHARDS: - [Thomas] Eakins

MR. GOINGS: - Eakins. Now, I was -you know, it was at that point where I really started realizing about, you

know, all of those -

MS. RICHARDS: So you never thought about painting those girls from life? Drawings, having them model for you?

MR. GOINGS: No.

MS. RICHARDS: You felt it would be better to take a picture?

MR. GOINGS: No, no. Well, there was a conceptual element here, because I wanted something that represented a different way of seeing. You know, the idea about the eyeball realist is one thing. There is an imaginary realist, which is another thing. And there is a Photorealist, which is - it may be a bastard thing, but it is another thing, you know. And the idea that working from a photograph was another way of looking at the world, indirectly albeit, but nevertheless a different way than has been done before.

So that was -

MS. RICHARDS: You were working in oils, right?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And you have always stuck to that? When you first started this approach, were you working directly, as opposed to very traditional Old Master techniques of doing underpainting, et cetera? Or did you work directly with the color on the canvas? Were you using glazes? I mean, those Old Master techniques. Were you using Old Master techniques like glazing and layering of the paint? Or did you work directly?

MR. GOINGS: Almost always wet in wet. But no, too, because once I got going and started taking photographs, you know, specifically for making paintings, I began to think more in terms of craftsmanship, of, you know, good structure, proper layering, and so on. So I began underpainting with very thin color, you know, oil paint, thinned way down, the turpentine, just as a stain to indicate the general local color areas. And then after that dried, a layer of overpainting, which generally finished wet in wet as I went along.

MS. RICHARDS: When you had this kind of "eureka" moment - you knew you loved painting the figure, and that that would be the direction you would take - did you have a circle of friends, of artists, in Sacramento there, who you shared this new direction with who were supportive, or did you feel very isolated and alone in this undertaking?

MR. GOINGS: Well, at first, I felt isolated because I didn't know what anybody else was doing, because I wasn't really paying that much attention at that point because we had just come to Sacramento from another area and I didn't know anybody locally. And it wasn't until later, when I met - well, I met Wayne Thiebaud.

And it turned out that one of the art teachers in the same high school district where I was teaching, but at a different school, was Mel Ramos. And I met him one summer session, when the two of us signed on to do a summer session teaching. And we taught together for one summer. And I got to know him.

He, at the time, was painting very abstractly, but subsequently became "Mel Ramos." [Laughs.] And it seems to me that I don't think that the painting that I was talking about - that I was describing - I think I did that before I met Mel. I don't think he ever saw that. But at the time, the few artists that I knew, I didn't think that they would appreciate it, because it wasn't like de Kooning, or, you know, it wasn't -

MS. RICHARDS: At the same time in the early '60s, you saw Pop art, right?

MR. GOINGS: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Talk about when you first saw those paintings, I guess, in a museum in San Francisco or a gallery?

MR. GOINGS: I saw a show in San Francisco. I guess it was probably the first Pop art show that was shown in New York. It was a museum show that came - I don't know where it came from, but it came to a San Francisco museum. And I went there because I knew who these people were and I had been reading about them in art magazines and so on. And I was really intrigued by them.

MS. RICHARDS: Because you felt its affinity because they were rendering real -

MR. GOINGS: Yes, because they were reaping their subjects from the same areas that I had been fooling around with, too. So I went and I thought, gee, you know, maybe these guys are somebody I should really look at.

So I went to the show, and I spent a lot of time there. And I was disappointed because - I mean, the images were

the images, but they seemed so - the paintings seemed so, kind of, tacky. There were strings hanging off corners, and the canvas was all loose and floppy. They were sloppily painted. You know, to them, that was the point. They were not concerned about technique and style. It was, sock them in the eye with the image, you know, which is what they were about.

But then I realized that that wasn't what I was about, that I wanted something more, something more, in my own mind, I thought, elegant. I just love the idea of an elegantly painted surface. I mean, my paintings are not - they don't have a lot of paint on them. But there is enough paint on there that if you look closely, you get the feel of the paint itself. And even if the tooth of the canvas is showing through in the paint, that adds to it. It makes - the painting is an object. It is a thing. It is not just a representation. It is something that was built.

That is why - the argument about if the painting is going to be - if it is going to look just like a photograph, why not just take a photograph? But they are not the same. Photographs are - I just described before that what the difference is. A painting has substance. And I know that there are photographers who are making these huge prints, and they are printing on aluminum and they are printing on this, and they are printing on that.

But it is still - the essence of the photograph is that it is a chemical impression, a chemical reproduction of a visual thing, which is fine. You know, I am not saying that that disqualifies it from anything. But what I am trying to say, I guess, is that, for me, the making of the painting and the seeing and - I am not going anyplace with this. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: No, you are; you are. When you started using photographs, I think it was by the early '70s, or actually '69, that you did the first Pickup Truck. At that point, you are not only using the photograph for information about an image and color and light, but you are also using - or the question is, did you also want to depict the aspects of reality that were photographic, the distortions, the quality of reality that a camera sees rather than using the photograph as a reference from which you would paint your version of reality?

MR. GOINGS: I think that probably mine is a mixture of both of those, because there are certain effects that I see in a photograph that I find I can translate into paint language that is a different kind of language than the photo language.

In other instances, there are photo effects, like certain halos that happen because of the way light strikes something or the way it bounces off of something, which I find intriguing. Like - [pause] - look at this: this kind of thing, this shininess that was on this metal step here.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MR. GOINGS: In the photograph, it is just a blur. And you read it because you trust the photograph to tell you the truth. Well, I tried to make this a little bit something more - to just play with it, you know, just to - more than paint language.

MS. RICHARDS: So the intention for you was not to copy exactly every aspect of the photographic - the camera's -

MR. GOINGS: No, no, no. The photograph, as you said before, is a source of information. And if some photographic - if there is some element that looks the way it looks because it is a photograph only, but that would not look that way with the naked eye, that is okay. Either way - I can do it one way, or I can do it the other. I can choose. It's like, you know, sometimes the light in the photograph of a shiny table in a diner hits the corner from the window. Sunlight comes in, and it hits it, and it makes like there is a line here. And this is bright light here and this is darker over here.

In the photograph, that looks - that edge doesn't line up. This looks fatter because the light is more intense and the camera reads that as bigger. Straightening that out is one way to go, and denying what the camera has seen and straightening it out, then, would try to put it the way the naked eye would see it. But sometimes it is more interesting just to accept what the camera saw and say, hey, if it works, it works. And it does sometimes. Sometimes it doesn't. You do it the other way. It is just -

When I make a painting, I keep working on it until it looks right to me as a painting, because by this time, I have already put the photographs away. And what I am after is a painting that looks like a painting that I like.

MS. RICHARDS: In the '60s, when you were painting your students, were you - those are the images I know. Were you also painting other things? Or were you really focusing just on the figure - on these people who you knew - painting those from photographs - before you did the Pickup Truck [series]?

MR. GOINGS: Oh, no, no. No, I did some other things, too. But at that time, there was a mixture, because at the time I was doing the figures, I was also still doing a few things from magazine photographs, which were a whole

entirely different kind of image, but still trying to develop the rendering effect that I wanted.

MS. RICHARDS: So talk about how you decided to paint that first Pickup Truck painting.

MR. GOINGS: [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: You have told this story many times, I am sure. Yeah, what were your thoughts? Were you looking for something - a different subject matter?

MR. GOINGS: Well, yes, I was looking - I was looking for some subject matter. The circumstances were, I was a member of a local cooperative gallery in Sacramento. A group of artists came together -

MS. RICHARDS: What was that called - the gallery?

MR. GOINGS: Pardon?

MS. RICHARDS: What was the name of that gallery?

MR. GOINGS: Artist Cooperative Gallery. [Laughs.]

MRS. GOINGS: I think it is still in existence.

MR. GOINGS: What?

MRS. GOINGS: It is still in existence, isn't it?

MR. GOINGS: Yes, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: In Sacramento?

MR. GOINGS: It is not the same people. But the idea was that everybody contributed by going down and washing windows, sweeping the floor, and in turn, you got to have a show, and that kind of thing. Anyway, they had an annual group show that they invited artists to participate in. And -

MS. RICHARDS: You mean invited that not every member could take part?

MR. GOINGS: Pardon?

MS. RICHARDS: Not every member in the cooperative could take part? Only some were invited?

MR. GOINGS: No, no, I'm sorry. I'm telescoping here because, in the beginning, it was a cooperative, as I have described it. As time went on, it became fewer - I mean, there were still a lot of artists involved, and they all got to show. But there were a lot of people who didn't, who weren't members.

And they had these annual group shows of artists that were invited, most of them who were not members of the organization. And I don't think I was still active with them at the point where they invited me to this. But they had a theme for these annual shows. And this particular year, the theme was views of Sacramento. [Laughs.] And I thought, what the heck, maybe there is something to look at in Sacramento.

I mean, up until this point, I had just been painting the figures and the magazine photographs and some fantasy things, too. So I took my camera, and I went out and started looking around. I drove around; I drove around; I drove around. Finally - it was hot. You know, Sacramento is hot in the summertime. It was just blistering.

So finally, I pulled into this parking lot and was sitting there trying to decide whether to just go home and forget the whole thing and not enter this group show or keep looking. And I looked over on the other side of the parking lot, and there was a very fancy pickup truck that had been all gussied up with a very fancy paint job and stainless steel exhaust things and, you know, all kinds of stuff.

And there were a couple of guys standing there looking at it and talking. So I got out of the car and walked over to see what was going on. And one of the guys was the guy who owned the truck, and the others were just people who were interested in looking at it. And he was telling them about all of the things that he had done to it. It was all automotive talk, you know, about overhead valves and all that kind of stuff that I didn't understand. [Laughs.]

And so, you know, I thought, well, this is really kind of a fancy-looking thing; I'll take a picture of it just for the heck of it. So I did. And as I was walking back to my car, I realized that, you know, there were two or three dozen cars in this parking lot. I realized that over half of them were pickup trucks. And none of them were as fancy as this one. They were mostly just working trucks, you know. There were one or two that were sitting sort of by

themselves, so I took pictures of those, too.

And I got back in the car, and I went home and sent the film off to be processed and just sort of forgot about it, thinking, I will get back to this theme show later. And the slides came back. And I looked at them, and I thought, I think maybe I have got something here. [Laughs.] So I went out again, and I set out to find specific situations with pickup trucks that were, you know, could be Sacramento, anyplace in Sacramento.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you thinking that the slide image would be the painting? In other words, the background needed to be right, not just the right truck, but the light, the composition, the orientation, vertical, horizontal?

MR. GOINGS: Well, in order to be a part of the theme, it would have to be the environment. And the environment - I mean, the environment of a parking lot - these big parking lots in Sacramento are huge. And they are not interesting. They are just cement, you know, forever. And so I set out to find interesting-looking trucks that were parked in interesting places. And that is what the first Trucks were. From then on, it is history, I guess.

MS. RICHARDS: The first Trucks were in 1969. I don't know if you -

MRS. GOINGS: Yeah.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah.

MRS. GOINGS: I'm sorry.

MS. RICHARDS: *Blue Chip Truck* [1969]. And calculating you were born in 1928, you were 40, maybe almost 41, which is somewhat mature. By the time you found the kind of vision, this kind of distinct sensibility, when you look back at your career, that Truck was very significant. I mean, you were working from the photograph the decade before, too. But did you have any sense at that point - oh, my God, I finally - [laughs] - I finally got something I think I am going to be able to mine for a long time that's really mine? [Laughs.]

MR. GOINGS: Well, you know, it occurs to me that things are so much different. I mean, I have been describing pretty much what I did and what happened to me - well, what happened from the time I graduated until the point where, as you say, I sort of struck it. And I can date, you know, set that as the mark of my mature whatever.

Nowadays, art students who go to art school, while they are still undergraduates, are thinking in terms of their career as an artist. I never thought of that until whatever age it was you said. You know, there was a point when I was painting and not really getting anywhere with it. And I guess I wasn't getting anywhere with it because I wasn't doing anything with the paintings that I did. I made a lot of paintings. But I never had any venue. I had no place to take them or show them.

And finally at one point, Shanna said to me, if you are going to do this, you are going to have to do it. You are going to have to somehow make connection in New York, because that seems to be where the action is.

MRS. GOINGS: I also said, you had better decide on what sort of painter you are and start putting together paintings that are consistent, because you will never have retrospect if you just have all this stuff -

MR. GOINGS: [Laughs] Anyway, she was the driving force in getting me off the ground, I guess.

MS. RICHARDS: In the '60s era in Sacramento when you were teaching high school, did you think it would be a goal to teach college? Was that something that you were striving for? Would that be an improvement in any way?

MRS. GOINGS: More money.

MR. GOINGS: Well, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And at that point, had you already gotten your M.F.A.? Or was that before -

MR. GOINGS: Yeah. I got it while I was teaching high school, mainly because it put me higher on the salary scale.

MS. RICHARDS: But with an M.F.A., then you could go to an art school or a college to teach?

MR. GOINGS: Well, somehow I never got around to it.

MRS. GOINGS: No, we considered it at one point. And you looked into it and found out that he would have to start as an instructor.

MR. GOINGS: Oh, that is right. I would have had to have started on the bottom level. I had four kids, and they all had to have shoes.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh. [Laughs.]

MRS. GOINGS: That is why I said he would get kicked out of his bedroom studio.

MR. GOINGS: [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: So you did that Truck, and you brought it to that show at the Art[ist] Cooperative Gallery.

MR. GOINGS: Well, there is more to that story, because I had - my current dealer, who has always been my dealer ever since I started showing in New York, Ivan Karp, was at [Leo] Castelli Gallery in those years. And I had sent some work to him, which he had sold for me.

MS. RICHARDS: When was that?

MRS. GOINGS: In the '60s.

MR. GOINGS: In the '60s, early '60s.

MRS. GOINGS: He opened his own gallery in 1969 - September of '69.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you know that he was interested in the kind of work you did?

MR. GOINGS: [Laughs] After Shanna shook me by the shoulders and said, you know, if you are going to do this, you are going to do it, you have to get to New York, I started sending slides to galleries in New York.

MS. RICHARDS: And how did you pick the galleries to send them to?

MR. GOINGS: Art magazines, ads. And luckily, I sent some to Castelli Gallery. And I got a note back from Ivan, who was the director then, saying that Castelli was not interested in adding new artists to his stable, but keep in touch, keep sending me slides as the paintings occur. So I did. And every once in a while, I would send a slide of a painting, and he would write or call and say, send that painting; I think maybe I could sell it out of the back room for you. So I did. And he did that several times.

MS. RICHARDS: This is before you ever had a show at any other gallery besides Sacramento?

MR. GOINGS: Oh, yeah. Then the Pickup painting for the invitational show came along. And it was like - I painted the picture. I took a slide of it because I always did that. I took slides of all the paintings that I did, just for my records. I sent the painting to the show. And my memory is that it was just within a few days I got a note from Ivan. [Laughs.] Ivan's notes were always on little scraps of paper about this big, folded once and stuck in an envelope.

Anyway, this note said - oh, I had sent him something. I can't remember. I had sent him a little painting or something. Anyway -

MS. RICHARDS: A slide of a painting?

MR. GOINGS: To Ivan, yeah, at Castelli. He sent this note back and said - I don't know - keep the faith, stiff upper lip, look at the American scene. So I took his note and wrapped it around the slide of the pickup painting and stuck it in an envelope with a note of my own that said, I already have. And I sent it to him.

MS. RICHARDS: And when you sent it to him, he had already had his own gallery?

MR. GOINGS: No.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MR. GOINGS: Not yet.

MS. RICHARDS: Sixty-nine.

MRS. GOINGS: Well, this was in the summer. His gallery opened in September. And he knew he was going to have his own gallery, but we didn't know it.

MR. GOINGS: As soon as he got my note and the slide of that pickup painting, I got a message right back from him. If you can do - what was it?

MRS. GOINGS: If you can do three more paintings of this quality -

MR. GOINGS: If you can do three more paintings of this quality, you can be in my new gallery, which is opening - dah, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah - on West Broadway. And the rest is history. [Laughs.]

MRS. GOINGS: Well, he just sold the paintings as fast as they came in. So I will let Ralph -

MR. GOINGS: Well, the amazing thing was, to me still is, that - I will have to get the time element right here, because I was still teaching.

MRS. GOINGS: Yes. October.

MR. GOINGS: Hmm?

MRS. GOINGS: October.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah. But he called and said - oh - [laughs]. He called while I was at school and said, I have to talk to Ralph, to her.

MRS. GOINGS: Right now.

MR. GOINGS: Right now. And so she called the school and asked the office if I could come to the phone. And she said, it's not an emergency but try to get him free so he can come to the phone. So over the intercom in my classroom came this voice from the office: Mr. Goings, there is an emergency at home. Will you come to the phone? [Laughs.]

So I went to the office, and I picked it up, and it was Ivan. And he said, how soon can you get out of that contract? And I said, what? And he said, I will support you if you stop teaching now and start painting. And I said, well, Ivan, how much is support? "How much are you making?" And he matched it.

MS. RICHARDS: This tape is running out.

[END CD 3.]

This is Judith Richards with Ralph Goings on September 10, 2009, in Santa Cruz, California, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc four.

Ralph, I think you were in the middle of talking about Ivan Karp calling you at school.

MR. GOINGS: Oh, yeah. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: And saying, quit your job and just paint full-time. [Laughs.] Could you finish that story of how that evolved? You were saying after we stopped recording - you were just talking a bit more about that.

MR. GOINGS: Well, that is actually pretty much it. I went home that day after his call and told Shanna about it. I said, you know, I don't know whether I can do this or not, because I didn't know whether I could get a leave, and I was a little, you know, with a schoolteacher's mentality and four kids, the idea of walking away from a paying job was a little daunting.

MS. RICHARDS: With health benefits, I guess, and all the rest?

MR. GOINGS: Oh, yeah. So I said, well, I don't know if I can do this to her. And she said, you can't not do it. You have to do it. So we talked it over some more. And I went back to the school and made arrangements, since it was towards the end of the semester, to take a leave for the next semester. And it turned out okay, because, as Shanna said, there was a teacher who had been department chairman in the district - art department chairman in the district - not at the school where I was, but in the same district - and was coming back to Sacramento. He was looking for a job, and so he could step right in and take my place.

And so once that was done, the papers were signed and so on, I pretty much felt like I was probably not going to go back anyway. And as Shanna said, we then - we felt like since - well, there was a period of time, that next semester, all of that, when I did nothing but paint and tried to produce enough work for a show at OK Harris. And I am trying to think at what point - well, the thing I remember is that I did 13 paintings.

MS. RICHARDS: Your first show there was in 1970.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah. So this was in '69.

MS. RICHARDS: So you did 13 paintings?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, in a year. And it is amazing to me that I was able to do that. [Laughs.] They certainly slowed down considerably after that. But let's see, I am trying to think the chain of events. I did the paintings for the show. And we went - we went for the opening of the show, which was really a big thrill because we had never been to New York before. The show was a success. Most everything was sold. I can't think what the next step was. At some point, we moved to New York. But it was sometime later, because back in Sacramento, after the show, I did take a teaching job for a semester at Davis.

MS. RICHARDS: UC-Davis?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah. Somebody was going on leave there, and so I took their place for -

MS. RICHARDS: Why did you take their job? I mean, did you feel it was like a feather in your cap? Was it kind of an honor to be asked to teach?

MRS. GOINGS: I think we thought we needed the money because we were going off on this adventure.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MRS. GOINGS: And we had paid - Ivan kept selling every picture, and each one for more money. But we were using all the money to pay off our debts. And so we needed a nest egg to be sure we could get by.

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MR. GOINGS: Now, well, I knew a couple of people that taught at Davis. And apparently when the opening came up - when the person whose place I took was going on leave - one of the people I knew at Davis said, well, hey, you know, Ralph is not teaching now. Maybe he could do this. And so they asked me if I would do it, and I did. You know, it was - I only had to meet two days a week, I think.

MRS. GOINGS: He also taught at Sac State.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, well, that was to do a favor for one of the teachers there that I knew, who was ill and needed a replacement.

MS. RICHARDS: As you were working on these paintings, which were really something very new in the art world in '69-'70, do you think that your ability to develop that work was enhanced by your being outside the mainstream - by your not being in L.A. or New York?

MR. GOINGS: I don't know. I don't know. [Laughs.] My guess would be that knowing me, I was probably better off doing them in Sacramento, where nobody knew what was going on. I am afraid that if I had been in L.A. or New York, I might have been easily distracted. [Laughs.] I mean, at the point where I was able to stop teaching and that first show had been arranged, you know, I felt like this was what was going to happen. This was what I was going to do.

And I tried to stay focused. I didn't want to get - Shanna will tell you that she had a really hard time getting me just to leave the studio and go out for lunch periodically, because I would get - you know, I would work from like 8:00 in the morning until 6:00 or so at night every day. That is how I got all those paintings done.

And I think part of that routine was just the carryover from teaching, you know, having to get up at a fairly early morning and be committed to doing something all day long. Except when I was teaching, I got home by 3:30 and I could take a nap. When I was in the studio, I couldn't get a break until it was dinnertime. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: When did you realize that there were other painters who were also working in a similar - in what would become Photorealism?

MR. GOINGS: Well, that is hard. I know what the occasion was, but I am not sure about the date. There was a show in the Milwaukee Art Institute. Is that it? I am going to have to get Shanna's help for this, maybe. A curator from - if I have the right museum - had been to see me. Remember that "New aspects" - or "Aspects of a New Realism" show? Was that in Milwaukee Art Institute? Remember what's-his-name came to visit me and -

MRS. GOINGS: Was that Taylor? Jack Taylor?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, I think so. Anyway, he asked me to put a painting in the show. And -

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, here - 1969, "Directions 2: Aspects of a New Realism," Milwaukee Art Center [Milwaukee, WI, June 21-August 10, 1969.].

MR. GOINGS: Yeah. And, you know -

MS. RICHARDS: And you are saying the curator's name was what?

MRS. GOINGS: I am not sure about that, you know. My memory is Jack Traylor, but -

MR. GOINGS: No, Jack Traylor was a folksong singer.

MRS. GOINGS: He was the one that came -

MR. GOINGS: Taylor.

MRS. GOINGS: Taylor. Jack Taylor? [John Lloyd Taylor, author of the essay, "Presence as an Aspect of A New Realism" in *Directions 2: Aspects of a New Realism*]. He was the one that came at the time when Satera [daughter's horse] was born.

MR. GOINGS: [Laughs] I guess. I don't know. I don't put that with it.

MRS. GOINGS: I mean, because he was there. Somebody was there who was an art director.

MR. GOINGS: Anyway, I didn't go - we didn't go to the show. But once I got the catalogue from that show, I realized that there were other people doing this. And I didn't know who any of them were at the time.

MS. RICHARDS: It must have come as a - was it a shock in a positive way or a negative way? [Laughs.]

MR. GOINGS: I don't know. It sort of made it okay, you know, that somebody else was doing it.

MRS. GOINGS: Well, we found out from McLean. He didn't know other people were painting like that, except for his friend Bob Bechtle.

MR. GOINGS: Bechtle.

MRS. GOINGS: The two of them had a studio together, and so they were both -

MS. RICHARDS: And did you know that they were doing that painting when you were?

MR. GOINGS: No. I can't think of any other occasion. That one museum show seemed like -

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah. There is another show at the ICA [Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, January 14-February 25, 1970] that you had called "The Highway." It must have been images of vehicles.

MR. GOINGS: Oh.

MRS. GOINGS: I don't remember that.

MR. GOINGS: Where was that?

MS. RICHARDS: Philadelphia, the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia. And it says it also went to Houston and Akron [the exhibition was in collaboration with the Institute for the Arts, Rice University, Houston, Texas, March 12-May 18; the Akron Art Institute, Akron, Ohio, June 5-July 26; and ICA, Philadelphia, in 1970].

MR. GOINGS: That was after the Milwaukee, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: One year later. And from then on, there were tons and tons of exhibitions.

MRS. GOINGS: There was something else. The guy who was buying for a corporate collection - I don't know, AT&T or something like that - maybe that is who I am remembering who came. And he bought the picture - one of your California Girl pictures. And he called me on the phone and said how much do you want for it? And Ralph wasn't there. And I panicked and I said $300. And I later found out he said, oh, I would have given you a lot more than that.

MR. GOINGS: The corporate collection was the Bell Telephone Company. It was in Chicago. But I can't remember his name.

MRS. GOINGS: That may be the Jack I am remembering. I don't know.

MR. GOINGS: We got sidetracked here.

MRS. GOINGS: I am sorry. That is my fault.

MR. GOINGS: No.

MS. RICHARDS: No. When you had that show in New York and it did very well, you just went back to California and kept painting, assuming there would be another show?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, I was trying to -

MS. RICHARDS: And in that first show, you did mostly trucks.

MR. GOINGS: It was all trucks, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: But there was - didn't you have an image of an airstream trailer?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, well, I figured that was a truck. It had wheels. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: So that was all trucks?

MR. GOINGS: Pardon?

MS. RICHARDS: That was all trucks?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And over that - I want to go back to a technical question. When you did that show and were using slides, I don't know if your system has changed from then. It is a long time ago. But at that point, what was the technique that you used, first of all, to pick which slide you would use? And then how you used the slide to create the painting?

MR. GOINGS: Well, the slide was usually selected just sitting down with my slide projector and the lights off in the studio and just running them through and through and through.

MS. RICHARDS: And when you took the slide, you are taking an image of what would be a painting, not combining pieces from three different slides to make a painting.

MR. GOINGS: No, I didn't do that until later.

MS. RICHARDS: At the beginning -

MR. GOINGS: In the beginning with the pickup trucks, the environment - the landscape was just as important as the truck, even though the truck was in the middle of the picture and then sort of monolithic. The environment was just as important. Occasionally, you know, some little detail might get changed or left out or whatever. But pretty much they were the same information - visual information.

There was a flap about the painting that was in that Guggenheim show in Berlin ["Picturing America: Photorealism of the 1970s," Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin, March 7-May 10, 2009]. The painting - the Truck painting that they had for that show was an early one, the McDonald Pickup Truck [*MacDonald's Pickup*, 1970]. It was a truck parked in front of McDonald's fast food place. And in the photograph that they had of the painting for the show that they were going to reproduce in the catalogue, there is a row of telephone poles way off in the distance, but you can't see the wires.

[Laughs] And so the people who were putting the catalogue together wrote me a letter and wanted to know, were the wires in the original photograph, and did I leave them out? Or were there no wires there or what? [Laughs.] And I thought, you know, it was really a kind of picky little thing to jump on. But at least they were paying attention.

And at the time, I said, I don't know. I can't remember if I left them out, or if I just couldn't see them in the slide that I used, or what, until just like two weeks ago. I have been going through all of my old slides. I have been trying to get some pictures together for the NPR [National Public Radio] Web site [. One of the women on there is going to do some sort of thing about the relationship with painting photography.

Anyway, I ran across the original slide that I used - the original print that I used for the painting of that truck. And there aren't wires on the telephone poles. [Laughs.] So I didn't leave them out. I just didn't paint them because there weren't any. I couldn't see them. They weren't in the print.

But the thing is, the photographs that I work from are not, have never been, really first-class photographs. I am not a photographer; I am a picture taker, because when I take pictures, it is to gather information. And I am not careful about the technique. I don't do any of the printing myself. So whenever I wanted a print or something, I

had to send it out. And sometimes - I usually just got the cheapest one they had. And that was the case with this particular painting. It was just such a cheap print that the telephone lines didn't show up. [Laughs.]

But other times - and as the subject matter has changed from the trucks to the fast food places to the diners to the countertops and so on, I have made changes when I thought it would help the painting. And I like the idea, for instance, of looking at a diner painting of mine and being able to go into the diner and say, oh, yes, this is the diner. I recognize this diner. But beyond that, that is, you know, that is just a little frosting on the cake. I don't know. What was the question? [Laughs.] I am wandering. You have to not let me wander because -

MS. RICHARDS: You are covering it. So for the paintings in that early show, at least, you took many slides. You decided which ones you wanted to use as paintings. Then what was the next step?

MR. GOINGS: After I decided on the slide that I was going to use, then it was a matter of projecting the image on the canvas and drawing it.

MS. RICHARDS: So you just said making a print.

MR. GOINGS: The print was for painting purposes. It is too hard to look at a slide.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay. So you started with projecting the image onto the canvas.

MR. GOINGS: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: And doing a light drawing.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, with pencil.

MS. RICHARDS: But you also had a print so that you could keep it next to your worktable.

MR. GOINGS: Well, the order was a little bit different. I would have a batch of slides of possible subject matter. I would go through them and pick out maybe three or four that I thought might be doable and have prints made of those three or four. And when I got the prints back, the prints got put up on the wall in my studio and just left there for a few days while I am working on something else, so that I am used to looking at them.

And after a while, sooner or later, one of those prints usually says, do me. And that is the one I do. I have the slide already. I just project it. And I use the print to do the painting to get the colors and the information, specific information, that I need out of it.

MS. RICHARDS: So does that mean that you never take the step of doing a sketch or preliminary drawings or preliminary oil sketches? You go directly from the print, the slide, to the canvas?

MR. GOINGS: Right, right, mostly. [Laughs.] But then, you know, there is a qualification, I suppose, for every idea. When I got involved with the still life subject matter, then I found myself making more changes in some of the interiors or whatnot because the objects are more intimate, in terms of their own space and also in relation to you as an observer.

So, you know, I find myself occasionally changing some of the effects of light or maybe even moving an object over or back or whatever. And that gets complicated when you already have the slide fixed. So then I started setting up the situations in the studio, because I have all of those objects. Then I could control everything. I could control the relationship of each object to each other and to the space that they are going to be in, the light, everything I can control.

MS. RICHARDS: I am going to return to that, I guess, tomorrow when we talk about that more recent work. What did you feel - this is still in the early years, early '70s. Did you feel you had a relationship at all to more traditional realists who were working in New York and showing as well?

MR. GOINGS: Oh, you mean, like the eyeball realists or like Jack Beal or some of those people?

MS. RICHARDS: Or Philip Pearlstein - artists or realists who didn't use photographs?

MR. GOINGS: No, no. My feeling was that they were seeing - they were looking at their world in a certain way, which to me was a sort of old-fashioned way. I wanted to look - as I said earlier, I wanted to look at it in a different way. And by using this machine, this camera, thing, as an extension of seeing, I could maybe see the world differently. And that was the intent.

MS. RICHARDS: Before we go on to your work, let me go back to the practical aspect. A few years after that first show in 1970, you moved. You left California. That was in 1974 you left California? But you didn't move to New

York City. So what was that move about?

MR. GOINGS: [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: You didn't move to Los Angeles or San Francisco.

MR. GOINGS: No, it was mainly about me, because we were living in Sacramento, and I wasn't tied to a job anymore. And we had talked briefly about the possibility of moving somewhere else just to try living someplace else, because we had always lived in California.

MS. RICHARDS: Which would be a little complicated with four kids.

MRS. GOINGS: He had only lived in California.

MR. GOINGS: Well, but, I mean - when I say we, I meant our life together. We had always lived in California.

MRS. GOINGS: And also, you had been up-country with Ivan.

MR. GOINGS: Well, I hadn't gotten to that part yet.

MRS. GOINGS: Oh, excuse me.

MR. GOINGS: [Laughs] Well, at a certain point, I was invited to sit on a panel -

MRS. GOINGS: Duke University [Durham, NC]. Duke.

MR. GOINGS: Duke, Duke, Duke, yes. And I went. And Ivan was also on the panel. And while I was there, he said, before you go back to California, come up to New York with me and come up to the country with us. We have a house up there. So I said okay. And we did that. We went up to his country place. And while I was there, he showed me this little house that was just, like, two blocks down the road from his house and asked me if I would be interested in it.

MS. RICHARDS: In buying it?

MR. GOINGS: In trading a painting for it. And I said, I don't know. What would I do here? And I think his idea was that it would be a getaway place, you know. And I wasn't thinking of that because I still was thinking in terms of what we were saying earlier about moving somewhere else than Sacramento.

Anyway, I came back home and told Shanna about it. And she was greatly distracted at the time because her mother was very ill, and she was having a really hard time with that. And it was not a good time for all of us. And so we just mulled it over. But I kept thinking about it and kept thinking about it. And anyway, what was the occasion? We both went east.

MRS. GOINGS: We went to New York for some reason - oh, for a show, one of your shows. And they drove us up to the country in that Jeep. Remember the Jeep?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah. Oh, that is when they offered us the house.

MRS. GOINGS: They offered us the house. And it was a tiny house. And we had three teenagers - four actually, although I didn't think Mark would go with us. And I was very -

MS. RICHARDS: But when you thought about moving somewhere, of course, you had four kids. They were all in school, so it is a big -

MRS. GOINGS: A big deal.

MS. RICHARDS: Big deal. But it sounds like part of - what didn't factor in was being part of the - feeling like you were living amidst other artists in the art world, wherever that might be. That didn't seem to be part of your interest in moving.

MR. GOINGS: No.

MRS. GOINGS: Well, we knew our children would not survive in New York City. They were typical California kids who were used to going everywhere on their bikes, and those were before we knew there were perverts that snatched your children. And we let them be very free, because we were in a pretty safe area. So that was part of not going there.

MR. GOINGS: Well, the ultimate move was - the intent was to be in proximity to New York City without actually

living there, because neither one of us wanted to. New York City made me very nervous in those days. I would go down there. And two days was about all I could stand, and then I would have to go home because - [laughs] - it was just nervous energy constantly, which I suppose most people like, but it bothered me. Anyway, I think -

MRS. GOINGS: The other thing is that shipping his paintings got to be pretty difficult.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah.

MRS. GOINGS: During the early '70s or so, there were a number of art thefts from, if I remember right, from the airport. And it was too expensive. He got enough money at that time for his paintings that we couldn't insure the paintings. And it just got to the point where every time Ralph sent a painting off, he couldn't stand it until he talked to the gallery to be sure it got there. That was part of it.

MS. RICHARDS: So if you were upstate New York, they could go in a truck.

MRS. GOINGS: No, we would just take them down.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MR. GOINGS: Well, when we lived there, we had a van. And I would either take the paintings down myself, or just down the road from us was the shop where the man who made my stretcher bars had his shop. And he drove - you know, he had clients all over the world, a lot of them in New York City. And he would take his truck down to New York City once a week to deliver stretcher bars to other people. So he would haul paintings for me. And he hauled stuff up to the country for Ivan sometimes. And so there was a sort of reciprocal -

MRS. GOINGS: And he would go straight to the gallery and unload, so we felt pretty secure, except -

MR. GOINGS: It was a sweetheart deal, really.

MS. RICHARDS: So he showed you that little house that wasn't right for you.

MRS. GOINGS: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: And then you started thinking about living in that area?

MRS. GOINGS: I was not enthusiastic. It was a very little house. I didn't see how we were going to do it.

MS. RICHARDS: So then how did you end up -

MRS. GOINGS: But because I was -

MS. RICHARDS: So you actually did -

MRS. GOINGS: Yeah, my mother was dying. And I could not deal with Ralph's eagerness to go. And so after she died, he said, okay, let's go. And before I knew it, our house was up for sale, and we were going. And it is a long story.

MS. RICHARDS: So you did, in fact, get that house that Ivan -

MR. GOINGS: Well, yeah, of course, we moved there and realized that it was way too small. So we found the house that we ultimately ended up with, had just come up for sale.

MRS. GOINGS: Just down the road.

MR. GOINGS: And it was perfect for us. And it was livable, mostly. [Laughs.] It needed a little work. We got it done eventually, and it turned out to be a good -

MRS. GOINGS: Yeah, we had to find a buyer for that little house.

MR. GOINGS: Well, yeah, that turned out okay, eventually.

MS. RICHARDS: So you set up a studio there.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, well, you know, at the farm, I had a whole separate building for my studio. It had been the carriage house. The house was dated 1840.

MRS. GOINGS: Eighteen forty.

MR. GOINGS: And it had this carriage house, three barns, and a woodshed - [laughs] - and a privy.

MRS. GOINGS: It was pretty primitive.

MS. RICHARDS: But it must have been a big house to have a carriage house.

MRS. GOINGS: It looks big, but it actually wasn't. We fit into it okay. If we had the fourth child with us, it would have been a problem.

MS. RICHARDS: So after you had that first show with the trucks, then you gradually started painting the fast food restaurants. And that was still in California.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Why did you - what was that transition about?

MR. GOINGS: Well, you have to look at some -

MS. RICHARDS: I am sorry. I am stopping from New York, going back to California for a few - for a bit.

MR. GOINGS: I am sorry.

MS. RICHARDS: I know we got you to New York, but I am going back to California for a little while.

MR. GOINGS: Well, it is sort of like this [Laughs.] If you look at some of the paintings from that time, the fast food places, in one way or another, there is a truck involved in most of them. Either the truck is parked in front of the fast food place, or you can see the truck out the window. And there got to be a notion of inside out - inside looking out - that intrigued me. And I looked for that kind of situation.

And then gradually - well, no. At that point then - I mean, there were paintings with the truck in relation to the fast food place. We moved to New York. The fast food places there were not as - I don't know. They didn't seem to me to be as much of what I wanted as the ones in California had been. And I think it had to do with the light, because the light is different there, completely.

But then I discovered the diners, eastern diners, which, you know, did not exist here in California at the time, except for a reproduction one in San Francisco. But there weren't any real diners - stainless steel diners here. So once I found those there, then everything got pretty much moved to interiors. And then from that -

MS. RICHARDS: And that has to do in part with the quality of the light, the California light.

MR. GOINGS: Well, I think -

MS. RICHARDS: And the reflections on the inside of the windows.

MR. GOINGS: After we moved to New York, I did a couple of truck pictures. I don't think I did any fast food - any eastern fast food places. I took some photographs of a number of eastern burger places and that kind of thing. But I don't think I ever did any paintings of those. But I guess the first diner interior was that Twin Springs Diner, the two guys sitting on the stool.

MRS. GOINGS: Yeah. You did a painting of me -

MR. GOINGS: Oh, the Kentucky Fried Chicken.

MRS. GOINGS: The fried chicken in the interior.

MR. GOINGS: Except that you are not in - she is in a restaurant sitting at a table by a window. And out the window is the Kentucky Fried Chicken. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, I remember that painting, yeah.

MR. GOINGS: That was part of the inside-looking-out theme.

MS. RICHARDS: What about the - when I look at the trucks and the fast food restaurants and even the diners, you are painting America. You are painting life. But it looks to me that none of those is new. They are kind of older-model trucks. The fast food restaurants - I guess they might have been built. But they are not the - they are not completely contemporary. And the diners, of course, are ageless.

Was there an element of what you could call nostalgia, or a goal to capture something that is more timeless,

because it didn't speak to the newest elements in contemporary culture? I mean, you could say that you are dealing with contemporary culture. And yet the images you picked to depict were not the newest part of that.

MR. GOINGS: You know, I don't -

MRS. GOINGS: I don't think nostalgia had anything to do with it. I think it was the opposite.

MR. GOINGS: I don't think it was a consideration, no. The things that - it has to do, I think, with just the ordinary things that I see in the environment. I don't think about how old they might be or how many memories they might carry. It is just they are there now, today. That is what they look like. This is what I see. This is how I see it. If you can find something that tugs at your heart because of this image, that is swell. [Laughs.] But, you know, I can't promise that that is my intent.

MRS. GOINGS: But, Ralph, you did choose the working man's truck over the shiny -

MR. GOINGS: Well, I did that mostly because they have more character, more interesting things to paint - dust and scratches and that kind of thing. You know, the painting of the truck that is in the back there, that is Shanna's birthday truck. It is from her home state of Oklahoma. You know, that is a beat-up, old working truck. And it has a lot of character.

But by the same token, the still life objects that I paint are very smooth and shiny and gleaming, which is also a fun kind of stuff to paint. You know, I am about the joy of painting. That is really what I am about, I think, and the subject matter that affords me the most fun painting. I mean, I enjoy making paintings.

MS. RICHARDS: One last question. In those paintings you did while you were still in California, there are no figures in them, basically. I mean, you had done the figures before. And then there was that period of time when you were doing the trucks and the exteriors where there were no figures, until a few years later when you started including them.

MRS. GOINGS: There were a few figures, but they were no more important than anything else.

MS. RICHARDS: But when there were no figures at all, was that a conscious decision to exclude the figures? Or was it about a positive that you were painting what you loved painting, which were these objects in the environment that they were in?

MR. GOINGS: In the beginning, in the early ones, it was a conscious effort to not have figures, because I felt that - I felt that figures were too hot visually. It seemed to maybe put it into the realm of storytelling. And I don't really want to tell a story. I just want to show you something. And if there is a figure, especially if it somehow might be reacting with something else in the picture, then it is going to generate some sort of interpretation, some sort of story.

I felt the need to try to keep that from happening. There was a conscious effort to leave figures out. But then, gradually, they worked their way back in, because, as she said, especially in the diner interiors, they are pretty anonymous. I mean, these are all people; they are just sitting there looking at the counter. And even if they are talking to each other, they are a part of the environment. They are not any more or less important than anything else. They are just there.

MRS. GOINGS: But when you have, like, single figures or the guy sitting up at the counter and everything, the painting becomes about them, not about the diner.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, well.

MRS. GOINGS: So that kind of changed, because you - that is what you didn't do at all when you first started out. And the few things that you did do, they were so anonymous that they blended in -

MS. RICHARDS: But in fact, the images of the diner that have the figures, there is so much detail going on in the diner that, in fact, the figures do stay back as part of the entire picture.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, I think that is true. I don't know. I shy away from the idea that there is some sort of sociology involved here. That is not my intent. As I said, I am about looking and the way things look. If people in a certain situation look like they are - look like they have some sort of meaning to them, then that is okay. I don't care. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Good. Thank you.

[END CD 4.]

This is Judith Richards interviewing Ralph Goings on September 11, 2009, in Santa Cruz, California, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc one.

Ralph, yesterday we left off in about the mid-'70s, and at that point, you had moved to New York, and you had gone -

MR. GOINGS: I had moved to upstate New York.

MS. RICHARDS: Upstate New York. And you were painting the diners. And I think we got to the point where you started - we hadn't talked yet about adding the figure. We started a little bit, not focused entirely. So that's where I want to begin now and ask you, why did you - you commented that you purposefully did not include the figure. How did you come about including the figure, and what was it you were looking for in the scene, in the image, with the figure?

I assume not every instance you would feel the figure worked. So when you were taking your photographs, what kind of image worked? What were you looking for in the arrangement with the figure in that photograph?

MR. GOINGS: Well, I think there's a couple of things there. First of all, taking photographs inside of the diners was difficult to get pictures without figures in it, because if the diner is open and if you can get in, there are going to be people in there - not just the people who are there working behind the counter but the people who come to eat and whatever they do there. There's that. And so trying to spend a lot of time to find a situation that didn't have figures got to be arduous.

Also, at the same time, it seemed to me that the kind of space that the inside of the diners was - that sort of closed in - is a rather intimate space, in terms of, say, a drive-in McDonald's where you drive up to a window outside or whatever. That's a whole different kind of environment. It seemed natural to have the people there, and it just got - I mean, it seemed to me like a natural evolution. I just needed to have them there.

I think that the notion that we touched on yesterday - last night - that many of the realist painters have been identified by specific subject matter, that so-and-so is a painter of this, and so-and-so is a painter of that - and I objected to that notion of being pigeonholed by a specific kind of subject matter.

And that's why, over the period of years, I think that I kind of spanned some of the traditional subject matter areas, from the landscapes, which were the trucks, and the fast food places, and then interior, and interior with figures, which is also kind of a traditional kind of subject matter to the still life - the countertop still life - which has - I mean, still life has, you know, been around for a long time.

It seemed like it was just touching all bases and was not letting myself be pigeonholed by a specific subject matter. There was a time when I was probably known as the truck painter, but that didn't last forever because I changed to other subjects. Anyway, that's sort of how I felt about it, that it was utilizing a traditional kind of subject classification. Did I get too far beyond that?

MS. RICHARDS: Did you feel that it was an exciting painterly challenge to add the figure?

MR. GOINGS: Well, yes, after I got involved with the figures - as Shanna points out, at some point, the figure becomes what the painting is about in the diner situations. But at the same time, I really didn't want the figure to be an element of - I can't think of the word that I want - I didn't want the paintings telling a story.

MS. RICHARDS: Narrative.

MR. GOINGS: I wanted the figure to be just another object in this space that has a lot of objects in it. Some of the objects are stainless steel and shiny, and the figures are soft and organic-looking. [Laughs.] So there was that contrast, but the figure is no more important, in terms of interpretation of the meaning, than any of the other objects in the space.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were selecting - after you took the photographs - and I want to get back to questions about the photography - but after you took the photographs, the slides, and you were looking at them, were you deciding on which figural compositions based on simple things like the color of the clothing they were wearing, the fact that you were depicting them mostly from the back?

I mean, because they are objects like any other object in the scene, were you looking at them sort of like abstract forms that you wanted, in terms of space and color and composition, or were you thinking more about their establishing a sense of intimacy or the, kind of, human element?

MR. GOINGS: Actually, I don't think any of those things. My approach to gathering subject information with a camera was to just rake in as much as I possibly could. I would go to a diner. Shanna would go with me. And sometimes we'd have lunch, or we'd just have a cup of coffee.

And sometimes she would be my shill, because people in a diner, as soon as you bring a camera out, everybody's on. They either don't want their picture taken, or they want to be glamorous, you know, and so sometimes in those sorts of situations, if I couldn't get - I just want the people there to ignore me, and I didn't want their character. I just wanted their presence.

So I would pretend that I - we would set up the situation where I would go through this routine of posing her as my subject matter, and we'd do the whole routine, and by this time, all the people in the diner are getting bored with this. And after a while, nothing happens, and so they go back to their lunch, and they eat their French fries and so on. Then I can take pictures of them, because they're not paying any attention to me, which is what I wanted. I would take hundreds of pictures.

MS. RICHARDS: How long would you be spending in the diner?

MRS. GOINGS: Depending on how interesting it was -

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, or how bad the food was.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you set up a tripod? Was it a really -

MR. GOINGS: Sometimes, yeah - usually handheld, though, because it attracted less attention.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have to get permission from the diner?

MR. GOINGS: Oh, yeah, yeah. I always went and talked to whoever was behind the counter, asked for the manager or whoever was in charge, and explained to them what I wanted to do.

MRS. GOINGS: You also carried -

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, I had a copy of my book - the one that Linda Chase did [*Ralph Goings: Essay/Interview.* New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1988].

MRS. GOINGS: And before that, you would take photographs of paintings.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, I had a portfolio, a little folder with photographs of paintings, so I could say, this is what I want to do. You know, I paint pictures like this, and that's why I want to take pictures.

MS. RICHARDS: Did anyone ever object?

MR. GOINGS: No, no. They loved it. They loved it.

MS. RICHARDS: Also, your paintings of the diners in general, there is - this is about light - there is an even quality in the kind of brightness that you depict. There aren't deep, dramatic shadowy areas. I mean, there might have been, but you didn't photograph those. You chose, or at that moment, you chose a moment or an angle that gave you an even brightness. Why is that, or is that an incorrect observation?

MR. GOINGS: I think it's probably a correct observation. I don't have a reason for it happening. I think it's just -

MRS. GOINGS: It's the way the diners are lighted - fluorescent.

MR. GOINGS: Well, yeah, they're almost always all windows on one side. And first of all, I would pick - we would pick, because Shanna always went with me - we would pick diners that had as much light as possible just so we could get decent photographs, because photographing interiors in low light without a tripod is very iffy. Holding the camera still enough just so you don't have a blurry image is difficult. And so that was just a part of the mechanics of being able to get a decent photograph that I could work from. So it was just a matter of picking places that had a lot of light in them.

There was another element about the light, too, that I usually had to consider, at least at the point where I might select a photograph for a painting, and that was the mixture of the light, because most of the diners had fluorescent lights in the ceiling, and then daylight came in through the windows, and the mix of this produced what I kind of felt was something I could call diner light.

It's not really natural light, and the fluorescents are kind of yellowy-green color. And that mix, combined with the colored film that I was using, sometimes I ended up with some pretty weird kind of light situations. So those got eliminated - [laughs] - because I wanted a more natural sort of feeling to it, not something that someone says, oh, this is some kind of weird lighting situation. That's how I think that came about.

As far as your question about how the figure fit into the composition of the whole image, the whole picture, and

you know, how or what sort of considerations I had for that relationship between the figure and the space and so on - that was determined - all I can say is the composition of the painting is determined by the selection of the slide, and that's sort of after the fact.

When I took the photographs, I was not looking for composition; I was just looking for information. So I'd just go click, click, click, click, click, click, click. And as I said, I shoot hundreds of slides. And the composition part came about in looking at the slides after they were processed. We would sit in the studio for hours and go through the slides, rejecting ones that didn't measure up to whatever didn't look right to me. But my approach to formal arrangement is mostly visceral.

MRS. GOINGS: I think he has an innate sense of composition, and most of those slides he took were compositionally okay, and sometimes wonderful. That's my feeling.

MR. GOINGS: Well, I'll accept the idea that maybe I do have a natural feeling for it, but my point is that I didn't - at the point of taking the photographs - I was not looking for composition. I was just looking for information, and if the photograph that I took was nicely composed, it was simply because my eye did it at the time, because I didn't take time to study the setup and move a little here or a little there or whatever.

I can't say that that's entirely true, because sometimes there'd be a pole or a corner or something in an awkward place that would be hiding some information I wanted, so I'd simply move over and take the shot - whatever looked best through the viewfinder - but not making overt -

MS. RICHARDS: You never imagined, then, doing paintings of the diners at night? The daylight was always an important part of the mix?

MR. GOINGS: I think so, because I wanted - I was interested in the kind of clarity of all of the objects and things that were in the diner. I don't think that I - I never approached a nighttime situation.

MRS. GOINGS: Mostly, too, we were traveling, and we just traveled on. If we were in another state or something, we just -

MS. RICHARDS: But it was never your intention - you never said, let me try these at night, and what would it be like to paint a nighttime scene in a diner? It was almost as if I'm picturing a stage set where the daylight is coming in and mixed with the fluorescent, as you said, and it's a Ralph Goings light.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, well, I don't know. I guess it didn't occur to me. It didn't interest me. I know some other painters have dealt with that sort of situation. It just didn't - it wasn't something that I wanted to do.

MS. RICHARDS: Going back to the process, so you took many, many hundreds of images and then picked the one or ones that you would use. And you determined that you would only paint one painting of that diner. You wouldn't say, okay, I'm going to paint one looking in this direction and another looking in that direction?

MR. GOINGS: Of the same diner?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MR. GOINGS: Oh, I painted several pictures of several diners, the same diner. I had favorite diners that I went back to again and again.

MS. RICHARDS: But I mean in - from one session.

MR. GOINGS: No.

MS. RICHARDS: Would you be looking for the one, or did you think, if I find three I like, I'll make three paintings?

MR. GOINGS: There may have been one occasion or two when, out of a trip to a specific diner, out of the batch of photographs that I took on that occasion, I may have used one of the photographs for an oil painting and another one from the same session for a watercolor. I'm thinking particularly of the Unadilla Diner and that - what's his name, the guy that was sitting at the counter?

MRS. GOINGS: Yeah.

MR. GOINGS: He was such an interesting character that I did two paintings of him - one of him from the back - and I think that was the oil painting - and the other one was from the other side, looking almost straight on at him, and it was a watercolor.

MS. RICHARDS: What's the name of that diner?

MR. GOINGS: Unadilla Diner.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember what the date is?

MR. GOINGS: No.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I see, 1977. There was a painting called Unadilla Diner.

MR. GOINGS: Well, I did other paintings of that diner, too, from photographs that were taken at different times. That was one of my favorite diners because it was fairly accessible to where we lived; it was just a few miles away. And I liked the people, and the food was pretty good, and it just seemed like a place that I returned to.

There was another one, a place called Tom's Diner, that I painted, gosh, three or four times, maybe five times, from photographs taken at different times or maybe a period of three or four years. And again, it was simply - I liked the guy that owned the diner. His name was Tom, and he was a neat guy, and I liked him. And the food was okay; it wasn't great, but it was okay. But it was a nice diner.

And the thing is that, after a while, I kind of got interested in the lineage of the diners themselves, as most all of them were designed and built in places in New Jersey and moved to the sites where they were. And I got sort of involved in the history of some of them. I got to the point where I could identify which ones still had the original stools, for instance, and the original kind of countertop that came with the diner and the same kind of quilted stainless steel trim around the ceiling and so on. But that's all aside from the point. It's just extra stuff. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: You were saying that the images you took, from those, you picked the ones that would be the paintings, and then you'd project them. Did you allow yourself, when you projected them, to actually do a little cropping around the edges? So you've got a 35-millimeter slide that's a certain proportion, but you've decided to make the canvas a slightly different kind of rectangle.

MR. GOINGS: Oh, sure; oh, yeah, absolutely, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So you could go closer and further?

MR. GOINGS: Oh, yeah, that's the great thing about a slide projector. Just by moving back and forth, you can change the size.

MS. RICHARDS: So rather than - you didn't crop and take out pieces and mix two different slides together, but if the slide were a proportion, and you wanted to make a square painting or even a vertical painting from a horizontal image, you would just move the projector to find the format that you wanted.

MR. GOINGS: Well, yeah, it would be a matter of making the canvas the shape I wanted it, put it on the easel, put the slide in the slide projector, and then move the projector back and forth until it fit - the part I wanted to paint fit on the canvas that I had prepared. And there would be stuff around the outside of it that wouldn't get into the painting because it wouldn't fit into the square.

MS. RICHARDS: So a decision had already been made about the size of the canvas?

MR. GOINGS: Oh, yeah; well, the canvas has to be made first.

MS. RICHARDS: Was there a certain proportional rectangle that you found yourself using again and again that had kind of a "golden mean," or whatever - a comfort level to you?

MR. GOINGS: Mostly the oil paintings and a lot of the watercolors, too, are generally the same proportion as a 35-millimeter slide, because that just seemed the most convenient way to include the information in the photograph. But as you were mentioning, there were occasions - lots of occasions, probably - when I would move back a little bit just to crop off some stuff on the edge that didn't seem to be important to the particular situation. It's not that I didn't manipulate, because I did, but it was not major things. I didn't take one figure from one diner photograph and put it into a painting from another diner photograph.

I did, however, on several occasions, use several different photographs - information from several different photographs - especially in situations where the interior, the view that I wanted to paint, included a window where you could see outside. And if the photograph was exposed for the interior light, then what was outside the window would just all be faded away, and the information would not be clear and easily developed.

I mean, I could have painted it to look faded out so it would look like a faded out photograph, but that wasn't what I was after. So I would take information from other slides, other photographs, and put it outside the window, so that you're looking at this interior, and maybe there's a figure sitting at a table or something, and there's a window by this figure, and outside this window, you're looking out, and there's a highway out - there's

another building across the highway.

MS. RICHARDS: Would you say that that, though, goes beyond the ability of the camera, and therefore you're not depicting a photographic reality? You're adding to it?

MR. GOINGS: I don't give a hoot about photographic reality. I use the camera to gather information. My point, as I said yesterday, is to make paintings - to make pictures, or paint pictures. There was a time when I made a sort of fetish about wanting to be true to the information in the photographs, so somebody who's looking at the painting could say, yes, I recognize that place or that kind of thing. But that was, again, just an extra bit of frosting on the whole situation.

MS. RICHARDS: As someone who's identified as a Photorealist, did you ever talk to other Photorealists about their rules - [laughs] - of depicting photographic reality, what they allowed themselves to do, what they didn't allow themselves to do, and note the kind of range or flexibility?

Maybe you could say the sizes of your paintings were more or less like the proportion of a 35-millimeter slide because you wanted to be more consistent with that photographic reality that is in that proportion, and you would be negating that if you put it on a square canvas, for example. But did you ever have occasion to talk to other artists, other Photorealists, about their rules of depicting photographic reality?

MR. GOINGS: Not really.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you just assume that everyone had their own unique - because their ultimate goal was to make a painting - that there was no kind of - what do you call it - list of dos and don'ts?

MR. GOINGS: I just figured that I used the photographs that I took to, as I said, get to where I wanted to go, and I just assumed that everybody else did the same thing. If they needed to be maneuvered, then they got maneuvered.

MRS. GOINGS: Well, McLean composed his pictures in the camera.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, actually, that's true.

MRS. GOINGS: And they had to be compositionally correct, and it would take him hours to do one shot.

MR. GOINGS: And then the horse would wag his tail just as he turned the shutter -

MRS. GOINGS: Yeah, he had difficult subject matter, and we talked about that, and Ralph would say, just take a lot of pictures, and Dick would say no. So he was very formal.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, so there is that difference. I guess that's true. We talked about that. I don't remember talking to anybody else about that sort of thing. And I'm trying to think if - I really don't know, exactly, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: Why was it important for you not to take pieces from one and manipulate the information you received to create the ideal, to take the setup on the table from one image and put the setup from another image into that, for example? Why was it important to make as few changes as possible?

MR. GOINGS: Well, again, this is aside -

MS. RICHARDS: At the point you were doing these diners before you were doing the still lifes.

MR. GOINGS: Well, this is another one of those things where, as a quirky thing that came out of my head, I noticed - I spent so much time hanging out in diners taking photographs and talking to the people who worked there and watching them and so on - I was sitting at a counter one day having a cup of coffee, and when I got there, there were a lot of people in the diner, but over the period of time I was sitting there, they all finished their lunches and whatever and left.

And the waitress who was behind the counter was going along cleaning off the counter and for every couple, three stools, there's a station that has a napkin holder and the salt and pepper shaker and a ketchup bottle and a mustard, whatever, and there are sets of these all up and down the counter. And as she was cleaning up and wiping off the counter and straightening up, I noticed that every - and all of these condiments that were on the counter were just sort of scattered around. They were all mixed up and helter-skelter.

She gathered them up and put the napkin holder here, salt and pepper in front of them, the ketchup here, the mustard over here, and that was it, and she did exactly the same setup for every one. I thought, what is this - this is some sort of pattern here, you know? So I started watching waitresses in other diners, and they all had their own pattern. And I thought, that's really funny. That's a really neat idea.

So that sort of led to the idea of not moving them around for better composition or whatever, just accepting reality the way it is, because I had this notion from the very beginning when I started making paintings about reality, that there is a form to reality, that it has its shape. It's not necessarily an aesthetic, planned, designed shape. It's oftentimes just by function. The reality adjusts itself by function.

It's not that some super designer has come in and said, we have to have all of these things this way so it will look nice. Things get put where they get put because that's where they get used and that's how people use them. And that's my idea, that I could rely on the natural form that reality has, that if I could capture that with a camera and not mess with it too much, just sort of accept it for what it was, that this could sort of become a visually good thing.

And that was sort of the basis for the early paintings from the photographs that I took myself. I'm describing this clumsily because that's not my - I've talked about this so much in the past, but I haven't talked about it in a long time, that I'm stalled, I guess. But it has to do with accepting - visually accepting reality as it exists without manipulation.

MRS. GOINGS: At that moment.

MR. GOINGS: At that moment, oh, yes, yeah, because an hour later it's going to be different, not just because the light changes, but because somebody will come along and move something or whatever. It's a flexible, fluid thing. So taking a photograph of it is stopping it for an instant and then trying to translate that into a painting. I'm getting off the track here.

MS. RICHARDS: No, no, no. We were talking about the fact that you don't make preparatory drawings in advance. All these slides are your sketches and the way that you're going through.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Once you start a painting with a particular image, do you ever get to the point where you say, this isn't working?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: I'm just going to stop this painting.

MRS. GOINGS: Right behind you.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, stop this painting, give up, put it aside?

MR. GOINGS: Often. Not often, but enough so that it's noticeable. Some of my paintings are dated, just as an example, like, 1980 to 1986. And what that means is this is one of the paintings that maybe was going, as you described, nowhere and got put in the painting rack for maybe two or three years and then taken out and a decision being made that maybe it wasn't so bad after all, or a solution to the problem that seemed to be hindering it had arisen, so to speak.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there certain reoccurring [sic] problems that you found were particularly thorny that would cause a painting to become a problem?

MR. GOINGS: I think it was every time it happened, it was unique to that particular one.

MRS. GOINGS: Canvas.

MR. GOINGS: Yes. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: The surface, the texture of the canvas?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, sometimes the technical things actually got in the way, and it was not until I could overcome some technical aspect that I could get beyond that and finish the painting up. I never seem to be able to do - let me back up a little bit. Every painting that I've ever done has been different from the one before in the way it was painted. I don't seem to be able to do the same thing twice. I could never find a canvas that was universally good every time I used it.

MS. RICHARDS: You're talking about flaws in the weaving?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, well, any of that, whether it's the right primer, the right texture, or whatever. Because I don't know why - it's one of those quirky things, that at a certain - it's like certain paintbrushes, one day, work absolutely beautifully. They do exactly what you ask them to do and they do it superbly. The same brush, the

next day - nothing. It fights you every inch of the way. So that brush has to be put down and not used until some other time. And I can't explain this. It's a nutty thing.

But it's not unique to me. I've talked to other painters about this. John Kacere used to talk about this. He had paintbrushes that he identified as usable and not usable on Thursday and Saturday, you know. [Laughs.] I'm joking about that, but it's that sort of quirky thing.

I think that generally, when I had a problem with the painting, I think part of it is that the way I work, which is very slowly. Sometimes the larger, complicated diner pictures would take a month, two months sometimes, to finish. I'm working every day. It's not just a little bit here and there.

So I think after a while I get to this sort of situation where I get too close to it, because I'm right up against it, working on like a four-square-inch area all day long for several days in a row, and it just gets to be maybe too intense, and I need to step back. Sometimes it just seems like where I am, I have to stop there, and what I do is just put the painting out of sight in the painting rack and leave it for a week or two, and generally then, taking it out, it's saying, oh, hey, I'm okay, and just go ahead.

MS. RICHARDS: Does that mean that you're working on more than one painting at once, and especially working in oil?

MR. GOINGS: Yes, later on I did. In the beginning, when I was doing the truck pictures, I was very determined in those days because I was preparing for the first show, and each of those, I painted them beginning to end, straight through without stopping. But after a few years, I found that - well, once we started coming here, after we got this house, and I was able to set up the studio here so I could work, I found that if I had a painting going here and a painting going at the studio in New York, that I could manage to handle both of them.

MS. RICHARDS: But not two in the same studio at a time?

MR. GOINGS: Well, yeah, and on some occasions, yes, but generally, it would be like the difference between an oil painting and a watercolor. The watercolor is sort of a release to me. I love painting with watercolor. I used to. I can't do it anymore. But it's the kind of thing that you can leave and return to at any time, because you don't have to deal with paint that dries or doesn't dry or whatever.

The oil paintings are all done, as I mentioned yesterday, wet in wet and so there's a certain - if I'm going to stop on an oil painting for a period of time, I've got to stop at a point where I can start up again without there being a noticeable change from the wet in wet.

MS. RICHARDS: Going back to your system that, after you pick a slide, you make a print, how big is that print, or has it always been the same size, eight by 10?

MR. GOINGS: Well - [laughs] - it depends on how poor we were.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, ideally. [Laughs.]

MR. GOINGS: I have to say that there were a number of paintings that were done from little eight-by-10 or smaller prints.

MS. RICHARDS: Four by six?

MR. GOINGS: Three by five, yeah, or -

MS. RICHARDS: So you're inventing then - you have to be - a lot of tiny little things unless you project the slide every so often to read what you can't possibly read in a tiny piece of a photograph.

MRS. GOINGS: I think that those were mostly Pickup [Truck] paintings, not those detailed - I think once you got into the diner paintings, you used bigger photographs.

MR. GOINGS: Oh, yeah; well, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And then when you used the bigger photographs, then did you grid them off?

MR. GOINGS: No.

MS. RICHARDS: No, so when you're working on the paintings, I think you mentioned at one point, from the upper left to the lower right, and you're working on a piece at a time, what's defining the - if it's not a grid, is it a form? You want to finish the entire stool; you want to finish the entire shirt of the back of the person?

MR. GOINGS: Well, that was pretty - and that business of starting from the upper left and working to the lower right was a joke. You know, that was not - [laughs] - it appeared that way in that photograph. It appears that way, and sometimes it works that way.

But mainly, it had to do with painting from dark areas to light areas, but in such a way that I could move from one area to another and work wet in wet and plan the end of a painting session, so that where I leave off, I can pick up again, even though the previous session, the paint had dried. And that sometimes got a little harrowing, because it meant sometimes I'd have to sort of repaint a little bit of the previous session so that I'd have the wet paint to continue with.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you made it a practice to always use the same brand of oil paint?

MR. GOINGS: Pretty much, pretty much. I don't use an extensive palette. I don't use a lot of different colors, just a couple of different reds, a couple of different blues.

MS. RICHARDS: What brand of oil paints do you use?

MR. GOINGS: Winsor & Newton mostly.

MS. RICHARDS: You've never been intrigued by grinding your own colors?

MR. GOINGS: I'm sorry?

MS. RICHARDS: You've never thought about grinding your own colors? It wasn't -

MR. GOINGS: No. Well, actually, I've done it when I was in art school. There was a technical class that I had to take in which we did that. But it wasn't anything that I - it seemed like, why should I do that when I can buy good - you know, probably much better quality paint than I can make. And it was so time-consuming. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Do you always work with a particularly consistent kind of light in your studio?

MR. GOINGS: I try to. My theory was that - oh, there's my son, Drew - my theory was that the lighting in most galleries and museums, I noticed, was incandescent, mostly. That's not universally true in museums, but in galleries it was pretty much - in those days, it was pretty much incandescent. So I have mostly just a bank of incandescent flood lights in my studio, which is what I still have.

The studio in New York was really good because I had very large windows up high on the north side of the building, so I could have daylight, except that I had to sort of be careful with it, because on our property, there was a mountain right up behind my studio. And in the wintertime, when there was snow on the mountain, the light came in blue because of the snow, and that was a problem for trying to match colors and so on.

But it sort of got balanced out with the incandescent lights. You know, I know some other painters that are obsessive about trying to have light in their studio that's as close to daylight as they possibly can get it. But it just seemed to get tedious trying to keep up with all of that, and if I had enough light to see what I was doing, and if I could - I figured if the colors went together, in whatever light I was using, then they went together, and if the painting got put in some other light, they should be okay.

MS. RICHARDS: Obviously, you were concerned, since you were using traditional materials - oil, paint, and canvas - that the paintings were going to hold up over a long period of time - the archival issues.

MR. GOINGS: Yes, of course. I try to be as careful with the preparation of the materials as I could, and I tried to use procedures that were more or less traditionally safe and permanent. But at the same time I had this feeling that restorers have to make a living, too - [laughs] - and if I made a mistake, maybe somebody could help me out later down the road.

MS. RICHARDS: Is it important to have past works in the studio, or, if you sent them for an exhibition, to refer to them, stretch out, let's say, the last year, or two years, to see what's happening with your work - changes that you may not be consciously aware of or that you're purposely seeking to have something evolve? Do you want to have those past works accessible, either in reality or reproduction, or is that completely not important?

MR. GOINGS: Well, it's sort of a bittersweet thing, because it took so long to make a painting. I spent sometimes months. By the time I was finished with it, I was sick of it. I wanted it out. I wanted it away. I wanted it gone. Once I decided that it was finished, that it was good, that it looked the way I wanted it to look, then I wanted it gone. And it was probably just as well, because when it was possible to sell it, I did, because we always needed the money because it was our living.

Then, after a time, being able to see the work again after not seeing it for maybe a year or two or three is such a

treat. And I can remember - well, like for instance, when I was showing regularly at OK Harris, I showed about every three years, and most of the work for the shows would be work borrowed back because it would have already gone out of the gallery, and there would be maybe one or two, three at most, new works that would be in the show.

But then when I had the show, I could go and I'd get to see these paintings that I maybe hadn't seen for a couple years, and that was really nice. It's like seeing your kids after you haven't seen them for a long time, and then when I had a show - a museum show in - what's the name of that -

[END CD 5.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Ralph Goings in Santa Cruz, California on September 11, 2009, for the Archives of American Art Smithsonian Institution, disc two.

We were talking about techniques and methods and oil painting wet on wet. Did you keep, or do you - did you keep diaries or any kind of written ideas about what you might be seeking to do in the next painting?

So when you went to a diner, when you started to think about, okay, this painting is almost done - I need to collect some - and maybe it happened before the painting was done; maybe it happened after the painting was done - that you set out with a camera. Did you have any of that preconceived - any of those, kind of, preconceived ideas of what you might look for in the next photographic outing?

MR. GOINGS: No, because part of the thrill is the hunt. From early on, in the pickup pictures, just the going out and searching and finding was one of the good parts. And the same thing was true with the diners.

I mean, we would go on day trips to different parts of the state, even some other states in the northeast, just to see what we could find in terms of diners. And we, you know, we made some spectacular discoveries, and then we also wasted a lot of time just driving and didn't find anything.

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs] Too bad there weren't any Web sites for diners.

MRS. GOINGS: Well, I was antiquing at the time, so if we didn't find diners, we'd find antiques.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, she had an antique shop - store - at the time. Anyway, it's, you know, I think that sums it up. That the hunt is the -

MS. RICHARDS: And the camera was the sketchbook.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah. It just -

MS. RICHARDS: And were you - was there a certain moment in painting Painting A when you decided, okay, now, I better look for the images? I better start thinking about or photographing for the next painting. Did you always wait till - in other words, did you wait till a painting was done before you did that, or did you have a certain moment when you - because you didn't want to have a gap between paintings, perhaps?

MR. GOINGS: No, because the photography trips that we took were not geared to the finishing of a particular painting or anything, because it wasn't - going out to take photographs was just a routine thing that I did periodically just to keep my inventory of photographs up. I always had lots and lots. You know, I've got thousands of old slides stored in a storage place here, and I look, you know, I looked through some of them awhile back, and I thought, boy, those are great, why didn't I paint those - [laughs] - you know?

So there was no - I mean, I sort of did the subjects that I did in series, although there was some overlapping, because by the time I got to New York and was starting to explore the diner interiors, I also did a few truck paintings of local New York-type trucks as opposed to California-type trucks.

But the taking of the photographs was just a - I don't know what word to use - just an ongoing part of studio work. It was just a thing that needed to be - you know, it's like you have to empty the garbage can every once in a while, and every once in a while you got to go out and take some pictures. And then every once in a while you sit down with some of the old slides you have and look at them and see if there's anything in there that you passed up before that might be useable now.

The thing is that I could - [laughs] - I could never really edit my photo supply. I could never throw anything away. So I've still got almost - [laughs] - all of them. As I said, there's some that I really wish I had painted but -

MS. RICHARDS: Did you feel that your studio - or do you feel that your studio is private, that you wouldn't want anyone to visit, besides Shanna, in the midst of a painting? Did you have a sense of that kind of -

MR. GOINGS: No, no, no, no. I can't ever think of a - I can't think of any occasion when our -

MRS. GOINGS: You sometimes got irritated if somebody stayed too long and you wanted to paint.

MR. GOINGS: Well, yeah, there was always that.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, that's disruptive. And what about studio routine? You said you worked every day; did you have a set routine?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah. Breakfast, to the studio, into the house for lunch, back to the studio -

MRS. GOINGS: Lunch, nap.

MR. GOINGS: - nap. [Laughter.] Shanna bought me this wonderful chair called "the master's chair," this huge overstuffed - my studio in New York was big, and this was this huge thing, and I could, you know, sink into that. And so every day after lunch I'd go back out to the studio and sit down in that chair and take a nap - 20 minutes. Just as though I'd set an alarm or something. It was just the way it always turned out. And then I'd work until dinner time, which was usually - well, I usually quit about 5:30, and dinner would be any time after that.

MS. RICHARDS: Was there a certain - did you always have music? Did you never have music? Or, I mean, was music ever part of the -

MR. GOINGS: I always had music until my hearing went really bad and I had to use hearing aids, which distort musical sound terribly. You know, I told you that I set out to be a musician. And being unable to listen to music has been a great loss for me. I really miss it. But I can't find a hearing aid - and I've tried a number of them - I can't find one that doesn't distort the sound. The pianos always sound out of tune, and sometimes the vocalists sound like they're missing - [laughter].

MS. RICHARDS: Before you developed your hearing problem, what kind of music did you listen to?

MR. GOINGS: Everything, everything. Lots of jazz, because that was what I was interested in playing. But I liked classical chamber music as well, and rhythm and blues, rock and roll - I didn't keep up with the latest pop, rock and roll stuff, but it was - well, along with listening to music, I also listened to the radio.

I used to listen to NPR all the time while I was painting until - [laughs] - they started getting - now, I can't remember when this began. But in the early days when I was listening to NPR, it was mostly music. And then they would have, like, hourly news summaries and so on. Then they started having feature programs where they would have guests, and they would talk about this and that and the other thing. And, occasionally, a controversial guest. And I'd get so involved, sometimes, and so angry with what they were talking about that - [laughs] - I'd have to turn it off because it was too distracting.

I've admitted this before that - you know, some interviewer asked me one time, since it takes me so long to do a painting, and you're working in just such a small area, what do you think about while you're painting? And my answer had to be, I try to think of nothing, because if I get involved in, you know, like, oh, well, I had this conversation with this person, and I made a fool of myself, and I should have said this, and I should have said that - I get so distracted with that, that I find I've stopped painting. I'm not working. I suppose I might - it could probably be described as a mindless activity. [Laughs.] I don't want that broadcast around. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Well, it's probably - it makes sense. It's kind of a meditative state.

MR. GOINGS: I think, you know, I suppose that's a, sort of, highfalutin way to describe it, but I think that's probably true. That it's just a - maybe it requires a certain degree of self-hypnosis just to -

MS. RICHARDS: Well, you feel that you also - if you're working in very delicate way, and especially, maybe, with watercolor, you have to also have your breathing - you have to be controlled.

MR. GOINGS: Well, I don't ever think about that. I just sort of let it happen. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: At what point did you decide to turn your attention to still life? I mean, I know chronologically, but how did that come about?

MR. GOINGS: Well, it came about because -

MS. RICHARDS: While you're, I think, while you're still doing diners -

MR. GOINGS: - of the diner interiors, because they seem to be - well, I told you the story about the arrangement. [Laughs.] But it seemed to be the, sort of, next step in touching on traditional subject matter categories, you

know, from, as I've said, from landscape, the interiors, to figures, to still life, and it seemed that it was - they were there, you know? It's like the light bulb went on. I was in a diner, and oh, there's a still life.

But then after a time, I got intrigued by the idea of manipulating the whole thing in the studio rather than - the early countertop still lifes were actual situations in diners. I would go to diners to find still lifes, and then I don't know what made - I don't know what sparked the idea of doing them in the studio, but at some point I went to a restaurant-supply place and bought napkin holders and salt-and-pepper shakers and, you know, all the condiment paraphernalia, and ketchup bottles and mustard and so on. And just started setting up the situations in my studio.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have a counter? A kind of a diner-like counter?

MR. GOINGS: Well, I said, I could - I simulated counters, and I had a big workspace counter in my studio that had a black Formica surface, which could pass for a diner - which did pass for a lot of them, actually. But it was a different venue for me because I didn't have to go out - it didn't involve going out and searching. It changed the hunt to, I guess, inventing or whatever. And I think it led to playing more with the effects of light on the objects than to do with what the objects were, because I could play around with controlling the light. I could try different combinations of light, and I could have the camera sitting on the tripod right there, and I could, you know, click, click, click, click.

And it just seemed like - it ended up being an adjunct to the whole still life idea. And then at a certain point - and this was before the stroke, so it was not because I was limited physically - but I started just inventing these objects on - the same objects, but not referring to them and not photographing them but just inventing, you know, from memory. That's what all of these things in the kitchen are - just for fun, just for the heck of it - being able to try it to see if I could do it.

And that led to some sort of improvisations, just make some marks on the little canvas and see what I could make it into or see if it suggested something. And that opened up another, kind of, doorway for what I call my hobby painting, which is about what I'm limited to now.

And then there's the nutty things, like the doughnuts with the cloud. I talked yesterday a little bit about humor in art, and I still feel a need for that. I think that it has a place. I'm not quite sure whether I'm up to it or not, but I like to play with the idea of it, you know?

MS. RICHARDS: When you started to paint the still lifes, you turned your attention to this, did you say this, historically time - genre- of still life - did you at that point look back at other artists in history? [Giorgio] Morandi is the most obvious one, I think -

MR. GOINGS: Oh, yeah, yeah, sure. Yep.

MS. RICHARDS: - you know, I'm interested in doing this -

MR. GOINGS: The Dutch painters, wowee. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: And let me remind myself of all those paintings that you probably had seen and have studied in the past. Was that part of your thinking at that, kind of, moment when you were starting to do those - focused your paintings on the still lifes that you found in the diner and that you created yourself, to look back at certain painters and their work to study that -

MR. GOINGS: Oh, yeah, well, I look, you know, I -

MS. RICHARDS: Which - who were they? Who'd you look at most?

MR. GOINGS: Oh, well - oh, gosh.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, take Morandi for example. Had you -

MR. GOINGS: Oh, well I -

MS. RICHARDS: - been fascinated by his work earlier?

MR. GOINGS: Morandi had always been a favorite of mine. [Jean Baptiste Siméon] Chardin - oh, I'm not going to be able to give you a long list of names.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, those are two obvious - [laughs] -

MR. GOINGS: My mind is blocking names like crazy.

[Cross talk.]

Morandi has always been particularly fascinating to me because, well, you know, I love his paintings, but I also - I'm attracted to the - I guess it's the - I'm not quite sure what it is that I want to call what - his - I don't know - the serenity of having, of being able to deal with the same images over and over and over and over, and define something new each time. There's a kind of, I don't know, it seems to me that there must be a - for him, it must have been a terribly great satisfaction to have that, you know? To be able to pick up the same two or three objects and see them with new eyes each time.

But the other still life painters that I'd looked at are all, you know, the historical ones that you see in all of the art history books. It's just when I got really involved with the still life, as you say, as a genre, I went back to a lot of those people and looked up - with the help of the Internet, you can get access to a lot of that stuff anymore. And just for the thrill of saying, you know, this is the same sort of thing, and wow, look what they did, you know?

MS. RICHARDS: You were saying that when you first started doing the still lifes, they were in the diners. Then you started creating them in your own studio, but still photographing them, so you're working still from the photograph and not from the still life.

MR. GOINGS: Well, but that was not to the exclusion of still getting them from the diners, 'cause those overlap. I mean, I was doing them both at the same time.

MS. RICHARDS: But when they were in your studio, you could, possibly, have just looked at the still life and done the painting, but no, you took the photograph of the still life in your painting and painted from the photograph.

MR. GOINGS: But remember what I told you yesterday, that using the camera was a - in my attempt to try to find a different way to look at things. And it just became a mechanical part of the operation, just another tool, a brush or -

MS. RICHARDS: With the intense focus on the objects in a still life and the light on the objects, it sounds is - compared to the diner scenes - it almost sounds like you're creating poetry as opposed to a novel. Not that it's slighter in any regard, but - and also it seemed to - is it correct to think it gave you the opportunity to be more inventive, or be more flexible, during the painting process, maybe, also, in part because these are smaller paintings, and they took less time, and you could go from one to the next more easily, so it gave you the opportunity for more experimentation than the large scenes of the diner? Is any of that true, or wrong?

MR. GOINGS: I'm not quite sure I understand what the question is. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: All right. When you were making this - painting the still life paintings and still today - as opposed to the larger, more complex, in terms of the numbers of objects, did you feel that you had the opportunity to be engaged in more abstract ideas and more inventive experimental approaches to light and to composition than you would be during the undertaking of a large painting?

MR. GOINGS: Nah, I don't know. I can't - [laughs]. I don't really know how to respond to that. It was just - I don't know. I think it was just process.

MRS. GOINGS: As you got older, you found it harder and harder to stand in front of a canvas for eight hours a day -

MR. GOINGS: Well, that's true. Yes. Yes. [Laughs.]

MRS. GOINGS: And being able to do the smaller ones -

MR. GOINGS: Well, some of the still life paintings are - actually, the last one I did was quite large. And it was a staged situation that I - the photograph for it, I took here. And painted the picture here, actually, and then sent it back to New York. It was - oh, gosh - it must have been five feet wide, huh?

MRS. GOINGS: I can't think.

MS. RICHARDS: Can't you sit while you're painting?

MR. GOINGS: Pardon?

MS. RICHARDS: Can you sit while you're painting?

MR. GOINGS: No. No. I've tried. [Laughs.] I used to. When I was painting the trucks pictures and the fast food pictures, I used to sit on a stool. But after we moved to New York and I had the studio there, at some point I just found that -

MRS. GOINGS: You had got sciatica.

MR. GOINGS: Well, yeah, that was a contributing factor. I did something to my back and ended up having bouts of sciatica. And that sort of put me off the stool. And I think that was probably - you're right. I think I started standing up because it was easier on my back. So it was a health thing. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: One more small question of technique. As slide film has been phased out -

MR. GOINGS: Right. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: - how have you dealt with that?

MR. GOINGS: Well, actually, I haven't, because I haven't really done much of anything in the last couple of years -

MRS. GOINGS: Three years.

MR. GOINGS: - since things happened.

MRS. GOINGS: Since his stroke.

MR. GOINGS: But it's possible and, you know, both my sons, since they work from slides, do this, and I have done it, too. And that is, you can burn a digital image on a disk; you take it to the photo shop - the camera store, or whatever. And they will load it into their computer, and then they can burn it on a slide, a 35-mm slide. They have this gizmo that actually projects the digital image on the slide film - and then they develop it and so on.

The problem anymore, as I understand it, since Kodak has stopped making slide film entirely, Fuji still makes it -

MS. RICHARDS: And slide projectors.

MR. GOINGS: Pardon?

MS. RICHARDS: And slide projectors.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, right. Yeah, well, having a slide projector is - [laughs] - another problem. But the technology has also found a way to deal with that, because there are digital projectors, and you don't have to fool with the slide at all. I tried one, but I had to take it back because I couldn't seem to get the thing to work. I couldn't get it - I think it's because I bought a cheap one, and I really didn't know how to operate it, and so I ended up taking it back.

But I don't see any reason why it wouldn't be a perfectly legitimate tool. And maybe, at some point, I'll - if I decide that I want to work from photographs - what a - [laughs] - I've been - I've sort of adapted to my situation. And it's because with some of these little things that I've been doing, if I want to work from a photograph, I photograph the objects that I want to paint and make a print. And since the paintings that I'm making are more like five by seven, six by eight, there's, you know - I can make a print that's at least as big or bigger than the canvas I'm going to work on. And transfer paper works just fine.

MS. RICHARDS: When did you - did we talk about watercolor? I don't think so. You've done a tremendous number of watercolors. And I've read about how you started to focus on doing watercolors - what inspired you. Could you talk about what inspired you to turn your attention to watercolor - when that happened and how the watercolors have related to the paintings and what - how you decide to do watercolor, to do an oil painting, and what part those watercolors play in your entire artistic practice?

MR. GOINGS: Well, what did you read about how I - [laughter].

MS. RICHARDS: Well, I don't want to -

MR. GOINGS: Let's get our story straight here. [Laughter.]

MS. RICHARDS: I'll let you reinvent that.

MR. GOINGS: My story is, as I remember it - and Shanna will maybe verify this - I had not - up to a certain point, I just didn't consider working in watercolors, because when I was in college, the watercolor instructors that were available at the time worked in a way that I found difficult. It was the wet-paper, direct, don't-mess-with-it, get-it-right-the-first-time kind of approach. And I couldn't master that. I could not control that the way I wanted to control what I was doing. So I just gave up on the medium entirely until we went to London - why were we there?

MRS. GOINGS: We went to Documenta in Germany, and then we went off to Holland and London.

MR. GOINGS: Oh, that's right. Yes, yes. And we made a side trip to London. And we went to the old Tate, I think - wasn't it the old Tate museum? And I think, actually, we went there to look at the Canaletto [Italian painter Giovanni Antonio Canal (1697- 1768)]. But while we were there, we thought, well, shoot, we'll look around. And we were wandering through - it seemed like a maze of little galleries.

And we found this gallery that had this show up of watercolors that most of - well, they all dated from the late 1800s, early 1900s. And they were mostly, I think, hobby painters. They were all watercolors. And they were - in terms of the technique of a watercolor - the California Watercolor Society, which was, you know, in force when I was a student - they were overworked and overworked. And I thought, hey, that's terrific. I could do that.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever look at Homer watercolors?

MR. GOINGS: Pardon?

MS. RICHARDS: Speaking - not - the East Coast watercolor - Homer. Winslow Homer and his watercolors, which were certainly precise and -

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, well, I would have loved to have had some lessons from Homer. [Laughs.] But he wasn't around when I - [laughs]. And I didn't have - I think I just didn't have what it took to try to develop that particular mode. But this encouraged me simply because these were unknown people. There were names I'd never heard of.

And I suspect that they were people who just, you know - it was like learning to play the piano a little bit. This was like learning to paint a little bit, you know. You use watercolors because it's a genteel medium. But the fact that they were - any of them were - the techniques were very labored - impressed me - [laughs] - they were effective. They depicted what they intended to depict, and they did it in a nice, crisp, clean, direct sort of way, it seemed like to me.

So I went home and took one of my kid's watercolor pans - you know, those little tin things that are about this big with the little pans of watercolor in it - and painted that truck that's in the studio for Shanna.

MRS. GOINGS: And you painted it just like you painted an oil.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, yeah. Well, except that it's thin. It's not, you know -

MRS. GOINGS: No, but I mean -

MR. GOINGS: Yeah. Yeah, it was from a slide that I - you know, one of the pickup photographs that I was using. And it was sort of a revelation, because it was fun, and, as I mentioned earlier, watercolor for me turned out be something that I could leave and come back to any time, because it doesn't involve drying time and that sort of thing. And it was kind of a relief, simply because I could work on a smaller scale. It was a good relief from working on the large oil paintings.

MRS. GOINGS: And it didn't take very long.

MR. GOINGS: And it didn't take very long. [Laughs.] Well, the more I got into it and when I started doing watercolors of the diners, it took considerably longer, but even so, they went faster than the oil paintings.

MS. RICHARDS: And you used the same approach of projecting the slide onto the watercolor paper?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah. Yeah, just projected and just, you know, a rough little pencil sketch from the slide. I always tried to use an extremely hard pencil, so it didn't leave a lot of graphite on the paper, or the canvas, for that matter. And then the underpainting - with the watercolors I always did an underpainting with just very pale colors, to define the drawing better.

And I think probably at about the time was when I started doing that same kind of underpaintings in the oil paintings, just using very thin paint to clarify the drawing and define it. And then started working from the print of the image.

MS. RICHARDS: So how do you decide to do watercolor versus an oil painting of the subject of an image?

MR. GOINGS: Well, mostly - there have been some occasions when I used the same slide for both a painting and a watercolor, but not too often. Generally, the watercolors were - I don't know, I just thought of them as a separate thing. The subjects were similar - were the same. You know, I mean, there was truck watercolors, and there were diner watercolors, and there were fast food watercolors, and there's still life watercolors.

So that I touched on all of the subject matter zones, but - and they were just all mixed together because, you know, maybe I would be working on a diner interior oil painting and decide I'd need a rest from it, and stop and do a watercolor of a truck or a still life. I always thought of the watercolors as a rest time. [Laughs.] Because those I could sit down and do.

MS. RICHARDS: Is there a watercolorist who you most admire? Someone whose watercolors you absolutely love?

MR. GOINGS: Well, I love Homer, of course. Beyond him, I can't -

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, he is the best.

[Laughter.]

MR. GOINGS: What?

MRS. GOINGS: No, I was - nothing.

MS. RICHARDS: You talked about going to London and seeing the watercolors. And I wanted to ask you, have there been any travels that impacted your work? We talked a little bit about Vermeer, and, for example, did you travel to find, to look at Vermeers that you hadn't seen? Or were there other trips that had an impact on your work, that contributed in some way? Or even that you painted while you were traveling, but -

MR. GOINGS: Hmm. Well, I mean, all of the traveling that we did was art-centered. I mean -

[Off-side conversation.]

I mean, we always went to whatever museum we could get to wherever we went. And we, you know, we saw some great shows and things.

MRS. GOINGS: Yeah.

MR. GOINGS: Can we have a rest stop here?

MS. RICHARDS: Sure.

[END CD 6.]

This is Judith Richards interviewing Ralph Goings in Santa Cruz, California, on September 11, 2009, for the Archives of American Arts, Smithsonian Institution, disc three.

Ralph, I wanted to ask you about critical response to your work. How do you feel when - does critical response affect you strongly if it's positive or if it's negative, or not? How is that -

MR. GOINGS: I'm sorry, I missed the -

MS. RICHARDS: When there's been reviews of your exhibitions, or your work in a group exhibition, commentary about your work, critical commentary -

MR. GOINGS: Let's stop right there because there hardly ever is any.

MS. RICHARDS: When you first started showing. So -

MR. GOINGS: I had one review in an art magazine, and it wasn't until a couple of years ago.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever talk to anyone about - I guess critics, art historians about -

MRS. GOINGS: It's not a secret why. It's not a secret why.

MS. RICHARDS: And why do you think that is, that there hasn't been a lot of critical attention paid, even in the '70s during the height of interest in Photorealism?

MR. GOINGS: Well, my sense is that in those days, it was either nonexistent or it was negative. As I said, I had shows every three years for about 15 years at OK Harris.

MRS. GOINGS: Twenty years.

MR. GOINGS: Huh?

MRS. GOINGS: Twenty years, more like.

MR. GOINGS: Well, but I don't recall an art magazine review of any of my shows there.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you think it had to do with OK Harris?

MR. GOINGS: Yep.

MS. RICHARDS: Did that ever make you say, why am I showing in this gallery?

MR. GOINGS: Well, not really.

MS. RICHARDS: How did Ivan deal with that in terms of speaking to you about it? *

MR. GOINGS: Well, it - [laughs] - our feeling is that - has been expressed by him, too, that - Ivan is a unique person. He's a maverick. He's, you know - he's - thought never wanted to be a part of the game playing. But he opened OK Harris. He took out an ad in *Art in America*, and the ad said, OK Harris does not advertise. And that's all it said. It was a full-page ad and that was it. And he would not - he would not buy advertising for his shows.

MS. RICHARDS: That's even more not playing a game. That's not participating in a very, very common business practice throughout capitalist society, advertising. So it doesn't necessarily have anything to do with the art world; it had to do with a basic business practice.

MR. GOINGS: Well, whatever it had to do with, that's pretty much the way it worked out.

MS. RICHARDS: So you're tying not advertising with not being reviewed?

MR. GOINGS: Well, you know, amongst artists who talk about this sort of thing, it seems to be a consensus that if you don't have ads - if you're dealing with us and advertising with art magazines - they're not going to review you.

MS. RICHARDS: What about the newspapers, where you don't commonly find gallery ads?

MR. GOINGS: I got a two-sentence mention, not a review, but what Lou [Louis] Meisel called a mention, in the New York Times, one time, and that was it.

MS. RICHARDS: Has it been different? There have been times when your work has been shown in Europe and Japan amidst a group exhibition. I don't have your list, bibliography, in my hands, but has there been more critical attention or reviews outside the U.S.?

MRS. GOINGS: If there have been, we don't know about it.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah. Well, to be fair about it, I think you know that there have been - I guess what I want to say is that the notice or the attention that has been paid to the so-called Photorealist movement by people who write about art has seemed, to most of us who are involved in it, to have been minimal and ranging from outright hostility to medium-warm.

As a matter of fact - [laughs] - I read one time a review of a New York show. This was in an art magazine. I don't remember at all who wrote the review, but it was a review of a show - I don't even remember the name of the gallery, but it was of realist painters. And the reviewers started out by saying, this is a realist show, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Thank goodness, it's not Photorealism.

And that - amongst us, we - [laughs] - out of that came the derogatory acronym or whatever - it's not an acronym, but whatever - NPR, "not photorealism." That seems to, you know, it seems to be an attitude that surfaces a lot.

MRS. GOINGS: He was in a group show early on, and the reviewers mentioned him and called him a "hamburger head."

[Laughter.]

MS. RICHARDS: Ah, that's not a serious reviewer. [Laughter.] Now, there was a show just a few months ago in Berlin at the Deutsche Guggenheim, right? A huge survey of Photorealists.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, right. The Deutsche museum of - yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah. Have you heard from artists who attended what kind of critical response was received?

MR. GOINGS: Yes. Valerie Hillings - is that her name? I'll have to look it up. I'm not sure of her last - spelling of her last name. It was Valerie anyway. She was the curator for the show. I heard from her - she wrote to me right after the opening and said that the attendance had been spectacular and that there had been a lot of very favorable response from the press, from the art press. And then later she - I got another note from her saying that the art press response was marvelous, and they were all really thrilled about it. But it's all in German. She said that she couldn't find anything that had been translated to send to me, so -

MS. RICHARDS: But there, but you could easily - it could be translated. They could translate it for - because you're all, most all, American artists.

MR. GOINGS: Oh, I'm sure it could be. Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, Hillings. Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] Thank you.

MR. GOINGS: This is the catalogue for that show.

MRS. GOINGS: I'll put that wherever. [Off mike.]

MS. RICHARDS: Well, that would really be interesting to have all that translated. It wouldn't be that difficult.

MR. GOINGS: Well, you know, I haven't heard from her for a while. By this time, she may have gotten some translations. She said that she, you know, she would work on it, but she was back and forth. She is assigned to the Guggenheim in New York, but she curated this show and she was spending a lot of time in Berlin because of that.

MS. RICHARDS: Your painting is on the cover of the catalogue.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you know that was going to happen? How did they -

MR. GOINGS: Oh, yeah, yeah. She told me.

MS. RICHARDS: That must have been especially gratifying.

MR. GOINGS: Oh, yeah. I was very happy about that.

MS. RICHARDS: I'm sure. Well, you'll see -

MR. GOINGS: Well, and also they were able to borrow my airstream painting from Dr. [Peter] Ludwig's collection, which they hardly ever loan. Which was great, you know, because I like to have that out where people see it. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Right, right. How many of your works were in the show?

MR. GOINGS: Four, I think. I think this painting, the airstream, and a still life. Mm, I can't remember what else.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] That's terrific. So there isn't anything else to be said about critical response. [Laughter.]

MR. GOINGS: I'd rather not say anymore. [Laughter.]

MS. RICHARDS: Okay, okay.

MR. GOINGS: Well, you know, to be fair, there are champions. You know, Linda Chase has done some wonderful writing about Photorealism. And Lou Meisel has been a champion for the whole group from the very beginning. And it turns out that, at this point, he seems to be one of the major collectors of the work, too. So you know, I tip my hat to him and just wish that there were more people with voices out there who are favorable to what - favorable to our enterprise, so to speak.

MS. RICHARDS: Speaking of your involvement, you talked a little bit awhile earlier in the interview about how you became connected to the OK Harris gallery, and Ivan Karp seeing your [work] at Castelli and then opening his gallery, and so - and he has been your primary dealer for all those years? Did you ever - or do you have an affiliation with another gallery in a different part of the country or the world?

MR. GOINGS: It's been the exclusive arrangement with Ivan from the beginning. He has, over the years, through his relationship to other galleries around the country and in Europe - I've been able to have work, to show work, in various other places. But he has been and is my primary representative.

MS. RICHARDS: At the beginning - and I don't know, maybe this has evolved - what did you want from the relationship with your dealer? What did you want the dealer to do, and what did you want to do yourself?

MR. GOINGS: I had no idea, because I had no knowledge of how the art world worked. I lived in California; I'd never been to New York. The only thing I knew about the New York art scene was from art magazines. But I did know that it was important to show your work in New York. And that meant you had to be connected to a gallery. Beyond that, I didn't really have any - you know, I didn't go - as it turned out, I didn't really search Ivan out. He chose me, in a sort of roundabout way, as I described. And I decided that -

Well, let me back up a bit and say that other artists that I had talked to, California artists who had had some New York experience - some said, well, you got to be careful. You can't trust most of those dealers, because they either - they don't pay, or they do shady things. And you have to be careful. So, you know, watch it.

And then there were those who said, well, you have to trust somebody. And so I decided that I trusted Ivan, that I believed him, that he would do the best he could for me. You know, I didn't have any expectations about - I mean, I knew that Ivan had had some involvement with the promotion of Andy Warhol and a few other, you know, really big-name people. But I didn't really expect that that would happen to me, that he was going to turn me into some sort of art star or something. That was not any part of my thinking at all. [Laughs.] I just wanted to show my work and, if he could find a market, sell some of it for me.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you and he ever talk about strategy, about who he would want to sell your work to? Would you agree if he said, okay, I'm not going to sell it to this person because they're not major collectors; I'm going to hold it and sell it to this person? Or, it's going to be first-come, first-serve.

MR. GOINGS: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, absolutely. Yeah. And early on, we had a discussion about price. And I had no idea what kind of prices I should be asking. And so we talked about it, and I asked him to suggest what he thought would, you know, would be appropriate, sort of, beginning prices, because he had sold a few things for me out of Castelli's backroom, like I had said.

And he said, well, here's what we should do. We'll start at this price - X number of dollars - and if we can sell this painting for that much and maybe one more for that much, then we'll raise the price a little bit. And we'll keep doing this till we build a platform. And we'll work our way up. And over the years, that's what happened. And it worked fine, I think.

MRS. GOINGS: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And you and he agreed that you wouldn't just sell it to the first person who wanted to buy it. You would hold off earning income.

MR. GOINGS: No, no. No, no. There were times when - later on - in the beginning, I think that he wasn't too choosy about who the buyer was. It was whether or not they had the money.

MRS. GOINGS: He began to talk, early on, about wanting to get you into certain collections and -

MR. GOINGS: Yes. Yeah. Well, yeah, he was in touch with a lot of big-time collectors. And I think he brought some of them - or his connection with them - from Castelli, but he did, yes. He talked about, oh, the big collector in Chicago, and I don't remember all of their names. But he was saying things like, this person deserves this; this person should have this painting because eventually it will go to a museum. Or this person should have this painting because they have a very well-known collection and you should be in that collection.

I mean, so that was a part of the mix. It was - you know, he was working for me. It's just that I didn't know the ropes, and so I didn't know what to tell him to do. So I relied on, as I said, I decided to trust him and go with him, and I've never been sorry.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were preparing for an exhibition, did you discuss what image would be on the postcard? Did he decide? Did you decide?

MR. GOINGS: In the beginning, instead of postcards, posters were printed. Like prints, you know - only, they were big announcements. The first show -

MRS. GOINGS: They chose all of them.

MR. GOINGS: I think they - I think the gallery picked the image. After that, most -

MRS. GOINGS: They chose all of them, honey.

MR. GOINGS: Huh?

MRS. GOINGS: They decided on all of them. They picked the most interesting image and -

[Cross talk.]

MR. GOINGS: I think so, yeah. Yeah, I was trying to think - I don't remember any time when I made some sort of decision about what the image should be.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] And when they wrote the press release, did you okay the text; did you give them text?

MR. GOINGS: I don't even know that there were press releases. Ivan wasn't interested in the press.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, all right, that's - [laughter]. So anything, any written information about your work that a critic might want to get from the gallery didn't - as far as you - you never saw anything.

MR. GOINGS: No. Right.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever put any restrictions on the sale of work or say that you wanted to - you must be informed before it's resold?

MR. GOINGS: Before it's resold?

MS. RICHARDS: Some artists have sales contracts which stipulate that they either get a percentage or they have control over the resale or even control over the exhibition - that your permission or approval needs to be granted for it. The context of the work - if someone wanted to put in a show of California painters, and you'd say, no, I don't want to be shown in the context of California painters.

MR. GOINGS: Ivan enforced that himself. Every time he resold one of my paintings, I got a percentage. He insisted on it with the collectors. I think that -

MRS. GOINGS: It's very difficult -

[Cross talk.]

MR. GOINGS: - you're right, I -

MS. RICHARDS: That's if the collector came to him to resell it.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, well.

MRS. GOINGS: You can't - there's no way to enforce that.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, in some places they have that. Some individual artists have certain restrictions. So he gave you a percentage - I guess, continues to do that?

MR. GOINGS: Sure. Yeah. Not every time. I think it had a lot to do with who the collector was that was reselling. For the most part, I think that the resale of my work that went through Ivan, through OK Harris, I got a percentage from.

If a painting of mine that was sold by OK Harris was resold by somebody else, then there was no residual, because there was no way he could control that. And the idea of selling working with this resale residual idea - I think that a lot of collectors would have balked at that. I understand that there is some sort of California thing where that happens, but then once that's in effect, nobody wants to sell work in California. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Do you rely on Ivan to keep archives of your work and your career, or do you do that - images of all your work and sales, all the records, the entire, you know, archive?

MR. GOINGS: They keep that, yes.

MRS. GOINGS: But we do, too.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: But you do, too.

MRS. GOINGS: That's what the Smithsonian has.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, yeah. How important has relationships with other artists - I should say, connected to the

gallery - sometimes one of the benefits of being in a gallery is feeling you're in a community of artists, that you share in common, that you're represented by the same gallery. And you might see each other at openings - of course, you weren't living there.

So did you feel that there was some kind of sense of community by being part of that gallery, and that you were introduced to artists you hadn't met, and formed relationships?

MR. GOINGS: Yes. Constantly.

MRS. GOINGS: Ivan and Marilyn's idea about it was that it was a family. Not all of the artists wanted to be family, but we met almost everybody we know through them. And they take care of their people.

MS. RICHARDS: So, for example, who did you - who are you friends with who you met through the gallery over the years?

MRS. GOINGS: John and Jean Salt, the McLeans -

MR. GOINGS: Richard Pettibone.

MRS. GOINGS: Richard - [laughs] - Richard Pettibone left the gallery pretty earlier, but he lived down the road from us, so we knew him. And practically everybody in the gallery. I'm blanking out on all the early people that were there.

MR. GOINGS: Well, John Clem Clarke was there when we first were connected with the gallery.

MRS. GOINGS: Yeah, he was a good friend.

MR. GOINGS: He subsequently left, but -

MRS. GOINGS: Idelle Weber and -

MR. GOINGS: Yeah.

MRS. GOINGS: Idelle wasn't in the gallery at the time, but her husband was their lawyer, so we - [laughter] - we became friends with them.

MR. GOINGS: Oh, lots of other people, but I can't remember all the names. I'm blanking out. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, yeah. There's been a lot. And so were you living near some of them? Did you get to see them often? Did you feel like there was a -

MRS. GOINGS: Yeah. The Karps - oh, you should tell about the arrangement up in the country.

MR. GOINGS: About what?

MRS. GOINGS: The arrangement up in the country.

MR. GOINGS: Oh. Well, Ivan and Marilyn maintained two guesthouses up in the country. And they invite gallery artists to come in the summertime for, you know, a period of a week or 10 days or whatever. And while we were living there in the country, that was always a good part of the summer, because they would have people in both of the guesthouses. And they were generally people that we already knew, so it was just a sort of reunion. And beyond that, I -

MRS. GOINGS: You need more names? Davis Cone.

MS. RICHARDS: Davis?

MRS. GOINGS: Cone.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell the last name?

MRS. GOINGS: C-O-N-E.

MR. GOINGS: Oh, and Dan [Daniel] Douke.

MRS. GOINGS: Dan Douke and Bob [Robert] Ginder.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah.

MRS. GOINGS: And also Cara Ginder - Cara Wood [Ginder].

MR. GOINGS: Cara Wood.

MRS. GOINGS: What's James's last name?

MR. GOINGS: We'll probably think of a dozen other pretty soon.

MS. RICHARDS: That's okay. Yeah, yeah.

MR. GOINGS: There were quite a few people, actually.

MS. RICHARDS: So you were living - what town was that in New York?

MRS. GOINGS: We were living out in the country from Oneonta.

MS. RICHARDS: Near Oneonta?

MR. GOINGS: Well, the village where our address was, was Charlotteville.

MRS. GOINGS: Yeah, it was a tiny village there.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there other artists living in Charlotteville? Or near, really near it, who you knew?

MRS. GOINGS: Not an artist -

MR. GOINGS: Well, Gary Bower lived there.

MRS. GOINGS: Well, Gary Bower lived there, yeah.

MR. GOINGS: The painter.

MRS. GOINGS: At one point, there was a fashion photographer and a world-known interior decorator and - [laughs].

MS. RICHARDS: But they weren't -

MR. GOINGS: No, they had houses there.

MRS. GOINGS: And we lived around the corner from Richard -

MR. GOINGS: - Artschwager.

MRS. GOINGS: Artschwager. But that - we met him through Ivan, but not - he wasn't in the gallery.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, he was our - Richard Artschwager was our neighbor for a number of years.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you - did you see each other from time to time?

MRS. GOINGS: Yeah.

MR. GOINGS: Who?

MS. RICHARDS: You saw each other from time to time?

MRS. GOINGS: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Richard Artschwager.

MR. GOINGS: Oh, yeah. Once a week at least.

MRS. GOINGS: We were not close friends with him, but, I mean, it was just a whole, sort of, neighborhood.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. So you certainly wouldn't have felt isolated.

MRS. GOINGS: No, most of them went back to the city at Labor Day.

MR. GOINGS: Well, Richard - at that time, Richard lived there year-round, as we did.

MRS. GOINGS: But Richard lived there. So did Pettibone. And Pettibone's now with Castelli. And there's a sculptor that - Richard Friedberg - and -

MR. GOINGS: Well, Richard Friedberg has never connected with OK Harris. I mean, he and Ivan have been friends for a long, long time, but he never - I don't think he ever showed with Ivan.

MRS. GOINGS: He's had one show. Yes, he's had one show with Ivan.

MR. GOINGS: Did he have a show?

MRS. GOINGS: Yeah, since we left.

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

MRS. GOINGS: And there were others, too, but I can't think of them.

MS. RICHARDS: So there was some kind of community there, certainly in the summer a large one, and then year-round -

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, but it should be emphasized that it was not arty. Hardly any talk - when there were gatherings, there was hardly any talk about art. Usually the gatherings had to do with food and eating. [Laughs.]

MRS. GOINGS: Yeah. Eating. Like we were talking about last night.

MR. GOINGS: And just hanging out, you know.

MRS. GOINGS: It was definite family, or community.

MS. RICHARDS: In the last decade, how do you see your work has changed and evolved? You talked about experimenting with inventing forms. And some of the painting is looser, a little bit looser - maybe because you wanted to experiment or because of your health. What have been the intentional changes that you've experienced with your work?

MR. GOINGS: In the last 10 years?

MS. RICHARDS: Well, it could be the last five years, whatever, but it could be in 10 years -

MR. GOINGS: Well, I think the big change is since 2006, when I had the stroke, because up to that point I was - I think that I was at the top of my game, so to speak. But after the stroke, I tried to regain some of what I was able to do before, but it's - I haven't been very successful at it. And so since then, what little I have done has been mostly an effort to find out what it is I can do and then try to go with that and try to do something with that.

And this involved the things that you mentioned, the looser paint handling and the, sort of, invention and imagination of - imaginating of - "imaginating" - [laughs] - images and so on - just to see what I can - physically what I can do. And it's a learning process. It's just trial and error and - because I don't have a program. I don't have a plan. It's just searching.

MS. RICHARDS: What are you working on right now?

MR. GOINGS: Well, the little things that you saw in my studio, the - I've done a couple of, three doughnut pictures. I started out - we have a close friend who just bought a house here in Santa Cruz that I guess is going to be her getaway house or whatever. And she's always admired these little pictures that we have on the wall in here. And I thought, well, I'll - it would be nice if I could give her a little something like that as a housewarming gift for her new house. So I set out to paint a doughnut picture for her. And so that's one of the ones that I have going in there.

And the others are just, you know, it's - I don't - I can't explain the fascination with painting doughnuts. It's just an intriguing notion. It's like, you know, we were talking about the wedge of lemon pie, which is another shape that I find fascinating, and the concept of it being an edible object is intriguing. It's just, again, I guess, as an old geezer, I'm just playing games. I'm just having - trying to have some fun with what I can do.

MS. RICHARDS: And as you said, you talked about - figure out what you can do, and it sounds like also maybe setting up new challenges, testing what you can do.

MR. GOINGS: Well, yeah. I'd like to be able to find a sort of alleyway that I could explore and try some - oh, what's - I'm missing a word here. Some larger-scale - I'd like to try some larger-scale things. I'd like, kind of, to expand beyond these little sort of doodle things that I've been doing to something more ambitious. But it's just

a matter of working through it, I think.

MS. RICHARDS: But it sounds like you're expanding the possibilities as time goes by and you figure out what you can - more and more - what you can do, and your facility returns some.

MR. GOINGS: Well, I don't know that anything is going to return.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, that you're building on the recent experience.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, I think so.

MS. RICHARDS: You just did a group of prints. They were photographic prints, I think. Pigmented ink-jet prints?

MR. GOINGS: Yes, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: How did that come about? I don't know of other prints you've done in the past.

MR. GOINGS: Oh, I'm not - printmaking has never been one of [my] mediums, although I have done some. There's, you know, there's the break between a print and a reproduction. I mean, I guess the difference is between a fine-arts, hand-on print and a reproduction print, which is a reproduction of a preexisting work.

That's what these are. These are based on paintings that have already been done, but they're - I don't know - an advanced kind of printing technology, so that it's a much more substantial and much more permanent object than the traditional reproduction, photographic, kind of reproduction prints. Posters, actually. Posters is a bad word for most printmakers. [Laughs.]

The studio that I did this work with is Magnolia Editions in Oakland. And we also did a side - this was a suite of four [Quartet, 2006]. There's this one, there's one in the back, and then there are two others that are part of the group. In addition to that, we did something - an etching - combination print of an etching with, you know - copperplate etching combined with the image printed with an ink-jet press.

MS. RICHARDS: When you say an etching - you mean a photographic etching? Or an etching you did engraved on -

MR. GOINGS: No, no. It's from a photograph, but it is also etched on copper. I mean, it's etched in the traditional way, but it was not hand-drawn. And the initial printing of this was printed in black, just black and white. And then color was printed on top with an ink-jet press. It's some sort of - I'm not sure of the technical terms here, but it's a combination etching-gravure kind of -

MS. RICHARDS: Photogravure.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah. And we did the one, which is available at Magnolia. Whether or not we'll do any more of that kind of thing, I don't know. It's difficult for me because it's hard for me to get there to the studio, and it would best be if I could be there and do hands-on work with it. But I'm not able to do that, so we have to do it by - occasionally, we can manage a drive there and spend most of the day.

MS. RICHARDS: Can they bring a proof here?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, he - for signing and for proofing - they bring them to [me] sometimes or send them to me, but it's -

MS. RICHARDS: How do you decide how big the edition will be?

MR. GOINGS: Oh, we just talk it over, Don and I, and he usually suggests - they're not large editions. They're -

MS. RICHARDS: What was the impulse toward doing this? To have more people be able to own your work that less - make it less expensive?

MR. GOINGS: Well, yeah. I got connected with him initially for that purpose, to have something available that - I mean, these are not cheap, cheap. I think they're between $1,600 and $1,800 a piece, but they're affordable - more affordable than paintings, which don't exist anymore because I can't make any more of the, you know, of the traditional image that I've dealt with. So it was an effort to just provide something that was more affordable and available. So - [laughs].

MS. RICHARDS: Are there - do you see your influence - the influence of your work or your vision - on younger artists?

MR. GOINGS: [Laughs] Yeah, people keep sending me pictures of painters who are painting ketchup bottles and salt-and-pepper shakers. [Laughter.]

MRS. GOINGS: No, you get -

MR. GOINGS: Huh? What?

MRS. GOINGS: You get a lot of mail -

[Cross talk.]

MR. GOINGS: Oh, oh, I get -

MS. RICHARDS: Fan mail?

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, I get, every day, through my Web site I get - with all modesty, I call fan mail. As a matter of fact, I just got one this morning from a young person - I assume a young person - he said he's a photographer in Turkey. And he just found my Web site, and he was very enthusiastic about what he saw, and he just wanted to say hello, and like that. I got a lot of that kind of e-mail from, through my Web site.

MRS. GOINGS: But you also get mail from young artists who admire your work and want to know about your process and -

MR. GOINGS: They want lessons. [Laughter.]

MS. RICHARDS: And are there young artists - younger artists - whose work you particularly admire and follow? I mean, I know you can't go to see their works in person, but whose works you -

MR. GOINGS: Well, there's - the two that come to mind immediately are Mark Goings and Drew Goings. [Laughter.]

MS. RICHARDS: Okay.

MR. GOINGS: No, I don't have much direct contact with young painters anymore. I haven't taught for so many years, and so I'm not in the environment where they - and I don't, you know, I don't go to the gallery anymore. And so I just don't have an opportunity to meet them.

MS. RICHARDS: One last question. How do you feel the art world has changed over the span of your career? I mean, as an artist, thinking about how you started out as an artist, and what your expectations were, and how it is to be an artist for you today. I mean, eliminating the issue of your not being able to move around, but - what kind of changes have you seen that affect - that had an impact on your work as an artist in the art world?

MR. GOINGS: Hmm. [Laughter.] I don't know. You know, in the beginning, I didn't start out with any kind of great expectations. I just knew that I wanted to be a painter, and that's what I wanted to do. I look around now, you know, and 40 or 50 years later, I see young people who are - most of them are coming out of graduate school, and they've already contracted for their first one-man show in New York and - or trying to - and they've got an agenda all set, and they're, you know, they're full-steam-ahead.

I don't, you know, I - [laughs] - I can't say that I ever had an agenda. I guess I just sort of took it as it came to me, and luckily, it came to me in some measure. And I'm glad about that. We were talking the other day about what might have happened if we hadn't left Sacramento, where I was teaching, and moved to New York. If I hadn't taken Ivan's offer in the beginning to go with his gallery, but if we had just stayed in Sacramento, we were trying to think what things might be like today. And we couldn't come up with anything definitive - [laughter] - and decided that we were much better off [with] what we did, you know. Right?

MRS. GOINGS: Right.

MR. GOINGS: I don't know if that answers your question, but - [laughs].

MS. RICHARDS: Is there anything else you'd like to discuss or talk about -

MR. GOINGS: Pardon?

MS. RICHARDS: Is there anything else, any other topic, that you'd like to touch on before we conclude?

MRS. GOINGS: No.

MR. GOINGS: I don't know. Do you think of anything that we haven't covered that needs to be covered?

MRS. GOINGS: No, I can't.

MS. RICHARDS: When - I guess one - with this show in Germany, it opens up all kinds of possibilities for a whole new generation to see your work and other Photorealists - certainly in Europe hasn't been shown significantly -

MR. GOINGS: Well, I think, you know, that show, in a way, was sort of an addendum to Documenta, which all of us were in. It wasn't in Berlin; it was in Kassel, but -

MRS. GOINGS: No, in '72.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, in '72 [Documenta 5, Kassel, West Germany]. But not in the last 30, more years.

MR. GOINGS: No, right. But that's what this show was about. It was to catch Germany up with what they hadn't seen since 1970-whenever-it-was.

MS. RICHARDS: Seventy-two.

MR. GOINGS: Yeah. And so it - as Linda told me when she wrote to me after the opening, she was on a panel discussion that occurred at the museum, and I had asked her a couple of questions about what they were talking about and what they were going to cover. And she said that it mostly had to do with the fact that Germany hadn't seen this art for so many years and that this was a sort of catch-up and that it was not about where Photorealism might go from here; it was about from there to here. And so it's -

MRS. GOINGS: But a, you know, new generation got this - [inaudible] - which is her point.

[Cross talk.]

MS. RICHARDS: A whole new generation is seeing it, not that it's going to -

MR. GOINGS: Yeah, well. There's probably been two or three generations since - [laughs].

MS. RICHARDS: Not that people are going to start being Photorealists again, but a whole new perspective, appreciation of the contribution that those artists played in our visual culture.

MR. GOINGS: Well, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And it's, I guess, for them, interesting - a picture of - most of the images portray America, at least for a period of time.

MR. GOINGS: Well, I think that was one of the big-interest things, the fact that it was - I think that's why they wanted the McDonald's on the cover. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Have you heard of any talk of other museums in Europe wanting to present that exhibition or parts of that exhibition?

MR. GOINGS: Well, there was some talk that the show might travel. And there was even some talk of - I heard this, sort of, scuttlebutt from the - what's his name, the current director of the Guggenheim in New York?

MS. RICHARDS: Richard Armstrong.

MR. GOINGS: Yes, he was there at the opening. And the scuttlebutt was that he was impressed with the show and in a sort of roundabout way suggested that maybe they could do the show in New York, which would be a kick I think. But I don't, you know, I haven't heard any more about that. It was just a rumor thing.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, that would be wonderful. Thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

Last updated...November 22, 2010