Smithsonian
*Archives of American Art*

# Oral history interview with Peter Saul, 2009 Nov. 3-4

Funding for this interview was provided by theTerra Foundation for American Art.

**Contact Information**
Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington. D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

## Transcript

### Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a digitally recorded interview with Peter Saul on November 3 and 4, 2009. The interview took place at 925 Bergen Street in Brooklyn, New York, 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.

Peter Saul 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 RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Peter Saul on November 3, 2009, at 925 Bergen Street in Brooklyn [NY], for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc one.

Peter, let's start with your family background, maybe just a little bit about your grandparents, if you knew them, and where they were from. And then moving on to your parents and their backgrounds, and then coming to when and where you were born.

PETER SAUL: Grandparents - my father's parents, I don't know anything about really except they were in the fur business in London, England. And that is it, pretty much. My mother's -

MS. RICHARDS: What was your - so your grandfather Saul, what was his name?

MR. SAUL: I don't even know his name. It is unfortunate, but I have never felt any real curiosity about where I came from or where my family came from or that kind of thing. However, my father was born in London, England, in 1900. His father sold furs or somehow- furs, I think. And he came to the - my father came to the United States when he was 21, 22.

MS. RICHARDS: What was his name, your father?

MR. SAUL: Bill Saul. His real name was Arthur Charles Saul, but people called him Bill. And let's see. He came about age 21, 22, to the United States, to San Francisco. He lived his whole life in San Francisco working for the Shell Oil Company. He was sent over as a sort of a clerk. And he ended up at retirement age - this is 1960 - he ended up manager of transportation for the West Coast, a respectable position. Okay.

My mother, her family came from Iowa. And let's see - Winterset, Iowa. And I don't know much about them either, except that it was a large family.

MS. RICHARDS: What was her maiden name?

MR. SAUL: Kelso.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell that?

MR. SAUL: K-E-L-S-O. Let's see, what can I say about my mother's family? Well, occasionally, I met some of them, very rarely.

MS. RICHARDS: Is that because they came to San Francisco?

MR. SAUL: Usually. Usually my mother would travel by herself to see her family. They were a large, poverty-stricken crew, lived various places in the west, lived in Spokane, Seattle, mostly in the Northwest. Let's see. What was their business? They were not educated. The boys all quit school at the earliest moment, which would be after third or fourth grade. My mother went the longest. She made it through grade 10. And my mother was very good at writing and reading and arithmetic, things of that order. And she had a good job in San Francisco in the 1920s.

She was secretary to the - what do you call it? Geez, I forgot what you call it - federal reserve chairman for the West Coast. My mother was his secretary. So that was a very good job. She was very pleased with that. And she maintained that job up until 1934. And then I was born. And it seemed to me that my parents were prosperous. We always had a live-in maid.

My mother's mother took care of me a lot when I was a little kid. Went for walks together, took me to the San Francisco World's Fair on Treasure Island.

MS. RICHARDS: How did your parents meet?

MR. SAUL: I don't know. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: But they both grew up in San Francisco?

MR. SAUL: They lived in San Francisco. Well, my father got there at age 21, 22. My mother got there at about age 21, 22, also.

MS. RICHARDS: Where did she grow up?

MR. SAUL: Winterset, Iowa, -

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, yes, I'm sorry.

MR. SAUL: And many places in the west, unknown.

MS. RHICHARDS: And what did your father do?

MR. SAUL: What did her husband - what did her father do?

MS. RICHARDS: No, your father.

MR. SAUL: Oh, my father worked for Shell Oil, Shell Oil Company -

MS. RICHARDS: That is right. Yes, okay.

MR. SAUL: From 1920 to 1960. And he worked in an office. He did the work that you do in offices. Gave commands, spoke on the phone.

MS. RICHARDS: So you were the first born?

MR. SAUL: And the only. I am an only child. Let's see, what can I say about that? Well, I felt I was taken pretty good care of.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you live in the city?

MR. SAUL: Yes, during the early years, I lived in the city and was taken good care of. Let's see, what can I say about that?

MS. RICHARDS: In elementary school -

MR. SAUL: Yes, yes, I was there.

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs] Were you particularly good at certain subjects or activities?

MR. SAUL: No, actually, I didn't do very well at all until my mother discovered I wasn't doing any of the homework. So she got after me and made me do the homework. That was about grade three, and I had not yet learned how to read or write or anything. I just sort of bluffed it or something. I don't know what I did, frankly. But years later, my mother said I learned how to read from reading comic books, which is probably true. About that time, I discovered comic books. And reading the comic books, I learned how to read.

I don't remember the early years of school except that there was one day when we made art. Of course, this is an anecdote I have already said. I might as well say it again. All members of the kindergarten class were asked to make a picture, after which they could go out and play. So everybody wanted to get the picture over with immediately and get out and play. For some unknown reason, I wanted to make a complicated painting, which I did do with a ship, birds flying in the sky, smokestacks, portholes, people waving, and so on and so on.

So the teacher was amazed and telephoned my parents immediately to come down and see the picture that their child had made. So they came zooming down. And she pointed out to them how unusual this was for anybody age five to make a picture of this complexity. And my parents were a little baffled. So what happened?

Let's see. Well, I started to take classes at the art museum.

MS. RICHARDS: In elementary school?

MR. SAUL: Yes, this is like age six or something. I don't remember. I was pretty young, even for this, but I was there. Unfortunately, most of the class was concerned with cleaning up and not making a mess. It was held in

the art museum. In those days, the art museum in San Francisco was only about four or five rooms on the second floor of the same building as the government, you know.

This came to an end rather soon because there were three floors and it was a Saturday morning art class. And I was supposed to get off for my class on the third floor. However, I accidentally got off at the second floor, and there was nobody there, and it was closed. And no one had shown me how to make the elevator work, how to press the button or anything. So I wandered around for about 45 minutes until I saw somebody. I said, hey, wait, wait. So anyway, that way, I was able to get out of the building. And after that, I thought, I think I will quit this. So I did. I didn't take any more art classes.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it simply because you got confused in the building?

MR. SAUL: Yeah, yeah. I thought, hey, that is a warning, you know. I think I was way oversensitive as a kid, very much easily frightened. I was frightened of movies, very scared. My mother was quite a fan of film noir and mystery stories by Ellery Queen and things of that type. And she took me to these movies, which by today's standards would be not only harmless, it would be impossible to imagine any child or human being being scared of. *Dressed to Kill* [1941] was the first one I remember, with Dennis O'Keeffe.

And the reason I was scared was because it took place in an old Victorian building like my parents rented at that time. And there was a dumbwaiter that went from the basement, where there had been some servant kitchen, up to the dining room. And in the movie, a hand comes out of the dumbwaiter with a gun and shoots somebody at the dining table.

So anyway, we come into the dining room in the evening. The maid is going to serve the stuff and everything is fine. I realize that my position is with my back to the dumbwaiter. If it were to happen, of course, you know, imagination takes over, you know. I thought, oh, my God; I could be killed this evening. So I refused to sit in my normal seat, and my parents thought I was crazy. And so began a long series of scenes where I couldn't sleep and stayed up half the night.

My mother, even so, couldn't stop going to these movies with me to keep her company. And I didn't mind. I begged her every time. "Please, I promise I won't be scared. Please take me." And she said, "Oh, but you will be scared. I will see it tomorrow with my friends." I said, "Oh, please, please take me." So off we went to see another scary movie. And I was just drained of all - I was just really worried. And this was getting me down, frightening -

MS. RICHARDS: Did it affect your schoolwork?

MR. SAUL: I don't know, probably. But I was just very - I was very concerned, much too concerned, with these things. And during my early life, I was much too frightened, timid, able to be frightened, in my opinion.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you frightened of other children?

MR. SAUL: No, I had friends. I was frightened of momentous events that would happen that would single you out, like landslides, earthquakes, which I never experienced. But there was a landslide. Every Saturday morning, I would go for a walk with my father. This was an effort to have something to do with your child, you know. My mother would let us out of the car at a certain point, and we would walk around the Cliff House, walk to the Cliff House around a sort of a route that went along the cliff there.

And one time, there had been a landslide. And if you looked straight down, there was just nothing but, like, 100 feet down to the water. So my father hopped across. Then he said, now, don't look down. I will take you. And so he took me by the hands and pulled me across, but I did look down, naturally enough. I just felt terrible. And I thought, suppose he had let go. You never know. Suppose he had a heart attack at that moment. Who knows what? So I mean, these are the kind of fears that gripped me needlessly when I was very young. So I was definitely a frightenable child.

And I had friends. I had good friends. Went all around San Francisco on foot. It is a mixed bag. You don't know what to say about this.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you find you were drawing? You were influenced by cartoons?

MR. SAUL: Yes, and also, on Saturday mornings, I would draw. After this art school, this art class let out, I continued to go downtown to be with my father on Saturday mornings. And he gave me pencils and paper, and I would draw scenes of war and chaos and murder and stuff like that.

And his friends were astonished. My father's businesspeople would come and talk to him during the morning. In those days, men worked half a day on Saturday. And it was kind of - they were impressed, I could tell. Everybody

said, your kid has so much imagination. This is incredible. I have a kid. All he draws is seagulls or something, you know. All she draws is flowers or something, you know. But I would draw pictures of, perhaps, things that were imagined and perhaps things that I had seen in movies.

Around this time, I got going into war movies, too, because World War II was coming about. And I enjoyed war movies. And we played war, me and my friends. But even so, I didn't enjoy risk, like rock fights, too much. I imagined the rock coming right towards me, hitting me in the eye, that kind of thing. It never happened, of course, but it could.

[Audio Break.]

I had a couple of friends who got hurt, you know, by rocks and razor blades or something. I didn't. [Laughs.] And let's see. What else? Well, those -

MS. RICHARDS: Did you do any particular activities every summer when you were a kid?

MR. SAUL: During those - well, there was a very amazing summer. My father had home leave, so he got a free trip to England every third year. And this was very luxurious. My parents saved money for this, I imagine. And we went on ocean liners and so on, flew over in 1949, stayed at a hotel all summer in London, quite a good one. Had lunch at those places, you know, where the royalty goes and all that stuff. Museums, I don't remember, except armor, suits of armor.

But anyway, yes, yes, indeed, yeah. There was a trip in 1939.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, you were only 5 years old.

MR. SAUL: And this was a trip that must have influenced something, my art or something. We went through the Panama Canal, and that was an amazing experience, first of all, because we followed behind a ship with prisoners on it, a prison ship. And that excited me tremendously. A ship of prisoners. It astonished me. So my parents knew someone with binoculars, so I looked over to see if I could see actual prisoners on the prison ship. [Laughs.] I was kind of interested in them. I never did, of course. They were all locked up in their cells on the ship, I guess. But I noticed it was white tiles. The prison ship was white tiles. Then it had the normal ship underneath. But on top was white tiles. We followed them. It was very hot.

And my parents talked about the donkeys. They are going to put the donkeys on tomorrow, they would say. I said donkeys? Why? What does that mean? Donkeys? Donkeys turned out to be little tiny motors that travel along on the ground that have a rope attached to them, which pulled the ship from one lock into the next. So they didn't mean real donkeys. They meant little tiny machines that would pull the ship.

And at a certain point in the canal, there was a huge jellyfish right in front of us. I mean, really big, like 20 feet by 20 feet. I had no idea that a jellyfish could assume this dimension. So people came out and looked at this, you know. It is astonishing. It is amazing. And then we had rough weather. And at a certain point, I almost went over the edge. It made my mother feel very, very worried. But I had no problem with it. The ship simply tipped violently, and I slid down to the rail, which goes over the edge. But I calmly held on, you know, which, to me, seemed an easy and obvious thing to do. I never know whether I am going to feel in danger or not. But in this case, I didn't. But my mother was very upset.

So let's see, what happened then? Oh, and we stopped in Jamaica at Kingston. And I remember that very, very exciting day. Visited the manager of the Shell Oil Company. Had a wonderful estate up top in the highlands above Kingston. And just made it back to the boat in time. They pulled out the gangplank after we went on. And I remember my parents all dressed up partying in the evening.

My parents went nightclubbing a lot and were very sharp dressers. This was 1935 through '45, you know, those years.

MS. RICHARDS: So in school, you did so well in kindergarten in art, and you said you didn't really pay attention to your schoolwork until she forced you to.

MR. SAUL: Not really, no.

MS. RICHARDS: Was there, during those early years - let's say, before high school - other teachers that noticed your artistic ability? Or did you actually end up being most interested in another subject?

MR. SAUL: There was nothing that interested me except playing, playing after school. We played monster, you know, Frankenstein. You sneak up behind someone - [laughs] - like this and try to get the back of their neck. Scare the heck out of them. [Laughs.] Let's see. No, I don't remember anything at all. They were rather pleasant years.

MS. RICHARDS: And did other teachers notice your abilities?

MR. SAUL: Well, I did draw in the classroom often instead of doing what I was supposed to be doing. But no teacher took note, I don't think. Again -

MS. RICHARDS: Were there art classes in high school?

MR. SAUL: No, no. No, there was no art class during these early years, these early - we are finished with that now. At a certain point, for reasons completely unknown, I was sent to a boarding school in Canada.

MS. RICHARDS: How old were you?

MR. SAUL: Ten. This was unknown to me why this happened except that - there were several good reasons for it, too. One was, my father's boss sent his son there. Belither was his name. And he was -

MS. RICHARDS: What was his name?

MR. SAUL: Belither.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell that?

MR. SAUL: B-E-L-I-T-H-E-R. And his son was just -

MS. RICHARDS: That is his last name?

MR. SAUL: Yeah. And his son was just completing the schooling there.

MS. RICHARDS: Does your father have a brother?

MR. SAUL: Yes, and that was the - that was another good reason, because I didn't realize it at that time, but probably was influenced - there was a convergence of reasons. That is one, Belither.

Another one, which I mentioned, in the Robert Storr article, is very common. It seems to me that the two brothers, my father and my uncle who lived in England who I rarely saw, of course, had a sort of a competition going on. And that probably his son was at one of these very important English schools, Harrow [School, London Borough of Harrow, London, England], which was paid for - very expensive - and paid for by his mother, by my father's mother, who was still alive then, paid for this. Otherwise, it wouldn't have been affordable, because my uncle was a simple man who just did manual work in a factory.

But, yeah, he went to this school. And I have a feeling that might have contributed to it.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you think also - you said that you weren't doing your schoolwork. Do you think they might have felt that -

MR. SAUL: That, too, that, too. Apparently, my father came by once, came by the school, according to my mother, and saw everybody running around and thought it lacked reason and discipline. [Laughs.] I don't know. It didn't look European, that is for sure. So all of a sudden, I was sent to Canada.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it all of a sudden in the middle of the school year, or was it the beginning?

MR. SAUL: The beginning. It happened in mid-summer. My parents took me up there to make sure I liked it.

MS. RICHARDS: It didn't sound like you were on - you were open to your parents about your fears and your concerns.

MR. SAUL: I guess - well, in this case, I didn't know a thing about it. I just went along on this trip. And all of a sudden, we were on Vancouver Island and my father and mother said, "Now, how would you like to be here?" And I said, "Well, fine." I tried to please my parents by saying yes to everything that I could possibly say yes to. And that included this, so off I went.

And that was certainly an unusual experience, because they discovered I was Jewish, which I am not, and all that crazy stuff. Total insanity. I wouldn't even - I can't even imagine it now.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have the opportunity - did you ever think to correct that impression, that you are not Jewish?

MR. SAUL: I did. I protested it all the time. However, it had nothing to do with religion. It was considered a bloodstream thing. These people, all the students I discovered, almost all, I mean, and all the teachers believed

in this sort of a bloodstream world, where if you had Aryan blood, you would be muscular and loyal. And if you had Chinese blood, your eyes would start to get slopey [ph]. And if you had Negro blood, you would be scared of the moon, scared of the full moon like, whoa, let me out of here. Terrible.

MS. RICHARDS: Did your parents share any of those kinds of prejudices?

MR. SAUL: Well, the thing is, there was no use asking them. Yes. Well, at first, I didn't dare ask them because they might be Jewish. It is possible. Who knows?

MS. RICHARDS: Were you raised going to a church?

[Cross Talk.]

MR. SAUL: No church. I mean, actually, I went to a church, but my parents didn't. It was an accident.

In third grade, the teacher suddenly passed around these little cards that said, would you like to be a Christian? And I thought it would make everyone happy if I said yes. I just had an idea that most people would prefer you to be a Christian than not. I don't know where I got this idea. So I said yes. So my parents were astonished when two weeks later, a minister came around to their house and said, your son signed this pledge to join the church.

This is total misuse of the school. But in those days, nobody even knew that church and school were supposed to be - church and school were supposed to be separate. I mean, I don't think my parents even knew that that it was in the Constitution or anything else. So my father agreed to take me on Sunday mornings. And I went to this church preparation. I forget which church. Presbyterian probably. And then he would go pick me up afterwards. My parents never attended any church. No, no. I don't know what they were up to. Nothing.

Anyway -

MS. RICHARDS: Do you think that one of the reasons why you don't know as much about your background is because your parents purposely didn't want to tell you about their background?

MR. SAUL: Who knows? Maybe. I think it is my parents were just - yeah, I don't know what is going on with my parents because it is true. I just didn't ask or I wasn't told. For instance, my mother vanished for six months at a certain point. Gone.

MS. RICHARDS: What age were you then?

MR. SAUL: Seven, maybe. She went to Carmel, California, Half Moon Bay, and lived in a large building with shingles. That is all I can say.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you think later it was some kind of mental institution?

MR. SAUL: Turmoil? No. I just think it was a separation, probably because my father was drinking too much or some discord, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: Who took care of you when your mother was gone?

MR. SAUL: The maid. We had a live-in maid at all times. And I saw a great deal of the maid. And I frequently didn't see any parent for a while, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: You mean days or months?

MR. SAUL: No, days. A day or so. And in this case, for a long time my mother was not there. But I didn't ask why. It is odd. I don't know why. I mean, I wasn't as concerned with my parents as I was with my friends at school. And I just simply - what can I say? I don't think I asked. I wasn't worried.

And so here I am up at this school with having trouble with being Jewish, which is, perhaps, a little very unusual. And I didn't ask my parents if they were Jewish because it could have been in the blood and maybe they didn't even know. They could be Jewish and not even know it because, as far as I know, they didn't go to any church. Jewish blood could be in their bodies from some previous generation. This could happen. And it would come out that then it would come out in you. You would want to make money and get high grades. This was Jewish behavior, you know. High grades and making money.

MS. RICHARDS: That sounds good.

MR. SAUL: Well, today it doesn't sound so bad. But in those Protestant days, it was considered very poor behavior.

MS. RICHARDS: That was during World War II, right?

MR. SAUL: Yeah, that was considered poor behavior in 1944, '45, '46. In those years, where I was in this boarding school, good behavior was declaration of poverty, to help poor people, muscles in sports and regular grades, not too high, not too low.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it a church-based school?

MR. SAUL: No, but it could have been. [Laughs.] I never listened. There was a church service every Sunday, but I never listened to it. I had a hollowed-out prayer book. I paid no attention, nor did many people. It was just like, you know, another world.

MS. RICHARDS: So you were there until high school graduation?

MR. SAUL: Yes, yes, six years, six years.

MS. RICHARDS: You mean you graduated early then?

MR. SAUL: Yes, yes. I did well in the academics. Again, a fear thing. You could be beaten for getting the wrong answer. You could be beaten for all kinds of things. During a normal day at the school, of the 60 students, six would be getting beaten. And during a weekend, like a Saturday when there were beatings, there could be 20, one third of the school. The most people ever getting beaten on one night that I remember - this was a few years later - was 35 out of 70 or something like that.

After a couple of years, the school was featured in *Time* magazine as the strictest school in North America. They used to have these education pages in *Time* magazine, and they would feature a school.

MS. RICHARDS: What is the name of the school?

MR. SAUL: Shawnigan Lake.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell that?

MR. SAUL: S-H-A-W-N-I-G-A-N, or the Lonsdale School, either one.

MS. RICHARDS: Lonsdale?

MR. SAUL: L-O-N-S-D-A-L-E. And that article brought a great deal of - not a great deal, but the school was going broke. And thanks to that article, more students appeared. But they were mostly students who needed a good beating, if you know what I mean. [Laughs.] People like myself, totally frightened out of their wits, didn't show up anymore. But I was still there; I was still there. And I was frightened, of course. I did skip a couple of grades. Partly, that wasn't due to brains. It was because there was another student who started on the same day as me named Bingo Wilson. And his father was very old. He came with his father, who was an old man with a beard.

And according to - the headmaster told my father that he wanted Bingo to hurry up and graduate so he would still be alive when he was - you know, see him graduate. So I think he chose me as a person of high grade, too, to accompany Bingo, so it wouldn't look so phony. So all of a sudden, whoops, I have skipped a grade and skipped another grade. It was great in a way, except then I was with much older kids and it was very dangerous from the Jewish point of view. It could be a real problem. Their idea of a fun conversation, you know, is, which city has more Negroes in it, Seattle or Portland, or Jews, you know.

[Laughs] Just crazy, crazy. This is another world, another world. I don't know what to say. Actually, looking back on it, it is funny, just funny.

MS. RICHARDS: Does the school still exist?

MR. SAUL: Yes, it does. And it changed completely. It is now - at that time, it cost $900 a year. This is 1947. Now it is 20,000 [dollars] or more. I don't know. And it is mostly Koreans. And it is, you know, both genders, male and female. And it is very successful. And I was contacted by them about 15 years ago to see if I would give them any money. It is incredible. First, I didn't have any money I wanted to give away. And I said, this is incredible, your approaching me. I said, I thought those were terrible years.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, they learned.

MR. SAUL: That is it.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah. So all that time when you were there, you were a very good student. Did you do any

artwork? Did you -

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Was there an art teacher, by chance?

MR. SAUL: Yes, there was one art class, but only lasted a few weeks. But that was a different - I mean, there was a class on Saturday morning. We were handed out little boards, little boards, you know, and a piece of watercolor paper and stuff like that and a brush. But then the teacher didn't show up. And then time went on and we just used that Saturday morning to do our homework or something.

Then all of a sudden, the teacher appears, a young woman about 25 years old. And she instructed us to put the little board up in front of us on some books. And she said, now I am going to teach you how to lay a wash. So she said, put the brush in the - you know, she showed us how. And then you start at the top on this paper, which is taped down. And we started doing this, but drips ran down because she forgot to tell us to wet the paper. And as soon as this started to happen, drips came down, and she saw what was happening, she burst into tears. And then she took this three cornered ruler and started hitting kids on the head. I wasn't in the front row, so I wasn't getting hit.

But anyway, she just started hitting and screaming. And then she ran out of the room and we never saw her again. That was the end of the art class. Isn't that crazy? [Laughs.] This is Canada, '47 or something.

And then I started an art club, because there had been one previously. And someone had had the skills to paint murals in the school block, you know, where they had the classes. And they had some pretty good rooms there. And, of course, smoking was the big thing that you wanted to do; so we could smoke there occasionally.

Everybody smoked, so no one was ever detected by smelling tobacco. Even the prefects proudly smoked, the students who could beat you, as well as the teachers. They also smoked, I am pretty sure. So you would never get caught from smelling smoke. You would only get caught if you had the cigarette burning. So there was a certain safety, you know. The worst thing to ever happen, someone might have to do it on their hand, you know, and then drop it. Yikes. That could have happened, but did not to me.

And then we painted pictures in this room whenever we could, because if you didn't have a hobby, you had to do more work, extra work. And work was hauling cut-down trees. They were constantly clearing near the football field and the cricket field. They were constantly clearing trees.

And what you had to do was follow along behind the headmaster, who had a big double-headed ax, and knock them off, you know. Wham, and down they would come. And then you would have to haul the branches away to big bonfires. So it is very - it was an exhausting, boring, and stupid thing that you could get out of if you had a hobby. So I provided a hobby, and we all had paints. And I painted more pictures. Mine weren't any good.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have art books or any references to art written?

MR. SAUL: We had three copies of *Studio* magazine or maybe only one. It was given to us by one of the matrons.

MS. RICHARDS: That was the only thing that would have given you an idea of what an artist -

MR. SAUL: - could do. Yes, that is it.

MS. RICHARDS: When you spent the summer in England, did you go to any art museums?

MR. SAUL: No. Saw suits of armor and castles, saw castles. It wasn't boring at all, but there was no art involvement.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] And your parents didn't have any artworks on the walls of your home?

MR. SAUL: There was a repro with a torn corner that they bought in Nevada for three dollars with a big gold frame, plastic gold frame. They had that on the wall.

MS. RICHARDS: With a torn corner?

MR. SAUL: Yeah. My father liked it a lot. It reminded him of his office building or something, some relationship within it. Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So you formed this art club, and so it was only -

MR. SAUL: Six people, six people in it.

MS. RICHARDS: - as a hobby that you were able to -

MR. SAUL: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: - include art in your life there.

MR. SAUL: Yes, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: So when you graduated - before you graduated at 16, was there talk about -

MR. SAUL: Fifteen.

MS. RICHARDS: Was there talk about going on to college?

MR. SAUL: Yes, there was. But the general talk was my parents felt I was too young and they wanted me to go to Stanford [University, Palo Alto, CA]. The tension about college in those days was, was there money to pay for it rather than would you be admitted. The thought was everybody would be admitted. There weren't enough people paying $2,000 a year applying to Stanford. They might need more.

MS. RICHARDS: At that point, right after World War II, though, there was a GI Bill.

MR. SAUL: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So there were new students coming in.

MR. SAUL: Yes, yes. I think maybe my parents just hadn't caught up with this fact. You know, I mean, they are not doing research or anything. So I just got a job. I got a job. I applied for it in the newspaper. A messenger office boy.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have any idea, though, that in a couple of years when you were older or when your parents could afford it, you would go to college?

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes. Every day I was reminded by my parents. Any job I took was just temporary. College was the preferred route. My father was very ambitious for me to attend college, receive technical instruction there and work for a large corporation and earn a living, proper living and so on and so on. Though my mother's younger brother was an artist. I had an artist in the family, which I probably never mentioned.

MS. RICHARDS: What was his name?

MR. SAUL: Hell, suddenly forgotten. Oh, Jean, J-E-A-N, Jean Kelso.

MS. RICHARDS: And what kind of artist was he?

MR. SAUL: Well, he went to the Art Institute, the San Francisco Art Institute. And he graduated in about 1940. He was younger than my mother. And he did one job only, and then he died of tuberculosis, even though penicillin had been invented during World War II. I guess it wasn't in time for him or something. But he died. He had one job only, one commercial art job, which was to illustrate something he saw under the microscope, some microbes or something.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever talk to him about art?

MR. SAUL: Oh, absolutely. He was very friendly to me, and he took me on camping trips sometimes in the summer.

MS. RICHARDS: Did he see your drawings, your artworks?

MR. SAUL: Probably. Who knows? I mean, you know, he had a family, too, a daughter a few years younger than me. And so we would all take off and go camping. He was good at camping.

MS. RICHARDS: So even though -

MR. SAUL: I felt encouraged. In fact, he also gave me for Christmas one year when I was in the early years, you know, eight or something, a very fancy sort of chair table that you could use to make art, one of those things you see in art stores that are never sold. Do you know what I mean? [ Laughs.] Probably the guy just gave it to him and said, oh, God, take this thing out of here. I am never going to sell this in the 1930s.

MS. RICHARDS: A kind of an easel stool?

MR. SAUL: Easel stool, yes. So that came to our house on a Christmas. And I remember my father thought it was pretty sickening that he would spend all that money on a thing like that when they didn't have any themselves, because was married, you know, and had a family. So that hung around for a few years. And -

MS. RICHARDS: Do you think that your uncle gave you the idea that - was he the only way that you knew about being an artist?

MR. SAUL: Well, I don't know. I didn't pay much attention to it. He was friendly, though.

MS. RICHARDS: So going back to when you graduated, you said you had a job in San Francisco. What was that?

MR. SAUL: Yes, messenger for McCann Erickson, the advertising agency. I just went around the streets to certain kiosks or whatever and bought magazines that I was supposed to buy. They would give you instructions on where to go to buy something like *Yachting Monthly*. And you would be checking the ads. There would be a checker. You would bring it back to the checker, and the checker would reach into the magazine and find the advertisement, cut it out, and make some notations. That was it. It was a very simple job.

That, plus preparing the office before - I got there first and I opened certain windows, closed certain windows, that kind of thing.

MS. RICHARDS: A job that a 16-year-old could do.

MR. SAUL: Yes, it was really simple. I enjoyed the job a great deal because I enjoyed traveling around the city by streetcar and foot.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you enjoy making money, too?

MR. SAUL: Yeah, yeah, I guess so. I made $150 a month. But I was never as moved by money as I was supposed to be. I think I was reminded too often about money to care about it much. My parents felt wealthy, even though they weren't, you know. They were just middle class, upper-middle-class people. But they felt wealthy. And they spent a lot of money on clothes, nightclubs, restaurants, and travel, frankly. A great deal for those days. It is astonishing. Nobody in my school, in either school, had much of a life like I had, in a way, you know, going to Europe, that kind of thing. Unknown to them.

So what was I saying?

MS. RICHARDS: So you had this courier job.

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Office assistant.

MR. SAUL: Very nice. It lasted about five months. And then I quit to go to Stanford.

MS. RICHARDS: So you entered Stanford young?

MR. SAUL: Yes, I did. And by the time I was there, I was old enough to get a driver's license, so I could drive back and forth to my parents' house in Marin County.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, so you grew up living in the city of San Francisco.

MR. SAUL: And then my parents moved at the end of World War II to Marin County, to a very, sort of, nice old house that had some special architectural merit. I have forgotten -

MS. RICHARDS: What was the exact area of San Francisco that you lived in?

MR. SAUL: Octavia Street below Lafayette Park.

MS. RICHARDS: And then what town? Oh, I am sorry.

MR. SAUL: Ross was the town they moved to in Marin County, where they rented a very old house built in 1900 that was very beautiful, big beams and all that. And the landlady, landlord, lived in part of this house and rented the rest of it to my parents. It was very nice. We got on well with the woman who owned the house.

MS. RICHARDS: But when you went to Stanford, you didn't commute every day, did you?

MR. SAUL: No, no. I stayed in the dorm down at Stanford, but I could drive back on the weekends.

It was very pleasant, but I got into a watercolor class, and it was just like a drug addiction thing. I was unable to go to any of my classes because I wanted so much to paint pictures, you know. It came upon me, the urge to paint, as soon as I got to Stanford. It was ridiculous.

I mean, I would be in the room painting and not going to class. I mean, I would be signed up for English classes, quite pleasant classes, nothing to avoid. And I would say, well, I will find out from somebody who is in the class what happened today. And in the meantime, I will just paint one more picture. And then I would promise not to paint anymore for a whole week or something like that. So I was painting these watercolors, which weren't very interesting.

MS. RICHARDS: Is it because the class was taught - was focused on watercolor, or because you chose -

MR. SAUL: Yes, watercolor. It was watercolor class.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you taking an art class the first semester because you thought you would be an art major?

MR. SAUL: No, I just snuck in because I wanted to do it. And he said, the teacher, Mendelowitz was his name. Mendelowitz.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell? M-E-N-

MR. SAUL: M-E-N-D-E-L-O-W-I-T-Z, I think, I think. God, it has been a long time. He said, "Well, you are awfully young." He said, "Usually, I don't let anyone into this class until they have been here for two years." Stanford had a rule. You had to have real education for two years, then you could take art. I said, please. And he said, okay, okay. And he called me his wild man, because all his other students were women, the wives of teachers or advanced students or something, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: Graduate students.

MR. SAUL: They were there. And they were all very dutiful. They all would make careful pencil drawings first. [Laughs.] I just went into it. And I enjoyed myself tremendously.

And I drove this car, which I had bought with my savings from this little job, and drove around behind the campus and down to Carmel and places, and painted pictures, you know, on my big board. And the teacher was very pleased. But at the end of the semester, I got these warning letters, you know. You haven't attended any classes. You haven't done anything.

My father wondered what was the matter with me. And then I said, "You know, look, I just want to be an artist." And he said, "Oh, God, what a nightmare." So I dropped out. And I am not quite sure of the timing at this point. But soon I became a merchant seaman, to make money, at this point, I think.

MS. RICHARDS: What gave you the idea to do that?

MR. SAUL: My father made it possible. I said, "Well, look," I said, "I want to be an artist. But how am I going to get any money?" or something like that. And he said, "Well, I can arrange for you to be a seaman because I have" - he is the transportation manager. "And if I give a crate of whiskey to the shore captain, he will put you on." And I said, "Okay, I will do it." So I went down to the hall. I was whisked ahead of people who were needing jobs. This is the kind of corruption that happens in labor unions. Right through.

And I got on the ship. I was one of three wipers. And nobody knew who I was except for the captain. They were very careful about this. Anyway, so I did that for five or six months. It went up and down the coast. I got on okay with the crew.

Had a near accident once, though. They were doing something called blowing the pipes, which you have to coordinate these big wrenches. You have to go like this and, you know, one after another. People are at different points in the engine room, you know, like down there, up here, and so on.

Anyway, it makes terrific noise, an unbearable whine. The whine was so great that I couldn't stand it, so I let go of my wrench. I put my hands over my ears, and the wrench fell. It started going down towards the head of the guy under me. So I screamed out loud, "Wrench," you know. And he looked up just in time to deflect it. So I said, "Gee, I am really sorry." He said, "That is okay. You just don't have to blow the pipes anymore. We will have somebody else do it."

And to make up for it, I cleaned the top of the motors in San Diego [CA], a tremendous heat thing, a fantastic heat, 130 or something. And you have got dust and all this. Nobody wanted to do it. So I said, I will do it. So I went up there, and I blew the dust off, you know, this tremendous heat. I am still alive. [Laughs.] So that was the whole job.

MS. RICHARDS: And all that time, were you doodling, drawing? Did you have a notebook, sketchbook?

MR. SAUL: I tried, I tried. One of the other wipers was trying to be a writer. And he said that his teacher told him, you have got to write something every day. So he would go to the desk in our little room, free wipers, you know. And he would write something or type it. I don't remember. And I would sit on the bed and try and draw something, but it was very bad. I couldn't do it.

Finally, somebody blew my cover about who I was. And that caused a very difficult situation, most unpleasant. This Hawaiian guy, huge Hawaiian guy said, "Hey, someone told me that you are the son of the shore - you somehow got to be on the ship because your father works for Shell Oil." I said, "No, not at all." He said, "Ehhh." He thought he would test me out by just hitting me, you know, to see if I would confess. But every time he hit me, I just said, no, no, because I didn't want to fight back because he was much, much bigger than me. No chance. Ridiculous. So I just said, "Oh, please," you know. "Please, no, no, you have got the wrong guy. It is not me," you know.

Anyway, finally, he got tired of this and he let me alone. And the next few days, he crushed his hand in one of the metal doors, so he had to get off the boat anyway. So he was gone. And then I got off, and I went to the Art Institute in San Francisco, very pleasant.

MS. RICHARDS: At what point did you find out about the Art Institute? Was that always in your mind?

MR. SAUL: My uncle had been there. And I knew it existed. And it was the art school, as far as I could tell. There weren't any others, so I just went there. Took some beginning classes, figure drawing.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you pay your own tuition, or did your father help?

MR. SAUL: I don't remember. Just did it. And see, I was not focused on money, because my parents wanted me to be -

MS. RICHARDS: Did you find a place to live, yourself, in San Francisco?

MR. SAUL: Ah, no, I lived with my parents. During this time, I continued living with my parents.

MS. RICHARDS: So you commuted from Marin County into San Francisco?

MR. SAUL: Yes, I drove in with my father, spent the day at the art school, and drove back in the evening. I met him downtown San Francisco.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you think he got used to the fact that you were going to be an artist? I mean, you were obviously diligent enough to go back to school. It's just you weren't studying what he might have preferred.

MR. SAUL: Yes, I suppose so. You know, the thing is I managed to focus on the art, believe it or not, not my parents' ideas. I managed to do that, and I don't know what they thought, really. I think it might have been crushing for them, in some ways. They had hoped that I would be somebody important, you know. And this way, to be an artist was like being a monk or something, you know. You were throwing away your life in some weird belief system that nobody would ever pay any attention to.

So I went to the Art Institute, and I made a few friends there. I existed as a beginning student until a certain point, just before September 1952, when I started art school proper in St. Louis [MO]. I quit the job before that, of course, and got ready to go to college. And I went.

MS. RICHARDS: So you went - you were 18 in 1952. So you -

MR. SAUL: I went off to college.

MS. RICHARDS: So you went to the Art Institute before you were 18?

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: You knew it was temporary?

MR. SAUL: My parents told me it would have to be temporary because it was very important to them that I get some degree. You must have a degree. So -

MS. RICHARDS: And how did you pick Wash U [Washington University, St. Louis, MO]?

MR. SAUL: My parents picked it. It gave a degree called a B.F.A. [Bachelor of Fine Arts].

[END CD 1.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards with Peter Saul in Brooklyn [NY], on November 3, 2009, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc two.

So your parents picked Wash U?

MR. SAUL: Yes, yes, my father -

MS. RICHARDS: Did that occur to you that you would rather pick it yourself, or you were happy?

MR. SAUL: Well, he just took over, you know. He found - oh, I know. I remember.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, you were only 18.

MR. SAUL: Yeah, all of a sudden, I was there. I was at Washington U.

MS. RICHARDS: You were saying he knew that that was a place where you could get a degree and be an art -

MR. SAUL: And live on campus.

MS. RICHARDS: And be an art student.

MR. SAUL: And live on campus, too. It was important to them that I live on campus. I don't think they liked the kind of people I was getting to know at the Art Institute. Sort of worried them. [Laughs.] So all of a sudden, there I am in Washington U living in a dorm and taking beginning art classes. And the B.F.A. degree was based on - you would take one or two academic courses per year, which turned out to be mildly interesting - mildly, you know. I wasn't thrilled by this. But I did them.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there any that you remember being - that you really enjoyed?

MR. SAUL: No.

MS. RICHARDS: Art history?

MR. SAUL: Oh, I got out of that. I didn't have to take art history. That was a mistake on my part, of course. But after about three months, the art history teacher called into his office, me and about six other people, seven, eight people, who were more or less the people who consider themselves fine arts. And he said, now, look, I don't want any snickering at the back of the room when I show art. We hadn't been snickering. This is ridiculous. But he evidently paranoically felt that this was going to happen. [Laughs.] We were not going to respect his course.

MS. RICHARDS: You were the studio art majors?

MR. SAUL: Yes, studio. All the rest were doing something called commercial art. It was 500-plus students and - but 12 or 13 were doing something called commercial art, which was a whole different thing, whole different program, but not completely different. Art history was shared in this big room filled with the students. Anyway, we didn't do this. He said, if you want to not take the class, not take art history, I will just let you have a B or C or something, and we will just forget about it. And I said, I will do it.

So that was that. So I didn't take art history. So I graduated from art school. To me, Rembrandt [Harmenszoon van Rijn] and [Leonardo] da Vinci were just one big century, you know, just a big haze, like, where are these people? I knew that Rembrandt was in Holland, da Vinci was in Italy. And you couldn't really tell what is going on. So I learned a lot of that from my first girlfriend, my girlfriend who had had pretty sound education in high school and knew all this kind of thing.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were in St. Louis at Wash U, did you have any really memorable teachers, studio teachers?

MR. SAUL: Yes, well, yes. I got on well with the teachers, as a matter of fact. They liked my energy and eagerness to do something. Yes, I got on well. Fred Conway was an important teacher. He was the final one, the painting teacher. Before that, Wally Barker. I mentioned him in a few essays. He was a really crazy guy, completely unpleasant and uglier than sin. But he spoke German, so he had become [Max] Beckmann's translator when Beckmann was working there as a teacher.

And after Beckmann died, whenever - 1950, something like that? He became a professor at Washington U - Wally Barker. And I don't know why he took a strong - a hatred towards me. I don't think he liked me at all. I

really think he hated me. But I don't know why, you know. I could never figure it out. He just didn't like me. He would try and give me low grades. Scary because, you know, I was - they had the draft in those days for the Korean War. And if you got lower - it was a complicated system. But you could lose your deferment, and I didn't want to do that. You know, please, because I pictured again bullets coming straight at me, you know. I didn't picture any situation like bullets are going there. You know, coming straight at me. No, please, I don't want to die.

And he said, it will make a man out of you. Oh, boy, what a friendly - so that was it. But I learned a lot from him in spite of that. He enforced a real academic background. I had to paint a still life realistically this big, which I did quite well.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you learn painting techniques there?

MR. SAUL: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: How to use oil paints and -

MR. SAUL: Yes, learned everything we were supposed to learn. They kept a full assortment of fine arts teachers just for this tiny group of fine arts people and any commercial art people who would like to know about it. So basically, they were very generous, Washington U, in having this education there. I took advantage of it. Yeah, sure.

MS. RICHARDS: So you lived in the dorm for four years?

MR. SAUL: No, just for the first few months, because I ate too much food and the restaurant cost - I suddenly thought, oh, my God, my parents are going to see this bill, you know $200 for - it seems like not much now, but then they had all these - it was all posted on a big board, and mine was the most. And I was kind of embarrassed, like I ate more food than anyone there. It was terrible. I can't do this. So I was thinking about it, and James Bishop, you know, the artist James Bishop - B-I-S-H-O-P - who was a student there, apparently, at that time. He was much older than me, eight years older. But he was a student there. He had come there to study with this famous teacher. I forget his name offhand.

Anyway, he was there at the table in the restaurant, and he was talking to these two kids. And Bishop said, now, we need another person for the apartment. But we found out it doesn't work unless we are all in fine arts. And the kids were saying, oh, I don't know if I can be in fine arts. My parents would kill me. And I suddenly shouted out, I can do it; I am fine arts. And he looked at me like, oh, my God, who is this crazy guy? So I did it, you know. So I went to this apartment that he was sharing with one other person. And, God, it was so disgusting, terrible. Beetles were falling off the roof. It was in the basement. It was so terrible that I thought, oh, God, this is awful. I can't live here. So he said, well, we will look around for another place. So we did. And we didn't find anything any better.

So I simply painted my room, you know. I painted the ceiling. I painted the walls. I painted the floor.

MS. RICHARDS: This was in the basement?

MR. SAUL: Yeah, yeah. And I just painted it. That freshened it up so that I could live there. Otherwise, it was just too slummy for me, you know. Coming from the middle classes, I can't deal with this kind of thing. It is like ancient Europe or something. But anyway, so we got on all right, not very well. He hated me and my art, you know, but he needed the rent money, so there I was. I was in there. And I managed - how did I eat? Well, I ate one meal a day, scrambled eggs, bacon, and toast at a local drugstore. It cost a dollar twenty-five. And that is all I ate. Everything else went into art supplies.

Consequently, I lost an enormous amount of weight. And when I got back to my parents, my mother was very upset. You know, my God, you lost 50 pounds or something, unheard of, you know. Oh, no, this is bad.

MS. RICHARDS: You went back home in the summer?

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes, and for vacations. I went by train.

MS. RICHARDS: So once they saw that you had lost this weight, did they -

MR. SAUL: They fed me up. I had a wonderful breakfast, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have more money to spend on food, then, in the next semester, the next school year?

MR. SAUL: We never talked about it. I don't know what -

MS. RICHARDS: Did you stay in the basement room for four years?

MR. SAUL: Well, yes, we went on with this, you know. We went on with this way because there was no way out of it. It turns out there were - nobody had any apartment except these particular people. That's it.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it within walking distance of school?

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes, remote walking distance.

MS. RICHARDS: At that point, as an art student, did you go to the St. Louis Art Museum? Did you really start -

MR. SAUL: Yes, I did. Oh, yes, I got to know -

MS. RICHARDS: So you were learning art history in a way -

MR. SAUL: I was learning. I was learning all about art. Yes, definitely. I was very satisfied by my education at Washington U. I had no complaint on it.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you do any traveling in the summers, or did you have to work at a job?

MR. SAUL: Yes, I went to Europe after the first summer, I think it was - yes - with a friend from the boarding school, from Costa Rica. He lived in Costa Rica. And we kept in touch.

MS. RICHARDS: You mean someone who you knew from Shawnigan?

MR. SAUL: Yes, we kept in touch. And he and I met up at a certain point and went as passengers in the backseat of these people that he knew from Costa Rica. We took a - we took one of these work-away things, where you work to earn your passage.

MS. RICHARDS: On a boat, a ship?

MR. SAUL: Yeah, yeah. Actually, this is silly, but you pay something like $200, and then you are supposed to work, you know?

MS. RICHARDS: And this is a ship going from where to where?

MR. SAUL: Let's see. Going from - I have got to get this straight. I don't want to make a mistake. Montreal [Canada] to Bremerhaven [Germany]. So I had to get to Montreal, although it is not that hard. One can get to Montreal on a train. And then from St. Louis, especially, and then just went right over. And I met him there. And we were on this -

MS. RICHARDS: What is his name?

MR. SAUL: Graham Webster. His family lived in Costa Rica, and somehow he found himself up at this school, too.

MS. RICHARDS: At Wash U?

MR. SAUL: No, at -

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, yeah.

MR. SAUL: At the other place, yeah. At Washington U it was a completely new experience. So anyway, so we went over there, and we had a wonderful summer. At a certain point, we met my parents, who were over there and bought an MG sport car, which they loaned us. Where was it?

MS. RICHARDS: When you landed in -

MR. SAUL: At Pisa. We met them at Pisa, and we got rid of these two people we were with. I mean, we didn't get rid of them, but that is our vanishing point. They were not a lot of fun. Then we got the sport car, the MG, little two-seater. And we drove from Pisa to Marseilles. And then we gave it back to my parents, who arrived at Marseilles and took it. That's it.

MS. RICHARDS: Was Graham in college at the same time?

MR. SAUL: Yes, he was at Stanford. He started at the same time as me. He was a year behind me in school. And so I guess he started at the same time. However, I didn't see much of him, oddly enough, at Stanford. I don't know why. I just didn't, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: So when you went, you landed in Germany.

MR. SAUL: And we drove down through Holland.

MS. RICHARDS: You rented a car?

MR. SAUL: Some friends of his had bought a little car of some kind with four seats and room for suitcases. And we took off. We went through Switzerland.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you visit museums, or maybe he was not interested in art and you weren't-

MR. SAUL: No, he was pretty interested in art. He was part of the art club, too. He just didn't paint enough pictures. [Laughs.] He just didn't do a lot. But there was five or six people in the art club.

MS. RICHARDS: So you spent the whole summer in Europe traveling?

MR. SAUL: Yes, yes. It was wonderful, wonderful. Yes, indeed. Everything was very pleasant.

MS. RICHARDS: And did you have a sketchbook with you? Were you doing art?

MR. SAUL: Yes, I did, yes, definitely.

MS. RICHARDS: At that point when you - after your first year at Wash U, what was your work like? What were the ideas that you were most involved in as - and did you think of yourself as a -

MR. SAUL: Well, I made these drawings like [Vincent] van Gogh. I made these drawings that resembled van Gogh's little cross-hatched drawings, you know, with the brown ink. I made a lot of those. I did quite well at it, some people would say. And let's see.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you think of drawing as being a primary medium? Or was it kind of secondary?

MR. SAUL: No, I thought it pretty primary, pretty primary. Or I didn't think that deeply of it. I simply did draw. And let's see. It was at that point in the summer that *Time* magazine - at that point, let me see, *Time* magazine and *Life* were much more important than they are now. I would never consider looking into the pages of those two magazines today. But before television, they were very, very important. And *Time* magazine, I came across at some point on our journey in Europe. And there were the four heads of Francis Bacon in color in the art section. And that struck my attention. And I was very interested.

So that was my only experience of Francis Bacon until I finally saw one of his pictures in the real in like 1990, you know. I mean, I am not kidding. I am so backward in actually finding the things. Things that influence me are often one-inch-by-one-inch photograph or something.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were drawing, you said you were with brown ink.

MR. SAUL: Yes, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Is that because that was a simple medium while you were traveling, or was it because you weren't really involved in color at that point?

MR. SAUL: No, it was a simple traveling thing. It was something I could do that looked pretty good. And we went to the museums. We looked at a lot of stuff.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you pick up any postcards or mementos, things that ended up on your wall in your studio afterward that were important?

MR. SAUL: No. God, I can't remember that. [Laughs.] I can't remember that. No, I don't think so. I went back to school. And when I got back, it was late, because there was a big storm at sea in the Atlantic and we were 10 days late on the ship coming back. Some ship sank. I didn't feel any danger, though. In spite of my fears when I was a little kid, I didn't actually feel the fear at this time that I perhaps should have. The waves were like a big gray mountain. We were up on it. And then it went down, and then it went up again. It was crazy.

And so when I got back to St. Louis, there was no place to live except the same apartment with the same two people.

MS. RICHARDS: You never considered going back to the dorm?

MR. SAUL: Too expensive and I didn't want to. It was ridiculous, you know. So that is that. I just - back there again, and then the year after that, oh, what the heck, you know? [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: You have survived.

MR. SAUL: Yeah. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: What about the other summers, college summers?

MR. SAUL: Well, after this second one, I had a girlfriend at this point who snuck away from her parents, kind of, and was able - she didn't get on very well with them, obviously. [Laughs.] Her name was Vicky - at this point. We later married. This is another person in my life.

MS. RICHARDS: What was her last name?

MR. SAUL: Goorman.

MS. RICHARDS: G-O-R-E-M-A-N?

MR. SAUL: G-double O-R-M-A-N.

MS. RICHARDS: G-double O-R-M-A-N.

MR. SAUL: And we went out to San Francisco because my parents - oh, my parents -

MS. RICHARDS: This is the second summer of college?

MR. SAUL: Yeah, that was great, because my parents loaned me the MG, the little sport car, so we drove out to California in this. And once she was there, she somehow told her parents, I guess, where she was or something. I don't remember this very clearly. But anyway, she lived in a little cottage in Bolinas, you see, near San Francisco.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell Bolinas?

MR. SAUL: B-O-L-I-N-A-S.

MS. RICHARDS: Had she been in college? Did she -

MR. SAUL: Oh, she was an art student, definitely, and had been in college and everything -

MS. RICHARDS: Not in St. Louis, though.

MR. SAUL: Yes, in St. Louis. Yeah, yeah, she had grown up in St. Louis and had a very good education in high school, art education. So she knew what century Rembrandt was, you know what I mean, that kind of thing. She knew the names of the composers, [Johann Sebastian] Bach, [Ludwig van] Beethoven, and so on. I mean, I grew up without any cultural information, just totally blank. [Laughs.]

So anyway, yeah, so we had a nice summer. We drew pictures on the beach and all that kind of thing. And at the end of the summer, we went back on a train and so on, you know, just continued life at the art school. Anything important I am missing? I don't know if -

MS. RICHARDS: So you spent the summer in Bolinas with her?

MR. SAUL: Yes, yes, a lot of driving back and forth, because obviously I had to show up at my parents' house. But there was - yes, yes, it was very pleasant. It was a nice summer, nice summer. What then?

MS. RICHARDS: And then you had your third year of school?

MR. SAUL: Yeah, the third year, I went out to California and just - the third summer, I went out to California. My parents, by this time, had moved into a more modern, smaller house that they had bought. And I painted-

MS. RICHARDS: Still in Marin County?

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes, yes, still in Marin. And I painted there and struggled with my art all summer.

MS. RICHARDS: And as a student, let's say, by the third year, what kind of imagery were you interested in?

MR. SAUL: I did the standard stuff. I did landscapes, still lifes. I attempted these things. Landscapes, still lifes, portraits.

MS. RICHARDS: No abstraction?

MR. SAUL: No, I always wanted to be figurative. I always wanted to have the excitement of the figure somehow in this.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you think at that time - were you looking at art magazines? Did you -

MR. SAUL: Well, the Francis Bacons impressed me a lot. So when I went back to Washington U, I asked my teacher what he thought of that. And he said, oh, it is just cheap tricks. Those English always bring in some cheap trick. Religion now, is it? It is religion. When will they ever learn to make the paint speak for itself? That was his comment. So I thought heck with it, you know, it still looks interesting. And then Bratby, John Bratby, the English kitchen sink painter, at that point, approximately at this time - good Lord, I hope I am getting this right - approximately at this point, had a little reproduction of a painting of a toilet that he had made in the *ARTnews*.

It was only one inch by one inch. And it was there because he won a large prize, $10,000, international art prize. And this caused a furor in the art school, too. I seem to have been attracted to things that teachers didn't like. Even though I was a good student and got along with the teachers, I was attracted to work they didn't like, Francis Bacon with his cheap religious subject matter and John Bratby with his painting of a toilet and Larry Rivers, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: Where did you see Larry Rivers?

MR. SAUL: In the *ARTnews*, in the pages of the *ARTnews*, a long article explaining how bad he was, you know. This is terrible and so on and so on. [Laughs.] I just think it was a lot of fun. I think I saw art as a rebellion, of course, you know, against middle-class doings. These were -

MS. RICHARDS: Was there any kind of Beat culture in St. Louis?

MR. SAUL: I didn't know about it. I didn't know about that. There must have been beginning, but it was invisible to me. My first knowledge of Beat culture was when I was living in Amsterdam [Netherlands], left school. And my mother wrote and said people are going over this weekend to look at the beatniks at such-and-such cafe, but I don't think it is right to look at people just because they don't take baths, do you?

I never replied because I was too busy. My life didn't permit me to consider this problem like my mother going to Berkeley to look at people with my father, you know. They want to see people who don't take baths. This was 1956-57.

MS. RICHARDS: So you spent your last year, and you were doing various kinds of genre, landscape, figure -

MR. SAUL: Yeah, everything.

MS. RICHARDS: Drawing from the figure?

MR. SAUL: Yeah, realistic, pretty much trying to -

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember what kind of color you used, what your sensibility was?

MR. SAUL: I just used the ordinary paints and colors. I did my best. I started to try and paint from *National Geographic* photographs at a certain point. The teacher said that nobody used photography as an aid except commercial arts. You are making a big mistake. But I said, I don't think so; so I stuck in there with it. And I continued to work from photographs, though I don't today unless I have to look at a photo. Why would I look at a photo?

MS. RICHARDS: So we will get back to that. So you graduated.

MR. SAUL: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: And what did you decide to do?

MR. SAUL: Well, my father and mother gave me a thousand-dollar graduation present.

MS. RICHARDS: That is huge.

MR. SAUL: Yeah, not really, though, not really. But then my girlfriend, Vicky, had saved 3,000 [dollars] because - she had her own fortunate thing. This is really crazy. At the beginning of the third year of the college, the teacher asked to see our work, anything we chose to show him. And so we brought in our stuff, all of us, you know, in this year's class.

MS. RICHARDS: She was in class with you?

MR. SAUL: Yes, yes. We were in the same class. And he took a look at our art, and he disliked her art extremely. Now, why this is, I don't know. I've thought about this occasionally. But anyway, she quit school and she never went back. So instead of doing back to school, she got a job restoring murals in the courthouse in St. Louis, which was being done by a number of art students who had graduated, you know. It was very high pay and considerably dangerous. I went to visit her once in the courthouse, and I had to walk on a plank like 50 feet above. Boy, it really does make you - you have to get used to it, no question, because they were all trotting about on these things doing okay and doing the work. Everything was fine.

And she saved $3,000 easily. So we had 4,000 [dollars]. And we thought the 4,000 [dollars] would just last forever, you know. We wasted it on - I bought an English-style raincoat and -

MS. RICHARDS: In St. Louis?

MR. SAUL: In Europe, and stuff like that.

MS. RICHARDS: So how did you decide that that was what you would do when you graduated?

MR. SAUL: We just thought we would. We wanted to go to England, because we speak the language and we thought there would be an art world there that we could locate and be part of, even. Who knows?

MS. RICHARDS: Kind of a permanent -

MR. SAUL: Yeah, we would never go back, never go back to the States. But it didn't work out quite like that. Everything got pretty chaotic.

MS. RICHARDS: So where did you end up landing when you went to Europe?

MR. SAUL: Well, we started in England. We went to Amsterdam. After a few months, we went to Amsterdam.

MS. RICHARDS: You were in London?

MR. SAUL: Yeah, we lived at sort of near Southampton, sort of a large estate where the people obviously needed money. We had to leave suddenly. It was a kind of a row. Vicky - let's see, what is that little plant? It is not the mint. What is that? You know, there is something you put in salads. It is not the mint.

MS. RICHARDS: Parsley?

MR. SAUL: I don't think so. It is one other thing. It is another little leaflike, little lettuce-type thing. The landlady said, now here it is. This is where it comes from, this little string on her property. And there is enough here for all of us, so we just all take a little bit. Okay, you know. So I showed this to Vicky, and she got to like it and took it all. I said, but you can't do that. The landlady won't like it. And she said, I don't care. So sure enough, she didn't like it. And we left. Boom, like that. And our paintings that we made, great big things, were put out in kind of under an eave, where rain could almost get on them, you know? This is really unfortunate.

So anyway, after three months, we left in Holland. I had to go back, deal with this stuff, you know. So I remember going back and building a crate all by myself to put these things in by shoving plywood behind and climbing - all the time she was looking at me out of the window, you know, like this, you know, to see what I was doing. God, what a crazy twosome.

Anyway, so I finally got this crate together pretty well, and I stored it at some giant art storage place.

MS. RICHARDS: In England?

MR. SAUL: Yeah, and just forgot all about it. That is it. They either blew it away or burned it or something. I don't know. Crazy.

MS. RICHARDS: So your goal was to find an interesting - a place where there was an artistic community, and you would just settle down and do your work?

MR. SAUL: Yes, I had previous contact with an art dealer at this point anyway, Duveen Graham Gallery, which is another anecdote.

MS. RICHARDS: Where are they, Duveen Graham?

MR. SAUL: They were at that time in midtown Manhattan.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you get in contact with them?

MR. SAUL: The art teacher - I asked the art teacher in St. Louis. And he gave me the name of three galleries that had theoretically shown liking for young art or something. They were one of them. And so I had my work shipped to New York. This was at my expense, you know. And in the crate I built, off it went, six or seven paintings. And it ended up in an art warehouse somewhere in New York City. I don't remember quite -

MS. RICHARDS: Had you been in touch with this gallery in advance?

MR. SAUL: No, no. What I did was I just took a painting under my arm and got in the cab and got dressed up in a suit and tie.

MS. RICHARDS: So you went from St. Louis to New York on this -

MR. SAUL: And I stayed at a hotel.

MS. RICHARDS: On purpose to find representation?

MR. SAUL: A gallery, yes, yes. So the first place I tried turned out to be commercial. I don't recall. She kept saying things like, and then you will want an announcement, won't you? And that will cost $200. I said, "Listen, hey, wait a second, let's forget it." And so I left that place with her screaming at me. You want a show for free? Try a museum.

Anyway, so then the second place -

MS. RICHARDS: These are places your teacher recommended?

MR. SAUL: Yeah. So then the next place was this Duveen Graham, on his list. And it was a real art gallery. And the guy liked it, Mr. Duveen, an older man, an older gentleman, 65, 70 years old, maybe. I don't know. Anyway, he said, this is very interesting. I would like to see more. So I said okay, I will have it sent over.

So I phoned up the art warehouse where I sent the work. They sent it over. So I came back the next day full of success feelings. And he said he didn't like it as well as he thought he would. And I said, well, gee, what can I do? I don't have money to take it back. I lied. And he said, oh, okay, we will keep it around and show it to a few people. And then I explained I was going over to Europe. And he said, well, send me some new stuff. I said okay.

So I sent some new stuff from Amsterdam and he didn't like that either. So he sent the whole thing to my parents. It cost $600 to my parents, COD [collect on delivery]. [Laughs.] So my parents had this early work and school work hanging in their garage, and they would give it to the local college to paint over, which they were - the local college was very grateful.

MS. RICHARDS: Did they ask you in advance whether they could do that?

MR. SAUL: No, just did it. And let's see. What then?

MS. RICHARDS: So where did you - you went to Amsterdam.

MR. SAUL: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: And where did you live in Amsterdam?

MR. SAUL: Various hotels, rooming house type places.

MS. RICHARDS: You moved around?

MR. SAUL: Yeah, yeah. First, we lived in a hotel. Then we found rooming house place. We lived up in the country. Bergen aan Zee [North Holland, Netherlands], Bergen aan Zee. Very beautiful. Years later, Vicky said we were surrounded by such beauty, but we were so miserable. It is true. I don't know why, but we didn't get on any longer. For one thing, I had failed to provide completely. All of my ideas had not panned out. And there we were stuck in Europe. My thousand dollars long gone, and her $3,000 vanishing at a fairly fast rate.

And just at that point, we got thrown out of Holland anyway.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you get thrown out?

MR. SAUL: Well, we made friends with a local cop at Bergen aan Zee, and he said, by the way, can I see your passports? So I said, sure, and handed them over. And he said, oh, you have to leave immediately. You don't have any visa or anything, and you have been here for months. It is true. [Laughs.] Many months. So we said, okay, we will go. So we took off, and we carried our stuff to the train and got to Paris. Anyway, that is another

story. But they fined us later a dollar for being in the country illegally. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: So you were in Holland for two years, I think.

MR. SAUL: Nearly.

MS. RICHARDS: Nearly two years.

MR. SAUL: We were there from about December of '56 to some point - let's see, when would it be - until March 1958. So, far longer than you can get away without a visa. It was crazy. Many misadventures. It was terrible.

MS. RICHARDS: And you said you were miserable.

MR. SAUL: Yes, apparently, yes, we were. Didn't get on -

MS. RICHARDS: But you didn't think about leaving?

MR. SAUL: I certainly didn't - well, we didn't know what to do. The situation was taken away from us by my parents who said, we will give you a little more money to stay there if you insist, but you have to go to Paris, where at least your work might be seen by somebody. You can't go on living up there in Bergen aan Zee. So off we went. I was more happy about that than Vicky because Vicky had a show at Bergen aan Zee and sold a painting, a picture of a maishcha [ph] bird - maischa? It's called *In a Birdhouse Scene with the Snow Behind*, total knockout subject for the people of the town. They bought it.

MS. RICHARDS: So she was a representational painter?

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes, also, more even - she didn't have any interest in modern art styles really. So off we went on the train to Paris.

MS. RICHARDS: And how did you find a place to live there?

MR. SAUL: We stayed at various hotels. In those days, people stayed at hotels permanently their whole lives. The one we stayed at off and on was the Hotel des Saints Peres.

MS. RICHARDS: Saints Peres?

MR. SAUL: It is on rue des Saint Peres. And it is - now it costs real money to stay there. I don't know, $300 or something. At that time, it cost a dollar a day.

MS. RICHARDS: But you didn't have a kitchen when you were staying in a hotel.

MR. SAUL: No.

MS. RICHARDS: So you would have to eat all your meals out.

MR. SAUL: There was a place. There were some pretty inexpensive places to eat. Chez Wajda was one of them.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell that?

MR. SAUL: C-H-E-Z. Wajda is W-A-J-D-A. It had sawdust on the floor. You could eat for a dollar, maybe. I don't remember the economic -

MS. RICHARDS: These were the days when you could - Europe on five dollars. So you certainly could eat a meal for a dollar.

MR. SAUL: Yeah, of course, there was two of us. But, yeah, we did manage this. We managed it. And then we found a place you could cook in Montmartre. But we didn't stay there long. It was so unpleasant with the landlord, you know. You are dealing with landlords, and they are so unpleasant, full of hate. They hate you to start with.

MS. RICHARDS: So this time, you were still - your ambition was to show in a gallery in Paris then?

MR. SAUL: Well, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Or just to do your work in -

MR. SAUL: Well, I was going to send it - I had already sent it on and had that awful experience. Okay, what happened then? Let's see. Well, I was just trying to get something done, thinking up these ideas.

MS. RICHARDS: And what were your - what were you looking at or thinking about that was affecting the painting at that point in Paris?

MR. SAUL: Well, I looked in the bookstores.

MS. RICHARDS: That is in 1958-59.

MR. SAUL: Well, I mean, I say this anecdote a lot, that I discovered *Mad* [magazine] comics. But actually, what that amounts to is that I looked at it for 15 seconds, no kidding, I mean, that was it. The whole experience - because it was a table in the back room with these magazines on it, *Life*, *Mad*, movie magazines, especially, *Photoplay* and things like that, that American culture table. And French young collector types were looking at these magazines, which were quite expensive, like five dollars, you know, something like that.

I just picked out this one called *Mad* and looked at a few pages and put it back down. I received the idea. It suddenly occurred to me, hey, why not use American cartoon culture in the paintings, make it more individual?

MS. RICHARDS: Before that, what were the images in your paintings?

MR. SAUL: Well, I tried some landscapes in Holland. And then I also tried the first attempts at things like Pop [Art], you know. My very first attempts, I did an icebox kind of -

MS. RICHARDS: Why? Do you remember your thinking of why you went from the landscape to -

MR. SAUL: Just because it was something to do. I hadn't focused on it as an idea yet. But I did do a few.

MS. RICHARDS: But you gave yourself permission, in a way, to paint an icebox.

MR. SAUL: Oh, yeah. That was no problem. I had permission to do anything. Yeah, yeah. I had permission to do anything. I mean, I completely ignored any possible rule. That was ridiculous to me. I mean, I just started - as soon as I decided to start, I just did it because I did understand that art is a matter of opinion. And an opinion can change. And Grandma Moses can be more famous than [Pablo] Picasso. It can happen, you know. And you tell that to people. And they say, oh, no, no, that is impossible. Our culture isn't set up that way. Things change, you know. Things change.

So I knew perfectly well -

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember what intrigued you about painting a common household object like a refrigerator?

MR. SAUL: It would be understood. It would be more - perhaps more interesting to the viewer, I thought. And it is just a style. It was beginning to dawn on me, though I hadn't talked about it to anyone. And I couldn't speak to Vicky about this. She didn't want to hear this kind of thing. So there was no one to talk to about it. But it began to dawn on me that I could do something, make my art more individual, if it had in it these kinds of things. And when I saw the *Mad* comics, I immediately realized that I could do it.

MS. RICHARDS: Had you been in museums and seen Surrealism and seen -

MR. SAUL: Yes, I had seen something like that. But it still hadn't occurred to me, believe it or not. And Surrealism I wasn't thinking about. I should have been, I mean, but I wasn't. It just didn't occur to me as a result of that. What occurred to me was to get some individual slant going to my art, that otherwise would look just like [Willem] de Kooning, pretty much, because I decided on the train coming down to Paris that I had better do something a little more modern, a little more in touch with the world now that I am going to have a chance to be known because I thought Paris, the city of art galleries.

MS. RICHARDS: And that meant more, sort of, brushwork?

MR. SAUL: More like de Kooning, more like de Kooning because he was world famous.

MS. RICHARDS: And how did you know de Kooning's work?

MR. SAUL: Oh, he was famous in the '50s, world's most famous artist. The art history book had a little, tiny one page on [Marcel] Duchamp, with a little, tiny photo. And de Kooning was like five pages of glamorous color and a long, long talk. So I mean, you couldn't miss de Kooning. He was all over the world. He was in the bookstores in Paris, book after book, everywhere. U.S. culture just really took over commercially, although the galleries in Paris still showed the earlier kind of thing pretty much.

You know, like grayed-down things, [Jean] Fautrier, and so on.

MS. RICHARDS: So you saw this *Mad* magazine and it -

MR. SAUL: It stimulated me greatly to start this. And I began immediately, within a half an hour, just went right to the place I was working, students and artists club, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: I was going to ask you where your studio was.

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes. A few days after we had got to Paris, we were walking in the Left Bank, and this guy sidles up. And this guy is, "Hello, can I help you," you know, that kind of thing. And we said, we are looking for an art studio. And he said, I know just the place for you. He said, "Come with me. I have a relative who has an art school or something. You can enroll, paint there. It's easy."

So we followed him onto Boulevard Raspail, and there was this place called the Academie Paul Cezanne, which was like a giant log cabin built out over the street. No kidding, no kidding. And we said, well, but it looks like it might cost money. And he said, oh, you have no money? And we said no. He said, oh, not to worry; you can still paint thataway, three blocks down on the left, the American Students and Artists Club [American Center for Students and Artists in Paris, France].

He said, all you have to do is wear a necktie - you - me - have to wear a necktie in and out of the place. They won't let men in without a necktie. But they have a free atelier on the top floor. And it only cost a few dollars to join. So we went down to have a look at this. And Vicky said, I don't want to work in the same place you are. So either you work here and I work in a hotel, or vice versa.

MS. RICHARDS: Why was that?

MR. SAUL: I don't know. I think she didn't like me very well. [Laughs.] Who knows why? It is too late now. Anyway, so we flipped a coin on it, and she won. And she said, I will take the hotel room. You can paint here. I said, okay, I will. So I painted there. And during the next two years, I painted there. And large numbers, apparently - not large, ridiculous - 15 people came in and saw my work there, people of some importance. Sophie Matisse saw my work there. This was incredible to me.

And various other people. Oh, and there were two ateliers. One was indeed for anyone like myself. But the other one was the classroom for Wellesley College [Wellesley, MA]. Was it Wellesley? One of the really famous ones. It was incredible. Yes, I think it was. And their teacher, Roger Barr, was in charge of this. And he was a highly unpleasant, miserable human being who looked upon me as just a businessman trying to make money off art.

MS. RICHARDS: He thought you were a businessman?

MR. SAUL: Yeah, yeah, it's just this total projection. Yeah, yeah, don't worry about it. It is just one of those things. He was not a very friendly guy. And what happened? Well, then I got the idea from looking at [Roberto] Matta's drawings of the Galerie du Dragon that if I contacted him, he would like my work, because I saw some similarity. I didn't know Matta's work previously, but suddenly, hey, I see the similarity. I am going to give it a try.

So then I had to get his address, and Roger Barr did have it. But he wouldn't give it to me for about the next seven months while various catastrophes occurred to us. Anyway, ended up selling newspapers actually.

MS. RICHARDS: You did?

MR. SAUL: Yes, the *Herald Tribune*. You know, the movie, *Breathless* [1960]? Well, women would only do that job in warm weather. In the cold weather, they hired males like me. So I was doing it during the winter. It was really nuts. I mean, I just took the papers outside. They give you 20 papers, and they give you a dollar a day in advance to encourage you to make money or something, not realizing that I could live on that dollar a day. It is a very silly situation. No kidding. So I just took the newspapers outside on the street. This is during our lowest moment and all that stuff.

And I dropped it in the nearest trash bin, keeping out two or three, you know, which I would sell in the evenings to make a buck-and-a-half or something, whatever it was. So I never actually sold it. But this guy gave me the job. He was most unpleasant. He was dying of cancer. He had already had one arm and one leg amputated. And there was more to go. And he was obviously dying. But he still had the job, still doing it. And he was full of fury and rage. And he said, you had better be out on that street with that newspaper. I am going to be driving around looking at you - because we knew he wasn't going to be driving around looking at it because he couldn't drive a car. He didn't have any leg. That was crazy.

I don't remember who the other people were. But in the summertime, women could make a ton of money doing this job. You know, they would just say - a guy would ask her for a date and she would say, how about buying 50

newspapers? Okay! [Laughs.] Big, big sales. But I never sold any. I sold, at the most, two or three at Gare Montparnasse to GIs that I would find sitting there. They all said things like, "Yeah, paper, okay, I will take a paper, but what I really want is a woman. You got any women?" I said no, we got no women. Ohh, that is the life. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: So you were working there. Did you enjoy going to museums in Paris? And did you -

MR. SAUL: Yes, the Louvre was a wonderful visit. The [Musee] d'Orsay wasn't yet in operation, still a train station. But the Louvre was great. You could enter it at any one of about 10 points and pay a dime worth of French money. A dime is worth - I forget the system. I think it was 500 francs to the dollar or something, something like that, old francs. And what happened? Well, we did so - we used to go there all the time, especially in hot weather. You could keep cool. If you went down into the basement of the Louvre, there was a coolness in the air. And there were these neat photographs of French explorers in Egypt that you could look at and stuff like that.

And I looked at the paintings, of course.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you meet any other artists beyond those in the studios?

MR. SAUL: The only artists - I did eventually sort of - I can't say, really, that I did. I would like to say that I did. I met again Bishop, James Bishop. I met him again. Who else? Well, there were four or five people in the atelier where I worked - Americans. I met them.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you seeking out other Americans? Or was that not something that you -

MR. SAUL: I wasn't seeking anybody. I was trying desperately to get some work together that I could feel was some sort of a contribution to modern art.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you feel that you had found your voice, in a way, that you had found - as you started -

MR. SAUL: I don't know. I found my - well, yes, I did. Yeah, I guess I did. Yes, indeed. Yes. This using of American culture seemed to me a terrific idea. I don't recall anybody agreeing with me, though. I mean, Roger Barr thought it was a neat trick to make some money. Oh, John Levee, an American artist I knew. That is another American. They are all Americans.

MS. RICHARDS: L-E-V-Y?

MR. SAUL: L-E-V-E-E. I knew of him because his father was an important businessman in San Francisco. And my father had met him. And I had seen his work in, again, in *Time* magazine. [Jean] Dubuffet, I saw his work in *Time* magazine. I never met him, but I met his daughter. [Laughs.] Does that count? Let's see. Who else? Oh, golly. I just didn't meet anybody of any artistic importance, really.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were in St. Louis, you saw Beckmann's paintings.

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Did that resonate with you at that time or later?

MR. SAUL: Yes, I took note; I took note. I didn't take as much note maybe as I might have, because they were put to you as a big deal. A rebellion possibility was zero. [Laughs.] But I did take very close note of them. Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: So as your paintings started with the iceboxes and many versions of the icebox, did you find opportunities to see Pop Art in reality or just in reproduction?

MR. SAUL: No, no, it wasn't there even in reproduction. I found out about Pop Art as an art movement from my parents. Six weeks after - approximately six weeks after my first art show in New York City, at [Allan] Frumkin [Gallery]- this is in '62, January - approximately six weeks later, I got a letter with a Sunday newspaper from San Francisco cut out, you know, explaining Pop Art - not me, but this was like others. And I took note of that, yeah. It was [Roy] Lichtenstein, [Andy] Warhol not yet exactly, but Lichtenstein, [Robert] Rosenquist. Who is the other guy, another guy who paints the - oh, let's see. Rosenquist, geez, I have forgotten.

But the message to me was, this is bad news. It means that these people already look a lot more like the advertisement than you. And that could be a huge advantage. I thought, uh-oh, this is not good news, really. Nevertheless, I just maintained myself and my art, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: At what point did you decide that you would leave Paris?

MR. SAUL: As soon as we could afford it.

MS. RICHARDS: And now, I think in Paris, is that where Frumkin saw your work?

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Can you talk about that, how that happened?

MR. SAUL: Yeah. That happened because I finally got Matta's address, and he finally - well, after I mailed in these drawings, nothing happened for about three weeks or something. And then I thought, oh, God, I am going to have to phone up, you know. What can happen over the phone? He can't shoot you. So I phoned up, and he said, oh, Peter Saul? Oh, Peter Saul, yes, Matta says in English language. Yes, yes, your work is very good. Telephone immediately the art dealer, Allan Frumkin at the Hotel Lutetia. So I did.

And he said, oh, Peter Saul, okay. You can have 15 minutes. Come and see me and show me your stuff. I will be at the Runting Room. And I said, where is the Runting Room? And he said, it is the basement. It is the basement bar. So down I went. I went there. I have an endless anecdote, possibly, for Paris, the move, I miss it - but anyway. And there he was. And he liked them. He said hey, these are really interesting. He said, let's talk business. What do you want for them? After about 10 minutes of conversation, I said $15 each.

And he said, we can do better. How about 25 [dollars]? And I said great. And problem solved. And he said, furthermore, anytime you need money, send me four more in a tube, and it is worth a hundred dollars. So that was the end of that problem. And he is going to give me a show. Now I start to work. By this time, I am living outside of Paris a few miles.

MS. RICHARDS: Why did that happen?

MR. SAUL: We were just trying to get out of the city. Vicky hated the city, hated Paris, the grayness. I don't know. It wasn't popular. She wanted a different life, a natural life in the country, not something to do with art and all that.

MS. RICHARDS: But she was still working as an artist?

MR. SAUL: Yes, but less and less frequently, it seemed to me.

MS. RICHARDS: What was she doing instead?

MR. SAUL: Nothing. It was a dangerous situation. [Laughs.] I don't know what to say. Nothing. But things picked up. After I became a genuine money- I mean, all of a sudden, economically, I was much more wealthy than the average French worker, you know. We bought a small car. We had a baby. Everything picked up.

MS. RICHARDS: When did you have a baby?

MR. SAUL: Sixty-one - excuse me.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you get married?

MR. SAUL: Yes, we got married in a small town in France where we lived, south of Paris a few miles. Yes, and everything was set up, you know. But Rome seemed a more attractive place suddenly.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember why?

MR. SAUL: Well, to escape Paris. I think Vicky didn't like Paris, for a number of reasons. Just like - nothing to go into even, just didn't like it.

MS. RICHARDS: She was working less in part because she had a baby?

MR. SAUL: Before then, too.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MR. SAUL: Just plain not. Not as interested in this whole life as one would have thought. And I don't blame her in some ways because it was sort of boring. First of all, she learned French, and I didn't very well. She became quite fluent, and I didn't. I don't know why. Nobody wanted to talk to me, quite honestly. So no French person never said anything to me, really. I was just a guy carrying the suitcases. [Laughs.] No kidding.

But anyway, so we left. We left and went to Rome.

MS. RICHARDS: And why did you pick Rome? What had you heard about it?

MR. SAUL: Nothing. We just thought - we must have heard something about it. I don't remember if there was any real - and why didn't we pick Madrid?

MS. RICHARDS: You didn't want to go to New York?

MR. SAUL: Oh, no, no, no. I was negative on -

MS. RICHARDS: Why not?

MR. SAUL: By this time, I was a strong communist and negative on meeting businesspeople, very negative on that. I mean, I evidently expected art sales. But I was unwilling to follow the capitalist belief system, in spite of this. I mean, I -

[END CD 2.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Peter Saul on November 3, 2009, in Brooklyn, New York, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc three.

So you were on your way to - I asked you about living in New York, and you said that it was just -

MR. SAUL: No, we didn't want to do that. Neither one of us -

MS. RICHARDS: Or anywhere in the States?

MR. SAUL: No, no, very negative towards the United States, capitalist country, invaded Cuba. Of course, I was subjected to communist literature in a sense that you could read even English-language translations of Castro's speeches. He would give a speech that would last 17 hours. I mean, you can read a translation and this talk about the cows and the bulls and all that kind of thing.

MS. RICHARDS: Was Vicky interested in that, too?

MR. SAUL: No.

MS. RICHARDS: So where did that come from? Had you been thinking along those lines in San Francisco?

MR. SAUL: Well, I was thinking along those lines because I was obviously interested in rebellion in the arts whenever I could find a way to have a rebellion. It evidently seemed to me more romantic, more the thing to do. I mean, what do young artists think about? They think about making some dent on art. And at that moment, art seemed totally capitalistic. American art, anyway, seemed totally capitalistic, designed to be inside of large bank buildings, you know, that kind of thing. Holy cow. I mean, obviously, I am not going to take part in that.

I mean, I do and I don't.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you interested in the Mexican muralists and what they stood for?

MR. SAUL: Yes, but I didn't like their work as I had seen it. I didn't know much about it. The only work that was ever shown was these great murals of peasants doing thing by [Diego] Rivera. And, I mean, it got sort of tiresome. It wasn't very rebellious, really.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you aware of other artists who were dealing with social issues in Europe or in the U.S.? George Grosz or Ben Shahn or -

MR. SAUL: Yeah, they were too domesticated for me, Ben Shahn and George Grosz, as was known to me at that time. These people's work like Otto Dix and people like that were actually not repro'ed, so you couldn't find them. I had no idea that these people - well, they might have been mentioned in one sentence in the history book. But the history book went from Picasso to de Kooning just like that. Bonk.

Germany was not included, except for George Grosz because he did some drawings, anti-fascist drawings during World War II. Those were included, but nothing else.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you decide where to live in Rome?

MR. SAUL: Well, we didn't know. We just went there with our baby and our car.

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

MR. SAUL: Rufin, R-U-F-I-N. Later changed to Jeremy. He didn't like it. I don't blame him, but anyway. So we ended up in a hotel in Rome. And he got sick. Rufin got sick. So we asked a doctor, I guess - we found a doctor. The doctor said, he is okay, but you have to get out of Rome. The air here is unhealthy. Out, outside.

So we went out and rented a place on the very edge of Rome. And that is where we lived during the time we were in Rome.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember specifically what location or what -

MR. SAUL: It was the south edge of Rome. Well, this is another anecdote. It was owned by the Catholic Church. And it was a little house next to a big house. The big house was owned by the Catholic Church and was the place that Madame Nhu, you know, the dragon lady of Vietnam, went to after she left Vietnam. It was a lot of excitement.

MS. RICHARDS: That was after you were there?

MR. SAUL: No, that is while we were there. It is while we were there. And her daughter was there. This was 19 - we left Rome forever in '64.

MS. RICHARDS: Sixty-two to '64, you were there?

MR. SAUL: Yeah, we were there. And she was there next to us at a certain point. It was really crazy because they had a lot of guards, you know, keeping people off the property, a lot of newspeople trying to put their cameras through the fence and a lot of tough guys pushing them back. And we had the opportunity to rent our top floor to newspeople for like a hundred dollars - we give you a hundred dollars; you let us stand up there? I said no, no, no. So we didn't do any of that.

And we shared the maid. We shared the maid with Madame Nhu. This is rather awkward. At a certain point, I had to contact the maid about something. So I went up there, explained to the guard, you know, living there and want to go there to talk to the maid. He said, okay, okay. So through I go. And I rang the doorbell at the backdoor of this place, and Madame Nhu's daughter came out dressed in her native costume, of all things, kind of a Chinese thing. Took one look at me and fainted - screamed and fainted.

And I thought, oh, God. Now what am I going to do now? This is really negative. So I just retreated and got the hell out of there. And soon after, I lost my studio. See, I had been renting a studio directly behind Madame Nhu's place, also owned by the church, of course. Oldest properties owned by the Catholic Church. So I said, "Gee, what am I going to do?" I asked the landlord, the priest who is in control of this rented stuff, I said, what am I going to do? I said, I have to paint. He said, "Well, you can paint in the church while it is not in use." And I said, great, I will do it.

So I got a nice concrete room behind the altar to paint in. And that is where I painted, except on Sundays, I guess. Isn't that nice?

MS. RICHARDS: You didn't have room in your home to paint? Or you didn't want to paint where you were living?

MR. SAUL: Probably that would have been considered not welcome by Vicky in effort to push my work. Everybody was sensitive to me being too much there. She was sensitive to me being too much there - too much Peter Saul art, too much Peter Saul, people wanting to know him, you know, all that kind of thing. I think if I - I was just simply there as a person. She never saw my art. I was just there as a person. We didn't get on that well after the marriage either, obviously. [Laughs.] I mean, there was too much of me, too much talk, too pushy, too many people wanting to meet me.

MS. RICHARDS: There were people who wanted to meet you at that point?

MR. SAUL: Somewhat, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: How did they know of you?

MR. SAUL: Pop Art, you know, caused people like you to appear, interviewers.

MS. RICHARDS: And did they know your work from Frumkin?

MR. SAUL: Yes, or from the Paris art show at the same time, "Madam Breteau."

MS. RICHARDS: How did that affect your work?

MR. SAUL: It didn't affect it at all, as far as I know.

MS. RICHARDS: I was going to ask you, did you feel that your work was affected by living in Rome versus living in Paris? Was there something about those places?

MR. SAUL: No, no, no. I just was me in a room, like here. I am not affected by Brooklyn. [Laughs.] I am not affected by Rome.

MS. RICHARDS: So it sounds very stressful, your home situation.

MR. SAUL: It was. I didn't realize how stressful it was. I thought well, first of all, I never quit anything. So the idea of divorce did not occur to me. I never quit stuff. I didn't quit art styles. I didn't quit painting. I don't quit marriage. You know, nothing gets quitted. So I maintained the situation out of spite, sort of a little bit. And it worked out okay for a number of years.

MS. RICHARDS: And your son grew up - well, I guess he was a baby then.

MR. SAUL: We had two sons. We had two sons. One born in Rome.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, what is his name?

MR. SAUL: Lief, L-I-E-F. It may be spelled wrong, but that is the way we spelled it. You know, it is too late now. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: When you were in Rome, did you meet any other artists?

MR. SAUL: Yes, Cy Twombly, met him.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you visit with him? Did you get to know him?

MR. SAUL: Yes, yes. I visited with him. And also another guy, James Willis, who I don't think is known today. I think he became an art dealer, actually, in San Francisco of African art. And let's see, who else? Oh, Jack Zajac, a sculptor, well-known at that time.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell Zajac?

MR. SAUL: Z-A-J-A-C. And let's see, who else? Well, I had an art show at the - what was that gallery called? It was right on Piazza del Popolo, a wonderful location, glamorous opening, terrific. Didn't sell anything.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you make the acquaintance of that dealer?

MR. SAUL: I don't remember. He just came to see me somehow.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you find - did you find that these other artists were supportive of your work? Did they respond - what was the response in the art community to that show and to the work they may have seen in your studio?

MR. SAUL: You know, I don't know. I have forgotten. I don't know.

MS. RICHARDS: It sounds like it was a relatively positive atmosphere for your work.

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes. It was positive, totally positive. Nobody said they didn't like anything, as far as I know. Of course, I didn't take the trouble to get to know anybody really, which is a big, big negative, I realize now. And it is too late.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, you are - after the iceboxes -

MR. SAUL: Well, they weren't painted all at once. I would return to them.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, yeah.

MR. SAUL: I painted during the first few months of this happy art style discovery, *Mickey Mouse Versus the Japs* [1961], and various other things.

MS. RICHARDS: How did cartoon imagery come into your work at that point?

MR. SAUL: I had to think it up. I mean, over the last 25 years, people have often asked me. And I actually couldn't remember most of it when I needed it. One I did remember was *Smokey Stover*, a short-lived comic strip from the late '30s, early '40s, which was not very funny at all. But it did feature those kind of visual inventions like the chair that ends up as a hand on the ground, you know, that kind of thing. It was a lot of visual

invention in *Smokey Stover*, which I remembered when I needed it.

And the other thing I remembered was *Dick Tracy*, an incredibly famous comic strip in the United States during World War II. And I read it every day when I was growing up in San Francisco.

MS. RICHARDS: What about the cartoon films and cartoon - the animated cartoons where you have the arm pulled, wrapped around, and then it pops back?

MR. SAUL: Okay, the only one I remembered when I needed it was this one where some cartoon character backs up to make a pitch, and backs up and up and up, and then he throws it, and it goes around and around the world, and threw the bat and on out into space. That is the only one I remember. So I don't know at the time. I mean, I was trying -

MS. RICHARDS: Out of all those cartoons, the bodies of the cartoon characters are completely elastic.

MR. SAUL: I wanted to remember this as much as I could, or have some ability to deal with it in paint. But I was not able to very much. I had a very limited ability to draw anything like that, very limited. I was trying, but I don't think I succeeded. It was mainly paint. I mean, the early paintings are mainly paint. I successfully got into the how-to-paint-like-de Kooning. But the other thing, which was a pure invention for me was more difficult. It is hard to do, you know. Like what? I couldn't remember a single thing of U.S. culture when it came right down to it.

I went to the American library. And it wasn't there. Something had happened. They had taken them out. They had thrown away the magazines. The magazines that were there had no advertisements. I couldn't find anything. It was hopeless. I just finally decided never to bother again with any research, just do. So I didn't ask my parents to send me anything. No. It never occurred to me.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were painting in Rome, you were consciously focused on American culture and American imagery?

MR. SAUL: I was focused on sort of folklore-type American imagery like [John] Dillinger, stuff like that. I was not focused on current very much, current meaning 1959-60. I didn't know what it looked like. I had forgotten. It was not circulated in Europe at that time. American media had not penetrated Western Europe.

MS. RICHARDS: Some of the paintings you did in around 1962 -

MR. SAUL: Except its art.

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs] - focused on crime.

MR. SAUL: Yes, yes, I could remember that.

MS. RICHARDS: The *Crime Boy's Secret Bathroom* and *Captain Crime*. What was the fascination - and *Super Crime Team*. All those -

MR. SAUL: Well, *Dick Tracy* was a big input. I can remember - kind of remember it. And that was the biggest input. And the other thing that was - a few comics, like *Crime Boy* was one of them.

MS. RICHARDS: That you got there, or that you remember from childhood?

MR. SAUL: Remember from childhood. The Iron Jaw [character from the *Crimebuster* comics]. I mean, these are just things of the time, 1940.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you think back to those film noir movies that you saw with your mother?

MR. SAUL: Perhaps, but I don't remember. I think I am still expressing the fears, but I don't know what they are anymore.

MS. RICHARDS: And you also had a few images that you had - that related to World War II like *Mickey Mouse versus the Japs*.

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes. I wanted to incorporate World War II.

MS. RICHARDS: Why?

MR. SAUL: Just because it was well-known. It was something that happened.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you feel that -

MR. SAUL: I was fighting an anxiety that I would never be looked at, I think, unless - I mean, there are only two things you can do to get known. You can know the right people, or you can paint an interesting picture, A and B. I did not think - I have no idea why that I would not be able to meet the right people. I felt I wouldn't be, even though I now think this is just totally silly, and I feel just as able to meet the right people as anyone else. And I had been meeting people. It is ridiculous that I felt this way. But I did feel this way.

And I think it is a result of that boarding school, the fear of being noticed, you know, as a person, because then that could remind them that you might be Jewish. You tried to be in the middle of things, you know, and never stand out in any way if you possibly could, because if you stood out, it could be a racial sign.

I think this started - I was way oversensitive. And, of course, the getting beaten, I didn't enjoy. I was way oversensitive to that, too. Everything was over - I mean, I probably should have left that stupid place before my personality was turned into such a timid person as I am. But I didn't.

Anyway, so I wanted to depend on my art, to be noticed, you know, and to manage to be noticed without knowing anyone. This was the big ambition. I did not go to New York City to see what happened to my work. I could have had the money to do it, obviously, you know, with selling. And I could do these things. But it never occurred to me, or even to inquire. I mean, if someone bought a painting, I didn't inquire who it was or why they might have bought it or anything. I was totally looking down on all this kind of thing. Just wanted to sit in the cafe and relax, you know, paint my pictures in the studio and that is it.

MS. RICHARDS: What precipitated your deciding to leave Rome?

MR. SAUL: Oh, well, my father died. At a certain point, my parents came through and visited us in Rome, Italy. And my father had retired, and he wasn't in very good shape, in my opinion. And sure enough, my parents went on to a cruise on the Nile. This is '63- '64, I guess. I am not - anyway, whatever.

MS. RICHARDS: Your last year in Rome was '64.

MR. SAUL: Yeah, well, this is part of that, I guess. Died on the Nile. And so my mother came back to Rome after this, you know. My father buried in Egypt. What can you do? When a person is dead, they are dead. Anyway, he is there in an English graveyard, because he never gave up his English citizenship, so he is there to this day. She paid for eternal care. I don't know what that means, but anyway. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: In Egypt.

MR. SAUL: But anyway, so she came back and slept on our couch while we arranged things, pretty much what to do. My mother went back to California, and she said, if you come back and live near me, I will give you the down payment on a house. So we said okay. I thought, hot dog, an opportunity to not worry anymore about dealing with landlords. That was a real pain in the neck in Europe, awful.

So we went back. Took everything, our car, furniture, the whole thing, back to California.

MS. RICHARDS: And where was she living then?

MR. SAUL: Marin County.

MS. RICHARDS: In which town?

MR. SAUL: Gee, I have suddenly forgotten the name. It is right on the water there. A very beautiful little spot.

MS. RICHARDS: Sausalito?

MR. SAUL: Near to it, one of those little towns on the water, but not Sausalito. Gee, I just can't think of it. Okay, anyway, it was very pleasant. They had a beautiful apartment. And my mother then encouraged us to live nearby, and we found a place. We were kind of encouraged by my mother to buy this particular place because she liked it. Anyway, there we are. Would have rather lived in a city, frankly.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay. So at that point, you were ready to go back to the U.S., and even though Vicky didn't like Paris and the city -

MR. SAUL: Didn't like the city anyway.

MS. RICHARDS: She would have maybe been willing to live in the city?

MR. SAUL: Yeah, a little bit. But anyway, here we are in Marin County, living in the house, accidentally, where the only artist had lived when I was growing up in Marin County. Yeah, I mean, there was an artist there who

painted commercial paintings of landscapes, you know. And he lived in this house in Mill Valley. And he had a little studio behind a house about the size of this, maybe a little smaller than this. And that became my art studio.

[Audio Break.]

MS. RICHARDS: So you settled into Mill Valley. This was in 1964.

MR. SAUL: Yes, I did.

MS. RICHARDS: And did you imagine that you would continue to support yourself by selling your work?

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes. Oh, the name of that artist that had owned a house is Ray Strong.

MS. RICHARDS: Ray, R-A-Y?

MR. SAUL: Yeah, Strong, S-T-R-O-N-G, a famous artist from Marin County, one of Marin County's famous artists. You can find him in books occasionally, rarely, but now and then. Yes, I continued to support myself, and pretty good, because Frumkin bought almost all of my work from the moment that we met until he retired from his business in '96, whenever it was.

MS. RICHARDS: We can go back to -

MR. SAUL: He is a very dedicated guy.

MS. RICHARDS: I wanted to go back to your relationship with Frumkin in a little bit.

MR. SAUL: Later, later. So I was able to support. And my mother was very generous. My mother was always a spender anyway. She bought herself a color television set, so she bought us one at the same time and so on and so on. So my mother managed to spend almost all of her money on these kind of strange things, round-the-world trips and who knows what? She did a lot of things. She enjoyed her life, after my father had died, very happily and lived in Marin County from '64 until she died in '79 - '77, '77. So she had a good life there.

MS. RICHARDS: It sounds like before your father died, he saw that you had some success.

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes, yes. He was amazed, astonished. It really did astonish him. It gave him some pleasure. The anecdote is that at the opening of my first New York show - of course, I wasn't going to go to this. But my father was, so he had a Jaguar that he bought, you know, those beautiful early sport cars. His mother had died and he had inherited $5,000. And the rest of the money that she had, she gave to his younger brother. That is a sign of negative, you know. So he decided to spend the whole thing on his Jaguar. So he has a Jaguar, and he is a heavy drinker, bad, bad, not good. Drunk driver -

MS. RICHARDS: Was he always a heavy drinker?

MR. SAUL: Yes, and a drunk driver, frightening. I am still alive. Anyway, what happened was he was driving back on the Golden Gate Bridge to come to New York the next day, you know. He was going home after work -

MS. RICHARDS: He was going to fly to New York?

MR. SAUL: Yeah, yeah, to see my art show. And he crashed into the toll booth. You know, you have to go in between. He went like - boy, what a mess. So the cop comes out. I guess the car is not badly damaged. But he said, okay, mister, you have been drinking. So he told the cop the anecdote about his worthless son who was an artist who finally made good and has a show in New York. And he said, that is wonderful. You just go right home and stay there. This was before drunk driving was a big crime. This was '62, January, '62. So he did. That is a nice anecdote.

MS. RICHARDS: So your father didn't go to your -

MR. SAUL: He did, he did.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MR. SAUL: And he said, "He is a nice young man. He is Jewish, but he is a nice young man."

MS. RICHARDS: Frumkin?

MR. SAUL: Yeah. [Laughs.] Isn't that crazy? He actually mentioned that he was Jewish. I didn't even know Frumkin was Jewish. I guess he is. It is nuts, isn't it? My father did have race prejudice, actually, against Jews or

anyone else. I mean, who knows? I didn't question it.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MR. SAUL: It is pretty nuts.

MS. RICHARDS: Did his drinking - was his drinking enough of a problem to affect you as a child?

MR. SAUL: Well, oddly enough, it didn't. My mother also drank quite a bit. They were definitely always quite woozy, it seemed to me. But it didn't bother me like it is supposed to have bothered people. The first time I saw my father really far-out drunk was 1951. And I mentioned it to my mother, and she said, yes, I made sure you didn't see that, or something. So I evidently only saw my father up to drink number three, you know.

And everything is happy and rosy. I never saw any bad stuff. So that's it.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, yeah.

MR. SAUL: I like to drink, too. I mean, I am on my way to being alcoholic. I don't care. It doesn't worry me at all.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were in Mill Valley, you set yourself up in this small -

MR. SAUL: Two glasses of wine every day.

MS. RICHARDS: It is supposed to be good for you.

MR. SAUL: I hope so.

MS. RICHARDS: You set yourself up in this cottage.

MR. SAUL: Yes. Actually, it was a sort of a house that you build from plans. And you buy a house magazine, and they send you the plans or something. It was built by Mr. Ray Strong himself, who was a good carpenter. And we remodeled it towards being more ritzy, as we were there with my mother, again, encouraging us. Oh, let me pay for that. Let me remodel your kitchen. Okay, okay.

MS. RICHARDS: And it sounds like you and Vicky, neither of you resented that kind of generosity.

MR. SAUL: No, I never had any feelings about this. See, my life was art and personal life, two things. It is only the last 10 years that I have become involved with career.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were living there, how did you start out meeting other artists, and who did you -

MR. SAUL: William T. Wiley, the first person we met. He just appeared at the door. I don't know how -

MS. RICHARDS: How did he know about you?

MR. SAUL: I don't know. But it was a knock on the door, seven in the evening. Here was this guy dressed like a cowboy, a well-known anecdote. "Hi, I am William T. Wiley. I live down the road." And he did.

MS. RICHARDS: How far away did he live?

MR. SAUL: Two hundred yards. He had a beautiful place, an old church. He didn't own it, unfortunately. But it was a lovely - made a lovely studio. You know, we used to pray. People would pray. All the pews gone. Just a big beautiful space. And I went to visit him. And after we met him, and he introduced us to his friends, you know, and then we met them.

MS. RICHARDS: Who do you recall meeting?

MR. SAUL: Oh, a great number of people. At this point, I did meet artists, definitely.

MS. RICHARDS: By that time, you had received recognition.

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: You had a show, several shows.

MR. SAUL: They thought of me, if anything, too recognized and too old to be interesting. I was 30 years old. I mean, that is ridiculously ancient in their opinion.

MS. RICHARDS: Is Wiley younger?

MR. SAUL: Yeah, four years. [Laughs.] It's silly, isn't it? Silly, silly.

[Telephone rings.] Just a moment.

MS. RICHARDS: It is okay.

[Audio Break.]

MR. SAUL: Yes, William T., he was very nice. We got to know him.

MS. RICHARDS: I think there are -

MR. SAUL: Joe Raffael is another one.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, Joseph Raffael?

MR. SAUL: Yes. William Allan, Bruce Nauman. He was a student of theirs at Davis at that time, graduate student. And let's see, who else? Robert Hudson was very important at that moment. Let's see. Oh, Robert Arneson. I didn't get to know him very well. I didn't get to know the people that weren't part of Wiley's, you know, "Funk Art" circle very well. I didn't get to.

MS. RICHARDS: You were in an exhibition -

MR. SAUL: Roy De Forest.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, yeah, Roy De Forest. The Funk Art show that was at the UC [University of California] Berkeley Art Museum.

MR. SAUL: Funny, yes. Yeah, Mr. Selz came over to my house. Did I say that anecdote? That is a good one, actually.

MS. RICHARDS: No, you didn't.

MR. SAUL: He said, I am Peter Selz. I want to see your studio. And I said, okay. So here he comes with his minions behind him. And as he walks through my house and studio, he said what you think of the word "funk"? And I said, uh-oh. I thought he said, "Fuck," you know. And I said, nothing, offhand. This is the man who at that time seemed to me quite elderly. I don't know how old he is now.

Anyway, so he was crazy. I said I didn't know what he was talking about at all. He said that is what I thought. And he stormed out of the house. And I didn't expect to see him again. But after a month or so, I got notice that I was in Funk Art show ["Funk," University of California Berkeley Art Museum, 1967]. And I had never heard the word, "funk," before in my life. And some of the artists were very upset that I was in it because of this lack of connection, especially as he chose to be in it that Vietnam painting that the Whitney [American Art Museum, New York City] now owns, *Saigon* [1967].

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MR. SAUL: So they hung it where you put your boots when you take them off, you know, as you come into the -

MS. RICHARDS: The Berkeley Art Museum?

MR. SAUL: Yeah, yeah. This was the old pump house museum.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MR. SAUL: They had a sort of a place where you hang coats and put your boots and stuff. It was right in the front of my painting. So nobody actually noticed this painting, though it was part of the show. Yeah, it wasn't welcome. It was an unwelcome thing. Politics was unwelcome in art at this time, period.

MS. RICHARDS: But Wiley always had comments.

MR. SAUL: Comments, well, okay, now politics is anything you might think; like if you don't like women, that is politics, right? But at that time, if you don't like women, that is just your opinion of women. That is not politics. Politics was politics. Wars, speeches, you know, that kind of thing? No way that can go into art. Opinion is another matter. You can always have opinions. Yeah, that was welcome. They didn't call that politics then. You just called that something else, you know.

I don't know. Anyway, it wasn't welcome. So we went to the opening. At least I did. It was interesting, you know. I saw the work.

MS. RICHARDS: You hadn't seen most of the work before?

MR. SAUL: No, no. Crazy.

MS. RICHARDS: I mean, it seems that there are connections between your work and Wiley's work.

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes, I think so. I think he is a good artist.

MS. RICHARDS: And did you talk about the ideas with him? Were you really -

MR. SAUL: Absolutely not. I am afraid my work did not make a good impression on these people.

MS. RICHARDS: You mean like the use of the cartoon text and his use of text and -

MR. SAUL: Wrong text. I would be doing the wrong text, wrong text. Too much testosterone, not enough thoughtfulness. Just a wild statement. But now it seems quite similar, if you look back on the West Coast art. But it didn't then. They felt very private about their group, you know, of people. Felt they were pretty important and all ready to be famous in New York City in about 25 minutes. Ready to go there.

MS. RICHARDS: And Frumkin showed a number of these same artists?

MR. SAUL: Yes, he did. Yeah. Some of them he met through me, though he already knew of their work. I encouraged him -

MS. RICHARDS: Like Hudson and Wiley?

MR. SAUL: Wiley. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Arneson, who he did get on very well with and continued to show Arneson for a long time.

MS. RICHARDS: You did a collaboration with Clayton Bailey.

MR. SAUL: Yes, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: How did that come about? And that was a ceramic piece.

MR. SAUL: That was quite a bit later. Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: In '74. I mean, just jumping a little ahead. We can go back.

MR. SAUL: Yeah, divorced, living a fairly -

MS. RICHARDS: You? Oh, okay.

MR. SAUL: Yeah, me, me.

MS. RICHARDS: So let's go back then to before we get to that. At what point did you separate?

MR. SAUL: Seventy-three.

MS. RICHARDS: Ah, '73. And where did you - did you move?

MR. SAUL: Yeah, I had to go somewhere, so I went to a friend's. I borrowed a friend's place in Sausalito and painted there. It was quite nice, large space, and lived with my mother for two weeks. I didn't know what to do next. So then, I moved into my studio, you know, just not to be in the house.

Then I met Sally, and we moved over to Port Costa, which is a small town in the East Bay.

MS. RICHARDS: This is '73?

MR. SAUL: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So you met her and very quickly became serious.

MR. SAUL: Yes. And then we moved into Port Costa, a small art studio. And we remained there for two years.

MS. RICHARDS: How far is that from Mill Valley?

MR. SAUL: It is a fairly - about an hour, maybe. I don't know.

MS. RICHARDS: So going back to this collaboration with Clayton Bailey.

MR. SAUL: That was about that time, shortly after. We got to know Roy De Forest and Clayton Bailey quite a bit better, and Robert Arneson, too. Not- Arneson was already very ill. I am a little confused. But anyway, Clayton Bailey, yes, very definitely got to know him quite well at this time, and Roy De Forest very well starting that moment.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you exchange studio visits or just talk over -

MR. SAUL: Yes, yes. I was right there at the warehouse, this place called the warehouse. Sally and I rented a space there where you could live and work. And I painted there.

MS. RICHARDS: You were saying that Clayton Bailey lived there, too?

MR. SAUL: Yes, he was just about a quarter of a mile away, in a small house, as was Roy De Forest, his next-door neighbor. So I got to know those artists quite well.

MS. RICHARDS: And how did this collaboration come about with Clayton?

MR. SAUL: He suggested it. Let's do something. So I said okay.

MS. RICHARDS: Had you collaborated on a piece before?

MR. SAUL: No, no, no. We just did it. I don't think we took it that seriously. We just did it.

MS. RICHARDS: But he worked more often in ceramic?

MR. SAUL: Yes, yes. He is a well-known ceramicist, really, out there.

MS. RICHARDS: And the work that you did was very much of that period and connected to artisan and -

MR. SAUL: Yes, that is true.

MS. RICHARDS: After you did that, did you think about continuing working with ceramics?

MR. SAUL: Yes. And I have thought about it occasionally, but I haven't actually done so.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have any - so it wasn't an issue with you, this working together. How did you actually collaborate on the piece?

MR. SAUL: We just talked it over, started doing it.

MS. RICHARDS: You are both physically making it?

MR. SAUL: Yes, yes. He did the slab. And then we did together the stuff on the slab. Every little [inaudible] already made a couple little things that he would have had there. So I mean, basically, it is just the two of us, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And then you glazed it together in the colors?

MR. SAUL: Yes, and I painted some parts, hand painted various parts. And that was it. Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Going back for a minute, at that point - I want to touch on your working methods, on your - well, actually, before we do that, maybe - were you always intrigued by - or not intrigued. Did you always have a sense that you wanted to be dealing with issues that could be read by a kind of a general public that weren't art knowledgeable?

MR. SAUL: Oh, absolutely, absolutely, totally, hoping to attract attention, hoping to attract the attention of a normal person, who would find it interesting, intriguing, and want to know more about it.

MS. RICHARDS: And did you think that was related to anyone else's work, the kind of approach that the Pop artists were taking or maybe the Photorealists painting racing cars and fire engines and things that could be read? Did you feel that it was part of that sort of approach?

MR. SAUL: Gee, no, I didn't, I guess. Maybe I should have. But I didn't. No, I simply wanted it - from earliest times in the art school, when I was in art school, I wanted to locate a public that would not be simply an art world

public.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it a sense of an anti-elitist -

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

MS. RICHARDS: Going along with the communist sensibility?

MR. SAUL: Very much, very much. Yes, yes, anti-elitist was much in my mind. I don't know why. It is just natural to me.

MS. RICHARDS: And yet, it does take effort -

MR. SAUL: Yeah, I know. And I am not successful. I am not successful.

MS. RICHARDS: - to unravel the actions that you are portraying.

MR. SAUL: Yes, I haven't been successful in doing this. I am very much an elitist. My work is considered as a kind of elite thing. I mean, it is far from being - I mean, no public has been concerned with it so far except that tiny group of people. And this is just the way it is. I mean, I just have not been successful.

MS. RICHARDS: At some points, though, you have been considered a kind of an outsider.

MR. SAUL: Yeah, I guess this happened especially during the political or Vietnam-type pictures. That was definitely a no-no, which I enjoyed very much. It was popular with ordinary people to some extent, too, college students and so on. I was able to give lectures to like a thousand people. Most artists couldn't do that in those days.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you enjoy that?

MR. SAUL: Yes, immensely. I loved it. Enjoyed showing off. I felt good.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you enjoy - do you want to explain the paintings, or do you really hate doing that?

MR. SAUL: I probably enjoy it all too much, have to cut back.

MS. RICHARDS: So it is a -

MR. SAUL: I am very proud of them and enjoy explaining them as much as I can. I try to not drive the other person into the ground as I get older, and careful, more careful.

MS. RICHARDS: You felt that you were explaining too much in the past?

MR. SAUL: I don't know. I mean, I just enjoy it so much, talking about my own picture and having them looked at, it is great.

MS. RICHARDS: In those early years, what part did drawing play? I know you did some works that were substantial works that were drawings. They were on paper. Acrylic on paper -

MR. SAUL: I started to - yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you view drawing versus painting?

MR. SAUL: I just viewed it as a smaller picture. I tried to make it as complete as I could. But in recent years, since I got my teaching job in 19 - when did I start doing that - 1981 or something. I viewed it as preparation.

MS. RICHARDS: So you would end up doing a painting on the same subject as the drawing?

MR. SAUL: Totally prepared. I mean, and again, to prepare, I didn't start on one - [inaudible] - see, this picture right here comes from that, see? It is quite similar.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, I am looking at it, squared-off drawing.

MR. SAUL: Yeah, yeah. And then I just redraw it, you know. But that is basically - this is less redrawn than most, mostly. And it is more redrawn. But anyway, you see I prepare as best I can.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. You did, though, in the '60s, very accomplished drawings.

MR. SAUL: Yes, yes, with color.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MR. SAUL: Yeah, yeah. Well, those I considered small paintings.

MS. RICHARDS: And what made you decide to do a work on paper versus a work on canvas?

MR. SAUL: Well, it is faster. And it can happen. My studio was smaller than this. And if the walls were used up, I just painted by stapling the canvas on the wall. And then I would send to Frumkin by pulling it off and rolling it. So if it wasn't time to pull off and roll, there was really no place left to work except on cardboard, which I had downstairs in the house. I had a space for a long, sort of a sloping -

MS. RICHARDS: Like a cardboard drawing board?

MR. SAUL: Yeah, I had a drawing board, a very long drawing board, where I did these.

MS. RICHARDS: Made of cardboard, not made out of wood?

MR. SAUL: No, made out of wood. And I did them there.

MS. RICHARDS: Sorry, I wasn't following what the cardboard -

MR. SAUL: Well, I just buy the cardboard at the art store, put it in the back of the station wagon, get a whole bunch of it, and take it around to the house, and put it up on this sort of sloping wall, and just proceed.

MS. RICHARDS: I see. You were painting directly on cardboard.

MR. SAUL: Yes, yes. But first I used ballpoint and colored pencil and -

MS. RICHARDS: And why didn't you use artist paper? I mean, maybe -

MR. SAUL: Because it wouldn't have any - I mean, it would just flop, you know. You would have to -

MS. RICHARDS: But did you put paper on top of the cardboard?

MR. SAUL: No, I just laid the cardboard there.

MS. RICHARDS: You were working directly on cardboard, because I don't remember seeing any of your works painted on cardboard?

MR. SAUL: Oh, they are. It is a kind of illustration board.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I see. Okay, illustration board. I am thinking of cardboard-box cardboard.

MR. SAUL: Oh, no, no, no.

MS. RICHARDS: Illustration board, not -

MR. SAUL: Illustration, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay, all right. Yeah, that is much stiffer. You have a very distinct color sensibility. And it is evident from your earliest work.

MR. SAUL: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Where did that come from?

MR. SAUL: *National Geographic* and other magazines. My mother collected all magazines that she read and kept them in a closet. So I would have like 50 *National Geographic*s to look at and 30 *Cosmopolitans* and whatever, you know, *Vogue*, all the magazines, *House Beautiful*, all these things. I was influenced by photography.

MS. RICHARDS: Color photography, obviously.

MR. SAUL: Yeah, yeah, color, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: But the intensity of your color - I mean, there could have been photographs that were more subtle and obviously advertising.

MR. SAUL: I don't think they were that subtle. I don't know. I mean -

MS. RICHARDS: *National Geographic*, the intensity of the color, was it also to attract the viewer?

MR. SAUL: Yes, I think so, to try to be looked at.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you feel it added drama? It heightened the -

MR. SAUL: I hope so. Yeah, yeah, I think so. I think it added drama. I was very pleased to find out about color. In art school, to a certain point, just before I went to New York, a few months before, I got inspired about color. It suddenly occurred to me as an idea that I could use color like *National Geographic*. So I began doing so. And those were the paintings I took to New York.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you study color theory in art school?

MR. SAUL: No, no.

MS. RICHARDS: No? You know, how some colors recede, advance?

MR. SAUL: No, no. I never would think of that, because colors do what you want them to. Basically, you can make any color do anything.

MS. RICHARDS: Are there other - are there painters in art history or contemporary art whose color that you were looking at when you were a student or in those early years, even in Mill Valley, that you adored that color and you were inspired by it?

MR. SAUL: Painters whose color I liked? Well, I don't know. I mean, it seems to me that when I looked at modern art in books that it looked good. And old masters looked lousy and now that has changed, and all photos look good. There has been some sort of a computer workshop or something where this happens. I don't know. But when I want to send a photograph of my work now to someone, I find that Sally can easily improve it by just pressing a few buttons on the computer, you know. It can get better contrast and this and that. It is amazing.

So nothing counts for now. Now I just don't know what to say about color. But at that time, it seemed like the oil paints had a certain dead look to them that was hard to overcome. This was 1955-56. The normal range of oil paints that I was using, Winsor Newton, Rembrandt had a hard time looking like anything except grayish dough.

But when the acrylics came in and Day-Glo acrylics, too, I would use, even though it is not permanent, I would use that. And that helped a lot, you know, give it more oomph. Now I use acrylic pretty much only, and it has worked fine.

MS. RICHARDS: At what point did you decide to use the oil glazes on top of the acrylics to combine those?

MR. SAUL: Nineteen eighty-three, '84.

MS. RICHARDS: And what prompted you to do that?

MR. SAUL: Boy, what did? I thought you could do it. I mean, someone told me, I think, that you could do it.

MS. RICHARDS: That you could put oil glazes on top of acrylic.

MR. SAUL: Yeah, someone told me you could do that. This was in Austin. Let me think. Yeah, this was in Austin, Texas. Of course, I am in an art school now, art school situation. Someone - and I don't remember who - told me you could do this. So I gave it a try and liked the result. It helps the dark colors a lot.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you think it was because there was a problem on one of your paintings, there was an issue that you were trying to resolve, how to make it look a certain way, and you were searching for an answer to that?

MR. SAUL: No, I think it was up to me. It was my - someone simply told me intellectually that you could do it. So I gave it a try on a painting, and it worked good. It helped the dark blue to be more blue, that kind of thing. I liked that a lot.

MS. RICHARDS: I think I am going to stop right now.

[END CD 3.]

This is Judith Richards interviewing Peter Saul in Brooklyn, New York, on November 4, 2009, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc four.

Peter, we wanted to touch back a bit on your early years.

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: And thinking about how the topics came into your work.

MR. SAUL: Well, as soon as I got the idea of using contemporary American culture in my art, which was in 1961, '60, '61, somewhere like that, I wanted to grab as much as I could. So within a very short period of months, I didn't just do a bunch of iceboxes. That took place over, you know, two years or so. But I grabbed a lot of subjects like *Mickey Mouse versus the Japs*, *Donald Duck versus the Japs* [1964], *Hitler's Bathroom* [1960], which was nothing but four toilets with swastikas on them. I could do it better today. But that was then. And let's see, what else did we have?

A mad doctor picture of '62 came about, and a dog in the doghouse [never shown in U.S.], a lot of different things. Many different subjects came about. So I was prepared to paint various things. So when I got to California in '64, '65, I started out, and there had been a huge falloff in interest in my work in the meantime, not my fault exactly. It is just that people's thinking had gone on to Minimalism.

And I remember in Chicago, I was going through at my opening. On the one hand, I was very happy because all the pictures were sold. On the other hand, nobody was talking about me or my pictures. They were all talking about Minimalism, about the excitement about having nothing there, absolutely nothing there. It was so mind-blowing, they would say, you know.

I went into the gallery and there was nothing there. It just blew my mind. That is the kind of thing people said in '64. And I thought, oh, this is not good for me, not good at all.

MS. RICHARDS: You mentioned that show in Chicago. And I wanted to go back to your relationship to the Chicago Imagists.

MR. SAUL: I hoped to meet them because someone had told me that I was influential on them. So I hoped going through Chicago that I would meet these people. And I stayed three weeks in a borrowed apartment, my wife and I, Vicky and two children. And we never met anyone except one of the artists, Ed Flood, who worked at the gallery, Frumkin Gallery. We met him. And he showed us his work very politely. But I never got to meet Jim Nutt or any of those people that interested me enormously. I hoped that I would make friends with these people. I wanted to see what their work looked like and all that.

MS. RICHARDS: There were two shows at Frumkin in Chicago, '61 and '63. And there were more - '64. Which one is this you are talking about?

MR. SAUL: These were drawings in '64.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, okay.

MR. SAUL: Paintings were in New York as I came through, and the drawings were in Chicago.

MS. RICHARDS: So at any point in the future, did you meet any of the Chicago artists?

MR. SAUL: Well, here is what it is, the rest of the anecdote. I felt like, gosh, I am not meeting anybody. So later on, about a year later when Frumkin was out in California, I said, gee, I hoped I would meet some artists there. And he said, no kidding. He said, we felt you weren't sophisticated enough, or something like that - me not sophisticated enough. I thought uh-oh.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you mean he is implying that he had control over who you met?

MR. SAUL: Well, he did pretty much, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Those others, though, could have come to your opening.

MR. SAUL: Yeah, why didn't they? You know, that kind of thing just never occurred to me to ask. I never asked that. Yes, I had met Jim later when he worked in Sacramento [CA]. I got to be good friends with him.

MS. RICHARDS: And his wife, too?

MR. SAUL: Yes. However, I had an unfortunate experience that was very peculiar. I was smoking in those days. I went by myself to Jim and Gladys's [Gladys Nilsson's] house in Sacramento, and I started to light my pipe or something, and she said, oh, you can't smoke in here. This is a smoke-free zone. Actually, no one had ever asked me not to smoke before in my life. So I said, gee, what am I going to do now? Instead of going outside and

having a smoke, I just got in my car and never saw them again. So I didn't see Nutt or Gladys for a heck of a long time, until Austin, about 1997. Now we're all good friends.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you feel that you did influence those artists in Chicago?

MR. SAUL: It never occurred to me to think about it. See, the way I see art is the individual painting of the image. The way the official American view of art is, there are points that you inhabit, like Dan Flavin inhabits the neon tubes, you know, all that stuff, intellectual view of art, which I don't agree with. So I would never even concern myself with this question. I mean, I look at art - many artists, you know - and I don't know to what extent I am influenced and how can they know, you know - I don't know. I mean, I look at stuff. If it interests me, does that mean I have been influenced? I don't know.

MS. RICHARDS: Back in the '60s, you also did a whole series - not literally one after the next - paintings related to the Vietnam War.

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes. That is very important. We have got to get to that. Yeah, okay, so we have got to get off that and get onto -

Yeah, the Vietnam things. The pictures I came up with in California after I had been there six or eight months, Frumkin came out and was not very pleased. He found them too tame, old stuff, a yawn. I thought, oh, my God, what now, you know? I am buying a house. I am living in the United States. The art dealer doesn't like the pictures. This is pretty difficult.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you, though, at some point, show those paintings that he didn't like?

MR. SAUL: He bought them anyway to encourage me. You know, I had a steady income from Frumkin from 1961 through '97. Every month, bam. As he said, it goes out right after the rent. And it did. He never failed, not one time.

MS. RICHARDS: We will go back to talk about that. Right now, though, so he came to the studio.

MR. SAUL: Yeah, and he didn't like anything, so I thought, what am I going to do? I said, I need an idea again, you know. I am a believer that ideas, sudden ideas, can rescue you. Like, for instance, I had this idea in Paris of putting American culture into my work, and it totally rescued me. And so I could be rescued again. I thought, what is going on? Vietnam War, I will do it. And so I just began just like that. And I never decided during the course of the war - during the course of my painting the war, I never decided whether the purpose was to protest the war, to approve of the war - although I personally protested it - I never decided whether the art was just using the war. Mostly, I think it was just using the war as a subject. But also, of course, that my leftist views also protested it.

But anyway, I realized at the time, kind of, that I was undermining actual art sales or anything of that type, any, perhaps, approval, except by a very small portion of the population, by throwing in other psychiatric ideas, which were extremely distasteful and brought me up against the reaction of the people for the first time. See, in Europe, I hadn't known anybody, so literally, I was really working in privacy. Now I was in a town filled with young architects, psychiatrists, you know, people like this, teachers, professors types, Mill Valley, California, young people, intelligent, college-educated, know who Jackson Pollock is, all that sort of thing, know about Pop Art.

Anyway, I invited him into my studio sometimes, and the reaction was usually they were appalled.

MS. RICHARDS: You invited whom into the studio?

MR. SAUL: Such people because -

MS. RICHARDS: How did you meet them?

MR. SAUL: Oh, because of fellow parents mostly, fellow parents - hmm, let me think. Well, actually, having children put you in touch with the town. That is all there is to it. So we were, both of us, in touch with the town. And we made friends easily. I mean, I was glad to make friends. However, showing my work to people was pretty upsetting to these kind of people. They felt that it was just me in the paintings. Peter, that is just you. Stop pretending those are Vietnamese women. You must be a masochist, or you must have something the matter with you and on and on.

Their view of art was sort of like van Gogh, you know, belief in van Gogh and his system that you feel so strongly that you have to express yourself in paint. And my view, which is do anything you want without consulting your feelings even, was not in their possibility range. So I realized I was messing up, in a sense. But I also realized that I was making my art sufficiently interesting to go on, you know, because nothing is more boring than art

that just states some good case, you know, like war is hell or something like that. Totally boring.

Actually, it seems to me probable that a lot of people like war and can't wait to get involved in combat so they can shoot somebody, obviously. I mean, that is obvious, you know. Anyway, so this brought about a conflict. And after a certain amount of -

MS. RICHARDS: Conflict within you, or conflict with your -

MR. SAUL: With actual people I met physically in Mill Valley, California. I mean, uh-oh. So I just sort of stopped inviting people to the studio. That seemed the easiest solution. And later on in life, more sophisticated people eventually visited my studio. So it was okay. But I got tired of hearing that kind of thing, you know, like, Peter, that is just you up there in that canvas, nobody but you. You know, modern psychology, you know. And I just thought, to heck with that nonsense.

And, you know, they had these thoughts like Yves Klein, like if you asked them why Yves Klein painted this many blue paintings, they would say things like, well, blue expressed the way he felt about things. You know, I mean, blue was his soul, his depth, and they will go on like that. You know, I just sort of thought, to hell with it. I don't need to know these people. So I never did show my work anymore to ordinary people for many, many years.

But I enjoyed the Vietnam paintings. And I learned that I liked to have two ideas in conflict. I don't like consistency because consistency is boring to me. Like if you look at a canvas and all the brushstrokes go to the left or something, that is the end of it for me. I never think about it anymore. I might think about the artist's idea or something, or the artist, his fame, position or something. But I wouldn't think of the painting. The painting is dead as soon as it has total consistency for me.

So I liked bringing in wacky psychology, which I made up. Now, the thing is people asked me where I get these ideas. And I think this is unbearably true that I pretend that I got them out of shrink books, because I did belong to this shrink book club for a couple of years. But actually, an art student, graduate type, recently called my bluff on that. He said, "Can you remember any titles? Do you have any left?" And I said, "Well, I got a couple." I was sure I did, you know.

So I went to my bookcase, and I did not. And then I thought carefully about this and realized that I might enjoy reading true crime and life stories of maniacs, but when it came to the actual picture, I always make it up. I don't bother with any research of any kind. It is just that people who write assume you have appropriated something. They think you got it somewhere. And I just make things up about that because I want to help the writer to write, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: Did any actual events of the Vietnam War that were in the news prompt any particular paintings?

MR. SAUL: Not really, no. I didn't pay that much attention to the actual news. I watched the roller derby during the day while I was working downstairs on these works on cardboard. I watched roller derby. [Laughs.] These crazy women, so angry, flinging themselves on the audience, you know, bashing the people watching them. Crazy, fake or not, I thought it was a laugh. And I enjoyed that. And I didn't actually pay that much attention to the reality of the war. No, no.

I mean, I didn't make any pictures referring to truth. Truth never entered the picture except accidentally, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: It sounds like intuition and fantasy, that amusing yourself, are very important ingredients.

MR. SAUL: Yes, yes. And I like to have these ideas in conflict in the picture, like the idea that you have got - well, I mean, just any idea in conflict, any idea at all. So I went through that. And finally, I got tired of the Vietnam paintings. They were shown. They were shown. I mean, I even sold one to the Whitney. I think Frumkin did, you know, having bought it from me. And he sold a few of the others, and it definitely rescued my career again on a very sort of weird level.

MS. RICHARDS: Because they were critically reviewed and people paid attention?

MR. SAUL: Kind of, kind of. But I can't be more specific because I didn't get much attention. I didn't realize -

MS. RICHARDS: But you think they rescued your career?

MR. SAUL: Well, from absolute oblivion for sure, but not very much, not very much. No. Anyway, I enjoyed painting them. And I never bothered to figure out whether or not they protested the war or anything like that. But it did put me at odds with ordinary people that I met in my life who had very insistent demands on painting and how it related to the artist and the viewer. I didn't go for that at all. Still don't, actually.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you have a particular affection or not for other artists who have focused on war and painted? I mean, you have done some parodies of *Guernica* [Pablo Picasso, 1937].

MR. SAUL: Yes, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: That is a painting about war.

MR. SAUL: Well, yes, it is. But unfortunately, I was just trying to trade on his fame and that painting's fame. I didn't relate to it as a war thing. I will in a year or so - I mean, it is on my list of to-do things.

MS. RICHARDS: Another *Guernica* painting?

MR. SAUL: But one that actually - see, the problem with that painting is that it is a completely harmless, Saturday morning cartoon, to me anyway. And he only had a month to paint it in. So for the middle of the painting, he just used his old Cubism gizmo. It is not much of anything, but it is world famous. So I definitely did it. I did a number of versions, hoping to appeal to people who were interested in these things. I wanted to show myself as serious, if I possibly could, because I had been dismissed as a not-serious artist.

So I wanted to be as serious as I possibly could. And that was one way. I did a number of versions of that, five or six. Several other things. Oh, well, what the heck.

MS. RICHARDS: In 1974 or '[7]5, you left Mill Valley -

MR. SAUL: Oh, I left Port Costa at that point. Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, I'm sorry.

MR. SAUL: I left Port Costa.

MS. RICHARDS: I'm sorry, you left Port Costa.

MR. SAUL: And we took off.

MS. RICHARDS: And you moved to New York, to Chappaqua.

MR. SAUL: Yes, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Why did you move, and why did you move there?

MR. SAUL: Because a local art dealer from San Francisco had inherited - well, she grew up there, pretty much - a very large estate in this town.

MS. RICHARDS: What is her name?

MR. SAUL: Rena Bransten. She is an art dealer in San Francisco.

MS. RICHARDS: In Chappaqua?

MR. SAUL: Yeah. And she thought this would be a good opportunity to do something for an artist - Rena Bransten did. So the deal was I give her one small picture every year, like this on cardboard, you know. And we moved out in the summertime for one month while they came back - she and her daughter and son lived there.

MS. RICHARDS: Where did you move for that month?

MR. SAUL: We went up to the Adirondacks. We discovered the joy and the simplicity and the inexpensiveness of the Adirondacks at that time.

MS. RICHARDS: So you left California, moved to Chappaqua, and lived in that house, except for one month in the summer.

MR. SAUL: That is right. And we lived there for six years, I believe.

MS. RICHARDS: And the kids went to school there, and you settled into the -

MR. SAUL: My younger son came to live with us. He finished high school there. My older son remained in California and lived in the old house. My first wife, since that time, has been living in my old studio and rents the house out to provide an income.

MS. RICHARDS: So your younger son went with you and Sally -

MR. SAUL: He soon arrived. I mean, I don't quite remember. Anyway, he soon arrived. Yes. And he enjoyed high school in Chappaqua. And it was very pleasant. And our child was born there. Our daughter, Gwendolyn, was born when we were living in Chappaqua. And what brought that to an end was after our daughter was born, we thought we might need more income, regular income. We were living on very little. Or health insurance of some kind. We had been very lucky. We didn't think about those things.

Anyway, within a matter of days of having this one single conversation, a letter arrived from the University of Texas. And it said, we have a good job; why don't you apply for it? And I thought, why, that is wonderful. I will. So I went down there on the train and applied.

MS. RICHARDS: You went by train?

MR. SAUL: I traveled a lot by train because I was afraid of flying for many, many years. I missed the first collision in midair by missing the airplane. So it frightened me. You never know when I am going to be frightened. I just don't know. This did frighten me.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you know who was behind sending that letter? Who was it on the faculty who thought, "We need to talk to Peter Saul"?

MR. SAUL: Sue Whyne, I think.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell her last name?

MR. SAUL: W-H-Y-N-E. She evidently met me at one of my guest teaching things at one of the Bay Area art schools. Anyway, I showed up, got the job. That is it, you know. Within a year, I had to wait for my son to graduate from the local high school, and then we took off. We drove to Texas, and we were there 19 years.

MS. RICHARDS: Going back to the time - I want to go back to Texas, but before we do, going back to the time in Chappaqua, looking at your history of paintings during that time and maybe this is related to my- what I looked at; it seemed that you were doing fewer paintings. Is that a misconception?

MR. SAUL: It is possible. Well, first of all, there was no interest except one person, Allan Frumkin.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, and you talked about that.

MR. SAUL: So you have - this market is satisfied as soon as Allan Frumkin has paintings that he needs.

MS. RICHARDS: So do you feel that, in fact, your work - you did slow down in some way or -

MR. SAUL: Yes, also the studio was unworkably cold. It was a nightmare of cold.

MS. RICHARDS: Where was the studio? Attached to the house?

MR. SAUL: It was a barn. It was a barn where I worked. And it was just too cold. It never got above 60 with the heat on. So I just couldn't deal with it. Eventually, I moved into the house, and I did work on paper. I wasn't sorry to leave in a way. It was very difficult.

MS. RICHARDS: So perhaps you did fewer paintings when you lived in Chappaqua?

MR. SAUL: Perhaps, yes. Those years were a little -

MS. RICHARDS: And you talked about the fact that you felt your work was not being appreciated.

MR. SAUL: No, no, no. I had one exhibition around that time, 1977, in which four people showed up. That was kind of amazing because Frumkin had bought this crate of white wine, you know, just in case, you never know. And all these little cups, and, boy, we just used four of them or six - me and him and - [Laughs] - these four people. Of course, it was cold, February. It didn't help any. But the paintings were exciting, but not exciting - probably if you had asked people, they would say, oh, Peter Saul is really exciting, but is not exciting as art. That is the problem. That is what they would have said.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, perhaps, I don't know exactly what was in that show, but the paintings - some of the paintings you did - that show was in '76 or -

MR. SAUL: That is the one.

MS. RICHARDS: And then you did a de Kooning woman with bicycle [*de Kooning's Woman with Bicycle*, 1976].

MR. SAUL: Yeah, that is the one.

MS. RICHARDS: Washington crossing the Delaware [*George Washington Crossing the Delaware*, 1975]?

MR. SAUL: That is the one. Okay, those would be considered exciting. Yeah, Peter Saul is really exciting, but, you know, it is not exciting as art. That is the problem. If you ask someone, that is what they would say, because art was very rigidly defined.

MS. RICHARDS: Conceptually -

MR. SAUL: It was conceptually defined as a certain attitude, certain appearance. It did not include me or my work.

However, later on, I mean, the pictures weren't thrown away or anything, you know. I mean, somebody even bought some of them years later. That is at the Whitney, that painting of the de Kooning woman, even. But no, I was defined out of art. And reviews were scarce.

And when I asked people about this, that is pretty much a summing up of the answer that I got. Like, you are very interesting, Pete. You are really damned interesting. The problem is you are not really interesting as art. Now, if you want to be interesting as art, you have got to do something like - and then they would list a whole bunch of physical possibilities. Like instead of painting on a flat canvas, paint it on a roll like this, so people have to walk around it to look at it. You know what I mean, that kind of talk. Oh, gosh, forget it. [Laughs.]

I mean, I just felt that if you had been - if it looked like you were not going to be successful in the sense of being appreciated, one might as well go ahead and do the pictures anyway. But the worst time for the art-making was the first years in Austin, because they didn't have a very good studio there either. It was very poor.

MS. RICHARDS: So let's talk about Austin. You moved there in '81?

MR. SAUL: We bought a little place, a little cottage not too far from the campus. Austin was a little more simple, but it was still a city. And let's see -

MS. RICHARDS: By the way, when you were in Chappaqua, living there only an hour from the city, did you find that you went into the city quite frequently and used the resources, the museums and other galleries?

MR. SAUL: Yeah, we did some. Some, we did, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Did that seem to feed your work or didn't -

MR. SAUL: I am afraid - well, I knew a few people, a few artists. Peter Dean, I knew. Peter Dean, who showed at the Allan Stone Gallery. He was a friendly guy, and we knew him quite well. But we didn't - and I met Robert Storr at that time as an art student at Skowhegan [summer art program, Skowhegan, ME]. That is how I met him.

MS. RICHARDS: So you were teaching at Skowhegan?

MR. SAUL: Yeah, yeah. And he was there as a student. According to him, what made me a friend for life was he thought it was quite unusual - is I gave him the usual criticism of his pictures, abstractions, fairly small, one-foot-square things. I always gave some sort of talk about them. He was displeased. He wanted more. He said, Peter Saul, I am not going to let that pass. I want more from you than that. And I said, oh, my God, I don't know what. I said, I will let you criticize my work. Come and look at it, and tell me your worst.

That evidently made friends with him. He evidently had never had a teacher invite him to criticize their work. Strange, isn't it? I didn't realize that. I hadn't had a teaching job yet, you know. So I didn't realize that was unusual or anything.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, maybe the atmosphere at Skowhegan encouraged that kind of dialogue.

MR. SAUL: It would, yes. It was a good school and a good experience. And our daughter was conceived there and everything, you know. We enjoyed the summer, and other people enjoyed their summer. The whole thing was quite amusing. It was good. It was good, yes. I got along with the students.

MS. RICHARDS: That is where you met Rob Storr. Were there other artists who you met when you lived in New York, that six years you were in New York?

MR. SAUL: Uh-oh, someone is having trouble with the lock.

[Audio Break.]

I am sorry. Where were we?

MS. RICHARDS: You were talking about other artists in New York.

MR. SAUL: Outside of Peter Dean, none we knew very well. I don't think I understood properly the importance of knowing artists, quite frankly. I hadn't been very successful in the Bay Area knowing artists. And Chicago, seemed to have not met them for some reason. And I didn't really do very well in the east either.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you go to Frumkin Gallery openings? You know, other artists' openings?

MR. SAUL: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: So you met the artists that way.

MR. SAUL: I met some. I met Paul Georges. And I would have liked to have spoken to him. But it didn't work out because he said, "Oh, Peter Saul, the Donald Duck artist." And I said, yeah, meaning we could have an amusing argument or something, you know. But then Jean Frumkin grabbed my arm and pulled me away like I am supposed to look down - oh, God, I don't know.

You know, the thing is it is such a snooty business, modern art. You have to be very careful, I guess. [Laughs.] It was crazy.

MS. RICHARDS: There were some other Bay Area artists showing at Frumkin in those years.

MR. SAUL: Yes, indeed. They weren't very friendly, quite frankly. I don't know why. I never figured it out. I don't know why. I mean, I missed the boat on making friends with the artists. I don't know why or how, but I trace it back to childhood, getting beaten with a stick and being considered Jewish. I mean, obviously, that is it. But I don't want to go into that. It is just, obviously, I got off on the wrong foot. Nothing is wrong with me, you know, in spite of this peculiarity. This is really nuts, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: Showing at Frumkin, he showed -

MR. SAUL: He liked my art a lot.

MS. RICHARDS: He showed a wide range of artists who, in one way or another, were dealing with realism.

MR. SAUL: Yeah, that is right.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you feel that you were also a realist of a sort?

MR. SAUL: No, I never thought about that. I mean, it just simply didn't occur to me. It did occur to me that I wasn't getting on socially. But I mean, I got on very well with Sally. We were out in the country. You know, big estate. There was a swimming pool. Everything was lovely. A big sort of rotting mansion. Rain would come in the window, and no one would discover it for half a year. Oh, my God, you know, that kind of thing. Full-time groundskeeper -

MS. RICHARDS: It sounds like it was rotting. [Laughs.]

MR. SAUL: Well, a full-time groundskeeper keeping this place under repair and his wife and all that stuff. Anyway, it was a whole different ballgame.

MS. RICHARDS: So you moved to Texas.

MR. SAUL: And there we were.

MS. RICHARDS: And you set up a studio. You said at first, it was -

MR. SAUL: It was very poor. It was south of the river.

MS. RICHARDS: Was the studio in a completely different place than the house you had bought?

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: The house wasn't suitable?

MR. SAUL: Well, the house was simply so small.

MS. RICHARDS: And did they not offer to give you a studio on campus?

MR. SAUL: No, it wasn't that kind of place. This was a big public institution. And then after about a year and a half, we met an architect teacher, and he designed us a studio for me. And that would be 1982 that that was built.

MS. RICHARDS: Where was that?

MR. SAUL: At the house, triangular, to avoid hurting this big tree. Sally said, we can have the studio here. That would be great. But we can't hurt the tree, so what are we going to do? We said, a triangular studio, just a long wall, and then you can stand back like this and look at it and then - it went out like that. So it was a very strange studio, unusual, triangular place. But it was very beautiful and very nice. And we had central air conditioning installed and lived comfortably, began to live comfortably.

And at that moment in 1983, I considered my mature work beginning. There was more of it. And it looked better. And that is when I started using the washes of oil paint on top of acrylic. Probably I got the notion from some art teacher that told me about it. We also got to know the art teachers. And this was successful. For the first time, I felt that we were successful socially. Partly this is because of Sally was very successful socially, too, in doing this.

MS. RICHARDS: Who were some of the teachers you were closest to?

MR. SAUL: Closest to, well, Sarah Canright, from Chicago. We are still close to her. Michael Mogavero, who had some career here showing , also Susan Whyne. And let's see, who else? Well, that is the only three that you would know. And they were very pleasant, and we enjoyed their company. And as far as I know, life at Texas was very good to us. The job was not too onerous. But there were some difficulties.

For instance, I went to the classroom to teach the advanced painting, and nobody was there. So I just read the *New York Times*. Well, if nobody is there, nobody is there, you know. And after about three weeks, hardly anybody had shown up or two people or something. One of the older teachers came in and said, "Where are your students?" And I didn't have the wit to say something. I just said, I don't know where they are. And he said, "Peter, this won't do. You will have to do better than this."

Yikes. So then I put a notice on the wall that said I have been criticized because you weren't there. If I get fired, you get F. And at that point, they were all entertained by this and came right in. And I got on well with them. This is fine.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever find out why they didn't show up?

MR. SAUL: They just didn't have to. In Texas -

MS. RICHARDS: But they were paying tuition.

MR. SAUL: Yeah, but it is very low, and it wasn't the purpose of their being there. You see, there were 17 people in the class always. But 10 of them at least were there not seriously. They were just there because their degree plan called for them to have some kind of an art class and they had chosen mine somehow. I don't know how this happened.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were hired, were you hired to teach graduate painting?

MR. SAUL: Not particularly, no.

MS. RICHARDS: But when you started, that is what you were teaching?

MR. SAUL: No, actually, I was teaching - there were very few graduates, only a handful. And I did consult with them. But gradually, over time, I didn't know any graduates. I don't know why.

MS. RICHARDS: So what were the subjects that you were teaching?

MR. SAUL: Just painting and drawing and, once, design, even. Just for ordinary people, really. I mean, I was a normal art teacher. It is nothing special.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hm [affirmative]. How do you think the teaching affected your own painting?

MR. SAUL: I don't think it affected it except that - well, here is a - it did affect it because I had less time. Two days a week, you are gone, so I began drawing, making preparatory drawings like that. And one place to make those drawings was in the faculty meetings and also in crits, where you have to appear to look at a student's

work.

MS. RICHARDS: When you are talking about those drawings, those preparatory drawings, you are saying that you didn't do preparatory drawings before that? You would just start on the canvas?

MR. SAUL: Yeah. I would start with acrylic.

MS. RICHARDS: So that shortened the time required to plan a painting if you did it first on paper.

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes. I think I sometimes planned anyway before, but not as a regular project, as a way to get into it and get further along.

MS. RICHARDS: So I assume that since you were doing those during the crits and the faculty meetings, you weren't too engaged by the faculty dynamics and the teaching?

MR. SAUL: No, no, no. I actually enjoyed the faculty meetings very much. They were a way to visit with my friends, the art teachers. And I didn't see any backstabbing going on that I had heard about, that it was going to be a terrible experience. People hate each other and all that sort of thing. I didn't see that at all.

The way it appeared to me was it was so warm and cozy that I actually fell asleep physically or started to. I couldn't believe it, you know. I would lean my head back against the wall and say, I am going to just take a brief moment to relax before I continue listening. And the next thing I knew, I was about to hit the table with my nose. I had fallen forward, and it was scary. I could have got hurt. So I tried desperately to stay awake.

And finally, one of the teachers, Margot Sawyer, got me a Dr. Pepper. And this helped a lot. And I became addicted to Dr. Peppers, but I broke the habit along with smoking and whatever.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, yeah. What would you say your approach to teaching was? Did you have a certain curriculum you had to follow?

MR. SAUL: We were supposed to, but I didn't. I felt guilty the whole time.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have certain problems that you always gave the students?

MR. SAUL: I didn't give them any problem. It was one of these things like you mentioned that was not so nice about California teaching. It is just that is what I was doing. And it was not good. I was waiting - I was putting it all on the students. If you want to paint a picture, I will look at it. If not, just get lost and I will give you an A anyway.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you give people As?

MR. SAUL: Everybody got A. But I eventually got a little annoyed with the students and tried to avoid them as much as I could because they were so whiny. They couldn't believe I was going to give them an A, even though I said I would, you know. "Oh, please, Mr. Saul, I hope you are telling the truth. My family always gets As." Oh, God. They follow you around.

MS. RICHARDS: So you never thought that if a student didn't show up, they shouldn't get a high grade?

MR. SAUL: Well, I did. I felt guilty about this. And I wasn't doing my job properly. And I occasionally made an attempt to set an assignment, without much success. They didn't do it or something. What can I say?

MS. RICHARDS: Did you think that being -

MR. SAUL: It helped me more than them, this teaching job. It gave me a gift of gab. You get to think fast. It helps a lot.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you mean that you spoke to them during class about painting and about art?

MR. SAUL: If they were there, if they were there. But there were very few there; a handful out of the 17 students, two to seven, would show up. The remainder I never saw again.

MS. RICHARDS: And was that consistent through the whole time you were there?

MR. SAUL: For me, yes. But not for the others. The other teachers would take attendance - I never took attendance, so that is one thing. The other teachers - some of them would take attendance three or four times during the class. They would sneak out.

They call you sir, though.

MS. RICHARDS: Did the people who ran the department know this is how your approach and basically not intervene?

MR. SAUL: I think they knew, and I think they thought I had enormous prestige, because these artists were completely unknown - not just unknown like I felt, but I mean, absolutely and forever unknown. They began to hire more known artists shortly before I left, retired, in '99, whenever that was, 1999. And that was a little different. But basically, these people were unknown and had remained unknown. They treated me as someone who could have made a lot of - I think here is their fantasy, in my opinion. They thought Peter Saul could have made a lot of money as a Pop artist, but he chose to protest the war instead. And he is a wonderful person. So even though he doesn't really do any work here, let's just keep him around, kind of like a Gandhi figure, someone who could have made money and chose not to, is the way they saw it. This is the highest you can get in the spiritual realm in Texas.

So I mean, I think I played that fully, you know, played that role for them. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Did you feel that living in Texas influenced your subject matter or your approach to painting in any way?

MR. SAUL: Well, I painted cowboys a few times, but not really.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you feel it was a positive to be outside New York and major art centers? Or did you just tolerate it?

MR. SAUL: Well, I never thought about it. You know, I wanted to be apart from the art world, obviously. And I still did. It is only in very recent times that I have changed my mind about that, 10 years ago. No, I enjoyed Texas a lot. I was appreciative of it. And I had a few art shows, even, at the Texas Gallery in Houston. I had a show there. Sold a painting to the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, even. I mean, it wasn't the end of the road or anything. And I maintained my shows in New York and everything.

I don't have anything not positive to say about living in Texas, really, though I was glad to leave, and we moved here.

MS. RICHARDS: You said you felt you - what did you say - hit your stride, or you felt that around 1983, you really -

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes. I really got into things.

MS. RICHARDS: What makes you say that?

MR. SAUL: Pictures just simply got a lot more forceful and interesting. It looked like my work has looked ever since, you know, basically. I haven't made any real changes since that time.

MS. RICHARDS: You started out - well, in 1984, you did a couple of paintings with [former President Ronald] Reagan.

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes, yes. That was okay. They were pretty good. I did a few using him as a subject. Yes, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: And you started what might be called a series of heads that -

MR. SAUL: Yeah, that is a little bit later, though.

MS. RICHARDS: In '86, I think.

MR. SAUL: Oh, yeah, yeah, right, it is.

MS. RICHARDS: And they seemed to be self-portraits, in a way.

MR. SAUL: Yeah, they probably could be. But, I mean, they aren't really.

MS. RICHARDS: When you started - when you did the first one, maybe it was in '86 -

MR. SAUL: I tried to make them -

MS. RICHARDS: *Smoking Head* [1987] -

MR. SAUL: Yes, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Or self - did you think, you know, this is something I haven't done before? This is a whole new

area to explore.

MR. SAUL: I was very pleased to have a whole new appearance of picture. Yeah, but I didn't think about its relationship to me like, is this me, or anything? By then, it had been so long since I had met anybody from the neighborhood that I had forgotten pretty much about that, and I just - I didn't think about reaction to my pictures. I wanted to be seen - oh, I got to send them to France. They began to be successful in Europe again around 1990, which led to my change of attitude a little bit.

MS. RICHARDS: And maybe it was in '86, but correct me if I am wrong, you had started to paint in a little different way. You started to use a kind of pointillism, not really, but a kind of application of paint.

MR. SAUL: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: What brought that change to you? Why did that happen?

MR. SAUL: Well, the pointillism starts before then, so I don't know -

MS. RICHARDS: Why did it start?

MR. SAUL: It just must have naturally begun. It wasn't an intellectual decision. Believe it or not, I haven't got a lot of intellectual decisions. That was just gradual move towards the dot. I think it was to make the acrylic paint blend, you know, because it dries very quickly. So you can use a spot, a spotty technique, to blend one color into another. And also, now, I mean, I have developed that to a sort of a little dry brush thing, a little fuzzing in, you know, that is not quite the same. But I still probably dot some.

MS. RICHARDS: Just to take a little detour, I wanted to ask you some questions about your studio practice. Of course, this could apply anytime.

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you always kept a certain kind of working hours? What have those been and have they changed? I mean, are an artist - do you work from nine to five? Or did you work mostly in the evenings? Or seven days a week? And has that changed or been consistent?

MR. SAUL: It has been the same always. I work when I can. Whenever there is no reason not to, I will do it.

MS. RICHARDS: Does that mean you start working as soon as you wake up in the morning and get dressed?

MR. SAUL: No. But I start thinking about it. And by the time I get to the studio, most of the - I have a pretty clear idea what I am going to do that day. I wake up and realize that certain colors I mixed or applied yesterday are too much this way or that way and have to be altered. I keep the picture I am working on in my mind an awful lot of the time.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you lie in bed thinking about it before you get up?

MR. SAUL: I could easily. I do often. Yeah, yeah, often. So by the time I get here, I am already to go.

MS. RICHARDS: And have you always also worked in the evening?

MR. SAUL: No, I don't, because I am pretty tired by then.

MS. RICHARDS: And when you were younger, even still, knock off for the day and not work in the evening?

MR. SAUL: Probably. I don't remember exactly. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Do you have - what about the atmosphere, let's say, music?

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes. I need to have some music going on. Here I have the *Times* classical station. Earlier, I listened to [country] western music to keep my two sons out of the studio when they were very, very young. They would lay on the floor underneath my canvas. When I was painting that Saigon picture, you know, those pictures, they would lay underneath the canvas and talk to me about this and that, you know. And paint would even drip on them occasionally.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you think they thought that was their best time with Dad?

MR. SAUL: Maybe. But I decided that I had to get them out, so I turned on the western station, and that drove them out. They did not like the western music. They called it "diaper music." So I listened - I just accidentally continued to listen to western music for a number of years. Until now, it seems - the western music has gone

downhill in my opinion. Boring, no more Patsy Kline mournfulness. Now it is all cheery stuff. I can't stand it.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you think western music and the kind of populist sensibility of that music relates to your paintings or what you thought -

MR. SAUL: It could have influenced me.

MS. RICHARDS: Or is it coincidental?

MR. SAUL: It could have influenced me. But, of course, I listen to anything now.

MS. RICHARDS: But mostly classical.

MR. SAUL: Yeah. But if I could listen to Dean Martin and things like that, I would.

MS. RICHARDS: Why can't you?

MR. SAUL: There is no station that plays that.

MS. RICHARDS: But you could get CDs or -

MR. SAUL: Yeah, I could. But then you have to put them in and take them out and think about them in advance. I don't want to think about it. When I am painting, I don't like CDs, because they eventually come to an end and then you have to go over and press the button again. I want a continual thing that doesn't interrupt me. I don't want to be interrupted. And no verbiage, you know, no talk.

MS. RICHARDS: What about light?

MR. SAUL: Well, this is okay.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you always wanted to work with artificial light for consistency? Have you had studios with natural light that you wanted to have?

MR. SAUL: I have had natural light and enjoyed it. I try to get used to the light that is there. I don't boss it around really. I just try to get used to it. Like when I came here and that light bulb was in place -

MS. RICHARDS: The two double fluorescent tubes.

MR. SAUL: Yeah, I thought, well, I will get these. And first, I tried painting red.

MS. RICHARDS: Which are warm spotlights.

MR. SAUL: Yeah, yeah. At first, I tried to paint there, but it was too much glare, so then I painted there. And the reflection was just right. I know because I have seen pictures on the wall exhibited. Then when I paint it there, everything is okay. So I am just going to stay with it until life forces some change, you know, which could happen.

MS. RICHARDS: You talked about not wanting to be interrupted.

MR. SAUL: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you feel that you want your studio to be private and nobody should - even Sally - come in when you are working?

MR. SAUL: Oh, no, no, no. Up in the country, we have adjoining studios, and it is no problem. I mean, if it is somebody you know, it is okay.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, yeah.

MR. SAUL: No, I don't feel like that. No.

MS. RICHARDS: And what about people potentially coming to the studio when your painting is in process? Do you feel that you don't want anyone to see it while it is in development?

MR. SAUL: No, but I could feel that way about certain paintings I have made. My ex-wife sent me a painting I made in January, 1956, a kind of a self-portrait of myself on the train, which my mother saved out of these paintings.

MS. RICHARDS: I am sorry. Who sent that to you?

MR. SAUL: Vicky. She sent it to me, and I scorned it when it arrived. I didn't pay any attention. I thought it had been destroyed, frankly, because my mother had it in her house when she died in her place in California. And I thought we destroyed it. Vicky helped me clean the house out. You know, I thought, throw this, throw that. God, I was just merciless, you know. Out it all goes, sold the rugs, you know, that kind of thing. Needed money desperately.

Anyway, time passed, and I got this in the mail. And for a long time, I was upset by people looking at that, because it is so lousy looking, quite frankly, just lousy. But I have given up. I let people see it now. Robert Storr has seen it. [David] Nolan has seen it.

MS. RICHARDS: Why didn't you put it away if you don't want people to see it?

MR. SAUL: I am too lazy to even do that. I am too lazy to put away even things that are valuable. Just stand there. I can't be bothered to take care of anything, quite frankly, like that. I just paint a new picture is what it amounts to. I don't think it is valuable to hang onto stuff.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you like having other paintings that you have done in the studio with the current painting?

MR. SAUL: It could be helpful, but it is not always possible. Like I haven't got anything here. That is the way it is.

MS. RICHARDS: Is that because the dealer wants you to send it to them?

MR. SAUL: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: But ideally, if you could keep the last one, two, three paintings -

MR. SAUL: Well, I have had that experience in the summer, and it was very helpful. I had a big painting and four smaller paintings in the studio during the summer, because I painted them, and then they all left at once, which is very nice, very nice, indeed.

MS. RICHARDS: If you could have images of those paintings, let's say, the dealer sent you a photograph -

MR. SAUL: Yeah, I might look at them. I might look at them. But I wouldn't put them on the wall or anything. You know, I would be too lazy to do that. I just would not bother. You know, I bother with almost nothing except my marriage and my art. It is a one-two thing. That is it.

[END CD 4.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards with Peter Saul in Brooklyn, New York, on November 4, 2009, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc five.

When you're in your studio, do you - have you ever painted on more than one painting at once? Or do you always do one at a time?

MR. SAUL: One at a time.

MS. RICHARDS: Why is that?

MR. SAUL: Well, I don't know. It's because I get focused on it, and I can't think of the next one until it's done. However, it may not be completely done. I have come back a month later, put a few tiny touches on.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you feel that you need to know what the next painting's going to be before you completely finish?

MR. SAUL: No. No, no. Not at all.

MS. RICHARDS: So you tolerate a kind of a blank between?

MR. SAUL: I want them to be as different as I can make them. I definitely don't want to have this, like, all-in-a-line stuff, where it's a style, by the American definition of style, where the artist always paints triangular canvasses or something. No, no. Nothing like that.

MS. RICHARDS: And so when this painting leaves, you have no idea what the next painting is?

MR. SAUL: No. I'm planning it right now.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay. So that was my question, but I didn't articulate it well.

MR. SAUL: Yes, yes. It's mostly planned. Mostly.

MS. RICHARDS: So it's - that keeps you from encountering a complete blank when this leaves -

MR. SAUL: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: - and the - feeling of not knowing what you'll be doing.

MR. SAUL: That's right. Although I actually have had periods without painting going on. But it makes me a little nervous.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you had moments when you really couldn't think of what to do?

MR. SAUL: Yes. Now and then.

MS. RICHARDS: And how do you get out of that?

MR. SAUL: Well, what I did was a mistake. I simply started anyway and made a poor painting, which then is very hard to get back.

MS. RICHARDS: If you think a painting isn't succeeding as you're doing it, do you quit it?

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes. Then I would. But that happens rarely. What is a mistake - the mistake I make has always been in recent times - since 1983 approximately - has been the idea of the image, was just too boring or lousy to be worth all the effort. The image was not worth the effort. That's what I consider a mistake. Only maybe two canvasses has something happened technically that has gotten out of line that I couldn't get over. That would be very rare.

MS. RICHARDS: Does it - do you ever come to the point where the color isn't right and you have to redo?

MR. SAUL: Oh, I can do that. I redo it, yes, a lot. That happens sometimes, sure. I can redo anything and mix any color; do anything I want, sure.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hm. Do you discuss the next idea with Sally? Say, Sally what do you think about this?

MR. SAUL: Not too often. She's more of a togetherness person. Her idea of good art is one that joins with people, as many people as possible. She is not an apartness person. Once in a while she gives me an idea for a picture, like the O.J. Simpson in the electric chair [O.J., 1996]. That was a good one, too.

MS. RICHARDS: Going back to this idea of the preparatory drawings. Up until when you started to teach in Texas, you had an idea in your mind. And how would that idea become the painting? What is the process?

MR. SAUL: Well, I think I just drew on it with wash-off markers somewhat, you know, maybe. I don't remember exactly.

MS. RICHARDS: So you never did a small pencil sketch?

MR. SAUL: Yes, I did. I started to occasionally do that. Occasionally.

MS. RICHARDS: To work out the composition.

MR. SAUL: Somewhat. I started to. I started to in the Chappaqua times. I started to. But I don't know that I really made much out of it. I just would have the most brief knowledge, like, on this side, a big green area.

MS. RICHARDS: Because the forms in some of your paintings, the larger ones, are very complex; the overlappings, the entanglements. And one would expect that you would have planned all that very carefully.

MR. SAUL: No.

MS. RICHARDS: You're shaking your head no?

MR. SAUL: Not really.

MS. RICHARDS: So when you begin now, do you always begin with a drawing on a graph?

MR. SAUL: Yes. I always begin. And I'm very careful. Sometimes I'm not successful, in my opinion, with a

beginning sketch, and I don't go any further. I leave it alone for maybe a year, even, and then I pick it up again. Sometimes - usually what the problem is very, very obvious; too obvious for me to grasp at the moment. I've never had trouble - I mean, the difficult thing about painting, in my opinion, is the obvious things. The subtle things are easily handled.

MS. RICHARDS: So when you say obvious, what kind of problem would that be?

MR. SAUL: There was a painting in my last - you see my last show? There's this one with this guy in the pajamas, and this woman started shaking. Okay. That painting I tried to paint a few times. I mean, I tried to make a sketch of it and wasn't able to get success. And then I realized -

MS. RICHARDS: This is one called *Viva La Difference* [2008].

MR. SAUL: Yeah, yeah. Okay. That one there. The solution was to make the bed smaller. That actually never occurred to me in the three months of off-and-on thinking about it. I thought the problem had to be in the figures, in some idea of the surroundings; you know what I mean? The idea that a bed could be too big - because you don't want to spend a whole canvas on the bed. That's ridiculous [inaudible] figure. So that's an example of obvious.

MS. RICHARDS: When you're planning the images, is the problem more often how to create an image to express the idea that you want to express?

MR. SAUL: No, no.

MS. RICHARDS: Or is it - or what?

MR. SAUL: To be interesting. On a mythical level, I hope to be interesting. And the whole thing hinges on the meaning of the word "interesting." Obviously I failed to grasp what was interesting in '64. I simply went my own way, and the art world went its way. Lately, I've been more coinciding. And so I'm a little more crafty in my thinking. I realized that consistency is dead. You have to have a problem in the thing in order for it to be interesting.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you find that the subject that you decided to address ever changes as you're working on the painting, and you're solving different problems -

MR. SAUL: Well, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: - you realize that you needed to - you actually realize that it's really about something else?

MR. SAUL: Oh, I welcome that. I welcome that, if it were - if it happens. It kind of happens. I never make it through a painting without some redrawing, because the sketch is obviously a graphic thing with some lines. And the solution to a painting is probably not lines at all, but things next to each other.

MS. RICHARDS: What process do you use to paint, after you have the canvas - do you determine in advance the shape and the size of the canvas before you -

MR. SAUL: Yes, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: - once you have the idea?

MR. SAUL: Yes. I determine.

MS. RICHARDS: And so you've got this canvas here, white, gesso?

MR. SAUL: And then I cover it twice with acrylic paint, probably a medium gray. And then I -

MS. RICHARDS: What do you mean, twice?

MR. SAUL: Well, with these little squeegees, these little plastic squeegees.

MS. RICHARDS: Roll paint.

MR. SAUL: Well, straight acrylic paint.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, squeegee. Mm-hm [affirmative].

MR. SAUL: Straight acrylic paint. But I don't roller. It's those little things. I dip it and do it, you know, twice so it's a smooth surface of acrylic. And then I square it off with white chalk. Then I put it on crudely with white chalk.

And then I redraw it a couple of times, which might take -

MS. RICHARDS: With what?

MR. SAUL: White chalk, which takes a couple of days. Erasing by simply brushing off the chalk.

MS. RICHARDS: When did you discover to use white chalk?

MR. SAUL: I don't fully remember. Probably in Austin.

MS. RICHARDS: I'm sorry. Go on.

MR. SAUL: I don't fully - I don't fully remember. And then, let's see. What do I do? Then after it's correct, I go with a black acrylic line. And then I wash off the chalk, and then I begin painting, probably back to front. Like background first and starting it out like that, unless I can't paint the background because the image is so complicated I can't imagine the needs of the background. In that case, I put in, first, the image. You know, there's not a hard and fast rule. You just simply keep going.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you like to develop parts all the way to completion before other parts?

MR. SAUL: Sometimes, but often it's impractical. And usually it's not completed just because you think it is. So what can I say? In this case and in any case, yes. This painting had a major breakthrough this morning.

MS. RICHARDS: Here?

MR. SAUL: In my brain.

MS. RICHARDS: Or in your head?

MR. SAUL: Yeah. You know what that was. Well, I have to have some nurses in this painting. You can't have doctors without nurses.

MS. RICHARDS: This is a painting that's turned face to the wall. We can't see it, but it's about doctors.

MR. SAUL: Yeah. It's hasn't begun. It hasn't begun. Hadn't even - it's just blank canvas.

I knew they had to have some nurses in it, but what are the relationship possible to the doctor? I want to have different ideas in conflict, like I said. And one is improper medical practice. AB, this is the big one. Like, not good. So what else can we have to conflict with that? Ideas of nurses.

I drew a little sketch of a nurse, and it looked like she was the dog, you know, a puppy dog? And then I thought, hey, I'll make the nurses real small, and some of them can be puppy dogs. And they can nibble on the person on the operating table and stuff. Could be a lot of fun.

Okay. That's an idea. That's two ideas. You have the wrong idea of nurses - you have the wrong idea of medicine.

MS. RICHARDS: So does that mean that this - the preparatory sketch for this drawing is then going to change?

MR. SAUL: Yes. It now changes after I go leave here today. I go back and change it.

MS. RICHARDS: So there's no gray paint or white chalk on this canvas yet.

MR. SAUL: There's - well, instead of using gray paint, I used purple, because I used the scraps of all of the little cups that I hadn't done.

MS. RICHARDS: I wanted to ask you about that.

MR. SAUL: I do.

MS. RICHARDS: I see here that your method is mixing colors - and what kind of paint are you using?

MR. SAUL: A Golden acrylic. I use 90 colors of Golden acrylic. Not every one.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you used this brand for a long time?

MR. SAUL: Yes, yes. I've used it since I found out about it, because I got a deal on it. I signed up originally - and it's very good paint - and I signed up as one to get money off on the purchase. So I can write Golden and get money and pay no more than a store pays, 60 percent of the price. Otherwise, it gets very expensive.

MS. RICHARDS: So there's 90 colors. And before you start the painting, do you mix these colors, or as you're going?

MR. SAUL: I mix them one by one, and I keep track of where they are on the floor, so all of the colors for this area will be over on that part of the floor, and so on and so on.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you put anything in the paint to keep it from - acrylics dry so quickly.

MR. SAUL: Yes. I should, but I don't. I just put a larger cup over the top. And in this studio they will dry out within about two weeks, so I have to use them.

MS. RICHARDS: That makes a pretty fast painting process.

MR. SAUL: Yeah, it does. Although I can remix it. It turns out I can remix anything. I didn't realize my ability to do this. I can.

MS. RICHARDS: Is there a reason why you don't work with a table, that you put these all on the floor?

MR. SAUL: Well, if I were to use that space, it might get in the way of viewing the painting.

MS. RICHARDS: When you've had larger studios -

MR. SAUL: I still don't use it. I just for some reason have never bothered with it. Well, at the apartment. I painted a couple of pictures of the apartment, and I have a little glass table that goes up like this.

MS. RICHARDS: With shelves.

MR. SAUL: Yeah. But I draw at the apartment. Works on paper only.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hm [affirmative]. Do you - it seems that your paintings are produced relatively quickly.

MR. SAUL: One month, usually. A month of painting, usually.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hm [affirmative].

MR. SAUL: It could be dragged on, but probably one month.

MS. RICHARDS: Going back to drawing, have you always, or never, kept sketchbooks, diaries, kind of visual -

MR. SAUL: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: - records of your thoughts?

MR. SAUL: Well, I have some very useful sketchbooks that I made with our daughter, Gwendolyn. I began drawing with Gwendolyn when she was a very little kid. And you have to keep kids entertained in restaurants, so we began drawing together. And she and I have both become much more skilled at drawing, and cartoony-drawing in particular. And she's very skilled, and I'm pretty - getting better myself.

Her brain is much more flexible than mine. She can draw pictures of things that she just thinks of. You just mention it, and she can draw it. With me, it's got to be something that I'm acquainted with drawing already. I'm too old to just rapidly get into things, I'm afraid. But still, we draw together, and we have these sketchbooks. And I found them, and I'm starting to use them occasionally. I use them for ideas for the human figure, not often without changing quite a bit. But I do use them. I consult them.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you thought of archival issues during your career? Have you thought, you know, I better use this kind of paint or this canvas because -

MR. SAUL: Well, yes. I have thought - people have warned me, and I think I'm now archival - [inaudible]. But early work, not archival sometimes. I've had some horrible, embarrassing repair jobs.

MS. RICHARDS: What caused that problem? The way you applied the paint or the kind of paint?

MR. SAUL: Well, both, really. Mainly not paying enough money for the paint; using reds that were impermanent or something.

MS. RICHARDS: How have you - what has been your approach to titling the works?

MR. SAUL: I find it difficult. And hopefully, I use the obvious title.

MS. RICHARDS: And the title comes after you finish with the painting?

MR. SAUL: Yeah. No, no. And if I'm going to have words in the painting, which I do sometimes, I find that a problem, too, because often when you finish the painting, the words are no longer satisfactory. They were good when you started, but when you finish, the words seem boring, stupid, ridiculous.

MS. RICHARDS: Can you paint them out?

MR. SAUL: I have to think up new words that use the exact space as the old words, or very similar. That can be difficult. But I do so. Yeah, I do.

MS. RICHARDS: Some of the titles seem to be - add an element of humor.

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Like *Girl Trouble* [1986].

MR. SAUL: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Or Mona Lisa Throws Up - I mean, that's very factual. *Mona Lisa Throws Up Macaroni* [1992]. But do you want to add humor to the title because you think the painting needs it?

MR. SAUL: Apparently. Apparently it's just natural to me. I thought I was more gloomy than I turned out to be. I wasn't under the influence of Francis Bacon after all. I just thought I was.

Actually, people laughed at my early work. And even though the only thing I could get out of the cartoons was dim memories of Smoky Stover and misuse of the icebox or something. Even so, people thought it was funny. I guess most modern art is completely unfunny. That's the fact, you know? So it seemed to be a way to stand out. So I didn't discourage myself from humor, though I don't make any big fuss about it. If it's humorous, it's humorous. I let it be.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you think that sometimes the titles need to be descriptive to help the viewer understand what's going on?

MR. SAUL: Yeah. I do.

MS. RICHARDS: Like *Castro's Mother Destroys Miami* [1995].

MR. SAUL: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: You might not know it's Castro - well, you would. But -

MR. SAUL: You'd have to think about it a long time. Yeah, I do. I want to help the viewer as much as I can. I don't feel - I have an unfortunate modesty in some of these things which I'm trying to get rid of.

MS. RICHARDS: How does the modesty - why is the modesty unfortunate?

MR. SAUL: It makes you satisfied with less money, for one thing. I mean, if you have a price like 75, or a hundred thousand [dollars], you know, to a normal person that's a lot of money. But in the art world, that's the tiniest small change. You've got to see it as the tiniest small change. You can't see it as a lot of money. Otherwise, that's all you'll ever get. You have to be bitter and complain. It's true.

You have to be more like Richard Prince, whoever he is. I've never met him. You have to be more like that. He's my financial ideal. I don't know what he's like. I don't even recognize his work, usually. But I know that he's the highest-priced living person. So I try to sort of think about him occasionally.

MS. RICHARDS: This is a small point, but some of the titles are the number sign slash 4 or 2. And some have a Roman numeral I or II. Is that kind of arbitrary or did you -

MR. SAUL: I didn't put that there, that I know of.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay. So basically the titles try to be as straightforward as possible.

MR. SAUL: I guess so. You could say that.

MS. RICHARDS: Except with the element of humor.

MR. SAUL: Which I don't mind at all.

MS. RICHARDS: Worse than van Gogh, better than -

MR. SAUL: Oh, yeah. Yeah, that was recommended by somebody else, *Better than de Kooning* [2008]. So I said, hey, that sounds good. I'll use that.

MS. RICHARDS: You talk about your titles with people, on purpose?

MR. SAUL: Well, Alexis Rockman, the artist, recommended that. We were in a restaurant, and he said, "It's better than de Kooning" or something. Or he said, "It should be better than de Kooning." Or something. I said, hey, that's a great idea. I'll make that the title. [Laughs.] So I did.

MS. RICHARDS: We talked a little bit about - before we go on to talk about your work again, you brought up the issue of showing with Alan Frumkin Gallery, and I wanted to go to that subject -

MR. SAUL: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: - in a little more depth and ask you about your relationship with him and then we'll talk about other dealers, as well. So you started early by saying that he purchased all your work.

MR. SAUL: As much as he needed. I kept some.

MS. RICHARDS: You kept some. Who decided which would be purchased and which would be -

MR. SAUL: He did. In his yearly visit. He would show up - and of course, it was incredibly nerve-wracking. I was, like, freaked out, you know? I was, like, freaked out. I couldn't sleep the night before, touching up the paintings, making sure they look good. Oh, boy. Frightening.

So finally he shows up in a rental car at the house, and there he is. He was difficult in some ways, brutal. He might start a conversation like this - well, laughing, he might say, ha, ha, well, Peter, guess what? Not one single person even asked what your prices were this year. I mean, frankly Peter, I've never in my life had an experience like this. Just incredible. You know, you seemed to have got to a point where the art collector is defeated and doesn't even want to know anything more about you. Okay. There's a start of a conversation.

MS. RICHARDS: So that's extremely -

MR. SAUL: Brutal.

MS. RICHARDS: - brutal.

MR. SAUL: Yeah. My stomach goes down like this. I think, oh, shit, I'm dead, you know? And then he says, "But guess what? I'm buying this whole roomful." And he did. And he bought it at generous prices. It was like down - you're down and out; he knocks you out, you know, verbally. You're on the floor, finished. And then he raises you up again, shakes hands. Now we have a glass of water.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever get angry at him for that?

MR. SAUL: No. Because there was nobody else. You see, what people forget is that -

MS. RICHARDS: Well, you didn't get angry, or you felt that you were angry but it didn't matter?

MR. SAUL: Who knows? I didn't even think on that level. I just realized I needed to get that work out there. And he was an incredible supporter, because people forget. People criticize him for not being more aggressive in pushing my work and stuff. But he did push it as much as he could. And people forget that during those years for the most part, the idea that something actually unpleasant should be in someone's house was unthinkable. It was just simply unthinkable. You wouldn't have a picture of some tormented and distorted person in your house. That would not happen.

So that he showed this every two years is commendable. I mean, Leo Castelli never showed anything like that. His idea was stripes or spots, which is it, you know? Which is the most brutal: the stripes or the spots?

Frumkin would never - I mean, Frumkin understood my work very well. I was very pleased with his appreciation. But he could be and usually was incredibly tough if you were going to demand anything. You never demanded anything. He paid a fair price, like 5,000 [dollars].

MS. RICHARDS: For example, what would you imagine having wanted to demand?

MR. SAUL: Well, during the later years of the Frumkin relationship, people were starting to get big prices. And I

would have -

MS. RICHARDS: What kind of people?

MR. SAUL: Warhol, people like that.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh. Not people in Frumkin, but other -

MR. SAUL: Yeah, yeah, yeah. People in the outside world. I don't think anybody in Frumkin's gallery ever got big prices exactly. I mean, they might have got more or less. I don't know. I didn't ask. I'm not really inquisitive enough, perhaps.

But I mean, the idea of big money for contemporary art was beginning during those years. And I occasionally would ask other people what they thought. But unfortunately, the people that I knew socially - art teachers and so on - were so low-down that they felt offended that I would even question this level of success. Like, "Peter, you fool, you're art-world famous. There's a half-page ad in the *Art of America* [*Art in America*] . You're showing here and you show there, you know; this group show and that group show, and you sell anything for $5,000 each, you know? It's big money, you know? What do you want to do?"

I said, well, how about - I don't know, think of someone. Like Warhol. And they say, "Oh, that's disgusting. Those people hang out with rich people all day long. You don't want to be like that."

I said, okay, okay. [Laughs.] So that would be the way the conversation would go. And I'd quit. I'd just give up on it. Basically, I just decided to live my life and do my best.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever have those conversations with other artists showing at Frumkin?

MR. SAUL: No. But most of them were very dissatisfied; extremely dissatisfied and left to their no-good. It did not help to leave. It just appeared to be a huge step forward. It never was. And [H. C.] Westermann became infuriated because - he had a big show at the Whitney. All these people had big shows at the Whitney, for one thing, which I never did, for reasons of subject matter and whatever, you know. But other artists all did.

And they all left afterwards because he said, "Well, the show's over. Now, back to work." Just like, no big deal, you know?

MS. RICHARDS: What did you think they expected he should say?

MR. SAUL: I don't know because I never spoke to them about it. I don't know. They wanted more, more - more like [Roy] Lichtenstein would have. Ultra, ultra money. Ultra something. I don't know what. I never found this out either, so I don't know.

But yeah. And he was a difficult person to deal with. There's no question. But he liked me especially, no question. He liked me and my work. Absolutely.

MS. RICHARDS: He didn't buy outright other people's work.

MR. SAUL: No, no, no. Just me. I think he used me to torment his other artists.

MS. RICHARDS: Would you have preferred that he just take works on consignment, sell them, and give you the proper percentage?

MR. SAUL: No. Because I couldn't live then, because - that's the way I live now, and quite frankly, there's always going to be four or five months that you don't get any income from art. It can easily happen. And so I have to be - I couldn't have done that then, at that price range. It would have been impossible. I can do it now.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were selling paintings to him outright, did you ever feel that you wanted to know what he sold them for, to know that he was -

MR. SAUL: He didn't sell them. He's still got a lot of them. His personality was such that - a lot of people didn't want to deal with him.

MS. RICHARDS: But if you were selling it - let's say he bought it from you for $10,000 and you would normally get 50 percent, typically, and he sold it for 30,000 [dollars]. Would that have distressed you?

MR. SAUL: No, no, no. No, I'm not really into money, quite frankly. I just let it go.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you involved at all in deciding how your show would be promoted, what image would be on

the postcard?

MR. SAUL: I couldn't. He would decide that.

MS. RICHARDS: And it wasn't something you wanted to be involved with.

MR. SAUL: I might have wanted to, but it was immediately crushed. Like, Peter, you paint them; I do the rest. And he was kind of a close friend, in spite of his brutality. I mean, I did talk to him.

MS. RICHARDS: Did he ever walk into your studio in one of these annual visits and say positive things, first off? Or was it always the dose of negativity?

MR. SAUL: It was a dose of negativity if he thought I needed it; if I looked like I might be expecting some sort of praise or something. But I mean, quite frankly, I got used to him; he got used to me. So there wasn't a whole lot of problem in this.

MS. RICHARDS: When his gallery became Frumkin-Adams, you continued to show there.

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: But at some point -

MR. SAUL: He retired.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, Frumkin retired. At some point in the mid-'90s - '98 - you decided to leave the gallery.

MR. SAUL: Yes, I did. I kind of did because all during the '90s I would paint pictures and send them to George [Adams], who would show them. Then he would send them on to the gallery in Paris, where they were sold. And after -

MS. RICHARDS: Gallery - which gallery?

MR. SAUL: Du Centre.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh. Du Centre.

MR. SAUL: After a certain number of years of this, I thought, God, who needs George? He's a nice guy, but who needs it? He doesn't - I don't know why, but -

MS. RICHARDS: But he didn't sell them himself, you're saying. He didn't sell them in New York; he sent them to Paris?

MR. SAUL: I sent them on. I had them sent on. I said to George, send them on. Give them a few months and then on it goes.

MS. RICHARDS: Because they sold better in Paris?

MR. SAUL: Sold immediately.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell du Centre?

MR. SAUL: D-U - small, I guess - and then, capital C-E-N-T-R-E.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh. Mm-hm [affirmative].

MR. SAUL: He's a kind of a commercial guy who a lot of artists don't like. But he transformed my life as an art teacher. There's no question. Just immediately transformed. And I could paint any picture and put it in a tube, send it over, and get the money three weeks later.

MS. RICHARDS: Paris.

MR. SAUL: Yeah. And that's when I changed my attitude, because I was telling that to the students. It's just totally a transformation of the art teacher's life. We can buy any Toyota we want, anything else. Frankly, it's nice, because I got my teaching wage, and I've got this coming in and all that. So I felt pretty good.

So I told the students that I could paint this picture like that and put it in a tube and send it over there, and I get 12,000 [dollars] back in three weeks. And I thought that would amaze them. Actually, they were stupefied that I didn't go over there and get to know these people. They asked, do you ever meet any of these collectors or

anything? Nope. That's like proud, you know? I don't need to meet anybody, especially money people. Like, no thanks. And that just really struck them. They suddenly thought I was crazy, you know?

And I suddenly thought, maybe I am crazy. Maybe the only reality that art has is as a profession. Maybe my attitude, which is based more on sort of like people like [Chaim] Soutine and [Amedeo] Modigliani and people like that. I like the idea of an outsider, a romantic outsider. Bacon - although he was gay. I don't want to go into that, of course. But I mean, just as an artist he was an outsider, perhaps. I like that. And I'm sort of negative on people like [Adolph] Gottlieb and all those people and Franz Klein, the group, the professionals. Don't want to be that. Want to be a romantic outsider.

MS. RICHARDS: But Soutine and Modigliani -

MR. SAUL: Attract women, for one thing.

MS. RICHARDS: - they had groups of artists' friends. They were part of the art world.

MR. SAUL: Yeah. But they were described in the art books as singularly outside of things. I didn't know the truth. I mean, who knows any of this stuff? I didn't bother doing research on anything. So I wouldn't know anything, really. It's just imagination.

MS. RICHARDS: So you had several shows with Frumkin-Adams and with George Adams.

MR. SAUL: Yes, I did. And still he said, "Can I list you?" - even though I said, I have to go on showing with Nolan. He's doing things. He's selling things. He's getting somewhere. Things are happening. And he said, I can't work with Nolan.

I said, "Well, I have to keep going with Nolan."

MS. RICHARDS: How did you meet Nolan? How did that start?

MR. SAUL: Through the Texas Gallery, in Houston. Got Nolan interested in my work. And at a certain point when I had work at the Mary Boone Gallery in 1998 or '99, somewhere in there. Group show, group show. He suddenly became very interested, Nolan said, "I want to show your work, really and truly, from now on." Big deal. "Everything I can do for you, I'm going to do." I said, okay.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you feel - did you learn that he had been a longtime fan of your work, that he knew your work from years before?

MR. SAUL: No, not really. I mean, I didn't even think about these kind of things. Quite frankly, I haven't been as concerned with people as with my picture. I'm beginning to get concerned. I'm trying very hard to get concerned.

MS. RICHARDS: When he approached you this way, it doesn't seem like it was a difficult choice for you to leave where you had been for so many years.

MR. SAUL: Frumkin - I mean, to leave Adams - no. But it gave me a horrible feeling to actually tell him I was leaving. I hate to disappoint people and say no. Just gives me the creeps, you know? I can't stand that. Gives me a stomachache.

I want to be a friendly person. And all the negatives goes into the painting, where it can be used.

MS. RICHARDS: Now that you're with a different dealer, do you have a say in these things, like what image should be on the -

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes. They ask me. They ask me. And at first, I didn't know what to say. Completely flabbergasted.

MS. RICHARDS: Like what should be on the cover of the catalogue, if there should be -

MR. SAUL: Or anything else? Anything else. I don't know what should be hung where in the gallery or anything.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, Frumkin never consulted you on the installation?

MR. SAUL: No, no.

MS. RICHARDS: But Nolan does?

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes. And I just usually say, well, suit yourself, and I'll come in, and if I have a problem, we'll talk about it. But it's usually totally obvious. In fact, it's always totally obvious. There's nothing -

MS. RICHARDS: How the installation should be.

MR. SAUL: Yeah, it should be. They're all individual pictures. So as long as they're lit properly, there's no problem.

MS. RICHARDS: What about the new relationship with the L.A. [Los Angeles] gallery, Patrick Painter? How did that happen?

MR. SAUL: It just happened all of a sudden. And I was a little encouraged at first. I took part in a group show there.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you get into a group show there?

MR. SAUL: A young woman, Heather Harmon - Heather - oh, God, I forgot her last name suddenly - anyway, a young blond woman who was the manager and director included me in a group show. And my work looked pretty good, frankly.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you go for the opening?

MR. SAUL: Yes, we did. They put us up. We had a wonderful time. I get on well with all art dealers. I have, really.

MS. RICHARDS: And so when you were in that group show, then what?

MR. SAUL: He phoned up while the opening was going on and said, "I want you to be part of my gallery" - and all that. I said, well, okay. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: But how does that relate -

MR. SAUL: Let's think about it.

MS. RICHARDS: How does that work with David Nolan?

MR. SAUL: They all have to get used to each other. I just don't worry about it very much. You know, I don't worry about these things.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you decide where to send your paintings, then?

MR. SAUL: I'm sending that to Nolan because he hasn't had one for a while. He had this show and now - had this Paris show just going on - just ending about now and haven't heard anything. Could be a disaster, could be good or medium. Who knows? Just - I'm reluctant to get bad news. I don't phone him up or anything.

On the other hand, he hasn't contacted me. So that's not good. So I decided to forget about it, go on with the next painting.

MS. RICHARDS: So you said you're going to send this one to Nolan. How do you decide which one to send to Painter in Los Angeles?

MR. SAUL: I'm not sending him anything at this point. I don't have anything.

MS. RICHARDS: So Nolan is your primary.

MR. SAUL: Yes. He's very primary.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you go to him for advice about what you should send to somewhere else? Or would he always say, well, no, I want it?

MR. SAUL: He would somehow arrange that everything would be under his control. But I am going to reuse a couple of paintings that he hasn't sold in the next show in Germany. That's a big help. Big help.

So I don't know what to say about it. But anyway.

[Audio Break.]

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MR. SAUL: *Zap Comix*.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MR. SAUL: Get to that next time. Go back. You don't mind going back.

MS. RICHARDS: No, no, no. Go ahead.

MR. SAUL: Is it on?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MR. SAUL: Okay. Well, shortly after I arrived in California to live there - not too long after, within a year or so - my next-door neighbor turned out to be a professor at UC Berkeley. The sculpture professor. This is completely accidental.

MS. RICHARDS: What was his name?

MR. SAUL: Dick O'Hanlon. O-H-A-N-L-O-N, I guess. O'Hanlon. He was the neighbor - my neighbor in Mill Valley; an elderly gent, about 65. Not very active in sculpture, but a teacher at UC Berkeley. And he said, "Pete, I want you to come over and meet" -

MS. RICHARDS: Did everyone call you Pete?

MR. SAUL: No.

MS. RICHARDS: Just a few people. You prefer Peter.

MR. SAUL: I don't even care. Anyway -

MS. RICHARDS: Okay. Go on. Sorry. Pete.

MR. SAUL: Okay. So off we go to Berkeley. And it was to meet his class. And it was quite a disaster. The students didn't want to meet me. I didn't understand why. I don't know what was going on. I think it had to do with dislike of the Pop Art movement compared to newer Minimalism. You know, students are very careful about these things.

Anyway, I did meet one student there. He said that he wanted to come visit me, named Don Donahue. And so over he came to meet me. I guess he came by bus to Mill Valley. I picked him up or something. Something like that. He had no car, apparently. So he said that - he came into the house - "and now the reason I want to see you is because I'm going to put out a comic book, and I'm going to print 50,000 and sell them for twenty-five cents each." Or maybe it was the other way around. "I'm going to print 25,000, sell them for fifty cents each. And I got three people to do it."

One is a S. Clay Wilson, who knows your work. He apparently rescued a painting of mine when he was a model or student at the University of Nebraska. Frumkin sent a picture of mine to the University of Nebraska to be part of a group show. And they got upset by its sexual content, I guess. This is what I heard. I forget most of this, but that's what I heard. And so he caused it to be brought up from the basement and put up with the other paintings - S. Clay Wilson. Wow. So he's going to be one.

And Robert Crumb, who's already done undergrounders in Cleveland, or some city in the east. And he knows how to do it, what you got to do, you know. So I'm going to have him come and see you and give you some tips on how to do it. And you're going to be the third. And I said, okay, I'll do it. Flattered, you know? And Crumb did come over and gave me very, very good advice, which I still remember - which was to use a lot of ink, a great deal. Use so much ink that you almost got the thing too much, because the professional printers who print things cheat on the ink. To save a tiny, tiny portion of a penny, they'll do less. So you have to do more. And I thanked him for this. He was a fairly young guy. Enormous wife, who had to leave the car to get out of the driveway.

But anyway. So Don Donahue was the publisher, and that day he came over to the house. I didn't hardly believe him, frankly. But he said, "Yes, my mother has bought me a $25,000 printing press, and I'm learning how to use it." I couldn't believe this. So I drove him back to his home in San Francisco -

MS. RICHARDS: I think you - that was in '65?

MR. SAUL: Yeah, yeah. This - maybe later, '67 or something. Anyway, I don't remember. I'm sorry I got the years mixed on this. I don't know what the hell, but it was then, shortly before, like six months before *Zap*. And I drove him to his house, and it was dark by the time we got there. But it was in the most expensive part of San Francisco, Seacliff, these great mansions that look out on the water. I thought, good God, who is this guy?

And then he took me up to his bedroom and said, "Now, shh, don't make any noise because my mother will wake up. But look." And he sort of pointed into the bedroom - in his bedroom. And here was this great machine, using

up a lot of it, you know? Like 10 feet by 15 feet or something. Some great thing with wheels and all that, that he somehow assembled in his bedroom. Crazy, I know. It hardly made sense. So I didn't really take him seriously. I said, okay, okay, I'll do it. You know?

Promptly forgot all about it. And after three months, he said, "Are you going to do it?" And I said, "I'll get to it someday." But I never did, you know? I lost interest. If I thought that, actually, he was indeed going to print 25,000 copies or something like that, I might have done so. But the way I pictured it, college students, he'll be lucky to sell 250. Who gives a damn, you know? I'm interested in painting, anyway. I couldn't be bothered.

It was the same with movies. I mean, I was invited to take part in that, and I kind of made a half-hearted attempt.

MS. RICHARDS: When was that?

MR. SAUL: Oh, Robert Nelson and Wiley made movies. And I did act in a few. But the - so, it's a nice way to spend an afternoon. But I'm not really interested, you know? And the movies were boring to look at. It's the problem.

So anyway, *Zap* was not boring to look at. Fortunately it worked out great. But they got Rory Hays to do it because I didn't do it, eventually. And I just didn't care.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you keep in touch with Donahue?

MR. SAUL: I kept in touch with Wilson. No. Donahue they fired after a short time. He never learned how to use the printing press. They got a professional of some kind. Wilson I still know. I keep in touch. Crumb I see occasionally in art shows. But he's not particularly friendly, Crumb, I don't think. But Wilson is. And I know the others, like Art Spiegelman and people like that, yeah. And I met last night or so, one very important person that I follow - Robert Williams, who's on at the [Tony] Shafrazi Gallery [New York City] now. Have you seen that show?

MS. RICHARDS: Not yet.

MR. SAUL: Well, you can say this or that about it.

MS. RICHARDS: Which artist are you talking about?

MR. SAUL: Robert Williams. At Shafrazi. I met him a couple of times at the Shafrazi Gallery. But I follow his work. He puts out a magazine called *Juxtapose*, which was important to me when I lived in Texas. It has all those people in it who paint who are like - like Todd Shore, you know? And I never saw these people in the real until I went out to Laguna Beach and there was a show on at a museum there. I was able to see the real work itself.

But it's not easy, because people won't view it with you, because a lot of people feel badly about these people, because of commercialism, you know, and one thing and another. I have to say, please wait, you know; I'll be out in 15 minutes. Give me 15 minutes, you know? Sally won't look at it either. Nobody I know. Museum people don't want to see it. I don't know why. Commercial art sometimes is better than fine art, in my opinion. I enjoyed seeing it.

And I saw Williams's work at the Oakland Museum [of California], and I was kind of impressed. He's a real - paints in a illustrational style. And whatever you think, one way or another, he has a connection to this culture which is impressive, no matter what you think of the way it's painted, the art style, all that kind of stuff.

And so that's the whole story there, you know? I guess.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you - speaking of reaching a wide public, did you ever do prints, lithographs, or any -

MR. SAUL: Yeah, I tried, but I never reached any particular public.

MS. RICHARDS: But did you feel that you made prints that you thought were successful?

MR. SAUL: Nearly. Not totally.

MS. RICHARDS: So you haven't -

MR. SAUL: To be a good printmaker you need to be living where the printmaker lives. Because otherwise it's all so high-pressure. You have only a moment that you're there, and it's not enough time to go back to anything - that's what I found.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you ever, in working with your dealers, made any requests or demands or restrictions on

who should buy your work?

MR. SAUL: No.

MS. RICHARDS: And have you ever wanted to restrict or limit the context in which you were shown? So for example, someone would come to you, or you'd hear about a thematic exhibition, and you'd feel, you know, my work doesn't - I don't want my work to be seen in that.

MR. SAUL: No. Not at all. Not at all. Quite the opposite. Only I think this is a mistake, and I wish that I had, and I will in the future, have some interest in the context. Because that's part of the secret of fine art success. I mean, why does Jeff Koons cost 10 million [dollars]? It's because of that. His context is very cleverly arranged; partly by him. I've met him, you know? I know him a little tiny bit.

MS. RICHARDS: So you're no longer a communist?

MR. SAUL: Yes, I am. I maintain that. I'm just not sincere.

MS. RICHARDS: You talked a lot about wanting to -

MR. SAUL: I'm just not sincere.

MS. RICHARDS: I see.

MR. SAUL: I'm not one thing at all. I don't bother with that.

The reason communism failed is because there's no humor in it, no sense of humor. Too much lecturing about how lucky you were to have health care. You're so lucky you've got health care. You've got an apartment. You've got a little car. You're so lucky. That kind of thing would drive anybody nuts, you know? They needed a Johnny Carson. There was no Johnny Carson.

MS. RICHARDS: So going back chronologically, what decided your leaving Texas in 2000?

MR. SAUL: Just plain retirement from age. I was 66.

MS. RICHARDS: Was that a requirement or an opportunity?

MR. SAUL: No. It wasn't a requirement. It was just Social Security kicked in. Not that that helps much, you know; get back most of it, you know? But I don't know. It just seemed like time to retire. I wasn't enjoying teaching as much as I had. The graduate students disdained studying with me starting about 1987. The graduate students, I never met anymore hardly, just very rarely. And so I was stuck with the ordinary students, and they were so whiny, mostly.

I wasn't enjoying the students. The teachers remained very good friends of mine, right now. But the students I don't miss. And this idea from some magazine somewhere that I'm popular with students, that's an amazing idea to me, because I was not popular with the students that I actually had. And I received a ton of complaints, as you can imagine. A ton of them.

MS. RICHARDS: So wait. Were you eager to think about leaving Texas, as well?

MR. SAUL: Sort of. The idea was Sally had become unhappy because of all the hot weather. We thought we'd go up in the east where she grew up. And we would live up the Hudson River, a similar type of area.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hm [affirmative].

MR. SAUL: So we found an old house, built in 1855.

MS. RICHARDS: What town was that?

MR. SAUL: Germantown [NY].

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hm [affirmative].

MR. SAUL: And we remodeled it over a period of about nine months; you know, hired carpenters and whatever. We lived in the studio. It was kind of nice. Refresh the artist's life, you know? We've got this big room, and we're in there with our bed and our paintings and whatever; our kiln, ceramics, all this stuff. It was a nice life. And after the house was finished -

MS. RICHARDS: So you moved there in 2000, 2001?

MR. SAUL: Yeah, I guess so. First we moved to New York City and spent a year in Sarah Canright's loft. So we lived there.

MS. RICHARDS: Where was that?

MR. SAUL: Mulberry Street. So we had a real artist loft, and we lived and worked there for about a year, nearly.

MS. RICHARDS: Stored all your stuff from Texas?

MR. SAUL: I don't know. We had it all - we had stuff sent. It wasn't that much. I had it sent in storage temporarily, I guess.

MS. RICHARDS: All your furniture?

MR. SAUL: Well, yeah. I guess so. And then went up to the country after we did that. We thought we couldn't afford living in the city. We're very conservative financially, both of us. We're into Treasury bonds, cash, things like that. Very careful. Don't buy anything we don't need.

MS. RICHARDS: So was it while you were in New York you located the house in Germantown, while you were in Manhattan?

MR. SAUL: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: So you felt that you wanted to be that far up?

MR. SAUL: Well, we thought we'd come in, and we do. We did come in a lot, and we'd stay overnight at hotels.

MS. RICHARDS: But you wanted to live in the country?

MR. SAUL: Yeah. But I - Gwendolyn and myself thought that Sally would enjoy this more than she actually did.

MS. RICHARDS: The country.

MR. SAUL: Yeah. Because it's a little bit of a isolation, and Sally's more of a person who enjoys people. And we have some very good friends in Germantown. But Sally became way too involved in local politics. It was depressing her.

MS. RICHARDS: Are there artist friends up there?

MR. SAUL: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Who are they?

MR. SAUL: Well, the Mangolds, for instance. Richard Artschwager, the Mangolds - Sylvia Plimack-Mangold and Robert Mangold. Tom Nozkowski and Joyce Robins. Other people, too. Holy moly. There's one named - Sally Drummond, who lives down the road from us. Sally - she's in her 80s. A lot of the people we know there, our friends are even older than I am. That's because the politics - the politics of the town. We're part of the liberal far-left group, I guess.

But it doesn't bother me. It bothers Sally more than me. But we know artists up there. Let's see. Catherine Murphy is a good friend. Gee, I suddenly blanked out on all this. Is that enough?

MS. RICHARDS: So you went upstate. And you said - you talked about Ithaca. But Germantown isn't - are you talking about two different places?

MR. SAUL: Yes, two different. Germantown's nothing. It's just that we might drive up to Ithaca once every two or three years for the pleasure of driving there.

MS. RICHARDS: I see.

MR. SAUL: Sally enjoyed the city of Ithaca.

MS. RICHARDS: And then in 2007, I think -

MR. SAUL: Came here.

MS. RICHARDS: - you came back here. And what made you decide?

MR. SAUL: Oh, to do that?

MS. RICHARDS: To do that.

MR. SAUL: Well, actually there is a specific reason, which is that we were planning this retrospective at the Orange County Museum of Art [Newport Beach, CA]. And I received a phone call from the organizer, Dan Cameron, that said, well, it looks very good. The Whitney's considering your show. So five months later, I got another phone call from him. They said, "Oh, I'm sorry, the Whitney's not considering your show." I thought, hey, maybe I could affect my fate if we lived in New York City.

So actually, we found our apartment in one day. We started looking - a real estate person took us around. This is a fee deal, but anyway, what the hell? We rent only. No money wrapped up in the city.

MS. RICHARDS: But you own the house in Germantown?

MR. SAUL: Yeah, yeah. So he took us on little tour, you know? And I said yes to all six of the apartments we were shown. And Sally said yes to the last one. So that's where we are. Bam, this is it.

MS. RICHARDS: What made it right for you?

MR. SAUL: It was actually better.

[END CD 5.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Peter Saul in Brooklyn, New York, on November 4, 2009, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc six.

So you're saying - I was asking what made this apartment great for you.

MR. SAUL: Oh, that was the thing. What was it? Nothing - we could see - we simply liked the building; it looked good. It was in the right area; it was close to the museums.

MS. RICHARDS: I was going to say, what is the right area?

MR. SAUL: Upper East Side near the museums and the park. We like to walk in the park. Sally jogs around them.

MS. RICHARDS: Central Park?

MR. SAUL: Yeah. Reservoir sometimes.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you jog?

MR. SAUL: No, but I walk around. I do a little exercise.

MS. RICHARDS: What museums do you most enjoy going to?

MR. SAUL: Well, we go to the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art]; we belong to that. And we can walk down to the opening of the Whitney annual or biannual [biennial], whatever it is. And other - the [Solomon R.] Guggenheim [Museum] is two blocks, can just walk right to it if you ever were interested.

MS. RICHARDS: You talked at one point a while ago about really being more in love with 19th-century painting -

MR. SAUL: Yeah. Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: - than with 20th century. Is that still the case?

MR. SAUL: It gives me more, yes. It gives me the style plus the subject. Whereas the 20th-century painting gives you the style and that's it. You have to be really fascinated with who the artist might be and what he might be like to get anything out of truly modern art. I think that [Mary] Cassatt and [Henri] Matisse are the last artists that you could be interested in them just from the paintings.

I think nowadays you have to really be interested in the artist to enjoy the paintings. You have to have some secret fascination, like, so that's what rich people buy. You have to say to yourself something like that. So that's what people are interested in on the highest level.

MS. RICHARDS: You mentioned being criticized - or your students wondering why you didn't want to meet the people who bought your work.

MR. SAUL: Yeah. Well, Texas is very commercial.

MS. RICHARDS: Has that changed since you lived in New York? Do you want to know who David Nolan sold the painting to and meet these people, or is that not -

MR. SAUL: I have done so, but I never force it. I don't want to make anybody nervous. I have done so, yes. I find that I'm just as good at this kind of thing as anybody else.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you find that subjects keep recycling, coming back in your work?

MR. SAUL: They started to.

MS. RICHARDS: Is it something you look for?

MR. SAUL: Yeah. I go over the past for a few things I can do better. There's one coming up, *Suicide by Champagne Bottle*. The guy has a big old champagne bottle between his legs, puts his chin over the thing and, pooh, cork takes his brain out. That's a good one. I'll do that again, big scale.

MS. RICHARDS: You did - we talked briefly about it - a number of paintings that are large heads that fill most of the -

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: And there's one that's called *Panic Attack in the Lumber Yard.*

MR. SAUL: Yes. Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Where did that come from?

MR. SAUL: I just made it up, and then I made up the title. It's just a made up - it's just -

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever think that - did something happen to you that triggered that idea?

MR. SAUL: Ah. Well, no. Yes, I did - I have had panic attacks, when I was much younger. This occurred - it occurs to a lot of artists, it turns out; it's called agoraphobia, and it's fear of the marketplace. You know about this kind of thing? Okay.

Well, yes. I went to a doctor about it and was cured and everything, but the memory stays with me. But I thought it was a good title but -

MS. RICHARDS: Was there something particular experienced in a lumber yard?

MR. SAUL: No. It was an experience on the Golden Gate Bridge. I hyperventilated while driving across the Golden Gate Bridge with a new dining table in the back of the station wagon. This is when I was first married. And it was a lot of feelings of confinement and being kept away from things. And I pulled over in a lane that was out of service. So I was saved, you know, from a collision or something.

So I felt very frightened. I was very easily frightened by these possibilities - flying in airplanes. I mean, I should have realized that having missed the mid-air collision, I'd had my scrape with death, and now I'm not afraid of flying at all. I changed immediately in 1989 when an art dealer told me that if you don't fly, you can't have a good art career. And I thought, hey, I'm flying. And that was it. I've flown ever since. It doesn't bother me. I don't mind rough weather.

MS. RICHARDS: Going back to the previous question about coming back to subjects, you've revisited Beckmann's paintings a few times.

MR. SAUL: Yes, but I don't think I'll revisit him again. I'll leave him alone.

MS. RICHARDS: And de Kooning, of course, many times.

MR. SAUL: Yeah. I'm going to leave him alone, too. I could revisit - *Suicide by Champagne Bottle* is one I'm going to revisit, and I don't know offhand. Oh, one is *Sardanapalus* [2005].

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MR. SAUL: I'm going to revisit that with cute animals. There's a painting I made called *Donald Duke Sardanapalus*, which I really liked, and I haven't seen since it left my studio in Austin, Texas. And I think I'll make a new one.

MS. RICHARDS: You did a painting that - I'm trying to come up with the name of it - that was artist - I think it's right - *New York Painter*.

MR. SAUL: That one -

MS. RICHARDS: *New York Painter*, 1987.

MR. SAUL: Yeah. I'm going to redo that.

MS. RICHARDS: And of course, the T-shirt on the painting saying Y-A-I-L.

MR. SAUL: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: How did that painting subject come to your mind and -

MR. SAUL: Well, not because I don't like Yale, because Yale has been extremely kind to me. They've invited me as a guest so many times I can't remember, actually, and I get on well with the people there I've met. I had one bad experience with the sculpture students, but so what? That's nothing.

MS. RICHARDS: So what was the idea then to -

MR. SAUL: Just bang up.

MS. RICHARDS: - it's kind of a parody of all the painters who graduated from Yale?

MR. SAUL: Yes. Just a parody of modern art in general. I don't know whether I have any.

MS. RICHARDS: And the shaped canvas?

MR. SAUL: Yes. This big glob of paint going on it.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

MR. SAUL: Look at this phallic pipe. How about that?

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, yes.

MR. SAUL: If that's not a gay pipe, what is? [Laughs.] Let's see what else we've got there? Oh, I don't know. You know, I just don't know. I enjoyed painting it in a funny way, and I made it up and that's it. I'll make up a new one sometime after enough time has passed.

MS. RICHARDS: This painting called *Legal Abortion* [1990], now, of course, this is a -

MR. SAUL: Oh.

MS. RICHARDS: - serious subject, and you have -

MR. SAUL: Yes. Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: - various texts. How does this painting approach this subject? What -

MR. SAUL: God.

MS. RICHARDS: And actually, this looks like a drawing.

MR. SAUL: It is a drawing on paper. I don't know, but it's pretty questionable.

MS. RICHARDS: You have this brain.

MR. SAUL: Oh, I think at this time I was beginning to get - [laughs] - criticized by women, and got some boos and hisses when I showed slides somewhere this happened. And I decided to increase it - increase the problem with women. Why not?

I mean, I have to admit that I don't feel the least bit that I should necessarily respect any group of people for any reason whatsoever. So there. I have taken - I have had experience with not-legal abortion, you know?

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MR. SAUL: I've had - I mean, I've done it. I know how it's done. I can do it. I shouldn't put that on the thing.

MS. RICHARDS: There's a - speaking of the -

MR. SAUL: That's not right.

MS. RICHARDS: - response of women -

MR. SAUL: Yikes. Oh, well, anyway -

MS. RICHARDS: - you have this called - your 1997-1998 one - two drawings -

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes. Yeah. Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: - one, *Your Sexist Joke*, and one, *Artistic Abuse is Not a Joke* [1998].

MR. SAUL: Yes. Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Are these kind of companion works or -

MR. SAUL: Two subjects. Two subjects.

MS. RICHARDS: And it looked to me as if this might have been in response to objections from women.

MR. SAUL: Probably. Probably. Just one picture more. Yeah. [Inaudible] - objection too.

MS. RICHARDS: "Your sexist joke makes me puke."

MR. SAUL: I'm not against either one in the picture. Let it happen. Let it happen. I enjoy that. And if either one were to cause response of any kind, I'd be interested. I wouldn't mind. I wouldn't fuss. I don't mind other people's opinions either. And I don't believe that a lot of stuff that is banned should be banned, starting with drugs and continuing with prejudicial statements and writings and movies and whatnot. Let it be. God, just really nonsense sort of -

MS. RICHARDS: Would you call yourself a libertarian?

MR. SAUL: I guess I'm not very sensorius. Pause for a moment?

MS. RICHARDS: Sure.

[Audio Break.]

I wanted to ask you about critical response to your work. We've touched on it -

MR. SAUL: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: - before.

MR. SAUL: Thank goodness for Robert Storr.

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs] Yes. He's included you in a number of exhibitions -

MR. SAUL: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: - and interviewed you. How does negative press affect you, or positive press?

MR. SAUL: Well, a lot of it I can't read even if I try because it's too dense. It uses a language that I consider preposterous, so I cannot - I mean, I have to use straight language. I can't use the type of language that is used in the *Artforum*. Can't be bothered. Ridiculous.

MS. RICHARDS: But you did write a piece in a recent *Artforum*.

MR. SAUL: Yes, I did, but I don't think it used any language.

MS. RICHARDS: No. And the piece that came before it was written by an artist, I believe, Hamza Walker.

MR. SAUL: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So the -

MR. SAUL: Well, I'm very pleased. Hey, my current attitude is I'm very, very happy with it and I'm very eager for

more. I mean, I've been - changed my mind about this kind of thing.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you found that press that you've received from writers outside the U.S. - in Europe or elsewhere - has taken a different approach than American writers, has been more -

MR. SAUL: It's been pretty favorable.

MS. RICHARDS: - interesting to you?

MR. SAUL: It's been pretty favorable.

MS. RICHARDS: Do writers who are not American approach your work differently, you think?

MR. SAUL: Probably they see it more as a criticism of America, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you think that's correct?

MR. SAUL: Again, I shouldn't - I should have looked into it more deeply. I simply haven't concerned myself - it's like the question, it's like, is your car wearing out? It's gone 120,000 miles; is it wearing out? I don't know. I haven't thought about it deeply.

MS. RICHARDS: When someone's written something that you thought - that you read and you thought was wrong, did you feel like - did you write back?

MR. SAUL: Ah, yes. In one case we had something happen about this. It was the magazine *BOMB*. I was interviewed for *BOMB*.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hm [affirmative].

MR. SAUL: Well, he sent us back the results of the interview -

MS. RICHARDS: When you say "we," who do you mean? You said, "He sent us."

MR. SAUL: Oh, Sally and I. I mean, he sent me. I'm just -

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. SAUL: And he said, "Here it is." If you don't like something, tell us right away because we're going to print it on Monday, or something like that. So I read this thing, and I really didn't like it. I felt it made me seem like a lousy person. Somehow I didn't like it. It was - I can't tell you why exactly.

But I suddenly woke up Sally in the middle of the night and said, "I can't handle this. We have to rewrite it." So we just got out of bed and went to the computer and - I mean, I rewrote it; took about four hours. And then we typed it in, and she sent it off. And I said, "If you print that thing you've written, I'm going to hire a lawyer." I was just really mad about it. Just terrible. So that changed everything.

And actually, they printed my version, yes. And it was a good one. It was a good one. I wrote it - I rewrote the whole thing. And then I discovered later that a lot of artists do this.

MS. RICHARDS: Rewrites an interview or rewrites -

MR. SAUL: Rewrites it completely, you know, practically.

MS. RICHARDS: So Perry Rubinstein interviewed you -

MR. SAUL: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: - and he had sent you what he thought were your words.

MR. SAUL: They were, maybe.

MS. RICHARDS: But the way he edited it -

MR. SAUL: I hated it. Deeply hated it. I wasn't being suspicious enough. I was like with you. I don't bother to talk like Jasper Johns, you know what I mean? One word every 40 seconds that you've carefully considered. I'd rather babble like an idiot. And he took advantage of my babble.

So I didn't like it, and I definitely rewrote it. We rewrote it very carefully, very immediately, and I felt great

satisfaction. I thought the article was good, had a lot of punch to it. I liked the way it presented me. So it had a happy ending.

But I have occasionally - that being the first time, and I'm ready for the next time.

MS. RICHARDS: Your most recent show at Nolan last year included a catalogue in which there was an interview of Peter Saul by Peter Saul.

MR. SAUL: That's true.

MS. RICHARDS: Did that come at all from that experience? Or maybe had you -

MR. SAUL: Yeah, it did a little bit.

MS. RICHARDS: Had you done such an interview before?

MR. SAUL: No. I just decided - it should have been more hard-hitting. I was a little too relaxed. And I'm getting ready for more intellectual stuff. I need more intellectual comment. I have intellectual ideas, so why shouldn't I put them out there?

MS. RICHARDS: But you felt that that interview was what you wanted, and it was successful?

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes, as far as - the one in the Nolan catalogue.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. SAUL: It was okay. It was - I could have done better.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you think you'd like - will you do it again?

MR. SAUL: Yeah. I'll do it better next time. I think that in modern art the verbal content is more important than the visual. It's something you know about modern art. You know the names and the theories of the artists. You imagine their lives, their successes and lack of. And you - it's a verbal thing. Hardly anybody spends time looking at art objects unless they're big sculptures that are really worth looking at, like a handmade human skull 20 feet high, you know, that vibrates and talks to you and says things like, "I'm dead." You know what I mean?

MS. RICHARDS: You talked about -

MR. SAUL: Something powerful.

MS. RICHARDS: - wanting your paintings to speak for themselves -

MR. SAUL: They don't.

MS. RICHARDS: - but really enjoying talking about them.

MR. SAUL: Yeah, well, the paintings - I would like them to speak for themselves, but they don't. It's a hope. But people don't look at visual pictures like that anymore.

MS. RICHARDS: Is that something that you've noticed has changed in the art world since you've been -

MR. SAUL: Well -

MS. RICHARDS: - a painter?

MR. SAUL: - at first - well, since I've been a painter, first they looked at the technique rather carefully; they'd pick out brush strokes and things. But gradually they stopped looking entirely at painting and talked about it in terms of the importance of the artist and how much money it was worth and stuff like that.

It's very difficult for a painting to be looked at. I think it can be done. Quite frankly, I haven't given up on painting. I think it has to have a good story, and I think that the story was banished from painting too quickly at the end of the 19th century. Stories have gotten pretty dead, and so they were banished rather quickly without anybody regretting it. Nobody said, oh, too bad about the stories. No, they just said goodbye happily.

And then they said hello to technique, and that was okay for a long time. But nothing lasts forever. And technique of painting was succeeded by appreciation of sculpture for the first time, in my opinion, thanks to Jeff Koons and a few people who had the foresight to realize that the modern factory system is better than this sculptor. I mean, if you want to have something astonishing to look at, you're better off telephoning the factory.

And this is a very powerful change of idea, that painting is really up a creek unless there's some story that is interesting. And it all hinges on the word "interesting" because, obviously, I've hoped to be interesting before, and I wasn't. And other people have hoped to be interesting, and they weren't. So what is interesting is completely accidental and still depends a great deal, I think, on the idea of the artist. Since I've become old, I've become much more interesting to most people.

MS. RICHARDS: What do you - what most drives you to continue to paint?

MR. SAUL: Oh, to get a good story and to be astonishing as I hope to be. I hope the story will be interesting. The technique and the story together, of course; you can't have just one.

MS. RICHARDS: Are you - do you continue to follow your impulses?

MR. SAUL: Sure. Otherwise you lose all authenticity. You're not authentic if you don't follow your impulses. And then nobody trusts you at all, and you just might as well retire or go into commercial art in the true sense of the word. I mean, there's always some chance of commercial art.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you - it's said that there are a number of painters working today that have been influenced by you. And -

MR. SAUL: I never think about that. It could be, but it embarrasses me, because it puts me in a position of, like, an authority, an older person, and that's not the rebellious youth that I'm pretending to be at age 75 and will continue to pretend to be until I drop dead. There's going to be no gloating on having had an effect on somebody.

In my opinion, I'm waiting to be noticed. I may have been noticed by some tiny fraction of people in the art world, but that doesn't interest me. I'm interested in the position of trying to be noticed. I like it. It suits me. I like to be rebellious, and I'm not waiting for some good reason to be rebellious. And I like to be - pretend to be youthful. It fights off death. It's the purpose you know, that's it.

MS. RICHARDS: What young artists - or younger artists - are doing painting that you think is interesting?

MR. SAUL: Well, there's a number but - I was deeply embarrassed by this a few years ago. Someone asked to name some painters that I liked that are alive, and I couldn't think of a single name. So I began to work out some and kept it in my pocket; I no longer have the piece of paper.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay, do you think - so obviously you talked a lot about how your relationship to the art world has - and how you feel about the art world - has changed.

MR. SAUL: Yes. I'm attempting to make some peace, to get somewhere. A lot of this has to do with the course that I took - Sally and I took - at Bard College [Annandale-on-Hudson, NY] about the life of [Peter Paul] Rubens. And I suddenly realized during these three lectures, each one about two hours. A very nice woman from England.

MS. RICHARDS: How long ago was this?

MR. SAUL: About a year ago or something, two years, three. Something very recently, I think. I don't keep track of time very well.

That you might as well go for some kind of professional recognition - accomplishment or recognition. Otherwise, the work will be literally thrown away. If no money value is achieved, it's thrown away, and that's all there is to it. So you have to watch out for your money value. It's not an option.

MS. RICHARDS: You talked about a very low period in the '70s when no one came to your opening -

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: - and other instances of the response of the art world. How do you define success right now?

MR. SAUL: I feel I am successful. I feel very relaxed. I'm in a good mood towards art. Ideas come to me when I need them. When the canvas is bare, an idea comes into my head. And let's see. What else?

MS. RICHARDS: That seems like the most important -

MR. SAUL: Yes. No, I'm enjoying life. We might - if we got enough prosperity, we'd move to another apartment higher up. We're missing light. We're on the fourth floor. So that's a thought.

MS. RICHARDS: That's easy.

MR. SAUL: Well, it's a big bother. You have to look at other apartments. You have to select one.

MS. RICHARDS: You did it in one day last time.

MR. SAUL: Yeah, but I was in a fury. I'm not in a fury now. And Sally and I both feel like this. Also, we worry more as time goes on. You worry about economics, you know. I mean, what does the future have in store? I thought I would be immune to a dip in sales during this recent time, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: Why did you think that?

MR. SAUL: Because I had such good reviews and just positive, wham, wham. Not at all. My sales are just down like everybody else's. And you have to take off 20 percent and all that stuff. Gee whiz.

MS. RICHARDS: What would you say is a - do you have a dream project?

MR. SAUL: No. I'm doing it.

MS. RICHARDS: It's just one painting following the next.

MR. SAUL: I'm doing it right now. Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah. Yeah. This painting that we see in front of us, what - do you know what the title is going to be?

MR. SAUL: Yes. *My Sweet Raccoon*. The idea is to have a relationship there with a - the idea of the - idea artistically is to have a conflict between a cute animal and a disturbingly distorted cartoony person.

MS. RICHARDS: And the animal, the raccoon, has a -

MR. SAUL: Wedding ring.

MS. RICHARDS: - diamond - [laughs] - wedding ring.

MR. SAUL: Kind of. I was going to call it *Raccoon Wedding*. What do you think is best?

MS. RICHARDS: Well, this is a - the person who's disturbed with the tongue out -

MR. SAUL: Yeah. He's grooming the raccoon.

MS. RICHARDS: But there's a woman there.

MR. SAUL: Yes. It's the woman, sort of, too. He's like an escapee from a sex-change operation. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Now, at one point you talked about being involved with depicting disturbed people or being interested in disturbed people.

MR. SAUL: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Obviously that continues.

MR. SAUL: Yes. Oh, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: What -

MR. SAUL: I think it's interesting. My mother spent her whole life - possibly wasted it - reading mystery stories.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MR. SAUL: And I think maybe genetically I've inherited something about this.

MS. RICHARDS: And you said you read those also.

MR. SAUL: When I'm by myself, I turn on the True Crime channel -

MS. RICHARDS: Is there a True Crime channel?

MR. SAUL: - or I read Oxygen - I look at Oxygen. There's a program called *Snapped*, which is of - exclusively

devoted to women who have killed men. And I read - I look at this carefully. I've quit looking now because I got satisfied, but it took quite a bit of time for me to be satisfied, like five hours.

MS. RICHARDS: So you continue to really be disturbed -

MR. SAUL: I like it.

MS. RICHARDS: - I mean, intrigued by disturbed people. Now, of course -

MR. SAUL: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: - disturbed people do unexpected, unpredictable things.

MR. SAUL: Yeah. That's good.

MS. RICHARDS: Is that -

MR. SAUL: That's good. Yeah.

Usually I - according to the program, most women who commit murder are trying to avoid some colossal embarrassment, like husband called up to serve in Iraq and while he's gone she takes up with 19-year-old African-American male with hair that sticks out like this, you know. And then, of course, he comes back eventually, and now what? You have to avoid the embarrassment. So she has her lover shoot her husband and then shoot her in the shoulder. But then she confesses, and everybody gets life in prison. You know what I mean.

MS. RICHARDS: Did everybody meet their - get their just rewards in the end of the -

MR. SAUL: Well, the thing is, in a way these people, they just - it's like a wild animal. If a wild animal's surrounded by people, it does something that's not too great. It leaps at the throat of the nearest person and gets shot, killed. If that wild animal had a whole lot of sense, like they don't have, it'd sit calmly and hold out its little paw and wave.

MS. RICHARDS: But that wouldn't be interesting.

MR. SAUL: It would be in a way.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MR. SAUL: It might not be. You know, it's tricky, isn't it? Interesting or not. I don't know.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you continue to read mysteries?

MR. SAUL: No. No. No. No, I -

MS. RICHARDS: Are there other kinds of things you read that are - affect you that are important?

MR. SAUL: No. I look at Jane Austen movies mostly, because I consider movies a thing. It's a togetherness thing for me. We usually go out and have a restaurant meal and go to a movie or something. I mean, I wouldn't go prowling around a movie house by myself; that would be just not -

MS. RICHARDS: Movies - certain movies - have been inspiring to visual artists.

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you, though, been -

MR. SAUL: Yes. Yes. I'm very interested in the quality of story in the - of the Coen brothers movies lately. We saw a very, very good one lately that sort of gets into the Jewish business, you know. What's it called? It's brand new. Brand new. It just came out and we saw it about a week-and-a-half -

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. Yes.

MR. SAUL: *A Serious Man* [2009].

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MR. SAUL: Oh, it was great. Just great. Loved it. And I liked *Fargo* [1996] a whole lot. And I liked *Far from Heaven* [2002]. That's not Coen brothers, but I liked it anyway. I like all these things where there's Freudian changes on

things.

MS. RICHARDS: *Fargo* is a movie I think can relate to your paintings.

MR. SAUL: Yeah. And that sheriff - that sheriff, she was so fabulous, and her husband who designed postage stamps. I love that stuff. Just detail, detail. That's why my little nurses are going to have to be puppy dogs and stuff like that, because we've got to have real interest. We can't have just a sort of solemn public interest. It's not good enough.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hm [affirmative]. You've received - you talked about the critical attention, positive. You've also received awards and recognition -

MR. SAUL: Oh, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: - including a Guggenheim [Fellowship] and NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] [grant], et cetera. Have those been really gratifying to you, or you just thought they didn't mean a lot? The National - the American Academy of Arts and Letters [honor society].

MR. SAUL: Oh, that did interest me. The National Academy thing really did interest me quite a bit. The others I took in stride. I felt I'd earned them by having art shows and having a certain respectability. The National Academy thing -

MS. RICHARDS: I think the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

MR. SAUL: Yeah. Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MR. SAUL: That was a kick.

MS. RICHARDS: Why was that especially wonderful?

MR. SAUL: I think it meant something to Sally. I think it really did. I think it gave me sort of a glow. I'm being - Sally's waiting for me to get more glow of recognition, so I'm trying.

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs] That's very - I can't think of the right word. Okay.

[Audio Break.]

MR. SAUL: Is it on?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MR. SAUL: Have we got five minutes?

MS. RICHARDS: More.

MR. SAUL: Oh, okay. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Twenty at least.

MR. SAUL: Okay. Well, on the way through Los - the way to California in '64 we stopped in Los Angeles at the - and we visited Rolf Nelson, the art gallery owner. I'd had a show there while I was living in Rome. I don't know, a moderate success or something. And he introduced us to some young artists.

And I said, gee, I really would like to make some sculptures, but I don't know how. I said, I'd like it to be lightweight and that I could do it by myself without assistants. Because I don't want assistants. And color, you know, paint it.

MS. RICHARDS: You've never worked with assistants either.

MR. SAUL: No. No. We tried a little bit; it was too difficult.

I got some advice on how to do it. "Well, here's one way you can do it. Use Styrofoam - make your shape out of Styrofoam, coat it with white glue, and then coat it with fiberglass, putting in as many pieces as you can of the fiber and just painting on the plastic. And then you can paint that." First you coat it with something - some sort of gesso-type stuff. I don't remember. Anyway, it can be done that way.

So I wrote all this down on the back of an envelope. And awhile later, I decided to do this. So I tried to buy Styrofoam or ask people where Styrofoam came from. And they said, "Nobody buys Styrofoam; you find it. It's everywhere. Styrofoam is everywhere." I said, how come I can't find it? And they said, "Well, look, here's a piece right now." And they'd pick up a piece of something out of a package. But what I wanted was planks of Styrofoam, big planks.

So I phoned various warehouses and chemical distributors and I found at each one they had impossible conditions. Like, one would not sell less than $20,000 worth and another one would not sell more than [sic] like $12,000 worth.

Finally, finally, after about a year of phoning, I found a place in the East Bay that would sell $1,200 worth to me.

MS. RICHARDS: Still a lot.

MR. SAUL: I was ready to pay. So I went over there with the station wagon, filled up the whole station wagon, except for me in the driver's seat, with these planks of styrofoam and took it back and started out. And I made five styrofoam sculptures. A lot of muscle work. A lot of sanding. I think you had to sand something. In order to get a surface I could paint, I had to sand. Real muscle stuff.

MS. RICHARDS: No electric sander would do, or you didn't -

MR. SAUL: I didn't like noise like that. Plus it's got this rolling thing this big. You don't have a hand that goes like this. So anyway, I sanded it off and painted it. I made my favorite subjects, *Man in Electric Chair*, *Superman's Mightiest Tasks*, *Communist Woman*, *Fighter Woman* - anyway, I made five altogether.

Today they're all broken. They weren't as strong as they should have been maybe. They all vanished.

MS. RICHARDS: What happened to them after you made them?

MR. SAUL: Well, one of them I sold to the di Rosa Preserve [: Art & Nature, Napa, CA], and it still is there. And that's the only one that exists. The others, oh, my God. My wife - my ex-wife - broke two of them just moving them, just helping me move them. Incredible. And then one I threw off the deck in a fit of rage. That's it, pretty much.

MS. RICHARDS: And you decided never - you consciously decided not to do -

MR. SAUL: Too much trouble. Then I used balsa wood. I made a balsa-wood sculpture of a - sort of a communist figure crossing the Golden Gate Bridge. And that broke, too, but I repaired it, and it belongs to the Smart Museum in Chicago.

MS. RICHARDS: What about - did it ever occur to you to use found materials -

MR. SAUL: No.

MS. RICHARDS: - that were stronger? Other artists in the Bay Area then were doing that.

MR. SAUL: Yeah, well, a lot of people were doing sculpture much more successfully, but it was heavy. They had people help them. They had cranes. They had work rooms. I was never willing to make the physical commitment that I should have made.

MS. RICHARDS: And -

MR. SAUL: So I just gave it up, continued painting.

[Audio Break.]

I kind of agree with Richter - Gerhard Richter - that the whole point is how to making painting valid now. And I think that it can't be about itself; there's just no way. That's happened. That was a thing of validity which has now happened. And you can't keep on doing it anymore than you can keep on doing religious subject matter. It's not going to work.

MS. RICHARDS: Or history painting.

MR. SAUL: Yeah. It's just not going to work. Although I have hopes of continuing history painting anyway, if you add something. If you add something to make it a good story now. It's no use doing a good story in 1850 or 1830 or something. It has to be a good story right now. And of course, people's feelings are hurt as you make the story interesting, as I've already discovered very - to my gloomy - I mean, to my -

MS. RICHARDS: People feelings are hurt?

MR. SAUL: Yes. In the Vietnam pictures. Women's feelings are hurt, minorities' feelings are hurt. This happens. If you make a story really interesting, it heats up, and then people are not happy with your picture, and they don't want to live with it.

About three years ago, I decided to reintroduce ordinary people in my studio to see what they thought. So what I did was I joined this group of the Open Studios of Columbia County. And people paid a hundred dollars to visit 20 art studios, one of which was mine. And 35 people came in. And I asked them what they thought.

MS. RICHARDS: What painting was on the wall then?

MR. SAUL: I don't remember, but it was probably recent. Not that recent. Not my last show at Nolan's but the one before that, probably. I don't remember. What I remember are their comments. Oh, yes. It was the one before this last. It was Bush and that sort of - one of them on the wall was Bush and that character - that Iraqi head.

MS. RICHARDS: *Bush at Abu Ghraib* [2006].

MR. SAUL: Yeah. That was on the wall.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MR. SAUL: Thirty-five people came by to see it, so I asked them what they thought and what they saw and everything else. It was very instructional for me. On the one hand, I decided to give up trying to contact people in a general sense. It's just hopeless. Because many people, even very intelligent people - the most intelligent people, probably - don't see imagery and don't read imagery really. They only read text. Today's person is a person who reads text, you know, and deals with computer screen and speaks and listens. They don't do any viewing except to see if something is broken. So that's it. So basically viewing is dead. This is tough on painting.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you find that audience of normal, usual, non-art people - their comments were different than what you would experience in -

MR. SAUL: Well, I never get comments.

MS. RICHARDS: - the Mill Valley or -

MR. SAUL: Oh. Yes. Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: - 30 years earlier?

MR. SAUL: A little bit. They were unoffended because they sensed that I was making money off this.

MS. RICHARDS: Is that why? Because they thought you were making money?

MR. SAUL: I think so. I think they relate to you as your status in the culture. If you're a known artist, they're going to be more respectful. What do you think? You agree? Maybe not.

MS. RICHARDS: I guess I'm surprised.

MR. SAUL: I don't know. They said at the end - I asked the guy in charge of the whole thing. They didn't - I mean, I had to press them to get answers, frankly. What they said -

MS. RICHARDS: That's pretty, where they were - very respectful?

MR. SAUL: What do you see? What do you see? What do you see? And they went - I didn't miss hardly anyone. He said that, well, they liked it. They thought it was exciting. But they couldn't live with it.

So it was still seen as potentially something to buy. Most people see art as something to buy. Up in the country - up in Germantown area - it would be something you want to buy or you don't want to buy.

MS. RICHARDS: They didn't think of it as something to see in a museum?

MR. SAUL: No. They don't go to visual arts museums that much, I don't think.

MS. RICHARDS: Did *Abu Ghraib*, that painting, end up being bought by an individual?

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: So someone could live with it.

MR. SAUL: Oh, yes. Andy [Andrew] Hall has that. He has 41 of my paintings.

MS. RICHARDS: Is that the most substantial collection of your paintings?

MR. SAUL: In Connecticut, for sure, and probably anywhere. Except that there's a woman in Belgium I never met who's supposed to have nine of my paintings.

MS. RICHARDS: But he has 40?

MR. SAUL: Forty-one. But a lot of those - some of - half of those are smaller things, things he got from George Adams and -

MS. RICHARDS: Drawings. Works on paper?

MR. SAUL: Yeah. Something from long ago.

MS. RICHARDS: So -

MR. SAUL: But some of them big and substantial.

MS. RICHARDS: I see. So they weren't all bought when they were made.

MR. SAUL: No. No. I didn't know him then. He's not that old. He's the one who had trouble with Citibank in the newspaper, so that's his problem. Hope he did okay. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: So your studio here - just to wrap it up - your studio here - is this a good - the ideal size that you'd like to have?

MR. SAUL: Well, it's enough. I mean, I could use more space, but I don't know what for. You know, I think more space would be useful for my feelings of importance to myself. Self-importance.

MS. RICHARDS: But this right now, if you paint on this wall, that's not -

MR. SAUL: Adequate.

MS. RICHARDS: - as wide as your largest paintings have been.

MR. SAUL: Almost. Almost.

MS. RICHARDS: You could -

MR. SAUL: A nine-foot painting goes there. And it's too awkward to paint the absolute corner, so it has to stick out that way. And there's a vague chance that someone could give it a push, and that would be terrible. But I've never have the slightest problem here, and I'm just used to it. Until something happens that causes change, this is it.

MS. RICHARDS: My last question. What effect did this retrospective - this recent retrospective -

MR. SAUL: Oh, it did a lot of good.

MS. RICHARDS: But how did you feel when you walked into that? It's not your first retrospective; it's maybe your third or fourth retrospective.

MR. SAUL: Yeah. My retrospectives were always in very small, out-of-the-way places. And how I felt was I almost didn't bother to attend the opening because I thought, here I am, 73 years old -

MS. RICHARDS: When that opened, yeah.

MR. SAUL: - and I'm opening in the farthest point you can get from New York City -

MS. RICHARDS: Orange County.

MR. SAUL: - geographically. You can't go further away. And it's a place that is hard to get to. And I didn't imagine anyone even from Los Angeles making that drive much. I almost didn't want to go, but Sally said, no, you have to go; let's go. So we went out.

It's a pleasant weekend. We went to the beach. We relaxed. It was wonderful. It's not a bad place, Newport Beach. And we did Balboa Island, a little place. It was very nice. It was a complete surprise to me that it was reviewed, actually twice, by [*New York Times* art critic] Holland Cotter, whom I never met, of course. And other reviews were good, too, very good, very positive. And people saw it from various countries.

It just goes to show you that you can't tell what's going to be interesting. But I think - I partially think it's because I'm old, and I think that nothing is expected from anybody after age 60. So if you continue to be interesting, they're astonished. That's what I honestly think.

MS. RICHARDS: It also then eventually came to the East Coast, to Pennsylvania.

MR. SAUL: Yeah. But to an art school, not an art museum.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MR. SAUL: The art school charges $10 to view that show. I mean, you'd have to be eager to see it. It's in an art school building. And it was very nicely displayed.

MS. RICHARDS: The Pennsylvania Academy of the Arts [Philadelphia] is a real museum.

MR. SAUL: Yes, but that's across the street. That's different. This is the art school. It was hoped that the art students would be inspired by this. I don't think they were. I was never offered - I mean, they attempted to sell a kind of master class idea, but only one person signed up.

MS. RICHARDS: Given by you, master class?

MR. SAUL: Yeah. But only one person signed up, so they had to cancel that. I don't think there was any interest on the part of those students.

MS. RICHARDS: So you're still waiting for the retrospective in New York?

MR. SAUL: Definitely. I expect those people to eventually show my work. The only thing you have to do is stay interesting, because as soon as you stop being interesting, they have their excuse to forget about it. So as long as you don't lose interest, everything's okay.

MS. RICHARDS: Great. Well -

MR. SAUL: You see, the problem with most modern art is it's very interesting when the person thinks up the idea of doing it, but then they have to keep repeating it, because that's what the art style is, and it becomes less interesting. This way, I can do different subjects. It's great.

MS. RICHARDS: So is there anything else you'd like to add?

MR. SAUL: I guess not. Have I used up the time?

MS. RICHARDS: We can always add more if you want to -

MR. SAUL: No, no. Are you satisfied? Okay.

MS. RICHARDS: Thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

Last updated...November 22, 2010