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ORAL HISTORIES SERIES

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ROBERTO “TITO” DELGADO

INTERVIEWED BY KAREN MARY DAVALOS

ON NOVEMBER 5, 7, 9, AND 16, 2007

Roberto Delgado, best known for his public art murals, lives and works in Los Angeles. He holds an MFA from UCLA and is the recipient of two Fulbright fellowships, a Ford Foundation fellowship, and a grant from the Brody Arts Foundation. He has created murals at sites across Southern California and in Atlanta, Cleveland, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Phoenix, and other cities in the United States and Mexico.

Karen Mary Davalos is chair and professor of Chicana/o studies at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. Her research interests encompass representational practices, including art exhibition and collection; vernacular performance; spirituality; feminist scholarship and epistemologies; and oral history. Among her publications are *Yolanda M. López* (UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2008); “The Mexican Museum of San Francisco: A Brief History with an Interpretive Analysis,” in *The Mexican Museum of San Francisco Papers, 1971–2006* (UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2010); and *Exhibiting Mestizaje: Mexican (American) Museums in the Diaspora* (University of New Mexico Press, 2001).

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THE CSRC ORAL HISTORIES SERIES

The CSRC Oral Histories Series publishes the life narratives of prominent Chicano and Latino figures. The life narratives have been recorded and transcribed, and the interviewer and interviewee have reviewed and corrected the transcriptions prior to publication. These oral histories are often undertaken as part of a larger research project and in tandem with archival collections and library holdings.

CSRC ORAL HISTORY SERIES PROJECTS

L.A. Xicano documents the history of Chicana/o art in Los Angeles with a focus on artists, collectives, and art organizations. The project resulted in new museum and library exhibitions, public programs, archival collections, and scholarly publications. These efforts were part of the Getty Foundation initiative Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A., 1945–1980. The project received support from Getty Foundation, Annenberg Foundation, Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, and California Community Foundation. Related support includes funding from Ralph M. Parsons Foundation, AltaMed Health Services Corporation, Entravision Communications Corporation, Walt Disney Company, and individual donors.

A Ver: Revisioning Art History stems from the conviction that individual artists and their coherent bodies of work are the foundation for a meaningful and diverse art history. This book series explores the cultural, aesthetic, and historical contributions of Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, and other U.S. Latino artists. The A Ver project is made possible through the generous support of Getty Foundation, Ford Foundation, Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Joan Mitchell Foundation, JPMorgan Chase Foundation, and The Rockefeller Foundation.

The LGBT and Mujeres Initiative seeks to increase archival and oral history holdings that document the Chicano/Latino presence in LGBT and women's histories, the role of women and LGBT people in Chicano/Latino histories, and the importance of gender, sexuality, and ethnicity in "mainstream" scholarly research and archival institutions. The project receives generous support from the Ford Foundation and individual donors.

ARTISTS INTERVIEWED FOR THE L.A. XICANO PROJECT

Judy Baca
Charles "Chaz" Bojórquez
David Botello
Barbara Carrasco
Leonard Castellanos
Roberto "Tito" Delgado
Richard Duardo
Margaret Garcia
Johnny Gonzalez
Judithe Hernández
Leo Limón
Gilbert "Magu" Luján
Monica Palacios
John Valadez
Linda Vallejo

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Karen Davalos: This is Karen Davalos with Roberto Delgado on November 5, 2007 [and I am conducting a life history interview for the CSRC Oral Histories Series]. We’re in Highland Park and I was just going to start with a basic question about where you were born and raised.

Robert Delgado: In Los Angeles. I was born in East Hollywood on Parkview and Santa Monica. I was raised in what is now known as Koreatown. At that time, it was pretty much Anglo-European.

KD: And are you the only child in your family?

RD: [I have] three sisters.

KD: And where do you fall, the oldest or the youngest?

RD: Second oldest.

KD: Second oldest. Did both of your parents raise you?

RD: Yes.

KD: And what kind of work did your father do?

RD: My father was a physician, MD.

KD: And your mom?

RD: She was, until he died, she was just a housekeeper, just a mom.

KD: She worked at home, is what you’re saying.

RD: Yeah.

KD: And the schools you went to in East Hollywood—well, let me find out exactly how long were you in East Hollywood—that was—

RD: Well, that was in Koreatown. The schools I went to, I went to St. Brendan grammar school.

KD: Catholic school?

RD: Yeah, with the Irish nuns—it’s almost all Korean now. Then I went to what was known then as St. John Vianney [High School]. It’s now Daniel Murphy [High School]—and soon to be nothing—which was a Dominican high school run by the diocese, which they are currently in the process of selling—closing down and selling.

KD: Right.

RD: And then I got drafted.

KD: Did your parents send you to Catholic schools because it was a good education, or—?

RD: No, it was mostly because it was Catholic.

KD: So you were raised in a Catholic household.

RD: Yeah, mostly on my mother’s part.

KD: And what did that consist of? You went to church on every Sunday?

RD: Well, you learned how to read and write; that helps. Well, yes, I was an altar boy for a long time.

KD: That’s a good confession to make. *[laughter]*

RD: And you know, in between drinking the wine—so, that lasted until like eighth grade or something like that.

KD: Was it a burden attending mass and being an altar boy?

RD: No.

- KD: Is it something you felt like your parents made you do?
- RD: No.
- KD: No? So you grew up with strong Catholic devout—?
- RD: Well, probably organizational—I see it much more of a, not a faith type situation, it's more of an organizational type of system—which is the point of the church and black America. It's obvious it wasn't a question of believing in Christ. It was a question of believing in yourself and your fellow man.
- KD: At the time though, were you aware of these types of concerns or were you just—
- RD: No, I was just having a good time.
- KD: Oh, really?
- RD: Yeah.
- KD: It wasn't a strict school like a lot of people report?
- RD: The Dominicans who were in charge of the inquisition? *[laughter]* Yeah, you had to, compared to now? Sure. I mean, they wore these big black belts, and they would just—they would *[pause]* swat you, you know, in a formal way after school in front of everybody else. So, you know, it was something that everybody didn't like.
- KD: Were you a good student in school?
- RD: No, I was C average, something like that. It wasn't no big thing. I think they actually kept me in the school because my mom knew the principle. And you know, it was pretty much I was just a jock.
- KD: Oh, you were involved in athletics?
- RD: Yeah.
- KD: What'd you play?
- RD: Football, track, and basketball.
- KD: Whoa, that's every season. *[laughter]*
- RD: Yeah. Yeah.
- KD: And was that something that you were encouraged to do, or came naturally, you know, like your dad was—?
- RD: No, it just came naturally, because by that time, my father died in 1957 when I was thirteen or so. So, I was pretty much on my own. So that's what I meant by the organization. And even the whole idea of getting to mass on time so that you could serve—when I was actually without any direction from above. I guess it was the organization that helped me through to where we are today. I guess. *[laughter]*
- KD: But help me reconstruct what you were thinking as a child. Was it drudgery, the strictness and the work—?
- RD: The schoolwork, the mathematics especially, wasn't too good. I mean, when you get into the higher—I have no idea what trigonometry and algebra and all that stuff *[is]*. I still don't understand it. I'm sure I could, like in a week, but no need for it right now.
- KD: Right. But as a child, was schooling something that you enjoyed?
- RD: Sure. You go to the school. It was an activity. It was interesting. It's where my friends were.
- KD: What kind of friends did you have?
- RD: They were jocks, preppies, preppy types. I hung out with this whole, the Catholic boys school mafia—Loyola, Notre Dame, St. John Vianney, Cathedral—
- KD: Like the students I teach.
- RD: You know, the guys from Cathedral [High School], we'd look down on. And Mount Carmel wasn't even mentioned. I usually hung out with guys, that whole—we went towards upper echelon type of situations.
- KD: Upper echelon?
- RD: If you had a chance to hang out with the girls from [Conaty and Immaculate Heart High School], where my sisters went, well, we'd rather hang out with the girls from Marlborough [School], because they had cars and their daddies ran the country and they weren't stupid. *[laughter]* And they're all blondies.
- KD: Now, I have you born in 1944, is that accurate?
- RD: Yes.

KD: So, you're growing up after the war—World War II—the prosperity of World War II. Is your family seeing that?

RD: Well, there's—now we get into a bio of my father. [*laughter*] Which, as you can see, I'm wearing a cap from the Meharry Medical College, which I got when I was—I was a finalist for the Nashville Airport. I was a finalist on a public art project, which I didn't get, in Nashville. So I had to present. So I went to Meharry, to check out where my father went to school. And I already knew that it was a, if you don't know, it's a historically black institution, college—it's a historical black college in Nashville.

So I went there, and I went to the alumni office, and of course they looked at me and said, "Your father went here?" We talked about it. I said, "Yeah, he graduated in 1913. Do you have any record of that?" He says, "Well, there's the picture of the 1913 graduates." They actually had it up in the office. And I looked, because his name was Smith—and we'll get to that in a little while. [*laughter*]

His name was Smith, so I looked up—first of all, I could see that there was a guy that didn't look obviously black. So I said, "That looks awfully familiar. [He] looks just like my younger sister." And his name was R. Smith. Well, his name was Roberto Smith at the time. So I said, "That's him." And they said that's cool. So I was chumming with the people. And when I have some money, I still send them [money for] their scholarship fund.

And, well, the reason I bring that up is because he was—they say he was born in Pasadena, but he was probably born in Sonora. And his parents were in the mining industry and they were both killed, or somehow he was an orphan. And he was picked up by this German guy named Schmitt who was living in South Carolina, in Charleston. So he went to Charleston and grew up there in high school.

And interestingly enough, I was a finalist in North Carolina. [*laughter*] So I went down to check it out, to check out where he went to school. And Avery Institute is now a think tank affiliated with the College of Charleston. It's a black institution. At that time Avery Institute, was kind of a quasi-military school for blacks. So the whole thing of it, was that at that time, and probably up until recently, and maybe even goes on now, if you're not white, you're black. It's the apartheid system of South Africa. It's not a question of you being different grades. It's like a one-drop thing.

KD: Yeah.

RD: So, anyway, he was considered black because he was Mexican, and he looked dark—much darker than my mom. So he, I think that there was always this sense of—how would you say it?—of [*pause*] a progressiveness in that he knew the differentiation between class levels and race levels and that was not—he didn't have to figure that out.

KD: Right.

RD: So he came back to LA after he got his MD. He was—actually, he was in World War I. Then he came to LA, then discovered his roots and changed his name back to Delgado and just started raising many families, [of] which one of them was ours—the last one. [*laughter*] He kind of—I don't think, I'm wondering where all of this came from. Like I said, this was a preppy jock that we were talking about here. And how did I wind up in Chiapas in '76, when everybody else was doing other things, you know? [*laughter*]

KD: I guess the question also, for me, is it sounds like you were investigating—what was the year that you went down to learn more about your father? When was that happening?

RD: That was purely because I was a finalist in Nashville—oh, this was 1971, I think. That was just because I happened to be in Nashville. And in, then a couple of years ago, or a year and a half ago, I happened to be in North Carolina. I was a finalist in Chapel Hill and I was a finalist in Charlotte, none of which I got. You know, the way public art works, you put in your qualifications and then they cut it down to three to five finalists, and then you present a proposal. And they usually give you some money and you go there and present a proposal. So I was in those places. So I just decided to investigate to see what was going on.

KD: So you said he had a sense of his Mexican-ness when he returned to California?

RD: Very much so. He did not permit the use of English in the house—while he was alive.

KD: Wow.

- RD: Something that many people—here’s the reason that he was—his reasoning was that if you permit the use of English in the household, then you’ll never learn Spanish, which is true. *[laughter]* People will learn English because they’ll hang out on the street.
- KD: Or watch TV.
- RD: Or watch TV. Or—well, that was another thing. The TV mysteriously broke one day.
- KD: Oh, really?
- RD: Yes.
- KD: So there was some TV up until when?
- RD: Up until I started failing in reading. Nobody was learning how to read. The TV mysteriously broke. We didn’t have enough money to fix it. Period. *[laughter]*
- KD: How old were you, in fourth grade?
- RD: Yeah, it was around third or fourth grade. It was a maneuver. He’d be all, “Oh, that’s too bad,” you know? It was obvious that he had tweaked it. And I went from not knowing anything, not knowing how to read, to being the best in the class. *[laughter]*
- KD: So it worked?
- RD: Oh, sure. *[laughter]* So, not permitting English in the house, it worked. Sure. That [was] probably his practical medical training.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: You know?
- KD: What about school? Did [they] you allow to speak Spanish? Or were there other people who would speak Spanish on the playground?
- RD: Well, I flunked first grade because I couldn’t speak English. And at St. Brendan, the nuns were literally from Ireland.
- KD: Right.
- RD: They didn’t like you to speak anything but English. I don’t know why, but they were—they were probably the—it was during that time that I presume that there was a lot of resentment against [the] English in Ireland, but they probably—because they worked in an institution, they probably had seen that it—I mean, I’m just figuring why they would beat you up if you were speaking Spanish.
- KD: Well, there were good Americanization programs through the church. In fact, from the ’20s through the ’30s, and they probably just spilled over in the ’40s, I would imagine.
- RD: Yeah. Yeah. I don’t know if this had to do with that. If I remember, it kind of had more to do with a personal thing. It might have been the shock of LA. Like I said, LA’s unique in that it’s two hours away from this country that’s 3,000 years old.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: Those things, whether it’s actually spiritual, or whatever it is—
- KD: But do they also teach you to celebrate Thanksgiving?
- RD: Oh, yeah. Yeah. There was a lot of—and that was because they actually did a lot of stuff, paper cutting and art and stuff like that. It was actually the—Thanksgiving was actually kind of the introduction into art.
- KD: Really?
- RD: Yeah, because, “Paint the feathers a different color on the . . .”
- KD: Do you remember your first endeavors with art in school?
- RD: Well, that was it. Those things.
- KD: Did you enjoy it?
- RD: Sure. Yeah.
- KD: Did you have crayons and paints at home?
- RD: No. It was a—I didn’t—yeah, there was a certain amount. But it wasn’t to do with—it had mostly to do with science fiction and—we were into making models of strange ships, usually with destroyed television sets, which I think one of my—those tubes we used to have.

KD: Yeah.

RD: We used to take them apart and then put them back together. Put them back together as spaceships or something, you know.

KD: Wow. You and who else?

RD: A couple of friends.

KD: Your friends, were they Latino?

RD: No, I was the only Latino. Maybe a couple more other people.

KD: In both of your schooling situations right? At St. Brendan's and St.—

RD: Well, all the way through UCLA. *[laughter]*

KD: Even UCLA, you're right. So, as a child you enjoyed making these kind of concoctions out of—

RD: Yeah, sure.

KD: Not that you didn't use a lot of the model sets—a lot of the men I talked to enjoyed making model airplanes, especially growing up after the war—painting them.

RD: Yeah, the model sets I could do. I could put them together without the instructions, which was interesting because growing up in an organizational sense, you would figure that you'd follow the instructions. But that might have been some of that orneriness that my father was famous for. "Don't need no instructions." And I put them together sometimes wrong, but it was interesting.

KD: The community you grew up in, you were growing up in a single-family house and your parents owned it?

RD: Yeah.

KD: And most of the people around had the same thing?

RD: Yeah, this was the '50s.

KD: Yeah.

RD: Yeah, it was the middle class.

KD: Did your father take vacations?

RD: No.

KD: He worked very hard.

RD: I think he liked what he did. He just—he was a like—I remember him taking us to the rounds in Solano Canyon in the Chavez Ravine and coming out—he had this big old Cadillac car, 1953, big car; a four door. And it was like a house inside. *[laughter]* And my mom would entertain us there while he was doing his rounds of these—and he'd come out and he'd have a dressed chicken and a gallon of Virginia Dare wine. And that was his payment for doing all of these things over in—right around the time, that was building up towards Dodger's Stadium. That whole thing.

Because that started way back in '55, three or four years before the Dodgers came in. They were already doing things with [Peter] O'Malley, making deals. [Pat] Russell, the great councilwoman, was—and so he [my father] was doing that. Obviously, we're losing money. *[laughter]* I don't think he really cared much about money at the tail end of his life. He didn't care because he didn't leave very much. He actually let his life insurance lapse.

KD: Wow.

RD: So it was—

KD: So when he passed away, was that a sudden change in economic status?

RD: Yeah. Yeah. Everything had to change.

KD: Did the family move?

RD: No.

KD: Or did you retain the house?

RD: The house was retained and that was because my mom was and is very basic. You own land, you got something going.

KD: That's right.

- RD: I will say that when me and Kathy Gallegos were buying this place, which just dropped out of the sky. Both houses here we bought for three hundred thousand eight dollars, closing. We're sitting on like nine hundred thousand bucks now, four years later. She said we couldn't afford it. I said, "No, no, half-acre of land in LA County for three hundred thousand dollars or less is a giveaway, and of course we can afford it, and will do anything to get this." And actually, I paid the guy about three thousand dollars that's somewhere. *[laughter]* The guy that was selling it—there were some deals going down. So anyway, that was a . . . She *[my mother]* parlayed that house into another one—in another one, and the house they have now on Van Ness and Sixth Street is worth maybe a million and a half or something. With 80 percent equity.
- KD: A very smart woman.
- RD: Yeah, in a basic kind of way. Nothing intricate.
- KD: Did she get an education in the United States?
- RD: She went to Lincoln High School.
- KD: Okay, was she born here as well?
- RD: No, she was born in Cananea actually.
- KD: I don't know Cananea.
- RD: That's where the revolution started in 1910.
- KD: Ah, okay.
- RD: Greene mining company, which apparently *[President]* Salinas de Gortari sold back to Greene mining company, *[laughter]* which is ironic. *[Cananea Consolidated Copper Company, owned by William Cornell Greene—ed.]*
- KD: Did she tell stories about where she grew up?
- RD: No.
- KD: How did you know about this? This was knowledge that—?
- RD: No, this is something that I picked up when I was doing another public art project in Douglas, Arizona, which is where she actually grew up for most of her life, before she came to LA.
- KD: Okay.
- RD: I was doing some artwork for the border station there. I have a lot of work there. So, yeah, I was looking up where she—Cananea and stuff—tried to look up the records, but they were all gone.
- KD: So your mother has a high school diploma in the United States, your father has a MD. Is the talk in the home that you need to go to school, you need to go to college, or is it—?
- RD: Yeah, it was always obvious that everybody was going to max it out.
- KD: Max it out meaning what?
- RD: Terminal degree in whatever.
- KD: Wow. And did that happened with the rest of the family—the two sisters you said, right?
- RD: Well, Yolanda is—which is the youngest—actually she was born about six months before my father died in '57—so she had to be farmed out to the family. *[laughter]* Because my mom had to go to work.
- KD: Right.
- RD: And so she's supposed to be getting her—I mean, she's got an MFA in acting and directing, and she has an MS in social welfare—MSW.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: And she's going to get a PhD in something, something to do with sociology—
- KD: Wow, you've got a little kingdom going on here, all of these terminal degrees in one family.
- RD: My other sisters are—the oldest sister just retired—she just retired from TWA, from way back then. She lives in New Jersey. My other sister—that's the older sister, then me, then the younger sister, then the youngest. The second-to-youngest, she has—she's an X-ray technician. I think it was—I can't remember whether it was an MS or BS from UCLA. So, she's an X-ray technician. But her daughter, her daughters—one of her daughters is a lawyer. She went to UCLA Law School, Cecilia Brennan. And she was—she actually was in the—she lives in San Diego, one of my favorite cities.

- KD: You're being sarcastic?
- RD: Yeah. Very. She can't stand it. But I tell her, "You're in the middle of the deal." She was actually on the team that got that Escondido decision. Which affected all the stuff happening in Pennsylvania and everywhere.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: A lot of it was precedent setting. And she just got out of law school. *[laughter]* So that's pretty good. She's very progressive.
- KD: So there's not a lot of leisure time with the family, little holidays?
- RD: Oh no, no, no, there's no holidays. Nothing like that. *[laughter]*
- KD: And then what about how you celebrate things at home? Are birthdays made a big deal of, or Christmas or Easter? It's a Catholic family.
- RD: Not birthdays, but *[pause]* things like Christmas and Easter, the big holidays, Thanksgiving.
- KD: So what does the family do for Christmas?
- RD: Dinners—big dinners, just the big dinners.
- KD: Are you eating Mexican cuisine?
- RD: Sometimes, sometimes, a mix of it.
- KD: Did this change after your father died or did it stay pretty much the same?
- RD: It stayed pretty much the same.
- KD: Are there other families here in Southern California at that time when you're growing up, other aunts and uncles that come or did you . . .
- RD: Yeah, there were all kinds of aunts and uncles all over the place.
- KD: Really?
- RD: Yeah. On my mother's side, not my father's.
- KD: Right, he's an orphan. So, do they get together? Is that part of the celebration for family events?
- RD: Yeah, but we usually went there.
- KD: Oh.
- RD: They usually didn't go into the west side.
- KD: And where were they?
- RD: El Sereno.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: East LA, Lincoln Heights.
- KD: Were you aware as a young child that there are different kinds of communities, especially if you're going over to Lincoln Heights and El Sereno?
- RD: As a young child?
- KD: Yeah. I don't know. Some people, it starts as early as seventh grade, other people it takes until they're in high school.
- RD: Yeah. Yeah. Seventh grade, eighth grade. I understood that there was a—not in a political sense, but there were ethnic enclaves. Yeah.
- KD: So, you mentioned that your family is Catholic and somewhat devout—obviously, you were an altar boy. Is there a sense in the family of, "We should do this because we're Mexican?" Outside of the language of course.
- RD: Do what?
- KD: Anything. We should celebrate this way, or—
- RD: No. No. There wasn't. No.
- KD: When you were growing up in school, a lot of the Catholic schools were very much involved in Kennedy's election. Was that part of your experience?
- RD: Kennedy's?
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: I graduated by then.

- KD: Oh, okay.
- RD: From '63—
- KD: Getting out the vote.
- RD: No, no, I was a jock—
- KD: So, were you any good?
- RD: And kind of—not enough to get a [scholarship]. The whole thing with—we were fairly organized.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: It was a question of the—the big deal was getting a full ride to a four-year university.
- KD: You were talking about that, huh?
- RD: Sure. And maneuvering this, that, and the other.
- KD: So what'd you run in track?
- RD: Oh, in track, 440, the 800, the 880. I think at that time it was feet.
- KD: Yeah. Any injuries?
- RD: Oh, well in football, yeah, there were all kinds of things happening in football. *[laughter]* I wouldn't recommend people play football.
- KD: No. *[laughter]*
- RD: If you're going to get into sports, get into something that's not going to injure [you], like anything else but football.
- KD: Broken bones or just bad bruises?
- RD: Just bad bruises and dislocated fingers and things like that.
- KD: Oh.
- RD: I mean, just the normal things that happen.
- KD: I know those are normal, but they're still disgusting to me. *[laughter]* Help me get a sense of what it was like when your family—growing up on the other side of town. You said the only, probably, Latino in the school, maybe one other.
- RD: Yeah. There wasn't a sense of—because I was big. I got big real fast, so I was pretty much the same size as I am now when I was twelve or thirteen.
- KD: Wow.
- RD: So nobody messed with me. I had a whole—there was a group of these jocks. It wasn't like we were—I guess we were kind of menacing—people didn't really—and we kind of, there was no question of me, looking at me as anything different than them. What I got out of it, and I tell to many people I know, my friends who grew up in the Chicano, East LA experience, what I tell them is the problem with them is that they don't understand the white west side.
- You don't understand how these people think. That they're very clubby. I just happen to be in the club. That was the deal. Once you're accepted by the club—and it's the same with blacks. There were some blacks. This guy named Bill from Loyola, who I knew, because I was a single-wing blocking back and so was he—in that old single-wing formation that nobody uses anymore. And it was the same. He wasn't—he had relatives at South Central, like I had relatives in East LA, but he was part of the club, part of the Catholic boy club.
- KD: Yeah. Yeah. I teach at Loyola Marymount. I know that club very well. *[laughter]*
- RD: Yeah, and pretty much that Catholic boy club happens to be, instead of being white with a few—it's pretty much—it's the club that put, the organization that put [Mayor Antonio] Villaraigosa in [office].
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: That whole Cathedral [High School and] Salesian [High School]—
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: To a certain extent, Loyola [High School], all of those [Catholic high schools]. It's still going. And it's very effective.
- KD: Yeah. It just elected a mayor. *[laughter]*

RD: Yeah.

KD: So there was never any of those experiences of, "Can't go to his house because his family's Mexican."

RD: No, even in the real exclusive things like the dances at Marlborough and Wilshire Country Club, there was no problem.

KD: Help me understand—

RD: I just didn't have regular clothes, that's all. *[laughter]*

KD: So what did you wear? Were you wearing secondhand clothes as a child?

RD: No, I just kind of invented things.

KD: You ignored the fashions. Hardly any of the men that I interview talk about that, but every once in awhile.

RD: Well, I was sewing things, because there was a sewing machine. There wasn't any question of why—my mom didn't have time to sew anything. And my sisters weren't going to sew anything for me. So I sewed them. So that was good.

KD: What'd you sew?

RD: You know, the cuffs of pants.

KD: Yeah, you'd hem your pants.

RD: And because they were either letting them out or—yeah, different things. Or cutting pants down to bermudas at different lengths and stuff.

KD: So the kids on that part of town didn't wear—what does everybody talk about? I'm imagining it was starting to be . . . Did you have a uniform for school?

RD: No. You didn't have to wear anything. It was pretty free. Right now, or at least a few years after—when it became Daniel Murphy—I think you had to wear ties like Verbum Dei [High School], to wear ties and stuff like that. Which makes perfect sense because it's a sociological, psychological thing that binds you, or something like that.

KD: This was a professional endeavor or something like that.

RD: It just makes you a little bit more exclusive, so you see yourself as being unique. So maybe you're going to achieve a little bit more or something. I don't know. I think it's a good idea. I don't know about uniforms, like in Mexico high schools, high school uniforms. But probably a tie would be—

[break in audio]

KD: We took a quick break for a phone call. You were telling me about uniforms at school and how you actually thought they functioned.

RD: Well, probably the ties. I wouldn't think in high school you should really have a uniform. It seems to be a little bit too—I don't know. What Verbum Dei has, the ties, that's cool.

KD: So—

RD: Because if you wear a tie, then obviously you have to fit the rest of it. *[laughter]* You're not going to wear a—

KD: A T-shirt.

RD: A parka.

KD: And when you dressed for school, did you dress up?

RD: Yeah, it was a preppy look. Just a button-down shirt. Pretty much what I wear now, you know?

KD: And you said you weren't a particularly—you said you were getting C's in school. But I was trying to get a sense of not just your grades, but did the teachers like you?

RD: Sure.

KD: Did you like them? Was there—

RD: It's the same thing as any—if they want to make their life easy, they kind of avoid me. If they want to make their life interesting, they go towards me. Same thing now. It was the same thing over there, over then.

KD: Any particular teachers that you remember fondly?

RD: No. It was just the people—the good lecturers were interesting because they put on a good show.

KD: So you weren't getting into art in school at this time?

RD: No. They don't have art in the—they teach you how to read and write and to do basic math through algebra and that's it. Which is probably what you need, and is probably what Masaccio taught his young apprentices in the studio back in [the] Renaissance. Especially when they were doing, like, bronze casting, which you have to do the density of this, the density of that. Well, that's all volume and trigonometry. [pause] That's hard. To learn how to read and write and learn to do basic math is hard.

To push pigment around and figure out what is the volume, the depth perspective, all of the stuff that you have to—apparently people want to teach you in three years with an MFA. If you can't pick it up on your own, you're brain-dead. And you think about how Michelangelo Buonarroti of the Buonarroti brothers from Florence was able to do that chapel with no MFA. I mean, it's amazing. With no MFA from UCLA, by the way.

KD: You make [it] sound like art is easy. Some of us find it—

RD: Art is, the mechanics of art is not rocket science.

KD: At least for you. [laughter]

RD: I don't think it's rocket science for anybody, I don't think that it's very hard.

KD: So what are you listening to as a young man in high school? Is music an important part of your life?

RD: No, it wasn't very important.

KD: So sports seems to be the thing that occupies your time?

RD: Yeah and a few parties.

KD: Yet, they're talking about expectations about going off to college. What happens immediately after graduation?

RD: Well, I was going from—this was the big 1A 2S game. Which is, 1A is that you're susceptible to the draft, two S's and you're a student deferment.

KD: Right.

RD: So it was going back and forth, back and forth. It took about three years before they figured out what was going on and drafted me.

KD: In other words, you enrolled in school long enough to avoid status.

RD: Yeah, and then you work another six months.

KD: Right.

RD: Yeah.

KD: What kind of work did you do?

RD: Anything.

KD: Where were you taking classes?

RD: The city colleges. I went to Pierce first, then Valley . . . [pause] No, I went to Pierce first, then I went to San Diego. Yeah, San Diego was interesting because there was kind of like a—it was a very interesting time. And that's when I got all of these good grades. It was like straight A's.

KD: At San Diego—

RD: City College.

KD: City College.

RD: And then I [bought] a little MGA. [laughter] I was just—it was interesting because I was playing football there. But I was kind of ineligible, but they didn't really know it. So I was really kind of doing it for the exercise.

KD: Ineligible because?

RD: Because I wasn't in the district. And I kind of agreed with my mom that we weren't going to lie, so I just said, "Well, I'll just play."

KD: So you were living at home and then for a while—

RD: Well, I was living with some people—it's now condominiums, but it was this little place in Ocean Beach in San Diego, where I'm actually scheduled to do some artwork for a fire station, if they ever decide to

give me the go-ahead. Actually, that's where I started to hear the music, now that you talk about music. Because there was this guy who had all of these tapes of guitar music of like *[pause]* the Segovia and all of these old tapes; guitar concertos from Boccherini and Mozart and all of that.

So he used to play these—it was guitar—just guitar, classical guitar. And I thought it was the best thing I had ever heard in my life. So that was interesting. Then I went to—I think I went back to LA. And then I had to go in for an interview with the Selective Service, and it didn't look too good. *[laughter]* They were eventually going to catch up to me. But then I had really a bad back situation happen—it was a spasm or some type of nerve thing in the back. I had all kinds of things wrong with me, you know?

KD: From football?

RD: Yeah, from football. All documented, boom, boom, boom. I took them into Selective Service and I could probably think that they took all my stuff, and as I left they probably dumped it in the trash. That was what was going on in '67, '66, '67. If they wanted you, they wanted you. They said, "Okay, well, you're drafted." Then there were two years that I enlisted. One was that they promised me OCS. And that was one thing—

KD: OCS?

RD: Officer Candidate School.

KD: Okay.

RD: Because I got all of these great test grades. And that was my naïveté—something that was not lost afterwards at UCLA—that I really believed them, that everything that you sign, that they say you're going to do, they don't care. *[laughter]* When you get in—if your name is Delgado in 1966 and you're drafted, if you're going into Officer Candidate School, your records are going to be shit-canned and lost and you're going to be immediately tracked into either basic infantry men or truck driver. Fortunately, I tracked into truck driver.

And these were all of the things that happened—and this was at Fort Bliss, which is in El Paso. There's no Chicano, there is no person who has a Spanish surname that is going to OCS at Fort Bliss at El Paso. Their records are going to be mysteriously lost and burned—and they were never recovered. Which, whoever did it, some Okie, redneck clerk probably saved my life because I was already tracked into.

Well, let me just say this. At San Diego City College, I was rooming with a guy who eventually *[was]* All-American at USC, Ralph Oliver, and was nominated for rookie of the year with the Oakland Raiders as a middle linebacker. That was just one of the people that was on the team. There were, like, three or four All-Americans on the team. I was once assigned to block Ron Yary, who we were playing. Cerritos. Ron Yary is in the NFL Hall of Fame.

KD: Yeah.

RD: I just bounced off of him and he kept on going. The two-a-day football practice that lasted for about a month or so before was one of the most grueling—it was hell. It was absolute hell. When I went into the Army, the basic training was just like, "What?"

KD: Easy. *[laughter]*

RD: You want me to do that?

KD: That's it?

RD: Oh sure, okay. Can we do it again? *[laughter]* So this whole thing, I was being tracked into OCS, the Ranger school, the Airborne. The whole shot, where you become—you're infantry . . . Actually I was going to go to Armor OCS. You know, second lieutenant gets to Vietnam. I think they lasted like six weeks, and then you were dead.

KD: Yeah. Yeah.

RD: And if they didn't get shot from *[the front]*, they got shot from behind you know? So the whole thing was absolute utter luck.

KD: And you were aware of that at the time?

RD: Oh no, no. I went, "Oh, okay, cool."

- KD: Okay. So before we talk about your service. When you go to San Diego, is that your first time away from home?
- RD: [*pause*] I guess so, yeah.
- KD: Was that a big deal?
- RD: No, not at all.
- KD: You were a very independent child?
- RD: Well, like I said, from 1957, there was nobody. [*laughter*] Nobody except for my sister's godfather kind of hurried me on. He was an electrical specialist. He lit up—the first and last time I ever went to Disneyland was in 1956 when it was being built. He took me to Main Street and showed me all the stuff that he was wiring and the electrical and the lighting and all. I've never been back there since. There was a little choo-choo train. [*laughter*] It was all like, raw.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: They were building it. So he showed me how to take things apart and putting them back together, you know, how to use a drill press without screwing up your hand—all the things, the shop stuff. That was valuable.
- KD: I would imagine for now.
- RD: He was a fixer.
- KD: Did you have responsibilities in the home after your father passed away?
- RD: No, not really responsibilities. It's just that everybody kind of cooked—everybody did everything together—not together, but like I said, sewing and—which is another strange thing about Chicanos. Cooking of things—pies. I was a pie specialist.
- KD: You were a pie specialist?
- RD: Yeah, I could take a bowl of basic flour and a quarter stick of butter, and with a knife I could make it into a fine . . . It takes about half an hour. you just keep on going and doing it. So I was doing it, you know, to make it into a pastry—to make it into a basic dough. I was doing it from the ground up. And getting into pies. I don't know why, but I got into pies. My sisters would invite people over to have some pie.
- KD: You were doing that in high school?
- RD: I think it was in—no, I think it was in eighth grade?
- KD: Okay.
- RD: Eighth grade, seventh and eighth grade. Yeah. [*pause*] And then fixing bicycles and stuff. Yeah, but the fixing the bicycles was my godfather—you know, how to use tools. [*laughter*]
- KD: And your father, even if he was alive, he wouldn't have been teaching you those things as an MD.
- RD: No.
- KD: No.
- RD: He kind of—we never kind of saw him. Because he started doing his rounds at around—he went to the office at around four in the afternoon and didn't come in until three in the morning.
- KD: Wow.
- RD: He was treating all kinds of things. [*laughter*] People who I don't think were making very much money.
- KD: So was your mother happy that you were going off to—was she hoping that you would avoid the draft too?
- RD: No. She's [*pause*] a duty type of situation.
- KD: Okay.
- RD: Duty type of situation. It's very common among Mexican mothers, especially among—
- KD: You said you enlisted, and that was to avoid I guess—
- RD: Well, it was to get into this tracking thing—which was all a lie—and also to avoid getting into the Marines. There was a good chance that you'd get into the Marines. Out of one hundred people, they'd take twenty-five and say, "You're in the Marines," drafted.
- KD: You guys were aware of that at the time?

RD: Yes. The reason I was getting such high grades is because we were passing around the OCS test. We were passing around the booklets. This was serious. *[laughter]* People were, like, taking crash courses in typing so they wouldn't have to become an infantry person.

KD: Right.

RD: This was serious business. *[laughter]* There were two hundred people getting killed every week in Vietnam. It isn't like now, you know.

KD: Well, not Americans getting killed every week.

RD: No, this was Americans getting killed in Vietnam.

KD: No, I mean people are dying now, but they're not Americans at that rate.

RD: Well, yeah, we were tracked into thinking, what were the consequences for us? Actually, bringing that up, we didn't really give a shit about the Vietnamese. *[laughter]*

KD: No, I sympathize, you tried to find a way to avoid being drafted. I didn't realize that this was like a—there was an incredible system, like an underground movement of how—like you said, going to school, then working six months, then going to school, like strategies.

RD: Oh yeah. There were guys that knew that everything you signed was a lie. So they would cc [carbon copy] everything to their congressman, or their dads would fix it up so that they knew that you were already . . . So there was a backup, which I didn't really investigate that much. There was a certain point where I was going to—

KD: So you took off. I have here that you were stationed in Italy.

RD: Yeah, that was the—well, I went to—

KD: Where was your boot camp?

RD: Well the boot camp was at Fort Bliss.

KD: Right. Then from there you go to?

RD: Well, then I got—they mysteriously lost all my records and I got sent to truck-driving school at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, near Tucson. So I just—they teach you how to do a truck, driving this truck.

KD: Eighteen-wheel?

RD: Yeah, some of them were that big, but most of them were the two and a half ton truck.

KD: Oh, military truck.

RD: A deuce and a half is what they call them, the basic truck. *[laughter]* There was a larger component of brown and blacks in that. *[laughter]* So anyway, I was trying to do that—I was still trying to do—I had to redo. They still had the records of my grades and the tests. So I was still trying to get into the [OCS]. There was a question of—yeah, after I had—you either went to Fort Dix, or Fort Louis for Vietnam. Fort Dix for Europe.

So they were like one hundred people and half were going here and half were going there. That was just a computer. So I was going to put in paperwork to go to OCS anyway, but then I went, "Holy shit, I've been assigned to Europe. I don't want to miss that." *[laughter]* So I kind of like, didn't put in the paperwork. I didn't withdraw but I didn't put them in. I said, "Well, I'll just do it later," because you can do it later. Then I went to Fort Dix. My sister was in New York. [I was] screwing around there for like four or five days, and then took a flight to Frankfurt. And then I was looking all over Frankfurt. *[laughter]* It was cool. Then I took a train down to Vicenza—Vicenza, Italy.

KD: Yeah.

RD: And I was just there in this little base that they have there—which is now a bigger base.

KD: Is that where your sense of the arts starts awakening?

RD: Well, it's probably—I've never been to a place like Frankfurt. Little neighborhoods in Frankfurt are eight hundred years old or so. So yeah, there's a sense of—you get the same feeling in certain places, in certain—as opposed to say, Ensenada. *[laughter]* I tried to explain that to people here—"Why don't you like Ensenada?" Because I had to studio down in Ensenada for about four months, just recently. And I just said, "No, forget it." Because there's no comparison with some place that has history and some place that

doesn't. And I say it, because I lived [in] San Cristóbal de las Casas, and Chiapas, for many years. And, you know, it's like forty or fifty years old. *[laughter]*

KD: Right.

RD: And so there's a difference between when you first hit Frankfurt. Yeah, there's this sense of art history that's unavoidable.

KD: Do you remember your first responses to that? Like seeing—

RD: I liked the smell of stale beer. I never have been able to—there's so much beer drunk there, and there's just this smell of stale beer that's really cool. *[laughter]* I don't know.

KD: So what was your daily life like in Italy, at the base there?

RD: Well, I was driving—the thing about it is, the truck driving is not bad. It's a great job, because they send you everywhere. The problem is, there aren't that many jobs, so maybe you get a driving assignment once a week, and the rest of the time you're sitting there polishing a truck, trying to stay out of trouble. And that's all you do.

KD: So what about leave? What'd you do for leave?

RD: I never took leave. There was no point. *[laughter]* Because I could get off on the weekends, I could get to Padua. I took my bicycle and went to Padua.

KD: So what was—?

RD: Or I took the train and went to Venice. Venice was an hour away.

KD: Right.

RD: People plan all their lives to go to Venice. We were debating to go to the bowling alley at the PX or to go to Venice. *[laughter]* Or Verona. Verona, you know, Verona was even closer.

KD: Did you see museums?

RD: Yeah. I went to everything.

KD: Really?

RD: Yeah, sure.

KD: What was that like? Do you remember your first experience looking at a classic painting?

RD: You know, in the Scrovegni Chapel in . . . St. Anthony's in Padua, the . . . What's the name of that—the guy has a weird name. Giotto, the Giotto stuff. Looking at it and seeing his brushstrokes and all that—that was interesting.

KD: You were paying attention to brushstrokes?

RD: Well, sure, you're this close to them, you know? You can see the brushstrokes.

KD: Help me understand how you have this new appreciation for art, whereas you didn't seem to talk about [it] very much in your elementary school or high school years. Or even your family, you know, you didn't seem to be doing things at home.

RD: Well, probably, it has to do—probably, I will think that the—I would look at my father's, we used to call them "doctor books." All of his books. I would even look at them with some of my buddies and stuff because we were looking for naked ladies. But on the side, he had all of these curlicue drawings and stuff. Everywhere, almost every page had these—it was like he would be reading and he would be doodling on the side of the book these weird things—these weird drawings. And you know, page after page, book after book, that I guess was the only exposure that I had to—like I was saying, brushstrokes, you know? It was usually done with a ballpoint pen, never pencil. And there was no shading.

KD: So in your home, there's not a lot of visual artistic expression? Even doilies that women sometimes make—

RD: It was Mexican. Look behind you, stuff like that was all over the place.

KD: Oh, it was?

RD: Yeah.

KD: So textile—

RD: That's what everybody has. *[laughter]* I don't know now. But what else is there? If you're going to have some daily stuff, stuff that's part of literally the fabric of your home. Most of the traditions from

Anglo-Europe have been lost. And in Mexico, I mean, in—Freudian slip—here, it's pretty much, like I said, it's two hours away. And really, the border doesn't exist.

KD: Well, help me understand your family, because many of the people that I've interviewed don't talk about these things in the home. They don't have Mexican textiles.

[*break in audio*]

KD: This is side 2 on November 5, with Robert Delgado. He was telling me—I'm trying to get him to help me understand what his household looked like. If he's giving me a sense—you're giving me a sense that this was quite normal, that you saw a *serape*. Where are these things coming from? There's no Olvera Street, there's no—

RD: It probably came from the family—the family that's either coming in from Mexico or from East LA. And I think it probably had a lot to do with my father. It still had a lot to do with my father, who became a great Mexican patriot at the tail end of his life. And something like a *serape* is like—well, like this, this is interesting. It's like a thing that you normally have in a home somewhere.

KD: You're describing the tapestry on the table.

RD: Which is pretty much—but it was the colorations. It was the—especially the *serape* have so many basic colors and they interchange. You notice that. Oh, that's a different *serape*, you know? And just that saturation of color as it tends to [*laughter*] get your attention.

KD: So these are, like, in the home, tablecloths, bedspreads, on a couch?

RD: Yeah.

KD: What about ceramics, Mexican ceramics?

RD: The toys, the wooden toys . . . that people occasionally come by. We would laugh at them because we were into vacuum tubes that we made into spaceships, you know? So there would be these toys and stuff like that—carvings—that I'm sure that I just dismissed, but I'm sure they stayed with me because they're made by somebody. They'd [be] made by somebody.

Magu [Gilbert "Magu" Lujan] is really influenced by that. He won't admit it, but he's really influenced by all the toys that they brought. And you know, Morse and I get into arguments with him and others that his cars are not influenced—it's not Detroit that's influencing him. It's the *Mercado Sonora* in Mexico City that's influencing him. It's the carving of a '38 Dodge that they try to approximate in wood, usually in villages outside of Mexico City that you eventually saw that migrated over to the United States, that he saw.

Obviously, the impact of Detroit is big. But the making of it is not something that Detroit influenced. It's the wood carving that somebody did that you can touch and—even more so than actually touching, let's say, a car. Because a lot of people say that Chicano art is influenced by the culture of the United States. I don't think that's the—I think . . . [*pause*] If you just look at it just from the point of view of a car and the car society, the thirty centuries worth of history, all the way to Neo-Mex now, anybody who is an art historian will tell you that Detroit is interesting. It has a one hundred year history. But it pales in comparison to the Borgia Codex. [*laughter*] Anything pales in comparison with the Borgia Codex. [*laughter*]

KD: So, it sounds like you're very much drawn to these longer historical records.

RD: Sure, why not?

KD: And is that some of things that you were seeing in Europe that was important to you, that was fascinating because of its longevity?

RD: Well, like I said, when you're looking at Giotto's brushstrokes, you're there—this guy was living, what, seven hundred years ago. That's really interesting. When you see those brushstrokes, that's really interesting. As I look at it . . . I saw at the Tate, I saw a Jackson Pollock one time, and I actually saw the fly that happened to have intersected with one of his drops. And I'm going, "Man." I'm right there when he's on top of this thing and he's dropping things. Those are interesting situations to think about.

KD: So is there any particular event that you remember in Europe helping you to formulate your artistic vision?

RD: No, not really. There was—I guess the sculptures were interesting, but that was later when I was grown. Oh, no, no, it wasn't. It was when I was in Florence. The slaves. The ones that Michelangelo did when he was like eighty years old or something, that people said he never finished, which I think he did. There was a big debate.

I wasn't—I have to say that I only lasted about a year in the transportation company until I figured out that I didn't like it. And I actually wrote an article . . . There was a guy in my transportation company who was from New Jersey, but all of his parents were from a town outside—right outside of Vicenza.

KD: Wow.

RD: So I wrote this article on him. Everybody goes on leave and goes back to the states, and this guy takes a bus. I wrote this article for the post newspaper and they liked it so they transferred me over to this headquarters company. The headquarters company is where—the guys there, they're all typists, they all have degrees. Headquarters are where all the intellectuals—especially during the draft, they all go to the headquarters company. That's where the administration was done.

So I was hanging out with all of these guys who had masters degrees and stuff. So we would—one of my buddies had gotten his degree in art history from Yale. And we were always debating whether in Florence, Michelangelo had carved these things and didn't have time to finish them or whether he left them like that purposely as a form of expressionism. And I happen to think that he left them like that as a form of expressionism. I thought it was cool so I made drawings and stuff of these things. Yeah. *[pause]* So it was—

KD: Was that the beginning of your interest in the arts?

RD: No, I think I had figured it out beforehand that I was going to do something with my facile ability to draw, which is not a prerequisite to being a good artist. But it helps if you have good hand-eye coordination and can draw really well.

KD: When did you start doing this drawing? That's what I'm trying to get a sense of. Is this happening in high school? After high school?

RD: Yeah in high school, whenever there was a little time. Not like Wayne Healy or people who have a book, who do these things and save them. I just did a drawing and it would be gone.

KD: Because there wasn't a class.

RD: No. But immediately before going into the Army, I kind of figured out that I was going to explore the possibility of fine arts, visual arts.

KD: Were you saying to yourself, "I want to be an artist?"

RD: No. Because I didn't know what that entailed.

KD: Right.

RD: Which maybe was good.

KD: *[laughter]* Why do you say that?

RD: Because it's not the best way to make any money. The odds of you making—any loan officer will tell you that. It's not really good . . . *[pause]* So—

KD: Sorry, I interrupted you. You were talking about your MFA. Your friend from Yale and had gotten the degree in art history and you would debate about—

RD: Yeah. Well, we were looking at those things. But mostly I just went by myself and looked around places. Verona. Took a—take a train in the morning on the weekend, sign out, and you come back at break for check-in. So you have a whole day of Verona. What do you in Verona? *[laughter]* I don't know. You go to a museum. It's almost like anticlimactic or something. You are walking towards the museum and things that are [a] museum. The whole city's a museum; the whole place is a museum. You don't even have to go to the places, the museums. Why go to a museum?

KD: So you were really struck by the architecture, the layout of the city.

RD: I had never seen anything like that because I had been born in Los Angeles. *[laughter]* Los Angeles doesn't have anything like that.

KD: No.

RD: Not the massive, the stuff—the strange onion domes from Vienna all the way into . . . From Vicenza, you could actually see them. That whole part of—not that I read about it. I didn't really. I just looked at it, looked at this stuff.

KD: No sketchbooks?

RD: No, I was just doing the same thing—doing drawings and throwing them away. There was no—I still do that [*laughter*] for most of the stuff. Then I use Photoshop for the presentation, or doing things that everything is done more systematically.

KD: So drawings for yourself are to explore, express, test out . . .

RD: No, usually they were in response to somebody saying, "Can you draw?" No, I don't like to draw. I find it a chore.

KD: So, your service ends, and then what happens?

RD: Well, I stay. I took an overseas discharge and theoretically—I was trying to get the GI Bill. So I put myself into the School of Fine Arts in Venice. Then I had like a year to get a free flight back to the states. So I'll just stay—because we had a house off-post. Same guys—hanging around with the same guys, but I was just commuting to Venice, to the school there.

Then I finally figured out that it was a joke. The school was a joke. These old guys were showing you—they were showing you—it wasn't very interesting. I didn't find it very interesting. The facilities weren't that good. I hadn't discovered printing yet and the intricacies of it. So I probably didn't take advantage of the academy like I could have, like I took advantage of UCLA. I was just like, kind of like, I just liked to hang out there. It was just kind of cool to hang out at the school every so often.

KD: Hanging out and living the life of an artists?

RD: Yeah, and especially an exotic American who was just at the base and who saw buddies—you know, the whole thing. Getting into debates of Vietnam and that stuff and all of those things—that whole Vietnam era in Europe—as much as I could with my limited Italian. And I had this girlfriend. It was kind of nice.

KD: You had an Italian girlfriend?

RD: Yeah. Yeah. [*pause*] So I was there. Then I came back and I was going to get in—I went to Santa Barbara with a friend of mine who had just recently [*been*] released from active duty. Also, he was from Maine or somewhere. But he settled in Santa Barbara, so we got this house. And I was going San Diego City College. Or was it [*inaudible*]. I think I'm getting mixed up.

KD: Yeah, help me understand—

RD: There's a period in which I am in Rome for nine months. Let's see . . . No, no, I came back in the summer of 1970, after around six months in Italy. Then I tried to get into Cal State or something like that, I tried to get into UCLA, and UCLA said no.

KD: This is for a bachelor's degree program for

RD: I tried to get in as a—

KD: Studio arts?

RD: A junior.

KD: Because you had accumulated so much—

RD: No, if you tried to get into the—I don't know how it is now, but if you try to get into the UC . . . First of all, you try to get into the UC system. I didn't really start thinking about that. The system to get into a college in the United States is pretty much like the Army. So you have to figure out all of these systems. You have [*to*] figure all of these ways of doing things. I didn't know that. I came back and tried to get into UCLA is, and I didn't get in. So I said, "Screw it, I'm going to go back to Rome," because there were some friends in Rome. So I went to Rome. And actually that was a really good experience, Rome was—and also I got into the Academy in Rome, the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome.

KD: Okay.

- RD: Because I wanted to use the GI Bill. That's what was going to finance me. So, I never went to the classes there either. I started selling drawings of sculptures, classical sculptures. But there was a strange thing where—if you can imagine paper and you use a stylus like that and it indents. Then you go over it with frottage and then all this stuff. And it was like an immediate seller. I started selling in Piazza Navona, where they had been selling stuff for a thousand years or so. I had my little easel, the little thing, and I would show everybody these things.
- KD: And you were selling this on the street, in a gallery?
- RD: No, in the street, in the *piazza*. And everybody—every so often the police come by and bust you, but usually they leave you alone. There was Piazza Navona, there was in front of the Pantheon. I lived around there. And then there were the Spanish Steps. But the Spanish Steps and the Pantheon, the police would always bust you. But they always left you alone in Piazza Navona. The only problem was you would get some resentment from my art friends, my Italian art friends, because I was selling so much. I was selling like two hundred or three hundred dollars a month.
- KD: Whoa.
- RD: This is in 1970, which is the equivalent of like a thousand dollars a month now. So I really didn't need the GI Bill. So I said, "What the hell am I going to school for?" So they let me go.
- KD: Help me understand—was it a disillusionment in that art school that you saw, the one in Italy and then the one in—the first one?
- RD: In Venice?
- KD: In Venice and then the one in Rome. Was it disillusionment of, "Oh my God, this is all it is?" Or is it really a sense of, "They can't teach me anything," or "All they're teaching is technique and I don't need technique." What was the—
- RD: I think the rest—if there was a school like either one here in LA, I would have really jumped in and been in the whole thing. But it was that there were too many distractions. You're in Venice. *[laughter]* You're going to the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice and they're showing you pictures of Verona in the art history—I mean, an art history class in Venice is a contradiction.
- KD: Right.
- RD: It's a joke. Same thing in Rome.
- KD: It's the slide presentation model, right? Here's these slides.
- RD: Yeah, and they're going, "And this is, notice the curves. Notice this Giotto." A couple of years ago I was this close to the brushstrokes. What are you showing me this for? I'm going to go outside. *[laughter]*
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: So I usually just wandered all over Venice and *[little Verona]*. Same way in *[pause]* Rome. All these little places. Same way in Ensenada, where I just got back from. I mean, I know Ensenada backwards and forwards. *[laughter]* I don't like it, but I know it. It was—so Rome was really valuable. It was pretty valuable. It was getting closer to that commitment to really study art. I already knew that you're not going to make a lot of money. So it was—I never was tracked into—which is common, you'll find, with Chicano males—well, there's a saying in Mexico, "You don't have a child, you have a grandchild." Mexican men don't have children, they have grandchildren. Because mom and dad and all the relatives, you get pointed in that direction. *[pause]* Maybe love comes into it somewhere. It's usually not—you just do it because of the family. And so, I was really—that was never the case with me. And now that I was going into a profession, which would never really guarantee me that I could take care of anybody else beside myself. That cemented that. That still exists, except now I make a lot of money. *[laughter]* Which is an accident of that one percent.
- KD: Right.
- RD: So, I'm sure that my girlfriend saw that also. *[laughter]* The thing—so we're in Rome now, and then I went to—I came back. And then I went to Santa Barbara with a friend of mine. And I was in Santa Barbara. Then I was in Santa Barbara, and midway through Santa Barbara, I was taking classes—I was taking art classes

there—I got into UCLA. The way I got into UCLA was kind of interesting because I had a—I didn't mention that I was in Italy for three years, literally. And I didn't get sent to Vietnam because when I got to Vicenza, I had an immediate reaction to the European Sycamore. So it gave me this, I was hospitalized and it put me on a medical hold. They call it medical hold. If you're sick, they're not going to send you into combat zone—

KD: Right.

RD: Because you can become a burden. So you're pretty much [stuck]; you can't get out. But they're not going to send you to a combat zone. So I was stuck in—there's an interesting aside if you want to hear it. [*laughter*]

KD: I'm curious about all this.

RD: During that time—well, first of all, that automatically shut me out of OCS.

KD: Right.

RD: I couldn't go to OCS. So then, I said, "Okay, I'll make the best of it." And that's when I decided to get the hell out of the transportation company. I didn't want to drive trucks anymore because it's more exotic to be in the headquarters company and write for the newspaper. And that—by the way, in the high school, instead of taking a beating from the Dominicans, you could write these long essays. So sometimes we wrote these long essays. [*laughter*]

KD: That's where you learned how to write.

RD: Exactly.

KD: Necessity.

RD: Long essays, on what? You would say, "What am I going to write about?" And they'd go like this with a belt, and you'd go, "I'll figure something out." [*laughter*]

KD: Ow.

RD: Which is pretty much what journalists do.

KD: Yeah.

RD: What are you going to write about? And you've got a deadline and all of that. So there was this guy, I was hanging out—I was doing photography for this special services, which is recreation stuff and they run the athletic department and all. And I was hanging out with this guy and he said, "You're doing pretty good at this, that, and the other." But I learned—and he never volunteered the information—but I learned about a program called the combat artist program. You're assigned—it doesn't matter what condition you're in—but you're sent to a combat zone, but you're still assigned to the old company. You're assigned what's called "temporary duty" to this old company. I said, "Oh man, I can get to Vietnam. I can do this." They give you a 35mm camera to do whatever and assign you to [do] stuff in Vietnam.

KD: Right.

RD: And then they give you a studio in Hawaii. And I go, "This is great, man!" So I put in the paperwork, and it doesn't matter if you've been sick or anything, because you're temporary special duty. And they already had seen my drawings and all that stuff. Everybody knew that I could draw and stuff and that I was doing all this photography stuff—I knew how to develop and I knew lab work and all. And the guy sat me down and he said, "Yeah, we're looking at your stuff." He says, "Why do you want to do this?" [*laughter*] I say, "Well, I get a studio and a 35mm camera." He says, "Yeah, but you know, these are called 35-.45's, because they give you a 35mm camera and a .45 caliber automatic and that's it."

Do you imagine what would happen if you show up—because they don't assign you to Army or whatever. They can assign you to a special forces or they can assign you to the Marines. He said, "You get assigned to the Marines as an Army guy with a 35mm camera and you're taking pictures of these guys getting blown apart. If you don't get shot by the enemy, you're going to get shot by the other person." [*laughter*] "That .45 is so you can put a bullet in your head when things get too rough." He gave me this horror story. And I went, "Oh shit, well maybe I should take the papers back." Because if I had done that,

it would be—I saw some of the pictures, some of the stuff that came out of that. And it's just absolutely gorgeous, it's amazing.

KD: Images from the front lines kind of stuff?

RD: Yeah. They had dozens of guys that were doing art and they would come back to Hawaii and do these sculptures and do this, that, and the other for six months. And it was—it was impressive stuff. I don't know why they don't publicize it that much. Probably because the UCLA Art Department doesn't think it's art, which is a problem that we'll get to later. *[laughter]*

KD: Documentary photography is what they call it.

RD: Yeah, it's really amazing stuff. I may actually look into that a little bit more because it intrigues me. But the thing—we're not getting into UCLA. The thing is, I kind of kicked in—I kicked in my ability to deal with organizations and bureaucracies. What I did—I learned that you really don't—the way they put in for the UC system—I don't know how it was then, but how it is now is—you put in for the whole system and then you have your first, second, third choice.

KD: Yes, same thing.

RD: Obviously, I put in UCLA. "What major do you want?" Studio art. "Well, you're never going to get it." Because everybody and their mom wants to go to UCLA in studio art. So I figured out what you do is that you figure out—I put in UC Riverside in philosophy, because nobody applies for UC Riverside and philosophy. So I got into UC Riverside in philosophy. And of course then I said, "I can't do that. *[laughter]* I have bronchitis," and UC Riverside was really smoggy.

KD: Yeah.

RD: It was the worst place in the world.

KD: Yeah.

RD: So they did it over there. But I got in—I still get into UCLA as a philosophy major. So I was a philosophy major. The thing is, I would never, never have gotten into UCLA or anything if you apply to studio art, because you can't do that. It's an elite situation and you're up against all of these other people.

KD: Well—

RD: So what you do is—

KD: The other places you applied [to] when you were—

RD: I think it was [UC] Davis. All the places nobody applies to.

KD: But when you were in Europe, I mean, those art academies, do you have to have a portfolio then?

RD: Yeah, I showed them my stuff.

KD: Oh, you did have a portfolio.

RD: Yeah.

KD: And what was that, the stuff you had acquired when you were hanging around town, drawing?

RD: Yeah. Experiments.

KD: Mostly pen and paper, or paper and pencil, or what?

RD: Yeah.

KD: What's the media?

RD: All the medium, to figure out how to do it.

KD: So you actually had a portfolio. I don't know, do undergrads have to use a portfolio in the UC system?

RD: Well, that was after I was . . . What you do, in the UC system—technically [I was] a philosophy major, and then I changed it to Italian, because I would have had to take these philosophy classes that I don't—the Italian classes were a lot more fun.

KD: And you had some Italian.

RD: And I had some Italian. And they would do things like "History of Italian Cinema."

KD: Right.

RD: But, you then apply for these studio classes. They're undergraduate classes.

KD: Right.

- RD: They're not junior and senior.
- KD: Lower division.
- RD: They're just like "Elementary Drawing I and II." And that's just like to get to know the guys.
- KD: Oh.
- RD: And of course, there were these people who were trying to draw and I was just, like, doing all of this stuff real fast. And so it was obvious that I was—these guys started to notice me.
- KD: Talented. You probably won't say that word. *[laughter]*
- RD: No, the thing was, I could do more in a shorter space of time because my hand coordination was either natural or mostly natural—
- KD: Technique.
- RD: The technical aspects of it. So I get to know all of these guys, and eventually I petition to get into the studio art program.
- KD: Who were some of those professors?
- RD: Jan Stussy, who was the chairman actually of my MFA, Lee Mullican, and oh, William Brice. He was . . . *[pause]* Who else? Sturman—I can't remember his name—Sturman, a younger guy. There was an interesting thing that happened with Ed Moses. *[laughter]*
- KD: Ed Moses would have been contemporary?
- RD: He's about ten years older than I am.
- KD: Oh, I thought he was in school the same time as most of you guys.
- RD: No, he was just starting to teach there.
- KD: Oh, he just started teaching.
- RD: But they tried to kick me out . . . *[pause]* I had one year left on my GI Bill, and I got my MA in art. And I wanted to get my MFA and he says—I was going to use up a slot for no other purpose than to get an MFA. And they didn't think it was—I just wanted to get the MFA because I wanted to use up my GI Bill. And also there was a possibility of my getting a Ford Foundation grant, which I did get through what's his name? Gómez.
- KD: Juan Gómez-Quiñonez.
- RD: Yeah. Juan Gómez-Quiñonez got me this thing. That was it. I'm going, "I'm going to make money. I don't want to drop out now." But all of the professors have their kids who they want to come in, and here Delgado is taking up *[space]*. I think it was a setup. They set me up on—it was the orals for the MA. And they said, "What do you want to do with all of this?" I said, "I just want to learn the techniques so I can teach school and make some money and buy a house." And you know, they don't want to hear that.
- KD: No. *[laughter]*
- RD: It was probably my orneriness. They want to hear stuff that nobody understands, the ethereal . . . the ethereal oneness of me and my paints. And so they wanted to kick me out. So Stussy calls me in and says, "They're going to kick you out because nobody wants to volunteer to be the fifth member of your committee." Oh, you already satisfied your MA—
- KD: Right.
- RD: It's to form the committee for the MFA for the next year.
- KD: Right.
- RD: So nobody wanted to come in. They knew that if I didn't get a fifth member—or fourth member, I don't remember—they'd kick me out and free a slot for somebody. That's what they tried to do. So I said, "Damn, you're going to kick out a Chicano who's a veteran from UCLA, who has *[pause]* a medical condition that's being taken care of by the Veteran's Administration?" And he kind of saw the light, you know? And sure enough he talked to—I'm sure that he got together with Ed Moses. "This kid needs one more person." And Ed Moses said, "Sure, I'll be the one." Which I think was really cool. And actually I talked to him about a year ago when he had these tapestries that he was doing in Bergamot *[Station]*.
- KD: Yeah.

- RD: And he actually remembered that. I mean he says he remembered. I don't know. He may have remembered it because I think he took some—he was just getting in to a tenure track situation—
- KD: Exactly.
- RD: So it wasn't exactly a—
- KD: Free will. *[laughter]*
- RD: No, I think it was detrimental to his tenure track that he actually—because he pissed off everybody, and he knocked out whoever wanted my slot, who could have been somebody's son or daughter who had a lot of clout.
- KD: Oh.
- RD: I like that from Ed Moses. The thing was, I more or less threatened Jan Stussy. And I think at the time he was the chairman, because they divvy up chairmanships. I kind of implied over my lawyer's dead body I'm going to get kicked out of here, that you don't want to mess with a veteran who is a Chicano, you know?
- KD: That's the first time that you used that word. I'm trying to get a sense of—you're overseas when the Chicano movement is flourishing in Los Angeles. So when does your sense of being a Chicano start to develop?
- RD: I was actually here between Venice and Rome.
- KD: Right.
- RD: During the Chicano Moratorium. I didn't really concern myself with that. I was only here for like six months. I was pretty much just getting to know the city again. So I wasn't—I don't think I even heard of it. I was just palling around with my old buddies and going up to the Bay Area. And it was the time that Chip Oliver was getting kicked out of the NFL—Ralph Oliver's getting kicked out the NFL for writing a book about how the NFL was protecting its players by putting them in the National Guard during that thing.
- KD: Right.
- RD: So he got blackballed from the NFL, kicked off the Raiders. So, it was interesting times. He was hanging out in [an] ashram in Marin County with Gypsy Boots and stuff, or Berkeley with Gypsy Boots and stuff. *[laughter]* So I was just hanging out up there and pretty much in the Bay Area with the white hippies. So I didn't hear at all about—and you know, this was another generation, pretty much that was high schoolers who were doing that.
- KD: Yeah. The walkouts.
- RD: The walkouts.
- KD: Yeah. So how is it you get a sense [of identity]? I mean UCLA in the '70s is still pretty much a hotbed of Chicano activism. Is that where your sensibility of this thing called Chicano comes about?
- RD: No, I just knew about the—I looked at it as a . . . kind of a political type of thing for my own—me and UCLA. It was like the Army. It was the same thing. It was the system that's trying to screw you. And if you don't watch yourself and don't hang onto whatever, they're going to screw you. And they try to, of course. But at the same time, you can use that system. You can get everything out of it.
- KD: So you're aware of this kind of politics that's taking place, but it's not something that you're involved in [or] would claim for yourself?
- RD: Exactly.
- KD: For the MFA program, you're specializing in paint?
- RD: Painting.
- KD: Painting. And can you talk to us just a little bit about—did they teach you anything?
- RD: The facilities—I used the facilities as much as I could, especially in the print area. Do I remember anybody talking to me about—it was pretty much just like pals talking. Pretty much like what you—talking about things in general—not anything to do with painting. I don't know whether—I probably would have learned it anyway, the on-the-job training. So they could really push the paint and do things, like, this fast. And getting the full tonality of things probably has a lot more to do with the serapes and the exposure to—the serapes I was talking about back in the house. And then the exposure to Mexico in '76 when I went

Chiapas and I started doing the—I started really pushing the pigment around in the murals. It's like you go and study under a master for violin, but the master isn't there when you're going back and forth—

KD: Doing your scales.

RD: Doing your scales. Well, no, you can do your scales anywhere. The nuances and the real—the stuff that really sets you apart from another violinist or saxophonist or whatever, that's when you need the master class. But the master class hadn't figured this [gestures to his art on the wall] out yet. [laughter]

KD: That painting on the wall.

RD: In fact, nobody's figured this out yet. Nobody. The idea—this comes from, technically it comes from [Stanton] MacDonald-Wright and [Morgan Russell]. But there were these guys in the 1920s who were doing what they called color synchrony. That you used tonalities to emphasize a shape. The tonalities to make one shape but a different color so the shape pops out. That's what I'm doing.

These shapes are being—they're overlaid—and the overlay is of course, abstract expressionism, which Picasso was doing—the layers of two, two images superimposed. So I just stick in the pigment and maneuver with these two shapes superimposed. If it gets too abstract and I want to emphasize the highlights of the rounded—the forehead or the shoulder—I will highlight. I will go from dark to light. Now, if it's too obvious, I will reverse it, so that the light instead of hitting the shoulder, it's actually a dark area. So it draws the eye in and it becomes a concavity, which is the opposite of a shoulder. But it's still a photo of—it's still an anatomy.

KD: You're talking a little bit about the piece on the wall. What's the name of the piece and the year? . . . Ninety-seven at the bottom.

RD: Ninety-seven . . . I don't know. What? The name of it?

KD: Yeah.

RD: I don't know.

KD: Is it untitled?

RD: I guess.

KD: So, this is your major own artistic expression, this kind of painting that I'm familiar with, in your work.

RD: Yeah.

KD: Does that develop in the time that you're at UCLA?

RD: Yeah, I was doing it, but nobody was commenting on it.

KD: Okay, so—

RD: It was like the silence was deafening. And actually, the silence is deafening now. Except for people like Magu who say that I can't call myself a Chicano artist because I'm not doing Chicano art. And the cool thing about Magu is that he actually says it. Everybody else just thinks it. But if you want to have a comfortable life, why mess it up by getting into a debate with Delgado?

KD: You seem to have a very keen sense of art history. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about the artists that inspired your work.

RD: Well—

KD: You just mentioned Wright.

RD: Strangely enough, Arnold Belkin, who I met in the early '80s, who is a Canadian Mexican—I met him at the Museo [Universitario] del Chopo when he was in charge there. His stuff used a lot of that, a lot of gradations. But I didn't know his stuff before I met him. People will probably say that Delgado was influenced by Arnold Belkin, but I didn't know him. I didn't even know his work at all. So it was interesting that—and he never really commented on my stuff. Maybe because he saw too much similarity. [laughter] He also didn't want to sign my first Fulbright papers in '84 because he said it was a capitalist plot by the State Department. He was very anti . . .

KD: So were there colleagues of yours or students that were influencing your work?

RD: No.

KD: Or encouraging or admiring your work?

RD: No. I didn't hang out with anybody. I just spent my time painting and repainting, just working the pigments so I could do it fast and experimenting in the print room. I was doing all of these experiments with power tools on plates and stuff, and the tile and different levels of acid eating with spray cans as a block-out.

KD: Wow.

RD: So there was gradation. I'd like to do that again, but I don't have access to a—

KD: Print shop.

RD: Print shop. The thing is, I could do all kinds of things, and actually the thing that is more interesting now, I'm getting into tile big-time. It was only discovered like ten years ago. It was—

KD: I'm trying to get a sense of where do these influences come from? You have [a] very, very strong sense of European art history. You rattle off the names and the places where art was created very easily. Yet, you talk about that you were bored by the coursework. You were more excited by what was going on outdoors. So it's not like you were getting this stuff from a book—or you were, but the book isn't as inspiring as the place and the actual experience of that place. I'm just trying to get a sense of where that developed.

RD: Yeah, it was probably the street. I think it was—you know, my formal training, it was exactly that; it was just formal. It was formal. It was more formal than training. It was like I have an MFA from UCLA. I gave them all—really, they could have taken all of the professors out and—the thing about UCLA is that it gave me money, because I was making money. I never lost money at UCLA. I always made money. I made eleven thousand dollars in 1976 with work study and the Ford Foundation grant and the GI Bill. And that's the way I wanted it. Because I wasn't going to pay for—what was his name? We had this class about art—I didn't understand a goddamn thing they were talking about. The ethereal nothingness of being . . . I don't need that. What was going on with me was probably what was going on with people in East LA who did not have access to formal education.

And what is going on with pretty much in the graffiti movement, is that you're just learning things—the more you paint, the better you get. Just like the more you practice your scales, the better you get. And the variations on that is more impacted on the daily life with others, not by a formal sit-down with somebody who's supposed to know more than you at a formal school like UCLA, or CalArts or any of those places. UCLA was just a means to get money so that I could get . . . I knew then that an MFA wasn't . . . Unless I was going into tenure track, and I wasn't going to do that—it wasn't needed. And it's not needed. As a matter of fact right now—at that time, you could start as an instructor with a couple of classes and then work yourself up in five years to having a full load in tenure track.

Now, it takes at least ten years, and you're what they call an adjunct professor. You don't even get a parking permit. You don't get medical. You don't get anything. You're a part-time worker. And now it takes you ten years before you can even think of getting a full load. Nobody's willing—in an environment like LA, you can't exist at a place like UCLA without working a full load. You can't afford it. So, what they're doing is they're getting all of these part-time people who don't know shit. *[laughter]*

KD: So were you aware of kind of how the institution works against the professional arts at the time?

RD: Sure. Sure, because it's just like the Army. *[laughter]*

KD: Okay.

RD: It works against the—you can't trust a damn thing that they say. If you don't put it to them, they'll walk all over you.

KD: So, at the time, you're in your early, late twenties, early thirties, right? Getting your degree.

RD: Yeah.

KD: You felt like you were making a good amount of money. Where were you living then?

RD: Oh, different places. Venice . . . *[pause]* in Hollywood, different places.

KD: And, I'm trying to imagine, painting is not the most expensive in terms of media in the arts. It's not like sculpture or tile that you do now that calls for all kinds of other equipment.

RD: Yeah.

KD: So you had a pretty decent life.

- RD: Yeah, I had a studio.
- KD: You had a studio?
- RD: Yeah, they gave me a studio.
- KD: Outside the school or in the school?
- RD: Well, it's a parking lot now, but it was part of the school. It was the old skating rink where Sonja Henie used to practice and stuff. I think it was a venue for the Olympics in '32, or [a place] to practice.
- KD: Does everybody have a studio? I'm sorry, I thought everybody in the MFA had access to a studio.
- RD: Yeah, mostly everybody.
- KD: Oh.
- RD: Sometimes they gave them, like, the print room. They just gave you the key to the print room and they gave you teaching—I tried to get a teaching assistantship. That was really pushing it. Stussy said, "Hey man, you got about everything you want. Hey, leave a teaching assistance for—we got this guy. He's married. He needs the money." I was like, "Oh, okay, okay, okay." So . . . [pause] I was just satisfied with that.
- KD: Did you go out and look at other art at the time when you were in the MA program, the MFA program? Did you gallery hop and check out what other people were doing?
- RD: No, not like now. I wasn't into the gallery-hopping scene.
- KD: Even your colleagues in the MFA program? Did you go look at their work in the studio?
- RD: Well, sure, we were at everybody's studio drinking. The studio we had, there were, like, three of us. There was a little patio garden, so we had barbeques and stuff. It was nice.
- KD: That sounds really good. [laughter]
- RD: And everybody was talking about art. But then they would talk about art and . . . [pause] They were—if they wanted to bring up the art of Europe, it didn't seem to—they didn't seem to know what they were talking about. They were talking about things they learned in slideshows, and I was . . . thinking about other things. [laughter] I was thinking about where I had been, the things that I had touched.
- KD: Right.
- RD: There was no—there wasn't too much of an interest. You have to remember, these are like—this is a group of huge egos and nobody was going to sit there and listen to me talk about what I was doing in the Army in Vicenza a few years—two or three years ago, when these guys were the elite of the elite. You know? I don't know whether that had to do—I don't think that had to do with that I was a Latino. Probably now it would because there's so much anti-Latino situations going on. But they were huge egos.
- KD: Or class? You're obviously—
- RD: No, I don't think it was that. I think it was just ego. These were the crème de la crème and nobody could tell them what to do. And what is art, and what is—they knew about the cinquecento and I wasn't going to tell them about it. Although, I would look around and see if the guard was looking and touch some of the things. And because there was—everybody was into . . .
- KD: Jockeying.
- RD: Jockeying for—not position in front of the master, it was beyond that. It was just—what happens now, one-on-one. Nobody wants to talk to me about Chiapas because they know I know too much. [laughter]
- KD: Tell me, if you can go back for just a second, what's the motivation behind touching a piece of art?
- RD: You want to see what it's made out of. I don't know . . .
- KD: So, kind of curiosity?
- RD: Yeah. Yeah. Touching it. I guess that's why they have guards.
- KD: Well, some people touch to break the rules and some people—
- RD: No, it was to touch. To see what it feels like. Because I touch my painting, I want to see what theirs feels like.
- KD: So you finish your MFA and the Chicano movement is still pretty much in development but a little bit winding down in some areas in Los Angeles. You go to Chiapas after that.

RD: Yeah, I had gone to—I met [Sister] Karen [Boccalero]. Actually, I hit her up for a job at Self Help Graphics [& Art] in, I think, '75 or something like that. I was hanging out in a few openings there. But it was—there was a messy relationship that I didn't, that I was kind of running away from. So there was a friend of mine that I had known—that I still know—from UCLA, my brother-in-law who was in charge of the CYO at St. Ann's, who was a priest there, who was a friend of mine. And he got himself a gig in Chiapas. You know, a young priest doesn't get a parish in the United States until you're well into middle age.

KD: Right.

RD: So he got a gig in Chiapas. So I called him up and said, "How's it going? I want to come down there." He says, "Okay, come on down." I went down there and just stayed for, I guess it was six months for the first part, and then off and on for I think ten years. Back and forth. I think the longest I stayed there was, like, two years straight, and also in San Cristóbal. And that was the introduction to—that was the introduction to Latin American politics. And by Latin American politics, I am talking about Roosevelt doesn't get any funding, if you really believe in the borders. They don't exist.

KD: For capitalist.

RD: Pardon?

KD: For capitalist investment—

RD: Or abuse. The way the IMF [International Monetary Fund] handles Mexico, the way that the LAUSD [Los Angeles Unified School District] handles schools on the east side is pretty much about the same. There's not pretty much of a caring situation going on either, in either one. It's just what can you get out of it? So anyway, the things that everybody was kind of mouthing about the situation in East LA, which I had seen from—when I was younger—I had gone to East LA for big dinners or something. There was a difference between that and the west side. So you see this disparity. Well, I saw a disparity between classes in Chiapas right away. And it was a crash course in political science. They had—

[break in audio]

KD: This is Karen with Roberto Delgado on November 5, 2007. This is tape 2 [for] the [CSRC Oral Histories Series]. Roberto was telling me about his crash course in political science in Chiapas.

RD: What do you want to know?

KD: That was farther back than what you were actually talking about. The priest who was your contact there eventually [got] kicked out you said.

RD: Yeah, he gets kicked out in '96 after '94, because they obviously knew what his influence was. The whole liberation theology situation, the relationship between—they always like to say Marx and Mark—

KD: "Marx," meaning?

RD: Carlos Marx and St. Mark.

KD: Okay.

RD: And San Marcos and Karl Marx. And all of these things that were coming out of Vatican II were happening in Chiapas, big time. Loren had these four seminarians who are now professors here, there and everywhere, and they continued. But they would go out into the villages and talk to people about what was going on and how the church could—the relationship between the church, the employer and the employee for example. It was mostly, at that time—well, it still is. It's corn and coffee—*pergamín* [parchment] coffee—which is mostly routed to Europe through Nestlé and General Foods, which they still own pretty much all of Chiapas. So you could see the relationship there between the indigenous and the ranchers right away and the prejudices that go on there. That was—I saw that right away.

KD: Again, this is kind of your training on the ground. You're not reading a book. You're not reading pamphlets that the religious theologians are circulating.

RD: Yeah, it was pretty much training [on the ground]. I mean, if you really want to read the Vatican II and what all the theologians say about liberation theology. I want to read a novel, you know? I was introduced to . . . What's his name? You know, the novelist from México.

KD: Oh, the novelist.

RD: The novelist [Carlos Fuentes]. And the not the poetic politics, but the people that lead up to [Gabriel] García Márquez and all of that, all of these little tales about what was going on. And I saw that what was going on back then—García Márquez talking about what was going on in the turn of the century in northern Colombia. It was right there. [*laughter*] It was right outside the window. Nothing had changed. That was interesting and stuff.

But as far as reading theory and stuff—because these guys were into reading theory. They would give me these books that they got from the Political Science at UNAM. I tried to read them. I said, "I'm not going to read this. That is stupid." Because they were academics, and they are academics right now. One of them is in charge of one of the campuses at [Universidad] Metropolitana. The other one is a lawyer, and the other two teach. One in Querétaro and one is at the University of Guadalajara. So they were going all over the place. And there were people coming in from Guatemala. This was during [General Efraín] Ríos Montt—you know, Ríos Montt said, "Deliver me the head of a Jesuit and I'll give you so much money." It was during that time that people were getting killed in Central America.

You have to remember that I was an hour, by fast car—I was a couple hours from the border to Guatemala. It was during that heavy-duty Central America time. Chiapas is just an extension of Central American. So that's what I was talking about. At the same time I was doing on-the-job training and honing my skills in this and seeing how some of the iconography of the Palenque and the Mayas could be incorporated into what I was doing. The style was the same, which was using the total gradation things, which I started developing at UCLA—at no fault of the professors, because they didn't have a clue—but the iconography was there. As a matter of fact, it was like bypassing the iconography of the Chicano movement. Because instead of hearing it from my uncle, I went to Palenque. And yet again, I touched the friezes and looked at some of the murals and stuff. So it was getting to the source.

NOVEMBER 7, 2007

- KD: This is Karen Davalos with Roberto Delgado. Today is the—I guess it's the seventh of November. We're in Highland Park. I was asking Roberto about why he went to Chiapas and what did he do there.
- RD: Oh, I was fleeing Los Angeles and a messy love affair, if that's what you want to call it.
- KD: But your connection was these Jesuits, or Dominicans?
- RD: He was actually diocesan.
- KD: Diocesan.
- RD: There were a lot of Jesuits there, especially after [Ríos] Montt put a bounty on their heads. So I took a plane to Mexico City and then took the train to Palenque. That was interesting. *[laughter]*
- KD: Yeah, what was happening?
- RD: No, the trains in Mexico. For some reason, I thought it was going to be like Europe. But it was—
- KD: In terms of?
- RD: Of time and trouble. Let's see, how can I put this delicately. In neatness, tidiness.
- KD: The material conditions.
- RD: In material conditions. Then I got to Palenque. I took one of those Bluebird school buses to Yajalón, throughout all of these villages. This is a picture here of—actually . . . *[pause]* So I went to, I just went to Chiapas and I did what you see there.
- KD: These are murals, large indoor paintings?
- RD: Yeah. And I started doing my own stuff too, I mean, painting. There's not much to do there, that was the good part. There's not much to do so you just sit there and paint. And the more you paint, the *[better]* you get. So it was good. It was good to get OJT *[on-the-job training]*. *[laughter]* As opposed to UCLA, where it's essentially a . . . Can you see that?
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: It's essentially a . . . Oh, I like the displays *[refers to computer screen]*, you can see it from that angle without it getting obscured. Oh, my gosh.
- KD: So, this kind of coloration, is this something that you were developing prior to going to Chiapas?
- RD: Yeah, UCLA.
- KD: Okay.
- RD: Nobody noticed. I don't think nobody even noticed.
- KD: What do you mean?
- RD: The whole idea that it was—I remember the other guy, the other guy's name was Morgan Russell. It was MacDonald[-Wright] and Morgan Russell on color synchrony. There are three figures in here. The reason you can see the head of the kid is that I happened to give it a strong color and strong tonalities. You can maneuver that. You can maneuver all of that. You can abstract and obscure, whatever you want by the direction of the gradation, of the tone gradations, light to dark, dark to light and stuff like that.
- KD: For people listening, does this have a name or location?
- RD: Well this one is in the Casa de la Cultura in Yajalón, which is where I went, where [Father] Loren Riebe had the parish. A mining community of about—not a mining community. A community—agricultural or ranching community. Of coffee mostly, I think. If you take all of the villages and everything around that municipality, it was probably like eight thousand *[people]*. The town, at any one time, there were maybe three thousand people there. It was not very big.
- KD: So where did these images come from? Did you capture them on photographs?
- RD: I did to try to scan these things. I don't know. You can kind of get an idea.
- KD: So you were working with what kind of camera?
- RD: An Nikon. A little Nikkorex, actually, that somebody gave to me.
- KD: Really?
- RD: At UCLA, this guy named Mike Bishop gave it to me, which was later stolen at Self Help, actually. *[laughter]*

KD: So these are just images of the community?

RD: Yeah.

KD: People at, it looks like, the church.

RD: Yeah, that was at the church.

KD: So you would use this as your source for the images in the mural?

RD: Yeah, I would make slides. You would have to go to Tuxtla Gutiérrez to get slides done. Then I would just project the slides.

KD: Okay.

RD: And then just do the outline. What I do now is I Photoshop it and make it into line drawings, and then do an acetate with an overhead projector. It's a lot easier. *[laughter]* Whatever's easier.

KD: But at the time, it was projection and then you do the drawings, the line drawings, and then you begin with—are you making decisions where you want to make something—those darker tones, as you're painting?

RD: Sure, you want to—you step back and say, "Well, those plants—there are too many plants there." I can see the plants, and the people in the background are all hidden. And I say that I at least want them to get the hint of the persons in the background, so maybe you just add another color to it. That's the terrain.

KD: That's the landscape. Mountainous. I have to confess, I had always thought, since I knew you had gone to Chiapas, that your work was, it looks to me like, in a dark—light has been obscured by the jungle and the way in which a dense forest can obscure an image.

RD: It might be. But I didn't think of that. And I didn't spend much time in the forest. It was pretty much the town and the people. There really isn't too much to do with vegetation. Pretty much everything I do is based on photography of people.

KD: So figurative?

RD: Figurative in that it's based on figures. *[laughter]*

KD: Okay.

RD: But obviously it turns out to be something that's pretty abstract.

KD: It has a very organic feel to it too. This is a mural at a wider angle. You can see Casa de la Cultura.

RD: Yeah.

KD: You were painting directly on the wall?

RD: Yeah, I was painting directly on the wall, which was a big mistake. It was acrylic outdoors.

KD: Oh, acrylic outdoors.

RD: We're kind of jumping—this is back when people were painting acrylic outdoors. This was—actually, this is ten years after. This is '86, this is after the Fulbright. So this is twenty years after—before the present, where all the Chicano murals fall apart because they're acrylic. Acrylic won't stand up. You learn real fast, especially if you're getting commissioned from the city, especially in the public art realm, which we'll talk about extensively at the tail end of this. This was also OJT, and when I mean OJT, I don't just mean getting this particular style down pat, but doing it fast and doing it in ways that is going to please a general population that hires people to divvy out the money for public art. So, what I'm going to explain to you, I usually explain in presentations if I'm a finalist. The thing is, the acrylic just falls apart outdoors. It won't last.

KD: Yeah. Especially exposure to the sun and the elements.

RD: This was facing south.

KD: Ah.

RD: Some of it's disappeared. That's okay. And a lot of the Chicano murals are that way. It's just a process of educating the public, that things fade and should be regenerated and this thing goes on and on.

KD: So no angst for your work that's public, it has an ephemeral quality to it. It just disappears over time.

RD: Well, what are you going to do? *[laughter]* You going to get all bent out of shape because chemical decomposition sets in? *[laughter]* I may be a crazy artist, but I ain't that crazy. And half the time the artists are

acting anyway. They're acting out the angst. Half the whole deal is how you play the role of the artist in front of the audience.

KD: How do you play that role?

RD: I pretty much take that role and throw it back in the audience's face, because they're expecting you to do that. "Gee, what about this tic?" And people have asked me that, "Do you feel terrible" that, for example, now, I get in great debates with Wayne Healy that there's the graffiti. "Do you feel bad about that?" He kind of can't stand these gang bangers that do that, or these taggers that do that. And I go, "The issue is not that they're doing it on a wall, the issue is why they're doing it on a wall." People at that age have creative energy. They're not very good. But they still have creative energy and they have to do it somewhere. I point out that in many of my—especially when I was doing my station at Heritage Square, when my mom went to school at Lincoln High School. They had, like, three chess teams after school. They had, like, I don't know, varsity, junior varsity, B, C and an equivalent of a freshman team. They had five football teams, each one with fifty kids—

KD: Yeah, same with badminton—

RD: You know, testosteronized males, that now—

KD: Yeah.

RD: You've got only varsity. So you have two hundred kids that used to be occupied, now after school trying to figure out what to do with all of this pent up energy. You see what happens. *[laughter]* So I say, "Stop complaining about the guys going over your mural," which I happen to think is part of the process of public art. "So, they add to it, so what?" In my particular case, I don't really mind that at all. I think that, if anything, it should call the attention of my contemporaries of the real problem. The real problem is that the educational system is a joke. Yeah, you have—and Wayne says—*Stand and Deliver* at Garfield High School. And I say, "Yeah, that's great, but 60 percent of those kids can only read at the sixth-grade level when they graduate the twelfth grade. What's that got to say about anything?" *[laughter]* It's a joke. Nobody is doing anything about it and they won't do anything about it until it becomes a national security problem—when people can't read the instructions to make a bomb probably.

KD: So take me back to the '70s in Chiapas. You're killing a lot of time. How do you get—where are you living? How do you get facilities to paint, to set up an easel? Are you using paint and brush?

RD: Well, we went to Guatemala City, every so often learning to take a caravan, we'd go to Guatemala City and hit—it was gorgeous you know. Now, you'd probably get jumped by a bunch of *maras*.

KD: A gang, you mean?

RD: The *Maras Salvatrucha* [were] kicked out of Pico Union and are now setting up shop in Central America, probably to control the business aspects of the US there. I went there, and I would buy the brushes and I would get oils and I would get acrylic. It was kind of pricey, but it was all right. And I would use as much local stuff as possible. But the—the car enamel, it was very hard to work with. It's very strong. It's stronger than the acrylic outdoors—obviously—it's car enamel. *[laughter]* But it's very hard to work with. You have to dilute it when it's—it'll kill you after awhile.

KD: Yeah, it's poisonous. *[laughter]* That's the benefit of acrylic.

RD: So I was using it—as you saw what I did in the . . . Where was that? The one with the—

KD: The one you sent me?

RD: The first one that was up. *[refers to computer screen]* I can't—

KD: I think that was Chiapas too. Hold on, go ahead and tell me about this.

RD: That's what I started doing, which took me five years or so. It was, like, ten feet long. The one that I sent you was this, that you see in the front.

KD: Is this inside the church?

RD: It's [the] parish hall.

KD: Parish hall?

RD: This is where—during the *cosecha*? This is where all the Tzeltals and Tzotziles and Ch'oles from the eastern part of the state, they would crash. They'd crash for—you know, people staying there while they went out to the fields to do their agribusiness thing. By the way, they would sit there and talk about how they were getting screwed.

KD: They would communicate with you in Spanish?

RD: Yeah, there was nothing else to talk about other than, "How much did you get paid today for your coffee?" They would pick, on average a hundred twenty pounds a day of coffee, and they would get paid, at that time, maybe three dollars. This is *pergamín* coffee that could be made into your normal Starbucks. Maybe out of a hundred twenty pounds, you can refine maybe like twenty-five pounds of good coffee. But I mean, just do the math. [laughter] They're spending pennies, literally pennies—they're spending a tenth of one percent, or maybe one percent or so.

KD: Did you have a sense of that brutal economy in Chiapas before you went down, or was it something that you were learning as you went down?

RD: No, it was when I was there.

KD: It was on-the-job training as well?

RD: Yeah. And I also learned how insulated, how very insulated this country and this economy can make you feel. You don't have a clue. [laughter] That, of course, is what should have been taught—when you're studying German expressionism, which I already told you, is pretty much Gronk. In 1920s Germany, you will definitely find *la tormenta*, and you will find very good reasons for why the state and the people had something to do with that. And if you had an art history professor who are not insulated like I was insulated, and the whole economy and the situation being insulated, you would have these things being brought up and discussed, which I think is the basis of art. [laughter] That's the whole point, isn't it? What is the subject matter and what is the universal value? Does Jeff Koons have universal value with his bunny rabbits? [laughter] I don't know. I guess we'll know in fifty years because they'll be dissecting it and dicing and slicing intellectually about what was the universal impact on society. But that's down the line.

KD: But you also said the other day that perhaps because he's a white boy, he gets dissected and analyzed and written about, in your words.

RD: He doesn't, he just [inaudible] if anything. It's obvious when they talk about somebody like Jeff Koons, and to a certain extent somebody like [Takashi] Murakami, who just had the big MOCA [Museum of Contemporary Art] show. What they're not talking about is to someone like me, very obvious. Why aren't you talking about that? [laughter]

Art history in the atmosphere of the university is pretty much talking about things that people don't understand, [they] don't want to ask about the etherealness of immobile existence or something. And if you read *ArtForum*, it's forum-speak for Christ sake. It's kind of like diplomats talking about this, that, and the other. [Michael] Mukasey talking about waterboarding and whether it's torture or not.

KD: Exactly.

RD: You don't have to really spend a whole debate on it. So, what are [Jeff] Koon's little doggies about? I don't know. We'll soon find out, I guess, down the line.

KD: What's this about? Actually, start with what you painted first here.

RD: That is what I painted first—

KD: This is a very different style.

RD: And the thing is, I had went to visit, I went to New York. I took a flight from Mérida. There were real cheap flights to New York and my sister was there. So I went there and said, "Wow, I can buy a bunch of paints." So I did. I bought a bunch of oil paints. I did this in oil, actually.

KD: Wow.

RD: The front's all in oil. Good oil paints from New York. And that was the "Stela H," that you can see that it's very stylized. It's not exactly what you would call your typical Madonna figure in anywhere. Maybe the closest that it comes to is some of the—the Orthodox Church things in Russia and things, the very stylized

Madonnas. But it's obvious that that's the hue. It was obvious that it was different. *[laughter]* So Loren said, "Why don't you do a picture? A painting?" I did. I did a painting that was big. It was about seven by five feet, just because what Loren did there, is he opened up the parish to everybody. I mean the whole place was like a plaza inside. So everybody was always there. They would say, "That's Tito. He's painting this thing. What do you think?" And it took me a long time to do it. It took me about six months to do it. It's very intricate. I still have it.

KD: And how did people respond? What did they think?

RD: Yeah, they thought it was all right. So he said, "All right, you can start painting it on the walls." So I did.

KD: Oh, you mean the painting first, this large painting.

RD: Yeah.

KD: So you can get approval and—

RD: Well, you can get kind of an idea, not a—

KD: Okay.

RD: Of course in the United States, they'd say, "Okay, we're going to convene a democratic process and everyone will vote," and sides will be set up and this, that, and the other. It was just an idea to get the flavor of it.

KD: Was that important to you?

RD: Pardon?

KD: Was that important to you?

RD: I just do whatever—yeah, sure I do that. Why not? As a matter of fact, I imagine it has something to do with—you have to do it in public art. As I say, OJT. The thing was so kind of abstract, and it was taken word for word from that Stela H in Copán. So the thing was so abstract that they didn't have a clue. They didn't see, they didn't jump. They didn't see that it was some kind of pagan affront to Christian normalcy. They didn't—the working class—maybe some intellectuals . . . If this had been a university town, maybe it would have been different. It was art. Or if this had been a—or maybe if the bishop of—Samuel Ruiz, if he hadn't been in there, the church would have said, "No, you can't put it in there." But he was there and he thought it was great. *[laughter]*

KD: I was going to ask you, did you meet some of the folks that were central to the beginnings of the Zapatista movement in the '70s.

RD: Yeah, I met them all. I didn't meet [Subcomandante] Marcos. I don't think he was born yet. *[laughter]* He was still in school somewhere.

KD: Yeah.

RD: Apparently at the Metropolitana.

KD: And what were those conversations like? I mean, did you seek out those folks, or they were just present?

RD: Who?

KD: The Zapatistas. The people that become what we call—?

RD: I don't have the genealogy of them, but I assume I met them. I remember one time, these guys from Tenejapa, in their full costumes—their Tzeltal, but they're from a place called Tenejapa—but the Tzeltales have these different costumes for different places. And they had these bright red culottes—and the thing about the Tenejapas, was they were part of the process of Porfirio Díaz, back in the 1880s. Bringing in the Yaquis and exchanging them with the Mayans to divide and conquer.

So a lot of the Tenejapas have Yaqui blood and they're really big—they're six-foot guys. So they walk in one time. They were having a meeting with Loren. There's like five of them. The whole contingent came in, but there are like five principal . . . In the dining room, they had a meeting. I always sat around and looked and stuff. They said—Loren kind of let me know that this was kind of a private conversation. It was funny, because they walk in and they all have briefcases. And I'm sure they would have had laptops. *[laughter]* This was maybe '77, maybe '78. What were they talking about? There was plenty to talk about. I mean,

there was plenty to talk about there. There still is plenty to talk about, what's going on there. Which is going to be interesting with this guy they got into Guatemala. [laughter]

KD: Yeah.

RD: Because he's going to bring up everything that Michaels has brought up and what's going on. And by the way, I think it was the federal court gave these Nicaraguan workers \$3.2 million dollars, six of them from Dole.

KD: I saw that.

RD: Which Dole bought United Fruit, which United Fruit was owned partly by Castle & Cooke, which is based here. They're all based here. And Castle & Cooke bought part of the interest from Nestlé and from Clemente Jacques, which was the General Food's subsidiary down there. These guys were bad boys. They were bad enough to do things—you knew what these people from Tenejapa were talking about. "Feeding my kid?" "How do I keep myself from dying?" We called it back then, it probably still is, but "cowboys in pickup trucks." The redneck cowboys in pickup trucks. They're just like cowboys, I mean like rednecks. And the thing about Mexico is that they all look Indian. So you've got this guy who . . . One time there was the Silva Herzog family, which is a family of diplomats in Mexico.

KD: Right.

RD: Millionaires. A Jewish family. There was an article being written by, I think at that time, he was an ambassador to the United States from Mexico, but I can't remember his name. One of the Herzog brothers. And there was an article in the *LA Times* and there was a big picture of him. I go, "Wow, this guy sure doesn't look like a Silva Herzog." [laughter] He was this mestizo, *indigena*—but man, don't tell him that. Don't tell him that. But, "Oh no, we come straight from Carlos Quinto. We were related to the late king of Spain." [laughter] And there's a joke on the chocolate that they make. But that's the whole thing in Mexico, this crazy—this love-hate relationship with their past. And let's not even bring up the black diaspora. [laughter] That will really . . .

But anyway, so these guys were—I thought that that was very interesting. It set the tone. I then knew what these guys were—these young seminarians that I was telling you about, who instructed me about what was going on. I was not going to read their books on the sociological ramifications of the third world and Nestlé or something. It was really dry. I was reading Jorge Amado.

KD: Okay, yeah.

RD: And I wasn't reading Jorge Amado when Jorge Amado was—because I did start reading some of his when he was a young writer. And he wanted to write about social problems and this, that, and the other. And it was really dry, stupid. But then when he got into the relationship—when he got into this phantom husband and what's her name? Doña Flor. When he got into that, you could see that he was talking about the same thing, but he was just doing it artistically. [*Doña Flor and Her Two Husbands*, 1966—ed.] It was—I got all of this stuff in there. [*referring to painting*] I got Guatemalan troops and helicopters and stuff. But it's really nice. It's aesthetically pleasing. There's a helicopter in there. These things—this is a Sebastião Salgado famous portrait of these two kids, literally hanging on the tits of their mom, which are completely dry, trying to get a little bit of—not milk, just moisture.

KD: Yeah.

RD: And there's a helicopter here, which is kind of like the leaves and stuff. And then there's a picture of Kathy Gallegos, a whole another implication. But it's pretty, you know? It's just pretty. I just like to see things visually, aesthetically pleasing. Now, if that brings—and that's a contrast. I think that's cool. I think that's what Jorge Amado [does], and other people in their books.

KD: And you were saying that storyline even influences your work?

RD: There's all kinds of stuff in there. There's—

KD: Do you ever get lost in the line drawings?

RD: Oh yeah. I have to have a template. I actually—it's actually like paint-by-numbers and all of the little facets and stuff like that, I have to number, so that at least gives me an idea of what paint I should use there and

whether it's a tree or a leg, you know? What is it? But what I like to do, is I like the aesthetics of it. The thing that brings me, the thing that's pleasing—I don't really want to . . . Once you've got the picture down of the two kids, all I want to do is—and maybe this is . . . For example, I did do the gradation here with the highlight of the skull—

KD: Yes.

RD: On both sides. And I think I saw it was a little too obvious, so I hid all of this other part with these branches and stuff like that because it was just getting a little bit too obvious. And I wanted people to—but I did that with the colors. The colors are vibrant, happy. Some may say this is a dark, moody painting—

KD: Yes, this particular painting that's in your living room, we've talked about before. There's also this kind of geometric division of space to further differentiate, tackle a particular segment of the portrait, of the painting, right? There's like a perspective going back—it's almost like a frame around it.

RD: Yeah.

KD: It doesn't—

RD: It's not deliberate—

KD: Right. Right.

RD: I think this one of the only pieces that I've ever done that, actually. In all my others there's not a lot—

KD: Yeah, I hadn't seen—

RD: This is just a painting within a painting type of thing. Then you have this thing going—

KD: Yeah, they're almost, it's not at the center, but it's a little above center, but the diagonal lines that intersect near the image of the helicopter, right?

RD: Yeah. So that's just . . . So we were, let's see. How do we do this?

KD: Where do you want to go?

RD: I tried to find the, in these—

KD: The photograph?

RD: I think there's a picture of—

KD: Some young girls?

RD: Of the guy. Well, yeah, I thought this was like a young girl carrying her sister.

KD: Yeah?

RD: But it's the mom carrying the—

KD: Right. One, two, three, at least, females, one of them is carrying a child.

RD: Yeah.

KD: And then—

RD: I got it off one of these.

KD: One of the photos?

RD: It's not one of these.

KD: And then there's another face over here? Is that what that is?

RD: I think what's happening in this, there's a big tank or something. Oh, this is—I took a picture of a Guatemalan soldier picture that was kind of carrying something, and this is not the full—

KD: No.

RD: And I just laid him down and these people are walking on him.

KD: Oh.

RD: And this was the size of this wall, and it was a hundred feet long. So there's a lot more that was going on.

KD: And this is Chiapas again, but what's the location of this mural?

RD: That's in the Parish Hall [in Yajalón, Chiapas].

KD: In the Parish Hall. Is that one of the other walls?

RD: Yeah, it was all the way around, three hundred sixty [degrees].

KD: Oh, all four walls.

RD: Yeah.

- KD: Whoa. That's why you were there for so long. *[laughter]*
- RD: Yeah, it was all OJT. This is why I can do stuff. I mean, for me to do a mural—for example, they're going to pay me, if I get this thing at Florida International University, they're going to pay me forty-five thousand dollars to do this mural that would normally take somebody . . . What they can do in an hour, I can do in like ten minutes.
- KD: That's a good rate.
- RD: I'm going to make, based on per hour, if you want to break it down per hour, I'm going to make a lot more money than they will. So obviously, this stuff paid off. And I do that in a lot of things. Now, the thing is, that doesn't mean that I shorten the mural. It just means that I have more time to put in the nuances with a lot less effort, so it makes for a better product, if you want to look at it as a product.
- KD: Yeah, use of your time. Value of your time.
- RD: Yeah.
- KD: I thought that was a Roman collar. That's why I was thinking it was a figure. A mouth, hair, shoulder, Roman collar, that's how I see it.
- RD: That's good. That's good. All kinds of things that you can—it's like looking at a cloud, you know?
- KD: So, you said earlier. And I'm sorry, I didn't write down the exact—it said you were doing this as—
- RD: You were brought up a Christian girl?
- KD: Catholic girl. *[laughter]*
- RD: Catholic girl? *[laughter]*
- KD: I can't hide that.
- RD: And you went to what high school?
- KD: I went to Cerritos High School. I lived in the suburbs.
- RD: The reason I say that, it's eventually going to get into what we're going to talk about with the Chicanos, and with Sister Karen, and with [Corita] Kent and the Immaculate Hearts, and that's all story, and Bishop [Timothy] Manning, and all of that stuff. But that's an interesting situation. That was an interesting situation. So anyway, we're here in Chiapas, and . . . This is interesting.
- KD: So you said it took you several years to do the entire four walls?
- RD: Yeah.
- KD: And did you have from the beginning, like, "I know what that wall is going to be. I know what that wall is going to be," or was it just discovery?
- RD: Well, on either side, there is a—I can't remember where it's from, I think it's from Bonampak—most of it was from Bonampak. From the mural. I just took the way they did the murals. It was just people. And it actually has a lot to do with—this is what I was doing to finance my stuff.
- KD: So you come back to the US?
- RD: Yeah, stuff like that.
- KD: This is Wilshire One on your computer. Is that the location?
- RD: No, it was Wilshire Boulevard near the bay. It was a Latino magazine that came up and folded. So I just did this on the walls. It was a fashion magazine. It was a little—
- KD: Every minute we get a new one.
- RD: Yeah. *[laughter]*
- KD: And that's interior?
- RD: See, that's pretty good. You figured it out. Yeah, it was interior. So you can see that there's the superimposition of figures and stuff like that.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: So . . .
- KD: Sorry, I was asking you about the process of creating the four walls at the Parish Hall.
- RD: Yeah, there was this long Quetzalcoatl on either side. It's a Quetzalcoatl on either side and the tail comes up. And you see that in what I sent you. You see, on either side of the virgin figure are these kind of

protagonists. And I think one of them is actually the god of death and war on one side. And on my—actually Quetzalcoatl is a Kukulcan. But that’s the thing that strung it together. Otherwise you would have all of these. Which is one of the problems with Chicano muralism, especially when it’s done by committee. [laughter] You have a bunch of people doing it. Everybody’s got their thing going.

KD: How to pull the composition together?

RD: Yeah, that goes out the window. So, you know, pulling the composition together was best under this linear Kukulcan. Then everything else was just added in, superimposed, of course. Then I did it, off and on.

KD: Why did you return?

RD: Well, it’s a pleasant place. If you’ve ever— [laughter]

KD: It’s a pleasant place in [the] 1970s, 1980s.

RD: Well, people fight over the land. There’s a reason it’s not the most productive. I guess if you want to produce corn, Nebraska’s a lot better. It’s just absolutely gorgeous, stunning.

KD: You fell in love with the landscape?

RD: The landscape is pretty nice. Yeah. The landscape. Yeah, I mean, the greenest landscape I’ve ever seen is in Salisbury, in England. It just hurts your eyes. They don’t have all of these village after village, where you see different costumes and the people. So that’s—the landscape, I don’t know. I think it has more to do with the landscape and the people and the, I guess, the rustic, kind of semi-colonial, like San Cristóbal. It’s pretty. Everything’s made out of adobe. It has this certain Mexican thing. [laughter] Which somebody will eventually write about, whoever gives a shit.

KD: It certainly sounds romantic.

RD: I’m sure that it will first be romantic, but then it’ll get down to the essentials of romance, I guess. [laughter] So anyway, there wasn’t too much to do here. There wasn’t—this place was kind of boring. Things were a little boring here. Like I said, and everybody always says, “There’s this ongoing struggle of *chicanismo*.” And I go, “Okay? You had the blowouts, so? You got rid of the draft, so now you don’t have to worry about going to Vietnam, got rid of Vietnam. So you got the same old screwed up Lincoln and Garfield and Roosevelt High Schools, which actually, you still have. [laughter] So where was your struggle, baby? Where’s this struggle going? Well, you want to talk about a real struggle, come on down to Chiapas.”

They all laughed and said—and I said, “Yeah.” And the irony was, this was the time that Castle & Cooke was buying everything. And Castle & Cooke is based over at Wilshire and Century City. I said, “Well, the thing is, you see the connection?” They didn’t see the connection. They didn’t see the connection. They still don’t see the connection, after Zapatistas in ’94.

KD: These are the conversations that you are having with people in the ’80s with folks?

RD: With people at Self Help, yeah.

KD: At Self Help.

RD: Yeah. Mostly at Self Help.

KD: So you stay down—you stay in Chiapas, going back and forth—

RD: This is around the time that we were forming, me and Richard Duardo, and John Valadez, and Carlos Almaraz and Leo Limón, and to a certain extent Frank Romero, and Barbara Carrasco and Bejarano.

KD: Guillermo.

RD: Guillermo Bejarano.

KD: Right.

RD: And all those guys were over at the Centro de Arte Público, a few blocks away, right over here. We called the Centro de Arte Público, and that lasted for about four years. That was interesting.

KD: Can I ask you about that?

RD: Oh sure. That’s what I think is one of the historical elements of LA that nobody wants to talk about.

KD: Why did you go and join that group?

RD: It was a place where I could go and work and paint. And you know, Richard Duardo is somebody, you can always have fun around Richard Duardo, you know? He was not an intellectual giant, but that was

somebody who understood where I was coming from in Chiapas. I don't think—he never told me, but—Richard does hold things very close to his vest—because he also understands the white world. That's one thing about Richard. He does understand the white world. So he ain't going to open up to nobody. *[laughter]* But anyway, so we were fixing this place up, and it was a place where I could park my van, and I think I was living there for about six months. It was a base of operations when I went to Chiapas and came back. Because I was going there for a year, coming back for three months, going there for three months and coming back for a year, back and forth. So these were all of the . . . After '82, the same thing started happening at Self Help, including having a studio there and living there and base of operations in LA.

KD: So, you make it sound like it's just a place to crash or hang out. Do you recall any of those conversations or debates about your work or the nature of Chicano art?

RD: About Chiapas? They didn't have a clue. They didn't have a clue about what was going on.

KD: So—

RD: And then we got back, fast forward about twenty years, or eighteen years, in '96 or '97, they had a little forum on Chiapas, because everybody had gone down on their pilgrimage to see Marcos, and everybody was talking about how wonderful it was to see the Mayans finally realizing their cultural heritage. I went, "Still don't have a clue, do you?" *[laughter]*

KD: Do you remember being voted into the Centro?

RD: Voted in?

KD: Yeah.

RD: No.

KD: You don't remember a supposed democratic process, I would say, where, when a new member would come in, they would discuss whether or not this person should join the group.

RD: I don't know. I don't remember that. I just thought we all just came together. I didn't think it was that formal.

KD: Did you do any projects with folks there?

RD: Oh yeah, there were all kinds of projects or were you just—and Richard was getting his Aztlán going with silkscreens. So we were doing this hanging things up with real primitive situations. And then finally we started getting—once Richard started figuring out that this was going to be a going proposition, he saw that the Centro de Arte Público was probably holding him back. And then he moved to this place downtown and the whole place kind of folded, because you know, he was kind of this leader. And I wasn't there. I'm not a leader, and I was going back and forth from Chiapas. And Carlos Almaraz just saw the light in New York and just split. He just—

KD: You don't remember confrontations with Carlos?

RD: Well, he did leave—

KD: I'm not asking you to speak ill of the dead if that's against your sensibilities.

RD: No, I was telling him—it was one of the normal things that I was trying to tell him, that kind of the thing that's still going on in Highland Park. This is a corridor between—it's obviously a corridor. But at that time I didn't realize it was between San Gabriel Valley and downtown LA, but it was a corridor.

KD: Right.

RD: And this place has a lot of potential and we ought to develop it through the development agencies, and this and that. And Richard's mom, Josie, was really into that. But Richard's not a political person and neither was anybody there a political person. I mean, if they didn't have a clue about the politics of LA and land use and . . . No wonder they didn't have a clue about Chiapas. But anyway, we were talking about that and finally Almaraz got fed up and split. He said, "I can't do this anymore. I'm going to New York. I got these possibilities." And then he left, and that was that. *[laughter]*

KD: Help me understand what would have been your motivation for staying with the Centro? What were you hoping—?

- RD: Well, that we could get—the whole thing. Form a 501(c)(3), get funding, see about buying the building. The same thing that I told Kathy five years ago that she should start doing with the Avenue 50 [Studio], that I have told Raul de la Sota through e-mail, and other people that they should start doing. Which, you know, is the thing that everybody does. Armory [Center for the Arts] of Pasadena does that, 18th Street [Art Center] does that, everybody does that, except apparently these Chicano groups. *[laughter]*
- KD: Were you aware—maybe you were in Chiapas at the time—the discussion that I heard that either Carlos or another one of the little bit older Chicano artists saying, “Look, everybody is taking public funding and philanthropy, private funding and they’re being held to other standards that compromise their integrity, so we’re going to do it differently.”
- RD: Okay, what are the options? *[laughter]* What are you going to do? Are you going to finance this place yourself? Are you going to have a day job? I mean, it’s the same thing. It hasn’t changed. It’s the same—in fact, it’s the same argument I had with Kathy Gallegos and her board of directors, “Oh, we’re going to do it differently.” Oh, that’s nice. But meanwhile, somebody like Eli Broad, whose company depends on probably 40 percent Chicanos and that’s his market—and he’s making a vast amount of profit—he’s giving his money to MOCA. You know? *[laughter]* Now, the thing is, is Eli going to tell you what to do? He’s going to try. They all try to tell you what to do. Boys and girls, have you ever been in the Army? You know, yeah. Have you been in UCLA? Have you been up against organizations? All organizations will tell you what to do. I think it’s this Chicano egoism that has something to do with—especially with the people who are—

[break in audio]

- KD: This is Karen Davalos with Robert Delgado and today is the seventh of November, and this is tape 2, side 2, and Robert was telling me about the challenges that Chicanos face in facing institutions.
- RD: Well, everybody’s going—the thing I say is that you have a Chicano institution, and these are the things that I was telling Self Help. And that whole Self Help thing was going and everybody was analyzing, and then I said—
- KD: You mean the closing of the institution a couple years ago?
- RD: You know why, why it happened, what was going on, apart from bad direction? I think there were a lot of balls being dropped. The number one, if you look at it from the point of view of who’s responsible. Where does the buck stop? The buck stops at Gloria Molina. And the fact of the matter is, history is going to judge, not Tomás Benitez, not anybody else, but Gloria Molina—that she dropped the ball on this major institution in her territory during her watch. She had direct access to Eli Broad. Direct. She was president for two or three years of the Grand Avenue project. She’s still on the board of directors. She could have invited him over and said, “Look, 40 percent of your business depends on people that look like me, not like you. What are you going to do about that?” He’s going to say, “Well, I’m never going to get the westsiders to back me on this,”—I don’t know how you would do it. But you would say, “Okay, is this a covenant that we’re talking about? You’re not going to do anything to East LA because [of what] the Westsiders [are going to] doing go to East LA?” Which is true.
- KD: Doesn’t that take Gloria Molina and Gloria Molina types to value art in the first place?
- RD: No, it’s not that. Then you would discount the whole Renaissance. [Pope] Urban II, or whatever his name was did not hire Mike Buonarroti to do this chapel because he loved art. He hired him because he wanted that ten percent tithe. The whole thing about Europe about that time—and they had travel directors, they had travel agencies—all of Europe moved in these processions. *The Canterbury Tales* tells about that.
- And they say that they went to a certain place and these people contributed to the local economy. When there was one of these big synods or one of these big meetings or all of the country, in Christendom, they would compete to see who would get these places, like conventions. Because they would come in and look at this work and say, “Not only am I going to give you ten percent tithe, I’m going to buy some of your wares; I’m going to buy some of your trinkets. I’m going to give you two percent extra.” And really, Michelangelo, I think they paid him the equivalent of a hundred twenty-five thousand bucks. That

was paid for in about a year or so. The Renaissance popes and the bishops and the cardinals, all of those guys were businessmen. They didn't have a clue about art, but they knew it did something good for their money—people felt better. They just felt better.

KD: But if you have a sense of the political inequity, why would you . . . Well, I guess what I should ask is—

RD: You're talking about now?

KD: Now and then. From what I know of the Chicano movement, people struggled over a sense of integrity that people were trying to improve the community but not sell it short, not sell it out. So, why would . . . Perhaps you're saying, unless you're going to engage in the kind of revolution that the people [of] Chiapas created, you might as well work within the system.

RD: Well, everybody works within the system. You would—everybody works within the system. The United States has this—I've seen, I've lived in the EU, and I've lived in Mexico. The problem with Mexico is it didn't have the system. It had a top-down monarchy for years which was based more on what the church was doing than feudalism. But the consequences of that are feudalistic, and that's what was going on in Chiapas. To [a] certain extent the southern United States, that was happening also, and certain rural parts of the United States, that happened also. But you always have redress, all the way up as Dole found out with these Nicaraguans.

KD: Right.

RD: Remember I told you the Nicaraguans are the biggest assholes in the world? But they're efficient. But believe me, this is one of their telling points with efficiency. They just got a \$3 million settlement from one of the most powerful companies in agribusiness in the universe, because they know what to do. As opposed to the—because they didn't have this stuff.

KD: You know, I would disagree with that characterization. The lawyers have been trying this—the environmentalists have been using this strategy. It's about five years old: find the places, that the way we're actually going to change the way the environment is treated is to change the companies. And the tool is the humans who work the fields and suffer the consequences of this—

RD: But, you know—

KD: No-holds-barred environmental attack.

RD: But what Dole is doing in Nicaragua, they are doing four to five thousand times more in Mexico. And Mexico has never done anything about it. Because Dole—

KD: No, but the lawyers have decided—

RD: Dole has Mexico in their side pocket.

KD: The environmental lawyers have decided that they're going to go after—there's a strategy of cases, and to bring it to the US is what is radical. To bring it to the US—

RD: What I would like to see, I would really like to see this precedent utilized in Chiapas. Because I think those lawyers are going to find out that this is a feudal hardball in Chiapas that is fueled by this sense of the king is here and the peasants are there. And even the PDR [Programa de Desarrollo Regional] right now in Chiapas, which is a left-of-center—

KD: Yeah.

RD: It's turning into this dictatorship and nobody likes it. The meritocracy just doesn't work. It doesn't work. It doesn't have any type of a cultural root in Mexico. It's going to take generations for that to change. They don't have a clue yet about how things can work here and how you can do things. And that gets back to 501(c)(3).

KD: Okay.

RD: I would not do a 501(c)(3) in Mexico.

KD: No.

RD: Because the deals are in.

KD: Yeah.

RD: And it's too hard, yeah. Here, you can do 501(c)(3), and you can get money from Eli Broad and you can actually tell Eli Broad where to go if he doesn't like it. Because there are ways of doing that. There are ways of maneuvering the person here—there are ways of doing it, but you have to be smart about it. If the ball was dropped second-hand at Self Help Graphics, it was by not putting Gloria Molina up against the wall and saying, "What are you going to do for us? What are you going to do for us?" And if she says, "I have no money," [you say,] "We don't want money. We want an audience with your buddy Eli. That's what we want. We want somebody who can talk to Eli." The thing, or the equivalent of the eight billionaires in this county. This county is the thirteenth biggest economy in the world. It lends money to Belgium. [*laughter*] I mean, it boggles the mind.

People are going to be studying—the embarrassing thing about Self Help Graphics is that when people really start studying the social anthropology on it, it's going to be very embarrassing for both Self Help—for Tomás Benitez, all the way to Gloria Molina—for the Chicano community. They're going to say, "What was wrong with you people? Didn't you understand that you were in the thirteenth biggest economy in the world and you control 40 percent of it?" Two or three years later, you actually vote in a—

KD: Mayor.

RD: Mayor in a major city. And half of the city councils and all of the eighty municipalities in the county are representative, if not more than the population breakdown of Latinos? What was wrong with you guys? That's why I always—that's why I am doing that with—

KD: Avenue 50?

RD: Avenue 50. I'm putting everything down, so that down the line—I think it's very dynamic, and what Kathy is doing is phenomenal. But to think that you can do that all by yourself is—and then to not take advantage of all of this money that is available and to go around in a beat up car when everybody at 18th Street or the Armory in Pasadena is driving around in BMW's, or Priuses, that's the big deal now.

KD: [*laughter*]

RD: The Armory has two or three Priuses, just for the staff. Why do these people give the money to these people? That's the point of an organization, to go out and get the money. It's not to—Self Help Graphics was at the level of instilling artistic competence and integrity during all of the guys that went there from Centro de Arte Público, almost everybody went over there. And sure, everybody was getting their stuff down.

KD: Well, technically, Self Help starts before, right?

RD: Yes, technically.

KD: When was your first venture over to Self Help?

RD: Nineteen seventy-four, around there. We hit up Karen for a job.

KD: So, you—

RD: It was the tail end of UCLA.

KD: Right. You continue there and were you part of the process that helps find the new space that ends up being the current location?

RD: No.

KD: You were part of the mobile—

RD: No. I just did . . . I always told Karen that she should broaden the thing. I always thought that was the case in LA. Any time that you have a . . . Any time that you have an institution in the city the size of LA and it's getting more and more—and the city is not a regional phenomenon, or a national phenomenon; it's an international phenomenon. Finally they figured it out. I think we touched on the difference between the county and LA. The county sees itself, mostly in music, in international situations.

KD: Yeah.

RD: And it's obvious that LA is in an international situation, and it's starting to belatedly pick that up. KUSC, for example, which is the classical [radio] station, which is pretty powerful. It's a powerful voice. It starts out, "From the creative capital of the world, this is KUSC, 91.5." What they're doing is they're throwing it at New York, they're saying, "Screw you."

KD: Yeah.

RD: They're doing it because they know it's true. They know it's true. The problem with LA is that nobody knows how to direct all the energy that it has. It doesn't have the managers. New York has the managers. Like I was . . . Yesterday, I was talking to Carlos Chavez and his wife, Lida. They're architects and they're opening up this place on Mission, the Fremont [Gallery]. This gallery, they bought this condo, this complex. Max Benavidez has also bought a—they're lofts. They're not old. But they date from the '60s or '50s. But he wants to give me a show there, and he wants to give Gronk a show there. I said, "Yeah, man. This is perfect. It's the corridor between the San Gabriel Valley and downtown LA, and you should do it because you've got the market and there's no other galleries around." And we were talking about it, "Yeah, that's what we figured." I said, "Wow, that's amazing, I'm amazed that you're actually figuring things out on a business 101 level, which is apparently this hidden thing for Chicanos."

KD: Well, if we can give them credit for a minute, maybe they don't want that path.

RD: Okay, what's your option?

KD: I don't know, maybe some people are idealistic still.

RD: Well, what's your option?

KD: The starving artist that creates for his or herself.

RD: First of all, in this economy, nobody starves. And I've seen where—

KD: You've lived in poverty, right.

RD: And when people say starving artist, it is something else.

KD: So, when you first come back from—it's kind of difficult for me to track, these trips back and forth from Chiapas to LA.

RD: Through Mexico City, which is important. There was always a stop in Mexico City.

KD: What are you doing in Mexico City?

RD: Well, I have friends there.

KD: Okay.

RD: And dynamic people. It's where I met—actually I met Juan Manuel Sandoval from the Seminario Permanente de Estudios Chicanos [y de Fronteras] and INAH [Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia] at Self Help Graphics, but we were going back and forth. And then—

KD: Is that's how you're staying in touch with what's going on in LA? Because that's also I'm trying to track. Are you—?

RD: No, we're well connected. We knew what was going on in LA through the parish and Loren, because he had his connection with St. Ann's.

KD: Oh, okay.

RD: That's how you—and he always had funds. You talk about a fundraiser. I mean he built the thing out of nothing with money from Santa Monica. [*laughter*] And he'd take—and from the point of view of what you were saying, maybe there's idealism. Yeah, the person who is taking money from you—let's say Nestlé and General Foods—yeah, you want to recycle some of that stolen money. So, I look at it as how much does Eli Broad, for example, and his real estate concerns make out of the economy, and how much of that economy is impacted by Latinos? So, you know, try to take some of that money and re-channel it into, I don't know, Self Help Graphics sounds liked a good idea—sounded like a good idea. Still sounds like a good idea with Avenue 50. But I guess everybody is idealistic. Well, idealism is really nice, but if you're a careful reader of history, you realize that it's nonsense. [*laughter*] If you don't implement it and if you don't have a strategy and if you don't form coalitions . . . Once the Protestant Reformation came into being and they broke the hold of the church, then it was a question of, "Okay, now what are we going to do?" Well, what had happened for about one hundred years is this bloodletting among the Protestants.

KD: Right.

RD: I mean, in Scandinavia, when they were—I mean, Gustavus Adolphus would come in, and "What type of village are you?" "Well, I don't know. We're Episcopalians." Then, "Kill all the men and enslave the women

and children.” It was bloody. It wasn’t just a fight between the Catholics and the Protestants, it was a fight between the Protestants and the Protestants.

KD: Yeah.

RD: Well, they formed coalitions, you know? They made arrangements. First of all, they saw that it wasn’t working. And that the church was just saying, “Oh, this is wonderful, we’ve got them all divided.” They said, “Okay, let’s make a deal.” Well, idealism is nice, but in order to make that idealism work, you’ve got to make a deal, period. Period.

KD: So were you—

RD: That’s not a negotiable either—

KD: Were you forming coalitions?

RD: Of course, between the Seminario Permanente de Artes Chicanos, which Karen took—[I mean] the Estudios Chicanos. I mean Chicano studies, Chicano and border studies. And you know, the INAH is not a little situation, it’s one of the biggest cultural institutions in Mexico.

KD: Yeah.

RD: And the world probably. It has immense power. And they were—the thing was they fund, they fund Juan Manuel Sandoval in the Seminario. They fund it real well, to the present. And the reason they do that is because Mexicanos are not dumb. They may be jerks when it comes to politics, but on an international level they see things very clearly. And they see the Chicanos in LA, that’s where the power is going to be. Now, they saw that back then.

KD: Right.

RD: How come Self Help Graphics didn’t see it? How come Molina didn’t see it? I don’t think she was elected then, but she was a councilperson then.

KD: This is the 1980s?

RD: This is early ’80s.

KD: Early ’80s.

RD: You know what I’m talking about?

KD: Yeah.

RD: How come they didn’t see it? Juan Manuel saw it. Not only did Juan Manuel see it, but he got funding setting stuff up at—

KD: I can tell you why they didn’t see it. Because they were not—their identity consciousness of the Chicano movement does not connect itself with Mexico present. It connects itself with Mexico past.

RD: Well, I’m not talking about that.

KD: But, why would they venture to a coalition in the very place that they are—?

RD: You’re talking about the Chicanos then?

KD: Yeah.

RD: In the early ’80s?

KD: Yeah. Coming out of the Chicano movement, the idea of Mexico remains a mythical past.

RD: Well, okay, I don’t know, use Ireland then. Okay, if you want to use the past, a good example is the coalescing of the Irish political system in the United States.

KD: Yeah.

RD: Vis-à-vis what was going on in Ireland in the 1880s and the turn of the century, it’s very easy to see. [*laugh-ter*] Where were the—and I’m not talking about, you know, when you’re talking about Self Help Graphics or when you’re talking about Centro de Arte Público. And actually when you’re talking about now, with Avenue 50, it’s not so much them that I blame, it’s the institutions that should know better.

Like, I don’t know why . . . I think that probably the thing that comes out of this interview and the thing [that] comes out of the Chicano Studies Research Center at UCLA or like places at Harvard—this girl that interviewed me from Harvard on Sunday—so Harvard’s interested. I told her that Harvard Corporation

is interested for the same reason that Juan Manuel is interested in this and INAH is interested in this, because LA represents—I'm sure every corporation has in their portfolio, a lot of money in LA County.

Well, this thirteenth place economy is made up of 40 percent Latinos, of which 90 percent are Mexicans and Chicanos. That's not lost on these people, you know? So they interview me. The thing is, the leadership all the way from Molina to Chicano Studies Research Center at UCLA, to any of the other think tanks everywhere, people should be gently telling Self Help Graphics at that time, or Avenue 50 now—and what I was trying to do then with the Centro de Arte Público, and these people were saying “no.”

These people with power, should be gently nudging—they say, “You know [you] really should put in for MONEY!” Because of this, that, and the other. What you're doing is you're forming a covenant against yourself. I don't understand that. Maybe it's because—I don't know what it is. Maybe it has a lot to do with—people down the line are going to study this fifty years from now and say, “Wow, Chicanos were really more Mexican than they were Americanski.” They didn't realize how Mexican they were. *[laughter]* They didn't realize that they had more to do with Pemex, the only oil company in the world that loses money. And how do you lose money in oil, [more] than anybody? *[laughter]* I mean, I went to see—this is irony—I went to see—

KD: Yeah, but you didn't even say, why didn't the church take responsibility? Is that because you're a good Catholic boy too, when it comes down to it? I've never heard anybody say, “We should have pressured the church.”

RD: When was this? You mean to get money from them?

KD: Yes. Self Help Graphics is in a church building. And even though the Archdiocese could argue “Well, it's the sisters,” it's one of the largest archdioceses in the country—couldn't say the world—and it's the fastest growing. And the population that is fastest growing is Latinos.

RD: Yeah.

KD: So—

RD: Well, maybe you're right.

KD: We could have gone after the church for some support. In the middle of Self Help falling apart.

RD: I was using Gloria Molina and Eli Broad as the contemporary situation. Right now, you wouldn't want to touch the church.

KD: Yeah, but prior to that.

RD: I know, prior to that.

KD: Actually, I think the church could have used it as a way to create positive image in the face of the sex scandals.

RD: Well, nobody thought of that.

KD: Because we were too Mexican, using your argument?

RD: I think it was—I don't understand, because you're too Mexican, so that's why you didn't want to ask Papí for something?

KD: Yeah, in a feudal system, right, that we wouldn't approach the church. We wouldn't.

RD: Yeah, that may be the case. I guess the people who are going to investigate this thing are going to lump the cardinal with Eli Broad and with Gloria Molina. The thing is, why didn't—it seems to me common sense to hit these guys up, because that's where the money is. People ask me why—and I travel all over the United States. I just got in from Fort Lauderdale. I had this thing at West Palm Beach, so we took the number 1 highway [US Route 1] up and down Florida. And I just got back from Oregon City, Oregon, outside of—

KD: It wasn't a city. *[laughter]*

RD: Right, next to the Willamette River.

KD: Yeah.

RD: And I'm going, “These places are, when you've seen one, you've seen them all.” The only places that are dynamic are the big cities of the United States, like LA. And I have a stake here, not because I was born here, but because it is the center of the world. It's the center of the damn world. But other than that, the

only other reason that I'm in the United States is because this is where the money is. This is where the money is. I can't make any money outside of the United States. Where would I?

KD: Doing public art?

RD: Yeah. This is—it would be—we're working on trying to get a place—well, that was one of the things, trying to get a place in Mexico to have as a center of operations, especially for fabrication because the fabrication costs are so low there. We would be off-shoring it. But, the thing is that Mexico is so—the delivery systems and this and that—you have to have that in place and ready to go, and there would have to be an overlap. I can't afford that right now. Maybe down the line.

KD: You shared with me your résumé, and after several of the public projects there's a number: 32K for the ceramic tile murals using stenciled airbrushed low-fire glaze, the city of Fremont, California, fire station number 8. Another project with the Valley Boulevard grade separation project—

RD: What does the "K" mean?

KD: No, is that the money that comes to you, or is that the cost of the project? Is that like, salary to artist?

RD: No, that is the cost of the project. To that I have to pay—I usually pay myself, I usually make about a third. So on the Fremont, I made like twelve thousand bucks or so.

KD: But in 2004, you actually made a very nice salary, because in 2004, at least what's listed, twenty-two thousand, eighty-seven thousand, and a hundred forty-seven thousand dollars for three different projects in 2004.

RD: Yeah.

KD: That's not bad.

RD: Well, the hundred forty-seven thousand dollars still hasn't been paid yet. We haven't even seen any money yet. That, yeah, these were good. The thing—this, yeah, this was about a third, a third and a third. Yeah.

KD: So, you were saying before, in our first session, that the one percent in the arts is a viable way to be a productive artist, it sounds like.

RD: Well, it's one of the options that you have with the MFA. The problem is that they don't teach you how to do it. You know?

KD: In terms of making the proposal, working with deals?

RD: Yeah. There's this mindset in the academy, and by the academy, I mean art departments at the university level, this mindset that the artist is the auteur. And you know that anybody in the movie business, which is a moving picture instead of a still picture like we're in—maybe in the movie business, we'll go, "Oh, that's the auteur director, right." You know, yeah. Indie directors know that you can't do anything without the approval of somebody. And that's the case with anything. It's just that you have this myth going on.

KD: So, your on-the-job training for public art, when did that start?

RD: Well, it started when I went to do this thing.

KD: So this is another—

RD: In '76.

KD: Oh, this is the latter half of the visits.

RD: Actually, this is after Chiapas. This is '89.

KD: Oh, okay.

RD: In Estelí. Actually, I think that Estelí got me the Fulbright for me and Wayne [Healy] in Spain.

KD: Oh, the one to Spain.

RD: Yeah, because I met Maria Ignacio Margariños in Estelí, and she had all this power in Madrid. She was a mover.

KD: So you have, on this résumé, you have two Fulbright's listed. So there are actually three? You have Fulbright teaching fellowship in Honduras in '95 and '87, the one to Mexico.

RD: Yeah, that was the research.

KD: Okay. And then the one with Wayne.

RD: I didn't put that down.

KD: I have that on my own list. The one with Wayne is '92?

RD: I guess I should put it down. I don't think there was room on the résumé. The résumé is pretty much for public—request for qualifications [RFQ]—and you don't want to put too much stuff on there. Because they're not going to read it.

KD: No, no, and of course you take out all the stuff from the '70s. That's why I keep asking about it. So you paint a mural in Barcelona.

RD: Well, I didn't. We didn't get the mural.

KD: You didn't?

RD: No. Oh, I didn't tell you about that.

KD: No.

RD: That's like, later. How do you want to do this?

KD: Well, we can come back to this because you have this here for me. So I'll make a note to ask about that.

RD: Okay.

KD: So, these are the murals in Estelí. Computer wants to go to sleep. This is an outdoor mural. And there is not as much layering in this image. Again, is this on the exterior of a—

[break in audio]

KD: So this is an outdoor mural.

RD: You can see—yeah, it's a CEBs. What does CEBs stand for? It came out of the—it came out of Vatican II in liberation theology. Comunidades Eclesiales de Base [CEB, basic ecclesial communities].

KD: Yes.

RD: And they have those in Yajalón. And actually, I got the gig here. It wasn't a gig because I didn't get paid. But the guy, one of the seminarians went—when he was still thinking he was going to be a priest, he went to Nicaragua and was based here for about three years, in Estelí. It's a very revolutionary place. [laughter] It's kind of where the whole thing started.

KD: Yeah. You keep going back to these—I mean you had mentioned before that you were in San Cristóbal de las Casas. So, now you're in Nicaragua in '89. Are you drawn to the revolutionary front? You know, personally, not just [it's] interesting?

RD: Well, it depends. Revolution is like what you said, idealism. Now, if you don't implement it with some type of policies and the whole way, especially checks and balances, and that's where democracy comes in. When you have the one party rule, it doesn't work. [laughter] The checks and balances are going to fall apart. Yeah, it's kind of interesting to be in the middle of the what is going on.

KD: I guess another way to put it is, if you look at this particular image, you know that's from Romero, right? And I'm sorry, I don't know who the female is, and I'm guessing—

RD: Well, all the rest except Romero are martyrs.

KD: Yeah.

RD: What are they called, "héroes y mártires." So they are all either from the Sandanista army [Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional] or the current thing. The Sandanista army that was fighting the Contras or when they were fighting the National Guard as guerrillas.

KD: And the art historian, to use one of your models, the art historian fifty years from now could say, "You were painting murals just like Diego Rivera, speaking to people of their revolutionary history."

RD: Sure. There were heroes and martyrs before and after the revolution. At that time, there was the Contras were heavy duty.

KD: Right.

RD: But then that stopped because they didn't get re-elected. The Sandinistas. [Violeta] Chamorro came in. And—

- KD: And this mural could become like a target then. I mean, it's like an indicator, "Shoot down this site."
[laughter]
- RD: That's ten years later, that's what Chamorro brought in. That guy's drunk [referring to photo].
- KD: Drunk?
- RD: I think he's drunk. [laughter]
- KD: He's definitely sleeping in a public place.
- RD: But, as you see, as you see the mural is still there. And what happened after Chamorro came in—
- KD: Now, this is the other side of the building, right? This is not the same?
- RD: This is the—
- KD: Or did they change the architecture?
- RD: No, there are two buildings there.
- KD: Okay.
- RD: The—
- KD: I'll look at all of them, just click on all of them.
- RD: I don't know how to work this.
- KD: Just click on this. I'm guessing, Estelí.
- RD: This is the cultural center, where I did—
- KD: Right. And these are donated, you call them donated mural projects, right?
- RD: Well, yeah. I paid for it.
- KD: That's what I meant.
- RD: As a matter of fact—the car I have right now—I went down there with Ginger Varney. I don't know if you remember. We used to remember—she used to be a correspondent for Central America.
- KD: Oh, okay, right. Yeah.
- RD: For the *LA Weekly*.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: So, we went down and bought this car that I have now, this piece of *mierda*, that's falling apart.
- KD: [laughter]
- RD: That's been down there for—I took it down to Honduras also, in '95. So this is the *centro*—the cultural center. And they were building it as we were, as I was working on it. And that's the one that Ortega inaugurated. So, I took a bunch of stuff, a carload of stuff for everybody, and I didn't use all of it, so I just left it.
- KD: What do you mean a bunch of stuff?
- RD: Acrylic, paint, brushes, stuff like that. You know, there was an embargo going on because the Contras and the Bush Administration. The first Bush.
- KD: So, again, are these faces of—
- RD: *Mártires y héroes*. So, there's an interesting story after Chamorro got in. Fuller Paint Company in San Francisco donated tons of whitewash to whitewash all of the murals in Nicaragua. The ladies that you see with Ortega—
- KD: Which one?
- RD: There. The ladies that you see with Ortega said "Over our dead bodies" that they're going to bring in the whitewash people, and they wouldn't let them into town. There's only two roads into town. It's in a valley. And they wouldn't let them into town, these people who were going to whitewash. They whitewashed most of them in Managua and León. So I guess they liked it. And this was into the—this was during the Bush Administration. The first Bush.
- KD: Right.
- RD: So, the effect was there. Yeah, I'm going to—I pretty much do the same thing, like I said, with public art. The city of Fremont wants firemen? All right, I'll give them firemen. So I'll find out, I'll find out—I'll use, like I did in Cleveland with this thing. There was this—I did like three, like, big medallion cut aluminum pieces, mixed media. I did a dozen of them. And there's all kinds of stuff in there. All the way from the People's

Square riot from the 1930s, the transportation riot demonstration to Mulberry Hill district of Cleveland—which is Italian—and which at that time, '94, maybe it's different now, but blacks can't go in there.

KD: Right.

RD: So of course, I did the Feast of the Annunciation with a lot of blacks around, which is their favorite feast. I happen to think it's good policy, good public art policy to set something up a little bit controversial that's righteously controversial. Because the people are going to—even if you sit and argue or if somebody is saying, "Oh, look at that. They put some blacks in there with the figure of the Madonna and the princess—the white princess—Italian princess." Well, maybe somebody doesn't want that done. And maybe some of the visitors will begin to speak among themselves and actually argue, and they will carry that over to your local Starbucks and buy an extra latte. And the city will make an extra eight percent.

KD: You're sounding very idealistic.

RD: Well, it's an idealism that the Renaissance pope had going. It's an idealism that is the basis of public art. When I was going down to '95, when [Richard] Riordan was in here. There was—he wanted to get rid of all the one percent. The fifteen members of the city council voted him down, I heard. Voted him down fifteen to nothing. The city council people are not art lovers, you know? As a matter of fact, the whole one percent thing is not based on art. The artist has to argue for the art. And the people who qualify them with the RFQs [request for qualifications] and eventually the RFPs [request for proposals] for the finals. They are the ones who have to know about art and also the artist. So you presume you're going to—and for every one Michelangelo Buonarroti in the Renaissance, there were ten guys who didn't know how to paint, but happened to be cousins of some cardinal. Well, you don't find those murals anymore, because they went on their way. *[laughter]* And believe me, to do these things in a fresco with the wet plaster and the paint, water-based paint, even indoors, it's not going to last for five hundred years unless somebody really cares for it . . . And two world wars, by the way. *[laughter]* Some people say that that's the reason they didn't bomb the hell out of Rome. The allies didn't bomb the hell out of Rome because there was all of this art. *[laughter]*

KD: Do you feel like this survived at least one war?

RD: Pardon?

KD: Did you feel like this work in Nicaragua survived at least one war?

RD: Well, it survived the Chamorro regime and the [Arnoldo] Alemán regime, which was even worse. Oh, do these things, can they go—

KD: I just clicked on it to make it move to a—

RD: *[inaudible]*

KD: I know you can do that, but I don't really know how.

RD: Yeah.

KD: I know I can open them all.

RD: Yeah.

KD: But that's the only other thing. So this is all the same image, and they're incredible. This comes in, the year again is the '80s, right? Eighty-nine, late '80s?

RD: Yeah, '89.

KD: This particular piece, as a whole, you're not, you're not using as much as that overlaying as I see in other works.

RD: Well, there's not as much in the public art as there is in the paintings.

KD: Okay.

RD: Because you want to keep it at least readable. You want to give the person who's watching it, looking at it, a chance to figure it out on the run so that they'll at least come back and ask themselves a question. There's a balance. If it was just a—something like this, if this was a mural, I don't think anybody would even notice it because it would just be a big color-field paintings. There's too many intricate things—it has

to be . . . I lose track of what's going on in that. Which is the point of easel work, which is more intimate type situations.

KD: Did you, by '89, I'm realizing that this slide actually gives us a little media acrylic on fiberglass mesh over concrete. So by '89, you figure out a little bit more how to make an outdoor mural fast.

RD: Yeah, first of all, you're not going to do it in acrylic. Although, these were—at the cultural center, it had overhangs.

KD: Yeah.

RD: So it filtered the light, and this thing is facing north, so that's not bad. And it's stood up fairly good.

KD: So help me understand this acrylic over fiberglass mesh over concrete. So you applied—to prepare the wall, you do what?

RD: I put the mesh over it.

KD: And then you're adhering that with, that's just concrete?

RD: I think it was acrylic varnish.

KD: Oh, a bonded—

RD: Just the bonding.

KD: And has it held up?

RD: It had in '96 when I went by there, it was still fine. They put up fencing in front of it, which I think obscures it a little bit. But they like it. *[laughter]*

KD: The fence is to protect it.

RD: Yeah. And I think it kind of makes it look like shit, but.

KD: This is actually the same thing, I think. *[referring to computer]*

RD: So anyway, that's—

KD: That's actually really a wonderful image . . . So here I am seeing some of these geometric shapes to help break up, to allow you to do the kind of technique that you've perfected—these multiple layers. You've obviously got some natural foliage going on in this man's face, and then a stripe. Part of me sees a little bit of . . . You only worked with Wayne Healy once on one project?

RD: We did a mural. I think it was together. It worked really well because he does all of this painterly stuff, very brushstroke—

KD: Yeah.

RD: Impressionistic stuff, and I do, of course, the gradations. And it worked really well. We did a thing on the Casco de Montezuma, which is at the Vienna arts museum. And I think it was for something to do with the *quinto centenario*, in '91, '92, before that. And it worked really nice. But we haven't done anything together. Why?

KD: Oh, this just reminded me of another piece, these abstract—not abstract, these geometric shapes that cut across the plane and allow for some—I mean, it goes across his nose. So half the nose can be in this blue and the other half can be in the green. And same with the lips. It allows you to play with the coloration. Oh, now I see. It's a cross. There's a cross here that's not facing forward but across there it does face forward.

RD: Yeah. Wayne uses that. His style, his painting style is completely different.

KD: Yeah.

RD: It works really well together, and I'd like to do more of that. But you get into that—you know artists have these huge egos.

KD: And this [is] another figure here, or is that my imagination?

RD: That's another figure, yeah.

KD: So all of these are from photographs—

RD: And newspapers.

KD: And popular portraits? Yeah.

RD: Stuff that the mom's had, which I just did drawings of.

- KD: And again, was this projected? Because this was years later.
- RD: I think I may have done the—no, this wasn't projected, this was gridded. It wasn't that—I had those projectors . . . It's just that you had to go to Managua to get slides then. And going to Managua was like, *[laughter]* you know.
- KD: And who is [in] the wheelchair on top or underneath—I don't know what language you would use for—
- RD: It's a disabled guy—you know, from one of the vets.
- KD: Do you recall any conversations while you were making murals with the folks that work in the area?
- RD: I pretty much spent time by myself. But the Spaniards were the ones who I got along with.
- KD: The—
- RD: The Nicaraguans are . . . I went to Honduras and I know the Guatemaltecos and I know the Costa Ricanses. The Nicaraguans and the Salvadorians are the ones who get business done. *[laughter]* You like businessmen? I mean, if you're going to take, if you want to be around somebody, you want to be around the Hondurans. They're just wonderful, and they just let everybody walk all over them. *[laughter]*
- KD: And you were in Honduras in '95 on this Fulbright teaching fellowship?
- RD: Yeah.
- KD: And what did you do there?
- RD: I taught at the Academy of Fine Arts.
- KD: What did you teach?
- RD: Public art. And they got three contracts. And I think they got paid a total of—what I did? I think they got paid a total of twenty-one thousand dollars for this group, this core group. They actually sued, they actually got a lawyer to sue—it was so stupid. This great façade of the national lottery system. The building, this great façade. And they had just put up the concrete and the normal thing to do with concrete is you either wet it down and put burlaps so it doesn't crack or you put diesel oil over it so it doesn't crack. They did it the short way. They put diesel over it. And I told them, they had evidence that they said, "No oil on the wall." And they finally found it and put oil on it. Somebody may have done it on purpose, by the way. Because putting a mural up by a bunch of kids is not—I'm sure a lot of people didn't like that. But somebody wasn't watching out, so they had to refinish the wall. And they didn't want to do that. And it might have been an excuse not to do it in the first place, and they got a lawyer. And the lawyer showed up and they said, "Okay, we'll redo it." *[laughter]* And I had them do the whole proposal.
- KD: The students?
- RD: The proposal, budget, how much per square foot, how much you're going to use, and add up a whole bunch of the mesh. And I left before they finished. I haven't been back there, so I don't know what really happened.
- KD: Was that, was the Fulbright just another good gig?
- RD: Yeah, it was another good gig. I wanted to be—you know, this was going to be kind of exciting. And it was. Honduras, having all of its usual problems.
- KD: That's what I was asking before. You seem to gravitate to these political hotbeds.
- RD: It's kind of where things are happening that—where things are happening I guess.
- KD: Do you learn something from these events?
- RD: Pardon? Do I learn?
- KD: Yeah, I'm curious as to what draws you in. I'm not a risk taker. I don't seek out—I'm an anthropologist who studies in the US because I don't like discomfort. *[laughter]*
- RD: Well, I was talking to my friend who I was with, who I rented a house from in Tucson when I was doing some public art there. He's an archeologist. And he works in Turkey in the Kurdistan area, right there. He says they have to go in there: "Well, first thing we do, is we get the minesweepers. We get the minesweepers." I go, "What?" He says, "Yeah, we get the minesweepers." "Why?" "Well, we don't want to [get] blown up." *[laughter]*
- KD: Exactly. *[laughter]*

RD: I don't know. It depends, I guess, on what you do. There's—actually, I have always said that the academy here in the United States should have a public art thing. Cutting my own throat, as Wayne says, "Don't even mention it." And I go, "Well, you know, you kind of want—" I think it'll eventually have to happen if you really want the best part. Because you have a pool of more—the more artists that are competing, the better you get, the better product.

KD: That's right.

RD: The better the artists themselves get.

KD: Right, that ego thing.

RD: It's not happening.

KD: So you were seeking out a place where you could do public art?

RD: Pardon?

KD: You were seeking out places where you could teach public art?

RD: Well, sure. This was going to be a teaching situation and I pretty much had the—to myself—the whole situation to myself. Now, I don't know whether they pursued it. I tried to keep in touch, but the—nobody's got e-mail.

KD: Right.

RD: And the writing is—

KD: What other kinds of places have you taught?

RD: That's it.

KD: So the two teaching fellowships. One in Mexico, one in Honduras?

RD: Well, in '80 or '81 I had a gig teaching at LA City College, but that didn't last too long.

KD: Why?

RD: Because I wanted them to draw. It was a drawing class. I had a drawing class and I had an art figure drawing class. So I set up, "Okay, we're going to do this. Everybody bring their ream of typing paper." "No, I didn't bring it. I didn't think—" "I said to bring a ream of typing paper. Because I said we're going to do drawings. We're going to do five-second drawings, ten-second drawings, one-minute drawings, go back to five seconds. We're going to do fast half-second sketches, and you're going to do that, and we're—" They just went crazy. They said, "Why do we have to draw these?" I said, "The same reason that Jimi Hendrix learned how to do the guitar. He was doing the riffs every day for hours until everybody around him got sick of this. That's why we're doing it." Half the class just dropped out. Which, in a way was good, because it was in competition, so they don't want to do it [great]. Same thing happened with Alfred. I don't know if you know Alfred Quiroz at the University of Arizona. He got a gig in Czechoslovakia, or Slovakia, or Czech Republic. And I was there in '98, or '99. And he said, "Do you want to take over my accelerated painting class during the summer?" I said sure. This was, like, twelve hours a week.

KD: Yeah.

RD: And it was, like, with nineteen people showed up. I said, "Okay, tomorrow, let me tell you what we're going to do. Here's what I want you to do, and here's what I want you to do." I gave them all the administrative stuff. I said, "Okay, after the class—we'll get out an hour early—after the class, go to Home Depot and get a bunch of two by twos or two by ones. Do this and do that, and tomorrow we'll—and get however much canvas you want. And tomorrow we'll spend time stringing up the canvases." They looked at me like, "What?" [laughter] And then, "I presume that everybody has the right amount of acrylic, the right amount of oils, do this, do that, and by the way, we're going to do a lot of sketching before." And I was just outlining what I do. And some people came in—first of all, like half the class didn't even come back, and then they came in, and half of those people didn't even have anything. And they said, "Home Depot? I've never been to Home Depot?" "You've never been to Home Depot? You want to be an artist and you've never been to Home Depot?" You know, Standard Brands was like that, before hand. I said, "Whoa, this is really elite." I should have known something was up when they had a machine that cleans your brushes, one for oil, one for acrylic. I went, "Oh!" You stick your brush in there and press a button.

KD: You're kidding!

RD: I'm going "Oh!" This is a public institution, if you can imagine.

KD: It's a public institution, yeah.

RD: I said, "Oh, my goodness, well, what do you want to talk about? Let's try to get it tomorrow." They said, "Well, I'm just going to go buy a bunch of—"

KD: Pre—

RD: I said, "All right, if nobody wants to string their canvases up, buy a bunch of canvases from Spend-a-Fortune or something. But bring them in tomorrow and start going." And they came in and nobody brought anything. They said, "Well, what do you want us to paint? What do you want me to paint?" And I said, "Just put the canvas and start painting whatever. You can always go over it again."

KD: Were these art students, or taking the general ed?

RD: These were—half were graduate art students.

KD: You're kidding.

RD: Graduate school art students. And I just—it went downhill from there. I just gave them, this is what is going on. Right now, believe me, I'm making more money than—

[*break in audio*]

RD: University of Arizona.

KD: Oh, University of Arizona. And they were reluctant—to be kind—to engage the skills of the craft: learning how to frame, learning how to actually draw. So what did you do with them?

RD: I tried. It was like pulling teeth. Eventually, they all did two or three paintings over about six weeks, about twelve hours a week. I would figure that—I just told them that the whole thing, debating on why—who are we and why are we here? Everybody wants to get an M.F.A. What are they going to do with it? We started talking about their lives pretty much. I said, "You know, if you want, you can paint that." They didn't know how to draw. I was amazed at the lack of skill, which didn't say much for Alfred. [*laughter*] But then I found out what the deal was. The deal was that he was, pretty much what I've already said about the academy in general, this was just—and I had thought of this way before—it's probably one of the reasons why I didn't go into tenure track. That it's pretty much that artists who really want to concentrate on their work and want to let the state or large organizations pay for doing their artwork.

And one of the things is that they have to more or less babysit people who don't have a clue of what art is about. And who really actually want to remain that way, who want to remain pretty much ignorant. It's blissful and it's true. It's win-win for everybody. In fact, it's win-win for me because these people are never going to be able to compete with me. And that's one of the things I told them. I said, "First of all, everybody's going to get an A, because I don't care. [*laughter*] The thing is, you don't want to be able to get an A, you want to be able to compete with me. I don't care about making you compete with me because you're my competition. That's business 101."

KD: Yeah.

RD: "So if you guys don't want to work, why am I going to go out of my way to make you work? If you don't want to learn how to paint, it's okay with me. But it shouldn't be okay with you. But if it is, that's okay too, because there are plenty of other jobs out there where you can make some money." And then I told them that there are five options. "One, you can do what I'm doing right now, and I'm not talking about this closet. I'm talking about what I'm doing out in Clement community center." And I'd given them essentially an overview of what I do with tile. And I was doing this tile thing. They came by the studio. They looked at all the stuff I was doing. Half of them didn't even know what public art was. I said, "This is where I'm making my money. This is one of the options. The other option is to do what Alfred's doing in tenured track and become a full professor and have your picture on the department wall."

KD: And have your benefits paid for.

RD: Benefits paid for and a parking slot.

KD: Oh, you don't even get that. You have to get a Nobel Prize to get a parking spot. *[laughter]*

RD: Yeah. *[And I said,]* "The other is working for the Tucson Unified School District." They all knew what I was talking about then. "The other is working for Disney or DreamWorks. And the other one is camping out in SoHo until you get discovered and hoping you don't get AIDS. Like Carlos Almaraz." And they didn't even know who I was talking about. And those were the options. "But really, if you guys could get a real estate license or go into money markets, that's where the money is. That's where you can pay for it, unless you want to become my apprentice in public art and make a fairly good living there. Those are the options." And I said, "None of these options require that you learn how to paint." *[laughter]* "None of them, except for public art, none of them require that you learn how to paint or *[learn]* the craft. So if you aren't going into public art, everybody's going to get an A, and that's great. Your grade point average is going to go up. You can get into law school, you can do this, you can do that, and everything's fine."

And of course, they got resentful over that. And they told mommy and told daddy. And mommy and daddy called up the art department and complained about me. Alfred Quiroz got called on the carpet for it. And his wife Marsha got all pissed off at me, and then Alfred got all pissed off at me, and now they won't even talk to me. So that's interesting. That's an interesting situation. And it just bolsters what I've already thought.

We were talking about UCLA and what I did in six years—five years, getting a BA, MA, MFA, and whether it helped any. No, it didn't. I made \$11,000 the last year and the rest is I had access to a nice studio with a garden. I could use my GI Bill. I had access to a certain amount of grants. And I had the key to the sixth floor to use all of the printmaking facilities. And that's it. I really appreciate Lee Mullican, Chas Garabedian, and all the—Jan Stussy, *[Jorge]* Amado, all of the guys. Gene Sturman, Ed Moses. All of these guys I was supposed to be interacting with. But I don't see a blip at all in any of my *[work]*. And the thing is, if I ever talked to them, here or in the hereafter, they will agree with me that it was—somebody's got to figure out down the line that in the overall expenditure of art by the state or by large institutions like USC, which gets a lot of money from the state, they should just close up shop and throw that money in the K-12s, period. Somebody's going to figure that out one of these days and there's going to be some props *[propositions]*, and we're going to be out of work.

KD: Don't you think you benefit—I mean, the MFA has allowed other doors to open. You can't get a Fulbright, you can't get a—

RD: Sure you can. You don't need a terminal degree to—

KD: It's a lot harder. *[laughter]*

RD: If you have—the Fulbright runs—is a function of the host institution. The host institution, not the—I don't know how it works in engineering, but the host institution has a lot to do with it, because you don't have to be affiliated with anybody in the fine arts, music, whatever.

KD: Yeah, I see what you're saying.

RD: If you don't have somebody signing off from the host institution, forget it. And that's why when Arnold Belkin, in '84, when I was just about to get the Fulbright, when he didn't sign off on it because he thought it was a capitalist plot by the state department, I just took my Fulbright application, tore it up, and threw it in the waste basket because I knew it was over. It was over. I could get as much—I could get all of the props to sign off on it from UCLA who I still knew, and I think it was—

KD: You mean letters of recommendation?

RD: Yeah, letters of recommendation from everybody from here, or even there. But if the host institution doesn't want you, that's it, it's over. So it's pretty much is that. If the host institution wants you, then you got it.

KD: Now what was that? That was one that didn't happen?

RD: Well, it happened two years later, because Elba Macías got in as the—Elba Macías got in as the director and Elba Macías was Eraclio Zepeda's wife and he was the congressman—or may still be for all I know, or just recently retired—the congressman from Chiapas that I knew. And she knew about me because she

knew about the murals in Chiapas, in Yajalón. So she said, "Oh sure, I'll sign it." Boom. She was a member of the PSUM [Partido Socialista Unificado de México], this was the precursor to the PDR [Partido de la Revolución Democrática]. And they were Marxist-Leninist. *[laughter]* And the thing about, Belkin had, as people who are becoming citizens and ex-pats, he was Canadian, so he rejected anything to do with the *norteamericano* stuff. So he was overreacting to this thing. I mean, the same thing. We got into arguments about soccer. He thought soccer was the worst thing in the world. Any sport is the worst thing in the world. I went, "What?" *[laughter]* Oh, yes, if you want to be an artist, you can't do sports. Well, it's good for your heart, you know? *[laughter]* And I think he eventually died of a heart attack or something.

KD: So, you said in the '80s you discovered public art. How did that happen?

RD: I think the first paying gig was Phoenix, the Phoenix—

KD: Two murals in Phoenix, Arizona?

RD: Yeah, let me see if I have them here. *[pause]* The slide, as you can see by some of the slides, the slide projector is really pretty bad. The slide scanner, rather, that Wayne has. I may be doing that right now, actually. Getting a new scanner, because the scanner is really bad.

KD: Yeah, you need a higher resolution.

RD: So, I think I have here somewhere the ones in Phoenix. It was a good gig. It was about thirty thousand dollars or so. Here's those. *[referring to image]* And it was before I discovered the fiberglass mesh and just did acrylic outdoors. It was done on concrete, but it was in an underpass. And I've been by there recently and it's still holding up. As long as the sun doesn't get it directly, it holds up.

KD: This says, "'88, McDowell Road history mural that's eleven by forty feet long. McDowell Squaw Peak Parkway underpass in Phoenix, Arizona, a 1 percent for the art program." Can we talk about the image for a minute and then talk about the process of how you got it? It looks like a policeman's face—

RD: That's an enlisted man coming back from World War II.

KD: Oh, okay. So what was—

RD: You can tell by the round thing on his cap. Somebody who knows about the Army knows that they have this round thing. Officers have this, like—

KD: A star.

RD: No, they have like eagle things coming out.

KD: Oh, okay.

RD: They have the actual shape of the escudo of the United States, the eagle thing. So, and there's a Chevy, a '57 Chevy. Just all of these things. There's somebody's face because I wanted to keep the face continuity with this and that. And this is a lady—

KD: The right and the left, the two faces. Yeah.

RD: Yeah, this is an indigenous lady from the area and other stuff from this kind of modern looking googie-type architecture, which is from the '50s. What's interesting is this river, riverine system that you see, it's like an overhead in blue. And you can see it in the other one much more clearly. There were two of them as opposed—that's from the old Hohokam river [canal] system that they had at that time. It dates from 800 AD, which the Salt River Project, this federal project that they started in the '20s or '30s, when they actually developed it and designed [it]. They used the old Hohokam system, the way they routed the river.

KD: Yeah.

RD: So I thought it was interesting that they would use this federal system that was like the Tennessee Valley Authority Salt River Project, pretty big. I think it was actually bigger than—

KD: What about the research you did to come up with this imagery?

RD: Just taking pictures and go to the library.

KD: So this is all in the place itself?

RD: Yeah, it's all in the place itself.

KD: And that's your strategy with all of the public projects.

RD: Yeah.

KD: So how did you get this gig?

RD: I was put in, [a] request for qualifications. They publish requests for qualifications—the other one is nicer.

KD: It's not that one.

RD: Here it is.

KD: Oh.

RD: The request for qualifications is published by different places everywhere. And actually, like I was saying about Europe, that you have to really look for it in Europe, because they won't really let you know what's going on and they're kind of chauvinistic in Europe. I just saw [a] thing for a two hundred fifty thousand dollar project for one of the stations, which would have been perfect—in Taiwan—perfect for me. And they just had so much stuff you had to do, and they had to be translated into Cantonese and this, that. I was going, "I can't do this." They think I'm a major—it's not going to happen. And I figure eventually they will figure it out, that you're not going to get artists to do that. [*laughter*] You're going to, at best, maybe get an architect who may have a cousin who's an artist.

KD: Right.

RD: And happens to know Chinese and—you're really limiting yourself by not extending it—by putting too many parameters. I'm talking about a budget down to the millisecond, those types of things. Well, nobody's going to do that. So you're just putting in your qualifications, usually ten to twenty CDs—everybody uses CDs now—your résumé, and usually a one page letter of what you can do that reflects the site. And I usually say, "The first thing I do is find out what you guys want and then look over the cultural history of the place and find out what the iconography is and get as much information as possible. And from there, I will submit so many finished designs, usually in line-drawing form for your approval." And once I get the go-ahead, or what they call the "Notice to Proceed," I do the fabrication and that takes so much time, and then I install it.

KD: Now these, did you work onsite or did you install it?

RD: I worked there on the site because I didn't know about the fiberglass mesh yet. It was a year before I figured out that. Otherwise, I would have worked on it in the studio. Just taken it over there, unrolled it—

KD: Mounted it on the wall.

RD: Mounted it on the wall. It was interesting. I shouldn't have got to know Phoenix. I was there for, like, five months.

KD: It's an interesting composition, I think it has all of the elements that you are known for. This overlap, this kind of palimpsest technique. But then it's a little more psychedelic on this end. Are these lines about the landscape?

RD: No, those are the design of her coat.

KD: And when you do the proposal, the method you're using is the cultural history of the place. You find that's successful?

RD: Sure, everybody wants that.

KD: Yeah.

RD: This was Phoenix. What's going on in Phoenix? So you've [got] the McDowell Road. Phoenix is a really young city. You know, a place like Cleveland is different. [*laughter*]

KD: Tell me about this one, because your media changes. Is this tile?

RD: No, that's acrylic on the fiberglass mesh.

KD: Oh, okay.

RD: Indoors.

KD: This is like the—

RD: That's Kodak.

KD: It's the Kodak one.

RD: It's an homage to Gabriel Figueroa. You can see him—he was the great cinematographer who was considered the master of black and white and did a lot of different stuff with [Emilio] "El Indio" Fernández during

the golden age [of Mexican cinema], and then with [Luis] Buñuel when he was kicked out of Spain. [*laughter*] And he [went] to Mexico.

KD: And was this done on site or in the studio?

RD: No, I did this in the studio. It was on a fiberglass mesh. And I eventually took it down, in '97 or '98, took it down in Mazatlán. A friend of mine is a professor down there and he knows the people at the museum, and the museum—

KD: Was that alone? This is a commissioned work, right?

RD: What if I have it in here? This? Yeah, they paid me very good. They paid me like sixty-two thousand dollars for this.

KD: Yeah?

RD: Oh, then they paid me another twenty-five thousand dollars to take it down. [*laughter*] Let me tell you the reason. The reason is, it's obvious that you see the third story here. They wanted to make this into additional offices for their digital—this was '98. Ten years later, it's abandoned. This was their digital Photoshop, where you're on location, you take pictures in 35mm. You take it to your digital Photoshop station. You convert it. You take Sylvester Stallone and you add a tree here and this there, and you do all the special effects and you reshoot it in 35[mm] in front of the screen.

KD: Yeah.

RD: That is all changing, by the way, as we speak.

KD: Yeah.

RD: But, so they said, "Oh man, this is great. We're going to do our Hollywood production here." So they did this whole thing, and they had an in-shop situation. Well, what happened with Hollywood, at that time, they had computers the size of this table we're looking at, this computer can do everything that that third floor department can.

KD: Exactly.

RD: And what they did is they farmed it all out to independents, so that went belly up. [*laughter*] Kodak lost a shitload of money on that. Not only that, they lost this

KD: The building.

RD: No, the mural. Look at this site. Santa Monica Boulevard is right here. I mean, the public relations for Kodak on this was worth a lot of money. Somebody probably told them that. But no, man, they wanted their third floor with all their digital stuff, and that lasted like five years—no, not even that.

KD: So you do the mural and your completion [is] in '94, at least, right? Eastman Kodak.

RD: Yeah.

KD: Then you take it down and show it in Mexico and then it doesn't go back up.

RD: Yeah. I put it up in the—I don't—let me see if I have a picture of that.

KD: Fascinating.

RD: It's this building that's a hundred fifty years old.

KD: Another Kodak space? That's what I'm trying to figure out because they commissioned [the] work.

RD: No, it was the Museum of Fine Arts.

KD: Oh, the Museum of Fine Arts, in what did you say? Guadalajara?

RD: No, Mazatlán.

KD: Mazatlán.

RD: And I knew the people there, so I just did it.

KD: I'm just curious how the commissioned work, how the artist is able to take down the commissioned work.

RD: Well, I just ripped it down. [*laughter*]

KD: What's the deal? Oh yeah, they say you can take this work—

RD: I told them this. This is the deal, this was the maneuver I did. I said, "Look," because of the [Visual] Artist[s] Rights Act, I had ninety days. They wanted it down in a month. I said, "I'm sorry, I won't be able to do that. I have other commitments," this, that, and the other, knowing full well that they may be able to give some

money out. And so they said, “Well, we’ll give you fifteen thousand dollars.” And I said, “Well, I talked to some guys and I can actually hire some guys and do this, that, and the other, and we can take it down in, like, a week, whenever you want. It’s going to cost, like, twenty-five thousand dollars.” *[laughter]* And they said, “Okay!” *[laughter]* And boom! And I saw the check and I get there and I got these guys together, took it down in like a day. *[laughter]* It was just a maneuver. They didn’t know what the hell was going on. Because nobody knows what’s going on with public art. We know about these things, so I got an extra twenty-five thousand dollars out of them.

KD: So their act protected you.

RD: So I took that money and went down—pardon?

KD: The Visual Artist[s] Rights Act protected you.

RD: Oh, sure. Because that gave me that ninety days. And they already had the people who were going to come in, strip the whole thing, put in a third floor. They were losing money.

KD: Every single day, yeah.

RD: This was at the time, this was at the time that, to take this to a Photoshop station, to do special effects, it was costing something like seven thousand dollars a second.

KD: Yeah.

RD: Now, it’s down to seventy dollars a second.

KD: Exactly.

RD: It’s a little learning curve for Kodak. And somebody’s going to eventually talk about that. So I used the money—I’m sure Kodak—all the way from their silver iodide production out of Mexico, that they pay the miners nothing, to take this silver and their whole silver iodide, not so much in private film stock, but for the movie stocks—they use it a lot.

KD: Right.

RD: I’m just recycling some of that stolen money, you know? So I took it down to Mazatlán, and ironically enough, it’s where my grandmother was—my grandmother was born in Rosario, which is about twenty minutes away, and it’s a mining community. So I thought the irony was cool. *[laughter]*

KD: So that’s where it’s housed now?

RD: Yeah.

KD: Very nice.

RD: I just don’t have a picture of it. But it’s in the carriageway. It looks fine. But then they went bankrupt, so I should go down there and check it out. This friend of mine . . . Nobody ever communicates with me. I can’t believe it, man. Probably because I don’t—

KD: You don’t have e-mail. *[laughter]*

RD: Yeah. I’m talking about that they—he was going through—

KD: So you eventually change your media a bit, right?

RD: Well, sure, in 1998 with the. . . Well, this one. I don’t have the full one.

KD: Describe or name it.

RD: This is the Douglas, Arizona, border station.

KD: Yeah.

RD: And I got this, actually, when I was in Honduras. I got the commission.

KD: So fifteen life-sized tile pieces, exterior wall of general services administration at the US–Arizona border station in Douglas.

RD: Which is where my mother actually grew up, in Douglas. They came over [from] Cananea because there were—there was still stuff going on in 1917. So they came over in 1920—she was like three years old—to Douglas. And then they moved to LA. So, anyway, I discovered this tile thing. I looked up this friend of mine, a friend of mine here in LA. His name was this person named Dennis Caffrey, who runs a shop here called Urban Clay. I said, “I don’t know anything about tile. I have these ideas; what do you think?” He liked my work. He said, “Okay, look. Here’s the deal. How much is it?” I said thirty-two thousand dollars He said,

"Okay, I'll take fifteen thousand dollars. I'll take half, and you can have the whole shop and all the facilities. I'll pay for all the materials and everything. You've got the run of the shop." I said, "Okay." He didn't say it, but he actually kind of mentored me because I didn't know anything about this stuff. [laughter] But at the same time, it's not rocket science. It was pretty much, the most difficult part was the grunt work, cutting out the stencils and doing this as the silkscreens.

KD: Oh, okay.

RD: And I knew about silk screening. I knew about silk screening and—

KD: So you're basically silk screening onto a tile?

RD: Yeah.

KD: Did you enjoy working with a fabricator?

RD: No, he's kind of an interesting person. A large ego—a large ego artist trying to get out of his corporate Urban Clay self.

KD: Now, I would describe these as a new expression. It's a silhouette of a person, but inside this space is—

RD: Yeah, I've been doing that with the monotypes over—with aerosol cans and stuff like at Self Help for years.

KD: Okay.

RD: I just transferred this into—and that's what he saw. I said, "Can you do this? Can you do this in clay, in tile?" He said, "Sure, instead of using aerosol or brushwork like this, you use airbrush." I said, "What kind of airbrush?" He said, "Oh, just use these, car-detailing airbrushes, that's what we use." I said, "Oh, cool." So the hard part was the cutting out of the stencils. And also the delicacy of it, because it's a powder. And what he told me that's very valuable, was you use a fifty-fifty solution of Elmer's glue and water and you airbrush that on it and that protects it and solidifies it so you can put another stencil on top without moving the tiles. And the Elmer's glue in the kiln just dissipates. So that [was] viable to do. And so, he was teaching me about all of this stuff, all of these—I was just absorbing all of this.

KD: This was a mining—

RD: Yeah, that's from Cananea, actually.

KD: Can you describe a little bit more of your research artistic process? Do you sit down with images from books, newspapers, and spread them around the room?

RD: Well, everything's done on Photoshop now.

KD: Photoshop now.

RD: Yeah, it's just easier. And I can always use the layers to compose it.

KD: You scan them in?

RD: Yeah, I scan everything in.

KD: And then you play with them on Photoshop?

RD: Yeah.

KD: And then . . .

RD: That's for presentation.

KD: Right.

RD: Not for the actual production.

KD: That's what I find fascinating, how the technology comes in only at the presentation stage.

RD: Yeah, because it's easier.

KD: Yeah.

RD: It's cheaper. You take the digitals, go into the library and if I've got light, I can just take pictures of something. Or like what I'm going to do when I have a community meeting—I have a community meeting for West Palm Beach, at the—at the Pleasant City community center, which is interesting because it's a black center. And I have the contract to do this mural in this building that was built by a black architect in 1921. So I'll be doing this mural. And I think I told you, I'm Latino, but not Cuban. [laughter] Which is really cool, and they think it's wonderful. I met them a couple of weeks ago. Because we were—about three weeks ago, we were actually finalists for this other project in Fort Lauderdale, so we just went up there—

- KD: You say “we,” you and—
- RD: Me and José Antonio.
- KD: Oh, okay.
- RD: Because it was a team effort and Fort Lauderdale is paying like three hundred thousand dollars. We haven’t heard back yet if we made it.
- KD: José Antonio Aguirre, is that the name you gave me before?
- RD: Yeah. Yeah. The Pleasant City one is a solo.
- KD: Oh, okay.
- RD: But see, I go solo and sometimes a team with José Antonio, and sometimes a team with, like this one here—this one here, I did with Doug Warnock from Pocatello, Idaho. He’s a professor at Idaho State.
- KD: This is [the] pavers [for the] Salt Lake City Winter Olympics downtown renovation project.
- RD: Yeah. And also with Susan Gamble in Tucson, who I met when I was doing that project in Tucson. And she taught me a lot about all kinds of—she’s a master ceramicist. She runs a shop called Santa Theresa Tile [Works]. She was taught in Tokyo by the masters and stuff. And actually, it was kind of a back and forth because I taught her everything I knew about airbrush—I mean about silkscreen—and also about airbrush, because she had never tried that before. In fact, one of the things that she said to me one time, is that, “You know, the thing that you have over me in tile and clay and ceramics, is that you never studied ceramics. You don’t have an MFA in ceramics, so you don’t know the rules and regulations. Because, you know, you can’t do silkscreen on ceramics.” [laughter] “I mean in fine arts ceramics—you can do them on coffee cups.”
- KD: Right.
- RD: “But, you know, going from a coffee cup to fine art, well that’s fine arts—”
- KD: Breaking rules.
- RD: Breaking rules. So the same way—with airbrush, she had no idea, with the airbrush, I don’t think anybody’s ever done that before, ever.
- KD: The—no, I think that’s an important technological advance. I think that’s fascinating here in the description. It frees up for you a lot of possibilities, I would imagine.
- RD: Well, I can do this. I can reproduce in tile, but the only thing is—
- KD: The painting on the wall.
- RD: Yeah, the painting on the wall. But the only thing is, it would take me forever to cut the frisket out.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: That’s the hard part.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: The stencils.
- KD: So, this one though, the composition looks strikingly . . . It’s a departure, I would say.
- RD: Well, because it was done as a team.
- KD: Okay.
- RD: Doug did the bronze and the laser cutouts. And she did the molded slab cut ceramic, and I did everything else that’s outside of it in airbrush and silkscreen.
- KD: Nice composition.
- RD: And there were thirty-five of these in the Utah center in downtown Salt Lake City, by the temple. It’s a gorgeous place. I’d like to go by there and see what’s going on.
- KD: So you get quite a few—this is *Faces of Science*. Where’s that?
- RD: Yeah, this is at North Carolina A&T [State University], in Greensboro. It’s a traditional—
- KD: Black college.
- RD: Black college.
- KD: Again, you didn’t do this in the space itself. You did it in the studio.
- RD: Actually, I did it in Tucson.

KD: Do you have a studio in Tucson?

RD: Yeah, a big studio in Tucson.

KD: How big?

RD: Maybe it was a hundred feet by thirty [feet].

KD: Okay, and that's when you were doing the other public project, you stayed there for a while?

RD: Yeah, and then Susan Gamble's Santa Theresa Tile [Works] were right next door. So actually, I tapped into her electricity. Because they didn't provide me with electricity. And I actually—at the tail end of the thing, I got it for half price. Because they forgot to give me electricity and I could have brought them to court.

KD: Yeah.

RD: So it's a classical rental type of situation. So I actually made out like a bandit, and I was actually firing and using her kilns. And in the meantime, I was doing the acrylic for the long things here in North Carolina. And this here is just a small mural I did for a friend who I went to grammar school with Roseanne Soble, who is now Roseanne Luth, who does research, [for a] market research firm in San Diego.

KD: So this is an interior space?

RD: Yeah, of her new building.

KD: So you gradually go away from the acrylic and even the mesh—the fiberglass mesh acrylic.

RD: Indoors, I'll do that.

KD: Okay. And outdoors, you're doing the tile.

RD: Outdoors I'm doing the tile.

KD: *Color in Motion*. Where's that one?

RD: That's in Atlanta airport.

KD: Ah. So this really becomes a very successful—

RD: That's what bought this house.

KD: [laughter]

RD: There's an interesting thing about public art. I was recently at Burt Green's [Burt Green Fine Art], and on second Thursdays, we walk downtown on Main Street. And I was at Burt Green's, one of the better galleries there. We were all gathered around, people were introducing us, and this friend of mine introduced me and said, "Roberto does public art. He does public art stuff." And everybody looked at me like I was nuts, like, "Public art. I've heard that, only losers." Like the general thing was that only losers do public art. And I said, "Yeah, it's okay, it pays the mortgage." And they all—because I'm looking at a bunch of guys and gals that have day jobs. I said, "Yeah, it pays the mortgage," and I think I actually said, "for the two houses." And that just quieted them down.

KD: A little righteous. [laughter]

RD: Yeah, I loved it. I loved it.

KD: This I've seen.

RD: This is like an indoor type of thing, so it was just straight acrylic.

KD: Is it on the wall?

RD: Yeah, it's on the wall.

KD: It looks familiar, maybe all of the institutions look the same to me. This is called *Youth in Motion*, and where is it?

RD: In Eugene.

KD: In Eugene.

RD: At the juvenile justice center, which is right across the street from the Oregon stadium, the University of Oregon stadium.

KD: Wow, these are my favorite. So these are all . . . What am I looking at?

RD: Yeah, those are the pavers.

KD: Pavers.

RD: Sample of the pavers.

- KD: Yeah, that run along the station.
- RD: Yeah, there were fifty-six of them.
- KD: That's what I was thinking. What else is yours? Is this?
- RD: Well, I kind of contracted that out from Ojuelos. A limestone guy in Ojuelos.
- KD: And when you say contracted out, is that what people call fabricators?
- RD: Yeah.
- KD: Okay.
- RD: And then we shipped it over.
- KD: And you gave them the design?
- RD: Yeah, I gave them a template that was the actual size, and he carved it, at about one tenth of the price of what it would cost.
- KD: Yeah, did he have to problem- solve things in a way that—?
- RD: No, he knew how to carve. *[laughter]* Even if you find somebody like that in the United States, if you can find somebody who can still carve like that, it would have just been prohibitive. For the price that they pay for this, it would have been, I would have gotten maybe a quarter of just the carving; no pavers, no nothing.
- KD: And the metro station? What year is that? Why can't I find it?
- RD: Two thousand and three?
- KD: Two thousand and three.
- RD: Something like that.
- KD: Oh, here it is, thirty-five pavers. No, that's the downtown Salt Lake City. Where the heck is it? Here it is, 2003. The pavers are your design. Because I'm trying to figure out—
- RD: The pavers are my design, yeah.
- KD: They remind me of the work that you did in Salt Lake.
- RD: Yeah, it was [the] same type of situation.
- KD: So there's some influence there of working with the ceramicist.
- RD: Oh sure. Everything that you see, everything you see is what I learned from Dennis Caffrey and Susan Gamble.
- KD: Well, it's not just technique though, I think that the composition is different.
- RD: The thing is I'm using Talavera tile.
- KD: Right.
- RD: I'm using cut Talavera in the middle.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: Let me see if there's a—cut Talavera in the middle, and I bought a bunch of—I went down to Tijuana and bought like eight hundred dollars' worth of Talavera [tiles].
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: And sure enough, the year after, they double in price. *[laughter]* So, I've got, for the rest of my life, enough Talavera. And I just cut them up into squares or whatever and just use them, and it gives them a nice little colonial type of Spanish colonial—
- KD: Well, and it also unifies the composition between the tiles, right?
- RD: Well, you could do it, you could just do it—there are two reasons why I think it's a more interesting design than to have the actual, the slab of one foot of tile. The other, the slab of one foot tile, you'd have to double the thickness of the base, if not triple it, because the pressure of somebody's foot will break it.
- KD: Oh, okay.
- RD: And it's just interesting. You know, one of the things about—I usually set these up. I would have ten of them strung up, and I go, "Well, what kind of design?" And you can get one of the—what do they call those things for carving?
- KD: Chisel?

- RD: Chisel. And you can get different points, get different designs—I've figured out how to get different designs from the way it breaks. So I'm just breaking them, you know? And different compositions of them. And you have to cut them down on two sides by about a half-inch, so you get like a one-inch space in between. They're really a pleasure to do.
- KD: It's interesting to hear you say that, because that's the first time I've heard you talk about your work in a kind of playful way. You're usually much more systematic.
- RD: Well, it's systematic.
- KD: But play . . . I mean it's discovery.
- RD: It's like playing sports.
- KD: Exactly.
- RD: It's fun, but you better have your plays down pat.
- KD: Yeah, right. But I also mean the larger sense of play.
- RD: Even in an individual sport, one against one—yeah, there isn't much of a difference. This can be a real drudgery.
- KD: The painting?
- RD: The painting. It's just like, oh, you clock in and you clock out. But then you kind of sit back and have a little . . . You look at it—drunk, stoned or otherwise—and you expect to look at it and to appreciate it, and that's good. That's the editing process. It's like Hemingway rewriting. He wasn't a writer, he was a rewriter. Some of those books he rewrote thirty times.
- KD: But paint allows you to do that revision, as you told the students at Arizona University. But this, with tile, the pavers, I guess you could throw out the tile and start over. But I suppose it's a starting over as opposed to revision. Or am I wrong?
- RD: Yeah. What I need to say is that you look at one of the tiles and then for the next one, you see the corrections.
- KD: Oh, okay.
- RD: That's what I meant. For this, there are certain things that I go over again, but it's no more than like five percent. It's usually how it's going to go on the next one. And it also makes you enthusiastic that you were able to pull that off.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: So it kind of keeps you going.
- KD: I want to take you back to people—pressure standing on the tile, that the bodies [are] walking on these tiles. Where did you learn that, that calculation?
- RD: Well—
- KD: That's kind of like an engineer.
- RD: I kind of figured it out. I just kind of figured it out, common sense. Then I asked Wayne, who has a degree in mechanical engineering.
- KD: Wayne Healy?
- RD: Yeah.
- KD: Hah, I didn't know that.
- RD: From the University of Cincinnati. He worked in aerospace for years.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: I asked him and he looked at me like, "Of course." [laughter] Yeah. I mean, it just makes sense. And also, a lot of this stuff is just common sense. So . . . it just makes sense.
- KD: Now, the MTA [Metropolitan Transportation Authority] project. I don't know, I've heard rumors about how artists got the projects.
- RD: The—?
- KD: The Metro stations.

- RD: Well, all of this—one of the best books to read about public art is Will and Ariel Durant’s, in their badly named *[Story] of Civilization*. It should be “[Story] of Western Civilization.”
- KD: Yes.
- RD: And he corrected that later. But one of their books on the Renaissance is just phenomenal. And the Durants get down to the nitty-gritty about the—like I was saying, they’re the ones that said, “These guys were not art lovers, they were businessmen, and they were men.” And they hired Michelangelo for exactly that reason. And the other book is [the] Benvenuto Cellini autobiography, which is excellent. Who is a really good writer.
- KD: And why is that a good book on public art?
- RD: Because it shows you all the fights they had. And I think we’re getting to that.
- KD: *[laughter]* Okay.
- RD: “He got the gig at the Sistine Chapel? Damn.” I mean, knife fights in bars and stuff over blocks of marble. The marble that he did the David on, that Michelangelo did the David on, was the third one down, the other two were stolen.
- KD: That’s right.
- RD: And his brothers, his brothers were these rough guys. And they said, “Okay, we’ll take care of it. We’ll get that marble back.” And he was going, “No, never mind. Okay.” *[laughter]*
- KD: *[laughter]*
- RD: Because he probably knew, that you don’t really go up against—it’s not like some guy came in and stole three tons worth of marble, or sixteen tons worth of marble. It was some—it was a big guy. You don’t really come up—you may have a couple of pizza parlors, you don’t screw with these guys who patronize the arts, as Jesse Helms found out. The Cincinnati Four. He almost lost the election. The thing with—tell me the rumors that you have heard, and we’ll compare notes.
- KD: Okay. George Yepes had the whole deal sewed up, that he was going to do all of the MTAs. And the Chicano artists found out. I don’t know if it was more than Chicano artists. I imagine it was more than Chicano artists were concerned about that. He had the entire gig and people complained, and then the MTA had to—
- RD: Sounds screwed. I’ve never heard that one. That’s way . . . *[laughter]* Well, first of all, I don’t think legally he could have done it. Because you have to—if it is a 1 percent, I mean, it was 1 percent.
- KD: Yeah, it was a 1 percent. What do you mean? They can’t give that big of a gig to one person?
- RD: Well, you have to publish it—
- KD: Oh, you mean the call. The call has to be public, the competition has to be—
- RD: Yeah. There are a lot of sweetheart deals going on, but that sounds like fantasy.
- KD: That’s what I think the rumor was, that they didn’t do the call—
- RD: That sounds like fantasy.
- KD: And they complained and—
- RD: No, he couldn’t do it anyway. If he did have that much clout, why didn’t he get a station? I think it’s probably a malicious rumor. And it makes no sense. They can’t legally—they have to publish the RFQs. A lot of times, they publish—
- KD: And RFQs, for the rest of the folks in the room.
- RD: Request for qualifications.
- KD: Request for qualifications.
- RD: It’s the same way for cement formers.
- KD: Right.
- RD: Architects know about that.
- KD: Plumbers, everybody gets to do a job.
- RD: If it’s federal money, it has to be published on a national level. If it’s state money, it’s on a state level, regional money, it’s usually—

- KD: And you were saying, it was hard to find certain—[in] Europe, you said it was hard to find. Where do you find those calls?
- RD: You look.
- KD: Where are you looking is what I mean?
- RD: You subscribe to certain things, and sometimes they just send it to you.
- KD: Because of your qualifications?
- RD: Huntington, New York, this guy just sends out these things. In Boston, Massachusetts, the Urban Art Institute—
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: Just sends out . . . Christina Lanzl [of the UrbanArt Commission]. You chum up. You send them an e-mail, "You've been very helpful," this, that, and the other. They just send you these things. After awhile they just send it to you. I signed up for a couple of things in Europe. And they're kind of helpful and not helpful. The best thing to do is to just put in as many as possible and you get on their radar screens—
- KD: Right.
- RD: And they start sending you this stuff. The best thing to do is to put in the qualifications anyway. You know that you're not going to get it. But the good thing is, is that they're all—a lot of people see your stuff. So it's pretty much like cc-ing everybody. So they go, "Hmm, actually, I should probably send this guy the next one, because maybe this person wants my job, and they'll get at me." See the politics that's going on?
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: But they also do the reverse. There's a certain—the timing sometimes is that they send out a thing that is only like—if they have a sweetheart deal going, let's say for Salt Lake City or something—which had a little sweetheart deal going for actually those Olympics. [laughter] Well, if they had a sweetheart deal going, they would publish the RFQ like two weeks before the deadline.
- KD: Exactly.
- RD: And you know, they would—
- KD: So there's no timeline legally about—but there's a—to play by the rules, you have to make it national or international. Like you are saying—you have to announce it. But there's no—the window of opportunity can be short or long depending on the project.
- RD: Yeah, they can pretty much—actually they, the only reason they're sending out RFQs is because most of this money is state money—federal, state, all the way to municipal. Even partly or mostly, even some of the private things, they're usually—they're just going to save each other trouble. "I'm going to publish this RFQ. We can always pick our own person." But the problem is that unlike the AIA [American Institute of Architects], us public artists have no organization.
- KD: Exactly.
- RD: I keep arguing with Judy Baca, with Wayne Healy, with all of these guys who are public artists. I say, "Look, we have to get something going here in LA, or at least in California, and everybody else will follow suit." And they all go, "That's a great idea," but nobody ever wants to even get together at a meeting. I don't know what—it's a typical traditional situation, the history of the Writer's Guild is the same way. But actually, we're more like the Director's Guild.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: Because we hire contractors. But the Director's Guild and the way it was formulating after the studio system was going down the tubes in the '50s, it was the same deal. Nobody wanted to do anything. "Why? I'm a director, I don't want to do anything. I'm an artist."
- KD: I can see how it helps you, like, in the larger, but in the immediate, that's your competition, no? You—
- RD: Well, it serves as competition for every director and it serves as competition for every architect.
- KD: Well, before I change gears, because I know I've had you talking for a long time. Could you tell me about what you think your most important commission works are, the public arts projects that you've done? Which ones do you feel are the most important?

RD: Well, the . . .

KD: Do you want to cheat and look at—?

RD: No, I think the most obvious one is the—you know, I don't want to get into a big, "Delgado is being very egoistic."

KD: No, I wasn't defining important, I'm just letting you define that.

RD: Well, I'm just saying. *[laughter]* The most important one is obviously the Chiapas thing. I happen to think the thing that I did in Yajalón, which was the center of activity politically all the way from what was going on—what was going on in Central America—was an animal of the interest of Castle & Cooke and United Brands and United Food, and now Dole, and all of the agribusiness. That was the deal. That was the deal all the way from Nicaragua to—they make a mint amount of money. And because Chiapas was an extension of Central America—

KD: Yeah.

RD: Like I said, these guys from Tenejapa who came in with briefcases, they were talking about—and what people talked about every year, or two, or three times a year—people who went through Parish Hall, where they were literally surrounded by this nine foot by two hundred and sixty foot mural, there's not much to do other than kind of ponder what's going on there, and then wonder how you're going to feed your kid. If art is supposed to be that important—enough to set up art history departments at colleges—then just looking at it objectively, what I did there over the course of ten years or so, obviously had an impact on '94. What happened in '94, with no Zapatista revolution, the PAN [Partido Acción Nacional] never would have gotten in, because the PAN made a coalition with the PRD. You're never going to hear that. And believe me, the PAN was not put in—many people say that the PAN were put in by the United States because they were conservative. They weren't. The United States wanted status quo.

KD: Exactly.

RD: They knew exactly the guys to pay off, and all of those guys were PRI-ista [Partido Revolucionario Institucional]. They didn't want the PAN in, because that was [an] unknown entity. They don't care whether it's right wing, communist, capitalist, whatever. You know, as a—well, everybody says, "PAN got in because the United States wanted them in." No, the United States didn't want them to get in. Now, the United States doesn't want the PRI to get back in, because it already knows the right people to pay off.

KD: Exactly.

RD: It already knows the system.

KD: It's just status quo.

RD: The PRD—probably in Chiapas with the PRD, they wouldn't want the PAN or the PRI to go into Chiapas. Nestlé and General Foods know the right guys to pay off with the PRD. So what I'm saying, to break off the seventy-year-old system, you never would have had it—you never would have had it without the Zapatista revolution. And what happened with the Zapatista revolution, as I—did I mention to you the IBM computers that Loren [Father Loren Riebe] took down there?

KD: No.

RD: Oh, it must have been the lady from Harvard that I was talking to. Loren, right after I got out of the Fulbright in Mexico City, I went to Chiapas. He did some deals.

KD: In '87? After '87?

RD: Yeah. He routed—he got a bunch of IBM computers from here. They were throwing them away; there was a new generation coming in. He said, "Oh, yeah, I'll take them." He routed down through—I think he got, like, fifty computers and I think, like, twenty of them had to go. And graft all the way down. And he routed it through some Franciscan thing, and it went all the way down there. So he had, like, thirty or forty computers. And he just set them up. He sold a few of them so he could get some money. And he taught the—usually the ladies, and usually Ch'oles and Tzeltales. The ladies—

[break in audio]

- KD:** This is Karen Davalos with Roberto Delgado and today is the seventh of November [2007], and he's telling me about the IBMs that Loren got in Chiapas. Go ahead. So he was teaching the women—?
- RD:** Well, he wasn't, but there were some people there that—the women below middle class are the ones who do the typing. So none of the farmer's daughters. The farmers, *latifundistas*, the rancher's daughters weren't permitted to, because there's actually a debit in trying to marry them off to the best guy. So all of these ladies, the people in the below middle class, they knew how to type. So you know, you have these things. And no big deal. You just show them everything—and it's another thing that's not rocket science. So then, they knew how to use a mouse and do this, that, and the other: upload, download, the whole thing. They just didn't have the Internet at the time.
- KD:** Okay.
- RD:** And it was getting closer and closer to NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement]. That started back in '88. In fact, one of my best buddies, Lalo Valdez from . . . He's now in Houston, but he was at the University of Texas. Do you know him?
- KD:** Sounds familiar.
- RD:** His daughter actually works for [the Department of] Public Works here. He and I were best buddies, a sociologist. Everybody was a sociologist. By the way, I was the first art person to get into the Fulbright in Mexican. Now, the program's doubled in size. And a quarter of Mexico is in the forefront of art, in the world. *[laughter]*
- KD:** Right.
- RD:** Tijuana comes to mind.
- KD:** Yeah.
- RD:** Anyway, they have all of these ladies doing this stuff. And they have the farmers coming up to him—the ranchers I should say—saying, "Loren, Loren, we need to put all of our files in digital. How do we do this?" He said, "Oh, well, you just came to the right place. We got this little Indian lady here who can look at your records and put them into a file." So you've got this person with her *huipil*, her full costume. And these guys—the man is in his little peasant, whatever. The Tzeltales of Yajalón wore the typical white outfit.
- KD:** Yeah.
- RD:** But the guys, like I said, from Tenejapa in red, culotte-type stuff. And the guys from Oxchuc had white embroidered, actually like kilts. And everybody had different—these people were never permitted into the ranch, much less into the office. And all of the sudden that barrier was broken and it was over.
- KD:** Wow.
- RD:** This was in Yajalón. Not in Mexico City, not in Tuxtla. Not there, not there, but in Yajalón. People will write about that in fifty years also, when they get over their little infatuation with Marcos. The thing was that—okay, that was a breakdown of that. Obviously this was not lost on these guys from Tenejapa who were wondering, "Jeez, if the ladies get through this, what are we doing picking cotton for nothing?" And actually cotton is in Sonora. Actually, Sonora is the second biggest producer of cotton in the world, after Australia.
- KD:** Really?
- RD:** And it still loses money. *[laughter]*
- KD:** So, it breaks down the social barrier.
- RD:** Exactly, bingo.
- KD:** And people start to talk.
- RD:** Yeah. I think they were talking before. I think they were talking back in the early '80s and the '70s when I was doing these things. But they were talking without—remember the idealism and all of that. Well, then you say. . . I talked to people at Self Help Graphics, I said, "You should still go to the supervisor's office, and just tell Molina, 'Hey man, what's the deal here?' You're going to look like a jerk down the line." They said, "Oh, I can't do that, she's the supervisor." *[laughter]* "Si, mi patron. Si, mi patron. Si, mi patron." It's a very interesting little play by "el muchachito y el patron" and by—

- KD: Valdez.
- RD: Luis Valdez, which I saw, interestingly enough, in Mexico City, at the Luis Echeverría center.
- KD: No way.
- RD: And with my friends. And you know, they change masks and everything.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: We thought it was great. My friend nudges me and says, “Look behind you.” And behind me—we were in the front—behind me were all the people who hang out at the liberal Luis Echeverría center, and they were sitting there with their arms crossed and a glum look on their face. Because he was talking about . . . They were ranchers. They were all these liberal, liberal ranchers, and they were talking about how the Indian could actually change places with the patron. And they didn’t like that. They didn’t like that. So that was around the time that people started noticing that Loren was a force. Eventually, he got kicked out in ’96, because he was—they were pretty much ignoring him since then.
- KD: But you were telling me that this is to you, one of the most important public works that you’ve done.
- RD: Yeah, because I think it coincides with what Loren was doing. It coincides with that this was the center of activity. Yajalón was the center of activity for what was going on. It was not San Cristóbal.
- KD: San Cristóbal just becomes the place that they occupy.
- RD: Exactly, because it’s the traditional—
- KD: It’s the power.
- RD: The traditional seat.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: And it is the most conservative part of Chiapas, that they are called Coletos. Because it was a—apparently, because they always had to wear *trensas*, because there was a standing—it was a standing court. You had to have a standing court for the king. They had that in other places too, Antigua. It was a *capitanía*. They’re still like that. I like San Cristóbal. But really, the people in Tuxtla are much better. People in San Cristóbal are just assholes. They even admit it. You know, they are just glum.
- KD: So, fifty years later, to use your expression, is the listener going to wonder why the project that made you no money whatsoever, is the one that you list as the most important?
- RD: Because I think it influenced the Zapatista revolution in a way. And I think the Zapatista revolution influenced the elections in Mexico. I think it influenced Evo Morales in Bolivia, especially. I think what [Rafael] Correa got in, in Ecuador just recently, by the indigenous. I think it politicized—it broke this barrier between the ruling class in Latin America. I think—what’s his name in Brazil, the same way. It was not lost on the black peasantry and campesinos and workers in Brazil. I think that it—I don’t think Hugo Chávez would have gotten in there at all without the—I mean, this is important stuff. Yes, of course, hands down, it’s the murals I did in Chiapas.

NOVEMBER 9, 2007

- KD: This is Karen Davalos with Roberto Delgado. Today is November 9, 2007, and this is our third session for the [CSRC Oral Histories Series]. I wanted to start by talking, Roberto, about the similarities and differences between your earlier work and your current work. You have out for me on the table, this—is this the Kwazy Wabbit [series]?
- RD: Yes.
- KD: And do you want to describe to me the media and the technique?
- RD: Well, it's a cut and broken tile remnants mounted on a board in silhouette.
- KD: And you were saying, in the ceramic work that you know, and the ceramic work that I know, this application of—
- RD: Airbrush over photo silkscreen. No, I've never seen it used. I've been using that since, I guess, the first ones were Douglas, Arizona, which you saw. So I guess this is just smaller.
- KD: So the public work influencing your private creations?
- RD: Yeah.
- KD: How does one do . . . I think you talked about it the other day—that you apply a thin coat of Elmer's glue to—
- RD: Well, you're going from one—if you're going to do one airbrush over another airbrush—this one doesn't actually have one airbrush over another airbrush—sometimes I do that. And you wouldn't—you really don't have to do it here on this small.
- KD: Oh, you don't?
- RD: No, it would be the big ones that would be like ten times that size.
- KD: So you're laying this down with—
- RD: The first one, like an airbrush, with a block-out stencil, either you use the positive or the negative. Like, what I did here was off-register slightly, and then given another coat, so it gets another color in.
- KD: On that profile?
- RD: Yeah. And then there are other techniques that you can use on photo silkscreen that can also give you a gradation called "split fountain."
- KD: So you're pulling a lot of different techniques into this media then?
- RD: Yeah. Same as I want to do, actually, what we see here in this book. What you see here is monotype, a lot of monotype where you use a stencil. You load it with—and then press it, you can press on the reverse to get a line. You hand press it. What I want to do is try to figure that on tile, which I may be doing today, probably.
- KD: And you're referring to the ones in the book *El Politico* from 1999. This said, "Oil spray can monotype on canvas, forty-eight by forty-eight [inches]."
- RD: Yeah.
- KD: That's a large piece. Is most of your canvas work large? From what I remember at the solo exhibition—
- RD: Yeah, I might as well do them large. They're mostly these four by four [feet].
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: Whatever. Like I have right now, I'm using up all of these canvases that were on sale at Blinks for half price. Me and Wayne bought like a thousand dollars' worth of canvas last year.
- KD: Wow.
- RD: So we're just running through them. [laughter]
- KD: Where are you getting your inspiration? What are you doing?
- RD: Same thing, all of these things, all of these acetates I have of people. You put them in the projector and compose what they look like?
- KD: Is that . . . You kind of do it as you're going?

- RD: Well, first you do it on a blank piece of white paper. You use the—you do the acetates, one over the other and see if they look good. I've got all kinds of stuff.
- KD: So these images, all of the Kwazy Wabbits are they like—what do you want to say?—a bank of image that you draw from?
- RD: Yeah, I've been doing lately just pictures that, for example, I'm going to donate, actually today to the John Wesley Community Health Institute's Hand & Heart Annual Gala, mainly because Villaraigosa [will be there], and so is José Huizar. And me and José Antonio [Aguirre] want to nail José Huizar to the wall and ask him why we haven't gotten paid yet for the Valley Boulevard grade separation project. And the price of our work is rising as we speak, and they want two thousand linear feet of tile done by May. And to just fire two thousand linear feet of tile would mean I'd have to get two extra kilns, which would cost seven thousand dollars, and where's the money?
- KD: Just the hours and the mechanics and the time.
- RD: Exactly. Because they're going to have the scaffolding up. If they take the scaffolding down, I have to get a cherry picker. A cherry picker is a hundred eighty dollars an hour. And if I'm going to get [a] cherry picker, the two thousand square feet start to get reduced because I take the money for installation out of the artwork. [laughter] I want to tell that to José Huizar, and that's worth a donation.
- KD: That certainly is.
- RD: Anyway, you know, these guys are *politicos*. It's going to be—
- KD: It's a clever strategy.
- RD: Everybody's [got] one. It's a clever strategy that dates back to the cavemen, probably. [laughter] The reason that everybody considers it so clever is because nobody ever notices that that's the way it works. [laughter]
- KD: Well, I think what I hear artists talk about—or the centers, the people who ask for donations when they're doing the fundraiser—is they tend to get the lower-quality work, because the artist doesn't get anything out of it.
- RD: Well, that's—
- KD: Obviously, you're talking about both—
- RD: Well, the thing is, I do all of these "lower-quality work." [laughter] If I had lower-quality work, I'd do it over again.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: Everything we're speaking of is probably a reference to the academy and their teaching methods. And that's why I think of it being kind of stupid to even think of paying people like Alfred Quiroz who pretty much wants to babysit, as opposed to me who pretty much wants to tell them what the game's about and tell them how to actually make some money and produce a good quality product over and over and over again, fast and efficiently.
- KD: So, correct me if I'm wrong, but you were saying these images are ones that you have [what] I would call a bank [of images].
- RD: Yeah.
- KD: And you just go through and you put them together in a way that you find the composition interesting. The other day, you called the painting on the wall, from '97, you said it looked beautiful to you. People can't always tell the content, but it always has a beauty to it because of the balance of color, the use of space.
- RD: Well, unless you're from Frankfurt, Germany, or Frankfurt, Kentucky, and you don't like color—
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: Which is a problem in the United States. It's a pretty colorless country, except for the border states and parts of Florida.
- KD: So does the content have meaning to you, then?

- RD: Well, sure. What you see here is based on photos I took off of the—I took these with a Nikon [film camera], I didn't do it with a digital. I don't know how that would work. But you see the striations are . . . are the oscillating lines in a TV, because I took these off of a video.
- KD: Okay.
- RD: And the video was—I don't know if you remember a few years ago, a video came out and it was actually nominated for—I guess it was the taco [stand] arrests. The LAPD was arresting all of the taco [vendors]. I can't remember her, [the filmmaker's,] name.
- KD: The guys on the street.
- RD: Yeah. And this lady did this documentary on it, and it actually got a nomination—it was up for nomination for [an] Academy Award for documentary at that time. I think it was '93 or something. Anyway, she gave me that, and I said, "Wow, can I take some pictures." She said sure. So I took them off the TV, and I liked those oscillating lines, the striations and stuff. So I used those.
- KD: And then here, at the bottom is—?
- RD: It's a guy getting busted for selling tacos by the LAPD.
- KD: Okay, same content, same story.
- RD: Yeah, and you can see I included the size of the TV screen, you know.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: So it's just one on top of the other. So I just made a bunch of silkscreens of those.
- KD: And in the series Kwazy Wabbit, does that topic run throughout, or does each—
- RD: Well, it's because these things look like rabbits, because they were all the remnants mostly from Atlanta.
- KD: Okay.
- RD: So, I go, "Look at these rabbits. What do they look like?" And I have some that are . . . Actually I want to get into those European rabbits that have those floppy ears. They're kind of cool. So you put these . . . But I have to find remnants or either break them right. But anyway, they look like rabbits, and Elmer Fudd and the Kwazy Wabbit, and the whole thing is, the Kwazy Wabbit is . . . Here's a good example. It's a picture of Scooter Libby. I did this about two years ago, so it was before Scooter Libby was even in the news. But I knew that there was a Kwazy Wabbit somewhere. *[laughter]* And it's getting so bad that it's comical, unless you're an African village that's wiped off the map. It's getting so bad that it's becoming a dark comedy.
- KD: The title of the series refers to—
- RD: Yeah, and I'm not going to use "George Bush" or "Condoleezza Rice" because that would be too obvious. As a matter of fact, I wouldn't use that again.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: I wouldn't use "Scooter Libby" anymore because it's too obvious. But of course, it's dated, so people will figure it out if they really care to. So I'm going to donate it to that. And that has a lot to do with [the] politics of public art, which goes all the way back to the Renaissance popes.
- KD: So, your range—
- RD: It's going to be an open bar, all of these people. It's going to be fun. I don't have to pay. There's going to be all of these people. It's going to be cool.
- KD: I think it's clever. It's really smart. It's a gig that you already—he has to speak with you. I'm curious about the—you make [a] loose reference, "It's all the same." That's what you were saying off tape. That's your technique—not necessarily technique but your style, which I, maybe naively, but it has this layered, but it kind of reminds me of this neo-Baroque sensibility. I told you before that it strikes me as being very organic in the shapes, even though the items in the painting or in the work are not organic. They're figures. You know this one is from a television set or something. They have a very organic, kind of overlapping—
- RD: They're based on the figures, so that right there is organic.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: So you try to figure out something that's not.

- KD: But the content is not the same in each item, in each image. Are you dealing [with] a range of topics from political corruption to environmental degradation?
- RD: Sure, it's just like the journalists. You know, it's like everybody's waiting. The people who are the saddest to see the Republicans go are the journalists. I mean, what a great show. Hillary or Barack Obama are going to do everything right and [be] really boring. War is interesting. *[laughter]* So, why would I want to do little houses in the valley?
- KD: Yeah, so it's interesting to you.
- RD: Sure.
- KD: Can you give me a sense of the range of topics that are interesting to you?
- RD: Well, this is called *The Politico*, and anybody will see it. This guy—actually, I got it off a picture of this PRI-ista coming out of his limo, and the rest is just things that refer to the political situation. This is like an *indigena*, and this guy is obviously of European character. He's a PRI-ista—he's probably more Indian than he is European, but he'll probably insist on this European-ness. And then there is this—I don't know what this is. This moon thing from, I think the Borgia Codex also. This is something to do with fertility or—
- KD: I always think of a muffin. What's this thing that's split here and also in the center?
- RD: That's it.
- KD: Oh, that's—?
- RD: This is a basket of something and it's opening up.
- KD: Okay.
- RD: I just split it open.
- KD: Right.
- RD: This moon thing, that's straight from it. And when it has these spots. These black spots are death symbols of putrefying flesh. And it has—and these are—so there's a ying-yang type of situation going [on]. This is a particular figure of unhappiness or death, and this is happiness, or life on the other side. You know, those are the . . . And the interesting part to me are the layering of the—the use of—the final thing that all of this was done—the painting and gradation, in all of this. And there is actually some airbrush, aerosol gradation, but not much. And this—the monotype was done with aerosol as the medium on the back of the template, which is—it just, you can remember it—
- KD: Yeah, it makes the image kind of—I guess, maybe the one's that I look at that have that aerosol, whereas this yellow in here, this basket, kind of pops out.
- RD: That's straight—
- KD: Yeah, that's paint.
- RD: That's paint. Brushwork.
- KD: Brushwork. Those two textures, it gives it a quality that makes it have a kind of depth that I guess, even your—even this one that's all brushwork, the one on the wall—it really pops out and draws in at the same time, so that's a fascinating technique.
- RD: Yeah, it's interesting to see what will happen when actually people notice it. *[laughter]*
- KD: Well, you have on the résumé that you gave me—you know, it's only two pages—it's not the body of work that you've done, but you had an exhibition in UNAM [Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México], in '84. And I'm imagining when you were down in Mexico making connections, and that sole exhibition, do you remember the kind of work you were doing?
- RD: I think it was kind of like this. It was monotype. It was on paper. Yeah.
- KD: And what about Robert Berman at the B1 [Gallery] in '88?
- RD: Those were things that were mixed media, kind of like if you can remember these—kind of like these.
- KD: *The Politico*.
- RD: Yeah. Or some more straight brushwork. But it was the same technique.
- KD: What kind of arrangement did you have with Robert Berman?
- RD: Well, fifty-fifty, if he sold anything.

- KD: Did he sell?
- RD: Not really. In the whole overall scheme of things, maybe he sold five thousand dollars' worth of stuff over three or four years. And that's not going to pay the mortgage.
- KD: No.
- RD: No.
- KD: So you had more than one—you exhibited more than once with Robert Berman?
- RD: I think once at the B, the B something.
- KD: The B1?
- RD: The B1? Yeah. I think it was at a duo show with Richard Duardo. And then once at the Robert Berman gallery. I can't remember where it was. He had it somewhere.
- KD: So, how do you—what do you think of those kind of relationships?
- RD: It's fine. It'd be fine. I don't mind fifty-fifty. It'd be fine. I don't mind people doing that. I would rather it—it's just that they're not going to do it. Dealers are like anything else, they will go with the trend. And the thing is, they don't want something that—they don't want something that's going to make you particularly think, because the majority of the public isn't going to necessarily buy something that is going to make them particularly make them think. *[laughter]* Or at worst, or at best, make them scratch their head. So—
- KD: There's an amount of visual literacy that your work requires.
- RD: Yeah, well, you know, the dumbing of America—I mean, the generation that comes out of Prop 13 [Proposition 13] in '78 right now are young lawyers. My niece, you know, who's thirty-six, she said the majority of people, when she was in her three years at UCLA Law School—she was probably exaggerating, which says something—she never met anybody—these were all literate, top of the line—she never had met anybody who had read a novel. They were all, like, specialists, out of the gates from high school. Boom, you are going to study law and statistics. And they read book after book about the specialty. And if you tell them about Dickens—I mean, they've read sociology books.
- KD: Right.
- RD: But if you tell them the *Christmas Carol* is not about Christmas. They'll go, "What?"
- KD: Yeah, it's a beginning of the class struggle.
- RD: In England. So, let alone, *Heartbreak House*. And if you tell them, "Well, that's when they put in National Health [Service], and they started to put in the social welfare system of England."
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: Based on art. *[laughter]* They'll look at you like you're crazy. These are lawyers. Then you see—or an MBA guy, or the young engineers. "Oh, I don't want to check that O-ring." *[laughter]* "Hey, we're doing pretty good here at Enron."
- KD: Where do you get the inspiration for these various political topics that you're taking on?
- RD: Well, I was reading the paper today. I look at the visuals and stuff. If it looks cool, I cut it out, scan it, and print it on an acetate.
- KD: Do you find that you're attracted to a certain kind of journalism?
- RD: No, it just depends on—no, I don't think—you award the Pulitzer in photojournalism, not because it's a certain style or this, that, and the other. It's, I guess, art. It's just art.
- KD: So, have you always had a studio?
- RD: Well, a place, a space, you know.
- KD: Can you describe some of them?
- RD: Well, the one—
- KD: Have you had to work out of the garage?
- RD: Yeah. Garage, anywhere.
- KD: What years was that? Where you were not in a formal studio? Like you are now, over at East Los Streetscapers, in Rosemead.

- RD: Well, I had the tent [in] back of my mom's house, on Van Ness, the *casa familiar*. I had this big tent and stuff. Then my sister got married and this was back in the early '90s—late '80s, early '90s. Then I was going back and forth [from] Honduras.
- KD: When you weren't really staying in one place, because you were going to Latin America?
- RD: Yeah. Yeah, so it was—you know, the house I had [in] Tuxtla Gutiérrez, it was just a house.
- KD: Then you mentioned before that you had a studio in Ensenada, and it didn't work out.
- RD: Yeah, I just hauled that . . . This was this last summer.
- KD: How big was it?
- RD: We're going back next week, because we're going to look at old—what they call *naves*, which are those big—like we have right now in Rosemead—those big steel things, manufacturing places.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: Well, there are dozens of them for rent. And I realized that that was the case, as opposed to this kind of first level of a proper house that we were going to build on the top. But that would—José Antonio wasn't particularly interested in doing that, I found out later. And he doesn't have the—you know, he has a wife and 3.2 kids. [*laughter*] It was too unstable. And I wasn't going to put in the capital investment to that unless I had a real solid, good lease—which isn't worth shit in Mexico—or I bought the place.
- KD: So you were considering collaborating with José Antonio Aguirre on a particular project, or just a studio space?
- RD: Well, we're collaborators for Valley Boulevard.
- KD: For Valley Boulevard.
- RD: Which is a big ticket item. It's two hundred twenty-seven thousand dollars.
- KD: Right.
- RD: So, we've got plans next week. We're going to go down and check it out. He's going to go down and check on his cousin who I was renting the house from. But anyway, it didn't seem like a viable situation. It was a good—I spent maybe two weeks there total, off and on, over four months. So I got to know Ensenada real well. [*laughter*]
- KD: So you were considering a studio space that was inexpensive and easy to do the kind of work that you're talking about?
- RD: Yeah, that's still viable.
- KD: Okay.
- RD: Preferably in Ensenada or close to the border because of the logistics of it.
- KD: The transportation.
- RD: Yeah. But the other option is, what we're talking about right now, they're going to flesh out—I know Hugo Guillen, who I knew as a teenager in Yajalón. He eventually got his PhD in environmental engineering from the University of Florida. And now he just got off a one-year stint as the president of the University of Chiapas. And he's an engineer. And I was telling you about José Antonio and his buddy Adrian—I can't remember his last name. Godoy maybe. Yeah, I think it's Godoy. Who's right now the president of one of the campuses—they've got three of them. And José Antonio's going to be teaching there. He's got a one-year teaching gig there. And if he gets the Fulbright, it's even better. And what I said, is "Hey, why don't we bring these two guys together? Why don't these guys do a deal, you know? You've got engineering. You've got the fine arts, and then at UNACH [Universidad Autónoma de Chiapas] you have engineering and architectural departments." They don't have any art.
- KD: No.
- RD: But engineering architecture is exactly what you need in public art. So we're going to get these guys. We're going to write up a—we already have the proposal. We can just do something for it, you know, try to bring these two guys together. And then José Antonio, because he gets a lot of his rock—he just got back from Cuernavaca, where he gets this limestone. Oh, he gets a lot of the mosaic from there, from Cuernavaca—that the Siqueiros studios abandoned. They're looking for somebody to buy it and fix it up. He said, "Let's

make a deal. Let's make a deal with the government. The government will give me a tax write-off and some really low-interest loans if you fix something up." If it's one of those hacienda projects, you know?

KD: Right. Right. Right.

RD: And we're saying, "Well, we'll get some money and this might be the center that we can use between the north and the south." So this is kind of ambitious, but I'd rather try to do that than try to deal just with a particular person in Ensenada. It's really going to be a really ambitious project, or I'm just going to keep on doing what I'm doing now, here. Although, I think we have, like, two more years in the Rosemead studio. Wayne talked to this guy named Herrera, who's the agent for this guy named Chan, who owns this place, who's apparently from Beijing. He owns the whole block. Apparently, he's got two more years. But once that's over . . . So we've got to start thinking about plan B now, and really, unless—right now's the time to look for a place in El Sereno, or Lincoln Heights, Boyle Heights—right there near Boyle Heights, near the 5 [freeway].

KD: Yeah.

RD: All of those places. I wouldn't want to go out to Lancaster. Or the valley. [laughter] But there are places you can find. But unfortunately, Wayne has a tendency to think that—you know, he's like, "This is the best of all possible worlds and nothing's going to change." He's like old Dr. Pangloss in *Candide*. [laughter] He comes out of aerospace.

This is an interesting thing. Yesterday I was reading the paper and there was a whole thing on Frank Gehry is getting sued because he did this thing in Massachusetts, and it was a three hundred million dollar building, and he got paid fifteen million dollars, and they're like . . . But the interesting part is, "Well, that's interesting, an architect is getting sued. That's interesting." Then I suddenly realized, the fifteen million dollars that he got paid as a fee for designing the place is five percent of the total cost. I told Wayne, and I told—I didn't really talk to Wayne, I talked to Patricio Villagomez, who does his—the partner there. I said, "Look at this. How come we only get one percent? What's going on here?" Well, what's going on here is that we don't have an AIA, period. And he laughed. And I'm sure he didn't even bother showing it to Wayne because these guys come out of aerospace. Wayne worked for General Electric and Hughes [Aircraft], and Patricio worked for Bendix [Corporation]. And you get in real comfortable situations in aerospace. You really don't have to think about the—all you have to think that if widget A goes into—applies to widget B, it has to work up in space. That's it. That's about as far of the future that you can think of.

KD: Let me ask you about these. I don't know, I have some friends that are engineers that would probably disagree with that characterization.

RD: Well, let's say, as opposed to—well, no. In the people that started up Yahoo! and Google and stuff—

KD: Yeah.

RD: Obviously, these guys are visionaries. Steve Jobs is a visionary. But that's very rare. Of every hundred engineers maybe one of them actually thinks beyond the next paycheck.

KD: In any field, yes.

RD: Not necessarily artists—artists are a little bit different. And you have to remember that these guys aren't engineers anymore. These guys are artists. I'm presenting them with something that's kind of important, called a paycheck. I'd rather get paid five percent. This thing from the city—that seventy thousand dollars represents one percent—it actually represents 0.8 percent because they take the one percent and they deduct twenty percent for administrative costs.

KD: Right. This is the most current call from the Department of Public Works, request qualifications for [the] environmental art project.

RD: Right. So it should be, we should be getting, well, five times that much. It should be a project that is three hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

KD: [reading] "Seventy thousand dollar budget, all inclusive, in tentative coverage of cost of design, fabrication and installation." That's budget. That's your salary. You said you only take like a third from that?

RD: Yeah.

- KD: That sounds like, really—you're right, that's peanuts compared to this.
- RD: Well, compared to the architects, yeah. And that's not only—we had to fabricate it and install. He just designed it.
- KD: Right. Right. You fabricate and install. *[laughter]*
- RD: What's going on? I know what's going on. What's going on is that we're not represented by anybody. We don't have an organization. And I said this—
- KD: You mean a union?
- RD: Of course. What is the AIA but a union? Well, they're not going to go on strike. Well, they used to say that the guilds weren't a union, like the Writer's or the Director's Guild.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: But now they're on strike, you know?
- KD: Can I ask you . . . These are beautiful images of the slides that are multiple stages of work. When did you learn to document your work and how? Have you always been documenting your work?
- RD: Well, I didn't document the—I regret that I didn't document my time in the Army and most of the photos have been lost.
- KD: Yeah, you said you threw away a lot of that stuff.
- RD: Yeah. As soon as I started doing things, back when I was at—
- KD: Well, you said you don't have a lot of—maybe they're not on slides, they're digital—of your easel work.
- RD: Oh, no I didn't bring them. *[laughter]*
- KD: Because I've seen an entire exhibition. I've seen the solo exhibition. Right.
- RD: I just didn't bring them. Yesterday, I went to the Art Walk and I took the train. I was kind of busy. I was dealing with these people in Florida and these people in Redmond, Washington, on the phone and stuff. And then—
- KD: I'm not being critical. I'm just trying to figure out that you actually have them [documented]. That's great.
- RD: Yeah, I have all of that stuff.
- KD: So, the show that you did in 2000 at Avenue 50 Studio, what was that? You want to describe that work? Was that all recent work?
- RD: Yeah, that was recent stuff. When was that?
- KD: Two thousand, at Avenue 50 Studio. Solo exhibition.
- RD: Yeah, I think—
- KD: I saw it. They were large—
- RD: Yeah, they were like this.
- KD: Yeah, that was in it.
- RD: I think maybe this one was exhibited.
- KD: Yeah, it was.
- RD: And there was another show with just these. I think it was a two-person show, with the Kwazy Wabbits, later.
- KD: Okay. I missed that.
- RD: It's a . . . It's just an exhibit, something to do. I usually just do it for the party.
- KD: You don't sell a lot of your—?
- RD: No. Nobody sells anything. Like I said, I was sitting there and they were kind of snickering at the fact that I was a public artist at Burt Green's. And by the way, yesterday at the Art Walk downtown, the work was really, really bad. I don't know what the deal [is] that was going on. I think mommy and daddy's got to the gallery owners, which is not uncommon. And it was really bad. But some people were snickering—I was telling you back then—
- KD: So you come back to this individual easel work.
- RD: Well, sure. It's fun to do.
- KD: Okay.

- RD: It's interesting to do. And I'm not stupid, and I know what I'm doing is just banking it, literally.
- KD: Okay. Okay.
- RD: Either for me or my estate.
- KD: Okay.
- RD: I mean, these things are not going to go away. And nobody, competitively, I'm enough of an astute observer of my competition and current art history to know that nothing's going to compare this. *[laughter]* Like I said, try to figure out where the ceramic stuff has been before. You can't. Because it didn't. It wasn't. So, what is this going to be worth, in fifty years?
- KD: What do you sell it for now?
- RD: Two hundred dollars. Three hundred dollars.
- KD: Wow. That's—
- RD: Yeah, but nobody wants it because it's weird looking. The thing is, like ceramic people go, "This is not right." *[laughter]*
- KD: Well, ceramic folks do not use fabricators, do they?
- RD: No. The problem with ceramic folks and—it's probably [the] closest to chemical engineering that there is in the arts.
- KD: Yes. Yes.
- RD: So they have a tendency to get into that engineering mode. And engineering mode is "follow the rules."
- KD: Right.
- RD: If you don't follow the rules, the place may explode.
- KD: Right. *[laughter]*
- RD: Or the bridge will fall, or whatever. And that's what I meant when I say, I come in there, and I talk to Wayne and Patricio and say, "Look man, we've got to form a—" Where are the rules that say we have to form an organization? There are no rules. It's just a good idea. But they don't think that way. They think by the book.
- KD: Well, also, this is quite a competitive world.
- RD: Well, that goes into it also. They may also—
- KD: Self interest.
- RD: Of course. But that probably, when you're drunk at a gallery opening or talking to artists, one to the other, I think it's just—I think it's that artists, like everybody else, want to agree and acknowledge and appreciate something that somebody else has already agreed, appreciated and acknowledged.
- KD: Yeah. *[laughter]*
- RD: So they're going to [be] like, "What do you think? What do you think?" And they're like, "I can't, because I don't have any other—there's nothing—I've never seen this before." And they're not going to say, "I've never seen this before," because [that] would be—
- KD: Admitting it.
- RD: Admitting that there's something that's actually been created.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: No. *[laughter]* Which would be the highest compliment. And it is the highest—
- KD: Who are some of your supporters?
- RD: There are no supporters. The only one that [I have] recently, is Carlos Chavez. And this just happened off the fundraiser a couple weeks ago. He bought—Kathy said, from Avenue 50, "What can I put in? Do you have anything?" I said, "Just take anything you have there in the storage." So she took one of these *rechulo* one foot by one foot of these faces that I had done with these little brushes that took me forever and put it up for a hundred dollars. I was making like thirty cents an hour on it, or something. So I said, "Jesus. At least get it above . . ." As soon as somebody bid two hundred dollars, and it was Carlos Chavez, and I said, "Who the hell is Carlos Chavez?" So I snuck up there and put in another hundred dollars. So I went back up there, just before closing and he crossed that out and put three hundred fifty dollars. So I said, "Oh shit, let

that guy have it for three hundred fifty dollars.” And it was good, because I hadn’t remember that Carlos Chavez had known me before and that him and his wife were architects. And then I found out later—he came up to me, “I’m so glad to get this, Tito.” And I go, “Who the hell are you?” [*laughter*] “Oh, okay!” So then he explained to me and everything came back. He did the Aldama [Elementary] School addition. And then he tells me, “I want to give you a one-person show.” I said, “What?” He said, “Yeah, we have this new gallery—our old office is now our new gallery in South Pasadena?” I go, “What!?”

Boy, it’s a good thing I didn’t go up there and scrawl that out and keep going—because I wanted to keep it for myself. In other words, I would have paid four hundred dollars, to get it back and taken the tax deduction, because I had given it Avenue 50.

KD: Right.

RD: It’s a good thing I didn’t. For some reason, I said, “Ah, let the guy keep it. Shit.” I didn’t even know who the guy was. So all of these little luck things happened. So that was good.

KD: Were some of these group exhibitions luck? I mean, you had some very important exhibitions in France, Mexico City, Glasgow.

RD: Most of these things are off the Self Help Graphics touring thing that they did.

KD: Oh, okay.

RD: So I just did that to pad the résumé. For all practical purposes, I’ve had, like, three exhibitions in the last twenty years. And that’s just the way it is. You realize that it’s like a casting couch type of situation.

KD: No, I understand.

RD: Not the best actors get the best parts.

KD: Yeah. One of the reasons that I’m excited about the project is the chance to help correct the record. Because you’re not part of the—

RD: There is no record.

KD: No, there is no record. But there is the attempt, I mean Gary Keller’s two-volume is a great example.

RD: Yeah, I think it’s fine that things like this come out every twenty years or something.

KD: But it’s not.

RD: It may be more—

KD: It’s looked at as an authoritative text, and yet it’s missing a lot of important—because it went only on call, it’s not—

RD: It’s a good index.

KD: So you were part of the CARA exhibition, right? Chicano Art Resistance and Affirmation, that came out of UCLA.

RD: Which year was that?

KD: Nineteen ninety?

RD: Oh no, that was one of the things that—that was one of the reasons that I didn’t really get back to Self Help. I went to Estelí, Nicaragua. I was going down there—went down there with Ginger Varney and the car and I was out of the picture—[out of sight], out of mind.

KD: Right.

RD: And everybody at Self Help, they were going, “Well, do you know any other artists? Who did that painting?” And I had some paintings in the frickin’ stairwell and stuff. And nobody said, “I don’t know who that artist is.” People are saying Tito—when the people from UCLA came by and said, “Who are your artists?” and stuff like that. Somebody would say, “Tito.” And other people would say, “Tito? We don’t know any Tito. Who’s the Tito?” [*laughter*] In other words, nobody is really going to—

KD: Promote another artist?

RD: Promote another artist. It’s highly competitive. The thing with these things, for example. I just—whatever I get in, I give it to Wayne and Patricio. And they didn’t do that for years. For years, they didn’t—I found out for years, for literally years, that I was giving them a copy of everything that I was getting in RFQ, and they were getting stuff in and not giving it to me. I just put them up against the wall and said, “What is

this bullshit?" I said, "Is that how it's going to be? Is that how it's going to be?" I said, "Believe me, you have more to lose by not informing me than by informing me because I get [more] RFQ's than you've ever dreamed of." And actually, I'm turning them all onto Europe and China. It's crazy.

KD: I was thinking you'd go after China and Japan.

RD: They want things—

KD: Oh, you were talking about that, that's right.

RD: They want everything. They want an RFP. They want a Request for Proposals. I'm not willing to do that unless there's a fee connected. And then they want it all translated into—

KD: Cantonese, yeah.

RD: Cantonese.

KD: I was thinking that you'd be one of the folks who would go after that market, because their bubble, their arts bubble—we were saying before the tape was on, you know, Sotheby's had an auction the other day, and they didn't sell twenty out of twenty-six items, if I'm getting it right. And one of them was—

RD: It's probably in there, I was reading the Calendar [section of the *Los Angeles Times*].

KD: Yeah, in the newspaper. And then their stock went down. Their stock crashed immediately after. It lost a quarter of their value.

RD: Well, there's a reason for—

KD: The bubble's bursting here, but not in Asia, where—

RD: Well, probably because these places . . . When artists are complacent, they get lazy, which I saw yesterday, which has consistently good work. Phototeca, Bert Green—

KD: Okay.

RD: Burt Green had some pretty good stuff. I didn't think it was that good. But the rest of the new galleries—there are also new galleries on the east side of Main Street, like, five of them. It was student stuff. It wasn't even competent.

KD: What are the contemporary work that you find inspiring, or good work, some of the artists?

RD: In a gallery situation?

KD: In any situation. Who do you think is any good?

RD: I don't particularly like Wayne Healy's style, but I think it's so unique that it's probably, it's probably going to last. I don't particularly like it. I don't think . . . The thing, the most vibrant, and thirty years from now, they're going to be writing about all this stuff, and they're going to be desperately trying to uncover some of the graffiti, so they can—

KD: Yeah.

RD: Well, that's what's going on, that's the name of the game—graffiti art, tagger art.

KD: Do some of your overlays speak to that?

RD: No, I never use it.

KD: No, but just the fact that you have these—

RD: Well, if anything, I was doing it before they were. [laughter] Maybe they've taken it from me. This is, for example—something—actually my mom lived in Aliso-Pico [neighborhood], about a block away when they had them back in the '20s.

KD: This is Aliso-Pico. This doesn't exist anymore, does it?

RD: No, it got torn down.

KD: You did it in '89, so they already had VARA [Visual Artists Rights Act] in effect. So what happened?

RD: It got torn down and they never told me about [it], so I couldn't take them to jail and shit. I could really—I went by there to see if there were any remnants. And I saw with the—have you been by there?

KD: No.

RD: What HUD [Department of Housing and Urban Development] did, what they built. It's gorgeous. It's exactly what you need. It's a lease-to-buy, so you have a stake. For all practical purposes, they're bungalows. They're one story, and they're nicely designed. I've seen those designs. Those same designs are

used in the county. My brother-in-law has a place up in Capistrano up in the hills and it's a small house but it's split level, and the way they're designing houses now is that you've got the split level with the open kitchen and it's a wonderful use of space. And I know that that's what they're doing inside. And the way . . . It's just a perfect—it's close to a perfect low-cost housing thing, with the option to buy. And the incidence of crime went down, graffiti went down. And I said—well, first of all I think they did a really good project. And secondly, trying and suing the government, forget it—if you can find a lawyer, it's going to take forever.

KD: Is that a mask in the center of—?

RD: Yes, that's the center of the Coatlicue, the monumental thing that's in Mexico City, the big Coatlicue.

KD: You use a lot of indigenous artifacts as reference.

RD: Yeah. I was—I mean, you've seen *The Book of Kells* and you've seen the Borgia. I mean, I love *The Book of Kells* and the way it has—and I use a lot of that stuff. But it's limited. You know, the thing is, is I'm dealing with thirty centuries of culture, with different types of architecture, this, that—the whole New World stuff. And if you really look at Anglo-European art, what you're talking about is pretty much Greco-Roman, Greco-Roman, ad infinitum, except for Islam. In the Old World, there's really nothing new, and it's kind of limited, especially—

KD: So, in some ways, your work is—I mean, there are folks who say that Chicano art, that it has to refer to this indigenous past. Your work does that.

RD: But—

KD: Your understanding of how you got left out of the CARA exhibition was you weren't there and no one was going to promote your name.

RD: Exactly.

KD: But the content of the work would have easily fit.

RD: It may have. It may have, except when I'm doing this, if I'm doing strictly—well, no, this. . . The style is not something that fits.

KD: Do you think there's a Chicano style?

RD: Oh sure. It's very impressionistic brushstrokes. It has a tendency to be overly figurative. There's not a lot of abstraction of the figurativeness—using the figure, one over the other in abstract expressionism overlapping over figures. There isn't a lot of that.

KD: Were you aware of this in the '70s and '80s, or is this looking back at the body of work?

RD: No, I was always looking at that. I mean, it was kind of obvious. I mean, what I saw back then, when I first got in touch with Self Help Graphics around '73 or so, pretty much the same stuff they're cranking out now. Except, now they're using Giclée and—everybody's discovered Giclée—and the impact, which I think is good, the impact of tagging art.

KD: Yeah.

RD: [Gajin] Fujita is taking advantage of that. But—

KD: Fujita is?

RD: He is a Japanese-Chicano artist who has gotten picked up by what's that place—in Venice? [LA Louver Gallery in Venice, California, represents Gajin Fujita—ed.]

KD: Yeah.

RD: In the overall context of things, Sotheby's will tell you that they're not going to touch anything that has to do with tagging art. And they're not going to touch anything that has to do with the Chicano style and the Chicano iconography type of style, because it's our—and it's the Chicano's fault that they happened to have compartmentalized themselves into a box canyon that they can't get out of. I mean, I've gone and tried to peddle my way—when I was actually trying to peddle my stuff at different galleries. They would say, "Oh well, I'm going to keep your slides for our next Chicano show." And of course, when the next Chicano show came up, they would put all of the people who were going to be in the Chicano show and mine would just stand out like, "Who is this?" The style isn't there, so they shit-canned mine from even

the Chicano show. First, I get shit-canned from the general population and then I get shit-canned from the particular. [laughter] That's why I say, I've had maybe three shows in the last twenty years. That's the reason. That's how they work. Chicanos are not—what Patricia Correia represents at Bergamot [Station], is the lack of Chicanos at all the other art galleries. [laughter]

KD: Yeah.

RD: Where do you see them?

KD: Yeah.

RD: None. Even in their permanent collections, even in their stable, they're not there. And so she's specializing in that. And the problem with Patricia Correia, is she's gone out—I think even, when this was at the studio, she even came up and touched this and looked at it and all that, and she said, "Well, I'll give you a call back." And I know her. "Hey, how you doing Patty?" "How you doing, Tito?" She won't touch my stuff, because it doesn't fit in. It doesn't look Chicano. You know?

KD: Yeah.

RD: And obviously, these guys aren't going to do that at the rest of the complex, because—maybe if I came up with another name, but not if my name is Delgado. [laughter]

KD: Do you think—?

RD: And at Bergamot, they're not going to have another Chicano show because Correia is already there.

KD: Do you remember conversations about this in the '70s and '80s?

RD: Well, I wasn't talking to much of anybody at UCLA, and then I split to Mexico. There were conversations during the Fulbright thing, because I saw during the reign of the monarchy, of the PRI-ista monarchy—which is still around—you know, you didn't—well, there's an interesting book—I don't know if you know about it—by Shifra Goldman, called [Contemporary] *Mexican Painting in a Time of Change*. Well, she brought up the—she brought up the whole thing with Rufino Tamayo, and Tamayo and the Pan-American Union and the Kennedy's and stuff. He was doing his murals—in '56 he was doing his murals and in '57. He wasn't doing his murals because they told him literally, "We don't want any Indians. We don't want this, we want nice little watermelons. And you do another mural, you're off the books. You'll never get another show in this town." Well, he saw the light. Well, all the other people in Mexico saw the light too. They stopped doing everything. They stopped doing any figurative stuff. Everything was abstract. Everything—because abstract is safe.

KD: Yeah.

RD: If you don't understand it, then there's no polemic going. So, everything was abstract. And then, the Chicanos started to—especially Carlos Almaraz started to sell in New York. And people, the young—this was in '86, when I was there. It was happening.

KD: Yeah.

RD: It almost came full circle. I happen to think that Chicanos made a mistake by not calling themselves Mexican. And probably down the line, they probably will. Because, like I said, these borders probably will disappear eventually, sooner than later. And as such, Chicano art is like what I was saying about Magu. Magu's cars have more to do with the indigenous toys that you can buy at the Mercado Sonora in Mexico City than they have to do with Detroit.

KD: Do you mean his three-dimensional work, or just the—

RD: Three-dimensional or, you know, I've got this.

KD: Yeah.

RD: This, does this have to do with Detroit?

KD: No.

RD: Well, most people will [think that] because they don't understand about the Borgia Codex. They don't understand that the whole disembodied—that's the whole deal. [laughter]

KD: Oh, you're connecting it to [inaudible].

RD: Or one of them, whoever.

- KD: Right, yeah, the disembodied guys. Huitzilopochtli?
- RD: Or any of them. That's just one of the—I should have brought the Borgia Codex book. It would blow your mind.
- KD: Can you answer a question for me? You've been referring to a range of literary, historical—you're incredibly well-read. At one point, did you start to explore this intellectual life of reading?
- RD: Of reading?
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: I was always reading. Like I told you, the TV broke down. You have nothing else to do. You read.
- KD: Did you read these things in college?
- RD: What things?
- KD: I don't know, you—
- RD: You mean about the Mayans and all that?
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: No, that was nothing else to do in . . . Like I said, in Chiapas, I didn't want to read books on sociology, didn't want to read books on . . . I looked at books on Mayan—can't remember his name, the first big Mayan scholar. So there were a number of books that—
- KD: I can't remember if Mike Coe—I don't think he's a Mayan [scholar].
- RD: But these books, if you really read the text, they're really dry.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: But that's where I got the images from.
- KD: Yeah. Do you think of this image bank the way that Siqueiros had an image bank?
- RD: He had an image bank? I guess, everybody has an image bank.
- KD: No, not everybody has an image bank.
- RD: Well, I'm saying, obviously, the people that did the work yesterday that I saw on Main Street don't have an image bank, but that's their problem. And actually, it's better that they don't, because they're not going to compete with me. And if CalArts at forty thousand dollars a year doesn't want to tell them to do an image bank, well that's forty thousand dollars down the drain that mommy paid for, for nothing. But these guys will later recoup by becoming real estate agents. *[laughter]* As long as the economy holds up.
- KD: I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit about the environment that you work in.
- RD: Well, the thing about public art, and the thing about doing that is if you can—if you've done enough public art, you can work anywhere. You can do anything, you can work anywhere. Except for—the only thing that I don't like is grinding metal noises. That's about it.
- KD: When were you doing grinding metal noises?
- RD: They had a guy that did grinding metal next door—
- KD: Oh, okay.
- RD: At the Streetscapers. Even they . . . Typically, Wayne and Patricio said, "Oh, doesn't matter to us, we're engineers." *[laughter]* And after awhile, I just said, "Oh, Jesus." After awhile we just kind of made a deal. And actually, the guy just left.
- KD: What about working near a highway?
- RD: Well, anything that's being done—
- [break in audio]*
- KD: Karen Davalos with Roberto Delgado, we're [on] side 2. And I was changing gears a little bit. I'm trying to get him to admit to a few things that he won't admit to. That's okay. I'm not going to push it too hard. I was wondering if you could tell me a little about documenting your work. What do you do? And how do you do it? You take photographs.
- RD: Yeah. Now, it's all digital.
- KD: Okay. So you started with photographs—

- RD: Which saves a lot of money.
- KD: Yeah, and storage.
- RD: And time.
- KD: You were photographing and having slides made, and some of these are in the process of . . . Did you always do that?
- RD: Yeah. Yeah. It's always good to do the process.
- KD: And why do you document the process?
- RD: Just to see—just to refer back, I guess. Half of them are lost—I don't know. If you're going to take one picture—I don't do it for all of them.
- KD: Oh, you don't?
- RD: No, I don't. Maybe I've done it for a few. Most of them are lost. Yeah, that gets—if you've got a camera handy, you take it—well it's halfway done.
- KD: And for the public works, you're not even documenting all of—?
- RD: Oh the public works, that gets documented from day one. All of the processes. You do that anyway, because they pay you by the milestones and stuff.
- KD: So that's part of it?
- RD: Yeah.
- KD: So how do you archive that?
- RD: Digital. Because you're working up to—the whole point of working up to a final design is a process—and then the fabrication, you take some pictures of the fabrication.
- KD: Okay. Do you think that—?
- RD: And the installation. Sometimes it gets interesting. I like to take pictures of the installation because it's likely the *albañil*. It just—might as well take some . . . Also, that's also good to cover that if they say, "Well, it started to fall down and stuff." Just it's good to cover yourself.
- KD: What was your reference to *albañil*?
- RD: The masons. The guys that put in the tiles. The workers.
- KD: Oh, okay. And do you tend to work with particular fabricators? I know that's off the topic, but you just reminded me.
- RD: Yeah, I'll bring in some people, some assistants, to do the—to do stuff.
- KD: Where do you find these kind of folks?
- RD: Strangely enough, one of them is Mary Wentz, who I saw yesterday, who's used to be a photographer for the *Times*. And then Felipe Hernandez, who is from Mexico and just is a person I met somewhere. He's just, like, [an] intellectual laborer. And other people that come in. Usually, not students. Strangely enough, it's not people who [say], "I need a job, because I want to pursue art," or CalArts, or—not CalArts. Art Center [College of Design]. Those kids are getting, they have money from Daddy. They're not going to work for fifteen dollars an hour. [*laughter*]
- KD: So you're looking for somebody who's got a good work ethic, not particularly certain kinds of skills?
- RD: Yeah. Well, skills? It can be tough, really. Most of the stuff I do—I have to do for the Valley Boulevard, I have to do what you see here—
- KD: On the tile?
- RD: I have to do, like, three hundred of these.
- KD: Jeez.
- RD: Individually cut—none is duplicated. All are taken from these Dover books—Chinese, Japanese.
- KD: Oh, okay.
- RD: *The Book of Kells* stuff. You can tweak it so you can get some good designs. But mostly taken from that book by [Jorge] Enciso on Mexican motifs. Which, literally has thousands of Mexican motifs. [*laughter*] But what I want to do is reflect the ethnic history of El Sereno [in Los Angeles].
- KD: What is the ethnic history of El Sereno?

- RD: Well, European mostly—Anglo-European mostly. You know, just white folk, northern Europe, not too many Italians, no Spanish.
- KD: No.
- RD: Japanese, certain amount of Chinese, except that the Chinese were all kicked out in the '20s.
- KD: Did you have to read boring sociology for that?
- RD: Mexicanos.
- KD: History?
- RD: No.
- KD: Where do you get this source? Where do you get this information?
- RD: Well, it's about the same as in Boyle Heights and Lincoln Heights.
- KD: Okay. Is that experiential knowledge you have of Boyle Heights or did you have to go to the library and read a book?
- RD: I don't know where I picked that up. I think it's just from talking about things. You know, the history of—the history of that area.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: But it's been mostly, in quantity, it's the same—it's Mexican. I mean, the deal is, you're desperately trying to find some Ukraine in there somewhere, because—mainly because I found those crosses that they have in the Serbian—I don't want to say that Ukraine is the same [as] Serbia—but they pretty much look the same. You know? The crosses that you have at the Serbian cemetery.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: They're kind of interesting, all of these things. You look into the mostly Dover books on Celtic art and it's repetitious, but if you really look into that and you scan it and you begin to break things apart with Photo-shop, it's interesting.
- KD: So that's what you're doing; you scan them and then manipulate with Photoshop?
- RD: Yeah. Oh, yeah. You've got to do that. You've got to do each one in Photoshop. Pretty much, pick up—it's not that hard. The hard part is tweaking the photographs, so you get a good acetate.
- KD: Oh, okay.
- RD: And then you have to—like this part here, this here, there were things that I had to—and this is very small—I think I had to make the eye darker so that you could actually see it's a head. And all of those things—well, that takes time. And I've got these, for Valley Boulevard.

[break in audio]

- KD: So you were saying, Valley Boulevard, you have seven hundred photos.
- RD: Yeah, about seven hundred I have to do.
- KD: For how many tiles? You gave me that before, I lost it.
- RD: Three hundred?
- KD: Three hundred.
- RD: Let's say there are two—let's say if there's one particular photo that I really like, I'll make it bigger and then do it. But they're going to be all about a foot squared, about a foot squared or twice that size.
- KD: The Valley Boulevard is—
- RD: Two feet squared, or a foot and a half by a foot and a half.
- KD: Okay.
- RD: But they're going to be cut into shapes.
- KD: It sounds to me like you're describing your artistic process. So there's an early stage, is the Request for Qualifications; you send that out. If you get the gig, you start generating—
- RD: Well, you become a finalist.
- KD: Okay.

RD: And then put across a proposal, like we did a couple weeks ago, or three weeks ago. Well, actually there were—it happened in a span of about a week. I had to go up to Oregon City to present the proposal, which I didn't get. But I discovered this great—the Highland Still House—this great Scottish pub that had an Irish, a little Irish band that was just phenomenal. I've never heard anything like it—some of the finest stuff I've ever heard in my life. And I was sitting, like, from here to the wall away from them, drinking Lafleur single malt—and it was just great. There was, like, a family type of thing. They were Irish American, but they were three or four generations—

KD: Generations removed. Yeah.

RD: But apparently, they still had that family thing. It was very strange, because you don't see that a lot, where they're passing the fresh kid around. And it was out of the—I thought I was in Mexico, except everybody was real pale. *[laughter]* But this is outside of Portland, like a fifty miles or so. So, it was . . . You go to these places and present. José Antonio was presenting at Rockville at the same time. I couldn't, because it was at the same time—he was presenting at Rockville, in Maryland. Then a week later, we had to go to Fort Lauderdale to present for this center. And that's when I went up to West Palm Beach because I had a project there that I already signed a contract for. So it was really good timing. So I got, like, four things done all in, like, two weeks. That was good. And it all has to be prepared. You know, boom, boom, boom. PowerPoint, the whole thing. You're trying to sell it, the contract.

KD: Do you wear a suit when you go to these things?

RD: No. Just this, like I am now. And I usually try to—it can be—sometimes it's preferable to—

KD: Look the part?

RD: No, sometimes it's preferable for me not to go.

KD: Really?

RD: I don't know. Sometimes it's—I'm debating that. Lately, I've gotten so many jobs that maybe not. I don't know. I don't think it's one way or the other. I get sometimes to the point where I'm saying—because I look at—I'm sorry, but this, this is a good thing.

KD: "Dear Robert, we regret to inform you that our committee did not select your proposal for the MATA South Terminal Project."

RD: Yeah, I can't remember what that was. I think it's—

KD: It's in Memphis, Tennessee.

RD: Yeah, I think it was a light rail station . . . Metropolitan—Memphis [Area] Transit Authority or something.

KD: Something like that, right. And this is from the director of public art.

RD: So anyway, I would have had to present—it's too bad that they didn't tell me who. Sometimes they tell you who the finalists are. I look at the finalists and I go, "Oh, shit."

KD: "Oh shit," meaning their work was good. It was good competition?

RD: Sometimes yes, sometimes no. Most of the time, if it's abstract, it means they want something safe. Mostly abstract stuff, as opposed to let's say, when you were doing abstract stuff in the in '20s or '30s and the Nazis would shoot you.

KD: Right.

RD: Pretty much abstract art is safe. It's safe.

KD: Your portfolio—if people are looking at your portfolio, it's not abstract. It's very figurative.

RD: I know.

KD: Yeah.

RD: But the subject matter is not safe.

KD: No.

RD: Abstract art is pretty mainstream. It may have something to do with—in order to pull off abstract art now, you have to be like Ed Moses. Ed Moses is what, in his late seventies, early eighties? And he's doing stuff that is amazing. And the only—there's this guy—I've seen others. This guy's from Tucson who's really

good, a young Chicano. I've never seen stuff like that. You can tell, you know? Most of the other stuff is like what I saw yesterday, it's a joke. There's nothing [there].

KD: Do you define your work as political, your artwork?

RD: Yeah, I guess so, *politico*, like women and war. [laughter]

KD: No, but some people have very specific notions on what's political and what's not.

RD: Well, I don't know because nobody writes about it. Like I said, letters has not caught up with the painting. Like I said, anywhere, even in New York. The only place where I see a lot of writing about everything, right, wrong, or whatever, is Latin America, where they write literally about everything. That may be changing—no, I don't think it will actually change. It may actually get better with the Internet, as soon as everybody has a computer and stuff.

KD: Well, Shifra Goldman used to be pretty prolific.

RD: Well, that's good. Name another one.

KD: Yeah, since then, we don't have—

RD: Max? Name another one. It's a big population here. We're not in the middle of South Dakota, you know? [laughter] When we can't come up with [anyone] beyond Shifra Goldman and Max Benavidez, where we are right now, there's a problem. [laughter]

KD: How would you like to be described by the art historians and an art critic?

RD: As a painter. Yeah.

KD: As a painter?

RD: Yeah. This is pigment. It just happens to be fired. I do 2D stuff. It'd be interesting to get into sculptural stuff. We have this big slab . . . Chris Turk was a professor over at ELAC [East Los Angeles College]. He lent us this big slab table. It's a really state-of-the-art three or four thousand dollar slab table. So I've been dying to do some slab work. That would be interesting.

KD: What do you think are some of the tensions between the Chicano art world and the gallery world?

RD: Well, the gallery world—you know, the Chicano art world right now . . . When you walk into Bergamot or any of those places, they see you as a . . . They see you as a person who doesn't look like themselves. And by themselves, the art world is pretty much governed by people of Anglo-European descent, you know, 90 percent, 95 percent, 99 percent. So, they usually like to do things—all things being equal—they'll allow a person who looks like what they see in the mirror. That's the case in the movies and that's why it was so important, what was going on with Dudamel, Gustavo Dudamel in the orchestra, the Venezuelan orchestra I saw there on Thursday, last Thursday, which had this review in the—a couple reviews in the *Times*. These are—I mean they pointed out in their reviews, they pointed out that in the—nobody was over twenty-six in the orchestra. It was a hundred fifty-five people.

KD: Yeah.

RD: And one of the violinists in the violin section was twelve years old. This was an orchestra they described as being anything equal to the twenty top orchestras in the world: the Berlin, the Philharmonic, both. New York, everybody. And Dudamel was in charge of it since he was like twenty-two or something. He's twenty-six now. He brought it to that point. I had a fairly—I had good seats, good acoustics. It was wonderful at the Disney. I was sitting there concentrating and I was trying to figure out when these guys were going to screw up. I couldn't believe—I couldn't find one flaw in it. This was the—they did some fluffy stuff—it wasn't fluffy stuff, it was good stuff from *West Side Story*. And then they did the Mahler fifth [symphony]. Did I tell you about this before?

KD: You told me a little bit.

RD: Yeah, well the Mahler fifth is one of the longest and most complex symphonies there is, and it's an hour and ten minutes. Yesterday, I was listening to the seventh symphony of Beethoven, and that lasted like twenty minutes.

KD: Yeah.

RD: And [Dudamel] did it with no notes, which I didn't even notice. He had no notes! Here, all upstairs. [*laughter*] And they were—they had the review on Saturday saying, "We have witnessed the way it should be done." And then there was another review on Monday about, "What I said on Saturday, it was even better on Friday!" Because he had seen the thing on Friday. And apparently they had—I don't know what. I can't remember what they had on Friday.

KD: Have you always listened to classical music?

RD: Yeah. So, what I'm saying is that, everything in the music world in LA, and probably everywhere else, has always been white on white.

KD: Yeah.

RD: It's an east-west situation, not a north-south. That's changed. Because, first of all, they got Dudamel away from the Berlin Philharmonic. They were, like, going, like, "One million here? No, I'll up you another million. I'll up you another million." [Esa-Pekka] Salonen was being—they were trying to take—the New York Philharmonic was trying to take him. Well, the thing is, with Salonen, he just likes LA.

KD: Right.

RD: They just like LA.

KD: Right.

RD: And [he] probably didn't like the snow. He's from Finland. But he had always had this relationship with Venezuela. And would he have had the same relationship with Miami, where they hate—Miami has this whole anti-South America thing. The whole Cubano—to a certain extent, that's also the case of the island—it's a great island mentality. And then New York, of course. Nothing exists beyond New York. So why did he open up to Venezuela years ago and discover this young kid? Probably because there are more Venezuelans here than anywhere.

KD: Right.

RD: And let alone Mexicans.

KD: Right.

RD: So there's an opening—

KD: We're the second largest capital of, like, many different—

RD: Yeah. So that opened it up. And that's a process that's changing probably—at least classical music. So now you have—it may actually impact hip-hop, and the fact that it's so damn Afro-American, African American. There are other parts of the African diaspora besides downtown South [Central]—the hood. As a matter of fact, people are saying, you can't tell the difference between Kanye West and 50 Cent. You just can't tell the difference. And the people are saying, "Oh, there's a certain nuance." They're really pushing it, you know. [*laughter*] It's like art speak. The difference between—what's the difference between this guy and that guy? Especially in abstract art. "Well, the ethereal lines and shit." [*laughter*] Your job is a critic, but you ain't fooling me. That may actually impact it. God, I was listening to some hip-hop rendition of some—

KD: Who is the new woman, they had a big party for her? The new pad . . .

RD: Oh, Olga Garay.

KD: Olga, yeah. Garay, right?

RD: Yeah. Yeah. Except for that whole thing that went down with the Philharmonic and Dudamel was a county thing. And LA—and Olga Garay—and if I see her, and we were supposed to have a meeting a couple of weeks ago, but it was cancelled. When I see her, I'm going to tell her, "You guys got to start thinking—first of all, you got to start remembering that *you* are in the center of the universe. Period."

Most of the planets that revolve around the sun want to be in LA. Period. Villaraigosa knows that. He went to China with his entourage, and he had to choose who was going to come with him because everybody wanted to go with him. And the Chinese, boom. That's the deal. First you have to figure out your power. Well, I mean, to get these guys away from the New York Phil and the Berlin Philharmonic, you got to have some people on the arts commission in the county and the music center foundation, which is mostly county money—

- KD: Right.
- RD: You got to have . . . These guys have to realize that this is the center of the world. That's the problem with the DCA [Department of Cultural Affairs]. They still think on a regional level.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: Why did we go off on that tangent?
- KD: I didn't think it was a tangent. It was an excellent exposition where you think the field is going in Chicano art and galleries.
- RD: That's right. It's pretty much white. Everybody is white, white, white. You get the art scene and you get the *LA Weekly*, as a lot of good—you have all the lists of things that are going on every week in LA. You just look at—you discount ten percent that if they're Anglo-European names, they might be black. But that's probably not the case because blacks don't make up a lot of the art academies in the LA basin. They're all white. They're all Anglo-European. They look like the gallery owners. They look like Robert Berman. And that's who Robert Berman—why would Robert Berman want to try to describe what we've been talking about to some of his gallery goers?
- KD: So, what you think is that we need more Chicano galleries?
- RD: No, we need more people writing. The basis is, we have Shifra and we have Max Benavidez. When I say that is a crisis, it is really a crisis. When we don't have anybody writing about what's going on, the tree fell in the forest, but did it really?
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: This is a big crisis. It has to do with the fact that the feeder schools, K–12 are not producing people who can read basic instructions, let alone write.
- KD: And the MFA programs and the PhDs don't value the kind of work.
- RD: They're all white too. They're a product of the—the MFA programs are a product of the gallery and museum system. They don't even teach public art. It's the only place that makes money. I bought these houses with it. It's obviously a viable growth industry.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: And they don't teach it. What is going on? Because they don't—because public art does not represent part of the gallery-museum system. The gallery-museum system is based on that I can take this product and I can put it up on a wall and then I sell it. And when that person sells it, and you make a profit and that person takes it, puts it up on a wall and sells it, and you make a profit. Buying, selling, buying, selling, buying, selling—public art is just there. It's not a viable commodity. That is the reason that it's not—that it's completely ignored. Why did they—who runs these things? Well, they're the people who told [Rufino] Tamayo not to—
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: They did it for a reason. *[laughter]*
- KD: Do you—I guess, do you have to cultivate a relationship with multiple departments of cultural affairs or something, across the country? Or do you really just send out the application?
- RD: Well, the more you send out, it gets on their radar screen. The reason I send out to these European places is just so that I can get on their radar screen, so they can see the work, you know? In rejecting my work, they have to look at it.
- KD: Right.
- RD: So that's good. And by probably legislation or mandate, they have to keep it on file. So, that's good. It costs me twenty-five dollars to express mail.
- KD: You know, you were saying before, you've had three—that's your expression—you've had three, the material in here only going to '94. Did you have—were you part of those early exhibitions: Chicano arte, *Chicanarte*—whatever, yeah, *Chicanarte* in '75? I know this would have been at the end of your time at UCLA.
- RD: No, I wasn't part of that.

KD: Right.

RD: There's always a maneuvering. You've got to eat the power lunches first to do all of that. Like I said, everybody was saying, "Oh man, just wait, we're going to get into the CARA thing." Everyone knew about the CARA thing. I was like, "Yeah, cool," you know? I went to Estelí. I was gone for a year. Everybody was doing the power lunches with whoever was in charge of it. I mean, that's the way it happens. That's the way it happens in the regular—all of these white boys are trying to get into Berman's Shop. I don't know what their maneuver is. I mean, there are certain maneuvers. I guess, at best you have a lot of power lunches. At worst, you die of AIDS like Carlos Almaraz. That's just the way it works, you know?

KD: I was wondering if you wanted to make a comment about your prevailing style, and would you rather be called "Chicano art" or not?

RD: No, it's Mexican. When everybody's done, thirty years from now or forty years from now, fifty years from now, it's going to be an extension of Mexican art. The thing is, it's been around for thirty centuries. If you look at the Borgia Codex, it makes anything out of Europe look like shit. That's just one book. *[laughter]* Wake up and smell the coffee. This is a country that influenced all of Latin America. If everyone's looking for Aztlán, well Aztlán's right there. And by the way, Mexico City is not only the biggest city in the world, it's the crossroads of most everything that's going on in energy, not necessarily right now in the technical e-mail stuff—the digital world. Although Querétaro is becoming a big software center. But it does more and has a clearer picture of what's going on, *[than]* let's say in China and England.

KD: Right.

RD: Not England, in Europe, than . . . And it has a more, if you want to look at it as a metropolis of so and so many people. Probably your average bloke in Mexico City is more informed of what is going on in the world than your average person here. Certainly K-12 they are. I would put up anybody—even from the private schools, take ten people who graduated—believe me, I've seen them, I've seen the school. I was in Nezahualcóyotl, the world's largest slum, outside Mexico City, and these kids were doing incredible stuff. And yeah, I'd put them up against anybody here. That translates into power, and that power is mainly an extension of the thirty centuries.

KD: Yeah.

RD: So this blip that's called Chicano, is just an extension of thirty centuries of culture that's come out of this part of the world. I'm sure that—are you Taiwanese or are you mainland Chinese? *[laughter]* Like what? Try as you might, but the Taiwanese are never going to persuade the rest of the world, and especially history that they are a particular thing that has nothing to do with mainland China. . . . You can say, "Well, we're talking about the Ukraine, parts of the Federated Russian Republic, or the Russian Federation—" So much for a republic. *[laughter]* There's a certain style that's going on that is not—the Georgians and the Ukrainians are not—their particular thing, that's any different than that. If anything, it's come full circle and Chicano art is actually influencing contemporary Mexican art, especially in performance, in that blend. And in the figurativeness. Like I said, it was all abstract in '86.

KD: Right.

RD: Ten years later, everybody's doing graffiti stuff. Everybody's doing what everybody's been doing all along. That's the—but it's come from—so when you're saying Chicano is big enough to influence Mexico? Well, yes. The circle of circumstances that came out of Mexican-ness. And that's it.

NOVEMBER 16, 2007

- KD:** This is Karen Davalos with Roberto Delgado. Today is November 16, 2007, and we're in the Highland Park. This is my second attempt to get you to talk about—last time I didn't have enough images, and I apologize for that—to talk about your work. And I have today some older images that are here collected for *Across the Street*, the exhibition catalog from the Self Help Graphics exhibition that was done in the '90s, I'm pretty sure, and that traveled to many places. There's an image of your silkscreen *Lotto* from '86. I was wondering if you could tell me about that image.
- RD:** I forget what the lotus is. The lotus is, I think, a symbol of power. I think it comes from, this thing comes from Palenque. And then this three-headed dog is just a papier-mâché thing that somebody had. I took a picture of it. It's a little papier-mâché thing from Oaxaca about two by two feet, or something like that. And then it's got this lady, Tzeltal lady picture, which I think is here. But when I was showing . . .
- KD:** Oh, from your slides?
- RD:** Yeah. This one. It's amazingly like my sister. Everybody says, "Oh, that's Yolanda." But no, it was this lady's picture I took in Yajalón. And then there's a figure of a man with kind of a crew cut. But it was kind of—what I did was, this is a cutout with spray, aerosol spray.
- KD:** Is that a new technique that you guys were doing, or you were doing?
- RD:** Yeah. And then the white you see is a stencil in that shape, negative and a positive. I did the positive of this using a paint, a monotype paint, loading the thing. And that's what the white is. And on either side there's—there's two silhouettes. I think I've also Tzeltales guys from Yajalón. That was it. Those things and then we were just experimenting with the frontage, and the use of basic silkscreen, doing it with split font gradation, split font gradation. There's three of the—the middle figure and the two side figures are gradated.
- KD:** Yeah.
- RD:** So this was a pull this way.
- KD:** Help me with that, from right to left?
- RD:** The squeegee was going this way.
- KD:** Down, top to bottom.
- RD:** Yeah. I can't remember how we did this, but anyway, you put a light and a dark and then you mix it with a squeegee until it becomes even and then you pull it. So I think it was done there and there, this way, vertically. And this one was done across, because you're mixing the yellow, red and black, back and forth, back and forth, with a big squeegee. And then you pull it. And you have to do that, I think it lasts for maybe five pulls and then you have to do it again.
- KD:** The notes here say that the master printer is Steven Grace and yourself.
- RD:** Yeah.
- KD:** I didn't actually realize that you're pulling your own squeegee.
- RD:** I think I was, or somebody was. I don't know. At that time, I had the arthritis kind of bad. It's kind of settled down now, so I wasn't too good at pulling squeegees. I mean, it was like day and night with some of the—especially the end [*inaudible*].
- KD:** Yeah.
- RD:** I couldn't walk, now I can. Couldn't pull a squeegee, now I can. But at that time, the arthritis was pretty bad.
- KD:** But Steven Grace, he was the first master printer at Self Help?
- RD:** Yeah. I think Richard Duardo was there before him, but then he split.
- KD:** How about this other image, which is actually quite beautifully displayed in the catalog. It gets a full page?
- RD:** Yeah, this is straight split font. And it's got that same dog. I think I used the—no, this is different. This was actually on a screen. So I think this was sixteen colors—this ain't sixteen colors but there's probably eight, because you can combine the colors—overlap them by using transparencies.
- KD:** Okay.

RD: So this is also a split font type of situation. We were experimenting in split fonts. There's a figure of a Guatemalan—there are some cigarettes called Payaso, and so there's a figure of that. And then superimposed under the Payaso is this kind of soldier. And then there's just these dogs of war type of thing.

KD: Which one's the soldier?

RD: The red.

KD: The red? Okay, now I see it. And here, in the notes, it's a fascinating description, they attribute it to you in the Self Help Graphics & Art [book from the CSRC's] Chicano Archives [series. The essay is] by Kirsten Guzman, and [the book is] edited by Colin Gunckel. The description on one page, attributed to you, says, "Pregnant female figure in anxious position with umbilical attachment to ground, fertility of people of the earth. Soldier as a set piece in a game of exploitation between countries. The clown figure from pack of Payaso cigarettes common to Guatemala. Three-headed dog, whose symbolism probably has some deep mythological story that has to do with Hades, the River Styx, Dante Alighieri, and so on, but it's just an image from the Mexican state of Guerrero that looked cool." [laughter] So to me, there's this idea of play in your—

RD: If you take [a] European course, it's just an image thrown together that looks cool. I'm sure that it probably has more significance than even the River Styx, and the dog that's guarding it—I can't remember the name of it—that dog. It may have come from that. But the three-headed dog wasn't a griffin-like thing that had wings. Those things are—the mythology of the New World as we know it right now, is as complex [as] anything in Europe. And that's just from the stuff that survived, let alone the burning of the books in Tulum and all that.

KD: Right.

RD: So who knows what was lost. As a matter of fact, they say that the burning of the books, as far as mathematics is concerned, probably delayed the digital revolution by fifty years, before they finally got the concept of the binary—one and zero, one and zero. Well, the counting system of the Mayans is binary, one and zero, one and zero. That's it.

So anyway, things like that—I mean, I'm just fascinated by. Like I said, the thing that I'm using right now for the medallions at Valley Boulevard grade separation are the Borgia Codex. And I just saw that recently. And I mean recently by like the last ten years—that the *escudo* of México with eagle and the cactus and the snake and all, that comes out of pre-Columbian—and it's really wild. You saw that picture of that strange cactus and that strange bird.

KD: Yeah.

RD: I mean, it's very stylized. [laughter] That's just three of the books that survived. So those things are beginning to be discovered. But it takes a long time for the people of Anglo-European descent who are in charge of the universities to accept that there's really anything beyond Europe. Now, they're finally accepting—they're probably going to accept that there's such a thing known as Chinese history before they accept Latin America, maybe because China has more power. And the Chinese billionaires—the communist billionaires are going to give money to UCLA. So UCLA, all of the sudden recognizes that there's such a thing as Chinese history. [laughter]

KD: What was the creative process behind this silkscreen in Guatemala? And what I mean by that is, you've given me a beautiful description of the technical aspects of the work, but what inspired you to make this particular—

RD: What was this, '84 or '88?

KD: Yeah, this is '88.

RD: Well, you know, I was—I think there were some problems going on in Guatemala at the time. [laughter] Where I was—I think I did this at Self Help Graphics when I was in between going to Tuxtla and here, right after the Fulbright in Mexico City.

KD: Okay.

RD: So, Tuxtla is like two hours away from the border—an hour away from the border actually—no, two hours. So it's an extension of Central America. Same companies—Nestlé, General Foods—same goons, same

families own everything. And it's still going on. I did it. A precursor to the '94 Zapatista revolution, which I think we already talked about, that it influenced a lot.

KD: Yeah.

RD: Well, the thing is, is that the basic soldier, pregnant lady, dogs of war, Payaso, you know? Kind of explains that whole—it's not like—this is not major mind-boggling philosophical intent.

KD: No.

RD: The mind-boggling, philosophical intent, is mind-boggling by its absence. I mean, because I came back. I go to East LA, and they go, "Oh, Pico Union is crazy." Of course it's crazy because everybody's from a crazy place. What crazy place? Chiapas. "Oh, Chiapas is okay, because it's Guatemala and El Salvador that's hitting the news." So these people know about it. So I say, "Chiapas? Shit. First of all, it's [as] big as both countries, has twice the population, it's the poorest state in Mexico, and just wait." And sure enough, eight years later, or when was it?

KD: Well, it should be apparent and should be clear, but the same book on Self Help Graphics from the Chicano Archive series, on a later page, it's describing . . . Your work occurs over and over in the Self Help Graphics archives at UC Santa Barbara—the CEMA Collection. California Ethnic Minority Archive, CEMA. And so, on another page, they don't have your words. They have this note: "The print is a multi-colored abstract piece. Orange figures converge on top of pale green and yellow figures. It seems as if heads of various animals, lizards, birds, erupt from a place directly from the middle of the print."

RD: Well, one of the figures happens to be a soldier, the other happens to be a pregnant woman, and the other one is the dogs of war. Figure it out! [*laughter*] If you leave out those particular—you know? One figure, two figures, and something coming out of the middle of the page. Well, if you don't identify them, it's an exercise in split font, which is probably what the art history department wants. Because if you look at UCLA and UC Santa Barbara's and the UC system's portfolio, I'm sure it's full of agribusiness, and they make a lot of money down there, you know?

KD: What about the reference, "it's an abstract piece?"

RD: Professors know from where their bread is buttered. Pardon? The reference to the abstract piece?

KD: Yeah, it's calling it abstract.

RD: That's like I was saying, the pan-American union, the Kennedys told Rufino Tamayo that "You will not do people. You will do things that are abstract." And so he—of which the most you can identify, is a watermelon. Well, that took care of that, didn't it? Because abstract is safe. It's abstract. [*laughter*]

KD: Do you disagree when your work is categorized as abstract, or do you agree?

RD: I think it's—well, I think it's two things. One, the damn thing is so abstract, that these people who have art history degrees, who are working for the state, the UC system, are so stupid that they don't see what is in front of their eyes. Or, they're doing it for that reason because they know where their debt is buttered. If you want to make tenure, you're not going to define this thing in terms of the relationship of East LA to Pico Union to a place that the United States is trashing. And it's companies that are trashing it.

KD: Now, the rest, I don't have images, but I was hoping that you would recall some of these projects—because you're incredibly well represented in the collection at CEMA. So, we talked *Guatemala*. We've talked about *Lotto*. And then there's another untitled project, [an] untitled silkscreen from '84. It looks like you did this for about two weeks, March fifth to the fourteenth. So, do you recall what that might have been?

RD: Yeah, that was a piece that looked like a playing card. And it just had all kinds of images from thing[s] from Palenque.

KD: So, you're working back and forth according to this—according to the finding aid for the collection. You have an incredible record of activity at Self Help Graphics. So that was the '80s: '84, '85, '86. And then here's some—I'm not sure what this is. It's under the category of murals.

RD: Which one are you pointing to?

KD: Can you see the yellow?

RD: Oh yeah. It's under the category of murals?

- KD: Yeah, I'm just wondering—
- RD: It's from Oxchuc from?
- KD: From '79, so that's early. Was that a photograph taken by you, or worked—
- RD: Oh, that's a painting. That was a straight painting. Seven by five feet?
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: Oh yeah, I remember that. I sold that to my brother-in-law's boss. He had this land company in the [*inaudible*] desert. I think he bought it for, like, five thousand dollars. I mean, some day down the line, he's going to make a lot of money out of it. So he eventually went broke, so maybe he's . . . [*laughter*]
- KD: So again—
- RD: Yeah, that was one of those OJT jobs where I was practicing the gradations, doing it as fast as possible, sitting and pushing—I think it was pretty much red. It was all red and blacks and it was like a tour de force on the gradations, if I can remember it. And I wasn't using block-outs or anything, so it was really brush control, really heavy-duty brush control. And that wasn't a mural. Was that in the mural section?
- KD: Yeah, that could be that they don't know exactly what they have. That's why I think your comments are really helpful.
- RD: It was five by seven feet.
- KD: It's large.
- RD: Somebody would have had to have measured it.
- KD: Yeah. Now this, this is another section of the collection, and these are all paintings. And it sounds like you were working with—experimenting with a—at least I don't see very many other folks referring to this—mixed media with oil and spray on vinyl.
- RD: Oh, it was a vinyl piece, yeah.
- KD: In '85, it says "title unknown." You have another from '85: oil on canvas, "title unknown." Eighty-five: oil on canvas. Mixed-media monotype on paper, also '85. So [you were] very productive. Another one from '85: mixed-media monotype on paper. Mixed media on Masonite with oil and spray. Mixed media with oil and spray on canvas from '87—sorry, that other one as well, the Masonite was also in '87.
- RD: You know, I think I did those in Tuxtla.
- KD: Oh, really?
- RD: In '87, I was in Tuxtla after Mexico. I came back here and then I went back to Chiapas. And this friend of mine gave me this house to use, so that was cool.
- KD: How do you think this ended up in the collection at Self Help?
- RD: They actually have them?
- KD: No, these are slides of your work.
- RD: I think they have them. I think they were later sold.
- KD: That's what I mean, they're slides of the actual work that's in the collection. Do you think it was—
- RD: I don't know. I probably just left them there and they just didn't say anything. And I think I kind of left them there because it was kind of frustrating. Because all of these experiments, everything I did there, nobody's done anything. I mean, I tried to get—I still think it's viable to get . . . I talked to Artemio Rodriguez, the woodcut, he does woodcuts, and I said . . . You have to understand, in the art world, there are people who do silk screens. First of all, printers don't talk to painters. The printer pros don't talk to the painting pros. And the painting pros don't talk to your sculpture pros. And the sculpture pros don't talk to the ceramic people. Nobody talks to anybody—in the academy I mean.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: That goes on also in other places. Which is because everybody is defending their turf. So I come in and go, "Why don't you do silk screens with a tile? Why can't you do both? One on top of the other, layers or whatever. You just register it right?" And you can do all kinds of things with—same way with wood cuts or same way with—or the monotypes that I'm doing.
- KD: Right.

- RD: So all of these can be blended. All of these different disciplines can be blended.
- KD: So, is it—?
- RD: I actually—I mean, people are going, “You can’t do that. It’s impossible to do that.” Well, that’s what they said with the . . . Like I was saying, ten years later in ’98, when I was in Tucson, you know, Susan Gamble says, “You know, the advantage you have over me,” who has an MFA in ceramics, “is that you don’t know the rules.” [laughter] So I’m just like, “Oh, do a photo silk screen on a ceramic? Sure, okay.”
- KD: So these—
- RD: They told me that you can’t . . . In order to get a gradation, you have to use some type of a spray, but you can’t get enough pounds per square inch to get the thing through there. And I go, “Oh, but how am I doing it?” “Oh, but you’re doing a detail brush for car painting. You can’t use a car-painting thing. That’s not an art tool!” You know. [laughter] Or they had never thought of it. Is that because, you get it at Pep Boys, you know? You don’t get it at the art store. That’s the type of minds that are floating around. So, with me, it’s great. So I guess they’re including all of these things in here because nobody else is doing it. I think it’s too bad. It doesn’t exactly stimulate situations. The best mixed media stuff, by the way of what I’m talking about, is happening in Mexico, because they don’t know the rules.
- KD: And I don’t know what these are. [pause] Mono silk screen, *La Calaca Embarazada*? From ’96. So I’m assuming you did this image there?
- RD: Oh, yeah.
- KD: I am assuming you did these there in Tuxtla?
- RD: That was a picture of a pregnant lady and profile. I just did it—I think it was—I just did it in the classic, you know, just a Greek with no head. So I just did that type of thing. What did it say?
- KD: It’s this one, on top.
- RD: Oh yeah, and then I put a *calaca* head in there. But then I think I did a whole series of those, and I took the *calaca* head was in there because it was around Día de los Muertos, and I just did that. But then I did a whole bunch of series using the mono-silkscreen along with aerosol and frottage, a dried brush technique with stencils. I was trying to get this, trying to use other techniques in this Self Help Graphics mono-silkscreen. I was hoping people would pick it up, but nobody picked it up. Everybody does just straight mono-silkscreen. The only one that I know that mixes the media—it’s really amazing. [laughter] If you try to do that in—like, if I was a young prof that was on tenure track and I was trying to get in good with the department, I certainly wouldn’t piss off the ceramics people by injecting photo or silkscreen into it. [laughter] Not only that, but then you’ve pissed off the printer, the printing people. [laughter] It’s just like—so that’s how things don’t get done.
- KD: So is this part of the same series—they’re different years, so I don’t know when you say series. This is 2000, *La Escalera*.
- RD: I don’t know what that one is.
- KD: *El Vero Mundo Valiente*, from 2001, also a mono silk screen. *Siqueiros, en el Bote*.
- RD: Oh, that was that big, huge . . . Self Help Graphics did a . . . [It] commissioned like ten artists. Did you hear about that?
- KD: No.
- RD: They did silk-screen murals. So each mural was—four times six, something like twenty-four or twenty-two by eighteen pieces of paper, together. So I did one of, just, Siqueiros when he’s looking through the bars, when he got thrown in jail.

[break in audio]

- RD: It was supposed to be Siqueiros is sitting there or something like that.
- KD: He looks terrified. Go ahead.
- RD: And they traveled it around. And really, it was a wonderful show. It’s the type of thing that I saw for Biarritz when I was talking to Tomás. But that’s the thing that should be traveled over. But nobody’s ever done

that. Where? Where? Who has ever done that? I mean, they had some great pieces in there. It's amazing what was pulled off. If you can imagine the size of this wall, twelve of these things, and everybody doing their own style about Siqueiros, and that's one of them that I did.

KD: The other thing that this book is documenting is your extensive interaction at Self Help Graphics, I mean, from late '70s to the current century. I was wondering if you could comment on your observations of its transformations, its growth, its setbacks. You were there for more—there were only a few artists who had that longevity at Self Help Graphics.

RD: They took advantage of the Fulbright that I had in Mexico, because I did a lot of things back and forth. I think it probably gave—along with Wayne Healy working for Hughes Aircraft, as a senior engineer, he would go all over the place working on gun sites and stuff. And he would make a deal to show Self Help Graphics stuff. I think one of them was in Ireland or something. The other one was in Pakistan or somewhere. That kind of got Self Help into the international type of thing, which culminated in the Glasgow show.

KD: Right.

RD: Which I think was just wonderful. And then after that—but then, I'm sure before Karen died, she was not feeling too good. She probably wasn't pressing it so much, so it started to go downhill from there. I think it was Karen's dynamism that carried this thing off internationally. And then after she wasn't there, the normal myopia of the Chicano leadership set in and they didn't want to—they didn't have anything going with something—ironically enough, with Tijuana, which was going great guns at an international level with the art that was coming out of there. Because everybody was moving to Tijuana. It still is. It's one of the most dynamic places in Latin America. So, what's going on?

KD: Can you comment on, you're part of the third silkscreen workshop, according to this note, in '84. It's probably one of the works we've already talked about, because it's got the same dates, March 14 and 15, and "untitled work, Somerset, 230 gram, textured white, 100 percent rag." And is it describing it? "Two female glyph Mayan ornamental carving, tints and shades of secondary color group."

RD: Is it silk screen? Or is it monotype?

KD: It doesn't say. It doesn't actually say. It was pulled by Steven Grace.

RD: Okay, then it was a silk screen.

KD: Yeah.

RD: It's just describing what we already talked about.

KD: Well, I'm curious about the—you were part of the *taller* number 3 and then number 6, it looks like. Did you see any changes? That's not that far apart in time, but did you see any development in terms of the organization's ability to put on these kinds of workshops?

RD: Well, it culminated, like I said, with Glasgow, which was really a tour de force. I mean, the stuff that they pulled off with these guys for Glasgow was amazing. [laughter] I think that their stuff was more radical than these big *Vehiculars de Guadalupe* that were like the size of that window, that were three by four feet or something, or big sheets of paper. And as I can remember, some of it was mixed media. I think they painted into it. It was really nice. And then after that, like I said, probably Karen wasn't feeling too good, so she couldn't carry it off. And there was nobody there, as you saw when she died. I mean, [she left a] big vacuum.

KD: We call it "founder's syndrome."

RD: Well, the same vacuum is going [on] at Plaza [de la Raza]. When was the last time you went to a show at Plaza, the beautiful Boathouse [Gallery]? That's made to order for a big international show. Just getting some guys from Tijuana. Well, SPARC [Social and Public Art Resource Center] besides that it's just a monument to Judy Baca, you know?

KD: Well, your friend Al Nodal made sure that there was nothing going on at SPARC. He cut the funding.

RD: Glasgow wasn't done with a lot of funding. A lot of these things weren't done with a lot of funding, you know? Maybe that's the problem; everyone expects funding. Kathy Gallegos over at Avenue 50, and finally she's getting around to getting some money. But a monthly show? Come rain or shine with no funding? Carts falling apart, she doesn't even make enough money to file taxes. Things get done if you have the . . .

I guess the willpower to do it. But I don't know why—people are going to—I don't know why Self Help is for all practical purposes, dead in the water. And why SPARC isn't doing anything and why they're—there's a lot of funding besides the Annenberg's, you know, around. Like I said, it's the thirteenth biggest economy in the world, just LA. There's a lot of money here. And the market is represented by the people who are doing all of this stuff. Forty percent of the market, 40 percent of the things that are sold. Target [Inc.] knows that. That's why it put so much money in it. Forty percent of it are bought by Latinos, of which 99 percent are Mexican. And so, press them. You're not going to get any funding if you don't ask for it.

KD: What do you think about the challenge of public art in Los Angeles—it was under the leadership of Al Nodal—that if you're going to make a mural, you also had to have the money to maintain it?

RD: Well, the problem is—the good thing is, there's a 1 percent mandate in LA, so there's plenty of work for those who know how to do it, like me and others. The thing is that, that's part of that—if I'm a finalist. Like me and José Antonio, last month—or beginning of, no, last month—we went to Fort Lauderdale, two hundred fifty thousand dollars. We proposed something in Rockville, Maryland, in the DC area. And I was in no hurry. He proposed it there, but I was in Oregon City, trying to get this gig to do a mural. I didn't get the Oregon City one, and we haven't gotten any results yet on these others. The thing is, the proposal is . . . Things of course have to be maintained. That's part of the deal. That goes without saying—and that goes . . . If you want to do a mural on the outside in acrylic and you have to maintain it, you're selling yourself to that mural for the rest of your life. You're going to have to repaint it every five years, period. Because it's just going to fade. And if you don't treat the wall right, or if you don't mount it on some substrate, it's going to peel off. So what I do is I just don't use acrylic outdoors, period.

KD: One of the things that I ask a lot of the artists, especially the women artists, how they're kind of life is affected by family or not. Do you think that because you're a single male, that public art is accessible to you, because you can travel? Do you think it's something that everybody—I mean, you have a lot of experience in this. Is this a world that really is—

RD: If you're going to be in the arts, it's one of the more viable growth industries unless you're going to go work for Disney or something, like we already talked about.

KD: Right.

RD: Or getting a tenure track. You can't support a family on becoming an instructor to whatever those assistant professor or adjunct professor or whatever, you never have a full load. There's not enough money there, not in this economy. So the—I'm sure that the majority of people who are into those things, into tenure track, especially tenure track—or just trying to sell it as SoHo gallery, trying to get into the gallery system—the odds of making any money in that are astronomical and the competition is fierce. And it's probably really hard to—the person who doesn't have 2.3 kids has an advantage. If I was in public—if I had a family, public art would be paying the bills, because it's a lot of money.

KD: Let's look at your most current project. Because you now have some images that you can talk about.

RD: Where? [*inaudible*] In other words, this house here, all of this was bought with what I got—I made a hundred fifteen thousand dollars. I mean, it was a hundred fifteen thousand dollar project—how come it doesn't have a—

KD: Yeah, I don't know why it doesn't have one either.

RD: Oh, I know, let me—

KD: Highlight them all?

[*break in audio*]

KD: So, we'll talk about the Valley Boulevard Project?

RD: Yeah. Since we last spoke, they're actually going to, for example, pay us, because now it's on the councilmen's main agenda. We've jumped a couple of concrete contractors. [*laughter*] That's good. Because they're not going to get the work done. And I told them that there's a window of opportunity for the scaffold that's available and if I don't buy a couple of kilns, then it's going to cost ten thousand dollars and

my cards are maxed and it's not going to happen. And I'm not going to go into my equity on the house, because it'll probably take as long to get that. And I said, "If I miss that opportunity, 20 percent of the artwork that you see, is going to be gone."

KD: Gone.

RD: Because I'm going to have to plunk that money into the installation cost. A pain for—

KD: So this is north medallion, what is that?

RD: Where is that?

KD: More detail.

RD: So, this is . . . Yeah. This is the curve. Here's the street. It comes this way and there's a thing—

KD: Oh, this is like an overhead shot, and you're displaying where the medallion is located on—

RD: Yeah.

KD: So, this is the medallion image.

RD: So, that's pretty much where you're going—

KD: You said this is from which Codex?

RD: Borgia.

KD: Borgia. It's stylized, obviously with colors, one of the things that's different. But the cactus, the feet—

RD: Yeah, it's all from the Borgia. It's realistic. I took it. I didn't stylize anything, it's straight out of the Borgia.

KD: I see, then why did you use that?

RD: Because it looks cool. *[laughter]* Where do you see something like that? There's a cactus, and there's others too. I'm thinking of actually doing this one. Doing the other one, a companion figure that instead of that—that's a little too—and here I'm using the same technique.

KD: Same tile and—?

RD: And mosaic. And José Antonio is an expert in mosaic, if you've ever seen the mural at the East LA Library.

KD: Yes.

RD: Which I found out is the biggest mosaic mural in the United States. *[laughter]*

KD: No. No. No. It can't be. The one in Texas is the biggest one. It's three stories.

RD: I don't know. *[laughter]* That's what José said.

KD: And then there's one in—it's not continuous—but there's a mosaic mural that circles a building in Chicago, in the community of Pilsen. But maybe continuous—

RD: It might be west of the Mississippi or something. I don't know.

KD: Anyway—

RD: Anyways, it's big and impressive.

KD: This is the south medallion and you prefer the image of the north medallion?

RD: I prefer to do an image that's the other type of—

KD: Now, describe what I'm seeing in the south medallion. What's this icon from?

RD: I think it's a flower, just a flower. Something like that.

KD: I think that's striking. I like it actually. *[laughter]* What else do you have?

RD: Well, these are going to be individual pieces. There's going to be like a hundred forty of them or so. And they're going to be individual pieces. This is the *olin* symbol, in which there are many . . . This is from Enciso's pre-Columbian and Mexican motif book. So I have iconography from Chinese, Celtic, Japanese, African American—mostly Nigerian, West African—and making up about a hundred fifty or so, which we're going to do individually like this. Cut this by two feet, let's say, by eighteen inches, each. So they're all going to be done individually, and they're going to have funnels and everything that you see there: silkscreens, airbrush, gradation of the airbrush.

KD: Those are beautiful. Those are just absolutely beautiful. You've definitely taken it to the next level, [from] the tiles that were at the metro station.

- RD: Well, yeah, I'm going to cut them. I'm going to cut them into shapes. And the thing is, I'm going to do every one of those into shapes, into different shapes and public works just hit the work. They said, "You can't do that. You have to have them in uniform." I go, "Why?"
- KD: Oh, installation.
- RD: It's hard to install.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: I said, "No, I will provide the block out." And I said, "Look," and I showed them pictures of what they did. "With a foot square, when you put in a foot square and you put in a block out, and you put it in a couple of inches, and it's nice and recessed and then the cement sets. It's the same thing as putting in something that's cut. Don't worry about that. That's my problem. Your problem is just . . ." What they really wanted is that, the fact that I was doing a hundred forty or so units, each of them individual. I was telling the . . . Have you ever seen *Forbidden Planet*? They once gave Robby the Robot instructions where all his circuits went. And all of these circuits go with these engineers, they don't know what to do. How can you do a hundred forty? And I go, "Look, for me to cut this one here into the shape that you see, and do everything here, for me to do the exact same thing takes the exact same time."
- KD: Right.
- RD: To do another cut figure takes the exact same time.
- KD: Right.
- RD: It doesn't matter. It's the same labor, one or another figure, so I might as well do a hundred forty different ones.
- KD: Right, you don't have a mechanical arm where you type it in—
- RD: Yeah. Yeah. And the thing that I didn't appreciate—I can see that coming from public works, but I'm sitting there with the representatives, the project managers for the Department of Cultural Affairs, and they're just nodding and saying, "Oh yeah, you can't do that." If [the Department of] Public Works says you can't do it, you can't do it. I said, "Wait a minute, I thought you guys were into culture." But the thing is, it's a bureaucracy. And I was telling Marcia Guzman that the—the councilman should know that, that all of these things have been past invented by Public Works. But it took a while, and an unnecessary while to do it. And it would have been easier, and it would have been a lot easier—we were kind of chatting afterwards about the problems with DCA, with Cultural Affairs.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: The problem is, is that Cultural Affairs just bows down to every other department. And I pointed out to Marcia that the one—that this thing, the two hundred fifty thousand dollars that they're going to spend on us to do this, that will be made up in tax revenue in three or four years—boom, just by tax revenue. Everything after that is all cultural dollar and the cement is not bringing that in. What's bringing that in is us, the artwork. And therefore we should be on top of the payment pile. Instead of the concrete guys getting paid, maybe we should get paid first. And Cultural Affairs does not back us to the point where we have to have a meeting with the councilmen. Why should we do that? Why should we have a meeting with that? When Cultural Affairs is just not giving a damn about—it's going back and forth between Public Work[s] or contract, or supplemental contract. It's going back and forth and it's not being addressed. It's [at] the mayor's office now. We signed that damn thing. We signed it six months [ago]. [laughter]
- KD: You signed off and approved six months ago?
- RD: It was signed by us six months [ago]. We said, "This is the contract? Okay, boom."
- KD: Oh.
- RD: We're ready to go, anytime. Six months ago? I think it was in May or April. I mean that's ridiculous. And that's a problem. That's a problem for the DCA, now that the county is not like that. Believe me, believe me, to get a contract to get Dudamel here from Venezuela and to keep that orchestra as one of the ten finest in the world, believe me, they get paid on time. And if they're going to do something, they—
- KD: You're right.

- RD: Because the county knows that the LA Philharmonic is a cash cow for this whole area. It's probably why a lot of the companies are in the LA area. That's just something that they should know politically at Cultural Affairs. Apparently, they don't. At least people in public art don't. They don't understand the whole thing. They don't see that it should be top priority, not because we're artists, but because we bring in the cultural dollar.
- KD: Right.
- RD: And it ain't going to get done. Or, less is going to get done if they don't pay us on time, you know? That's just—well, something—
- KD: Do you think it's also a misunderstanding of the actual work that the artist does?
- RD: The people at Cultural Affairs should know that.
- KD: Yeah, they should.
- RD: They should know that—
- KD: Right. If you close the window on production, somebody's going to have to take it out of installation.
- RD: I mean, they should know, but they come out of the academy, and the academy doesn't even teach public art. They don't teach—everything you've seen, everything I've done, they don't even have the silkscreen department talk to the tile people, let alone [*laughter*] have public art. It's a jump that's being offset by the fact that we do good work. We experiment. And like Wayne Healy was an engineer. And I didn't listen to—I was wise enough to not listen to the people at UCLA. All I did was take their money. And now we're doing all kinds of stuff that nobody is doing. [*laughter*]
- KD: Now, this is a painting, acrylic on canvas, 2006, *El Beso*. You sent me these: one hundred twenty-six by sixty inches, a nice large narrow piece. When did you do that, or why?
- RD: I think it was—there was—I just always crank out a certain amount of these things. They just keep piling up.
- KD: So where do they come from?
- RD: What do you mean? The idea?
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: The idea is that a lot of these come—these are fascinating images that I got out of some magazine on the Huey—the famous Huey helicopter, from Vietnam—which is kind of the emblem of Vietnam. And they have these different gun systems. And the thing about the gun systems is they have these ammo feeder shoots. They just curl around. They're just these great looking things. So I just thought it was like really cool looking.
- KD: So is that the contrast in this case, between this couple kissing and the ammunition shoot?
- RD: Well sure. I took that in Figueroa—I think I took it in, like, '98, or—half of those guys that I took pictures of are probably in the Marines now. Why? Because it pays a little bit better than Home Depot. Why? Because these guys never bothered to—if they did graduate from Garfield, they're reading at a sixth-grade level, so that's about it.
- KD: Yeah, tracking them into the military.
- RD: Exactly. And not only the military, but like I said, tracking them into transportation and infantry ground.
- KD: I don't have a title. Oh yeah, there it is, *Chalo's Dream*.
- RD: Oh, [that's] one of the same thing, one of the kids I took pictures of. He's thinking about—this is a picture of a mannequin that I took in Mexico City actually. All of these ladies from—what do they call it?—[a] bridal shop. It's just really strange. It's a mannequin, and there's only three things—there's an assembly to the Huey helicopter.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: And people would know, because the Huey helicopter had kind of a boot on it—anyway, people, especially Vietnam guys, they would know that. Then you have this guy, baggy pants, just standing there with his cap backwards like that.
- KD: Right.
- RD: Shit-eating grin, thinking about that he's going to get married and have 3.2 kids, but really Home Depot can't do that. But anyway, there's the opportunity and they give you a uniform and boom. The irony of

course, is that he's not going to be a helicopter pilot, because they kind of want a bachelor's degree for officers and this guy doesn't. *[laughter]* It's just this dream, this pipe dream. So on the one hand, it's kind of this, what are all these guys thinking? They have—they have this car show. I can't remember, I think in February or something, all along Figueroa, Highland Park.

KD: Yeah.

RD: It's fascinating. It's absolutely freaking fascinating. And you have all of these guys out there. And all of them with the girls and the guys, and they're all courting, and it's like this big plaza. And it's really great. It's not . . . And then, you know, what I do with the colors, the colors on this I like a lot. I'll tell you, I have it out in the garage.

KD: What do you mean you like the colors?

RD: I like the use of the greens, those kind of pulling off that green, grayish-green, kind of a very, very cool green. And then the browns are real hot. So that—those are the colors I like.

KD: That's my favorite composition.

RD: The blues are—it's just hard to figure out a color. That's the whole trick, once I figured out the imagery and everything, it's no big deal. The hard part is figuring out the colors.

KD: Well, you definitely have talent there. So this is *Cheerleader One*, *Cheerleader Two*.

RD: Those are cheerleaders.

KD: Fiberglass mesh from 2005, eighty-two by thirty-four inches. It's like a series of these, right?

RD: Well, there's two of them, the cheerleaders. There's a man and a woman, and it's from my mom's 1937 Lincoln High School yearbook.

KD: Oh, okay.

RD: And then it's these kids—this young rapper kid. And then there's another figure in there. And then there's the ammo feeder shoots. And then this one, the only thing that's different is that there's this picture up here in blue of one of those frozen bodies—it's a dog from Pompeii.

KD: Oh, okay. Yeah.

RD: And it's just this grotesque dog that's in death throes. I thought it was kind of interesting, so I kind of put it in. And that's it.

KD: Is this all the same series that you sent me, *El Beso*, *Chalo's Dream*, and the cheerleaders, and then I have *Ordinance Feeder Shoot One* and *Ordinance Feeder Shoot Two*. *[laughter]* I actually don't know what that refers to.

RD: Yeah. That's just most of them. Actually, it's the same thing as this.

KD: Yeah, it's the same as the child on the mother's breast.

RD: Exactly. And then this is a lady just atop some egg crates that I took in Honduras in Comayagüela. The Comayagüela neighborhood killing zone of Tegucigalpa. *[laughter]* Where the school is actually located. It's really nice during the day. Don't go in there during the night. *[laughter]*

KD: What's "Ordinance Feeder Shoot Number One" refer to? What's an ordinance feeder shoot? That's where you lost me, the title.

RD: That's the ammo—

KD: Oh, okay.

RD: Ordinance is ammo, ammunition.

KD: Oh, okay, sorry. Yeah, the coloration is just fascinating on this whole set. And why that dimension?

RD: I think just that I paired it off. I don't know. I think that probably the length of wood was there. Like they're all going to be these . . . I guess we bought about a thousand dollars' worth of canvas when we use them, we're all doing these things of the same size.

KD: And acrylic on fiberglass mesh, ninety by thirty-two inches, and it's called *Warthog*.

RD: Oh, that's the A-10 Warthog, which I was—if you've ever lived in Tucson, all you ever see are these Warthogs everywhere, because Davis-Monthan [Air Force Base] is there. And you also see pockets of cancer everywhere, because the Warthog is pretty much depleted uranium and it's—occasionally the pilots come

down with it, but it's mostly the maintenance guys. So there's—nobody wants to talk about it in Tucson. Every so often, they point out that there are these pockets of cancer. And kids are being born with extra limbs and shit. So anyway, it's the famous Warthog, and it's just the front of it with the Gatling 20mm cannon, you know, the "tank killer." And this kid—this figure—actually this figure is of a malnourished neonate, is from Salgado, where I got these. I did a whole thing on Eritrea or something like that.

KD: Right.

RD: So that . . . Warthog and a young kid drinking a Coca-Cola or something, and a malnourished neonate. That's it. *[laughter]*

KD: Was it a reference, this series, to a specific war, or were you thinking back to Vietnam because of the machinery?

RD: No, I was thinking back to Tucson because—they're neat planes. They have two pods in the back. And I found out from Alfred Quiroz—this is interesting because Alfred has a collection of German Luftwaffe, he has, like, all of them. His whole studio is full of, I don't know, like eight hundred different types of planes, all hanging from the ceiling. And he gets them from the Czech Republic. He used to get them from Czechoslovakia, these models. They're just, like, really detailed. And he puts them together. *[laughter]* I mean that's the way he kind of relaxes, I guess. And he puts them together, but it's all, like, Luftwaffe, and half of those things you didn't even know about. They have planes—they were the ones who came up with the pods in the back of the jets.

KD: Oh, they did?

RD: They had dozens of jets. *[laughter]* They were, like, so advanced beyond what anybody could . . . That double-jet thing that came at the end of the war, if they had put it into major production, it would have made the Allied Air Force null and void. *[laughter]*

KD: Yeah.

RD: Because all it did was go up, knock one down, come down, knock one down, at four hundred and five hundred miles per hour. *[laughter]* It would have annihilated all of the air forces anywhere. Well, the A-10 is one of the—it's from one of the Nazi Luftwaffe planes. It's really cool. It looks really cool. It's very slow. It's an effective machine. They use them all the time. It's not an exotic fighter. It's a ground troop support.

KD: I'm surprised to hear you—a person so critical of military brutality to—it sounds like you're fascinated with the machine.

RD: Oh yeah. The irony of it is if you've ever—one time I was at Aviano Air Force Base, going up to Frankfurt to get a series—for my allergy, my allergy tests and stuff. And there was this F-4 Phantom, which is this huge jet. It's really big. It's big. It's a really huge jet. *[laughter]* It was the basic fighting jet of the '60s and '70s. And you just sit there and look at it and they're just gorgeous. They're just like these sculptures. It's kind of like interchanges, you know, like these interchanges—the 110 and the 105 [freeways], that interchange all these things. They're just like these sculptures. And you know that they are absolutely perfectly worthless and they're going to be—they don't get you anywhere that you're going on time, unless you're going there at midnight. *[laughter]* And you know that they probably will be—they're just fascinating. I think that's part of the whole mystique. Half of them—it's amazing, the F-22 [Raptor] fighter that they have that's supposed to take over—we're talking about, I mean, I'm talking about stuff that costs billions of dollars, when they don't plunk enough money . . . You know, one of the big deals right now is graffiti. Well, hell, man, if you don't teach a kid how to paint, they're going to do something graffiti. You might as well do it after school with some funding. Because it's costing the MTA thirteen million dollars a year and Cal Trans some astronomical, something like thirty million dollars a year in just graffiti repayment. *[laughter]* What is going on? And if they catch the kid, seventy-five thousand dollars a year at CYA [California Youth Authority].

KD: Right.

RD: So, I'm going, what I'm talking about is important stuff. So we have this F-22 fighter that's just absolutely gorgeous. It's just a sculpture and what it does is amazing. But it's absolutely useless. *[laughter]* It was designed to go against the new model MiG and the Sukhoi, which are mothballs now. Russia has other

priorities. And they're still going forward with it. What is it? I think it's the culture of the military mind's creative—even if they sometimes think in almost abstract art terms that they see these things. You can see how seductive it would be and that's how they get these contracts. And I'm sure if they hire psychologists, there will be some people who will go, "Wait a minute!" Strangely enough, it's usually the women generals in the Pentagon, where they have to go and say, "Excuse me, what's this plane good for?" *[laughter]*

There was this woman general in Vietnam who said, "Wait a minute, you want to bomb Hanoi? You want to get rid of all of the stuff that's coming in from China and from the north? Well, okay, how many theatre nukes do we have?" And all the guys went, "You can't use nuclear weapons, that's not fair!" *[laughter]* You know, up and until . . . And that's the thing, and going even further back, I'm talking about men thinking about the way women think.

KD: Right.

RD: And these guys that choose the F-22, almost have this artistic vision of things. It's like when Lincoln, when everybody—when the South was beating up the North. He said, "I got to do something? What about this drunk Colonel that we have named Grant?" And he came in, and he went and he said, "How you going to beat these guys?" He says, "Well, I'm going to kill them." *[laughter]* And you know that there is a rumor, that people have speculated that there were all kinds of European economies that wanted to divvy up the spoils—who are they going to if the South won?

KD: Right.

RD: And they came over to observe one of those battles. In seven hours, seven thousand people dead. And these are muskets that throw like cannon balls. They don't show a little tiny NATO round. They throw this—I mean, it'll split you in half. And they were all, like, fighting—they saw that the troops [that] were dying were the ones who were fighting in the old European style.

KD: Yes.

RD: Where you—up and until World War I, the French infantry had bright red pants. Like Target. *[laughter]* That's the mind of the guys, and it's—it's no big deal except that you're spending billions of dollars, and it can get kind of dicey for civilians in an Iraqi village. And those civilians are usually women and children.

KD: This passion that you have about the distribution of power and the devastation caused by war. Do you use the paintings as the place to express that and the public work as the beautification project?

RD: No, the public work, I sneak in all kinds of stuff in the public work, like the—the thing that I did at the North Valley police station.

KD: Oh, let's go back to that.

RD: So, these guys, you can see the cops . . . What am I doing here? You can see these cops that are standing at attention.

KD: Yeah.

RD: It's the same one.

KD: Tell me the media that's used here.

RD: Color, same as these.

KD: Okay.

RD: So they're up here too. You can see them all. It's very symmetrical. And there was this guy with his daughter and this lady with a kid.

KD: In a stroller?

RD: Stroller. And then this guy playing a button accordion. Just those three images. When you superimpose them, they get real abstract. But you can see that they—I wanted to do that rigidity, and it's from the 1954 review of motorcycle cops. And if you can remember back in LA, the motorcycle cops, they still wear their choppers and the boots and all of that, and that uniform, but they have helmets. At that time, they had these little floppy hats, you know? *[laughter]* And remember, I told you that the guys were kind of like nuts? Because everybody knew, in fact, during World War II, they were wearing those leather helmets like Snoopy wears, you know? Well, it makes no sense if you're going to collide with something. *[laughter]* But

guys are going, "Well, I ain't going to wear no helmet. That's for sissies." And sure enough, these guys . . . I wanted to point that out because they were all wearing the floppy hats and these are motorcycle hats. So you point that out, that insanity that is with these people. And actually, the LAPD didn't start wearing helmets until the insurance companies said, "We're not going to insure your cops anymore, unless you wear a helmet." They went, "All right. But it's for sissies." [laughter]

That's the mentality of some of these organizations. So I put that in. I'm sure that somebody is going to see that if they ever notice, and they will, one of these days. Because eventually art history is going to run out of things to talk about. And like I said, the Chinese are probably going to get inter-married with the Mexicans, so UCLA will notice the Mexicans now. So those are all kinds of things that are put in the Stockton—there were one hundred of these things. Well I put in a lot of—

KD: The little tiles that are on the little floor on the front of the building right?

RD: Yeah, but I did the same thing in Stockton, which I don't have any photos of.

KD: Sneaking more images in, is that what you mean?

RD: Well, right next to a school named after Christa McAuliffe, the lady who died in the Challenger—the teacher who died on the Challenger. So of course, I dug up the old O-ring, the famous thing from—

KD: Right, the O-ring is what fails, right?

RD: From the Norton Niacol or something. [Manufacturer of the O-ring was Morton-Thiokol—ed.] Yeah. The memo that said, "You really shouldn't have these people launch this, because we haven't really tested the O-ring under extreme conditions." Four nights before the launch, nobody bothered to tell NASA about it. There was a big whole thing. So, of course, it's there. [laughter] And there, right next to the picture of Christa McAuliffe—

KD: What's there, the text?

RD: Yeah, the text.

KD: Whoa. That's not sneaking at all. [laughter] That's in plain sight.

RD: Yeah. No, no, by sneaking, that's in plain sight too. And they love it. They go, "Oh God, that's really great, you've got our uniformed guys on bikes there." I go, "Hmm, I don't think they get it." But that's okay. They think it's beautiful. So, that's good. And I'll—there's some other stuff that's in Stockton too, a lot of it's strikes.

[break in audio]

KD: So, tell me about your work with Kathy. How did you get in?

RD: Well, it was during—which they will be doing again—the federal government was trying to—an improvement zone, or whatever. HPLE, or something like that. So, Mrs. Duardo—

KD: Richard Duardo's mother.

RD: Yeah, Josie. She was a real activist. I said, "Well, Jesus, we could link this up. This could be the corridor thing, and this corridor could, this Figueroa—we could get some money." We just ask them. And I remember Almaraz, in one meeting saying, "Why?" [laughter] I said, "Because we don't have any money for anything. We don't have any money. These guys have all this money. And they want to plunk money—if they're going to plunk money into Figueroa, why don't we get some of it?" And he said, "That's not the artist, and—" This whole artist thing, that the artist should only think about the artwork, which is absurd. So he said he didn't want anything to do with it, and he split. And he did. [laughter] He went to New York.

KD: Did the group attempt to get part of the funds?

RD: No, I dropped it after awhile. So what? I don't care. I mean, if they don't care, I don't care. I wasn't going to do it by myself. It's the same thing with the—I'm not going to do it by myself. If nobody wants to do it. Forget it, drop it, forget it.

KD: Did you think that the principled aspects of some leadership of the Chicano movement have—well, I think I know how you're going to answer this, but I'll ask it anyways—have created problems for their own economic success?

RD: Well, I guess. It doesn't make—just using Self Help Graphics as an example. Like I said, in particular, when we went—me and Wayne Healy—I said, “Look, we got this offer from Biarritz. Why don't we show the Siqueiros murals, the silkscreen monotype murals over there? It got a great show at the LA Public Library and the Orange County museum in Santa Ana. It was just beautiful.” [*Inspiring Heroes*, an exhibition in 2001 at the Orange County Center for Contemporary Art, featured the work of thirteen artists who were active at Self Help Graphics; these works included *Ode to Siqueiros* by Aguirre, which was also displayed at the Los Angeles Central Library—ed.] I said, “Look, we've even got the places that they want to show it in. Here's pictures, Tomás.” He said, “Okay, I'll take them.” I said, “Here. Here's all the information, here's the contact people, here's the pictures.” “All right. Goodbye.” “Let us know what happens.”

They didn't do anything. Why didn't he do anything? Well, I don't know. You might want to be asking him that. I think it's because he knew that he'd have to get some funding for this. He didn't really know what to do, how to get the funding. And they never had gotten funding. Karen knew what to do. Karen knew immediately to go to [Gloria] Molina, to go to the big guys. To lean on Molina so she could lean on somebody else to get some funding, otherwise they're not going to listen. No funding person is going to listen to people from East LA. Unless they do it through the . . . We're two artists at Valley Boulevard and the DCA doesn't listen to us, so we have to go to the politicals. I got to meet with [José] Huizar, and we did. And we're going to get results. That type of thing takes a certain amount of—

KD: Diplomacy?

RD: No.

KD: Muscle?

RD: No.

KD: What?

RD: It takes a certain amount of knowing that the *patron* is not that powerful. And that you are just as . . . Remember that I told you that one of the things with the Zapatista revolution . . . I think was, like, ten years before. Not ten years, but six years before . . . Loren Riebe took sixty IBM machines to Yajalón?

KD: Yeah.

RD: And all the sudden, the whole power, the whole façade of the *patron's* power fall apart because these guys don't know how to use the machines. And the Tzeltals, within four months knew how to download all their records. That type of thing hasn't reached . . . It hasn't reached the power structure of the people who administer art in the Chicano community and in general, and the DCA, with the Department of Cultural Affairs. I hope Olga Garay is going to change that. And one of the things that I'm talking about is just seeing Los Angeles, for example, as not original, or a capital of California, or a capital of the United States, but it is the cultural capital of the world. And like I said, KUSC, which is a powerful station comes out and says it, “From the cultural capital of the world, this is KUSC.”

Well, they're not going to, because they are wet guys and they know they're in charge. And they know—they'll throw it. Because what they're doing is, they're throwing it out to New York and they're saying, “Prove us wrong. Prove that we're not the cultural capital of the world.” East LA, one of these days, is going to figure out, “Prove that we're not 40 percent of the market of the thirteenth biggest economy in the world. Prove it to us. Why aren't you giving us money? And tell us why you aren't giving us money.” And go to Molina and say, “How come you aren't leaning on Eli Broad? How come he's not—” Why? Well, Tomás—Tomás has always been under the *patrón*. And that's a problem. That's a problem. And as a matter of fact, if you want to extend it to Latin America in general, I think this whole current thing of leftist leaders, all the way to what's-her-name in Chile, to the guy in Brazil to Correa in Ecuador and Evo Morales in Bolivia.

KD: But not Hugo Chávez in Venezuela?

RD: And Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. I mean, there's a lot of them.

KD: Yeah?

RD: Yeah, sure. There's a lot of them that are finally flexing their muscle because they know that they got power.

KD: Oh, right.

RD: And most of them didn't like to confront what Hugo Chávez is confronting. Hugo Chávez is talking righteous stuff. The United States doesn't like it, because it's, because he's part of OPEC [Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries]. And there's really nothing—and the United States is afraid that he's actually going to get to [Angela] Merkel and Germany and those guys, even [Nicolas] Sarkozy in France. And eventually down the line, sooner than later, oil is going to be pegged to the Euro, not the dollar. And it's just petrified.

KD: [*inaudible*]

RD: They attacked over that. That was the deal. It's not oil.

KD: Yeah.

RD: It's what it's going to be pegged at because [Saddam] Hussein wanted to do that. He wanted OPEC to peg it to—well, you know, you can see the reaction—they're trying to vilify this guy. And I think that type of stuff just doesn't exist in the—at least in the art world of LA. And by that, by comparing what is going on geopolitically in Latin America and then coming to LA, it's not like I'm going from one huge place to a little place. We're talking about [*laughter*] probably the economic, if not cultural capital of the world. I mean, you know, just the employees' retirement fund of LA County lends money to Belgium every so often when they need it. [*laughter*] That type of thing, nobody has figured out on the Chicano level. Richard? I'm sure Richard knows exactly what I'm talking about. He's probably looking for somebody. I left way before the place closed. So if it was going to close, it was going to close by probably inertia. Because eventually it probably got so expensive, which was what I was seeing. Why don't we get some money from these guys? These guys are going, "Oh no, we don't need that." So they all split. But I think it was because—you know, if Richard's insinuating that I had something to do with the CAP [Centro de Arte Público].

KD: No, no. He did not say that.

RD: Or that I chased everybody away.

KD: No, no. He was not saying that. He said that you raised important questions that they couldn't answer.

RD: Bingo.

KD: Yeah. [*laughter*]

RD: And the problem is, why couldn't they answer it? Why can't they still answer it?

KD: Yeah.

RD: I mean, I saw Villaraigosa yesterday doing the speech for forty minutes. He had—I think it's going to be in the papers because—the other thing he didn't talk about was the planet Pluto. Here's this fundraiser for this place that's a drop in the bucket in giving medical care to the poor, and he brought up, in a very nice way, he brought up the fact that we're the only country in the world that doesn't [have] universal health care.

KD: Health care.

RD: I thought it was a great speech. He said, and he brought up his growing up in East LA, and his whole, "Why does Russia have universal health care and we don't?" That's the type of—now, it has reached a level where these guys are thinking as a power structure, they no longer have a "I'm here and the *patrón* is there" mentality. That hasn't filtered down to the cultural level. And I think it has a lot to do with the university. The university is not providing—I mean, when the university is not providing instruction in what I do, and what bought this house in a very limited market for artists and the MFAs—I mean, the thirty MFAs that UCLA grants—the thirty or fifty MFAs that UCLA cranks out—90 percent of them are going to be selling real estate in two years. And some legislators are probably thinking, "What a waste of the tax payers' money." And that's how you close departments. And maybe that's what should happen. But because these guys—and that's what happened with Self Help Graphics. They didn't think outside the box. They didn't look, they all stopped. They're not thinking like Villaraigosa. Villaraigosa, first thing he does is go to China, you know?

KD: Yeah.

RD: [*laughter*]

KD: Thank you so much.



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