



CSRC  
ORAL HISTORIES SERIES

NO. 9, NOVEMBER 2013

# RICHARD DUARDO

INTERVIEWED BY KAREN MARY DAVALOS

ON NOVEMBER 5, 8, AND 12, 2007

Richard Duardo was born in East Los Angeles and is a graduate of UCLA. His serigraphs have been shown internationally and are represented in notable public and private collections, including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. He is a recipient of an Artist of the Year award from the California Arts Commission. In 1978 he established Hecho en Aztlán, a fine art print studio, followed by Aztlán Multiples, Multiples Fine Art, Future Perfect, Art & Commerce, and his present studio, Modern Multiples, Inc. He has printed the work of more than 300 artists. Duardo lives in Los Angeles.

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).

This interview was conducted as part of the L.A. Xicano project.

Preferred citation: Richard Duardo, interview with Karen Mary Davalos, November 5, 8, and 12, 2007, Los Angeles, California. CSRC Oral Histories Series, no. 9.

Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2013.

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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.

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## 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.

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## 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

# INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD DUARDO

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## NOVEMBER 5, 2007

**Karen Davalos:** This is Karen Davalos with Richard Duardo in Los Angeles on November 5, 2007, for the [CSRC Oral Histories Series]. And I wanted to start, Richard, with just a few really general questions, and then we'll open it up for specific information about growing up. So you were born where and in what year?

**Richard Duardo:** I was born in Boyle Heights, May 15, 1952, at the Lincoln Hospital on the corner of 4th and Soto Street.

**KD:** You have that well memorized, huh?

**RD:** I always drive by that when I buy my tamales.

**KD:** Okay. And you're number one of how many children, or what?

**RD:** I'm number two, second oldest, of nine children.

**KD:** And were your mother and father both in the picture?

**RD:** Let me see. Okay. My mother is from the northern Sonora desert, out in . . . What is it? Prietas [Agua Prieta], which is a desert town close to Arizona. So we're kind of—we're Mexican, but we're Yaqui Mexicans. So our family is Yaqui Indian.

**KD:** And was she the person who crossed over, or—

**RD:** My mom was the first in her family to cross over on her own at the Arizona border, I think, near Tucson, illegally. I think back then, they called them *mojados*. And I think she was about eighteen years old. And she came alone on her own, the proverbial immigrant story to find a better life for herself. And she met somebody in Tucson, a gentleman, a good samaritan that bought her a ticket, a train ticket that brought her into Union Station in Los Angeles. She was eighteen years old, I think. I don't quite know what her story is with my father. I don't know if they met here or if they met down there, but I suspect they met up here. And I understand, what little I knew of him, that he is from DF, the central part of Mexico. So he was another immigrant, probably an illegal. But they got married, and they had three children, my two sisters and myself. And then he left my mother. I don't know if they got divorced. He left my mother, and he returned to Mexico, I've never seen him since. I suspect he's probably dead by now.

But my mother then—what does she do? I mean, at the time . . . She's only told me once, when we were driving downtown, she said, "I lived here first, for the first two years," which was around Staples Center, which used to be a bunch of tenements. And then she met . . . I'm a little kid, so I don't recall a lot of stuff, just little vignettes of memories. But she said then we moved to Boyle Heights. And when they separated, my mother . . . I think she might have been about twenty-one, twenty-two, with three kids, undocumented, fourth-grade education. My mother then took my older sister and myself, my older sister, whose name is Irma, back to Sonora, and left us there in the care of my grandparents, or my grandmother and my aunts and uncles, in some dusty village. That's all I remember. Everything was dusty, dry, and dirty, or just dry. Desert.

**KD:** And you're about what?

**RD:** I think about two or three. And I recall going to school. They put us in school, my sister and I, which was an adobe. Going to school, it was . . . I know it was a dirt—everything was dirt. The floor of the school was dirt. It was—what are those bricks called?

**KD:** Adobe?

RD: Adobe bricks. And it was like a tiered seating area on planks, and then a slate board, and we learned the alphabet. It was pretty much [our] situation for about the next two years. I don't remember much of it. And my mother coming down to visit us now and then to see if we were okay, and then she'd leave. And she kept one of my sisters with her up in Los Angeles. And then the next—I don't know what duration of time it was. She finally came and picked us up, because she had met a man who was going to marry her, so she wanted to bring the kids back up, my sister and I.

KD: Did you feel—do you have memories of feeling, like, “Where’s mother?”

RD: Oh, of course. I’ve been dealing with abandonment issues for fourteen [years] with my therapist. So we came back, and I met my new father, my stepfather, Arthur. And they changed my name from my original name, which was Saul. Because they called him Ritchie, he changed my original name from—my middle name was Richard, and my first name was Saul, which it still is. I didn't know what my real name was until I was twelve. But they switched my middle name to become my first name.

KD: Did you have a sense why?

RD: No, I didn't even know I had a different name. I mean, you're so young.

KD: You're so young, right.

RD: Yeah, you don't know. You just know that this is—not until I saw my birth certificate, I think, when I was twelve, did I see my real name.

KD: Wow. And when did you learn your family's—your mother's migration story?

RD: From her. Between all my—I have five sisters and four brothers, counting myself. So between all my sisters and all of us asking my grandparents, my grandmother . . . What she managed to do when she found a husband is, she brought us up first, and we settled in Boyle Heights by the Evergreen Cemetery. And then she brought up my Uncle Ralph, and then she brought up my Aunt Sally—Celia. And then she brought up her mother, our grandmother, Ana Casarez. Her maiden name was Casarez. So we all lived in a house, actually an apartment, on Malabar. My father—who it took years later to reconstruct it, my stepfather—that he was basically born in East Los Angeles, and was also a high school dropout. So he was a truck driver.

KD: When you say “also,” who's the other?

RD: What did I say?

KD: You said “also a high school dropout.”

RD: Well, actually I'm thinking . . . My mom left school when she was in fourth grade, so she never got her degree. And my stepfather evidently also did not finish high school. So he's a typical Mexican American kid with no high school degree, there's no future. So he was a truck driver and a bartender at night, and he was an alcoholic. What else?

KD: And your mother worked?

RD: And my mom worked at Abba-Zaba taffy factory, somewhere downtown.

KD: Yeah, I remember that.

RD: Yeah. So she worked at a taffy company, and I know my uncle picked up a job. Once everybody—we were all living out of an apartment, which was . . . Not all the rest of the children were born. But I think for about two or three years—she didn't have children again for another couple of years, I think because she was working two or three years, because the next explosion of siblings happened one after another. But there was about a two- or three-year gap before she started having another group of kids with my stepfather, which makes six of my siblings are stepchildren. And, what else? So we lived principally in Boyle Heights near Brooklyn Avenue, which is now called Cesar Chavez Boulevard. And about two blocks away from the Evergreen Cemetery, about a block away from El Tepeyac, the world-famous Mexican restaurant. Sound familiar?

KD: Yes.

RD: And that was our upbringing. And most of Boyle Heights at the time was a shifting community, from a Jewish immigrant community into a very hardcore, first-generation Mexican community.

KD: Now, is ... In your youth, are you aware of that shift, or is this . . .

RD: No. Well, I was aware of boarded-up, fenced-off synagogues. That I would ask, when we were in the neighborhood, what those were. But my parents never had a clue. They were literally synagogues that had been fenced off and shut down. But my mom used to take—I remember the red cars were still running, the trolley cars, and her—I remember she'd take us downtown by trolley, or take . . . I recall I was always with her, it seemed to be me, once we were back in Los Angeles. But she'd go downtown to kind of experience the other world, because Boyle Heights at that time had been a pretty insulated, protected community of immigrants. Everybody was very careful about *la migra*, being arrested and stuff like that. So going outside of the community, which was going downtown, which was still at the height of its . . . I mean, downtown was still bustling with Bullocks and May Company—it was the Westside. So I think she would go down there to vicariously experience what being like middle-class successful. And I was her little toddler. I recall being lifted on and off of trolley cars.

KD: The trolley car.

RD: Yeah. And that was—

KD: Did your family have a car?

RD: Yeah. Yes, of course, as we got older, and the family started to grow. Whatever it was, some car from the '50s. Because I remember it had [no] seatbelts, because she got into several car accidents. They always had to be big cars, because there was nine kids. But we stayed in Boyle Heights up until a point where we had—we moved into a house, which was a rented house.

KD: You're competing against your—

RD: AC unit.

KD: Yeah. Go ahead.

RD: We—I know, as a core group of family, which was my aunt, my uncle, my mother, and my grandmother, and my stepfather, it was a pretty tight group of, like, basically immigrants trying to figure it out. And my stepfather was the only one that was a native-born Chicano, or Mexican American. And, of course, all of us were born here. Most of my siblings were all born at the general hospital [LAC+USC Medical Center], and I think I was the only one born at Lincoln Hospital. I don't know why she picked that one. It might have been nearby. My stepfather started considering some entrepreneurial shift in his life, so he found a bar by Cal State LA on Eastern Avenue, and he wound up . . . I don't know what the deal is, when you're that young, he must have been about twenty-six, twenty-seven. He might have leased it or rented it. But he opened up a bar called Ritchie's. And we moved from Boyle Heights to City Terrace. That's moving up.

KD: Yeah. Were you aware of it at the time?

RD: A little bit. Because now it was—it seemed a little bit more upscale. And that might have been another neighborhood in transition, from a middle-class, working-class white neighborhood that was started to shift into Mexican families.

KD: And you're—what age were you when the family moves to City Terrace?

RD: I think I was nine years old, or ten years old. Because I remember in 1963 the Beatles released *Meet the Beatles*, and I had one of the biggest fights in our family [because] I wanted a Beatle haircut. So I know that it was at that period, and my aunt bought me my first LP at a Jewish [record store]. I mean, Brooklyn Avenue was in transition, so there was delis . . . I mean, it was kind of transitioning out to the Westside on Fairfax, so there were still a lot old vendors, I guess, or people that had mom and pop shops that were still kind of, like, run by Jews. And there was a couple of great musical instrument stores that sold LPs. And one of the first things . . . My aunt used to walk from our house up Brooklyn Avenue past the Brooklyn Theatre and go to these exotic—to us, they were exotic little stores. And that's when I saw the Beatle album. She got it for me for my birthday, and that became a fight. That's kind of a turning point, because I realized, that's when my mom and my grandmother decided that our family should move out of that area. Nothing to do with my Beatle haircut, but just like, "It's time for us to move." A positive direction, a better location for the kids, because there were still gangs there.

KD: Well, what was the schooling like, when you were in Boyle Heights?

RD: Pretty mediocre. LA Unified.

KD: You were in a public school?

RD: They'd be basically babysitting us. I went to Malabar Elementary, and then we went to Woodrow Wilson Junior High in City Terrace. And then my sister, I know, went through Hollenbeck, which is on César Chávez or Brooklyn Avenue, because she was a couple of years older. So she started her junior high school there. I think also, my mom didn't want us to go to Roosevelt or Garfield [High School], which was in Boyle Heights. She wanted us—she thought maybe the better schools were heading towards the northeast, and Woodrow Wilson was an upscale high school for upwardly mobile Chicanos. So she thought that would be a great jump for our family. And my father thought it was close enough for him and his bar. Well, what happened was, they weren't able to find a place, evidently, since he opened up his bar and didn't have any money. So we all wound up living in the garage behind the bar for about [two] years. Nine kids, two parents.

And my earliest memory is of just going to sleep about one or two o'clock in the morning, listening to Nat King Cole. And my job in the morning, before I went to school, was to go into the bar, sweep it out, wash all of the glasses, and dig out quarters out of the pool table that they had dropped while they were betting. And I think my mom . . . oh, this becomes apparent to me later, probably after a couple of years, felt that it was no way to raise kids. We were living in a garage, nine kids. It was literally an ocean of beds. And she pressured my father to get us and the family out of there. I don't think he had the money, plus I think she was upset because he was running . . . Basically, he was letting bookies run out of—you know, gambling and bookmaking right out of the bar. So she was concerned something bad was going to happen.

My grandmother lent my mother [the deposit] because she was working. She took a job folding sheets at an industrial laundry in Pasadena, which has since closed. So I think between . . . And my uncle started working at a bakery, Bowie Pies, which no longer exists. And my aunt, I know, was babysitting. So I think what they were doing was pooling their resources, and my stepfather was trying to make a go at this bar, which I don't know how it was going. I don't recall. I just remember a lot of arguing, and a lot of drinking, because he was an alcoholic. And I think my grandmother, I believe—it's since been verified by my sisters, from talking to my mom—that my grandmother lent my mother the money to buy the house in Highland Park.

KD: Wow.

RD: So in Highland Park in 1964, '65, Highland Park was a white, Republican enclave of older Republicans that were dying. It was adjacent to Eagle Rock, and adjacent to South Pasadena. Northeast of Highland Park was the bottom half of South Pas, of course, which was the location of the—what was that hardcore right-wing organization? The John Birch Society?

KD: Yeah, John Birch.

RD: I remember when I was bicycling, later on, when I would bicycle through that neighborhood—because I'd explore everything around Highland Park by bicycle as a teenager—bicycling past that storefront, and going, "Oh, my God, this is the [home] of the far right."

KD: Oh, so you had a sense of it as a child?

RD: Oh, yeah, yeah. My stepfather was a Teamster. Another job that he had while his little bar was going was, he was still a driver, and he wound up being a Teamster because he was driving for the meat-packing houses in the city of Vernon. That was his steady job. And, but going back to . . . I think my grandmother, as I understand, lent my mother—pushed my mother, saying, "You've got to get these kids out of this garage and get them into a real house." So my grandmother gave my mother—loaned my mother the money to buy a house in Highland Park. This is 1963, '64, '65. She found a five-bedroom house, two baths, for sixteen thousand dollars. And, who knows what a down payment is? Ten percent of that. Sixteen hundred dollars? So my mother got the house in Highland Park, on Echo Street, which is near Avenue 56. Which later on, in about . . . Ten years later, I come back to that neighborhood with the Centro de Arte Público.

- KD: So your schooling is the public school system. When you're in Boyle Heights, these elementary school years, that's a mix of—
- RD: It was principally Latinos, Mexicans, Chicanos. Boyle Heights by then had been pretty much turned into a 90 percent-plus, easily Mexican community. That's all I knew.
- KD: And you grow up speaking Spanish. So what's—
- RD: Yeah, we were bilingual. My mother would speak Spanish to us. When we left the threshold of our house, the community spoke Spanish. In the schools, it was—well, most of the administration and the teaching staff were white, so it was . . . This was the full-on dealing of acculturation, proper acculturation. Because my mother could never afford babysitters. This is where I think, actually, I became, I think, absorbing the culture. She would park us in front of the television. That was our babysitter.
- KD: What did you watch?
- RD: We'd watch *Father Knows Best*, *I Love Lucy*, *Captain Kangaroo*, *Engineer Bill* [*Cartoon Express*]. Just those programs from the '50s. We were glued to a television, and I think that's where my sisters and I started to, like, get a clue of the culture we were in. We were absorbing it through television, because our community was pretty much Mexican around us. And the only other time where it seemed like it was an anomaly was when we were in school. It was English-speaking, so we—my mom probably, through us—learned English. As we were coming home, we were talking more and more, between my siblings and I, we were talking English, and probably instructing my mother in English. But she still speaks Spanglish, or *caló*, half English, half Spanish.
- KD: And this school—when you go to City Terrace, is it pretty much the same, or is it mixed?
- RD: It's . . . City Terrace was fifty-fifty, like, white kids and Mexican kids. So it was transitioning. But to us, it was, like, "Oh, my God, we're in a whole different place. There's trees here."
- KD: Did you have a sense that your family was struggling economically?
- RD: No. I mean, you don't realize that until you kind of look at it in retrospect, like, whoa, we had a pretty [good setup].
- KD: So you don't remember being hungry, or—
- RD: Oh, no. I mean, you're talking about an aunt, an uncle, my mother, and my grandmother, from their side of the family, all working. I mean, they may be like manual jobs, but they were working, and they were all contributing.
- KD: And caring for the children, I imagine, and sharing that responsibility.
- RD: Right. I think that's one of the reasons why I think I have such an affinity for understanding women, is because I was pretty much raised by two sisters, one above me by a year, one below me, an aunt, who was probably sixteen, an uncle, who was probably eighteen, and my grandmother, and my mother. But my uncle was working all of the time; he almost was practically gone non-stop. So I recall as a child that pretty much I was dealing with women, right down from young children to teenage to my mother to my grandmother. So my thing was—and I was kind of—the awkward thing was, my father, my stepfather, viewed—this is all—this all comes out in therapy, and when you really examine what happened; I couldn't understand, because my father was physically abusive to my mother, and to me, and pretty much, it occurred to me later, years later, that I represented the other man, you know what I mean? The history, the constant memory of the previous man in her life. Hence the effort to change my name, and the beatings, and all of that stuff. Well, he was an alcoholic.
- KD: So the other—if you don't mind me asking, the girls in the family did not get the same kind—
- RD: No, no. Uh-uh.
- KD: The ones who were not from the other father. Huh.
- RD: And I remember—well, not until the other boys showed up on the scene, meaning they were born, that he pretty much ignored me. So my family upbringing in the household was pretty much women, so I developed—I think—this is all in hindsight, because—the revelation is. I thought, my God, I became really good at entertaining women. You know, being a playful little kid, making them laugh; I just got into that habit of

just being a clown around them and having fun with them. And I think years later, wound up coming into play, my ability to be empathetic towards women and understand them. It's almost you—I think I picked up their intuitive abilities to communicate, be it consensus building, you know what I mean?

KD: Yes, absolutely.

RD: But in the broadest possible ways, they got me in touch with my feminine side. I didn't become gay or bisexual, but I mean, I really understood how to deal with women as a result of that kind of [experience].

KD: And the skills that women have in communication.

RD: Yeah. And—

KD: Do you think that the school was a release for you, then? Or how did you—if the home was tense, it sounds like it's not—

RD: I was pretty oblivious. I mean, I just went through the mechanics of getting an education, pretty much unconscious.

KD: So there's no one treating you special in school, or helping you along, or being the teacher that—

RD: No, nothing. I mean, I didn't start thinking about my schooling and its—the curriculum, and its function in my life until I was in junior high school, which is at the point when we moved to Highland Park. But we moved to Highland Park when I think I was eleven or twelve. By then, I think we had about . . . Most of all the siblings, except for the last two, Jojo and Cleo, may not have been born. So there was seven of us by that point. And we got into this five-bedroom house, two-story, two-bath old Victorian on Echo Street, two blocks from Avenue 56 in Figueroa, which will later come into play, where the Centro started. And we were the only Mexican family in that—within easily ten square blocks, and all our neighbors were old, retired—old Republican women, like widows. Their husbands were already dead. And we were, for them, the first.

KD: Yeah.

RD: The first sign of something happening.

KD: The block is going to hell. [*laughter*]

RD: Yeah, exactly. They would come over and harangue my mother about keeping her children in the house, because it was a quiet neighborhood until we showed. I mean, we weren't rowdy; it's just there's kids. And it took a couple of years, but they softened—they took us in as neighbors, because I started mowing their lawns, and what is it, helping them with their groceries, they were old, old ladies, and they needed help, so my mom would just say, "Go help Mrs. Haskin do that, go help so and so do that." I think they realized that we were humans, you know what I mean? Decent people.

And then about two years after we were there, the Solises, the Solis family moved in. They had eleven children, a block down. And then the neighborhood—immediately, the neighborhood started to shift. I mean, we were part of pockets, I'm sure, happening all over Highland Park, because Figueroa, from the Avenue 50 right up into York Boulevard, which is about a twenty-block length, was the main street of this town, this suburb. What did they call them? A bedroom community for downtown? Highland Park was pretty much white, but it was transitioning super fast, and all—I think all the stores up along there were brand-name stores, like department stores that probably catered to middle-class people started to deal with Mexican families rolling in with eight kids. But there wasn't—I don't think there was that much resistance. I think it was more of a complacent sort of, "Well, okay, here it goes." And then, you know, obviously there's the flight, which makes homes available, and the only ones moving in are Mexican families. So Highland Park was [this] forest, because it was so green, and it had the Arroyo Seco], and my mom thought we were moving into a very [green] country—we thought we'd moved to the country.

KD: Right.

RD: A forested country. It was just insane. Then I went to Luther Burbank Junior High, which was up the street. It was about a fifteen-block walk. So did my sister Irma, so did my sister Sandra. And then all my siblings thereafter, over the years. Then when I was done at Luther Burbank, the next high school was Benjamin Franklin, Franklin High School, I think, on Avenue 54, which was transitional. You can see, when we



transferred—well, when I got there, it was probably 60 percent white and about 40 percent Mexican. By the time I graduated three years later, it was probably 80 percent Mexican and 20 percent white.

KD: Wow.

RD: That's how fast Highland Park was changing. And Mike Hernandez was a friend of mine in high school, who wound up becoming the councilman. I didn't know Ed Reyes, but I did know Mike Hernandez very well. And it was—at that point, maybe I might have been about fourteen or fifteen that I started hanging around with [gangs]. Highland Park had three gangs. HP, which was called—Highland Park, which was the Optimus Homeboys, which was up the street, past Luther Burbank was a home for delinquent teenage boys. Most of them were white, white trash. They had their own gang, HP. And then in the other direction, south of—in Highland Park. Highland Park didn't have a gang, but from Avenue 50 south, you have the Avenues.

KD: The Avenues, right.

RD: And then from Avenue 26, I don't know what that would be—that would be north—is Cypress Park, I believe. Cypress Park had the CP Boys, the Cypress Park Boys. And since most of the—and at the corner of—right there is Nightingale, which was a junior high school, which was—if you went to Nightingale, that was 100 percent Latino, Chicano. That was a hardcore elementary school. So Luther Burbank was like a safe school. Franklin—from that point, when you graduated from junior high school, you either go to Lincoln High School or Franklin. And if your parents really wanted you to get away from any possibility of gangs, they'd go over the hill, and go to—Eagle Rock High School was 90 percent white, Eagle Rock. Eagle Rock was the last [white] hold out, which was, you get beat up, you'd get pushed—you could get beat up if everybody attempted to transfer into Eagle Rock [they] would usually wind up coming back to Lincoln Heights, to Franklin, because they'd just beat the shit out of [them]. They were trying to keep it white.

KD: And you remember that as a young man?

RD: Oh, yeah.

KD: Wow. I was going to ask you if you could go back a bit, moving from apartment to the back of the garage, to then—

RD: A house.

KD: A house. Was there a sense of privacy gained, or—since you're the boy—

RD: Yeah, we had a yard. My mom was happy; she had a backyard with grass.

KD: And did she plant gardens?

RD: She had—well, yeah, she did, because I'd help her. It was a tiered backyard. I just remember digging holes and putting down rosebushes and lemon trees and avocado trees and kumquat trees. She just said, "We're going to grow grass now, we're going to do this."

KD: Now, you've mentioned before that you were with her, it sounds like when you were a toddler going downtown; this is—you're a bit older. Are you—just because you're the oldest boy, or are you her favorite, or—?

RD: I'm the oldest boy. There was a cluster of three of us, my sisters. So as teenagers, there was a gap of about five years. So everybody is else is—

KD: They're little toddlers.

RD: Eight, ten year olds, right down to newborn. So we were like surrogate parents for my mother. We'd have to—we'd take care of them.

KD: Assist them.

RD: Assist, yeah, we'd take care of the next generation. We'd have to eat in two shifts; the younger—there was nine kids.

KD: So the table could only hold five.

RD: An aunt, an uncle, a grandmother, and two parents. That's five plus nine. So it was—I remember they made a table off of a sawed-off plank of bowling alley, and it'd still only seat like eight people. So I

remember, we'd have to eat second, the older ones; the younger kids would eat in the first shift, and we'd eat in the second shift. It was pretty fun.

KD: Did you have your own bed, or did you always share—

RD: Right, it was five bedrooms, I had to share a bedroom upstairs with my brother, but the older ones got the upstairs bedroom. I had a bedroom for about six months, and then my next brother, Bruno, who started to get older, [joined me]. She said, "You're going to have to share a bedroom." The only one that ever had bedroom by herself was my older sister Irma.

KD: Because she's the oldest girl?

RD: Yeah. She was a teenager.

KD: Becoming a woman, right. A little bit of privacy. So growing up, you didn't probably have that, since there was enough boys to crowd into a room, you didn't have privacy.

RD: No. Well, I had some, until they decided to put my brother in a room next to me. There was a middle bedroom upstairs, I don't know who got that one. Maybe my sister Sandra, but she wound up running away when she was fifteen. That's another thing. Well, around fourteen or fifteen, which would make my sister sixteen, which would make my younger—my next younger sister, Sandra. Now, mind you, we're the three that are from a separate father. We started going through that teenage stuff, just acting out and stuff like that. For me, I joined a gang. Little Cypress Park, Little CP Boys. And for my sister Sandra, she was fighting—whatever teenagers do, just making hell for your mother. And my older sister, Irma, she was really quiet.

You know, we're dealing with an alcoholic stepfather, so there was a lot of screaming and yelling and beating. You've got to put a lid on it when you've got eight or nine other kids, or six other kids. His kids. But he definitely had a drinking problem. And my sister Sandra, I think, ran away when she was fifteen. We didn't see her again for six years. My—and for me, it was rough. I mean, I was estranged from this guy. So, yes, when I was in high school, I decided to take after-school sports. Just, you know, so [I could] come home later, just to stay out of the house, because it was just too insane there.

KD: Yeah, I was trying to figure out where you found a sense of quiet, private, safe.

RD: Well, despite all of the little people running around, I got pretty good at being able to block out and get things done. Plus I found that whole yard work a refreshing break. Everybody had chores, so I would always volunteer for the chores that would take me out of the house, which was, I would be in charge of the yard, which was totally cool; it had just poltergeists with six kids running around. And—what happened? I took tennis. I wasn't a real jock. It was dumb, but I just thought, "You have a choice. Cross-country, football, dumb. Basketball," I just thought, "dumb." Tennis, you wear white and you bang a ball across there.

KD: How hard could that be? [*laughter*]

RD: Yeah, that could be a lot of fun. And it was there that I met my friend Randall Stout, a tall, skinny white kid, a geek. I've got to back to the Cypress Park Boys. So I started having problems at home, because I was hanging around with gang-bangers.

KD: And they knew it.

RD: Yeah. Because—

KD: Did you change your dress style, your attitude?

RD: Well, I was dressing . . . From junior high school, I was what they called a "jetter."

KD: Do you want to describe that?

RD: A jetter is a kid that presses his pants and presses his shirt and really keeps his hair combed, and stands in the lunch yard with his hands in his pocket, vogue-ing, posing, with another posse of jettters. And jettters, they're all about, it's just looking good.

KD: Just looking good.

RD: Yeah. Not gang-banging, not cars. Just standing there looking good. And two members, the two leaders of our jetter gang all of the sudden joined, you know, the Little Cypress Park. So being a follower, I followed George Torres into joining Little CPs, as they were called, which were like the entry level for the real gang,

Cypress Park. Most of them were siblings, younger siblings, of members of the bigger gang. And it was at that time that I think my mom probably started getting concerned that I might be going the wrong way, taking a wrong turn in life. I think I was probably trying to figure out how to make my stepfather happy, and he was a hardcore Teamster at that time, really kind of left. Didn't make—to me, he never made sense. He was a registered Republican, but he was a hardcore union man.

KD: And you were aware of that as a young person.

RD: Yeah. Well, because he—there would always be the union talk, the struggle of the working class and stuff like that.

KD: Wow. Marxist language at home.

RD: Yeah. And I thought, God, probably—this is all unconscious, because you have to reconstruct, “Why'd I do this?” But I think in order to please him, I . . . Well, I had to—I know I was pissing everybody off, because I was hanging around . . . I was a member of Little Cypress Park. And one of my dearest friends at the time, his name is Mario, literally I think I knew him from the time I was eleven or twelve—my best friend, because we'd bicycle together. You know, little kids, they play together, and then they—if you're growing up together, you start exploring the same things, which in our case was, we got bicycles, and we started exploring.

KD: Now, did you buy your bike, make your bike, or get a hand-me-down?

RD: Probably a hand-me-down. I never got a new bike.

KD: I didn't think so.

RD: A ten-speed. But I started exploring—we started exploring Highland Park by bicycle. And then thereafter, Eagle Rock, and then discovered South Pasadena, and then discovered City Terrace, and then discovered Pasadena, and then San Marino. We just traveled by bike.

KD: Everywhere, yeah.

RD: Glendale, my God. Never went downtown. Downtown looked scary. You know, buildings. Bicycling through—

KD: Neighborhoods.

RD: Neighborhoods, it's fun. And all the way up to the [Arroyo] Parkway near the foot of the mountains, which was like, oh, my God, what an adventure. Anyway, but Mario wound up doing the same thing, we joined the stupid little [gang]. And it's all—to me, it was like an extension of now being a jetter. Now, we've got jackets. Now we're looking mean. And you do stupid stuff like break windows. Just dumb stuff. Little CP didn't carry guns.

KD: No.

RD: Or clubs. It was still like, “Wow, we're in a gang.” The big guys were doing the scary stuff. And when my—

KD: But that's part of the allure, right?

RD: Yeah.

KD: The promise of the next level.

RD: Well, the thing that completely changed it as a paradigm for me, and almost I would say it was a chemical brain shift, was my best friend was shot in the head, and I was with him when that happened. It was rough. So it—I just had an epiphany, literally. And I left the gang. I got jumped out.

KD: Jumped out means you got—

RD: Beat up.

KD: Beat up.

RD: Ostracized, lost all my friends. This all happened around eleventh grade, the beginning of eleventh grade.

KD: Can you tell me how that happens? You decide one day, or is it over a course of days? Do you announce that you're going to leave the gang, and then they jump you?

RD: No. You just stop hanging out with them, and then eventually, they figure it out. And then they formalize the departure.

KD: So you knew that was coming.

RD: I think so, yeah. So I was, at this point now, in high school. I'm not a jock—you know, there's cliques—I'm no longer a jetter. I'm not a geek, the studious ones. And I am just going through my courses in the eleventh grade. I started to become conscious of what was going on, in terms of my education. I'm being advised, when I sit down with counselor to do a curriculum, that my curriculum, as it's been presented to me, is, metal shop, wood shop, print shop, whatever. Recess. And I'm thinking, "I'm being routed into Nowheresville. There's no future for me." And I got pretty upset. And my friend Randall Stout, my tennis—geeky, skinny tennis friend, is [saying], "Yeah, Richard, you've got to—we've got to organize." And I said, "Yeah, you're right! We've got to fight this bullshit," because I'm—you know, I'm listening to Jimi Hendrix, all this stuff is going on.

And I'm getting little inklings that there's some people that are pissed off about grapes, the United Farm Workers. And I'm picking up flyers whenever my mom would send me to the supermarket. There's people with placards because the [farmworker] boycott had started. I'm like going, well—I'm reading this stuff, and then I discovered in a little storefront on—what is that street, Monte Vista, which is a parallel street to Figueroa, there was a little storefront with a bunch of eighty-year-old Russian communists with a mimeograph machine, holding meetings for old communists. And I only saw it when I was walking to school one day to Franklin, and I looked in. And they welcomed me in, I'm a kid. And they had allowed the storefront to be as a base of operation for the United Farm Workers in organizing the boycotts in the markets locally. So I met Pat Bonner—I remember him to this day—who was this skinny white man who was part of . . . He's the elite cadre of César Chávez's group. And he, you know, fired [men]. I was, like, politicized. Between the old Russian communists, and Pat Bonner and the mission for "our people," I got really into it, and I started organizing. What happened? It was happening simultaneously. I'm going through [a] process, I'm in the midst of processing the death of my best friend. I'm ostracized from any clique in school.

KD: And you've named all of them, right? Was there no surfers or skaters?

RD: Thank you, there were . . . No, skating wasn't in, surfers weren't quite happening. I mean, we're fairly inland.

KD: Well, I've talked to other people in Highland Park, and they were clear about their—

RD: Their cliques?

KD: Yeah. [*laughter*] Just checking, just checking.

RD: Well, at that time, it was the geeks.

KD: Yeah. They didn't call them geeks, then, did they?

RD: I'm trying to remember what we called them. But you know, the nerdy types that were basically on an academic treadmill. They were focused on college. There's that group. There's the social ones, the hip party people, the right people, the cool people. And then there was the jocks. And then there was the gang-bangers, their clique, the *cholos*. And then there was—oh, gosh. And then there was the stoners. And I found my family with the stoners, after I'd been jumped out of the gang.

KD: At that time, that just meant smoking pot and drinking?

RD: Yeah. Well, just smoking pot. I wasn't drinking. I didn't start drinking until I was twenty-seven. So I was a pothead. I later became a pothead like my stoner friends. And drugs, whatever. Mushrooms, mescaline, acid.

KD: In high school?

RD: Yeah.

KD: And you're getting this—you have a job to have the money, or friends are sharing?

RD: You know, a bag of pot was five dollars at the time. Driving up to San Francisco to hang out in the Haight, because I was part of that group. We had a Volkswagen, it cost us—we'd pool our money on Friday, right out of high school—we'd leave school at three o'clock, pool our money, about four of us, and our drugs, pot, and we'd drive up to San Francisco and spend the weekend in the Haight, getting stoned.

KD: You're kidding.

- RD: And drive back Sunday night and go to school on Monday. Yeah. I was with some hardcore, cool—I mean, it’s a pretty innocent period. Nothing really fucking scary—heroin or meth or anything.
- KD: No. And your mother wasn’t concerned about that, because you were out of the gangs?
- RD: I don’t think—they didn’t know. It was like spending the weekend with my friend.
- KD: And they knew it wasn’t gang-banging friends, so—
- RD: Right. She was happy I was out of that scene.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: But Randall Stout and I . . . The walk-outs started happening at Lincoln High School. Everything’s starting to get political. I think this ’68, ’69.
- KD: I think the walk-outs were ’68.
- RD: I was a late bloomer in high school, so I was—I turned eighteen in my senior year, and I had to register for the draft. One of the big fallouts with my father was he was—my stepfather, he was a Korean War veteran, so he was really self-righteous. “You’ve got to do your part for your country, and you’ve got no fucking balls unless you step up and do your part for the war.” And I was like, totally against the war. I had to register in high school, they did the lottery. Thankfully, my number was really high, like 186. I was getting political, I was organizing groups to do weekend boycotting at the local markets, where I’d run into all the old grannies that I’d mow their lawns, and they’d go, “Shame on you, Richard, for doing all kinds of stuff like that, getting involved with all these nasty people.”
- KD: Now, how did you organize high school kids? I mean, what was that—you went to a group that already existed, or—
- RD: Well, I was stuck in a print shop, a print class, so I designed—I laid out a bunch of “Call for Action” and printed them in the print shop and handed them out. And I started organizing the walkouts out of my high school, just—which I managed to do about four before I got caught. And I also started a newspaper, an off-campus newspaper, because we realized the local on-campus paper was basically kids on Prozac. It was nothing. No issues were being discussed. It was all just fluff.
- KD: Right.
- RD: That’s part of waking up. It’s just like going, “Oh, my God, we’re just being railroaded here.” Railroaded in my education, being brainwashed that everything is cool when it’s all fucked up in this school. And Randall and I organized, through the storefront on Monte Vista, using their mimeograph machine, an off-campus newspaper called the *Student Voice*. And our header had all these guns and fists, and a portrait of Che Guevara.
- KD: Had you seen the Black Panther Party’s materials, or where did it come from?
- RD: No, no, I was—pardon me?
- KD: Where did that image come from, then?
- RD: Oh, because in 1967, while looking at the newspaper one day, which I don’t know why, because I didn’t really read the paper that much. There was a picture of Che Guevara, the announcement of his death—I think it was in the *Herald Examiner*, because our family was adamant about not reading the [LA] *Times*, because it was run by “white racists.” This is my stepfather talking. So we’d read the *Herald Examiner*.
- KD: So probably the information he was getting from the unions, that kind of line.
- RD: Probably for him, yeah. For me, it’s on the front page of the *Herald Examiner*, this incredible guy with this beret and this hair, a rock star. I said, “Who is this guy?” And I read the story, and I was thunderstruck. Then I started bicycling. Because I’d been bicycling, I knew that there was a Free Press bookstore on Colorado Boulevard, on the corner of Colorado Boulevard in Fair Oaks, in the dirtiest, the deadest part. It was basically skid row at that time, that part of Colorado.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: There was a bookstore called the Free Press bookstore. And I used to go . . . I started to bicycle. I was getting political, I had no money, so I’d bicycle up there with heavy baggy dungarees and big sweaters, and I’d shoplift books. Well, Jerry Rubin got me started. It said, “Steal This Book,” so I stole it. [laughter] And most

of the books that I was stealing were either on Buddhism—*Be Here Now* is the other big book that I stole, that—because I was still processing death, my friend. And I remember—let’s just get back to the other stuff. Randall Stout and I said, “Yeah, let’s start it,” so we did. We started mimeographing an off-campus newspaper called the *Student Voice*. And on our masthead was, of course, Che Guevara and these fists and guns, and we dealt with issues.

KD: Such as?

RD: Oh, you know, the railroading of our curriculums directed towards Latinos.

KD: And were you working with other kids on campus other than Randall?

RD: Randall and I were the secret editors of the *Student Voice*. The word was out that they were looking [for us]. The administration was looking for the organizers of the walk-out. The publishers of this revolutionary campus newspaper. We were like Zorro, because everyone was excited, but we didn’t reveal ourselves. And every time we had a walkout, the police presence was pretty intense. They were photographing everybody. And there was—one of my high school teachers, his name was Neil Randall—he must have been about twenty-two, because now in hindsight, you also realize that a lot of the teachers had just been spewed out of the system, right? And Neil Randall was so positive as a young teacher, you know, encouraging us to exercise our rights, our democratic rights, and this and that. So he was on the inside, on the administrative side, one of those young, fiery, still alive, not burned-out high school, just clocking in, teaching the bullshit, and go home. Got really excited about engaging his students and making them wake up. And he was—he’s the only one that knew that Randall and I were publishing this paper, and he was . . . And then the regular school paper, in the letters to the editor, then became a forum where students were dealing, saying, “Why is it that we have an alternative paper out there that is dealing with issues that are more pertinent?” Which was—it started a dialogue, internally, which was not so good for the administration, because people were waking up. So they were on a mission to find out who was doing this. Little did they know it’s a skinny, half-blind white kid named Randall Stout, and me, Rich Duardo.

KD: And what is in it for Randall Stout?

RD: I think he was excited to be part of—you know, there’s a revolution going on, a social revolution, and you can feel it. It’s permeating in every direction.

KD: Yeah, because Franklin isn’t the first school to blow out.

RD: Yeah, it was really Lincoln, Lincoln really set the pace. But I don’t know how many other schools, because . . . I’m sure Roosevelt, Garfield, all that stuff is going. I was dealing with parents that were— [sirens]

KD: Hold on just a minute.

[break in audio]

KD: There we go. We paused for the siren going by. The schools—

RD: Neil Randall was awesome. And then there’s something really . . . And I’m now going down to the counselor’s office, to talk to Mr. Espelin to say, “I’m not happy with what’s going on. This is bullshit, what I’ve been routed through.” And he [says], “Richard, it’s too late to get into a pre-college curriculum. You should have started that in the ninth grade at Luther Burbank.” And I said, “Well, I don’t want to do this. I won’t accept what I’m being set up for.”

KD: This is in the middle of your eleventh grade.

RD: Yeah. And he said, “What do you want to do?” I said, “I want to take advanced English, algebra, chemistry—I want them all. I want that.” And he [says], “You’re not prepared for them.” I said, “I don’t care. It’s my right, I want them all.” Of course, I was dying miserably with the workload. I didn’t do too well. I failed algebra twice, but I was trying. And I wasn’t interested in going to college. I was just—I wanted this, because there were all these people in those rooms that I’d never seen, other than in the quad. The nerds—

KD: So your idea wasn’t . . . No one’s talking to you about, you do this to go to college. It [was] just, “I should be allowed to have these courses.”

- RD: Yeah, whether I'm qualified or not, I want to have experience this.
- KD: Well, it's a public school. There's no such thing as qualifications. [*laughter*]
- RD: Well, they do. You've got to be prepped for it. Your junior high school curriculum, which was like . . . Well, nobody told me that in junior high school. I was being railroaded through that, unconscious. But I said, "I'm awake now, I want this, even though if I'm not prepped for it, I want it, I want these courses."
- KD: So they let you—
- RD: Yeah, but I was dying miserably. I mean, I was failing, but struggling. I was making an attempt. And they discovered who we were, somehow. Somebody spilled the beans inside the school. I got busted. So I was called down into the principal's office, out of class. And—what happened? When I came down there, my parents were in there. And they had four or five issues of the *Student Voice* laid out. We never put our names to it. We had—and they had the flyers that I printed in print shop for the walkouts. And Mr. Tanner told my parents, "I am ready to sign the paperwork to expel your son from high school, and before I do that, I want to appraise you of the situation, so you're aware that there's an opportunity for your son to change, and still get a high school degree, and have a possibility of a life." He presented the evidence, and then they asked me, and I said, "Yeah." So I'm one of the rabble-rousers. I'm one of the guys that cost thousands of dollars of lost education time for students and disrupted classes. And I'm instigating people to do acts of—what do they call it?
- KD: Were you encouraging acts of violence—
- RD: No, no, no.
- KD: Or civil disobedience, or—
- RD: Civil disobedience, yeah.
- KD: You're not allowed to encourage acts of civil disobedience.
- RD: No. So he said, "You've got to—this is you—you've got to get your son to understand what the consequences of this is. I'm not going to sign this, but I want to hear it from him tomorrow, and from you, what course your son wants to take in his life." So he made it pretty scary for them. So we went home, and I thought he would be proud of me, because—and instead, he just went on a tirade, went crazy nuts.
- [*break in audio*]
- KD: This is Karen Davalos with Richard Duardo, and he's telling me about the time that the principal at his high school tried to call him in on his activity, and the results—the family's reaction.
- RD: So I went home with my parents, and I had a tumultuous screaming argument with my father, stepfather. And I was given an ultimatum: that if I didn't change, or quit what I was doing, I would be kicked out of the house. So I—well, I thought, the eleventh grade is about to end, my senior year is about to start, and I said, "Okay." And I was just—I was so ingrained in my politics at that point that I thought, "Oh, my God, I'm going to die inside." You know what I mean?
- KD: It would be a great—your sense of integrity, and—
- RD: I mean, I just thought, "How do I stop what I do? I believe in this." And I thought about it really long and hard, and I thought, "Where in the world—where in this situation now can I be revolutionary, iconoclastic, and a voice of freedom?" And, mind you, I'd never even lifted a pencil or drawn a circle. I was eighteen. I thought, "Artist. You can be as revolutionary and loud and opinionated and self-righteous as you want to be in [this] world—in the art world. And they'll just accept it." You know, what an interesting curiosity, an artist with an opinion. And I thought, "Okay. I'm going to be an artist. This is how I can survive, this is where I feel I can be free." That's it.
- KD: And had you had any—
- RD: None at all. Nope.
- KD: I mean, I'm imagining, you're in public school, there's probably not a lot of art classes. So it's printing, but not—

RD: There are—yeah. Well, there were art courses, but I never took any. But I knew there were in the curriculum, like ceramics, drawing. I think those were the only two courses. Painting and drawing and ceramics. And—unless you want to do the frou-frou stuff, like theatre arts, which was—it was just too flamboyant and too gay for me. I’m not homophobic. I just thought—and that was the theatre group, too. That was another clique, another high school clique. The really loud, extraverted, theatrical—

KD: Yeah, the extraverts.

RD: Yeah. I said, “Don’t want to get into theatre and dance, forget that. But, okay, I can be an artist.” And that was a real conscious decision, I remember. “This is how I’m going to survive.” And right about that time, at the beginning of my senior year, that September, a new teacher had come on campus, fresh out of college.

KD: Wait a minute, can you back to the—you have to go back and tell the principal what you’re going to do.

RD: Oh, yeah. Well, I went back, I agreed. I signed the contract, the agreement that I would not—

KD: Cease and desist.

RD: Yeah, that if I ever were to do this, I’d instantly be expelled, and that I would disengage myself from printing that paper, and all this stuff. And that I would—my work with the United Farm Workers was outside of that—but that I would not disrupt the school, organize and lead any walkouts. And that I would cease to publish this off-campus newspaper, the *Student Voice*.

KD: And how did you handle that with Randall?

RD: Pardon me? I’ve got—could you pause it?

KD: Sure.

[break in audio]

KD: Go ahead.

RD: So—

KD: You were going to tell me about, first, the twelfth-grade teacher that’s new. But question was—

RD: So it must have happened right before.

KD: How do you tell Randall? I mean, how do you—

RD: We were buddies, we were pothead buddies, and trading albums, and this was really great. It’s like meeting at the tree house and going, “Oh, we got busted” kind of shit. But he understood what was going on. He was called down there too.

KD: He was called in too.

RD: So we both had to stop. The little fun and games stuff had ended. And—what happened? So it must have been right before summer, because come September, they introduced—you know, there’s always a couple new teachers, right?

KD: Mhmm.

RD: Come September, a new teacher had been hired, then they announced it over the PA, and his name was Richard Romo.

KD: [laughter] You’re kidding.

RD: He was taking over—he would be teaching a social studies class. I’m at my senior year. I’m pissed off. I’ve signed up for ceramics, painting, and Mr. Darby’s advanced English, struggling through physics—I mean, I was nuts. All these teachers, when they’d see me—mind you now, I’m in courses where I look around and it’s 90 percent white and Asian. I’m going, “Wait a minute. This school is like 80 percent Latino. What the fuck is going on here?” So I thought, “Well, I’m representing.”

KD: But you’re—it sounds like you’re doing well in the English class. It’s just the sciences and the math that you’re not prepared for.

RD: Yeah. I couldn’t get it. My God, algebra? It was bizarre.

KD: If it’s not taught right, especially.

RD: So when I joined—I signed up for—he was the first Latino high school teacher at our school, so I signed up for his class. I didn’t care what it was. And the only other Latino . . . Actually, I’ll correct myself. The only



other Mexican American was Mr. [Jose] Holguin. Mr. Holguin, who fought in the Second World War in the Pacific, flying a B-24. I remember that, because he taught Spanish. But most of the course he'd just share war stories, and they were amazing. He got shot down, had to live in the jungle. So that was Mr. Holguin, who probably was—he wasn't right wing, but he was a coconut. He was toeing the line. Ricardo Romo, he was—this guy was—I mean, he was young. We were all in awe. We're looking at ourselves, he was mirroring us.

KD: Are you aware of that at the time?

RD: Yeah, everybody was. And he was really positive, really supportive, really encouraging, and he mentioned about students organizing themselves throughout high schools and colleges.

KD: Oh, so you get a sense that this is bigger—

RD: I mean, we were like, "How?" That—were legal and okay, as a group. How and what? Because I was like, "Hmm, maybe I can get away with some stuff." And he said they're called UMAS. So we organized a chapter of the UMAS on campus, which was a legal organization.

KD: United Mexican American Students.

RD: And he was our—you know, every organization has to have—what do they call it?

KD: A sponsor, a teacher, a representative.

RD: A teacher sponsor. And Mr. Romo was ours. So he's already now starting to rock the boat, legally. And guess who's back in the picture? Richard Duardo is the first president of UMAS.

KD: Oh, I see. I didn't understand. Before, there was no formal student organization. You really just did this as a very grassroots anarchist, and there wasn't a sense that you could—

RD: Do it within—

KD: A structure that's acceptable to the school.

RD: Yeah. Even though they don't want it, we're now doing it properly. And they have to acknowledge—

KD: If you're a registered student group, like the chess club or whatever.

RD: With one of the instructors or staff or teachers as a sponsor, you're doing it right. So we were doing it right now. So I know he was walking a tightrope, and he was trying to be careful that he didn't incite us to the point of going, "Okay, if we can do this, then we can organize walkouts." He was just saying, "What you're doing here is historic, and you have to do it right, or you're just going to blow it."

KD: Oh, so he even gave you a sense of context at the time.

RD: Right, right.

KD: Wow.

RD: And then within six months, UMAS had been on a national level transmutating into MEChA. So our chapter of them became MEChA.

KD: And as the first president, what are you doing? Weekly meetings to—

RD: Yeah. And I remember, Mr. Tanner, [the principal], he would come down. He was pissed, because I'm back at it again. But I'm not doing anything wrong, but I'm now becoming a thorn again.

KD: Was there a goal of the group at the time, or are you still figuring that out?

RD: Well, yeah. We were, I think, pushing for better—the big issue was the counseling, that all the counseling was directed towards Latinos, railroading them into menial education to prepare them for menial jobs. That was really obvious, and that was the big core issue.

KD: And so you guys didn't use—couldn't use the disguise of a cultural group. That you were just out there doing the—campaigning for better education.

RD: Advocates for more egalitarian counseling, for both—because there was also ... You know, they still had home economics classes that young Latinas were being railroaded into, service industry type jobs. And so were the young men, and the demographics show it. Look at the lists of students, and by their names, their surname, guess who occupies most of those courses.

KD: Were you gathering that data, or is it just observation?

RD: Yes, observation.

- KD: Whoa, you guys are checking out the enrollments for—
- RD: We were on it. And they were onto us that we were on it. So it was getting pretty sketchy, because they know, they can just roll it back and see where this all started, where we're doing it within the system, seem to be tying with this young [new teacher], I mean, he was a big cross-country hero, he broke records. Richard Romo was famous nationally as being a Mexican American kid that broke major . . . That's the right time, yeah. I mean, he was famous. Darling of his college. And he came out to the West Coast to teach high school, social studies at our high school. Nobody—I didn't know who he was. It took years to just realize, "Oh, my God, we had a major person in our high school at a real crucial period." Just incredible. I was getting—so I took these art classes, and much to my surprise, I actually was talented.
- KD: So up until then you had no—
- RD: Nothing.
- KD: Crayons at home, it wasn't a thing that you were doing.
- RD: Never went to a museum in my life up to that point.
- KD: Well, let's look even more widely than going to museums. Did your family have a kind of sense of visual, creative expression?
- RD: No. [static]
- KD: Maybe your mom is gardening, or . . . She doesn't have time, probably.
- RD: No time. She was raising nine kids.
- KD: Right. And even the way she arranges the home, do you have a sense that, "This is my domain, I'm going to take care of it"?
- RD: Oh, well, there were doilies over furniture and stuff like that. Is that what you mean?
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: It was well-kept house. She was a good homemaker.
- KD: But other than that?
- RD: No.
- KD: What about—you hadn't talked about—
- RD: Books. And I remember she got us the *Encyclopedia Britannica* from a salesman, and that night there was a big fight, and the next day, she had to return them.
- KD: What about—you didn't mention any kind of religious or spiritual—
- RD: No, that was absolutely—my stepfather was a declared atheist.
- KD: Atheist. And your mom didn't have a Catholic background?
- RD: She tried. We managed our first communion and then he laid down the law. It was always his way or, [so] there would be physical conflict.
- KD: So in the home, there's not a lot of sense of color even.
- RD: No. Just a household trying to maintain itself with fourteen participants.
- KD: So you go to an art class.
- RD: Ceramics. I don't want to throw pots. I can make sculptures. There's an armature for making heads, so I started making sculptures. I made a portrait of Ho Chi Minh.
- KD: [laughter] Were you reading *The Red Book*?
- RD: Chairman Mao. Yeah, I was. What else did I do?
- KD: Yeah, because you mentioned actually before—
- RD: Ho Chi Minh. Chairman Mao. I did a portrait of Che Guevara.
- KD: You're kidding.
- RD: And they were all incredible, lifelike. I was using terra cotta, which is a very . . . You could really manipulate it. You could get some incredible detail. I made a portrait of my younger brother. I made a portrait of an old [man in the neighborhood].
- KD: These were like busts then?

- RD: Yeah, busts. But they were, “Oh, my God, the kid knows what he’s doing.” Because the woman that ran that class, Mrs. Wong, [got] on the phone, call downtown, the central school district office.
- KD: Yeah?
- RD: I remember, whatever, whoever was in charge of the departments of the arts for the entire unified school district—
- KD: Coming out to see your work?
- RD: Coming out. And everybody [is asking], “Who is this kid?” I’m just like, just playing with this stuff, having a great time. So they organized a show for me, and they showed it at a bank somewhere in Wilshire Boulevard. I was showcased. And Mr. Schwartz, who taught the art classes, he was basically a frustrated artist. Great guy. He was just saying, “Those who can, do, and those who can’t, teach.” You could tell he was a burned out . . . This is a paycheck, and I’m babysitting a bunch of kids. But when he noticed that I could draw when he set up all the still lifes, which was basically thirty-five minutes of babysitting—“Now, okay, you guys, draw this”—so he could thumb through his art magazines and read the newspaper. It was a babysitting class, there was no real art teaching going on in his class.
- KD: No technique, yeah.
- RD: But when he saw what I was doing, and it was like, “Are you taking classes privately? Are you going to some . . .” I said, “Nope.” He was, “Okay, this kid’s got something,” which I didn’t know. He says, “Draw the thing.” I’m drawing the thing. You know what I’m saying?
- KD: Yeah. Well, not really, because I don’t have that kind of talent, but I can understand it came easy to you.
- RD: Yeah. It was like a cakewalk. “Sure, I’ll do that.”
- KD: And when they’re telling—you’re getting—it sounds like you . . . Let me ask the question: Did you have a sense at the time that they’re noticing you, and that maybe there is something?
- RD: Yeah. Well, Mrs. Wong saw it right away. She just got on the horn, got some people from the central district or whatever.
- KD: And did you believe it?
- RD: Well, they all came in and looked at the stuff. I don’t recall any, whatever, the adoration stuff. I just recall, “Oh, you’re going to show it? Cool. Can I bring my mom?”
- KD: Really?
- RD: Yeah. And—but I was more excited about this teacher, and what he was helping us do. Dr.—
- KD: Richard—
- RD: Ricardo Romo. And I was now, like, balancing. And I got—I didn’t get busted for anything, but I got called into the principal’s office again. And I was, I thought, “Oh, my God, what could I possibly get busted for now?” And it was—who was there was Mr. Espelin. He’s gotten awards now for helping so many—he’s famous for placing so many kids, Latino kids, into college.
- KD: Okay.
- RD: You know, getting them packages for colleges. And it was Mr. Espelin and Mr. Tanner again, that scary refrigerator-sized principal. And you know, they still paddled then. So I was like, “Shit, what did I do? What could I possibly have done?” I couldn’t figure anything out. And then when I get into his office, Mr. Espelin is there, the counselor, who I’d been, like, on his case. I wasn’t very angry, but I let him know, “You really have fucked up a lot of people’s lives, railroading us like this.”
- KD: Yeah, I guess he would be the source of—
- RD: Yeah, he was toeing the party line, just put them on a fucking train to nowhere. And I thought, “What’s he doing here?” They said—you know, and I’m now playing the game, and I’m getting close to doing it again.
- KD: What do you mean?
- RD: Like starting trouble. But now in the framework of acceptable behavior and civil disobedience.
- KD: Okay. So the thing that’s on the plate would be some civil disobedience.
- RD: Yeah. Okay, so it looks . . . Maybe, I’m thinking, in their mind, it looks like I’m getting ready to cause some trouble again, except it’s going to be harder for them to shut it down. I’m president of MEChA, I’m still

really smart—I mean, smart, street smart, politically smart. I’m organizing dozens of kids with placards on the weekends around supermarkets. I’m—

KD: For the UFW boycotts?

RD: Yeah. And they called me in to tell me, basically, that they think they can—they have an idea to help me, because I didn’t do all the pre-college stuff and they think I’m college bound. And they’d really like to see me get—talent like mine, you know. “A mind like yourself shouldn’t be wasted. You didn’t do all the pre-stuff, but we have idea of how to catch you up.” “What’s that?” “It’s a program called Upward Bound.” I said, “What’s that?” “Well, they put you in the summer into a college dormitory on a campus. In this case, it’ll be Occidental College, which is in Eagle Rock. And you will be with a bunch of high potential, ill-prepared minorities, blacks and Chicanos. And you’ll be able to be put on a fast track to getting into college.” By catching us up. Compressed courses and stuff like that. Experiencing real college courses, so we could really get into it. And I said, “Sure.” I mean, because it’s—live in a dorm during the summer and get away from home. I said, “Sure, I’m down for that.” So I went to Occidental College that summer and lived in a dorm. It was insane. It was hardcore political. It was like a love-fest. Everybody there, we’re obviously, we’re all misfits, and really—they’d probably call us ADD or hyperactive.

KD: I see what you’re saying.

RD: But we’re basically just balls-out teenager, and we really want more. And they’re trying to figure out how to give us more and reprogram us, right, so we don’t go out there and burn down banks and shit. And I was put in a dormitory that was run by obviously, in hindsight, they were young people too, twenty-two-, twenty-three-year-olds. Our mentor dorm mom and my “parents” were Sean Lara, who is now Juan Lara, and Joanne, his wife. And he’s—they had just left the order. He was a priest and she was a nun. And they had fallen in love, busted out, and got this great gig to babysit all these crazy Latinos. We’re talking Chicanos, blacks, Puerto Ricans, or angry white trash. Everybody’s got a chip on their shoulder and we want to change the world, and they had us all together for two months in a dorm.

KD: Now, was there tension between groups, or—

RD: Always, but everything was worked out. Everything was so dynamic, everybody was like, conflict, resolution. Let’s deal with this. Stop, sit down, let’s deal with it. It was an incredible compressed course of, like, fucking managing in the world, which I thought was awesome. The government funded some pretty hardcore shit. But in hindsight I realized it actually was a program of compromising. It took about ten years to realize it, [that] they just shut me down. But that was—so that was an amazing experience.

And from there, coming back and finishing up high school, I was just now geared towards, “Okay, I can play this game.” I mean, I can front this way, some crazy wild artist, and I can still follow what I really believe in, which my politics were left, left of center, hardcore. I joined the SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] chapter at Occidental College, which was the last semester of my high school year, because I met them while I was there in the summer. Because they’re—you know, Occidental College is basically a bunch of fucking white kids, and the SDS chapter was a bunch of wannabe white kids, wannabe revolutionary white kids. So when they see all these crazy blacks and Chicanos in this dorm that summer, they came in and started sussing out the situation, and handpicking, like, the craziest motherfuckers.

KD: And that was you. [laughter]

RD: And when I went back to finish my last semester, I was invited to join SDS at Occidental. I’m going, “I’m in high school,” and I thought, “Well, this is cool, I like the politics, I like what they’re doing.”

KD: And what were they doing?

RD: They were fucking burning down banks and trying to shut down induction centers, you know? The demographics are already out. All the Chicanos that are being . . . You know, I had to register for the draft, and I did my homework: 90 percent of all the Chicanos that registered at the Lincoln Heights induction center were going to Vietnam. And I found out—I met some Quakers, First Friends, good Quakers, when I went over to register for . . . Because I had to register. They were marching outside of the induction center or the—whatever, whatever it is that you have to go—and then say, “Yeah, you got my body.”

KD: Recruitment center, yeah.

RD: Or register for the draft, or—yeah, you have to register. They're walking out there telling all these Latinos, "Don't register here. This is the information. 90 percent of all the—everybody registered at this center is being drafted and sent to Vietnam. Go register in Pasadena at this induction center." Because they were building a class action suit, which was, 90 percent of the draftees, people registered at the Pasadena center were white, and 5 percent were Latino and blacks, because that's Pasadena. And of course, the only ones being drafted and sent off were the 5 [percent] or 6 percent Latinos and blacks out of that one. So they were building a case saying, "This is all basically—you're sending minorities to fight this war." And they're not like crazy communists. Quakers are just trying to say, "There's something wrong in this picture here." And I met eventually my girlfriend there, who's a Quaker, who I wound up living with for about six years. She's a Mackenzie, with her hippie family up in Sierra Madre. But that got me into a world of pain with my stepfather, because I did, you know, I did this in good conscience, I believed this is correct. I went to Pasadena and I registered as CO, conscientious objector, and became part of a big class-action suit. I have to pee.

[break in audio]

KD: Here we are again.

RD: So by joining this—by registering CO [conscientious objector], joining in this class-action suit, hooking up with Quakers, I just basically unleashed the mega-wrath of my stepfather.

KD: And you're still in high school.

RD: Yeah. Almost the last semester of high school. I'm part of this high-potential program, Upward Bound, I'm doing all the right stuff. I mean, during the regular school year, they run a weekend program. They keep you going. So yeah, I've got this incredible curriculum of trying to make art, which I'm really enjoying, being down with United Farm Workers, running with my crews and organizing boycotts around supermarkets in Highland Park, Eagle Rock, doing the right thing and doing it right. And then secretly meeting with this wannabe chapter of SDS people at Occidental College. And it was something that happened in Santa Barbara. It had to do with the war. There was going to be something major happening at UCSB, Isla Vista, which was a community of student [housing]. And our SDS chapter decided that we had to send a cadre up, and the cadre was not by volunteer, it was by selection. The cadre that was chosen was three Latinos and two blacks, by the steering committee of SDS, and our job was to represent—

[break in audio]

RD: So after going to this rally in Isla Vista, and realizing how close it was to either getting killed by cops or beaten terribly—I mean, they were cracking some serious heads. I know they were causing some brain damage to people. And when we got back to LA, it was on the drive back that I looked around the car, and it just dawned on me: we were the sacrificial crew.

KD: Oh, the color.

RD: Yeah. And that really, really pissed me off. First, about how—that I could be that naïve, and that, you know, we could be betrayed that way and set up that way by people that [you thought were progressive].

KD: Doing exactly the same thing that the military was doing, sending the people of color to the front line. Wow.

RD: Yeah. So I just kind of shared my revelation. We just saw some gnarly shit.

KD: Yeah, because this is after the free speech movement, the development of—pushing for ethnic studies. This is—the military had already learned riot tactics, had them down.

RD: Yeah. And the police.

KD: Right, who they worked, whether it was SWAT brought in, or whether it was National Guard, whatever. They have that whole system down by then.

RD: Yeah. And I just thought, “You know what?” And I shared this on the drive back. I said, “We are—we’re just fucking cannon fodder for [both] sides. We’re the ones that jump into the trench and really fight the fight, whether for the far right or the far left, we’re cannon fodder. This is really fucked up.”

KD: And what did your friends say?

RD: We came back and confronted the group, when we had to do a report. We just called them on all their shit, punky white motherfucking ball-less pieces of shit. “What are you going to do this winter? Go home to the Hamptons and kick it with your family and say how revolutionary you are?” I just said, “I’m out of this shit. Fuck you guys, you’re all full of shit. You’re worse than they are. You’re phony. How could you guys have set us up like that? This is bullshit.” So I quit SDS, and I felt betrayed by the left. And I thought, “Well, I’m happy being an artist. I’m just going to make art.” And my politics come out in my art. The predator piece up there? That’s still shaking it up. The one on the wall.

KD: Which one are we looking at? The gun? Or behind the duck?

RD: Do you want to pause it?

KD: Yeah.

[break in audio]

KD: Okay. We’re back; we were looking at some artwork. You come back from this—

RD: Yeah, with another minor epiphany of like, “Wow, okay, I’m betrayed now on both sides, so I’m just going to hunker down and just be the bad boy that I could possibly be in the art world. That’s where I’m going to manifest my dissatisfaction with the status quo. I’ll be the artist prankster.” And I came back. Romo was an advisor. I mean, I was a leader. Dr.—Juan Lara also, he became my surrogate father, because I was pretty disenfranchised with my stepfather. So I made it through school, graduated. On the day of my high school graduation, I was the first male on both my mother’s side and supposedly my stepfather’s side, first male to ever get a high school degree, which was a major thing, except he didn’t show up to my graduation. I mean, he was just—he did not want to acknowledge anything, because I was still the other man’s son. I wasn’t his own flesh and blood. So I came home from my graduation, took my gown off, didn’t go to any of the parties, packed up all my stuff, and left home.

KD: Wow. Did your mother know that was going to happen?

RD: Yeah. I said, “I’m out of here. I did what I was supposed to do.”

KD: And what was the plan?

RD: Well, I had a full ride with Occidental. I had a full ride with the San Francisco Art Institute. I just had to decide what to do. And I decided not to go to school.

KD: Wait, back up. How did you get these full rides? Was it through the Upward Bound program?

RD: Yeah. Well, there’s an intensive amount of coaching and doing applications, and the whole idea is to get as many of these people, students going through that program, college-bound.

KD: And—didn’t you have to have a portfolio for—

RD: Yeah, I was making things.

KD: So you had put together a portfolio.

RD: Yeah. I mean, I was getting so much attention that it was like, doors were popping open, people were making calls, and things were happening. To me, it was like, I’m just having fun, whatever. I’ve never been to a museum, even at that point, so I was just going, “Well, this is cool. People are happy about what I’m doing. They’re not on my case about it.”

KD: Right. Yeah, you’re getting validation from other adults, whereas you hadn’t had any validation from other adults in the system.

RD: Correct. So two of my mentors at this point in my life are Richard Romo and Juan Lara and his wife Joanne. So I leave home, crash at friends’ houses. I go for the interview at the Art Institute of San Francisco, and I realize, you know, I’m still hanging out with a bunch of guys that are doing drugs. I mean, smoking pot, it’s innocent shit, in light of what—

- KD: What happens now, yeah.
- RD: Yeah. And doing mushrooms and backpacking, and weekends of going up to the Haight, just being really—experiencing the '60s, really.
- KD: But it's the '70s.
- RD: Well, it's the early '70s, but it went on for two or three years.
- KD: It continues, yeah.
- RD: And I just—when I went up there, when I did the four-day—whatever they call it, the prep stuff. Where you get to—you're shown the campus, they park you in a dorm so you can experience dorm life, all I saw was drugs, drugs, drugs around me. Everybody was always stoned, everybody was on acid.
- KD: Right, and what did that—
- RD: It freaked me out, because I thought—my home was the counter-balance to going over the edge, and that was about to end, I thought, "My God, I can't be in this environment, because I'll go for it," you know what I mean?
- KD: You had that sensibility—
- RD: Yeah. I just went, "I can't be here. I'll go for it." And I thought, "This is not good for me," so I opted not to take that. And then I thought about all of that gucky white shit at Oxy, and I went, "I don't want to—they'll turn me into a coconut. I don't want to go there either."
- KD: So what were your mentors saying?
- RD: I was pretty inaccessible. I was living on a bicycle, crashing around Highland Park or South Pasadena with friends. And then, I don't know, I think . . . I'd blown my opportunities, meaning the windows had closed. I blew them. And I don't know who I ran into—it might have been Juan Lara—who said, "What are you doing? You had this, you had that." And I said, "Eh-h." And he goes, "Don't do this." I said, "Well, it's too late on all that other shit." He said, "You can go to junior college and get back on track, and methodically work your way into a four-year institution, transfer in. Just pace yourself." And I said, "Oh, okay." So I found a sixty-five-dollars a month cottage in Pasadena, bordering Altadena, in the black area. And I moved in there. And I just bicycled to PCC, Pasadena City College. Well, I had to move to Pasadena. I think that's what prompted that. In order—what are your choices? LACC, Glendale. I'm like going no, no, no. And PCC had a great reputation as a jump-off point into transferring you into a four-year. I think this was Juan's advice. But you have to live in Pasadena. So I took this sixty-five-dollars a month cottage—
- KD: And your only method of transportation is your bike.
- RD: Yeah. And I got [an] EOP—
- KD: It's a—what kind of bike?
- RD: I don't know. Ten speed.
- KD: Okay, at least it's ten speed. *[laughter]*
- RD: EOP was in place—educational opportunity grants. I think that's what it, EOP—the Educational Opportunity Program.
- KD: Program. So when you are registering for a junior college, you don't need your—if you're asking for financial aid, you don't need your parents—
- RD: No. No, no. So it was never more than . . . You know, junior college back then, the grants for a semester, or for the year, were like fifteen hundred, two thousand dollars. It was enough. Take a part-time job, do something.
- KD: So you had a part-time job?
- RD: Yeah. I worked at a Circle K.
- KD: Grocery store.
- RD: Yeah, a grocery store. Bicycled to work, go to school. And I used to bicycle down Green Avenue, and at night I used to listen to the radio. And the coolest radio station, which was starting to play, is FM radio, just started . . . KPPC was off of Green Street. And I was listening to Baba Ram Dass, Alan Watts, some cool psychedelic music. And I always bicycled past it, and I'd go, "This is where it all comes from. These guys

hang out here and talk.” So I started going in there and meeting the most incredible fuckin’ people in my life. Like Alan Watts, Baba Ram Dass.

KD: Right. How did you make that introduction?

RD: Because you’re like this geeky—you know, when you’re really young, adults are excited that young people—

KD: Are interested.

RD: Are interested. And they encourage you, and they allow you to be there, experience it, at the very least. So I’m stealing books, shoplifting books at the Free Press bookstore, because I can’t afford to buy them. I’m educating myself, reading some hardcore shit.

KD: Now you said you had done that before. Is this the same—

RD: Yeah, it’s been ongoing for years. Most of my library of almost three hundred books were stolen, and they were all political, pretty much. Very few art books. I was still trying to figure out how to be a participant in changing the world.

KD: So Communist literature, and—

RD: And first-person accounts, and then a good—you know, I would probably say half of it was spiritual, because I was still trying to process the death of my friend that was already like five or six years past. To me, that was the big question, was how to change the world, and how to understand what life is, because I don’t get it. I don’t know. I was trying to reconcile—in the vacuum of having no religious context to process things, because that was a no-no in our household, an avid atheist that was constantly reminding us that there was no God, there is no God.

KD: Oh, so it was a discussion.

RD: Well, no—

KD: Not a discussion, but you were—

RD: There was pronunciation.

KD: Pronunciation, yeah, that’s a better way to put it.

RD: Basically just, “Shut up and listen. There is no God.” So we were all pretty fucked up as teenagers.

KD: And your mother never privately blessed you or anything?

RD: No. So a good amount of my processing was trying to figure out what life is all about and be—trying to change the world. Sometimes it would switch to trying to change the world, and second, what’s life—the meaning of life. And these radio programs were just an opportunity for me to just go, oh, my God, there’s a way of dealing with this, understanding what it is all about. Alan Watts blew me away. Dr. Richard Alpert— Baba Ram Dass—blew me away. And I started to get a feeling of like, I can find my way here on a spiritual level too. And I was so preoccupied with those two things in my life that I was virgin until I was twenty-one. It never occurred to me to have sex. I was dealing with two things: changing the world, or—

KD: Were you having girlfriends?

RD: I think a lot of girls liked me, because I was told later, at our first reunion ten years later, I was told by all these hot girls in high school, when they’d see me, when they saw me at the first reunion, you hear all the stories, they thought, “Oh, Richard, I thought you were gay.” I said, “Why?” “Because you were—you never had a girlfriend.” I had the biggest crushes on girls, but I would never act on it. I said—I don’t know—Lisa, Lisa, what was her name? Lisa somebody. I remember walking her home three times out of the week carrying her books, and I never kissed her, for two years. I was too terrified. But I had the biggest crush on her. So when I finally got out, I was a skinny, hungry student living on peanut butter and jam and going to [junior college]. At one point, Juan and Joanne got a house on Brigden Road in Pasadena about six blocks away from PCC, and they invited me to come live with them, because they scored an incredible house with a guesthouse, a private guesthouse. And Juan made the big overture: “If you stay in college and work your way there, here you are. We’ll just—no more responsibilities of having debts. We’ll give you a token charge of you have to pay rent, thirty-five dollars a month.”

KD: How generous.



- RD: Yeah. And my Quaker girlfriend, Susan Mackenzie, we fell in love and we moved in together. And I mean, we were just this incredible hippie commune situation. Joanne and Juan were—I know they were under thirty, and we were upstairs, like twenty . . . It was a separate, entirely separate access, separate kitchen and stuff.
- KD: About what year is that then?
- RD: Maybe '73, '72, '73. And Susan and I went through PCC together and transferred both to UCLA, and we had this idyllic hippie life.
- KD: Now, you're skipping over a couple of years there. There's this going to school—
- RD: Yeah, taking art courses.
- KD: Taking art courses.
- RD: Anthropology. The only things that interest me. I mean, you had to take the prerequisites in order to transfer, so I did those. But the elective courses—
- KD: The electives?
- RD: The electives that I took were art or really exotic classes that I just wanted to know something. Like geology was one of my favorite classes, cultural anthropology, which as a result of that course, my introduction to Carlos Castaneda and the teaching—
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: And that book had just come out. So this teacher, probably in her mid-twenties, was, "Here it is. You're Mexican, you're from the desert. Richard, you're Yaqui?" You know, that kind of shit. I was like, "Yeah." "Look, you've got this whole history to your people." So I really got into Carlos Castaneda.
- KD: Could you back up a little bit? You had a sense that you were Yaqui, you don't learn that much later in life?
- RD: Just stuff like that doesn't occur to you. Like any Mexican American or Chicano, you know that you're half of something, a European that raped your grandmother, and the other half is whatever Indian group you're from. And I never pursued it.
- KD: It's part of your growing-up knowledge. Everybody kind of knows that.
- RD: Yeah. But the pride kicked in when that book came out, the teachings—the Yaqui way of knowledge. I was like, "Hey, I'm a Yaqui. That's trippy." It was like all this heavy-duty cosmic shit coming out of the Sonora desert. Awesome. So I did whatever you have to do there for two years, and then—and wasn't involved in anything political. And now, my mind is rewired strictly on making art. I'm becoming an artist.
- KD: What are your influences at the time?
- RD: Andy Warhol, Marcel Duchamp. The minimalists were just kicking in big time.
- KD: Now, they're not teaching that in class, though, are they? You're seeing that.
- RD: Yeah, I mean, I'm engaged in the art world.
- KD: Reading the magazines.
- RD: I finally went—the first time I went to a museum at LACMA, ever, the first time I stepped into a museum was at the LA County Museum to see a show called *Art and Technology*, which is a seminal show. And I saw the mud bubbling in the courtyard, and I was going . . . That's when my mind said, "Anything can go." And I'm reading Marcel Duchamp, that, like, idea preempts object. Whatever you say is art is art. And I'm like, yeah, reading Joseph Kosuth and all this fucking wordy-ass art period stuff. And I'm looking at Joseph Beuys and a bunch of lard and shit, and I'm going, "yeah." This, to me, is revolutionary. It's not, you know, studio paintings and portraiture—
- KD: Landscape and portraiture.
- RD: Landscapes of rich people, it's like fucking guys.
- KD: But you're not getting that in class, are you?
- RD: No.
- KD: Yeah, my understanding is that doesn't become part of the art history course until the '80s.
- RD: No, no. I'm just chasing it down hardcore on my own.
- KD: Yeah. Okay. So chasing it down where?

- RD: Stealing books. Going to the library and going to museums and shows as much as I can.
- KD: Here in Los Angeles?
- RD: Yeah. And the second most major show that blew me away was Andy Warhol's show at what's now called the Norton Simon Museum. And I must have been like twenty-three, twenty-four, and meeting him, and shaking his hand. He would never remember me, you meet a lot of people.
- KD: Oh, because he had come to give a talk.
- RD: Well, he had a show there.
- KD: Right.
- RD: And I thought, "My God, this is great." It's all—he's just appropriating, which is basically the foundation of my work. I just saw it—between the philosophy of Marcel Duchamp and seeing Andy Warhol's work, that it's all about whatever you appropriate and change it, the context and the presentation, it reanimates itself as an entirely new thing, an object or a statement.
- KD: So that vision of your art happens during the time you're at Pasadena City College, not necessarily because of the courses, right?
- RD: Yeah. I'm operating from a very methodical, calculating mind, because that's where I had to be in the politics side of my life, methodical and calculating about how to organize a group of people, how to do it properly, how not to get busted, how to work within the framework of acceptable civil obedience. I mean, my brain is wired to be methodical. And I thought, "Okay, I'm very methodically going to be a very calculated artist here." There's no passion here. It's pure methodical, left foot over right foot to get to a certain point. I mean, I wasn't shooting for fame or adoration; I was shooting for an ability to create a revenue stream to keep going. That was it. Make an object that sells.
- KD: And you figured that out in what year? What year are you deciding that?
- RD: I'm thinking about maybe twenty-three, twenty-four.
- KD: And that's because you see that—
- RD: If I don't figure it out, I have to take a job and work for the man.
- KD: Okay.
- RD: I was determined never to work for anybody. I would apprentice, but I would never work for anybody.
- KD: What do you mean, apprentice? Working—
- RD: If I saw somebody that I really respected, I would offer myself to them, and say, "Any way I can—"
- KD: As an artist.
- RD: Well, as an apprentice, no. I'm an apprentice, I'm not an artist.
- KD: No, but I mean to another artist, not to some other field.
- RD: Yeah. Right.
- KD: Okay. And in the classroom, they're teaching you technique, I imagine?
- RD: Yeah. Douglas Bond, painting. Oh, what was his name, Sam—what was his name? It was a Japanese printmaking instructor at PCC that was phenomenal, because his work was commentary, political, Japanese. Yamaguchi? [Yes.]
- KD: You can come back to it.
- RD: Yeah, I'll figure it out. Phil Cornelius. I was getting into ceramics, hardcore. So I was meeting Paul Soldner, Peter Voukos. Phil Cornelius was like a lightning rod of the new movement in ceramics.
- KD: In ceramics.
- RD: And his buddies were Paul Soldner, Peter Voukos, John Mason. They'd be coming around the studio and hanging out, and I was meeting . . . At the time, I didn't know the magnitude of who they were, because they were just regular guys hanging out with Phil Cornelius, who was a god to me. And I was trying to figure out how to put imagery on ceramics. This was all starting to lead towards printmaking. And I couldn't figure out how to do it, and then somebody said, "Well, you should try silkscreen decals." And I said, "Ceramic [decals]?" "Yeah." "Where's that?" "Well . . ." Yamaguchi, whatever his name, the printmaking instructor, his room was so crowded, fifty students, you could never learn anything. It was just nuts.

And somebody said in the—what do you call it?—that’s the art department, and then there’s . . . At PCC, there’s a whole other department where you can learn professional skills.

KD: Right. Graphic arts and—they separate these things.

RD: Yeah. So the more vocationally oriented, where it’s really, you learn how to—skills that are going to get you a job out there. So I think it was science and technology. The department had a silk-screening course, like to learn how to make real estate signs. You know, real professional, but professional equipment, because obviously they get more state funding to buy equipment, state of the art equipment versus the fuckin’ art department. And I checked out the class, and I walked into a room that had state of the art silk-screening equipment. And I’m still thinking I just want to learn to make decals, but I’ll take the course. And it was being taught by a twenty-seven-year-old by the name of Dennis Anderson, who then became my next mentor. And I learned everything, because when I commit, I’m ferocious. And I became his lab assistant, because I was so committed. And I wound up figuring out how to put photographic images on clay, but by now my heart was no longer in that. It was this is an incredible medium.

KD: What’s speaking to you in that medium?

RD: That you can—it transcends making an object, but a multiple of objects, so you don’t have to rely—I mean, I was already starting to take studio painting. Oh, my God, all the money you have to spend to buy the oils, the canvases, work on a painting for about three weeks, a month, and then if I’m lucky, to sell it. My brain’s going through this, [thinking,] “If you’re lucky to sell it, you sell it once and that’s it, and you’ve got to start this whole process [all over again].”

KD: Is it also—are you any good at paint?

RD: No, I didn’t think I was that good as a painter.

KD: Okay.

RD: But I’m [thinking], “Damn, a lot of material, a lot of time.”

KD: But it’s the same in ceramics, you make it once—

RD: To make one object. I don’t think I want to go this route. In my mind, it put me in a precarious situation on having to rely on a dealer. And in the amount of time you make a pot, because you know, it’s—past the romance of putting paint [on] a surface, ultimately it has to become a commodity, and it has to be handled by merchants, dealers, brokers, whatever you want to call them.

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

RD: Yeah, I’m looking at the whole linear structure of commerce and I thought, “Oh, this is how they control artists,” because I’m starting to react to that. There’s a system in place here, [and I resent it].

KD: Oh. So are you using the same kind of analysis that you learn through the Chicano movement stuff, in terms of class and race and power analysis, you’re applying that to the art world?

RD: Yeah, this sets up a situation, a dynamic where I have to be dependent on somebody for my livelihood, and I have to transcend this system. And you know, I’d just seen Andy Warhol’s show, he’s doing multiples on canvas, he’s silk-screening. This is—so you can have one idea, and you can do it not once just to sell once as a painting, but to do it in groups twenty or forty or fifty or one hundred, and now you have an opportunity to satiate not just one collector, but twenty or thirty. [I’m thinking,] “Okay, I’m going to go this route.”

KD: You want to move your car? Let’s pause for a minute.

[*break in audio*]

KD: This is Karen Davalos with Richard Duardo, and today is November 5, 2007. This is our second tape on our first session for the [CSRC Oral Histories Series]. And Richard, you were telling me about Dennis Anderson and the print shop, and how it’s so exciting to you, that new media.

RD: Right. So Dennis was fresh out of Art Center [College of Design]. He’s a painter. Kind of Wayne Thiebaud-ish kind of paintings. A great guy, an incredible inspiration. Really encouraging. Because I became his TA

almost immediately, the first semester, I was there every free moment I had. I was there, I was honing a craft, a technical craft.

**KD:** Now, help me understand the way folks like you and Dennis Anderson see this. He's obvious in, like you said, a different department.

**RD:** Yeah, he's really—

**KD:** He's trained as, it sounds like—

**RD:** A painter or graphic designer. He had a balanced education in Art Center. He probably took this job because it—

**KD:** It pays the rent.

**RD:** It pays the rent while he's struggling as a painter. And he encouraged that. He could see that I was just—I just saw it. I saw what it meant for me. And when I'm excited about something, I am like an insatiable sponge. I just go for it, everything, I read everything on it, try every technique, and once I exhaust that place, I even go outside of that to get more.

**KD:** Actually, you answered a little of my question, but let me see if I can push you farther. Some people learn by doing, some people learn by books; you're doing both.

**RD:** Right. Because I know he was teaching a course that he had rudimentary—at one point, I realized just rudimentary education, in terms of the course, the technical course he was teaching, he only had so much. And he was actually encouraging more for people to use it as an art medium; he was actually probably not following the curriculum that was prescribed in that department to teach us how to print real estate signs, you know what I mean?

**KD:** Yeah.

**RD:** Technical, whatever. He was pushing us more as an art medium. So he was kind of an iconoclast within his department, which was the best environment for me to be in. Otherwise, if he was a hardcore vocation-oriented instructor, I'd be shut down left and right, whatever I was doing, because now I was experimenting in every direction, and he was encouraging it. And I was really so good at it, but I was helping his workload, because I became his TA.

**KD:** Is that normal, for a student—

**RD:** Well, I got a work-study job, part of my EOP funding, and I asked if I could do my work-study there. So I became his teaching assistant, and I was in the darkroom all the time working big, large-format cameras to make my art to [orthochromatic] film positives. I was just nuts. There's an endless supply of film. This is a vocation course, so all we have to do is go down to the requisition department, and I'd get big, five-hundred-dollar boxes of twenty-four by thirty-inch orthochromatic film, and check it out, go upstairs, and burn it all up.

**KD:** So that's not the same as the art department. You'd have to get your own supplies, I'd imagine.

**RD:** Yeah.

**KD:** Oh, what a find.

**RD:** All the paper I wanted, all the materials, all the ink, everything, because it was a vocational course. And he was encouraging people to make art. So it was a great, great just—I don't know, a little safe place to just be free.

**KD:** Do you remember some of those early experiments?

**RD:** Well, yeah. I mean, I was just at my brother's house about two months ago, and I saw some of my early prints, and I was like, "Wow. I remember that. I remember why I did that. I tried to figure out how to do four-color processing." I was pushing myself to keep refining the understanding of this medium. It's 2000 years old, and this was the cutting edge of technology, because they have to teach entry-level professional screen-printers here. So everything that was coming up on the market was being brought into the studio.

**KD:** Right.

**RD:** So I was learning [with] brand-new pieces of equipment being dropped into the studio, and I was like, "Yeah, get out of the way, I'll figure this out" kind of stuff. I think that was the best—PCC was also—it's a

junior college, so in junior colleges—I didn't realize this until I transferred to UCLA, which I found the art department there to be more theoretical—that in junior college, it's hands-on, including the art department. They show you technique. And it was time to—I took it from two years to three years because I just did not want to leave that school. And Juan [Lara], because he was now in charge—he was at Haines [Hall].

KD: Haines. I don't know what—

RD: Haines Hall at UCLA became Chicano central.

KD: Oh, right.

RD: And Juan, at this point, is moving up in his academic climb. He's at UCLA, leading the EOP program. And he's coaching me on getting ready to shift and transfer to UCLA. Both Susan McKenzie and I, we both wound up going to UCLA.

KD: And she's also in art, or ...

RD: No, she's a housewife now. She's probably . . . If I'm fifty-five, she's got to be like—

KD: No, but at the time, was she in the arts with you?

RD: Yeah. That's where we met. Well, I met her—the whole Quaker thing. But actually, unbeknownst to me, she also was gearing towards art. So we both went through the art department at PCC, and both of us transferred to UCLA. She was a year behind me, so I was the first one there. But Juan pretty much made it a cakewalk for me to get into UCLA, which was an awesome thing. But once I was there, it struck me like it was moving through Jello. I just found it so uninvigorating, completely academic—

KD: Did you buy into studio arts?

RD: I transferred in as a graphic arts major. But I took all studio art courses.

KD: You don't have a portfolio for graphic arts, do you?

RD: You do.

KD: You did.

RD: It was enough to get in there. Plus there was an aggressive drive to get as many minorities in these colleges as possible. So it was a nice little window to slip into. I never had—if they had been a little bit harder like they are today I would never have made it in, because I didn't do any of the prereqs. I fudged on the prerequisites, you know, you could substitute whatever this for an anthropology course, or geology for a physics course. Just bullshit. I did what I had to do in order to get the transfer credits lined up to hop over to UCLA. And when I did that—and once I was there, I was completely disappointed. It was—nobody was teaching anything; they were all sitting around talking. High art, theoretical shit. To me, I want hands-on experience. I started to realize who was teaching and who wasn't, who was just sitting around doing a circle jerk with his students. Robert Heinecken was teaching, he's a photographer, so I got hardcore into photography. Adrian Saxe was teaching real ceramics. And I got technically awesome ceramics training, so I maintained an interest in ceramics. And then in the printmaking department, it was Ray Brown and some English professor who I forget his name. And the minute I landed, you know . . . And the printmaking department was the most obvious [and] Robert Heinecken's department—actually, those three courses. Well, there's a department head, but there's—what do you call it . . .

Ceramics, in the ceramics department, Adrian Saxe recognized immediately [that] I know my shit. Because we're talking about teachers that are used to having freshmen, seventeen-year-old stupid freshmen, and they're just coddling them through four years of whatever bullshit, and letting the world chew them up afterwards, because all they're really there for is the tenure, the dental plan. Their meal ticket while they're struggling in the art world. Adrian recognized that I came in with a lot of technical knowledge from my training with Phil Cornelius. And Robert Heinecken, because I was living and breathing at PCC in a darkroom, was like, "Holy shit, this kid knows his stuff." His chemistry, films. And in printmaking, Ray Brown was like—that was like the Messiah. All the printmaking instructors . . . Eugene Sturman, who's out of Tamarind [Lithography Workshop] training, so he's teaching a course at UCLA in printmaking. Ray Brown. And I had this Englishman, I can't remember his name. They all—the minute I signed into a printmaking class, they all saw it. "This fucking kid knows his shit." So part of my education package, or my

funding package, at UCLA is once again, there's work-study. And they pounced on me. Adrian, Heinecken, and Ray Brown, the printmaking department, they all pounce on me to sign—

KD: They want you to work for them.

RD: Yeah, with my—so I spread it out over three years, because I was there another three years.

KD: Oh, okay. Because you needed—you probably needed just two to graduate, but did you go slower in your pace?

RD: Yeah, I went slower. I was still smoking pot. The school was such a cakewalk for me, I could bullshit my way through everything. I mean, because everybody, in my mind . . . I came from a really hardcore place, a community college where they taught you shit. Here, I'm sitting in classes where everybody's like pinning up some stupid ass shit you know they did last night, and they're just wordy, wordy, wordy during the critiques, and I'm just going, "My God, this is such bullshit."

KD: How did you handle critiques?

RD: I think I was pretty engaging. I know I was popular—I was pretty [*telephone ringing*]

KD: Do you want me to stop?

RD: Yeah, let me pick that up.

[*break in audio*]

KD: We're back. You were telling me about . . . I asked what was a critique like for you? What did you talk about?

RD: I was a really smart, on-top-of-his-shit guy. I'm coming in with hardcore readings of insanely wordy dissertations by Joseph Kosuth. I was into the minimalists, the earthwork guys. I was fairly well educated and self-educated. So to me, it was like sitting through Romper Room while these guys were going through their lectures. I wasn't obnoxious, but . . . So I could—when it came to my turn to critique, I could spin anything, and I could pull it off. So it made me—it was a lazy environment for me. It was too easy. So what I found was I was hanging out with the only three other Chicanos in the whole art department. Sailer Talamantes. Tito Delgado—Robert Delgado. Because he was a coconut then. He was a graduate student, and I wasn't really hanging around with Robert, because Robert was in total denial of what he was. He was sucking up to the system. Anyway. And Nacho, who was next door in Melnitz, in theatre, in film. But we'd spend most of our time in the sculpture garden doing big old massive bong hits, just basically fucked up.

KD: [*laughter*] On campus?

RD: Yeah.

KD: You can't do that anymore.

RD: Over there?

KD: Mm-hmm.

RD: Maybe a wild time. But—and now is commuting every day by car with Juan, so we'd have these incredible discussions. He's a great guy.

KD: About what?

RD: Everything. He was such an incredible mentor for me. He was a great guy to hang out with.

KD: Were you talking about art?

RD: Art, politics.

KD: The meaning of life?

RD: Yeah. The whole God thing. It was like he was the best—if I had a late surrogate father in life, it was the best time, because it was when I was most receptive for dialogue. So we did that for three years, we drove in together every day, drove home together every day.

KD: And you were still living on the property.

RD: Yeah.

KD: And you had talked before, when you were at PCC, things that were influencing you. Any of the—

- RD: I pretty much had, at that point, disengaged from the art community—I mean, the Chicano political community. I was on an art track.
- KD: Were you aware it's going on now? I mean, this is UCLA in the '70s.
- RD: Yeah, Dixon Art Center was at the furthest reaches of the north campus. We were separated from the rest of the school by the sculpture garden. So it was a world unto itself, and I never left that part of it. If I'd go south into campus, the administrative, or further south, the medical? To me, it was another planet of students. I was hanging out with a bunch of jean-wearing, torn-pant, scruffy . . . We were—north campus was probably scary for them. Long-haired freaks up there. So I didn't really engage the rest of the community. I used to go all the concerts at Royce Hall, as many as I could. I got to meet—this is when I became like a maniac about jazz. I forgot to mention, my PCC years, plus, I was doing a lot of psychedelics. I mean, I was just being what I am, what everybody is at that time.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: Doing a lot of psychedelics, listening to Alan Watts, Baba Ram Dass, hanging out with some really cool people, doing that thing. So I started to go to concerts, and back then it was very cheap. Frank Zappa. Who was it—who was that crazy artist-type guy? Jeepers. I was listening to that crazy psychedelic type music.
- KD: And they're doing concerts at Royce Hall.
- RD: No, no. In Pasadena, at the Pasadena Civic Center, or at the Rose Palace, where they prep all the—you know, it's an empty place, they have to prep all the floats. Jimi Hendrix played there, I think Led Zeppelin played there. I saw some pretty crazy-ass shit. So I'm listening to music, and I'm fairly hardcore into that. And at one point, I felt like rock and roll let me down. So somebody gave me an album for my birthday, it was—another album. The first one that changed my life was the Beatles, *Meet the Beatles*. I got an album called—shit. It was Miles Davis. It was—it's a seminal album, because to me it was like psychedelic, and I was into psychedelic music. And it was like—well, there's psychedelic jazz. It was all over the place. And like anybody, a set of headphones in his apartment, you're smoking a lot, you're reading every word on the liner.
- KD: Yes, the liner notes.
- RD: And I'm like going, "Who's Joe **Zawinul**. Who's this Herbie Hancock guy?" Because I'm hearing this, I'm going, "These guys are cool." Which prompted me to start hanging out at Poo-Bah [Record Shop] and bookstore—Jay Green owned that—which had everything you could imagine for the connoisseur of rock and roll, bluegrass, jazz, reggae.
- KD: And this in Pasadena.
- RD: Pasadena, yeah. And I'm started to go to—I'm starting to read on the liner notes of this album I got for my birthday, and I'm going, "Okay, well, I want to know who this Joe **Zawinul** is." And then the next album I buy is Weather Report. And then, "Who's this Herbie Hancock?" It's the next album I get. Well, that seminal record, my God, I should know it by heart. That was the launch of jazz fusion, a transitional period where Herbie Hancock did the *Head Hunters* album, and they're all playing at Royce Hall. Keith Jarrett.
- KD: Wow.
- RD: So I'm a student, I can get in there for seven dollars. I can show up in the afternoon when they're doing rehearsal and offer to move equipment and meet people, and then that night, see them. And I saw everybody. I saw all the superstars of what was happening in jazz, which was going through this incredible transformation itself. *Return to Forever*, [by Chick Corea]. Keith Jarrett doing solo concerts. McCoy Tyner. Cecil Taylor, who was a percussive [pianist]. He was insane. His concerts would start out with a full Royce Hall, and halfway through half the people would walk out, and by the end of the concert, there would be a third of the people left, because he was so fuckin' in-your-face. But I saw everybody. And I was so hardcore, like the maniac that I am, I wind up . . . They remember me from, like, helping them do whatever. "Can I get you water?" in the afternoon. And then watching them, and trying to talk to them.
- KD: So you do that more than once, hanging out in the afternoon.
- RD: Oh, yeah. As often as I could. I'd just check to see who was playing. If it was jazz, I'd go to it.

KD: Wow.

RD: And then whoever was doing the booking at the time knew what time it was, because they were bringing all the amazing people in. Philip Glass. It was just amazing shit. Steve Reich, Terry Riley. Minimal—the hardcore minimalist stuff.

KD: Is this changing your ideas about visual arts, or influencing your ideas about visual arts?

RD: No, I think it's inspiring me just to be creative. But of course, I got to know everybody. I don't know, where is it—I think it's in the next room. Herbie Hancock commissioned me to do his portrait. Joe **Zawinul**, when he found out I was from Pasadena, he lived in the Arroyo Seco, invited me over to his house, meet his family, bring all my albums so he can sign them. It was just nuts.

And eventually, it segued into reggae, because that was another birthday present my girlfriend gave me, [an album] called *Natty Dread*. Mind you, I'm just a jazz freak. Every little . . . I know everything, and I'm hanging out with other jazz freaks, and we're like groupies. We're dropping names, trying to one-up [each other]. "Oh, yeah, Airto, right. He played with so-and-so and so-and-so on this album. Remember that track . . ." Just freaks, just like kids are with punk music now. And my girlfriend, Susan, gave me a record with this weird picture with these guys with knots on his head, *Natty Dread*, and I played it, and I had an epiphany. "Oh, my God, what is this?" Reggae, Bob Marley. And of course, I became a freak about that. I met Roger Steffens who was doing the radio process for one hour or two hours on Sunday on KCRW, all the reggae beat. And reggae was a weird anomaly out there that's interesting to a core group of people. Of course, like the maniac that I was, I introduced myself to Roger Steffens at SMC [Santa Monica College]. I did a poster portrait of Dr. Alimantado, it's one of the first things that I did at the Centro de Arte Público. Music was inspiring me constantly. I think it was the source of my art back then. But where are we at?

KD: UCLA?

RD: So I transferred to UCLA.

KD: You're still in UCLA.

RD: And I'm now segueing from hardcore jazz. I'm doing imagery that's music-related, and I got into reggae. I met Roger Steffens. Roger Steffens, when he saw this portrait I did of Dr. Alimantado, invited me to hang out more at the station and come to gigs, because they were just barely starting. Promoters that had the courage were starting to bring other people that were a little bit iffy. I mean, Bob Marley was iffy back then. And I was invited, as a result of knowing probably—for the reggae scene in Jamaica. Roger Stefan was the ray of light, the possibility of a greater possibility for their career. So he had a lot of clout. And I was his friend, because I'd give him posters, because I was doing reggae-inspired posters. And I got to meet Bob Marley in his first gig, backstage at the Roxy. Smoked a big chalice with him. Three times I was with Marley. At Pauley Pavilion, backstage, when he played for eighteen thousand people, and then his last concert in LA, at the Starlight Amphitheater in Glendale with Peter Tosh, who'd been estranged from him for almost seven years. Joined him onstage, for the first time and only time ever before they both died.

KD: Right.

RD: Backstage, they're sucking up on a chalice with these guys.

KD: So is it the—

RD: I found reggae political and inspirational. That's what got me into the music. They were dealing with issues for music. So it was popping back up. But I finished up at UCLA, got my degree, and I'd just come out of a three-year bubble. I'd been living with a beautiful blonde, blue-eyed Quaker hippie girl for five years, and I looked at my life, and I thought, "I think I've turned into a coconut."

KD: Why would that be?

RD: Because I was no longer engaged in the political scene or anything. I was just doing the hippie arty-farty thing, getting really good at it and enjoying music, and having tumultuous wild sex with this hippie girl. And I thought, "Well, I'm spewed out of the system." And they tried to recruit me to go back to graduate school. And all I did was look at all the grad students there, and I thought, "They're all brain-dead. That's



all I need for you to complete the process with me.” I mean, they really wanted me back. And I said, “I’ll pass, I’m out of here.” Free ride and everything.

KD: And who’s making this offer?

RD: Ray Brown, Robert Heinecken, Adrian Sax. The chairman of the department. They’re all like, “Richard, you’ve got to come back and do a graduate program.” “No fucking way. I’m lucky to get out of here with my brain intact, thank you. I want in the world. This is a bubble.” I always felt UCLA was a bubble, it wasn’t real. A bunch of people just talking bullshit, they don’t know what it’s really like out there. I came from a hardcore experience, and I just thought this was bullshit, and I want out. Just give me my—

KD: There was no advancing of technique when you were there?

RD: No. I rode on everything I learned at PCC. I bullshitted—not bullshit, I just blew everybody away. I could do anything because I had training in it. And whatever, when they’d talk about how to do something, it was always just talk. I said, “When are we going to do it?” Encaustic. “Well, yeah, are we going to do it?” So I was just happy to get out. And the first thing I did was go back to—I was kind of lost. I thought I had lost my bearings and my motivation. So what I did was I went to—I said I’ve got to go back to my roots.

KD: Is that the language you used them?

RD: Language—yeah.

KD: You know, “go back to my roots.”

RD: I said, “I’ve got the core—I’ve got to reconnect to the core of myself.” Which was, “I’m going back to Boyle Heights.”

KD: Not Highland Park.

RD: No. Highland Park was just bad news, memories of my upbringing as a kid. And I went, I said, “What’s going on in Boyle Heights?” I’d been hearing about this nun that’s trying to get something going, trying to do something for Chicano artists. I thought, well, I’ll go check her out.

KD: Now you had already been familiar with the idea of Chicano as a *movimiento* from high school, and after the high school experience, did you continue to—

RD: At UCLA?

KD: Did you use the word *Chicano*, or is it—

RD: Oh, yeah. I mean, it was sort of like . . . It never occurred to me that I was anything other than—I mean, it was a foregone conclusion. And the only thing that might have been an overture to my community, the Chicano art community, while at UCLA, I got Gronk his first slide lecture presentation there, when I found out that there was a budget for visiting lecturers in the art department. I went to the department head, and I said, “You’ve got to get this group in here. You’re all about fucking smart conceptual bullshit. Whatever your rap is, this a group in East LA that is pushing the envelope.”

KD: And that’s what they were doing, your training was supposed to be conceptual art, right? At the time.

RD: Yeah. That was the big thing when I was at UCLA, was earth works, minimalism, conceptual. So that’s what everybody was doing was sitting around and talking.

KD: But it didn’t strike you, it didn’t speak to you.

RD: No. Well, it wasn’t hands-on. I wanted hands-on. “I get all this shit. Show me something new that I can get a handle on.”

KD: So you brought Gronk out as part of Asco, or Gronk is—

RD: Well, Gronk is the only one that showed up, and he gave a pretty entertaining lecture and slide show. What else did I do? Oh, the off-campus, I was recruited into a group of artists that were trying to organize a show at the Barnsdall [Art] Park [in 1975], a seminal show called *Chicanarte*, and they asked me to join the committee to organize the show and to design and print the poster, which I did [*inaudible*].

KD: Yeah, no, I know that work. But that’s why I’m trying to figure out—you seem like you stayed away from that, but yet I know you were involved in *Chicanarte*.

RD: No, if somebody can engage me and get me excited about something, I jump into it. I think it was 1975.

KD: Yeah.

- RD: Well, I think, nobody knows me as a poster artist yet. I haven't started anything, but I'm good at it. And I think Sailer mentioned to that group that, "Hey, this guy at least could help you design the image, and possibly a silkscreen poster for it." Which I did, the *Chicanarte* show. I think there's a transparency or slide of it. And then I was asked to get involved in another show called *Conjunto*, which I did the poster for that one. Neither—I don't know if I was in the *Conjunto* show, but I think they were looking at me as basically a graphic artist. [*Conjunto* was an exhibition of prints at Self Help Graphics in 1978—ed.]
- KD: A graphic artist.
- RD: So I was never invited to be an artist in the Chicano art show.
- KD: You're invited to be on the jury because of your—you're just older than most of the folks, or—
- RD: No, I think we're about all the average age. But I'm going through—I think because I had a skill set that could be used to help this project or that project. Those are—I think while I was a student were the only that come to mind as "Oh, okay, I remember doing that," that might be Chicano-related, that I was engaged in in my community of Chicano artists. But when I got out, I still was so disenfranchised and kind of disconnected that I was actually desperate to reconnect with something. When I heard about this nun, I drove over to East LA, Brooklyn—
- KD: So before you go there, what are you hearing? Because I've actually never heard very many stories, so I really would like to hear.
- RD: Hearing what?
- KD: How—what is it the people are saying on the street? What is the line that you're hearing? There's this woman, Sister Karen, that's doing . . . What is it you're hearing?
- RD: You know, at that time, probably the only groups that were being recognized or getting some semblance of recognition were Los Four, they did the seminal show in 1975 at LACMA, *Los Four*.
- KD: Yeah. I think it's before that though.
- RD: Seventy-four?
- KD: Seventy-four, I want to say. [*Los Four* opened at LACMA in February 1974 and closed in May—ed.]
- RD: Okay. I heard about that show, I didn't see it. I'm doing my thing. But I heard about it. I said, "Well, cool." Then I heard about some graffiti conceptual piece that was done by a group called Asco, and that's when I started investigating them, because I thought, "Okay, these guys are interesting. What are they about?" Met Harry, and then I heard about a hardcore group of Chicanos in Highland Park, my neighborhood, that opened up a *centro*.
- KD: Mechicano [Art Center].
- RD: Mechicano. And I was kind of curious now, because it was two blocks from my mom's house. Checked that out a couple of times. It was—I knew that I talked and hung around with . . . One guy was a really tall Chicano. And I didn't really know the core, I was a nobody, really. But I did realize that their support, their funding source was liberal Jewish money, the backers. Progressive, encouraging a scene, being—the money that's helping them. And to me, I just didn't connect. I got to know them but never became friendly enough to want to be—it was a *centro*—to want to like go over there and go, "Here I am."
- KD: How did you learn that it was backed by progressive Jews?
- RD: Because I'd go to their openings, and they'd be in the back toasting each other, and I'd go, "Okay, the brothers are brown. This is their scene, but it seems like the power and the lever-pullers are this cadre of really cool, progressive Westside Jewish types." I thought, "Well, this is curious. This is novel, but I just don't feel where I can plug in here." I wasn't looking to plug in, but you know, it just wells up. And the word was that there was this nun trying to get some shit going over in East LA. And I know that there was . . . Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery] was doing something, but Goetz had already a reputation on the street that they were commercial, and that they were fronting for TELACU, the East Los Angeles Community Union. And TELACU was a HUD-funded program to reconstitute, reinvigorate the business district of East LA and Whittier Boulevard. But what it really was a bunch of guys enriching themselves. And—which to this day is

still going on. So I thought, “No, I don’t want to mess with that,” because I checked out their place and it was all folksy kind of fucking decorative, touristy shit.

KD: The aesthetic didn’t match yours.

RD: Yeah. It was Uncle Tom, coconut art. Give them what they want. Aztec warriors, holding Aztec princesses. Great technique, but it’s all fucking garbage as far as I’m concerned. It’s more shit.

And through the grapevine—I don’t know who exactly—I had just heard that there was a nun trying to get something going, to create a community for disenfranchised Chicano artists coming out of the schools. And to set up a support mechanism to bring attention to their work, find a market. So I found out where she was at. She was on the second floor of a building on Brooklyn Avenue across the street from La Parrilla. Went over there, walked up the stairwell, just a hodgepodge of shit. Boxes, cabinets, two nuns—Sister Beth, Sister Karen. And I went in, and I said—presented myself—and I said I was out of school, I just graduated, I’m a pretty decent printer. I didn’t claim myself to be a master printer, but I said, “I know what I’m doing.”

KD: Did you bring your portfolio?

RD: Mm-hmm. And she said, “Well, what do you want to do?” And I said, “Well, I can set up a print studio for you. I can start that way.” She said, “Come right in.” So I set up their silk-screening studio.

KD: And she already had equipment, or you were—

RD: No. It was two jiffy clamps and a piece of plywood. And after that, you can jury-rig everything. You don’t have to buy . . . I know how to jury-rig everything. It’s in the photographs for the Centro de Arte Público. I did the same thing for them. And I started doing posters for their events, their projects, their Day of the Dead.

KD: Are you designing or just printing?

RD: I’m designing it. Leo Limón started. Leo Limón . . . The core of the group was Michael Amescua—sound familiar?

KD: Yeah.

RD: The metal sculpture guy. Linda Vallejo. We’re all fairly young. Somewhere between our mid-twenties and . . . Twenty-seven, I think that was the average age. Probably twenty-four to twenty-eight. Linda Vallejo—I don’t know where Linda came from, but she was there, or she showed up. Michael Amescua, myself. And then . . . Spewed out of the machine again, an education machine, John Valadez showed up. He was mostly photography at the time, and Leo Limón. And we were all—we were probably the first core group of consistently showing up and helping Self Help become what it was becoming.

KD: You’re doing this for free, right?

RD: Well, yeah, of course. It’s a place for us now. And Sister Karen is providing it. The funding source, we don’t know. We just know we can be here, we can do things. And most of her—the trajectory and the philosophy is emanating from her, so she’s basically shaping the content of our work, because she’s probably, in hindsight, kowtowing to her funding sources, which are probably the Catholic church, showing the community that they’re doing a good thing, and whatever other sources. I was never part of the administrative—it was a lot of communication, but it was never any issue of like how we get—how has all of this been paid for. Probably the building, like the current Self Help, was given up for free by the church, and supplies she got donated—I mean, who’s going to say no to a nun, right? And we had to do stuff that was engaging the community, supporting the community, but she tried to really find a way not to get too political.

KD: How does that conversation come across?

RD: What’s that?

KD: The “not too political.” Did she literally tell you that, or—

RD: Well, you know, “Here’s an idea we want to do.” Well, you know, chain-smoking nun. “Maybe we could just approach it a little differently,” and this and that. And she’d pretty much get what she wanted, which was a watered-down version of whatever issue we wanted to address.

KD: And what were some of those?

RD: Migrant rights, things that were near and dear to our heart. School, preschool—just safe stuff for the community. Information for medical clinics, free medical clinics, we were a clearing house for doing poster work that would—that could be disseminated in the community that would kind of—more informative.

KD: Oh, okay. And that kind of work—

RD: Nothing political. No march, no posters for organizing marches, or this or that.

KD: Service-related, then, it sounds like.

RD: Well, in hindsight, I'm thinking, well, she was protecting—I think it was all well and good, because she was trying to make sure that this thing kept going, and you're not going to push the buttons of the people that are throwing you bones if you start snapping at their heels. We're not going to confront the Catholic Church, never.

KD: And at the time, you didn't—

RD: There's posters, you'll see them. When I went looking through things, I thought, "Oh, my God, we were so fucking naïve."

KD: That's what I want to ask you. At the time, it didn't seem problematic to you?

RD: No. I mean, I think—

KD: This is feeding something; what is it feeding, then, for you?

RD: Our need to make—to practice our craft that we learn, whatever it may be. In John's case, I remember he was photographing left and right, and he was doing things out there, I'm sure, that probably wouldn't have made her happy. Documenting police violence and stuff like that. And for me, I was trying to sort this out, I was trying to find myself. In the meantime, "Here, take my body. Take my skills. What do you need? Okay, you need—you're going to start a gallery, Galería Otra Vez? I'll do the posters to announce that you've got a gallery. Oh, you're going to start—you just got a free UPS truck and you want to do what? A Barrio Mobile Arts Program? I'll start the Barrio Mobile Arts Program poster series. Oh, we're actually going to go on the road? Okay, I'll do all the classes for the kids."

That's what I remember. All of us being in a truck all the time going to elementary schools. Linda doing painting, Michael doing sculpture, papier-mâché, Richard Duardo doing silkscreening, and John Valadez showing kids how to take pictures. She got funding for that, I don't know what. We may have gotten a stipend, fifty, sixty dollars. But we were doing—we knew we were doing something good. We were brown faces going into brown elementary schools and doing these courses. They may not have amounted much other than the experience, but the important thing was that they were seeing older Chicanos sharing something with them, a talent, craft. I thought that was really important. We're going to show them that information and stuff doesn't just come from white people. Do you understand?

KD: Yeah. I'm just trying to get a sense of—

RD: It's like being basically, I thought, this is a good opportunity to be—what do they call these people, when you're representing, or—a role model.

KD: Role model.

RD: Yeah. We're good role—we're Chicanos as good role models for these little Chicanitos—

KD: And you were aware of that—

RD: Oh, years later, big, burly Mexican Chicanos would come up to me and go, "Hey, do you remember me?" Right, you look like a six year old, right? "Dude, you came in my school, and I was like, oh, it was so awesome." And I was like, "Well, good. What are you doing now?" "Uh, I'm a truck driver." I said, "Well, a lot of good it did you, but more power to you. Are you raising your kid right, or your kids?" "Yeah." I said, "That's all that matters."

KD: So were you hoping at the time to create artists, or just—

RD: Yeah, of course you want to like inspire whatever you're—whatever you think you're doing might be a trigger—

KD: So that wasn't satisfying if they were just inspired generally.

- RD: Well, it was—that sounded a little cynical. Just my feeling was, “You’re alive, you didn’t go to jail, great. Are you raising your kids right? Awesome.”
- KD: Okay. And when you were working with this group, was there discussion about what are we doing, why are we doing this, or was it everybody worked theirs out on their own?
- RD: Well, it was being moderated by Sister Beth and Sister Karen. But it wasn’t an impressive environment, it was just like, we were just there—we have a haven in our community where everybody’s pursuing they can in their craft, or projects are coming in that requires their skill set, and we’re doing that, because we’re doing something good for the community. Bottom line, it’s—that’s the way we saw it, I think all of us. We are in our community and we are doing something good for it.
- KD: And how—where did difficulty start to arise?
- RD: There weren’t any. I mean—
- KD: How were they negotiated?
- RD: It was pretty apparent that we weren’t pushing the envelope, politically. But to me, I’d done my—
- KD: You’d done that.
- RD: I’d done my time in the trenches. I just wanted to do some great—I wanted to do a good thing for my community with what I do with my skill set, and that’s enough for me. What changed it was one day, Carlos Almaraz walked up the stairs, and we heard that he was coming, we were told the day before, Sister Karen said, “Carlos Almaraz is going to pay us a visit.” And I kind of knew who he was, Los Four, that show. And when he came in, he had just come back from doing two or three years with the United Farm Workers, and he—it was like Che Guevara. He was deferential to Sister Karen, checked out everything, made really positive remarks about what was happening. And then he invited John, myself, Leo Limón, on the side, to come meet—to come to a gathering at his studio across the street from Nightingale’s, at a storefront on Figueroa. And we were like, “Cool.” He didn’t say why or whatever. So we all went there, and when we—
- KD: Did it strike you as curious that Linda wasn’t invited?
- RD: No. I didn’t even make that—how’d you know she wasn’t?
- KD: You just said—
- RD: Oh, yeah, by just listing that. Maybe she wasn’t there that day. Michael might not have been there. I think it was whoever was present got the invite, and I don’t think we shared it with anybody. So I remember going to that storefront and walking in, and seeing Frank Romero, George Yepes, Leo Limón, Victor Valle, who’s a writer—
- KD: Right.
- RD: Who was publishing *Chismearte*. Somebody Bejerano, who was a co-publisher.
- KD: Ben? No.
- RD: Something Bejerano.
- KD: William—Guillermo.
- RD: Yeah. Guillermo Bejerano. They were doing *Chismearte*. Magu [Gilberto Luján]. God, who else was there. Dolores Cruz.
- KD: Judithe? Or not, it’s too—
- RD: Judithe [Hernández] was already on another planet. Married, gone to Chicago, left the Los Four. And Carlos giving . . . It was a discussion, but he was the discussion leader, so he—I wouldn’t call it premeditated, but there was—
- KD: A goal.
- RD: There was a goal.
- KD: And what year was this about? Seventy—
- RD: Seventy-six, maybe, ’76. And it was fire and brimstone, a call to action.
- KD: Really?

- RD: Yeah. That—he prefaced everything in such a way that we understood that all the *centros* up and down the state are being compromised by non-profit dollars, which has—there used to be something, a non—some agreement that non-profits have to—
- KD: You can't be political.
- RD: There you go.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: And he broke it all down, *centro* by *centro* by *centro*, up the state.
- KD: Wow.
- RD: I mean, this is a guy that just came out of a trench with the farm workers, and that before we turn into sedated cattle, and just let the status quo run its course, that we as cultural—he never referred to us as artists, we were cultural workers. He was a Communist. He had just—
- KD: That would be the language of the Communist Party, yeah.
- RD: Yeah. He had done China, he'd done Cuba.
- KD: Right, right.
- RD: And that it was our responsibility to be the vanguard of a revolution, the cultural vanguard. As cultural workers, our responsibility is not to make decorative, escapist art for the elite bourgeois, but to offer our services in the struggle of the proletariat. It was just awesome.
- KD: You liked it.
- RD: Yeah.
- KD: How did everybody else respond?
- RD: It was pandemonium. Just happiness, excitement.
- KD: Really?
- RD: It's like finally. I don't know where George came from, or everybody, but he pulled together a group of people to say, "Now is the time." And we became a collective right at that moment. And we made a determination: what is the procedure now, we have to find a location, in our next meeting of such and such, people are in charge of—who's in charge of—location committee and this and that. I remember—I think John and I found the building on Avenue 56.
- KD: This is the beginning of Centro—
- RD: Centro de Arte Público. And at the next meeting we became the group, I think, the Centro de Arte Público. And we would not take any public money, non-profit money, that we would not compromise our politics, that we were—this would be an experiment to inject ourselves into a community and start the revolution.
- KD: Now, those two things, was that conscious at the time? Inject and experiment?
- RD: Yeah.
- KD: So you conceived it at the time as an experiment—
- RD: There was a whole grand plan, and I mean, we did everything in a very methodical way, which was, we located the building—
- KD: Location, location, location?
- RD: Well, if it was location, location, we should have been westward, you know?
- KD: No, but for this project—
- RD: No, this project was, the community that we were going to transform was Highland Park. We were the cultural cadre that was going to plant ourselves in an identified community and start disseminating the revolutionary cause of the Chicano movement.
- KD: And why Highland Park?
- RD: Because it was an identified community.
- KD: Because of the boundaries?
- RD: Yes. And we got this second floor, five-thousand-square foot studio across the street from the Highland Theatre for three hundred dollars a month. And the first shots in there is Leo and I sanding the floors in a barren room.

- KD: You want to get those out, or—it's getting late, so I don't know if we want to wrap up some of this, or—
- RD: You can take the light box and the loop, and—
- KD: I have a light box, yeah.
- RD: Well, the sheets on the Centro de Arte Público. And—
- KD: So you're sanding the floor with Leo.
- RD: Yeah. We were all happy, we found the place, we nailed down the lease. I don't know who signed it.
- KD: Yeah. Who's signing in whose name?
- RD: I think—well, you know what, you have to realize that there is a distinct age difference between two critical people of this *centro*, and that's Frank Romero and Carlos Almaraz. And then the rest of us are all twenty-something.
- KD: You're all babies.
- RD: Yeah. So it must have been Carlos or Frank. And we got in there, and it's the youth, us, the younger ones that went full force. Stripped the place, clean it up, sand the floors, varnish them, build the walls, lay out—you know, they laid out how we'd have a communal gallery, and then where everybody would have their workspace. I was the identified propagandist, poster maker. I was in charge of that. And then Carlos and Frank and John were going to be doing murals out there in the community, uncompromised, dealing with shit. And that was it. We all got in there.
- KD: And so you said before, you had rigged up a way to make posters. Could you run through that real quick?
- RD: You'll see it in there. It was—without having to buy a two-thousand-dollar drying rack to dry fifty sheets of paper, what I figured out with clothespins and two-by-twos, hinged, I could make—and the clothespins nailed along the side—if I hinged two parallel, I could clothespin sheets of paper. You'll see pictures of it. A portrait I'm doing of Danny from whatever, Eddie Olmos and Danny from *Zoot Suit*. I did a poster for that show. But you'll see them all hanging from that system. But we got in there. And it was like from the get-go, it was tumultuous. It was freewheeling. We had once a week—it was pretty hardcore.
- KD: In terms of the activity—
- RD: The regiment—the regimentation of how the Centro would run. We were hardcore. Carlos immediately put up a portrait of Chairman Mao and Ho Chi Minh, and we'd read out of the *Red Book* like once or twice a week. And we'd have—the Communists have the term for it, where you have to do a confession—
- KD: A testimony—
- RD: Of how you failed as a revolutionary cadre member, and how you're going to correct yourself, and stuff like that. And we'd have those like—
- KD: Judeo-Christian confession.
- RD: We'd have those like once a week or something. But it was all about transforming ourselves, transforming ourselves to be this core—
- KD: And what kinds of things are you expressing to the group, your confessions?
- RD: Our temptation in bourgeois activities and stuff like that.
- KD: Okay. And the group is basically becoming a commercial enterprise, right?
- RD: Well, it's starting to take on commercial projects in order to pay the rent. I mean, mind you, that's five grown men that can't make three hundred dollars a month rent, that's fifty dollars a month each. I mean, if you look at all the pictures, everybody's bone skinny. I mean, we're starving. And—
- KD: Oh, so maybe I'm mistaken. So the first endeavors are not commercial projects.
- RD: Right. They were planning of doing projects, organizing marches, or dealing with issues of maybe the racism in the commercial district up and down the street. We're just—we're taking on projects of community organizations who need poster works to promote their events, we're doing them. In the meantime, we have no funding source.
- KD: Right. So it's not like you're inventing the topic; it's—someone comes to you, "We've got this event," and you say, "Okay, we'll create that poster."
- RD: Yeah.

- KD: And you're doing design, or you're just—are you doing printing?
- RD: No, I start doing some—designing some poster work.
- KD: And who else—
- RD: Carlos is designing, Leo's designing. And then I'm suggesting that we start doing posters so we can start a revenue stream, support for the Centro. So John did the first one, which was a portrait of a *cholo*, identifying the *cholo*, what he's wearing on his—it's a really funny poster. Sort of like almost torn out of a dictionary, sort of like, "This is what a *cholo* looks like; this is what he calls his pants." And then, you know, things for community events. And then we were started to be approached by organizations that existed, nonprofits that needed things done, so they'd subcontract to us. Posters or murals or something. And then a program started, the Nixon administration started a program called CETA, Comprehensive Employment Training Act, and all of the sudden, LA was—I recall hearing the figure that almost 5,000 artists were being supported by CETA grants. But it was non-profit organizations that could apply, and then they could hire—
- KD: Right. And that didn't strike the group as another compromise?
- RD: You know, in the course of a year and a half of struggle, struggle, struggle, we're all starting to tweak our politics to survive. Carlos is doing commercial—he's designing fucking boxes for a shoe store downtown.
- KD: So the commercial work, it—that's the beginning of what you thought was a compromise, the negotiation? I wouldn't say compromise, I don't know if that's your word.
- RD: Well, just having a reality check that we're going to have to do some stuff for money. And there's—there was a core group, and then there was a turnstile of people coming in and out. I remember Guillermo and Vincent were running their publication out of there, and there must have been a falling out. There was a lot of meetings or stuff that happened that I would sometimes opt not to sit through. But eventually, *Chismarte* seemed to have just floated away. Guillermo and Vincent were gone. And then I remember Carlos and Frank got into a fistfight that we had to break up, and then Carlos—and then a meeting was called and we voted Frank out of the group. And George—
- KD: Do you remember what the argument was over?
- RD: No. Probably something stupid. You know what, they have a history.
- KD: Yes.
- RD: So it broke it down into something personal. And we—
- KD: But you had mentioned before that—
- RD: You know, what I think, it was by proxy, now that I recall, it was a power struggle of who was going to control the group. And for Carlos, he wasn't trying to control the group. He was trying to prevent Frank from controlling the group. Because they were our leaders, and Frank was sitting on the fence. He was a born-again Chicano, as far as—I think, honestly, we all were concerned he was just—all of the sudden, it's cool to be a Chicano. And he was a little bit obnoxious about it. So I don't think he was—when he came up to think about—it was like, I think everybody was happy to see Frank go. He was a coconut.
- KD: And your sense of his politics would have come out in these meetings that are called?
- RD: Yeah, well, I think—you know what he would do, because he has a history with Carlos, so he knew him as an artist, a struggling student artist, an artist trying to succeed in New York, almost losing his liver and self-destructing, coming back, being lost—

[break in audio]

- KD: This is Karen Davalos with Richard Duardo. Today is November 5, 2007. This is tape 2, side 2, and he was telling me about the observations of Frank Romero.
- RD: So, because they've known each other since they were teens. So now we're talking about two guys that are probably between thirty-five and thirty-seven, struggling over the leadership of a group of, on the average, of about five or six other people that were in their mid-twenties. And I think what annoyed Carlos was, at our meetings, was that Frank would make cynical interjections about Carlos's . . . Whatever Carlos was saying to the group.



KD: And most of the things he's saying to you is his understanding [of art and politics]?

RD: And unbeknownst to me, I didn't know Carlos at the time. I didn't know that, at the time, that he was whatever, bisexual. He never tried anything with any of us. So that was a revelation that happened, maybe the second year, when he was arrested for some incident in a bathroom in a park, which shocked the shit out of all the us. That's how naïve we were, what we didn't know about Carlos. And I think maybe that's something Frank always knew, and might have alluded to and make fun of. And I think that one of those meetings, it just broke down into basically something that had been brewing between them, that got elevated to a total fistfight.

KD: So it wasn't necessarily over politics, what's Chicano art—

RD: No.

KD: What do we need to do for the community.

RD: No. There was a sufficient amount of people coming through there. We were a *centro* at this point, probably one of the hardest-core *centros* in LA.

KD: And when you say that, what do you mean? What are you—

RD: It's like we could drink, we could say whatever we wanted. We didn't have to worry about offending anybody and their politics. Our politics were hardcore community based. Left. We wanted revolution. We didn't tread lightly with anybody.

KD: Okay.

RD: We didn't have a funding source to cower at, because if we say what we really think, we'd be shut off. We were like, "This is us. Okay, we're starving, but at least we're honest with ourselves." And Frank just didn't fit, and he got voted out. And then CETA came up. Everybody's trying to figure out what to do, and we all took CETA jobs. I took my first one with SPARC, with Judith Baca. I mean, by this time, I got a reputation as being like a guy that can bang out a mean poster. And there's all these non-profits that got nothing but open positions with CETA grants. I went to SPARC, and I worked there for about five or six months. The commute was killing me, in my Volkswagen. But I did a lot of posters for them. I had a great time. Judith was really, really cool.

And then I was approached by Alonzo Davis, who ran a gallery at Leimert Park called Brockman Gallery, who also had just got a CETA grant. There's a poster in there. And Alonzo blew me away, because he was really colorblind to who he allowed to apply and then become part of Brockman and their whole program. And all of these non-profits were basically cultural outreach to communities, this and that project. For me, I was the poster designer for all, and printer for all Brockman activities and events. Which was cool, it was fun. I just keep honing my craft, and then I'd go back to my studio with the guys, and do my thing with what my responsibilities were there.

KD: Oh, with the Centro, that's where you had a studio?

RD: Yeah, and that's where I'd do the work.

KD: Oh, really? Pause?

RD: Yes.

[break in audio]

KD: Go ahead.

RD: Yeah, everybody understood that my studio, my print studio, was at the Centro. So I was basically an outsource employee, or a grant recipient through SPARC, and I'd do all my work there. Just show up for meetings or delivered my stuff. And Brockman poached me from SPARC—they literally poached me—it was the same arrangement.

KD: And you're—are you making a living, or is this the only job you have, at CETA?

RD: It's the only job I have.

KD: Okay. And you're a starving artist though.

RD: We're all starving.

KD: It's not enough to cover—

RD: You'll see it in the pictures. We're all—I look at the pictures—when I was looking at the slides, I was like, my God. No wonder so many women would come over and feed us. Chicanas, artists. And then we—you know, we gained a reputation. So Barbara Carrasco came in and joined the group. Dolores Cruz came in and joined the group. Judith Hernandez came in for like ten minutes before she got engaged and moved to Chicago. There was more. It's just hard to recall everything. But it was a constant struggle to make rent. And then at one point, Robert Delgado—I don't know where I ran into him, but I saw him, and he had just come back from Mexico, doing some real time in Chiapas. So a guy that I'd known three years before, who I thought was just a bleeped-out coconut, was now more fire and brimstone than even Carlos. And I said, "Dude, you should join our group. We could use an injection of somebody in from the trench." And I invited him to one of our group meetings, and it was a little bit contentious, because he was too confrontational. He just didn't know how to tread lightly. He was in everybody's face, calling us on our collective sort of hypocrisy and this and that. He was over the top hardcore, trying to one-up us, I guess. And Carlos was not impressed. And we took a vote, and we voted. He was allowed to join the group.

KD: Everybody has to go through a vote process?

RD: Yeah, it has to be a collective decision. It's not one person. There's no leadership. There's maybe somebody guiding the meetings. And that was rotating, because Carlos wanted us to get our skill set up in terms of leadership. And Tito was voted in. I know he was a dissenting voter. And then it just was another two or three months, because he'd call us on our bullshit. We'd been reduced down to basically everybody out for themselves. And Carlos took a trip to New York.

KD: Oh, that was what he was complaining about, that there wasn't actually—

RD: We weren't really doing anything effectively in the community. And he had a point. At one point—

KD: You mean, in terms of social change, or—

RD: Yeah. And I was—you know, everybody's got a job, CETA. And you come back and you're burned out. And now you've got to sit around and talk more fucking politics, and you don't think you're—at this point, two years in, you just—I started to feel that we're not being effective. At one point at one meeting, I said, "You know what? Walk downstairs, walk a block, and stop somebody on the street and say, 'Do you know of Centro de Arte Público and what they're doing in this community?' I'll bet you right now, ten bucks, they'll just give you a blank stare. We're not—we're this little bubble on the second floor of this building talking all this great political shit about transforming this community. In two years, what the fuck have we done? Nothing. We're all struggling artists." And prior to that, I remember one time, we flew to Washington, DC—and we were all wearing black pajamas, in solidarity with being these guerillas. And we—John, Carlos, and myself flew to Washington, DC, to confront the National Endowment for the Arts.

KD: Did you have an appointment?

RD: No. We walked in.

KD: And?

RD: They sent out this guy that later worked up—some guy from Texas. Find a Chicano at the NEA, get them—get him to talk to them. Some guy out of Texas. Kept in touch with him for a while, a nice guy.

KD: Common strategy.

RD: And he was like, "Hey, we're making our effort to—" Well, basically it's just like, [he] cooled our jets. "You delivered your message direct and in our face. You can go home now." And I remember, we went out into whatever those water gardens and kind of wandered around aimlessly in our black pajamas, and I thought, you know—my feeling was, nothing's going on. Nothing's going on.

KD: Oh, so you were dissatisfied then.

RD: Yeah. I thought this is—nothing's going to come to this. And I remember I went to New York to visit friends, Carlos and John, because they were like father and son. Went back to LA—and then I flew back to LA, and the next thing I heard, Carlos is packing up to go to New York to try to find a dealer. Or to visit friends in New York. And when he came back about two or three weeks later, he called the meeting, and

we sat down, and he announced that he had given up on what this was, this experiment, and that he was now going to go for a career as a painter, an artist.

KD: So that's—

RD: Seventy-eight, maybe.

KD: Seventy-eight?

RD: And that was—to me, it was just devastating. As much as I was unsatisfied, dissatisfied with what was going on the group, I just—in terms of a leader, I just thought, “My God, that's it. That's the last nail in this coffin.” And of course, Tito was there haranguing him or hounding him or whatever, calling him on his shit and his hypocrisy for all of—setting us all up and leading all these young guys to sacrifice all these—their time for this. “Just for you to just get your self-indulgent career chasing bourgeois dollars for paintings.” And that was it. He demanded that we vote him out of the group again or something, and that was rejected. And that night—

KD: Wait, I'm confused. Who demanded?

RD: Carlos demanded that Tito get kicked out of the group.

KD: Oh, okay. And the group didn't agree.

RD: Didn't agree. And that night—and although John agreed with Carlos, but the vote was still in favor of allowing him to stay. And that night—

KD: Was it like close, or—

RD: I think it was like three-two or four-two or something. Leo Limón was game for Tito, I was game for Tito, maybe Dolores Cruz was a voting member, she was game for Tito. I don't know who might have been—I mean, we were a pretty sorry sack of people by that point. It might have been a three-two vote. And Carlos said, “That's it. I'm done.” Which was—couldn't figure out what that meant. But that night, Carlos and John moved out completely. By midnight they were gone.

KD: Wow. So all of their materials—

RD: Everything, everything. And they moved downtown. And John didn't talk to me for about two years, Carlos for about a year and a half. And that was it, it was over.

KD: That was the end of Centro.

RD: Yeah. And I know that I was already paying maybe half of the rent, because I was starting to take on paying poster gigs. I mean, I was generating money. Sales of prints or taking on jobs. And I thought, fuck it, then, all right, every man for himself. And I said, everybody's leaving now, it's over—I said, all right, I'm taking over the lease. There's one year left of the lease anyway, it was a three-year lease. And I just shut the doors and just started making—I mean, all of the sudden, I had five thousand square feet. And people from the punk scene ... And then Carlos Guitarlos, who lived in the neighborhood, one day walked up, knocked on my door. I went downstairs, opened it—because I kept the door locked now. I had started an eleven-month apprenticeship with Jeff Wasserman in Santa Monica, because I really wanted to get my master printing down. So during the day, it was basically a locked-up studio, and I just worked there at night and lived there.

KD: Oh, that was your home.

RD: Yeah. Well, when everybody left, I said, “Fuck it, I'm moving in. I'm paying the rent and I'm moving in.” I didn't kick anybody out, basically it just died, and I just took over the lease. And I mean, five thousand square feet? All told, I probably was packed into, after two years, my whole world represented about 20 percent of the space. The rest was now empty. And Carlos Guitarlos knocked on my door, I didn't know who he was—1979, maybe, '78. And I led him upstairs and he looked around, and he does, “This is a great place. Would you mind if I brought my guitar in just so I could hear it, what it sounds like?” And I said sure, and he brought up a Fender guitar and a little amp, and he was playing. I think, “This guy's pretty good.” He goes, “You know, there's some bands that would—it'd be great to do some gigs here. And you can pay your rent,” and this and that. And I said, “Yeah, that's cool. Sure.” Well, the punk scene. Johanna Went and ... The word got out: “There's this guy in Highland Park that's got this great space.” And all the punk bands

were always struggling to find venues. So all of the sudden, Fear, Johanna Went, the performance artist, did one of her first performances. Freaked my mother out.

KD: Why was your mother there?

RD: Because my family was two blocks away, and my mother would always come over and bring us food, or she'd invite the boys over to her house and she'd feed us, or my siblings would come over and hang out with me. So now it's my space it became Hecho in Aztlán Multiples. And my sister Lisa was starting to help me run the business, because things are starting to happen. Somebody's got to type up an invoice or something, chase down some client. And I kept it for another year, and it became a little mini-epicenter of the punk scene. And mostly for the East LA punk bands that were coming out, the Brat, the Plugz—the Plugz were originally from Texas, but when they came out here, they were—and it's only been recently that they've been acknowledging that a majority of the LA punk scene was over 60 percent Latino, disenfranchised kids.

KD: Were you interested in the music, or was it—

RD: Yeah, well, to me, it was an outlet. My five-year relationship had just ended. I was in total self-destruct mode now. It was the perfect scene for me to get into. My vision of the world and my belief system, everything I had bought into had disintegrated. My new mode was nihilism. And I just found my community. So it was drinking, drugs, self-destruct, punk bands, gigs at my studio, just insanity for about three years of my life. And it was—for me, it was an ability to—

KD: Did you meet Diane Gamboa at that time, or—because she was photographing the—

RD: Yeah, but I didn't really know her. I was at the core of the scene. I mean, I started a record label immediately called Fatima Records with a friend of mine, Yolanda [Comparan Ferrer], who produced my show in Mexico. And Tito Larriva. To me, it was—I found, "Oh, there's Chicanos in this crazy in this crazy [scene]." It was anarchy. And I was looking for anarchy, and I thought, "Great. I'm home." So I started doing flyers and posters for them. The seminal poster that launched my career is in that corridor, that portrait of the Screamers. So my flyers started getting less—they became reductive in that there was less information, like, location, time, and price, even the names. I was doing—like Raymond Pettibon was doing at the time, everybody's doing cut-and-paste punk flyers for their favorite bands if you were an artist.

KD: Right.

RD: And I was doing the same thing, except they were getting bigger, because they were silk screen, and they were having less information. At one point, the Screamers asked me to do a poster for a gig—it's in the hallway. I did a poster for their gig, there's no name, there's no date, there's no time, there's no location, and even their name was in Japanese. And I said, "Here's—dude, I got it." And they like went, "What is this?" I said, "I did your poster, your gig poster." And like, "Where's the information?" I was like, "Huh?" I mean, my mind had gotten to the point where it's just image now.

KD: Image, right.

RD: And it was a disappointment for them, and I thought, "Whatever, it doesn't matter, I did it." And a dealer saw that image. And at this point, I was doing an eleven-month program, an apprenticeship program with Jeff Wasserman, driving across town to Santa Monica and working at a studio where Ed Ruscha, Billy Al Bengston, you name them all. They were all going through. David Hockney. I was the Mexican in the back doing whatever had to be done to help the production, but I was meeting, like, amazing people. I mean, the people that I'd only read about in books who were now in there creating, and I was able to watch the process. But one day I brought in—and I was doing my posters, my print projects. I wasn't doing political posters anymore. I was doing print—I was creating print projects for myself in order to hone my craft, technical challenges for myself. I was trying to understand printmaking to its zenith.

KD: Which kinds of—

RD: Like—

KD: Challenges did you take on?

**RD:** How fine of a halftone can I print? How tight a registration can I do? How can I layer colors, trap everything. It was all technical challenges, size. How big can I go before my equipment fails me? And then I take my prints and I would do it, and ask my master, Jeff Wasserman, to critique them before we started our work. I'd get there a half an hour early, and he'd pin it up and he'd tell me what all of my ... "Okay, this is how you get rid of fish eyes," and I'd take my notes. And that night, I'd go back and try something different in light of that information, come back and pin up the next piece. And one day he asked me to leave—and I'd take it down quickly, because I mean, you know, you've got an Ed Ruscha here, we're working on Billy Alders, a triptych of David Hockney. Wall space for critiquing is crucial real estate in that studio. So I was just grateful that he'd pin it up and tell me what I was doing wrong and I'd take my notes and I'd take it back, and then I'd do my job for eight hours. And one day, he said, "Leave it up." He said to leave that up. And I was like, "Huh?" This is before his other master printers would come in. There was three other master printers from Gemini that worked for him. I was just the fuckin' Mexican in the back blowing out screens and washing chemicals. I had the shittiest job, basically, but I loved it, because I was there.

And he would—he said, "Leave it up." I was like, "Okay." So I went back, put my mask on, blowing out screens. At one point, I heard—that day, I heard him shouting, and I look, and he said, "Kill the machine and come here," the pressure washer. It's really noisy. I turn off the machine, take my gear off, my suit, the plastic suit—I mean, it's chemicals. And I walk up front, and he goes, "This is Karl Bornstein, and Karl says, "You're Richard Duardo?" I said, "Yeah," and he shakes my hand. He says, "How would you like to make two hundred forty thousand dollars a year?" I was like, "Uh. Okay, sure." He goes, "Here's my card. I want you to come to my gallery tomorrow." So I'm looking at everybody like, "I'm being set up for a really good laugh, right?" He says, "You did that, right?" I said, "Yeah." "That's your design?" "Yeah." "And you did the printing?" "Yeah." He goes, "I want you to come to my gallery tomorrow."

**KD:** He's talking to you as an artist or a master printer?

**RD:** I don't know. He's just saying—

**KD:** Oh, you don't know at that point.

**RD:** What's going on. He just said, "How would you like to make a quarter of a million dollars a year?" I'd be an idiot to—

**KD:** Who's going to turn that down?

**RD:** I said, sure. And Jeff was smiling ear to ear. He was happy for me. And I said, "Okay." He was—Karl Bornstein started Mirage Editions, which launched Patrick Nagel and that whole Nagel bullshit phenomenon. Well, I was the second artist he launched, with a five-year contract. I lasted one year, and it took four years with a lawyer to get out of the contract, but that's another story.

**KD:** Are you ready to pause for today?

**RD:** Yeah.

**KD:** Okay. Thank you so much.

## NOVEMBER 8, 2007

- KD:** This is Karen Davalos with Richard Duardo. Today is November 8, 2007. We're here in Los Angeles. This is session 2, tape 2, for the [CSRC Oral Histories Series]. And Richard, you were saying that you had some thoughts, things that you recalled since our first meeting that you wanted to talk about.
- RD:** That's correct. I know we were moving into 1979, and moving out of the facility in Highland Park on Figueroa. But there's a couple of events that happened while we were in that space for two years, for the Centro de Arte Público, and the last year where I had it at basically my print studio event space. But I forget to mention that one thing that was interesting about that Centro was that it was literally a block away from my family's house where I was raised in Highland Park, more or less, the latter part of my teen years. And it was a coming home for me, because I left my family and my siblings rather abruptly on the graduation day of my high school, and I was pretty estranged from my family, mostly because of issues with my stepfather. And by the time I was done with college and about six or seven years had passed, although I was visiting my family, I'd never sit down or take a chair. I would just come in and talk to my siblings and my mother and leave.
- KD:** Literally.
- RD:** Literally. She always said, "You'd never sit down when you come here."
- KD:** So not even family celebrations.
- RD:** No. I was pretty done with that household, because of one person. But I remember, when we took the space in Highland Park, I started seeing more and more of my siblings because it was a block walk from the house. So my sisters were coming by—Lisa, Cleo, Jojo. My brothers were coming by—Eric, Oscar, Bruno. They're all—we're talking about kids basically under twenty, nineteen, more or less. And my sister Sandra is still MIA. She's probably in her sixth year of being a runaway, incommunicado. And my sister Irma had found religion, because we were basically raised as atheists, agnostics—atheists, really. We were just nowhere, in terms of any kind of religious foundation, for any of us. And I believe in a reaction to that, my sisters, when they left home and given an opportunity, they went overboard in the other direction. My sister joined a fundamental Christian group that was pretty fanatical and wound up taking her to Florida, southern Florida, to start another church. Because it was a fundamental—it was a fundamental church that was pretty spirited, and they were growing so fast that they were putting together groups of people, church members, and sending them to faraway cities to establish new churches.
- KD:** Was it mostly Latino?
- RD:** You know, no. Korean, white, Latino. And my sister Irma, who was my oldest sister and my closest friend, my protector, actually—because we were the ones that were left in Mexico, and she pretty much took care of me, so we had a pretty tight bond—went to Florida and had a child, Michael. And then got pregnant and contracted hepatitis from some shellfish, and the church group that she belonged to was of course so fundamental that it didn't believe in doctors and medication and just believed in prayer, or that this was obviously a trial.
- KD:** A sign.
- RD:** A sign and a trial from God. So my mother—at that point, I'm in Highland Park with the guys. Pretty much my in-studio mentor was Carlos, so I'd always talk to him in confidence about everything. He's the one that pretty much coached me when I told him what was going on, that it's the responsibility of the eldest son. He knew that my father was pretty much—my stepfather was pretty much MIA in my own household, and this is his stepfather, so it's no big deal to him. But Carlos, I remember, counseled me into going—he said, "Well, what's going to happen? Are they going to fly her back?" What happened was they did not take her to a doctor until she fell into a coma.
- KD:** My goodness.
- RD:** So by the time we got word that my sister was in the hospital, it was—she was in a comatose state already. So my mother—it's her first child. She was in a panic to get to Florida. And my stepfather didn't—time,

maybe he didn't have the time. Maybe he had nothing to do but he didn't care, but he just didn't have the time from work. There's eight kids in the family that have to be fed. So my mother was preparing to leave, and I remember sharing this with Carlos, and his advice was, "You have to, as the oldest son in a Mexican family, you have to be the male representative for something as major as this," in terms of like a catastrophe in the family. And up until that point, I'd been terrified of hospitals. The goriest thing I saw was my friend's head being taken off. So I had a phobia about blood and hospitals and all that stuff.

So he just said, "You've got to do it." Which I wound up doing. And flying to Florida, and tormented by fundamentalists, because they were—they basically did, for the next ten days, while we watched my sister die with an eight-year-old—she had eight-month—she was eight months pregnant, too. Basically saw—my mother and I did a—what do you call it?—a vigil for the next ten days by her bedside while we were being subjected by half a dozen fundamentalist screaming at us that this was a trial for us to come to Jesus. You know what I'm saying? And I completely—that completely, you know, solidified my anger and belief towards organized religion. My anger—just relentless anger and mistrust of organized religion and how it manipulates people. So my sister passed away. Pretty catastrophic, because we'd been basically watching somebody—it's her firstborn, so it's major for my mother.

KD: Yeah.

RD: For me, it was my best friend. So we came back to the state, we came back to California, they flew out her body, and then we went through the same thing as an entire family. But this time, five hundred church members screaming and yelling that she died because of our failure to accept God—

KD: Accept God.

RD: Accept God into our lives, and blah, blah, blah. And that was a funeral that was turned into a circus, basically, by them. I mean, a scream-fest, angry—you know, a couple of my siblings just went nuts in anger, being manipulated by them. Me, I'm pretty cool. I just did ten days of that, so I'm not surprised it's going on now times five hundred people.

KD: Did it bring you and your mother closer together?

RD: No, I'd been—well, did it bring our family closer together?

KD: Just you and your mom being there together for someone.

RD: I really am close to my mother, but at a fairly arm's length, so I feel like, pretty cautious about being too much of a mama's boy. But I think we have a pretty good relationship. At my first show in Sacramento, which was hosted by the Royal Chicano Air Force at their Galería, Galería Posada or—I don't know what they're called. But José Montoya invited me to go up there and do a show, and I decided to take a train. And at the last minute, I decided to take my mother. So yes, I think we have a great relationship. The funny thing about our whole trip—let me—

KD: Yeah, I'm sorry.

RD: It just occurred me, the San Francisco show and the Sacramento show, I just don't track a lot of stuff. Came back to that [show]. I was pretty distraught, even more shaken up, because you have to remember, I mentioned earlier, I saw one of my best friends, childhood friends die, and now my sister died. So I'd been grappling with that whole issue of death and integrating it into your life, almost going on—at this point, almost going on ten years. And another thing that came up was, in that period, was my mother walking over [to the studio] my younger brother, Oscar Duardo, who's probably sixteen years old at the time. So because of my proximity in this studio to my family, I became more and more responsible in being the elder son.

KD: And are they pursuing this as much as you are? I mean—

RD: No, no, no. Nobody in my family had an artistic bone in their body.

KD: No, but I mean the coming over, the—

RD: Oh, yeah, yeah. Because I'm the older sibling, and in their minds, although this is only occurring to me in hindsight years later, but I realize now in their mind, I'm the high school graduate, I am the college graduate. I am doing something.

KD: Oh, right.

RD: Never mind, in my own head, in that second floor building with four other guys, all I'm thinking about is how we're starving, struggling, and we're going nowhere. But in—

KD: But from their perspective—

RD: I am the prodigal son that is doing it. So my mother would constantly send the kids over to hang around me, be at the studio, help me, or bring me food. She would come over, if there was visiting artists from different parts of the country, because it was, like any *centro*, it's open, people are coming in from various parts of the state, other *centros*, it's a crash pad, it's a meeting place for the community. I mean, there's a lot of activities going on. And my mother, if she happened to drop by, there was some artist from Texas or something, she'd invite everybody to dinner and she'd cook dinner for everybody. So it was great. So I think it's—

KD: That must have given it a real kind of nurturing, homey feeling.

RD: Yeah, for sure. Feeding, always feeding skinny, hungry artists. Well, that's her nature. She invites people off the street and she feeds them, she houses them. And on one occasion, I knew one of my brothers was getting into trouble, and that was Oscar. And she brought him over by his ear one day and said, "Your brother—I just picked him up from the police." They released him because he's a minor. "He just broke into a house with some friends. Your brother's headed in a bad direction. This is the beginning. It's going to be—we're going to have the first one, an incarcerated member of the family. He's on the road now."

KD: Right.

RD: So she said, "You've got to do something. He dropped out of high school in tenth grade." Basically just an angry teenage son, my brother, younger brother. So she said, "Teach him a skill so he's got something to do." So I said, "Okay, you're going to be my assistant. I'll pay you," whatever it was, thirty, forty dollars a week. And the timing was perfect, because I just got a commission to—I don't know where it came from, or it might have come out of Carlos's budget, but Carlos and John Valdez ... We were invited by Luis Valdez, what is, Teatro Campesino—

KD: Teatro Campesino.

RD: That he was doing a play called *Zoot Suit* that at the Mark Taper Forum. And we were invited to come see the rehearsals and get a feel of it, because it was still in rehearsal, and we were still figuring out the packaging of the show. And that we might have a crack at the marketing, whatever they called it then, the promotion, marketing material. So we went to it, and what came of it was a suggestion by Carlos ... By that point, I think Gordon Davidson had already committed to Ignacio Gomez, the painter, illustrator—basically a commercial illustrator painter—to do the piece, which wound up being that iconic, defiant portrait of—it's in the hallway [here]—of what everybody thinks was Edward James Olmos. But in fact, he did the portrait before Olmos had ever rehearsed—

KD: Ever had the part.

RD: For the piece. It just wound up being coincidental, the look, that it looked like Eddie Olmos. But anyway, Carlos's take on it is, that's a done deal. They've got their—what they call the key art. So maybe what we can finagle out of this for the Centro is a mural, which they got, which they put on the whole side of whatever that theatre was on Sunset. think Hollywood, Sunset Boulevard, across from the Palladium.

KD: Yeah.

RD: I forgot the name of it. Anyway, they got this massive commercial commission to do a massive mural on that whole wall on Sunset. What I got out of it—and I'm pretty sure it spun out of his budget—was a commission to do a silk-screen limited-edition poster of my design. And he may have—did you some of these slides?

KD: Those slides I didn't see.

RD: There's a couple—three or four shots of the CAP studio, the Central de Arte Público. We're in production on that print, and it's basically a portrait of Danny Valdez. I think that's his name. Daniel—his brother,



Luis's brother is Danny Valdez. And Eddie Olmos. And that was the project that engaged my brother, and so it was perfect timing. There was money and there was an effort, and I made him my assistant. And he—

KD: I don't remember him here. Go ahead.

RD: And he learned really quick. I would say those were—one of the better days when Centro was doing its thing and everybody was working together. And that was about the time my brother became integrated into our studio as my silk screening assistant. So I basically took to heart what my mother requested. I showed him a trade. Basically, I gave him a trade.

KD: And he also goes on to assist at Self Help, right?

RD: He runs—eventually, he does—once he leaves my studio downtown, because he followed my studio for another two or three years. Basically became a competent printer, a master printer. And then he left that after a fight with my sister, who became my production manager at my studio, Lisa. And took the position of being the printer over at Self Help Graphics, I think, for seven or eight years, until he had a falling out with Sister Karen, like every printer there. So anyway, when those guys finally left, I think we left off where Carlos and John left in the middle of the night after some big hassle with Tito, in '78. I don't know. I'm assuming it was '78 was a pivotal year, because I know that by 1979 I was headfirst in the punk scene, and my new world. This angry, nihilistic, out of control, street-medicating, crazy world. I must be, what, twenty-seven at the time, my body could take it, the booze and the drugs and the partying, and the working all day. But all I knew at that period was—for all of us, when we started that Centro, is we worked seven days a week, eighteen-hour days. I mean, that was our life.

KD: But those aren't all working on commissioned projects, are they?

RD: No, you're just doing whatever you can do. And looking at my slides, I saw that there was a T-shirt printer. So I realized, okay, we were doing T-shirt printing, too.

KD: Yeah, there's actually a couple of—if I can ask you a few of those that I picked out. Let me see if I can find them. Well, yeah, one of them says, "Family, '78. Seventy-seven, '78." That's not at the studio. It must be this way. This is '79, Almaraz, Valadez. That's not where I had a question. So this is the period you're talking about.

RD: Right.

KD: Can I open it? Is that okay?

RD: Please do.

KD: That's one with, like, an office-type space, and printing—

RD: Yeah, we had a gallery—

KD: Space and a gallery space, is that what it is?

RD: Yeah, a printing space, a gallery space, and a studio space for everybody. And those are right next door. You know that, right? That's for Linda Lack. Isn't that weird?

KD: Yeah, that's what I was going to ask you about.

RD: It's come full circle. Thirty years later, John's pieces, which was a commercial commission. So you can see we were doing commercial work. And that Brockman poster that looks like rocket ships—

KD: Yes.

RD: The refueling transport is the word CETA.

KD: I saw that, and that was one of my questions.

RD: And that's the Brockman logo, because I had to do promotional work when I was a CETA worker at Brockman Gallery.

KD: And the photograph of everybody lined up—you probably can't see it very well, but it looks like Barbara Carrasco is in the middle—

RD: Yeah, it's the whole posse at that—

KD: Yeah, so who is that? Who's the posse?

RD: Well, trying to get a loop, the one closer—

KD: Yeah. So the folks in the picture, Carlos Almaraz—

- RD: Guillermo Bejerano.
- KD: Guillermo, Barbara Carrasco.
- RD: John Valadez.
- KD: John Valadez, and then you're thinking maybe Victor Valle—
- RD: Yeah. But somebody to do with the publication, that was one of Guillermo's guys. And obviously, I must have been the guy shooting the pictures. John [Valadez] and I at the time were always—because I had done two years at UCLA with Robert Heineken in the photo lab, so I was taking as many crazy pictures as John was.
- KD: And who's the couple posing, the man and the woman? There's like so many of those. I wondered if that was—you're all too young to recognize. That's you?
- RD: No, I'm just realizing—you just pulled out another leaf, right? No, I just saw it. Wow, that's me. And that's the back of the studio, that's John and Carlos. Oh, that is John Valadez with his first wife and his little girl.
- KD: Yeah. She shows up in a few of them.
- RD: And his artwork, too.
- KD: Yeah. The one that looks like almost a display, like an exhibition, gallery type. That one?
- RD: Oh, that's Johanna Went doing her first show. Oh, my God. I didn't know I had pictures. And that's me and my sister Lisa. That's me in my guerilla pajamas that we all wore. That's the first indication I'm starting to do punk stuff. The first poster is "Fuck you if you don't want me." That's Bob Zoell.
- KD: Yeah, I recognize that one. So that's a performance, then, in the middle.
- RD: Yeah, that's Johanna Went.
- KD: Yeah. And there was another one that I must have missed. But, the gallery space ... So were the gallery—were the shows at the Centro, were they—
- RD: Well, those are later. This is where I'm more—well, there's a mixed batch in just that one sheet. There's obviously the Centro group, and then there's stuff where I'm pretty much running the studio on my own.
- KD: So when it's Centro, you guys are doing exhibitions?
- RD: Yeah, and people are coming through, they always are. I know Carlos was taking pictures, and John. So there has got to be an incredible photo documentation of that whole facility space for the two and a half years it kind of existed as a collective. So by the time everybody split, you know, that night Carlos and John left after the big falling out with—regarding Tito—Robert Delgado.
- KD: Oh, you remember John Valadez leaving as well?
- RD: They left that night. When we took the vote, they voted to kick him out, and whoever was left, it might have been Guillermo—Guillermo was revolutionary to the core, Limón, me. Maybe Dolores Cruz was still there. I know Barbara wasn't in on that vote. And we opted to accept—we voted to accept Robert Delgado—Tito—as a member of the CAP, Centro de Arte Público. And that was it for Carlos and John. They didn't say it, but that was it for them, because that night, they moved out. Literally, completely disappeared. Which was a shock to the group.
- KD: Yeah, and you? How did you—
- RD: What, how did I react?
- KD: Well, I thought the leader had left, which was Carlos. So it's over. But mind you, Carlos had just gone back to New York and made his announcement to the group that he was going for a traditional career, he was going for it, again, as an artist.
- RD: Oh, I didn't realize there was two times he does New York.
- KD: Yeah. Well, that was a brief trip. I don't know what happened, but I think he got a sufficient amount of feedback and support to compel him to now go the course of a painter, for himself. Because that was his big announcement when he got back. And he took a studio apartment in Echo Park, above the little lake, and started to do a series, so he was working more and more at home, obviously, during all the Echo Park pieces, and just coming in for meetings or whatever, until eventually, after the New York trip, which might have been as a result of people seeing these Echo Park pieces, and there is—I'd have to look at one of the

notebooks, there was a dealer that took—a broker, a private dealer, that took an interest in the work, and probably became an advisor or mentor and convinced him that you should go for it, and then he introduced Carlos to Jan Turner, and Jan Turner committed to pick him up and giving him a show. And that was the beginning of Carlos's trajectory as a successful painter that crossed over to the Westside. He crossed over and found an audience.

But when they left, they went directly downtown, because we didn't talk for a year and half, easily, two years. I didn't know whether they moved in together. By the time I reconnected with John Valadez as a friend, because we were fairly good friends, it was pretty [developed]. Well, first of all, Carlos was my mentor, so I was obviously concerned, and John was my best friend in that group. And for them to leave that way and completely cut all ties with everybody for over a year—easily over a year for sure, maybe possibly two years—I was pretty devastated. I mean, my whole world as I believed myself to be a participant in this whole collective thinking, cultural workers, just completely collapsed. So in that vacuum, I got into a very self-destructive, nihilistic twist in my life. But it was also that year of the dissolution of the [group], the fragmentation of the group, it was happening. I wanted to get my skill set up to a better level as a printmaker. I mean, I only viewed myself—I never thought of myself as an artist. I thought of myself as a printmaker.

KD: Oh, really?

RD: Yeah. Never ever thought of myself as an artist. I thought I was a printmaker. And I thought I'd better get my skill set up. I just wanted to make better prints. And I thought the best place to learn to make better prints is—there's only two places, Tamarind Institute or Gemini GEL. And I thought, Tamarind is a non-profit—I think they were already associated with a school, in terms of their funding. And I thought, I don't want to learn that way. I want to learn the for-profit way, of how to run a business, a studio. And I started going to Gemini, and they had a separate silk screening—they had basically different printmakers for different specialties. Lithography, etching, and silkscreening. And the silk screening building was adjacent. I mean, Gemini was spread out over three buildings before they consolidated everything. And the silk screening building was run by Jeff—the component of Gemini that involved silk screening was run by Jeff Wasserman.

So I would go there every five or six weeks, every couple months, and beg for a job. And they never had any openings. They were basically—if they took anybody in, they came out of a university with a master's in printmaking. So here I am, I'm just an undergrad, and not even a major in printmaking, because I got my degree in graphic design. And he was polite, he was nice, he was courteous. Because here I am, showing up every couple of months, "Can I work here?" And the next time I visited Gemini to beg again for another one, Jeff is gone. The entire silk screening department had been closed down. And I said, "Where is he?" "He's in Santa Monica." And they're subcontracting now all the Gemini work to his new studio, Jeff Wasserman Silk Screen Co. So he basically bought all the equipment—I'm sure he got a great deal—and then set up in a warehouse in Santa Monica that his grandmother lent him the money to buy the building. Much as he was a master printer at Gemini, everybody just—it wasn't big money, no matter how many degrees you had. You made your money as a printmaker in your printer's proofs.

KD: Right.

RD: So I found out where he was at, and I would still see [him]. Centro is still running, I've just finished my CETA tenure at SPARC, my CETA tenure at Brockman Gallery. And then I'm thinking, "Well, I want to learn from the best. It's not enough that I'm doing it on my own and solving my own problems, technical problems, but I really, really want to learn from the best." And Jeff, to me, once I identified him at Gemini, he was the best printer in silk screening probably on the West Coast. So I found out where he was at in Santa Monica and proceeded to continue to do the same. Show up every couple of weeks asking if I could work there, ask if I could work for free, just begged. And then eventually, I think I just wore him down. He says, "Just come in on Monday, you'll start."

KD: [laughter] And about when was that, the year?

RD: It was '78, maybe mid-'78, because I know I started during the summer, the hot summer. And I was in pig heaven.

KD: Yeah, you talked about the work, you know, you would try something and he would look at it and critique it before the day really started. Tell me what goes through your mind—like what's—there's no degree, there's no certificate: what makes a master printer? Like the process and how you identify it. What does it mean?

RD: Well, it's having the ability to solve a problem that's ever presented by any artist that you're doing a project with, a print project. You have to be the problem solver, you have to figure out how to make what they want to do happen. And usually, working with every artist, it presents uniquely different circumstances and needs to fulfill the requirements of what they're trying to do, accomplish in this print. And it's just a matter of problem solving. And after awhile, you just get intuitively better and better and better. And if you're doing it in the presence of another master printer, they're accelerating the process by telling you what's going on, as you're dealing with fish eyes, hazy edges. You can just either scratch your head and go, "What the hell is going on, because I can't find a book that will tell me what the problem is and how to solve it," but there's somebody standing there right there that just in an instant can look at what just happened and tell you what just happened and how to solve it, or how to approach it, or how to resolve it. And it's just like an epiphany. And then you incorporate that into your experience, right. And that's one more thing that's no longer a problem. It progressively builds and builds and builds. It's almost intuitive. It's amazing when it becomes just intuitive. And I couldn't master everything. Lithography just wore me out. It was too physically taxing.

KD: Really?

RD: Etching, the chemistry was scaring me. Silk screening, even though it was solvent-based at that time, it was, of all the disciplines in printmaking, the one with the fastest results. So that's an indication of my impatience, that if I wanted to start something with somebody, I wanted to get it done as quickly as possible for the satisfaction. And lithography was way too long in the proofing sessions, in the preparations of the stones and all that stuff. Etching, the chemistry, the process was also too long, and the chemistry required in setting up for etching, and the press, the equipment required, was cost-prohibitive. And the health issues really bothered me. So for me, I just went, "Well, if I'm going to be a printmaker, I'm going to work in the realm that is easiest to work with, has the fastest results, and has the greatest possibility in terms of the format size."

KD: Oh, really?

RD: Yeah. There's only so big you can get the lithography.

KD: That's true.

RD: And if you want to get really big, you get ready to drop about sixty thousand dollars for a litho press. And then you spend the rest of the year trying to find the stones, because it was a dying art until Tamarind resurrected it. And anybody that got into lithography was probably picking up the last pieces of equipment that was available. So if there was anything to be had in terms of if you wanted to go towards lithography, and you wanted to set up your own studio, you were facing a very cost-prohibitive route. I'm doing okay, right?

KD: Yeah.

RD: And Jeff took me on, and it wound up being eleven months. And I got the opportunity to work with Ed Moses, Edward Ruscha, Billy Al Bengston, Bloody Bill, Laddie John Dill, Guy Gil—Laddie John Dill, Patrick Nagel, who was becoming a phenomenon. Patrick is a really great guy. He must have been—if I was twenty-seven, he must have been about thirty-four.

KD: Really? Wow.

RD: Yeah, you don't realize—to me, he was like an older guy. But I realized in hindsight, he must have been only four or five years older than me. [Also] Lita Albuquerque, Judy Chicago. I mean, everybody that was anybody in the art world on the West Coast was going through that studio and working on prints. So my

pleasure was just to be in the presence—to me, my rush was being in the presence—and that’s why I enjoy printmaking. It’s like, if you really want to be a gaga fan to art stars, but not be stupid and just standing around just adoring them, is when you can be in their presence while they’re in the process of creation and you’re actually a participant in helping them finish that. So it was the best, for me.

That’s why I decided—I mean, it was really a decision that I did not want to be an artist, because I found it to be a self-indulgent, singular solo activity that I didn’t think would contribute to my development as a human being, you know? I’m still grappling with issues of God, right. So I thought, “Okay, I’ll develop a skill set that can only be used by artists, me, and if I’m really, really good at it, like as good as Jeff, I’m going to be able to work with the people that I just admire, for years, even as a student, that I would read about in textbooks.” I could actually be in a room with them and watch them create, you know? Watch their process and help them arrive at something they wanted to do, because I was the master of something that they didn’t quite have the technical skill set to arrive at. But I could get them there.

KD: You were talking about what ... You would do these projects early in the morning to get Jeff to critique—

RD: At night.

KD: Or at night, at the studio, and—

RD: At the studio, at the Centro de Arte Público.

KD: And were you—I mean, you were doing your own work, right?

RD: Yeah. Well, I was—I don’t consider I was making—I was creating technical—

KD: Right, that’s what you talked about last time. So it’s not like you—

RD: I was doing technical projects for myself in order to accomplish multi-, halftone printing. Flat-field printings, big. I’d do a big print just to resolve the issues of—

[break in audio]

KD: This is tape 3 with Richard Duardo. Richard, go ahead, you were telling me about problem solving.

RD: I was doing posters for—I’d already had two or three years of doing posters for Brockman, for SPARC, for Self Help Graphics. So obviously, I have a skill set as a graphic designer and as a printmaker, and obviously, it’s being appreciated, because they’re all poaching me from different organizations. But I wasn’t, like, enamored with myself, you know? I was fixated on being the best printmaker in Los Angeles. That’s what I wanted to be. Basically subservient to—I mean, I viewed myself as completely being subservient to the artist. That is probably why I became a great artist, because so many other printmakers were torn between their work and grudgingly doing this because it was a job. Me, I was determined to be the best printmaker in Los Angeles, the best.

KD: Did you find that things you go on to do as an artist, creatively, were influenced by this early endeavor of a craft?

RD: Yeah. And organizing those slides and seeing that *Conjunto* print, because I completely—I didn’t remember that until I saw that slide. I went, “My God, this is completely different for a Chicano artist in a *centro del arte* to be doing this kind of stuff.” And I look at ... There’s some slides—there’s some pieces that were returned to me that are in the storage area that I have not seen for thirty years plus. And I look at those, and I thought, “This is pretty conceptual stuff.”

KD: Yeah, that’s what I thought.

RD: But I wasn’t pushing myself. Yeah, so I do my time with Jeff. I travel in my little Volkswagen across town and get to the studio and do whatever tasks were unfinished or what I was working on, or doing something for this event or whatever. And then I would do a piece that I might have created for myself. A challenge, a technical exercise, let’s just call it that. I considered the work I was doing nothing but technical exercises to master my craft. And Jeff would let me bring them in, pin them up, and he’d critique them on a technical level, printmaker to printmaker. And that’s all I was interested in.

And that’s all he was interested in talking about, because Jeff came out of, as far as being—as much as he was probably the most renowned silkscreen printer in the West Coast, he came out of a garage printing

T-shirts. His trajectory, life-changing trajectory, was that he was the only person they found that could pull a squeegee when Gemini needed a silk-screen, studio printer. But because he's such a perfectionist, it was a pretty seamless segue from printing T-shirt fabrics to printing a hundred twenty-five-color Sol LeWitt print in perfect registration. That's how much Jeff's brain was wired the same way. Which was he was not about his ego, not about his own work, because there was—he was all about a perfect print to the specifications of the artist.

KD: So tell me about when he—what did he show? He tells you to leave one up one day.

RD: It was the poster that I did for the Screemers, the piece in the back.

KD: Oh.

RD: Because this had now changed, probably in terms of scale. It was the big jump for me. I went from a twenty-four by thirty poster size for all these *centros*, this or that, or for this group or that, and nothing ever transcended twenty-four by thirty, thirty-six. And here I walk in with a thirty-eight by forty paper. And I'm being introduced to paper sizes from the prints that he's doing, and I'm watching how you can handle a piece of paper that way, and how you can perfectly print it.

So my next challenge for myself back home on my rinky-dink equipment is, how am I going to figure out how to do a big-format print, which I figured out. When I pinned that up, he was blown away. Because, one, I did it overnight. It was like nine colors. And I did it in this large format. So he said to leave it up, and that's when Karl Bornstein was in there walking through Bob Zoell, because he was feeding him the same horseshit. "How would you like to make two hundred fifty thousand dollars a year, kid? Stick with me" kind of act, because he was riding on the success of his [Patrick] Nagel work. And we were printing all the Nagel work there for Karl Bornstein. So Karl was in there fairly often, pushing basically a commercial artist that he built into, of course, a fifteen million dollar a year enterprise. But in the meantime, he was probably showing up, being all gaga himself, because he's seeing Ed Ruscha in there, all in the superstars. Billy Al [Bengston], Ed Moses. Like, literally, the West Coast established, recognized superstars were in there working for Jeff, and Karl's in there doing these Patrick Nagel prints, which are okay, but that's not—

KD: Yeah, I wanted to ask you, at the time, you know who Karl Bornstein is, you know who Nagel is. Where do they rate on your scale of—

RD: I like Patrick, because he was a really kind person, he was a genuine person.

KD: That's what everybody says about him.

RD: Yeah, he wasn't . . . [He was] completely unaffected by what had fallen on his lap, and a really generous human being. I think that's why Karl made so much money. That relationship was totally in Karl's favor. But you don't know all of this until you get a little bit older, and you realize . . . I became [friends] with him and his wife, Jennifer Dumas, who was an ex-model.

And this large format stuff . . . Mind you, Patrick Nagel's work had been never bigger than fourteen by twenty, thirty inches max. These silk screens, very small. And he saw this big huge print also, when he'd come in to look at the proofs. And he took me aside on his own, and he said, "Richard, I'd like to do some big prints with you." And I was like, "Wow, sure." And we were working to that end until Karl found out that he was coming to me separately. By then I had already had a relationship with Karl. And [he] completely usurped that and said, "You can't do this. If you're going to do large format prints, I'm going to be the publisher, and Jeff is going to do them. We're going to contract Jeff." So Patrick—it became apparent Patrick was trying to make a break on his own from Karl. But contractually, he was probably . . . As I later found out, since I signed the same contract, that he was straitjacketed into a relationship that was—mine was five years, his was five years, I'm sure. I wouldn't be surprised if it was ten years, his contract.

But anyway, after pinning that piece up, and him saying, "Don't take it down," that's literally the day everything in my life changed, because Karl Bornstein happened to have an appointment, or some business to be in there. Because I'm sure I would have taken it down by the end of the day. For some reason, Karl happened to be there, show up, and does his little Napoleon march around the studio and looks at everybody's work and offers up his comment, unsolicited. He was pretty obnoxious.

- KD:** Well, I guess what I was trying to figure out is, my understanding is that dealers take a certain eye, a certain look, right? And you're—from what I've seen, yours is nothing like Nagel, unless there was a period that I'm just unfamiliar with. I'm just curious how it struck him, or how—
- RD:** Karl, at that time, is basically a commercial dealer. It's two different worlds. There's the institutional, fine art world of really academically trained artist that go through that rigorous route of lining up the right curators and right collectors and the right critics in your corner, and you're on that trajectory. And then there's that whole other universe of, like, the LeRoy Neimans. No institution would give him the time of day, but he's not caring, because he's selling five million dollars' worth of prints and paintings. We're talking about [Hiro] Yamagata, who I also worked for. You know his work?
- KD:** Mm-hmm.
- RD:** Another '80s phenomenon that made Martin Lawrence [galleries] twenty, thirty million dollars a year. He's a Japanese painter who'd just do this dumbass stuff that sold for five thousand dollars a print. And not one museum or major dealer represented him, because he's . . . The commercial world, Karl Bornstein, Mirage Editions—that whole world is a billion-dollar business, and it's all commercial work. It's all decorator stuff. It's all, churn it out, or find somebody, make them a star. Because it's all marketing.
- KD:** And did you know that going in?
- RD:** Yeah.
- KD:** Okay. So what becomes the tension?
- RD:** Between Karl and I?
- KD:** Well, you said you tried to get out of the contract.
- RD:** When I started to see my royalty checks, which I've never cashed. They're like seven dollars, twelve dollars. He was selling everything I was producing, all the editions I was creating, all the originals. And then when I get my statement, my check, all the deductions were just ridiculous. I said, "What is this? This is bullshit."
- KD:** How long did that last then?
- RD:** The good part of the relationship, maybe about twelve months, eighteen months.
- KD:** The business part of the relationship.
- RD:** Well, I had to sit out my contract. I could not produce, or he'd sue me. So I said, "All right. I'm a printmaker. I'm getting jobs. I don't need this. So I'll just sit it out," until it was done. He wanted—it's a control issue. I was one artist he could not control, or wear me down by me having some revelation that "Oh, my God, I can't do anything else." I just thought, "Well, I'll just go back to contract printing, I have a studio."
- KD:** And at this time, what studio? Where's my list?
- RD:** Well, the crucial thing that allowed me to get a studio and move downtown was, I was approached by some well-dressed Chicanos in suits at my studio in Highland Park, this is—
- KD:** Are they remaining nameless, or—
- RD:** I'm running around wearing torn jeans and a tartan skirt and a mohawk, and printing posters and having a great time. Having Fear, Johanna Went ... It was a Temporary Autonomous Zone. Just like TAZ. Have you read Hakim Bey's piece?
- KD:** No.
- RD:** Oh, you should read that little manifesto. But it was literally a poltergeist in that space. And I was young, and I was into it. This was an alternative to something that—my world that had just imploded, and this is what I replaced it with. And it was invigorating and full of life and exciting, and I was 100 percent all there. And evidently, the word of mouth was getting out there that there is this guy in Highland Park, so I was getting phone calls from Mick Haggerty, the top graphic designer at Warner Brothers. People were coming to me, knocking on my door, calling me on the phone, going, "I'd like to see you."
- KD:** Wow.
- RD:** "I'd like you to print my work." Philip Cheng. It was a trip. I mean, had I been a little bit more self-centered, I could really—

- KD: Really worked it. *[laughter]*
- RD: Yeah. But I was just, “Oh, sure, come on in. What do you want to do?” And get excited about what they want to do.
- KD: And what space? They’re coming over to the one—
- RD: Highland Park.
- KD: The one in Highland Park. And it looked about the same, what we see in those—
- RD: Yeah. Except more and more pop, punk stuff is going on. There’s beer bottles; there’s fucking members of bands that are crashing there, because I had five thousand square feet.
- KD: Yeah, you were saying before that you were only taking up a small corner of it. But I find that fascinating that they came back. It must have been—this is the ’80s?
- RD: Yeah. No, beginning, late ’70s, really.
- KD: Yeah, so the beginning of slumming.
- RD: And they were fun projects, and they were different; they weren’t Chicano, and they were fun. To me, they were always—I’d get excited about the imagery, but I’d get more excited about—the more difficult it was, the more I was excited about taking it on, because I wanted to solve the technical challenge of it. Like I said, you just get practice. Right, Tony? *[asking friend]* Practice makes perfect.
- KD: *[laughter]* You’re going to commit him on tape, huh?
- RD: So this is Hecho en Aztlán. And then curiously . . . What I wanted to do, because I really thought about that name, because I was still a Chicano. But I mean, I was still—I’m in this other world, and this is what I came from. And every print that I do, I want this stamp on there, especially because now most of my clients are coming from the Westside, and when they’re writing the check, they’re going, “Heck-o, and, Richard—what?” And they’d ask the question, “What is this?” And that was the only opportunity for me to get on my soapbox and go, “You are on our land, and this land is called Aztlán, and I am a Chicano,” and I do my whole spiel.
- KD: Can you give me some of it?
- RD: Well, I don’t know. They’d go, “What is,” first of all, “what is Hecho en Aztlán?” “Well, *hecho en* means *made in*, okay? Aztlán is the mythical land of the north that our ancestors said our blood would be mixed and we would become the cosmic race, and this is where you’re at, because this, the Southwest has been identified as that.” So it was a little mini educational process in the course of writing a check. And then they found it really, really cool. So I would stamp my prints with that. And I said, “And this is my message to the world through your work when people pick this up. They’re not going to see a stamp that says, ‘Made in the USA,’ ‘Made in Mexico,’ ‘Made in China.’ They’re going to a stamp that says it was made in Aztlán.” Make sense? And I thought, “Okay, this is my—still my little political agenda unfolding here.” Really kind of an irreverent, humorous way for myself, you know? I’m not being a hard-ass Chicano now. I’m being a real playful one.
- KD: And also at the level of ideology, right?
- RD: It’s embedded in there. Subtly, but it’s embedded. And it’s an opportunity. I always found it—invariably, it was always an opportunity for dialogue, to people that were completely unconscious about it. So I thought, okay, I’m still doing my part for the movement. But the image might be of a fucking punk with a Mohawk. But at least that little stamp created the opportunity to have that conversation again.
- KD: And the writing of the check, as you said.
- RD: Yeah. That was fun, always. And I don’t—these suits came up, knocked at my door, these really slick Chicanos in suits, and they said, you know, they’d heard that I’m this young entrepreneur. And, “Would you like to have—if you had a hundred fifty thousand dollars, what would you do with it? What would you do with this business if it got an infusion of a hundred fifty thousand dollars?” And I said, “Well, I don’t know, I’d just get more equipment.”
- KD: Because at the time, you were working with your little jury-rigged.



- RD: Mm-hmm. And they said, “Can you do a business plan?” And I said, “What’s that?” And they said, “We’ll write your business plan. Just give us an overview of what you do.” And basically what they were were guys scamming the SBA by—
- KD: The SBA?
- RD: By recruiting people and writing their business models and doing their paperwork for an SBA loan.
- KD: Oh, Small Business [Administration].
- RD: Yeah. And the deal was that when you got your loan—and they cook your paperwork. What am I, am I keeping receipts and stuff like that, or even a spreadsheet? No fucking way. But I’m successful. So they just made it all up for two years and submitted the proposal, and I went through the process. And right before—and there’s, on the inside of the SBA, of course, there’s some people working with them. It’s all about a kickback. This didn’t occur to me until I was well into the process, and then they came back for another visit, they said, “Okay, you’re going to keep—this is the deal.”
- KD: You need to keep getting loans so they can get their share?
- RD: No, no, no. It was a one-time loan. “This is the deal. When you get your money and it’s in the bank, you owe us twenty-five thousand dollars in cash.” And then I got it, I went, “Well, okay, cool.” I mean, I can still work with the other hundred twenty-five thousand. So that’s the deal, sure. They said, “Look, we’re not messing around.” And [I said], “Neither am I. I get the picture. Thanks for the opportunity. No problem.” So sure enough, I got my SBA loan, all the money went into the bank, and they picked me up in the car. I went straight to the bank, I wrote out a twenty-five thousand dollar check for cash, pulled out the cash, got back into their car, gave them the bag of my money. And they dropped me off at the studio, and they said, “Have a nice life. See you later.” And of course, now I’ve got a hundred twenty-five grand in the bank. Of course, it’s a loan, but I’m going, “I can make a move now.” And I leaped into downtown. And I remember taking my mother with me, because this was a big—I started looking for a space, and I remember when I found two or three options, I asked my mother to come with me.
- KD: What do you mean? To get a house, or—
- RD: No, to look at the space. Kind of having your mother’s blessing.
- KD: You’re such a good *México*no.
- RD: So we looked at about three buildings that I had already sussed out, and we wound up at the Diamond Walnut building on Seventh Street, across from—which is about a block away from Alameda, which is now across the street from the Greyhound bus station. [Former California Walnut Growers Association building—ed.] That wasn’t there before.
- KD: Yeah, I know.
- RD: And I got the top floor, the eighth floor, which is about eight thousand square feet, for about five hundred dollars a month.
- KD: Whoa.
- RD: That was—
- KD: That’s really good.
- RD: Well, people were getting twelve thousand square feet, whole floors, for two hundred bucks at that time. Nineteen seventy-nine?
- KD: Yeah, ’79.
- RD: I was the first wave. I was actually the year later than the first wave, but basically in hindsight now, I was part of the first wave. And I remember we came up on this huge, twelve-foot by ten-foot freight elevator that brought us up, and we walked in. I mean, I had already seen it. I walked around with my mom, and I said, “I’m going to start here. I want to start here downtown.” Because I had the top floor, which means I had the roof, which was another eight thousand square, because immediately I started doing punk gigs on the roof, rooftop.
- KD: I’ve heard about this.

RD: And because I was running around with all the hardcore punk band, the Plugz, the Alley Cats, X—jeez, who was around then? The Germs.

KD: Black Flag?

RD: No, they were an Orange County punk band. They were—I had started moving away from the scene. They were kids. I was in the punk scene when there was pogoing and it was fun. The Orange County punk bands brought in slam dancing, and fucking elbows to the jaws, broken teeth, thrashing and stuff. That’s when I started to go, “I’m not about this.” And then I started moving away from the punk scene. It was no longer fun, it was angry. To me, white trash kids coming up from Orange County.

KD: Yeah, that’s what it was.

RD: Just wanting to fucking beat everybody up on the dance floor, just like—

KD: So this becomes Aztlán Multiples? Is that the name change, or—

RD: I was—when I moved downtown, I just ... My sister Lisa, who had been hanging around, got a job working for my paper supplier, my fine art paper supplier. They would call it the “paper mill,” and it’s located downtown on Traction Avenue, east of Little Tokyo. What they now call the Art District. And I was—you know, now—and then I ran out and spent eighty grand on two clamshell printers. Brand new one-arms, racks, light tables. I made a state-of-the-art studio that made Jeff Wasserman drool. Basically he was my surrogate father now. And we started up. I mean, I had business going nonstop, so it had now just extrapolated into four times the volume, because I could handle it. And I’m starting up. My brother is competent enough that I hire him full time.

KD: Oscar.

RD: Oscar. And I think at that point I grew . . . I know when I started up there, I was alone. I mean—

KD: You were the staff.

RD: I was dumb. I bought all this equipment and I’m there by myself. And I remember, still running everything by myself. But in order to answer the phone, which is ringing nonstop, I got a wraparound headset with a big extension cord. There’s shots of me where I’d be literally answering the phone while I was printing and racking, and bidding and taking on jobs. I thought at once point, I think I’d better start hiring people, which I started to do. And I still didn’t know how to run a business. I’m stuck now with fourteen hundred dollar a month loan payments to the SBA, based on a business model that says I’m going to making, God knows what, three hundred fifty thousand dollars year.

KD: Oh, that’s right. The loan is based on the business model.

RD: And I’m only paying them off only with their own money that’s in the bank.

KD: The leftover.

RD: The leftover, the reserve, which might have been about twenty thousand, twenty-five thousand dollars. And I’m doing my little poster jobs, and they’re coming from everywhere. Epic Records, Warner Brothers, that are commissioning artists that are hiring me, or whatever. They’re hiring me to do something. And I went . . .

While I was at the Paper Source buying another pile of rag paper, my sister is handling all of my paperwork and answering the phones and taking orders. And I’m seeing this, every time I go in there, because I’m chatting with my sister. One day I’m in there and I’m watching her, because I have to wait for a while. I said, “Where’s Wally?” His wife that owned the . . . She goes, “They’re never here.” “They used to be here, where are they?” “Well, they’re not here because I’m doing—they don’t need to be here.” And I literally, over the counter, I said, “Why don’t they have to be here?” “Because I’m doing everything.” I said, “What’s your job title here, Lisa?” “Um, clerk.” I said, “Really? What are they paying you?” “It’s like seven dollars an hour.” And I said, “You know, Lisa, you’re running this company, and they’re telling you—they’ve wired you to believe that you’re nothing but a clerk. But do you know you’re running this business?” And she had her own little epiphany, and she goes, “Yeah, should I ask for a raise?” I said, “You know what? I’ll double what they’re paying you. Just come work for me. Run my company.”

And she jumped ship, and she—because she was a model of efficiency. And I just said, “All I want to do is pull a squeegee and have fun with artists. Do you want to run the business? Knock yourself out. Make as much money as you want. Pay yourself whatever you want. Just spare me the phone and all of the bullshit. Do all of that stuff that people do that run a business, and you can have whatever you want here. Just let me have fun. Just tell me you got this artist, this is what you got to do, and just let me have fun. Let me do that part, the creative production part.” And my brother was with us, and at that eight thousand square foot space, things just jammed. It was amazing.

KD: Did you make money?

RD: Yeah. I mean, we hired people, more people, and it grew into a facility that had about—we had three separate workstations, which required three people. Separator, somebody that recycled the ink—actually four people—a racker, who helped the master printer, and a master printer. So there was three workstations, four people per station. So we had twelve people and my sister running the office, and me. I’m bouncing around because I’m good at everything, and there’s nothing I—more than to say, “Let me do that for you, just get out of the way,” and I’d get into it. And we got so big that we had to find another facility, like a satellite facility.

So I went back to where the Paper Source was on Traction Avenue, and found out the whole second floor was available, which was three separate lots. So I took leases on the whole second floor, all three lots. And I said, “Okay, I’m going to start buying more equipment, and we’re going to set up over there.” And Lisa, to her credit, because she’s that smart, she goes, “What are we doing duplicating the overhead,” and blah, blah, blah. Just dumb. And in the meantime, she’s fighting with my brother, because my little—they’re siblings. Never mind that this is the workplace. She’s very professional, but he’s pulling his fucking sibling bullshit on her. So she fires him. I mean, she ran everything through me. I said, “You know, I defer to you. You’re running the business.” She goes, “But you’re the—he’s not going to take . . .”

KD: Right, it has to come from you.

RD: Yeah. “You have to do it.” I said, “Oh, God, Lisa.” Three siblings working together and all these other people. She wanted it to end, because the confrontations was not—

KD: Helpful for the rest of the office.

RD: Yeah. They’d see this, which would encourage everybody to challenge her, this and that.

KD: Exactly.

RD: And she’d make her case. She goes, “Richard, this is completely disruptive to the chain of command, and people are losing respect for me. Stupid Oscar comes up here, and I ask him to do something as his job, he wants to challenge me.” I said, “You’re right. All right. You want me to swing the axe.” I went over, I said, “Oscar, let’s go for a ride. Let’s go have lunch.” And I swung the axe. And that was the beginning of a four- or five-year estrangement from my brother. But he brought it on himself, basically. But a door opened up, because Sister Karen called me up, she says, “I really [need]. . .” at just the perfect timing. And I said, “You know what? I’ve got a great guy for you: my brother.”

KD: Wow. You helped him get that job.

RD: I said, “Oscar, Sister Karen needs a rock and roll, young, on top of his shit . . .” Well, she was always—at this point, she was calling me for advice or calling me to come over and pay her a visit and try to help whoever was their printer at the time, because they were struggling constantly. They never technically had a good printer. And I’d do that, so we’d have those chats. And then at one point, I said, “Yeah, I’ve got Oscar, a professional. That’s what you need. You don’t need somebody out of college.”

That’s the problem. She was hiring people that came in and said, “Look, I have an MFA in printmaking.” Well, a college-educated printmaker is somebody that can do about three prints for critique. That’s not a printmaker. You’ve got to be able to do a hundred fifty sheets in perfect registration within a time frame and a budget. That’s the big, you know, canyon difference between somebody with five degrees who doesn’t know how to wipe their nose, and somebody that has no degree, probably not even a high school education, but has done fifteen years in the trench and is a master printer in the real world. And I

said, "I've got the perfect guy for you." Oscar had just done, what, five years with me? I said, "You should take my brother. He's looking for a job." And he took the position.

But again, he got into—you know, he felt that he was Self Help Graphics at one point, because Self Help Graphics projected itself in the world through its graphics, its prints. So somewhere in the course of yanking that squeegee in that room downstairs from Sister Karen, since pulling all the levers in his mind, because I'd hear it from him. "She doesn't know what she's doing, she doesn't even know any of that." I said, "Oscar ..."

KD: What year is this that he joined?

RD: Maybe '81, '82. And I'm having these punk gigs on the roof. I started a record label called Fatima Records with my friend Yolanda [Compero] Ferrer from Mexico, who was a big rock en español promoter in Mexico, who I met through Tito Larriva. Because they [the Plugz] were my favorite band. I related to them and I got behind them, because they were a brown face on those punk stages. Three guys from Texas: Charlie Quintana, who is now a big session drummer, and Tito Larriva, who's been in every fucking Robert Rodríguez film now, and Barry McBride. Bass player, another Texan. And I loved those guys. I would do anything for them—all their posters, all their flyers, anything for free. Their T-shirt. Because I thought they were the greatest punk band on the planet. Only because they actually knew how to play their instruments.

KD: [laughter] You figured out punk music, huh?

RD: Yeah. And as a result of—I mean, I was at the core of that scene.

KD: Now, as a record label, that means you're the producer.

RD: We were a small, independent record label.

KD: Where are they recording?

RD: Wherever you book a recording.

KD: Oh, okay. Live recording. Oh, no, a studio place.

RD: Studio, yeah. That's what making records is. You get the band, book the recording studio, record the material, contract a pressing company that packages your whole thing, and then the next thing is distribution. That's where we died; we died on distribution. We were small and independent, and we were trying to use Slash as our model, Slash Records. And at that point, I'm a player in the punk scene. I don't mean in an obnoxious sort of way. Everybody knows me, Richard Duardo, fucking factory, print studio downtown, record.

And I remember talking to Bob Biggs all the time, trying to use him as a mentor, or get him as a mentor, because Slash Records is already going. *Slash*, the magazine which Steve Samiof started with Bob Biggs. Bob Biggs, of course, fucked up and wrestled the label and the magazine away from him. Steve kept going—Steve's House of Fine Art. All the little—all the beginning players of the bigger art world and subculture world. I'm starting to be basically integrated into that planet, and it keeps—the reins keep getting bigger. I was introduced to these guys that came out of Ohio that needed a place to crash—and it wound up being Mark Mothersbaugh and Devo—through another friend. And then [I] became friends with Mark, and then Mark found out . . . Mark and I hit it off, because he was actually an art major specializing in printmaking at Ohio State. So Mark was always coming over to my studio and we were doing prints, and blah, blah, blah. And that leads to meeting . . . It's just insane. YMO, Yellow Magic Orchestra, these Japanese that came over. Because Devo now finally gets her hit, and they blow up.

KD: This was '83?

RD: Eighty-two or '83. So I'm integrated in the punk scene. I'm starting to meet the crossover bands. Like starting with Devo. I guess today they'd call them alternative bands, right? But they're breaking out music in another direction, conventional music, and then there's this hardcore punk scene. And then out of the hardcore punk scene, some superstars are busting out. The Go-Go's, X, the Blasters came on the scene maybe about '84. And there's this band that I've known from the mid-'70s, Los Lobos, are in East LA. They played at my wedding in 1980. In 1980, the Hong Kong Café, downtown in Chinatown, is going off. That is the core insane venue for the punk scene. I'm just doing little satellite shows just for fun, but I never

viewed myself as a venue. Just fun shows at my place. Although the police shut us down twice, the riot squad twice, but I was never a venue. I was just—at most, the last year there, eight, nine gigs. But they were seminal gigs for certain bands.

And what was really, what's going on was Madame Wong's downtown, in the Hong Kong Café. The Starwood and the Masque, Brendan Mullen's club. And this little satellite—well, this little scene was basically playing out between about nine clubs in Hollywood and Chinatown. And there was a girl named Hong Kong Tracy, because she ran the door at the Hong Kong Café, who looked like Lynda Carter and was the source of . . . Some of the fuel driving the punk scene is basically booze, but also what's starting to creep in is the first sign of speed. And speed was coming into the scene in the form of what they called black beauties, and it winds up, the girl I get involved with, Hong Kong Tracy, is the Costco of black beauties. I didn't know that until I was dating her for about four months later. At this point, I'm like twenty-eight. She's . . . I find out later, she's basically nineteen. But she comes from a very successful, wealthy family based in La Quinta, but she's slumming. She's just another—she's going through her teenage acting out with her family, and this is what she is. She's a punk and she's dealing drugs when she doesn't have to. But she's doing her part to be an angry punk young girl. And we hook up in that scene and we have a tumultuous relationship that lasted about four months. I find out her age, and I kick her to the curb. "I don't want to mess with you. You're a teenager, for God's sake." So I said, "Call me in a couple years," that was my way to get out. Got out. Plus, I also said, "I can't do this." Because she got me going on the stuff, and I thought there was something terribly wrong with it when I kind of had a semi-meltdown in my studio. And I just said, "I want this out of my life. I want you and that gone. Bye." And two years later, of course, she calls me up like clockwork. I've got my SBA loan, I'm downtown, I'm designing a line of furniture.

**KD:** A line of furniture?

**RD:** Yeah, it's called Artifacts. I'm hooked up with this Jewish princess from Georgia and we're having fun. The world is plowing ahead whether I get out of bed or not at this point in my life.

**KD:** The business is its own motion.

**RD:** Yeah. I'm only showing up because I enjoy it so much, but basically I'm starting to drift away towards self-indulgence. And one of them was, of course, Ron Rezek, of Ron Rezek Lighting and Furniture, just started. He's massive now. I met him as—he was one of my instructors at UCLA. And I ran into him. "What are you doing?" And, a massive furniture designer. We became friends. And he in conversation, he said, "You know what? I'd like to commission artists who do posters, promotional silkscreen posters." Basically, they're not serious advertising, because they're so limited, like fifty. But he wanted to do something that he could commission some of the great designers or artists in LA. And I got, of course—did all the printing, which was a great contract for me.

And one of the things—Ron and Carlos Almaraz are going to hit a trajectory in about five years from that point, if you can remind me. Tracy. So I'm doing my thing, and my punk label is . . . We sold everything we had, but we never got paid, so we bellied-up, right at a crucial time when the Plugz could have broken. We collapsed as a company. And you know, records, if you've got a hit, it's like you've got a two-week window to put more product out and keep the momentum going. And we realized with the album *Better Luck* that we [had] collapsed. And I felt so bad, because I thought, "We blew it." And we also had the Brat on our label, and the Brat was the biggest potential possibility of breakout of the entire LA punk scene, because Blondie was going, and this was the Latin version of Blondie. Unfortunately, they're stupid young kids, and they hook up with—who did "My Sharona"? The Knack?

**KD:** The Knack.

**RD:** Okay. Total—their manager, total fuckin' sleazebag. Five-dollar-than-God, full of themselves, because the Knack has got the biggest . . . His manager, Cesar Ban. And we never had contracts with anybody, I always worked. And to this day—I'd go through the formalities, by the time we get it done, we never even wind up signing them. But I think . . . I operate from a level, "I'm working with you because you want to work with me," and that's enough. This is nothing more—the structure of how it all breaks up into royalties and

this and that. But ultimately, a contract doesn't mean shit. Two people don't—I learned that from Karl Bornstein. If two people do not want to work together, all the contracts in the world are not going to bind that marriage together, or its productivity. And because we didn't have a contract with the Brat, the manager for the Knack, who saw one of our kids, saw the same thing. This is a band that could really break.

Well, he jumped in, threw a wedge between, signed them on in management, then cut us away. Their label. And then start chopping them some ridiculous fucking deal that went nowhere. They went nowhere. They plowed into the ground and they disappeared. And I thought, "Well, lesson learned for you, stupid idiots." But that's the way it went down. Another band that could have just—right through the roof. But that's what kind of what happens, right? Greed takes it all away. But Tracy—things are happening. Our record label, I'm doing a furniture line, my print company is going berserk. I'm doing my own prints, they're selling. Just kind of nuts. Hanging around with—dating Jane Wiedlin from the Go-Go's. She was fat at the time, so they weren't anything yet. They couldn't play their instruments.

KD: I was the teenybopper in the audience.

RD: Yeah. And then I was also—and then for about six months, I started dating Daphne Vendetta, who was the manager of Mad Society, the famous band with the ten-year old boy with the mohawk, nine-year old boy. That got her a lot of grief and put her on TV a lot. And Daphne, we were together for about six months, and then I found out she was starting to do heroin, and I kicked her out of my loft. And two weeks later, she died of an overdose. Never forgive myself for that. And working with all kinds of crazy . . .

At this point, the only way I could tell you who I've worked with is by going through the archives and blocking out the dates and looking at the certificates of authenticity and addressing. That is—I learned early on from Jeff Wasserman is, you have to create provenance and a history of whatever project you're doing, so you have a reference record. It's more as a service for the collector, whoever—forget the publisher, but the publisher only cares about getting the stuff and flipping it. Their records suck. But eventually, true collectors out there will route themselves past the publisher, because they want to find the person that rolled the stone, rubbed the plate, or pulled the squeegee, to hear it firsthand how it was done. And I started to collect production notes, and then create my own certificates of authenticity.

KD: So back up. Is this when you first started learning to document your work?

RD: Yeah, that was about 1978. It was the result of hanging around and working—

KD: With Jeff.

RD: Being part of Jeff's studio.

KD: So, and now tell me a little bit more about certificates of authenticity.

RD: It just represented, in a one or two page document, the ability to look at everything and refresh your memory, for me. That's what I recognize ultimately as a document, why I thought, "Well, this is good." But initially, it was to create a record in case somebody wanted information, you'd just Xerox and give it to them. "Yeah, I did that. Oh, here. I can't remember everything, but thank God for this document, I can tell you what happened." Bring it all back. And—

KD: So it's your notes about the process and the project.

RD: The production, right. And—which ultimately boils down to a certificate of authenticity. And my sister, when she came back on board, she took it on like a hell-bent archivist.

KD: Oh, really?

RD: Yeah, Lisa was really into the information of the event that happened. So—probably to her credit, because I can pretty much write off seven years off life in the '80s, because the '80s were insane in the art world. I don't know how much—it was mad money. Mad money.

KD: Yeah. The economy is doing well. Everybody's buying.

RD: We're talking about—my marriage lasted . . . Well, I was doing a line of furniture with my girlfriend Beverly [Bass]. Steel and glass. They're on there. Artifacts. Running my print studio, doing my posters. Karl Bornstein is not in the picture yet. Okay?

KD: Okay.

- RD: And . . . no, maybe he was when that happened. Yeah, I didn't sign with Karl until maybe 1986. Maybe I might have taken a print and pinned it up at Jeff's studio long after I was gone, just to show him what I was up to, and that prompted that whole relationship. I think that happened, because my relationship with Bornstein was—I have a copy of the contract. I think I signed in 1986, and it was over ... I had to sit out five years.
- KD: Right.
- RD: But I mean, I'm master of my own universe at this point. I've got a full-blown production studio going, run by my sister—
- KD: And that's still Aztlán Multiples?
- RD: Yeah. Well, at this point, it's Multiples Fine Arts.
- KD: Multiples. And it's twelve people, or—
- RD: Yeah, twelve.
- KD: In the '80s.
- RD: It eventually blew up to about sixteen employees. But you know, and we're doing Yamagata, and Yamagata is a rock star in the commercial fine art world right now. And to get—Martin Lawrence is a chain gallery. The '80s saw the birth of the program selling in the commercial art world and chain galleries. Hanson, Martin Lawrence. It became a formula. [Thomas] Kinkade is still—
- KD: Churning them out, yeah. *[laughter]*
- RD: But it's a really well oiled machine. And we were getting—capturing contracts, because there was a ton of these kind of dealers and publishers—or galleries and publishers. But basically publishers with retail galleries that were a chain and were all over the country. And we were a famous print studio, so we were grabbing like forty thousand, fifty thousand dollar contracts. Mind you, seventy-five to a hundred fifty colors, so it's a lot of effort. And my sister's running the whole show. I'm saying, "Please, just let me stay away from that craziness." I was not into being a manager of a company. Didn't want it; it wasn't my dream. Just run it and let me have my freedom was my attitude.
- KD: And she seemed to have given you that.
- RD: Yeah. I said, "I'll come in and when I want to have fun, I'll just have fun. I'll stay out of everybody's way. And I'll be gone." My fun was to produce my work, and then it gets sold by my brokers, dealers, whatever. And at this point, Robert Berman had seen that Screamers poster, and I was—now this is—it's starting to get really crazy. I got so much shit starting—just too much shit going on. Shows—
- KD: So you're doing your own work. We hadn't really talked about that yet.
- RD: Well, I'm starting to get this—I don't know what it is. The Andy Warhol of the West Coast. People are just—
- KD: Right, that's the thing people—
- RD: Knocking on my door left and right. I'm doing all this crazy stuff. I'm having a good time. Oh, I want to do furniture, I'm going to do furniture. Having fun. And hook up—two years later, I'm pushing my shows at High Point [Market] in the Carolinas, which is a furniture fair that somebody said, "You really want to blow this up? You should go to—send your line over to High Point and pitch it at the big fair there." Which I did. And I was—I flew to New York, hung out with a bunch of my friends. At this point, I'm so successful I'm flying to New York back and forth about every six weeks, partying on both coasts. Basically having a great time. The East Village is just exploding. I got interviewed to this gorgeous redhead, blonde, strawberry blonde. FUN Gallery. Patti Astor. Patti Astor. And you know, this is Futura 2000, Lenny McGuire. This is Keith Haring. I'm cool myself, I'm—they're going, "We've heard about you." I've already got my own shit going, so when I hit New York, I'm not some little . . . There's no attitude, I want you to understand that. I'm just a great guy blessed and surprised that people know who I am on that side. So I'm like, Patti Astor—
- KD: Right, a little Chicanito from Highland Park.
- RD: Well, I don't even think that's going through my head. I'm just in this insane, beautiful, churning world of creativity. And was introduced a couple times to—oh, gosh, I know—when did that happen? I think in

the—I flew to New York for the first time in my life, in 1977, '78. My friend—my mentor, Dennis Anderson, had quit teaching at PCC and went for New York to make it as a painter, finally. And that was my base of operation. He was another surrogate father. So my first trip out to New York, he introduced me to everybody. I was a kid, really, whatever I was [in] '77—twenty-five. And he was living in SoHo, which was just starting to happen. Great studio loft. And I would be wandering around just—there were some people I'm sure I'd meet up with, famous, but I didn't know who they were. But the one introduction that really sent me off was in nineteen—so I'm doing these little trips, still struggling in Highland Park, but maybe doing a trip maybe once every six months in New York. And in—it might have been '79, because I had enough of a portfolio of exercises.

KD: Right, you're calling them exercises.

RD: I thought, "Well, gosh, I'd like to have a critique while I'm out there." I brought stuff out so I could show Dennis what I was up to, because I'm just proud. I'm his student. So I'd always bring stuff up to show to students. So I'd always bring stuff up to show them what I'm doing, and I'd also try to hustle little sales here to keep money in my pocket while I was in New York, get the trip to pay for itself. And one trip out, I came out there, and I'm doing furniture, and my friend Jim Ebenson is a very successful New York furniture designer who moved out there and is kicking some butt. It's another loft I would stay at. I told them when I was coming out to show my furniture, my steel and glass furniture. "What? You're doing furniture?" I said, "Yeah. Dude, it's cool, it's fun." I was all over the map.

KD: What kind of furniture were you doing? Like—

RD: Steel and glass, but incorporating silk screening. So I took silkscreening into a three-dimension medium. So it's in there. [*referring to binder*] It's kind of fucking New Age cool. It's in there.

KD: I don't think I saw it.

RD: But the thing was, they were tables that only relied on two legs for support, which was—to me was the fun part. It was impossible, but I wanted to make it possible. How do you have a table with two legs that still works? And I figured it out. That was my claim to fame. And it was introduced in a seminal show that launched the whole furniture art movement, called "Made in LA," in Los Angeles at Robertson, and Arnov Dickman ran that showroom with . . . He made an open call to the art world for functional art, and that was the launch of the functional art movement. And at the time, I knew Peter Shire. And I don't know when the Memphis shit kicked in, the Memphis Group from Italy, all that crazy art furniture. Well, Arnov—maybe it might have happened at the same time, but it didn't quite explode into LA on a mass level, the understanding of the Memphis movement of artist-inspired furniture. But he probably attempted a jump on it by organizing the show called "Made in LA." We did the poster for it. Tim—Mike Fink, my friend and artist, did the poster, and I did the printing of it.

And I said, "Well, fuck just doing the printing of it. I'm going to make some furniture." And my steel and glass furniture was launched there, called the Artifact. And I did it with my partner, that girlfriend at the time, Beverly Bass. She's in the picture in the promotional material. And we broke up, but I was still pushing the furniture. Sent myself ahead at High Point, North Carolina. I was taking the train down after hanging out with my friends in New York, and in DC. My sister called me up before I left New York, and she said, "I just got a phone call from Tracy Delaney." I said, "Oh, yeah, I remember her, the girl I broke up with." "Well, she's in DC, and I told her that you were taking a train heading your way down to Highpoint. She wants you to call." So I called her up, and she said, "Well, do you want to meet for lunch, get off the train?" I said, "Sure." Well, I got off the train, and we spent three days in a hotel room fucking our brains out, and then she asked to marry me, and I said, "Sure." Went back to New York, and I had my portfolio prints there. Skipped High Point altogether.

KD: Oh.

RD: Yeah, just got back on the train, went back to New York. Got my portfolio out, and I'm at Jim's house, the studio, and he says, "So what are you going to do?" I said, "I think I'm going to meet Andy Warhol." And they all laugh, him and his wife, because these are West Coast people trying to make it New York and



terrified at the politics of New York. Me, I'm like, whatever. And they laugh, and they do, "Really." And I said, "Do you know where he's at?"

KD: So you were serious.

RD: Yeah. And they said, "He's by Union—his studio's over on Union Square, around Union Square." And I said, "Okay. What train do I get. How do I get to Union Square?" They give me the train, and they're still laughing, "You fucking idiot."

KD: *[laughter]* West Coast boy.

RD: "Warhol, right." So I get my portfolio, get on the train, get off on Union Square, spot a public phone, go to the public phone, call information. "I want Andy Warhol's studio." Call his studio, this woman answers, and I say, "Hi, I'm Richard Duardo. I'm a printmaker from Los Angeles. I'm only here for a couple days, and I really would like to meet Andy Warhol and show him my prints." And she said, "Well, we're going to have to make an appointment. I'm going to have to look at his calendar." And I said, "Well, where are you at?" She gives me the address, and I spot the building across from the phone. I said, "Well, I'm across the street. Could I just walk up?" And she goes, "Look, you can come in and we'll make an appointment." So this is only four or five years after he'd been shot, so now it's like—there was a real attempt of a buffer here. A serious, in-place buffer to protect him. So they buzz me in, I take the elevator. It's now—he's also an industry now, interviews, going bonkers. I forget, Richard somebody, who was doing all the covers, airbrush covers, stylized, re-touched photographs. God, if we can remember his name . . . I got some great stories on him, because we wound up becoming friends and hanging out here on the West Coast.

Anyway, I come up, get out of the elevator, look, and there's a long hallway, double doors and a station for a receptionist. And a woman waiting there, looking at me. And I start walking towards her carrying my portfolio, and there's a corridor with double doors, too, and to the right of me are two big oak doors. They're all—it's an old building, refurbished, super white walls, but all the wood super polished and refurbished. I look over, and there's these two double doors that are open to the side, are wide open into the hallway. And I look over, and it's Andy Warhol sitting at a big desk. You know, just an incredible studio, more than this. But I mean, a room about this big, but just elegantly filled with things. And he's signing prints, and I stop, and I just turn, and I walk towards him. And he looks up at me, and I'm smiling, because I'm this gaga stupid little kid—

KD: From the West Coast, yeah.

RD: And I said, "Hi, I'm Richard Duardo," and I just start my spiel. And he finds me really cute and amusing, and I'm sure I'm younger than. Look at pictures of myself, no wonder I was getting hit on left and right by girls and guys. But I think he was just pleasantly surprised at how—it's the equivalent of an awestruck barefoot farm boy from Nebraska kind of attitude, in-your-fucking-face, but genuinely. And at this point, literally people are running into the room, and he looks at them, and he says, "It's okay, it's okay," and they leave. He says, "It's okay, it's fine." So he says, "Take a seat." And we're talking, and basically, you know, he's probably amused. I'm a young boy, probably trying to figure out if I'm gay or not, right? But I'm just going, "Well, I've been a printmaker, and this and that, and I brought some stuff, and I thought it would be really cool if you'd tell me what you think of it, technically."

KD: Yeah. Hold on, I'm going to—

*[break in audio]*

RD: Drink some sake with a bunch of scrumpy artists? I thought, "This guy's cool."

KD: And none of us can imagine what two million dollars looks like, but . . . *[laughter]*

RD: Pile it up. But that was Japan, and then two weeks later, I fly back to LA, and everybody's saying, "The sky is falling," and I'm going, "I don't feel it." They're still knocking on my door at five o'clock. I'm talking about young Turks, CAA agents, young producers, young whatever, managers. There was so much money in the '80s that people are showing up at my door on Thursdays or Fridays with thousands of dollars in cash to buy art. I have a box in my loft, because Joy was so freaked out, because I wouldn't deposit the money.

KD: Oh, you didn't have a safe.

RD: Yeah, so I'd put them—a bundle like, and—

KD: Like in the drawer, and lock the drawer. [*laughter*]

RD: In the fork—the silverware drawer, I'd put this one under my pillow. I'd take that five thousand dollars and, "Hmm, I'll slip it between the books." And then I'd forget. It was just so nuts. It was really, really nuts.

[*break in audio*]

KD: We're on tape 4 with Richard Duardo [on November 8, 2007]. Go ahead.

RD: And '87, October, Black October, didn't feel it. I think it's because we're cranking—we're just making money. The studio's making money. I'm making money with Carlos [Almaraz]. I'm making money on my own art. I'm making money on people that I'm publishing. My gallery's running, Future Perfect, which is now at a separate location, Mikocola on Omar Street. I dropped sixty thousand dollars on a build-out, hired a fulltime staff, poached the director from Fahey/Cline.

KD: Oh, right.

RD: I forgot what her name was—to be the director of my gallery. I'm just hemorrhaging money in every direction, because it's coming in just as fast as it's going out, so I don't notice. And then Carlos passes away in December of '89, and literally, almost in January . . . Well, first I'm kind of really shocked and depressed about that. My relationship is falling apart, because I'm seeing two other different women in two other different cities, so, rightfully. And all of the sudden, the phone stops ringing. Almost literally, to the day, January 1, 2, whenever everybody comes back to work, my phones stop ringing. My phones stop ringing in my production print studio. And at that point, my sister's long gone, she left two years before. And then I've got Kay Kotch, who's now Kay Richards who owns Ikon at Bergamot Station. Big secondary market broker. I hired her right out of Otis-Parson as a sculpture student and trained her, and she hit the ground running, running my production studio. Brilliant girl. That's why she's a gazillionaire today. Not because of me, because she had the talent. I recognized it. I just fed it. I just said, "This is your domain. Go for it." That's what I think I'm really good at. I just give—I don't put a ceiling on anybody. If I think they can go all the way, I just—

KD: And what did your sister go on to do?

RD: She got married.

KD: Oh, that's right.

RD: Yeah, she wanted to get out of the studio and all the fumes. I think what she was doing was amazing, I couldn't do it.

KD: And so she has a house now, and—out of it, at least?

RD: No.

KD: Oh, no?

RD: I think she was as bad as my brother with all her printer's proofs. She owned 30 percent of the company, and when she decided to leave, she was so fearful that I was going to crash and burn that she went to a lawyer and got a notarized document that she was giving me back her percentage. When she gave me that, I said, "Lisa, you've got to be joking. You own a third of this company. Why do you want to do that?" She goes, "Because I think you're really going to crash and burn, and I don't want 30 percent of your debt." I said, "Really. Thanks for the vote of confidence, sis. Whatever. I'll take it. I'll hold it. I won't use it, but I'll hold it for you. I think you really ought to think this over before you hand over a third stake in this company." But she said, "I think you're . . ." I think maybe she was seeing something I wasn't seeing, because I saw it eventually, which was I was just spun out of control. So I hired Kay, and the machine is still going, but now it's slowing down. We have about twelve, fourteen employees. We hit the wall. I refused to let anybody go, because she said, "We've got to downscale." She was a smart girl. We adjust the machinery, we downscale the overhead, we do this. And I kept refusing, and she'd write memorandums anytime I'm next door just doing rails and having sex with two girls at a time, and—

KD: What your sister had figured out.

RD: I was just out of control.

KD: Yeah.

RD: And just—and she'd come over, and she'd go, "We have to do this, the company has to do this," and I didn't want to do deal with it. I didn't want it to start to get dismantled, although it was necessary. So all I would do is say, "Book me a flight to Dublin, book me a flight to London. I'll think about it while I'm on the road." And I'd just basically over there—and at this point, I wasn't partying anymore, I was kind of depressed, because I'd check into a hotel and never leave the hotel for about two weeks, get on a plane, come back to LA, look around, look at my world—my friends were dying left and right of AIDS.

KD: Right, this was the beginning.

RD: My best friends, Mario Tamayo, Atlas Bar and Grill, Cha-Cha-Cha, who was my dear friend, my best friend, my little brother, and he died. Oh, gosh. To think of everybody. My friends that founded the Advocate—you know, I had a lot of gay friends. Him and his lover died. I started seeing too many people die too young, and it was getting me—like I said, I didn't deal with—

KD: Not a lot of tools for that one.

RD: Yeah, for processing death. And now here it is, it's coming fucking in buckets. So I disengaged. In 1990. We meandered for about six months. I refused to fire people, because they had, some of them—at this point, most of my crew had become—the most reliable were the Mexicans with families, kids. The arty ones would just bang around the studio for three or four months until they had enough money to go back to their studio and paint. So my rock-solid employees that had been on board for six or seven years were Mexicans who had families. My core group. And Kay said, "We've got to scale back." "Well, what do you got in mind?" I said, "He's got two kids. She's got four kids. Come on, what are we doing here? We can't put people out on the street." She goes, "Okay, this is your cash reserve at the going rate. We've got six months. You have a six-month window to make a decision." And I said, "Okay. All right, we've got six months. Book me a flight to Hawaii, I have to think."

And we basically ground to a halt. I ran out of money, and I had to let everybody go. And I was basically in a catatonic state, and most of it was a spiritual crisis. It really was, when it eventually unfolded before me, I realized I was in the midst of a total just profound spiritual crisis, because I didn't understand the world I was in. Everything got dropped in my lap and I was miserable. I had everything. That's why it kept getting progressively worse for me. Okay, there is no happiness in success and money and adoration. There's nothing. Emptiness. Nothing but emptiness. Which completely—most people strive for that, and think that's what it is, and thankfully, they never get there, because they would have had the same sort of revelation.

KD: Crash and burn, yeah.

RD: But I asked her to book me to—I said, "I've got to go. I've got to go somewhere." I was just jumping out of my skin. She said, "Where do you want to go now?" I said, "I don't know. I don't know." She says, "I'm going to book you to—I'm going to send you to Hawaii." I said, "Okay. Okay. Book me—" And everything's always planned out. Get off the plane, take a cab here. "Mr. Duardo, your room is on—" and I just sit there and just channel surf. Crept to the window and go, "Oh, my God, Dublin. Nice." And two weeks later I check out and get on a plane and go back. I could not engage the world. And I—she said, "I'm going to put you on a plane to Hawaii." I said, "Cool. Can I go to Kauai?" I knew . . . Carol Bennett's in Kauai, Carlos is buried in Kauai, he had a house there. I went to his funeral. And I said, "Send me to Kauai, find me a place in Kauai," which she did. And she gave me the itinerary, and I looked at it, I'm leaving in four days, and I'm already going into my anxiety, because I know what I'm going to do, I'm just going to freak out there, or worse.

KD: Because you're alone.

- RD: Yeah. And I'm seeing a therapist now, who I'm still seeing for fourteen years. And on my way back from her office in Santa Monica, I'm driving down, and I see a bicycle store, and I went . . . I used to love riding a bicycle as a teenager. I lived on a bicycle.
- KD: Right, you went all over town, yeah.
- RD: And I pulled into their parking lot and I walked in, and I said, "I'm going to Hawaii and I'd like to ride a bike." And they're like, "Huh? Well, what, do you want a mountain track?" I said, "Well, yeah, I want a mountain track." "Are you going to camp?" "Yeah, I'm going to camp." And they said, "Okay, here's this mountain bike, and we can—these saddlebags, front saddlebags, back saddlebags. Here's a compressed tent; here's this camping stove system, here's some freeze-dried food. Here's some tight, roll-up outfits that are thermal warm." And I'm going, "Okay." And they literally assembled a trekking bike where I could live on it. And then they showed me how to break it down and reassemble it, break it down and reassemble it, so I could put it on the plane. And I said, "Okay, done," and I bought it all, threw it in my car, went back, and I said, "Okay, I'm going to Hawaii. Cancel my hotel."
- KD: *[laughter]* Oh, shit.
- RD: She goes, "Are you going to stay with friends?" I said, "Yeah, maybe, sort of." And I got on the plane, landed in Kauai. I timed the trip also—I found out that my dealer from Japan was getting married, and he was getting married at the Hyatt Regency whatever, some fucking five-star hotel, because they're all about ostentatious show of non-existent wealth.
- KD: By then.
- RD: Yeah. And he's getting married, so I agree to just book myself just one day into a hotel, some five-star hotel, to go to their wedding, one of those little pagoda things created in those hotels for all those Japanese tourists. And I landed at Kauai airport, get out, assemble my bike, and start to freak out. Because everything that's always been planned for me is no longer in place, except tonight, I—if I can bike there, which—because I hadn't been on a bike now for a good fifteen years, if I can bike there, I'll have a hotel to spend the night in.
- KD: Did you bring other clothes?
- RD: Yeah, I had all the stuff that—
- KD: Okay. No, but for the wedding, attire for the wedding.
- RD: Whatever dress clothes I had, I wore on the flight. And I assembled my bike. It was sixty-five pounds of equipment. And mind you, I didn't even train for this. I got on the bike, and I'm going, "What was I thinking?" I am terrified. I'm shitting bricks. "What am I doing, what am I doing?" Manage to get to the hotel—I mean, Kauai is only fifty-five miles of road, the periphery of the island. Fortunately, from Lihue, the airport, I only wind up being three miles down the road. But I arrived dead, checked into the room, called them up, met him and his—her parents, his parents, for dinner. I love his parents. She—Shegayu Kai. And went to their wedding the next day wearing the same clothes, my dress clothes. And they said, "What are you doing now?" And I said, "I'm going to bicycle." And they're checking out to go fly back, and I meet them in the lobby, fully geared up in my bicycle outfit and my sixty-five-pound pack of material and walk out to the lobby, hug them goodbye. And they said, "So you're going?" "Yes, I'm bicycling." Still no clue. Got on my bike, terrified, because it's so shaky from the weight.
- KD: Do you have maps?
- RD: Nothing. Nothing. It's just shaking. You know, you don't know how to balance it.
- KD: Yeah, because you can't balance all that weight, yeah. Takes strength and balance.
- RD: I thought, oh, my God. And my muscles are weak, and they're watching me going out of the parking lot of this hotel.
- KD: *[laughter]* I'm sorry I'm laughing.
- RD: I know, it was pretty hilarious.
- KD: It's a good image.
- RD: And I stop, and I'm, "Bye!" *[laughter]* And for the next six weeks, I lived on that mountain bike.

KD: Six weeks.

RD: Yeah.

KD: Wow.

RD: And the first night, because I'm so stupid about not understanding the Circadian rhythm, I thought, "Oh, it's almost dark, so I'll stop now in this cane field and set up my tent," cooked my food. Well, in Hawaii, when it gets dark, it's pitch-black dark. And my timing was so bad off that when it got dark, I couldn't even find anything, because lo and behold, I didn't get any candles or flashlights. So I just felt my way—zippered my tent as a pouch and crawled in there and slept, and then woke up the next morning at dawn, and then cooked something and tried to make myself—and then packed myself and set—no, I didn't know where I was going, but I just thought, "Okay, let's bicycle." Bicycle—I knew I had a couple friends on the north side, with Elsa Flores's house, which was empty, which she had offered, and on the south side with my dear friend and neighbor of fifteen years when she was downtown, Carol Bennett, the muralist.

KD: Right.

RD: I knew I had a place down by Kokua, whatever that place is called, sorry. And I just kept to myself, and then got into a rhythm of understanding what time to stop, to set up, to prepare for total darkness. And also into the rhythm that when I woke up at daybreak—daybreak for some people was like—there, five-thirty in the morning, but I was wide awake, because—

KD: You were on California, yeah, Pacific time.

RD: No, no, no. I was hooked into—I can't just lay in a tent when it's daybreak outside, because it's a whole—

KD: Circadian, right.

RD: So I started getting into the whole thing of the rhythm. So my day did end at six-thirty, because it was dark at six-thirty. I wasn't in a hotel hitting the bar and trying to pick up some girls. And my joke was, when I was leaving, I told my friends, they said, "What are you going to do in Hawaii?" I said, "Well, I'll work on my tan. Get a tan. Try to get laid. And drink." And wound up—that might have been the case if I was in a hotel, if I ever left the room. But I had to figure out how to pace my bicycling, because I had sixty-five pounds, and this was rolling hills. So I—and I also realized that there was only some—I had to eat a certain way, because I discovered cramping with food in my gut. So I had to measure my eating and my drinking, and I had to rehydrate like mad, because it's hot and sunny, and I am sweating gallons of water. I'm basically cleaning my system out. That was not my intent, so you understand that. But it was happening. I was also—all that bicycling for hours, because I never knew where I was going. I'd just see a road and go, "Oh, okay." Sometimes it would go to another road or lead to a dead end or whatever, but I was mostly on cane roads; I was off the beaten track, rarely saw people. I was just pumping and breathing. And I started to watch my breathing to pace myself on the hills. Do you understand?

KD: Yeah.

RD: And in the course of doing this, about two weeks into the trip—and all I was doing when I was—when I knew it was time to stop and maybe eat a morsel of something, because I realized I cannot eat heavy, the course of the day. I can just rehydrate and eat food and rest until it gets processed so I don't cramp, and then get back on the bike. So my system's being cleaned out; I'm dropping weight like mad. The architecture of my body is changing. I'm turning into a machine. I was the organic part of a two-piece machine, the bicycle and—

KD: What's your thought process during the day? Just on breath?

RD: Everything. My whole life.

KD: Oh, you are reflecting.

RD: Yeah. "Oh, how am I going to do this? Why did I do this to Colleen when I'm just—oh, wait, here comes a hill. Concentrate on your breathing. Oh, you made it past the hill. Cool. Oh, good time to stop." I had a Walkman, and I only had Berlioz, which is nothing but angels singing, a chorus of children singing. So I find a place and sit down and play that, and just try to wipe my mind clean, and drink, and eat my morsels, and then go, "Oh, okay. It's been an hour, get on the bike." Didn't have a clue where I was going, but just

bike. And about three weeks in, I came over the crest of a hill, and I felt like I went through a membrane. And I pulled over and I got off, and it occurred to me that I was now fully there, present, completely. It was that revelation. I was like, “Wow. Three weeks and I’ve just arrived.” That’s a trip. Kept going, and started noticing all these things about—you know, I was kind of breeding on all of this fucking religion, philosophy, and stuff, trying to figure my way through life—oh, I get it now. The yin and the yang, oh. The dark and the light, the balance. Oh, look, it’s manifested in that little scene of nature that I’m tripping on, that’s kind of curious.

KD: So prior to that three weeks, you didn’t notice the environment?

RD: No. I was noticing how beautiful it was, and just enjoying it. But all of the sudden, I started to see metaphors in nature for religious—

KD: Theology, maybe. Not religion, but spiritual.

RD: Spiritual metaphors in nature. Which I thought, this is curious. Oh, I understand that now. Kind of the yin and the yang shit. Oh, I get it. Wow. It wasn’t a studied—I wasn’t in any, prior to that, any scholarly trek on understanding spirituality, let alone religion. I was a total unconscious hedonist, not a determined hedonist. And on the fourth—maybe about a week later, maybe about two weeks later—this is my whole life, me and a bike, avoiding people.

KD: Right, it doesn’t sound like you’re going to any of the tourist places.

RD: The only time I come into a town, a little town, was to get water, rice, maybe some beef jerky, maybe—something.

KD: So really simple foods anyway.

RD: Yeah, just to keep myself alive. And about two weeks after that event, I was on old cane roads that led me to this cliff that was overseeing what looked like to be a pier that probably fell off, broke off two hundred years ago, hundred fifty years ago, really, really old, probably built by Portuguese salesmen. And I thought, “How beautiful,” and I’m looking out, it’s a beautiful blue sky, the clouds are rolling in, and about no less than two hundred yards away are black clouds, pouring rain. I look behind me and it’s beautiful mountains, it’s so green, and the trees are talking, and I’m going, “Wow, this is really cool.” And I went, “I get it. I get it,” but my observation was—it was a revelation. And my observation was, “Oh, I get—from an outside, I get the totality of it all.” Outside observation, which is ego-based. And in a flash, I didn’t exist, and I was part of the totality. And it felt like somebody stuck a five-inch copper cable straight into my chest and just cranked up all the electricity. And it felt, if you can—it felt like a little Atari computer that hooked up with IBM, you know, ten thousand square foot defense computer, and it was question-answer-question-answer, download and answer question, answer question, answer question, and I kept getting high, high, high. And I was—I started to cry spontaneously. I felt it was just amazing.

And then my ego kicked in and said, “You’re losing weight. There’s drugs in your fat, the fat is releasing old toxins and drugs into your system.” Because I read this somewhere, that our body stores some of the drugs that we’ve done. “And this is nothing more than a hallucination from you cleaning up. This is a freak-out. Richard, get on your bike, get away.” Which I did, just jumped on my bike, drove off. I was in a panic, in fear and anxiety. And I’m basically away, and I’m going, “Wait. This is what I’m trying to get away from.” And that was real. So I just spun my bike around and went back up and got off my bike, and I said, “Do it.” And I don’t remember—I probably don’t remember the next forty-eight hours, although I do remember one morning finally kind of feeling conscious enough to go, “Oh, I should pack up and get on my bike.” Does that make sense?

KD: Yeah.

RD: So I was in this netherworld of—it was like a spiritual bubble.

KD: Yeah. Out-of-body experience.

RD: Yeah. That kind of came back in thirty-six, forty-eight hours, I don’t know. But evidently, I was taking care of myself, because I wasn’t covered with twigs or fucked up; I just thought, “Wow, this is interesting.” But I was completely in another sphere.

KD: Did it scare when you come out?

RD: No, no, no, no. What I did—you know, there's no foundation for understanding this experience for me at that moment. But I'm in a place of total, complete—let's just call it, for lack of a better—I was in a state of grace.

KD: Yeah.

RD: So I got back on my bike, and I am just high. I'm in the presence of something so amazing that this incredible dialogue is going on. Not an ego-based dialogue, just like being with my mother or my father, and I thought—I just kept my routine, which was not to see people. But when the time came for me to come into a village, a town, to get food or restock, when I was coming down, the first person I saw was a couple—a girl walking up the road from the village, probably to whatever condo she rented, and she was a luminescent. And then I saw a car of tourists drive by and pull into a little shop, and I just saw two luminescent bubbles.

KD: You saw their aura.

RD: Yeah. And I thought, "Oh, my God, this is amazing." What I saw was, to me, every one of them was like, "Oh, you're here. You're here in that body. Oh, my God, you're going shopping!" And then when I hit this town, it was just orbs of light everywhere, walking around, talking. And I thought every one of them was God. And people, I started—I could register right off, people were—they weren't tripping on me, they were just happy to see me. Does that make sense? I was shooting something out, for sure, because every one was being disarmed and smiling and happy. And I thought, "This is cool." I mean, they were picking up some vibe from me. So that trip continued that way for about two weeks. I came back to LA. I continued for—that state of being continued for about two more months.

KD: Whoa. Did you continue to see auras?

RD: No. But everyone that knew me said, "What's going on?"

KD: You're different.

RD: Yeah. And I tried to explain, and I said, "I don't know, you know. I don't have a religious context or an organized system, a spiritual system. All I can tell you is this is what's going on." And then people started to tell me, "This may . . ." The funny thing that happened on the flight back, and I don't know how I got this, I got a book—a book of the Tao landed on my lap. Not literally, but you know, it's like I can't connect where it came from. But I read it on the plane, and it was the one thing that started to prepare me to accept spirituality in a non-structured way.

KD: Religious, institutional.

RD: But through the experience that I literally had it at, in nature, because it is a philosophy of integration in the nature for attaining it. And when I got back to LA, I totally tripped out on my relationship. Mind you, I was juggling two women and a live-in girlfriend, and I wanted—I was totally like, I'm real here now. So I let everybody know, of course. The live-in, Joy, understandable why she just said, "I can't deal with this. You're bullshit. I'm glad that you want to be straight up and honest and clear, but to hear this? Thank you, bye." The other ones, same thing. "You promised me you were going to leave her. Fuck you. All you want to do is talk about *it*." So I think—I had a situation where—then I tried to understand what this was, because anybody I tried to talk to couldn't get it, so I started reading books like—

KD: And you're telling people as much as you're telling me, or—

RD: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Friends that see me, I was on—I was in this place. So they were more curious at directing questions at me, because the clarity of my being was such that I was blowing people away. And I'm not saying that from an ego point of view. I just felt that I was nothing more than a vessel, and that they were equally . . . I was honored to be in their presence. It was just a weird spiritual place to be; a total state of grace. That's the only thing that I finally locked onto—this is what it is. Wow, it is. And when I fell back into the world, which I found out later is a very common Buddhist explanation, and I also found, I kind of came to realize, because I started reading books like a famished prisoner. Everything. I wanted to anchor the

experience in some context of who else, where does this—which eventually I realize, it’s fairly common, and it’s almost at the epicenter of every religion.

And I thought, “Okay.” Not in an ego, “Oh, my God, I’m the next Jesus Christ.” I just went, “Okay, great. Wow, I got to experience something really awesome.” But none of these things make sense to me. Christian, Judaism. And the only thing that really made sense to me was taking it from the Tao, and then finding out how the Tao is Chinese, and then finding how Bodhidharma worked his way through China and the Shaolin Temple and faced the Wall and all this. So I was reading like mad, trying to figure . . . And then eventually, the transmutation of Ch’an Buddhism basically into Zen Buddhism. And then reading into Zen and going, “This is it. This is it, this is it.” And the unfortunate part of reading about how there’s levels of satori, and what I had just experienced was the first phase of satori.

KD: Yeah, that was the first.

RD: And the work now has really begun. You’re fucked, because, to coin the phrase, by the Christian wording, they call it . . . I’ve heard this before, once you know the truth, you can never turn your back on it; you’re actually tortured by it, because most people spend most of their time believing, and believing, by definition, implies that it’s a leap of faith, there is no direct experience. The ones that are really fucked are the ones that have a direct experience, and they get tossed back into the world. Then it’s like, you’re really fucked, because you know—you know when people—

KD: It’s hard to be in the moment.

RD: One of my friends, here’s a good example. Like after lunch, Mario Tamayo, because he was a total fucking party gay hedonist, my dearest friend. When he invited me over to the restaurant from my trip, we’re having lunch, and he’s just perplexed, he’s just trying to be playful and mischievous and prankster, trying to break through what he thinks is a whole fucking manufactured Duardo in front of him. And he said, “So, what is it? Do you believe in God now?” I said, “God? Well, I don’t see it as God. And *believe*, that is such a fucking weak word, because I can’t say I believe in God. I have to say—ooh, shit, this is embarrassing,” because this is the old Duardo. So speaking for the old Duardo, this would be an embarrassing thing to say. “But I have to tell you: believe is not an operative word. It’s—I know.” Which, you know, to some people—

KD: It sounds pretty hokey, yeah. [*laughter*]

RD: Or it elicits such an immediate response of like wanting to dismantle you. Because that’s a big assumption, that most—and I said, “You know, that’s all I can say. I know.” And I fell back into the world, and I’ve just got to—the rest of the thing now in my life is to figure out how to get back there. That’s it. Everything else—that’s what Zen Buddhists do, you just chop wood and carry water, and you work on yourself. And that’s not even the goal, that was the other thing.

KD: No, right.

RD: It’s just to get back to that place of just breathing and being, and everything was cool. So basically, since 1992, that’s when it happened. Which is—fifteen years. I—that’s it. Everything else, I’m doing what I’m doing.

KD: So the company crashes—

RD: Yeah, it all falls apart, and I was so happy. [*laughter*]

KD: And how do you—well, we’ve probably done enough for tonight.

RD: What time is it?

KD: It’s ten to five.

RD: Let’s give it ten minutes. I knew that when the company folded that I had print drawers that were probably about as big as the gap in there, I had five print drawers full of what probably was about two million dollars’ worth of inventory from publishing over ten years that I owned completely. So I thought, “Well, okay. I could probably ride on this for about six or seven years.” So I said, “Kay, let’s shut it down, liquidate the equipment. I want you to—you’ll still work for me, but what we’re going to do now is become print dealers. Just set up appointments, bring them over to the studio, our showroom, because I turned the production facility into a showroom, rent everything. Had all the drawer units out. And we just said, we’ll



sell prints. It'll carry my overhead, your overhead, the studio overhead, and that's what we're doing until I figure out what to do. Well, that meandered for almost seven years, before I ran—

KD: Was that—what did you call that?

RD: Art in Commerce.

KD: Art in Commerce.

RD: Yeah. And in that period, because I was so successful at—we were both successful at selling prints; we weren't publishers anymore or contractors. We were just dealers of prints, works on paper. And I had the inventory with no obligations of royalties or anything, it was all, from dollar one, I was in profit. And it generated so much money that I'm back in the world, being responsible, spiritually, as best as I can, because that's the only mission. Everything else is literally that. Okay, what am I going to do? I'll do this, I'll write. I'll do it without attachment or ego, stuff like that. I was trying to follow the path, the only path that made sense to me. And I got into the rave scene. I said—she said, "Well, what are you going to do?" I said, "You know what? I think I want to be a concert promoter."

And I partnered with a Malaysian friend of mine to—I was invited to be on the board of LACE [Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions], to willingly join. And they were in a lot of trouble, and here's Richard Duardo. I've got a trail of reputation that's following me now—that took me ten years to shake, most of the '90s, of my life in the '80s. So there's a lot of assumptions. And I was recruited and asked to join LACE because they probably thought I had deep pockets, I had connections, I could make shit happen. And I tried the best that I could, and I was successful, and that's how I met Mario Tamayo, and we became fast friends. And then it was always—when you sit on a board, which I've done like three times, it's always really about how much money you can bring in, you know?

KD: Yeah, that's your job.

RD: For any non-profit, that is your job. I took my job very serious. Goal-oriented. So with LACE, I concocted a couple projects that generated money that also brought in their base, and projected them out by the epicenter of the disenfranchised little angry downtown art community.

KD: So can you tell me at least one of those, or is it too late?

RD: The Great American Art-Off, which was in a dance club setting, a stage. It's actually the old print thing downtown on—it was called at that time—it was run by those two brothers, the Colachis brothers. It was called Vertigo. They had built a brand-new, beautiful new club with a stage and retracting curtains and a great dance floor, great lighting. And they were my friends, '80s friends. And I approached them, and I said, "Look, I'd like to do this event. It's called the Great American Art-Off. I'm going to have two easels onstage, fully loaded with all the requisite paints and pastels." And I got a hold of my friend, Michael Ladish, who owns a prop house, and we pulled all these props. And I talked to models and friends—this is all a fundraiser for LACE—to come in, and we would create three-dimensional vignettes.

We had a select group of twelve artists, they had a half an hour each. And the first two would be onstage, the DJ would be playing, everybody would be dancing, and the curtains would part, and those two artists had a half an hour to paint that scene, or draw it, or whatever. And then the curtains would close; that canvas would be taken off, two fresh canvases would be on. In the meantime, behind the curtain, they're constructing a wild scene. And the curtains would part, and those two artists would do that scene. And we did that, and at the end of the night, we had an auction of all the work created. It was a fundraiser for like—and I thought it was so much fun. And then, what else did we do?

KD: Bottle that one. *[laughter]*

RD: Then I met Tef [Foo] while shopping for food at three in the morning at Ralph's, and we knew each other from all the club scene and all the EDM stuff, and I said, "Tef." "Richard Duardo." He's a player in his world, I'm a player in my world. And he said, "We should work together." And I've heard that so many times from people, I'm like, "Yes, we should work together." If I did that with everybody, I'd need about five years. And I thought, "Yeah, Tef, we should work together," because he was doing raves with ten thousand people, that was his scene. And I said, "Tef, we should work together. We're going to do something."

And we got together and we concocted a show called Circa 92, which was a showcase of art, music, and technology under one roof, simultaneously, and a confluence of different scenes. The rave scene, the club scene, the art scene, everything.

At that rave, we had Jenny [Otser Settings], real-time writers, Mike Degas. We wanted music and writers, but how can you get a writer to communicate to five thousand people? Well, we do LCD screens that are patched into a computer. We park them onstage and let them take it in, and sit down and start talking about it, scrolling out. It was so fucking awesome. And I said, “You know, this is a franchise that we’re going to start as a fundraiser for LACE, every year, we’re going to do.” Which we’re literally, we’re showcasing what we discovered in a year, and bringing it to an audience one time. The best of technology, the best of art that’s breaking out, the best of music, and sharing it for like six hours. And of course, it was an overwhelming success. I think we raised like fifty-five thousand dollars for LACE, which is more money than they fucking ever saw in a decade, I’m sure. But it got me involved in a scene that for the next three years . . . because we became a production company, Om Laboratories.

KD: Okay, that’s Om Laboratories, I was going to ask you.

RD: And Om Laboratories was actually the production facility for the corporation that was called Poppin’ Fresh. I was always having fun with names in companies and icons and logos. And for three years, that went on, until I realized I’m spinning out into a crazy world of drugs, and I jumped out of that in 1996. I’m running out of prints to sell, somebody almost tried to kill me, I’m living in a warehouse pissing in my bucket, my dog Buddha is with me—I had a beautiful dog named Buddha. And I’m going, “Well, here we are again,” three years later after that experience. “What am I doing?” And I said, “You know what? It’s time to go back.” And I’d been seeing my friends, old friends from the art world. And remember, three years out of the art world makes you like—you’re forgotten.

KD: You’re dead, yeah.

RD: People, when they’d see me, said, “Richard, what’s going on? I hear rumors that you’re, like, running around with a bunch of seventeen-year-old kids in nightclubs at four in the morning.” And I said, “Yeah.” And I said, “Okay, I’m going to go back into the art world.” And what I did, the last thing before I did that, I thought I’d do one more big thing. I got together with Richard Montoya, and we said, “Let’s do the Lollapalooza of Latin art, of Latin music.” So we put together an event called Big Top Locos, and our headliners were Rage Against the Machine. We lost thirty thousand dollars, by the way, but we—it was a historic concert. And I told Montoya, I said, “Look, if we do this right, we can do this all over the Southwest. Package this, and we can be the Lollapalooza of the *rancheta* music, a showcase of everything, a broad stroke of everything possible in Latin music. Salsa, Cuban, flamenco, rock in *español*.

KD: You could do it now. Not then.

RD: Yeah, probably now.

KD: The markets are too—

RD: Stratified?

KD: Yeah, there’s the word.

RD: Yeah. But that was a worthwhile project. Really great. And that was the end. I said, “Okay, I gave it one more try. Done. Thirty thousand dollars in debt, I’ve got to move on.” And my friends are seeing me, if they catch me, my old art friends, saying, “What are you doing? How old are you? Go back to what you do.” I’m like forty—this is ten years. I’m fifty-five—forty-five. My advisors. Ed Ruscha, people that know me. “Dude, you tossed it all away. You’re a master printer. You’re the best, you’re at the height of your craft. You’re losing money left and right, Go back to what you know. Be a printer.”

KD: And are you producing art on your own, too?

RD: Mm-hmm. At that time?

KD: Yeah.

RD: Well, I consider all the things that I’m doing related to my projects is all art making. I consider the project that I’m doing a creative project. And I went, “Okay, I will.” No money, but you know, I think—my blessings

are that when I ask the universe to help me, it comes in in the most incredible ways. Somebody finds me, “I’ve been looking for you, I’ve got a project with this artist, it’s about eighteen editions.” And I’m thinking, “Well, I can hammer together the equipment”—I have no equipment, right?—“I think I can find the space. What’s my time frame? Good. What’s your budget?” “I’m sorry, is \$80,000 enough?” “Oh, gosh. Yeah,” and I’d walk away going, “Yes!” And I’d get back on my feet, and I’m going, “Thank you, thank you, thank you. I’ll try to do it right this time before I blow it again.” You know?

**KD:** You want to pause for tonight?

**RD:** Yeah.

**KD:** Thank you.

## NOVEMBER 12, 2007

- KD:** This is Karen Davalos with Richard Duardo on November 12, 2007. This is tape 5 for the [CSRC Oral Histories Series]. What I wanted to start with today, Richard, is looking at some of your own work, which—you had a few of them here. You did the poster for—
- RD:** Manhattan Transfer.
- KD:** Manhattan Transfer.
- RD:** New Order.
- KD:** Right. And these are all are—
- RD:** Offset.
- KD:** Offset.
- RD:** Huge, four by five foot offset posters for concerts.
- KD:** And that was at one time?
- RD:** Gosh, I would say 1980, 1988. Somewhere in that window, 1988 to 1991.
- KD:** And of the work that you were doing, your own work, I'm mostly familiar with the—it's kind of Hollywood.
- RD:** Oh, yeah. The Hollywood iconography stuff.
- KD:** Yeah. That's one series, right?
- RD:** Well, it was more like a relationship with the dealer, Karl Bornstein. And it was all about [a contract]. I mean, I was signed in the contract, appropriate contract, and I was going to be the next Andy Warhol, according to him, if I of course followed—
- KD:** The prescription?
- RD:** The direction, his direction. Which was all about Hollywood icon portraiture. So it was like a more decorative version of Warhol. That's Lauren Bacall, James Dean. I mean, I did all the icons. That's James Brown. From old Hollywood icons to contemporary pop icons.
- KD:** And the coloration's certainly kind of '80s pop candy, right?
- RD:** Yeah, well, I like playing with the process, or I also like playing with the colors. I always looked at it as a refreshing break from the job.
- KD:** Really?
- RD:** Yeah.
- KD:** Because some of the jobs you did are the same kind of coloration, really—
- RD:** Well, they might have been the artist that I was—I guess my publishing escaped my taste.
- KD:** That's what I wanted to ask you. I mean, I don't know, does the studio get to choose who it works with, and so you tend to do work with a certain kind of look?
- RD:** When I can exercise the option to publish or invite people to my studio, I opted for young, emerging artists who had an irreverent kind of punk-pop skewed sensibility. So yeah, if I were smarter and knew everybody back then, I should have been inviting Ed Ruscha into my studio and doing prints, and then I'd be making money, serious money. But I was kind of—I thought all the old guard were already established in their profile in the art market, and the representation, so I made it kind of a point to try to help the underdogs.
- KD:** And are those some of the names you've already mentioned to me, at the time when they were American artists?
- RD:** Yeah. Mike Fink, Bob Zoell, Gary Panter, Mick Haggerty, Nick Taggart—I mean, we're talking a gambit of people. And Nick, Nick was from England. Bob Zoell's Canadian, German-Canadian. And Chaz [Bojórquez], a Chicano. So I was basically responding to and encouraging and supporting artists that have just—for some strange reason, their work affected me.
- KD:** I mean, these really geometric pieces, those are yours as well, according to this.
- RD:** Those are twelve-inch. I was invited by Seymour Stein of Sire Records . . . Seymour, at the time, was riding on the heels of incredible success with Blondie and the Talking Heads. He was based out of New York. We were introduced by a mutual friend at Warner Brothers Records, Jeff Ayeroff. And he said, "You know . . ."

Well, he never bought anything, but he knew who I was. Whatever, I don't know, We probably ran across each other socially. And Seymour also was—God, my God, I just realized, Madonna was on Sire Records before it got absorbed by Warner Brothers. But she signed Sire originally. So Seymour was a player. Short, chubby, looked like an overweight version of—who's the “Piano Man” guy?

KD: Elton John?

RD: Billy Joel.

KD: Billy Joel?

RD: Yeah, Seymour looked like a chubby Billy Joel. And in the '80s, I'm sure he must have been in his late thirties, mid-thirties, you know.

KD: So this is an entire series you did?

RD: He invited me to New York and commissioned me to do what's called a generic slate for twelve-inch records, which are the sleeves of ... When they do extended mixes that they send out to the radios and the DJs. So if you remember the album cover for that particular artist, it would always be a blank sleeve, with only the label and side, indicating what that was. And he thought he'd try something fun, so he invited me to design a generic twelve-inch sleeve for all their extended released and special promotions. So they flew me out there. I didn't have a facility, but a friend of mine up in Kingston, New York, just south of Woodstock—my friend was really Dennis Anderson, my mentor, who had now set up a print studio south of Woodstock. And Seymour commissioned me to do a twelve-inch sleeve. So I said, “Okay, give me a couple of weeks, and I'll show you some pieces,” so they could pick their twelve-inch sleeve. It was like a five thousand dollar commission or something.

So I went upstate, took a train, and then I—what I thought was just to break away from [my studio], it just being some commercial job, what is that I'd take the opportunity to explore randomness in the making of prints. So I took the format, which is a twelve-by-twelve-inch format, and then I did a random composition, single black and white composition within the twelve-by-twelve-inch format, just random. Six versions, six different compositions in that twelve-by-twelve format. And I indicated no—as to what was top or bottom, or what was—whether it was reversed or not. And I—Dennis Anderson, who had a print studio up there, I said—and he was training young master printers there. I said, “Just give me . . . I want to book your studio for a week, and just assign me one of your apprentices.” And he said sure, and I came in, of course, with all the—I mean, the introduction was just too much, a little over the top, “Here's Richard Duardo!” Blah-blah-blah. Here we go. Anyway, he gave me this young kid—to this day I don't remember his name. And I said, “Okay, here you are. Here's the separation.” I believe six cell separations, positives. And I said, “Just shoot them on the screen, and center them on the screen, and then we'll get started.” The first question was, “Well, okay, what is—what side is the correct side to shoot?” And I said, “Just shoot them,” which kind of probably surprised him, but he shot the screen, and then we started setting up to print.

It was a monoprint session, which means we'd just print for the number of days until I'd basically spent my money. And he shot all six screens. And then he said, “Okay,” and he clamped in the—he set up the table. Cut that on the paper for the printing. And he said, “Now, okay, what's the first screen?” And I said, “Pick one,” which started probably, in his mind, thinking, “This guy is another wacko artist.” And I said, “No, really, just pick one. Just pick a screen.” And he picked a screen, then he was going to clamp it in, and he said, “Which is the top side?” And I said, “Just clamp it in there, pick one.” And he clamped it in, and he position—because it's a twelve-inch square, and the paper had been preformatted with I think maybe about a six-inch border.

KD: Yeah, that's what it looks like.

RD: And he said, “Okay, what are the colors? What's the first color?” And I think at this point, I really got him pissed off, because it was like, he said, “Don't tell me to pick a color.” I said, “You know, let's do this. What do you got already mixed?” Because I hate mixing. You know, I do this professionally, and I'm really diligent about it. So now, it's my turn to have fun, and I want to break all the rules. When it comes to my work, I

try to break all the rules. Because it's a reaction to the super hyper perfectionist attitude you have to have as a printmaker to make a perfect print for a perfect composition to appease the—just a terribly out of control, insecure artist. So when it comes to my work, I don't care about registration. I don't care about whether it's a great composition or not. I just want to have fun with the process.

KD: And did you have fun?

RD: Oh, yeah. So I said, "I don't want to bother mixing colors. This is useless." I said, "What he has already pre-mixed from the previous job." Had about twenty-four, twenty-five cork cans, gallon can size paints. And I said, "Let's just stack them all over this table over there." And he said—which he did—and I said, "Okay. Just tell me. Stand over there and tell me what color I hit." So I walked away about ten feet, turned around, made a little compact piece of paper and tossed it over my head, and—until it hit a can. And I said, "That's the first color." And for sure this kid thought I was nuts, but ... And we'd print five or six sheets. I'd stop, and I'd say, "Let's get another screen."

Finally he got it. He was just, "Forget this dialogue, the guy wants me to pick up a screen, I'll pick up a screen. Top or bottom, doesn't matter, I'll clamp it in. I've just got to wait for him to toss the crumpled paper and we have it colored in." And we made seven or eight versions, because I'd only run five or six sheets, and I'd say, "Stop, let's try another." And then when all the sheets had various stencils. Then I'd shuffle them all when they were dry, and then I'd break them up into six groups, and we'd do the whole process all over again. And in about two days, it started to become apparent. I was just blown away, because the pieces that were coming out were so fucking beautiful that I was flabbergasted. He was, too.

KD: And the only thing, this one, this one here? I kept trying to figure out why it was so familiar.

RD: Why?

KD: It's the color scheme of the CARA [*Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation*] exhibition.

RD: Of the CARA?

KD: Yep.

RD: I didn't know that.

KD: Well, it didn't exist yet.

RD: How about that.

[*break in audio*]

RD: The registration mark became something I became fixated on, because I had to use registration marks outside the margins of a print when I'm working for a client. Like printmakers use registration marks to center, and that's it. References to something known you're on target.

KD: Yeah.

RD: And I started to think, you know what, and then you cut them away when the print is completed, they're discarded. And at one point, I thought, I want to make the target, the registration target, the focus of my—some of the elements in my pieces, which pops up throughout a bunch of prints, up until—for about ten years.

KD: And these are dated '86, but I don't know if that's the year.

RD: I guess that's when it was.

KD: Yeah, so NYC generic.

RD: Ah, so they were the generic twelve-inch sleeves. And when it was all said and done, there was about sixty of these things, and when we looked at them, Dennis Anderson, my first mentor at PCC, we all looked at them, because he was watching the process, and he was like, whatever, Richard's on another planet. But you could see, by the fourth or fifth color, something was going on. And this kid was watching it too, it was like—I was getting knocked off my feet. I just thought I'd do something stupid, and if I'm lucky, I'll find one good piece, and that's it. Well, they're all turning out to be these incredible—I don't know what you'd call them, spontaneous compositions that happen as a result of not engaging your mind, trying to be perfect.

KD: Spontaneous. There's something to that.

- RD: The process was revealing its own creativity by allowing the randomness to happen. And that, to me, was the biggest revelation. I was just, “Oh, my God.” And I got scared—I always get scared when something great happens in the studio, because it terrifies me. The feeling of elation is so overwhelming that it’s freaky. I get scared. It’s goosebumpy scared, like “Oh, my God, something big just happened, and I’m terrified.” Like the bicycle stuff years later, I thought . . . and I never revisited it again, it was so overwhelming an experience. Because I could have taken that and extrapolated it into a whole body of work, and I freaked, and I ran away from it. mind you, I got on the train about a week later, and I spent the next week just hanging out with my buddies and seeing the countryside, and going to auctions, and meeting Amish, and whatever let’s over of those—who are those people that made those chairs and those houses?
- KD: Quakers, or Shakers?
- RD: Shakers.
- KD: Upstate New York.
- RD: Yeah. I was basically hanging out with my mentor the last week. Put together the real portfolio, edited the fifty or sixty sheets to about thirty. Jumped on a train, went back, and went to see Seymour, Seymour Stein. And he said, “What do you got for me?” And I just laid them all out. It was the same reaction. Each—he loved the first one, but loved the second better, but wait a minute, “I love the third.” And then by the time they’re all spread out, he was going nuts. And he said, “Okay, okay. I’ll pick one—we’ll pick one for the cover, but I want to buy all of these.” I said, “Boy, okay. Give me another—give me three thousand dollars.” So Seymour has the whole collection. And—but I had like about twenty—
- KD: I was about to say, what did you do with the other—
- RD: I had like twenty left over, so I brought them home, and they all wound . . . I’d throw them in the drawer, and either start giving them away or I’d sell him. And then eventually, they’re all gone.
- KD: You’re also known for that Mickey Mouse.
- RD: Which one?
- KD: The smile and—
- RD: The smile and the happy face, that was done 1986, ’87. I went to England, hung out with some friends, got taken to some mushy, muddy farmhouse that they thought was from, out in the countryside of London, and wound up doing a bunch of ecstasy for the first time in my life, and dancing, and then . . . I don’t know if you’ve ever done pharmaceutical MDMA, but it was a drug used by counseling and therapists. Well, that was the clean stuff, and that was the same effect. It just busted my head wide open, and it radically shifted the direction of my work. So all that new, that—whatever you want to call it. To me, I look at it back now and I go, “God, I was on another planet.” But I like what I did.
- KD: What do you like about it?
- RD: That it’s just free and naïve and childlike.
- KD: Those are good words, yeah.
- RD: Playful. I’m not trying to be smart.
- KD: And then there’s the symbol—
- RD: Which one? The target?
- KD: The target is in this one. And it’s in this one too, *Got a Mickey*.
- RD: Yeah. So I think—now that we’re having this conversation, because it’s literally occurring right now, if you have to say, “Well, are there motifs?” I guess it just occurred to me, maybe there are. Targets and record inserts.
- KD: Yeah, record inserts.
- RD: Forty-five [rpm] inserts. I’m thinking one reference is printing and one reference is the only thing that I look as a source of inspiration, the thing that compels me—
- KD: Music, you mean?

RD: Are two things, is that I'm inspired by other artists when I see a really great show. I'm not inspired to do what they did, but they just start the fire in me. Or I see a band that just completely connects me to creativity, like inspires me. So I thought, those are my sources.

KD: And who are some of the artists that inspired you?

RD: Well, the one that really made me start thinking . . . Living right now, and most engaged in my life, and most influential. Gary Panter, Bob Zoell. Living?

KD: Yeah.

RD: John Van Hamersveld, Raymond Pettibon. You know, I don't copy their work, I just find them a light to just reinvigorate my own, like, Richard, get up, Richard, and do something, kind of stuff.

KD: And what about the non-living?

RD: Marcel Duchamp, profoundly, blew me away. He just made me believe that you can do anything, and Andy Warhol, I thought, was just a cool guy. I mean, I was impressed with his stuff, but once I became more educated in the history of art and then starting to see, oh, wow, the epicenter of—the genesis of modern contemporary art is really—as far as I'm concerned, is Marcel Duchamp. I did just—I was never that impressed with Picasso or the Impressionists. I was really, really floored by . . . Art finally talked to me when I started, when I was introduced to Marcel Duchamp. I thought then anything was possible, you're as free as you want to be.

KD: And you also see some of the—I mean, those are icons, they're all icons. One's of music, and one's of kind of pop culture, and the other's Hollywood, but they're all icons, drawn to the symbol?

RD: Some of them were just what my dealer required in the mid-'80s. Or there was a little bit of calculation of trying to do something smart. I mean, when you're a good printer, when you're a competent craftsman, you make chairs for craftsman, say you're a woodworker and you're really, really competent, you've mastered the craft of making a perfect chair for a designer who's designed the perfect chair, you execute it, its assembly. And in printmaking, you wind up becoming a master craftsman in your field. And in my case, like I said, any time there was an opportunity, or I created an opportunity, to do my own work, what I wanted to do was just do nothing but explore printmaking and not worry about perfection.

So I looked at the content of the work, the actual piece was irrelevant to me; it was all about process. So when somebody says, "You can make money if you're a great printmaker, you're a great artist, and if you do this, you can make this amount of money." This is Karl Bornstein. "What do you want me to do, because I'm willing to do this if I can make a quarter of a million dollars." "You're the next Andy Warhol, Richard Duardo. You've got to go beyond Andy. So it's all about icon portraiture." So I said, "All right, let's do icons."

KD: And at the same time, you did work at Self Help Graphics, you were part of the atelier—I never say it right.

RD: Oh, yeah, I was invited to do a couple prints. And my prints were always the ones that—as far as I'm concerned, I mean—was completely out in left field, because I think everybody was stuck in . . . I mean, there might have been an undeclared agenda, in order for the Chicano art movement to be identified as a genre, we all have to work within the confines of a certain color group, and the confines of certain—a catalog of iconography, and some political commentary. I just started to see the calcification of the medium, for Chicanos, as being just two steps removed from being a political poster or an event poster, just kind of too sentimental.

KD: When did you make that observation?

RD: Maybe in the early '80s. Mind you, I had just gone through about four years of in the trench with those guys, pulling my weight. I just finally thought, "Okay, we've done it, we've said. Now let's just get on with what we're all doing."

KD: But on the other hand, if the argument is, the art comes from their experience, then your art is coming from your experience, from what you said. That was the music or—

RD: Yeah. So mine was reflecting that. And I was also being perceived more and more in the Chicano art community as not being an artist but as a printmaker—poster-maker. You know, I'm not doing real art, I'm doing



poster work. And I kind of tacitly accepted that kind of position, because I was gun shy. You know, artists that make a body of work and present the work, then it is judged, opinioned, or critically . . . It's critically reviewed, in terms of its meaning, its content, its depth. And I really wanted to dodge that bullet.

I was in a group show, I was invited in a group show sometime in the mid-'80s, I remember Christopher Knight reviewed it when he was writing for the *Herald Examiner*, he's writing for the *Times* now. He was just a beginning reviewer getting his chops down. But it was kind of—I don't have any . . . I know it was '85 to '87. I was invited to a major revue of pop art. And of course, Andy Warhol. It was at the [Los Angeles] Municipal Art Gallery. And Andy Warhol was one of—that's the only artist that registers in my mind, because when I was invited, I said, "Who are the artists?" And when they said Andy Warhol, I was like, "Oh, my God." Terrified. But I said yes. I said "Yeah, I'm down." Of course the show goes up, they hang me directly across from Warhol's work. And, you know, sort of impressive opening, everybody's happy. I'm holding my own. But it's pop iconography.

KD: Do you remember what piece?

RD: No, they had a selection of about five or six pieces. And of course the review comes out, and it goes on, artist by artist, Andy Warhol, another commentary on his work ad nauseum, because it's two decades into Warhol. How many times can you keep talking about—find an angle or talk about his work. And then the next one was, of course, literally the next paragraph, was Richard Duardo. And it was like, "Why settle for second-rate when you have the best?" And that was it. That was the comment on my work. And then it's on to the next subject. That's when I went, "You know, I just don't want to play this game. I just want to find my own audience, direct." Collectors, friends, or I'd like to hide in the shuffle of the crowd. Usually a young crowd. So that's—

KD: Art critics don't got very much—they never comprehend local art.

RD: Really?

KD: No.

RD: Oh. How about Suzanne Muchnic?

KD: Little bit better.

RD: Yeah. She did a great story on John Valadez.

KD: Yeah. I have two others that I didn't—the torsos.

RD: Oh, yeah. That's a commentary on anything that was on Prince Charles and Lady Di, that's their portrait.

KD: I actually thought that some of these are getting quite political. They reminded me of the—you know, it's not over-the-top—

RD: Preachy.

KD: Preachy politics that Chicano artists are used to, or African-American artists were used to in the '60s, '70s, and '80s.

RD: Well, I think I just—if I was going to try to sell anything with a message, I wanted it to be playful and irreverent and obtuse.

KD: Well, I thought . . . Certainly the irreverent, that's what comes out in the ones that were my favorite, *Got a Mickey*.

RD: Well, which was actually originally—that was the Self Help Graphics print. And there's one original serigraph of that on my wall in there, and it has the original title that I wanted. And my girlfriend, Jane Nicholson, the writer, who had been with me at the time, nineteen or twenty. And it takes a lot to write a title, and I remember whenever Ed Ruscha would come in and sign this print, and Jeff Wasserman would sign the prints, and he'd have some incredible scriptwriter come in and write his titles. And I thought, well, I'm going to try this, so I'll ask my girlfriend to write in the title. And she said, "What's the title of the piece," and I said, "Slip Me Another Mickey." And which she started to do it diligently. I don't know what it was, ninety prints? And then at one point, she calls me up from Self Help, and she goes, "Richard, I am really bored." She's a writer. And I said, "Yeah." She goes, "I just want to title them as they hit me." And I said, "Okay, knock yourself out." And I said, "Just tell me what you're thinking." And she said—she rattled

off a bunch of things she'd already done, it was after the fact. And I said, "Uh, okay. You know which one I really like is 'Where the Fuck Is Annette?'" And she laughed, she said, "That's my favorite too." And I said, "That's, yes, sign the rest of them 'Where the fuck is Annette.'"

KD: As in—

RD: Annette Funicello.

KD: Annette Funicello. Yeah.

RD: And Jane and I went ahead and wound up doing a collaborate piece called . . . you know, that portrait of Alex from *A Clockwork Orange*?

KD: Yeah.

RD: There is . . . Well, see that body of text down below? That was at my studio, and I was working on that one day, and she . . . I'd work on a print, and I'd quit because I didn't know what I was doing. There was never a piece of artwork I was reproducing as a print. I would just start with an image or a stencil, and I'd build it until it was resolved. And she was watching the process over three or four days, and she was inspired. And one day, she handed me—she said, "I wrote a piece about—your piece inspired me to write a piece." And I looked at her piece that she wrote, and I was so flabbergasted—it was amazing—that I said, "We're a collaboration now, and I'm going to silk screen the text onto the print."

KD: Yeah, that was the one I was going to ask you about, because it's the only one I've seen with that much text.

RD: Yeah. Well, she wrote the piece. And then I insisted that we both sign the print, because it was now a collaboration. So I wrote that, when I said, "I'd like to hide," if there's something that happens, working with another artist, either doing their print for the first time, if I'm so . . . Sometimes I'm inspired to the point that I come out of my shell, and literally, as a printmaker, say, "I've got to do something with you together," which we wind up doing. With Chaz, that wrestler piece? That's actually a re-strike, because the original, in 1987, is all gone. And people kept going on and on and on in the '90s going, "You know, all this Mexican wrestler shit which is so fuckin' hip."

KD: Valuable, yeah.

RD: "Yeah, he did it first," and I'm like, "So what." "We should re-strike the edition, we should re-strike the edition." Well, I finally got around to it like three years ago. I said, "Fuck it. Just to shut people up, I'll re-strike the edition." And to break the monotony of a re-strike, I called Chaz up and I said, you know, "We've always been talking about doing a collaboration, and I could never get the opportunity to do one." And we've done some great pieces with Chaz. I mean, they're in the collection at the LA County Museum. I mean, I really went over the top to try to do some great things when I worked with Chaz, because it's so rare, it's like every four or five years, sometimes ten. And I said, "You've got to come look at what I'm doing." I didn't invite him to collaborate, because he just really—he's just gun shy. I said, "You've got to take a look at what I'm doing."

And once he was in the studio and lay down an acetate over the piece, and I said, "Do something." And he had no choice. So he just spontaneously wrote "Y que?" I think, like, "so what?" And I went, "Awesome." And we printed it. It's only one separation on a twelve-color print, so it's technically nothing more than a flourish. But I insisted, "You have to sign this edition with me," because I wanted people to know that I think this—I believe this to be a collaboration. Most artists would just say, "The back door's over there. Just be quiet leaving." And scroll their name over the thing and claim it for themselves. But I like to give kudos to the people that do something with me.

KD: Well, in your archive, I had seen a note [about] collaborations with Shelley Lake and Ebens, Stephen Douglas.

RD: Right.

KD: What are those?

RD: Shelley Lake was an MIT graduate, and one of the first computer artists to do human motion graphics animation, which is fairly common now, right?

KD: Yeah.

RD: Fair, super common. Well, she did the seminal video performance by Kraftwerk, where their rock and roll video is basically a virtual band singing, floating heads. She did that when she had just gotten out of MIT. And her introduction came as a result of Rebecca Allen, who was another MIT graduate. And these two women were part of a young cadre. I guess the first wave were people taking computer art, motion graphics and animation, and starting to move it into the entertainment fields. And that introduction never would have happened if it hadn't been for Mark Mothersbaugh from Devo, who, as a result of his success with Devo, he was meeting and greeting all of these people. I was being introduced into the same circle of friends as a result of that relationship, because we had a great friendship. And we were in New York at the Palladium, and Mark actually was the—this was 1987, because I remember that's when the Congress passed MDMA, turned it into a controlled substance, which was now basically—it's not been declared a drug. But pharmaceutical MDA—MDMA, was still being manufactured, which was—this is real stuff. And Mark had a direct source to a pharmaceutical lab in Philadelphia or something like that. He was getting four hundred, five hundred hits shipped out to him. He wasn't a drug dealer. He was Dr. Happy. He—as a result of Mark being my friend ...

And ecstasy was nonexistent in downtown LA, or what it became to be called. But it was MDMA. And Mark one day gave me some E, or he gave me a little pill, and he said, "Richard, take this and your life will change, your art, completely." And he prefaced everything, because I said, "Mark, I'm done with ecstasy. I mean, I'm not with everything I did as a teenager. Acid, mescaline, mushrooms, whatever. If anything, I take a hit of pot now and then, but I'm done, that aspect." He said, "Richard, you need to take this for your art." And I took it, locked myself into my loft, and my world went insane. I mean, it profoundly affected my work. And what I did was what . . . Then what the next thing he did was he gave me a bag of this stuff, and he says, "Give it to the appropriate person, artist downtown." I said, "Done, dude." And I spent a summer turning on artists. It was a new thing, you know? And it was pharmaceutical, no sketchy little tweaker shit. The stuff that makes you just sit down and just sort your life out. Inadvertently, as a result of being Mr. Happy's assistant, I got pegged as the go-to—I wasn't selling this stuff, I was just . . . "You, come here. You need to take this." But I got basically pegged as the guy that was turning on downtown, as a result of my good friend Mark, who just—you know, he wasn't about selling this shit, he'd just get it. He thought it was important to get people to open up.

KD: Experience.

RD: Experience this mind—I mean, the incredible. It's not . . . You've done it, I think, maybe . . . Sorry.

KD: *[laughter]*

RD: It wasn't a visual drug. It was all processing, in your head. Just incredible. And breakthrough, if you're an artist, writer, performer, it's a breakthrough drug. And we went—for some reason, we were both in New York, the Palladium was just opening, we were all hanging out with . . . The Palladium was the first club that commissioned artists to do these installations, so there was a madness of art parties and activities. And we're the LA core that flew out there. And I was introduced to—these two screens came down—of course, we're on ecstasy—and all these computer graphics on these cube screens, twelve-by-twelves that were moving and rotating around the dance floor. I was just looking at the graphics, and I thought, "That's the future of art." In my mind.

KD: And when did you—

RD: Real-time art making.

KD: And you start doing these things, these machines you were telling me about before.

RD: Yeah.

KD: That comes within the next couple of years?

RD: Yeah, it starts happening within that period. I wanted these little freestanding robots that were dispensing sound and visuals. It was fun. Didn't quite go all the way, but it was fun.

KD: So what did you end up doing with Shelley Lake? I was wondering if that was—

- RD: Well, we were introduced. I saw the Kraftwerk on these huge cube monitors—we're talking ten feet by ten feet. And I was, "Oh, my God, who did that? Who the fuck?" And he said, "Richard, we're having dinner with them later on today, Shelley Lake and Rebecca Allen did this." So we meet them, and I just—you know, like—I just threw myself at them, and I said, "I have a print studio, I'll do whatever you want, I want to work with you. It's not electronic, but I think I can give you a platform where we can take things that you create there and anchor it in a substrate that is recognized as an art form. I might be able to find you an audience. And Shelly was the first one, we did *Tinkerbelle*. Have you seen *Tinkerbelle*? The wireframe *Tinkerbelle*?"
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: Rebecca was trying to . . . She goes, "I want to stay in my own medium." Nothing happened with Rebecca. She wound up teaching at UCLA. Rebecca Allen?
- KD: Mhmm.
- RD: But Shelly and I really hit it off. I just—she was sweet. She's gay, a really shy gay woman. And we became really good friends. And we'd always hang out and talk. We were both having the same issues with the art world. And we talked, and then we concocted this *Generic Art Show*. I mean, and you haven't even seen those pieces. They're in a container downtown. But we did *Generic Art*. Aluminum pieces. We took six major art movements, I did all the printing, the blocks. We packaged them with the general Ralph's packing with the little cut oval. I mean, they've not seen the light of day. Peter Frank wound up giving us, after we did the installation, pick of the week.
- KD: Right.
- RD: But it was art as a fucking commodity, a product that you could just roll down and pick it off the aisle at Ralph's. Which we did an installation at the Ralph's on Hollywood. I think it's Sunset Boulevard, but by the In-N-Out Burger now. Talked the manager into—it was—we wanted to document this product in the proper place that it was intended for.
- KD: That's amazing.
- RD: And then we did a show, an installation show, with—I'm not sure. The Natoli-Ross Gallery. I think it was 1991. I think you saw the poster, right? [*Generic Art Show* was shown at Natoli-Ross Gallery in 1988—ed.]
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- RD: Rick Duardo. *Generic Art Show*, which was all about . . . She did her pieces, which were her computer-generated huge canvases. I have this book for you. She wound up being invited into a group show in Japan, and then did about four or five group shows in Japan. That's Shelley Lake.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: This is . . . Shelly did her huge canvases, which I loved. Couldn't find a fucking audience for them. But this was not our show. I was approached to do a show. I countered with, "I want to do a collaborative show with somebody I really like." It turned out to be Shelley Lake. And they said, "Sure." They wanted a show, I said, "I insist I do a show with somebody I want to do a show with, Shelley Lake." And we did the *Generic Art Show*. Fabricated these pieces, which I loved. I think it was brilliant. I mean, you know, don't mind saying it myself. And she did her pieces aside from the collaborative *Generic Art* pieces that we did. Which was also the show with the star system, which was an indictment on the art world. I'll give you one of them, they're in the back.
- KD: [*inaudible*] That one I don't know.
- RD: It shows how the art world is a pentagram.
- KD: [*laughter*]
- RD: Anyway, that piece, and then my individual pieces, which I was really, really happy with. But once again, maybe it was a little bit too fucking obtuse for the art world, was a piece called *Quesoteric*. And I'd been looking for years now at Bruce Nauman's neon art pieces, and I thought, "God, it's a great little medium to explode some possibilities of shifting visuals with the lights and the text." So my piece was *Quesoteric Art*, and it was actually titled, "For the critics." It was basically a twelve-foot long neon installation of text in

Chicano graffiti. You know, blocky Chicano graffiti. And it was—it would blink on “Quesoteric,” entirely. And then it would blink off, and it would blink on “Queso,” and then it would blink off, and then it would blink on “Que,” blink off, and then it would blink back on “Que,” “es,” “s,” and blink off, and then it would blink on “esoteric.” So it was esoteric cheese. And my little setting was that sequence of this neon, a carpet, a very elegant chair, you know, like from a study, a little table, a glass of wine, a sliver of brie. And this was, “Okay, here sit down,” for the critics. Meditate on this. And of course, everybody’s like, “Huh?” I mean, my community, so-called the Chicano community, it just, nobody gets what the fuck I’m doing. What am I doing, posters with Mickey Mouse, and “Where the fuck is Annette II.” This ravey-looking happy faces with rabbit ears, to this—I was just all over—to pop icons, you know. I would just doing whatever, or events, projects. Or furniture.

I think that’s why nobody on the curatorial side could ever nail me down, because I wasn’t sticking to one thing and methodically working towards an identity for this. And I had an aversion to that, because I had just gone—I’d been doing five—at this point, six, seven years in the trenches of working with some real artists, serious artists, and seeing how they’re stuck. I did meet Jim Dine through Jeff Wasserman, and I liked his work, and I liked it when I was a student. But here it is, it was 1978. It’s got to be easily eighteen, twenty years, and he’s still fucking flaunting a bathrobe and hearts, because Jim Dine’s got to do what Jim Dine does. Billy Al’s got to do with Billy Al’s doing. Ed Moses. And I keep thinking, “Everybody is straitjacketed into their shit, because you have to do that in order to do a body of work that is addressing some major aesthetic issue that qualifies it for some institutional acclaim.” And I just kept thinking, “I just want to do what I want do, whenever I want to do it. I don’t want to do car crashes.” And ... I love Carlos, but I just thought, at one point in the ’80s—and he was even saying it, he felt he was stuck. Car crashes and Echo Park pieces. And I remember his complaints, when he said, “I really want to do something different, but the money’s too good.”

KD: Right. People want a Carlos Almaraz, not—

RD: Yeah. They want something that’s recognizable. And I thought, “God. My God, it’s no different than making a fucking product, a widget, at this point.”

KD: Tell me about the project that was a response to the *Helter Skelter* exhibition, MOCA. You had said that—the same one, was it—

RD: We did *Truckload of Art*.

KD: *Truckload of Art*.

RD: I think it’s Terry Allen, right? Or Terry—Terry Riley is a musician. Terry Allen is a performance conceptual artist or whatever. Somewhere along the way, somebody played me that record [“Truckload of Art”], and I just knocked my head off. And then of course, we’re living in a building full of other artists or ideas or wannabe writers. And Bert Ball was two floors—just come in from New York, where we met. And Bert and I would brainstorm ideas. We did *Truckload of Art* and *Western Exterminators*, so that’s the only claim to our collaborative frame. And I think they were seminal shows, for sure. But the first one was *Truckload of Art*, and we literally took—

KD: A forty-five-foot semi truck. [laughter]

RD: Gutted it, carpeted, sheet rock, track-lighted the inside. Hired a driver and a rig, and put that puppy on the road. And the launch of it was, we piggybacked on all the marketing promotion for MOCA’s big *Helter Skelter* show. So we put the brunt of our money, which was all of probably about four thousand dollars. They rent a trailer, gut it, turn it into a gallery, and then we put Georgia Andine, Robert Williams, Gary Panter ... God, who else. Who was in that show? Bob Zoell. And that was it.

KD: Now, let me—

RD: Maybe Sabina Ott, and maybe Mary Warnoff were in there. The thing was, it blew everybody away, because we literally—the night of the opening at MOCA, we drove in. We’re talking about a white truck, looks official. Drove right into the front of the *Helter Skelter*. It’s in the review. Drop the truck, pulled the rig away so they couldn’t force us to drive away. Dropped it, threw open the doors, set up our very elegant

stair entryway, and right at the time whoever was the cultural affairs commissioner was coming in with his entourage to bless that opening, MOCA's. They saw us first, because we had a ribbon and some scissors. And he was like, "There, the photo op, let's go." We walked right up and cut the opening ribbon to it—we hijacked the show. And the MOCA press, everyone—for them, it was sort of, they're freaking out, but they realize they can't really freak out, because this is the new spirit of what's going on. Except they have no control over it. And I think we brought a lot of attention to whoever was involved with that show.

And then we proceeded, actually, the guerilla marketing for that show prior to that was we printed. We printed parking tickets, and we crashed Margo Leavin's show, Corcoran shows, Doug Christmas's, the LA Louvre. When they had openings prior to our launch, we ticketed all the cars. And of course, you know, most people that have a flyer, they toss it off their car. But when you see a ticket, you get pissed off, and you either read it, or deal—you throw it in your car, and you want to deal with it when you get home. Did you ever see this?

KD: What?

RD: The book.

KD: Yeah.

RD: And it's the frightening text, did you read it? It's all about a fourteen-year-old masturbating for the first time.

KD: No, I didn't read the text. *[laughter]*

RD: It's hilarious, because it starts you to laugh, once you start realizing the details of your ticket, you realize it's basically an announcement for a show, a *Truckload of Art* show. So we hijacked a Margo Leavin opening, we hijacked a Corcoran opening, we hijacked an LA Louvre opening. We were going for LACMA. I don't know why we—I think we ran out of money. Renting the driver, the hitch, and we just finally said, "Well, okay. We made our point." Didn't sell shit, but I think we did something really playful in the art world.

And then we did the *Western Exterminator* show, which was—I'm going back and forth to New York, and New York is—it controls the outlet for all the major magazines. And so basically, they're determining what's going on in the art world. We're just three thousand miles away, getting sunburned, as far as they're concerned. And here it is, there's this whole new East Village movement that's based on this lowbrow—you know, we're walking into the lowbrow, the culture, and elevating it to a level of high art. Which is cool, because I've been in a playful mood anyway, and all the people I'm dealing with art in a playful mood, but we're on this coast. Nobody seems to notice what we're doing. And I think, Bert and I—we just thought, here it goes again. New York telling us what's cool, because they know what's cool, and only they know what's cool, and they discovered it. "Well, okay, what's going on."

Lowbrow really started with Ed "Big Daddy" Roth, Von Dutch, and Robert Williams, but Robert Williams is almost second-generation. But still, they're nobodies. They might have been something big and unusual in the pop culture, in the '60s, but they were never viewed as a transcendent sort of possibility of an art form, a genre. And here, New York, getting sharpies, doing bug-eyed versions of Rat Fink, and it's art. "Okay, and you guys are saying business brilliant? How about this: We're going to do a show that pulls out all the relics that have been doing this shit for twenty years, New York, and take a look at this. It's been going on on the West Coast for over two decades. Hello?" And from that point on, we took—once again, another show that didn't sell shit. And James Corcoran, I remember, was at our opening, cruising like a shark, just basically sizing up who's who. We're not a real gallery.

KD: Where was it?

RD: At the Zero Zero [now Zero One Gallery].

KD: At the Zero Zero.

RD: On Coconut. And so—and John [Pochna] can never get . . . He's an alcoholic, so he's never going to put a stable of artists together. He just gives curators an opportunity to pull off great shows. Well, we pulled off *Western Exterminators*, and it was a shot heard around the world. Didn't sell shit, but we said, "Here it is. Here's the epicenter of lowbrow." Had Big Daddy Roth, Bob Dutch, Robert Williams, Gary Panter. The

current generation, and the godfather of the new one. And, “Go ahead, check it out. It’s been duly noted and registered that this is the real shit. You New Yorkers? Nice try, keep going. You’re superstars, whatever. But this is where it really started.” And that’s what that show was all about.

Of course, Robert Williams immediately—paintings were fifteen hundred dollars, which means I could have had them for seven hundred fifty. He had ten oil paintings. These paintings are now selling for six hundred, seven hundred thousand dollars. Couldn’t give them away. And I’m ranting like a monkey to all my collectors, “Trust me.” I’m begging them, “Trust me. Robert Williams is going to be great.” And of course, when you’re looking at big-breasts chicks, bug-eyed bugs, and you’re going, “Is this art?” “Trust me, it is.” Nothing. Immediately after the show closed, James Corcoran got ahold of Robert Williams, put all the paintings in the back room, and started flipping them. He got it. He saw it. Once again, we’re running ahead of the curve. That’s my MO, is—you know, and I’m not saying that I’m pissed off or anything, it’s just sometimes it doesn’t pay to lead the pack.

**KD:** When you had Future Perfect gallery, did it receive critical reviews?

**RD:** Well, I didn’t pander to—I mean, I didn’t want ... No. I never projected the space as a conventional gallery.

**KD:** Tell me how you thought of that gallery.

**RD:** I thought—how did I think about it?

**KD:** Yeah.

**RD:** It was just a place to present artists. Even now, although it was treated as a gallery, we said we were a gallery, I just thought, “I just don’t want to suck up to ...” You know, you have to really play a game, you have to know who the right curators are that are jockeying to be recognized as smart, cool, on the edge curators, and then you have to make relationships with them, and then you finally have to find writers that are like-minded that are also jockeying to get some recognition, right? And then you develop this troika—you want me to shut that off for a minute? Already, you already know that I’ve got a very clear view of—that the art world is a system; it’s a parallel, mirror system of a very well oiled machine in commerce. And they’re just doing it, but they’re doing it with white ivory towers supported by public money, and making determinations as to what is culturally worth acknowledging and acquiring.

**KD:** But don’t you learn with your work with the graphic arts council [the Prints and Drawings Council at LACMA], it’s not just public money, it’s capital. Old money.

**RD:** Oh, yeah. No, no, no. For sure.

**KD:** Do you want to talk about that for a bit, or—

**RD:** Well, I always—you know, you already—I don’t know. What were—you kind of ... It occurs to you that there’s a lot of politics going on in the art world that sometimes determine people’s careers, versus just the intrinsic, you know, qualities of the work that they’re creating. Sometimes I walked into places, and I go, “How the hell did this wind up in this institution?” And if you do enough of the homework, you’ll realize the machinations going on between curators trying to make points, collectors trying to make too much fucking money, and realizing on people that are cluing them in to put them on a fast track of being major collectors to important artists that have yet to become important, to let curator write his catalog. And you start going, “My God, this is ...” And then you—if you’re young enough in your career and you’re smart enough ... Unfortunately, most young artists are not, although Mark Gustavi is really smart at that, by the way. He’s got a show on the fifteenth, you should come see it.

**KD:** Oh, okay.

**RD:** Mark—my hat goes off to Mark Gustavi. Shepard Fairey is his generation’s version of Mark Gustavi. Mark got it, I don’t know how he got it, if it was just spontaneously, or some smart art professor at UC—he went to Fullerton, Cal State Fullerton—clued him in, but he got it. It’s a very methodical way of becoming a very successful artist on the institutional side. There’s also a very methodical way of becoming a very successful artist in the commercial side, and they’re parallel universes that never cross over, even though Andy Warhol tried to cross LeRoy Neiman over in the early ’80s using—what was it called? LICA? LAICA. Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art. They were on Robertson, another group of collaborative group of artists

that want to break out of the mold and create their own institution. Of course, they sold themselves out to—let's see, *Playboy* offered them money. Andy Warhol sold himself to *Playboy*, and LeRoy Neiman, by agreeing to a collaborative show or a joint show, and that was an attempt by the commercial world to cross over into the fine art world. Of course, they were shut out, and they lost all their credibility, LAICA. I think it was LAICA.

KD: Yeah.

RD: Los Angeles Institute—something like that. Which is—I was in the—what was going on there, because Richard Newton, who was Shelly Newton's husband, was on their board. So when we'd have dinner, I'd just hear them ranting about the bullshit of institutions, whether progressive—everybody's trying to figure out how to jockey for position, and ultimately, it's all about money.

[break in audio]

KD: We are on side B.

RD: Yeah. So I don't know, I think I was kind of—

KD: What was your goal when you—

RD: Took the position at—

KD: Took the position on the graphic arts council at LACMA, LA County Museum of Art?

RD: A friend—one of the board members came over there, they tried seven years prior, five years prior, to try to get me to be on their board, the graphics arts council at LACMA. And I was so adverse. I just thought it would be a betrayal of my beliefs if I joined the belly of the beast, you know? So I said—gracefully said no, I didn't have time, blah-blah-blah. I had already served on the board at LACE, and I was disappointed that even cutting-edge nonprofit institutions were playing the politics. Manuel Ocampo, i.e., for example, being a manufactured—mind you, I do believe he is an incredibly talented painter, but his fast track really should dig into gear with LACE positioning themselves to be his biggest cheerleader.

And I just went, we're doing these nonprofit small institutions that are cutting are doing the same thing. And then I was still smarting from my association with MOCA when they were just an advisory group, before they were even a brick and mortar, the advisory—a couple members of the advisory group, when they were trying to make it a reality, and I'm already a downtown institution of ten years. I'm in the community, everybody. So it's a no-brainer that they come to me, because I have a print facility for propagating information, really. The information that has to be propagated into the community is that downtown, the art community needs an institution that is in step with what's happening. I bought it lock stock and barrel. We're all here for the community, young artists—

KD: For MOCA?

RD: Yeah. "And we need all the support we can get." "Okay, what do you need?"

KD: So you were on the advisory board?

RD: No, no, no. I was approached by the advisory board. Well, can you make a piece, a promotional piece to push this thing, or the issue that MOCA—an institution like MOCA needs to be created. So I said, "Sure." We printed five hundred posters for them.

KD: That's the circle square, yeah. The red—

RD: It's kind of a green—

KD: Oh, what I'm looking at is a slide, so maybe the color's not too good. But yeah, it's geometric shapes.

RD: Yeah, John Van Hamersveld was the artist.

KD: Yeah.

RD: John's a megastar. And I never even got a thank-you letter. So I thought, "Well, it's business as usual." Oh, and of course they find their money and their big developer dollars, and they start their institution, which became the joke in our community that they leveraged our community to make themselves a reality, and then where did they build? They build among all the bank towers up on Bunker Hill, and they've forgotten



the rest of us down in Little Tokyo and the scruffy lots in the art district. Tomoko was a big letdown too. So poking fun at them at the *Helter Skelter* show was a little payback.

KD: Not too difficult, I bet.

RD: Yeah, it was fun.

KD: So why did you go on the graphics arts council then?

RD: Well, I think it was 2000. I don't know, what am I, I must be forty-eight, and I just reengaged myself into the art world on the advice of some friends from the art world after being out of the loop for about for or five years. And I was approached once again by two board members that came in my studio. And they said, "You know, we really think it would be important for you to join." And my feeling was, "Well, I'm not getting any younger, so maybe I should see what it's like inside the animal." And I joined, of course, immediately I thought there was a great opportunity for change. I thought, "Well, change—maybe I should stop screaming outside the walls and go inside, and try to figure out how to change from within. Be a participant in change, not a—I didn't have any grandiose ideas that I was about to fucking conduct a coup, but I knew that I was starting at the bottom of the hierarchy there.

And the graphic arts council was perfect, because you propagate imagery. I can take the medium and start changing the perception and the face of that particular council through the associations of the artists I was bringing in and the programs that we were instituting, which was the next gen membership drive for our council. Which immediately LACMA, upstairs, saw what a brilliant idea. And then gave us a two-paragraph letter saying that we can cease doing what we're doing and they're going to take next gen to the next level, because we're stupid. We don't know a good idea when we happen on it. They'll take it to the next level. It was just—I was just like, "Wow, whatever."

KD: So you started off just as a member. What did you observe—?

RD: As a board member.

KD: Yeah.

RD: I was recruited immediately onto the board. I was never a member of the graphic arts council, never.

KD: Oh. So immediately after—

RD: No, they recruited me directly onto the board.

KD: And what's your first observations on how things run and what they're doing?

RD: I don't know anything about Robert's Rules of Order. I feel overwhelmed, almost as if these people look like they should have died last year. And I'm thinking, what am I doing here? I just want to be effective. I'm goal-oriented, and I was trying to figure out—nobody's mentoring me, because they're all brain-dead, they don't want to work. And I don't know quite what to make of it. So the first four or five months, I'm totally lost. We had monthly board meetings, so basically for the first four or five meetings, I haven't got a clue, and I'm getting pretty frustrated, almost ready to quit. And actually, I told one of my—the one person that recruited me that should have naturally have been my mentor, who was worthless from the point on I was on the board, I took him aside, and I said, "I'm thinking of quitting. I don't get what's going on here. I don't want to waste a board position, and I don't want to waste my time.

KD: What do they do so far, from what you observe?

RD: They meet and talk about nothing.

KD: I mean, did they have agendas of bringing in graphic art?

RD: Oh, gosh. No, no; they're concern was about how proud they were about the acquisitions of prints—I don't know if you understand—none of the—evidently the museum doesn't have money to buy art—

KD: No.

RD: Unless they can convince a captain of industry that's been sucked into their board of trustees to buy a piece and donate it, or some very generous members of LACMA to buy a piece, because they're usually being groomed and worked on by curators of various departments. But in the case of Kevin Salatino . . . Oh, so every major department, somewhere along the way . . . There was a wisdom in the '60s of developing support councils out of the membership with particular interest, that they could do activities and raise

money so they can give it to the curator, and he can go out and acquire. And in the case of the graphic arts council, they already had a history of commissioning artists to sell prints and raise money to give to the curator to go shopping. And if you look at everything before then, it was the old guard. David Hockney, Ed Ruscha, Ed Moses, Judy Chicago. Just—I mean, great. Granted, they were great.

But I could see for about fifteen years, they had not been—the last major artist of note that I thought was contemporary was Roger Herman. And that was—I think they only commissioned him because he got—LACMA used to give the new artist of the year award, some little accolade for some up-and-coming artist. And the only two artists that they had done anything that impressed me was Jay—I think his name was Jay Phillips. He died of AIDS almost two years after he got his big break. And I remember Jay Phillips from working with him at Wasserman's print studio. And that was it. To me, that represented about ten years past. And ever since then, not much. Floundering. No commissions in four years.

KD: So what did you decide to do?

RD: No newsletters in two years. Their quarter of a million reserve had been dwindled down to fifty-four thousand dollars, and they're still sitting around doing this monthly circle jerk. And I'm sitting there, and I'm totally naïve. I'm kind of overwhelmed that now I'm in LACMA, I'm a board member of some council. Eventually I find out it's basically being at the bottom. But I'm overwhelmed that I am now sitting in the board of trustees board meeting room. All the councils meet in the trustees board room. And I'm inside.

KD: Well, that will definitely impress you, right?

RD: But I can't figure out what to do. And then eventually I work up the—I buy my own Robert's Rules of Order, and I start reading exactly what they're saying when they're talking. And then it occurs to me, I've either got to do something or quit. And that's when Doug Blake says—this is the guy that recruited me in there—says, "Well, why don't you chair a committee?" I said, "Huh?" Four meetings later. "Yes, a committee." "Oh, that's when everybody asks to do a committee report and they just table it for the next meeting?" "Yeah." I said, "What kind of committees are there?" That's how fucking naïve I was. And he says, "Well, we have membership, newsletter, PR, community outreach." And I thought, "Hmm." Oh, print commission. So I said, "Okay." The next board meetings, I asked to be put on the agenda, and I read my little what I wanted to say—finally, the Mexican talks. *[laughter]* And I said, "I'd like to volunteer for a committee chair." And they said, "Okay. What chair . . . Well, there is no committee . . ."

KD: There's no openings.

RD: No, there's, well, there's—I think there was two openings, membership—no, Stephen Nemeth was still membership chair. There was one opening, and it was a natural for me: print commission, or print committee chair. And they all know I'm a printmaker, and I said, "I'd like to volunteer to chair the print commission." And they said, "Well, we're trying to manage our money." And I said, "Well, also, I have a proposal, if I'm commission—"

KD: Appointed, or—

RD: Appointed the chair. And they said, "Okay." So they take a vote. I'm voted as chair. Now I can do my next report or proposal, which is, I'd like to commission—we have to—I believe that we have to immediately put the word out to our membership, all twenty of them.

KD: Did you know that at the time?

RD: Yeah, and the world at large. No, well—that I didn't know at the time, and the world at large, immediately, that it's—the graphic arts council, it's the first time in seven years it's issuing a new commissioned print by a Los Angeles artist. And you know, I wasn't chair then, I'm going to correct something, because I think I claimed I was chair at the time. And they said okay, and I'd like to propose an artist for the print commission. And they said okay. Mind you, I'm Mexican American, the only ethnic representation on the board. And they said, "Well, who's that?" I was ready. And I said, "Well, I'd like to propose Salomón Huerta." And everybody's blank.

KD: "Who's that?"

**RD:** Yeah, “Who’s that?” One board member knew it, because his eyes lit up. I mean, somebody that’s on top of his shit. And then it’s sort of—I can also read, because I said “Huerta,” that “oh, my God, no sooner do we give him a fucking chair and what he’s got to do ...” I could see it. “He’s pushing his Latino agenda.” And then that starts a discussion, because we have to make a decision. And there’s all these detractors, very gracefully non—there’s the detractors putting up their cases to, “How can we publish somebody that is not known and not integrated into the art world?” And I said, “Well, I’d like to demonstrate that this gentleman is in a position to really anchor a re-launch of our publishing program with the graphics arts council.” And they were like, “Eh-h.” And I hold up the edition—the front cover issue that just came out the month before of *Art News*, ten artists to follow in the world. And of the ten, who gets the cover? Salomón Huerta. Which was like jaw-dropping.

Now, the thing around the boardroom is not whether it’s somebody that is known, it’s somebody that we will be able to get, because he’s so big. And that’s when I said, “Well, if I can get permission from the board to go after this person, and if I can get them, can we commission them to do the print?” And of course, now they’re being, “Impossible.” And they voted yes. And I said, “I’d like to step away from the table and confirm that so we can get this going.” I mean, I was now—now this is what I know, how to get shit done. And they were, of course, “Heh-heh-heh,” and I said, “Sure.” So I recessed, I went outside, called on my cell phone. Salomón said yes. Went back in from recess, and I said, “It’s a lockdown.”

And then there was [a moment], “Oh, my God, it’s going to be a costly process, we have diminishing funds.” And I said, “I also called my friend who runs a publishing company.” Because I can’t do the printing. They said, “Well, are you going to print it?” I said, “No, he wants to do a lithograph, an etching or something.” And [they] said, “Well, you know, the last time we did something with ...” Oh, mind you, in order for this to go forward, they had to cancel negotiations with David Hockney. And Hockney had been asking them to hire a printer of his choice, and the printer requested thirty thousand dollars per production. And Hockney requested that half the edition be given to him. You know, because anybody on the outside world, in terms of [benders], when you hear an institution, MOCA, LACMA, whatever, MOLA, you just go, “It’s my payday.” Framer, installers. And it’s the same with them. And they’re, like, they’ve been evidently arguing for two years whether to green light a thirty thousand dollar commission and then give up half the edition to the artist. And they said, “Well, it’s going to be a very costly process. We’re down from our all-time high of two hundred fifty thousand dollars, down to fifty thousand dollars.” I said, “I’ve also just talked to a printer, a lithographer, that’s out of Jean Milant’s print studio downtown, Cirrus. I’ve approached and contracted a master printer out of Cirrus who has his own shop that is willing to do it as a nominal cost rate.” “Who’s that?” I said, “Francesco Siqueiros.”

**KD:** Oh. [laughter]

**RD:** Oh, here it is. I get the chair. I get a Chicano Mexican artist. Now I’m giving the job to a fucking other Mexican. And I can—I’m just thinking, “Man, if they’d just look past this shit, something great is about to happen for this group.” And I can just see the gears going. I can just see they’re just terrified. It’s the beginning. That’s how they start. They clean our kitchens and mow our lawns, and then they move into the house. You know what I mean? I can just see it. And I’m saying, “Look, believe me.” So why did they sign on? Because it wasn’t thirty thousand dollars, because the artist wasn’t going to take 50 percent. Francesco agreed to do it for less than ten thousand dollars, and Salomón agreed to give the fucking edition to the institute. And they still voted for it grudgingly. It was just like, they’re just grinding their feet toward the inevitable. And not the takeover of LACMA by a bunch of browns, but just finally, look, we’re helping here. Give us a little credit.

**KD:** So they sold?

**RD:** Oh, yeah. And that was—on the basis of that, they trusted me, so I could take another leap. Shepard Fairey, it’s like another—until they saw two hundred memberships sold within two hours at that overnight event where he was signing. Which—who was it? You know, actually that was a joint, we did—I got them to green light a simultaneous commission, Shepard Fairey and Raymond Pettibon. They both agreed to be

there that night and sign the prints. That's how we got two hundred members that night, at that all-night party, the first one. Overwhelming success, okay? Which gave them—it made it easier for me to then present the first one, the next one. Because I'm all about being egalitarian, and actually I really want to break away from the whole misogynist structure of the art world. I said, "The next one should be Camille Rose Garcia." A woman, and a woman of color. And at this point, the resistance just let up. I mean, I'm putting money into their coffers. Just let me go. Let me do what they asked me to do. And then rolling it back to Salomón. Actually, the sales were very slow. And then I was started to get grief about it. I was going, "How can this be?" That's when I found out our membership was twenty.

KD: Oh, that's how you found out. *[laughter]*

RD: They're blaming me that sales aren't happening.

KD: There's only twenty people out there outside of the people in the room. *[laughter]*

RD: Yeah. And I went, "I'd like to volunteer for another chair, simultaneously." "What's that?" "I'd like to become membership chair. And while I'm at it, since we haven't done a newsletter, nobody knows we've done this print, I'd like to also volunteer to be the newsletter chair." So I wore three hats for two years, and I built—I took that organization from thirty-five members to three hundred seventy in two years, and fought my board all the way. And then I've done my job, three years was enough. I was helping Cheech on the side, trying to work—figure out where the levers were to try to get his show green-lighted over there.

KD: Right, Cheech Marin's traveling exhibition.

RD: Got Cheech on my board. Cheech joined my advisory board, created an advisory board, because they had the whole board locked up, so there was no room for turnover. So I thought—so I proposed to them—

KD: Oh, so there's no term limits to the—

RD: No.

KD: You just die.

RD: Yeah. *[laughter]* Thank you.

KD: So you came in because someone died.

RD: Probably. And I knew that this monolith would never shift. So—

KD: Not if it's a life term.

RD: So what if I created a ghost board, an advisory board, and sold them, which I did. And we set up another board, and when the advisory board met, it was like sparks exploding in a room, it was the most incredible gathering—an incredible selection of people in Los Angeles. Jim Heimann, Taschen Books, Mick Haggerty, Warner Brothers Records. I mean, I'd have to look at the sheet—I mean, I put together what should have been our board.

KD: You helped bring those people in?

RD: Yeah, the advisory board was my idea. And then we created the board, and then I recruited the board members. And they had to join at a certain level, which was ten thousand dollars into our coffer. And then at those board meetings, it was phenomenal what was going on. And all the time, I kept thinking, "This should be our board, but they'll never let it happen. Those fools, all those fools, if they cared about its mission and LACMA, then its curators should have just quit together." It wasn't about power. To them, it was always a power struggle, who's in charge. Well, the people in charge weren't doing anything, but to them, the most important thing was, they were in charge. They controlled everything, even though it was heading towards a brick wall, at least they were in control.

And I thought the advisory board was a possibility. My proposal to them was, our failure as a board was a fact that nobody was properly mentored or groomed to become on the board, so we'll—I'd like to propose an advisory board where we can cherry-pick ideas and run them through our board. You know, ideas of merit that are—and it's all about the benjamins, that generate attention and interest for—the mission is to get money for Kevin to go shopping, bottom line. So everything had to be dovetailed. And this was a hardcore group. We'd say, "Look. We're down for any crazy idea. Just remember how much money

it's going to generate, and how big of a profile it's going to create for the graphics arts council. I guarantee you, it'll be a shoo-in. Oh, and number three: it's not going to cost them a penny."

KD: How do you do that? Favors?

RD: Sponsor, favors, friends. This is the board. That's what they were supposed to be doing, but they were just all fucking rigid old men and women, just, "Oh, that's a great idea, but we don't want to do it."

KD: So you were able to get some important commissions.

RD: Yeah. We got Kenny Sharp to do that installation for the IFPDA [International Fine Print Dealers Association] that December—whenever that show was, January. Got flak from the top down. That's when I thought, "Okay, I think my head's about to hit the block now," which I was perfectly okay. I'd done my job, jacked up their membership, and tried to do what I do—what I could do for Cheech. Because I was basically doing work for Cheech, and I had got him on our advisory board. We were working for all sides—the bigger agenda was, any way and any time I had time to try to figure out how to push whoever on the inside to realize the merits of that show, that's what I was doing on a parallel level for Cheech.

KD: The "American Painters," what's it called? [*Chicano Visions: American Painters on the Verge*—ed.]

RD: Modern and contemporary. That's the most contemporary department in the museum. Everything else is dead things and dead people and the decorative council, the photography council—

KD: But it isn't successful, the attempts to get LACMA to accept Cheech Marin's show.

RD: No. No, no. And we thought, you know—I mean, in hindsight I realize, we were so low in the pecking order of influence that, you know—

KD: You were works on paper.

RD: Yeah. That whatever we were doing here wasn't permeating to the top, except for the bad things that we did, or the super good things that they just stole from us. I mean, the young people that I got—by the time I left my board, I changed the complexion—I had got Raymond Roker, the publisher of *URB* magazine, an urban lifestyle magazine, onto our board. Nichol Bradford with Vivendi Universal in the gaming industry, on our board, way before the trustees realized the money real people with real money are people that are running the EEA.

KD: EEA.

RD: Electronic Arts. They're—way before they got it, we were getting it at the bottom. I wasn't saying at my board meetings, "We need more black people, brown people, this—more Asians." I was just looking around going, "We've got to get real, we've got to reflect what's going on," which is younger and more ethnically diversified. And that's our board—that's how our council is going to become invigorated. And by the time I left, the average age of the board went from sixty-five to seventy, to about thirty to thirty-four, and I was proud of that. And it also went from about 80 percent male to about fifty-fifty, and I was proud of that, really proud of that.

And then I fell on my sword, because a woman that I thought should have been our board chair—and it was time for a woman—but I was . . . My elevation to the chairman was negotiated in a back room by Kevin Salatino, you know. Kevin knows—Kevin was in step with what was going on, but the old guard wasn't. And in order for them not to explode the whole thing, he hammered out an agreement with people basically in control of our board to let Richard become chair. I mean, they never—

KD: In return for . . .

RD: It was never a membership vote, it was always—you know what. I don't know what the Soviets call it—it was all our . . . I realized also our organization was not a democracy, because the memberships on an annual meeting, people picked their chair. And the board picks the nominees, so there's not much of a choice. And the nominees are basically a rotation of old people, and the vote, the annual meeting is, there's only one candidate. So it's just a rubber stamp. And I thought, this is how the system works here on a council level. And since I had just reinvigorated the whole organization, and the members that are coming in and going to programs and activities or group events, are now coming back going, "What the fuck is going on here? These fucking geriatrics, they don't get it." "Yeah, yeah, yeah. Just bear with me. It's a process."

And it's getting close to our annual board meeting, it's time for votes, and members are suggesting that I should be nominated, and I'm saying, "I'm more effective as a chairperson," that was my mantra. I do not want the chairmanship; I'm more effective as a board chair, committee chair. And I've already got three—

KD: What's more?

RD: What's the point of being the chair? You have to sit there and babysit meetings, because they're all dumb.

KD: Yeah, because I would imagine the chair of the council doesn't sit on the committee, doesn't chair a committee.

RD: No, he sits there and just hits the gavel and acts grandiose. That's all I saw from our chairs. They do nothing, but they feel really important. And we're in the trench. By this point, there is more members, younger people, and they're actually taking responsibilities, so I feel like the weight is now being distributed properly. In the older guards that are controlling the board are even happier because they weren't doing anything before; now they're riding on success and claiming it. Know what I mean?

KD: Yeah.

RD: And the deal that was cut was, I would agree to be chairman only if they allowed me to pick my co-chair, vice chair. Vice president, whatever you want to call it.

KD: Right.

RD: And they said, "Okay. And who's that?" And I said, "Bettina Korek." She was twenty-three years old, out of one of the—Yale. Really brilliant, smart, engaged, positive, level-headed, and she had been with me side-by-side helping shape and build this organization back. Just like me, naïve and enthusiastic that things could work if you do it by—you play by the rules, you read the playbook, you can actually change things. And of course, they freaked at that, because that automatically means she's positioned after my two-year tenure to become the next chair, and these old guys are fighting it tooth and nail. Their look was like, "We just let a fucking Mexican take the chair, and now we've got to swallow this? He wants his co-chair to be a woman? And my God, a fucking kid at that? Twenty-three?" And I said, "That's the deal. You want me to be the chair." And they're—they really me to be the chair, because up until this point, they've been controlling me. So basically, I'd be a puppet.

KD: Right, that's what I thought. If you're chair of the council, you're not going to be chair of the committee. So there's no action.

RD: Right. So I said, "I will be chairman if I can pick my vice chair, Bettina Korek." And they freaked out. Kevin, he knows that they're just dragging their feet on progress, convinced them to calm down, let it happen. Bettina's awesome. Her father's very wealthy, he gives tons of money to LACMA. And they let it happen. And I knew, and I told Bettina this, "I'm going to fall on my sword. In about a year, I'm going to put everything into play, because you should be chair." She would have been phenomenal. I said, "You should have been chair. I would have been happy to be your vice chair, but this is the only way we can try to do something with this fucking ..." I used to call it driftwood. We were recruiting pylons, and we were dealing with driftwood on our board.

And we got in there, and I think I lasted about three, four months. Because I'm chairing meetings now, I'm having really . . . They've now gathered themselves as a hardcore faction to fight me tooth and nail at every board meeting. They were just resisting progress. We're not like saying we have to all—we weren't pushing agendas like we've got to wear red and read Mao's book. It was, we were—everyone now on my board that was young, it was all about the mission. And at board meetings, these young people would look at these old people, and like they were stupid kids ranting. It's like, "What are we here for? We've got a monthly meeting. We're supposed to get certain things done. The agenda is how we support the council, why are you going ragging on Richard about this or that?" Or, I've got a secret agenda. I mean, I was like—you know, I'm in power now, in their minds.

KD: Right.

RD: You've got the brown boy in power, you've got this little Amazon, twenty-three year old, as vice chair. Now we've got a black guy and a black girl on our board? So this faction was fighting. It was miserable. I'd walk

out—my second board meeting, I went straight through the back and then threw up. Or I'd walk out with the most massive headache and depressed. And I kept telling Bettina, "You can do this," because she's really well educated, very eloquent. I said, "Now you know why I know you could have been a better chair than me. I cannot fight this, or I get really down and dirty." A couple of times I had to stop my rant, when I was defending myself and asked the secretary to strike something, some lines that I said off the record, and recant them and apologize, because I didn't want them on the record. Because I would call people—I said, you know, "We're reducing ourselves to a circle jerk."

KD: Oh, God. *[laughter]*

RD: "Steven, please. Look, I'm shutting you down. You're on another tangent that's going to burn forty-five minutes of board time and get nothing done." Or—it was pretty ugly. I was pretty depressed.

KD: So how did you—

RD: Six months in, I took a leave of absence for two months. And two months later, I submitted my letter of resignation, which automatically elevated Bettina to the chair. And I was advising her, and she was really—I said, "Bettina, you've got the youth and the ability. You can fight those guys." And she hung in there for another year, and she just finally said, "I'm done. It's too entrenched. And they've lost half their membership." There's still a young faction on the board, and they're still calling me up. And I said, "I need to know two things. Is Frank still on the board?" "Yes, he is." "Is Steven Nemeth on the board?" "Yes, he is." "Is Steven—whatever his name is, some fucking old director that is angry at the world, film director, who thinks—fancies himself a painter." "Yes, he is." And I said, "The troika is in there running things. I'm not coming back. Clean house and I'll come back." And I just want to be a chair again of a committee, you know. I said, "I don't want to sit through another board meeting with those three." They should have retired. They've been there for twelve years. And I would—one of the first things I proposed when I was chair was—

KD: Term limits?

RD: Term limits. I mean, that was—to them, I had just declared war, and I should have been—I just thought, well, okay, I set myself up for this one. They know what I want. And what I want was just a stronger, better board. But to them, it was I'm out gunning for them.

KD: Did—how did you then—you were saying that LACMA doesn't start thinking about Cheech Marin's show until Target came on board?

RD: Until Target gave them a million dollars for their education program. *[laughter]*

KD: Target gave money to—

RD: LACMA. I don't know the exact amount, but—

KD: LACMA, and already at that time, Target is backing the traveling exhibition.

RD: Yeah, Target was a committed lead sponsor on the show to begin with. And BBH [Exhibits, Inc.] in Texas was the company, the museum—the company that puts together museum-quality shows, traveling shows. It was a contracted company for—to put the shows together so it could tour. And Target was the underwriting sponsor. It was a no-brainer. Everything was in place. A catalog, a fully packaged show. It's just getting the institutions to sign on. Or block out the time. I mean, you couldn't ask for anything better. And then from the first show on, which was at San Antonio, I believe—I don't know what the second venue was, I think maybe Albuquerque was the third venue.

KD: I think the second venue was the Smithsonian.

RD: Okay. Thank you. From the Smithsonian—well, from San Antonio, it's understandable that it is a massive event. Because I think about six or seven of their homegrown artists are major, majorly represented in that show. So, okay, it might be an anomaly that the turnout and the opening was overwhelming. The community.

KD: Okay. It might be an anomaly, but yeah.

RD: Well, that was my thinking. I'm like going, "God, I've never seen so many ..." I'm from LA, so when I go to a museum show, or even a reception, to see maybe—in a city of 60 percent Latino, whatever demographic

combination, when you go to a major event on the higher levels at LACMA, if you spot one of your own in the room, you're compelled to just gravitate towards them. That's how basically white it is. To see that kind of an opening reception event populated by 95 percent Mexican Americans, Latinos, Chicanos, whatever you want to call them, was overwhelming. And I thought, "Well, it's because this—the anomaly is that this is a major Chicano art survey. It's Cheech, it's an anomaly. When it opens up in—" What is it, that—

KD: The Smithsonian, and then Albuquerque, right?

RD: Yeah, but at the Smithsonian, the numbers come in, it's a blockbuster.

KD: And there's no Latinos in that town. Well, there's no Chicanos in that town. Few.

RD: Yeah. It's official, it's a blockbuster. It's not an anomaly. Albuquerque, I was with Cheech. I didn't go to the Smithsonian, but I went with Cheech to Albuquerque. That's a small city, something like ten thousand people. But it looked like Woodstock, to the point where they had to find a phalanx—did I say it properly?

KD: I don't know.

RD: You know, a wedge of security people?

KD: Oh, right, right, right.

RD: To protect Cheech to get him through the crowd. Because there was a Cheech—it was celebration, actually. I think consistently I can say this about San Antonio, because that's what told me kind of personally, as a Mexican, as a Chicano, as a Mexican-American, to go through that entire museum was goosebumpy, you know? Because you realize, hey, we're not all that bad. We actually have talent in our ranks, in our people. And the other thing that tripped me out and made me realize that this is really, really important, this show, is there is actually families—the whole gamut, in terms of age, going through there, and there were a lot of people that were like emotionally attached, either by—you could tell by the work or the totality of the whole thing, the revelation about themselves. It was a positive experience for our community, like of pride, to the point it was an emotional catharsis for people, you could see it.

KD: Crying, yeah. Yeah.

RD: So Albuquerque was—that's it. San Antonio, maybe an anomaly. Smithsonian? Maybe an anomaly. No question anymore. Albuquerque, this is major. It's a mega-blockbuster show. In the meantime, this is only a year into the six years, and Cheech is still, when he's in LA, taking meetings with Andrea Rich, trying to convince her on the merits of the show, her stonewalling him. "Okay, can I convince you on the merits of the numbers." And what it would translate into? Ticket sales.

KD: Right, ticket sales.

RD: Merchandise sales, gift store sales.

KD: Because by then they'd already had [at] LACMA *The Road to Aztlán*, 2001.

RD: Which was a great—

KD: It was a blockbuster for them. They didn't—that's a homegrown show, and they didn't anticipate—

RD: There was ... So, you know, it doesn't take a big leap of faith to realize this is, this could be really good for the institution at large, and with the changing political landscape of the power, political power and how it's being redistributed, supervisors, councilmen, that it would be a smart thing to get on the train here, Andrea. And she—like I said, fought it tooth and nail. And Cheech told me that, "Okay, if you don't want to do it this way, we can do it this way," which was, to quote him—her thing was, "Are you threatening me?" And he goes, "No. We can either do it here, or we can do it in a public forum." And then, you know, "That'll remind you ..." He didn't say this, but that would mean the supervisors, the board of supervisors—do you think Gloria Molina is going to take kindly to this woman stonewalling something when they're getting 70 percent of their funding? I think the county funds up to 70 percent of their funds.

KD: Yes, it's a public institution.

RD: And that still didn't penetrate. So what happens? I don't know, a couple of years ago ... When did the initiative, the Chon Noriega initiative—

KD: It must have been 2004.

RD: Okay, 2004.



KD: Two thousand and five at the latest.

RD: She's fighting it tooth and nail. And then all of the sudden, Target donates a big chunk of money for their outreach education program. And miraculously, she has an epiphany and realizes the wisdom of the show. Except I understand it's been tweaked and turned into something else.

KD: Yeah. That's what I understand.

RD: Because the curatorial department of modern contemporary work were upset that this was not—they were being forced at a show.

KD: And they supposedly don't do that.

RD: Right.

KD: Right? They don't take traveling exhibitions.

RD: As they're still counting the money on King Tut. They just—it's hypocritical. But what the hell, what can you do?

KD: I wonder if you could change gears for a minute and tell me about the Kurosawa.

RD: Oh, it was—

KD: The portraits.

RD: That was a commission that was given to me by—orchestrated by Kay Nakashuma in Japan, who put together most of the survey shows of American pop art over the '80s, which I think I was in three of them.

KD: Yeah.

RD: Museum shows that were a survey of contemporary American art, pop art. Mostly American contemporary art. They're confused about their words, so they called it pop art. But it was basically a contemporary survey of American artists. And Kay also had a company called Ussio, *U-S-S-O*, and you know, curators there wear two hats. They're really at the beck and call of corporations. Institutions are basically attached public facilities that are more or less funded by corporations. Museums are tax shelters, generally are tax shelters. Or, as one—it was revealed to me by the curator of my show in Gifu, where I did the Kurosawa thing, said, "Ritchie, you have to understand. When a company like Sony has to pay a hundred sixty million dollars a year in taxes, rather than just give it to the government, they just say, 'We'll spend a hundred dollars.'" It's a write-off if they spend it on a public institution. But basically, that institution is subservient to their agenda, more or less. So it's a PR thing over there, museums.

KD: So did you work from photographs that they handed to you?

RD: Kay got ahold of me, and she said—oh, God, I forgot her name. Akiko [Kazuko Kurosawa] ... I'd have to crack the notebook. The daughter, because he's dead by now, Akira Kurosawa. That they want to commission me to do ten portraits of their father. I forgot—I met them both, I forget their names, but they're in the book. The son and the daughter. The son's like some gambler playboy, he doesn't really care. They've got a foundation. But the daughter is very on the mark about maintaining the integrity and the institution of her—whatever her father's done. Mind you, he's being finally, posthumously recognized by his own country as a great artist, never mind that he had to do Dewey's liquor commercials in order to keep himself alive.

And now, posthumously, although Francis Ford Coppola and George Lucas and [Steven] Spielberg and every young director in America has already always pointed the finger to the East and said "Kurosawa," probably hands down. The vote was taken. He's considered the greatest film director of all time. And I'm aware of all of this, I love film. And I'm like going, "What?" "Yes, they'd like to commission you to do ten portraits of their father." And my response is, "Why are they picking a fucking Chicano from East LA when there's—I've been to Japan. There are great artists in Japan. This is a project that should be done by a native artist, because the grief you're going to deal with is not going to be worth it." I'm already thinking of the fallout. And she says, "They insist on it, and they're flying out to meet you." Which they did, an entourage of about twelve people. Because I'm still hemming and hawing. I'm, like, saying, "I can't do this. I'm going to be ripped apart in Japan," and I like Japan, because they like me, they buy my stuff.

KD: Yeah, I wanted to ask you about that.

RD: And so they came over, and I was so touched at that meeting—I mean, I was flattered. I’m like going, “I don’t know why, but okay, I’ll do it.” So I took the commission, it was about a hundred thousand dollars. And I had to create ten portraits. And then they were going to publish them as an edition of twenty-five portfolios, and they were going to sell them for ... I don’t know what it was, twenty-five to thirty thousand dollars each. First they started talking about hundred thousand dollars, and I do prints. And I said, “Look, I’m not Ed Ruscha. Let’s have a reality check here. I’m not David Hockney, Ed Ruscha. I’m Richard Duardo, marginally successful recognized artist in LA. So this is not—I don’t merit a hundred thousand dollar portfolio. You flatter me, but they’ll be buried in a vault until we’re all dead. Let’s get real.”

So they agreed to about twenty-five thousand dollars. And I guess the money was to raise to go to his foundation, they have a foundation for their father. I said, “I’m down for it.” “The commission is a hundred thousand dollars, we fly you to Japan, we give you a traditional Japanese house. Tatami mats, sliding doors, and a studio. And at the end of the completion of the project, we will underwrite a museum show.” This was the Takumi museum in the city of Gifu, which is outside of Kyoto. I said, “Okay, cool.” So I went over there, did it. It was—it was fun. Slightly art-directed. Basically, it was an illustration job. At one point I realized, you know, they’re so concerned about protecting the legacy of their father that I really could not do anything other than something that was so lacking in any kind of energy.

KD: You just colored the image.

RD: Yeah. I just thought, I don’t know, they could have hired—they could have done this at home with Photoshop for what I did, and saved themselves a hundred thousand dollars. But it was done. The reception was phenomenal, it was beautiful. And I was really, really grateful. I came back, I think I had four portfolios. And I was so disappointed with what I was able to do that I tried to bury the project as much as possible, like put it behind me. So I think I don’t even have a portfolio, I gave—I mean, literally—I sold my portfolios for two thousand, three thousand dollars. I just wanted them out of sight. Except for the documents, you know?

KD: So why do you say you like Japan? Tell me about all the different relationships and opportunities you’ve had in Japan.

RD: I think the Japanese ... You know, although—I think the Japanese were colorblind and not—they weren’t prejudiced. I mean, there wasn’t all the bullshit that I thought you have to go through here as an artist of color. They were more focused on recognizing you as an artist, not as a Chicano or a black artist, but as somebody—just as an artist, and I thought that was refreshing. I didn’t ever—nothing ever entered into the conversation about, you know, you must be angry for being treated—you know what I mean?—your people being treated that way. It was always about just being really supportive, and I thought that was refreshing.

And I think they were fixated on the fact that most of the work that I was doing was basically American, referencing so much pop culture, and the Japanese are fixated on pop culture. So I was just perfect for the time, which was the rock and roll ‘80s in Japan. Where if you own ten square feet of Tokyo, you were a gazillionaire, because that’s what was driving the art market. Mad money from the Japanese bubble. And I was part of the people just reaping it in, having a great time, and just really enjoying myself. And you know, I was also doing stuff that was in tune with what they were all about, they were gaga—everything all—anything American. Pop and American. So I was hitting a home run.

KD: So what was the work that was selling so well over there?

RD: Portraits—the icon portraits.

KD: The icon.

RD: Yeah. Anything that had Japanese—like the Screamers print, completely—they didn’t get it.

KD: Oh, okay.

RD: And I thought that was the most cleverest and coolest stuff here, but it wasn’t working over there. You know, it’s like, “Why do we want to see stuff with Japanese writing on it?”

KD: Oh, right. They’re actually in the binder for the Kurosawa project. There’s some calligraphy in there.

- RD: Oh, yeah. Hand done?
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: That was a Japanese guy that ... I wanted the face, the portfolio cases, to be silkscreened, and I wanted them done by a Japanese calligrapher, so I found some kid in Little Tokyo, and I asked him to do the calligraphy for me. Then we scanned them and used them. I don't know if we incorporated any into the artwork.
- KD: I didn't see any of that.
- RD: There was—I did incorporate imagery that referenced the films that he does, and they had me remove all of that, because Kurosawa evidently did not get a favorable deal on those films that he did with those film companies. And the family was, I guess, at odds with that company, and they were concerned that they would get ... It would put the film company they were hassling with in a position to sue them for sourcing images—
- KD: Right, right.
- RD: Even though they were his images, or—as far as I'm concerned, it was his artwork. I just wanted to incorporate it. So we had to cut that out of all of the imagery. Like I said, I kept getting watered down, watered down, until it was palatable for the family, the public, and the press. So basically, it's like a plain piece of white bread.
- KD: It doesn't sound at all like the kind of work you've been doing in your own studio.
- RD: No, it wasn't.
- KD: It was irreverent, and trying to fight against—
- RD: That whole project, I'm really grateful that I got it, but you know what, like I said, they could have hired an illustrator, art directed him, and gotten the same results. They didn't get Richard Duardo. I mean, it started as Richard Duardo, but by the time I got through all of the changing and corrections and deleting, of possibly offending—I mean, they weren't offending. They just wanted to not even have the question come up, so it was deleted, or asked me to remove this or do that. So it was so watered down. I just was kind of—I thought, "This was a waste of money and time on their part, but, you know, I'm grateful for the project." It looks good on the resume, but to me it's sort of ... I never show, I never show those things. They're gone anyway, but to me—when I was back from that trip, everybody was, "Whoa."
- KD: Yeah, they're actually not in your—
- RD: No.
- KD: The two binders you shared with me.
- RD: Nope. That whole project, I'd just as soon forget that it ever happened.
- KD: Now, I want to go back to some of your studio ... I think it's Multiples. You showed me a brochure the other day, and you described it as a philosophy as opposed to a—your intention originally was to make it a—
- RD: A brochure, a marketing brochure for our services.
- KD: Marketing brochure.
- RD: But it wound up being kind of a manifesto on the philosophy of my studio.
- KD: And so one of the things it says is, "Emerging artists workshop, hearkening back to the origins of Aztlán Multiples." So what was the emerging artists workshop, and how was it—
- RD: Heartening back to Hecho?
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: Well, the studio in Highland Park was when I was—now had been converted into a full-time silkscreening studio. I would invite as many artists that I possibly could afford material, ink-wise, to come in and do prints with me. And then—
- KD: And who were some of those folks?
- RD: Jeepers, you'd have to go through the notebook. I liked Tim—Nick Taggart, who must have been about twenty-two, just arrived from England. Mike Fink, Bob Zone. Did a lot of prints with Leo Limón. John Valadez, John Van Hamersveld, Mick Haggerty.

- KD: Okay. So it's the names you've been giving me.
- RD: Yeah. I remember those because we did so many multiple prints that they're embedded in my brain. But like I said, if I pop the documents and just block out those years, I can remember, "Oh, yeah, oh, yeah. Him too, him too." Neil Taylor, wound up doing a couple prints with Neil Taylor, who was one of the leading members of the LA Dada movement.
- KD: And there's actually—I think there might have been a slide.
- RD: Yeah, I did—I was one of the venues for the first LA Dada, whatever it was, and I did their poster. I forget what they were doing. Actually, they created a program, because it was an international festival. Because they had ... I remember Italian and French and German, all of these Dadaists that congregated in LA. And I let them use my venue for performances and pieces.
- KD: Oh, the large space that—
- RD: Yeah, in Highland Park.
- KD: In Highland Park?
- RD: But I never got—I was just being a nice guy, but I was only engaged enough to do the poster and provide a venue, but I never got to hang out. I mean, I wasn't interested in hanging out with a bunch of people I didn't understand. I mean, it was supporting their stuff, but I just frankly didn't find any common ground with them. They weren't into punk music, goddamn it.
- KD: Oh, is that what it was?
- RD: I believe so, that's where my head was at.
- KD: Now, I want to take you back even farther, in '82, the Aztlán serigraph.
- RD: Oh, yeah.
- KD: I was so curious—
- RD: Why?
- KD: Why you did that piece.
- RD: Hmm. It's '82, huh?
- KD: Yeah, it's '82. So it's—for the Chicano movement, it's late, but not for your Aztlán Multiples or Hecho en Aztlán.
- RD: Because I think Hecho in Aztlán was about to mutate into just Multiples, Fine Art Printing. And I wanted it to [be] a definitive document. Well, I just want to do a definitive art document that said, "Okay, I did this. I was part of this."
- KD: And it ironically gets picked up by the Chicano art folks, doesn't it?
- RD: Who's—what Chicano art folks?
- KD: Doesn't that become one of the ones that circulates in the Chicano [exhibition] *Just Another Poster [Chicano Graphic Arts in California]*?
- RD: Yeah. Well, yeah, because Shifra Goldman—Shifra Goldman, of course, is now the ... She'd be coming around the Public Art Center, the Centro de Arte Público. And she'd be having her kind of contentious conversations with Guillermo and—
- KD: Guillermo Bejerano.
- RD: And is it [Victor Manuel] Valle?
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: Guillermo—no, wait.
- KD: Vincent—
- RD: Baez.
- KD: Yeah.
- RD: And Carlos. And I mean, she was hardcore. She was like saying, "You're not ..." Her agenda, as I perceive it—because I sat through some of those conversations, I didn't say a lot, I'd just listen—was that she wanted the link of the revolutionary muralist movement—

[break in audio]

RD: To do twenty-one questions, and then give them . . . Which was a litmus test on, like, how Chicano are you, and how true are you to the revolutionary movement that was started by your relatives in Mexico, you know? The real painters, the ones that pulled out guns and shot each other. And I just thought, “God, this is so ... I’m never going to ... If she’s ripping those guys apart, my God, I’m going to try to stay out of her crosshairs, because I’m doing vacuous, decorative pop shit. I’ll never hear the end of it.” And when I did that Aztlán piece, she called me up, and she said, “I want to talk to you,” and I was like, “Ugh, here it comes.”

KD: You’re sinking in your chair. [laughter]

RD: And I said, “Sure.” She came over, and she said—I think she didn’t buy it from me, she bought it from somebody else, but—“I want to ask you about why you did this piece.” And [as] I told you, and just—the whole thing was Hecho en Aztlán. I really like this, I did a typographic design of it that was intended for a business card in a shop, but I finally wanted to address it as a print. And this is the way I did it. I did it impulsively, and I don’t know what I was doing. There’s a square, a rectangular space, I crossed—I said it was an exercise in printmaking, and it was my goodbye to something, of a part in my life. “Shifra, there’s no—it’s not loaded.” This is the way it was. She was impressed with that. But about five years ago, she called me up and invited me over to her house to share a document of some student that did some insane thirty-page dissertation on that piece.

KD: Yeah.

RD: You know about it?

KD: Yeah.

RD: And she read me a couple paragraphs, and I said, “Enough. Please.” I mean, this is why I hate—I don’t really hate, but this is why I’m just annoyed by academia, because they can take something and just extrapolate into a fucking book, and you still walk away going, “Huh?”

KD: Well, I guess that’s why I’m anthropologist. I believe in talking to the person first. [laughter]

RD: Yeah. She said, “Do you want a copy of this?” I said, “Nah. You can tell the person that I say, more power to you and I hope you get your PhD.” But I said, “I can’t believe somebody could do a dissertation on one fucking print, this is ridiculous,” and that was that. And that’s the last time I saw her. She has it framed—well, she had it framed in her house at the time, so I was really flattered. And I know that she was ... The conversations that we would have over the years, that never amounted to more than half a dozen, it was always ... She was gentle with me, because I was gun-shy. She always wanted to see where am I coming from, what’s my politics? What’s my position?

KD: Well, I’m surprised that it sounded like, from your perspective, that these conversations at [Centro de Arte Público] were ... I mean, I would find that the way you describe Carlos Almaraz’s idea of, let’s start this *centro*, were exactly her kind of Marxist, Leninist—

RD: Yeah, he is. And I think maybe while he was drifting this way or that way, every now and then she’d come in there and she’d call him to the carpet.

KD: But what would be the drift, is what I’m trying to figure out.

RD: Maybe that he was doing bourgeois work. He was indulging a Westside audience, that he was detracting from ... I mean, Carlos had a cross to bear. He’d just come down doing mega-murals for the United Farm Workers. Devoted—he was a cultural worker in a faceless organization that was working for the proletariat. And I think every now and then, when he’d slip this way and design some pigeons for a shoebox, and maybe the word got out or maybe she saw something that just looked too commercial, she’d never miss a trick to just come over there and just read him the riot act. And Carlos had been to China, Cuba, incredibly well read, always reading. If he wasn’t painting, he was reading. And incredibly articulate. That’s why he was a great leader and a great leader in a discussion group. He was amazing.

But—and in my mind, I thought, this, “I’m convinced.” I bought into the program. “I’m a cultural worker, and my skill set is I’m a printmaker and I make posters.” Very simple for me. And he—Carlos, in the hierarchy, if you can call one, in a collective organization, was the theoretician, right? Not a leader, but the group theoretician. So he basically was educating us. That was his responsibility. Just in terms of technique, which he was doing with John Valadez because I didn’t want to be a painter. But I was doing my thing, and I was being coached, mentored, and directed by his conversations with him, or when we were all talking as a collective group. But I never considered myself, you know, like Bejerano and Carlos when they would start a dialogue at the table. It was just like, “Okay, cool, cool. Everybody’s so smart here. But I’ve got nothing to say. I just want to go back and pull my squeegee. Are we done?”

KD: Are you pulling squeegees on these things?

RD: Which things? Oh, yeah, that.

KD: *Chicanarte*, '75.

RD: The only other thing that I noticed was when I said ... Oh, yeah, and there was a show called *Conjunto*.

KD: Yeah, that’s in there too.

RD: And then when I saw that, I went, “Oh, yeah. I remember that show.” It’s all prompted by looking at these slides, why I probably have to write something, because I’ve been sharing things with Jamie when I get home from you, and she goes, “Did you tell her that?” And I said, “No, it just kind of popped into my head,” now that all this stuff is cycling through. She goes, “You know what, you should write a document that just helps.” A supporting document, you know?

KD: Yeah. There’s *Conjunto*. Well, hopefully this will be part of your document too. The *Conjunto* group show in ... '87? Or is that '77?

RD: I think it’s '77.

KD: Yeah, it’s '77. And then Day of the Dead posters for Self Help Graphics?

RD: Yeah. But I did a Day of the Dead poster that I’m so proud of, and I can’t find a transparency of. Because it was really fun, and it was really pop, and it was really hip. And that’s how I started meeting all the hip designers.

KD: Did it look like something that would remind me of the graphics for Grateful Dead?

RD: It was a skull with a clown eye mask, you know, where you see the little clown.

KD: Yeah, it’s in here.

RD: It is?

KD: Yeah. That’s why I was saying it reminded me of the Grateful Dead, because of the mask.

RD: And it had two roses in its mouth, right?

KD: Yeah. That also reminded me of the Grateful Dead.

RD: I did that one, and I thought, “This is fun.” It’s a happy one.

KD: And they went with it, right? No problems?

RD: Mm-hmm.

KD: I think I had something here I was going to ask you about. Let me pause for a minute.

RD: Oh, yeah. *Hecho en Aztlán*.

KD: So *Hecho en Aztlán* [*Multiples*] becomes an installation in San Francisco.

RD: Right, at Galería—

KD: Galería de la—

RD: Galería de la Raza.

KD: Seventy-nine, '80? [1980.]

RD: And that’s a result of ... I don’t know how I was—I think I was introduced to Carmen Lomas Garza when I went north on one of a number of trips, with either John or somebody. We’d drive up there. There was always something. Concilio del Arte Popular had gatherings, and I remember going up there sometimes with John, Leo Limón, and myself. And the big guys would have the meetings, and us little guys would, whatever, hang around and wait to hear what the word was. And I remember being introduced to René

Yáñez, who said, “On your way back to LA, drop by the Galería,” which I did, and I met his girlfriend at the time, Carmen Lomas Garza. And I saw her work, and I said, “I have a print studio, if you ever want to come down.” And she came down. And of course she was awesome, because she’s traditional. She’s a Texas Mexicana, Chicana.

So my family—my mother really loved her, because she was also doing very sentimental, beautifully ... Work that reminded probably women of my mother’s generation of their experience, right? So she really hit it off with my mom, and we wound up doing two prints with her, the *Nopalitos Frescos*, which is a tiny little print, beautiful print. And a couple other things. And we’re good friends, Carmen and I. And then Carmen called me up, and she said, “Richard, I want to ...” I guess she saw all the stuff she’s done. She said, “I want to organize this show for you up in San Francisco. They have to see this, because I think Galería de la Raza, La Raza silk screen—

KD: La Raza Graphics, right.

RD: Yeah, they’re all churning out kind of the same formatted ... There’s now a look to some sort of—the poster work done by *centros*. And I think I probably represented a breakout. Impossibilities. So she wanted to show that. And so she—

KD: Yeah. The color scheme is different, the—it has a very kind of graphic—

RD: Yeah, it references—

KD: Style, it’s referencing, closer to—

RD: New wave, punk.

KD: Well, referencing, in fact, Nagel in this one.

RD: Patrick Nagel.

KD: Yeah.

RD: Yeah. That’s actually Nick Taggart, the young twenty-two-year-old English writer. And I guess she wanted to show San Francisco: “Hey, there’s some people down in LA that are Chicanos, and they’re doing fucking—they’re all over the map in what they’re doing.”

KD: And even the kind of installation for announcing the show at Hecho en Aztlán is very—

RD: She—that wasn’t planned, but at one point, because the curation went so fast and we set it up so fast, it was two or three days left. And she said, “We have a window. I think you should do—I think you should do a sign.” And I said, “I don’t make signs.” And she said, “I think you should do something.” Which is—I’m scared shitless. I said, “What?” She goes, “Just do it.” So I started doing it. I just threw it together. And I was very embarrassed by it. But you know, now, in hindsight, well, I managed to pull something off.

KD: Oh, it’s very ’80s.

RD: Mm-hmm. You hit the nail on the head. It’s very ’80s. So I was a child of the period.

KD: And there’s nothing wrong with that. This is ’79, so it’s, you know . . . [laughter] So the work that you did with her were those offset—

RD: Silk screen.

KD: They were silk screen.

RD: Yeah. It was great working with them. I’m sorry I’ve never been able to get back into the studio. But her work is of such complexity that it would be thousands and thousands of dollars, which I’d like to do, but also, she’s a superstar now. She doesn’t—

KD: Well, she does the—she does them for—

RD: The lithographs for—

KD: The lithographs for donation.

RD: And she works mostly with somebody in Arizona, right?

KD: I don’t know.

RD: Yeah.

KD: I think there’s just one or two that I was ... [referring to images]

RD: Oh, that is—

KD: I've seen this.

RD: Yeah, that was an offset poster design I did for Teatro something, *danza*?

KD: Teatro Mexicano, something *danza*.

RD: Yeah. And that was Miguel [Delgado], who was in *Zoot Suit* the film, and *Zoot Suit* the play. The choreographer who also taught at La Plaza de la Raza. Great guy. Gay. He died of AIDS, I think, about five or six years ago. Anyway, he asked me to design the poster for them. So I had fun with it. And there's the Plugz.

KD: Here's the Plugz. So this is—this is CAP [Centro de Arte Público], '78, '80 prints. Does that sound accurate?

RD: Yep.

KD: That's what I thought.

RD: And then that Carlos Almaraz, that two-color serigraph, *Una Historia de Amor y Pecados*. That was Carlos's first silkscreen. It's a two-color print. And then we didn't work again for another three years, I guess. And then that reggae piece was because I was getting—starting to get involved with the reggae scene and doing posters for ... I think I only managed about four: two for Bob Marley, one for Dr. Alamentado, and one for the Mighty Diamonds.

KD: And what I found fascinating is this particular sheet gives that sense of the range of—

RD: Yeah. John Van Hamersveld.

KD: Yeah.

RD: It does.

KD: It's a really nice kind of—it's just as random as the one you pulled out of the bag and put on the table.

RD: Yep.

KD: This incredible mixture of styles and influences. I mean, you really can see the—what I guess you'd call the Chicano school of poster making, and the punk scene, and the music world, you know, the way album covers were done, and the advertisements for albums, or—

RD: I had—the only course I ever took again in college was I signed up for an album cover design course at Otis-Parsons, I think maybe in 1980, 1979, only because it was John Van Hamersveld and I had been following his work. Not literally as an artist, but whenever I liked something amazing, [something] I thought was an incredible graphic design, invariably it would wind up being John Van Hamersveld. So when I saw his name pop up and—what, the itinerary, or the curriculum for a semester ... It was a nice course, and it was the album graphic design, John Van Hamersveld, and I immediately signed up on the course.

And then when he did the go-around in the room on the first night, like, "Who are you? What do you do?" When it came to be my turn, I said, you know, "I'm Richard Duardo, and I have a silk-screen studio downtown, and I've always followed your work," and duly noted. At the end of that first session he pulled me aside, and he said, "I want to do prints in your studio." And to me, it's like—I was gaga. I don't have—I'm not just going to sit through a course here. This guy's going to come into my studio, and I'm going to watch the process, the design process. And I think I was leaning more towards graphic designers at that point, because I'm doing graphic posters. I'm never—I don't start thinking about using printmaking as my medium, as an art form, until like four or five years later. I'm just like into making beautiful, well-executed posters, whether it's mine or superstars that are suddenly knocking on my door. Richard Duardo, if you just say hello, and if you're somebody, he'll just fall all over himself and just do your work.

So Mick Haggerty, Bob Zone—I was meeting my heroes. And as soon as they found out I could do prints, they were approaching. And of course I immediately [said], "Yes, I would love to work with you." And of course, they weren't paying for anything. So they were happy to get projects started with me, you know.

KD: When I was looking through the binders, which you generously let me do the other day, I came across, in the one about the big top locals, which you've spoken about, a letter to Al Nodal of what used to be called CAD, the Cultural Affairs Division or Department. And it was to negotiate asking him if he could buy some tickets to the event, and maybe promote them, give them to colleges and students and stuff. And you even



say MEChA, a MEChA organization. So my first question is, a strategy for marketing, and the second is the connection with—the relationship with Al Nodal.

RD: Okay.

KD: Because most folks—

RD: This will be on the record now.

KD: Okay.

RD: Al Nodal, I met formally, not through any network of players in Los Angeles in the art world. I met him through Bert Ball. Bert Ball, who was my friend and co-curator for *Truckload of Art* and *Western Exterminators*. Bert Ball is from New York. Al's from New York, Washington, DC, New York—something of a connection back there that they had, and a friendship. That translated into a continuing friendship when Bert got settled. Al was really, really successful. Al had just been appointed—I'm taking back to the beginning of Al and I knowing each other, and not being able to leverage that relationship. Bert—my introduction to Al was through my friend Bert. Al probably came to two or three of my parties or soirees, and probably saw a lot of illegal stuff going on, mostly people doing pot or whatever, rails of coke. And also saw what looked to be like, on the surface, a very, very successful Latino. And he kind of shied away from me socially, publically and socially.

And when I'd asked Bert, I said, "What the hell's Al's problem? Did I like insult his girlfriend or something?" And Bert said, he said, "Well, in confidence, Al thinks that you didn't make it as an artist. He thinks you're the biggest drug dealer in downtown LA." And I said, "You've got to be joking." He goes, "No. He thinks your real money is coming from drug dealing." And I said, "Whatever." What I should have done was confronted him directly and just dispelled that myth. My attitude was, "Fuck him."

KD: It's small operation compared to what you're doing anyway.

RD: What?

KD: You haven't had to rely on Cultural Affairs for anything.

RD: Right. I'm self-made in a community where everybody's walking around like they've just been let out of Auschwitz, and here's this Chicano that is living large and having a great time, and everybody knows. I'm walking around in tailored suits made by Stephen King in London. And he probably goes, "Nah, it's either trust fund money—no way. That's an oxymoron, a Mexican with a trust fund. Or—no way he made it in business, in the art world, especially. Impossible. So he's obviously a drug dealer." And Bert said, "That's what he thinks is going on." I said, "Whatever, I don't care. Fuck him." So he's—I think he was the cultural czar for almost eight years. Three terms, maybe twelve years. So he's polite to me socially, in public, but we never had a friendship. It's only recent that he finally warmed up to me. But I think—

KD: But not even a relationship in terms of the art business, right?

RD: No, no. No, I never went after public money, nor ever sought—I just thought, you know, I always thought that was—I always thought that was a handout.

KD: What about the California Art Commission artist of the year—

RD: Artist of the year award of 1988?

KD: Nineteen eighty-eight.

RD: That was—as far as I was concerned, an anomaly in my life. I couldn't understand—

KD: [*laughter*] Why'd I know you were going to say that?

RD: What?

KD: Why did I know you were going to say that?

RD: Because I couldn't understand why they—I got the call. I always considered myself an outsider, and I didn't play by the rules. I didn't suck up to politicians, or key players in the art world. I just—I just didn't play the game. I just did what I was doing. And in hindsight, I always—now I think, I'm fifty-five. God, I think, if I just really sucked up to that person, if I really got in good with these curators, if I really played the game ... If I really went balls out and shoved my face into MOCA's, and called them on, "Look, look what I've done,"

I could have leveraged something from some board position, board of trustees, or this or that. But I just thought, I really hate this system. And I'm going to try to operate outside of it, even though I'm part of it.

KD: Don't you think that sounds rather like your origins in the Chicano Movement?

RD: Yeah, yeah. I'm just a mistrust of—

KD: The institutions.

RD: The institutions.

KD: And fighting against it. And irreverent play, and—

RD: Prankster.

KD: Prankster.

RD: Irreverent, outsider, thumbing my nose at them.

KD: And I actually have the reference, but one of the things you gave me, and I think it's '90s, is—it's like an artist statement. And you say something like, "Being Chicano is irrelevant to who I am as an artist." My first take on that is it sounds very '90s, because, you know, there's those phases of, "Yes, I'm Chicano"—not just you, but just in general, folks. "Yes, we're Chicano, we're proud of it," and then, "No, we don't want to be pigeonholed into the ethnic box," right? And then there's the come around again with the multiculturalism, and Latinos are now wanting to be ethnic just as much as Chicanos had been, because it gets you entry into certain institutions under their diversification efforts.

RD: Right, right.

KD: And then we come around again after the '90s, because multiculturalism doesn't get us anything. It's like probably the arts, the graphic arts council [Prints and Drawings Council at LACMA] is probably the most diversified I've ever heard.

RD: The graphic arts council.

KD: Yeah.

RD: Yeah.

KD: If you had two African Americans and yourself and a woman.

RD: No, there's like at least, it's easily fifty-fifty.

KD: Right, just at the time you were talking—

RD: And they're all young, yeah.

KD: Yeah. But folks that you've deliberately brought in. So, you know, there's nothing to be gained by multiculturalism. We're not in the institutions as administrators, and we're not in the institutions as artists, and we're not in the institutions as curators, so it's irrelevant if I'm a Chicano.

RD: Yeah.

KD: I was wondering if you could reflect on that.

RD: Well, you know—

KD: And I could be wrong. That was just my assessment.

RD: I was so seriously entrenched in the movement, the Chicano art movement, from right out of UCLA, '76, probably into about '80, '81, before I spun out into this . . . The world, I'm sure, starting—my community, the Chicano community.

KD: I would actually want to pause you, because you were doing in high school, so '68, '69, before college.

RD: Yeah.

KD: You're in the Chicano Movement.

RD: Right. Sixty-nine on. Right into, what, '80, '81? And you know, it's not like I woke up one day and said this is—I've done enough. I think you just evolve. And I want to work with more people. I want to work with this guy, I want to work with that guy. And then pretty soon, because I got this feedback, I . . . Almost exclusively through the '80s I'm working with one Chicano artist, Carlos Almaraz. In the late '80s I started working with Frank Romero. Maybe one or two projects with John Valadez. Those are my three relationships to the Chicano art world. For the most part, in the '80s, I'm all over the map. Bernar Venet from France, flying in and doing some prints. A lot of artists from England. Curran O'Malley. These two fucking

politically angry lesbians coming over, and I'm doing prints with them. And I mean, I'm everywhere. David Hockney. Dennis Hopper comes in and does a four-month project with me, eighteen graphics on aluminum. I'm hiring printmakers from Switzerland to come over and work in my studio. I'm all over the place, and I'm not thinking about whether I'm Chicano enough. But I start getting hints from the community that I sold out, just working with—

KD: And what kind of—how did those hints come?

RD: That I'm not inviting enough Chicanos into my studio to do work. And I'm like going, "Oh, God." I'm working with Daniel Martinez when nobody else will, and I think he's doing some major shit, and he's even getting pushed and marginalized by the Chicano art community because they think he's too fucking conceptual and pandering to the white world, the greater ... And I'm like going, "You know, you can't win here, so fuck it, I'm just going to do what I'm going to do." And that's—it's run its course, even though I know I've worked with Chicano or Latino artists.

But it wasn't until 2001, December, when I flew out to La Mansion, and I checked into the same hotel Cheech was in. And I flew out on my own, because I wanted to celebrate of—90 percent of the twenty-six artists in that . . . I'd say twenty of those artists, I published or shared studios with or been good friends with. I'm going out there, I'm not in the show, I don't give a shit, because people don't recognize me as an artist. But I'm going out there as a printmaker. Somebody that's proud, because I've done prints with most of these guys. I want to be there in their launch of this circus, this six-year tour. And I wind up, of course, checking myself into the same hotel that Cheech is in. He's just been given the key to the city, all of San Antonio is falling all over themselves, because this is a massively important show, and it's a celebrity-driven show. It's big in San Antonio. The whole town is going nuts.

And Cheech spots me in the—what do you call it, the lobby. We talk. "Are you here?" I said. He says, "Well, let's—I've got to do this or this, you want to come along?" I'm like, "Are you driving?" I said. "No." At one point ... Now I'm just driving along with Cheech in his limo. And this is a four-day event, and every night we're winding up back at his house. I mean, back at the hotel. And he'd say, "Come on up." And we'd have—they gave him a big, massive whatever—

KD: Suite?

RD: And we're doing tequila shots and bullshitting, and people are coming over. I mean, he's, like, holding court. And we're talking, and by the third, I don't know, second or third day, he says, "Richard"—this is being taped, right?

KD: Yeah.

RD: He says, "The circus is on tour, the show's on the road. There's an opportunity here. I pretty much control all the merchandise." And I said, "Okay, cool. Right on." [laughter] And he says, "You're Richard Duardo, most noted—greatest master printer, blah blah blah. Do you—I've got some ideas here about maybe I want to do some prints, some posters, and market them. I want ..." Well, he didn't break it down into prints. He just said, "I pretty much control the merchandising aspects of this, and the possibilities. Would you be interested?" And when I heard that, I think—I'm sitting there, three sheets to the wind on about five shots of tequila. And I said, "Dude, T-shirts, mugs, calendars, note cards, offset posters?" I said, "I don't—that's not what I do."

KD: That's not what you do, yeah.

RD: "But I will find you somebody that does that. Let me hook you up." You know, I've got my mission, sir, I'll do that for you. And he goes, "No, no, no. I want to do something that involves you." And I said, "I'm a printmaker. I make limited-edition prints that they sign. If we do something, what, two or three of the artists of the show, some images that are sellable, I can advise you on which ones. Margaret Garcia is a natural, Carmen Lomas Garza is a natural. And then we can do limited editions and they can mark—they can sign them to all fifteen venues, because it's a fifteen-museum tour." I said, "Then there's the possibility of some revenue strain." And he said, "That's it?" And I said, "That's—right now, that's all I'm thinking about. I mean, you're asking me." And I said, "But let me think on something. I think maybe there might

be an opportunity. How many venues? Fifteen?” These are four-star museums, not little community centers, Hoboken. I said, “Let me think on this.” And I went and I thought about it, and I brain-farted the Legacy project.

KD: Which is the—

RD: Quinceañeras, quinceañeros. Which is now called the Chicano Collection. So the next time I saw them all, we got together, and he said, “What do you got for me?” And I—when my brain kicks in, my brain just starts writing. And then my parallel brain, which is—great ideas are only great if you can rationalize how the numbers are going to work out and how much money it’s going to generate, because I am working in the private sector, and I have to see the numbers work out. I just can’t brain-fart some pie in the sky project that sounds great. So I said—he said, “What do you got?” I said, “Fifteen venues. What’s the biggest celebration when somebody presents their child, their daughter, to the world, that they’re ready? It’s called *quinceañera*. We pick fifteen artists, there’s fifteen venues, blah, blah, blah. This is the breakdown, this is the numbers, this is the cost, this is what it’s going to generate. It’s a six hundred thousand dollar [investment]. It’s going to generate 2.6 million dollars. You’ve got to take into consideration a royalty fee to all the artists. The breakdown, it nets about, on 100 percent sales, 1.6 million dollars. Here’s your project, Cheech.”

And he goes, “Great. Let’s get started. What’s our deal?” And I said, “Well, if I’m your partner, it’s fifty-fifty on the net.” And he said, “Let’s get started.” I said, “Okay. Give me three hundred thousand dollars.” He said, “What are you talking about? You’re going to produce this shit.” I said, “Look at me, man. I can barely pay my rent. So—did you really think I was going to bankroll this?” He goes, “Yeah. You’re Richard Duardo.” I said, “I’m Richard Duardo, but he doesn’t have any money.”

KD: You’re in the private sector, yeah.

RD: He goes, “Well, what do you ...” I said, “You just got Target to pony up God knows how many millions for this. Why don’t you yank their chain again and get them to bankroll this?” “Well, it’s a for-profit thing.” And I said, “Well, then, let’s go to people that like to make money, venture capital, and get them to bankroll this thing. You’ve got fifteen venues, fifteen cities. All we have to do is sell five portfolios per city. That’s—at five thousand dollars, that’s a hundred twenty-five thousand. Fifteen cities times a hundred twenty-five thousand dollars. Do the numbers, Cheech. We can make money. We just need somebody to bust out the checkbook, and let’s rock and roll.” And I’m thinking—Cheech, if you ever hear this—you’re only sitting on forty million dollars’ worth of property, you could have done it yourself. But anyway, but like the smart businessman that he is—and that’s why he’s probably a millionaire, gazillionaire—is that it’s other people’s money you work with. OPM. He says, “Let’s start shopping this.”

So we took meetings with—who knows?—the hair guy, golfing buddies. We met the captains of industry in the entertainment industry in the world, producers, directors. Meetings were set up, and we did our bid. I put the proposal together, and for eighteen months, we just hit wall after wall after wall, because they could see the vision of the project and the value, but they couldn’t see the pipeline that would make the numbers happen. In the meantime—and the only pipeline that we were proposing for the numbers to be realized were the venues, and every three months, one venue would fall off the calendar. And eighteen months later, we’re like four venues in, and our chances of return are diminishing. At one point, I just said, “Dude, it’s a dead project. Forget it.”

KD: But then he goes on to do the—

RD: I ran into Melissa Richardson Banks, who runs a company called CauseConnect that puts together worthwhile projects that need to be funded with sponsors in a position to fund them, except this is a for-profit project. So now we have to re-tweak the whole thing and make it a philanthropic project. And I truly believe that this is what it should have been at the get-go, because this is ... You know, after eighteen months of going, it starts occurring to me that this is more than just about making money. This is about creating a document so important for our community. Not just Chicanos, but Chicano artists. And

encapsulating it in a manner that is so—it's done archivally, properly, to an academic benchmark that it can be given to an institution, and they will protect it. You know?

KD: Yeah, I understand.

RD: That two hundred years from now, a scholar will open up this document and say, "Wow. Something weird happened in the Southwest in this little window." Because I started—in the course of traveling and meeting Cheech and going to more and more shows and getting out of my bubble in LA, I thought, "You know what? We're actually evolving as a people. I think we're being diluted." and I don't mean that in a negative way, but maybe a better choice of word is, we are becoming so assimilated now that we are even losing our Chicano cultural identity. Our kids are now hanging out with black kids, Puerto Rican kids, Asian kids. We're—the cosmic race is now actually fulfilling and accelerating its process. We are mixing our bloods and churning our blood so much that maybe ... I believe this, because I said this to Cheech, I said, "I think in about fifty years, there won't be any more Chicanos. There will just be this hodgepodge of kids that are 20 percent Korean, 50 percent black, and 30 percent Mexican." You know what I mean? They're going to be so diluted, they're going to go, "I don't know if I'm a Chicano."

And I said—I think now I see the urgency of this project is to anchor this subculture in history before it gets totally diluted and nonexistent and—you don't want to hear this, Cheech—maybe, possibly, irrelevant. But at least we captured it. This churning, forty, fifty years of a subculture that wanted to determine their own identity and got, you know, extroverted about it and really let the world know, "Hey, we're here. We're not queer. We're brown." But I just thought, "Okay, this is really, really important for me." I felt like, wow, this is now the bookend to my life. The final overture of Richard Duardo, impresario, entrepreneur. This is the project that will be—you know, I was getting ... I said, "Cheech, you know, fuck the money, fuck the return. We are about to do something so fucking great for our people that the money is irrelevant, the return. We have to do this project. We have to embed these fifty portfolios to the farthest reaches of the world, to the major institutions that will protect it." You know what I'm saying?

KD: Mm-hmm.

RD: And let the scholars, PhD students doing a dissertation, if they manage to find this on the shelf and dust it off and crack it open, let them remember us. You know what I'm saying?

KD: Yeah.

RD: And I think that's all this is all about now, and I'm totally down for it. Let's do it. I don't give a fuck about the money; let's just get it done. And we did it. Cost—it went a hundred twenty thousand dollars over budget, almost killed me, financially, business-wise, personally.

KD: This is the Giclée, the—

RD: What?

KD: It's not the same project anymore, right?

RD: Well, it mutated into a real academic document. We were operating from a crazy Chicano point of view, quinceañera. Because it was clever, cute, made sense. We're presenting our children to the world. And when Chon got involved, I think more like with Cheech, it mutated into more of a—

KD: Chon Noriega?

RD: Yeah. More of a serious academic document. Which I fought it kind of tooth and nail for a couple months, and I went, you know what? Probably they're right, it's got to be presented this way to that world, otherwise they'll just treat it as some sort of merchandising trinket attached to this show. Because you know, when I was making this case with Cheech, it was like, "We're going to have to go this route, because then we can go after public money, because it's not for profit. And some fucking company bank or whatever that's trying to jockey for a market share of this audience, this is like a perfect [fit]."

KD: Yeah. We're the fastest group of home buyers.

RD: Yeah. This'll work for—and it wound up being an insurance company and a bank, right? Bank of America and Farmer's Insurance. And I was saying, "You know"—no offense, Cheech—"in ten years, some people will remember this show. In twenty years, a handful might. Some academics."

KD: Yeah. Some of us will make our careers on it. *[laughter]*

RD: In about thirty years, whoever had a catalog, they'll be dog-eared and probably be picked up at a yard sale for about twenty-five dollars. And in fifty years, it's history, this moment, this five-year tour. But you know what, in fifty years, people are going to be pulling out an eighty-five-pound portfolio off of a shelf in the museum of—at the Tate or whatever, or right now, the University of Essex—that all of the sudden seems to be interested in Chicano art.

KD: Yeah.

RD: And some fucking English academic is going to crack that thing open, and the world will reveal itself to them, and we will—you will come alive, I will come alive, Carlos will come alive, and we will speak from the grave. And I am so fucking down for that. You know what I'm saying?

KD: Yeah.

RD: I said, that, to me, is immortality, not that I'm—

KD: But you also do the—you produce the DVD.

RD: Yeah. And when we were talking about the conscience, I said, "You know, it's one thing to have a portfolio of twenty-six prints by twenty-six artists from a travel list, it's nothing more than images in a box. We have to have the artist embodied in the—we have to have the artist present the work, and we need a face—for every piece of print, we need a portrait of the artist, a statement by the artist, and a statement about the piece. An encapsulated biography. That's the way I see it. And we have to incorporate as many elements—facets of mediums in printmaking as possible. Let's get, you know—Artemio Rodriguez is phenomenal. We should get Artemio to do the portraits of the artists. And the text piece. We need some writer." I'm not an academic, I don't know who wound up doing it. I think—that was really hammered together by a lot of volunteers over at the Chicano resource center.

KD: Yeah, I think so.

RD: Yeah, which was great, because when Cheech was on advising, it was—everything has to be done to an academic standard. I didn't know. To me, it was like, okay, we'll just get them to talk. And Cheech was—everything is correctly—the grammar is correct, no—can't fuck this one up. So thanks to them, they really shaped the text, the bodies of texts for each artist. We needed, of course, a statement by a renowned academic, which wound up being Chon. And I—well, that's later. But my—he said, "Well, what's the guts of this?" I said, "The prints, but the prints are not enough. They're just nothing." It's the statement by the artist, a brief bio, a portrait of the artist, so the viewer, before he turns that leaf, he just met the person, he has gotten a little run down on the image you're about to see, and brief bio on them. So by the time they flip it, it's just not an image. They've just been introduced to the artist, he's said something about the piece I'm about to see, and we get a brief encapsulation of their life.

And then I said, "The most important thing, I really think we should have—because it's all about new media—is we should create a documentary on this whole process. So it's—and then we need a catalog." I really wanted a catalog for the project. Because there wasn't enough money, what we did was drop in his show catalog, which is ... Doesn't kind of make sense, but that's the best we could do. I mean, it was all restricted by the money. B of A and Farmer's Insurance loved the project. They wanted to sign on. It was at this point down to three hundred thousand dollars. I was redoing, tweaking, tweaking the budget constantly. So I brought it down from six hundred thousand dollars to three hundred thousand dollars. And then B of A and Farmer's said, "We'll do it. We'll hold hands. But you sit down with a pencil and you bring this down to two hundred seventy-five thousand dollars, or there's no deal." And I went, "Okay, whoa."

We killed sixty-five thousand dollars right off. That was the budget for the film. And we gave—we only had ten thousand dollars for our documentary, an hour-long documentary. You know what we got? We got a wonderful woman, Tamara Hernandez, thank her—I think she's out there at UCLA, a young filmmaker, Canadian, Nicaraguan. One of my dearest friends. I said, "I'll give you ten thousand dollars." She said, "Just ten thousand dollars will buy me a lighting package, a sound package, and a state of the art camera. I'll just do it for free if you just give me the equipment at the end." And I said, "God bless you." She thought it

would take her thirty days. It took her almost a year and a half. We got hundred fifty thousand dollar film out of that woman, and I'm so fucking grateful. We had a lot of fights, because, you know, with a director, they want to shape a document. And I'm just saying, I want a documentary. I don't want like a fucking Oscar-winning movie here. Just give us what we need, a document, a video document.

KD: But no one wants to do it.

RD: But she wound up, to her credit, fighting me. We didn't talk for six months while she was—

KD: Well, because she's got standards, yeah.

RD: Yeah.

KD: She's got to meet her standards.

RD: Yeah. Well, you'll understand why I'm not in the film very often. I'm not in the film at all, in terms of being interviewed, because I was fighting with her. I was pretty angry. I don't know why, now, in hindsight. So the only Richard Duardo is when I've been caught with Cheech in that document, I'm pretty sure. Or I might have grudgingly just given her two or three minutes. I just—I was that, "Give me the fucking thing," at that point. But I'm really grateful, because when I finally looked at it, I went back to her, and I apologized. I said, "You made a great, great document, really." Now I'm kind of upset because I'm not that—you know, I'm not in it that much. In hindsight, God, I could have leveraged this so much. I could have demanded at least fifteen minutes of airtime on this. But I think it all worked out. And I'd come off—have you seen it?

KD: Yeah.

RD: I come off as—I'm pretty clowny and irreverent.

KD: We've gone past our time, it's almost six o'clock.

RD: Yeah. I'm kind of smirking at Cheech a lot when he was talking, did you notice that? *[laughter]*

KD: Yeah. *[laughter]*

RD: It's like—we did it, and that's all that mattered to me. And sort of all of this other stuff, like all the wordy, serious talk, is irrelevant to me. I just think we accomplished it, we got it done. The capsule, the legacy is complete, never mind that he lost money, I lost money. It went from seven months, it was budgeted for seven months, and it dragged on for two and a half years. But we got it done. And that, to me—all of the sudden, I just—I just rehabilitated myself among a community, the Chicano art community, as a guy that really was like the go-to guy for all things Chicano. Which I found really funny, because I'm going—now what I'm dealing with, way over on the other side, is everybody that thought I was so egalitarian and open to everybody, basically I'm saying my white friends—

KD: Right.

RD: They're all going, "You are"—now they're saying I'm just on a Chicano trip. So I'm like thinking the same thing. Here it is, you do too much—you do something good here, you get grief over there. You do something over here, you get grief over there. We're done.

KD: We're done? You don't want to tell me what you're doing next?

RD: Uh-uh.

KD: Okay. Thank you very much. Today is November 12.

RD: I'm going to write it to you.

KD: And that was Richard Duardo and Karen Davalos on tape 6.



## INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD DUARDO

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### RELATED RESOURCES

#### Publications from the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press

“Centro de Arte Público/Public Art Center.” By Karen Mary Davalos. *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 36, no. 2 (2011): 171–78.

*L.A. Xicano*. Edited by Chon A. Noriega, Terezita Romo, and Pilar Tompkins Rivas. Exhibition catalog, 2011.

“No Cover.” By Dan Vargas. *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 37, no. 2 (2012): 181–203.

*Self Help Graphics & Art: Art in the Heart of East Los Angeles*. Edited by Colin Gunckel. Second edition. The Chicano Archives, volume 1, 2014.

“Vexing Questions: Rethinking the History of East LA Punk.” By Colin Gunckel. *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 37, no. 2 (2012): 127–56.

#### Special Collections at the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library, Los Angeles, California

CARA: Chicano Arts: Resistance and Affirmation Papers, [volume I], 1985–1994

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