

PROYECTO MISSION MURALS
Oral History Audio Transcripts

TIM DRESCHER ORAL HISTORY

Berkeley, California, June 26 and 28, 2018

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CARY CORDOVA: This is Cary Cordova. It is June 26, 2018, at 9:30 in the morning in Berkeley, California. This is an interview with Tim Drescher, or Timothy W. Drescher.

And, Tim, I have your permission to make this recording?

TIM DRESCHER: Yes.

CC: OK. Thank you. And so, Tim, as we were just discussing, I'm going to be conducting an oral history interview with you. And I'd love to just find out a little bit about your background, your sort of intellectual trajectory, and the ways in which you ultimately came to participate in the mural movement in the Mission. And so that's kind of where we're headed. But could I start with just knowing what year you were born?

TD: 1941.

CC: 1941, OK. I thought—I was guessing right around there. And where were you born?

TD: I was born in Oakland, California.

CC: Oh, you were born in Oakland—all right. And were your parents from Oakland?

TD: No, my parents were from Sacramento.

CC: So how did they come to Oakland?

TD: Well, my mother, with my father—my father was return[ing] to school as a graduate student in physics at UC.

CC: At UC Berkeley?

TD: Berkeley. And I was born right on the cusp of World War II, and within a few months, we were living in Albuquerque, New Mexico, which is where I had my first memories.

My father was teaching physics and meteorology at University of New Mexico—was not, as far as I know, a part of anything having to do with the Manhattan Project. Everybody always asks. But the answer is no, except that occasionally he'd say, "Well, I one time walked into the office of the chair of the physics department and said, 'Hi, Gil.'" And he said, "Oh, hi, Barney. Let me introduce you to Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones." And it was obviously Enrico Fermi and Robert Oppenheimer or something like that—Mr. Smith, Mr. Jones. But no participation really.

After the war, my dad got a job teaching at UCLA. So we moved to Westwood. And I went all through school in public schools in Westwood, went away to college, and immediately after college, went into the Navy. That was in '63 when I went in, and I got out in '65. And I did not like the Navy. Those were not happy years. To the extent that when I got off the ship and out of the Navy—it was in Alameda, the Navy base next to Oakland here—I got out on a Friday and Monday morning enrolled in graduate school in Madison, Wisconsin, having driven nonstop

all the way across the country, just to get the experience as far behind me as I could. I got to Madison and was in English literature and spent the first year, year and a half, reading English literature and criticism. And it was just—it was glorious.

But one day I looked out the window of the classroom building and right outside was—I think it was the second Dow—a demonstration against the recruiters from Dow Chemical. And the general feeling was that a company that makes napalm shouldn't be recruiting on the campus of an educational institution that's supposed to be teaching people how to think. So I watched the whole thing, and the next morning listened to the chancellor of the University of Wisconsin talk about the demonstration—the arrests and so forth. He systematically lied about it. That was a real shock to me.

CC: What year would that have been about?

TD: That would have been 1966 probably, maybe '67, somewhere in there. And I was really shocked that somebody in that position would lie so blatantly. In light of today, that seems extremely naive. But I was extremely naive.

But it was Madison; it was the sixties. And Madison was very exciting, not only because I was interested in the academic subjects I was studying, but because of all the intellectual ferment that was roiling around the campus. So the standard day would be you'd get up, you'd go to classes, and after class you'd go to a demonstration. And after the demonstration, you'd meet in a study group. And after the study group, you'd do your homework. It was a very packed few years intellectually, which I found tremendously exciting.

CC: So what years were you at Madison?

TD: I was in Madison from '65 to '71. And I left Madison and ended up—got a job as the dean of a college, Columbia College in Chicago, which was kind of an arts school. I say “kind of” because they had a television/radio department and some other things as well.

And I didn't get along well with Chicago either. [*laughs*]

CC: Didn't get along well with Chicago either. The other place that you didn't get along was?

TD: The Navy.

CC: Oh, OK. Why? What was it about Chicago?

TD: Well, in Chicago everybody talked in terms of high schools. And that's how you were defined, in terms of which high school you'd gone to. I hadn't a clue. Not only did I not go [to high school] there; I didn't know what they were, where they were, or what they signified—things like that.

So I always felt I was a bit of an outsider. But I did make some good friends in Chicago. And one of the things I found fairly soon after I arrived was the beginnings of the community mural movement. What was attractive to me about that was that the muralists were combining their artistic skills with progressive politics. And that's exactly what the guy I wrote my PhD dissertation on did—William Blake.

That combination of art and politics attracted me to Blake and subsequently to the mural movement in Chicago. The muralists were doing in the early seventies what I had been studying Blake as having done around 1800. Blake you know, wanted to muralize Westminster. But there was no commission on offer, so he went small.

CC: Well, let me—there's so many different things that I'd like to go back and touch on, including on Blake. Maybe before going there, let me just back up for a moment and just double-check: did you have siblings, sisters, brothers?

TD: Not to talk about.

CC: Just the number.

TD: One.

CC: One brother or sister?

TD: Mm-hmm.

CC: OK. Younger or older?

TD: Older.

CC: Older. And so all of you moved to Albuquerque. Did your mother work?

TD: No, she was the classic homemaker.

CC: OK. Just wanted to double-check and see. And most of your early schooling would have taken place in Albuquerque. Is that correct?

TD: No, my early schooling started when I got to Westwood, when I got to Los Angeles.

CC: Oh, OK. So what year did you move there?

TD: We moved to LA in '46.

CC: That's right. You said after the war. So 1946. OK, and so you went to school in Westwood?

TD: Mm-hmm.

CC: What were the names of the schools?

TD: Fairburn Avenue Elementary, Ralph Waldo Emerson Junior High School, which is interesting because they have a [Kay] Nielsen mural in the library. And I remember being taken there—the whole class was taken there the first day of school. We were shown this mural and told how exciting it was and so forth. And I didn't appreciate that at all at the time.

Although I went back and saw it a few years ago with a colleague who was studying murals. And it's certainly of its time. There was a ladybug in the corner, and that was exciting to junior high school students for some reason. But I just—I remember that the excitement of seeing that mural in that room passed me by at the time.

CC: Would that have been like maybe one of the first murals that you encountered, or maybe the first mural that you really remember encountering?

TD: The first mural I remember encountering was in the sixth grade. So it was a year or two before I got to junior high. And we were doing a segment on history, and we were learning about the Incas. And we did a mural on butcher paper in the classroom of the Incas' conveying of information from one place to the other by human relay. And that's my first mural memory.

CC: OK. And you also went to high school in Los Angeles?

TD: I did.

CC: In the Westwood area?

TD: I went to University High School.

CC: University High School.

TD: And I don't want to talk about where I went to college.

CC: Oh, OK. So, was it in the Los Angeles area?

TD: But after that I went immediately into the Navy.

CC: OK. Were you recruited or drafted?

TD: No, I joined the Navy [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] partly because I was pretty sure I would have been drafted and sent off to be a foot soldier in the Army. And I thought that being an officer in the Navy sounded like a better deal, and I think it turned out to be.

CC: So you were an officer in the Navy?

TD: I was.

CC: Of what rank?

TD: Well, you start out as an ensign and you get promoted to second lieutenant. And then you become a first lieutenant. I was out before that happened.

CC: OK. And so how many, let's see—so 1963 to 1965 were the years that you spent in the Navy?

TD: Mm-hmm.

CC: And did you travel during that time?

TD: Well, the ship I was stationed on was home-ported in Alameda here next to Oakland. I was on a cargo refrigerator ship, which doesn't mean we carried refrigerators. It meant we carried refrigerated cargo. And we basically sailed back and forth between California and Vietnam and fed the soldiers and the other ships that were supplying Vietnam.

CC: Interesting. So you were participating in the early years of Vietnam.

TD: Yes. The week I got out of the Navy in '65 was the week the president upped the total troops going to Vietnam from whatever it was to something like 425,000. And I was certain I was going to be extended and not let out. But they did.

CC: It was surprising that you weren't extended.

TD: Well, I was very glad.

CC: Of course. Or I would think—it's interesting. So you went into the Navy in 1963 and I'm just thinking about that year. That's the year also that Kennedy was assassinated.

TD: Yes, I remember exactly where I was like everybody else.

CC: Where were you?

TD: I was standing outside the kitchen on the ship. And we were outside the Golden Gate coming home.

CC: Really. Was it announced over the loudspeaker?

TD: It was, yeah.

CC: How did all of the crew respond?

TD: It was interesting. Everybody was just stunned. It was very quiet for a long time—I mean for days. And I was sitting with other officers and some officers from the South Vietnamese

Army when it was announced that [Ngo Dinh] Diem had been assassinated. And they didn't care at all. And I thought that was really peculiar. And I didn't understand anything of the politics.

The Navy polarized me. I knew I didn't like being yelled at, and I didn't like not being able to get things done that I thought should be done. But I wasn't politicized at all. I had no idea about what the issues were or who the players in the game were and so forth. But I was surprised that these South Vietnamese officers didn't care that the head of their country had just been assassinated. It always struck me as being peculiar. Now of course I understand it. We certainly didn't feel that way about the assassination of Kennedy. Everybody was just really stunned.

CC: Did you—it's interesting to hear sort of your—you mentioned a little bit of being naive in graduate school. I'm just curious like in terms of thinking about like the fifties and the sixties and sort of cultural transformations, like moving from Eisenhower to Kennedy say, or sort of thinking like were you involved at all with the 1960 election? Or did you—you would have been right around voting age right around then. Is that about right?

TD: Not quite. I couldn't quite vote. I remember going to a speech one time of Kennedy when he was a candidate. I was very impressed with his control of the material. He was obviously a very sharp guy, and people would ask him questions, and he'd instantly understand what the references were and could cite the chapter and verse of senate bills and laws and his history and so forth. I was impressed. So I went up afterwards and talked with him a touch. And so I met Jack Kennedy. [*laughs*]

CC: You did?

TD: Yeah. But I still had no idea about what the politics were and didn't until I got to Madison. As I said, that second [Dow Chemical protest], looking out and trying to understand what was going on. I remember asking another graduate student why don't these student demonstrators—why don't they just follow the established procedures to get what they want? And he looked at me and he said, "What if the procedures—what if the system—is the problem?" And that's when lights went on, bells rang, sirens wailed. And that was really the moment where I realized that I needed to understand the political dynamics of what was going on. And I was very lucky to be in Madison at that time.

There were other places. New York City of course—Columbia—Berkeley, Ann Arbor. But there weren't a lot of schools where people were studying—not only paying attention to current events but also studying what the history was. You know, people, study groups reading Marx, because he certainly wasn't being taught in any of the classes.

CC: Did you participate in some of the study groups?

TD: Indeed I did.

CC: You did? A study group on Marx perhaps?

TD: That was one of them.

CC: That was one of them.

TD: Yeah.

CC: What were—do you recall any of the others?

TD: Well, there were study groups on race. There were study groups on—well, this came out of Marx of course—[that were] talking about the class structure, class elements in the United States. And reading, you know, the political thinkers, Marx and Engels and Rosa Luxemburg and, you know, the whole list of usual suspects.

CC: I mean, if I could just make an observation, it would have been—I mean, Madison, Wisconsin, I think is well known for having a kind of radicalism--and maybe you were participating in a lot of that ferment.

TD: Well yes but what does participation mean? In that case what it meant for me was I would attend lectures. The two most famous teachers were William Appleman Williams, who had written *The Contours of American History*. I'm not sure he was there by the time I got there. I think he might have moved on to Oregon. But the other guy was a history professor named Harvey Goldberg. And he taught European social history. Harvey was the best public speaker I've ever heard.

CC: To this day?

TD: Hmm?

CC: To this day?

TD: Oh, absolutely, yes. So that was exciting, but he was also a brilliant historian. And so attending that, attending study groups and beginning to pay attention to things. And of course, reading voraciously.

CC: How did you end up choosing to study English literature, and especially like, what was your—where did your love of books come from I guess might be sort of a question in there.

TD: I guess the short answer is from my parents, both of whom read at home. So we had lots of books around the house. My father was a physicist and wanted to know how things worked in the material world. That's what physicists do. And I think I was very attracted to that but not to the mathematical part.

So I think my going into the humanities was partly an endorsement of my father's intellectual bent, but also a rejection to the extent that I wanted to go off and do something of my own. And it was just a matter of—after that, in college, it was going to be philosophy or English

because those are the texts that had been most interesting to me. And I ended up in English and going to Wisconsin because Ricardo Quintana was there. And Quintana had written a book on Jonathan Swift.

And I found the dialectics, the contradictions, the zeugmas, the juxtapositions, the contrasts that were so important in eighteenth-century English literature. I found that very attractive, studying those things. Same thing with the metaphysical poets around the end of the sixteenth century.

CC: It's so interesting to hear you describe those interests and then think of you being—you would have been in the Navy applying to graduate school. Is that correct?

TD: I was; I did.

CC: Such a disconnect I would imagine between the everyday life of the Navy versus filling out these applications.

TD: Oh, it was huge. But I mean, I knew I didn't want to—after about a week I knew very clearly that I did not want to be in the Navy. I thought going in that maybe I would make the Navy a career. As I say, I don't remember. Maybe it was two days, maybe a week—convinced me that wasn't so. I didn't want to be in the Navy anymore.

CC: Was your father ever in the military?

TD: No.

CC: And why did you choose the Navy out of all of the branches?

TD: Well, I didn't. As I said, I thought it would be—I don't know whether it was less rigorous, but it was maybe less threatening to be on a ship than it would have been to be carrying a rifle through the jungles of Vietnam. That's a pretty easy choice.

The other branch was the Air Force, and I had never been around that, so that didn't seem to be in the cards at all. When I was in the Navy, I did at one point look into becoming a fighter pilot. And the Navy of course checks you out, and if you've got all the physical characteristics they get very interested because it's very tough to pass those tests. But I would have to have extended from the two years obligation that I had—I would have to have extended that to six years. And when I thought about it, I realized that being a fighter pilot was very exciting. I mean just, wow. But six years was the other side of that, and finally, you know, I decided no, I'll just get through with this and pursue my other interests.

One thing I did on the ship in my free time was learn French. But I had nobody to speak it with. So I taught myself to read French from a book, and I had no idea what the sounds were. So I didn't really learn French. I learned this peculiar, twisted, completely idiosyncratic version of some nonexistent language that had grammar somewhat similar to French.

CC: Had you studied the language before?

TD: I'd studied some Spanish before, yes. But no, grad school—see, it was a different thing. It was very—it was fascinating to me. But by the time I got out of grad school, I had not only had a smattering of Spanish and French and Italian and Anglo-Saxon, which was appropriate for English. Middle English doesn't even count because it's so close to English that you could just basically read it with a couple of foot notes.

And I found all that really, really interesting. If I had it to do over again, I might have been a language major in college and just studied three or four different languages.

CC: Interesting. But I mean, it's interesting also to think like—I mean, French was also a sort of colonial language in Vietnam. Did it have any relevance in relation to that?

TD: No, I never ran into it at all.

CC: Let's take a break.

All right, we're recording again. I have just a quick fact question. Would you mind telling me your father's name and your mother's name?

TD: My father was Bernard C. Drescher. My mother was Dorothy Hanrahan Drescher.

CC: Oh, Hanrahan was her maiden name?

TD: Yes.

CC: Could you spell that for me?

TD: H-A-N-R-A-H-A-N.

CC: Got it. And just out of curiosity, did they meet in Sacramento?

TD: Oh, yes. Oh, yeah.

CC: At school?

TD: The family story goes all the way back to '46, 1846, in the Sacramento area. So that was before the gold rush or much of anything. So, since that time there's been an ancestor of mine wandering around those areas.

My parents met in school. I think probably not grammar school but possibly high school. I don't really remember. They were both conservative Republicans.

CC: Which meant something different at the time maybe. I mean, I don't know—what does it mean to say conservative Republicans? Are you thinking like forties, fifties?

TD: For them the forties, sure. Probably thirties, forties, and fifties. They got married in, I don't know, '36.

CC: OK, during the Depression.

TD: Yes.

CC: And they were conservative Republicans.

TD: Yes.

CC: That was not necessarily a popular opinion for some.

TD: My father's side of the family had been in the wholesale grocery business. In Sacramento that was fine. He looked ahead and saw what it would take to really build the business and he wasn't so interested in that, so.

But my understanding was that, my mother was one of ten children born to an Irish railroad worker. How much more classic can you get than that?

My father was a physicist. And so, I'd like to see it oversimplified as the combination of intellectual curiosity with the compassion for the working class. At least that's the way I've chosen to interpret those parts of my background.

Back to graduate school, studying eighteenth-century literature—you know, Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, that crowd, that led me to Blake, who was born, in 1757. So when I bumped into Blake, what was fascinating was the combination of art and politics and the combination of verbal and visual expression. And that's what I ended up writing my dissertation on.

CC: Have you ever—I mean Blake was such a fascinating artist. Had you studied art at all?

TD: No.

CC: So was this your first really serious study of art? I mean just I guess not from making it, but from looking at it?

TD: Yes. I mean we may have gone to a museum or two, but I don't remember that particularly when I was a child. But there was something about Blake that was, as I said, [that] attracted me. And that caused me to start studying art history more and more seriously. But it was all graduate school and since for art history.

CC: Hmm. And so your first job after graduate—well, maybe before I go there, what did you argue about Blake in your dissertation, that I will confess I have not read. [*laughs*]

TD: You mean Blake or my dissertation? Nobody's read my dissertation. Nobody has that kind of time to spend anymore I think, including me.

I was talking about art and alienation and the Marriage of Heaven and Hell. And the way in which in that work, which is only twenty-seven pages, he combines visual and verbal elements, all of which fits into a very dialectical approach to both his visual and verbal work. And that was new to me, and now it's still fascinating to me. And I still to this day would contend that dialectical analysis is by far the most fruitful way to approach pretty much anything.

CC: And how did you come to understand dialectical analysis? Was that from a professor at Wisconsin?

TD: No.

CC: No. The study groups perhaps?

TD: Partly from study groups and partly from just pumping into it and doing the reading that I was doing. And I was reading about dialectics in politics and history and realized that it certainly applied to the analysis of art and literature. And it was wonderfully fruitful in those senses.

So people don't understand that maybe today when there are courses—there are whole departments about almost anything you can think of. But in the sixties, just being able to talk about the visual elements in Blake and the verbal elements simultaneously, that was radical stuff. That was breaking the boundaries of what was proper to study in English literature.

CC: Right, it's interdisciplinary work, which was a degree of radical, just to push over from one department into the other, right?

TD: It seemed like it at the time, and I think it was. And then it combined that with political analysis. Then it gets really radical. [*laughs*] But again, Madison—as a few other places [also had]—Madison had an intellectual community where you could pursue those interests seriously.

CC: Did you feel like you had good mentorship there?

TD: You mean from the school?

CC: Mm-hmm.

TD: No, no.

CC: So you didn't have a supervisor or somebody who was really helping you in terms of making some of these ideas?

I'm gonna stop the tape for just a moment.

OK, so we're back recording, and I was interested that your first job upon finishing your doctorate was in Chicago, is that correct?

TD: Yes.

CC: And that's where you talked about maybe seeing the community mural movement evolving. And so I'm just curious, did you end up talking to any of the artists that were working at that time?

TD: Oh, absolutely. And that, as I said, that was very exciting. It was going from the intellectual study of somebody who combined art and politics to actually living it, as it were, on the streets. And I met a lot of the artists. I remember meeting Mitchell Caton and Mark Rogovin and John Weber and Caryl Yasko, Justine DeVan.

It wasn't a very large community, and everybody was pretty much on friendly terms with each other. And I wanted to participate in some way. And I had certain skills that were of use to the muralists. I could write and I could photograph. So I started documenting the murals and the processes. And one of the first things I did was edit the *Mural Manual* that Mark Rogovin wrote about how to paint murals for classrooms, street corners, and community centers.

And so I left Chicago, came out to California, moved to San Francisco in, I guess, '74, '73 or '74. And when I went to the Mission District I realized that gee, there were muralists here too, and I had some skills, the same skills that could be of use. So I showed slides of murals from Chicago, for example, and people thought that was pretty interesting. And I started meeting the muralists, and we all became friends. As I said, it was a small community.

And that was the role I played because I had those skills. I would edit the occasional catalogue that somebody prepared for an art show they had at a museum or something like that. And I would edit and proofread and ghostwrite various application letters for schools and for funding and things like that.

CC: Did you ever approach photography as an artist as well as a documentarian?

TD: Well, the answer to [that] is yes, but mainly as a documentarian because I was teaching, starting a family of my own. There wasn't really enough time to do everything.

CC: What year did you get married? To ask a hard question.

TD: Oh. 1980.

CC: 1980?

TD: Yeah.

CC: OK. And then maybe just going back to that photography, for me, just having looked at a lot of your photographs of murals, I don't think I realized that you had also done some photography of murals in Chicago. And so, forgive me, but also just curious, like how—sorry. I'm just trying to find the right words—what years were you in Chicago? Would that have been, you finished—

TD: '71 to '73?

CC: '71 to '73. So, like the *Wall of Respect* had already been created?

TD: Yes.

CC: And of course, having studied murals, I understand that [that] mural is a particularly important mural. It's something that has been sort of referred to as one of the first community murals. Is that also your impression?

TD: Well, no—that's just a fact. Depending upon how you define things, it may or may not have been the first. But the thing is, the *Wall of Respect* was done in the summer of '67. In the December issue of *Ebony* magazine of 1967, there was a big three- or four-page spread on the *Wall of Respect*, and that gave it a kind of national stature that no other mural had.

And so the *Wall of Respect*, sometimes people say it's first. I don't really think so, but it triggered the movement and the differences between isolated people sort of painting murals and a consciousness of there are some of us doing this, and we're doing this on an ongoing basis. The awareness is really important in creating a movement. And the *Wall of Respect* certainly had a huge amount to do with that.

Now, that being said, there had always been murals in Latino Chicano communities. There were pulqueria and panaderia murals and so forth, just where people went every day. And there were also murals of the New Deal painted in libraries and schools and courthouses and train stations and so forth. So a lot of people throughout the whole country were used to looking at, murals—and especially in the Chicano community. The earliest mural I know of that I would think of as consciously Chicano, consciously political, was painted by a woman in 1965.

So coming out of a long tradition of wall paintings in that community, does that count as the first mural? I think that's not a particularly useful way to look at things.

CC: An influential mural painting.

TD: Well, it was before the *Wall of Respect*, but it didn't trigger a movement in the way that the *Wall of Respect* did. So, these are quibbles. The important thing, I think, is the fact that people with artistic skills or who wanted to develop artistic skills started applying those interests and those abilities to the walls of their communities, giving folks who normally

weren't listened to by anybody, giving them a voice. They could talk about what they wanted to do for their reasons, and that is titanically important politically.

CC: Well, I agree with you, and I'm curious because what you've identified was the way in which mural painting was deeply tied to the fight for civil rights.

TD: Yes.

CC: And so I'm just curious, was this also a way in which you saw some ability to participate in a kind of civil rights struggle?

TD: Oh, sure. Of course. Yeah, I mean, marching is one thing, and it's all well and good, but partly for physical reasons, marching wasn't a particularly attractive thing to me. But there were other things that needed doing. As I said, I could write, I could photograph, I could organize. So I did what I could.

CC: Right. And it blended that sort of art and politics.

TD: It continued that, yes. But it went from academic to what? Everyday reality.

CC: And so when you decided to come to San Francisco, were you applying for a job from Chicago or did you just come, or how did that happen?

TD: After I left the deanship at Columbia College in Chicago, I got a job as the director of a foundation and did that for a year or so. But I realized that I didn't—I wasn't having any fun. That didn't speak to me either.

CC: What kind of foundation was it?

TD: It was an educational foundation.

CC: In San Francisco?

TD: No, in Chicago.

CC: Oh, in Chicago.

TD: Yeah. And I didn't particularly like that. So I just left everything. And I had the offer of a place to stay at Lake Tahoe. So I lived in Lake Tahoe for a year.

CC: That's nice.

TD: Yeah, and I learned how to cross-country ski and started teaching cross-country skiing. And at one point, fairly early in the fall of '73, I simply got in the car and drove around the state of California, literally knocking on doors of different departments in schools, colleges, and so forth around the state.

CC: Literally, like knocking on doors?

TD: Absolutely cold—walking into places and not knowing anybody, not having made any advance contact with anyone. The idea of my “advanced” work was to go to the bookstore and see who was teaching what. And then I would go talk to the chairs, chairs of mostly English departments, but some other departments as well.

And it’s interesting, in all the time I did that, people sometimes would ask me if I had a doctorate, and I could say yes. They never asked me what it was in. So I could have been applying for jobs in nuclear chemistry. “Do you have a doctorate?” “Well, yes, I do.” And that was all I said. Nobody ever asked me what it was in. So I mean I looked at sociology departments and English departments and art history, a lot of things, and one thing led to another and I got hired at San Jose State. And there was a—

CC: In the English Department?

TD: In the English Department, but there was a special program they had that was kind of a more generalized humanities program. And so I volunteered and started teaching in that as well. That way you could bring in the interdisciplinary interests, so forth.

And one of the crucial people down at San Jose State at that time was the economist Doug Dowd. Do you know [him]? Doug Dowd was extraordinarily bright and is the best articulator of economics of anyone I’ve ever met. He could talk about economics so that you understood it. And he was also very, very funny. He lived just a few blocks from me in San Francisco.

So Doug and I joined each other on the Hound [the Greyhound bus] and rode back and forth to San Jose three times a week. So that was, so in that sense, that was a good thing, but it was a part-time job. And then I, after that, I went up and knocked on a door at San Francisco State. It was, I think, September, and somebody had just quit before the semester started. So I happened to knock on the door of the administrator of an English program within a day maybe, maybe within hours of the time when he had just lost a teacher of three courses. And I was qualified. So he hired me.

And then subsequently, the humanities department was looking for somebody, and I qualified for [that position]. And so I moved over from composition in English to interdisciplinary humanities, which is pretty much what I’ve been studying all along, although unofficially.

CC: Right.

TD: So I got to teach not only that, but I also out of that, taught courses in the La Raza studies department and the NEXA program, which was a convergence program of science and humanities. And I ended up co-teaching the course in Marxism in the NEXA program. So you see the trajectory now.

CC: So what year would that have been that you knocked on the door at San Francisco State? Do you know?

TD: It was 1974 or '75.

CC: OK. And you were already living in San Francisco.

TD: I was.

CC: Because you were teaching at—was it San Jose?

TD: Yeah.

CC: How did you find a place to live in San Francisco, or where did you first put your feet down?

TD: Well, the first thing I did was stay with friends, just crash on the floor and go around and knock on doors. And one day in Noe Valley, I was walking along and I looked at a building, and up on the second floor, there was a guy standing on a ladder painting a ceiling. So I went in and asked him, I mean I just went in and asked him if he knew the owner. And he said he was the owner. He was just doing the painting. And I said I'd like to rent the apartment. And he said OK. And that was that.

CC: Do you remember what the rent was like?

TD: I remember it wasn't very much. Even in those days, it didn't seem like it was very much. It was easy to do on the salary I had. I don't remember the numbers. It wouldn't mean anything today anyhow.

CC: Well, only just in terms of shock. [*laughs*]

TD: Shock, that's right. I remember the landlord, after I'd lived there a couple of years, he raised the rent to fifty dollars a month. And I called him up and I said, "Bernie, fifty bucks a month? That's just too much." And he said, "Well, how much can you afford?" And I said, "Well, I thought maybe half that would be, you know, that's a big chunk." He said, "OK."

Yeah. That was a different planet.

CC: Yeah, it was, it was. So where was that place in Noe Valley?

TD: That was on Vicksburg. But then I met the girl next door, who is Jo, who turned out to be my wife. My parents died in the late '70s, in '75 and '77, so I had a little bit of money. And Jo looked at me and she said, "Well, what we do now is we buy a house." I go, "Buy a house?" I'd never thought of buying a house. I just wanted to read books and go to demos and help organize things. She said, "No, no. We're supposed to buy a house."

So we looked around and we found a house in Noe Valley, an Edwardian—really very nice place. And it was two floors, nice yard, garage, three bedrooms, two bathrooms. And what that cost was a down payment of \$23,000, which wasn't that much even then. And the monthly payments on that were less than my rent had been in the previous apartment. Like I said, it was a different planet.

CC: Right. It was. And where was the Edwardian? Where was it located?

TD: Alvarado Street.

CC: Alvarado Street. And what year did you move in there?

TD: I think it was '79.

CC: Was it before you got married?

TD: Pretty much the same time. That all happened within a few months.

CC: Gotcha. And so yeah, you're on the cusp of starting a family there. It's the latter half of the 1970s that you're really maybe getting involved in this new community of muralists. Who did you become friends with in this community?

TD: In the mural community? Well, some folks at the Galería de la Raza, Ralph Maradiaga, Maria Pinedo, René Yañez.

CC: So one of the things that I think I would be curious about is that you also became involved with *Community Murals* magazine at this time. Is that right?

TD: Yes. It was a little more than being involved with. We started it.

CC: Yes. I don't mean to undercut your accomplishment.

TD: No, no. Well, that grew out of—the first mural conference I went to was in Boston in 1974, and that grew out of my association with Mark Rogovin and the public art workshop that had led to the *Mural Manual*. So we all went to this conference in Boston. That was fine.

In '76, New York City Arts Workshop sponsored a conference, and we all went to that. And they started out of that publishing a newsletter. A murals newsletter. That started in '76.

CC: Where? In City Arts, and in Chicago.

TD: New York City.

CC: Oh, in New York City.

TD: Yeah. In '78 there was a conference in Chicago, and by that time, I guess we were semiorganized, and it seemed like the logical next conference would be in a couple of years. And the logical place was probably Los Angeles, probably Judy Baca and SPARC or the Bay Area. And there wasn't any kind of real coherent program going or dynamic leadership. But a group of us from San Francisco, from the Bay Area, decided that we could put out a newsletter.

So the idea, our idea anyhow, at the Chicago conference in 1978 was that the Bay Area would produce a murals newsletter and the next conference would be held in LA. But SPARC never did that. We did our thing. We started the murals newsletter. And if you look at it, you see it had all these different names and finally ended up being *Community Murals* magazine.

CC: Oh, really? What were some of the earlier names? Or that's probably not critical—just curious.

TD: Well, there was *Community Murals* newsletter, *International Community Murals* newsletter.

CC: That's interesting because that actually just jars something for me because I do remember going, is it *Community Murals* newsletter, or is it a magazine? So that fits.

TD: At various times it was one of each. All the above.

CC: Is that a full run?

TD: This is a complete with a sort of an index of titles of all the articles in *Community Murals* newsletter

CC: I've never seen a complete run of it.

TD: That's the whole thing.

CC: That's amazing. Like I'm genuinely salivating.

TD: I'd be pleased to give you a copy.

CC: I've never seen a complete run.

TD: If it would be of use to you, I'll be pleased to give you.

CC: I would keel over with extreme joy and happiness.

TD: The really useful thing is that semi-index. You can just read through twenty pages to find out where the article that you want is.

CC: That's amazing. And I was going to ask you if you had kept a complete run because I've never seen it archived properly.

TD: I don't know how proper that is.

CC: Well, no. I mean like it's clearly proper. It's more like it's really missing from a lot of our important institutions.

Let me stop the tape.

All right, we're back recording.

TD: The thing about *Community Murals* magazine, and when I say that I refer to the whole run of everything, newsletters, whatever, was that it was a joint effort. If you look at the masthead, there are always ten or twelve people listed. And [they were all] muralists or mural activists and we were all coeditors. At least that's the way I looked at it.

My name is associated with it because it was my phone number and my post office box that people sent things to. But that's OK because I'm reliable. And we ended up producing the magazine. And one of the really important things about that magazine is that we produced on time for twelve years. We never missed a deadline. We finally became quarterly because it was just too big to produce larger issues just twice a year.

So, yes, I'm proud of that. We did good work and people sent us things from all over the world. Some of the translation stories—a guy sent an article and it was in French, and [it] was a level of French that I couldn't really translate. But there was a man who lived across the street, across Alvarado Street, who had gone to medical school on a French-speaking Caribbean Island, I don't know [which one]. And he sat there and read, did a running translation of the French article that had been sent to us. And that was not great, but he was kind enough to do it. And it took a few minutes, but not very long. And from that, with a French dictionary, my knowledge was such that I could convert it into usable English.

And I remember every now and then we'd get a letter from somebody who had written the original in French or German or whatever it was, saying, "Wow, the translation was really wonderful." And I felt very good about that because I had used these people who had a demotic knowledge of the language, but then you have to put it into English, which is a different animal. I learned something about translation from that. That was fun.

So, when it was all said and done, I had stacks and stacks of magazines in the garage. So I said I could salvage, harvest from those twelve full runs. And then there was just no call for the others. So they got disposed of. And I had the twelve full copies bound. And that's these two volumes that you see here.

CC: Well, I'm so glad that you did that. There's something, there's something about you, Tim, that I think you would have in another life also maybe been an archivist.

TD: I might have been. That gets us to the Artstor story.

CC: Yes.

TD: But I wanted to tell you about the magazine. One day the phone rang. Was it the phone? No. One day I got a letter. The magazine got a letter, right. And it was from who's in charge of copyright in the country—Library of Congress?

CC: Yes.

TD: It was from the Library of Congress. And they were telling us that they had noticed this publication. They had no copies in their files, and the fine was going to run to \$50,000. Basically, who the hell did we think we were? I checked my desk. I didn't have \$50,000. So I called them up and they were very nice. They said, "No, you don't." I said, "Well, I don't think we have some of those issues. I mean, I might have one or two copies, but I can't send you those original copies. Can I send you Xeroxes?" And they said, "Sure. Fine." So we started sending them to the Library of Congress after that and never got a bill for fifty grand. So that was nice.

CC: Yeah. I was glad to see they were on it.

TD: So somewhere back there in the Library of Congress, there should be a full run of *Community Murals* magazine.

CC: That's good to hear. I think I've struck out when I have looked, but I believe they're there.

TD: Well, you won't have to worry about it in the future.

CC: No, that's amazing. One of the things that was always striking to me about reading the issues that I did read was the global stories—the stories about a lot of Bay Area muralists traveling all over the place to do murals. And then it's interesting to hear you talking about people sending stories from abroad. How did you guys manage the mailing list? Was there somebody—were you handling that too? And did San Francisco State give you any funds? *[laughs]* Sorry.

TD: How can I put this? No. No, in fact—I was teaching in the humanities department as an adjunct, right, teaching three or four courses a semester. And they had a resources room that had lots of art slides. And I had sort of made this assumption to myself that when the time came, I would donate my collection to them. Except that one day somebody broke into the resources room and swiped, I don't know, a projector or a computer or something. Not a big, huge deal, but uncomfortable, nasty. The department, in its inimitable fashion, responded by among other things, taking my key away so I no longer had access without going and begging from people to use the resources room.

CC: Did they blame you?

TD: No, no, it wasn't a matter of blame. They were tightening up security. And so that ended the associations with the resources in the humanities department at San Francisco State. So my courses—I almost never touched on murals in any of the courses I taught. I was assigned different courses, and murals didn't fold into them naturally. And I wasn't going to twist things just so I could talk about that, so I didn't.

CC: So you were teaching a lot of sort of core requirements, perhaps?

TD: Yeah, I taught all the core requirements in the department at one time or another, which is how I kept my job. I was the utility infielder for the department. I was really useful.

CC: Was there—did you ever feel any support for, I mean, it's interesting. I can't believe you're working so much on murals, but you're never invited to teach a class on murals or encouraged.

TD: Never happened. No encouragement, no recognition, no support. Never had any secretarial support. So after my access to those slides was removed, I was teaching courses, Biography of the City. I taught a biography of San Francisco, Los Angeles, of London. And to illustrate those courses, I had used slides, and suddenly I no longer had access to the slides. I got a copy machine and made my own slides. So I was doing my own copy work in addition to everything else, so that I had the illustrations for what I was teaching about in the classroom.

CC: So how did *Community Murals* magazine fund itself? Like how did you—?

TD: Donated labor was the key thing. And the costs, we got a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities [NEH].

CC: Did you apply for that?

TD: We did apply for that. And when the first check arrived, it was made out to *Community Morals* magazine. I hadn't noticed that. I was opening an account at the local Bank of America. And I stood there and handed this check to the teller, and she looked at it and said, "Community Morals, my word." I said, "What?" I took it back and Xeroxed it.

It's in one of the magazines, and the comment on it. "So that's why we got the grant." And that was probably in 1980. We got that grant for six, seven years. It was \$10,000. And that's what ran, funded *Community Murals* for about a decade.

CC: Wow.

TD: And then by the time the Republican attitude had worked its way down to the level of committee that we would be dealing with, we basically said we need the money. And they said, "Oh, if people respected you enough, they would pay for it. If they don't pay for it, that means they don't respect it enough."

And I look at the population we're dealing with. We're dealing with poor people, people of color, people who don't work in these realms and to whom the murals actually speak and express. But no, they said no. If you were making a profit in the magazine, then we'd be happy to give you money. So exactly upside down.

CC: Right. If you were making a profit for a nonprofit.

TD: Exactly. Exactly. So by that time, we were all getting older, starting families, and we were pretty much exhausted doing this. And we could have gone into debt and survived for a few years, but there wasn't any way out of that. This is all before computers, you understand. And this is the end of the print world or the print era. And computers came in the way that we know them today, within a decade. And that would have been the way to do it. Now, of course, full-color computers and so forth.

CC: Where did you print it at?

TD: Inkworks. Inkworks Press on 6th Street in Berkeley.

CC: OK. And so you would deliver it in person kind of thing?

TD: One of the organizers of Inkworks was on our editorial board, Lincoln Cushing.

CC: That's where I know Inkworks. OK.

TD: Yeah.

CC: Gotcha. Is that kind of how you first met Lincoln Cushing?

TD: Yes. He had been down in San Diego, and he was coming up to the Bay Area and sort of looking around for people who were doing things that he was interested in. And I think he'd been not only a screenprinter in San Diego, but also involved with printing, very savvy knowledge of the printing industry. So I remember meeting him one day at our house in Noe Valley, and the rest is history.

CC: Are there any stories in *Community Murals*, newsletter or magazine, that you think were especially important to you?

TD: Offhand, nothing I can think of. My goal was always to get as much information out to people who were painting, to get the information out to them so that they could learn what was going on in other places.

See, today that would all be done by computer, but that wasn't in the cards back in the seventies and eighties. There were a couple of things that I thought were particularly important. I don't know whether to me necessarily, but they were the foldout issues. There's an issue with—had a Balmy Alley foldout where the pages folded out, and you had thumbnail

pictures of all the murals in Balmy Alley. Well, we did the same thing for prisons, California prisons, and the same thing for the Lucha Continua political art park in New York City.

And I always thought those were—they seemed important to me because you could see the whole project and there wasn't any other way you could see the project at once of any of the three. But I always thought those were pretty good.

CC: Yeah. No, I've used that Balmy Alley issue, I think, repeatedly. So I would agree with you.

TD: Well, I still use it.

CC: I mean, I guess speaking of Balmy Ally, maybe this would be a good moment to ask you a little bit about your own involvement with that project.

TD: One day I got a call from Ray Patlán, who lived in Balmy. Had been a muralist in Chicago before he'd come out west.

CC: Had you met him in Chicago?

TD: I had not met him in Chicago, but he was good friends with John Weber, and John made sure that we met once Ray came out here. And so now we're in the eighties. It must have been '83, I got a call from Ray saying that he had this idea for a project for basically muralizing Balmy Alley. Would I be interested in writing a letter of application for funding to the Zellerbach Foundation? Well, of course. I mean, that's the kind of thing I'd been trained to do. So I did, and we got two thousand or twenty-five hundred bucks, and that was the seed money that got Balmy Alley done.

Ray had sort of formed a group he called PLACA, and we had meetings to which various muralists came. We all talked.

CC: Where were the meetings at?

TD: Oh, just people's homes, people's studios. I remember Ray's place; I think it was on 29th Street in San Francisco at one point. We talked about the project and what it would be, and we had to get permission to paint on people's fences and garages and so forth.

I remember going around the block that Balmy ran through. We would go to the house, the back fence of which we wanted to paint on in the alley that ran behind the houses. And I remember going and doing that with Patricia Rodriguez, who was one of the Mujeres Muralistas. And we had to explain to people what a mural was. Talk about a different state of affairs. People didn't know what a mural was. And so we say we want to paint a mural on your back fence and it won't cost you any money. And oh yeah, what a mural is—it's a painting on a wall or a fence or a garage door. So we'd explain all this to them.

CC: Did you do it in English and Spanish?

TD: It depended on what they wanted to speak. If they spoke only Spanish, Patricia would talk with them. Otherwise, we both talked. But having to explain to people what a mural was, that was a long time ago. We did that.

CC: Though of course, there were the murals like in the minipark, and I mean, there were murals around. It's interesting, though, that in 1984, '83, that this would have been.

TD: Well, that was a few blocks away. It doesn't mean people ever went there.

CC: Fair enough.

TD: And also we're talking about a population of—it was Latino. It wasn't Chicano. There were people there with backgrounds from Mexico, but there were also a lot of people there with backgrounds from El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, various countries in South America, Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, Chile.

And so it's a very different mix than you'd get, say, in Los Angeles. Los Angeles was Chicano. If you made the effort, you could go find where the Salvadoreans were hanging out. But it wasn't like Los Angeles was a Latino community. LA was a Chicano community, but San Francisco was Latino. So you had a much wider variety of restaurants.

CC: So actually, it occurs to me, like, not only did you have to explain what a mural was, but of course, PLACA was very politically oriented. And was there any explaining of what the ideology was for the painting of the murals?

TD: Sure, we weren't trying to hide anything. We said that there's a dual theme either celebrating local cultures or critiquing US involvement in Central America. We thought those were important issues that needed to be looked at more carefully and understood more carefully.

And a couple of people said, "Well, no, I don't want to get in trouble. I don't want any part of that." And they said no. And over a period of time after they saw the project and so forth, I think everybody said yes. I don't think there are any properties that are not muralized in the alley now. But it took a while for some people to see where it was going, what was going on and to decide that they thought it was a good idea and they wanted to be part of it.

TD: But see, you're talking about PLACA and Balmy at the beginning. So we're talking '84, which is sort of the year for Balmy, right? By the end of the century, it had basically become, as murals wore out, garage doors were replaced, so on and so forth, new surfaces became available, and they were almost always painted by somebody else, a different muralist.

And by the end of the century, Balmy had become spiritualized. And as you see it, even today, I think it's still true. Going in either end of the alley, you are surrounded by religious figures, a bodhisattva, a Virgen de Guadalupe, the Five Sacred Ages of Corn. And then there are *milagros*, you know, miracles.

And there are also a lot of murals that don't have anything to do with Central America. There's one about Nepalese women. Well, how many Nepalese women are there in the Mission? I don't know, maybe some. Not that it's not a worthy cause, but it certainly isn't part of the Central American orientation that was dominant in the mid-eighties. So it's really shifted over time.

And the population of the Mission District has shifted as well. Now, of course, it's in the midst of massive gentrification generated by the property values. And so who knows what it's going to be like in another ten or fifteen years.

CC: Right. And if I recall correctly, you actually helped with a painting in Balmy Alley? Maybe not.

TD: Well, my primary—I was a founding member of PLACA because Ray had asked. It was fun to be at those meetings. I didn't paint in the first cycle, but I did assist Janet Braun-Reinitz when she came out, maybe six or eight years ago, and painted a mural about AIDS in Africa. She's a Brooklyn muralist.

And that, of course, has exactly nothing to do with Central American politics. But as I said, the alley had been opened up at that time, and it became a feather that people wanted in their caps. They wanted to be able to say, "I painted in Balmy Alley." I just was one of the assistants to Janet in that project.

CC: Do you think that there are ways that you would describe, I mean, I was just thinking what you said about Balmy Alley, that maybe there are other sort of iconographic changes that you could also see in the larger community of the Mission District murals? Right, not just where Balmy Alley was clearly painted, at least at that moment in time, with a specific desire to speak to power about intervention in Central America, US intervention.

TD: There were stories of contra sympathizers trashing people's apartments in the Mission District.

CC: Really?

TD: Yes, stories. I don't know if they—but yes, there were some tensions around that.

CC: Oh, sorry. Let me stop the tape.

CC: All right, so we're back recording, and we were just maybe going to chat a little bit about Mission District iconography.

TD: What do you have in mind when you say that?

CC: I don't know. I mean, I actually, well, one of the things that I ended up arguing was the way in which there was a kind of harmonious representation of Latin America in the

seventies that dramatically changed in the 1980s with the concerns of Balmy Alley, with the sort of—that the murals portrayed a lot more violence, global violence in the 1980s than they had in the seventies. So that was something that I saw in terms of change.

TD: So, as an example, as it were, a shift from the minipark to the politicized Balmy.

CC: Exactly.

TD: Do you know about Michael Ríos's Vietnam mural? Because that was on a building, one side of which was the minipark; the other side faced Bryant and 24th.

CC: I don't know if I recall that one.

TD: That was pretty intense imagery. It had punji sticks and U.S. colors. So it wasn't all tame and roses and warm fuzzies. Even in the seventies. I'm trying to go through them.

And also the drug passages in the Jamestown mural, which was very early—was in '73. And it had Indigenous people shooting up, and the idea that the mural was saying is when members of La Raza shoot up, it's murdering all of La Raza, which is a fairly standard trope. But it was '73. It was pretty early to be a public mural. It was indoors, but it was still there. And there were some pretty heavy Vietnam War scenes, partly because they were painted by vets who had come back and were painting that on the walls.

And there was the detail of the *Homage to Siqueiros* that Chuy Campusano did in the Bank of America and that farmworker image where the farmworker's stepping over the crucified laborer with a book. And the pages of the book say, "Our sweat and our blood have fallen on this land to make other men rich." It's not very warm and fuzzy. That's pretty hard hitting, especially inside a bank.

So I'm not sure I'd agree that—

CC: I don't mean that the images weren't biting. Actually what I—and maybe I should be clearer. Like, one of the things that I argued was the actual portrait of Latin America—

TD: Ah.

CC: That there was a way in which like say, *Latino America* gave some of these sort of—I don't want to undermine it—but a sort of more hopeful representation of Latin America that for me, at least when I look at some of the images of Latin America, like Juana Alicia's work of the child and the gun [*Alto al Fuego / Ceasfire*], that to me just represented a pretty radical representation of change of Latin America.

TD: Do you remember the date on that? That was fairly late.

CC: It was in the eighties, early eighties.

TD: Early eighties?

CC: Yeah. It [was] maybe '84. [1988]

TD: I thought it was around the same time.

Well, that was certainly there. And interestingly enough, the Break the Silence Mural, *Everyone Deserves a Homeland*, which got attacked constantly by, one thinks, Zionists who thought that any representation of a Palestinian was the representation of a murderer. And it's that typical Zionist hyperbole, the same kind of thing we see in Trump as he exaggerates and lies on and on and on.

And that's one of the few things, two topics that you can't—there are a couple of things you cannot paint a mural about in this country. One is Israel. Another one is abortion. I do not know of a single mural about abortion in this country. So there are some subjects that are somehow forbidden.

As to the depiction of Latin American culture—well, I think like everything else, I guess I would say offhand that like everything else, the depictions have gotten more stark and there is more violence in them. There's more violence in the US, in the neighborhood; and it's just of a piece with what's been happening in society.

CC: Right.

TD: I don't see any radical moment or when things changed.

CC: Well, yeah. No, it was more just a question if you had observed any sort of ways in which maybe the iconography had changed over time. But it would—were you going to say something?

TD: No, go ahead.

CC: Well, it would nicely lead me into maybe talking about Chuy Campusano's mural *Lilli Ann*, which was aesthetically quite different from his work and different from a lot of work.

TD: Radically so.

CC: Yes.

TD: Not the first abstract mural in the Mission.

CC: I wondered about that. Really? Is there another one that you can think of?

TD: Tomas Belsky did one on the corner of 24th and Bryant. I'm sure I've got an image of it somewhere if you want to see it. But it wasn't—Belsky, you can tell by the name, wasn't

exactly at the heart of the Mission community. I mean, he was a nice guy and people liked him. There was no hostility. But he wasn't a Latino and doesn't come from that background.

So there was Belsky's. And there were [murals] in the minipark that had abstract designs. But the minipark is so dominated by the Quetzalcoatl and the volcano and Ríos's alphabet blocks. So you didn't see the sort of—the abstract designs become kind of decorative and minor and just in the background, which is what they were.

No, but you do have the ongoing cultural expressions. I mean, look at the Mission Model Cities mural painted by the Mujeres Muralistas, where you have images from different Latin American—including South American—cultures. You've got a Bolivian dancer and a Peruvian figure and so forth and so on. So it is of the polyethnic Mission Latino community. It's not just Chicano, as it would be in the housing projects in LA, for example.

And Chuy was a really sweet guy, by the way, a really nice guy. And Chuy, interestingly enough, had hung out with Emmy Lou Packard. And so he is a kind of link back to the New Deal muralists in San Francisco through Emmy Lou. And that includes Diego Rivera, because Emmy Lou worked with Diego. So, Emmy Lou Packard and Lucienne Bloch also. She is the one who discovered the *Man at the Crossroads* mural after it had been pounded to bits with sledgehammers in New York City. She and Lucienne saw the fifty-five-gallon cans filled with mural shards and said, my, my, look what's happened, and so forth.

But Lucienne was out here and Emmy Lou and they had both been close to Diego. And so there's a line, if you want, from Diego to Chuy Campusano. And you can see, I think things in—I haven't thought about this yet. I think you can see some Rivera-ish, Riveraesque moments in Campusano's mural. He fills the space with lots of people, lots of things going on, and does it really well. I mean, a lot of murals—a lot of murals stuff lots of people into the frame. They're just doing it, just stuffing folks onto the surface. But Chuy had a much more complex sense of how to do that, as did Rivera. So that's something.

CC: Well, one of the things that—I dedicated a lot of thinking to *Homage to Siquieros* by Chuy, and it is interesting to turn to something like the *Lilli Ann* mural, and you look at it and you think, Is this the same artist, you know? And I think he was, my impression, never having met him, was that he was pretty experimental, but he was very interested in sort of diverse aesthetics and approaches.

TD: Doesn't surprise me at all. He was a bright guy and he was curious and exploring new things. Yeah, makes perfect sense. But I don't know the backstory of the *Lilli Ann* commission, whether somebody said, "I want this painted and this is what I want," or whether they just said, "Here's a wall; you can do what you want on it." And he just explored new turf.

CC: So my understanding is that he got money from the city of San Francisco for a wall and that he wanted that wall. So he's the one that pursued that particular wall.

TD: Oh, so he had his eye on that. Well, it's a great wall.

CC: It is a great wall.

TD: Yes.

CC: And do you remember any reactions after he painted it?

TD: Not much. There's a lot of respect for what people do, at least at that time there was. You know, OK, he wants to go off and do that or he wants to go off and do that. I respect that. It's not what I would do. I don't much care. I heard more comments about Keith Sklar's mural on the board of education building down in Civic Center. And people really didn't like that.

It's interesting. I thought that the muralists, the artists would look at what Sklar was doing and they would try to figure out what he was doing. They would maybe learn a couple of things because Sklar is a very talented artist.

CC: I agree.

TD: But all I ever heard was bad mouthing about that, which was kind of disappointing, I think. Never heard bad mouthing so much as shrugs about Chuy's *Lilli Ann*.

CC: Shrugs as in like people just didn't get it or—?

TD: Or was there something to get? I mean, mostly they thought they didn't care. Maybe they were a little surprised that one of them would do something like that. But in that case, it must have been a healthy moment.

CC: All right.

TD: What's the date on *Lilli Ann*?

CC: 1986.

TD: '86. Well, I think it made the cover of *Community Murals*.

CC: Well, I'll have to find that issue now.

TD: Well, there's certainly something in there about it.

CC: Definitely. I'll be looking for that.

I think maybe now would be a good time for me to take a break and return to our conversation, if you're OK with this. And so maybe I could just say that I'd love to keep going. But also I have the respect of not wanting to overwork either of us. And so if now seems like a good moment, I'll stop the recording.

TD: OK.

CC: All right. Thank you.

CC: All right. So today is June 28, 2018. This is Cary Cordova, and I am recording an oral history interview with Tim Drescher. This is our second session, and Tim, we were talking a lot in our first session about murals, I guess, about the iconography of murals.

But as I mentioned to you, I'd like to go back and just think about maybe like going to the Galería de la Raza for the first time, or where did you find the art that you were curious about in San Francisco? Or how did you connect with the muralists in San Francisco? What steps did you take?

TD: I'm not sure I'm going to remember the order correctly, but there were three things involved in it, maybe four. I was driving through the Mission and I looked up and saw murals. I don't remember the order, but one was the various Muralistas' painting on the Mission Model Cities mural.

CC: *Latino America*

TD: *Latino America*. And I stopped and talked to them or to somebody and they told me that—I guess it was *Paco's Tacos (Para el Mercado)* was going to have a dedication next week or something like that. So I went to that. And somehow in my mind, this gets tied up with the dedication of the Bank of America mural, *Homage to Siquieros*, that Chuy and others did inside, [which] was dedicated inside the bank.

CC: Did you attend that as well?

TD: Yes.

CC: You did?

TD: Yes.

CC: Do you remember anything about it?

TD: Well, I remember that the bank handed out glossy brochures, as one might expect. One of the images on the brochure was the farmworker holding the book out, [which had] written on [its] pages "Our sweat and our blood had fallen on this land to make other men rich."

Interestingly, in the brochures' photograph, those pages were blank. Now, you can assume that that was chicanery on the part of the Bank of America, that they blanked it out and so forth. But it might also be that, in fact, they took the photograph before the words were put in because the mural was painted on panels in a studio. So one doesn't quite know about that. But the fact is they did hand out the publicity without those words on it. And those

words are really pointed when you see them inside a bank. So people stand in line looking at this mural while they're waiting to deal with the bank. So I don't know.

But also—so in answer to your question not about the Galería, but about me in San Francisco, that's how I found the muralists and started talking to them. And people were nice and welcoming. And I remember in particular Consuelo Méndez, because she was extraordinarily articulate and also had the most politicized, best understanding of the politics of what they were doing. And that was quite wonderful.

And anyhow, one thing led to another. And I ended up going to the Galería. Somebody said something [like], "Oh, you got to go to the Galería." So I did. And I don't remember my first visit particularly, but I remember enjoying the people, enjoying the atmosphere, the sense of camaraderie, and also the art and the purpose of the art that artists and the audience at the Galería have felt. Everybody was in the same struggle, and it was a civil rights struggle. It was about learning one's own history or creating it.

In those early days of the seventies, the Chicano—artists were creating the whole idea of what it meant to be a Chicano. It's not like there was a textbook around that they could look it up in. So what they did became part of the foundations of Chicanismo. And that was fascinating, what they were doing.

I remember Ralph Maradiaga, who—poor Ralph, one of the nicest guys, and he was terrifically helpful in dealing with the NEH and *Community Murals* magazine. Ralph really helped me write those, fill out those forms, effectively.

CC: Really?

TD: Oh, yeah.

CC: Did he have any kind of background that helped with that?

TD: All I ever knew is that he had gone to Stanford, and apparently he had been doing that, handling those aspects of the Galería and Studio 24.

Ralph, on his fiftieth birthday—God, fiftieth birthday—he went to the doctor, just figured he was turning fifty. It was time for a checkup. The doctor said, "You're fine. You're a little bit overweight. Start jogging or something like that." So it's like the next morning, Ralph went out jogging and dropped dead. It was just terrible.

And Maria Pinedo, who was extraordinarily smart and is kind of the person who triggered the whole idea of bringing in crafts from Mexico and Central America and selling them in the United States. And she developed connections with the artists in Mexico. And the third person there was René Yañez, who was just an absolutely brilliant artist, was hysterically funny. René had a sense of humor. You had to pay attention. But he was a very, very funny guy and very perceptive. And René was not only an artist in his own right, but—there's a word for it—animateur, the animator of a whole bunch of Mission District culture. Probably the

single most significant player in that whole game. You know, he didn't promote himself so much. But if you looked carefully, almost every art show or event, you'd find that René had been involved in it somehow.

So those are the three figures who were in charge of the Galería. And that was exciting. I met other muralists, people passing through at the Galería because it was one of the places people went, Chicanos went, when they were coming to San Francisco.

And interestingly, the Galería, it was not a purely Chicano operation. I mean, they welcomed artists from—I even showed something I did there once. So it's not like they were fussy about that.

CC: What did you show there?

TD: I showed a medieval tomb rubbing from England for one of the Day of the Dead shows they did. And they put it in one of the front windows, and the night before the opening, an automobile drove through the window [*laughs*] and smashed up a lot of stuff.

CC: On purpose or by accident?

TD: I think it was by accident. Ironies. Yeah. But the point is they were open, they were interested, they were informed. It was a fun place to be.

CC: About what year would that car crash have been? Or maybe just like late seventies or early eighties?

TD: Late seventies is what I would say. Yeah, I would say somewhere around '78.

CC: Gotcha, which actually—I have several questions actually relating to what you've just said, that one event in 1978, I've actually quoted you on because you described going to the Frida Kahlo show.

TD: Mm-hmm.

CC: And maybe, I don't know, is there anything that you would elaborate on in terms of that experience?

TD: Well, one of the things that's going on here for me in those days is that I didn't have a clue. I didn't know what a Chicano was. I wasn't raised in those neighborhoods. I was raised on the other side of Los Angeles. And I remember in high school running cross-country meets against Garfield High School. Garfield was the heart of East Los, of course, and I was always very impressed with how tough those guys were. They were terrific runners and they were terrific competitors.

It was made clear to us that they are also scary and we should be a little bit frightened of them. Well, I was certainly intimidated by their running ability anyhow, and it wasn't—I didn't

actually meet any of those students until earlier this year, as far as I know, at a conference at UC Santa Barbara on Chicano historiography. It was the fiftieth anniversary of the blowouts, and there was a panel with five veterans of the blowouts and we got to talking, swapping experiences and so forth.

So the point, as far as San Francisco goes, is that one was learning all the time about the parameters and what the figures were. And then they did the Frida Kahlo exhibit with a nice catalogue by Rupert García, probably the first of its kind. And that was exciting too.

I mean, everybody sort of remembers—well, there was my life, and then there was my life after I discovered Kahlo's paintings and seeing how fascinating she is and to watch how people would, and still do, sort of distort or shape Kahlo to fit whatever their particular thing is. They'll talk about her as a mystic and as a feminist and as an artist and completely ignore her politics. I mean, she had pictures of Stalin and Lenin and Marx over her bed all those years that she spent lying there in a cast. You can't ignore that.

And the fact is that because of her physical infirmities, she was a lot of the time "ripped out of her tree" on drugs. That's going to affect her artwork. So you can't just say, oh, she was a precursor and early magic realist painter. Well, that might be true, but somebody else could come in and say, oh, I recognize this kind of art. It's done by people who are high on whatever it is. So interesting to see that she was much more complex than she's usually given credit for.

CC: Well, and that moment was such a moment of trying to recover, right, like or reclaim Kahlo, because she had up until then been very overshadowed by Diego. And it's also just very interesting to see that transformation that you were witnessing in the culture.

TD: Exactly. And it's interesting even today. Rivera said that she was by far the better artist. I'm not sure that's true. I don't know what he meant exactly by better or not. But that seems to ebb and flow too, according to whom you're speaking with.

The feminists would argue, of course, Kahlo was the superior artist. But I don't know what the criteria are. And if you look at it all, they're both terrific, but in very different ways. Talk about working on opposite ends of the scale. He's doing these huge murals, and she's doing these tiny things that she could hold in front of her while she was lying encasted in her bed. I mean, it's really interesting, though.

CC: It is fascinating.

TD: As a couple, yeah.

CC: And I mean, just as an aside, I've just been finding some stuff about them being in San Francisco and [I'm] just so curious about their whole experience in San Francisco.

TD: I've talked with Lucienne Bloch and also Emmy Lou Packard about some of those things.

CC: Did you?

TD: And yes, they enjoyed them as people. And that was interesting to hear about them as just other artists, just like everybody else we talk with. They're artists too.

My favorite thing was the story that Emmy Lou had a little brown paper sandwich bag that—Kahlo had gone out to Treasure Island. It must have been 1939. It could have been '40. They were divorced at that time, but they were getting back together again. And she was going back to Mexico and she went out to Treasure Island to say goodbye to Diego while he was painting the mural that ended up at City College.

Only he wasn't there when she went out there, and she had to go to the airport, so she left him a note in this little brown paper sandwich bag and sealed it with a kiss. And so you have this note to Diego, this little love note from Frida to Diego. And then it's sealed with a kiss, and there's this big lip print of Frida on the bag. And Emmy Lou had that. And I thought that was a fabulous souvenir—Frida Kahlo's lips.

CC: That is great. Let me, I couldn't help myself. I got a little off track, but I'd love to go back for just a moment because you mentioned—did you also attend the reception for *Paco's Tacos* then? Is there anything that you would remember about that reception?

TD: Well, we didn't call it a reception. Nobody called it a reception. It was called the dedication.

CC: Dedication.

TD: And what it was was kind of a neighborhood party. So maybe *fiesta* would be a better choice. But the thing about *Paco's Tacos* is that it was painted at a taco stand, which was next to a small parking lot, because the owner of the taco stand had heard that McDonald's was going to go in on the corner—was it two blocks, three blocks away?—on the corner of 24th and Mission. And he wanted to establish his restaurant and make sure that it was in place and locals would understand the nationalist characteristics of the taco stand versus McDonald's.

In other words: eat here, not at that corporate, capitalist monstrosity that's going in. And everybody at the dedication understood that. I didn't understand that until I got there and people explained it to me, but it made a certain amount of sense.

And that was painted in two halves—half of it designed by—I'm not going to remember this. Was it? They were two of the Muralistas maybe.

CC: One was Consuelo, maybe.

TD: Consuelo, yes. The other one might have been Patricia or Graciela.

CC: It might have been Graciela.

TD: I think so. Thinking by style, looking at it.

CC: Right. Me too.

TD: The thing about that was that they didn't actually agree on exactly what they wanted to do, but they somehow agreed on scale. So the figures on both sides, two halves, are the same. And they asked somebody else, who turned out to be Susan Kelk Cervantes, to do the coloring so it was all consistent. And unless you look at it fairly carefully, you wouldn't notice that it was done by two completely different hands.

CC: I don't think I realized that Susan had worked on that.

TD: She did the coloring.

CC: Interesting.

TD: And that was her first participation with the Mujeres at all. Fast forward to the future. And it's what, ten, fifteen years ago, they were going to tear down the taco stand and rip up the parking lot and build something else there. So I think it was Susan Cervantes went by and saw that going on and said, "Look, can I have the mural? Can I have the fence boards?" And they said, "Sure." They didn't care. They weren't thinking about it. I think it was Susan.

But somehow I picture Ray Patlán, who had a small sports car at the time, being involved. Anyhow, somebody—and they could only load half the fence into their car. So they did, and they took it over to the Precita Eyes workshop at Precita Park. By the time they came back, the other half was gone. So only half of that mural was saved.

CC: But they did save half of it.

TD: Apparently they did.

CC: Just two people that are no longer—well three, I guess. Graciela and Ralph in particular. I wonder if there's—Ralph is not around for me to interview, right.

TD: I know. That's a pity.

CC: Yeah. And Graciela is not.

TD: Unavailable.

CC: She's unavailable. And so I wonder if there's anything in particular that it would be good to know about either of them.

TD: Well, you can talk about their personalities, I guess. Ralph worked at the Galería, so he had business responsibilities for things going on at the Galería and Studio 24. As I said, I know

he was a graduate of Stanford, was very smart, wonderful sense of humor, and very generous. I think that would be a word I would associate with him.

Graciela was harder to get to know, and I didn't know her particularly well. I do remember there was a reception for Pablo O'Higgins at Rupert Garcia's apartment out in the avenues. And Rupert was kind enough to invite me to that. And I remember Graciela came in sort of native costume and was, of course, really stunning. I mean, she was really a beautiful, beautiful woman.

But I remember her presence in that room. And I remember O'Higgins's presence in the room as well and how careful he was that when he left, he went around and shook hands with every single person.

CC: That's classic. One thing I want to, thank you, but one thing I wanna ask you, which it's so funny you corrected me from saying reception. It should have been dedication. But just the idea of dedication for murals, I think that was fairly new as an idea. Or had you seen that in Chicago? Or I don't know. I'm curious about how that idea had evolved.

TD: To me, it wasn't new. It was just something that you did at the end of a mural project. You had a dedication, which was a kind of a celebration of it's being given from the artists to the community. And in the *Mural Manual* that I worked on with Mark Ragovin, I mean, I worked on it very little and after the fact. But one of the things that you do when you paint a mural is have a dedication at the end of the project. And so it was certainly done in Chicago, and it just seemed like a natural part of the process.

CC: Interesting. We talked a little bit about the Galería, but really, maybe I should also focus on this other important site that is evolving for muralists. And that's with Susan Cervantes, Luis Cervantes and Precita Eyes. What interaction did you have with that creation or evolution?

TD: Everybody knew everybody. So I knew Luis and certainly Susan, and I've known Susan since—pretty much since I got to San Francisco in '74 or '75. But Precita Eyes was in a different part of the Mission and it was across what used to be called Army Street, across Cesar Chavez, right.

CC: I remember Army Street.

TD: They had this studio on Precita Park, which is a lovely park in that neighborhood. And they didn't go outside of that neighborhood, really. They were very local and they didn't have the political aspect of their art.

And how to put this? There were some artists in San Francisco, one or two in particular, who really disdained the quality of Precita Eyes art. I mean, the standard scathing comment was they never saw a paint color in the jar that they didn't like. You can identify a Precita Eyes mural.

This is still true somewhat today. I think you can identify them by the palette. But if nothing else, Susan was persistent and dogged and just kept after it and had much more of inclination or a motivation to work with youth. And as you see it today, Precita Eyes has really developed that part of their program where they do a lot of working with kids and teenagers and bring them into the mural world sometimes at quite an early age. And they do that very consciously. They're not pretending to do great art, but they are involving the community and especially the kids in projects that imaginatively and chromatically relate to their community.

And I don't remember the year. You probably know this. At some point they moved their studio over to 24th Street, and that puts them right in the heart of the Mission District. And so they have, in fact, become the go-to mural organization in San Francisco because there really aren't any others. There have been programs that sponsored murals, city arts programs. But Precita Eyes has been there working with the community at least since the mid-seventies. And their landlord basically changed the rent and got them booted out of the Precita Eyes studio. And then Luis died, and there was all this—and it was a really terrible, difficult period for everybody involved there.

But they are the ones who after Patlán moved out of Balmy Alley, which was just what, two blocks from the Precita Eyes headquarters. After Patlán moved out of Balmy Alley, Precita Eyes sort of took over curating the alley in practical terms.

CC: Had he been curating it before?

TD: Oh, yeah, it was Ray's idea.

CC: So he was very much managing who was painting there still.

TD: He was the key person. Absolutely.

CC: Do you know about what year he left, even roughly?

TD: No, I don't even want to guess.

CC: OK.

TD: Something tells me it was the nineties, the early nineties maybe. I'm not sure. But it's Precita Eyes that gives the mural tours now.

CC: Right. I mean, I have had people remark on the dominance of Precita Eyes in terms of the mural community, and I wonder if there's anything just to like—it's interesting to hear you describe, like, a particular palette or there is something recognizable about Precita Eyes murals.

And I wonder, this is me just wondering, how has that shaped Mission District murals generally? Or what kind of dominance has that resulted in terms of images or form or even schooling for muralists?

TD: They've had programs offering training for youth.

CC: Right.

TD: So there has been that influence. But all this happens and then, not all of it, but the big changes come. You just asked me, and I'm not sure, but I'm going to say the end of the nineties. And that's the period in which I had moved over here to Berkeley and was less and less involved in San Francisco. And Ralph had passed away at the Galería and there were struggles. And Maria Benito left the Galería as well.

And it was sort of, you know, generally a passing of generations, if you will. And the folks that I knew and the world that I was most familiar with kind of ended at the end of the twentieth century. My book on San Francisco murals goes to what, '98? So these periods, I'm beginning to lose touch and not have the involvement that I had before then.

But prior to that, I did notice that when I would hear snippets or I actually took a couple of tours with the Precita Eyes people, and scholarship—that kind of accuracy in detail was not their thing. But they also made a lot of claims to be more important, and in fact they were, just in terms of sheer numbers of murals. And that's understandable. But as scholar to scholar, not necessarily forgivable. [*laughs*]

CC: Right.

TD: So when you go back and look at it, you know, you've got to get it right and you need more accurate numbers than I can remember right here off the top of my head, for example.

CC: Well, maybe that's a nice lead-in for talking about your book, the San Francisco murals book. And I mean that really is such a major undertaking to think about like the recording this mural here, this mural there, sort of trying to organize, trying to map it, everything. I wonder if you could just talk about that process.

TD: Well, it's little different than I think you have in your mind's eye.

CC: Yeah? OK.

TD: And the reason is that I did not one day look up and say, OK, now I'm going to record, I'm going to study these murals. That wasn't it at all. It's that when I came here, oh, there's an airplane, came to San Francisco in '74, as we talked about earlier, I could photograph, I could write, I could organize. And my own scholarly proclivities demanded that I keep accurate—get the information accurately.

And so I just naturally was keeping forms. I can get one of the forms—there's some in the garage if you want—that recorded the information about these murals. So I was just doing that naturally; that was just part of the game. And because I was friends [with muralists] and it interested me, I was there for all these murals being painted. So it wasn't like I had to go back and reconstruct anything. I had the information forms in my study just stacked up.

CC: Did you alphabetize them by artist or by location?

TD: I didn't organize them at all initially. There weren't that many, you know. There were maybe, what—a couple of hundred at most. And that was a lot of information. It certainly became the generation point for the book.

But what happened with the book—I guess the first edition was 1991, something like that—was that there was a woman from St. Paul named Moira Harris, and she's a very interesting figure. She's still with us. She got maybe the first PhD in African American art way back in the day.

But Moira and her husband John founded this publishing house called Pogo Press, named after their dog Pogo. And she consistently would find slightly offbeat art historical topics, not just paintings that you'd find in a museum. She did a book, for example, on Hamm's beer ads. "Hamm's the beer—refreshing." And they had bears, remember, that were flogging the ale. Well, she did a book on those advertisements and one thing and another.

And she was looking at murals in San Francisco. And one way or the other, somebody told her about me. So we got together and we talked, and they kind of offered—would I be interested in writing a book about San Francisco murals? And I thought that—I mean, I was plenty busy. I remember that. But I also felt that the murals, their quality and their stories, deserved accurate documentation.

So I said yes. And this is before computers. I mean, that's kind of crucial. So I put them in order and double-checked with people when I was trying to write out the histories and tried to put in the book, tried to explain what was going on in San Francisco in a way that would make sense to somebody reading who didn't know all that history.

So, I had a basic draft, and then a couple of things came up. One was that John and Molly thought it would be better for their book if it were about the whole Bay Area, not just San Francisco. So suddenly we're not talking about forty-nine square miles, but we're talking about the Bay Area.

And I was curious. I said OK. So I started tracking down people I had met and contacts and going [to the Mission District], and I ended up putting together the information about all the communities, San Francisco, down the Peninsula, San Jose, throughout San Jose—even had a couple in Watsonville, as I recall—and then back up the east side, Fremont, Hayward, Oakland, Berkeley, and so forth.

So that was good. It was more work, but it was fascinating. So I did enjoy that, putting that together.

The second thing that happened about this time when I got all this material together is I somehow contracted a lung inflammation, and it was treated with a corticosteroid called prednisone. It's still out there, still being used, a really powerful drug. Yeah, well, among other things, when you're taking prednisone, it's like—apparently it's like taking speed. It's like an amphetamine.

And so I wasn't sleeping much. And I remember one day saying, Well, I've got to create a map. I've got to map all these murals so that people can see where they are. So I got a map, and I went down to the copy shop and I blew up the map so that it was large scale and started putting in dots where all the murals were. And that was pretty straightforward. OK, that was easy enough.

And then I had to decide how I was going to identify them—what order was I going to put them in? And so I worked that out, what seemed to be a logical order. If you start here and you go up Market and then you'd kind of distinguish between murals on the north side of Market and the south side of Market, and then the other neighborhoods all made sense and so forth.

The only question is, which one would you do next and all that—and that made sense. But what happened with the prednisone was that I would wake up in the morning, which was early in the morning, sometimes four, five o'clock, and suddenly I'd think, No, I didn't do it right. I've got to change all the numbers. I've got to reorder the murals.

And with the drug in me, I would just work fanatically at that for a day or two or whatever it took. And I think there's something like six hundred murals, and I didn't have to reorder all of them. But San Francisco, I remember redoing that maybe two or three times at least. I'd wake up in the morning and say, Got to redo it! And I'd change the numbering for all the murals in San Francisco.

CC: Oh, my God.

TD: So you were saying, giving me credit. Well, give the drug a fair chunk of credit. Anyhow finally got rid of the inflammation. And when that happened, I had these maps nicely ordered, and that's what found its way into the book.

CC: Were you worried about leaving murals out or leaving people out? Was that a concern?

TD: No. I felt very confident that I knew them all. And I realized, of course, that something's always going to escape. No matter what you do there is going to be a mistake in there somewhere or a couple—and there are, but nothing major.

No, I knew the turf well enough to know what was out there.

CC: So there's nothing that you would be like, I wish I'd done that differently or anything like that?

TD: Well, no, other than getting the dimensions I missed on one, you know, fairly small stuff,

CC: Could I ask, it's interesting to hear that you were encouraged to do the Bay Area. And now I'm remembering some portions of the book. And I'm just curious, like was there—or did you see a difference between the mural art in San Francisco versus, say, in Berkeley or other places?

TD: Well, there was a lot of similarity between San Francisco's Latino murals and the largely Chicano murals in San Jose. So one sees connections there.

And the unifying concept is La Raza. Now, when [José] Vasconcelos talked about *la raza cósmica*, OK, what he meant has been excavated to the nth degree. But there was a feeling amongst Latinos—both people with Mexican backgrounds and people with other Central American and Latin American backgrounds, partly because of the shared language of Spanish. But there was a feeling that everybody's in this together; we are all members of la raza, hence the name of the Galería de la Raza. It wasn't the Galería de los Chicanos. It was La Raza, clearly. And looking at that, which was completely appropriate for the multiethnic neighborhoods and population of San Francisco.

Going to East Los Angeles—it's Chicano there, you know. There are people to this day who refer to themselves as Mexicans, not as Chicanos or even Mexican Americans. And so there was that shared sensibility in a lot of the murals, but not all of them.

In Palo Alto, very upscale community, right. That's where Stanford University is. And the most interesting murals in Palo Alto, except for a couple based around the Chicano studies department at Stanford, were sort of photorealist pictures of mailmen and cat burglars and things like that. You know, they were fun, the trompe l'oeil and so forth.

When you come all the way around and you get back to Oakland and Berkeley, you have a different population entirely. Oakland is a largely Black city. And Berkeley, as it's called the People's Republic of Berserkly—probably a fairly apt name there. And the artists had different interests, different backgrounds, different references.

One of the most interesting, really fascinating murals in Oakland, for example, was painted, or at least directed, by Keith Sklar, and it's called *Mitzvah, a Jewish Cultural Experience*. And it's several stories high. And it shows famous Jews from the Bay Area, [including the] designer of the Golden Gate Bridge.

And what's interesting is that some of these people are clearly Asian American. And some are Black and some are white. And the point, of course, that the mural is making, is that Judaism is not restricted ethnically. It's a religious belief. And there are lots of different kinds of Jews, and a lot of them have played important roles in the San Francisco Bay area, including Harvey Milk, for example.

The interesting thing about that mural is that it's designed so that these figures sort of march out of the mural, and they march down steps that are at the bottom of the mural, and they march into the real world. But Sklar once told me, in a quiet aside, he said, "That's true, but notice we're being marched into a parking lot." [*laughs*]

It's just from having been around long enough, And I guess having gained some respect that the folks would talk to me and give me their information easily.

CC: I mean, one of the things that I'm trying to grapple with is thinking about murals at that time and the expectations of muralists for their art. And by that, how long did they foresee their artwork to exist on the wall? And I guess I'm also asking this because there has been maybe a bit of a change in terms of people wanting to restore or keep or preserve murals.

And so what were the expectations of muralists that were working in, say, the seventies, or did it change, change over the eighties? Do you know what I mean? And let's stop on that question.

CC: OK, we're back.

TD: I don't remember folks talking about it. They did talk about which paints they were using. And the paint of choice in the Bay Area was Politec, which had been formulated for use in murals in Mexico. And there was a dealer, an art store in the Haight Ashbury, that carried Politec and [was] very, very supportive of the muralists and what they were doing and gave them very good prices.

Politec was a wonderful paint and lasted a long time. But that was forty, forty-five years ago. When the murals started deteriorating, in some cases, the muralists would go out and touch them up very ad hoc. Nothing organized around that. But in the last ten or fifteen years in the United States, all over the country, the murals from the seventies—there are no murals left, I think from the sixties, very few from the seventies. And they've been destroyed by weathering.

You look at Chicago, they're painted on brick, so the paints may last, but the walls beneath them start crumbling and the cycles of freezing and thawing—very tough on paints and everything. Chicago muralists became expert at tuck-pointing, which is replacing the grout in between bricks, not something they grew up knowing that they'd be doing when they went to art school, that's for sure.

Most of the murals that have been restored have been restored by local mural groups. Precita Eyes, for example, has been restoring, repainting its murals for a number of years now. Chicago Mural Group, which became the Chicago Public Art Group, CPAG, ditto, started doing incentives. But for most, there just isn't the support. It takes some financial backing to be able to do that. The mural groups can do that to some extent, but for independent murals—the only organization trying to look out for those is an organization called the Rescue

Public Murals, RPM, an organization that grew out of a conference at the Getty Museum. Have you got the date?

CC: Yeah, I was just looking. No, not handy. Was it 2006 maybe?

TD: I think so. That's what I was going to say.

CC: OK.

TD: There was a conference at the Getty, and then there was a luncheon held at the conference where the Rescue Public Murals was formed. And the two at least titular chairs of Rescue Public Murals were the conservator Will Shank, [who at] the time was the chief conservator at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and me.

So bringing those two groups together, the community muralists and the professional conservators—is kind of a fascinating challenge because they have very different views of what's going on. The one thing about conservators is that they are absolute masters of paint, chemistry, materials. They know it very deeply and very thoroughly—just wonderful resources.

A lot of muralists think they know a lot of that. But when you get them sort of in the same room comparing notes and so forth, the professionals really understand it much more deeply. It doesn't mean that the muralists don't know enough to be doing a really terrific job. In Los Angeles, for example, in East Los Angeles, Willie Herrón has been conserving murals in East Los for a number of years on a really minimal budget that he gets—sort of got scraps tossed to him by the city programs, but enough for Willie to do the job. And over those years, he's learned a ton about conservation and does very, very, as far as I can see, high-quality work.

But one of the attitudes and the professional code of ethics for the conservators is that you never do anything that can't be reversed. Well, that's fine if you're dealing with paintings that are indoors. It's sheer idiocy when you're talking about outdoor community murals. You want the absolutely most long-lasting materials you can get your hands on, because even those are only going to be good for maybe twenty years. So that's one thing you have to go against. You know, you've got that ethic.

Another one is you're not allowed to change anything. You do not make changes. You reproduce, you work, you repair exactly what's on the wall. That's the meaning of conservation. You conserve what's there. And a super example of that is what they did with *América Tropical*, the Siquieros mural on Olvera Street. It's very faded, but you can make it out and it's not going to get worse anymore. They have conserved what's there and protected it.

But we're not talking about those works. We're talking about mural projects and murals that are part of an ongoing social dynamic in a neighborhood, so it's not just paint on a wall. It's something that's much more dynamic than that.

So, for example, take David Botello, who did a mural at Estrada Courts in Los Angeles called *Dreams of Flight*. It showed different kinds of flying, with Chicano kids doing it. One was an Aztec eagle figure. One was a kid swinging on a tire hung from a tree branch. One was the Endeavor space shuttle.

He painted that in the seventies, and then he went back and restored it on his own dime in 1996. He made two changes. One was the kid swinging on the tire was wearing a baseball cap, and he turned the cap around because people wore them backwards by '96. They wouldn't do that in '76. So he made that change. And he gave one of the kids an earring, which at that point turned the boy into a girl—to say girls can do this as well.

Well, tell that story to conservators—it breaks one of the minimal codes of ethics. And I've had conservators I've spoken with who say, "Yeah, well, that makes perfect sense." I mean, it's kind of alive and still going on, of course, you know. The only problem is deciding who gets to make those decisions about what changes are acceptable. And that turns out to be not much of a problem as long as it's done honestly. So you talk to the people who live with the mural. If they don't have a problem with it, who has any business having a problem with it?

But in San Diego, the Chicano Park Steering Committee, which had painted the original murals under the freeway in Chicano Park, since the murals were started, since they were painted in big numbers in the seventies, by the twenty-first century, a lot of them, most of them, all but one of them had become born-again Christians.

So in repainting and updating those murals, they were turning these classic figures into devils because otherwise they would be "betraying Christ's trust in them". So the famous Olmec head, this skull, they were putting horns on it and things like that. And they were called on it. And under the threat of lawsuit, they finally backed off from it. But those are changes that were not acceptable. And [those were] very volatile discussions.

CC: Wow. I did not know that story.

TD: Oh, it's a classic—just fascinating story.

CC: It is a fascinating story.

TD: So who gets to decide what changes are acceptable? And usually it's just not an issue.

CC: Were the artists around to defend their work from these kinds of changes, or some of them were the artists?

TD: Well some of them were the people who were making the changes.

CC: I see.

TD: And there is that school that says the artist can do whatever the artist wants. They have complete control. But that kind of leaves the community out. That introduces a kind of dynamic, or a nondynamic, that probably wasn't there when these murals were originally being painted.

So Rescue Public Murals tried to set up an organization that—first of all, how do you decide which murals are going to be quote, “saved,” end quote. And Rescue Public Murals set up a system where there were committees of really knowledgeable people from each city—or parts of cities if they had separate mural histories. And together this committee knew the history, knew the sociology, knew the politics, knew the art history. They could relate all the different factors that came into play and, based on their knowledge of all these things, put together a list of which murals should be given the resources for being saved. They also identified sympathetic conservators who would be willing to act as materials experts, not as formal, traditional conservators.

And that got some grants from Heritage Preservation, which had raised \$9 million to restore and conserve statues, public statues in public parks. So that was the hope that we had when we set up RPM. But the finances of the country had changed.

And so one mural—I mean, we did evaluations of maybe fifteen murals in different cities. The evaluations explained what was going on and explained what it would take to get them properly restored. And that isn't the classic conservation in this case. Sometimes it means repainting. I guess in an extreme case, it would mean taking the mural off and repainting it from scratch. That never happened.

There was one mural in New York City called *La Grande Jatte* in Harlem, modeled after Pointillism, Seurat's Pointillism and his [*A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*]. The painting is in the Art Institute of Chicago.

Well, this particular wall was taken and duplicated figures from Seurat's painting but made them Black because the mural was in Harlem, which is just delightful. I mean, it's a marvelous, marvelous thing.

But the wall was not smooth plaster. It had these swaths of—I don't know what to call it—swatches of plaster that were put on. And as the artist for that mural, Eva Cockcroft said, “Well, it's not Pointillist; it's plate-illist because these plaster swaths are the size of dinner plates.”

So at any rate, one benefactor called RPM and said, “Do you have a project?” and had certain qualifications for it. Just because they knew somebody in RPM; that's what enabled it to happen. And so that mural was restored beautifully. It's a spectacular piece of work by all.

Eva had passed away, so she couldn't be even consulted on this. But people who had worked with Eva did it with the full participation of conservator Harriet Irgang [Alden] in New York City and Janet Braun-Reinitz did the painting. And it was a wonderful project.

And so it can be done. But the question is who's going to pay to save these murals? And the answer is they may be important, people may love them, but the funding just isn't there except on very limited, scattered basis.

CC: So many directions to possibly go here, but maybe actually just taking for a moment Eva Cockcroft, who was also really important in documenting murals.

TD: Yes.

CC: And I guess she's another person I'll never meet. So I'm wondering about her, like what was working with her like or knowing her?

TD: Oh, it was, it was wonderful. Eva was just terrific on all accounts. Again, she led, founded, one of the founding members—she and Joe Stephenson founded a group called Artmakers. And there's a whole history of that, how that came out of the City Arts Workshop in the Lower East Side of New York City in the early seventies and so forth.

Eva was an inveterate photographer and whenever she traveled she photographed murals wherever she went. So she ended up with hundreds, hundreds of murals—well, thousands—of mural slides. I know that because on her death they were given to me. So I've got all Eva's mural slides. And they were not organized at all. It was horrible. I spent weeks. But it's wonderful to have the images.

And she wrote a lot. She was one of the people who wrote about community murals and indeed about art. In—what was it? In 1974 that she wrote an article in *Art in America* on the Museum of Modern Art's role in the Cold War and using Abstract Expressionist art as a tool against the Soviets. Well, I mean, it's a very, very important article. Peter Selz, who was a curator at the Museum of Modern Art at that time—Peter now lives in Berkeley, I've talked with Peter about that, and he says, "No, it wasn't like that at all." So you can get two different views of that story too, if you want. But Eva wrote, traveled, painted, participated. She was great fun to be with.

She got breast cancer and she was going in for surgery. And she took magic markers and circled one breast and wrote on her own chest, "Not this one." And then around the other one, she circled it as a target and had an arrow pointing to it and wrote on her chest, "This one." What a wonderful sense of humor.

CC: Right. Just making sure.

TD: And she called that art project something like *The Busy Doctor's Helper Project*.

CC: So she literally thought of it as a kind of art project.

TD: She could make art of anything.

CC: Yes, I get it.

TD: Eva was great to work with. And Eva was one of the wonderful people to talk with on the telephone because you just have the conversations and the discussions about the murals and the muralists and not only just share gossip but—mostly and much more importantly—talking about the nature of murals and restoration and all.

So, yeah, she was fun. She had four sons, one of whom lives here in Berkeley, and they're friends. And his name is Peter. Peter Cockcroft. And Peter fell in love with a Chinese American woman named Yali Lin. So their official formal legal name is Lincroft—Peter and Yali Lincroft.

CC: They joined it up.

TD: Isn't that wonderful?

CC: That is wonderful. I still have several questions for you. But before I go in, just to take a moment, when you were talking about paint and I was thinking about the technology of paint and the importance of Politec in the San Francisco Bay Area. But also, and I guess, connected with preservation, different knowledge of glazing or different knowledge of trying to protect the murals, but also maybe are there any I guess, stories about the learning curve with the technology of paint or the technology of glazing? Or also the issue of protecting murals from graffiti vandals, particular murals that had become extremely controversial? We talked, I guess, a little bit about that the other day.

TD: Murals sometimes get attacked for political reasons. Attacks seem to always come from the right wing, which seems to believe that if you don't like something, the proper thing to do is to destroy it. There's a lot of that going around. More technically, yes, there is definitely a learning curve about which paints work best and why.

In Los Angeles, people worked with Nova Color. It was the paint of choice. On the East Coast, one of the popular paints was Golden Artist Colors. And Mark Golden has been a wonderful supporter of mural movements and understands the paint chemistry and is always available for consultation. So very supportive, but also needs to make a business.

One of the things that *Community Murals magazine* had was a column by a guy named Bill Meadows, who was a retired paint chemist. And he wrote these columns explaining different aspects of paint chemistry for the community muralists. That was quite wonderful.

And there's a story—you find people, it's very interesting, defending their choice of what paint they're using on very different grounds. They always say, "Well, this is better than anything else." But the reality is this is available and the others aren't. I can go down to the store and get more of this color if I run out. I can't do that if I'm using this paint that's made someplace else across the country.

Politec, for example, hasn't been available in the US for a couple, three decades at least. But as a mark of the paint chemistry, the level of knowledge that is useful, there was a mural

painted in a housing project, part of the mural—I'm not naming names here, which is why I'm being cautious. But part of the mural was painted with red paint. And after a few years, the red paint had faded and the inhabitants of the building on which the mural was painted really liked it. And with all the best intentions, went out and they were going to repaint the mural, or at least the red parts that had faded most.

They even went to the trouble of finding out what brand paints were used. And so they used the same brand of paint, put it up, and it faded very quickly. And they said, "My word, what went wrong?" Well, as it turns out, the chief chemist, quality control officer, head of the paint company, went through a rough patch in his marriage, was distracted to put it mildly, was falling in love, the whole rigmarole, and the quality care of the paints deteriorated. And it just happened to be during the time when the residents bought the replacement reds and they just weren't up to snuff. [*laughs*]

So archiving and documenting is potentially infinite. You can never find out everything you need to know. I once talked to a conservator and sort of proudly said, "Well, I always make a mental note of roughly what direction the wall faces so that I can assess the damage of ultraviolet light." And he sort of looked at me condescendingly and said, "I take a compass, which I place against the wall itself, take a direct compass reading. And when I combine that with the latitude, basically the GPS point, I can run that through a NASA database and find out how many hours that wall has been exposed to sunlight, making allowances for clouds and eclipses and things like that."

And I thought, Well, you put me in my place. [*laughs*]

CC: Seriously. Oh, my God.

TD: But see, that's the difference between conservators who do things at that level of technical precision and bozos like me, who just sort of take account of roughly which way the wall faces. I'm sorry, how did we get—oh, we're talking about paints.

CC: That's fascinating, though.

TD: The level of vituperation about some conservators is just—to me it seems irrational. And people talk about some conservators as though they are the devil incarnate. You know—that the planet is clearly a worse off place because these conservators walk around on it and so forth. Other people are much more generous.

So some of the murals are being saved. But the ultimate decision, the primary decision about which murals get saved, probably has to do more with gentrification than anything else. The two largest single destroyers of murals are gentrification, speaking nationally here, gentrification—which means that buildings with murals on them get torn down so that new buildings can be built—and school administrators, because there are lots and lots of mural projects in schools and a new dean will come in or a new provost or something will come in, and they want to make their mark. They want to show that they're tough and that they're in charge. And one of the first things they do is order the murals obliterated.

So there are hundreds of school murals—[at] colleges, junior colleges, state colleges—that have been destroyed on that basis.

CC: That's fascinating. I don't think I've really seen that as a phenomenon.

TD: Well, check it out. Now that you file it away.

CC: Right. I will.

TD: If you find examples, let me know. And if you find out that I'm wrong, let me know.

CC: OK.

TD: Probably. I mean so that's, you know, the destruction. And of course, there's always the police attacks. Openly or not, you've got to have the permission of the police, because at least in some places—Chicago is one—if you paint something that the police don't like, that mural will be, quote, “vandalized” almost instantly.

CC: Is there a particular example that comes to mind for that?

TD: Yes, the example is in New York, but it's typical. New York did a silhouette mural. This is early, early. This may be as early as '71 or '72, on the Alfred E. Smith housing project—the Smith, as it's known.

And they did a silhouette mural. And in the upper left-hand corner, there was a drug deal. One person was handing something to the other, but the other was a policeman, which you could tell clearly because his billy club was silhouetted in the mural. And within a very short space of time, the police made it known to the muralist that that was not something they wanted to see on those walls. And it was repainted without the billy club. So there was no policeman involved in that deal.

CC: The artist repainted it?

TD: The artists repainted it. They were leaned on. So there's one example.

CC: OK. That's interesting. I have to think about that. I have to think about if there have been any similar instances in San Francisco.

TD: I can't think of any police instances in San Francisco.

CC: I can't either, but this is—yeah, I don't know.

TD: Yeah. John Weber knows of several things—instances in Chicago.

CC: Really?

TD: He would be the guy to talk to about that.

CC: Right. So, let's see. I mean I feel like we've actually been leading up to or sort of talking about your more recent work, definitely with the Rescue Public Murals. But you've just produced this incredible book of murals about Los Angeles, right? And so did the San Francisco murals book become a springboard for this kind of other work, or how did you keep evolving towards this end?

TD: A number of things combined. The ongoing interest in murals, taking them seriously. Most people who write about murals don't think of them at all as murals. They don't think about the mural medium itself, but they simply see pictures and they talk about those pictures in terms of whatever their particular interest is. Is this mural about Indigenous culture? Is this mural about feminism? Is this mural about academic, really intellectual categories?

And we're going to see more and more of that by a younger generation of scholars trained to be theorists, and they will talk about the murals as related to various intellectual critical theories.

That wasn't my interest. My initial interest was the politics, because I was interested in the relationship between art and politics, and that has to do, of course, with how they affect people's lives. What is it in the mural medium or a particular example of it that is effective that does have some power to it?

So that was the interest. And it grew out of, as I said before, it grew out of my interest, my academic interest in William Blake. Then I ended up in Chicago, discovered that muralists were dealing with art and politics at the same time.

And [it was] much more political in the early days of the movement. And certainly by 1980, when Ronald Reagan became president, mural imagery became much tamer, much less incisive, much less—fewer images of oppositions bashing together and a lot more multicultural handshakes instead of what might earlier have been murals about racism.

Now, I don't think multicultural handshakes are a bad thing. I'm not coming out against sisterhood and brotherhood. I think those are good things, and they are positive images for young people to grow up with and for older people to be reminded of. But the question is what is not being painted? And that starts being asked really importantly, I'd say, around 1980.

So here we are in—well, we've got Balmy Alley. It was a project. *Community Murals magazine* was a project to the end of 1987. And I was at a convention, a conference of the Modern Art Association—no, College Art Association, CAA. And I was talking with Holly Barnet-Sánchez, who also paid some attention to murals and is a scholar of Latin American art and society.

We got to talking about murals and realized that a group of murals in Los Angeles at Estrada Courts functioned in a very special way and that some of their meanings grew out of material things, like not only the shape of the wall and the architecture they were on but the direction that the mural faced. What's on the back of a building? If a mural called *Give Me Life* is on the front of the building, you walk around to the back and you find a mural that effectively—it's called the *Sacrifice Wall*, but effectively it's *Give Me Death*.

And so it's going past those two murals that you have to do when you live in the projects. And that's always a question in the projects and so on and so forth. And so Holly and I decided, you know, you want to write an article about these murals at Estrada Courts? Yes, that sounds like a fun thing to do.

Well, one thing led to another. And as we studied more and more about the murals at Estrada Courts, we studied more and more about the other murals in East Los. When we started writing about these things, we realized that we had no reason at all to stop with just Estrada Courts. Let's look at all the murals in East Los. And so that's what we did. That was the generation of that project, and that's what it was based on.

CC: How did you divvy up the writing?

TD: How did we divvy up the writing? You know, it went back and forth. Whoever started it—it went back and forth so many times that it wasn't really divvied up. Finally, both of us wrote everything. It was a nice collaboration in that sense. It was terrific.

CC: Had you collaborated with someone as a writer like that before?

TD: No. But I did believe in working collectively. I think that's an important model to be out there. And certainly *Community Murals magazine* was a collective effort. I mean, I might have been a kind of coordinator, but there were coeditors to it. There was never a single editor taking credit for any of that.

So I believed in that in principle and worked with her on that. And in the course of that time, I worked on a book with Lincoln Cushing about American labor posters. And we did the research on that jointly and ended up with a thousand Xeroxes, color Xeroxes, of a thousand labor posters. We sat in this very room. And we sat there and we took one and said, "OK, this is about this aspect. This is about women in labor. This is about martyrs, or this one is about exploitation."

Then we looked at the next image, and we did that. We just sat here in this room and divided the murals up that way. And when we got through all the images we had, we had our chapters stacked up on the floor. They just organized thematically—just all by themselves.

CC: That's fascinating.

TD: Yeah. And each stack became the basis of a chapter.

CC: I love that method.

TD: It worked quite wonderfully well. And then we sat here and talked about it, and Lincoln talked, for example. And I talked and I took notes and then wrote out a draft, and Lincoln corrected it and edited it and changed it and so forth. And we did that back and forth until we were satisfied. And that was kind of also the model that Holly and I used.

CC: And you kept every one of those images in the book, or did you leave any out with your thousand color Xeroxes?

TD: Oh, no, it doesn't have a thousand.

CC: Right. It doesn't, does it?

TD: No, we had to exclude some. That was just way too many. So we excluded what fit less well. The way we went about it is we took the ones that made the most sense, that were the most powerful, the ones that would be most interesting to general readers. And that's what got included.

CC: Interesting.

TD: Yes. In the course of that process, I was introduced to Max Marmor, who was the head of Artstor at the time. And Artstor offered to have me put *Community Murals* into their library. Artstor is a digital art history library, and it's available to museums and libraries and universities. It's expensive. It seems like an individual—and I don't know what the figures are, but let's just say if it costs \$20,000 a year to be a member of Artstor for a university, that may seem like a lot of money, but think it means you don't have to hire three or four art historians or slide experts. So in fact, it's very, very financially effective for a school or museum. They save a lot of money working with these digital images.

I ended up putting into Artstor about seven thousand community mural images. Part of the motivation for that was my awareness that if my garage burns down, the loss would be—I kid myself to think that it would be significant because I've got not just my mural images but [slides] that other people have sent me over the years.

I've got, I don't know, forty or fifty thousand mural slides. Some are dupes. It's not fifty thousand different murals, but it's thousands. And the fact that Artstor now has the heart of that collection means that if there's a big fire—and there are fires in this part of the East Bay—if there's a fire or something like that, the images aren't lost. They're available to scholars and students and interested parties.

And that was that project—not only—they duplicated the slides, Artstor. And then I had to do the archiving.

CC: For seven thousand slides.

TD: For seven thousand slides identifying place, artists, publications that mentioned it. I'm proud of that work. It's pretty, not completely, thorough. It's not 100 percent accurate, but it's really very nice. And I consulted throughout the whole thing with professional slide librarians, electronic technologists, and so forth. So we tried to do it right.

And I got a phone call a couple of years ago from Artstor and they said, "Just wanted to let you know that last year your collection in the Artstor library had something like, I don't know, eight thousand or eighty thousand hits." And I thought, that's wonderful. That's exactly the usefulness. That's how these images should be used.

People can't get out to see the murals or don't want to go into those neighborhoods, but they can see the imagery. It's not a perfect system, but it's really useful.

CC: Oh, it's incredibly useful. I've used it myself.

TD: Good, good.

CC: It's very helpful.

TD: So that's the Artstor story. And I cataloged mural slide images for three hours, four hours a day for a couple of years to get through those.

CC: So it leads me to ask, what didn't they get with those forty or fifty thousand slides?

TD: Oh, nothing of real importance. I mean, a couple of things I missed going through the collection, but nothing comes to mind. Except that was done in whatever it was, the year, and nothing since. So there are more recent works that haven't found their way into that collection yet. Somebody else will come along, or multiple people will come along, or the legal atmosphere will shift and the threat of being sued will diminish. No more "You used my image without proper permission."

At one point, I was told by a lawyer for Artstor or an administrator at Artstor that they couldn't, that I was welcome to do more images now, but that the basic thing was to identify the title of the mural, who painted it, where was it located, what kind of paint and so forth and so on. It doesn't make references to anything famous like the Sistine ceiling or something like that.

But they said now, [with] litigation being so prevalent, you've got to get a release form signed by anybody who's in the picture. So if Chuy Campusano is standing in front of one of his murals, I'd have to get Chuy's permission to put that in the collection. I don't know. Chuy has passed away. He has heirs. That's where you'd have to go. It's enormously time consuming.

But that wasn't the end of it. Also, anybody else that may be in the picture. So if I took a picture of a mural with, let's say, a sixth grade class of kids walking by—it could be a fun picture of kids in front of a mural—I would be legally required to find out the names of all

those kids and get permissions from them, sometimes thirty, forty years after the fact. Needless to say, I didn't pursue anymore. I mean, it just sounds insane to me.

CC: That does sound over the top. What about the actual murals themselves, did they say—because, I mean, if they're pushing about the people, I'm wondering what concerns were radiating from actually. They are your photographs, but they're photographs of other artists' work.

TD: You have to get permission from the photographer or whoever owns the slide image, for example. And you'd have to give permission from the artist.

CC: Right. And because Artstor is simply presenting the work, not offering.

TD: Yeah, then it's an educational [use], so I'm pretty sure they're safe under fair use.

CC: But have you had a lot of people reaching out to you for publishing?

TD: What happens is that every now and then I'll be contacted if somebody does want to use one of the images. And that's exactly how the system should work. They're trolling through Artstor and they find this mural image that they want to use and they see who owns the image.

And in most cases, that's going to be me. And so they contact Artstor. Artstor gets in touch with me or asks them to get in touch with me, and we work it out. And that happens a few times a year. Yeah. I don't know the number of times it's not followed through with properly.

I think the art deserves, for a variety of reasons, deserves to be accurately documented and have accurate information available about it. It seems to me a bit of a contradiction to talk about making money from community murals because they're painted—certainly in the early days—they were painted with a kind of group mindset [that] this isn't a commercial enterprise. This is a community-based enterprise where we're talking about the issues and ideas and thoughts and aspirations and problems that people in a community share.

And to make that a profit-making enterprise seems a bit of a contradiction. Paint a community mural and then immediately copyright it and hire a lawyer to protect it? I understand why it's done, certainly. But speaking for myself, my goal is to make accurate information as available as possible.

And yeah, I've been paid money for use of some of the images by corporations. I remember going back and forth with Toyota Motor Corporation. I mean it took weeks and weeks and weeks because they have whole departments that deal with these kinds of permissions and so forth. And I didn't. And they were giving me forms to fill out and finally pulled in three hundred bucks or something for use of this image, [of one of Eva Cockroft's murals in Long Beach]. And I sent the money to her sons. It wasn't for me to make money off that. So there are some contradictions floating through the game.

CC: Well, it is—you're pointing at a kind of transformation of murals, and I was thinking about it as you were talking about one of the I think it was the handshake. What was it? The multiethnic handshake?

TD: Multicultural handshake.

CC: Multicultural handshake. And that not only have those kinds of politics or the finances potentially changed, but also the co-opting of murals, right, the actual hiring of murals that are specifically more placating or not political at all—simply pretty, but without a lot of the sting that I think was also initially—

TD: Of course, they're political too, in a different way.

CC: They are.

TD: So in that sense, everything's political. The question is, what are the politics? How does it relate to the dominant forces in society?

But some are talking about—like I said, a good example, I think, is murals that in the early seventies might have been about racism, by the late eighties are about racial pride. And as I say, that's not a bad thing. I'm not coming out against that kind of awareness. There are questions to be raised about identity politics, to be sure. I think that's basically a positive thing, but it's what's not being painted any longer.

CC: Well, one of the other things that is also happening as murals or muralism is developing are new laws that come into effect.

TD: Ah, yes.

CC: Right. Which is also quite interesting. So the visual arts—is it rights law?

TD: Well, there's two— there's a federal act and a California act.

CC: Right, exactly. Did you pay attention to when these laws were passing?

TD: Legal protections.

CC: About VARA [Visual Artists Rights Act of 1990]?

TD: Well On the face of it would seem like a good thing, that it protects the interests of the artist. It's not that simple. Because of VARA, if you have a building that has a mural on it and you want to sell that building and a new owner may not have the same interest in that mural as you did, your title to the building is encumbered.

You can't just do it because the new owner doesn't want the mural there and can't do anything about it because of the Visual [Artists] Rights Act. So that's complex. Those are two different interests at loggerheads, and that's difficult to resolve.

CC: Is there a case that you have in mind when you—?

TD: I've had phone calls from people, owners, and building owners in precisely that situation, yes.

CC: New building owners that have come in?

TD: Yes.

CC: That don't know how to respond?

TD: Well, they come in and they say, I bought this building. It's got a mural on it, but it used to be—I don't know—a dog and cat hospital and had dogs and cats on it. And I don't want that on the side of my building because of whatever it is that I'm using it for. And I find that I can't get rid of that mural.

And then, of course, as the murals fade, they become eyesores because they're not being maintained. And so that's an enormous expense that very few new building owners would want to undertake.

I was asked, hmm, last year maybe, by a developer in San Francisco. [The developer] had a client who owned a building—[it] was a laundromat and had a mural on the side of it in the Mission District, no less. And the developer wanted to hire me to evaluate that mural.

And I don't know this, but I think they wanted to know if they were going to run into trouble if they got rid of it, if they destroyed it, because they wanted to tear the laundromat down and build condos. And was there anything to be concerned about?

And I can understand how somebody not from that neighborhood would think that the mural in question was not particularly important. But when I looked at the mural, it's an almost perfect example of how murals can interact with their community and can represent different interests. And it used the—it understood the scale of the street it was on and the size of the images and so forth. It's really quite wonderful in every way. So that's what my evaluation said. I haven't heard back from them, so I don't know what they did with it.

I think the way they could deal with that is to have a meeting with the muralist and make an offer—say, "Look, we own these buildings. There's this wall. We'll give you this wall and so much money to paint any mural you want on it. But the deal is that we remove the other one and see if the muralist would go for that and not raise an issue about it." I don't know if that ever happened. I don't know what's going on with it.

CC: Interesting.

TD: Yeah, it is. There's another thing about the law, the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution.

CC: OK.

TD: [*/laughs*] Equal rights. And it expressly forbids government monies being spent to promote individual religions or specific interests. Which means that it's illegal for government monies to be used to support community murals talking about, say, Black pride or something like that, or that have religious images in them.

CC: Specifically for religious images.

TD: Well, that would be a leading obvious example with a long legal history.

CC: Right.

TD: But one could argue constitutionally that a mural promoting Black identity is unconstitutional.

CC: Well, are we seeing much funding—government funding—for murals?

TD: Not anymore. But there was certainly.

CC: There was CETA [the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act], right?

TD: CETA wasn't—it depends where you were. But it wasn't directly for murals. They were funding artists. And the artists usually had jobs where they were training kids. That was their CETA job. That was their day job. That's what CETA paid them for.

But that gave them an income and financial basis allowing them to paint murals. So it wasn't direct, I think, in most cases—certainly not in San Francisco.

CC: But otherwise, I don't think we see it that much.

TD: It's very indirect. I mean—think about that. The government would give money to the, I don't know.

CC: To the organization.

TD: It would give a grant to whatever the intermediate body is, which would then pick out organizations. The organizations would then work with specific muralists. I mean, we're three or four steps, degrees, of separation from that.

CC: Though it does remind me of all the controversies in the 1980s over NEA funding.

TD: This was not one of them as far as I know.

CC: No.

TD: But it might well have been if anybody had thought of it.

TD: It's just that I mean, I am not attracted, not particularly interested in legalities and things like that, so I haven't pursued much of this, but I bump into it.

CC: Right. Did you pay attention at all to some of the whitewashing of the Galería billboard murals that took place not too long ago?

TD: No.

CC: They had a queer billboard in particular.

TD: Oh. And it got vandalized. Yeah, I knew about that. Well, I think the Galería billboard—I mean, there's a story in itself.

CC: I actually had that on my list to talk to you about.

TD: They had called the billboard company for months and months, if not years, trying to talk to them to give permission so that they could use that space. They couldn't get through.

And one day a team of billboard people from the company came out and started taking the billboard down. And I think it might have been Ralph or René walked out from the Galería and said, "What are you doing?" And they said, "Well, we're with the billboard company. We don't want to use the space anymore. So we're tearing it down." And René said something like, "What are you going to do with it?" "So we're going to take it off to the dump, trash it. We can't use it again." And René said, "We'll do it for you. We'll take care of it. We'll throw it away for you."

And they said fine. So they took it off the wall and just left it stacked up there and drove off, at which point people came out, local people came out, put the billboard back up and started using it for rotating artworks. And that's been the story ever since.

At that point, the billboard company got back in touch with them and so forth. But that was the legal, I think, moment where the billboard changed controlling hands from the company to the community.

CC: Right. And I think maybe it was René who told me that part of their dislike of the billboard ads was like the focus on tobacco and alcohol that typically was appearing there.

TD: [the Galería put up] billboards talking about good nutrition and keeping your community clean. So very much community service things, very positive—to celebrate local cultures.

The first billboard was *Tin Tan*, which was an arts magazine, a Chicano arts magazine. And then they did one, *Salsa Ahora*, you know, celebrating the salsa dance. It's quite a rich history.

You know that René passed away a few weeks ago.

CC: Yes, I am very aware. I'm very aware. And there's a memorial coming up. Would you be planning to attend or?

TD: It depends where it is. I mean, physically, it's a real challenge for me to do things like that.

CC: Is there anything, I mean, I guess when you were describing René and saying how he could be so funny or if there's any particular sort of memories of René that you would care to share.

TD: Oh, that would take some thought, thinking about that, yeah.

CC: OK.

TD: Yeah. I mean, it's one of those things where I really very much like to do it, but I know every time I leave the house—never thought of myself as being disabled, but functionally, that's what's happening. So that's why it's really nice that you can come here.

CC: Yes, my pleasure. It's such a delight.

TD: OK. You wanted to talk about *Lili Ann* too.

CC: I did, yeah. If there's anything—we did talk a little bit about it.

TD: We did talk a little bit about it.

CC: I think there was one thing you said that you had, maybe it was a slide of a performance or something.

TD: Well, I was going to ask you if you wanted we could go look for that.

CC: Oh, OK, definitely. How about before we do that and maybe sort of—really, I think one of the last topics that I have, which is relating to René. So maybe that's appropriate, is talking about the *In Progress Exhibit*, which he curated, if I'm correct. But then you wrote some of the exhibition catalogue.

TD: Yes.

CC: Or your photographs are in there.

TD: He asked me to write the catalogue. Yeah, that's what I did.

CC: And you took the photos of the artists, didn't you?

TD: Most of them.

CC: Which I love. I love those photos of them. They're so young.

TD: Oh, they do too, for exactly that same reason. "Oh, I used to look like that?"

I didn't take the cover photograph, but, yeah, there are a lot of fun things about that. The idea was that the artists would paint in the Galería so that passersby could just walk by and walk in and talk to the artists while they were painting. Well, that wasn't that big a deal for most of the artists who had painted murals—they were used to having that kind of street corner conversation be part of their process. But it was pretty exciting for a lot of the people, a lot of residents and folks just walking by, getting that opportunity. But there are more stories than that.

One in particular that I remember is that [about] Daniel Galvez, who is a photorealist. That's the style he paints in. And he was going to do one panel, and it was going to be a vertical panel. So it's masonite. So it's four feet by eight feet. Although [it should be] eight feet by four feet. You put the height first. So eight feet by four feet. And everybody's looking forward to watching how Daniel works out these detailed, super-detailed, photorealistic paintings.

He came in one day and sort of very generally sketched out Estrella, this young Chicana that he was going to paint. I think that's the one he did. And people thought, Oh, great, now I know I can come back. And people who noticed that showed up, some of them at the end of the next day. I don't know, say that was a Tuesday. They showed up Wednesday afternoon after they got off work, and he was done. He was blindingly fast. And they never got to see him paint on it at all. He just went in and painted this gorgeous thing, and that was it. *[laughs]* "Damn. Didn't get to see that at all." So I remember people dazzled but unhappily so by the speed with which Daniel painted.

CC: Right. We should have had video of him painting.

TD: You'd have to use slow motion, apparently.

Then that's another direction you could go talking about Galvez and the commissions that he's done, one of which was the Malcolm X memorial in New York City. And he was commissioned to paint a mural about the life of Malcolm X.

He did the design on a very long maybe—I don't know. I want to say ninety feet long and eight feet high or something. It's very big. And he did that on a piece of paper. And he rolled it up and took it off to a meeting of the committee in New York.

And as he tells the story, he gets there and he unrolls it, and people are standing around looking at it and thinking, “Oh, this is gorgeous. It really is gorgeous.” And in different moments in Malcolm’s life, you know, the fire hoses and attack dogs in Birmingham, Alabama, and his trip to Mecca and [him] wearing the yellow Muslim robe and so forth.

And finally, Betty Shabazz, Malcolm’s widow, stands back and says, “Where are the white people?” And everybody says, “Huh?” She said, “Malcolm wasn’t just about Black people; he was about everybody.”

So Galvez comes home, picks up the phone and calls me, and he says, “Drescher, I need a blue-eyed devil.” [*laughs*] Which is, of course, the Black nationalist Black power term and so forth.

CC: Did he put one in?

TD: Well, I wasn’t the only one. I mean, he made that call to several people he knew. We’re part of the large crowd. We’re also in monochrome. So it would be hard to find us. And if you found us, it would be hard to make it out.

The irony is that, I got to be in a mural about Malcolm X. And the memorial didn’t open for years and years. I think it’s open to the public now, but it certainly wasn’t for a long time.

TD: But you have a friendship with Daniel?

TD: Yeah, sure.

CC: I mean, he’s a talented painter, but he’s one that I haven’t had a chance to write about or do a lot of research on.

TD: Well, if you want a connection, I can make a call.

CC: OK. Not just yet, but I do like his work a lot, so it’s nice to know.

TD: He’s gotten a lot of really—he’s made his living doing these big commissions, things like in federal office buildings in DC and stuff like that. So really pretty big-time stuff.

And he’s done a number of murals jointly with Jos Sances, who worked as his assistant in the Malcolm X mural. So you find that these same people do keep coming back around into the game. Everybody knows everybody else. And for the most part, there’s a lot of respect, not much competition. The ill feelings, very little, I’d say. Not that everybody’s really close bosom buddies, but not too much open antagonism, hostilities. I mean, [there’s] some of that.

CC: Right. One thing I think I’m not sure if it was in your book or another book, but I was always intrigued by how Daniel used a projector—I think it was for the House of Brakes mural.

TD: Uh-huh.

CC: So, I mean, it was such a strikingly different tack for creating a mural.

TD: Just project onto the wall and draw the lines.

CC: Right.

TD: Well, that wasn't—he didn't invent that.

CC: No, I know. He's just one of the few that comes to mind when I think of that technique.

TD: We did for the mural sculpture, the ILWU [International Longshore and Warehouse Union] mural sculpture had these big metal, big structural steel, sections. It was three sections.

CC: That was for the longshoremen.

TD: Yeah.

CC: Is that right? The one downtown that I'm thinking of?

TD: Yes.

CC: OK.

TD: The *ILWU Mural-Sculpture*. And the first thing we did was prepare the surface and basically gessoed it and so forth. But you're dealing in painting on structural steel. Nobody had much experience with that—like none.

And then, OK, we've got to put the design, got to put the sketch up. How do we do that? And the traditional way would have been to grid the surface and then take a scale sketch and transfer a one-inch square to a one-foot square on the mural. But [in this case] the mural was shaped, and that wasn't going to work. So we projected onto the steel.

So we went out at night. So we were inside a big warehouse in one of the piers, Pier 80 or 82 in San Francisco, and projected it at night. And then you know, you project it. And once you got it registered so that everything fit properly, then anybody could just stand there with a Sharpie, which is what we did. There'd be three or four or five of us working at the same time, just tracing the lines with a Sharpie.

And when you turn the projector off, you have the outline of the mural that you had already designed to scale. And then you just had to kind of paint by numbers, fill in the spaces that are defined by the Sharpie, by the sketch.

CC: Who decided on the actual design of the sculpture or how the sculpture was going to look?

TD: That was designed by—there were twelve of us in the project. [*grow/s*] Well, there are some members of that project who still won't talk to each other. That's how deep those divisions went. And there were some—

CC: So this was a rough project in terms of collaboration.

TD: Oh, very. Oh, very, yeah. But the actual design, we got together and some things had happened. So we knew we had the commission. And we got together to decide to start designing the thing. And the idea was, OK, next week, next meeting, everybody bring what their ideas are.

And out of those twelve people, ten people either came with nothing or just came and said, "Well, we'll build a wall." We had the location too, and there was nothing. It was down by the Muni bus turnaround, where the Union Hotel is now.

And ten of the twelve people came in with either nothing or just say[ing], "Well, we'll build a wall." And then they'd paint on the wall. And I found that interesting, that the lack of creativity given you could do anything you wanted to. But two people came in with sculptural ideas. And one of those ideas was to kind of put the shape of a ship up as a kind of sculptural base and then paint narrative history of the union and the area on the steel. And that's what finally happened. But what shape?

What started out as the prow of a ship was taken a little bit—and one of the dozen of us, Lari Kilolani, was a sculptor, and he's the guy that designed the shape of it. Everybody said, "OK, we'll go from here."

And some of the lines, some of the shapes of the steel, corresponded well enough with, in one case, a ship's prow and so forth. So you could make do with—it wasn't that the steel was shaped to fit a particular design, but the design utilizing elements that the union came into contact with, like ships and loads that they would haul by crane and so forth. There were enough of those so that the shapes of the steel that Lari had kind of done abstractly could be made to work and were made to work for the content. Does that make sense?

CC: I think so, yeah. I've been curious, and I didn't know where that shape came from. It's hard for me to recognize. I wouldn't have necessarily. I mean, now it makes sense, actually.

And then I was curious because I did see that there was a lot of people listed as creating the work. So then that meeting, or maybe after it was formed, was when you also decided what to paint and where? Or how did the—who decided what got painted?

TD: That it was going to be about the ILWU was a given from the beginning. ILWU Mural Sculpture

CC: Right. And the commission came from?

TD: The union. But the union had clout with the city so they could get funding from the city in a way that a bunch of independent community muralists couldn't. I remember getting paid for that project after—what was it—two or in some cases, three years of work. I made \$2,000. *[laughs]*

So basically what happened was that I called every muralist in the area, invited them, and maybe fifteen or twenty showed up to the initial meeting to talk about it. And of those, twelve kind of stuck it out.

CC: Were you the one communicating with the union?

TD: Well, that was interesting. It wasn't me in particular, but one of us, unbeknownst to the rest of us, was meeting separately with the union. You can imagine. I mean, I find that completely underhanded.

The union needed some source that they could have confidence in because they didn't really know what they were doing and they knew that they didn't know what they were doing. So they picked one of the muralists who they thought had enough of a proven track record that they could rely [on]. But still, you know, back alley, under-the-table discussions in the project that at least some of us conceived of as a collective project. That was not appreciated.

CC: Right. And was that found out during the time that you were actually painting or not till afterwards?

TD: I didn't find out about it until afterwards.

CC: I see.

TD: We had the meeting and said, "OK, what are we going to do?" And we had the meeting to decide, OK, sculpture, and we talked about the narrative. And then people brought in sketches of ideas they had of things to go into the mural.

And those, the content of those, grew out of discussions with the union—you know, what's important to you. And, of course, in San Francisco [it] was the big strike of 1934. And one of the big moments in that strike was when the police murdered two of the strikers. They just shot them in the back as they came out of their lunch hall at 1:20 in the afternoon, right where the mural is located.

CC: I did not know that.

TD: Well, they were shot across the street from [where the sculpture is], literally across the street from it. And I thought that one of the interesting things would be to take the shadow cast by the mural sculpture at 1:20 on July 5—which is when the guys were shot—take the shadow and trace that out and have that be the plaza, the plinth, on which the mural

sculpture was erected. But I could never get any support for that. I just wanted to invoke the solar system.

CC: Right. And so it's across the street from where they were shot. Or it is the site where they were?

TD: It's across the street. They were shot in front of what is the Boulevard Restaurant now.

CC: OK. Oh, right. OK.

TD: I've never eaten there. It looks like good eats.

CC: Is it still there? I'm not sure.

TD: I think it probably is. Anyhow.

CC: Yeah, it does look nice.

TD: For sure.

So then the different vignettes that came out of those discussions with the union were sort of decided on. And then two of the dozen of us sat down and drew the actual design for the mural. And the reason for that was so that it [would] be consistent, the design [would] be consistent. You don't want twelve hands doing that level [of] design. And it was designed the way it was so that different people with different skills could paint on it and the mural wouldn't look that way. It would all look consistent.

And the design, the style, was patterned after Anton Refregier's murals catty-corner across [from the site] at Rincon—what was then the Rincon post office.

CC: So you guys were thinking about that.

TD: Oh, that was very conscious. Although when it came time to do the actual painting, some artists' egos got in the way of following what the group had agreed to do. And they would do their own style, and somebody else would have to go in after them and correct that style into the style that the group had agreed on.

So it's not a group mural done by a group with special stylistic additions by Smith or Jones or Thompson or something like that. It's pretty coherent, I think, collectively.

CC: Yeah. It interests me as a project and just as a shape. And the painting itself.

TD: Well, the original motivation was that the Democratic National Convention was held in San Francisco in 1984. And the idea was to get something big about celebrating labor to be seen by that convention.

CC: I see. OK. I think I have asked you [about] and found out many wonderful things, and I know I still have questions, but I think we're at a good stopping point. And so this has been fascinating. Thank you for sharing, especially that story about that last sculpture. I've always been curious about it.

TD: Well, there's more to it than that. The genesis was three people getting together and saying let's do this, let's go to the union and see if they'll support it—three people together. And part of that discussion amongst the three people was “OK, let's agree that we're going to say it was three people, that no one of us is going to say they did it individually.” And we all agreed on that.