



CSRC
ORAL HISTORIES SERIES

NO. 5, NOVEMBER 2013

CHARLES “CHAZ” BOJÓRQUEZ

INTERVIEWED BY KAREN MARY DAVALOS

ON SEPTEMBER 25, 27, AND 28,

AND OCTOBER 2, 2007

Charles “Chaz” Bojórquez is a resident of Los Angeles. He grew up in East Los Angeles, where he developed his distinctive graffiti style. He received formal art training at Guadalajara University of Art in Mexico and California State University and Chouinard Art Institute in Los Angeles. Before devoting his time to painting, he worked as a commercial artist in the film and advertising industries. His work is represented in major private collections and museums, including the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, and the De Young Museum in San Francisco.

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

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

Preferred citation: Charles “Chaz” Bojórquez, interview with Karen Davalos, September 25, 27, and 28, and October 2, 2007, Los Angeles, California. CSRC Oral Histories Series, no. 5. Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2013.

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THE CSRC ORAL HISTORIES SERIES

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

CSRC ORAL HISTORY SERIES PROJECTS

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

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

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

ARTISTS INTERVIEWED FOR THE L.A. XICANO PROJECT

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

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SEPTEMBER 25, 2007

Karen Davalos: This is Karen Davalos with Chaz Bojórquez, and today is September 25, 2007. We're in Highland Park.

Chaz Bojórquez: Yes.

KD: And I just wanted to start with some basic questions about your childhood experience, where and when you were born, and a little bit about your family.

CB: Yeah. I think you can say if there is a definition for Chicano, what it is, I qualify. I was born here in Los Angeles, down in Chinatown, right on Sunset and Beaudry. And as a child we moved from there when I was one years old, just further up there at the Arroyo Seco River, just the branch of the river up into Highland Park. So I'm just, like, two and a half, three miles from downtown LA up where we were. My parents—I'm fourth generation. Well, [it's] sort of like mixed up. Because my grandparents—my grandfather and grandmother were—he was an American. He was half Mexican and half Basque in Arizona, and [came] around the turn of the last century. And then my grandmother had English, and she was from Guanajuato. And she had English and Indian blood in her. And my grandfather had Papago.

That's one thing about being Chicano: we all have pride in our European ancestry, but we all could also name our tribe. And I don't know a thing about being Papago, but I do have a lot of pride. It gives me my sense of place, of where I live. I'm not European. I'm from here. [*laughter*] I always tell people, "When the Aztecs marched from Utah, down to Mexico City from Aztlán to Mexico City, they also turned around and marched back." So I feel that that immigration is still going on today, and I claim my native cultural landscape, my Aztlán Hollywood—because I was really raised in LA with a *huge* Hollywood movie, West Coast, surfer, sushi eating background. And that's my part of my culture defining who I am as a Chicano. In some ways, *Chicanoism* defines my Americanism.

KD: What do you mean?

CB: What kind of American am I? I'm a Latino American, with culture from Mexico and Europe. And my grandparents—the ones that I said were American, [from] Arizona—they moved to Tijuana during the Prohibition and gave up their American citizenship. There was issues before that on my mother's side about the family being shipped into Mexico during the riots and the strikes of the miners in Arizona.

KD: In Arizona, right?

CB: And right before World War II right around in there. I've been seeing it on TV. So on my mother's side [they] were shipped to Mexico, but they were American citizens.

KD: Oh, you mean the deportations [during] the Depression?

CB: The deportations. Yeah. My mother's side was deported to Mexico, and my mother would say she was a little girl, and everybody disappeared. And after a couple of months, everybody kind of came back and all that. The uncles and things, they all were able to come back to the United States.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And from there, they came to Los Angeles. So my mother's family, she was a stepdaughter, and she had a stepsister. And she was raised—and her mother died early, in her twenties—TB. And the whole family migrated to Los Angeles. And they moved to the old Jewish section, Lincoln Heights. And in Lincoln

Heights, they lived behind the temple, the Jewish temple [on] Brooklyn Avenue. She would tell me all about the Jewish experience there in her early times. And about the pickles and the barrels, and about all the baseball teams, because East LA was—and downtown was all connected through baseball teams.

KD: Right.

CB: And then she would say later on, she went to Belmont High School. And her and her aunts [would] go down to the movie theaters, and she experienced the race riots of '43. She was there in the theaters when the sailors came in. And she had been dating a sailor [*laughter*—a Latino sailor—and who disappeared when she was in high school. He disappeared. Anyway, long story short, he came back into my mom's life in her late sixties, early seventies, and they remarried. And so my mom has been married for about eight years now with this old boyfriend who was a sailor from those times. Long story short, my mother experienced the riots, and she said how the sailors came in and grabbed the young Latino men and hauled them outside, and stripped them of their clothes, and burned their clothes and beat them up. And she was very much influenced by that, not having anger, but feeling very sorry for what she saw, feeling that these are our people that it was happening [to], but also understanding that she didn't live in East LA. And I said, "Mother, it was. East LA was three miles away."

KD: Yeah.

CB: She says, "But those three miles were across the river. It was another country in East LA."

KD: Yeah.

CB: So she said she never really connected to Chávez Ravine, which was just three blocks away. She said, "No, we were Belmont," and she felt that she was raised in a very Anglo culture. She didn't see the divisions of the Latino or the brown and white cultures as much from Belmont. And when she saw all this rioting and all that, she felt very, very sad, and she felt—and she understood racism. But she didn't develop a hatred and all that because she worked in downtown.

KD: Now, did she tell you these stories when you were a young boy?

CB: She didn't, no. Actually, when we were about high school age—

KD: High school age?

CB: When we would start asking our . . . not our cultural background, I wanted to know more about LA history. And it would pop up on TV. And then when the play *Zoot Suit* came around again, all those stories kind of came up again. And then I would ask Leo Aguirre, her old boyfriend from high school. And since he was a sailor and all that, I asked him. He would tell me, "Racism is so much heavier now than as before." He said, "They lived with the Polish; they lived with the Italians." Downtown on Figueroa and Sunset [it] was Italian.

KD: Yeah. Yeah.

CB: And the Chinese, and the Japanese. And she had Japanese friends who were taken to sort of camps.

KD: Yeah, interned.

CB: Interned. So my mother was very, very open-minded as far as culture, her friends, the neighborhood and all that. We were always multicultural. And my mom always brought that into the family, also in the food that we ate. My mom had Greek friends, and we always had *dolmades*. We had sushi. The first sushi I ever had, it was in the '50s, the 1950s.

KD: Wow.

CB: And my parents would take me down to a little restaurant down in Chinatown that had a jazz bar, and I was under ten years old. I was born in '49. And that jazz bar actually [*laughter*] we still go today, and it's a nightclub called Firecracker, with hip-hop and jazz and all that. So I used to go there in the '50s and the mid-'60s with my parents to go eat Chinese food. And then when Thai food came in, we were crazy about it. We always had Thanksgiving dinner with rice and beans, and *dolmades*, and margaritas. And my parents were very much into, not Mai Tais—daiquiris! Yeah. We always had fro—frozen daiquiris on ice. So it was real '50s, real Pink Panther times. They wore suits at the parties and everything, so I remember seeing all that influence. And that was the culture that I saw in my family, and it was very happy. It was very

family-oriented. We were not poor. And very multicultural and very open. And that's what LA gave me as a young child.

KD: All right. Well, what kind of work did your parents do?

CB: My father, hard blue collar. My father worked at the General Motors plant in South Gate. He put in twenty-five years without missing one day.

KD: Wow!

CB: And so he built General Motors products—Pontiacs, Chevrolets—and he did the front-end assembly. And then he became a foreman.

KD: So it was a union job?

CB: It was a union job. He was a strong union man. And the union saved his butt because now he gets great medical. *[laughter]*

KD: That's right. That's right.

CB: You know?

KD: All right.

CB: So I'm very pro-union.

KD: Absolutely.

CB: My mother worked as a typist, clerk-typist for the bureau of adoptions for downtown, and she said she learned a lot about people. And it was about really how people really live. "Everyone struggles" is what she said, and "It's not a perfect world, and take care of your family and relationships." Like I said, she did not ever come from any kind of hate. She used her experiences to make me grow as a better person. So the bureau of adoptions was a big influence on my mom. Then she went to the LA library, and then she was a clerk-typist there at the downtown library, but she would always go to all of the new books or new author releases and listen to their lectures. And she would always bring first editions of books into the home.

KD: Wow.

CB: And that's where I got influenced by Leo Politi, the Italian muralist from downtown. And he painted the mural there at the Mexican [Cultural] Institute on the walls. And also he painted another mural at the library of South Pasadena. And nobody really knows about him, gives him credit, but his very beautiful, childlike fantasy artwork . . . it's gorgeous. And he did a lot of children's books, and then my mother I think came home with four or five of them all signed and autographed by Leo Politi. And I was so impressed. And I'm talking six, seven years old.

KD: Wow.

CB: About '67, '68, because there was one thing—I had a conversation with an artist recently, and it was about young graffiti kids. I said, "I never met a real artist until I was fifteen, and just barely got to talk to him. I [had] never gotten to go into anyone's art studio to see how artists make a living, what do they do, what they look like. Until I went into art school." And so I was eighteen or nineteen.

So it was Leo Politi, just seeing his signature . . . He was an artist who did children's books. I said, "Oh, this is a job I want to do." Because to be an artist [means] you're special. You're the image makers. You're the dreamers. You're the people that can . . . Well, I was at a political rally, and it was soldiers in Iraq who came out, who are against the war now. And they were saying they knew what they had to do—to march, make statements and speeches, and all that. And they said, "What do the artists have to do?" So I said, "Oh, okay. This is what we do. We bring everything that's in the world—which is called "life"—that is totally confusing. It's part of history, abstractions, people's experiences, people's fears, and all that, we organize all of that into one piece of paper. We can organize it and make a vision. You cannot tell me [there's] a political movement without its banners, without its logos, without its t-shirts and plays, without its websites, without its books. That's the artist's' part. That's what we do. That's how we contribute.

So coming back to what we were talking about. It's describing the artists that I saw as a young child, describing the artist that I wanted to be. It was the artist that did not work in the studio, but the artist who

was out there who made things. Later on, I found out that I love design. I think designers make the best artists because they deal with culture directly. *[laughter]* I always say that there's two kinds of artists: the studio rats, and the—and cheese and wine artists, okay?

KD: *[laughter]*

CB: The studio rats, they could be great artists, but they just hate to talk to people, and they just stay in their studio. And the cheese and wine artists, they're the ones who are out there making connections. They may be good artists or not. But you need to be out there with the cheese and wine—and I *love* cheese and wine. *[laughter]* You know?

KD: So you're a cheese and wine? *[laughter]*

CB: I'm a cheese and wine artist. I've got to say that when I make my connections, it's not here at the house. I get plenty of phone calls every day. But to make connections [it's] there at the art openings where we pass our cards, find out whose work—who is doing what, what's the next projects, how can we organize and do new projects, how can we continue with the show that we're seeing there, it all comes together. How can we get other people to come out to the show? All of those questions are answered at the art openings. Yeah, and we're eating cheese and wine, but, it's part of the network. It's part of getting connected and contributing and being involved.

KD: Did your mother teach you some of these tricks about how to—

CB: Social graces.

KD: Yeah.

CB: Social graces, social skills. And so it is what she taught me, not to be afraid. But just be involved. I was never afraid of anybody or anything. I never thought myself as Brown or Chicano until somebody mentioned it. I did not become a Chicano until I was forty. I had to find that. You know you're not born a Chicano.

KD: I love that line.

CB: You have to declare it and define and defend it. And once *[laughter]* Luis Ituarte once told me—he was part of [the Department of] Cultural Affairs, and he is a liaison now with Tijuana—he once told me, “Chaz, you're a Chicano and you don't even know it.” And I started hearing that a lot. Because it takes a lot to define [it] to be a Chicano, because that definition is large and huge. And we have to define it within ourselves. It's a personal definition. And once I did that—Now I'm hopping way late—later on.

KD: That's okay. I'll bring you back.

CB: Because it helps to define exactly what I was doing when I was a young man. I had a voyage. I knew I had a voyage. I was seeking my path. I went through all that stuff as a young man—and we'll talk about that, too. But now I know where it had led me, where it's leading me.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And that's my identity—of who I am, but also to be proud of who I am, and also it's part of bringing a whole package. I can't bring *Chicanoism* just—you know, “I'm a Chicano.” No. It's a whole, whole package: my family; my history; my graffiti experience in my neighborhood; my grandparents from Tijuana; border issues; border art, and all that, and when my art history experience when I went to art school, all of that has come together to define to make a package. And I'm a Los Angeles West Coast Chicago artist.

KD: Now some of this vision . . . Was your mom very direct, explicit in her teaching you to be proud of who you are? Your dad was—

CB: Yes.

KD: Do you remember any explicit instructions or events that happened? “Well, this is what you need to do” or “Think of it this way?”

CB: *[laughter]* My mother—and it's like art—told us about our love life, she says, “You can have any girlfriend you want.” I mean she stayed out of our girlfriend things, she says, “Because you're going to be the one who's sleeping with them.” *[laughter]* So my mom in some ways gave us the goods, but let us alone . . . Relationships are like art.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And, but my parents were pretty hip. We lived in Highland Park. We had a nice home. I was strongly middle class. So like I said, I came from privilege compared to my cousins in Montebello who were somewhat *cholos, vato locos*. You know that every family has a *cholo*, and we're all—

KD: But were they—your family [are they the] only [ones owning] homes? Your cousins and uncles, do they [own] homes, or are they living in apartments, or . . .

CB: No. Everybody after World War II were homeowners, everybody in our immediate families and all that. My personal family is [my] twin brother and myself.

KD: Oh, you're a twin?

CB: I'm a twin, a fraternal twin. [With] my parents, [it's] the four of us. And when we moved into Highland Park, it was all Anglo.

KD: Right.

CB: And especially the high school was all Anglo, but [*laughter*] I remember I saw my photograph of—my high school photograph, graduation photograph—recently, and there was about 25 percent Latinos in there. But I can't say I remember them. Because I think what—We all spoke English. It was all, "Go Panthers!" Here at Franklin High School, I still live two blocks from Franklin.

KD: That's right.

CB: To me, it was an Anglo world. Then when I would go visit my cousins in East LA, it was still an Anglo world, because we all spoke English. And then when I went down to Tijuana, that was where [it was] Mexican. But Tijuana is not really Mexico—Tijuana is rock and roll! And I remember we used to go down there for big parties, and my father with his brothers, I remember, they would get drunk, and we would take the '58 Chevy station wagon, and they would be taking off the taillights. I would just be hanging around there with my tricycle, and they would be stuffing the inside of the body of the frame of the car full of liquor bottles.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And that was common [to] bring liquor across the border. To me, it wasn't drugs or firecrackers or anything. It was just [what] everybody did. And it wasn't to sell. . . My father would give the liquor to his neighbor friends, or they [would save it] for the big parties that they would have.

KD: When are they having parties?

CB: When?

KD: Well, at Christmas . . .

CB: Right. At all your functions, all your baptisms, all of the wedding anniversaries of all the cousins, it was about at least four parties a year, something like that. They always had—I remember we would have luaus, and when Chubby Checker first came in, I remember seeing *all* the adults twisting, with leis on, and things like that. You know? And we were a big Dean Martin family, and every evening, my father would put on a stack of five records on the hi-fi right before we started eating. Right before, he would always put [on] a stack of records. We always had music when we ate. And it was Louis Prima. And, there was Cab Calloway, Chubby Checker; there was Los Panchos . . . Were they then around? I remember them. And then some classical. Because my parents were part of a record of the month club or something like that. So we'd always get *Blue Danube*, *1001 Strings*, all that kind of stuff.

Also at the supermarkets, they had these promotional art books, one artist a month in a sleeved case. Like one book. And it was Michelangelo, and it was Leonardo da Vinci, it was Botticelli, it was all these people. And my parents started collecting those books, and there were about thirty of them. So I had artist books when I was very, very young.

KD: Can you remember about what age that is?

CB: Probably in the early '60s. Probably about thirteen, fourteen, fifteen. Right around there . . . Not fifteen—younger. And I would love looking at the pictures. And my [mom]—She also had the book of the month club for . . . what was that? It started with an *R*. "Regal?" "Rexel?" "Raleigh?" book of the month club. And it's [got] all these short stories in it. So we had book of the month clubs.

My father was a member of the National Rifle Association. He was what you would call a “Chicano redneck,” and he would go to the gun clubs in Highland Park and be friends with the local chief of police, with the men who owned the local markets, and all that stuff. And they were all Anglo. So my father was never scared of anything, and he’s dark, and short. But my father always thought of himself as Frank Sinatra because when we were down in Mexico, when the family moved down to Tijuana, they moved there because of the racetrack. There was John—my grandfather was the chief engineer at that hippodrome at the Caliente racetrack. So I spent many summers as a little kid just running around the racetrack, me and my brother. And left alone.

KD: Really?

CB: And we would collect tickets on the floor, we would see the horse races right up at the gate, and we were about ten, eleven, twelve years old. Then we would spend the night there and watch the dog races. They—My grandmother would come and pick up my grandfather and take us, and we would go. Because they knew we were safe there with all these thousands of strangers. Nowadays, I wouldn’t let my kid run around at the racetrack [*laughter*] at ten years old. And then my grandmother would also take us to the bullfights. And so I have a *big* affection [for] the bullfights. Because it brings a remembrance of my grandparents and all that.

KD: Yeah.

CB: Because they lived three blocks away from [the] downtown bullring. And my grandmother would take us to go eat, and we would catch a Bob Hope movie down in downtown Tijuana at the big palace theaters. And so I had all that Hollywood influence, like I say, Mexico—Tijuana was not Mexico to me. And I was getting all this culture in Tijuana, all that artwork, clay work, ceramics, everything—all that kitsch, that *rasquache*, whatever you called it. I was raised with armadillo purses, with black velvet paintings. With low rider cars that were taxis. Burros painted to look like zebras. We all have family pictures like that. That’s all my background.

KD: Is your family then speaking Spanish to grandma and grandpa, and English with your mom and dad?

CB: Yes. At home [it] was English. When we would go down to Tijuana, it was all Spanish. Let me say it was a loving, fun family. We had some really drunk uncles and all that, like everybody. But there was no child abuse. My parents divorced when we were twenty-one, later on. But my growing up was very magical, very rich.

KD: Can you tell me a little bit about—more about these family get-togethers? Is Dad putting on music like he does at dinner-time, and people are dancing, and—

CB: No. It was when we were down in Tijuana, it’s their music. It’s all mariachis and all this. And actually, a lot of live—

KD: Like *conjuntos*, or . . .

CB: *Conjuntos*, or “trios.”

KD: Yeah, a trio.

CB: Trios, yeah. They would come and play in the evenings. Because my grandparents had apartments in Tijuana and they always had a new car every two years. My grandfather always wore a suit for dinner. And they had a housemaid that would come and cook, and all that stuff. And it wasn’t a *fancy* house, but they had apartments [that] were just extension[s] of the property. Build the house over there, a duplex over here, and all that. Two apartments on top of two garages. And my grandmother built all that up. So they had money. And they traveled all over Mexico and stuff. So there was no lack, there was no real poverty. We weren’t rich, but everything was always given.

I remember one party, we went down there—and Tijuana was small then. We went down to the river, which is still full of ranches, and it was not so many then. It was just a sewage line. There were a lot of ranches there and stuff, and some uncles, a cousin, or something like that went to a pig farm. And I remember running around, and the pigs were twice as tall as we were. They were *huge*. And they

butchered one, and they killed and butchered one, and all the squealing and all that. We all thought that was great. [laughter] And they chopped off the ear, and we're waving the ears and all that.

KD: Yeah.

CB: But the special part was that they brought in a *churro*, like a llama. And a huge *churro*, as big as the dining room table for me, for that age. And I remember that they killed it by bleeding it, and they saved the blood, and we all had the *churro* blood with a little tequila and salt and pepper. And then we all passed it around to the family, we all sipped at the *churro* blood. Which has a real distinct, oily flavor, smell . . . I thought, "Oooh, man! These Latinos are so tribal!" [laughter] I really felt connected in some ways. That was our rite of passage. And then they turned the *churro* on its back and propped it up with sticks on the head side, and built a fire underneath it, and that's what we did: cooked it, and then opened it up from the belly, and we all had *churro* meat. I remember that happened a few times.

Or we would go down to the beaches down at Ensenada, and we would camp. My parents always liked to go on vacation, so they even bought a small house down in Ensenada. So as children, we would always go down to Tijuana, and then go down and maybe spend a weekend in San Ensenada. And my father had these military tents, these huge canvas things that we would have to set up with the pole in the middle, for six people. And my mother, I realize now my mother really didn't like it because it would just be windy and sandy and dusty. And we would go fishing as kids on a rowboat—which, again, I would not let a ten year old go on a rowboat in the ocean. . . And we would collect mussels from the rocks.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And my father would just put us on some rocks. He'd get the rowboat, come on to some rocks and just put us on it, and then we would pull mussels and throw them back in the boat and then jump back in. And then we would also eat lobsters. The fishermen, they would catch lobster. And then abalone, fish . . . And then we made our own smoker there in the ground. And my father was very, very good at that stuff. And so I remember a lot of good times—

KD: So Dad's making Mexican seafood cuisine?

CB: He is setting it up. My mom is cooking it.

KD: Okay.

CB: But he is kind of setting it up. He gets all the ingredients. He does all the macho things. He would clean the fish. Then let my mom cook it or something.

KD: Is she doing that back at Highland Park as well, getting seafood for—

CB: We would bring a lot of seafood back always.

KD: Okay.

CB: But there camping, it would be over a Coleman stove with kerosene, and you're pumping it and all of that, and with the wind. I remember it was great. I remember it was really a great time.

KD: It sounds like a lot of fun.

CB: And we did that about a dozen times until my father retired. Well, he didn't retire. He got the house in Ensenada, and he stayed there with his other wife. But I haven't been there in about fifteen years, something like that. And they finally sold the house down there. But that was a lot of memories. So I had that cultural influence as a child down there. But here in Los Angeles, I remember my parents would take me to Barnsdall. And we're talking about the early '60s, so I was probably about twelve, thirteen years old? No, I couldn't be thirteen . . . That's too old. I think I was younger.

And Barnsdall was the center of Los Angeles's art scene at that time. I remember we would go about three times to the all-city painting shows. They would leave it open to the all the artists in the city. And we would have to take the bus up there to Barnsdall because there would be no parking. Everything would just be so full. And then we had to hike up the hill. And they had easels all over the sidewalks up the hill. There were easels. And thousands of people of LA would show up on the weekends, to the all-city art show, and in the gallery inside. And then my mother also enrolled us in children's classes there up at Barnsdall in the early '60s.

- KD: And what kind of classes are you taking?
- CB: At that time—I can't quite remember. It was probably tempera painting with cutouts, and things like that. You know, assemblage. [*laughter*] Cutouts, kid assemblage.
- KD: Right.
- CB: Children's things. I think we probably did clay.
- KD: Did you also have art supplies at home?
- CB: Oh, definitely. I had an oil painting set when I was six.
- KD: Wow.
- CB: When I was six, I had my first oil painting set. At the same time, I also had a paint-by-numbers set. It was just a blank canvas of twelve inches by ten inches. And the other one, I had something I could actually work on. I painted, I remember, a dog. And then, with the paint set, it was all sunsets. But I remember I painted a German shepherd, and I always was copying cartoons. Big influence by Walt Disney, but I always buy comic books, and I—
- KD: Which ones?
- CB: Comic books? Well, it was the DC comics, but it was always Walt Disney stories. I loved Uncle Scrooge. And Donald Duck. And I would always draw Huey, Dewey, and Louie. And I would try to sell them for a couple of pennies to my friends. I would make copies of them. And which I did. We were in the Woodcraft Rangers. It was something like the Boy Scouts.
- KD: Oh, like Boy Scouts? Okay.
- CB: Yeah. I'll get into that in a little while. . . So the comic books were a big influence. Later on, *Mad* magazine—I just loved *Mad*, which led me on to surf magazines. But also [at] about ten, eleven years old, we would go up to Barnsdall Park, see all these art shows. My parents also took me one night. We went over to the galleries over there on La Cienega. The Ferus Gallery. And I guess this is mid-'60s—'63, '64, or right around there. I don't know how that corresponds when—when they were actually having it, but I remember we went there. So they were having art activities, and my parents were really hip. They would take us. When I was fourteen, my mother enrolled me at the Pasadena Pacific Asia Museum. Yeah, it was the Pacific Asia Museum, but it wasn't about Asian art then. What's the museum in Pasadena, the private museum? That very rich guy?
- KD: What's his name?
- CB: It's not Armand Hammer.
- KD: Peter . . . It's—
- CB: Norton.
- KD: Norton.
- CB: Yeah.
- KD: Right.
- CB: Okay.
- KD: Simon.
- CB: Norton Simon? Okay. His work was at the Pacific Asian art center.
- KD: Oh, Okay.
- CB: That's what was there. So it was a legitimate, hardcore museum. And my mother enrolled me when I was young—about fourteen, 1965 or so—to take paint- sculpture classes, which I took for about two years. So I was messing with clay and all that stuff. I remember there was a little kid about eleven years old who was Billy Shire, who owns La Luz de Jesus—big influence on lowbrow art and all that. And he was a little kid then, and we were in the same class. And downstairs were major exhibitions.
- I remember there was one exhibition, I went to go look at it in the gallery, and I was really fascinated by this painting of this naked woman coming down the staircase, and it was all fractured. So I knew it was Cubism, but it was Cubism and movement. I found that very continuity very much like Hollywood. I go, "This is a movie painting." And then there was also a urinal, there, and stuff like that, and this cracked

glass and things, and this stool with a wheel on top of it. And I was being exposed to conceptual [art]—to assemblage.

KD: Right.

CB: And I go, "This is interesting." But I still felt a coldness to it. And then my teachers said, "Oh, that's a very famous artist. You should go and talk to him. He's right over there sitting in the courtyard." So I went there and I spent about twenty minutes with Marcel Duchamp. And he asked me what my name [was] and, "do I like art?" And we just had an older man—young artist talk. And it was like the first time I actually talked—spoke to—a professional artist who actually had a work in a gallery. I had never made that connection. I never met a real artist who was in a gallery.

And then I think a few months later, they had a big show there on this guy from New York who had these Brillo boxes and these cans of soup and all that, paintings. And I go, "Who is this person?" And these vacuum cleaners, all different colors. And I go, "Now, this is fun." I go, "It's nothing something I would do, but this is *really* cool." I realize now it was Andy Warhol's first one-man show was not in New York. It was here in Pasadena.

KD: Right.

CB: It was here. So I experienced that. And then I also went to a couple of lectures that there was these older men, who were like, twenty to twenty-five. And they had a big show, and it was Ed Kienholz, Billy Al Bengston. It was the Ferus Gallery people. There was like, four of them. Ed, there was [Robert] Irwin. He did the gardens up there at the Getty [Museum]. And some other people. And I started to speak to them. And I said, "How can you be an artist?" Because I was getting hassled. This is junior high. And [I'm thinking], Art classes are only forty-five minutes long, and then everybody hassles me because I can't—you can't be an artist when you're a little kid. Nobody believes you, your work isn't important enough. How can you take yourself serious to be an artist? I was very confused.

I remember I had a conversation with Ed Kienholz about how can I define myself as an artist if nobody believed in me as an artist. And it was the chicken and the egg thing. "I'm still a kid. How can I be an artist if I haven't done any important work? And how do I do important work?" [*laughter*] "Oh, how can I be like you guys?"

KD: Did he give you [an] answer?

CB: "Yeah" is what he said. "Just do it." I don't remember no deep answer. What I remember, he just said, "Screw everybody." He said, "Don't listen to anybody." He said, "Just do it," and all that. And in some ways, that really opened up my eyes, in that I realized that to be an artist is not just doing "art"—not going to art museums and art galleries and seeing what art is, and trying to do that. He said, "Just do what you want." In some ways, let me say he gave me the idea that I can do whatever I want, and that could be art. And that [is] just—fundamental, first base. I realize now to be an artist, you've got to go all the way. You're going to need—you need to take first base, and take it all the way to home plate, but—

KD: Well, it sounds like your mother and father are giving you lots of permission, a lot of freedoms.

CB: They gave me a lot of things to work with, a lot of tools. They gave me a lot of okays. My father never really commented on my work. Actually, as a matter of fact, now that I've had hundreds and hundreds of shows and all that, he has yet to go to one show. My father's never been to one art gallery show of mine or anything. Then my mom has been to three or four of them. But she really understands. She don't have to go to all of them, but, you know. The support was there as a child.

KD: Right.

CB: Later on, they still ask me, "Do you do graffiti? Can you change the word? You know, can you change it to 'artistic calligraphy?' You're not a graffiti artist." They hate people calling me a graffiti artist. They didn't even like me being called a Chicano. They still don't care too much for it. Because for them, it was a bad word, and it wasn't going to go anywhere. It was a detriment to an art career. My mom felt to be a real artist, you had to be in a museum. She said, "You got a shot at it, and you should drop that 'Chicano' and that graffiti stuff. You have skill." I go, "Mom, having skills is not enough."

There's plenty of good artists out there. You've got to say something. You need something unique and it also has to be profound. Just to be different is just to get to first base. And [to] finish my work. So now, they understood. They helped me [understand what] art was as a young person, and I think I left them behind. Now they really have a hard time really understanding what I do.

KD: Was there as you're growing up—You graduated in the late '60s, right?

CB: In '67.

KD: Sixty-seven? So—

CB: Right.

KD: You were living in, near the part of town where a year later, we had the walkouts, the blowouts?

CB: As soon as I graduated, I missed all that. I did not experience any of the walkouts. I did not experience any of that Chicano farmworkers-definition-anger-immigration-migration issues. I did not grasp that. I already was out of there, out of high school, and I did not have any political friends. I was involved. I did go to one march. And that was when we had gone into Cambodia illegally, and the march was to bring the voting age from twenty-one to eighteen. Because all my friends were going to Vietnam, and they weren't voting. They didn't vote. They couldn't vote then at eighteen years old. And so I marched—I did one march for that. I did not march for César Chávez and for the student rights. Well, the walkouts were because of our servicemen in Vietnam. That was part of it. And then also better education. But I was already going to Cal State Los Angeles for one year. [I had] some mathematics and a fine art major. And—

KD: We might be jumping ahead a little too soon. Can I bring you back to childhood for a minute?

CB: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

KD: Okay.

CB: Because there—there's still a lot there, before we go into my education.

KD: So, you talked a lot about the family's sense of celebration and vacation, and what I would call "cultural celebrations." And you mentioned at one point [a] baptism. So is the family spiritual or religious in any way? Or attending to your spirituality?

CB: We're all baptized. My parents believed that even though they were not going to church that we should go to church. So they did take us to Saint Ignatius Catholic school, that [is] just three blocks away from here, back in the same hood. And they wouldn't let us in. And then across the street a young couple, they were Anglo, and he was part of the fire department or something like that, they were able to get their two kids into the Catholic school immediately. So my mother made an appointment with the sisters and went down there and complained. They said, "Oh, well, we just didn't—we don't have room," and all this kind of stuff. And she insisted that we attend there. So they had us there for about a month or so.

Then they had a talk with my parents saying that my brother and I were very destructive—not "destructive"—*distracting* to the rest of the kids, and it would be better if we went to a church of our [own] kind, [meaning] a Brown church. So they asked us to leave the school. The other thing was that there was a big [church] down at the corner, a Filipino church. It was another church. Hundreds of them here.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And they had the Boy Scout meetings there. So my father took us when we were about ten years old to the Boy Scouts to join the Boy Scouts, which is a Christian religious group. They stopped my father at the door and told him it's better that he join a troop of our own kind. Namely, go to East LA or something like that. Another thing about being Brown—that was an all-white troop, and they wanted us to join the Brown people. And my father wouldn't go, he wouldn't get angry. I mean, he wouldn't fight, even though I did see him fight a couple of times. Just with drunk guys and all that. Anyway, my father said, "Well, screw them." He says, "I'm going to get my boys in this kind of kid activities and all that. Little League and things like that."

At the same time, there was another neighbor, Mark Scott. Germans. And they had two boys similar to our age, and we were all friends. And there was another German couple, the Loeschers. My parents were very good with these Germans. And they even taught my dad how to make beer. And I remember as we

were little kids when the beer was ready, we had to go to the basement, and I had to sip the beer out of crock into the bottles, and my brother would cap the bottles, and my mom would put them in boxes, and we would always make this beer. It was another tradition of the family. We wouldn't drink it. Only my dad.

KD: [laughter]

CB: And so, there was all these Germans in the neighborhood. And Mark Scott said, "Well, we've got boys. I saw a Woodcraft Rangers thing," and all that. And they formed this Woodcraft Ranger troop, which was more about Indians and cowboys and nature and all that, instead of the Boy Scouts was more a social thing. Helping people cross the street—I don't know. But Woodcraft Rangers was a lot of fun. And we went camping on summers, and overnights and all that. I got my picture in the paper one time because I had so many of these little merit badges, and it was cool. My dad really liked it. And we'd collect butterflies and mounted them, and we took photographs of birds, and then we made mosaics out of petals of flowers with different colors and all that. Indian beads, bracelets—I mean, all this fun stuff as kids. One was really cool—we would paint on glass, colors.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And then fill it in with transparent colors, and then Indian ink, and then put it on crushed aluminum foil, then black tape it around it. And so it would just sparkle between the transparent colors and all that. I thought that was cool.

KD: That *is* cool! [laughter]

CB: So Woodcraft Rangers was really good, but we got there because—indirectly—through segregation through the racism [in] the Boy Scouts.

KD: When this was happening—that the school and then this other [incident with the] Boy Scout, you were aware at the time?

CB: Yeah.

KD: That this was based on?

CB: Yeah.

KD: Because we're Mexican?

CB: Yeah.

KD: Or dark [skinned]?

CB: Oh, yeah.

KD: And the other group, the rangers, that sounds like—

CB: Wood Craft Rangers.

KD: Were they much more diverse, then? I mean, you mentioned—

CB: [laughter]

KD: So was it all the people who couldn't get in to the [Boy Scouts] all the people that were being pushed out? Did you have an awareness of that at the time?

CB: Yeah. Yes, I did. Because we also tried to go to South Pasadena to the swimming pool. It was called "the Plunge." We used to go to the Plunge in South Pas, but I remember they wouldn't let us in until certain days, the day [before] they cleaned it. There was the "Brown day" or whatever. And my parents also tried to find a home in South Pasadena, and there was a color line that even the real estate people would tell them. "You can't buy in South Pasadena." You couldn't get a loan to get to South Pasadena.

My father tried to get us in Avenue 43, which is a local area right here, into Little League. And they said no, they were all full. You know, "We can't have that." He says, "Oh, well, you know . . ." And they said—and they told him that. And then he asked again or something. Anyway, they told him, "No, you can't have a team." And he realized that they were discriminating. I guess it was all-white teams. And they said they had no more sponsors. So he said, "Well, what if I made my own team?" "All right, go ahead." And my dad, he told me later, he got mad at that, and he said, "Well, I'm going to make my own team, my own baseball team." So he got us a sponsor. I think "The coldest beer in town," the liquor store, that was on the back of our little t-shirts. And he got me and my brother. My brother was a good athlete. I was terrible. And he got

all the fat kids, all the Asian kids, all the crybabies who turned out to be gay later on. And we formed [a] Bad News Bears [type of] team.

KD: [laughter]

CB: It was the worst baseball team. We lost every single game. But it was a lot of fun. It was a lot of fun. My dad gave us the Little League experience. He also took us to Eagle Rock, and we did that for about three years. I hated it. My brother was a jock. He was good at it. And my dad was a jock, too, so he was real good at it. And I remember he would barely let me play, because I wouldn't hit the ball. I would strike out. And I was so happy. I would look at him, and I'd go, "Please don't call me!" [laughter] So we had an understanding there. [laughter] So there was no problems. And that's what I say: as a childhood, it was really, really good. But through this racism and problems like that, it gave us other opportunities, and it never stopped us [from] doing something, and the experience was even better.

KD: Did [your parents] also say to you things like, "Keep your head up?" It sounds like they're modeling that. They're keeping their heads up; they're showing their pride; they're not going to let somebody else's prejudice stop them. But [are] also giving you explicit instruction?

CB: No.

KD: "We're Mexican and people might not treat us right, but don't let it bother you?"

CB: No. We never had a definition; we never had an explanation; we never needed one. It was just through example. Actually, we didn't need to define or our problems, because we felt we didn't have problems. We felt that we very much fitted in. Because being *Los Angelino* is being multicultural. We did not feel we lived in an all-white absolute city. And that where my father worked, he dealt with black people. And my father would gripe about them. He would say, "Oh, they don't work." And all this kind of stuff. So I mean, yeah, we had our own prejudice. But my parents never told us that we lacked something. Like, that we're brown, we're not like them. That we need to always be proud. You know what I'm saying? Never, you know?

KD: Can you tell me about the schools you went to? You were mentioning that you didn't get into Saint Ignatius. Were you in public schools, then, in the community?

CB: Yeah. Yes, yes. We went to the local public schools, mostly all here in Highland Park, to San Pascual [Avenue] Elementary School, and then to Garvanza Elementary School here in Highland Park. This neighborhood used to be called "Garvanza." And then we went to Luther Burbank Junior High School. And now they're called "middle schools." I don't know. And then we went to Franklin High School. And so I was raised in Highland Park, and I love Highland Park. I feel that Highland Park has changed. It's more Latino now. But it's changed. I accepted it then, and I accept it now. I think it just grew to what the rest of LA looks like. So I think LA is a very good example.

It's a very nurturing place, because it has an old artistic community history here. It has the first suburb out of Los Angeles was at Highland Park. The Indian villages used to be here in Highland Park. I could tell you in certain parks and all that. So it's old culturally, from the dirt. The first art school from USC was here in Highland Park, just a few blocks away. So there was a rich history. Then I was very much aware of it when I was really young. So I felt that this was a really cool place to live. I always thought Highland Park was special. And then at the bottom of Highland Park close to downtown are the big hills, huge hills. Mount Washington. They go up to a thousand feet. And I always [told] myself, "Boy, when I get older, I want to live in lower upper Highland Park." [laughter] "I'll live in Mount Washington." Because I had a couple of friends there in high school, and I thought living up with the view and hills was "you made it." I ended up living in Mount Washington for twenty-five years.

KD: Oh, you did?

CB: Yeah.

KD: And when was that? Around what time?

CB: Oh, 1981 to just a couple of years ago. Something like that. Almost two and a half years ago. I even invested up there. I owned four homes up there. And I rent three.

KD: Wow. You've done pretty good for yourself.

CB: It's through the art. There's [my] fine art career, which is a whole story, and then my commercial art career, which is a whole 'nother story. We'll get into that.

KD: When you were in school, were you taking art classes? I guess if you're getting it on the side, maybe you're not getting it in the classroom?

CB: No. I was given art school on the side when I was young. But also, I was taking any kind of extra classes that I could get in art in junior high. Because in elementary school, it's just part of the curriculum. But in junior high, I remember I had some electives, and I took ceramics. Ceramics was it. And also in junior high, I took drafting. And I took three years of drafting.

KD: Wow.

CB: It was Drafting 1 and 2, 3, 4, all the way up to Drafting 6. And then I took a summer school at Eagle Rock High School. I took a summer class; I wanted more drafting, advanced drafting. And that was, when I was sixteen, something like that. fifteen, sixteen. Well, in high school, so that's fifteen to eighteen.

KD: Were you attracted to a particular career that would require drafting?

CB: I wanted to be an architect, and I was a big stamp and coin collector, too. I had all the 1909 VDB. What's that? It's the guy who designed it. On the coin, there's his initials on it.

KD: The initials, right.

CB: Yeah. Those were the hard ones to get. I remember my mom would hate it, but I would collect pennies. And I would get about two or three dollars, and I would go down to the bank and trade it for a roll of pennies. And I was about seven, eight years old. And my mom would wait outside in the parking lot. And I would go in, and I would get my rolls of pennies, and at home I would look at them all. I remember one time at Christmas, I got a bag. I got, like, ten dollars of pennies. Man, I was *thrilled*.

And so I was a collector also of rocks. Which later on, I love geology. I have all these books, and I have all these boxes of rocks, which I drag around from house to house. So I was really interested in all that kind of stuff. I even took a biology class. I guess I did very well in science, and they gave me a weekend scholarship for the summer at the natural history art museum downtown, [near] where the coliseum is. I think for the summer there, I would go on the weekend and take classes. And they would give us these species and the families and the . . . genre? I loved that, but I was not very good at it. I would get bad grades. I was a bad student. I didn't know how to study. In high school, I was a mathematics major. And I would take advanced [courses]. Algebra was easy, and then calculus and advanced calculus and all that was hard. Geometry was too much writing, all those—

KD: Equations?

CB: Not . . . not the equations. The numbers I loved because I had gotten into doing layout on the numbers, doing layout composition [for] formulas. And I loved how the numbers fit on the page. I would do layout or design with that. And what was it? The propositions in geometry, Okay? Anything with words would confuse me, I hated that. So I wasn't very good at calculus, but I loved the idea of imaginary numbers, and endless . . . infinity, and just things like that. Concept abstraction I thought was fascinating. And then later on, I started seeing it in the color wheel. All that stuff was fun to me.

KD: Are you getting encouragement from teachers?

CB: Yes. Yes. Mrs. Priscilla Beady. Mrs. Priscilla Beady, [an] Anglo woman who was stocky. Not fat. She was tall, huge teeth, white hair real short. And she was a woman who lived by herself her whole life, and who would travel to Ethiopia and to Egypt and all that. She was in her sixties. And she was full of life, and in junior high, we were constantly going on trips, field trips. She would take us all through museum shows. I saw the Ed Kienholz car.

KD: Wow.

CB: That, when it first came out at LA County [Museum of Art]. And I had to get a permission slip from my parents just to see it, because there was two of those wire bodies in the back. Very controversial at that time. It was in the paper. So she made sure that we all went and saw it. During lunchtime, she would get a

bus and she would take us there, and come back at three or four o'clock. We'd miss the other classes. She would work it out for us. She took us to see—

[*break in audio*]

KD: This is Karen Davalos with Chaz Bojórquez, and we're talking on September 25, [2007]. He was telling me about his high school teacher.

CB: Yes. She was my high school teacher.

KD: Priscilla Beady? And the places she would take you.

CB: Yeah. Yeah. She took us to UCLA just to see Giacometti, and that's a sculptor. And I was very much impressed by that. And none of those artists really influenced me as far as I wanted to paint like them, but they influenced me [because] they're not doing something that they really like. I saw freedom in their work. I saw that they really did get interested in what they were doing. And the uniqueness when I saw those tall statues of Giacometti—they're very ugly. I mean, ugly long face, and skinny arms, and all that. But they are so powerful. Their presence is undeniable. I mean, I—my mouth would just drop. And the drawings of the inner soul, just redrawing the face over face. It was just—

KD: Yeah.

CB: And I found that fascinating. Fascinating, you know? It let me know that art did not have a definition. It was indefinite. And it was leading me to make my own decision about art instead of trying to copy and try to follow in the art market or in the art circles or whatever definitions of art, or [to] be a landscape painter or a portrait painter. I did not know what kind of art I wanted to [produce] when I was young.

KD: But you were aware of those schools, like abstract expressionism or something like that? You're already aware of those in high school years?

CB: Right. Yes. And also that assemblage and abstract—well, not expressionism. And conceptualism was first kind of coming in.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And I liked what they were doing in the beginning. Later on, it was not my kind of art because it's too personal. It's too "Me! Me! Me!" and I'm a "we" mentality in my art. It's just a twist on it. And so Priscilla Beady would vouch and would get me out of my other classes. Well, then, I would go and I would have a ceramics class before lunch, I would stay there during lunch, which was against the [rules], but she would lock the door and let nobody in, and then I would have a ceramics class after lunch. So I would be there, like, three hours or something.

KD: Wow.

CB: And then she got me an invitation to try for a scholarship at Chouinard Art Institute. So one weekend I went over there, and I threw on the wheel, and I took that little bowl and I put it on another cylinder that I made, and the top on top of it. And I turned that and put clay, and turned that into a face and put a little lid on it. So it was like a face on a pillar with a lid. I wanted to show sculpture and throwing abilities, with the one [object]. And the teacher, Juanita Jimenez, had just graduated from ceramics there at Chouinard, and she became the teacher's assistant, and she was handling these weekend classes. And she was from Highland Park. And her sister was a nun. And she sometimes would pick me up and take me to class. And I really liked her. She was a Latina woman, she was . . . twenty . . . I think twenty, twenty-one? And I was sixteen. So she was an older woman, and I was just so attracted to her. And she was a real artist. Oh, I thought it was the coolest. And I really tried to do everything that she said and truly get involved, because to me she was the real artist working on it, and you could tell she was in love with ceramics. To do ceramics, you have to love it, because it is a filthy, dirty mess, and you have to get your hands in it. As I went for the class, she said, "Oh, okay. Well, you got it." I go, "What?" And she goes, "Yeah, yeah—you've got the scholarship. Don't worry." And all that.

So out of thirty, they picked three of us, and stuff. So I got a weekend scholarship at Chouinard when I was sixteen. And I went there for a year and all that. And it was pretty good. At seventeen, for that

summer, I started reading—my mother started getting some art magazines. The back of the magazine, I started seeing these ads for art schools. You know, San Francisco Art Institute, RISD [Rhode Island School of Design] . . . Who else? It wasn't UCLA or something like that. There were just a couple. And then some lower—Art Center, when they were down on Sixth. I had just had some friends—I remember at high school, some friends went to Art Center. You had to wear a suit and tie at Art Center. It was commercial. I forgot where I was going with this.

KD: You had just turned seventeen.

CB: Oh! As I turned seventeen, I started seeing all these—and I saw this thing: "Summer extension class in Guadalajara through the San Francisco Art Institute." Summer extension courses through them. And I sent for an application. I asked my mom, and she goes, "Yeah." So, she helped me. And I sent for the application. It came back, and they wanted two hundred dollars for the summer. And I didn't have two hundred dollars. I did have a paper route. And then so I asked my grandfather in Tijuana—and I had to ask him in Spanish, which was very hard for me. And I told him I would pay him back. Because my parents said, "No, we're not going to give you the money." And they said, "Well, maybe your grandfather will give you the money." So I had to go ask my grandfather. And he gave me the money. Two hundred dollars. Sent it over there.

My mom called a friend of her friend who had a family down in Guadalajara, because we didn't know anybody down there—I did not speak Spanish. And then I remember her helping me pack a suitcase, and we're going on the Greyhound bus to Tijuana. And then from there we got a ride with some strangers in a station wagon, and we drove to Mexicali, and my mom got me on the train and saw me off late at night. I remember just waving to my mom. And I don't know how she got back to LA. I guess [she hitched a ride].

So I went down there for three months, and on the train and all the way to Guadalajara not speaking Spanish. I could understand it, and then when I got there, I started staying with this family who had three boys older than me. And since I was the young one and the gringo. So we had to rotate the bed. I would get the bed one day out of the week. Otherwise, we slept on the tile floor. It was nice and neat. There was a rug that I washed, and I put that down. Then I was able to sleep. So I slept on a tile floor for three months. And then my classes, I would take the bus by myself—I was there in Guadalajara all by myself—and I would take ceramics, and sculpture, and pre-Columbian art. Those three. And my ceramics class, we would go to Tlaquepaque, the ceramic cultural center of Mexico. We would go to these *talleres*, and we would dig in the ground and dig our own clay. We would make our own kilns out of adobe and fire it with horse shit.

KD: Yeah. The fuel is—

CB: The fuel was horse, not cow, because cows break it down too much. The horse has a lot of fiber. It makes for a higher heat. So that was our jobs, to go out there into the fields and collect all of these, dried-up poops. The plates. I thought it was great. Loved it! Loved it!

KD: Wait a minute, wait a minute—back up. When you were going down in this stranger's car and on the train by yourself and all that, were you afraid?

CB: No.

KD: Excited?

CB: Yeah.

KD: You remember feeling—

CB: Excited. I felt like a grownup. I felt very mature. I was very quiet and all that, and my parents would say that that was very mature for my age. And I had none of this fear. And—

KD: You weren't worried about language, communication?

CB: No, because I figured I could point at food. [*laughter*] It was not difficult. If I wanted to express myself deeply, I could try and say it, or talk to somebody else. Besides, at seventeen, what kind of deep thoughts do I have? [*laughter*] It's pretty basic. I still wasn't interested in girls. That was just too much mystery and

trouble and heartbreak. I did have a girlfriend that I came back, but it was really sweet. *[laughter]* She was a real—real beautiful girl . . . Linda Stevens.

KD: Go ahead. Tlaquepaque?

CB: Yeah, Tlaquepaque. We fire our own clay. And the sculpture, I made my own cast out of plaster of Paris. And we would pour concrete in there. So I learned casting. I learned pre-Columbian art. I learned all about Tlaloc, the rain god. What's his name, the main guy? Common knowledge. *[laughter]*

KD: Huitzilopotchtli? Quetzalcoatl, or . . .

CB: Quetzalcoatl.

KD: Yeah.

CB: Big influence. Because I started seeing elements of ancient Mexican culture in some ways identified a lot more easily than contemporary Mexican culture. I didn't know Mexican politics. I didn't know how really people lived or anything in Mexico, but I loved to see the pyramids and the sculpture and the ancient empire, and I read Bernal Diaz's *The Conquest of New Spain*. It all started making sense. I started finding a connection with me and Mexico. But not the contemporary, but with the roots, with the ground, with the ancient. And I liked the design. And habitation. Remember, I wanted to be an architect.

KD: Right.

CB: So the temple structure, all that was just fascinating. The first time I went *inside* of a temple, in San Juan, Teotihuacán, there, the pyramids. Then next to the Pyramid of the Moon there's a couple of temples there. And I went inside, and I put my hands on it, and it felt like electricity or something. I felt like it was like . . . not coming home, but the world—my life just got bigger by a thousand years. I *loved* history. I was—I'm a history buff, too. But especially all this was kind of building up. So I spent three months down there.

Then I would go out with the guys drinking. They would take me . . . *[laughter]* I remember we had to dress up because we were going to a businessman's strip club, right, in Mexico. *[laughter]* And we all had to wear ties and all that. And I remember seeing these women in bikinis, and they were very Mexican looking, and they had machetes, and I remember [them] striking the machetes and sparks were flying out, and I go, "Wow! This *is* tribal!" *[laughter]* You know: "This is crazy!" And we would go to movies. All the young kids would take me to movies, and stuff like that.

And I remember one time we went to Lake Chapala, all a bunch of university kids. And everybody was older than me. And there were some students from . . . Berkeley and Santa Barbara. The Santa Barbara guys were surfers. It was the beginning of that time. But they were an art class, and they were down there taking classes. And I remember we all went to Lake Chapala. Big barbeque, big drink out, and all that. At seventeen, this is cool. And then we all rented horses, and we were racing the horses as fast as they go, like, fifteen deep, just racing them as hard as we could go, with the rocks going everywhere else like you see on cowboy movies.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And I'm just bouncing up on top of them, and stuff. So I—that was a lot of fun. And then they had guns, and we were shooting guns, and at tins cans and all that. So it was a real, a lot of fun. Being away from the parents, doing things, acting like an adult. And it wasn't dangerous.

KD: Now, it's not the first time you were away from your parents?

CB: No, as children, when we used to go down there to Tijuana they would leave us there about two weeks at a time.

KD: But it's the first time you're in this adult role, it sounds like.

CB: First time I'm totally away from any type of supervision.

KD: Right.

CB: Or any type of control, and doing a job, actually—going to school, trying to educate myself, and meeting total strangers, speaking with people ten years older than me, adults, and stuff. It was cool. I thought it was great.

KD: And the language was not a problem?

CB: No, because the classes were being taught English and Spanish, and there was plenty of English people there and all that. And then the Spanish, the Mexicanos, they all wanted to practice their English. And then I was picking up enough that I could go, "Wow! Great!" You know: "More beer!" We all got along. And I think that . . . the connection here was that we all liked art. It wasn't that I was a gringo to them, I was a gringo. It wasn't about politics. There was a lot of politics with the Viet Nam going on at that time. There was . . . we all kept it with art. And it reinforced my love and reinforced the idea that art could be a livelihood. That was a hard jump to think about making a career with art when you're young, and having a livelihood. I did not even want to call myself an artist. I defined to be an artist so high. To be an artist, that you had to be making money off of it, you know?

KD: Well, yeah, because I'm trying to just understand. You told me you were majoring in math, and you were interested in architecture.

CB: Yeah. Yeah.

KD: And I can see the connection to art with those three things but it sounds like—

CB: Art was always second.

KD: It would seem . . . Okay. Because you didn't see it as a viable career?

CB: I didn't have my tools. I wasn't doing something specific. I was copying. I was reading art books. I was [doing] paint by numbers. I was, you know—I started doing some paintings, but they would just be abstractions, and I didn't think that they didn't have enough meaning and all that. I was just exploring.

KD: Now, it sounds like your teachers and your mother can recognize that you have talent. At least, if it's just technique.

CB: I have talent; I have hand skills. Because with the drafting, I was real good at lettering.

KD: Okay.

CB: I had real good hand skills, and I had a big interest—but I didn't know what to do. [laughter] Actually, I still find some artists, they're still trying to find their art. And some of them haven't. Stuff like that. You need to grasp something to actually work with. Which is my graffiti. It comes later.

KD: So this event, the—this three months in Guadalajara gives you a sense that it's possible?

CB: That I'm on the road. That I'm on the road of learning something, on a quest that—that the road, I did not see the end. I could not see—it was way beyond. But I could see *all* these people on the road, and I felt really connected. That I found that my kind of friends—were people in the arts. That's the people I wanted to speak to, I wanted to be around. I wanted to be an artist. But I didn't know what—how to do it. Because I was doing my art and all this stuff, and . . . but it was just, you know, ceramics. Plates, bowls, all that. My ceramics . . . and you know Peter Shire?

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: Okay? Okay. We were classmates and all that. Adrian Saxe was another classmate. He's an incredible ceramicist. My teacher besides Juanita was Ralph Bacerra, who is in the Smithsonian under ceramics. And we were influenced by . . . John Mason had just left, which—who started teaching up at Berkeley ceramic sculpture. And who was that other guy who was really big? And started—Peter Voukos? No. It was another one.

Anyway, so I had a lot of strong, strong masters there in ceramics I could see. It was a strong unit and stuff. But I was doing ceramic . . . sculpture and plates, and making my own porcelain, and then stuff like that. I was doing my painting, which was abstract. More like—who was another big influence, was John Altoon. I met him at Cal State LA. He gave a lecture and a class, and he was so funny. And he showed the work, and I go, "Oh, God! This is so just globby, twisty things that are so defined, and he doesn't need no background." I thought they were just *beautiful*. There were an organic influence to my ceramics—John Altoon—because I wanted to lose things, you know? I have one piece left, it's in the other room, [one piece left] of my ceramic stuff.

KD: Oh, you only have one?

CB: Yeah. All that stuff.

KD: Were you selling it?

CB: No—they break. I didn't sell until I was in my forties. *[laughter]* Nothing. I'm still not a big seller. I sell out of my home, but . . . I make a living. I'm not a big seller at all. The galleries, a lot of times I have my show—I won't sell at the openings. Maybe a couple of months later. Something like that. I'm thick on shows and what I do, and all that stuff, but on sales, it just—you know, and like that. But when I make a sale, I'll get twenty grand in my pocket. Or I'll get five, six grand in my pocket like that.

KD: Yeah.

CB: So in some ways, I'm doing very well, but I'm not a big seller. Richard Duardo sells really well. Frank Romero sells really well.

KD: Right, right, right.

CB: But they had a lot more product. I'll do one painting a year, with a print and some design, and a shoe, or this or that. I'll mix it all up, but I do not have—if you put all my work together, maybe about a hundred pieces.

KD: The body of work?

CB: The body of work—of paintings.

KD: Of paintings?

CB: Design and all that stuff, there's hundreds. But as far as my major painting, it's a lot less. A hundred. I don't do series. Only in prints or something like that. Because each piece is just *[complete]*. I'm dedicated to that story, to finishing it, and it's just complete. I try to put everything I know and want to know, and my paintings have conclusions. I try to put a lot into one painting. And it'll take me a year with the dialogue and the conversation. So anyway, back to when I was in my childhood. I was doing ceramics; I was doing my math; I was doing my drafting because I wanted to be—I still wanted to be an architect. I thought that would be my day job. My mom still tried to get me into teaching. She says then I could have my summers off to do painting. She still says that. *[laughter]*

KD: But it doesn't work that way, unfortunately. *[laughter]*

CB: Mm-hmm.

KD: I used to think that, too.

CB: Yeah, yeah. Yes.

KD: So you are getting some encouragement to have a “real” job?

CB: I'm getting—

KD: So you were getting encouragement in the arts, but it's—you've got to do something to make a living?

CB: My parents were trying to make sure that I made a living, and it wasn't about art. Because my brother started going into fashion design. And my brother was also a musician, a bass player and a singer for all these rock groups. He played *[music]*. When we were in high school, he was Mr. Rock n' Roll. He would play at all the functions at the high schools, and then they would also play at the Whiskey, and Gazzarri's, at the Palladium, at Boogaloo, which was where Sonny and Cher were playing. I think they opened up for the Doors at the Cheetah down at P.O.P.—down at Santa Monica, that Pacific Ocean Park place. So, and I would go to all these things, when I was seventeen.

Well, my brother had his own set of friends. When I was eighteen, I would hitchhike up to Hollywood and then go to the—the Hullabaloo, which was the place. And after I would be sitting there, and then I would see Sonny and Cher would be sitting right next to me. I ran into the hall, bumping into this guy, and it's Sal Mineo, you know? And then we would see the Doors, who I *loved*, Sly and the Family Stone I hated. The Beatles I hated, the Rolling Stones I hated. You know, they were just too commercial. But I liked—I liked the Doors. And then there was a lot of all these other groups. You know, Blue Cheer, I thought they were cool. There was . . . So, I saw all the rock bands of San Francisco and all that stuff. And then we were also hanging out at the Shrine Auditorium at—at night. And so I would see a lot of rock shows there. So I was really influenced by Hollywood. And—and then we'd—sometimes, we would—we would cruise Whittier, you know, and—and go down there.

KD: Who had the car?

CB: It wasn't me. It was my older friends. David Lara, who is my stepbrother—which is a whole 'nother story, too. My parents are very open. When we were little kids, these other kids would hang out, who only had one parent, or just we were in Little League or something like that, and they got to know the families. And some kids needed more help, and my mom would always extend her hand and make sure that they come over for dinner and all that. And there was a couple of them that became stepbrothers, that we always see each other Christmas and all that, and even though we're not related, we're—we're hard—we're family. So David Lara was one of them. He was about a year, two years, three years older than me. And he had the car. And we would go cruising around and stuff. And then—and some other of my friends.

KD: Was he designing his car in a certain way?

CB: Designing his car?

KD: Yeah. Is he fixing it up a certain way, or is it—

CB: *[laughter]* It's funny you say that. No, he didn't. His father did. His father was from Mexico, who had other families. He was a shyster lawyer. And he took this car, and he had it cropped and molded with this other car. So it had fins, but it was short, and it had a Studebaker grill.

KD: Wow.

CB: It had seats that went all the way up to the—to the top of the roof, like from *Star Trek*. And all the buttons and knobs were all different things, you know, that he had in there. So it was just a crazy-ass car. And we would go cruising in that, you know? And then I always knew that David was—is gay. So he would always kind of have his issues and his problems and all that. And then all those guys—and with my other stepbrother, Steve Medina—we used to call him "Weasel"—from Little League, from grammar school. And his parents and my parents would go camping down in Ensenada. They knew each other that way. So Steve Medina was a real *travieso*. We would all hang out together. But we would . . . Yeah, cruise Hollywood and cruise the Whittier [Boulevard]. I felt like both places was cool, but I liked Hollywood better. It was more fun; it was more like me. I went to the—

KD: When you say "more like me". . .

CB: I was turning into a hippie.

KD: Okay.

CB: And there's no Chicano hippies that—

KD: Right. What are you wearing?

CB: Bellbottoms, and kind of sailor pants, up high. And my father would get mad at us and tell us to take off the clothes before we'd leave. I would wear these—

KD: Did you have to go out of the house in one outfit and change into another?

CB: Sometimes. But it was just—we weren't that drastic. And then we would comb our hair over our ears, so whatever hair—we were trying to get it long, so we would comb it over our ears. And it wasn't about drugs. It wasn't even about drinking. That came one or two years later. *[laughter]* You know? But then it was really about I loved going to Hollywood. I loved going and hearing the music. One time in high school—

KD: Do I need to get water?

CB: No.

KD: Oh. Okay.

CB: Just one time in high school, my friend Steve Gookin . . . And in junior high I won the American Legion award for scholastic achievement. So there was a big auditorium assembly, and they gave me the award, and I was in the newspaper. And then they gave me a big bronze medal and all that. And then I immediately went into high school and failed English. *[laughter]* They knew I had potential, but English spelling was real difficult for me. I had to memorize how they looked. I had to memorize sentences. How they looked, not how to construct them.

KD: Did you ever figure out if you have a learning disability?

CB: I just knew I wasn't good at it.

KD: Oh. That sounds like my learning disability. *[laughter]*

CB: Yeah.

KD: That's why I say that.

CB: I was really bad on the academic stuff, but I was really good on the visual [area] and putting perspective. But I remember Steve Gookin. And that's when he says, "Hey, man, we got to catch some of this jazz! Jazz is hot!" And all that. And we're like, sixteen. And I go, "Yeah!" I knew I wanted to learn jazz, but I didn't know how it was constructed, the free spirit, or how it's built or anything. I thought it was cool to learn jazz. My first record I ever bought was called *The Black Cat* [by] Smith. Willie Smith? An organ player. That was my first record. I had to borrow money from my parents. So he said, "We've got to go to the jazz clubs." And he says, "Yeah, there's this place called Shelly's Manhole. We've got to go up there." "All right," but you have to be eighteen or twenty-one to get in. So—so he was able to get [permission]. His parents were letting him borrow the car. He was seventeen, but he got a learner's permit.

KD: Right.

CB: And so we dressed up in suits and all that, and then we went up there to go to a jazz club. And we went to Shelly's Manne-Hole and—well, who was playing? Boltesech, Boltzchico? Boltesuh? Bolticetti? Something like that. A Brazilian guy. And then later on, I saw the incredible scat guy, who I still love. It's a white guy who plays piano, you know? So we went to go see them, and I remember they stopped us there at the door. They go, "Uh, do you have some ID?" And I had no idea what ID even *looked* like, so I reached in my wallet acting stupid, I was so nervous, and I gave them a piece of paper. And I just gave it to him. And I was just looking down, and he opened it up. Then he folded it back up and gave it to me, and then he says, "Okay, you can just take these gentlemen up to the front, to the circle. And they didn't stamp us [for drinks]. They said we only could drink cokes. So we went, "Okay."

KD: Okay.

CB: Yeah. So we—we got in, you know? And then they got to know us, and let us in. I opened up that piece of paper, and it was an excuse my mom wrote for me for gym class so I didn't have to go the showers or something like that. *[laughter]* I was so embarrassed! But I didn't know what to do! I just gave them anything I had in my wallet. I tried to look like an adult. I didn't have a driver's license—

KD: No.

CB: Or ID, a student card. My library card, I should have gave them that.

So we went to jazz clubs, and then we started going to—the last parts of the beatniks, there was Pandora's Box, which doesn't exist anymore. We went there about three, four times. And then I would hang out there. And there was all these older people. Beatniks, you know? I mean, they were in their thirties. *[laughter]* And I thought it would be really cool. And then one time the police came with *horses* and chased us all out. They were all running down to Sunset Boulevard, and I thought, "Wow." I said, "This is—this is fun." And then we went to another place; it was another garage down on Sunset. You would walk up by the Whiskey, and then walk down.

So there used to be some houses. It was Pandora's Box, and it was something else. Anyway, that was a hardcore coffee house, and they would have movies and things like that. Bergman.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And they would have coffee and cinnamon hot drinks, and things like that. People playing chess and—you know, the beatniks were about a literary groups, so there would be poetry and things like that. And that's when I started hearing about all these other guys. Kurt . . .

KD: Kurt Vonnegut?

CB: Yeah. There was Kurt Vonnegut, but the main guys, the guys out here in Santa Monica.

KD: Oh.

CB: There's a little house that I even went there. All the Beat Generation. [Jack Kerouac.] [He's the author of] *On the Road*.

KD: Yes. *On the Road*, yes.

CB: Okay. So I remember hearing about them, maybe it was them or maybe not, but that's when I started hearing about them and their names and stuff like that.

KD: Oh, okay.

CB: So I knew about the Beat Generation. And then my parents would take us Downtown. And when we were younger, we would go down to Philippe's [in] downtown, which I can honestly say I ate at Philippe's before I was born. Because they used to go to Philippe's when it was down by the train station, when she was pregnant. So that's why we love Philippe's. So we would go to there, and we would see beatniks coming in. And my parents would say to us, [*gasps*] "Look! BEATNIKS!" [*laughter*] You know? But they wouldn't tell us "I don't want you to be like that." So you go, "Oh, beatniks." And it was sandals, long hair, and the early '60s. I had a fascination. It was with the bohemians—

KD: Right.

CB: And all that. I knew they were about art and literature, and things like that. And they were—they were peace, love, dove. So I really was directed to that. So around when I—eighteen, when I got out of high school, I started growing my hair long. You know, not too long. I started to wear, you know, bellbottoms and stuff. I was—I was a hardcore hippie. Then the drugs started coming in, so . . .

KD: Were your friends also into this? Try to give me a sense of what the whole school was like. Were they gravitating, or were you a unique group that was listening to jazz?

CB: In high school you think you know it all. You're just a unique group, [*laughter*] you know? Because I just ran into some old high school friends just a couple of weeks ago at a party, and stuff like that. And everybody's moved out, and we were all talking about how—that unity we had when we were all together, and we didn't realize that, you know, the—the interests and all that. I . . . in—in high school, at Franklin, there was—I just wrote an article where Rick Griffin, the artist who did all the hippie posters and was a surf artist, he was a—

KD: Okay.

CB: In *Surfer* magazine, and—and—and he's having a big show at Laguna, and—and they asked me if I would contribute to the catalogue. And I wrote an article about what it was to be Latino and influenced by Rick Griffin, because he's a surfer. The article was about my brother—my twin brother. In high school, they really got into skating, but we came from—not from a surf culture—from a *patin* culture, from a scooter culture. And here in the hills, we would make our own scooters. And we're talking about, you know, late '50s, and we would take the steel wheels and hammer out that the skates, and then with roofing nails—because they had the big heads and the short shaft. We would hammer them onto the bottom of a two-by-six.

KD: Right.

CB: And then put the front end on where you would grab on. But later on we took that front end off, and we would go down the hill Superman style, on our stomachs. And then when the steel wheels would hit a rock, and we'd go down fast, out of control, and then we would skid, and then our faces all had scabs, and our arms and elbows and hands were all full of scabs. But brother really liked skating. When it came to the wheels, they would have to make the wheels [using] the chemicals, the hardener and the resin themselves. Then later on, they came into the rubber wheels, but that's when they were kind of stopping. So they had the hard wheels. And him and his buddies—Bob Shepard and a bunch of these other guys, Scott Shimabukuro. A white guy, Asian guy, my brother Latino. [They] really got into skate culture. And they would dress like surfers. And in high school, they would dress like that.

And my brother was a fashion—fashionista, so he started wearing yellow shirts. Oxford, button-down, cotton, yellow shirts. Bright, lemon yellow. But they didn't make them, so he would ask my mother to get yellow dye, and my brother would dye the shirts in the tub. And then he would iron them, and he would go with these yellow shirts. And then everybody else wanted to wear them. So they had this group called the Continentals, you know, which I wrote [about] in the article and stuff, and . . . And then—so they—they

were kind of a fashion skater kind of group, and they would wear desert boots like the Beatles, and then they would wear a white—white Levis, but short, which should show a little sock. And they would have these shirts—white shirts—but they wore them out, *cholo*-style. And then later on—like the *cholos* were wearing Pendletons, and they would be like Sir Guy.

KD: Right.

CB: But there would be a sort of—was Sir Guy, Pendleton, or . . . Sir Guy was separate from Pendleton?

KD: Well, there was another line called Sir Guy—

CB: Okay. But the Sir Guy had the beautiful pocket, fold inside pocket. And we all had a Sir Guy shirt. We all had a Pendleton, and we all had a Hawaiian shirt. [*laughter*] That was our groups. And then the *cholos* in high school would wear the Sir Guys and the Pendletons in dark colors. But they would also wear Converse, white, Levis, high, with Converse tennis shoes, kind of like a *cholo* thing. Or there would be this other group. There was the Continentals, and you know something? I better check that word.

KD: Okay.

CB: Long story short, one day all the surfers and all the *cholos* changed clothes. The surfers had Pendletons also, but they were in light lemon yellow and pink and coral—And then one day, they just changed shirts. And the whole school cracked up, because some of the *cholos* had *chola* girlfriends—[they were] hardcore. And the guys, [the] hardcore [guys were wearing] a lemon yellow shirt. And we thought that was really fun. There wasn't animosity between the cultures or fighting or anything. I did get into a couple of fights, you know, at some parties, but it was just because people were drunk or something like that, and not between the *cholos* and the surfers. So I had cousins who were from—

KD: They orchestrated this prank, or this joke?

CB: Yeah. Because there were Latino surfers, and there was white *cholos*.

KD: Right.

CB: Right? And then the girlfriends were all mixed too, and stuff. And we had a lowrider. A lot of times, it was a convertible. It was beach culture.

KD: Right.

CB: Like I say, Snoop Dogg has a lowrider. It's a convertible.

KD: Right.

CB: So even hip-hop, it goes across there. There was all this blending between all the groups there in high school, you know? So it was easy to go Whittier Boulevard; it was easy to go to Hollywood because my brother was playing in the bands. And then my cousins were *cholos* down in Montebello. And that was [normal] to me. I thought everybody had that story. But not really, you know? It was just a few of us. Let me check. Okay. You want to cut it?

KD: Sure.

CB: All right.

[*break in audio*]

KD: So we took a pause there so Chaz could look up a name in the catalog that he's a contributor to, *Heart and Torch: Rick Griffin's Transcendence Retrospective*. And so the group that your brother was a part of was the—

CB: They were called the Collegians, you know? And that's where you wore the yellow shirt, and sort of like a fashionista skater, before the word "skater" was used. And plus he was in rock n' roll, so he was mixing up all this culture and Hollywood and clothing, and sports was a lifestyle. I mean, we would go down to the beach. I don't know if you've seen the Dogtown [and] Z-Boys video?

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: All those skater guys who came out of the surf culture, they were surfing underneath the pier, the burned-out Pacific Ocean Park entertainment park that burned down. And they were surfing in between the pier poles. And they complained that people would throw rocks at them. We were the ones who used to throw

the rocks at them, [laughter] because we [had] contempt of their beach culture, because we were skaters, too, but we were inland. We were scooter culture. If you call them "scooter," you're not water people, and all this stuff. And so we would throw rocks on them and think that was funny. And now I even talk to the guys about it.

It was so influential because I remember my brother had a windbreaker with one white, thin stripe around the chest, which all the skaters and surfers all had that. And surfers weren't considered athletes at that time. We respected the Hell's Angels more because they were organized, a club. They had class, they had, you know, dress. And surfers were beach bums, and they were longhaired, they were pre-hippie, they came out of the beatnik area, but they weren't intellectuals. They were just beach bums who were surfers, you know? So not—nobody cared for them, so we just treated them . . . You know, we'd—we'd throw rocks at them, you know?

KD: Now, in this high school time, are you doing fancy writing?

CB: My artwork in high school consisted of just ceramics. I was trying to do some paintings, but they weren't really doing much of anything.

KD: What about the doodling on your—did you guys have Pee Chees, or . . .

CB: [laughter] I had the Pee Chees. Yes, we all had Pee Chees, and I always did letters. Letters, old English—not necessarily *cholo*—which were morphing into *cholo*. But I was trying to do more old English from type books. I really tried to go and to copy the letters that had serifs, you know. You know, the flags?

KD: Yeah.

CB: The ones that looked like the old English from the *Los Angeles Times* headline, from the Constitution.

KD: Okay.

CB: From the graduation certificate, birth certificate, your induction to the military.

KD: Are you studying these things, books from the library? Or just objects that you see? You know, like you said?

CB: Both. Both. I would get type books and then just study type, what old type looked like, and try to copy it. And then I knew that type also represented family crest, and also tradition and things like that, because Michelangelo had a crest. I saw a carving once. And then I also saw it also represented . . . sort of like history. Type is the history of language to me, and old English was the most prestigious, and it was always used at the most [times] if something was really important. So I noticed that certain typeface was used to . . . dictate a certain type of attitude. And also, old English was in these most important documents. And I started seeing the relationship of *cholo* roll call. Tagging was using old English. And what and [why are] they were using it? Why? Because it was the most prestigious, most important typeface.

There was this other typeface that they were using, which was script. They used [it] to paint on the sides—on the back windows—the side back windows of our lowrider cars. And then we would have the names of our girlfriend, or a song we liked, or somebody, you know, that we liked or something, and it would be a script. And we called that "teen angel." Teen angel type. So there was old English, which they call now—somebody calls it "black letters." They did a big research [project]. This woman from Boston did research about black letters, about old English letters used in Mexican culture. You know?

KD: Wow.

CB: [laughter] They really got specific. I heard it on the radio. So in high school, I was writing old English letters, but not to be *cholo* style. It was really to be more of my drafting background.

KD: Oh, okay.

CB: It was more about finding that, and more about design. And I liked—loved the movies, so I really liked movie posters. And the hottest artwork that was happening at those times, the most—what was really important to me, not to museums—was album covers.

KD: Yes.

CB: The best artists were on album covers and on movie posters, you know?

- KD: So were you collecting album covers, or making sure [that you were] reading them, talking about them, looking at them, studying them?
- CB: Yeah. I wouldn't buy them. I would buy a few, but I wouldn't buy an album just for the cover. Even though a lot of people did. I was really attracted to the Doors covers and things like that, Anybody who was hot had—I mean, there was the Beatles' incredible album covers. *Sgt. Pepper's*. The Cheech and Chong album covers. You would open it up and it would be a door panel, the outside, on a '51 Chevy. I had that same car. And on the inside would be a kilo of marijuana, you know, on the inside album cover, to show inside the panel, there—
- KD: You had a '57 Chevy?
- CB: No. I had a '51.
- KD: When was that?
- CB: When I was nineteen. I've had twenty-five cars.
- KD: Oh. Well, that's no big deal to you, then, huh? *[laughter]*
- CB: Yeah. Yeah. Cars . . . cars, I love cars. That's a whole 'nother thing. I had a lot of cars: Jaguars, Renaults, Fiats—
- KD: I have some specific questions I wanted to ask you to [return] to a few things. Like one of the things I was struck by, your brother's creativity.
- CB: Yes.
- KD: Just kind of creative expression, kind of home-based, you know, creative expression. Was there other kinds of creative expression in the home? I mean, certainly, you're getting the books and the museum, but, you know, is—
- CB: Oh, we did a *lot* of creative things my brother and I. One thing there for about five years, we got into gasoline-powered model airplanes, with those motors and all that. And my brother would buy [these models]. He was the one who always did things first. I'm older; I'm ten minutes older. But he was the more aggressive one. And then so he would buy this plane on strings, you go around and around.
- KD: Yeah. Yeah.
- CB: And then my dad really got into it. But I would just buy the planks of balsa wood and draw my own plans and cut them out, and then I would make my own planes, and then—with all the mechanics and everything else. And then I would get all the gas motors that were thrown away—you would get them for free at this place—and I would interchange all the parts and make my new gas motors because I didn't have twenty dollars to buy a new one or something. So I was into engineering. I would make that. And then later on, I got into gliders, where I bought kits and made my own. The largest one was—had six-foot wingspan. Six foot by, like, about four or five inches wide.
- KD: Wow.
- CB: And we would tow them, and they would have a fuse, and it would get so high and then the fuse would burn a string, and it would turn to the tail, and then it would come in big circles. Then we started building planes just with a gas motor on them, and just let them go. *[laughter]* Just—and they—and go in *huge* circles *way* up until it disappeared. And we lost a few of them like that. You know? But I would make my own plans, make my own planes, you know? Usually the better flyers were the bi-wing. You know, there's the two wings. Or I would do the gliders with the long wings, or just—you know? And I would have a lot of fun with that.
- KD: Was that high school, or was that—
- CB: That was junior high.
- KD: That was junior high?
- CB: Yes. It was all in junior high. And at the same time, we were doing Little League, you know?
- KD: Yeah. Yeah.
- CB: And then we got into that, and then we also—I started getting into casting. I started making these clay things, these designs, and into necklaces. We were trying to make our own puka shell beads, you know?

And I would make these designs, and then I would take my father's fishing gear, he had lead weights, and I would make—I would take a tin—tin can and cut it down and make one side as a handle, and boil down lead over my kitchen stove. I wouldn't, [*laughter*] I wouldn't dare do it now!

KD: Or let a kid do it! [*laughter*]

CB: I did—I—yeah, let a kid do it. And pour it, you know, in these lead things, and—and cast all my—you know, these different shapes. And then we would hammer them onto a piece of wood that we would lacquer, you know? And then wear them as a necklace. We also started doing—make tikis out of redwood. Cutting, you know, little—about three inches long by a half, by one inch by a half inch, and then cut it out, and it would look like Easter Island statues. From Easter Island. Real tiny ones.

KD: Yeah. Yeah.

CB: And then we would burn them on the stove, and then sandpaper them, and the burn would just cut out all of the grooves, and then thing would come out really . . . [You could] see the grain all in the wood.

KD: Yeah.

CB: Then we would varnish—stain it and varnish it, and then put those fake ruby, diamonds, or blue or green little diamonds, and put them as the eyes. And then drill a hole and put a little leather thing around it for around the neck, and my brother would sell them and all that. He did that for a few years. He had a big—a little home shop. He even rented a shop there in Pasadena—in Old Town Pasadena when it was all a dump. That was [when] Old Town was a mess.

KD: Right. Before the gentrification.

CB: And—yeah. So he had a little shop downstairs; it was a little leather hippie shop where he would make sandals for all these hippies, and tiki god necklaces and things like that. And I would help him, and we would make all that kind of stuff. So we were really into surf culture a lot when we in junior high. That, the skateboard, going down to Ensenada, always going to the beach. Later in high school, when somebody had a car—there [were] no malls—we all went to the beach. Always, always down to the beach.

KD: And what beach are you going to from here?

CB: All of them. Anything from Bolsa Chica to Santa Monica, to Zuma, to Malibu.

KD: Really?

CB: Yeah. We would hit them all. Now, I did not swim. My parents didn't swim. My brother Bertie swam. I tried surfing a couple of times, with the huge boards. Got hit in the head, almost knocked out, and I said, "Screw this noise." I just loved the sand. And then, you know, I tried to surf. And down in Mexico I tried surfing again, down in San Blas when I was traveling. That's my traveling stories. And so I wasn't that athletic. But I *loved* the ocean. I loved looking at sailboats.

KD: The outdoors?

CB: I loved the outdoors, but I wouldn't go in the water, or something like that. I wasn't that kind of—

KD: So when graduation comes up, what are you thinking about? What are your friends thinking about? Going to college, get a job?

CB: No, the war. Vietnam.

KD: Yeah.

CB: The number one [thing] for the guys was Vietnam. And the guys who wanted to go college was all, "Get into Cal State LA." Or LA City College, or Pasadena City College. Because I'm here in Highland Park, [and] Pasadena City College is close. But all the young men, all my friends who went to Vietnam, [they] all volunteered. They all joined the Marines and the Navy, you know? The majority of those guys all volunteered, because you could've gotten out if you had fifteen credit—sixteen credits, units.

KD: Right.

CB: A full curriculum even at a city college you could've gotten out.

KD: Right.

- CB: But *everybody* volunteered. So they weren't thinking about school. College was not on everybody's mind out of high school because we did not come from families whose parents went to college. It was about getting a job. The women wanted to go into government offices, something secure.
- KD: Okay.
- CB: The guys said, "Oh, join Caltrans—California Transportation." Because you'll be working outside.
- KD: Right.
- CB: And all that. [*laughter*] So we had all these stupid ideas. But furthering education was not part of it. It was going to college to further your [career], for a job. So a lot of people went to Trade Tech, and stuff like that.
- KD: So how did you end up at—
- CB: Well, I have to interrupt. I went to two different schools.
- KD: Okay.
- CB: My twin brother went to Trade Tech [Los Angeles Trade Technical College] and took fashion. So then he got an AA degree out of it. I think they call it an AA. Two years. He went working in the fashion districts downtown. And he became very successful with women's handbags, helping with women's dresses, but mostly accessories and designs like that. In the late '70s he was making sixty thousand dollars a year.
- KD: Wow.
- CB: And he was still in his twenties, right.
- KD: Wow.
- CB: And they'd fly would fly him to Japan, Milan, Taiwan, and I think in Rome. And New York.
- KD: For the big fashion shows?
- CB: Big fashion shows and all that, to see his handbags, and then to help to display. So I was aware of all that kind of stuff, and he would come home with these fashion magazines that were like, four inches thick and weighed eight pounds of ink from Italy. I would just drool over it. I wasn't a fashionista, but I loved the photographs, the layouts.
- KD: Oh, yeah?
- CB: And I wasn't about *gorgeous women*, I just loved what they were *wearing* and the colors and the landscape behind them and everything, and the rich—the jewelry. I was looking at rich people. [*laughter*] And I liked it! You know?
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: So my brother was very influential. It was like that. So he got out of high school, he was already in a career. I did not have a career set up. First place I went to was Cal State LA.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: And I had to fight to get in there because my grades were C's and B's. All my friends were going there, and they said, "Oh, you should come with us." I never even thought about which college I should go to until I applied. So I went to my class counselor who I only had met once in those three years. They said, "Well, you know, [you] don't qualify for that. [You] ought to [go] to a trade tech." I said, "No, I want to go there with all my friends." Even though I did not know what I was going to take at Cal State. And she wrote a letter and says, "Okay, well, you know, I'll recommend you, but it's up them to let [you] in." They let me in. And my first year, I got straight A's.
- KD: Wow.
- CB: I did real well. And then my second year, I failed classes. They were—
- KD: So what was the difference?
- CB: Difference was a lot of things. I was taking drafting and painting, and some academics. The drafting and painting were [easy]. I was way beyond that, and I was not getting anything out of their painting classes, and I just felt really—I [thought], "Why am I [here]? I want to be an artist. I don't want to be an architect, and I'm not getting anything out of here." And then the academic classes were boring. Anyway, I started seeing these film festivals that they were having at the schools, and I started looking at more movies, and

stopped going to classes. And I failed a couple of classes. And I still have nightmares about being late for class and not having the homework! *[laughter]*

KD: How painful!

CB: Everybody has that, and it comes from that time. I just didn't want to participate in the school. I just felt really lost, lost there. Then at that time, I was in Hollywood with this girlfriend, and we got—

KD: So you moved out of the house?

CB: No.

KD: Okay.

CB: I was still living at home. This is what happens: I had a car accident where I got hit. I crashed through the front window, and I got hit in the head, and got cut up on my forehead. And basically, her father came and helped us out in the hospital and everything else. Basically, they just gave me some aspirins and just cleaned my head and all this. I had some scratches. But the insurance company gave me one thousand dollars. And I took that one thousand dollars and I went to Chouinard. And I applied for Chouinard, and they looked at my work, and they said, "Okay, we'll accept you, only a—"

KD: Provisional?

CB: Provisional?

KD: Conditional, or something like that?

CB: Yeah. Yeah. There's another word for it. I had to take a preliminary class with my regular classes. And if I did well there, then they would put me back into the curriculum on the proper time schedule.

KD: Okay. Before you go forward, help me understand why at the art class at Cal State, you feel like there's nothing there for you, but at Chouinard—

CB: At Chouinard.

KD: That there, that that's going to be useful? Help me understand that.

CB: Because [from] my experience at Chouinard, when I was there with my ceramics lessons, I would walk through the other classes and see—I would smell oil from the oil paints. I would see people actually painting live nude people.

KD: Wow. Yeah.

CB: Models. I would see them serious about painting a toaster or something—objects. I would see design classes and all the work up on the walls. I understood what that was leading to even though I didn't they were serious classes. I knew what an art place was supposed to look like and smell like. When I went to Cal State LA, they claimed the desk after you finished painting, there was no smell. And it was a class of something else in there. There was no finished assignments. The floors were not dirty in the ceramics department, you know? Everybody looked like they were studying to be something else.

KD: Oh, I see.

CB: It was not a real art school. It was so disappointing, especially coming from Chouinard where you get to see it and smell it, and people dress different. And over here was a more regular school. Everybody was going to be either a teacher or something else, and taking art classes on the side.

KD: I see what you're saying.

CB: I remember one time, they asked students there in the class, "How many of you are taking an art—art course? Art curriculum?" And only maybe, you know, four or five of us out of thirty *[raise hands]*. Everybody was taking it either for an easy class, or just a supplement to what they are doing. There was nobody really serious in there, and the projects were lame. And I got an A in it. And I took those drawings to Chouinard and I could barely get in. Because what they wanted is figurative, and I hadn't done very much figurative. I had done ceramics and stuff like that. So it was when I took that one thousand dollars, I applied over there, they gave me a [basic] figurative class. Which is old school style at Chouinard then, because we took six hours of figure drawing every day for six weeks. And then another six hours every day of painting. Basic painting, and design, and stuff like that.

So Chouinard was not only far superior, but I knew I had to go there. And I was there. But what happened—let’s see: you were telling—what was the changes? I got a car, my first car, and I got a job at the department store, local department store. Well, my first job [was when] I was seventeen. My first job was at Jack in the Box. And I would go after school; I would walk a mile to the Jack in the Box, from Highland Park to Eagle Rock on Eagle Rock Boulevard—

KD: Oh, really?

CB: And right there by Occidental College. And I would go there after school, and I would walk home, which was on this side of Highland Park, and I would go home about two or three, and then go to high school the next day. That lasted about a year, but I was the fry cook. The first time I did hamburgers—you had to do forty hamburgers at once. I burned them all. They had to throw them all away. Chickens, I burned. French fries, yeah, I burned. Until you get the hang of it and you’re doing all three of them at the same time. But they were ready to let me go because I was giving away too much free food, you know?

[break in audio]

KD: This is Karen Davalos. We’re on tape 2 with Chaz Bojórquez, and he is telling me about his first jobs.

CB: Yeah. It was right out of—in high school. I worked at Jack in the Box, and we talked about that. And then as soon as I graduated from high school, I went down to People’s Department Store on Figueroa Boulevard and Avenue 57—right around there, 58. And at People’s Department Store, they asked me if I could count money. Okay, I could work a cash register. But I started unloading trucks in the back and doing inventory work, and taking the clothes out to the front. And then they needed help on the weekends and sales, so I had to get that same one tie that I had, and I would be in the men’s department, and I would sell clothes in the men’s department. And I worked there for about two years. And there was this old man that had a little office upstairs. And it was—it was a reconverted [space]. The People’s Department Store had everything: notions, materials, women’s clothes, men’s clothes, you know, perfumes, hardware. It had everything. All this—one of these local department stores. But before, that building was a theater—a movie theater that we used to go when we were—we were just really, really little kids. And then they emptied it all out, and then they made it somehow flat. I don’t know how they did it.

KD: Yeah.

CB: But there was these offices upstairs that were still covered with movie posters. [One poster] with Gary Cooper and *The Last of the Mohicans*.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And so this old man was up there. He was the lettering guy, and the window display. Window dresser. They needed somebody to help him, so they said, “Hey, go help so-and-so up there.” And I started to see—[for the] first time—lettering brushes, rulers, pencils—the drafting material that I was aware of, and also the pins and rolls of material. And signs with numbers of it. “Ninety-eight cents,” whatever. And so I had to help him. So he said, “You can you do letters?” I go, “Yeah, yeah.” So I would do all the signs, and then I would help him to do the window dressing for the People’s Department of boxes, of hardware things, dress mannequins. But mixing it all up. This was not a fashion department store. It was just everything that you would need, from a toilet plunger to—

KD: Yeah.

CB: You know, your clothes for the kids for school, you know? And rows of peaches in the front, so I had to arrange everything. It was fun, because I actually liked it, you know? I thought maybe I should get into that. Because my third job—no, it was my third job. I used to drive a truck that I would drive around, and it was a big van. And I would service coffee and sandwich machines, and cigarette machines and all that. So I had a route. I did that for one year, because a friend of mine—it’s always a friend of mine had a job and they were looking for help. So I decided to do that, and I made good money at that, but I had to get up at four in the morning. And then I would work from four to four, you know? And that was really rough.

Physically, I'm not a really strong person, and I like my sleep. And basically, I don't like to be told what to do. *[laughter]*

I lasted a year, saved my money, and I—and I bought my second car. My first car was a—a Fiat. A '40-something Fiat with the door—two doors that opened the opposite direction that they should. And that—and I bought it without even knowing how to drive. And I taught myself how to drive going up and down—late at night up and down the streets, grinding with a—with a little four-speed, you know, stuff, you know? And then my second car was a '51 Chevy Deluxe Coup, and it was just a gorgeous. I paid one hundred dollars for that car. In the mornings, I would drive my car—I had it lowered. Put a moon—baby moons on the wheels. And then all the headliner was totally torn up. It was just barely hanging. And then I loved—I had an Asian girlfriend at that time, and so I put a Chinese lantern on the inside of the car, hanging in there.

KD: Oh, wow.

CB: And then we would have—there was no—the electricity wire I extended and put the little bulb hanging in there. So while we were driving the Chevy, we had a big Chinese chandelier hanging in the back of the car. And I remember one time there was so much trash in the floor of the backseat—and I would never clean it up. The radiator water used to leak somewhere, and the air conditioner on the floor—after a while it would start dripping and go in the backseat. I remember one time we went somewhere, and people started laughing, and we looked back there in the backseat, and there was a marijuana plant growing. It was already about six inches tall, growing in the car on the floor. *[laughter]* There was so much trash and dirt and stuff. Anyway, I thought that was great. So I started hanging around with the wrong type of people around that time.

KD: And you had been enrolled. You were—

CB: At Chouinard.

KD: At Chouinard.

CB: That's when I started getting heavy into drugs, and it wasn't—it didn't take me out of the loop. It put me *in* the loop. I took a *lot* of LSD. We started taking the very first LSD that was coming from San Francisco, from Owsley [Stanley]. And it was powder—pink powder. And then we would have parties, and we would put them in gel caps, all this pink powder, and get crazy on ourselves. Cocaine was coming in, but I never liked it. I never touched it. It was mostly the hallucinogenics. Oh! When I was seventeen, I went down there to school in Guadalajara. When I was eighteen, as soon as I graduated, I saved some money and I just went down four months by myself. And I hitchhiked to Acapulco.

KD: Really?

CB: Yeah. I spent three, three months . . . four months?

KD: Right after graduation?

CB: Right after graduation.

KD: What was the goal? What was the intention?

CB: Find myself. I wanted to go visit my friends back at the art school in Guadalajara. I went to San Blas. First I went down to San Blas, where it's all tropical. I started meeting all these surfers. I understand Rick Griffin was all hanging down in San Blas. All these people were down there at the same time. I never did meet Rick Griffin, but I met a lot of blond-haired surfer types, hippies, and they were all into weed, into marijuana.

KD: Right.

CB: And also, I went with them; we went down Oaxaca and we bought a half-bag of peyote buttons, because they sold it—they sold it at the market.

KD: Right, right, right.

CB: And we all went on a couple of trips with the peyote and stuff down at the beach in San Blas. I left them there, and I hitchhiked and went by myself to Mexico City. And I ran into one of my friends here in high

school, his younger brother who happened to be in Mexico City. Ran into him. I said, “Well, I’m going . . .” I heard there was going to be a huge eclipse of the sun during daylight in ’69 or ’70.

KD: I think ’69.

CB: Something right around there.

KD: I remember that. *[laughter]*

CB: And I went down there, and I went down to a small town between Acapulco and another . . . I can’t remember the name of it. We ended up there in the middle of the night, and we slept on the dirt, and out in the fields. And there was cactus and corn and all that on a hill, but there was a lot of people all around, a lot of campfires. And the next morning, we woke up . . . All these people from Russia, the United States, and Japan—and they were all scientists—they all had telescopes, all living in tents. And then *all* these Mexican hippies drunk out of their minds, loaded on peyote. And they invited me, so I get loaded on peyote and drunk out of my mind. And we’re all skinny, and dark, dark, dark. And a few American hippies. And we were smoking weed and stuff.

And I feel all of a sudden that I have a connection with these people. The Mexican culture, I had the connection with the ancient, not with the contemporary. And then all of a sudden I connected with the Mexican people—only through their hippies. You know, people like me or something like that. Some of the hippies I was meeting were international hippies; I started meeting people who were traveling the world. Women with backpacks, by themselves, you know, in their thirties and forties who had been traveling the world and all that. There’s a whole group of world travelers that are vagabonds or something. There’s this group that they identify with each other and they see each other, and it’s incredible. At that time, there was this world. I would go to Puerto Vallarta and meet Germans and people from travel- all over the world. And so at that eclipse, I met all these people who were traveling all around the world, and it started to give me the idea about I would like to travel the world. Okay.

So yeah. I hitchhiked to Acapulco, and—and then we ended up in Puerto Escondido the next following nights. I almost got into trouble, into a fight with this drunk Mexicano—a *ranchero* guy who kept on falling down. And he had crutches, and every time, when he would fall down, when he would try to get up, you could see the pistol sticking out of his back pocket. And when we would see that, he would look the other way. We walked away. We started to hide because he was [drunk] and it started to get real dangerous. And then we took a bus all night long. We ended up in Puerto Escondido, and I remember in the middle of the night, I could hear the ocean, and we went down a dirt road, found the ocean. And there were some *palapas*—some hammocks—and we ended up sleeping there, you know, for a while. And left Puerto Escondido, and hitchhiked to Acapulco.

We headed north on the top of these trucks that were all full of corn. [We were walking down an] empty road; beach on one side, jungle on the other side. Hot, and no cars, anybody around and stuff. And we see this ranch, *all* of these kids, you know, guys, they were all waving at us to come on over there. And we go, “Okay.” We walked over there, and there was a farmhouse, and they were all loading big sacks of corn onto the back of a huge truck. And they said, “Come on!” And they said they were going to go to Acapulco; if we wanted to, we could hike, hop in, hop on the top. So we did that, and all night long I remember sleeping on these bags and have boll weevils crawling on me.

KD: Yeah! *[laughter]*

CB: And bugs and all that. But looking straight up in the sky and seeing the stars shift as the road turns, and the stars would be shifting back and forth. And there would be the hot wind and the smell of the ocean. We arrived in Acapulco around seven, eight the morning. And my buddy and I, we hopped off, went to the bathroom around the corner. And everybody else that was hopping off the truck got picked up by the police.

KD: Whoa!

CB: The police showed up and all that, and took their backpacks and their guitars and all that, and left them there. You know, [they] took some of them. And we all hid. And then we were still tired, so we slept

underneath some bushes. I remember way up on top of the hill, and looking under these bushes and looking at the [view], Acapulco all down below. So we went down there, and gradually I hitchhiked back up to San Blas. And that was one trip when I was eighteen, you know? And then I went again at twenty-one. And then at twenty-five, I met with my girlfriend, and we had a car. And I wanted to visit *every* port—every single port between here and Panama Canal. So that’s what we did. We saved up some money, and we had a Karmann Ghia, rebuilt the engine, and we went from here to Santa Monica. And from Santa Monica to Hermosa, Redondo, all the way down to San Diego, all the way. And we went because I wanted to visit every town all across the Pacific side from here to Panama. And we did, and it took us about five days to get to the border, you know.

KD: Right.

CB: And then we camped, because a lot of camp sites between here and there. And we went all the way down Baja California, and we cross the La Paz on the ferry, went to Mazatlán, and then from there we went down to San Blas, which I had stayed, and we rented a house there, and we spent a month, month and a half there.

KD: How are you funding this trip?

CB: I would come back and do these stupid jobs of loading trucks and all that, and then just take the money. It wouldn’t cost me. If I had eight hundred dollars I could spend three months down there.

KD: Wow!

CB: You know? It wasn’t expensive. Rooms were twelve dollars, I remember. That’s the hotel room. If I wanted to be real fancy at a beach, thirty-five dollars if we had it, you know? We would share it with three people. I would eat at the market, and I would always make sure the food was hot, that they made it there. I only got sick once, in Taxco. But otherwise, I was healthy. We crossed to Mazatlán, and then drove down to San Blas to spend some time there, and then went down to San Blas. We really liked that place, where we rented a house. We spent another four weeks, maybe five weeks there. And at art galleries, rock n’ roll, discos—you know, all that. It was fun. And then we went all the way down to Colima, Manzanillo. And then from there, we came inward, and we went north to Oaxaca, Puebla, and went to all the markets. And then we got down to De Las Casas, what’s the one up in the mountains. Chiapas.

KD: Chiapas, right.

CB: Right. And we went down in there, and I spent Christmas and New Year’s there, and it was *freezing*, where we actually started a small bonfire in the room. Because it was all adobe convents, and just adobe rooms with big wooden doors, and you just had an iron bed in the middle and that was it. It was beginning to snow a little bit. And we rented horses. I [was] always at the [bourgeois] end, and so we . . . I always want to explore, so we would rent horses, and we went horse riding all through the Mayan temples up in the mountains there and all that. And we went to the river. There was a ton of stalactites and stalagmites, with Mayan offerings from a thousand years old. And then we went all the way up to—

KD: Is this just adventure, or is it also—

CB: Just adventure.

KD: Is it spiritual exploration or historical exploration?

CB: Historical. I wanted to see the ruins. But I wasn’t anything as spiritual. Because you get that from traveling when you get back. Because once you’re there, I just let myself open, and what’s ever happening, and I’m saying, “Oh, wasn’t that the greatest thing of my life?” Everything is the greatest thing of your life when you’re traveling.

KD: Yeah.

CB: So I just let myself open. You really change once you get back. So it was really about adventure. Meeting people with boats, and they would take us on boats and stuff, and the jungle. I went surfing at San Blas, but we had to paddle out down the rivers, and there was crocodiles or alligators? Crocodiles.

KD: I think crocodiles.

CB: Yeah. So they would be there, and the iguanas falling into the river and they're on the surfboard. And I don't swim and stuff, you know? And so my girlfriend and I—Kathy Jones—we didn't make it to Panama. We made it to Costa Rica, just thirty miles short and all that.

KD: Wow.

CB: And we were—supposedly, there was a friend. The long story short was that some guy was building a boat down there, [and] going to the South Pacific. He wanted a crew. So we went down there, but he was just a mess. It was the last person I would want to get on a boat with, you know? Ego trip and an alcoholic, too. So we explored Costa Rica, and went to the other side and all that, and went to the temples, and went back to Guatemala. Car broke down, didn't make it to Ticul. Fixed the car and went out to the Yucatan, and we camped for three weeks [and saw] all—the whole Yucatan peninsula, all the coast.

KD: Wow.

CB: Went to Tulum when nobody was there. They had just opened up the road to the Yucatán. And camped in Tulum, right outside of it. And then there was a soldier. And then to Uxmal. We camped underneath a tree with hammocks and stuff. Chichen Itza, we had that place three days for ourselves. Mérida, spent about a week in Mérida just to eat and explore and food. Palenque, camped at Palenque. Took magic mushroom in Palenque. Let's see . . . yeah. We went up to Yucatán, came back up, and then her parents—her relatives are Mormon. This is the woman I married eventually. And so we went up to Utah and spent some time out on the Four Corners, Zion, Bryce [Canyon]. This is all the same trip. And we came back to San Francisco, saw some friends.

KD: And how long is that trip?

CB: I think that must have been five months. Four or five months, I think, on that one, you know? And then . . . so we had started on our adventure of exactly traveling. So I had done, like, five countries right there, and Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Mexico and the U.S. And [I was] really getting a grasp about my individuality. And then at the same time, I had come back here and my friend from junior high school, him and his older brother Leopoldo McIntire. Chicanos from Michoacán. You know, he was born here, but his family's from Michoacán [they are] these Irish [people too]. Leopoldo McIntire. And *cholos*, [with] *vato* pants.

So he had gone to Vietnam and prison. They didn't send him over because he was selling marijuana at Fort Hood. He got put in prison, *da da da da da*, and then was up at Fort Ord, and they taught him paste-up, you know, which is layout and paste-up on magazines and everything. Cut and glue. They taught him that, so when he got out, he taught me. He got a job through a placement agency through the prison and all that. He got a job in Hollywood, and he goes, "Hey, you know"—they called me "Charlie"—"Hey, Charlie, they got some odd jobs over there. I could teach you paste-up."

So I got a job in Hollywood doing paste-up. So my friend through the jail got me my first real artsy job in paste-up production. And we would do the movie theater list. I would get a one-column or a two-column, or a five-column; you know, two or three four inches square, and then we would put the headline, the title of the movie. They would make different sizes. We would cut them out and get the ones that fit, and then on a typewriter . . . My mother taught me—take typing classes. I knew how to type in junior high. My mother forced us to take typing classes. And so I knew how to type, and we would make the theater list: the times, the phone number, the address on every movie theater. They all had to be done by hand. So that was my first artsy job in Hollywood. It was at the Max Factor building, right across the street from the Chinese Grauman's [Theatre], there on the fourth floor. And I was there for five years, you know, part-time, three days a week. I never had a full-time job until in my forties.

KD: So you're doing part-time, and what else are you doing?

CB: Saving my money, and then I'll take off to Mexico.

KD: Okay.

CB: Which I did. And then another part-time job, and then I moved to another place right above Dodgers Stadium. It was Figueroa at Terrace. So I lived right above Chinatown, right on the highest part of the hill.

KD: Yeah.

CB: You know? If I looked right in my backyard, which you could see the—the Armory, or—

KD: Yeah.

CB: So I lived right up there for about two and a half years. And then I would drive up Sunset and go to my job, you know? Then I had my girlfriend Kathy, and eventually, we said, "Let's go around the world." So I moved in with her for another year right after that. So this is the early '70s, you know? So I'm doing paste-up production, and all the movies. *Enter the Dragon*, first kung fu movie with [Bruce] Lee. And I went to the premiere.

KD: Really?

CB: And he had just died, and all the other actors were there, you know? Because the bosses got free tickets, and they go, "A kung fu movie? Hey, kid, you want these tickets?" [*laughter*] I would go to quite a few movie premieres. *The Exorcist* at the studios. That was a private [event]. I mean, you need to have ID to get in there because that was a *big* thing.

KD: That was big, yeah.

CB: That was real big. It was anti-religion. But I worked in advertising, and I got to hear the bosses how they worked advertising. So I worked there for five years. And then my friend, Leo McIntire, quit and went to another movie studio. All these are independents. And it was called Tony Seiniger and Associates, which I did another three years there on and off. At Tony Seiniger's, [that] was where I grew up.

KD: You grew up how?

CB: Mentally, job-wise, everything else. As an adult.

KD: I mean, before, this is a carefree, happy-go-lucky, experimenting with drugs—

CB: Traveling, all that.

KD: Yeah.

CB: I had no responsibility. Kathy did have a child. When I met her, she was divorcing, and the husband got custody. And so we didn't have any children. She was a waitress. Oh, she was a waitress at the Velvet Turtle restaurant.

KD: At the Velvet Turtle?

CB: And she was making great money.

KD: Good money.

CB: [*laughter*]

KD: I would imagine.

CB: That's why we owned four houses, you know? The waitressing, and that commercial jobs that I had, you know, with the fine art, with the paste-up. And we were both making really good money. Things would cost less. When I first started dating her, I remember I was so poor. I didn't have the job. I was between jobs. I lived underneath of a house—an apartment in a basement. An apartment off Avenue 43 on Latona here in Highland Park. And I was real skinny. I tried to sell my blood one time to pay the rent. And so that they laughed at me. They said, "You can't give blood. You *need* blood." [*laughter*] They told me to get out. And then I remember buying a can of mackerel. That's all I could afford. And I had a cat. I had this girlfriend; she had dumped me and left me the cat. [*laughter*] I got stuck with the cat.

KD: Oh, man.

CB: I remember splitting the mackerel with the cat. And I would heat up mine, you know? And then I remember meeting Kathy, and she would give me money for gas. And it would be twenty-three cents a gallon, so she used to give me two quarters. [*laughter*] She was . . . It says a lot about Kathy.

KD: [*laughter*] She wasn't going to let you go far.

CB: Yeah. [*laughter*] I was there at home, you know? But gasoline was twenty-three cents, and I remember riding my Chevy lowrider to her house. And we broke up and got together, and this and that. And she was Leo McIntire's old girlfriend, right? See, he had met her first. So it was this group of hippie guys. Kathy and I ended up being together another eighteen years to seventeen years, and we get married in 1979. And as

soon as we got married, everything went downhill, but we were together for twenty-five years, you know? And Julie came to live with us when Julie was fourteen, until she was twenty-one. I raised her. But she was . . . angry. She had Tourette's syndrome—a heavy Tourette. And she hated art, didn't want to be associated with any of my friends or anything like that. And Kathy would try to please her. We weren't close. And the whole family—what family I had—just deteriorated.

So my family was the people I met in the Chicano Movement, which is another part of the story. But there in the early '70s, I asked Kathy, I said, "Well, let's move in together, and I want to travel the world." And she goes, "Okay." So for two years, we saved our money. And we were able to say five thousand dollars each a year, and we had twenty grand at the end of two years. And we went to our travel agent, and we gave him a list of all the countries I wanted to visit. There was some thirty countries. And it's a list of every country that I dreamed of or wanted to dream of. It was my wish list. And so we had twenty grand, and we told my parents. I mean, she was quite a bit older. It was just my mother and father, and my parents got mad at me. I mean, I was twenty-seven—

KD: What year is this?

CB: Or twenty-eight. Seventy . . . '77, '78.

KD: Okay.

CB: I got that new job at Tony Seiniger's, giving me mad money, but working sixty hours a week.

KD: Sixty hours a week I was thinking.

CB: Right.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And they were all on coke. I wasn't. I didn't care for it; I would just do stupid things. I was there to do a job, and you get paid by the job.

KD: Right.

CB: So I wasn't going to go on coke. But I would have my martini at lunch at twenty-seven. *[laughter]* It was a drinking society, and the boss, you know? And then if you worked after eight hours, maybe we'll go outside and get a quick toke on some weed, get back into work. But I wouldn't get stoned until I would clock out and drive home late at night. Then I would just light up a joint. But at that was really about working. It wasn't a party. I learned so much about advertising. Headline, body copy, logo—which we'll talk about later—which is the fundamental foundation for graffiti art is the same as advertising. *[pause]*

KD: Go ahead.

CB: Yeah. My parents said that we were stupid to spend twenty thousand dollars on a trip, even though we've already traveled together; that we should buy property and apartments, and we could own—we could've bought apartments for twenty thousand dollars at that time. Cash—cash out.

KD: Right, right.

CB: You know? We could've been heavy millionaires right now with that. But nope, I wanted to travel the world. And it was the smartest thing I ever did. In retrospect, it *[was worth it]*. So the list that we gave them, I remember I said, "I want to travel around the world, totally circumnavigate the world before I was thirty."

KD: Wow.

CB: I gave myself that *[objective.]* Other people were saying they wanted their Mercedes before they were thirty. *[laughter]* But I wanted to travel around the world. And nobody was talking like that. I only had friends from Vietnam who had gone to Cambodia. They'd go on Thailand for R&R, and stuff like that. And they would say, "Oh, man, Thailand, the babes there, the clubs," whatever. And, then they would say, "Oh, yeah, and the temples and the culture." And the only country that never got beat by anybody was Thailand. And they would meet people from England and Britain, and *[they act superior]*. And I found, like, I wanted to travel the world. So we saved our money. My parents: "Okay." Gave us a blessing. And we had lived together. We got rid of the rented house in Mount Washington that we were living in.

KD: Wow.

CB: And I remember packing. Our first stop was Tahiti. LA to Tahiti. Papeete, the capital. And we were going to be there for two weeks. I remember walking down the steps with—not a backpack; it was a suitcase over my shoulder. I didn't want to look hippie. We were one step above. We were slacks or something like that, we were doing [it right]. And walking to the limousine. My work friends surprised me and Kathy and got us a limousine to take us to the airport. I was—for the first time, I got scared, because I'm leaving for a year and a half. And going to Tahiti not knowing anybody. I'm going to be away from my family and all that. It just seemed like, "What am I doing? This is—could be dangerous."

KD: When you went to Mexico, you didn't have those thoughts?

CB: No. Mexicans were safe. [I'd] not got into any kind of trouble. The police stopped me, hassled me a few times. I paid off a couple of things and all that. You know, I just . . . no fear. No nothing.

KD: But fear going to . . . ?

CB: But traveling around the world and leaving and all that, and not being able to call anybody, no support group, nothing? I got really scared, and I remember in the limousine and going to the airport and going, "What am I doing?" But also being excited. I'm excited. This is the most adventurous thing in my life. And I was not going to Vietnam to war, and I wasn't going to a job in Europe. We planned this all by ourselves, you know? So what we had planned was Tahiti [first]. We traveled all the way around Tahiti. I went to Melville's house, from *Moby Dick*.

KD: *Moby Dick*.

CB: And [I] got a grasp about all those guys who were down there. There was this big French group down there in the 1830s, 1840s. They were called the naturalists, and they would go down there, maybe it was 1860s, before the Grand Epoch. And it was maybe 1870. Captain Cook was there in the 1770s. It was still native, naïve to them out there. So I started seeing [how] these guys were living, what they were writing. And there was a little bit of it called Tahiti'iti, and all the naturalists—the French naturalists lived out there. Gauguin was drawn to those people. I went to Gauguin's house, you know, and his studio. I got to see what he was seeing. And not that much had changed. You know, sure there's a big airport and all that, and a military base, and they're shooting atomic bombs out there at the French, and heavy security—they really hassled us. But you get away from that, and it's old Tahiti, with just the waves and the natives, and you could see how it was. It was beautiful. I got that romanticism of the traveling artist and Gauguin. Until you start reading that they left their wives and children, and then—

KD: [*laughter*] I see what you're saying.

CB: Yeah. And then there are the Cook Islands. I saw the king of Tonga. I met his son. You know?

KD: How did you meet the king of Tonga's son?

CB: At a bar in Tonga. There [were] two sons, and they were both, like, playboys, and one of them had a band. And at the family house—guest homes, we all had separate rooms with a veranda. It was screened all around like that with whale teeth, things from ancient whalers, all that, and wooden floors, and they would make you breakfast at seven in the morning. It was just like old style . . . What's her name? That woman who would write down their [stories], and they would make movies of her stories? "Ma" was her last name. Not "mother," but something. "Grandma" or "Ma," or "Gram" or something.

Anyway, and then I went to Samoa. There's three Samoas. And there's American Samoa, which had McDonald's and all this stuff. And Free Samoa, or—the big island next to it, which is all Samoan culture. And then there's a tiny little [island]. I think it's called Kawai'i, just like a little small island. No—Savai'i. Savai'i, which is no electricity. It's all traditional Samoan culture. It's saved. You need to take a boat out there to the tiny little island. So we were in the Samoan—the island, and it was still traditional culture and all that, and they live in the grass houses. I forget what they were called and everything else. Helped this man dig part of his canoe, you know? It's not a log. There are planks which are woven together with coconut string from the coconut fiber that they make, and traditional symbols. And I started seeing these eye symbols that were the same in Easter Island and Tahiti and the Cook Islands, and I found out that they had

similar gods. On Maui was this famous god, too, who traveled all the south Pacific who roped the sun just like the guy in the Greek mythology.

KD: Yeah.

CB: The guy with the chariot, who roped the sun when it crossed the [sky]—I forget the name. Similar stories. And I would read these books. And I had a lot of time to read. That's when I got into reading when I was traveling around the world, you know? I read a lot of books by Joseph Conrad. You know, *The Heart of Darkness* and [others] because we went up into there.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And we went up to Borneo. I went up the rivers in Borneo. And then also [like] Joseph Conrad. I read a lot of his books. James Michener, [too, who wrote] *Return to Paradise*. They did a lot of movies . . . *South Pacific*. Joseph Conrad, who was Polish or European, [and] that guy who did all that stuff. Really hard to read. But his descriptions . . . I could spend one afternoon on one page, and just go over and over his descriptions. I didn't have to read the story. I couldn't get the story. You know how he writes.

KD: Yeah.

CB: Just descriptive. Just describing one red eye [laughter] on somebody. And I found that he is a painter. This is not a writer. And I started—I did a lot of writing and I started reading all about the histories down there. Yeah. So we were there, and somebody introduced me to this guy. He said, "Oh, yeah he's got a band. Come on over tonight, and we'll go to his house." Basically, he has a house down a dirt road. It's not fancy there. They've got electric guitars, and they're all playing rock n' roll and stuff like that. We came to a table, and it was so-and-so, Du-tu Afu-fu, Du-tu A-wa-fu, or something like that was their family name.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: I forgot his first name. And that was the son of the king of Tonga. And then [laughter] we went to the movies and they were playing *Grease*. I like *Grease*. I don't know why. [The] Travolta movie, you know? I've seen it about four or five times. [laughter] Is that being recorded? So yeah, I saw *Grease* there, and with a bunch of Australians, and they hated it, and I had to defend the American hot-rodding. I was defending LA because those are our riverbeds, and I got all tough.

KD: Is that what you identified with? The car culture part of it?

CB: As soon as I saw it on the screen, yeah. I go, "That's my riverbed!" I lived a few blocks away from there! Those cars, you know, all that, that was my mom's era, you know?

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: All the petticoats, the bobby socks, everything. And I felt it. If I had stayed here, I would say *Grease* is a silly movie, you know, with John Travolta, but once you see it out there, it became nostalgic. I missed home through that movie, and we saw it again. Singapore? Something like that. No, no. In Borneo, in Kuching, there's four countries in Borneo, and the upper river logging community—old Chinese, but with a couple of skyscrapers. And we went to a nightclub there, and because they were featuring "Los Lobos de Singapore!" [laughter] And from that day, I say Los Lobos from Singapore!

KD: Right, right, right. Not Los Lobos from East Los Angeles.

CB: A Malaysian group.

KD: Right.

CB: And they were all playing Bee Gees and stuff like that, you know?

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: And Kathy and I, we were out there discothèquing, dance. That was the thing to do. But throughout the islands, Elvis was everywhere. Altars to Elvis in the most remote little towns.

KD: Really? Did that strike you at the time as unusual?

CB: Totally unusual. Totally. I didn't realize our influence, [the] American influence out there. There was a man there in the Cook Islands. I flew to a small little atoll—Aitutaki—and spent a week there at the guesthouse. [I] rented a motorcycle and just went around it. You go around the island in twenty minutes. And there was an airport there because World War II, the Americans had built an airstrip there and carried some

planes there. And well, I had an argument. This man really got on my case of how *bad* American influence is on their culture, on the music. And he said the worst thing was ABBA. He *hated* ABBA, and ABBA was just ruining their children and everything. I told him—I said, “Well, ABBA isn’t American, but it is.” But he felt that their cultures were being destroyed by the Western cultures.

KD: And what was your response? Did you feel the same?

CB: He was right. Of course I felt the same. You have to go to church there. Okay? I wasn’t a church-going person. “Sunday, you’re going to church.” So they drag us to church, and it’s more, “Hallelujah!” I don’t know what to say. [There was] a lot more singing. Well, it’s—

KD: Well, it’s not Catholic.

CB: No, no. But they’re heavy Methodists down there.

KD: Okay.

CB: Heavy Methodist, and . . . what’s that called? Wesleyan Methodist? I don’t know. There was Moonies down there in Tonga. That’s where they ended up. And then there was a lot of Mormons in some of the islands. So they’re really a family. They’re good. They’re Western Christian family-oriented. They just really fit well.

KD: Is it the missionaries bring them the American culture?

CB: No, English.

KD: Oh, Okay.

CB: In the 1830s, during the winters they brought all this culture. Because there’s a lot of literature. There was a woman [who wrote] “The Insufferable Grief.” [She is] a wife of a missionary, who talks about taking a family and living down there on the islands. “My Island Husband” was another one from an island woman who wrote it down there.

KD: Were you reading them while you were traveling?

CB: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Because I would try to dig up their authors down there in the islands.

KD: Okay. Why are you exploring the authors?

CB: Because they were the only ones who were writing stories.

KD: Okay.

CB: I was about stories, novels, and stuff like that. And once you go down there to one of their bookstores, if they have an island author, then they’re proud of them. He is Norman Mailer, you know? You have to read *that* book that they wrote, you know, seventy-five years ago. And nothing’s changed, you know? So I thought that was fascinating. And so I did a lot of reading. What was that? *Time*—*Newsweek* had an island issue that you don’t get up here. So I would read all about what’s happening in the islands in *Newsweek*. And one island, Nui, that we went to, it’s basically a volcano that a ring—an atoll, a coral atoll—around it, and the volcano sank, and it makes a lagoon.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: So they’re just like a straight, tall hat of a volcanic—not “volcanic”—of coral rock, which is as hard as metal, and cuts as glass. And it goes straight up in the air, with cliffs maybe two hundred feet on the sides. And they’re all hollowed out because it’s calcium. There’s caves down inside. So there’s a small island that’s about . . . four miles across, and it’s its country. And we went to Nui, and somehow they never put our names on the flight, so we had to spend ten days there. And they did have a hotel, and we rented a motorcycle, and I taught myself how to ride a bike, and crash right into—and went all around into the caves and found where all of their old, ancient boats are all stacked up, a few burial plots and everything, their bones and things.

So I’m reading about, you know, Captain Cook was there in the 1780s and all that. Bligh had gone through those areas. And there at the hotel, it was made international because there was all these Europeans there. And we would all meet at the bar at a certain time, because that’s where all the shop owners or whatever and the *politicos*—who was ever important in that island culture—met at the bar, and it was a man culture.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: And you know, it was three dozen men. We would have gin and tonics. Warm. And they would talk about it, and I said, “What are all these people doing here?” They’re saying, “Oh, yeah. We found uranium in Nui.” So the UN was there either to classify, to bring them in as a country right away—and then also, these people who wanted to exploit the island, to start putting mining on it. On an island that’s only four miles in diameter.

KD: Wow.

CB: So we got to see that, and I found it interesting. It started telling me more about who I was, an American. Because they were telling me, you know, “Well, if American industry comes down here, they’re going to take it away. We need to preserve the rights of the indigenous. They need to own the property.” Because when you go to Fiji, the Fijians are party people, like Hawaiians. The Fijians are tall, more African-looking, you know? Curly hair and tall, and all the men are totally buff, and the woman [have] incredible bodies. Not like the Tongans or the Samoans. I mean, they’re huge. They’re over six feet, but they’re three hundred pounds.

KD: Right.

CB: The Fijians are just these incredible body types, like the Haitians or something like that. And they’re party people, and they were very difficult to make to work, to make the sugar cane fields when the British came in.

KD: Ah, right.

CB: So they brought Indians from India.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: So the Indians are more than sixty percent population there in Fiji. So you go down, and you see restaurants with chapatis. You see Hindu temples in Fiji. And they own all of the stores, but they don’t own the property. They own all the banking, but they can’t do anything without a Fijian owner. So there was a big hassle. And since 1980, what? They’ve had two coups in Fiji.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: What was it? Two years ago, or recently, the Parliament closed up all the doors. [The conflict] between the England culture and the Fijian culture. I never even knew that existed until you get there. We rented an apartment, and I was dying for tacos or burritos. And I saw that the Indians had this chapati—it was a flat bread tortilla. And I went over there; I said, “Hey, can you make that a little bit thinner?” And they go, “Okay.” And so I said, “Tomorrow, I’ll come by and I’ll pick up a dozen or so.” And we went to the open market, and I got some beef, and I had it ground up. And I got some tomatoes and onions, and . . . Of course they have cumin and cilantro.

KD: Yeah. Yeah.

CB: We did it up. I made some great burritos, in the apartment, on an electric stovetop. In the room we would have a pitcher of water that [had] an electric coil in the bottom, and so we’d have hot water. Most rooms had that out there. We used to put water and boil it, and then put an egg in there, and for breakfast we used to have a three-minute soft-boiled egg.

KD: Right.

CB: We would eat out of the pitcher and make our own food like that.

KD: Is that how you made it around the world with only twenty thousand dollars?

CB: Yeah. Yeah. We had a thirty-five dollars-a-day budget, and we were gone a year and four months.

KD: So you did the islands?

CB: We did the islands. And then in Samoa, I went up to see [Robert] Louis Stevenson’s home.

KD: You’re kidding me.

CB: I went to his home, and where he had died. I went up to the hill to see his gravesite, and it was great. And then he had a stream in the jungle coming down, and they had a dam broken off—it’s clogged up—and made a pond. About three times as big as this. And I noticed they had a little fire pit over there, and I told

Kathy, "We're barbequing." [laughter] So I went to a local [vendor]—they don't have stores over there. There's a great big icehouse where all the ships come in, and everybody eats out of tins. All the meat—Spam, Vienna sausages—are big down there. And the chickens are frozen, and you'd have to look in these big boxes, and they're called "numbers." Number one is about the size of a grapefruit, and [so on].

KD: Right.

CB: So we got a number four, frozen bowling ball small chicken. Defrosted it, and I went and I got some ketchup, some mustard, spices, all that, marinated the sucker with some lemons. And then we took it up there, and we made ourselves a barbeque because I love barbeque. And that was at Robert Louis Stevenson's home.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: And then we swam in his pond. And we started reading some of his stories. So I was getting this literary kind of education.

KD: Yeah.

CB: I hadn't had time to read anything like that, you know? So I was reading some really big novels. So from there we went to the islands, and then we ended up in Fiji, jazz clubs a-go-go, and disco clubs, we partied hard there and stuff. You know, they have now *Survivor: Fiji*. You know, those islands? You can go there, and they have them all little huts all around that you can rent. So we went to some of those places there, you know, and stayed there.

KD: Wow.

CB: Then, we went to New Zealand.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: Spent a month in New Zealand. And they're big on ceramics. And I met a bunch of ceramics people. They took me to their homes. I saw the kilns. I went to a ceramics show. They're big on watercolors. I rented a car, and we went from the top tip of the north island across to the south island, and went to the very top—tip of the bottom island. And I picked up fishing gear, and I went fishing in a lot of the lakes and rivers. And I say my biggest trout about thirty inches long.

KD: Wow.

CB: And it was almost as big as the calf of my leg.

KD: Wow.

CB: And it was a thrill. I caught wild trout in the rivers of with these glaciers coming down. That's a whole interview in itself. It was beautiful. We saw penguins.

KD: Are you doing any artistic expression?

CB: Oh!

KD: Did you pick up a pad of paper and . . .

CB: My whole trip I did watercolors. I did landscapes. I have all these landscapes from all these places. Tahiti, I caught a cricket outside, so there's a big [inaudible] of this kind of grasshopper.

KD: Yeah?

CB: And then with a—sitting on a flower, on an iris, an orange iris, in a night scene with the moon, because the moons up there are upside-down. And they come over here. The moon rises from the left—

KD: Right.

CB: To the right when we'd look south. Over there, you're looking north; the moon rises from the right to the left, and it's upside-down. And somehow it was closer. And you actually feel that you're standing out sideways, and off the edge of the globe. You actually feel the presence that you're not standing on top, but you're standing out sideways, and you're looking at the world. And you can feel your—the presence, the—you could survey yourself in the globe of where you are, and also that you're in the Southern Hemisphere.

KD: Wow.

CB: Whole different other kinds of stars—

KD: Yeah, yeah.

- CB: And everything else, you know? It was fascinating.
- KD: You still have the watercolors?
- CB: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. I gave them as gifts to my parents and stuff, but I have a few there, you know?
- KD: You [*inaudible*].
- CB: I've never shown them. I don't exhibit that stuff. And I never sold it—
- KD: And because it's—
- CB: It's personal. It's not—it's not what I define "art." It doesn't have the history, the language, you know, and all that kind of stuff. There are so many better watercolors than me and all that. I'm not going to take it into that realm.
- KD: So why are you doing it? Why—help me understand your capturing the expression of the place, the feeling of place.
- CB: Oh, it's—it's my art.
- KD: Okay.
- CB: It's my release. It's my fascination. I love—you know that Ferdinand the Bull? You know, the guy who sits underneath the tree and smells the flowers? [*laughter*] My ma always called me that, you know? Because I loved to stay by the beach and just draw a landscape. Stay in the mountains, on top of rocks, and just sit there and do a landscape is the—one of the most rewarding things for me. But it's not going to get me an art career; it's not going to make—put money in my pocket, and it's not going to give me dialogue. It's not going to buy me homes. It's not going to do nothing, that kind of—because once you get into art, you have to compete. And if I'm going to do watercolor landscapes, then I need to get in that line with the other ten thousand and compete. Otherwise, I just save it for myself. Do the best I can, but graffiti satisfied me. I still need it as an artist, an outlet.
- KD: But you hadn't found that yet. Or had you?
- CB: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. I had found it, but I was coming and going, coming and going. I already was tagging in the streets.
- KD: Right.
- CB: I started in '69.
- KD: Tagging in '69 means you're—
- CB: I put up my skull stencil.
- KD: It's right after high school?
- CB: Yeah. I was living on Latona, in that basement.
- KD: Right.
- CB: And then at eighteen, I was at Chouinard.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: And then that summer, I was at nineteen. You know, I was nineteen. And I was going to Chouinard, a full-time ceramics major, and that summer break one of the teachers said hey, he's teaching a painting class. I totally forgot this: a painting class in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and it cost three hundred and fifty dollars. And if you wanted to go, and you'd get painting for landscape painting. And so some ceramics people were going, and this girl that I really cared for, an Asian girl—she from here—Bonnie Yicamora—and we were in ceramics class together. And we started to make whole plate sets and teacups, extra to sell, and to make the money for three hundred and fifty dollars. And we were going to go together separately, but together. [What did I know about] relationships? Because she had this other boyfriend that she was serious about, and I was the—
- KD: You were the backup?
- CB: The backup, yeah. But that was before I knew that. But you know, in the Ceramics department was a separate room off the side of the main building. And they would lock that up, and it had skylights in the top. So before they would lock up, we would stack chairs up on top of the tables and go up and unlock the skylights. And then we'd make sure there was a ladder outside, because it was firing kilns and things like that.

And then—so we would come when nobody was there, and then we would put the ladder and climb up on the roof and open the skylight, and then put the ladder down, and then crawl in there, and then open the door, and lock the windows. There was no alarm. So we would spend the night. We did this about—I don't know—six, eight times. And we would do ceramics in the middle of night—

KD: Oh my goodness!

CB: And make plates and sell so we could have money so we could go. When did we go to the moon?

KD: Oh, I don't have that one. I keep notes of all the different events. Did we go to the moon in 1969?

CB: I missed all that on TV. I was in the mountains camping in Santa Fe at a place called Bandelier National Park. And when I came back—I didn't even hear about [the moon landing] until we came back to Santa Fe and I saw it on in the newspapers. I said, "Damn, I missed the moon landing!" You know? That one is a big one for me. I missed that one. But we were up there in Santa Fe, New Mexico. There was ten girls and five guys. I think all but one got pregnant. And it was a big scene. One couple got married. All the other girls had abortions, and they all went to Mexico or something like that. Bonnie didn't. And she wasn't pregnant. But I was having sex with her and all that, but we were just young kids, and way too much fresh air. No adult supervision.

KD: No adult supervision. [laughter]

CB: You know? It was just right before the pill and stuff.

KD: Right.

CB: We were all hippies and stuff, and being in art school.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: And then I remember the teacher—I'm not going to say his name because—because I used to sell him kilos of marijuana, and he was a good guy. The whole class would go up on the roof of Chouinard and lay back, and the girls would suntan, the guys rolled joints and just get high, and talk.

KD: And this is your cheese and wine?

CB: Actually, the cheese and wine started with my parents. You know, with my father. They were, I told you, party people. So it was really easy to party and talk and all that, and then I would sell bags of weed to some of the teachers and things, because that's where they would score, from the students.

KD: Right, right.

CB: But I remember we all went to Santa Fe, New Mexico, and I got credit, and I spent, oh, six weeks, five, six weeks out there, and got credit for a painting class at Chouinard. And this was at the same time as the moon landing. I think it was in sixty—

KD: I'm going to say '69.

CB: Sixty-nine. Exactly. Summer of love—

KD: Yeah.

CB: So that was another addition in there.

KD: I had a note that you had studied under a calligrapher.

CB: Oh, it's another story. When I was going to classes there at Pacific Asia Museum when I graduated from high school and I was living down here in Latona under—in that basement. Right around there, in '69, when I went to Santa Fe, New Mexico, I met this guy Brian Jones, a classmate, who turned out to be—later did MTV type of music videos with Michael Jackson. Then this other guy who was ten years older than me, Tom Ruddick. Tom Ruddick became my mentor there for a few years. You know, I was nineteen; he was twenty-nine. And we got along real well.

And soon as we got back, I talked to them about [what I] did. They wanted to know more about Chicano culture, being Latino and all this. I said, "Oh, yeah. Well, you know, we do *cholo* letters," and they were fascinated with *cholo* letters. When we came back, they picked up the spray can—Brian Jones and Tom Ruddick—and Brian started painting some—spraying some bulls in '69, before I did. He was doing, like, gigantic, life-size bulls, just without line, with the horns and the tail wiggling off like—and it was running. And—and he did a silk screening, which I collected. One silk screen, which I have a copy of that. And

then Tom started doing a dragon with spray can. And they only did it for that one summer, and I went with them, and I'm telling them, I go, "No, you guys are doing it all wrong," and all the letters. I had no money. I remember the first time I went tagging, I had to put—I had to dilute a bottle of red ink with some water, and I put it in the hand sprayer that I was using to water my clothes when I would iron when—

KD: Yeah, yeah. [laughter]

CB: When there was no finger sprayers. And that was my first tagging because I couldn't afford a spray can. That was the time with the macro? With the cat?

KD: Yeah.

CB: So all that. And then—but they were doing spray can, and I said, "You've got—" and they said, "That's art!" It was fun to them. But they weren't taking it serious. I go, "No, it's culture." And I was telling them, "And it belongs to us, not you." I started getting identity issues. "If they are going to write their names and start tagging," I go, "that's not right. Only Latinos and only *cholos* and only gang members and only old English do it." There was no New York graffiti at that time. Cornbread started in '67 and '68, but Taki was, like, '70, '71, the first one.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And then all that New York stuff started in the early '70s, you know? *Star Wars*, that video didn't come until '85—

KD: Eighty-five, yeah.

CB: It was later.

KD: Yeah.

[break in audio]

KD: So let me have you tell some of that again. We're on side 2 of tape 2, and it's the twenty-fifth of September. And we're continuing a story about his friends, Brian Jones and Tom Ruddick and their tagging.

CB: Mm-hmm. Tom Ruddick.

KD: Ruddick.

CB: *R-U-D-D-I-C-K*. And Brian Jones.

KD: And what were they doing?

CB: They were the artsy guys. They were the cool guys. The older guy that had all the babes, the younger guy who was the rock n' roll. And they were just clever in their work. And they were doing quick plays with shadows and all that stuff. And they were, like, the new hot art. And they picked up the spray can and started drawing these images: a bull and a dragon. And that dragon was twenty feet long. The bulls, they were all six feet high. Six feet by eight feet.

KD: [Are] they doing these on the walls, or are they doing them on canvas?

CB: They're doing on the walls or and this was where I said, "We have to do this in the Arroyo Seco river."

KD: Okay.

CB: So we were doing it down there in the in the concrete alongside the freeway.

KD: Right.

CB: But then I felt that they weren't doing it right, and it was *my* culture that they were using. In some ways, they made me . . . not envious or jealous. They put a light in me.

KD: You were aware?

CB: Awareness that I go, "Well, why can't I be doing this?" Because I felt I could do it a whole lot better. But I did not take graffiti as an art thing. To me, doing graffiti was going out there and being a part of your community, the Avenues, really respecting my tradition but also my history in Highland Park. I knew I could write the Avenues, even though I was not ever a gang member. I lived on Latona; I played in Little League in Avenue 43, in the home of the Avenues where they all hang out. You could have a Chicano surfer next door and a Chicano *cholo* next door, and I'm the Chicano hippie. And we all went to the same school, and

we all dated the same girls, and we're all driving some stupid lowrider car, or a Toyota or whatever. Or a Volkswagen. The *cholos* ride in a hippie car, and the—

KD: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

CB: It was all mixed up. There was no division there. So when I said, "These guys are taking away my culture," I started writing. I started drawing out there. And I didn't have materials, no spray can. So then I started drawing. I said, "Okay." I had known in Mexico a lot of stencil work that I seen with the political stuff with the PAN and the PRI. One-color, two-color stencils. I saw this guerilla art for political purposes. And then in '66, I started seeing some things when they had the Olympics down in Mexico City and where—those two guys, I used to know their name, and it was two black American athletes that they put up their fists. And then the shootings of the students there at the university.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: And I started seeing symbols and all this stuff, political things. And I knew it was all stencils. So that's when I click in, because I started doing a drawing, and I tried it once in the streets, and it was a skull. And it was way too complicated, and I'm a slow drawer. So I said, "Let me do a stencil." And then the new material was Mylar at that time.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And so I bought a big sheet of that and scotch taped it and stuff, and put—I didn't have [inaudible], so I put bamboo top and bottom. So it was a big sheet, five feet by six feet high. And I did the drawing; it took me about a month or so. And I used a skeleton skull, which was probably about three foot round, the skull. It was smiling, because I wanted to represent the Day of the Dead. Because I started hearing about these Chicano artists, people like Magu and Frank Romero. And I had a big discussion with Magu, and when I saw Magu's work, I go, "Well, that's Mexican American. That's our stuff. That's border. That's cute, fun. I love this." I knew what he was talking about. I knew that work. In the back of my head, I was saying, "Well, I can do better than that." I go, "I can do that," you know? And I told Magu, I said what he motivated me to do Chicano art was because I *knew* that language, and I wanted to do it, and I could do it better, because I was very competitive. And so . . . And we laughed about it and stuff.

So I knew about Chicano art, so I did my skull with a smile on his face, because I loved horror movies. [Mr.] *Sardonicus* was happening there. I did the big pimp daddy hat because of the streets. And . . . *Shaft*. And *Shaft*. What was that "fly"? *Superfly*.

KD: *Superfly*.

CB: And all those movies were coming out. Black identity. And I always knew, because when I [went to] Cal State LA, they would always have SDS—Students for a Democratic Society. I went to a couple of their parties. I met some Black Panthers; they invited me to *their* parties. And I—I did a stencil. Once I did a stencil, I did it on a bed sheet, and they had it at one of the Black Panther parties in Pasadena. You know, they're all dancing. And in their black suits with the thin ties and their black silk socks and everything else, and small hats. And they had my skull there at a Black Panther fundraiser.

And I started seeing culture, and so when I saw those I added the pimp daddy hat to the skull, the fur collar from New York because I thought that was cool. And I stopped there. And where there's fingers—the original drawing, those fingers had a joint up by mouth his mouth, and it had a joint smoking. Curlicue stars coming out, you're getting high. But I did not want to put drugs in the street. I was not going to put a symbol about drugs in the street at all. That's where I would not cross the line. So I crossed its fingers, and it turned into a Señor Suerte—Mr. Lucky.

KD: Oh.

CB: Because I used to see the *Mr. Lucky* shows on TV, and—

KD: Yeah.

CB: I thought Mr. Lucky would be good. And if I had drawn the drawing further out, that drawing would've had huge bellbottoms and platform shoes, with maybe a goldfish inside the—the heel or something.

KD: Yeah. [laughter]

CB: It was just all of that era. So I did that drawing, I cut a stencil, and the first one went out in 1969 in—at the end of '69, in the winter, on the spiral staircase when you're coming on the Pasadena Freeway from downtown. I mean, when you go north on the Five [highway], the spiral staircase, I hit it right there. It was the first shot that I sprayed. And it took two of us, and I was so nervous I misspelled my name. *C-H-A-Z*, I misspelled. I put *C-H-Z*. I was so nervous and wanted to hurry. I left a letter out. [laughter] But that thing stayed up there. It's '69 to the Olympics.

KD: Wow.

CB: Eighty-three? '84?

KD: Eighty-four.

CB: Right around there. It stayed up there till the Olympics. Then I hit another spot on the freeway down there by Avenue 43, a couple of garages up here in the hills. But I kept it in my neighborhood. And one time, I went over there to my job over there at the Max Factor building, the parking lot in the back, there was a parking structure between a little street between Hollywood High. And I hit it right there on the wall. You know, I put my stencil. And the next thing I saw, [a] rock magazine suddenly showed me, and it was recording artists and all that, and how cool they were, and they say, "Oh, and this stencil's on the side of their recording studio up in the hills." It was my thing, and they just gave it credit for some hip recording studio and stuff like that, in Hollywood.

So things were kind of happening there, and my friends who were doing this, they only did it for that one summer, Brian Jones and Tom Ruddick. Oh, there was two other guys: Willie—William Dillingham. And he was doing . . . kingfish. A great big drawing of a fish with a crown. And then that's when I met this Italian guy, Gusmano Cesaretti.

KD: Gusman?

CB: Yeah, Gusmano. "Cesar-etti." Because "little Caesar?" [laughter] And he was twenty years older than us, a photographer from Florence. And he just *loved* the culture. He started taking photographs of all of us.

KD: Oh yeah. Yeah.

CB: And car cultures, the Imperials, the Clique, car club—with a Q. Or is it with a K? I don't know. And started photographing all of us. He loved the *cholos*; he loved the *cholas*, all that stuff. He loved the tattoos on the eyes, the tears and stuff like that. And he interviewed me for the graffiti, and we spent a lot of time together, became good friends. And then in 1970—late '74, he came out to me and he says, "Hey, I interviewed you." He goes, "Can I take your transcripts and do something with it?" I go, "You can do anything you want." So in '75, he came [back and] he took me to his studio and he showed me the unbound pages, already printed, of *Street Writers*, of the book.

KD: Oh, wow.

CB: And so we made a deal, and I got five free copies. But my name didn't go on the book, but the whole dialogue and everything is verbatim, [it] is my stuff. He does give an introduction. There's a big chapter of me and my work and all that with the skull. And then he got some TV [projects]. I was on ABC *Eyewitness News*.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: They interviewed me. Which I think—I mentioned to you one time that he might have it in his archives. But it didn't go anywhere. I have the date and the producer and all that stuff. Published in 1975. And then so that book got me a lot of publicity, all right? But right up until then, I was doing my graffiti. As I did go to Chouinard—well, a minute, just take it back. I was doing my graffiti, and it's '69. Having fun. I went to Chouinard, and they changed the school from Downtown to Cal Arts in '71.

KD: Right.

CB: Right around there. The dean of the department came up to our department and had a talk with us, and said, "Everybody's transferring, except we don't have a Ceramics department. We don't believe in ceramics." His words were, "Ceramics has not progressed in the last five hundred years, so we're not going to

have a ceramics department. You guys need to go to Long Beach State or somewhere else, or Berkley to graduate." And so there was a big—you know, the big find of Chouinard and—

KD: Mm-hmm. Right.

CB: All that stuff.

KD: Seventy-one. Mm-hmm.

CB: So I had to reapply, and when the school was at a nunnery. It was a Catholic school for a semester or something. I went up there and I applied, and I showed them my two years with my ceramics, and they said I wasn't good enough. I wasn't accepted. So that was the end of my art school. But then I went over to LA City, and I took Japanese, conversational Japanese. It was just a few weeks of that. I got tired of that. Then I went to PCC and I took life drawing because I just wanted to get into a life drawing class. And did that. And then I—then I walked out of it after a while. You know, didn't get any certificates or degrees or anything. It wasn't important to me. And then—

KD: Most of your training sounds to have come both on job and while you were traveling around the world.

CB: Yes. Oh! And at nineteen, we started seeing in the *LA Weekly*—What was the one before the *LA Weekly*? The *Free Press*, LA.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And they had alternative classes. At the end, they had all these classes you could take . . . Zen Volkswagen mechanic for women. Or, you know, learn lifeguard. All these classes. No credit, and you just pay thirty-five dollars—whatever you can. One of them was calligraphy, Asian calligraphy with this guy in Echo Park. A *güerro* guy who just five years older than me, but he was all Asian dress, all incense in the house and all this stuff. I don't know. He was just totally flipped out. But he taught me—he goes, "Oh, yeah." You know, he says, "This is the way you hold the brushes." And I wasn't getting anything except for one piece that he had up hanging on the wall. It was a beautiful script, and all Chinese brush and all that: the word "the." *T-H-E*, in large.

And the light went on again, and I go, "Now, that script is art. And that is profound, and that is unique." And that I could understand. It was another step with calligraphy. And it's just the word "the." It wasn't even a tag name or a gang, or a community, or anything like that. I mean, it just hit me really, really hard. And then I said, "All right." So what other classes? And I see Pasadena, they're having this master calligrapher. It was master Chung.

KD: Right.

CB: Or is it Chiang? Chung? Chiang?

KD: I have "Yun Chung Chiang."

CB: All right. I'm not—what is the last name? The first one, or . . .

KD: We're probably saying it incorrectly—Chung. *C-H-U-N-G*. Chiang.

CB: [Chung Yun] Chiang.

KD: *C-H-I-A-N-G*.

CB: He gave me a bio, and I kept that, and I still have that. And it showed [he] is half-Chinese. His mentor was the brother of the last emperor of China.

KD: Oh, Okay.

CB: Po is the brother. And he learned from him. So I did not learn Asian calligraphy. What I *did* learn was that every line counts. It was—now I know it's fifty-nine minutes of meditation, one minute of execution.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: To me, that's a spray can mentality. And then—plus the *cholos* took themselves *stone* serious as warriors, and started reading more about Japanese calligraphy. And you know, in college, you love Hokusai. You love all those guys. And then with the Asian girlfriend, she used to bring me lunch, and we used to turn our paintbrushes the other way around and eat the rice with our paintbrushes. [*laughter*] So that's—that's so—

KD: Romantic.

CB: *Lady and the Tramp*.

KD: Yeah.

CB: You know?

KD: Oh, right.

CB: Yeah. It was real cute and stuff. And so . . . this Asian culture I was very much interested. So I went to the classes, and in Pasadena, I learned to take letters serious. And we talked a few times there and stuff like that. I was—already was nineteen. And then—so I left that, and then right then I realized—and then when I got into the advertising with my friend coming back from prison around '71, '72, I started seeing headline, body copy, logo. The public space. Billboards. For example, headline, body copy, logo—is that your headline on a newspaper movie, okay. You've got your headline: "They came to kill, but fell in love."

KD: Right.

CB: The body copy is all the actors' name and all that. The headline is part of the title.

KD: Right.

CB: And then the logo is the person who is paying for the whole thing—the sponsor, all that. So it is at the bottom. And they have their own symbol: a visual title, letters, of symbol logos, or whatever not. Circle T, circle R, circle TM, all that stuff, I had to learn about what—copyrights and things, and all that. And then I realized that advertising and graffiti were one in the same. And I saw that the art in graffiti or the spirit in graffiti could be put into an advertising. It could be funneled, and it's distilled into advertising because how they try to get a whole movie or a whole book into one poster. Especially we were taught that you had to grasp it within three seconds, because if you're driving on the freeway and you see a billboard, you only have three seconds to catch it. TV was something—four seconds; something else was six seconds. And formats and all that.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: How much have you seen?

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: And the format dictated how much you could put in that space and all that. And then what were they saying, you know? I really was getting the grasp about formatting. So when I went around the world just a few years later after that, I started collecting all these newspapers. So in Tahiti, in French, and in Fiji, it would be Hindu. You know, it's all these different countries, different languages: Sanskrit, Tagalog, Filipino. Even though I could not read what they were writing about, I could tell by the formatting the first page was international news; by the size of the headlines, by the pictures, by the formatting how much information.

And then also, the logos were big corporations. Second page, local news. Logos changed and all that stuff. Third page are the sales, except in the world you never have sales of food. Only in the United States. We never saw food sales like supermarket stuff in all the advertisement for sale food, and when I was around, I never saw—really saw that. It was—

KD: Fascinating.

CB: It was other things. You have sales on food here in—in California. I didn't realize—God, the food here is great! [*laughter*] The food is great in California! But I started collecting newspapers, and I could tell by the formatting what the subject matter was. There was a big show up at Museum of Natural History, *otra vez*, and they had just did some surveys, excavations in the city of Ur in Iraq, Ur and also Mari? Was that the other one? And they had dug up some of the royal libraries, and because of the fire or something, the clay tablets were hard. They were preserved. And there was an exhibition. And I got my ass down there as fast as I could. I go, "I got to look through these layouts." And the first writings. Because I knew initially writing, because I was reading *Epic of Gilgamesh*. One of the first books written from the Sumerian.

KD: Right.

CB: It's that quest story, and through the battle, [they] find redemption. But I knew those were the very first writings, and the first writings came from keeping accounting. This was script, and I wanted to see the layout, all right? I mean, this was food for me. This was—this was—

- KD: You've been doing research for a long time! *[laughter]*
- CB: Yeah. And I was about—early twenties, right around there.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: Because I saw it—I saw it in advertising. Headline, body copy, logo, flush left, flush right, you know, sub copy, sub text, all this stuff, where—how it goes.
- KD: Did you think of it as research, as investigation?
- CB: No. And nobody else was doing it. I would tell Kathy. I would tell people and all that, and they found it interesting, but nobody really cared about it. It didn't make sense, because I was into graffiti and nobody cared about graffiti. That was the poison; that was the stink of anything I wanted to do.
- KD: So even before you're creating something that might be considered fine art, around '69 and then into the '70s, you're investigating script?
- CB: Mm-hmm.
- KD: Investigating script as art, as you said?
- CB: It took, like, to '74, '75 for me to tell myself that graffiti is art. I kept those two things separate.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: Until I started seeing all this blending, and I said, "I can make graffiti art by investigating it in an art sense." I told myself, "I need to make a painting of graffiti." To prove that—you know, not that you put it on canvas, it's art, but to investigate it, and actually what does graffiti look like on canvas? What would it speak of? What would those, like the composition, would be different?
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: You would spend more time on it and all that. You'd get more detailed instead of—you can't grasp the whole wall. Something like that. It turns into something else. Where is that going to take me? So I started seeing all these relationships between the billboard design and graffiti, and also I started asking myself, "So who owns the public space?" Because billboards were full of liquor, smokes, smoking advertisements, and you talk about some things that are detrimental to the human condition. "And if they're throwing [up] graffiti there," I go, "then how come we can't have [space]." I didn't see graffiti as dangerous. Why can't we put it in the streets? Gusmano Cesaretti went to the city council in '75 and asked if we have the Arroyo Seco river as a free zone for graffiti. And he had a brochure. I say "the brochure." And for one mile on the Arroyo. And they said no, because of insurance; they could not have youth down there, and accident happens—
- KD: Oh, Okay.
- CB: They're liable and all that stuff. And plus they didn't want to encourage that graffiti. That was the beginning of a lot of battles with city hall.
- KD: Let's take a break. *[inaudible]*
- CB: I think we might—
- KD: You've been—you're really an amazing *[laughter]* storyteller!

SEPTEMBER 27, 2007

KD: Testing one, two, three. Why don't you see what your voice is like for the machine?

CB: Hello. Good morning, Karen.

KD: This is Karen Davalos with Chaz Bojórquez. It's September 27, 2007, and we're on our second session for this life history interview. And I wanted to ask you today about your first encounters with the Chicano Movement.

CB: Mm-hmm. Can we move this?

KD: Sure.

CB: That way, I have a direct view of you.

KD: Yeah.

CB: Because in some ways, I'm telling you the story.

KD: Yeah.

CB: I'm not remembering. My first encounters? Well, let me just say that from our last interview, just that one phrase I wanted to tell you about when I was in Chouinard.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: And there in '69, when I was first going there. I was in ceramics, and my teacher was Juanita Jimenez, and then my regular classes I had some really incredible teachers. And I do remember the one who really encouraged me—not directly, not really actually saying anything to me, but just [someone] who I felt was an artist who I really admired, who I really wanted to be was this teacher Mike [Matsumi] Kanemitsu. And he was a famous artist. He worked in watercolors that were very fluid. And he would bring me scraps of his paintings, the end pieces of the canvas rolls, which would be pieces, three, four feet square or something like that.

KD: Uh-huh.

CB: And he would give me those pieces because I didn't have hardly any money. And I felt so heart moved by his generosity that I felt that he was the one that was opening the artistic doors for me. He gave me the green light that I could be an artist. And he would tell incredible stories. He was basically from New York and a Japanese man. What's ironic about it is that he would bring in a little son, a very young boy whose name was Paul. And Paul was about two years old. Later on in years, Mike and I got together because he worked—his studio was down on Traction, [where] Richard Duardo was. He was downstairs below, on Fourth and Traction.

So, and I met Mike again many years later, and he said he was going to have a film showing of his Academy Award-winning film about silk screening. And there I met his son again, who by then was about fourteen, who was a graffiti writer. Which Paul and I became friends. [Skept] was his name. And that was about fifteen years ago. So Paul and I have become close friends. We see each other every once in a while. His father has since passed away, but I still feel very much connected to him through his son. And that's even up till today. And then his son being in graffiti is an added plus.

KD: Amazing connection.

CB: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. So anyway, I just wanted to plug that in: that Mike Kanemitsu was a huge influence. And it's just that hand on the shoulder and that older man kind of giving you [encouragement], saying, "Okay, you are—you're a working artist." Nobody had ever said that to me. Everybody always seemed to criticize what I was doing. And so this was the first time I really felt that I was doing the right thing.

KD: Criticize the . . .

CB: Criticize that my art wasn't good enough; that graffiti wasn't art; that ceramics is really a craft that wasn't going there; that I didn't have a career, like teaching or something. There was no support group, and when you're a young man at eighteen, nineteen years old—I was very, very shy. Very vulnerable. And so when I had that encouragement by Mike Kanemitsu—and I had his class for about . . . two, two and a half years and stuff. So he was a very wonderful man. And I really miss him. So we can I guess go on to the Chicano stuff.

KD: Chicano?

CB: Yeah. Okay. This is going to be stumbly. Which [year] was it? Seventy . . . Okay, that was Sister Karen, and—and when I came back from the trip. In 1969—I graduated in '67, so I had lived with my parents there for a year or so, and then I moved out when I was about twenty with my brother. That was around 1969. And then I started seeing things in the newspaper that were the first indications of the Chicano art movement. Because when I left high school—in '68, I believe, was the walkouts?

KD: Yes.

CB: Right around there?

KD: Yes.

CB: Because it happened right after. And . . . so I missed all the walkouts. I was totally detached from any schools or friends, or anything like that. I had no connections. And so the walkouts were just something that I would see in the newspaper or watch on TV. I did not participate or have any friends involved in it. It seemed . . . Other kind of people marching for honorable causes. But I started seeing the Chicano art movement at that time. And that made more sense to me, and it was something I never had seen before. And I was really inspired by Magu.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: And I felt Carlos Almaraz, and—and I really admired Frank Romero, and then the Streetscapers. And it took quite a few years—maybe at least twenty years later—to finally meet these people.

KD: Wait a minute, wait a minute. Where were you seeing their stuff?

CB: In the newspapers and magazines.

KD: Okay.

CB: Not in art galleries. I started seeing a couple of murals. But like I said, I never really ventured into East LA or anything.

KD: Right.

CB: Any mural that would happen downtown.

KD: Right.

CB: My involvement was very slow and cautious, and—and it was just through a vision. At the same time I did not connect with any of those people, I started seeing in Highland Park on Figueroa, there was a shop on Avenue 55 that I could see up in the window, and it was this rockabilly poster, and a bunch of other posters. And I thought it was really cool and cutting edge, and somebody told me there was an art studio up there. Never went up there; never had the nerve. And years later, as I found out, it was "Centro Cultura"—Richard Duardo's place.

KD: Yeah, yeah.

CB: I can't remember the name of it. It was Richard Duardo's place. Him and I talked about it years later. But I started seeing glimpses of the kind of movement that I wanted to participate in, that I wanted to be part of. But I was still not connecting. And then somehow—I don't know who it was—I met somebody who took me to a meeting, to the Mechicano Art Center on . . . I can't remember if it was on Cesar Chavez, First Street, or Whittier. I can't even remember where it was located.

KD: It had two locations.

CB: Mm-hmm. Well, the location I was involved was—it was right on front of a big boulevard.

KD: Okay.

CB: On the corner, it had a big glass window.

KD: Yeah.

CB: I met the—the director, Ray [Atilano].

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: And a nice, quiet man who had a cane. And he was the type of man that you spoke to and had conversations with, instead of a—somebody, an action person. And he was one of the first men to actually listen to me, or want to talk art. And then he was the first one who gave me my first art job. He hired me to hang

the show. And he asked me if I ever hung a show, and I told him no, I don't know how. He says, "Can you hammer a nail and measure?" I go, "I can do that."

KD: Yeah.

CB: I was very arrogant on the other ways, occasionally. *[laughter]* And so I hung this show, and he—I think he gave me twenty-five dollars, which paid my month's rent. Which I was real happy, and I felt like I could put the A for "artist." At least I got the letter A.

KD: Yeah.

CB: I felt like I was doing the right thing being involved in an art gallery.

KD: Did you know what show—do you remember the show?

CB: No, I don't remember the show. But I remember that I took my painting down there to show, and they didn't like it, and it wasn't shown. *[laughter]* And my painting was a painting that it was—it was a canvas that was probably about four feet by five feet, and it was just gold leaf. I had bought this fake gold leaf at Standard Brands, which was the art store before the Art Store, and—and I really liked the sense of the reflection of the gold leaf. Also how they put gold leaf in the backgrounds of Japanese screens—

KD: Yeah.

CB: But also that the sold metallic color was what you put underneath of cars, and the distance would drop, and I really liked the sense of it, just a sheer wall that would shimmer and vibrate and—and glow. So I put the canvas, everything gold leaf, but I added some maturity to it, so I wanted to be rusted all of the squares and all that. And the squares themselves started making this uniform pattern.

KD: Right.

CB: And the edges between—themselves started getting really interesting. They had tiny little bits of color in there. And—but I wasn't getting the patina that I wanted, and I didn't know how to make a patina except something rusted out and all that. So I go, "Oh, Okay. I'll urinate on the painting." All right? *[laughter]* So I put—

KD: To cause the—

CB: Yeah. So I put some—

KD: Oxidation? Yeah.

CB: It'll cause the oxidation, and because—you know, that—that was my—I figured that might work. So I urinated in a spray bottle. Probably the same spray bottle—

KD: Oh, so you're controlling—

CB: *[laughter]* Yeah, I'm controlling it. I added some water to it because I thought it would hold, and I would spray it for quite a few days. I had it outside, and it would dry off, and I'd spray it again. And it smelled a little bit, and you know. But I started getting the patina I wanted. And I'm a process person. I don't care how long it takes, how long it—I don't care how long it takes, as long as I'm getting to the end that I want. And so to me, it—it's always been the journey not getting there. It's always been the journey. And that's the way it is in my paintings. And I got a beautiful green edges and the patina and everything, so I felt I had a interesting painting. I took it down to my Chicano art center. They felt that it wasn't Chicano enough or interesting enough, or—what was it? It wasn't to the theme of what they were having, so I guess they liked it or dislike it, but it was not included in the show.

KD: So help me out: when they said no, did they use words like "not Chicano enough," or was that something you were—

CB: That's something I'm thinking back now.

KD: Thinking back now?

CB: Because that's what I got later on.

KD: Right.

CB: What was important there then—the Mechicano Art Center, the Goetz [Art Studios and] Gallery, I wasn't aware of Self Help, but I know it was starting. They were really protective of being Chicanos, so they only could show traditional Chicano paintings in those days. So it was family values, religious, migration, farm

workers was really important. Marches. If you were angry, you were right about Vietnam. Hey, baby. So a plain gold painting wasn't saying anything to anybody. I think it was a select show at another gallery. And I kept my mouth shut because I didn't know the Chicano dialogue. I did not consider myself Chicano, but I considered myself a Los Angeles Latino. And this was artwork I could understand. Coming from a Tijuana influence and Los Angeles, Olvera Street, you know, everything? It seemed—and downtown. I said, "This is my work. These are my people, even though we're not—may not be doing the same imagery."

KD: The sense of place?

CB: It's a sense. Exactly. It was a sense of place, and I did not realize how much I really needed a sense of place. Years later, Self Help became my place that I really felt that I belonged to. So the Mechicano [Art] Center . . . I think I lasted there throughout the summer and winter. It wasn't a whole year. And I had a big argument with—not with Ray. They gave us a commission. It was right across the street. It was a hospital. And they said that we could paint some murals inside the children's wing. And when I asked Ray, I said, "Hey, are we going to start?" Because I did a bunch of drawings of fishes all dressed up as mariachis doing songs, and other fishes dancing, and it was all—a whole underwater scene. It was like a *Fantasia* thing or—

KD: Wow.

CB: And very influenced by Walt Disney type of coloring, and they would be painted on Masonite, and then really cut out, relieved, and then applied to the wall. That way the walls could be pretty much left alone, and all these were just large applications.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: Can we stop it right now?

[break in audio]

KD: You were telling me about the mural. The design was these dancing fish?

CB: Oh, yes. In the hospital. So I had the drawings and everything else, and once I went over there and I approached the director of the hospital. They said they never heard any—of the project. They didn't have any money. I was there to pick up the money and the paint. And they had nothing, and somehow I got very angry and I flipped, and I told them that they were being very abusive, using talent and trying to get us on the cheap. And I was—a very young man's attitude, which I understand now, I was hurt. [laughter]

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: You know?

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: And . . . so anyway, I told them off, and the doctor said that I should—I need to calm down and start taking life a little bit more serious. [laughter] I got so mad I quit the Mechicano Art Center.

KD: So you didn't have—you said you were thinking back on when your—when your gold leaf painting was rejected.

CB: Mm-hmm.

KD: Thinking back that it wasn't Chicano enough. At that time, in the '70s, was there a dialogue with you about what kind of work you were doing and how it did or didn't fit? Or did people talk about it with you?

CB: In the conversation . . . It was the first time I ever sat in a meeting, in a circle of talking about Chicano art, but I wouldn't contribute because there wasn't much I could contribute. I realize now I had a lot. I didn't feel that I was a Chicano artist until you actually do Chicano art. I didn't feel that you were an artist until you actually got *paid* to be an artist.

KD: Yes. I've heard you say that, yes.

CB: So I felt that I was still a young kid unloading trucks. I would drive in my Chevy and either work downtown or loading cigarette machines in bars and all that.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: And which I felt comfortable in those places. I didn't feel that I was a member yet. But I felt that I could be a Chicano by being who I was. I felt being a Chicano was being born in Los Angeles of Mexican ancestry,

and having all that visual language in my backpack. My life was from Los Angeles and Tijuana; it was the border, issues and imagery. So I felt I could participate. But I was going to participate in what was important to me, and at that time I guess it was . . . conceptual surface.

KD: Right.

CB: You know? That I was going to bring my work to the Chicano movement, and it would be Chicano art. Which I was wrong: they already had a definition, a criteria what Chicano imagery *should* be, and I was out of the pool. I was out of that circle, out of the box. So in some ways, my imagery did not fit at all. I had a cloud pencil drawing which was abstract clouds. When I would travel in Mexico, I would do these cloud drawings of what would a cloud look like, and then what it looks like in five minutes later, and what it looks like five minutes later. So it would just be these kind of continuing little abstract or squiggles, kind of changing shapes, and I would put numbers under them. I had a drawing something like that, and then I went to the Goetz gallery. And I can't remember who was there except a couple of men. It was a woman [too]. And it could've been Christina Ochoa at that time, who is now my lady. But we may have met, but I don't remember. Because she worked at the Goetz gallery there for a few years before Self Help Graphics.

And . . . so I was called to come and pick up my piece before the opening. And I went down there, and evidently I didn't have a proper frame. It was a little plastic thing, I glued a hook onto it. It hung on the wall; it fell down, it broke. So I had to pick up all the pieces. So that was my first and last experience with the Goetz gallery. By that time I was kind of disgusted with the Chicano Movement. I didn't give it much credit because I didn't feel that I fit.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: And I found out that it was more Mexicano than me. I was rock n' roll. I was Hendrix. I was LA. I didn't speak Spanish hardly, very well. And I had more surf culture in me.

KD: Right.

CB: And I just felt—I go, “Maybe I'm just dealing with the wrong people here.” Even though I felt the Chicano Movement was like relatives.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: Family extension.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: It was very close. Heartfelt, and I understood it. But in some ways I didn't feel I belonged, or I didn't feel like I even qualified. I felt very much under—undereducated, and also that maybe I didn't have my vision yet. I felt still very lost in trying to find who I was. In the same time, at this very same time, I was going out on the streets and doing graffiti.

KD: Right.

CB: But I didn't consider graffiti art but I felt that it had something to do more with the Chicano movement because it dealt with *cholo* gangs. But *cholo* gangs were—to me were the contemporary, was the real-life contemporary cutting edge, real-time Chicano movement. The Chicano movement then was about the farm workers, César Chávez, unions. My father was a big union member, but I didn't have any connections with that. My family did not come from the farms.

KD: So you didn't have a sense that maybe their boundaries were too narrow? Their definitions were too narrow?

CB: Yes, I did have the sense that their definitions were too narrow, very strong, very powerful, and going in a different direction than I needed to go.

KD: But your style wasn't to confront that and say, “You guys need to change it, make it so it fits me?” You just—

CB: I tried to participate in bringing *my* language into it, which I was still stumbling it because I thought it was because of abstraction. But I realized that just by being brown you don't participate; that it had to be more than that. And I did not have the proper language or the tools to participate in the Chicano Movement, because my work was still ceramics, gold leaf painting, and then abstract oil painting at that time. So I

didn't have anything to contribute. But at the same time, without even noticing it, I was doing the graffiti. My first tag was in '69, so it was all part of that.

KD: It was the same time.

CB: You know?

KD: Help me with what you actually did in Mechicano. You said the first thing you did was hang a show. What other kind of roles did you play then?

CB: That was it. I never went on a mural thing with them; I never—we never hung out afterwards. I went to about maybe about eight or nine meetings.

KD: And these meetings of consisted like, "what we're going to do next?"

CB: Yes. It was a more organizational "what we're going to do next." "[What] is coming up; there's some shows." Not that much that I can remember a dialogue about Chicano identity. Not, like, Mental Menudo.

KD: Okay. Okay.

CB: Yeah. That's different. That's about Chicano identity. This was more organizational things about limited resources, who can show up to hang this show, who can do this and that. It was very, very limited. But they had a really nice, big space as I recall. And plus, I needed to participate somewhere, and I was not finding anywhere to participate.

KD: So your next step was what?

CB: With the Chicano Movement? Let's see . . . then I was living in the basement off of Avenue 43 on Latona Street, and that's gang territory. I was getting involved in drugs, and I was getting heavy with the movies. I loved the movies. And cruising Hollywood, I was a real hippie, and a lot of music. I went to a lot of clubs. And in my life, that never stopped. We still go to a lot of clubs and all that. And when—that started when I was a young man going to clubs and bars and things, it's never stopped. That's my whole life, you know, of just participating in all these things. Where was I? What I remember seeing: the zigzag man on the rolling papers.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And that to me was part of the hippie culture. Zigzag man, t-shirts, and posters at head shops and everything like that. I started seeing . . . I think I may have described this before on the tape: the *calavera*. That story was always part of my family history, because we'd always heat little clay *calaveras* as mariachis in Tijuana, all these little clay statues of *calaveras* and dogs. That was always funny to me, and death was never very scary because my experience with the bullfights and—

KD: Are you saying that you actually had some prior childhood experience with Day of the Dead?

CB: Yeah. In Tijuana, they would always have Day of the Dead. [In] Tijuana [they] would dress up for Day of the Dead.

KD: Right.

CB: But it was more of a festival instead of a religious festival.

KD: Right.

CB: And it was more of funny sculptures and breads, and candy shiver skulls, and things like that. To me, I did not understand the religious part of it. We never went to the cemetery, even though my grandparents are buried in Tijuana, in the Tijuana cemetery up on the hill. So I do have that connection. But we never—the family never did that.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: To us, it was more of a festive thing. And I'm lost.

KD: I'm sorry. I interrupted you. You were talking about the zigzag man and—

CB: Yeah. Yeah. The skulls to me was very much part of it; in my culture, something that I could adopt, adapt, and grab hold on. And then watching a lot of horror movies and sci-fi movies, I don't know if *Star Trek* started then, but I've always been a Trekkie. You know? I've always loved *Star Trek*, and I've seen all of the different programs that they have. I have yet to go.

KD: Well, that's something we have in common. [laughter]

- CB: I have yet to go to a convention, but that's—
- KD: Oh, Okay. *[laughter]*
- CB: People who like sci-fi movies are optimists—
- KD: Yes.
- CB: You know? You know?
- KD: Yes.
- CB: So, but I could not bring my Trekkie into the Chicano. You know, they didn't understand that. It was— everything I did was too Anglo. I had a lot of hotrod influence because we used to build hotrod plastic cars.
- KD: Yeah. You were saying you did them without the models. I found that really fascinating.
- CB: Mm-hmm. They were—
- KD: You did them without the kit.
- CB: Oh, yes.
- KD: You just built them yourself.
- CB: The airplanes, yeah. And then with the cars there were plastic kits, but we would mix all the different body parts. And then we would spray paint them a certain way, like the body shops.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: Transparent blue? You'd always put silver underneath. And transparent red, you always put gold underneath. Which, I took those applications up into my paintings even now. You know, I take that hotrod body shop background, which the hotrods were all in the magazines. There were the surf magazines, and the hotrod magazines were very, very similar in those days. And *Mad* magazine.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: You know? It was kind of a goofy, Big Daddy Roth—*Mad* magazine type of character with the hotrods in Hollywood. You know? The Munster car, the Mysterian, Mysterious, with the bubble top. [This was Ed Roth's Mysterian, built in 1963—ed.] I knew all of those cars. That was really Hollywood in some way. The lowbrow culture before. And it was LA culture. What that had to do with the Chicano culture, it wasn't connected yet. It was too set—too much separated. You know? Chicanos didn't surf. They did, but it wasn't part of the movement.
- KD: Right.
- CB: So yeah, *[laughter]* which is funny when Cheech and Chong—their first movie, *Up in Smoke*, there they are with a surfboard and a convertible lowrider.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: And now I realize when the surf movies were up there by Malibu, that's where he has a home. Cheech was very much involved in Malibu. He is a Chicano that was born in Long Beach with a father who was a policeman. Typical Chicano. And talk about Chino Latino, Cheech and Chong?
- KD: Yes. *[laughter]* Yeah.
- CB: You know? Anyway, that's later. The connections come later, but at the beginning it was very much separate. I did my stencil with the skull, smiling skull of Dr. Sardonicus. The skull of the Chicano Movement, and the hat of like I said, is the pimp daddy's from New York, from the movie culture. It was *Superfly* and *Shaft*. And—because I identified more with the black cultural movement of what they were doing for civil rights.
- KD: And where were you getting that information or that influence?
- CB: Like I said, through Cal State LA, were through Students for a Democratic Society—
- KD: Okay.
- CB: And the Black Panthers. Even though I was not a hard activist, I was a hard partier. So I—
- KD: Right. You said they were using your work.
- CB: They were using my work, and I also—
- KD: You knew these people.
- CB: That was through—what's that if you absorb through your cell membrane or something? *[laughter]*
- KD: Yeah.

CB: Meiosis, or. . . ?

KD: Osmosis?

CB: Osmosis.

KD: Yeah.

CB: That's the way I was just getting things. I was not an activist. I did not have a voice where I could just have my opinions and all that. They would pop out, but it was mostly anger, and I would just be a confused kid, and I would usually say stupid things. And another thing was—that I did that was stupid in Mechicano Art Center now that I remember was that they did have an art show, and that it was going to be at the LA County Art Museum but it was going to be in their rental gallery. And they asked me if I would participate and put in a small piece in their rental gallery. And I said, "Where is the rental gallery?" They say, "Oh, downstairs." I go, "Is that a real gallery?" They go, "No." And I got really mad that here once again, that we're being used and abused, and we're getting the back door, and we're better than that. And I refused to participate. *[laughter]*

KD: I'd have been right there with you.

CB: Yeah, but what a stupid thing! Years later—and I had a print at Self Help Graphics, and it was shown in a group show at the rental gallery. And that was about ten years ago, so that was probably about '98, '99—right around in there. And I remember I was really proud and happy that it took me—what? From '69 to '90 . . . '98 to finally get my head straight and be really proud. And I was really happy to be there in the rental gallery, and to show in the LACMA downstairs. Because I realized that everything counts, and there's always a new audience, and there's always—my job is if I have something to say, I need to show it, define and defend it, and I need to prove it. And everywhere is valid.

But it took me that many years to get my head on straight. I lost maybe some opportunities when I was a young man in the Chicano Movement, because if they didn't accept me I-didn't-want-to-be-there attitude. Around that time—let's see. The next Chicano encounter . . . nothing. Nothing for years, until I came back from traveling around the world.

KD: Do you want to talk about that trip? Because we didn't finish.

CB: You know? No, no. That's right. So we're going to talk about that trip, because I had a lot of influences and stuff which gave me a lot of foundation from when I got back. A lot of validation when I got back. But I'm trying to think—anything else with the Mechicano Art Center in the '70s? And the Vietnam War ended. I was traveling in Mexico an awful lot. I was out of town a lot of that time. I was in South and Central America. I had to Mexico I think a total of seven times before 1980—

KD: Wow.

CB: You know? And—

KD: I don't think we got that. I mean, you talked about going to Mexico, but I didn't realize it was seven different trips.

CB: Yeah, it was probably about—

KD: Wow.

CB: If you add it all together, I think it was about three years. Living down in Puerto Vallarta. Did I talk about that?

KD: Yes, you did.

CB: About myself and things, about hitchhiking and stuff. So all that time, in some ways it kept me out of the city, and I lost track of the—what the Chicano Movement was doing. Do you want to stop that, or—

KD: No, I'm fine.

CB: Are you getting volumes? I was getting my job with Tony Seiniger my second movie studio place, that I was—oh, here. Okay. What happened around '78, '79, I was working at Tony Seiniger's, and then I was paste-up production, but they would give me assignments to do titles for the movies. Because every time a gang movie would come up, they go, you know, "Charlie! Here, would—you're from East LA. Why don't you do this logo?" Since I was the only Latino in the whole place. And this is over there in . . . Third Street

and Beverly, or something like that. Over there by the Beverly Center it's South Hollywood, all that industry. I was a real yuppie. I [was] making a lot of money, every time a gang movie would come in, they would give me a chance to do the title. They had just did *Taxi Driver*.

KD: Okay. Yeah.

CB: So Tony Scott, the director of—I don't know. He wasn't the producer of that. The director was Scorsese, wasn't it?

KD: Yeah.

CB: Okay. So the producer, Tony Scott, wanted to do something in East LA. So he came in East LA. He was going to be doing a brand new movie with some brand new actors and all that. And Richard Yñiguez was one of the actors, and he came in, and the movie was going to be called *Boulevard Nights*. And I was given the opportunity to put the gang tattoo on his arm, which was a cross with a rose, a bleeding rose. But since it was temporary, we only did it with felt markers. So that was my job: to put a fake tattoo on him. And I did a logo and showed it to Tony Seiniger and Tony Scott, and they said, "It's too gang-looking." So I had to milk it down. Make it more plainer. And then there's a legality that the average cap height of all the letters that you have to count through picas of the title a percentage of that has to be the equivalent—equal the medium cap height of all the actors' names.

KD: Right.

CB: If you messed around there in the title down in the credits, you had to put 100 percent—100 percent cap heights of all the titles and credits, and directors and producers and all that. And the actor's name had to be so much a percentage of the title. And you would measure the letters, the height, and then make them. So there was all this—this legality, and also readability. So I learned about understanding the logo, of how it's supposed to legally represent the movie, also visually represent the story, and also that a poster, an announcement has to be read in a certain—in its own, in its own way. You have so many seconds to see it—

KD: Right.

CB: And you need to comprehend it, exactly what it is. A radio program, a story, a book, a movie, a play, or whatever, you need to explain all that in a vision on a piece of paper as quick as possible.

KD: So you were working first in—

CB: It economized. I started to economize.

KD: Economize, yeah.

CB: Economize my thinking of exactly how to present language, and how I should be designing my graffiti in the streets more into an advertising concept and foundation instead of plain name and just tagging.

KD: I don't know this language. You said "paste-up production," and then they brought you in to do the titles?

CB: Right.

KD: Those are separate parts of this industry, but you have to tell me about paste-up.

CB: Okay.

KD: Last time we talked about headline, body copy—

CB: Body copy and logo.

KD: And logo.

CB: Right.

KD: These influenced your tagging style?

CB: Yes.

KD: Okay.

CB: Yes. Let me explain what I was grasping, understanding from advertising that made the connection through—to graffiti was that first you had is the public space. And money buys billboards. The largest lobbyist here in California are the billboards, as far as really strongest. And they could put up anything they want. And I found it offensive. It wasn't "offensive." I found it equally contrary or argumentative that if

you're going to be putting graffiti in the streets, then—if you could put billboards of naked women, liquor, cigarettes, other vices on the billboards in public spaces, large, then graffiti wasn't that much different.

KD: See, I'm curious where you got that critical voice, though, where that criticism of media—especially media in your community, where does that critique come from?

CB: It was a critical voice, in some ways. I found I'm not really complementary, but were equals, were that they were the same thing. There's a word for it. Putting graffiti out there on the back of a liquor wall was doing the layout of a billboard or a magazine. Or laying it out for a marquee for a movie or a one-sheet poster, which of—

[*break in audio*]

KD: This is Karen Davalos with Chaz Bojórquez, and we're on tape 3 on the twenty-seventh of September [2007]. And he was telling me about the connection between how he sees the complementary roles of graffiti and mass media, and billboards in the community.

CB: Mm-hmm.

KD: Go ahead.

CB: All right. You had asked me if I was making some type of critical analysis or something. I didn't approach it any way that I was trying to make an understanding of it, because in some ways all this happened maybe with weeks, months, and years in-between it. [*laughter*]

KD: Okay.

CB: It was an unwrapping of the onion.

KD: Okay.

CB: More knowledge would come to me, and I think a greater, wider understanding of exactly how graffiti functions in the street. I noticed that it was doing the same thing. It was drawing an audience. It was speaking for a unique group. It had a roll call. I could look at a graffiti piece and tell you how old the kids were through the hand styles, through the heights of the letters: letters closer to the bottom of the sidewalk are shorter kids. Taller. How strong the group is, how many are in the group, what streets that they control. Knowing their history, I know that this gang goes back into Belmont, into the '40s and all that. Knowing some of the histories, I know that this gang is violent, and this gang are lovers, and these gangs are baseball players, because all these gangs started as baseball teams. And, you know, there was all the communities had—

KD: Right.

CB: Baseball teams.

KD: Right.

CB: And stuff. So I could tell a lot by reading the graffiti, just as much as I could read a billboard, or—and to me, movie advertising is the most . . . not "soda pop," but it's the most basic type of advertising. It's the most . . . movie advertising is entertainment. It's not like any other kind of advertisement. You have to grasp the audience, and the grasp is—are—the audience is dying to be able to connect with movies. And that's why, audience, we love the photos in the movies.

KD: Yeah.

CB: The album covers.

KD: Yeah.

CB: Titles were becoming very important. What was really happening were all the movie designer types was catching the movie titles, the title sequence in the beginning of the movie, like the *Pink Panther* [films] had incredible beginning titles. Certain studios were famous for it.

KD: With that example of the *Pink Panther*, I'm thinking there's, like, a whole . . . You mean more than just the letter that hits the screen? You're talking about that whole sequence that goes with the titling of the movie?

- CB: Well, they actually used . . . Okay, the *Pink Panther* title, they actually used the letters to sequence action through the letters and through the gunshots.
- KD: Right.
- CB: And the “P” turned into a gun.
- KD: Right.
- CB: Actually, the designing it where the titles became more than just letters. And at the same time, I was going to Los Angeles—Los Angeles Designers Club meetings. LA Designer Club? I think that’s what it was called. But—
- KD: I actually don’t know what that one is.
- CB: It was the top. It’s like . . . in-house. You [know], trade—
- KD: A trade organization?
- CB: Organizations for all—maybe the—the graphic designs of LA.
- KD: Okay.
- CB: And there are books, resource and reference books for all the advertising agencies of what they do, of their designers, of what they’ve done, with photographs and everything. They are resource books all over the place, if you go and you want to find who is doing what. And that was the dictionaries and directories of those times. This was before the computers.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: So, and there was clubs that . . . Los Angeles designer clubs, and things like that, and they would have lectures. So I would go to a few of them because they would have a famous designer who did the *Pink Panther* logos, or who did the *James Bond* logos, okay? That’s another application of the—of the bullets—
- KD: Yes.
- CB: And all that. That was the top design happening in LA as far as I was concerned. And also, the first animation. It looks terrible compared to today, really piece-y. But just a paper airplane just gliding through a living room underneath a table and around the lamp and all that. And we would see these videos of where technology was taking us. And then I had gone to a lecture where the SCION art computer that was just the first computers that they were beginning to put type. They couldn’t do diagonal lines, but—
- KD: Oh, yeah. Right.
- CB: They could put horizontal and vertical. And they only had about three typefaces, and then you still had to order type on the outside and still plug it in, because the typeface on the computer still wasn’t sharp enough. It was still all toothy.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: The—the—that squared . . .
- KD: Right.
- CB: And there’s a word for that.
- KD: Pixels.
- CB: Pixels. It was all pixelated. So this, I kept on seeing the new advances in advertising and technology, and so I was very much aware of what was happening there. Letraset, rub-on letters. I used to do my own photo-type. In these advertising agencies, there was a large machine, and you would actually photograph each letter on a strip of photographic paper in a darkroom to make to make your headlines.
- KD: Wow.
- CB: I started as a cameraman—a stat cameraman at Tony Seiniger’s. So enlarging all these different types of photographs.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: And we would take them and cut them out, and we would put glue, actually, with a little brush, on the back, and come out, and would paste them. And we would cut them out with our X-Acto. And we would draw inclines. Rapidographs. Here’s my experience with my drafting experience came in. So triangles and T squares and everything, and lettering—I knew all that stuff. Overlays, acetate overlays—Rubylith,

Amberlith overlays—to block out sections. I knew all that. I started learning all that technology. That technology helped organize in my mind the foundation of how to do layouts in the language of advertising. I knew what it took to get a photograph in a billboard. I knew how the photograph process was, about lighting and everything. Because I had taken about three photography classes there at Franklin High School also, besides my ceramics and drafting. So, and then I would take a lot of—I was really into photography. And my father always had guns, rifles, and pistols, about a dozen of them, and he always had movie cameras. So . . . and regular cameras. That was his hobby. He had always had movie cameras. The latest technology, he would always have it.

KD: Was he doing family movies and—?

CB: Family movies, things like that. Some still lifes on our vacations, so we always have slides—boxes of slides of our family photos.

KD: Of the large family get-togethers, too, or just the—

CB: Yes. Those large family—

KD: Great.

CB: And also down in Ensenada we would go camping and things like that.

KD: I hope you still have those.

CB: Yeah. They're all kind of messed around, so that . . . I think there's a picture of my brother with a huge surfboard and stuff like that. All those times. So technology and that kind of stuff was already—I was always already familiar with. And so there at Tony Seiniger's, I—okay, I did—they asked me to do *Boulevard Nights*.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: Back to that. I had to clean it up. And then the movie bombed, unfortunately. It was supposed to be a big hit. And then I did *The Warriors*. That came in. It was a big . . . from New York.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: The big occult gang movie.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: And that movie—that logo, even though it was a collaboration. I started it out, and then somebody—the graffiti writer Seen—*S-E-E-N*—from New York, very famous early writer, he worked on it. And then they asked me to add drips. And I refused to add drips on my letters. So in the studio, the director's—their art department added the drips. So the *Warriors* logo that you see is far removed of what we did. It's a collaboration, but I was very much involved. That was my worst logo. *[laughter]*

KD: When you worked with Seen . . . I'm imagining he has the same kind of training that you—you know, or some kind of line of work. He's . . . no?

CB: No. As a matter of fact, I never—we didn't meet.

KD: Oh, okay.

CB: We were supposed to meet for dinner a couple of times. He was working at the studio. When I was gone, he'd come in and I would go out. For that whole week, we never met. And of what I know from Seen from New York and all that, he has a tattoo background.

KD: Okay.

CB: Graffiti. I don't think he has any art school or advertising, and it's basically—for him, it's New York—style graffiti. Because that's what they had asked us for: the New York style, hip-hop wild style, bubble letters, drippy title. Where I was doing the Old English, straight only, black, up and down square letters. So that was a collaboration. I also did *Trip 182*. That was another gang tag movie at that time. Then I worked on those Muppet movies, which was a bunch of little colorful lettering and all that. Something about finding treasure. So I had to draw a lot of jewels and things like that. It was very . . . Which I picked up my old influence: my Uncle Scrooge comic books. You know, the big jewels and all that, and the barrels of gold coins and all that stuff.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And so I did that. And I worked on James Bond movies doing the layouts, and pasting up about three of those. So those were big hits. So I got to see my handiwork—you know, Al Pacino movies—I got to see my handiwork on billboards and on TV and on print magazines. And yeah, I got a thrill about it, but what was important is I got to see exactly what—what I was doing looked like at the end. How it—

KD: What do you mean?

CB: Well, if I did a logo, a logo doesn't mean anything without the photograph, without the subhead, without the—the newspaper page that it's advertising on. It has to be ready. When I would open the newspaper and read the whole movie [ad], my logo was just part of it. It was part of a larger advertising scheme of broadcasting this language out to the public. And I would see how my logo . . . Even though I did it, let's say, ten inches long, it was on a billboard fifteen feet long. It was on TV three inches wide. That's supposed to represent fifteen feet. And I started seeing how this language—my hand skills, in the beginning—how they were projected and broadcasted out in the public domain. And large had a big voice, small had a small voice. It all depended on where it was, television—

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: This and that.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: So the logo had to be appropriate. It had to be thicker letters for if it was done smaller. A thicker outline. It has to be less outlined, more fill-in on the face of it, when it was larger. And then if you're on TV, sometimes they would plug it in with sparkles and things like that, or change the color. And the logo had to be manipulated, and it had to be like a transformer.

KD: Yeah. Yeah.

CB: But it still had to keep the integrity of what the logo meant to the movie. *Fast and Furious*, you know those letters are tilted backwards.

KD: Yeah.

CB: Comedy, they're all bouncy and—and—

KD: Yeah.

CB: Fun. That just a generalized term, but basically, that's how they design logos. You needed to get the whole story into every logo. And I started bringing the whole story into every letter. And every letter had to speak on itself for the—it had to fit with the logo. Another movie, for example, that worked real well was *Caveman* with Ringo Starr and some other people in it. Okay, remember that logo was a bunch of rocks all carved out. C-A-V-E-M-A-N, and the N was falling down—

KD: Yeah. [laughter]

CB: Sideways. [laughter] Do you remember that?

KD: Yeah, I do.

CB: Okay. I did that.

KD: It works. That's why—

CB: Right!

KD: I remember it. Yes.

CB: Real simple, and all that. *Caveman*, rocks. And all that.

KD: Now, if you're making a living . . . This is a full-time job, or these—are these contracted for each? I don't know how Hollywood—

CB: Okay. When I was working at J. Walter Thompson in Hollywood at the Max Factor building for five years, between '72 and '78, right around there, I was only three days a week. Tony Seiniger between '78 and '79. I—for two years there, full-time, sixty hours a week.

KD: Yeah. You had said that, sixty hours a week.

CB: It was hardcore. Talk about acid dip. I got—I—that's why I said I grew up there. And we worked hard, and I met incredible people, and work was just fascinating. And it was deadlines, deadlines, twenty-four hours—

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: But they—they paid me a fortune. And so by that time, I had about six cars. I already had the Fiat, I had the Renault Dauphine, I had a Mercury, I had a Hudson—not the Hornet—the Hudson Wasp, which was the same style but smaller. And then I had a Karmann Ghia, pearlescent white. And then I had my '51 Chevy. And then I probably had a couple of other cars that I can't remember yet.

KD: Did you do anything to these cars?

CB: No. I wasn't a car guy. I would just hang a Chinese lamp in the middle of it—

KD: Right, you said.

CB: Put a brodie knob with a naked girl on the steering wheel, you know. Something to make the car smell nice. That's about it. *[laughter]*

KD: So—so these were fast cars?

CB: No.

KD: They're not?

CB: No. I—I wasn't into muscle cars.

KD: Okay.

CB: I was into low and slow. Or classics. Or something—or funny European cars. Cars to me were fun. And they would always break down, but I learned a good lesson about buying cars, okay? This is for everybody.

KD: Hold on.

[break in audio]

KD: Let me see what I can hear.

CB: This is probably a waste of tape. This is the Chaz recipe of buying cars.

KD: *[laughter]* Go ahead.

CB: All right. The Chaz recipe of buying a car is that you never buy a car when you need it. *[laughter]* When you see a car you like, buy it. You don't buy it unless it's a good price, but you always can buy a good car when you don't need a car. And then sell the old one then, because the old one is still running, and you could always step up, step up—

KD: Okay.

CB: Step up.

KD: Okay.

CB: Right? And I worked myself up to a Jaguar. So . . . and I think I had an Austin-Healy and stuff like that. Anyway, so by that time, I had that many cars. All right. Tony Seiniger, working real hard. Let's see . . . those logos. *Star Wars, The Empire Strikes Back*, they gave me a—that was a tissue layout, and I did the master inking of that stuff. I did a lot of master inking with Rapidograph, French curves, T square, triangles.

KD: Now, you have to back up, because I'm completely ignorant on that technique that you're talking about.

CB: Oh, oh, oh. Okay. What I'm saying is that when I was doing the logos at Tony Seiniger in the late '70s it was all hand skills.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And it was using my hand skills from my drafting, triangle, and T square, up and down, vertical and horizontal. But also I had my compass, and everything. This was using Rapidograph ink pens, which were the ink pens of various size tips.

KD: Okay.

CB: They were industrials tips. And . . . and so I would put them on my—on my compasses for curves, and then I would—for different thicknesses. And then I would have French curves, which are all those loop-de-loop plastic things, for templates. And all the logos, everything had to be done by hand, section by section by section, and then trimmed. The lines—where the two lines would meet, I had to take an X-Acto blade—number 11, super-pointy—and scraped where those two lines meet where—with a continuous line. And we're talking, like, a—a double zero. That's what a ballpoint—a skinny ballpoint would lay down.

KD: Yeah.

- CB: You know? So that's—I was cleaning those things up. That's when I had really good eyes. And then, but I was the best. And *not* one of the best. [laughter] There was a couple of people that were really good. I can't . . . And so I did master inking for a lot—maybe fifty logos.
- KD: Wow!
- CB: Including the—the *Star Wars*, *The Empire Strikes Back*, which was the second one. And then we worked on about two other *Star Wars* movies and things. And I went to the premieres and stuff. Another movie I worked on, I did the inking, was *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. And . . . anyway, I'll give you a list later.
- KD: I had no idea that—but now I can hear the . . . I mean, you haven't even gone through this traveling you did after that period you worked in the industry, but I can hear—when I look at the work that's on the wall in your home, the influence. I mean, you're all about letters. You're all about script.
- CB: All about letters.
- KD: And this—
- CB: All about script, yeah.
- KD: Clean line.
- CB: Mm-hmm. And the formatting. The presentation and all that. How I said traveling around the world, I could read headlines in newspapers exactly more or less of what their *intent* were by the layout and stuff like that. Which I found—what's the point of that was that this is a universal—not “mentality,” but it's a universal structure that I think as human beings that we have of how we interpret language, of how it was laid out. Because when it was laid out in the clay tablets from the Sumerians they're very much the same layout as now. Because when I saw those clay tablets, there was a headline. I don't know if I told you I saw headline, body copy flush left, flush right, indentation, paragraphs. And then the logo down at the bottom with the king's signature.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: All it lacked was just the stamp. [laughter]. It's just the same formatting. And what was that? 2500? 2000 BC.?
- KD: Yeah. Yeah.
- CB: Right around there? Okay. So that's four and a half thousand years. Nothing has changed. And when you look at those clay tablets, they're a TV screen. TV screen-sized.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: Okay? We worked with television, so there's a safety that we have to deal with on the inside of it, and there's this ratio 3:4—I forgot—a 5:7 ratio. And it's the same little hand, pocket size. It's like those Pop Tarts size. [laughter]
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: And that's—you flip it on the side, it's eight and a half by eleven.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: So there is this chubby rectangle that it's very much in our mental structure that we have of—
- KD: Cognitive. The way we think language, the way we use language. You say “format”; I'm thinking “composition.”
- CB: Right.
- KD: There's a similar composition across the world that you've seen. I think we're using the words the same way.
- CB: The same meaning. Maybe one is two-dimensional, the other one is three-dimensional.
- KD: Yeah. Yeah.
- CB: Or something like that. But it's the same thing, because for me, a flat, two-dimensional layout is three-dimensional.
- KD: That's right. I can hear you say that.
- CB: Yeah. I'm working it. One time at my job, we were doing a Paul Newman movie, and that client was there. It had to be for a deadline for a newspaper. I was the last one in the building. Everything comes back for

revisions. I learned [that] revisions were my meat and potatoes. If I just stuck around, hung around there, I would always be up to an hour late in the morning on every one of my jobs. I was never [laughter] on time on any of my jobs. [laughter] But they knew that I would be the one who would hang out and stay at the end.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: Because that's when I would be wide awake. [laughter]

KD: Right.

CB: And they needed always people who were dedicated to the work. You lived at your job, you didn't work there. That's the kind of jobs they were. So one time was this account, people came in, we quick have to change it, all that. The printing was stopped. We had to get this layout because it's the printing board for the printer. Anyway, so I gave it to them and it said "Paul Newman"—I had "Newman Paul" and all that, and I almost got fired right off from the spot.

KD: Oh, yeah.

CB: Because I embarrassed my bosses, because I gave my layout straight to the account person, where I should've given it to the account executive, and who would've given it to the boss, and this and that. And . . . because I don't read what's on the paper. They were shapes. That's what I'm saying. I didn't read the body copy. If it's misspelled, that's not my problem. It was the logo.

KD: Yeah.

CB: The wrong logo or something, and I read . . . "Paul Newman" was the same as "Newman Paul."

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: You know? So that was an example.

KD: Do you want to talk about the trip around the world?

CB: Yes.

KD: We cut some of that short last time in Tahiti or—

CB: Yeah.

KD: And I see you've made notes, so go right ahead.

CB: Yeah. I just went like that. Like up to now, I've been to thirty-seven countries, and I've been out of the country for about three, four and a half years between '66 to now. [If] you stretch it all out. And when I told myself and Kathy, I said I wanted to go around the world. So we saved our money—as I said, we saved up twenty thousand dollars. And we bought our tickets, and I gave them a list of all the places I wanted to go that were places that I knew or didn't know, or romantic places, historical places.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: Ancient cultural, or . . . that were historical places. So we gave them our list, and they gave us tickets all the way around, from Los Angeles heading west back to Los Angeles. I really wanted to circumnavigate the world. I felt that that was really important to me, and I said I had never been fearless about everything else, but when I left, I was really scared and nervous.

KD: Right. You talked about that. [laughter].

CB: Right.

KD: Being afraid.

CB: And I was more . . . I think it was about being on a plane that's going to go all the way to the Southern Hemisphere and try to land on a dot on an island on the South Pacific. That was really scary. So I left Los Angeles. I went to Tahiti. I talked about Tahiti, about Gauguin and Herman Melville. And also Herman Melville, and so when I read *Moby Dick*, and Queequeg the Indian, he was from the Marquesas. And I know the tattooing style of the Marquesas. I know the tattooing style of the Tahitians, and also of the Samoans and the Fijians. Similar, but totally different. So when they talked in the book about Queequeg's tattoos, I knew the style of tattoos in his face, and I knew the style on his legs and all that.

KD: And where did you gather that knowledge?

CB: By being in Tahiti and looking at books and magazines. Because once you go there, and their libraries or bookstores, they'll have books of tattoo designs of the Marquesas, or something, or tattoo. And there would be drawings from the whalers. And . . . because they would collect heads as souvenirs from the Maoris and the Marquesas. And then I started reading. What was really fascinating was the child . . . *The Kon-Tiki*. The voyage of the *Kon-Tiki* by . . . It is the Swedish guy whose son—who did the voyage [by] taking a balsa wood raft from South America, and then going through the currents, and then ending in Tahiti. [He was] saying that their culture was—the island culture was also very influenced by the mainland culture. Another thing I found about [was] the sweet potato—what is it called in Spanish?

KD: No, they're not *calavadas*?

CB: No. Anyway, there's the sweet potato culture all—all across the South Pacific.

KD: Right.

CB: And it doesn't come from Malaysia—it comes from South America.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: And all that. So I started reading all about this, that there is a connection between South America and these southeast island cultures. So I started seeing all this design, and I thought, "Boy, I'm going to get myself some tattoos, you know, down here in the South Pacific." And so as I went . . . went from there to the Cook Islands where they spoke English, and I started seeing more of this—of this sweet potato culture. I went to the island of—the main island is Rarotonga. And then from there, we went to a small island north of there called Aitutaki, where I spoke about a small airstrip from World War II. And they had altars to Elvis Presley there because he had recently died, and they hated ABBA. And then spent about two weeks in the Cook Islands. From there, we went to the island kingdom of Nui, and—where they had the radiation and things. I spoke about that.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And then from there, we flew on propeller airplanes. Nothing was jet. Everything is a large propeller, so it's old style, which I love. Airplanes that were just DC-3s and things. The kingdom of Tonga, where I met the son of the king of Tonga.

KD: You said that.

CB: And then from there, we went to another island north of there which is part of Tonga called Vavau, and we rented a house there for about two weeks. Which was incredible place. Living with the native culture of . . . How can I describe island culture? Well, we just lived there for about two weeks. We rented a home. And we would go on these boats, and I would snorkel, scuba dive on these caves underwater. And now, I don't swim, so it took an awful lot for me to go down there. And I remember walking from one sandbar to another, and I had to go up to the water up to my waist. A lot of coral rocks underneath.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And then I would sit and then I had my snorkel—snorkel thing—it wasn't scuba. And then I would swim across to the other sandbar. When I would look at these rocks, I saw maybe about a dozen huge heads about as big as my foot of moray eels.

KD: Oh!

CB: And there would always be sea snakes going by. And large clams, at least twelve inches in diameter, who had large blue lips on them like that. Which I bought a shell down there, a trident shell, which is totally illegal to ship, but I shipped one back. Which to me was—a trident shell, that's a trident shell of where in mythology is the cornucopia is a trident shell.

KD: Were you painting these things as well? Because the other day you talked about doing some watercolors during your travels.

CB: Yeah. I was doing some landscapes of all this stuff.

KD: Right.

- CB: I didn't do that shell, but I did some other shells in New Zealand. And my art history, I was seeing this stuff. In Tahiti, I knew Captain Cook was there and Tahiti'iti to survey the crossing of Venus. And I was at the exact point there. So the astrology was a big thing to me.
- KD: Mm-hmm, mhmm.
- CB: I went to the exact point where he—they did the survey. And then where Captain Bligh put his boat. You know, came into the Bay of Tahiti and all that. So I got to see these places. I got to see history. I got to see painters, where they lived, and tattoos and cultures. So I was real excited all about that culture. I'm rambling. Okay. Then we went to American Samoa.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: And then regular Samoa. And spent about two weeks there. And then I went to Fiji, and spent about another month there. And I spoke about that. And then I kept on seeing this culture, the sweet potato culture. And then I wanted to get some tattoos there, but it didn't happen. Long story short, I never got a tattoo in my life. *[laughter]*
- KD: Here I had this question waiting to ask you about the tattoos, and—
- CB: Never got one in my life—
- KD: Well, you—you couldn't find the right person, the right design while you were traveling? Because you're interested in it, it sounds like. You're wanting to do it.
- CB: It didn't happen. Samoan tattoos are both legs up to the belly button, backs, and down to short sleeves, and stuff like that. And then across the ribs up to the front. And so it takes a whole process. But I felt that I would be faking it if I wasn't a Samoan. I would be faking it if I wasn't Fijian.
- KD: Okay.
- CB: What I could put is the Avenues gang symbol, because I drew it.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: But I'm not a *cholo*.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: I felt that the tattoo was too important to try just to decorate myself with it. You have to be in the hood, in the life to even get three dots on your hand between your thumb and your first finger.
- KD: Right.
- CB: You have to be in the life. I don't feel that I can do that. I'm the artist. If I'm going to have a tattoo, it's going to be, "Chaz con Christina" *[laughter]* "por vida." So I—that's why I didn't. I was fascinated. It just gave me more influence, because tattoos to me are a tagging. They are line work, black and white. Let me move up real quick.
- KD: Okay.
- CB: When I went to Guadalcanal, there, the tattoos on the people's arms were traditionally—all their traditional tattoos were totally gone. What they had—tattoos on their arms were American names, places and positions because of World War II.
- KD: Right.
- CB: They had numbers, important numbers is on their arms, and things like that. Somebody who has a pair of keys is a very important person, because they have a lock. They have a key to lock something up, something valuable. So some people would wear a key around their neck. They would be very prestigious. And also certain—if you had numbers, that means you had numbers of something important. I don't know. Social Security number, telephone number, where you lived or something. There was just these dumb numbers, but to them . . . And it was no composition. It was about—they were talking about how—where they were on the hierarchy of their village through these, these tattoos. But they lost anything traditional. It was just all . . . To me, the war, the bombardment had fallen so hard on Guadalcanal it just shook their whole culture up. And it shook their language up, and it—and what came out of the cup, they just threw it on their arms. So it's a whole combination. Where cultures they had—lands where they had their culture intact still had their traditional, beautiful line work patterns.

- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: And the technique with the rock and the bamboo sticks. You know, that stuff. So . . . anyway, so I started seeing how the Tongans, Samoans, and Fijians—in some ways, they represented *cholos* to me. They were the proud, the warriors. Beautiful clothes. Their mothers loved them. The women admired them. And they were proud and happy, with their culture. And I go, “That’s a *cholo*.”
- KD: Yeah. [laughter]
- CB: Because every *cholo* loves his culture.
- KD: Right. Right.
- CB: And loves—well, I don’t know if they’re going to say they love their mom, [laughter] just because it’s . . . But you know, I saw that as a Chicano culture, I felt, in the islands. And island people look like Chicanos. I mean, it was—
- KD: Meaning?
- CB: They’re brown.
- KD: They’re brown?
- CB: Yeah.
- KD: Yeah?
- CB: Minorities.
- KD: Yeah?
- CB: I started meeting Maoris out in the islands.
- KD: Yeah?
- CB: They’re *cholos*. They’re Chicanos and all that. Same strong family, everything. Tradition, imagery. They have canoes, we have lowriders.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: The same similarities. I started getting a grasp of—sense of family tradition.
- KD: Now, can I interrupt you for a second? When you’re planning this trip, when you’re in the middle of the trip, or at least at this point, was this a deliberate kind of—this sounds like good old anthropology. I mean, all the good part of anthropology, not the bad part of anthropology. I mean, you sound like a historian, an [anthropologist]. Did you recognize that you would be doing . . . Was this a conscious kind of mapping of the world’s aesthetic expression, especially body art and other kinds of decoration?
- CB: Yes. But it wasn’t—that was not my primary intent. My primary intent was to go to places that were exotic, romantic.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: The ends of the world. Valley of the Blue Moon in—in that movie, you know? Whatchamacallit. Going to—we’re going to have to fill in that one.
- KD: Yeah. [laughter].
- CB: What is it? I read that book. The Valley of the Blue Moon where they never grow old, in Nepal.
- KD: Right, right.
- CB: That’s why I wanted to go to Nepal. I wanted to go to the South Pacific because of James Michener. That was the name I was trying to think of: *Rascals of Paradise*.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: James Michener. I did read Margaret Meade.
- KD: You did?
- CB: Yeah. I read a couple of her things. But they weren’t entertaining. I didn’t like reading it. And in some ways, it was like, too old. I don’t know when she wrote it. In the ’50s or something?
- KD: No. Before that.
- CB: In the ’30s or ’40s or something like that?
- KD: Twenties, ’30s.
- CB: So the culture that I was encountering was more contemporary, but with their feet still in the culture.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: So I did read things like that. I like I said, I read a lot.

KD: You have a lot of notes. I didn't want to stop you. You're up to Borneo or, no—

CB: No. So we went from Fiji, from American Samoa.

KD: Right.

CB: We flew over to Fiji, which was really a fun place. And then from there we went to New Zealand, which I encountered the Maori culture. And like I said, there was a lot of ceramicists there, a lot of hardcore hippie type of low-tech artists. Watercolor, oil painting, ceramicists, stuff like that. I don't know if you'd call it "low-tech." And then [we] rented a car for six weeks, and drove from the very top to the very bottom. And I saw the places where Captain Cook had landed, I met people who in turn introduced me to other people to go visit, and all that. I saw penguins on the south island. We went fishing. We went to the high mountains. Almost went skiing, except for I don't ski. And . . . there was a lot there. But that's all I can remember right now.

And then we traded in the tickets to go to Australia. We said instead of going to Australia—because we had a deadline—one specific stop in Papua New Guinea, and Mt. Hagen at a "sing sing" festival that happens every six years, where all the six hundred different languages of tribesmen all come to this one spot, and for like, four days, they have a sing sing. A big powwow and dancing, and all that. We made tickets and a reservation over a year to be in Papua New Guinea at that certain time for sing sing. So we had to manipulate our time, either hurry up or lag back. So we had extra time. I didn't want to go over to Australia. I said, "We met enough Australians; they're great and all that. I want to go more into the islands." So we went up north to New Caledonia. Nobody's been in New Caledonia.

KD: No. [laughter]

CB: And it was a French protectorate, and also the French are real bastards out there. Because in Tahiti, they had atomic testings, so I got body searched and really hassled, and we really had to check with the police. We couldn't go to the other islands outside of Tahiti on our trip there. What's that—Bali Ha'i? But that's another one. I can't remember. It's a famous island right there. New Caledonia, they really hassled us. They pulled their guns on us. Another body search, and then I had some salt and pepper in my suitcase, and they thought it was heroin. So they were going to take us to jail there. Anyway, they—they finally let us go. And then we left New Caledonia about three days later. And then from there, we flew to the New Hebrides. I can't remember the capital. We spent there about a week. And then in New Hebrides, there's a long strip of islands, and we flew to the island of Guadalcanal.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: And Guadalcanal, I spent two weeks. And Guadalcanal, World War II is very much alive. Rusted planes on the beaches; certain areas of the island you still can't go because of unexploded bombs.

KD: Right.

CB: I found bullet casings there on the beach, certain seashells. Seashells I collected across the house—the whole South Pacific, which is some of these.

KD: Oh, is that what we see here?

CB: Yeah.

KD: Beautiful.

CB: All those are the different places. There's a bullet casing right here from Guadalcanal.

KD: Yeah.

CB: You know, and stuff. And then knowing seashells, the different structures, I compared them to Mexico. Some seashells were poisonous; some seashells would twist one way—right—and—and the other is—a different island, it would twist left. So I collected those. I found—they were always telling me—I remember a Jacques Cousteau program said when the nautilus—

KD: Yeah.

- CB: That there's nautilus, and they're only in the South Seas—South China Sea, south of Papua New Guinea and north of Australia—but they've never . . . they've only seen them a certain size. Never a baby nautilus.
- KD: Right, right.
- CB: In Papua New Guinea and Port Moresby, we met some friends of friends who had said, "Oh, we have a sixty-foot catch sailboat. We're going away for the weekend—want to go with us to some islands south of Papua New Guinea?" We said, "Definitely."
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: Of course, I don't swim, and I get terribly seasick.
- KD: Oh!
- CB: So I was real sick, but we went up to these islands, and there on the beach I found *all* these tiny baby nautilus. One inch high. Which you see they're here.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: Obviously, even Jacques Cousteau doesn't have that. And I also started collecting Polynesian art. And so I started collecting wooden spears and clubs—nothing, no metal. So I have a large collection of Polynesian art.
- KD: Were you carrying this stuff that you're gathering, or are you sending it?
- CB: It was sent back. We're sending boxes back by ship. They take three months [to get] back.
- KD: It sounds like it.
- CB: We would get boxes. I would put my nautilus shell; I would put my carving of the love god of Tonga, the—you see that over there?
- KD: Yeah. There it is!
- CB: Yes. You can see why it's a love god? [*laughter*]
- KD: Uh-huh.
- CB: And I had one made out of sandalwood and stuff. I put that on there. And you see a spear there.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: And—and then the spear there, that—that's from the—
- KD: Oh, right behind me?
- CB: Solomon Islands. You know, and stuff like that. And I got Fijian throwing clubs, and all that. Somehow, it was the technology. Like I love my father's guns—
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: But I didn't. I'm against guns. But the technology is the most cutting edge to represent a culture. And also there's technology of the spears and all that. They also represent their sense of religion.
- KD: Yes.
- CB: And stuff. So I started collecting the weapons. Not for their strength, but for this sense of material, and what it meant in their religion, and their strength, and also it represents something—it represents the ancient past. All these stylings and designs. So in Guadalcanal, I picked up a lot of that stuff, and read more James Michener. The Story of Guadalcanal—the Diary of Guadalcanal.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: And the voyage of Captain . . . I forgot his name, but Bougainville? [Louis Antoine de Bougainville.]
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: Where he first went to bring the bougainvillea back?
- KD: Mm-hmm, mhmm.
- CB: We went to the university, where I definitely wanted to see the *whole*. . . There was a whole hillside garden, the only one in the world of all the samples of all different kinds of bougainvillea, which are—there are about two hundred different types of bougainvillea. And there at the university, they had a ceramics school, which I went there, and there was only a couple of people there—it was on a weekend or something. University there in Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea. And so I was just curious about a lot of

things. And plus the materials. In Papua New Guinea, we went to the Mount Hagen sing sing, where I— which, that photograph.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: So we spent a week up there, and met thousands of tribesmen. They did start a riot, and there was one man killed up there. And what's interesting is everybody comes in tribal dress. Otherwise, there's a lot of flip-flops and t-shirts. Or if just go five miles out of town and it's dirt roads, it's women with naked tops pulling a pig on a string, and men with ass grass—a bush, basically—and huge seashells in their nose, and still with bows and arrows. And we went to a river out there, and we went swimming. And then there was the whole family of these people.

KD: Now, you've made plans to see this sing sing a year ago, you said. A year before your travels. Was it what you expected?

CB: So I expected . . . It was two things. It was more than what I expected, because you actually see these people, and some of them—some speak English. We got embraced. Everybody's in tribal dress and rubbed with coconut oil.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: And it's real hot, and the whole place stinks. And it's just sort of like everybody's dancing and singing these—undulating back and forth, maybe a hundred men with these skirts moving back and forth, these women all in black fishnet veil, maybe a two-inch square.

KD: Wow.

CB: And they're all almost naked. Of course, the tops. But they're all smeared in—in coconut oil and soot, so they're jet black and all that, with the black fishnet over their heads. You know, maybe a hundred women moving with a—with a blue shell in their nose, or a blue necklace or something. *Outrageous* things. I took a lot of photographs, which I used in some of my prints nowadays. Because I took the photographs, I can use them. [*laughter*]

KD: So were you observing from the sidelines? I mean, how did they . . .

CB: You pay a little extra more, and you go on the field. There's a big soccer field that had some benches up on the side. [It was] very expensive to get into the—into the bleachers. And if you paid a little more, then you go out—actually go out into the field. And they had fence around it, and basically the natives themselves could not afford it.

KD: Right.

CB: It was mostly white people—Australians and all that. That was the second part about what I saw down there in Papua New Guinea, was this was colonialism that I have never seen before. This was plantations that I had—we went to a couple of banana and avocado and coffee plantations, we got invited. And workers were out there in there in their ass grass, and the colonials, the Australians and it was some French were down there. And [*laughter*] it was kind of a real French Indochina, with their big colonial house, still rough, like wild west, guns on the corners, and things like that. They told me about some killings between the tribes, and their plantations. And the racism and the way they treated the people, and what they ate and what the White people ate, there was a small little supermarket there only for White people. And it was like the Deep South in the 1880s or something. It infuriated me. After the two weeks—no, we were there I think a month, or three weeks, something like that.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: I couldn't wait to leave.

KD: Really?

CB: The racism, the segregation, and all that was just too much.

KD: Was it only towards the indigenous people of the place, or did—

CB: Yes. It was—

KD: Did you also feel as a person of dark skin—

CB: It was all toward indigenous people. And they called them “darkies” over there. And they also call them “nik-a-niks?” And also—what was that? “Pickaninnes?”

KD: Pickaninnes?

CB: You know, like—yeah.

KD: Yeah.

CB: Stuff like that. And they spoke this English because in World War II they had this pidgin English. So it would be something like, “Me one guy go with two guy, find food, okay? Yo sabe.” You know, at certain time. Something like that. Which was their national language, which you would listen on the radio, and they would be speaking something like that. It was fascinating. But they also kind of, like, thought of us as—first as snobby Americans.

KD: Okay.

CB: Brown people that they had never seen before. We’re from LA, Hollywood—that right off the bat is—you’re total bourgeoisie weirdo. Something like that. I was told many times that they never thought of Hollywood actually being a place or having people. And Los Angeles was somewhere, you know, like somewhere else—Cape Town, South Africa.

KD: Yeah. *[laughter]*

CB: They have no concept of it.

KD: Right.

CB: And all that.

KD: Right.

CB: So in some ways . . . And then, plus we were dark. And being American, let me say Americans have attitude without even knowing it. We are very demanding. We are very inquisitive. We open our mouths way too much. We are very openhearted—that we want to know what other people are doing and saying, and I just kept on putting my foot in my mouth. And we’re kind of like know-it-alls without knowing it. We have an opinion about everything.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: We ended up getting incredibly . . . We went to the golf club of Papua New Guinea, up Mount Hagen. And you see these guys with the ass grass—grown men, fifty to sixty year old men down there cutting it with a machete, the grass for the whole golf course.

KD: Wow.

CB: And of course your servers are all black, in white suits, white cloth, tropical suits, and all you drink is those Fosters. So that’s half a quart—

KD: Yeah, half a quart.

CB: A can. So yeah, we drank six of those. Myself, I drank about six of them. And we would get soused with these people, and I would ask them, I would go, “So what do you think about Americans?” “Oh, the Yanks?” *[laughter]* “So what did you used to call us?” “Oh, septic tanks!” They used to call us septic tanks and all this. And once we break it down with alcohol, then it becomes real funny. They get to know you. But there was still a lot of heavy prejudice and segregation and racism, and I just really hated that part of Papua New Guinea. So we moved on from there, Mount Hagen, the sing sing, and all that. From there, we flew up to the Philippines. Landed in Manila at five in the morning. Ended up at some places in the red light district at a hotel where the doors were—kept on slamming. They were just—

KD: Oh!

CB: It was a prostitution house. And . . . because those were the cheap rooms at that time in the morning. We went up north to Baguio, to the ancient town of Baguio, which is the ancient rice fields, which are like, 2000 B.C. They have no idea of where these people come from. There, I met this tribesman who sold me a spear. That’s that one there.

KD: Mm-hmm.

- CB: And he invited me to his village the next day. And it rained the whole day, but it was hot rain. Walked down through all the mud and in the rice fields up to our knees for hours, and went down into the bottom of the valley to the river, where he showed me their ancient rocks of their religion that nobody can see. And I go, "What are these?" He goes, "This was a temple before anybody." Thousands of years old. And it was covered up with palm leaves and all that. And he took it off, and what it was, it was a square rock. It was a post that was probably about four feet high, square-ish on all sides. And across the top was a nub, like a big nipple.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: And I said, "I've seen this before." It's in Stonehenge.
- KD: Right.
- CB: They'll put at the top of the post, there'll be these nipples, and on the lintel, it has two cups holes knocked out of it where it fits, where it fits.
- KD: Right.
- CB: And I said, "I've seen this structure before, through my books about architecture and stuff." And I told him, I go, "There's—this rocks was the beginning of a temple. You only have just one piece?" I go, "If you look down here in the river"—because they're on a slope—"you're going to find more rocks buried all down here." And they were real surprised. They go, "How do you know this? How do you know this? You've never seen this before, and you're telling us of all this stuff?" They were very surprised, and they got real suspicious and all that. And in turn, they invited us to a funeral. And we didn't realize it, but the person had died five years before, and they wait—it's so expensive for the funeral they wait till a bunch of people die, and then they just save their bones and keep them in little bundles. So you want this little shack that was up on stilts and it was all smoke and people were crying, and people are donating things in food. And we would eat with them. Spend the whole afternoon there, and I said, "How can I contribute?" And he took me by the hand, took me to this other hut, and they had a bunch of homemade liquor in Pepsi-Cola bottles with the corks. They said, "It's one dollar each. Can you buy five?" And I said, "Yes."
- KD: Oh, wow.
- CB: So I brought the liquor back. And then the old man—and they're just in little shorts. Basically, it's raining outside, no top, tattoos on them, and really wrinkled old man. And we ended up just getting blitzed that afternoon, and they offered me betel nut.
- KD: Oh! [laughter]
- CB: So betel nut foams up in your mouth like peyote. It's some type of, acidic-type base [that's] foaming. And you have to spit it, and then—and it comes out blood red when you spit it. So we were there drunk, spitting and coughing and laughing. And they brought a huge, dark, black pig. They butchered him in front of us, and a duck. They boiled it in a big pot with water, and that's what we ate late that night. And then we had to find our way back. On this other side of the valley, there was a road. It was all full of mud, and it was a full moon by the time we got back to the hotel. But it was really fascinating there. Once I got back to the United States, I saw *Apocalypse Now*. It had just come out.
- KD: Ah-hah.
- CB: They did some of the filming in the Philippines, and the scene where they have—when Martin Sheen gets up and finds Kurtz, and the natives there are executing a huge water buffalo by chopping its head in one cut.
- KD: Mm-hmm?
- CB: Those men were the same men in the hut. They were—they filmed in that valley—
- KD: Wow. [laughter]
- CB: And all that stuff. And a lot of them were saying, "Oh, yeah, a film crew came here months ago," or something like that. They were telling me about it. And I go, "Oh." I didn't know what it was.
- KD: It didn't make—make sense to you there. Yeah.

- CB: It didn't make sense, till I saw them on the screen here in Los Angeles. And I go, "Oh, I recognize that person! Oh, I recognize that person." So it was cool, sort of. Hollywood finds me.
- KD: And do you believe in fate?
- CB: Oh, definitely. Fate, karma.
- KD: Before this trip, or after, or because of the trip?
- CB: Always have.
- KD: Always have?
- CB: That was my hippie background.
- KD: Uh-huh.
- CB: I always believed in fate, and I always believed in karma before I knew what karma was.
- KD: Mm-hmm. Right.
- CB: I always believed in karma. I always tried to do the good thing. But then I'd always back myself up. I would try to do a few good things, and then that way I knew something good was going to be coming. *[laughter]*. I go, "All right, I've got bad things—I'm due for a good thing." What's that—there's a book right now—*Good Things Happen to Good People?*
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: Right. Which was, true. So Baugio, the Ifugao.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: The *I-F-U-G-A-O* are the natives, I think. It was Ifugao.
- KD: These are all famous anthropology sites. That's how I know them.
- CB: Right. And that's an Ifugao spear.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: And then from there, we flew down to south to Borneo, the island of Borneo. Stopped in Sarawak. I spent about a couple days there, and went to the museum. Stopped at—just an airplane stop in Brunei, but I got to see all the golden temples and everything else of the king of Brunei, one of the richest men in the world. And where the Philippines is Catholic but down in here is Muslim.
- KD: Right.
- CB: And there's also the Dayak people—the pirates, the sea pirates all around there. And you got to see their culture in the museums and all that stuff. And then went to Kuching, where it was all Chinese *[inaudible]* people, and all that stuff, small *[inaudible]*. And that's where I saw the Los Lobos de Singapore at the nightclub, when we went dancing there.
- KD: You were telling me that.
- CB: From there, we went over to—headed north to Singapore, which is modern, contemporary, Disneyland. No chewing gum. Everybody queues up. Incredible place. Stayed at the Strand Hotel. No, no, no. I stayed somewhere cheap. I went to the Strand Hotel, where Joseph Conrad and James Michener all drank. And you order a Singapore Sling because that was where it was invented, there.
- KD: Right.
- CB: I had been to Manhattan and had a Manhattan. I'd been to Long Island and I've had Long Island Iced Tea. This was a thing that I've done—
- KD: Uh-huh.
- CB: I always try to do, too. So I've had a—every place that they have a drink. Margaritas in Ensenada and Tijuana. Singapore is fascinating. More museums, more culture, meeting people, dinners, all that stuff. Then flew south. Went to Indonesia, south. I went to the island of Sumatra, where Jakarta is the capital.
- KD: Right.
- CB: To Java, the artistic city. There's Jojakarta. And went to Bali. And in Bali, spent a month, where I became totally fascinated by dance. And . . . which I was totally unprepared for, the dance. The only taxis that they have over there—somehow some shipload got down there, and they have Chevy Impalas—are all the taxis in Bali.

KD: Wow.

CB: They're all Chevy Impalas, like '67—I'd say it was about '68, '69. Right around there. Chevy Impalas. The real nice ones.

KD: Yeah.

CB: You know, and all that. So we rented one. They would take us all around the island to the different festivals that would be at different parts of the islands. And we lived in a small town up in the mountains, Ubud. Which was the culture—artistic place of, of the island. But every rock has a spirit, every bridge has a spirit, every tree has a spirit, and they give thanks every morning, every evening with a little piece of rice on a banana leaf that they cut and fold origami-style into a little plate and with a small flower. And they would say greetings and thank-yous to the spirits, and they would leave the rice on every tree, on every rock that was large and that had a spirit in it. And a dog would come up behind them and eat it. But it was a tendency—it was the offering that counted. Went to some all-night ceremonies that only the natives—the Balinese were invited. And they dressed us up as Balinese.

KD: How did you get invited?

CB: You start meeting your neighbors who are Balinese, who introduced to their friends, their daughters and cousins, who turned out to be an artist—everybody's an artist in Bali. You just start meeting people. And they say, "Oh, you need to go to this festival. It's very, very important." Underneath this huge, certain tree that's been there for them a thousand years. And then they do this special dance of when the Dutch where they're carrying their guns not on their shoulder, but over their shoulder with two hands, like they're carrying a sack. They hold the guns that way, with these funny Dutch hats, like Captain Cook, made out of—I don't know what it was. Bark or something like that. And dancing all in unison, all these men with the drums, the gamelan, and . . . I don't remember that. All I remember is gamelan. All night long. And it's a trance thing all night long until dawn. So I went to one of those there.

KD: Did you witness trancing?

CB: Yes. A couple of times. I saw this . . . The Balinese believe in—which is something that I really picked up on—they believe in equal amounts of good with equals amounts of bad. That you have to have both. You don't live on the very top of the mountain because that's where the gods live.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: You don't live close to the sea—

[*break in audio*]

CB: The trance dances is one of the traditions there in Bali. [In] the trance dances, and there's each the good and the bad, equal amounts. And one of the bad parts is Rangda. A seven-foot woman with long hair, and twelve inch nails coming out of her hands, and that she's constantly wiggling, and her eyes are flashing back and forth, and these huge teeth, upper and lower incisors that kind of crisscross each other.

KD: Right.

CB: And certain kind of colors on her dress which represent evilness. And there was all this symbolism on the dress. And I go, "Phew!" It's like the Aztec dancers or something. So Rangda was being attacked by these villagers. So they got these plain villagers—maybe five of them who came in—who were talking to the priest in the corner. I kept on seeing them—who kept on little by little dropping their heads. And they kept on putting this smoke in their face, and I don't know what it was. I don't know what it was, but I don't—it wasn't a drug thing. It was more of a coconut or a more of an oil smoke, or coconut oil, or something like that. And they would talk to them and pray over them and everything else, and slowly so that they would get into the trance, all five men.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: And the priests themselves are a mixture of good and bad, because they wear these skirts that are checks. That's real ska looking. [*laughter*]

KD: Yeah.

CB: Black and white checks. White means good, black means bad.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: So it's all checks—they represent good and yet bad. And they had a special kind of cloth hat—that would be kind of their turban, which I bought one. . . which I have one. And as soon as these men became in the trance, they were given *keris* knives—these knives called *keris*, which I have one here, which I got one. Antique one. And the knife is—a certain handle represent the different islands, Muslim or Hindu—or something like that—tradition. But the blade is skinny and wiggly, just like a serpentine, like a snake, to a sharp point. And it's very dangerous. Extremely dangerous, very sharp. And they were given these knives as their eyes were closed, and they were told to attack Rangda. And they—screaming at the top of their lungs, hair raising, and all of a sudden the gamelan and going, and there's probably a hundred men going *da-da-da-da-da-da-da-ling!* With bells going on and everything. And your hair is curling up. And they—these five men start attacking her with the knives. And Rangda is so powerful she is able to stop them by putting her hands out. And they can't—they just drop to the ground with the knives pointing at her, and they just can't go any further. It's like a powerful force.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: Rangda makes them turn the knives around and point them toward themselves. So these five men are there with knives on their chest. And then she makes them try [to] kill themselves. So these five men are jumping on the ground with the knifepoint on their chest. Another one has a knife right in the eye socket. Another one is trying to stab his leg with the knife, yelling and screaming, running around in a circle or crawling on the ground. Totally terrifying! [*laughter*]

KD: You're scaring me telling me!

CB: And it's in a temple outside in the dark with torches—

KD: It's in the dark?

CB: And the temples are . . . All the demons and—and carvings—are all bottom-lit. And they're, like, five stories high all around you with—with the jungle. This is incredible. And they but the good part of them keeps them from hurting themselves. I mean, but to see a man run at full speed and jump on his chest on the ground with a knife and nothing happens? It was incredible. And then they brought them out of the trance, and they were vomiting, and they were just—everything like that. And Rangda is beaten because then Vishnu comes out with the golden arrow and chases her away. Another dance that I saw was the priests come out spinning around—it was gorgeous—with these they would open up these paper umbrellas. They were no more than three feet wide. Then they brought out about three little girls—virgins. But, I don't know if they were—they looked like about seven or eight. Very thin, very delicate and all that. Very pretty. Totally dressed up in the Balinese outfit. And then they would get them, and they would put the umbrella down, and they would stand on top of the umbrella. And they would lift the paper umbrella, and the girls would dance on top of the umbrella as the priest was holding it.

KD: Wow.

CB: You know?

KD: What's going through your mind? Is this magical, spiritual?

CB: It's still magical. It's magical, spiritual, and it made their art, their culture alive. A living culture. It wasn't ancient anymore. It was there. It was there. It was the present. I was seeing it. It was stronger than anything that I ever seen. And I was so much more moved—and being Roman Catholic. Not that I wanted to be Balinese, but I was just so moved of how their religion and their spirit could go beyond anything physical or mental that I ever seen—and I knew Hollywood!

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: We could fake it here.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: But you couldn't fake it over there. I was—my hands are sweating right now. It was just so beautiful, and intense. That's when I started understanding about *la raza cosmica*. Because every time I would go to

Mexico, something magical would happen, but I just took it as granted. Of course! It's Mexico! *[laughter]*
But when you see it as an outsider and you see the—what the *real* magic does.

KD: Tell me one of these magical things that happened in Mexico.

CB: Well, okay. The eclipse of the moon, all right?

KD: Okay.

CB: My experience there when I was in Monte Alban in Oaxaca, out to the ruins. I spent the night there, and there was nobody up there at that time. And we would crawl from the outside of the temples—outside of the total complex, we would find a tunnel underneath, and we would crawl and come up in those center temples down in the main plaza.

KD: Wow.

CB: And we would go and look under the bushes and stuff like that. And I spent the night there, and I thought that was incredible. There was a lot of things. I don't know. Lake Chapala or something like that. But those are just—but the real magic was, I think, the people.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: Nuke, one time [he] told me his mother told him that—she says, "You never know when you're talking to an angel." So in some ways, you're always—just stay open to it and all that. What seemed normal to me in Mexico once I got out there and I saw the magic out there, I kept on saying, "Well, that's like Mexico." That's like, I can understand this. I can understand that love of culture, of a living culture, and stuff. So anyway that was Bali. There's a lot more to that. Let's see . . . Bali . . . yeah, Borneo, Singapore, Indonesia, Bali.

Then from there, we went up north to Malaysia. I went to Kuala Lumpur, the capital before the skyscrapers were built. And then I went to the island of Penang, the ancient Chinese island, where we saw temples, a thousand temples. Million Buddhas, I think it was called. And it was this temple of a million Buddhas, all the tiles, effigies, sculptures, big ones and all that stuff, ancient thing. And the island of Penang.

KD: That composition must have spoken to you. Did it?

CB: Yeah. Yeah. Because the Chinese can really . . . There was one temple there that was nothing but snakes—those green, skinny, fluorescent snakes. And there was so much smoke in there that they were all intoxicated. But the floor, the sculptures, the ledges, all that stuff, the incense. All the piles of sticks of incense. It was just insane, and the place was just crawling with snakes. We would go in there and check it out and stuff. They said, "No photographs. It excites them." *[laughter]*

KD: Oh, yeah.

CB: You know?

KD: Yeah.

CB: So we were there in Kuala Lumpur, and in the island. And from there we had made reservations to—later on to go to Iran, was part of the trip. But in Kuala Lumpur, we found out that they took the hostages in Tehran, Iran. That was in 1980. And we had tickets to go to Tehran.

KD: So you didn't?

CB: We had to change tickets. It was a big hassle and all that. But that's what I remember was happening. I was very disappointed because I did want to go to Persia. That was a big stop on my trip, was to go to Tehran. And I missed that. And then from Kuala Lumpur, we went up to Thailand. And in Bangkok, we quickly left Bangkok and wound up sort of heading up north, up to Chiang Mai, which was more of an artistic area.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: But then the next town up—right up to the border of the Golden Triangle—between China, Burma, Laos and Thailand is the Golden Triangle—is Chiang Rai. And I had been reading things about it, Vietnam. This book, *The Politics of Opium in Southeast Asia*, was a big two-inch thick book that was illegal in the United States. And it talked about the Vietnam War being financed by the heroin trade between Cambodia, by Air America that we would ship them, CIA planes. And I started meeting some expatriates, some Vietnam guys who were still out there, like *Deer Hunter* types and all that stuff.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And we decided to go up into the opium fields. They had these trips that you could trek up in there for about three days, and with a guide. And it's kind of pine trees, some—up in the sort of mountains. And you stay with the villages and the villagers and you see these fields of opium. So we went up there. We spent two nights up there in small villages, and at night time the old Thai guy would come in—he looked Chinese—with one white hairs down his chin, and he would ask us if we wanted opium. And then we would—set us up to a little pillow on the side of our head, and he would make a little opium presentation with a ceramic bowl, and then with a needle, and then putting out the tips. And it wasn't that we were getting all crazy. This was tourist-grade opium. *[laughter]*

KD: Yes.

CB: You know?

KD: Yeah, yeah.

CB: And the next day, we would go to the fields, and then we'd see him scraping it, and they would show us, and everything like that. And I think I got a necklace of opium pods, baby opium pods. But I quickly got rid of that, because I wasn't going to take—I can't take it on the airplane.

KD: Right.

CB: Heavy military in Bangkok, so I dumped all that stuff. But our guide said, "Hey, it's Christmas Eve. Why don't you come to my village and spend the night, and spend Christmas with us?" And it was the Mao tribe. And also there was a lot of military guy from the Kuomintang, from Chiang—no, not Chiang Kai-shek. There was . . . yes, it was China Kai-shek's army that was pushed out and into north Thailand who were still the military force running the golden opium trade up there.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: So there was still Chiang Kai-shek—Kuomintang there, and who were protecting all that area. And we saw bundles there, and we knew that was opium and stuff like that. And—and the women were all dressed up in—with big steel loops around their necks silver, gold coins, big necklaces, and their hair all done up. And I can't remember . . . And red cloth with silver coins all in there. And they have a huge bonfire, and they asked us to sing Christmas carols with them. Because they were Christian, and they had all these Christmas carol books in their Mao language, but all the tunes were "Jingle bells, Jingle bells." *[laughter]* And "Silent Night."

KD: Yeah.

CB: And all that. They were all the tunes, but in their language. And we sang it in English. And they asked us, "How do [you] know these songs?" We go, "Oh, they're universal."

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: They asked me to dance around the campfire with the man. He was kind of kicking in, and kicking dirt, and moving around sideways and all that, and . . . Of course we got blitzed again, and we had a wonderful night sleeping on a wooden floor with a big blanket made out of barked paper. And all that. It kept you really warm. The next day, Christmas day, our guide took us to the boat—those long, skinny boats with a Chevy motor on top of it with a long propeller?

KD: Yeah?

CB: Took us to the Fang River, which was right at the border between Thailand and Burma. Or China. Probably China. It was over there on the Westside. And we spent a whole day going down the Fang River and stopping at these military places. And it was just like *Apocalypse Now*. The same thing as Martin Sheen going up the river. The same type of river scene and all that. We would stop at these places; they would check our paper, and then the military guys would get on and get off. And then one time these huge—over six feet, buzz head, American men in casual clothes, not military—got on to this boat, and we went down for a couple of hours. And they got off and walked into the jungle without saying a word to us. *[laughter]* I don't know who they were.

KD: Who was that?

- CB: You know? I don't know. And you could tell they had guns underneath their big, baggy shirts. They were CIA or something like that. And we finally got back to Chiang Rai late that night on the bus. At the end of the river, we hopped onto a bus, and came on a dirt road and everything. Of course, they stopped us at a checkpoint. They asked me to get off the bus. They searched me and everything else because I didn't look, like, Thai. So that was an experience.
- KD: During your trip, when you're being stopped by the military or the police and being stripped and—were you ever afraid?
- CB: No. No, because I made sure I didn't have any drugs on me. You know, it wasn't that.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: In Chiang Mai and in Bangkok, they would yell at you across the street, "Want some marijuana?" [*laughter*] I go, "Yeah, Okay." So I would buy it, but it we would just use it in the hotel room, get rid of it. So I knew—like, for example, Bangkok was an open city. But in Malaysia and the island of Pagan, there was a lot of signs that say, "You use heroin, you will be hanged." And they had hung some Europeans. So it was totally illegal there. So I didn't mess with the drugs, except just partying or something. But I wasn't buying it, shipping it, transporting it—anything like that. Even though I should've kept totally away [from] it. So I—
- KD: So you didn't get into trouble, though?
- CB: Never got into trouble. I never did. And I figured, well, if I got busted, it's a buyout. But since coming back, I've seen *Midnight Express*. [*laughter*]
- KD: Yeah. That really put the fear of death in you?
- CB: Yeah. I worked on that movie. That was my lettering, that drippy *Midnight Express* thing?
- KD: Uh-huh.
- CB: I worked on that, too. I just remembered that. Okay. So we moved [on]. Thailand was an incredible thing. And then went up to Burma. And then to Rangoon—[a] fourth-world country.
- KD: Why do you say that?
- CB: Because it was run by the military. We were not allowed to buy Burmese money. We were only allowed to use American money or Thai money, and we had a better exchange rate, and we could only buy, as tourists, only at certain shops. And we would go to these shops, and it would be empty shelves, and maybe one light bulb, one ballpoint pen or two, a little bit of food.
- KD: Wow.
- CB: The place was empty, Burma was starving. It was real repressive, a lot of military, and the people were totally separated, like what they do at Cuba. Cubans can't go to their own hotels. But we did buy some illegal, black-market Burmese money. We bought twenty dollars' worth, but it was, like, two hundred dollars what you could buy over there. Because Kathy wanted to buy some rubies, Burmese rubies. And I told her, "No, it's against the law. Let's not do it." We ended up with too much Burmese money, that we just gave it away at the end.

But we took the train from there to Mandalay, because I knew there was a big battle there with the British in World War II. And I wanted to see the temples of Mandalay, the hills of Mandalay and all that. Mandalay has not changed since the time [of Kipling]. With the British were there, the Kaiser Pass and all that stuff? It hasn't changed in over a hundred and fifty years, Mandalay. And it was incredible. It was still hotels with driftwood floors and everything else. It was just beautiful. The temples. It was just incredible.

And then from there, halfway down, we went to the ruins of Pagan [now Bagan]. Pagan, hardly anybody knows about it. It's in the high desert, and there's thousands of multi-storied Buddhist temples, with points at this—at the very top, [on] which they still maintain golden crowns, up to the size of a table, [from] which they hang rings and golden bracelets and everything else, all jewelry, rubies, everything. But these temples are totally decrepit and falling down. And maybe inside, you'll find a Buddha resting on his elbow, totally laying down. That is about two hundred feet long. Way taller than you. Inside these temples. And the sand coming in, and the sand has filled up half of the body, or something like that. They're like Indiana Jones places.

KD: Yeah. [laughter]

CB: Nobody there. You go outside, and there's pieces of petrified wood half-buried in the sand and things. Way across the barrens, you can see a little silver line that is—that was the Irrawaddy River, and the mounds beyond that. And you could see a tiny little dot at the top of the mountains and ask, "What is that?" They go, "Oh, that's a famous temple monastery where they still have the finger of Buddha is there." Then they said that Genghis Khan had come and destroyed—had gone there, in those times. So it was a fascinating place. We spent about three days there. We had a horse and buggy that we rented with a driver, with big wheels, wooden wheels, and a little buggy, and a little *palapa* top on it.

KD: Yeah.

CB: They would get us little sandwiches and make food for us. And we would spend the whole two days going [from] temple to temple all by ourselves and all that.

KD: Oh.

CB: And that night was New Year's night, '79 to 1980. And that's where we spent New Year's. And they had a huge festival. And we met these Tibetan monks who we spent to midnight with them, buying—they bought us tea and everything, and told us that levitation is real, and the moon trip, the United States, was fake. And all these other things that we talked about. From Burma we went to India. Calcutta. Got stuck in the airport. They wouldn't let us out. And then we never saw Calcutta. And we went from there to Katmandu, Nepal. Which . . . I spent a month in Nepal, traveling, and went to Pokhara, which is a lake city. Rented horses, went up to the high mountains and the hills, spent a night up there. And then we went to this other town at the base of Mount Everest, and rented a small little cottage. It had a fireplace.

KD: Now, your investigation seems to change during your travels.

CB: Uh-huh.

KD: Is it because of the culture expression, or what you start to be drawn towards?

CB: The doors are wide open to me. I'll be drawn to whatever comes to me, or grabs me, or takes me. You don't find people, they find you. That always happens. Somehow, we found ourselves on an adventure, and with options and decisions. We could go here or here or here. And they would know somebody, or friends, or families—

KD: What about your aesthetic investigation? Because when you were in the islands, you were talking a lot about line.

CB: Yeah.

KD: You were talking a lot about—

CB: My aesthetic investigation of what I was finding of the art and all that, these cultures, Nepal and India—and Nepal and Malaysia and Indonesia are so thick, there was no time for me to think about graffiti.

KD: Oh.

CB: I wasn't really thinking about graffiti. I was thinking about wood carvers, spirits. I was thinking about their culture, between—difference between Hinduism and Muslims.

KD: Okay.

CB: The difference between the Hinduism in Bali and in India. There was no time to think about Chicanos or graffiti, or nothing like that. There was graffiti over there, but it was more stencil and political, but there was no tagging. No nothing like that. I did find tagging in Istanbul, where I told you, with the Crusaders.

KD: Right.

CB: But in Singapore and all of there through Asia, I was just there absorbing everything. I did not have time to really reflect. I can't say there was something, that saying, "This is similar to Chicano culture."

KD: Right. Because you hadn't been telling those kinds of tales.

CB: Where in the islands, the cultures are more simple, and concentrated. And once you get it, you get it all. The island cultures didn't start till about 600 to 800 A.D.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: Where these other cultures are thick and far. So going—

- KD: But—but it sounds like you're making a lot of trips to temples.
- CB: Yeah. Temples are wonderful tourist spots.
- KD: Okay.
- CB: Temples are the artistic beginnings.
- KD: Okay.
- CB: And also, any sculpture or writings that I would see engraved would be in the stone, would be at temples. I started seeing a lot of temples with engravings that were thousands of years old. And I said, "Okay, so these are truths. To engrave in stone takes so much time, and it's only the truth. It's either an event or a truth." Like the steles in Mayan culture.
- KD: Exactly.
- CB: And so to me, it was like when I saw the Lincoln Memorial.
- KD: Okay.
- CB: And his words engraved on the back. I go, "That is a truth." You know, that stuff. Something that people can believe for generations, instead of something just for now.
- KD: So it sounds like in this particular experience, it was the media that's telling you meaning?
- CB: I saw this pine—
- KD: Whereas before, when you were looking at newspapers and languages you didn't understand, it was the form.
- CB: It was the form and the contemporary [style] of it. Where I started seeing. And with these cultures, these more ancient cultures, that their language and the culture was already engraved in stone. They didn't have anything like that in the South Pacific.
- KD: Right.
- CB: There was nothing in stone. It was something that they had a belief that went way, way back, and that belief was something that they had written that is still a language, that is still something that they believe in, but it was still written out. The sayings of Buddha in Nepal, all the books and all that stuff. You know? Can we take a break right now?
- KD: Sure.
- [break in audio]
- KD: All right. We took a quick break to get some water in our throats. You were telling me about—I think you were in Burma.
- CB: I'm in Burma. And spent New Year's there. And the fascination of the incredible ancient culture there. And it reminded me of the temples of Mexico, but you were there in those times, the ancient times, because it was still very much alive there. And—
- KD: Hold on just a minute. I just wasn't sure [we were recording].
- CB: Oh, Okay. Let's see from Burma, I went to India, and then Katmandu. And I talked about Katmandu. Oh, yes. And we were rented a small cottage at the base of Mount Everest, which was still about two hundred miles away. And every morning, we would get up before dawn and hike to the edge of this other hill with no trees or nothing. It was huge, and we were like tiny little ants on top of it, and we would wait for the sunrise to come up and [be] reflected on Mount Everest. Which was a triangle, a pyramid-type size. And maybe it was the size of my little fingernail at that distance.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: But it being so clear, it's like, almost in your lap. Having the little bit of money or something, I said I would like to go bourgeoisie. We took a charter plane that they had for tourists. Another DC-6. And with about maybe twenty tourists. And then we flew from Katmandu right across the face of Mount Everest, and then turned around and went across it again. It was two times. And the pilot and the copilot asked me if I could come up to the front of the plane. And so I have photographs of there in the cockpit with the two pilots,

and Mt. Everest right outside the window. I don't know how high we are. Mount Everest is twenty-nine thousand [feet].

KD: Yeah.

CB: And we were up there at least twenty thousand, twenty-five thousand feet. And it was incredible. I got a sense so far, by traveling in the world, I got a sense of my place, of what it felt like to be on the other side of the world from Los Angeles, as far away I could get from the Chicano culture and still remember it and reminisce and see similarities.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: And I also felt that—not only an adventure, but I felt like an astronaut. Totally on the moon by myself. Totally self-reliant, self-sufficient, and anything could happen, and I felt, like, as far detached of family and culture and friends as I could—ever can get. And I felt that I . . . In some ways it was—I was going to say, I felt safe. I felt the similarity in humanity. I started feeling that I was not meeting cultures, but I was meeting aunts and uncles, and *tías* and *tíos*, and brothers and sisters, and that extended family started blurring. Those lines were broken. I did not see the U.S. culture and Thai culture or Balinese. I starting meeting and speaking to people, and we were all the same. Same similar jokes. Maybe different clothes, maybe a little different food. But so much similarity. And I started getting the feeling that I wanted to come home, by continuing my trip. I was ready for the second half of the world at that time. And like I said, the world was getting to be heartfelt and all that. And then also, [laughter] I could feel the position, like I think I explained, of the globe.

KD: Yeah.

CB: If you were standing on top of the world, you're standing straight up at the bottom, upside-down, so when you're out in LA, you're standing almost three-quarters at an angle. I started feeling my body, physical body, in the location of the world. And I knew I was on the other side of the planet, but also on the other side of the universe.

KD: I'm curious, maybe I didn't hear you right, or . . . I heard a contradiction. There's this closeness and farness—a sense of alone and with the world.

CB: Mm-hmm.

KD: Am I getting it right?

CB: Yes.

KD: Were you aware of that tension? I don't know if it's a contradiction, but it's—

CB: A tension?

KD: Certainly.

CB: Yes. I was . . . Loneliness because my girlfriend Kathy was missing her daughter.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: She was very tight. She still had that string all connected all the way back to Los Angeles. And it wasn't going to break. She still had that connection. I broke that string and became adopted—I felt adopted by the world. And I became comfortable in the different cultures and all that. And the blending of them without the borders.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: Talking to people in the South Pacific is similar to talking to somebody in Singapore. It—different cultures, something like that. But their beliefs, their family, their needs, their wants, their sense of future, were similar. These were family issues, something that I didn't have. I have a small family. I really was embraced by this feeling when I see other families change from "culture" and started turning into "people," individual people. It was real interesting. And in coming back to the United States, I felt that Chicano culture was my new, adopted family. I adopted the Chicano culture. The Chicanos didn't embrace me. But I didn't give up. I knew that I was still a Chicano if they didn't appreciate the sushi eating, surfboard, non-swimmer that I was. I still knew I was a Chicano. But not in those words.

KD: Right.

- CB: I had to come back, and I knew I was "TJ Latino." Where I did not feel like a Mexicano. I was American. So like, Chicano defines my Americanism. So I felt alone, detached from my family, but totally embraced with the new—with the world. You know? Incredible. Mount Everest, and then to . . . oh, yes. From Mount Everest, we left there and then went down to India, which I tried to get out of there as fast as I could.
- KD: Why?
- CB: India is one of those places where there are a hierarchy of caste systems.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: And which is another racist segregation. And also that part of that caste system, tourists are at the bottom of that. So they would just approach us and say, "Buy this," and "Buy that," and they wouldn't listen to us, push us around and all that. So it was just we did not belong in the Indian culture. Even though some people have can appreciate it and understand it, I did not feel comfortable in the Indian culture in New Delhi. We stayed with some Christian missionaries there.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: And in their home, which was a very expensive, beautiful home with waiters and stuff. And so we kind of left there, and I said I was glad to get out of India. No disrespect to their culture or anything else, but I just didn't like that hierarchy. They would pick at Kathy to buy something, or pull her to get into this rickshaw, or to buy this and all that, and she would—she would have a short temper. She would get mad at them and tell them off. Then they would look at me and tell me how they're mistreated, and I should control my woman better.
- KD: Oh.
- CB: So being a Chicano and believing in strong Chicana women, I told them, I go, "Screw you guys. She's right." So then they looked at me as like, a wimp.
- KD: Right.
- CB: So I just didn't care for it, so we didn't stay there. That's why we had spent more time in Nepal through our experience in Calcutta. So from there, we left India, and we went to Pakistan, to Karachi. But just overnight, but it was, like, thirty-six hours of just—another hassle at the airport, being searched and all that. I don't know, Mujahideen types, guys with turbans and everything else with rifles walking around the airport poking at your suitcases, and asking what you're doing here. And then they would take Kathy off to a whole 'nother room, not explain it to me. But what it was, she had to be in the women's section.
- KD: Oh, okay.
- CB: That was another shock to my culture, segregation of the men and the women. We did not meet again until inside the plane. And where I would see women in purdah.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: Totally covered up.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: And that little dark mesh across just the eyes, and some of them had a little flap over that. I was shocked with that. I can appreciate their culture, but it's not something I'd ever seen before.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: And coming back—and that contradicted with the Chicana Movement of equal strength in the family. My mom was strong, and my father was strong. And maybe that's American or something, but that was one thing I noticed in the world: that the women and the men were still so far apart. And I felt very thankful to be an American. When I left America, I didn't know what it was to be an American.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: And when I got out there, I had to defend it, and I became hawkish, and I became—I had a choice to whether I wanted to come back to live in America, in the world, where I wanted to live in the world. And I decided to come, definitely come back to the United States, and definitely the West Coast.
- KD: Equality was the reason? Equality between men and woman?
- CB: Was the reason for?

- KD: Wanting to feel—wanting to return to the United States.
- CB: There was a bunch of different things. Food was one. *[laughter]* Not that I missed American food, but I missed the abundance of sitting at a table and having three different kinds of liquids, at your sitting. It wasn't going to make you sick of having hot foods. Of salads—totally unheard of in the worlds. California, things like that. I'm not a rice eater, white rice.
- KD: Oh! *[laughter]*
- CB: That was a shock.
- KD: You must have gone hungry! *[laughter]*
- CB: I was a bread and tortilla eater.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: And a couple of times, I insulted people by saying, "Do you have any bread?" You know? "Oh, this, you should have bread in your culture," or something. *[laughter]* I would say stupid things like that. Totally insult them. One time in Burma, I started getting so weak and so weak. I said, "I need some meat." So when we got to Singapore I went to a McDonald's. *[laughter]* And it reminded me of home. It was the same McDonald's here as the same as there and all that. Except it's twice as much over there.
- KD: Right.
- CB: But I had to eat at McDonald's just to get some fake meat or something like that. So there was a lot of things that I started feeling I wanted to come home, and one of them was—the things that I didn't like—was the racism, which was huge. The inequality of the way they treat people. Even just the hierarchy of a rich person to a poor person and all that. I hated that. And then when I saw that, I started getting really sick to my stomach about it. So that was—that's when I started feeling, I go, "I want to come home to my culture," but I wasn't ready to give up the trip.
- KD: Okay.
- CB: Kathy was thinking of different things. She had a daughter she was thinking of who was about eight, something like that. So from Karachi, Pakistan, we left out of there, flew over Istanbul—I mean, flew over Iran to Tehran, that they were having all their trouble at that time with the hostages, and flew to Istanbul in Turkey. And at that time, it was freezing and snowing, and I wanted to go visit, do my art history again. So I went to the Santa [Hagia] Sofia.
- KD: Right.
- CB: And there was snow on it, and it was beautiful. And it was hard to get—hot tea was the only thing we can get. Some falafels or some food. The Santa Sofia was larger than I thought. [It] was empty. But the stone rock floors and everything were worn smooth with grooves and dents, and you could feel the thousands and thousands of people who had been in there. I knew it became the new Vatican when the church split up after Rome split up, when the Vandals came in and broke up the Roman Empire and the Orthodox Catholic Church went up there to Constantinople. And with Constantine and his wife Isabelle. Yes. Because there's the tile mosaics of them up on the walls. And it was that Byzantine style with everything else. And I knew that it was changed, and that later on when Suleman the Magnificent came and conquered it, it turned into a Muslim temple. But when it was Constantinople, I was reading how the Crusaders came through there.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: And I told you about finding the . . . I already told you about finding the graffiti?
- KD: Yeah. Yeah.
- CB: All right. Finding the graffiti in the balconies upstairs, and all that. So we'll go through there. And so that's when I started coming back to graffiti language once again, once I got back into Europe. Asia, I was totally consumed by their own culture.
- And in Europe, there in Istanbul, we took a bus down . . . Let's see, how was it? From Istanbul, we just took the bus south and into Greece, all the way down to Athens. And then Athens, it was also snowing, and it was cold. When we went to the Acropolis, it was snow on the temples. And I could see across, and

I felt—I was thinking of how the early Athenians . . . When they were there, you could see the edge of the city. You could see how the ocean looked. You could see how maybe how it felt when they were there. And it was absolutely beautiful. They did have a bank strike there, so we had to get out of the city to save money. It forced us to go to the islands. So I said, "Let's go to Crete," because Crete is Knossos.

KD: Right.

CB: The ruined temples of Knossos, where King Minos had his wife, who had an affair with a bull, and is the legend of the Minotaur who lived down in the basement is their son. And then how also the legend of Icarus, that he flew. He made the wings of wax and feathers. And he also flew from this spot. And also they had the bull culture statues and all that. I go, "I have to go to this place." And we went to Crete. And we spent about two, three weeks there.

KD: What's the draw?

CB: The ruins of mythology, which I'm really interested in. And also these temples have started getting to be more and more interesting. And also I started seeing cuneiform from that time. I go, "Oh, this is the land of cuneiform." But it also [was where] they had these names for early Greek. Bar one? Bar two? I forgot. But there was different styles and all that. And it was more about symbology. A trident and . . . I can't remember the other symbols, but it was more about symbology and representation. And I could start seeing more of the languaging that I knew about, because this is Western history—art history.

KD: Right. Right.

CB: And Greek mythology. And so I was back on course of trying to find what their language looks like, and being fascinated by it. But also walking through their footprints, means a whole different approach. We also went to the island of Santorini, where they had the ruins of the Minoan city I can't remember. Akrotiri? I think it's Akrotiri. The ancient Minoan city that was covered up and re-dug. And the Minoans were a total fascination with me. I think those are a romantic culture, the Minoans. And they, [the] Minoans are the ones who went over there and fought the battle of Troy.

KD: Right.

CB: And then I read the book [by Heinrich] Schliemann, the guy who romanticized about proving that the stories of ancient mythology and the Bible are—can be a map to finding these old, ancient ruins. So that's another romance story. I read all about Schliemann and all that. I was back on the track of Troy and of this Western culture. And then from there, we left Greece, and Yugoslavia was still formed. But we had to hurry because the . . . President Tito—I think his name was Tito—was going to die, then they were going to close all the borders.

KD: Oh.

CB: And then they were talking about a civil war up there between all of these, and which started maybe ten years afterwards or so. But we went through Yugoslavia on a bus called "the Magic Bus." It was nothing but hippies, and it was all full of hashish and guitar-playing hippies and all that, and they asked us where we're from. We'd say, "Oh, we're American." They'd go, "Oh, yes. Freedom of choice. Yes, yes. Okay." [laughter] And they would make fun of us. I was dressed up with little slacks, so I didn't have to iron or anything like that.

KD: Right.

CB: We didn't have backpacks.

KD: Right.

CB: And they were saying, "Oh, well, you should get backpacks. You should do more traveling. You people get out in the world and all that," because they felt that we weren't the hippie types, and—and that we were just tourists straight from LA.

KD: [laughter] How wrong!

CB: And I said—and we already had been more than a year traveling.

KD: Yeah.

CB: You know, stuff.

KD: Right.

CB: But I didn't have that hippie look. But I—

KD: Did you confront them? Did you inform them?

CB: A couple of times, but I was thirty-one.

KD: Uh-huh.

CB: They're twenty-two.

KD: Ah.

CB: They're not going to listen to me. And I didn't care. *[laughter]* We did meet a lot of people on our trip, and we said, "Well, if you're ever in LA, stop by." We did have about ten people show up.

KD: You did?

CB: Throughout the years. Different people would show up at my home. So Yugoslavia was one mad two days, three nights, or something like that. And we went across to Italy. Across Italy. There again the police hassled me, because I had these rusted, ancient Nepalese swords that were real wide at the tip, and curled up. Very Sinbad-type of swords and all that. Real rusted antiques. And I had that in my backpack, so I was bringing in arms into the country. So they hassled me about that, and I told them *[they were]* antiques. So they let me go by. But I got hassled a lot by the police.

In Venice, Italy, I totally fell in love with Venice. Totally just insane. And there, I started seeing not engravings of letters, but documents which I was really drawn to that. I didn't know I was going to be seeing that. I thought I might be seeing architecture, statues, and maps. I was really interested in maps. But then I started seeing documents that they had framed, between—peace treaties between Venice and the Turks.

KD: Yeah.

CB: Between Venice and Malta. Between . . . some even earlier things. A copy of the Magna Carta. Which wasn't even Old English, it was Celtic.

KD: Right.

CB: It was in a typeface that was before Old English. So these things that I was picking up, and I was realizing I was making a chronological sense of typefaces in my head. I really wanted to go up to Germany to the *[Gutenberg]* press. You know, the first man to put type—

KD: Right, right.

CB: I really wanted to go see that, because I knew my type, I heard that *[Gutenberg]*—

KD: And that's the name of the first press, isn't it? So my question at this point is, it's clear you know you're on this quest. I mean, you've been telling me that.

CB: Yeah.

KD: And you identify what different parts . . . Are you taking notes? Are you drawing? Are you sketching these things?

CB: No, not really. I'm doing the watercolors of the landscapes and all that. And, these are simple watercolors. I'm not a master at watercolor. And I'm doing compositions where it's the landscape, and then maybe I'll put some symbols, like text at the bottom. That . . . okay, as I did one in Santorini, a watercolor where it was cold and snowing, and I was just looking up over this white Greek house, multistoried, with little stairs going around it. It looks like an M. C. Escher.

KD: Oh.

CB: Type of staircases coming all around it.

KD: Yeah.

CB: All white, with black clouds over it. And then across the bottom, I drew a trident, a dolphin, and something else. Something like that from the Minoan cultures. It wasn't a dolphin, it was a trident, something else, and something else across the bottom. And it would be laid out like a magazine ad, type of thing. It would be a photo with text type of thing.

KD: Mm-hmm.

- CB: But with symbols. I did quite a few of those things.
- KD: Now, you're seeing it as a magazine ad as you do it, or thinking back on it?
- CB: No, I'm combining what I see with stuff that I find. Maybe something around the sculpture in the ruins. I copied some money, because some of their money in the South Pacific is fishes, and their gods, and all that, and their designs. So I copied some of that on top of a wrecked World War II bomber plane in the jungle, which was all done in black and white in the jungle. Then on top of that, I have this colored water god walking across it, with these other symbols. And with the Japanese flag, American flag, and the Samoan flag all in a design across the bottom edge, all stretched out. Stuff like that.
- KD: Wow.
- CB: So I was combining. And in the islands, there was these birds I would see, so I would draw the birds like symbols across the right-hand side in small silhouettes, type of things.
- KD: You've got to let me look at those. *[laughter]*
- CB: All right. Yeah, yeah. My parents have the best, but I've got some right behind the couch there.
- KD: When we look at art, you've got to pull that out.
- CB: Yeah.
- KD: You were in Venice.
- CB: Venice, totally fascinated. Loved the place. And since then, we—Christina and I have been back, and we might go again at the end of this year. *[laughter]* So we went to Florence, where I started seeing the masters. I saw Michelangelo. I did not cry. *[laughter]*
- KD: I wanted to know if it did the same thing, art in Italy, the passion you describe in the Pacific Islands?
- CB: It was different, because I already had seen these images in books.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: But you don't see the scale.
- KD: Right.
- CB: Yes, I loved [it]. Okay, well, I took sculpture as a young kid.
- KD: Right.
- CB: I loved Michelangelo. I would copy him as a young kid, and stuff like that, on paper that I would get from the supermarket bags.
- KD: Oh, the bags?
- CB: The brown paper? Okay, that's what I would draw on. Because I would see in my art books that my parents would buy me. Constable and these other guys, they would do landscapes on the colored paper, and then they would just do a black ink, and then with the white highlights.
- KD: Ah. Right.
- CB: And that's why I used brown paper, and it worked really well. That was a trick that I thought that was really cool. So I started seeing in Florence . . . I was much more moved by Botticelli, and the—*The Birth of Venus*. The four seasons, *[La Primavera]*. I was just knocked out. My knees got weak [with] those.
- KD: Right.
- CB: The *David* is powerful, masculine, everything else. But it was a little static and all that. Maybe overdone. I mean, it was too perfect. You couldn't see any problems with it. What I was really moved by . . . The Michelangelo ones, where as you approach in the building where the—they're the captives. The unfinished pieces of these bound men coming half-done, coming out of the rocks. Now *that* is sculpture. It gives me goose bumps right now. That, I was really impressed by that. We went to . . . not the Medici burial place. Was it the Medicis? But Lorenzo de' Medici, his burial place, where we got to see more of his sculpture and everything. And there at the Uffizi Gallery museum, it has a bridge that goes across the river: the Ponte, famous bridge. The Ponte something. *[Ponte Vecchio.]*
- KD: I know nothing of Italy, believe it or not. *[laughter]*
- CB: Of Florence. When you see this famous bridge from one side of the river to the other, the Uffizi is on one side, the Medicis lived on the other, so they were able to cross the bridge. And they built a whole arcade

above the bridge that they could cross the bridge without anybody noticing or seeing them, so they just had total security.

KD: Right.

CB: The bottom of the bridge was all the jewelers, who were mostly Jewish and all that stuff. And so that arcade across the bridge, on top of the bridge, it only could be opened only a certain one hour, one day a week. And we signed up, because they had a portrait gallery of every famous artist in the Renaissance. A portrait of Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and nobody knows about these things. Of Newton and everybody. I wanted to see this.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: Only recently that I read and heard in the paper—it was about a year ago—that they found a secret room up there off of that bridge that Leonardo da Vinci had a secret room in there that he would work and stuff.

KD: Wow.

CB: A workshop and all that. So we were seeing really special places, and I could see Newton.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: Not—not Wayne—the other Newton. And they would have writings on the bottoms, so I started seeing this Old English done in Old English times.

KD: [laughter] Yeah.

CB: And that was incredible. And so Florence. We moved on—

KD: Before you leave Italy, help me understand why Botticelli's *Venus* is so powerful for you?

CB: I don't know. First of all, the sheer beauty. The sheer beauty of it. That conceptual . . . concept. I'm not clear . . . the composition.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: Here is this woman who is totally—she's in the nude, but you don't look at that, because she is so beautiful. And you see the wind blowing in her hair, and she's being born out of a seashell. That same big clam seashell that came from the South Pacific, that large one, which represents that she comes from the oceans of the world.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: I'm getting it mixed up between the four seasons, where the guys are blowing off the sides—

KD: Well, her hair, her hair is blowing, yeah.

CB: Yeah. Her hair is blowing, and then the ripple in the water, and . . . but there's something. I forgot what's—

KD: There's definitely movement.

CB: Definitely movement. And then the roses are flying in the air.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: Stuff like that. But that is not a straight-ahead composition. That is a total abstraction. That is a composite of reality, spirituality, and maybe even some hedonism. Because at that times, it was really pushing it to put a naked woman and all that. And I think Botticelli had to go [before] the Inquisition. He almost got his head chopped off. And they burned a lot of his paintings.

KD: Right.

CB: And he was very oh, what's that word where . . . for his times . . .

KD: He was persecuted, you mean? Or . . .

CB: He was not "promiscuous," but he—his paintings were very—on the edge of being outrageous.

KD: Okay.

CB: Of being immoral.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: At that time. But Medicis saved his ass. And so when I saw his painting, I wasn't thinking about all the trouble that he went through. I read that later. But I when I saw the painting, I go, "This is a modern painting. This is modern mentality of composition. This is a work—the beauty and the spirituality and the concept

told of what—how to paint it.” The idea was first, not the composition. A lot of the formality of who is giving the money to the church and all that.

KD: Right.

CB: There’s a word, a formal concept. This was totally off the wall. This was a modern, contemporary painting, as far as the layout. And like I was saying, the sheer beauty of it. It was more impressive than Michelangelo is for me. And plus I’m a painter. I like to work on that flat surface and solve my problems.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: Even though when I did sculpture . . . Sculpture in some ways is easier. Let me explain. Because in the two-dimension, we’re always faking the third dimension. We’re always having one-point, two-point perspective, different lights and everything else. Mist between the mountains, all that kind of stuff. Maturity, patina, everything that we try to paint, we’re always faking the third dimension to an extent. And [with] sculpture, if that arm isn’t put on right, you can see it. [laughter] And it’s easier to twist it and put the fingers on where they are supposed to come out. Instead, it’s easier to make a hand out of clay than it is to draw a hand. You know, for me. I don’t know. But that’s how I see it, because it’s so obvious when you make a mistake in a three-dimension—

KD: Right, right. Right.

CB: Because you can see where it fits.

KD: Right.

CB: Where drawing it, you’re always trying to fake it. So the paintings were so much more impressive. Leonardo da Vinci, they would always have these little tiny blue landscapes in the distance in the background. I thought that was *beautiful* because the horizon always represents the travel, the journey, and always what’s over the mountain. It’s always the inquisitive. And I can see that, and I would fly into them. I was beginning to see paintings that I was familiar with in books and stuff like that when I got to Europe. So Florence, big thumbs up and all that. Venice, incredible. So, Italy.

Then we took the train through Lake Como. Went through Switzerland. Went straight to Paris. Got into Paris [at] ten o’clock at night, out of the train, and then took a metro. And we did not know where we were in Paris. Did not see Paris until we popped up out of the subway on the Left Bank. And it looked like—it looked fake. [laughter] It looked like Vincent Van Gogh and Toulouse Lautrec would be sitting on the bench there. And with the round little kiosks—things with all the notices around it. It was so cute, romantic, and this architecture, and the Notre Dame was away—a couple of blocks away. And it was at nighttime. It was music. It looked like a movie studio set.

KD: That’s what I thought you were going to say.

CB: Right. It looked just like a fake set. Something you would—it just looked totally fake. It was just incredible. It looked *surreal* and all that. That’s what Christy and I, when we go to New York, we go, “This looks fake.” When we’re in Brooklyn, it looks like *The French Connection*. [laughter] That’s—we always—

[break in audio]

CB: I’ve already lost a lot of weight.

KD: Yeah.

CB: I’m down to about one hundred and thirty.

KD: Wow!

CB: Something like that. I got sick in Nepal, and also in Bali, I got really, really sick. And I had a really bad stomach and high, high fevers.

KD: Oh.

CB: And . . . which in retrospect, I did pick up something, and I did have either malaria or typhus that I carried on until just a couple of months ago, where I had another attack just—

KD: Wow!

- CB: Just May of this year. And that I had to go to the emergency hospital when I came back from Guanajato. And then thought I had an embolism or something, a bubble, because I was having big chest pains, sweating, fever, fever, fever, sweating, then within a couple of hours freezing—
- KD: Freezing.
- CB: That I was teeth shaking, I couldn't hardly even speak. And so something I picked up there, I still got rid of, and I just had heavy antibiotics just recently, which I've been feeling a whole lot better. That was just three months ago. So what I picked up there—I still coming back. That's part of the story. And so in Paris, of course we went to the Louvre. And one of my favorite artists of—which I don't know if you can see it in my work, but which I'm really influenced by, is Vermeer. Vermeer was God to me.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: And I wanted to see his paintings. I've only seen them in books. I had never seen a real one. And I was really moved by him, even from the book. From the light. It's Vermeer's light. But his sense of tranquility, his sense of perfection, his sense of the moment were just totally captivating for me. Rembrandt, good painter. A good drawer. I love his etchings. What's his name—Albert Dürer.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: Fascinating. Type. Good hand skills. Really respect that man. But stiff. Too stiff for me. Compositional—
- KD: Uh-huh.
- CB: Compositions. Studio compositions. Well, even Vermeer. But Vermeer was more than just a portrait snap. Vermeer was that whole movement—moment where you could want to spend some time with that woman stitching that lace.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: You know?
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: His moment was extended. He actually made sound stop for me. I was just, I don't know, in the zone with his work. I always try to put a sense of light in my work. If you notice, a lot of my work [is] bottom lit.
- KD: Yes.
- CB: Which has a lot to do with Hollywood and stage lighting.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: But also Vermeer was [an influence]. And so I went to the Louvre, and I knew they had a couple of Vermeers, so we went there, and it was on the top floor—I think it's four stories. And they were renovating it. And they said, "Oh, Okay."
- KD: Oh.
- CB: "Well, maybe." So I tried to talk to some curators and all that, speaking no French. They had attitude. I got attitude because I starting demanding. [laughter] And they said, "Come back tomorrow," and all that. And so for three days, we went to the Vermeer—to the Louvre, and I would call on the phone—which was very difficult and trying in French, trying to find out if the Vermeer, if we could see it, or get some type of permission. But they never let me to see it.
- KD: Oh.
- CB: But I got to see the Rosetta Stone.
- KD: [laughter] That speaks your language.
- CB: That's my language.
- KD: It is.
- CB: The Rosetta Stone was insane. It was a milestone in my life.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: Because I had read about [Jean-François] Champollion? Was it Champollion? Something like that. About his analysis of how he went to the Rosetta Stone, how he went with Napoleon into Egypt and all that, and how they ransacked the place and brought it all back to Paris. [laughter] So I was finding a lot of Egyptian art there. And once again, stone, steles—engraved words and symbolism and letters, and all that. Flush

left, flush right. All line over line, you know, compositional stuff, either about events or truths. And so Paris was fascinating and all that. And we met some Parisian friends in Baguio, in the Philippines. When we were walking back on that muddy road late that night, there was a couple way up in the front. And the road was so muddy, and it had rained. They had a big slide. So the whole hillside had slid and covered up the whole road, so we had to make our way across the mudslide, which was about a hundred yards, the length of a football field.

KD: Oh.

CB: And it was dark, and it was wet mud, and they had already started a small, little path across the face of the avalanche. And there was this other couple there, and we kind of held hands and walked across in the dark. And they were Parisians. They spoke very little English. And we became friends that night, and they said, "When you come to Paris, come visit us." Which we did. We hardly communicated.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: They took us to have lunch with their parents in Chartres, south of Paris.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And we had a six-hour lunch there, and where the father explained all about his World War II experience, and how the Americans came and took them out of a concentration camp. And he was in tears, how he loved the Americans. And then the mother kept on serving a duck, a liver dish, homemade drinks and brandies, and all that. It was just forever we were there. Stuffed apples, baked apples—I remember all of this just from that one meal. And then they took us over to see the Chartres Cathedral, another thing that I've only seen in books.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: And knowing architecture and the history of the two towers, and as soon as you walk in and you see the maze on the tile in the floor, and then the stained glass. I was moved. I was so moved, and I felt the presence of the Crusaders. I felt the presence of the early church, or the power of it. It was the biggest thing of those times. And I did not feel a connection to it being Chicano or anything like that, being a Catholic, not at all. But I just loved the presence of master art. The history of Western civilization I was seeing. So I was really impressed by that, because that's what I knew.

KD: Yeah.

CB: I didn't know the history of Asian art, in this valley art, or something like that, you know? I was encountering it. But Western art and when I saw, like, Chartres and all that, the Louvre, I was getting the paycheck. It was payday for me. What else did we see in the Louvre? The *Water Lilies* were closed, Monet's *Water Lilies*—there's a special place.

KD: Yeah.

CB: I wanted to see Munch. No, not Munch. Munch, who did the—oh, he did *The Scream*. Who was the guy who did all the [inaudible] paper job posters of very Art Nouveau stuff? All the Parisian stuff? Very Art Nouveau.

KD: Oh.

CB: It was real hippie stuff.

KD: Yeah.

CB: I keep on thinking of "mocha." Moch—*M-U-C-H*. Much . . . Anyway. [Alphonse Mucha—ed.]

KD: I don't know.

CB: I knew his name. I went to see a big show because he was also a theater person. He did a lot of backdrops.

KD: Right.

CB: Large-scale paintings and all that. We got to see the originals. And that's where I would love to work in theater. With the movie—for the storyboarding that I know and everything else, I have never done it, but I was really moved by his. And then also I started seeing posters.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: Which is headline, body copy—

- KD: Body copy, logo. *[laughter]*
- CB: Logo. And Toulouse-Lautrec posters.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: And all that stuff. And I started some Gauguins that were influenced by the Asian—by the Hokusai prints, and all that stuff.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: Some Van Goghs, who were stone copies of Japanese prints. I started seeing the connections between there. Gauguin, I started seeing his paintings in the South Pacific when he was in Tahiti. So I knew where he was coming from. I could feel it. I started seeing in these painters, in the Impressionists, the painters that I was seeing, I started seeing other parts of their influences, which fed more to me. So now, I wasn't just grasping of what I was learning on as a first person—I was grasping second- and third-person information.
- KD: Oh, I see what you're saying.
- CB: And all that. Within their artwork.
- KD: Right, making connections between their aesthetics.
- CB: Because I understood at that time—it took me up to there—that every painter, every art piece that you do is a self-portrait. You look at a painting that somebody does, I can tell you what's their priorities, what's their interest, what are they going to spend time on, to actually draw, what's their conclusions, what's their influences. Everything a person does is a self-portrait. It tells me a lot about that person. And that I find more interesting than the piece.
- KD: I would have to agree with you.
- CB: Mm-hmm.
- KD: I'll be fascinated to see what you have to say about some of your own, then.
- CB: Ah, yes.
- KD: So—
- CB: Well, it's me talking. The same thing I do here, I just put it up there.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: The same old shit. And then I—when I did get back to Washington, DC, in '95, I did see some Vermeers.
- KD: Okay.
- CB: And I did see something. I wanted to say that.
- KD: *[laughter]* I wanted to know if you did, yes.
- CB: And I almost cried on that one, because they were so small. They were so hand-held. They were precious. They were jewel-like. I couldn't believe his skills and his clarity—beyond any photograph.
- KD: Are—are you drawn to—because you've been to the Louvre, because you've seen things that most of us only see in books, are you drawn to brushstroke?
- CB: *[pause]* Yes. A Vermeer, you don't see his brushstrokes.
- KD: No.
- CB: They're smooth. And that's the same with Leonardo.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: When I saw the *Mona Lisa* and all that, I could've kissed her. She was so cute. *[laughter]* She was really a doll, that woman with that smile, and I know what's on her mind.
- KD: What?
- CB: Either . . . She just . . . Love. It's obvious. It's that—it's that little grin that a woman gets when she's in love, or had sex, or has a baby, or has a family. It's this family love thing and all that. Either she was Leonardo da Vinci's—okay, they say he was gay because he had a partner. But in those times, they had kids, too.
- KD: Right.
- CB: Either it was his daughter [or], I don't know, his mistress. But I think he was, I think, related to her or something like that, because he took that painting with him to Paris. He never sold that painting. That was

part of his collection. And I think she's in love with something. And anyway, you can see it in her eyes, too. I see it [in] Christina's eyes. That's what I tell her. She gets this little grin, when she's real happy.

KD: Did it make you want to go home?

CB: No.

KD: No?

CB: No, but Kathy was sick and tired of the trip by that time. She wanted to see her daughter.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: She wanted to see all that stuff. So she was pushing me, and then we didn't—we missed some countries. We were supposed to come from Greece to the bottom—the boot of Italy and work up. Instead, we just took the bus, hit the top, and then we kept on going north. But the *Mona Lisa* I wanted to kiss. Because she was just—I could see the woman in the painting. Now that's a painter.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And it's not a portrait—it goes beyond a portrait. You know, on that one. And then so I started—

KD: What do you mean by that, "It goes beyond a portrait?"

CB: You should never do a picture. It's always a window. It's always—it's more than a sense of it. The picture has got to be so clear, so to the point and all that. It gets you in the vehicle. It gets you pointed in the right direction. What you see is just where it gets you—like I say, it is just a point of departure. And a good painting will make you dream. What's that, nepenthe? The drug that makes you forget? [*laughter*]

KD: Yeah. [*laughter*]

CB: Something like that. When I would see—I saw the woman. I saw why he wanted to paint her.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: There's a reason. There was a connection there. And the need to paint her, because there was all this sense of beauty. There was a compassion in that painting. It's not a portrait. [That's] why I think he's—it's somehow related. Has to be family. So from there we went over to Paris, to Chartres and all that stuff. It was fascinating. And then we had to get out of town. So we went over to England. And we took the bus—it was a whole package thing.

KD: Yeah?

CB: So we went across to Calais? Cadiz? What's the town—

KD: Cadiz?

CB: There's a—there's a town. No, no, the Cadiz is in Spain.

KD: No? In Spain.

CB: Calais, I think, where the boat crosses from France across. And I was really fortunate enough as to get on a hovercraft. So we crossed the Channel on a hovercraft. That's one of those big rubber skirts, and it just floats on top of the water.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And it was just because I was getting real bad seasick.

KD: Oh, Okay.

CB: This was before the tunnel, and we didn't have money to fly across, and it was just one package thing, and we went across on the hovercraft, which I thought was just so cool. Went into England, and I went to the Tate Museum.

KD: Yeah.

CB: Another fantastic painter, Turner, right? He is a monster. I saw about twenty real Turners there, and I just went insane with him. Talk about first modern painter. And I had read his story in the book that my parents had gotten me from the supermarkets.

KD: Oh, right! Right.

CB: I read—Turner was one of them. And when I got to see his painting, I go, this is a real painter. This is a *man* painting. This was powerful. This was just putting all his energy out there. I mean, he would see the weather and all that kind of stuff, but the way he saw it, I mean, it was almost like he was the magician

making the weather. Because it wasn't—it was more than what nature was making. He invented weather in those paintings.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: And what else? Oh, and that other incredible artist which was like Vermeer? Ta—Tomato? Tallow? Tom-eda? Tal—Talamosa? This super-realistic guy? This guy. [*refers to image*] [Lawrence] Alma-Tadema. You know him?

KD: Alma-Tadema? No, I don't.

CB: Oh shit! [*laughter*]

KD: Well, I guess I—I know the image, but I don't know—I didn't know the body of work, yeah.

CB: Look at that!

KD: Those are—there's your romance!

CB: There's my romance . . . That's the Greek mythology.

KD: Yeah.

CB: You know, the vistas, the maturity of the marble, the glamour of the dresses and the hairstyles. Because in the Minoan cultures in the Athens museum, what they found—the gold. A lot of gold was all jewelry, hairpieces for women, earrings.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: All that. Anyway, *he's* a big influence. This is like Vermeer. You could see the—the full light and all that. So anyway, I bought this one over there at the Tate. England. What else? Tate, Big Ben—all that. I got to see some of the regular sights. Terrible food. Because I was getting hungry. I was really getting really hungry and losing more weight. And I had to come—my body was just moving too much.

KD: Yeah. How did you keep a pace up when you're ill? I mean, did you take days off? Did you let yourself, or—

CB: Yeah. But it would be—

KD: Passion to see—

CB: Like, three days—

KD: The world?

CB: And then move on. Three days and move on, and all that. By that time, it was already a year and three mo—a year, year and four months is the trip. And retrospect I saw too much. And actually, I went too fast. And even though I spent a month in some countries and rented houses and cars it went too fast. In Papua New Guinea, we had to get up to Mount Hagen to see the show.

KD: Uh-huh.

CB: Port Moresby is at the south island—south end of the island. And we took a flight across to the north end of the island, on the coast, to the town of Lae. Which was the airstrip where Amelia Earhart finally left. It was the last airstrip that she left across the Pacific. I walked there—out there on that airstrip, and walked. And because there's one plane a week or something. And walked at the very end, and felt where the water hit the rocks at the end of the airstrip, and told myself, "This is where Amelia Earhart . . ." And because I knew about planes and [my] fascination with them, and I knew about her. And it brought a sense of history. And I saw some old photographs of the bombing of the Lae airport during World War II, because it was occupied by the Japanese.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: And I could see some craters over here and there, and stuff like that. But then we had to get up to the mountains and Mount Hagen for the sing sing. It's two hundred miles of dirt road, and you go up to about eight thousand feet. And it's high altitude jungle. And the only way to get up there is a bus—one bus a week. You know, it's like that. But they had a car dealership of pickup trucks—Mazda pickup trucks—that was just a cab front, and there was no trunk in the back. It was just two steel rods, the frame with the wheels.

KD: Right.

- CB: Brand new. They had to make a delivery of about fifteen of these cars up to Mount Hagen. And somebody told us, they said, "Go to the dealership, and you might get on the caravan. We went there, and that's where we met some of these people who took us to the golf course and all that, and it was the dealership people. And they say, "Okay, all right. Tomorrow, do you guys want to drive a car two hundred miles in the jungle?" And I said, "Yeah." So we got up the mountain. We spent—at dawn, and I was the second car, and it was to drive a pickup on a dirt road as fast as you can, because there's no—these people drive seventy, eighty, ninety.
- KD: Well, there's nothing else out there, right? So . . .
- CB: There's nothing else out there, and to them it is . . . They all drive fast out there.
- KD: Right.
- CB: There's nothing. It's all "Yahoo!"
- KD: Right. *[laughter]*
- CB: And we did that for something like twelve hours.
- KD: Phew!
- CB: Driving in—in the jungle as fast as I could. That was—that was a story for Papua New Guinea. It just came back to me. I don't know. That was England, we left England on a Freddy Laker flight for, like, one hundred dollars, and arrived on . . . right after Easter, something like that. No, it was before March. When's Easter?
- KD: April or March.
- CB: In April?
- KD: It depends on the year. Yeah.
- CB: Yeah. It was in April. And we came home at like just a couple days after Easter. We arrived back in LA.
- KD: And what's the first thing you do?
- CB: The first thing you do is . . . I wanted to eat. I think—I think we went to Phillippe's. *[laughter]* I wanted to—I was really hungry. I became a real heavy connoisseur of food traveling. My mother was a good cook.
- KD: Right.
- CB: My twin brother eventually became a chef at Ritz-Carlton and all that.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: And then—so in a lot of ways, food was always important. That was one of the first things I wanted to do was come back and eat. I'm just going to say one thing real quick, and then we might wrap it, right? Before I left, there's the Chicano thing. Before I left around the world in '79, I had gotten a cold call. Because I was hitting my tag already for ten years in the streets.
- KD: Right.
- CB: And I got a call from this guy I didn't know. His name was Richard Duardo. And Richard was saying, *[doing impression]* "Hey, Charlie." *[laughter]* I'm talking like Richard Duardo. I love you Richard. He said he had seen my work. He has a printing studio. He had a place down in Highland Park. He has always admired my work. He had heard about me. He wanted to bring me in his studio and do a silk-screen print of the skull. And I told him, I go, "Sounds great, but two things: I don't commercialize that skull because it belongs to the Avenues now. We can do another skulls, or something like that. But not *that* skull, because it undermines the real meaning of that thing, and men have died for that. And it belongs to them now. The second part is that I'm leaving in two weeks and I won't be back till a year and a half, Okay? I'm going to call you when I get back." He said, "Okay, here's my number." Didn't meet him; didn't know him, or anything like that.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: Two years later, I go to—I'm working at Seiniger's again, and one of the coworkers is Lili Lakich, a wonderful woman who was very influential to me, because as soon as I got back, she said, "How come you're not doing your work?" I said, "Oh, I need to work, get some money, and all that." She was asking me how come I'm not doing my artwork, my—
- KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: “Why aren’t you doing you work?”

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: We were at a barbeque, and she just turned around sideways, looked at me, and she goes, “You’re stupid.” And I go, “Really?” And she says, “Yeah. You should be doing your work.” Hardcore woman and all that. And that stuck in my head. And I said, “I better get back to graffiti.” Because that’s where I left off. I just needed to get back. I was just more involved in getting the job. I had to move in with my mother because we had no money.

KD: Right.

CB: And then I finally got a house back with Kathy, and then I was back on the same place I was working at sixty hours a week.

KD: Right.

CB: And we were doing a lot of movies and things like that. And then she said I was stupid for not doing my work. And she said she was doing neon art, and she is the owner of the Museum of Neon Art downtown.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: And so she had an opening. She bought the space down there for a hundred thousand dollars, which we thought was insane!

KD: Yeah.

CB: A whole factory size. She had an opening. I went down there, and she says, “Oh, I want you to meet this guy who wants to meet you. His name is Richard Duardo.” So I met Richard Duardo there. So this is at the end of ’80. The beginning of ’81. And Richard invited me to go to his studio and to do a print. He was going to sell it and exhibit it, and all that kind of stuff. And I told him, well, I’m not a real artist, I told him. I just do my graffiti, which I have to get back to, which I haven’t done in a couple of years or so. And then plus I’m just doing this commercial work—all these logos, and all that stuff. And I only had done one real painting, which was a canvas that I had stretched and put my skull stencil on that I sold to this guy so I could make some money for my trip. Which was shown at the Amuse Restaurant over there on Beverly. I think it was the Amuse on Santa—no, Santa Monica. This restaurant called Amuse, which was very hip then and all that stuff.

KD: Yeah.

CB: So it was the art guy who—agent, anyway, who had bought it, who had seen it. And then I made another one [but I] flopped the image. There’s only two canvases with my skull on it, which this guy Fernando Lasano owns, which recently I just exhibited for the first time at the Cultural Affairs event this year, in 2007. At the beginning of this year was the first time I ever exhibited that painting at a hip-hop event.

KD: Right, right, right.

CB: So there was two paintings that I did when I left, and those were the two real paintings that I ever done. When I came back, Richard wanted to do a print, and I felt kind of unqualified or something. The Chicano Movement was really happening, and everybody was having big shows in Europe, and I felt I was just a nobody, at that time.

So he got me in the studio, and we did my letters with a cross, with my letters and everything, and it came out pretty good. But it was all black on black, and with a red dark—ox blood red letter with a cross with letters, “ese”—you know, E-S-E—in the middle of it, and all that. And it was the show poster for me, Bob Zo, John Valadez, and this kid named T-Kid, a graffiti guy from New York. And Bob Zo and this guy—this other guy who was the director for *Pee Wee’s Playhouse*. I can’t remember. I don’t remember. A famous art director. And they put me with John Valadez and all that, and I felt the weakest. And I painted a whole wall of letters. One foot-high letters, I painted a whole studio wall—roll call. And they were really impressed. Los Lobos came in—that’s when I first met them. They have pictures of them standing in front of it, and they’re all young and everything. And my piece came out in *Details* magazine, and I think the *LA Weekly* or something. It got a bunch of reviews, but just the pictures. They basically interviewed Richard Duardo.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: I thought it was cool. [*laughter*] I always tell—everybody still laughs. I wanted to be like Richard Duardo, I told him, because he was hip. He had the girls. The nightclubs, he would go and VIP, comped this and all that. He would take me around to the different clubs and things and all that. And I was smitten with all that, glamour.

KD: Yeah?

CB: And I still [had] Hollywood in me, so I was very, I guess . . . My mom liked—loved the movie stars.

KD: But you had access to all that before.

CB: Yeah, but this time was different, because I was actually meeting people. Henry Rollins, and all that when he still had a lot of tattoos. Shadee. Who else I would meet? Oh, like Timothy Leary.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: All these clothes designers and stuff like that at clubs. I wanted to be like them. They were having fun with their art, and I was just working for the paycheck.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: I was using my art skills for the paycheck. But in the meantime, I was buying a house, and nobody else was. And I was saving. I was doing my commercial work, and I was saving between 1981 to '86. I did so much commercial work working at advertising agencies. Walter J. Thompson, Tony Seiniger and Associates, [Foote, Cone & Belding]. Well, it's not Walter J. Thompson. It's Wodell and Associates, the first one, then Seiniger. Then a bunch of independents, and then [Foote, Cone & Belding], J. Walter Thompson, and Sachi & Sachi. I worked for all those agencies, car agencies, Universal Studios, Fancy Feed cat food, Carnation. You name it. Products, big money—I hated it.

So I was going out at night, and I wanted to be like Richard Duardo. I wanted to be like the Chicanos. I wanted to be like John Valadez. I went to his studio. They were all working and doing their art, and I felt I didn't have the tools or the paintings, or anything. I felt I was just starting all over, but—

KD: So with the trip around the world, you didn't even think you had the art historical training.

CB: My trip around the world was all a personal experience. I didn't think it could apply to anything except me and my encounter to what I needed to know. I did not think of it as a scholarly education that I could apply this. I felt it was just personal. Because I would—when you go on a trip and you come back and you tell people, "Oh, I went over here," they get tired in five seconds. They don't listen to you. They don't care. "Oh, I went to the South Pacific." "Oh, that's nice." [*laughter*] Nobody ever really cared if I did or not. I came back. I printed at Richard Duardo, that one print.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: Right after that I did another print with him in around '87, and then—which was a skull, straight-on skull, called *Los Avenues*. I went hardcore into my graffiti tagging out on the street. And then my very first graffiti painting was when I came back in '81, was a roll call. And I did the roll call with an airbrush because spray can was too big, and I wanted smaller letters, and I knew the airbrush, so I borrowed a compressor and an airbrush from a friend of mine, and I did it in my living room here on Mount Washington, I did that painting.

KD: Wow.

CB: I couldn't afford a frame, but I knew on the curbs, were all half-inch radius curves on the concrete. So I made my frames half-inch curve, and I made it thick, like a concrete *placa*.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And I used fake Zolatone that I saw in Disneyland and also at the studios, that they were making fake rocks.

KD: Right.

CB: And I used Zolatone, and then I painted on top of it to make it look like a fake river wall—the Arroyo Seco river wall that I was trying to copy, that type of thing. And so in 1980, I did my first roll call. And later on down the line, fifteen years later, that's the first—that painting went to the Smithsonian.

KD: Mm-hmm.

- CB: And that was interesting [for] CARA [*Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation*] and all that, and it made a big impression, and it was a good starting point for me. And so I was lucky that that first painting—1980, that’s what it says on it. As soon as I got back, I found the house that we’re living up there. Then up to 1980, I was painting there. And then I met Richard and all that, so by ’87 I did my second print. And I was showing it to Robert Berman, trying to get in Robert Berman gallery.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: And Robert Berman was showing, as we say—[*laughter*—this was not my quote, they were saying, “Robert Berman would show any Mexican that fell off the truck.” [*laughter*] Except he didn’t like my work.
- KD: [*laughter*] So you weren’t the Mexican that fell off the truck!
- CB: I wasn’t! And I was disappointed, because I would see newspaper articles with Leo Limón and I would be envious. I never got jealous, I was just envious. Because jealousy is motivated through hate or something. I don’t know. And then I would see Richard Duardo in the paper, and then he introduced me to Jackson Browne. So I went to and I met Jackson Browne. Found out that his family was from Highland Park.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: Claude Browne had built this small church—an abbey—which hardly anybody knew about down here in Highland Park, which in some ways—when I did ceramics there at my high school, my very first art show was at a little community art show here in Highland Park. It was at the abbey. So I was about seventeen when I had my very first commercial art show. I may have said it was at the Mechicano Art Center which was my real first art show. But this one was a little community [place], and I had my ceramic plates and some cups. And they called me up and he says, “Hey, we’ve got some money for you.” And I went down there real happy. And evidently somebody bumped a table and broke a couple, and they paid for them. So . . . [*laughter*] I got the money for the broken pieces!
- KD: [*laughter*] That wasn’t because they bought them?
- CB: No.
- KD: Okay.
- CB: Right. So Jackson Browne, he had just done an album, and they had some graffiti letters, and I told them, “You should’ve had me do it,” and he agreed. He asked me and Richard Duardo to design his next album cover.
- KD: Oh.
- CB: I did the letters, and Richard did the cover, which they used his cover, and they ix-nayed or—they didn’t use my letters, because they were too . . . because Richard’s—ended up using the face of the Statue of Liberty. And the *cholo* letters of my style wasn’t really matching.
- KD: Match?
- CB: And all that. But Jackson Browne asked me if I would do some other work. If I would do a mural, he would photograph it. At his concerts that he had huge, large-scale screens, four of them, a composite. That he would blow up my image twenty-five feet high by forty feet long or something like that. It was at the Wiltern [Theatre]. So I said, “All right.” So I did some compositions, and he picked the most heaviest wild *cholo* one with Los Avenues, with my skull stencil and everything else. And I went down to the Arroyo Seco off forty-three and I did a whole painting with a photographer. And I go, “Oh, wow—this is cool.” And so he photographed it and he took it all around on his tours. And so Jackson—
- KD: Was that a good commission?
- CB: Yeah. He paid me well. It got it in the right place. It got—I got to do it on my terms, with my imagery, with my voice. And it was cool.
- KD: Were you A-R-T artist yet? Remember the other day, you said you had the A in “artist?”
- CB: Maybe I was up to the R.
- KD: You were up to the R?
- CB: Right. I wasn’t—
- KD: [*laughter*] Your standards are incredibly high. I know we’ve been talking a long time—

- CB: I had a day job. I *have* a day job. As long as I had a day job, I wasn't an artist.
- KD: Ah.
- CB: If I was living off my art like John Valadez and Richard Duardo, those were real artist to me, you know? Having a day job or anything like that, I go, "No matter what it is, it ain't going to cut it." You had to live off your work. Yeah, we're going to cut, but I just forgot a whole important thing. When I met Gusmano Cesaretti there in the early '70s—
- KD: In '75?
- CB: Yeah. We did that book *Street Writers [A Guided Tour of Chicano Graffiti]* in '75. So the *Street Writers* had already come out in '75, I already was on TV and all that, so I already had that reputation before I left for traveling around the world.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: So people were aware of that book. It did give me some credibility as being a voice in the Chicano Movement. I had to write a couple of articles, and I go, "What am I going to call this, you know . . . gang lettering?" And I started writing. I started calling it *cholo*. I hadn't seen that anywhere else, but I think we were all thinking about the same thing, so I think I was one of the first to give the definition of "*cholo graffiti*" compared to hip-hop graffiti.
- KD: Hip-hop, right.
- CB: And all that. West Coast, wild style.
- KD: Wild style? Mm-hmm.
- CB: Because I knew about their graffiti, but we didn't have a—a name for our graffiti except "gang graffiti," "Old English," "*placas*."
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: We didn't have a definition for the letter style, and I called it *cholo* and all that. And then I wrote an article for a couple of things—I can't quite remember—at that time, in the '80s. Probably the statements for my work with Richard Duardo and stuff like that.
- KD: Were you—were you using this term *cholo*?
- CB: Yeah. Yeah. I started using it right around there, in the mid-'80s. By that time, the computer came in '85—the little Macs, little square Apples.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: And I said, "It's time to get out of here," because I felt that now—I was driving the Jaguar by now, and I was really—I was buying my third house.
- KD: Right.
- CB: You know? And on the weekends, doing my own blueprints, going down to the city, getting my own permits, and building the whole thing and having inspectors come and checking off, and . . . so I was doing my architecture and building. And there was one time there in '89 when I got married. For two years I did not do any work, from '89 to '92 or something like that, '91, because I was just working on the house. Busy with the house, and dedicated to my family, to—to Kathy, and this is my job now, you know, and all that. And she was more concerned about me. She said I could do whatever I want, as long as I brought money in. And the art was not bringing in the money, so I was building these houses. So somehow I didn't work there. But in '86, glory be the day, I quit my day job. And I said, "I'll never go back." And I didn't learn the computers, and I said, "I can't go back." And I really put myself on thin ice, in the water, and all that. And—and that's when my stepdaughter had moved in around '83, '84.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: So I had kind of like a pseudo-family and stuff. So I had to be sure to bring in work so that meant I had to build the houses and all that. But in '86 was my last day job. And then from there on, I got the "T" for the art, you know? So I think we could we could stop.
- KD: Let's pause. We're done for today.
- CB: Yeah.

SEPTEMBER 28, 2007

KD: Okay. This is Karen Davalos and [Chaz] Bojórquez, and today is the twenty-eighth of September, and this is our third session. I wanted to ask you a bit about some of those early, important exhibitions, and if you could go back to the ones in the '70s before we go on to the '80s exhibitions.

CB: All right. I think I spoke about the Mechicano Art Center, and I think it was 1970, but I sure feel it was 1969, right around there when I was in the Mechicano Art Center. And then my brief—couple of weekends with the Goetz gallery and stuff. So I wasn't really connecting with the Chicanos in any exhibition way, until . . . Let's see . . . the Barnsdall, show which was in 1975. Which I don't know how I got involved. I'm not sure exactly. I think I probably just got a letter in the mail, recommended by somebody. Because in looking back at the Barnsdall book, there were a lot of curators. Judy Baca, Richard Duardo, I think John Valadez, a bunch of people that have disappeared—that I don't remember. Because I recently looked at that book.

KD: Oh, you did?

CB: Yeah. And there's a photographs of all the curators and the event. And now that you bring it back to me as—I was really excited about that show. And I showed that skull painting, this where I took my stencil, *Señor Suerte*, and I put it on the canvas for the first time. And that was in 1979. And I did the same image, but just two versions: one facing left, and one facing right.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: The very first one, I think, was facing left. No, I can't remember. Anyway, it was when I had done two. And the first one was bought by—I can't remember whose name, but it was the co-owner of the Amuse Restaurant over there on Santa Monica, and he exhibited it there. No, no, no—he didn't exhibit there. I would go there, and he would say he couldn't because it would scare the customers. But as I borrowed the painting, or it was right before I had sold it to him, that's the painting that I had used to exhibit.

KD: Do you remember the exhibition?

CB: Very well, because at Barnsdall, the last time I had been there was when was a young kid. And also I had taken art classes there in the junior art center, whatever it was called then. And so going back to Barnsdall was—I felt it was really important. It was a real gallery, a major gallery, because I had never really exhibited in what I felt was a real gallery before. The Mechicano Art Center to me was an art center. We had to sweep it and clean it, and hang it ourselves. Barnsdall was a municipal gallery.

And then to be part of a group Chicano show, I was just totally—really exciting, because I was going to be showing with painters who were far superior than me. Huge . . . history of art exhibitions, major artists, like people who I really respected in the Chicano Movement but I never had met them. They were all still unknown to me. I had seen their photographs and pictures, so it was kind of exciting. So I had my painting, because I remember just dropping it off and then showing up for the opening, and seeing several hundred Chicanos. And the first—that was the very first time I saw Chicanos. You know, the way we dress. Some of them had hats and mustaches, and long hair, and speaking Spanish and—and all those images of the low-riders, the tortillas, the grandmas. Everything that was typical of Chicano art now.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: That was my first introduction that I actually got to see it in depth. Wood carvers, farm workers, *cholos*—every type of imagery I had never seen in one place before.

KD: Do you remember the abstract stuff that was also on exhibition?

CB: There was a couple of abstracts, maybe in ceramics and things like that. But no, I really don't. I don't think that really impressed me, because to me Chicano art was objective. And it [had] things that I admired, even photographs of grandmother, or something like that. I had never seen it all together in one spot, and it glorified our—the community and—and our culture, where I didn't have a sense of identity, Latino identity. I was just a floating American in a large ocean of Los Angeles city. I didn't have that specific identity. And then when I saw the Barnsdall show—what was it called?

KD: *Chicanarte*?

CB: *Chicanarte*.

KD: I think they ran the two words together.

CB: Yeah, it was the *Chicanarte* show. I really felt—wanting—really wanting to be part of the group. And I started seeing people having their photographs taken there. I was really impressed by that. I saw the Asco group.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: I had seen a couple of photographs of them. Now I know it was Willie Herrón and Patssi [Valdez]. And there was people taking photographs of them or video. And then there was also other artists; there were groups that they were having photographs taken, and I felt totally invisible. I mean, nobody was going to take a photograph of me, and—but I really wanted it, because I really wanted to be part of the group. I was longing to be part of the group. In my view of my own work, I've already said it twice, I'm sure: I love group shows. Group shows are what make me click and work. My dialogue is—

KD: What's the challenge of a group show?

CB: The challenge is—is a group show. Okay, well, I'll tell you the challenge, and also why I don't like one-man shows. In group shows you get to see the whole scenario. To me, it's more of a movie, with a story. And my dialogue, my text and type is dialogue for their paintings, for their visions and paintings. Their paintings add vision to my dialogue. I feel it's sort of like a storyboard. And I feel that you get more out of a group show than what you do with a one-man show. A one-man show is just about what I see as an individual working with his unique . . . coherence idea, but in some ways it's very, very narrow, you know? No matter how broad a one-man show could be, it's still a very narrow, one perspective. Where a group show, it's voices, music, imagery, song and dance. It's everything to me all together.

KD: But you had mentioned that the group shows, they don't get the reviews that the solo exhibitions do.

CB: True. But it was never that important to me.

KD: Oh, okay.

CB: Because I only have, in my whole career, three one-man shows.

KD: That's actually quite impressive.

CB: Yeah. [laughter] I don't know. It's—

KD: No, it's quite impressive.

CB: It's infamous.

KD: You keep saying you took up—if you say that you . . . Well, I mean, you have this long career, but in your definition you're devoting yourself as—you defined yourself as an artist in '86 if I heard you correctly, because that's [when] you stopped the day job, right?

CB: The *T* in "art."

KD: So you're getting quite a few shows in a short period of time, and I'm imagining it's because you actually have this long career where other people might define you as an artist. Part of that is your work in the street, which I didn't know how much a tagger would talk about that on tape, so you—it's up to you to say.

CB: Oh, yeah. Plenty, yeah.

KD: Okay.

CB: That's the graffiti part.

KD: So we are talking about early exhibitions, but we don't call them formal. Let's just say the work you did in the street.

CB: All this time that we're talking about the Mechicano Art Center and the *Chicanarte* show and all that, I am tagging the streets.

KD: And is it with more than just the stencil?

CB: It's the stencil and letters. So I'm using the spray can, and I'm finding a lot of difficulty with the spray can, you know? Basic things if you [laughter] ever want—if you use a spray can, your spray can finger goes numb in fifteen minutes, you know? You really have to have strong fingers. Taggers have strong fingers, strong hands. And then you have to have what they call "can control."

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: And I did not have good can control when I first started. I acquired it once I got my letter shapes, because I kept on reinventing the shapes as I was going on the walls. And so I had to really just get my letter shapes down. And then my can control became tighter because I knew what I was doing. I had a vision of what the letter *A* looks like, letter *B* looks like, and things, and what [and] how I wanted to manipulate it, how it would work in the whole word or in my name. Or in my tag. So that took a while to get my chops with my letters, and then with that came can control. But I never liked the can, because there was only one company, Krylon.

KD: Yeah.

CB: It was very drippy. Way too much liquid in it. And it just wasn't that much pigment in it, so everybody complained. Nowadays, you have cans that are made in Germany, Montana, and Belton. And in Mexico City they have their own graffiti cans just for the graffiti writers. Some of them have magnets on the side, so that way when you're running and tagging at night, the metal ball inside doesn't rattle.

KD: Doesn't rattle?

CB: You know?

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: So you don't make any noise. Some of them are larger cans. For blacks and your whites for your fill-ins and things like that, they make larger, almost liter cans. You know, twice as tall. And they are made with heavier pigment, and they're like cream when they come out. Beautiful paints. That has only happened with the last five years or so, you know? Specially made spray cans for graffiti writing. When I was starting, there was just Krylon, and maybe American Pride and—and Rust-Oleum. And there were just minimal colors, and they were just a terrible. They were too liquidy.

KD: So are you documenting that work—

CB: Well, just to make a long story short—I was just trying to make a point—I went back to the brush because I didn't like the spray can.

KD: Okay.

CB: All right. You know? But the brush was like a felt marker. It's a ribbon line, thick and thin. So it's like a hand quill where you do calligraphy.

KD: Yes.

CB: So I felt I could go back to the brush because before the spray can, they had used brush, and the line work is similar to a felt marker, so I wasn't reinventing the graffiti and trying to turn it into an Asian type of a calligraphy using an art brush or something. I was still maintaining the same line, and still keeping the tradition, you know? So I felt confident that I could go back to brush and doing graffiti instead of spray can.

KD: In that realm of exhibition, are you working in groups?

CB: The graffiti, total *solito*. Solo, solo, solo. I used to have some friends that would go down there with me, like, Brian Jones and Tom Ruddick, and Willie Dillingham. We used to do that in '69. Yeah, around the summer of '69. But they all quit at the end of that year. And I just kept on going. And they were doing an artsy thing. We had talked about that. But right after my friends got tired of me, of going down there to the river, I ended up going many times by myself down to Arroyo Seco river off [Avenue] 43, and I would take a six-pack of beer and my ghetto blaster with heavy batteries, which was like, about three feet long.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And then I would take my paint bucket and a paintbrush. And some water and all that. But basically, I would just rinse my paints in the river, you know? My paintbrushes I'd cleanup at the end. So I would go down there. Ended up many times just doing it by myself, you know? And in the river, it's very bright. It's right next to the freeway.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: A lot of lights, reflections, a lot of shadows. The walls are sloped. There's a breeze that comes down the river. There's the sparkle of the water. And then to get down there, we used to walk down the railroad

tracks. Right alongside the main boulevard in Highland Park were railroad tracks. Because if we were really loaded or drunk or something, to keep away from the boulevard, from the police, walking down the railroad tracks was a way we would connect throughout Highland Park. And if the moon was out that night, all the broken bottles on the tracks would glitter, and we would call it "the diamond-studded highway." [laughter] To us, it would be a sparkling [highway]. What's that—hallucination or something. But that's how I would get down to the river from my home. So that way, I could take my gear and not be spotted. Or I would just hop into my Chevy if it was running. So from '70 all the way to the late '80s, basically I did it by myself.

KD: And how consistent is this? Every month?

CB: In the beginning, it was once a week.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: It was every week, you know? Because there I was hearing some stories about out in New York, okay? The tagging over there with Taki 182.

KD: Right.

CB: And he was a bicycle messenger and happened to be tagging his name all the way around. And how it started getting picked up. And then how the first gallery was Hugo Martinez in New York. And that was in . . . I can't remember . . . '73, '74, right around there. Anyway, he's noted for the first graffiti show.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: And I think it was called The FUN Gallery. And then once that happened, New York said, "Okay, we did it. We've done it, did it. Did it, done it, whatever." And then they started closing up the yards. They had started getting way too much heat from the tagging, the destruction, and they started closing up with—the barbed wire, double fencing, and the dogs. And then the gallery said, "Okay. Well, we went through it; it was a fun phase." And it didn't ever get considered as art, really fine art. The most it did was in New York. And I was reading those stories. I really wanted to go to New York. I really wanted to go and hook up with those guys, because they—there was no connection here.

Here, there was only gangs, *cholos*, gangsters who were doing art. I would see them in the riverbed, but they just look at me, and they would sit way over there smoking weed, and I would be down on the river, and they would see me coming to paint, and . . . Everybody just left me alone, you know? I guess they thought maybe I was crazier than them or something. I never was chased by the *cholos*, never chased by the police, you know? I always was able to go and tag anywhere in the riverbed, and also on garages in my neighborhood, and—

KD: I'm imagining you have a very different relationship to these things you create from your tagging, because they don't last.

CB: No, it's not supposed to last. The feeling that you get [from] a piece that you tag is that it's going to get covered up. Or some other *cholo* is going to come and cross over you, call you a *puto* or some other gang would cross you out, and then they would write. And then other avenues.

For examples, I did a piece down near the riverbed, and then CP [Cypress Park] Boys came up the river from Cypress Park, and they saw my tag, and they cross it out and put "CP on it. Later on, within a few months, Avenues came by and crossed out "CP" and wrote "Aves"—big letter A, or A-V-E-S—"43rd." And, you know, I wasn't writing that. I would go back down to riverbed, and every few months I would see—and then they would see this progression, [a] conversation over my piece. There would be a dialogue. The back and forth, back and forth of totally anonymous men writing, crossing each other out either to cover up this special tag spot, what would you call a tag? It's an allegiance to your group, or to your gang, or to your neighborhood. And this special spot, and then people crossing, people would defend it—you know, go back and forth.

I found that really interesting. I found that fascinating. It added more to my art that I really wasn't aware that was going to happen. And I had people dialoguing it, and actually adding things, and conversing over it, and willing to die for it and fight for it, and I thought, "Boy, that's the real value of an image."

I [thought], “The real value of an image”—this is something I always say—“the reveal value of an image when it comes to it is worth zero. Art is worth zero. It’s not worth anything. The real value is when somebody comes and actually believes in it, you know?” One way to believe in it is they reach in their pocket and give you money for it.

KD: Right.

CB: Another way is that it represents who they are. They’re willing to die for it if it’s their gang, if it’s a tattoo onto them, or they’re willing to appreciate it is when they see it in magazines and whatnot. Or I get people who borrow the image and use it in a movie or something like that. Or people want to put it in a book.

KD: So . . .

CB: They use it, and that’s the real value, I think, [of the answer to the question] “What is the value of art?” It’s how it functions. Not just making it.

KD: So are you documenting these . . . these conversations, this dialogue? Do you photograph?

CB: I have photographs. Very few early photographs, but I have photographs because my girlfriend, Kathy, whose tag name was Blades because she had stabbed her previous boyfriend a few times, and [laughter] so we called her Blades. And then she became my girlfriend. And I always told myself I would never teach her how to use a gun. [laughter] Or change her name to Bullets, you know? And she stabbed me once. So she was a real blades person. But she wrote out there in the street. Just for fun that she wrote “Blades” one time out there. So I do have a photograph of the “Blades.” But she had a camera, and she was the one who photographed. And what few pictures I have that time, she is the one who did it.

And . . . so we were saying the—the real value of art. In some ways, that’s what I was finding: by putting my piece on the street, I was getting more respect than I could at any Chicano show. I was getting more . . . I felt more responsible by participating in the community by adding my tag and the image than participating in the Chicano Movement. My skull tag to me was my Chicano identity, [it] was my participation, my ticket to try to get into the Chicano club. I would’ve done it anyway, because I thought it was cool, because the graffiti was already in my background. And the skulls [were] already from Mexico. I already had that language, and I just needed the green light to go ahead and use it, you know, just to use all my—my—

[break in audio]

KD: This is tape 4, and I’m talking with Chaz about his tagging in the early ’70s.

CB: In the early ’70s. Yes. So like I said, I was getting more respected [by] my tagging, and I felt I was doing something more important, and really getting satisfaction out of the tagging. I really thought it was a lot of fun to tag, and to be out there at night, and it’s very—like I said, it was to me, it was very romantic in the moonlight, you know? [laughter]

KD: Oh.

CB: And the place and all that.

KD: I’m getting feedback—Hold on. I don’t know what that is. No, I don’t hear it on the tape. Go ahead.

CB: Okay.

KD: Maybe it’s just ringing in my ears. Did you hear it? [laughter]

CB: Yeah, I heard ssss.

KD: Oh.

CB: You know? Sometimes when these wires cross, or something like that.

KD: I was worried about that.

CB: So yeah. So even though I was not a gang member, I felt that I could speak for the gang community because I lived in gang-gang-land, and I had friends forever, cousins, and my uncle was a *pachuco* and a zoot suiter, and, you know, I felt I very much qualified. It was never a question that I could not do gang graffiti.

KD: That’s interesting, because my understanding of graffiti of—from my family’s experience is when you get written over, you know, you get crossed out, you’re—you’re being dishonored.

- CB: Mm-hmm.
- KD: And you saw all of that as positive dialogue. I found that really fascinating. Other—other taggers probably wouldn't have that view, right?
- CB: No. No. Probably other taggers, a gang member would not have that view.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: Even today, a graffiti writer if somebody went over their work; no, that's disrespect.
- KD: Disrespectful?
- CB: Totally disrespectful. But in some ways, I was in and out—a third person back and forth. And so when I would come back, I didn't have anybody watching my back, so I wasn't going to start any problems. I wasn't a gang member. Go down there and choose off CP boys or something. I wasn't going to go down there and tag in their area, because to me, to represent who I was in a *cholo* and a Chicano way was only to tag in my own neighborhood. To put it on the boundaries of who we are, what Highland Park was. That was tradition, and I kept to that tradition. Except for that one piece that I tagged up there where I worked up in Hollywood, you know?
- KD: Right.
- CB: And otherwise, all my tags were in the riverbed, riverbed. As soon as you came across—right before you crossed the river on this round spiral staircase on the 110 freeway and the 5 [freeway]—that was the border. And I've had men come up to me recently—gray hair, balding, and everything else—and they would tell me how when they were a kid, [laughter] they used to see that image and get really scared. Or they would come down when they had cousins in Highland Park or Cypress, they would come from some other part of the city; they would see it, and they would hide behind a seat, or they would say, "Oh, we're coming to the valley of the skulls." You know?
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: I was real surprised. It influenced a lot of people, they remembered it, you know? They remembered it on the spiral staircase because it was a monument.
- KD: When does the exhibition of your work on the streets start to conflict with, you know, the gallery, the museum?
- CB: Well, okay. It is '69 to the early '70s. I kept it totally separate. Actually, the first exhibit that I actually had with my skull was at the *Chicanarte*. [The] painting.
- KD: Right, right.
- CB: And where I actually put the skull on the canvas, and took the canvas to a gallery, and exhibited in an art show. It turned that graffiti into something else.
- KD: So is that the path that leads you on to some of these other works that are—
- CB: Yes. To my Chicano art career?
- KD: Yes.
- CB: My skull tagging painting is basically ground zero. It's the core of my Chicano artwork was this skull tag, *Señor Suerte*. Mr. Lucky. And when I put it into the gallery, it changed it, because then—this is a long argument for the next twenty-five, thirty years, it's up until recently that I realized in retrospect that it's not graffiti anymore when it goes into a gallery. You know? It's argumentative. We can go back and forth and all that. But what really happens, graffiti is really what you do in the streets. There's an intent and purpose and a function into the streets. And the audience is different.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: As soon as you get into a gallery, the intent and purpose and function and the audience is totally different. But what you get out of the gallery is that you could take the graffiti and start talking about it. You could start talking about what it is, why it's important, who it represents, its history. You know, what am I trying to say to the audience? And it's totally different. You cannot do that [in] the streets. I can do an incredible piece behind a liquor store, but the *hell* if I could get a curator out there and say, "Hey, I want to show you a great piece of art!" They're not going to believe me, because to them, it doesn't function as an art piece.

- KD: Was that hard for you early on, or did you come to peace with yourself on that?
- CB: I thought it was art. I thought anything out there in the streets was art. Because Andy Warhol was doing it.
- KD: Right.
- CB: You know? But no, graffiti was not considered “art” at all. It was considered vandalism, period. There was no merits in the letter shapes, your audience are gang members, there’s no respectability. The only thing it had was tradition.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: That is to hold up the old graffiti, you know? And later on, that was the problem with the Mechicano Art Center not showing my graffiti, because they felt it was . . . Well, I really didn’t have anything to show to the Mechicano Art Center, I had abstractions.
- KD: Right. You said—
- CB: I was showing what I was doing in school, in art school. I thought that’s what I would start showing to be an artist. But when I started showing there, the first time I showed my graffiti piece at the *Chicanarte*, I felt very defiant. I said, “I’m glad.” I was real surprised they took my piece. I said, “Okay, I’m going to show them what I want to show this time.” And my tagging.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: And really didn’t feel it was really Chicano work; I didn’t feel it was really a good painting. I felt I was really stepping out on thin ice and taking a chance on this one, even though I believed in it and I knew it was right, but I knew it wasn’t really going to be accepted that well.
- KD: What about some of these earlier exhibitions? Now this is “gallery,” this list, and I want to get the one that says “museum.”
- CB: Mm-hmm.
- KD: So some of these early [exhibitions] you’re showing in?
- CB: Those would be New York. I jumped from ’75 to ’85.
- KD: Right.
- CB: Nothing was happening.
- KD: And then the Robert Berman in ’91?
- CB: Mm-hmm. Yeah. A group show, and somebody else had submitted my work.
- KD: You start working with Self Help [Graphics & Art]. I’m wondering if you—the way you were talking about Mechicano and feeling as if you are not part of the group of Chicanos. When you are at Self Help do you say, “Okay, I’m at Self Help—that must mean I really am a Chicano now?” When does that moment come?
- CB: All this time, I knew that in the ’70s that I felt that I was doing Chicano art, but I did not feel that I was an artist yet. And I did not feel that I could call myself a Chicano because I didn’t speak Spanish, and that was a real embarrassment on my end that I felt I didn’t speak good Spanish, and that I could not be a Chicano. I felt that that was a barrier. And I—
- KD: So language is an important criteria for you?
- CB: To me, speaking Spanish was one of the foundations of being a Chicano [and] to maintain your connection to your motherland.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: You know? And all the Chicanos that I was seeing were very in Spanish, and [they] were very educated. And I was not academically educated, even though I had gone to art schools, but never finished. And I didn’t speak Spanish. So in some ways, I felt, like, very much on a ledge. And then working in Hollywood, I felt very much detached from the community, too.
- KD: So you didn’t have any tools that would say to you—your experience in Mexico, your family, this connection to this particular community—none of those things registered to you as Chicano experience and valid experiences?
- CB: It was, but it was just in my back pocket. It was nothing that I could show to people as credentials to get into the club. I don’t think it was good enough.

- KD: Oh.
- CB: The stuff that I had going. Because it was totally different than everybody else's experience, you know? Ceramics wasn't going to get me in.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: You know? Graffiti, they didn't like [it]. Even the Chicanos didn't like graffiti. Up at Barnsdall, the *Chican-arte* show, when I first walked in I didn't see my painting until I turned in to the right, and it was right there on the first wall, right in the middle. I got first position in the whole show. And I was shocked. My legs started shaking, and I didn't know what to say. I didn't even know who to thank. I didn't know anybody there. I didn't know how, what. We just hung around, and I basically, I don't think I had a word to say to anybody. And then we left. And I was very pleased, very happy. I got the catalogue and all that.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: But I didn't connect with anybody. And the next Chicano show, it was probably ten years later. That was in '75? Well, yeah, Luis Valdez. It's ten years later. I got to exhibit some of my paintings, graffiti paintings in the foyer of a theater down in San Diego that this guy wanted to hang some artwork there. So I drove down there, and then when I got the paintings back about a year and a half later, they were all folded. [laughter]
- KD: Ugh!
- CB: I had to re-stretch them and all that. That was *Rollcall*, which is in the Smithsonian, and some other paintings. Some major paintings. They came back all folded. Big cracks and creases in them and stuff. And that was in '85, ten years later. And then I started meeting graffiti guys from New York who were not the graffiti writers, but agents and all that. Some gallery people. And they asked me, and so I sold them a small print on paper. And Mark Moskin, he's the one who put it at Bard College in '88 in New York. So I had nothing to do with it, really.
- KD: Oh, I see—
- CB: No real connection.
- KD: Mm-hmm. You had, you had mentioned that Robert Berman was one strategy at one time.
- CB: Robert Berman was showing an awful lot of Chicanos and gave them a lot of prestige, and being in the newspapers and all that, with Richard Duardo, Leo Limón, Patssi Valdez, Frank Romeo. Solid, basic foundation of Chicano art. I knew that you cannot show Chicano art in every gallery. You had to go to a Chicano art gallery to show Chicano art. And I knew Robert Berman had this group, had a stable of them, and I really wanted to [join], but I was very intimidated. I was very shy, and, I didn't speak the way I do now. [laughter] I met Robert Berman through Richard Duardo, and Richard finally said, Berman can't really grasp my work, and he finds it interesting, but he doesn't know what to do with it. And I go, "Okay. I can understand that." I heard the same thing indirectly [from others]. I got my pictures I think [with] that other guy who had that gallery up there in Hollywood. There was only one other guy. [pause]
- KD: I don't think I know that.
- CB: Gronk was with him for years.
- KD: Oh.
- CB: And he just recently retired. Blank. Anyway, his name is not on my bio because I've never exhibited with him.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: But his response was similar. That they didn't know—they didn't really care for my work because they didn't know [what it was]. They found it interesting, but they really didn't care much for it. And I realized because there was no audience for it and they didn't know how to label it or how to represent it.
- KD: Right.
- CB: And who really nailed it was Sister Karen.
- KD: Yeah, you did several exhibitions with Self Help.

- CB: Now, let me jump to '87, with Richard Duardo. I did a first print with him, and he gave me the first show, or the first exciting show. It was at Future Perfect Gallery, let's see . . . yeah. *Most Loco Say Boys*, '84. So we jumped from '75 to '84 with just a couple of just small shows. Basically, I was not showing anywhere. I'm working, I'm traveling. And then *Most Loco Say Boys*. By '84, I already bought a house. And that was an exhibit—which I already spoke about, with John Valadez and Los Lobos being there.
- KD: Right.
- CB: So that was a big deal. I was not doing that many shows, and Richard Duardo was the one who introduced me to Robert Berman, and—
- KD: Well, how did you meet Richard? Did we talk about that? I don't think we had.
- CB: I met him through the cold call before I left to travel around the world.
- KD: And then you came back.
- CB: And then I came back, and I met him through Lili Lakich. And then we just started hanging out. And that was our first print, I think, that we did. The *Most Loco Say Boys* was in '84. And then again, I went to Richard Duardo, and then I think in '87, and we did another print. He had taken that first print I did—very colorful, black on black—showed it around, but nobody bit, nobody bought.
- KD: Now, he was with Public Art Center? What people called Public Art Center?
- CB: No. This was after. He already had his Future Perfect Gallery down on Traction. I'm getting now to about Sister Karen.
- KD: Right.
- CB: So Richard Duardo and I, we did another print, and which was a skull, straight-ahead, called *Los Avenues*. And I did a circus-size, one-sheet movie poster, big halftones that I wanted to show. And very gritty. I put Zolatone to make it look like asphalt, like the street. And then we did a silk screen on top of it. A very powerful piece. Richard Duardo kind of told me, he goes . . . he goes, "Chaz, those skulls are going to be the ruin of your career." [laughter] And I said "Yeah, I know, but I like it." So he got the print, and he took it over to Sister Karen. And it was donated to her, and it's in their archives from that time.
- But Sister Karen is . . . Indirectly it came back to me that she said she couldn't show any work like that, and she couldn't show any of my work because it would undermine the Chicano Movement, of what she was trying to do. They were trying to show the positive images, and the things that they could deal with the suppression of, oh, let's say border issues or the farm workers' issues, and all that. Those are things that you have dialogue already created, and things that you could come to a conclusion. Those were political things that really affected the community. You put graffiti in the mix, it's all bad boy, bad language. And why protect something that everybody hates and it makes us look bad, the community? Why dress ourselves in the *cholo* wear and all that? This was before *cholos* were hip [laughter] and cool, and the Japanese buying the work.
- KD: Right.
- CB: The community did not really care to show Chicano work. Not "Chicano"—*cholo*.
- KD: *Cholo*?
- CB: Gang work. Because nobody—I've been asked a hundred times who else was doing work like my work at this time. Nobody. Nobody was doing graffiti.
- KD: And how did you respond to that kind of critique or assessment?
- CB: I agreed. Let me tell you, I didn't have any issues with Sister Karen, because I already was in advertising, and I knew what it took to satisfy the client and then the customer.
- KD: Did you change?
- CB: Did I change? No. Not one bit. Tomás Benitez says when the Black Panther got hassled, they got blacker. [laughter] You know? So I just got more Chicano. John Valadez one time said it: "If I'm not successful, I know I'm doing the right thing." [laughter] That maybe these are just defeatist, pat on the back quotes or something. But I felt that it wasn't my time. It wasn't my time, and I knew it. And I was being told, "Oh, man." I was being told by the rock n' rollers up in Hollywood that I was ahead of my time, that I was very

cutting edge in my work and all that. People who did not know *cholo*-style graffiti felt that I was doing very industrial type of lettering, very contemporary. They asked me to do some book covers for these people in New York and stuff. They didn't see the tradition in it—they just saw the contemporary, because I was using black, bold letters. And it looked like architecture when a building or the company gets the brass, bronze letters on the front of the building?

KD: Yes.

CB: They're chiseled, engraved in, or popped out. They felt that's the kind of work that I was doing.

KD: So what's the moment where you feel like you actually arrive, then? They start accepting your—your work?

CB: When I actually arrived? Through Richard Duardo, who gave me a little bit of those exhibitions, but it was through his connections he introduced me to a man that was going to be very influential: John Pochna from the Zero One Gallery. And that was probably in '85. Let's see . . . What did I do first?

KD: Oh, I put them all out of order.

CB: Okay. The first show out there was written up in *Juxtapose*.

KD: Here it is.

CB: I was just thinking about it this morning.

KD: Eighty-nine.

CB: No, no, there's one that's missing here. No, yeah. Because I'm not solo. It's a group show.

KD: Oh, okay.

CB: [*laughter*] I guess they're all mixed up like that. Where's that last page? Mechicano Arts . . .

[*break in audio*]

KD: There we go. We found it.

CB: Okay.

KD: Nineteen eighty-five?

CB: Yeah. Evidently, I was in a group show at Zero One in '84, was my first show. But the *Western Exterminators* show in 1985 was a major show, because it was with Big Daddy Roth, Robert Williams . . . Who was in it? Mike Kelley. And I remember going to the opening, and sitting right in front was—Buck Henry was there. You know, sitting right in front of my painting, drinking a beer, and—

KD: What did you—what was in the show? What image?

CB: What image? *Rollcall*.

KD: Oh, it was *Rollcall*?

CB: It was *Rollcall* which was in that show. And I remember when I was getting some reflections, and some people were liking it—the other artists. Robert Williams, he liked the work, and the first time I ever kind of met him, I knew he was a monster painter. And so that show was really important. Yeah, it was that painting.

KD: The one that ends up in the CARA exhibition?

CB: The one that ends up in the CARA exhibition, yes.

KD: Unfortunately, I only have black and white.

CB: It is black and white.

KD: Oh, it is?

CB: That looks just like that. [*laughter*] It looks concrete and stuff, you know? I put in the *Rollcall* everybody who was influential to me, who was my—who is important to me, and also who was my protectors, and who were my friends. And basically, that's called your telephone book. [*laughter*] And so I have all my friends and my girlfriend, and then I even have my parents in here. And then I have my, [*laughter*] I have my boss.

KD: I grew up with something very similar to this, but I can't read it anymore.

CB: Mm-hmm. Oh, here. "Connie."

KD: I see "Connie," yeah.

- CB: The upside-down triangles are spacers. “El Tony,” my boss.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: “Mary.” that was the girlfriend of my friend. Willie Dillingham, I think is “Weasel” in here because I let the letters bleed off, because this is supposed to represent a small portion of an endless wall. It’s like the Vietnam Wall.
- KD: Yes.
- CB: Okay? And then *Año Loco 1980*. When I did this painting, I first felt that, “Look, I need to get out of my day job, and I need to start committing myself total 100 percent [to my] art career.” And I already had a home. I already had a house that I was fixing. And then I decided to go totally freelance. And so I quit my job probably around ’85, ’86, I think. Right around there. And then I showed at the Zero One Gallery for a lot of shows.
- KD: Yeah. Several.
- CB: And I even curated . . . two or three shows? Three shows at the Zero One. I put the first graffiti show at the Zero One gallery.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: And it was called *The Next Step*. And once . . . No. That one, *New Directions*.
- KD: Yeah. *The Next Step: New Directions in Graffiti Art*?
- CB: Right. You know?
- KD: Or *New Directions*? That’s says two-man show.
- CB: Yeah. *New Directions*, two-man show. *Next Step* right here. Okay, I curated that show. And then I would also [show] with “Best of the West” shows every two years, and where everybody who was really hot at that time was showing. It’s all those artists are not who we would consider the “lowbrow.” *Juxtapose*. Every artist has had major contributions in *Juxtapose*. And Robert Williams is the editor.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: And the publishers are thrasher, skateboard people.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: That was the mix that we had there. And like I told you, couple of times, I took my mom, and there would be Timothy Leary, and there would be, you know, like the Getty kids, and there would be just all kinds of other people. I can’t even remember. But it was a ball. And it was wild. We could do anything we wanted. Basically, we could put our own shows—I mean, with John Pochna’s, okay. But, he was *really* open to the most craziest shows, you know? The Elvis show one time.
- KD: Are you part of the decision making at Zero One Gallery, or does he just say, “Hey, I want this?”
- CB: John Pochna did all his decisions.
- KD: Okay.
- CB: And he just put what he liked.
- KD: So you bring him a range of things and he selects?
- CB: Yeah. When I ask him for a show, or he’ll show anything—anything that I brought him.
- KD: Oh really?
- CB: He would never refuse me. If he wants me in a show—a “Best of the West” show, a big group show or something like that, it’s the painting that I am just finished working on. That’s what I’ve always done in my career. I never do a commission. I’ve never done a commission, really. And then I never do a theme. If somebody asked me, “Oh, we’re having a gun show. You know, can you do a gun show?” Or quickly do something like that. And that never works for me. That’s the class assignment.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: That’s college . . . college art assignment mentality to me. So it’s whatever I had on the canvas, that’s what I showed. And that’s what you get.
- KD: And all of the other galleries you were at were that generous, or was it more of a negotiation?

- CB: No, what I gave them is what they showed. Only a few times that a gallery director or curator would come to the house and actually look at the work, and I would show them what I wanted to show them, what I was going to exhibit and they would agree. But coming to my home and actually picking a piece for the show specifically and all that? Very rare. Very rare. Unless . . . oh, recently, I was in Chicago at—
- KD: The Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum?
- CB: Right. They changed their name or something.
- KD: Yeah. National Museum of Mexican Art.
- CB: Okay. Same thing. *[laughter]* So . . .
- KD: My book is on that museum! I can't get the new name in my head.
- CB: So they did a large exhibition just last year about Mexican Americans and African Americans. And they knew that I had a painting with a burning X. Malcolm X turns into Generation X. And they asked me if I would submit that image for consideration. And I did, and it was included in the show. Okay, that's a rare type of thing.
- KD: Wow.
- CB: All exhibitions that I have are just whatever I want to show. You know, they get what I put in. Plus, I try to put in the best work for an exhibition. It's graffiti guys? I put a graffiti painting. It's more dialogue-academic, I try to put more about words and things, about concepts, about either language or dialogue. Like an ivory tower, or a three-talk, a collision of dialect, of two styles of lettering coming and combating and smashing against each other and creating quarks or something like an atom smasher?
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: And it creates new elements. And out of those two smashed—two different letter styles come graffiti writers' names popping out of there who use a clashing of their . . . That kind of painting I'll put into a museum show where we have dialogue. I wouldn't put a stencil of a skull. That would be for a graffiti show, you know? So I try to put the best work in the best place.
- KD: Is a dealer helping you get your work out there? Have you ever had a dealer?
- CB: Dealers, no. Dealers are a waste of time, unless you have a dealer in New York. But, if you are here in Los Angeles. Because I met a lot of dealers through Tony Seiniger who were art representatives for illustrators for the movie one-sheet posters. They would come in with a stable of their artists and their portfolios, which I would review with the art directors. And I would also review job applicants, people who wanted to come and work there, paste-up production, and all of them were either from Art Center or . . . Let's see. Art Center or . . .
- KD: Otis [Art Institute]?
- CB: Not so much Otis, but CalArts.
- KD: CalArts?
- CB: CalArts and Art Center. They would come in looking for jobs as young kids. So I would review a lot of portfolios. I got to see what people were doing.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: Their bios were minimal, okay, granted. I was not impressed with the work that they were doing. But I needed to see somebody who had good hand skills, lettering, and basically could work with a triangle and T squares. But also, I would tell them "Can you take orders?" Most artists can't. "Can you take orders, and can you live here at this studio?" This is not a job, you live here. "You have to get really involved in this type of work to do your best. We need your best. Otherwise, if you can't work twelve hours a day and love it, then I can't hire you." I would ask them. As soon as I wanted this person, I asked them, "Do you really want to work here?" *[laughter]* And I would get the craziest and good people. I would get suicide people. That's what working at these places were. Made you really committed [to] the type, or the putting the artwork together and making the deadlines for the movies. It was very exciting work, and it really gave you kind of like a military background to go back to your studio and work.
- KD: Is that the skill that helped you market your own things, if you don't have a dealer?

- CB: Yeah, because I realized these agents were dealing with artists who are the studio rats.
- KD: Oh, Okay.
- CB: You know? The nerd type of artist who *can't* get out, who *can't* speak to the clients. Who are just better just working and earning the money. And doing illustration is getting it—doing another one, and over and over and over. It's a job. It's a hard job. And those guys made great, incredible money. So seeing these agents, I didn't need an agent, because none of them could really sell my work. My work was not applicable to any of the commercial markets.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: They were all commercial agents, so I never felt I needed an agent, and not getting interest from Robert Berman or anybody else. And John Pochna was a "do what you." You connect at the openings with people who you wanted to connect with. It was not his job. And other galleries in some ways were not promoting *any* of the artists traditionally. They wouldn't give you a stipend to keep in you in their studios so you could keep on painting. None of that. There was no promotion because things were getting real tight. So you weren't getting your gallery to promote themselves and advertising in magazines and all that, show when your next show is coming up, showing your work in their galleries before [the opening] or, would do a lot of advertising, promotion.
- KD: Right.
- CB: Now they weren't doing any of that. And it was getting where the artists had to pay for their own invites at that time.
- KD: In the '90s? Or in the '80s?
- CB: In the '80s, '90s. Kind of like a little bit here, it started showing up and all that stuff.
- KD: Wow.
- CB: Because especially with John Pochna, he wasn't making a lot of money. He was just showing good art. Not that much was selling. He made a living, but, you know? But I was meeting museum people there. He got me to meet the Laguna people. That was Greg Escalante, Bolton Colburn, another collector, Charlie Miller. These were surfers with a lot of money, and involved in the arts.
- KD: And so you get a show at Laguna, or are you . . .
- CB: No. Never really got a show at Laguna. They just bought, they acquired a piece for their permanent collection. And I was selling a painting for seven hundred and fifty dollars, something like that.
- KD: What was the kind of arrangement you had at the galleries?
- CB: The galleries were fifty-fifty.
- KD: It was fifty-fifty.
- CB: Yeah. Everything was fifty-fifty. I have to say only one place—Self Help Graphics—was 100 percent to the artist. Every exhibition, every artist got 100 percent. All negotiations were [open]. If there was somebody who wanted to buy something off a gallery wall, the curator, Christina Ochoa, would just give the phone number to the artist, and they would make their own connections. They would ask if they wanted to donate anything to Self Help or 10 percent, but 90 percent of the artists never did. [laughter] And then also—
- KD: I didn't realize it was so positive for the artist.
- CB: Oh yeah. If you made a print, let me tell you, if you made a print—and a lot of famous Chicano artists all printed at Self Help.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: You would get an edition of about seventy prints. They would split that edition with you, and you would get the lower numbers right off the bat. And then the next numbers would be submitted to, I think, three to five permanent collections. And eventually some of them went into the LA County [Museum of Art].
- KD: Right.
- CB: And some of the artists [have] some of their best [in] museum collections because through prints, through Self Help. So the artists would get to keep half of the edition, and then the other half that was part of Self

Help would be put into permanent collections where it would help your bio. And the half that you had, if you sold them for two hundred dollars, you had—you would make three grand. No, six thousand dollars. If you had thirty prints at two hundred dollars, that's six thousand dollars. Which in turn you could also donate to other nonprofits or fundraisers and all that. So artists helping artists. So when they said, "Self Help never helped anybody," the people are blind, stupid, or bullshitting. Because you walked out with money, with prestige, and you [had] the museum collections, and then you got 100 percent of the sale.

KD: So you—were your exhibitions—which, there were quite a few. I know I—somehow I can't locate that piece of paper right now.

CB: At Self Help? No very few.

KD: Oh, I thought there was quite a few.

CB: No, no. They're all group shows.

KD: Okay.

CB: With the two prints I did there. And then I was in a group show. I take that back. I take that back. The first—Sister Karen, it took seven years before Sister Karen let me do a print, because seven years passed and graffiti started getting more popular, and maybe my reputation started getting more popular.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: And it was around—in '87. So, '84. No. I did the first print. No. That's Richard Duardo. The first print I did at Sister Karen was . . . What year is this one?

KD: Yeah, it's on the wall. *[laughter]*

CB: Yeah, that's why it's *[laughter]* right here. Ninety-four. All right? So it was already up to '94. I knew Richard Duardo from '87 to '94. It was seven years. And then it was Luis Ituarte who [was] trying to form an art center here, who formed the Graffiti Arts Coalition in '90, and I met him indirectly around that time. And he was trying to protect the youth, and they asked me to participate. And that was the first time—in '90—when I started meeting all the street graffiti guys, all the New York style. It was in 1990. Eighty-nine, '90, right around there. And Luis Ituarte was the first one who told me, "Chaz, you're a Chicano—you don't even know it." He goes, "You're a major Chicano [artist]. You don't even know it." I go, "Well, I still don't speak Spanish." But anyway, he turned my head around and the flags went up.

KD: Yeah. So he's telling you that because you're saying the same thing you're telling me. You didn't feel like you could qualify, you didn't identify?

CB: Right.

KD: So even as late as '90 someone was telling you—

CB: I wanted to. And Sister Karen rejected me, and I said, "Oh, okay. Well, I understand why." I had no animosity. I had true understanding, because in advertising, you're trying to satisfy so many people, I knew what it took to get to the end of the line. It wasn't the same thing when you started. *[laughter]* So instead of changing myself, I said, "Oh, okay. Well, if I'm not going to deal with anybody, I'll just do what I do. That way I don't have to compromise." That way I could do anything I want in my own voice, in my own way, in my own time, and keep my commercial work separate—my house building—and then keep the graffiti separate. And the graffiti art. I'll just show—if I get into a show, they get whatever I *want* to show.

KD: So does something like this start to represent the print on the wall? Does it start to represent when things come together?

CB: Things were already happening, because this print is a photograph of a sculpture that I did.

KD: Yes.

CB: Which is up at the Mexican Museum up in San Francisco, the show that Holly Barnet-Sánchez . . . And do you want to stop?

KD: Sure.

CB: I want to show you the catalog.

[break in audio]

- CB: [laughter] This is their catalog.
- KD: [This work is] *Por Dios y Oro*?
- CB: *Por Dios y Oro*.
- KD: And it's wood.
- CB: "For God and gold."
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: Oh, it's thick. It's about this big.
- KD: And this [was] for the *Codices* show at the Mexican Museum? [*The Chicano Codices: Encountering Art of the Americas*.]
- CB: Right. They paid me.
- KD: That is a commissioned work?
- CB: This is a commissioned work—my very first one.
- KD: That could be '92 or something like that, right?
- CB: Marcos Sanchez directed.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: This was in '92? Look what it says there.
- KD: I thought it was—oh, I thought all that was for the quincentennial, the challenging of the [encounter]?
- CB: Yes. It was.
- KD: Didn't it come around then?
- CB: Right, right. It was the quincentennial?
- KD: Quincentenary?
- CB: Right.
- KD: There's another image of it in the book, isn't there?
- CB: No. No.
- KD: No?
- CB: I just got the cover.
- KD: Just on the cover?
- CB: Marcos calls me. He says, "Either I could put you in the book, or I could put you on the cover, but I can't put you both." I said, "Okay. [laughter] Put me on the cover."
- KD: So this is a commissioned work?
- CB: This is a commissioned work.
- KD: And you have to go back a little bit on what you said, because you said you never did one, like a theme show. So how did you end up doing that?
- CB: Okay, yeah. Because I'm not full of contradictions—I'm just full of little missteps. Because I've been asked many times to do different things, and I just don't feel good about it. On this piece, I got called—a stone cold call—from the Mexican Museum to participate. And I said, "Who else is in it?" And all of these incredible other artists, and I said, "Okay, I'm down. I have to." And they were going to give *me* money up front. I think we got fifteen hundred dollars.
- KD: Yeah, that sounds about right.
- CB: Fifteen hundred dollars, and to do it. And I said, well, for me, that fifteen hundred dollars wasn't money in my pocket. I was going to spend the whole fifteen hundred dollars for the piece. I said, "Great!" And I was going to do whatever I wanted. So I designed this piece with my experience from Mexico traveling. I kept the theme. I kept it all to Aztecs, with a little Mayan influence. This is a Puuc design. Is it Puuc? *P-U-U-C*? Puuc-Maya style?
- KD: Yes.
- CB: Something like that?
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: And . . . which just has a little of that art deco?

- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: So you could see that, and that as I tried to put everything from the New World—the languaging, the hieroglyphics, the buttons is numerology from mathematics. Here's the teeth, it is for Tlaloc, the rain god. Is this symbol of the blue star is for Venus, for astrology. Quetzalcoatl for the god of knowledge, and then . . . Let's see. There was the two different teeth for male and female. Men like to snap things off, and women like to grind. *[laughter]*
- KD: Oh, yeah. Yeah.
- CB: And the feathers are different here, male and female Quetzalcoatl. And then over here is the rattlesnake tail for Quetzalcoatl, for language. And then the heads from Tulum. The heads go on both sides like that. That's architecture. This symbol is the lotus, which represents Palenque, for city-state government. So all the cultures. It also [has] sacrifice through religion, and you have the jaguar and the snake, and then the claws here are for the eagle, these little things right here. So the eagle, the snake, and then jaguar. And then I bombed it with the Christian cross, and "Christobal Colon," "Cortez," "Cabeza de Vaca," and I think "Alvarado"—he went down to Guatemala. And then here, "Ferny and Izzy." *[laughter]*
- KD: For Ferdinand and Isabella?
- CB: Yeah. Ferny and Izzy. Okay? So that's—
- KD: That's their *placa*.
- CB: Yeah.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: Right here is the body copy. Here's the logo.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: Ferdinand and Isabelle *con safos*?
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: And then I brought it up to speed, and I put "1492" in kind of a chiseled. That's all in silver. It looks like metal. Then underneath, stenciled, "Por Dios y Oro." You know, real small subtitle. So I'm doing graphic layouts and all composition. Over here, the world was divided between Spain—"S"—and Portugal. And these are "Barrio Papa," "Barrio Inglaterra," "Barrio España"—I mean, all the other conquering countries. They were speaking, the quotes. And then I added these lines of excitement and for the composition.
- KD: The energy and the movement.
- CB: The energy and the movement.
- KD: You did that out of wood?
- CB: Yes. Assembled wood. It's hollow inside, but it's two inches thick all the way around.
- KD: And so this is combining a lot of your experience and skills.
- CB: Yes, sculpture, assembly. These were wooden planks. I had to glue them all together and put dowels all in. Five dowels all across, glued with clamps and everything else. So I loved wood. I love sculpture. I can handle this type of approach. It was fun. And it was soft wood, but it's more like pine. It wasn't real balsa wood.
- KD: And this part is actually flat, right?
- CB: No. It's all relief.
- KD: There's relief here, too?
- CB: Yeah. All these ridges are low relief. And then these are high relief.
- KD: And you created this in a studio?
- CB: In my bedroom, with a door—and when I covered it all in plastic, and I had a respirator, and with a Dremel.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: And I had four months to make it. It took me three months to carve it, and I had a week to paint it.
- KD: Oh!
- CB: So basically, I splashed all the colors that I thought might be on it—pinks and greens for patinas and all that, just gaudy, the red right down the center, just gaudy. Just put all the colors I wanted. Then I took my

Zolatone with a dry roller and then hit all the highlights, and then brought it back down to stone. And then re-hit it with the paint, and went back and forth until I got this blend or the mesh of the two. And so when I submitted it at—and mapped them out. So I didn't feel that I did a compromise piece by it being commissioned. In some ways, Marcos, I thought, gave me an opportunity to stop working on some other things, and it gave me an opportunity to actually focus myself on one piece. It was a job that I could finish.

KD: It's a beautiful piece. I mean, I thought you were going to say that was the one that brought you kind of into Chicano art proper, because it really gets circulated.

CB: Let me tell you something, Karen. I was—I am very proud of this piece. I am very happy with this piece. The reviews that I got from this show were terrible. Though I've had three bad reviews. One of them called me "sophomoric" and all that. It was this piece. And one of them called me.

KD: Oh, I remember the reviews differently. Wow.

CB: Yeah. It was the *LA Times* curator, Peter—I don't know. Peter Asshole. I don't know what his last name was. And he called it—he didn't call it not "moronic," but he called it something "high school-ish." I forgot the word that he used. This was collectors, Judith and Stuart Spence, major collectors, bought this piece from me about fifteen years ago.

KD: Oh, really? I thought it was part of the collection at the museum.

CB: No. They never bought it. They gave it back. It traveled and everything else, and then all the artworks went back to the artists.

KD: Oh, I didn't know that. I totally misunderstood that.

CB: No, they did not buy the pieces. It was work money. It was a stipend for a honorarium.

KD: Well, I must have made a huge mistake in the book I wrote. I had better go correct that. I understood that it was a show to bring in work for their permanent collection.

CB: No.

KD: Because Terezita [Romo] and others wanted the permanent collection to focus on Chicano art, to gain some status for Chicano art. And they had four collections of Chicano art.

CB: About eight years ago, oh, I went to go see Terezita up there in San Francisco. And I told her, the Spences bought it and all that, but they don't have room for it. I've been holding it in my living room for almost ten years." And she says, "You know, that would be a great piece to have in our permanent collection." So she wrote to the Spences and tried to get them to donate it. And the Spences called me, and they go, "We're not going to donate it. They're not offering any money, anything, the exhibitions, nothing. They don't have a building."

KD: No?

CB: And stuff like that. And so they said, "We're not going to donate it." And I go, "Fine." But they say, "We are going to donate it to the LA County," because they were recently asked from MOCA and LA County major collectors for donations, and they donated one to MOCA, a painting—it got accepted like that. This one, it took a year for them to go back and forth to decide if it was going to be part of their permanent collection because the committee did not like it and did not want this piece in their permanent collection. And it took a year for them to argue about it. And it finally did when—just last year when the LA County in 2006 had their fortieth anniversary permanent collection show?

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: All right. I was given a phone call halfway through that exhibit. He says, "Oh, I saw your piece in the show." I went, "What?" And so I found out—and I went down there, and there I was, right next to David Hockney's road—to *Mulholland Drive*—to his studio. I was right next to that painting, and it was included in the permanent collection. And it had an addition: large black boards with more letters on the background that I had added when it exhibited at the Autry museum. On their Treaty of Guadalupe [Hidalgo] show. [*Culture y Cultura: How the US-Mexican War Shaped the West*—ed.] Christine Ochoa was a co-curator on that, and she brought in—asked me if I would bring in this piece. And I added two [parts]—an eight foot by eight foot section behind it all painted black, and then with white letters coming out of it like hair, but all words.

The date, 1847 to 1997, something like that, for the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. And then I put all the words of identity as far as Latino, Mexican-American, Chicano, Hispanic, and something else like that. With all the words all the way around it.

KD: Wow. I hadn't seen that version of it.

CB: That version is what's at the LA County.

KD: How did it feel knowing that they were debating it?

CB: Same old thing. And you know something? If they took it—when they took it and the Spences called me, Stuart Spence, I cried. [*laughter*] A couple of tears.

KD: [*overlapping dialogue*] Contradictions just—

CB: But if they didn't accept it, [it was] the same old thing. It wouldn't have hurt me one way or the other. I wouldn't have been angry.

KD: Who was your audience?

CB: Who was my audience?

KD: Yeah, when you first made this?

CB: This was made for the other artists. [*laughter*] I wasn't competing for an audience. That this was going to be a traveling show to museums and all that, and to be part of supporting the Chicano Movement. I wanted to compete and have the best—some of the best work. I was competing against the other artists. It was more of a graffiti thing. More of a personal thing. Let's get in the ring and wrestle. I'm very competitive like that. I'm not in your face, but I will fight to have some of the best work. Remember, I've always said you're going to be remembered by your worst piece, so I've always tried to be the best piece that I can. Nothing leaves the house unless it's the best I can. That's why I don't have that much work. I put a lot of work into each piece. Like I was saying, one painting could take me a year to finish. And I have five or six one-year paintings.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: They require a different process of languaging. I think I've already told you about approaching a painting that it's open-ended.

KD: Right.

CB: So you have open dialogue. Where is that going to take you? It's going to take you somewhere you've never been before. You're going to end up somewhere. You could create something really incredible, something really unique and special. And some work needs to be done quick. Is a statement. It's a vision. It's a signpost. So that's a different kind of work.

KD: Tell me a little bit more about your artistic process. You know, this piece is, to me, extremely historical. You had—you've got to know who Ferdinand and Isabella are to get—what was their *placa* that you gave? Their nickname is?

CB: Ferdinand—

KD: Ferny and—

CB: Ferny and Izzy.

KD: Izzy?

CB: Yeah, Ferny and Izzy.

KD: So do you do the research—you know, you go to the books first?

CB: In this case, yes.

KD: All right.

CB: But I already had references. I knew from—what layouts I was going to be using because there's that one sculpture that's over there in the Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City, that one outside which is the—I don't know the name of that god—deity—but it's the mother god with all the multi hands, and all the heart. The breast and the hearts all around the waist, belt, and then the—

KD: Coatlique?

CB: Is it? Yeah. The hearts.

- KD: Yeah.
- CB: And it has the big teeth kind of coming out. It has the two snakes' heads coming straight together, forming one eye each, the two eyes of the face.
- KD: Yeah, that's her.
- CB: That's where the premise started. Okay? You could see that.
- KD: Absolutely.
- CB: But I needed a surface so I can paint on, so I needed a blank space in the center, and I needed elements to represent just the culture. And so I started drawing and drawing, and then after I came up with this—so I drew this before I built it, of course. And then the technique, the painting skills I already had. The technique, not painting skills—the technique that I already had. So I just did it at the end. This was easy for me to do.
- KD: What—are you crazy?
- CB: No. This was fun and easy. This only took four months.
- KD: Oh, I see what you're saying.
- CB: It was just work. Wood carving. I just draw it out and zzzt zzzt zzzt and shavings and all that, and getting my knife and—X-Acto—and digging it out. This was fun. Where an open-end dialogue painting, where the dialogue is the premise and the composition, and the ultimate voice and the vision, that's hard.
- KD: Is this an example, *Words That Cut*?
- CB: *Words That Cut*? No.
- KD: No?
- CB: Because I made a list of these words. Well, what was happening with the *Words That Cut* is then I was getting involved with a culture, what year? Ninety-one? Yeah. With Luis Ituarte. And we formed this group, The Royal Arts. The Graffiti Arts Coalition.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: Probably about six adults, and they tried to protect these kids by giving them exhibition space and this and that. And then also fighting for their rights. So we went down to the city. I spoke to the council members in chambers a couple of times, city council, the police department. We went to the Getty, which was 1991, and we had a big conference at the Getty. The graffiti summit.
- KD: That's right.
- CB: We had over three hundred people there. LAPD, sheriff's department, the school police, which is second-largest in the city, and then we had homeowner associations, real estate people, clergy, anti-graffiti people, and we had some pro-graffiti people. And we had Caltrans, MTA, and it went on and on. There's a big brochure that came out of that project. And we all went up there and gave speeches and talks and all that for the whole day. And all we did was just argue about the definition of graffiti. We had one of those mediators from Washington, DC, flown in just especially for this, who had just negotiated with the UAW, United Auto Workers. And he came to help negotiate our conference, okay? And all we did was just end up arguing, and we couldn't even define the word "graffiti." And then we invited all these people to—we got an anonymous [gift]—which was Universal Tours, Universal City gives ten thousand dollars anonymously for a graffiti show. And we took it to the Raleigh Studios over here in Hollywood, which was to one of their studio sets, airplane hangar sets.
- KD: Yes.
- CB: Which was private, because we couldn't use a gallery or anything, or city space.
- KD: Because it had to do with graffiti?
- CB: It had to do with graffiti.
- KD: Okay.
- CB: Al Nodal was part of this. Was number one leader through Cultural Affairs.
- KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: So Cultural Affairs was organizing all this as a support group to the Graffiti Arts Coalition. And they were fundamental. I went to the meeting with Al Nodal to the Universal's city tour—Universal City—and spoke to their people and all that. Out of that experience, I remember we had all these police and all these non-graffiti people and all that, and what they did, they brought cameras, and when the young kids were leaving, of course they were tagging, and they were filming them. And at that time, you would get some five hundred dollars for turning in every tagger, which broke the bank on that one.

KD: Right.

CB: Also, we had tables of information, of Xerox information to all—everybody involved. And we had a big graffiti event going on inside the airplane hangar, which I have a video of. Young kids, all these panels donated and everything else from this movie studio sets. And it was great. And then we had a table, yeah, set out there. We had this British crew come up to us and says, "We're from England, and we're fascinated by graffiti, and we want to do a movie about it. And we have these flyers that we're going to do—take some auditions in Long Beach next weekend. Can we leave these flyers—applications here?" We go, "Let me look at it." Okay, sounds good. And a couple of us reviewed it, and we said, "Okay, sounds good."

And so the following weekend a bunch of the guys went down there to Long Beach, and they said, "Okay, you know, can you write your name and address? And okay, what's your style? Can you tag on this wall here?" And then so they was, "Can we take a photograph?" They took one of the kid and all that, and home numbers and everything. All right, it turned out to be sheriff's—Long Beach—a sting operation for the Metro line and all that. And they matched them up with the Metro line and all around there. And they—it came out on the newspaper how successful they were to round up all these taggers, and how stupid taggers were. They just came mindlessly down there and got stung.

I wrote a letter to Al Nodal saying when you offer these kids a job, when you offer them a career and to be famous, and to take their skills and this is what we're trying to do by—get them off the streets by making them more professional, I feel to get the graffiti writer off the streets is you have to make them a better graffiti writer. That's when they start getting involved with the books and magazines and movies, and everything else. And so I wrote that letter to Al Nodal that it totally undermined our credibility for what we were trying to do. And he said well, it wasn't up to him; that I'm writing a letter to the wrong department. So I wrote it to the sheriff's, and the sheriff said, "Well, you need to write it to Long Beach." And I just stopped. They were just bullshitting. So out of that experience—long story short—I made a list of all the words that were important of that meeting at the Getty.

KD: Mmm.

CB: And then I said what happened there, we had a wall—a steel wall of non-communication. We had a barrier that we all built up from both sides, and that wall turned into a solid steel, and we couldn't move it. And it got confusing. What does that look like? That conversation, that experience, that day, the whole results of what happened was really confusing, because we did everything right and a lot of it went into the gutter. And the support people that we did have the—either we had support, or we had false support. And so I made a list of all that stuff.

So that's what this painting [*Words That Cut*] came from, a steel wall of all these words: of "SWAT," of "crack," of "permit," "law," "LAPD," "cultural affairs," I think I had "network." I had "justice" and "equality" are down here at the bottom. "Cholo," "RK"—Rodney King was happening. "Chaka" was right down here. "Abuse." All these things. I think "hip-hop" is in here, something like that. So how did they fit if they created a wall? It's building with bricks of all different sizes. But still trying to make sense of it. You could see the words. So and then all this is done by hand. It's a piece of paper. It's all low-tech. I don't use a compass. I will use a straight edge just to get my straight edge. A triangle. But basically it's just a piece of paper so I know the letter *E* is three bars horizontally, with two spaces; so I know that the spine is the nose and the chin are a little bit smaller than the spine. So I just make it on a piece of paper, and I just mark it a little like that, fold that in half, and that gives me my center line.

[break in audio]

KD: This is Karen Davalos with Chaz Bojóquez, and he was telling me about the—

CB: The technique.

KD: The technique for *Words That Cut*.

CB: Mm-hmm. And so basically, I have two different styles of lettering. One is the script, Old English style. And the other one is this chiseled letters, which I really kind of started seeing in my world travels. I saw it on Roman buildings and ruins, and I saw it in Sanskrit. But what it was: it was a chiseled valley, which delineated the line. So it was a V-cut. And then it could be cut off at the ends. So it's really it's carving in stone. But in the *Words That Cut*, the letters pop out.

KD: Yes.

CB: It's dimensional toward you.

KD: Yeah.

CB: Like in "Chino Latino," the letters on the side, they're chiseled in. It's hard to do. To make them pop out and chiseled in, basically it's the same lines, the same thing, but it's just how you highlight them. If you highlight them from the top, it's easier to chisel in; if you light them from the—or here—if you light them from the bottom—different ways.

KD: I had a question about the Graffiti Arts Coalition. You and your colleague—was it Luis?

CB: Luis Ituarte.

KD: You approached the studios to get funding, and they say yes, but they don't want to—they want it to be anonymous? Right?

CB: We got involved with Cultural Affairs. Cultural Affairs were the ones who got the money.

KD: Do you think they said yes because they understood this connection? You know, that they understood that these are writers, these are illustrators, these are designers?

CB: Yes. Yes. I went to that meeting, it was a dozen men and women in suits.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And they weren't really saying things like, "Oh, well, we love the youth. We're going to give away a bunch of free tickets." Basically, it's just to get more of them to come into Universal. There was nothing—I don't know if they even got it. It's . . . I felt that they had ten thousand dollars that they had to donate somewhere. [laughter] And they were good friends with Al Nodal, because it seemed like a given. They go, "Yeah, okay, we're down for that." We didn't have to tell them too much. And as soon as I started telling them how important this was, that graffiti was important and it reflects the community, by making community healthy. It could make the community healthy, and by making the youth healthy.

KD: Right.

CB: Al Nodal would look at me like to keep my mouth shut. He says, "We don't need to go there. We don't need to sell this idea," because the more I sell it, the more I say "graffiti," the more damaging it could be, the more [it is] undermined, because they weren't really supporting graffiti. They were supporting a youth event. But they didn't want to be involved with the graffiti if it went bad.

KD: Did that organization have other—was that the life and death of the organization, then, this symposium?

CB: It was the life or death? Yes and no, because we learned a big lesson, because we still continue—we had more exhibitions. But we never told anybody, we never publicized them. Always word of mouth. And I learned a lesson from then on: that all graffiti events are not publicized. You don't see them in the newspapers; you don't see them in the art guides or anything like that. Nothing like that is done. Invites, but only passed around through the graffiti people individually. We don't do mass mailings, and we don't put graffiti events on at coffee houses or anything like that. We learned a valuable lesson.

KD: Did that work? Who were the people that were central to that project? To the coalition in general?

CB: The coalition? Okay. Luis Ituarte, myself. There was Margo Jim—*J-I-M*. There was Diane Alexander, who was one of the cofounders of the *LA Weekly*.

KD: Right.

CB: And then it was Sharon Donnan, who is a cultural anthropologist. That's what she was. And then . . . Who was there? Elena Cervantes. And I mean, these were the functioning members. There was helpers, or their husbands. I forgot one more.

KD: Is the group still in existence, or did it dissolve?

CB: Typical. We all started arguing after a couple of years. And then the graffiti guy—the graffiti kids, they were in their early twenties or eighteen, seventeen years old. Real young. They would tell us to stop arguing. [laughter] And then the group wanted to get more militant, and I didn't. Because from the Raleigh Studios show, we also started getting letters specifically to myself that they were going to be keeping an eye on us; if they ever see us on television and on newspapers, articles or anything, they're going to be keeping tabs. And this came from a lawyer. And also that we were liable for the endangerment of the youth, and also for the—where you take them on a wrong course for—yeah, endangerment.

KD: Yeah.

CB: But also misleading them to make crime.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: And also, you had to be eighteen years old to have a spray can. And being an adult organization, we could be liable for anything that they steal, if some of them are busted, some of the kids—some of their probation was not to be hanging around graffiti art or the materials.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: Which later on, the police would come in and they took Tribe, this girl writer, and they confiscated her laptop, her computer. Went in there, and they found photographs of her with these other writers who had convictions. So they got her through associating of breaking her parole through—through associating with other criminals or something. And they got her that way. So, and they gave her, what? A year? They let her out in a few months. And there was GK. I think he did a year, and then went in and did another six months or something like that. So they were coming down hard on the graffiti guys. Then now, they have the "three strikes," where they evaluate how much damage you do, what it takes. It turns a misdemeanor into a felony. And after three felonies they won't give you life, but they'll just really mess with you. Time, money—they just sock it to you with money.

So those were the people in the Graffiti Arts Coalition. So the Chicano part of it was, like, maybe Elena, which we didn't really bring Chicano art or vision anywhere into the Graffiti Arts Coalition. It was graffiti. And it was more about the graffiti writers from the west side of LA all the white guys who were really hardcore New York style.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: Mid-city, which were more black and all that. They were really real hip-hop, because they were break dancers and rappers and all that. And we had the graffiti guys from, like, Glendale and all that stuff. And East LA, there's, like, K2S Crew, which were all half-Asian and Latinos. So there was a Chinese-Latino, a Hawaiian-Latino, and the Japanese, and Filipino-Latinos and all that in that crew, which I'm an honorary member, which I've gone up with them, on twenty-seven-foot walls, something like that. And I hate heights.

KD: So it sounds like there was also kind of an interracial aspect to this?

CB: And there was about four women writers. Omega, Aurora, and Two-Tone, because she had two different color eyes, one brown, and one yellow. We used to call her "Two-Tone." And Cocoa was another girl that would be writers. I don't know if there's any female writers—I think Omega is coming back online. She was the girlfriend of Hex, who was a famous writer.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: So in meeting these guys, I organized some shows at the Zero One [Gallery] and had a real hard time. Like I said, John Pochna did *not* want to do that show because, he said, "Chaz, the other galleries won't take me serious if I show this kind of work." And he says, "And I can't sell it. And also, I might get troubled by the landlady." I said, "No, no, it's all right." But one of the kids in the group, in the CBS crew—this was from the

Hollywood guys that were coming to the meetings and all that—was Skate. Skate, they were painting late one night on the trains, and he stepped back to take a picture of it, didn't hear the train, and got killed by the train. And this was a big, young man, blond—he was like a Viking with a beard and long blond hair. At this time, we organized.

Oh! So okay, wait. There's these two stories which was important. So I asked Zero One if we could have a graffiti show and also do a mural on the outside of it, the Zero One, [at] Melrose and La Brea. And there was an empty lot there, so the wall was all barren. And so they asked me if they could do a "rest in peace" for Skate. And I said, "All right." But through John Pochna, all we could do is twenty foot by twenty foot, all right? The whole wall, it was a hundred feet long and all that, and maybe it was twenty-five feet high. It's twenty by twenty foot, only for the month, and it has to be come down. "No problem, no problem." And then so that's when I met Mear [One], and so I negotiated with CBS crew and the gallery inside, and organized that first show. At the end of the month—no before the opening, when they did the mural, I went down there, and they didn't do what I said, and they did it twenty feet high and one hundred feet long.

KD: Oops. [laughter]

CB: And then at the end of the show, I says, "It's got to come down." They said, "Fuck you, Chaz. If you take it down, we're going to kill you." [laughter] And so I said, "Okay, let's have a meeting." So the CBS crew showed up in that dirt lot, myself by myself, BMW shows up with these thugs they get out of there, because these are graffiti writers, and their parents work in Hollywood, own clubs and this and that.

KD: Right.

CB: Some kids are rich, and some of them are poor.

KD: Right.

CB: Some of them are doctors and all that stuff. And here comes Mear: real skinny, tall, with a red mohawk, with his shirt off and on top of a skateboard being pulled with heavy chains by two pit—bulldogs—coming down Melrose like Ben Hur.

KD: Right. Uh-huh.

CB: And that's where he threatens me. He says if I mess with the mural, they're going to kill me, because that's their guy, that's their man, and that's a "rest in peace." Then the mother calls me on the phone: "Please don't take the mural down. That's my son," and all that stuff. What had happened—long story short, they also tagged up all the stores up and down the street.

KD: Oh, no.

CB: So all the store owners go to the owner of the property, who talks to John Pochna, who tells me as loud as he can if I don't get that mural off the wall, he's going to get sued, and it's going to be *my* ass, and they've got to do something now! Or otherwise they're going to close his gallery.

KD: Yeah.

CB: Because [of all this] destruction. So I had to call up Cultural Affairs. I says, "Okay, can you get an anti-graffiti group in Hollywood—phone number?" Okay. I called the Hollywood Beautification Team. "Can you people cover up some graffiti?" "No problem! We'll be there tomorrow morning. Cultural Affairs, can you get—send five gallons of buff paint out to the Zero One Gallery?" So I had it all delivered and everything else, and I supervised it. And I covered up the mural. [laughter] That's the first time I ever did that. I had to defend—because I had the bigger picture here. And I told these graffiti guys, I said, "If you don't let me cover up this mural, you guys will never show in this gallery here again, and this is the only gallery that's going to respect you and show you." I go, "And you're going to mess with me." I go, "Don't [inaudible]." And they griped and all that. They left me alone. We covered up the mural.

KD: Did they show again?

CB: Yes. I organized a couple more shows. They brought in a New York graffiti group, a skater group. And I told John Pochna, "How dare you show New York guys without having some LA people in here." I go, "You can't do that. You can't bring New York guys and not show in LA. You can't bring them here to LA." I got very determined. So the gallery is big, and this smaller section—big doorway, smaller section in the back.

That's what we call "the bar room." And I said, "Let me put the bar show together." [laughter] And he goes, "Yeah, you can do whatever you want, Chaz. Yeah. All right." So I organized a small show in the back of the gallery with these New Yorker guys.

KD: This sounds like your Chicano Movement. [laughter]

CB: Yeah. [laughter] But I had more fun with the graffiti. They organize better, they respected each other better, we had more response and all that than the Chicano—it was head-to-head at this time, with the Chicanos getting the prestige and shows, and with the graffiti, and then with the graffiti, I had the low-brow, too. I had the—the fine art graffiti people, too. I could show there at regular galleries. And so it all made sense. So I did a couple of more shows there till, finally, the place was—all the stories about the place, the pipes breaking at my show and everything else, which I already told you about. Another quick story was [about] the Graffiti Arts Coalition. We organized through Helen Samuels—major person, Helen Samuels. She ran a graffiti crew. And she lived by herself, and she had a daughter who was like, eighteen, and her boyfriend was Skate.

KD: Oh, okay.

CB: And she was an organizer. A really incredible, powerful woman. Let me say, when I started meeting these women—it opened my eyes. I changed my life in this way. And I started meeting Helen Samuels, and Sharon Donnan, and Diane Alexander. It was these other women, how much dedication they gave, of their time, and how much they would die for these children. They became mother hawks. And they would do whatever it took to get shows and protect them, and to make sure that they got picked up from their school to a graffiti site.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: Or to make the meetings and all that. These women were the ones who went out there and picked them up, because they were still kids without cars or anything. Nuke would go on a bicycle or a skateboard from downtown Highland Park all the way to South Gate.

KD: Wow!

CB: He would come on a skateboard. So when I saw how these women of already forty years old were acting, I said, "I can't believe it. They're stronger than any Chicano or male artist I've ever met." And they're doing it just from heart, without no plan, no nothing, because this whole graffiti thing was against the law, and they were doing it just through the knowledge that this was the right thing to do. Jumped in the pool. And I felt that I had been so protective of every step that I did. I felt that I wasn't totally in the swimming pool; that I didn't totally dive in. Because I made sure that I had a house to rent, that I had money to pay for the bills, or like that. I always covered myself. And then when I saw these women just doing it 100 percent with no safety nets, no nothing, it changed my mind. I go, "I need to be more like them." And I've never seen that type of attitude in men, or in the Chicano Movement as a whole. Total sacrifice and all that.

KD: Did you do that kind of thing, then?

CB: Yeah. I changed my life. I said, "I'm going graffiti 100 percent." And I had just been married in '89. I had lived with Kathy for eighteen years before we got married. And then as soon as I did that problems with the marriage started happening. And then I think in '93, I made three hundred and fifty dollars for the whole year. I started building houses at that time. Remember I started doing—I stopped doing artwork between '90 and '91, right in there, so all this was kind of happening, too. And I was committed to these meetings and all that. I was also up at Barnsdall Park. I did art advisory for two years at that time, too.

KD: You worked.

CB: Yeah. With John Valadez and also with the conceptualist, that really incredible woman, Abby Abbott. Anyway, it was a bunch of interesting people. And they all hated graffiti, all the people who—

KD: So that was for what would go into the gallery, that advisory group?

CB: That advisory board was to advise Nolan—or was it Noel Cortland? Noel Cortland? It was Noel Cortland—something like that. To advise him. He would bring suggestions of shows, and we would review them. And

he would do whatever he wanted anyway. Yeah. He was a listening man. Spoke very softly. I got really tired of him. A wonderful man.

I liked him as a person, but I got really tired, because I pushed a graffiti show, and he goes, “No, we can’t have graffiti.” “A youth show—let’s have a youth show. The energy of the youth and what’s important to them.” “No, can’t have that.” “A one-man show.” I go, “Let’s have Robert Williams.” Everybody hated his work and Sandow Birk, another guy that was hanging around at the Zero One [Gallery]. They hated his work. “Too stiff. He’s not going anywhere.” And nothing like that. And I go, “I’ve got to get out of here. These people, they don’t understand what’s going on.” What was important to me. Cutting edge cartoons [were] important. [laughter] Graffiti had a lot of cartoons. Movies [too]. Oh! About Skate.

KD: Yeah?

CB: I think in 1990, ’91, probably just before this painting, Helen Samuels went down to [Mexico City]. She spoke fluent Spanish. She went to Mexico City, somehow with Cultural Affairs down there, connected with a youth group in Mexico City who organized a graffiti wall. Got permission for a wall on a sixteenth-century building in Mexico City close to the central plaza. What is—Sonora, or whatever it’s called. She was able to get money from some lawyers and all that, and we got tickets for ten writers to go down there—airplane tickets—and in turn, they were going to buy the tickets back. We got them a place to stay, put in food, and Skate and Kathy and I were in charge that they would make phone calls. We would organize the phone calls, and make the connections, and all that. Skate would talk to his girlfriend [laughter] every single night, and ended up giving me, like, a two-hundred-dollar phone bill right before he died. [laughter]

And so that’s why I remember, he had that phone bill, and then he died, and then I had to deal with the mom. But, I never told her anything about it. Because when I went down to Guanajuato four months ago, they were saying [about] their tradition of graffiti, they have no historical tradition. They don’t know when it started. But I am in the process of writing an article for their graffiti magazine in Mexico City about when we sent that first graffiti crew down to Mexico City in 1990, ’91. We could’ve been the very first graffiti mural down there and started the whole graffiti movement in Mexico with that group. Coming back, didn’t have enough money for about [laughter] three of them guys, and they got stuck in Mexico City.

One of them was Ben Frank, a big, round black man. Very handsome looking. And this an interesting story, because there’s a woman—I forgot her name. A student in Mexico City right at that time, in the Metro, talking to her girlfriend. She said how much she was really excited about wanting to go to America, and she said she really would like to meet an American black man as she was walking up the steps out of the Metro. And at the top of the steps was Ben Frank. [laughter] And Ben Frank was saying, “Well, does that look proportionate? Let’s get somebody to look at this and tell us that this looks correct.” He turned around, saw this girl, Isabelle . . . Isabella? I can’t quite remember her name. Anyway, it turned out to be her. They made a connection. He got stuck down there. He got to stay with [her]. She says, “Oh, you could stay with [me]”—somehow, he made a connection. He stayed with her. Long story short, they have three beautiful children. [laughter] They got married. And he lived down there for three years.

KD: Wow.

CB: And all that. And became a Mexicano.

KD: Wow.

CB: And now he moved back here and made, what? The first graffiti magazine in Mexico City.

KD: Oh, so you are part of that history, then. You’re right.

CB: Yeah. Yeah. I was. I was on one of the covers.

KD: That’s amazing.

[break in audio]

KD: Go ahead.

CB: The magazine from Mexico City was *Clandestino*, a magazine. And he gave me one issue where I was on the cover. But this was by Ben Frank.

- KD: You were talking about this recognition and prestige. And every time we start down that path, you talk more about graffiti than you do about like . . . You know, the book that I opened here is the Cheech Marin—the show based on Cheech Marin’s collection.
- CB: Yeah.
- KD: That’s not a big deal to you?
- CB: About what?
- KD: Getting—
- CB: Prestige and the Chicano Movement?
- KD: Or just part of an important collection, what’s considered, well, it’s not the largest collection of Chicano art. It’s the one with the greater dollar value, probably.
- CB: Joe Diaz in Texas has an incredible collection.
- KD: Yes, he does.
- CB: As far as dollar value, I would say, fifty-fifty, or whatever. Because he has Carlos Almaraz. And Joe doesn’t. But Joe has the contemporaries. And he has a series—he has money of one artist, where Cheech doesn’t. And Cheech had a small collection, and he got a curator. Yáñez?
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: What’s his first name?
- KD: René?
- CB: René. René Yáñez to help organize it, and René Yáñez suggested that he could expand on his collection by including more people. So when Cheech went out there and bought more art pieces, and they said he doubled his collection or something at that point? I don’t know if he did. I think he just added another 20 percent to his collection. And people have ragged on him on that point. That he just really called himself a collector, but just changed at the very last minute. For me, that’s still a collector.
- KD: Yeah?
- CB: Anybody who puts their faith and their money and their voice and their name to it, it doesn’t matter when he bought it, it doesn’t matter what he’s doing. He is organizing a show to make a statement about Chicano art, and taking and grabbing that rope and putting it around his neck. Cheech put his balls on the line on this show. And he told me, he says, he can’t put [up] print work. He can’t put the Chicano Movement posters and all that. He says it would be difficult to sell. He was trying to sell the concept that we are fine art artists.
- KD: Oh, right.
- CB: Fine art painters.
- KD: Right. He didn’t want to include the reproductions. Yeah.
- CB: The reproductions. That’s why he only put paintings. Then he got criticized by the director of Self Help Graphics. He was really ragging on Cheech, saying, “No, he’s weak because he didn’t [include] the prints.” Prints are a big start actually, the prints started the Chicano Movement, as far as I’m concerned, up in the north and in the south. And I was talking to an artist, a famous artist which pissed me off. I respect anybody who works. I respect somebody but I may not *like* them. [laughter] For their political ideas. I said, “Hey, have you heard about this Cheech show?” That was going to open up within six months? I hadn’t heard a word. Somebody told me, they said, “Hey, there’s this big Chicano show happening.” I go, “Are you in it?” [laughter]
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: I said, “Are you in it?” And he goes, “No, man.” I’m only telling this because some other artists also felt this. He says, “No, and I’m advising everybody not to participate. Because Cheech is not a good representative for Chicano art. He is a comedian, and he is not a legitimate collector.” And he told me that we should boycott this show. And he wanted to have nothing to do with it. I looked at him, and I said, “Mr. Artist,” I go, “we’re going to have an opportunity to have a graffiti—a Chicano show, which we hardly ever have, and it would be good if we got the best artists in that boat.”

KD: Yeah.

CB: “Because it’s going to represent all of us, and we’re only going to have one time to do it, for a presentation. This is advertising presentation. This is a one-shot thing.” I know about presentation—you only have one shot, and you’ve got to go more than 100 percent. I said, “We should have the best representative artists of the Chicano Movement in there, and you should be part of it. And I don’t understand why you should say we—if you don’t want to participate, why even boycott it? Why even feel that way?” I go, “It doesn’t matter.” He was part of CACA—Chicano Art Collectors [Anonymous].

KD: CACA, yeah.

CB: They had a show at the Santa Monica Museum with a catalog. I saw [laughter] the catalog. Great big beautiful portraits of the collectors, [laughter] and nothing about the artist! Talk about an ego show! Couldn’t believe it. But he’s represented by every single one of those collectors. Not one of those collectors collect me. Nor am I in that show, or anything like that. And I’m not saying I think that was a point that he was saying CACA is a legitimate collection group; they should do it, not Cheech. But I’m coming from Hollywood. To me, any doer, any show is the one that opens. Any good show is the one that opens.

KD: That’s true.

CB: You know?

KD: Right.

CB: If you have something else to say, put on another show. No one show is going to say everything. So, this is because I already had hundreds of shows. So this person wanted a boycott. Anyway, long story short, I get a phone call within another month, and it’s Cheech Marin. [laughter]

KD: So you were part of the original collection, then?

CB: No. I got in the week before. I got in the week before. He had met Nicholas Cage at a party or something like that. I think he had seen this painting. And I tried to get this painting, and I couldn’t get a phone call to Nicholas. Anyway, he got this painting invited for the show. I go, “Okay.” He’s told me he’s got the *Words That Cut*. I go, “Fantastic!” It is in the collection of Nicholas Cage.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: Yeah.

KD: And the other one is?

CB: Cheech and Patty. So he bought this one. I said we talked about is this a good representation for Chicano art? Because this show, when it showed in San Diego and La Jolla, I was talking to the curator, and the curator told me that this was definitely not Chicano art. This was really a stretch in the collection, *Words That Cut*.

KD: *Words That Cut*.

CB: *Words That Cut* was really not Chicano art.

KD: So you had that same discussion with Cheech?

CB: Yeah. I said, “Is that a good representation for Chicano art?” Thinking of John Valadez and Carlos Almaraz, and Patssi [Valdez] and Margaret [Garcia]. Because I asked him who is in this show. And he says, “This show is about social conscious documentation and values. This is a show about who we are and what we want to say.” He goes, “Talk about social commentary.” He goes, “This painting hits it.” And he knows through my graffiti that this is the same voice that I’m doing with my graffiti as I’m doing here. He says as far as he’s concerned, it’s a Chicano painting. He asks me, and I go, “Yeah, it’s a Chicano painting.”

KD: So where is the ambiguity or the ambivalence come from?

CB: Other people. This is a graffiti quote: “You’ve got to be in the culture to know what’s happening.” The same thing with Chicanos: you’ve got to be in the culture to know what’s happening. And we already had from the CARA show, decisive anti-American quotes and all that stuff.

KD: Right.

CB: So you have to be in the culture to know what graffiti is. Cheech was going to try to do that on Chicano terms. But he says, do I have something with more letters? *[laughter]* I saw Cheech [before then when] I worked [at] Tony Seiniger. I worked on three movies of Cheech and Chong. I worked on *Up in Smoke*—

KD: Right.

CB: No, not *Up in Smoke*. *Born in East LA* was one of them. *Next Movie*, and another one.

KD: Okay.

CB: I worked on three of them. And then one time, I went down to the convention center downtown, where the Zero One [Gallery] had the art conventions from all over the world. There was one downtown at the convention center downtown—the blue building. They offered John Pochna free space because they wanted a cutting edge space, because those booths are very expensive. So Zero One had a booth down there.

KD: Wow.

CB: So I went down there and looked around, and I see my hero Cheech Marin coming down the walkway. And this is probably the late '80s. And somehow—I guess my eyes were bugging out, because right before we got about thirty feet to each other sideways, he kind of looked up, glanced at me, his eyes crisscrossed, and then he made a quick right. *[laughter]* He got . . . I don't know. I looked like I was going to shake him down or something. And I was real nervous, and plus I was raised with *Up in Smoke*. He was my hero. Representing West Coast, Chino Latino, Cheech and Chong. Everything about him was just cool. And so I told him—I said, "Okay, the next time I meet that man, I'm going to standing in front of my painting, and I'm going to charge him a lot of money." *[laughter]*

And I remember, the next time I meet somebody, that's why I have a—I have a rule. I don't like to meet anybody, talk about my work unless I'm standing in front of it. Because I can't describe it, and I can't defend it, and people who always talk to me always have a story that I have to listen to them about some graffiti issue. And it's usually negative, and besides, if I'm trying to protect, project, and defend something, and get that voice across, I need to be standing in front of it, because that's my hood, and that's my power, and that painting on the wall will stand me up no matter—I could say something stupid, but that painting's on the wall. *[laughter]*

KD: Right. It speaks for itself.

CB: It speaks for itself. It's, "Don't talk to me—talk to the wall." Type of thing. Which might have been another Chicano story. So with Cheech, I said—Okay. You know something? Cheech told me I did not want to buy—he goes, "I never bought you, even though I knew you, because I hate *cholo* gangs, I don't like graffiti." And I said, "Why are you calling me up?" *[laughter]* I go, "What do you want?" He says, "No, I want to put you in this show, and some people have said that I should put you in this show, that you really qualify." I said, "I just finished this painting, and it's called *Chino Latino*, and it's about the combination—these are black and white issues. It's about Latin and Asian issues." Which was my background in Chinatown, being born down there and going to the clubs, and firecracker night, which is the big disco night twice a month. I'd been going there for five years. And it was all Asians [and] Latin couples—either an Asian girl with a Latin guy or vice-versa.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And they all had the same cars, they all ate the same food and everything else, and they're all going to the same schools, and they're all dressing similar, they're all listening to hip-hop. And I said, "Let's talk about Asian and Latin issues." And so right in there is the scale—are all my graffiti friends.

KD: And you're describing *Chino Latino*?

CB: Describing *Chino Latino*. It's basically—I left it in black, because for the tattoo culture and the graffiti line work. I looked up dragon drawings, of the dragon prints that I brought back from Nepal. I had huge wood-block dragon prints on rice paper, and I was looking at those things, and Nepalese and Chinese and Tibetan styles. And I redrew my own dragon, a combination of several of them. None of them had arms and legs, so I redrew that. And then inside, instead of scales, I have "Relic" who was Filipino Latino. I have "Tribe,"

who was a woman, Asian. She's Chinese and Latino. "Sinner"—he's just stone Chicano. And then there's "Mir," and then "Vile," who are a big influence. I mean, graffiti guys Latin and a white guy, and all that. And then in the middle here, I wrote, "Los Locos de Cali." And it's holding the letters. And all the letters are real dimensional, and it's just a symbol of the unity, where it's the Asian letters and the *cholo* letters all combined. So I was just trying to combine these two elements. And then I incised—chiseled in "Chino Latino" across the edge. And then added all this patina and stone effect.

KD: Oh, so that was added? That done last?

CB: Yeah.

KD: In terms of technique?

CB: In terms of technique, I painted it and all, so black and white, and then I cut- taped it all up, if you could imagine that and then Zolatoned it and washed it, and put washes and everything on it.

KD: Wow.

CB: In this case, I added the Zolatone. I didn't want the Zolatone in the white areas.

KD: Mmm.

CB: It's too bumpy, and it's not the right texture. I wanted two different textures, so I had to do one first or the other. First I had to draw in the dragon, then went in there and then I masked it all off, and then paint it. So I sent Cheech. I told him, "I got a painting for you. It was something that I just finished. Let me send you a slide." And then he called back and he says, "Yeah, okay." We worked out a price, and he says, "Okay, that's fine." He says, "Now, I only pay 50 percent. I only pay full price if it's John Valadez or Patssi, and all of that stuff." I go, "Cheech." I go, "this is my price. This is half price. I would double it at a gallery." I go, "Don't call me asking for a painting if you're not going to pay what it's worth." He goes, "Okay." [laughter]

I sent it to this address. People came, shipped it and all that. I did not see it until—San Antonio is the first show. That's how I got into the Cheech show. And, that's how I get into a lot of shows. The CARA show—I was not considered to participate in the CARA show until I had just met Richard Duardo, who introduced me to John Valadez. John Valadez was on the committee of CARA. And it took a couple of years [laughter] to curate that show.

KD: Yeah.

CB: Insane. John knew me a little bit. He called me up late one night just when they're closing all the list. And he says, "I'm on this committee. I think you ought to be in this show. Can I pick up a portfolio?" I said, "Oh, a portfolio? Let me put something together." I didn't [have one]. He came the next morning. He said, "Oh, it's good to see you, John." I barely knew him. He says, "You need to be in this show." He took my portfolio and demanded that I be in that show to the other curators. Otherwise I would not be in that show.

And years later, I gave him one of my *Los Avenues*, [a] big print as a gift. And I told him, "I would not have a Chicano career if I wasn't in that show," because in that show, *Rollcall* went in, it went to the Smithsonian, and it got picked up for the Smithsonian. That's how I got on the list for the permanent collection at the Smithsonian.

KD: It wasn't Andrew [Connors], huh?

CB: It was Andrew.

KD: Oh. But that's how he learned about it?

CB: Andrew did not know me. He said he had a girlfriend who came and went to the show at UCLA, and the girlfriend said, "Have you seen this painting over here?" The *Rollcall*. And he goes, "Yeah," because he had seen it, and he was trying to write down the words. And the girlfriend saw him. "Did you see this painting?" They went back to it, and they found it very intriguing. So when it went to the Smithsonian, I get a cold phone call from Andrew Connors saying, "We'd like to purchase"—or no, "We'd like to acquire"—there are certain words—"your *Rollcall* painting." Not this one [referring to image], that's—

KD: Is this *Somos La Luz*?

CB: Is also part of the collection. They came back a few years later.

KD: Oh. I didn't know that.

CB: The *Rollcall*, they said, "We'd like it in our permanent collection, but we're a nonprofit, and we don't have funds for unknowns. But we would like to have one of your pieces in our permanent collection. Could you submit something for consideration?" I said, "I will give you my best piece. Would you like the one that's in CARA?" She says, "Yeah," because it already has the prestige, pedigree. They said yeah, and I said, "I will give you my best piece, and will walk it over to you." To be in the Smithsonian, you don't say no, even I should've give them money. I felt so lucky, and I didn't feel—once again, I felt guilty, that I didn't quite deserve it, that I didn't have enough, that I should've [been] more involved in the Chicano Movement. I was doing all I can, but I was involved with all these other things. I still felt a little insecure about it. Then he says, "You have to give a talk over here." I said, "All right." So they flew me over there and I gave a talk, and I did my graffiti demonstration in front. And that demonstration piece on cardboard eventually ended up in his office and it's in the Albuquerque permanent collection.

KD: I've seen it. [laughter]

CB: All right. So that was a demonstration piece out on the yard. All of a sudden—when that went into the collection, I was forty-three years old, and my magic number all my life has always been forty-three. And I lived off Avenue 43. And I knew that when I was forty-three, something might happen. And at forty-three, my painting went into the permanent collection [of the] Smithsonian. Everybody treated me different from that moment on.

KD: Galleries? Other artists? Viewers? Critics?

CB: Galleries treated me the same. They could care less. It's about trying to sell it. Do they have an audience for your work? Exhibition is something else. The Chicano artists treated me different. Really different. I had more respect, and then I had more to talk to them about. And then also the graffiti guys could care less that I was in the Smithsonian, but I could bring that up at—like at the Getty event or something like that. The Smithsonian collected graffiti artists.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: And it also looked good in magazines. And when you're between East Coast and West Coast in magazines, you have to realize you're really competing with your other graffiti guys at a competition and either you battle each other on a wall; since you're living in other cities, the battling happens in the magazines, that's going up. Make sure that you get in these magazines. That's why magazines, I write, are important. It's the arenas. *Rap Pages* is a hot hip-hop magazine. *Graphotism* out of England, *On the Go* out of New York in this town. You had to be in those magazines to be considered the leading graffiti writers, and that's where you compete. People go, "Oh, wow, that's hot!" "Oooh, weak!" That's where you kind of show. And so it looked good on there, on my bio.

But as far as the graffiti guys here, they didn't care. And then who were really impressed were the *Juxtapose* guys, the Zero One guys, the lowbrow guys. It really impressed them because they were fine artists trying to get into galleries—art-school-educated artists. Graffiti guys were not art school educated. Could care less about the fine art world. And then the Chicanos were art school educated, caring about museums. And there was so many left behind. I don't think Gronk is in the permanent collection, and neither is Magu. And the way I understand it is they never got their paperwork together.

KD: Well, part of it is when Helen Lucero and Andrew Connors left the Smithsonian, there went that acquisition strategy.

CB: The doors closed?

KD: Yeah, the doors closed. Exactly.

CB: Right. Yeah. Some guys diddled around. And I'm not saying anything bad about anything. You missed an opportunity. And I know about opportunity. Opportunity comes once. This old man I used to work with at a major advertising agency that they acquired his type shop and they just gave him an office in there, and he eventually passed on there in the office. We went to the funeral. He was in his eighties. And him and I would always have lunch together because we were the two martini lunch types. And we got along. He was a real scandalous old guy, and he would tell me stories all the time. But he told me, he goes, "The

way to stay in the business is to stay in business. You need to keep those doors open. Opportunity *always* comes by, but you need to be ready. You need to have your bios, your slides; you need to have your work available. And you need to take advantage of something.”

- KD:** Well, it sounds like you had—like you knew how to keep your work going in this advertising world, right?
- CB:** I knew about presentation. There’s these words. Okay, like when Lexus first came in on the market their competition was Cadillac, Jaguar, BMW—the top, right? How was Lexus, which was basically a Toyota—was it Toyota or Mazda? Anyway, how were they going to get market share? What they do is you get your image out there everywhere, with every movie star in every position, and the most prestigious homes and all that. You need to acquire market share by being in the market. Even if—they’re losing money. They’re losing millions of dollars in advertising. And I knew that through advertising as an artist who wanted to promote myself, when opportunity comes, I have a choice there to take it or not take it. Opportunity comes, especially a good one, you’ve got to be ready, because it’s going to be going away.
- KD:** Well, but when you were talking about the CARA show, you said that John Valadez said, “Give me your portfolio,” and you made a little comment like, “Uh, portfolio.” Like did you *have* a portfolio?
- CB:** No. At that time—
- KD:** At that time?
- CB:** In ’85, no, not really. CARA was in ’89.
- KD:** Well, it opens in ’90, so they’re planning it for—what? Five, six years prior to that?
- CB:** Right, right. So I think it was probably ’88 when he got my portfolio, something like that.
- KD:** And you do that now, though? You have a portfolio ready?
- CB:** Now it’s all digital.
- KD:** Right.
- CB:** I could go somewhere, and I don’t have to take anything. I just open up a website or something like that. I don’t have a website. [*laughter*] Another thing. What I do, if you put my name, I’m on, like, nine hundred sites. I said, “If you want to know,” and then I’ll just do an attachment. I could send you my bio over e-mail. But yeah. I’m ready. I’m ready, I’m prepared.
- KD:** I’m—there’s a question in this survey about collectors and audience, and I’m not sure if you could answer this question easily because you have so many different audiences, right? I mean, the graffiti [*is*] the lowbrow Chicano.
- CB:** Right.
- KD:** Do you have a kind of collector? Is there a type? Or is there . . .
- CB:** No.
- KD:** No?
- CB:** No. My collectors are new money people. They’re usually the hot movie director, a young movie star who [*has*] a lot of money. Somebody who has so many apartments in New York, [*one*] on Park Avenue, is one of my collectors. It’s all new money people. Big collectors. The Spences [*are*] real collectors. There’s one. And then the rest are just the museums themselves: MOCA, LACMA, the Laguna. Mexican Museum. I have some standards. Something like that are in their collections. But half of those are prints. But I have paintings at MOCA and LACMA and Smithsonian and Laguna. Those are prints *and* paintings, major paintings in the Smithsonian. A bunch of other ones are all prints. I read other portfolios of other artists, and they had [*their work in*] Kaiser Permanente permanent collection, big corporations—I don’t get any of that. I don’t get any of that. I’m not on their radar whatsoever.

I had a conversation with Howard Fox just recently. And I told him, “Howard, I’d love to participate. What I have is important.” But I go, “But, we serve two different audiences, Howard.” I go, “When you curate a show, you’re not serving the public.” I go, “You are writing for your industry. You are writing for other curators, and you never put yourself in an embarrassing situation. If you don’t believe in something, you always take a second position, or always have a comment: ‘Well, let history see’” I said, “Because you’re trying to protect yourself. You are the artist in your world with your own audience. That’s what

you are, [that's who] you are serving." I go, "It's not the same people that I serve." I go, "So I don't need you, Howard, to validate me." I go, "You're not the one who validates me. If you put me on the wall at the museum, I love it, and my work has something to say in it, and I want to be in the permanent collection, and I want to participate on your terms and your voice, and to your audience." But I go, "But that's a separate world, and that has nothing to do with my real career." I go, "Who validates me are the graffiti guys, are the other artists and all that. That's my audience." Right now, a magazine in Tokyo is going to be my audience. It's going to be a whole 'nother—it's not going to be Chicano, and it's not going to be American, and it's not going to be lowbrow. It's going to be all types of Japanese people. And so, I mean, him and I, it's not arguing. We were just saying we just serve different masters.

KD: So you're not going to be in the show—

CB: I'm in the Cheech Marin show.

KD: The one that's curated by Howard Fox, Chon Noriega, and Rita Gonzales? [*Phantom Sightings*, at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.]

CB: Oh, Rita Gonzales? No. I don't think so. Let's see. Howard came here a year ago. He said he is organizing a show, but did not tell me the name. I got it through—Patricia Correia gave me the name. And then he said he's not sure, he said, but if I was included, would I be happy if they used *Rollcall*? I said fine. And I said, "Is this the same time as the Cheech [show]?" When he left, I said I would love to be in the two shows at the same time. That would be a coup. Because I could be Chicano and I could be contemporary, which I feel is our world.

And then Rita e-mailed me a few times, and I said, "Hey, I got this painting I'm working on: *We the People*. It's going to go to Spain and all that. Can you write a crisp?" Back and forth, back and forth. She said she'll get me right after the holidays. Then three weeks, she never responded to my e-mails. So I guess I got looped out of it. And then I hear about this show through other people. But they never tell you the list. As an artist, they don't tell you the list until the opening. I may have *Rollcall* in there, I don't even know it.

KD: You had said earlier that museums cost you money. [*laughter*]

CB: Yeah, yeah. To finish that story: Howard did ask me to come down. He said he had a special project for me, and I said, "I hope it's not doing a lettering job." So I went down there. The Cheech Marin show is going to be cut. No Texas people, only LA, and it's going to be called "Collection of Cheech Marin." And they gave me a title, and he asked me if I would do the title wall. And I said, it was a job. I go, "I hate to be brought down from an artist to just a laborer." But I go, "You know something?" And I told him that. I go, "I really don't want to do any more commercial work, Howard." But I go, "But this is my show, and I think I would love to do a good job at it." I go, "Yeah, I'll do it." And I told him reluctantly. I go, "Yeah, I'll do it, because it's my show, and I want defend it." We looked at the space, and he asked me if I have any suggestions. I said, "Yeah—let's open up the door all wide. That way you see all the paintings at once."

Anyway, they thought that [they] might use some of my suggestions. I said, "We need to see the Cheech show not as individuals like a regular show, because that's not what we're saying. We need to see [when] somebody comes in, and it's a movie storyboard set. They see *all* the color, all the excitement all at once. And they move all throughout the gallery. Like at a movie, at an exciting event. So let's open up the door the full length, forty feet wide. And these pillars in here? Let me paint them. I'm not going to make it outrageous—soft, subtle colors and all that. It'll be kind of the grays. And I'll make them totem with *cholo* graffiti, a roll call of all the artists in there." They let me paint these big pillars about as big around as the table.

KD: Now it sounds like an installation.

CB: Yeah. [*laughter*] And they go, "Whoa! We like that. We don't have much of a budget." Yes, you do. So I'm going to do . . . give them the lettering job. I've got to finish that before the end of the year. I'm going to go down there and paint, and I'm going to be real proud to be in the Cheech Marin show. And I'm waiting for it.

[break in audio]

CB: [laughter]

KD: We came back. We had to get a drink of water. We wanted to talk a little bit about Self Help Graphics, because that model of 50 percent of the print run going to the artist. I mean, could you tell me more about what the benefit is to the artist? And be specific. Like when you do a print there, do you bring your own supplies? Do you use the supplies that are there? Obviously, you need the machines to do the print. I mean, this is not—those aren't free. But how does that work?

CB: Okay. With Self Help, it's about print making. And when you go to Self Help, you need to also put on the coat of its history: that it's a print making activist cultural center with ties to the farm workers and also to Sister Karen, [who] was the—an equal and also a coworker with this, Sister Corita Kent from, what was it? Mary something convent over here in Hollywood. I forgot the name. I knew it. So I knew about Sister Corita Kent from the hippie times. And I think I might have seen her because I remember there was this nun at one of the love-ins. Did I tell you I went to a lot of the love-ins in '67 and '68? All right.

And then . . . So I knew from that history, from the print making and the signage, the posters, the marching, and all that—it had a big history, and it was really important. So when you went to Self Help you were bathed in that tradition and that history. So it wasn't like any other art center, community center that I was ever involved in. And so it already was a package. And I know through doing artwork that prints is graphic design. And also, it's a limited amount of colors through time—we only have one week. The most [you could do] is three runs a day, and then one is curating. So I think at the most, it was twelve colors that you had, or less. And you really had to have all your preparations, your negatives ready to have twelve colors.

Like I said, Sister Karen could have liked or appreciated my work, but it didn't function or fit, or benefit her to show my work until later, [when] she gave Luis Ituarte a show—to curate a show. And Luis Ituarte was the one who asked me to participate to do a show at Self Help, not Sister Karen. So I came in around the back door. And once Sister Karen saw my work, she said she had no idea that graffiti could look like this or be like this. We ended up having a few conversations. She said she invited me to come and print, and I said, "All right." And so I came with this *Por Dios y Oro* print I wanted to make of my sculpture. But [by] making large-scale photographs, it turns into maybe three different densities, over-burnt, overshot, undershot.

KD: Right.

CB: And then from there, I could take the highlights, and I could take the overshot, it's a big block, and I could print the solid areas and work up. But it's not that easy because basically you have to redraw all the negatives totally over again, because things fill in that you don't want, or things drop out that you don't want. So just to make this print, it's not just a photograph of my sculpture. It's far from it. It's totally, totally redrawn from scratch. So what people don't realize: your negatives—you need one full-size, same-size negative for every single color.

And people don't realize how difficult that technique is with silk screening, especially if you're going to do a serious print where I'm using silver drop shadows that are just one-sixteenth off the side of another dot, so I could get a warmer middle tone gray in the middle of the values. So I'm splitting my blacks, cool blacks and warm blacks, but also splitting with silver in between there. Then solid silver with my solid blacks, and then just a little bit of silver with my warm blacks in the middle. And I need a negative for each one of those, and I needed to know the process, and I needed to convey to the printmaker master Joe Apuche.

Joe Apuche is one of the best printmakers I've ever met. He is a master, and the way you can tell is because he looks like he's never working. If there is a problem in the print, he will talk to you, and within two minutes it's cleaned up, it's repatched, it's covered up. He moves it, readjusts it, gets it back online. He tells you [that] you need a line over here for two edges to match up. He can tell you what to do, and

I mean, he does it so effortlessly, he looks like he's not working. He's just a master at that. Where I've worked with other printers where everything goes terrible, everyone's arguing and fighting, and then you end up with a bad piece of art.

So Sister Karen would come in, and we would have conversations there at Self Help in the print room. Then later on she would call me at night, which—we had about two or three late-night conversations. She was a night owl. And first we talked about—

[*break in audio*]

KD: This is Karen [Davalos] and Chaz [Bojórquez], and he's telling me about late-night conversations with Sister Karen.

CB: Yeah. And so our first conversations were there in the studio when I started printing. And she started telling me—she said that I had opened up her eyes as far as graffiti. And that graffiti can't be art. And in some ways she felt that I was doing something—what I was doing was important. And coming from her, I was really moved, because I knew this woman was a really important woman. And not because she ran Self Help—just because of her history. And she was very kind, and she was extremely intelligent. And she told me that she felt that in some ways, to promote the Chicano Movement was to—not only to get out there, but to put it in everybody's face. People needed to see the Chicano Movement over and over and over again. That way they get an idea that "Oh, there *is* a Chicano Movement!"

The same thing happened with advertising. Carnation: why do they need to advertise if everybody knows about Carnation? It is to show that they are a wholesome, quality, contemporary company still offering you healthy food to your family. You still have to be *in* the marketplace to compete.

KD: Right.

CB: And you have to show why you're important. Sister Karen and I, since I knew advertising, I knew exactly what she was talking about. Promotion, what I said about the Lexus: you need to get market share by getting your work out there. And you only have one time; it has to be good work. So when she said to me sometimes she would give away the work, and to museums or art centers or community centers, or give away the work to fundraisers for other people in the community, for they could get the money. Because in turn, the artist has already gotten half of the edition.

KD: Exactly.

CB: They're already paid off. She felt [that] she could do whatever she wanted with her part of the edition. And that was to make the Chicano Movement grow. If you just sold them, then it's a store, just a repetition. It goes out to whoever. But you want to make sure that those prints go to a good place, and many times those places are not willing to buy it—but they're willing to take it for free. Like I said, you have to realize every university and every museum is a nonprofit.

KD: That's right.

CB: They want everything for free. And as an artist, you have a choice: either give it to them when they ask it, or not to give it to them.

KD: Yeah.

CB: But—

KD: Even the Smithsonian does not have an acquisition budget regularly.

CB: No.

KD: It depends on the Congress.

CB: My painting, the *Rollcall*, was donated for free. But they paid for my hotel, airplane flight, and I got an honorarium for a hundred and fifty dollars, from the Smithsonian. Okay? That's chump change.

KD: Yeah. That's about what I make from the Smithsonian.

CB: Right.

KD: You know? [*laughter*]

CB: But that's what everybody makes, and that's the business.

KD: Yeah.

CB: All right. Am I going to complain about that? Hell no. I'm in the Smithsonian. I'm proud of it. It's worth more, and what is that worth?

KD: Yeah.

CB: So every university. So in some ways, what Sister Karen was doing I felt was promoting the Chicano Movement first, and getting it into the right collections and position and collectors, and I felt what she was doing with her part. And then they were having annual print sales. They had grants. The grants were to promote the printmakers. And so it wasn't that every artist had to get their own grant, or the printing shop had to get their own grant. The grants were coming from the office.

KD: Oh, I never thought about it that way.

CB: Right. One of the reasons they closed out is they felt that Self Help wasn't doing it right, that they felt that that the gallery director, the curator, should've been an educated person getting their own grants and all that. Where the curator there was not hired to be a grant writer. [She] was there to organize twenty to thirty shows a year.

KD: Whoa!

CB: Christina [Ochoa] was putting on twenty to thirty shows a year. And in there for six years straight, it was thirty shows a year that she was putting on. Twenty at Self Help—

KD: How could you do that? There's only twelve months in a year. [laughter]

CB: No, no, no. See—okay. Many shows are out of the gallery—

KD: Okay.

CB: [She is] sending shows to other spaces, institutions, events, weekend events—all that kind of stuff. Getting the paintings out there. And also Christina Ochoa also had three restaurants that she was filling for ten years. She still does. And doing side work promoting Chicano shows and her own shows at the 825 gallery of Patricia Correia and [David] Zapf [Gallery] in San Diego, and some other shows that she had put on up there for the farm workers. She [organized] a lot of photography shows in Sacramento for them. And also the black velvet shows that went across the nation and also to Mexico. That she was organizing shows to Tijuana and all that. So Christina Ochoa was doing twenty to thirty shows a year on her own. She was not a grant writer. The money was coming from upstairs. That way, she was free to put everything together. And then—

KD: Yeah, it sounds similar for the artists. The artists were free to do their work if the grants were being won through Self Help administration.

CB: Right. Right. So they felt that that was one of the bad points of the gallery: that they should have a grant writer. But then the grant writers are not curators, and there's different kind of curators. They did bring in a professional grant writer from USC. They got a new artistic director there at the very end.

KD: Right.

CB: What's the name?

KD: I don't know why, I'm blanking on his name, too. From Mexico.

CB: Yes. Okay. All right. They brought him in there, grant writing and everything else. When you are writing grants, those kind of curators put one show every two years.

KD: That's right.

CB: And that's what happened. He was there a year and a half, and he got one print show, and that was it. So that's a different show. The model that Sister Karen [had] was this Christina Ochoa model. When she gave Christina Ochoa her chance, Christina was volunteering there for two years with no pay doing shows and all that because she had gone to museum classes at UCLA. She was giving curating classes out of Mexican Cultural Institute and getting some lectures through some of the universities as a curator. As a guerilla curator—that's what they said. Because curators are the modern DJs. So Sister Karen—and also Christina Ochoa started the *tertulias*, the artist talks. Before her they weren't having them, and when she started,

she really promoted them. And at the end it was cut. It was one of the major points of having an art show, that you also had an artist talk.

KD: That's right.

CB: That was through Christina Ochoa. But this was the model that Sister Karen had promoted and had refined, and had passed on Christina to help promote the artist: give them their voice and images, try to get as many as you can on the walls, and mix them up with the young ones with the professionals.

KD: Now, you're describing a lot [of] the benefits would you consider it a studio space? You could inhabit it for that brief amount of time and really feel like it's your space? Or are you working elsewhere too when you're doing a print?

CB: When I'm doing a print, it's my studio, because when you walk in, you need to go ahead of time, and they give you the free acetate to do your negatives, and the paint with Indian ink. All that is supplied for free.

KD: You're kidding.

CB: Yes. You can go ahead, and they have the tables there that you can work on. All those people—Margaret Garcia, Yreina, Rena Cervantez, all those people did that stuff. Willie Herrón—all the major artists. And Frank Romero. And then—

KD: But that's an amazing benefit. I was thinking it's just the space, you get access to a master printer who problem solves with you. You're talking about supplies?

CB: Supplies. They print it. They give you all the free paper for the project.

KD: For the *taller*?

CB: Everything is a grant project for every atelier.

KD: The atelier.

CB: Yes. It was—the ateliers were every year. They would have a list, and either they would bring in a new curator to organize these things. They would ask a woman to organize women. That happened a lot. Or they would have some outside—from the Chinese American community to come in, or some other thing like that. Or they will package up some important artists together, the youth, or something like that. And they would get grants. And we could come in as a group. They would give us all free supplies, and then each one of would have one week. They would have paper for those artists, one hundred twenty-five sheets, very expensive. All the free ink, and all the facilities. And Joe burns all the screens, everything else, and actually just prints them for you. And you're there helping to pick colors and mix colors exactly the way you want it, and to revise your negatives as you go, because you're realizing you need more color over here and all that.

And when you're working on those prints, every single artist has to do an all-nighter there, because you're always massaging it and changing it, and you can never plan for the unknown. Every time I was there, I always had to pull an all-nighter. And I remember leaving—the neighbors coming in one time. The police came in the parking lot, and I had to talk to them because, [it] was closed. I was there late at night. And the cockroaches in that place would come out at night.

KD: Of course.

CB: Insane. So everything was supplied. And then at the end of—

KD: But also letting you use the space as late as you needed to use it.

CB: They would give us the keys.

KD: Yeah.

CB: They would give us the keys.

KD: That's a lot of freedom.

CB: Is that on or off?

KD: It's on.

CB: Okay. I thought we had— *[laughter]*

KD: No. No, no, no.

CB: I participated at Self Help because I felt I was missing something.

KD: Uh-huh?

CB: Okay, I was getting a lot of fun up at the Zero One Gallery with the hot-rodgers and everything else. The graffiti guys were still real young and causing a lot of trouble, but in some ways I felt really enriched, born again with them. And which ruined my marriage. [laughter] And I mean, finally divorced [due to] the graffiti. She felt I was spending way too much time with young kids, and I had to restart my career all over again and have them evaluate me? I told her yeah, I do. I need to compete with the New York movement again. And if I'm any kind of an artist, fight for my space even though I'm twenty to twenty-five years older than these guys. I go, "Then there's a reason for that." Fight and [defend].

So anyway, so I also needed a Chicano [connection] and I started hanging out at Self Help Graphics, and I really found so much comfort. This was a conversation we had with many people. Everybody found Self Help really a home base, comfort base. I would go in, and while somebody's printing, I would get a six pack and Joe and I would have a beer or something. Other artists would walk in, and we would have great conversations. At the art openings, I would meet the other artists, and we'd be outside in the parking lot.

On my show, when Sister Karen said that she would like to do something with me—and at that time, on the late night shows—and she asked me if I would participate in a large-scale silk-screen mural project, where we get the prints—and there would be multiples—twelve of them to create a larger mural of silk screening. This was a project that just started right before she had passed. And I told her, "Sister Karen," I go, "I don't want to do that." It wasn't the regular silk screening, it was the mono prints. I hated the mono prints. My stuff was ugly.

KD: Oh. Okay.

CB: I said, "I'd rather do a regular full-size silk screen," and all that stuff. And she said, well, the idea with the youth is she would like to give me an opportunity to do something there. I said, "All right. Then let me put on a graffiti show." And she said, "All right." You know, "Let's work out something that is a youth show." I started the print. She passed. I was getting phone calls that night from Joe Apuche saying, "Hey, we're still going to do the print, because I was starting that next week We're still going to do your print and all that." Tomás Benitez was aware that I was going to be doing something there. We didn't know what. Christina Ochoa, the director, said okay, what would I have in mind? I said, "I'm not going to do a one-man show." She said I should do a one-man show because Wayne Healy had a one-man show there, Gronk had a one-man show, Leo Limón had a one-man show, Yolanda Gonzalez had a one-woman show. And I always wanted to exhibit at Self Help, because I said you are not a Chicano unless you show in East LA. You are not a hot artist unless you show in Hollywood. To be a graffiti writer, you need to show in the river.

KD: Right.

CB: Which [by the way] tomorrow is going to be one hundred men, graffiti writers from [around] the world, and we're going down to the river, tomorrow.

KD: That's great.

CB: Yeah, I'm totally excited. Totally excited about that. So as Tomás was aware of having a show, so Christina asked me if I would do it, and then two years passed. Seeking Heaven—SH crew—which is here in Highland Park. Approached her because the graffiti guys were beginning to want to show in galleries. And they were a Latin-based graffiti crew. Christina said, "Hey, these guys from SH crew came in and wanted to show." And I said, "Really?" She said, "You want to organize something? Maybe show with them?" I said, "No." I said, "You know, no. I want to show by myself now." But I said, "But I want to show the second show. Have a graffiti show of the youth, of this SH crew and then have my show right after that. Have the youth, and then have my show, and I'll come home, I'll come with the graffiti."

KD: For that art historical context?

CB: Huh? With—

KD: Art historical context to you, or . . .

CB: Yeah. There's regular street graffiti, and graffiti: next step with my work. And what does that look like? And we could have dialogues between the two. And they would be doing some printmaking, and I would be

doing some printmaking and stuff like that. So it was a nice concept and all that. Tomás was aware of it and all that, and it turned out that's when I had my show, in 2000? At Self Help?

KD: We have it here somewhere, but . . . [*laughter*] Every time I go to find it, I can never lay my hand on it.

CB: It's the very first page, because it's limited to one-man shows.

KD: Oh, you're right. It would be the first page.

CB: Yeah. I had my first basic—where I brought in other paintings from Nicholas Cage, from other collectors, from Charlie Miller, from Laguna. And that was the first time I ever had all my paintings up to then all in the one room.

KD: Yeah, [in] 2000.

CB: Yeah. Right.

KD: [*Mondo:*] *The Graffiti Artworld of Chaz.*

CB: Yes. And I had a "pick of the week," and it was a big show, and I wanted a taco truck at my opening. And since then, it was a tradition to always have tacos at the openings. Because people stay longer. It was the conversation out on the parking lot.

KD: Right.

CB: I knew from the Zero One [Gallery]: as soon as the liquor's gone, people leave. As soon as the food is gone, people leave. So I wanted tacos at my opening, and that became tradition at Self Help. A local restaurant would always come and supply food and all that for a dollar. And what would happen is that the art show would continue on the inside, but all the artists would be talking on the outside and all that. I felt that was really important. So that was another tradition of Self Help. And so I felt very much satisfied, [*laughter*] even in my stomach from Self Help.

KD: It sounds like it's taken you a long time to feel like you've reached the place that you wanted to be at with these multiple audiences you had.

CB: Mm-hmm. Yes. Long story short, it was not Christina who gave me a show. She never actually—she only included me in some group shows when my print was part of the show. Christina has never given me a show at Self Help, so a lot of people felt that since she was my girlfriend. We were seeing each other. I got heat for it.

KD: I wonder if you could reflect for a minute on . . . I shouldn't use this word . . . It sounds like you finally come to terms with yourself about how you evaluate yourself in these multiple worlds. So what has that opened up for you? I mean, at least that's what I'm hearing, that you finally felt a presence of value. That you could call yourself an artist, you could call yourself a Chicano artist. You could say you do *cholo* graffiti work. So . . . what path did that open for you?

CB: That only happened within the last ten years. Really, within the last five years. I was getting—let's say a newspaper article or a magazine quote, or I was getting interviewed there maybe about twice a year or something there. About ten years ago. Now, I get interviewed every week. And I have one to five shows going on all the time. I'm included. And—besides my products, which we haven't even talked about. It's just going to be a list added on to the end of this interview.

And why a lot of that has happened is because the graffiti writers grew up. Because the graffiti world grew up with them. Those guys opened up their own magazines, their own museums, started touring across the world. Infected the rest of the world with their magazines, the computer, the Internet. Like I say, you're not a graffiti writer unless you're doing a t-shirt, website, MySpace, YouTube, black book—like I said, there's all your clothing.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: And besides you're painting, you're printing, *and* doing the murals in the street, and you're a tough ass and you've got to defend it. And traveling all around the world. When that happened with the whole movement, it brought me with it. And it gave me a professionalism, it gave me a righteousness, and it validated me in a lot of ways that I was defending that graffiti was art for all those years: that I was getting crap from the graffiti writers that they would say it's not art, and crap from the galleries that are saying they won't

show art. Some galleries were saying, “We don’t want to undignify the real meaning of graffiti by showing it at a gallery. It should really remain in the streets where it’s really powerful.” Which was crap.

So now there’s movies—I’ve been in many movies, graffiti movies and stuff. We’re not talking [Hollywood], they’re in the circuit. But it’s more video movies all over. I was just in a movie in Spain. I was in a graffiti video, and plus two television stations, and plus two radio stations about Chicano art. And then in Mexico when I went to Guanajuato, I was on three magazines, and two graffiti magazines I had to do interviews at the same time. And then give two lectures. One at the design school, and one at the fine arts school. And then go up live painting the graffiti with the Mexico City guys.

KD: Wow.

CB: You know, one week. That’s what I’m going to be doing in Tokyo. They have a whole magazine issue just for me over there—*Kaze Magazine*. And then I’m going to be going up in Tokyo and Osaka, and book signings. And then we have t-shirts—a special t-shirt made over there, and I’m designing a shoe for Royal Elastics that’s going to be coming out next year. Probably going back to Tokyo. And so I needed an image that they could use for all of the advertising, which is this stenciled skull which I supplied, and it’s going to be using for their Internet and websites, and the posters and all that.

And then so that has made me a professional. In some ways the graffiti movement—world movement—has brought me into the world art movement. Then the Chicanos, what I get out of the Chicanos is museum tours. I’ve been in so many museums in the last ten years. [And] Cheech, it’s half of those museums. It got us into I think fifteen—it was supposed to be fifteen [shows]. About eighteen now, or something. And that opened up doors to two other shows.

You want me to comment on the difference between galleries and museums? [*laughter*] In galleries, like I said, I call it a store. You are dealing with the owner of the store, who has his vision, his taste; what goes on the walls is up to him. And so if I am selling graffiti work, I need to go to a graffiti gallery. Chicano work, I need to go to a Chicano gallery. Because it’s not their vision—it’s who their clients are. It’s who they are trying to sell. They need to make money as galleries. I’ve helped run galleries. I’ve installed, I don’t know, fifty shows, something like that. I know what it takes is—on their side, 50 percent is barely covering the gallery side, unfortunately. And if you start raising your prices, then you’re not going to sell. In my experience, out of 95 percent of my shows, out of the openings, I never sell anything.

KD: Really?

CB: Yeah. They usually come during that month. Or afterwards. Eight-five percent of my sales or 90 percent of my sales are out of my home, because they want to get to know me and come over here. I’m too specific. My work is too specified. My audience is broad, but the collector base is very, very narrow. And plus if you go buy a painting, you’re going to have to pay, twenty to forty grand in my pocket. Especially with those one-year paintings. And I don’t care. If I get to exhibit that painting in ten shows, it tells me what that painting’s really is worth, and what it’s about. And it picks up a pedigree, and it becomes its own person.

Like I said, paintings are worth zero when they come out of my studio. They are worth nothing. It’s once they got the press when people start talking about it, review, critique, this, that—that’s the true value of art, especially of my work. So I’ve been a lot of places. So the galleries, I know that they need to make a sale, and I’ve been at many galleries. After a year I’m asked to come down, and through their assistance I’m given my slides back. So I don’t feel that one gallery is going to save my ass or going to make my career or anything. So you go to the next store. Basically it’s about making money and getting your work out there.

KD: So it seems like you don’t have any problem with promoting yourself.

CB: No, I don’t.

KD: And I’d say—

CB: [The] art promotes itself.

KD: Did you learn that on the street? You learn that with your graffiti work and work you did in the industry?

CB: I applied it when it happened, but I didn't know it was going to happen. Because I never knew graffiti—when I was young, never knew it was going to be a career. To me, it was my art. It was fun, what I felt comfortable with, and what I wanted to know. It was just personal. And then have a commercial job—fine art job on the side. And then I was doing rental houses, so I thought I would be a landlord, and then I could just have—all my free time, I could paint whatever I want. *[laughter]* I was setting myself up, but I didn't know this was going to be a career with the graffiti.

KD: Hold on just a minute.

[break in audio]

KD: Okay. We're in the studio and we're looking at some digital images on the computer so that I can get a better sense of the graffiti work. Here's *Street Writers*. *[referring to the computer]*

CB: This is *Street Writers*. I did in in '75.

KD: Yes, I've seen that book. Yeah.

CB: Mm-hmm. And you could see—that's me there. And that's my letters. That's me running. And then these are other people, but it's just '73. Spray can. That's Little Jimmy. And this guy, he's still in prison, Timmy. They gave him forty to life for killing his mother—stepmother. Casper, CP Boys. There's Blades. You know who Blades is. That's her piece. This is what was happening then. And this was in the early '70s. There's some *[from the]* 1970s. I have a whole package of 1970s photographs of East LA graffiti that this old man was doing. I met this man in Albuquerque who put on the first graffiti show ever, of photographs and pieces in Pomona. Pomona City College, in 1970. So the first graffiti show was here in California, not in New York. I just found that out about three years ago. Let's see, "Chingaso." That was my early name. They used to call me Charlie Chingaso.

KD: When did you become "Chaz"?

CB: When I went to Chouinard. The Anglo artist asked me what my name was. I said, "Charles." And they go, "Oh, Chas!" And I didn't know what "Chas" meant. *[laughter]* They started calling me Chas, so I was at the art school and guys there at Chouinard called me "Chas." And then one guy changed it—was changing his name. Was writing—Tom, Tom Ruddick, whom I mentioned, he was writing his name backward, *M-O-T*, and the *T* was turned into a *Z*, and it went to "Moz." And I changed my name to "Chaz," changed the *S* to a *Z* for like, my last name. And it stuck. So it's easy to pronounce. So before, it was "Chingaso." Avenue 43. Place—when I was first doing graffiti, it was about me and my name. And then a little later, it was about me and where I lived. Later on, it was about me and my girlfriend. And then it was me with these other writers. And then it turned, instead of me, it turned into "us."

And then later on—now I write about all of us, our culture, West Coast, and also I write about graffiti. If graffiti had a soul, what would it write about? It would write about issues that were important to it, like the Getty conference, the collision of two different types of letter faces, the practitioners. One guy in jail, and he writes this pathetic, moving, heartfelt poem about being in prison. I wanted to take a poem, a Chicano poem, and write it in *cholo* graffiti. And who came out in the newspaper. I didn't know this. There's this woman called Marisela del Norte. And I tried to call her. I tried—I got her phone number and left messages after messages. She never called back. And then also—and I got a letter from my friend in prison. And his letter was so moving that I took his poetry and turned it into a painting. Half of it in the shadow. Okay, that's me writing "Chaz 43." That's my skull. And then all the different—the A's.

KD: A's.

CB: This guy, I never found out. Seventy-two. That was an incredible . . . This guy named Fred.

KD: That looks like *Rollcall*. *[laughter]*

CB: Fred Martin. Yeah. Fred Martin, Steve Julian—

KD: Yeah.

CB: "Quatro, Soldados, en armas."

CB: “La Raza Cosmica.” “The East Los Atzlan.” “Año del Chicano 1972.” “Viva la Raza, CS.” I saw that, I go, “That is art.” There’s no denying it.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: To me, it was a signpost. It was a hammer on the head. Seventy-three. “Viva la Raza.” So it’s part of the graffiti that was part of the Chicano Movement, and it was part of the farm workers movement. Here it is: the spray can with the UFW black eagle. Which now I understand that some of the artists are using that symbol, and they’re getting letters from the farm workers’ lawyers saying that they are illegally using their logo that isn’t approved by farm workers, so we can’t use the UFW eagle sign in none of the Chicano work anymore. My friend Leo McIntire. And he was doing that stencil for that one summer, Quetzalcoatl, with spray can, and feathers.

Let’s skip on to ’75. So this one, in some ways I was involved in that. Okay. I’m just going to start clicking these off, but anyway, that’s when I’m in Papua New Guinea. I think this guy’s name was John.
[laughter]

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: This is in the riverbeds, my first time . . . I don’t know if I told you the first time I ever saw graffiti and the first places was in the Arroyo Seco riverbeds, where you go up these tunnels. They’re the sewer lines for the streets. And we used to go up as kids and then go sliding on these slopes. That you go in the tunnel about a mile in, and they would go up about forty degrees. And then we would crawl up there in these tunnel tubes, and then with the water in there was all the green moss, we would put on two piles of Levis and go running, and then we’d have candles stuck to the walls, and go sliding. And so we’d go sewer sliding. And we thought it was the most fun.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And in there, we would find out graffiti, and they would use candles or a Zippo lighters that had a lot of kerosene and make a lot of smoke. So all this puffy candlelight. There’s Jerry from 1951. There’s an old . . . And then we photographed and documented in there. I think Susan—I’ve taken Susan Phillips in there. This was a ten-foot painting, and it was this *Somos del Barrio LA*. It’s supposed to be bigger. And I redid it here. *Somos del Barrio LA*, a stencil. I’m from Avenue 43, these are my friends, and then we are from barrio LA. This is a statement of who we are. This one, I was writing about me and my place. Chong Young Chiang, his background. There’s “Chingaso,” one of my first tags—’73. This was the *Chicanarte* show.

KD: Right.

CB: I got that central wall. And that’s when I started seeing real [laughter] Chicanos, real Chicano art. I had never seen a show like this. The *Chicanarte* show was the first time I ever seen a Chicano show.

KD: Well, I think it was one of the firsts.

CB: Yeah.

KD: There’s not that many before that.

CB: No, not at this scale. Okay. That’s *Words That Cut*. Okay, that’s a large-scale painting.

KD: Now, Nicholas Cage got that from a gallery purchase?

CB: Yes, from the Zero One.

KD: From Zero One?

CB: Nicholas Cage owns four paintings, two large and two small ones, and all that. And he owns that print, the *Los Avenues* print. He has that one there, too. You know, in his home. In one of his homes. He’s got many, many homes and boats. Here’s the recent print I did because immigration, I think I told you, you have to be a native almost with feathers in your head to be considered an alien. I mean, to me, you have to go to this extreme. Otherwise everybody who’s brown is a suspect. And life’s a bullfight, so you can win and lose. And you’ve got a green card, and he’s—

KD: Where was that printed?

CB: PCC. Pasadena City College.

KD: Okay.

CB: I gave a lecture and a talk, and I gave them the layout, and they cut the color and printed it as an exchange. And we split the edition and all that. That was the trade there. This is one of Blades's photographs. She was taking photography. So it's me in the riverbed with my stencil. And I have these separated also. Seventy-four, Halloween. I dressed up as the Señor Suerte. That's me in '75. *Veteranos*. And this is the girls. I did two of them, guys and girls. And it says "Chaz Avenue 43, con safos CS." And "Veteranos," a space, and then "Blades." No, I'm sorry. There's Blades. And this is the guys: Alaton, Fisheye, Ronnie, Delilah. Oh, that's a girl, Aburzo, Leo McIntire—he had a big ol' natural. We always called him Tommy. *J-O-N-N-A-T-O-B* . . . John . . . John . . .

KD: Jonathan? No.

CB: What is that? [*laughter*] *N-A-T-O-B*. I don't know. And then this is . . . I misspelled that. It's supposed to be "Kingfish." That's the *K*. That's not a *K*. It's an *F*. Because that was "Kingfish," and I was thinking of "Fish-eye." I mix letters around in my head. And I never noticed that until right now, until—in the spaces. This is '75. At the *Street Writers* book. That's my first tag.

KD: Oh, there it is. Yeah.

CB: I told you—

KD: On the Pasadena—

CB: I misspelled my name, "Chas." The Pasadena Freeway, and that was '69 to '84, it stayed there. And here it got tagged up with the blue. "Chingaso." That's out of the book. That's another tag in the street. And that's another picture of the *Chicanarte*. What I do have in my images—and did I send you—they're more or less chronological. And then I started adding a whole bunch and they got all mixed up, but the majority of it is chronological, so you could see what I'm doing. At the same time, riverbed, and I'm doing some movie thing.

KD: Right.

CB: And then here, these sequence of pictures. That's me writing in there. And this picture here came out in the *History*—see, graffiti? This is a major book, *History of Hip-Hop*.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And it's all about the beginning of hip-hop, African lambada, New York graffiti, all this stuff. And then we come to . . . I think it's right here: Los Angeles hip-hop. Toni Basil. Popping and locking was first invented here in Sacramento by Don Campbell right here. He used to work in a restaurant. And also, he also went to Chouinard. We didn't know each other, but we ended up on a bus talking to each other, and he was a landscape oil painter and stuff.

But that all started here on the West Coast, and then it got picked up over there. And here is early times. And then here they . . . Okay. There's me there. And then I think they have a whole thing here—"Chaz CB" here, landscape and all that. I'm one of the few graffiti guys. And then it goes—yeah. Every graffiti. Every hip-hop piece. And then this was done when I went to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, and we gave a talk there because they inducted hip-hop to the music museum. What is it? Music . . . What do they call it? The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

KD: The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, yes.

CB: Right. So yeah, that's where graffiti kind of takes me, too. Not the Chicanos. Chicanos are these museum things, but we hardly ever give talks, hardly any *tertulias*. No money. The only ones who can go to these openings—we have to pay for our own travel for these openings. And so it's really we're having these big openings, but it's not uniting us.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: It's not uniting us. I am going to be in a big lecture. Rubén Guevara is organizing a lecture with Yreina Cervantez and all these other people about what's happening with the murals and the graffiti out there. He's organizing it now. It's going to be when we get back from Japan. And about why we're—the graffiti guys are ruining the murals, what's happening with murals. And I'm saying the mural people haven't done anything in fifteen years. They want to get paid to do a mural, and then they want to get paid to clean it

up. And if it's my piece on the wall, if somebody tags it, they should go over there and fix it up themselves, wash it down. And if they leave a tag on a mural for four or five months, the city's going to come and buff it out. And that wall that they've had for thirty years in their pocket, and they could go over there—any artist mural—Chicano artist could go back to that wall and do whatever they want on that wall. That wall is theirs. Touch up.

KD: But you have a different [view] of the things that go on a wall. You're able to let them be changed?

CB: If your piece gets covered up, if you've got a photo, then it has a death, then it had a life. While it was up, it was live and living and represented to my audience. And if it's covered up, fine. You're the source. You could—if you're worth any of your salt, go do another one. You've got the photo. You've got the flick of it. Go do another one. Don't cry about it.

So anyway, I think I might be . . . It's going to be an interesting conversation because I'm getting on the mural—on the Chicano muralists' case. I said, "If you're not going to defend your walls, then maybe you don't deserve them anymore. Then someone else is going to take them away from." I want the Chicanos to come up to bat and fight, because I ragged on the graffiti guys with the Cultural Affairs event we had a few months ago, and I said LA was famous for being the mural capital of the world. Not anymore. And you could blame the graffiti guys for that. And I said, "Yeah, the graffiti guys covered up all the murals. Why? Because the city refuses to give the graffiti people any legitimate space."

KD: Right.

CB: And they say we're dealing with kids. You can't rationalize, be logical with the graffiti movement. It's emotional based. It's dealing with a lot of young kids, who are doing almost 100 percent of the destruction, are fifteen to eighteen year olds, because they don't give a shit about being artists. They don't. So how do you talk to them? Remember I told you I only could influence the thirty year olds, the twenty year olds, younger ones. So I tell them, I go, "The Chicano artists' graffiti . . . The Chicano muralist people need to come up and bat and be the reason why they were the muralists' capital in the beginning. It's time to reinvent themselves. And if somebody tags on their piece, you clean it up." The graffiti guys do. If somebody tags on their piece, they'll go and clean their piece up.

So I have issues with the graffiti guys and all that, in a good way—I mean with the Chicano guys, in a good way. That's why I think this lecture's going to come up, or this talk—

KD: But maybe it means we need different muralists. We need murals that can speak to that generation.

CB: We went to Judy Baca in '92, and I could try to get some of the graffiti guys enrolled into her. She said, "As long as they don't bring a spray can." They could use a air compressor, but not a spray can. And I go, "Don't be—don't do that." But anyway she finally came around and did a couple of murals, and had some—Nuke and Duke, and some other guys, too, at UCLA.

KD: Right.

CB: And got heat for it! Shit came out in the newspaper. What is a professor taking graffiti people to the classroom, and why is she defending them, and all that stuff? And she came up to bat. Judy Baca came up to bat and fought for their causes and all that stuff. And then it passed, and then the graffiti guys moved on. But, what's happening right now is that the murals are getting totally destroyed because the graffiti guys are angry, the young guys, because they have no legitimate space to work. So the yards have been closed, so that's where the older graffiti guys would meet the younger graffiti guys and they would learn that a tag does not go over a bomb, that a bomb does not go over a production, that a production could go over any of those. A bomb could go over a tag. It's one of these rock, paper, salt things.

KD: So you've lost the structure?

CB: We're not talking to the youth. Right.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And the youth are going crazy right now, because I say they have no connection to how to be a professional, how to be on TV, movies, make money off their skills or anything. We've lost that connection because the police have closed us down. And that's why they're destroying everything. It's to really stop

them, but at least they could see you paint on this wall, you go to jail. You do the same thing on this one, you could make money; you could go to Japan or Europe or something. That's what I'm going to be bringing up to this talk.

KD: Sounds good.

CB: Yeah. I'm probably going to get some heat for it. Remember this? I told you. That was mine. And what's interesting is that . . . can you cut that type? I think for just a real quick rush. I have lots of these books. James Olmos, when I did my mandala, and there's my skull that they put in there. The monks I dealt with. And "El Ese Loco Chingaso and Blades," in Highland Park. This is a graffiti love tag. My first shows. And I'm trying to show that caveman letter. There's LAs and there's downtown. The Smithsonian, when I was there giving a lecture, and that piece. *Boulevard Nights*. That's the *Rollcall*. That's the one in Hollywood. Big letter A. Laguna has this one.

KD: Yeah.

CB: Of course, MOCA has this one. The house of the avenues, and also the temple. And *Somos 43rd, Avenue of the 43rd, Chaz and Blades, Ese. Somos Locos*. The collision of the two dialects. This was the stuff out in the riverbeds, or Jackson Browne. This was the gang, just the stuff before.

KD: What . . . See, this is where I was getting confused. This work to me is graffiti art.

CB: Mm-hmm.

KD: And it would go in, like you were saying, the galleries that respect that.

CB: Mm-hmm. Yes.

KD: But it's also been shown in Chicano contexts.

CB: Yeah. Yeah. Right. And graffiti magazines, and Chicano [shows], yeah. This is fourteenth of September, 1991. That's when we had that conference at the Getty. All these were "pro" people, and all these were "anti" people. You know, all their names. And all this is *en basto*, so it's all chiseled, and then with silver, and it's all—it looks like steel right on top of it.

KD: Yeah.

CB: So that was in the event that gave me the idea to do that. It was one of these things that . . . That's Richard Duardo [with] Los Lobos.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: Right there in front of that wall. Here's this wall—you can see how big that was. "Most Loco Say Boys," that was the invite. Here's MTV 1986. ABC channel seven. You know, here's that other part. Yeah, yeah. Andy's interview, Andy Warhol's.

KD: And your Chicano pose.

CB: Chicano pose. Yeah. That's the real me. [laughter] *High Times*. I thought that was so cool, in *High Times*. Here I'm hitting up stores, storefronts, extra large and "y Que." This was a piece that I did in the streets with this guy, Tombs.

KD: Yeah. Wow.

CB: That's off of Melrose. Here was that burning X of Malcolm X turning into burning Generation X. It was in the *Times*.

KD: That was the piece that got picked up by the show at the Mexican Museum on the African legacy?

CB: Yeah. And as soon as it was going to go down to Mexico, they shipped it back. And it wasn't included in their catalogue or nothing, in their video. They made a video. It wasn't included in there. Basically, my painting went, but the image was not included, it wasn't even shown in anything. It was like I wasn't in the show. Then I was doing these for movies. *Under Fire*, I did that stencil, shipped it down to Mexico. They filmed it. This—it's not Managua, it's not Nicaragua. They did the Siqueiros mural over there at Self Help and redid it, and they asked me if I would do all the letters across the top.

KD: Oh, I didn't realize that!

CB: Yeah, yeah. So I said of course I'll do [it]. Tattoos on the necks and the backs and all that of the gangs, my skull. That's the Jackson Browne layout that I did for Richard Duardo. And—

- KD: When people are doing the image—your Señor Suerte image—on tattoos, were they going to a tattoo shop, taking a photo of it?
- CB: Taking a photo. Either somebody has a photo—but rarely. It’s just copied from some other prisoner to another *cholo* member and all that.
- KD: Really?
- CB: It’s all done in prison. That’s not in tattoo shops. This is all of prison gang symbols, all done in prisons. So over a thousand men with that. And they said if you wear that and if you get a shot, the skull will protect you, that you won’t die. That’s what they tell me.
- KD: When did that start happening?
- CB: It started happening around—during the ’70s, definitely in the ’80s. It lost total contact with the artist or symbol.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: The gangs picked it up and started using it. Because I wrote it in the gang area off [Avenue] 43 where I lived and all that. So they said, “This is us,” Jackson Browne. It was for some t-shirts and all that. This was the commercial work I was doing, designing, painting. I didn’t do these illustrations, but I designed [them] and this thing. *California Suite*.
- KD: Neil Simon.
- CB: *The Cheap Detective* with Peter Falk. And then you kind of do this. You see my letter styles?
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: I designed that. And then here’s the one in the streets. The one that I told you kept on writing.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: Dogtown. Not Cyprus Park. It was Dogtown. Dogtown with the blue would come and cross me out. Avenues in the red would come and cross out Dogtown. And then it went back and forth and all that stuff.
- KD: So you do have documentation of the work you do in the street?
- CB: Yeah. Just not a lot. Not the early stuff. New York. The burning skull, the one with the three roses of two men had just died, two young graffiti guys. So the third rose is for the next one. Another mural at a gallery. I forgot—the Zero One. This was a show that I had at the Zero One. What’s his name? Taken with the graffiti on the background here, which is this wall here.
- KD: Oh, at LACE [Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions]?
- CB: At LACE, yeah. Niki. So I’m doing tattoo on her face. I mean, painting. The Blues Brothers. I worked on these layouts—all these lines are mine. *Cocaine Blue*—oh, I did this in your gallery at your—at your school [Loyola Marymount University] with Fuglie. Gordon Fuglie?
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: Yeah. *Cocaine True*, *Cocaine Blue*. I did the title wall of [that] show. He asked me to come in. That was just a layout, and he approved it, and I painted it all up. Metal Menudo. Okay. Here’s some of the stuff. All right. [Honey Suckle] Rose. See, I did all master inking of this stuff. The Seiniger Associates baseball team. The rhino was his thing. *Quest for Fire*. You can see that’s my style of fire.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: You know? Tabs. Kenny Rogers. Oh, yeah—this was a caveman. See? These were some other eyes. And they go, “Yeah, why don’t you follow this idea over here?”
- KD: The rock?
- CB: Yeah.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: Rock—rock idea. I did this one, this one, and this one. And somebody else did these here. We put it all together, and they said, “Okay, well, let’s go with this idea.” Then we ended up with that. See, look.
- KD: The transformations, yeah.

- CB: Mm-hmmm, mm-hmm. Big time warriors. This was a mural piece I did back here. That's me painting it, but all the guys just want to look at the girl. *Mumia 911*. A collaboration. I did all those letters. I give a lot of my work to, fundraising or whatever. I mean, my activism. This—here's a door right here.
- KD: Wow. That's huge.
- CB: It's *huge*. I organized with this show. It was one of the last Dada shows downtown, and we brought in the graffiti guys. And this was at the men's something sports—something. There's some building downtown. It was kind of empty. It was a huge show. And see, this—that [number] seven, that's over six feet, seven feet tall. I needed a scaffolding up here, four layers to get way up here.
- KD: Wow.
- CB: These words right here are four feet high. Seven samurai from the far Eastside. "K2SL" . . . "K2S" . . . "STN." "Killed to succeed," "second to none."
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: This is the Chino Latino group. Here is one of the Cheech things I did: the *Next Movie*.
- KD: Oh, *Next Movie*?
- CB: This is half-size. So it was a board; I sprayed it, all that stuff. I did—faked all this stuff, and then the titles go right in here. Here was *Born in East LA*.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: Some presentation. *Boulevard Nights*. More tattoos.
- KD: That tattoo.
- CB: Tattoos. And I think that's about it in this . . . But I've got boxes of archives of all this stuff, so . . .
- KD: So when did you—when did you start thinking of, "Oh, I better archive my work. I better [document] this work?" When did that happen?
- CB: When did it happen? Right away, because I knew that archiving, it was going—because I knew that graffiti was being destroyed. So I needed to preserve it through photography. And then also, I was doing the commercial stuff, so I was getting proof sheets and presses. I was accumulating archival stuff already. And then I would have somebody photograph it every once in a while if there was a painting. There's a tattoo. This is a large-scale photograph, and all this is just faked airbrush and painted in by hand.
- KD: Oh, I didn't realize there was a skull on the back of the *Boulevard Nights*.
- CB: Yeah, I put in our skull. And the Gypsy Rose, a very famous car?
- KD: A car. Yeah.
- CB: And there's . . . That's not Danny Lopez. Was he going by Danny Lopez then? That's Danny de la Paz, right?
- KD: That's what I thought his name was.
- CB: Yeah, and he was married to Margaret Garcia. And they would tell us, "No, bigger guns!" So we had to photograph a gun, cut it out, shave it, and glue it down on the photograph, and then re-photograph it. It was all done by hand. That's movies. That's the riverbed I just showed you. This is the one. You just saw this one—the Blades and all that.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: *Año Loco*, '75. And these are *veteranos*, poor people, over there. That's me giving the A for the Avenues '85. That's for *Interview* magazine. That was a photo shoot—a stone photo shoot.
- KD: Right.
- CB: *Trick 182*. They asked me to do it New York style. So photographs of bricks on top, and a piece of acetate laid on top, and we airbrushed it and combined the two. That's at Two Talk with David Lee Roth.
- KD: Are they buying also from Zero One?
- CB: Zero One? David Lee Roth was a co-owner—something like that—at that time. There's my skull on the freeway. There it is again, where it would combine it—I would put it where all the other graffiti was. I would put it right in, because I wanted the thing to talk, this to me is language talking just to be involved in it. I thought that was so cool. That was the painting that I showed—the one that it was on canvas. One of two. That one, I have no idea where it is. This is a close-up of this skull on the freeway. Another Chingaso

on a garage door in Highland Park. That was a show poster I did with Richard Duardo, the *Most Loco Say Boys*, the first show I really can say “art show” that I had. I thought it was a cool poster, but it didn’t sell. So we changed the colors all pastels and this and that, and it looked stupid. I learned a lesson from there. This is that—

KD: Did it sell when it was pastel?

CB: No. Nothing sold. This was the painting the Spences bought.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: And then, where’s the *Rollcall*, *El Loco Vato*, *Ese* and *Esas*. And then right here, she’s a world-famous psychologist, and gives lectures. So I started reading some books about the transferring of images kinetically? And all that. You know, it was kinetically, symbols transited.

KD: Oh.

CB: I took those symbols out of her psychology book. They have these flashcards. They go—

KD: Right.

CB: “What am I looking at?” A circle, this and that. So I put those in there that he was transmitting to us these languages.

KD: *El Vato Loco* in ’85?

CB: Right. You know?

KD: These are quite big.

CB: Five feet by five feet.

KD: You’re painting them in a room like this?

CB: Yeah. Sometimes in a hallway. [*laughter*] The *Words That Cut* was in a hallway, and I only could get four feet away from it. [*laughter*]

KD: So, but you were used to a nice studio from your day job. I mean, those—

CB: My day job?

KD: Well—well, yeah. You worked in environments that had—

CB: Yeah. But my home studio was crap. Was a second bedroom, or outside—a garage or something like that. I never had much space. And then, I always make paintings that are at least as far as I could reach up and down and sideways. I want to compete with somebody of equal size. Basically it’s a one-to-one [ratio]. Because if you attack a painting that’s, six feet—five feet by five feet and all that, you have [to] wrestle with it. You have an equal opponent, and you had better do something that’s important there, or it’ll kick your ass. I really give painting a *lot* of respect, because it’s kicked my ass [*laughter*] a lot of times, and I usually don’t have dead babies. I did not work them until—*gh-jeet! gh-jeet!*—revive them again. Because initially, your first idea is always a very good one, but your first application, your first attempts are usually terrible.

Same thing in advertising. Good ideas—all right! All right! Let’s get that down on paper! And it comes out nothing like what you talked about. You need to re-work that out and re-clarify exactly what it is. That’s why in advertising, what I learned: if you can draw it, you can build it. And that’s for the student making the TV commercial. You have to do storyboards. You’ve got—that storyboards, if the product’s there in front or in the back and there’s a tree and all that.

[*break in audio*]

KD: This is Karen Davalos. We’re on tape 6 with Chaz Bojórquez, and it’s the twenty-eighth of September, [*laughter*] and we’re looking at images.

CB: Yes. Here is the logo of *The Warriors*, which I did for Tony Seiniger. And—

KD: Oh, there’s your—the *E* that’s the three lines horizontal.

CB: The three lines was the *E* that came out in the—the Dogtown Z-Boys skate movie, where they were doing graffiti in Santa Monica on the west side of LA around the same time, in the early ’80s. And then we had a conversation if they had picked up my *E*, but I think we all picked it up from Rick Griffin, who was doing it

at the same time . . . Well, no, he was doing it in the '70s. But it's a real *cholo*—and you could see how the *cholo* influence is here.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: *The Warriors*, okay. That's a picture of me in the riverbed with a spray can straight ahead. *Chingaso Avenue 43*. Here's that other one. Okay, there seems to be some dupes in here. Here's that one. Oh, this one is *Under Fire* in '83. I did some stencils for my day job, and it was used in the movie *Under Fire*. Yeah. And down in Mexico.

This is my *Rollcall*, which I kind of spoke about all my powers and friends. And then that's another picture—early picture of me in the streets, actually writing the *veteranos*. This is that piece there with the skull, this is—this is me doing it. You know? So I'm not going to—I'm just going to just show the little pictures here. *The Warriors*, *Caveman*. I think we came down to here.

And you see that tattoo? That's me in front of LACE. I did a big skull. That's that print right there. And then when Playboy Eddie—when the graffiti guys went to prison for stealing a car and he sent me that poem, guns became an issue with me, so I started doing some paintings of guns.

KD: *Multicultural Solution*, 1992.

CB: Yeah, *Multicultural Solution*. And it's all in glitter. It was just in Spain right now. So this is a bigger than life-size. This painting's forty-eight [by forty].

KD: Was that Patricia Correia?

CB: Yes.

KD: Yeah, I've seen that.

CB: Yeah. I wanted to make the gun so precious and so beautiful, like you just wanted to go up and pick it up; that you wanted it. It became something valuable.

KD: Why did you engage that contradiction?

CB: What do you mean? It's not a contradiction. Because the young men feel that a gun can solve all their problems.

KD: Oh.

CB: And the gun is beautiful to them.

KD: Okay.

CB: They can get whatever they want with a gun. It's a beautiful thing. And then plus I was raised with guns, and to me that's one of the highest form of technology. I like the mechanics of a gun. I don't like what it does. I actually have voted for gun reform. We don't need guns and stuff. But to make a gun a beautiful object, that was the intent of this piece. Plus the anxiety and the energy—

KD: That's a very different work.

CB: I also did this three-dimensional. There's a sculpture, three-dimensional sculpture all with glitter and everything else at Patricia's. I did the gun. And then I started getting into these paintings. This one, *Somos la Luz*, where the graffiti guys were coming from the darkness and into the light, because they had a big graffiti battle between Hex, *H-E-X* and Slick, which is up here. *S-L-I-C-K-K*. "Slick" in here. And then over here is *S-O-M-O*. "Somos la luz," in here.

KD: I see it.

CB: I did it over here, "somos la luz." And all—everything that's white in here is not white paint. It's silver leaf and silver powder, so it's all becomes into metal. So it's from black Zolatone street . . . And over here is "43rd." So that's Avenue 43 from where I came from. And then we come into the light. So it's the real metallic piece coming out. The Smithsonian came back after they acquired the first piece, maybe about four years later, and they say, "We want a more contemporary one, and we're willing to buy it. Name your price." So I got a good price, and this one is also in the Smithsonian collection.

And I started doing these really complicated paintings. And then this one here, too. This was *Graffiti-text*. *Graffiti-text* was—here, it says *G-R-A-F*—two times—*F-F-I-T-E-X-T*. I just put the letter 2 instead of write it twice. And it was about tagging, and it was about the . . . *G-I-G-R-E-N*. It should be red and green and

blue. Spot the green lines. It's really about the trains. I can't quite read it now. Here a tag, and this is *C-C-B-A-N-O* tag . . . I don't know. There's a lot of tag-banging going on in this thing at the same time. But once again, everything here that is white is really metallic, and it's all silver, and it's all these . . . Then I tried to get certain words that had zeros in or circle or letter *C*'s more in the center of the composition, because I wanted to make it look mechanical. Like these swirls and all that stuff. So the text is about the contemporary dialogue is really a very conservative text. And the people who are participating and fighting with it is a very organic. The text back here is supposed to be non-organic but structural and the individuals, the people themselves, are organic letters, the graffiti letters. And they're busting in between and trying to be identified, and they're all breaking in between the words.

So this was the style that I was trying to do at this time [it] was really important. Here was the ivory tower, where it was the Bowers Museum, the Zero One Gallery, I want to say the *O-B-E*, adobe LA.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: They had organized a graffiti show. And then I think MOCA, and I think the Smithsonian—I think it's spelled in here. I think the Works Gallery, which I was showing at Mark Moore [Gallery] and stuff. So like I said, them busting through this building, they look really weak. And I realized what they had to offer was not graffiti, but dialogue and talk. So that's why I started including more and more of their names. And then, like, there's this group. I put a band around them. Here's another group of talk, and that's another band around them. Putting them in groups, just like that. I think Andrew is here. Yeah, I think Andrew is right in here, and it's written backwards. I think it's *A-N-D-R-R-E-W*—something like. My *W*'s and my *M*'s are three lines straight down with the *X* on them, like when you're counting time in prison four lines and an *X*. Four would be five. And once again, this is a lot of silver, and then the ivory tower on the very top, I started using glass beads, glitter.

KD: Whoa!

CB: And the whole thing shimmers like it is insurmountable ivory tower that just goes straight up into the sky, and it shimmers up there. Because the ivory tower is something of beauty. So I started mixing—started getting my paintings really more mixed up. Here's *Playboy Eddie's Lament*. Here's the one he wrote. "How was"—let's see, "who was"—"who was I" . . . no. "How was I" . . . Something. I don't know. "Out of juvenile hall, gun in your hand." I left a lot of the words bleed off.

KD: Right.

CB: "Ready for anything. What's up? Life of violence. Greed is your downfall. You're on the road to death from juvenile hall to the county, and finally the state pen." And he also sent me a picture of a guy with bricks in his face and all that. "For"—something—"bricks in his face is for every year." He misspelled it, and I misspelled it—"every year in solitary confinement. And you ask yourself, 'And what have I become?'" And I went, "Fuck!" This is "word," *W-O-R-D*, for truth, being in prison, and he finally got out. And then it's his incarceration numbers. And everyone in there who paints in the river knows that there's huge—the concrete walls have bridges way up across, and they lay out these *beautiful* shadows all the way across these concrete walls. So this is really talking about the riverbeds, too.

KD: Oh, I see. The way you've got the light.

CB: Yeah. Here is a guy with a tattooed skull on his back, a gang member. The three roses—

KD: That's a photograph that you took?

CB: Yeah. Yeah.

KD: Do you meet many guys with the tattoo?

CB: Once in a while. Every couple of years. Like I said, you've got to be in the culture. I don't hang out with these guys. Sometimes they show up at my home, or my door. Maybe friends; he says, "Hey, this guy also just got out. He wanted to meet you," and all that. "He wanted to get . . ." And they come, and sometimes they give thanks, and they'll show me. And this guy had a tattoo on his stomach like this, and he was a big *panson*. It was all like this. Then this guy, Cowboy, he had it tattooed on his neck. And then I've seen guys

in the street and restaurants and all that tattooed on their skulls. And also, of course their arms, and on their legs. Something like that.

KD: Wow.

CB: That's my real value. Here's another gun. This is scratchboard. It's probably just a little bit bigger than this. It was supposed to be "living large." *L-A-R-G-E* up here, "El"—*E-L*—"El Desire." A "desire," "power," and "love" underneath there. It's chiseled. And this is silver, and it's spray painted, stencil, and this looks like really popping pieces of metal right up in here.

KD: What year was that? Oh, '95.

CB: Ninety-five, when I was dealing with Playboy Eddie and his gun issues, and all that. And so . . . and then here's some skulls, '97. Here's the *Golden Boy*.

KD: Oh, *Golden Boy*. Is that what's in the living room?

CB: Yeah. No.

KD: No, this was different.

CB: No, this is the original painting.

KD: Okay.

CB: That's a small stencil. The original painting is—whatever size, fifty-one by forty-three. And it's all in gold impasto and all that. And then it—the blue back here. My brother—my stepbrother David, I told you the one who [went to] Vietnam? He's been almost twenty years HIV positive. He's been fighting it. Now he's got to worry about being overweight and being old, and heart disease and everything else. [laughter] But he's a survivor. And then I was going to do a St. Sebastian, and I was going to put arrows in here, but I put the *cholo* golden boy, because I know that in the Renaissance, there was a lot of golden boys that some of the major artists did. And even Andy Warhol did a golden boy.

KD: Yes.

CB: And then I wanted to do a golden boy. So this is "SB"—*S*, large, with the letter *B*—Saint Sebastian. And this is letter *D*—right here, chiseled—*A-V-I-D*, "David." And right here, the letter is *L*. And the letter *L*, there, was David Laura. I'm just mixing them up trying to—in here. And I have a big photograph, large scale, full-size, same-size photograph of this piece that I'm going to show you. But I write "The Golden Boy." Every once in a while I'll write a poem. "The golden boy is the victim and the criminal of all crime. He is the youth and the strength of us all. He is willing to give up his life and believes he will never die. He is a saint who will take our pain, and the one we blame. He is the boy made of gold." Yeah. Because I was dealing with the graffiti guys. Everybody was blaming them for *everything*. The muralists were blaming them; they started to think everybody was blaming them. Mono prints of *The Golden Boy*. Oh, the *Graffiti Mandala*. So you can see the scale right there.

KD: Yeah. Wow.

CB: And then . . . And here it is here. And this is a seven feet by—

KD: You don't have very many figurative works.

CB: No.

KD: So that *Golden Boy* is—

CB: You know when I did that *Golden Boy*—I was showing some Chicano artist my work, and I heard him saying, "Oh yeah, Chaz, yeah. Yeah, he's a designer. He's not much of a painter." Right? So I said, "All right." That's why I painted *The Golden Boy*. [laughter] So I don't have much—yeah, you're right. That was the reason I painted *The Golden Boy*. I go, "Fuck! I'm going to show him I can paint!" I just choose to do letters. I can paint. Fuck. Let them design.

KD: It seems like it's very hard to get away from these categories.

CB: Yeah. Oh, yeah. We all rag on each other. I do my own ragging, too.

KD: What I'm trying to figure out is—

CB: Doing a car is cool.

KD: Why were you doing a car?

- CB: Her husband was getting married.
- KD: Oh, okay.
- CB: And he's all reggae. "One love," "por vida," and all that. And then they had a lowrider and everything, so it you always put *cholo*, and it's—
- KD: That's cool.
- CB: So that was my job. They got married at Self Help.
- KD: That's the Self Help parking lot, yeah.
- CB: Yeah. Yeah, where they got married there in 2000. And then Self Help, okay. Here's Mike Catarouse, and that's—
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: Self Help Graphics, and all that stuff. Welcome.
- KD: Oh, I didn't know you painted the stairwell.
- CB: Yeah. And even on the inside of the wall in there. That's my offering.
- KD: Of course it's your writing. You can't miss it.
- CB: [laughter] Yeah. Yeah, I couldn't miss it. Tattoos. From Milan. This is an Italian. Flycat, *F-L-Y-C-A-T*.
- KD: Is that a ink pen tattoo, or a real tattoo?
- CB: Real tattoo. Real tattoo. Yeah. Actually, here it is right here. See, and the "Flycat." That's another tattoo. That's when it was just done. You see it's all red. I did the drawing, and then he got another friend to do the tattoo. There's an Italian. He's got "LA" down here, like the LA Dodgers, on his leg.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: On the back of his neck he's got a teen angels-style "Los Angeles."
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: And then Luis Rodriguez, that was him. And Luis Rodriguez is in that book. I made you a copy of my chapter in there that I wrote.
- KD: Oh, thank you!
- CB: Luis wrote "A *Cholo* in Milan."
- KD: [laughter] Really?
- CB: And it's about Flycat. Flycat just spent three months in my home. He just left last month. Here's going up with Mr. Cartoon.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: All right? He's hot, he's famous. Him and I, we said, "Let's go up, but let's not have any paparazzis. Let's do it in a private studio downtown. I don't want any of this." So his entourage is about twelve people with photographers and everything else. And I brought my entourage, about four with photographers—
- KD: [laughter] Yes. Right, right.
- CB: With my people. I mean, we were just so bourgeoisie, hyped up, Hollywood and all that. But that's what it takes if you don't have your YouTube site going on with this stuff. So that's him and I. And then I came back and I changed it all in here. That's me working on it.
- KD: And what are you using? Is that brush?
- CB: Brush and paint.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: This is what I'm going to be doing in Tokyo. This is what I do. Go up, Mr. Cartoon and Baby. You could see what, Niki. Like that. Viva la vida. It was a big time magazine. That is paint.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: That was Mr. Cartoon's girlfriend. She had Mr. Cartoon tattooed on [her, but] they have since broke up. Cars, cars, cars. Mr. Cartoon. This is the stuff going up in Albuquerque. Here is one of my latest paintings. Which I did on that wall. You could see the outline on the outside right there. Okay. Which is this one right here. It's seven feet, and it's on wood. The first time I did it on wood. And it's all chiseled. So actually, everything that's white is really silver. This is a silver, a steel ball of color. "We are people," "we the people

are people of color," and we will always be stuck with each other. And reference "we the people," back here, from the Constitution.

KD: Mm-hmm. In the same lettering.

CB: "We the People," the beginning of the Constitution. The second part of that phrase is, "in order to form a more perfect union." "In order to form"—

KD: I see that.

CB: "Form a"—that thing here is "a"—"a more." I think "more" . . . I think over here is "more." "A more." Here is "perfect union."

KD: "A perfect"—yeah.

CB: *U-N-I-O-N*. And this is just "del." And then the next part, "in order to form a more perfect union" is the flame, [it's] ephemeral. Yes. That's the ephemeral part that you can't grasp.

KD: Ah.

CB: And then also, "to preserve" . . . I think. I forgot the rest part. The justice, the peace; to promote liberty and posterity. I thought it was "prosperity." No, it's "posterity," which I had to look that up. It means about family and generations. So that was the part that I made the flame come off of there. And this one took me a year just to do it. And it looks a whole lot better. It's at Patricia's [Correia] right now. It's still in a crate.

KD: Oh, really?

CB: And it went to Spain.

KD: Oh.

CB: It showed in Spain, the first exhibit, and then now it's at Patricia's.

KD: What was the show in Spain? What was it called or about? Oh, it was the one of the biannuals?

CB: No. It was [at La] Casa Encendida. It was the *Pintoras de Aztlán* [exhibition].

KD: Oh, the *Pintoras de Aztlán*!

CB: Yeah.

KD: How'd you get the book?

CB: I went there.

KD: [laughter] Oh! I was going to say, it hasn't come here yet!

CB: No.

KD: I've been waiting for it.

CB: No, no, no.

KD: Oh, it's very beautiful.

CB: Oh, it was a great show. We got such a *positive*, major response. Why? Because the Spaniards come from . . . With their art, the Europeans and all that, I think people miss painting. The shows that they see are more conceptual. When they saw ours, they said, "God, we haven't seen a painting show in so long!" And they were so happy to see so much emotion. They—

KD: You had a lot of pieces in this show.

CB: Everybody had about seven or eight pieces.

KD: Yeah.

CB: Wayne Healy went to it, and he gave a mural workshop. Georgie Yepes went.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: And let's see—who else? Cheech, Patricia Correia, and let's see, that's one of the artists.

KD: Well—

CB: That was it.

KD: It's an interesting group of artists. That are in the show.

CB: Yeah. Yeah.

KD: Because in the past, that grouping, you would—

- CB: This show was so much fun, and it really reinforced that the Chicano Movement is alive and well if we choose to take it there, because—
- KD: Well, you sent all contemporary stuff, so that's a good example of the most contemporary, and the rest were all from collections. They were able to collect. They went to this group, the curators from La Casa Encendida, which is next door to the Reina Sofia—
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: It's the Santa Sofia. No, Santa Sofia is in Istanbul. Reina Sofia is the museum in Madrid. It's right next door to Reina Sofia, and two blocks is the Prado.
- KD: Right.
- CB: Of course I'm going to be in this show. *[laughter]* I was there to wave the Chicano flag.
- KD: I mean, the things you're doing are from the twenty-first century. You created them [recently] right? They weren't—they might not all be 2007, but—
- CB: No, that is—
- KD: The one with the gun—
- CB: Mm-hmm. It was—
- KD: *[And]* the *Mandala*—
- CB: It was in '90. It was in '90. The *Mandala's* '99. They're all done pretty recent.
- KD: Maybe you have a, *[laughter]* maybe you have a different timeline than I do.
- CB: Yeah. It ain't back in the day.
- KD: No. It's not the '80s.
- CB: Right. *[laughter]* For young kids, "back in the day" is just two years ago. *[laughter]*
- KD: Exactly. *[laughter]* A week ago!
- CB: Right. But yeah, I felt really strongly, and the response was they loved the Chicano painters because it's emotional hbased: they can see it, they can feel it. We have stories. John Valdez, this was making a killing over there. Frank Romero was killing. His young protégé . . . ¿Como se llama? There's a young guy who paints just like Frank Romero. And anyway, he didn't go—
- KD: Oh, Adon? What is his name?
- CB: David Flurry.
- KD: Oh, David Flurry? Yeah.
- CB: Right. He was the young guy. They asked Vincent Valdez, but Vincent didn't want to participate. David Flurry represented at a large scale—came up so good and so strong, when I got back—I've only met him a few times—I called him up and left a message on his machine saying, "The next time you have a show in Spain or something like that, you better show up." *[laughter]* I go, "People were asking about you. You could've been on television to define and defend your work. You have to be there representing who you are. When these opportunities come, they don't come up often." I go, "Next time, you be there, and I'm telling you that as a supporter and with respect, but I'm getting on your case. Okay, talk to you later." Because I feel that people need to come up to the plate. The graffiti guys do it all the time. They're always proving themselves. No, but I mean they [have] the competitiveness, the quality of graffiti in the world has gone up. Not this one—here.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: World graffiti. You start seeing some of this stuff, you can't deny it. It's incredible artwork. This stuff like that. And they're constantly competing and getting better and better. There's a book, equal size of this, of the women graffiti writers of the world.
- KD: Yeah, I think I have them.
- CB: You know?
- KD: I love graffiti. *[laughter]*
- CB: Right. So—
- KD: That was my first entrée.

- CB: The competition is so stiff, and you're trying to get better and all that, and we're going places. The graffiti movement is going somewhere. I don't see why the Chicanos can't. That's why I get bugged that it's time that we need to come up to the plate and redo why we were famous in the first place. Chicano murals, Chicano prints. We have a voice. I've never [had] Chicano studies, I really don't know what they do. I have never been asked to talk, lecture, or show slides at not one Chicano class, ever. I can guess what it's about, but I've never been connected to the universities, ever. I've given lectures at USC and UCLA and all that through cultural anthropology—landscape engineering? That was about the landscape designing for cities.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: Urban design classes, I've given lectures there. Some art class, something like that, through the graduate [program]. Never in Chicano studies.
- KD: Well, since only three of us teach Chicano art . . . [laughter]
- CB: [laughter] I see.
- KD: That might be part of it. But I was thinking—
- CB: There was no need, eh?
- KD: No, I think it's also the bias. People without degrees aren't respected in academia.
- CB: Well, see, that's where I disagree.
- KD: Oh, I completely disagree. But that's the way that world works. Like we can't hire a person who has a bachelor's degree, even though they have all the life experience.
- CB: Yeah.
- KD: And then to get a guest lectureship, they ask the same questions: what are the credentials? What are the credentials? That's the world—that's the world—yeah.
- CB: Right, right. My bio is [clear]. I always tell, "Well, these people support me." These people support me, these people support me—all that stuff. These people. The museums.
- KD: Yeah, you have a lot of work with the Gary Keller—the Gary Keller productions. He owns your work? Or did he—
- CB: The school has bought a couple, and I've been in every single book that they've had. And he's asked me if I would do a special project with him. And that's when I was having problems with the divorce. So I told him, "Let me get back to you." But he has always offered me opportunity and stuff. And then the Cheech show. And then Susan Phillips, that was a whole thing. You read what she wrote about me? [In *Wallbanger: Graffiti and Gangs in LA*—ed.]
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: Okay, yeah. It took her ten years to write that book, and within the ten years we kept bumping into each other at these galleries. And she would ask me what I was doing, and I would say, "So what are you doing again?" "Oh, a book." "Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah." You know, sure. And then it finally came out. But in those ten years she got to know me a little bit better, and the whole scene. She feels graffiti art only should be in the streets.
- KD: Right.
- CB: That you can't take graffiti into the galleries; it's something else.
- KD: The same argument was made of murals.
- CB: [laughter]
- KD: The same argument.
- CB: Right, right. That's stupid. Because you know something?
- KD: The same argument is made about Day of the Dead [inaudible].
- CB: Uh-huh. Oh, Sister Karen [said it] made it too commercial?
- KD: Well, not "commercial," but it's not religious, it's not spiritual.
- CB: It's not spiritual? The individual could make it spiritual.
- KD: I think the viewer can make it spiritual.
- CB: It certainly helps a lot of other people who don't make the altar but can see it. It functions. It works.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: But anyway . . . I think that's [it]. [Let's] wrap it up here.

KD: Yeah. Do you want to make one last comments, or do you feel worn out? Do you want to say something?

CB: I think you might be able to pick up some comments, because I've already had said [enough]. There was a lot of conclusions that I had said about the . . . you know? Except what . . . See, if the Chicanos don't get off their butts—which is something that I've always said before: if we don't engage the youth, the youth are going to leave us behind. The same thing with the Chicanos: if we don't engage the present and what's happening with all the new art movements, we're going to get left behind, and this generation is going to be the end of the Chicanos. Well, there is a rule that we have in graffiti. The rules that are in graffiti, is that there are no rules. So I don't want to hear about anything about excuses and all that. And I feel I'm one of the slower artists.

KD: You mean in how long it takes you to produce one work?

CB: Yes. I'm one of the slower-producing artists. And I've been able to do plenty. Especially at our age, that we're all getting sixty or so, I go, "We only have twenty more years. Or ten." And I go, "And if we don't come up to bat just like the youth are with the graffiti in the movement, we still have so much more to do. It will slip within our fingers." So that's a threat. For my case, I am going to keep on going with the graffiti movement. I have a future. I have a world. I need another life.

KD: Yeah. Someone can lend you another fifty years?

CB: Yeah.

KD: Yeah.

CB: I would be really happy.

KD: Yeah.

CB: I would be really . . . [*laughter*] Not that I started low. Somebody said, "I may not be tall, but I am fat."
[*laughter*]

KD: That's a great way to end.

CB: Yeah.

KD: Thank you.

OCTOBER 2, 2007

- KD: This is Karen Davalos. Today is October 2, 2007, and I am with Chaz Bojórquez, and we're going to wrap up with some images from your advertising and—
- CB: From the commercial art and design.
- KD: Let's go in the other room.
- CB: Right, yeah. Let me tell you, this is about my fine art paintings, so it's totally different than my graffiti or my commercial work. [*referring to painting*] This is a painting that's probably about four feet square, done on linen with oil. One of my very first early oil paintings, which . . . I don't paint with oil, I paint with acrylic. Oil takes too long to dry, and I'm more of a graphic person, just painting on top and with washes. And this was the experience that I had of being in the river, in the LA River doing graffiti: there would always be all these birds. And since I have a fascination with birds, this is a snowy egret, and sitting in black water. And the composition here is that it goes—just trying to connect one side of the canvas to the other.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: You're never supposed to split a canvas, and here I'm just trying to connect them from one eyeball to another eyeball. And what you could see here is that this bird is about realism down here. And then the realism, it appears an eye across the water to the surreal. And then so this bird is totally imaginary, and it starts turning into some type of reptilian thing. But it's turned into surreal, which in turn is progressing into the pure design. And then what I feel: that pure design leads into a perfection, into a circle. This is a continuation of the real, surreal, pure design until [the] ultimate shape, which is just a circle way off in the distance that this bird is flying to.
- KD: Does the work have a title?
- CB: No. No, it never had a title. I don't even—I haven't signed it. Here on the edge, I have that communication that with that storyboard thing.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: Where here at [the] very bottom are little frog eggs, which we used to find in the river. Let me just put on this light. That would help a lot.
- KD: Oh, yeah.
- CB: We would find the frog eggs in the river, right here at the very bottom. And then they in turn would grow to a tadpole. And the tadpole would get into a little half-frog, half-lizard. Then finally it turned into a full-fledged frog. And then over here, it's viewing the inside.
- KD: Yes.
- CB: Now, these progressions I did, it's one plus 50 percent. It's a mathematical growth. And also it's the color spectrum. So just having these repetitive [designs] . . . I did the story in two ways and two different languages. But it's kind of like growth from the egg to the full growth and all that, and then finally back to the circle again.
- KD: Right.
- CB: So just taking a realism into a perfection.
- KD: Did this exhibit at any of the galleries?
- CB: I've never shown it anywhere.
- KD: Really?
- CB: This is my own private fun. This is the stuff that I just do, and I don't exhibit any of this stuff. But this was done in 1972, '73, '74? I probably worked on this painting about at least a couple of years, put it away, and coming back to it. So I was about twenty-three, twenty-four.
- KD: Wow.
- CB: You know, that's what I was doing, and the graffiti in the streets. And then as we come over here, you could tell—I think I showed you this painting.
- KD: Right.

- CB: It's unfinished, but it was done at the same time, and you could tell that I was fascinated [with] the shells. I was collecting shells. And this is one that I had collected and started painting. But I was actually doing three-dimensional stuff using my ceramics tools to apply paint, real thick paint in linear lines, and then painting on top of them and then re-scratching those thick paint underneath. And it pops up with some line works for texture. This is oil as well, on linen.
- KD: And you can do that with oil? How—
- CB: Yeah, you can. Yeah. You just pack it into an ear syringe and then re-squeeze into that right across there. I think I probably used some type of thick white zinc pigment texture paste or something. But it was oil-based because that's all that I was using. But it's that fascination with shells. And then in here, it was going to be two birds flying across, in silhouette, and as detailed as I could get it, two little sparrows, kind of showing the totally erratic flight, mindless, and just going across the picture in a bad composition. And then the real beauty and the real intelligence relies with the shell, an inanimate object. So I was going to show the living object is totally mindless, and then the inanimate object, the shell, is the supreme intelligence, just through the structure. It's like I said: it doesn't have the birds, but it sounds good. But the—
- KD: Oh, it does. It does sound good.
- CB: But it shows the elements that I was combining all at the same time with my travels. So it's very personal and it sort makes sense. What I have here . . . So I was—I went through my—some of—just my master press and . . . okay. And I was going to show you that. Let's just show some of the commercial work. This is the stuff that I was working on at work, in my day job. This is an Earth, Wind & Fire brochure.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: Which I did all the layouts and everything. I did not design it, but I was working with the graphics, as they would give me tissue layouts more or less of what goes where, and you have to make the blueprints, basically the floor plan—the blueprints for the printer. All that side, all the photographs and layout, and lay out all the pages mechanically. So this was the show poster, but you could see how many little photos I had to work on the typeface.
- KD: On the typeface.
- CB: And all the lines, all that had to be all done by hand.
- KD: So they were giving you the copy, but you were . . .
- CB: They gave me the rough tissue layout, and then I had to basically draw all the lines, get the photos all to size. I had to make the little mechanical squares with ink lines exactly all equal, [so] that this photo goes inside this box, but remove [the] outside line when you print. Here's this—all this was inked out. And then they just dropped it out white, but everything matches in there. So these brochures were the stuff that I was doing also for the commercial work. Here's *Star Wars*. I inked this logo, the master logo, which also . . . The brochure, I assembled. Lara Marks, that was some other company. That was Columbia. And all these brochures. When they did the premiere, it was all in-house stuff.
- KD: Right.
- CB: There's a box that I did for the Reagan-Bush campaign. So there was some of these little pieces, like these little cactus with glasses and hats, and a display box. So I would work for a company that was doing this, and they wanted some detailed drawing. *Back Roads*, I inked the logo and then helped organize this the one-sheet poster. The Eagles with whatchamacallit? Scott Glenn.
- KD: Yeah. [laughter]
- CB: Warner Brothers in-house brochures.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: I did—what's that?—*Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. There [were] Chuck Norris movies, yadda yadda, and stuff like that. So this was the commercial stuff, and you could see what I do here. What I do in my commercial art is my logos. Nobody really knows that I designed a lot of titles and logos. So these are just some of the books that I have. What I just do is I just slip in all of the elements. The master one, the

finished one, which is printed out of the computer. But initially I started drawing all by hand, so I have all my hands here. This company was called Motivate. Motivate. They had clothing with the big marijuana leaf on their clothes.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: So we had "motivation" and "motivate," and it was for caps and t-shirts and things, so different sizes. Psycho Realm and Flycat, and Street Platoon, they did a CD cover for them. I do a lot of CD covers.

KD: [laughter] Well, yeah.

CB: This was one I kind of helped design. I wasn't too much involved in that one. That's Flycat. That's Italian. DJ Dex from Philadelphia. Nomatico, and that's world trance music. Luis Rodriguez, *My Name Is Not Rodriguez*. I do not know when he did the logo, but I set up the photo shoot, and I designed the whole package, using some of my artwork for the background.

KD: Now, is this your own company, or is this through the design studios?

CB: The design studios were more of the commercial things, so it's the movies and all that. All these logos and these CDs that I'm showing right here are all my individual products that people approached me individually, asked me to design a logo for them, and if I would design with their CD box. I just drew it here, and it's just representing myself and not a company or anything. I guess "Chaz Design."

KD: But you don't have to seek projects? [laughter]

CB: No. All projects come to me.

KD: Wow.

CB: Everything on the phone.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: That's right. I stopped having a business card. I didn't want to meet anymore—anybody. Like I said, I have enough people calling me on the phone with a lot of good projects. A young woman's going to come on Friday for another big graffiti world book, coffee table book. And she feels that it's strongly going into art, and she needs to talk to me about putting my work in it, but also talking about graffiti as art. So that's another project coming down the road. That's the third book project this year that I'm working on. This is another CD cover that we did in collaboration. Here is another CD. Psycho Realm, Street Platoon, and Flycat, showing my letters, how it comes out. Undisputed Truth. And from Italy. Psycho Realm. Another Flycat from Italy. Here's another Nomatico. DJ Dex. And Quinto Sol.

KD: Yeah.

CB: Another group. And I've also done Quetzal and a bunch of other ones, which—you have that list. But you can see how I do the logo. But then once it's applied—because function is the word here—how it functions. I have to design it to fit a CD cover. I have to design it for it to fit a t-shirt. This is something else. This is a Royal Elastics—letters for "The Seventh Letter" show, and their invite was these postcards. And there's mine right there. And then you just pull them out, and it's a postcard, and my bio on the back, and tag. So everybody here . . . And all these are the *T-H-E*, spelling out "The Seventh Letter."

KD: That's clever design.

CB: Application is really clever in how—how it goes.

KD: Yeah.

CB: So here's *Undocumented*, for a photography show. It also went on t-shirts. *Revolutionist* is for a book cover title that's going to be coming out.

KD: Now, this letter design that you have here, I don't know if you call them "fonts" when you're doing them?

CB: Mm-hmm. That's just my font.

KD: This is yours, yeah, because I can recognize it now.

CB: Yeah.

KD: This T with multiple—

CB: I started doing double lines and triple lines from the pinstriping influence.

KD: Oh.

- CB: So I bring a little West Coast car culture into it. That's these dual lines and things. And then Oxford lines. I'm applying it. I did the title wall for an event over the weekend where they had four hundred writers down in the LA River.
- KD: [laughter] Yeah.
- CB: I told you about [it]. It was the most incredible vision. For half a mile, both sides of the river, there was cars, and they were four abreast in the river. Maybe about a hundred cars down there, and people with lawn chairs and everything. Going up with murals up to thirty feet high, and it was just—
- KD: Is it still there?
- CB: Yes. [laughter] It's there forever.
- KD: Well, I guess I'm going [laughter] over to look at it.
- CB: You go down Figueroa—
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: And you make a left on San Fernando Road.
- KD: Okay.
- CB: Or I think it's twentieth.
- KD: Okay.
- CB: As soon as you just go just about a hundred feet, and there's a bridge. There's the river underneath there. Just park, and just look down on both sides.
- KD: Okay.
- CB: You are going to be amazed. It was the most incredible thing. We're Antimart [Anti-Market], a store up there in Sunset. So this is a commercial signage. This is what other people do and then give to me as gifts.
- CB: Postcards of *Señor Suerte*, they did some postcards. *El Ese Loco Chingaso*. And . . . oh, this was in a collaboration with another artist, Sandow Birk, and he asked me if I would do the first line of the Koran. So here it is.
- KD: Oh.
- CB: "In the name of God the compassionate, the merciful." Which is perfect for me. So he's going to be working and doing something with it. And I told him yeah, just do whatever you want. Collaborations to me are incredible. Some artists and I, we'll take a painting—a small painting—and it'll be mine, and then I pass it over to him, to another artist—let's say Mear, which I have done. Also with Gajin Fujita, which I've done. And then he'll paint on top of it, and then he'll send it back to me, and then I'll paint on top of it. And then I'll send it back to him. We'll go back and forth a few times. And these pieces are not for exhibition or anything else. It's just within our own dialogue back and forth. So I love these little private collaborations that I have going with different artists. I've done about five.
- KD: That kind of collaboration sounds to me like the sensibility comes from graffiti writing.
- CB: Yes. It's all graffiti artists, and we're just—
- KD: That culture of conversation within the graffiti art world.
- CB: You couldn't have said it better. It's the culture of conversation. We are actually just dialoguing within ourselves through visual means, and for nobody else, [no] purpose. It's not for exhibition. It's not for writing about it, or not that we were given it as an assignment or anything.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: This is just our own private dialoguing back and forth, which I feel is really important. I get a big kick out of that. But, it's just nobody knows about it, and it's not supposed to be meant for it to be anything other than just personal, quiet talk. *In the Name of God*. This is how I start and then how it ended up. Something like that.
- KD: The early drafts of . . .
- CB: The early drafts. And then *Got Green Card*? That was that print I did.
- KD: Yeah.

- CB: So here are the original letters. *Quinceñera*. My first computer taking in my letters and putting it into a computer. I didn't do it. I had Jesse Ituribe, you know, did it. Young blood computer wizards. I tell them, "Okay, can you facet it and make it into metal?"
- KD: Wait a minute—you did the hand design—you lettered this by hand?
- CB: I did this by hand. They put it in the computer, and they hard line it.
- KD: Right.
- CB: And then what they do is they give it a program that chisels it. And then we [use] multi-point lighting, and make it gold. This come with different points of light, and then with green on one side and red on the other. And then we compose it. A survey of twenty-six contemporary artists, basically that's these letters all done by hand. And then some letters, I don't have to write *all* the letters out because I can pick up letters from other parts of the words.
- KD: Right, right.
- CB: And then I assemble it. And then it comes out like this. So that looks computer, but it's all done by hand. And that's the same thing with the outline on the outside. Oh, here is the finished [product]. I gave them that. Here is the outline. We assemble it the way we want it. So that's how I did *Quinceñera*. And *Got Green Card?* Here are the color variations. I wasn't quite sure what I wanted to do, so I ended up with this one, the first one, more realistic.
- KD: Right.
- CB: Then the final kind of drawing, and then from there . . . I took that to the class, and they combined it and did the printing for me. Here is a photograph of my sculpture, and they took that as a detail, and shot a negative, and they assembled it. These are photographs from my family. Here is a bullfighter down from Tijuana, when I was a young kid at Tijuana, because my father was a photographer. So he would shoot this.
- KD: Where did he develop?
- CB: I think he had these made.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: He would have people made . . . or he had friends who had a darkroom. He didn't print them himself. I think this is . . . No, this is—it's a famous bullfighter. I forgot his name. Carlos Orozco.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: Okay. That's Carlos Orozco. And, my father says, Manolete. And I saw the one that had the hippie—with the long hair in '66. I can't remember his name. A famous bullfighter.
- KD: Wow. You've been to a lot of [laughter] famous bullfighting events.
- CB: Bullfighting was always a fun thing. Here's Fucket, a skateboard company. And here is my skateboard here. It was on the web. This is a webpage thing. And immediately, these little small companies are just two guys, and they always crash and disappear. Other skateboard designs.
- KD: [laughter] Graffiti artist-dot-comming?
- CB: Yeah. This is a page from somebody else's site, when I gave him—I worked on an event down at the Grand Central Arts Center in Fullerton. It was a Fullerton Extension, and we painted all outside in the street. And then, [the] Quinto Sol logo for their CD. Which a little kid at the event—a woman with her little four-year-old, five-year-old—and was [saying], "Quinto Sol! Quinto Sol!" Anyway, he busted me for my letter designs, and he says, "Daddy, where was the drummer in Quinto Sol?" And he recognized my letters. And I was writing something else. And they go, "Oh, yeah, *Quinceñera*." They even recognized my *Quinceñera*. Cars . . . you saw this in the CD. This is a friend of mine, Hispaño, from prison. And he put my skull inside of it.
- KD: Yeah, I see that now.
- CB: You know?
- KD: And the A is for the Avenues?
- CB: Yeah. Yeah, he's from here. This is Playboy Eddie. And then this is the stuff I drew, a commercial piece.
- KD: Okay.

- CB: A commercial piece. This was the Vans. The Vans shoe. Designing the initial logo that goes around the edge, posters—
- KD: “Syndicate.” And this is the one that has that chiseled—
- CB: Yes. And—
- KD: This is chiseled out, right? Am I getting this right?
- CB: No. In here, it looks chiseled out, but actually in the tennis shoe, it’s chiseled in.
- KD: It’s chiseled in. Yeah.
- CB: So I just had to give them the hard line and everything. They wanted poster designs. Here’s *Syndicate*. Another poster design. Here’s another poster design using—
- KD: So you did . . . This *Got Vans?* is from your—
- CB: [It] is from their trademark. This is their logo, “Got Vans?”
- KD: Right. But you’ve combined two images of your own work here.
- CB: Yes.
- KD: Right.
- CB: It’s a poster. “Los Angeles,” and then I tried to make it like this West Coast tribal thing. And then with the letter S for “Syndicate.”
- KD: Right. And the back is the . . .
- CB: It’s the *Por Dios y Oro* statue. And that comes from the *Got Green Card?* print. And so these were other poster designs. I used my Quetzalcoatl design, then I did pinstripping—
- KD: I see it now.
- CB: For a bit, like hot rod.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: And then what I did is I cut it in half, and then I took that half and flopped it over on this side, and that became my shoe design. Here, I’ll show you. Here’s *Syndicate*, here’s the original letters. And then put into the computer. And then here’s *Got Vans?* Here’s designing the *Syndicate*, and how I massage them.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: These are original drawings. I wanted descenders to come down, and I also designed it if it was all straight across, like right across here. Of course, if it’s on a band, then I don’t have any space at all. The letters are all the same cap size. Other designs for t-shirts, of just flopping the thing backwards and putting just a ghost image.
- KD: Okay.
- CB: Yeah, here is my Quetzalcoatl design that I’ve done. And here was the plank for the shoe, and that’s what I had to go with. And you could see how I split it, and I had two different toe versions, and then I had the side over here like a flame. And somehow it came out you could see *V-A-N-S*. That just came out by itself.
- KD: Really?
- CB: Yes, it [*laughter*] did.
- KD: That’s genius.
- CB: And it scared me. And when I showed the Vans people, they all got goose bumps at the meeting. And they thought I was really being clever. It just came by itself. And there’s other applications for the “Syndicate” bleeding off, being larger.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- CB: “Con safos” on the tongue. Here is a different version. “Syndicate” on it, like that. This is what I do: I give them a whole campaign: “Syndicate,” like, embroidered for the high-tops, the inside pads. “Syndicate,” the skull. “Con safos”—they picked that one.
- KD: How long did a project like this take?
- CB: Two weeks. I’m given a deadline.
- KD: Right.

- CB: And it was, like, the two weeks before Christmas. And then by the time they finished and all, that was one year later when the Vans shoe came out, for the party—and also getting paid. [*laughter*] I had to wait a year to get—
- KD: You had to wait a year to get paid?
- CB: Oh, yeah. Because they—
- KD: Is it a decent wage?
- CB: No. No, it's not. I'm making a quarter an hour. What I do is I hit them up. [*inaudible*] with fifty pairs of shoes.
- KD: Okay.
- CB: And then with the party, with the invites, then I [can] promote. And I could sell a couple of posters there at the show, all right.
- KD: Right.
- CB: So that's why I nickel and dime them. But since it's a small edition, and they're trying to go for the "cool" factor—that they just want artists to design some shoes, and they're not going to make any money off of it. It's just trying to show that their company is dealing with cool individual artists, and they promote that. So they say, "Well, we don't have too much money for the artist, but, we want you to be part of the Vans family." That's what I always get.
- KD: [*laughter*] Yeah, the family motif.
- CB: Right, right, right.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: "Do you really want to be working for us?"
- KD: Yeah, the family.
- CB: Yeah. That's a bunch of BS.
- KD: And the hat with the same—
- CB: They asked me if I could do a little thing like a, a keychain, a giveaway—something with the shoe for promotion. And I said, "Well, let's do a hat." And they went with the hat design, and that's the initial hat presentation I gave them. And that's just a little black Xerox that I just cut out and glued together. That just for the band—
- KD: The mockup?
- CB: For the white letter—the mockup. And then the "Chaz" logo. Which I just realized I need that for something else. So that was a presentation I did in two weeks. This is what I gave them with a burnt CD of everything.
- KD: Oh, okay.
- CB: And then the same thing with—oh!
- KD: This says your round the world trip.
- CB: Yeah. I brought out those watercolors.
- KD: The watercolors.
- CB: This was a Broke, t-shirt for Italy, t-shirt company. And these are the original drawings here.
- KD: So you're getting jobs over the world?
- CB: All over the world. They call me up. Or it's friends of friends. An Italian comes who have friends who are the t-shirt people, who are graffiti guys, who their friends are making a new magazine or something. I meet Stussy up here in San Francisco, and they're Japanese guys. When they're in LA, they bring some Japanese designers from Japan, to my home just to meet. Nexus 7 I'm going to meet in Tokyo, and they're clothing design. Also Taps, Taps, a Japanese design group that are just really hot right now. And then the Z-Boys, Wes—that he did a shoe design—him and I are going to collaborate on a skateboard, on a deck. Just meeting people. Here are the original . . . What they took my drawings and this was the t-shirts that they did. They just took the initial letters, and then blew them up. Then on the back, they put the whole logo, which I thought was real cool. Here's for Ja Rule, the rapper.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: And all that. They called me from New York, cold. They just needed some really quick things and all that. I said, "No, my 'quick' is the finished piece."

KD: [laughter] Right.

CB: And all that. So we went back and forth. And then they never used it. Now, I got paid I think fifteen hundred dollars, and this is for three days' work. And they didn't use it. People that don't know what they want. Conart, a clothing company. So this was a logo I did about twelve years ago. Which was the style I was doing then. La-La Land. That was going to be a magazine title cover.

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: Here's the Luis Rodriguez layouts, but you could see exactly what other covers . . . Here was the final.

KD: Right.

CB: But these were the others—

KD: The other mockups?

CB: Other mockups. I liked this one. But then his fourteen-year old kid liked this one.

KD: His face?

CB: Yeah. And I said, "Yeah, that should go because we're trying to sell Luis Rodriguez." We could go exotic with my work, but his face is better. And then in doing the retouching—

KD: *Por Dios y Oro* is the other background that you're using?

CB: Is the other background, mm-hmm. And then *Playboy Eddie's Lament* is used on the back.

KD: Yeah, I see it.

CB: Yeah. And then Luis, I pumped up his hair and made his pompadour bigger. So—to make the graphics fit in pretty well. And here is some more backs, different designs for the backs. And here's the logo for Rodriguez. Oh! Kell Muñoz, they asked me to do a logo for their company, [an] architectural company in San Antonio, Texas.

KD: Yeah.

CB: And they wanted that Chicano feel. And this is the first times I'm working with the computer. So you could see I was trying to see on an "architect." This would be painted, this would be inscribed in the marble, the rock wall. And this would be cast metal that would be dimensional. I really tried to push this one.

KD: So "Kell" is painted, "Muñoz" is cast metal, "Architects" is the—

CB: It's chiseled in. Right, in marble.

KD: That's nice.

CB: And I thought it would be architecturally really cool. And then what he really kind of liked this kind of big brushstroke—"KM Architects." And then I said, "Well, we can make that into chrome." So we're pulling—squeezing—pushing buttons on a computer. I didn't know. But I came up with this presentation. And then here is some more just plain letters for your letterhead and all that. The one that they really liked was this one. They didn't care for the other ones, the metal ones. They just liked the straight letter.

KD: Didn't they want it to look like graffiti writing?

CB: No. They just felt that [it] stood for their company. A logo ID—

[break in audio]

KD: We're continuing on October 2. We're looking at this commercial work.

CB: My logo work for Kell Muñoz Architects in San Antonio. And so you can see, I gave them different varieties.

KD: Yeah.

CB: Here are the pages, the working pages. You can see how I actually really just do it all by hand. And then, see, there's that *K*, and then *I*.

KD: So you scan that? This is the stuff you said was in the computer. So you scanned it in the computer, and then modify it?

CB: And then [I] modify it. Here is my "Muñoz" that I turned into metal. That's the master.

- KD: What did you—what application are you using to . . .
- CB: I faked it. I have no idea. It's just late at night just—just messing with it. When I first—
- KD: Are you in Photoshop?
- CB: Yes, in Photoshop, yes. In Photoshop, I can do that. But how I did it I have no idea, because I can't reproduce it. They had a project in San Antonio about seven years ago where they renovated the sports arena there in San Antonio. And they told me they went and started studying letters, and my name kept on popping up. And they were influenced, and they designed this carpeting—
- KD: This is the rug! I know it! *[laughter]*
- CB: This is the rug. And they used my letter styles with cattle branding.
- KD: That's right!
- CB: And combined the two, and they had a designer combine it. So my letter styles are on acres of this carpeting in San Antonio.
- KD: Oh, I've seen it. *[laughter]*
- CB: You have?
- KD: I went to see it.
- CB: You're the only one who has seen that. Here is Kell Muñoz.
- KD: I couldn't miss that building. That was a beautiful building.
- CB: Okay. This is some of the Royal Elastics. This is the current stuff I'm doing with the Royal Elastics logo. That's going to be a t-shirt in Tokyo. You can see how the original work got started. These are my letters. I put—
- KD: You've got a cleaner line on this—on this lettering.
- CB: Oh, yes. Because I put it in the computer. You could tell how much cleaner—I cleaned out and massaged—the computer makes—I make all the letters, [all] the cap heights all even [and] spacing in-between them. And I cleaned out all the negative areas and make everything balance. Then I get a rhythm and a rhyme through it, and then it becomes even a better logo. Then I'll start stretching letters and overlapping them, and either hanging or clipping or weaving to make the final design.
- KD: You've just given me all the technical terms that I—I don't—yeah. *[laughter]*
- CB: I just made them up. And the book that they're going to make over there for me this is a presentation of the cover.
- KD: That's from *We the People*.
- CB: In Tokyo. Yeah, *We the People* will be a wrap-around with a flap. They didn't have time to do that. So we're going to make it into—we are going to take the t-shirt design and use this for the front of the cover of the magazine, *Graffiti Since 1969*. And then the back is going to be my *Mandala*.
- KD: Oh.
- CB: So this is the back of the magazine cover.
- KD: Nice.
- CB: And this is the one I'm working on. Sin Fronteras, a graffiti crew in Mexico City. I'm doing their logo right now.
- KD: Yeah. The stuff that you do with metallic, it's hard to photograph that. I'm not sure if I—
- CB: It looks yellow.
- KD: Yeah. I'm not sure if I've seen a photograph that represents it well so I'm eager to see them.
- CB: No. The—even the photographs—
- KD: The real work.
- CB: That's all right. That's the watercolors I did traveling around the world.
- KD: I'm glad you at least have them in a beautiful portfolio. *[laughter]* That you don't want to show them, that you don't talk about them that way, but at least you're preserving them well.
- CB: Yeah. Like I said—here, the moon is upside-down, the Southern Cross. This is in the Cook Islands. I found a cricket, and I had him in a jar, and I drew him. And then I didn't know what to do, and then I went outside

and I found an iris plant. And then I drew the iris underneath it, and made it into a night scene. So I started with the cricket first.

KD: I was imagining much, much more bright watercolors.

CB: No.

KD: This is fascinating.

CB: These are illustrations. These are really movie illustrations because they're opaque. They're not transparent, as like, watercolor is. This was in American Samoa. And then so it's in—like I said, there was these red birds, and I sat down and started painting the island. Also bats, and these large type of seagulls, type of albatross form.

KD: Right.

CB: So I was adding kind of that as a language of where I was. And then I would just fake the branch for the style. And then I'm missing one from my parents. I need to get Xeroxes of that. And then this is a glacier in New Zealand, all the way down to the ocean.

KD: Yeah.

CB: So we had climbed up the glacier, and it got dark on us. And it was just the blue glow of the glacier against the night sky.

KD: Very nice.

CB: Mount Cook, the back side of it. This was a seashell out of New Zealand that I tried to copy as realistic as I could.

KD: Wow, that is your realism. Yeah.

CB: And then this was that plane crashed. This is in Guadalcanal, with the water god walking across, the plane across here. And . . .

KD: Do you—you've got another thing there. Is—you—like you were working with a transparency. Is this technique from your advertising?

CB: Yeah. It's just a tissue paper. And then I have a layout because I was going to put the Japanese flag, and American flag, and the new Solomon Island flag all in a design across it as a language band across, as a subhead across there. But keep the remembrance of the war in black and white, in the background. So that was just the layout. Yeah, this is an advertising technique. Frangipani, the flower of the Pacific. And this is in Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, which I took the fish design from their money. And this is where I'm just trying to make it as realistic as possible.

KD: That's watercolor and what else?

CB: Watercolor, pencil, and a charcoal pastel. Something like that. Papua New Guinea, the sorrow, a mudman dance with a cassowary bird, these real mean birds. And the woman would have seashells, and then the men would have bones in their nose. So that was like a man and woman thing in the dance. And I saw the mudheads, and then, I painted the bodies out of my head. And then the cassowary, I had seen a bunch, and then I saw it on a postcard. So I took the bird from the drawing from the photograph, from the postcard. And then in Bali this is Rangda, the seven-foot evil woman. And here she is trying to block out beauty, which is a flower vase that was in our hotel room there, which I painted, and then I had the—I saw Rangda the night before. And I saw her on a postcard, but I just got the elements that I needed from the face and put her—and designed this, and then put a flower in her hair. And then trying to block it out so I just twisted my own hand around and painted my own hand.

KD: Wonderful composition.

CB: Yeah, yeah. It works—

KD: Really nice.

CB: Teal nice. And then this was—I spent one day penciling this out: a door, a Balinese door. Then one day water coloring it. And this is nothing but values, dark to light, light to dark, to dark to darker, to light, to dark. It's really hard to control. I just painted exactly what I saw, all these value changes. So it's a beautiful antique Balinese door. That was the door to the bathroom. A post that I was working on outside, holding

up all the patio. It was all made up of stone. A little daredevil. Nepal, some of the mountains. They started turning into crystal shapes.

KD: That's beautiful.

CB: These are the foothills. This is up to about fifteen thousand feet, and then up to—

KD: This one's got more opaque style, or—

CB: Yeah. It's a watercolor, yeah, but up here was the pencil.

KD: Oil?

CB: Yeah.

KD: With pastel?

CB: Yeah. Not oil, but the powder pastels.

KD: Oh, okay.

CB: You know?

KD: Yeah.

CB: Charcoal pencils and stuff like that. The mountain shapes. The lake there at Pokhara. I have a really beautiful one of this with the snow, with the wind blowing off the mountains of Machapuchare. And this is just a rough painting one of their big initials. This is in Greece, when it was snowing, but there was all this beauty, architecture. Remember I told you that M. C. Escher thing—

KD: Mm-hmm.

CB: That I tried to get? And the lights are on in just this one room, and it was freezing outside. I copied this. I bought this [*inaudible*] for my house. Then I faked the rest of it. Or I just added. I didn't fake it.

KD: Wonderful technique.

CB: And then here is the Minoans, about the monkeys. [It] was a mural. And the dolphins was another mosaic, and it was all in the ruins there. And it was snowing in the triad, and then the Minoan [have] a bull cult. And then there would be pictures of them. The boys would be totally naked except for a sash, and then with their heads shaven except for huge locks of hair in clumps on top of their head. And then I think that's that of the ones I have. The best ones I gave as gifts for my parents. And then you see the mini-god that I'm working on.

KD: The one you're working on now.

CB: Mm-hmm. Okay. We can cut there.

KD: Thank you.

CB: This is a Serichrome print, and it's the same size of the painting. This print, just a little bit darker than the original, but this is for my brother David, *The Golden Boy*. And then—is a survivor, which I explained on the tape. So I just wanted to show you this full size. When people said I couldn't paint, that's when I did this figure drawing.

KD: [*laughter*] That's amazing.

CB: And then, so—

KD: And what's this—what is this reproduction for?

CB: Is my collector wanted to exhibit his painting, but he didn't want to exhibit the original one. So he paid about two thousand dollars for this print. Because a Serichrome is—they actually lay in the different colors at different—not at the same time.

KD: Yeah.

CB: It's almost a printing technique.

KD: Yeah.

CB: So that way, I could exhibit. He gave me that as a free copy.

KD: Oh, I see. So you don't have to bother the collector for when it travels for a show?

CB: When it travels for a show and all that. And he said I could sell it or do what I want, because he was real picky. He didn't want his stuff being shown. Recently, the *Mandala* . . . He lives on Park Avenue in New York. The *Mandala*, to get it into his house, he had to disassemble it because it wouldn't fit [through] the

door. When it got sent to Spain, he had to get a museum person come disassemble the painting, reassemble it, ship it, exhibit it in Madrid. It came back to New York, and then they had to take it apart again just to get it through the door into his living room.

KD: So that was the last time he did the lending?

CB: He has issues with me about that.

KD: Tell him not to buy such a big work. *[laughter]*

CB: Here—here is—

KD: Oh, I don't want it to crease.

CB: A half-size of the *Mandala*.

KD: Oh, yeah.

CB: So you could start seeing that the—

KD: Wait, this is the half-size?

CB: Oh, yes. This is seven feet high. So this is about four and a half. This is the half size. Because the painting is twice as big. Or four times as big. So you got to see the detailing. The pinstriping up there on top—I explained to you exactly what all these symbols represent.

KD: No, it's really nice to see at least. It's impressive.

CB: Well, that's what I'm trying [to do]. I'm trying to impress you by showing—

KD: *[laughter]* I think you impress anybody, not just me.

CB: Well, just, these paintings represent something, and then the commercial art represents something else, and I need to show you exactly the divisions, but all the connections.

KD: The low—the overlay, yeah. No, that's very clear. That's very clear. No, I appreciate the chance to—oh, wow! What do you call that fabric?

CB: It's a glitter—

KD: That's not Mylar.

CB: I just called it "glitter paper." It's a plastic, and they used it for stickers and all of that.

KD: Yeah.

CB: I just went ahead and just blew it up, and just made it all cha-cha Hollywood.

KD: So excellent execution.

CB: Isn't that—

KD: Yeah. No, it goes so well.

CB: And it's the—it's the blue, the red one.

KD: You did these in '99?

CB: In '99.

KD: What house did you do this at?

CB: Richard Duardo's.

KD: Yeah.

CB: A house of Richard Duardo's.

KD: Yeah.

CB: It should have a little poodle stamped on it. And here's the red version, which was really hot. And my last piece is this one here. The dragon.

KD: Oh! This is *Chino Latino*?

CB: This is *Chino Latino*, and this is the printed version because Cheech Marin has the original painting.

KD: Right.

CB: Which is done in—basically in a lot of black and white more like tattoos. Then I took that and broke it all down into two different kinds of prints: there's the red version and a blue version. The blue and white like the ceramics, like in Japanese ceramics. Soft blues and everything.

KD: How many colors are in this?

CB: This is probably about twelve, or something.

- KD: I love the purple underneath.
- CB: Yeah.
- KD: It comes out. And the green and . . . Wow.
- CB: And you could see here is the word "Mear" right across here.
- KD: Yes.
- CB: *M-E-A-R*. "Vile." You could see "Relic" in the center.
- KD: It's amazing how the different media actually enlivened it a different way. I really like it.
- CB: Yeah. And then you could see the detailing adds a lot. And then, when I did this, I kind of pushed the letters. I printed the fluorescent orange underneath first. And then the darker brown, I kicked it over a little bit, so leave a little fluorescent orange drop shadow.
- KD: Yeah. I see that.
- CB: Which gave it a little bit punch. It makes the eye kind of unfocus, and it makes it a little—like a little glare, orange glare line.
- KD: You're right. It picks up the technique from the painting.
- CB: Yeah. So that's done on purpose. And then I get my orange lines on the inside, and it starts looking realistic. And then the dragon is very graphic, except for its arms coming out. So it's a combination of chiseled letters to make it look real, flat graphic two-dimensional coming up to back the three-dimensional. And just having fun with the graphics of it.
- KD: Do you consider these part of a series, then? I mean, they start out as a single painting, but do you think of them—when you start working them in different media, do you think of it as a series?
- CB: It's [up] to . . . You want to call it a series, that's what it would be. Because I'll do the skull as an original drawing, and then [if] I still like it after, I'll add color and make it a print. And then maybe I'll come to a super close-up—super close-up detailed—and put it on glitter paper just to even magnify the dramatic graphic part of it. So it's sort of like . . . It's a process. Sometimes only if I think it needs it. But I'm not just going to do, "Well, I've got a good design. Let's do it in blues and reds and just different sizes."
- KD: No, I didn't—yeah, I don't see that.
- CB: No, it's for every application. I felt the glitter needed a little bit more bang, in your face detail to bring up the skull. And then I'd have the same image on here for the Self Help Graphics one. See, this is in cha-cha colors.
- KD: [laughter] Cha-cha colors?
- CB: With the whole image.
- KD: In '97?
- CB: In '97.
- KD: *LA Mix*.
- CB: Right.
- KD: Yeah.
- CB: You know?
- KD: Okay.
- CB: And you see how I applied it over there. But I guess if you're going to call it a series, this is a series. But I don't create it as a series.
- KD: There's got to be another word for that. There's got to be another word for something—
- CB: I—it's just dialect.
- KD: Yeah, yeah.
- CB: Another dialect. Another—you know? Because I really tried to redevelop them into—that's a unique, individual piece that works for itself.
- KD: Yes.
- CB: And this one works for itself, works by itself. So I'll keep the ideas coherently unique and stuff. Karen, I think besides my sculptures and all that stuff, which we don't need to get into, I think . . .

KD: Maybe we'll have to just do a follow-up when we're done—

CB: Yeah.

KD: With the—

CB: Well, I think you're—probably have enough, I think.

KD: Okay.

CB: I'm thinking right now.

KD: All right.

CB: All right?

KD: Thank you so much.

CB: All right. Good.



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