



**Artists Documentation Program
Video Interview Transcript**

**GEORGE HERMS
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**Interviewed by:
Brad Epley, Chief Conservator, Menil Collection and Kari Dodson, Objects Conservator,
Menil Collection**

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About the Artists Documentation Program

Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, artists have experimented with an unprecedented range of new materials and technologies. The conceptual concerns underlying much of contemporary art render its conservation more complex than simply arresting physical change. As such, the artist's voice is essential to future conservation and presentation of his or her work.

In 1990, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation awarded a grant to the Menil Collection for Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, then Chief Conservator, to establish the Artists Documentation Program (ADP). Since that time, the ADP has recorded artists speaking candidly with conservators in front of their works. These engaging and informative interviews capture artists' attitudes toward the aging of their art and those aspects of its preservation that are of paramount importance to them.

The ADP has recorded interviews with such important artists as Frank Stella, Jasper Johns, and Cy Twombly. Originally designed for use by conservators and scholars at the Menil, the ADP has begun to appeal to a broader audience outside the Menil, and the collection has grown to include interviews from two partner institutions: the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, Harvard Art Museums. In 2009, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation awarded a grant to the Menil Collection to establish the ADP Archive, formalizing the multi-institutional partnership and making ADP interviews more widely available to researchers.

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[Speakers (in order of appearance): Brad Epley, Menil Collection; George Herms, Artist; Kari Dodson, Menil Collection]

[BEGIN INTERVIEW]

[00:00:00]

Brad Epley: Today is Friday, February 10th. We are here at the Menil Collection in Houston, Texas with George Herms on the occasion of his exhibition or his -- the group exhibition *Holy Barbarians*. My name is Brad Epley. I'm the chief conservator at the Menil Collection. And joining us also is Kari Dodson, objects conservator at the Menil. And this interview is part of the Artists Documentation Program. George, thank you very much for joining us today.

George Herms: My pleasure.

Brad Epley: And what a great opportunity hopefully for you to revisit some of these pieces, and also for us to revisit this kind of conversation with you that you had with Carol Mancusi-Ungaro several years ago.

George Herms: Right, yeah. So it's a pleasure to be able to remember what I remember today. And give it to you. I don't believe in being secretive. I mean there are some things the photographer Edmund Teske, he had like secret processes, he didn't want you to know how he solarized prints. Early on people didn't know. But I've always thought I have no secrets, and I'm very lucky to be able to just find found objects and make sculptures out of them. Not all that complicated.

Brad Epley: Well, maybe we'll start with this one, it's called *Painters Shrine*, it's from 1961. And I guess -- do you happen to remember anything about its exhibition history or --

George Herms: It would have been in the Batman Gallery exhibition in 1961, May, at Batman Gallery in San Francisco. There were in that exhibition hero collages, *Baudelaire*, a jazz trumpet player named *Cowboy*. And this is kind of along those lines. It's not for a specific person, but for painters in general. If I had to get specific, I would say probably Arthur Richer at this time was the closest. And John Altoon, those would be. And John Altoon is in this group show. Those were the painters that I was saluting. And the shrine is I think one of the through lines in the assemblage history before Bill Seitz comes along and does *The Art of Assemblage*. I was in Mexico City in 1955, 4, and

every taxicab driver, every bus driver had a little shrine. And then thinking back, I'm not an artist at that time, but I think those influenced my way of working with found objects is to make shrines. And I think it's native to all people, beachcombing. See, I'm an urban beachcomber is one description. And at this time I'm living in Larkspur next to Corte Madera Creek. And Corte Madera Creek goes out past San Quentin into the San Francisco Bay and out the Golden Gate. So this wood that forms the main shrine, this has all been in Corte Madera Creek floating back and forth as the tides went in. And I would find it and pull it. And the paintbrush. Now am I allowed to touch my own work at this moment?

Brad Epley: Yes.

George Herms: Thank you. Because I don't remember what's on the other side, and I would like to tell you. You can see it, right? You can see it better than I can. So there's a tube of paint and a paintbrush. So these are very straightforward associations.

Brad Epley: Would that have been your paint or?

George Herms: Yeah, I did some painting at that time. I don't remember using this particular tube. But inside there's a wonderful Madonna and child. Newspaper clipping. And a little star, which is cut out of a patch that used to be in the military. This would be the air force patch. I cut the star out. One nail. This was my thrill at the time. One nail. One swing of the hammer. Bam, you know, put some -- and then you're done. That was the goal. I didn't make it all that often. But Eric Hammerscoffer was one of my pseudonyms with Paul Mistrie we'll get to. And so I'm looking at what it says here. Sixth day, the afternoon, many autographs of Michael --

Brad Epley: Angelo.

George Herms: Must have been Michael Angelo. His letters are exhibited. It's on some -- this is where the conservators are so helpful, figuring out what is that material, and how do we keep it. This is the challenge. On this side again it's like three washers. And they're made into the three circles. And this lovely little -- I think it's like a button. That is painted. It's made out of paint. This is made out of paint itself. And I think we all have some kind of DNA of what is a shrine, and this really qualifies. I mean it's got a lot of -- to me -- classic geometrical shapes. I did an altar once for one of the poets in *Semina*. And she wanted to put all her little -- she had like Buddhist -- objects from different religions. She commissioned me to make this that they would all sit

on. And she just said all she knew about altars, that they were always symmetrical. So I proposed to her that well, how about the symmetry of seven, can we go with that. So the challenge for me is always -- I'm going to sneeze. No, I'm kidding. I just want to look at the bottom.

Brad Epley: Not much on there.

George Herms: No. So the thing with the found objects. Duchamp laid it out very clearly. He called them ready-mades. There's ready-mades, and then there are ready-mades assisted. And I've used that category. So this base is just a found object, not assisted. None of these things. Well, that little star was cut out. So I think the assemblage movement of working with found objects in a way takes off the burden of the ego, because I didn't make these things. The individual objects were created by someone else. I find them. And then again I think this is Duchamp who took the word painting, and he changed A to O, and he made it pointing, that the artist's job is to point out that which is beautiful. And I think eventually friends of mine, like Artie Richer and Altoon, people wanted me to learn how to draw and paint. And so I did go as far as I could in those areas. But the urban beachcombing. All kids pick up stuff. It's seashells. To make a little shrine. I taught my boys when we'd -- they would always collect the things from the beach and put them together. And I'd say, "OK, make a little shrine of it, and then walk away." See, this thing which is so dominant today drives me nuts. Got to have things, I got to have things. And the spirit, that's a shrine. If anybody tells you they're working on my catalogue raisonné then just laugh. Because there are shrines all over the woods of California, Sierra Nevadas, Mexico, Paris, everywhere, little shrines are made for that moment of objects that are magnetically attracted to that moment and that space. So in terms of objects, does any of this bring up questions?

Kari Dodson: Well, in the sense that your act as an artist was to assemble these individual pieces and put them together, what importance do you lay on the originality of the pieces? So say if one of them was to become damaged and we were to make a creative effort to replicate that piece to unify, reunify the appearance, how would you feel about that?

George Herms: Well, the objects that are found have already had a life. And I mean this as conservators, you're faced with a guy who -- everything has its life span from 0 to 100, minutes, weeks, years. And the artist comes walking along on day 42 of this 100-day thing, says, "Wow, fantastic, I love it." And so then I make my art and you're then in charge of dealing with Mother Nature, who says, "OK, that's great on day 42, but it's on down." And so it's a tough call. The

leaves fall off of trees. Something came off of one of my pieces, and I mentioned that to a really good collector, the Marmors in Los Angeles. That something fell off of something of mine that they had. And I said, "Well, leaves fall off of trees." And Katherine Marmor says, "But George, not a work of art." So there is this thing, that we think art is never ever to change. And we have a lot of knowledge about how the universe started and where it's going, but my use of a certain palette which -- this one, with the *Shrine to Painters* you get some color. But almost entirely you will have weathered wood, steel that has rusted, paper that has yellowed, all showing the effects of time. So time becomes one of my elements that I work with. And of course that weathering thing is not something that one can fake. I'm doing currently 2017 in my backyard sheets of steel mesh, which I cut a shape out of, and then I crimp so that the edges don't cut me. And then the shape of a big leaf rusts, and then I have a big rusty leaf. So it's too shiny for my taste in the beginning. But then it does become fitting my palette.

Brad Epley: As you've seen pieces in exhibitions or even maybe things that you own or things your friends own and you've seen them pass through time, are there any that jump out at you as maybe having aged or gone past some point where you are less happy with them or?

George Herms: Well, the thing is I think -- just guessing -- that when I started looking at art, and I would go and see all these paintings where the varnish had gone dark, and so I actually picked a palette that is from those old paintings and the discoloration. So I start out there. That's my brainchild. And I think that I've not seen -- I got an addition once on a piece called Secret Archives, one of those pigeonhole things, has a toaster in it. And it was on view at the Oakland Museum. And somebody slipped their wallet into one of the cubbyholes. And of course there's nothing in the wallet. Aw. So I've had adding, but I've never had any subtraction. And I can't think offhand of anything that I was disappointed. I notice that all things seem to darken with age. And of course with a painting you just remove the glazing, get down to where it's clear, and reglaze it. It's very hard. When casting resin came about I thought oh, this is cool. But what happens when you put casting resin -- it's clear, like a varnish. When you put it across something that is rusted or weathered, the color that I'm after is based on light that is bouncing off of the (inaudible) makes rust glow. And when you fill it in with casting resin you don't have that bounce. The light stops at the surface. That was one attempt to kind of -- because the fact that things were disintegrating, I was aware of that always. And I was never opposed to finding a way to halt entropy, but to enjoy it. So I think as I went from working with found objects, which is still my main shtick, into painting and drawing and photography and lithography, I had to take on

everything as an autodidact, that's my -- I have to learn how to do all these things that have been quote artists, has to do with art, they got to deal with me, and vice versa. Yeah. So I've been very lucky in that most things, I would say when I taught painting, because I eventually, never having gone to art school, became a teacher. I think this says something about our art schools, I don't know. But one of the assignments would be to take a sheet of newsprint and put it up in the window and cover it all over except for one square. And have the sun hit it. And then next week you open another square. Until finally at the end of the semester you have this beautiful piece of paper that is gradations of value. All the values come out. So I've been lucky in that -- other than that -- that newsprint does yellow -- nothing has grabbed me as I saw it and I said, "Oh, that's not the way I made it." I'm not the way I was when I made it. I have a big book called *The River Book*, which -- I don't know. I have to get one of them here. But it covers photographically all the last 70 or 60 years. And as I flip through it it's wonderful because I have no ego trip going. These things, I didn't make them. You know what I mean, these things are found. So what do you say "I'm the best founder in the world", man. But I would flip through and look at these things, 1960, 1961, and I would say to people, "I was there when this was made, man. Hey, I was there when this was made. I'm a lucky dog, I was there." It goes back to a -- Pee Wee Marquette at Birdland in New York City. He was a midget and he said, "Tonight we're recording. And so when you clap for these artists, your hands are going to go on the recording. And somewhere in the future you will be there and you can say to people, 'I was there when that music was made.'" So I use that all the time. I'm very lucky. I get up every day and make art. And I have friends like you in the conservator business that take care, I mean that know what the problems with -- they're all material things, the spirit is the same.

Brad Epley: Should we talk about the *Wrench* a little bit too?

George Herms: Certainly. Yeah. Now the *Wrench* is really a Walter Hopps, because he did a show in '61 in Pomona. I believe it was called the *Object Makers*. Prior to Bill Seitz doing *The Art of Assemblage*. And he saw the *Wrench*. He used to visit me, and he wanted to exhibit it as a found object. But it was not signed, and to me the signature was not important, because it's such a beautiful object. And it says on here, "'Go fuck me,' Paul Mistris." And so Paul Mistris was one of the pseudonyms. I had a show once called *Pseudonymphia*. It was like six names that I've exhibited under. And Paul Mistris was one of them. The origin of Paul Mistris, there's another piece that he signed, I forgot about that, but in my grandfather's dictionary, I got the big dictionary when he passed away, and his xylophone, and at the top of the big

dictionary there's usually a word, the first word and the last word on those two pages. And on this one was the word palmistry, in a variant spelling. And I said, "Hmm. That's Paul Mistrick." So that became a name that I worked under. And I think that *Object Makers* show was the beginning of -- about at the same time I think Bill Seitz was going around the country and Europe too, but mostly America, and came to visit me, and selected the piece that went into that show. And there was a catalog for *The Art of Assemblage* which I never read for 20 years, I just looked at the pictures. You know that story. And then this one time I had a studio next to a body shop. And there was this metal door in a brick building with no windows, and the sun set opposite the door, and so in the afternoon, I just described an oven to you, and it would just get unbearable. So I would drive from Orange, 20 minutes, half hour, to Laguna Beach, and go to the beach. And I took Bill Seitz's essay in *The Art of Assemblage* and I handwrote a copy of it. And if I had known -- it took me 20 years. It would have saved me so much grief, because he laid out the pedigree of found objects, Duchamp, and going back, starting off with "The Liberation of Words" and "The Liberation of Objects," then "The Collage Environment." And so I think he was the best curator that I ever was friends with, and I celebrated him on the twentieth anniversary of *The Art of Assemblage* and called his widow to get an 8-by-10 glossy of him to make a shrine for Bill Seitz. And Irma said, "Oh yes, George, I'm looking at your piece now." And I'd forgotten that he had bought -- not only did he put a piece of mine in the show but he also bought one of my works. And Walter Hopps, Bill Seitz, and the one that started the Modern, Alfred Barr, these are the three I think of the twentieth century, or twenty-first, I don't know, but of the twentieth century I'd put them as the tops. And they were all in one room one night. These are the kind of stories that Walter and I would talk about when we were supposed to be talking about an exhibition we were doing. And they were putting together *The Art of Assemblage* show and Walter was helping Bill Seitz. And he realized he did not have a Jasper Johns. And they realized Alfred Barr had an assemblage by Jasper Johns. So they went over to Alfred Barr's apartment in New York and there they were, the three greatest things, picking out a piece for a show. So I would say that Walter's curating of my work is a major reason why I'm here at this moment, was that he saw, as whacked out as I was. See, he was always very ahem, you know, doing this like this. So when he would come visit me -- I'm living in a place. No electricity, we had spring water coming. This is in the Malibu mountains. And I would immediately make Walter take his shoes off and plant him in some mud to try and ground him. He just had so much electricity going through him. But that electricity helped bring something like this that he would see. He had the eye and he would spot things and he would put them in his pocket. He was a good eye and a mind. The combination, we don't

always get them both. So I really associate this with Walter. Now do you want to look at the other side of it?

Kari Dodson: Can I lift that for you? It's got a label on the back that maybe has something to do with --

George Herms: Yeah, I don't remember this at all.

Kari Dodson: Let me spin this around and set it back down. Let's see.

Brad Epley: We were also going to ask if you could weigh in on if it's -- there's a front and a back to this thing.

George Herms: OK.

Kari Dodson: It does have a label on the back.

George Herms: This says, "Remarks by Walter Hopps." Where that came from I have no idea. I have no memory of this. But it's perfect because in a way this is a remark, that he would take something like this and say, "Work of art." And you couldn't argue with him. But see, this whole range. This one I'm doing in my backyard now in Irvine with that mesh that is all silver and shiny. And then I spritz on it and it starts getting into this whole color range. Which at one point I saw over at Peggy Guggenheim's in Venice. All the Braque and Picasso. Those cubist collages. They had the same color range. I had a great feeling. The tans. And so again we're back to -- these are the colors of a lot of the old masters' paintings that I could see in museums. This was the color range.

Kari Dodson: So would you consider the face that we're looking at now a front or a back? Or is there necessarily a front or back to this piece?

George Herms: I don't remember this. And the other side, go fuck me, is just like an adolescent thing with that. But the Paul Mistris is important. So I think that it would be nice if you could tip it up on its side. If it could be exhibited on its side. I thought about that when Caroline showed it to me. She found -- we talked about how could you see both sides. What's put on the surface is really secondary to the sculpture. I mean it's a sculpture, very pure. It's like one of the surrealists. Something geometrical. I forget. Somebody did something and they said it was a geometrical version of something.

- Kari Dodson: So the shape. And then also the age-induced patina. And then finally the inscription and the label in terms of their importance for the meaning of the artwork.
- George Herms: Yeah. You'd think I would remember doing this. Because you try to glue piece of paper to rust? It won't take. You know what I mean? Ordinarily.
- Brad Epley: You did a good job, it's still holding steady.
- Kari Dodson: Quite stable.
- George Herms: I mean the life span of glue. Walter Hopps said the great boon to my type of artist was the invention of white glue during World War II. And that opened up a whole -- now this polyurethane -- whole -- the chemistry of permanence. And a lot of what I worked on then, more than in later years, was impermanence. It was a shrine. Well, there comes something along called installation, where it seemed to me you did not need to glue or fix. You just had module components. You put them all in a box and took them and then you laid them out. And there's your show. So installation art is I think a child of assemblage. It'll be gone maybe.
- Brad Epley: There's -- sorry. Go ahead.
- George Herms: No, go ahead.
- Brad Epley: I was going to say there's one more behind you that unfortunately we can't deinstall. But it's this piece *Paul's Piece*.
- George Herms: Yeah. *Paul's Piece*. Yeah. OK. So I get the art historians up the giggy because I was 10 years younger than all of these artists in this show. So that's why I'm here. And as I say, I just emulated them, these artists. And what would have happened if I had fallen in instead of all these great artists a bunch of mediocre wino pseudo-intellectual artists and I emulated them? I wouldn't be talking to you today. I know that. But so the art historian is doing -- she came across the announcement for *Pseudonymphia* that had all these names. And I think she's referring to current people who have personas which they keep and do. And it was more of a joke. It's like people change name. Wallace Berman had several names in the *Semina*. Marcia Jacobs, Pantalì Xantos. And Bob Alexander, who opens the show here, he and Wally always had dialogue, what later is called mail art. They all sent things to each other through the mail. And it's more like just in a party atmosphere of something would go down, oh, that'll make a great name. And you start. Paul Mistrie.

You could break it in half, would be Paul and Mistrrie. And so there was a lot of it. I've been going through the Temple of Man archives, which is Bob Alexander, a poet and an artist. He stopped that and formed a church for religious freedom, 1961, the same time. And so I've been getting that stuff to the Smithsonian. And going through and seeing the various names that Bob Alexander called me and vice versa. Almost a name a week. So when she asked about Paul Mistrrie, I said, "Oh, I don't think anything exists." And then Caroline found the *Wrench* and I could say, "OK, we have it." And Caroline said, "There's another one called *Paul's Piece*." Well, *Paul's Piece* is a found frame. And this is a child's card game with an F on it that I wrote, "Paul Mistrrie." It's got a rusted screw eye, which I'm probably as fond of screw eyes as I am of any object ever invented. And then there's another glued on little piece of paper that says, "Legs." It's kind of sticking out in the air. And the rectangle that it's on. Boy. I don't know what that's made out of. It's thick, has a certain thickness. Do you have any idea what that is made out of? The gray rectangle.

Kari Dodson: Just appears to be a square of wood.

George Herms: It's wood.

Kari Dodson: Yeah. That's just wood.

George Herms: It's wood. Because there's those marks of grain. And then I don't know what the black drawing is. It looks like it was heavier at one point. But this is the kind of thing that Walter Hopps would spot. See, there's paint rubbed along here. So I think the only other person that -- like some of this is not beautiful. We can say ugly. I think the master of ugly is right there, right there. I think Ed Kienholz can do ugly better than anyone. And he did it with pride. In your face. Like at a certain point he got so he would take that polyurethane and he would shoot it all over them like he's ejaculating all over his art, there'd be these drips (inaudible) and he really was in your face. So the two of us are at dinner in Malibu at Virginia Kondratief [Virginia Dwan], 1962, and she says, "Wild, how only a year ago no one had ever used the word assemblage, and then here a year later there seem to be two wings, Ed Kienholz, the political, and George Herms, the poetical." Is that a word? Poetical?

Kari Dodson: It is now.

George Herms: Anyway that's the point. And obviously we can see where the money is. I'm still scuffling and Kienholz went on to great heights. And his career and mine

are definitely interwoven. So that's a piece of wood. The color. Why is it silver?

Kari Dodson: Oh. The paint?

George Herms: Is it? A painted piece of wood. See, the black. I don't remember using a pen with that kind of tip. I apologize. My memories of things are not totally complete.

Kari Dodson: And we apologize we couldn't take it off of the wall for this. But it's in a bit of a deteriorated condition but --

George Herms: This is what's on the back?

Kari Dodson: -- this is a photograph of the back of the work.

Brad Epley: We wanted to ask you. That black label. That's from the Batman Gallery exhibition?

George Herms: Yeah. This is the announcement for my first show at a legitimate gallery. Little card. The work is erected for the glory of God and to groove mankind. L-O-V-E. And my initials. And so that was my announcement. Well, Wallace Berman, if you've seen the announcement, it's like this. All red. And it's a picture of me with a policeman's cap on. I'm standing next to something that doesn't exist anymore, but a life-size assemblage sculpture. And he put in huge big letters my name, George Herms, exhibition. And I'm putting out this little four-by-five card. This is my -- like this. But I think it was Wally's way of introducing me to if I want to go down this path, I will be exhibiting. I didn't want to be an exhibitionist. Because he did a smaller card for my second show. Same thing, George Herms, exhibition. It made it look like exhibition was my last name and I was from then on going to be known. Herms would be my middle name. But I think that -- you know, he never said anything verbally to me about that. But I think that's what he was doing. And of course the work is erected for the glory of God. I'm walking along a street in San Francisco and I look at the side of the building and here's a plaque saying, "This building is erected." I forget what it said, probably for God. Maybe for the glory of God. To groove mankind, that's pure beatnik talking.

Kari Dodson: Would you say that those are now part of the work? I remember a part of your interview with Carol in 1992 or 1993. You spoke about an exhibition label that had been slipped onto *Greet the Circus with a Smile* as now being

part of the work. Would you describe these labels, this one and the label from the Pasadena Museum, the same way?

George Herms: Well, yeah, this is -- I don't know. The steamer trunks, you know, I mean that's a form. I think something Bill Seitz does, shows some, like a lot of documents. This is everybody, I was rubber-stamping, embossing. Bob Alexander loved these certificates of ordination and stuff like that. And so I think the work of art has to take on a life of its own. I can't be there every day because I'm working on today's work. So I mean there is aesthetics that get into it. And in this case I'm fine.

Kari Dodson: I mean in a way it's a record of the history. But in a way it's also hiding half of the back of the work, if indeed that is supposed to be visible.

George Herms: Well, but it gives more information.

Kari Dodson: Sure does, it sure does.

George Herms: So it's a found label. Yeah. At what point does the artist release? Because these things, as we're talking about, are headed toward disintegration. And as an artist one tries to stop it with glazing of paintings and different methods. And at some point I think you have to just say, "OK, universe, it's yours, I'm going to go hear some jazz, I'll be right back."

Kari Dodson: Let it go.

George Herms: But this, I'm still -- I swear to God I've got the same cover on my desk at home that I'm working on right now.

Kari Dodson: The dictionary.

George Herms: One of these. Still I love. Everything to do with books is sweet.

Kari Dodson: Now we have this displayed on a shelf at the moment, because of its condition. It's just not quite sturdy enough to be hung. How do you feel about that display?

George Herms: Until you mentioned it, I hadn't even thought about it. The way it was displayed. So I think that's the bottom line. If you start looking at the frame instead of the painting it's not right. You should be looking at the painting.

Kari Dodson: Speaking of the painting, there was a bit of a question when it came in. The central element here is a touch loose on the central screw. And so we're not entirely sure what the correct orientation of that should be.

George Herms: Well, we can be democratic about it, you know what I mean?

Kari Dodson: Take a vote.

George Herms: And we can put it in different things and put them up and let the public vote.

Kari Dodson: You don't have a --

George Herms: I would assume that it would have been square, that kind of thing.

Kari Dodson: Square.

George Herms: But with time, on so many of my works, like I make sculptures that fall over. When I was 70 I had -- the way you do a self-portrait. OK, you're 70. What do you know about yourself? Well, I have thoughts that fly away. I make sculptures that fall over. And a third one I'm ashamed to say. But it was a fear of running out of sugar. But so the works in Sue's backyard. A wind comes along and that thing goes. So I mean it got to the point where when we did a show at -- let's see. What's -- Newport Harbor is now Orange County Museum of Art. With Sarah Bancroft. She paired a younger artist and myself. And I had this reputation of making sculptures that fall over. Well, this one doesn't fall over, OK? So we had a table. And we called it the lemon bar because if it doesn't fall over it's a lemon, right? So this would be on the lemon bar (inaudible) so know thyself. I am not a Richard Serra. I have showed the same time as Richard Serra. The First Street Bridge in San Francisco. I had 50 sculptures on the scale of *Greet the Circus with a Smile*, 50 of them, across a bridge. We closed the bridge for a weekend, had a big party. And meanwhile the Richard Serras are in a museum, taken care of. But his rust. Mark Di Suvero, I love his work, and he thinks I only like the ones that are rusty. I said, "No, I like the other ones too." I don't know. In a way I think you are doing just an excellent job with things that were made when atomic bomb was hovering over everyone's consciousness. We may not be here long. We may not be here long. And so the idea of making a work of art that would last forever was way down among the priorities. And it really was let's make something beautiful this moment. That's where all the happenings come in. Now would Allan Kaprow want those exact same tires in the exact same configuration? I don't think -- I mean knowing Allan. So I think if you -- and again to me it's a matter of heart. You have a good heart, you want this

thing to look as good as it can and as close to the original. Yeah, I'm attracted to -- obviously coming out of abstract expressionism. This is ground zero when I hit the scene. And with the introduction of objects, I think that was the beginning. I mean John Altoon in a big abstract painting took a chunk of rusted window screen and pressed it into the pigment of the paint. So objects I think were beginning out of abstract expressionism. I think that was one of the -- for artists.

Brad Epley: We can go talk about *Bessie Smith* now too, if that's OK, this piece that's over here, *Bessie Smith*, or the *Day of Bessie Smith*.

George Herms: Oh yeah, yeah. Do you want to bring -- can you put it on the table? What do you want?

Brad Epley: I think if you don't mind we'll just walk over there. And it may take a minute for the film crew to transition.

George Herms: OK, absolutely. Did you get enough here?

Kari Dodson: Yeah, I think so.

George Herms: Yeah, things like that. The problem is I do a lot of collages where I cut out of newspaper, magazine illustration. And cutting out. And I'll lay out a little thing of these pieces of paper. In Sue's backyard. And OK, cool, and I go like this, and then a breeze comes along and blows all of these things off onto the ground. And I'm chasing them around and finding these pieces of paper and then they're -- and it's in a better composition than mine. That's what pisses me off. Yeah, we can talk about --

Brad Epley: Ask you one other quick question too. About this label, the Pasadena Art Museum label for this piece. This isn't shown on any exhibition list. Would you have put that on there just as a gag? Or if it's on there it was probably in the exhibition? It's signed, "Paul Mistris." And it says owners were Walter and Shirley Hopps at that time.

George Herms: Walter and Shirley Hopps. Yeah. I'm sorry, I don't know if I put it on or not. If I did it's right where I would put it. Whoever did it has my salute.

Brad Epley: All right, because I think that may relate to the California collage show that was at Pasadena, and I just didn't know if you remembered if this *Paul's Piece* was in that exhibition.

George Herms: I don't remember it being, because that, I had a corner. Well, maybe. Let me think about -- there were 13 works in a corner. There was a string piece. There was a warped tennis racket. And it had a picture of my friend Bobby Driscoll on the card there which I have since forgot. And then I think *The Librarian*. No. *The Librarian* was over here. All the books. And then there was the piece that had the American flag on the wall that they pulled off. So that's one, two, that's four, so there were nine other works. And that could have been one of them.

Brad Epley: We can sleuth a little more and see. We'll look a little deeper and see if we can find it.

George Herms: Yeah. A lot of these things are almost an instant emotional reaction. Something. I don't like that. And I do complain if something that's not right -- but this has none of that for me. I wonder. It said Pasadena show. Well, oh, there was a window that was the director's window. Every month there'd be a different piece in there. I wonder if that might have been. See, the Pasadena Museum is the first retrospective of Marcel Duchamp. So that's where I see his things. And Joseph Cornell, big show of Joseph's work. Which was to this day still with me. So that is kind of my education, looking at actual works of art by the people that end up being my heroes. OK, want to go look at *Bessie Smith*? I think this title is the *Day of Bessie Smith*. There's a little -- you have it?

Kari Dodson: I do. This was sent to us here after. Got it in a little envelope there. Hope --

George Herms: Yeah, so, oh boy, in 1963 I have a show in Pasadena at an artists' cooperative called the Aura Gallery. And a wonderful opening. It was up the stairs of the gallery. In the other half of the upstairs was the Pasadena Ping-Pong parlor. And so for this show there was -- I don't know. It's called Triple Jack. On its label it has three red apples, and I just loved the label. So my friend Dean Stockwell is going to get the booze for the opening, it's an artists' cooperative. And I said, "Boy, I love that," but I loved the label. Triple Jack was like Thunderbird. It was just -- oh, man. And so everybody at this show - - we'll get to the art in a minute. I'm talking about the people right now, this is where I get lost, and everybody just got bombed out, and we went back and broke into the Pasadena Ping-Pong parlor where there was like a row of Ping-Pong, everybody played Ping-Pong, there were overstuffed chairs. You could sit. And it was a wonderful opening. And every piece had a little orange card that I had stained with what's called life raft dye. In the movie Humphrey Bogart is called Old Yellow Stain because it's something you drop in the ocean and it makes the ocean yellow. But this orange color is -- I had a

bucket of this dye and I had an old Packard that died on the road in. So it was taken apart, and I had an exhibition. One exhibition on the interior of an American motor car, 1962. And so the dye. I would take the bucket of this dye and fwhh. The whole Packard would be covered with it. And then the fog would come in at night and erase it. So the next day I'd have to do. So when it came time to do the show I made all the labels like this. And boy, I wish I could remember the New York poet, may come to me, who had a book of days. He named every day. And it's a cool thing. You can do it yourself. The American Indians have like the moon of the crackling snow. And you can name the day, what happened the day before or after and during. And so the *Day of Bessie Smith* is this wonderful picture of Bessie which I think there's got to be some butterfly hinge situation that this can be kept from somebody like me. Whacking and taking it off. The fire is because I used to run a torch over everything. Start off with plastic toys in the '50s. Tommy guns. Melted. And so it gives the brown. Especially paper, it does a nice thing. So the actual day. You could look up. The sun was in the sign of Sagittarius. And the moon was in Leo. So it's another way of identifying a day. And again the simple ain't easy. To make a thing. There's one, two, three, four objects. It's very tough to write a poem with just four words. Or four objects. And so when I would teach that would be one of my assignments. Make a poem out of objects. Which would come very trippingly off the tongue. It's lunar. So this one, really orange, had to be the nail, so that's fine. There's another nail. Oh, see, there's all kinds of nails on here. But this is out of the ocean. A seashell. And of course Bessie Smith, a great artist. I think if you get to hear her singing, she -- absolute angel. And sometimes people have a tragic life but they still produce an incredible body of art. And Bessie Smith was one of those. And so at this opening in 1962 at the Aura Gallery I have a picture of Walter standing next to this. He loved this. He always wanted it. Because that was our link, is Walter and I, was jazz. Walter and Jim Newman get out of college. They love jazz and art. So they're going to put on jazz concerts and art shows. And they figure that the jazz would pay for the art shows. Well, it went the other way historically. But whenever Walter would supposedly work in an exhibition -- well, no, we're talking about a time in Chicago where the clubs were across the street and they knew when one club took a break. The audience would go across the street and listen to another giant. Giant. I've been very lucky, Walter was too, we got to hear some of the best artists. And my role model. See, not having gone to an art school, I went to a lot of jazz clubs. Every night sitting in the front row. That's where I think longevity. Live jazz. Hear as much live jazz as you can. And this sometime I'll see. Maybe I can get you here for the Menil. There's -- a photographer shot that whole opening. And [Virginia

Condriev?] is -- a lot of -- Ed Moses. A lot of the artists at that time. A wonderful opening. Until they broke down the door of the Ping-Pong parlor.

Brad Epley: So conditionwise this looks good to you?

George Herms: It looks good for me, except I worry about the fragility of the paper. They have the same problem with *The Librarian*, which -- a lot of books and pages, gravity. And my problem, see, when I do restoration, I call it restoration comedy, because I break more than I fix. Remember that about me, OK?

Kari Dodson: I will, I will write it down.

George Herms: I go here, "I can fix it." No. Maybe that subtitle when I get back. But see, Artie Richer, who was a friend of all of us, was a painter. And he would work on a big painting, and then at the end of the day he'd get a brush and he'd go stick it in a can of black paint and he'd go like this. Back up. And then leave. And then when he would come back the next day, he'd say, "Oh, man." So then he'd have to take care of that black spot. And then that got him back into the painting. These are artists' tricks that they play on themselves. Now this piece of plywood is from the ocean. This is from the ocean. And I still look for these. You won't find them anymore. Beachcombing. And they're the perfect ground for my taste because yes, it is rectangular, but the ocean has worked on it and softened it. Softened the geometry.

Brad Epley: One solution that we used for this exhibition was actually to put a Plexiglas bonnet over this.

George Herms: Well, this is always a question. See, I don't feel that this piece is bothered by Plexiglas bonnets. I can see it, everything's fine. So I would go by that. At first -- OK. They started putting these kind of works behind Plexiglas boxes, somewhere in the '60s in museums. And I didn't like that. I felt as though -- see, I did six months in jail, so you have kind of a thing about being, you know -- and so when they did that I got really pissed off. Poor LA County Museum took heat from me. I was going to get my little torch that I burn, and go and burn holes in it, so it can breathe. Well, I didn't do all these things. I mean Kienholz would have done something like that. What I did is I made a series of boxes called the *Zodiac behind Glass*. And so if it's going to be behind glass? No, in front. So I did -- took a nice subject, the zodiac, behind glass. And I made 12 boxes for each of the signs of the zodiac during that month. Halfway through the year I fell behind, the sun got ahead of me, I wasn't done with that one. But the problem with the box is they were made out of wood. About eight inches deep kind of thing. Is that shadow at the top.

That shadow bothering you. Well, if you get shallower and shallower you eliminate that. Well, then you're back to a piece of Plexiglas, which I later came to like, on top of a collage. So that's two-dimensional. And with Plexiglas, the great thrill of Plexiglas is that you can drill through it. And so that means you can have a collage and then you can drill and put objects on top of it. So it was kind of a 10-year thing where -- art and life. That was the battle of those days. Separate. You want art and life to be the same. Not separate. And all my things are out in life in your face. And then they start putting them behind glass back, back, and then pretty soon they're two-dimensional. And then I start putting objects in there. And here I am, back in your face. It was 10 years but I went full circle. So yeah. I think protection. I mean this is what I get from the Temple of Man that I inherited. The very first line says to present and preserve the works of creative musicians, artists, books. So yeah. Present and preserve. And I think the Plexiglas is a preservation technique. Yeah.

Kari Dodson: Can I go back for a moment to the label? I know we spoke about the origins of the label. But I wanted to ask if it -- again, going back to -- not to be a broken record. But is this now a part of the piece that should be displayed with the piece? Are you --

George Herms: This is how it was in the Aura Gallery. There was one by each thing. So in the best of all possible worlds I would have this in some way so that it reads like a label. Because your labels are (inaudible) you don't have a label for each thing. This one did. I can't remember the --

Kari Dodson: But this was not just associated with that one particular exhibition. This is now something that you would like to see associated with every subsequent exhibition of *Day of Bessie Smith*?

George Herms: Well, if it were right here. Some way to present. I don't know. I mean it's not necessary. We've got documentation that it is *Day*. And it was probably more impressive when you had one here and all around the room. In a way it was like a motif going through.

Kari Dodson: OK. Do you have any particular opinion about the amount to which the print is now lifting away from the surface of the plywood? Is that --

George Herms: My first impulse is to make it flat again.

Kari Dodson: It is.

George Herms: I mean that's my first impulse. But I realize by these things that it is glued. That's still there. That's why I'm talking about some of those hinges. Is it possible to somehow -- I don't know how they come. But to cut out a shape like that. To hinge. And then have the hinge at this part here connected to the wood.

Kari Dodson: Is there supposed to be movement allowed with it?

George Herms: That was never part of it. I do know that I have done so many things that have been a piece of paper. Sticking on things. The craters that take such good care of my work have finally figured out how to do it. But basically I want to break every plane. When I make a sculpture. Which for the people that are trying to build a crate for it, can drive them nuts. And now the work I'm doing today, I'll show you some on the iPhone later. But they're like three-quarter-inch plywood board like this, totally covered with one collage material. And then I go with my drill, my quarter-inch drill, that's the high end of my technical ability, and I just put a hole through it and I stick a wire through, and then I go to a store that sells the glass beads that we bought Manhattan -- remember we bought Manhattan with a bunch of glass beads. So I get those beads. So then we've got this two-dimensional thing and then there are these sinuous copper wires with different color beads and rusty objects on. So they can sometimes get -- have this much remain. It's pretty interesting.

Kari Dodson: But in this case we've got -- we don't have that element here. We don't have the element of breaking the plane with the print. So it could be hinged if that were possible to the surface or fixed to the surface.

George Herms: I worry, because it is vulnerable. And I would trust you. Whatever you -- sometimes these are one-way streets. When you put some -- my problem with like *The Librarian* and the pages coming out of the books is that the weight of the glue that I use, yes, glue, hastens gravity's path. So that's why I was very impressed with those butterfly hinges that are invisible. You can't even see them.

Kari Dodson: There was one other element that we dealt with in preparing this piece for the exhibition, and that was on the mussel shell there is a very thin dark coating that is --

George Herms: Oh, that string?

Kari Dodson: -- a naturally shed coating as the mussel ages.

- George Herms: Mussels have a black skin like that, yeah.
- Kari Dodson: And as that ages I wondered what your feeling was about the way that the appearance of the shell will start to change or lighten in color as that starts to shed away. Should that be preserved?
- George Herms: It looks fine to me today. So I mean sometimes I see something and it doesn't look right to me. But this is nature. And I'm back to that philosophical life span that nature says it goes, and then that's over with, and then coming on and grabbing it, here, stop it. Oh, you were so beautiful as a seven-year-old girl. Can we just freeze you that way, ma'am? Yea, artists are a drag, no, today, but the thing is this is today, this is the most fantastic day we ever had, you've got it.
- Brad Epley: OK. So are you OK if we just revisit *Greet the Circus* for just a few minutes as a finale?
- George Herms: Listen, I'm here to help you any way I can. Also to give the crew a hard time.
- Brad Epley: So I think, George, the last time you saw this was when you and Carol had your conversation about this piece that had just recently come into the collection as a gift. And it was a really great and constructive conversation I think. Particularly with respect to the treatment that this piece has needed over the years. Especially then to address a few things that had gone awry before it came into the collection. But also throughout the years as we've lent it or as we've exhibited it. We've always valued the opportunity to revisit that interview with you. So we thought we would take the unique opportunity of having you here to see it yet again just to get your read on how you feel about the way it looks now, some like almost 25 years on from that interview.
- George Herms: Yeah. The only thing that is different, and we talked about this, of how it was originally a performative piece. Because -- I'm going to do this, originally this would be closed and I would come and lift it for you to see. But I can't be here every day for every person who wants to look. So I think this is a good way to do it. And one of the things that I point out. There's another L-O-V-E here that you have the original O when I started in 1960, because I made objects for a poetry reading, I made them for a wedding, someone's birthday. These were all labors of love, or they're supposed to be. And so this then became everything that I did and do to this day. I put L-O-V-E on it. It's a two-way thing, it's to remind me that if you don't love what you're doing go do something else. And so it's an imperative. But the O here is from the original rubber stamp set which my kids swung with this O, I don't know

what they did with it. The kids are wonderful. I used to make figures out of wire and I come in one day and they've taken the leg of the man and pulled it all across the room. And then they have all clothes hanging and like so. So the O that was replaced with a rubber -- the stopper on a little Pelikan ink bottle. So that's the kind of thing that I notice is the thing that no longer are available to be used. And the feathers, Tarzan Feathers was another pseudonym that I worked under. I would go up to do a show in San Francisco in the evening and I would cut out a big -- out of a four-by-eight sheet of plywood the shape of California, paint it white, and then that evening I would come in. And it's a tar. You get it in a thing like this. Hydroseal. Cover it with tar. And then come and get duck feathers. Words that you have to watch out for spoonerisms because when you say duck feathers, make sure you've got those letters correct. And I would have to mention duck feathers in case someone in the audience was allergic. And so it's a beautiful thing. It's like a storm, a cloud. Charles Brittin has photographs of me. I'm playing like bongos. I just pound duck feathers into tar. Well, obviously some feathers are pushed way in, some are just resting on top. So my experience has been that these things, if they go somewhere, you come back, there'll be a few feathers in the bottom of the crate. So there's not really much we can do about that situation. If these are --

Kari Dodson: Speaking of which.

George Herms: Speak of the devil.

Kari Dodson: I hope you're not allergic to duck feathers. We have collected a few of them in the course of our preparations for this exhibition.

George Herms: Can you see that?

Kari Dodson: We gave them a nice home.

George Herms: Every exhibition.

Kari Dodson: Right.

George Herms: See, the effect of Tarzan Feathers is still there. I mean obviously I had more hair at one time. But so that's a built-in situation where change is inevitable. And the fact of life is that this little table leg that's in the mannequin -- and there's a mirror in down below. As you'll carefully come in, you can see your head, and as you get down closer and closer all of a sudden this takes like your head is over here. The sides of your head. It's a phenomenon for two-

eyed creatures. So it's a science thing. That's the science. And I think at one time there was a problem with this plane that we solved. Everything looks good on it to me. We have again situations where paper are coming off. I don't know that that's -- to me it doesn't need to go in and be glued. It's still there. I don't see any -- this whole back side has cloth and things that are obviously floating around. There's a hand holding a roach actually that would disappear, and I would have to sometimes replace it. It's like a vocabulary of things that I relate to. It's like Cocteau had a poem called *Vocabulaire* in which he actually uses those words that to his ears are really hot. And one of the things, you'll be able to shoot from the back here. But there's a black enamel paint shape on a white card. And there's a large piece. I don't know where the hell it is right now. The largest that I did at that time was *Saturn Collage*. And it was about this size. And it's of this era. Done at the same time. So there's cloth and different kinds of things all over it. And I lived next door, a few houseboats down from Wallace Berman for a couple years. And in all the years I knew him, and I would show him work, I would just say, "Cool." And so they tried to put him down as being my mentor, and I said, "I don't think so." Role model, I'll give you role model. But this one time when this black enamel, it was like a Jackson Pollock dripping thing that I did things like that. So there were all these found rags and detritus and then there was this black-and-white work of art that I had made. And that's what Berman pointed out. That everything else was a found object, I mean to use his word, but that that was a work of mine, and it didn't quite -- you know what I mean? It was different. He didn't say to get rid of it or anything like, he just -- that's what he noticed. And I think because he was probably one of the purest artists I've ever known. His standards were so high. This -- he's living about where the surrealism exhibition is, in front of me. And I never had a TV, never had electricity. But I would go watch the fights with him. So there's something from the boxing era. Where some guy has gotten knocked out of the ring. The champion is knocked out of the ring. Mm. So in a way these are -- it's almost like a novel with these various chapters of things that I was interested in at the time. And a lot of these, it's like I have never seen them before. But I remember a fascination with 1910 theater in New York. And I had two books of David Belasco, who made the Belasco Theater. And lots of improvisers. A stage that could revolve. That was -- having it all down below, bringing, raising it up. And so just the theater as a source of reference. And I eventually did theater pieces myself. But a lot of the women. There's a picture, I think it's one of the geisha, I'm not sure. In here. But the black-and-white photographs of movie stars, theater people, are a source. I think that's a good way to look at it. Some of these are sources that continue. And some of them I milk for a little longer, and I move on. But the theater. And I think that's from Joseph Cornell too. He had a wonderful

relationship to actresses and would do these -- like imaginative, a fan letter to someone. And these things are so fragile. Almost hanging by a hair. This bow. But as I say, that era was one where Eric Hammerscoffer, all I wanted to do is swing a nail. It's in a museum somewhere. Just he then, you know, boom. And then they stay together. And so that's what I see. The staple gun I eventually let go because of rust and staples, they just go straight in, and they will come straight out over time. So it's amazing. These are what, 40, 17, 57-year-old staples. Still holding. And also there's some things which are personal to me. And then there are other things. I know nothing about anyone in this photograph or this photograph. Or the news clipping. So it's almost using human faces, human beings, as a part of the vocabulary. The various components that go into something, it requires a space that things can be thrown into a pile, and then I can go to the pile, or something will jump out at me.

Brad Epley: Would you work on multiple pieces at a time? Or would you really be focused in on one piece at a time, and then it was finished, and then you'd move on to the next?

George Herms: I think I worked both ways. I would say primarily -- well, this is what Artie Richer said. Because working on a big painting, it could go over a series of days. But he liked things that you started and you drove it all the way home to finish. That was his favorite. And I know what he's talking about. So I don't think this was done in one day. But there are other works that are related to this that were probably in the wings. And obviously the Tarzan Feathers, there's many works involving that technique. But as far as -- my son now, because we have all these storage problems. And he'd like to have -- at one time he took the storage money and got a big warehouse studio living situation for himself. So one half there's all my work, and then he lived and worked in the other half. And eventually he got referring to all my work as the mountain or the burden. He got out of that. And his ultimatum to me now is you sell one work, you get to make one new work. So that's Wilder's law. So I wouldn't be here today doing that. I think what's maybe closer to your answer is the idea of a series. And I think when the Love Press, printing books of poetry, when I clean the press, I do a whole ton of just rolling ink all over everything. Printer's ink. I was going to cover the universe with brightly colored printer's ink. And I think what I do, I call it a wave. I work in a wave. And just like a wave, it kind of crests. And I keep working. And it's just like a wave. There's that kind of froth at the end. And those works are kind of the froth. And the best works were leading up to that pinnacle. But I won't give up. I keep going till it's over. And I don't know where the wave will come from. I don't know what it's going to consist of. Now it's

magazine illustrations, glass beads, copper wire. This mesh that I'm rusting and making into shapes. Because of arthritis I want to keep my hands active. This piece has really been such a great -- *Greet the Circus with a Smile*. Yeah. We're very lucky. I'm so thankful to you, to Dominique de Menil, and to Walter and Caroline. Because another piece on this scale is called *Hugo the Aquarian*. And it's a life-size figurative piece. Legs with books on them. Holding two lanterns. And a big A on it. And I worked with the filmmaker Paul Beattie. And along this creek, Corte Madera Creek, there was like a platform away from my little shack that I lived in. And it was up in the air about 10 feet over the water level. And we put *Hugo the Aquarian* out there. And for the film the plan was that I would dance with *Hugo* and then we'd go off and into the water. And so we're back at my little shack. And Paul Beattie and I hear this noise. We look out. And *Hugo the Aquarian* has taken a dive on its own. No film of that. So I got down in the creek. And we have some kind of like a water ballet thing with it. So it was just lying there in this tidal creek that every six hours -- when people -- I didn't have a boardwalk to my place. So if you came in you had to stay six hours. Before the tide went out and you could walk across the marsh to get away. But it was a good thing. Because people would show up with beer and wine and we -- times were different then. You didn't have to have that answer. It's lovely. So *Hugo the Aquarian* is floating in Corte Madera Creek. And I come out and it's gone. And I look. So Corte Madera Creek came and took *Hugo* and went out past San Quentin, took a right, and went out the Golden Gate. So we can't do what we're doing here today with *Hugo*. That's why I'm very grateful to all of you.

Brad Epley: Well, we really appreciate you taking the time in this visit to come back and talk with us, not only about this, but the newer work as well. It's been a real pleasure.

George Herms: It's my pleasure. I get up every morning and go to work, that's all I know. And then seeing this taken care of makes me feel really worthwhile. And also just for me personally the Menil Collection with the witnesses and the works that they put together here. I mean you talk about heroes. Almost every one. For a long time. Yves Tanguy is my favorite painter. Because I'm trying to do with objects. Yves Tanguy, those things, you can look at any one of those shapes. It's right there. Nothing mysterious. You can look at it all you want. But you don't know what the hell is going on. And that's how I'm taking objects rather than painted shapes and in some ways using his compositional techniques. And you can look at these things all you want, they don't go away, there's no scrim over it to keep you from seeing it. But you still don't know what's going on.

Kari Dodson: Sure don't. Full of mystery.

George Herms: Yeah.

Kari Dodson: Well, they're a pleasure to work on, and a pleasure to learn about.

George Herms: Yes. Well, let me see your hands. You're in good hands. I know your hands are inside these things.

Kari Dodson: Inside these gloves.

George Herms: You're in good hands, yeah.

Kari Dodson: There we go. Oh.

George Herms: Don't touch me with those things.

Brad Epley: Thank you very much, George.

George Herms: Thank you. Thank you. It's been a pleasure. Good company.

Kari Dodson: Come see us anytime.

George Herms: Good company.

Kari Dodson: Your granddaughter went to an art school you said.

George Herms: My granddaughter went to the Art Institute in Chicago.

Kari Dodson: Art Institute.

George Herms: And got a good -- I mean that's a great place.

Kari Dodson: She works in New York?

George Herms: Yeah, she lives in Brooklyn.

Kari Dodson: And that was your entree to the current set of artists?

George Herms: No, no, this is through a guy named Adam Kimmel, who was friends with all these artists. And he was a men's clothing designer. This is an Adam Kimmel. Is there a K in the back of that?

Kari Dodson: There's an L. Oh yeah. And there's a K.

George Herms: Yeah. Men's clothing designer. And he was going to do a line of clothing based on the beat generation a few years ago. And he's talking to Tony Shafrazi in New York, and Tony says, "You know, some of these people are still -- there's one of them wandering around the hills of Topanga." So he sent him to Dennis Hopper, who phoned me up, and Adam and Neville Wakefield came out and then we just immediately -- I opened up all, anything to do with the beat generation that I had. And he bought works. And we became really good friends. And so he at the best men's clothing designer of the year award, and so instead of pocketing 300 grand or whatever, he got all his friends in New York, took us all -- and me. All to Florence, Italy for 10 days. We just partied for 10 days. And Florence is fantastic.

Kari Dodson: That's awesome.

George Herms: And then when I met all these guys. And I'm still in touch with a lot of them.

Kari Dodson: So is this the George Herms shirt?

George Herms: I don't think -- no, we talked about -- because I do a lot of coffee stains on newsprint at a certain period. And I said, "That look. Can you make a suit out of that?" We talk about -- and now I don't know if he's in the men's clothing thing or not. I think I ran into him just after his father died. And I think I kind of represented an older thing. And then he got married. Most beautiful woman in the world. I wish I could remember the name. *My First Mister* maybe. This actress comes on the cover with tattoos and a street person. And in life she's the most beautiful, tall, blond, like gorgeous. But in this movie she started out really gnarly. And so when they got married he flew us all over to -- let's see. There's Venice and then you come down and a little inland. Can't remember the name of the area. And a castle. And that's where the wedding was. Again a big-time party. And most of those artists were there too.

[END INTERVIEW]