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Raymond Lopez-Aleman

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Raymond Lopez-Aleman

INTERVIEWER: John H. McNeely

PROJECT: El Paso Area Artists

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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Artist.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Autobiography.

1 hour (1 7/8 tape speed), 23 pages

M: Well, Ray, you say that you were born in New York in 1921, so that you are now fifty-two.

L: My mother and I left New York when I was...I don't think I was a month old yet. We went to Cuba, and there I contracted sleeping sickness. So we were forced to stay there for quite a while until I recovered--maybe a year or so. Then we went to her home in Caracas, Venezuela. Then years before we came back to the United States, I probably made one or two trips to New York, 'cause my mother was just a wanderer. She just loved to go from one place to the other. She had left my dad.

M: She was a native of Caracas?

L: She was /of Spanish parentage, a/ native of Caracas, yes. We spent some time in Puerto Rico, we spent some time in Haiti. I started school in Santo Domingo.

That covers that early period because I don't remember it. But finally by the age of ten, my mother had decided to come to New York, and she died very soon after. So, I was forced to stay in New York, but not for very long because my dad found me in some orphanage in New Jersey. From New York, or New Jersey--whatever--my dad being into the hotel business, we went from one city to another: Cleveland, Chicago, Detroit, Toledo. So all my youth, I attended something like seventeen elementary schools, one junior high school, and three high schools.

Then I got into the Army. I volunteered right after Pearl Harbor--one of the very, very few who volunteered, incidentally. I was amazed, even there in a great war, in my battalion alone I think there were only three men whose numerals started with 1-6, 1-7 or 1-9, depending on which area they came from.

Anyway, the Army itself abetted this wanderlust, for traveling, because again, as you know, /in/ the Army you don't spend too much time in one place, and you're shipped someplace else for training. And at that time we had to train for over two and a half years before we were committed to combat, because we weren't ready. After all my training, I got my commission at Fort Benning, Georgia, an infantry commission. I qualified as an instructor in heavy weapons-- machine guns, mortars--and so I got a chance to see Texas.

M: You were commissioned as a lieutenant?

L: Yes. Heavy weapons. As an instructor I got to see everyplace from Fort Travis down around Texas City, Galveston, all the way up to Mineral Wells, Walters, Gainesville, Hood, and so forth and so on. Then just prior to being sent over, I jointed the desert training maneuvers /for/ five months where we goofed around from Needles, California to Yuma under General Terry Allen from El Paso, who recently died. He had just been transferred to the desert center because of some differences he had had in North Africa. I don't know what the causes were but there was a difference there, I know; and somehow or another they decided he'd be better off. But he was a tremendous general, a wonderful gentleman. I only saw him twice, but he seemed to be quite a gentleman.

Anyway, from desert maneuvers, after I was trained in the hardiness of surviving on the desert, I was sent to, of all places, the Aleutians to look for or seek out Japs who may have /hidden/ themselves in the caves, or so forth, so on. So, we went from one island to another; out to Kiska. We didn't find anything. We were there almost eight months. We found shells, of course, remnants and things like that, but they were so barren at that time. But soon after the United States Army and the Navy launched a project

to make the whole area...well, they had airports, they had supply depots. But the distance from the Aleutians, as you know, to the Kuriles in the Bering Sea is very short. It was only a hop over to Japan in case we were ready to go into Japan.

But from the Aleutians, I came back to San Francisco and I don't think I was there a month before I got orders to... Oh, I applied for the paratroopers and I was accepted. And while I was waiting for my paratrooper papers to come through, they decided to send me to the Pacific. So, I didn't get into the paratroopers. I was accepted, but somehow or another there was a shortage in the 32nd Division. They were having a tough time in New Britain at that time, and I was sent down there. That was a pleasant two years. (Laughs)

M: Did you see some action?

L: Oh, yes. With the 124th Infantry, I became a First Lieutenant. I never became a captain though I assumed a company for a short while. I always had a little tough time with authority. That's one of the reasons I probably drifted towards art, because in art I think one has a chance to be one's own person, more so than in any other profession. Whether you're a writer or a musician or whatever, you do have to live under a certain responsibility and authority. But most of all you can almost always pick your jobs, you can work on your own. At that time I didn't realize it, but every time authority presented itself to me, there was always conflict. It did cause trouble in my Army career because I never could take orders directly. But, I survived. I think that's one of the things most of us in the war wanted to do--you know, get out of the thing one way or another and forget about it as soon as possible.

So after the war there was a short marriage that lasted two weeks. There was no attempt at school at first. I didn't know exactly what to do, I just

traveled. I should have mentioned that I was in the hospital for six months before I got out. Again, I landed in Texas, at Temple, Texas, at McCluskey General Hospital there. Of course, my condition was defined as battle anxiety or an anxiety state bordering on neurosis. At that time I didn't even know what was wrong with me, because I was so unsettled. I didn't even know that I was in that state. I had struck an officer with a carbine. Of course, it was in a moment of indecision and aggravation and so forth, but he was a higher ranking officer. Of course, they didn't want to press court-martial procedures on me, so they decided the best thing for the good of the regiment was to have me committed to a hospital because I had shown signs of neurosis and anxiety. So, I was packed up and sent to McCluskey, and it took me six months before I was ready to be released.

So, right after that I was very undecided whether to continue school or whatever. So I spent maybe a year or two just wandering around. In 1947, I decided to go to the University of Chicago. And, of course, I flunked the entrance examination. I didn't have the qualifications to enter the college. So they gave me a tutor and I was sent to the University of Illinois. Inside a year or so I took the test again and I entered the Division of the Humanities at the University of Chicago. I lasted about three or four quarters. I'm not even sure, because at the time I was also involved in dancing. I had just taken up dancing as a profession, and I was getting a couple of club dates. I was still living free and easy, trying to make up for the five years that I'd spent in the Army, I guess. I just couldn't settle down. Still I had no idea of art. The fact that I took the humanities, I guess, might have been that I was somehow indirectly interested in art. I remember /that/ while other fellows in basic training in camps in the United States had pictures of maybe Betty

Grable or Rita Hayworth, I had a nude by Modigliani. I was more attracted to the arts than anything else, and very early in life I had an appreciation of art for some reason, or at least I liked it. And I could always sketch a little. If anyone wanted a sign made or a picture or a cartoon, I would make them--sometimes for the local civilian papers while I was in the Army, or if anyone wanted something I would do a little sketch for them, a cartoon. I still have one or two around in my papers. But I never in my wildest dreams ever thought I'd become an artist, or anything for that matter. (Chuckles) I didn't give that much thought to anything.

But /studying/ the humanities, I had the chance to do more work or study in the arts, but not any practical work--all academical. I did not take any drawing courses or craft courses of any kind. It was much later that that came up. But it gave me a good foundation for becoming an artist, because I realized what art was before I went into it, where I think most artists that I have known have become artists first and then learned about what art is second. Not that I learned everything there was to be learned about it, but enough for my own scope, to know what I was getting into and what I appreciated and didn't appreciate. I knew that it would be a losing cause right from the beginning. Not that I was so negative, but I knew that the chances of success in art are not that great, or to discover a new method, or to create, or to be founded, or to enter school with vanguard ideas. You just have to take your chances and go along. I realized that before you can discover anything or plan anything, that you have to learn your fundamentals and all the basics.

So it was about that time, I think, that I decided to leave dancing completely. I had enough money to go to Laguna Beach, California and rent a house there for about six months and just draw--pastel painting and drawing.

I didn't do any color with oils. And, I thought, "Well, in those six months I should be able to prove to myself whether I'm capable of going into this as a means of living. I have enough money to carry me, and if I find that I don't have this particular talent, if I'm kidding myself, then I'll go into something else. I could go back in the hotel business or become a bum again. I don't care. Anything that I'm gifted at." A bum was pretty good at the time, 'cause I always loved to drift. Anyway, after six months I had several hundred drawings and a few little water colors, and they weren't really too good. I took them to the then president of the Laguna Art Association, Leonard Scheu.

M: Laguna was already quite an art center.

L: It has been an art center for quite a long time, since the early twenties. A great many marine painters and successful artists and writers have settled there. At that time, we had about six or seven galleries in Laguna which for that time was quite a bit, because even places like El Paso didn't have a gallery--where now they might have something like 50 galleries in Laguna. But that is commensurate with the degree of rise of art in every community we have in the United States.

Anyway, Mr. Scheu looked at my drawings and what he said was almost what any old professional artist who has any paternal feelings will say to any young artists, that, "You may have it, you may not. It shows some inkling there, some trace, but this is not it. What it takes to become an artist can't be measured by just lines and color. It's something inside of you. The stick-to-it-ness, the dedication, etc." I thought my dedication was greater than my talent--I think it's always been that way. So he said, "That's it. If you want to continue it, it's like everything else in life. You have to enjoy doing it, because your enjoyment will come from the doing of art and not from

any monetary or material gains you get from it. If that's what you're aiming for, forget it!" Because he set examples at that time...this was maybe 1956, and he said at that time that there were seven or eight artists in the United States that actually obtained their living through art. He meant artists who painted and sold and lived off the profits of the work they did, not artists like the artists in New York, like Lavine, Roscoe, Hoffman--all artists who later were to make a living from art--they all had to teach. There were very, very few artists. Now, I'm not talking about the few good commercial artists we had at the time that were working for the national magazines and making a very good living, I'm talking about the fine artists. Most every fine artist up to the later forties and early fifties had to do something else--and usually teach--to continue their painting, unless they had some kind of a pension, endowment or inheritance.

So, that didn't set too good with me, but I had realized that this was so, because I had never met an artist really who wasn't teaching or doing commercial art on the side, or cartooning, or lettering, or what have you. Anyway, I took this step forward, and I decided that was going to be it. And I've never regretted it. There are times when you become despondent and say, "What the hell am I doing this for? I could be doing something else." And sometimes, when you're in front of a canvas or an easel, puttering around with colors on a brush, you wonder if you're expressing anything, if you're really saying anything. I think doubt comes to almost all artists. I've even read snatches of Peter Hurd making a similar remark, that sometimes you do wonder if it's worth it for your whole life to spend doing this particular thing, if you're making your statement, if you're making your mark in life, if you're leaving anything behind--whether it's true or not. There are times

when you do something that shows that you are; a certain appreciation or a certain acknowledgement comes from a certain area which gives you enough inspiration and encouragement to continue to do your work.

The selling of a painting, as far as I'm concerned, is of no value except to the amateur in encouragement. I think it's only rated--and in our material culture, I think most of the young artists I have met measure their ability in art--by the profit they make from it, never once considering to look at their work objectively or to bother with the recognition that a certain work deserves, and not in the monetary field. It's a pity, because our amateur painters start off the same way. As you know, the first painting or so that they paint, they want to put a frame on it and put it up on a wall in some hospital or drug store or corner or art fair and sell it. Then if they sell that painting, they feel they have made tremendous progress in their painting; that is their measure of success. And that to me is ridiculous.

That's what we have to face--I think the way our New York promoters and our publicists who've made it. But the poor artist sometimes can't find his own way ahead because of these goals that he has set for himself, which are not really claimed on quality, on fineness of work. In other words, to me anyway, I don't do art for a living. I live more or less for my art. That's the way I'd like to be. I like to see it that way, I like to hope to be that /way/. So far I haven't really done what I want to do, and whether I will or not I don't know. But I'm going to keep trying. I still maybe have a few years left, and /I'll/ make the most of it.

M: Well, now, at Laguna you lived there for six months and asked this man's advice. What did you do then?

L: After Scheu told me what he thought, gave me his opinion--which wasn't really

too encouraging--my mind was set that I was going to be an artist. Even if he had said, "Your work is ridiculous," or "Your attitude is not proper," I would have gone ahead anyway. Those six months did wonders for me in finding myself in many ways. I loved the isolation, the solitude of just getting away by yourself and doing your work--not hampered by orders. Because before that I had done several jobs which I had to cater to a certain quota or I had to cotton to a certain policy, I had to work along a certain project. And here I was completely free. That was a gift from art that I enjoyed, and in return for that I was going to give more of myself.

So after the confrontation with Mr. Scheu I went to New York, where I decided to go to the Art Student's League. I picked two artists who I thought could help me: one of German extraction, George Gross, who many considered the finest artist to come out of Germany in the last fifty /to/ seventy-five years, who died about eight years ago; and Robert Brockman, a Russian Jew. Both of them were steeped in the fundamentals and traditions of art, but both had achieved a success of sorts. Gross' success had been that he had used his art as tremendous social expression--so strong that he was asked to leave Germany by Hitler in 1933 or 1934. Brockman didn't have so much of a social statement but he loved the beauty of life--the redness of an apple, the whiteness of a pitcher, the skin tones of a nude. So, I thought /that/ between these two I would get perhaps something that I would like, and so I concentrated on Brockman and Gross. Of course, I didn't spend enough time there, as much time as I would have liked, because my money ran short, and New York is an expensive place to live in. And I couldn't sell paintings while I was studying, it was impossible in New York. So I decided to go back to Laguna where there was a chance at least of selling something and continuing to paint, and where

life was not half as expensive as New York, at least at that time. I could live in Laguna Beach on \$20 a week without any trouble whatsoever, and I did.

So I went back to California, and once in a while, I would drop in the studio of one of the better artists in the area. If I didn't model for them, I would sit and watch the class. Sometimes they would let me sit /in/ on a class. Then I finally got accepted, after my third try, by the Laguna Art Association, which was the first feather in my cap. Because to enter the Laguna Art Association at that time, you had to submit three works of art and they were judged to see if you had the quality and the ability to be a member. They had only a quorum of members--they could /not/ have an over amount. And, as I said, it was my third try. I was tremendously pleased that I could get in. I was lucky, I think, at the time because I didn't think I was that good yet. But I happened to have two good paintings at the time that qualified. If I had put the totality of my work in there, I think I would have been rejected because I had some pretty bad stuff.

Anyway, I still had the wanderlust, so I traveled around, I didn't stop my traveling. I got myself an old Volkswagen, _____ wagon, where you can put all your belongings in and you can carry some large canvasses in it, too. I used to carry forty-inch, fifty-inch canvasses in there with the stretchers without any trouble. And I went to Guadalajara, Wisconsin, New York, Michigan, Arizona. I worked in galleries, met artists, kept painting. I never had any success of any kind, but I always managed to sell a few paintings to make just enough money to keep going on. Sometimes I would take a side job. I did resort work just in the summers to make enough money to keep me going during the winter. So for about ten years there I worked in resorts, ranch resorts. It was good pay because I was program director and it took about four months out of the

year for me. During those four months I had no expenses whatsoever at the ranch because your food and lodgings was given besides your pay, and everything I made was stashed away in the bank for the coming winter. So it worked out fine until I hit El Paso one winter. (Chuckles) And through a series of accidents, I managed to stay here. I think I've been here now six, seven years, which is the longest I've been anyplace in my life. Of course, you know how that evolved, with the Greenfield /Gallery/ and so forth.

PAUSE

Learning my first English in New York and being ten years old, knowing only Spanish and this combination of thoid /third/ and cah /car/ and pahk /park/ and boid /bird/, and moving to a middle western place say like Detroit, Michigan (at that time we were outside Detroit), /where/ there were no Spaniards or Mexicans or Cubans at that time at all, my Spanish accent with my New York /accent/ was just too much! So the kids would...I was sensitive to it. My sister even more so, because she had just recently come from Spain and she just had no ear for picking up the English. I had a little bit more luck than she did.

So finally this rule was made in the house, where we had a large slate board in the living room where my dad would constantly be writing out words for us and helping us tremendously, because he was a linguist himself. He knew five or six languages thoroughly. To him it was an easy matter, but somehow or another we didn't have the talent for language. And he decided the only thing to do was just to curtail Spanish altogether--which was no hardship, because in the areas we lived, Spanish was not necessary in the least. Now,

if we had lived here in El Paso, I think, we probably would have.

M: What was your father's name? Was he Raymond, too?

L: No. His name was María. But, of course, he changed it because María wouldn't go too well. So, he changed it to Jack. So, he was Jack López-Alemán. My mother was Emelia.

M: Her name wasn't Alemán, though, was it? The practice is in the Spanish-speaking countries to...

L: No. As I told you once, My dad had wanted to be a dancer, and he decided that López-Alemán would have been a good stage name--just two names he picked: López, Alemán. And he took his own mother's name, that was his mother's name.

M: Alemán?

L: Alemán. So he just passed it on to me and it was on my birth certificate, and so I used it.

M: You never used your mother's family name?

L: No. However, in the Army I did use López alone. But the minute I became an artist, then I took my dad's name, complete name. The Army never pushed it because they didn't even know that it was one name. Of course, they thought like all Americans that it was my mother's name and my father's name. But if I had used my mother's name, my name would be López-Alemán Díaz.

M: Díaz is her name?

L: Right.

M: Emelia Díaz.

L: Right.

M: You've never kept any ties with your parents' relatives back in Spain or anything like that?

L: Just an uncle in New York, that's all.

M: You don't know where in Spain your father came from?

L: Oh, yeah. Vigo.

M: Vigo.

L: In northern Spain.

M: But you're just thoroughly Americanized. Those ties are all...

L: Yeah, from the tenth year on, you know, with living in the middle western states there and going back to New York and California and the Army, it was enough to Americanize me in many ways. Having left home when I was seventeen and having very little influence of any...I never felt any Spanish influence after my tenth year, except that I knew innately I was Spanish and that I was always proud of being Spanish. In fact, I never felt... It was coming to El Paso perhaps, and places like San Antonio, Southern California, where I started to become more aware of being Spanish because I started to look more into the Spanish ideas, the Spanish art, and became more fascinated by it. And I realized how much of our heritage we can't throw off, that it stays right with us, whether we want it or not.

M: Well, Spain has been awfully strong in art. Some of the greatest artists of history have been Spaniards. So, they really have shined in that field. This sister of yours, is she near your age?

L: Yes. She's a year younger.

M: A year younger than you are. You've kept up with her, you go to see her. She lives up in Wisconsin?

L: No, she lives in Michigan and has a family. She's got two boys and a girl. The girl's married and the boy's about to be married in August. One of the boys has very good art talent. Tremendous. In fact, he started oil painting when he was about fourteen. The other boy is a musician, has his own rock

band. So there's a little bit of art in the family anyway.

M: Well, let's see here. You spent a season in Guadalajara, you already mentioned that. A summer season there?

L: Just a summer season. I had a job with an American for a while who was doing some plastic research. But it gave me a little time to go into some of the Mexican art. At that time I was very impressed by Cuevas and Rufino Tamayo, though I still idolized the works of the earlier muralist painters of México like Rivera, Siqueiros. I particularly liked, I guess, Cuevas because he had a very strong social statement to make and yet not breaking from the traditional Mexican art that had been more or less initiated--I think, at least--by Rivera and of course by his pre-columbian leanings. I would copy his drawings, and also Tamayo's paintings. His colors were very strong for me at that time. Though Cuevas at that time was considered to be a radical in Mexican art, today he's considered to be a conservative. That's how much things have changed. Because in Mexican art, as you know, they're following the lead from New York, and you're more likely to see a Mexican today to be painting like Andy Warhol than he is like Orozco or Cuevas or one of the early Mexican masters. It's quite strange how that changes.

M: Then you had a gallery at La Jolla, California for a while?

L: Yeah. Not quite La Jolla, it was on Mission Beach, which is right outside La Jolla. In fact, it was three of us at the time--a fellow named McCracken and an Armenian by the name of Botasian, Pete Botasian. We decided to open up this little gallery because there was a room in the back for us to live and paint, and sell in the front. So we ran the place for about a year. In fact, it was almost a year and a half because I had taken a trip and I'd come back. And we did quite well. We sold a painting a month which was sufficient to buy

beans and milk and coffee to keep going. One of the fellows, Pete, is still out there on Mission Beach. He's got a duplex--paints downstairs, has his own studio. Very gifted artist. He had a four-year scholarship to Chicago Art Institute. And the other artist, McCracken, married a very rich, wealthy widow and lives in high style in Laguna Beach, and still calls himself an artist but I'm afraid that he's lost the hunger that is sometimes necessary to be a good painter. He lives too much the easy life.

M: You think it helps for an artist to be hungry, then?

L: I think it does. I think in the initial process, maybe not just hungry for food perhaps, but the hunger for success, the hunger for recognition--these hungers all feed towards his desire to work and find and probe. I think once he has settled certain problems, certain artists become a little latent, a little lethargic. I hate to point to too many, but I think /of/ Peter Hurd's work. In my estimation, I think his great work was done prior to the war and the late forties. I think since that time, because he has achieved a certain modicum of success, he's not really put out the work that his early talent dictated. I see this in many artists, that their early work is so much greater. Then there's a levelling off and sometimes it's just almost a feeble attempt to copy what they did in the earlier years. A prime example of this, I think even more so than in a case like Peter Hurd, at least in my opinion, would be Chirico, the Italian Surrealist painter who really was more instrumental in bringing the Neo-surrealism School into being than anybody else; and how strong he was, and how much of an influence he was in his early years. And then he decided to change his style. Not to change it; it was convenient, it was a traditional thing, it was a thing he did with ease. But there was nothing left. When he tried to come back to surrealism, he didn't even have it anymore.

M: Well, now, when you came to El Paso in 1966, that's when you had a right serious automobile accident. Did that happen pretty soon after you came here?

L: Yeah. That was one of the reasons I had to stay in El Paso and one of the reasons...I didn't have to, but I cancelled my trip. I was on my way out to California. My car was pretty well packed. I wasn't on my way out at that particular time, but I was about ready to go.

M: You had stopped here for a while?

L: Right, and Albert Greenfield had wanted me to stay over for at least a couple of weeks because he was giving an anniversary show. I think it was the third anniversary of the Greenfield Gallery, and I was one of the featured artists. He thought that it was ungrateful of me. Well, he always said it in a very definite way. He made you realize that he had gone through certain troubles and difficulties to get you a show or to help you, and all of a sudden you were going to take off without even a thank you or stay over and give a little help. So I decided to stay the two weeks for the opening of the show. Of course, Mr. Greenfield died on a Saturday and the show was going to be on a Sunday. My accident was on a Wednesday or Thursday--maybe a week later, two weeks, I forget. But it was in that time, because I stayed after his death to help with the gallery, though I was not in the estate or anything. I think the estate was up for probate. I was helping two of his friends who had taken over the gallery. They were Gladys Rodehaver and...I can't remember the girl's name. Maybe you remember her, she used to be the personnel manager at Bliss, who Albert had gone with.

Anyway, they suggested I take the gallery over because the artists felt... He had about thirty or forty artists at the time and they felt that they wanted someone who knew a little bit about art and was in my position of being single

and who could still live there and perhaps still put their cause across to the city, which was helping the unknown, the younger artists. There was no other gallery at the time that was helping these particular people out. Anyway, for \$600 through the sale of some paintings to a collector here in El Paso, I bought the gallery. That, of course, was the basic reason I'm still here, because from that time on I could never quite get out of here. I made several attempts but I have these tie-downs, these responsibilities, that led to working as a resident artist for the Southwestern Cultural Center, which was a government grant to help art teachers and art students throughout the city to develop better ways of learning art, appreciating it more. I had a sole job of just teaching. I enjoyed that tremendously. That was a three-year grant.

M: That was in the old Southwestern Bank Building. You had your accident just about the time Albert was putting on that third anniversary show. Were you at the anniversary?

L: I was at the anniversary.

M: So it happened soon after.

L: I don't know how much later. I know that I stayed because of the accident.

M: Yes.

L: I also stayed because one led to the other. First, of course, it was Al's death, and when I was about ready to go again, the accident happened. So they were pretty close together. Of course, buying into the gallery also made it almost determined that I would stay in El Paso at least for a while. I thought maybe one or two years would be it, then I would get rid of the gallery and continue on my merry way. But then the grant came through on the Southwest Cultural Center. I started teaching for the Museum of Art. I started teaching for Loretto Academy. My classes built up more and more.

- M: Then you were giving lessons in the Greenfield Gallery, too--you had classes there--and selling some paintings along the way.
- L: Right. We sold paintings. We gave instruction.
- M: But you sort of lost interest as time went on in the Gallery, didn't you? You were so busy.
- L: That's it. I think an artist... When you're a 40 per cent artist or a 20 per cent artist because of your other interests and followings, it makes it very difficult to do one or the other well. Many times running the gallery and teaching, I was not devoting enough time to painting. So I became very lax in the running of the gallery. Sometimes wanting to paint, I would shut the front door and not even answer if I was involved in a painting, which of course is bad for business. Or if somebody came in I wouldn't talk to them because I was too involved in my particular present painting or my immediate painting at the time. Of course, the business started to slack off. Then I was teaching upstairs. That took more of my time.

So this is something I think that any artist has trouble with, who has to find some way, some means of revenue to continue painting, and still divide his time equally well so that the time he spends on his particular work to secure enough money to keep painting doesn't impinge on his freedom, or on his own time for his own particular expression. I think this was the trouble with me. It becomes quite a conflict because you need quite a bit of time to paint, or to write, or to do anything. You just can't paint for two or three hours, go to a job; or come from a job, and go to your painting for two or three hours. It's too...what's the word?

M: Well, it breaks the train of thought.

L: Right.

M: Concentration is broken.

But then about a year ago you moved here on East Yandell Street and away from that building the Greenfield Gallery was in. Here you haven't had to operate a gallery anymore.

L: No. As you know, I sold the name of the gallery to Edgar Schnadig. I think in time Edgar's going to do quite a bit in the arts. He has the means and the energy and the full dedication of just wanting to run an art business. He has a lot of good plans for the Greenfield Gallery and tremendous expansion plans. So that gave me a chance to teach in my own place on Yandell and to do more painting. But the trouble was that I got involved in too much teaching. Just very recently I had to shake off another one. I resigned my job at Loretto Academy after four years because that will give me at least two more days a week to paint. In fact, it helped so much that within the last two months I think I did eighteen small paintings that I would not have been able to do if I had continued teaching those six days a week which I have been teaching.

M: Well, you were really full-time teaching with six days a week.

L: You can say that again.

M: Well, now, in your painting you specialize in certain subjects, like clowns and some on religious themes.

L: Yes. I think that sometimes what the layman doesn't understand, John, is that an artist doesn't paint religious pictures per se, or clowns just for the idea of doing Christ or doing a clown. There's very little difference between a Christ and a clown. Now, that's not being irreligious, it's that the clown or Christ-figure to the artist is an object to express with. It hurts me sometimes when someone looks at a religious painting of mine and thinks that

I'm religious. Well, I might be religious--we're not discussing my bent towards religion--but it isn't the reason I paint, though. I paint because it gives me a chance to use my forms, my ideas of composition, my ideas of color better than any other subject. I find a clown extremely good for showing the passions of man so much easier than, say, painting a little girl or little boys. The clown is an object to me to express an idea, not anything to do with the circus or just painting colors. When one looks at the works of Rouault, he could very easily jump from Christ to clown without any trouble. Sometimes the difference between a religious figure and a clown in a Rouault is very difficult to make out, unless you read the name under. I don't think he was that involved whether it was a clown or a Christ or a saint figure. Our own Walt Kuhn used clowns for that same purpose. Though he was involved in his early days with circuses and entertainment, to him it was a subject he could paint and knew about, but express his ideas. Nothing is more devoid of the color of a circus than Walt Kuhn's great American paintings of clowns because, I think, he stands number one of American painters using the clown as an expression.

M: You also have used some western subjects, though, like Indians and cowboys, and you did have some experience there up on the Monomony Reservation in Wisconsin. Just what was that that you did there? (López-Alemán laughs.) This thing doesn't make it too clear.

L: Doesn't make it too clear, no. I worked at a ranch for six or seven years next to the Monomony Indian Reservation in central Wisconsin. During the summer I would do some sketching out there and I would sometimes even go out and work with some of the children in crafts. But I was not involved with the Indians directly, I was working for the ranch. But many of the Indians would

also work for us at the ranch because we were a riding ranch. Many of the Indians were good horsemen, etc. Also, they worked in other facilities of the ranch. But that was my first exposure to knowing Indians and being able to work with them and draw them and paint them. But outside of that...

I also used the Indians, too, because, being program director, I had to set up different festivals during the fall and sometimes during the summer. These were three, four-hour festivals that had to show the life of the Indians and so forth, so on. I would do a little research at the local libraries, then I would go ahead with songs and dance and even re-enact particular scenes of their history for tourists and for guests. But outside of that I had no more involvement.

M: These types of ranches you worked on were like dude ranches.

L: Yeah. They were what they call guest ranches, actually--a ranch where people go for a week or two to relax and enjoy a little western atmosphere.

M: These Monomnies, have they lost their identity as Indians more than, say, some of these Pueblo Indians up here in New Mexico?

L: Oh, no. The Monomnies are very strong. They're the second richest tribe in America, from what I understand, through the accumulation and control of their lumber. Where the Oklahoma Indians struck it with oil, they were fortunate enough to stay there and not be moved around, though some were. Some of the Monomnies were sent up to the State of Washington. But those who managed to stay there became quite wealthy. Not rich, but at least they could be independent. There was a share...what do they call it? Where they divide profits among everyone in the tribe. So everyone got a pretty just income from the business of the big lumber mills up there. But recently things have changed, I understand. But I won't go into that.

M: But I mean while you were there, these Monomonies, did they still have tribal dances they would do and that sort of thing?

L: Yeah. They're not like the Pueblos or our own little Tiguas. They're more independent. They don't have to dance for the tourists.

M: They don't?

L: I'm sure that a lot of what you see in the Southwest is done to pick up a few extra bucks at their own expense, actually. Because I'm sure they don't feel more like it than anybody else, but make a fool of themselves doing some of the things they do. But it's a way to continue to eke out a living. And at least the Monomony was fortunate enough to have some income where he didn't have to do a war dance in front of a high school bunch or a bunch of school teachers looking for some lost culture or something or another. There is a difference, yes. But when they do it, they do it as a way of tradition, a way of keeping their own traditions going. In fact, many, many times no outsiders are welcome or are there. There are so many Monomonies living in the area that they do attend their own festivals, but you don't see too many whites or whatever names they have for each other, which they do. (Chuckles)

M: Here in the Southwest, have you contacted Indians particularly to paint or anything like that?

L: No.

M: When you've done western subjects, then, it's more out of your imagination.

L: Right. I don't know what it is, but I can do an Indian head or a colored head. I think almost anybody can. I need a form of departure. For instance, that one that you see down there (designating a painting), the lower Indian head, is made from a white man's head. I liked the pose of his head, so I decided that I would make an Indian out of him. But I have to do many things

in the meanwhile. My composition has to change, my coloring has to change. The features have to change, of course, on the face to give the Indian look. In other words, sometimes I use the point of departure, a photograph or so, or sometimes I just do several drawings until I have what I want--and that's it. I would like to have an Indian pose, but I find I don't really need it.

M: You've never really worked much from models?

L: No.

M: You don't use models.

L: I couldn't find any models for that one (motioning to a painting. Laughs.)

No, my figures are distorted enough sometimes where I don't have to. When you distort a figure, you have to have a point of departure. You have to have a basic concept of the way the figure stands. But once you have that concept, you can distort it to your way of looking at it. If you've done enough life drawing or head drawing, it becomes a little easier.

M: You've never tried to do commission portraits or anything like that?

L: I've done it very, very, very little. Only on extreme cases where I was so hungry and the money sounded so good that I would attempt it. Now, I've had students who will do portraits, and do do portraits. That one right now (referring to a drawing), that's a professor at your university that you're looking at right now, Professor Barnes. Do you know him?

M: Oh, yes. Tom Barnes.

L: Well, that's he, right there. Someone's doing him, I guess some kind of commission or something. And that's only five hours work on that. So that isn't bad. It's going to come out to be a pretty good portrait.