

FLUXUS, FILM & SAM: A CONVERSATION WITH JEFF PERKINS

Editor's Note: This conversation was held in New York City last September on the occasion of a Fluxus event in memory of Al Hansen at the Emily Harvey Gallery. The conversation was held in Jeff Perkins' home in Lower Manhattan on 17 September 1998.

How did you get into the art world?

I started drawing and painting when I was a teenager. My father had a talent for drawing, so I got interested in it. I decided I wanted to be an artist.

After high school I had to go to the Army, (I joined the Reserves) and after that, I came to New York and went to the New York Phoenix School of Design, and I lived at the YMCA on West 63rd St. I worked for Macy's doing display work, and then I did more display work, and went to classes, had friends in the Village, and hung out in the Village. I remember I saw an Ad Reinhardt show at the Jewish Museum at that time (all black paintings) and I was looking at Abstract Expressionism.

Did Andy come into your focus?

My first exposure to Andy Warhol came as a matter of fact at that time.. I had a 16mm Bolex camera and in Springfield, MA where I grew up I found out about some cultural magazine and as a matter of fact, Bobby Brown, Jean Brown's son, was a friend of mine, and when I visited Bobby at his home, above the fireplace mantle was a Franz Kline (a color Kline) and I was astonished, and at that time, we were seeing these beautiful issues of *Film Culture* in the 60s, so I knew about underground films. I used to make trips up to New York before I moved to the City and saw Thelonius Monk at the Five Spot, and I was interested in New York because I was born in New York and knew a lot of interesting things were happening here.

One day we went to New York to see an underground film (the only other art film I had seen was *The Virgin Spring* by Ingmar Bergman, and that was impressive but I didn't quite understand it, and we went to see *Vinyl* by Andy Warhol, with Gerald Malanga and Edie Sedgwick, and my friend Cy Hurlley from Holyoke really found it disgusting, it was basically an S & M movie with great humor. We also saw an adaptation of *A Clockwork Orange* written by Ron Tavel, and that was interesting to me. But what was going on in the film was weird and strange, and I had seen nothing so hip. The soundtrack was a portable record playing with *No Where to Run, No Where to Hide* by Martha and the Vandellas, it just kept going on and on and on. I thought it was very interesting.

You sort of combined your interest in film with the rest of the visual arts and the people you met, a kind of art life.

I stayed in New York for about a year and a half. I was still in the Reserves, and while I was in New York, I was supposed to go to meetings every week and I forgot about it, and didn't go to any of them. In 1961, my father died, and I went back to Springfield for the funeral, and there were letters waiting for me from my Reserve Unit, so I went in to see the Commander, and he told me that I should be prepared to go into Active Duty. My cousin was in town for my father's funeral (a career military guy) and he told me that what I should do is to enlist in the Air Force, because if I were

inducted into the Army I would be sent to Vietnam and I would be killed. . At that time, I didn't know what Vietnam was but he knew, because he had already served in Vietnam, and I could have certain privileges in the Air Force, and that I should go see the Commander and ask him if I could do that. I did, and the Commander said yes. I went down to the Air Force and enlisted in 1962 and went to San Antonio for my basic training, and I remember one weekend, I had a pass to see the Museum of Modern Art in Houston. So I took a bus from San Antonio to Houston, and the exhibition was a retrospective of Sam Francis, and I remember the painting *Big Red* which is now at the Museum of Modern Art, and I was impressed by Sam's work at that time. Then I went back to the base.

I went for further training in Pompano Beach, Florida and during a competition, I was stationed in Tokyo in 1963. I wanted to go to Tokyo, because I had done reading of the beat writers and Orientalism was in my blood, Suzuki, Gary Snyder, Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, so I was ready for Japan, and the mystery of Japan was ready for me. I had two weeks off before I started work as a psychiatric technician and went into Tokyo and got off at Shinjuku Station and someone asked if I were American, "I am Japanese, and I would like to take you around Tokyo. I'd like to practice my English." He gave me a little tour, and I discovered the jazz bars of Shinjuku, full of small cafes and all different kinds of places, and there are a lot of jazz cafes, and I was already into jazz. And I discovered this coffee shop called Fungetsu-oo, a kind of New York Greenwich Village coffee shop, and I gravitated towards that. One evening, I was in this particular jazz place and I met an American journalist and asked her if she knew anyone who had psychedelics, and she said, yes, and that she knew a New Yorker who was married to a famous Japanese dancer and she gave me his number, and this guy answered, and his name was Tony Cox, and asked me to visit them. It was a very long trip on the train and it was quite complicated to the outer limits; it was at night, and somehow I found the street, found the house with a wall, a thatched roof, big pine tree right in the front yard. Tony greeted me at the door and invited me in. There was a stairway at the right in this two-story house (very unusual for Japan) and down the stairs came a woman with long black hair, dressed in black, and she was very pregnant. She walked across the room, and then went back up the stairs again. That was Yoko Ono, and she was pregnant with her first child Kyoko. We became friendly, Tony and I talked about New York, and they didn't know any New Yorkers in Tokyo, and then they decided to come out to the Air Base to buy baby food. So they came out to the base and bought a hundred jars of Gerber's baby food and a camera, and we went into the cafeteria of the PX, and Yoko was very unusual-looking, since she dressed like a Beatnik with these muu-muus, long dresses, and her hair was very long and black.

Tony and Yoko and I became close friends, and they were living in the house that Yoko's parents had given to them. I began hanging out with them. Tony and Yoko had done the New York underground scene, and Yoko was already pretty famous as a matter of fact. John Cage was coming through with Merce Cunningham, and she worked for the Cunningham Company as a translator. Later I learned from reading Peggy Guggenheim's biography that she was Peggy's roommate on a tour, and Peggy wrote very nicely about her. Yoko was connected to "high art" and was honored by a lot of modern artists in Japan in 1963. At that time, Japan was very active, and she knew everything about what was happening, and as a result I knew about it. And I met a bunch of artists, Shigeiko, Tone, Takemitsu, Paik, and also Sam Francis. Sam had a studio there and I went to an opening at Niaqua Gallery

and there was a show of a group called High Red Center, the preeminent avant garde group in Tokyo at the time, and I remember going with Dan Richter who later ended up working for Yoko and John in Ascot and Jed Curtis, who was in the Fluxus show in Wiesbaden show and now lives in Los Angeles as an actor, I met them as a result of Tony calling me up and telling me that these two guys had arrived from India and they had this amazing hashish, and I'd like you to meet them anyway, and I met them in the train station in rush hour, and there is a huge overpass over the tracks, and I saw this huge man walking towards us (about 8 feet tall, a giant wearing white), and I couldn't figure out what it was and as it got closer, I realized it was a very tall man with another man sitting on his shoulders in a posture of yoga, and the carrier was Jed Curtis and the man on his shoulders was Dan Richter. I continued on to Tony and Yoko's while Dan and Jed were staying together in Tokyo at the time. Dan had this incredible gift for gab—Yoko and Tony two nights before Dan left stayed awake two nights in a row, because Yoko wanted to record him because he was so unusual. Yoko wouldn't talk to Jed except through the door, she wouldn't let him into the apartment. Yoko was peculiar in certain ways like that. Jed said that Dan was like a Bodhisattva, and they had met under the Bodhi tree in India. They were world travelers. The night before Dan left for New York we talked all night before he left for the airport. Jed stayed a while, and I kind of moved into Jed's apartment for a while. I wrote some early pieces there.

When we went to see the show of the Hi Red Center, the gallery had been boarded up with a sign saying *Show Canceled*, so we went out for some dinner and returned to the gallery where there were about 100 people all drinking beer, and in the room, there was a soft chair and in the chair was Sam Francis with Jasper Johns standing nearby. After the show closed, we went to a bar where Sam also had gone, with a couple of gorgeous Japanese girls and a man whom I think was Tono, the critic. That's when I saw him. Yoko had a concert in a famous venue for avant garde events, Sogetsu Kaikan, next to the royal palace, and they had a tape lab there, Kosugi and all of the young experimental composers were using this tape lab and they had a concert hall there. Sam painted a beautiful mural for the lobby of the Sogetsu Concert Hall around that time. I remember seeing it then. Yoko called the concert, "Farewell to Tokyo" and had just published her book, "Grapefruit" in the plain white paperback edition. Kyoko was born and she invited me to join in the concert. Tony Cox and I performed while she made an announcement. Tony's idea was that we be bound tightly with ropes back to back, with the ropes having bottles and cans hanging off of them. We were to walk across the stage twice, and it was difficult to walk, almost like a sculpture. Yoko turned out the lights in the hall, and she announced that she had released two snakes out into the audience and that they could light one match only to see if they could see the snakes. We performed it, and then she did her striptease with a chair out on the stage, and a couple of other pieces. That was my baptism into performance.

During that time, Yoko was my mentor. "Go to see the Noh Theater in Tokyo..Forget about Kabuki. Noh is the best one." So I did go on several occasions and also read about The Noh. She told me a great deal about Japanese culture. I felt the influence. Fred Lieberman came over from Hawaii (he was a grad student at the East-West Center), studying the music of the Noh and its instruments, and he had produced a concert at the East-West Center which was a Fluxus concert. There is a note on it in *Mr.*

Fluxus by Emmett Williams & Ayo Yasunao. So Fred invited me for that, and Yoko gave me a few performances to do, one was Tone's *Clapping Music*, which was misspelled as "Crapping Music". I couldn't figure out how to perform this thing, which was a visual score, a circular score which looked like a grapefruit cut in half and were looking at it as if you were seeing the seeds in it. And it was "Crapping Music" and I just couldn't do it. Fred produced the big concert, John Cage's *Atlas Ellipticalis* and Cage conducted that, and they had taken the big Symphony Hall with Toru Takemitsu, and John Cage performed on piano with a prepared piano piece and I got to assist. I got to play records for him and I ran from the stage to the booth. Sam Francis and Jasper Johns were there, since they probably were on their way to Japan. Maybe this was before the Tokyo event.

But you were still in the Air Force?

Yes, but I stayed AWOL another two weeks and so I was punished, but that was no big deal.

I continued to make art there and do some writing, found object sculptures, and I was working nights at the hospital and so I had a lot of time to read. I made a study of I Ching, largely because of Yoko's influence. She also gave me a copy of Cage's *Silence* and also *An Anthology*, and I found Jackson Mac Low's writing very interesting, and Henry Flynt's writing was likewise interesting. It told me all about the scene in New York about LaMonte Young. Tony was involved with LaMonte Young and so was Yoko with her Chamber St. Loft Concerts Chamber Street. She was very determined as a woman artist, realizing how tough it was in the New York art scene; it was competitive was especially hard for women artists. Tony borrowed my camera, and Yoko did a performance on the Ginza, handing out flowers to people on the street, and people were terrified. She tried to give away flowers to people, and the next scene she was sitting on the window seat of her apartment in Shibuya; she was dressed in white and she was plucking the petals of a flower. The last shot was her lying on a bed covered with flower petals. I was writing instructional pieces, copying the Anthology poetics of Brecht, Watts and Mallow, and Nam Jun Paik had a show in Yoko's apartment. He had brought two huge books—4 ft. x 2 ½ ft. wide and 9 or 10" in thickness with beautiful red bindings, two rare sacred Buddhist texts with an announcement that they would be shown in Yoko's apartment, and you must make an appointment. Yoko's apartment was one big room with a Shoji screen, a small kitchen and a bathroom. But it was basically one large room. I remember Shigeo Kubota came to see the books, and she came into the room and we closed the screen; Yoko and I had tea and we were talking, time went by and more time went by, then Yoko opened the screen and looked in, and when she did so, the two books were on the floor and Shigeo had opened the books and used them as a bed and was asleep on the books. Basically, the two books were empty with no text in them. Years later, I was talking to Paik about these books, and he had found these books and bought them from this guy. It was one of these unusual things.

Then Yoko did her "Fly Piece" where she invited the audience to please tell how they flew. Nam June Paik couldn't be there, but he would phone in and everytime the phone would ring, it would be Paik. I met Yoko's parents one day. Her father was a very big man and he was debilitated by a stroke, and her mother.

NEW YORK

They went back to New York, and my next station was Washington, DC, at Andrews Air Base and I used to play piano for the patients. Everyday they asked me to play piano. Then I met a couple of artists in Washington, Royce Dendler and his wife. Royce and I became friends and he was teaching at an art school in Washington and asked me to do a couple of lectures on I Ching. I explained how it was used and did a workshop. I also made a little film in a junk yard outside the base. She liked it a lot, but it has since disappeared. It was a performance piece in which I did some actions in front of the camera, and that was that. I painted all my clothes silver at some point, my uniforms (I had a Puerto Rican roommate at the time who thought I was crazy, but he turned me on to salsa music, Eddy Palmieri and others) Royce was an interesting guy. Yoko and Tony were talking about having a kind of university of New Art.

I was discharged from the U.S. Armed Forces, and Yoko and Tony had a spare room in New York at 100th Street, and so I rented it living with Yoko, Tony and Kyoko. Yoko had already done a performance on the roof of a building they were renting in the village. We had already gone on macrobiotic diets, and Yoko was cooking dinners, and we had a good time there. Yoko got a performance at the Carnegie Recital Hall where she performed her "Cut Piece" and I think it had never been done before, although someone had said she had done it in Kyoto. There was quite a large audience and she invited the audience to come and cut her clothes off. Some guy came up on the stage, and he was very challenging. The scissors were quite big, long, and he was strutting around her (Tony and I were backstage) and he got into it, and it was filmed by the Mayles Brothers. The situation looked dangerous but after all, nothing horrible happened.)

And then we put up a show in the Judson Church Gallery, an environment called *The Stone*, and Tony produced it. It was a paper room in which Yoko asked anyone to enter the room closed in a black bag. I created a film that was projected on both walls, *From Here to be Continued, To Here to be Continued* the next day. The show stayed up for a month. Then Yoko wanted to go Off-Broadway. We took over a Macrobiotic Restaurant where Yoko occasionally worked. We took up half the restaurant and ran it. We went to visit George Maciunas in his apartment, and George showed us all his stuff (this was about 1967), and he was living with his mother. It was a very small apartment. There was one small room in which he lived in, very small to imagine anyone living in it, and the room was cover from floor to ceiling with crafted cabinets in which there were little drawers and in each drawer were objects. "Smell Chess" by Takako Saito—and many others. It was also at the 100th St. apartment where we made Yoko's film #4, "The Bottoms Movie". I made a short film called "Shoot", Fluxus Film #22. These films were made for the Fluxus Film Fest at the New York Cinematheque, produced by George Maciunas.. I didn't know how important he was, but I was impressed by the room. And it was very Japanese—and there were other Japanese artists living in the same building: Kosugi, Saito and Kubota all there. Takako told me recently that she found that building, not George. Ay-O had a loft on Canal St., and we visited him.

George Maciunas then called a meeting. George had gotten a federally guaranteed no interest loan from the Federal Government, one of the first NEA grants, and I think Henry Geldzahler was the first commissioner of it, and George was connected. George

engineered these loans to buy these buildings in SoHo. I was at the first meeting when George was offering lofts (\$2500) on Wooster St. and you could buy one. Around that time, I was getting evicted from 2nd Avenue and there was no lease. Tony had stolen the electricity from the next building and the phone from the next building, everything was illegal and I was getting kicked out of there. I went to Cordier & Ekstrom to see a Walter de Maria exhibit (I think it was his first) where he showed these metal sculpture Swastikas and sculptures with rolling balls on Madison Avenue near the Met, and I came out of the place about 11 or 12, and I had not slept. I walked to the corner about to cross the street and there was an amazing girl on the other side with her arms open wide. I looked behind me to see to whom she was gesturing, and there was no one there. It was me and apparently I had seen her in the Annex the night before with two men (and I was their waiter and there was a bit of flirting between us) so I said "hello" and let's have a drink. She was a movie actress working in Roger Corman movies, and her name is Bobbie Shaw. She moved back to L.A. and I decided to go to Hollywood too. I passed up the Maciunas offer and got a drive-away car which was an amazing experience in itself and I found this little hippy girl who was going to San Francisco, and we were going to share the ride. There was a snowstorm when we were leaving and while we were gassing up at the gas station at 1st St. and 2nd Ave., which is still there, a limo pulled up to the curb, the window rolled down and my name was called out. It was a high school friend, Allan Sugarman, who had been busted for dealing a large amount of LSD to the police, and he had been in prison for several months, and I had written him a letter that it was time to reform and to get religious and reform his ways. He answered my encouraging letter with two words: Fuck you, Love Al, so he had been bailed out by mobsters, and the rest of his life was very existential. He was shot in a gunfight in our home town, Springfield. Allan was actually a genius, and he went bad because of a traumatic experience with his father, whom he discovered hanging in the basement of his house when he was a child. Allan was one of my teachers. At the age of 15 and 16, he had read all of the existentialist writers, but his life took a very wild course which led to his early death. I started out for L.A. That was in itself an adventure.

LOS ANGELES

I arrived in L.A.. I knew Fred Lieberman at UCLA and I knew Eve Babitz whom I met at the Stone exhibition at the Paradox. I first moved in with Bobbie, the apartment behind the Country Store in Laurel Canyon, and three days later we went to Topanga Canyon and I met Wally Berman, who was the first artist I met in L.A.. There was a club called The Corral, and Wally was sitting there with Dean Stockwell and Russ Tamblyn and the band Spirit was playing on a Sunday afternoon. Subsequently, I went out to visit with Wallace in his house. I contacted Eve Babitz and she brought me out to Venice and showed me around West L.A. . Fred Lieberman was involved with the avant garde music scene and introduced me to Joseph Byrd, who was producing avantgarde concerts at UCLA. He did a concert in the Music Department, and I was invited into that show, and I made a water-filled plastic membrane that people had to walk through and it ruptured, so people had to walk through this lake to get to the concert hall. There were different kind of performers, and then Fred produced a concert at the Schoenberg with Yuji Takahashi, the pianist, as the guest performer and Fred invited me to participate with a light piece with theatrical lighting.

At UCLA Student Union, there were 2,000 people in the audience. First, I did Yoko's Bag piece—I had a bag made and Bobbie participated by coming up from the audience. She was a very attractive woman, and we both got into the bag. At that time, we were breaking up, and we had this kind of emotional event in the bag (it was very hot in the bag) and it was a very successful performance lasting about 20 minutes.. Then I did a piece of my own: I had a Polaroid camera and took a picture of someone I didn't know and then I took pictures of people in the audience including Bobbie and then I made a fire on the stage and photographed the fire and then brought photographs of the fire and passed them out to people in the audience.

My first job was a waiter job in the Old World Restaurant, and then as a projectionist in the Cinematheque Theater, managed by Louis Teague, right near the Old World. Soon after Louis Teague left and I became the manager and I started to do programming. I did a Kenneth Anger retrospective which was wildly successful. Samson de Brier always came to chat and generally make his presence known. I became a kind of focal point for experimental film makers; a lot of new things were going on at UCLA, Charles Lippincott from USC came, and Peter Mays I met there and we are still good friends. And I was doing performances all this time, writing them, doing private performances without audiences. I was still living in Laurel Canyon with Peter Mays, sharing a house as the thing with Bobbie Shaw had ended predictably. Multimedia was big at that time, and back in NYC, I was in the Second Avant-Garde Festival. USCO was there in New York. When I got to New York, I thought I was out front coming from New York to L.A. Joe Byrd, a friend of Cage, knew what was happening, and he was in *An Anthology*.

The job at the Cinematheque gave me a focus, producing shows; Peter Mays asked me to be in his movie (an experimental film), *Sister Midnight*, and I acted in that movie. Charles Lippincott, a student at USC in the film department, came around and he asked me to put together a light show to do rock concerts, to replace the light show they had for Pinnacle Productions at the Shrine Auditorium. I put the word out, we had a little meeting, and John van Hammersveld, David LeBrun, Jon Green, Burton Gershfield, Michael Scroggins and I were renting a big house above Sunset Strip (12 rooms) and we shared the house. The first concert was a Jimmy Hendrix concert after Monterey (his debut where he burned his guitar) and Blue Cheer, a noise trio. The following week, there was a concert in Shrine Hall where they do expositions, and that was the band Cream, with Eric Clapton, Dave Mason and Ginger Baker, and these shows were amazing. There were three band shows, the Who, and each weekend there were 3 bands for \$7.50, and that was the first wave of power bands in England hitting L.A. The shows attracted a great group of people, and we used to sip LSD cocktails as a mild stimulant. Marvelous experiences. One night we were projecting the Velvet Underground show from a kind of erected platform in the middle of the auditorium, a temporary construction, and there is a little room on this stand so no one could come up on it. There was Sam Francis standing there with Tono Yoshiaki, the critic and that was a trip.

(I had previously met Sam, not in Tokyo for the first time, but in L.A. at a party for Toshi Ichiyonagi, Yoko Ono's first husband.) Sam was there with his wife Mako; actually I was not introduced to him, but I knew who he was. After the party the group was going to the Avalon Ballroom on Venice Pier to see Jim Morrison and the Doors perform their debut concert where he dove into the

audience, but I decided not to go because I was having personal problems. So I missed that concert. I met Morrison later through my friend, John Stehura, a schoolmate of Morrison's at UCLA. It turned out that Sam found out about the light show, because one of our members, John Green, was installing and living in Joe Funk's litho studio in Venice, and Sam was making his prints there at the Pot Shop, sharing the space with ceramicists. We did a few more concerts for Pinnacle, and then they got very ambitious and did a big concert at the Rose Bowl and it was a failure, and they lost thousands of dollars and went out of business.

We were doing fabulous light shows. We had many movie projectors, slide projectors and it was very big. The screen was 70 x 35 feet—and it was good stuff. I could not have been doing better work. Painting was dead. So I started hanging out at the Pot Shop—we set up our light show at the Pot Shop—and we kept jamming. We generated a great deal of techniques, and I started an optical technique with a movie projector. In Joe Funk's shop, there was Allan Kiesling, another member of the Light Show from the Shrine, with a bank of 6 slide projectors with dimmers on them, and he could regulate the shutters and those shutter wheels on drills were making a lot of noise, so you could strobe slides and animate pictures—basic animation, and I started doing minimalist abstractions with flicker using the 6 slide projectors. I found Terry Riley's record in C and I knew who Terry Riley was. That was the first pop version of modern avant garde music. I brought the record back to the shop among other modern music that appeared at that time and used it as sound track for the light show. And Sam was making lithos in the printshop. Suddenly, Sam got very interested in our light show and suddenly people started to show up such as Henry Miller, Jim Turrell, and it became a *cause celebre*, and Sam decided to become our patron. Sam helped us a lot with money for equipment and supplies as his sponsorship of our work. Also Betty Freeman came around a few times and also provided some unpublished tapes in her collection that we used in our shows. She was a supporter and a friend.

I had found this studio on Ashland Street above an appliance store. At that time, there was a big artist community in Ocean Park: Turrell, Kawai, Berlant, Diebenkorn, Lewis Palmer, Allan McCollum, Charles Garabedian and others (who were in that building) and it was beautiful with windows on two sides and a beautiful floor, being originally a sail-making place. I couldn't afford it so Sam rented it, because he had received a commission to do a big painting for the National Gallery in West Berlin.. He started setting up shows for us: Santa Barbara Museum of Art and Richard Feynman came to that show. He actually came to three shows of ours. We were really doing well, the Grinsteins were coming, and it was interesting, a new art form. We were into psychedelic work, and the art was vital. I met Anais Nin and she brought her books and gave me all her books, and Henry Miller came a couple of times. And then Sam gave us the Ashland studio to give concerts there, and every time we gave concerts, Sam would give a party with bartenders and Ed Janss would come and Wally Berman came and it was a scene. Sam had salons in his garden. Ed Moses saw my work a lot and liked my work. And it was very interesting and wild stuff. And then, Sam got a commission to do a big painting, *Berlin Red*, for the National Gallery in West Germany and I asked him if I could film him doing it. He agreed saying that he had not ever been filmed or photographed while painting. So I started filming him (it took a year to get it together). Dan Cytron was working for Sam, and he prepared the room, got the canvas, gessoed the canvas 30 times,

and waited for a year. During that year, Sam started his litho shop and it became my work, filming him working in the litho shop and other incidental things, including and starting with some short rolls of him working on his "Edge Paintings". I didn't own a movie camera and didn't really have much money, so I was borrowing cameras and equipment and paying for film from my own pocket as Sam and I agreed that he would not be financially involved with the project. And then he started the painting, 30 x 70 feet, and it was very dramatic. It was not a disappointment. Sam performed as a painting, and the spirit of Pollock was there. Sam did it his way. He painted five shapes, and I filmed 3 of the shapes. And then it was over. I tried to work with it, but it wasn't enough. So I went to Sam and asked if I could do an interview with him (that was 1974) and he didn't want to do an interview since he had never done one before and didn't want to do it. He was a painter and that was his work.

One day I had breakfast with Sam, in which we had very stimulating conversation. Mako was there, and he said, okay, I'll do an interview with you and it has to be here at this table, and we'll pass the camera back and forth. He gave me a date, and actually I didn't own a camera and didn't have any money. So I had to find a camera, and I knew Larry Janss and Larry owned the Fox Venice Theater at the time and I was working there doing graphic arts for their ads to make money. He had an Eclair with a Nagra tape recorder sync with a sound system. Larry agreed on the stipulation that he film the interview, so I agreed. Since Sam was leaving the day after the interview for Tokyo, I simply showed up at Sam's house with Larry and the equipment, Sam looked at it and said, oh, I see, and it was a different situation. He sat in the garden (his two boys came running out to play) and I had a book full of notes about Sam. I wanted to interview Sam, but it was a disaster. Yet Sam was enjoying it a lot. And besides we were friends, and I wasn't coming from a professional documentarian point of view.

However, I was there with the camera with three rolls of movie film. This was an event that had to happen. He understood that too. We worked and suffered and pushed and struggled and searched until we could find a common ground. At a certain point, I threw up my hands and said, I give up, I cannot seem to get through to you. And he said, Yeah, I don't like to do interviews, I feel like I'm in a police court and this is torture. And this is all on film. Then, he said to me if we could only find a subject like we have at times as we did the other day, while we were talking about dreams. So he asked, tell me the latest dream you had. Well, it's not about me, this is about you. And he said, no, so I told him my dream that I had and then he softened up. He tried making some statements that are useful. The character of that event being basically spontaneous and live comes across in a different light. After all, I don't think he ever did another filmed interview. I could see that he was trying, but he was also making it difficult. He is very quick of mind, very intelligent, seductive and passionate too, but it is complicated with all the things he does. I told him, you talk about contradiction, and he said, no, it's not contradiction, it is conflict in my life. So painting is an outlet because there are no problems but a kind of ecstasy for him. And this is one of the conflicts for him. The price was my vulnerability, to be exposed. He said in the interview, "You could tear me apart with this stuff."

After the interview, he left and I walked over to the doorway to his studio and he was standing there like a temple god with his arms crossed, and I felt stupid and I said I'm sorry, but I'm not going to develop the film because it was so awful. He never said a word.

"You do what you want with it," said he. It was the first interview I had done with anybody, and I really didn't want to do an interview.

But you had prepared for this, made the appointment, did the research. You didn't know that the kids were going to come into the studio, as a diversionary tactic. You did everything you could do to do it correctly.

I felt it was okay. I tried to integrate the interview with the litho footage, I had a lot of footage. There were certain things in the interview. He said certain things in the interview that I wanted to clear up. He said something that I had an opportunity to jump on and it was an important statement for elaboration. I told him that I wanted to re-interview him, and he said "absolutely not." I started in 1967, I did the interview in 1974, and in 1977 went back to him again, and asked if I could do another interview and he said no.

He told me I could film him making new paintings in the same studio at Ashland. He was doing different kinds of painting and I shot two nights. I wanted this film to be included in this March show (1999 in Los Angeles) very much, but the curator, William Agee, turned it down. This film has been rejected, but I am going to get it done in Paris.

Then you collaborated with Guy de Cointet while you were living in Los Angeles in the 1970s?

I was a good friend of Guy's when he started his publishing and he offered me a page in his *ACRCIT*, his first publication as a newspaper, and then he did a show with Billy Barty in his first performance, and I helped him with that, selecting an actor. He first wanted a little girl to play *Qei No Mysxdod* which is an anagram for Guy de Cointet. That's one of the codes, and that is the key to a code. And I shared a house with him. We stayed in touch. I last talked with him on the phone from New York to L.A. shortly before his death. It was such a tragic thing. He was an exceptionally talented artist with a great sense of humor. I miss him.

In 1974, I had a job as artist-in-residence for LAICA and worked at the Veteran's Hospital with two other artists with a CETA job. I produced works there, and I made some drawings which were destroyed by the staff, because they hated them so much. One day I was at Cal Arts and ran into Taka Imura, who was a filmmaker whom I met in Tokyo and Yoko did a score for his film called *Ai*, which mean "love". He said, "Yoko has been looking for you. Here's the phone number in New York." I called and Yoko said she had heard that I was dead and had OD'd in San Francisco and died. And I told her that was not my thing. She said that there were some interesting things going on in New York, "why don't you come and visit us."

She had previously written me letters to keep me informed. She sent me the catalog of her first show at Indica Gallery, where she met John Lennon. She was thinking of coming back to the States, and to come to California. She was talking about Mills College. She said life was very difficult with Tony with no money, but the work was good. They were very poor. The Beatles had come to her concert at the Royal Albert Hall. She was popular, but her life was so difficult and she didn't know whether she could take it any longer. Come and visit us, go to United Air Lines and there will be a ticket for you there. That day I got to the airport, went first class, got off the plane and a chauffeur was waiting for me with a

limo, took me to the Fifth Avenue Hotel where William Burroughs was staying, Attica State was going on and I watched that on TV, and so I checked in the hotel and told them I was there. The usual waiting time for Yoko was three or four days. So four days I got the call, "come on over" and they lived in this little basement apartment on Bank Street. I went over and knocked on the door, and John Lennon answered the door in his bathrobe and he looked at me and laughed because I must have looked as if I were in shock. But he put his arm around me and said, "I'm just John". They were in bed, big place in the back, they laid in bed all the time listening to the radio, which John liked to do. I remember "I am a Walrus" came on the radio and he started bouncing up and down, "it's me, man", smoking joints. So they basically told me that Tony Cox had stolen Kyoko. Cox, a born-again Christian, said that they were the agents of Satan and they were very evil people, and Kyoko was buying it. They had gotten a court order from a judge in Houston that they could share custody of Kyoko, but Tony who had been in jail had escaped and grabbed Kyoko and disappeared. They hired three people to try to find them, but were not successful. So they asked me if I would do the job. I was to start out by going to Houston. I didn't know anybody in Houston. I said to Yoko as I was leaving (they were recording an album) I have to go back to L.A. before I go to Houston, because I needed some clothes, I had bought a VW van and the engine was bad and I had to get the van out of the garage and pay for it, and my friend Joseph Bogdanovich was making a movie in which he asked me to be the lead in the film and I had to cancel that. I really needed to go back to L.A. and Yoko felt I should go directly to Houston. I was emphatic, and then Yoko agreed. I got my van out of the shop, drove it out to Cal Arts to see Joseph. That day Alison Knowles was having an event, a potlatch event, and Peter van Riper and Simone Forti were there near the *House of Dust*, Alison's piece. Joseph and I drove to the house and parked right near the house where he was staying. We smoked some grass, went back to Cal Arts and it was evening time by then. Peter and Alison were sitting behind the campfire and Simone was there too. That was the last thing I remember. I woke up 7 days later in a L.A. County Hospital in the Emergency Critical Care Ward. My mother was sitting there, my friends, Peter Mays, David LeBrun, Jan Wolf, James Cameron and a number of people were around my bed. My hip had been dislocated, my jaw had been broken, my ribs had been broken, and I had been nearly killed. We had left Cal Arts and drove down this road and at an intersection, a 16-wheel truck arrived at the same time and it won! It was claimed that I drove through a red light or a stop sign. At any rate, the driver said I drove directly into the path of his truck. I have never been able to believe that I would do that. I was lying in the hospital, and Yoko and John sent 12 bouquets of flowers, and Sam Francis sent one. And the people there wondered why is this guy lying here, and he's getting flowers from John and Yoko. I stayed in there for 6 weeks, and I was to stay in bed at home for another 6 weeks in Venice. So I did that and was recovering.

Yoko called from San Francisco and asked if I would join them in San Francisco at a big hotel where they were staying. So I was well enough and I drove up there. I had film footage of Kyoko from when we lived at 100th Street and I brought it to give to Yoko. And we got there and we couldn't find them. They weren't checked in the hotel. We turned around and drove back to L.A. As soon as we got into the door, the phone rang and it was Yoko asking me, "Where are you?" And I told her that we had been there, they weren't in the hotel, and we returned to L.A. Well, she explained that they had been kicked out of the hotel, so they checked into another hotel. She then asked me to get on a plane

and come back to San Francisco. And I did. I brought Jan with me, and they stayed at the Stanford Court Hotel, and we checked in there. Supposedly, Yoko had seen Tony in Sausalito. I tried to be a detective looking around Sausalito, and I came across a young Mexican gas attendant, and he thought he knew something and I set up a meeting with John and Yoko to meet him, and we stayed in the car for an hour waiting, but the guy never showed up and we looked and looked, and it didn't pan out. While they were there, Geraldo Rivera was negotiating a deal with them to give a concert in Madison Square Garden and they were going to live there, buy a house there around the Bay. They were friends with Paul Krassner then, and there was a book by Mae Russell that Paul had gotten them. She was a conspiracy theorist and she had these theories about the Kennedy assassination and they were really into that. They were looking for houses, and then they went back to New York, and I went back to L.A. Then they asked me to move to New York to work for them. In fact Dan Richter interviewed me for the job. He had been a professional mime, got a job in the film, "2001" and met John and Yoko and started working for them as a personal assistant. Dan was leaving and got someone to replace him, Peter Bendry, who came out to L.A. to hide from John and Yoko. "I need a life", and based on that and other concerns, I decided not to take the job. So they did the concert, and they invited me to come out for the concert and I spent a couple of weeks in the East and then returned to Los Angeles.

NEW YORK

After John was murdered, I moved back to New York in 1981 with my son, who had been born in Santa Monica in 1977. I went to ask Yoko if there were any jobs with her. And things were different. Her life had completely changed, and she had a different life. She has moments of warmth and yet fame and celebrity has taken over her life. She needs security wherever she goes. We can be friends, but we could not be more closely involved than that. Nothing personal.

I found this building in which I am now, renovated the building with other artists, and after a couple of years of getting this building livable, I continued doing art work in my studio, did some performances, was in some films, and I continued being an artist, but did not exhibit so much.

And I basically put the film project of Sam on the shelf and did some painting of my own. I tried to get funding for it, AFI, NEA. I have never been successful trying for grant money, always being turned down for this project. It was always disappointing—a misunderstood project, I suppose. I am presently working with the musician, Charles Curtis, for a music track for the film by another old friend from California, Terry Jennings. The music is excellent and works perfectly with the film.

In 1990, I met Emily Harvey and started showing work at her gallery. I did a sculpture for a show called *Fluxus & Company*, and Emily brought it to the Venice Biennale for the Fluxus show and *Kunstforum Magazine* reviewed the show with a picture of my sculpture to illustrate the review, but credited Larry Miller for it. I've been in other group shows here and in Europe.

I have completed a two-year audio piece, a part of which was presented in the Performance Festival in 1997 which Nam June Paik produced and in 1994, I was also represented in the Seoul/New York Max Festival which involved Yoko Ono's Film #4, and the Bottoms film of which I was the cameraman. I also

made a more "experimental" performance in memory of Richard Maxfield and Terry Jennings who was a friend and collaborator.

I work as a taxi driver on weekends, and I interviewed my passengers with my audio recorder, so I have about 300 hours of interviews with random people. In 1997, Nam June invited me to the Seoul/New York Max Festival to present some of these tapes, so I made a composition of some 2 hours' for a performance called *Movies for the Blind*—a kind of movie with no images. What I did is to present in the Maya Deren Theater making a spontaneous set with two candelabras and candles, I was sitting behind a table with two tape players and an effects machine. What I wanted to do is to interweave these two tapes. I had both tapes on hand but it didn't work so well. I just played the two-hour program. The set was very dark, strange looking, and a friend commented "it looked like voodoo." There were some young artists in the audience who really liked it. I really didn't get much feedback except from the young artists. A German conceptual artist, Andrea Knobloch, was in New York and she heard this piece and set up a show in Dusseldorf called "The New York Security MiniStorage Project" which opened at the Kunstverein in July 1998. My tape was presented as an element of sculpture along with Andrea's room model and audio work by Kyra Statmann.

The project seems ripe for NPR or Pacifica Foundation. It really should be on the radio.

Well, here I am an artist who drives a cab and takes advantage of the situation to interview my customers. I'd like to digitize these tapes and get an artist-in-residency at Harvestworks and get this digitized, cleaning them up and propose the project to be realized.

Paik called to tell me that "you're the ultimate Fluxus artist, you're the ultimate underdog. In the earliest days of Fluxus, that was what we were about, we were about the underdog. And now those days are over, and now these tape pieces!" Yes, The Artist as a Cab Driver.

After the Seoul/New York Max Festival in 1997, I picked up Simone (Forti) giving her a ride to the party and I asked her tell me her dream, and so she told me this great dream she had. And now, this would be my focus topic for the next three months. I have one tape: "Movies for the Blind" and the second tape on "Dreams". The compliments come from my making my art from my work. But this cab work is becoming very difficult for me, and I have to work 35 hours in two days. I try to stay fit in spite of it.

Well, I think it's unique that I'm an artist and I drive a cab, I'm articulate and I've done a lot of things. Sometimes when I tell people in my cab about myself, they cannot believe it. A lot of the tapes are me talking, I'm talking about my life but the better parts are conversations with other people. Originally this was supposed to be a book. (New York is a very busy town. What do they say? The Devil dwells in the details? I think it's a New York lawyer's saying.) In this case, I say that there are a lot of details missing here that really are an essential part of the saga, but I suppose that it's up to me to get that out there to see.

RESOURCES

CYBERART99: seeking solutions on Sunday 9 May 1999; 10am - 5pm, at The Great Hall @ Cooper Union 7 E. 7th Street, NYC (at 3rd Avenue). It's been four years since ASCI produced what was perhaps the world's first CyberFair at Cooper Union, NYC. Michael Govan, Director of the DIA Center in New York and internationally renowned performance artist, Laurie Anderson were keynotes. The field of cyberart has evolved and changed dramatically since those early days. The issues at the end of the twentieth century are no longer how to get access, how to create your own homepage, or how to use the Internet to make art. Artists have pushed this globally interactive medium in all kinds of creative ways: hypertext poetry, multimedia works, and even live performances. Categories have been created at prestigious international competitions to recognize and reward the best and most innovative work in this newest of digital art media. However, there are pressing questions that need resolution if this young artform is to survive and flourish.

At **CYBERART'99**, you will see and hear how artists and museums are dealing with the unique challenges of this rapidly developing "virtual" art. As a medium that cannot be sustained by the traditional commercial gallery model, webart requires new solutions regarding its production, presentation, and maintenance. This all-day event brings together some of the world's most creative digital minds in a unified effort to invent concrete and viable **new models** of support.

The event format is designed to first provide an important historical context... history being a relative term in this field. Highly recognized webart projects that exemplify many innovative U.S. and European support models will be presented in the first half of the program. Then, proposals for four **new models** of support will be shared for public critique and feedback. These proposals will have been created during a month-long online discussion of the panelists prior to the event.

Participants include Robert Atkins, Wolfgang Staehle, Martha Wilson, among others. \$20.00 registration at the door. For event schedule, panel topics, hyperlinks to panelists URL's: <http://www.asci.org/cyberart99>

NEDCC offers its preservation manual on-line at <http://www.nedcc.org> from 1 March 1999 on. The Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC) announces the on-line availability of the third edition of its publication *Preservation of Library & Archival Materials: A Manual*, edited by Sherelyn Ogden. The updated and expanded version of the manual will be available March 1, 1999 on NEDCC's Web site at <www.nedcc.org>. A desire to make current information readily available at no cost prompted NEDCC to update the manual, adding important