John Kutzik Interview

Janet Bishop, Interviewer

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INTERVIEWER: And I'll say the date. And then we'll do timeout. I'll take off my jacket and then go into it. Ready?

VIDEOGRAPHER: Ready to go.

INTERVIEWER: OK. This is Janet Bishop, and I'm coordinator of archives and special collections here at CSU. And today, I'm doing an oral history with John Kutzik, who is an emeritus professor of art here at CSU. The date is August 4, 2009, and we are here in a special gallery of the School of Art. Do you know the gallery's name offhand?

JOHN KUTZIK: I think it's called Directions.

INTERVIEWER: The Directions Gallery. And I think this will be a fun oral history. We have a bit of variance from the traditional oral history, where I will ask Professor Kutzik a few things of his life leading up to his experiences at CSU. And then we will go around the gallery and talk about some of John Kutzik's paintings. So we will start in a minute, and I will say to Daniel, we'll take a break right now.

OK, John. Thanks so much again for volunteering to interview with us.

JOHN KUTZIK: You're very welcome.

INTERVIEWER: I'm going to ask you a few questions, as I said before, about your life before coming to Fort Collins and sort of your influences, what influenced you to go into your career, and your formative experiences. I'm going to start now asking you the question I always ask all our history narrators. And that's, could you state your full name for me and date of birth?

JOHN KUTZIK: OK. It's John Frederick Kutzik-- JFK-- 1/1/36.

INTERVIEWER: Wow. And I bet you were rooting for JFK, just because of the initials.

JOHN KUTZIK: Yeah, I kind of voted for him.

INTERVIEWER: Are you a native of Fort Collins? And if not, where were you born?

JOHN KUTZIK: I am not. I was born in a small town in Western Minnesota called Montevideo, Minnesota.
INTERVIEWER: How large was the town?

JOHN KUTZIK: It was about 5,500 people, and it remains so today. It hasn't changed that much at all.

INTERVIEWER: So are you of Scandinavian stock, then?

JOHN KUTZIK: No, I think, though, the town was evenly divided between Scandinavians and Germans at that period of time.

INTERVIEWER: OK. What were your parents' names, and do you have siblings?

JOHN KUTZIK: My mother's name was Sarah. Her maiden name was Weckworth. And my father's name, of course, was Reinhardt. He came from Romania. And his last name was Kutzik, of course.

INTERVIEWER: And then, what were your favorite hobbies or pastimes? And we'll talk a little bit more about this, but do you think these translated into your future career path?

JOHN KUTZIK: I'm sorry. I didn't get--

INTERVIEWER: What were your favorite hobbies or pastimes growing up?

JOHN KUTZIK: Well, I loved sports. And I did a lot of drawing. And later on, I started to read quite a bit and things like that. But I lived in a rural community, and play was a very important part of my activities.

INTERVIEWER: Which is excellent. I think kids have less play now than they should, in a way-- unstructured. Describe for me a bit who your role models were. Were they within the community, or were they outside of your community? Did you idealize people in the media, or who did you admire growing up?

JOHN KUTZIK: Well, I think most immediately, of course, were my parents and my siblings. My brother, for instance, was nine years my senior. And he was very, very, important to me. He had a great deal of influence to make me interested in school. And learning and things like that were very, very important activities for me.

I had teachers. I admired teachers a great deal. One of the reasons why I went into teaching was I really admired teachers a great deal. And curiously enough, I had an art teacher in high school who's still alive today. I'm just kind of amazed. It was only a couple years ago I went back to visit him. So he was very, very important to me.

INTERVIEWER: Very good. I think we're ready. Thank you so far for your answers. Let's talk a little bit about your education, and specifically, your elementary school experience and high school experience, not in too much detail.
JOHN KUTZIK: OK.

INTERVIEWER: What was your elementary school like? And was there any difference between your mother and your father in terms of encouraging you with your studies or to pursue as career?

JOHN KUTZIK: Let's see. The town was very small, and I could go to school walking to school very, very easily. And it was one room for about, I think, six hours a day. To a child, it must have seemed about eight.

But the school experience was very good. I liked it so much, I repeated the second grade, which is rather embarrassing. But nonetheless, I'm kind of glad they held me back a year, because it helped me to get greater maturity and things like that.

But I enjoyed the experience very, very much. Again, it was a lot of play. I knew all the students in the class. And that class was constant throughout my first grade, kindergarten, all the way through high school. So it was a very close community, and I knew most of the kids that were the same age as I.

INTERVIEWER: So the high school and the middle school, were they in one building?

JOHN KUTZIK: No, I went to a middle school called [? Sidney ?] School. And there was another one in town too. I forgot the name of that. But there were several grade schools, and then we have a very large high school in town as well.

INTERVIEWER: I'll ask you two questions sort of hinting at your future career. Since you became an artist, and you mentioned drawing as a young child, what did you draw? Did you pick subjects around your town or animals or people?

JOHN KUTZIK: The only thing I remember very vividly, my father was a dry cleaner and tailor. And he had opportunities to get clothing samples. He was a tailor. He made suits. And he had lots of samples of cloths on pieces of paper. I did a lot of work on the back of clothing sample papers.

And World War II was happening then. And I went to the movies downtown and things. And I was always the hero for the Allied troops. So I drew war pictures, frankly, one after another. And I entertained myself for a considerable length of time, at least now that I think about that.

INTERVIEWER: What a wonderful skill to have.

JOHN KUTZIK: Well, it was fun. So I was always a hero, and I always survived all kinds of disasters during World War II. So that was an early experience.

Coupled with that, I used to like to walk in the woods and stuff like that. Even though nature was not a very important part of me, it seems like I absorbed a lot of feelings for ideas that came from nature as well.
INTERVIEWER: And now I have to ask what I call the librarian's question. Many people mentioned formative books that shaped their childhood experience in some way. What books did you read, and what were a few of your favorites?

JOHN KUTZIK: Egads. I really didn't read so much as look. I looked at a lot of books. I loved to go through dictionaries and look. And these dictionaries had drawings in them. I was brought up in a Protestant church, and it was full of engravings from both the Old and New Testament. And these played a very important role.

I took Sunday school, and the Sunday school lessons were always in color. And we always had lessons each Sunday in these real, real small, colorful pamphlets and things. So I think religious types of background, in a visual sense, were important. Reading didn't play an important part, except I did like poetry a great deal.

INTERVIEWER: So it's interesting that the visual information you received from books highly influenced you.

JOHN KUTZIK: Yeah, I think I'm primarily a visual person. But I do like poetry and things like that as well.

INTERVIEWER: So from elementary school to high school in your small town. Next, you went on to college. Where did you go to college, and how did you decide upon the college and your eventual major?

JOHN KUTZIK: Well, that's always an important time in a person's life. My brother came home from the army of occupation in Japan. He was an excellent student in high school and also in college. And I did have a football scholarship to play at Gustavus Adolphus College in Minnesota.

But I looked at their art department and decided to go to the University of Minnesota. My brother, I think he had just finished law school there. So I elected to go to the University of Minnesota. And I took both my bachelor's and my master's degree at the University of Minnesota.

INTERVIEWER: So you already had a sense, even before matriculating, that you were going to go into art.

JOHN KUTZIK: Yeah. Minneapolis is a very good town for arts. They have Walker Art Center there and the Minneapolis Institute of Art. They have a real good school of art in Minneapolis as well, as well as Saint Paul. Saint Paul has got a number of art schools and galleries and colleges. So I always thought it would be good for me to go to a large town, in that I came from a small town.

INTERVIEWER: What was your impression? Had you been to Minneapolis a lot, so it wasn't the rush of the big city?
JOHN KUTZIK: Well, it was interesting, because my brother took me by the hand for the first time. And if you know the University of Minnesota campus, there's an area off campus at the University of Minnesota called Dinkytown. Dinky.

INTERVIEWER: Dinkytown.

And it's a very, very small town there, and I really felt I was back in my hometown. So consequently, it was a charming place for college students and stores and a very close access to the University of Minnesota.

INTERVIEWER: Any extracurricular activities or interests? Did you still play football?

JOHN KUTZIK: Actually, I did. I have anecdotes about that, but I won't dwell on them too much. I played freshman football at the University of Minnesota. At that time, you didn't have to be too big. And I played offensive guard, and linebacker on defense. At that time, one person played both offense and defense. Today, everything is specialized.

But frankly, I think—what shall I say? I think I got smart. I knew I was going to get killed sooner or later, so I elected to stop playing.

INTERVIEWER: It's interesting, because it sounds like you had a good mixture of sports and art. You were interested in poetry. Did you find one thing influenced the other? Or did you keep the various interests separate?

JOHN KUTZIK: I think the structure of sports really taught me to know that you really had to work at it. And I think if you're going to be in the arts, you have to work at that too. So it taught me a little bit about how to learn and how to work and things like that.

Those things were important to me. So I think that was good. Plus, sports gave me a lot of friendships and camaraderie, things like that. I enjoyed those aspects too.

INTERVIEWER: Excellent. Tell me a little about your graduate training or your post-college experience before CSU.

JOHN KUTZIK: Well, my graduate training, again, was at the University of Minnesota. At that time, it was kind of an unusual school in that the chairman of the art department at the University of Minnesota ran Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, which is a big, prestigious museum with close contacts to New York City. And this chair had contacts in New York.

So consequently, we had a lot of professors from New York teaching in our department. So I got a very, very good background with style and stuff like that. That was very important in America during that period of time. So I felt very, very lucky there to have those advantages.

The facilities probably could have been a little bit better, but art departments always suffer with things like that. But we managed, really, quite well. It was a marvelous way to work. They had
students from Europe. They had students from the USA. It was a real, real good situation to study in.

INTERVIEWER: And what were the years, roughly, that we're talking about?

JOHN KUTZIK: Sorry?

INTERVIEWER: What were the years, roughly, that--

JOHN KUTZIK: Roughly from about 1959 to 1961.

INTERVIEWER: I'm trying to think of a major art influence in America at that time.

JOHN KUTZIK: Well, at that time, it was abstract expressionism. And it was a real big style, and it really, really influenced my thinking for, say, my first 15 to 20 years outside of college. Immediately after that, after I got my degree and stuff, however, pop art became a real popular medium.

And I immediately found out upon my graduation that my style was no longer popular. So consequently, the next 20, 30 years were trying to find exactly where you belong. That type of thing. I should look at that camera more? Oh, I'm sorry.

INTERVIEWER: You're doing just fine.

Well, that's interesting, because everything old becomes new again. So probably if you exhibited some of your early paintings.

JOHN KUTZIK: Yes, as a matter of fact, we have an accountant now that I astonishingly found out that is helping me out with my finances during this troublesome time. Well, he's selling abstract art on eBay, and I don't think he's had very much formal training. So here I am.

INTERVIEWER: So when you shifted from abstract expressionism to pop art, were there some role models? I mean, Warhol. Not Lichtenstein.

JOHN KUTZIK: Yeah, I think, yes, Warhol, Rauschenberger. There was one person, who became exceedingly popular, by the name of James Rosenquist who studied with one of my professors. So consequently, that had a great deal of influence on me, trying to follow in his stead. But needless to say, I cannot work like someone else. So I think I discovered quite soon.

INTERVIEWER: So after Walker, did you come immediately to CSU? Of did you have a few other--

JOHN KUTZIK: No, my first teaching job, after what I thought was a lot of sophistication, was in Warrensburg, Missouri, and I taught at Central Missouri State University. Now it's called state university, but then it was called college when I got there. And I taught there for four years first.
And then I left there and went to Southern Illinois University near Saint Louis on the Alton campus. And there's another campus there too as well. I taught there for two years. And then I came to CSU thereafter. So here I am.

INTERVIEWER: Here you are. OK, well, that leads to the CSU--

JOHN KUTZIK: OK, good.

Now, I didn't move too much, yes? Is everything copacetic?

VIDEOGRAPHER: Yeah, you are perfect.

JOHN KUTZIK: OK.

INTERVIEWER: OK, John. Let's talk a little bit about CSU. And why don't you tell me this. What year did you come to Colorado State University?

JOHN KUTZIK: It was 1967 in the fall. And I came from suburban Saint Louis area down near Alton, Illinois and stuff like that. And it was quite a change. I had never really seen the mountains before.

INTERVIEWER: And that leads conveniently into my next question, which was, what were your first impressions of Fort Collins and the campus itself?

JOHN KUTZIK: Well, I was, first of all, I think, kind of flabbergasted. The environment was mountainous. I was a plainsman, coming from Minnesota, and I'd never saw a landscape like this before. Fort Collins looked like a small town. It was very, very charming. The pace was rather slow, and the friendships were close in the department and things like that.

Nonetheless, when I came, I believe they had just completed a new library here at that period of time. And I was really, really impressed with that. It was marvelously built, and the furniture reflected the time, the '60s. And it really, really felt nice.

INTERVIEWER: And how did you hear about CSU? Was it a job posting or was it a reference?

JOHN KUTZIK: The University of Minnesota had a bureau of recommendations, and I had my file there relative to my credentials. And I placed. And I said I wanted to try to teach here. And I sent my credentials here, and I got in.

INTERVIEWER: Fantastic. And you got into the Department of Art?

JOHN KUTZIK: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: How large was the department at the time you came?
JOHN KUTZIK: At that time-- I'm just guessing-- I would say maybe about 200 at the most. The chairman's name was Perry Ragouzis. That was the first chair I had here. And the campus, frankly, it was spread all over the university. I worked in the old, I think, the Humanities building for my first classes. So consequently, there was just a small group of us who worked together quite a bit.

Graphic design was in that area, and I got to know people in graphic design really quite well. We also had a photography department, to the best of my knowledge No, not photography. It was interior design. So I got to know the graphic designers and the interior designers. Later on, interior design moved out from the art department.

INTERVIEWER: I have one question about your colleagues and one to place you in the history of CSU, and then a few questions about teaching. And then we'll look at your paintings. Who were your colleagues, meaning who were the people that you felt an immediate rapport and connection with? Are there some people that you bonded closely with here at CSU? Faculty?

JOHN KUTZIK: Well, at that time-- I'm trying to think-- there were seven of us hired at the same time. So consequently, I tried to get to know those people well. My longest connection, I think, was with two fellows. One was Stan Wold, who taught in the art education department. And one was Randy Wassell, who retired one year before me during that period of time. So they were very, very important.

I got to know Phil Risbeck really quite well and John Sorbie and a few people in the basic design curriculum. And I was the chair of that area when I first came. I got to know some people there too as well.

INTERVIEWER: Let's talk a little bit about teaching just a little bit. And I sense you had a special calling to be an artist. Most artists do. But did you feel a special calling to become a teacher and teach your art methodology to others? And what methods did you use in teaching, in terms of teaching your students?

JOHN KUTZIK: Well, I taught the design curriculum here. I had to learn a lot of that myself, because the University of Minnesota had a very loose idea of what constituted design. And it was always in preparation to be a painter or a sculptor. And structure wasn't a very important thing.

But prior to teaching here at CSU, at Southern Illinois University and at Southern Missouri State, they had very structured programs. So I learned kind of a structured approach to design and form. So consequently, I used those things in my classroom quite a bit.

But I always tried to orientate it to the fine arts too, as well, rather than just practical things, associating painting and sculpture and interiors, because he had an interiors program, and also graphic design. So those were the disciplines I had to be concerned about to make it important to them too, as well. So my teaching stressed those things-- color, form, pattern, and observation.

INTERVIEWER: And then a question for you, a two-fold question. What did you hope your students would learn from you, and what have you learned from your students?
JOHN KUTZIK: Oh, dear. Well, the thing I wanted to give the student is hopefully tools that really would set them free. And that is, in a sense, that they could use them and give them strengths to pursue their own things. I really didn't try to stress any specific theory that they should follow. I always used to use the words that there are alternative resolutions to persistent problems. And some of them, hopefully most of them, were of a successful nature and all that type of thing.

So I always considered myself teaching foundations, which really, it doesn't sound so restricting to me, because for my own self, I could do anything I wanted. But for teaching them, it would be kind of a broad spectrum of experiences, hopefully that would help them later on. That type of thing.

The students, I was always amazed that many of the students had a tremendous amount of ability. And I really, really enjoyed to work with them. And I learned from them, really, quite a bit. I was always learning something new, and I consider that very, very important.

INTERVIEWER: And you have taught design up until--

JOHN KUTZIK: Actually, no. The design curriculum-- the word "design," during the '70s, became a naughty word. It became a word, I think, of narrow-mindedness. And there was more concern about getting students into sculpture, into painting and media today without a curriculum of formal studies in pattern and things like that and composition things. So it did change, although I tried to incorporate in my teaching of painting and sculpture and things like that, using formal language in some way to have an idea of how objects were created.

The word "beauty," seemed no one ever talked about beauty anymore in the conventional sense. So I always thought that was kind of sad. Something's put together well.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think it's people were more-- "mercenary" comes to mind as a word, but that's not quite the right word. Do you think people were putting aside beauty because they were focused on art as a medium for career, so less on art for art's sake, so to speak?

JOHN KUTZIK: Yeah, I think so. Well, I always think that no matter if it's for money or something like that or if it's just purely for enjoyment that there is something there that communicates best. There are many ways to say something. But there's a way to say things best, and I was concerned about that.

INTERVIEWER: Lastly, what refreshed you on campus, meaning, what did you love? Revivified you maybe during a stressful day, a walk, painting?

JOHN KUTZIK: Yes, I've taken a lot of walks around the campus. I've enjoyed this building, really, a great deal. I think we are very, very privileged to have had this building. There are so many schools that I have visited that don't have a building for themselves in the arts, and I think we're really blessed with that. I've enjoyed, frankly, a great deal, the student center. I've always enjoyed going about there.
The library, too, should be an inclusive part of that, because I enjoyed that area of campus very, very much. And I have enjoyed the sports here on campus. Some horrible, horrible teams, but some really, really fine teams here. But that's always been a nice experience for me.

INTERVIEWER: And the presidents you've seen come and go, any specific memories for you?

JOHN KUTZIK: Here on campus?

INTERVIEWER: Here on campus. I ask this as an archivist.

JOHN KUTZIK: Well, I must say, again, my tenure here has been a long one. There was a period of time that I lived in kind of a dormitory situation after a divorce, and it was on campus. I think it was Lory Hall, if I remember correctly. I can't remember the-- anyway, it was right on Laurel. So that was kind of an interesting experience for me. And it was kind of nice to live on campus for a number of years during that period of time.

Right now, I'm just amazed how this campus is suddenly growing during this period of time. There's so much building going on. And I remember when I came here, there was a lot of dormitories being during this period of time. And it seems like, upon my retirement now, this building is really starting to go on again.

And I like to see that. It's nice to know the college goes on. It grows and forever changing and things of that nature. It's the one thing that I think is real, real pleasant in our society, that we have universities and places that keep on changing.

INTERVIEWER: Well, universities have this special ambience, special atmosphere that's always nice.

JOHN KUTZIK: Yes. Right on.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I think we'll stop with this part of the interview. And let's take a walk around the gallery now. And we'll pick out some paintings and stop in front of them. And you can tell us about your thought processes, your methodology even, or what was the themes are for paintings. Thank you.

JOHN KUTZIK: All right.

INTERVIEWER: Record now.

OK, so now we're going to talk with Professor Kutzik. Actually, I'm going to talk with Professor Kutzik about some of the paintings here, hanging in the gallery. And we're going to take a selection. And John, I'd like you first to tell us a little bit about item number two. Perhaps, if you could introduce the painting by its title and maybe the date you painted it, and then we'll go on from there.
JOHN KUTZIK: OK. This painting, I believe, is called Stop Sign. And its inspiration was, frankly, waiting for a light to change that seems to go on forever, and then suddenly being aware of the people around you and things like that and wondering what they're thinking and what I'm thinking and waiting for the light to change. And it's just the feeling of a pause during the day that so many of us have to go through to get by in our lives. And I just thought it would be a good idea to try to paint that pause that is between activities and things like that.

VIDEOGRAPHER: Two, one.

INTERVIEWER: OK. This is really interesting. Could you tell me a little bit about the little boxes here?

JOHN KUTZIK: Where you see boxes?

INTERVIEWER: The little arrows here.

JOHN KUTZIK: Well, it means, essentially, I have my turn signal on. And they're all pointing one way for a right turn. And over here, we have circles, which show a stop sign. But the stop sign is not red, yellow and blue. If you stay there long enough, they become different colors and stuff like that.

So I guess it's kind of a fantasy on the whole experience of pausing at a stop sign and then navigating through and then suddenly having everything change again. And I thought putting a bicycle in there as a means of transportation is a question I think we should be asking ourselves from an ecological standpoint. Maybe it's a better way to go sometimes.

INTERVIEWER: Very true. Just tell me about what the media is that this is.

JOHN KUTZIK: Many of these paintings are watercolors. And it's transparent watercolors. Initially, I work with ink, and like a children's coloring book, I fill in the ink marks in most instances.

INTERVIEWER: And what was the year that-- do you know roughly when you--

JOHN KUTZIK: Oh, dear. I have not been writing years on these. But I would say it would be about 1995. And anyway, it's supposed to be Shields and Prospect Street one morning on the way to CSU.

INTERVIEWER: Wonderful.

JOHN KUTZIK: That's kind of the idea. And if you look carefully, you'll see a little bird in there. Remember the swallows and stuff like that that fly all over those intersections? So I tried to show that as well. Few little birds in there.

INTERVIEWER: I think I see one right there.
JOHN KUTZIK: Uh huh. There's one over here too, as well, and one up there I set up. They move so well. They're really fun to watch.

INTERVIEWER: Excellent. Thank you. Let's go to the next painting.

VIDEOGRAPHER: Three, two one.

INTERVIEWER: OK, painting number three. I love the colors in this painting and the border that you have. Could you tell me its title and a little bit about it? I see "Shadow Drawing" painted down here.

JOHN KUTZIK: That's correct. It is called Shadow Drawing, and it was based upon a very small drawing that I still have. And the genesis of the study was over a number of years, I did a preparatory study in acrylic, a very small one. A few years later, the drawing, and unfortunately, that drawing was recently stolen. I can't find it anywhere. But the larger painting survived. And this is the painting.

So the genesis of the idea, frankly, started in the '70s. And I think I completed this painting about 1995 or so. So it took a long time in its growth. And it's based upon the moving experience I had, in more ways than one. A divorce, and then new household, and the scribbling, frankly, in front of the television set is trying to get things in order and just kind of the mood of the experience.

I've always liked the drawing a lot. It meant a great deal to me. And the shadow, of course, is kind of an irregular thing with things coming out of the painting above it, so to speak.

INTERVIEWER: And I see there's-- actually, it's a three-handed figure. There's an extra hand.

JOHN KUTZIK: Oh, yeah, that's right. I always forgot about that, even when I painted it in. It seemed like I needed an extra hand at that period of time. And yes, so there's some kind of psychological things that I kind of like about it. I've always liked a little bit surrealism and expressionism in art, and I think this work reflects that.

I also like paintings that have a border on the outside. Sometimes, I really don't think a frame does a painting justice. To add outside borders kind of nice too. It spreads a little bit more in the room.

INTERVIEWER: I was at the Art Institute of Chicago, I saw the Grand Jatte painting, Afternoon on the Island, and it has an amazing pointillist border on there.

JOHN KUTZIK: Oh, yes, that real, real large Seurat painting?

INTERVIEWER: Yes, exactly. So it's interesting that you mentioned.

JOHN KUTZIK: Yeah, and it's interesting the way how Seurat handled that, because his fused in, I think, a little bit more of the outside-inside. Mine's rather severe, I think.
INTERVIEWER: The delineation between outside and inside.

JOHN KUTZIK: Yeah, it's a little bit stronger.

INTERVIEWER: OK. Let's go to the next painting, then.

JOHN KUTZIK: 10, uh huh.

INTERVIEWER: OK. Let's go to painting number 10. And I have inside information. I know there's a background story to it, so I wondered if you would tell me that. But first, why don't you tell me the painting's title and its media and also when, roughly, it was painted.

JOHN KUTZIK: OK, well, I can't remember the title of it exactly. But it's Pissarro, the painter Pissarro going to paint. He had a cart that he pulled when he went out to work. And I don't know how many children he had, but he had many, many children. And he did a lot of landscapes in the suburbs of Paris and stuff.

And I painted this out of inspiration of reading a book by the same guy who wrote Lust for Life, Irving Stone. And he wrote one on Pissarro too, I think. The book was recommended to me by a friend. And I read the book. And I really felt very, very moved with the descriptions.

So consequently, this is kind of an illustration of what I thought Pissarro would do in the early morning, going out and painting in suburban Paris. And that's the way I felt about him. Apparently, his wife had so many children, and they all kind of supported him in his activities, and he's going around painting. And I think I would've liked to do that, so I said to myself in one kind of way or another.

Now, my wife really enjoyed this a great deal. It was our anniversary, and I said, to heck with it. I'm going to give her a gift of the painting for the anniversary. So that's kind of the long and short of it. And my wife really esteems it.

INTERVIEWER: Your wife, Jennifer Kutzik, who I'll annotate, works as a colleague of mine in Morgan Library.

JOHN KUTZIK: That's right. And she holds it in a place of honor, and I feel very flattered.

INTERVIEWER: Excellent. What year did you paint it? Do you know?

JOHN KUTZIK: Gosh, I would say maybe about 1985 or so, or something like that. I always wanted to do paintings based upon the work of some other artist, things like that. There's a drawing in here that's kind of an homage to Picasso. It's based upon what I think of Picasso and his relationship to women. So I try and show that a little bit in the drawing, a little satire. The painting down below, you were--

VIDEOGRAPHER: Three, two, one.
INTERVIEWER: OK, let's go down now to painting number 11. And if you could tell me some of the same things.

JOHN KUTZIK: Well, again, this is based, too, upon a reading I did, as in the work on Pissarro. There was a book written by Jean Renoir. I think it was called My Father. And it was based upon Jean Renoir's contact with his father, Pierre. And he talked about Renoir becoming an old man. And I'm not a young person anymore. And he continued painting throughout his life and even in old age, crippled by joints swollen and stuff like that. I heard that he had to hold a brush in a curious way, the arthritis bothered him so much. And I thought that was really heroic.

And the book contained a series of photographs of family affairs with things like this. And he was working-- I think one of his last paintings were two nudes that he painted from life but put into kind of a pastoral type of environment. At least it showed that a little bit. So I tried to show him painting in the field. And then I tried to show the painting as the other side, kind of the painting is part of a larger scene that had to be cropped into the work.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

JOHN KUTZIK: But I thought it was really, really nice to put in two layers of space involved in the painting. And here, the painting shows his children surrounding him. And I suppose the young Jean Renoir beside his father and all that sort of stuff and people in the background also admiring his work from different walks of life in Paris.

The foreground, then, is kind of a more casual scene with a croquet set, a man kind of at a beach party and stuff like that, which apparently, life along the shore, and stuff like that, in Paris was a popular thing. Anyway, I tried to put all of those parts together, and I though, rather successful here, showed those things.

In the middle, I had to be a little bit coy. I put a figure in there, a little boy that has a mask. And the mask was hypothetically a mask that Picasso made, so to speak. And he's showing Renoir there's more ways to do a scene than just the way you do it, because Picasso was coming.

So I tried to tie a theme of Picasso into it as well. It was fun to do that, because it was kind of a fun painting and trying to work with all those layers of space. And I really liked painting it.

INTERVIEWER: Well, it's interesting, because you allude to Picasso, but Picasso, at least during one phase of his career, was dealing with cubism in a way.

JOHN KUTZIK: Right.

INTERVIEWER: So this is, in a way, dealing with different layers and things behind other things.

JOHN KUTZIK: OK, great. That's a very good observation. Thank you.
INTERVIEWER: So very many levels in this.

JOHN KUTZIK: OK. Thanks, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: That's the great thing about art. You can see so many things into it. It looks like these two paintings were painted around the same time.

JOHN KUTZIK: Yeah, I would say so. I said '85 for one. Maybe this one came first. This one being the second. So I would say about '87 or '89. Maybe '90. But anyway, that was a very, very good read. I really enjoyed reading that book and also the book by Irving Stone.

INTERVIEWER: Excellent. Well, speaking of Picasso, we're going to jump back in our next painting to number six.

VIDEOGRAPHER: Three, two, one. And--

INTERVIEWER: OK, you had mentioned in your previous painting a small figure representing Picasso. Now we're in front of a painting, and I'm reading the title below, To Picasso. Could you tell us a bit about this painting? And it differs from the other work in that it's a line drawing. And maybe why you decided to make it a line drawing and a little bit about the background of the painting.

JOHN KUTZIK: Well, it's a very early drawing. I think this comes from the '70s. And I was trying to think what contributions Picasso made to the figure during his lifetime. And I was also thinking of his relationship to the women in his life and things like that and his inspirations, things of that nature. I guess there's the idea of masculinity in the bull and the charged figure and also the goddess figure, the Greek god, and kind of the relationship of those several parts.

So I was interested in those ways and manners of communicating between people, sexes, and things like that when I painted the painting. And for instance, Picasso loved both African art, he loved Greek classicism. So I was trying to show those aspects together in the same work, for lack of better words.

And it's kind of a dreamlike thing. And it's really hard to interpret, exactly, but I really, really like the way the line worked, the decorative aspects of it, and the strength of two figures together, from a formal sense. And from an emotional sense, I think it reads well too.

Thinking about Picasso, I always think about what women would say about Picasso, especially with his relationships. And it has to be apologetic for me. But I really love what he did with a lot of his cubist drawings of women, even though the distortions were sometimes gross, but sometimes absolutely beautiful as well.

So I have mixed feelings about him. But I think he's a very, very important artist of the 20th century. Certainly a daring person trying many, many things. And he had to pay homage to his influences one way or another. So that's one of the reasons why I enjoy this drawing quite a bit.
INTERVIEWER: Yes, with the strong strokes of the line. And is this a minotaur, then? Or a Minotaur's head? A bull's head?

JOHN KUTZIK: Yes, it's supposed to be that type of thing. And the form of a person. And I, Picasso did some naughty but beautiful prints of that type of subject. And I guess I tried to emulate that a little bit there as well.

INTERVIEWER: Very nice.

A VIDEOGRAPHER: and one.

INTERVIEWER: OK, well, now we're at painting number 13, and it's a very fantastical scene over a village, it looks like almost. It's almost like a variate of a Christmas painting or a children's story. Could you tell me its title and a little bit about the painting? It's a watercolor, isn't it?

JOHN KUTZIK: It's a watercolor. Uh huh. This is called The Death of Ase, based upon a play by Ibsen called Peer Gynt. And The Death of Ase was, I believe Peer Gynt's mother. She could never control the boy growing up. He was constantly running away. He was a real schlemiel, as they say in German. Got into all kinds of trouble and uncontrollable.

But nevertheless, he came back upon the death of his mother. And she was dying, I think, and Peer said, well, I'm going to take you for a ride. And he got on the end of the bed and pretended that he was on a horse or driving a horse. And he told her of all the fantastic things around her as she was passing away. And he carried her away.

And I thought, god, it was a very, very moving that the son had the ability to pay homage to his mother. And in spite of death-- this kind of represents the idea of death and loss. But she's reconciled, and Peer carries her away. So that's kind of a long story.

But nonetheless, it was very, very, fun to paint. Kind of like the folk tales of Europe during that period of time, the Grimm stories and stuff like that. I'm sure that some tales in Norway, Henrik Ibsen probably took advantage of as well. And it was really, really fun to paint. So that's it, essentially.

INTERVIEWER: And I love the intricacy of the tiny, little village figures. It must have been a lot of fun painting everybody in there in that scene.

JOHN KUTZIK: Yeah, actually, it's supposed to represent the world. And the bed is floating up in the air, and the world is disappearing, and the village is small, and Ase is going to a different realm. So that's kind of the tale there.

INTERVIEWER: Now, what year was this painted? And I heard it said that this was a prize-winning painting. Did you submit it?
JOHN KUTZIK: Actually, it has been in several exhibitions. And I did win prizes on it as well. I can't remember the places where I did show it. But it's true. A lot of these paintings, I did send to national shows.

And I showed in many places in the United States during my tenure here from some of these paintings. And they were really, really fun to do, and I was very honored for the honor bestowed upon me for doing these paintings. So that really is part of the history.

INTERVIEWER: Excellent. And what year was this painted? In the '80s or--

JOHN KUTZIK: I would say maybe about 1980 or something like that. Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you.

JOHN KUTZIK: You're very welcome.

INTERVIEWER: Let's go on to the next painting.

VIDEOGRAPHER: And one and beep.

INTERVIEWER: All right. Now we're on painting number 14. And it's a little bit of a different style than some of the other paintings we've looked at. Why don't you tell me a little bit about it and when it was painted and maybe about your decision to make panels with painting, different scenes.

JOHN KUTZIK: Well, in a contemporary sense, Warhol was doing a lot of paintings in boxes and serial. So I tried to emulate that. But I think early art from the Medieval period and stuff in churches and things like that did have panels too. So I elected to try to do a painting where I try to tie in together six diverse ideas together in one panel. And frankly, if I remember correctly, this is one of the oldest paintings in the group. It was painted during the early '70s.

And if I remember correctly, I really didn't do any preliminary drawings for these at all, or very, very little. And I used ink to ink it in very, very quickly and built these panels up very fast. A lot of these drawings you're seeing, initially, were beginning ideas to do prints. I used to do a lot of work with the woodblocks.

And I knew that I would never, ever be able to complete all these things in wood. So consequently, these were all one-shot affairs. But I really was very conscious of the woodblock always as the instrument to judge the work by.

I really wanted to do something of people dancing, or the relationships of male and female together, whatever that may be, and different types of things. And anyway, children playing and masked people and dancing of sorts and the interaction between figures and stuff. And I tried to do it in a decorative sense.
And this was the outcome of it. And I really like the spirit of the forms very, very much. And a lot of movement and a lot of strength. And I enjoyed doing it. I guess that's about it.

INTERVIEWER: It's a very playful piece. The colors and the movement and almost like a festival, fiesta up here.

JOHN KUTZIK: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And then you have the almost animal shapes here--

JOHN KUTZIK: Right on. Uh huh.

INTERVIEWER: --and mixing up the human forms. So very interesting.

JOHN KUTZIK: I remember so many people had said that about my work. I'm very, very serious about when people see it, to be very, very joyous and playful and spontaneous. And I'm very happy about that, that it transcends my feelings about it sometimes.

But yeah, I agree. And Carpeaux-- I don't know, you took a lot of art. Carpeaux was a sculptor, and he did some marvelous things of figures dancing and things like that that I just thought were beautiful. And I really wish I could have that in my work. So I said homage to Carpeaux and hopefully it's got some of that strength and joy that Carpeaux showed.

INTERVIEWER: The playfulness, yes. Very nice.

JOHN KUTZIK: Thank you.

INTERVIEWER: And this was the 1970s?

JOHN KUTZIK: Yeah. And again, it was a period between marriages, I like to say sometimes. And a period of a strong search for ideas and purpose and intent. And I really, really like the way it came out.

INTERVIEWER: Very nice.

VIDEOGRAPHER: Three, two, one.

INTERVIEWER: OK, well, we're shifting a bit. We'll go to painting number 15, which I know shows something related to CSU. So do you want to talk about this painting and what year it was made and its title and process?

JOHN KUTZIK: I'm assuming that this was in the early 1980s. And it's called The Petite, or The Small Magic Lantern. I have a larger painting of this, and this was a preliminary sketch for the larger painting. In my classroom teaching, I often show slides for the students. And I understand now the old slide projector is going to fall by the wayside, which really makes me feel a little bit sad to a certain extent.
And I loved to go from room to room showing slides and things like that. And I had a little cart, and I had all kinds of stuff in there, books and magazines and supplementary material for the classroom in it. So it shows me going from classroom to classroom to show slides to students.

Obviously, this got to be a little bit crazy, because the projector, of course, is taking into consideration all kinds of fanciful architecture and situational things that really don't exist at all, only in my mind's eye. So I tried to put that potpourri of figures and images and thoughts around me showing slides. So that was kind of the idea there.

The inspiration of the title comes from a play that I think I saw either in Budapest or in Prague. The Iron Curtain was still in extent during that period of time, and freedom for the people and creativity had a hard time. But there was a play, and I think it was showing at the Montreal Olympics, called The Magic Lantern. And I did see the performance of it, I think, in either Prague or Budapest.

And it really dealt with freedom and stuff like that. But it was done with beautiful lighting and stuff like that and figures and dance and pantomime. And they presented the play in the English language. It was very, very moving, and the end was kind of an idea of, freedom, please.

So I put that in the work too, as well. So I guess I just enjoyed the idea very much, and I always wanted to show a painting of me in the classroom showing slides but in the most fantastic sort of way. So it was a lot of fun to do.

INTERVIEWER: It's interesting, though. There's such a range of children, young people, students, and it's almost like an alter ego is lurking right there. This is you, I take it.

JOHN KUTZIK: Yeah, right. It's supposed to be. And kind of-- I don't know-- clowns and figures that are not so nice, gremlin-like things and things like that as well. But it was a lot of fun to do. Some paintings are fun, and this painting was fun for me to do. I really enjoyed doing it. I sensed the celebration. It was a lot of fun.

INTERVIEWER: It's funny, because in our archival historic photograph of CSU, we have a sub-collection called The Magic Lantern Slides.

JOHN KUTZIK: You're kidding.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

JOHN KUTZIK: Well, that fits right in.

INTERVIEWER: Right in. And oftentimes, Magic Lantern Slides were glass slides shown on tour, sometimes hand painted by the lecturer.

JOHN KUTZIK: When I was in college, I showed slides for four art professors. And they had those huge lantern slides. And I'm very, very familiar with them. And you had to do it manually.
So consequently, showing slides for four different professors of art at the University of Minnesota, I learned a lot about art, because someone had to do it. So yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And that chaos of loading the slides.

JOHN KUTZIK: Right.

INTERVIEWER: Very fine. Well, thank you. We'll go on to the next--

VIDEOGRAPHER: One.

INTERVIEWER: All right. This is a very interesting, intriguing painting. So I hope you can tell us about it, its title, and it looks almost like a dream scene almost. So if you could tell a little bit about it.

JOHN KUTZIK: Well, it is a painting, again, that's, I think-- see, the history of it, I started this painting in the '70s. I completed it completely then, but it was an ink drawing. I had a colleague of mine. I was working on it, and I said, god, I think this drawing needs color, to a friend of mine. He says, leave the thing alone. And he used scatological terms. Leave it alone.

Well, I kept on looking at it for a long time. And in the '80s, then, I said, I'm going to do it in color. So I did it in color. So that's kind of the history of it in terms of development.

The painting is based upon a book I read during a late marriage of mine, that is, a former marriage of mine. And the book was written by a Czech, or something like that, called The Painter of His Time. So I was reading that, and my marriage fell apart, to make a long story short. And I thought about the painting, in a modern sense after the divorce occurred, of what's the situation then and my relationships to the broken marriage and things like that.

So I put it together this way as best I could. And I think at the time, I was probably reading Don Quixote, and this is Don Quixote here in his armor doing good with paint on his fingers, so to speak. So that was kind of the origins of that. And my two children I had and stuff like that in this strange, painted room.

The room in there is kind of subterranean. And it was my studio in a former house with a church beside where the house was. So I put that in the window. So I put all these things. And we had a cat called [Dunkelschwartz, ?] and a dog named [Funsel, ?] So I put all the elements of a past household together in kind of a fantastic sense. So that's essentially it. I tried to work it out.

INTERVIEWER: It's interesting in the artistic process, one always works things out. It's almost dreamlike in that in one's dreams, things pop up but in a different context, so it's--

JOHN KUTZIK: Yes, I was trying to-- and of course, there's the bull in the background, the masculine aspect of it. I don't know. And it's subterranean, hypothetically underwater, so to speak. So it's that type of thing I tried to show.
And again, I sent this to a show in Wichita, which was an original art show, and I won top prize. I got a real good cash award on that, which really made me feel good. Best in the show and all that sort of stuff. So it made me feel very, very good.

INTERVIEWER: Well, it's wonderful. It's nice how you combined these intricate details with this vivid color and sometimes very themes, as you know. But this sort of intricacy and vibrancy still--

JOHN KUTZIK: Well, thank you. I've always enjoyed working that way. Again, we talked about the abstract expressionist movement earlier. And I've always felt guilty about the swashbuckling of some of that stuff. I just had trouble with pure calligraphy all the time. Seems to me that you don't have to work that fast all the time, or something like that.

I've always liked to draw in a conventional sense, I guess. So it kind of works out in the painting. But I'm quite pleased with that yet. Some of the work here, I'd like to do over again. But this one, I think it works rather well.

INTERVIEWER: Spoken like a true artist. You're never quite done.

JOHN KUTZIK: Thank you.

INTERVIEWER: Well, thank you. And we'll go on to number 19.

VIDEOGRAPHER: Three, two, one, go.

INTERVIEWER: OK, now we're going to a very different style, more realistic.

JOHN KUTZIK: OK, yes.

INTERVIEWER: And why don't you tell us a bit about paintings 19 and 20. They seem to depict CSU scenes. So if you would tell-- let's start with painting 19, its title and the activity--well, I think we can guess the activity. But tell us a little bit about it, please.

JOHN KUTZIK: I forgot the title of that. I believe it's Rams Set Point. And during that period of time, my wife and I attended a lot of volleyball games at CSU. And in my class, I happened to have a student of mine who was a player for the volleyball team at CSU. I really, really had fun. And watching the women play, I really, really enjoyed looking at their bodies and their agility and skill. And they had a strong, winning team. I think they went to the NCAA that year, if I remember correctly, and played very, very well.

And watching the women play, I really, really enjoyed looking at their bodies and their agility and skill. And they had a strong, winning team. I think they went to the NCAA that year, if I remember correctly, and played very, very well.

So consequently, this is kind of an homage to CSU having a winning season and playing games. And I enjoyed doing the watercolor. And I really love the action and the placements of the figure in this particular work. So that was the inspiration of the work, and I enjoyed doing it. This, too, is based upon a drawing. I have a drawing of this in graphite as well. But I wanted to show the watercolor.
INTERVIEWER: Very, very nice, lively rendering. And it's--

JOHN KUTZIK: Oh, thank you.

INTERVIEWER: Did CSU win that game?

JOHN KUTZIK: I think so, yes. I enjoy trying to show Moby Arena in the background there, with all the bleachers and things like that, trying to get that sense of space. I believe in the middle, they had a big Ram logo there, and I tried to put that in the bottom too, as well.

INTERVIEWER: So judging from your styles, this is probably a later painting than the one we just looked at.

JOHN KUTZIK: Correct. Oh, yes.

INTERVIEWER: So would that be, what, late '80s or early '90s?

JOHN KUTZIK: I'm trying to think of those seasons. I think it was the late '90s they had some real, real good volleyball teams during that period of time, as well as basketball, I think.

INTERVIEWER: Did you find that you, throughout your career-- and looking at the paintings in this room so far, there's a variance of style. The vibrancy is there in all the paintings, it seems, color-wise and energy-wise. But in styles, we've viewed it from the abstract and surrealist, almost, to more realist. Did you toggle back and forth between those styles? It seems your later paintings got more set in the realistic mode.

JOHN KUTZIK: I think my more contemporary work a little bit more deals with representation, I think. I really have enjoyed a lot of the drawings. I've done a whole bevy of drawings over the years that I really like to generate into paintings. And some of those drawings deal with surrealism and things like that. And I really like to do those too, as well. So I don't want to be tied down to one particular need to work. I'm willing to go back and forth.

INTERVIEWER: Who's your favorite surrealist?

JOHN KUTZIK: You're asking a good question. I think I like my Magritte probably better.

INTERVIEWER: That's funny. Magritte popped into my head.

JOHN KUTZIK: Yeah. I think I like Magritte the best.

INTERVIEWER: Better than Dali?

JOHN KUTZIK: Dali does some interesting things. I taught a course here at CSU on the surreal movement with a poet in the English department, Mary Crow. And the reading and stuff helped me with my thinking for ideas and things like that. There's another surrealist, Masson, is another one I think of quite a bit too.
INTERVIEWER: But I've always enjoyed that movement, both from poetry and both from painting. Not so much from books. I think some of those books are hard to read.

JOHN KUTZIK: Yeah, it's a more visceral sort of movement, better suited, I think, to painting and the brevity in poetry.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

JOHN KUTZIK: Let's go to number 20.

VIDEOGRAPHER: Three, two, and one.

INTERVIEWER: Another scene I think you painted from your experiences in Fort Collins or on CSU's campus.

JOHN KUTZIK: Right.

INTERVIEWER: Why don't you tell us a bit about number 20.

JOHN KUTZIK: Well, at one time, when my legs were a little bit better, I used to run a lot on Spring Creek for short runs and things like that. So I tried, in this particular work, to show me, fantasy outfit, high stepping, and running along Spring Creek. And it was kind of a delightful place to run.

And I enjoyed the bicyclists and the kids playing with Frisbees, and dogs, and children playing, and also meeting runners, singularly. And I see up ahead, I tried to show a woman with a child running too, as well. So all those parodies I tried to show, and also the ducks and the trees and I guess there's a skateboarder in there.

So I tried to show all that frivolous nature and the joy of the mountains and the trail and tried to make it bright and happy. And it sure was fun to do that sometimes. And I really would like to do that yet, but I haven't been on the trail for a long, long time. So that's what I was trying to show, trying to remember.

INTERVIEWER: And I can see the foothills. Are these the foothills?

JOHN KUTZIK: Yeah, there are the foothills popping in many different colors and kind of bright things. Yeah, the mountains in the background. So it was fun to paint.

INTERVIEWER: And some of nature captured in little circles there or little buds.

JOHN KUTZIK: Yeah, that's kind of a parody on a tree, so to speak. It's kind of whimsy, the whole thing, trees and sky. Again, that's probably a little bit of cubism in there for me and stuff like that. Thinking of the work of Lyonel Feininger or some of those German expressionists who kind of broke space up with geometric shapes.
INTERVIEWER: Interesting. Thank you. It's a nice vision of the trail [UNINTELLIGIBLE].

JOHN KUTZIK: Why, yes. I think now, it's just concrete, isn't it?

Well, it's still dirt in some places, but some days, it's filled with people. Some days, it's empty and barren. So it's nice to see it filled with activity.

The parks in Fort Collins are nice. They really, really are. I really, really enjoy them.

INTERVIEWER: And I see you have the-- it's almost like-- what was that, the old symbol of Fort Collins on the parks, the duck or something, geese.

JOHN KUTZIK: Oh, that's right. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: There you go. Right there.

JOHN KUTZIK: Of course. I've got one coming up there, don't I? Lot of mallards.

INTERVIEWER: Let's go now to number 23.

VIDEOGRAPHER: Two, one, and go.

INTERVIEWER: Now we're going a bit backwards, I think, in terms of timeline and remembrance. Drawing number 23 is another line drawing. And I've heard that it represents a specific place in your life and time in your life.

JOHN KUTZIK: Yes, it's kind of based upon a memory. We had a garden back in my home in Montevideo, Minnesota. And the backyard was kind of a place where we went to relax and enjoy ourselves and things like that. And I played in that backyard a great deal as well.

My father played the violin, and it was a part of my growing up. My mother died when I was relatively young, and I was raised a little bit by my grandmother and my stepmother. And the lady in the background represents my grandmother. The empty chair represents my mother, who wasn't present.

I grew up during the war years, and during that period of time, it seemed like the war lasted forever. My gosh, in terms of time, relative to the conflicts we're in now, World War II was a very short period of time. But I was a little boy, so it seemed to be a long time.

I played a lot of soldiers and things like that in that backyard. So consequently, all the figures around the yard and on the outside are soldiers and tanks and guns, trying to remember the play that I used to do a lot when I was young with war things in mind. My father, then, came from Europe, and there was a great deal of separation from that area. He was very happy to be in America. Being in Romania during that period of time would have been horrible. My grandmother, too, came from there.
My brother was in the airborne in the army of occupation in Japan. And he's falling down here in a parachute, hopefully there in that milieu. So it's kind of a fantasy based upon my backyard during those war years and how I remember it in a very fantastic pattern.

It was a lot of fun to paint, especially the woods and the soldiers and surrounding that nice, high plain grass in the middle ground. And back of our garden was a huge ravine which was kind of a magical area for me when I was a little boy. And the ravine went into the Minnesota River, and the Minnesota River went all the way to Minneapolis and all this sort of stuff. So it was kind of a fantasy--

INTERVIEWER: Of faraway places.

JOHN KUTZIK: --that really meant a lot to me. So that's kind of the history of that.

INTERVIEWER: It's interesting. Earlier, you spoke about liking borders, making borders. And here, you have a border of all the little soldiers and the war activity and your brother parachuting around, circling around the garden. So you've made your own border.

JOHN KUTZIK: Exactly. Yeah. Framed--

INTERVIEWER: Or frame.

JOHN KUTZIK: --framed by the war, so to speak. And that period of time, it seemed to be all over. One never forgot it. So that's kind of the history of that.

INTERVIEWER: What year was this drawing?

JOHN KUTZIK: I think it was in the middle-- maybe the early '90s. I was married to Jennifer at the time, and I remember doing this. And I wanted to remember that period of time. It was a very important period of growing up, so to speak.

INTERVIEWER: Very nice. Thank you.

JOHN KUTZIK: Thank you.

VIDEOGRAPHER: Two, one.

INTERVIEWER: Now, our last run of paintings that we'll talk about have various themes. But one running theme in them is they portray water in various sorts of ways. And I know, you having grown up in Minnesota, John, water is an important thing to you--

JOHN KUTZIK: That's true.

INTERVIEWER: --that's been mentioned. So let's start start with painting number 26 and 27. And we're going to do a slightly different approach with these two paintings, because one was the genesis of the other. So why don't you talk about both paintings, their titles, what they
represent, and how you moved from watercolor in one to large-scale acrylic, I guess, would be the other. And also, what water represents in these paintings. It almost looks-- well, there's bird figures, and then there's waves.

JOHN KUTZIK: Right. Well, initially-- I probably didn't tell you, but there's also a drawing I did of this in the '70s, which is even an earlier throwback. And it went through a metamorphosis of a sort. I was trying to think of the origins of this idea initially. And with the experiences of water, I used to fish with a cork.

INTERVIEWER: Fish with a cork.

JOHN KUTZIK: Fish with a cork-- a bobber. Sometimes called a bobber. And the bobber would go up and down. And beginning the drawing initially, I thought of a bobber in the water. And then I thought one bobber being female and one bobber being male. So I set these two figures together in that initial cardinal drawing.

And then as I went along, the bobber turned into kind of a two-faced figures of sorts. I was born in January, which is the sign of Janus, one who looks forward and one who looks back. So I had a female Janus and a male Janus there. I don't think the Greeks would agree with me on that type of thing, or whatever Janus represented. But nonetheless, that's kind of the theme.

The bobbers seem to be kind of happy in their milieu. They're going along the shores together, so to speak. Either they're coming or going. It's pretty hard to determine which way they're going from one another. Anyway, that was kind of the theme that was there.

I thought of this work as kind of a parody on Egyptian tombs and things like that. So I tried to flatten out this stuff like a wall painting in an Egyptian tomb and trying to make noble the experience I was having. And I don't know, the fish are kind of teeming and happy in their situation, and storks and stuff, water birds, and the stars are all popping together. So I thought everything, to a certain extent, was connected together. And that's essentially it.

The border, again, really always develops in these acrylic works. I stretch my work on a 4 by 4 foot panel on plywood. So consequently, there's always a border on the side. And I take a slide, and I project the image on it. So there's a border, and I try to work the border in with the painting, and that's kind of the origins of this with the bigger paintings.

INTERVIEWER: So do you do a line drawing and then make it a transparency and then--

JOHN KUTZIK: Yes. And then project it.

INTERVIEWER: --put it on the canvas.

JOHN KUTZIK: I haven't found a better way to do that yet. I'm working on another painting now that's based upon drawings from the '70s. And I'm trying to do a geometric grid and making the transfer that way. I don't know how successful that's going to be. It seems to me I'd have a little bit better control, because a projected image sometimes--
INTERVIEWER: Distorts.

JOHN KUTZIK: Yes. It will distort, and I think it'll be a little bit more accurate. But we'll see. It's a little bit tedious to make some of these drawings over and over again that way rather than projecting them.

But that's kind of the history of that from a standpoint of subject and work. And it's true that the water theme really comes to me very, very naturally. I don't know what a psychologist or a psychiatrist would say about the theme of water, but it's a real important part of my thinking about things, seeing the water, land. But growing up in Minnesota with the lakes, and we had a river going right by our home in Montevideo there, and stuff like that. So I grew up with that.

INTERVIEWER: It's interesting when you say you based it on Egyptian tombs. You can see the woman figure [UNINTELLIGIBLE]. She's holding her hands in sort of a formal Egyptian pose.

JOHN KUTZIK: Yes. Right.

INTERVIEWER: There's a sort of flatness you see here that is not in other paintings.

JOHN KUTZIK: I tried to enliven a little bit the broken color in those areas. I think it's got a little bit of a dimension like that. But I really didn't want to make it perversely so. I wanted to keep the flatness of it, because I didn't want to make it real, so to speak.

INTERVIEWER: And the ornamentation, the birds are almost like ornaments, almost, in the background there.

JOHN KUTZIK: Yeah, right on. Almost like the Chinese or Japanese screen painting, or something, too on the background. So that was the idea, kind of representing sky, earth water, the whole works. But the water, certainly, is bigger.

INTERVIEWER: Now, what's the time lapse between drawing or watercolor to large-scale acrylic? This was done in the '70s or the '80s?

JOHN KUTZIK: No, there's a drawing that's not here. Frankly, I really didn't like the drawing too much, so I reworked it and got to this probably in the-- I was married to Jennifer when I did this. I think probably about 1987 or something like that. And then this work come, I think, in the late '90s. So there was a time gap between these two.

And I really like the strength of this. I really like the way it's painted and the brightness of it and the way the border works into the larger part of the painting as well. So that's the history of that. And I enjoyed working on all three of these studies, which is always nice.

INTERVIEWER: Very nice. Thank you. We'll go on to more water-themed paintings. Number 33.

VIDEOGRAPHER: Two, one.
JOHN KUTZIK:  Now, am I in the right spot? I guess I am. Is that OK over here?

INTERVIEWER:  Maybe if you're right there. That's great. OK, we're at painting number 33. And sort of a very different styled painting than the previous two images we saw. And it looks like it hearkens back to your Minnesota days, if I'm correct.

JOHN KUTZIK:  That's true.

INTERVIEWER:  Why don't you tell us a bit about the painting and its title and also the genesis of the painting.

JOHN KUTZIK:  I think the title of this is called Boundary Waters. And in Northern Minnesota, they have a large area there that has no roads in it at all. And it's pure forest. And the transport, primarily, is by canoe.

Geologically, in that era, it was covered by glaciers. And the gouging caused a whole series of lakes connected all the way to Hudson Bay. So hypothetically, you could take a canoe all the way to Hudson Bay from that area. So that is the area.

When I was in college, some of my first teaching experiences were working in a boys camp in Ely, Minnesota, called Camp Voyageur. And I have talked glowingly about that area relative to doing plein air painting and having a good time up there. They used to call me "The Crafty Chiseler" when I was up there, all the little boys, because I was the craft counselor.

INTERVIEWER:  Chiseling wood, would it be?

JOHN KUTZIK:  Well, as a matter of fact, my two summers up there, I took a cedar pole, and I carved a historical French voyageur one year, and painted and polychromed it. It was almost life size. And the second here, I did the same. But this time, I did the contemporary voyageur at Camp Voyageur. So I had a young boy with a knapsack on his back and all that sort of stuff. So hence "The Crafty Chiseler."

Anyway, I talk so much about it that my brother-in-law challenged me to take a sentimental journey. And I think in the late '90s, he made accommodations for us to go up to Camp Voyageur again, because it's still in extent. So my brother-in-law and I took a trip up there, and this is a celebration of that trip.

Jennifer mentioned the fact that he forgot coffee, and I had a headache for three days, because I'm a coffee nut. But we were up there for about four or five days, and this is our trip up there, Farm Lake, and me carrying bags, my brother-in-law carrying the canoe. I found out that I don't have the stamina to carry those canoes anymore like I did, so I carried the bags and he carried that.

And here we are on the Minnesota Boundary Waters camping. So it's kind of a memory of the experience but also an experience of being back there again was really kind of a remarkable
thing. So we're at Camp Voyageur up in Ely, Minnesota on the canoe trails. And it was a lot of fun to go out there and do that.

I have a horrible sense of direction. Get on those lakes, you don't know where the portages are, so it was kind of tedious. And it gave a good test in three days about the relationship with my brother-in-law and I. But we had a lot of fun. We had a good time doing that.

INTERVIEWER: Which, it looks like a wonderful adventure. And I like the episodic nature of the one panel and then the other, sort of leading up to the lake, almost, and now you're on it and canoeing away.

JOHN KUTZIK: Right on. That's essentially the whole thing too. And you have to worry about the weather. You have to worry about where the portage is. And you've got to have a good sense of direction. It's really kind of wild up there. It really is. You feel alone. But it was fun to do that. And I had a good time, and I'm sure David had a good time on it too, as well.

INTERVIEWER: Now, I know from your description that it's a later painting. But also, probably you could tell because, once again, it's more realistic or realist in nature, rather than the more abstract paintings you did previously.

JOHN KUTZIK: The one down below is a little bit different.

INTERVIEWER: Right. And we're going to get to that right now. So let's go to 34, which--

VIDEOGRAPHER: Two, one.

INTERVIEWER: OK. As I mentioned a second ago, we have another painting with water in it. And it looks like it's a canoe as well, but from a different time period. Would like to talk a bit, John, about painting number 34, its title and what it's representing.

JOHN KUTZIK: OK. I'm not sure if this second painting of the Boundary Waters grew out of my experience in the late '90s going back there or not. And it seems to me it came from the same experience. And I'm really trying to think which one I painted first. If I remember correctly, I think I painted the small one first. And it was kind of an inspirational painting that came from that trip that my brother-in-law and I made up to the Boundary Waters in the late '90s.

And we are canoeing, and we're on not so much a lake anymore but we're on a river. And we're going, I think, downstream. You can shoot the rapids sometimes on boats. It's better that you have an aluminum body rather a wood, because you hit rocks and stuff. You can really smash things up.

Well, this kind of represents two canoers, then, going down a rapids very, very rapidly, where you've got to have both oars in the water and be very, very careful when you go through the channel. So that's what it represents.
And this is a loon over here. They're very, very stylistically made. And I just tried to bring in most of the things that are in the woods but make them more clear and more strong than what they really are. So I exaggerated size and scale and things like that.

Jennifer mentioned earlier an experience with a moose on that trip. We had a tent, and my brother-in-law was adventurous. He went to the other side of the flowage, they call it, way on the other side. And he was over there, and I was doing a watercolor. And suddenly, David started yelling at me, clear across the flowage there, quite a ways away. What the devil is he yelling at me for?

Well, to make a long story short, he came back in the canoe. And he said, John, did you see it? I said, see what? He said, right above your head was a huge moose. And that moose was so quiet.

INTERVIEWER: You never saw him.

JOHN KUTZIK: And I'm glad, because he had big antlers and the whole works. So consequently, in this drawing, there's that moose with the big antlers. So I tried to put all the elements in in that experience.

INTERVIEWER: He looks like a benevolent moose, though.

JOHN KUTZIK: Well, thank god. So anyway, it was kind of fun to paint. It was a painting that the organization comes very, very spontaneously. And it was really, really fun to do. And that doesn't happen too often.

INTERVIEWER: Wonderful. And it's interesting that you did this painting chronicling the same trip as the previous--

JOHN KUTZIK: To the best of my knowledge, I did. Yes. It wasn't a memory thing, because my memory faded quite a bit from that first experience. That was during my college years, which put it back quite a ways.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you. Really nice.

JOHN KUTZIK: Oh, thank you, also. I appreciate it. We'll go to the last painting.

VIDEOGRAPHER: Three, two, one.

INTERVIEWER: The last painting. And thank you so much. This has been--

JOHN KUTZIK: Well, I really appreciate it. I really appreciate the privilege. Thank you.

INTERVIEWER: It's been wonderful. Last painting also is somewhat water themed, but very different in feel and in subject matter. Would you like to tell us a bit about this painting?
JOHN KUTZIK: Well, the title comes from a poem by A. E. Housman. And it's a poem that I can recite verbatim, I think, pretty accurately. But nonetheless, it's the poem, and the first stanza goes, "With rue my heart is laden for golden friends I had, for many a rose-lipt maiden and many a lightfoot lad." And then it goes on to talk about the maiden and the lad later on in their lives. And "By streams too broad for leaping the lightfoot boys are laid."

And this is kind of parody on a boy trying to go across a stream, and it's too big for him. And Housman's poetry, I really enjoyed at one time in my life. So this if the theme of the boy leaping and not making it. And in the background, then, are islands that look like you could leap from island to island without too much trouble. But it looks like he failed here. So crudely--

INTERVIEWER: Alas.

JOHN KUTZIK: Crudely, that's the theme of a realization of sorts. So I enjoyed painting it. At one time, I was really thinking I would love to illustrate the poetry of Housman from A Shropshire Lad. But I never got to it, so this is my one attempt at trying to pay homage to Housman's poetry, because his ideas really are strong types of meaning to me, and I can see visions, I guess. So this is one of the visions I had. And it was really fun to paint, to try to put this together.

The islands in the background are lakes in Minnesota. There's one lake just full of small islands like that, and your canoe has got to sweep through this whole lake and these small, little islands. It's really kind of fun and mysterious to go through that area. So that's the setting I tried to create there.

INTERVIEWER: So it's in a way, if I may, a combination of your memory, your knowledge of Minnesota and the lakes and the water, and your love of literature, which is reflected in a lot of your paintings. And then also the stylistic features that some of your paintings have, the border, the abstraction, and also the pattern. So all together here.

JOHN KUTZIK: I think that's very, very observant. And I think you picked up those qualities quite well.

INTERVIEWER: What year was this done?

JOHN KUTZIK: I would assume maybe about 1983 or something like that, during that period of time. I only started doing acrylics, I think, about 1980. Prior to that, I had not painted acrylics for a long time. I painted watercolors. So these are early experiments based upon drawings that I did earlier and then put them into painting form. And this is one of the early ones of that group.

INTERVIEWER: Very nice. Well, this is the conclusion of our oral history and walking tour, painting tour, with Professor John Kutzik, who is professor emeritus as of today, is it?

JOHN KUTZIK: Yes, it's true.
INTERVIEWER: Congratulations. And again, it is still August 4, 2009. I'm Janet Bishop, and it's been an honor and pleasure and privilege to get the chance to see your work and talk about your methodology and hear about your experiences here at CSU and as an artist as well.

JOHN KUTZIK: Thank you very much.

[SIDE CONVERSATION]