

UC Santa Cruz

Institutional History of UCSC

Title

An Artist with Shoes On: An Oral History of Founding UC Santa Cruz Professor of Art Douglas McClellan

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9tn727hf>

Authors

McClellan, Douglas
Reti, Irene H.

Publication Date

2014-12-19

*An Artist with Shoes On:
An Oral History with
Founding UC Santa Cruz Professor of Arts, Douglas McClellan*

Interviewed by Nikki Silva
Edited by Irene Reti

Santa Cruz
University of California, Santa Cruz
University Library
2014

This oral history is covered by a copyright agreement between Douglas McClellan and the Regents of the University of California dated November 16, 2014. Under "fair use" standards, excerpts of up to six hundred words (per interview) may be quoted without the University Library's permission as long as the materials are properly cited. Quotations of more than six hundred words require the written permission of the Head of Special Collections and Archives and a proper citation and may also require a fee. Under certain circumstances, not-for-profit users may be granted a waiver of the fee. For permission contact: Irene Reti at ihreti@ucsc.edu, [Oral Historian](#), Special Collections and Archives, McHenry Library, UC Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz, CA, 95064. Phone: 831-459-2847.

Table of Contents

Interview History	1
Early Art Career	2
Art School	6
Teaching Art in Los Angeles	12
The Art Scene in Los Angeles in the 1950s and Early 1960s	21
Coming to UC Santa Cruz	27
Finding Inspiration	30
Family Life	33
Oxford of the Orange Groves	35
The Early Days at UC Santa Cruz	36
Approach to Teaching	54
Finding a Home in Soquel, California	58
Token Artist in the Academic Senate	60
More on the Place of Art in the Early UC Santa Cruz	68
Moving into a More Verbal Era	87
An Explication of McClellan's 2013 Show	97
Local Activism	104

Interview History

Douglas McClellan arrived at UC Santa Cruz in 1970, where he taught until his retirement in 1986. He was one of the founders of UCSC's Art Board and served as chairman from 1970 to 1975 and again in 1983. Before coming to UCSC, McClellan taught art at Scripps College/Claremont Graduate School, where he headed the art department from 1962 to 1970. McClellan's experience in both faculty and administration in the college-based Claremont Colleges located east of Los Angeles, which were known as the "Oxford of the Orange Groves," attracted the attention of Founding Chancellor Dean McHenry, who invited him to interview for a position in the newly created art department at UC Santa Cruz. McClellan was fifty years old when he arrived at UC Santa Cruz as an affiliate of College V (later Porter College).

Douglas McClellan was born in about 1920 in Pasadena, California. In this oral history he describes his childhood as a "wonder bread upbringing." His father was a furniture salesman and his mother worked for the telephone company. His rather conventional parents would not have been in favor of McClellan becoming an artist, so he told them he was studying industrial (automotive design) at Art Center School in Los Angeles. He was really beginning a long career in art.

Pearl Harbor and World War II interrupted McClellan's life as an art student. He found himself drafted into an Air Force Service company, where he served in the South Pacific and Japan, working as a camoufleur (designing and creating military camouflage), drew and printed maps, and wrote foxhole poetry. After the war, he studied political art with Boardman Robinson and muralist Jean Charlot at Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, where he also met his wife, Marge. He received his MFA in Visual Arts from Claremont Graduate School in 1950. McClellan's vivid recollections of the Los Angeles art scene from the 1940s through the 1960s provide valuable historical documentation of Los Angeles arts and culture.

From 1950 to 1959, McClellan taught painting and other art classes at Chaffey College in Ontario, California, where he also chaired the department. In 1961, the

Los Angeles Art Institute (later known as the Otis Art Institute) in Los Angeles hired him as dean of the arts, where he served for two years. He then relocated to his alma mater, Scripps College/Claremont Graduate School, where he remained until he was recruited by UC Santa Cruz in 1970. In this oral history, McClellan provides a narrative of the early years of UCSC's art faculty and students, the UCSC college system before Chancellor Sinsheimer's reorganization of 1979, and the unique flavor of the campus in its early years.

McClellan's visual art has been widely exhibited including at the San Francisco Museum of Art, the Los Angeles Museum of Art, and group exhibitions on the East and West coasts, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. At age 70, he started writing poetry again and is the author of seven volumes of poems. The most recent is *So Many Chairs* (Many Names Press, 2013). In the oral history McClellan discusses his transition from university professor to full-time working artist. In January 2014, Nikki Silva and Charles Prentiss curated *Paintings, Collages, Digital Stuff, and Poetry, to Boot*, a retrospective show of McClellan's work. The exhibit took place at the Michaelangelo Gallery in Santa Cruz. The oral history concludes with a description of that exhibit and several samples of McClellan's poetry.

In addition to producing award-winning programs for the Kitchen Sisters and many other National Public Radio endeavors, Nikki Silva is an alum of UC Santa Cruz's aesthetic studies program (1973). She is also a longtime colleague and friend of Doug McClellan's. It was for this reason that the Regional History Project invited Silva to conduct an oral history with Douglas McClellan as part of our series on the early UCSC arts faculty. We were delighted that both Silva and McClellan agreed to participate in this oral history. Silva conducted three interviews with McClellan at his home, in August, September, and November of 2014. The interviews were transcribed by Mim Eisenberg, audited and edited by Irene Reti, and returned to McClellan for his corrections. We thank him for his gracious and hard work on this project.

Copies of this volume are on deposit in Special Collections and in the circulating stacks at the UCSC Library, as well as on the library's website. The Regional

History Project is supported administratively by Elisabeth Remak-Honnef, Head of Special Collections and Archives, and University Librarian, Elizabeth Cowell.

—*Irene Reti*

*Director, Regional History Project, University Library
University of California, Santa Cruz, December 2014*

Silva: This is Nikki Silva of the Kitchen Sisters. I am doing an oral history for the Regional History Project at UCSC for Irene Reti. I'm talking with Douglas McClellan, and it is August 24th, 2014. Well, first off, can you begin by introducing yourself and saying where we are?

McClellan: This is Doug McClellan. We are at Oak Tree Villa, an assisted living community in Scotts Valley, California, in our apartment. And Nikki has dropped by, and we're going to talk.

Silva: Yeah. So you've just moved here.

McClellan: We've been here about two and a half months now, but I've been laid up for about the last month with the oxygen tubing and so on. So I don't get around much and I haven't met many folks here, which is a shame because there are some live wires around and things are happening, but I'm not that portable anymore.

Silva: I'm really impressed. I've never been up here. I think that the rooms are great, just kind of all looking out—

McClellan: This one is a slightly larger one in that it's at the haunch of a turn, so it's not rectangular; it's wider at that end than that end, so it gives that added space for the computer and—

Silva: Your studio.

McClellan: My "studio," yeah.

Silva: No, it's great because it's got a little personality to the room, and the angles and stuff.

McClellan: What intrigues me is that you have some questions that Keith Muscutt gave you. Let's start with those. I'm just so curious.

Silva: Then we'll circle around to Irene's questions, and we'll circle around to my questions. So Keith says, "A few ideas spring to mind. Definitely ask him about World War II, how he became a camoufleur. It's a nice story of, among other things, insubordination."

McClellan: [Laughs heartily.] Keith was always so impressed that I was a camoufleur, that the army would have that designation as a soldiering thing, a camoufleur.

Early Art Career

In the middle of 1941, I started [at] the Art Center School in Los Angeles to study to be an industrial designer, which is the only way I could sneak art school past my parents. And then Pearl Harbor hit, and the school, being very opportunistic, put us all in a camouflage class. And, being super—super whatever they were, they put us to work making a huge scale model of downtown L.A.

So when the school was over that year, we were drafted into a company—a strange company called an Air Force Service company. It would have been Halliburton if it were this war. And we were supposed to do three things. We were supposed to build airstrips, camouflage airplanes, and make maps. So there were people in the company from the New York stage, from Hollywood

decorators to—and then the service part of it were mostly kids from Brooklyn, who called us “fucking prune pickers,” as a general term of endearment. [Chuckles.]

And when I went overseas, of course, General [Douglas] MacArthur didn’t think it was particularly manly to do camouflage, so we just became general service troops. I was somehow elevated [to] a five-stripe sergeant, I don’t know why. And I was in charge of the work detail. One day, it was raining. We were living in mud. We were building Red Cross quarters for people yet to come and I held some men back to build some duckboards for our encampment, so that we could walk between tents and whatnot. And this very insecure first lieutenant said, “Sergeant, I want all those men on the job.” I tried to explain to him what I was doing, and he said, “Sergeant, I’ll have you busted.” It struck me as the best idea I had heard in the gosh darn world, because I didn’t really like [chuckles] being a five-star sergeant.

So they busted me to two stripes and put me in a trailer with a light table, nice and dry, a trailer with a stool and a light table, and the job of working on maps. I was pretty happy with that. And within a week—this is where it gets kind of spooky—a package came from home with a set of oil paints and the *New Anthology of Modern Verse*. I thought, Aha! Aha! I took it seriously, so when I got out, I went to art school. [Chuckles.]

Silva: So you’re locked in this room with your book and your art supplies and your maps and—I love it.

McClellan: Yeah, yeah. So it was very agreeable and we went through the rest of the Pacific Operation. We wound up in Japan eventually, where I volunteered for steady KP so I could get into town, and I did. We soon came home.

Silva: So when you were camouflaging—describe that to me a little bit.

McClellan: I taught camouflage for a while at March Air Reserve Base before we went overseas. It consisted of not much theory: rolling up burlap and dipping it in paint, letting it dry, and then, with a hatchet, cutting it into strips. You roll it and then cut it into strips, and that's how you made camouflage to weave in sort of netting and so on.

And there was also the other function of camouflage, which was deceptive, building false armies, so to speak. I studied that when we were in Australia. The only thing I remember is that the demonstration was for a false piece of artillery to fool the flying-over enemy, and it blew up, and there was a British colonel there—you know, fat and British and moustache and everything, who kept saying [affects a British accent]: “The bloody thing blew up. The bloody thing blew up.” [Chuckles.] So that was where we learned about deceptive camouflage, which was used much more later.

Silva: So what were you doing with the maps?

McClellan: The maps were usually captured maps, photographs that were put on vellum, and then we'd opaque out the Japanese words, unusable information, and draw in more usable information so that when they were printed—oh, we had a printing press—I forgot that. That was the fourth thing. We printed maps.

Had a big Webendorfer press in a trailer, and they printed maps for the air force for forays into enemy territory.

Silva: This sounds like it might have had some lingering impact on your work.

McClellan: The maps?

Silva: Anything. All of it. All of it.

McClellan: Oh, I think—oh, sure, sure. Why not? If you have an experience, use it, I say.

Silva: Yeah. Looking at your other things that you did later, as an artist—can you see any of those early camoufleur artistic techniques coming through?

McClellan: I'd have to stretch pretty hard to find them. I never was impressed by camouflage, actually. Along the way, I did some murals in an officers' club in the Philippines and a few sort of artsy things. I think that was the only major thing I did, was a whole mural.

Silva: What was it of?

McClellan: Night life, I think [chuckles], as a twenty-year-old man envisions it. [Laughs.] Flossies dancing and orchestras playing and notes in the air.

Silva: So you said that your folks weren't interested in you pursuing art. What drew *you* to it originally?

McClellan: I think I'd always drawn. At junior college I took some art courses, in which our teacher secretly informed us that [Pablo] Picasso was crazy.

[Chuckles.] She was very much the art teacher, overdressed and full of vigor and stuff, but very bad at art teaching. And—oh, God, I don't know, it's just one of those things that just happens. As it happens, I have a grandson who's going off to Rhode Island School of Design next month, who has done more drawings at the age of eighteen than I did when I was thirty. He draws like a fiend.

Art School

So back to arts, being an artist. I don't know, it just happened. After the war, I had heard of a teacher named Boardman Robinson. I'd wanted to do political art, and he'd worked for *The Old Masses* and *The New Masses*. He had an art school in Colorado, Colorado Springs, and my friend and I got in my car and drove back there and convinced him to let us in on the G.I. Bill. I stayed there for two years with him and then, later, with a muralist, Jean Charlot, and got a very strangely broad taste of stuff to do—you know, sort of a want list. When I came back to California, I sneaked my way into an MFA program and got an MFA in a couple of years and fell into the slavery of teaching.

Silva: So what was on your want list?

McClellan: Well, the want list had built up. It was a framework, I guess. I wanted to say something and I wanted to be a real craftsman about it. So—what else would be in that framework? Oh, God. With different teachers I'd get different enthusiasms, and some would last and some would not.

Silva: Were you political?

McClellan: I was in the only veterans' group that went on record against capitalism. [Laughs.] In Colorado Springs, there was a rabble-rouser named Irving Blau, who kind of corralled us all, and we were militant. We didn't go very far. It was called the AVC and it didn't last very long. It was going to be a competitor to the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion. It was short-lived, but idealistic as hell.

Silva: So growing up, though, your parents—were they political?

McClellan: No.

Silva: Where did that come from, your wanting to make a statement?

McClellan: Falling under bad influences at junior college, I think.

Silva: When were you in junior college?

McClellan: Well, the Pasadena city schools never had high schools and all that stuff. In 1941 I got my associate in arts from a junior college. That was the summer I worked for a little while, and then I went back to school, and Pearl Harbor happened.

Silva: Tell me about your friend Paul Darrow.

McClellan: Paul Darrow was a friend from junior high school. We've stayed friends for years. He married the girl I went steady with at one time, and we went to Colorado Springs together and studied there, and studied in Claremont. I'm still in touch with Paul. He's three weeks younger than I am, so we remember each other's birthday pretty well. He's a cartoonist. He's been doing

two cartoons a week for a publication called the *Claremont Courier* for over fifty years. And he has shows. He's falling apart, as we all are, but he's still there and it's wonderful to have a friend for that length of time. He taught at Scripps for a while. He taught at Otis [College of Art and Design] while I was there, and he moved to Laguna [Beach] and became a character.

Silva: It sounds like you were on the same path, in a lot of ways.

McClellan: Well, we were and we weren't, yeah. He stuck to it. I didn't come around to it later. [Laughs.]

Silva: So he also taught, but he quit teaching earlier?

McClellan: No, he quit teaching later, actually. He would commute from Laguna.

Silva: So let's just back up. Where did you grow up?

McClellan: My parents were from Iowa and Oklahoma. Like many people in Pasadena at that time they came to start at year one, no past. White bread. My father sold furniture and my mother worked as a telephone operator but as time went on she rose in the company, so there were tensions within our family over who was the most successful one. My father really wanted me to be a doctor, like most fathers did at that time, a doctor or a lawyer. But it was a very white-bread upbringing—to the point of Wonder Bread, upbringing. They were good parents, caring. I had only child problems, I guess.

Silva: And what did they think as you progressed in your career?

McClellan: Well, the great big faultline in a lot of careers at that time was the war. And they got me back, as it were. And I guess that made things okay.

Silva: I hadn't really thought about that. A lot of expectations probably fell away.

McClellan: Yeah, we're just so glad you're home.

Silva: Well, I wanted to ask you about your involvement in automobile design. I read that somewhere and I said, wow.

McClellan: [laughs] It was my beard for my parents. Do you know what a beard is?

Silva: No.

McClellan: Well, a beard used to be a woman who went out with a Hollywood star who happened to be gay. And so for my parents I said I wanted to do automobile design so I could go to art school.

Silva: So something practical.

McClellan: I was interested in the look of cars, but that was just, as I say, a front to get me to art school.

In Pasadena you went to elementary school, junior high school, and JC. So the last two years of high school were spent at JC. That's why we never had a prom. There was junior high school and then two years of college. And you could go earlier and take college courses as nominally a senior in high school. The spirit of John Dewey had taken over the reins. It was progressive education. And the kind

of education we got at junior college—I must say I took the easy course. You would end up being brilliant conversationalists at a cocktail party. If anybody asked you any questions beyond that, you were stumped. [Laughs.] It was so generalized. Everything was generalized. “This is a Monet. This is a Manet.” That was a time of great messing around with education.

Silva: Reflecting back, what do you think of that, that kind of combo?

McClellan: I got along well at cocktail parties. [Chuckles.] Well, I was a bad student, so I don’t know. I skimmed by, and I guess I was bright enough to take true-false tests without knowing the content, or something like that. You know, really I skated by. The whole education thing, I skated by. I got into graduate school by taking the GRE [Graduate Record Examination] because I’d read *Time Magazine* and [*The*] *New Yorker* religiously while I was overseas, and the information in those two magazines was sufficient to crack the GREs and get graduate status.

Silva: So did you go to any museums when you were a kid? Did you have that kind of a cultural bent in your family?

McClellan: No, no. My mother did buy a set of books, bound, identical. All sorts of things. And I was read to, but I read a lot. I read a whole lot. All through the war, I read a lot. I’d have a pile of books here and I’d read them and put them over there and get another—and build a pile here. Really very diverse stuff. The book that probably struck me more than any book I read in that period was *U.S.A.* by John Dos Passos. Three novels in it. And it was done in kind of the hep style of radio bulletins and whatnot, kaleidoscopic sort of writing. I was

impressed with that. And, of course, it was very straight-ahead, leftist stuff, and I liked that. So that was the book. Then Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel* and all the classics of the early forties, I guess, the late thirties, I read omnivorously.

Silva: So when you got into the military, what did that do to your mind socially—beyond the reading and being in the room by yourself part?

McClellan: Well, being an only child and suddenly being in a building with two hundred guys, a quarter of them from Brooklyn, was an educational experience. I had good friends. I have a friend who just recently died, who was an artist from Clovis, California. I had known him in art school, actually, and we went in the army together. I made friends. I made enemies. We'd go into Riverside when we were at March Air Force Base and live it up.

In a sense, I was free. The experience of the war—as I said, we would have been Halliburton rather than combat troops—freed me to do what I wanted to do. I kind of earned my chops that way. As an experience, it was broadening and liberating.

Silva: And then with the G.I. Bill—

McClellan: G.I. Bill and met Marge in art school. We got married.

Silva: So at what point in art school?

McClellan: In Colorado Springs. She's from Denver. And after the first year we got married, we lived together in an apartment, and we finished and bought a '28 Studebaker with [chuckles] a straight 8 engine about a yard long, two yards

long, wooden spoke wheels, and set out for California, looking just like the Joads, with all our art stuff in the back. We were stopped at the border, and there were no—well, that’s a story in itself. Anyhow, we made it to California.

Silva: Wait a minute. I want to hear this story.

McClellan: Well—

Silva: So first of all, what inspired you to want to go to California?

Teaching Art in Los Angeles

McClellan: Well, I was born in Pasadena. I wanted to see my folks. The friend that had gone back to Colorado Springs with me, whom I’d known since junior high, suggested I come to Claremont. “They let you do what you want,” he said. The first year, I was just there as a transient and then I did the whole thing about getting graduate status. Then I took the GRE, got in, and finished the year off and got an MFA, which was a rarity at that time. The MFA was not common.

During the time at the art school, we met a couple through some kind of a real estate situation that set patterns for our lives. He was an Irishman, and she was a San Francisco socialite, and they drank a lot. We’d go over to their house and not have dinner until nine, and we’d learn about the *bon temps* life. He was chairman of the art department at the local junior college and he hired me to teach there. But over that summer, that rascal got a job at the University of Illinois. So I not only took over a job at the junior college, I took over as chairman of the art department. I’d never met a class before and it was a hell of a year.

Silva: That was your first time teaching?

McClellan: First time teaching.

Silva: Oh, my gosh!

McClellan: I taught night school; I taught day school; I did administrative stuff. The next year, I got roped into being yearbook adviser and working with the theater, and I really got frazzled. So that leveled out, and—

Silva: What classes were you teaching?

McClellan: Drawing, painting, design, art history, whatever, name it. I had books. I'd stay a chapter ahead.

Silva: What kind of people were in the classes?

McClellan: Pretty raw. It was in a town called Ontario, California, which is semi-rural and very straight. They were tough nuts to crack, but I did have some good students. But it was just the luck of the draw.

Silva: It sounds like you were pretty political, and that was a pretty interesting time, the early fifties.

McClellan: Yeah. Well, I kept it apart from my teaching. I didn't have time to be political then. [Laughs.]

Silva: So wait a second. We need to back up to the Joads. You and Marge—okay, you're coming, and you're not here yet, so tell me that story.

McClellan: Well, first, the car broke down some place in Arizona. It was a Studebaker World Champion Commander. This was a time when Studebaker had just come out with the first postwar car. We went into this agency that still had the gladiolas in the lobby. I'm sure the mechanics looked at us and said, "Oh, shit." They said, "Get the parts; we'll fix it." So my father hustled around and got the parts, and it turned out that it didn't really need it. But they had offered to put me in gear and to send me West [laughs], in second gear, I think, all the way to California. So we had a delay there.

And at the border, we had this layering of stuff in the back, and we were stopped for inspection. I said, for some reason, "Marge, don't tell them about the kumquats." [Laughs.] Sort of a W. C. Fields sort of thing. And so we had to take everything out of the car.

Silva: How did you meet Marge?

McClellan: In art school.

Silva: Tell me that story. The first time you saw her, were you smitten?

McClellan: No, no.

Silva: C'mon!

McClellan: No, sorry.

Silva: [Chuckles.] How did she win your heart?

McClellan: She wore well and had a great sense of humor and was a good artist, and I grew to respect and love her. So we got married in her grandmother's living room. The preacher had been hired out of the Yellow Pages, and our best man and maid of honor were late, and he kept looking at his watch, saying, "Oh, dear, I have some young people on a mountain." So finally everybody arrived. We got started. The laundry man came. The dog barked at the laundry man. The preacher finally got out of there, saying, "This ain't gonna never last," you know? [Laughs.] So then we went back to Colorado Springs and had an apartment, and the next year we finished up there and then did the car trip.

Silva: Can you talk a little bit more about your two teachers there, the mural guy and the political cartoonist? Just what drew you to them?

McClellan: A poster had been made of Boardman Robinson's drawing, a gouache painting of the hands of Moses, which was a pretty powerful drawing. I had read about him and knew that he worked for *The Masses* and that he had a school and was a good teacher. Well, he was pretty old then—you know, seventy-three, I think. He taught by anecdote. He would cruise the class. I started the class, and I was drawing, and he stopped behind me, and then he'd move on to the next person.

And about five days after that, I was drawing—I was waiting for the words of wisdom, and he finally said, "I'll be goddamned. You're drawing standing up with a fountain pen." I thought, that's it! [Laughs.] That's the word of wisdom. But he was a good teacher, and he did great critiques. On the weekend—on Friday we would have a critique. But he retired, and before he retired, two other

students and I came to California to look for a school for him to start or be in. We cruised around and went to Ojai and talked to Beatrice Wood and talked to all sorts of people. We didn't find anything, but we were going to bring him with us, as it were. And that failed.

So he was replaced by the polar opposite. Jean Charlot was associated with the Mexican mural movement, though he was a Frenchman, and he was sort of the intellectual of the movement. Well, I had seen a kind of crude booklet that was a lecture on modern art for [Walt] Disney, in preparation for doing *Fantasia*. And he had given them a sketchy history of modern art, and it was printed in blueprint, I think, or something. You know how hard it was to reproduce stuff. I was impressed with his intellect.

So he came to the school and he was even more indirect. He would go around the painting class and he'd observe that your socks didn't match, or ask how the kids were, or some pleasantries, look at your work, and then on Friday he'd have a critique, lecture. He was brilliant enough that one Friday he gave a lecture on [El] Greco's *View of Toledo* and we all went out on the courtyard afterward for a cigarette, and someone said, "That son of a bitch was talking about me." I mean, he was able to just net everyone and find a concern and use a work of art to do it. It was just flat-out brilliant. He was such a good guy. When I left, he said, "I have great faith in you, and I think you're going to paint the next *George Washington Crossing the Delaware*." [Chuckles.] Those were his parting words.

Silva: So how do you think these two guys influenced your teaching style?

McClellan: [Exhales.] Robinson, not so much. Charlot, only in that preparation helps, I guess. I had no teaching style. The first day I taught, I came home and said, "I can do it! I can get up in front of people and talk!" I had no assurance of that until that time.

Silva: That first year at junior college, when you were teaching—how did you approach preparing for that many classes?

McClellan: I made notes. I had books. I had some encounters that startled me.

Silva: Like what?

McClellan: One young man asked me to stay after class and it turns out that he was Jesus. And a woman in my night class took me aside and said, "When do we leave? You're gonna run away with me." And I thought, My God, it's a zoo! It *was* a zoo. And that sort of prepares you. You walk more lightly and more nimbly when you realize things like that are going on.

Silva: It sounds like you were prepared for Santa Cruz by that class! [Laughs.]

McClellan: Well, yeah, right. [Laughs.] Yeah.

Silva: So, okay, so you're down there at junior college. You're wearing all these hats.

McClellan: Yeah, and I was put in charge of the creative arts program, which included domestic arts, and these two hatchet-faced women, who didn't like me at all, had to answer to me, and that was uncomfortable.

Silva: Domestic arts. What were they?

McClellan: Cooking, sewing, homemaking. I was being Peter-principled up to where I didn't want to be anymore, so I made the rather unwise choice of going for glamour and going to Otis Art Institute in L.A., as dean. I had three things juggling. I thought I could drop teaching. Well, that was really a bad mistake, and I was deaning and whatnot.

Silva: And were you making art as well?

McClellan: I was, but art became seasonal when you taught as much as I did. Every summer, it was sort of a different thing and I never quite got the continuity that a real producing artist needs. I never got that continuity until I retired, actually.

Silva: Okay, that leads me to another question by our friend here. I'm going to bring Keith into the picture because he's got a question right along these lines: "Ask him about how he struck the balance in his life between service, taking care of other people through, for instance, being chair of his department for so many years, and personal creativity."

McClellan: Well, I didn't handle it too well, actually, in that each summer was almost like a sealed unit. I think the kind of momentum that you need is more constant than that and it was kind of seasonal. It was like a vacation. I always had something I wanted to do, but it was pretty diverse. I rented studios and I had some good experiences with studio mates.

Silva: Down there?

McClellan: We rented what was called the Airplane Museum, which was a big, old temporary-type building with chicken wire around the top. The chicken wire had failed and little birds flew through. It was a tall, empty structure.

Silva: Where is this?

McClellan: In Claremont, at the edge of town. And that sort of thing. But there was always a tension between teaching and being an artist. The way I taught, I spent more time—or administered—I spent much more time on campus than my other faculty members.

Silva: And this was in the administration era?

McClellan: Yeah, right.

Silva: You had your studio, and you were administering, but you weren't teaching?

McClellan: And by then I had—the Pasadena in me got me onto a lot of senate committees at the university. So those drew me up to the campus a lot.

Silva: So how did you get drawn into Claremont? Tell me about that time.

McClellan: Well, Claremont was one of the few programs that offered a master of fine arts. It was the creature of a man named Millard Sheets, who was a brilliant motivational speaker, a pretty good artist, and an incurable optimist. And he called the three of us—one of us was Jack Zajac—"the unhappiness boys"—because our art didn't express happiness and joy. He was raised a poor boy, an orphan? I don't know. He had a paper route, and I swear to God that

he'd get up every morning and go check on the paper route and make sure that little kid was still doing it right, because he just never let anything alone.

But he hired on some interesting people, like a still-life painter, Henry Lee McFee, and an old Disney artist, Phil Dike, and a sculptor named Albert Stewart, who looked just like Maurice Chevalier, and when he talked he looked at your left ear all the time. And he did pronouncements. I steered clear of him, but he had a good sense of humor, and he really believed that art was the seventh son of a seventh son, sculpture especially. And when Jack Zajac got the Prix de Rome as a painter, he came up to Mr. Stewart before he left, and he said, "I think I'll go into sculpture. Is it hard?" [Chuckles.] Wonderful reaction.

So anyhow, back to Claremont.

Silva: Now, did you know Jack? How did you meet him?

McClellan: He was a seventeen-year-old brat that was brought in at our studio, our graduate studio, and took up space and started muscling in and bringing in women at night and playing the violin for them, and just screwing everything up for us, really. So I knew Jack when he was seventeen.

Silva: Oh, my word! That's a long history.

McClellan: Yeah. Ultimately, he was the link to Santa Cruz, but that's sometime down the line.

Silva: Okay, so he's seventeen and he's living it up in your studio.

McClellan: Gypsy violin, moving our still-life stuff. God, all the sacrilege of that! But he was nice. [Chuckles.]

Silva: So describe a little bit more about Claremont, in terms of the program and what was going on.

McClellan: Well, they brought in interesting people in the summer. I was very susceptible to influence. I remember I did a huge drawing under the influence of Carlos Lopez, called *The Crown of Thorns*, that won a prize at the L.A. County Museum and was *cause célèbre* in the *L.A. Times* because it was sacrilegious. And I thought I'd arrived, you know? [Laughs.] It was really a very derivative drawing, I must say. And my MFA project was the crucifixion, so I was into big themes, which were very popular at that time.

The Art Scene in Los Angeles in the 1950s and Early 1960s

I admired artists like Rico Lebrun because they did huge themes and a lot of either biblical or classical mythology stuff. It was kicking around in L.A. a lot. L.A. was kind of a seminal art scene, not taken too seriously on the East Coast at that time. We had shows at a gallery in Los Angeles. I had a gallery in Los Angeles, actually, Felix Landau, along with Jack and my other friend, Roger. Had shows there, one-man shows. Never sold much. I've never made a dealer happy in my life. I mean, this is a shame. I've never had them want me to come back.

Silva: So how did you make these connections for these exhibits? And you exhibited elsewhere, too—earlier than that, even, right?

McClellan: Right. Well, my first exhibition plaudit was the Library of Congress, when I was a student. A lithograph.

Silva: Of what?

McClellan: *The Cook* or something. It was a slice-of-life thing with Expressionist drawing.

Silva: And so how was it exhibited there? How did that happen?

McClellan: Oh, God, I can't remember the details. How it got there, I don't know. I don't remember a thing about it except that I always could put that on my vita, that it was the Library of Congress. It was probably something to do with students. I don't know. Anyhow, galleries. The three of us were there, and it was one of the going galleries—La Cienega [Boulevard] at that time was just a strip of galleries on both sides and every Monday night everybody around town showed up and trekked to the shows. That was the ritual.

Silva: So during that time, you were mostly painting? Drawing?

McClellan: Painting.

Silva: Big? Little?

McClellan: Well, by the standards of the time, middle, middle.

Coming back—now, when did this happen? While I was at Chaffey College, I got involved with the Ford Foundation. They were doing a series called "You and Modern Art," and the critic for *Art Forum* or some magazine—*Art Week*? I don't

know—had written this course. It had a syllabus, and it was supposed to be tried in various circumstances around the L.A. Basin area. There was one in L.A.; there was one in Santa Monica; and mine was in Ontario, California, which was considered the rural test. We'd meet weekly and people would read the syllabus and we'd discuss it. And through it, I got to know the man who wrote the course, Jules Langsner, who was a very influential critic at the time. Did he get me the show? I don't remember. But anyhow, I got involved in that circuit somehow about that time, about, oh, I believe '55 or '56, something like that.

Silva: So what was your dream at that point? What was your vision of what you were going to be doing?

McClellan: Would it be a cop-out to say I was too busy to have a vision?

Silva: It sounds like you're a doer, to me. You do it! You're not worried too much about where you're going in terms of the next step.

McClellan: It was short-term. Whatever I was doing was short-term. I knew I wanted to get out of junior college, and they were nice enough to offer me a deanship before I left, which didn't tempt me damn bit.

Silva: So when you say "out of junior college," meaning that you wanted to go into some higher—

McClellan: Yeah. More glamour, more class.

Silva: [Laughs.]

McClellan: So I got into this strange morass in L.A. It was the Los Angeles Art Institute, later to become Otis. It was originally Otis, and then it became Los Angeles County Art Institute. Millard Sheets, whom I mentioned before, had taken *it* over and had made an MFA program out of it and put in a series of humanities courses. He had four or five head professors that taught painting, drawing, printmaking, sculpture, and design. They were each prima donnas. Each had their own turf.

And the students were a snotty bunch. I mean, the school made them that way. When I came in, they one-by-one came to my office and complained about the school. I tried to enlist their help and finally built new studios. Here's something that just always struck me as being a lesson in life: their studios had been in basements, held apart from something else by a ratty curtain, and now they got these new studios. Each got a studio. They were beautiful studios. And every one of them came in and complained about it.

Silva: What were they complaining about?

McClellan: Well, it wasn't quite right. I don't know. And until they did something to mark it up—like, peeing on it!—then it was theirs. I just watched this thing unfold. I was amazed by it.

But the big thing at the Otis Art Institute or L.A. County was the director was a practicing drunk, who had had a nice career kind of writing about art and collecting art, a very civilized man, moneyed. And he would arrive at work at about eleven. He'd start sniffing lunch at about twelve and lunch always had three martinis and a beer before he came back. So there was this tiny window

when I could work with the director. And I had all this crap to do in hiring people, and we hired a registrar that didn't know squat. It was such a mare's nest! And the director of the galleries was pissed off. Everybody was pissed off. So I stuck it out for two years and I received an offer back at Scripps, where I'd studied, and I resigned. So the director resigned, predating my resignation, so I had to work that summer to put the whole year together.

Silva: My word!

McClellan: What a martyr I am, huh?

Silva: That sounds like a lot! So, then, what year are you going now to Scripps?

McClellan: It would be '61.

Silva: And you're still doing art work on the side.

McClellan: Yup, yup.

Silva: When you can, in the summer, in your big studio. Do you still have the studio?

McClellan: No, no. The minute I got out of Otis, we took a house at the beach for a month, in Crystal Cove, which is a nice beat-up little beach between Laguna and the northern part, a hidden beach. It was full of shacks, and we rented one next to our friends. I felt so liberated. We built a thing on the beach called Headquarters. Our kids were—Dave was probably, oh, eleven or so, twelve—and Wally was a little younger. And [our friends] had kids, so the kids would sort of wander around in droves.

Roger and I started, downstairs—our house had a porch, underneath the porch—and we started making gimmicks. We'd get wood on the beach and glue it together and whatnot. I did three pieces and then went to his house for cocktails, and then we'd be done with five pieces. And pretty soon we were working about eight hours a day doing sculpture, which I did a lot of. And actually [my son] Wally just picked it up this year at age fifty-eight, I think. His piece is at the end of the hall. He's doing it all the time now. So it's a sneaky gene.

Anyhow, I went to Scripps to graduate school as a joint appointment and taught drawing, painting, and worked in the humanities program, which was big there. I developed a series of lectures on ancient art.

Silva: So the administrative stuff has fallen away.

McClellan: I had no administrative stuff to speak of.

Silva: How did you feel about that?

McClellan: I felt really good about that. I felt teaching was much more interesting. I had a little more time to myself, though being chairman of the department, of course, kept me at work most of the time. And I had an assistant, who was perpetually too busy to do anything, which is a state of mind. So that wasn't helpful. But anyhow, it was great for a while, and [I had] good graduate students. I'd make the rounds a couple of days a week to their studios. We had a couple of revolutions. The graduate students didn't have very good facilities, so they all confronted me as the functioning boss of the graduate program at that time. So we tried to work things out. So there were the hassles.

But in '67, I got a sabbatical to go to Rome. Jack [Zajac] was there, and he said, "Come on over," and they found us an apartment. So we took the kids and went to Rome for nine months. I did a lot of drawing then. I did a whole series on *The Divine Comedy* and a series of modern tarots and mostly monochrome stuff. Saw a lot. Took a lot of slides. Traveled. Marge knew the market man. It was a very *gemütlich* neighborhood.

When we came back, things had been stirring in the Scripps department because there was a new dean. She was a woman dean; that's the first one they had. She wanted to make her chops, and she pulled together a lot of the faculty, and they decided this and decided that while I was gone. I came back, and I was disaffected. I thought they'd made some dumb choices, and I started a war with the dean. Bad idea.

Coming to UC Santa Cruz

So I get this call from Santa Cruz, from Jack Zajac. "Hey, Doug," he said [chuckles], "You ought to come up here." I'd been reading about it. *LIFE Magazine* had a whole spread on UC Santa Cruz at that time, as the non-Berkeley. And as it happened, Dean [E.] McHenry, the head guy—his sister was our neighbor in Claremont, and, though I didn't know her very well, he figured—well, I was in Claremont in the college system because it was the Oxford of the Orange Groves, so-called, so I could function in the college system at UC. So he was predisposed. I came up and interviewed [with] James [B.] Hall and a lot of people. James Hall was provost of [College] V, and Frank [X.] Barron was nationally famous for his work on creativity, and who else was there? I don't

know. It was one of those cocktail party interviews, you know, just to see if I crooked my finger when I drank my tea or something. I don't know.

Silva: So you were with all of them at one time, in a room?

McClellan: It was a kind of a cocktail party at Jack's.

Silva: An actual party-party.

McClellan: Yeah. But it had the trappings of a party, but it was an interview, to look over the merchandise sort of thing. So I was offered a job up there.

Silva: What job were you offered?

McClellan: Professorship, because I had gone up the ladder.

Silva: But for art or for—what was here? What was happening here?

McClellan: Well, at the time, of course, half your soul belonged to the college, and half belonged to the discipline. And each half wanted about 65 percent of your time, so [chuckles] it was—well, we have to start with the whole tapestry of [UCSC].

Silva: It's a whole chapter. And I want to hear all about the cocktail party interview [chuckles], because that sounds really good, and what *you* thought.

McClellan: Well, I interviewed with Dean McHenry. There was an assistant to Dean who was a non-academic, lay-it-on-the-line kind of guy. He talked out of the corner of his mouth. I interviewed with him. He had to do with kind of the housekeeping things up there, and Jim Hall, as I said, because he ran the arts

college and I would be affiliated there, and Frank Barron, who was big on creativity, and—one other guy. I do not remember who the other person was. But it was an informal interview.

So I was offered the post, and I wrote a scathing letter to the dean [at Claremont], and I resigned. I still had a commitment down there for about a month and a half, of a seminar I was teaching, so I would commute to Santa Cruz. When we came to Santa Cruz, our first residency, through a friend in Claremont, was Mangels Ranch, with six bedrooms and nine bathrooms.

Silva: In Aptos?

McClellan: Yeah, the one in Aptos. We had it all to ourselves [chuckles]. Marge's memories are great because everybody would go off to school, and she had this whole place to walk around. There was a tennis court to look at. There were birds and there were bees. She just was in heaven up there. Had a great kitchen. So we lived there for a month or so. Anyhow, that was the transition to Santa Cruz. I don't want to get ahead of myself.

Silva: No, we'll do that next time. A lot of [Keith Muscutt's questions] are in the next section. Well, here's an interesting one—we can talk about this. "Ask him where he turns for inspiration: [Joseph] Cornell, [Kurt] Schwitters, [Robert] Rauschenberg, [William] Hogarth, [Hieronymus] Bosch, Asia, Africa, Oceania]...?" This is not too long of a question or anything. "...Asia, Africa, Oceana, Americas, photography, nature, science, et cetera, et cetera? And how, why? Ask him if there's any art, art movement, medium, et cetera, that he dislikes."

McClellan: [Laughs.]

Silva: Don't you love these?

McClellan: [Laughs.]

Silva: I got this e-mail and I was so floored. I mean, I got this, like, five minutes after I wrote to him, asking him, "You know, I'm gonna talk with Doug. Got any questions?" And, boom, it was right back.

McClellan: Uh-huh.

Finding Inspiration

Silva: Anyway, where do you look for inspiration? Or where have you found inspiration?

McClellan: For a long time, I was a magpie and stole ideas and tried them on for size, and slowly you get more and more discriminating, I guess. But all the things he mentioned, I'm interested in, you know, in a dispassionate sort of way. To pick up several influences that stayed with me for some time—one was Max Beckmann. One was [Wassily] Kandinsky. Schwitters, as he said. Probably, though I hate to say it, it's so trite, [Vincent] van Gogh. And I became very interested in primitive art, just because I showed how prismatic the whole thing was. Yeah, I'd say that was about it.

Silva: But it sounds, too, like when you went to Rome, that really had a pretty big influence. Had you ever traveled like that before?

McClellan: No, not really. It was the first time abroad for any length of time. We went back to Italy a couple of times since then. But Rome is very cultural and I didn't like much of the contemporary stuff being done there. It was kind of third-generation something or other. But you got to get thrilled by the Winged Victory of Samothrace. And you got to get thrilled by Etruscan sculpture. You got to get thrilled by Etruscan painting. I loved the Etruscan tombs because they were playful. And I developed a theory, which I even tried out on a class: One thing is true, that all through the history of art, you could distort proportion any way you want, but you never distort function. You could make the legs short, the body long, make the head large, but you don't—except the Etruscan tombs—the knees go the wrong way. I was really fascinated by that. I tried that on a humanities class and there are still some women out there in their sixties or seventies that believe that, but it was irresistible. That sort of thing. That's not what you call inspiration.

Silva: No, but it's thought-provoking.

McClellan: Speculation.

Silva: Exactly, exactly. Can we back up just a little bit to the war? Because at that point, your interest in art and poetry emerged. Can you talk about the poetry and how that found its way in there? Did you continue that throughout, or did you leave it and come back?

McClellan: I'd been interested in poetry before. I loved T.S. Eliot and [W.H.] Auden and those guys. But when I was studying art and reading about art in the fifties, the dictum was that if you talked about art, you were not a sincere artist.

There was even that statement by Claes Oldenburg that “anybody who listens to what an artist says about his work should have their eyes examined.” So I think I just suppressed it. I suppressed words. They did come out in various ways, in memos I dictated or something—words did, but I just kind of forget them for a while. But I’ve always been really fascinated with language, and I’ve always been a large vocabulary lover. I loved obfuscation and all that stuff. But I was busy with other things, I think. So not until I was seventy did I decide to write poetry.

Silva: Did you write poetry during the war?

McClellan: Yeah, I wrote some foxhole poetry. [Chuckles.] I let Wally’s son read it when he was packing up our house. And he didn’t say much. I mean, it was very soulful stuff. Oh, God! But it was poetry.

Silva: So what were you writing about?

McClellan: I was nostalgic for this unattainable woman I knew, and it was what the future holds—very philosophical, milky stuff. When I got to art school, I just put that aside, though I read a lot. The thing I had done in the army was—I told you—I read omnivorously. I had a lot of time. And the army provided you with these books, all the same format. They’re kind of half a size page, and they were thick and disposable. I just read myself blind in the army because, you know, life was not that interesting. You were in a jungle, you were in a tent; you were going to go to another jungle, another tent. When I finally got rid of all the tech sergeant stuff and became a drone, I had a lot of time. I could read in my trailer, too.

Silva: Okay, here's a good one [from Keith Muscutt]: "Ask him if his creative process is fueled mostly by emotion/passion or by cerebral/intellectual energies."

McClellan: That is such a trite question. [Laughs.] Come on! [Laughs.] Keith, you can do better than that, for Chrissake!

Silva: [Laughs.] You're not going to grace him with an answer?

McClellan: Well, that is a question that has been asked for so many centuries, you know. The left brain/right brain harmony, or whether it's fueled by passion, or whether it's the intellect arrives at the point—it's such a tired subject. It is! And the answer is both. It's always both. I mean, no matter how much one thinks that it's all heart, it's also left-brain stuff. No, Keith, you could do better than that.

Family Life

Silva: [Chuckles.] I had a question. So you're doing all these jobs—I'm thinking even in the junior college era, especially when you're trying to do three things, and then there's Marge, and then there's babies. How did that family work, life work out?

McClellan: Well, I'll go by the places we lived. When David was born, we were living in a rented room owned by a woman whose favorite opera was Maytag. Then we moved to a place called Colorado Street, which was a ghetto created by moving a lot of houses together by the town dump in Claremont, and we fell in with the second—remember I mentioned way back this couple we met that sort

of gave us a matrix for how people live? This was another group. He was a classics professor at Scripps; she was a vice principal in high school. We lived in two-story houses and between them was an olive orchard. The olive orchard became the central place of the neighborhood. We had speeches every Fourth of July, every Labor Day. When anyone graduated, we either went to a restaurant and rented a room, or had it there. Our kids remember sneaking beer and watching the fireworks on the Fourth of July. And Robert Palmer and I and another person would vie with each other for speeches. We learned that from them.

We learned also about wine. We belonged to a wine club together and bought a share of Almaden. We'd get these gallon bottles of Chablis and split them up in the neighborhood. Good-living type stuff.

They were very keen on food, and so we learned some things about food from them. We'd go to the beach every year with the kids and rent a motel wing and have what we called the Bean Clam Rally and wow each other with food. And what else did we do? We had a football pool. We watched boxing together, the men. We played poker. Anyhow, we bonded with about six families and also learned about a lot of things that way. That was the second place we lived. The kids grew up with other kids around them. David learned to walk there, and Wally was still in the pram at that time, I think. Anyhow, then we bought a house. We bought a modern house in a neighboring town and moved there, and the kids went to school there. And we lived there for, oh, gosh, seven or eight years. But we'd return to Colorado Street for events and holidays.

We bought this house. It was a post-and-beam house, really fifties modern. Glass wall to ceiling. It had slats on the side, and it was in a corner lot that had been sluiced by several floods and had no soil whatsoever. So I, with students' help, had built a Japanese garden.

Silva: You're kidding!

McClellan: In the Japanese garden, we planted a tree that Wally has visited recently and said it's huge. And a lattice fence and a little garden in there. Very shibui. Not like this place. We had a great life there.

Silva: So next time, before we head into Santa Cruz, I want to ask about the Oxford system at Claremont.

McClellan: Okay.

Oxford of the Orange Groves

Silva: This today is Labor Day, the first of September 2014, and we're having our second conversation here with Doug McClellan. It's very hot today. Well, we were going to talk about the Oxford system.

McClellan: Oh, Oxford of the Orange Groves.

Silva: Yes.

McClellan: Claremont started with Pomona College, and then a women's college moved in called Scripps, where I taught, and then Claremont Men's College started across the street from Scripps College, and then Harvey Mudd

College started up [the] street and became a science-oriented, tech-oriented college. And then there was Pitzer College, which was formed in the days of free thinking and all that. It was a women's college for a while; now it's coeducational. There was a seminary. There were several study centers and they were all called the Claremont Colleges. All of them together became the Claremont Graduate School, which is now the Claremont [Graduate] University. But because each college had an autonomous president and whatnot, it resembled the English system much more than anything else, and someone called it the Oxford of the Orange Groves.

Silva: And that was sort of in your favor when—

McClellan: It was in my favor coming to Santa Cruz because Dean McHenry knew about it. As I said earlier, I actually was around the corner from his sister, but that wasn't the important point. He thought that anyone coming from the Oxford of the Orange Groves would not be shocked by Santa Cruz, which was a collegial system at the time.

The Early Days at UC Santa Cruz

Silva: So how did you first hear about Santa Cruz, and what led you to—

McClellan: Well, first, there was a lot of publicity about the campus. There was a big spread in *LIFE magazine*. There was a lot of talk. It was the anti-Berkeley at the time. I had a friend, Jack Zajac, who was here as a visiting professor, and he called me and said, "Do you want to look at a job at here? Because I think you'd get along here very well." And so I came up and interviewed.

Silva: So how old were you?

McClellan: I was on the cusp of being fifty years old, forty-nine, I think at the time, to be technical.

Silva: And Jack was about—

McClellan: Jack's about nine years younger than I am.

Silva: I was wondering how he became attracted and came to Santa Cruz.

McClellan: It was through Eloise and Page Smith, I think.¹ They liked his work. I think their daughter, Ann, had known him in Claremont. She had been a student of mine.

Silva: So did you know Page and Eloise through Ann?

McClellan: I did meet them when Page came down to give a commencement talk. So I'd made their acquaintance, but I didn't know them yet.

Silva: So you started to tell me last time about your first trip up here. What did you think? And what did you think when you read about it in *LIFE Magazine*? What appealed to you?

McClellan: Well, it was very much a PR thing about this innovative college, an innovative branch of the University of California. So that intrigued me. I was getting restive down there, too, because one should never teach at their alma

¹ See Randall Jarrell, Editor and Elizabeth Calciano, Editor, *Page Smith: Founding Cowell College and UCSC, 1964-1973* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 1996) Available in full text and audio at <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/smith>

mater. Too many people remember the good ol' days, and so I was finding it a little bit scratchy down there. This seemed like a chance to relocate, because weather factors were setting in. The San Gabriel Valley, where Scripps was located; was really Smog Center. We had a cabin nearby, at a mile altitude, and you almost had smog at that altitude when you went up to the cabin. So it was just a series of things that made it seem attractive to move.

The kids were—Dave was actually going to Cabrillo because he knew we were coming up, and Wally was in high school. We just picked up the family and left.

Silva: So the kids didn't mind the move?

McClellan: Oh, I think they complained like hell. My eyes were on other issues, I guess.

Silva: So you get to town, and so what did you think? Had you been to Santa Cruz?

McClellan: I had been here for an interview but never really experienced Santa Cruz.

Silva: What did you think of the little berg?

McClellan: Well, I was all for it. I took an organic gardening class. I bought Earth Shoes. I took shiatsu. [Laughs.] And grew side burns. What can I say? I said, "Yes!"

Silva: You jumped in.

McClellan: [Laughs.] Yeah, I jumped in.

Silva: [Laughs.] Earth Shoes and shiatsu. That's amazing. You were ready.

McClellan: I was ready, yep.

Silva: So you came up to be a professor, and which college were you affiliated with?

McClellan: College V.

Silva: And so what was that like?

McClellan: That's the arts college.

Silva: Paint a picture of what that all looked like at that moment. So this is 19—

McClellan: 1970. It was quite new, not very distinguished in architecture, but on a great knoll overlooking the ocean. And on the knoll overlooking the ocean—I think my third day here, I was having coffee with Don Weygandt, and suddenly a truckload of nude students came on top of the hill and had a ceremony. They were trying to shake things up. Gurdon Woods, the working chairman at the time, really wanted to wake this place up, and they got a Carnegie grant for doing various sort of alternative things.

Silva: Happenings?

McClellan: They were getting close to it, yeah. It didn't take here as they'd hoped it would. It brought lots of interest from a guy named Ken Feldman, who

was kind of on the forefront of conceptual art at the time. Fluxus was a movement, a New York-sourced movement of expanding the concept of art.

Silva: So they were just trying it out here.

McClellan: It was a grant, you know, to do some things. I don't know who organized that particular caper, but it was quite a welcoming committee, I thought. [Chuckles.]

Silva: [Chuckles.] What were they *doing* up there?

McClellan: They were performing some ritual. I don't know. I averted my eyes. [Laughter.]

Silva: So Don Weygandt was here. Who were your cohorts, your colleagues?

McClellan: The situation at that time was more or less a balkanization. Each provost of a college had a lot to say about the hiring. So the faculty at that time was slightly dispersed and quite different. There was Don Weygandt, Hardy Hanson, Patrick Aherne, Doyle Forman, Fred Hunnicutt. And the guy that was running it, Gurdon Woods, had come down from San Francisco. He was a sculptor. And that was every campus except Cowell [College], which Page Smith had developed. He had believed, when he was at UCLA, that only artists should teach art history, people who practiced the arts should teach art history. He brought up Mary Holmes, and subsequently hired Jasper [A.] Rose.

So they, in a sense, had their own inner sense of what art should be about. So they stood out slightly in that regard. The Smiths were early, very influential—

because they were early and because they were both very powerful people. So that was what the faculty was at the time. There were a couple of hirees that I've forgotten. There was a fellow teaching photography at College V. And there was somebody teaching ceramics at Cowell. So it was a mixed lot. Didn't get along too well together. I think I mentioned this before: The one problem with the college system was that both the college and the board wanted to share and it was just a lot of work.

Silva: So you were affiliated with College V.

McClellan: College V.

Silva: And who else was affiliated with College V?

McClellan: Fred Honeycutt. Patrick Aherne was with Stevenson [College]. Don was with Stevenson. Hardy was with College V. Doyle Forman was with Merrill College. Gurdon Woods was at Stevenson.

Silva: So each of those folks would teach for their college and then teach for the arts.

McClellan: Right.

Silva: And where would the arts meet? Where did you come together as a thing?

McClellan: We had no facilities of our own, except a drawing studio at the top of the library, I think. And College V built facilities that could be used for a studio. It was very gypsy for years, until the Baskin Center was built. There was a little place called Hahn Art across from Cowell-Stevenson, and we had a

painting studio at the top of Natural Sciences for a time. And they taught where the lime kilns were at the base of the campus. What was that building called? It was an old structure, and it was modified. Above the barn. It'll come to me. But it was an adapted building for some kind of three-dimensional work, and I don't remember what.

Silva: You were mostly teaching, though, at College V. Or did you go to those other places as well?

McClellan: Dean McHenry had come from UCLA and would not commit the sins of UCLA when he moved, so there were no departments. Departments bred empire and all manner of things that were anti-education. So the board of studies would meet, and we became the board of studies in art, finally. I don't think it existed when I arrived here.

I wasn't early in the scheme of things, really, and I was viewed with mixed reviews, I think.

Silva: Why?

McClellan: Well, because the other guys wanted somebody else, I suppose. They each had their own candidate. I happened to see a file I shouldn't have seen, in which I was referred to as a tap dancer, which meant I didn't stick to one thing. I remember that. I wrote a poem about it. [Chuckles.]

Silva: [Laughs.] I think you wrote that into your bio that we put up in your show, that you were a tap dancer.² So you said you didn't get along. How did that manifest itself?

McClellan: I was somehow nominal chairman of the board of studies. I would have a meeting and I blithely started out saying, "Well, we could do all this in an hour, and we've got an agenda," and Jasper Rose would interrupt and somebody else would grump and walk out of the room, and so it was not a happy ship, is all there was to it.

Now, one of the reasons I was hired also was because my career of chairmanship meant I must have been shockproof. I'd been chairman at the junior college; I'd been dean at Otis. I'd been chairman of the graduate studies at Claremont and all this. So I had "chairman" written on my forehead. It was really hard work to weld a faculty. But the virtue of it really is that a student could get a really varied

² McClellan wrote the following statement for *Paintings, Collages, Digital Stuff, and Poetry*, his January 2014 retrospective show curated by Nikki Silva and Charles Prentiss:

I am by nature a stylistic tapdancer. I am fascinated with the mystical core of things, believe in the accidental and random, have a passion for words. I also have a strong urge to deal with the essential comedy in things. These preoccupations have led me to leave painting forty or so years ago and move into collage, found-object assemblage, and more recently into poetry and digital doings.

Along the way there have been paintings containing words, rubber stamp comics, pyrocollages, purely abstract landscapes, seven books of poetry (self-published), and a gallery full of unsittable chairs. Each enterprise was an 'iceberg' with the bulk hidden beneath the surface: each was a project with a beginning and an end. Each took a long time.

The 'theaters' came about by trolling through my collection of flea market findings and a desire to tell stories more specifically than I had been able to before. Recently, the new digital prints allow an old painting student to do outrageous things with an irresponsibility not even dreamed of in art school. They are recycling of earlier collages and assemblages of mine with all the razzle-dazzle I can muster. Plundering the internet for images is a bit like being loose in the NY Public Library with scissor privileges—restraint is difficult and ideas of taste become radically altered.

education by studying with various people—from the strict Yale-oriented Hardy Hanson classes, to the monosyllabic Doyle Forman classes, to—you know, whatever. So it turned out pretty well, and I stayed chairman for four years. And then I surprised people by stepping down and saying, “I don’t want to do it anymore.”

Silva: Why didn’t you want to do it anymore?

McClellan: I wanted to paint. I wanted to teach. I was always frustrated in my art life by these jobs I had because I could only work in the summers. I think I talked last time about the discontinuity and how it works against you. So I just wanted to be a blithe faculty member and go along for the ride, which worked pretty well. But I did get involved in the faculty senate and major committees, and so I got stuck again, but that was different.

Silva: So that’s different, in that it wasn’t just your board of studies.

McClellan: Right.

Silva: So you were representing the arts?

McClellan: Sort of, yeah. An artist with shoes on. You know, curriculum committees and a whole manner of things. I remember one curriculum issue that came up—which tells you a lot about Santa Cruz—a student petitioned the committee to have the numerical designation of his major changed because it was 666, and we spent an hour on that. [Laughs.]

Silva: [Laughs.] That's perfect. So what did you think about the lack of departments?

McClellan: I thought the arts were an orphan. God, I don't know. It wasn't until a new dean of the humanities came in that there was even an arts person in the division administration, and we stuck Keith Muscutt with that job. Was he in electronic music at the time? He'd gone from being useful in outfitting the auditorium and gone with Gordon Mumma to the electronic music thing as a technician. I remember being at an evening with Audrey [E.] Stanley³ and somebody else, and we all thought, Keith Muscutt, and stuck him with the job. So he stayed in that position, ultimately as the assistant to the dean of the arts for ten years to fifteen years. So anyhow, order was taking place in more traditional academic terms all the time.

Silva: You mean it was evolving towards that?

McClellan: Yeah, it was like—what is it, the Heisenberg principle [of uncertainty]? Things were gelling down. Departments became more important, and offices became more traditional, deanships and all that stuff. So it slowly became a part of an almost normal university, almost normal.

Silva: What about your students, those early students? What was your feeling compared to where you had been?

³ See the oral history with Audrey Stanley forthcoming from the Regional History Project in 2015.

McClellan: They were thoroughbreds at academia to get there, because there was really a high demand on admission. They didn't know boo about art but thought it was a great idea. [Laughs.] How would I compare them to previous students? They were smarter, less sophisticated, and probably, in the end, more rewarding than previous students I'd known. It was the zeitgeist, I think.

Silva: It was a really different time. What kinds of people were attracted here? It was very new and very different.

McClellan: Yeah, the chemistry—it was attractive to probably more maverick types.

Silva: Well, who were some of your students that you remember from those very early days?

McClellan: Philip Brookman. I had an independent study with him. He wanted to paint like Richard Diebenkorn and he did pastiches of Richard Diebenkorn. He went on, of course, to become curator of photography at Corcoran [Gallery of Art].

Let's move away from that topic. Maybe we can get back to it.

Silva: Sure, yeah.

McClellan: One of the big issues that I had to deal with campuswide was the art history appointment. And the prevailing idea at Cowell, of course, is it should be somebody that does art. This woman from New York, Nan Piene, was highly recommended by Peter Selz at Berkeley. There was a big row about that. And

Nan, at the start, was a terrible teacher. Her lectures were dull. But she was probably the most productive counselor and mentor for a lot of people, and she got better at teaching.

The art history wars were interesting. That, plus the gallery situation. Cowell had already started a gallery. Eloise Smith had run it pretty much by herself, including driving to L.A. to pick up paintings from somebody and bringing them back. I thought that the university, by God, ought to have a museum. And so I made a memo about that and made the mistake of referring to the “bad ol’ days at Cowell,” and [chuckles] I had this meeting, and Philip was there and John Dizikes was there, who was a friend of the Smiths and a historian, and Eloise and I forget who else. But it was just a disaster of a meeting, and I just decided that’s not worth pushing that around anymore. So I spent a little more time on the Sesnon Gallery, which was being built at the time. And I enjoyed putting on shows.

Silva: I hadn’t really ever understood that part of the history between the Smith Gallery and the Sesnon.

McClellan: There was competition, budget competition through the colleges, I guess. We never had a joint show, I don’t think. In the early emergence of Sesnon, I remember one show we put on. There was a technician named Steve Lynn, who worked for sculpture, and he and I put on a show of bare bases and texts to go with them. Did you ever see that show?

Silva: I think I did! It’s coming back to me.

McClellan: Yeah, there was one where if you put your feet on a certain blue colors, you were archaic; if you put them on red and blue, you were classical. And there was one with a division and a tape that said: “Now, when you go to the next room, be sure to shut the door behind you.” And so you could sit there and watch people. It was The Pedestal Show. That’s right. And we had one where you could sit there and become part of a [René] Magritte. Those were the really fun things to do.

Silva: Well, and for students, too. So challenging and educational, but quirky and weird at the same time.

McClellan: Did you know Susan Stauber? Was she of your time?

Silva: I don’t think so.

McClellan: She sent me a letter recently. She remembered those earlier days as being playful. She sent a couple of memos that I had written—I don’t think I have them right now—to the college about a place for lockers for art students. And really, at that time, the college was pretty preppy, and a lot of the art things that seemed to center there were less traditional. That’s all we could say there.

Silva: I remember—I don’t know if you remember this—do you remember that time that Rick Carter and Charlie Hanley put that—they put that whole water skier down—as you went down Western, the west side of the campus, and they put a For Sale sign up on—[Chuckles.]—in the campus, and they—it was like “Buy this recreational property.”

McClellan: [Laughs.]

Silva: I think it was up for about twenty minutes, but—do you remember that?

McClellan: I remember Charlie Hanley, and I remember Rick Carter headed a group—we swapped students with Cal Arts [California Institute of the Arts]. Were you there then?

Silva: No.

McClellan: Well, Cal Arts people came, and one fellow took photographs every hour. And someone grew a garden in honor of Santa Cruz, and they did all kinds of conceptual things that Cal Arts were hatching. At the end we had a show, and the photographs were nothing but a table with all kinds of exposed film on it. It was just very oblique stuff. But Rick's group went down to Cal Arts and decided, they need some humanity, so they painted this huge, huge version of Christ entering Brussels by Ensor and left it there. [Laughs.] I thought that was the wittiest thing I'd ever heard.

Silva: Well, Rick Carter is pretty amazing, still. He's kind of exactly the same, actually, in that sort of wonderfully joyous—

McClellan: Even with Oscars and all?

Silva: Oscars and all, Oscars and all.

McClellan: Terrific.

Silva: I know. He's kind of fun. So, then, you've got this tension in this department.

McClellan: Mm-hm.

Silva: And who's teaching art history besides Nan, at that point, Mary?

McClellan: Mary Holmes and Jasper were teaching it.

Silva: And what was that trifecta—how did they get along?

McClellan: Well, she taught modern. [Pause.] I don't know whether they ever got along, really. I'm trying to think who else was involved. There were people hired in for art history.

Silva: What about aesthetic studies?

McClellan: Well, that was the college baby, of course. It was an answer to history of consciousness. I think Jim Hall initiated that.

Silva: And Pavel [Machotka]?

McClellan: Yeah. Pavel Machotka.

Silva: When did he come around? Was he there when you got there?

McClellan: Either he was, or was just about to. I don't remember now.

Silva: And what was he teaching? He wasn't teaching art history.

McClellan: Psychology.

Silva: Psychology.

McClellan: And his interest in [Paul] Cézanne—that came somewhere along the line, but I’ve forgotten. He became a sort of expert on Cézanne, and he eventually became a painter. He’s in Italy still painting, as I gather. No, Pavel was very big on the aesthetic studies major.

Silva: Were you connected to it? Were you one of the people that was in charge of it?

McClellan: No. It’s so murky. I don’t know why. I don’t think I did much with it, actually. I remember very little about the aesthetic studies major. I don’t think I had much to do with it. I may have had classes that could be counted for it, but that’s about it.

Silva: There were a lot of photographers in that major because there really wasn’t a photography major.

McClellan: Right.

Silva: And you said somebody was teaching photography at one time?

McClellan: There were several people. Ken Ruth was teaching for a number of years before Norman Locks taught it. And before him, there was this guy—he was fascinating. He came from the Northwest, and he was mycologist, and his family were all mushroom people. He taught for a couple of years.

Ceramics. Where I’d come from, of course—the places I had come from had all been strong in ceramics, and I always thought it was the most useful of majors because people had to stay there all night to do a kiln; then they’d set a good

example for other students. The crafts were disdained by the art group. We were fine arts and that's it.

Then later, of course, Cowell—this idea of crafts, medieval craft and whatnot. College V had a ceramist for a while, Bruce Bangert, but I don't remember where he taught. He was under their aegis, but they didn't have a studio for it, so I don't know where he taught. But then Cowell developed a major, and I can't place it in time, of the arts and crafts and their history. So they would teach the arts and crafts and the history as a unit, and that went on for a number of years.

Silva: Your painting and drawing class—where were you located most of the time?

McClellan: We had one studio in College V. It was a multipurpose room. The best studios available at that time were the ones at the top of [the] natural sciences building. We had a great loggia and all that there. And I taught a painting class—golly, there were so many of them, I don't remember.

Silva: And you were kind of drifting from place to place until the studios were built.

McClellan: Right. There was one in social sciences, actually.

Silva: That process of getting the new studios built in that whole complex—what was that like? How much input did you guys have?

McClellan: I only taught there one year in that place. I don't remember the planning of that at all. I remember that it was an all-purpose studio, a very, very

definite, sculpture, foundry-type studio. I also taught in the Performing Arts theater area. I had my office there for a while. There was a studio downstairs. Maybe that was the earliest painting studio. Yes, it was.

Silva: In Performing Arts, that whole area?

McClellan: Behind the theater, at the end of the hallway, there was a big studio. That's right. Gosh, I'd forgotten that. But as you can see, it's just a whole progression of different places, ad-hoc'ing it till the building was built.

Silva: You had a student who wanted to paint like Diebenkorn.

McClellan: Uh-huh.

Silva: What else were the kids going for? What were people yearning to follow?

McClellan: Well, it depended on the class they were in. With Patrick Aherne, they worked on basically one painting all the time and the transformation of it. In my class—it was full of gimmicks. Had to do five paintings with a different ground. Paint the canvas red, then paint it pink, painting in beat-the-red-to-death type thing. And then the other painting—Don was so open—it was largely the influence of the teacher, I think, as much as anything: what we showed them, what we prized and so on. I was pushing for sort of expressionism, I'd say, just generically.

Approach to Teaching

Silva: So your students would come in on the first day and how would you approach your class? What would be your normal kind of way of introducing or pacing the class?

McClellan: I'd usually start out by reading something.

Silva: By an artist or about an artist?

McClellan: Not necessarily, no. Reading whatever I'd been reading lately. It was a philosophical statement or something. "How could this be done visually?" I'd say. And we'd talk about visual language a lot, but also touch on kitchen matters, like mixing color, and what color does to color, and the wonderful mysteries of composition and all that stuff.

Silva: Keith said, "Ask him about the relationship between language and imagery. In my humble opinion, his visual art is deeply rooted in language, poetic structure. His paintings have the qualities of witty and well-balanced sentences, shot through with visual puns, rhymes, rhythms, et cetera. Conversely, his writing is rooted not in imagery per se, but in the way visual artists manifest their ideas through imagery. He inhabits the intersection of visual and verbal literacy, exploring one direction or the other but never straying very far." This is Keith talking about you, but I think it's interesting that you instantly said you started your painting class off with a reading. It is that literate—

McClellan: I have a painting somewhere in storage that I did over forty years ago, in which I did a series of haiku as paintings. On and off, I've flirted with the idea of the word entering the painting in different ways. So I guess that showed in the teaching, because I always liked visual puns and whatnot, just that kind of stuff. How I stressed it in teaching, I don't know. I never gave it as any kind of goal or any kind of assignment, but it was my own personal idiosyncrasy. I don't know. But it sounds pretty lofty, what he said.

Silva: I was impressed. I thought it was interesting, especially given your movement into poetry. I think it's pretty fascinating, and when you look at all of your work, it's such a through-line.

McClellan: I've said this a million times I guess: I was raised as an artist when you didn't dare talk about it. "If you could talk about your art, you should not paint it" fifties type of attitude, so I guess I was always suppressing my inner self.

Silva: So did you feel that the students were able to talk about their art or write or verbalize, or did they try?

McClellan: We had critiques in which everybody got to chime in. Some people were shyer than others. I know I certainly was wordier than Don Weygandt, or Fred Hunnicutt, or Doyle Forman, but Don would feel the painting when he would critique, and I would talk about it. It was that difference.

Silva: Did you ever co-teach a class with anyone from another discipline or from the arts?

McClellan: I taught with Mary Holmes, and I wound up being the guy that made sure the chalk was in the chalkboard. [Laughs.]

Silva: [Laughs.]

McClellan: It was a lecture/drawing class, and Mary just took over. I was so outclassed.

Silva: Well, a lot of what they talked about in the early days of the university was that kind of interdisciplinary approach, where you'd take some scientist and put him in with some—

McClellan: Well, in a lot of cases, when the colleges were at their strongest, people were urged to teach outside their field. So Bill Matthews taught science fiction or something here, and those core courses of the college, where artists had to teach writing. Eww! Eww! I taught writing once, and it was just—I just wasn't equipped to do it. But you were supposed to be versatile and show versatility, and students could learn from any one type of thing. But that's not team-teaching. There wasn't much around College V of that, more likely at Cowell College. Don taught with somebody, I think a botanist. But that was part of the experimental nature of the campus.

Silva: Okay, here's another writing question from Keith, about *your* writing: "Ask him how he comes up with such delicious lines as 'silent as the p in psalm.'" [Laughs.]

McClellan: "Psalter" is the word. Well, I've always liked language. When I retired, I was released. I could write poetry. And I really took to that. I did my

best work, I think, after I retired. I was writing poetry, I was doing those assemblages and just having so much fun.

Silva: What about Ivan Rosenblum, when you first got here? Who else was with Ivan at that time?

McClellan: Well, you made strong friendships at the college because your offices were adjoining and what not. I got to know Ivan and David Swanger and people that are no longer here—more as friends, than with people in your own board or your own field of study, because you were, you know, borrowing a cup of sugar, as it were, from the neighbors. Ivan was always jolly, and I knew his first wife and went to the house.

Silva: It seems like he was really in on the whole aesthetic studies thing.

McClellan: I'm sure he was. He and David Swanger were both hired as hyphenated positions. David was poetry and education. And there was a strong education slant in the aesthetic studies major, now that you mention it.

Silva: I had [mistakenly] thought you were one of the founders of aesthetic studies. I realized, when I went to a recent reunion of aesthetic studies, I didn't really know anything about aesthetic studies. I didn't even know what it was.

McClellan: Who was there?

Silva: Ziggy Rendler spearheaded it. David Swanger was there and Ivan, and then Pavel wrote a letter saying, "The place of the college in our newly-

established university was never clearly defined.” [Laughs.] It’s just like what you’re saying. Here, read this part of the recording that I transcribed.

McClellan: “A steadfast vision of its [Porter College’s] founding provost, James B. Hall,” who was a poet. He was hired, much to the chagrin of Eloise Smith.

Silva: Why?

McClellan: Because she had somebody else in mind, a British film director, as a matter of fact.

Silva: So the Smiths were here when you got here. What was your relationship with them from those early years?

McClellan: Socially good. We entertained them, and Eloise would always write a polite letter about Marge’s cooking and all this stuff.

Finding a Home in Soquel, California

Silva: To get back to Santa Cruz—how did you find your way to Soquel where you ultimately settled?

McClellan: I was going to take a very studied look at the various microclimates, and Fred Hunnicutt, who lives in Soquel, said, “Well, let’s go look around.” And we drove down the street from his place, and I looked at this field, and it was a gray day, and there was a beautiful, huge flowering apricot tree with a beam of sunlight on it. And I said, “I want it.” [Chuckles.] So much for microclimate. And it was available. And so we bought it.

Silva: What had it been before?

McClellan: There had been a family there, and the woman was widowed. It had been the mill office for Grovers Gulch Lumber Company. Grovers Gulch had been cleared, and the blacksmith had moved in 1903 or something, and pulled out the trees and used it as a farming area. Then the people that we bought it from had moved in and remodeled the house in 1934, and that's what it had been. Absolutely bow-legged house with no flat surfaces at all. You put a vitamin down and watch it [chuckles]—watch it reach warp speed. You learned to live with that. This place [in the assisted living community] is so flat, I don't know what to do with it.

Silva: [Laughs.]

McClellan: So that's how we got a house there.

Silva: Is that where you first gardened, then, or did you garden somewhere before that? You said you were an organic gardener.

McClellan: That's why I took the course. I wanted to be an organic gardener there.

Silva: Where did you take the course?

McClellan: Cabrillo Extended Learning, or whatever it was. There was a guy that was kind of famous for it, as I remember.⁴

Silva: Chadwick was here, but did they have any of the farm stuff then going on [at UCSC]?

McClellan: Let's see, I know that when I came to interview, we had a cocktail party at the Zajacs at the Cowell residency, and Chadwick lived in the floor below, and hit the ceiling with a broomstick to shut us up. So he was here in 1969-70. Paul Lee, of course, was very involved in that. I don't remember the state of the garden at that time. It was just an embryonic state. But it was definitely a living thing at the time and a cause for Page and Paul.⁵

Token Artist in the Academic Senate

Silva: When you started working with the larger faculty senate and you were no longer working with the art folks, what was your role?

McClellan: Token artist.

Silva: You were the token artist.

⁴ McClellan is most likely referring to Richard Merrill, who taught organic gardening/horticulture at Cabrillo College for several decades—Editor.

⁵ See *The Early History of UC Santa Cruz's Farm and Garden*, Oral history interviews with Paul Lee, Phyllis Norris, Orin Martin, and Dennis Tamura (Regional History Project, UCSC Library 2003). Available in full text at <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/farmgarden>

McClellan: I was sort of going to bat for all the artists there, so they wouldn't have to do it or something. It was some vain reason. I don't know. I like power. I don't know. Power, yeah. [growls]

Silva: You're good at it. You're good at dealing with lots of kinds of people.

McClellan: Herding cats, it is.

Silva: No kidding, no kidding. All those committee meetings.

So, you get there, and then suddenly things start to really change in terms of the college system and what people think should happen with that. Can you just talk about some of those issues and what you thought about—

McClellan: Well, the college system—as I said earlier, the college only wanted its share, but everybody wanted 65 percent of your time, so the board of studies ran the major, whatever the major was, and the college ran auxiliary courses or whatever, and you taught for both the college and the board. And at the college, you taught a wider variety of things maybe than you should have, but it was all in fun. And for the board, you tried to lead a normal life, I guess. [Chuckles.] I don't know.

Silva: Well, Linda Pope was a student of yours.

McClellan: Yup. She was a student of mine after I retired. I taught one course. It was the best course I ever taught.

Silva: What did you teach?

McClellan: *Collage and Assemblage*. Great students and great results, and it almost made me want to teach again. But not quite.

Silva: Why do you suppose it was so different?

McClellan: I think I was no longer a professor; I was an artist who chose to teach something. I think there was a slight shifting of the view of what I was doing. I felt less responsible and yet more involved than I had as a garden-variety prof. I had more fun. My best assignment was that we met at my house, in the studio, but everybody had to spend seven dollars and ninety-five cents exactly on their material. And they had to bring receipts. [Laughs.]

Silva: Oh, my God! How did you do *that*? How did you come up with seven ninety-five, first off?

McClellan: It may have been another figure, but it was a very arbitrary figure.

Silva: [Laughs.]

McClellan: It was probably cheaper than that at that time. Well, going back to graduate school teaching and all, I always found that if you do something through a tight opening, where it's almost arbitrary, you always start saying, "Oh, I can't do that." And then you find that you can do it. It just uses more imagination, and it also takes any pressure off of it, because who could be expected to make art with seven ninety-five, right? Of course. So it just was a device that I'd used before in a variety of ways, especially in the graduate program. People's projects would be lofty, and I'd talk them down on it, saying, "You can make art any way you want, but only don't expand too much." So it

was just personal philosophy, but people that took the course always remember that aspect of it. There were several quite mature people that took it. Linda had a great project.

Silva: So what year was that?

McClellan: I retired in '86. It was probably '87.

Silva: And you were actively already working on your own things—

McClellan: Yeah. That probably energized me in some way.

Silva: So what aspects of the university did you miss? Did you miss anything when you retired?

McClellan: I dreamed about teaching for a while. I developed a fondness for teaching drawing near the end, and especially figure drawing. Some of my best classes, I think, were in figure drawing. I had auditors, Lynn Swanger and Roy Rydell, and all. They would sit in on the class. It was a brisk kind of teaching, short-term, in drawing. You get around the room. My favorite device in that class was, after about the third or fourth week, I'd say, "Okay, I want you to do the worst drawing you can of the model, absolutely the worst." And there'd be titters and giggles, and then about three minutes in, somebody would say, "What do you mean by 'the worst drawing'?" I said, "The worst drawing." And so people would titter more and do it, and then we'd put them up, and we'd walk around, and somebody would always observe, "Well, these are some of the best drawings we did," because they were looser. I always got a kick out of that one. [Chuckles.]

Silva: That's great. I read this article in *City on a Hill* about the politics of the department. **Footnote** Tim Craighead or somebody—I think Tim says this. He said that "the politics of the department was a nightmare," and he said, "but Doug and Don refused to operate in that realm." What do you suppose he meant by that?

McClellan: I don't know. I don't know how others operated in that realm, so I don't know.

Silva: It's interesting that he thought that—

McClellan: There was—well, there were schisms, but—no, I'm mystified by that. I appreciate it, but I'm mystified by it.

Silva: Craighead says, "There were a lot of petty politics at that time. They didn't seem to get involved in them. There is nothing more vicious than university politics and nothing less important than them. But there was a lot of that flowing around in the early days of the department. Part of what made Don and Doug great professors was that they refused to operate in that zone. They were genuinely more interested in talking with students, getting work done and moving on." That was in a *City on the Hill Press* article that he was interviewed for.

McClellan: How nice. Well, there was, you know, a certain amount of soul capturing going on, on the part of some of the faculty members getting students as allies and whatnot, but that still doesn't affect the teaching that much, does it?

Silva: Okay, so this is a question. Irene Reti at the university—she was wondering: “What was the political relationship between the art board, or arts division, and other divisions and boards at UCSC?”

McClellan: Well, there wasn’t really an arts division until fairly recently. We were always under humanities until just before I retired. Then a division was forming, and David Cope, who was also a provost at College V, at—what’s the name now?

Silva: Porter. [laughs] I never call it that. Never, ever.

McClellan: Yeah. Became the first dean of the arts. And that would be about ’83 or ’82 or ’83 or something like that. That’s when it actually became a division. By just sheer growth and all, it became a division. Then Ed Houghton took over, and now they have a new dean, of course.

Silva: But in terms of that division having any relationship with other divisions—

McClellan: Well, I assume it was a stepchild, but I wasn’t involved in it at that level at that time, so I don’t know.

Silva: What about politics, in the bigger sense of the world, and that moment in history when you were teaching? What was UCSC like, in terms of the students?

McClellan: You know the old saw about campus politics are so very, very ugly because the stakes are incredibly low. [Laughs.] Okay, from my experience on the senate boards, the hard science group always thought all others of us were

children and they were the grownups. They usually ran the committees. The humanities, of course, at that time were not as much in the shade as they are now, but they were still a little iffy, soft, and the social sciences were—that would be the most interesting politically to be in, I think, because you had the range of all kinds of minds on the campus. We had Elliot Aronson in humanistic psychology and some were training mice to jump through hoops and what not.

But anyhow, no conclusive statement on that except that politics are politics, and when you have people with a reasonable education trying to outdo each other [chuckles], you have the essence of politics. In a way, the dream, as you say, set it up as being a political theater, and it resolved itself, as anyone could expect, by becoming more orthodox and having fewer points of friction. The vision of the place really was based on the fact that people are really better than they are, or not as nasty.

Silva: So what about grades and narrative evaluations?

McClellan: It was another reason that Dean McHenry thought I could stand it because we didn't give grades at Scripps, either. Well, that became more acute after I got into senate politics. We assumed no grades, though as a chairman I had a lot of trouble with people that wouldn't write evaluations, partly because they just couldn't write and couldn't bring themselves to evaluate. I always thought it was a good idea, though it is a temptation with a big class to get about three pat statements and pick a, b, or c. I wrote some that people remembered, they were so touched, or were so thorough, or whatever. I was feeling like writing at the time.

Evaluations were a good idea, [but] I could see why they didn't survive. Because transfer students—that was a big problem, and that was constantly the complaint: "How can I take this to Davis and get a graduate degree?" I don't remember exactly when grades became optional, and then, of course, they became mandatory. But personally I always liked the evaluation.

Silva: And it seems in art such a better way to approach it. I mean, how do you grade someone on that level? I guess by how they show up—

McClellan: They show up.

Silva: —and they do the assignments. But that's not very telling.

McClellan: Yeah, not very deep, anyhow, just deportment. Deportment and attendance is all.

Silva: Okay, so then the politics, just what's going on in world events. How did you feel Santa Cruz students kind of fit into that picture of what was going on across the country?

McClellan: My initial experience was they were less involved than the ones in Claremont. What were the political issues? I mean, aside from the obvious ones like the Vietnam War and whatnot.

Silva: Well, there was the whole movement of Chicanos, Indians, women, gays.

McClellan: We had a big Chicano rebellion my second or third year here. MEChA came into being and they decided that for the appointment that we wanted to make, they wanted somebody else. They had a demand meeting with

the board. On one side you had a cowering board, and on the other, these hard-eyed guys whispering to each other. They wanted to hire a guy named Tony Palomino, who did low-rider drawings. We wanted to hire Ed Carrillo. So we got down to hard-ass talking, and I remember one guy said, "Your blue eyes ain't never gonna see the problem." [laughs]

Silva: That is a great line. [laughs] That sounds like it was kind of a through line, just people arguing about who was going to get hired.

McClellan: Yeah, and that was the same time that the administration at Central Services had a fire. So it was held at Kresge College. I remember this kind of ad hoc meeting. I must say that most of my colleagues in the department dithered a lot in that damn meeting. I was really disappointed in them.

Silva: Didn't they think that somebody started the fire?

McClellan: I don't think that was ever established. I think it was electrical. That wasn't a part of the Chicano revolution, short-lived. But MeCha was, of course, the issue at that time. And so Ed Carrillo came, and his first year he painted a mural inside and outside of Classroom Unit II with all kinds of thematics that would be suitable.

More on the Place of Art in the Early UC Santa Cruz

Silva: This is Nikki Silva and I'm here with Doug McClellan, and it is November 16th, 2014, and we're on number three of our interviews.

McClellan: And I'm sitting next to Nikki here. [Chuckles.]

Silva: So, why don't you start.

McClellan: Okay. I tried to parse out parts of the first years here because the last time, I thought I sort of went [blank].

The issue of art at UCSC was really kind of interesting in that Dean [E.] McHenry and Clark Kerr, who was the president of the university at that time—Dean was the chancellor—had talked about a university that would be unlike the [University of California] Berkeley because Berkeley was the hot potato at that time. [UCSC] would be an Oxford of the redwoods with collegiate functionings and no departments. Departments breed greed, partisanship, all the bad things. And so the arts were outside of the humanities, basically. They were under the umbrella of the humanities, but they were supposed to be sort of respite for the kids who were taking the really solid stuff.

About the second year or third year I was here, a team came to evaluate the arts here, and on the team were two guys, Allan Kaprow, who had just invented Happenings as an art form, and Paul [Brock], who was this abrasive, kind of wonderful guy with a cigar always in his mouth. They were at Cal Arts [California Institute of the Arts]. Cal Arts—in Valencia—at that time was the new art school, the reformed art school. They had a course in industrial design, and they were going to design a salt shaker, so they spent six weeks debating whether people should eat salt or not. I mean, this was [laughs] way, way outside our realm.

Anyhow, so in a mop-up meeting, they said that the arts ought to get its act together. And Dean McHenry says, "Well, we always thought that they could do

that in their college as a kind of activity, nice activity,” and Paul [Brock] pulled his cigar out and said, “And I suppose you have test tubes and Bunsen burners in the college so people would study science?” And McHenry said the classic answer: “Oh, no. Those boys grade hard.” [Laughs.] I thought that was memorable. That was early on.

Silva: So at the start, then, art was just kind of tucked in as a—just—as what?

McClellan: Each college had somebody in the arts, and—

Silva: But it was more recreational?

McClellan: It was ancillary. I don’t know if it was recreational. The vision was so civilized, of a college with log and a professor sitting at one end and a student at the other end, discussing Plato. The arts were just really baubles. So that was an issue right at the beginning.

I also sized things up and thought we ought to have a museum. A university has a museum. They have a curator. They have a collection. So I passed around some paper to try to get people to come and talk about it. I had included Eloise [Pickard] Smith in the paper, and I’d made the mistake of referring to the bad old days when the provost’s wife had to drive to L.A. to get the shows. I was confronted with all the heavies from Cowell [College]— John Dizikes, and Eloise Smith, who pointed out I was a great disappointment to her, as a matter of fact. [Laughs.] And so that was an ancillary issue—

Silva: But you meant that it should be just more elevated as an institution, yes?

McClellan: Right. But, see, that also suggested an art department. So there were issues involved.

Silva: So why did you think it would be so important for the college to have a museum?

McClellan: Because everybody else had one. [Chuckles.] No, I don't know. I thought it was one of the functions. It would put art center, front and center, in its way. We were in a stage where everything was up for grabs in those early days. I mean, you could do this, you could do that, maybe you could do that. Actually, the first few years I was here, hiring was just prodigious. There was no tomorrow. But then suddenly the budget stopped all that, so we suddenly had to face what we'd decided, and we were not complete. But that just kept the issues a little hotter, I suppose.

Silva: So at the beginning you had this vision of what you wanted, but then the budget cut off the whole picture?

McClellan: Well, if we made an appointment, we could always make another one to amplify it or correct it or something. But then suddenly we couldn't do that. We were stuck with ourselves, as it were. So that was part of the ferment.

Silva: You said at the very beginning that it was not like Berkeley?

McClellan: Dean McHenry was a good friend of Clark Kerr's and Clark Kerr had a vision of things. He must have been a wonderful guy to work with. But UCSC came along after the ferment at Berkeley. Big classes and all that were issues. Too many students and no sense of a home for any of the students. The Colleges

provide that. You know, it works in Oxford and so on. And one of the reasons I was hired was that I came from the Oxford of the Orange Groves in Claremont. And very few graduate programs, until history of consciousness and a few of those came along.

Silva: So in the early days, when art was just sort of tucked in with humanities and not a central thing, what were the students thinking? Was there any kind of clamor from the students for more art, or more of a professional art department?

McClellan: Not that I recall. The students, in the first years, were all high achievers academically because it was a greater hurdle to get into UCSC because it was new and exciting and so on. But they'd say, "There's this thing called art. Let's try it." And it had the most erratic students in the world. They were as bright as—bright as could be and unequipped visually, for the most part. But that doesn't mean the stuff wasn't interesting. It just was they were a different breed of student. So I don't think they would have thought of that out of their experience.

Silva: And what was going on at the other UC's, in terms of art and art departments?

McClellan: Well, let's see. UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles] had been there forever, with William Brice and all those guys. UC Riverside was developing an art program. Of course, Berkeley was the mother of us all. I had all kinds of friends in graduate school who went to Berkeley. The University of California, San Diego kind of went on a conceptual turn. Berkeley was a full

smorgasbord of subject matter, and the University of California, Davis was kind of out there in the fields, with Wayne Thiebaud and those guys.

Silva: I'm just wondering how Santa Cruz fit in? The other UC's had defined departments, so why were they thinking that the arts were not necessary to develop here?

McClellan: Well, we didn't have departments.

Silva: That's right.

McClellan: We had boards of studies, because departments breed greed and so on, and bad thoughts.

Silva: It's interesting, though, that there would be sort of a developed interest at the other campuses in solid departments that would attract students and that here it was kind of relegated to humanities.

McClellan: [When we became a board of studies], we started meeting as a group of artists. I think before that, they didn't. And we realized deep down, we were very hostile [to each other]. You know, because the appointments that had been made college-by-college, were made by other than artists, or the swing vote was by other than artists, so there was no sense of companionship, almost, let's say. And we started to meet as an art board. I think my first meeting was to say, "We have quite an agenda here. It might take a full hour." I didn't count on Jasper [A.] Rose [chuckles] and a few other things. Anyhow, the meetings were a shambles, and—

Silva: So they were a shambles because of the different personalities and disciplines peoples came from, or because of the politics and appointments?

McClellan: Well, that—yes. [Chuckles.]

Silva: Yes to all.

McClellan: Yes to all. Even after we became a board of studies, there was some conflict because colleges were still making appointments in the arts, independent of the board. So Provost A would hire somebody that they liked the cut of the jib of, whose contributions would not particularly contribute to the whole. So they had these little outriggers and stuff. And it wasn't until there was actually an arts division—you have to look that up, when that came—that there was any kind of total control over it. I realize I'm speaking as a middle manager who kept wanting more control. [Laughs.] Shame on me.

Silva: That was kind of the Wild West. So at those early meetings when you first started to come together as artists, what were you trying to do as a group?

McClellan: Well, as I say, we had a number of positions coming down the pike. Does it go to three-dimensional or two-dimensional? Does it go to the core course or does it add a new direction, like printmaking? Well, there was certain partisanship. You know, "We gotta get one more sculptor"—that sort of thinking, which is logical. And, as I say, we could be a little more sanguine about the appointments [in the early days] because there'd be another one next week, practically, as it were. And when that dried up, the bargaining got tougher, I would say.

Silva: And you hadn't met your full complement of people that you needed.

McClellan: That's right, yeah, we didn't. But we thought of it as a rounded art department. The person that had run it before as a loose group was Gurdon Woods, who was a sculptor. He was convinced that sculpture was the art form of the seventies and everything should be sculpture. And he did arrange for a Carnegie grant. I told you about all the naked people jumping out of the truck.

We wound up being—within the university spectrum—by far the most conservative art department in terms of drawing, painting. We didn't flirt with conceptual art, or new technology art, whereas others were heading off in that direction.

Silva: Why do you think that is?

McClellan: Because of the personnel, I guess, that started it. You had a committed painter, a committed sculptor—

Silva: So Gurden was the committed sculptor.

McClellan: Yeah, and he hired Fred Hunnicutt and so on.

Silva: Well, there's a strong printmaking contingent. How did that happen?

McClellan: We had a studio in the new Performing Arts center, and I had a candidate, and the other candidate was Kay Metz, and she was hired, and so she was the nucleus of the printing program. And then somewhat later, Paul Rangell came back to the fold and took over lithography. So Kay was the genesis of the printmaking department. Well, Kay would bring people in later on, but at first I

think she bore the brunt pretty on her own. But we didn't have that raw edge that other places seemed to have. As I said, at Cal Arts—the guys that evaluated us were charitable but not particularly useful.

Silva: But they were pushing for you guys to really have art be a focus versus a sub—

McClellan: They said, "University, accept this child." Right. So there continued to be appointments, but they were college originators, as I said, and they didn't quite fall into the grand plan, which we didn't quite have yet, anyhow. So there were these outliers. And evaluating of students' curriculum and performance for a degree was a little bit touchy for a while.

But just the whole business of art identifying itself—now, when Helene Moglen became dean⁶ she decided she knew nothing of the arts. So Keith Muscutt was hired as her assistant in the arts and [soon after that the arts became a separate division at UCSC]. I don't know when a dean of the arts actually came into being. Was it—oh, I know, I know. Oh, we hired this turkey from Yale [University], who was supposed to put us all together. And the first thing he had me do was design a mace to be carried at ceremonies, and he wanted a motto. He wanted all the bells and whistles. Oh, man, that was a year! He only lasted a year. Then I think Ed took over that, [Edward] Houghton, for many years. And

⁶ See Irene Reti, Interviewer and Editor, *Helene Moglen and the Vicissitudes of a Feminist Administrator* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2013). Available in full text and audio at <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/helene-moglen>

Ed, being a very stable guy—you know, it set in and became ossified, like any other department.

Silva: So looking back at it and if you could have designed it in a way that it might have worked better for the faculty and the students, do you have a vision of that, or is it just kind of the nature of these departments or lack of departments?

McClellan: I'm not sure I had time for vision then. You got me. I don't know. I wanted everybody to be happy. [Laughs.]

Silva: Well, it's so interesting, these things that grow out of idealism and vision and bold experiments.

McClellan: Well, my vision was a thriving art department with a museum and a bridge to the humanities through the museum and a growing collection, maybe modest. I did make a mistake, probably in years three or four. A wonderful family wanted to give us a collection of African art. These were simple vessels made by the tribespeople. They were all supplanted, I suppose, by plastic buckets by the tribe, but they were a big collection. And I accepted it—again, my idea of the zeal for a museum—but there was no curatorial anything—there was nobody curating it, so they wound up in colleges, and they wound up being taken home for memorials. It was really just decimated. I think Keith Muscutt probably spent two years trying to give it back to them after I left, after I left that position. So it was a failed effort at unity.

And the university never looked twice at the idea of a museum, I don't think, and so two galleries—the [Eloise Pickard] Smith Gallery [at Cowell College], of course, was Eloise's baby, and is very active. And then when [Mary Porter] Sesnon [Art Gallery, at Porter College] was formed—

Silva: How did *that* happen? Did that kind of grow out of your idea of a museum but more towards a gallery?

McClellan: My idea was a museum is a repository and has well-tended gardens, well-tended collections. Sesnon had none of that, really. Now, did you actually work at Sesnon?

Silva: I did. I was the director for a while. I wasn't there for very long. Okay. I have some more questions from Irene [Reti] She said, "I would be interested to hear more about the contrast between the Claremont colleges and the UCSC college structure."

McClellan: Okay, at Claremont the colleges developed, added new colleges over a very broad spectrum of time. The parent college was Pomona, and the the Scripps [College] came on for women, and then the men's college [Claremont McKenna College] came along, and then an engineering college came along, and then a wacky woman's college came along that was supposed to be very avant garde. And each had its own trustees, its own president. The presidents met. Over it all was a graduate program that featured certain things, including education, God knows. And people grew accustomed in their space, I think. Now, students could take any courses across the board.

Silva: From any of the colleges?

McClellan: From any of the colleges, if their advisers or department or whatever, approved of it. So the only competition, I suppose, would be—well, you know, traditional rah-rah stuff, basically. Scripps had a humanities program, so it was unique in that. Pomona was the liberal arts college that [actor] Robert Taylor went to. Claremont men's was the new boy on the block when I was there in school. And that was strictly a business-oriented college.

So you'd say that they're fairly heterogeneous and comfortable. Whereas [at UCSC] so many colleges were really put together in a very short time, and none of them had a chance to really set their tradition, except probably Cowell, which seemed to walk in the door with tradition in its pocket, so [chuckles] I don't know what to say about that. The [political] temperature was much hotter in Santa Cruz because of the time frame, I think.

Silva: So each of the Claremonts were very autonomous and sort of a full-blown institution.

McClellan: Right. With their own presidents, their own boards of trustees and all. So they were fairly distinct, one from the other, but they shared courses with each other.

Silva: So what about art in each of the colleges. Did each of the Claremonts have art?

McClellan: No. Pomona had art, and Scripps was very strong in art, the women's college. And students could take art—you know, guys from CMC

[Claremont McKenna College] could take drawing and all that. The only other art college that came along was [Pitzer] College, the fifth college, which was the women's college, and it was far out, and it had a Zen Buddhist department chairman in art.

Silva: So in terms of Santa Cruz, where you were dealing with all the individual colleges and the individual artists that were appointed in individual colleges—down there, you didn't have to deal with the other—

McClellan: No. There was probably competition between Scripps and Pomona over time. Pomona art was more—I won't say more art-history driven, but fairly studio-oriented in a way. At the time I was working there, the Pomona department had become much more forward looking than Scripps had. We still taught drawing, painting, design, and they had Mowry Baden from Canada and people that were testing the limits of art. So that was, you know, a temporary *contretemps* (whatever the hell that means) between the two. But we were kind of, like, separate entities. We fought at the graduate level.

Silva: Because that was the overarching—

McClellan: Yeah. We had a very strong MFA program, and a student could study either place, but the final evaluation was a committee thing, and it just led to certain arguments. But it wasn't contentious; it was just a, "I'm smarter than you are" type thing, you know.

Silva: So here [at UCSC] it was all [created] at one moment. It's like a Big Bang—

McClellan: Big Bang, yeah, right, right. Yeah. I think I can see advantages in that, too, in the Big Bang, because you're forced—I wouldn't say to unify but—

Silva: You're all kind of equal in some ways.

McClellan: Yeah, there's an equality and an evenness because all of the colleges had it, were part of it, rather than just two isolated fiefdoms. But what else would there be that would be different? Well, the physical town—Claremont—have you been there?

Silva: [No audible response.]

McClellan: You know, it's like a theme park. All around it, you have lots of crap and freeways and everything. I swear that if I went back to Claremont, I'd find some of the same dogs walking in the street. [Laughs.] It's just—it is a—it is a real mill town, you know. Everything relates to the mill. So that is going to make a difference between this kind of wonderful Wild West, taming-the-wilderness thing of the UC campus. How that affects the arts, I'm not sure, except it brings out the *plein air* in a lot of people.

Silva: Okay. So Irene also would like to hear about some of your close relationships and friendships with people like Don Weygandt and just how that influenced you.

McClellan: Well, Don and I were very compatible. We couldn't be more different as teachers, I don't think.

Silva: In what way?

McClellan: Well, to watch Don critique a painting is almost like watching a mime. He's in it. He's in the painting. He's doing this. He's doing that. Students responded to the tactility of it all, whereas I would tie it to some of their painting and, you know, go off here and off there and off there. But we agreed with each other very much on most everything. Don was not a force at meetings, tending to be much more reticent. But he and I got along well, and we've remained friends. Others were mixed bags. I liked a lot of the people we brought in, like, Alan Gussow, who brought some really fresh ideas in, and Sarai Sherman, and [Vita Hackman], and various fresh views coming in. That began to get really interesting, you see, because there was the meat and potatoes [chuckles]—and then here comes the sauces, you know. [Chuckles.]

Silva: (laughs) Always the good part.

McClellan: I disagreed with some of the faculty; I agreed with some of the faculty. It's not very productive to talk about, I don't think. What, did I like him better than him, her better than him?

Silva: No, but it's interesting how the dynamics shaped the department and what was going on for the students. I mean, that is kind of the interesting part: why it happened as it did.

McClellan: One thing you can say about the department is that if a student studied with four or five of the faculty, they got totally different attitudes toward learning—from the doctrinaire, to the "let's have fun!"—to, "Nature is the god" and so on. We certainly were not yoked as teachers.

Silva: Like with a philosophy or a technique. Approach. You guys had your own approach.

McClellan: We were all free to do what we wanted. So if somebody—let's say if Professor A does visual fundamentals, it's likely to be the color wheel and something else, and the other person's likely to be: "Let's pretend we're building a house, and then we'll do this and that and that." So there were a number of attacks or approaches on how to learn about art, which I thought was very good. The diversity of it was a bitch to administer but very good educationally. [Laughs.]

Silva: That's good.

Okay, here's another one from Irene: Were you involved in helping develop the art board as chair, in terms of what directions the board would go as it developed? What was the philosophy or focus of the program at that point?

McClellan: I think it was a series of agreed-on needs without vision. You know, "We need more of this," "We need more of that." And, as I said earlier, "We can always make up for it next year if we need to fill that." I don't think we had time to have a philosophy.

Silva: So you guys were just trying to get the core covered, and you weren't aspiring to be really different from any other place or to forge into some new way of teaching or conceiving?

McClellan: No. No, we weren't. We were pretty much journeymen. I worked at a place where a charismatic person ran it and had the vision. "You don't have to

bother having a vision because I have a vision," you know? And it was partly successful and partly a failure. So, to go to the vision thing here, we were really pretty mundane in meeting the needs. Because we were surprised and the university was surprised at the number of students who wanted to be art majors. We had mouths to feed, and it was a surprise to McHenry and subsequent chancellors that all these kids wanted to be artists, or wanted to do art. So we had mouths to feed, as I say, and that's what was our philosophy at the time.

Silva: So they hadn't anticipated the interest in art?

McClellan: No, no, no.

Silva: That was the times, I guess.

McClellan: It was the times. As I said earlier, the student body was fascinating because they—in the first five years or so—were people that had done smashingly academically, and now they were going to play with art, and they found that they liked it.

Silva: So by the time you decided kind of to retire—can you talk about the arc, the change from when you'd first gotten there to when you were leaving? What was it that you saw?

McClellan: I saw the student body change, the art majors change.

Silva: In what way?

McClellan: Well, part of it was the cooling down. If I had tried, say in the early years, to teach a drawing course based on anatomy, I'd have [chuckles] waited

all day. But the students—later, the students in the mid-seventies on seemed much more conservative in some way. I noticed that—well, it just—it struck me that they weren't as interesting to my anthropological self as they should have been. That's one thing that I noticed.

Silva: Because they were wanting to be taught skills?

McClellan: Yeah, and belief in basics. Yeah, taught skills. That was an interesting thing. About the time I retired, I noticed that quite a bit in the classes I taught. Art become more established, obviously, in that time. We still were in [a] competitive gallery situation, which I thought was bad.

Silva: Between the two galleries?

McClellan: Yeah.

Silva: What were the differences between those two galleries? I mean, was there just a different approach or philosophy or—

McClellan: Not particularly. The Cowell Galleries, started by Eloise Smith, then—did Mary Banham run them for a while?

Silva: I think so.

McClellan: Then Louise Newberry ran Cowell and Philip [Brookman] ran Sesnon. It could have been better. I mean, there could have been more cooperation, and there could be a nucleus of a collection, as specialized as it might be. What else did I notice? Well, I think I was getting a little stale, and I say that because, of course, I taught after I retired. It was a killer. [Laughs.]

Silva: And why do you think that was?

McClellan: Because I was no longer a teacher; I was an artist teaching, and it's a strangely different thing.

Silva: And you weren't responsible on the administrative level anymore.

McClellan: No, I just showed up, yeah. In thirty-six years of teaching, I'd been a chairman for twenty-five years, and that's a terrible thing to ask anybody to do. I think as you become elder faculty, things do change. People's attitudes towards you do change. I don't know. Just it was a life of the luna moth, I guess.

When the new dean [Helene Moglen] came, she became also provost of Kresge and somehow joined forces with Porter. I wrote a long treatise on the Kingdom of the North and the Kingdom of the South and they shall build tractors in their gardens and in their bedrooms and so on, linking it to Red China as a kind of marvel of—it was just fantasy, you know, that kind of thing. Too bad I lost it because—it was really a magnum opus. [Laughs.]

Silva: So this was published, or you just gave it to her?

McClellan: I circulated it. [Laughs.]

Silva: And what was the reaction?

McClellan: I don't think she liked it. And there was a guy named Wallace Berman that did postcards or something like that, and so I got the class going on this. I guess it was a design class. And so we all sent her postcards, and she

didn't understand why anybody would send her postcards as a project. I mean, she just—we didn't mesh very well. [Chuckles.]

Silva: I saw some other little newsletter things you wrote, where you're talking about grades and talking about this, and sort of going off on a whim and—

McClellan: Mm-hm. We needed some lightness around the place, I think. It was just a chance to do something verbally, I guess.

Moving into a More Verbal Era

Silva: Because you're kind of moving into your verbal era.

McClellan: Yeah.

Silva: Tell me how that kicked off, once you were retired. When did you start?

McClellan: When I turned seventy, just about. So I've been retired for a few years. Nothing precipitated it. I wanted to wake up on my seventieth birthday in the British Museum with the Elgin Marbles, and I did. I started writing then.

Silva: I have a few other questions about teaching, but I want to be sure we get some of the poetry stuff in.

McClellan: Okay.

Silva: Well, first off, let me just ask a few more questions about the art. I really want to talk about your digital political missives that I'm lucky enough to receive. How did that come about? It feels to me like this real circling back on the very earliest things you were interested in—

McClellan: I was interested in becoming a political cartoonist. Well, as a lead-up to it, during the Bush administration, I had written 400 pieces of doggerel called *DUMBO, Doggerels to Undermine the Bush Oligarchy* . . . I just got used to making political statements, and then when I got comfortable with the computer I combined a poem and a picture, and slowly I just forgot the poem. I loved to sit down and have an hour to just go through the files, find something and check out the *Huffington Post* or whatever, and make a weekly statement. The nice thing about the computer is that I can plunder any library I want and call on my art history. I find it very therapeutic.

Silva: That's great. And how long does it take you to do them, usually?

McClellan: An hour and a half or so. Depends. Sometimes I leave them overnight. Sometimes I send them and say, "Damn, I wish I had done this instead of that." But it's got to be quick.

Silva: Yeah, there's such a great immediacy to them. It's like you're just talking to the news.

McClellan: Yeah.

Silva: Okay, the Artist of the Year. We didn't talk about that.

McClellan: Well, I was Artist of the Year in 1992, I guess. That's twenty-two years ago. By then, I'd retired. I worked extensively with the Cultural Council. I had a show, both at the county building and then subsequently at the Art League related to that. That show at the Art League was the first time I put poems up in

the White Gallery, large poems instead of paintings, and each one described an artist.

Silva: So you were starting to merge the words and the—

McClellan: That was the first public utterance of that.

Silva: Then so many of your other series have sort of used that, too, like the chairs and—

McClellan: Well, I have some works in storage that are probably forty-five years old, where I tried to combine words and image. I've always been working at that somehow. Failing, mostly. I'm currently writing, or trying to construct a series of concrete poems using the wonders of Photoshop, in a way that I never have and a way I've never seen. But it's tough going.

Silva: I love it. You're working with Facebook.

McClellan: Oh, yeah. That's my media—yeah, I've been running all my shrines on appropriate birthdays on Facebook.

Silva: So tell me a little bit about the shrines.

McClellan: That was a series of work I did on the computer. There are certain people who stick out in my life—running the gamut from Blossom Dearie to Georgia O'Keefe. And I got one format—my old design teacher instincts—a symmetrical box. I took my box format that I'd done as a sculptor and put stuff in it relating to that person as I saw them. There're always two side pieces and a central trunk of it, and a screen behind and a banner above.

One thing about working within limitations—I always plugged this as a teacher, too—that a few limitations are very stimulating. I used to—back when I was counseling MFA projects—tell them to limit themselves, and they’d say, “Man, I can’t make art that way!” And I would give them my little philosophical treatise on the little Rembrandt that’s this big [demonstrates] that has the whole world in it and stuff. So I always enjoyed starting with a limitation or starting with X number of boxes to fill, and then using that as the continuity factor. So the shrines were a series of thirty-some homages.

Silva: They’re great. I want you to read some poems here. You can go through and read a few that you like.

McClellan: My goodness. This was a quickie. I heard there was a contest. [Laughs, then reads his “Ode to Santa Cruz”]:

Santa Cruz, to honor you,
I declare a mural—
surfer facing the sea
wearing a full bore tool belt;
rat gray pony tail.
Unfinished dissertation
in hand—he balances,
rampant on a green wave.
Tattoo of Gaia that bears
the word "Mom" on his chest.
His board, a riot of earth tones,
bears the proud legend

"En Plein Air."

On the shore, strong women
will be seen, gathering
with a rainbow of others
in solidarity. Planting, writing,
catching their own waves.
The painting style is bold,
Rivera-like, colors clear,
edges crisp, but the pearly
Pacific light sweetens the mongrel parts—
redwoods, tourists in black socks,
screwtop wine bottles,
pale slackers, bronzed shiatsists,
owlish deans, and organic garlic—
into a rare harmony. All gentled
by an avant garde surfbeat,
string band, folk song loop
from an amp behind
a tie-dyed screen.

Silva: And so it won a contest.

McClellan: It won a contest and Garrison Keillor read it at the City Center.

Silva: I love that poem. What about your bumper sticker, Best Bumper Sticker in Santa Cruz County?

McClellan: Oh, yeah. "Huichol Overcome"—that was Keith Muscutt's idea. I

just had the gear. [Chuckles.]

Silva: I love it!

McClellan: How many poems do we—

Silva: Whatever you feel like. I just brought a bunch because I want to [choose] things that resonate with what we've been talking about.

McClellan: You haven't seen this one for a long time.

The White Gallery (which is a series)

The White Gallery is bare, the light is restrained,
is a room filled with quiet echoes,
and in it, art is pure memory.

As one absorbs the luminosity of the empty walls,
the presence of artists emerge.

Traces can be felt. The optical absence
produces ghosts
of only the most persistent aura.

(At times, the artist speaks to us,
at other times, we speak.)

There are rules:

Each viewer is alone.

No distractions, no other vibrations.

The mind must supply its own picture.⁷

That was the frontispiece to [poems about]—there were what, twenty artists?

Silva: And who were some of the artists you wrote about?

McClellan: Oh, the usual suspects: [Johannes] Vermeer, [Pablo] Picasso, [José Clement] Orozco—oh, gosh, I don't remember now. [Paul] Klee, [Pierre] Bonnard—was Bonnard there? It's a long time ago, Nikki. I don't know. I don't remember.

Silva: I love that one. How about one more?

McClellan: Oh, let's get philosophical here:

On Beauty

Beauty is not caused. It is.

—Emily Dickinson

Begin with calligraphy—
a Japanese ink dance
that is both the very act
and a meditation
on something
incredibly remote.

Wall of a Byzantine chapel

⁷ From Douglas McClellan, *The White Gallery* (Many Names Press, Santa Cruz, CA, 1993.)

wondrous colored light
jelled into eternity
squeezed in droplets
from some microscopic
black hole in the universe

And for innocence
the faultlessness of a butterfly—
fancy dress fritillary
that reopens windows
to delight, long stuck
since childhood.

For closure—Bach—
calculus of the gods.
A concept so vast
that anyone tempted to describe it
can be easily excused
for screwing it up.

One more.

Silva: Okay.

McClellan: “Trompe-l’Oeil”

Trompe l'Oeil

Still life is arguably the most philosophical genre.

—Dr. Hanneke Grootenboer, Oxford University

Just before the museum closes
he comes upon it, last gallery from the end.

Item: *Spanish Still Life, 1602*

peasant harvest raw from the garden
trussed and tied on a windowsill...that simple

Deadweight objects

Hanging in velvet void...

from upper left to lower right—
a quince, a cabbage, a melon
and a cucumber that tilts as if to block an escape
but from what?

Pay attention.

Sheer presence inhabits this vacuum
each detail of surface—
stigmata of bird-specks
cut of orange flesh
every fleck of clinging soil—
sets a trap for the eye.

Look harder. Look deeper

*It is so important to take it all in
before closing time.*

Silva: Thank you. So there was one more quick question from Keith [Muscutt].

McClellan: Oh, we're back to Keith.

Silva: We're back to Keith. This one—it kind of goes with what we were talking about earlier, about the political stuff. "Ask him why his work has become more and more overtly satirical and political. Is it a response to a jaundiced view of changing deterioration—political climate—or just a recognition, acceptance that his work was always ironic and political?" [Laughs.]

McClellan: Yes.

Silva: Yes. [Laughter.]

McClellan: That's an answer: Yes.

Silva: Yeah. Well, things have gotten pretty bad, but they've always been bad.

McClellan: They've always been bad, yeah. And I always harbored this desire to be a political cartoonist, going way back. And I find my opportunity now.

Silva: You found a way to do it.

McClellan: Yeah. Well, I got back to it.

Silva: Yeah, exactly. It's so great. Your poetry group. Why don't you just mention that? You got involved with that group?

McClellan: Yeah, in the last ten or twelve years I've been a member of a poetry group—a very good group of poets. We're all very different, and we sat around and discussed each other's poetry and stimulated one another. I miss it very

much right now. I'm trying to figure out a way to reconstruct it because it does—it does keep the juices flowing, and without it, I find I get lazy, and so I wish I had it.

Silva: And a lot of those people have had something to do with the university over the years.

McClellan: Right.

Silva: Who else?

McClellan: Priscilla Shaw, David Swanger, Charles Atkinson were very active on the campus. Robert Sward taught the courses over there. Farnaz Fatemi is married to Paul Skenazy, who I knew in my first days up there because we shared [an] office area. We were very close for a time. We went river, rafting and so on. I've known Paul for a long time. Anyhow, Farnaz is now his wife. And so the poetry group was wonderfully tonic. As I say, the strength of it, I think, is that we're all such different poets and that's good.

Silva: That's good. That *is* good.

An Explication of McClellan's 2013 Show

We never did go through the show, which I was sorry we didn't when it was up on the walls.

McClellan: These are the ones Linda took, right? [looking at photos of McClellan's artwork]

Silva: Yeah.

McClellan: Yeah.

McClellan: These are quite early. These are the earliest, when I was being expressionistic, as you can see, a self-portrait. I did a whole series of still lifes and had shows. I was a comer in 1952 on La Cienega, having shows and whatnot. This was a class demonstration to show the method of the early portraitist.

Silva: That was number 13.

McClellan: Number 12 was—what's the Mexican term for it? [My son] Wally McClellan was not expected to live. He had Hayaline membrane [disease] on his lungs. He was in an isolette in the hospital and this celebrates his survival. And what's it called?

Silva: A Retablo?

McClellan: Yes.

Silva: Oh, how amazing! How old was he when that happened?

McClellan: He was an infant.

Silva: Just as an infant.

McClellan: Yeah. I had four of these boxes to fill, and this was—obviously, by that time I was able to get some computer time in. This was a series.

Silva: Wait. That was 27, 28, 29?

McClellan: Yeah. And 30 is—I did a whole series of houses. 30 and 46 are those. And these had their own lighting system. 32 to 38.

Silva: And those aren't digital; they're physical objects.

McClellan: These are physical objects, right.

Silva: Little window boxes, like.

McClellan: Yeah. And up to 41, 42. That was one of the biggest series, but I had somebody build these boxes. 45? My God, that was big! And this series was between these and these. So in other words, we're talking number—

Silva: 47?

McClellan: Yeah. Starting with number 50—this was a series that I wished I'd done more of, and I couldn't, called Creation Myth series. Different creation myths by various cultures.

Silva: So that's 51, 52, 54.

McClellan: 55. And the cages were an offshoot of the earthquake. And then the fall of the Berlin Wall, as a matter of fact. They came to mind together. This goes back to an older form, like this.

Silva: So these are screens, screened cages.

McClellan: Black-screened cages, three-dimensional. They're best seen on a projection of a Lazy Susan turntable so you can see them from all sides. I had a show of them in San Francisco so displayed. More of the early ones, '77 through

'86—through '88, where the first three-dimensional group—I was involved in burning paper and making collages of it, and I had board games in mind. This is earlier; this is back to the sixties, when I was not very productive, because I was commuting to L.A. at an art school there and was having all kinds of time factors. This is a very early still life. A self-portrait! God!

Silva: Number 20.

McClellan: And this was an homage to my friend, Daniel Rhodes, number 91, and this goes back again to those—

I got a grant to do this book, *Uncle Bob's Book of Advice* or something and using an air brush just as a cover from one of them. I was happy with air brush for a while.

Silva: That was 21 and 21A.

McClellan: George Hitchcock and I decided to have a rubber stamp show, and there are all rubber stamp things which go back—

Silva: So that was with George Hitchcock?

McClellan: Yeah, he did some. These are mine. We had a show called Masters of the Rubber Stamp. When I retired, we bought a press, and I made a lot of paper, patterned paper, and collaged these. It's Lantern 1, 2, 3, 4.

Silva: 1, 15, 16, 17, 18—

McClellan: 19.

Silva: —19.

McClellan: 20.

Silva: 20, 21.

McClellan: 21. My God! There isn't any 22. Then I did a series of Lake Tenaya, I think. It's a water situation up in Yosemite [National Park] there.

Silva: 123, 125.

McClellan: These, I don't know.

Silva: 126.

McClellan: This is more of a landscape. And I did a Chinese medicine series, with collage.

Silva: 134, 135.

McClellan: A bore. Ooh. This is all Chinese medicine series. While I was in Rome in '67, I did *The Divine Comedy* in my bedroom with graphite. These are all the drawings, up to 151, 152, including 156. This is another thing I did in the classroom to demonstrate something. I've forgotten.

Silva: 157.

McClellan: Another burnt paper collage. These are Postcards from Hell. What is the number on them?

Silva: 159 and 160.

McClellan: 160. More burnt paper collages. On these, I used a deck of cards to determine the image, the color, the treatment, and the one I could cheat on.

Silva: The free card.

McClellan: Yeah.

Silva: So that's 168 and 170.

McClellan: This goes back early. It's upside down. I did that in 1960- —I've forgotten when I did these. I was—I was in a mood. [Chuckles.] I did this in Italy when we lived there, on paper. Just six versions of the same Vermeer because we needed some color in the room. Framed it later.

Silva: That's 176.

McClellan: Damned if I remember these. [Chuckles.] More burnt paper. And there and there and there and there. And this was a story. I was trying to tell a story, but I've forgotten what it was.

Here are the ones that are determined by decks of cards. These, up to 188.

Some things, I did in Baja when we were down there for the winter, the landscapes like this and this and this.

Silva: 189, 190, 191.

McClellan: 193. I don't remember that. 196. More prepared paper collages.

Silva: 197, 199.

McClellan: These are Coconino County [Arizona].

Silva: Okay, so that's 198, 202, and 201?

McClellan: Do you know where Coconino County is?

Silva: No.

McClellan: Krazy Kat.

Silva: [Laughs.] Okay.

McClellan: A board game, the forty-year-old thing where I tried to combine images and words. "Van Gogh's Eyes Could See Light." This is another one of *The Divine Comedy*, the harpy. And the chairs.

Silva: What gave you that idea, for the chairs?

McClellan: I'd like to say the Goodwill but I stole it somewhere. I don't know. Well, probably little blessed things like [René] Magritte and all. A chair is always the presence of a person sitting, you know, so I'd photograph a park in Paris with nobody there, but the chairs were there. And you realize the personification. So I decided to make personifications of the chairs. I would actually go to the Goodwill once a week, and I'd get a chair and come home and work on it.

Silva: And so what were some of the personifications in the chairs?

McClellan: Well, the funniest one (Rube Goldberg) isn't here because it's collected by a friend of mine. This is "The Dirty Little Schoolboy Daydreams,"

and their eyes and the toes and the shoes, as you remember. And this was a written-on shirt. This was an impressionist's birthday. This was a page, "Traveler's Memory" or something like that. Boy, my memory has gone dim here.

Silva: They're great.

McClellan: Occasionally. I did a series of tigers at one time, based on [William] Blake, only my version was "Tiger, tiger, burning mild / Oh, to think you once were wild." It was an incorporation of tiger and all this stuff.

Silva: [Laughs.]

McClellan: This goes way back. So anyhow, that's—I can't remember this one.

Silva: It's so great.

McClellan: Each had a poem, too.

Silva: Oh, they did. That's right, because we put the poems up with them, too, in the exhibit.

McClellan: Okay!

Silva: Well, that's wonderful. Good, we got that, and lots more. I recorded a lot that night, too, of the reading, when you read at the gallery. So we have that, too.

Local Activism

Silva: Tell me about your activism in local politics, like with Save Soquel.

McClellan: Well, that was a wonderful communal event. I was a staff cartoonist for Save Soquel. Yeah, a bunch of folks, and we met often and had demonstrations and did all sorts of things.

Silva: What were you saving? What was in danger?

McClellan: Well, you know, the park on Old San Jose Road, just up from Soquel was going to be 524 housing units, the O'Neill Ranch. This wonderful woman, a quite youngish woman, had thought it was a bad idea, and got in touch with Saul Alinsky. They had one of his trainees come out and talk with her and us about how a community organizes. All the "bad" [President Barack H.] Obama things, right? So we had meetings; we had rallies; we had propaganda. We went to meetings and were shouted down by hirelings of contractors and whatnot. And, by God, they finally—the county took it over, and I got on the committee to make the artwork on it, and we put these blue spheres up. I regret the fact that it's called Blue Ball Park, but what the hell? [Chuckles.] And when you go there and see how much it's used and how wonderful it is for the community, you feel very good. That was a good thing to do. We still keep in touch with some of the people who were on that.

Silva: How great to bring in organizers to teach people. Anything else, dear Doug?

McClellan: I can't think of anything, Nikki.

Silva: You've done beautifully. This is great.

About the Interviewer:

Nikki Silva is an alum of UC Santa Cruz's Aesthetic Studies program (1973). She has been producing radio stories for National Public Radio for many decades. Her groundbreaking national radio collaboration with Davia Nelson on The Kitchen Sisters has brought together independent producers, NPR member stations, artists, writers, archivists, historians, and public radio listeners throughout the country. Nelson and Silva are also the creators of the Peabody Award winning "Lost & Found Sound" segments on *All Things Considered* and the Peabody Award winning NPR series, The Sonic Memorial Project. The Kitchen Sisters began their radio lives producing a weekly live radio program in the late 1970s on KUSP-FM in Santa Cruz.

Over the past twenty years, Silva has worked as history curator at the Museum of Art and History in Santa Cruz, and as a freelance curator and exhibit consultant specializing in regional history. She and her husband, designer and artist Charles Prentiss, have produced dozens of exhibitions for museums throughout California including *Paintings, Collages, Digital Stuff, and Poetry, to Boot*, a retrospective show of McClellan's work exhibited in Santa Cruz in January 2014.