

# ALTERNATIVE PROJECTIONS

Experimental film in Los Angeles, 1945 - 1980

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### INTERVIEW SUBJECT: Sam Erenberg

#### Biography:

Sam Erenberg was born in Los Angeles in 1943 and grew up in the Baldwin Hills neighborhood. Inspired by exhibitions of Dali and Hard-edge painting, he began drawing and enrolled in the Chouinard Art Institute in 1965. He and his wife moved to an artist's colony in Woodstock, Connecticut in 1967, where he made his film *Time*. The Erenbergs moved back to California in 1969, settling in the fertile artistic environment of Topanga Canyon. He received his BA in Art from California State University, Northridge, and an MFA from the University of California Santa Barbara. In Santa Barbara, he worked in performance, video and artist's books and became involved with curating the Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum.

Erenberg's films, installations, books and paintings have been exhibited throughout the United States, Europe, Asia and Central America and are included in numerous collections worldwide including the Museum of Fine Arts, Kunstmuseum Bern, Switzerland; Akademie fuer Sozialarbeit, Bregenz, Austria; Wexford Arts Centre, Wexford, Ireland; Art Metropole Collection, National Gallery of Canada; Smithsonian Library; UCLA Armand Hammer Museum; New Mexico Museum

of Art; San Diego Museum of Art; Santa Barbara Museum of Art and the Skirball Cultural Museum among others. He is a recipient of grants from the Durfee Foundation and the California Arts Council. Erenberg lives and works in Santa Monica, California.

### **Filmography:**

ELYSIAN PARK I, II (1967, Super 8, silent, Elysian Park I: 4:08, Elysian Park II: 3:44)  
MARKER (1967, Super 8, silent, 3:00)  
THE CASTLE (1967, 8mm, silent)  
SCORE (1967, 8MM, black & white, silent, 4:06)  
TIME (1968, Super 8, silent, 6:28, Short version, 4.31)  
THE LAST STATEMENT OF PAINTING (1970, Super 8, silent, 7:58)  
THE LAST STATEMENT OF PAINTING II (1970, Super 8, silent, 4:08)  
NIVEA MILK (1972, Super 8, silent, 6:03)  
TRAJECTORY (1977, Super 8, silent, 4:19)  
THE SILENCE I, II (1969-70, Super 8, silent, 6:33)

### **Tape Contents**

#### **Tape 1: Pages 3 - 17**

**Interview date:** March 28, 2010

**Interviewer:** Adam Hyman

**Cameraperson:** Alexandra Cuesta

**Transcript Reviewer:** Sam Erenberg, Elizabeth Hesik

#### **Tape 2: Pages 18 - 32**

**Interview date:** March 28, 2010

**Interviewer:** Adam Hyman

**Cameraperson:** Alexandra Cuesta

**Transcript Reviewer:** Sam Erenberg, Elizabeth Hesik

#### **Tape 3: Pages 33 - 47**

**Interview date:** March 28, 2010

**Interviewer:** Adam Hyman

**Cameraperson:** Alexandra Cuesta

**Transcript Reviewer:** Sam Erenberg, Elizabeth Hesik

#### **Tape 4: Pages 48-60**

**Interview date:** March 28, 2010

**Interviewer:** Adam Hyman

**Cameraperson:** Alexandra Cuesta

**Transcript Reviewer:** Sam Erenberg, Elizabeth Hesik

#### **Tape 5: Pages 61-69**

**Interview date:** March 28, 2010

**Interviewer:** Adam Hyman

**Cameraperson:** Alexandra Cuesta

**Transcript Reviewer:** Sam Erenberg, Elizabeth Hesik

## TAPE 1: SAM ERENBERG

00:00:28

SAM ERENBERG

Sam Erenberg. S-A-M, E-R-E-N-B-E-R-G. I was born here in Los Angeles in 1943, The Good Samaritan Hospital. Was a war baby, that's World War II baby. And my parents were living in the Malibu Colony at that time.

00:01:39

ADAM HYMAN

And who, tell me, go through your family. Give everybody's name, what they did, and so on.

00:01:42

SAM ERENBERG

Oh, okay. I see. Well, my father was a writer and a journalist. He wrote humor, and from 1939 to 1974 he wrote the newspaper panel Grin and Bear It, which was a political cartoon. He also wrote jokes for NEW YORKER cartoonists. The cartoonist on, for Grin and Bear It, was George Lichty, and they came out from Chicago, worked at the CHICAGO SUN TIMES.

00:02:25

SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)

My mother was already out here, she had gone to Hollywood High School. After she graduated in about '35 [Erenberg note: My mother graduated in 1933], I think, she started acting. And she was in a number of small films, she was kind of a bit player in Hollywood films. She hung around with actors and people in the film industry. After my father came out here a few years later, he was a, a kind of stringer or a-- he wrote for THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER.

00:03:05

SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)

A gossip columnist would ask him about a particular actor or actress, and he would make up a kind of scene, saying that he would, he saw, for instance, Vera Miles or somebody. And then write a joke about the actress, and another actor. And then the gossip columnist would put that in his column. Never mentioned, of course, my father's name, or he might have said Arthur Erenberg saw so and so.

00:03:36

SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)

So that was one of his jobs out here, as well as writing for the newspapers. My uncle, my mother's brother was a director. He started after, after the war he started working in the film industry, and was a second unit director. I think he made THE CAINE MUTINY, THE LAST ANGRY MAN with Paul Muni. [Erenberg note: Irving Moore "worked on" THE CAINE MUTINY, not "made."]

**00:04:12** **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And one in particular was THE SOLID GOLD CADILLAC, and I remember that because I think I visited the set. I mean, I visited a lot of sets when I was a kid. After that he went into television, and I think he directed DYNASTY and DALLAS, programs like that. I went to-- we moved around a lot, up until the time I was about five or six, and we finally settled in Baldwin Hills, and that's where I grew up, I went to Dorsey High School.

**00:04:49** **ADAM HYMAN**

What are the names of your parents and uncle?

**00:04:51** **SAM ERENBERG**

Oh, my, my father, Arthur Erenberg, and my mother was Adele Irene Moore, and then, it was her maiden name.

**00:05:07** **ADAM HYMAN**

And your uncle?

**00:05:08** **SAM ERENBERG**

My uncle is Irving, Irving J. Moore.

**00:05:12** **ADAM HYMAN**

And did you have any siblings?

**00:05:14** **SAM ERENBERG**

Yes, I have one sibling, a younger sister. Marney [Erenberg note: Marney Erenberg Stofflet], who was named after my mother's cousin who, who went down in a B-29, World War II. My uncle also was a bomber pilot. And actually saved some people in his plane. You know, all but the gunner.

**00:05:40** **ADAM HYMAN**

In what way?

**00:05:41** **SAM ERENBERG**

Well I think they were on their way back from a bombing run over Germany, and they, they were hit, and they were going down over England, and he got everybody out of the plane. And, everybody except the gunner.

**00:05:57** **ADAM HYMAN**

And this was Irving Moore?

**00:05:58** **SAM ERENBERG**

Irving Moore.

**00:06:01** **ADAM HYMAN**

So in your early years in the school district, was there any exposure, interest in art films?

**00:06:13**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Well my first experience was, was taking-- I lived in, off of Jefferson Boulevard and Exposition. And my first sojourn by myself without my parents was to go-- I must have been 12 or 13-- to go downtown to these great old theaters on Broadway, and see a movie on a Saturday. And I did that on my own. I'd have to take a, a J-car, a streetcar, which was called a J-car, and then a bus to get down there.

**00:06:49**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And I particularly liked sci-fi. And so those were my early experiences. [Erenberg note: Looking back to the science fiction and horror films made in the 1950's: I think those films were classics or art films in a sense.] Other than visiting sets. My parents' friends knew a lot of people in the film industry, writers were always hanging around the house. And, and so I was exposed to that. But kind of my own-- and, you know, my father being a writer, we had a lot of books, and so, you know, I read a lot as well.

**00:07:26**

**ADAM HYMAN**

So did the downtown movie palaces have any larger or deeper significant for you?

**00:07:33**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Well, I mean, these theaters were really grand. And I just remember the architecture and the architectural elements inside. It was, they were very plush, it was quite an experience for a kid to go down in these, to be in these great theaters. Of course many of them have been restored since then, but I mean, they were in their original form then. This was probably 1955, '56 or something.

**00:08:18**

**ADAM HYMAN**

And how did you, and so it was, so back to schools, prior to college, do you remember anything significant then related to art or film in your schooling?

**00:08:25**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Well I think, I know that early on I was much more interested in music than I was in, in film. And I mean, although we had a television, I think in '49. So, I mean, kids in the neighborhood would come over to our house to watch TV. The old black and whites, you know, and Mom would put the filter, the plastic filter on the screen so it wouldn't hurt our eyes.

**00:08:55**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

But it was mostly music. In fact I took no art classes in high school. I did take a class with of Jazz, Jazz Appreciation, I remember that. Actually it was Charles Lloyd, a well known saxophonist who taught at-- I ran into him years later-- he taught that class in high school.

**00:09:26** **ADAM HYMAN**

He must have been really, really young.

**00:09:29** **SAM ERENBERG**

Why?

**00:09:30** **ADAM HYMAN**

He, he must have been just a few years older than you.

**00:09:30** **SAM ERENBERG**

Yes, yeah. [laugh] Well I think he is. I mean, he's probably over 60 now, yeah.

**00:09:38** **ADAM HYMAN**

I think over 70. [Erenberg note: Charles Lloyd was born in 1938.]

**00:09:38** **SAM ERENBERG**

Is he?

**00:09:39** **ADAM HYMAN**

Yeah.

**00:09:40** **SAM ERENBERG**

Yeah, I don't know. But I saw him at a party up in, up north, and we talked about it. But he didn't remember me, but I remembered him.

**00:09:53** **ADAM HYMAN**

So when did you start discovering art, other arts?

**00:10:00** **SAM ERENBERG**

Well, thinking back, we didn't have much art in the house, a few reproductions. I saw, I seem to remember an exhibition in the old Balboa Pavilion, where we used to vacation in the summertime. And there was a show of hard-edge painting, and this might have been '63 or '64, maybe even '62, I can't remember. [Erenberg note: Four Abstract Classicists was originally curated by Jules Langsner for LACMA in 1959. A second version was organized by Langsner for the Balboa Pavilion in 1964.]

**00:10:29** **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

But I had, I somehow, I was impressed by this. And this was on the Balboa Peninsula. And then maybe, you know, in '62, or '63 also I had some friends who took me to some exhibitions. And I can't really remember, it might have been Salvador Dali on La Cienega Boulevard in a gallery or something. And, I mean, this work was absolutely crazy to me.

**00:11:04**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

You know, I mean, that anybody could make, do something like specifically Dali. I mean, so, you know, it seemed very exotic to me. And so, you know, I started working on my own, just started drawing for really the first time. I never even drew as a kid. And it seemed like an interesting-- you know, I was kind of floundering around and, with my other studies, you know, I got kind of kicked out of UCLA.

**00:11:40**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And I mean, just, I just really didn't know what I wanted to do. And so I applied with the help of a girlfriend, I used her portfolio to get into art school. I didn't have a completed portfolio. So she loaned a few of her pieces to me, and they accepted me. This was 1965 at Chouinard Art Institute, which became the California Institute of the Arts.

**00:12:16**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

Back up a couple things.

**00:12:17**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

Yeah.

**00:12:18**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

First of all, tell me what hard line art is?

**00:12:23**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

I'm sorry?

**00:12:23**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

The hard-edged art that you described.

**00:12:25**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

Oh.

**00:12:27**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

What, is hard-edged art? And then what was its impact on you?

**00:12:28**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

Oh.

**00:12:33**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

Aesthetically.

**00:12:34**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

Hard-edge is a term created by Jules Langsner, and he actually, I studied with him at Chouinard, art history. He and Peter Selz, an art historian from Berkeley, or actually he might have been at the Museum of Modern Art at that time, came up with the idea of putting together a show of these, which was called The Four Abstract Classicists with, John McLaughlin.

**00:13:08** **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

Fred Hammersley, Karl Benjamin and Lorser Feitelson. All of them, except McLaughlin, taught in different colleges in Southern California. And, and this was-- I liked this work because it looked very kind of pure and very much like, the colors were very much like Southern California. It was, it was a kind of distilled, and especially Hammersley, and I realized that Hamersley taught at Chouinard.

**00:13:42** **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And so I decided-- and as well as Langsner-- said, this is where I want to go. I want to meet these guys. So I applied and was accepted. And, well I've been working that way ever since. I mean, monochrome painting, abstract painting mostly. I mean, I, sometimes my watercolors verges on landscape, but they're rather amorphous, so. This was a profound kind of discovery. And for somebody who had never had any art background, it's kind of a revelation.

**00:14:26** **ADAM HYMAN**

Can you speak to what in that spoke to you?

**00:14:30** **SAM ERENBERG**

Well, like I mentioned, I think the purity of their work. I mean, it really wasn't until later, I mean, I responded physically to the work. I mean, they were, they weren't necessarily large paintings, they were still kind of easel paintings. Most of them were easel painters. Meaning they weren't paintings as big as abstract expressionist paintings, and it was really quite a different approach.

**00:15:09** **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

But I think it was to the physicality of it. I mean, the color was physical for me, and that's what I responded. I mean, they're very cool paintings. In fact, the Orange County Museum there's a show called The Cool School. That, and these paintings were the central part of the show. I mean, the work is, you know, I still think it's emotional. I don't think it's unemotional, but it's not a kind of hot emotionality, so.

**00:15:46** **ADAM HYMAN**

And briefly, then, you said you tried going to UCLA at first?

**00:15:50** **SAM ERENBERG**

Well yes.

**00:15:49** **ADAM HYMAN**

What were you trying to study there?



**00:15:51**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Well, I mean, I was just taking the general education courses. Yeah, but even in high school I used to cut a lot out of school, you know, I wasn't really a very good student. So, I mean, I really wasn't motivated until I went to art school.

**00:16:17**

**ADAM HYMAN**

That's interesting. You're not the first person I've talked to whose...

**00:16:23**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Yes.

**00:16:25**

**ADAM HYMAN**

Alright, so before we get into the details of what you studied at Chouinard, can you just describe for me what Chouinard was like, where was it.

**00:16:35**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Sure.

**00:16:35**

**ADAM HYMAN**

What was it like? Who was, in general, attending it, and so on.

**00:16:40**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Okay. I mean, it was on Grandview Avenue...

**00:16:42**

**ADAM HYMAN**

Can you start by saying Chouinard was?

**00:16:44**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Oh, yes. I'm sorry. Oh, yes, Chouinard Art Institute was on Grandview Avenue, in the McArthur Park area of Los Angeles. And it was started in 1929, I believe, by Nel Chouinard [Erenberg note: Nelbert Chouinard. Lots of students on the GI Bill after WWII. When I started in '65, lots of hippy-types.] as an-- at the beginning, I mean, the school flourished with artists on the GI Bill. So it was also a kind of training ground for people in illustration and even the Hollywood film industry. [Erenberg note: Don Graham taught animation at Chouinard. [http://www.rarebit.org/wiki/Don\\_Graham](http://www.rarebit.org/wiki/Don_Graham)]

**00:17:23**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

A lot of people, for instance my first teacher there, Milly Rocque was a, she was, she worked, I believe, in costume designs for Hollywood movies. But she could really draw, you know. And, I mean, she was probably the most profound teacher I had, although there were, you know, because she taught me how to draw.

**00:17:45**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

It was a-- the school had a fountain. It kind of-- it's in a central courtyard, and there was a two story main building around it. And then down the block there was some auxiliary buildings. And a great faculty of Jepson, Herbert Jepson who had started a school in the later '40s, called the Jepson Art Institute.

**00:18:17**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

He was great. He would kind of look at the ceiling like that while, and give these rambling lectures about his philosophy of drawing. And I understood very little of it, but, you know, I knew he was serious. And then Fred Hammersley, I taught, I studied with his design class. Jepson taught drawing.

**00:18:46**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

Jules Langsner was my first art history class. John Canavier taught sculpture there. Mike Kanemitsu taught painting. I'll think of some others.

**00:19:07**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

You don't have to go through them all now.

**00:19:08**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

Yeah.

**00:19:08**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

But go back, Milly, you say she taught you how to draw. Can you tell me what it means to you to know, what does it mean to know how to draw? Like, in a general sense?

**00:19:18**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

Well, I knew that I didn't know how to draw when I went into her class. So I knew the difference between the end and beginning. But, I mean, she taught that class like a, like a sergeant in the military. I mean, you would, first you started by just, with a skeleton. And we would make drawings of a plastic skeleton. And sometimes she would have you just make points, make dots on the paper, rather than line.

**00:19:59**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

So, you know, following the contour of those, of that form, the form of the bones. And so we knew, I don't think we even saw a live model until halfway through the course. So it was, it was rigorous. And, I mean, I really didn't have the concept of looking at form in space, which is so important for eye hand coordination.

**00:20:28**                      **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And I think that, you know, those skills are really, I mean that makes a difference, I think, between being a good painter or not. Because, I mean, you're, when, even when you're not making minute detail in painting, you have to have an idea about drawing.

**00:20:59**                      **ADAM HYMAN**

So when did you feel you learned how to see?

**00:21:02**                      **SAM ERENBERG**

Well that's really a long process. I mean, I don't think I ever, you ever, I mean, you ever finish learning how to see. I think you kind of, I think you can develop, you know, your practice, I think. And then, I mean, that is a difficult question, I don't know quite how to answer it.

**00:21:38**                      **ADAM HYMAN**

Was there any, at Chouinard, was there any acknowledgement of respect for, or practice of film as art?

**00:21:47**                      **SAM ERENBERG**

Well yes, I mean, there was an animation class there, and I know my wife, who I met at Chouinard took that class. And...

**00:21:58**                      **ADAM HYMAN**

Who's your wife, please?

**00:22:01**                      **SAM ERENBERG**

Oh, my wife, Elena Mary Siff Erenberg.

**00:22:05**                      **ADAM HYMAN**

Who taught that animation class? Do you remember anything about it?

**00:22:09**                      **SAM ERENBERG**

I don't remember, no I don't. Since I didn't take it, I can't remember who taught it. It might have been somebody from Disney, because at that, in 1962, Roy Disney became involved with Chouinard, and called it the California Institute of the Arts. Ultimately the L.A. Conservatory of Music and Chouinard together became Cal Arts. And they moved out to Burbank, before the Valencia campus was built. I think it was 69.

**00:22:37**                      **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

So I was there from '65 through '67. But since, I mean, I remember Disney visiting. You know, I'd be in class and he would peek in. And, in fact, I was recruited to be an animator. They wanted to pay, I think, a dollar fifty an hour, but at the time I was cleaning bathrooms for a dollar fifty, and I didn't want to be an animator, so I didn't take that job.

**00:23:13**                      **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

I think it was, you know, being an apprentice out at the studios. And I think you had to be out there on Saturdays. And I just didn't want to, you know, I mean, I wanted to devote most of the time to my study, not to that. But I think some, I mean, some kids probably did go out and do that. But...

**00:23:34**                      **ADAM HYMAN**

When in that period at all, then, did you really do any sort of film practice or exploration?

**00:23:39**                      **SAM ERENBERG**

No, I didn't. It was, it was not until '67. And, we started becoming interested in eight millimeter and super eight. I think the first super eight camera was distributed in '65, I believe. So it was right around the time this new technology was coming out. And I liked the small cameras because they were, they were like drawing.

**00:24:09**                      **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

I mean I could-- they were very portable and simple to use. And you could take them wherever you went. And so, you know, but I didn't, I certainly didn't, I learned this on my own. There was nobody teaching us.

**00:24:31**                      **ADAM HYMAN**

And who were you painting with during your years at Chouinard?

**00:24:33**                      **SAM ERENBERG**

Well I started with Jack Goldstein, and so Jack and I, in fact we were on the work study, in other words we got a, a, we had to work for tuition, so we were kind of janitors at the school. And, and then Peter Kantor, also started with me. Peter Shire, Raul Guerrero. There were other students who were there before me like Al Ruppertsberg, Terry Allen.

**00:25:06**                      **ADAM HYMAN**

Now how many of those, I mean obviously we'll, we'll separate Jack for a moment because I'll ask you separately about him, but did any of the others become interested in trying anything with film?

**00:25:15**                      **SAM ERENBERG**

I don't remember that. I just remember at Chouinard seeing my, going to seeing art films for the first time.

**00:25:27**                      **ADAM HYMAN**

Like what?

**00:25:29**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Well there was this, a theater called The Vagabond on Wilshire, and so that's where I first saw Bergman and Buñuel, Fellini, Kurosawa, I mean masters of, classical masters of film. And I had never been exposed to that, to those filmmakers before. So that was, that was my initial exposure.

**00:25:56**

**ADAM HYMAN**

What did your family think of your becoming interested in art?

**00:25:59**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Well I think they probably said, gee, finally he's going to be doing something. Although [laugh] my father wasn't, he wasn't too optimistic that I could earn a living, you know, being an artist. And, but, I mean, I think they were just happy to get me out of the house. Although I had left, you know, a few years earlier. [laugh] I left, left the house when I was about 19 and never returned. So my father probably would have liked me to have left it when I was 16, but.

**00:26:38**

**ADAM HYMAN**

Could you describe The Vagabond Theater?

**00:26:40**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Well, gee, if I can remember, it was just this old, old theater on the north side of Wilshire near, maybe a little closer to Otis Art Institute, which was on...

**00:26:56**

**ADAM HYMAN**

Where was that?

**00:26:56**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Otis was on, was just about two or three blocks west of Chouinard. And so, and that's where the L.A. Conservatory of Music was. That was right next door to Otis at that time, as well. And so it, there were, I remember the many art, many of the art students at Chouinard, and Otis, would go to The Vagabond, so.

**00:27:22**

**ADAM HYMAN**

Do you have any recollection, did you ever go to The Cinema Theater?

**00:27:26**

**SAM ERENBERG**

I did go to The Cinema, that was a few years later. It was maybe late '60s, yes. Yeah, The Cinema was, that was the place in a way where the art crowd, or artists, lots of visual artists, filmmakers and even musicians would go. Especially on, I think there, they had a program called Round About Midnight or something like that.

**00:27:55**

**ADAM HYMAN**

Movies 'Round Midnight.

**00:27:56**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Movies 'Round Midnight. Yes, and so sometimes they started at 11, but that's where I first remember seeing, well let's see. Oh, like I AM CURIOUS, YELLOW, perhaps, those, those three films. But I remember, I also went to another place called the Cinematheque 16. I think that's where I saw most of the experimental films. I mean, the films at The Cinema were more art films, but they were more narrative films.

**00:28:44**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

They were underground films like Warhol or, but I mean the true kind of, you know, like the Whitney Brothers, Brakhage, Vanderbeek, those films were, were screened at the Cinematheque, I remember. Because those really blew my mind and, and became much more influential in a way than the films I was seeing at The Cinema. On the Whitney Brothers, I mentioned that.

**00:29:14**

**ADAM HYMAN**

So can you describe the Cinematheque Theater?

**00:29:18**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Well it was a small theater on Sunset Boulevard. The Cinematheque was, had programming, I believe, on the weekends. And I mean, I think it was maybe, it seated 50 or less than a hundred for sure. I'll bet like The Egyptian, like the films for small, like the Spielberg Theater. And it was great. I mean, seeing these, everything was like, was new. I'd never even read about these, about these filmmakers before. I mean, Shirley Clarke, just a revelation. Maya Deren, it was all new.

**00:30:05**

**ADAM HYMAN**

Can you recall any particular films?

**00:30:08**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Well I mean, MESHES OF THE AFTERNOON, I remember seeing that there for the first time. I think on, I might have seen Michael Snow's WAVELENGTH there. I can't, I mean, I can't remember the names of the films.

**00:30:37**

**ADAM HYMAN**

What about those sort of films that were affecting you?

**00:30:42**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Well, I think Len Lye, too, I might have seen Len Lye's early work there. I mean, Brakhage and Len Lye, they worked directly on film, on film stock. And that seemed really wild, especially since I studied painting. So, these, those weren't the first experiments I did with film, but they were, but I did a number of films where I dyed the film stock with ink. I used bleach, spray paint, magic marker, all kinds of different implement, I implement the, or distorted the film.

**00:32:23**

**ADAM HYMAN**

Okay, so tell me a bit more about who you were hanging with.

**00:32:25**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Well at Chouinard it was a really, a free-floating atmosphere. I mean, the studio I lived in was at Adams and Hill. And I'd started in, I think the fall of '64 there. But the Watts Insurrection took place while I was in this studio. And so I was in the curfew zone of this, this uprising. And I couldn't leave for two, or at least I was afraid to leave for a couple days.

**00:32:57**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

For a while. These tanks going down the street right outside the window. And, you know, I saw a lot of shit happening. But it, I mean, it was a 25 hundred foot loft on top of a, of a clothing store. And Jack Kling one of my instructors at Chouinard took me under his wing and let me stay there.

**00:33:25**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And there were-- people came and went in this studio. But one guy I remembered was Larry Bishop. And Larry was the son of Joey Bishop, the comedian. And, you know, we were doing a lot of drugs and hanging out, but, you know, ultimately he became an actor and filmmaker, and, but I mean, it was wild.

**00:33:52**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

I mean, kind of hanging with him for two or three months. Ultimately he became a filmmaker and made-- I just recently saw one of his films on Sundance called HELL RIDE. It's a biker film. He made a number of biker films. I know he, I think he collaborated with Quentin Tarantino on that film. And I think he was in KILL BILL VOLUME II, I believe. He's an actor as well.

**00:34:22**

**ADAM HYMAN**

And what made it, I don't know, what, wild? Was it, I mean, what was the art student life like in general in the '60s?

**00:34:33**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Well, my wife will see this, [laugh] I mean it was, I mean, everything was happening. You know, I mean this was like, I mean, Haight-Ashbury was, was, you know, we would go up there, take off from school. Or go up there for a week and go up to Big Sur. The love-ins in '67, my last hear at Chouinard. Those, that's where I made my first films.

**00:35:09**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

At least the films that I, that I've kept and kind of edited. Or at least significant enough, and not just raw footage. There was actually a complete work of art. But I mean, there was a lot of experimentation with sex, drugs, people were coming on...

**00:35:46**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

I remember Man Ray coming to the school. I think it might have been '66. He was having a show at the L.A. County Museum. He was a little guy, but really had a profound effect, just listening. He was there, artist in residence, he gave a big lecture and went around the studios and looked at work. But it was great.

**00:36:13**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

I mean, I had such a little art background that every experience was a new experience. So it was like kind of just like, you know, I was like a sponge. You know, like soaking up everything. And, I mean, it was all, it was so new, but I couldn't put it really into context, and it took me a few years. I mean, I dropped out of Chouinard and lived in, went back east, made a film back there, came back.

**00:36:43**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

Which we can go into. But, then lived in Topanga Canyon. And I think, but I didn't put my art education, I wasn't able to really put it into context until graduate school. Because everything was just, because of the lack of background I had before Chouinard.

**00:37:02**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

Do you remember anything about what, like, Man Ray said at all on that visit? Or any other particular notes, notes from anybody else?

**00:37:11**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

I think, he said, he was having a rough time. I mean, just surviving. I remember him saying, I wish my show at the museum had come a little younger, so I could have enjoyed it more. So, I mean, he had lived in, he talked about living in Hollywood, and not liking it too much. But, you know, he worked for, I mean, Salvador Dali did as well, worked for the studios for a time.

**00:37:46**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

But I don't think they ever really achieved much. I mean, they were brought in to, to make films, Hollywood films. They might have landed doing something on their own, but I'm not sure how much they contributed. The same with writers. He, I believe one instructor, if I remember, he said, he asked, it was funny, what do you think of grades?



**00:38:17**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And he said, I don't know but I'd give your question an F. I remember that. That's always kind of stuck with me. [laugh] I mean, there were still grades at Chouinard, it wasn't like, you know, during the strikes, during the Vietnam War, I mean, it was during the Vietnam war, but it hadn't affected campuses yet, so there were still grades at Chouinard. But, they, you know, my, my grades were all over the place. I mean, I was in ceramics, wasn't very good at that.

**00:38:51**

**ADAM HYMAN**

How do you grade things like that?

**00:38:54**

**SAM ERENBERG**

I mean, the grade, this one, Lyn Foulkes was like the really great L.A. artist, was a student there a few years before me. And many of the instructors held up Lynn as the best student that ever went through the school. I remember that. So even though I wasn't that, I was familiar with his work, I think he was in the Venice Biennale when he was just, you know, like still in his twenties or something. Which is not unusual now, but back then that was very unusual.

**end tape one,**

## TAPE 2: SAM ERENBERG

00:00:18

SAM ERENBERG

I should talk a little bit about growing up in Baldwin Hills. I mean, I spoke a little bit about the film and TV influence, and my father's friends, and mother's as well. But my mother was also a political activist, and she was the president of the Baldwin Hills Democratic Club. So at the same time, in, that I was having these film people around, there was a lot of political organizing as well.

00:00:56

SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)

And demonstrations, and I remember all this campaign literature from the 1952 Presidential Campaign, of Adlai Stevenson, and I even remember the smell of the ink of all this material that was piled up in our living room. I, I remember picking him up, I'm talking about Stevenson, at LAX, and being in the motorcade, at that time anybody I suppose could join, or at least, if it was organized you were part of it.

00:01:31

SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)

And we-- a whole long line of cars drove with him, and then, and probably there was no police escort at all. No Secret Service protection. And I remember people along the side of the road throwing rocks at some of the cars, calling us Communists. It was interesting then. And my mother, in the late '60s, started working with gangs in South, South Central Los Angeles.

00:02:13

SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)

At that time Dorsey was about a third African-American, a third Japanese, third Anglo. So I had a lot of African-American friends. And I, you know, this was the, I mean, the influence of jazz, I think, became important to me then. And, and it continued on. The music scene was something I was part of. At least in, as an appreciator.

00:02:44

SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)

You know, I never played music, but I just, I've known a lot of musicians throughout my life. And, but this, you know, during the Watts Riots my mother was a kind of stringer for Look and Life Magazine, so reporters came out from New York, Chicago to ask her, because she had, she was a, had a kind of introduction to certain people in Watts or in South Central.

**00:03:12**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And she knew a lot of people, so she put them in touch with people she knew through her work with gangs. It wasn't the Crips and the Bloods, it was before that, like the Businessmen and other names. I mean, we also lived in the West Adams area before Baldwin Hills, so, I mean, that area of Los Angeles was where, and Westchester as well.

**00:03:37**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

That's where I grew up. And, and during this time, Rico Lebrun who was teaching at USC, the Mexican artist, was living in a place called The Village Green. And I know my mother collaborated with Rico. He might have designed a poster for Stevenson, if I, I'm not quite sure. But, but they knew each other then. I mean, this was probably, you know, this was probably the first, probably either the first or second, either '52 or '56. I'm not quite sure.

**00:04:23**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

There's still a, you know, a mural by Rico Lebrun in the common area at Village Green.

**00:04:26**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

Uh huh.

**00:04:30**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

That they're working on preserving.

**00:04:30**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

I see, yes, mm hmm.

**00:04:31**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

I'd be interested to see if your mom knew my parents, because they were both politically active in all these things. My mom was in Stevenson campaigns.

**00:04:38**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

Yes.

**00:04:38**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

My dad was at Watts during the Watts Riots in '65, and they were both involved with this, the, the housing.

**00:04:49**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

Mm hmm.

**00:04:49**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

There was a ballot measure to clear the housing covenants.

**00:04:52**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Right, uh huh. Yeah, so I mean, I had all this material, and you know, I've done performance, I've done, we'll get, we can get into that later. Produced books and produced installations about that. And even this group of paintings here, which I'm working on right now, one painting is, notes that time.

**00:05:21**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

It was important time for me as an artist, I mean, to witness that, you know, in different perspectives. From my parents' perspective and my own living down in there. And so I would come home, when I was able to leave the studio, I would come home and then realize again, I mean, my parents living room was a kind of this nerve center.

**00:05:47**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

All these people, these reporters going in and out of it. Her friends from the community coming with, trying to looking for help. And it was really dynamic. Bad time, as well, very bad. The, well.

**00:06:15**

**ADAM HYMAN**

Let's go into Chouinard a touch more. Tell me what Jack Goldstein was like at that time.

**00:06:22**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Well Jack was, I mean, he certainly didn't-- you know, he was learning how to draw like I was. And then so, you know, he came in with, looking like one of the Beatles. I think he was probably influenced by the Beatles. His good friend, Peter Kantor kind of had the same kind of haircut and, you know, we were all kind of just into, more into rock and roll and, although I was, I had a little, you know, I had a little difficulty.

**00:06:58**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

I was a jazz guy. So this whole hippie thing that was about to happen, you know, I was, I felt a little uncomfortable with it. But I, growing up in the African-American community in Baldwin Hills. I ran with, you know, my friends who were mostly African-American then. And, I mean, you know, if I was in a car listening to the radio, I couldn't listen to rock and roll.

**00:07:25**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

If they were around, they wouldn't let me [laugh]. They'd give me a hard time if I did. So, it's was either rhythm and blues or jazz. And, so, but, you know, then Jack and I, we had conversations about drawing. And, you know, but it was nothing profound, because we were, we were just in our first year of art school. And I don't remember what Jack's background was before that. I didn't know him, I just, I had met him for the first time there. And, but I mean, you know, we were having a good time.

**00:08:02**

**ADAM HYMAN**

Where did you go to see jazz?

**00:08:05**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Well, first, there used to be a place called The It Club. Great title, right? It was on Washington, I'd go to. And then after The It Club would close there was an old theater called Adams. They called it Adams West. On Adams near Crenshaw. So when the clubs, either Shelly's Manhole, or or The It Club, or, or The Parisian Room, on the corner of Washington and La Brea, the, those clubs would, would close down at, at 2:00 in the morning.

**00:08:46**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

Then we would go to the Adams West with, there'd be two more sets from two to six. And generally these, I mean, you know, it was amazing. You'd see Thelonious Monk, and then see another four hour concert of Thelonious Monk until six in the morning. It was unbelievable. I mean, you know, I also saw, there was a place on Sunset, too, where you saw incredible jazz as well.

**00:09:18**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And this, I mean, you know, I followed-- my parents used to go down to Central Avenue clubs when they first met. And, during the, you know, in the '40s. Well that scene was-- I obviously inherited their love of jazz. You know, or at least it was just reinforced by them, you know. They did have jazz records at the house.

**00:09:40**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

So, I mean that was, I got-- I went to these clubs before I was 21. You know, I would, you know, dress up in a suit and, and just to get in. You know, and if they, if they wouldn't let us in, if they said, no, no, you're too young, you can't get in here, then I would wait out, and I would stand, wait outside or stand outside and listen to the music.

**00:10:09**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

You know, they'd try to get me to go away, but I wouldn't. But I mean, at this time I was also going to, you know, to comedy clubs. I saw Lenny Bruce on a club on La Cienega, I can't remember the name. I think he might have gotten busted during that gig, too. I mean, this is like, you know, this is really my education. Clubs.

**00:10:34**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

I mean art school, I mean, actually I started going to clubs before art school. Because I mean, I graduated high school in '61. So I was doing all this clubbing. You know, I mean, I was working between, before I went to art school, at different jobs, not important jobs. But I had jobs. And since I left home at, at 19, I had to, you know, right after high school I had to support myself.

**00:10:58**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

So, but that's, that was, you know, clubbing was what I did. I mean, and not dance, which, is more like just, you know, comedy clubs and going to Vegas and also jazz clubs.

**00:11:20**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

So what lead you...

**00:11:34**                    **ADAM HYMAN (CONTINUED)**

Should we talk about the Topanga?

**00:11:36**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

Okay, well, yeah.

**00:11:39**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

Or was there something before?

**00:11:39**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

Yeah, well I, my wife and I weren't married then, but we, Elena and I, we dropped out of Chouinard together in '67.

**00:11:52**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

Why'd you drop out?

**00:11:53**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

I dropped out because she dropped out and I wanted to be with her. [laugh] We went back east, she, she's from New York, so we went back east and lived there. First went to Massachusetts and then to Connecticut. And we saw an ad in the paper to let, these people were starting an artist colony in Woodstock, Connecticut, it was on an old farm.

**00:12:27**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And so we went there. And we spent about a year there, a little less than a year. I made the film TIME there. There were people working, people, other artists working at a place called Sturbridge Village, which was a, you know, a kind of early American revolutionary time kind of village set up. And, for tourists.

**00:13:00**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And, and so I used many of these artists as actors in this film. But then I, you know, I think I finished it when I came back to Los Angeles. We were there maybe nine months. It got too cold, we left. And, but there were no film, I mean, there were no other filmmakers there, or any people experimenting with film. Just painters and sculptors and ceramic, ceramicists.

**00:13:32**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

We came back and kind of looking around, and at that time, and during the Chouinard years, and I'd listen to the Fireside Theater on KPFK. They generally started around midnight, their program. I think it was five days a week, if I remember correctly. And, you know, I had met Peter Bergman, one of the, in I think Venice.

**00:14:02**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

Anyway, one time, one night they were interviewing Ram Dass, Baba Ram Dass, Richard Alpert the LSD guy. And, and I had, he said that he was going to, the next day he was going to be in Topanga Canyon giving a talk. I don't know exactly, he didn't know exactly where that was going to be, but he gave a kind of, some directions where the old canyon and the Topanga Canyon Boulevard come together.

**00:14:36**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

So I went out there the next morning, and he, he must have been stoned, because he was up in a tree talking to about 20 or 30 people standing below the tree. [laugh] And, you know, talking about mysticism and whatever. And I don't, I had never been to Topanga Canyon before, and, you know, I associated, like, Topanga with freedom.

**00:15:06**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And, and I was right. And it was an amazing place. And, and my wife and I were, we had gotten married in '67 in New York, and had come back. Actually our, our wedding party was at the Electric Circus in the East Village. [laugh] So I mean this clubbing thing kind of extended to our wedding.

**00:15:41**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

Anyway, so we decided we wanted to move to Topanga Canyon with the, and in '69 we moved there. And Elena started UCLA, she wanted to be a filmmaker. Her father had, was also in, had a kind of film history. He worked for David Selznick as a financial advisor in the '40s. He worked, he was an investment banker and Lehman Brothers in New York.

**00:16:16**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And sent him out to make sure that, that Selznick was not spending too much money. And it might have been during GONE WITH THE WIND. And so she had a choice to work in Hollywood, or go to film school. And she wasn't confident enough to work. I think she had a chance to work for Richard Sylbert the production designer.

**00:16:38**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

But she decided she didn't want to do that, so she, she applied at UCLA. At that time it was not hard to get, to study film, to get into the film department. So she ultimately went, got a degree and a master's. But, but we, but during that time... [technical]

**00:17:02**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

Okay, so Elena at UCLA.

**00:17:03**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

Oh. Elena started at UCLA Film Department in 1969. And I was just painting. You know, I was working in the post office, I, in Santa Monica, and, but in my free time I wasn't, it wasn't a fulltime job, I mean, I had days off. So I was working in, as a clerk. In my free time I would go and, over to, drive over to, to Westwood and, and sit in on some of the classes with her.

**00:17:40**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

You know, great classes of the history of film. And I was getting an education, a free education while she was studying film. And had no interest in the art department at all at that time. I was painting, still, in Topanga. Met a lot of musicians. I mean, at that time Topanga was this amazing place. And I remember groups like the Spirit, Rare Earth, Canned Heat. Neil Young was up there for a while. Taj Mahal.

**00:18:18**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And I had met Wallace Berman, he had, he was showing his work at the community center up there. And I mean, at Christmas time, trying to make some extra money. You know, I made, I made money playing poker up there. There were poker games every Friday, Saturday night for years up there. But I mean, it was, it was an interesting group of people.

**00:18:56**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

You know, I'd run into Dennis Hopper, who was Wallace's friend. George Herms. There was a, a theater called The Theatricum Botanicum run by Ellen and Will Geer. And they put on plays, and it was down near the creek, the Topanga Creek near Topanga Canyon Boulevard on the other side of the creek. We lived on Hillside Drive with, near the old, I can't remember what it was.

**00:19:28**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

Do you remember your address?



**00:19:31**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Ah, 20812 Hillside Drive. Yeah, there was an old American Legion Lodge on, right on the other side of Canyon. So, you know, there was a place called The Corral where all these rock groups would perform up there. And then my ex-brother-in-law played with a musician. Gil Melle. Gil, I think was, did a lot of recordings for Hollywood films. I'm not sure if he composed, yeah, I think he was a composer as well.

**00:20:07**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And so they had a, a group that played every week at the Moon Fire Inn [Erenberg note: Moon Fire Inn: just south of Topanga Center on Topanga Canyon Blvd.]for two or three years. Ben Matthews on bass, Forest Westbrook on piano, Fred Stofflet on drums, and Gil was the, was the tenor player and played other instruments. And, and then, you know, I mean I, just people, just even on our, on our street, on, it was an amazing group of people right on our street.

**00:20:40**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

Oh, right next door, Keith Carradine, his, his parents had owned a house next to me, but he rented another house just below me for a while. And his girlfriend, I think she was an actress as well. Up the street, Viva, one of Andy Warhol's super stars lived. She had her daughter there while she was living in Topanga. I believe she lives in Palm Springs now.

**00:21:07**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

She was married to a French video artist, Michele Auger, I think his name was. Auger, A-U-G-E-R. So I mean, it was amazing, you know, kind of creative proving ground in a way. I mean, all this stuff was happening. And so it kind of, it reinforced, you know, my film work. And, I mean, I wanted to make films.

**00:21:37**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

You know, we met George Herms at the time, and we tried to [laugh] make, do a documentary film of him working on his press. And we made, we filmed him for two days, and then realized that the film was no good. It was all kind of a waste of time. On the others side of me, Don Preston [Erenberg note: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Don\\_Preston](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Don_Preston)], keyboardist with the Mothers of Invention was, we became very, very good friends.

**00:22:05**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

He was split up at, I think, at that time from his wife, Tina. They're back together now. And I remember one time Don asking me that he wanted to make a film. So he, we got a bunch of our filmmaker friends and he want, his idea was to, to see a, a car go off a cliff. So he got this old junker, and we went up to the top of, of, up near Mulholland somewhere.

**00:22:35**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And Elena, my wife, was on one camera, and I had one camera. And there was another, a third camera. And we had both 16 and eight millimeter. But the, we were having a hard time trying to get the accelerator pedal to stay down. And we tried different things. I mean, you know, actually Don asked me, well, just sit in, you know, sit in the car and then jump out, like you see in [laugh] in, in movies.

**00:23:05**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And I said, no way am I going to do that. So, you know, we tried getting big boulders, and then throwing it at, and put, placing it on top of the accelerator. That didn't work. Finally the, you know, the, we were set up to do this right, and we thought we had it right. And the boulder came off the accelerator pedal, and the car just rolling off the cliff.

**00:23:34**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

It was very unspectacular. And so, you know, Don was kind of pissed off, and he said, I'm going to do this right, I'm going to get another car and I'm going to, and I'm going to make it go off the cliff at Palos Verdes, you know? So, but we, we made these, you know, the footage and gave it to Don, so maybe he did something with it. I don't know if he ever, if ever got the car off the cliff.

**00:24:01**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And, you know, I made a film myself, I mean, which is kind of lost now, or at least not completely lost. It's a, I made, I edited something just recently in Final Cut Pro which were the outtakes. But it was an Edgar Allan Poe kind of a short story called THE SILENCE. [Erenberg note: Original cut version of The Silence found in storage in March, 2011.] Nothing to do with Bergman's SILENCE, although perhaps, and I, I doubt Bergman knew about, I mean, Bergman's SILENCE has anything to do with this, this short story.

**00:24:29**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

But I made it down in the creek, in, after a big rainstorm, so the water was flowing pretty strong. And that's probably my the most narrative film I've ever made. I mean, the films I made are, were only for a 10 year period, from '67 to '77. I think I probably made 15 or 20 that can be considered full, full works.

**00:24:55**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

I unfortunately have, some of them are lost. And that one is lost. But I remember I dyed the film with blue ink for, for an effect. I believe it was super eight. So another, I mean, I, you know, my wife worked in 16, but I, you know, I mean, she had a, I think a Beaulieu. And, but I mean, you know, and, and Mitchell.

**00:25:20**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

But these were just, I never considered doing that. I just thought it was too cumbersome to have these big cameras, these big heavy cameras. So, so I was happy to stick with eight millimeter and super eight.

**00:25:37**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

What are her films like?

**00:25:40**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

Well she started with, she started in animation, because of that class she took at Chouinard. And she made an animated film at UCLA. But she ultimately got into the, what's called Ethnographic Film Program. And, and she, and that was video. So she made a, and that was her, her master's, her thesis was in...

**00:26:08**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

There was no video in the '60s.

**00:26:09**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

Well, well it was, by that time it was, she graduated in '75. She was there for six years. So she had to, so I think she had to take a number of, you know, she, four years plus two years. Or maybe three and three, I'm not sure. But, they, they had had that, that program, it had already begun, and she studied with an anthropologist, I remember, Karl Heider.

**00:26:36**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

We had film parties at, as well in Topanga Canyon. I think Colin Young was the director. He left and became the director of the British Film Institute, or, or some, some film school in London. But he lived in Topanga as well. So we would have these film parties, and a lot of these musicians, a lot of these, a lot of documentary filmmakers from UCLA would show their works at our house.

**00:27:01**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

Like who?

**00:27:03**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

Oh, [laugh] that's a hard one. I asked my wife who they were, you know, she doesn't remember. [Erenberg note: The only UCLA film student Elena can remember is Judy Reidel, who became a film editor in Hollywood.] She remembers their first names, she doesn't remember their last name. But I think, but we remember Chick Strand. Because she had gone through that program. So we met, we met Chick and, although I'd looked, I looked at her film more as experimental than, but I, I guess she was a documentary filmmaker.

**00:27:30**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

I think she came out once, and then Gene Youngblood came out, because my, my wife took a course with him. And then I got to know him a little, a few years later when I moved to Santa Barbara. But, you know, I mean, those were the only, I think we met David Lebrun, although David doesn't remember meeting me, us.

**00:27:55**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

But I think we, I met him just like on the side of the road, on a walk in Topanga Canyon. And, and we talked about film. It, it might have been when we were trying to make that George Herms film. We, I think we might have come out and he was right there, you know, for some, for some strange reason.

**00:28:13**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

Did you know Michael Scroggins then? He lived in Topanga in that period.

**00:28:17**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

Michael?

**00:28:18**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

Scroggins.

**00:28:19**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

No, I don't think so. I knew Bob Denver. [laugh] Dobie, Dobie Gillis. [laugh] No, I, I don't think I knew any, any filmmakers other than the people that were hanging. I knew some photographers. But not filmmakers.

**00:28:40**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

Okay, so let's, so when and why did you start at Northridge?

**00:28:49**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

Well I, I decided that I'd better get a degree, I'd better get serious about, you know, I had a child, and my son Noah was born in 1970. And, you know, I just didn't want to work in the post office the rest of my life. So, you know, I decided I should probably go back to school, and take, you know, and get a degree, thinking I was going to teach.

**00:29:17**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And so that's one reason why I went, and Northridge was the simplest, because at that time, you know, it had a good faculty. Peter Plagens, Walter Gabrielson, and then John Canavier, who I, who had taught at Chouinard was out there. And I knew John, I wasn't going to study sculpture, but I knew that John was there.

**00:29:42**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And it had Karen Carson, and it had some, some interesting artists. And not just teachers, but they were interesting practicing artists there. So, and it was, I mean, you know, when we, we would go to the market or to get things in Topanga, I mean, that's where we would go, to the valley. So it just seemed rather than go, you know, try to go to UCLA or that way.

**00:30:10**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

Elena went back to UCLA because of the film, but I wanted to study art. And at that time UCLA film, art department wasn't that interesting to me. It, it was a, full of a bunch of, you know, old, I don't know any other way to say it, old timers. And I wanted to experiment more. There wasn't, there didn't seem to be much experimentation going on there at that time.

**00:30:36**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

So I went to Northridge. And, you know, ultimately it proved to be an interesting place. Because Bob Smith taught design there, and he, he was the, the person who ultimately started the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art. You know, and that was like about 1973 or so. Or four. I think maybe '74.

**00:31:07**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

And what was that?

**00:31:10**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

Well, it was an alternative space. And I mean, the '70s was a, was this, was the flowering of this, you know, it was just the coming out of all these alternative spaced, spaces in the art world. New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles. And it was, I mean, there was really no contemporary museum in Los Angeles at that time.

**00:31:34**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And so with the help of Marcia Weisman, who ultimately became one of the founding, the founders of MOCA [Erenberg note: Marcia Weisman was an original board member of MOCA.], had connection with Century City, ABC Century City. And so that, we got a space in Century City for a dollar a year to start this very beautiful space. And, you know, everybody kind of, you know, it was really a grass roots kind of an endeavor.

**00:32:08**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

What was the space, then, on Robertson Boulevard?

**00:32:11**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Well that's, they moved a few years later, after they lost their lease, and, and, but, you know, at that time, you know, I mean, I had left, I, I had gone up to graduate school to UCSB. Again, I applied to UCLA and was accepted, but I just, I wasn't sure I just wanted to do painting. And I'd heard that, this interesting performance artist who had just graduated, who had gone to Cal Arts named Wolfgang Stoerchle.

**00:32:43**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And, at, had been in the graduate program at, at UCSB. And, and so I decided, also they gave me a full tuition, a full TA-ship there where I had to wait, I mean, I would have worked, I think, with a painter at UCLA. And, you know, probably Bill Brice. And, I mean, I liked Bill and I liked his painting, but, you know, I wanted to do, you know, other things.

**00:33:15**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

So I went up there, Santa Barbara. And, and ultimately I did get in with a, you know, to start doing performance seriously. And the first performance piece, I started making books, artist books. And I started, I mean, there was a film program, I wasn't, you know, I wasn't, I didn't, I wasn't studying film.

**00:33:38**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

I mean, at that time, video was starting to be the medium of choice for performance artists and sculptors. And so, I mean, they had a few portapacks, not as many as Cal Arts, but they had a few. So I started doing, I started collaborating with Richard Dunlap, Miles Varner, Wayne Buckley, who were on the faculty.

**00:34:04**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And we did pieces together, they, you know, I was a little bit older, I was 30, 29. I was 29, so I was a little, a little older than others. And so they accepted me more. And because of my experience in L.A., I mean, I, they, many of the students came from other parts of the country. I mean, not a lot of people came from L.A. At least before me.

**00:34:27**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

So I had a lot of connections because of my, because of the people I had known in L.A. And I was already showing in a gallery. It, you know, just as I finished undergraduate work. So, I started, and I was living in Topanga, I was commuting to Santa Barbara. But I was, one class I, I taught was called Materials and Methods.

**00:34:54**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

But it was essentially a lecture program. So I got different people to come up. I got George, George Herms, Viva, Peter Clothier who was a poet, and an art educator. People I knew down here. Barry Markowitz, people to come up and do performances, little performance pieces, or readings, or lectures.

**00:35:22**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

What was interesting to you in performance pieces at that time?

**00:35:24**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

Well I mean, you know, the work had come out of process art, and that was like the, the buzz word, you know, in the art world at that time. I mean, everything was kind of exploding. Process had come out of action painting. And minimalism, which was a kind of, a more formal in the '60s, a more formal way of making work, mostly sculpture.

**00:35:52**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

Artists were more interested in kind of, you know, time based media, and, and experimenting with processes, materials. Eva Hesse, in New York, the sculptor, was making work with resin. And, it was, you know, the process was very fluid. And, and so whether it was sculpture, and, and most of this was sculpture, most of this experimentation was in sculpture not painting.

**00:36:29**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

But in film, video, performance. And, and then even land art, you know, earth art. And so all these, these movements were exploding, and at the same time the alternative space movement was, I mean, the art world had kind of, had contracted. And there was all this experimentation and people were looking beyond making finished objects, or even beyond the marketplace.

**00:36:58**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And, and so all these alternative media, you know, was converging. And there was a mixture of media as well. I mean, you had sculptors working in video, you had painters working in sculpture, or film. You had, you know, performance artists working. I mean, or, or sculptors working in performance. So all this kind of cross fertilization.

**00:37:31**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And then the alternative space movement was just, was, you know, was the, were flexible enough to nourish all this activity.

**00:37:47**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

Why do think it was happening?

**00:37:49**

**SAM ERENBERG**

I mean, I think it was just the art world. You know, I mean, pop art, which was really a, a New York thing. You know, it was a kind of, it had a, it was a reaction against, and you had a series of reactions against the status quo. And, you know, abstract expressionism was a reaction to European modernism, pop art was a reaction against abstract expressionism. And, you know, it was time for it to, you know, people wanted something new.

**00:38:26**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

People wanted, you know, to, you know, they didn't want the marketplace or gallerists, or curators or museum, or, you know, or art critics to, to set the agenda. So, you know, I mean originally it had, there had been a couple of shows, Harold Szeeman and the Swiss curator had done this exhibition called When Attitudes Become Form at the Bern Kunsthalle.

**00:38:57**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

Which, and a, many, many of these people working with process were, it might have been the first exhibition. There might have been one video artist, maybe William Wegman was in that show. And then there was Marcia Tucker at the Whitney Museum did another exhibition called Materials or something.

**00:39:23**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And there were a couple exhibitions. But, I mean, this was, this kind of work was fermenting, even before the, I think in '69. I mean, it was. You know, Richard Serra was, you know, throwing molten lead against the wall. And Barry Lavay was working with, with felt.

**end of tape two**



## TAPE 3: SAM ERENBERG

00:03:32

SAM ERENBERG

So, I felt that, that because, it really was a choice of, you know, I had to support my, by that time I had two children. And Elena was still going, and, and I needed to support myself while I was studying. And so I went to Santa Barbara because they gave me a full TAship. And, and I was able to make some money there, I didn't have to pay tuition to go to school.

00:04:10

SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)

So that's why I went. Went up north. And then I got involved with these performance guys, again, because of Wolfgang Stoerchle. I mean, Richard Dunlap was a musician as well as a visual artist. So he had that experience. But I think, I mean, before Wolf had, Wolf had come out and, I mean, after he was accepted at graduate school, he made, his piece was, was riding a horse from Toronto, Canada to Santa Barbara, as a piece.

00:04:47

SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)

So he was creating this kind of reputation before he ever arrived at school. I mean, that was kind of unheard of. I mean, every, they knew somebody quite unique was coming. And, and that was documented. I remember seeing a poster of him on a horse. You know, with a cowboy hat on, it's this German guy. Well, you know, Germans and Austrians are obsessed with cowboys and urban, American cowboy films and, and the Southwest, the desert, you know. [laugh]

00:05:23

ADAM HYMAN

Germans, they are a desert loving people.

00:05:26

SAM ERENBERG

[laugh] Evidently. They dress up, you know, the Germans have these Indian, cowboy and Indian clubs, and they dress up like, and so I started making these performance pieces on, and...

00:05:42

ADAM HYMAN

What were their nature?

00:05:45

SAM ERENBERG

Well, I mean, they were sound works to begin with, because that was what the other artists were doing. The first piece I made was called Four Questions. We, it was performed first at, up at a college in Northern California. And I, I'll think of it in a minute. But the piece essentially was made with a four channel mixer, a sound mixer.

**00:06:24**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

There was a card, cardboard table in, with four microphones. And a kitchen timer on top of the table. And one person would ask, one, or four people, four performers, and the first would ask a question. And that person would set the timer for five minutes, and then everybody would sit down and answer the questions simultaneously on all, on all four.

**00:06:50**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And it was performed in a theater, not a gallery space. And the four speakers were behind the audience sitting in the [sounds like] round. It was a theater in the round. And, and then at the end, the chime would go off on the timer, then everybody would leave and go offstage. And then, for a few seconds, and then come back again and the next person would ask the next question. And so that was the first performance piece I did, and I think it might have been 1974. Performed in '75 I think. And...

**00:07:29**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

What was interesting to you about it? What were you investigating?

**00:07:32**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

Oh, I mean, kind of the density of sound. You know, of kind of obscuring the normal narrative, of, you know, there-- I knew there would be a lot of spontaneous and intuitive kind of layering of sound with it, with people answering it. And so, and also nobody knew the question beforehand. So, kind of like this interview.

**00:08:08**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

So the-- we didn't know what we were going to get. So I mean, I liked the idea of chance, and, you know, chance has been, chance and coincidence has been a part of my work. I mean, I, no matter what media that I work in, I think whether it's film, I mean, I don't generally write scripts, I never wrote scripts.

**00:08:34**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

I mean, I had a kind of general premise or idea before I made, but I generally didn't have things planned out. And the same way, I mean, I have a kind of, I set a kind of precedent, or a kind of tone, or I have an idea, and I work in series, generally. And that's been the MO from the beginning, still is in my work.

**00:09:03**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

How does chance come into play in painting?

**00:09:05**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Well, I mean, for instance, the painting behind me is, it's called The Ash Series, and I began by taking Rabbit Skin Glue, which is just a, which is a sizing medium, and painting the unprimed, the canvas, the raw canvas. And then taking oil paint and saturating the glue with color. And so the glue is not put on in an even way.

**00:09:40**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

It's, some, in some areas it absorbs more and some it resists more. And so I don't know, I know there's going to be light and dark, depending on how the painting absorbs the colors. So, or the paint. So that's the kind of, that's a chance. I mean, the element of chance is in that. I mean, once that's, the painting is there, I can only, I can only really alter the tone, or the color of the paint.

**00:10:11**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

I can't alter the light and black because once the first-- so it's almost like a printmaking process on, on canvas. And, you know, I mean, I mean, abstract painting is, can be like that. I mean, you know, it kind of, you discover it through the process of making the work. And, I mean, not that I haven't made works that are, that are planned out.

**00:10:36**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

I mean, I did when I was a student, use tape and filled in color, because that was what hard edged painters did. Or at least that's what I thought they did, and what, you know, Frank Stella did. Who, those were influences on my work, you know, back then. But, you know, I mean now, I mean, but throughout the years, you know, I didn't follow any kind of preconceived or preordained way of working.

**00:11:08**

**ADAM HYMAN**

How long then were you at Santa Barbara?

**00:11:10**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Well I stayed, after graduate school, we stayed up there because we had, my son has, you know, has a disability. And so he, we felt that the schools up in Santa Barbara would be a little easier to, for him to, to get, you know, special ed up there than down here. And so we stayed. And also my wife's parents were getting older, and needed help.

**00:11:48**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And so we stayed in Santa Barbara, actually for quite a long time. Up until '90, '92, when my wife got a grant to be artist in residence at the Santa Monica Place, when she did an installation. Or, but, I commuted. I didn't stay in Santa Barbara throughout the years. I would go off and teach. I taught a year at Ohio State, and I would go, I'd be a visiting artist and do, and also I did work down here as well. So I would commute out. Commute back and forth.

**00:12:33**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

When did you move to Santa Barbara?

**00:12:34**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

I moved, we moved fulltime in, after graduate school, in 1976.

**00:12:42**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

So what else did you find when you discovered while you were in Santa Barbara?

**00:12:46**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

Well, I mean, I started working with, at this time I met Daniel Lentz, who was a composer, and so I collaborated on a number of pieces with him. I did one of the visuals for one of his pieces called NORTH AMERICAN ECLIPSE. Which performed at the Libero Theater. I actually used a piece of scrim that Robert Irwin had left behind when he did an installation at the UCSB Art Gallery.

**00:13:20**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

I got involved with the Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum. I was on the exhibition committee, and we started inviting performance artists. That, when we first started, CAF it's called, Contemporary Arts Forum, we didn't have a space. So we would find different spaces in Santa Barbara. We invited Chris Burden to do a piece at the Armory Building.

**00:13:53**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

There he did a piece with search lights. We actually rented a search light for him and we shined it in through the entrance of, through the front door of the large front doors of the building. And the Armory had a second floor, and, and Chris and some other friends, I think Alexis Smith might have been one of his, took, like, little wooden airplanes and threw them, and, you know, trying to just threw them off this second floor.

**00:14:26**                      **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And they kind of, you know, the silhouettes of the planes, it was a piece. Yoshi Wada was a performance artists in New York, a sound artist. We invited him. And there were, I mean, a lot of people from San Francisco. And I was involved with that, and then Daniel Lentz started another nonprofit called Waves, Music of the Present Day.

**00:14:54**                      **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And we invited people, composers or musicians to come and be in residence. Laurie Anderson, Steve Reich, Scott Johnson, others came, and used local musicians or artists to perform pieces. I remember when Reich was there he did pendulum music, which is a simple piece with microphones going past a, it's kind of a reverb piece.

**00:15:25**                      **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And visually, you know, all visual artists were used to-- it doesn't take much, you just hold the microphone, let it go. But back and forth kind of a phasing effect. But local musicians were used. And in, you know, Daniel was, you know, he had a group called The California Time Machine a few years before, and then the Daniel Lentz Group, and you know, I never went on the road with him. But he went off. You know, at that time New Music America was still live stuff.

**00:15:55**                      **ADAM HYMAN**

Mm hmm.

**00:15:57**                      **SAM ERENBERG**

And so, mostly, it was just making work. I mean, one thing I liked about Santa Barbara is that there-- I mean, I was involved enough in the '70s. In the '80s it got to be a little more difficult being there. Because then the art world changed again, the alternative space movement kind of died.

**00:16:24**                      **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And then commercialization started taking over. And I didn't have a gallery then, so it was kind of tough to make a living. So I became kind of like a day trader. But, to support myself. But the, it was...

**00:16:41**                      **ADAM HYMAN**

A day trader of what?

**00:16:41**                      **SAM ERENBERG**

Stocks and bonds.

**00:16:42**                      **ADAM HYMAN**

Oh, okay.

**00:16:45**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Literally. So it was, it was difficult to-- I mean, there was neo expressionism was happening anyway, and, you know, that was, this kind of movement that came out of Jeremy, New York. I mean, there were some neo expressionist painters in Los Angeles, but many of them weren't very good. And I mean I, I was an abstract painter, and, but none of that was really being shown.

**00:17:11**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

I mean, a little bit of it was, but not much. You know, I had a show in 1980 at a gallery in downtown Los Angeles, of my abstract painting. But I didn't show a lot in Los Angeles. I showed more, I was making a lot of books, showing in Europe, and not in Los Angeles. So there really wasn't a need to be in Los Angeles. I mean, ultimately I got kind of tired, you know, in the early '90s.

**00:17:37**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And we moved back. And after my children left home we moved back to Los Angeles. But it, Los Angeles didn't seem that interesting. It wasn't like it is now. I mean, there was a downtown kind of scene, that was about it. I mean, there were a few, there were galleries and stuff, but...

**00:18:08**

**ADAM HYMAN**

When and why do you think Los Angeles changed again? When it became interesting?

**00:18:11**

**SAM ERENBERG**

[laugh] Well, well I think a lot of it had to do the ethnic makeup of the city. I think people from all over the world. You know, a friend of mine said, like, that downtown Los Angeles on Broadway is like Cairo. I mean, it's amazing, 160 languages and dialects spoken here. I mean, it must have been like New York in, around the turn of the century.

**00:18:38**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And I think that's the main reason why it's interesting. Also New York got kind of expensive. Artists, because it got a unique group of art schools here. And film schools, that artists could stay here after they graduated. And, rather than going to New York, that-- you know, New York, I mean, was no longer kind of the epicenter.

**00:19:03**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And now you have, you know, Berlin, London, Los Angeles, and other places besides New York. So, I mean, it's still not the economic center, I think New York's still the economic center. But, but it's sort of the creative center. You know, I think we, I think we surpassed New York in the early '90s.

**00:19:30**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And it's, and then, you know, younger artists at that time, like Baldessari had a huge influence, I think, on the whole art scene here. John Baldessari. I mean he was imploring artists, his students to go to New York and not stay in Los Angeles at that time because, you know, he wanted artists to get beyond the influence of the Venice art scene.

**00:19:57**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

Which was, you know, ever since Ferus [Gallery] was the beginning and end of art in Los Angeles. And so, but that's reversed again. You know, like I said, because of I think, when I think of artists staying here after, after school.

**00:20:21**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

What's the Venice arts scene?

**00:20:22**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

Well, I mean it's, the Venice art scene, a group of artists, many of them who had gone to Chouinard, Ed Ruscha and or to Otis or Jepson, and some to UCLA, of course. But Ed Moses, Joe Goode, Larry Bell. And the Kienholz, Ed Kienholz. I mean, these are the original people. And Wallace Berman as well, from Topanga, who had showed at Ferus Gallery.

**00:21:03**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And, and they settled in Venice because it was near the ocean and it was cheap studio space. And a nice place to live. And so, still is. And so that became synonymous with Los Angeles art. Especially with New York. And, you know, and Ferus, well, Ferus is, I mean, it's still on our-- I mean they just recreated the Ferus Gallery as part of the art fair on La Cienega, so. I mean, Los Angeles was, the whole-- back then there was just one street, La Cienega Boulevard, that was the gallery scene.

**00:21:53**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

Now in that whole scene, did you have any awareness of them incorporating film in any way, in galleries? Were any of the artists experimenting with film?

**00:22:08**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

I think there were, but I just wasn't aware of film. I mean, I think, because of Long Beach Museum's Video Program, artists in residence, video artists and residence program started, David Ross was there, and that was probably in the middle '70s, maybe '74 or so. I think that's when it started.

**00:22:32**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

Maybe it was earlier, I'm not sure. But that, I wasn't aware of film and art. I mean, there must have been artists. Although I think Frank Gillette might have been a painter, that's possible. I'm not sure. I mean subsequently I know there are, you know, there are filmmakers who make-- who paint.

**00:23:31**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

I mean, right, you were talking about back then. I didn't know. But now, I mean, now there, there's a real explosion, I think, with artists. I mean, they're making, I mean art, visual artists are showing their films at Sundance now. I mean, Shirin Neshat, the Persian artist, just made a feature length film based on a novel about the Iranian Revolution.

**00:24:02**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And that is being distributed by a main-- an important film company. I don't know which one it is. But it's being distributed. I just-- and that's happening. I mean, and Julian Schnabel is certainly, but I mean, that didn't happen since, until the '90s.

**00:24:29**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

Maybe artists kind of realized, I mean, I think it could have been that, I don't know exactly what it is. But I know that artists are doing big projects in, you know, for biennials and big museum shows. And the scale of everything got big, and so maybe the egos got big, too. I'm not sure.

**00:24:56**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

But in terms of Schnabel's case it's certainly justified. I think he's a great filmmaker. So, I mean, some of them, I won't mention names, some of them made films that didn't, that aren't so great. But, now I think film now is becoming, and it's not just, I mean, remember video art was a kind of, was used in performance as documentation for sculpture or for performance pieces.

**00:25:30**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

Or sculptors using their body as an object, and these pieces were used as documentation. I mean, video was used differently, or porta-packs, black and white video was used differently as compared to film, to experimental film in, let's say, the '50s, '60s. Now film, then performance changed, performance art became more theatrical.

**00:25:59**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And many artists like Chris Burden, myself, John White, others, got out of performance when it became more theatrically oriented, less oriented, less applying painting and sculptural ideas, or ideas associated with painting and sculpture. And the whole new, kind of new generation like Michael Smith, performance artist from New York, that changed.

**00:26:31**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

I mean, so, I think every performance artist kind of did what they had to do. Or, you know, they were, it played out. Chris Burden went into sculpture, and so they changed. I mean, it kind of just died. I mean, that changed. And then, and then film, and then because of this, how do I put this?



**00:27:07**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

I mean, the film, because I think there was a new, a kind of narrative that came back into the work. This is the word I'm searching for. So when a narrative came back, then artists, visual artists really, you know, started using film, you know, going back to film. And, then the nature of video changed to high definition and digital.

**00:27:34**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

So the digital, you know, that changed. We haven't talked about computers, but, well the digital part of it. But, but I think the film part, I think is because narrative came back into performance and video. And so film became a natural thing, an extension of that. I mean, I think there are younger video artists, or at least artist who are going back to film now because they don't like the look of digital technology.

**00:28:07**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

So that's going to change again. So, I mean, there might be a resurgence of actual film, I don't know. It doesn't seem plausible because of the cost. But, \ I think, or I mean, people are, young people are interested in film again. I mean, visual artists are, I think. Whereas my generation coming up, they weren't that, I mean, they were, they went to film, but I don't think they were interested in working in it.

**00:28:31**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

Okay, so let's go back to you now.

**00:28:32**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

Yeah, okay.

**00:28:34**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

You know, what lead you to make films?

**00:28:35**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

Well, first, it was just, everybody was doing, everybody had a super eight or eight millimeter, it seemed like everybody did. So I did it because everybody else did it. And again, it was very, you know, the cameras were portable. I used the camera as a drawing tool. And, you know, I wanted to document, I mean, everything was just happening, everything was exploding.

**00:29:01**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And I'm talking about the '60s. And you wanted to, you know, you felt like you had to record it. I mean, there was something that was going to happen every day, there was, like, there was this possibility that something new was going to happen. Something, you know, you didn't want to miss anything. And so, you know, I took thousands and thousands of hours of film. [Erenberg note: I was exaggerating about shooting thousands of hours of film. Perhaps hundreds.]

**00:29:25**

**ADAM HYMAN**

Where's all that?

**00:29:25**

**SAM ERENBERG**

It's, well it's still, it hasn't been looked at. I mean, my films were in storage for 35 years. And...

**00:29:34**

**ADAM HYMAN**

Don't you think you could sell all that to an archive house?

**00:29:37**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Yeah, well...

**00:29:36**

**ADAM HYMAN**

Distribute it and make some money.

**00:29:39**

**SAM ERENBERG**

[laugh] And so I, you know, it wasn't until these young artists started, well, looking, I mean, started working in film again, that I said, you know, I was up-- it was all stored up north. And I looked at the boxes and I said, gee, maybe I should take a look at some of this stuff again. You know, after all this time.

**00:30:04**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And so I started doing that, and some of them you know, were actually finished works. I had really forgotten about most of it. Because I didn't make, I made these things not to be a professional filmmaker or to even exhibit them. Because I didn't know, I wasn't familiar with any, any nonprofit, I mean I know there were a few back then in Los Angeles.

**00:30:31**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

But I mean, other than the theaters I went to, I wasn't aware of screenings. Only, and again, I had these, we did film parties, and since my wife was doing it, I did it, too. And, so I looked in, you know, I went to the archives, into the storage, and started seeing what could be saved.

**00:30:56**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

Some, many of them are brittle and they break. So, but I'm able to, you know, to, and some are still missing. I know, I remember some that I made that were more complete that I haven't found yet. So hopefully I will.

**00:31:15**

**ADAM HYMAN**

Now why didn't you worry about, in your, no, I'll come to that question later. Okay, so I know you're starting to shoot these films even before, like, your painting practice...

**00:31:29**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Yes.

**00:31:28**

**ADAM HYMAN**

...had taken off in any way.

**00:31:31**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Right.

**00:31:31**

**ADAM HYMAN**

So really, like, what else were you exploring in them aesthetically?

**00:31:35**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Well, the first films, we can go in kind of, as I remember them, in, the first films I had, again, heard about these, I had hear about these performances, let's strike that whole, start again. I had heard about these be-ins, you know, because they, the first ones were in San Francisco, in Grant Park.

**00:32:04**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

I knew there was going to be some ones down here, and I, because of Peter Bergman, and I'd heard that there was going to be a series of them. I first, I think there was one first at, up at Griffith Park, near the merry-go-round. I didn't record that. But I went to, so we took a bunch of cameras with us to Elysian Park, and then I made, and that's turned into Elysian Park One and Two.

**00:32:32**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And one of them was a, I had a Bauer, a really nice, I think it was the, called the CL-107XL if I can remember. It was a great camera with a, like a hand, a stem on it. And had a great, you know, about a 45 millimeter lens on it. Big lens for a super eight. And, you could make a double, triple, exposures.

**00:33:05**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And, I worked with filters, and it was kind of like painting. You know, I'd done, it's true I hadn't, I was still a kind of a student painter, and I hadn't completed my education yet. But, these films seemed complete. I mean, they just seemed like finished works. Without any, without knowing, without studying film, you know.

**00:33:32**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

I recently went to a lecture with, the lecture that, or the screening and lecture that Mark Toscano put on at The Hammer about the films that were restored by Mark. And I think it was interesting, when they all said they wanted to, they, many, or a few of them were SC film student, but they all wanted to drop out.

**00:33:55**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

They couldn't wait to drop out. And I think, what we were about then, I mean, I'll consider myself part of the group, now, since I didn't know them then, and because I didn't go to film school. But there was a free-- there was a freedom that they were looking for, that I was looking for.

**00:34:19**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And I suspect they were looking for, that wasn't at the SC Film School. Or UCLA, either. But I remember when I showed my films to these documentary filmmakers, you know, they just dismissed them as frivolous. Frivolous experimentation. Not serious documentary work. And that's what they were doing. I mean, one of them, you know, a couple of them were making, doing exposé about the United Fruit Company in Guatemala.

**00:34:49**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And it's true, I mean, they were, I suppose, on one, in one sense, frivolous in terms of its social impact, or import. But anyway, I was having a great time making these things. Making these films. So they were important enough for me to at least save them. I didn't throw them away.

**00:35:09**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

So in the range, what other stuff did you, what was the range of other things?

**00:35:13**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

Well I made another...

**00:35:15**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

That you shot and documented?

**00:35:15**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

Yeah, I mean, you know, I was, I did, I used drugs. [laugh] I, I'll admit it. And, so one film I made was called SCORE, and that's, the score is, you know, is to, like, score some grass. And so, a friend, a couple of friends and I were out looking for grass in Hollywood, and I just, my friend went in and, to make the buy, marijuana.

**00:35:49**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And, and I filmed while he was in. I filmed him going in, and I filmed him coming out. And that became a film which I called SCORE. I made a film, which I can't find called THE CASTLE. When I was going to Chouinard, there was a castle up in Silver Lake where many of the students had lived. And we used to hang out there.

**00:36:14**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And I made a film. I mean, it's just, it's like, I can't explain how these films were constructed. I mean, it's been 40, 45 years. All I know is there is, you know, multiple exposures, there's the use of filters. And there's painting on the films, there's altering of the film stock. So I was just kind of trying to do, what can I do today that's different, basically.

**00:36:48**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

Let's do something different, let's do something that's cool. And I think that's what it was, you know, what they were all about. I mentioned before about the narrative film in Topanga. I made the, a film in McArthur Park called THE LAST STATEMENT OF PAINTING. And I used that title because everybody was talking about the death of painting during this time.

**00:37:16**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

So I made, I set up two cameras and had a couple of friends and my wife and my, holding my, Noah, my son, he was probably six months old, sitting on a park bench in McArthur Park. And I, and the two cameras, and was shooting at the same time. And I used filters. Now looking back, I thought that, I thought that it might have been influenced by I AM CURIOUS, YELLOW, but I don't think so.

**00:37:53**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

Because I made this film before that. So I used a red, yellow and blue filter. And it must be because they're primary colors in painting or something. I don't know why. But maybe just because I had red, yellow and blue filters. I mean, you know, it's like, I'm not sure if there's anything more philosophical than that.

**00:38:11**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

I made a second version, I mean, with the, I made several hours, we were there all day. And so I made a number of different films, just out of that, out of that footage. And what I call now, which I edited, I called, what do I call it? THE LAST STATEMENT IN PAINTING TWO. ONE and TWO. And that is a kind of, a direct assault on the film stock with paint and spray paint and everything else. And so that, you know, the first, so I mean, I've got, I made some, I made one in 16, which I can't find as well. But so...

**00:39:00**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

Now did those exist as, like, single objects? Did you make multiple prints?

**00:39:08**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Oh, no, I never made multiple prints of anything I've ever done. So, you know, after I showed them at our film parties, or with friends, I put them into storage, and that's where they went. And that's where they stayed. [laugh] And, and it wasn't until, like I said, recently, I saw other visual artists making films, I wanted to do it.

**00:39:34**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And so I was working with a young film editor, I was trying to save these on DVDs, so I sent them off to a lab in Canada to transfer them. So we used, we transferred them to AVI files. Which is a, I know, it, it's a, it was a good enough format for Final Cut Pro because they were, all the films are silent.

**00:39:58**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And the only film I ever made that could, was called TIME. This film I made, started in Connecticut. Which is, I used to show with a recording of "The Time Has Come Today" by the Chambers Brothers. Um, that film somehow got shortened, so it doesn't really sync up with that. And I don't particularly like sound with any of them, anyway, now.

**end of tape**

## TAPE 4: SAM ERENBERG

00:00:45

SAM ERENBERG

We were up in San Bernardino Mountains and I decided, let's make a film about going down the mountain. And so I decided to sit in the back seat and film while Elena was driving and-- my wife. Right at-- I started the beginning with, at the top, with one role of film, just shooting out the window. I said let's try something else. I'm going to use the rearview mirror. And so, we backed up and went back up to the top.

00:01:35

SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)

And I put a new role of film in and I shot the whole-- in, I believe it was in slow motion. But I can't remember. I don't know. I think it must have been more because it was longer trip. And we're talking about 40, almost 45 years ago that I'm trying to recall exactly what I did. But the whole film was shot through the rearview mirror. And so, the title marker came both from these, the markers that mark the depth of the snow on the side of the road because you could see them as the car was passing by through the rearview mirror you could see out through the back window these markers, dut, dut, dut, dut, dut [makes chopping motion with hand] as we descend the mountain.

00:02:28

SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)

But also I seem to remember, and I'm not sure if this was at the time or in retrospect, Dennis Hopper's famous *Double Standard*, which was shot at the corner of San Monica and Wilshire where there used to be at that corner an old standard gasoline station. And he eventually shot that photo from the back seat into, so you could see, you see the view in the photograph you see through the windshield the standard station and as well as the cars in the rearview mirror reflected.

00:03:14

SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)

And so, I thought, you know, it might have come from that. But I kind of doubt that I actually, that I probably didn't know. I think that photograph might have been made in the early 60s, 60 or 61. And I think the title came from *La Jetée* from Chris Marker who's really an influence on my work. I mean...

00:03:38

ADAM HYMAN

Why?

**00:03:39**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Well, I think Marker, or *La Jetée* was just a fantastic film. It blew my mind when I first saw it. But Marker's also a photographer. And he's a political, his, I mean, there's a lot of political content in his photography. And he made a series of photographs of the Paris strikes in 1968, which I must have seen. And so, since I've done so much work about the Watts Riots and in film, in books and installation work, I think Marker was probably an influence early on.

**00:04:20**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And I can't remember. Do you remember when *La Jetée* was made? But it must have been before. If not, it was...

**00:04:28**

**ADAM HYMAN**

*La Jetée* was made in 1959. [SE: *La Jetée* was made in 1962.]

**00:04:29**

**SAM ERENBERG**

1959, so I must have seen this before I made this film.

**00:04:42**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

But I experienced, yeah, I experienced, [laugh] I actually lived in the curfew zone of the Watts Riots and grew up with parents who were politically active. So, I mean this was already part of my being even though I hadn't perhaps made it in work, you know, the work hadn't been fleshed out yet. I had no-- I suppose, you wouldn't classify any of the work I made in film as political unless you consider making, I mean, that, everything made in the 60s was political.

**00:05:17**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

In that sense it was. But no overt political imagery or reference to any political event, I didn't do it until I started making painting and books and sculpture or installation.

**00:05:35**

**ADAM HYMAN**

Now, what did it actually mean to be living within the curfew zone of the Watt Riots?

**00:05:43**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Well...

**00:05:45**

**ADAM HYMAN**

What was the limitations of the curfew act?

**00:05:48**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Well, [laugh] gee.



**00:05:53**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

Well, I think it was probably, you know, maybe like Compton Boulevard on the south...

**ADAM HYMAN**

I don't want the geography, just what did it mean to you?

**00:06:03**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

Well, I mean, it was scary, to begin with. Like I say there were-- I wasn't afraid of the people doing, you know, like protesting or, I don't like to use that word, riot. But, for better, for want of a better term, rioting. I wasn't-- I was more concerned about the National Guard than the police. You know, having me being mistakenly shot, I did the performance piece, actually the last performance piece I ever made in 1983. [SE: I lived on the corner of Adams Blvd. and Hill St. in downtown Los Angeles, which was inside the boundary of the curfew zone. The curfew was from 6PM to 6AM. Many roadblocks were set up at major intersections. The unsettling aspect of living inside the curfew zone was that the California National Guard had brought in armored personnel vehicles with machine guns on them.]

**00:06:38**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

It was called the "Death of Fred Hendricks" about a young man who was trying to get home from work and the police shot him. He was running. And eventually he was perhaps told to stop. I don't know. I don't know exactly. I don't know the details. All I know is reading the newspaper I kind of, or I think perhaps my mother might have had this because she was doing all this research during the Watts Riots. So, I did this piece, a kind of memorial to him.

**00:07:16**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And he didn't seem, I mean, after the fact they found out that he was just, that he was coming home from work and not from making any kind of trouble. And he was running and probably didn't stop because he was scared to stop. And, I had the same feeling. So, obviously, I mean, I knew. I mean, I was kind of, I was caught in this kind of vortex. But, you know, I was, I kind of lost control. I mean, I didn't feel I had any control. I was kind of holed up in this loft.

**00:07:49**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And, you know, I'm calling people. And then after a couple of days, I got out. And I would go home. And where I think I mentioned before, you know, my mother was meeting with these reporters and, from out of town. But, you know, these events as an artist you kind of absorb this, it's difficult to make work right away. They'll be doing some documentation about the Peace Tower on Sunset Boulevard that was, artist participated in, the protest against the Vietnam War.

**00:08:35**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And Mark DiSuvero, the sculptor from New York as well as Lloyd Hamrol and some others helped organize that. Lloyd Hamrol is a Los Angeles artist. It takes, you know, you absorb these events and you let them digest or whatever. And it takes a few years. I mean, you don't write a novel about something like the month after something happens. You, it takes, you have to, there has to be some distance between the experience and what you, and then the work that comes out of it unless of course it's a documentary film, which I don't do.

**00:09:47**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

All right, so tell me more about the film *Time*.

**00:09:50**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

Oh. When we were back east... sorry, start again.

**00:09:59**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

The film *Time* began while we were living on an artist's commune if you want for a better name in Woodstock, Connecticut. And it started off with a subject of black magic. We had access to a sculptor's property. And he had a lake with a kind of an underground tunnel that left, that, over the lake where probably at one point they used to transport goods or something to the lake or from the lake. And so, we had all this, these spaces to make this film. And I shot all this raw footage in Connecticut.

**00:10:50**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And part of it was kind of black magic imagery. But it was kind of, it became kind of convoluted, kind of, part of it was a '68, the Robert Kennedy assassination happened during the making of this. And I was all, kind of bent out of shape about that. And so, I kind of got sidetracked by that. So, I had all this raw footage. And when I came back to Los Angeles, I looked at this footage and it didn't make sense.

**00:11:32**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

So, basically I just turned it into a one psychedelic kind of montage of, and you know, looking back I think for the filmography I said that it, there might have been an influence by *Chappaqua*, Conrad Rooks' treatise is on the 60s. I'm not sure. I'm not sure if that's the case. You know, I've tried to put all this stuff in context because I haven't been thinking about or, these films for so long. And so what was I thinking when I did this.

**00:12:04**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And that's the only thing I can think of. I tried to say, well, what does it look like. And I try to come up with something, you know, because we're looking at all these influences. I'm not sure which were actually influences and which weren't. I mean, it's hard to remember all that, you know, to say films that I saw what, and when and where I saw them and how they influence me, it's just a kind of, it's a big kind of like space.

**00:12:37**

**ADAM HYMAN**

Well it seems to me that to have a very concrete like, oh, this influenced me so I did that... It never works like that.

**00:12:45**

**SAM ERENBERG**

No, not at all. Not at all. And certainly in the visual arts, you know, art history. I mean, it's like there's no way I could say, you know, certainly I have, I mean, they're just filmmakers and films I love that, like for instance *The Saragossa Manuscript* made by this wonderful, I think his name was Hosh... , a Polish filmmaker. [SE: *The Saragossa Manuscript* (1965) was directed by the Polish filmmaker, Wojciech Has.] I can't remember his full name. But I had seen this probably in the early 60s.

**00:13:23**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And the film was about-- *The Saragossa Manuscript* was a treatise on the Spanish Inquisition. And this film was, is known for its amazing editing. And you kind of get lost. It's a very long film and you get lost in not knowing where you are and, in terms of time. It goes back and forth between past, present and future or-- and I think this film kind of had it, an influence on, I mean, on my own little short films, which are really kind of abstract.

**00:14:06**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

I mean, if you go a bit later I made a film called *Trajectory* where it's really a performative work. And I think as I started to make more films the work, because the performance and films started to overlap in the middle 70s. The last film I made was '77. But the first performance I made was '74. So, there were four years where both were influencing each other. And *Trajectory* is a, I'm actually manipulating the camera. So, the camera becomes a prop like a prop in performance.

**00:14:47**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And we're throwing the camera back and forth, another artist and myself. So, in that sense it's more like Gary Beydler's films in terms of space. And in that film I also was very careful how I picked the spot on the ocean. So, there were two horizons. One, the bluff on one side and then the horizon of the sky and the ocean on the other. And so, we, and then part of the film is swinging the camera over our, over the head in slow motion.

**00:15:29**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

So the other artist was standing just outside the area where the camera was swinging. So, as the camera went by him you had a reference point. And that distorted the body. Then you had the axis of the camera, the lens would hit, would show-- very often it would be the sky on these other two horizons. So, there were these reference points. And so that's, I mean, it's not stop action like Gary Beydler's work.

**00:16:05**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

But in terms of creating this kind of space in which all this action takes place is, and I was thinking about that. And I, and in these other films too even though the narrative is different or, you know, the manipulation of the film is different with painting the film, what happens is when you paint at least in my films, they, you created a kind of a density. What, it just created a kind of space that was very flat like painting. And so that's, so painting on the film created like a flattening of the space. And, so obviously that was an intent.

**00:16:49**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

Are you familiar with films of John Porter at all?

**00:16:51**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

No, I don't believe so.

**00:17:20**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

*Trajectory* was made in '77. I read recently I think in *Art Forum* that Steve McQueen the English video artist just made a film throwing the camera between I think it was her sister. Sister caught it and she would throw it back to him. So...

**00:17:45**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

Tell me about *The Silence*.

**00:17:46**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

Well, *The Silence* was just based on this Edgar Allan Poe fable. And it's kind of a dreary story about the devil and goes back to my interest in I think in Aleister Crowley through Kenneth Anger and this, and mysticism. I've kind of always been interested in Jewish mysticism and metaphysics. And it seems to go with the territory especially coming off the 60s. And so, I found this story, which is a kind of parable about this place in the desert somewhere.

**00:18:36**                      **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

It's nothing specific in the story. And there's basically three central characters, in the story. There's the narrator and then you have the person telling the story to the narrator. And then you have this other being, this mystical being who is, kind of seems to be controlling everything. And so, I tried to figure out how could I make a little short film and what the structure would be. And so, I invited some friends. All non, you know, non-professional actors.

**00:19:20**                      **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

I've never had a professional actor in any of my films. And I made it along the creek in Topanga Canyon that runs from throughout, from north to south. And the creek was full of water. So, I said, there had been a storm a few days before I shot, I started filming. And, you know, unfortunately one of the actors was killed in an automobile accident on Topanga Canyon Boulevard. His name was Alfonso Sosa. The three people are Martin Webber, Ronald Young and Alfonso Sosa were the three people.

**00:20:05**                      **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

Anyway the film is, you know, is a kind of a mood poem. And it's very abstract. You know, years before I, I do things like put Vaseline... I don't know where I got that idea. Somebody, I'm sure another filmmaker. Spreading Vaseline on the lens to, directly on the lens to create a kind of amorphous effect, you know, better than a filter or something. It worked fine, you know, so, much of the, the film of showing the water, but I cut the, I would cut the shots of the creek running in between the dialogue.

**00:20:51**                      **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

I mean, there's, the shots are basically just these two characters talking to each other and then kind of imaging this other figure. And so, and then on, to finish it off it was shot in black and white. But I wanted some color. So, I died the whole film blue. [laugh] And that's about a 20 minute film that I'm still searching for. But I did make a new version just last year of, from the outtakes. But that was made in final cut pro. And of course like I, it has some fades and that I could never do back when I made the original film or cut it.

**00:21:41**    **ADAM HYMAN**

So, that too is silent as well?

**00:21:44**    **SAM ERENBERG**

*The Silence* is silent and as all my films are.

**00:21:49**    **ADAM HYMAN**

Then *Nivea Milk*?

**00:21:53**

**SAM ERENBERG**

*Nivea Milk* was made around '72. I would suspect, these films are kind of half parodies, all of them on other filmmaker's work. So, it's not appropriation. But it's kind of, you know, I would see something and say, oh, that's you know, probably amuse me or something and I would want to make a film as a reaction to something else. And so this, you know, could have been one of Warhol's films that I thought were amusing with make-up.

**00:22:30**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

But, you know, at the time I was also seeing performative video tapes where I remember Eleanor Anton made a thing, it might have been around the same time, of, she slowly takes off her clothes and starts putting make-up on herself. But it's obviously a feminist piece. It's a kind of, it's black--, these were all portapak these video tapes. They're all black and white documentary type pieces, you know, recording performances.

**00:23:12**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

I mean, my films are all filmic. They were trying to maintain the character of film, which is not really what most visual artists were concerned with I don't think. I'm sure there were some. I mean, like Gary Beydler and Jack Goldstein. But even Jack's work was more kind of conceptual, little conceptual pieces rather than really, and I was, I was always concerned with maintaining the inherent quality of film, not that they would be beautiful.

**00:23:50**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

But they definitely have a quality that is quite different from video. And so, that, so the film again, it's a very small space. I think even used some close up lenses, which I normally didn't do. But the actor was just, I asked the actor to apply make-up. And *Nivea Milk* was just a, is a cover [pats cheek], make-up and so, it was just some ...close ups. And it was all kind of out of focus.

**00:24:31**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And I like that. And I believe there was an American flag. So, it's a little kind of anti-war touch to the film, underneath on the table was covered with an American flag. I'm not sure if that had anything to do with formally with what the actor was doing-- all she's doing is putting make-up on. So, there's nothing personal about it. It's just like she's a prop in a sense or at least, you know, an actor doing this, making this act of putting this on.

**00:25:06**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And so, I was, by '72 obviously I was, I made a lot of paintings, so I don't know if there's any relationship to painting the face and painting canvases. But, you know?

**00:25:21**

**ADAM HYMAN**

So, now, all these films where were you seeing them at all?

**00:25:26**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Well...

**00:25:27**

**ADAM HYMAN**

Or were you?

**00:25:28**

**SAM ERENBERG**

I wasn't actually. I mean, I...

**00:25:33**

**ADAM HYMAN**

Why not?

**00:25:34**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Well, you know, I made them, I mean, first of all I'm not sure I would have had any outlet to or know of how to show them. I mean, I showed them to friends. Like I mentioned we had some film parties. But I wasn't getting any positive feedback from these documentary filmmakers about what I was doing. So, I didn't know what to do with them other than to put them away, which I did.

**00:26:03**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And I didn't know, I mean, all the work, all the films I had seen in all the theaters were mostly people, I mean, the only Los Angeles filmmakers that I knew of were maybe the Whitney Brothers and Kenneth Anger. I wasn't aware of anybody. I mean, I wasn't aware of Pat O'Neill or Morgan Fisher. Jack I knew because we'd had gone to-- Jack Goldstein I knew his work. And I did know, I didn't know Gary Beydler's work at all.

**00:26:42**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And Gary and I showed in the same gallery. Ellie Blankfort Gallery and it was a gallery in her home. And Gary was making sculpture. I had no idea he made films. So, I mean, we could have, and I assume, I think I looked at his film at his history. He did show his films. But I don't know you know, since I wasn't aware that he made any I wouldn't have known. I wouldn't have known to even talk to him about film since I didn't know he made films.

**00:27:13**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And it was the same with others. I mean, there were so few people in the art world, in the Los Angeles art world making film. And so, I just wasn't aware of it, you know? If I had known, I know that there was a few presenting organizations there back then. But I had never heard of them. And everything I saw was, were artists mostly all from New York. You know, the ones I mentioned, Shirley Clarke, Brakhage, Vanderbeek, I mean, those people didn't live in Los Angeles. So, or maybe they did and I didn't know about them.

**00:28:06**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

You know, I mean, it just didn't, I didn't put it together somehow.

**00:28:25**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And ... in that symposium that I saw at the Hammer. They were talking. They never, I mean, generally they didn't put titles on their films. Of course they were 16 and titles cost more money. And I really didn't have very much money as well. So, I didn't have titles. I didn't even have, you know, it was kind of this raw footage. So, you know, some of them are complete.

**00:28:53**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

But these films were planned. Some of them were planned. They're three and a half minutes because that's the length of a cartridge of super eight or eight millimeter film. So, I plan these films to be three and a half or seven minutes long because if there was, I mean, they're cut as well, the longer ones are cut. But I generally didn't want to cut them. [laugh] I mean, it's just more work. And, you know, since I wasn't making them for, to be viewed or at least to be screened because I didn't know, I didn't have any outlet then. There wasn't any need to make a finished product.

**00:29:34**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

So, why did you make them?

**00:29:35**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

So, why? Why did I make them? [laugh] Well, it was a visual expression, you know? I mean, obviously it, you know, it filled some need I had to make, to work in this format. And, but I mean, it was kind of a, it was a 10 year period of work. And, you know, I mean, it's hard to explain, you know, why I stopped, why I just didn't be, continue as a filmmaker. I don't know.

**00:30:10**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

And then what was the relationship [unintelligible] between those and performance?

**00:30:17**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

Well, ... *Nivea Milk* was a kind of documentation of a performance. I mean, unlike Eleanor Anton's video, which is more personal and political. I mean, this was still an action, a kind of performance, a camera documenting some kind of performance. So, half my films have a kind of performative nature to them. Certainly *Trajectory* does. Certainly I mean, *Elysian Park One* and *Two* have a, you know, it's a woman dancing mostly in the, one and two women dancing to some music that is not heard.

**00:31:09**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

In fact that same footage was in another piece I saw recently. Who's the, I'm trying to think of the name of the performer, the conceptual artist who had a show at MOCA a couple years ago. *Rock My Religion*. Dan Graham.



**00:31:35**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

Yeah, and part of- he made that, I think in 1972- and there's a part of that film called Hippies. And in that section of his video, which is about an hour long, the same woman who's in my film that I made five years earlier is in his video. So, he must have either shot it himself. He was there or he used some stock footage that someone else shot. But, it's a kind of a performative aspect to it. I mean, I'm documenting, so it's kind of a verite of these women dancing kind of in slightly slow motion.

**ADAM HYMAN**

We talked about this some, but *The Last Statement of Painting* one and two, where there things about those that you wanted to...

**00:32:32**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

Yeah, that was definitely, I mean, it was a kind of pun or at least that the cliché, the painting is dead was, I was just hearing that at that time. It was 1970. And that was almost at it's height, this kind of refrain. You hear it from every, from all quarters, that painting was dead. And so, at least in terms of titling of painting, the last, I mean, *The Last Statement of Painting* that was a kind of a glib title that I chose for that.

**00:33:02**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And then using red, yellow and blue in *The Last Statement* number one and actually painting on the film stock to kind of prove, you know, to make a kind of declarative statement of resistance. No, painting isn't dead. I'm painting on the fucking film. So, basically it's as simple as that. And, you know, I mean, having the three people on the bench sitting static kind of like a painting right? They didn't move. I mean, they moved slightly.

**00:33:34**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

The only movement would be people walking behind them where you see the cars on Alvarado Street slowly going by. But the three, you know, I gave instructions to the three actors and baby Noah to sit still and not to leave. Although every so often they got up, but essentially, you know, I was creating a kind of a proscenium, this kind of space that was kind of flat. And, so the way I looked at it you see the park and the trees behind.

**00:34:09**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

But the bench is like a proscenium and these three actors are moving slightly within the parameters of the bench. But it does, you know, the cameras are, I just turn the cameras on and shot. And subsequently I made some video tapes that were apart of my installations later on, like in the 90s, where the camera just, it's just one shot. So there is a big difference. You mentioned when you first saw my work that the camera moved a lot.

**00:34:42**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

Part of it I think might have been that I was always on edge when I made these films. And, you know, I couldn't hold still. Half of them were moving automobiles. But part of it too, you know, I was probably stoned a good deal of the time making these films and it's hard to hold the camera still. But then subsequently everything-- when I shot in video there were these pieces that documented a place or a space. And I did a piece about... [technical and break in tape]

**00:35:23**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

...became kind of a drug haven.

**00:35:28**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

So, you're using video and film to document spaces?

**00:35:32**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

That's one aspect of it, yeah. Yeah.

**00:35:39**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

When did that come into play?

**00:35:40**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

Oh. Well, I mean I made one piece. It was kind of a video installation about the death of Roland Barthes, a French writer. And he was killed crossing the street after a lecture he gave. And so, the video is one shot. It's an hour long shot of the street in front of the college where he was hit. And so, cars are going by and you see the French flag blowing in the wind. And these cars are going by and they're putting on their brakes and you see, and you hear the ambient sounds of traffic and a child just kind of screaming in the back ground and just an hour, you know, in the late afternoon.

**00:36:45**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And so I was trying to kind of capture without obviously anybody there, although at one point a man, who could have been a professor at the college, with a brief case in his hand crosses the street and, in the approximate spot where Barthes might have crossed. So, he becomes a kind of, you know, but, again it's kind of pure chance. I had no idea, we just...

**00:37:15**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

What college?

**00:37:15**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

College de France in Paris.

**00:37:20**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

What year? When did you get a video camera?

**00:37:25**

**SAM ERENBERG**

[laugh] I got a, we bought a High-8, a Sony High-8 in maybe the, I don't know, the late 80s. But we didn't use it very much. You know, because, well, we got it with the anticipation-- my wife bought it with the anticipation that she was going to continue to make ethnographic film. But she didn't. And I hired a French video artist named Dominique Belloir to shoot. [SE: The one-hour video was shot in Paris by Dominique Belloir and her daughter.]

**00:37:58**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

I gave her instructions on what to shoot. It just so happens that her own work are depictions of places. And so it was very natural for her to be able to complete that piece.

**00:38:15**

**ADAM HYMAN**

How do you feel about what your view is of pieces such as that it seems to me or in experimental film or one aspect of structural filmmaking. But then there's also an element of other later experimental documentaries or so forth, which are very dependant upon prior knowledge of an audience to fully suffuse the piece with meaning and irony and so forth.

**00:38:49**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Well, I mean, obviously these films I was, I made my last film when I was 30, I mean, I started when I was 22, and my last one I was 32. And the video work is, I was already in my late 40s or middle 40s. So, I was a more a, you know, kind of tested artist. And I had not done any kind of installation work, there was no context for making these films other than the pure joy of making them.

**00:39:28**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And making a video for the art world is quite different. I mean, it was, you know, the piece was part of a larger installation with photographs of artists holding all the books, which I, there were documentary photos. I made, and the props, the books were actual props. And the piece was about color as well because all the books were bound in different colored cloth. And so there was a table in the installation with the books as props. So, you had all these different elements working together in this exhibition.

**end of tape 4**

## TAPE 5: SAM ERENBERG

00:00:43

SAM ERENBERG

I was hanging out with Cheryl Bowers who taught at UCSB in the art department and we both involved with Contemporary Arts Forum and so we were programming lectures, performances, exhibitions. And then finally we had a space. And so, we wanted, you know, at that time the arts were going through this really dramatic shift. And part of it was this, you know, a change from a kind of, from art school to university, college environment. So, you had other disciplines beginning to be felt and influenced.

00:01:43

SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)

And everything from identity, politics to structuralism to feminism to multiculturalism. And all this was kind of fermenting and affecting art education and we wanted to-- and the term multidisciplinary was also in the air-- and we wanted to grade something. The term actual came from my friend James Lee Byars the artist who did-- who didn't want to be called a performance artist-- he did actions. And the actionist was the Viennese, a group of Austrian performance artists.

00:02:33

SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)

Paul Schimmel created this "Out of Actions," very, very excellent show. And it was 1949 to 1970. By the way covered much of what we've been talking about in that exhibition.

00:02:45

ADAM HYMAN

The MOCA show? The documents of performance?

00:02:50

SAM ERENBERG

Yes, and its origins in concrete art and other movements.

00:02:57

ADAM HYMAN

The show is good for something.

00:02:59

SAM ERENBERG

Yes, you know, he's more than good. And the historical shows he's done over the years are excellent. And I think very influential if not here in L.A. than around the world. So, I lost my train of thought. Actual symposium.

**00:03:30**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And so, we met as a committee, my wife, artist Bill Anderson, Richard Dunlap, Cheryl Bowers, who became Ciel Bergman at one point. And we got a grant, a couple of grants from the California Arts Council and National Endowment and put together, and started putting feelers out about something that we might do, which would be a kind of a series of dialogues, open dialogues. Kind of in the Socratic method. And finally we decided on some people in Santa Barbra and others, Chick Strand, the filmmaker, my wife had probably saw her films.

**00:04:29**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

I don't think she knew her, but saw her films because she went through the same program that Chick did at UCLA in ethnographic film. Gene Youngblood came and participated. She had also studied with him at UCLA and knew him. He spoke about the cybernetic revolution. Something that many of us didn't even, wasn't even aware of. Remember 1981, so the coming cybernetic. Michael Moerman was another instructor in anthropology who I think co-taught in the ethnographic film. Another of my-- he talked about language patterns. [SE: Dr. Michael Moerman, taught in the Anthropology Department at UCLA. He studied language patterns.]

**00:05:17**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

Niccolo Caderni was a theoretical physicist who was at the Institute for Theoretical Physics at Santa Barbara. Let's see. Richard Hecht was a, he taught Jewish history I think in the Department of Religious Studies and talked about a sacred space. And then we invited a few artists. Fred Stofflet, the percussionist, and Rita Yokoi a visual artist. And they did some pieces on the ground of the Natural History Museum in Santa Barbara. That's where the symposium took place in 1981.

**00:05:59**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And so it was scheduled over a weekend, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. And there was a panel discussion. But I forgot. I'm sorry. Leslie Labowitz, a performance artist who works with plant material. In fact she's going to be doing something on 18<sup>th</sup> Street. She collaborated with Suzanne Lacy on a number of performances. And they're going to recreate a bunch of that for a Pacific Standard Time. Anyway she was invited and participated. So, on Friday night there was a panel discussion with all participants.

**00:06:38** **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And then each participant did a workshop. And at the end everybody got together again and spoke about how the weekend had change or how it permuted or how, and, you know, a lot of it was hard to follow, because it was very unstructured. That was the biggest complaint. But I think it was a kind of unique experience. And I'm now remembering actually the moderator who is the cultural historian José Argüelles SE: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jos%C3%A9\\_Arg%C3%BCelles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jos%C3%A9_Arg%C3%BCelles) who was at that time I think at the University of Denver.

**00:07:24** **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

But he became a head of a place called the Naropa Institute in Boulder, kind of spiritual center or the study of consciousness. And he was our moderator at least for the first night. And so those, I think those, if I remember all of them.

**00:07:44** **ADAM HYMAN**

And what was the importance of organizing it for you?

**00:07:50** **SAM ERENBERG**

Something to do. [laugh]

**00:08:00** **ADAM HYMAN**

Tell me about the economics of your filmmaking.

**00:08:05** **SAM ERENBERG**

There is none.

**00:08:07** **ADAM HYMAN**

Tell me about that.

**00:08:08** **SAM ERENBERG**

Well...

**00:08:09** **ADAM HYMAN**

Two sentences.

**00:08:12** **SAM ERENBERG**

I mean, these films were made for a dime. And to tell you the truth when I started restoring them. Well, not really restoring them. They haven't been restored. But when I began transferring these films I thought maybe that somebody in the art world would be interested in showing them. And that they would be documented in some way. Like much of my other work, I mean, other than painting. I mean, right now we're in an economic environment where we can't even, I can't even imagine selling painting.

**00:08:55**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

I mean, it's very, very difficult now. But I mean, the films are, you know, there was such a kind of formative period that, you know, I just didn't know what to expect. But this young editor really, really thought that they were worthy enough to be seen. And so, she was the one that told me about John Wyatt. And then he liked them enough to show them. And in fact he thought that they were better, that he liked them a lot.

**00:09:36**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

So, he invited me to show one-- to show two of them at the, at his psychedelic shorts program. And then I contacted Alice Hutchinson and, who was then teaching at Cal -State Long Beach. And I knew she had done, written a book about Kenneth Anger. And I knew that she was doing organizing some film and video programs for Venice Biennale and consulting. So, I got her over and she liked them and then told me about you.

**00:10:12**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And so, you know, I think I'm maybe somewhat surprised, although maybe not. I mean, I just didn't know what I had actually, because I made them in the spirit of just pure kind of filmmaking without ever expecting them to be seen by any large amount of people. I was, and it, I think I was spurred on by this, by a younger visual artist working in the medium now. And it just gave me a little bit of, a little, a boost to be able to, you know, say, because I really didn't know any, of what the relationship was to my later work until I started showing them to a few friends of mine.

**00:11:04**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And they said do you realize this painting behind me now, do you see, which was made in 1999 how close that is to what *Trajectory* looks like, which you made in 1977. And I didn't really know.

**00:11:24**

**ADAM HYMAN**

How is it close to *Trajectory*?

**00:11:24**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Well, it's, it just, you know, it's [laugh] ...it has the same feeling. It has the same kind of sensibility as that film. And I don't how it does. But I mean, I didn't see it until it took another pair of eyes to look at this. I mean, I hadn't, since I have never shown this work in the context of my other work, I really, I wasn't sure how it all fit in. But now that I'm looking at it and I've lived with it, with the work for the past two years and I can see all the other work in context, now I can see how it all works together.

**00:12:09**

**ADAM HYMAN**

And what happen to your super eight camera after 1977?

00:12:17

SAM ERENBERG

Oh, I think we still have it somewhere. It's probably stored up in a garage up there in Santa Barbara maybe where all...

00:12:23

ADAM HYMAN

How long did you shoot any super eight?

00:12:26

SAM ERENBERG

I stopped in 1977.

00:12:30

ADAM HYMAN

So, I also fascinated by, all this material that you say you have that you just were documenting things. And what's the variety of that?

00:12:39

SAM ERENBERG

Well, it's so kind of fragile and I'm afraid to even put it through... I mean, some of the stuff I got caught in the-- I have an old super eight projector and it's not a very good one. It's not in good shape. So, the film gets caught in there and it stops and starts burning. And in fact - I actually incorporated that into the film *Time*. There's a burning part of the film, which I think is still in there as part of the film, which I kept. But the, which actually does still go through the, a projector, but barely. But...

00:13:26

ADAM HYMAN

You could think about donating it to something like the Academy of Film Archives, they have a large eight millimeter home movie collection. It could give a much fuller picture of the art scene in Los Angeles.

00:13:34

SAM ERENBERG

Well, I've come, you know...

00:13:44

SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)

I did. I called Ross Lipman and had a conversation with him through the urging of Alice Hutchinson. And what...

00:13:52

ADAM HYMAN

He's at UCLA. I mean there's May Hadong and Mark Toscano.

00:13:56

SAM ERENBERG

Right. I did try to contact them. I wasn't successful. I think, and I emailed Mark several months ago. But I didn't get a response. But, Ross said yeah, I'll take just about everything. You know, he said he doesn't have money to archive much of anything or certainly not super eight or at least my super eight. But I sent him a few of the films on a DVD. And I haven't heard back. But I mean, I suppose when the time's right, I'll do that. But he's, I know he's busy.



**00:14:35**

**ADAM HYMAN**

Beyond the two of them is another person at the Academy who specialized in home and amateur movies who would just be to be open to, you know, taking a collection of eight millimeter documentation of L. A. from the 70s, and they catalog it and transfer it and so forth.

**00:14:58**

**SAM ERENBERG**

I don't think of these as home movies.

**ADAM HYMAN**

I know, but in the grand world of how super eight is considered, it's just the term that works better than any other. They are not home movies. But not the finished films, just all the other stuff.

**00:15:15**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

Yeah. What happened is, the only context I had for experimental film, like I mentioned before, was seeing all these kind of so-called masters, Brakhage, Connor, Van der Beek, Clark, etcetera, etcetera. And that was the only context I had. After seeing recently the screening of Morgan Fisher, Tom Andersen and his work, and I liked it a lot. In fact I think Tom Andersen's maybe the one I, the one filmmaker who's work is closest to mine maybe in a certain sense, although I think all of them have had certain aspects.

**00:15:54**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

But what I saw was that these films were definitely L. A. They were different than those films made in New York. They look different. They felt different. And I saw, I finally saw what was missing for all those years. A group of filmmakers who have worked here and who are, many who are still working. And I said, you know, my little super eight films actually hold, I think hold up against these other even though they weren't 16. And I realize there's a certain prejudice for 16 millimeter versus super eight and eight. But, you know...

**00:16:36**

**ADAM HYMAN**

The exhibition of eight is so difficult.

**00:16:37**

**SAM ERENBERG**

It's so difficult. Although in Europe it's still, it's quite-- there are very specific screenings and parameters that are set up for screening super eight compared to here in the States.

**00:16:58**

**ADAM HYMAN**

And after whatever, 1973, '74, or even after that, did you go to see experimental films anymore anywhere because what you described in your film was mostly in the 60s and the Cinematech16. After that did you go to anymore?

**00:17:19**

**SAM ERENBERG**

No. I mean, I lived in Santa Barbara from '76 to '93. And I don't remember seeing much up there. And, you know, what I would see would be considered art films, foreign films, documentaries and more mainstream films, which is always, it's always been a continuing interest. But experimental film, I supposed it stopped when I stopped going. I mean, really the Cinematech 16 was the only outlet I saw for, you know, the rest were art films. I see, like this other category, experimental and art films.

**00:18:06**

**ADAM HYMAN**

And...

**00:18:07**

**SAM ERENBERG**

But I think now, is all broken down. I mean, I think there's so many visual artists making, working in film and video now. And in fact because High-8 and digital technology is so advanced. I mean, the quality is so good compared to what I, I mean, my films have faded. They're only ghosts of what they once were. Even the painted ones. I mean, they're just, they were like ten times more intense coloristically. So, just like a painting, you know, it has maybe a ten year lifespan.

**00:18:43**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And these films are only in facsimiles. But the technology is so much better now that you have visual artists really realizing their kind of dreams or their ideas in just fantastic ways. You know, just in animation and everything has change. I mean, in 1968 I worked for Bill Melendez Productions for about six or seven months. They did, they produced peanuts and Babar the Elephant, you know, cartoons for television and movies.

**00:19:27**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And I was a background painter. I mean, everything was still cut. It was, you know, everything was shot in 35 millimeter. But, you know, everything was, you know...

**00:19:40**

**ADAM HYMAN**

How was that done? What was involved with background painting for that?

**00:19:42**

**SAM ERENBERG**

Well, I either used acrylic paint or a kind of a water based paint. And you were given a black and white drawing and a story board and asked to make it. And...

**00:20:03**

**ADAM HYMAN**

What were you painting?

**00:20:07**

**SAM ERENBERG**

I was painting the background of a scene.

**ADAM HYMAN**

But how, physically?

**00:20:12** **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

Oh, physically, on like an eight by ten piece of paper. And then the cels would be attached to that and shot frame by frame. But my background paintings were a little too expressionistic for TV. But the last, you know, what really turned me off to that ultimately was sitting in a studio in a Hollywood sound stage with a bunch of people from Chicago for the advertising agency. We had made a, I think it was a Real Lemon animated commercial.

**00:20:57** **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

And we had worked months on it. And they didn't like it. And they just said start over again. [laugh] And I could, I think I quit shortly after that, you know? I couldn't, that was the end of that. But...

**00:21:13** **ADAM HYMAN**

Now were there any other key important cultural or ethnic identifications for you?

**00:21:20** **SAM ERENBERG**

Well, of course. I mean, my upbringing in Los Angeles. I mean, living in South, it's really not South Central. I'm not even sure that African-American community even likes that term any longer. It's South L. A.

**00:21:40** **ADAM HYMAN**

Nobody's ever liked the term South Central.

**00:21:42** **SAM ERENBERG**

Yes, maybe. So, many of my friends were African-American and Japanese because of school. And I mean, because of the make-up of my school too there was, you know, I had anti-Semitic experiences as well. But obviously the, you know, that didn't deter me at all. And I expressed myself, you know, politically and even my Jewish identity although I don't have a formal Jewish education.

**00:22:29** **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

You know, it's part of my-- and my parents weren't religious. I mean, they grew up, my father grew up speaking Yiddish in house. But they were social activists. And so, that's also an inherent part of the Jewish sensibility especially in America and expressing yourself socially. And, you know, my parents were both activist. I wasn't an official red diaper baby. But, I remember when I was ten years old after the Rosenberg's were executed my mother wailing on the living room floor like her mother had died.

**00:23:08**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

So, I mean, these experiences were pretty intense growing up. And, of course, you know, being hauled off to demonstrations from the time I was a kid. I mean, I always thought, you know, that's who my parents were. You know, dragging me to these demonstrations. So, that was my education. And that has a kind of ethnic kind of background to it in a way. And since my parents were-- I went to, I had so many African-American friends. And because of my parents involvement in local community of Baldwin Hills, that's part of who I am as an artist.

**00:23:58**                    **ADAM HYMAN**

Okay, I don't have any other questions. So, do you have any key points that you wish to address that we haven't touched on. Obviously, I haven't gotten into your painting.

**SAM ERENBERG**

I think the relationship to painting, you kind of went, huh?, So maybe that would have to be fleshed out by some curator somewhere [laugh].

**ADAM HYMAN**

Relationship to process artists, I didn't ask that.

**00:24:32**                    **SAM ERENBERG**

I mean, process, you know... Did you see what I wrote down as the answer? You were going to ask me process, and I said no, I knew artists. Nobody calls...

**00:24:46**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

Process art is term invented by Lucy Lippard or somebody like that. You know, she wrote this book *The Dematerialization of the Art Object*. Something, six years, it was like a very influential book. And I put, she wrote in like already, maybe it was 1970 or '69. I mean, it was already in the air. She was just picking up on it. But nobody called themselves a process artist. It would have been embarrassing to say, oh, hi, I'm a process artist. [SE: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Process\\_art](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Process_art)]

**00:25:27**                    **SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

Everybody's work was process oriented. So, it would be ludicrous to say you're a process artist.

**ADAM HYMAN**

Well, there were a few other performances that you said [unintelligible]

**00:25:49**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

Wolf's pieces, I was performing his pieces. I performed his pieces like in different places because he was such an influential guy in Santa Barbara and later at Cal Arts. You know, he basically started the performance art program at Cal Arts. He graduated I think in '71 or '72, about two years before me. Like I said, he was the reason I kind of went there. And then there's one thing I saw, one thing I wanted to mention.

**00:26:22**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

It's just an aside. It has nothing to do with me or, but I thought of kind of interesting. I see a relationship to Bas Jan Ader who's a filmmaker and I hope he's going to be in your program somehow. He should be. And Wolfgang. The piece I mentioned about the horse, riding the horse from Toronto to L. A. Well, I mean, Ader's idea of taking the sailboat from, all the way across the Atlantic Ocean. And that's, you know, he disappeared.

**00:26:59**

**SAM ERENBERG (CONTINUED)**

I see somehow it relates. I'm not sure. Who knows? Maybe somebody knows that, if he was influenced by Stoerchle [Wolfgang Stoerchle] by this piece. I kind of think...

**00:27:11**

**ADAM HYMAN**

Charles Lummis of the Lummis Home in North LA originally came to L.A. by walking here from Cincinnati writing newspaper columns as he walked. He had this whole following, in the late 1880s or 1890s.

**SAM ERENBERG**

Maybe Wolf was influenced by Lummis [laugh].

end of tape 5