

Kienholz Interview Part 1

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WESCHLER: One other piece that we talked about briefly, but not in this context, was the Back Seat Dodge. Is that an autobiographical memory also being worked out?

KIENHOLZ: Sure.

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KIENHOLZ: Oh, it was an old car that my father had when I was a kid. I borrowed it one night and went over the hill to Plummer, and there was a girl--I went out to Chatcolet Lake, as a matter of fact, to a dance. So I must have been at least sixteen, maybe seventeen--yeah, probably early on seventeen. Anyway, I went out to the lake, and this girl was out there, and I enticed her into the car. We got some beer and pulled off in the tules someplace and did intimate and erotic things all over her; and we sat there and drank beer and had a nice time. And I couldn't remember her name later. I thought, what a crazy situation--to be that intimate with a person and not know who they are. It just seemed wrong to me in a way. And then I got to thinking about back seats and Dodges and the kind of a world where kids are really forced into a cramped space in--maybe even a fear situation, certainly a furtive situation. Like what a miserable first experience of sex most kids go through. I mean, the back seats of cars. The car, of course, was space, territory. So you could lay in the back seat and do things with her. I just don't think that's very smart, very right. I think it's a lot better than kids have

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freedom of their own. Well, like my kids have their own houses. They can tell me to leave, and I'll leave. They can do as they please in the houses, and that's their space and their decisions, their territory. I just think that's better somehow than the back-seat culture that Americans went through, or, I guess, all people went through. I mean, it's not a phenomenon just to Americans; it's also a European phenomenon.

KIENHOLZ: Now, I had a lot of trouble with the Dodge. I decided to make it, and I knew cars of that vintage--or know them-- very well. So I decided in front how I was going to make it. And then the problem was to find a Dodge. So I started out looking through Watts. I went, Christ for two weeks--

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every day I'd get in my car and I'd drive down to Watts, talk with people, looking for an old car, talk to people, and doing all this stuff--going around and everybody saying, "Oh, yeah. We got one. Old Fritz has one up...." And, you know, I'd go up

and see old Fritz, and he'd sold his. I wanted a Dodge. I would settle for '36, '37, or '38, because in '39 they changed the style. I truthfully wanted a '38 because my father had a '38 at that time. I looked and looked and looked and it was just a disaster; I couldn't find one. And I almost gave up the whole thing. I just said one day, "The hell with it." And I went out to the beach, for some reason, with somebody--I don't remember who. And I was coming back, and I turned off of the Coast Highway

turned off into that canyon, and damned if there wasn't a '38 Dodge sitting there on the sidewalk--I mean,

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parked by the sidewalk. I slammed to a halt, and I went back and looked at it. There was a lot of junk stuff in it, and I was--oh, I was like crazy with it really because I wanted one so badly. I started poking around through it. If the owner had come out, he would have shot me. I poked around there, and there was a "For Sale" sign clear down in the bottom, under some tires and stuff. And I got the phone number. So I went back to the gallery and started calling, and finally I got this kid. He said, "Yeah." He says, "I'd sell it." I said, "What do you want for it?" And he said, "Well, oh, I'd have to have, geez, I'd have to, I'd have to have thirty-five dollars." And I said, "Okay." And he says, "Oh, yeah, but I don't know if I want to sell it because, see, I'm going in the service in three days, and I'm going to need it to do my last bit," or whatever. So I said, "Well, I'll give you thirty-five dollars. And you bring it to me when you're done driving it around, whatever, and I'll give you thirty-five dollars for it and drive you back home." He says, "Okay." I gave him the address and all that. So he showed up, and he showed me the car. And he wants to demonstrate it, wants to take me around the block and all that. I said, "No, that's okay." He said, "Well, yeah, but...." I said, "No, that's fine." He said, "Well, what are you going to do with it?" I said, "I'm going to cut it up and

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make it into a piece of sculpture." And he was just flabbergast. He said, "Yeah, but, well, why--but this is a good car."

I said, "I don't care about all that. I'm going to cut it up." And he was really--he wasn't too pleased about giving me the car, but he finally gave it to me, and I took him home.