



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Willard
Cummings, 1973 March 20

Contact Information

Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/services/questions
www.aaa.si.edu/

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Willard Cummings on March 20, 1973. The interview took place at Carnegie Hall, and was conducted by Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The original transcript was edited. In 2021, the Archives reconciled the audio with the transcript. This transcript replaces a previous version which was published to this website. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

PAUL CUMMINGS: Let me say it's the 20th of March 1973, Paul Cummings talking to Bill Cummings in his studio in Carnegie Hall. You were born in Maine right?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Yes, in Old Town, 1915.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And was your family there, I mean was that their—

WILLARD CUMMINGS: No, my father was working for the American Woolen Company. He and mother had met in Borderville where he was working in Bassboro and they were married and he was given a larger plant to manage in Old Town, Maine. I was the first child and my brother King was born about a year and a half later, also in Old Town. Then we moved to Skowhegan when he was given a larger mill and we lived in the millhouse which was a beautiful Bulfinch house located on the river there, which has unfortunately been torn down. Then in 1924 I think, he didn't particularly like the way the American Woolen Company was going. They actually wanted him to be head of it and he didn't want this so he started his own business. A shoddy business where he made, or the mill made lining for refrigerators and it was a very low-quality product. Then we moved to Wellesley Hills and—

PAUL CUMMINGS: When was that?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well, at Skowhegan three sisters were born. My family was interested in music and also interested in theater and I was interested in painting. In 1925 we moved to Wellesley Hills where we lived for three years and during that time I studied at Boston, first with Anna Coleman Ladd the sculptress in her studio on Clarendon Street. My brother and I both had tutors for schoolwork at this point and I went into Boston three days a week to study art.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, had you started drawing early on?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Yes, I had started drawing early in Skowhegan. When I was about six I drew all the time and I preferred it to I guess all sports and most everything else. And so I'd always drawn some and my family had taken me to Boston twice to see a couple of potters and Anna Ladd was one of them. She was a friend of the family's and she took me on as a student in her studio there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was that for sculpture or drawing or painting?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Oh, that was for sculpture. I copied a Michelangelo; *The Eye of David* and I copied *The Ear of David* I believe, and various things from plaster casts in those days. And it was quite exciting to me because Mrs. Ladd had several very exciting people posing in the studio. I remember at that time that I was studying with her she was doing a bust of Blanche Yurka who was playing in *The Wild Duck* in Boston at the Repertory Theater. Then through Lakewood, next to Skowhegan, you know, they have the oldest summer theater in the country. I'd always been interested in theater too, and very interested in theater people and liked them a lot.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That developed on your own or through family interests?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Oh the family was interested in the theater and naturally connected with it. Dad was the president of the company. Although he was running his own mill, he did

this, had an interest in it on the side. Which really helped them out because he was a good businessman. So our house was always filled with actors. Also another friend of the early days was Jere Abbott. He started the Modern Museum with Alfred Barr and had been at the Fogg, he taught at Bowdoin and left Bowdoin and went to the Fogg at about the age of 28. He was a good friend of Alfred Barr's and they traveled in Europe and Russia and France together a great deal. His father and my father were very good friends, and he was a good friend and the age of my family more or less. so he was in the house very often, and encouraged me a great deal at quite an early age. Also when Blanche Yurka was there one summer, she came to do one play and spent the entire summer with us. I invited her to stay with us because I had met her with Mrs. Ladd and she came for one week's rehearsal, one week's performance and stayed on the rest of the summer with us. She was great fun, very energetic and very dramatic and very exciting and she also drew quite well. So on rainy days we'd take charcoal and chalk, charcoal out of the fireplace, and we'd do portraits and draw. At that time Jere liked one of the drawings I did—I must have been about eleven. He liked one of the drawings very much, which I saw years ago in his house which pleased me very much. Let's see, then we moved to Wellesley but we always came back to Skowhegan in the summertime. We had a cottage on the lake which is now part of the school property.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, I'm curious about your interests in music, theater, I suppose also literature. Did you read a lot as a child?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well, we had a tutor and we read Greek plays and things like that. I didn't read very much contemporary literature at that time. As I recall we weren't allowed to read Zane Grey stories.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, which everybody else was reading.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Which everybody else was reading except us. Also we were studying violin at the time. We had two violin teachers, two lessons a week. One with Felix Winternitz who had been the first violinist under Munch, the original Munch at the Boston Symphony, a remarkable man, and with an assistant of his called Irene Forte. All the children played. My brother played the violin, I played the violin, one sister played the cello, another one played the piano, and another played the harp. So we were being quite pushed into music. Then in Boston this all continued, the girls continued studying music and as I say I was studying with Winternitz as well as studying art. Jack Eastman, who is now the director of the Skowhegan school, and I used to take the trolley from Wellesley Hills to the Boston Museum for the Saturday morning drawing classes at the Boston Museum. That was guaged very much for children, I mean we'd do watercolors and details of Egyptian tombs and that sort of thing, copies of Chinese screens.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, was the music your interest or was that really a parental interest?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: I think it was maternal and paternal interest. I liked it, I liked music very much, but I was not a good musician at all. I was really very poor. I mean I had very sort of sentimental tastes, so on. I mean I liked, you know, Kreisler and the sort of sentimental music much better than Bach and Mozart.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you still play or not?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: No, I decided in Paris years later, 1928 or 9, that I couldn't do both painting and sculpture and music because I had really gotten, studying a lot, with Boulanger and my head violin teacher was Master Schier who was a contemporary of Nadia Boulanger and the second fine teacher I had at the conservatory was the young man whose first concert we went to a St. Raphael [ph], was Gino Van Visconti [ph]. You know they were pretty good strong stuff and I got to be pretty good but I figured I'd never make it as a fiddler, and I really was much fonder of painting and sculpture. And so in Paris the first year we had courses there in a school called the Ecole Pascale.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you get to Paris though?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well, the family took my brother and me over and we stayed there and we stayed there for the year. And then mother and the three girls came over the next year and we had an apartment in the Bat Marceau. And then I took special courses at the Sorbonne and we had a tutor, an English tutor for algebra, or for math and Latin and English. Then I took courses at the Sorbonne with people like Focillon and so forth. I was about fourteen, fifteen, or fourteen. I took courses, sit-in courses at the Sorbonne which I loved and

then I was studying also part of the time at the Academie Julian, and also studied privately with a sculptor named Louis Aman-Jean, a sculptor not well known in this country, well known in France in the time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how did you like all this milieu that you were in?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: I loved it. I was a compulsive worker and I loved it. I spent long hours in the studio and then would come home and get the schoolwork done. We worked long days in those days and we had a wonderful time. We all were very enthusiastic sightseers, we went to the Louvre very often, we went to Notre Dame, also went to opera and ballet and all that sort of thing and liked it very much. Saw Nijinsky, saw quite a few people who of course are now legend. And then my brother and I took several trips, very simply, through the country on our own time before we came back to America in the spring leaving from Le Havre. We took a three weeks trip on our own, just station to station as we wanted to do it. And I was very interested in medieval art at the time, I was crazy about Gothic architecture and Romanesque architecture and I had studied it with Focillon at the Sorbonne. And also the man who had an apartment upstairs, a chap named Harrison who was in the consulate there, he and his two sisters and mother lived above us, he was an ardent medievalist and I was very fond of him so this became a really raging enthusiasm. My brother and I spent a week in Chartres going through every single piece of stained glass in each window, you know, day by day by day by day and going through every piece of sculpture on all of the three portals and also doing watercolors and Portion and Charitt [ph] so on.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How much time did you spend in France then?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: We were there for two years, from October of '28 until Spring of '30.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And why did you come back, was that—

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well there was something in America called the Crash, so having really lived in Paris with the best teachers and everything in the world we came back. Dad wanted us to keep the big house in Wellesley Hills and continue the same sort of education we had been having on a more moderate scale, and mother didn't want to do that. In the meantime they had bought an old farm adjoining our summer property which they had bought really to have as an adjunct to the Eastman Music Camp which was run by friends of theirs, Sir Frances Finney, Walter Damrosch, Howard Hanson and so forth and mother didn't want to move back to Wellesley with Dad being in Skowhegan running the mills and he had closed his Boston office which he had when we lived in Wellesley Hills. So we moved into this house that hadn't been lived in for thirty years, and the old nurse that had been with the Cummings grandparents had come with us, come with mom and dad when my brother and I were born, and a girl named Yaya [ph], a Mexican girl, she and her sister. She was a woman of I guess forty by this time. She was about four and a half feet tall and she married an almost seven-foot Swede from Westport, Maine who was going into either a gas station or a chicken business so before we got home from Europe, Dad who had always indulged her anything she wasted because she was an absolute little saint, had set her up, set her husband up in the chicken business and when we came back from Europe, Pete Whiting was his name. He and mother did not see eye to eye on how to run the whole establishment and so one morning we woke up with 6,000 chickens to feed before we went to school. In the meantime we had been given an old Buick by some friends of Dad's and I was old enough to have a license, which was fifteen in those days, and so I was the family chauffeur for school projects. It was probably the best thing that ever happened to us because we were certainly well on the way to being totally spoiled.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how did you like this shift in life, going to school and not having tutors?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Oh, I thought it was great. We had this old house and we all came home and scraped paint and took off tin ceilings and finally restored the house to what it had been originally in 1792 and which was my mother's enthusiasm Dad's too, he liked it very much and we all liked it. So we'd scrape paint and candle eggs, we raised hatching eggs. To get a little more pay for them than just ordinary eggs, then we would kill and dress chickens and deliver them on weekends to various institutions, the Elmwood Hotel, the Central Maine Sanitarium and several other places. We would clean and dress as many as 250 chickens a weekend and those were the days when they were dipped into hot water and hand plucked. We continued that and I almost finished high school in Skowhegan but I didn't. In 1931 they

decided that they could get along without me as a farm hand and I came to New York and lived at the Sloane House and went to Grand Central in the daytime and the Art Student's League at night.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you pick those two schools?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well there weren't too many other schools in New York at that time. And there was a man that I liked very much named George Oberteuffer who just returned from many years living in France and he was a very fine painter and I liked him very very much. And then I always wanted to be a portrait painter from the very beginning.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How so?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Just because I like painting portraits. I was crazy about people and I thought portraits were very handsome, very beautiful and Wayman Adams was teaching at Grand Central in those days and I suppose that was why I went there to begin with. He was a good teacher.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who else did you study with at those schools?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well, I started studying when I was in Boston. I started studying with Philip Hale three weeks a day, who was then sort of king of Boston. I was too young to work at the Museum School where he taught but I worked in his studio and we got along very well. And at that time another student was Robert Haze. He was at Harvard, he was more than I was, he would come in every Saturday with his box of charcoal all chopped down to pinpoint and worked very meticulously as well all did. And Mr. Hale's daughter, Nancy Hale, the writer would come in too.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What would you draw?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well, I drew from casts and then I did several self-portraits and several still-lives. Then I started painting a little bit although he kept me drawing most of the time and these were very complete drawings in charcoal or red chalk and all done in parallel lines, all striped which was Mr. Hale's technique. He did a very fine book on Vermeer, which I never read, which was very large and impressive and he had acquired a reputation in France as a very fine draftsman. He was a wonderful man. I don't know that I'm crazy about his work but he was a brilliant raconteur and he liked me very much I guess because I was a nuisance. He had quite few old ladies in the studio he'd tell marvelous stories to and I at fourteen would miss the point entirely and then say, what happened Mr. Hale, and then I used to work on his pictures during lunch hour too. He painted in little strokes so I didn't see that he would notice if I did a little work on them so I sued to work on them, both the pastels and the paintings, while he was out to lunch when I wasn't with him. And he never did notice the difference, or if he did notice he never said anything. His wife Lilian Westcott Hale. That used to annoy me a great deal because the general gossip around Boston was that she was a finer painter than he was and I wasn't going to buy this at all. But anyway the Boston days were very exciting.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well what did he talk about? You know, his ideas about art or things you'd pick up besides the drawing, the techniques.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well, he didn't very much, he talked about people and characters. That is to say he was a very good raconteur. He was very fond of Seurat. I know many of his students would copy a little Seurat print. He was interested in pointillism although he didn't paint that way himself. He painted in narrow sort of impressionist brush strokes but nothing adding up to impressionism at all. He seemed to favor a kind of impressionism and did very literary I suppose intentionally romantic pictures. One of the landscapes was called of course *Bohemia* and had later become the—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: So he was a very amusing and marvelous man. He gave a very fine anatomy course and he used to drag me along when we gave one at the Boston Public Library, and also at the Museum. He used to take me around to those lecture courses and sit me in the back row.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Were they given from drawings that he had made or—

WILLARD CUMMINGS: They were mostly given—the big book he used was Dunlop's Anatomy and he has all kinds of charts, he had skeletons and charts and he talked about muscle structure, but my recollection of it is that the course was really based on knowing anatomy rather than the relationship of anatomy to drawing, how it worked as being useful to drawing never seemed to be a consideration.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Bones and the muscles.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Yeah, just the impression of actually having the knowledge. But there was never any attempt as far as I remember to relate this to drawing or even to be flexible with it. It was just to get the actual technical knowledge of the structure of the body and the muscles of the body.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have you found that useful in the years?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Yes, but I think it was a little academic, a little staid and a little dull. I've heard Bob do a lecture on anatomy and he makes it much more alive, much more vital and much more part of the whole group. He gives you reason to the whole thing, how it functions and so on. Mr. Hale didn't. You learned anatomy in the same way you'd cover a salad course at dinner or something like that. I mean he didn't relate to it, or if he did he didn't convey his relationship to me of why and how anatomy was really an alive and exciting thing and worked in terms of really fine drawing. I mean you never looked at any master drawings, in connection with these things, it was just Dunlop's Anatomy and Mr. Hale himself.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So you became a great surgeon?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: So I became a great surgeon, right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What kind of art were you interested in at that point?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Only to be a portrait painter.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But I mean of older painters, which ones interested you? Were you interested in Rembrandt or Manet or Cezanne?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well, I was always crazy about Manet. Of course in those days we weren't very exposed to the French artists. I mean I remember the first showing in Boston of any French pictures at all was the Fuller Collection in which they had Manets and Renoirs and Cezannes and et cetera. And of course at the time, '27 or '28, it was considered revolutionary you know, like wild. I don't know why Seurat didn't seem as wild except that he was the painter Mr. Hale seemed to like and Hale never talked very much about the others at all, at least not to me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: No interest in old masters.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: I'm interested in old masters, yes, and I'm crazy about Da Vinci. I love the Italian primitives, primitives, like Botticelli and Lippi. Michelangelo I was very fond of. I had a special interest in Botticelli and Lippi I think.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was the appeal?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: I don't know, I just like the way they drew and the kind of character you know that their people were intended, but I hadn't seen very much contemporary painters.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well what about the museum in Boston though?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well yes but there again there were very few contemporary pictures, very few. Now there were Rembrandts and I suppose perhaps the most contemporary things in those days was the collection of Millet. I liked Millet. But I wasn't too crazy about him. I like him very much now, but then I thought they were sort of not very interesting.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Were there many, well you couldn't know many other artists at that point or did you?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: No. Waldo Peirce was an old friend, he came over to do my sister's

portrait at Lakewood in about 1926 I guess or something like that and he was a wild man. He was married to Ivy Troutman then and a wonderful guy. We all liked him very much he did a good portrait of my sister. I remember when Waldo arrived. His wife beautifully dressed because she was English in the most beautiful sort of clothes, handwoven, elegantly dressed and Waldo had on a shirt and a pair of pants theoretically held up by a silk necktie which didn't hold them up at all. They came in a big touring car. I think it was a Pierce Arrow with the top down. And he had this heavy beard and was very, gutsy, they used to call him Hercules. And the two little French-Canadian maids that we had were so terrified that they went into their bedroom and pulled the curtains and locked their doors and it took mother about three or four hours to get them to come out. And so you know we had met people in the theater and Jere Abbott was visiting. At that time of course we were young enough so we weren't up for all the art activities, but there we were all were in Skowhegan, Maine. Some of the actors liked painting and some of them painted. I remember Arthur Byron son, Buddy, who was a cripple, a quite extraordinary man but below the waist he was twelve years old and the top part of his body was sort of Michelangelesque in scale. Very handsome, perfectly beautiful head, magnificent hands that he could walk on, he played the best tennis in the world. He had studied with Bridgeman and wanted me to study with Bridgeman and he thought that Bridgeman was the living end. And so I came to New York and I went to the League and signed up for a Bridgeman class. This Buddy had insisted on it and I stayed there two days, one day before Mr. Bridgeman came and the day after Mr. Bridgeman came I left.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why was that?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: I couldn't stand him, he was perfectly terrible. In the first place I thought if you were drawing you drew from a model, the model was there and you were supposed to do that. And he just came down and sat and erased the drawing and didn't look at the model at all, just redrew page 33 of his book or something like that and I felt that this wasn't the way to see and—

PAUL CUMMINGS: You had to draw a Bridgeman.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: You had to draw a Bridgeman, the hell with the model, and I was much more interested in the model than I was in Mr. Bridgeman. So that didn't work out and so I took a night course from Robert Laurent.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How was that?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: A sculpture course which was wonderful. He was just a great guy. So I got back then into sculpture at night and into painting in the daytime.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How long did you continue that?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well I was in New York '31 and '32 and then the family thought perhaps I was getting too many ideas in New York. Well not too many ideas but they didn't know sort of what my influences were and suggested that I go up to Yale. But at this time I got a job during the summer for the Eastern States Exposition in Springfield, a big panorama thing for the chicken business for Wyford Bros., in which we had live chickens and then painted background—multiple hills and a train. The head of the society was a Mr. Knight from New Haven, Harry Knight, he was a good friend of Dad's, and so they had me go down and visit them and look at Yale. So I signed up at the Yale Art School.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well I'm curious about the League. You were doing painting in the day and sculpture in the evening. Did you find a conflict between those two ways of working or thinking?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Oh no, it was all people and I started out as a sculptor anyway and I liked sculpture very much and always tended to you know two or one almost. No I didn't see any split in that and I liked both of them very much and I liked Laurent very much, he was just a wonderful teacher, a wonderful man. And the League was filled with very exciting people at that time. It was when they had the big go to about getting George Grosz to this country and he came over, and Yves Pene du Bois was studying there and Raoul Pene Du Bois and Gordon Irving who was a good friend of mine, his father worked at one of the big galleries in New York.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, who were some of the other students there that you got to know in

that year?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well there weren't a great many of them. I was very crazy about one of the models, Irena Govgovska [ph] and I used to walk her home after school. She lived on St. Mark's Place and she was studying to be a doctor. She was a Polish girl, her family didn't know that she was modeling to put herself through medical school and she had an aunt and uncle and I was crazy about the whole family and crazy about her. She was very beautiful and very intelligent and I still see her, she comes to Maine. She's married to a man named Dr. Weiner and has three children. She was crazy about music and she has three children who are all extremely profound musicians. Her son is going to become a doctor but he really plays you know concert quality cello. And so I used to go down there and I used to have a lot of fun with them on Sundays and would go to all the Polish dances, folk music and actually danced in Madison Square Garden when they had big Polish festival in the old Garden. It was enormous fun and I loved to dance and I liked this girl very much, we had a very good time.

PC; That's a lot of action doing those dances.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Oh boy it was fun in those days, it was great. I could do it and they were wonderful people too.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well it's interesting you keep going around and around but always back to Maine.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Yeah, well when we lived in Welleseley, the family built a summer house which is now part of the school. So we went back there summers and knew you know people in the theater and friends in town and so forth and so on. The family then got the farm in '32 and we stayed right there except when all of the children went away to school. My sister went to [inaudible] Manor and I did it all at Grove, my brother went from Lawrenceville to MIT. They tried to get me into Deerfield but that didn't work so I went to art school instead they went up to Yale, I was there for three years. They registered me in first year but two weeks after school had started they put me in third year by this time I had painted quite a lot.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you like Yale? Because this is again a new milieu.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well, I liked the students there a lot. It was a very old-fashioned school and I like the people. I mean Lou York was a wonderful teacher on Mr. Taylor was great. You could see it was very inbred. I mean they had all studied with Tom Alden Weir and most of them had won Yale scholarship to come back to teach. But there were some very fine teachers. I never saw anything Lou York did but he was an excellent teacher, a fine teacher in aesthetic. But he was very limited and politics were excessive. I remember getting a portrait job there from Dr. Quinton who was head of the medical school I think, and Dean Keller was so upset about this that he went to the head of the medical school and said you can't have a student taking jobs that I should be having. So they changed this around.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh really?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: And also a lot of us students had sent in work to the Academy show and would get accepted and the faculty weren't quite often.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You mean at Pennsylvania?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: No, at the National Academy of Design. And so you know there was some feeling of competition. Then some of the older students like Bill Pearce and Valator and so forth, Victor Killian and Mike Russo and a chap named Euchenko were very active and very fond of Renoir and Cezanne and Goya and so forth and Delacroix, and this didn't interest the faculty at all. I mean they just weren't on that kick at all.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who where they interested in?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: I think John Alden Weir, Kenyon Cox as far as I could see. You were supposed to do this nineteenth-century underpainting things with glazes which was supposed to be the method of Titian. If they had ever looked at Titian outside of reproduction he had little to do with it. But we did learn a lot of things of course. Steve Dorian had taught mural painting and year after year after year they won the Prix de Rome and Gene Savage was teaching there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: And although we weren't crazy about his work I like the figure paintings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you know I'm curious, was the National Academy a place to aim for?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Yes, in the early thirties it received a lot of attention, big reviews which changed almost immediately. I mean by 35 this was out. But there were painters like, well like Speicker and another painter I like very much, can't remember his name now, who did figure things. I remember one was a man with a hawk and a plaid shirt which was very good. Leon Kroll you know was quite good in those days. He still looks pretty good considering his age and all. I was never crazy about Kroll's painting, but he did one painting of Babette, who was a popular model. Several of the artists—Speicher did her and Kroll did her and it was a very fine painting. But you know I suppose the things that we aimed at in those days were Renoir and Maillol and Kroll and Speicher seemed to be affiliates, seniors. So that was the kind of exposure, we hadn't got into all of the other people yet.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you continue the sculpture at Yale too?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: No.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Not what happened?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well I had a full painting course and sculpture was a separate course. And I didn't really like what they were doing in sculpture, they were doing pretty academic stuff. One of the sculptors taught drawing, Joseph Emile Renier, who was a very good drawing teacher, but I didn't really like any of the sculpture. Ray Braggio was a student at the time in sculpture and Jack Canaday was a student at the time in painting. Tom Folds who is at the Met graduated and went to Exeter. They were a great lively group to be with. I never did join the Glee Club but a lot of my friends were very busy in this. They were a very stimulating student group and they were—of course they were years older than I was, I hadn't even finished high school and they had gone to college and then had come on to Yale which was kind of a graduate school at the time. I did win a couple of Prix de Rome medals. My first one for some synagogue doors and the others I can't really remember. I got two others.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What about people like Folds and Canaday, what do you remember about them at that point?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Oh, they were good friends, Canaday was a compulsive worker and so was Folds. They were very quiet and very serious and the work I remember of theirs was mostly egg tempera.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Canaday was still doing his meticulous—

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Very meticulous yeah, and so was Folds. Well it was the Tino Artinian method of painting and very exact and very well drawn and very much done in that system with no liberties take at all. But later, the year afterwards in painting you started experimenting in all kinds of mediums that they weren't using like tempera, underpainting and oil glazes and things like that that weren't taught in school, we did this on our own and you know that was quite stimulating. The students used to say to Valentor or Euchenko and some of these people were very stimulating. Bud who is now Merle was there also and I was living in a rooming house and Bud was a year ahead of me. He had quite a bit of money and he had a very handsome place in Sterling which he was trying to get somebody to sublet and he didn't have any luck with, so I told him I would give him what I was paying in my rooming house for the rest of the year. He was chasing Lupe Valez to Mexico I think so his apartment was available. So one year I lived in style in Sterling. And I had a lot of other friends in town who were older, actually friends of Valentor's fiancée who were doctors there and we used to have great parties and a lot fun, medicinal gin—alcohol from the doctors in the hospital.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Those were the great days.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Those were the great days. And orange blossoms were a great drink.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you know this was all going through the depression really.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Oh totally, like my rooming house was forty dollars a month with food, absolutely great. And there were some lively things the architects and painters put on. A big costume ball, a Renaissance Ball there and it was quite a lively event and you know there were a lot of good things going. Then during Christmas and Easter vacations and so forth I would come down to the Metropolitan, and some of the others did, and make copies of Rembrandts and Bellini and various things and you know we were well enough trained and had expert experience and so the copies were really quite good. Of course this went out about that time, I guess we were sort of the last people doing it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You hardly ever see anybody make a copy now.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: But in the twenties—I mean Waldo Peirce did marvelous copies when he was a student, in the Prado and so forth which still exist and are really quite fine.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well how did you like the whole Yale experience? You know you were moving with older people and in a competitive atmosphere.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well It wasn't, it didn't seem terribly competitive to me in that sense and I liked the people, I mean Theodore Sizer who taught there was an awfully nice man and very nice to the students, spent a lot of time with them. He brought us down to the Morgan Library and he brought us down to Chester Dale's house. Mrs. Dale took us all through and exposed us to a lot of very good things that we wouldn't—you know, private collections and so forth of personal friends of his who, I mean we wouldn't have gotten into otherwise. And we spent a lot time in the museums, Yale museum was very rewarding, it's greatly increased with a lot of wonderful things to study there, both American painting from Drummer Collection or the Jarvis pictures, and there were very fine graphics. There was a lot to see and a lot of good material and there were a lot of artists or etchers and print people working in New Haven at that time. And Yale having the Prix de Rome you always heard wonderful stories about what so and so was doing. It was really I suppose more cosmopolitan and New York Scene at the time as far as exposure went. It was very lively and very exciting and it was a controlled enough group—which wouldn't have happened in New York at the Sloan House or something like that. I mean my social life was all with actors and theater people here, and so I think for me Yale was a very good experience at the time because I was exposed to people with more background and more artistic potential than you would have found in the average art school in New York.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well it's interesting because one thinks of Yale as being so isolated in some ways and yet close to New York. The experience of people seems to vary so much because I have interviewed other people who were there different years and their descriptions are so completely different.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well they were probably older and I suppose that it was much more scholarly or had a much more scholarly orientation than sunk in with me. I mean I was interested in the painting part of it and I was never a good scholar in that sense. I mean I actually passed Sizer's course on drawings which was a lecture course. We had three required courses and having lived in Europe the A-1 sort of history of art was not very difficult because I had been exposed quite a bit to that both in the real thing and also in books. But I was a very poor writer and didn't think in words or sentences at all and actually I was going to flunk this course and he said bring me in some drawings and I brought in some reproductions I had made with chicken bone and silver point and tempera, just the way the old masters had done them—copies. And he saw them and passed me in the course completely with an A. But I never did do a written paper.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You wrote the other way. Well did you become friendly with many people that you've kept up with from Yale?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Oh yes, Valentor was a good friend until he died, and Canaday I see casually from time to time. He's been complementary in the paper a year ago, they needed a portrait for the New York Times and he recommended me for it, which I did. Vanlentor I guess was my best and closest friend. Another chap named Frank McNitt who was the nephew of George Bellows and I spent a good deal of time with him and Euchenko.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Let's see, this was what year?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well I graduated in '35, so this was '34-'35.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How contemporary was the interest? I mean how modern—you know was Picasso—

WILLARD CUMMINGS: At Yale? Oh god nothing. The only contemporary thing was Marlene Dietrich's German record, that was considered very contemporary. Except for these three or four artists who are good friends of mine, who were interested in Picasso, who were interested in Juan Gris and these people in the old masters too. But it wasn't just Titian, Goya and Delacroix but also very interested in Renoir and Cezanne, Picasso, yes. I don't think Picasso's influence at that time was as strong with us as Cezanne.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Very impressionist, post-impressionist.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: And I liked Manet, I was crazy about Manet myself and Goya, Velasquez.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What happened after Yale?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well then I graduated and went home and worked in the theater that summer. I worked backstage in the theater, doing sets and props and working on all that part of it, and painting actors and actresses. Vincent Price was up there doing *The Wild Duck* with Manshick and he liked my work. I remember once we did a Spanish model who was posing in a mantilla and so forth and she liked the portrait so much she bought it. I was so excited I sent a telegram home to the family and thought I should be expanding a little bit. So I called Blanche up and asked her about doing a portrait of her as Gina and she said, Oh Billy you are much too busy. So that was dropped flat and the shell broke at the same time. I had an aunt, this was again in '31, not a real aunt but a kind of courtesy aunt who kept an eye on me and was very nice to me. She was the best friend of a woman, Elsie Linworth who was the godmother of Flagstad's daughter and she was also Flagstad's agent with Columbia Artists and she wanted me to do Flagstad and arranged a cocktail party where I met Flagstad. I used to go to the opera a lot and was crazy about her. I just said you know I'm not really up to it if I could come back in a few years I would be very grateful but it just ridiculous to try because I wasn't good enough to pull this off. So that never came about.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well what were your ideas about portraits then. In other words there were so many theater people around and they are always so ambiguous you know, how did you like painting them as opposed say to somebody who was in as they say real world.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well I loved it, just loved it, I mean they represented the you know the absolutely marvelous. And at this time I was at Yale and I used to have a bet with

John Valente who really wasn't in portrait painting at all but was crazy about Joan Crawford, and I wanted to paint Cornell. And we had a bet that one day that would do it. And one day I did, I've known her in the theater and I've known Stanley Gilkey and several people from Ms. Cornell's office, and from her Justine McClintock's office. Stanley was up there one day, this was after Vincent Price had liked my work and had commissioned a picture and so forth, and this was about '38 and by this time I had had a couple of shows in Boston and had some reviews and had some good clients. I was really making it as a portrait painter, very successful. And so Stanley took some photographs down to Miss Cornell's office and she liked the work very much. But she was rather busy at the time and so I was very disappointed about that. About a year later I was visiting on Martha's Vineyard and thought well, I'll give it one more try and so I walked up to her house and asked if she was there and she was and I told her who I was and she said yes, I remember and this is kind of a perfect time because I'm free now for three weeks and would love to sit for you. So I rushed back to Boston and got a canvas and easel and paints and took the next boat back and we did it and it was great fun. She was a wonderful person, is a wonderful person.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well where was your first show then? You had a show in Boston which I haven't been able to find, where was that?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: At Grace Horne Gallery I went up there to do a portrait one spring of Cardinal Spellman and another friend was going to have me do a little girl who got the mumps. I sublet a studio in the Fenway Studios where I had studied with Hale, and Optins, and Cutler and those people had studios. So here I was paying studio rent and I had to finish the Spellman portrait out to Brighton while he was giving a retreat. I wandered into the Ritz bar one night and there sat Mrs. Robert Hilliard who was a friend of friend's. I met her in New York with Bob Higley who was a playwright who had done a play at Lakewood, and Bob's

wife was the sister of Chick Austin and so on and Mary was a great friend of Marie, Mary Goodwin Higley and she sat a lot for me when I was here in New York in '36, no '37, I guess that was it. I did two or three portraits of her and other friends and she had marvelous parties, always theater people, and one of her close friends were the Robert Hilliards. And so Dorothy had come back from the theater and she was quite marvelous. She was very beautiful, she looked like Lachaise, a marvelous dancer, tiny, handsome feet and beautiful face. So I said you know, Dorothy I've got this beautiful empty studio with marvelous north light, what about sitting for me? And she said, I would love to. I was really shy in those days in spite of the fact being so up in the theater and so forth, but to go back to your reference of real people as opposed to theater people I was very comfortable with theater people and I was quite shy with real people especially if they were Harvard or something. So they asked me for lunch, the Hilliards, the week later and I think when the portrait was done and I was so scared I had to walk around the block three times before I could make myself go in. I finally went in and Robert served marvelous martinis in sherbet glasses which took away almost any shyness I had immediately. And in the house were the copies of portraits of Dorothy's family, like John Hancock, copies from the originals they gave to the Boston Museum, and some other lovely things and some contemporary paintings they were interested in. And they had let me see the Philip Wrens. And there were official guests and some other people from New York and in the middle of the afternoon after cocktails, martinis, and wine, Robert said I want everyone to see Dorothy's portrait, can't we all go into the studio. I gulped and almost died in embarrassment and we all got in cars and went to the studio and Robert said I'm crazy about it. I want to buy it. Here's a check right now and I'll commission you to do one of me immediately fondo for it, it was the first time I had consciously heard the word fondo you know in terms of what you're painting in that era so we did a fondo of Robert. And of course all of Dorothy's closest friends liked Dorothy's portrait best and didn't like Robert's and all of Robert's closest friends liked Robert's and didn't like Dorothy's.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: So this was a good lesson for a beginning portrait painter. And oh at the same luncheon, Nat Saltonstall who had just started to live in the same building with the Hilliards, had just started the Institute of Modern Art in Boston and he liked my work very much. I had a quite a few examples of things in the studio, five or six portraits. So he introduced me to the man who ran the Grace Horne Gallery and we went up the next week and Gavin Whitmore said I like your work very much, I'd like to give you a show. So I went to Maine in the summer and came back and had a show in the fall. Dorothy was quite familiar with the press and Robert wrote a forward to my catalogue and I got a full page spread in the *Herald and Transcript*.

Which all was just great, launched in Boston. And Francis and Marilyn McBay [ph] was she—the niece of John and Alice Garrett who had been in the embassy in Rome—had portraits done which they liked very much and invited me to come to Washington to visit her mother and also visit her aunt in Baltimore at Evergreen House. And they liked my work. Her brother-in-law, Marilyn's brother-in-law was Benjamin Tourin and Violet Tourin wanted me to do a portrait of their youngest child, and also of Mrs. Tourin who was a very shy woman. She was a Spencer and quite marvelous looking but she was very very shy. And I did a portrait of her in a white lace mantilla and a low-cut velvet dress which was hard for her to accept, but they were crazy about the portrait. Then I was handed down to Baltimore and went through a lot of things in Baltimore. Of course that was a marvelous experience being at Evergreen House because Mrs. Garrett had been a great friend of Cocteau and Jacques Blanche and Selouger and she was the godmother of Leon Bakst's son, and all the Cocteau correspondence was there, all the Zuaga correspondence, everything, you name it. And they had marvelous stories about how she got to wear a blue dress at the wedding in Rome of Umberto when he married the Belgian princess. And marvelous people, marvelous parties. And they had house guests like, oh, Finky Nabakov and Carl Milles and all these people and Leslie Cheek had been to Yale and who was terribly snobbish, was running the Baltimore Museum at the time and running it well.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It seems that one day you started and within a couple of years you had a terribly large body of work already you know.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well out of Yale I came to New York and—no, it wasn't that soon. I came to New York in the fall of '35 and I was here for two or three years I guess and during that time I was doing drawings. We had a friend, again from Boston, who was in charge of

the *Journal American* and I did illustrations for the Jack Lake Stories. They were serial love stories on the back page of the Sunday *Journal American* magazine, and I did menu covers—I did anything I could do to get work done in between. I had friends posing for me, I was a member of the Players Club and used to go there and see people in the theater that I knew and some of them posed for me. And then Mrs. Landon Post, who had been at Skowhegan a lot in the theater—she was married to Landon Post who was the city commissioner of buildings or something like that and her father was Ron Kirby who was the famous cartoonist for the old *World* newspaper, and a very fine cartoonist, she sat for me and Laura Hope, another actress who was a friend of hers sat for me and a woman Lucille Stewart, and the niece of this kind of courtesy aunt.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who was she?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: She was from the south and she was an art student, we were in school together as well as being friends everything was mutual, and she sat for me. And I did Mary Higley a lot and an actress I went around with called Catherine Nesco, several paintings of an actor called Lloyd Crawford, who was very handsome and quite a good model too. So I did quite a bit of painting then. I had quite a bit of exposure but no cash and I was doing commercial jobs on the side. And I went to Boston. All of this worked for me because there were people that they knew and they had seen in the theater and so forth and so on. And then I got to some of the artists and writers like the Hilliards and society people and then I had two or three shows in Boston. I think I had one junket with Carl Zerbe, at that time Gab had some of my work shown in New York in '39 or '38, did a Cornell portrait and it was shown in Boston and it was shown here at Marie Harriman's and at Seligmann's.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did those exhibitions work for you, the early ones say in Boston.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Oh, in Boston it was sensational. I got full page reviews and reproductions.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I mean after the shows, did the show do much for you in terms of actual commissions of work?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Oh, yes, surely. I was busy all the time and then that sent me to Washington and I got work there and then from Washington to Baltimore and I got a lot of work there. By this time Vose was my dealer.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you get involved with them?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well they liked my work and Grace Horne Galleries had some problems, he had gone into a partnership with a man I didn't get along too well with and so I went to Vose. They asked me to show there and that went very well and I insisted if I show there, that my friend, Charles Cutler, the sculptor, would be exhibited too. This was a great send-off for him and another friend, Peter Dubaniewicz, who was a painter and a friend of mine. So I had the big gallery and they had the two other galleries and we opened the show and it was as a benefit for British Relief, this was in 1940. Then I went immediately into the army and was there for almost five years. And so this dropped off. And I got married just before I got into the army and so I never went back to Boston after the war, I mean to live. I had exhibitions there at Margaret Brown's Gallery, she had taken over the old Grace Horne Gallery. But when I was with Vose and I was doing the Keith Merrill portraits on the North Shore in Boston, three of those, I was going out to Huntington to do the Milbank portrait. Bob Vose actually had to take two suitcases of laundry and meet me at the train with it, I was that busy and I was trying to get just under the wire. Vose had a very nice studio in their building. When I was in Boston I would use the studio there, they had a studio for portrait painters. Then in the army I worked, did some portraits too.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know you had mentioned painting children and a lot of people complain about that. Have you found it difficult or do you enjoy it?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Oh I love it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You do?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: I love it, and to meet children, they really are wonderful to paint more so than adults because they are not the least bit self-conscious and you can always do something to get them to pose, you'll find one thing that they'll repeat again and again. You

know people say they are so cute but so little that they don't look like anything. But they look exactly like themselves later on, I think a good portrait of a child looks just the same when he's sixty.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you generally paint people in the studio or in their own surroundings?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: In the studio where possible because the light is much better. In private houses it is apt to being quite harsh and flat. I remember one of the first commissions I had which my dad got for me for the State House in Maine. There was an old man, a retired colonel (I was in New York at the time) at Old Town, Maine and I thought it would be nice to get out of New York for a while. So I got on the train and finally after days got to Old Town. This man had an eye patch and he wanted the eye patch removed and wanted me to paint the other eye and all this. His daughter was a retired Rockette.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh my.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: And it was a low-ceilinged house with flat light and the portrait was, well it's in the State House, but it was far from a good working opportunity. I had to work sitting down which I never do and so on and so forth so after that I've been quite cautious about working in people's houses unless I know the house, the Keith Merrills, they had an enormous house on the North Shore that Andrew Mellon rented one summer, beautiful house and you know endless rooms and beautiful light and everything, and the Margaret Gardner portraits I did at their house but then again they had a beautiful house. And in Baltimore at the Garretts when I was working there on the various commissions that they had gotten me—she had a beautiful studio that she used herself and I could use it when I was there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you find it very easy to set up in a new place and start working like that?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: No it's difficult. I tried to do Paul Mellon in his house in Washington once ne summer. There were just so many marvelous things around it was just very distracting you know. He had wonderful Manets and Cezanne and I never could get ahead of them.

[TAPE ONE SIDE TWO.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: This is side two. A lot of artists had been going away for their summers to Hamilton Easter field's place. Did you get to know many of those people or were you totally involved with the theater?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well, I knew some of those people at Ogunquit because at Yale we had a model named Rene Botka who also posed for Laurents and took one of his shacks during the summer in exchange for posing for him. Her husband was a sculptor, Steven McNeely. I was very fond of her and very fond of him and I used to go do and visit them in Ogunquit, having studied with Laurents too. And Kuniyoshi and Karfiol was still there and Karlfiol had just done a portrait of the *Two Long Boys in a Pony Cart*, one of his famous ones. I never knew Karfiol well. I knew Laurent very well and liked him very much and loved his house where he had a marvelous collection including a lot of American primitives. So monkey see monkey do and I started to buy American primitives when you could get them for five or ten dollars apiece. I got quite a few of them in the thirties and then at this same time in New York in the fall, I shared a studio at 51 West 10th Street with Frank McNitt and another boy, and Brooke had a studio in the same building, Alex Brook, whom Frank had studied with. He left Yale and studied with Brook and Kuniyoshi and they were both good friends and they had both been in Maine. Kuniyoshi had been in Maine extensively earlier. In the same way I met a lot of people with Maine backgrounds like Owen Davis in the theater. Davis got the Pulitzer Prize, he was one of the famous playwrights. So Maine has always been a contact with artists and theater people for me. I got to know Brook very well. He said what do you do and I said I'm a portrait painter and he came and looked at the work for himself. He said, oh, Bill you're much too good a painter to be a portrait painter, why don't you give it up for something else and I said, how shall I put it, I said I was in the Met and the other day I saw all those canvases, you're damn good. Off course, Alex didn't like being confined with famous portraits and he didn't usually get a likeness like I did, which of course caused him some confusion.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think there's a special technique in that, or is it a skill or a talent

or an ability in catching a likeness?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: I guess there must be, I think it's really liking other people that much. A lot of painters don't.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Some people seem to be able to and others just fight every stroke and it never happens. But my first studio in New York after I left Yale was on 13th Street. And of course Brook and Laurent and Zorach, who I hadn't yet then met, all showed up there and these were the artists I liked best at that time. Kuniyoshi and Brooke I thought were just marvelous.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, the Whitney was downtown too.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: And the Whitney was on Eighth Street.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Were you ever interested in what was going on there? Did you ever go to the Whitney?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Oh, sure. I used to go to the Whitney all the time to see the exhibitions, they had wonderful annual exhibitions. That's where I saw the Babette which I think is the finest Kroll I ever saw. And other work of many other painters you know, Dickinson and lots of very fine things, Hartley, a great many of them. So I got to know Alex and Yass quite well and I also got to know Edith Halpert a little bit. At that time I was interested in collecting primitives. I'd been up to see them at Weston and had seen some things and I bought a couple in a bookstore in Springfield. They had a lot more things, but I didn't have much money to invest in those days so I came back and I wanted these things badly. It was a series of eight portraits by Matthew Pryor, not signed but I'm sure they were Pryor and two other very fine paintings. I saved up some money and went down to the American Folk Art Gallery which was over the Downtown Gallery and looked at the exhibition and got very enthusiastic about my catching the five o'clock train and I said to the old man there, I said what are these and he said oh, those aren't catalogued yet and I said do you mind if I look at them? And he said not at all, go ahead. But I can't give any prices on any of them. And I looked at the eight pictures, so it was too late for those. I used to go quite often to look at the things in the Downtown Gallery and see what Alex was showing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How'd you like Edith in those days?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Oh, well I can't say that she paid a lot of attention to me, you know. She didn't mind people coming in to look at things, that pleased her very much, but she never had much time for anybody. She was busy and she didn't butt in and she'd leave you alone in the gallery and so forth, she didn't come and hover over you. And obviously I was a student, a young painter. I didn't have any, you know I wasn't a prospective sale. There was a little Laurent Dealabash that I wanted very much, but I never got it. But we later became very good friends and she was a great help to me and we had a very close friendship later on, but that was after the war really.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The war seems to be a whole little block of time.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Yes, in a way it was a complete switch, it was completely than the life I'd been leading before. When I went into the Army the idea was to get into camouflage, so I was sent to the chief engineers, indoctrinated, marched into Portland, Maine and spent most of the night waiting for our hotel reservations that never did materialize. So they took us down to the old armory which hadn't been opened since 1916 or '17 I guess. We got blankets filled with rats and had left all our little bags with our toothbrushes and so forth at the station. There was a big watering trough which they filled up with water so we could wash. We spent the night there and then the next morning we were given breakfast and indoctrinated and then put on a train and sent to Fort Devens, which was an overnight trip, about a hundred and twenty miles I guess, and got off the train the next morning. I didn't know my right from my left and I couldn't tell a private from a general, they all looked the same to me. We were issued clothes and so forth and that afternoon a telegram came in to assign me to Belvoir. Well usually they stay there for a couple of weeks and they learn how to make a formation and all of this stuff and make a bed and all the rest and I didn't get that. But I got all my shots for the entire three weeks that afternoon and ended up with somebody in the same bed with me in an upper bunk just crawling with pain from all these shots. We got to Fort Belvoir about a day and a half later and I had basic training and never did master the right from the left, but I got along without that. Then when I was through with that I was

put on an assignment—I'd sort of skipped out of the camouflage idea because it wasn't a very well-run battalion and two or three friends of mine over there said if you can stay out of it do because it really isn't an awfully happy situation or a very productive one. So then a special services officer got hold of me and we set up the first soldier art project in the army. Rather than just painting murals for the recreation halls, sort of explain the various phases of the engineer training on the post, which I thought would be enlightening to parents of the G.I.'s who visited the G.I.'s themselves, a perspective on what they were doing, I having had all of this in basic training. And that's where I met Sidney Simon, I was looking for other artists to work on the project and found Rocky Stevenson and Sidney Simon and Henry Wahl and Frank Altschule. We were all assigned under my private command to run this project and we had very nice offices and also we built a small gallery where artists could show not only ourselves but anybody who was doing any work on the post. We covered it with Bemis Bagging and got some tracing paper and put it on stretchers and we got indirect lighting and so forth, very simple. It was a very nice little gallery where the soldiers could show their work and so forth.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Were there many who did?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Oh, yes, quite a few. And then we had classes and they had one colored battalion there, and Colonel Newman who was head of the colored battalion liked what we were doing so much that he asked me if I could also give two nights a week to setting up classes for the colored battalion. So I did this very happily and there were some very good students, some of them had been at Howard in the art department at Howard. And so we had classes about four nights a week.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How many students did you have?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Oh, it would vary from ten to 45 sometimes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That many?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: On occasion, yeah. We had to do it on two different evenings and then they could come in the afternoon and work too on their free time. And also the boys from Howard liked me and I liked them and they wanted me to come in to Howard and meet some of the people in their faculty and other people who were interested in the art at Howard. Then there was a General Godfrey's wife—he was chief engineer or something like that—who had lived in Paris and knew quite a few artists and so forth, among them Caresse Crosby and a friend of hers had written the play *Annabas*, the French poet, I can't remember his name—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Sojour, St. John Herbst.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: That's it, and I got to know them and did see quite a bit of them and they got some money together to help us with the gallery and extend that a little bit. And the camp newspapers had done several stories on you know the Cornell portrait and Vincent Price and various Senators and so forth. Then I picked up *Time Magazine* one day and it said "Private to paint portraits of generals," Private Willard Cummings is going to paint General Marshall and so and so and so on, and I thought that was very interesting. This had come up a couple of times and the local officer wanted to know if I wanted to do it and I said not particularly that I was very interested in what I was doing and I thought it had some meaning. And so anyway the third time around it came out and I was sent to Washington. All this time I was living off post in Alexandria with my wife. We had a little house there and so I would get there every night and we had some good friends in the army and I liked them very much, and we had also other friends who were stationed in Washington, the Fergusons, Harding and Jane Bancroft. He was head of the *Times*, was a Sunday painter, did much better Sunday pictures than I did, enchanting things, absolutely enchanting things. Harding and Jane lived next door and John Ferguson who was in the Navy and later worked in Washington and married to Peggy Valentine, Arthur Valentine's daughter here in New York, lived on the other side of us, north of Richard Salant who's now head of CBS I think. We had these funny little houses that were George Washington's servants houses I think and they were very tattily done over by a southern lady who was very fussy about whom they were rented to. At least she pretended to be, I don't think she at all. And we had other friends who were stationed around there so we had a very nice life and then I did portraits in Washington so it was very pleasant. Then I was moved into the War College and Colonel Mead who was my boss in public relations call me in oh, there was a Sergeant Regus who was a nice guy

from Maine too and lived in a houseboat, he was great fun. We used to take the houseboat back and forth from Alexandria to the War College so we had some fun things going. But so the Colonel said you're a portrait painter. Do you know why you're here? And I said I just know what I read in *Time* magazine and he said that's right. And he said, well, you see that file over there, that's filled with photographs. You can use any one you want. And I said oh really, Colonel, I don't work from photographs. The poor guy turned absolutely green. And I said there are a lot of things I've learned to do in the army, like polishing garbage cans so they look like sterling silver and did them so well that the mess officer used them to make iced teas in them. I said there are a lot of things I can do that the army's trained me for, like that, but I said portrait painting I don't do from photographs. Well, that changed his schedule a little bit because he had to get me a place to work and getting a place to work meant that one had to call the Post Commander who was a very nice man, General Bresnahan who had come from Pittsfield, Massachusetts, where I had done some portraits too. So this became a very close immediate friendship with him and his wife. He gave me a place to work and we did a portrait of him that everybody thought was just marvelous. He was a very handsome man with white hair and he was very proud to be Commandant of the War College and so the War College was properly installed in the background in the Stuart fashion. Marshall was very busy at the time and they had me do one there of General Mark Clark next and that was successful and they had a big opening for the Clark portrait and Margaret Smith came. I knew Smith, he was an old friend who used to work for Dad and had been a great friend all the way along. Then we did McNair. In the meantime the project I started in Belvoir, the soldier art project, had been taken over by Sidney Simon who was on the project and then they started to organize an overseas thing where we would have enlisted artists and some other artists like Henry Poor were correspondents on the same project. There were only rumblings about this, it wasn't an accomplished thing at all. I didn't much future in portrait painting, it was awfully difficult to get sittings and so forth and although life was very comfortable in Washington where McNair said he would get me into OCS if I wanted to go and so I said fine. I think the last math I had studied was in France in French and here I was to do map reading, or mathematics and demolition and other stuff, terrified of dynamite. So off I went to OCS and I found myself there at the age of 28. I guess with the brightest bunch of young kids 20, 21 from Texas A&M, just as bright, right up on their studies, and so week by week I was a little further behind and doing the best I could which wasn't terribly good and I managed to stay in for about six weeks I guess and then I took a training course and had some very funny experiences in that training, quite amusing. By this time the soldier art project for overseas was under way. Henry Poor who I had known in Baltimore recognized my name and thought it would be nice if I went to Alaska with him, I had wanted to go to Africa.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What appealed to you in Africa?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Oh I just thought it would be exciting in North Africa, I've always wanted to go there. They told us at that time that the African Theater wasn't opened up yet and George Biddle was head of it and he was supposed to stay in Washington sort of hovering over the whole project under the Chief of Engineers. So we all got off on our assignments. I was going to Alaska, Sidney Simon was going to Australia and somebody else was going to India. And I met a lot of wonderful guys. There were about fifteen or eighteen of us in San Francisco, the '41 project, Aaron Borad, Howard Cook, David Friedenthal, Charles Shannon, Sidney Simon, Henry Poor, Joe Jones, Ed Laning, and Joe and Henry Poor and I were set for Alaska. So I was pulled out of training and commissioned and if I hadn't been I never would have made it for the world because of my math. But anyway it was just in the nick of time. After six weeks I was pulled out and commissioned to go on this project and I liked Henry very much and I liked Joe very much and so we were all stationed together in San Francisco and we had a fine time there. And I had friends out there. Madame Chiang Kai-shek was there and fairly popular in those days. Nobody knew too much about her and she was staying at the same hotel that we were. There were these sort of great retinue parties and Bill Parham who had been there at the camouflage office battalion at Jefferson Barracks along with our other friends were in town for this and so we had quite a gay time. I adore San Francisco, I had done some portraits there, I had done a portrait of Mrs. William Crocker and we went up to see the house and the other friends there, and a lot of good painters in San Francisco too we met that Henry knew and other people would know. Most of them were girls actually who were working on the night shift at the Kaiser plant, and the graveyard shift as I remember we called it. So we had a very interesting time in San Francisco and we went up to Seattle and waited for our boat and finally ended up in Anchorage, Alaska and we all did drawings on the boat and so forth, did drawings of each other. Joe had trouble with his

papers and so he couldn't go in an occupied zone. He had been in the communist party at some point and we finally got clearance for him to go up with Henry Poor to Nome and I went down to the islands. Ed and I went down into the Aleutians and Ed was very timid and always wanted to know what I was doing and it just drove me up the wall. We got along fairly well but it was not entirely pleasant.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you like Alaska?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Oh I liked it very much and I liked the people, and I was fascinated with Aleutians. I went down there two or three times. When I came back from Aleutians George Biddle had talked to some *New York Times* reporter and it ended up with the whole project cancelled. The nonmilitary members were dismissed or were taken over by *Life* magazine or by *Look* or something.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh right, right. *Time-Life* artists war correspondents.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: They were taken over by the soldiers I brought in, the W unit it was called. So I was left up there in intelligence and I did some murals and I redesigned with an architect named Pete Jerome the office's mess and so forth at Anchorage and did a mural for them. Then I did a portrait of Buchner and Buchner turned out to be a very good friend. He liked me very much and I liked him very much and he was a wonderful guy and his wife had been the roommate of Bentley Friendly's wife who was a friend of mine. He would drive me around to various parties the neighborhood gave for him, he liked Alaska. And I liked Alaska, liked the people and they were perfectly extraordinary. I remember going to one house one night on his birthday, a series of houses we went to, but one was a woman who had been an actress and her father had been head of the Royal Academy. And this house was like many of the Alaskan houses, you know shingled with tin cans and it looked like a dump. You walked inside to the most beautiful English drawing room filled with perfectly lovely things, her father's copies of Rembrandt's and various portraits and etchings and all kinds of things of his. Her husband was a miner, they had met in Africa when he was on a Guggenheim and he had gotten another one to do some work in Alaska. They were charming, bright sophisticated people and there was a pianist, an Eskimo pianist who was brought up in an orphanage who was awfully nice. He had been brought back to Alaska to do a book on herbs and leaves that could be eaten if you were marooned out on the tundra. He was a very fine concert pianist and he had married the grandniece of Franz Liszt. So there were some interesting people. Then there were other people there who appreciated it very much, because they have an enormous life. They were crazy about Alaska because it had opened up a whole new life that they never would have had the chance at, and especially during the depression. So they were exciting and I did drawings of a lot of them, got to know quite a few of them quite well. And a lot of kids were homesteading land up there at that time. Then I was crazy about the Aleutians—I thought they were absolutely beautiful and strange and mystical and weird things, with marvelous sort of light. Buchner was building a house, a house was being built for hi at Adak and he said, well, the engineers have got to put a staircase in, would you go down and see what you can do about it. And so I went down and got the house going and then I came back. In the meantime my daughter had been born and I hadn't seen her. So he asked me to go back to Seattle and buy furniture and fixtures and prints and so forth. So I had a couple of weeks there in Seattle and I shopped some of the time, and so forth and so on while I was there and we saw friends there that we had, but before that I had been going around the Aleutians Islands, I went on the Kiska Invasion which of course was not even there when we got there, and then later I went to Attu and did drawings for G.2 on all Jap installations and so forth and which was fascinating because we found a lot of Japanese diaries written in English and some very interesting things. Then for about three weeks I was on Shenian, with the Alaska Scouts which had a very remote outpost and on that, my Gunark from Adak who Shenian and then Shenian on LST and the captain had been a—I'd met him before and he looked familiar and I looked familiar to him and it turned out he was a very good friend of my wife's, we'd been together, he'd gone to in the meantime and John Joyce Adams and we'd seen quite a bit of him while we were waiting in San Francisco and Ed was with me, he said, Joe I'm on the bridge all the time, you take my digs and so I did, and then he knew the captain, the general who was in charge of Shenian and he introduced me to him and he and I became very good friends and he had one funny experience there because he got all ready to go after about three weeks and got all checked out and the general had me for dinner the night before and said, you know, I've never met an artist before, you're really not such a bad buy and so forth and so on and you seem, you know, fairly bright, not as stupid as I thought most artists were and so I said, you know, thanks very much, the next day I got all checked out, was waiting at the dock and was doing

some drawings of them loading this LSD, Transport T, and so I was working on this drawing and they closed the doors and took up the ropes and I kept on drawing and then the thing moved out and I thought that's great, you know. It'd be nice to have a view of this in mid harbor and the boats only went every three days and so I finished drawing in mid-harbor and then they really took off and I got a drawing of it in the distance, finished the drawing, you know, suddenly realized that I just missed my boat, who were living in tents then and so I went back and told them I was going to spend a few more days with them. And I went over to the generals and said, you know, I'm really terribly grateful to all the nice things you said about me, artists not being stupid and so forth. But last night, this is what happened. He roared with laughter and I said, just as a souvenir of your words, I'd like to have the drawing, he said he was very pleased, so we spent a few more days together and finally did get back to and there I must say I was very touching, Father Hubbard was there, the Jesuit priest, and a lot of people were killed onto, or I must say the soldiers were absolutely incredible. It was after I'd gone to York and a lot of them posted for me and they'd gotten the silver star and so forth and they had decorated the graves with marvelous wildflowers in Alaska and they decorated the graves of all their buddies in the most fantastic ways I'd never seen so beautiful, with these wildflowers.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In what way?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well, they'd made wreaths and garlands of wild darfinian and all the flower that grew there and done beautiful things with the moss and the tundra and so forth.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How long were you up there?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: In Alaska?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Ah, about two and a half years.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, a long time.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Two years I guess.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You covered the whole—

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well, I never got up to, except on the way out at the airport. I never got up to Fairbanks and my run was from Anchorage to Attu and of course the pilots were bombing Camchat and all of that at the time. You'd be in these places and sometimes they would and sometimes they wouldn't, it was just terrible. All these pictures standing around with their wives and their kids, but we had some bad flying there too.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In what way?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well, we got out to Adak once and couldn't land and the plane went right up against a mountain and headed back in the fog and the pilots didn't expect to make it out of it anyway, they were actually wet with sweat and all of a sudden we saw them that, Uman, we didn't have enough gas to get way back to Anchorage, there was an opening in the clouds and they could see an airport. Actually it was almost a closed-up airport and they took one dive and got in, but they hadn't expected to make it at all. I was the only passenger, actually I had to calm them, they were so nervous. I wasn't bright enough to be that nervous, although I thought there wasn't very much of a chance, but they, you know, they practically passed out when they hit the ground, had to be carried some place and be given a drink.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have you been back up there ever?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: No, but I'd like to go. I'd like to go, no I never have been back.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Great going place I hear, well, what happened after Alaska?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well, then we came back and I thought I was going to get with General Godfrey, I'd always wanted to go to India and the former what's the present none commission, ah, warrant officer, what's between a sergeant and a second lieutenant, warrant officer, had become in the meantime a major, that was with me in special services a man named John Sarkas, who's the one that I had worked with on the first soldier art project,

helped set that up from Washington and he was here in New York in special services, and he, I wanted to go to India and almost did but he requisitioned me specially to be here and my wife was here in New York at the time. She'd been living with her sister, we got a small apartment and my daughter had been born, she was nine months old when I got back and so I was assigned to special services on 45th Street and Colonel Warburg was the Colonel who was a wonderful guy, absolutely marvelous man and General Kerr was head of the whole department. Very nice man whose son was interested in art, he was young, but he had been taken around to several art schools, looking and so forth and we got some good people in and we got, they had an advisory board on the Trimsovie and Hildreth Mier I think and Maz Stonehill and education man at the Modern Museum, Dimico and another man who was head of Solomon I think who was head of the education department at Riso, Rhode Island School, Rhode Island Museum and then we got into the office, we got Jack Bauer and Paul McGrill and then later Nat Saltonstall which started the—

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was this project, now that you were doing?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well, we one thing that we did was to do a whole training manual on art, I mean how to paint a portrait, paint a still life and this took in all kinds of things, etching and small kits and we sent kits out to special service committees we got from Brown or we made up special for us and the whole training manual on this to make artists a legitimate part of special services and then the other thing we did was to hold a soldier art contest which we held in each of the service commands and this in Washington and for those we had exhibitions arranged in most museums throughout the country, in the areas and we sent around juries to jury them and choose so many things in each category, painting and sculpture, water color, graphics, photography, and then the final selections were shown at the National Gallery in Washington, and then Henry Simpson did the forward for the book and simultaneously we got in Valentine, who had Penguin books at that time, he still does, who was the son of an artist and then this guy lived very close to 21st Street at about that London Terrace at 23rd, his brother here and Simon Telly did a catalogue, just came out at the opening, based on the selections that people had made in the service commands then to Washington, we took all the photographs of all the winners and had a book published, which was called *Soldier Art*.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who's idea was the exhibition, the book and the whole thing?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well, I think it was, I guess it was mine and then Jack Bauer's and then we got awfully good juries, you know really top not professional juries like Alfred Barr and Jim Soby and Dzubas.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was it successful from your point of view?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Oh, I think it was very successful, yes, yeah, it exposed quite a few of the good artists in the army and it also gave a lot of you know, it was a broad kind of incentive, very good entries in all the service commands for these things people were very excited about and during the show in Washington various exhibitions wasn't world shattering but it was a very, very nice show.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Given all the—

WILLARD CUMMINGS: You know given the democratic and schematic idea of the whole thing it really came out quite well.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well what things besides that happened, how long was that that wasn't very long was it?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: That was about a year and a half I guess and then after that I got my discharge which was just fine and by that time well before the war I had talked about going, Chuck Cutler who had a place in Maine and being a portrait painter, I knew that I'd just wander around and I liked Maine and wanted to stay there, I wanted to have some reason for being there and my wife liked it too and well, we were all together in San Francisco waiting to be shipped out, we talked a lot about American art and American artists and the only thing for an American art student to do before the war was to go to Europe you never studied with the great in their own country so we thought it would be good to have a school, using the summer which Americans just use for play, at least in those days where the very serious students could come and work. And by this time the family had moved out of the farm and had moved to Guilford and the summer cottages that we owned were being rented

so I talked to Henry Poor and the Zorachs and several people and asked them what they thought of the idea and it was a good idea. So Sidney Simon and Henry Poor and Charles Cutler and myself got together and talked to the family about renting the property and we incorporated as a non-profit organization. My brother-in-law, Chauncey Hubbard was a great friend of a Paul Mellon's and he got Paul interested and Paul gave us a thousand dollars or something like that the first year. And we did over the chicken houses in the middle of winter and in the spring opened up the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So that was '46?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Our opening season was '46. It was in '45 we started organizing, the fall of '45 was when we got our incorporation and all that business.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So you were ready in the spring?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: So we opened the spring of '46 and we got all our friends to come up and help us. We were the first people I think to start a visiting artists series, the other summer schools as far as I knew were one-man schools. Two other schools started about the same time, one on the Cape, which didn't last very long, and then Robert Laurent had had a summer art school at Ogunquit which was very casually run, you know he and his friends, he and Karfiol and two or three people. But they didn't really put much into organizing it. It was quite pleasant it was very casual.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The Hofmann school is basically Hofmann.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Yeah. So we got all kinds of people together the first summer, Kuniyoshi came up, Jack Levine came up, the Zorachs came up and people who in those days were certainly the leading artists before all this post-war stuff had started with the abstract expressionists and de Kooning and all of this, in any degree, so that all of us, I mean, Levine and Poor and so forth were the people that the exciting young students wanted to meet and study with—

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you promote it those first years, was it through all the art schools?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Yes, we put ads in the magazines and we'd get all kinds of letters about people who wanted to come, and when they came they liked it and spread the word. We had very little housing and very little space in those days, it's grown a lot now.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How many students did you have?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: That first summer it was 38.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Pretty good number.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: It was a good number. We were very lucky of course there so many GI's and they could attend on the GI bill. We only had a few older people, Mrs. Garrett came up with Mary Rogers, Mrs. Benjamin Rogers, Standard Oil, and Countess di Zappola and Mary Canfield. Well, they were odd companions for the GI's I can tell you, chauffeurs and painting bonnets but they were nice.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how do you pick the instructors over the years? Because it seems that many people have gone there as students and then three or four or five years later return as instructors.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well for a long time we hadn't wanted any alumni to be instructors because I so hated the kind of thing that had happened to Yale, it was so inbred and so bad you know. As far as progress they were 20 years behind, 30 years behind. So it was a long time before we asked any of our alumni to be instructors.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When did it start then?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: I don't remember exactly when, in the fifties, late fifties.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it was about ten years or so.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Oh yeah and when we first started there were four of us and then

Anne Poor joined us and was a member of the board the next year, and we had a secretary, and you know, everybody said, well Bill you're so good at organizing you just do that and we'll do the teaching. So we had a little office down on 13th street and we had a secretary and we set up an advisory board, Jack Baur, and Lloyd Goodrich and old friends helped us. Lloyd's sister and brother-in-law had been in Skowhegan for a long time in the theater, Frances Goodrich and Al Hackett, who wrote all the Thin Man stories later, and so forth, they had been up there as very young people and working in the theater and writing plays and so forth and Lakewood was very exciting and I suppose it was seeing what these actors got out of working, you know, young actors like Humphrey Bogart and so forth got out of working with really seasoned pros like Arthur Byron and Martin Wincell and so forth that gave me the idea that this would be great for painters and it didn't have to be restricted to a one-man school and you know get artists say from Chicago or Washington and various places who weren't exposed to many professionals who were too busy to teach except in New York, like Zorach and Barns and Levine and so forth. Levine hadn't done any teaching and Kuniyoshi who did teach some. And so the five of us ran it and each year. One of us would take a year off, and we would ask some other artists. We asked Jack Levine and we asked Abraham Rattner and so forth and then in 1960 we had the big fire, we reorganized the thing totally with a Board of Trustees. And since the school was designed as a school run by artists for artists, we wanted to keep that consideration very much alive so we set up an artists' Board of Governors, a lot of us taught at the school, which is 24 artists connected with the school or who taught there or were graduates from it which now includes quite a few of them. Alex Katz and Robert Indiana.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I know Jack Beal is on it.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Jack Beal was not a student of ours but he's been up there as a visiting artist. Very good, he's been wonderful for the school. And then we at that time hired a full-time director to really run the thing with a salary, low salary. I hadn't taken anything previous to that. And so then we added some of the buildings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What happened the year of the fire? What caused that?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well we've never known what started the fire, as near as we can tell it was some sort of a bounce back on the power line that broke the electric wires and started it. I had gotten up at three o'clock in the morning to give about six students breakfast at my place the morning school closed. They were the last students there and I had taken them down to the bus in Waterville and came back and did the dishes. It was by that time quarter past six and I went back to bed and woke up about 9:30. My son was with me, my wife and daughter were on the coast, and I looked out and I saw smoke and I told my son who was about eleven I guess, about eleven, to call the Skowhegan fire department on the house phone. And I rushed up to the office to call the other fire department and by the time I finished making the call the whole thing was aflame and it was completely dry, completely windless, cloudless day, it had been very, very dry, very dry and the flames went right straight up the house from 25 feet away and when the fire department came—we had two ponds there that they fed the hoses but the house was scorched and burnt and demolished. The funny thing was there wasn't an ash around the barn itself, but 150 feet out in the fields it was just black with ashes and the first thing the insurance people did was not to look at the barn but to look at the land and to grab people to go and get more water and pails and brooms and go out to the surrounding area to put the fire out which had just started up in the fields. So at that point we did reorganize with a full-time paid director and a Board of Trustees and a Board of Governors, and we continued our Advisory Council of museum people and so forth.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What's the difference between the Trustees and the Governors?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: The Trustees are responsible for the overall accepting of the policy of the school, the financing and the projects and so forth.

The Governors make all the educational policy, they have all the say about what schools receive scholarships, they choose the faculty. They set all the educational policy, everything.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Does that have any influence on accepting students and things like that?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Yes, they are the ones who choose the list of schools to which scholarships will be awarded or part scholarships, which ones will get full scholarships and

which ones will get part scholarships.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Does that change a lot?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: The Board of Governors?

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, whether one school gets a full scholarship or—

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Oh, yes, it changes quite a bit dependent on how much they need and how much we have, and which send us the best students. So we've had very very good students consistently and they get repeats. When the school for a couple of years sends us poor students, a nonserious student, somebody not really qualified to be in the program, we drop it and pick up on another school. Schools do change and some get better and some get worse. Maryland Institute in the old days was no good. It's excellent now. And Cooper in the early days was absolutely tops but doesn't stand up to the same level anymore. It may again, I think it's coming back very fast. It has had a slump, the students weren't very good. Brooklyn had sent us some good people for a while and then they got very poor.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But you mentioned Brandeis was selected—

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Oh, yes, Brandeis used to send us good students and then they started to send students who were in the theater and not interested in painting. So we dropped that and the art students were quite good students. San Francisco has sent some good students.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How many do you have now in a given year?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: We take 65 students in all and about 40 of them on scholarship or part scholarship.

We used to take as many as 70, but we found the extra five just crowded the classes. 65 seemed to be a much more manageable group. Everybody got more out of it and we could be more selective and so we found it works much better.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why do you have so many scholarships? I mean the proportion just seems to be—

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well it isn't that large. Yale summer school is all scholarships I believe and of course it costs us—even for the paying students it costs us twice what we charge, I mean on our present budget. If we had more money we could save money, but carrying on all of these fund raising operations are expensive but there is no other way to survive.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have you built up an endowment or anything for it?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: We started an endowment, it's very, very small, I mean I was talking to somebody who works at the bank last week and he just, it's \$119,000. He just ignored it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's not even worth thinking about.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: He didn't want to think about it as far as he was concerned. But it is a start and we do keep adding to it when we can. But it's very hard to raise money for a summer project even though it's very concentrated. And there are always new things that we need. New buildings and equipment and students want different things all the time. When we started out sculpture was all carving and modeling, and then

welding came in and now it's power saws and band saws and all equipment is very expensive to maintain.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: And of course 28 years ago canvases were reasonably sized, now you have to give a student a place where he can do at least an eight or ten foot canvas.

We try to reflect what the students want, and the art scene has changed so much since 1946. As I said in 1946 and Anne Poor, Jack Levine and myself and Zorachs were considered, you know we weren't considered old-fashioned, but a few years later we were so far out of date you couldn't see us in history even. And you know we try to give the student a good

cross section of what is going on and of what we feel is very sound basic training. We have kept life painting and life drawing and such stuff alive, and it's coming back now with a vengeance. We had like 48 people in our life class last year, six years ago I doubt that there were six.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Six or eight and those were beginners. Now instance, Phil Grausman, who is a very good draftsman is teaching sculpture next year said he not only would like to teach sculpture but he would like very much to give a drawing class. And in the last four years they've really wanted drawing a great deal, and so much so that instead of having just one model we have two models which makes drawing much more interesting. This has worked out you know very very well.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How many applicants do you get every year?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well, last year, after we had accepted the 65 students, we turned away 88 qualified applicants.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you have a lot of people just write in who are curious about—

WILLARD CUMMINGS: A few, not many. I would say four or five at the most.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it's on a fairly professional level.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: I would say most of them are quite serious. Some of them you know are good enough and some not. But as I said,, last year we did turn away 88 qualified students and the artists have been so marvelous in back of it. I've been sitting in on the Board of Governors, and I don't know of any schools that ever approached them. We have a Chairman for the Alumni Committee each year and the overall Chairman of the whole thing and they are all willing to serve on the Board of Governors and make all these decisions and contribute names of schools that they know are good. Jack Beal has been a great help, Indiana has been a great help, Alex Katz has been marvelous help.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: In the early days we were making all of the decisions so it was kind of harder to push something new through than it is with the Board of Governors. We've always tried to give not only sound training in one sense but also to represent the very best artists in the various trends so that the students whether they are a realist or abstractionist is exposed to all points of view. It is necessary to open them up to the real thing in action so that they can start making decisions of their own. And such radical things have happened over the years. A painter like Phil Grausman came to study painting and ended up in sculptor. This has even happened with members of the faculty like Sitsami was there aa a painter and became a sculptor because he got fascinated by it. And this also happened to Nick Carone who was a painter who got very interested in sculpture.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What about your own work since the war? We haven't talked about that.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well I've been painting along when I can. The last two years it was very confusing because I was giving time to the school and it was very frustrating. So two years ago I decided when we had some problems to work out for the future to really put in as much time as I could for the school, and get that settled, and then get out of it, and go back to painting. I realize the years were crawling quite fast.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well had the school been taking more and more time as years go by.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: These last two years I decided to spend a lot of time getting things organized, fundraising thing working and so forth, but it has taken me much more time. Maybe I've been putting in the time I should for school, but before, if there was a commission, I would stop and do it. Last year I did a couple of portraits and that's all. So I think things are getting lined up now so that the staff we have which is very very good can handle things, pretty much alone.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think the period of the war affected your own work as far as changes and ideas or attitudes went? For a lot of people the war made them think in different ways and do different things and they might have gone into it one way and came out quite a different person.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well in the war during the Soldier Art Project and working in Special Services after the war, and also working for G-2 in Alaska, I learned a lot of things about organization and administration, how to set up forms and this and that and the other. I never in the world would have learned alone!

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: So I did learn a lot of things like that in the Army—I was sort of forced to—which I never learned in school. They equipped me to sort of set up Skowhegan in a way I never would have learned otherwise. It certainly made a big dent in my career. I had been working in Alaska and when I came back and started to do several portraits of women, they had shoulders on them. They all looked like generals, or very husky privates. But I got over that and you know I have done quite a bit of painting. I have had a few exhibitions, I guess my last exhibition was in '61 at Maynard Walker's gallery. But I have been painting I guess less since then, or I guess since '65 than I had before. We spent one year in England and I did a lot of drawing there, I was completely off and really dug into drawing which I hadn't been able to do for a long, long time. I was very pleased about that. We lived there and the children were in school in England and so forth, and we traveled on holidays.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Whereabouts were you?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: In London and I had a studio out in the Notting Hill Gate section. You know Notting Hill Gate?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah. I Used to work at the Mercury Theater.

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Oh did you really? Oh yes, that was there of course, did you really? That was exciting.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you maintain your interest in the theater after the war?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: Well, I mean I had old friends in the theater but I don't know who the young actors are today at all. I like to go to the theater but not in the same I did. I used to follow it constantly, I knew people in all of the shows, and was in touch with all of them and saw them all the time, went to all the parties. I still have very good friends in the theater and but they are of a certain vintage.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I'm curious about how you approach a portrait. Say you are going to do a painting of a man who is a successful business executive that you know, is it different from a successful man you don't know who wants a painting by you, is your approach different? How do you decide what to do?

WILLARD CUMMINGS: No, I don't think it's different. I think that you have a certain feeling about the sort of impact of a person you know and what their tempo is, what their energy quotient is or something like that, and just what they sort of are in silhouette. You can sort of tell. Now when I did Bill Benton—I was completely absorbed by the ideas that he just never stopped giving out. He was you know, very, very electric. When I did Stevenson, I had quite an experience with him. I was doing the portrait for Brittanica Films and I had seen pictures of Stevenson, seen him on newsreels and all that sort of thing but I really didn't have any idea of what he looked like you know. So I made an appointment long before, several months before I did the portrait to arrange a time and setting with him. His office was here in New York and I was supposed to see him at 1:30 and I was there at 1:30 and he came in about a quarter of two and he saw me sitting there. He looked and went to the desk and asked if he had any phone calls and she told him what they were. He went into his office and she called in and said I was there and he walked back and said how do you do, and he said you wanted to see what I looked like didn't you. I said exactly. If you're painting a portrait you have no idea until you see the person what they look like and he said I can understand that. No, I think it doesn't really make any difference whether you have known a person for a long time, I think it makes some difference how you respond to someone and how comfortable they are with you. I think that's the biggest thing. I always wanted to do Casals. I heard him play in Royal Albert Hall in London in 1927, '28, and I was always fascinated by him. Then a few years later some friends of mine opened a gallery in Puerto Rico, Terry Morales asked me if I would come and do some portraits and I said well, Casals lives there and she said she knew him and I said if you can get him to sit for me I'll come down and do the other portraits. So she took him my work and he liked it and said he would sit for me. I knew I wanted to do, I wanted to do a life size with the cello, playing. I hadn't seen him I guess since '28 really,

even in concerts. I had seen him a couple of times on television. So I got down there and went out to see him and he said I have some guests now and I said I would wait and the guests happened to be very good friends of mine, Maranara and Rudolph Tsuckobi, artists who I had known very well here in New York. And they were very nice and Casals asked them about me and they said I was a very good painter and a nice man and you'll like him and so on. So this was fine and we talked after they left, he and his wife. He was just delightful. He had started out as a painter and then the family decided he should really stick to music. He likes art and he had known millions of artists. The first day I started—he was so nice and charming and easy to work with—I suddenly saw, really saw him sitting there you know, playing the cello and I looked at this big canvas, I wondered if I was out of my mind. I know had gotten some charcoal notes here and there and laid it out and had a couple of brushstrokes down there was really nothing to see. I got my things sort of laid out generally where I wanted this and where I wanted the cello and him and the background and so forth. He said do you mind if I look and I said no, but there's not very much to see. He looked at it for about three or four minutes and then he came over and put his arm around me and said I want to tell you I think this is going to be a very important portrait. Of course if anybody says that then you know it will be marvelous to work on. If you get a person that keen, that anxious even before you put the first brushstrokes on the canvas to you go crazy. He's a master.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]