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Oral history interview with Salvatore Scarpitta, 1975 January 31.-February 3

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Salvatore Scarpitta on January 31 and February 3, 1975. The interview took place at his studio on Broadway and 18th Street in New York City, NY, and was conducted by Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

PAUL CUMMINGS: This is Paul Cummings talking to Salvatore Scarpitta in his studio on Broadway and 18th Street. You were born in New York, right?

SALVATORE SCARPITTA: Yes, I was born in New York City in 1919.

MR. CUMMINGS: What day?

MR. SCARPITTA: Twenty-third of March. I'm going to be 56 in a month or so.

MR. CUMMINGS: No, two months.

MR. SCARPITTA: Six or eight weeks.

MR. CUMMINGS: You said before, your parents came from Sicily.

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, my father was a Sicilian. He came to the United States at the very turn of the century as a young man, very young. My mother is from Poland. She has a Polish-Russian background, and my father is an Italian from Palermo, Sicily, and came here to the United States and realized he would have to have a better education to be able to live here. He realized that there were great opportunities at that time. Stayed only six months to realize this. Then stowed away as a Western Union boy from America to Europe. That's a new one.

MR. CUMMINGS: When was that, about?

MR. SCARPITTA: I think it was just prior to World War I. And he was about sixteen, I guess, and returned to study and graduated as an architect and an engineer from the Italian World Academy of Architectural Arts in Palermo. He returned to the United States to learn more with Timkin Roller Bearing Company and worked with the Timkins on their place at Palisades, and also I believe in Illinois, and from then on moved to independent work of his own. He built the Los Angeles Stock Exchange. He built at that time the largest hospital in the United States, called the County General Hospital, Los Angeles County. And he did the whole façade in granite, and the granite façade of the Los Angeles Stock Exchange, and other important buildings. He was also a great portraitist. He made good portraits and made some important portraits of McCormick of the McCormick Harvester Company. He was very strong in that group. He had good connections, thank heavens. He learned how to speak English very well and he knew how to move very well and was extremely successful. And very luckily so because he remarried and so had two families to support, and he was able to do this and his children were well taken care of to say the least. So, there were good connections there also in the family. We always got along. I lived at my father's studio.

MR. CUMMINGS: Where was that, in New York?

MR. SCARPITTA: He was in New York and when I was six months old moved to California. Most of his work in New York City was either working on the estate at Palisades, which belonged to Cora Timkin, which has since been destroyed to put that Palisades Parkway through there. But there was some very interesting work there - incredible things and organic sculpture turned into architecture on my father's part. I have photographs here that would surprise you. And, of course, the portraits were continuing, you know, Tammany leaders in New York, certain religious leaders. He was an official kind of portraitist, more than vanity. He was extremely realistic. Along with that, he had good associations with other artists that were famous in America so that he had, I think, a good cultural introduction to the United States. He knew how to speak English very fluently and very clearly and he prided himself on it. My mother, on the other hand, came from Poland. Her father persecuted draft evaders from the Russian Army during the time of the Russian-Japanese war causing the immigration of the family from Russia (now I believe it is Russia again - it has always been contested) and came to the United States as a little girl of six. She studied ballet. Her brother was already in the [incomprehensible] as a ballet

dancer.

MR. CUMMINGS: What was her family name?

MR. SCARPITTA: Yadensky. Nadia Yadensky. So the theatre seemed to be the thing with my mother and she was in the theatre and traveled in Europe with an American company and finally returned to the United States where she was also in some of our first important motion pictures as a bit player, small parts and things. She finally managed to get a rather important part with Rudolph Valentino in, I believe, "The Gaucho." She danced with him. Then she met Erik Von Stroheim and was in Erik von Stroheim's biggest picture, I believe, called "Metropolis" that was never shown here. It was produced, but never shown. I believe it was never finished. She had a rather good part in that picture. And my father, being a jealous Sicilian, decided it was just too much. He would dress up as an extra to check up on her. He did it for love's sake. But he got into a hell of a fight and the motion picture director said, "Who is that savage that's coming out in the crowd down there?" and my mother said, "That's my husband," and said, "Would you please get out?" Terrific.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's terrific. Did you grow up out there?

MR. SCARPITTA: I lived in California. I really did live in California. I was taken out to California at six months of age. I grew up there. I went through high school out there. I went to Hollywood High. My mother had always been a little bit, shall we say, peeved, to say the least, at my father because she wanted a stage and screen career and my father instead had other kinds of chauvinistic ideas. But they patched up most of the things. I must say everything. They were very strongly together, though. My mother was his second wife.

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you have other brothers and sisters?

MR. SCARPITTA: Stepbrother, Guy, who is a TV producer, and a sister who is in charge of the library, or at least was until last news I had, at Columbia Pictures. She handled all their archives. The music department, all of their records. She was very strong with it. Strangely enough, this may be Rudolph Valentino's only living relative in the United States-which is his first cousin. So her name is Valentino.

MR. CUMMINGS: What were their names before?

MR. SCARPITTA: The other family's name was a very wonderful name in Italian archeology and art history. Maliticusa, who was rector of the University of Palermo, an Egyptologist, and whose books are texts in the universities now it Italy. So, we have a marvelous cultural background. And my brother's a very active person. He produced a lot of very important sort of cornball comedies that come out of a kind of computer for TV. One of them was the "Beverly Hillbillies" and another one was "Green Acres." I mean popular stuff. [Inaudible.] Something he wanted to avoid because he had been Frank Capra's right-hand man as a young fellow in the studios of Hollywood. So it was sort of a letdown from a certain standpoint. But I'm not looking into my brother's life. He's very pleased with what he's done.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, how's California? How did you like Hollywood High?

MR. SCARPITTA: I loved it and it probably has meant the most to me when I was away from the United States for almost-well, on and off for about 16 years-later in life. Those days in California really are what kept me from forgetting my language, from forgetting my wife, from-it kept me from forgetting I was an American, really. Which could have been possible because I was so much into empathy in other peoples' situations. And I learned to speak Italian almost flawlessly reached from the standpoint of pronunciation that-I learned that language at 17 when I left California. I went to Italy at 17 years of age.

MR. CUMMINGS: But it was the language of the house?

MR. SCARPITTA: Oh! Absolutely yes. My father spoke English and my mother too. Later on my mother did learn Italian. She could certainly speak Italian and she learned it, you know, from a Sicilian who did speak very lovely Italian. Sicilians speak a dialect. However, the dialect is consistently considered aristocratic. To speak Italian is to make things commonplace. It's a reversal of situations, you know. You have that aristocracy in Rome for instance. The Roman aristocracy likes to speak a Roman dialect. This gives them sort of a saliency in a popular sense, that they are real people, not just an emblem. And certain places, Sicily particularly, has this kind of elitist sort of secretive elitist approach, and I used that word mildly.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you learn any Italian as a child?

MR. SCARPITTA: A few words, only a few words. I did not really know the language. I hardly spoke twenty words when I went to Italy in 1936.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you draw as a child? Did you make things?

MR. SCARPITTA: Oh yes, I had a lot of fun with my father. I must say he wanted a son that could do something, possibly to help him. I'm afraid I wasn't much of a help, but I got bitten by the bug. So he helped me enormously by proving to me that you could dissent and still somehow make it. Though he himself was a strict disciplinarian, I found out that by being rebellious to him I was still able to survive and I thank him for it, you know, because unless you have an issue to fight with I think it would be more difficult. I found in him a kind of loving opposition, you know, and it helped me.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you go to art classes or anything?

MR. SCARPITTA: No. They had these programs in school as a boy. You could try water colors, use your imagination. They didn't favor infantile drawings as much as they do now. They tried to combine more in those days, I suppose a kind of artisan sense of things so that the sense of things so that the same importance would be given to carpentry as would be given to art classes, which I'm deeply appreciative for because it made things seem more palpable to me. And, coming out of an artist's studio, I found that was a good approach for me. And naturally it didn't mean that I didn't have to go out and learn, but humanly it gave me a nice sense of America and its nature.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did your father let you work in the studio?

MR. SCARPITTA: I would stumble in when he was working and he even allowed me to use stone and even went to the point of paying to have some of my things cast in bronze by this fellow. So, I mean you know, he used a great deal of tolerance there. Tough guy, very strong, willful, but if you knew hot to grab him, tremendously generous. And I never knew how to grab him so I was always, always running away from him.

MR. CUMMINGS: What schools did you go to before Hollywood High?

MR. SCARPITTA: I went to Charmont Grammar School and then to a place called [incomprehensible] Junior High School.

MR. CUMMINGS: Were you interested in sports or school activities? What was the education like?

MR. SCARPITTA: Well, my brother had been a very well-known football player in California and came out of a generation that was into sports. So when I came to the same school that he had been, they said, "Oh, the new star." But I didn't need to be prodded - I loved it. I wanted to go and play. I liked it, you know. But I was really so gawky and I was walking into closed doors at that age and you know it seemed that my feet were a part of my neck. But I really wasn't big enough. I later became stronger and tougher. But at that age, at sixteen, you see, you are really too young I think to play that game, or if you play it, you play it with limitation. Whereas my brother was exceedingly fast - he was also a track man - very fast, low hurdles, high hurdles, a fast physical type of person, instead I found myself at the bottom of every pile, you know. I didn't know if I was being attacked or if everybody just fell all over me.

MR. CUMMINGS: Was there an interest in music or books?

MR. SCARPITTA: My father played music by ear which I loved to hear. He had a lovely melodic sound and at the time it was amazing. It was instinctive and had such central and direct emotional overtones as to finally be very interested to me. But that remained kind of as a hobby of my father's. We had interesting people near us. Aldous Huxley lived a half a mile up the hill, so I was meeting these strange Anglo-Saxon types, and being from an Italian family, I really revered them because they were so gawky and tall and seemed to have such a way of wearing clothes. I thought that was fabulous - seeing them you know. Then from then on to reading and whatever the books were that we read. They remained in our lives as young men from that period, Jack London and Ernest Hemmingway.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, do you remember anything about the high school, any teachers or events or -

MR. SCARPITTA: Well, I remember a marvelous sociologist, I thought. He was the history professor of my junior high school. His name was Mr. Campbell and he was a man who had the patience to sit in the room and read to us during our off period. There's an hour of sort of free - nothing, I suppose. And he filled that with marvelous readings. And he's remained terribly strong in my life. Some women, too. A marvelous woman called Mrs. Logan and she would say, "Sal, don't you remember, it's Miss Logan," you know, like you still don't remember. Another marvelous woman was John Ford, the Director's, sister-in-law. Her name was Honey, a marvelous woman from grammar school. These emerge. Another figure emerges from high school, a marvelous football coach called Vic Kelly who was from Carlisle University and a contemporary and played on the same team as Jim Thorpe. Marvelous people. I'm very happy to remember them. Old schoolmates, one was Mickey Rooney. He was a couple of years older. His name wasn't Rooney at that time. It was some other Irish name, not McBann, but something like that. Rooney is a name he assumed. Jinx Falkenberg who had a TV production was in my class. Actually, she was a year ahead of me so she must be a year older than I am. Christ, you must not say that. And

other interested people who went into America their way. I took off for Italy at 17.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, how did that happen?

MR. SCARPITTA: It happened because I had been acting since I was eight or nine years old. My mother wanted that, and I got into that pretty deeply and was able to buy a mother a marvelous fur coat, of which I am still very proud because I haven't been able to buy her anything since. I then went on to small parts in movies, bellhop parts that little kids could play in those years. Then went on to be very interested in Spain, bullfighters. I wanted to learn how to dance Spanish flamenco and join the company of Jose Fernandez, who had a big company in California with interesting people. [Inaudible.] And I was dancing with them [Freddie DeSanto] for a couple of years. Many companies asked for the entire company to do certain pictures. At that point I was making $250 a week when I was 15 or 14 years old.

MR. CUMMINGS: Fantastic. That was right at the beginning of the depression, too, wasn't it?

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes. It was right in the middle of the depression. It seems like there's room always for some kind of entertainment regardless of how deeply society may be in trouble. Now we all weren't working and some of us were able to work from time to time. And living in my father's house, I wouldn't want to report that as being prosperous, because maybe I would work two or three months a year, whereas people who were a little bit older saw the rougher side of it, you know. After all, I was coming out of the house where the meals were. So I finally felt that there was something wrong about my staying in California. I felt it was the kind of life that was interfering with my studies.

MR. CUMMINGS: In terms of what?

MR. SCARPITTA: My future, my destiny. I felt that somehow it was not equating. It was Spanish dancing. The one I might be interested in was Escadero, certainly not Jose Fernandez. And if I was interested in Spain it wouldn't be through the travel guides, but possibly through the Spanish Civil War. These things all started to affect me in a strange way at that age and I thought I must go and see these places. So, with my father's willing or unwilling permission, I had a little money, left for Italy in 1936 in September.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's a very interesting year, isn't it?

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes. I went to Italy in 1936 and with me were Mexicans that were getting off someplace to go and join the Republican Forces in Spain. I don't remember their names. I believe one was Emilio Fernandez, I'm not sure. And these two cats got off and I wanted to go with them, but they were eight years older than I was. The moment I saw they were stepping on the land, they knew the language, I didn't, that there was some - thing. I guess the proper word would be that it frightened me, and I felt I must go on to my new people, and they were my father's relatives in Italy. I think we stopped in Barcelona. I don't remember if the boat stopped there or Gibralter. I don't remember where-I forget exactly where they stopped off. I went on to Palermo to see my father's people. From there I wanted to get into the Art Academy that my father had gone to.

MR. CUMMINGS: How was it like, you know, from California here you were in a new land, a new life -

MR. SCARPITTA: My craves were strange, you know, my craves were strange. I am mixed blood, a regular half-breed. They looked at me as a kind of curiosity I think. They knew I was half Sicilian, but they also knew I was out of the United States, which intrigued them. I didn't put them down, I didn't put them off. They were intrigued with this kid 17, you know, and they loved my father and I guess they wanted to take good care of me if they could.

MR. CUMMINGS: Kind of a family interest.

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes. And it was huge, of course, like 30, 50 cousins, ten uncles. I don't know, it was enormous. It was exciting. It didn't look anything like "The Godfather." It looked more or less like coming into some sort of garden with people sitting around smelling plants. I mean, it seemed like nobody was doing any work at all, and they had plenty of time to devote to me-tell me stories and they started to teach me Italian. They were cultivated people, professional people and rather well off, I suppose. Judging by the diamonds they wore on their fingers, they looked wealthy. They tolerated me as long as I kept away from my girl cousins. That was their primary concern. It was pretty retrograding, but physically it was enjoyable. I could have stayed there in Italy. I mean I had had bad experiences in the past because my father had taken me there two or three times before. You know, seven years, nine years, eleven years of age we used to go back and visit these people. So I knew who I was going to visit. They were not that totally strange.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, I see.

MR. SCARPITTA: But my mother hated Sicily because she found it so restrictive, and she used to weep waiting for

my father to bring her back home. She was very much affected by that.

MR. CUMMINGS: It was kind of both ways, apparently.

MR. SCARPITTA: But I loved seeing and Sicily is physically so beautiful, you know. At least at that time there was such a wonderful aroma of citrus fruit and it seemed like you couldn't go anywhere without smelling jasmine or oranges, lemons, tangerines. Really fabulous. I loved it, I really did.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you live in a house then or what?

MR. SCARPITTA: Oh yes, I lived with some uncles, an aunt I believe. I was in the home of an aunt. Then the cousins were getting too big so I got myself a place in a little hotel. But I used to eat at their place. I mean Sicilians are very wary of the males, especially when you're seventeen.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you get into the art school? What did you do, what was it like?

MR. SCARPITTA: Well, I used-my father had relatives who were architects and so forth and he had some pull so-it was very rare for them to let an American who didn't know the language come in. But they had a part of the Academy at that time which was a preschool which was supposed to be an introductory kind of middle ground to get in. So I got into the preschool and six months later I passed the examination to get into the - at that time once you were admitted into a school of the "Kingdom." At that time it was a "Kingdom" and you could transfer to any school you wished, be it Rome, Florence. So once admitted in Palermo I was able to be transferred to Rome where I wanted to stay. Then I went on to the Italian Academy of Arts in Rome.

MR. CUMMINGS: Palermo was the first official training?

MR. SCARPITTA: That wasn't really training. What it was, was politicking.

MR. CUMMINGS: But once you got into school, what did you do there?

MR. SCARPITTA: Well, I was amazed at what they were painting because it seemed so lost in time to me. You know, I'd been brought up on war story magazines, *Argosy* magazine. I was brought up on another kind of art and it suddenly - I realized that they were searching way back into ancient books and were painting that way in a kind of peculiar fashion because during fascism in Italy they cultivated a historical approach in the arts. I found that really pretty curious and never felt it as being important that I saw very accomplished people doing that kind of work. I never, as they say now, I never got turned on by it, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: But did you draw, plaster casts?

MR. SCARPITTA: I did the whole thing. I did it in homage to my father. I wanted him to know that I was doing it from the bottom up and it was the bottom all right. So I went through the plaster casts and everything like that. The common thing that went on in those years was the life drawing. We also had an anatomy class which was unbelievable. It was like being in the 16th century, which was unbelievable. We would go to the hospital and operate with the professor on the corpse, it was wild. It was so wild. It was so alien; I really didn't understand what he was trying to do, frighten us or what, because we were completely unprepared to see a body skinned. I don't think it helped me in the least.

MR. CUMMINGS: But then learning the language and going to art school-

MR. SCARPITTA: And meeting a lot of American girls in Europe and the English girls speaking my language and just meeting a lot of beautiful people who were traveling through Italy.

MR. CUMMINGS: Was this in Palermo?

MR. SCARPITTA: No. This was in Rome already. I was only in Palermo a very few months, two or three. Just to make the break, to get into the school, because that's what I wanted to do. And I'm glad a conspiracy was possible because the curriculum of credits was enormous and I wouldn't have even been able to approach them at 17 years of age. So I was able to get into this preschool and have enough time to make up on them and then finally to come in the back door. That seems to be my destiny.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, you went to Rome when, then?

MR. SCARPITTA: In 1936, October or November. Well, I thought I wouldn't have any money so I tried to hire myself out to the Italian movies as a stunt rider because I had seen it done in California in the movies, and was actually foolhardy enough to take a job jumping a horse in an Italian movie. Fortunately, they cut the part out because the horse sort of sat down and slid over. But I got 30 bucks for it.

MR. CUMMINGS: How long were you in Rome?

MR. SCARPITTA: I was in Rome until '38 and in '38 I met an American Consul, a fabulous guy, William Everett Scott, and William Everett Scott was Vice Consul in Palermo and he had friends who were in Rome so he was constantly up there and we had a good relationship. He loved to paint, and he would clue me in on what things were doing in America, you know. He had copies of *Life* magazine where I would see the work of Thomas Hart Benton. And he showed me paintings of Ben Shahn. And it was quite an antidote to what was being shoveled out of Italy at the time.

MR. CUMMINGS: What was happening at the Academy?

MR. SCARPITTA: I was going to the Italian Academy which at that time was the Royal Academy. It was under the King's sponsorship and I was the only American. Actually, I am the only American, with the exception of Vincent Masterpoe, John Sedaius, these Americans that were with me-but I was the youngest to graduate and I think there were not that many more than three or four up to that time that graduated from an Italian Academy. I remember the first little group of foreigners that studied in Italy and actually managed to get through it. That is a miracle it itself.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, in terms of what? In curriculum?

MR. SCARPITTA: In terms of the curriculum, and also, you know, the time that we were living. We were living in 1936, '37, '38, '39 and even up to '40. I think I graduated in '40, which was one year before Pearl Harbor.

MR. CUMMINGS: What were your classes like?

MR. SCARPITTA: Purely academic, unbearably so. It was a beautiful group of people governed by a situation that went back to 1810. Actually, it hadn't changed much from the time of [inaudible] who was a real classicist sculptor, who actually was in that school as a young man, I think he was, and his plaster casts were all over the place. They had developed the taste for a kind of Neapolitan painting, kind of English Neapolitan type of painting which was still better than the fascist art of its time.

MR. CUMMINGS: But what did you do, because here you were in a very academic situation, but obviously aware of the official art that was being represented by the elders or whoever?

MR. SCARPITTA: It represented my elders actually and because of that it also represented total and complete opposition so that the only artists that I wanted to meet were those that were not so, I felt, attracted. Even though the teachers had been trained with fascism, I found them the only ones that I could get along with because there was a certain anarchy that they had. They were extremists, you see, and it made me happy to be with them and they accepted my kind of odd-ball position, they liked it, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who did you get to know in those days?

MR. SCARPITTA: Oh, let me see. I met some interesting Italian artist that were non-conformists that remained in my mind and still do. Philipo Dopeses, Mario, a wonderful artist, Roberto, a persecuted Jew. These were my friends. They also were the best damn painters in Italy. I didn't meet others who knew it. They were all like Morandi, who I would have liked to have met, artists like Bucho Contano, for instance, which I met later on. Artist like [inaudible], a lovely friend of mine. I met the people I wanted to meet. I had every opportunity to meet hem. Italian fascism is not in any way comparable to the Nazi organization. There was plenty of room to move around in. They had a built-in defeat in their system.

MR. CUMMINGS: How do you mean that?

MR. SCARPITTA: I mean, even though they were in power, they didn't believe it.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, I see.

MR. SCARPITTA: So they gave us a terrific leeway. I could step out of line a certain amount. Something that in Germany, I imagine-I have never been there but I have read enough about it-would have been impossible.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, you know all of this implies you had a great deal of regular political activity in Italy.

MR. SCARPITTA: Oh yes. You can't imagine. I mean being a young fellow and seeing people drafted, not drafted, being shanghaied into the army. People your own age, you know. I hope to always maintain an international sense. And I felt a bit of empathy for these guys.

MR. CUMMINGS: But how is it-you were an American. You were part of it, but you were foreign. It's really intriguing.

MR. SCARPITTA: Well, you know it isn't that uncommon in Italy. Everybody's going to want to live in America, you know. And one mustn't feel that an air-tight situation-there was not. There's always a relative in America. Maybe this will explain to you: I was stopped for having done something. I crossed the street at the wrong time. The traffic cop at that time in Italy had the right to issue a summons to pedestrians. He asked me for my papers. That's also a part of their police system. So I put out my passport and he said, "I can't give you a fine, I have a brother in Brooklyn."

MR. CUMMINGS: So he identified with, you know-

MR. SCARPITTA: With relatives-it was a kind of association. But it makes up a lot of the Italians' character, really. The Germans called the Italians traitors. The English short of found them lovably unbelievable. I found them extremely human.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, but you were living there. You were going to school. You had friends that were students, painters. You had a family background, associations.

MR. SCARPITTA: This all helped, you see. I think that I was a rather unique situation and later on, in terms of strict nationalism, I may have been abused in America. In this way, it because incredible to certain American people who couldn't imagine how, you know, somebody with a cultural background like my own, because I'm fairly well-read, could absolutely go on the beach that totally. I went native, let's say. That's something Kissinger would never be able to do. You have to have empathy to do that.

MR. CUMMINGS: But you must have been aware, then, through these people, of the developing political situation once the war started. How did that affect your life?

MR. SCARPITTA: Well, it affected my life very easily, directly let's say, not easily. It affected my life very directly because I had very strong ties sentimentally with the United States. And I think, in a thinking way too, I turned out to be right, which is one of the few occasions I've been so-called "right"-was based on the moment that I put my foot on European soil, that the United States was not going to be vanquished by them in any way. And at least for that probable period of time that could be as long as my life and that they had nothing to replace it and that they could only compliment it. So anything that I've met from that point on, I've felt like a strong man. You say something that is absolute as I'm saying you must have been, if not a Boy Scout of the worst variety, at least a racing driver type from California. I loved American racing drivers, whatever the hell their last name was, Irish or Italian or Anglo, and this stayed with me. Why give it up?

MR. CUMMINGS: Terrific. But didn't you say, well you know, Hitler's in Germany, Mussolini's in this, and they will go to war with America? Are you going to stay around? I mean what's going to happen?

MR. SCARPITTA: Well, it only becomes a problem when the outside forces press on you. Then you have to show where you're at. So this will require - now that we're going to - that's because this is very important. I want to answer that. I'm going down to the corner and put another quarter in that damn parking meter.

[Pause.]

So it's very important in my life for me to say that those years prior to World War II through the kind of international situation that Rome had with Englishmen, Austrians, Americans, Wales, New Zealand, a very curious mixture of people in Rome and those years very prior to World War II gave me an incredible amount of reason to understand my youth, my infancy, even more than if I had been in the United States.

MR. CUMMINGS: In what way?

MR. SCARPITTA: By contrast with everything that had gone on before in my life. I had a good polarization, a good confrontation, I was able to evaluate a life which was just an entity. But I was able at least to compare it to other situations. I felt in many cases to be extremely inferior to the problem of maturity. But in other areas found older men [inaudible] in something. I was able to draw some sort of conclusion that I had been accepted because there was something true about my bearing. These Italian people, which I presume you would call intellectuals, they tolerated me. They tolerated me in an extremely generous way. They conditioned me in a certain way. They conditioned me to accept an alternative to fascism without indoctrinating me, simply by showing me they would be more acceptable to a free youth than to what militarism does which prescribed obedience, fatherland and what turned out to be a nightmare. So I had all the wonderful equipment to be able to withstand any kind, at least the pressure I was involved with. I could take it. They tried to put me in the Italian Army because they had a law. The sons of Italians in foreign lands were supposed to be considered Italians and I told them I would prefer the concentration camps. At 19 that's not bad, you know. But I didn't go for any act of heroism. I really and truly believed that I would be better off. Because I figured I would meet the people that I had been talking to [inaudible]. And as it turned out, the American Consul that I mentioned before had been transferred to Romania and he asked me that the moment the war broke out in Italy to come to him. I received a

telegram, "Sal, get out. Come to me." I wired back, "I haven't got any money." Received another wire, "Don't worry. Come." So I left Italy and went to Romania.

MR. CUMMINGS: What year was that?

MR. SCARPITTA: 1940. Well, the 7th or 8th of June I left. War was declared on the 6th of June between Italy and France and England.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, before we get into that, which is another story, what kind of work were you doing in school?

MR. SCARPITTA: Well I had just finished the ordinary thing everybody does, trying to do it a little bit better at the Academy. I was doing the same thing, trying to do it a little bit better. I don't consider myself, by looking at the old drawings-I've had occasion recently to look them over. They're nothing more or less than what everybody was involved in. I had no brainstorms. Even though I was looking at other things, I was following a discipline. This was something that the Nazis had to find out about and it existed at that time a form of dictatorial regime, let's say a way of dictating the way people existed in schools. So I accepted the dictatorship, let's say at the level of getting through school. But I had already begun to look at Van Gogh and Matisse and Picasso. These were people that were unnatural to Italian art. With the exception, of course, of the Futurists, who understood the value of these people.

MR. CUMMINGS: But how much of that was available to you? Was it there in galleries or museums?

MR. SCARPITTA: It was only by association with people. If it was in the museums it was tedious. It was only through people that you could get any information at all and any human reasons. The grapevine of humans. The museums are structured in totally traditional-and fascist-museums based primarily on the justification of so-called virile, so-called academic morality.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, were there very many books or magazines available?

MR. SCARPITTA: There were magazines available. There was a fringe of Italian fascists that published a magazine called [missing dialogue] which was under the control of the Minister of Cultural Affairs whose name was [missing dialogue], who was trying to insert into Italian art a kind of, shall we say, a contemporary approach, favoring certain artists who then developed into communists or something else, but it was an originated thing and they did have openings in Germany that were unheard of.

MR. CUMMINGS: Were there any professors that you remember or students or other-

MR. SCARPITTA: I remember those professors. I remember students. The war separated us. I remember a certain German girl in the Academy. One in particular that was a secret German agent. It was unfortunate. In art school, like any other walk of life, you have everything you know. I made it a point to draw the distinctions almost immediately. And I'm very happy and proud that I was able to do so with the help of my friends. You know the State Department later on had things to say about Americans' independence abroad. I still think that I did the right thing. I met people in school who were sincere and who were insincere. I met people who were extensions of their government like this German agent who obviously was through later experiences, but I knew how to humanly say to the helpless by declaring themselves as such, developing a kind of difference, and I joined with the helpless. It was a kind of sentimental, emotional, democratic idea I had, but it worked out in the long run.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, you know, here you were in 1940 in Romania and war appeared.

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, I'm-

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you get there?

MR. SCARPITTA: I got there by train. I went out-

MR. CUMMINGS: You stopped and bought a ticket?

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, naturally. The United States wasn't at war yet. You see, we didn't get to war until December 7, 1941, and I'm speaking of 1940 now, in June. So we hadn't entered the war. We were still a year and a half away.

MR. CUMMINGS: So you could kind of move around then?

MR. SCARPITTA: Oh yes, you could move around still. The American Consul was open. The embassy was still there. As a matter of fact, the American Ambassador had gotten me into the American Academy. He was very-

MR. CUMMINGS: I meant to ask you about that.

MR. SCARPITTA: His name was Scopes. His secretary was a man called Allen Rogus and Allen was the one primarily responsible for getting me into the American Academy. Again through the back door, because they wanted me to have a studio. They were talking to an American kid and they wanted that guy somehow to profit as much as he could by this weird confusion going on, so at least I would have a place to work. I'm deeply grateful to them.

MR. CUMMINGS: Were you up there then at the Academy?

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes.

MR. CUMMINGS: For how long?

MR. SCARPITTA: Oh, for six or eight months, maybe ten months.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh really. Where did you-was your studio in the Academy?

MR. SCARPITTA: In the Academy, yes. I had my studio in the Academy.

MR. CUMMINGS: Were you living there or not?

MR. SCARPITTA: No, but I could have if I wanted to.

MR. CUMMINGS: What do you think of that place?

MR. SCARPITTA: Well, it's changed immensely. In the old days the American Academy was a king of a "tea sipping." Influential sons of influential people.

MR. CUMMINGS: We all have some of that.

MR. SCARPITTA: Not really. It's changed. I was up there a couple of years ago and it's absolutely at the opposite end in comparison to what it was, Paul. There are children running around and there's a sense of dirty diapers. It's a beautiful difference in comparison with when I was there. When I was there, it was kind of a cultural rest point. It was very rare to find anybody with an Italian last name in there. It was generally WASP, white Anglo-Saxon, Protestant. But they were extremely aware of me because of my father, you see. Because certain people that had known my father in New York. For instance, a Morman [missing dialogue] sculptor was a good friend of my father's so he was a visitor up there. There were lots of reasons why I would be given every God-damned advantage that a guy could have, and I'm deeply grateful because they've helped me enormously. Enormously. It got me off the street, you know, and into some kind of privacy.

MR. CUMMINGS: Where had you been living in Rome?

MR. SCARPITTA: Living in with family. My family came to visit me too, from California. There were plenty of ways to sleep but not many ways to work. Actually there was only one way-it was this way. So I got to remain there. And I left with a Britisher who was also probably a dynamiter. We used to call him Dynamiter. He was a British agent and we both made it across-he was actually more than a [missing dialogue]. We got off the frontier together and I hated to say goodbye to him because it was like saying goodbye to the sun.

MR. CUMMINGS: Really?

MR. SCARPITTA: Yeah. We did everything-well, he represented to me the kind of resistance that was needed, you know. He loved my painting, at least he said so. He "made believe", maybe. He made me warm. I painted a portrait-his name was Mitchell. I met him in Rome. He was obviously very much older than we were. He was a perfect British Captain, I mean.

MR. CUMMINGS: What was his first name? Do you remember?

MR. SCARPITTA: I don't. John. John.

MR. CUMMINGS: Fantastic!

MR. SCARPITTA: Not to be confused with Watergate. No. This was a wonderful person who had happiness on his side.

MR. CUMMINGS: If you went to Romania by train, you had to go all the way up and around.

MR. SCARPITTA: Yugoslavia, parts of Hungary and Romania where the American Consul was waiting for me.

MR. CUMMINGS: What did you do in Romania?

MR. SCARPITTA: We loved to paint, so all he primarily was concerned with was the fear of what he thought was impending great disaster.

MR. CUMMINGS: Not a place to go in a disaster.

MR. SCARPITTA: Not really. Because having that kind of backing, if he had been in Russia, it wouldn't have frightened me. What was important was that he was a part of American soil abroad.

MR. CUMMINGS: I see.

MR. SCARPITTA: So I stayed with him. But then I got into some trouble. We led a life in the Diplomatic Corp that I was completely unprepared for. Annoyed women, uncertain husbands, and a kid nineteen, twenty at the most. I found myself being introduced into situations of love that I could not sustain emotionally, you know, and it so happens he couldn't sustain emotionally either. So without there being a real right between us, it was necessary for me to-I would have risked death to leave that house, and I found myself without any protection in the middle of the Balkans, a young guy who just barely spoke Romanian. On my own. So I worked my way back to Italy.

MR. CUMMINGS: When did that start?

MR. SCARPITTA: This is still the beginning of 1941. We still hadn't entered the war. My parents had come to visit me; Father, Mother, two little sisters from California. They had come once a year or so before. I was there-I was like the Indian off the reservation telling everyone that we had better get back to the reservation. Bill told me before I left, "Sal, I don't know what's going to happen, you know, like between us, but get your people back to the U.S.A. because it's terrible right now." So I went back and, of all things, everybody got sick. At that time smallpox was monstrous, and it was defused in Europe. So there was sickness and all sorts of health problems. And it came to be the seventh of December when the United States went to war. Here I found myself still unable to let this family, even though I had a lot of help from the American Embassy, unable to get it together enough so that we could get the hell out of there.

MR. CUMMINGS: Now where were you?

MR. SCARPITTA: Rome.

MR. CUMMINGS: You were back in Rome?

MR. SCARPITTA: Rome. Right. So I went to the American Embassy, and they said, "Sal, we're burning our papers and we're out. From now on all we can hope for is a civilian exchange." So I went out with the American Consul, his name was Cooley, and we went to a party, and everybody was arrested, and from that moment on I was under police guidance, surveillance, whatever the hell you call it. 'Til they wanted to intern me at the beginning of 1943, 1942. In 1942 was the first real repatriation of diplomatic personnel. The beginning of 1942. The Consul and these other guys were returned; instead, I was sent to an internment center about 80 miles from Rome and I was there for about 18 months.

MR. CUMMINGS: Really that long?

MR. SCARPITTA: Then I escaped. Well, it was like being on a vacation, except we didn't have anything to eat. We were given 5 lira a day, and deflation was monstrous, so you couldn't get enough food really on the money that was passed around by the Swiss legation in charge of American affairs. But I met a beautiful Canadian girl while I was there. She was called Ivy. She was interned, too; she was nineteen then. It was just beautiful, and we had a wonderful friendship, and finally she was transferred to somewhere else, and I escaped. I just walked away.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, were you free then?

MR. SCARPITTA: No. I just had to report to the local police every day, and then finally it was twice a week. So it wasn't, really wasn't-I can't remember having suffered except that I got beaten up once because I said the wrong thing.

MR. CUMMINGS: By whom?

MR. SCARPITTA: By a policeman. Clubbed. Someone who was with him said if he did it again-another Italian-said if he did it again to the young guy that he'd get even with him, so he stopped it. But I was in the hospital because of the beating. But that was the only instance of violence.

MR. CUMMINGS: What did you do? That many months is a long time.

MR. SCARPITTA: Not really. Not really. I walked all over the place. I used to walk around the lake. Then occasionally British prisoners would come in, military, and we would send them messages. It was a lot of fun, really. It was exciting. I met a British Air Marshall who was a General in the Air Corp, and you know, like we had our thing. I mean, it wasn't that depressing. The peasants were extremely kind. They gave us eggs. Free eggs.

MR. CUMMINGS: What could you do with five lira?

MR. SCARPITTA: Five lira at that time was supposed to be about a half dollar, but they weren't really because of deflation or inflation. I was able to get along, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you have any other resources?

MR. SCARPITTA: Well, I used to have friends bring me things. It really wasn't that bad, Paul. Honestly, I was very lucky. And it wasn't a concentration camp. Let's forget it. There was only one alternative for me, and that was jail. I managed to keep out of jail, you see. Sometimes they would put people in places like that to be able to study them more closely. Then the charge would be espionage, you see.

MR. CUMMINGS: What did you live in during that period?

MR. SCARPITTA: In a person's house. He received his money from the government. I think it was two lira a day.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, here you were kind of a government subsidized guest in somebody's house.

MR. SCARPITTA: Oh yes. But that was the American Government through the Swiss Legation.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

MR. SCARPITTA: Oh, yes. All this money was coming from the United States. You see, they were chopping off the part we were not getting.

MR. CUMMINGS: Uh huh [affirmative], I see.

MR. SCARPITTA: Actually, I think I was entitled to something in the neighborhood of $180 a month.

MR. CUMMINGS: Which would have been a lot of money.

MR. SCARPITTA: Which would have been a lot of money in exchange. But it wasn't, you see, because they were exchanging it at whatever rate they thought they wanted it changed to.

MR. CUMMINGS: So could you paint or draw? Could you do anything?

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, I did. I have drawings with me right now from that period.

MR. CUMMINGS: They didn't say, "Why are you drawing that?"

MR. SCARPITTA: [Inaudible.]

MR. CUMMINGS: Wow, terrific! But, you know, did you have any idea of what you were going to do? I mean, it sounds like a kind of -

MR. SCARPITTA: It was a period of waiting. You wait, you know. You wait, you learn how to play chess. All things that prisoners learn. Even though you're, as the Italian say, [inaudible], which means "free within the boundaries of the town-ship". So I made friends with the cobbler and a fabulous guy that made shoes. Another guy that made olive oil and a hotel owner that lived there because his hotel had been destroyed in a bombing. And we met a lot of very lonely people who were refugees in their own countries. But there were also Italians who lost their homes, who are now living in small towns, who are really not very dissimilar to you and who, strangely enough, empathize with you. Even though you are an enemy alien They feel, you know, that now we've lost everything, this enemy alien isn't that much of an enemy, nor is he that much of an alien. Disaster was becoming total.

MR. CUMMINGS: A realist, in a way.

MR. SCARPITTA: Not really. I found it extremely human and totally understandable. To you it might seem that way because you lived here. You have never experienced this sort of thing, unless you're one hundred years old, and then maybe Sherman marched down through Georgia, you might have had some kind of inclination of what that might have meant, you know. Suddenly, destruction and tragedy unites people.

MR. CUMMINGS: But when did the war first become apparent to you, in terms of daily-

MR. SCARPITTA: From the moment I put my foot on Europe, I knew it was in the air. From the time I saw my Mexican friends go the fight in the Republican army. I knew that the hand-writing was on the wall. And from that moment on, I was interested in meeting that kind of people. It's very lucky I'm here to tell you the story because, with my kind of simplicity, to put it mildly, I could have been shot many times. I had friends that had been shot. Lonely people that may or may not have been spies; I don't know. It was a bad period of human life and in Europe they seem to be very well adjusted to this thing, but to an American it seems completely impossible up to now, 1975. Because we've been basically concerned with our own affairs. We managed to keep enemies out of our land. Whereas this in Europe is almost a generation of occurrence.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, right.

MR. SCARPITTA: Just impossible for an American to understand.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, what happened?

MR. SCARPITTA: And our movies haven't helped. They've shown the worst sides of our people; they haven't shown those parts that really resemble us, you know. It's too bad.

MR. CUMMINGS: What did you do as time moved on?

MR. SCARPITTA: Well, I didn't wait, you see. I just got out. I knew there was confusion. The moment I saw that there was no longer control that there should have been, I realized the measure of their laxity was the measure of my freedom. I took advantage of it as much as I could so they never got me again. I went up in the mountains with partisan groups.

MR. CUMMINGS: We heard about them.

MR. SCARPITTA: Actually they were not partisans, they were escaped prisoners that I was with first-Americans, British, French.

MR. CUMMINGS: Military?

MR. SCARPITTA: Military, yes. I was their liaison man. I spoke the language. I tried to help. They were starving. We needed the peasants to survive, and I was the guy that had learned how to talk to the peasants, so I got medicines and other things. It was a high net-work of influences and things needless to go into because it would be too complex.

MR. CUMMINGS: But you knew the language. You could go down the hill and talk to somebody and say, "I need some eggs, I need some--." But didn't they question you?

MR. SCARPITTA: If they had, I wouldn't have been able to get away. The problem was right on me. Never to be questions. Even though I talked a very good Italian. I learned Italian at 17. It was never that easy for me to equate the gender in a language. Feminine and the masculine were my constant worry. Being not terribly sharp with the language in a really grammatical sense, I would presume that if the word ended in an "a", as a noun, that it would then be a feminine word. Well, this doesn't run constantly through their language, and this was my worry. So, fortunately, I was never questioned. They never questioned me because I made sure they never questioned me, which meant I was doing a great deal of running.

MR. CUMMINGS: Wouldn't they question you for just the fact that you wanted something or needed something?

MR. SCARPITTA: Not at all. You don't understand. Italy was no longer regimented. It was already crumbling, so you were moving in the cracks, you know, and Italians themselves were becoming more and more strangers and foreigners in their own country. So you have a great deal, an enormous amount, of displaced people, and you can take advantage of it.

MR. CUMMINGS: I see. You mean people from one part of the country have moved?

MR. SCARPITTA: Right. Different dialects. Italy was united in 1870. The dialects in Italy are incredible, and they still remain today, very strongly. A crisscross, mish-mash of different dialects at that time. There were people from all over scrambled in different parts of the country. They couldn't quite equate where my accent was from.

MR. CUMMINGS: And everybody else had strange ones, so it really didn't make any difference.

MR. SCARPITTA: It really didn't make any difference, and I was very lucky. Extremely lucky.

MR. CUMMINGS: But how did you find living with these-

MR. SCARPITTA: The peasants and all.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, yeah. And with the escaped military.

MR. SCARPITTA: Oh, I loved them. They were on my side, you know, so I found them-first of all when a guy says "my side", that sort of prearranges matters, but you start talking about their homes, their family, their people, where they are from. Whether they're from the middle of England, Mid-what do you call it?

MR. CUMMINGS: Midlands.

MR. SCARPITTA: Midlands, yes. Whether they're from Midlands or an American from Kentucky, you know. I mean you didn't have to get into any suspicious ground because what we were talking about was human things. Show me your folks, the way you went to school. Strange naïve things that made life tolerable to us. I was in that condition for almost a year.

MR. CUMMINGS: Where was that?

MR. SCARPITTA: In the Apennines. In the mountains in the center of Italy.

MR. CUMMINGS: So, what did you do then, go to different villages, stay in the same ones?

MR. SCARPITTA: No. I stayed more or less in the same spot. I wouldn't risk changing that much. We could change position in the mountain without going down in the towns. There were certain towns that were key towns for the Germans. At that time they started taking over certain towns that were key towns for the Germans. At that time they started taking over. I'm talking now about October, September, 1943. So the Germans had certain towns taken over, or they had their fascist allies with them. So we generally tried to press on just one town where there could be some sort of political influence. It's kind of a Vietcong story. But, unfortunately, Americans have had to learn from mistakes first instead of being at the head where we should be. So we have had unfortunate experiences that weigh in recent American history. But it basically is the same situation as the Vietcong too. Partisan movement isn't just a mobile unit for warfare, it is a sort of combination of active and passive resistance within the confines of a certain township.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, how did you get involved with the partisans? It's one thing to be-

MR. SCARPITTA: First we were there as escaped prisoners. The partisans became liaison.

MR. CUMMINGS: They found you then, right?

MR. SCARPITTA: That's right. They found us.

MR. CUMMINGS: Because it was their terrain in a way.

MR. SCARPITTA: It was their terrain, and they had a natural trend. They brought in radios so that we could communicate with the South, which was at that time in alien hands, and we would get airdrops of food and other material. So that went on for close to a year-eleven months, and then a group of us-80, including Russians, Yugoslavians, partisans, English, Americas, we crossed the lines. We managed to get through the German lines, and went South.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you do that? I mean, that is a lot of people.

MR. SCARPITTA: Eighty. Eighty of us. We lost two. A husband and a wife on mines, but 78 of us got through.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you do that? I mean, that is a lot of people to move.

MR. SCARPITTA: We only had six miles to go.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, I see.

MR. SCARPITTA: I was eleven months within six miles of the front line.

MR. CUMMINGS: Incredible!

MR. SCARPITTA: I had an assumed name. I wanted to die with an Anglo-Saxon name.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh. Great, great.

MR. SCARPITTA: A fixation. I had an assumed name and a dog tag of a dead British soldier called Jack Short. That was wonderful. That wonderful man. So I got South. I was wearing a British dog tag.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, that's incredible.

MR. SCARPITTA: And they were amazed when they found out that wasn't my real name. I was really just a son of a bitch from the United States. A lost city in Europe, you know, and of all the people to be there at the rescuing point. William Everrett Scott was there. The same guy who was a major in the U.S. Military Government, and when he saw me come in, thin as a rail, he couldn't believe it. He said, "My God, Sal, you're alive!" I said, "Yeah, Bill. I'm alive." All he had to do, instead of getting hot under the collar because of customs inside the American Legation in Bucharest, all Bill had to do at that time in 1940, at the end of 1940, was to say, "Sal, let's forget these personal things. You're under diplomatic protection right now, and you come home with me." But he didn't do it because he was extremely afraid of his manhood. I loved the man, but he had strange complexes. He could have spared me a hell of a lot of trouble if he had overlooked a bit of my youthful stupidity, you know, which he did not. I love him still. The guy's gone now, he's dead. He's been dead a long time. I've always traced him, followed what I could about him. He could have helped enormously. So when he said, "You're still alive," I already realized that, in a way, he was kind of an enemy to me. The people who had been my friends became more so. Many of them happened to be communist, you see. They wore red stars on their hats. I was the American that was like, Mr. In-between. So I decided from that point on that there was more friendship with those that I had spent my life surviving with that those that used to raise and lower the American flag. And this caused me a hell of a lot of trouble when the State Department decided to pull my passport for three or four years because of my friendship with these people. So you see, the war ends finally, and I'm back at last in my own group.

MR. CUMMINGS: Where did you meet him?

MR. SCARPITTA: Coming across the lines. He was at the first American military stop which happened to be Naples at that time.

MR. CUMMINGS: Strange.

MR. SCARPITTA: After a departure like the one I had, to run into the same man on the elevator going up because I had to make a report, you see.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. SCARPITTA: I was going to make a report on dead soldiers, that kind of thing.

MR. CUMMINGS: What did you do in terms of just living? Were you just surviving?

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes. Basically running, lying. I never killed anybody. They tried to kill me, but I never returned fire because I was going too fast in the opposite direction. We had German skiers, police dogs, and the mountain troops after us constantly. But we made it form one place to another. British Captains, British Lieutenants, American Sergeants. Always sharing some kind of hole in the ground with one guy. Friends. And that made-

MR. CUMMINGS: How many people in the group?

MR. SCARPITTA: Eight hundred of us. When we made the final report, in our area of less than 20 miles were 800 allied troops hiding.

MR. CUMMINGS: Really?

MR. SCARPITTA: Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: But were there very many caught then or not? I mean, that's a lot.

MR. SCARPITTA: The percentage is about 35 or 40 percent of people were captured. Maybe I'm a little too generous about that. Maybe it could be 50-50.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well that's a lot of people.

MR. SCARPITTA: Yeah, yeah. The Germans would treat a captured military prisoner pretty good. I was in bad shape because I was a civilian and I would have been shot. That is why I wore those tags. To pawn myself off as a soldier.

MR. CUMMINGS: I see, I see. They would have thought you were a spy or something.

MR. SCARPITTA: The civilian in the front line is automatically a spy. Especially if he's [laughs]-it sounds very much like a class "B" movie. It was lived and remained a complete part of my life, and I don't relinquish one friendship; whether Communist or not. I even met a fascist that I liked. [They laugh.] We captured him, and we

saved his life.

MR. CUMMINGS: You know, what did you do as a group? I'm curious about what the interactions were?

MR. SCARPITTA: In what way, Paul?

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, you were living off the land, right?

MR. SCARPITTA: You know, there are many things. When you talk to Italians, you first have to speak of family. Which means that we have cousins in the area or at a certain time, even your mother or you father may be escaping from something. So they are within a stone's thrown. It's always a protective kind of a situation. It isn't that dramatic as some-let's say some poor Polish man who found himself in Italy without friends, or a Frenchman. These are really dramatic cases of trauma. I wound up in a quantity of affiliations which would take another twelve tapes to fill. It isn't that-you're not that isolated. It's a Vietcong thing. It's family, man. And you can't-you have to kill the family.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. SCARPITTA: Which isn't mafia. It's family for survival. Mafia is family to kill. In Italy it was family to live.

MR. CUMMINGS: So what happened when you crossed the line?

MR. SCARPITTA: We came to a completely flattened village and there was a British Major, no, a British General, a Brigadier, whose name was Wainwright. Similar to our General from the Philippines, Wainwright. He had us all line up, all 80 of us. He said, "Of the 80 of you, we have heard that you have English and Americans, too. Would you take one step forward?" And so the number of us that were, took one step forward. And so he came over to us and asked us how we felt. He smiled. He was kind. And the other fellows were all sent to an internment center, and they were the most wonderful anti-fascist fighters and they went from fighting free to concentration camps until they were cleared. This was terribly disconcerting to us because we had shared our food with these people for over a year or close to it anyway. But that is the first distinction-English speaking people step forward. You know, from that moment on, I realized I was in a privileged position, and I wasn't ready to relinquish it either because I was starving to death, and I didn't mind it in the least, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, what did you do then?

MR. SCARPITTA: Well, I joined up immediately. As soon as I came through, I joined up immediately. Bill Scott said, "Don't join up immediately because we're going to find out the right spot to send you." I realized Bill was going to have me parachuting, and I got so frightened at the idea of returning where I had been that I thought, "I've got to jump the gun on this guy." Because Bill was going to make a hero out of me at all costs, you know, and I'm not ready for that. So I met an American captain on a navy boat and he told me he had the right to induct. I said, "Induct me, Bill." And he did. So I became part of the United States Navy.

MR. CUMMINGS: What did you do then?

MR. SCARPITTA: I was an interpreter and interrogator of prisoners of war. Also, I was detached as a-what do you call it?-an expert-a specialist on Italian things and sent to the Allied Commission, and with the Allied Commission I was given the job of tracking down lost Italian art.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, and I was in that outfit for a year or so.

MR. CUMMINGS: Now what could that entail?

MR. SCARPITTA: It meant working with the Italians in a kind of liaison form. Going to their deposits where they had taken works of extreme importance out of their museums and hidden them and cataloguing them, photographing them, becoming responsible in as much as it was our government that was running Italy. Making ourselves responsible for their national treasures, you know. Their treasures were suddenly our responsibility. And that went on for a year.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you like that?

MR. SCARPITTA: I liked it. I liked it. I liked the people I worked with. They were wonderful scholars out of the United States, like Charles Rufus Morey, another wonderful man called Rewald from Princeton University, another called Major John Ward Perkins who became the director of the British School in Rome. Marvelous people who felt almost total empathy with Italian art. They became curators at that point of Italian art along, of course, with the Italians who really had a hot iron because that was their bag, and so we worked hand in hand.

MR. CUMMINGS: What was the Italian response to the Americans involved in this kind of activity?

MR. SCARPITTA: I don't believe they were concerned. At that time, they were concerned about food mainly, and their political aspirations. I don't think they felt that much responsibility except as a political instrument. They would talk of some destroyed monument, you know. They would use pressure as you would use pressure politically, but I don't think they had as much empathy toward their work as some of these foreigners that were suddenly entrusted with this responsibility, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: That happened so often-

MR. SCARPITTA: That was a rebirth of a country, and the primary things were survival, and it seems like the Greeks say, "When war comes, museums are silent." So it was our responsibility, having a privileged position, to try to do what they were incapable of doing at the time. And I think it was well done with some minor exceptions. Under the circumstances, it was a good job.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah. I've interviewed a few people who served on those various committees.

MR. SCARPITTA: For instance? What were their names?

MR. CUMMINGS: Taller.

MR. SCARPITTA: I believe he's with the Boston Museum now. Who else was there? We had some very fine people. WE also had some political appointees who really were inept draft dodgers that got into-they really didn't, they were known-most of the people who fought against the Germans coincidentally happened to be in the culture of the humanist thing; people had accidentally been, like John Ward Perkins, had been with an Ack-Ack battalion, which in our language means anti-aircraft, but then corollary to that were teachers at Oxford and were naturals to be nominated for a thing like this.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. SCARPITTA: But we did have political parties that, you know, got into it in a very particular kind of way. I mean they were very shoddy people, really.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. SCARPITTA: One of them destroyed a painting unwittingly-I'm not going to name his name.

MR. CUMMINGS: Really?

MR. SCARPITTA: I mean, there was a painting that was puffed out on a panel from 14-something, first-period Renaissance piece, it was puffed out through humidity. And he said, "How come it's puffed out?" and he poked his finger into the middle of it, and it disintegrated into dust. This man is today one of our people that runs a museum in the United States.

MR. CUMMINGS: Really? Well, that's that.

MR. SCARPITTA: We had that kind, and we had the other kind like Colonel Rewald whose reputation was at the level of the guy who lived in Florence. What was his name?

MR. CUMMINGS: Berenson.

MR. SCARPITTA: Berenson's level.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, you were in the Navy then for a while?

MR. SCARPITTA: Uh huh. [Affirmative.}

MR. CUMMINGS: 'Til when?

MR. SCARPITTA: 'Til I was finally discharged in 1945-at the beginning of 1946, in California. In the meantime, I had married a very lovely Jewish girl in Italy.

MR. CUMMINGS: Where did she come into this now?

MR. SCARPITTA: She was with me in the mountains. You see, I'm a chauvinist, so I would always talk in the male-I should have always used the plural. She actually disarmed a German soldier. She was a courageous, beautiful, wonderful woman, and we were married for sixteen years. Her name was Contrida Contierri, and her father was a Legal Counsel against Benito Mussolini in 1926, of which I am very proud because I found the man to be

outstanding. He was Legal Counsel against Mussolini at the time of the [inaudible] murder in 1926 or '27, and she was in the mountains with me all through that period. But we were married by an American military chaplain that died just a few years ago, who was a fabulous man in charge of American prisoners of war in Europe. His name was Monsignor Mague.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you meet her? I mean, she was just there?

MR. SCARPITTA: During the period of working herself through the cracks, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: I see.

MR. SCARPITTA: Someone with American bureaucracy finds it very difficult to understand, and that's why the German's lost the war. They never understood what went on between the bricks.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right. A lot. The British sort of row, don't they?

MR. SCARPITTA: The British have democracy on their side, so they have a greater relativity in dealing with the people. I find them outstanding. I loved being associated with British soldiers. I found them fabulous and found them democratic. You know, there is a class situation, or there was a very strong class situation in England. I found British soldiers to be true descendants of our own spirit.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, you know, then you had a chance to come into contact with the British, American, English-

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, and Italian.

MR. CUMMINGS: German, all kinds-

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, Russians. I was very lucky.

MR. CUMMINGS: What did you think of the rest of them? I mean the other group.

MR. SCARPITTA: Germans?

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. SCARPITTA: We fought them.

MR. CUMMINGS: No, I mean later when you came into contact with them.

MR. SCARPITTA: Never. I've never-I've only had one German friend. From the time they tried to kill me-they chewed up the ground with a machine gun around my body-I decided I didn't want to meet them anymore, so I have never been to Germany. I had one German painter friend who has since died. I loved her work-Magalita, a marvelous German painter, and I admire the work of Joseph Boies. His person as a human being, even though he was a Nazi flier, I'll forgive him that because I feel I was as much on his side as an artist as he was against me as a human being, so he had time to reformulate his humanity, and I find him tolerable now. But he is the only one.

MR. CUMMINGS: Fascinating. Because I said that to somebody, that he had a certain kind of military background unknowingly.

MR. SCARPITTA: Oh yes, he was a burnt flier. He got shot down and burnt and survived by a miracle. I think it caused his rebirth-I think he's a-I don't know him that well, I've never met him, but I have a kind of-he's the only German I'm interested in.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, how did you get all of a sudden from Italy to California?

MR. SCARPITTA: They sent me back by plane because my father was ill in California.

MR. CUMMINGS: I see.

MR. SCARPITTA: Actually, he was dying, so I was given emergency leave and was discharged at Treasure Island in California, and Treasure Island is a Navy base-

MR. CUMMINGS: Right. That was 40-

MR. SCARPITTA: The beginning of 46.

MR. CUMMINGS: Early 47.

MR. SCARPITTA: Yeah, like January.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, I was thinking-what did you do? Here you were, you know, right back-

MR. SCARPITTA: Well, I had an Italian girl, and I had a baby, so it was important for me to get the hell back to my wife, you see.

MR. CUMMINGS: Was she here then?

MR. SCARPITTA: No, she was in Italy. I was sent on emergency leave. The navy, you know, like we weren't transporting families around as we do now.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. SCARPITTA: So I went alone.

MR. CUMMINGS: So you were here for how long?

MR. SCARPITTA: Probably six, eight months. Inasmuch as I had been inducted into the United States Navy in Europe, they gave me five cents a mile to return. So I found myself with a few hundred dollars and the trip to get back, and so I did. When I got to Italy, Charles Rufus Morey said, "Sal, your place is in the American Academy again." He, at that time, was cultural attaché at the American Embassy, and through him and Leonardo Venturi, who was an Italian historian, I believe, a very fine mine, they got me into the American Academy.

MR. CUMMINGS: Anyway, what about Morey?

MR. SCARPITTA: Charles Rufus Morey spoke to Leonardo Venturi, who was a liberal in the best sense of the word, and they said, "Look, we've go this guy, Scarpitta. What do we do about him?" And Venturi said, "I think he should be up at the American Academy," and Charles Rufus Morey said, "Well, I have the means to send him there," and they both agreed that I would go, and so I was sent through the back door to the American Academy again, as I had been in 1939, and I found myself-Oh, by the way, in the meantime, I had stored eighty tons of American aerial photographs, bombing run photographs, for the archives in Washington in the premises of the American Academy, so that I had known all about it, and I had worked at it. I wanted to go back to the American Academy. I solicited my return to the American Academy, and both Morey and Venturi agreed that I should return.

MR. CUMMINGS: Anyhow, we have you back in California. What did you do those months while you were there?

MR. SCARPITTA: I'd lay on the front lawn eating avocadoes. When I left the United States Navy, I was examined because of tuberculosis, and fortunately it would seem to be either nonexistent or an extremely mild form. But I was down to about 145 pounds.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh my goodness!

MR. SCARPITTA: Which it seems like not too, you know-145 pounds-now I'm 215, terribly overweight, but I was really terribly thin then, and so I laid on the front lawn and I ate avocados from a tree I planted when I was a boy and met wonderful people. Met old friends from my-

MR. CUMMINGS: What was it like? I mean, you know-

MR. SCARPITTA: Marvelous, it was a marvelous encounter. I had my wonderful ruptured duck, which I was proud of, and campaign ribbons. I'd tell where I'd been and they were glad to see that their young friend, you know, had been through quite a bit, whereas a lot of my tough American friends had been working at Lockheed Aircraft for four-hundred dollars a month. In those days quite a salary and-or maybe more. And so I felt very good, and I started to paint again, and I painted a couple of portraits of people I was interested in-American faces-and just to meet them again. It was a-I made a few portraits that I wanted to paint a long time. For instance, a newspaperman that I loved called Leonard Boyd. Len and I have been friends from the time that I used to hide his booze for him from his wife. So he posed for me, and I'm proud to say I made a very resemblent portrait. And other faces that interested me.

MR. CUMMINGS: Were they friends or-

MR. SCARPITTA: Some were acquaintances; some were early acquaintances. It was sort of getting acquainted with the United States again. But I realized that I must go back and-

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, what about your wife? She was still there-

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes. I realized that I must go back and so after a few months of this kind of life, I got onto the train for New York and then got on to an Army transport with my five cents a mile thing and got back to Naples bringing a fur coat for my wife. I loved that fur coat because I finally brought her something. And I met her in Rome and began a life again over there. The people that I had known in the mountains were now coming back into the cities as writers, as motion picture directors, as painters. Some of them never to be seen again; some of them to become friends. Most of them were communists or close to communism. I found them as loyal as they were before from the human standpoint, and we retained almost a collaboration friendship. Painters are born in Europe, at least from my way of knowing it, from groups. They don't come out as individually as we have known here in America. I think that is because of class situations more than anything else.

MR. CUMMINGS: In terms of-what do you mean?

MR. SCARPITTA: In the United States you can be the son of a plumber and become an artist more easily then you can because an artist being the son of a plumber in Europe.

MR. CUMMINGS: Really?

MR. SCARPITTA: Times have changed. Now it's more like the United States, but in those days it was-it was a little stiffer. And it was also a source of delight for me to find certain friends of mine that I had known during the anti-fascist period who had been sons of extremely poor people, and suddenly they find themselves emancipated, not chained to their origins. This excited me. It excited me-it made these people I had known rather summarily in the mountains, made them more important, and I became fast friends with many of them.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who were some of these people?

MR. SCARPITTA: Well, Consala Torcato. Many others that I had known even before the war. Others that I can't remember or would have to dedicate some time to. It was exciting seeing people that you had known in a predicament suddenly become individuals, and I wasn't going to le their political opinions remove me from the possibility of their friendship. This was disapproved of, so I was thrown out of the American Academy because of denunciation by a Spanish painter. This is something that I have never quite been able to understand. He was trying to get a visa for the United States and went to the United States Embassy and said, "You've got a communist up in the American Academy." This was not true. However, that was what he said, and I learned that he was allowed to have a visa after I was thrown out of the American Academy because of what I was told about my political associations.

MR. CUMMINGS: How long were you at the Academy there?

MR. SCARPITTA: Until 1949.

MR. CUMMINGS: So you were there, what, about three years?

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes. I was there so long that they thought I was part of the wall. They didn't need to have an excuse like that. All they needed was to say, "Hey, Sal, man, out with you. You've eaten us out of house and home," you know. But the United States was in a bad period, very suspicious of its own people and maybe even rightfully so because there were some people that were easily brought out, and I imagine-I'm not right now in 1975, I disagree totally with the way they went about their matters, but if you have a poisonous attitude, you may find another poison to compliment your own. This meaning that there may have been some Americans who would go out looking, really obnoxious people, but I didn't consider myself one of them naturally, but-

MR. CUMMINGS: What did you do at the Academy during those years. I mean, were you painting?

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, yes. Constantly. And very happily so. But the American Academy allowed me to really begin my life all over again. See, the politics and the social situation in Italy, even though very important, didn't have the significance that it may have had two or three years before. The painting began, my futurist background, my association with Roberto [inaudible], meetings with certain American painters, Phil Guston, American sculptors, American painters of the '30s and '40s, Jack Levine. They all kept me in touch with the U.S.A., but my own work was abstract at that time, so I was running into their disapproval with the exception of [inaudible], which doesn't know whether he is abstract or figurative because for him art is a way out. He is a very interesting man. But, you know, you came back-you were living in the Academy with your wife and family-

MR. SCARPITTA: No, we had our own place. We could have lived in the Academy. We ate in the Academy.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, that marvelous food.

MR. SCARPITTA: It wasn't like now, man. We had our own cooks, and they were ace high.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, now you can't believe it.

MR. SCARPITTA: It must be horrid. But in those days we ran the American Academy because the American Academy didn't have a director, so we had a college that was running it, a college of ex-G.I.s.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who?

MR. SCARPITTA: John Meyers. Do you remember the name of the man in New York that I went to see to give the etching to?

MR. CUMMINGS: I forgot his name.

MR. SCARPITTA: Marvelous man. Jesus, I love him. His brother was one of the singers. Another painter, called Bob Alexander, from California, who now is an architect. There were six of us. Paul Valentino, who was an ex-G.I. who is now into some other thing. There was no director. We ran it. But that was only a part of my life. It was a perfectly skid row nature. The American Academy was a survival space, individual possibility of survival. On the outside, or shall we say on he inside, was Italy, humanity, politics, the competition, let's say competition; and that's where I began with the abstract movement in Italy. We started out as extremely left-wing people. The Communist Party didn't like our attitude toward art, but accepted us because we had a certain crescendo, a certain popularity. We also made friends among leaders of the Communist party who were not that sectarian about their approach to art. [Inaudible.]

MR. CUMMINGS: Why do you think they have always promoted so-called-

MR. SCARPITTA: Because they were evading the Russian dictate. I have no other explanation. There is no sense in sublimating it. It was repetition of the master's formula.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah. But how, you know, since you started to make portraits in California and you started painting-

MR. SCARPITTA: No, it wasn't, you see, because my portraits that I made in California were based on a French tradition. I was interested in Van Gogh at that time, I was interested in Paul Cezanne. I wanted to sharpen my painting instruments. It means that it would necessarily lead away from representation rather than into representation. [Inaudible] saw my first painting in 1930, along with Phil Guston. It was completely nonobjective painting. I turned a few years later toward a more figurative painting, possibly politically inspired. I wanted to see if it were possible to pain something that is going on in New York now and that I went through 25 years ago. They have an Alliance of Figurate Artists down here. They speak very much the way we were speaking in 1949 or 50.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes. That is why I don't go down there, because I know it backwards, you know, and I don't particularly-I'm not particularly interested in that facet of their work.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. SCARPITTA: Men like Philip Pearlstein, you know, or others of these people, I have found them outside my desires going back to 1948. So, I moved on from abstraction to a kind of figurization that was more-

MR. CUMMINGS: What is the abstraction like, because I have never seen those?

MR. SCARPITTA: Well, in Europe, and I'm proud to say to you that there are some going for as high as eleven and twelve thousand in Europe today for paintings that I made when I was twenty-two years old. I am very pleased to know that those paintings re protected and somebody else is taking care of them. And as I didn't receive the money because when I sold them, I sold them at fifty dollars each.

MR. CUMMINGS: Doesn't that happen that way.

MR. SCARPITTA: Yeah. It does happen, and I'm not sorry about it because it helps my work now.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right. Right. What were the abstract paintings like that you did?

MR. SCARPITTA: They were more or less constructionist, I'd say. Some were more emotional, lyrical. The paintings were like the flash of a fan. [Inaudible] contributed strongly to my getting rid of interference, let's say. Getting rid of static to learn how to paint. I loved working at them because I felt that I was learning something, you know, and they were not didactic. It was me that was learning, but ultimately, they were grey paintings, non-objective.

MR. CUMMINGS: No color?

MR. SCARPITTA: No. Kept them in grey monochrome. Then I moved from that on into color. I have always wanted color. I feel that color is our vitamin, so that there are later paintings with color, and I hope again to touch them again. I have never considered myself a nonpainter. By nonpainter, I mean that I am aware of color, even though form is important to me. But I'm really happy about those years. They developed my painting. In Italy they know about them. This that we are doing is, even though elongated and boring, is really a synopsis of a life, so I have excitements. I have a damn good things going for me, and I am part of the best painters in Italy. This continued until I decided finally to tear some painting apart, so I tear painting apart, and I start cutting canvas around 1956 to 57.

MR. CUMMINGS: What do you mean, tear?

MR. SCARPITTA: Tear it apart, cut, using it as an object. What I wanted was an illusion, a tangible object. And it created a storm in Italy, and I had my first shows, and I had very strong influence on a number of the younger artists. Monosoni came to me to ask me, "Sir, may I imitate your painting?" and I said, "My God, man, you're honest. If you can imitate it, imitate it, because I don't know how." Because I really was unable to repeat a painting. I still am.

MR. CUMMINGS: What started that, do you think?

MR. SCARPITTA: Oil paints slipping off the canvas, which I found not to be my own disease, but disease of others, and I felt that it had to be staunched like one could staunch a wound, so I started to bandage my paintings in 1957, and Leo Castelli saw them in 1958 and said, "Salvatore, you have to come back to do a show." And that's the man that started me on my way home.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did he see them? How did he find you?

MR. SCARPITTA: Through others, by hearsay. I think the real Mister In-between in that case was a painter in Italy called Piero Dorazio, who told Leo about this, and Leo came in hugging the shadows and walked out into the light in my studio and said, "Salvatore, I want this in America," and paid my way along with Fredrick Kiesler. They both paid my way back to the United States, causing a family disaster. It caused a divorce between me and my wife.

MR. CUMMINGS: You mean to come back here?

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes. She was unprepared to return, and that invitation to show my work caused my divorce.

MR. CUMMINGS: She wouldn't do it? She didn't like it? Did she ever come here?

MR. SCARPITTA: She did finally come a couple of years later. One of the daughters elected to accompany me, the eldest, Mavia, and when Mavia came, she was with me, separated from her mother, studying at the Walden School in New York through the efforts of friends, because they realized I was incapable of paying the tuition. Leo's money, which was given to me every month at that time, was barely sufficient to pay my studio rent. I loved being in America. I did not come to America to find a goldmine; I came to find painters, and I have been amply rewarded, because I ran into Franz Kline. I ran into Bill de Kooning. I ran into people I consider the best alternative that America has to offer to Europe, and I never regretted it, though at times I felt lonely.

MR. CUMMINGS: In terms of what?

MR. SCARPITTA: In terms of isolation as painters in New York City. It is not gregarious as in Europe. We don't use politics as our meeting ground. We use painting only, so it means we live much more isolated lives than they do in Italy.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, you know, before you came back, when you were in Italy, were there American artists that interested you? Did you know about them? Was there any kind of interest back and forth?

MR. SCARPITTA: Oh, God yes. I had been to Pollock's first show in Italy in 1950. I have never let politics interfere with my own desire to invent my justification for being alive, you know, so if I ever saw anybody else even in a remotely beautiful position like Jackson, I would be there to see his work.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you find that you looked at it differently when you were in Europe? What did the Italians say about American artists, abstraction expressionists?

MR. SCARPITTA: They were very [inaudible] by the American political situation, rather than by the American artists, you see, with the Marshall plan and with affluence in the '50s. Italians are very aware and are always going to be aware of political significance in art. This has caused their work to suffer tremendously from the standpoint of when you find an Italian artist that is really individual, like Alberto Burri or Bucho Fontana, you're finding people that are completely against the general crowd.

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you think it takes that on the part of an Italian artists; that he has to reject and cut everything off to become himself in a way? Now to keep part of the mainstream or-

MR. SCARPITTA: You mean they must exclude themselves or something?

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, they've got to, you know, like pull away or not-

MR. SCARPITTA: In what way? It is not clear to me.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well you know, in their work? I mean, to carve their individualistic-

MR. SCARPITTA: No. Italy's main critic is the School. With the School as there was at one time, the danger in New York that there be a School of New York, and suddenly for better or worse, America is more separated but stronger. I consider our country stronger now that it was during the time of the expressionists because we are more varied, and we can take care of more parts of the castle than we could before.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Inaudible] thirty people paint.

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, they are on the same side.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. SCARPITTA: They are defending the Southeast part of the pass, but the Indians come through the Northwest, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. SCARPITTA: We are in a better shape now, much better.

MR. CUMMINGS: So that variety makes a tough-

MR. SCARPITTA: Liberty.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. SCARPITTA: Liberty makes it. That's what they want. Why kill it? We have it, you know. Let's measure it, you know, and we have to pay prices for that, and I don't mind paying them. I paid for them in the past, and I'm ready to pay for them in the future. We have a marvelous variety in America, and the French have a marvelous word for it. They say, "Hurrah for the difference," you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: I know.

MR. SCARPITTA: Hurrah for the difference. This is our power.

MR. CUMMINGS: Why do you think it doesn't exist in Italy that way?

MR. SCARPITTA: It was to exist, but, you see, there are too many historical situations that stopped that. It will come to pass in Italy too, but it's going to take a hell of a lot more time. That is why I can only stay over there a bit at a time. I never refuse going to Italy. I enjoy it every time I go, but I'm very happy to return because I find I'm sort of in my-not state or national problem-I came to my own problem better here. That doesn't mean I'm praising the U.S.A.; I'm simply saying that it exists, and that's how I exist.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well how do you find that? I'm interested again, going back to the same-when you started tearing them and bandaging them. What happened? Were they over forms? Did they-

MR. SCARPITTA: No. No. The idea is you have a canvas that is perfectly bidimensional, is suffering under a pressure, either cultural or your own personal. You are giving the canvas a beating. You refuse at that point to interpret the canvas as the backstop to all these emotional problems. What I am saying is that when I began in 1956 or '57 to make this move where I was doing nothing but ripping up my own worst canvas, but the best canvas that Jackson Pollock ever painted or Bill because I tore it up, I was tearing it up for them. Not as a doctor, not as a saint, not as a thief, not as a broker, but as if you were sitting at a table, and everybody is eating abundantly, and you suddenly decide that you are going to leave, that still makes you first, regardless of what they eat.

MR. CUMMINGS: I see. But that sounds like also a point of achieving your own identity in a way.

MR. SCARPITTA: But of course. This is where Bill, Pram, and Pollock come right back into the picture again because it is just simply a personal story. But we live in the world. We have seen so many things so that if I

insult Jackson Pollock one afternoon, the next day I feel perfectly justified in saying, "have a good morning," you know.

[Break. Resumes February 3, 1975.]

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you remember your first exhibition in Rome in 1949?

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, yes. In 1948.

MR. CUMMINGS: 1948?

MR. SCARPITTA: About the year '48 at the Gaetano Chiurazzi Gallery. He was a very interesting man. Chiurazzi's father was a celebrated foundry man in Italy and his son grew up knowing all the most interesting Italian writers, poets, and painters of that time, and was himself the owner of an antique gallery of antiques, but he felt that this wasn't giving his own ideas any leeway at all. So marginal to his antique gallery he included paintings of some of the younger or some of the older friends that he had. That's how I-

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you meet him?

MR. SCARPITTA: I met him through an Italian painter called Mario Maffi who was extremely loved in Rome, and they had known each other many, many years, and I believe that with that help and showing my paintings to Chiurazzi-you know, he liked them. He said, "All right, let's show them." These were figurative paintings at that time. In '47 or '48 I was still somewhat of a figurative painter. I say somewhat because I was always very interested in Futurism, and in Cubism, let's say, which I found to be more sober than the Italian Futurism.

MR. CUMMINGS: In what way?

MR. SCARPITTA: More sober in the sense that it dealt I think with more sobriety in terms of the plastic phenomenon that went between man and man rather than an illustration or dynamics as conceived by the Futurists. I found the Cubists to be more adventurous even than the futurists, who I thought were very important Italian painters. But Picasso always represented much more to me and I think to my generation than the Futurists, even though the Futurists were, shall we say, home-grown and were our best certainty of meeting people that were involved in developing a more adventurous and more innovative approach to painting, and also in a human sense more active, more polemic, even more arrogant.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you meet any of those Futurists? There were still a couple of them living then.

MR. SCARPITTA: I met a very strong-a Futurists friend of mine-Roberto Mali, whose work is closer to Cubism than to Futurism, but he I think at times is as strong as Boccioni who just now, some twenty years after his death, is being fully, more fully understood in Italy. So there was Mali and there was a young Futurist called Monacasi who now is a well-weathered painter, but at that time was one of the young exponents of the second wave of Futurism. The influence of Balla was still around. Boccioni was still much loved even though gone. So there was still physical contact you might say with that world.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah. Was the art world of Rome very small?

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, it was small, but it had some pretty strong figures in it because they had already been tested though fascism, which had its own official art, and even though it approved of certain aspects of Futurism, they were approved more or less like rowdy cousins who could not be relied upon for anything. So that even though it was a select small number, relatively, in comparison with today where it seems there is an inflation of painters, in those days there were fewer painters but they had lived through twenty years of real trials and tribulations so that they actually had something to say and something to show.

MR. CUMMINGS: What happened to the official fascist painters?

MR. SCARPITTA: They had to bear the brunt of our after-war polemics. They were heavily attacked and denounced-and in some cases managed to retain a certain clientele that they had during fascism by moving over possibly toward the historical side of their activity. In other words, learning heavily on the fact that they were older painters and had a greater range of, shall we say, connections than the younger people could possibly have, because we had to even invent our own galleries. We had to invent everything from scratch when the war was over. So we did manage to have galleries that on the Italian spectrum were either progressivist galleries, or there were certain galleries that were tied to the Vatican in some sort of bleak way, and so that everything sort of resolved itself in the final analysis, after thinking back at that period, in a sort of a political way. So you could really not very well tell the political ideology of anybody but there was an attempt to sort out thoughts and people, and this did bring certain progress to Italy because it brought contrasts, it brought, you know, the painting story to a head. It created a certain, shall we say, divide, and it was an exciting period.

MR. CUMMINGS: Now you lived there from when to when, roughly?

MR. SCARPITTA: Well, I was there in 1945-6, I believe. After the war I returned to Italy from California and immediately began my work again. I was still up at the Academy when I painted the paintings that were shown at Chiurazzi's and then later on with friends that I had known there in the-and still do-in the art world of Rome. There were galleries that were sort of spontaneous combustion galleries and I showed at a couple of those galleries. The Il Pincio gallery was one of them. And-

MR. CUMMINGS: Were they cooperative galleries?

MR. SCARPITTA: No, they weren't. No, they weren't cooperative, but they stressed abstraction rather than figurative art, though they did show some figurative painters. The left-wing movement was very much divided along the realist and abstract levels, and I found that I operated more clearly and more truthfully working with the abstract artists and just simply arguing with the left-wing people that were social realists which I found had a kind of traditional way of rehashing history. It didn't have any excitement for me as a painter so I moved along as independently as I could at that point-though like Pietro Consago, Julio Torcato, Mario Maffi and still others that I don't recall at this moment, but who were very active that way and moving along a more free European way of painting rather than relying on a kind of nationalistic figuration in painting which was what he communists wanted.

MR. CUMMINGS: Wasn't [inaudible] part of that?

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, [inaudible] was the exponent of that hold world. And it was painting that could be interesting, but didn't have any personal reason for me because I was more interested in painting that was to come rather than painting that had to be rehashed, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: How many years did you say there before you came back again?

MR. SCARPITTA: I was there until '53. I came back in 1953 to California and stayed six or seven months. Then I returned again to Italy and after the visit to the United States I think my work was even more accentuated in the abstract way. Another gallery was born called La Tartaruga, a gallery in which certain American artists were beginning to show their work. For instance, Franz Kline, Bill de Kooning, Mark Rothko, Conrad Marca-Relli, and they included me among the young people that were there to show my work in the gallery and occasionally there would be a show in Milano at the Arte del Naviglio. Primarily, my work was shown there at La Tartaruga and the work moved more and more into an abstract-we call it abstract, but what I was really interested in was a time of energy painting coming out of Futurism. I was also interested in color energy.

MR. CUMMINGS: What do you mean by that?

MR. SCARPITTA: Color energy-including color to intensity and at the same time trying to make it as physical and possible. In other words, my primary stride at that time as a painter was to make my painting real even though it was of, shall we say, abstract or even nonobjective nature, to make it terribly physical. Physical enough so that I would feel that I could make a mistake and be able to register it in my mind according to the intensity with which I was able to make a painting. It was a kind of a physical way of being an abstract expressionist, which I never was. But I had that vibration. Only naturally the work is very much different. It isn't at all abstract expression. It finally reached a point where I called it "blind" painting where it was simply working without the optic, without the visual necessity, and making it more and more physically tangible until finally I tore up the canvases that I had painted and made canvases out of my torn up oiled canvases. I bandaged them, wrapped them, pulled them in different directions and found that even though I was getting into something that is called tridimensional, it was offering me a greater input than just optically making some sort of variation on cubism or abstract expressionism. I felt that I was now dealing in terms of a reality that I could pursue.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, the first paintings that you tore apart, how did you reconstruct them? Where they glued together like-

MR. SCARPITTA: No. They were pulled into position. I used the ordinary painter's stretcher and then they were pulled into position by tension.

MR. CUMMINGS: By pulling one end-

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes. And then I pulled the other end across and then wrapped so that it was in a way kind of a wrapped painting. Very humorous. When I came to the United States I had all these things laid out on the dock down here at 45th Street and the customs guy was a little bit annoyed with me because he said, "I've been waiting for you. When are you going to unwrap those things so that I can see them?" When I told him that was it, he laughed. He was good-natured, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: What do you think caused the shift from working on a canvas to tearing it apart and using it as materials?

MR. SCARPITTA: Well, facetiously I've answered that in the past. I think I can repeat it. It seemed like the paint was skidding off my canvas-it was literally-the paint thickness, the greasiness of the color itself, possibly my own overload of-

MR. CUMMINGS: It was getting thick-

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes. Not so thick as it was actually exploding from the center of the canvas toward the outside of the stretcher. And this was happening because I think I had a real overload of intentions, of motivations that had to be smoothed down somewhat so that I could reckon with them, and the only answer I had was to start cutting up the canvas itself and stanching the flow of paint which was escaping me.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, it was like the image was exploding out of the middle.

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, it was and this I attribute also to the Futurist background, coming out of Futurism.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right. Well, how were those received when you first-

MR. SCARPITTA: They were received with a great deal of excitement. When they were first shown other painters from Milano came down, they saw them, one of them asked me whether he could imitate them or not and I laughed at him. I said, "You're the first one that I have ever met in my life that has the guts to come out and say that you would like to imitate them." I said, "Man, imitate them if because I don't know whether I'm capable of imitating them, so if you can do it, more power to you." And he went on to that and many other things later on that I found extremely important in Italian painting. It was very nice that we did have a point of contact that I inspired. And he went on to his own bigger and better things.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well you know, from '46 to '53 is seven years that you were there. You lived in Rome all the time, right?

MR. SCARPITTA: I was at the American Academy until 1949.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, right. And then you had what, your own studio?

MR. SCARPITTA: After that I, well, I got into a little mix-up with the, at that time, the assistant director of the American Academy there and there was a bit of unfortunate, let's say a little bit of misunderstanding based on my friends in Italy, actually based on my relationship with them. At that time there were elections in Italy and we were out late one night and somebody was painting something on the ground. I think it was a huge hammer and sickle, or something. It was about five hundred feet long. It looked like a great big white line to me, and, you know, like in the excitement and everything, why I picked up a brush and helped him pain this damn thing. So, you know, it was about three o'clock in the morning, this great big pail of whitewash. Well, somebody was there that saw me do this and I believe that it was referred to the people up at the Academy that I was getting a little bit too involved in Italian internal politics or something and they sort of said, "Sal, I mean, you've already been here for three years and you're a damn trouble maker," and I said, "Well, you're wrong about that because I don't think that there is really anything to this, but if you want to read it that way, okay." And so, on the best of terms really, we separated from the American Academy. But I regretted it in a way because it was relayed-a kind of a bit of the McCarthy period really because it was referred to the American Academy by a Spaniard who, I understood later on, was interested in a visa, and this was his way of proving his loyalty to some absurd principle of his own, because I am sure that that Spaniard will never defend the United States, but I will. Anyway, he caused me trouble and that hurt a bit. So at that point I was a guest in the studio of a very lovely Yugoslavian painter and dress designer who had a lot of space at that time in her studio and she allowed me to sleep there, and I stayed with this woman called Bulsha Cohsack, who is very much loved in Rome now. I believe I stayed in her studio for a year or so. Then my paintings started to sell and I was able to pay for a small studio of my own. And you might say from that time on I had my own little studio in Rome and was working very hard there and becoming more and more well-known in Italy and this allowed me, in turn, you know, to keep from falling over the edge.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, how was it for you? You were still an American in Rome, although you knew the people and the city and you were involved with the art world.

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, yes.

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you think the people looked at you in a separate way?

MR. SCARPITTA: No, you see, I was an international sense in the progressive movement. I was very close to

communist friends, no question about that. However, the distinguishing marks were there. I was American and because I was American they excluded me from certain internal decision that they made themselves because the Communist Party moves in terms of internal decisions and I was never part of that process because I was never in the Communist Party. Not because I wanted to set myself apart so much, but rather because my circumstances were not the same as my Italian friends. But it never bothered me. I was only interested in making them understand that an American was not necessarily any cliché that they might have of an American and that they would have to view me because they could find very little to disagree with about me in terms of painting and in terms of ideology even though I am not an ideologist. So it meant something to me that it took away some of their nationalism-I think it took away some of their extreme nationalism and put them on a more international level. And I think I helped in that, and I'm proud to say that not one of my friends is a communist today. And I'm not saying it is because of fear or shame. I have nothing to fear in that way of thinking. I am just saying that reality is finally what changed their minds rather than a change in ideology. Now the way one interprets reality is, of course, extremely subjective. But when you get certain things of suppression, of differentiation, like it terms, say, of being an abstract artist and feeling that this liberty is not to be allowed you because you supposedly are on the left. There are lots of things that go on all the way up to the Hungarian Revolution that will tell you this, and it explains that if you are a painter, what you really feel is extremely privileged to take advantage of as much freedom as you possibly can and in return give your best work so that it isn't just a one way trip of the ego, let's say, or an opportunism on your part. So it had a good function that way.

MR. CUMMINGS: How were the galleries able to function for you? Was there a market? Were people interested in things? Or was it, you know, like in New York in the late '40s and early and mid-'50s, the people looked but nobody bought anything?

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes.

MR. CUMMINGS: All of that kind of thing?

MR. SCARPITTA: Well, there is a certain similarity after the war over there. We were starting to emerge as some marvelous American artists. The world isn't that separate in its desire to renew itself so that as they survived over here as many of our wonderful people even like Franz Kline at one time, you know, was going around through the restaurants making caricatures for a buck each, so we all had all sorts of difficulty. Possibly they had more difficulty than we did over here because in Europe we had what we probably call a kind of collective, somewhat of a cartel or a kind of league that would move and sort of pass along material things too.

MR. CUMMINGS: In what way?

MR. SCARPITTA: Well, if somebody won a prize for painting we knew it and he would simply be paying the dinner for the next six nights.

MR. CUMMINGS: Is that right?

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes. It was that kind of a-there was a wonderful fraternal feeling to it.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah. Did you find that here?

MR. SCARPITTA: In another way. It wasn't as channeled as it was over there. I mean over there you see it was impossible really to get any other kind of a job. If you were a painter, that was it. That was your job. You couldn't go out and get another job because the unemployment was enormous and the work that was available was so limited, and as an American over there I couldn't hold a job because the jobs were for Italians, you see.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you have the GI Bill or anything?

MR. SCARPITTA: I had the GI Bill up until '50, about 1950, which was terribly important to my survival and my work. I owe everything-everything I was able to do in those years I owe primarily to the GI Bill. But what I was talking about was after this GI-after '50. I had the GI Bill up until the time I was at the American Academy. Then afterward I had to sort of make it on my own, which was good. I mean I wasn't a baby anymore and if I wanted to stay there to, you know, to hack it alongside the people I had elected to share somewhat of a life with because I did not live, you know, in any kind of a cocoon or gilded cage. I was now out on the street with the Italian fellows that I knew so I had to live you might say exactly the same way. And I don't regret it.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who offered- [inaudible].

MR. SCARPITTA: Cleno Dumatsis was a very erratic type of man, completely unpredictable, the great love of the excitement of the Italian, and he was extremely important in Rome because his gallery was an avant-garde gallery opposed completely to the, shall we say, officialdom of the left wing movements in Italy which was figuration in art. So he was the first one to show important American artists and some of us that were in Italy. He

meant a great deal and is truly a part of Italian recent art history.

MR. CUMMINGS: Is that gallery still operating.

MR. SCARPITTA: No it isn't, but he has a new one now that I believe he opened last year and so he has resumed activities.

MR. CUMMINGS: Were there other galleries showing modern things there so that you could see the works of other people?

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, there were other galleries, but painters like Oscar, they had a kind of official acceptance of the painter. The most independent painter of that time from the standpoint of just him doing his own work in the most sort of, how would one say, the most either individual or-I guess that's it-most independent way was Alberto Burri, whose work many of us were very, very interested in and who did represent a kind of dignity and independence that took a while in emerging, but as it finally did it proves I think that he is one of Italy's best artists over the last two generations. So, certain Italian artists who were being exhibited in the United States-Burri was one of them, Oscar was another.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. SCARPITTA: So that in a way they represented a kind of official art because they were accepted by the United States, whereas we had the romantic notion that we were being excluded because we were extremists, and it sort of fed our egos, you know. It wasn't until later on when ideology sort of had to take a second place in front of your own effort that we were able to understand that some of the people we may have been criticizing were really a hell of a lot better artists than we thought. Ideology has a marvelous way of interfering with vision, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: And a lot of other things.

MR. SCARPITTA: And a lot of other things.

MR. CUMMINGS: True. Whey did you come back in '53 to California?

MR. SCARPITTA: I came back because I was asked to appear on a television program in California on, I believe it was NBC. Ralph Edwards had a program, believe it or not, called, "This is Your Life," which is an American program.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. SCARPITTA: It's the type of entertainment that bases itself on the torture of the human soul. But he did it extremely well. He is extremely intelligent, brilliant. He was doing my mother's life and I was asked to come back to be on this program. So they paid my way and I brought my wife and the baby with me. Little Mavia was our only child at the time. Later on we had Lola, who was born in 1957. Now with my second wife I have Selaba, who was born in 1972. So, three girls. But anyway, to get back to '53, the three of us went to appear on this program as a surprise package. Thereby causing my mother to almost have a heart attack because I hadn't seen her in seven years.

MR. CUMMINGS: Out of nowhere. Well, was this your wife's first trip?

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes.

MR. CUMMINGS: What did she think of it?

MR. SCARPITTA: She liked it but she was extremely cautious. I would say she was physically afraid. She didn't know the language. She was a very enterprising girl, you know, a lot of courage, and probably would have done most anything to remain here, but we were not yet, I think, emotionally or mentally able to return to the United States. It took more time for us to figure out a little more about what, you know, living was all about. I mean, before one chooses where to work, he has to know with what he has to deal and in this case we had to deal with ourselves.

MR. CUMMINGS: So it took more-

MR. SCARPITTA: It took time. It took another seven or eight years. No, it took another six years, five or six years.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you ever have any desire before that to come back here and set up-

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes. Constantly. I had that constant desire, but I always dreamed of it in heroic terms. I would

dream of strange situations whereby someone would ask me what I thought and then at the last minute, like when you are going to take a fork in the road that on the left-hand side there are certain people and on the right-hand side there are certain people along with your country, and then at that moment it would be a hundred yard dash through the pearly gates into the United States again. But that was a fantasy that-it was constantly with me.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah. Well, what happened with the work after you started tearing things apart and stretching them and wrapping them around? The first things of that nature that I remember seeing were at Leo's in what, '59, '58, something like that?

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, yes. In '58. They came in and they were shown in January of '59.

MR. CUMMINGS: So what I don't know is what preceded those-

MR. SCARPITTA: No, there were things in 1957-58. As I said, the painting was sliding off to the far edges, was being pushed by a terrific overload, almost an incapability of handling paint so that I had to go in and hang on to the painting almost as a life preserver and it started assuming shapes inside the canvas that I could literally hang onto, and it became my answer to this predicament that I had found myself in as a painter. And, of course, in Europe and especially in Rome, it was a very much, you know, a front line effort completely, if you wish, but individual and had the connotations of change in it. It was a big change not only in my life, it changed, as I said, there was the episode and many other things happened later on. You know, when I brought that work to America, it influenced many other people who saw it, and certain canvas reliefs started to emerge and I am quite convinced that they weren't there up until the time I had, you know, experimented on my own life with it.

MR. CUMMINGS: Now, these were built over regular rectangular stretcher, weren't they?

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes. They were built over classical painting stretcher bars.

MR. CUMMINGS: But I remember, maybe they are later ones, where they seem to have-

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, that happened in 1961. I was interested an ex-members, which means the cross of St. Andrew, and I had some paintings like that and had a show out at the Dwan Gallery like that in California organized by Leo and it was an interesting show, but it lasted only as long as that show. I returned to the stretcher bar right afterward.

MR. CUMMINGS: What provoked those do you think? That image?

MR. SCARPITTA: Statusism. I really wanted a nuclear point in my work. I didn't want automaticism to take over total.

MR. CUMMINGS: Was there some of that?

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, automaticism had become-it never was a dominating part, but the "blind" that I call blind in the earlier paintings was already a form of automaticism and I think that it exists in the work. It never was preponderant, but it was there and the ex-members were kind of cross-hairs on the nucleus of the motivation that I was interested in. However, you could take a cross and multiply it and make that equally automatic so I dropped it after that one show. I do have two or three good pieces left though out of that work.

MR. CUMMINGS: Now, I remember earlier ones that were kind of canvas colored, there was no painting or no dye, nothing-

MR. SCARPITTA: No, no painting. There was a dye, but it was a dye of the most domestic nature; tea, coffee, iodine. I couldn't handle the color. I felt inasmuch as I had eliminated the color from the canvases through a process, first using ripped up painted canvas and then moving on into raw canvas that the most that I could do would be just to permeate the canvas itself with certain tea, certain wine, certain-it was really a certain tablecloth color that I was interested in and some of them took a twenty or thirty canvases from that time. Then when I came to the United States I felt the immense importance, and still do feel it, of color. I feel that the color in the United States is the strongest color in the world at that time, not just from the standpoint of potency, but from motivation of color. The energy that was being used putting it on impressed me enormously so that I stuck with monochromes for a couple of years and then gradually wanted an impasto color comeback into my work and did finally work it up to a heavy pigment around 1964. Paintings like *Sundial for Racing*, which I have out in Chicago or in Illinois, and paintings of-Bob Friedman in New York has a number of my paintings of which there is one like that. So, in '64 the color gets to play a kind of vitamin role in the painting.

MR. CUMMINGS: Was that kind of, you know, a premeditated idea of getting color back in?

MR. SCARPITTA: It's a desire. Nothing in my work has really been premeditated except by desire, Paul. I think it

is noticeable in my work that I only start to reason when I am actually involved with something. I am not a conceptualist of that nature though the concept finally comes into my work almost in this automatic way that we were talking about, so that suddenly the painting assumes a more laminated reason to exist. I mean in terms of expression. It isn't an absolute. I have always been extremely relative in the work. I have never laid down any guidelines to modern painting. I find that the theory has always been alien to the excitement process itself.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right. Has anyone evolved the theory about your work?

MR. SCARPITTA: Well, it could be done because I don't believe that any work is without human thought, and I know certainly that my work is governed by the head too. But I try to make it emerge only as a punctuation marks would in literature and as a certain syntax, but I would love too-and that is also one of the reasons that I have excluded ideology in painting and theory because I feel the painting itself may dictate its presence to the artist as much as the artist may desire to dictate to the painting. As a good exchange, if you are in a receptive condition, you can find a dialogue with your work. I would enjoy very much that one examine my work from the standpoint of its cohesion rather than its certain physical energy. I do feel that there is a coherence even in the latest sledge that we are showing up at Leo's now. I have had people like Bob Friedman, who knows my work very well, say that he is absolutely amazed that even though they are sledged that it is a totally different world, different context, different time in my life, he recognizes my work from the old things, yes. That's right in the middle, so it is in there.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, when did you start to do things, you know, belting and-

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, that happened around 1963 with larger canvases. They were-

MR. CUMMINGS: Where did the materials come from?

MR. SCARPITTA: The materials were my kind of desire for the found object somewhere.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, the kind of desire for a certain anonymity, however, even though a belt, or a safety belt or certain flexible tubes are anonymous, I would bend them into the shape that I wanted them in my canvas. I think I was already thinking of certain motivations that went back to my childhood. I was very much interested in racing cars in California as a boy and had even painted numbers on racing car at fourteen years of age. So I still have this terrific desire to either possess a racing car or its skin or something of that same object that had really enchanted me as a young fellow. And I think that some of the sides of my canvases of those days are very definitely associated with dirt tracks, safety belts, exhaust pipes on racing cars, etc. So that went on as far as I could push it and then the desire for the thing itself came forth, namely a racing car itself. So I stopped the painting abruptly where it was in the middle of the work and went out and built a facsimile of a racing car, using certain original components and other things made out of wood and plastic and built inside my fourth-story studio on Park Avenue a full sized 1930 American racing car, just like the ones that I had seen as a boy. And that started a whole series of events whereby I built a half a dozen of them and even the fact that a couple of the cars were simply images, nonfunctional, of racing cars, and finally I realized the same effort would go into a functional one so I build three or four that had engines and the whole schmeer.

MR. CUMMINGS: Really?

MR. SCARPITTA: Yeah. Fully functional. And I was operating a kind of post office out of New York to the sentimental grapevine of American racing drivers of that time, people that I loved to talk to, and by searching here and there all the way across the United States was able to put together the components of cars so that they would return to their original appearance. And so what it was was a kind of restructuring of lost American objects-because the racing car consumes itself. In other words, its function will change its body, its function will change its design, and what I was doing was actually ignoring its function, putting the function off to one side and trying to get more and more back to the physical feel to not only the hand, but to the eye of what that racer really looked like when it was hot on the speedway forty-five years ago. I made some that way and they-when I made them, we still have some left, but of all the places in the world that they build sophisticated racing cars is Italy, and a couple of years ago they bought two of the nicest ones that I made and they now own them in Italy, through Leo's. But I hated to see the Ernie Triplet car go. Car # 4, that was, Ernie Triplet, an American racing driving from California in those years, a car dedicated to him, and another called Rail Duster, which was a class A car for speedways, race tracks in the Northeast in those same years. One an orange car, the other a red car, both with full racing engines and extremely indicative of what American home grown racers looked like. Something that they did not have in Europe because most of their racing cars were factory made. And even though they were prototypes, and some of them enormously beautiful, they didn't have that look that our cars have. There is something sort of unique and agricultural about an American dirt track car in those years. And they used to go fast and they would churn the dirt like agricultural devices. The dirt track racing is completely home grown type of racing coming out of horse racing tracks in the United States, whereas in Europe they were

given permission to race on the roads from the inception of automobiling, so that you don't have dirt tracks in Europe. This is a completely home-developed automobile based on totally different conditions of racing and it is still going on in America.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh yeah. County fairs, state fairs.

MR. SCARPITTA: Oh yes. Ohio, Indiana, Iowa, Pennsylvania. Oh, quite often. Yes, I love them, I enjoy them. I am very interested in the men and the machines they use and it is still the only vehicle we have left possibly on earth that still is using a front engine. You see everything is rear engine now. Only in American dirt track racing do we still have front engine racing cars. Because they need to be pulled through flat turns and they slide ass end upward so there is a rooster tail of earth as they slide around these flat dirty tracks. It has been a sensational American sport since 1909.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, you know, how did this develop-that you got into this research in the shape of the cars, people? What did you do?

MR. SCARPITTA: Well, how did I get into the racing car thing? I think that it is in the life of people. I don't say all people, but I had very strong desire to even become a racing driver as a little kid. People want to be firemen. Little kids want to be policemen, aviators, whatever it may be. My desire was racing cars and even to drive. My father was totally against that so I used to sort of hang around the garages when I was a boy in California. A wonderful racing driver lived very near my house. Needless to say I pestered him to death.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who was that?

MR. SCARPITTA: A great Indianapolis champion called Wilbur Shaw, who is a three-time winner of the Indianapolis and lived within a quarter of a mile from my house. I even made a drawing of him, a portrait of him when I was twelve and he was very kind. So we had all sorts of motivations to love those cars and drew enough of them, made enough drawings of them to really know what they looked like and how they were supposed to look when they were, shall we say, ready for racing, not museum specimens, but what they really-I mean, my racing cars even had baby shoes tied to the steering wheel. I mean a whole mythology, a whole trip, let's say spiritually, with the racing car was there. Even the greases and certain things, certain smells, caster oil for instance. All these things meant a great deal to me so it was really not so much going into it in researching it, though that was necessary, I had people help me. Old racing drivers gave me amply of their time.

MR. CUMMINGS: What did they think of your idea? You know, you go and talk to one of those people-

MR. SCARPITTA: Well, they thought that I was one of these car buffs and probably am, that would go to any length to finally get the car the way you wanted it so they were very prone. They didn't realize I suppose that I was going to try to get them out of the garage and out of the auto shows and enter the art galleries. They didn't understand that possibly, but when they came to the galleries finally, and some of them saw it, they loved what they saw and the place where it was being shown didn't make much difference to them. They kept seeing their own fetishes there whereas I was seeing my racing cars in the context of what was going on in the United States at that time. There was a lot of pop art going on, and I felt that work seemed to be sort of anonymous in a way, a literary anonymity in many cases, and in some cases none at all. Some cases extremely justified. But I felt that I had something to say in that period of shall we say, the American background as the stimulus for those works, and the racing cars were my way of showing that I, too, knew something of America. And it made a tremendous change in my life, by the way, meeting people and getting out of my studio was very important to me. To meet these old racing drivers, you know, many of them had very narrow minds when it came to social problems, etc. However their love for their world was so great as to offset anything that I might have, you know, objected to, but from a certain elitist point of view. I accepted their love because I knew something of it myself and it really stimulated the cars to reproduce more and more. And I say, I did six and probably have the components for another two.

MR. CUMMINGS: But you said some had real engines.

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, absolutely. When they were sold to Italy, one had a Hal engine and the other one had a marvelous racing engine built out on the West Coast from a Ford Model B block. I think it was a McDowell. And these are all souped up engines, four cylinder engines of that time. They were extremely fast. For short races, as fast as what could be produced by the famous Miller Engine Company. Of course, Miller was a more reliable engine, but as far as the speed was concerned, they were fully dignified and were completely competitive. So they had great racers-

MR. CUMMINGS: Did they work? You know, the ones with the engines?

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, I tested them.

MR. CUMMINGS: You could drive them?

MR. SCARPITTA: I tested two of the eight. You see, I wasn't too interested in the function of them, but just for the fun let's say I tested the midget car myself that I built for Leo's son, John Crestow, which was a Midget racing car, 1937, restructured totally with a Harley Davidson souped up engine in it sand had it up to well over one hundred miles an hour on a dirt track. Needless to say, everybody was scared to death, including myself, but it was marvelous. Then it burnt up on the track because of a mistake that we made with a certain conduit that we were using for gasoline. It caught on fire-it cross-fired between the manifold and the carburetor and the next thing I knew I was surrounded by flames. I was very lucky. Even though a Midget is a very hard car to get in and out of, I was able to get out almost immediately so that I wasn't burned. But it did a job on the paint, I'll tell you that. But we put it back into the right position again. I mean, mechanically. And it now belongs to Leo's son. But I had the McDowell out on the track. I could move another one out right now if I wanted to, but as I say, the function wasn't the main thing. What I wanted was this body that covers a certain type of man almost like a suit of armor and that is of the 30s and heroics aren't that important as the marvelous kind of popular feeling that went on between a man and a machine of his own making. That's how I wanted them shown and that is how I showed them, with that kind of feeling, I hope.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you ever find out why they were designed that way? Who started it and how-

MR. SCARPITTA: The development of the racing car body is not dissimilar to the development of the airplane fuselage, or the aerodynamics of a certain type, and then certain mythology protracting itself to certain attitudes that want to repeat themselves. Certain things, a fishtail was supposedly more aerodynamic, more or less World War I fighter plane, the cowling, the windbreaker in front of the face. There is another particular attitude that was, you know, constantly present in those days. And, of course, the radiator, and the situation of the wheels, the wide axles, the point of gravity being as low as possible as you could make it because of these incredible runs that they would make around the track on a very bad surface. I mean, a big chuck hole in a dirt track would flip a car right over. So, you know, there were many, many things that contributed to its design. But the only thing that I can really think o that can compare with it in a way is the World War I fuselage.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah. What was it like driving a piece of your own sculpture around?

MR. SCARPITTA: Well, it was mine and it wasn't mine. It was mine inasmuch as I put it together. It was mine inasmuch as I desired it. I did not invent the form. I felt that it was a moment really of reflection and reception. I didn't feel like jazzing up the car. I didn't feel like making it into a John Chamberlain. I felt that it should be what it is, that I try to understand it. If I really desired it that much, try to understand its meaning rather than its function, and possibly function too. And that's how I went about it. I never really considered it my sculpture, but I certainly considered it the extension of my ideas inasmuch as my racing cars never really did exist the way I had them. They were restructured. So there was something new in it for me.

MR. CUMMINGS: What do you mean restructured?

MR. SCARPITTA: Well, you see, I would have a racing car. I would have the frame. I would have the radiator, the cowling was missing or the tail was missing or shocks were missing. All this was all like a post office box going from one garage to another and finally this collage came together which possibly hadn't been together for forty-five years because these instruments had become obsolete. Certain shocks would become obsolete, certain carburetors, certain engines, certain front axles. Even certain bodies so that you find that you could get to a genuine prototype by simply going back far enough through strata of garages through the stratifications of time to be able to get a racing car that really now is exactly as it was then, you know. And with the same material and the same significance to it. I call them the Iron Age Racing Cars though some of them have aluminum bodies, but they have that kind of attitude, you know. They have a hammered out feeling.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, right.

MR. SCARPITTA: An artisan feeling.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, you know, what was it like in some garage and you were looking for an axle or shocks or something?

MR. SCARPITTA: Well, it meant getting truckloads of useless stuff to finally find the few pieces that were adequate.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah?

MR. SCARPITTA: I was assisted by numbers of ex-racing drivers, car owners, other artists, welders, mechanics, and just friends who had an inclination to follow through with this desire of mine.

MR. CUMMINGS: A lot of experience.

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, it was, and it lasted from 1964 to '69, five years.

MR. CUMMINGS: To build all those cars?

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you have help in the act of building?

MR. SCARPITTA: Oh yes. I had people helping me. It was an immense job. I mean you start with the frame-I mean even some of the frames that I have were built by myself. I would have to build the frame. There was everything, but not a racing steering wheel, the right kind. I made the steering wheel, the right kind. I made the steering wheel. Cutting up the steering wheel as Wilbur Shaw suggests in the book he wrote called *Gentleman, Start Your Engines*, and he tells of how he made his steering wheel, cutting up a circular steel saw into an X and then making his, shall we say, handle, a steering wheel handle. So, I mean, this went on and on. I built my own. You see all the radiator shells, those are all things that were supposed to supplement missing parts, missing pieces of facing cars, where I couldn't beat out the metal, I would just simply make them of fiberglass. But the cars I have shown are all homogenous in that they are metal. These fiberglass modules that were supposed to become other races cars were kind of a nervous tic that I had that would allow me just to continue doing things, manipulating them in the hope that I might use them. That goes for those, you see those radiator shells over there? Those are reproduced from Miller racing shells. I liked them because they looked like drivers' helmets or something and so I made-you see there are four of them there. These, of course, have no car, but if I had that and I wanted to continue I would still be in the same finish. I would have to start in again with the frame and the usual thing all over again.

MR. CUMMINGS: The whole thing?

MR. SCARPITTA: Well, I did it until I exhausted the experience entirely. I enjoyed it. It allowed me to return to the United States in a plastic form. I felt that I was no longer using, shall we say, a vehicle which I have learned elsewhere, but I was prescribed almost by the rules of the racing car itself, to remain within the context of something that had happened in my very early childhood in the United States. So I had something, you might say, to base myself on, a source to base myself on.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, you know, to go back again, in 1953 you were here for a few months. You then went back to Italy.

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, back to Rome again in 1954.

MR. CUMMINGS: And then when did you come back here again?

MR. SCARPITTA: Leo Castelli met me in Rome through another friend of mine who was an Italian painter called Pietro Doratsio and Leo came to my studio, he liked my work, he had already been in contact with the Tartaruga Gallery and Frederick Kissler happened to be along on that trip, or a little bit later, and through their considered interest and in particular Leo Castelli's, my work was brought here to the United States for a show in 1959, in January of '59.

MR. CUMMINGS: Were you here?

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, I came with my work. I fell in love with New York City at that time, the excitement of its painters, the disarming way that wonderful painters like Franz Kline would meet you. There was a complete lack of professional arrogance. You might find that later on in the evening drinking, but it didn't appear immediately, and that really got to me and I enjoyed every moment of it and was even able to make friends at that late date and in their lives. I consider them friends and we were friends. I think it's reciprocal. Bill de Kooning and others were in New York. Less famous, but equally simpatico, as the French say, and I became really taken by desire to work in New York City. Nothing could interfere, it seems, with this obsession that I had to-I must work in New York City. It wasn't that I was [inaudible] in Madison Square Garden to box in. I was perfectly happy to, you know, be a masseur or bellhop or an usher, knowing, of course, that there would be the time when I would be able to do my own work. I didn't do nay of those things thanks to the marvelous help of Leo Castelli. I was immediately put into condition to work in New York by him and ever since then have had his help in being able to continue to work in New York City. And just recently we have had some excitement, some payoff let us say, but people finally, you know, buying work in quantity enough so that in some way I could show Leo that I wasn't just considering him a patron, but a kind of foreign minister to which I could bring good news, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, terrific. Did you know '59 was part of the end of The Club and the end of Cedar?

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, I saw some of it.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you get into some of it?

MR. SCARPITTA: I saw some of it. I was down at the Cedar a lot like most Americans were. Everybody was at the Cedar that was interested in painting or sculpture, and everybody-I wouldn't want to generalize it that much because certain people that I admired like Roy Lichtenstein or Jasper Johns, people who had very reserved kinds of life didn't lead that kind of a sidewalk existence. But coming from Europe I found it extremely natural to move the European sidewalk inside the Cedar Bar and was there for three or four months before I realized that the fellows there could out-drink me 150 times and that really I was not and never had been a good drinker. So it was very hard to be with them because they knew how to handle something that in Europe was called wine and was translated into bourbon or scotch and I didn't have the excitement and I felt that sort of-that was a funny period. You might say that everything American was sort of that way in comparison to Europe. I found that painting could be more like scotch than wine so it was very difficult being shall we say a wine painter to deal with the bourbon painter. But it happened finally that aside from the mythology of either wine or whiskey that the work came first and that there was a possibility of finally meeting at a human level and both-I mean Rothko came to my show, the first one. So did Franz. I considered myself extremely privileged because I admired these artists and I know that for all of it, it isn't, you know, just a gallery jumping affair. I felt that was a nice spirit of solidarity in some of the artists coming. Also Bill de Kooning. So it was a good experience for me. Even though at times I became extremely angry at them because I found a certain chauvinism when I came here, and if someone had knowledge of another culture doesn't necessarily mean that he embraces it and a lot of the fellows didn't even know that I was an American, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, no.

MR. SCARPITTA: I didn't want to go around with an American flag painted on my back like some of the Hells Angels, but I was rapidly approaching the point of becoming a Hells Angel because I felt that there was a certain amount of chauvinism during those years and, strangely enough, there was a period of five or six years in which European artists were almost excluded from the American Art scene. I didn't consider myself a European, but I felt that the Europeans that accepted the importance of Jackson Pollock, Bill de Kooning, Franz [Kline], Mark Rothko in an exceptional way, and they were talking a great deal of how they were selling their paintings to Europe, so I can't figure out their protective nationalistic leanings. But after living in the United States for a while I started to empathize with them because I found out the galleries had been the other way for many, many years. Being an American you couldn't get into a Julian Levy [Gallery, New York, New York] or another gallery because it seemed like the French had absolute control over the art world. So it was just a moment of reaction and one that I barely, you know, there is nothing that has remained in me from those days. I just had to understand it by living here in New York a while.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, you built at one point an Italian military car?

MR. SCARPITTA: yes, that was in 1973. In 1973, yes. A friend of mine, Carosi, told me of a junk yard and I went with him and this immense junk yard had armor plate that had been cut up after the war by the government to be sold as deadweight steel. We looked at the armor plate. I returned to the United States. He then sent me photographs and said that he found the chassis. I wired back and said yes, by all means let's build up from the chassis. It will be an interesting jigsaw puzzle. So I returned to Italy to work with Carosi and we were able to, in this mountain of plate, match the color of the camouflage on certain plates and this plate turned into the entire shroud, the entire outer shell of an Italian armored car of 1940, a desert North African patrol car of eight tons. So we worked at it for eighteen months. I took four trips to Europe, three or four trips to Europe and in the meantime, Carosi was an absolute mechanical wizard and got it to be fully functioning and when I came in we go the body together, which in some cases was thirty-five millimeter plate, in the least vulnerable sections of the armored car it was 15 millimeters. So it was quite a job. With incredible help from a factory in the northern part of Italy, a factory by a marvelous [inaudible] and steel man called Scotsca Borosi, we were able to ultimate it in October of 1973 in time for the show in Milano. My paintings and this Captured Armored Car, as I called it. [Inaudible.] I made it completely inoperative from the standpoint of aggression. It was then covered with grease and then water poured on top of the grease. It was surrounded by two big Red Cross flags that hemmed it in on the sides and then these two big belts that crisscrossed down the middle. I'll show you the photographs. I have them.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, great. Doing a shift here-Taking a racing car to Venice in 1972. Was that-

MR. SCARPITTA: Well, we had a friend from Italy who told Leo of the interest that still persisted in Italy about my work even though I had been gone now some ten years. They were still extremely interested in seeing what I was doing.

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you go back in forth?

MR. SCARPITTA: No, I hadn't gone back in nine years up to that point. So this person through a gallery owner and very lucid Italian art dealer, an involved person, Pistoli-through these people, they decided that they would take about thirty or thirty-two of my paintings with the two racing cars, the Ernie Triplet Special and the Rail Duster, these American dirty track cars, and ship them to Italy and show them there. They were to be shown first in Turin, which took place in May of 1 9 72. And in June of 1972, at the time of the Biennale in Venice, the dealer and other dealers-because there were other dealers involved too-who wanted to see my work shown on the Piazza San Marco in Venice at the inauguration of the Biennale in Venice. They arranged permission to bring what I was told was the first automobiles ever put on Piazza San Marco Square of that nature. Yes, they had had trucks, sound trucks from TV. Yes, they had had certain vehicles, but they had never had two racing cars brought to the-to this incredible medieval square. And this permission was obtained and on the sixth of June, 1972, I met at the docks in Venice a couple of big trailer trucks, saw an immense crane lower my racing cars to the ground along with a huge crate of paintings, put on a railroad barge right out in the open. It was a beautiful, sunny day. The orange and red car on the barge. Huge new wood crate. Me sitting beside it with my friend, with our 1928 tugboat which looked like a miniature of the Mississippi Queen. We went up the canals al the way to Pizza San Marco where friends were waiting and the big barge was brought right up next to the quay at Piazza San Marco and these crates were taken off and the two racing cars pushed off into the middle of the square where they were exhibited at the inauguration of the Biennale and needless to say, old friends-Neil flew in from Paris, it was just one of those magnificent days. I've told friends that if somebody had decided that that was the time to torpedo my barge that I would have been happy to go to the bottom with my racing cars because it was a moment of such incredible joy to come back to Italy, a place that I had seen inside and out, where I had lived so deeply, and to come back from the United States after an absence of nine years with my work-and then with these marvelous racing cars, which to me was almost like coming in with your own toys. And the friends saw such an elation on my part that there wasn't even any room for the usual strife that goes on between artists. It was five or six days of pure joy. I loved every moment of it.

MR. CUMMINGS: I love the photograph-

MR. SCARPITTA: And two minutes after the inauguration of show the two racing cars were sold and all the paintings. Whereupon they asked for twenty more from Leo which were shipped the next year. So out of that show fifty-two of my paintings, large and small, and two racing cars returned to Italy. And this always made me feel rather perplexed because these things were born here, I did work on them here, they were seen here in two or three shows, a couple of one-man shows at Leo's, but no one had ever wanted to buy them. And now I can announce that these two racing cars are now in living rooms in Europe, and one of them in particular is brought out-one of them is brought out into the open once a year for a great party that they hold with their friends at this big Italian farm with this incredible villa and this racing car in the living room comes out once a year and there's a big party.

MR. CUMMINGS: Wow.

MR. SCARPITTA: So it was a tremendous joy to me even though I did want to see these things somehow remain here, but it makes no difference. It is over there now and a part of my life is lived over there. Whatever I have gained has an enormous part which is Italian, so I am very pleased that they took these things to Europe in the final analysis. I hope that they will be so much traveled that people won't even make any differences anymore about going here or there to see something. I am just happy that they will be maintained, that they will be guarded and that people can see them.

MR. CUMMINGS: For a long time you have had two careers, one starting there and one starting here, and now they seem to be simultaneous.

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, this is a fantastic thing. I think it happened in a natural way. I have come to understand even though I am a born American what an immigrant must feel coming to the United States. Even though I was a veteran of the United States Armed Services, I lived in Europe for sixteen years, I sort of had to come back into a new world. I suppose it is the same thing for anybody that changes even within the context of the United States. I mean I have talked to people from San Francisco who have come to live in New York and have found that even after ten or fifteen years it is not the same as somebody who is from New York. I don't know, I think it is a possible interpretation of life to say that someone has a split personality. I think that we all have split personalities, that we all either come from Italy or San Francisco and that somewhere along the line there has to be an intermarriage, completely within one's own nature, that will allow you to work in New York or to work in Rome or to work in China or to work in L.A. I think that it has to do not with the outside world. It has to do with something that is within us and I am grateful to New York because I think that I do have some sort of a modus vivendi now within myself that will allow not a marriage but a certain compatibility between my extreme experiences, and I find New York the best place in the world to bring these extremes of one's life into play. This is no guarantee of the work that will be done, but it is to say that New York is a wonderful place in which to work. And from there on in you are on your own as to what you do. But the how of it in New York is marvelous. The what of it is our responsibility. So, I feel quite at ease working here. I don't think I could have built the racing

cars over there, and certainly without having built the racing cars here I wouldn't have wanted to build the armored car over there. So everything seems to interrelate in a certain ay. Now I have come back to making these sleds and, you see, there is a whole, there is a whole. At one time one's life can be a backstop. At another time you are a handball player. There is a fine ray of this dualism to be complimentary rather than a contrast, a difficulty.

MR. CUMMINGS: Can I ask you about the military car, the armored car?

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes.

MR. CUMMINGS: What kind of reaction did that get from the people when it was shown there?

MR. SCARPITTA: It's very difficult to analyze. I imagine some people thought that it was my kind off-

MR. CUMMINGS: a joke?

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, possibly that, but possibly a kind of function taking an enormous part of my life. In other words, that I'd be interested in an armored car, certainly not interested in war. That I'd be interested in an armored car, certainly I'm not interested because, you now, of its aggressiveness, but maybe yes. Maybe I wanted to see if it were possible to count for one. But you can't count that armored car until you make it. And I feel that I don't know whether I [inaudible] it, but I am sure that I immobilized it. I built it to immobilize it and I think that some people in Europe found that to be extremely important and I received letters, come to think of it, after the show that said that it took a while for the reasons of this show to make sense among the brother artists in Italy, but it seems to have caused them a certain upheaval in that they were interested in trying to find a reason themselves, and possibly in the nonreason there lies its fascination. To me it appeared like a Louis XVI carriage, you see. It looked to me like an armored car from Louis XVI. It was so remote from modern warfare, it stared to-it's an anachronism-it started to, really to appeal to me. The more I worked on it, the more I realized it was so totally out of context that it was, its elegance and yet its extreme beauty, I thought from the [inaudible] standpoint that we had an incredible machine here; possibly one of the last. There was this kind of, um, joy of the object. The Italians were so mistaken in their approach to modern warfare that only their country could have produced such an absurdly beautiful instrument of destruction, and I was glad to review it so that we could really realize that that was the case.

MR. CUMMINGS: What did the belting do, the fact that it belted down?

MR. SCARPITTA: This is symbology on my part. Belts have been extremely important in my life and in my work. I thought these belts could contain and at the same time immobilize. You remember I was telling you how the paintings, the paint was sliding, skidding off my canvas?

MR. CUMMINGS: Uh huh [affirmative].

MR. SCARPITTA: Yet it's bandaged. When belts came into my painting the belts were-it's always been the staunch to heal, to splint, to hold, to stay in position until it gets well. This was my intention with the armored car, that it could turn into a milk delivery truck if I kept it belted long enough, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you think that any of those images or materials come out of the war experience?

MR. SCARPITTA: Undoubtedly. They come out, and they're there as evidence, without a doubt. I mean there's a whole romantic bag that one can get into if he's inclined that way. I can't say that I'm inclined that way, but I reflect things of that type undoubtedly because I've come through times of being tarnished or being rubbed like a tree by deer. I have been wrong whether I liked it or not. But this wasn't the reason for the choice of the piece. As I say, it came after the racing cars, it came after an involvement in real vehicles.

MR. CUMMINGS: No, but I mean the materials, like, you know, the belting and the-you know, that a-

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, that's right.

MR. CUMMINGS: I'm thinking of weathering. You know, do those things reflect back?

MR. SCARPITTA: I don't think it has so much to do with the military as they had to do with, like say with the world of healing, of bandages, arm bands, wrist bands-

MR. CUMMINGS: Where do you think that came from?

MR. SCARPITTA: Even as we used to call them in the old days, the duck belts that the racing drivers wore in the '30s to contain the human body in, to protect it, and at the same time removable so it doesn't become a straight jacket.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. SCARPITTA: I did feel at times that my world was a world of straight jackets, and when I saw the Marquis de Sade thing that they had here in New York, they had it-it's an incredibly long title-but it's an incredibly beautiful play, and I'm convinced, without reddening in the slightest and without false modesty, that the way the costumes were developed and the way the backdrop of that play was developed in 1965 comes out of my first wrapped paintings. See, the straight jacket has something to do with them, and that is a certain sadomasochism at the level, however, of culture, not at the physical level of the actual involvement in hurt and in pain. The pain was not so much within the boundaries of the painting as within the possibility of doing the same. So possibly it's just an autobiographical interpretation of the difficulty that I was having as a painter. So I don't give it any ideological or formal overtones whatsoever. It is just a human predicament. But I was able to explain it formally, and, in that sense, I have seen its echo in other work along the line. If it hadn't been done that would not have been done, and I'm quite convinced that if I hadn't to perceive though this underworld, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: You know, one thing that's interesting is that you can move from painting to three-dimensional objects.

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes.

MR. CUMMINGS: Use the term, "sculpture" in a way.

MR. SCARPITTA: Not that sort. [Inaudible] not as extremely illusive intellectual type. He said, "Don't call them paintings, call them sculpture. It will be much more far-fetched that way." Well I was in-Marco loves to be far-fetched-I don't' care about being fear-fetched. My clumsy things, or my answer to painting, is not extending sculpture into a sophisticated kind of condition.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's what I was thinking. You don't think of them as sculpture.

MR. SCARPITTA: No, I don't-

MR. CUMMINGS: They're really-

MR. SCARPITTA: I still think of them as my possibility of using canvas rather than the painting with the canvas.

MR. CUMMINGS: But then the racing cars-

MR. SCARPITTA: [Inaudible] I could think of bodies. I could go through al that work to have a big thrill of choosing your own color. Or painting a number or a decal, you know. I think the biggest thrill of every car was that moment.

MR. CUMMINGS: The painter.

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes.

MR. CUMMINGS: The color.

MR. SCARPITTA: The color, all the numbers and the names, and the wrapping of the steering wheel, which is also extremely symbolic to me. The taping of the steering wheel, very, is a very important kind of gesture. The action of the hands. At last, no monkey wrenches, no hammers.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. SCARPITTA: No mechanical devices, just touching with your hands, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: What happened after the racing cars? Was it right into the sleds? Was there something else?

MR. SCARPITTA: Well, no. After the racing cars, the armored car. And after the armored car, ire turned to New York completely fed up with steel and welding, rods and the fumes and the-but more than anything, the numbers of people that were involved. Each so lovable. Each person so lovable as to really almost forget where I'd come from. But I finally returned to my studio. I enjoyed the solitude. I realized that it was possible to work within the confines of my studio. I found it a relief after six or seven years to finally be alone in my studio again, and the sleds that came out of that period of solitude are the most movable way of, let's say, interpreting that solitude.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did they appear as images?

MR. SCARPITTA: It's a really odd thing. I really don't know how the sleds came to be. I knew what led to them;

certain paintings-that I call paintings like these I've been gesturing to on the wall. They had a certain way of respecting the structure bar around them, whereas before it was canvas stretched in the conventional way over the structure and then whatever happened within the canvas space. Suddenly, as you see on these paintings here on the wall, the stretcher is wrapped. Then suddenly I realized that the word could be wrapped itself. That maybe the empty spaces in there were totally justified, and from that structure, suddenly emerged the, you might say, the geometrical appearance of a kind of a vehicle that wouldn't move with wheels. It could be dragged along. Something happened whereby the desire that I had in the racing cars were still there, only the wheels weren't here. To build a thing is similar to building the painting structure, and suddenly instead of wheels there were runners underneath. And then I began what I wanted to do which was an expedition inside my own studio. I wanted to go as far north as I could go in my own studio, so I pointed north and started in the most literal and childish way, thinking of the way [inaudible] said it, that when you are a child, you have everything; that when you are no longer a child, you are already dead. Well, following that instinctive impulse, I went on with the building of dog sleds-out of my canvases again-and proceeded to build ten of them, and some of them are 15 feet, some are 13 feet, some are 9 feet long, some are agricultural types, some with a design of a racing sled, some are sleds that aren't' even for snow or ice, but for sand or for grass. The object is without wheels that can be pulled and was an object of spirit to me because it was very conventional and would allow me to work on it any way I saw fit, required no research because of anything that can be dragged along, once that principle is understood, will allow you an incredible liberty. So that I was able, without any research, just using mnemonic recall, just to continue. And every sled was different and with different reasons, and along with the sleds, as I built the sleds, canvases were appearing as a corollary to this because I wanted somehow a sort of a tent, or a backstop, or a blind to accompany each sled. And this is the work that is being shown now at Leo Castelli's.

MR. CUMMINGS: There was the vertical one that has a couple of panels next to it. That's one piece.

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes. Those were-those canvases came out. They're found objects too. I didn't want to manipulate the canvas. I respect enormously the bidimensionality of things. You might say that the sleds bore the brunt of my manipulating with my hands. The canvases themselves are almost impersonal. Almost impersonal. However, they are painted with extreme care, and I tried to penetrate them with oils and with resins in such a way that they would be an organic surface.

MR. CUMMINGS: With little cut outs and-

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, well the window inside is a found object. The canvases were that way. Those canvases I found in a supply deposit. They were surgical canvases for childbirth. Very interesting. You know, I realized immediately that there was a great fit there. That what I do want is, yes, something extremely direct, but to have it actually given to you without having to cut the hole in it yourself, I found a miraculous gift so that I handled them with extreme care, I cut them close to the limit of their own dimension as possible, which making [inaudible] in other words, same dimensions that would otherwise be used as a triptych, whatever I thought.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. SCARPITTA: So, the only dealing that I had with them was to humanize the surface as much as possible, so as to make it an organic corollary with a sled, which I think most people that I've talked to agree does exist. And I'm very pleased with that. But then few know, you are one of the very few, possibly one of two or three people, that those are not contrived canvases, that they were not made that way, but that they were found that way, and I just realized that this is really what I wanted. I always wanted air to circulate in my paintings anyway. That was one of the reason that I first cut them up. The window in itself is extremely important to me, even though I was the only one that knew what that window, that little window, was for. It was a very stimulating motivation, and I respected it as much as I could.

MR. CUMMINGS: This is the first time you've used a number of elements to make a total image, isn't it?

MR. SCARPITTA: No. It was done with all the ex-members. At the Dwan I had sleeves of American sailors in the painting.

MR. CUMMINGS: But weren't they all together?

MR. SCARPITTA: No, those were detachable. They were detachable.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh.

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, I still had some that are shown in New York there. You can dismantle them. So this is not the first. The first time was 1961.

MR. CUMMINGS: But the ex-members. Did they follow a pattern, or did you rearrange them?

MR. SCARPITTA: Sometimes, yes, they could be rearranged. Actually the [inaudible] was going down to Dwan came down and I told him, you know, you put them up anyway you want so that the show is quite different from the show that we had at Leo's.

MR. CUMMINGS: Because, see, I've only seen part of the-

MR. SCARPITTA: There was an attempted-but I find [other artists, names missing] was leading to art and technology, was leading to minimal art, was leading to a lot of things that really weren't of really much importance to me.

MR. CUMMINGS: No.

MR. SCARPITTA: All these factors, to some measure are in our work, but I didn't feel like becoming the proponent of something like that. So I turned my back on them, and now, 11 years or so later, what is it 14 years later, an entirely different context, the same kind of impersonal reason is present again.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Inaudible] the sleds a little bit more because, in looking at them the other day, I noticed they're, you know, like that. They're wrapped-

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes.

MR. CUMMINGS: They're belted-

MR. SCARPITTA: You see, I wanted to make these-it's been in my nature as a basis for work, to be as true as possible to the design. Otherwise I might really start making mistakes and be put in the position of not being able to judge the intensity with which I have to move into a certain so-called object. So authenticity from the standpoint of this mnemonic recall, so that even though this sled may have never existed before, it has the absolute inevitability of the way it is built. That means getting into a whole system of developments. First the wood, then the empathy for the canvas wrapping, then you might say inventing its function, not terribly dissimilar the way the Egyptians developed the Nastaba Cult of the Sunships. Yes, is the world in facsimile, but is so that-and this went for my cars too-a special [inaudible] Jack, the first racing car that I built, the facsimile type racing car, to be able to build an object that had a function that was beyond its physical capability. This is the presumption that I have in the work. And-

MR. CUMMINGS: It kind of becomes a mystical object.

MR. SCARPITTA: And this is my hope that it can travel in the imagination and that one can give it his expedition, one might say that, by looking at the sled and by having it, as if you'd crossed the ice cap with Shackleton at the South Pole. It was a triple fantasy but that required an immense desire for the so-called objective truths that go with certain predicaments that make desires become tangible. That gives them the possibility of figuration. The sleds are as much this as I was capable of doing.

MR. CUMMINGS: But these sleds are facsimiles of real-

MR. SCARPITTA: No, they're not facsimiles. They're recreations of the concept of the Northern sled.

MR. CUMMINGS: But it's not-then it's quite different from what the racing cars-

MR. SCARPITTA: No, because the racing car itself, even though it existed as such, had been manipulated, had been everything to it. IT was only supposed to appear beautiful on the track before the race.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. SCARPITTA: Then, from that moment on, it was pure function. I was making it race as it appeared. It was again the same thing only it isn't exactly the same as the sleds. The sleds are more [inaudible] than the racing cars. They're also less impersonal in certain ways. Though I've prided myself, and some people have said that the racing cars have a certain personality to each one of them. Now this I tried to push to the extreme in the sleds. I did feel more independent about them. It didn't require the technical assistance. The materials were immensely more manageable. The wood, canvas, resin, racks, the lacings-everything within capability of bare hands, and this was to me a great liberation in comparison to the racing cars. But the sleds represent to me at that level a greater possibility of humanization which is really where I think I'm at as an artist right now. You like to make human work.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, I mean, it feels like you, the way the others show you. It's a quality of confrontation that seems more consistent. But in the racing cars, it always struck me as being kind of a full blown, but separate experience, you know.

MR. SCARPITTA: Did you see the second show up at 108th Street where we had the six cars shown?

MR. CUMMINGS: No, I don't think so.

MR. SCARPITTA: Well, I'm sorry, because I think you might have seen a good counterpart to the sled show. I had the car tarps up on the walls. Components of the- components of the cars on the walls and on a lamp, a big 1929 class B Monster Car and then laying around another five racing cars, all more or less from that period, which I consider the hand-made period of racing cars, and it really had a lot in common, Paul, with the Sled Show. However, I must agree, if you meant to insert the idea that there's something in these sleds which is of a more personal-that there is a more personal situation, then I will have to go along with that and all it whatever empathy I had with the materials that I was using, namely the wood, canvas, and paint.

MR. CUMMINGS: What about the one that has the [inaudible] on it? Is that what that is?

MR. SCARPITTA: The split skies? One with the inserted pole.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, the vertical one with iron rings that hold the-

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, because [inaudible] have two canvases of the type that I was talking about with the apertures in the middle. They're not painted. They're impregnated with a certain pigment and very much resin, so what happens is you have a kind of weathered organic surface upon which there is a certain necessity in my own mind to establish a connecting link between the two modules so the pole alongside for me has the function for me of uniting, in a visible way, the two separate modules that are resting, one on top of the other. And the pole alongside that is wrapped with canvas and between two-and held by two iron-well, uh, they're really more like [inaudible]. Let us say that they're held-that this pole is held in position by two iron [inaudible]. And that it is a double image-the canvas is a double image held together by [inaudible] and a vertical pole. This, from the standpoint of purely visual satisfaction on my part. Then some people read into it that they could look like weather vanes-whatever they say is perfectly all right.

MR. CUMMINGS: The unicorn.

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes. It's a kind of an emblem.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes, yeah.

MR. SCARPITTA: No. That entire show is about 14 months. Yes, and one sled that was now shown is downtown in Leo's basement, which is still haven't been seen, which is a curious agricultural sled. Looks like kind of a wheel-less wheelbarrow.

MR. CUMMINGS: Really?

MR. SCARPITTA: And it's all wrapped in natural canvas and primed and impregnated with resin and wax.

MR. CUMMINGS: You didn't use any plastics.

MR. SCARPITTA: Well, yes. When I call something resin, I'm speaking of polyester or in some cases of epoxy, which in my case have been mixed with rubber, firecoal, so as to give it a certain elasticity.

MR. CUMMINGS: I see. I see. How's that going to last? Will it last or-who knows?

MR. SCARPITTA: I think if something is appreciated, they have a way of keeping them. If they stay together, that means people are enjoying them.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah. Yeah. What kind of reaction have you gotten? This is quite different from what everybody thought-

MR. SCARPITTA: I've had marvelous reactions to this show. Often times as great as reactions to the racing cars. Yet there have always been in my life even with my painting there are some, you know, that don't like it, that possibly find it headstrong or-I don't know what they see in it. But there are also others and these others have seen something in the work that has reached a point now where they say that the work that they have seen up at Leo's is the happiest work that I have ever done, which is nice to hear because that word "happy" is a word that I have used so sparingly or so conventionally as to make it almost nonexistent in my vocabulary. But the sled show, I have been told is, has connotations of happiness, elation.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Inaudible].

MR. SCARPITTA: And when I use resin I really forget polyester. I think of pine tree resin, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. SCARPITTA: So everything is truly made. Everything is truly built up from the ground. I have had marvelous assistance from a young friend of mine who helped me with the carpentry and with much of the guide work that goes with making heavier objects. Some of these sleds do weigh so much that I alone can't lift them. With his help, with his empathy, we were able to produce fourteen-in fourteen months we were able to produce ten of these.

MR. CUMMINGS: You know, it is interesting just thinking about those sleds and the racing cars and the Italian armored car, how many people you worked with.

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, it has been very exciting.

MR. CUMMINGS: And for years you haven't been one person alone in the studio.

MR. SCARPITTA: With the exception of the sleds. The sleds are truly an individual job. There is not a thing on those sleds that isn't, you know, totally off my battered brains. I feel very much that way about the racing cars, too, strangely enough. I feel there is a slight discrepancy between something being a metaphysical object and something being just simply functional. There is an extremely narrow margin in there. With the sleds I worked on that margin almost constantly. With the racing cars, because of the nature of the racing cars I was allowed that margin only in a very sparing way and I took the greatest advantage of it. But with the sleds I have really a completely sort of one-way trip attitude and I feel not different than somebody who decides to organize an expedition say to the Pole and is going to use dog sleds and then realizes that he has to have porters, he has to have supply points, he has to have all these things and if he is a good explorer he will see that all these people come home safe and he will not blush when he stands there either with the rest of them or with his dear sculptor friends. The idea is mine. I have a great empathy toward the people that come along with me and I would love to be on a trip like that that somebody else had invented. I seem to have to continue doing this and if I have to like reach a point where the last 90 yards I have to go alone, I'm going to do it whether there's a way back or not. In other words I'm extremely proud of this latest show and I don't feel as I felt with the racing cars and with the armored car that there have been all these people around because it has been fourteen months of a solitary conversation between me and the best way for me to cross that ice cap of my own life, and I feel that this show has reasons that certainly for me go beyond aesthetics, that certainly for me go beyond the New York art scene or the Rome or the Milano or the Paris or whatever it may be. It was a very personal trip that I took knowing that I would have to do something of this nature to allow me greater independence as an artist because we are all extremely aware of what everybody else is doing. So the nature, the direction of the trip you want to take becomes extremely important and I took a trip that only I was taking and had the good fortune to have Leo again say, "All right Sal, you can come back to the geographic society of my gallery and tell the people about it and show them what you did." And to that extent and in many other ways I am deeply grateful to Leo, especially because of his love and there is love in Leo for this new work of mine.

MR. CUMMINGS: You have been with Leo's gallery from the beginning almost.

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes.

MR. CUMMINGS: During all the shifts and the manifestations.

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes. Well, this is a position that Leo has taken as a man. Each of us, I think, has their own way of interpreting Leo Castelli, each of us in that gallery. I have interpreted my position with him at times as friend, at times as relative, at times as painter in his gallery, at times as guru to his personal life. And I am sure that he feels the same way about me, that he has been guru to me, he as been even painter to me because we talk painting. Many times I consider Leo to be an artist. Other times I see this other facet of him that I don't know about at all, which is that of a businessman foreign minister and that is where I have had to look more closely into my own life and be able to try and stop projecting my own self into other people all the time and try to see a predicament of the nature that Leo has on his hands to deal with. And these very same words that I am telling you I told him after we were together at the opening of this new show of mine and I was sort of criticizing myself that I had always considered Leo as sort of a patron of mine and that if he liked the painting somehow I would get enough money to live, you know, and without really looking into the matter and realizing the difficulties that he has had to overcome. He has been extremely important in my life in New York. We are not intimate at he level of, you know, partying and small talk, but with the main things in my life so I believe we have always been communicating. So, our relationship together has been one that I have recognized, you know, his abilities as an art dealer and while I find he is completely different than the way I live my life, somehow Leo has always had enough margin to be human to me so that I have never felt, you know, that his gallery was run by certain types of aesthetic mob artists. I have always felt that Leo has a very wide spectrum in which it is possible to be whatever you want to be and still be with Leo. Some of us are not longer together with Leo. I found out that in most cases, Leo has been right. I would say 99 percent right. Because even though I have had dear friends that

have left I still feel that humanly Leo did not lose anything by their absence. That humanly he has not recuperated himself and salvaged his own spirit so many times that whatever decisions he makes I just naturally find right. I mean, I feel very much like a [inaudible] in some Balkan government that may be in charge of some fire station in the woods and I feel that Leo is very much like the foreign minister of that Balkan Republic. So, I don't want his job and he certainly wouldn't want mine, but we seem to be in he same art country and to call it Balkan would make him mad, but to me the art world, don't get me wrong, to me the art world is always a Balkan so I am not putting Leo down at all. I am simply saying that he is the government and I'm the fire warden who is on cloud nine. Leo's been extremely loyal to me and I have been through enough troubles in New York to have been mad at anybody and everybody including myself, so that would include Leo too, but our relationship has always been one of extreme frankness to each other and it has finally, I believe, really after many, many years now, it is finally producing some mutual satisfaction at a level that I feel Leo will enjoy more and more. I have fun and love what I am doing or I wouldn't do it. So my satisfactions have been really quite substantial, Paul, in doing work that I choose, you know. I am very lucky in that way and I know it.

MR. CUMMINGS: I want to ask you a few minutes here, about teaching. You taught at the School of Visual Arts.

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes, for four or five years at the School of Visual Arts [New York, New York].

MR. CUMMINGS: What that your first-

MR. SCARPITTA: Too crowded, the school is too crowded with teachers. Almost too many teachers for the number of students. I look back on it with sympathy because of some of the young people that I met. I guess I did really meet an awful lot of people in those years while I was working on the racing cars. If I had been into the work that I am doing now I never could have taken that job.

MR. CUMMINGS: Why is that?

MR. SCARPITTA: Well, it is just I feel, at least for my personality, my character, my kind of syndrome, that the more I am within he confines of my studio the more I am able to do-I love people, I am not turning into a recluse, but there are certain moments when you just have to be alone to work and I am learning that now for the second time in my life because I lived for a good fifteen or twenty years alone in my studio. Then I had these five or six years of great excitement and now I am back in my studio again and I really am enjoying this kind of attitude in work. I think that this thing I am telling you about others have been also because this art and technology thing took a lot of people out of their studios.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. SCARPITTA: And some of them still are and may never return. The conceptual thing took many people out of their studios. I mean, I find my particular facet, a valid facet in a spectrum of very many diversified attitudes.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you like Peking? What did you teach over there for so long?

MR. SCARPITTA: In Peking is what they call a kind of free school in which they could do painting or sculpture as the student pleased.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did that work?

MR. SCARPITTA: It worked out beautifully because it was without any organized curriculum and mainly I was interested in metamorphosis when I was with these people so that for instance the first problem that I remember that each take the chair that he was sitting on and turn it into something else without destroying it. It was really a difficult job, but some did beautifully. So, I enjoyed that part of it. But then as I say, too many teachers. The school within New York City as far as I'm concerned is almost breeding monsters.

MR. CUMMINGS: Why is that?

MR. SCARPITTA: I don't know. I feel that to have the New York syndrome come into a school-the galleries become synonymous with people's lives and it doesn't allow for the invention that should be allowed the so-called teacher. In other words, he should be able to say something without people having to check up on him and see if his words really correspond to what he is doing. If that is the case then don't be a teacher. You are an artist. In other words, you are not there to be taken into a laboratory to be dissected constantly. That's the trouble with being a teacher in New York. So, I don't teach in New York City anymore because I feel protective enough of my own sanity to realize that I am not going to go through that. I have to go through that with myself when I am working. I don't feel that it should be a public manipulation. However, I still teach twice a month down in Maryland. You see, it is outside New York. I feel a certain elation when I leave the City. I go down twice a month. It's not that much and I can really go down feeling that I can give something. It hasn't become a painting habit. It's still fresh to me and so I go down there quite happily.

MR. CUMMINGS: Whereabouts?

MR. SCARPITTA: It's in Baltimore at the Maryland Institute College of Art. I have been there since 1965 and they have been so extremely relative and elastic in their dealing with me, being a fellow who comes down only twice a month, that it allows me the liberty that I need to, I think, instruct according to the way I feel without getting into a kind of structured or constricted atmosphere.

MR. CUMMINGS: How long do you stay there each time?

MR. SCARPITTA: I stay there overnight.

MR. CUMMINGS: So you are there two days.

MR. SCARPITTA: That's right. Two half days and a night.

MR. CUMMINGS: Everyday two weeks. That's not a bad schedule.

MR. SCARPITTA: Beautiful. I love it. I, of course, am through in the afternoon sometime. There are young guys that work out or ex-students so that you might say that it is uninterrupted for 36 hours. There's not much sleeping going on down there. It seems to be sort of exciting when I go down there. So it becomes a kind of exciting experience every two weeks. I have met some very, very fine and inventive people there.

MR. CUMMINGS: How do you find the students different there than at the Visual Arts?

MR. SCARPITTA: Only because of the myth of the exposure to the galleries here that makes the student here feel that somewhat similar the way painters in New York feel regarding painters that are not in New York. In other words, you are supposed to be in New York, the myth has it, you know. I won't foster that myth and I don't propagate it. Myths are very bad. So I find the situation in Baltimore more realistic and people seem to have a life that is less controlled by painting events than what happens here.

MR. CUMMINGS: Gallery openings and all.

MR. SCARPITTA: Yes. Or painting which is faddish at the moment, you know. They have more time to live out an experience there without questioning it as much. I mean Joseph [inaudible] who say that there are students of mine that have come out of the contingency matter like that so they burn up an awful lot of expenses that they might well have weathered a little longer before getting into such extreme positions. Like Joe is in an extreme position. I don't know how terrible it is going to be, but, of course, if he's got a good political sense, and Joe is intelligent, he can take care of himself. He's not that young anymore so God be with him. I mean these are the kinds of products that we have in New York.

MR. CUMMINGS: Do many of your students go out [inaudible]?

MR. SCARPITTA: Oh yes, we remain friends in many cases.

MR. CUMMINGS: Really?

MR. SCARPITTA: Oh, absolutely. Richard, who helped me with the carpentry on my sleds, is an ex-student from Visual Arts. Dana Lipsig I met at Visual Arts. These are people that Charlie [inaudible] with the racing cars, Susana Santoro, students from Baltimore, Pete Richards, from San Francisco. Fantastic people.

MR. CUMMINGS: Apart from teaching through the 50s and 60s, well, have you had any other activities or any other jobs other than working in your studio?

MR. SCARPITTA: At one time, you know, when I was without money. Right after the war, they had me teaching wounded GIs for a little while. That didn't last very long. The fellows were just staying there waiting for places to go home on the boat, you know, or fly home. I have been in motion pictures as a child so generally there were Americans in Rome connected with the motion pictures and if there was a day or two free when I was really in need of money I would go and be in some super spectacular as an extra. You know, like [inaudible]. But one time they pulled me out to make me an assistant director with Fred Zinneman, who made that picture called "High Noon". You see, it was in the blood, he knew it. He knew my brother was a producer in California and so Fred Zinneman actually moved me up into an assistant directorship on this picture. It was something that I knew about. I knew the peasants well and I was able to make the peasants do what Fred wanted them to do. But that is the only exposure that I have had at money making other than going around, you know, trying to make the paintings round, making them become [inaudible], you know. In other words, keeping your life together. In the painting mainly. I'd rather that too because I think that it helped me. I think that a lot of our marvelous talents here in the United States are made to be too practical at many, many things and then the jack of all trades things come out and suddenly their work has been suffering because they have had to give so much attention to

survival. I feel that I have been very lucky that I have always been able to keep working and survive and I am deeply grateful for that.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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