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Oral history interview with Peter Agostini,
1968

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Transcript

Interview

**Interview with Peter Agostini
Conducted by Collette Roberts
1968**

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Peter Agostini on 1968. The interview was conducted by Collette Roberts 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. This is a rough transcription that may include typographical errors.

COLETTE ROBERTS: I think it would be nice to start before you were an artist. Where were you born?

PETER AGOSTINI: New York, in Hell's Kitchen which is over on the west side and it takes in the territory of about Thirty-Fifth Street to Fifty-Fifth Street between Ninth and Eleventh Avenues.

MS. ROBERTS: Its north of Chelsea more or less.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right. It would be north of Chelsea.

MS. ROBERTS: You lived there about how long?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well a very short period. After that I don't remember too much because then I ended up in a home out on Staten Island. I mean according to my memory it was about a year or two, two years. And then I moved to Forty-Eighth Street and Sixth Avenue which was at that time the theatre district.

MS. ROBERTS: That's where your parents lived?

MR. AGOSTINI: That's where they moved to at that time.

MS. ROBERTS: And do you remember about what age you were then?

MR. AGOSTINI: I would say about eight or nine.

MS. ROBERTS: And you went to public school in that district?

MR. AGOSTINI: St. Patrick's Cathedral. I went to Catholic school there for about a year or two and then we moved to the Bronx for another year or two.

MS. ROBERTS: And that was another Catholic school?

MR. AGOSTINI: No, that was a public school. Then we moved to Third Avenue and Fortieth Street. From then on I can remember. But all that other thing is evasive.

MS. ROBERTS: I guess we could almost have a history of New York aside from your own.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right. Because I really, really trampled New York. I mean I really knew its docks, I knew everything about it. I'm probably more New York orientated than anybody because I have been in the heart of all its districts.

MS. ROBERTS: You remember the elevated subways?

MR. AGOSTINI: Every one. That's right .

MS. ROBERTS: I remember the Third Avenue one.

MR. AGOSTINI: I remember that it was right outside my window.

MS. ROBERTS: Oh really? Did it shake the whole building?

MR. AGOSTINI: No, it used to put me to sleep because it was rhythmic. You know, after a while you accustom yourself to it bouncing on the rails. I think a lot of ideas I get come from all these wanderings and lookings and hearing. And the street itself. Every time I make a piece of sculpture I can almost smell where its origin is, you know.

MS. ROBERTS: Incidentally, as we speak of sculpture, when did you start to feel you wanted to be an artist or when did you first start to work as an artist.

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, it was in the home there. They saw me dreaming a lot. I don't know where I picked up reading but I was able to read very young. They were baby books to me— I was already reading Dante at that time. I was only about seven or eight and I had been able to read Dante so they said, what are you in school for? I said I don't know. So the Sisters sent me out to look at the leaves, draw them if I wished because they knew I wanted to draw. I didn't know why— but I just drew.

MS. ROBERTS: You were very sensitive then to your environment.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. So I was drawing at a very early age, consciously. I used to draw pictures for them and they called me the "little artist" and left me alone. Let me wander. I didn't have to be at school, they just let me wander around.

MS. ROBERTS: They were very sensitive to have allowed such a freedom of expression.

MR. AGOSTINI: They figured that I knew my work. I mean when there were tests I used to take them and I didn't have to worry about being in class for them. But the thing I found out— this was a strange thing— that it was the first time I felt my isolation as an artist. I could not communicate with the other boys for some crazy reason. I could in sports, you know— anything that we had to do physically.

MS. ROBERTS: Do you think they resented the fact that you were an artist?

MR. AGOSTINI: No, I don't think they even knew. I don't think people know. Maybe I, I couldn't communicate. You know they sense your non-communication because when they would say something I would be silent, you see? The enthusiasms were different.

So I stayed there for two years all by myself practically. I pursued whatever I wanted to and I got the sense of being alone but I didn't mind being alone. You know, I was able to observe this way and I used to look all the time. I remember when I was about eight years old this woman passed me wearing a perfume that drove me out of my mind. That was the first time I realized that I had any kind of attachment to a female. I smelled the perfume and I had dreams for weeks after it.

MS. ROBERTS: Dreams in a sexual way or just in a fairytale way?

MR. AGOSTINI: Naturally I didn't know. I couldn't imagine. You could say it would be a floating idea— everything floating around and I couldn't connect anything. I had no idea what sex was. I didn't even know what a girl meant. I mean I had no consciousness because this was a boys' home.

But there I had the first idea about what homosexuality was. Because there was a boy there and I noticed that the other boys attacked him. They couldn't understand him. He was very feminine in a way and they teased him and they used to call him a girl. I never knew what they were doing all this for. Well what happened to that boy — he got scared one day and dived out the window. That's all I remember of him.

MS. ROBERTS: How sad.

MR. AGOSTINI: But that was a strange thing because I tried to protect him from the other boys because I was able to handle myself. That's the one thing I learned from Hell's Kitchen. You'd better know how to handle yourself. Or you got beat up. So I stopped them. I protected him for a while but I never spoke to him. I would just make sure that I would be near so I could watch and make sure nobody would hurt him. But they used to do strange things, like they'd make certain kinds of movements to him and he became very scared, you know. This probably was a physiologically upset boy.

And don't forget all the boys would bathe together. The Sister would make us bathe together and then we would come out and dry off. And when we were punished we would be punished naked and they used a bamboo stick on you. Right on your wet skin and it used to make you bounce out of your brain the way they hit. So there were all these things, you know, and you could not connect them. Everything that happened there was unconnected.

MS. ROBERTS: Very Kafka-like in a way.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes, it would be because things happened. You did not participate. You just wondered about

them. You didn't even think, you couldn't think because there was nothing to think about, you had no reference.

MS. ROBERTS: But do you feel the boy was really homosexual or was he just of weak constitution?

MR. AGOSTINI: No, I found out later, that some of the boys attacked him on that basis. His femininity was so obvious in his nature, you know what I mean?

MS. ROBERTS: Oh yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: I mean he had this feminine way about him. He probably was a boy just born with a highly feminine nature. But now I approach it as homosexuality because he probably would have grown to it because of the mere fact that they would have imposed it on him sooner or later. Here you see a bunch of kids imposing something they couldn't understand onto someone. They already felt the difference so imagine when he got into a high school. Then they would have made it real, you see.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's why I say it was all unreal because nobody knew what they were doing. And even the teacher handling the situation was like a mist. She didn't exist. You know, she was just there, and it was just a very strange situation. All I can remember is long rooms, a hundred and eighty boys in cots in one big long room, shoes outside your bed. It was a little like being in the army.

MS. ROBERTS: It was a school where you were boarding?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well it was an orphan asylum but I was not an orphan so my father had to pay. My mother had died when I was about three so there was no one to take care of me.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, I see.

MR. AGOSTINI: But I do have a faint memory that at about four or five I was sent to a French school where we just spoke French. But I was so wee at the time, you know, all I remember are a few expressions— *oui, oui madame*.

MS. ROBERTS: You still say it very well.

MR. AGOSTINI: Well it is because it comes from that time. I always have had an easy thing with the language because it still lingers. I don't remember how long I was there.

MS. ROBERTS: Do you have an Italian background.

MR. AGOSTINI: No, no I don't. You see my parents weren't Italian— they were Dalmatian.

MS. ROBERTS: Of course, yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: Dalmatians, as you know, have an ear for languages. My father spoke many languages.

MS. ROBERTS: Greek too?

MR. AGOSTINI: Oh yes, he spoke Greek, Italian, French, Arabic, Hebrew, anything that came along. He just tuned in and he would get it.

MS. ROBERTS: So you inherited it to a certain extent.

MR. AGOSTINI: Sound. Not understanding. I used to kind of kid around with and at times I'd be a German— I could do it so easily, or a Japanese for them. Anything. I have an ear for sounds. I can sound out the music of a language, you see. And I can almost make believe that it's real— it will almost be the same.

MS. ROBERTS: It is almost like Danny Kaye?

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. Only in a different way. You see Danny Kaye is comedy. I want to really speak it, you see because my ear says I know it. That is the difference.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, that is marvelous. Do you think that in a way it is because you have a rather generous way of communicating? I mean you like to communicate.

MR. AGOSTINI: I love to.

MS. ROBERTS: And that probably would be part of it.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right. Anything with a barrier to it I can't understand.

MS. ROBERTS: Would you be in favor of the Bahai idea, for instance, of one universal language?

MR. AGOSTINI: No. They had that idea way back in Esperanto, you know.

MS. ROBERTS: But nobody learned it. That was the trouble.

MR. AGOSTINI: But we are doing it automatically now by plane. As we get dropped off places we pick up words, you know, like cinema, matinee. And all these things come into the language.

MS. ROBERTS: Became they are sort of a universal indication that way.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right.

MS. ROBERTS: It is always very interesting, the matter of communication— because communication can be a way of getting to people, and also a way of remaining perhaps more intact, because if you communicate nobody goes after you. You go to them but you keep completely to yourself really.

MR. AGOSTINI: Well this we call the war. I had this terrible thing when I went to teach down in North Carolina. You know, the people are back in the Victorian Age. They are that way. So what I do is kind of kid them right away. I would say something very funny that will spill them off and then at that moment I nab them freely and talk to them, see? But I have to say something that seems completely ridiculous and then immediately they get nabbed off because they will laugh and then I move in.

MS. ROBERTS: Incidentally what was the college you taught at? It is recently isn't it?

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. That is where I just was— I just flew back today.

MS. ROBERTS: Oh my goodness. Caught you on time.

MR. AGOSTINI: You got me about an hour later.

MS. ROBERTS: What was the name of the college?

MR. AGOSTINI: University of Greensboro [NC]. It used to be a women's college but it is starting now to move into co-ed.

MS. ROBERTS: I see. Incidentally what is the situation there with the Negroes?

MR. AGOSTINI: I don't know. You don't really see or feel it. Down there it is a slightly protected issue. They don't bring it up. They did have at the school somebody lecturing on black power and someone retaliated by not giving the college money because they allowed this, you see?

MS. ROBERTS: Do they have Negro students?

MR. AGOSTINI: Oh yes. I had a girl in my class, but I think she must be Indian though. Her name is Cheek and that sounds very much like an Indian name. But there are not too many.

MS. ROBERTS: But in other words there was no obvious discrimination.

MR. AGOSTINI: Not there. Not really. And yet you know it does exist. It's in the manner of how you hold hands or how you walk or something. It is all over the world you know. I find discrimination in Europe between maybe an Italian and a German. So I just say its racial misunderstanding.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: Nobody understands anybody. It goes for everybody. I don't care what they are— black, green, yellow, purple or whatever.

MS. ROBERTS: Or nationality or whatever.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right.

MS. ROBERTS: Going back to those far days when you first started high school, where was it? In New York?

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. But there is a little image that comes to mind. When I was about seven at the Home I dreamed I was going to make the greatest painting in the world. It was in my head and I painted it but it was a child's dream and what was it but Columbus landing on the shores and I had the horses coming out of the water,

and the armor was all asheen. I think the painting must have been about twelve feet by thirty feet and everybody was saying it was the greatest painting in the world. You know, if you would make a lollypop it would be the same thing. But this is what I dreamt, you see. I was always conscious of being an artist. I read and I was involved with looking at [Gustave] *Doré* illustrations which I liked very much at that time.

MS. ROBERTS: What was great was that being an artist for you was neither being under the— norm nor above the norm. It was just a fact— you were an artist .

MR. AGOSTINI: That's all. And I knew I couldn't communicate it and I didn't try. I didn't say why, I didn't ask myself questions, again this Kafka thing— what is presents itself, states its person and that's it, you see? Without any formal trying to know or wondering why.

MS. ROBERTS: Were you at all mystic in your childhood because after all you did have a religious training.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes, I was thinking about becoming a priest .

MS. ROBERTS: Because it goes with art, really, at that age.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right. Either that or be a gangster, you know. Something that was very decisive, where it made a point in your life. Business wouldn't do that because you are amalgamated too much. But being a gangster or a priest or an artist is like definite points of view. It is like an antisocial social thing.

MS. ROBERTS: It is creating your own world.

MR. AGOSTINI: Like coming from the outside, rather from the inside out, you know.

MS. ROBERTS: Right, right. And then that now takes, us to— no, you are still not in high school if you were seven or nine.

MR. AGOSTINI: No, I never went to high school until very late, you see. When I was thirteen I tried a school and it frightened, scared me. It frightened me and I just walked out. I took a job as an assistant cook in a delicatessen. And I sort of liked the cook so it was just a game.

MS. ROBERTS: And to make money too.

MR. AGOSTINI: I would make a little, he said to work when I wanted. He was a very nice fellow, you know. And of course at that time I was thinking— I was walking down Forty-Third Street and I saw this guy working on the Graybar Building. You know, he was making these little figures coming out of the side. Well, he was making those and I asked him for some clay.

So I started modeling a head. I remember making a head of Shakespeare, you know, long hair and all— again a kid's world. And he said, "Do you like it?" And I said, "Sure, I love it." That is what I am going to do. Be an artist. And I spoke with him for a while.

That was the first inclination, but I was always being an artist. Because even at eleven— I used to go to Sunday School which they required— and I used to make drawings, religious drawings for the teachers there and they used to buy them from me. Crucifixions, and all this stuff.

MS. ROBERTS: You really had an audience.

MR. AGOSTINI: All the time. There was always somebody.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: And when I went to school— that's where I remember painting my first horse. I was around twelve. The teachers said to make something and I said I was going to make a horse in water color against a background. I did and she looked at it and said , "Can I have it?" And I said, "Take it," you know. And she said, "You are an artist." And I said, "I am." But everybody knew it. All the time they used to call me little artist and that was that.

MS. ROBERTS: Isn't it in a way more gratifying to think of those days when you really were not supposed to be an artist but were? And had an audience and then you grow to a world where all artists are supposed to have an audience and really do not have one.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right. So in a way this may have protected me too. You know what I mean?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: Because later, whereas most artists jumped for the idea of being famous you see, I didn't think about it. The point is, I had this security of knowing I could get a possible audience, and when I met everyone in the '30s, I never thought of showing because I had no feeling about it because I could do it, so what was the difference whether I show it or not, you see?

So I was the last one of the whole group to come out. I came out in '59 and they were begging me to come out in the late '40s. Charlie Egan wanted me to join him in '45 and I said I'm not ready, you know, I just like to work. So I never had this feeling that if I wasn't showing I wasn't being an artist. It didn't mean anything to me.

MS. ROBERTS: How did you hook up with [Stephen] Radich? I mean how did this come about?

MR. AGOSTINI: That was all an accident. It goes back to a little psychic experience. Let's call it that. In 1958 I remember I tried to sell some drawings to Poindexter [Gallery, NYC]. Well, maybe it was the way I approached her or something, because she didn't want to look at them. I said I came up here to show you and you are going to look— I don't care if you buy them or not but I am not going to carry these back without you looking. George Spaventa told me later that she liked them but she wasn't going to buy them. I wanted one dollar apiece for them because I needed money. I was absolutely broke and I wanted to pay my rent. But she said, no, she didn't want to speak to me— they're very nice but goodbye, just like that.

Later I was lying on my bed and all of a sudden I felt as if something disturbed my bad and I looked and saw this sort of shape, you know, I don't know if it was a shape or not— I was lying down and half asleep. And next thing I know it said something to me. It said to me, "You are going to get money, women, anything you want in six months." You know, it is like who's kidding who?

So I told it to my wife and she said— I didn't tell her about the women bit because she would have killed me. She said to me, "You know what you did? You sold your soul to the devil." I said, "I had nothing to do with it. I was just sleeping there and something came out and talked to me, I didn't say anything." She said "You must have thought it." I said, "No I am just telling you, that's all." And we forgot the whole damn incident.

Now! Three months later Tom Hess calls me up and asks to see my work. I didn't even know who he was. And this is after twenty years and nobody had seen what I had done. And then I get a letter in the mail from a little Tenth Street gallery [Manhattan, NY] asking would I like to show my work. I didn't know where it had come from. She had asked [Earl] Kerkam, did he know a sculptor who she could show. And he said, "Why Agostini— I remember back in 1936 I saw a beautiful figure of his." And this is already twenty-three years later, you know? I didn't know then, he told me later about this story. But don't forget I got that letter a week after Hess called me.

MS. ROBERTS: Isn't that interesting. And Kerkam you knew?

MR. AGOSTINI: Casually. He was a friend of Franz Kline and Franz Kline and I were very close friends. But I never showed anybody my work, you know.

MS. ROBERTS: And in the Village who was it then, was it Tanager [Gallery, NYC]?

MR. AGOSTINI: Tanager had just started around that time, you know, on Tenth Street. This is '59.

MS. ROBERTS: But the letter you received was for which gallery?

MR. AGOSTINI: Grimaud Gallery. Do you remember Grimaud?

MS. ROBERTS: Sure, I know her.

MR. AGOSTINI: She had prints.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, of course. As a matter of fact she was in existence until fairly recently. She had very good things.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes, but she really wasn't interested in me. She was interested in having sculpture between the prints she wanted to sell. And she told me that she was more interested in a younger sculptor who happens to be with Radich now. Will Horwitt. And that she really wasn't interested in me but since she couldn't get him she'd take me. I said it doesn't make any difference. I wasn't caring. I didn't go to her. She asked me could she show and I said go ahead. She took all these little heads I did. You know, these strange heads I have here.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, they are very beautiful.

MR. AGOSTINI: She got very interested in those. And she said she didn't want any of my drawings, she doesn't believe Americans can draw. So I said, okay, so no drawings. And don't forget now Hess had come down to see me just before this. And I said I really don't have anything much. He said show me what you have. So I showed

my drawings, everything, you know. Done in the '30's and all. Figures and things.

MS. ROBERTS: I am interrupting you to find out one thing. Who do you think talked to Hess about you?

MR. AGOSTINI: I will come to that. I showed him these little things and he said to me you are a very good artist. You are an excellent artist and you have to start coming out. And that was the time he offered me the Longview Grant. And when he said a thousand dollars I almost fell through the floor. That was an unimaginable amount of money. He came down when I had the show at Galerie Grimaud.

I asked him how did you know about me? He used to hear [Willem] de Kooning talk about me, and Franz Kline and Elaine [de Kooning] talk about me. And he said, "This has been going on for years," and he just felt like calling me. But then it's like that vision. I just wondered why at that time, you know. It was very strange. I told him the story later and he said, oh come on Peter you are being mystical. I said look it happened. I'm a realist . I'm not saying it was a mystery but it certainly happened. Maybe my brain projected something.

MS. ROBERTS: Do you think that there is such a thing as being asleep with open eyes? Because this is the case when it is like a dream but a dream that comes in that in— between of consciousness.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes.

MS. ROBERTS: Where you can't say you were dreaming?

MR. AGOSTINI: No, I translated the fact to it that I can antedate things. Like things I think of will happen. I've had it happen to me again and I just don't want to see other things now because I saw some very disastrous things that did— happen. So everything happened at once. I got the Grimaud show, Hess wrote the big article on me and that was it. Within a month Radich came down and offered me money just like the damn vision said. I got money and everything.

MS. ROBERTS: When was this?

MR. AGOSTINI: February, 1959. That is when it started.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. I am trying to remember now when did Radich open his gallery.

MR. AGOSTINI: He went with Martha Jackson and then from there he went with some other guy who had a gallery. I forget the name of the gallery. And he came down and told me I could have as much money as I wanted to keep going. He said ask for it and you will get it. And I asked and I got it. And I went on for a couple of years this way. That's why I am committed to him. His first attempt, his first artist was [Matsumi] Kanemitsu and then he had Ilse Getz and then he picked me. He came down and said would you go with the gallery? So I showed him drawings and this big thin figure I had. So he bought some drawings and he said I want you to be in the gallery. And he proceeded to give me money. He said I want you to be with me for life. He wanted to give me a life contract, see? Then the publicity I got just flowed from then on. You see, again I never ever believed that the audience wouldn't be there.

MS. ROBERTS: That's right. You were well prepared for it.

MR. AGOSTINI: From the early beginning. I remember talking to Bill, I said "Look Bill, when I come out it will be alright. It doesn't matter."

MS. ROBERTS: Yes and besides you, from what I see, you always had an audience by the mere fact you had the artists with you.

MR. AGOSTINI: That is right.

MS. ROBERTS: Which is the only one that counts, basically.

MR. AGOSTINI: They always stuck up for me. Bill, Franz defended me to the hilt . I remember somebody asked Bill de Kooning why are all you fellows so nice to this guy? Because when I came in Franz, Bill, [Jackson] Pollock always sat down and drank with me and talked. They said who the hell is he? No one ever knew because I never showed. And Bill said he is one of the greatest sculptors in the world and don't you forget it. Just like that. And Franz is the same way, you see. He would say when he is ready he will show— that's all. So I had confidence.

MS. ROBERTS: In other words, there was no need at any time in your life for bitterness.

MR. AGOSTINI: None whatsoever.

MS. ROBERTS: Of course we will all agree that bitterness is something that goes with temperament of people

too. I mean you can always find reasons for being bitter.

MR. AGOSTINI: People of wealth are bitter.

MS. ROBERTS: You can be very wealthy and not have what is due you on other levels. And if you have what you need you are not bitter.

MR. AGOSTINI: I used to work very fantastically and my wife would say as long as you have a dime in your pocket you think you are a millionaire. I said, "But that is the way I feel. I never felt poor, for I could always get something. I went through the Depression this way and always could.

MS. ROBERTS: But actually how did you make a living during those times? By teaching?

MR. AGOSTINI: No, I never taught until recently. I was for a small stint on the WPA. About a year, that's it. Somehow I didn't think I could get on, so I never applied. And then when I got on it was so easy I didn't know why I didn't get on in the first place. But I always worked. I always had jobs. I was a plaster caster, I designed mannequins for Bergdorf Goodman.

MS. ROBERTS: You would do things where actually it would be applied sculpture to industry and designing?

MR. AGOSTINI: I wouldn't do that until when we were very broke and I couldn't get any jobs anymore just as a laborer. You know, as a laborer— like painting apartments. When I couldn't get these things somebody came to me and said, "Would you design hands for these people?" It was for Christian Dior. I made hands and they said, "Will you stay on?" So I stayed on and I made more hands and then I designed other things. They were very good because after a while all Fifth Avenue wanted what I did. I still got fired though, you know. They told me I was too high-style and I said, "Okay," so I left. It didn't matter. Then I went to other things, you see. But this was 1948.

MS. ROBERTS: But when you were painting apartments did you have time to sculpt? Did you have time to do your own work?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, I always drew. Like Bill said, I was one of the best draftsmen in the country because I always drew. Always drawing. You see, even when I was painting a wall I was figuring out paints or when I was working with plaster I was— see that is how I learned plaster. When I started becoming a plaster caster I started learning the flow of plaster. I believe that the artist is always conscious of the artist and not the job.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, I see. Did you get involved in all the talk that went around at that time? Did you go to the club?

MR. AGOSTINI: No. I was a member of it but I never went to it. In a way I pulled away from them. About that time, around 1946, I pulled away completely.

MS. ROBERTS: From the abstract expressionists?

MR. AGOSTINI: From everybody. Before that I used to see Franz every night, I used to see [Conrad] Marca-Relli, I used to see Bill pass my house, you know.

MS. ROBERTS: They came here or you went to the Cedar Bar.

MR. AGOSTINI: No, it wasn't here. It was on Sixth Avenue. The Cedar wasn't in existence at that time. That came in 1947 or '48. And the only reason I got introduced to the Cedar was I met Franz one day and he took me and treated me to a beer and that was at the Cedar and this was around 1950 or 1951. That's exactly when they started at the Cedar.

They used to visit me at my studio which was across the street from Franz. It was on Sixth Avenue next to Baizerman. Baizerman was here and I was in 307, which was on Sixth Avenue and across the way was Franz, underneath was Marca-Relli at the time. Franz was in the front. Marca-Relli was in the back.

MS. ROBERTS: And [Mark] Rothko was there too, wasn't he, on Sixth Avenue?

MR. AGOSTINI: I never met him. I met him later. I ran into most of those fellows later. I ran into Pollock on the project because he worked right next to me.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. Speaking of the project, do you have memories of who you worked with? You just spoke of Pollock there working with you and all that. How did it strike you? In fact, I have never been able to really get a clear definition of what the project was.

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, when I joined the project it would be very unclear because when I was there they gave me a teaching job. I had to teach children then I had to teach girls from 14 to 16 in the tough section, you know. Then I had to go to University Settlement downtown and in St. Mark's Center I taught older people. I came in when they made teachers of the artists. I was late.

MS. ROBERTS: Because at the start it was what— in '33?

MR. AGOSTINI: No, it was later than that. It started first with the Whitney group. And then that was incorporated into the project.

MS. ROBERTS: The time of the murals and things like that was before you?

MR. AGOSTINI: No, that was the same time but I wasn't on it. I came in as I say around 1939, 1940. Just about when the war started but before the war started for us. And then later they dropped all the teaching jobs because I think they were planning for something else.

I had to teach Camouflage. I had to study up on it. I had to teach lettering and all these stupid things, you know. Then that folded up and next I was on a poster project, Byron Browne was with me there and Kerkam was sitting right in front of me.

MS. ROBERTS: Was there a special studio where you met or how was it?

MR. AGOSTINI: No, it was right in King Street Building. And we all sat at our little tables and worked. Just as if we were in a business.

MS. ROBERTS: In an administration, yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right. And then somebody was wanted in the "genius" department. They called it the "genius" department because you got the best breaks there. I think the only reason they picked me was because I was the least politically orientated. I don't mean political politics but -ism politics, factions.

MS. ROBERTS: In other words you were the easiest to get along with.

MR. AGOSTINI: No, but I was not attached to any group. So I could always be picked and everybody would say okay, see? Because I didn't belong to anybody. Again I had the sense of being alone a lot. So then I was put in the department and in that department was [Jean]Xceron, Frederick Hoke, Pollock and me. And Lee Krasner was the head of it. That was when she was going with Pollock. And they were talking at that time about buying a table. So I said I had a table but I want 20 dollars for it. This one right here. And finally he said no. And then he saw this figure, this thin figure of mine right here that you see. Which I had done when I was very young. I was about twenty when I did that. So Pollock wanted to buy it from me. He said he liked it. I said well I want 100 dollars and he said it was too much. So I said I would rather keep it. That was my contact with Pollock at that time. And he was very quiet so—

MS. ROBERTS: He was still a realist at that time wasn't he? I mean he was still under the influence of [Thomas Hart]Benton.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes, oh yes. I remember that we had to do posters for windows. And I was thinking and thinking, you know, why don't we use [Piet]Mondrian? He had these beautiful slabs like the hard edge today.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: The American Flag in slabs. I said let's do it all in big slabs, big American Flags, you know, with the blue. Like hard edge would do.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: And I introduced them to this idea of using Mondrian as a basis for making our big displays in windows and then we started off on this.

MS. ROBERTS: In other words you used the architectural side of Mondrian?

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right. We had to do it, you know, and it had to look big and I figured what the hell, I can't think of drawings that way. So I figured if you take the blocks of color that would do it. So Xceron said that's a good idea so we started to proceed with it.

MS. ROBERTS: As a matter of fact Xceron got connected with the [Solomon R.] Guggenheim [Museum, NYC]

fairly early in the game. Do you remember how that happened?

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes, but you see I didn't remember him too well because he was a very gentleman gentleman.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, very sweet.

MR. AGOSTINI: No, he was a gentleman, you know, he was always proper.

MS. ROBERTS: Oh yes, he had that. White collar.

MR. AGOSTINI: Oh yes. And he was always precise. And Frederick Hoke would be what we call a guy. And Pollock was— he still had this kind of shy westernism about him at that time. He still had that kind of quality. And I was just New York. That was it, you couldn't say I was anything else . That's what I was. That's how I would describe all of us at that time, see.

MS. ROBERTS: I see. And de Kooning you said you knew about that time. How did you get to know him?

MR. AGOSTINI: Through Marca-Relli. You see, I knew Marca-Relli 'cause I went to a school to work in clay. I had no experience.

MS. ROBERTS: At the league?

MR. AGOSTINI: Oh no. This was the Leonardo Da Vinci School [Manhattan, NYC]. Well it wasn't a school, you see. There was no teacher there .

MS. ROBERTS: There was just the facilities.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes, the facilities. And this was to keep the Italian boys from becoming Mafias I suppose. That was the whole reason.

MS. ROBERTS: A health studio.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. That's what the idea was. So they let Italian boys go there. I had no money, so I didn't pay anything. I just went there and worked. And that's where I met [George]Spaventa. He was only seventeen years old . He was a little boy and he was doing this kind of work there— they were orientated in St. Gaudin mind you.

MS. ROBERTS: Oh yes, I see.

MR. AGOSTINI: This is what they were doing there and My God I was looking at them— I mean I saw them doing this and I said did you ever hear of a guy by the name of [Constantin] Brancusi. Who is that ? They didn't know [Aristide] Maillol— nobody.

MS. ROBERTS: No!

MR. AGOSTINI: I knew, I had books. I said let me show you. So I used to bring them books and show them who these people are. They had no idea of anything.

MS. ROBERTS: Do you think that it's perhaps your European background that made you more curious of things linked with sculpture?

MR. AGOSTINI: No. I was born here.

MS. ROBERTS: You were born here but you said your father was Dalmatian, speaking so many languages and so forth.

MR. AGOSTINI: I hardly knew him either. My father was as much a stranger as Spaventa was.

MS. ROBERTS: Oh, really?

MR. AGOSTINI: I hardly knew my father. I would look at him and ask him questions but I never said "father".

MS. ROBERTS: What was he involved in? I mean what was his work?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well he had an employment agency. He had one of the oldest employment agencies in the country. And a lot of actors used to go there for jobs. So I used to meet actors like Jeanne Eagles, Richard Barthalamew used to come there. My brother eventually got into the movies, and he was a painter. So I always saw life looking and I never stopped.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: And everybody says there's a wall but I'm looking. And when you are looking there is no wall. It is only when you try to communicate that you find this wall, you see? So I have been a looker.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: Not a voyeur, you know. That would be a different term.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, you were involved in looking.

MR. AGOSTINI: I had to because that was the way things came to me. Say I got orientated to it, you know here's one thing I learned at a very young age— not to get morose about things. I didn't think about them. I feel you don't have to think because you are absorbing all the time. And things are taking place and I try to keep the thinking out.

MS. ROBERTS: Now wait a minute what do you mean by you didn't think?

MR. AGOSTINI: I didn't think upon thinking.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, yes. Well you were not reflecting on yourself really.

MR. AGOSTINI: Not reflecting, but observing.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, but you thought plenty with all you say.

MR. AGOSTINI: But you would think because as you pour material if you have a body that's orientated to use that material it will use it. That's what I believe.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: And it starts using— and I let it use it. Not me imposing on it. You see that is the difference.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. Well really what it amounts to, don't you think, is that when you really like life, and I think that that's what's basic in this case, you are sort of fascinated by all that happens. You can't help it.

MR. AGOSTINI: I still am.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, of course. You can't help it. Therefore, it detracts you from any self-pity or any self-indulging because the rest is more amusing.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. You see by looking out so much— I used to think I was shy. It wasn't that. It would be that somebody would stop my looking and all of a sudden I'm presented with communication. And communication was my problem at that time. For a very long time I could not really communicate by language to people, you see, unless a person became a close friend. And when I got a close friend I clung to him. That was the danger.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. But don't you think that perhaps it was not because you could not communicate but simply because that communication was perhaps for you a loss of time for observation?

MR. AGOSTINI: That was my confusion which I found out later. The way I am talking now, I'm communicating. But I couldn't do this before. I couldn't do this until 1960.

MS. ROBERTS: Because you don't need to observe as much. You have done it.

MR. AGOSTINI: No, I have been able to make the two work together. That was my biggest problem. But I do realize that I do stop the observation when I am communicating. Now I am trying to link the two together so that they work as one unit.

MS. ROBERTS: Some people can do the two at the same time. But then they are writers, usually.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes, but I think writers—

MS. ROBERTS: It is a different thing, as a rule.

MR. AGOSTINI: I don't want to do what they do because they do both at the same time for information.

MS. ROBERTS: That's right.

MR. AGOSTINI: I don't want that.

MS. ROBERTS: No. You have no use for that information.

MR. AGOSTINI: I feel that you are already informed and that this information will take place. This is what I call thinking on top of thinking. You abuse the right of your truth this way.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes but don't you think perhaps -it is also individual, because, for instance, Henry Miller, who talks with you and reflects at the same time and it actually gets him to something that he both discovers and communicates.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes, but all artists are like this. Really if they could be, you see. Even if a man is sculpting, even if a man is moving a piece of paint across the surface, I feel that an artist can talk. Recently down in North Carolina I was talking with this fellow. I was listening to his communication and observing at the same time. And when I found his point false I jumped in and attacked him you see. And in attacking him it released a lot of information I had no idea about, he came flying out with it, you see. That's what I mean. And it's not reflection, it's just real information that comes out. The idea of orientating your mind, thinking about something, get the picture and then the picture is deciphered by you and then brought out again. I don't do this. You see what I mean?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: I got away from the motion picture. I want to bring it back to real again, you see.

MS. ROBERTS: That takes me to a fairly recent subject for me because I met accidentally the fellow who wrote that book on Kline which I am quite sure you do not approve of. Did you read that book? By Fielding Dawson?

MR. AGOSTINI: No. I will read it. I feel Fielding Dawson is talking Fielding Dawson from what I know of him. And he became an arch enemy of mine for a very simple reason: because Kline liked me and he couldn't understand it. It was like a jealousy.

MS. ROBERTS: I see.

MR. AGOSTINI: He once erupted at me and I told him don't get tough with me or I will knock you right down on your ass. I said don't talk to me that way.

MS. ROBERTS: But you mean that Kline had a friendship for both of you and therefore there was a sort of antagonist because of, well—

MR. AGOSTINI: No, you see this fellow wanted a friendship. I was just with Kline, you know. It didn't matter, friend or not. It was just that we knew each other. We didn't question whether we were friends or not. And de Kooning did something very funny. Somebody asked him about me and he said the reason I like Peter is because I can talk to him just once a year and still I am his friend. I don't have to see or know him — I just know he's there. He didn't have to communicate with me, see? He felt it.

MS. ROBERTS: You think that Dawson, perhaps, is essentially possessive?

MR. AGOSTINI: It is possessive writing.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, it possessive writing.

MR. AGOSTINI: I didn't read the book but I know the man. And I could tell you that that's possessive writing. I also know that he was possessing Kline to use him for writing, you see? He wasn't possessing Kline as a person, he was intrigued by his value. He was a value. He wouldn't do this to somebody who didn't have what we call social value.

MS. ROBERTS: In other words it had to be someone well-known.

MR. AGOSTINI: He's running out of well-knowns.

MS. ROBERTS: I happened to be on a round table discussion with him. At first we were terribly antagonistic and I felt we could never go through it before the tape was started. And then little by little we found grounds on which we could function. We didn't speak of the book because I pretended I hadn't read it. It was the only way I could get out of it.

MR. AGOSTINI: I could go on like this for hours.

MS. ROBERTS: Well, that's just what we want. You know, this business of having freed yourself completely so that you can communicate on any level and at any time— don't you think it is perhaps also the fact that when you have experienced so many things, there comes a time when you want to exchange ideas about them?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, I feel it, yes. I really do want to exchange now. I am more at ease with people. You see, the position a person gets into sometimes is that they're worried: Suppose I do this, this is going to make an enemy, or something like this. It is what we call a fear of ourselves. Well, I really don't care. The point was that before, I was scared to not care, you see. But now I am not scared.

MS. ROBERTS: You have gotten over being scared of not caring?

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right. So now I say what I please and whatever I lose I win something else.

MS. ROBERTS: And of course you are free not to answer, too. I think you have a daughter, don't you?

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. I have two daughters. One from my first wife, one from my second wife. And I'm married now to Phyllis.

MS. ROBERTS: And that is your third wife.

MR. AGOSTINI: Third wife.

MS. ROBERTS: This is something you don't have to answer, but one thing links to another. Was your change of partnership a great event in your life or was it just sort of a matter of course, just as you live, things unwind and they happen?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, this is what did happen. I remember when I was with my first wife. I thought we were just perfect together. And I used to enjoy her company, she had a good sense of humor. It was an excellent idea. Then for a while there she didn't come to visit me, she used to go home to see her parents a lot in New Jersey. She left my daughter over there with her parents. She didn't have to, but she wanted to work. And at that time I said, "Look, if you work I don't want your money. I've got enough for both of us", you know. The job I had was during the war. And well, she wanted to work so I said, "Work, keep your money, do what you want with it." Then who knows what happened. She was getting distant. So one day when we were walking to the subway, I said to her you don't seem to like seeing me anymore. She said not really. I said then I think we better not see each other anymore. She said that's right and she went down into the subway and that was it.

MS. ROBERTS: I see. So it had that element of casualness which—

MR. AGOSTINI: No, I was being casual then because what else could I say? I was trying to feel out the situation. But then when I wanted to see my daughter— that became difficult. And then I didn't realize the machinations that went behind it and that was the first mistrust of people. I didn't realize what kind of an image I had been. And I was very nice to her mother, you know. I used to buy her beautiful Japanese books because she liked gardening a lot. I was very pleasant to her. The biggest mistake I made in my life. I should have kicked her and she would have enjoyed me.

But I didn't know this about people. I figured you just be easy with people, you give them little things— you don't have to do anything fantastic, just be easy with them. But it didn't work out that way. So I went out once— I was getting very anxious and then it hit. I felt this fantastic sense that I needed something.

So I went to see my daughter, she was about five. And I hadn't seen her because they made it so impossible for me to see her. At that time I had lost my job, I wasn't working and I was surviving on unemployment insurance. You got 11 dollars a week. And Franz said he was going to New Jersey and I said perfect. It gave me an opportunity to go out there and see my daughter.

So I went out with Franz Kline and I saw my daughter walking down the street. I bought some candy because I figured I would see her, you know— because I would wait until I did. So I went over and gave her the candy and I started talking to her. Then my wife's mother saw it all and she called a cop. She said I was a molester. So I was dragged off to the prison. Franz said, "You keep your hands off him he is the father of that girl." The cops said, "Don't tell me that, we just spoke to the grandmother," and she said she never saw him in her life.

So, Jesus, they were ready to kill me, you know? Picking up little girls, you know? Then the father heard about it — my father-in-law, He came running and he said, "Hello Peter, what are they trying to do to you?" You see, he was an artist at one time but he gave it up— in South Africa. But he was a man who had that dream. And that was the first time I realized this woman was out to get me. Naturally it was straightened out, and the cop

apologized. I said I understand but look what could have happened to me because of a little misinformation. You should have investigated it when I told you. Because the child had even lost the idea of me, you see?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, which can happen.

MR. AGOSTINI: They talked so much against this man who wasn't there. And the child naturally lost me. But that shocked the hell out of me and I tried to talk to my wife about it but she wouldn't communicate. It was about two months later I met my second wife. That was a very fantastic situation. That's like a history of the village. She was one of these fantastic, beautiful women. Everybody knew her and she had such a sharp tongue everybody was scared out of their wits.

MS. ROBERTS: Would I know her? What is her name?

MR. AGOSTINI: Marina O'Brian was her name. She used to hang out in the Waldorf. She was a blond. I'll show you a picture of her.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. Her name seems familiar.

MR. AGOSTINI: Oh yes. Everybody adored her. De Kooning— they thought she was the most beautiful thing they had ever seen.

MS. ROBERTS: The Waldorf, you mean those get-togethers of the artists in the Waldorf cafeteria.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes, yes. She used to go there all the time, you know. This is back in the '40s and right into the '50s. Even in the '50s she was around.

MS. ROBERTS: Was she a painter too?

MR. AGOSTINI: No. She was an actress. And a writer and a brilliant woman. Fantastically brilliant. When I met her everybody, just to look at her, used to come to my studio. [Edgard] *Varèse*, John Graham, all the artists, and they just looked and listened to her. She was so fantastic, you know. She was sharp of tongue. She used to tear them to pieces. She made them look like idiots and their eyes would just shine. It was the funniest experience of my life.

So I spent from that time on observing her. Why should I talk, you know. She was doing such a beautiful job. We'd go to a party and all the men came like flies to sugar. Begging her, saying why don't you leave him and marry me. You know, they were out of their minds. And I used to watch this and say, gee, it is just unbelievable.

I had a daughter by her by the way. That thing went on for fifteen, sixteen years, till she died. You know, I think in a way I didn't get too interested in doing my own work because she was more interesting.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: Now I realize what I like—I like life. And she was so loaded and this was more interesting. So I would wait until she went to sleep to be an artist.

MS. ROBERTS: That is very interesting, what you say. Don't you think that people go to art because it is life? But when they can have life the way they want it, they have a tendency to leave art.

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, I did. One of the guys would say, look Pete, are you giving up your art? And I said, "Oh come on, this is more interesting. You'd love to be in my position. I'm enjoying it. She's murdering me but I'm enjoying it. I may feel like a mop at times but then I feel like a king too. I possess what nobody has, you know? And I really enjoyed the damn thing. She led me into such a strange life for fifteen, sixteen years.

MS. ROBERTS: What happened?

MR. AGOSTINI: Cancer. Just got it like that and it killed her. Never knew. She never knew. She got it throughout her whole body so fast that she never even had pain. Isn't that fantastic? Again, I "saw" that in a very crazy way.

I got mad one day and I didn't see her for about a couple months. Then I came out of a theatre and I thought I saw her get out of the car. I had bought her a car. She got out and she was looking at me. She took a scarf— she always used to throw the craziest colors together, green shoes, purple dress and sort of a dark purple scarf. You know, the combinations were atrocious but she made everything look beautiful. So she was putting this scarf on her head—

MS. ROBERTS: She was pre-pop.

MR. AGOSTINI: She was just beautiful. So she threw this thing on her head and she looked at me. I went to talk to her and she got in the car with this guy with a hat on and I got very jealous. Zoom! I ran over to the house here. The window was open and I rang the bell. No answer. No answer! But while I was walking here I got this funny feeling I called her. And she didn't answer me. And I yelled where are you? No answer. As if she never existed. So I rang the bell, rang the bell and I said okay.

I sat on that doorstep until daybreak. Until seven in the morning. This was from one o'clock until seven I sat on that doorstep. I rang that bell again and eventually she let me in. I was mad at her. I said, "Where is he?" She said, "Pete, I'm sick." I said, "Did you have the car?" She said "No." She wasn't even out. The car was in the garage being fixed.

MS. ROBERTS: And you thought you had seen her?

MR. AGOSTINI: That's why I came over! And then I said, what's the matter. Well then I found out and I took her to the hospital, to a doctor. And he said she had a tumor. They'd take it out and everything would be alright. And I figured okay. I walked off. Then I came back to see how she was feeling. I tried to give her food but she couldn't hold it on her stomach. I called up the doctor and told him. He said we must put her into the hospital right away. It was on a Sunday. We took her over to the New York Hospital right here, on Twenty-First Street.

MS. ROBERTS: Oh yes. The Post Graduate.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. We took her there and I left her there. She was very weak and she looked bad. The doctor called me up that night around ten o'clock. He said, "Mr. Agostini your wife may not live. In fact, she is not going to live. She may die tonight, tomorrow, any minute. I hit the floor. I couldn't believe it! You know, I didn't believe she could even— die. You see? The shock just hit me. And I remember falling right to the floor. Just like that.

And then I spent seven weeks with her. Watching. I started saying I am powerful, I can make her better. You know, all the things that come into your head. I said no! I didn't want her to die. And— that was it.

MS. ROBERTS: Actually, don't you think that the serenity that you show now, you think that you can acquire that serenity without having gone through an awful lot?

MR. AGOSTINI: I had seen a lot of death. I saw my brother die in '22. I saw my other brother, who was a painter. There is his drawing of me when I was nineteen, see?

MS. ROBERTS: Very beautiful.

MR. AGOSTINI: Oh, he was a good artist. I am going to have a retrospective on him. I am going to gather his work. He died in '52. He was a very handsome man. He was going to be an actor and then he gave it up and decided to paint. He used to double for Valentino.

MS. ROBERTS: Oh really?

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. He was a fantastically handsome man. And I used to glory in him. He was a lot older than I and he was my brother and he was also like my father. He really took care of me. He never told me what to do— if he saw me drawing horses he would get a book on horses and leave it on my table. He saw how I liked water colors and he would leave water colors on my table. Always watching and giving me what he thought I needed. And actually the reason I became a sculptor was because he was a painter. He said, "I will paint, and you sculpt." I said, "Good." And that is the only reason I became a sculptor.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, because your drawings are quite extraordinary. You could have become a painter.

MR. AGOSTINI: I teach painting now. And I've taught these kids a new idea about painting that is flipping the school down there. But I really didn't care about either. I thought of him as the artist. Don't you see what I mean? I wanted him to show. Not me.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: I was not going to show until he showed, you see?

MS. ROBERTS: Such is life. Yes, yes. I know. And then you met your third wife?

MR. AGOSTINI: That was recently at a— I remember I went to a party. This girl said to me, "Aren't your hands cold?" I said, "They're alright." She said, "I will knit a pair of gloves for you. I said there's no need, I don't need gloves. I will lose them anyway. And I called her up a year later. We started talking, became friends, and we saw each other. You know, we went out. It wasn't a quick thing.

And she has told me that she loved me then, but I didn't even know— what the heck? I just look at people and how do I know? It doesn't shine "I love you" out of your eyes. People just look at you and you figure they look at you like everybody else looks at you. They think you are either strange looking or you are not strange looking, you know? It was about two or three years later we started seeing each other. But that blow I had felt hung on for a while.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: I can remember Marine as if she were here this minute. And I don't disconnect from her any way, you see?

MS. ROBERTS: No, I think that whatever has been very strong with one never dies.

MR. AGOSTINI: It's not even a sense of dying. It's a sense of— it's like that was a state of being at that time. And the other state doesn't make sense. There is one thing I notice. I can't stand the touch of a peach. I sort of identified it later to the point when my mother died— I was about three and they had this velvet on the coffin? I rubbed it.

MS. ROBERTS: Oh, yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: I froze. And I won't touch a peach. If I bite one I freeze. I get a chill that freezes me. I can't stand the touch of it. If somebody threw a peach at me I would drop it right away. Can't touch the skin. Anything velvet drives me crazy.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, for a good reason. Did you ever go through analysis?

MR. AGOSTINI: No, because I am doing it all the time.

MS. ROBERTS: You don't need it.

MR. AGOSTINI: I identify immediately when things happen to me. I know.

MS. ROBERTS: Actually what do you feel about the need for analysis? I am not talking of the layman. But for the artist it always surprises me when they have to go into analysis.

MR. AGOSTINI: Well I feel sometimes that an artist feels that he has got like a solid ball in his stomach and he wants to get rid of the ball and he doesn't know what it is, you know? It's like something is tight there. If somebody says you can go to a doctor and get an injection and get rid of that tightness, he would do it.

MS. ROBERTS: And it is probably truer than analysis then. I mean I am quite sure that there are ways of getting rid of it— the physical ways.

MR. AGOSTINI: I think there is. They will find this out. This tightening up that people get— because I know sometimes when I get very, very upset my stomach hurts and I always want to throw up. I know this about myself. But I don't get this anymore. When it does pile up to a terrific thing, what I do is lie down and I allow it to happen, you see. I am sick for the day but it is not a sick sickness. It's this piled up thing that has gotten so tight I allow it to release, you see.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. Well, you are bringing up an interesting point. Do you think that a great deal of what people suffer from is their resistance to suffering?

MR. AGOSTINI: I think this is true. Like I know my point. I just let it go. If I feel like being angry I just scream at the top of my lungs. I don't care. I'm not embarrassed anymore, I get angry, I say stupid things, I know they're stupid but I still say them. And when they are all over I say I said stupid things and forget it, what do I care. You see, I learned not to care. Not only so much in relationship to things, but about what I was doing. Because I found out I am so complex it doesn't matter. I'm not going to try to find out how complex I am. And we are so damn complex.

This is where I do not believe in the psychiatrist because he's talking about something when I've been in existence for over a billion years. Like we've all been that long. How do we know what piled up all during that time? Maybe my whole anger may be that some bear chased me in a cave, you know. I got scared. Who knows? Genetically we have fears. We are fed them.

MS. ROBERTS: Going to the start of your career. I know you stopped it really willingly for definite reasons at many stages. But when you skipped high school and went to work, did you keep on going to museums?

MR. AGOSTINI: Oh, yes. When I was about seventeen I remember taking a subway ride. So I said to myself how can I explain trains to myself? So I made a little poem, not about the subway but a train that I had seen when I was in the Home. It used to make the subway ride fantastic. Then my job—I was a file clerk. I figured, what do I do here? So I started making a game out of everything. Work became kind of game. I was on top of the Empire State Building. You know, way upstairs. So when everybody would leave at five I used to love it.

MS. ROBERTS: Which company did you work for?

MR. AGOSTINI: For an advertising agency. But I had this crazy situation there. It's really a story. I came into this place and it was highly American-English and conservative. The most conservative place in the world to hire me. They said, "Well, you don't look Italian so we will hire you." I was fourteen. You know, at that time they had the idea that Italians were violent. So I took the job.

And the woman there practically— everybody does this— adopted me as a son. And the president who was— here's how conservative it was. He was the president of the Sons of American Revolution. He was the president of the Republican Club in New York. This was the kind of man he was. And he looked like a doctor. I still remember Frederick Coleman. He used to sit there, I hardly spoke to him but he was so strange towards me.

Like one day I forgot to take off my pajamas. I had thrown a tie on so not to be late for work, you know. So I came in and I had to run the board. The pajamas were big black and white stripes and they looked very strange. The vice president came in and he complained. He said, "Do you know what we have at the board?" The president said, "Yes, Peter." [The vice president said,] "But do you see how he is dressed?" [The president said,] "What is wrong with his dress?" He said, "I don't like remarks being made about Peter, do you object to him?" He said, "Well I will tell you what. You pack up your things. You are fired." He fired the vice-president! Like that!

He never spoke to me much but no one could bother me. He used to tell his secretary Peter is going to go away now. I used to be like a bird, you know, at certain times I had to leave. I didn't know why, but I just had to go. So he used to tell his secretary, who was supposed to be like my mother, to feed me stamps so I could steal them, and money so I could take it, you know, because the salary was so little and they would never give me a raise because they said I would have to pay taxes. So he would allow me to steal. It was a very crazy set-up anyway.

MS. ROBERTS: In other words they gave it to you as petty cash? I mean they had to have some reason.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes, petty cash and everything and they never questioned what I would do with it. And each week they put in more, you know. So it used to pile up until I took it. What else was I going to do with it? And then they used to make sure that I had a little money put aside because they figured by November I'd get nervous and would leave. Without reason I'd say goodbye. They would say, goodbye Peter. We'll be seeing you. I'd say I hope not. And then I tried being an artist, you know? Doing my work. And it always was a failure. I'd quit about three and then go home. This was the set-up of that time.

MS. ROBERTS: That is really fascinating. You don't know if he had lost a son or something like that?

MR. AGOSTINI: No. He had a son. I remember one time when his son—you know who his son was, well he ended up Bowery. It was just the strangest thing. He was a multimillionaire but his son went the other way. And then he also had a copywriter who was the brother of Mrs. [Gertrude Vanderbilt] Force of the Whitney [Museum of American Art, NYC].

He always had doubts about himself so when he had doubts he would go over to the bar. He wanted to be a writer and there he was copywriting. So the boss would say, "Peter, he likes to talk to you. Go over and talk to him." You see I used to sit in the office with all these things like that. I'd go over to the bar and we would sit and we would talk and I would get him out slowly. You know, I would get him back to the office. I don't know what I was like—a house detective or something.

MS. ROBERTS: You were just a good omen.

MR. AGOSTINI: yes, but he treated me with—not like you would treat someone, you know. I was something special.

MS. ROBERTS: It is almost like a Russian novel. It is almost like [Fyodor] Dostoevsky.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes that is right. Everybody knew it happened, you know. Because it was that way.

MS. ROBERTS: That was before you got to know Kline, de Kooning, etc.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes, but I knew my brother. And my brother was friends with Byron Browne.

MS. ROBERTS: I see. That brings us to Kerkam too.

MR. AGOSTINI: Kerkam probably knew my brother. And I knew a couple of other guys who used to know my brother. But it was at that school, Da Vinci School, I started meeting everybody. That's where I met Marca-Relli. And later I met Spaventa; He was working next to me. But I met him through Marca-Relli later .

MS. ROBERTS: Incidentally, where was that school?

MR. AGOSTINI: Thirty-Fourth Street near Third Avenue. It was like a store but in the back was a big studio.

MS. ROBERTS: Do you remember who directed it?

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. [Onario] Ruotolo. He had done a portrait of Carouso. He was what you call real Italian corn. He had the manner like the *il granprofessore*.

MS. ROBERTS: Oh, yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: You know, the tie and all. All this with the big hat and the cane and he walked like that . He was the old time Italian master, you know. And a lousy artist was he too.

MS. ROBERTS: What is always s surprising is how those things can survive even as long as it did. Who put money it in?

MR. AGOSTINI: [Fiorello] LaGuardia and [Benito] Mussolini. It was a crazy thing, you know, for Italian boys. They would get money from there and here.

MS. ROBERTS: And as you say to prevent them from becoming the Mafia.

MR. AGOSTINI: And also to get them inclined toward fascism in a way if possible. And yet they were all anti-fascist there. Ruotolo was a scoundrel. He would take money from wherever it came. You understand?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: So that he could live in the style he was accustomed to. You see?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. I see.

MR. AGOSTINI: But he was a beautiful scoundrel. Nobody cared. The school was run crazy. There were people making suits there. Opera was going on. Guys were practicing on the violin. Little kids about so big were drawing from the model. It was crazy— everything all in one big slammy place.

MS. ROBERTS: And did you have to have a scholarship to enter it?

MR. AGOSTINI: It was automatic. He looked at you and you got your scholarship. That was it.

MS. ROBERTS: Oh, I see. In other words you didn't have to pay to study.

MR. AGOSTINI: No. He said, "You know how much it costs?" He gave me the business. I say, "I have no money." He said, "No money?" I says, "Nope. I have no money, I do not want any teacher. I just want to work." He said, "Go to work." That's all.

MS. ROBERTS: That's pretty nice. So you kept on working without wanting to show until this vision you were referring to?

MR. AGOSTINI: I never thought of it. Even when de Kooning said, "Look Peter, we are making money. And you could be with us, you are with us. Why aren't you with us?" I said, "It's different." I don't care, you know. They couldn't— Bill understood. Like he understands it now, you know. It wasn't necessary to being an artist, you see. I told him it wasn't necessary for people to like my work.

MS. ROBERTS: As long as you are able to enjoy doing it.

MR. AGOSTINI: I was doing it. I was doing these heads. I was doing everything I wanted to do. And when I got the vision it was a sort of sign to let go now. Do what you please. I've had big holidays in a sense.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, yes. I see. You know, I am looking at the chest there, at all those things on it. It seems to me that it is a summation of what you were speaking about. I see that hand and it probably would have worked for Dior very well. Is that from that time?

MR. AGOSTINI: No, I got that . That was made in Belgium. I used to make hands. But they would tell me what kind of position they wanted. I would tell them no good. I said, "You cannot take that mechanical hand and get the movements unless you make it with clay." So I proved my point. Then when they saw my hands they said I was a perfect [Sandro] Botticelli.

Because hands were so easy for me. I could make them with my eyes closed. You know, I could do anything with hands. They said we want umbrella hands. I would make umbrella hands. They would say we want cocktail hands. I would make cocktail hands. Anything you would want in hands I could do. See? In one day I would knock off a pair.

MS. ROBERTS: I was wondering, in sculpture who were your gods when you started?

MR. AGOSTINI: In the '30s in New York I saw Kolbe and Balch at the Bucholz [Gallery, NYC], you see.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: And that's a crazy experience there. You see, my life is like a chance. Like a beautiful chance. Things will happen. And I remember walking into the gallery one day and walking into the wrong room. I walked into Bucholz's apartment. He was eating and said, "Sit down son." I sat and he talked to me and said, "What do you do?" "I am a sculptor," I said. He said, "You want to show?"

MS. ROBERTS: That was Curt Valentine.

MR. AGOSTINI: Probably could have been. Yes. I said I don't think I am ready. He said, "I'll take a chance and give you a show now." And I was exactly twenty-two years old at the time. But I had already done this figure, see.

But I just didn't go back. It was that people didn't question me ever. One thing these guys knew about me was that I had seen everything. I studied like crazy on my own. I learned my own art history. I was always at the museum. And one day I wanted to get there early to have an "experience" as I called it. So I slept in the park so as to get there early, you know. I got up and about 10 o'clock when they opened I walked in and I looked at everything.

And I had a revelation. I knew what was good without even thinking. I didn't have to question. I said, "Good, terrific." I must have looked crazy walking around. Magnificent. Like this I was going around. See? And I felt so good. And I just walked on. But only once did that happen, where I just knew without question.

MS. ROBERTS: Would you call this a moment of illumination?

MR. AGOSTINI: Call it what you will. But I knew it happened to me. I understood all art in the one fleeting second.

MS. ROBERTS: But isn't it something that would constantly happen to you?

MR. AGOSTINI: I never had that experience again. You see, things happen to me that are already ordained.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. There is a sort of pre-determined factor .

MR. AGOSTINI: There is something that tells me that this will happen and I will see.

MS. ROBERTS: Don't you think that possibly because you are very intuitive you have a very deep knowledge of what you need and you usually get what you need?

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes, and I pursue everything. Now the accident of teaching at Columbia [University, NYC] was very strange. I never went for a teaching job. I got a letter saying would I want to come up there for a year. It wasn't that they picked me specially. I had no idea what happened. They really wanted [David] Slivka. [Constantino] Nivola liked Slivka, you see. Nivola had a slight antagonism to me all the time and I never knew it. I had thought he picked me and I was very gracious to him for it.

It was not until I left Columbia did they tell me the truth. You know who picked me? Myer Schapiro was the one. He said, "Get Agostini." I had no idea. I called him up and said thank you but I never knew about it until I quit. No one would tell me. They always made me think it was Nivola. And I wanted to kill him because he had done some very, very vicious things to me up there

MS. ROBERTS: That's very interesting about Schapiro. Have you talked with him a lot?

MR. AGOSTINI: I'll tell you how I met him. I was in my studio. The Longview people come around to pick out what they think should go to the Longview. And who comes in but this man. Are you Peter Agostini? Yes. I am Myer Schapiro. I said, "What do you do?" He said, "I am an art historian." I said, "Well, I am a sculptor."

It was silly but I had never met him, you see. I didn't remember the names of critics so I don't know if I read anything by him or not. And that is how we met. That was the last time we met. And the first .

MS. ROBERTS: Were you at all aware of what was going on in France at that time in sculpture?

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. As I said, I knew everything that was going on up to date. People used to come to my studio because I used to get all these books. I told them about [Théophile] Gautier. in the '30s and no one even knew about him. I had gotten this book and I said this guy is terrific. I showed it to Marca-Relli and everybody, you know. And they used to come to my studio I used to go looking for these things. As I said, I introduced Mondrian. He wasn't so much of a big issue here at all. They hardly knew him. I knew about Mondrian. I knew everything that was going on. Really.

MS. ROBERTS: Speaking of Gauthier, were you at all instrumental in the Museum of Modern Art putting on that show?

MR. AGOSTINI: Not in the least.

MS. ROBERTS: Well, that was so much later .

MR. AGOSTINI: I know, and this was in the '30's. I still have the book here. I remember buying it for a quarter and it had an article on him. Then I used to talk about [Théodore] Chassériau to them. No one ever heard of him.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. Well, Chasseriau is unknown here practically .

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, I knew about him then, see. And I used to talk to them about him. He had style . He died young. But for any kind of information like this I was the source: I had a room loaded with books. I used to go around and all the book guys would give them to me. They gave me a whole bunch of Lafcadio Hearn first editions for a dollar.

MS. ROBERTS: Who gave it to you?

MR. AGOSTINI: This fellow. I used to walk in and look. He knew I was broke. He said here is a nice pile for you. Take it. They used to— look, I tell you the world was an oyster for me from the day I was born. People used to want to give me things but I couldn't take them. I could have gotten Diamond Jim Brady's big mirror with big cupids on it, carved in wood, hand carved, for 10 dollars. But I didn't have ten dollars. And it's worth now about five thousand dollars.

MS. ROBERTS: Speaking of one thing leading to another, I was wondering about the Museum of Modern Art. When did they include you?

MR. AGOSTINI: They never did. And I never knew why. It doesn't matter.

MS. ROBERTS: I wonder how that happened.

MR. AGOSTINI: They just never did. They bought a wax drawing of mine— Lieberman did, you know, in the print department. A wax drawing, one of the big wax ones. A lot of people have tried to do wonderful things for me but somehow it didn't work. Like Norman Geske at Nebraska wanted them to buy drawings of mine, way back.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: They wouldn't take them.

MS. ROBERTS: Geske had been very good at that. He has seen things very early.

MR. AGOSTINI: In 1959 he wanted my first aerial piece. But it couldn't be transported. It broke in transportation. That was why it was sent back, but he included the photograph. He wasn't going to keep me out. He was one of my real backers.

And another strange backer I have is Andy Williams, the singer. Buys a lot of my work. And he bought it right from the beginning. You see? He was here a few months ago. He sees something, says I will take it and gives me a check and walks out.

MS. ROBERTS: I am not sure I understood the name.

MR. AGOSTINI: Andy Williams. He is a singer— he sings on T.V.

MS. ROBERTS: That's right , he is the singer. Of course.

MR. AGOSTINI: And everybody says Andy? He is one of my biggest collectors.

MS. ROBERTS: That is interesting

MR. AGOSTINI: When I went to Chicago people were highly antagonistic to me. You know? They resented me because they thought I was too sensual. Isn't that funny? They said there's something too damn sensual about what you do, Peter. And I said, "Isn't that good?" They say, "No. I don't care."

MS. ROBERTS: That is strange

MR. AGOSTINI: Now, you talk about the Modern Museum. I think what they resent about my work— I have been trying to figure it out for a long time, too, and I feel that I am a little off the edge. I am not like anything they've ever seen.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, I suppose they would probably consider the traditional part of your work not new and then the other part—

MR. AGOSTINI: They don't see tradition in my things either. That's the strange thing. Even what I myself would say comes out of tradition, they don't see it. I don't imply history, you see? It isn't that I am not. I don't imply it. Everybody now is trying to be non-history and I am considered it without even trying. Like my *Swells* [1965]. Nobody can make heads or tails of these things. And yet they can make heads or tails of a guy who makes a big box. Isn't that strange?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, it is strange.

MR. AGOSTINI: Not one person has bought a *Swell* of mine yet.

MS. ROBERTS: Now wait. There is perhaps a reason there. Those *Swells* take up an awful lot of space.

MR. AGOSTINI: Well they buy big things from these guys that take a whole wall.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, I know. But I think they always have been terribly concerned by the—

MR. AGOSTINI: Plaster?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: But they bought a plaster hamburger by [Claes] Oldenburg. They bought a plaster shirt of his.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, but it is painted. It is more permanent.

MR. AGOSTINI: No it isn't. It is the same plaster.

MS. ROBERTS: I wonder if it isn't the question of permanency.

MR. AGOSTINI: No, it's not that because they have a Segal and that's plaster. His is more fragile than mine. Mine will take a hammer. His won't. And they took him right away. They included him in all the shows.

It's not that. It's just I am off the edge, you know, of belief . I really believe they don't know whether— I know they know I am an artist, this isn't what their problem is. But they don't know I am an artist in the terms they consider an artist is. An artist— he is in a group. Where am I ? I'm in no group. They include me in groups but I am never of a group.

MS. ROBERTS: Artists are pushed by artists . There is no question about it.

MR. AGOSTINI: The pop group. I came in with their first show with a clothes line.

MS. ROBERTS: And in the World's Fair you were on that podium with all the pop.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right. And yet—

MS. ROBERTS: It is a strange thing.

MR. AGOSTINI: Those balloons of mine. Nobody could figure them out. They can't figure me out, don't you see? They can see a [Roy] Lichtenstein. That has a degree of observation, you have it in your comic strips. It's been transformed. It has an artistic reaction against or for. You see? Andy Warhol— reaction for or against. Mine don't say anything. They are just these balloons flying off the building. And yet everybody is doing balloons today. Isn't that funny?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. But I can't help thinking that these things are personal in the following way: for some reason you get to know curators personally and when you do, they follow your career more closely. I don't mean by that that they can be bought in any way. I don't mean that at all. But there is such thing as a close association.

MR. AGOSTINI: It is a strange thing. I want to tell you a funny story. Tom Messer came to the show and he flipped. He wanted to buy the biggest one for the Guggenheim. He brought Guggenheim into look at it. He said we've got to get the piece. But he couldn't sell it. He is the curator there. And he wanted it. Came in three times. They won't buy it.

Right now I have a friend, William Rubin, at the Modern. He wants the Modern to take one of my pieces and I bet you he doesn't sell it to them. Don't ask me why. Phillip Johnson comes in with people from Texas with loads of money. He said, "This man is a great artist, buy him." They ask him, "Why don't you buy one?" He said "That's not the question— I am telling you he is good." I asked him once why he didn't buy and he said I don't know.

I heard the story from [Stephen] Radish. He said Peter, "If you had heard him you would have blushed the way he praised you." But these people wouldn't bat an eye. I got broke once and I called up Tom Hess. He called the whole group of collectors. Now he's a man with an opinion, right? He said he couldn't even sell one of my drawings, never mind a sculpture to anybody. And he said I don't know what it is. He's bought a lot of my things. You see? Now no one knows what it is. And the same in Chicago. The head of the Chicago Museum came to see me here. We went out and we were drinking.

MS. ROBERTS: Spire?

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. He said, "God, I love your work, Peter. It's fantastic." He never bought one for himself or for the museum. And he said I would love to see you in the heart of Chicago. A big flowing thing, you know.

MS. ROBERTS: It is strange. I mean it is very difficult to draw conclusions.

MR. AGOSTINI: Now you understand what I mean, see? So what I am saying is I seem to be off the edge. That's the only way I can say it. And somehow they can't put their finger on why they don't buy. They will not deny I am a great sculptor. Mrs. List is the same way. She bought one piece of mine. Somebody asked her, "Who do you think is the greatest sculptor in America?" She said, "Agostini." They say, "Well, how come you don't buy?" She doesn't know. You, know, Dawn Gallery [NYC] is the same way. She wants a real sculptor and really have a beautiful show, a real great show? "Have Agostini," she said. But, she said, "He is not in my gallery." You know, it is like asking mysterious things.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, well, I think there is such thing as having turns. I mean all of a sudden there will be that ball rolling and it will roll all the way.

MR. AGOSTINI: My ball has been rolling all the time. You know, I always managed to sell. But the whole thing is no one knows why.

MS. ROBERTS: Of course you have to remember something about museums. They work with committees. And they may want something very badly, but if the committee doesn't want it—

MR. AGOSTINI: Maybe I'm the Kafka of sculpture.

MS. ROBERTS: You know what very well may happen is that the committee for some "x" reason doesn't want you. And it is the committee that does the purchasing actually.

MR. AGOSTINI: I know Clement Greenberg absolutely turns livid at the sound of my name. Do you know who else goes livid and he will never mention my name? Even if he mentions everybody else's name in a group show he will not mention my name: Hilton Carrier won't even mention the fact that I'm the show. I was at the Chicago Institute [Art Institute of Chicago] when they had that big show there.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: He said they gave the presentation to Louise Nevelson. It wasn't true. It was me. As you walked, in, it was Louise Nevelson and then there was a great big room right here and me. And then you walked on to everybody else. But he didn't even mention that I was it! Isn't that funny? He mentioned everybody else but my name didn't even appear once that I was even in the show. And any show I have been in he never mentions I have been in it. He has never used my name in vain.

MS. ROBERTS: Oh, that is remarkable. What about your rapport with the younger group you were mentioning like Marisol [Escobar] and people like that?

MR. AGOSTINI: They all think I'm wonderful. The younger sculptors, I am like their little god you know. They say Agostini why do you complain? You did the balloons. Like I've done the fantastic things.

MS. ROBERTS: But they are back of you, aren't they?

MR. AGOSTINI: I am considered part of the younger group. And yet I am of the older—

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. You are of the older group. I mean it is good enough to be in the younger group.

MR. AGOSTINI: But the younger group always consider me. You know, and they always say hello.

MS. ROBERTS: It is very mysterious. I know exactly because I have seen it happen time and again.

MR. AGOSTINI: It happened to [Paul] Cézanne— they couldn't see him. They just couldn't see him and he knew them. He was like a recluse. But I am not going to do what he did, 'cause I am too much interested in life .

MS. ROBERTS: But that was a different time. You can't quite figure it the same way. I am quite convinced that the same thing can happen in any time.

MR. AGOSTINI: I don't figure time. I feel that some artists get a certain kind of no, no, no from people. And they don't even know why. So I don't blame them.

MS. ROBERTS: No. But it would be interesting to find what makes the "yes" for the work and what makes the "no" for the work.

MR. AGOSTINI: Of course.

MS. ROBERTS: Because as you say, I don't think that there is a preconceived attitude about it. It just happens one way or another.

MR. AGOSTINI: I know.

MS. ROBERTS: And why should it be and why shouldn't it? It is very mysterious.

MR. AGOSTINI: You see, so it like one comment on an idea. You say, why is something wanted? And yet somehow they want Oldenburg so much. They just want him so much.

MS. ROBERTS: You don't think that it might be just because it was a very new idea?

MR. AGOSTINI: No. It isn't a new idea.

MS. ROBERTS: No, but it is a new idea inasmuch as the— well, how could I say it?

MR. AGOSTINI: He has just exploded a [Marcel] Duchamp. They said that he was doing soft sculpture. I did a soft sculpture before he ever did. I was playing around with soft forms. But yet they credited it to him.

I saw a thing that Barbara Rose wrote about me a long time ago. She said, "Agostini is not a sculptor because he makes things fly." Okay? Three years later she writes a story about this guy being fantastic . Not me, another guy who had taken a balloon and put it in a box which I had done five years before. And she says this guy has a new idea. Isn't that strange? Now he knows well enough I had done it. They never mention the fact that I created the soft object. The idea of soft sculpture. They never once said anything.

MS. ROBERTS: Speaking of the soft sculpture, your soft sculpture is using a soft object but it is quite hard when you touch it.

MR. AGOSTINI: I know. But the point is I was trying to create the object so it would feel soft by visual experience, without the touch.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. The visual.

MR. AGOSTINI: Because you are not going touch it.

MS. ROBERTS: But you can say the Oldenburg is not just visual, it— is actually drooping.

MR. AGOSTINI: Well then, he is just being realistic.

MS. ROBERTS: Right.

MR. AGOSTINI: So I am creating the illusion of realism. See? I am trying to make it as an artist. Like the thing just falls softly. And you feel it's soft. I created the idea of soft movement, fast movement. I used the winter, the summer ideas. Crushing objects together. Exploding them out. I played with moving into things like the butterfly— I used the idea of a thing sinking in and bellowing out.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: And these are all my ideas that came from the '50s. So it wasn't to state that I am an originator — I'm just a natural. These are two different things. I am naturally with myself. You see?

MS. ROBERTS: With yourself and the work is yourself. You know, I think perhaps you may have put your finger on something there. Perhaps there is more of a need for people to have the work on one side and the artist on the other. And when it becomes one, very often it disturbs them. I know that with Nevelson it was so for a long time. And now that she has become a little more detached from her work she conveys, to them, much more than when she was in it.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes.

MS. ROBERTS: It is possible that basically people want an object and not a soul. I mean it is not excluded.

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, then they are going to have to get somebody else.

MS. ROBERTS: No, I mean it is possible. I don't know.

MR. AGOSTINI: I know. It's a point. Yes, but that is like assuming that they think. And I am not assuming that they think. I think they do it sporadically.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. But that could come to them absolutely without thinking. I mean intuition doesn't work for the creator only.

MR. AGOSTINI: I will be perfectly honest. And it may be very blunt. I always consider someone who absorbs something and reexplains it to another person mediocre. Do you know what I mean? In a sense I feel that they are able to refine it for visual experience. And that's where mediocrity sets in. It is like [Pablo] Picasso does something, they refine it and people see it. Though in his case, it is quite different.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, it is quite different .

MR. AGOSTINI: You see what I mean?

MS. ROBERTS: Well, what you really say is that— the follower, the one who comes after very often has an audience that the creator didn't have because he does not refine—

MR. AGOSTINI: No, people like mediocrity better because it is closer to their world. You know. Who wants to see somebody who really has a high flying idea?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, but it doesn't quite work this way because at the same time you find that people every so often do fall on the right person and that the right person is high flying.

MR. AGOSTINI: Look, I have asked. I have asked people. I have asked Scull, you know, and I've asked [John] Kraushaar. He said— I remember that is where I heard about what Mrs. List said about me. Then Kraushaar said that I never failed in making a masterpiece of my shows. What are these people telling me? That I am the greatest thing that ever lived and then they say but the hell with you.

That's what they are telling me. And I don't see it. What am I supposed to do, die or something? Who's kidding who? Are they pulling my leg one way? Or honestly telling me something? Or are they just saying that really is it and they don't know why? I don't doubt once that I'm one of the most original sculptors living today. I don't doubt this once.

MS. ROBERTS: No, of course not. Nobody does actually.

MR. AGOSTINI: But yet, they'll tell me this in one breath and they say, boy! And I wonder what they mean by that. And then I've got to figure out how I am going to live.

MS. ROBERTS: That is right.

MR. AGOSTINI: In that other sense.

MS. ROBERTS: That's right. But do you think that it comes also sometimes after exposure in certain galleries?

MR. AGOSTINI: I know, some people say to me if I leave Radich— a [Leo] Castelli wanted me and everybody else. Who knows? I don't want to put it to the test. I owe Radich gratitude. It's not a gratitude that I feel committed to. He did back me as much as he could when I needed it. He can't do it now because who knows why? I don't know whether he is a lousy salesman or a good one. That is not up to him. It's up to the people walking in to know.

It shouldn't need Radich being a salesman to sell me. So it's not his fault. It's the fault of something in people. It may come with the way they wear their clothes. It may come with where they go with their wives. It may be something that they feel in my work that isn't touchable. Who knows? The mystery of it is that nobody knows the answer.

MS. ROBERTS: That's right. But isn't that true of so many things. Isn't it true that maybe that is what makes the scene so difficult to judge in one's time: that you can't judge your time. People live it. It is about as much as they can do.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes, but you see I am not attaching importance to any of this.

MS. ROBERTS: No, I know that. We are talking absolutely objectively.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. So what I'm saying about the scene is that these people are playing right. Don't forget. For anything to become popular it has to be feasible to their world. They could feel that maybe I'm too ancient. You know? Now this could be true. When I had the *Saracen* [1959] I had not a problem. I sold everyone of them.

MS. ROBERTS: When you had the what?

MR. AGOSTINI: The *Saracen*. You know, that big scale thing with all the things sticking off it?

MS. ROBERTS: Oh yes, yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: That, everybody took. My bronzes, everybody says I shouldn't work in bronze but they buy the bronze. Now, Messer wants my plaster. Hirshhorn [Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington DC] wants my plaster. You see?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: They say, how can we put it outside? They didn't think about how to put [George] Segal outside. Why all of a sudden do I have to fill a program? Plaster isn't for outside.

MS. ROBERTS: No.

MR. AGOSTINI: And neither is marble in New York, because it would corrode. So that falls flat on its face, you see?

MS. ROBERTS: I know. But you see I think that there is no explanation for a great many of the things that we live, and that goes for art too. But I think that there is such thing as rhythms and at times your work hits that rhythm or it doesn't. And that can very well be the pure haphazardness of timeliness.

[END OF REEL 1, SIDE 1.]

[TAPE 1, SIDE 2]

MS. ROBERTS: You said something very striking to me about the surprise that the abstract expressionists had at their success. I mean how success took them by surprise. Would you like to enlarge a little on that subject?

MR. AGOSTINI: I am trying to figure out why— the word "surprise" is very important in this case— really this is

what happened to them. I think that up to a certain time they were always just working. And any kind of acceptance, anykind of acceptance outside of the group they knew was a surprise to them because I don't think that they thought of ever hanging a painting or exhibiting a piece of sculpture.

MS. ROBERTS: You are sure you are not translating into their mind your own modesty and your own passion?

MR. AGOSTINI: No. Because I spoke with them many times . And there was a little incident that came out. Franz Kline and Marca-Relli were hanging in the open air Washington Square Show [NYC].

MS. ROBERTS: What date was that about?

MR. AGOSTINI: About 1945, I think, or about '46. And I remember Franz won a prize for drawing and Marca-Relli got the prize for painting. So they showed them in the entrance room of the Whitney Museum[of American Art, NYC]. We all went there and they were aghast at the fact that they were hanging in the Whitney Museum. It was just too much, you know. They couldn't believe it. Which in a sense made me feel that this was something that they could never believe would happen.

MS. ROBERTS: You think that their rebellion— because in fact it was a rebellion against many of the "isms" of the past and really European art to a certain extent— was a revolt, was an end in itself?

MR. AGOSTINI: No. I don't think that they were even rebelling. I think in their talking they found maybe they could do something else . And I think that when Pollock received some kind of acceptance— he was the first one to be accepted as an American artist in a strange sort of a way— they decided then that they should try something. And I think when they got talking to each other they hit on these ideas and began giving ideas back and forth.

Like I think that Franz had no idea of doing big Mack and whites until Elaine de Kooning suggested one day that should blow up one of his drawings and see what it looked like. So when he saw what it looked like she said, "Well, why don't you do that?" And he did a few and then Charlie Egan gave him a show.

MS. ROBERTS: Charlie Egan was active then?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, he was induced to show these people at the gallery— he was backed up I think by Poindexter in fact. Or somebody, I don't know. He had a gallery on Fifty-Seventh Street and I remember Elaine de Kooning coming to me and asking me would I like to show in it? This was back in about '45 or '46. And they decided to start showing the group people. I think Elaine was the real prime mover in a sense.

MS. ROBERTS: I thought Egan showed Kline in the '50s.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes, but that was later. But he got a group together at that time.

MS. ROBERTS: Oh, I see.

MR. AGOSTINI: And they asked me, I think it was around 1946 because I was doing some portraits at that time. And he wanted to show this portrait and a few other things of mine. They were trying to get a group together to show and I think they had de Kooning first and then they had Pollock and they were showing in this little gallery on Fifty-Seventh Street. And then Franz may have come later. I don't know, around '50 I think it was.

I remember when he hung this show he was— I said to him, "How do you feel about it?" And he said, "I don't know." You know, in a sense he wasn't sure of this bit or not. It wasn't like a revolt. It was just that he did something different and he was unsure about it as much as anyone else.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. Now, I was wondering about something you said in conversation, that basically you were very close to all the abstract expressionist people. When did your association with them start? I know you used to go out with them and they were terribly friendly and not at all antagonistic to you as they were sometimes to one another.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes.

MS. ROBERTS: No, how do you explain this and how did the whole thing start? You were talking of Marca-Relli, for instance, who was seventeen then.

MR. AGOSTINI: No, 20.

MS. ROBERTS: He was 20. And you were about the same age then too?

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes, but this was around 1935.

MS. ROBERTS: Well, let's go back to '35. That was in fact the time of the WPA wasn't it?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, Marca-Relli was working at this school for the WPA at the time— '36. He was teaching. Everybody who got on WPA got a teaching job or did what they called studio work. He was put on as a teacher. And he came to this school to teach while I was working there, you know, as a student, in a sense.

MS. ROBERTS: You were a student at that time?

MR. AGOSTINI: A student. But there were no teachers as such.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: I was there, and Spaventa was there.

MS. ROBERTS: That is that Da Vinci School?

MR. AGOSTINI: Leonardo Da Vinci School, yes. At that time he was just painting and he tried to make friends with me but I stopped it at that point and then later, like a year later, I got friendly with him because he lived right near to where I did— Eighth Street, and I lived on Fourth Street, see? It was then that he introduced me to Bill de Kooning. We went to visit de Kooning. This was about '36 or so.

MS. ROBERTS: Oh, I see. De Kooning must have just about arrived at that time.

MR. AGOSTINI: No, from what I heard, he had been here since 1927. But I never ran into him in the Village because nobody ran into anybody. It was in the '30s and I think that the only people around were Marca-Relli, myself and then, I don't remember [Reuben] Nakian at that time. I met all those people in the '40s and later. But around that time it was Marca-Relli and myself. And the only person we knew was de Kooning. But, you know, there was no real friendship. It was just we knew each other.

MS. ROBERTS: You said something that interested me: that de Kooning, because perhaps because he was a European, was more conscious of heading toward a form of recognition or a form of communication than the others. Would you like to say a few words about this?

MR. AGOSTINI: De Kooning used to invite people who come from Europe. You know, he tried to contact artists who came over from Europe and people from museums and all. Because once I remember he met me in the street and he introduced me to this man who was from the museum in Holland. This was in the late '40s. But from the beginning I think that de Kooning was aware of his significance as an artist, you know. And I don't think any of the group I knew felt this significance at all.

MS. ROBERTS: This is quite interesting in another perspective. Do you think that because de Kooning had a sense of history, having followed it very closely in Europe, he could place himself in history too? In other words he took that same perspective?

MR. AGOSTINI: I think more or less that's probably true because he followed [Jean Auguste Dominique] Ingres and he was involved with this kind of tradition, you know. And I don't know what tradition we were following.

I mean everybody was going helter and skelter— Marca-Relli at the time I first met him was involved with [Pierre-Auguste] Renoir and then he shot off to that [Georges] Braque and then to [Henri] Matisse, to [Raoul] Dufy. He was more conscious of history than I think I myself was.

MS. ROBERTS: But he was mostly concerned with history in modern dress shall we say.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right. He didn't have what—

MS. ROBERTS: What de Kooning probably was relating to deeper in time.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right. And for that reason Marca-Relli was very much a worshipper of de Kooning. He thought of him as a good artist at that time. He never respected anybody else but he did respect de Kooning.

MS. ROBERTS: Do you think that is the reason some people thought he was influenced by de Kooning?

MR. AGOSTINI: No. De Kooning did some black and whites which were very similar to what Marca-Relli later did. But the shapes that he saw there— he may have used those kinds of shapes— but the thing that triggered this cutting out bit came from the saddle idea. You know, he had these pieces of saddle.

MS. ROBERTS: Oh, yes. Well tell me a little more about that. I know we branched out on this but what happened with that saddle?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, he had the saddle on his wall and it was all in pieces, you know. And then he put it together.

MS. ROBERTS: Did he slice it off?

MR. AGOSTINI: No, no. It was made that way in Mexico and he picked it up. It was all in wood. And he hung it up and we thought it was a piece of sculpture, you know. Because they were pieces.

MS. ROBERTS: He found it in many pieces?

MR. AGOSTINI: No. He bought it that way. That is the way it was put together. It was a kind of construction where one thing fitted into the other. But it had this kind of quality that had to do with pieces, you know. Later he started cutting out canvases to get this kind of piece operation. He didn't realize that maybe unconsciously he was thinking in these terms. But he applied it.

MS. ROBERTS: That's interesting. And that explains why there are so many curves in those pieces.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. That's right. You know, I felt that Marca-Relli was very much tied up with the Italian school like [Carlo] Carra. You know?

MS. ROBERTS: Oh, yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: And I felt like when he was looking at [Giorgio] De Chirico he was looking at it with Carra's eyes. And then if you remember Carra used to make these kinds of forms that were very much linked to the way that he makes his forms today. Like he cuts them out to get this almost tubular quality. Not like Fernand Léger. But more like the Italians. Like Carra and that group that were around at that time.

MS. ROBERTS: But was he familiar with the whole group?

MR. AGOSTINI: I imagine he was. I think he was. Although he never talked of them.

MS. ROBERTS: You know, when you come to think of it now that we are talking, do you remember Duchamp's *The Bride [Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even, 1915-1923]*?

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes.

MS. ROBERTS: Well, that has that kind of separation and delineation of parts.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. I agree with you. It is like a futuristic idea. It was splitting the thing so as to give it more quick dimension and if you look at Marca-Relli's early things they are very futuristic.

MS. ROBERTS: I didn't recall that he wanted to make it move. Because after all the futurist introduced the movement in the figure.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. But he made his parts move. He tried to get the sense of speed.

MS. ROBERTS: In an abstract way?

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. Like he used [Paolo] Uccello's battle scene for one of his collages, you know? So you get that quality.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: So he really was more of an Italianated Frenchman rather than a French-Italianated. So, I think every time he was looking at the French he was looking at them with Italian eyes.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. That's very interesting.

MR. AGOSTINI: And this is the difference. And when he looked at de Kooning he probably saw the value of de Kooning basically this kind of a way. You know, through the futurists, through the French to de Kooning.

MS. ROBERTS: Well, of course in de Kooning there is movement. But it is not the futurist movement.

MR. AGOSTINI: No.

MS. ROBERTS: It is much more of an expressionist movement.

MR. AGOSTINI: I feel de Kooning, from the things I have seen, the attitude she has, was always inclined towards the quality that LaTour had. Georges [de] La Tour.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. You mean the artificial lighting?

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. It is like the artificial light and the way the image comes against it. You see?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: I think even in his early things, like *The Glazier* [1940]— the man sitting at the table— there is a dream-like quality of LaTour in a way. It certainly couldn't relate to much of anyone else. I don't think it was a surrealist idea. I think it was just this kind of LaTour idea and this is his understanding about Ingres, you know, in a way that kind of tight understanding of the thing itself in light.

MS. ROBERTS: What kind of work did you do at that time? I mean, what were your own interest, your own involvement?

MR. AGOSTINI: In the '30s I was doing horses and figures. Then around 1942 when I went into this defense plant I started making what they call a point between two lines. I would make two dots and make a line. And then I would make another point and then pull back the line. I was trying to work with lines. I did a whole series of sketches on this. And then I did scribbles.

MS. ROBERTS: Incidentally, De Chirico at some point was fascinated by that same thing. The trajectory of the lines between points.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. I think this has been true for most artists in a way because they even score the canvasses this way, you know. It is something that tries to make you fix some kind of space for yourself.

MS. ROBERTS: Speaking of De Chirico, Did you ever feel yourself a kinship to that kind of state in space?

MR. AGOSTINI: When I was around 18 I did. I made a water color after three horses that he did.

MS. ROBERTS: I see. I wasn't even thinking of the horses when you said that. But rather something about the relationship of volumes which is both cubist and surrealist reminded me of it in some of your things.

MR. AGOSTINI: But he was not my prime mover. The real thing that got me as far as I can remember and who I really got hung up on for a while was Maillol.

MS. ROBERTS: That's strange. I would never have thought that.

MR. AGOSTINI: I know. But Maillol interested me very much, and I used to be interested in Despiare for portraits. And then somehow I lost that. But I always looked at Maillol.

MS. ROBERTS: Because of the rotundity of volume?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well it was like [Francios] Pompon. You remember Pompon's work?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. Definitely .

MR. AGOSTINI: Pompon interested me, too. I saw him in 1933. I saw his forms and they interested me very much. In fact I think the guy who influenced me the most was Pompon. And nobody ever heard of him either.

MS. ROBERTS: Because of the—

MR. AGOSTINI: The pureness of his forms.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. The synthesis of all forms in animals.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. And the cracked egg still comes out in some of my things. You know I didn't consider him surrealist. I just saw him as getting the most out of a pure form rather than purifying a form to make it look pure.

MS. ROBERTS: He is more or less of a formalist in a way.

MR. AGOSTINI: He did more with it than I saw any American artist do with the same idea. I even consider him richer than [Elie] Nadelman who becomes slightly picturesque to me.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. What about [Constantin] Brâncuși? Were you familiar with his work?

MR. AGOSTINI: I was very familiar with Brâncuși but I was more interested in the sensuality that Pompon had than what Brâncuși did not have. See? I never felt Brancusi had that sensuality. I felt that his things were very cool. I didn't say cold, but cool.

MS. ROBERTS: It is more intellectual.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. It was like an intellectual pursuit. And I didn't want to get that kind of clarity. I was more interested in that sensualism, that skin that Pompon could give to things.

MS. ROBERTS: The skin. That is very interesting. Because actually all your sculpture has skin.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. And that was what I was after at the time. Even when I would model something I would try to give it the feeling that whatever I had underneath was held down by the skin. Always the outside holding the inside in. And I think this is primarily what I still do all the time. I try to get as much force coming out and I try to hold it back with a skin.

MS. ROBERTS: The skin is your architecture in other words?

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. To hold back the thing so—

MS. ROBERTS: It is a soft architecture.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right. Even when I do cloth. I must be getting this because this is what they keep telling me I have, sensualist idea in my work. But it's because I have always been conscious, even when I am drawing my line is not a line. It is like the skin holding back the form. So that you always feel no matter how I draw it that the thing is within the realm of skin rather than the line.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. That is very good definition. It is the contained that comes first and is covered by the container.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right. In other words I do all the possible things underneath. And in the process the illusion is holding back. You know what I mean everything holding it back. I'm never conscious of the outside. I'm always conscious of holding something in. And in the process skin takes place. You see, in other words I never pursued the skin, I pursued the inside and what happened is that the skin took over.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes

MR. AGOSTINI: You know, unconsciously. In other words I held back my forms with this.

MS. ROBERTS: Do you remember what was the reaction let's say of Kline to what he saw of your work? Or the reaction of [Mark] Rothko?

MR. AGOSTINI: You would really have to ask them because I personally think that all the artists of that time just used to shrug their shoulders. They couldn't figure me out at all. They didn't dismiss me but no one ever said anything about my work.

MS. ROBERTS: In other words it was you as a person and as a receptacle of their own thought and the exchange that they sought.

MR. AGOSTINI: They knew I was a good artist. But they never knew what for. I don't think they ever really figured me out. Although at one time they considered me one of the best draftsman in America. They used to consider me that. They felt that I was a fantastic draftsman. And what they based in on was the fact that I used to be able to throw these figures into space and just draw them so freely.

I'm sure, I'm sure Graham saw something in these things. Because when he did those heads, I was doing heads similar to that—the Renaissance heads I used to do. I could almost get the quality without being like them. Like taking the Renaissance and putting it into modern terms. I did five which I called "Crazy Women Heads." Where I was able to get the skin through drawing, which nobody could get at the time. I don't think any artist in America has ever gotten that. And I think one head is owned by Sally Haslett. She bought one.

MS. ROBERTS: The painter?

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. She bought it. She was the first one to buy me.

MS. ROBERTS: Well, she has a skin quality in her things

MR. AGOSTINI: And she saw these things It was a small head like this, just of a woman's head. I wasn't being like Rothko who took that kind of smoky world. You know like to look through it? My things had a density and you

could feel the skin, you could feel the hair and you could feel the action of my forms. Plus you could feel my character.

In other words I was able to unite all things and make a head that looked so real. And this used to—you know they just thought it was a good drawing. That's all. They couldn't figure it out. And I never used cross hatching or anything. I just used my lines as if they were skin.

MS. ROBERTS: Incidentally, you spoke of portrait there. Do you think that a real sense of observation is enough for portraiture? Or is there another dimension to portraiture?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well there must be because there's a lot of guys who observe and they see too well on the outside and not enough of what happens. They usually lack the skin. I even did a portrait where I smoothed it almost down like glass and it still looked like skin. I couldn't destroy the sensation that I gave to my surfaces. I always would get to skin no matter what I did. I chopped it, chewed it, or whatever I did skin would come out.

And my idea is this, I must have been so sure of my distance from the center to my point that made it tight. You know, that gave it kind of solidity. And it was that solidity that gave it not only softness but hardness as well. When it's alright, everything is right, the overall dimension has all of what one perceives.

MS. ROBERTS: Do you think that a real understanding of light, of what light does to surface and to volume can achieve such a feeling. I mean do you think that those are things that might be connected?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well I never use theory or any sort. I never had a theory, I never cared what light I had, where I was, or anything. I just worked. And as my things developed they always had this thing. What happened is I had transferred all my information to my fingers. In other words you could almost touch and feel.

What an artist has to do I think is to get this kind of transference. It has to be not so much unconscious, it just has to be true to one place. Like his fingers. The transition has to take from all the observations and it just pours out of his fingers. If it doesn't pour it is just cold articulation. This was the thing, no matter what his theories were, that Ingres had.

MS. ROBERTS: Oh, yes. He certainly painted skin. I mean he had the feeling of it.

MR. AGOSTINI: He was the only one I thought who could paint skin as well as I did. Or get to it through a drawing. I haven't found anyone else, [Eugène] Delacroix, no one else has ever done it. I did a painting which I mocked off in an hour, and I was not a painter, I just used the paints that were left on my brother's pallet—I did this portrait of St. John the Baptist and you felt that skin without my even trying. Just knocked it off and pushed it aside, forgot about it.

MS. ROBERTS: I am very much interested in this idea of skin—you put it very clearly—but at the same time thinking of it in terms more visual, and less sensual, I was wondering do you think it could be a sort of summing up of observation and intuition. I mean the interweaving of the two?

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right. It comes to this after awhile. Because you cannot think in terms of light and create light. I used to play around and say I would do a light head coming out of the dark, and a dark head going back into light. You know, I would play games. And even then the skin would be perceptible all the time in what I did. Till I almost got flesh. You know? I would get flesh so easily into my things. You know how [Wayne] Thiebaud paints?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. You mean the painter at Allan Stone [Gallery, NYC]?

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. Now he plays with light. He plays with skin tones, but he doesn't get any of this. It just becomes a pictorial observation. You see?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. It is spelled out. I think that when he does those cakes, though—I think that his cakes have skin. I don't think his models have it.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right. So in other words he gives you the froth. You know, cakes will be frothy. Making the cream on top of the cake is much easier than observing a figure and getting it. You see what I mean? I've watched people paint apples but they never made me feel an apple as when I see a [Paul] Cézanne apple or I see an apple by [Jean-Baptiste-Siméon] Chardin.

And yet I painted a bowl of apples and I get an apple. I don't paint, and my use of tones don't fit here, they don't in the past, they don't fit in the present, they don't fit anywhere. It was just that I painted apples and for some reason those go to be apples. In other words it comes through, I feel that I have everything at my fingertips

now. Even if I don't do it I could do it. You know it is like I have this thing that pours out of me without my even caring—about light. Everybody tells me I get fantastic light over my things.

I did this still life in the window. Well if you saw how I put that together, put this here, put that there. I don't even think about it. Put this here. Okay change it, put it over here. Oh, put it back. And what happens is the thing starts getting light. Those bottles were cast bottles, but what did they catch light? You see?

MS. ROBERTS: It is a form of life reality.

MR. AGOSTINI: Exactly. This is the point we have to get to. The life force in a thing that is done by man. This is the secret that made Ingres so terrific, this beautiful life force. And this is the thing that de Kooning was getting in his women in a sense—terrific life force.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: And even though they are just skins that are hung on a clothes line. That's what they are. He just did it. There are skins of a woman—he ripped the skins off and hung them on a clothes line and stuck glass eyes into them/ And stuck a mouth on it as if it were false, you know? The idea is that he gives a certain life to his fantasy.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. Which of course is the essential thing.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's it. All the other things people can learn, but Ingres didn't think about learning. He just did it. There were probably some better painters than he, you know, using colors and all. But somehow when he used colors, whatever they were they were right. He just had it in him.

MS. ROBERTS: Do you think that perhaps the fact that you were so fascinated by the world of appearances, transcending it but just the same fascinated by it created some kind of gap between you and your friends who were actually seeking their way in abstraction?

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. You see I couldn't lie it myself. You know? Like abstraction. To make a cold thing. It never appealed to me. I tried a box quite a while back. I busted it open and I had things popping out of it. I love the quietness but quietness won't happen with me. You see? My greatest tragedy is as I said in the beginning I am trying to be withheld and yet I spin out.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. But that doesn't seem to be a tragedy because basically you do communicate with it.

MR. AGOSTINI: I know. But I am sure I could communicate with the other. And its only in this portrait I did that I got this thing. You know? I did this portrait very quiet. I hardly made her features. I barely made her eyes. Just touched them. Just touched her mouth. And just touched the whole surface. And the touching of the surface pulled it right away out. You see? And yet the whole thing is so quiet. And I did less with that than most people do with any portrait. I think even Brâncuși did more with a portrait than I did. I simplified everything. The hair and everything made like one idea.

MS. ROBERTS: What are your reactions to [Giovanni] Giacometti because certainly he has had his own interpretation of the figure.

MR. AGOSTINI: I can't figure him out yet. But he's the opposite of what I want. I do not want his crustaceans. Sometimes I have tried it myself. There is something about his crustaceans that I abhor. But he does exactly what I am doing, too, in many ways. Like I play with the doll idea. His things are like big dolls only his become more the buried doll of Etruscans of the Egyptians. You see? I like to get the doll in another way but we still both stay with the same doll I feel this is where Giacometti is. He is the maker of dolls just as I am in a sense.

MS. ROBERTS: Your figures now are not at all realistic. At least I have not seen personages recently of yours except those little statues that you have so many of.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes.

MS. ROBERTS: But in your big shows you have seemed to have regulated those to the level of sketches or studies.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. That is right.

MS. ROBERTS: But they are the final product with him.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. I know. They become like drawings to me. You see? And this whole thing I am

trying to play with, the Swell idea, is like the pressures I am working with. To define the distance of maybe a woman's leg. You see? It's really all defining the sense of the body. You know? And I don't know why but I end up doing the these big wells which turn out being overblown women in an abstract way.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. Well, this idea of dolls that you just mentioned. In what way do you feel that your relate to Giacometti's?

MR. AGOSTINI: Just the fact that they're dolls. And I think that image making ends up this way anyway, you know.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, but you say they are dolls, Giacometti never refers to them as dolls.

MR. AGOSTINI: I know.

MS. ROBERTS: It was his wife. It was Annette. It was whoever it was. And for you they are effigies, not people.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes, that's right. I had to separate the fact that I was never going to make living things. I was going to make dolls that were living. I had to accept this sooner or later.

MS. ROBERTS: I see. Well then it might be the reversed path from Giacometti. Because I think that his personages may become puppets and you want your puppets to become personages.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right. I believe that all images eventually become live because the maker goes away, he dies. It is like Easter Island things—they become real things. You know? It's like art becomes real and not the people behind it. I think the artist gets lost eventually. And he only can have this concept of his own endurance for a period of maybe a few hundred years and then when his name get lost the things take on their own world.

You know? They live as a kind of memory pattern. Not of things that we perceived, not of things we dreamed of, but of things that have a spark. And it doesn't matter if they represent or don't represent something. And I think this is what I found out when I was looking at all art—just like the Archaic Greeks: you look at them and they are wonderful to you. And it doesn't matter who the hell made them. The stroke of a man's hand on them is not even there anymore.

MS. ROBERTS: That explains the possibility or machinery as a matter of fact.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right . The only thing is that machinery will not get it. Because the artist embedded something. This is the strangest mystery— that does man imbed in his effigies when they are wonderful? This is the thing that people call genius. And this is maybe the whole reason why we are groping for God. Or groping for anything— that somebody can imbed something. That's the only truth that we have, that man is a highly organized brain, that he can imbed these things with up. Because few men can do it as you know. When these things have been copied, like the ones by the Romans, you see the fallacy. They never look like the original.

MS. ROBERTS: They lack presence.

MR. AGOSTINI: They lack it. Now what is it that a man stamps inside, he never stamps it on the outside. He puts inside an equation that is absolutely true. And that's, I think, where the whole mystery of what we are about in art is. No matter how you define it—whether you make it in the square, or you make it in a pyramid it's that kind of space that is put there by just one man. Now not all the pyramids are magnificent. Maybe one or two are. You see?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. Do you think that it is possibly this that you call "imbedded" in the work as a mark of a tremendous curiosity that finally finds a fulfillment in the act?

MR. AGOSTINI: I wonder. Because my idea is even some of the Egyptians we don't know who did the work, some of those workman who were just workmen imbedded those things and created something we call "creation." So it isn't as much that God is the creator. God is man and man is the creator at a certain point when he imbeds this thing into something.

MS. ROBERTS: You speak of the pyramids but basically what was imbedded in them was really almost essentially sweat.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. But the sweat, don't forget, was the design of one man who made that kind of proportion.

MS. ROBERTS: Now wait. This leads us to something else. Now it would be conceivable that other peoples'

sweat, of the machine at that point, might go through the conception of the man, as in architecture

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes.

MS. ROBERTS: And possibly the sculpture if you can afford to have that evolved process and if you follow every bit of the process. Because from then on the machine, or the whole industrial process becomes the prolongation of the arm.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. But you see what happens—when the man who drove those men was dreaming he probably passed through them as well. You know what I mean? It's like an image. Should the man like it or shouldn't he? In the case of the Egyptian he didn't. But he must have passed his image into every man who'd swear or till the imprint was made inside. It could be brought out in this was too: that a man like Napoleon, who was not making images but used people, motivated his whole army to his senses into this idea that he had. And he motivated them to such a point where he became their arm.

MS. ROBERTS: Now wait a minute. Yes. But I am not sure that the two comparisons work for one reason. What you say about Napoleon—I see very well the relationship. But something happened and that might be the clue to the pyramids, too. That in that everyone of those men under Napoleon, on account of his drive loved him. It was a love. Now the sweat of the Egyptian peon or whoever really worked on those stones—was it also possibly a form of love but the love of the menial job, having not conceived the whole. That form of love that might find some kind of pulsation through the stone. I don't know. I am just asking you.

MR. AGOSTINI: I am wondering about this too because you take the Incas with similar temples and with the cruelty that they practiced. You see what I am trying to figure out? Where divinity begins. Where the divine act begins and the man who motivated it. Whether he motivates a piece of stone to become alive or whether he motivates a big thing to come alive. You know?

It's the kind of motivation which has been all man has ever—man always precedes the motivator. We even do it to this day. We look for a guy to motivate a group. The Beatles have their Guru. A motivator. He generates what they call a "center." And that center becomes like a garden of Eden. You sit there and you are possessed of it and you don't need anything more but that possession.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. But you don't think that the Guru in general becomes the symbol of something greater than the man himself?

MR. AGOSTINI: It has to be. Just as the artist's work is probably greater than he is. A man who actually proved this point was Michelangelo. He devoided himself as a human being and only existed in what he did. Another man who did this was [Leonardo] Da Vinci. He gave himself to this thing that took him over. I think you get taken over. Now one wonders what takes over. We could deny the fact that there is a God and all these things. But what is the take over? What kind of force takes over that creates man's impulses towards this?

I was reading about a constructivist and he says we are all machines, we are all IBM complexed. I always said this myself. For years I thought that we were IBM machines. But then an IBM machine can be a very good one or it could be a loco one. Now for all IBM machines then a superior IBM machine calculates the others into place. But who is the calculator is what I am trying to figure out. I am talking about man himself as a being this prime IBM machine with all the information that is possible within him and it explodes.

Like one man gets the thoughts of a guy like Einstein. The thoughts of any man which are superior to anybody else's in a sense. They come out, they function, express themselves simply. They see it. They see it. You know? It is like they really see it. They don't have to be taught. If they never had a lesson in their life they would have seen it. You see?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: Now what gives this total perception to any specific man? This is the thing that pulls it away from the idea of construction unless he says that all things within this man are constructed right. You know? So they make the proper multiplication, they make the proper subtractions. Then if you figure it all out he is a perfect machine. He is a thought. See?

So what man has really tried to figure out is the thought process of the whole world. You know this is what makes art and everything else. Thought process. And it doesn't matter how you use this thought process. You could even use it in the most decadent manner. You still can't imprison life.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes speaking of the thought process and what you just said a minute ago. Do you feel the mere fact of answering a question "yes" or "no" doesn't matter—and all that matters is that the question be raised in such a way that it should present the problem?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, I would say this is all okay. But what they're trying to figure out is the reason or purpose of thought. And they're right. Thought has no reason, has no purpose. As yet we don't know. But the point that man is questioning today is where does all this thought come from? So we create a Zen articulation for it. We create a Buddhism articulation for it. But yet when Buddha go to answer he was silent. And Zen says absolute silence is where it is. Then he puts it back to a thing within that no one can touch again. You see?

MS. ROBERTS: Well does that mean the negation of the act then?

MR. AGOSTINI: It doesn't matter. Whatever man does is not involved with this thing. This is the thing that they are coming to right now.

MS. ROBERTS: How do you equate this thinking, for instance, with your experience of, not your personal experience but your experience of the people you have known. That is to say, all that group of people that you would meet around.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. That's it, you see. When I first knew these artists I was indifferent to them. I didn't say they lacked anything, but I was indifferent to what they had or didn't have. I looked at their work and I was looking for something. I was looking for this thing that was a touch. That imprisoned this thing. I couldn't explain how to get it. I couldn't explain how they could get it. And I couldn't explain why they lacked it. This is where it comes back to Zen—as I looked there would be a "no" there and a "yes" there. You see? That's all. You remember I said I went into the museum one day and all of a sudden I could "yes" the yeses and "no" the nos.

MS. ROBERTS: You mean that you sorted that which was meaningful to you from that which was not?

MR. AGOSTINI: No. I saw outside of myself. I saw what was wonderful and what wasn't.

MS. ROBERTS: You say "outside of yourself," but don't you think at this point you're still at this point the measure of judgment?

MR. AGOSTINI: I wasn't measuring that day. That's the point. I had decided to walk in and just look. And whatever popped in my head would be the answer. I wasn't thinking of a man's ability to do this or do that. I just said this is full and this is empty. It would be yes or no. You see?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: And that's all that I could see. And I would look and say this man is wonderful. Not the man, but what he did. The man I couldn't care less about. And this is true. The man behind the thing is practically meaningless.

MS. ROBERTS: We both agree that what wonderful about [Louise] Nevelson was that she was an artist and she recognizes artists. And you were talking about then of this geographical place that one could call an artist.

MR. AGOSTINI: Because it has more to be here—I don't know of anywhere else at this point. And when I talk about Louise having this kind of scope is that I feel that she has this kind of life force that makes her participate.

MS. ROBERTS: Now do you think that it is a form of energy above all?

MR. AGOSTINI: I don't know.

MS. ROBERTS: You know, we spoke some time ago of the purity of the artist. What it meant to be pure. Now that is such a vague word and nobody agrees on what is pure and what isn't pure.

MR. AGOSTINI: I know

MS. ROBERTS: But do you think you would care to define something about it?

MR. AGOSTINI: I will. Number one, when I had my class all these students are working. And yet all that came out was dry information. From all of them. Maybe one would get a slight touch but on the whole it was dry information. I gave them a lead in and they fed me back dry information. So I tried again. Dry information. So in process of this I feel I want to get out. I can't take anymore dry information. It isn't that I was looking for a genius. I wanted to see somebody who would make me see something had happened.

MS. ROBERTS: Those students that you were mentioning, were they at Columbia?

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. Columbia, and now down at this other place, too.

MS. ROBERTS: That is where?

MR. AGOSTINI: Down in North Carolina. I look at their work. They absorb my information very easily but they feed me back dry information. I keep wondering what is a teacher supposed to do? Give information that only brings out dry information? Like everything that is dry it vanishes. It crackles. Becomes powder. So I feel teaching in this sense is meaningless. It's not important for me to see the products. And I no longer want to look at the products of my investigation.

Of course when I am pushing them I'm pushing them through myself. Like the guy trying to push stones up that slope. But don't forget he was getting love back. I am not getting that. I'm getting just a student who is going through a course. That's the difference. They have to take my course for three points, they get it over with and out they go. They are not really interested.

MS. ROBERTS: Well, they are not strictly art students. They are following a curriculum.

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, even if they were. I had some art students that were interested. But they still gave out this dry information. So I wonder will they ever be this I am looking for. They can't be through me. They have to be through themselves. Then I tell them to quit school. They say what about you? I say then I am about of a job but at least that's more honest. Because if I am out of a job I can always ride on the guilt of people. Because they cannot forgive my arrogance, they cannot forgive me for things and because I'm such a lousy bastard they have to pay me for it. You see? That's the whole thing I feel. And they will do it one way or another.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. But we were talking of the artist and how people who have met the artists know how to recognize artists. Don't you think that perhaps the way one can recognize an artist is by what he is not rather than by what he is? Because of each one being different from another.

MR. AGOSTINI: Oh, you never look at the kind of work? That has nothing to do with it?

MS. ROBERTS: No. No. But I mean the individual.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. Well, the individual is always there. Now I do not agree with the things that Louise does. I just see her information. And I see the inner articulation. That's all. I may not even agree with what de Kooning does. But what comes of is what I am interested in. I see that other thing inside. That lurking presence. It is the lurking presence that I perceive and it can come out of any goddamn thing. I don't even know where it's going to come out. You see?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: It has nothing to do with how a man goes to it. He could give me a big glorified outside and I'll just see the façade.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: But I want to get into the temple as they call it. That's the word—I think this is where the world has been screwed up. They have the façade and they have the temple. The inner and the outer.

What most people love is the façade because it's as far as they can see. So it's not their fault that they don't see further. When half the artists don't see further how can you expect them to feel this other lurking thing inside. Nobody even goes that far to look at it. Look how they walk into a gallery. They go one, two, three, look around and out they go.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. But do you think that this thing that interest you in those that you recognize as peers and people who really have something to contribute to the world—do you think that it may be that total dedication that will at some point come out?

MR. AGOSTINI: This is the point. I don't think that I has anything to do with the world. I think that it is an inner thing that happens and the guy that has it has no idea that it's going to be meaningful. It doesn't even have to be. I don't think the world is even interested in this idea. It just happens to be one of the key points of why man created God.

And the only thing is this information that the artist has—he is like the needle. He gets to the altar. See? And he is present when the silence takes place. He just knows. And for what reason it doesn't even matter. The whole truth of it is that the artist is the most purposeless, if he is a true artist, individual in the world. You see? He is absolutely purposeless.

MS. ROBERTS: The completely gratuitous act.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right. That's the point. And when it gets to this point of reality, where this thing is, then you have some kind of truth. Now Hindus sit on their fannies trying to find this. That doesn't do it. Going into caves doesn't do it. You can be the most decadent rake in the world and you might still have it. See it doesn't belong to any specific what we call "shell" of man.

MS. ROBERTS: Do you think it is almost like a very thin, little light that would be trembling inside a human being and have no other purpose but to just exist as that little, vibrating light?

MR. AGOSTINI: We wonder. We wonder. Now supposing all men have this. It's a possibility.

MS. ROBERTS: It's a possibility. But they don't recognize it.

MR. AGOSTINI: My reason for teaching is that possibility. That maybe they will walk out some day sometimes in the future and connect. You see? They're not going to get anything from it because no one knows what it is. But if all people go to this sense—like when you get a whole race of people trying to define this world of silence, like Chinese—you've got continence. And like that moment when Chris walked into the garden before the soldiers came and took him. It was that moment face to face with—

MS. ROBERTS: With destiny.

MR. AGOSTINI: With destiny, sure. He faced something there and couldn't tell them what it was. He didn't even know himself. All he knew was that it was just a thing that happened. You don't even know why it happens. It has no direction, it has no meaning. And man from the beginning of time creates God all the time—for this thing. It's within himself. You see? And maybe the whole purpose is that all men get to this silence and vanish.

MS. ROBERTS: It's a possibility.

MR. AGOSTINI: Maybe that is all it is. So that we just vanish.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: You know you can't give it heroicism because it doesn't exist. There is no term for it because we have had six thousand years to practice the idea for one reason or another. Some people thought an animal had it. Some people put a hawk on a man's body to find it. All these things were made to find the answer. They say if I make a hawk it will be more than a man's head to me. See? Or they put the head on a lion's body. They are always trying to perceive, how to get this combination together.

The biggest tragedy of man is that he has never looked at himself. Because that figure has been the most inarticulated bit of work that man has ever done. He has confused it, grotesqued it. He has done everything to it. But never saw it. And it's the most difficult thing in the world to do. As soon as you get close to making it realistic, something happened to it.

MS. ROBERTS: And it is no good.

MR. AGOSTINI: Isn't that funny. Why? Then you've got to pull back on that other thing. Then you've got to take the rabbits, everything out of the hat.

MS. ROBERTS: But isn't it true of anything? It is not just the figure. It is the fact that any reality that is not transcended doesn't really ring of reality.

MR. AGOSTINI: Well this is where I think America has a key. It was a puritan state, right? They opened up a complete new world which has never been really delved into so seriously. Sex. You know? Before it has always been taking, you know, it is understood. It's been put in a varied part of things. You know? But the Americans are hung up on it.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. It is a very strange as a matter of fact. The reaction to Henry Miller in Europe at first, not now since he has been really fully integrated into European civilization—was that the American was so surprised they had a sex and Europe was accustomed to it through the ages.

MR. AGOSTINI: This has been for generations you know—the Egyptians, everybody. But all the Americans have figured out, "What is it?" So maybe it has something to do with people. I really believe that is where it is. That's where the Renaissance of America is.

MS. ROBERTS: In understanding what part of true life is in sex?

MR. AGOSTINI: No. What is sex. It's never been thought of in those terms. American is going through now the most pornographic ideas about it. And the American male is hung up on it. But the whole truth is somewhere, I

feel, this is the way I feel here—that somewhere within this realm is some kind of an answer to this thing. The others failed.

MS. ROBERTS: So you think possibly this search around the basic elements of reproduction, really, is perhaps a new field of investigation of both plastically and mentally?

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right. I really believe that that's where it is.

MS. ROBERTS: And, well, it is very obvious in your work because basically they are always either phallic or testes or whatever.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes.

MS. ROBERTS: In fact that perhaps is the reason why it is not as sellable on certain levels.

MR. AGOSTINI: No. I don't want to accept that anymore. You see? I've come to the conclusion that I can't look within anymore. I have to always look out. And I have to accept this condition of trying to get this understanding. And it happens—if we go by even when the first man began in the Garden of Eden he split himself. Right? Out of him was pulled a woman. Right?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: So he created that kind of myth.

MS. ROBERTS: It is certainly a myth. Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. So maybe these two myths should become one. And when they become one they die. You see when woman becomes man again they are both equal.

MS. ROBERTS: There is a death.

MR. AGOSTINI: Then there is a finish to this whole mess that has taken place. Like it is a kind of circle taking place.

MS. ROBERTS: What about the pendulum?

MR. AGOSTINI: The pendulum is—doesn't exist. The circle is quicker. It is true, isn't it?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. Except that possibly through rhythm.

MR. AGOSTINI: Man is pendulum, but his thoughts—

MS. ROBERTS: Circle. Yes. But don't you think that everytime man has reached a certain form of extreme thinking in one direction it is just as though there was a sort of a pendulum which went the other way again?

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. I think that's man's fear.

MS. ROBERTS: You think that it is the fear of the circle that makes the pendulum?

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right. I think that's why man created the pendulum so that he would swing back and forth. It gives him eternity. But it doesn't give him the eternal.

MS. ROBERTS: Oh, well that is interesting but would you define this?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, the eternal is what Buddha said. That all things must return to one single position. Everything started out on its path. And pendulum— you know how the pendulum goes?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: But suppose we gave that pendulum free swing. Then it is going to go bigger and bigger and bigger.

MS. ROBERTS: And at a certain part it will go all the way. With its own weight.

MR. AGOSTINI: But as it goes this way man is getting more fear for the completeness. Because man's greatest fear is to find that answer that he is always touching as an artist or as a musician or something.

MS. ROBERTS: Well don't you think that the fear is not the answer but is the fall?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, you see—

MS. ROBERTS: Because before you reach the start of the new circle there is a fall from the pendulum to the earlier stage.

MR. AGOSTINI: No. I think this will complete the act once it gets back. There is no need anymore. You see I think man does not want to come to that position of a complete circle because he fears this. And he has created gods and everything else to interpret for him. He keeps trying to create interpreters for his inner sanctum. He creates priests to take care of finding out the truth. Right? He creates philosophical thought to find out reason. But the shock may be that man is his own creator and that may be terrible. That he was the god all the time. You see?

MS. ROBERTS: I don't know that it should be terrible because actually the idea of God with the external or internal is still the idea of a perfection.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. But you see the point if that we have no idea what perfection means. You see we have no real substance to prove the point. And because there is no reason for proving a point is that we struggle against this act. You know? Now the idea of the artist today—the reason I say America is a very good point for this is because it's in a state of no objectives. There is no reason, no objective for what it does. It makes art this way, it does that. You know it is doing everything. There is no religious purpose, there's no political purpose, there is no purpose for his values.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. But wait. This could be art in itself because of its purposelessness.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right. So now we have reached this purposeless stage. And what's happening is that what happens is that the preponderance of the mediocre world which is the facade wipes out the other thing. They're trying to wipe out the other thing. You see? To man's eyes.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. Because basically it reaches too fast a certain easiness of the aspect of things.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right. But at the very end when there is just nothing else anymore they are going to see it.

MS. ROBERTS: Tell me. When you spoke with Kline and all the boys about everything as we are now talking—because I know you and I am sure it has been part of you for many years, what was their reaction to this quest, this freedom of thinking?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, I remember one day de Kooning was speaking with Spaventa and I sat at the table. And they were talking about what they were going to do with the atomic bomb and all that. You know, they were a little worried. You know? Where are you going to go. And I just sat down and say, "You know if it ever hits it would matter anymore. I say you've got to face it. It doesn't matter." And he says, "But we have to stop it." I said, "You can't stop anything. It will happen so fast that there won't be any time for stopping."

One press of a finger and that's it. And we don't know who is going to do it. It could be an accident or it could be purposeful. You know? And who do we know who is going to press it there—whether it's a sane man or an insane man. You see who wants to wipe out everything because he finds it's hopeless.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. But don't you think that there may have been a reason for hoping that there might be a way of stopping it. Because after all fatalism is not the answer to truth either.

MR. AGOSTINI: I am not being fatalistic. I am being realistic. The point is I refused to worry about it because I don't trust man.

MS. ROBERTS: Right.

MR. AGOSTINI: So I wished to go to joy whatever I have of my own life.

MS. ROBERTS: That is right.

MR. AGOSTINI: And I said, "As far as I am concerned it doesn't matter." So he walked away and he says, "You are right, Peter. I am just going home to paint."

MR. AGOSTINI: So it did work.

MS. ROBERTS: That was de Kooning.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right . He says, well here is nothing left to do but paint. I says that is right. So you see he caught on to my direction right away. But he felt I had stalemated an argument. But it was a meaningless talk. And I couldn't stand listening to it anymore and I had to say something. You know, it was like who cares. You know?

You see Spaventa is symbolic. He's always involved with the symbols, the numbers and everything. He believes in magic. And I don't believe in any of this. I believe real is enough magic. If I can look into a face that's as magic as I could ever be. And I'll look into that face and I'll never know. That's terrific magic. That I could pursue to look at someone and never know. I don't want to go looking outside for numbers and everything. I just want to look at the one thing that I know I have to look at— is another face.

MS. ROBERTS: You accept themystery in other words?

MR. AGOSTINI: As far as mystery is concerned, it's only mysterious because we don't know about it. But if we look enough and escape attachments of symbols this is what we've been doing for the last, how many, six thousand years? They said the hawk's head, the lion's body, all this was involved with mystery. Trying to explain it. But we know this doesn't happen.

So the next step, is what really is it that we are looking for in people. Are we afraid of the reality of another person? That's why we were never able to do it. We are afraid of its reality . We will not accept a real head. And no one has really done a real head. And tried to get close to it. But even he idolized the idea. He tried to give it another dimension. Andthat was not his artistic truth. His artistic truth is what was inside. Not what he did. You see?

MS. ROBERTS: Where you very involved in the discussions at the club when it started?

MR. AGOSTINI: No.

MS. ROBERTS: You never did go there?

MR. AGOSTINI: I told you I was tied up with my wife at that time and she absolved everything for me because I pursued and watched her. And this was one step I made towards myself. Which was wonderful. I disconnected myself from everyone and just watched her. You see? Watching this living being act.

MS. ROBERTS: That was enough of a surprise.

MR. AGOSTINI: Oh, it was fantastic. I learned fantastic things from it. I learned all that I am talking about now. You see?

MS. ROBERTS: I meant to ask you more about the real start of The Club, of the showing of the abstract expressionists, of all those things that have been glorified in any number of ways since. And so much the better as a matter of fact because what is important is to remember the names and no matter how it is done.

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, actually the club was the first time the artists got together as a group. We would seek each other singularly. And that was not discussion. That was just talking of the day. It was like you would meet a friend for coffee or tea. The Club because of the inability to gather anywhere, we couldn't gather at the Waldorf because it was taken over by the hoodlums. So we had to get out. So Philip Pravia started The Club where artists could talk to each other. This was the one big gap in the whole thing.

MS. ROBERTS: Where was it located at that time?

MR. AGOSTINI: Eighth Street. Right across from the Art Theatre. The Club had this function—it created a word for artists to talk to each other, to formulate ideas as a group rather than an isolated thing. It wasn't like the WPA way either. That belonged to the guys that were Trotskyites or the guys that were Marxists or something. You know? It was really the first time artists got together and started talking as artists. They had nothing anymore, the war was over—it was '47.

MS. ROBERTS: Were all WPA people politically minded?

MR. AGOSTINI: They induced this. Like they say, are you for the communists? Everybody say sure why not? Because everybody was broke and naturally we were workingmen. None of us really believed in it. But so we were workingmen. You see? So you all joined and everybody was a happy communist. You know? But not a real communist. Just because what else could you be? You couldn't be a capitalist so you were a communist. You see? Because we were in that kind of a state.

But you will notice that those that left changed— like the Zero Mostels, They all eventually accumulated money and accumulated fame and all and they went other ways. No matter what their leanings. You see? And it was really something that was imposed because it was the only thing to do. It was like joining the Artists Club. It was the same thing. They were all artists there so you joined. So if all artists were going to be communists, so you joined the communists to be with the artists. That's about it, you know?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. In other words it had no really political purpose?

MR. AGOSTINI: No. Some had it.

MS. ROBERTS: It was just a solidarity movement.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right, It was like having an artist's union or something. You know?

MS. ROBERTS: That's right. It was really just a way of being against but not a way to be for anything.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right. It was against but not for.

MS. ROBERTS: At the club do you remember the participation of Ferren, John Ferren?

MR. AGOSTINI: No. I never went to it. That was the trouble.

MS. ROBERTS: Oh, you had never been. I see.

MR. AGOSTINI: Never went there. I was considered one of the charter members because I told you it was when I met mywife in '45and that closed that deal to me.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, I. see.

MR. AGOSTINI: And the club started in '47and I would just see them once in awhile and talk to Franz. I would see them very sparsely. But I could tell by the way everything was getting agitated that something was happening to them. Franz became an abstractionist and he never even had these ideas in his head before.

MS. ROBERTS: How did he grow into it, abstraction shall we say?

MR. AGOSTINI: Because of The Club. They spoke back and forth and talked to each other. And it became an idea.

MS. ROBERTS: Really, that is really what I was driving at is that The Club took the part that the cafes had in Europe in creating cubism.

MR. AGOSTINI: Exactly.

MS. ROBERTS: So that abstract expressionism really grew out of this exchange of ideas.

MR. AGOSTINI: And when they saw one successful person at it they all— it was like they all jumped on the bandwagon. Because you must remember nobody had any idea what they wanted to be up to that point. It was just working. Some were doing figures but they weren't sure of it. Some were doing this but they were—France was painting landscapes.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. I remember. Not good ones at that.

MR. AGOSTINI: And I didn't care for Marca-Relli's work. I used to think he was nothing but a pursuer of the French school.

MS. ROBERTS: What was the position of Mark Rothko at that time?

MR. AGOSTINI: I never met him during that time. You see he eventually— that's it. You see you never met these people because he would probably be talking with Gottlieb or some of the older group. You know there were the older groups and the younggroups.

MS. ROBERTS: Oh, yes. You didn't know Gottlieb, for instance?

MR. AGOSTINI: No. Not then. I may have known him to say hello and he would be introduced to me but I never really spoke to any of them.

MS. ROBERTS: I see. So you really got to know them before The Club?

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right.

MS. ROBERTS: And afterwards casually.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes, casually. Hello, goodbye. And I think they were all persuaded to follow this impulse through Club action. You know they all start talking and the idea got going. Just like you said about cubism. I am sure it just started that way. And Franz sort of got convinced later. You know, by Elaine telling him to blow up his painting. So he looked at it and she said, "Why don't you paint that."

MS. ROBERTS: Were Elaine and de Kooning married when you knew Bill well?

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. They were married. I knew Elaine when she was sixteen and it was just a little after that that she married de Kooning. This was in the '30s.

MS. ROBERTS: And not that I want to turn this into gossip but just because all is part of life and that is what we are talking about. What were the sort of halo of, well glory, love, or on the contrary disruption around them at that time?

MR. AGOSTINI: I knew very little of that. You know, I didn't know anything about Elaine or whether she was with de Kooning or not. I used to see him as he passed on his way to his work. He used to live around the corner from me. I would say hello and we'd have coffee and then he would go on to his work. He never mentioned anything. I had no idea about her knowing anybody else.

You know, it's only later I heard what had happened. She was going out with Frank O'Hara for awhile. In fact, I met her with Frank O'Hara. But there was no connection made with it. You see? And if I had met her with anyone there would be no connection made as far as I was concerned because I knew nothing of the gossip that was going on at the time. You see?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. And besides who cared anyway.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. Well it didn't bother me. I liked her and she was a friend of mine and that's all. She was always a close observer of me as an artist. She always liked my work and she was probably one of the few that credited me as being a terrific artist. Because I don't think the others even thought about it. Marca-Rella couldn't think less. And I am sure Franz didn't think much of me then. Not much of me as an artist. But he couldn't figure me out so he left it alone. He had no opinion.

MS. ROBERTS: How did you pass from the abstract expressionist movement, which was basically your association, to the pop movement by the mere fact that you exhibited with the pops.

MR. AGOSTINI: I had nothing to do with the abstract expressionists because I only saw their work when it was exhibited.

MS. ROBERTS: You never exhibited with them?

MR. AGOSTINI: Never. I never exhibited at all until '59. I knew their work and I was hearing about Franz riding high and I used to go drink beer with them, but I avoided them because they were famous.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: You know it is foolish for me to go in because they say, well you know, where are you? So I understood this. I leave them alone.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: I knew where I was. I was not with them ever.

MS. ROBERTS: You had no need for it anyway.

MR. AGOSTINI: No. I never was with them even before because when they were thinking of Picasso I was against Picasso. I preferred Matisse. See?

MS. ROBERTS: But you always state preferring Matisse.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes.

MS. ROBERTS: I mean that has not changed.

MR. AGOSTINI: No. That's the way I have always been. And as I told you I liked Maillol but I preferred Pompon.

MS. ROBERTS: It is always a question of "skin" really .

MR. AGOSTINI: And that's where I was. And I liked that idea. And I had nothing to do with the artists in what I did. They liked my drawings because I used to make these flying angels and horses. Like Elaine was always caught up about my horses. They couldn't figure out why the hell I did then and I couldn't either.

MS. ROBERTS: Among the sculptors who really, since it is always artists who discover artist, who were the sculptors who were first aware of what you were doing?

MR. AGOSTINI: I think there was only one and he came to my studio. And at that time he wasn't even a sculptor. It was [James] Rosati.

MS. ROBERTS: Oh, really?

MR. AGOSTINI: He was at that time a designer. And he used to come to my studio all the time and talk. But he just paid me respect as an artist. You could tell by their manner.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: And Philip Pavia.

MS. ROBERTS: Was it Rosati who was influential in your teaching at Columbia?

MR. AGOSTINI: No. He wouldn't help me one way or another. Isn't that fantastic? He reneged on me and always, all the way down the line not one of my friends ever helped me.

MS. ROBERTS: So that actually how did you— because I know that it is not easy to go and teach in one of the major—

MR. AGOSTINI: Meyer Schapiro.

MS. ROBERTS: Oh, it is Meyer Schapiro.

MR. AGOSTINI: He was the one. Not one artist gave me a tip or anything. No artist ever invited me to talk anywhere. No artist invited me to exhibit anywhere.

MS. ROBERTS: Isn't that interesting.

MR. AGOSTINI: They just left me alone. They never proceeded to do anything. De Kooning said, "Well, Peter, if you want a gallery..." But I wouldn't even put him up to it.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. But that may have been your not wanting to put them on the spot because you liked them as friends.

MR. AGOSTINI: I think that is one thing that Bill or Franz once said. He said that Peter has always been one of my dearest friends because I never put him on the spot for anything. There was a reason for it. I did not believe in them that much. I only believed in myself.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. That is a good reason. Yes. What were your connections with Meyer Schapiro then? I mean, after all, if he recommended you, you had talked with him and you had impressed him.

MR. AGOSTINI: Already— I told you of the accident of my show.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: That little bit about the thing that happened to me. I got this letter from the Grimaud Gallery and she showed me. That was sheer accident. As I told you this woman asked Karkam did he know of any sculptor. So he says yes I remember one guy. He was the only one who ever said a word for me. And he always said this, "That guy could make a figure with skin. You see he knew that. I did a freezing woman and he said the thing was full of skin. The damn thing was real . You know?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: And he was the only one who felt this about me. And he told this woman: I saw one thing of this fellow's way back around 1937 and '38 or '39. He didn't remember. But he said why don't you try to get him. I don't know what he is doing now. And that's all. That was the only thing. But it was for no big gallery, or

anything.

MS. ROBERTS: No, I understand. But Mleyer Schapiro, I know you told me about this, it is on the other side of the tape. But when you got to talk to Schapiro because after all he didn't recommend you just because he had seen one piece.

MR. AGOSTINI: No, he came to my studio.

MS. ROBERTS: That's right. So what kind of exchange did you have with him. You know I have the greatest respect for him.

MR. AGOSTINI: I don't know. He spoke very simply about certain things and I hardly remember what I said to him.

MS. ROBERTS: You don't remember what was the topic of your conversation?

MR. AGOSTINI: No. But all I know is that he has been one of my best people, he has always tried to get me something.

MS. ROBERTS: Oh, really.

MR. AGOSTINI: Always. Like they wanted a Freud medallion. He suggested me. They didn't take me though. But he suggested me. And he has always been on the sidelines suggesting me for things, you know. And I can never figure out where he got this feeling about me but he did have it.

MS. ROBERTS: Well, he understands artists. Always has.

MR. AGOSTINI: But he could have taken a lot of men at that time. You know? Why suggest me for the job.

MS. ROBERTS: Did he ever come to attend your lectures at Columbia?

MR. AGOSTINI: I don't think so.

MS. ROBERTS: You had an exhibition of your students?

MR. AGOSTINI: Never.

MS. ROBERTS: So he doesn't know how much he offered by offering you.

MR. AGOSTINI: Never. I have no idea of him ever walking in on my show when I had a show.

MS. ROBERTS: And have you ever kept on that relationship. I mean did you ever write him or exchange some more with him?

MR. AGOSTINI: No. I just called him once and thanked him. That's all. That's about it.

MS. ROBERTS: I see.

MR. AGOSTINI: When I found out about it I says I want to thank you because I couldn't understand where it was possible. Had no idea who would have suggested me for Columbia. I knew then it wasn't Navolla because I later found. out he had suggested Slivka, not me. And it was bane to his position that I was even there. And I never realized it. I was always giving him court because I thought he was the one that hired me. And he never was.

MS. ROBERTS: Do you feel that it is beneficial to have certain places like, for instances, MacDowell [Colony, Peterborough, NH] for an artist to have all his time to work and have no material thing to do since you have your studio and you can work in peace.

MR. AGOSTINI: You are asking me a very touchy question. You know what I really believe? That an artist should get nothing. He should just sweat it out somewhere and find out if he even wants to be an artist. That is his biggest point.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. Because why suffer all this when you can be anything else.

MR. AGOSTINI: Why? Because the way I went through it at least I knew that is what I wanted to be. These guys go to MacDowell and everything hoping for the beam to strike them and they are famous. It isn't that way. You've got to feel it all the way back. You know? It doesn't matter if you are doing odd jobs or you're not doing your work. it has nothing to do with this. This pampering I think is the worst thing that has ever happened to it. All they have given is more mediocrity. And we get loaded down with it by the thousands. You know when

people feel this is an easy way to pursue something they will go ahead and do it. Just like I tell you the kids come in myclass cause they figure— no test. Just do your work and you get a mark.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: You see? It is valueless. It may be valuable to some great artist that would need that.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. But not at the start of life .

MR. AGOSTINI: And maybe for them. But I don't believe in pampering the artist at all. I really don't.

MS. ROBERTS: What is your reaction to Duchamp? How do you react to his writing or lack of writing or lack of work and discoveries?

MR. AGOSTINI: I think he was— the thing we were talking about. Since he couldn't fundamentally grab that inside thing he was going to pursue the emptiness of the search. See? He didn't have enough within him to pursue something like Cezanne would. So he pursued the facade world. I think he is a facade artist.

MS. ROBERTS: I don't think so. But I am interested to hear what you have to say about him.

MR. AGOSTINI: You see it is like a man understanding the temple. And perceiving that he is not going to stand there. He will take the facade. Like he is not like the other artists that is just facade and he never saw where the temple is. He may have gone inside and perceived something— I don't know. But if you were to say like the difference between he and Cezanne I would say Cezanne was an artist and I would say Marcel Duchamp is a truth.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. Yes. Well now we connect.

MR. AGOSTINI: You see what I mean.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. Absolutely. He is really a philosopher.

MR. AGOSTINI: He is a truth. He is a truth.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: He is a truth of that—

MS. ROBERTS: Because what you said is very true. I feel he knows the temple. But he has chosen not the temple.

MR. AGOSTINI: That is right.

MS. ROBERTS: But I don't think he chose the facade. I think he chose to leave the temple where it is.

MR. AGOSTINI: Well he has go to the outside then. And he figured if he— like he implies the outside as the world. He was a good man in this: he said if I cannot show them where God sits I'll show them where His disciples are. The disciples were never the God. You see?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: They were the men that never could perceive and this is the one thing he was worried about. Was he a disciple or a god. You see? That was his problem.

MS. ROBERTS: And his choice was to play neither.

MR. AGOSTINI: So he plays chess.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: So he doesn't want to play either.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. As a matter of fact, chess may be the disciple playing against God but taking turns.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. It's like the devil and God playing at chess. You know, who will win?

MS. ROBERTS: Right. The reason why I bring Duchamp back is because you said a minute ago that the reason why you were against the gravy of art— the MacDowell possibility of studying and so forth— was that you have to worry at all times if you really want to be an artist.

MR. AGOSTINI: Well I thought he took the other twist. Well that's where his truth is. You see? I love his truth because you could see how many followers he grabbed, He knew and he said it himself that most of these people are disciples in that sense. You know he says they multiply what I just threw out as a suggestion— and which I would, not even try to multiply.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. But basically he sits on the mount.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. He says look I can't get in but I know.

MS. ROBERTS: I choose not to get in.

MR. AGOSTINI: I don't think he could have gotten in. Because if he could have gotten in he wouldn't have the choice you see? Cezanne did not have the choice.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. Right. Right. You don't have a choice really.

MR. AGOSTINI: You don't have a choice.

MS. ROBERTS: But he was great to have chosen not to get in.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right. Because he knew he was not a Cezanne. Because what did Cezanne get out of the damn thing. It was just nothing but a headache to him really.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. Besides you couldn't reduce Cezanne anyway.

MR. AGOSTINI: No.

MS. ROBERTS: It is not the point.

MR. AGOSTINI: And he figured by— well, he brought the word a facsimile of truth. You see? He says why not this? Why not that? He is giving you that question. And if you accept it then he says it is. But a man who has been at temple doesn't accept it. He knows it isn't . You see? He doesn't say it is. He says if I give you this, it is. Right? And you say, yes, it is. So everybody has accepted his "it is" thing but he has not explained the other thing to them because he figures it's useless. Like I do, you know, when I say if I am going to get dry answers why even bother.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: You see?

MS. ROBERTS: There's no interest at all.

MR. AGOSTINI: No. There really isn't. You see if you bring people in— that's where priests of old knew the answer— they allowed no one into observe these things because they figured it would interest no one but themselves. You see? They would only tell it to another initiate. As the initiates were brought in they were told but then committed to silence. So that is how it would travel on.

MS. ROBERTS: I was wondering this word of "silence" that you use in which I'm very sensitive to, in fact I wrote an article "In Search of Silence." Don't you think that in our time there are people who are conscious of that need and search for silence.

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, it isn't so much their need to search. It's a thing that is going to happen. They automatically will find their world where it is. You see? Like no man is going to be able to escape and grab another and pull him into their world. That is what every man has found out. They try it by marriage. They try it by many worlds. You know? How to take another human being and bring him to this point. And it has never been successful. It's that search that we are talking about. The man who isn't involved with art is in other ways pursuing this without knowing. Every man is pursuing this without knowing. And the reason that most of them end up as facades is that they just get pasted there by the winds. They are the dust that falls down on this facade all the time. And it's getting heavier and heavier, and then it is going to be like the moon. You know? Nothing. That is exactly what is happening. They become the dust on the façade rather than being inside to find out. And this is not mysterious. It has to be this way because how can you give any reason for this thing that happens. This touch that some have and some don't. It does exist. We see it in performance.

MS. ROBERTS: Well, what you are defining, really, is the idea of quality.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes.

MS. ROBERTS: Which of course cannot be measured in any way,

MR. AGOSTINI: No, no one can. And they can't even talk about it. This is where the critical sense fails. That people criticize is the facade. All the critics are faced with is a facade. That's all they can see unless they, too, are in there. And then they're faced with silence. You see?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. I was thinking of the article— I don't know if you read it, of [Hilton] Kramer's on this exhibition of Louise Nevelson's.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes.

MS. ROBERTS: I thought he went pretty far into what he wanted to say.

MR. AGOSTINI: It was the first decent article he ever wrote. Even though he is, as I told you, my hated enemy.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. It was a good article.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. But it doesn't justify what he said about the others.

MS. ROBERTS: Well, nothing ever justifies anything.

MR. AGOSTINI: No, but I mean— what I am trying to say is it shows you the incompleteness of his world. He at one point gets a slight glimmer of something in somebody and then it closes off. In other words his perception is very narrow.

MS. ROBERTS: What was your reaction to that quality of silence, which I do think is there in that show of Louise's?

MR. AGOSTINI: I am, going up to look at it. I haven't seen it.

MS. ROBERTS: Because I do think she does achieve a certain quality of this.

MR. AGOSTINI: You see it comes out of the piece. It is like when you come face to face with something, there is no comment really. That's the answer to something that's wonderful. There is no comment. You see? It is a feel. You feel it and that's enough. And what these guys are doing with the minimal is trying to get you just to feel it. And that's enough. But they spend four pages telling you how to feel it and that kills it.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. They certainly don't achieve it.

MR. AGOSTINI: That isn't it. But they are trying to force you to say this is not sculpture, it's not painting, it's not space, it's not light— but it's all a lie. Because it certainly is space. It's the division of space. And it's all these things.

MS. ROBERTS: What would be your comment on [Ad] Reinhardt's statements of what painting isn't . It isn't this, this, this, this. Just then you were using almost his flow, his rhythm, about minimal forms.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. Well, you see he knew but he also didn't get it. He knew the answer but the touch was lacking. See? Some men know what's inside but their own touch won't open that door for them. They see through the facade. It's like they see through it— it's a vision.

MS. ROBERTS: They see through it but they cannot walk in it?

MR. AGOSTINI: They can't go in there. This is where the visionary is. There are the visionary artists and there are the enterers. The ones that enter. Then the visionary and then the fade. And outside are the people. It is like three worlds. You see?

MS. ROBERTS: Even four.

MR. AGOSTINI: Or even four.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. I am very much interested in what you have to say about minimal sculpture. As a matter of fact "Primary Structures" was the name of the show. Now we might even be more specific. The one at the Jewish Museum, for instance.

MR. AGOSTINI: When? Recently?

MS. ROBERTS: You remember two years ago?

MR. AGOSTINI: Oh, two years. Yes.

MS. ROBERTS: There were all those young people with strictly bad structures.

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, I had some of them as students and they were very bad artists. So most of them grabbed that as a way of being presentable. I think many do this because they can present nothing else. Now those that pursue it may be very honest, you know, in pursuing this one thing. But again it is going to be whether that space they define has this quality. It's still going to be that. And there will be a few who have perceived something and they will be in the same category as the guys who did abstract expressionism, and the ones who did some kind of something in pop. As I say, it doesn't matter what terms you use to get to this point it is whether you get it that counts.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. In other words as with all trends, you accept it because a trend is always a necessary reaction against something else. But it is what they do with that trend that counts.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right. All trends come out of some need. At a certain point the abstract expression became absent. There was nothing else to do with it. It doesn't mean something else can't be done with it later but nothing could be done with it at this point. So they move into the next step. They take the next logical step, the opposite you know. Instead of being deadly serious let's be deadly funny. See? It is the same thing.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: Then when they got deadly funny then they start playing with your eyes. So they start the op bit, you know. Sensation, they try sensation. Then when they figure it is not sensation, it's not funny, it's not serious, let's be cold and articulate. Let's be mathematicians to the nth degree. And it's another thing— it's a search. That's what is wonderful about American artists— this damn search that they have. Whether they fail or not doesn't matter. And the small success they get they are entitled to.

MS. ROBERTS: Right. What you just said, that whether they fail or not doesn't matter interests me very much because it goes back to what is interesting is the quality of the question, not the answer.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right.

MS. ROBERTS: And so the quality of the question is valid.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right.

MS. ROBERTS: I was wondering in that framework of reference what you feel about the work of let's say Chryssa [Vardea Mavromichali] who uses the neon sign now.

MR. AGOSTINI: Well I feel that she grew into it. You know, she was headed for it anyway from what you show me there. And she started finding what she stood for and perceived it in this fashion. I can't say that anyone could accuse her of going to anybody else.

MS. ROBERTS: No. Absolutely not.

MR. AGOSTINI: She went to herself. She is in the same world as Duchamp. That's where she is. See? She is another perceiver, of what the inner temple has at side. She knows it, she can't get in, she is a visionary. See? She no longer can get in so she is looking as a visionary inside. So she tampers with the things that Duchamp does. The games. The visionary games. It's a chess game with themselves. She is a chess player like he is.

MS. ROBERTS: That, is interesting. I never thought of it but I can see what you mean by that. Yes. Speaking of visionary and of the temple, because this would be enormous stone in a temple: what are your reactions to Tony Smith?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, he's another visionary. You see? I have heard him talk and all and I don't know if he is deathly afraid of me or not because I think he put a knockout drug in my drink that night. I still to this day believe it. But I was questioning him just as I questioned John Cage who is another Duchamp-ist. And I would say in a crazy sort of way Tony Smith is the same. It is that element the visionary knowing the temple, not able to get through the facade so they give the facade. There is a reality to the facade you know.

MS. ROBERTS: Oh, there is a reality.

MR. AGOSTINI: The only time it's reality will be finished is when every man comes within the temple. Then it vanishes. And this is what man is trying to do. You see the whole purpose is to get rid of the facade. Why do we always talk about the inner? We are always talking about inside. Our subconscious or—it's all baloney. It's that "in" thing that we have to be. The facade is confronting every man from the day he is born. And some men could see through the facade, they look in the open door because the door is open for them to see. But they can't walk into it. They cannot get there.

MS. ROBERTS: I don't know, this may be very trivial but your ideas of facade brings me to the idea of the door, etc., I am thinking of Blue Beard since man creates the myth. Now, do you think that there is a possibility that going through certain doors may not be reaching the temple but may be reaching that form which is not life but death.

MR. AGOSTINI: Oh, yes. But you see I didn't try to use this term because death to me is the unknown quantity. I mean you come to it and that is it. I could see another man's death but I cannot see his termination.

MS. ROBERTS: Right. So that it is still the inner temple for all purposes.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right. And I cannot use death as a point because death is a termination and I don't know what it means.

MS. ROBERTS: There is no termination by definition, because it is a cycle no matter what.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. I know. But I am talking about the termination of the facade.

MS. ROBERTS: Oh, I see. That becomes more involved. Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: We are facades and on this kind of "façade" thinking of this world, when I tell you I want to look at a face I want to look beyond the facade if I could get it. You see?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: So every time I cope with it I am faced with a doll. That is as far inside that facade as I've gotten. Now the next thing is that if I find the answer maybe I won't touch a damn thing.

MS. ROBERTS: Well, because you won't need to touch it.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right.

[END TAPE 2]

MS. ROBERTS: This is our third tape, Peter.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. .

MS. ROBERTS: I know your work well but I haven't seen the very recent things. I mean the very latest. Do you think you could describe it to me a little?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, what I am working on now is still the idea of the Swell. I am exasperate with it now. I am not interested any longer and I want to finish it. Whatever I believed about it I don't know anymore what it was. So I'm confused about it and I want to leave it until some other time when it comes back again.

MS. ROBERTS: When you say "Swell" do you mean this sort of balloon effect but which also relates to fragments of solidified cloth with pleats, like archaic sculpture—

MR. AGOSTINI: No. No this is those big round things I made. The very last things. Those big eight foot round things. See they have to have a fantastically big dimension and there is a point of no return unless they go into that big dimension. The best thing for them is for one to be made and put outside maybe three or four stories high and that would be the end of it. I mean it has come to that point.

MS. ROBERTS: It would have gone as cosmic as it could become.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right. In other words I think that's what every experiment is— you're talking about a possibility of certain kinds of dimensions and you explore then and then they become in the own way a maquette of the original. You know— what they could be. But even if they don't get into that other world of being something, it's alright too. You see this is what I think American art gets involved with. Everything is done in an experimental stage and I think we're all driven to the streets whether we like it or not.

MS. ROBERTS: What do you mean by to the streets ? By actually putting the sculpture outside?

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. And I think this comes out of a loss of identity that the American artist has with his own word. So he makes a performance for an outside participation.

MS. ROBERTS: But do you think it is because you would like it to become a part of the city as a part of the environment of the man of the street, without having to be on exhibition, without having to be even looked at but just part of his time?

MR. AGOSTINI: I don't think it even has to do with that. I don't think I give a damn about the man on the street. I never did. I am not pro-workman even though I was one myself. But maybe it is because I worked with them I value them less. You see? Being one of them myself I couldn't care less for them. I am not doing this for the city. I think that that is the ultimate of this idea of what America has always been screaming about and I think it is about time we got it over with and then find out whether we're really artists or we just are architects.

MS. ROBERTS: I may be very obtuse but I am not absolutely sure that I quite comprehend what you say. Should I understand that you feel America has always been for the bigger and better and therefore that sculpture would follow and therefore land by definition on the street because there is even more space than in the studio. And that whether it is good or bad becomes indifferent but it may well be the end of a certain form of expression? That's what I'm not clear about.

MR. AGOSTINI: No. It is very easy to explain. Once D.H. Lawrence said if ever conceived its three thousand miles and its two thousand miles the other way they would have a certain kind of art. He was caught with it when he was traveling to New Mexico and all. But every American who is born to this is inherent to this idea. This is his heritage. And the funny thing America has found out about itself is that there is a fantastically impersonal emotion when it comes to art. They are completely impersonal. In other words America may find out that it doesn't have an artist. That they don't have the kind of personal accrue ment of meaning between them and what they are doing. And I think that is a very important thing that has happened in America.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. But don't you think that we may be considering the artist in nineteenth century terms because if you think of the artists of the seventeenth century in France, they were artists and they were totally impersonal.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes, but it is quite a different thing. You see, I think that the artist was always close to his work. You have to be an artist that gets close to something. But the American has never been close to anything. When he left Europe he hit a vastness that was unexplainable to him. And this unexplainable thing of vastness made even the Indians incapable of making a movement. Like this dimension of space, this total dimension has sort of gotten into the artists. I don't care how big they made the tigers or things in other countries, there was a personal attachment to these things. The artist himself was involved with the craft and everything else. But if you notice the American today can even have somebody else do it and it wouldn't matter. I know it gets close to what the Egyptian did with the pyramid, but the pyramid was an artistic expression. It wasn't an artistic idea.

MS. ROBERTS: Well, yes, what you mean to a certain extent is that America is very unsensual.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right.

MS. ROBERTS: And that is where we go back to your idea of "skin."

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes.

MS. ROBERTS: And you feel because it is not sensual it can be totally devoid of personal involvement.

MR. AGOSTINI: It is the reason for what we get in art today. If you notice even the abstract expressionism got that way. It became unattached so it died because the one or two who made any idea out of it were about as close as they could to the fact that you can be that personally free. In other words they were trying to be free of something they didn't even have. That's why it failed.

MS. ROBERTS: Now, did you feel that it failed? Because you know that for instance in Europe many of the Europeans have, I wouldn't say copied but have been in great admiration and even in awe of what was done in America.

MR. AGOSTINI: I know. But that's because they were tied up. They thought the Americans were free. You see? And the proof of the Americans' no freedom is the fact that when they went after the schools during 1913 they were so cold, it was so froze a Pissarro would make Prendergast look as if he was a teacher. You see, teaching it.

The Americans have never been able to be persuasive with art. They had the Hudson River School [NY] which is a cold blooded idea if ever there was one. You know that school?

MS. ROBERTS: Oh, of course. Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: Cold blooded as the devil. And if you look through all American art it was this way.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, so far so good. I agree. But then when you get to the '40s there is an involvement which seems to me very close to the type of involvement that the European had. It was a different time, different ethnic background, but it seems to me it is parallel.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. But you see it is in this world of differences that's wrong. You see? You could do it with what was. But the American realized that what was impossible for him to do anything with. So he hit on these dimensions which they found out in advertisements. You know? So the American is very much like the Japanese. They can accrue so many ideas into themselves but they don't have the soul to make it work. I believe America is a big soulless world. What we are having today is America in search of a soul. You see? It doesn't have it.

MS. ROBERTS: But don't you think that one of the valid things is the quality of the question as we talked about it before? Now if you are looking for a soul, which means that maybe you don't have one, isn't it perhaps one of the most valid searches?

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. This is a point now. The soul is your living act. The soul is your life. The soul is exactly what you pretend to be right now. It is the accumulation of everything you are. It's like when they used to tell you about the Bible— you are responsible for your actions. What they are really telling you is that your soul is going to be responsible for your actions so it means that if there is a soul and the body is responsible for its actions, the most important thing is the body. The soul is still the aftermath of the idea.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. Well, isn't that definitely an existentialist approach in general?

MR. AGOSTINI: I don't know. You see America makes the big mistake in searching for a soul. This is where the problem is. So in searching for a soul they search for what they call "freedom." They have freedom. They have this soulless world that they know is more or less true at this point. You know? We don't need gods to prove a point. We need men to prove a point. We need men to be. Men who are completely composed and in this kind of art now, when men become the individual world and become the essence of themselves, maybe we will get to where—like the first prehistoric man when he drew on the cave.

MS. ROBERTS: Now when you speak of the past and without going quite that far back, your interest in the kind of aesthetic search of let's say, the Greeks when we were talking of certain canons of beauty— your interest in not the primitive quality but the archaic quality of draperies, of bodies and so forth—isn't that what you translated into the modern idiom of the cloth hanging on the clothes line and being completely stiffened by plaster?

MR. AGOSTINI: But do you notice I use soulless objects? Everything is soulless. It's presence I will tell you a good example of this is, do you remember the last show de Kooning had?

MS. ROBERTS: At Knoedler [& Company, New York City]?

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. That was a good example of what I am talking about because there nobody understood he was going right back to cave painting. Prehistoric, cave painting. I knew he was interested in that because I had done a bunch of water colors and he saw one and he said, "You know, Pete, that is goddamn interesting. You know what that looks like? That looks like a cave painting."

MS. ROBERTS: And that is what interested him.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's what interested him because that's what he saw. You see? And all his painting— they call it what they wish, de Kooning felt that he had to go there for his kind of an answer. You know it's like it's the godlessness. It's like taking the one object that was persuasive to his nature which was the opposite thing to himself, a female. And to do it in that kind of erotica that he had was being absolutely primitive to the highest degree.

MS. ROBERTS: I thought that was one of the best shows he ever had.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's true.

MS. ROBERTS: I think it is the best he has ever had. So that when he was panned for it— alright, if you want to pan de Kooning that is anybody's choice. But as far as de Kooning was concerned it was the best. But I felt that it was a bit of an exorcism. It was sort of as in the cave painting— some painted animals with the hope of killing

the animals. He didn't want to kill the woman but there was a sort of hate-love quality.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. But the reason man hates woman is because he feels that she makes him do things he doesn't want to do. And yet if she didn't make him do things he didn't want to do he wouldn't do anything. You see? Man has to be pushed to do things otherwise he will do nothing.

MS. ROBERTS: But he has motivations certainly as much as a woman has.

MR. AGOSTINI: No. Motivations are all because of. He comes out of motivations because of.

MS. ROBERTS: You mean it is not as instinctive?

MR. AGOSTINI: Ha has got the instinct to go ahead. The instinct is there but it has to be touched. You see I don't think that anything in this world can do without a catalyst to set it going. You can have all the energy in the world but if you don't have a catalyst to set off the energy it won't work. This is what I think we call social activity to one another. Without the social life or without the social aspirations or without all these things we would have no reason for getting involved, even though we may have all the energy to do it once it starts. It's like there has to be a pushed button.

MS. ROBERTS: Right. But at the same time one of those pushed buttons is competition and you don't believe in competition.

MR. AGOSTINI: No, it is not even competition, it's just exploding energy. Energy is not a competitive action. I mean without competition I'd work, with competition I'd work. Maybe harder because I would be forced to. Competition is nothing but another kind of a catalyst. You see? It's not a necessary catalyst but until you find something better it's a good one.

MS. ROBERTS: So really it's what would actually unleash the energy.

MR. AGOSTINI: Okay. Now you have hit the point of what happened in American art. Here's a country that doesn't believe in a soul and it starts searching for one. It doesn't believe in it out starts searching for one. In other words it is trying to get a catalyst to set the ball rolling. And America is in a state of being made a— it has been catalyst by everybody believing that they have it. Which is the same as if they had it. So they push and they try anything. And they have nothing to lose because they think that whatever they do is ahead of the game. You see? There is nothing to look back on, there is nothing to look forward to but they themselves.

MS. ROBERTS: Now do you think it is the reason why you were saying a little while ago that people like [Donald] Judd, for instance, whose—

MR. AGOSTINI: Put [Robert] Morris and the whole school in that. I mean you might as well mention all of them. I think the whole bunch of them generally knew when they saw what happened in pop, and they also saw from an abstract expressionism— that as soon as they could get a group action and they could extend it out that, they would gain a name for themselves. Most of these guys are interested in only one thing, I think! To make a place in art history. They are art historians.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: It is not even people in search of an idea.

MS. ROBERTS: But you know it is strange what you say in a way because their existence was originated by a man. It was really extraordinarily pure and devoid of that art history thing, I think, and that was [Richard] Bellamy because after all in the Green Gallery [New York City] is where he started all the pop.

MR. AGOSTINI: I know. But he was backed by two men who were already looking for something to replace for the fear of weariness in what they had. And they were Sidney Janis and Castelli. The prime movers of Bellamy were these two men. He was what the call— you know when they are selling slaves— he was the gatherer of the slave so that they could pick which slaves they wanted for their harem.

MS. ROBERTS: It is a nice image. But you don't think that they are enslaved, though, by their galleries.

MR. AGOSTINI: Of course they are. They are enslaved to their enjoyment. Because otherwise they would just be useless human beings running around from one place to another. Nine tenths of the artists want to be enslaved to something— the only reason they are working is for the enslavement. Enslaved by the things that they are given, enslaved by the popularity and the publicity that they get. That is another thing that has happened today: this beautiful sense of being enslaved by a social order. You see that's the difference between my age and their

age. My generation was not aware of this enslavement. There was no market, there was no market place. There were no speakers. There was no one to eulogize.

MS. ROBERTS: Therefore a greater freedom because of no fear of losing.

MR. AGOSTINI: There was nothing to lose. And there was nothing to gain. See? There was no way to go really except just to yourself. But today the artist is orientated to slavery, to the harem bit or the race horse stable. The idea of the stable is quite prevalent here you know.

MS. ROBERTS: But it has been in Europe too. After all it started in Europe.

MR. AGOSTINI: But you see what starts in Europe doesn't mean that it has the same meaning in America. A lot of things start in Europe, like Mondrian, and it certainly changed its meaning when it got here. It got lost. We are the greatest losers of the European idea. And the reason why we gave up the European idea here is because we have never understood it. No artist has ever been able to translate the European world of art into American terms. As soon as they try they fail miserably. In other words I would say we are successful because of our failure

MS. ROBERTS: That makes sense. Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: We are hopelessly bad in everything that they do. We become professionals. We are the best face washers and hand cleaners of the day. We use toothpaste on our teeth—we are washing ourselves constantly. And this is the same thing that goes into our art.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. Well you are going back to Henry Miller almost. I mean it is the same sort of a position of *The Air-conditioned Nightmare* [New York, New Directions: 1945].

MR. AGOSTINI: But it is true.

MS. ROBERTS: Being a European and having been brought up there until the age of thirty— I was wondering if there was not a type of freedom that you neglect as you talk. Not that I don't subscribe to many of things that you say, but there is a type of freedom which is acquired here perhaps by the very enormity that you described as being unworthy of the personal act. But because of it there is a feeling of fresh air, of wind that is totally unknown in Europe.

MR. AGOSTINI: I know. But you see Europe just grew old in its bed. You know? It slept in its bed just too much. And America has just gotten to a bed. But the bed is still a European bed and they are unfamiliar with it. They are better off with a knapsack out in an open field. You know it's like that kind of thinking. In other words, there is no bed in America. It is not a "bed" world. Europe is a "bed" world.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, I know. For the better and the worst because you can be bedridden and you can also be bed—enjoying.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. But this is what has happened. And the search in America definitely is that they are not throwing over anything because they are just trying to find out if their habit of trying to imitate is worth anything and they have been very unsuccessful. So because of this unsuccessfulness that they have with European art they had to be something else. It wasn't something they didn't want. They wish they could be a Cezanne or a Matisse, you see.

MS. ROBERTS: Well, that I am quite sure is true but at the same time something can be born out of that incapability, after all, Cezanne wanted to be [William-Adophe] Bouguereau.

MR. AGOSTINI: I know. But he was close enough to wish for that. No American is close enough to wish for anything. You see? No American thinks, "Boy I'd like to be an [Thomas] Eakins. We have no heroes."

MS. ROBERTS: Well, you seem to say that there is a tendency of nomadism when you said something, and actually quite lyrical, about that knapsack element.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes.

MS. ROBERTS: But it is a different thing from the thing which creates the real climate for art. Really.

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, it is a poetical world. That's why our writers are superior to our painters.

MS. ROBERTS: It is a poetical world because it is very abstract really.

MR. AGOSTINI: Sure. Because by the nature of ourselves we are wanderers. We are wanderers in the financial world, we are wanderers in the world of war. We are wanderers all the time. We never have it here. We always have it somewhere else. America is a somewhere else person. He is not here via a heritage. He has no idea of this. A man's heritage is his grandfather. And as soon as he has gotten his grandfather's wealth, down the drain his grandfather goes and he is off somewhere else. Whereas in Europe there is an ancestor worship to some degree for at least one or two generations. But an American has no grandfather was as distant as your ancient ancestors back in the fifteen century. You see? And his father is where your great, great, great grandfather is. You see what I mean? In his world. So he is a fatherless—

MS. ROBERTS: But isn't that a form of freedom? You know [André] Gide had that wonderful word about bastards, that they were so lucky not to know who their parents were.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes, but that is the dream of the European. He can watch the American and see what it did, So what does the American have? He has absolute freedom. Right and he hates every bit of it.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, he hates every bit of it but try to take it away from him and I think you will see pretty fast how much he loves it.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's the point. He has never been contested. You know, if you are never contested on something it loses its meaning.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: And America has never been contested on its freedom.

MS. ROBERTS: Speaking of that freedom in the world of art, do you think that— well we were talking of those experimental shows at the Stable [Gallery, New York City] for instance and everybody who started there. What, as a sculptor, is your reaction to the sculpture of Marisol or the sculpture of Segal, for instance?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, I would say Marisol is closer to where she is than Segal is to what he is. Marisol is living with her past. Segal has been reading a lot of art history and history too. He is Pompeian. Out of his own failure to be a painter he hit on something by accident and he played it to the hilt. You see what I mean? I don't consider him an artist at all. I just consider him a man who reuses or reinnovates innovation.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. And it is very interesting for this following reason: Did you see the show at the Museum of Modern Art of the Sidney Janis collection?

MR. AGOSTINI: No.

MS. ROBERTS: Because you will see there Marisol and Segal next to one another. And Marisol is an artist and Segal isn't in this.

MR. AGOSTINI: Oh, no. He isn't.

MS. ROBERTS: I mean in this particular instance I have never been as aware of the enormous gap between two realisms.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. Well, you see his realism is again that observation of an American: If I can't get it one way I will set it another. You must see an American has to succeed. If he doesn't get it one way, he tries another. He is not even interested. He does it as a game. It's like a poker game with him. American doesn't have what you would call artistic morality.

MS. ROBERTS: Would you define that?

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. The artist in Europe had it, an artistic morality. It set up an academy to fight an academy. And in the process of fighting they search. You see?

MS. ROBERTS: Oh, yes.

But in America it has been an academic world all the way down the line. As I said, every artist himself becomes his own academy. You see? And there is no spirit of revolt against anything here really. As I said there is no contention. A man says I am free so everything is free all the time.

MS. ROBERTS: No spirit of revolt. I don't know about that but I was thinking that there was a great spirit of despise though, because artists have a lot of mental restrictions about one another just as in Europe and even more.

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, again I think this is alike. It can be very easily straightened out publicity-wise. As soon as publicity takes over an American will have respect. If they don't talk about you they despise you. Inherently the American is very orientated toward advertising. He can be advertised to like. He can be advertised to love. You see? So when you talk about his freedom look how easily he gets in shared. You don't find a Bernard Shaw among Americans. You don't find people who revolt against ideas as they did in Europe.

MS. ROBERTS: What about Miller? I think he is close to doing that.

MR. AGOSTINI: He is very European though. Miller lived the most of his life in Europe, didn't he?

MS. ROBERTS: A great part but I wouldn't say most.

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, I think that's enough. He is like an expatriate looking back. It's like Ezra Pound all these people—or Gertrude Stein.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, but don't you think this is a very American way of doing it? As we said before, the being against or for is sometimes the same thing. And the very fact of staying in Europe as much as he did is not to become European. It is to be an American in Europe.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes, but you see in Europe Miller would be another writer. In America there was so much that he could talk against as he's talking for something. You see? Because he was dealing with a country that was so puritanically set up that it was actually a gold mine for a rebellious writer. But it wasn't a kind of encompassing greatness of a guy like Herman Melville. You see? Which was a way of rebelling in search for a soul. His white whale is really a beautiful idea of what America is all about. He was the first one to realize the vastness of the inability of the American to find the truth. And he realized that the American has to go down but the whale would get him sooner or later. That's the secret of Herman Melville's mythology. That was a real American novel.

Miller is a man who leaves home and doesn't remember anything about his forebear, you know. But comes back to complain. But when you think of a complainer like Miller and a complainer like Shaw you have got two different dreams going. You have one with big dreams and another man who is being very prosaic. He is very close to saying something, I don't like this and people do this and do that. You see? But he is not telling you another kind of an idea as Shaw does. Shaw has a real purpose behind his telling. Miller is just telling. He is still a journalist. He is a very apt journalist. And that is America's failure. They have journalistic writers.

MS. ROBERTS: Every so often though he is a poet.

MR. AGOSTINI: That is luck.

MS. ROBERTS: He has a sense of rhythm.

MR. AGOSTINI: But we have Poe, right? I can't say much for a few others we have but we do have Poe and we have Whitman. Whitman is another good example of an American. "I sing of myself", he says. You see? An American idea. The wanderer. Nomadic. The knapsack. The bedlessness of the American. The love of just being alive and things. And this was the American dream from the beginning. People came here just to be alive. So that is the one historical truth of

America, that people came here to be alive. They can grow. That's all. In Europe you feel that you were grown and you assume. Here you figure you can grow and you don't know what you are going to be. That's the beauty of America.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. Well, that's the total freedom.

MR. AGOSTINI: You don't know what you are going to be. You can be an odd flower. There's no past in America. His past is relegated always to the past. It doesn't come up with him. A rich man's son is not like his father. He goes another way. And this is the difference between the American and the European. He has never found the core of heritage. So naturally he is free. So he makes art. But that is not always what art is made of. Art is a heritage orientated world. How we are going to find out now. The only thing that is beautiful about America, you are getting a test case: Can a heritageless nation produce a heritage?

MS. ROBERTS: Well it really could be said do they want to? I think that if they want to, they will.

MR. AGOSTINI: No. It is time again. Every country in Europe grew. It became a five hundred year old baby before it started thinking. And then it took on three hundred years of thinking. Then it started doing. Then it started doing for three hundred years and then it produced. You see? That's the difference. America became

America, in twenty-five years it started progressing. In fifty years it still progressed. In a hundred years it still progressed. It's not even two hundred years old and it is progressing. It hasn't done anything about those other things we were talking about. It is a progressive idea. It progresses from one system to another of living well.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: It has never progressed in any other way.

MS. ROBERTS: I was wondering if you felt it would be fair for me to ask you to qualify, just as a little game, in one word a few of the people of the present scene in sculpture. I am looking through this book of Barbara Rose's.

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, I thought that it proved the nonexistence of sculpture and the hope of its growth, whereas she has enough to say about painting. I hit Ad Reinhardt with this idea— I said, "Well you never learned to look at sculpture." He said, "I wish there was some around to look at." He said, "There isn't any sculpture, there hasn't been sculpture for a couple thousand years or something."

MS. ROBERTS: What did he think of yours?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well he always came to look at mywork. He said I intrigued him in some way. I don't know what the hell he meant by that. I don't give a damn what he thought. The thing is I have to value the man that much to wonder what he thought. I don't think of any painter having a decision about sculpture because very few of them investigated sculpture in any way. How can they? They are in the same position as the layman. The only advantage that they have is that they are artists.

But most painters have such a limited idea about sculpture they don't even think of it. They will never bring it up in a discussion. When they have panels you will notice the argument will always be about our fathers the painters. And then I say what the hell makes you think the painters were the fathers of the sculptors? But they can't see it any other way. A sculptor comes into the world without a birthright.

MS. ROBERTS: But for instance when you spoke of Reinhardt, I know that it might have just been personal, but he got along very well with Louise Nevelson.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. But he told me of a letter he wrote to her. He said to her, "You must remember, Louise, that painting is black and sculpture is white." Even if he said it joke-wise, it showed his thought of sculpture. You know? I said, "By the fact, then, what you mean is that I am greatest sculptor today because I'm white." You see? It was this sense of whiteness that they talk about mywork. Don't forget they don't even talk about my shapes and my form. It is just this whiteness. Everyone else can paint their stuff white but they don't consider that whiteness. I am the white sculptor of the world.

MS. ROBERTS: What about when dust gets over it?

MR. AGOSTINI: Everybody says it is white. Even dusty white. You see? When they asked me to go into the Castelli Gallery [New York City] I said why do you want me in the gallery? They said but you are so white. So what they are trying to say is I am gleaming white. I am electric light white. I am white white.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. That to me reads that everyone has to be the end of some line. Yours was that end of white shall we say and that was a reason to be in Castelli's.

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, I am trying to figure what was their term for sculpture you see. What they were really saying was that they never defined sculpture. So they hit it in tonality rather than in form. And they thought as painters would think. Well, if painting is color and it is also black then if a thing is absent of all these things it has to be white.

MS. ROBERTS: I am just looking at the photos in this book *Toward a Sculpture Renaissance*, by Barbara Rose, and I see that very beautiful Max Weber cubist sculpture. Also [John] Storrs and also [Robert] Laurent. Now we get to [Gaston] Lachaise. What do you think about Lachaise?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, I think he is probably the only thing America has as a sculptor. At this point. He is the last of our heritage and yet he is so European. He is very involved with Europeans and the way they look at their world. In a sense he tried to get the sensuality of the Hindus but still it was a Frenchman's world. He stayed European. That's one thing I'll say, he was one of the best sculptors we had.

MS. ROBERTS: And in that respect I see [William] Zorach also reproduced.

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, I can't stand Zorach.

MS. ROBERTS: What about Paul Manship?

MR. AGOSTINI: Detest him.

MS. ROBERTS: [John] Flanagan?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, I don't know. He is a story teller.

MS. ROBERTS: [Ellsworth] Kelly?

MR. AGOSTINI: Oh, he is so cute. He's just cute. I can't stand him.

MS. ROBERTS: And there we come to Smith. Which seems to be her great god in that essay.

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, he seems to be the one who personifies the American blacksmith again. You know? You have got to remember it always becomes a literary world too where they deal with the Americans. And the blacksmith is a very strong point in American mythology. They are always thinking of the guy that—

MS. ROBERTS: Makes the horseshoe?

MR. AGOSTINI: And also beats the rail. John Henry. You know that old song, John Henry beat the rail and he got killed by a machine. The man with the strength of Mars, Vulcan you know? There is probably a Vulcan dream. America at this point thinks of its artists as Vulcan. Delicacy is out in America. That is the unknown quantity in the American world. I think if they have it they resent it.

MS. ROBERTS: What about [Ibham] Lassaw?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, I have always felt that he is— I never considered him, again, an artist. I consider him in ideas, he does ideas. You see there is a difference between an artist and ideas. A lot of these guys fall into the world of ideas. Like George Norris and all these guys. They are just ideas. You see? And I consider him as that part of that world. And they will represent the same thing he did a few years.

MS. ROBERTS: It is not the same ideas, though, that they are talking about.

MR. AGOSTINI: No, but it is the same kind of world that they deal with.

MS. ROBERTS: And what about David Hare?

MR. AGOSTINI: I can't see him at all. I just cannot see him at all. He is just too grotesque for me. I don't see any reason for him.

MS. ROBERTS: And [Seymour] Lipton?

MR. AGOSTINI: The same way.

MS. ROBERTS: But not for the same reasons.

MR. AGOSTINI: Not for the same reasons. I just can't see him. There are certain people I just cannot see in a world of art in America. And you could put Lassaw in that group too. I don't see them. Somewhere else they would be more persuasive— you know, some other world. But as artists I think they are more— They are not artists as far as I am concerned.

MS. ROBERTS: What about [Herbert] Ferber?

MR. AGOSTINI: It goes the same way.

MS. ROBERTS: [Richard] Lippold?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, he is a guy that seems to be like [Nikolaus] Pevsner. You know? And I always thought of Pevsner, but I never thought of him in the world— there is a something about art that they guys lack. And yet fundamentally they've got something but it's something to do with something else. And I don't know what that is. You see?

MS. ROBERTS: Well, it is creative but perhaps talking about something else.

MR. AGOSTINI: About something else all together. It has nothing to do with being an artist or being involved with that idea. You see?

MS. ROBERTS: And what about [Theodore] Roszak?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, Roszak is in the same category in a way. In a different way as Lipton, Herbert Ferber. In fact I would link these guys all together. One just a little cleaner in his idea than the other. One being geometric where as the other one is being profusive. And another one being an abstract .expressionist. They run all the gambits of the art form. You see? But they don't produce a factor. They lack a factor. Whatever that is, I don't know.

MS. ROBERTS: And what about Nakian?

MR. AGOSTINI: Wow there you have another guy. There you have a guy who has a heritage. He actually feels a heritage. There are only a few Americans that you can say that about. He in a way is similar to de Kooning in that world. The search for heritage. De Kooning does have a heritage and Nakian's search for his heritage involves him with heritage. You see?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. But should one conclude that without a heritage there cannot be any art? I don't think that you want to say that.

MR. AGOSTINI: No. I didn't say that. I'm just saying what these men get involved with. What I feel about them. I say a heritage has to somewhere— maybe America doesn't need a heritage. Maybe it has already new kinds of heritage values. You know like a new set of values which says heritage is not the thing. It's today, not yesterday and not tomorrow.

Maybe their kind of heritage is the instant ability to approach the say and they're off. But extending the day doesn't seem to be important to the American artist. It was important to the European artist to extend the day into eternity. So we don't have what we call the eternal reference in the American idea. It is still always today.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. Well in refusing their heritage in a way is almost instant birth.

MR. AGOSTINI: That is what they believe. They believe that they are self-made. You must always remember the principle of the American man is he is self-made.

MS. ROBERTS: Right. So that in a way it is probably a good thing, historically anyway, that it reflects it.

MR. AGOSTINI: It does reflect it.

MS. ROBERTS: Now [Isamu] Noguchi is of a totally different civilization. How would you place him?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, he is the only Japanese that successfully almost fits into the American world. He is a successful American who stays Japanese.

MS. ROBERTS: Well, yes. Maybe you would like to enlarge a little on the idea of staying Japanese in this sense. You mean the purity of matter?

MR. AGOSTINI: No. Because you notice many Japanese today perceive the American idea and become bad Americans. You see? They aren't even Japanese artists . They use a different kind of terminology. They are the reverse of what Noguchi is. He is an American looking with Japanese eyes. He stayed in that world and still was an American.

MS. ROBERTS: In other words it is his authenticity that makes him American in a way. It is his authenticity as a Japanese.

MR. AGOSTINI: That makes him what an American eventually is in a sense. Because an American is a rebirth of all kinds of ideas.

MS. ROBERTS: What about [Raoul] Hague?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well he is in another world. He's a good artist, you know. He is in the same world as Nakian in a sense. It is strange that both are Syrians by the way. They both seem to have the same kind of heritage consciousness. One goes back to the Greeks and the other goes back to the Egyptians in their feelings. So they are orientated to a heritage. They search out of that the American heritage with a heritage way back. They are like an international heritage, which is pretty much the truth anyway.

MS. ROBERTS: It is really a form of humanism at this point.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes, that's right.

MS. ROBERTS: Now, what about a man like Kohn?

MR. AGOSTINI: Gabe Kohn? I wish I hadn't seen his early work because then I wouldn't have had the same opinion. I saw his early work and I didn't like it at all. And I wonder if he didn't just grab something to be modern, up to date. You see? I know they've said of him that he built this pieces like a shipbuilder and all that. But he conforms to something in his things. You know, they are not European—

MS. ROBERTS: There is a functionalism in form maybe.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. And it's tied up with the boat. He, by the way, could have been the real predecessor of a lot of hard edge ideas, really.

MS. ROBERTS: He started with it. Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: I think he could be their predecessor. Like he is the predecessor of the soullessness of the American. Of the minimalists, you know?

MS. ROBERTS: He was or is he still with Radich?

MR. AGOSTINI: No, he never was in our gallery. He was with Castelli and then he left Castelli and I don't know where he went after that.

MS. ROBERTS: Now, [Mark] diSuvero.

MR. AGOSTINI: DiSuvero, huh? Well, again he falls into the same category of men of his age. You know? They flew at the painting because there was no sculptural dimension to their thinking. You know? And he did the same thing as [John] Chamberlain. You could put them in the same group. Chamberlain and diSuvero and [Allan] Kaprow and all of those guys.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. But they were creating an environment as Nevelson did at a time. Well, diSuvero did as a matter of fact in a way.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. One went after Kline and another went after de Kooning in a sense.

MS. ROBERTS: Which is true of Sugarman too in a way.

MR. AGOSTINI: I think he was trying to carve wood and I don't know whether he saw the world of Gabe Kohn first. Which I feel is where he started. I think Gabe Kohn is more original. And I think diSuvero then picked up on Stuart Davis and he found he would be orientated towards Stuart Davis as a world of his kind.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. Is [George] Sugarman still with Radich?

MR. AGOSTINI: No. He is with Fischbach [Gallery, New York City] now.

MS. ROBERTS: As we go along— this is Peter Agostini. What would you say if you saw this picture just there? *Christmas Package*, 1963— and you didn't know that it was yours?

MR. AGOSTINI: In all honesty?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. In all honesty.

MR. AGOSTINI: I wouldn't find a heritage in it. I wouldn't say it had any specific new form abbreviations. I think it was totally itself. It doesn't pretend. I think this is where specifically that goes. It is hitting at the truth of being today and that's it. And it's a piece that when you look at it it stays where it is and that's it. You know, it doesn't pretend to the past and it doesn't pretend to the future and it doesn't pretend to anybody else's world.

MS. ROBERTS: So that although you are critical of American standards in a certain way you claim the very qualities that you find fault with.

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, that is why I know than so well. Being that it is my total fault, you know. See I probably am one of the most total American sculptors. I don't think there is one man who could claim that more than I can. You know? I think I am really totally American.

MS. ROBERTS: Of this moment. Of this minute.

MR. AGOSTINI: Of the moment. Like they taught what I have predeceased. You know? I have been before pop. I wasn't trying to be before anything— I was just being the actual thing of my day. And I never developed a heritage. And it is because I never schooled myself in heritage. I knew about it. I never got it second hand, it was

first hand information that I found out myself. I could look at it and I knew their value and I let it go. I couldn't find a reason for my relationship to other things in that sense— you know, why I should be here or I should be there. And I presumed to do as I pleased. When you talk of freedom I am the complete apostle of this idea.

MS. ROBERTS: Right.

MR. AGOSTINI: Every time I go through a book and see a piece of mine it always has that quality. It won't define itself anywhere.

MS. ROBERTS: Well, it is extraordinarily present.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right.

MS. ROBERTS: And I mean by "present" not necessarily of the present. But it has a presence.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right.

MS. ROBERTS: And that I think is that total involvement probably in that minute and with skin.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right . You could see even in the photographs, the others are ideas— you take all these men that I said have ideas or they have heritage, you can't say this for my pieces in all honesty. There's nothing there that you could say it about. You could look at its skin— in other words, it is itself. But I believe in itself in sculpture or in art . You see? And I am looking for other artists that have this containment. I think de Kooning has this quality of being itself.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. I think so too. What would you say of [Richard] Stankiewicz?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, he is in the same category with Lippold and these other people. He is also in that world of diSuvero. Only he is more original to himself than they are.

MS. ROBERTS: I think he is much more self-contained.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. Much more contained than they are. But I would still relegate him to the same condition. You see? A man has to be absolutely by himself before I recognize the thing. Louise Nevelson is by herself. You see the difference I am talking about?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. And here is [Lee] Bontecou.

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, as I said, she's a glorified idea. But I think [Salvatore] Scarpitta did better.

MS. ROBERTS: I like Scarpitta.

MR. AGOSTINI: He's much better than she is. He is an artist, and she isn't . She is just a—I hate the performers. I am against the performers. I'm against the people who perform the abilities of artists . I think those people should be shot. It like those people are stealing the world of true artists . And true artists are being relegated to nowhere. A guy like Scarpitta is getting nowhere.

For me I have no complaints. I am doing very well and I don't give a damn what they do in my case. But I resent them for what they are doing to others. You see? I resent Chamberlain. I resent diSuvero. I resent all these guys for the valuelessness of their values. You see? And they have not given a big thing to the world. They have given nothing. All they have done is interpret, they are interpreters and they should be artists rather than interpreters. That is what I would call them. And I consider Bontecou an American art historian. Now that's the expression I would use for these kids.

MS. ROBERTS: I am glad you speak of Scarpitta because he has sort of disappeared for the scene.

MR. AGOSTINI: He has never had it. They have never given him the credit.

MS. ROBERTS: But I have seen every show he had at Castelli and they were shows I liked.

MR. AGOSTINI: He has a presence

MS. ROBERTS: He has a presence. It is meaningful whether he puts his tensions one way or another.

MR. AGOSTINI: He did shaped canvas when nobody else was thinking in those terms and he has never been given credit for it. And it's always true that the original is superior to the artifacts.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, and at the same time it is true that it has that ruggedness and that splinter element

which would not make it sellable.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right. He just isn't sellable. While Bontecou sells like crazy. You see people artifact something and of the great masters of this was Andy Warhol. He is an artifact man. You see?

MS. ROBERTS: But he is very genuine that way.

MR. AGOSTINI: Not really because he did it with tricks. I mean he played a game and he came in with the group and he knew it would happen. So there is no genuine—he just tried other things. I think people when they say "genuine," they're genuinely mediocre if you want to call it that. But their pretensions are that they are not. Like I consider Segal mediocre outside of Hague and Nakian and Louise Nevelson. I consider the others mediocre people and they cashed in on somebody else's ideas. Which is what I resent.

MS. ROBERTS: Now here is somebody who cashed in on no one's idea and this is the worst picture one could choose to show him, [Joseph] Cornell.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. I know.

MS. ROBERTS: I mean there are so many things that reproduce well why should she pick this one?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, she picked one of mine and I would have given her one much more interesting. But that the way it is. Art historians sometimes to disclaim someone will put in the wrong thing. You understand? To break them down. You must remember what they are trying to do when they put these books out is wither to dismiss the artist or do something for them. It is very true.

MS. ROBERTS: What were your reactions to Cornell when you first hit the scene? Were you aware of him? Did he mean anything to you?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, yes in a way as I told you it is like—don't forget I came at the end of the Victorian heritage. When I was born it was going out. So there would be this kind of thing within him. You know, the thing in the glass case or the thing in the home. The preciousness of little things. I would call him nostalgia. Poetic nostalgia.

MS. ROBERTS: Right. In a way isn't it what most surrealism is?

MR. AGOSTINI: I could never figure out surrealism. Don't forget that before it became its own academy—you know like a group became an academy, it probably was trying to infuse other ideas into art and by infusing something else it opens up art again so that I can add this to the whole milieu. You know? And this is the thing that America doesn't allow—adding to a milieu. It takes it as a school. You know what I mean? It's like pop became a school. This all happened by the way with the French. It all started because of that battle between [Jacques-Louis] David and that group—Ingres and [Eugène] Delacroix. That's where it all started.

MS. ROBERTS: The great fight between the classic and the romantic.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes, it all started at that time.

MS. ROBERTS: But you wouldn't say that that had anything to do with the surrealists?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, it started the idea of symbolism of a sort of take over.

MS. ROBERTS: Oh, yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: You see what I mean?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. That it was in a way the idea of symbolism of a sort taking over.'

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right. Because as soon as they saw cubism fraction things it also gave birth to surrealism in a way. Cubism started breaking up the human being and then they started saying if we can break it up in form then we can break it up in form then we can break it up psychologically. It was the breakup of reality.

MS. ROBERTS: Of the conventionality?

MR. AGOSTINI: No. Just reality. No, I actually think they were not even thinking in those terms. I think they just thought it was a good idea. We will do this. You know the thing is that people always think of schools as coming out of a great course of investigation. This is never true. Some guys will say, you know, I was noticing that if you split color and you would get red, white, and blue and yellows and everything just to white itself. And

another guy says, what do you mean that there is no such thing as black? He says no. Just go ahead and look. And then it happens—an idea is set off. So then they talk to somebody else and that is what schools are made of. It's out of some kind of talk that an investigation emerges.

This happened with me with the clothesline I was talking to someone and they said, "You know you can make a clothes line in sculpture. Why the hell not?" You know? It had nothing to do with any kind of an idea of any sort. It was just that you could do this and see what happens. You see? Now, if it were not acceptable and did not go into something else, they couldn't predicate me into the pop art idea. See? Something comes out of this. Schools are the afterthought of the idea.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. You might say that the image precedes the idea anyway.

MR. AGOSTINI: Oh, sure. But this is what didn't happen now. Now you have got something else. You got with the idea and then the image.

MS. ROBERTS: Now, yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: That what you've got. You see?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: That all started with the pop boys. They got the idea and the image together all at once. They knew what they were going to do. They heralded this whole thing to come out this way.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. Well, that was all for a very simple reason, actually. In commercial art, and many did come out of commercial art, you do have a project that you try to realize in a visual way.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. So we are advertising then.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: So we are really advertising.

MS. ROBERTS: But even without talking about advertising, which is the lower form of it if you want, it is the mere fact of finding an image to carry a thought. What do you feel about [Edward] Kienholz? It seems that he comes right after [Joseph] Cornell in this book. I am not too sure I understand the order.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. That is strange that he should because he just makes a room where the other guy makes a box out of the idea. But he is a surrealist too, you know. Big box surrealism.

MS. ROBERTS: True. Actually it is very well related even on the page. I mean you can see them very well together.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. That's right.

MS. ROBERTS: What about [José] de Rivera?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, he is an unusual guy. I think he is very good. Artistically I don't know but I know he is very good. I still am trying to figure him out in a way. His earlier things I didn't like but his later things I do. He's very original in what he did. You now, his concept.

MS. ROBERTS: You don't feel that certain times it might appear as well, I wouldn't say jewelry but I mean the sort of essence of precious metal.

MR. AGOSTINI: He certainly isn't being rugged about it. And I think that's why I like him. I resent the guy who tries to be "rugged" about it. You see that's [Mark] diSuvero you know. With a lot of baloney. Or [John] Chamberlain who tried to be. I prefer de Rivera to any of them. I think he could be classified with and I sometimes think he is even better than David Smith. I really believe he's better. I think David Smith has been over-exalted and Rivera hasn't been exalted enough. You see?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. Now going on with the book.

MR. AGOSTINI: You notice you went through fifteen minutes of discussion on art as you passed through the pages. That shows you the value of sculpture today. I mean, you know, where it is. They can hope for it because they think that people are giving sculpture meaning to things. But what they haven't noticed is that they haven't been giving sculpture meaning to things, they are trying to figure out their space. I think that the whole idea is that architecture has taken over.

MS. ROBERTS: All you have to do is look at Frank Lloyd Wright's museum after all.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. And you find out that that encompasses everything they are trying to do. Even [Donald] Judd does, or Robert Morris. What he's doing is actually that big thing. It's like a big Guggenheim [Museum, New York City] there without the shell idea.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. It is an architectural project.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. You see their ideas is to make the diminutive presence of art be an architectural idea. Well they might as well forget it all and just have another architecture, why even bother and just consider ourselves nothing but decorators of architectural buildings. You know?

MS. ROBERTS: Right

MR. AGOSTINI: So this is the world I am trying to dodge now. I'm trying to personify they artist as one world, we should not be like the past, we don't have to be like the Egyptians. They had a different world than we and a different orientation. They were different in their purposes and drives and everything. And I think that sometime in our world we should define where artist becomes the artist. And the artist is really a scared animal but nobody wants him. You see?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. I see that actually you are quite generous when you speak of the artist. You don't limit it to sculptors because basically you are a painter too in a way.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. Well, I am thinking in these terms because I never met many sculptors in my early youth. I got involved with mostly painters. They were all the friends I had. So it seems that I had a monologue with myself about sculpture. Sculpture is like a monologue—

MS. ROBERTS: With forms.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. All I was doing was speaking with myself. You see? When I spoke to painters all I did was speak of painting because it was like speaking to a wall if you spoke about the sculpture. They had no idea about the sculpture. Outside of one of them, and that was de Kooning. He was conscious of sculpture.

MS. ROBERTS: It is interesting because in a way he is the most painterly.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. He was very conscious of sculpture. He told me about Hague back in the '30s. He used to speak to me of Giacometti. He was a close admirer of Giacometti. He knew about sculpture like no other painter did. The only one. And he talked to me because I was the only one who seemed to know about sculpture. He and I could talk about these things.

MS. ROBERTS: You speak in the past. Don't you ever see him anymore?

MR. AGOSTINI: No. It is no use. It's like we never had—he never really felt at ease talking to me. So I never felt at ease talking with him either. But he did speak a hell of a lot with Spaventa. Now there is someone that she left out. She left out Spaventa, Pavia and a few others, who were sculptors. And she gives relatively so much space to painters. She could have added a few more pages and brought in more sculptors— and not be so personal. She's not that personal about the painters but she is very personal when it comes to sculptors. She feels that she has to say something in sculpture whereas with painting so much has been said. You see? You have to have a new language for sculpture, that is what it amounts to.

MS. ROBERTS: Don't you think that it may also be because she must talk about painting with Stella? After all her husband is a painter.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes, but she is akin to all these guys who are working with sculptural ideas. She's always talking about them. I am amazed that she didn't bring her friend [Dan] Flavin in more in that, book because she certainly spoke an awful lot about him at one time.

MS. ROBERTS: I was wondering if you would care to follow the reproductions with me and go through the painters and give me a few of your reactions. Going into the past, for instance, going back to [Alfred] Stieglitz's time and to the early start of modern art in America, how do you feel about [Georgia] O'Keeffe, for instance?

MR. AGOSTINI: I would say she was an American— I will say that much. A real American artist. In a way I would say that as a painter she has the sensation that I would say Louise Nevelson has.

MS. ROBERTS: Are you perhaps referring to the response to their work more than what they have to offer?

MR. AGOSTINI: I think in the offering, different as it is , the same idea is there. The labyrinth they both have that

same thing. One into the atmosphere and the other one into the space.

MS. ROBERTS: Incidentally, someone I think is a very interesting in a labyrinth way is [Lucas]Samaras. Did you see that show at Pace with mirrors? They had built that room with mirrors with all those intersections. I am interested in Samaras, what do you feel about him?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well—

MS. ROBERTS: There is the labyrinth idea—

MR. AGOSTINI: He is a Corfuan. You know what a Corfuan is? From Corfu.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: It is a Byzantine world that he is involved with. And the mirrors, even though they are of today, are a Byzantine idea. Even when he does the box. He has a Byzantine sense of proportion about things.

MS. ROBERTS: But this I feel is very sensual.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. The Byzantines were very sensual.

MS. ROBERTS: Right. And he is now one of the young Americans.

MR. AGOSTINI: Actually what the Byzantines lacked in form they gave forth in the richness of color.

MS. ROBERTS: In warmth, yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: Where they'd go static on one thing they re-enhance it with brilliancy.

MS. ROBERTS: Right. But speaking of labyrinth, I thought that this was of course almost mythologic. I mean you wouldn't have been surprised to find the Minotaur at the end.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right.

MS. ROBERTS: I mean it really called for the Minotaur.

MR. AGOSTINI: That is what I thought. He is very Corfun or Cretan. Not even Cretan. I would say Byzantine. I feel a Byzantine quality in his work. It would even get away from the Mediterranean, it would be Asiatic mostly.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: You don't find that kind of feeling in the Mediterranean. Theirs is the dulling of the sun's affect. Whereas in the Near East you find the brightening of the sun's affect.= To make something outshine even in the sun.

MS. ROBERTS: Well, speaking of O'Keeffe, I think of the others that were handled by Stieglitz. What about [John] Marin?

MR. AGOSTINI: You know it is very funny, that seems to be an American world too— the labyrinth. He has labyrinth things too. He leads you into his observation, you know?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: And he spaces it for you. Now that is another curiosity. That seems to be the world of the Americans, you know.

MS. ROBERTS: Well, if you want, Pollock, too.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. His is a labyrinth too.

MS. ROBERTS: Also on this level I think it is true of Mark Tobey.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right. So you have this maze. It is like the maze of space. You see that is another thing that America has. You would say Louise Nevelson belongs to this maze of space. O'Keeffe, even though she cleans it up, is still a maze of space. Marin, Tobey, Pollock. It is that kind of an idea that they perform,

MS. ROBERTS: Stieglitz a had [Marsden] Hartley, too.

MR. AGOSTINI: Hartley again is the David Smith in a sense. You know? The blacksmith. The raw against the refined.

MS. ROBERTS: What about [Arthur] Dove though?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, he's like that whole school— they were all encompassed. That was where the American found their failure. Dove and this other guy, MacDonald Wright. This is the failure of the American to understand the European. So they hit or something and if you notice even [Albert Pinkham] Ryder was hitting that too.

MS. ROBERTS: But he went further.

MR. AGOSTINI: But like Dove and all. Then they got this dense quality. The American canvas became dense. You know, they couldn't seem to—it is as if they made so many mistakes that it got heavy with paint. You know? They didn't have the purity of idea so they got dense in their paint. It just got heavy. It was like searching again to see if something will happen. They were always looking for the genius to happen.

MS. ROBERTS: You must have been an adult when you heard of the Armory Show and the kind of scandal around it.

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, it didn't make any sense because by that time MacDonald Wright and Dove were relegated to museums that you never saw. There was no Modern Museum or anything. There was no art world in the '20s. Of course when you read of Stieglitz and all these people you must remember that they had sources like in Paris. You now?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: You went there. They weren't out in public and it was known to just a select few.

MS. ROBERTS: That's right. I got to know Stieglitz through [Henry] Miller in '39 and he took me to him.

MR. AGOSTINI: He had a coffee klatch with these people. That's about all it amounted to.

MS. ROBERTS: It certainly was not an active scene.

MR. AGOSTINI: There was no "scene" really.

MS. ROBERTS: But I am always fascinated by that kind of an image that you see in [Charles] Demuth—

MR. AGOSTINI: And [Charles] Sheeler.

MS. ROBERTS: And Sheeler and all this which I feel is so totally American and totally present.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. Well, they were involved with getting that realism which they felt about America, that soullessness. You notice they try to get nothing but the thing itself, the architecture of the thing itself. There's the beginning of your sculptural ideas today. It is in men like Sheeler and Demuth

MS. ROBERTS: Certainly. Then of course there is [Edward] Hopper. And where do you situate him?

MR. AGOSTINI: It is always hitting on a thing of the emotion. I wish I could see them beyond an emotional way—Hopper again plays with this American loneliness. You know? This soullessness of the American.

MS. ROBERTS: Soullessness is always slightly shocking to me as an idea. And therefore I am more struck by the loneliness than the soullessness.

MR. AGOSTINI: The only reason Negroes look for the soul is because they are forced back into it because of the poverty of their means. And other people felt the poverty of emotion. Which is still poverty. And it all came out of the poverty of certain things and the glorification of materialism, which has always been America's dream.

And you are confronted with a world like this day in and day out, day in and day out it makes you feel that this is all without a soul. You see I don't believe in a soul and I am sure most Americans don't either. They may run to Church to get it. But look what they have to do. They have to sing a hundred spirituals or throw themselves in the aisles before they believe it. They always have to hop up the energy to become a soul but they want to become a soul that's present. Not something that's inside and is a search. They want to see it. The American wants to see the thing right on the stage. If somebody could get on the stage and, say here is the guy and here is his soul standing right next to him. They would say, Jesus, now I believe it. The great grandfather of the Americans was Doubting Thomas. You remember when Christ said, "Stick your fingers in my wound and believe me."

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. Yes.

MR. AGOSTINI: I think that is the American.

MS. ROBERTS: Well, it is interesting then you get to get to this through Hopper. Well he might have agreed with you.

MR. AGOSTINI: It is quite obvious in his work.

MS. ROBERTS: Now of course when you get to realism it is difficult not to speak of [Andrew] Wyeth.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes, I know. Well, he is a good example of that too. He's like the wipe out. 'Til everything is just on the surface and forget it. You know? He just puts it right on the surface. But he isn't that good a realist. Now let's take realism. Take the [Jane] Van Eyck Marriage Scene [*The Arnolfini Portrait*, 1434]. Where would he stand with that? You see what I mean? He's like a washed out rendition of an advertisement. Whether we like it or not these things have to be relegated to the international scene sooner or later .

This is another thing, we cannot just stay Americans. We are not going to be there. When we compare the Egyptians, we are looking at two thousand years. When we look at the Greeks, the Greeks in relation to the people around them had to span a certain kind of perspective. There is no perspective in Americanism. In trying to get an international look Wyeth doesn't stand up at all.

MS. ROBERTS: Well, he is not even known. Period.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right . He wouldn't even exist. He would be a commercial advertisement in some bad magazine and would have died that way. You see?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. But that isn't true of Davis. Davis has a real presence.

MR. AGOSTINI: Davis is a presence and he is a commentary on some kind of observation. His frustration, his misinterpretation of European ideas— again that's a good example of what happened. You see? Unable to cope with the heritage values of the Europeans, he gets his interpretations and a misinformation allowed him an escape hatch.

MS. ROBERTS: And he became original by accident?

MR. AGOSTINI: An American. That's it.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, but actually it is original.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes.

MS. ROBERTS: There is no doubt about it.

MR. AGOSTINI: But it is because of a failure not because of a success. You see?

MS. ROBERTS: You know I just got this book today so I haven't gone through it yet. They show a 1937 [John] Ferren.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes, I know. He was working with plaster and a few other things then.

MS. ROBERTS: It is interesting that they show that. Many people don't seem to remember he really was a forerunner of many things.

MR. AGOSTINI: He was a forerunner but he was an eclectic. You see this is another thing you have to watch. You know there is a man who could be a dilettante in what he is doing. Ferren fits the dilettante world. Even though America has no soul it does have something else— I don't know what the hell it is— and he lacks that something else which would make him articulate. You know, I would say coldly articulate or warmly articulate. There is an articulation that's taking place. And another thing, a man could be an original with an idea and not be a good artist. And another man could swipe other guys ideas but make great masterpieces out of that. So we can't confront on originality.

MS. ROBERTS: No, we can never actually.

MR. AGOSTINI: When I call man an original, I am saying that he is original and good. I mean his originality is good. You see when I see Scarpitta in relationship to the others, he is good.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. I agree.

MR. AGOSTINI: The others are just modish in their concept of him.

MS. ROBERTS: I know. Speaking of eclecticism what do you feel about [Arshile] Gorky?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, he is a guy we are going to have to pass over because when I first saw him many years ago I always felt the image of Picasso hanging around his neck. This was way back. I see him now and he defines himself more as a good artist. And I see him a little better. But when I see him again it's like an illustration of Picasso's idea. You know the mother and son bit? It's good for America but internationally it would fail in relationship to a Picasso. You see, that's what I am talking about. I put these guys into an international status because they will have to be sooner or later.

MS. ROBERTS: They have already as a matter of fact because I think that is how they last.

MR. AGOSTINI: That's right.

MS. ROBERTS: I mean, that is how they go beyond the temporary scene.

MR. AGOSTINI: They have to be equal to any European. Like Mondrian is equal to anyone in that kind of an idea and he's the best. You see?

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. however, there is a tendency at present to show that nothing is being done in Europe. And in a way, having seen their work over there, I think what is true is that it is certainly less—

MR. AGOSTINI: Spectacular.

MS. ROBERTS: Spectacular and especially less in quantity. Europe is poverty stricken in a way at present. But when it is good, it certainly reaches great heights.

MR. AGOSTINI: Matisse in his later years was ahead of these guys in their formative years. He renewed himself. You see you don't need a lot of young people to make the scene. You need just one man that makes it. And that's what Matisse did.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, and [Jean] Dubuffet does it too.

MR. AGOSTINI: Dubuffet I have my doubts about but he is good. And he is original in his concept. He's good and strong in that. And Picasso does it still. And [Joan] Miró isn't doing it but he's still good.

MS. ROBERTS: What do you feel about [Hans] Hofmann?

MR. AGOSTINI: That's the same thing I feel about him— he was a European trying to articulate an American world with European ideas. So he is a good forerunner of everything that happened in America.

MS. ROBERTS: And he was their teacher in many instances.

MR. AGOSTINI: Oh, sure he was. But he lacked that one great thing— he was not an artist. He was a teacher.

MS. ROBERTS: Do you feel the same thing about [Josef] Albers?

MR. AGOSTINI: Albers I feel, yes.

MS. ROBERTS: You feel he also is a teacher before being an artist?

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. I still cannot get it out of my mind. I don't care what they do, I still look at a Mondrian and I find it more powerful. And why I don't know. I mean you could get very clever about it, you know. These things look very nice now because don't forget we are looking for nuances. We are looking to look now. We're going to give people credit for things that we don't even believe later because there is nothing else to look at. And we're just hungry. Suppose we stop being hungry and start becoming more and more critical? Then we will see what's left. We are very hungry now. We are hungry for the Americans to be the big scene.

MS. ROBERTS: We spoke of Ad Reinhardt a little earlier. When Reinhardt said that what painting couldn't be, do you think that he might have been right at this point, the only way possibly to define what is, is showing what it cannot be?

MR. AGOSTINI: That was a good point. I liked Reinhardt because he made statements about his stand on things. He stated where he is. Where are you? And that is what I feel: that I must state where I am and say where are you? It's like that because that is what America is really. We are all primitives. All of us. We have no consciousness of what the hell we're doing. We are just doing things. And some maybe doing it just to be clever

— we don't even know if we are doing it to be clever— we don't even know if we are doing it to be clever, whether we're doing it to get attention or what we are doing these things for. But we're doing a hell of a lot of stuff.

And sure it overweighs what the Europeans do because the European always wants to be the artist. But that is another point— you just can't be the artist. You are the artist to start with. That's what is killing Europeans. They want to be artists and that's not good. It would be better if they had a dead period for fifty years and forgot it all. And then some artist would come up and be an artist. But they are all trying to be. And this is what's killing. In America it doesn't matter because everybody is just doing a lot of stuff and they are all trying to get attention.

MS. ROBERTS: Do you feel that Kline was an artist in the way that you speak of it?

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. In a lot of ways, yes. But I am still searching whether I know he was. You see what I mean?

MS. ROBERTS: Do you think we could get anywhere near what it is to be an artist? In words?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, number one, I know that I want to be an artist and I know that he wanted to be an artist. I mean I knew I was an artist and then I proceeded to be one. And I know Franz felt the same way. My generation felt that way because of a very simple reason— that's all there was. You either were or you weren't. Because to be one was a stupid idea because it wouldn't get you anywhere.

MS. ROBERTS: It was not a question of choice.

MR. AGOSTINI: No. That's what you were and you were stuck with it. So our point was, now that we're artists what do we do about it. We just go ahead and work. You see? But today most kids want to be an artist because it is a very lucrative thing for emotional, financial and other reasons.

MS. ROBERTS: It is a way of life .

MR. AGOSTINI: It's a way of life . Now, in this way of life you may find a few artists who go into it and are good, because the potential thing is this big push today— that the Americans are artists . They are convinced right from the beginning they are whether they are or not. This is another mistake, you see. Europeans are trying to be artists because they have all those traditions. But the Americans, since there is nothing, say well already you are an artist, kid, now what are you going to do about it? And the kid has never examined whether he is one or not.

So your schools are loaded with "will-be's." And they're going to be dumped along the way. Millions of them will vanish. We only get a handful out who because they have been pushed into it have to be relegated to criticism. And now in this kind of critical act you have to define were they successful artists . You can't say will they be anymore. They show so fast that by the time they do their first painting they already have a gallery.

MS. ROBERTS: Not quite.

MR. AGOSTINI: But pretty much. They come in at twenty-five, twenty-six, thirty. They say if you haven't been successful by the time you are thirty you've failed. That's the way they believe today.

MS. ROBERTS: It is pretty bad, isn't it, that way? I was looking at these various pictures. I don't see any of [Barnett] Newman here.

MR. AGOSTINI: Barney Newman has always been my hang-up. I have very little to say about him, because I wonder if he's honest or he has been relegated to be in a clever man.

MS. ROBERTS: Well, is there a place, you think, for being both?

MR. AGOSTINI: Probably. That again is the American contradiction. We don't know what the American school will consist of. And he is one of those ambiguities. So I leave him where he is. He is an ambiguity.

MS. ROBERTS: Did you have a chance, or were you too young, to meet [Bradley Walker] Tomlin?

MR. AGOSTINI: I met him very accidentally.

MS. ROBERTS: Marvelous person.

MR. AGOSTINI: I was going to get a house up at Woodstock [New York]. And they had told me that he had just gotten rid of his Woodstock house. And in the process of going to East Hampton [New York] to get his other house, he died of a heart attack. That is all I knew. But Marca-Relli knew him. At that time I told you I was more interested in watching my wife than I was in watching artists . So I missed a lot of people who were with that

group that came along in the late '40s. I am talking about after 1945. Before that time I was very close to all the artists . But between 1945 and 1950 I had very little to do with any of them. He was one of that group.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes, definitely. One of the most enduring I would say in many ways.

MR. AGOSTINI: Marca-Relli knew him and I just was never there at the time when they got together.

MS. ROBERTS: I don't see any of Gottlieb in this context. Oh, yes, here is one. What are your reactions to him?

MR. AGOSTINI: I don't like his early things. Look how time tells the story there. Gorky, Gottlieb— they all had the same kind of search. Barney Newman. See? Same age.

MS. ROBERTS: What about Rothko?

MR. AGOSTINI: Well, now you talk about the play of color. They are right where Albers is. That is the world of Albers. They're all involved with that world. I don't know. I can't say much for them.

MS. ROBERTS: Do you feel Reinhardt was going further in that same search or was it just his attitude that interested you?

MR. AGOSTINI: I would say it was his attitude. He was always speaking of prayer and I always wondered whether he was a prayer. You know? He wasn't using that word but there was always like a prayer. He was like a—

MS. ROBERTS: Incantation of sorts?

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. It was like an incantation. And I often wondered about his incantations. And I feel this goes for fibers, I feel that they are all mystics.

MS. ROBERTS: It is true for Rothko, I am sure.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. Rothko is a mystic. Gottlieb even in a way is a mystic. I think it is kind of mystical painting that they're doing. And the same goes thing goes for Clifford Still. That whole group was involved in a mystical thing. But the one thing that they did do—they made a definite approach to that kind of truth. Everyone of them. Gottlieb, Rothko, Clyfford Still.

MS. ROBERTS: Even [Robert] Motherwell at this point.

MR. AGOSTINI: Motherwell I feel is different. He's much younger than they are. And I feel he used these people. I think he used their kind of mysticism for his own purpose. He is historically orientated. I'm not interested in him. But Rothko, Clifford Still, and Barney Newman all were involved with the high mystical idea. It's a very Judaic idea they are involved with. It's like the mystique of God. Is He light, is He a splash or what is He? Is he something? It is a cosmic idea. I feel that they are all involved with the cosmos.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. When you speak of mysticism, what do you feel about the form of thinking of Tobey who is a Bahai.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. I know. There is a mysticism there. But I wouldn't say that for Pollock. And I wouldn't say it for Franz Kline. Now there you get a world of men at certain ages having a school of thinking like a world of their time. And their time seems to stand out. Their world. And they all relate to their world of their time. So if you examine a man in his time and his relationship to it, I don't think Motherwell stands up. Does he? In his time.

MS. ROBERTS: I see very well what you mean.

MR. AGOSTINI: I put men in their time. I'm part of their time but because sculpture was such a meaningless thing I became no time because there was no sculptors to have time with. There was no time for sculpture and that is why sculpture is such a strange art. It had no time. David Smith— what time does he belong with? He doesn't belong anywhere really. Louise Nevelson in a sense could be their time because of the mysticism of her involvement. She comes with Georgia O'Keeffe and all. Even though she is dealing with form it is still a painter kind of form. It is not the form itself so much— it is the illusion of form.

MS. ROBERTS: Giving form to shadows.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. Which is the mysticism. So she fits her time.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. I see what you mean.

MR. AGOSTINI: But she was never a sculptor like I am a sculptor in that kind of a world. She is more of an artist rather than a sculptor.

MS. ROBERTS: An architect in a way.

MR. AGOSTINI: Yes. It is a different world altogether. She had no sculptural ideas like I had. Because I am a real sculptor in this sense, with a real sculptural dimension in thinking and all. Of the presence of a body as well as a space. And all these things, which is quite different.

MS. ROBERTS: You know I have always been convinced that the artist was really the one to be the critic of the artist because he alone could judge the artist.

MR. AGOSTINI: That is right. In my own investigations I have to see them where they are. Isn't that true? Because I touch all their worlds—I have been in their rooms. You know what I mean? Their consciousness rooms, you see. Where their consciousness is, I have been in those rooms. And the fact is I didn't stay because they weren't for me.

MS. ROBERTS: At the same time you have a consciousness of them.

MR. AGOSTINI: I could see it.

MS. ROBERTS: And I think so often the historian is only touching the surface of it.

MR. AGOSTINI: They can't help themselves. They cannot be in a world of the artists' consciousness. Because when you delve into these things, when you make a move on a piece of paper, you could realize what another guy made the same kind of move in a different way. You see? Abstract expressionists could look at each other and say he got it and he didn't. they could read it fast. And that is why so many faded out, because they weren't real.

MS. ROBERTS: Right. Do you think you can at any time teach a reading of a work of art? Independently of the artist, in our time that is.

MR. AGOSTINI: You mean look at his work and try to see it? That is another thing I have to test myself on. I have been going to listen to art historians who have classes down there. I go listen to some man to see what he has to say. And while he is talking I realize a very important point has come up and I ask him about it later. Then he would talk about it.

Because he never looked in the door. You see? He is only talking about the construction and knowing artists, it is the one thing they never think of. You have no valid act for what you are doing. You take a chance on something. And in taking a chance it opens up possibilities for you to continue. If it fails in the process you drop it as a failure. So it is a research that you are taking of yourself. No art historian figure well, look at the way he constructed this— the space he got at this point and how he got that there and that there. You know?

MS. ROBERTS: But that is not the way things are done.

MR. AGOSTINI: No artist ever worked that way. That's what I said about surrealists. They never thought in terms of surrealism. When the name was put on it then they discussed ideas about surrealism. See? They figured if with cubism you get this kind of dimension, the break up, that means the man is all facets. So if he is all facets, one could say his brain is a clock. So he tries it out. And in the trying out somebody says, "Boy that is surrealism." That man is a surrealist.

MS. ROBERTS: You see that is why I never quite believe in those long explanations on slides because you don't explain anything in explaining a painting.

MR. AGOSTINI: No. it's like I said, if I could walk into a work of art and if it is full of silence, and I walk away from it, that is its greatest compliment. Because it has completed the act of its information to me. There is nothing to say about it. It is all it. And that is exactly what we are talking about God. He is all present, he is all it and we need no further discussion about him. So we have to dig up disciples and they give you long information on why He is all this.

But you know in His presence they say in Church by yourself you are supposed to get the presence, who else do you need? You don't need a guy to take you by the hand and guide you to the altar. You stand there and look and you wonder about it. Do you believe or don't you? And you say, "No, I don't." Then you leave. You see? And if you don't get struck by lightning when you walk out that door, it's a big phony. You see? Or if you do get struck, then God is a phony because He has no right to have revenge in His soul. So, to be struck by lightning because you say God doesn't exist proves that He is—

MS. ROBERTS: Not God.

MR. AGOSTINI: Of course not. He should understand that you doubt.

MS. ROBERTS: Yes. Well this poses the whole problem of quality, and I think that is the one thing that can never be talked about, really.

MR. AGOSTINI: How can you?

MS. ROBERTS: Either you sense it or you don't.

MR. AGOSTINI: I am trying to teach students to look for their own world. I want them to look and find if there is a world to look at. And if there isn't why even bother.

MS. ROBERTS: And if there is, then it is their own.

MR. AGOSTINI: I am not trying to make art go on forever. If it is supposed to die now, let's forget it. It's not important. If it has lost its importance, get rid of it. If it's meaningful let's keep it. But our truth is to find out if they find meaning in it. I sometimes feel that I am the last of a line. So why bother. If they don't want to produce a world of their own— if they don't want to give birth to their kind of children, I say be birthless. Who cares? I am not looking for their immortality and I doubt my own. In the world we live in you can't look for their immortality, you have to doubt your own. Because the way things are, you may be a worldless world. You see? The way things keep going. So who even wants to be involved with that kind of an image.

MS. ROBERTS: At least you want to have the freedom of the search.

MR. AGOSTINI: So I say be of today.

[END OF TAPE2]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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