



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Brice Marden,
1972 Oct. 3

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Brice Marden on October 3, 1972 and was conducted by Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's the third of October, 1972, Paul Cummings talking to Brice Marden. You were born when, 1938, right?

BRICE MARDEN: Yes -- October 15.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In Bronxville; so it is birthday time, isn't it? Well, give me some kind of general idea about Bronxville and growing up and family background, brothers and sisters and so forth.

BRICE MARDEN: Well, I was born in Bronxville but actually living in a town called Briarcliff which is 32 miles north of the city. I don't know why I was born in Bronxville; there was a doctor there or something. I've always been a little embarrassed by it because it's rather a horrible town.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what was Briarcliff like?

BRICE MARDEN: It was a small town. During the war I guess there were about 1500 people there. It's suburban. It had been farm country, you know, early in the century, then mostly residential. I was brought up in a house that was one of the old farms. There was this one man who was the kind of patron of the village

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who was that?

BRICE MARDEN: A guy named Law, but that was back in the turn of the century. He owned all these cattle farms and where I lived was one of the farms but they didn't have the barns any more. There was just, like this foundation, this old house

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you have brothers and sisters?

BRICE MARDEN: I have an older brother Michael who now works for CBS, he's four years older than I, and I have a sister named Carol who is six years younger. And as long as I remembered, we lived in the same house but the town went through lots of changes. After the war a lot of people moved in.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And it really became suburbia, didn't it, after the war?

BM: Yeah. It was right next to Scarborough and there's the beautiful Hudson River there. We used to go over and look at it; my father was a real Hudson River freak. He just loved it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why was that?

BRICE MARDEN: He just thought it was very very beautiful. He thought it was one of the great scenic wonders of the world. He liked rivers, sailing down rivers. Dad sailed the Rhine.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, was he interested in sailing, or was it a hobby?

BRICE MARDEN: No, he wasn't interested in sailing; he just liked looking at nature.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what schools did you go to?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, I went to the public schools in Briarcliff, kindergarten all the way on through. As I think back on it, it was quite uneventful. Everybody says how bored they were; I was never really bored in school but when I think that I can't remember anything that happened I must have been pretty bored, you know. I was an average student, very average. I always somehow ended up in the middle of the class.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was there an interest in art, culture, books and music at home?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, in a way. There were always reproductions of paintings on the wall and a couple of original paintings. There was one thing that I remember very distinctly. It was a Bellini portrait of Bosche, Leonard, Lorendo or something, which was always hanging by the stairway. This was a little reproduction out of the National Geographic and he was just always called "Joe" you know, for years. And for years that thing was

around and it was Joe. Then later, you know, in studying art history and stuff like this I came across Joe and finally get to see it in London. It was a really beautiful painting but it was there, you know, it wasn't I think that was very important that it was there and it was like my father liked Rembrandt. When there were big shows in the city, like at the Met, he'd always go see them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Would you go too?

BRICE MARDEN: No, I wouldn't go. Also there was a man with a family living next door, and Fred Serginian was the father of my best friend when I was a kid and we grew up together and he was always a big influence because he had been an artist.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really!

BRICE MARDEN: He still painted, not very often. Like maybe once every two years he'd go through a thing with painting. During the Depression he started doing layouts and stuff like that and got to be a very big advertising man. He was like head of the art department at Young and Rubicam for a long time. And he would tell stories about when he was a student and studying with the Ashcan School people. Luks was a big teacher of his. In trying to think back on what could be considered like the first real aesthetic kind of experience, one of them was going through some drawings, some nude drawings with his son. And they weren't just like supposedly dirty pictures, you know, they were something much better than that. And he was always very encouraging in a quiet way. He was very quiet but he was always very encouraging, especially when I started out in art school. My parents were just totally perplexed, you know, coming from a town where everybody goes to college, a very Ivy League kind of place. Ninety percent of the people graduated high school. And I had come from this Princeton family, you know, my grandfather taught there and my father went there and my brother went there and I always wanted to go there. But then I decided I didn't want to go.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, did you make drawings as a child?

BRICE MARDEN: No, I was never really artistic in any way. In my last year in high school when I had taken all these required courses and I could take easy courses, didn't have any more math or science to take, I took typing and art. Typing I found very difficult but the art thing, it was a horrible art teacher. I mean he just wasn't into it at all and it was really boring to go into the class and you'd take out your paint and you'd paint for a half an hour and then you'd clean up and straighten up and leave.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Nothing happened?

BRICE MARDEN: Nothing. But I somehow got interested and I was also much more interested in a kind of alternate life style. My last year in high school I kind of dropped sports and things like that; I started writing and was going to New York more.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When did you start going into the city?

BRICE MARDEN: Oh, maybe eighth grade or something, started to hitchhike.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, did you run around the country very much to neighboring places or into New York for things to do?

BRICE MARDEN: It was mainly New York. The family used to take driving trips as vacations -- Williamsburg and Virginia and things like that. But my father loved bricks and he loves stone. He built beautiful stone walls. And I used to have these long talks with him trying to compare with what I was doing with him building a stone wall.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What happened?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, that went on for years, you know. There you are -- you get this son who starts hanging out in Greenwich Village and wants to be an artist. I used to go to the Modern and see shows like the Picasso show.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When do you think you started going to museums?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, Mrs. Serginian, the wife of this guy who lives next door, used to take us to museums. I can remember going to the Met and the first time I was at the Museum of Modern Art was a very, very distinct impression. The first time I went to the Museum of Modern Art I really dug it, but I can't remember anything specifically about it, vaguely Brancusi.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was that again when you were in early teens?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, early teens. And I used to hate the city. It really scared me. I was brought up with the kind of thing of going to the city was very special. You dressed up to go. I used to come in and I'd seen all the

Brigitte Bardot movies before "God Created Woman." I was a big Brigitte Bardot fan. I'd come in and I'd go to the museum and then I'd go see a Bardot movie, go to a bar, have a couple of drinks and go home.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What kind of things did you read? Did you read a great deal? Were you interested in music or was your family interested in any of those things? Were there books around?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, there were books around. I didn't read much. I never was really much of a reader. I still am not, but you know, read the usual stuff

PAUL CUMMINGS: What about music? You have yards of records over there. Is that just something that's gone on for a long time?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, well, music I kind of like. In my last year in school I was what they called a pseudo-intellectual, that's what they called them, but I was just, you know, there had to be something different. I just got interested in different stuff. A lot of it was just coming to New York and hanging out in the Village and stuff like that. You meet people and you hear things and you go into book stores and get books and stuff like that. And that's really one of the reasons I became an artist, you know. I'd tell people that I liked the way the girls looked in Greenwich Village, you know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's a good reason to start.

BRICE MARDEN: So I figured I'd become this artist and go to Greenwich Village which is where it is supposed to be going on, where it was happening then.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What kind of places did you go when you came in in those days?

BRICE MARDEN: Coffee shops, Sheridan Square. When I go over there now, you know, and I see people coming in from high school on the weekends and, you know, I was doing it and

PAUL CUMMINGS: But it's a very different Village now.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah. I had a group of friends and we'd come down together a lot.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have any of them pursued any cultural activities?

BRICE MARDEN: No, no, no, oh no. The last one that I had some hope for finally just

PAUL CUMMINGS: Gave up?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, was there an indication on your family's part that you were supposed to go to college, go into a business or profession?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, we were always brought up with the whole thing that we would go to college. There was no worry about going to college; you'd go to college. You were expected to go to college. For years I wanted to go into hotel administration. I was really just impressed with the way hotels were run. Conrad Hilton was an idol, you know. I'd read his book in envy. Cornell has the best hotel school and I really wanted to go there up until the second semester in my senior year in high school. I'd applied to all these hotel administration schools. And then I said I don't want to do that, I said I wanted to study art. There had been no indication so in a sense my family was really largely upset.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What do you think it was in you that developed this idea besides the girls in the village?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, you know things kept happening. Like in the boring art class I would do things like clean out the book shelves instead of paint, and you'd end up looking through a book about Cezanne and it was just something interesting about it. I couldn't understand anything but there was just something interesting about it. So, you'd go, you know, you'd go to a museum. So, instead of going to all these hotel schools, I had to apply to some college and I went to a college called Florida Southern College.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where's that?

BRICE MARDEN: It's in Lakeland, Florida and it was for people from the north who couldn't get into a college, a decent college.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you find it, though?

BRICE MARDEN: It was recommended by some guidance counselor or something. With your marks, you know, you can get into such and such a . . . like I had "c" average or something, you know, and it was for There were a lot of rich kids there, a playboy college. I went down there and just immediately hated it the second I saw it. The idea was to go there and take liberal arts for a year and take art courses to see if I was interested. So I did it and there was a good guy teaching there. His name was Dean Eggert and he was very helpful. I had a drawing class and a design class with him. But even at that time I really wasn't showing anything that

PAUL CUMMINGS: But this was your first real kind of art.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Tuition of some kind, other than the high school.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, and he would go through, you know, like he'd go through like Cezanne real swiftly and tell me things about him, you know. He left the next year and went back to the University of Iowa to get a doctorate or something. I've seen him a couple of times since then, a really nice guy. He was very helpful. On vacations he would give me like these passes to go to the Whitney and to the Modern. I can remember going to a member opening of the Pollock retrospective. He told me to go see it and look for this and that. That show really excited me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That was at the Modern?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, that was at the Modern. There was also a big Hofmann show at the Whitney then. When I went back to school he'd say, "Well, what did you think?" You know I'd have to give him all this. He was very helpful but I hated it down there. I was involved with theatre people, you know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh really.

BRICE MARDEN: I just couldn't hack it. I was in a fraternity, you know, and

PAUL CUMMINGS: Which one?

BRICE MARDEN: It was Sigma Chi, it was a Sigma Chi colony.

PAUL CUMMINGS: A colony?

BRICE MARDEN: They had started out as a colony and then, you know, you've got to do all this stuff and then you become a chapter and I just couldn't hack that. You know, the anti-Semitism was just . . . I was really shocked. I was really naive, you know. So I just quit that and I was in the theater group.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What did you do in that group?

BRICE MARDEN: You know, acted in plays, bit parts; I was really terrible.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But you were trying all these things.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, and there was a couple there . . . my English teacher was named Robert Gisilow and his wife Vivian ran the drama department and I helped with the plays and they were good people. They had very high standards.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Had you an interest in theater before or was this just something that happened in college?

BRICE MARDEN: No, it was just something I did and they were nice people to hang out with. They were all strange, all lived off campus.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Hang around.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah. But I really hated that place; I hated it. It's the largest group of Frank Lloyd Wright architecture anywhere in the world.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh really?

BRICE MARDEN: The campus, it's in

PAUL CUMMINGS: How'd you like that?

BRICE MARDEN: Fascinating place, most of the buildings don't work very well, you know. They put up But I just hated it. One thing was it was the equivalent of my junior year in high school, everything was very easy.

That's one of the things I liked about that English course, this Gisilow guy was difficult, the only thing that seemed to be like on some kind of college level. I always thought college was really this hard thing, you know. I was down there just breezing through.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How long were you there?

BRICE MARDEN: I was just there a year, then I transferred to Boston University.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How'd you select that?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, my father had gone to the guidance people in New York and said he wants to study art and be in the Eastern urban area which is what I wanted. So they had some, a whole bunch of schools, everything except New York. I really didn't want to come to New York and Boston University just seemed good; it looked good. I went up there and saw it and they accepted me; I obtained my portfolio. It called for a test in my portfolio.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how'd you like Boston?

BRICE MARDEN: Boston was fantastic. That was my first city and I mean it's great to go to school there because it's a college town; it's full of young people. And there's all of this stuff going on for them. That was really lively, that was good in Boston. And also like I really got into . . . like the first year in Florida I really wasn't learning that much about art or how to make it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, was there anything to see in Florida? I mean there was no museum, there was nothing?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, there was the Ringling Museum in Sarasota; I went there a couple of times and there was also that art school down there, the Ringling School. We all looked up to that as something like a real art school. But Boston was just right from the beginning, it was really good.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What did you start with there, who were your instructors the first year?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, one of the things that was important in Boston is that I insisted on living by myself.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you live in a dorm in Florida?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, and I just hated it. It was like five roommates and I got along with everybody, you know, but just really hated it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It inhibits life.

BRICE MARDEN: And so I said in Boston that I wanted to live in a rooming house or something. I wasn't going to live in a dormitory, which also upset my parents. I finally said, well, hell, I'm not going, so they said O.K. So I lived in a rooming house which was good.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was it, a student house with other students?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, it was a college-approved thing. I mean they didn't have enough room for people in dormitories anyway. And it was nice. Boston's a great town, you know, it's small; it's great for walking in, beautiful to walk in.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, there are lots of museums and cultural activities and things going on constantly there. Did you do a lot of things outside of school or were you basically involved with academic life and classes?

BRICE MARDEN: No, everything I did out of school had to do with art, like going to museums, going to galleries.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Had you gone to galleries in New York very much?

BRICE MARDEN: No, not really that much in New York.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Boston was really the beginning of that?

BRICE MARDEN: And at Boston I remember going to these galleries and finally asking the teachers what am I supposed to be looking for, you know, and they said you look at things that help you solve problems. It's not easy and it wasn't easy, you know; it took a long time to really begin to be able to look.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what kind of work were you doing? Because it sounds as if that's when something really started to happen.

BRICE MARDEN: Well, one thing was that my friend Fred Serginian and his wife had been giving me a subscription to Art News for years and I just thought the Abstract Expressionism was great; I loved it. But Boston University was very academically oriented; it was staffed mainly with people that had gone to Boston Museum School. I studied with Karl Zerbe, Kokoscha and Beckmann were like the big heroes. It was a big Expressionist school and it was a whole school of that kind of painting, you know, Hyman Blume and . . .

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, it's still the figure.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, and so they were really into drawing. We had to do a lot of drawing. The first year you didn't take any painting classes, you just took a lot of drawing classes and anatomy and perspective and design and lettering and color. And I can remember taking a color course and just not understanding anything, this was Albers' color course. A great teacher though.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who taught that?

BRICE MARDEN: It was Arthur Hoener who taught it and he was very good because he was the abstract painter on the faculty. Then there was a sculptor named Hugh Townley who was abstract, but everybody else, you know . . . These were the two new outsiders. So I really got a lot out of Townley and Hoener, more from a philosophical level, about art and what it's all about. But those other guys, I mean I was taking drawing with, oh who was it? Conger Metcalf was teaching the greatest first year drawing class. It was just fantastic, and a guy Murray Reich, who's in New York now and a good friend, he was a graduate student and he was teaching second year drawing. And I took two of his classes. You had transfers so I could double up on all those credits. So I was taking two drawing classes and two painting classes and Murray was a fantastic teacher. That was the first year he was teaching, just fantastic, just fantastic, and he was very helpful. And then around my second year in school, you know, it was like Murray kind of accepted me more as an artist or as a promising artist than as a student. And then I came in, you know, like one summer I sublet his loft and stayed in Boston and tried to work; didn't get any work done. I'd just hang out in coffee shops all the time, and got involved in that whole Boston folksy thing that was going on.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was there a lot of interplay between students in the various schools up there, or were you pretty much involved with people close to the university.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, you met them on a social level. I had a lot of friends who were at Harvard. I would go to this club called the 47, you know, that's where Joe Barker started and all these people, it was very active. Also we would go over to the Harvard Square with Murray and a guy named Harvey Quaytman, who was at the Boston Museum School at the time, and we'd go over and Henry Geldzahler was at Harvard and we'd have coffee with him, you know. And it was great. We'd get involved with some discussion and we'd say like "Henry, tell us more about so and so," you know, and he was very big. It was just then that he started going to Provincetown and, you know, meeting people like Kline and stuff.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What did he say? I'm curious about what he was as a personality or an image, a bearer of information.

BRICE MARDEN: At that time?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

BRICE MARDEN: He was, you know, just kind of accepted as this little, brilliant but very nice guy. And he was like a teaching assistant or something at Harvard and people would go to listen to his lectures (I never did) and he would put up shows in the Fogg museum, nice little ones. He was just kind of a . . . he was interested, he was like really interested in a lot of the things that were going on.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's interesting because the whole little patterns kind of evolve here. What kind of work were you doing? Were you just doing student work, or were you beginning to break out of that?

BRICE MARDEN: I was doing work in school and then doing work at home. The work in school was like all the school work, you know, realistic, and at home I was working more on problems that had grown out of design classes and stuff like that, abstract problems, really trying to figure out how to paint, abstract, and what it was about.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There wasn't much of that in school?

BRICE MARDEN: No, there wasn't any of that in school, only in your design class and in your sculpture class. But in the sculpture class I eventually just ended up making heads, because I was painting a lot of heads in the painting class. The first year painting was still lifes; I painted still lifes all the time. And I got very much involved with Cezanne. I started beginning to understand a lot of the things about Cezanne and Matisse, you know, early

Matisse. It was great being in Boston because you could go to museums and see these things if you were interested, and then you'd go down to the city and go around to museums. We used to go down on the weekend. We'd go to like fifteen galleries on Saturday and, you know, twenty museums on Sunday and then I'd go back to Boston.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And would New York exhaust you or was it really exciting?

BRICE MARDEN: No, it was really exciting, really exciting, you know, going around and seeing those de Koonings and Klines. I used to love Klines, you know. After this damn Albers color course which I just didn't understand at all, I had no idea of what was going on. I just thought I didn't know anything about color, so I just worked in black and white all the time and then I really got into Kline and de Kooning, you know, all those guys. But it was really very exciting, you know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What did your instructors say? Were they aware of the fact that you were doing one thing in the class and the other thing at home?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, well, some encouraged it, you know, like Hoener would. I mean he was really pleased, and some were really receptive, because there was a lot of hostility among the faculty.

PAUL CUMMINGS: On whose part? Who was responsible?

BRICE MARDEN: The more traditionally oriented. One guy would give a lecture and another faculty person would start questioning things, you know, there's be this great ideological split.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it was really apparent in front of the students?

BRICE MARDEN: Oh yeah, yes, it was perfectly obvious. You just had contact with these abstract teachers when you were in your first year, but then when you went into the painting major you were in their hands. But I just kept doing all this other work outside. By that time I'd gotten to know some other painters in the town.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who, for example?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, there was a guy named Bobby Newas, who was the big star student over at the Museum School and he was my age and we got along fairly well and he's always been like a very big influence on my life. I've known him for . . . he's about the closest friend I have now, whom I've known for such a long time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Is he in New York or where is he?

BRICE MARDEN: He's not in New York now, he's out in Ohio. He's in the music business now.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How was he influential, in what way?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, number one he was really great. He had this loft and was just so facile in all these paintings, you know. He could make these Abstract Expressionist paintings and I just couldn't make them. Also, he was a big folk guy, you know, music. He used to hang around the clubs and stuff like that, and that was what I was doing in my spare time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The folk music.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, and then there were other painters, Alan Cody, and there was a co-op gallery there called the Nova Gallery and Murray Reich was in that and Harvey Quatytman and people like that and they'd get discussions going like The Club in New York, you know. It never would quite work, but I'd go there and just listen, you know, be very interested in

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why didn't it work, do you think?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, it was always self-conscious, and, you know, trying to be like some sort of a Boston School or something. It wasn't panning out and . . . I mean it was like so provincial. A guy named Jack Wolf was a big shot painter and they were all these people who shows in Boston, or New England artists.

PAUL CUMMINGS: All that Newbury Street

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Kind of realistic country images.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, as a student a Baskin show was something that was eagerly looked forward to.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how'd your work progress? You were there for four years?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah. My first year painting class was a very good class, and then Read Kay, who I had in second year painting . . . you started painting the figure. He was just fantastic, a great teacher, and he was in no way at all receptive to abstract art for the most part. But when it came to looking at something, you know, he was fantastic.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In what way?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, Read Kay really helped in a very strong way to develop my ideas about color.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was that just discussion or asking questions?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, I couldn't understand what people were doing with color, like say an abstract painting. I just couldn't understand it and most of the explanations were pretty evasive. I mean like I couldn't figure out push pull to save me, and a lot of the color stuff. I mean I had seen all these Albers students who were showing on Newbury street in Boston, using these color ideas of Albers, but they just, to no end at all, you know, using these little tricks. You can spot a Yale painter a block away. But Read Kay would talk more about old master paintings and color and you could discuss a Matisse color painting or something like that and just the whole idea of like seeing a dark against a dark, you know, what kind of color came that way. He was very good; he was a very good, very astute. We were just into learning, you know, learning how to look at things. That was a great thing about Boston University, boy, they really made you look at things.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Everything.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah and there was a lot of drawing, anyway I was doubling up in drawing classes. I had a lot of drawing. But there was a style, I mean definitely a style. It was all very painterly and drawing the planes, which really threw me when I went to Yale, because Yale had a completely different style of drawing and I just got so fucked up about it. So Read Kay was really a tremendous influence. But I was still doing abstract paintings outside, you know, on my own. But the thing was that I brought them in for marking or something like that and he lowered my mark, you know, said I was wasting my time with this thing, you know, painting self portraits. I painted lots of self portraits at home. By this time I was living with two other guys and we had a big apartment which had a studio room. I started second year painting and then third year painting with Read Kay so I had him for two years.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You had a lot.

BRICE MARDEN: And then my last year there the students organized this exhibition committee. The students would put up shows in the halls, stuff that they went around and got from the galleries and stuff like that. I started that thing just to make the place more controversial, you know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What would you do, form a committee and then go to the commercial galleries?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, well, I went to the head of the department, David Aronson, and I said, "Can we put on a show?" and he said, "Sure." So the first show was of Harold Tovish drawings and I really like them. I picked the drawings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: These were early, not the mechanical drawings, the earlier ones?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, these were the figures, like studies for sculptures that he did around 1958 or '57.

PAUL CUMMINGS: He's an abstract sculptor?

BRICE MARDEN: No, he's very much a figurative.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And then he became a figurative sculptor.

BRICE MARDEN: Oh, really?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, he shifted. But they were figure drawings?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, and the faculty liked that, because they liked Tovish. They had gone to school with him, you know, they liked his work. Then we started throwing in stuff that was a little bit more controversial.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Such as?

BRICE MARDEN: We did a show of works that students did out of school. They didn't like that very much. That

was good, see, because all along I was really hard-working, very serious, earnest, but, you know, nothing really special. And so they kept giving all the scholarships to everyone else. And finally in the end I organized that student thing and they really liked that so they had to give me a scholarship to someplace. I'd been trying to go to Skowhegan, that was the big summer thing. You got this scholarship to Skowhegan. So after I graduated, they said, "Do you want to go to Yale-Norfolk?" And by that time I was married and had a kid and the baby had just born that March and so it was a painful thing. They decided that I should go to Yale-Norfolk; they offered me a scholarship. And it was really, you know, one of these political numbers between schools. Yale was being run by Bernard Chaet and B.U. was being run by David Aronson and they were students together at the Museum School and they had shared a studio, right, and they kept doing these things to each other

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh God, really, I didn't know that.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah. And you know the Yale-Norfolk summer school was just like a farm system, you know; they get all the schools to send their best people going into their last year and then they pick them over. And I was all signed up to have a teaching assistantship at Bowling Green State University in Ohio because I just couldn't get accepted at any schools I wanted to go to, and I needed a teaching assistantship, you know, because of marriage. So I was going to go out there but then I went to Norfolk. And I know that Aronson had just sent me to sort of screw Chaet. I went there and that was a fantastic summer; I did a lot of painting and I painted a lot of landscapes and I painted a lot of abstract paintings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That was what, '61, wasn't it?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, the summer of '61. That was really good because all this time I'd been hankering for this abstract experience and then when I got there and I saw what other people were doing, you know, from around the country at Norfolk, and they were all painting out of the art magazines, which is what I was trying to do, but they had it really slick, you know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But you had seen a lot of abstract paintings in New York, hadn't you?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, but I mean I couldn't quite . . .

PAUL CUMMINGS: Make that next step.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah. I was getting a couple of them, and then I'd actually shown a couple of paintings in a gallery, John Peterson Gallery in Boston, which showed abstract painting. They had a couple of Tworikov drawings or something like that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, who was teaching at Yale that summer? Or at Norfolk?

BRICE MARDEN: The painting faculty was Bernard Chaet and Jon Schueler. Schueler was fantastic, really fantastic.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In what way?

BRICE MARDEN: He was very inspirational, in just the way he would talk. In Boston most of these guys were very dispassionate; the involvement was very kind of cold. They wouldn't discuss what it was like being an artist. I mean they never discussed that. I mean like Read Kay would say things, but you know they weren't the kind of things -- they weren't very romantic. They'd say well, you're an artist, supposed to be strong, you should eat a good breakfast and blab, blab, blab, you know. Then you run into Schueler, you know, who just would go into ecstasy, just talking about the sky, and he told these incredible long stories, you know, that were so beautiful. He was really something. And Chaet would come around, he's a great teacher, because he would just like spot it and say it. He had this like a whole set of cliches, you know, you could walk around and give a Chaet crit very easily, you know, simple and direct. But I was still painting landscapes; it was a real challenge. Sometimes I'd paint one and then I'd do an abstract of the same thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How'd that go over?

BRICE MARDEN: With me?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, with you and with the school?

BRICE MARDEN: The school liked it. I don't know, there were a lot of people there who were trying to get into Yale, you know, and I didn't care.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, it's a very competitive summer.

BRICE MARDEN: I was all set at this other place and so I figured Yale wouldn't even bother me. I still was very

skeptical about Yale from my Boston experience. I did about 24 paintings and one of my nicest nature paintings, a little square treetop painting, really beautiful, I did in about fifteen minutes. Oh boy, I thought this is really roaring along and it was great. You know, you have all this experience and then getting a much more confident idea about what you're about. When I got there I could draw, you know, I couldn't make drawings that looked good, but I could draw. I was never anything like an ace draftsman that's for damn sure.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What about the other students? Were there any that you found interesting or that you got to know or you kept up with?

BRICE MARDEN: Oh, well, Chuck Close was there. He was fantastic. And he was just this brassy dude from Seattle, made these big wide open West Coast abstract paintings. He was great. Then a guy named Bill Haukhausen was there. He was from Cooper and he knew the whole New York thing, so we all listened to him. And then a guy named Jim Olsen from Texas, who was a really nice guy and he was doing very slick art magazine paintings, abstract painting. I can't remember all the people from that summer. But the whole thing is that so many people in New York now had been to that summer school. A lot of people went there; Ron Davis was there. That's where I met David Novros. David was like my best friend and he was from USC. He was doing really good paintings then, very complicated. He was a real hard worker. Yeah, it was a good summer, a really good summer, and at the end of the summer they said, "Why don't you come to Yale?" There were also visiting critics there, you know, like Bischoff was very good; he just ripped the hell out of my stuff. I hated him but, you know, it lingered; it was very good.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How'd you like that idea of bringing all those people for a day or two like that?

BRICE MARDEN: I thought it was good because I just wanted to have, you know, any kind of exposure from any artist or anything. I mean like the thing I started out with, the thing about the girls in Greenwich Village, I mean it still was very much involved with like being an artist and like not really knowing what being an artist is about.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And any externals, that was . . . ?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, yeah, you know and grow beards and wear desert boots and all that kind of stuff. I figured if you looked like one that might be some kind of a start, you know, and it really made sense, and everybody said you were phony.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what kind of criticism did you get from him?

BRICE MARDEN: Who?

PAUL CUMMINGS: From Bischoff.

BRICE MARDEN: Well, I had been working on this big landscape, this big vista. You know, the California painters were a great alternative because painting was more abstract and less dry than say Boston painting, so we used to try and paint like them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Had you seen many of their paintings actually or was it magazines?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, you'd see some in the magazines, you'd see them in New York. You'd go in for a Diebenkorn show. But I'd only seen one show of Bischoff's. You know, it really wasn't that good, but I felt he was really good; I really liked him but I wasn't trying to paint like him or anything like that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What did he say that was so difficult for you?

BRICE MARDEN: I was struggling away with this landscape, carting the damn thing out every day, standing there looking at it and he looked at it and he said, "I look at this picture and get green sick." And then some other painting that I thought was very trivial was something that he really liked and carried on, but I don't remember what was that. I just remember that green sick thing. He was right, the painting was so damned green, I just couldn't handle green, you know, I mean looking at it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: This was painting outdoors, wasn't it?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, it was really tied to naturalistic color, but I couldn't make it, you know. Then, after my painting was still very black and white and then they said, "Why don't you come to Yale and we'll work it out." So I did go to Yale and I went right into the advanced painting so you had your own space to work in. I was lucky, they had this building and it had this big long alley that was like these stalls, but in the four corners you got a big studio. And I got one of those corners the first year there. I didn't know anybody, and I was very shy and was married with the baby and we were living in another part of town, you know, and I was up there just working all the time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But you taught too?

BRICE MARDEN: No, I wasn't teaching, I was just a student. But then the next year the friends that I knew at Norfolk came there, you know and . . .

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who was that?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, Chuck was there and Haukhausen was there. But at Yale it was really a lot of work. Eventually I just gave up painting the figure; I think I started one self portrait and then I just stopped.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what kind of things were you doing then?

BRICE MARDEN: It was abstract but I was more into the Abstract Expressionist thing. The first year I had for painting instructors Alex Katz and Jon Schueler and Schueler was great. He was beginning to wear a little thin by then, you know, because I'd had him that summer, but it was good. Alex was fantastic, just fantastic, and that's one thing I have to say, I've really been lucky at Yale because, you see, I got great teachers, really great teachers.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What did you like about Katz?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, you see, Yale was like -- there was always a romantic and a classicist, and Katz was the classicist. I never considered him a classicist, you know, his paintings were pretty loose. It was much more loose than anything that was done in Boston, you know, and Alex was, you know, he'd done great paintings, fantastic paintings. He really had that color thing. That first year was really good.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You weren't really involved with any kind of academic life or social life that first year?

BRICE MARDEN: Oh, yeah, you know, where we were living, we were living in this little two-room apartment. We had some friends, Gene McGussik and Harriet Shore, they were pretty close friends there. But we were really kind of separate because we had the baby, you know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That made a lot of difference.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, made a big difference. And I worked. Every morning at eight o'clock I would go to work at this frame shop and I'd line up the mats all day long, you know. I'd work until about eleven and then go to my first class, my art history class, then I had painting or graphics or something in the afternoon.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Pretty heavy schedule.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, and then I'd usually go back and work in the studio till about eleven at night and have a long dinner or something . . .

PAUL CUMMINGS: What did you do that next summer?

BRICE MARDEN: That was a good summer. We were going to stay in New Haven and I was going to work full-time at the frame shop, the Munson Gallery, it was very nice. They also ran a gallery in Princeton and Frank Stella and Darby Bannard worked for the same guy, that was a little bit earlier, like I felt connected . . .

PAUL CUMMINGS: Part of the big scene.

BRICE MARDEN: I was married to Pauline Baez who was Joan Baez's sister and I had met her in this coffee shop in Boston and we got married the summer of my junior year. And Nicholas was born and, you know, it was the whole thing, like young college students married with kids and there was a lot of them, it was a whole fad. Everybody seemed to get married for some reason, you know. So it was work, work, and work and really little social life. You'd go to parties and things like that but it wasn't that much.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But you think being married really affected your life?

BRICE MARDEN: Oh yeah, it made it very serious, very serious, very serious. So we were going to stay in New Haven and I'd rented an extra room in the apartment and I turned it into a studio and it was about four feet wide and eight feet long and I could open the door and back out into the hall. So my sister-in-law who was living in Carmel, California, called up and said, "I've got this big house so why don't you come and stay. We'd rather have you around." So we went out and it was just fantastic. They had two-car garage with a studio on top, so I got a lot of painting done there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That was what, '62?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, '62.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That was that summer?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how'd you like California?

BRICE MARDEN: Oh, well, it was just marvelous. I loved the way it looked; it was just great. I was really excited about it. It was beautiful country down in the Monterey Peninsula. I would paint in the morning and I'd come down for lunch and then go up and paint a little bit afterwards and then about two o'clock Nicholas would wake up and I'd take him for a walk, put him on my shoulders and we'd walk. And we'd go down to Point Lobos all the time, really beautiful, really beautiful. I could see like John Schueler landscapes, you know, and beautiful cypress groves, you know, that Monterey cypress. It was a beautiful summer and I got a lot of work done. But looking at the landscape really affected me and by that time I was into painting these rectangles, you know, and I was painting paintings that had basically the same setup as the ones I was doing in New Haven except the space was completely different, it was much more open, you know. I really didn't like that . . .

PAUL CUMMINGS: Like that California . . . ?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, it was like the whole California scene and I didn't like it and I was very upset that the environment could have that much of an effect on what I was doing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What didn't you like about it?

BRICE MARDEN: They just seemed too soft, too open, you know, too landscapey.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You mean kind of a traditional landscape?

BRICE MARDEN: No, I mean, you know, like it was like easy abstract painting. Then I went back to Yale and oh, Alex had said I was trying to paint like de Kooning, I was trying to paint like Kline and I was kind of getting it down. And Alex said, you know, you're trying to paint like these people that are much older than you. Why don't you identify with yourself, blab, blab, blab, you know, and it was great. I really started trying to get rid of the cliches, you know, the Tenth Street cliches. And I had a big painting I worked on. It was six by eight or something like that, and I really worked a lot out on it. By this time I was really interested in Kline and I was really getting to know what Kline was about, and then I got interested in Manet, you know. It was like this very natural kind of progression. Then my second year there I had Vicente as a teacher, Esteban Vicente and Manet. I was like getting into the Spanish and he was really helpful, really helpful. He's very aloof and he really didn't have much to do with the other students.

[END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE ONE]

PAUL CUMMINGS: This is Side Two.

BRICE MARDEN: Vicente would tell me these tall stories.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh really, what kind of stories?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, about meeting Picasso and, you know, just New York stories, and he talked about painting. He always said, "I can't teach you how to paint, you know."

PAUL CUMMINGS: What kind of things would he say besides about your own work?

BRICE MARDEN: He didn't say all that much. Reginald Pollock was also my teacher that year; he was really pushy. He was always trying to get you to do something, change a technique, do something like that. But Pollock was good, too, he used to tell beautiful stories. He used to have a studio next to Brancusi's and he had all these great Brancusi stories.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Those things always seem to be so important to students, you know, the stories about other artists, older artists.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, we were very curious about how they work, you know, what is it really like. And I don't get that with students now, you know. They'd rather hear about your personal life than what you're doing in the studio. But I was having a bad reaction with Pollock. But Pollock got me doing a thing, he said, "Do a drawing a day" and I would do a drawing a day. I'd work on these abstract drawings and I had noticed this tightening process that I'd started with Alex, that the things that kept recurring in paintings were rectangles and then I had made one very fast painting. It was just four rectangles, very loosely done, and that started it. I just got into

doing these things with four rectangles and

PAUL CUMMINGS: In what way four rectangles, in a horizontal, square, vertical . . . ?

BRICE MARDEN: There was a division somewhat near the center, a vertical division, and then there was a division exactly in the center going horizontally and each rectangle would be painted, you know, this kind of painting within each rectangle but it all became one painting. In other words, it wasn't a separate, I mean, like each area was painted basically a color and there was a lot of painting along the edges, tight painting on the edges, but it was very loose, kind of sloppy painting, full of drips and stuff like that, very painterly. I did a lot of paintings on paper at that time and Vicente would say, "You're working yourself into a corner; there are too many restrictions on yourself. And why don't you try and open it up." I'd give it a try, you know, I was always very willing to do whatever anybody said to do. I figured they always knew more than I did, so what the hell. I was really a very complacent student, you know, I mean hardworking. But Pollock was the one guy I really objected to. I just got to the point where I just said no, man, I'm not going to do any more of these things. Can't you see that I'm just doing this, you know, and he said O.K.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why would he kept saying do . . . ?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, he said you had to change your technique, you know, kept wanting me to paint very thin, and I didn't want to have anything to do with that, turpentine washes and that's the way he was painting. Vicente, you know, was just such a tough painter, that was great being with him. Also I was getting very interested about Zerbe at the time and he knew a lot about Zerbe and he was very helpful. Then also at this time people were coming through, like visiting critics. Guston came a couple of times; he was very good, very good.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You seemed to like that idea of the visiting critic, find it useful.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, yeah. You know like Guston was one of my heroes, you know, as far as someone who handled paint. He was really fantastic and there he was, you know, talking about your work, applying his thinking to what you're doing. It was really very exciting. Those are the ones who stand out. There were other guys who came around, like Raphael Soyer and Robert Gwafthmey and they didn't push you around at all. Also I had a Tworkov as a teacher for a while and he was very good; he'd come right in and hit it right on the button, you know. He didn't mince his words and he'd just say "This is a cliché on Kline, this is a cliché on de Kooning. What are you doing that for?"

PAUL CUMMINGS: How'd you like the fact that somebody could come in and just go zap what are you doing there?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, one of the things about Yale is they really turned out bright painters for some reason. I don't know why. I mean the teachers wouldn't let you have it easy and the time I was there I was in with these visiting critics and I was taking these drawings classes, but I was really so sick and tired of drawing the figure that I just quit. I just refused to go.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you were doing figurative drawing and painting that went both ways, back and forth?

BRICE MARDEN: No, by this time it was all abstract painting.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So this was what, '62?

BRICE MARDEN: No, that happened in '61; my first year there I stopped. I started one self portrait, I never finished it, still have it up at my parent's home. I just stopped and haven't had any interest in going back to it. I just keep thinking some day when I'm old and retire, I'll start painting landscapes to try and figure what Cezanne's really about.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When you were at Yale you came into New York a great deal?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, I came in a lot, saw a lot of shows, used to go hang out at the Cedar Bar. I used to do that in Boston, too, see Franz Kline.

PAUL CUMMINGS: All the heroes.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah. Then I moved to New York after Yale. I won a prize at Yale finally. Every time I submitted something to a show or tried for a prize, I never got it. So I decided I was going to give up doing that. And Yale was a big Fulbright school, and I didn't get any Fulbright there. Everybody else was getting all these Fulbrights. They do this jury system there where they have the faculty and then they invited a couple of people up to just be on the jury and you have to go in and they ask you questions and stuff like that at the end of the first semester of your last year there. They said I had painted myself into this corner, you know, what was I going to do about it? Vicente kept saying that and I kept saying, "I don't care, you know, there's plenty going on here in

this corner." Vincente said, "I don't like what you're doing, but I really like your attitude." He said, "You're a fanatic."

PAUL CUMMINGS: Which appealed to him.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, you know, if you're a fanatic, it's fine. He said all the best people have been fanatics. He was a very, very nice guy; I really loved him. We were never very close, I mean I used to see him and it was very formal because he's a very aloof, very oppressive, you know, he really does his number. It was also at Yale I first got to like Jasper Johns, that had happened at Yale. They had a loan show from the Albright-Knox that summer and fantastic paintings, just beautiful paintings. They had Matisse, Notre Dame, the triple one, and a yellow Christ Gauguin, you know, really lots of good things and a good Kline. And there was this Johns colored number painting, and Johns really in terms of the students was really considered not to be taken seriously.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really! Why?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, at least that's the way the magazines were coming out, I mean *Art News* was still the big magazine.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But they'd run one on the cover at one point.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, they did, but, you know, it wasn't . . . there was a story that Hess ran it to kill it, you know, He said "We'll put this on and that will kill this Pop Art shit."

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, I'm very interested because that was a great transitional period, the Abstract Expressionists were way up and Pop was coming up like a rocket after them in those days.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah. I saw a couple of Johns' painting shows, saw a couple of Rauschenberg shows; Bob's things didn't really impress me that much. I mean I was really hostile to it. Jasper's was like a painting and also I was involved with this Spaniard who was an incredible realist painter, and so the whole thing was like really working together and I thought it was a very neat progression, you know, by going from being interested in Kline because of no color and then starting to figure out color ideas from that how to control color in a black and white painting, then taking that into Manet where he uses this fast drawing thing, and my first real color experience was looking at a Manet in a Boston museum, the *Street Singer* or something, girl walking out of the door with cherries in her hand, and Manet was a very big thing for me. I applied for a Fulbright to go to France just to study the *Olympia*. I just wanted to paint it for a year, you know, Didn't get that Fulbright. I wanted to go to Spain to look at Zurbaran, to Barcelona, and that was Zurbaran's three-hundredth anniversary too and they had a big show that summer. I was really dying I missed it but that was the summer I spent in California so it wasn't that bad.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how was your work going then as you came into New York?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, I was still painting rectangles that had gotten down to just two, asymmetrically divided because Vicente said that if it's symmetrical it's decoration.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Marvelous.

BRICE MARDEN: And then I came to New York and . . . Oh, at this jury thing I was expecting to get a thing where you're out of residence for a year -- and I didn't think they were going to buy it because I had just gone right ahead with what they told me not to do in the first jury. I walked in and they didn't even ask me any questions. They said, "You've really done okay." And I said, "Gee, that's really nice." First time recognition, you know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

BRICE MARDEN: And teachers were there that I had never talked to because I never had classes with them, like Louis Finkelstein. I had a nice talk with him that night. Then I won the prize which was like \$500 bucks, it was Susan Morris Hilles prize and with that I probably wouldn't have had the guts to come to New York. I mean I had a list going from Boston, Puerto Rico, California, you know, all over the place and New York, But I knew it would come to New York. It was a very horrifying thought going there. So with that we came to New York and looked around for a loft, couldn't get one and moved into an apartment on Avenue C, lower East Side, railroad flat and painted there for nine months. In nine months I met one painter and that was Harry Jackson who did those cowboy paintings, and that was because I was hanging out with all these folk singers, and it was a great time. I met Bob Dylan through a good friend of Joey's and he was really fantastic, he was a fantastic guy, and like that was really something to hang out with him, he'd always been kind of a hero for me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That all seems to provide some kind of contrast to the painting, I mean the folk world.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, well, it was like that kind of caring, you know, kind of like slightly involved in peace

things, you know, going to sane rallies and things like that in Boston. Yeah, I was very liberal. Also, my father-in-law was a quaker and that was quite influential. He was a really good man and he was working in Paris at UNESCO as a physicist, Albert Baez. His specialty was really teaching physics so he worked in Paris setting up physics departments in universities in underdeveloped countries and so forth. They were absolutely horrified with where we were living; it was really, you know, Avenue C and it was really pretty bad and scary.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That was a pretty wild time though, you know, '63.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, I mean fights in the streets and stuff like that, and then the first exposure to this whole thing with junkies and things like that and they were all there then, you know. And I had some old friends from Boston who were involved in a lot of those scenes, you know, very heavy scenes like drug scenes. But they were friends that I'd known for a long time, and I really liked them, great people, and you know kind of notorious in their own little way and there was also the being on the road number, you know, that was really important, these people kind of involved a kind of Boston-Cambridge-Berkeley-New York circuit, and a lot of the folk people were on it, like Ron Nuitt was doing that all the time. I'd always keep running into him, you know, and Jim Kweskin I used to see all the time. We used to hang out in coffee shops together. Lovsky and Kweskin and Davey Gould are now part of his religious cult, something weird. A lot of it was to really become involved in an early underground culture, and you're an artist so you were kind of peripheral from that but you weren't involved in regular society and I really felt very very strongly about that, that you really are, you know, if you're an artist . . .

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what about the musicians? Did you get to know a lot of performers?

BRICE MARDEN: Oh yeah, like, you know, the best people around Cambridge were musicians like Eric Von Schmidt, the blues singer, and he was also an artist and a filmmaker. He's this incredible person and I used to kind of sit at his knees in Boston. He didn't allow people sitting at his knees but people kind of did. I had been in New York and then my father-in-law said come to Paris for a year, for free. I was working as a guard at the Jewish Museum at the time, you know, they had a big Jasper Johns show. I was a guard then, you know, I was guarding the room that all the early flags and the targets and things like that were in and that was very good for me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How'd you get that job?

BRICE MARDEN: I had been down looking for jobs, you know. It was very hard to think of what you can do so you go to the Museum of Modern Art first, and a lot of people worked as guards there, but they didn't have a job, and you go around to museums. I never even heard of the Jewish Museum when I went there, and they needed a guard so I had a part-time job as a guard. I worked from eleven till five and then I would go home and paint at night.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how'd you like that, spending all day with somebody else's work like that?

BRICE MARDEN: Oh I did. I was still into learning, you know. But I was doing things like I applied for this Fulbright, as I was trying to study Spanish on the job, nobody ever went to the Museum during the day during the week and it was good, it was really good. But then this chance came to go to Paris. I really didn't want to go to Paris but you just can't say no to a free year in Paris. So we went and it was just great, just fantastic, it really was.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What did you do there?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, I couldn't paint; I couldn't find a studio. We hardly had any money. We were living in New York, three of us, on 52 dollars a weekend we got over there and didn't have any money, couldn't rent a studio, but the in-laws had a big apartment and we had a big room to ourselves and there was a maid's room in the attic that came with the apartment so I used that as a studio and I worked on drawings. Before I left New York I had gotten to the point the paintings were like large areas of one color, maybe two strips down the outside, or just like two rectangles, you know, two grey rectangles, very kind of worked, put on with a brush and worked with a palette knife, lots of varnish, very oily kind of surface. Then when I was in Paris I was just really fascinated with the walls, they were replastering and cleaning up Paris at the time, started that clean-up thing, and I just sat and watched them plaster walls all day, do this fantastic accumulation of drips, you know, these old walls. Also I was very interested in European art, you know, like Polikoff was an artist that I liked a lot, and in sculpture Giacometti. I mean to me the whole European thing wasn't dead like everyone was saying; there was still a lot of interesting stuff there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What other artists interested you at that point while you were in Paris?

BRICE MARDEN: I can remember going and looking at a lot of Polikoff. He interested me; I liked his stuff.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was there that said something to you?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, I thought the color was good, but the paint . . . they were very simple paintings but they were complicated for the good ones. He did a lot of junk, you know, and you see a lot of the junk in Paris. The Paris gallery scene at the time isn't much different, you just went and they had a lot of little interesting things to look at. Lawrence Rubin had a gallery there and you could see Stellas and Nolands. I mean I saw my first Nolands and Louis's there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How'd you like seeing American painting in a Parisian context?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, I was also reading Art International and Clement Greenberg was doing a lot of writing for them. That was the time of post painterly abstraction and I was hungry to get news from New York or from the States and still going to the Louvre all the time. I got this pass to go to museums free and so I would work in the morning and then in the afternoon go to the museums and did a lot of walking in Paris, a lot of walking. I was there for about four months, then broke up with my wife and went back to New York, went to the same building and rented an apartment just the same as the other one I had. I forget where I started working, oh, I worked in a frame shop for a year.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where was that?

BRICE MARDEN: A guy named Victor Lober who ran a frame shop on Third Avenue called Framemakers.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh yeah, from the Thirties or Twenties.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, Thirties, and then, you know, that was good. I was a terrible framer, I was, really. The shop wasn't doing well; it was all this big struggle and stuff like that and it was a full-time job. I needed a lot of money because I had to send money, you know. Finally, he decided to let me go; I was breaking too much glass. Alex got me a job with a silkscreen printing place, Chiron Press; it was run by a guy named Steve Polietsky, head of graphics at Cornell. And there I started meeting these artists, and then friends of mine from Yale started moving to town, and I started meeting people and getting involved in a kind of scene thing. By that time there weren't so many musicians around there to hang out with and that just got awkward. About that time Max's opened and Max's was like a very important thing for me. I was there kind of meeting people, your peer group, and I met a lot of California artists through David Novros.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, Max's became the new Cedar Bar.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah. I can remember hanging out in the Cedar but that just wasn't happening, you know, and so I was still sort of switching back and forth between the West Village type thing, you know, Kettle of Fish and the musicians and things like that. But Max's really kind of did it. I met Carl there, Carl Andre. I'd met him before and had seen his show that he had at Tibor with the big . . .

PAUL CUMMINGS: Styrofoam?

BRICE MARDEN: . . . the big styrofoam pieces. I really thought that was fantastic. We used to sit and get drunk, and Carl would tell all these stories, you know, he was just great. He was just fantastic.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And he loves to talk.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what kind of work were you doing; you were at Chiron Press part time?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, that was to print silkscreens. You'd work with different artists and we were working with good artists, you know, Youngerman and I did the original Robert Indiana Love poster. That took days and days and days.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you like working with these different people in that type of circumstance?

BRICE MARDEN: It was very good. I was in New York and I was really anxious to meet people and stuff like that. But it was still very difficult. I would go to openings; there was always Tuesday night openings, and I'd go to all these openings and I'd be the only person who would look at anything. Everybody else knew everybody, and I didn't know anybody. But then you start meeting people and I met a lot of people through Steve Poleskie and we were both painting along. That whole building was full of artists; it was 76 Jefferson Street, lots of really good people.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who else was there in those days?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, when I was there, Steve Poleskie, and Janet Fish was upstairs. I can't remember the guy who lived on the first floor. He used to work for Castelli but then he just kind of dropped out. Neil Williams had

been in the building, and Emilio Cruz, Eric Dolphay had once lived there. Then after that, you know, like Gary Stephan and Neil Jenney and people like that were living. It was a good building; it was a Jack Klein building; it was Jack Klein's first building.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, the great Jack Klein.

BRICE MARDEN: And Jack was very good to me, cut my rent for me and stuff like that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, somewhere in the mid-Sixties you got involved with Bykert, right?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, that was early Sixties. I was finally getting to the point where I was . . . I'd moved into this loft, got my first big studio and started working on a whole bunch of little drawings and I used to draw over proofs from the silk screening place and I even got to the point where I was running special proofs just for myself, where it would be a rectangle, just one color, and I would draw over it and I did a whole series of drawings of proofs we did for a John Goodyear print, which had vinyl dye cut cut out and then white thing printed on black vinyl, and if you moved back and forth you get the . . . and I printed up a whole bunch of those on kraft paper, did a bunch of drawings on that, it was like the first really kind of series.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In other words, you'd use that as a springboard, or incorporate . . . ?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, it was kind of like obliterating some kind of surface and in remaking a surface and they were involved a lot with, you know, this like tedium. At this point I had a very strong Zerbe influence, you know, he painted that way. He was so involved that it became really something else and by this time I was just making one color paintings. I'd come back from Paris, started working on a group of paintings. I did a lot of good drawings in Paris. I found out I couldn't hold a big surface with a charcoal color, so I started breaking it down. So when I came back and I just ended up one night making this painting that was one color. I was trying to do grid paintings but couldn't do it. I just painted the whole thing out one night and it looked good, so I just left it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What do you mean grid paintings, in terms of what?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, they were like John's number paintings except there weren't any numbers.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So there were vertical lines and horizontal lines?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah. You know, equally divided. I mean I was doing drawings like that and then I'd kind of work in each area but try to make it hold total, you know, be moving around back and forth, so it would be like in one plane. And also at that time, meeting Carl, Carl worked in grids and stuff like that. Then Klaus [Kertess] came along. Klaus was the first dealer really that ever looked at my work. Dan Graham ran a gallery for a year, the John Daniel's Gallery or something. He'd come and looked at these and he was kind of interested, but they were still in a transitional state. At that time dealers were looking for a body of work, you know, a constant body of work, something that looked like a show, and I hadn't had it. So I didn't have dealers down; I didn't get into that whole hustle. And friends I knew were beginning to get involved with galleries. A lot of people were with Park Place and I was in a Park Place invitational show. Then I met Klaus through Carlos Villiar who introduced me to him and Klaus was going around looking through people for starting his gallery. I'd met him at an opening at the Jewish Museum and he'd said he'd like to come and look at the work and I said fine. Then he called a couple of weeks later, at the same time he was looking at David's work and Bob Duran and Dick Van Buren and stuff like that. He came by and I pulled it out and showed him some drawings and I put out the paintings. He said, "I'm opening this gallery and I'd like it if you'd have a show." I didn't know what to make of it at all, you know, I mean he was totally unknown. Nobody knew who he was. He didn't have a space and he couldn't say what artists he had. And he was just going from studio to studio and while he was out on the street going from one studio to another everybody was on the phone saying what the hell is going on. I had dinner with him a couple of times and asked him a lot of questions. He just seemed to be very straight and he couldn't say where his space was. He said what spaces he was trying to get and one of the spaces was the Green gallery, you know, the old Green Gallery's space, which is where he opened up. And he had backing but he didn't have that much money. So then there we were, all in this gallery. David didn't go with us, he went with Dwan because Virginia had just opened up that year and she had a lot of bread, you know. And then I had a show.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how was that? That was '66 and the first show?

BRICE MARDEN: I really can't remember how it went. I remember the summer before going to California, drove to California with Novros and Dunan and Clark Murray and Jan Sarkisner and we all drove out. It was a beautiful drive, fantastic drive across the country; it was just incredible. Loved it, loved Nebraska and all the way across I was making notes on just shapes to paint on and I was into making ugly shapes, you know, painting. You know, they're kind of like bat rectangles, near squares but, you know, and inelegant shape, because with just one color and so you didn't want the shape to be making it look nice, or something, so I was figuring out shapes and I came back and I had a lot of canvases, of Milaer and Drevick, used to live upstairs. They gave me all these

canvases when they moved out, so I was painting on a lot of those stretchers and painted over a bunch of his paintings, he said I could. I had his permission and Klaus has one of those paintings and during the summer this one stripe keeps coming through, from Milaer's painting, yeah, oh boy. But I remember painting the show and like there was certain things I wanted to do and I'd never been able to do up until that time and I'd do a big painting and I had this studio and I was really rocking along in the studio, had a good set of drawings, I forget how many drawings I showed. It was maybe five drawings, three black ones and two white ones and these were drawings I had done over silkscreens all the same size, done over Trova, Ernest Trova.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh yes, you work over a lot of other people's work, don't you?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, they use this great paper, you know, these artists would come in and we'd get these paper samples. I did a great series of drawings over Helen Frankenthaler's paper. She never used it, so this paper was left over and I was into paper and so Steve would just say, oh, well, take it. But well, you have a show and you say, wow, this is great, you know, something's going to happen; you really get excited. I mean I have really detailed notes leading up to the show. I was keeping a very accurate kind of diary.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have you done that for a long time?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, I was doing that then, you know, sort of living by myself and had a lot of time to do that kind of stuff. But I still keep notebooks. They're in a much different form and not so much written, mostly just photographs and magazines and notations I make for myself, color notation.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, was the show successful from your point of view? I mean, once you saw everything and the installation and the way it was handled?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, I mean things were going pretty well. A lot of people liked the show. I had a great opening, fantastic opening, just invited everybody I knew. I have a list of absolutely everybody I invited to that opening and it was just great, and a party afterwards, and it was a really exciting time. You'd go to Max's after the thing and Mickey would give you a free bottle of champagne and you'd commandeer all these tables and just sit there and drink and drink and drink and drink and you'd get to meet all these people. It was a lot of fun, really a lot of fun, you know, talking and I met all these painters and stuff like that at the time. So it kind of fit into that, but it didn't fit into it, it was part of it. But paintings were very grey paintings. Then I started getting more involved with color and I wanted to push the color thing. So the next show I had all the paintings were the same shape. I would try to get the color that was specific for that shape, what I felt was right for that shape and so in the first one I had two paintings of the same shape. They were the most difficult paintings to make in the show because I kept ending up with the same color.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you start with something that was obviously different and end up with . . . ?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, I kept ending up with the same thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Were these the oil and wax combinations?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, they were oil and wax. I mean when I started getting involved with the color, the color starting to get subtle, and I had to get rid of all the shiny stuff and I asked around how do you make a matte painting. I tried a couple of layers and Harvey Kleighton said try wax and he gave me a couple of formulas and I tried it and it just worked right from the beginning. So I've been using it ever since.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You like it?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How have you found Klaus as a dealer? Has he done a lot of work for you, you know, placing paintings in collections and exhibitions?

BRICE MARDEN: Klaus is very good; we're always trying to figure out what the hell he's doing, you know. I mean really there's never very much high-powered kind of hype thing and you always wanted that, you know, because we wanted to sell and Klaus has been very slow. I mean a few things sold out of the first show. I think I sold some of the drawings; Jack Kline bought one of my drawings. He came to the opening and bought a drawing. Jack is very beautiful. He bought paintings from me, took paintings for rent and things like that and he would buy things so I could go to California. And before I had the show there, Klaus brought a friend who bought a painting. That financed that trip to California. And you could get little bits of money from Klaus. You could go and get a hundred dollars to build stretchers and get some canvas. But I was very cautious about that. Some people were going in and trying to get a lot of money from him and I just didn't want somebody to get my paintings because they made me a loan. I was very tight about it. So perhaps I'd get in some shows but not like big shows and stuff like that. But there was an article about the gallery in *New York Magazine* which Rosalind Constable

did. It was very helpful to get your picture in the magazine; you begin to feel that something's happening. And, you know, all this time I was working, had a job, and when I had the show I quit to finish painting the show. Klaus got me some money so I had a month's free time to finish painting it. So I did that and had the show. I really enjoyed not working. When the show was ending in November or something and I got to January without working, I finally had to get a job. I talked to Dorothea Rockburne at a Ron Bladen opening and I said, "Do you know any jobs?" And she said, "Why don't you come by where I work tomorrow; we need somebody to do some stuff." She was working with Rauschenberg and I went by and he had moved into his house and he had all this junk in there and it was just lying around. It had to be put into some order and so I did that. It was actually supposed to be like a part-time job but he said, "I'm going to be working on these paintings in a couple of months and I'll need somebody to help me with them and so there's plenty for you to do around here." So I worked with Bob starting out as a kind of janitor and then an assistant.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what kind of things did you do with him, or for him?

BRICE MARDEN: I used to go around and clean the house up. It was a big house and he was still trying to figure out how to use it, where to put, what to put where and so on.

PAUL CUMMINGS: This is where?

BRICE MARDEN: This was one on Lafayette Street. He did those revolver paintings and I'd order the plexiglass and get all the stuff and clean it, and I figured my job when he was in the studio was to have everything there for him so that all he had to do was to make art and not be hassled with anything else. I would clean the screens out when he was working and stuff like that. You know, it was good, it was

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you like the experience of working with him?

BRICE MARDEN: I liked it because I've never really been influenced by him and I thought his work was okay but it wasn't

PAUL CUMMINGS: It wasn't where you were going.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, and I found out later, Bob told me this, I don't know if it's true or not, but at that time Jasper was looking for an assistant and he was thinking of offering me a job. I saw Jasper once and he said, "What are you doing now?" And I said, "I'm working for Bob," and he said, "Oh." Then I found out later that he was going to offer me the same kind of job, but I think it would have been much more difficult working with Jasper because I was much closer to his painting, you know. But with Bob it was very easy to do; I was just painting along and having a great time. We'd sit around and talk about painting and I didn't disagree with him on that many points, you know. It's just the pictures are much different; we're involved with different issues. It was really good; he was very generous and he was very helpful and it was a good experience working there, really good. Actually it got to the point where I was just taking care of his collection; he decided he had to put that in order, keep track of everything and I was doing that and he was buying more things. And he was in a phase, you know, of kind of collecting. But this was about the time he got the house in Florida and then he really became involved with that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

BRICE MARDEN: And then eventually he said, "You really shouldn't be working for me anymore." And he was right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So what have you been doing, teaching?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, after a while the painting thing started going and the drawing thing started selling; people wanted the drawings. They would come in and they'd be interested in the paintings but they'd always cop out and buy a drawing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why?

BRICE MARDEN: Couldn't just, couldn't quite . . . it was still risky. I mean the prices weren't high or anything; I was kept trying to keep them down or maybe that's what was scaring them off. I don't know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But he was selling things for you?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, but we weren't getting a lot of money. It got to the point where selling something wasn't an unusual occurrence but you weren't relying on the money. Then somewhere along the line, Lambert got interested in Paris and I had a show with him and that was nice. Lots of people were giving shows in Europe. Carl was showing there and

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you've shown a lot there in the last two or three years -- different dealers, different shows and things. Did you like being shown in Europe?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, I really liked hanging a show in Paris. I mean I'm really sentimental about the arts; I really loved it. I had a nice time when I was there and I learned a lot and went through a lot of changes and so I was anxious to have this show with Lambert. It was good; he was showing good people and it was like my first real kind of big money deal or whatever. And that went very well. Then Fischer was interested but he was hesitant, you know. What he would do was he'd ask the people he had for shows. If they start out with Sol [Lewitt], Sol recommends Carl and some other people and, you know, they would recommend me. I've always been very lucky with the dealers because like Klaus is incredibly sympathetic. The complaint was that he wasn't hustling enough but he was really very good for an artist, you know, and he really respected the artist, that's what came first. He really dealt with people that he respected and it was good with him, and Lambert really loved the work too. If someone isn't really involved with the work it's just kind of a drag. And most of the dealers are that way. I mean they just really don't care; it's like a product. So I've been very lucky that way, involved with people that care about it. Europe is, well, I don't know, there are lots of shows in Europe and you get to go there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have you been back there since?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, I've been there just about every summer for about three years. And you line it up so that you get a show just before the summer and stay over there for the summer, save the money.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where do you go when you go?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, when I did the show for Yvon, I went and stayed in Paris for a while. I made two paintings there. It was rather traumatic; I had to find a studio. I didn't like that change so I've always painted everything here and sent it over. We've been to Greece for two summers.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When did you get married again?

BRICE MARDEN: Oh, oh, gee, about four years ago, '68, '69, something like that. It was when I was working for Bob. I met Helen at Max's. My whole life was really there, Max's Kansas City was very important, like it's a really very important cultural spot.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What's her name, your wife?

BRICE MARDEN: Helen Harrington, and she's really something, you know, fantastic woman. She's very strong, very smart, very bright and she also is very receptive to art. That's really how we got to know each other, you know. She knew the painting.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Is she an artist or not?

BRICE MARDEN: No, she isn't. She studied it but she hasn't been doing it. Maybe she'll do it. I'm sure whatever she did she'd be good; she's very astute.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You were in a Documenta how this summer in Germany. Were you there for it; did you go and see it?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, I went to the opening.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How'd you like that?

BRICE MARDEN: I thought it was great.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I've heard so many conflicting reports about that exhibition. I'm curious what you have to say about it.

BRICE MARDEN: Well, the one thing was the town. It's an awful town, just a god-awful town. The people just don't know how to handle it. I mean you get a sudden influx of strange people and it's like there is this little quiet town where everybody's leaving, there's hardly anyone there between the ages of 13 years and forty and then all of a sudden it's full of these artists, you know. They really look like they're ready for the loony bin. It was like that beautiful movie the King of Hearts where they let everybody out of the insane asylum, you know. That's what it was like in Vassel and it was also this incredible hustle. I mean I loved the business part, you know. I mean it's like a hobby, you know

PAUL CUMMINGS: In what way?

BRICE MARDEN: In just watching it. You know, who's going with who and all that kind of power stuff shit and all

that crap, you know. And it was all so obvious and blatant. The Documenta was hilarious. It was a big show and there was a lot of great stuff in it. It was a good show.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How much of it did you see?

BRICE MARDEN: I went through practically the whole thing. I wasn't there all that long and it was really awful there. I had to get out as fast as possible.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And that immense catalogue they do.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, yeah, yeah and it's nice having the whole thing much more international. Last year I had all these paintings ready to send to Fischer and some people wanted to see them so they came by and they'd say, "Oh, don't let that one leave." I said, "What do you want?" You know, I mean as far as I'm concerned it's all like the same thing. Another guy who's been very helpful is Gordon Locksley in Minneapolis. He came very very early. I met him while working at Rauschenberg's the first time and then when he came back he was very interested in the work.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you meet a lot of people through the Rauschenberg association?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, I met lots of people in and out. You know Bob would make a point, you know, like Helen and I would go along with him to places and we really had a good time. He knows how to have a good time. I mean he really had his troubles, you know, and it really makes him nervous, that's why we'd go with him to a lot of these things, because, you know, he really gets it aesthetically. You know, he has never had the respect of other artists, never had it. He's gotten much more respect from collectors, especially European ones, and accompanying connoisseurs, and he's really had a hell of a lot. But he's done fantastic work, you know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you see a difference between the European and the American collector?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, the European collector is basically richer, you know. I mean and it's less involved with the social climbing thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How about the European-American dealers? Well, you've only had one American Dealer?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, Gordon Locksley was a dealer of mine, you know. I mean like Gordon's really responsible for a lot, and Gordon's a tougher businessman, sort of like Gordon and Klaus can consult on things, which is very good, I mean it's finally at the point where they're working together. There were some problems. I mean Klaus was the main man, and I really trust him, and I believe him and we're close friends and I really respect him and I really respect what he's doing. But I am not quite sure what he's doing. But when it gets right down to it, like who's the best dealer, of all the dealers to be with who can you be with and for all the reasons, it just seems to me that Klaus is the best. You get to a point where things start happening, like the past year or so I started selling and there's a demand for this stuff which creates a lot of pressure. You say like what am I doing, am I selling out, blab, blab, blab, you know, but they're collectors, they really just don't want their painting. They buy a painting trying to buy a little part of you and they come around to have a look at the painting and you go and see it and it's hung upside down or something. But there are some collectors that are private and they're much more aligned group of people, they're really very good. They're good people and they're collecting for a very good reason. Sure, they might be speculating and doing all that kind of stuff but there's a lot of money going around, there's a lot of artists able to make more art. It still seems that it's the same kind of proportion; there's a lot of bad art, things really look bad, there are tough times.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, one thing that interests me with what you just said. As the market for your work develops, what about pressure? Do you feel that there are nine people waiting for paintings and you don't have any? Does that bother you; does it inhibit your work or not?

BRICE MARDEN: No, there's always one special kind of group of paintings, those were groups of paintings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you work in groups or sequences?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, I work in groups. I'll work on five paintings at the same time and they might take two, three months, and then I have other things that I'm always working on. There's always other stuff around the studio. But the main show, the one I always worry about the most, is the New York Show because that is the peer group. That's where you're really getting the most feedback and stuff like that. But that's not to say that you slough off on the other. Like the show I did for Kaunat, I had a series that I tried to do before, it didn't work out right. I changed the idea of the series around. Then I did it again and I did it for the show there; it was like really working something out. Also, there's been a big change in attitude since this whole thing's happened. I'm making enough off the paintings to live on it and I don't have to teach. But I like teaching; I'm getting a little tired of it now as a weekly thing. You can repeat yourself too much and end up teaching the same course for

three years.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where are you teaching?

BRICE MARDEN: School of Visual Arts. I used to be very lazy; I still am lazy, I didn't like to work too much. I had to force myself to do it and in the past few years things have really changed. Like I would make a commitment; I'd commit myself to three one-man shows and that's a lot of work. You know, for me doing fifteen paintings a year is like a lot of paintings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you destroy a lot of work?

BRICE MARDEN: No, but there's a lot of stuff that I'll keep for a long time and just keep working on.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do the drawings relate specifically to paintings or are they just kind of working ideas and the paintings are separate?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, the drawings have always come along; I've always believed in drawing as a separate pure art form. I never made drawings really as studies. They were drawings as drawings. I mean I have lots of things I do as studies, like notes and notations. More recently I've been working on a lot of similar ideas, you know, using the drawings more as a kind of study for a painting. I did a group this summer which is a series which uses every one of the . . . like the way I'll divide the canvas, you know, two verticals, two horizontals, three verticals, three horizontals, one kind of painting, and one color painting. So I just did a set of drawings that did that, you know, were studies for the paintings, same proportions. That's what I did this summer. Then I also did some other drawings that were studies for new paintings that I'll probably do in about a year.

[END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE TWO]

[SIDE THREE]

PAUL CUMMINGS: This is Side Three. Well, let's just pursue the use of the drawings for a second. You've always done a lot of drawing, and you mention it over and over and over again, and I've seen them in the gallery. Do you make a great number of them?

BRICE MARDEN: No, it's not all that many. I really haven't kept that much track of them. We're trying to get a show together which would give us a better idea. You just lose track of where some of these things are; they move around a lot. I like drawings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think some of that springs from having drawn so much at school?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, it has to do from school. Pollock was very important on that, getting me to do a drawing a day, you know. You work out a lot of ideas in drawings. Then for a while I was worried that the drawings were beginning to be just too repetitive. But then I started seeing some older drawings. That's one of the problems, you know, that the drawings are sold. So I don't have many; I don't have much to refer back to. But then you go around and you see someplace and say, ah ha, they really are different, you know, like they've gotten much more physical in the past few years.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What do you mean physical?

BRICE MARDEN: The surface is more physical. They're taking on a kind of object quality. And so as a result of that I started working on another group of drawings that are much more linear and those I really like. I work on them in notebooks. I've done about two notebooks of them so far, and I've tried it on some bigger things. I did some lithos last year, that was somewhat involved in it, not really but it was a kind of combination of the two.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How'd you like that? Had you made them before?

BRICE MARDEN: No, I did one litho and it turned out looking like a silkscreen. It was just like a bad printing job. I had done etching in college; I studied with Peterdi, you know, and I always liked it. It was very physical and in the etching I worked out a lot of painting ideas while I was at Yale.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How'd you like him as a teacher?

BRICE MARDEN: He was okay. He was a good graphics man, you know. He was definitely a style and that kind of luminosity thing and I couldn't do the style too well. I just worked out my own problems simply and so I didn't talk with him all that much. But I got a chance this year to do some more etchings and I really enjoyed that. I did those out in California.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where at?

BRICE MARDEN: Crownpoint Press. Esther Brown. That was good. I liked that. Then I did the lithos and it's so unphysical -- I mean that's just drawing, you know. It's very sensual. But I loved drawing on the stone. It was good, I was working with two very good printers.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where was that?

BRICE MARDEN: Rauschenberg has a place in Florida called Untitled Press. It's a kind of thing that he set up and it's really nice. Twombly made some lithos down there, I made some, I think Betty Parson is going down there. It's really nice, and Bob just invites down who he wants and then they kind of publish it or something. I'm not quite sure what the deal is. Klaus gets half of everything I've done. It's a very good deal.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you like working down there?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, we went down . . . it was right after I had the show in New York, and I went down there to do one litho and I wasn't too enthusiastic about it. I was taking it more as a vacation and I went down there and it was cold and the sun wasn't out and I ended up doing a lot of work. I went down to make one and I think I made six prints and it took me a long time to come around to the prints. I really . . . I just felt hung up. That was very torturous, you know, it's another one of those sell-out things and finally they came out and I said, "Fine." They were okay. I just saw them again a couple of days ago and they looked good, I really liked them. Some interesting things going on in there, really interesting.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Does your work change for you very much between the time you do it and then, if you see it a year or two later, do you have a much different eye toward it?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, you kind of build up, you have recollections about things and you see it, you know, like the color might be a little bit different than you remember. Sometimes it's surprising; sometimes it's very surprising.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Speaking about drawings and seeing things again, I'd kind of like to talk about color, because your colors change, don't they, in a particular way? Do they just change in a natural growth or do you have a method that you use?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, you get involved in different things. First I was really involved in this grey thing when I was doing the monochromatic painting and you try to get the most complicated color experience. So I was working to get a color that would be like grey and yet could also be considered green or red, working in a very close area. Then I started pushing the color more and then starting like the two panel painting. I started using two colors and then in the three panel paintings. I mean you start using two colors, you know, it just seems there is an infinite number of things you can do. Then you use three, it gets more complicated. Last year I did a lot of playing around with it. Most of the color comes from some sort of visual experience.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Something you've seen.

BRICE MARDEN: Just like something you see in nature, some sort of color feeling. I did a group of paintings last year called the Hydra paintings from being at Hydra, you know, looking at the color there and very carefully making notes about it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Are they word notes or drawing notes or color . . . ?

BRICE MARDEN: I suppose I've thrown them out. Blue olive green with slight ochre tinge, black green between, black green brown trunks, tree trunks.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It really comes from observation of something.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, like one travels around and looks at things.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you make photographs ever?

BRICE MARDEN: No, no, I'll make notes and little drawings and things like that but not photographs. Just collect the postcards.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know, one thing you had mentioned before; do you feel a part of any of those groups that the critics have organized over the years?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, yeah, like I feel very close to Carl, you know. He's one of the best sculptors around. I consider him a friend, learned a lot from him, love his work and in lots of ways at points we've been dealing with very similar issues, you know, like the color in his pieces. It goes all the way through; it's the same color all the way through and I was always trying to get that feeling to the color in my paintings, that it was straight through.

It wasn't layers or something. I was very close with David Novros as a painter. We've always been very close and our paintings in a lot of ways are very similar. His are mathematically more complicated in terms of progression and stuff like that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you use ideas like that?

BRICE MARDEN: No, not at all. Mine are really very intuitive. I mean like I said most of the paintings will start with a natural experience, but some of them don't at all, like there are these two Hydra paintings. One dealt with like a landscape color of rock; it's kind of this strange grey and strange green and very bleached out, bleak sun, bleak light thing. Then another painting that I did in the same group was just a very dark and light painting which didn't have anything to do with anything visual. I was dealing with this kind of reaction to the place like an intuitive, or spiritual reaction. So it's not always based on natural but more and more it is. You get a color memory in mind and then you try to make that color and then you start working from that color.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it's really very different from the Albers classes, the Albers ideas.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, I mean there's no rules. Then things start repeating, you know, like you get certain value jumps that start repeating themselves. So you work away from them. Perhaps it's maybe really interesting and you work into it a little bit more. I've been wanting to do more one-color paintings. I haven't been doing one-color paintings lately, or I've been working on them but just keeping them in the studio. I've wanted to do some, but somehow I've been compelled into doing this other thing. But there's lots of things I still want to do. It's just gotten to the point where there's lots of things to do so you work more and it's much more fun to work.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So you weren't being painted into a corner at all.

BRICE MARDEN: No, not at all, it's really very wide open.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what do you feel about the criticism that's been written about your work? Do you think it's perceptive?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, last year was the first time there's really been a lot written about it. Not really a lot but I've been mentioned in articles and stuff like that. Some people are just difficult to write about, you know, like there was never much written about Poon's dot paintings. They were really good paintings but the people couldn't grasp and hold on to them, really get soaring off about it. It's the same with mine. I mean you know they don't reproduce well and there isn't too much you can say about them. The one that I really liked was John Ashbury did an article for *Art News* and he just kind of wrote his reactions to it and stuff like that, and he wasn't really acting very formalistic or analytical. I mean there are things to say, you know. I've always felt involved with the grid for a long time; I've done a lot of grid drawings but no grid paintings. The one grid painting that I kept in storage from years ago. I've always meant to do some more, try it, but there are only so many things you can do.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

BM: And but . . . let's see, my grid. Carl's grid comes from the module, my grid comes from the outside shape. I start with the outside shape and then the grid comes as a result of that shape, breaking down that shape.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How do you break it down?

BRICE MARDEN: Dividing in half, and dividing in half and dividing it in half. And where other people's things grow out, mine grow in.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How do you pick the sizes that you work in? I mean are they just standard sizes?

BRICE MARDEN: No, you veer toward the one size, you know. My things are basically about the size of a person. I used to do a lot of small paintings. I've never really done many big paintings. I'd like to do more big paintings but the studio really isn't big enough so I'm going to start working on this group. They are all 6 x 9 which is fairly big, but they are all made of panels. Some of them get a bit bigger, maybe nine feet long and three feet wide and three feet high.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What kind of panels?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, all my paintings are more than one color, like there's only one color on each panel and it started out because it was easy to paint them that way -- with a physical separation. You didn't have all that edge problem. Then I started getting involved with how the edges meet. So I just keep on using it. There are certain things I really don't know why I started using, like in the beginning everybody used to ask me about the drips at the bottom, you know, and I never had any answer for the drips at the bottom. So some critic would write something, you know, and then some other person would pick up on it and use it and, you know, there are a

million things you could think of. That could have been a deliberate rip-off of Jasper Johns but it just wasn't. I kept trying to remember where I'd noticed that in his paintings and the first one of the first talks I had with him was about how did you start doing those drips on the bottom, and he had his reasons which weren't the same as mine.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's interesting in all of this that you've never mentioned somebody like Barnett Newman. Does his work say anything to you?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, I think Newman is a fantastic painter. That show last year was just beautiful. But I don't really think I was working with those ideas. And the same with Reinhardt. That's another favorite with writers. They try to hook me up with Reinhardt. Reinhardt I've always found very uninteresting. I mean he made a lot of really mediocre paintings and some good ones, but I just don't find them that interesting. Johns was interesting, and Stella was like very interesting, and I think Noland is a fantastic painter. Warhol is very interesting but I can't think of any immediate contemporary influence. I mean I got to painting the way I painted more through old master influence than through contemporary influence.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How do you mean by "old master influence" because it certainly isn't traditional image?

BRICE MARDEN: No, but it's like attitude. I mean it isn't like the formal intellectual kind of attitude. I just never had that attitude towards painting like a Stella attitude. It really left me cold. But I like the paintings, you know, and now they look warm and sensuous, very painterly. But at the time they didn't.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The earlier Stellas.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, the black ones and the purple ones and the silver ones. So many people are really influenced by their contemporaries and there's nothing wrong with it but it just didn't have a firm enough basis for me, you know. I may not object to anyone saying he's not interested in any painting that happened before Frank Stella. Okay, that's an attitude. But I don't see the whole thing in little spurts and jumps, you know. It's like one big thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what about some of the museum exhibitions that you've been in? Are they important to you? Like that Structure Color show at the Whitney or the Modular Painting at Albright Knox, or White on White that they did in Chicago?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Or are they just sort of nice things to happen?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, when you're not there it doesn't make much difference, you know. To go see it, it's much different.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you saw the one at the Whitney show I presume.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, I saw the Whitney show but it wasn't a good show. It was a bad show. It was really bad scholarship. Sure it's nice to be in the show. I like being in the Whitney Annual, although I've only been in it once. But that's like to see how you stand up because it really gets hard to judge your own painting in a certain sense. You have to get it out

PAUL CUMMINGS: See if you make contacts.

BRICE MARDEN: You come right down to it, you want to be in Museum shows. You know, the more color reproductions the higher your prices can go or some jazz like that. I'm not as involved with that as I used to be. I wanted to be in as many shows as possible because you make the damn stuff and people are supposed to look at it and you expose it

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Well, do you look at art as a method of communication or not?

BRICE MARDEN: Not as a method of communication. I think it's one of the last things left in our society where you have to be perfectly honest and it's hard work. I don't care whether it's appreciated or on what terms it's appreciated, the fact that it's there and some people can appreciate it. That is really good. But I don't think that anybody is going to come and stand in front of my painting and have some revelation, you know. It's a statement, it's a fact and it has to be taken that way. You look at it and it's a contemplative object and I always really just have to mean something, do something, be something. So that's the standard that I have or would use and some are better and some aren't. But I don't expect anybody to really have any one-to-one kind of communicative experience. Some people respond to it, some people it leaves cold. I really like it which is somewhat embarrassing because, you know, you're not really supposed to like your own work or something. But I really like it, you know, like I just really enjoy looking at it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you take things out and look at older work every now and then?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, every once in a while. Not often on my own. I want to go down to the storehouse -- you know, Klaus' storage space. I've never been there and I've got a lot of old things in there and I just want to go look through and see what's there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Because sometimes people want to kind of look at what they did a couple of years ago to see what it looks like.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah. I had a show at Swarthmore College when I first moved to New York. It was made up of a lot of work I did at Yale and I had a few new pieces that I had done in New York. And I just got a letter that they want to do a show with one of the paintings from the show and the new painting. I thought that would be a nice idea. It's nice to see the old things. I mean like going to Documenta. There were two paintings in there, one I hadn't seen for three years and one for a year and it was nice to see them, you know, see what kind of changes have been going on.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What about the teaching at the School of Visual Arts? How did that start and what do you teach there?

BRICE MARDEN: I teach second year painting. It's a workshop. I teach in a very loose way, let them do whatever they want to do. Basically I'm trying to get them somewhat excited about art.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How do you find those students because I get such contrasting comments about them.

BRICE MARDEN: Well, you know, some of them are good and some of them are terrible and there's a lot in the middle. Some of them are really lively and bright. But they change every year, like one year they are very drug-oriented and the next year they are very serious and the next year they are into something else.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The fashions influence them.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, that and it gets more into the Nixon years. The students approach things in a way that they are being approached. When I was in school, it was Eisenhower, very pragmatic, practical. But two years ago or three years ago they weren't at all flower children.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Spaced out.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, and they know things and all that kind of stuff. I like teaching there because they don't bother you; it's not political. You get into academic situations and it's so political; they really try and pull it out of you and it's disgusting. When we got into Yale, Yale was like a great meeting ground for teachers. They got out and they went immediately out to teach. I didn't want to do that because my ideas just weren't developed. At Visual Arts, they have a very good hiring policy. They've had young coming painters and an amazing faculty if you just look at the names. In terms of what is being done in art in the world, you know, they've got six people doing whatever it is.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, that's why I was curious as to the kind of students that might be attracted to that.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah. But the thing is it's a convenient place to teach. They don't pay much but you don't have to travel to it and it's not demanding. I think that's why a lot of people work there. They get away with murder, but then the teachers do. I don't think they teach that hard. I don't really teach that hard. There's no reason really why you should. I mean you have a certain obligation. It's a contract week after week after week, you know. You can go for weeks without talking to somebody. They don't need it. They might think they need it. But let's say you do a one shot thing where you go to some school and talk to a lot of people. You really have to put it on and it's really draining, really draining.

PAUL CUMMINGS: For one or two days visiting critics, have you done any of those?

BRICE MARDEN: A couple, you know, and I'd worked at Skowhegan for two summers; taught one month each summer.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you like it up there?

BRICE MARDEN: It's okay, it's a good school. When you think about what kind of schools are available, you know, that's one of the better ones. It's no way supposed to be ideal. But when I was at Yale I thought it was ideal, it was practically utopian because there were all your meals and you didn't have to worry about supplies because you couldn't have a job while you were there so you had to have all that together before you got there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

BRICE MARDEN: And then you just worked. That's the way it's supposed to be at Skowhegan too, but it's a little bit apathetic. The last time I taught there, the faculty was in terrible shape, all divided and just horrible. The figure against abstract and all that crap. It's so childish.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The same old song and dance.

BRICE MARDEN: It was awful. But that was one of those unfortunate summers. I'm connected with the school; I've worked for them and stuff like that and it's good. I don't know about schools; I mean there are all these artists and it's really interesting. It's just like the gallery thing with all the new galleries, so many people showing and it's great all these people have an opportunity to show and sell things. It's good it's happening but there's not much good coming out of it. There's really very little good work around.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You always hear that, you know. I mean I've heard that from whenever it started.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, that's because that's the way it is. You know, for a while you're very concerned with how you're fitting into that, but then that doesn't really make much difference to me anymore because with the whole change of attitude about the work, it's really much more involved with the work. It becomes your life and sometimes like it can become a profession. When I became an artist my parents were upset. It took them years to . . . they still don't really accept it. They were much happier when I got the job teaching. You know, then my mother can say that my son teaches, you know. You say, well I have a painting at the Whitney and they go and look at it and they don't understand it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. It's another world. Well, is there anything that you want to say or talk about that we haven't touched upon?

BRICE MARDEN: Well, there's the Europe and American thing. That's very interesting. I like being in Europe a lot; I like the kind of quality of life, and yet I also like the energy in the States and also I have a very deep-seated love for New York, really. I think it's fantastic. I really enjoy being in New York. It's horrible and all that kind of stuff but I really like it. It's really very exciting. Also, there's another thing about the kind of working in progression, like working in groups, you work with other things and you finish with that, and then you go out and you get very social for about two weeks. Then you get sick and tired of that and go back to the studio. And you start working on another bunch of things. You get more and more withdrawn. I mean like I started last year . . . I haven't been going to galleries too much but this year I decided I really wanted to see and I went around and, you know, there's lots of great things to look at but . . .

PAUL CUMMINGS: Something isn't happening?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah. Well, there are a lot of people working and that's good, and a lot of people keep getting better, you know. Like Jack Benny was on television last night talking about practicing the violin and he practiced for two hours a day for years and years and he really doesn't get any better. And there are a lot of people that do get better but I mean with so many galleries the standard has begun to fall down. There isn't one gallery in this town that could mount a full-season of good shows. Castelli could do it but he couldn't do it constantly. There's a lot of good stuff and a lot of it is very narrow. I mean the people are very willing to segment themselves, align themselves with a sort of a school.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You've got to have one line to follow.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, you know, I've always liked Edwin Dickinson. Dickinson reinforced my Zurbaran thing because he really got a lot out of Zurbaran. So, you know, if you like Dickinson it's not too far with a guy like Bob Bechtolt. I mean he's a painter that I kind of respect. I get less and less interest in any painting that isn't abstract but there are people who are doing really good painting. It's oh, just the whole quality thing. I'm more conscious of quality and more conscious of drawing and things and really be in Greece and traveling around and looking at all this sculpture and just really getting excited about it. It was something brand new and that's the whole thing. If it's good, it's always going to be brand new.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Don't you think the whole thing about quality though is so difficult to define because today's quality is what today's is?

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, but then again I mean the fashion changes and stuff like that and the Renaissance will be in. Now Rembrandt is really hot for awhile there, you know, now that the whole interest is fading and somebody else is coming up and you know it'll change like it has a lot to do with what is going on in the world really, like politics is very important in the way it affects people's life and . . . But I don't make any kind of gestures to change politics or anything.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You have no great political interest then?

BRICE MARDEN: I think morally, you know. I mean, you know, don't like Nixon and I don't like war and you really find it's really surprising when you find out you are really anti-violent and guns horrify you and violence horrifies you. But, you know, you do these, march every once in a while or something that's just like conscience cleansing and I get more and more into the thing where I feel that what I'm doing is really the thing I should be doing and there's all sorts of things that feed it and . . .

PAUL CUMMINGS: What kind of things?

BRICE MARDEN: Travel feeds it a lot. I hate traveling, you know, I don't like to get on planes and meet trains. I like everything once I'm going, you know, I like the place, I like the house, that's very important but, you know I'm just traveling around like one of the reasons we went to Greece, because I wanted to do this group of paintings that was based on the color of olive groves so we toured the Peloponese looking for olive groves and looking at ruins and sculpture and that was good. Or wherever you go just really looking; when traveling we try not to do it in planes that much.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Closer to the earth.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, see more what's happening, yeah, and, you know, I don't know, there are all sorts of people that have been very helpful. That's one of the things I like about the art thing; it's always been fairly open, people really pretty straight with each other, much more so that most other kind of . . .

PAUL CUMMINGS: Very different from business.

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, and I mean you can sit there, you can sit there and tell somebody that what you think what they are doing is a bunch of junk and then give your reasons and then talk to them about it and stuff like that and it's good, very healthy. There's a lot . . . I don't like this kind of factionalism, like, you know, people like the Conceptualists. That's one of the interesting things at Documenta is that they have all this stuff and Paul Thek had this incredible environmental piece and you say, "Well, geeze, did you see the Paul Thek?" And they say, "What, that's not art, can't read it."

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

BRICE MARDEN: And they get very upset with these narrow attitudes and in teaching I try to keep them very open about things.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Look at everything and try . . .

BRICE MARDEN: Yeah, it's a complicated experience and you've got to keep it complicated and not make it simplistic, you know. I think that's a problem, too many people just . . . they say I've painted myself into a corner. They used to say that about somebody that paints photographs, that's a bind . . .

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

BRICE MARDEN: To me it is.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah.

BRICE MARDEN: And maybe that's like just an old-fashioned notion but I've always felt kind of not safe but you know like I just, the nicest thing about not teaching and having the luxury of just thinking on my own for about three years with no hassle and just working, it was really hard to get the work . . . keep going because nobody was looking at it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

BRICE MARDEN: And my wife at that time just wasn't enthusiastic at all so it was like we're letting you do this but we have to live this horrible life and she really felt bad about it and we just kept at it and a lot of them fall by the wayside which is just as good.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Okay. Well, do you want to end there?

BRICE MARDEN: Sure.

[END OF TAPE - SIDE THREE]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

Last updated... *March 26, 2004*