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Oral history interview with Ivan C. Karp, 1969  
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**Contact Information**  
Reference Department  
Archives of American Art  
Smithsonian Institution  
Washington, D.C. 20560  
[www.aaa.si.edu/askus](http://www.aaa.si.edu/askus)

# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Ivan Karp on March 12, 1969. The interview took place in the Leo Castelli Gallery, and was conducted by Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

## Interview

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's March 12, Paul Cummings talking to Ivan Karp. The magic life of Ivan Karp. As you were saying, before the art scene --

IVAN KARP: I lived in Brooklyn. I was born in a place north of New York City called the Bronx. But I have no memory of that place. I think we left when I was one year old and moved to another curious district called Queens, I think it was. We stayed there for a little while. There were some gypsies on the street and the thing to do was to run by their window, make a face and run. That's all we did. I was two and dangerous and that they'd carry you off.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. What year were you born?

IVAN KARP: 1926 in June. In the Bronx. That's what I've been told. There's no record of my having been there. You know, there's no landmark. Anyhow we moved to Brooklyn and my life became much more significant then. We lived in the center - Midlands - parts of Flatbush and at the edge of a district called Borough Park. It was sort of anonymous territory. Flatbush itself has handsome tree-lined streets and tall apartment houses along the main boulevards.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you live in an apartment house?

IVAN KARP: I lived in an apartment house. We moved every year. It was during the Depression and if you moved into a new apartment house they'd give you three months' free rent. And so we moved. My father liked also that the house should be very new, fresh and bright. We moved about every year; every two years we definitely moved. To live in a house for two years was not good. It was not considered good style and good taste. So I lost my friends every two years. I had to cultivate a new circle. And it was very unsettling. I went to public schools there. I went to high school. I didn't do well in high school. I was very distracted since the war had begun. I went to Erasmus High School. I was very militantly interested in being a fighter for the government. And I was very distracted by the girls as well. But long before that my father used to take us when I was very young, six, seven, or eight years old, we used to go every Sunday to the center of cultural activity in Brooklyn, which was the Brooklyn Museum. We used to go there to listen to the band concert which was at three o'clock in the afternoon. I remember the nice little Italian conductor who used to play Rossini and other nice things. We went there just for that. Then you left after the band concert. There was nothing else to stay there for. Music was the thing at that point. I guess that might have been at two o'clock; but anyway I remember that one day by mistake we hung around for a while and then another orchestra came in. This one actually had strings; an orchestra with strings; it was not just a brass band. We stayed for that and we realized that symphonic music had a greater depth and dimension than this little brass band which played Rossini. Then we began to hear people such as Brahms and others. Then we used to go for the really more majestic event, the string concert. Then we realized that it was possible in the midst of all this Museum that there were other things besides the concerts. We began to wonder around the rooms. I took a great deal of interest in this. They have a wonderful Egyptian collection.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

IVAN KARP: Everything was completely catalogued and I was very impressed that things had survived four thousand years and so on. I guess I mentioned earlier that when I was around ten or eleven years old I already remember having illustrations in my own room of American painters mostly, mostly the 1930s' painters.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you have brothers and sisters?

IVAN KARP: I have a sister. We both used to be more or less interested in the same things. Though I had the action painters of the period, you know, Midwestern painters. I remember Thomas Hart Benton was crucial for me. Luigi Lucioni, a tree painter. And John Steuart Curry. And the famous Flood scene which everybody had in their room.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What is that? Grant Wood?

IVAN KARP: Not Grant Wood, no. Grant Wood was too intellectual for me at that point. Who was it now? It was up

behind John Steuart Curry. I don't remember who did the Flood scene. And there was a Franz Marck, that Blue Morse, which I really hated from the beginning. I never took that in. I remember that the New York Post issued prints of Van Gogh. And we bought those through the Post with coupons very reasonably. I remember the *Sunflowers* was the most important print we bought and that was in my mother's room. And the old woman sitting in the chair was also kept very special. We actually had those two framed. The whole house was full of these prints from the *New York Post*. And there were other prints that I had picked up. I must have been nine or ten or eleven years old. I remember these very clearly. And we kept going to the Brooklyn Museum and I kept looking at things. I was very interested in pictures and spectacles and scenes. There wasn't much encouragement I suppose in my own community in the midlands of Brooklyn. At Erasmus High School the classes were terribly overcrowded. And there was very little focus on the arts. The war was on. It was a turbulent period. And, as I said, I was distracted by girls. There was really not much to be done. And I didn't graduate. They thought I was a very fine person even though my scholastic grades were not up to par. I took the regent's in English and I passed; I got 72. I failed everything else. But they thought that I was such a fine person that they said I could hold the flag during the graduation but I wasn't going to graduate. Somehow that was a terrible dishonor so they would let me hold the flag to make me feel better. But I didn't hold the flag and their feelings were very badly hurt. Anyway, I went into the Air Force after that. I went to work. I was working already after school.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Were you interested in reading?

IVAN KARP: No, I didn't read anything until I was seventeen years old. I read then Joseph Conrad. The first important book I ever read was one of Conrad's. And I knew that some day I was going to read. But I had no time to read then. I used to work after school while the other kids were having a grand time playing football and hockey. I did deliveries for various institutions like stores. I delivered hats. I delivered clothes for a cleaning establishment. I delivered meat for a meat market. And other types of drudgery for twenty-five cents a delivery.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. For the neighborhood shops.

IVAN KARP: Yes. I was a victim of the Depression. I contributed to the family income somehow. I remember the movie on Saturday, which was a big event. It was ten cents. There was a serial and it was really fantastic. I guess probably just when the war started it went up to a quarter. It was a severe jolt when movies went up to a quarter. It was ten cents in the afternoon. You'd sit there for about four-and-a-half hours. I think you had to get in before three o'clock. It was fantastic.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When would you go?

IVAN KARP: On Saturday afternoon if the sun was shining and you got out and the sun was still shining I would feel very guilty about something. I don't know what I was feeling guilty about. I was told you had to be in the fresh air, that it's very important to be in the fresh air. Anyhow, I guess all through that period I was always looking at illustrated things, pictures. In fact, in school they used to remark that I was only interested in the pictures in the books and not in the written matter. And I remember for history and for physics and for the classes we took whatever they were I used to make very good illustrations for everything with maps and illustrations.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, you made drawings?

IVAN KARP: I always made little drawings, little illustrations for the various topics that I was supposed to bring in, you know, compositions.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When did that start?

IVAN KARP: Oh, that was early in high school, first term or second term.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But nothing in primary school?

IVAN KARP: No, I did very well in primary school up until high school. Then things got very, very distracting.

PAUL CUMMINGS: With girls.

IVAN KARP: With girls. I went into the Army. In basic training I remember I was reading John Dos Passos and Thomas Wolfe and all the social protest writers. I learned how to read very quickly. I remember I also had a lot of pocket books. I used to trade them with another fellow.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, they had those paperbacks?

IVAN KARP: Yes, it was the beginning of the paperbacks. We used to trade them off. There were a few of us reading significant literature at the time. We even had discussion groups. I was in the Air Force. First I was at

Biloxi, Mississippi where I took basic training. It was a very depressing state of affairs. Then I went to Amarillo, Texas for nine months airplane engine training, B 29's. After very elaborate aptitude tests they decided. . . Oh! I went to the Cadet School and I didn't qualify because of my eyes. I couldn't see quite well enough. And my mathematics was no good. I wouldn't have been a good navigator. So I was supposed to go to radio gunnery school. Then they shifted me to radio mechanics school - no, just to gunnery mechanics school. I went there for eight months and I graduated with honors from mechanics school; I really have no mechanical aptitude at all but I understood the diagrams because they pictorial, you see, and I really fathomed the pictorial things very nicely. Otherwise my cultural life in the Army was, as everybody else says, not very much. I read all the time, the proletarian writers, the American writers. I was very much involved in them. I read all of Thomas Wolfe. He was very important in my formative was in Guam at a certain point. It's a small island in the Pacific of no particular character. But I didn't kill any of the enemy. I didn't drop any bombs. I flew around a lot.

PAUL CUMMINGS: No medals?

IVAN KARP: I got the Pacific Campaign medal, the Honorable Discharge medal, and some other little minor medals. Somehow I was also a marksman, an expert rifleman. All visual things. I liked the target I suppose is what it was. I fired well. And I never achieved more than PFC. Anyhow I came out of the Army. I suppose I was reading a great deal then. I had a vague notion that I'd be involved some day in literary matters. I had felt certain things very intensely in literature. They struck me in a powerful way. I never thought I would be a painter but I always knew that I'd be around the arts in some way. I used to cut pictures out of magazines and I always accumulated reproductions of drawings and paintings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Had you started writing at this point?

IVAN KARP: I started writing what I called parables. After I came out of the Army I went to work. Of course I was also on that 52-20 club where you got twenty dollars a week for a year. So I didn't do anything at all for a year. Then I went to work in a department store and I managed to save enough money to go to Europe. I remember I saved \$730. I went to Europe on a student ship which cost a hundred dollars each way. So I had five hundred dollars or less for my whole trip to Europe. I stayed there for ten months on that five hundred dollars. It was a very much impressed by Kafka at that point.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What year was that about?

IVAN KARP: 1948. 1949 is when I went to Europe for the first time. It was a good time to go. It was just after the war. It was a tragic and dramatic time in Europe. There was still rationing in Paris. Tourists got a smaller ration. My mother used to send me food packages occasionally from home. We managed to survive on that. It was a very romantic period. I was with two other young men. It was a beautiful period of romantic agony.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Are they people we know?

IVAN KARP: One of them I still know. The other one I've lost touch with.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Is he involved in the art or cultural scene?

IVAN KARP: Well, they were intellectual people. One of them became a mining engineer. That's worth seven tapes to discuss that whole history of this young fellow. The other man I don't know what he's doing now. But we had a very intense experience there. It was full of adventure and romance and all kinds of fabulous intrigue. And it was really a very beautiful experience for a young man to have. I was twenty-two or twenty-three years old. It was the best possible thing to happen to a young man. It was the classic experience of growing up with the landscape for me, the European experience, the people, learning how to speak French, wandering around the streets.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you spend all your time in Paris?

IVAN KARP: I spent most of my time there. I did some hitchhiking. I went to London, I traveled a little bit in the hinterland of England. And we hitchhiked around France. I was fascinated enough just by that not to want to even go further afield. But I didn't really know what old architecture was or old churches; I knew that something strange was going on there that I wasn't used to. The buildings were very elaborately textured and carved and I knew they were venerable and remarkable. I didn't know why exactly. And I didn't take much particular interest in architecture. That's become now the dominant preoccupation of my own visual life, architectural things. I had no real clear destination. I had no life's work. I still knew vaguely at that time when I was 22 or 23 that I would some day attempt at least to write something. I was writing parables, one-line profound statements, poetic statements. I remember also it was very important that my whole room was covered with reproductions of the French Impressionist painters. I had graduated from the American protest painters.

PAUL CUMMINGS: From the 1930s to the 19th century.

IVAN KARP: From the 1930s right through 1860-1870. I really liked the pre-Impressionist painters and the Impressionist painters. I remember Cezanne was very important to me then. I don't know exactly why. He's not that important to me now.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you visit the museums?

IVAN KARP: I went to museums regularly. And of course the Impressionist painters were really tremendous to me. Van Gogh was my great hero. I wept over all his letters which I read then. I used to read them every day as if they were a Biblical thing. I'd read three letters a day and I'd feel elevated and purged and profoundly moved; it was a real exorcism. He was my hero. But I thought that maybe he was somebody else's hero, too, so I didn't announce it. You know, he was my own private hero; nobody else really understood him as I did. You know there's this feeling also about Albert Pinkham Ryde, that certain Americans feel that he is their own and nobody else really understands him - right? And even Winslow Homer for all his wide appreciation nobody really truly understands the true worth of Homer. And Van Gogh was a great hero of mine. And we all like Toulouse-Lautrec I suppose. And Cezanne I knew was very significant somehow. I had a lot of his reproductions in my room. And I was reading all the time then. I even started reading Henry James I remember.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you read art history or things like that?

IVAN KARP: I read no art history. I knew the Impressionist painters by going to museums. I got to know their sequence and their life's work in chronological order pretty well. I knew of the 19th century just by going regularly to see the shows. We used to see all the major shows. So the 19th century was pretty clear to me and part of the 20th century was also. Before that it was just vague.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There was very little in the galleries at that time in Paris.

IVAN KARP: I never went to an art gallery then. I didn't think that you could go into an art gallery. There were galleries. I knew you could go into a museum, you could pay the fee or go in wherever it was permitted. But I didn't think that you could walk into an art gallery. A lot of people still think you can't walk into an art gallery.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You mean that you need an invitation?

IVAN KARP: Well, the French art galleries are a little scary anyhow. I'm not sure whether you can go into a French art gallery safely. I came back from Europe. I had spent all my money and I had to work. That was in 1950. I remember I got a job selling Good Humor ice cream for six months. You could work from April to September. And if you worked fourteen hours a day you came up with a fairly good deal, \$70 or \$75 a week I think I made. That was pretty good in 1950 for a young man. I was on unemployment insurance much of the winter. I took other jobs. I worked in a factory assembling electric eyes. That's all I can remember doing. I know it was a very advanced and very mysterious thing I was doing but I was making only one component, one little thing. I kept doing this one thing. I remember the people around me were very alien. We had no rapport at all.

PAUL CUMMINGS: No? They were all older?

IVAN KARP: No, they were my age. It was a big sub-assembly and they were hiring a lot of young people to put these little parts together which finally wound up into an electric eye of some device. We found out later that it was a subsidiary of the telephone company. Anyhow, it was a very, very hostile atmosphere I must say. We got into real serious situations there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really? You didn't talk about a beer on Saturday night?

IVAN KARP: No. It was the dark ages. I don't know if it was the McCarthy or pre-McCarthy period. I think it was 1952 already when I did this job because I know Douglas MacArthur was coming back from Korea or something. There was a big argument about that. It was a dreadful time. Anyhow there was a lot of political turmoil. I was a liberal young man and they were very alien people around me. I used to go to see the shows. I started going to gallery exhibits in New York at that point. I had always gone to museums constantly. And I even went to see the new painters. I didn't know where they fitted in. Some of them antagonized me. Pollock antagonized me terribly. He absolutely appalled me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where did you see them - at Betty Parsons?

IVAN KARP: I must have seen probably Pollock's first or second show in New York. And I remember seeing Kline's first show. Kline struck me as something significant somehow. I understood the idea that he was trying to compose in a space and the black marks were very powerful, very masculine. And I somehow associated them with American energy or something even at that point. But Pollock appalled me somehow. I didn't understand the sweeps and I didn't know if there was anything lyrical going on there. I used to make speeches against Jackson Pollock that year. I did no work in the arts then. I knew that perhaps I might have destiny that way. I

was writing fiction. Then I was writing short stories, little mumbly short stories, two and three page things. I took jobs everywhere. I worked for the government collecting labor statistics. I went to a film school and I was a film editor for about two years. I worked on film crews making commercial films. I remember I was editing also for television. From westerns we used to cut out all the singing and all the love scene and leave in just the action, cut them down from an hour and a half to forty-two minutes and take out everything but horse action and shooting. I remember that. Taking out all the other clips. And we used to try to make films out of the parts that we removed. I remember I spent a year cutting that Johnson film called *I Married Adventure*. You remember that one? *Adventures in Africa*.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yes. Right.

IVAN KARP: Osa Johnson, the writer. I remember visiting her at her house just before she died. We were cutting those films and preparing them for television. They had apparent accumulated a great storage of film and it was cut down to something like forty-five programs. I spent a lot of time editing that. It was pretty monumental.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where were you living at this point?

IVAN KARP: I lived in New York. At times I lived with my parents; I lived by myself in furnished rooms. I saw my parents fairly regularly then. I made enough just to get by. And I remember I took a course at the New School. I forgot about that. Because I had the GI Bill. In the beginning they didn't require you to take courses for any credit so I used to go there just to flirt with the girls. Then I went and took a course in film editing, as I said. That was also on the GI Bill. I found that I had two more years coming to me. I got a diploma. The school, the building has since been destroyed. And I think that was the only school in New York specifically dedicated to film activity. I found out later that it had very curious political connections.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was the name of the school?

IVAN KARP: I don't know. New Institute for Film I think it was called. But I got a diploma. And it was a fairly decent school. I worked very hard there, as hard as one could. I got a job with film crews. But it was all for commercial film making and for television commercials. It really wasn't very inspiring.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have you maintained any interest in films? I mean in making films?

IVAN KARP: Oh, yes, a very profound interest. I'm so profoundly interested that it's magic. I won't even discuss it. It's been for me the abiding goal of my life since I've been a kid. I've spent more time in movies as a young man than anybody I've ever known, five, six, or seven times a week. Sometimes twice a day I go to movies. And that wasn't just to hide away from the world or to avoid looking for a job. But I was really caught up in it and I have been for a long time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have you made any movies or anything?

IVAN KARP: A few little films, yes. They're in somebody's closet somewhere. They're hidden away and I'd rather they not come out at the moment. One has vague mysterious ambitions. I got married in 1956. And I settled down to writing rather rigorously. In fact I gave up all my jobs. My new wife seemed to be concerned enough with my literary activity that she was willing to be the worker at that point. But then we couldn't support ourselves well enough so I went out to work again. I was writing short stories then. It took me a year-and-a-half to write my first short story. It was a twenty-two page short story. I still have it at home. It's a very nice short story. But, nobody ever published it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You started working for *The Voice* about this time, didn't you?

IVAN KARP: 1956. 1955. I must have gotten married earlier I guess, it's not clear in my mind. I got married probably in 1953. Forgive me, 1953, yes. And I started working for *The Voice* in 1955 I guess it was.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you get involved with *The Voice*?

IVAN KARP: Somebody said that they needed writers who would work for nothing. They weren't paying anything. The only person who was paid there I think was the advertising man.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Dan Wolfe.

IVAN KARP: Yes, Dan Wolfe. Right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Now he's a big administrator.

IVAN KARP: Yes. I guess people get paid there now. But then you gave your services. I thought it would be very good practice for me to compel myself to write on art. I wrote art criticism. I used to go around to the galleries

and I used to go to where they suggested I go. I used to always go to the Hansa Gallery at that time. It was considered an important little iconoclastic spot.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The Hansa was downtown.

IVAN KARP: No. When I went there they had just moved to Central Park South. It was one room. Dick Bellamy ran it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: On the ground floor.

IVAN KARP: It was half a flight up.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

IVAN KARP: I used to go there. I was very friendly with Bellamy. I used to write about their shows. Dick liked what I said and he asked me would I come in and work there, he would work three days a week and I would work three days a week and the salary was ten dollars a week plus commissions. We didn't sell very much I had two other jobs besides that. I worked for the courts, for a lawyers' service in the morning. That was very interesting. The cases on the New York City docket on a certain level of the municipal courts are about five to six years behind. So the lawyers need not appear to answer their cases when they come up because they know that they can't be called. So they have a service, people who go there and speak for them, say that 'So and so will not appear; put the case off until 1967 or whatever'. And so worked for this service. My duties were to go to court every day and just announce that this firm could not appear because the case was not ready. I did that in the mornings. And I sold space for a Brooklyn Heights newspaper as well. I didn't sell much space because it was a small, very modest newspaper as well and there were very few merchants who felt that it was crucial to advertise in this paper. So I had those two jobs. I stopped writing for *The Voice* except occasional pieces. And I worked for the Hansa Gallery. We had, of course, Richard Stankiewicz and Jan Muller at that point and George Segal. I remember we showed Chamberlain there for the first time. And Lucas Samaras: we put some of his pastels on the wall I remember. And a lot of other people. Their work came through Al Leslie. We showed Wallace Ting. It was a cooperative gallery and you had to pay to belong to it. Most artists of course couldn't pay a monthly stipend. So it was really an incredible struggle for the painters themselves and for us except when Jan Muller's paintings caught on I remember we sold quite a few of them. And actually my weekly salary amounted to \$45 and \$50. That was fantastic really. My wife was working so we managed to work things out. And then I think it was - I'm trying to remember who it was discovered that I was a very energetic young man and that I could speak very nicely about paintings - I think it was Norman Carten of all people- and he said he thought that Martha Jackson might need somebody. I worked two complete seasons at the Hansa Gallery. It was a lot of turmoil and anxiety. It was a very beautiful period for me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was this the first time you started to meet the painters?

IVAN KARP: Yes - well, I had known painters before that. I used to walk around the City a great deal in between jobs. I was a city walker. I'd go to the movies when I could afford to or I'd just wander around the City and look at things. I met people that way. I remember my first real contact with the art situation in New York was Hyde Solomon. He was a dear, dear friend; as he still is. He introduced me to painters that he knew. I was very much caught up in his own painting; as I still am. He was really my first legitimate entrance into the art community. In fact he was the one who suggested that I go over to *The Voice*. He said they might need somebody to write something over there. He knew people over there. I wrote reviews for them for a while. Also a couple of dance reviews, and a couple of movie reviews, and a couple of theatre reviews; a little bit of everything. I liked doing the art reviewing most. And then I went to the Hansa Gallery. As I said, Bellamy invited me to come and work there half time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What about the Tenth Street galleries - did you know any of those people?

IVAN KARP: I knew everybody in the Tenth Street galleries. But they emerged after that. About 1958, 1959, something like that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes, a couple of years later.

IVAN KARP: It was a hotbed of activity for about two years. It was a very big event around there on opening nights, you know, there was a great deal of traipsing around the street there. It seemed like a major community was developing. But we felt very illustrious uptown, quite removed and detached from all of that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did they ever get uptown?

IVAN KARP: How did the Hansa Gallery get up there? Somehow it was a rent-controlled room. I think it was something like \$90 or \$100 a month. And of course there were about ten affiliated artists. Everybody had to pay

in. But then the rent went up and the expenses generally went up and the cost of exhibitions went up. We never saw many people there. A few people would come. I remember Richard Brown Baker was one of the few collectors who used to come in regularly.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was a very large room. I remember visiting it.

IVAN KARP: Yes. It was a nice-sized room. And we put on very beautiful shows. Myron Stout was shown there. A lot of wonderful pioneering work was shown. We were very much caught up in it and it was a very dramatic and romantic experience for me. I became very much involved with the painters.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Are there any people you showed who have disappeared that you can think of?

IVAN KARP: Yes, a number of them. But if I say that they disappeared and they really haven't they'd take it very poorly.

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, you know, I mean people who may not really be showing today, that sort of thing.

IVAN KARP: There are three or four artists that I know of who are not prominently exhibiting right now that were in the group.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who are they?

IVAN KARP: \_\_\_\_\_ Beckworth, I remember. Let me think of who else. There was another young fellow there whose name I've forgotten for the moment. I shouldn't forget anybody because they made a very strong impression on me. Myron Stout who hasn't shown now for many years is just having his works of the last eight years, the paintings that he's been working on for eight years, being shown at the Corcoran. The show is just concluding now. There was an interesting commentary by Hilton Kramer on those paintings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I didn't see that.

IVAN KARP: He's an important pure painter. He was one of the few hard edge painters and he emerged really in the late 40s or early 50s with very, very straight forward, very honest black and white compositions; very significant work. Of the other painters who were there at that time: Miles Forst, I think he teaches out of town; he's not exhibited recently. Bellamy still shows occasional works of Miles's.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes.

IVAN KARP: Yes. I've not seen him exhibit much. Fay Lansner who until recently was affiliated -- Fay Lansner who showed with Kornblee recently. She's still a painter. I think she's still active.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

IVAN KARP: I've not seen her work recently. Most of the others I think are still shown around quite a bit. Al Leslie is shown here and there occasionally. We see his gigantic figures. He was a very powerful painter back then.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. Who founded the Hansa?

IVAN KARP: A group of painters. Bellamy can tell you more about the founding concept. Certainly Jan Muller was one of them. I think Gandy Brodie was there in the beginning also. Miles Forst was there. And a number of other painters were involved. I think even Felix Basilis was there with him for a while.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that's right.

IVAN KARP: I don't think we ever showed Basilis during the time I was there. And how our shows were always reputable and they were always quite professional. We were caught up in our installations and everything looked good and we were very idealistic.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Were you reviewed by the art publications and the newspapers or anything?

IVAN KARP: Yes, we were covered reasonably well. If we had a striking show I think it was fairly well covered. There weren't that many good shows at that point in New York. And there weren't that many prominent galleries.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And the collectors?

IVAN KARP: So they used to come around and we'd see ten people a week there besides a few students and friends of the artists. There might be two or three collectors come by in a week and a few of their friends. But



when we showed something of consequence it really broke out. I remember Richard Stankiewicz's show was quite successful. Oh! there was also Jean Follett who I forgot to mention. A very important pioneering constructionist, collagist.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yes. From St. Paul.

IVAN KARP: She's just not shown for quite a while. She's out in St. Paul, that's right. And we sold some of their work. I know Muller was very successful there just before he died. He had two successful exhibitions there and he died in the midst of his best work. And Richard Stankiewicz did very nicely for a sculptor. We sold a dozen pieces or so at very modest prices.

PAUL CUMMINGS: He was doing plaster figures then, wasn't he?

IVAN KARP: No, he wasn't. He was doing his paintings of figures. And they were roughshod. I never really particularly liked them. I loved his pastels. We all did. Some people did buy the pastels. We rarely sold the paintings. Oh! Allan Kaprow showed with us there, too. He did his first room environment there: just paper strips and hangings. And it was quite an event. I remember we had quite an attendance from among the young people. Kaprow was an important figure in the gallery. He used to do remarkably inventive things. He did very nice paintings, too, like Vuillard in a way, you know, late Impressionist type paintings. And he was very good. He's got some of them at home. You can ask him, force him to show you some of those early paintings. I don't know how much respect he has for them but he still has them around the house. And I remember we used to go out to George's [Segal] every so often. George raised chickens and we used to go out there to this semi-pastoral district of New Jersey to visit him. I remember once we saw a chicken coop where he used to work and paint. There was a half-finished plaster figure all white of a man riding a bicycle. We were all very, very much impressed by that. It was a really striking piece. And everybody was shocked that George had kept this object a mystery there. And I suppose in a sense by all our enthusiasms and all our energy we convinced him perhaps to pursue that. I never thought his paintings were remarkable.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Wasn't that brought into the gallery at one point?

IVAN KARP: Yes. We finally showed that. A real big, roughshod thing. The bicycle was a holy wreck.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes, I've seen that.

IVAN KARP: Anyhow it was very impressive. I remember that. Bellamy was always loyal to George even though I think maybe he had the same feeling about George's paintings -- that they were not remarkable, that they were just interesting, expressionist, figurative paintings. Bellamy has always been very loyal to the people that he's been caught up with. And it's been much to their benefit. He's encouraged them to uncover whatever skills they had. Anyhow, the Hansa Gallery came to its major turmoil and there was internal strife and the purging of personalities. And at a certain point it seemed that I was obliged to leave also. I was being purged. It was done very, very gently, very obliquely, and there was all kinds of turmoil and conversations that were very elaborate about life and thought and philosophy and art and the future of man. I remember we all made beautiful, tearful speeches. And how I left. I was out of a job. And I had nothing. I had given up one of my jobs in Brooklyn. I still went to the courts in the mornings and earned \$28 a week from that job. That was already 1957. I guess it was 1957-1958 when Norman Carten suggested that I go over to Martha Jackson and that she was looking for a lively young personality. I went there and she hired me immediately. And I was so astonished that I didn't know what kind of salary to ask for. I took a very low salary. I worked on a commission basis plus a small drawing account. She was very nice to me I must say. A very high-strung woman. She was very much caught up in the gallery.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What kind of things did you do for her?

IVAN KARP: Well, looking for new talent. I would help her with the installations. There was other help there. She always had a big crew of people working for her.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who was there in those days?

IVAN KARP: Steve Joy was the manager at that point.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

IVAN KARP: He was running around all the time with documents in his hands trying to organize material. And a lot of other people I don't remember any more. They came and went. Some of them are still in the artists community and some of them have gone into the other world whatever it is, the art dealers' burial ground; there must be one somewhere. I worked there for one full art season, nine months I guess it was. Mrs. Jackson left me pretty much on my own. I encouraged her to show John Chamberlain. She thought his work was pretty strange and pretty difficult. She thought they weren't really decorous enough for the gallery space and I used to have to

keep them in the basement and sell them from there. The first one I ever sold was to Robert Scull. He came into the gallery. He said he was looking for really aggressive new art. He had done very little buying before that that I know of. He must have made a couple of mistakes. But he never told me about them. He bought a little Norman Carten. I remember we were showing Norman then. And he bought this little Chamberlain based on my own fervor and my own conviction and his own belief that it was really something interesting. I remember I sold it from the basement and I think the sale price was \$275. It was a great thing for me and for John because on the basis of that sale Mrs. Jackson was encouraged to keep John in the gallery. And she got to like his work a great deal. We showed energetic painters of the period. I remember Wallace Ting was a favorite of mine. He seemed like an important second generation abstract expressionist. We were all caught up in very emotional art at that time. Karel Appel showed there then. And some Japanese artists, very decorative and elegant.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was the avant garde quality you were looking for that wasn't there?

IVAN KARP: You know, we all admired -- myself and Dick Bellamy and the young painters anyhow -- all admired what Castelli was trying to do mostly. We thought that was the outpost for really threatening new things. Just beginning with Rauschenberg. He was the hero. And Jasper Johns just had his first show in 1958 I guess it was, or 1957. And this seemed to us like the kind of art that we really wanted to be caught up in.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But you weren't interested in Janis or -- ?

IVAN KARP: Oh, yes. All the major abstract expressionist painters were my heroes, too, de Kooning, Kline and everybody else. I was caught up in that tremendous enthusiasm that everybody had at that point when American art seemed to become so important and arts activity in New York was the dominant activity. I used to go to all the openings and all the social occasions and the personalities swarmed. . . I really never missed anything at that time. It was a great unfolding for me. The personalities and the people and the collectors and the whole world of museum folk and art historians and art critics. I was just getting involved. And they were getting involved, too. And everybody was. There was a great tumult.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

IVAN KARP: Yes. Everybody was identifying themselves in the things they preferred. The artists were locating their own images. It was a great tumultuous period, the late fifties. And I remember that a friend of mine, a man I used to see regularly came into the gallery one day and he asked me if I didn't want to perhaps consider working for another gallery and would I come to lunch with a certain Leo Castelli. And I agreed that it might be a very nice lunch because I hadn't had any fancy lunches for a long time. So we had lunch. We discussed it. They invited me to come work at the gallery which they thought would be expanding. They were moving from their little upstairs premises here at 4 East 77th Street to a new downstairs where we're presently sitting. At that time there was just Mr. Castelli and a secretary and the then Mrs. Castelli. Connie Trimble was the first secretary here and she worked very hard. She worked all day long. She never went out for lunch that I can remember. She was bookkeeper and accountant and everything. The gallery was just beginning really. It had already gotten quite a bit of attention based on Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns and a few others.

PAUL CUMMINGS: This was -- what? -- the second year of the gallery?

IVAN KARP: I think it was probably the third year. The gallery opened in 1957. I think I came in early 1959. I'd really like to get that sequence down for you. And I can if I try. Those things are vague in my mind.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You've been going to Provincetown in the summers?

IVAN KARP: Yes. I've been going since 1942. I went to Provincetown in 1941, 1942. I was there when it was still a very serene, very beautiful, very, very remarkably charming place to me. All the peers were there and all the --

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you pick Provincetown?

IVAN KARP: Well, you know, I suppose one's aesthetic instinct is to go to the remote place, the place furthest out. And it seemed that the edge of America was the place to go. I probably had some clues from somebody who said that it was a very beautiful community architecturally, you know, that the beaches were fifty miles long and it was spectacular and mostly that it was an intact, insular little New England community and that it had an arts environment. And I thought it would be sympathetic to my sensibility. I went there as a young boy or in my early teens rather.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

IVAN KARP: And I went back there regularly after that. First with my family. Then I went back regularly. In fact one point I owned two little cottages in Provincetown. At one point I worked for a gallery. Then I even ran my own little gallery for one disastrous season. That year we showed --

PAUL CUMMINGS: What year was that?

IVAN KARP: I remember the year it was; it was 1959 or 1960. I showed Diane Oldenburg in this little gallery called the O. K. Harris Gallery.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's right. How did you arrive at that great name?

IVAN KARP: Oh! That's a fantastic story.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I just saw that in somebody's bio the other day.

IVAN KARP: I know that after I was already affiliated here at the Castelli Gallery I suggested to Dick Bellamy (because the Hansa Gallery was closing) that perhaps he might approach Martha Jackson and she might be able to use him because he was out of work at that point. And he did work at the Jackson gallery for a short period of time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I don't remember that.

IVAN KARP: He was there for about four or five months I believe. And I suppose that some of the background that I got on collectors and certain formal institutional activities also was gained by him during his short stay at the Jackson gallery. I remember he bought his first suit for that occasion. I bought my first really good beautiful formal suit when I went to work there. I was an art dealer. Which was a strange activity. Of course the Hansa Gallery was just like being there and being part of the situation, you know. I sold paintings I suppose but I wasn't an art dealer, that kind of thing. This was really being an art dealer. You went on the floor and very nicely dressed people came in. It was very decorous. And you made flowery speeches. You spoke about the paintings in a scholarly way. And it was very nice. Anyhow, at that point a collector in New York wanted to open a gallery on 57th Street. He asked me if I wanted to operate it for him. And I told him it would seem that I was committed to the Castelli Gallery, that I was very much caught up in it and I was enjoying the situation here and I felt very much a part of it in the brief time I'd been there. And I suggested (Enter Mr. Robert Scull) [speaking to a third person] "How do you do?" This is the gentleman I'm speaking of right there who has just walked in. It's a very curious coincidence. And I recommended Dick Bellamy to this gentleman. It's a curious historic sequence here. The gentleman: Robert Scull. It's incredible, isn't it?

IVAN KARP: Yes. I just mentioned his name. And he had conversations with Bellamy who he thought was a very curious personality in contrast to myself. And I told him that Bellamy, strange and odd and peculiar and eccentric and spiritual as he seemed, was really a man terrifically caught up in art dealership and had a marvelous eye and insight into what was fresh and bold and good. So this collector agreed to have Bellamy as his director there. We had to get a name for the gallery. I remember Bellamy and I spent three or four nights with lists of names. We came up with beautiful names. I remember just a few of them now. One was the 'Oil and Steel Gallery'. One we thought of was the 'Finger Lakes.' But we thought that was strangely obscene for some reason. I don't know why. We thought of 'Five Star Gallery'. We had to get a very blunt, campy name for it. We finally decided that 'O. K. Harris' was the best name somehow. It had a very strange complex set of meanings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In what way?

IVAN KARP: It had a tone of official business wise-guy activity -- O. K. Harris, Harris the official swinging businessman. Add, you know, a phrase like O. K. Harris bespoke a great number of things. It had very complex significance to us. And we proposed this. And I'd like to confront that that gentleman back there right now with why he finally rejected that wonderful name. Anyhow, he did reject it. And Bellamy in a moment of sadness decided that the Green Gallery was the right name for it -- 'Green' not as a man's name but meaning both new and green and slightly slimy; you know, it had a very complex connotation because Bellamy has a very poetic mind and he is a bit of a poet in his way. And 'Green' had a very elaborate reference for him. But for most people it was just the name of somebody or the name of a thing. The Green Gallery. I think somewhere we still have the notes on the possible names for that gallery. Some of them are quite remarkable. In fact, some have been used by other galleries that I know of.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

IVAN KARP: Yes. Anyhow, that's where O. K. Harris comes from; I used that name for the small gallery in Provincetown that I opened. In fact, I'll show you something that I have: a stamp from that gallery. Here's the symbol right there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: "O. K. Art".

IVAN KARP: Yes, we had a little stamp and we stamped it on the back of all the things we sold. We only sold eight paintings. And our stamp was 'O. K. Art.' I still have that stamp here and it's still very precious to me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's terrific.

IVAN KARP: Well, the Provincetown activity was just for summers. The galleries in New York were closed in the summers. I never really earned quite enough so I had to work in the summertime and so I worked in Provincetown. I worked first at the H. C. E. Gallery. And then I ran my own little gallery there. But it wasn't a success. People didn't buy avant garde art in Provincetown. Up there they wanted to buy watercolors and lightweight drawings and prints.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was H. C. E.

IVAN KARP: H. C. E. was run by Nathan Halper. He showed a group of nice New York painters. He showed Milton Avery, Angelo Ippolito and George McNeill, you know, a very solid group of New York artists. There was a small audience for them. And he had certain classics there also that he sold. That gallery was in operation I think until a year or so ago. I think now the premises has been sold. It was a little historic place in its own way. I've not been back to Provincetown for three or four years -- four years I guess it is -- it's become a bit of a quagmire, a bohemian trash heap. Although there are still a number of artists living there in their own little sanctuaries, and there are still wonderful elegant and charming little side streets, and the dunes are still there, and there's the national seashore with its beautiful fifty-mile beach, the center of town is an unseemly place now and the atmosphere reeks of ugly pretensions and unpleasant connotations for me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's a plastic world.

IVAN KARP: Yes. People come in from other communities to this bohemian center. They come to see the spectacles. And there are people who come to provide them with spectacles. So there are the exhibitionists and the voyeurs and they find each other there somehow. So it's really not a very. . . I'll go back there occasionally I guess. It calls me every so often to look it over again. But the beautiful shoreline there and the piers are all mostly removed. The fishing industry is much in decline and it's become a sort of resort situation. I'd like to ask the gentleman who just came in here right -- Mr. Scull, we're doing a tape on the background of New York galleries and I want to ask you -- what came up the moment you walked in -- the moment you walked in here I was saying to Paul that at a certain point in my own affiliation with the art world a certain collector had suggested to me the possibility of opening a gallery in New York and that I had recommended another young man who he accepted finally as his director; and that at a certain point we had to come up with a name for the gallery. And I remember that at a social occasion at your own house out in Great Neck, at a party, we sat down and I made a very long idealistic speech about how we arrived at this name; and it was O. K. Harris, if you remember. And we proposed this to you as a name.

ROBERT SCULL: Thank you.

IVAN KARP: And you rejected it. But I don't remember why you rejected it.

ROBERT SCULL: There were two names. They were: 'O. K. Harris' and 'The Big Tit.'

ROBERT SCULL: I beg your pardon, it was.

IVAN KARP: No, no, I don't think so. The other one --

ROBERT SCULL: It was a serious title that Bellamy almost insisted upon.

IVAN KARP: No, no. The other title we suggested was 'Oil and Steel'. And another one we suggested was 'The Finger Lakes.' These were the three names that we concretely suggested for the gallery. But we really preferred 'O. K. Harris'. And as the official backer you wanted --

ROBERT SCULL: Well, I wasn't a backer. I was an official buyer, one of the two or three people that --

IVAN KARP: We know you paid for the electricity.

ROBERT SCULL: -- promised to buy a certain amount of work.

IVAN KARP: Anyhow, you vetoed the name. Whatever it is, it's in art history now; it was the Green Gallery and it's got its own place in time.

ROBERT SCULL: Would you also make a comment that I paid more for art there than any other collector in New York. Knowing the financial crisis I was launching I couldn't get a discount. Everybody else got a discount but I couldn't.

IVAN KARP: Well, this is not your tape and we may contradict that in a minute.

ROBERT SCULL: It's the truth. Everybody used to say, "I want twenty off on that." [INTERVAL]

IVAN KARP: Well, the Castelli Gallery opened with a fanfare in its present premises downstairs here. The room where we're sitting right now was the rack room. It seemed like the biggest rack room in New York at that point. We had one full exhibition space, the room in front, which was enormous. The back room was the office. The middle room was the rack room. The front room was the gallery. Such a thing now would be insufficient for anybody. We have a warehouse that's seven times the size of the gallery.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was only a couple of years ago you took it over.

IVAN KARP: We opened downstairs as well. The works have become very large. They were not so large then. Artists produced paintings on canvas and it was feasible to put them in a rack. A lot of our artists didn't of course. Rauschenberg brought in objects. And other artists did, too. Scarpitta\_\_ constructions were monumental. We were already pretty far out I guess at that point. I enjoyed then, as I do now, constantly seeing marvelous new talent come in and watching artists emerge from total obscurity into a very important place of prominence on the international level. This is still for myself, and probably for Leo also, much of the great joy and excitement of art dealership.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What do you think it is that attracted younger people? I mean in the earlier days of the gallery; not now because it's established and it has its position.

IVAN KARP: I suppose we must have had a pretty fresh look from the beginning, you know, in that we were showing works that probably could not have been seen elsewhere, and they were provocative, adventurous art. And the young people who felt adventurous were probably drawn to the gallery, at least proposed their work to us, and then the artists already affiliated with the gallery recommended others. It was a family situation. It still is. The names of artists would come to us from various sources. In most cases it was a matter of going out and looking. Artists would come in with their slides and photographs as they do today. I would search them out and do a lot of the legwork, as I still do. And if the things looked very interesting to me I would call Leo and he would go. And if we were both confounded by somebody's work we might even call a third party. That was rarely the case, but occasionally we would consult with other people who we knew were caught up in the same kind of things that we were. I would say, "this young person looks very good to us. What do you think?" And we would sort opinions out that way. Most of the time it was Leo and myself and that was the decision. It was rarely that somebody in the gallery, that one of our artists actually said so and so should be shown here. Because the artists have a tendency to admire artists who work in their own spirit. Of course that is not always the case. A couple of our artists are remarkably objective that way. I remember the first artist in New York that I know of to have any kind of responsiveness to Lichtenstein was Salvatore Scarpitta. Oh, really?

IVAN KARP: When Roy's work was first shown here it was much despised by our own art community here, by artists, critics, collectors; almost universally. And there was just a handful of people besides Leo and myself who were very surprised by Roy's art and very fascinated by it. There was Robert Rosenbloom I remember. And I remember Sal Scarpitta said, "Why don't you just give in to it? You really seem to be taken up with this thing. Put one up there in the front room." We finally did. We were pretty much caught up in it. But they were alien and strange; no question about it. And there was much fierce antagonism to the idea of even having that kind of work in the gallery.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In what way?

IVAN KARP: The subject matter alone was so alien from art's preoccupation, the idea of references to commercial things, to mindless cartoons, and to the type of treatment that Roy brought to them, seemed to be contrary to the whole sensibility of art. It was against the thinking man's art. It was anti-sensibility. People were appalled and shocked by it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Intellectual.

IVAN KARP: Yes. Intellectual process in art. I remember there was a great deal of turmoil. There were very unpleasant moments here in the back room when I used to bring his works out and say, "This is a young man Leo and I are very much considering. It looks very good to us and very daring and very dangerous. And we like them."

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, these were the early Pop images of his?

IVAN KARP: They were really the straightforward cartoon things, figuration, and cartoons that were familiar, and commercial things, objects from the newspapers, very blunt, very bland, very cold, very numb in a way. And people were appalled by them. I remember a curator of a local museum who was a very close friend of the gallery came and said that we had gone too far and he would not be interested in visiting the gallery if work of this type was going to be shown here. That was a pretty strong statement from an important museum

personality.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Is that somebody we know and love?

IVAN KARP: Yes, that was somebody we know and love. There were a number of people who we knew and loved who said this. And some of them I suppose may still harbor this particular remoteness from this particular kind of imagery. Others, of course, have come around and agreed that this art was provocative at that point and now it seems to be more meaningful. The whole event of each artist coming to the gallery is a dramatic situation in itself: finding Lee Bontecou's art, having John Chamberlain's work here for the first time. John came with me from the Jackson Gallery and I've always been very loyal to John's art. He's a fabulously turbulent personality. He's one of the last of the abstract expressionist personalities. A man of various, complex moods. He's a very turbulent man, a very beautiful man, very poetic and sensitive. And I've always been very close to him and his art has always been in the gallery from the beginning. And of course the artists who were with us in the beginning are still with us more or less. There have been a few changes. Nobody has felt they really had to leave the gallery. Except I think it was Gabe Kohn who -- I remember one day some works came back from an exhibition and they had some terrible black marks on them which I did not believe were part of the work. And I remember I was cleaning off the black marks with a towel and he said that the accumulations on the work were part of the work. And he got very angry at the Gallery for attempting to keep his works clean.

PAUL CUMMINGS: His patina.

IVAN KARP: Patina, yes. Anyhow, whatever it was either I misunderstood him or he misunderstood me. Eventually he left, not for that one reason, but for other reasons. [Machine turned off.]

PART 2 (still Side 1)

PAUL CUMMINGS: Okay it's Part 2. You're on. Do you want to talk about some of these people, you know, in 1958 and 1959 like --

IVAN KARP: Well, when I came to the Gallery of course I came into a situation that was either established or was formative. Castelli still was in association with his wife who now is Mrs. Sonnabend and has a gallery in Paris.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was her position in the Gallery?

IVAN KARP: Well, she was one of the formulators of the Gallery, a very strong personality, a very sensitive woman. She had with Castelli a very impressive collection of 20th century Europeans and some Americans. They had a number of powerful Dubuffets of the very best, 1946, 1947 period. They had some Giacomettis. They had three Pollocks. Fabulous paintings. They had a number of de Koonings. It was a very impressive collection to me. I know it was very deep, very complex, and very complete in its way. It was of the highest quality. And the shows they were having -- well, it was as if they were searching I imagine. They were trying to find the best American talent. When I walked into the gallery there were a number of people who for me were not the most striking personalities of the moment. But being relatively new to a very sophisticated situation like that, I held off my own opinions and judgment on these things and watched the work with a certain amount of fascination and amazement. I know we had the names you mentioned --

PAUL CUMMINGS: Norman Bluhm was there. And Capogrossi was there.

IVAN KARP: Capogrossi was shown tentatively.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Savelli, Vicente, Daphnis.

IVAN KARP: Savelli who still shows somewhere. And Esteban Vicente, who is a friend of Castelli's and we know still shows, was doing very sensitive collages during that time and for a brief period I know had quite a following around this very sensitive, intelligent work.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How about Newbill?

IVAN KARP: Al Newbill -- yes, a very curious and reticent personality, showed some very intelligent abstractions during that time. And he withdrew. All these people withdrew. They were really never invited to leave. Nobody in a sense was ever asked to leave. I think I did it once with one artist where I said that it didn't seem that the situation was really ripening or getting any better and that it might be better for him to be detached because he was becoming very dependent on the very existence of the gallery. This was much later on. But at that time these artists I suppose must have observed that the situation was in furious change, that new artists were coming, that they were threatening personalities, and that their own art seemed alien to the situation. And they withdrew for problems of their own personal prestige and for the cultivation of their own destiny. Paul Brach was with the gallery for a while. He's now teaching on the West Coast. Marisol -- her art seemed really quite alien to

the gallery, the figurative things particularly. The last show we had of her work I remember were bronzes, figures; and they were very brilliant. I think it was the work of hers that I liked best. I find her present work much too whimsical for my taste, too anecdotal really. The work at that time was much more serious to me and I found it tolerable to live with. It was oddly surrealistic. It was remote also from my own character. Eventually Castelli felt that way. And I guess Marisol must have detected our feelings because again we never suggested that the artist leave. It was just a matter of mutual unspoken understanding that the thing had come to a certain turn.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Just magic dissolution.

IVAN KARP: And the artist would say, "Well, I don't think I'll be showing next year. I'll be doing something else." That's what it amounted to.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Johns and Rauschenberg were involved very early, I mean 1957.

IVAN KARP: Yes. Apparently they had a very powerful impact on the gallery because Castelli himself and Mrs. Sonnabend, the main audience in the gallery, were giving these two artists a great deal of attention. And they were getting press attention and everything else. Rauschenberg was not internationally celebrated at that point. But he had a tremendous following in the arts community, especially among artists who identified him as an important and provocative force; you know, using new materials and working in a kind of powerful sense of intelligent composition. He really showed people how they could compose difficult substances and difficult materials. Johns, of course, was a great flash when he first occurred there. He was immediately seized upon. His first show sold out very rapidly. His work was responded to very quickly; became a very powerful force. And I think the fact of these two artists with their strong personalities and the interest around them perhaps did quake or shake some of the other artists in the gallery.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. Norman Bluhm.

IVAN KARP: Yes, Bluhm I'm sure found himself totally estranged from the situation there. He's a lyrical painter. And he really didn't somehow tie into the way things were going. Scarpitta had first show there. It was a very beautiful show. I remember seeing that while I was still with the Hansa Gallery. It was one of Castelli's very first shows. I was very impressed by it. They had shown works of Dubuffet and other European masters, Giacometti, for instance. The installations were impeccable. I was very impressed by that. And the walls were so beautifully maintained. In our own little shabby situation at the Hansa Gallery we were always washing the walls with soap and water; we really didn't have enough to paint the place. So I could never get over the elegance of the Castelli Gallery. And I still like to try to think that we could maintain it like that. But it's really a tumultuous operation. It's very hard to keep up.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did someone like Savelli be involved?

IVAN KARP: I don't know. Maybe there's some nationality thing there. Leo is probably the only dealer in New York who speaks fluent Italian as well as four or five other languages. I think the more advanced Italian artists were drawn to him as somebody they could really communicate with. Savelli's work was very elegant, very intelligent; a little bit sedate. That's what it amounted to. It's still good work. He does very good work. But they're really not remarkable. Who else was there that's still with us? -- Nassos Daphnis. He had a very powerful first show there. I've seen photographs of it and that show seems like a very important pioneering event.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yes.

IVAN KARP: Of course now he's made some recovery after two or three rather muddled years when his performance was more or less drowned by some of the powers, people like Noland and Stella and Kelly who have dominated the situation. But he was an important figure.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. To me he's always been one of the strongest really pure painters.

IVAN KARP: Yes, with a very great sense of straightforward honest clarity about his art that very few other artists achieve. But every so often the clarity would lead to vacuity. That still happens with his paintings sometimes; they become really totally empty for the sake of the exercise. We see this is a familiar development with a lot of geometric painters; they do a lot of exercise paintings and in the midst of it the poetry occurs somewhere. Daphnis had a period of two or three years when I found his paintings particularly quiet and empty. And Castelli agreed. And of course now he's come back with some rather powerful paintings and it proves he really has a lot of energy and a lot of vitality in his conception.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yes. And Gabe Kohn was there for a while.

IVAN KARP: Gabe Kohn -- I've described the parting of the ways there. Gabe was a very temperamental man. His

production was very small. He was fine, one of the last of the good wood shapers.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes, he's a great craftsman.

IVAN KARP: His work still looks very fine to me when I see it. But we don't see much of his work at all. He's a very turbulent character.

PAUL CUMMINGS: His health is bad. He doesn't work much really.

IVAN KARP: So he went away from the gallery at a time when really in a sense he was finished producing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Then I think in 1959-1960 you had Ludwig Sander.

IVAN KARP: I was there in 1959-1960 and Ludwig Sander who just recently became affiliated with a major gallery on 57th Street, after being also in the shadows for a couple of years, was a very nice refined what you might call a lyrical geometric painter, he had his own little world, and nice control of the color. His painting is based on subtleties and nuances. I think we admired him very much as a person. He's a very special kind of man, a very special kind of thinker.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But I think it's interesting that you had Sander and Daphnis who has stayed all the way through, who are quite different from all the other people in the gallery.

IVAN KARP: Yes. It's curious that they should have cropped up there. It shows I suppose a certain agility of mind or a certain susceptibility, if you want to describe it that way, on the part of Castelli. Of course I wasn't there when these artists came to the gallery. Sander, of course became overwhelmed by the new group of artists that came in, Chamberlain and Bontecou, you know, these great powerhouses. And his quiet art was being drowned. And he said that he was leaving the gallery for that reason. But Daphnis even in his darkest moment never felt that he should ever lose touch with the gallery. And I'm glad he's still with us there and he still looks fresh. It's amazing. Scarpitta, of course has stopped making his powerful bandage-like structures. They're powerful works, you know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They are.

IVAN KARP: There may be a re-interest in that kind of painting, that kind of relief-making. Some years from now I think his work should be brought out and re-evaluated. They're really very powerful.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, they're fantastic.

IVAN KARP: But we see now he's involved in his own nostalgia. He's making automobiles and we're going to have a show next month of six racing cars that are both memories and personal conceptions, you know, the nostalgia for racing cars. And they're remarkable things. Whatever they are in art is very hard to say at the moment.

PAUL CUMMINGS: He once said that that's the thing that separates the boys from the others.

IVAN KARP: What was that?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Whether they liked the cars or not.

IVAN KARP: That's an interesting point. A lot of people like the cars. It doesn't make any difference who they are or what they like. They are powerful phallic objects unquestionably, you know. And they blaze in their color and all their equipage. They're fascinating.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Are these done with super color and things like that?

IVAN KARP: Yes. Well, he colors them according to a certain tradition of coloring racing cars. He puts all these little affixes, you know, various companies all supply equipment for racing cars. And it makes for a very handsome construction collage. They're really remarkable objects. And if you can take them just simply as objects they're really quite palatable.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You also gave a show to Bill Giles.

IVAN KARP: The Giles situation is a stormy one, a turbulent background, a matter which has never been made clear.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did he ever -- ? Where did -- ?



IVAN KARP: I used to go around -- as I still do -- to all the studios. I had seen Giles's work in 1960 and he looked very promising to me. It was not at all like his present work. They were sort of very complex constructions in the spirit of the moment.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. There were lots of wires.

IVAN KARP: Yes. Assemblage. And we felt his work had a certain stark energy about it. It was beyond a lot of the assemblage work that was being done. It was much more blunt. I never thought that he was right for a show; nor did Leo for that matter. But Rauschenberg and Johns conceived the notion that Giles would continue some kind of a 'School of the South' like Van Gogh had this notion, and even Gauguin, the two of them were going to make a School of the South. And I think that Johns and Rauschenberg, being Southerners, discovered that Giles was a Southerner and decided that they would incorporate him; in a sense they really compelled the gallery to exhibit him maybe slightly before Giles was ready to be shown. His work was ripening, you know, and probably would be ready for exhibit soon. But somehow this wasn't the moment. It hadn't come to a turn. And Rauschenberg and Johns created quite a situation there. And Castelli was always responsive to them. Their heroism sort of overwhelmed him; and still does to a certain extent. Giles showed; it was a very modest exhibition; it wasn't remarkable. I think he himself felt that these two personalities were very much dominating his own creative activity and he withdrew from the gallery very shortly -- almost immediately -- after that show. And he hadn't been heard from for a long time until recently he had quite a successful show downtown at the Frumkin Gallery. I think he's had two successful shows there. His work has become very different really. It's a geometric format with sort of personal emblems.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And Ed Higgins came with the gallery.

IVAN KARP: Ed Higgins, yes. I found Higgins out in Queens. He was working in an industrial loft. His work looked really remarkable when I first saw it. I took Leo out to Queens and we were both very impressed by Higgins when we first saw his work. His first show was a smashing success. These massive iron objects with the white intersections, you know, very powerful, corporeal suggestions. Even the second show was very successful. It looked quite original. He had his own little zone. Nobody else was working like that. And it seemed very private and very important. But he also was very turbulent, a very troubled man in many ways. Very alien in personality from what you might consider the artistic type. He always struck me as a kind of farmer personality, a very blunt man concerned with the materials. He could never really speak out his thoughts about art. But that's a sculptor kind of mentality. There were some personal tragedies in his life. And his work just simply did not develop from there. He repeated his themes over and over again. His work became more massive and more overwhelming and heavier and more unwieldy. He didn't cultivate the use of new materials as the other artists did as they learned what could be done with new plastics.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That seems to be a kind of thematic key to what was going on in the gallery -- the investigation of new materials.

IVAN KARP: Yes. All the artists were very much awake to the new materials. They don't always understand the implications and sometimes they seem to be overwhelmed and dominated by the materials themselves. But Higgins apparently just never adapted himself to that. He's an ironmonger in a way. He's still making things but they're not remarkable. He's still connected, very locked in with the things that he was doing earlier. And his work has not evolved. He's loosely affiliated with the gallery. We're sympathetic to his development and if he really breaks away again I imagine we might cultivate another interest in his work.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And then the following year you got lots of new people: Twombly and Bontecou.

IVAN KARP: Well, Twombly had loosely been with the gallery all during that period. To me he's one of the great important forces in American art. I remember as a young man wandering about the New York art scene that Twombly made a very powerful impression on me when I first saw his work at the Stable Gallery in the middle fifties I think it was. The white chalk on the blackboards were shown first at the Stable Gallery, it was actually white chalk at that point. They were made on very bad canvas and a lot of them didn't survive. I think Mrs. Ward, the Director of the Stable Gallery still has a couple of those paintings. Twombly says he always wants to go to see them. I remember there was a disparaging review of him but they had an illustration of his blackboard painting. I remember cutting it out and I put it on my own personal dictionary at home, my little precious dictionary. And that was my prime illustration of what art was supposed to be. I thought that was the most important object of abstract art in the world. That was in the middle fifties I guess. I wasn't even with the Hansa Gallery yet. It was just before that time. But I already felt that Twombly was a significant figure. I was so astonished to find that actually he was related to the Castelli situation when I got there. I didn't realize that he was part of the gallery. I don't know the exact sequence of events, how he came to the gallery. Oh, he was very close to Rauschenberg and Johns, I think.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes.

IVAN KARP: They probably invited him to come to the gallery. I still think he's a very important personality. We had no success with his first two or three shows there. He went to Europe and married into an illustrious Italian family and was apparently quite successful in Italy. Became one of the important figures there in Italian art. And to a certain extent in Germany. But he really had no audience here. In the United States, there were no more than a handful of us, about eight or ten people, who knew of Twombly at all or who ever spoke of him or who ever even though that he was of any consequence. And we'd pull out the works and talk about them, just a little handful of people, you know. I always felt very warm about Castelli's feelings about Twombly. He was always tremendously loyal to Cy's art. And I felt the same way; that we should never lose him, somehow just keep clinging to him. We had one very bad show of his. It was really a flamboyant French kind of show that Twombly turned out. He's a little ashamed of it himself now he says. It was all sold intact to somebody. It was called Homage to Commodus, the Roman emperor. And we had a bust of the Emperor on loan during the show. The paintings themselves were related to the School of Paris abstraction. They were really fanciful, unfortunately. And that did not serve Twombly's career. For all the people that I told just before the show that he was the great figure, the great misunderstood figure, they had to confront these foolish pictures.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And they said, "Ivan, why did you do this to us?"

IVAN KARP: Yes, why did you tell us these lies, you know. Anyhow, in his last two shows Twombly has come back and shown what remarkable complex nature his art really is. He looks really powerful now. His work has generated an audience. We made a couple of museum sales recently and we sold out the last two shows. Which is really rather startling. Because it's pretty difficult art -- those little cryptic graffiti markings are very, very elusive and peculiarly elegant and strange. And so I'm very pleased that he has emerged from his obscurity.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You said it was a very interesting way that Lee Bontecou was uncovered.

IVAN KARP: Well, her whole career up until very recently. . . That was a very startling thing to me, the drama of her personality and her art being so singular, so strange, so unique in its way. It was the same old situation, just going around to studios. But in this particular case Dick Bellamy told me he had visited a studio on the Lower East Side in the lower really dark depths of the Lower East Side, Avenue B or Avenue C which still retains that medieval cast about it. And it's really in the lower depths. Dick said that he had gone there to visit a girl in a loft on the top -- I forget who it was he was visiting -- and on the way down from this studio -- he was visiting Marsha Marcus I remember now -- on the way down there was a door open to a studio. The building wasn't heated and everybody in the building kept their door open to get the heat from a laundry which was operating on the first floor. People drew the heat in from the laundry and the whole building was vibrating constantly from the laundry machinery. He looked through this doorway and he saw these incredible tent-like apparatuses. I don't know if he ever saw anybody there but he said he thought he saw a girl in this room and there were these strange things, and that if I should ever go to that building I should try to see these things. So I did. I sought out these strange objects. I remember the first day I went to this laundry building it was in midwinter, very cold, and the building was violently vibrating. I knocked on the door of this studio and a very delicate little girl-like creature came to the door. I said to her "I am looking for the artist who works in this studio, a certain Miss Bontecou, I believe it is. Is she at home? Is she at home? Is she your mother?" And she said, "No, no, I'm Miss Bontecou." She looked to me like a fourteen year old girl, a very fragile creature, ninety-four pounds she weighed then, with a very delicate face and straight blond hair. I remember going in there and seeing these tent-like structures with their fierce apertures, you know, rather terrifying. And in contrast to them this little girl was a rather unsettling experience. They had a vast and shattering psychological implication, you know. It was rather overwhelming. And I really was unsettled for a week by the confrontation of these objects and delicate, pale, little Miss Bontecou there. At that time I used to come back from my tours and report to Castelli and to the now Mrs. Sonnabend that I saw So and So downtown, that this looked good, and so on. We were looking for talent then. And one day we made our tour and we wound up a Bontecou's studio. I remember our group consisted of: Leo, and me, Michael Sonnabend, who is now the husband of Ileana; and Ileana (who was then Mrs. Castelli). The four of us went into Miss Bontecou's studio. And all of us in our own way were rather astonished by this scene. I was perpetually astonished. She was very soft-spoken, if spoken at all, she hardly issued a word about her art; she never referred to it as her art; just as things that she'd made or something like that. And I remember we were all rather shocked because they were scary in their ways, especially in that environment, in that atmosphere. It was Michael Sonnabend who felt very strongly about them. He said they had a kind of logical power that was really more than he had seen in years. Leo was very brave in inviting those works to come into the gallery. They really seemed terribly alien from anything we had ever seen. I remember the day we had them shipped in. We were sitting in the back room talking to two museum officials. One of them was Alan Solomon who was then working at Cornell. And there was the curator of a museum in upstate New York. We were all sitting discussing exhibitions or something. And two men from the shipping room said, "We got dose tings. Where do you want them?" I realized that it was Bontecou's work being brought in. I thought that really neither Castelli nor myself could see how those would possibly fit into the gallery, in this fragile gallery space. Anyhow the men brought the two pieces into the room and they really were transformed in that situation. They were capable of being seen. They had their clarity and they had their object power. And I remember that within seven minutes of their being brought into the room both works had been purchased by the two museum officials sitting

there. Each one bought one of the works of Miss Bontecou. We concluded the deal there. We were able immediately to advance her I don't know whether it was three or four hundred dollars; (I think we sold each piece for four or five hundred dollars). They were enormous, you know. She was living on \$32 a week teaching out in New Jersey somewhere. She had a roommate who helped pay the rent who worked in the studio with her. I remember telling her that there was three or four hundred dollars, something like that, for her. And she said, "My God, what will I do with it! What will I do with it!" The first time she was really outgoing I remember was the day I told her we had sold those two things. She never expected that. Anyhow, she's had continuous success since that. Everything that came into the gallery, all the objects were immediately purchased, you know. She never had very much in the way of demands. Her prices were always modest. Until quite recently, until about three years ago when her prices have gone up to about seven, ten, twelve thousand dollars. But curiously enough, and a surprise to most of us, she married Bill Giles.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

IVAN KARP: That I think was one of the biggest surprised of the art community life.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But they were old friends though, weren't they?

IVAN KARP: Oh, I guess they knew each other for many years. I personally may have introduced them -- I don't remember; but it's possible. I used to go around with Giles a great deal in New York when he first came here. It was a big surprise. I think more for Leo than for anybody else. I don't think he expected that -- if she ever got married -- that of all people she would marry William Giles. It's a very curious combination. They have a child now. And they both do good work. But her work has changed radically. It's like her old art inside out. Instead of these gaping, terrifying, black apertures with this tent-like construction, they're kind of efflorescent flower -- you know, they're surrealistic flower forms really. And it's like a turnaround in imagery, a different kind of presence.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you see her early work -- the figurative -- ?

IVAN KARP: Oh, yes. We saw some of the bronzes and some of the uncast animal things, which were very powerful, these winglike bats and strange animal creatures that she invented, you know, the terrifying creatures. Quite remarkable I think in their way. Beautifully crafted. She was one of the hardest working artists I've ever come across. She worked fourteen, fifteen hours a day. Unbelievable. Never out of the studio. Never ever out of the studio. Whenever I'd call the studio she was always there. But she never wanted to talk about her art. And she never lectured. She never much socializes. A very reticent person. And smart and elegant in her own way. A very special kind of personality.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That was also the way you found Frank Stella.

IVAN KARP: Yes, Frank Stella. Well, partly through the aegis and auspices of Bill Seitz who is a wonderful art historian and museum director. Apparently he was a friend of Frank's at Princeton.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's right.

IVAN KARP: Frank had been there. And I think Bill suggested Frank's work to Leo. They were these big black paintings and they were pretty alien at that point. It was almost like the Lichtenstein experience which came a few years later. At the beginning nobody liked Frank's paintings except a few of us here in the gallery.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I remember when they were in the Modern show everybody said "pin stripes."

IVAN KARP: Oh, yes. "Those blasted pin stripes". Yes. Oh, my God, what things were said were really terrible. Frank was a very confident man from the very beginning. In fact in the beginning when he was just a baby really he seemed almost too arrogant, \_\_\_\_\_. He really was. But he's changed. He's a very intelligent man with very strong opinions about art. And he's on the great top of the situation now. He's the great powerful figure of this kind of painting.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did Langlais ever get associated with the gallery?

IVAN KARP: Oh, Leo and I -- I don't know -- it seemed that the thing to do (at least for me) was to go to the Tenth Street openings. I went to all of them. I always hoped that somebody would spring forth from there who would look remarkable. To both of us Langlais looked very good in the show he had at the -- I've forgotten what gallery it was down there in the basement, a small little gallery -- I've forgotten the name of it already -- it was so famous for that brief flaming moment they had. . . We both liked Langlais very much. We thought he was decorative, we thought he was superbly decorative. He had one very, very handsome show of these little wood collages, wood constructions. And then his work became a little genteel, a little too decorative; it became colorful. He's always been a good artists. His animal figures in wood are also very, very strong, very remarkable. But they had a very deep decorative quality about them. And they're very sufficient for what they aspire to be.

He really is a remarkable craftsman. I haven't seen much of his work recently since the animal constructions. So again there's another little interval that I almost forgot about. We have a little Langlais still hanging in the basement.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And the Yves Klein show -- that was really --

IVAN KARP: Oh! I've really disassociated my self from that. \_\_\_\_\_ Yves Klein was a remarkable phenomenon. He was a unique personality. And I spent many hours talking to him in his own peculiar way. He really had some very funny things to say. I remember that he told me about certain events that he promoted in Europe that were in a sense the first happenings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What were all those strange, you know, theories that he had about water and light and fire?

IVAN KARP: I never wanted to get involved; when he started talking about water, light and fire I withdrew to talk on the telephone. But he used to tell me about presenting the "day", September 15, to the people of France.

PAUL CUMMINGS: A great gesture.

IVAN KARP: Yes. A fantastic thing to do. And he'd tell me about an event that he had planned for a theatre -- which always stays with me -- he would hire a very sumptuous Parisian theatre and would invite everybody with reserved seats to sit down and at a certain point some very scantily dressed girls would come in and chain everybody to their seat, they would draw a tremendous chain across everybody's seat and put leg irons on them and then leave the theatre. And that was his event! And these people would be left squirming in the theatre. That would be one of the important events. Like presenting the day, September 15, to the people of France. He told me a few other anecdotes like that. I thought he was a very funny, very amusing, very colorful personality. He died shortly after. His paintings for me really were not of great consequence.

PAUL CUMMINGS: He was a great kind of performer in a way.

IVAN KARP: Yes, he was a theatrical personality. Those things were interesting as ideas. Like, this 'International Klein Blue.' They had a certain strength about them, those plaque-like things. But Leo and I both felt that they really were not very significant. I think there were certain forces working on Leo at that point to show this most dangerous of all the European avant garde artists. We sold a few of them for a very modest price. Apparently shortly thereafter they went for as much as 18, 20, \$25,000. \_\_\_\_\_ Unbelievable. I think we sold them for eight, nine, twelve hundred dollars top at that point. Leo still has one little one which was repainted several times by Yves Klein in International Klein Blue. But again this is something you've reminded me of. I think I wanted to forget that Klein experience.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I was always curious about that. And Tworkov was at the gallery.

IVAN KARP: Tworkov -- the entire art community always felt that Tworkov had never been properly celebrated, that he was really an intelligent, sensitive painter working with the first generation of abstract expressionists who really had been overwhelmed by their energy and by the amount of adulation they got. He was really a very sound painter. And on our part it was an act of, a demonstration that we believed in this man's work; that this edge of abstract expressionism should have been celebrated; his work again was very sound, intelligent painting. But in the face of what was going on in the gallery he attempted to compete with it. Which was alien to his way of working. I felt that to be the situation. Because he was there unfortunately when people like Lichtenstein appeared and Rosenquist. And really it was a very shattering experience in the gallery for most of the artists to be confronted by those very cold things. And Tworkov's art became alien from what it should have been. It became very harsh and very difficult.

PAUL CUMMINGS: He's basically lyrical.

IVAN KARP: Yes, he's a lyrical painter with tremendous control of the paint substance. And he probably could have been and should be, and he may well still be an important figurative painter.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And great surfaces, handling --

IVAN KARP: Sensitive poetic surfaces, you know, which I still think he's very much capable of. Anyhow, it's too bad that Tworkov's career was not launched earlier.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And then of course in 1961 and 1962 there were Chamberlain, Lichtenstein and Moscovitz.

IVAN KARP: Yes. Moscovitz's story is a good one, too. Moscovitz married Tworkov's daughter.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

IVAN KARP: It was a very interesting development because Moscovitz was only twenty-six years old and he met the daughter of the elder statesman of the gallery (as Tworikov was the oldest artist in the gallery then) and there was a family thing there. Moscovitz I found in Brooklyn. I used to even go as far as Brooklyn and Queens and Staten Island. I've even gone further afield. But don't tell other artists who have occasion to look at this. Moscovitz lived in a little two-room apartment in a really desperate district in Brooklyn near Pratt where he apparently had been going or been teaching. He had all those melancholy window shade pictures and they really were terrific, really profoundly moving things. I took a number of people up there before I even took Leo there. And everybody was very, very deeply touched by his work. Leo also was very much taken with him. Moscovitz's first show was really a powerful event. You know, these private images, these window shades, they touched on an area of city nostalgia and city melancholy that nobody else had touched upon. It was very much part of the assemblage tradition of the moment, too.

IVAN KARP: Well, we sold out the first show. I think we sold a total of about thirty-five or forty paintings of Moscovitz. And they were all beautiful work. And in a sense they became exhausted. He finished with those shades. He did a series of very elegant drawings and collages with envelopes but they were much smaller in scale, much more intimate. And then things sort of got locked up with him. He got involved with Jack Tworikov's daughter who he subsequently married. And his art seemed to lock in. And it just didn't work out. There was nothing there. I saw his work recently; I went to his studio about a year and a half ago and he was painting kind of field abstractions and they're very intelligent, very good work. Not quite aggressive enough for our present moment at the gallery. But he's still a very fine artist. It's just a matter now of whether he has the depth of creative energy or force to really come up with an important powerful image like he did at that time. This is a familiar thing. We can see that an artist may have one surging important mental configuration in him and he explores it and it depletes; and we see artists who push this kind of image over like decades; we've observed it. And we're in a sense compassionate and sympathetic. We feel also a little distressed to see them compelling certain successful images to the point where they become totally shallow and empty. At least Moscovitz didn't do that. He had his image and he expressed it but he used it up. And it didn't seem that there were any other terms for him at that point. He may come back to it. But artists do have a limited fund, you know. And it's unfortunate that the American art situation makes great demands on artists. And for better or for worse innovation is very much a part of our American art scene. I think it does a certain amount of damage I suppose to artists who are quite fragile.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, it's part of our culture. New cars come out every year.

IVAN KARP: Yes. The whole American mentality is wrapped up in innovation. It also affect the arts. I think it's very good for many American artists and it's very destructive to others. But it's not something we're going to change by declaiming against it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Well, when did you start going to studios on such a consistent basis?

IVAN KARP: Oh, I did that from the first week that I was with the gallery. I've never stopped going. Of course there is a number of artists constantly coming in to the gallery. It's never changed. Well, from the beginning I suppose it's ten, twelve, fifteen a week. And as the gallery got better known it's increased. I see upwards of 35, sometimes 40 artists a week who come in with slides and photographs. They're from all over the country. I can say now in the midst of all this that in the last six months the work is the best I've ever seen. The most consistently high level of work is coming in to me. And it's very painful to have to turn away most of these people. There's no way for us to show them. And there's such a limited number of galleries in New York that one can recommend that they bring their work to. There are eight or ten galleries dealing with important, adventurous, avant garde work. And they have their own way; they don't necessarily believe in what we believe in. And they have a limited number of exhibitions they can have. So we have artists coming in from the small college towns, you know, heads of art departments. They're from the Middle West, the Far West, Texas, Oklahoma, Nebraska and so on. It's unbelievable. They come regularly. I see their slides. The work in many instances is as good if not better than much of the work that is being exhibited in New York and yet there is very little opportunity in New York for these artists to show. The best I can do is circulate their names to the various institutions that exhibit new talent; you know, they have different kinds of shows in various places around the country. And I keep a record of the artists who I see and admire. And I always keep boxes of slides. I must have fifty boxes of slides of the works that I have admired over the last two years. A handful of these artists have achieved an affiliation with a gallery and have had exhibits. In fact a few have gone quite far with their things. Others are still in the drawer and there's been no change for them. An example: Ernest Trova was in my drawer there for three years. I showed his work to everybody. And there was no response. He was still painting only. I showed the work to Arnie Glimcher \_\_\_\_\_ when he first opened in Boston. I said here's a painter working in St. Louis who has his own little way, you know; it's a private world. There's a little too much imagery for our own gallery. But you're starting out and here's somebody who's got real spirit. And something else regarding Trova which I must say is quite remarkable. Arnie affiliated him on the basis of the slides. He told Trova on the telephone that he would show his paintings. Then he went out to see them after that. And we know that he's had quite a success with that gallery.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's true. He had a Trova International.

IVAN KARP: I trying to make a claim for historic sequence here. Anthony Caro's photographs were in my drawer for a long time before he ever showed in America. I was in London and saw his work in his studio. I thought he was one of the most powerful sculptors that I had seen outside of New York. You know, he was doing these giant steel constructions to told Leo about Caro. I showed him the photographs. He was interested in seeing them and possibly showing them. But we had no way of getting the work over here. We couldn't afford the shipping charges which were estimated at five or seven thousand dollars just to bring them over, some pieces of them, \$8,000; we just didn't have the money to do it. So the photographs were in my drawer for a long time. I showed them to a lot of people. But there were no takers. Apparently some other people visited Europe and also discovered Caro's work. And later apparently he was able to work in this country. He did his fabrications here. And he's teaching at Bennington. Then apparently he was affiliated with the Emmerich Gallery. So I mean a lot of these artists have come through and have gone on, you know, to wherever they've gone.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you keep like a notebook of all these things you've seen?

IVAN KARP: I have a notebook. Well, when the artist becomes affiliated and his career and destiny is more or less out of my book. He doesn't have to be served in that way any more so I can finally proceed to cross out pages. Every so often I revise my book and all the pages of names that are in there that I've seen over the years I remove and we go on to the next page and serve a group of new artists that are coming up. And it's a hard thing to do it. Our new warehouse situation uptown is partly dedicated to showing artists who can't be shown elsewhere because their work is difficult, or eccentric, or oversized, or whatever it is that it just can't be shown elsewhere.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you get to Lichtenstein? Because he'd been showing with Keller I think for years.

IVAN KARP: Lichtenstein had three one-man shows at the Keller Gallery. They were comparatively sedate, semi-cubist kind of paintings with little intimations of cartoons. Allan Kaprow who is-an old friend of mine and showed with us in the Hansa Gallery days called me on the phone one afternoon and said there was a painter and teacher working out at Douglass College -- or Rutgers I guess it was -- who was doing some rather unsettling images. And Kaprow asked me if I would be so kind as to look at them. I said, well, you know, of course I'll look at him as I look at anybody's work; and he should bring the stuff in. I said, "Does he have any slides?" "No, he had never taken any slides. Would you look at the paintings themselves because it's important to see them in person." I said, "Yes, it's all right to bring them right to the gallery." Apparently the artist brought them in on the top of his car from Rutgers one afternoon when he wasn't teaching. I remember seeing Roy in the hall with them. They were all facing the wall. I said, "What are these?" He said, "Well, Mr. Kaprow called about me. I'm Lichtenstein and I wish you'd look at these paintings." There were five of them there. He turned them around in the hall and it was a very jarring experience. I remember the first thing I said to him, "You really can't do this, you know." That was the first thing I said to Lichtenstein in a very shocked and startled way, as if saying to myself who would ever have thought of such an idea; it was just too shocking for words that somebody should celebrate the cartoon and the commercial image like that. And they were cold and blank and bold and overwhelming. And I remember saying to myself he can't do this, he just can't do this. I said it to him aloud. He said, "Well, I seem to be caught up in it. Here they are." He was a very shy man at that point. A Roy probably is still shy I think although he is very suave in his way. And I said, "Well, look, I'd like Castelli to see these. They're pretty unsettling." I remember Roy and I put them in the back room. I made him take one back with him which I didn't like at all. It was just a little mushy cartoon picture. But we kept I think four of them. And then Leo saw them and had his own set of reactions to them. Which was pretty startling. And we both were jolted. We thought well let's look at them again; we'll put them in the racks and we'll take them out again and see how they feel as the days go by. I told you earlier in the tape about how other reactions were; we showed them to people who came into the gallery. And it was not good. It was a bad scene. There were really truly unpleasant moments there because people thought that if we'd show art like that it would be the end of our situation, that we were pushing things too hard. And we said, "No, no, it's really an intelligent and original innovation. It's peculiar and alien and strange and we're going to look at them some more." I don't know if I told you that Warhol, who was a collector to a certain extent at that point, (I didn't know who he was ) he came in with some young men who had also been buying works from me, and I remember Warhol bought a little Jasper Johns drawing for \$350. What a beautiful drawing! Wow!

PAUL CUMMINGS: Warhol bought the drawing?

IVAN KARP: Warhol, yes. He came back the next week. And I said, "Oh, there's a curious painter downstairs that I'd like you to look at; very strange." (I didn't know who Warhol was or what he did. All I knew was that he was a man with a crop of gray hair who came in and bought a Jasper Johns from me). He issued one of his curious little sounds like an astonished "Oh!" that he says every so often, which he still says in a state of astonishment. He said, "Good God" -- or whatever he was exclaiming -- "I'm doing something like this myself!!" He said, "What are these paintings doing her!" Whose work is this! What is this man! What is he thinking!" He was really shocked

and at the same time he was appalled. And I think he was very troubled that somebody else was doing the same thing. And he asked me if I wouldn't come to his studio and look at what he was doing. I said, "Do you mean to say that you're really concerned with the same kind of images?" He said, "Yes. I actually am doing cartoon things and like commercial subjects. But they're different, of course; they're very different. Would you come and look?" And I think it was a couple of days later that I went over there. I used to go to studios on weekends, on Sundays usually; sometimes after work. I went to Warhol's powder blue building on Lexington Avenue, a four-story building which he owned. I was shocked to see that his was the only name on the bell. I went in there. It was a very dark place. There was one very bright light on in this living room area which was beautifully decorated with fine, elegant furniture and beautiful paintings with a generally surrealistic character about them. A number of canvases were jammed up against the wall. A record was playing. I have a copy of it here. I remember Andy just for this particular event. I think the name of the record is "I Saw Linda Yesterday." He played it the whole time I was there. I must have been there for two or three hours. The same record over and over again. We could hardly hear each other it was playing so loud. I said, "Why do you play \_\_\_\_\_ this same record?" He said that by the end of the day he really understood -- he could feel what the guy was trying to get around to. He said after all the guy who was making the record probably had to do it over twenty times and 'really want to suffer along with him and really find out what this is all about." So he played the record all the time, you know. And the next time I'd come there'd be another record playing all day long. I ought to play that one here for the tape so you'd get an idea what it's like. Anyhow, I saw the paintings there and they were, as he said, cartoon subjects. Some of them were very lyrical. Unlike Roy's paintings which were pretty stark and straightforward and cold to begin with. And y still had the echo of abstract expressionism in his brushwork and things.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes.

IVAN KARP: The black lines as we see here in the painting, this painting of Nancy were smokey and the lines were irregular and they dripped a little bit and they had what you might call artistic gestures about them, and there were a lot of cartoons.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They were still personal.

IVAN KARP: Yes. They were very personal, very elegant, very lyrical. But there were a few cold ones. I remember a few pictures of the so-called dance step paintings and a few others. They were very straight, stark paintings. And I had already learned from Lichtenstein that these images cold and numb as they were best taken for what they were. I said to Warhol that these paintings without the lyrical abstract expressionist phenomena were somehow much number and much more powerful, much more scary. He said, yes, he was drawing in that direction but he didn't know whether it was all right to do that kind of painting because the others were art and this was something else; these were kind of powerful making of pictures but it wasn't art like they made abstract expressionist pictures with tricky lines and beautiful brushwork. At the same time I said, "They're not all so soft and lyrical. That Nancy picture is really a beauty. It's a great painting." He was very touched by my reaction to it. I said that I would invite other people to come up to his studio but that I didn't think that maybe the gallery could be interested. We were just beginning to launch Lichtenstein; we were planning on showing Lichtenstein and that maybe it would be a very destructive thing to have these two new artists doing the same sort of thing. He was very troubled by that because he wanted to be with us in the gallery. But I said that I would invite dealers and friends to look at his work. And I remember I left and returned to the gallery that day -- it must have been in the morning that I went to his studio -- about an hour and a half after I got back to the gallery an enormous package arrived with a red ribbon around it. It was his Nancy painting (which is right here on the wall) which he gave me that day with a little note on the back thanking me for coming over and being so kind to him.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But he was still involved in the commercial art field.

IVAN KARP: Apparently so. But I didn't know. I didn't ask him about that, what he did for a living. But he had this nice house there with beautiful paintings and furniture. I guessed he was doing something for a living. In one corner of this very elegant living room these paintings were stacked. And he was working right there in a very narrow space. I don't know how he was doing it. I said, "You'll have to get a studio. He said, "Well, you know, until I fill up this room I guess I can work here." He had his own peculiar way of talking. I remember all the windows were closed off with fabric so no outside light came in. And it was a pretty strange experience with Andy there then. I took some people up to his place. I remember I took Henry Geldzahler up shortly thereafter when he was still I think doing art history work at Harvard -- I don't think he was affiliated with the Met yet, or he was just about to be. Henry also was very impressed with Andy's work at that point. He and Andy's work at that point. He and Andy got along very well together. And they seemed to enjoy each other's presence and company. Then I brought up a number of collectors. And curiously enough, although the reaction to Lichtenstein was very hostile, everybody that I brought to or sent to Warhol bought one of his works. Everybody bought one. I have a list there. The fifteen people that I invited to see Andy's work that I thought could best deal with the work all bought work. Andy sold about 15, 18, 25 paintings maybe in the first three months from his studio. The price was something like \$250, \$300, or \$400. I remember the Campbell's Soup Can paintings were \$30 apiece. They

were standing all around the room there. I remember Leo bought one the first time I took him over there. Leo liked Andy's work very much. But he felt also as I did from my own instinct that to show Lichtenstein's and Andy's work the same season, at the same time, would be destructive to them somehow. So I tried to get Andy into other galleries. I told Martha Jackson about him. She had his paintings for a little while. Robert Elkon had them for a little while. And I think a couple of other dealers did. But nobody really took to them. They were very alien for these people. The work was very strange I think for everybody. At the same time it must have been not more than five or six weeks later I was eating in a little fish restaurant down near Peck Slip called Sloppy Louie's, which is very much in existence, a man stood up, a tall, slender, blond man and he said, "Aren't you the man who saves the old stones?" He said this in reference to the Anonymous Recovery Society. And I said, too."

PAUL CUMMINGS: \_\_\_\_ When did you start that?

IVAN KARP: I started I would say about twelve or fifteen years ago. I always five years but on thinking about it really it must be fifteen years now I guess.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really!

IVAN KARP: I've been doing it for a long time. I don't save much lately because I can't afford to buy them any more. The demolition people are charging too much for them. Here's a beautiful one right here.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really? This is a famous one.

IVAN KARP: Yes, a very famous one. Anyhow, this man came over to me and said, "I have a couple of old stones, too." And I said, "Well, my God, nobody else is supposed to have those things. I save them all." But I thought it was marvelous that some guy was also saving these bits of demolished buildings. I said, "I'd love to see what you have up there." And I went up to this loft building with this man. I saw that he had two stone heads, two melancholy pieces. They really weren't very much and he really wasn't in desperate competition with us. But I saw there were paintings in this studio. He turned them around. And of all things the first one I saw was a giant depiction of Franco-American Spaghetti, and the front of a Ford car. And again they were really commercial images. This was about six to eight weeks after I'd seen Warhol's paintings. And again here was another artist who did not know either Lichtenstein or Warhol or what they were doing. It was Jim Rosenquist. This was in late 1962.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really?

IVAN KARP: Well, middle 1962? It was earlier than that. Wait a minute. I don't know the first date we showed Lichtenstein.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Lichtenstein was 1961-1962 that season.

IVAN KARP: Well, I saw Rosenquist in 1962.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes.

IVAN KARP: Warhol was the same time. But he didn't show until 1963. Anyhow, Dick Bellamy went up to Rosenquist's studio and saw the paintings and he affiliated him immediately; that very night -- the moment that he saw the work he wanted to show them at the Green Gallery. And it was not by concert, but by coincidence that Lichtenstein and Rosenquist were shown at the same time in New York, about the same month in late 1962 I think it was really, the first show. I don't remember the exact date. But I remember it was quite an unsettling event on the New York art scene at that point.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Because I had seen his things that summer in the studio.

IVAN KARP: I had seen before that -- in fact I had seen Tom Wesselmann's work. Henry Geldzahler had taken me to see it. Wesselmann was doing giant collages but they had in them also certain suggestions of commercial material. He was using giant emblems.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yes. He had shown at the Tanager.

IVAN KARP: Where?

PAUL CUMMINGS: At the Tanager.

IVAN KARP: Oh, did he have a show like that?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Great Americans \_\_\_\_ collage.



IVAN KARP: Yes. But they didn't connect him up immediately to this development, you know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

IVAN KARP: I'd seen Thiebaud's early slides then. I saw Thiebaud's slides before he went to the Stone Gallery. And he looked very interesting. But I thought that he was a romantic. And then there was another wonderful painter I saw in late 1961 who was doing paintings of the front of movie magazines, a kid named Zimmerman. He was about twenty-five years old. I have slides here of his. And really he came up at the same time as the others and did not know them at all. I went to his studio twice and he looked very promising to me. And I got him into a show first of so-called -- well, it wasn't called Pop art then -- it was called Common Imagery which was my general title for it at that point. He was in the show, this young man Zimmerman. He died in his own studio because turpentine and paints caught fire and he was killed. He was twenty-six years old. Probably he would have been one of the major figures in the midst of painters who were just beginning at that moment.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did Vanderweil appear?

IVAN KARP: Oh, Vanderweil. Because the gallery was showing so much in the way of really textural art and the kind of thing that Lichtenstein and others were doing I suppose Leo and I our own reactions turned to a kind of painting world. A group of artists had arrived from Chicago apparently two years before. John Chamberlain told me that he thought the best of them was Gerry Vanderweil. So I went to see his work. He was doing these rather lush almost -- well, you might describe them almost as Art Nouveau paintings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Swirls and color.

IVAN KARP: Yes. He has a very curious history. His paintings were very lush, very rip, cornucopic kind of abstractions. And that's a crucial word I later discovered; 'cornucopic' was the word that stayed in my mind about them. Their incredible ripeness was proven later on in something that happened in Vanderweil's development which I discovered. Anyhow, Leo and I both thought they were very strange, unique and remarkable abstractions. And I still very much believe in those paintings. And we showed them. He's going to show at the Peridot Gallery.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

IVAN KARP: Of all places in this world! I go in to Lou Pollack once a year and I say to Lou, "Lou, I never bother you. I'm going to send you one painter to look at; just one; and you'll look this year at one artist." I sent Gerry Vanderweil over there with his drawings. Lou Pollack liked them very much. Gerry is a great draftsman. He did these drawings of his wife, these female portraits that are just exquisite. Well, what were those paintings about? These cornucopic, ripe pictures? They were about his wife's pregnancy I later discovered. I didn't know she was pregnant when he first started painting those pictures. But those paintings got riper and riper \_\_\_\_ until you might say an actual fetus was visible in these paintings. They were a kind of creative trauma in the husband's mind in response to his wife's pregnancy with their first child. And these paintings actually grew in intensity and ripeness as his wife's pregnancy advanced. I didn't tell him that. And I don't think he was aware of it. And at a point they became almost totally surrealist. They were birth pictures. That's what they were, you know, of childbirth. And then that was the end. Those paintings finished \_\_\_\_\_. He didn't do them any more. He couldn't do them. He started doing landscapes. It was a different world entirely. And that one show was a very beautiful show. We sold a number of them. They were beautiful; bursting with color. They were a unique psychological experience for a man, for an artist. And for us. They were very powerful. We still have one that somebody has been storing at the gallery for six to eight years, or whatever it is. It's a very beautiful painting. A terrific painting. So that's a curious little development there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Let's see, well then Warhol joined the gallery. That was after he showed --

IVAN KARP: Yes. I went away that summer to Provincetown. I was very sad that I couldn't find any affiliation for him. But he was selling a lot from his studio. Somebody suggested that perhaps the Stable Gallery would show him. I was very surprised that of all people the Stable Gallery took him on. They liked him very much. Mrs. Ward had a certain rapport with him. And he had his first show there of all those powerful images. He was already a personality in New York somehow. And the attendance was enormous.

PAUL CUMMINGS: He used to be around Tenth Street.

IVAN KARP: I discovered later that he'd been around a lot. I haven't seen him for a while. I haven't been seeing him very much. But then I started identifying him with other people. He didn't know many of the artists. He was very much in awe of Rauschenberg and Johns and the other American masters. And he was always very intelligent man. Which he still is. And he produced an awful lot of remarkable work; like too much almost. In those four or five years there were maybe a hundred different images. Really a remarkable man. Andy and I used to travel around to the shows all the time during his formative period there. He always had very definite

opinions about art, about what he liked. People say that he never talked about art but he always talked about it. He was always responsive to one thing or another and was always very, very strongly concerned about the way things were in art, what he liked, and what he didn't like. With people he was close to he would speak quite fluently. In public situations he's a very shy man by nature. In the gallery of course these artists developed international fame. Rauschenberg really didn't until he did his flat paintings. His collages and constructions were really very insular art. They were appreciated by the art community, by the artists particularly. And until he did his flat combine paintings, his superimposed silkscreen paintings really he did not develop an international audience. And that happened very fast. In a year and a half or two years his situation really brightened considerably.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know there's some point -- and offhand it must have been I guess maybe around 1960, 1961 -- that the gallery seemed to have taken on a flavor internationally. Or at least maybe the periodicals started covering it with --

IVAN KARP: We always got coverage. The amazing thing is that the back room of the gallery, that little office there always attracted a great number of art personalities. Partly because Leo himself very much enjoys social situations in art. He's a very outgoing personality. And I guess I am myself to a certain extent a pretty social character. I was more so at that time anyhow. Anyhow I've always been receptive to people. People always received a very courteous entrance into the gallery. There was no atmosphere created where people felt that it was difficult to penetrate.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There was no stuffy art gallery feeling.

IVAN KARP: That's right. You could borrow magazines. You could go through the photograph files. You could go through everything we had. And everything was always very well maintained. You could always find the records. And it was open to everybody. We gave photographs -- and still do -- to every art historian, to every art critic, to every museum for their asking. Of course what happened (and at first we didn't realize it) in doing this is that these photographs, which after all is the replica of the art object itself, were widely circulated and they started to crop up everywhere. I get letters now from Russia and Turkey and Hungary regularly, regular letters from people in those countries who in a way are in touch with us. They have some notion of what we're doing. There's one particular correspondent I have in Hungary and he says that we are his life's blood, his sustenance, what we do. And every year I send him a parcel of American art periodicals. I've never met him but I get wonderful letters from him. His name is Atlai Gabor. He's made a very strong impression on me by the way he writes his English letters. They're very beautiful. So kind of unknowingly the gallery by being what it was, an outgoing open place became a center of activity. People come in here and spend a lot of time. They'd meet each other. Every Saturday was an important event at the gallery. Dozens of people standing around in the back room discovering each other. There was a lot of romantic atmosphere. Always a lot of beautiful girls there. What always made the gallery activity worthwhile for me was the number of beautiful people and especially the beautiful girls who always came in. They were always particularly welcome; as they are to day still. That's where I met my wife -- at the gallery. She brought in slides and, in fact, brought in some paintings of an artist she was interested in. And I guess I was more interested in her than I was in the painter. But I think we did show the artist. And then I married his sponsor. Well, I suppose with all the information we gave out we began to get a lot of attention internationally. All these photographs started to crop up in every magazine. And Leo, because he speaks a number of languages, was always able to receive the international museum directors and curators. They used to come because I suppose they were well received. I'm sure that was a large part of it. Everybody was received with the greatest courtesy. Especially students. We've always been open and generous with students and their requirements. And they have very, very definite requirements. They must have certain facts for their teachers. And they've always been given as good, if not better, attention than almost anybody that comes in there. So I suppose the situation generated -- although we didn't know it. By that time Ileana had become Mrs. Sonnabend and had detached herself from the gallery. And the gallery no longer had the collection that it formerly had. All the wonderful paintings and gradually been sold off partly to sustain the gallery's operation, which became more and more expensive. And to inaugurate the Sonnabend Gallery in Paris Mrs. Sonnabend had sold a number of those paintings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You mentioned Michael Sonnabend earlier.

IVAN KARP: Yes, I mentioned that he was with us when we visited the studio of Lee Bontecou. He was a friend of Leo's and a friend of Ileana's over the years. He was a Dante scholar. That's how I knew him. Now I can say that he was the man who came into martha Jackson's gallery one day and said that Mrs. Castelli would like to have lunch with me. He was the man who actually invited me to come and work with Leo. We once had a very fluent discussion about some obscure topic.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So he's really been \_\_\_ the art scene or a long time?

IVAN KARP: He's been on the art scene for a long time, yes. Hovering around and he had a lot of friends in the

art scene. He's a very articulate and lively character. Anyhow, the gallery had a hard time sustaining itself. And it still does. This is not a generally known fact and maybe should not be widely circulated. It really walks a tight rope in its survival economically, trying to live with new artists.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I've always had the feeling that Leo operates in that atmosphere better than one --

IVAN KARP: It must be the case because it's the only way we function. Leo is not a business man. He's never been interested in business functions for a gallery. Perhaps in that sense we're both failures because we don't have a business mind for it. Certain types of management do lapse. We have a fine accountant there now; we have a fine accountant and staff. They tell us how to save money and everything else. I do try to cut corners. But Leo simply is not made for that. He wants to live the full life there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It must be this way.

IVAN KARP: Everything is very expensive. If we have a little success we spend it on some new drapes, or we redo the floors, or we fix moldings. We're putting in new lights next week. So it's always that, you know. And then we have seven employees at the gallery full time plus this outside staff, which is practically an adjunct to the gallery; like two photographers in residence; they're always there. We have two conservators really. And a framemaker. We have Stanly Pohler who makes half of our frames for us, mostly our poster frames. The poster business is a special business in itself, a whole world. And we've just opened a print gallery now for some reason that's very hard to understand.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's a whole new world. Right.

IVAN KARP: It is. We just simply couldn't handle it at the gallery. So Stanley poler, our engineering consultant (because a lot of art now is engineering), and more recently a sculptor who became a conservator, Craig, who now does a lot a restoration work for us --

PAUL CUMMINGS: Craig who? Who is Craig?

IVAN KARP: Martin Craig, the sculptor, who's shown I believe at one point at Bertha Schaefer for a while, in addition to a number of places in New York -- I've forgotten now; he's a very good sculptor but he has a hard time like a lot of the other people. And we always talk about the arts flourishing here but we know we're talking about twenty-five or thirty artists altogether. And the others still have to work very much for a living. They teach and they do all kinds of art related activity. Martin Craig has been a sculptor for many years; a good one. And now he's doing arts engineering and restoration. And so we have him an Stanley Poler and we have the two photographers. We have a youngster running our uptown warehouse gallery. And we have David Whitney working downtown at the print gallery along with the present Mrs. Castelli. So it's a pretty vast activity and I don't know how we sustain it. I really don't know. Because we don't sell established 20th century masters except for our own. These are the artists in the gallery. And we don't get that much work to sell. At this point there is literally nothing for sale in the gallery. There are a few lithographs and a few small paintings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They seem to have been producing less and less and less and less as their fame has grown.

IVAN KARP: Yes, we \_\_\_\_\_ but not with Frank or Rou. They are the main-stays. These two artists of course are very productive.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Johns and Rauschenberg.

IVAN KARP: Last year I think we got two paintings from Johns -- in the last two years three paintings, I think. He paints for himself. He keeps some of his paintings and we get the others. He doesn't paint very much. There are a lot of situations involved there. It's his own problem in making art you know. All the disciples he's had of course usurp much of his own material.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

IVAN KARP: And Rauschenberg has been involved in engineering projects, very elaborate one, very costly ones.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What about EAT? Did you have any -- ?

IVAN KARP: I personally have managed to detach myself from that almost completely. I'm really not involved in any EAT activity. I'm not an -- what do you call it? Admirer \_\_\_\_\_ of this activity. I think the inspiration, the idea, the philosophy around it is probably profoundly significant; I mean the idea that art should somehow manage to merge with the world of engineering is sensible and feasible solution.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's kind of theatre.

IVAN KARP: But what's resulted so far to me has been absolutely nothing, nothing; very little in the way of important art. And I'm sure Rauschenberg never stops. And he knows it. He tests himself constantly. We're going to have a show again of Rauschenberg at the end of April. I don't know yet what they are. They've just been vaguely described to me, but I think you do plug them in. I'm a little worried about them, you know. Because he's a magician -- Rauschenberg -- and could be, and has been in some cases, one of our remarkable artists. And he has all the capacity. But this business of the construction of these devices has not been satisfactory for me at all. Nothing has resulted there. But I suppose the experiment, the adventure it self is worthwhile.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Before we started this second section \_\_\_\_\_ you had mentioned --

IVAN KARP: Some reflections on the gallery's life and the gallery's activity.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The gallery's life and specific kinds of personalities.

IVAN KARP: Just a few reflections on that: what'd developed now in the last eighteen months or two years that distresses me somewhat is the coterie situation in New York art galleries. A certain gallery will represent a certain situation. A certain gallery on 57th Street or another one down there will represent a point of view, which is supposed to be the only and exclusive point of view. And for me it's not a wholesome state of affairs where the points of view become identified; like the Castelli Gallery is representing a way of seeing. Which it does not want to do at all.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Life style, philosophy, and all this sort of thing.

IVAN KARP: It's being forced into a position which it does not have. Because we're really eclectic. We're interested in every point of view. And because we're not concerned with, we have not celebrated another so-called point of view -- the field painters, or the color painters -- now we've been identified as a separate entity. And that's not right or good for the art situation. I think that a certain group of art critics, art historians who enjoy all the drama of this kind of thing -- the little private feuds and private wars -- have created an unwholesome situation. Because the best work should be shown; and the best work is of every kind. There's good realistic work being done. In the last three months we've seen a new group of photo realists who are remarkably talented. And there's good figurative work still being done one way or the other. And there's fine pure abstraction. And there's good construction work. And there's elegant sculpture. It comes from all sides and from all directions. I know it does.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There's great variety.

IVAN KARP: And there may be tendencies and surges of interest in art. There is a romantic reaction right now. There are a lot of painters working with color and with paint again. There's a lot of "soft" art, as we see. And these things react perhaps to the precisionist tendency of the last three or four years. You know, it's feasible. But to identify one way of working as the only feasible way of working at our point is a very destructive factor. It's forced artists into situations that they don't want to be in. Artists have become identified with ways of working. The so-called "field" painters school; the group of artists associated with that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, they're being defined; which they never like.

IVAN KARP: Yes. They don't need to be defined. And then they find themselves in traps because their only protection, their only security is being locked into a situation. And somehow I find that very distressing. The other thing is just the enigma of gallery activity in itself. It's not for us there, and it's not for many other dealers I know, just strictly a commercial enterprise. It can't be that. Because what we're dealing with is new flourishing young creative talent. And it's creative activity at its best, you know. The survival of it is commercial if we can make it. But it's a unique thing. The gallery is a kind of moving museum, a moving machine museum. It's constantly in action, constantly in motion. After all, the best art will first be seen in these little curious places called galleries. And it's got to be a creative and energetic enterprise. I don't really know the full and complex implications of this activity at this time. I know that the 1950s and 1960s for us have been a remarkable moment. And it's occupied my mind and my energy, partly I think maybe at the expense of my own literary commitment; though I am totally dedicated to that life of my own. Work in the arts, of course, has been a great sustenance also.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How about your own collecting?

IVAN KARP: This is my second full collection. I had a collection before this. It's somewhere else now. This collection is five years old. And, as you can see, it's pretty eclectic. My wife and I enjoy phenomena. We collect antiques and things. We have a lot of 19th century landscape paintings of anonymous painters because I guess we can't afford the masters. There's a nice early 19th century portrait of a man over there. We don't know who he is but he certainly is a New England personality. There's a Rosenquist painting. And a Lichtenstein there. And

a beautiful Andy Warhol; Black Flower is one of three that he did. Here's a cool geometric painting by Peter Gourafain who shows a great deal of promise and may still emerge triumphant. A powerful Chamberlain here. A Victorian marble and bronze bust here. A cabinet full of mixed antiquities and American trash. Two 17th century chairs over there. This industrial -- whatever you want to call it -- coffee table, it's just a skid, an industrial skid polished up and looking beautiful; some Victorian bronzes. A man standing on top of an airplane there. A Roman portrait on your right there. A lot of anonymous art from the buildings that have been taken down -- these beautiful cherubs in terra cotta. Early American furniture and other kinds of furniture. Things from buildings. Objects from the 1930s. Everything that you can imagine.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Spoons --

IVAN KARP: Yes. Curious and eccentric 1930s spoons in the drawer. That's what the arts have been for me; just the whole civilization, the whole world of things that nourish you, that you want to look at; that you need to see. And that's everything for me. My life is amongst the living artists and dedicated to the situation of art that's just emerging. My own sensibility extends itself I think to all the centuries that preceded us. And I'd like to say again that I think this is probably a remarkable moment in art history; and it certainly is an American moment. There's no questioning that. And a number of us know that and feel it very deeply that this is a crucial moment. And this taping that you're doing here, Mr. Cummings, I think is a rather crucial matter. I think it's an important document. And if America flourishes and survives they're going to remember this moment in the 1960s, all of us are going to remember it as a powerful creative moment in the generation of a profoundly unique and remarkable American art.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I'm curious about two other things. You were never very involved with The Club? Although Leo was a member, wasn't he, of the painters' Club and went there occasionally? Did you ever go to that?

IVAN KARP: I used to sidle in there to their turbulent meetings. It's been kind of revived.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yes.

IVAN KARP: Leo spent a lot of time at The Club. In fact, he came up out of that group of artists and he was very much involved with them. He collected their work and there was a lot of interchange. I didn't spend much time there. I used to go in and hear Milton Resnick haranguing Philip Pavia and that whole crowd of remarkably colorful characters. It was really a different time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. Stanley Landsman says, "They're still talking about nature."

IVAN KARP: It's very strange. A different sensibility was at work. The artist's mentality, his way of feeling about things really seems to have been different. We talk about artists now as being swingers, as being cool. The kind of traditional alienation and agony is no longer present.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, they're very much a part of the avant garde social --

IVAN KARP: Artists participate in the society though they may be critics of it. Many of them are. We know their political views. We share them, you know. They're profound critics of certain troubled things in our lives. At the same time they're makers of American life as well. They're certainly participants. And they're watchers of the American scene. They're no longer as traditionally alienated as they had been. It's a really new artistic mentality here. I don't know if it's a new thing in the world history of art. But certainly the young painters around me now, even some of the older ones, don't have this kind of total agony situation where they're always estranged and always suffering the torments of estrangement.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, some of the older ones have matured a little bit.

IVAN KARP: Well, like John Chamberlain. We talking about John Chamberlain's being a fabulous relic of the abstract expressionists ecstasy. And it isn't often that we see that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: \_\_\_\_\_ that movie which is still \_\_\_\_\_

IVAN KARP: Yes, that kind of thing still goes on. It probably still goes on at The Club where they rehash the problems of the 1940s and 1950s and have a lot of fun. It has sentimental value. And it's nice to see people there. And the commitment is still as firm as ever.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Was the first Mrs. Castelli active in the gallery?

IVAN KARP: Oh, yes, she was quite active. In fact she formulated a lot of the early policy. She's a very strongminded woman. She selects a lot of the European artists. She's made some interesting recommendations to us. We're going to show, I think, an artist that she identified last year in Europe, a sort of "soft" artist name Zoria. We may be showing him next year. He's already working in this tradition of softness, of funk objects, you

know, like Robert Morris and some of the young people around him. And there's another artist in Europe who's interesting to us and is interesting to her. His name is Alviani. We might show him next season. We've never shown many really European artists before. And I think that the Italian School right now is the best work being done in Europe. Unfortunately because of the dominance of the American situation, and the French being very resistant of anybody else having any situation. British sculpture looked very good a few years ago. It seems to be repeating itself a little bit now. But now it seems that Italian avant garde art is really, truly lively. And there's not much of an opportunity for the artist in Italy to expand. They have a small audience, you know. And they look awfully good. In looking through Italian periodicals you see wonderfully inventive work being done. And this whole "soft" tendency seems to suit them very well. There are a number of artists working this way. They're in there and they're in swinging with it. They really feel it very deeply. There's a kind of Italian Pop art also which I very much admire. A number of artists are doing that. It's a very whimsical kind of thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Pop art has had an enormous impact.

IVAN KARP: Yes. Artists who locked into expressive situations were in a sense invited to come out and deal with imagery in their own way. And I think that Pop art was responsible for the expansion of precisionist painting. Because we know there was a great deal of geometric painting all through the abstract expressionist period. We called it hard-edge painting; and it was \_\_\_ Ellsworth Kelly and Myron Stout and, you know, there was Glarner and Bolotowsky. These people were working right along. And so we talk about this new world around Stella -- now that's just a continuing tradition. Stella, to a certain extent, took it away from what it was. But that mentality that expanded out of Stella and others came from the attitudes of Pop art, which are clarity, bluntness, refinement of surface, you know, primary coloring, and so forth. And I think that that's been a reaction, maybe an overreaction, to a certain extent, to the emotional period of the 1940s and 1950s. Now we have a return to expressive art in this new soft school. Which relates (and I insist it does in a recent little piece I wrote) to abstract expressionism in its object loving, in its celebration of the object. We're looking at the Chamberlain here which is an object of assemblage, and adulation of abandoned materials. And much of the new soft art has some of that same quality about it. The mental force that created it perhaps is slightly different. Anyhow, there seems to be no end to it. There's a lot of energy here in the American arts community. And the great joy and thrill is watching it unfold. As you and I do all the time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's about the end of the spool.

END OF INTERVIEW

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