



Smithsonian
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Oral history interview with Charles Alan,
1970 August 20-25

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Transcript

Interview

**Interview with Charles Alan
Conducted by Paul Cummings
August 20-25, 1970**

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Charles Alan on August 20-25, 1975. The interview was conducted by Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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

PAUL CUMMINGS: I'll put all the statistics on here saying that it's Paul Cummings talking to Charles Alan. Why don't you give us some background, some kind of idea about education and family and how you got involved in being an art dealer?

CHARLES ALAN: I was born in 1908 in New York City and became interested in the theatre when I was seven years old, having been taken to see the Diaghilev Ballet. I'd also started to draw and my family, my mother especially, I think imagined that I was a genius. But as a result of my being encouraged to draw and paint and the fact that I went to the Ballet, and was taken a great deal to the theatre when I was very young I became enamored of the theatre and was determined to work in theatre and become a scene designer. When I was about thirteen years old I read, I think in *Theatre Arts* magazine, that Norman Bel Geddes was going to start a class, so I persuaded my father to allow me to go if Geddes would accept me. He did accept me and there I met a number of people who have remained friends all my life, especially Henry Dreyfuss and Aline Bernstein. I studied with Norman that year and the following year he had an advanced class which I attended as a part of a picked group of people.

MR. CUMMINGS: What did you study?

MR. ALAN: Scene design, stage design. At that time Norman was commissioned to design *The Miracle* for Max Reinhardt. A number of the people in the class were asked whether they wanted to work on that. In addition to going to the classes I generally worked in Norman's studio-office weekends and after school-whenver I could. I guess I worked all the summer of 1922 on *The Miracle*. Then when I was about to graduate from high school there was an enormous battle with my father who was very anxious that I go to college. I was very anxious to continue working in the theatre. Finally, we made a compromise because Professor George Pierce Baker was coming that year from Harvard to Yale to start the Yale Drama School, so my father agreed that if I was accepted in that school, I could go there for two years instead of going to college. It was really supposed to be a graduate school and no one had every been admitted directly from high school, but with recommendations from Geddes and Robert Edmond Jones and various other people whom I knew, Mr. Baker did accept me and I then started at the Yale Drama School.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's marvelous. I was just going to ask who in your family was so interested in the theatre that you went all the time?

MR. ALAN: Well, no one was especially interested in the theatre except as people who go to the theatre, that's all. My father was an amateur at music. He played the piano, not too well but with some understanding. He was also a great Wagner fan. He actually wrote a book for children on the Wagner Ring which I illustrated, and it was really quite a success.

MR. CUMMINGS: What was the title of that book?

MR. ALAN: *The Nibelung Ring for Children*, or the *Ring of the Nibelung* for Children. At the same time I did

illustrations for *Vanity Fair*. I got to know Frank Crowninshield who was a great influence on me and really introduced me to all modern art: Picasso and Braque and Rouault, and Marie Laurencin, who as a great favorite of his. I did a great many small illustrations for *Vanity Fair*. In fact, enough so that I went to Europe in the summer of 1926 on the money I made out of that.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's very interesting. I'm curious about a little more background. Was there an interest in literature? Did you read a great deal?

MR. ALAN: I would say we were an upper middle-class cultured family. My father was a merchant. There was nothing at all special about the family. Is this all right? Am I talking loud enough?

MR. CUMMINGS: It's fine, yes.

MR. ALAN: Shall I go on?

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes.

MR. ALAN: After I finished at the Yale Drama School...

MR. CUMMINGS: How was it in Baker's classes?

MR. ALAN: Are you really interested in all this?

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes.

MR. ALAN: Oh, it was very good. It was very exciting because it was the first two years that it was there at Yale. There were a number of very talented people in the classes. I don't know what else to say about it.

MR. CUMMINGS: Were there any other students that became good friends of yours and have remained friends?

MR. ALAN: Herbert Biberman, who's become famous as being one of the Hollywood Ten, was in the class, and there was a girl named Rose Bogdanoff who was quite a good designer (she has since died); she did quite a lot of costume designing both in the theatre and later on in television. There was also a man named Lemist Essler who wrote a play about Machiavelli called *The Grey Fox*, which Henry Hull acted in.

MR. CUMMINGS: So it was really quite a professional class?

MR. ALAN: Oh, yes.

MR. CUMMINGS: There was no doubt about where they were going to go.

MR. ALAN: There was a man named Maurice Gniessen, who was director of the Goodman Theatre in Chicago. It was very stimulating. I was the baby of the school; everybody else was older.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you like being younger than everybody?

MR. ALAN: I liked it.

MR. CUMMINGS: What gave you the impetus to want to go to Europe?

MR. ALAN: I went to Europe just because I wanted to go to Europe. I wanted to travel around. Also because of my connection with Max Reinhardt, and especially some of the people around Reinhardt. I spent a great deal of time that summer in Salzburg, went to a lot of rehearsals and hung around the festival. Then when I finished at Yale the course was two years-I wasn't as anxious to go to work as I had been when I graduated from high school. So I persuaded my father that if he had sent me to college it would have been four years and I had only spent two years at New Haven, so he should let me go to Europe for a year to study. So the winter of 1927-28 I went to Europe and studied at the Kunstgewerbeschule, Arts and Crafts School, in Vienna, mainly with a man named Professor Cižek, who was most famous for his children's classes. I went to that class because it allowed one to work in any medium that one wanted to. There was also a very famous stage designer teaching there. Though I didn't actually study with him, I knew him and worked some with him. His name was Oscar Strnad. I spent most of the summer of 1927 in Salzburg and the winter in Vienna and did some work with Strnad on an opera called *Johnny Spielt Auf* which was being done for the first time. Then when I came back to the United States I really did have to go to work.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you travel around while you were there?

MR. ALAN: I traveled around during the summer. I went to Paris. I went to Italy.

MR. CUMMINGS:Did you visit museums?

MR. ALAN: Yes, visited museums and all that. I still was very interested in painting and drawing; even though my main interest was the theatre I was also interested in the visual arts. Then when I came back to the United States I had to get a job. Through a series of silly circumstances I went to California and got a job at Metro Goldwyn Mayer with the design department. I hated California at that time.

MR. CUMMINGS:Do you like it better now?

MR. ALAN: I like it much better now. It was really my fault that I hated it anyway. I lived too penuriously. I would have enjoyed it more had I not. Anyway, I finally got myself transferred back to the MGM studios in New York that had opened a few months before, because talking pictures had just started. Then they closed that studio. Then I went to work for Warner Brothers studio in Flatbrush. Well, I won't go into all this. I became more interested in direction than in design and continued working in theatre up until I went into the army in 1942.

MR. CUMMINGS:Had you studied art history?

MR. ALAN: Yes, I studied art history. In connection with studying stage design at Yale one had to study art history and also the history of architecture. So I did have quite a good background. Also, I had done a lot of reading on my own and a great deal of traveling. Having worked on *The Miracle* I was terribly excited about medieval architecture and sculpture and all that, so when I was in Europe in the summer of 1927 I went to every famous cathedral in France and every chateau and most of the famous cathedrals in England. Then in the spring of 1928 before I came home I traveled through Northern Italy and went to Venice, Florence, etc. So I'd seen a great deal of art. I'd seen the Louvre and the National Gallery in London and I really had a good background in art history.

MR. CUMMINGS:Did you get to the Bauhaus?

MR. ALAN: Yes, I did go to the Bauhaus. I went to Berlin for Christmas vacation of 1927 to visit some friends. On my way back to Vienna I stopped at Dessau and went to the Bauhaus. It was quite amusing because I walked in and said to the receptionist that I wanted someone who would show me around in the morning and I wanted to have an appointment with Paul Klee in the afternoon. Which is the kind of thing one can only do when one is nineteen. So they got some student to show me all through the Bauhaus. At that time I was very interested in all the stage designs but especially the costumes of Moholy-Nagy. I saw all those and all his designs. They also had made an appointment for me at two in the afternoon with Paul Klee. I spent about three hours with him. He couldn't have been more charming and showed me just hundreds of watercolors and drawings. The floor was absolutely littered with them. When finally I had the sense to say I thought I had taken up enough of his time and I was about to leave he said, "You're not going to buy anything?" I said, "Oh no, Dr. Klee, I couldn't buy anything. I'm only a student. I don't collect art." He said, "Well, anyone of the watercolors is only a hundred marks apiece." Which of course was twenty-five dollars at that time. But foolishly I didn't buy any.

MR. CUMMINGS:That's fantastic!

MR. ALAN: Then, as I said, I came back and worked in the movies and then in the theatre until I went into the Army.

MR. CUMMINGS:When did you go into the Army?

MR. ALAN: I went into the Army in June of 1942. And for various reasons which I won't go into here, while I was in the Army I decided that I would never go back into theatre. When I came out of the Army in the fall of 1945, I had to go to work at something. I knew that I wanted to get into some kind of business and that I wanted it to be a small organization where I would really count as a person and where also what I did today would matter tomorrow. I didn't know exactly what kind of business it would be but I knew it would have to be something that would interest me and that would be in a field that I knew. I had really no idea of becoming an art dealer or working in an art gallery. It was by the sheerest chance that I heard that Edith Halpert at the Downtown Gallery was looking for someone who would come in and help her. The idea being that she was going to retire in 1950, which would be her twenty-fifth anniversary, and she wanted someone who would come in and work for five years and then take over the gallery. At that time my sister, then Aline Louchheim, was managing editor of *Art News* and of course knew Edith Halpert. So I called Aline and she called Edith and made an appointment. I went in, and Edith hired me immediately.

MR. CUMMINGS:She was still on 13th Street then?

MR. ALAN: No, she had moved up to 51st Street. She had been at 43 East 51st Street I think from about 1942 or 1943 and then bought the house at 32 East 51st Street and moved there. Actually, when I arrived the opening exhibition at 32 East 51st Street was still hanging. Could we rest a moment? [machine turned off]

MR. ALAN: I'll just give the brief facts to begin with: I started at the Downtown Gallery in November 1945 and I stayed through the season of 1953. Then I left there at started my own gallery in the fall of 1953. I sold it to Felix Landau in the fall of 1966 and stayed with it until November 1969. In January 1970 I started with Terry Dintenfass, Inc.

MR. CUMMINGS: Can I ask you some questions about Edith or do you want to just start talking?

MR. ALAN: I think it would be better if you would start asking questions.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, you know, it was a very prominent and well-established gallery that you came into. What was it like going to a gallery where many of the artists were very well known and there was already a substantial business going?

MR. ALAN: Oh, it was very good. You must remember that I was familiar with the gallery and had visited the one on 13th Street, although I had never spoken to Edith. I was also very familiar with many of the artists. I had been a great admirer of Stuart Davis for many, many years. I knew Kuniyoshi's work. I had seen Jack Levine's work. I mean I really knew the gallery. I don't quite understand what you mean, "what was it like to go in?" I have no basis of comparison because I've never worked for a gallery that didn't have well-known artists and wasn't really well established. Actually, it was rather amusing going there. I wasn't at all sure that I wanted to get into the art business. I had the layman's usual impression that it was really all wheeling and dealing and that you could never trust an art dealer. I had never bought a work of art in my life except, oh, a few little Oriental things when I had been in California. So I had really no idea of what it was like. And, as I say, I had this impression that it was a very shady business. I asked a couple of people and I decided that the one person I could talk to was Kirk Askew, whom I had known for many years because he and Constance used to have salons in the house on Saturday nights in the thirties and I had met a great many people there. I was very fond of them. I had also known Julien Levy very well and went to openings at his gallery and saw a great deal of him and Joella socially. But Julien I didn't trust quite as much as Kirk as far as advice went. I knew he was very mercurial-oh, I'd trust him as a person-but I thought his advice would be more from his point of view than really thinking about me. So I went to Kirk. He spoke very highly of Edith and thought it was a great opportunity to be able to be in that gallery. But then when I asked him whether he thought I should be an art dealer at all he said, "Well, that only depends on one thing, whether or not you have a passion for painting." So I said "I really don't know whether or not I have a passion for painting. I've always been interested in painting but I can't tell you that I have a passion for it." He said, "Well, if you don't have a passion for it then I don't think you should become an art dealer because you're not going to make very much money out of it. The only reason to be in it is if you really have a passion for it." Actually, though I thought his advice amusing at the time, I think generally it's quite true. I think one of the troubles with the art business today is that there aren't enough people who really do have a passion for painting.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes. They all want to do wheeling and dealing and make money right away.

MR. ALAN: Yes.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, that's interesting. So you, in a way, had an acquaintanceship with the art world and with dealers.

MR. ALAN: Oh, yes.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you know many artists at that time?

MR. ALAN: No, I didn't know any of the painters.

MR. CUMMINGS: That came after you got into the gallery?

MR. ALAN: Yes. Of course when I got to the gallery I met them. I can't say I've been on close terms with many of the artists. In some ways it's something I've avoided all the time I've been in the art business. I would say I'm on "friendly business terms" with most of them. Actually, I think it was Edith's very close involvement with the artists that put me off a little bit and the example of her life which frightened me. I think what I had felt about it has now been borne out in that she really had no life outside the gallery. I found when I worked for her that I was also becoming completely absorbed in the gallery and spending most of my time out of the gallery with either artists or clients, and it worried me a bit. I suppose I didn't want to end up as Edith has with no friends because she never made any friends outside the gallery, and now that most of the artists have died, and most of the collectors have either died or drifted away, she really is left with nobody. So for that reason I try to maintain what I call a friendly business relationship with the artists without getting so involved with them that I have no life outside. Also, Edith never went to the theatre, to the movies or to a concert-she had little interest in music, though she was somewhat interested in the theatre-if she was taking an artist and his wife or a collector and his wife.

MR. CUMMINGS:It was eternally business.

MR. ALAN: It was always to do with business. Her whole life was somehow tax deductible, or tax deductible on the side of the person who was taking her.

MR. CUMMINGS:Didn't she have any interest in anything outside the gallery?

MR. ALAN: She had no real interest in anything outside the gallery and the people who were in one way or another connected with it. I don't mean any of this in a derogatory sense. This was her life. We always got along very well. But around 1950, after I had been there for about five years and realized that she was not going to retire as she had said she was, I began to spend fewer evenings with her and with artists and collectors and became less and less her escort, which I had always been, to museum openings and things like that. I again began going to the theatre and to the opera and to the things that had really interested me all the early part of my life and which I had given up when I worked with Edith.

MR. CUMMINGS:It sounds as if the whole thing was either very demanding or just slowly absorbing.

MR. ALAN: It was very absorbing. She never really demanded. But on the other hand, when I did start leading my own life more it caused some friction between us. She was a little bit upset. I don't know whether I should go into personal things in this interview, but I might as well say so and it will be on the record forever and ever: contrary to what many people think, I never had an affair with Edith. On the other hand, she did sort of feel that I was her escort, and were invited together to many collectors' houses and especially to artists' houses. Then in 1950 I began going with somebody else, a woman whom I had known for many years who through circumstances came back into my life. And that rather upset Edith. I was glad of it, because as I said, Edith's life was so completely bounded by the gallery and the people connected with it.

MR. CUMMINGS:Why do you think that was? That she had no other interest? Or she kept giving them more and more time and pretty soon they took over?

MR. ALAN: Well, you must remember that she was a woman who never had children. She had two unsuccessful marriages. She really had no family except a sister and a niece. First of all, I think she is naturally a very possessive woman and she thought of the artists as her family. And then she felt-well, I'll put it this way: I feel she was basically a rather insecure woman except in her own field. When she was in that field she felt secure and there was something she could talk about, and she could dominate people and all that. And the collectors with whom she spent much of her time after hours she also dominated. They depended on her advice and they loved hearing her stories. Sometimes after they'd heard them twenty times they got a little bored, but generally they found her-which she was-a very bright and very interesting and very amusing and vital woman. So there was really no need for her to have any life outside. She liked being queen bee. That was simply it.

MR. CUMMINGS:In the first years when you were there, in the late forties, what was the art business like? Were there lots of collectors? You know, prices were not as wild as they are now in the post-war period.

MR. ALAN: Oh, I think the art business was very different and actually much more pleasant than it is now. It was much more relaxed. The collectors were generally more educated, more serious, and much more cultured. I think also they respected the dealers more and the dealers on their side respected the collectors more. It is my recollection at least that the collectors spent more time at the gallery. A man like Edward Root, let us say, who was a special friend and customer of mine and with whom I got along in many ways better than Edith did, would come to the Gallery and spend two hours and we would talk about all sorts of things, not all having to do with art or the artists or the paintings in the Gallery. We'd talk about books and music and politics and whatever came along. Every ten or fifteen minutes or so I might say, "Oh, I just thought of a painting that we have that I don't think you've seen that might interest you." I might bring it out and we might talk a little bit about that. If he didn't like it he was always interested in knowing why I liked it and why I thought he would like it. There was a great feeling that if I showed him something it was incumbent on him to respect my choice and my taste and find out why I thought it was a good painting.

MR. CUMMINGS:He's very interesting. I'm very curious about him. Everybody has had good things to say about him.

MR. ALAN: He was a remarkable man in every way. He was just a wonderful, wonderful person. But there were other people, too. There was a man named Oliver James, people like the Lowenthals. No matter what some people may think of their taste, at least they were very serious collectors and they spent a great deal of time in the gallery. And it was a different kind of conversation. There was very little talk about money or the value of things or whether this was hot, and all that sort of thing.

MR. CUMMINGS:Things weren't as expensive then.

MR. ALAN: No, of course they weren't nearly as expensive. When we sold something for five thousand dollars that was an enormous sale. But I think the atmosphere was altogether much more pleasant. While Edith was certainly a business woman and interested in making money, it was not very obvious, at least to the outside. She was very shrewd and very tough. When I say "shrewd" I don't want to imply in any way that she was ever anything but scrupulously honest; but that she really drove hard bargains. She wanted her way as much as she could get it but on completely fair terms. But the whole business was more pleasant. I also think there was much more a feeling of respect on the part of everyone. The artists were much easier to deal with at the time. They were really more interested in painting and in their art than they were in amassing a great deal of money. They were much more respectful of their dealers and more appreciative of what the dealer was doing for them. And I think the dealers warranted that respect.

MR. CUMMINGS: There were a lot of artists in that gallery who had really struggled through the Depression and the early forties. Do you think that had an effect on their attitude toward her?

MR. ALAN: Yes, I think it did. Edith on her side was very loyal to her artists and she stuck by them through bad times and they appreciated it. There was never any talk about an artist leaving the gallery. Hardly any of them did leave.

MR. CUMMINGS: They seemed to stay forever and ever.

MR. ALAN: They stayed forever. For instance, I remember when I came to the gallery-in about 1942 or 1943, Edith had just started representing an artist named Raymond Breinin, whom today no one remembers but at the time you have no idea-Raymond Breinin was the hottest thing in the American art world.

MR. CUMMINGS: He was a kind of surrealist, wasn't he?

MR. ALAN: No. He was really a romantic artist, if you could imagine a Chagall without color; because he painted in very somber tones. And we just couldn't keep his paintings! People were waiting for works by Raymond Breinin. And for the time he got comparatively high prices. Then all of a sudden Breinin just stopped painting. First he painted very poorly, and then he stopped. But Edith kept Breinin's name on the gallery roster for a long time after that. It was only, oh, maybe five years later that he finally said that he was going to leave the gallery. Well, there was really no point in his staying.

MR. CUMMINGS: Stuart Davis left at one point, didn't he? Wasn't that earlier?

MR. ALAN: Oh, everybody left at one point. But they always seemed to come back. Ben Shahn left and went to Julien Levy, and then came back to Edith because she sold his things better and I think he fitted more into the Downtown Gallery, though actually some of his best paintings were done at the time he was with Julien Levy. Stuart Davis left because of an incident which was around 1932 or thereabouts. Edith bought paintings from Stuart. He was very broke. After he did the Paris pictures there came a period when he wasn't selling well at all. I think it was in the early 1930s. So Edith bought a number of pictures from him. The idea was that she would pay him a royalty when she sold them. The fact that she owned these paintings created a great resentment in Stuart. He left the Gallery. Then I think he realized that really he should be back and so he came back later on. I don't know exactly when it was but I think it was either in the very late 1930s or the very early 1940s. For awhile Sam Kootz was sort of a private dealer and he handled Stuart's work. Then I think somebody else handled Stuart. I think it was really Julian Levi, the artist (not Julien Levy, the dealer) who persuaded Stuart to come back when Julian began showing at the Downtown Gallery.

MR. CUMMINGS: What was it like dealing with the museums in the first say, five or six years there? Because there couldn't have been too many that were active.

MR. ALAN: They were fairly active. But the whole feeling was different from what it is now. I could go on for hours about this. The museums bought a great deal. Museums like the Metropolitan, the Whitney, and of course the Museum of Modern Art bought a great deal from the Downtown Gallery. The University of Nebraska was buying. The University of Iowa was buying. There wasn't much activity in California. The Art Institute of Chicago bought a great deal from the Downtown Gallery. Also Milwaukee, Wisconsin, when Danny Deffenbacher was there.

MR. CUMMINGS: He was at Minneapolis-at the Walker.

MR. ALAN: Minneapolis, yes! The Walker. Hudson Walker himself was very devoted to the Downtown Gallery. Yes, there was a great deal of museum buying. It was a very different kind of museum buying in that today I think the museums really have in many ways usurped the prerogatives of the dealer. The museums are trying to discover artists on their own. At that time the museums evaluated much more and didn't buy an artist until he had some recognition or until they had had a chance to watch his work for a number of years. Now I think the museum wants to rush in almost before he's had a show. But then, with few exceptions, the museums were really much slower in buying things, but they still bought a great deal. Edith particularly had very good relations

with all the museums directors.

MR. CUMMINGS: I notice in the biographies of her gallery artists that they all are in an enormous number of university collections.

MR. ALAN: Yes. Her theory was to hell with the collectors; you really established an artist's reputation through museum purchases and that was absolutely vital. Also, that was how you held an artist's market, because museums did not sell their paintings. Edith worked very hard to get collectors to give paintings to museums so that the artist would be represented. She also felt—and I think rightly at that time, which was different than now—that the museums didn't have large collections (museum collections have grown tremendously in the last fifteen, twenty years) so they showed many of the works that they bought. Today they buy them and they're put in a storeroom and no one ever sees them, but at that time the artists' works were really hanging in the museums. The result of that was that many people would come into the gallery and say, "Oh, we went to the Museum of the University of Nebraska and we saw a Kuniyoshi," or we saw this or that and, "Do you have any paintings by that artist?"

MR. CUMMINGS: So it was good merchandising.

MR. ALAN: It was good publicity, yes. It was the way she got a lot of people to see the artist's work. I think at that time also there were a lot more museum group exhibitions than there are now. Now so many of the exhibitions are packaged.

MR. CUMMINGS: Like the Annuals in Chicago and the Whitney and the Corcoran.

MR. ALAN: Yes. Minneapolis used to have shows; Iowa had a show every other year.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did they produce a good response?

MR. ALAN: Yes. And I think there were more sales out of those shows. Of course there aren't as many shows now. Really the only big one outside of New York is the University of Illinois. Chicago has generally given up those shows. And Minneapolis has. But they stimulated business a great deal.

MR. CUMMINGS: Were there any particular museum people that you worked with that interested you?

MR. ALAN: I personally? No, not especially. I've known an enormous number of museum people. I could go on and give impressions about a lot of them.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, I think it would be very interesting to see how, say, someone who now may be a big museum director but has been through five or six museums, how his attitude has changed, what was he like when he first started?

MR. ALAN: Well, the curious thing is that there are very few people who have done that.

MR. CUMMINGS: Really?

MR. ALAN: There's Perry Rathbone, who was never very friendly with the Downtown Gallery and has never been friendly to me so I really have had little to do with him. I can't say I've ever more than met him. There was George Washburn who was at Buffalo, then the Rhode Island School of Design, then went to Carnegie, and then of course went to Asia House. I have the greatest respect for George Washburn. I think he really is a marvelous museum director. He himself developed and he broadened his taste, and personally, no matter what the trustees of Carnegie Institute think, I think the last Internationals that he did were really marvelous and a wonderful combination of older artists and new faces and all selected with great taste; I may not agree with all the things he showed but generally there was a kind of consistency. Certainly he built up the sculpture collection at Buffalo. It's remarkable what he did in the time that he was there. Andrew Ritchie is another who has gone from one place to the other and has consistently done a very good job. But it's strange when you think of it there are very few museum directors who started as some kind of assistant curator, then rose to curator, then director of a small museum, and then went to a larger museum.

MR. CUMMINGS: Tom Messer started in a small museum.

MR. ALAN: Yes, and then he went to a big museum. I'm just trying to think of who-

MR. CUMMINGS: John Baur-

MR. ALAN: Well, you see, those museum directors were all very good art historians and they had a great background aside from modern art. They were really scholars. I don't think that many people in the field today are. Tom Messer is a pretty good scholar.

MR. CUMMINGS: It's gotten to be a very social butterfly kind of thing.

MR. ALAN: It's really a public relations job and I think that's too bad. That's largely what's changed the character of the art world.

MR. CUMMINGS: Were there collectors then that you particularly worked with or that usually wanted to see you when they came into the gallery?

MR. ALAN: Not especially. I think I talked more with Edward Root than Edith ever did. Edith always said, "Oh, Edward Root is a Frank Rehn customer." But actually as time went on Edward Root bought a lot of things directly from me. Especially during the years that Harris Prior was director of the Munson-Williams-Proctor and Mr. Root was giving them a great deal of money for purchases. The other person who was really my customer at the Downtown Gallery was Joe Hirshhorn, who had never gotten along with Edith and had not entered the gallery for many years. Then an old friend of mine from the theatre told him that I was at the Downtown Gallery and urged him to come back, so he did, but hardly ever dealt with Edith.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you find him as a collector?

MR. ALAN: I always got along very well with Joe. I find that he has a lot of annoying characteristics but I've always liked him. And I generally respect his taste. If you buy as much as he does then of course you're going to buy a lot of things that I personally don't think are very good. But he's got a good eye. He really is obsessed, but whatever his motives are and whatever his neuroses that make him such an obsessive collector, I still like him. When you get on to him, he's really a very simple person. You get on to him very quickly and you know you're going to have to go through this ridiculous bargaining. You're prepared, and he knows you're prepared. It's really kind of a game, a ritual, really almost a kind of sexual thing, you know, that you have to go through with him.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did he buy in lots at that time, too-groups of things at a time?

MR. ALAN: Oh, yes. He came in one day and I sold him nine Marins. He had never owned a Marin before. He bought numbers of things, particularly when he felt he had to catch up on somebody. I think it's rather too bad with Joe. Before he began to think of himself as a museum, which was long before he really made the provisions for the museum, he was a much better collector. While I think he made a lot of mistakes, his collection had a real personality. When he began feeling that he had to buy abstract art, for which he really doesn't have great feeling, and non-objective art, and so forth, he just bought what he felt he should have. When you go to his house or his apartment or office and you see what he has hanging you see the things he really likes. On the other hand, I think he has much better taste in sculpture, great feeling for sculpture and he can somehow see the difference between good and bad abstract sculpture better than he can painting.

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you find a great deal of difference in people who buy sculpture compared to those who buy paintings?

MR. ALAN: I don't know what you mean.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, you know, it always seems to me that there are fewer sculpture collectors, maybe because of the size, weight, and cost problem, than there are people who buy paintings.

MR. ALAN: Well, I don't know any collector who is exclusively a sculpture collector except Howard Lipman, and he's really made a kind of thing of it.

MR. CUMMINGS: His collection is enormous compared to the percentage of sculptures that a lot of other people have.

MR. ALAN: Oh, yes. David Pincus I suppose collects ninety percent sculpture. He's really interested in sculpture. And Lionel Bauman is really interested in collecting sculpture. But I don't think there's anything particularly special about a sculpture collector.

MR. CUMMINGS: I'm trying to get more of the essence of what the Gallery was like in the early fifties.

MR. ALAN: The Downtown Gallery?

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes. Who else was working there at that point?

MR. ALAN: There was Lawrence Allen, who was Edith's secretary. I don't know how much she's spoken about him. You know Lawrence is black. He started with Edith in 1926, left her for a period, and then came back. He was really her confidant, her secretary, her everything; she depended very much on Lawrence. And he was actually very good. I don't think there's ever been anybody better in the gallery as a secretary, receptionist, that sort of thing. He understood Edith very well and was very devoted to her, though he could be amused by her

foibles. Well, Lawrence was there, and he was very important. He was marvelous on the telephone. He was very good with collectors. The artists were very fond of him. In every way he was a vital part of the gallery. Aside from Lawrence and me, there was really nobody except Edith's cousin who came in and did the bookkeeping, but had nothing to do with the functioning of the gallery. There were just the three of us. Then later on John Marin, Jr. came.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did he come into the Gallery?

MR. ALAN: Well, this is very restricted. When Stieglitz died-turn this off for a moment. [machine turned off.] Stieglitz died in 1946. Edith, of course, was determined to get the three Stieglitz artists, but Georgia O'Keeffe was determined that the American Place would go on. Immediately after Stieglitz's death Bill Dove, Arthur Dove's son, came to Edith and said he would like her to handle his father's work. So Dove left the American Place. The American Place continued with just O'Keeffe and Marin. Somebody had to run it and so John Marin, Jr., who was doing nothing of any import-the elder Mr. Marin persuaded O'Keeffe that John should run the gallery. That didn't work out very well. Mr. Marin, who was not a stupid man by any means, realized that his son really couldn't operate the American Place, and besides, O'Keeffe and John, Jr. never got along too well together. Finally it looked as though something was going to happen with the American Place, that it wasn't going to continue. Of course many other dealers besides Edith Halpert were after those artists so we had to find a way to get at least Marin to the Downtown Gallery. Actually, it was I who dreamed up this idea. There was a little yard which had never been built on that Edith used as a kind of sculpture garden. It was useless; nobody ever went into it. The sculpture just sat out there getting covered with soot. I knew something of the building laws-how, I don't know-but I did know that it was permissible to cover an entire lot in New York to the height of one story. So there was this yard that had never been built on-I don't think there was even a basement underneath it, and I persuaded Edith that she should build on this yard and make a fireproof vault underneath it, a room which would be completely devoted to the work of John Marin. I thought if she did that she would be able to get Mr. Marin to come to the gallery. I must explain that in the period from 1946 to 1950, when Marin actually did come to the Downtown Gallery, we had been selling a great deal of work by O'Keeffe and Marin. We were very friendly with the American Place and whenever there was anybody who was interested in one of these artists we would send the porter to bring the paintings over to the gallery-it was only two blocks away-and we had sold many more Marins and O'Keeffes than had been sold at the American Place. Mr. Marin liked selling pictures. Also, Edith had maintained the prices and in some cases had raised them, so he was very happy working with Edith. It was just a matter of doing something-he was worried about the physical aspects of the building, because while the house was well-built and all that, it was only so-called fire resistant-it was an old house. Also, I don't think he was too fond of the idea of being associated with about twenty other artists. Anyway, we dreamed up this idea and got estimates of what it would cost. It seemed feasible. Then we approached Mr. Marin. He said he'd think about it. Then there was the problem that if American Place closed what would happen to John, Jr. So Edith decided that the only thing to do was to take him on at the Downtown Gallery. That's how it all happened.

MR. CUMMINGS: I'm curious to know what he would do in a gallery.

MR. ALAN: Well, Edith has always been obsessed with records-she does have marvelous records, as you know. She always complained that no one kept up the records. So John just sat making all those entries in all those photograph books and all those record books and pasting in all those clippings. It was really almost a full-time job. It was one thing that Edith and I argued about because I am very bored with records and paper. I think this is a world of paper and I really hate paper. So I just wouldn't do it. I must admit I did it very badly and she was always complaining. I think had I not been valuable to her in other ways she probably would have fired me because that distressed her very much. But when John came he didn't mind and he really kept those records. And he was not unfriendly with the clients. The fact that he was the son of John Marin, Sr. meant a great deal to them. He's a very pleasant guy. I wouldn't say that he made an enormous contribution to the Downtown Gallery, but he certainly didn't do anything to its detriment. And gradually I think he did bring in some clients who were really his. It worked out very pleasantly and we all got along very well together. And I was very fond of the old man Marin.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you see him frequently?

MR. ALAN: Oh, yes. He came into New York about once a week. We often all had dinner together. Sometimes we'd go over to New Jersey and have dinner there and spend the evening. I went to Maine two summers-the summers of 1950 and 1951-and I visited the Marins; this was without Edith. Marin himself was very interested in music and I had much more interest in music than Edith so we talked a great deal about that. He was very friendly with Rosalyn Tureck. I knew her playing and I think I'd met her. We had a great deal to talk about outside of art, really more than he and Edith did, so we were quite friendly and I was very, very fond of him. And I think he liked me. Later O'Keeffe came to the Gallery because it was really the best place for her.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you get along with her?

MR. ALAN: Oh, yes. I got along very well with O'Keeffe. I like her.

MR. CUMMINGS:She's always away.

MR. ALAN: Yes. But I've been out to Abiqui. Through Doris Bry I know that she asks about me and I always ask about her, and I see her when she comes to New York. She's a remarkable person.

MR. CUMMINGS:She seems like an extraordinary lady.

MR. ALAN: Oh, yes. She's very tough but she's very nice. I'd like to talk a little more about the Downtown Gallery. I think its whole situation in the forties was quite interesting and in the thirties it was really unique, especially after the Daniel Gallery closed and Kuniyoshi and Sheeler and Spencer-I think those were the main artists-came to the Downtown Gallery-it was really the gallery of so-called modern American art. It had this great reputation. On the other hand, I think Edith was shrewd enough to realize that she was going to have to move uptown, that it was no longer the kind of quaint gallery on 13th Street in the Village that people like to come to. The whole atmosphere in the Village was dying. I think Prohibition made a great difference because people didn't come to those speakeasies anymore. This sounds silly but I still think it was true. The whole feeling was changing and I think Edith was very shrewd in realizing that she was going to have to move uptown. This was a tremendous burden for her, because while the Gallery has a great reputation I don't think it was actually making so much money. The folk art was in many ways supporting the Downtown Gallery. The Gallery was a corporation, although Edith was the sole stockbroker, but she considered the folk art her personal business. But I don't think even the folk art was doing so well. Mrs. Rockefeller wasn't buying as much as she had in the late twenties and the early thirties and the situation was a little ominous. Then it was Harnett that came along. When Edith found the Harnetts, or the so-called Harnetts, that really made the move uptown possible.

MR. CUMMINGS:How did she find those to begin with?

MR. ALAN: The Harnett story is this-there was a picker-you know, a man who travels around and finds things and brings them to New York to various dealers. This picker had sold Edith a great deal of folk art. He really sold more to antique dealers than to art dealers, but in buying furniture and so forth he found a lot of folk art pictures which he used to bring to Edith. Hasn't she told all this in her tapes?

MR. CUMMINGS:I don't know.

MR. ALAN: Well, I'll tell it but it's only second hand from me. Anyway, in 1935 he came in and he had a painting that he told Edith very honestly he had peddled to every dealer that he knew in New York and no one was interested and he didn't want to carry it back to Philadelphia, so if Edith wanted it for seventy-five dollars he would sell it to her. The painting was filthy dirty. It looked as if it were in fairly good condition, but it was black with dirt and with varnish that had turned brown. All you could see in the painting was a towel and vaguely behind the towel there was a figure. Somehow the painting of the towel intrigued Edith. She liked this man and she didn't want to disappoint him because he had brought her many things and she felt obligated to him and wanted to encourage him to keep on. So she wrote a check for seventy-five dollars and bought the painting. She gave it to a restorer named David Rosen who was with the Philadelphia Museum and who was a great friend of Edith's and did a good deal of work for her on folk art things. He was a very good restorer. David Rosen started to clean the picture and called up Edith very excitedly and told her that it was signed by Raphaelle Peale and dated; it said "Raphaelle Peale Pinxit," with date-I've forgotten the date now. It's that famous picture called, I think, *After the Bath* (this is the title that Edith gave the painting; nobody knows what Raphaelle Peale called it). So Edith sold that painting to the Nelson Gallery in Kansas City for five thousand dollars, which was a very nice profit. Anyway, soon after that this same man came to her with this *trompe l'oeil* picture of a Colt revolver hanging on a barn door. Edith was crazy about the painting and so she bought that for very little money. She knew that Chick Austin, who was then the Director of the Wadsworth Atheneum, liked *trompe l'oeil* painting. She also knew that the Colt family was one of the founders, or biggest backers of the Wadsworth Atheneum. She immediately wrote to Chick Austin and sold that painting. But of course before she sold it she saw that it was painted by an artist named Harnett of whom she had never heard. I think she sold it to the Atheneum for something like \$350 or \$500. She had probably paid a hundred for it. Then she told this man that if he ever found any other paintings by this artist Harnett that she would be interested in buying them. Edith was never very much for research, mainly because you can't smoke in a library. At that time she was a chain smoker. She did go to the library and she did find that there was an artist named William Harnett who had lived most of his life in Philadelphia and was born in 1848 and died in 1892 and had exhibited at the Pennsylvania Academy. She learned a few other facts about him, but very little. But that was enough for Edith.

MR. CUMMINGS: We're running out of tape. [END OF SIDE 1]

MR. CUMMINGS: This is Paul Cummings interviewing Charles Alan, August 20, 1970, tape 1, side 2.

MR. ALAN: As I was saying, Edith has always been very sloppy in research so she felt she had enough facts about

Harnett. Then this man brought other paintings and other people on hearing that she was interested in this artist brought paintings. She sold most of them as soon as they were brought in with no difficulty. Everybody was very enthusiastic and she sold to museums and to very big collectors. By 1939 she still owned enough paintings to give a show, so she gave this Harnett show which was sensational. It was really the Harnett money that allowed her to move uptown. Then the war came and there were delays. Finally, I think it was in 1941 or 1942, she moved to 51st Street and that really revived the Gallery. But after the war when I came to the Gallery, while business was quite good, the Gallery didn't have the same kind of excitement that it had before. Now there were other galleries dealing with American art and younger artists.

MR. CUMMINGS: She didn't take on too many people after that, did she?

MR. ALAN: No. There was a long period when we didn't take on anybody- that is from the time I came to the Gallery at the end of 1945 until 1951, when at my urging we did take on a few new young artists. Edith had taken on the artists out of the WPA in the late thirties and they had what they called the younger group, which included Jack Levine and Guglielmi and Siporin. There were five or six of them. Then in the early forties Edith had taken on Ralston Crawford and Karl Zerbe. They were all with the Gallery when I came there. The only person we took on at the end of 1946 was an artist who has since died named Wesley Lea. Then we didn't take on another artist until we took on another group. Edith turned the room which had been used for folk art into what we called the "ground floor" room because we were starting these artists on the ground floor, and also because the room was on the ground floor. We took on Herbert Katzman, Jonah Kinigstein, Walter Meigs, Charles Oscar, Carroll Cloar, Robert Preusser, Robert Knipschild.

MR. CUMMINGS: How is it that they came in a group?

MR. ALAN: Because she decided that she would take on a group of artists. Certain of them came because she had made a trip around the country. We had a show of young artists seen on this trip who had interested her. In that show were Knipschild, Meigs- I think there were one or two others, I don't remember the names now. We had a large show with quite a number of artists. Then we got this idea that maybe we should take on a few young artists. So out of that group that had been in that single exhibition we took on Meigs and Knipschild and Preusser. Then various other artists came into the Gallery. Their work had interested us so we decided to go ahead and take on a few more. There were about six of them altogether. We started them as a group. Actually, from a business standpoint it was a very good way of doing it in that particular gallery because we had a lot of publicity. *Life* Magazine did a spread. *Time* Magazine did a big story. A lot of collectors came in and bought one picture by each of these artists. They were very, very cheap.

MR. CUMMINGS: A lot of activity.

MR. ALAN: Oh, yes, it was a very good move. It brought in a lot of activity and stimulated the whole gallery, as a matter of fact.

MR. CUMMINGS: It's interesting. You know there's one thing that's always intrigued me about that Gallery. As you came in there was a wall of photographs of all the artists. Whose idea was that? Was that hers?

MR. ALAN: That was Edith's idea. It was like a family photograph album, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: A theatrical restaurant.

MR. ALAN: And the funny thing about it is that when I left Edith and started my own gallery and, as you know, quite a number of the artists came with me, she still kept those photographs. When I complained to her about it she said, "But those are my children and if they have left home that doesn't mean that I should take down their photographs." I thought it was very confusing to people who came to her gallery and saw photographs of Reuben Tam, Jack Levine, and so forth, who were now in mine.

MR. CUMMINGS: It's extraordinary. There's one gallery now I think that has photographs of the artists.

MR. ALAN: There are some. I think at that time there were a couple of galleries that had photographs. I don't think it was as unusual then as it might seem now.

MR. CUMMINGS: That always fascinated me.

MR. ALAN: I think the heyday of the Downtown Gallery as far as its reputation and its excitement and its vitality was really in the 1930's. In many ways after the move uptown, and especially when it was established in the building at 32 East 51st Street, it never had the same kind of excitement. Edith herself could never really get away from that eye of the late twenties and thirties. I can remember when Jim Sweeney, who was quite friendly with the Gallery, came and just begged Edith to handle Jackson Pollock's work. At that time he was not doing the drip paintings. Those came after he had painted things like the *She Wolf* and was using very heavy impasto.

Edith just loathed them. I went over to Peggy Guggenheim's Gallery to see a bunch of them. Previously I had only seen one or two. I must admit I didn't like them either. I've always been made very nervous by paintings with a great deal of paint. I've never been a Van Gogh fan, for instance. I don't know why, but I just don't see why artists use so much paint. I hate that kind of painting. I like the later Pollock much better. I think that had I come back and been wildly enthusiastic about his paintings Edith would have handled his work, but I was not. I liked the *She Wolf* very much but this particular bunch of paintings that had been done about 1947 or 1948 I really disliked. So Edith didn't take on Jackson Pollock. Generally she had an absolutely blind spot for any sort of abstract expressionist painting—really anything that was not in the style of the thirties. It was tragic. And so she couldn't keep the Gallery going.

MR. CUMMINGS: Keep up with the times.

MR. ALAN: Keep changing with the times. I will admit, too, first of all I was very dominated by her, and secondly—well, I was more open to a newer kind of painting. I wasn't terribly enthusiastic. There may have been things that I liked but was not comfortable enough with to feel that I could communicate my enthusiasm to a collector. As a matter of fact, when I started my own gallery I was never comfortable with Paul Burlin's work or anything that was fashionable, you know; and at that time he was painting very abstract expressionists paintings. So he left me. I couldn't blame him. I was sorry that I hadn't liked his things. I didn't think he'd go on that way forever, but I wasn't really selling for him. But I think poor Edith never found a way of really keeping that gallery alive. In many ways it's a shame she didn't retire, as she said she would, in 1950, or at least in 1960. Actually, when I left her she had the idea that she would become a kind of private dealer, have a closed gallery, rent the ground floor and the basement on 51st Street, and just use the second floor and her apartment which was directly above and only sell by appointment. It's a shame I think that she didn't do that.

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you think she needed the activity of people coming in all the time?

MR. ALAN: She had no other life. She wouldn't have known what to do with herself. Yes, she needed that. It was really vital to her.

MR. CUMMINGS: You know it's interesting, she had no feeling or interest in any kind of abstract painting, did she?

MR. ALAN: Oh, yes. She always liked Stuart Davis' work very, very much. I've never known how much she really liked George Morris' work, though. Some of it she liked. Of course he's so enormously prolific that he must paint some poor paintings.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did his paintings ever sell very well?

MR. ALAN: Yes, they sold. But, as I was about to say, I don't know how much Edith was intrigued by George Morris' paintings. It was sort of the idea of George Morris. First of all, he is a very bright person and she felt he was very influential, and a lot of the other artists liked him very much, as a person I think more perhaps than as an artist. He was friendly with Stuart Davis, with Guglielmi and with a number of other artists. Then I think Edith liked the idea that he was from a fine family and all that. She liked going to the Morris' house and the Morris' apartment.

MR. CUMMINGS: And the studio.

MR. ALAN: Yes. But Edith in many ways is an obsessively and neurotically, almost psychotically orderly person. I think she was bothered by the kind of messiness of abstract expressionist painting. On the other hand, she liked expressionist painting very much. For instance, she liked Soutine. She had seen Herbert Katzman's work in Chicago and she liked that. Ben Shahn admired his work when we had a couple of his paintings at the Gallery.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did the artists have much influence over her as to her choice of new people in the Gallery?

MR. ALAN: Not really. Certain artists did have an influence on her. Julian Levi especially (I'm talking about Julian Levi the artist), but I think Levi has very, very good taste. He was more prone to admire some of the abstract expressionists than Edith was and he may have tried to influence her to take on some of them, but she was really like a mother hen in that she felt the abstract expressionists were threatening the Downtown Gallery artists and all that the Gallery stood for. She was not at all resilient. She suddenly gathered all her artists under her wing and became very protective of them. She was also terribly annoyed by all the publicity that those artists got and that they made for themselves and the great backing that *Art News* and Tom Hess gave them. That she resented terribly. And while I don't think she was right from a gallery policy standpoint, she was right in many ways because I feel it was the first step toward a complete breakdown in the art business from what I would call a serious and aesthetic standpoint. It opened the way for the kind of public relations business that the art world has become today. Up until that time there really wasn't so much emphasis on publicity and on what was hot and what was new.

MR. CUMMINGS: And it always has helped.

MR. ALAN: Certainly the Downtown Gallery got an enormous amount of publicity. But at that time this great emphasis on the abstract expressionists came about to the exclusion of almost everything else.

MR. CUMMINGS: Was that because she knew a lot of people in the press?

MR. ALAN: No.

MR. CUMMINGS: Of the accumulated effect of being there?

MR. ALAN: No. She said-and it is one of the things Edith said that didn't need any grains of salt-she never called up a critic. She never called anybody up and said, "Oh, you must come in and do something about this." If she got a bad review she just said, "Oh, that's part of the game." I will say that she would deride the critic. I mean if we had a one-man show and it got a very bad review she would show the review to collectors and then say, "Look at how idiotic this is." But I think that was just good salesmanship. And, after all, it was her right to do it. There was nothing wrong in it. But she never complained to a critic. He could give one show a scathing review and come into the next show and she would never mention the bad review. On the other hand, she never mentioned a good review either. She always acted as if that was the critic's job and she had her job and that was that. In those days the critics were inclined to be a little bit more respectful of the artists even if they gave a bad review. It wasn't ever snide or nasty. They just talked about not liking the work. She never hid the reviews away. They were always laid out, whether they were good or bad, on a big case in which drawings and so forth were kept in cellophane envelopes. She never went after publicity. Oh, we'd send out press releases, and when we started the "ground floor" room I think we did call up-what was her name-Margit Varga, who was at *Life*, and said, "We are going to do this and maybe it would be a story for you." But we seldom did that unless we were really positive that there was something good. In this case it was the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Downtown Gallery and the first time since the WPA that Edith had taken on a group of artists, so it was quite legitimately a good art world story. Edith had been in advertising herself for a brief time before she started the Gallery and she knew the game enough from the other side so that she never bothered editors or critics or anybody like that. And the Gallery just naturally got its own publicity, which was the best kind.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes. Well, how did you like the experience of becoming an art dealer in those years working with her?

MR. ALAN: Oh, I liked it. I only left Edith for one reason and that was as I told you, that when I went to the Gallery she said that she was going to retire in five years and she wanted someone who would take over and manage the Gallery. Then she didn't retire. She always had an excuse: either we took on the young artists, or we took on Marin so that she really couldn't leave. Then when 1953 came and I had been there eight years-well, I really had no complaints; by that time we had settled any friction that there was between us about my leading my own life and not being so absorbed by her and the Gallery. But I finally went to her and said, you know, I could stay forever but I felt that I had contributed a great deal to the Gallery and really had been very instrumental in getting Marin, which brought great prestige and money, and while she had always been very generous about my salary and commissions I just didn't feel that I wanted to go on working only for salary and commissions, that I felt I should have some interest in the business. With that she became hysterical. She said that she had had one partner (Beatrice Kroll Goldsmith), that she had bought her out; that she couldn't have a partner, and she wasn't going to have anybody looking at her expense accounts, and so forth, and that she absolutely wouldn't do it. I never said I was really going to leave but she knew very well. Then she said, well, she really did want to become less active and she certainly didn't want to bother with younger artists any more. So we made this arrangement where we split. I think she would have liked to have been more of a mother hen over my gallery and resented it that she wasn't. As a matter of fact, she was furious that I took on Robert D'Arista when I started my gallery, both because I liked his work very much and also because I felt I wanted to have one artist in my gallery who had not been at the Downtown Gallery. And I made it clear that I was going to take other new artists. She didn't like that.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did she ever come to your gallery?

MR. ALAN: Oh, yes. She came to the opening of the gallery. I had a big party and she came in a brand new hat. Then the first one-man show that I had was Jack Levine's *Gangster Funeral* painting and all the studies and drawings that led up to it. The Whitney Museum had already bought the painting and actually most of the things had been sold, but I thought it would make a good show. I wanted to establish that Jack was with me. Actually, it was a very good move. I knew Jack wanted to have a party and we discussed it and finally we came to the question of whether or not Edith should be invited (it wasn't just to be an open party; it was to be invitational). Jack said he thought Edith shouldn't be invited, which was really my feeling but I wanted to get his thoughts on this before I voiced my own. I said, "Well, you know it's going to be very tough, Jack." He said, "Yes, I know, but I think we just have to show that we've left the nest." So I went to see Edith and said to her (she knew I was going

to have this show. I think she personally owned one or two of the drawings so we had to borrow them from her), I said, "Edith, I'm going to have a party for Jack and we have discussed something and we've come to a decision and I want to tell you before you hear it from somebody else. We're not going to invite you." This I thought was the kindest thing to do. She was absolutely furious and she just couldn't understand it. I said, "Edith, if anybody says anything to you about it you say, 'Oh, I understand these boys. They just want to be on their own. And it's wonderful.'" But she never really forgave us. It was an awful thing for her. We had a show of Karl Zerbe that first year and had an evening party for him and I invited her to that. She didn't come. At that time we had a great many parties; I felt it was good for business and I always invited her to any party that I thought she would like to come to if it was an artist that she had handled. She never came-although she always did come to see almost all the shows. As a matter of fact, she bought a number of things from the gallery. But we were never quite as friendly after not inviting her to that party for Jack Levine.

MR. CUMMINGS: Which artists did you start with? And were there any that didn't want to come with you?

MR. ALAN: The only artist who didn't come with me was Ralston Crawford, which I was sorry about because I like his work. I don't know why he didn't. He never was very clear about the reasons. He was a very quirky sort of person anyway, but not unfriendly by any means. Then, as I said, Paul Burlin left soon after; I think after the first season at the gallery. Then gradually my gallery changed.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who were your first artists?

MR. ALAN: Oh, there were quite a number. There were all the young artists from the Downtown Gallery, that is, Charles Oscar, Walter Meigs, Jonah Kinigstein, Robert Knipschild, also Jack Squier. We had had a few pieces by William King at the Downtown Gallery, although we hadn't really shown that artist. Then there was Jack Levine, Guglielmi, Zerbe; Julian Levi, William Bryce (we had taken him on at the Downtown Gallery in 1946; he was really my choice).

MR. CUMMINGS: So you started with a pretty well-filled-out stable.

MR. ALAN: I had about fifteen artists when I started. Then about 1956, or maybe it was 1955, two or three years after I started (I'll go on at another time about my feelings on American art dealing from a business standpoint)-I was having a very tough time mainly because the artists were producing very little. I was really having a problem getting merchandise. So I talked with a lawyer, and my accountant, and I decided that the only thing to do was to give the artists some sort of guarantee in return for which they would deliver a certain number of paintings every year to insure that I'd have something to sell. I worked it out very carefully-what the gallery could stand financially in order to do this, and it seemed feasible. Then I went to the artists. Quite a number of them did not want to participate in this plan.

MR. CUMMINGS: Edith had had contracts with some of them, hadn't she?

MR. ALAN: No. We had contracts with that group of younger artists. I've forgotten the provisions of those contracts and exactly from whom we did buy paintings, but the artists generally didn't like it, so at that time several of them left me; Julian Levi and Karl Zerbe were the most important ones. I went on, on that basis, with some of the other artists. Finally I stopped it. It was costing too much and I wasn't getting the paintings and it really wasn't working out. The artists began painting only the most unsaleable works. They all suddenly changed their style but everybody wanted the paintings they had done five years before, or the kind of things they had done three years before, you know. Reuben Tam, who had always used a lot of color, did nine paintings completely black and white. Suddenly nobody wanted those paintings, and of course those were the ones that I was buying.

MR. CUMMINGS: How are you for time?

MR. ALAN: I think we should stop now.

[END OF SIDE 2]

MR. CUMMINGS: This is Paul Cummings interviewing Charles Alan, August 25, 1970, tape 2, side 1.

MR. ALAN: I think I was saying that the artists were very unproductive; that I had started trying to make some arrangement to buy paintings from them and they would guarantee to deliver a certain number. It really didn't work out. At that point several artists who had been at the Downtown Gallery left - mainly Julian Levi and Karl Zerbe. I took on some new artists-I don't remember exactly who, but the gallery was changing and was representing much more my taste, which I would characterize as a liking for what I would call neurotic art, rather more surrealistic in direction, though really not that. Anyway, this went on. Then about 1960 I felt again that it was too risky to depend on the production of the artists. I also felt it was terribly confining to handle only contemporary American art, and especially younger artists. And since the gallery was taking this direction

toward what I call neurotic art I thought I would enlarge it and buy things of other periods-things that I liked and that I felt were related and in a way gave background and followed the same direction.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, you hadn't dealt in any art of another period though, had you?

MR. ALAN: Not up to that time. Then I raised some money; I went to Europe and I started buying things. After doing some research I felt that the periods that interested me were Italian 17th century, English late 18th and early 19th century, and certain French sculpture of the first half of the 19th century, that is, what would generally be characterized as Romantic art. I bought quite a number of things and started showing them. For example, paintings by John Martin and Darby and sculpture by Bayre, Aubrey Beardsley drawings.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did it blend into the gallery?

MR. ALAN: I felt it somehow worked along with people like Bruce Conner and Oliveira and so forth, whom we were handling at that time-Richard Boyce's sculpture. I bought Bakst watercolors. It was quite a conglomeration. Actually, while I did quite well with individual items I found that for a gallery of the size and type that I had it was not going to be good in the long run, mainly because my gallery was an exhibition gallery. As the years went on, very quickly it became difficult to continue to buy enough so that I could have enough exhibitions to make it worthwhile. The prices of things I was buying were going up astronomically. Also, in a gallery of the type I had it was difficult to keep people aware that we did have a stock of other than the contemporary things which we regularly exhibited. So, finally in the fall of 1965, after having done this for about five years, I decided that I was going to get out of it, because by that time everything was getting enormously expensive, so expensive that it was becoming impossible for me to buy and still sell at sufficient profit. So what I did was simply to write to Geoffrey Agnew and send him a list of the things. I figured how much they'd cost me and how much expense I had in connection with them, and I figured about a ten percent profit, and I said, "If you would like to buy this whole group, no selections and no bargaining, I will be glad to sell them." He wrote back, "Yes," that he would. I was sorry about it but I still think it was a good move. I got all my money out plus my expenses plus a little profit, and I suppose in the end I about made the interest on the money that was invested.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you find that your collectors overlapped?

MR. ALAN: No. That was the trouble. Also I felt it was confusing to people. In New York I don't think it's possible to have a gallery that does what I was doing, unless you start out that way, or unless you're a private dealer. For a gallery that has to have exhibitions you simply cannot do that. If you're a large gallery like Kennedy, let's say-Kennedy is a good example-then you can have different departments. The people who buy Western Americana don't necessarily buy Ben Shahn. With a gallery as small as I had it was very difficult. No, there are very few people-I don't think any to speak of-who bought both kinds of art. I did buy a number of things by European artists, mainly Enrico Baj and Gastone Novelli and some younger artists who are not particularly well known-we did fairly well with those-and those I might have gone on with. But then Felix Landau came along and was going to buy the gallery. So I stopped all that sort of business.

MR. CUMMINGS: You never had more than one or two people working for you at any point, did you?

MR. ALAN: No.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who were they?

MR. ALAN: I never had more than one person at a time working with me. Howard Rose worked for twelve years, then I had another boy, Rand Mitchell, but that's all.

MR. CUMMINGS: You never had a desire to make it a larger gallery?

MR. ALAN: No. My hope was to keep it as small as possible. However, I think like most things in the world, that's very difficult now. I think the small gallery is going to disappear. I'm very apprehensive about the next two or three years. I really think that the trend, because of the enormous increase in overhead and the demands of the artists, is going to be in two directions: one is the private dealer who has much less rent and needs much less space and only one person to work for him, and the very large gallery like Marlborough, Kennedy, etc.

MR. CUMMINGS: That has a variety?

MR. ALAN: Yes. I don't mean this in a derogatory sense at all but is a kind of department store. I think that the cost of advertising and of rent in a location that's easily reached for the passer-by is going to force a great many smaller galleries out of business. I don't see any future for them in New York.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you find that you built many clients from street trade, passers-by, people who just wandered in?

MR. ALAN: No. But on the other hand, you still need to be in a convenient location so that the real collectors, the buyers and your clients, don't have to go out of their way to reach you.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right. Otherwise they won't do it after awhile.

MR. ALAN: I'm not at all familiar with the business of the so-called downtown galleries, the old galleries, I don't know how well they do or where their clientele comes from, or how they attract the clientele. I think the whole art business today, and when I say "today" I mean really the last five years, has depended so much on people who have incomes outside of their business that it's very difficult to tell how much money anybody is really making.

MR. CUMMINGS: But there are a great number of dealers who don't have other resources and continue marching along.

MR. ALAN: Oh, yes, I think that's true. But generally the highly publicized galleries today, the galleries that really get the most attention and do the most daring things are run by people who have incomes other than their gallery.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, Dwan and Howard Wise are the only two-

MR. ALAN: Dwan, Howard Wise, and Leo Castelli.

MR. CUMMINGS: Leo doesn't have-

MR. ALAN: Leo is not a wealthy man but he has an income outside the gallery. He really wouldn't have to make his living from the gallery. I don't mean in any way to say that these people aren't perfectly good-they're very nice people, but I think it has changed the character of the art business. Ten or twenty years ago there were really no dealers except, oh, perhaps Julien Levy who had a small income. Almost all of the dealers were making their living out of their galleries. The Milchs had some money outside. And of course there were people who had capital that they had built up in their business over a period of years.

MR. CUMMINGS: Janis has done that, hasn't he?

MR. ALAN: When Janis came to the art business he had been a private dealer for many years, but he made his money in the shirt business. I don't know what Castelli's money is from but I know he's from Trieste and comes from a family that has had money. He also was a private dealer for many years before he opened the gallery.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you find the new artists that you took into the gallery? Of course, the ones from the Downtown Gallery you knew of. But how did you find the newer ones? Did they come to you off the Street? Or were they recommended?

MR. ALAN: Bruce Conner just came in off the street. Apparently he had gone to every gallery in New York and had been turned down. He finally came to me. I was very enthusiastic about his work and actually bought a few things from him, which were very, very cheap (he asked exceedingly low prices) but really as a token of my genuine interest. He said, "Well, I never imagined that the gallery that showed Jack Levine would be interested in my work." Then he told me that I was really the last person to whom he had come. Joe Brainard was recommended to me by John Gruen. Suzy Bablik was brought in by Ray Johnson. Richard Boyce, whom I took on in the early sixties, I had known for a very long time because when he was a painter and when the Downtown Gallery had had an exchange exhibition with Boris Mirski in Boston we showed a painting by Boyce which had interested me. Also, he had been a pupil of Zerbe's when Zerbe taught at the Institute in Boston and Zerbe had been enthusiastic about him. Then he had shown in New York at Zabriskie and I had seen those shows. When he was going to leave Zabriskie he wrote and told me and asked would I be interested in seeing his work. We really didn't take on many artists. Those were about all that we took in the last years. In the years around 1955, 1956 we did show some young artists. We had shows of four or five unknown artists every year, but I don't believe we went on with any of them. We showed Oldenburg in one of those shows; we showed Robert Smithson. I've forgotten most of them. Nothing ever happened-Edward Giobbi.

MR. CUMMINGS: Some did emerge out of the shows?

MR. ALAN: Some did emerge, but I didn't keep them on. We had those shows-I've forgotten what we called them. I wrote a little introduction to the catalogues which explained that these were people who had brought work in, or that I had seen their work in one of the Tenth Street Galleries, and it just seemed interesting and that I thought it should be shown Uptown. But I was reluctant to take on a great many artists. Of course it was a great regret to me that I didn't keep Oldenburg. He would have come with me, but at the time it was very hard for me to imagine selling Oldenburg or being able to do anything for him. I hate having an artist's work around the gallery when you aren't doing anything for him. The only things I had seen of Claes Oldenburg's besides the

driftwood pieces that we showed were these newspaper things that he had showed I believe at the Rubin Gallery on Fourth Avenue. And much as I liked that show, I was genuinely enthusiastic about it, I couldn't imagine persuading my clients to buy anything. They seemed so terribly fragile to me and so terribly destructible that it worried me. I think today people's attitudes have changed-people don't care if something falls apart. Ten years ago it had seemed very difficult for me to sell these, and from a practical standpoint it would have been very difficult to store them. I was already having enough trouble with dust problems with Bruce Conner and several of the things falling off, and all that. And while I liked Oldenburg's things I worried about the practical aspects of showing them. Also I really couldn't visualize any direction for Claes. I couldn't think what sort of things he would be doing in ten years, so I hated to take him on. This is an example of my feeling about most artists - not being able to project something of how he is going to be. Claes was fairly young then, I don't think he was thirty; I guess he's around forty now. That's why I didn't take him on.

MR. CUMMINGS: You know, one thing I haven't asked during all of this: did you at any point have the idea of building a collection? Or were you really just interested in dealing?

MR. ALAN: No, I never did because, strangely enough, I really don't like owning things. Also I think Edith Halpert conditioned me, though she of course did collect, as we all now know. But I remember when I was first at the Downtown Gallery some artist brought in a painting, I've forgotten now what it was, and I said I wanted to buy it for myself. Edith said, "Oh, no, we need it for the Gallery. I'm sorry, but you can't buy that." I was quite annoyed and I think she saw my annoyance for she said, "I think I should explain to you that you have to make up your mind whether you're going to be a collector or a dealer. Because if you buy it, then the Gallery won't make any profit out of it."

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you think that's true that one must be one or the other?

MR. ALAN: No, I don't think it's true. But personally I don't like owning things. I've just now moved and I've gotten rid of an awful lot of things. As you can see, I have very few things around. Actually, all the years of my life that I worked in the theatre I lived only in hotels. At that time I felt very strongly that one should never own more than what one could get into two suitcases and carry with one's own two hands. It was only when I got into the art business that I began owning furniture and objects, etc. Like many dealers, when I had my gallery I bought a number of things from the artists and some outside the gallery, but those were all owned by the corporation, which is quite the usual practice because if one is a dealer and one buys something then one has to draw the money from the gallery to pay for it and has to pay tax on that money. So that whatever object you buy really costs much more than if the gallery owned it. Since I owned the corporation a hundred percent it was really mine. Unfortunately, when Felix Landau bought the gallery all those things were assets of the gallery. But I was just very lazy-he really would have sold things to me that I liked very much and felt were mine. (Some things I had bought because I liked them, but it was also to do something for the artists and to have them hanging in my apartment.) But there were certain things that I felt very strongly about personally that I would like to have kept. I could have bought them at cost and the cost was very cheap. I just neglected doing it, and then when the gallery broke up Felix got all those things. Which I feel badly about. I'm thinking particularly of two things by Bruce Conner and two Hockney drawings. When I was at the Downtown Gallery I bought a number of things because even though Edith said you mustn't be a collector, I still was buying. Those things I've sold because the profit was so big I couldn't resist the money. Also, because I think I enjoy the money more than the possession. I had two Stuart Davises and two Ben Shahn paintings, several Marins, several Doves, and so forth.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did your relationship with museum people change or maintain itself once you opened your own gallery?

MR. ALAN: Oh, I think it was really quite the same. I've always felt they've been very nice to me. We had very good relations. I'm not a very social person to begin with. I'm very jealous of my privacy so I've never been on close social terms with people in the museum field, or with artists for that matter, or with clients. I will have lunch with them and sometimes I'll go for a drink but I really hate the social aspects of the art business, or I suppose of any business. I don't enjoy it. And, as I said, I always have this example of Edith who really had no life outside her gallery, and that worried me. But no, there are few museum people that I've really been friendly with. I suppose the one that I've been the most friendly with and have known for a very long time is Jim Elliott. On the other hand, I don't mean that I'm unfriendly. I'm on a first-name basis with most of them that I've know for a long time. I think we did a very good business with museums even after I left Edith and had my own gallery. For instance, there was not a year that the Museum of Modern Art didn't buy something from the gallery, and we sold to most of the museums who did buy.

MR. CUMMINGS: Around the country?

MR. ALAN: Yes, around the country.

MR. CUMMINGS: What about critics? Were there any critics who were particularly interested in your artists? Or

was it rather eclectic? Or didn't it really make very much difference?

MR. ALAN: It didn't make much difference. I remember once Hilton Kramer wrote a scathing review of an exhibition by Jack Levine, and sometimes things were ignored, but generally I think we got a pretty good press. In fact, I heard other dealers complain so often that their shows weren't being reviewed in the *New York Times* that I always kept very quiet, because almost every one of our shows was reviewed. There were a few that weren't, but I never complained because the average, compared to a lot of other galleries, was quite high.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did the critical response make much difference with your collectors?

MR. ALAN: I never thought so. I agree with Edith in that way. I don't think it hurts to have a very good review, but I don't think it kills you if you don't. I think the *New York Times* is all-important. Unfortunately, it really is a matter of life and death, especially for a small gallery. It's the thing that brings people in. I have a theory that most people don't read reviews. It goes in one eye and out the other. I feel that if you were to ask most of the people what they'd read, they don't remember, but the fact that the review is there is what's important. I noticed way back when I was with the Downtown Gallery that if there was a reproduction of something in a magazine or newspaper, then even if the review was very poor people had the impression that it was good and they came in.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's very interesting.

MR. ALAN: I don't believe it makes any difference except that I do feel that you must get reviews. Like many businesses of this type, you really have to keep your people in the habit of coming to the gallery. That's what worried me a little when I started buying the Romantic art, the non-modern art, that when we had those shows and our regular clients didn't come in, it broke a pattern and lost some momentum. After five years I felt that it was not good, but during that time we had quite interesting exhibitions. We had a very good exhibition of Duchamp, Picabia and Schwitters. I really enjoyed showing other things than just the artists on our roster. Some of those shows did bring people in. I think that that kind of show that was in a way related to the younger artists whom we were showing was very good for the gallery. We didn't make a great deal of money out of a show like that but still it gave the gallery a certain prestige.

MR. CUMMINGS: You did a Messens exhibition at one time, didn't you?

MR. ALAN: Yes, and we had a show of an English artist named Austin Cooper, which didn't get particularly good reviews. But we sold quite a number of the things.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did the younger Europeans do in the Gallery?

MR. ALAN: Oh, not very well. The Novelli things which I bought I think we probably came out about even on. Even though we had a lot of paintings left over the profit on each sale was enough to pay for the ones that we still had on hand, and in time we would have probably have gotten the money out. We certainly made money out of Baj. Then he went to Cordier & Ekstrom and started to show, and we stopped. They had an exclusive contract with Arturo Schwarz who handled Baj and I couldn't afford to meet his demands.

MR. CUMMINGS: He's a very demanding man.

MR. ALAN: Yes. Then the prices were so high that Arnie Ekstrom complained that he couldn't sell. Paintings that we were selling for \$3,000 he'd have to ask six or seven for and that was really too high for Baj. That's why he felt it was a bad risk.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you have in your own gallery any particular collectors who were involved with a number of artists?

MR. ALAN: Yes. I suppose our most loyal collector and the person who probably bought the biggest variety of things is Richard Baker. Hirshhorn bought quite a lot but more of certain artists. But Richard Baker bought a great deal. I like his collection. I think it's very personal. As I've said about other people, I don't like every painting that he owns but I can see why he likes this and why he likes that artist. I think he's made mistakes but I think when one sees a large group of his paintings and sculptures that he is really a very good collector, a real collector. Different from people like the Sculls. Now I don't mean to talk against the Sculls, but I don't think they're true collectors in the sense that Richard Baker is. He has an extraordinarily good background. He's a very well educated person in every way and continues to educate himself.

MR. CUMMINGS: You mentioned before the difference in the collectors that you first met in the forties in the Downtown Gallery, and then after you got into your own gallery, and in more recent times.

MR. ALAN: Yes. Well, I think generally Richard Baker is more like a collector of the 1940's and 1950's. I may be

wrong and I may sound very snobbish about the present-day collectors, but I just don't feel that they really have the same kind of personal enthusiasm. Also, they don't have the background to make judgments. Nobody is a "connoisseur" anymore, and I do think people were. The word "connoisseur" implies that you're only buying little objects that you keep in a drawer or portfolio and you bring them out and you love them. I don't think that's true at all. My god has always been Paul Sachs. He was always very nice to me and the most pleasurable times of all the years that I spent as an art dealer were the times that I spent with Paul Sachs.

MR. CUMMINGS: When did you meet him?

MR. ALAN: I met him at the Downtown Gallery. He came there very often, almost every time he came to New York. He liked the Gallery. He liked Edith Halpert. He came in with Russell Allen for prints and every now and then Dr. Sachs would buy a drawing. Of course he had known Jack Levine when Jack was very young and he had bought drawings from him when Jack was thirteen or fourteen years old. Then he came to my gallery and spent a great deal of time. He would come puffing up the stairs, which he didn't like, and would often sit for a whole afternoon. And I loved it. I would show him a great many things and he would question me as to why I liked something, why I thought it was a good drawing, and then he would tell me why he didn't think it was a good drawing. I really learned a great deal from him. He bought a number of things from us. I remember he was very excited because I had gotten an early Weber woodcut from a collector who would sell it; apparently at that time they were very hard to find. I really learned how to look at drawings from him. He was a remarkable man. I never hesitated to show him anything, because he'd always look at it very carefully, ask why I liked it and why I showed it to him and all that. There was never any question of selling him anything. I think that's the difference today, both on the part of the dealer and of the collector. When Dr. Sachs came in or Edward Root, or Oliver James, those people that I've been speaking about, I never thought about selling to them for some reason. Of course I was delighted when they bought something. But we just sat and talked and I showed them things, and they bought very regularly. I think today the attitude has changed very much. I really don't know a great deal about the art business because I've only known Edith Halpert and myself and to degree Felix Landau, and now Terry Dintenfass. But Edith, you see, never called a collector, never, never telephoned anyone except on the rarest occasions when she knew someone who had been waiting months for a painting by a certain artist. Then she would call and that person would be grateful that she did so. Once in a great while she would write a letter to somebody about a show if she knew that person was interested in the artist. But it seems to me that recently there's much more telephoning and much more writing, especially telephoning.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes, a lot of telephoning. Lots of pictures are sold on the phone unseen.

MR. ALAN: Yes. It's really gotten to be much more of a selling business. It wasn't in those days. As a matter of fact, I think people bought more than they do today, though the prices weren't nearly as high. I have a feeling that if someone were to make a survey of the business of American art over the last twenty-five years, that is since World War II, that the numerical count of objects sold in 1970 would not be very much more than the number sold in 1945. Now, of course, the prices are much, much higher; I wouldn't count prints, I'm thinking only of paintings, drawings and sculpture, unique objects. But I have a feeling that the volume of business as far as the number of objects goes has not increased appreciably in the last twenty five years. Of course, the amount of money that things cost has increased tremendously.

MR. CUMMINGS: Fantastic. It's just unbelievable.

MR. ALAN: Yes. But that's something else again. People are much richer, too, than they were twenty-five years ago.

MR. CUMMINGS: Just to go back for one minute here-did you have any method when you selected the artists for your gallery?

MR. ALAN: No. Just the people whose work I liked. My feeling is that selling is really not hitting somebody over the head. It is communicating your enthusiasm, the dealer's enthusiasm, and his faith. It's simply a matter of communication. If you are not very enthusiastic then you simply cannot sell. At least I can't sell.

MR. CUMMINGS: What other things have you found that have changed a great deal in the art world?

MR. ALAN: I think the artist's attitude toward the dealer has changed a great deal. The business of dealing in American art has always been very peculiar. When I was first in the business I thought it was terrible that these dealers really had no capital, they were only handling things on consignment. I thought the European method of dealing was much better in that the dealer made a contract with the artist and owned the artist's work. That it was much more of a business; that it was better for the artist as well as for the dealer.

MR. CUMMINGS: It never worked here though for some reason.

MR. ALAN: Now it really is working here. But as Edith pointed out to me, in the so-called School of Paris it's very

hard to name more than twenty artists. In the late 1920's and early 1930's when this was at its height there were probably 50,000 artists painting in Paris. But, you see, the thing was that Paul Rosenberg, let's say, had a contract with Picasso or Braque. He would buy Braque's output, which was much bigger than the output of most American artists, because European artists are generally more prolific, or were in those days. So, let's say, he bought fifty paintings by Braque during the year. He also bought specified sizes, shapes, a *figure* this, a *figure* that, a *paysage* that, and so on. Then he would go to Bernheim Jeune and say, "All right, I have fifty paintings of Braque and I'll sell you ten." And he would go to another dealer and sell him ten. But he would keep the best ones for himself. Then Bernheim Jeune had a contract with Matisse and he got, say, fifty paintings from Matisse. He would come to Paul Rosenberg and he would sell a certain number of Matisses. The result of this was that all the dealers were really concentrating on a very small number of artists, and it was worth everybody's while to promote those artists. And they were in a position to finance the publication of books, etc. There was much more of a market among dealers than there is ___ (I'm talking about the period between 1945 and 1955). But I think that when people like Virginia Dwan and Leo Castelli and Sidney Janis especially, and Marlborough even more, came into the American field they began buying the work of artists and putting artists under contract. That's really something quite new. The trouble is that while I think everybody is making money I wonder how well it's going to work. It seems to me that it's getting a little bit out of hand.

MR. CUMMINGS: In what way?

MR. ALAN: The prices are getting too high and the artists are really making too many demands.

MR. CUMMINGS: \$50,000 for an Andy Warhol is too much?

MR. ALAN: Yes. But that seems to have been a very peculiar circumstance.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes, it was.

MR. ALAN: That I don't think was a valid price, but I think that it's a very inflated market. In Paris the market never became inflated; it was a very realistic market; the prices went up but slowly and very realistically. Also, you must remember that you had all these dealers who were dealing in the same artists. For instance, here nobody shows Jasper Johns except Leo Castelli, and nobody shows somebody else except some other dealer. Leo Castelli doesn't go out and sell to Virginia Dwan and Larry Rubin and Emmerich.

MR. CUMMINGS: Johns hasn't enough work. (?) [Inaudible]

MR. ALAN: Oh, he has enough work if he would sell it.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well-not as much as one would think.

MR. ALAN: No, the American artists generally aren't so prolific but you go to see a big Jasper Johns show and you see an enormous number of things that are "the collection of the artist" that obviously are not being offered for sale. If a proportion of those things were sold to other dealers, and if, for instance, Larry Rubin would sell Kenneth Noland to Leo Castelli, and Janis would sell some other artist to somebody else, then you would really make a market.

MR. CUMMINGS: It's interesting they are very wary of doing that for some reason or other.

MR. ALAN: That's because it's been a tradition in American art dealing and the dealers have always been very jealous of their rosters of artists. Years ago Edith herself felt that it would be a much better way of dealing, though, as she said, there would be an awful lot of poor artists who would have no galleries. On the other hand, a lot of the artists in Paris in those days before World War II, especially in the late 1920's, were by no means starving; they were selling to collectors, and there were collectors who were very loyal to these artists whom you and I have never heard of; they would buy enough paintings every year to support the artists. The artists would also sell some things to other people. But it was a very different situation. It was more realistic. The art dealing situation in New York now depends a great deal on fashion, which depends a great deal on public relations.

MR. CUMMINGS: There's a lot of speculation.

MR. ALAN: A great deal of speculation. And the fashion can change. You look at people like Philip Guston, say, who was a very popular artist. I think you would have great difficulty selling a Guston today. It has nothing to do with him as an artist; there are a lot of other abstract expressionists who are in the same position. It's a shame that an artist should have to completely change his style in order to keep on selling to make a living.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes. Something new all the time.

MR. ALAN: The artists in the 1920's changed but not as drastically. There was not as much incentive to change.

MR. CUMMINGS: So in a way they really reflect the temper of the times by their changes?

MR. ALAN: Well, I think it's become much more a business of fashions. And this means a business of publicity. You've got to publicize in order to sell. You've got to make the buyer feel that there's tremendous demand for it. It's not the idea of just having something because you like it. It's the idea that it's written about and that people are talking about it and the minute somebody comes into your house he recognizes it.

MR. CUMMINGS: How do you think that started?

MR. ALAN: Over there, there are three angle irons about four inches long. Somebody here the other night said, "Oh, what are those?" Actually, they were to hold this bookcase. I said, "Oh, that's a little sculpture that Robert Morris gave me last year." And they believed it! Immediately it took on a different character for them. I mean, if it really was by Robert Morris, if he liked the three angle irons and put them together and it was bought for a good price, you know, the person would really feel very good.

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you think that a good price has a great deal to do with that, too?

MR. ALAN: I know so. It's just the idea. Duchamp said that years ago. When Bruce Conner sent something to Duchamp with a note which I was to pass on asking Duchamp to sign it, he said, "You write back to Mr. Conner and tell him that it will cost him fifteen hundred dollars."

MR. CUMMINGS: That's marvelous. He and Dali are not too far apart.

MR. ALAN: No.

MR. CUMMINGS: What are some of the other aspects of the art scene and the art market that you've observed that you feel would aid in describing it over this period?

MR. ALAN: I think of all the dealers in New York over the last fifty years (I'm not talking about Kennedy or Wildenstein or Knoedler-although Knoedler I think is a very moot point at the moment; I don't know what's going to happen to Knoedler) that the most successful by far is Antoinette Kraushaar. Probably over the years she has made more money and has the steadiest business of almost any other of the smaller dealers.

MR. CUMMINGS: Really?

MR. ALAN: Oh yes.

MR. CUMMINGS: She had Prendergast and all those great fantastic-

MR. ALAN: Yes. And now she still has Prendergast-she still has Hassam and Lawson and Sloan and so forth. She really is better off not selling. She's had a very loyal clientele. She's also had very loyal artists. Generally, I think if one could examine her books one would find that she probably has made more money than other small dealers over a long period of time. There are other dealers who have made killings in this and that, but for really steady business, and, as I say, a very loyal clientele, I think she has done the best.

MR. CUMMINGS: Didn't Edith Halpert have a rather steady clientele, too?

MR. ALAN: Yes, Edith did, too, but not for nearly as long a period. And you know where poor Edith is today, I have a feeling that Antoinette over the years has probably made more money than Edith. I suppose one would have to say that Edith's inventory today is probably worth much more than Antoinette's because Antoinette sold more things than Edith did. Edith hung on to things.

MR. CUMMINGS: Edith built an enormous collection though, didn't she? And owns an awful lot of pictures?

MR. ALAN: Edith owns a great deal; that is, Edith personally and the Gallery both own a great deal.

MR. CUMMINGS: I mean there are thousands of pictures-

MR. ALAN: Well, I don't know whether it's thousands. I think there are thousands of folk art paintings, but I don't think that her personal collection and the Downtown Gallery collection is that large. I would say there are probably something over five hundred pictures. I think she has several million dollars worth of paintings there. As of last year she still had forty-three Marins. And she must have twenty paintings by Demuth. She has several O'Keeffes. She has quite a number of Doves. She has a large group of Hartleys-at least twenty. She has Kuniyoshis. She still has some Shahns. She has several million dollars worth of paintings I'm sure.

MR. CUMMINGS: You know one thing we haven't talked about and you mentioned it but I don't know if you want to get into it-that's Felix Landau and how that came about.

MR. ALAN: Well, I don't want to get into it too much, particularly as I'm suing him at the moment. It came about because I don't like living in New York and would like to get out of it. I've talked this way for a long time. Felix and I had done business together. As a matter of fact, he was showing several of my artists and I was showing a couple of his artists, I think five or six we were showing in common. For personal reasons he wanted to come to New York, so he came to me and said I'd talked so much about getting out of New York, would I be interested in doing something with him? I said yes. He made it very clear immediately that he didn't want any sort of partnership and I agreed that I didn't either; that if he was interested in buying the gallery I would be glad to sell it to him. He wanted me to and wanted to stay with it for five years; he didn't want to make a quick transition. So after six months of negotiating we finally agreed on terms. I think by nature Felix is more impatient than even he had imagined.

MR. CUMMINGS: How?

MR. ALAN: Well, he was very anxious to change—he wanted to make it his gallery very quickly. The result was that we lost a lot of my clients before we gained enough new ones, so the gallery didn't do very well. Actually, the third year we did do quite well. We had I guess the biggest gross that we ever had.

MR. CUMMINGS: Was that because your clients weren't interested in—?

MR. ALAN: Well, he wanted to show his California artists and during the first year the emphasis really was on them. My clients weren't terribly interested in them and I felt that we should have done it a little more gradually. Also I think that neither Felix nor I realized that we were really not compatible at all. We seemed to be but when it came to the point of working together we weren't. He was always wanting me to telephone people to come into the gallery, and I refused to do it because I don't like telephoning to anyone and I really don't like the telephone ringing. He loves the telephone. I'm very awkward about calling up somebody and saying, "I haven't seen you in a long time. Why don't you come into the gallery?" and all that kind of thing. I refused to do it so this kind of animosity built up. Then there was another person involved in this that I think aggravated it. Finally, Felix said that he just wanted me out, and that was that. That's really as much as I want to go into it. In a way it was a shame because I think it could have worked out better. I don't think he understood me enough or the character of the gallery and I think he wouldn't have lost as much money as he did. It was natural the first year that there should be some drop, but there shouldn't have been as much as there was because business was generally good. It was just too quick a changeover. One thing in my background which I didn't mention but I can in this connection was that in 1938, really knowing nothing about typography, I did a dummy which restyled the rotogravure section of the New York *Times* (which doesn't exist any more). I brought this dummy to Lester Markel and he was very enthusiastic about it. I was supposed to direct a show at the World's Fair in 1939 and for that reason while I was working in the theatre I couldn't take another job; it was difficult to get another job. So I had a few months with nothing to do and I went to the *Times* and worked there with various ideas of restyling other parts of the Sunday paper. Some of the ideas have been incorporated since then. Anyway, when I went to the *Times* I was always fighting with Lester because I had done this dummy of the roto section and it took six months before you could even begin to see the change. He said, "Oh, you know, you just don't understand. When you change something like this it's got to be done so gradually that it's months before people are aware of it. Otherwise they're very uncomfortable." I feel it was the same thing with Felix and the gallery. I think if it had been done much more gradually it would have worked out better. There were unfortunate things, too. We had a show of James Gill which really wasn't very good. It was very distasteful. Today you can get away with that kind of erotic art better than you could four or five years ago. It shocked a lot of people.

MR. CUMMINGS: Really?

MR. ALAN: Yes, really. Particularly the announcement. It was just a series of things in that first year, and so it was very difficult to bring it back. But, as I say, the third year we did very well, but by that time there had been too many personal differences that were aggravated by an outside person. It just didn't work.

MR. CUMMINGS: Can you think offhand of any other specific things that you'd like to say something about?

MR. ALAN: Specifically, no.

MR. CUMMINGS: Any kind of general areas you'd like to comment on?

MR. ALAN: Generally, I think that the day of the small gallery is going. There's not going to be much place for it any more. I think that we're going to get into the situation they had in Paris in the late twenties and early thirties where you had a very small group of artists who were doing extremely well and a very large number of artists who weren't. I think that's one of the things that's making for all these artists' coalitions and militant groups and so forth because so many artists today feel that they are not part of the art world; that they're ignored by museums and by the dealers. There's a great deal of dissatisfaction.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right. Do you think it could support more galleries?

MR. ALAN: No, I don't, because I think the overhead is just too much.

MR. CUMMINGS: There's not enough quality among all these unrepresented artists.

MR. ALAN: No, I don't think so. There is quality among some of them, of course. I do feel very strongly though that the museum should not take over the role of the dealer, and should not show artists until they have been evaluated by dealers. It's the dealer's place to make the discoveries, not the museum's. I think it becomes more and more confusing to the public when museums show unknown artists because they give that artist a cachet when he really hasn't been through the mill and proved himself. So I hope that the museums don't capitulate to these artists.

MR. CUMMINGS: It's a very interesting problem. I think that the museums and some of the more powerful curators are so involved with tastemakership that they lose sight of what they really should be doing: making taste by selecting as people develop sufficiently so you know who they are.

MR. ALAN: Yes. I think the public gets just more and more confused. They don't know what's really good or what the museum is standing behind. Actually, I think the Whitney with that little room downstairs has solved the problem in a way better than some of the other museums-just giving those artists a chance to show and that's all. They have probably ten or twelve of those shows a year.

MR. CUMMINGS: And every month they change.

MR. ALAN: Yes. I think that's quite good. Now the Museum of Modern Art has that Information Show. Well, I think it's terribly confusing to people.

MR. CUMMINGS: So many times people don't know what it is. They think it's literature.

MR. ALAN: That's true. The whole conception of art is changing. There's no doubt about it. I think people's way of living is going to change. I don't think people are going to collect objects the way they used to. Go to Bloomingdale's and look at the new furniture-it's not the same idea of furniture, and the idea of walls aren't the same and hanging things on walls, and so forth. I must say that philosophically I'm very Spenglerian. I feel that we're at the end of a culture and all one can do is be a Horatio at the bridge and preserve values.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who knows what the new one is going to be.

MR. ALAN: The new one is not going to be here; I think it's going to be something very different. But first the barbarians have to come and burn everything.

MR. CUMMINGS: Maybe they're here and we don't know it.

MR. ALAN: But, no, I still feel that this is a terrible problem and since the dealers are putting the artists under contract and handing them what seems to be huge sums of money, it's going to create a great problem. I don't know how many artists there are in New York City today, and I don't know how many there are in the country, but I think one would have great difficulty making a list of a hundred artists just off the top of one's head.

MR. CUMMINGS: You mean people who are really making contributions?

MR. ALAN: No, it's not people who are making contributions but people who are known, who are really, let's say, making their living at being artists, who are being shown in galleries and museums, etc. I think a collector would have difficulty naming a hundred artists. I'm not talking about people from the past but people who are currently in the limelight. And yet there must be hundreds of thousands of artists in the country.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, we're almost at the end of the tape.

MR. ALAN: Yes. Anything more I can say would be very dismal. The article by Peter Schjeldahl in the *New York Times* last Sunday was interesting because I really think the coming season is going to be very upsetting. I think this problem is so mixed up with all the other politics that are making problems that I don't know what's going to happen.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's just about the end of the tape.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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