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Oral history interview with Julien Levy, 1975 May 30

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Julien Levy on 1975 May 30. The interview was conducted by Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Side A of the original audio recording was transcribed in 1978. In 2019, Side B of the audio recording was transcribed. In 2022, the transcripts were reconciled. The transcript has been lightly edited for readability. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

PAUL CUMMINGS: You were born in New York City, correct?

JULIEN LEVY: Yes, January 22, 1906.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And did you grow up there and go to school in New York?

JULIEN LEVY: Yes, I went to Ethical Culture School for a short time. Then I had some childhood difficulties and my parents took me to the country and I went to a private school in Scarsdale, which at that time was not fancy Westchester County. We had a little farm and a little white colonial house.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What school was that?

JULIEN LEVY: It was called the Roger Ascham School, and I graduated from there and went to college from that school with a certain interlude. During the War they closed up. I went to Scarsdale public school for a year.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you like the contrast?

JULIEN LEVY: I was bewildered by it. [Laughs.] It was supposed to have been one of the better public schools. That is why Westchester County and Scarsdale became very chic because they had such a good, supposedly, public school. But I found myself lost in the change and I was glad to get back to the little school where you would sit on the lawn and do kind of individual research. It was interesting and I suppose somewhat advanced. One of my greatest—shall I go on with this as long as I am on it?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Sure.

JULIEN LEVY: Really, my biggest educational experience as a youngster was around twelve years old, I think it was. We had a math teacher from Australia and he gave the students in his class—it was a very small class.

That was the only really progressive thing about it was that the classes were very small and very mixed. There were children of freelance writers and artists and children of the neighborhood all mixed up, and the classes were not any bigger than ten or a dozen which made it fairly individual. This math teacher gave us a choice in geometry. It was first year geometry. We could either research or we could take the regular course and we would get equal credit. If we got fed up with one we could shift. The research class became three of us and we were given a month to play with the Pythagorean Theory and do what we could with it. We had never had any geometry. The others went through the geometry book questions and answers, construction and so on, and we labored over this. We had our cues—the theorem is the square and the hypotenuse is equal to half the sum of the square of the legs, whatever it was. You figured out the construction by yourself which is a very—which is as good as a crossword puzzle. We would sit out on the grass during mathematics hour with a twig and draw in the dirt. We got the idea very quickly that you drew a square. Then how do you get the theorem to come out? What do

you do with this diagram? It is like learning how to cut clothes or to build houses or what not. We finally solved it, found the construction by dividing into triangles and so on, and came up with the correct answer. Then we caught up very rapidly with the rest of the class by rushing through the book. You learn constructive thinking that way instead of doctrine thinking. I'll always cherish that just as an experience.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Now where did you go on to college?

JULIEN LEVY: Harvard.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you select that or was that a family influence?

JULIEN LEVY: No, it was a very desirable college at the time and the head mistress of Roger Ascham was a Bostonian—I think that's where the name came from, he was a Boston, or a New England educator, and she was preparing us for Harvard more or less, I think.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, I see. So it was a logical step.

JULIEN LEVY: It seemed a logical step. It was my first application and first choice and then I was accepted.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you go there to study any particular field or interest?

JULIEN LEVY: [Laughs.] Well, that comes into the question of how did I get into art, which is very mysterious. My family saw that I was a writer

I had written a Christmas poem for my mother which she thought was beautiful and sent it to a lot of critics and had it rejected, which is all right as a poet. And then I wrote the school play in my senior year, so I began to get the idea I was a writer. Harvard, I knew, had a marvelous English course. I think the English course—and the writers who were teaching there were all very important people.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Were there any professors that were particularly important to you that you remember?

JULIEN LEVY: Well, I never went on. I flunked English.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

JULIEN LEVY: So that's the end of that. [Laughs.] I think Santayana was there both in English and Philosophy. There were all the famous teachers and writers there at that time but I've forgotten their names now. But I flunked Freshman English. I got A in every other course in my freshman year. I didn't flunk, I got a D. It turned out that my advanced progressive school had never taught me where to put commas and just where the verb came in except how I invented it, and this got pretty sour treatment in Freshman English. Then at the end of my freshman year, having flunked that course, I was supposed to—in Harvard you pick a concentration field after your freshman year. So, my roommate was going to be a doctor and a couple of my best friends were going to be doctors and I told my family that I had to pick some thing so I'll be a doctor. And, they said, you have no more doctor in you than a—you don't know what that means even. And I said, well,

I don't know what to pick. So my mother said she had gone to college with the wife of Paul Sachs when she went to Radcliff, and Mrs. Sachs was a classmate of hers. She was going to call them up and find out what the art department was like. So she thought if I could not be a writer—we had been to museums in Europe. In summer my family traveled to Europe a couple times and took me there and we would go in through the Uffizi and the Louvre and I had shown interest.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Were there paintings at home?

JULIEN LEVY: Not particularly, no. We weren't a painting family but we did museums in Europe and I enjoyed them and showed interest. So she talked to Mrs. Sachs and Sachs called me in for an interview and he said: whatever you pick at Harvard is really unimportant to your career.

It's an opportunity for you to study and you will find, with your background, that the fine arts courses are very small, have a very small enrollment. And English course, if you happened to have gotten a good mark, you would be in it with hundreds and hundreds of youngsters who were going to be stockbrokers eventually, and wanted to be well read, and read novels, and

have some conversation. So, if you think you have any aptitude for fine arts I have a museum course we can work with. I'd aim for that. So that was the actual time I had gotten to fine arts, by flunking Freshman English. I have been writing ever since, and I've even been published since. [Laughs.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you pursue the Sachs course then? Did you study with him?

JULIEN LEVY: I studied with him, I studied with—I met Alfred Barr up there and Chick Austin. That was the time when our whole generation of museum directors were made by the Sachs course. And by the time I had worked there for a couple of years I came to the decision that I was not going to be a museum man. For temperamental reasons, because I lack how to handle trustees or how not to handle trustees. I judged myself as somebody incorrigibly rebellious against the kind of tact and politesse it takes to do that part of the museum work—the money raising which is a mystery to me and was even when I had a gallery, and the flattery needed to work with a group of trustees who are over you. Somehow or other I have to be my own boss.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did Sachs talk about things like that in his course?

JULIEN LEVY: Well, he talked how to—yes—"how to" mechanics of a museum from cataloging, curatorial responsibility, money raising responsibilities, and your relation to trustees and the public.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did his course influence you any way during the time you ran the gallery?

JULIEN LEVY: Only because I knew a whole crowd of museum directors by the time I opened the gallery which may have been a help.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So, you continued through Harvard then till—

JULIEN LEVY: Then what happened to me there was that one of our fine arts professors, curiously enough, was a movie bug, and he used to take some of his favorite students down to various little odd movie houses in Boston to see the latest thing in a Garbo or Gloria Swanson picture. I got very enthusiastic and I thought this was an art form. I was already beginning to think that photography was and I had got myself a little camera.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did the interest in photography begin? Was it through seeing movies, or friends, or just one of the things that was around?

JULIEN LEVY: No, it wasn't around. It came out of just using my eyes and it seemed to me a very important new medium, and much livelier than—I almost immediately became interested in contemporary art rather than art history although I was studying art history—not because I didn't love the old masters but because I wanted very much to know what was going on here and now in every way I could find. So, well, even in my English course I met a student up there who introduced me to James Joyce—and this didn't help my punctuation much. [Laughs.] But it definitely gave me an idea that what was going on today in writing was more exciting to me than—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you read the little magazines then, Transition and various—

JULIEN LEVY: Well, I very soon began to. I mean once you get on the track of these things and it soaks in you begin to understand it and you have the curiosity and avidity to go further. You rapidly find your way.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What do you think provoked your interest in contemporary art rather than the more traditional things?

JULIEN LEVY: Simply because they were living people.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see. It was more a part of your life at the time.

JULIEN LEVY: More a part of my—I was looking for life. In fact I left Harvard before graduating. I should have had only about three more months to go. I said I just can't keep out of real life, and I can't stay in seclusion. Even three months more is a torture to me. My father couldn't understand it. He said that just having a degree is going to help you in business. And I said then I don't want business, I want sex which doesn't need a degree, at least to get into it. [Laughs.] By that time I had really become so interested in photography, and particularly in movies, that I had no idea that I would go into museum work or gallery work. I thought I wanted to find my way

to Hollywood somehow and learn how to be a director—which would be impossible in those days because you had to be the nephew of Sam Goldwyn to do it. [Laughs.] But I wasn't convinced and I wasn't sure, but I knew I wanted to and I had already translated a lot of my fine arts work into photography.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In what way?

JULIEN LEVY: Well, first I got interested in a course of Arthur Pope under Denman Ross—Denman Ross had retired—who was teaching something called the color solid which I thought was both clownish and very fascinating. It was both silly to codify art into these geometric forms and yet fascinating that it might be done. And I thought I ought to go into scientific angles of art more and, in relation to my field of concentration wouldn't it be a good idea if I studied psychology because there must be some psychology to be found about painters and their work.

I worked with a man named Troland who was a behaviorist psychologist and he had a hidden commercial background. He was doing psychology himself for Hollywood and he got the idea that he would advise the—if he retired from Harvard—advise in Hollywood on the psychological motivations of actions and people and so on. And I invented a proposition for him just to be able to play around by myself, and said could I take a research course with you? And I proposed a psychology of the difference between chiaroscuro which I had learned from my art courses and from straight photography, you know, accurate, realistic, or doing what we call in the art courses, "crowding the shadows," or doing impressionist photography that we called in the art course "crowding the lights." And he said "What's all that? I never heard of—"

And I said, "Well this comes from the art course and this is not psychology but can't we relate it so that I can do research as to how many people like it better this way or how many people would like it that way, and so on?"

PAUL CUMMINGS: What do you mean by "crowding the lights?"

JULIEN LEVY: What it actually meant was, well—Monet and the Impressionists, for example, that have all these blonde pictures, they make all these dark accents but the general appearance of the picture is of a shimmering impression of light. The forms are drawn in light. Rembrandt does something with the highlights which show you some detail and the rest is crowded into dark. And actually in movies or in photography today you can still find the same thing. You can find a somber picture with a highlight falling on the table or on a hand or on a face, or you can find something that's shimmering with light with only the dark black tie or dark eyes showing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What happened to your project then?

JULIEN LEVY: Well then they gave me a laboratory and an assistant so that I could do a thesis on this project. And I was supposed to invite students up and take polls of how many liked this better or that better, and set it up on easels, and so on. And I asked for a dark room and they gave me a dark room and I never went on with the project. I sat in the darkroom making rayographs which is developed by printing out paper in a light and making my own little fantasy compositions which was a sheer waste of time on the college money. I was very spendthrift with my years in college. And then I'd take a girlfriend up there and use it as a place to neck once in a while. And I never really did get through with my project. I pulled some kind of thesis out of it at the end of the year, but not much. Nothing that Professor Troland could use in Hollywood.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What sense of direction did you have because you said you left Harvard before—?

JULIEN LEVY: I wanted to get a job and start working in the movies, definitely, and meet people. My father objected strongly to Hollywood. He thought it was a den of vice—it probably was—and I got a job as assistant to an assistant property man on a set. It was in New York so my father permitted that. Columbia Studios I think it was called, and it was up in the Bronx somewhere. They were doing a picture of Gloria Swanson's. That had a special effects man named Murphy who had done the film with Fernand Leger called the *Ballet Mechanique* in Paris. And on the basis of that—he wanted to go to Hollywood—he had gotten a job with this outfit to be their special effects man. He had a prop man which is somebody who went and found the lights and the chairs and the prisms—they did things through prisms—and so on. I was the errand boy for the special effects man so I had an entree into the world of the movies which lasted for a little while, not long. Columbia Studios folded up anyhow and that was that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But that got you into New York.

JULIEN LEVY: That got me to New York, it got me into contact with that activity that I wanted, and curiously enough it got me—in New York I met Marcel Duchamp and talked to him about my movie ideas.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Now how was that? How did you get into his circle, or his world in those days?

JULIEN LEVY: Just lucky I guess. [Laughs.] I never did know how I got anywhere. I really seemed to follow my nose and my nose led me into all kinds of things that eventually became more and more interesting for me, and fortunately kept me away from most of the kinds of things that your nose can get you involved in if you were absolutely without any discipline. I didn't have discipline but I found my way somehow into the most extraordinary, lucky coincidences. The particular thing with Marcel was that my father—my mother had died—was trying to get some interest to replace his loss, and he thought he might start doing something about a new apartment for himself and maybe collect some art. He had no idea what kind of art to collect and he had a son who supposedly had studied art at Harvard. And I might advise him. It never got very far because he was a very stubborn man and took very little advice but he was a good put-downer. He put down everything I suggested to him but he at least took me along with him.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did he eventually buy things or collect?

JULIEN LEVY: Well, the whole of my self saga involved the Arenberg Collection and the sale. He took me to Brummer Galleries where he was trying to buy—there they are right there—a couple of Italian chairs—antique Italian chairs—for his new music room it was going to be. He had just become a very rich man (he lost it again in the crash in the thirties) and he had also just lost his wife and he thought that was very ironic and so did I.

I said "Dad, you've always worked very, very hard and you never allowed yourself and mother to have any kind of play, and now you've got all the play you want but you don't know what to do with it because you haven't got Mother anymore. Perhaps you should be a little freer and live in today a little bit more and not save so much for the future." And he said "Well, you're going to be a bad businessman Julien." And I said, "I'm afraid I am." But we went to Brummer Galleries about these chairs and Brummer and this young Marcel Duchamp were installing a Brancusi—which is one of the early errands that Marcel did over here. I fell for them and I persuaded my father to buy a marble bird in flight and I said "put it in your music room, it's a note of music. Buy a black piano, don't buy a brown one, and have the bird of flight there and let it reflect on the piano." My father bought it and immediately had an excellent furniture maker transcribe that beautiful hand-hewn base pedestal so that the Brancusi was made to go with his stuff into a black polished pedestal that matched the piano which, well the end of the Brancusi story is that he bought it for a thousand dollars and a few years later he was offered two thousand and he sold it. I said "Dad, how could you do that? It was one of the most beautiful things you ever managed to buy." He said "two-hundred percent profit is good business. What are you talking about? I think you made a good choice for me and I made a good profit on it. You'll never rest easy when you learn what it is going to be worth in the future. If it is worth anything it is going to be worth a lot more than that." [Laughs.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It certainly happened.

JULIEN LEVY: Yes. [Laughs.] And so, in the course of that, I chatted with Marcel.

He said "How did you happen to come here with your father who is already talking about painting the pedestal black? I'm not sure I'll let him buy it." So we talked and he said "Well, don't go to Hollywood. Come over to Paris and meet Man Ray. I'll get him to let you use his studio. He has a camera, and you do experimental films. Why not?" So, that was that. [Laughs.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Then you went off to Paris?

JULIEN LEVY: I went off to Paris.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So that was what, in twenty—

JULIEN LEVY: It was about '27.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You spent quite a while there, didn't you? Or, was it back and forth, the time in Paris?

JULIEN LEVY: I arrived in Paris and fell in love and married. They stopped making the movie and I

had to come back to America and try to go into my father's business in order to support a wife. It was at that time that I reduced my artistic ideas to pedestrian ends for the moment.

However, even that was very important for my later career because the girl I fell in love with was the daughter of Mina Loy who was a symbolist poetess friend of all our group. Marcel introduced me to her and I met her at Peggy Guggenheim's, who was giving a big cocktail party. I was very impressed because I saw the aging Isadora Duncan there, I met Pascin there, I met—well, she had a sum of all the people in Paris of that time, including Mina Loy, who became my mother-in-law, and Joella Loy, who became my wife. So then, several years later, when it came to opening my own gallery I already knew the gang as far as modern art went. And then to our wedding—Brancusi and James Joyce became our witnesses. We were married by a Justice of the Peace. I mean there was no religious ceremony, only a civic ceremony and there were just two witnesses.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what was it like? You had to come from Harvard to New York to Paris and all of a sudden to be in a circle with all of these people. You know, this is quite a different—

JULIEN LEVY: I had two very definite impressions and they were both somewhat mystic.

Number one, I felt as though I'd found where I belonged, so I was not surprised at all. And, number two, I was full of hero worship which I didn't lose. I was quite naive about all these people. I had no sophisticated sense of where they belonged or what their value was supposed to be. They were "greats" to me but I also felt that I belonged there [laughs] and that lasted all the way through. That is how I got to know them, how I got to work with them and how, even in being a dealer, I didn't feel like a businessman. I never felt that I could size them up as anything but very great people. I was very humble and pleased to know them and yet I felt absolutely confident that I could talk their language with them and they could talk mine. So we got together and we could always understand each other.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Now, when you came back to New York, was that so soon after or were you in Paris very long?

JULIEN LEVY: Well, I'd been in Paris about a year. We married in Paris but came back immediately afterwards to try and earn a living here.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Which was—what year did you come back?

JULIEN LEVY: Well, it must have been 1928.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Your father was then in real estate business?

JULIEN LEVY: He was in real estate.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. So you were going into the real estate business to learn what it was all about. [Laughs.] How did that work out? Because it was sometime before you did decide to open a gallery, right?

JULIEN LEVY: It didn't work out well at all. I was both too fancy for it and too unbusinesslike. I tried to sell my Father—he was building a house on Central Park West—the idea that I had seen in Europe of cantilevering and having all glass windows. He said, "You're mad. On Central Park West nobody will live there. You have to think of what the tenants want." I said, "How can you make any progress unless you do something new, and it's a perfectly feasible idea." Well, it didn't work, and neither did my relationship with my father. It was about on the same basis. It was all just opposite. I couldn't really conceive—I was very narrow-minded about his point of view which was excellent in its way. And he just thought I was hare brained.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did the idea of becoming an art dealer evolve?

JULIEN LEVY: Well then, you see, I had to go and earn my living somehow, and the only thing (if I wasn't going into real estate) that I knew anything about at all was my Harvard background, and I applied for a job—got a job at the Weyhe Bookstore as an assistant in his gallery upstairs.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh really, I didn't know that. How about that?

JULIEN LEVY: I was there for two years which made an apprenticeship for me and I pulled down a salary which was what I needed, and it was something that I could cope with. [Laughs.] It was something very different from real estate.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you like working there?

JULIEN LEVY: Very much, and I thought the old man was marvelous. He was in the book department.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They were very big in the print business weren't they?

JULIEN LEVY: And they were active in prints. That was Carl Zigrosser upstairs who later went to Philadelphia. And it was a very pleasant, informal atmosphere in which I learned something anyhow. And eventually they let me put on my own show there a couple of times.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And what were they?

JULIEN LEVY: Well, the first one was the adventure of the [Eugène] Atget photographs. I had met Atget through Man Ray when I was in Paris and he lived right around the corner from Man Ray's studio, and I was either a block or two blocks up above the T. So, when I was doing this experimenting at Man Ray's, I used to go over to Atget and buy prints from him, as many, actually, as he would sell me. They were five francs a piece and that was about a dollar. I didn't have a lot of pocket money but I always could afford ten dollars a month, or something like that, as many as I could get from him. He wouldn't sell too many because he didn't like the work of printing them up again, and he never would let one go without printing a replacement.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, was he the first photographer whose things you bought then?

JULIEN LEVY: Yes. And that was before I even had anything to do with photography except my own playing around. Then when I came back to America—

when I was still working in my Father's business—Berenice Abbott, who had been Man Ray's assistant over there, wired to me that all of Atget's work was about to be thrown away, sold by the concierge. It was in the ash cans outside the door when he died. And she could buy them for a thousand dollars, and she didn't have a thousand dollars, and she knew I had been assiduously visiting and could I do something about it with her. So by that time I had a little money of my own. At a certain age I got a small—I got twenty-five thousand dollars from my Mother, which I was to get at the age of twenty-one, which I then had. So I took a thousand from that and I left twenty-four which was what I started the gallery with. I took a thousand for that and sent it to Berenice with an arrangement by which we would be half owners. I put up the money and she did the discovery, and after we hashed it through a bit we did a very liberal arrangement for her. I thought it was liberal for her and it worked out much to my disadvantage in a way. I said, "Well, I'm not really much in the photography business and you are. Your whole life is engaged in this and so why don't you call it the Berenice Abbott Collection, and you get all the kudos and all the publicity for it because it will help you. It has nothing to do with me. I'm simply half owner in the background and we have a little contract that I own half of, and we will see what we can make of it because it should turn out to be an important collection." Then I arranged with Weyhe. He gave the money for publication of the first book, and I assembled and put up the first Atget show at the Weyhe Gallery at the time of the publication of the book.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that's how all that came about. I see, I see.

JULIEN LEVY: That was my first exhibition but that was photography. Then I arranged the Calder show which had vicissitudes which we don't need to go into.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Now, you had met him in Paris, right?

JULIEN LEVY: I'd met him in Paris.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That was the one where you had all the wire portraits of people?

JULIEN LEVY: That's right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right. How successful was that in terms of attendance, or sales?

JULIEN LEVY: Not particularly, no.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Just that nothing happened?

JULIEN LEVY: No, nothing. The people who had things happen to them at that time were—Rockwell Kent, for example, who was very, very popular, and all his wood cuts sold, and sold,

and sold.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you were there for two years so that was what, 1929, '30?

JULIEN LEVY: About '29, '30. Then I came to the same thing that I did at Harvard and I said I won't take a boss any more if I could possibly be my own boss. And so I took all of my Mother's money and started to have my own gallery. I took a fling at it. And it was to be, specifically, a gallery for introduction of photography as an art. The other side of that was that about the same time I met Marcel I became very intimate with Alfred Stieglitz. I used to always go and stay hours and hours in his gallery and talk to him in the evenings with a sandwich and a cup of coffee, and with Georgia O'Keeffe. And I persuaded my Father to buy an O'Keeffe. Alfred was a big talker and he had long winded theories about aesthetics and ethics and all kinds of things, some of which were quite genuine and some of which seemed to me half bluff. But it was all very fascinating. And I met his crowd to some extent. I met Marin and we got along well together, and Georgia and I talked a lot. There was a friend of mine from Harvard, this little Man Friday who suddenly occurred, who was a man named Gary Ross, who I'd known at Harvard. I don't know how he got in with Steiglitz but he was there all the time. He was the one who ran out and got the coffee and sandwiches.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, do you think those conversations were informative or influential for you when you started your own gallery in terms of here was a dealer who was doing all these things?

JULIEN LEVY: I'm sure—yes. I always called Stieglitz and Duchamp my Godfathers and everything either one said to me—I didn't follow them. I often didn't know that I agreed with them, but the whole atmosphere of the way they thought and the way they talked, although they were at two different poles of ideology, was the fertilizer for my thinking and feelings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was Duchamp like as a person for you in the early days, in the late twenties?

JULIEN LEVY: Well, as I say, all of these people, as I met them, I hero worshipped.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, I mean as you got to know him better and better, and talked about things. Was he—

JULIEN LEVY: We had a lot of fun over sex as we got together, [Laughs.] and I think the first time he got intrigued with me—we elaborated further on it—was when he showed me his sketches for "The Bride" and I said, "This is really a love-making machine, it's not like the 'Nude Descending a Staircase,' it's a kind of futurism. This is a biomorphic machine. This should work like biology as well as like art." I said, "Why don't we devise a doll worked by wires and hot air?" And we joked, we joked, we joked, and I said, "Well, if you kiss the doll, this big doll which would have all this wire contraption like you go and you're doing, all the way down to the genitals, and so your tongue inserted into the mouth would make the genitals push and pull." [Laughs.] He said, "That's it, that's exactly—why not." He said, "Let's make it."

Of course we never did but it was one of these—and then he started to teach me how to play chess and I got fascinated by that. On the boat going over we played a lot of chess together and I began to try and learn and he loved teaching. I was a real amateur at it but I learned what his feeling for chess was. He wanted to make an aesthetic experience out of every game, not a winning experience out of it. He said it wasn't a war game, "it's an aesthetic game, and you feel the shape of the board as it begins to shift its patterns and you make it become beautiful, even if you lose, and you've experimented with it." And he taught me by—instead of giving me a handicap which he said is terrible. He was like my physics professor who said try and make your construction of the Pythagorean Theorem. He said "suppose I give you the handicap, it is a very big handicap but you are a very amateur player, you're just beginning. Suppose I say that this pawn is going to queen or else I lose, and you have all the pieces and I have all the pieces. I'm not giving you a piece. I'm already showing you that if you sacrifice all your men to get that pawn, it would be a new kind of game. I'd lose, even though I was way ahead because my game, as we propose at this time, is this pawn is going to become the queen." So, the whole board would take another shape, then he would stop in the middle and he'd say, "You see what this shape is, all coagulated by the pawn who isn't a queen yet? It's a princess, it's becoming a bride and you can't stop her or if you can, you win, and it's a whole different configuration." Well, this was all a revelation to me. This was a game of chess which is supposed to be either mathematical or a war game. This is the way we—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you continue playing chess?

JULIEN LEVY: Yes, I do, off and on and I make chess sets and in the later years in my gallery I had a chess show.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What do you think would be the impetus to finally go and find a space and open a gallery and collect the people and do everything? Was it the fact you wanted your own establishment?

JULIEN LEVY: Well, it was what my Father would say. I was wacky. I had studied art and I liked art. I didn't want to be anyone else's—I wanted to be my own boss and so I had to have a place that had to do with art where I would be my own boss. I was the other end of the Hitler stick. I was an unsuccessful painter but I wanted to be my own boss. [Laughs.] So the only way to do it was to have an art gallery where I would be the boss but I wouldn't have to do any paintings or photographs.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But you had no interest in museums?

JULIEN LEVY: I never gave up my horror of museums, and the more I saw of them the more I was convinced that I'd made a wise choice not to be a museum curator.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you plan your first exhibition? How did you, you know, approach the people you exhibited?

JULIEN LEVY: Things are all related. One grows out of another. It's organic. The way modern art came out of past art it's organic. The way you look at something that is going on in modern art today and begin to get a sense of what must come three years from now, or five years from now because it unfolds like biology unfolds. And my idea that photography someday—I was always too much ahead—would be an art led to the choice of the photographers who I thought had the most persistent thing towards the future. It also led me to throw them over. I did the first Cartier-Bresson show with a manifesto to practically which was anonymous. I signed it Peter Lloyd, wrote it myself, and signed it with an invented name, in which I sat down with the great "S's" of photography. This was nonsense for me with a photography gallery but it was part of my feeling that you turn over when you find the new thing, and Cartier-Bresson meant something new to me. He'd never been seen nor shown. And I said the great "S's" Stieglitz, Steichen, and Strand, with a little bit of Steiner and Sheeler thrown in. [Laughs.] They were all talking about beautiful print quality of absolute, perfect realism. And I said "here is a lousy print quality of absolutely imperfect realism, but stop motion that is a poetry in time instead of being confined to space. And so, let's have this for a change." [Laughs.] It never was appreciated. Stieglitz did as he was very broad-minded, but in a grumpy way. And Strand never talked to me again. And in general—if there was any support for photography in those days, they all were shocked that a gallery for photography would show non-photographs. I called them antigraphic. And then I just wrote the other way so that the introduction and preface seemed logical to Cartier-Bresson's drawing show, which put a knife in his own photographs, saying that he couldn't cut through as well with a camera as he wanted to try and do with a line. Did you see that show?

PAUL CUMMINGS: I haven't seen that yet.

JULIEN LEVY: I'll show you the catalog later.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Great, great. Well, when you decided on the gallery who were the first persons you approached? I mean, once you decided this was what you were going to do, who were the first people you wanted to—?

JULIEN LEVY: Well, first I thought it was very important to have the critics. I had no idea that it was important to have a customer. [Laughs.] I thought they would come in by droves if I had an interesting gallery. I had two things to sell. One was to make an—with the lowest possible budget—interesting new decor. Something new for the gallery in the way of hanging pictures a different way, of showing them a different way.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was the first gallery like? I've never seen a photograph.

JULIEN LEVY: It was around the corner—I couldn't afford Fifty-Seventh Street upstairs, on Madison Avenue between Fifty-Seventh and Fifty-Eighth. And I did a curved wall. It was my invention. It was the only expensive thing I did and before Frank Lloyd Wright did all his.

And my theory was that we would try it, anyhow. It made a nice, smooth running—it led the traffic of the gallery, it ran smoothly, and it didn't have the rigidity of Bauhaus, which I was

beginning to go against already. I thought it was—it was a formula that was frigid. And I thought it a way of seeing paintings so that you to move along from one to another, and when you got to the other you didn't see the one you just left, instead of standing back from a flat wall and seeing five different, or eight different paintings in front of you.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was sort of an individual experience.

JULIEN LEVY: Yes, you had to move and see each one individually. To some extent the others were there but they faded in the curve. Then I also tried to do a different framing in hanging things so you didn't have wide burlap walls to keep nails out of the wall and—Stieglitz had plaster walls and he used to repaint after every exhibition to keep it immaculate, and Knoedler had red velvet. Most of those galleries do. And I wanted a wall that you could hang on very easily without repainting, redecorating, without having cloth. So, it was a problem of invention, and I invented something. We won't go into that, it was—well, it was a different kind of molding strips which I slipped the glass under and let it fall down and then just put drawings or paintings behind it and they were held against glass seemingly floating and without marring the wall, and without tacks or nails.

But you did have two lines of tiny little strips which were part of the wall architecture, which allowed us to go in and set them there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I've never seen photographs of that gallery which is why I'm so curious about the space—

JULIEN LEVY: I have them somewhere in my barn. [Laughs.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: The mysterious barn.

JULIEN LEVY: There were two small little rooms with a self-service elevator coming up to it, and a back storeroom and back office for me, very small. It was quite intimate and small. A white room and a kind of a Harvard red room which took the place of red velvet, and I've always used it. I have it—still—I've always kept that color for painting. It works well I think.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What did you do as far as, you know, launching the gallery went mailing lists, advertising?

JULIEN LEVY: Well, that is the other thing. I asked Weyhe who was a darling about it, and he gave me his addressograph machine and I made my list from his. It never worked because Weyhe's clients certainly didn't like my—it kept me busy addressing envelopes and putting stamps onto—oh, a thousand people who I didn't know. And then I had a guest book which we gradually built up from his own list. And then I tried a new approach to the critics. That was my next thing. I thought the critics were very important. As I say, I forgot the customer in a way. I thought of the critics much more. And I called on a couple of them. Henry McBride was very sympathetic and a pleasant little man. He was charming. And then I wrote press releases. I'd learned to write press releases at Weyhe's which you mimeographed and sent.

So I changed that system and I took the style of each—and they flunked me in freshman English—and I did very well by it—critic and mimicked it and wrote a miniature review in his style with a little note on it saying, "in case you want to use this in toto, this is not sent to other critics."

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh really!

JULIEN LEVY: "This is especially directed to you. The others have something else." This is the same show but they have another aspect of it."

They often didn't come in at all but just used that because they found out it was true. So if they liked the review and were lazy they could put in excerpts from it just like it was in their style.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Reviewing your own exhibitions. [Laughs.]

JULIEN LEVY: Yes. And then I invented another thing which was the cause of my downfall. I invented the cocktail opening. That had never been done before.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why did you do that?

JULIEN LEVY: I think Knoedler occasionally gave either wine or champagne to critics and favored customers in the back room. I just did it as a come-on, and the freeloaders came on. And I

became an alcoholic in the process too because I had to sit from the beginning to the end of each of my openings drinking with everybody. But it filled the gallery and made it look very crowded. It did not help sell the pictures. People who might have bought got "tiddly" instead.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you know, those first exhibitions, was Allen Porter working for you, or did he come later, or where does he—?

JULIEN LEVY: He came very soon. My first assistant was John McAndrews. Did you ever meet him?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I know who he is.

JULIEN LEVY: I'd known him at Harvard and he was—he helped me draw the curved wall. He had architectural training. And he helped me meet a couple of younger photographers. He was a good friend of George Platt Lynes who was just beginning to be a photographer. And I think it was through him I met Walker Evans because Stieglitz would never have known Evans particularly.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, did you know Lincoln Kirstein then?

JULIEN LEVY: Yes. He is a complicated subject. [Laughs.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: True.

JULIEN LEVY: I knew him in various other ways at that time too. He wasn't connected or helpful at that moment. He was still at Harvard I guess. Quite possibly. Or maybe not.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But did McAndrew work for you for a long time?

JULIEN LEVY: For I think all through the first year while he was marking time until he got a job as an architect. I could pay very little. I think I paid my assistant fifteen dollars a week. But it was all done like a big family and we all enjoyed ourselves.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was all brand new.

JULIEN LEVY: Yes. Then Allen came when John left. Allen came through various friends of the same crowd. In fact, that particular crowd, I'd met via my Harvard years. Not so much through Sach's course but my tutor there was Henry Russell Hitchcock, and he helped interest me in some of the moderns. He gave me a—

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's interesting. I mean, all these people. It gives one the feeling that it was a very small, kind of compact world.

JULIEN LEVY: It was really, in a way.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Once you got to know two or three—

JULIEN LEVY: Once you got to know two or three it spread around. I held at that time a theory in—I was very Bourbon I think and I still am a little. But I always thought it was a shame that what was known in those days as the salon got lost finally in the shuffle, because it was a way where clients and artists met each other, and you did get this contagion of interest and conversation about what you were all at in an intimate atmosphere and not in a lecture hall.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What happened in your first years in terms of selling? I mean, who came in to buy things?

JULIEN LEVY: I never sold anything.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really? [Laughs.]

JULIEN LEVY: And so I lived—I finally closed up. Doing research of how I managed to get on is—. The first thing that happened was that no photographs sold. But I had incidentally met a painter in Paris named [Massimo] Campigli and he did two or three portraits of Joella, and he gave me a show of his work to put on. And, after my second photography show, I put on a Campigli show and made enough money to pay the small expenses of that year, and Campigli clients who got on my list, and later on branched out into some other things. And it began to teach me the lesson that I'd better do more with painting and less with photography. If I was going to survive

at all I'd have to find more painters.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, did the photography exhibitions attract many people, or did the painting exhibitions attract more people?

JULIEN LEVY: Oh, not until the painting exhibition did anyone come in, and not until then were there any sales.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So photography really was just a gesture.

JULIEN LEVY: It just kept going more and more as a gesture, more and more as propaganda until I got completely discouraged and said, "Well, let it propagandize itself from here on. I can't afford it anymore."

But I had albums full of photographs and projects for launching photography into applied applique. I even had photographic material printed trompe, not trompe l'oeil but I had pillows, pillowcases made of photographs of rocks so that you could have something soft to lie against that looked hard. [Laughs.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] That was very surrealist.

JULIEN LEVY: Yes, it was very surrealist. And then, of course, I had the first surrealist show at that time which attracted a whole other crowd many of whom became more or less paying clients. And, that I must put right with you for the record because it is usually attributed to the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford. And the way that came about was I brought all the material over from France. The Compelier/Campigli and the surrealist show were to be my only two painting exhibitions for that year. The rest was supposedly all going to be photographs. And Chick Austin had been a teacher of mine at Harvard. He was post graduate and teaching students when I was there. He was also one of Sachs's museum men. By that time he was the director of the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, and I saw a lot of him. Any time he came to New York we would go out and have dinner together or he would stay in my apartment with Joella and myself. I had a guest room. And he was wildly excited about my surrealist material and he said wouldn't I do him a great favor and let him give the first show and then I'd give it later in New York. And I thought that was splendid because what am I—a gallery for and not a museum director. Commercially speaking, the best idea is to have a museum do it. That gives you prestige and then you try and do the follow-up, the business end. So all the material I assembled went into the first surrealist show, as famous as the first one at Wadsworth, and then reassembled in my gallery after it closed at Wadsworth. It still was my show, my organized show.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well that again came through your friendship with all the people in Paris.

JULIEN LEVY: Over there, yes. At that time I discovered Joseph Cornell because he came in when I was unpacking the surrealist material, and then he came back and said "Would anything like this that I've been making make any sense? Does it look as though I'm imitating? Because I've never seen these things? This looks to me like I've always dreamed but I've been doing these things."

And I looked at them and I said, "Not only do I think you're not imitating, you are doing something all of your own, but I want to put you in this show." So I sent the first Cornell's up to Wadsworth Atheneum.

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PAUL CUMMINGS: It's side two.

JULIEN LEVY: —came in very furtively. He's a very strange, backwards-moving character, and very sensitive, and very furtive, and very guilty-looking. Finally—he had a lot of brown paper bags stuffed in a big overcoat pocket, shabby overcoat, and he pulled, finally, these out as though he was a merchant for daily pictures—and hid them a little bit, and said, "Please, would you like to look at these?" He'd pull the brown paper off from it. He had these—mostly collages at that time, somewhat in the manner of Max Ernst, but entirely original, they were. He was afraid they looked too much like Ernst, who he claimed he'd never seen. They were cutouts he'd made, I found out later, because he began by having his retarded brother, who he babysat for, and he'd cut out pictures and tell stories to his brother, and they'd paste them together and make these things. That kept his brother interested and happy. That was the origin of all of Joseph's work. That's what he had, some of the ones he picked out, that looked more or less like

Max Ernst.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know, I'm very curious about the effect of his brother on his work. Did you get to know that household ever?

JULIEN LEVY: Little bit, yes. Uh. Well, Joseph always claimed his brother was very intelligent, but his brother was unintelligible, because his speech—had a speech defect, so I couldn't follow. I think the major effect was the devotion to making these things, these fairytales of his, come true to his brother.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really [inaudible].

JULIEN LEVY: And everything else grew in Joseph's mind as he invented these stories and cut out these cutouts. [00:02:02] Between them, they had invented this little miniature world, private world, for themselves, but I think it was all Joseph, and the brother was a very responsive audience, and was the *raison d'être* for doing it at first, you know, publicly.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But, now, what was the reaction like to your exhibition of the Surrealist material? Because so many people—

JULIEN LEVY: That had swarms of people come in. The reaction was—considering that it had never been seen in America and wasn't understood at all, was—uh, it made a lot of noise, and a lot of interesting reverberations. Yes, people thought it was crazy, but not so crazy that they weren't excited to come. It was a big novelty. It had a few prestige buyers immediately. Alfred Barr bought a Cornell, presumably for the museum, and I don't think he ever presented the museum, and kept it in his private collection, because he thought it was too frivolous for the museum. Years later, they managed to sell the museum some Cornells.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who else bought things from that time?

JULIEN LEVY: I would have to research my books to find out, but Condé Nast bought a Dalí [inaudible]. The, um—things sold. The prices were almost nothing, but—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was it a successful exhibition from your point of view?

JULIEN LEVY: Publicity made my gallery, I think. From there on out, I really couldn't escape the label of being a Surrealist gallery. [00:04:07] I showed—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Because you gave Dalí many shows, for example?

JULIEN LEVY: I gave Dalí many shows. After that show, on the basis of the fact that I'd given the Surrealist show and had sold some Dalís, I met Dalí in person and arranged for a single Dalí show, and then I gave them continuously until the break—we had breaks just before the war, one political and one business-wise. He went to Knoedler.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was the—a political break? Over—

JULIEN LEVY: Oh, I thought that, as we all did in those days, that we were left, and Dalí was very blithely pro-Franco. Picasso was painting *Guernica*, and Dalí was painting Spanish beans and Franco. I felt I had to take sides. It's the first and last time I became partisan, and I chose the Communist side at that time, before the general shambles of the Spanish betrayal, anyhow, and I thought that Dalí was getting too—if Dalí was going into politics, and going onto the Franco side, I had to part with him. I don't part with my artists easily. I always try to find them a berth. I found him Bignou who had become friendly with me, and had sent me a couple of Dalí purchases. [00:06:00] I said, "Dalí and I are not going to work it out, politically. Would you like to have him? Because I want him to have a good dealer here in America."

PAUL CUMMINGS: How was it selling Dalí through the 1930s? Because he was with you most of those years until—

JULIEN LEVY: How what?

PAUL CUMMINGS: How was it selling his work? Was it difficult?

JULIEN LEVY: Oh, that was easy. That's the part of the gallery [inaudible] all through those years.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really? He was like the main—

JULIEN LEVY: There were minor prices in today's prices. I mean, I'd sell a Dalí for—never over a thousand dollars. But I'd sell out the show, and that was enough to pay my rent, and the rent was low, too. As I say, my secretary got \$15 a week. I got nothing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, did you—what was Dalí like as a person to deal with in those years? Because he was just really making his name and becoming a public edifice.

JULIEN LEVY: [Laughs.] I liked Dalí enormously in those years. It wasn't until the later years, when he became ultra-flamboyant, that I never was unhappy to separate from him. We still see each other occasionally with great cordiality. Um—and I still have Dalís. I bought a couple from him now and again, even in later years, because Dalí is a curious man. He's like—I understand Corot was during his Barbizon period, when all his clients asked for nymphs, and he painted nymphs by the yard—in the woods by the yard [laughs]. Dalí always put two or three paintings that he never showed aside for his private collection. He signed them "Gala Dalí" or something like that, and they weren't for sale and not for show, and they were always beautiful. [00:08:00] I think that he has this—nobody's seen this collection, but I think he has a secret art that is serious compared to the things that he throws out for money.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think he succumbed to the blandishments of easy money because he was so skillful and—you know?

JULIEN LEVY: He succumbed? I don't know. He held—he decided to stand for it with pride, just like he stood for Franco. Breton attacked him as being Avida Dollars, and Dalí said, "Why not? It's too bad you aren't more Avida." [They laugh.] But I think Gala—I always thought Gala was some—I found it difficult dealing with Dalí because of Gala.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why is that?

JULIEN LEVY: I found her a very shrewd business manager. I wasn't very tough about—I'd get along fine with Dalí. We'd come to an arrangement that I thought was perfectly friendly, rather loose, rather un-businesslike, and Gala would come in and pin this down, saying, "What are you doing? You're cheating my husband. I want this over it and out," and so forth and so on. Dalí was—"Oh, yes, Gala is right," she said.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you have contracts with many of your artists, or was that not feasible?

JULIEN LEVY: They were all—[inaudible]. First of all, I didn't want contracts. I thought they could easily be broken, if any side wanted to break it. It was always disagreeable to try to define and hold to. I did everything—I would write a letter after a conversation, saying, "As I understand—as I remember, and if you agree, initial this, initial this This is a general gist of our understanding." [00:10:02] At the end of my Gorky experience, that letter-writing thing was a disaster, because after his suicide, his wife called in a lawyer and said, "Is this a legal contract?" and the man said, "No, this is a friendly letter of nonsense. We can break that in a minute." So they did. That's another story.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's another—yeah, that's a later one.

JULIEN LEVY: [Cross talk] and the tragic end.

PAUL CUMMINGS: During the '30s, when you were really doing all these marvelous exhibitions—[de] Chirico and Max Ernst and Peter Blume and Dalí, on and on and on, everybody—the Depression was going on. Did that affect the kind of activities? Did you feel limitations because of the general economic malaise?

JULIEN LEVY: Well, the Depression gave me the euphoric idea, which didn't exactly materialize, that, as all our bourgeois, concrete acquisitions crumbled, some of the spiritual values become more alive. Also, as the stock market's speculative indulgence in the Old Masters as something you collect to show off your wealth, something you bought because you could get capital gains on it when you resold it and so on, would vanish, and prices would be low, I'd be able to afford to buy some pictures for myself. Younger couples would be able to afford to have a really good, young, original painter's work over their mantle, because of the Depression, not—it wasn't— [00:12:01]

PAUL CUMMINGS: You turned it around.

JULIEN LEVY: I turned it around. I said, this is the time to be experimental, be reasonable, be *spirituelle*, and not have a big commercial gallery. This was my feeling. It didn't quite work, but this is what I was working with—the theory I was working with.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Were there particular individuals who were collectors who supported the gallery in terms of buying frequently from exhibitions, or did—was it a turnover in terms of the collectors?

JULIEN LEVY: People who what?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who frequently bought from you. Or was it just a lot of people—

JULIEN LEVY: I gradually had a few fateful, smaller collectors who were in one specialty or another. For instance, with Eugene Berman and the Neo-Romantics, who were still not appreciated, but I gave as much attention to them at that time, and I still believe in them, as I did in the Surrealists, but the Surrealists made more of a [inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Noise, yeah, right.

JULIEN LEVY: But the Neo-Romantics each had their following, and with the early Berman shows, I had subscribers who underwrote it for me. I had an agreement with Jane—yeah Eugene Berman, before he came to America, to take each year's work. Then I had six ardent collectors who had got special prices, about half-price, who guaranteed—and then they had first choice—who guaranteed that each one would buy one canvas at half-price, if they could have first choice of the new work that came over. They'd all assemble, very excited that the new Bermans are here, and we're going to pick ours. Agnes Rindge [Claflin], who taught at Vassar, was one. Henry-Russell Hitchcock was a subscriber. [00:14:01] Joseph Brewer, who was—at that time, Brewer, Warner & Putnam was a publisher—was a subscriber. The Askews subscribed, and the Selbys subscribed—Jim Selby. So I had a kind of a guarantee, and they had a kind of an in bargain, and a feeling of clubmanship [laughs] to the development of this man. Then when Tchelitchew came over, he had a whole following all of his own that he—very properly, but some did get—artists don't do it anymore—always told them, "Buy from my dealer, not from me, because I want—he wants to, and he won't remain my dealer long if I keep selling to my friends and not through him." They all thought that was perfectly splendid and good, and the right and decent thing to do. He had a whole following. Wright Ludington in Philadelphia, and a couple of other Philadelphia collectors. He had a beautiful woman who married Harriman, I think, or one of the trustees of the Modern Art later.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Marie.

JULIEN LEVY: One of the beauties of the time.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Marie.

JULIEN LEVY: Not Marie Harriman, no. That is not Mrs. Harriman. He did her portrait—he did the Sitwells, and the Sitwells had friends over here. He knew all the ballet and opera crowd. They would come in for his show, and then they'd stay to see the other shows, and sometimes buy some of the other men. They'd buy a Dalí then, and they'd buy a Berman then.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you get into the Berman/Tchelitchew circle? Because that was—

JULIEN LEVY: That was early as [inaudible] and I think that was through all my Harvard connections. They were all, they were all—see, they were—the Berman—the Neo-Romantic circle, the Berman/Tchelitchew group, really worked with the great tradition of drawing. [00:16:13] They could do virtuoso drawings, both of them, like—yeah, and like Tiepolo. They were the Baroque-type of drawing, not the fine, linear, angular school, which is rather tight. They had this wonderful sense of loose drawing, which our Harvard crowd always thought was one of the high spots of drawing, the art of drawing. So they all latched onto these men, not so much for their paintings, but for their calligraphy and their drawing quality.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So because it—I mean, they didn't particularly care for the Surrealists.

JULIEN LEVY: No. No, because this would be another—whole other group. Neo-Romantic group followed the Neo-Romantics—

PAUL CUMMINGS: But it's fascinating that you showed these two groups of people who really

didn't care for each other, yet met in your gallery, somehow.

JULIEN LEVY: Because they were both alive and of our day. And I thought they represented two branches of rather the same tendency. The—in fact, although I had certain prejudices about how Picasso developed, I think they were both in Picasso, and I think they're both in the history of art. It's the dialectic relationship between Romanticism and Classicism, which goes on always being productive. Sometimes merges, but always is there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How do you mean met in Picasso?

JULIEN LEVY: Well, Picasso, in a way, was a dominant end of the age, although he's gone on for 50 years more, with the culminating figure of the modern school of a certain sort. [00:18:02] He had two phases in his own character. He had his Blue and Rose—or Blue Period, which was romantic, and he had his Cubist period, which was classical/analytic. In his drawings, he had the same thing. He had sparkling, Baroque-type drawings. He had angle-type [ph], the classical drawings with a very fine line. He developed those two sides, always, so that both those sides of Picasso come out in the two lines of Romantic and Surrealist. He had them both, and he really continued, in a way, having them both. The Romantics came out of the Blue Period, the absinthe-drinker, the sad, lonely, melancholy, but beautifully painted in the school of Courbet.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But they were also involved with the theater. You know Beara [ph] and all those people—

JULIEN LEVY: I think that's when they went—I think that's where they decayed, but then—everybody decayed. I was very sad about all my artists.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How do you mean decayed?

JULIEN LEVY: Sometimes they decayed just because they came to America. Sometimes they decayed just because they went on living. Marcel Duchamp was the only one to interrupt this by saying, "I'm going to stop painting, because otherwise I would decay. I'm going to do other things." Because once you get something that's called your style—let's say Hemingway in writing, who did a beautiful book with *The Sun Also Rises*, and his earlier book, *In Our Time*, was terrifically inventive and interesting—just became a commercial product, and the father of a whole—lot of the whole school of baby Hemingway commercial products [laughs]. It sort of corrupted American literature for years.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What do you mean by the artists—some of the artists who came here were corrupted by coming here? Who's an example of that, and what—

JULIEN LEVY: They all did poor work when they came here. [00:20:02] Let's leave the artists, for example. I was very interested—[Arthur] Chick Austin and I put out papers for Kurt Weill to come over here, and Chick was going to have Margony [ph] produce for him when he came over, the refugee, at the Wadsworth Atheneum theater. The—Lincoln Kirstein, at that time, put—also helped, and he was going to do something for the ballet. But he came here, and he tried terribly hard, and quite quickly, to find out how you broke into the popular music, how you got your records—you know, your discs, recordings—made and sold, and how you got to Hollywood. He did *Lady in the Dark*. He did musical comedy for Broadway, which lost, mostly, the Kurt Weill flavor, except for something like "September Song," which that's a little bit like his real thing, accidentally.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why was there this decay? What provoked it?

JULIEN LEVY: I think—how do writers decay when they go to Hollywood? They sell out somehow. Their soul sells out. I don't know why they decay. They—partly because they are asked to repeat, partly because they have to make money—they feel success is money-making. You could starve in Paris and be a—you know, a neighborhood hero, and the butcher would help you, and the baker would help you, and the cafe owner would adore you. You can't starve in America.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why do you think that has never taken hold here, that neighborhood support that—do you think it's part of a romantic tradition, or, you know, it's—

JULIEN LEVY: I don't know. [00:22:00]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It fascinates me, because the Europeans have—

JULIEN LEVY: You're asking me to improvise. We're a very young pioneer nation, and one of our doctrines is success. I suppose the old world has long ago gotten over the idea of success, and they are rich in culture. So they admire the richness of culture more than America has time for. I don't know just why, but at any rate, you sell out. They sell out, to some extent, without knowing it, when they're here.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's a fascinating observation, though.

JULIEN LEVY: Well, it just happened. It was very sad to me, always, and I never could explain it. I just—I didn't agree with—I mean, people would say, for instance, to Berman, "Do not sell to *Vogue* magazine." They'd give him—ask him to do a cover, which he did splendidly luxuriously and they were not very easy for him. "Don't do it. You're selling your soul to *Vogue*." "How can I sell my soul to *Vogue*? I'm an artist." "You'll find out." And he said, "Julien, do you think I should or shouldn't?" I said, "I think you have to—you should make a living. Just don't do what they tell you to do. Do what you want to do, and make them buy it or reject it. You shouldn't feel that you'd be corrupted by that." However, somehow, it did corrupt him [laughs], after a few years.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I think so. I think he also was a man who had to contend with marvelous skills, and people would see. "Oh, let's get Berman. He can do this and that, and the other thing." He might have been swayed by that recognition. I don't know, I mean he's always struck me as somebody who really had these fabulous graphic skills.

JULIEN LEVY: Marvelous.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Everything just happened so—

JULIEN LEVY: Come out like a birdsong. [00:24:00]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, just, you know, so easily, one after another. They weren't, really. You know, Breton appeared here—we're jumping around a little bit, but that's okay. Breton appeared in this country, and many of these people came the time the war started. How did that affect the gallery and your circle of people? The fact that Max Ernst appeared, and Breton appeared. Many of the artists you had been exhibiting were, all of the sudden, living in the—around the corner [laughs].

JULIEN LEVY: Uh, well, it was very interesting for American art, obviously. It was an important moment. I had melodramatic and private difficulty at that point in writing my memoirs, a memoir of the gallery. It's a key question as to what was the influx of the foreign influence. You know all about it. You knew all these people and so on. Just that moment, I was in oblivion myself, privately, personally. First of all, all money from my gallery was finished. The rent was put up triple that year, and my lease ended. I didn't know how to raise new money, which is another story. Everyone says, if you'd had any sense, you'd have gotten a business manager. You go around, you get—you go public or something [laughs].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, they're all—

JULIEN LEVY: Didn't occur to me. I asked—I didn't want to ask my father, but I finally asked my father, and he said, "Nonsense. If you can't make a go of it yourself"—

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs] forget it.

JULIEN LEVY: He said, "Forget it." [00:26:00] Well, I just didn't know what way to turn, but at the same time, I was taken into the army. Pearl Harbor occurred.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: You volunteered.

JULIEN LEVY: So I just—I simply wasn't on the scene when they all came here. By the time I came out of the army, which wasn't a very dramatic—I never got overseas, I never was in the trenches. I was in the hospital with a glandular breakdown. My thyroid conked out. So I just traveled around in army hospitals for a while before I got a medical discharge. By the time I appeared back on the scene, my gallery had closed down, and my artists were very involved and picked up by other galleries.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But Kirk Askew did some things for you, didn't he, for a while, or—

JULIEN LEVY: For a while. When I first went into the army, as he was an old friend of mine, he said, "Leave everything in my hands, and then we'll—when you come back—I'll keep the fires

burning for you, and we'll see how you resume."

PAUL CUMMINGS: But how did that work? I mean, he was doing a very different kind of thing.

JULIEN LEVY: Well, he wanted to go into modern.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Oh, I see.

JULIEN LEVY: And he'd lost his connections in England, partly because of the war, and he knew all the clients I knew, because we were close friends, and he entered all mine in every opening I had. I used to go to his salon, as it was called, where he—and bring my artists over to meet his guests. How it actually worked, that was that he persuaded Tchelitchew and Berman to stay with him, and Peter Blume to stay with him, and they were with him by the time I got out of the army. [00:28:00]

PAUL CUMMINGS: So that was a whole [laughs] shift of emphasis there.

JULIEN LEVY: It was a shift of emphasis. Dalí, by that time, was with—it wasn't Bignou anymore. It was George Calaire [ph] and—no Carstairs. They were all a group of their own. So to start up again, I had to start up sort of new, and I wasn't entirely in touch with—and Peggy Guggenheim came over and had her museum, which gelled the whole thing, and gelled it on a big scale. I had been working on a small scale. So I was on the fringe those few years, and then there's a kind of hiatus. Physically and emotionally, both, was a hiatus for me [laughs]. Then I re-began, because after that, I said, "I'll look for new men." I got Gorky, I got Paul Dilbo [ph], and a few others, and started up again in a smaller gallery.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Before we get into that, because that's another chapter, back in the '30s, you gave Peter Blume an exhibition with his famous *Eternal City* and things. Where did he come from? How did you find Peter Blume? Or was he—did he come into the gallery? Did you have many people who did that?

JULIEN LEVY: Oh, by that time, all the artists I had—I had people coming in the gallery, and I'd look quickly at what they had, and went through all the embarrassment of telling bad ones that they were bad, or whatever, and good ones that I'd try to fit them in. Peter came on the idea that some critics had called his *South of Scranton* a Surrealist work, and so he thought maybe he would belong. [00:30:09]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Was there a difference in handling American artists as opposed to the European artists? I mean, was it more difficult to sell American paintings?

JULIEN LEVY: No, it was much easier. It was very difficult to sell European. We were very chauvinist. We became more and more chauvinist. The Americans did.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

JULIEN LEVY: I told you the story of the Whitney Museum and the toast I made. Except for the Modern Museum, and myself, which remained equal-equal, it was, if you're a good artist [laughs], you're a good artist, and it makes no difference what your nationality is. Both the clientele and the rest of the museum world wanted desperately to make—to be pro-American. That's why, to my view, the final result of Surrealism via Gorky and the—what became the New York School became the international school, because we—our politics are set up—the Rockefellers—not so much Nelson as his brother—Chase National Bank, the embassy, everything, when it became big, when art became part of our prestige, wanted to have an art that would spread America all over the world. An imperial art [laughs], so to speak. [00:32:00] This action painting that Pollock and Gorky started became it. It was big. It was easy to do. You could put it in an embassy, you could put it in the hall of a bank, and you could sell it all over the world. It caught on with the artists all over the world, so that a lot of the national individuality was lost. We became—it was no longer called American, but it was an American export. It was the first time we had exported instead of importing, and we were terribly happy about it as Americans. But that is the center of a dealer at that time. He would either import Europeans to a certain old-fashioned—and then they didn't like modern—group, who thought that the only important cultural thing was European. If you wanted to have a portrait painted, you didn't have Titian. You didn't even have Gainsborough. But you did have Sargent, and he was an American [laughs]. And you could have an American portrait in the English manner, in the English/French manner, and so on, all down the line, but we would Americanize it. Then we wanted to have our individual American who was purely American, and you'd have to have jazz, and Stuart Davis,

and invent some purely American thing. There was no sense of non-nationality, in that we just do quality only.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What kind of response, the first years, did you get from the museums? There were not as many now as—museum directors running around then as there are now, but—

JULIEN LEVY: I was very—just as I sent my first Surrealist show first to Wadsworth Atheneum, I was very anxious to go operate with museums. [00:34:07] I had many happy and unhappy adventures with Alfred Barr and the Modern Museum, and cooperating it with a lot of their early shows. I sometimes got a very tough end of the stick, which, a year later, was told to me by someone, I think Dorothy Miller—someone, anyhow, in the Modern Museum said, "Alfred always is furious at you, because you've done everything first that he's wanted to do first." He was always impeded by trustees, so it would take him a year or two to put through a show, and by that time, Julien Levy had done the show, not on a museum scale, but the prestige was out of it. I tried very hard to cooperate with Alfred in every way, as I had with the Wadsworth, and sort of saying, "Please do it yourself first." Took them too long to put it through. However—

PAUL CUMMINGS: What about museums around the country, though? You know, Chicago, Minneapolis, wherever.

JULIEN LEVY: They didn't, in those early years, didn't really exist. Duncan Phillips came in a little bit for his particular brand of things in Washington. There was no national—the Washington National Museum wasn't there. I had no contact, no contact with asked with the Art Institute. I don't think they were spreading into modern at all yet, and didn't turn up and say, "Can we do something together?" or "Can we buy something from you?" or "Can I sell you something?" I didn't even know the director of that. I knew the director of Worcester Museum, who I think was Henry Francis Taylor [Francis Henry Taylor], who was another Harvard/Sachs man. [00:36:07] He became director of the Metropolitan, but it was a long time before I could break into the Metropolitan at all with moderns.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you finally?

JULIEN LEVY: Well, I sold a Gorky to them [laughs]. It was an American painter back then.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What about the Whitney Museum? Were they interested in the Americans that you were showing?

JULIEN LEVY: Oh, yes. They bought some of my men, when my men became American citizens after they came over here. But they were restricted to Americans. Of course they bought a Peter Blume. They had Peter Blume even before I had him. But they didn't ever buy a Cornell as far as I know. He was an American, but it wasn't exactly museum material according to the Whitney.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, their aesthetic was something else in those days. It still is. [They laugh.] As one looks through the art magazines of the period, *Arts*, or *ARTnews*, or *Magazine of Art*, in the late '30s and '40s, it seems as if there was very little real reflection of what was going on. The magazines had their point of view, and that's what they kept, you know, feeding their audience, you might say [laughs]. Did you have any—was there any use in the magazines? If they ran a long review of one of your exhibitions, was that productive, or did it appear too late in terms of the—

JULIEN LEVY: Well, I was always, I was always hopeful for things of that sort. [00:38:02] It never really—you know, I had no sales. That's the whole point of my gallery. I don't know how I lived through it. But I was always very optimistic. I tried to take a little ad in *ARTnews* regularly, so the gallery's name was in front of the public. They would review, sometimes with understanding, sometimes rather facetiously, but they'd get reviews. I don't know if anything actually came in as a byway of clients from that, except that any client that did buy felt that there was some prestige, there was such a thing as some clippings referring to these people they bought [laughs]. It wasn't an absolute unknown. It had been reviewed in *ARTnews*, not badly. Really, the accounts of non-sales, absolutely non-sales, are astounding. I had two successive Magritte shows, and the only Magritte sold at all was to Kay Sage, who was married to Yves Tanguy, who might as well be a European, who bought a Magritte.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really? How fantastic.

JULIEN LEVY: And Max Ernst, there were no sales, no sales, almost entirely, until the Carnegie Institute bought one, and that started a little ball rolling.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So the influence of a major museum acquisition is noticeable? I mean, there are other people then—

JULIEN LEVY: Oh, yes. Once you've got a major museum acquisition, it would be very noticeable. Once the—it was after my stint in the army, and came back, and I didn't have Tchelitchew anymore, but by that time, the *Hide and Seek* of Tchelitchew's was sold at a museum, and it was a popular success as well as a museum purchase. [00:40:13] Then you could sell Tchelitchew, only I didn't have Tchelitchews anymore.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you buy many things during these years for your—

JULIEN LEVY: I used to have to. There's a story Stevenson wrote about, called *The Suicide Club*. Begins with a man who sells cream puffs in a restaurant, and any time he passes a table and they don't buy one of his cream puffs, he ate it himself. I had to eat my whole tray full of cream puffs, which is the reason I have some money in the bank today, and I'm happily retired. I have an attic full of Max Ernst, because whenever Max Ernst couldn't live, or pay his rent, or do anything, I would buy a Max Ernst to keep him going, no matter how hard—where I could dig the money. I had a little more access to something than he had. And it would go into storage. Wouldn't sell. So I still had them, years later, when Max Ernst became a million-dollar proposition.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah. But are there—did you build up a large collection? These great myths about what you have, and where it is [laughs], and all this kind of thing.

JULIEN LEVY: Well, my greatest collection, the really dazzling palaces of success, would be the list of all the paintings that I didn't sell. If I owned them, oh, I'd be [they laugh] on the top of the world.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But did you develop the idea of being a collector during this period, or did you just accumulate—

JULIEN LEVY: I thought they were simply [inaudible]. First of all, I was a collector just as well as I was a gallery. [00:42:03] I was an art-lover. I hated to—if I could—if once in a while I did sell a picture, I'd look at it as though I was parting from my oldest friend. Sometimes I would almost say, and sometimes I did say, no. Once or twice I said no, because I didn't like the family that was going to be adopted. [They laugh.] A story was written about that by one of my later secretaries, and it was published in *Harper's Bazaar*, I think, under a fictional name, of the art dealer who was—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really? Who wrote it?

JULIEN LEVY: —couldn't make ends meet, but suddenly brought the ceiling down when somebody he thought was an unappreciative buyer wanted to buy one of his pictures, and he threw him out.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh my. Who wrote that story?

JULIEN LEVY: Eleanor Perényi.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, marvelous. [Laughs.] Did you have very many people that worked for you? We've mentioned McAndrew and Allen Porter briefly. But he—Porter worked for you for what, four or five years or something?

JULIEN LEVY: Yeah, he was a long time with me. Yes, we all—we sort of worked—it was an intimate team. It was just somebody sat in the gallery while I ran around [laughs] and organized—bought pictures and organized the shows and so on. Somebody did the dirty work, and was very pleasant, and the receptionist, and the telephone answerer and everything. Allen Porter was invaluable. After he went to the Modern Museum—who did I have next? I had some very lovely secretaries. One—turned into girl secretaries, I think, after Allen. I had a marvelous and efficient secretary named Elena von Mumm, who left to marry Edmund Wilson. [00:44:02] I had a lot of—I had occasional girls from college who would work almost for nothing, just for the—they'd meet a young man and get married. It was a nice, distinguished way to live, to be a secretary in an exciting and rather odd-ball art gallery.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know, sitting here with all these books behind me. How did you come to do the Surrealist book?

JULIEN LEVY: To do what, the—

PAUL CUMMINGS: The book on Surrealism.

JULIEN LEVY: Well, I thought—I also was passionately fond of—I don't know why either—of book-making, and choice of types, and papers, and things like that. I thought it was kind of an art, in a way. Caresse Crosby suggested that she would fund that, she would publish a book by me, about Surrealism. We met in Paris, and we knew all the same people and so on. If I'd do all the dirty work, if I got the printer and so forth, and the budget arranged, get it published, and she'd finance it. So Allen Porter and I really did that from the ground up, and vending [ph] all the way. I had a great time picking colored papers and different types. Got Joseph Cornell to do the cover. I invented the idea of burning corners for Joe. He liked it. And then we reproduced it and put it in—it was kind of, again, like a defeated painter, the same as doing the architecture of my gallery and the framing of my gallery. [00:46:01] I enjoyed doing all the announcements. That was another innovation I made that I enjoyed so much, because there's the fun of having a gallery when you can't feed the painter himself? All the gallery announcements, in those days, when I first opened, were a nice, either expensively or inexpensively engraved card. I invented the idea of fold-outs, fold-in, typographical—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Different sizes, different papers.

JULIEN LEVY: Tricks and collage, and so forth.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How was that book greeted, though, when it first appeared? I mean, from your point of view.

JULIEN LEVY: It was remaindered.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was it really?

JULIEN LEVY: [Laughs.] Yes. And I can now really get a copy for myself. It didn't sell. It wasn't reviewed.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really? Nothing happened to it? But not—

JULIEN LEVY: Except that now you can't get one for a hundred dollars if you can find a copy.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But now Arno has reprinted—

JULIEN LEVY: That's a reprint. That ran into another little tragedy.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

JULIEN LEVY: I had been looking all over to have it reprinted, and Arno didn't reprint it. Somebody approached me called World Wide, and I said, "If I can oversee the fact that it's a perfect, or near-perfect, facsimile, you can make it. Let's go." Duchamp offered to write a foreword, and I decided no. I wanted to do a little postscript—or a foreword of my own. They did a very good reproduction job, and they supposedly gave it to Arno, who is the distributor. Then all of a sudden, they did these things that publishers do today: they collapsed. [00:48:02] They sold their whole outfit to some other publisher, and the publisher bought that for one or two names in it, and all the rest got—they're in the basement in busts somewhere. I can't get a copy.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Because I wondered—it seems, in the last few years, it disappeared. [Cross talk.]

JULIEN LEVY: It exists. It just hasn't been—you can't get it for the market. It's in limbo. I have no access to get the damn thing. I want to buy it back and put it back on the market.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Julien?

[Audio Break.]

JULIEN LEVY: —my woes about the list of problems of Job, which I practically never complain about. To any businessman, I suppose it would be quite logical that when things get successful, then you begin to find that you have to be tough to keep from having things stolen out from under you. But the later years of my gallery, after my masochistic years of going on and on, and never making sales, when it began to even faintly have a glimmer of success, the betrayals and

the, well, moral and physical thefts from me, became heartbreaking to me [laughs], and absolutely amazing, because I was innocent. Not expecting that to arrive. I hadn't expected success, and I certainly didn't expect the dirty tricks. And I was quite—and I still don't like listing them, and they aren't—to an ordinary businessman, they are, I'm sure, quite in the—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Workaday world.

JULIEN LEVY: —workaday world. If some competitor gangs up on you, you gang up on him next year and get it back [laughs]. [00:50:00] I never occurred to me and I was just shocked.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The years after the war, in the mid and late '40s, you showed a whole group of kind of different people in some way. I mean, Leon Kelly, and Maurice Grosser, and Rico Lebrun, and Gorky came along, and Matta came in there. Dorothea Tanning. Howard Warshaw. How did you ever find Howard Warshaw?

JULIEN LEVY: He's a good draftsman, too. I always look at a man's drawings before I get sold on his paintings [laughs]. And he's a beautiful draftsman. Well, by the time Peggy Guggenheim had set up the Surrealists as a somewhat booming affair, and I had come out of the army, I had to start again, and I was—never discourage Levy. I used my same techniques. I wanted to find new young men and go on just as happily as I had done before. I'd be more discouraged today, when the young men are, in my opinion, not as promising as when the other young men came along, when the new ones became classics—when the old ones became classics, there were young ones to follow.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was it difficult—how did you meet somebody like Gorky? Where would he have come into the—

JULIEN LEVY: I wrote that story in the preface to his memorial service, the Museum of Modern Art, his big retrospective show. He came in the very first years of my gallery, very much like Joseph Cornell. [00:52:00] He used to see every show I gave, and he'd sit and—just to come in from the cold sometimes [laughs]. He brought me down to his studio to look at his work, and I said—well, what I actually said at that time was that, "You're going through—and I think it's very great of you—all the styles in history. You're digesting them. You're doing this." By the way, this picture up here is not a Cézanne. It's a Gorky, in the manner of Cézanne. He never copied a Cézanne. He tried to put himself into the—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —spirit.

JULIEN LEVY: —into the spirit of Cézanne, and then do a Cézanne-type picture for his own growth. He could do that, and at that time, I said, "Now you're being Picasso, and I don't want to show you. But you come back to me any day, when you're being Gorky, and I'll show you." Then he said, well, he was hungry, cold, and starving, and I bought his sketchbook from him of Picasso-like drawings, which I still have, and for which purchase he was grateful, because he knew that I thought they were somewhat valueless, but that I obviously was making a gesture in thinking that he was a promising man and needed encouragement, and could be encouraged. As soon as he decided he was Gorky, other galleries were interested, [Sidney] Janis wanted him. He came to me and he said, "Well, Julien, you were the one who told me to come back when I was Gorky. Now I'm Gorky. Will you look at my work?" I looked at him and I said, "Marvelous. You are being someone distinctive in yourself, and I love them, and I want them. Let's have a show." [00:54:00] His friends were very much against it. He was a nice man. He was very loyal in that way, because they said—the whole crowd—he belonged to a crowd that later became the international school—they all said, "If you—it will be your death, as far as your reputation in America goes, if you associate with a Surrealist gallery. You've got to associate with an American for American gallery."

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why did they think that?

JULIEN LEVY: And Gorky said, "I'm sorry. I've always liked everything Julien has done, and he's—I've wanted to show with him, and he's always offered to—been open, and now he'll take me on with a show with him."

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. How were his first shows when you showed him? Were people interested? Was it hard to—

JULIEN LEVY: Yes, there was a great deal of interest. Again, there were no sales.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, but he was a [cross talk]—

JULIEN LEVY: There never were any sales, but they were understood, and he developed a following quite rapidly. The kiss of death, which was a preface by André Breton, was not quite a kiss of death. It was respectable [laughs].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you know Breton much when he was here? He wrote some things for you, didn't he?

JULIEN LEVY: He wrote the Gorky preface, and he wrote a Browner, I think. Yes, I knew him. Had a nice—the only pleasant stealing story in my woes of Job is the story of Breton, who—he had given me—sometimes I'd bought and sometimes he'd given me, over the years—I knew him in Paris—an edition on nice paper. The first edition of each of his books, signed to me, sometimes with a nice, long inscription, sometimes just "*a mon ami*." [00:56:03] I had them in my library. He was being republished by—having a book come out, translated into English by—to be sold at Brentano's. I don't know who published it. Maybe Brentano's.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They did, yeah.

JULIEN LEVY: They wanted to have a whole window display for him, so he asked me if I'd lend him all his old books, because he'd been—he's a refugee and came over with no baggage, and had no—nothing—no credentials to sell. So all these inscribed copies of mine were exhibited in the window at Brentano's. I never got them back. I said, "Andre, you know, I lent you these books. Aren't you going to—aren't you finished with them? Can I get them back?" He said, "I have nothing for my library in my studio in New York. I know Brentano's is over, but I have them on my bookshelves now." I said, "Well, when are you going to give them back to me?" He said, "I'm sorry, Julien, but in a certain way that you may or may not understand, it's the justice of poetry. I am the author, and they belong to me, and you're not going to get them back." [They laugh.] And I see his point. It's fair enough. Here he was with none of his—you know, nothing of his own, stripped of the things he'd created, and I was only a secondhand man. I had gifts—they were gifts. They belonged to me, property-wise, but I hadn't written them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What kind of a presence was he in New York in those days? Because one hears so many different points of view about what he did or didn't do.

JULIEN LEVY: Well, there again, it was my absent time. You'd have to ask David Hare. He and David and Bernard Reis, that famous figure today, who were publishing a magazine, *VVV*. [00:58:00] And he was active as usual, in an editorial, advisory, fatherly position among the exiles. I was mixed up with the wrong end of it. First of all, I partly wasn't there, and secondly, I was seeing something of David Hare, who married Breton's wife, and so I was on the wrong end of the divorce [laughs].

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] You were left out of that—

JULIEN LEVY: I was left out of that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —kind of a shift. There are some exhibitions you did, which were not one-man shows, which are quite interesting. One in 1938 was the *New and Old Trompe L'oeil* [*Old and New Trompe L'oeil*] exhibition. What provoked that? How—you know, idea exhibitions, I always find interesting, and that trompe l'oeil exhibition is one particularly so.

JULIEN LEVY: Well, your use of the word "idea" exhibition is—sums it all up. I think my whole gallery was an idea exhibition. [Laughs.] As I've explained it to you, it came out of some concept I have that art develops organically, that I wanted to show it as it was developing today, rather than as it was a museum obituary. All my exhibitions were idea exhibitions, in a way, a group or not group, whether it was a photography exhibition—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, but I mean a theme—this was a particular, specialized—like the year later, you did the documents of [Philippe] Supo Cubism.

JULIEN LEVY: It wasn't so much a document. It was tracing a situation that was currently important for what modern painters—some of the modern painters were doing, and giving it a depth and history. [01:00:01] It was a forerunner of the concept of Photorealism, in a way, and I balanced it off with my feeling for photography, and what developed from photography as being imitating painting, up to being so-called pure photography, on into documentary photography, on into experimental photography. And painting, likewise, I wanted to show that it would

approach the photographic and go beyond it in certain ways.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know, I almost get the feeling that there's this kind of a didactic, teaching attitude behind—

JULIEN LEVY: I'm afraid there was. I always thought I was teaching a lesson. [They laugh.] I always thought I was preaching with my gallery.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What do you think now that—you were one of the first people to give so many exhibitions to photography, and now there are—it's my last count—150 dealers across the country—

JULIEN LEVY: I'm delighted, because I have a son who's a photographer, and quite a good one [laughs]. It's nice to see it come alive. It's nice to see all the things that—I'd always wanted to do some of these things myself, and I just don't have the hands and the eye for it, and I love to see it come out if they were children of mine. I had some other group discoveries which were now coming out. I don't know whether you know that I showed the first two or three times experiments in comic strips. I showed *Terry and the Pirates*. I showed Walt Disney.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

JULIEN LEVY: [Laughs.] And none of those caught on either. I was exhibiting the originals for the —

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see.

JULIEN LEVY: —signed originals. [01:02:02] I wanted very much to have crazy cartoons, great favorite of mine. This grew out, a little bit, from Hubert Selby's *Seven Oddly Aughts* [ph], and I obviously was connected with the *Seven Oddly Aughts*—that's the moment I wanted—interested in photography, movies, comic strips, and so on. It's a part of my feeling of what contemporary mediums are. They're not necessarily frescoes. They can be lively.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right. Well, you know, the material changes, but the ideas can carry on. Talk to me about the closing of the gallery. Why did that happen? One could have continued being—one can be an art dealer forever, it seems.

JULIEN LEVY: The definite key to it was the death of Gorky, which I took very much to heart. He was very close to me at the time. It was the last straw of my sorrows of Job, and he hung himself for it. I was in the middle of it, from the drama of his separation from his wife, and I held his hand through that. I had an automobile accident with him that laid him up for a while. I was—I had a broken shoulder from the accident, and I couldn't get up to him when he telephoned to all his friends, started crying for help, the day he killed himself. He wanted somebody to—you know. He was calling, "Come." He did it in strange ways, but I heard him, and I called everyone I knew and said, "Somebody go over to Gorky. [01:03:59] I can't make out what he's talking about, but I think he's going to—he's in trouble." Nobody got there on time. Then, almost immediately afterwards, the purchasers, whose names I won't mention, but it's really disgraceful, rushed around, tried to buy all the Gorkys I had. There he was, dead—

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: [Inaudible.]

JULIEN LEVY: —and hung, and if he'd ever sold any of those, a few weeks before, he'd have been a little more careful about living [laughs].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Would have made a lot of difference.

JULIEN LEVY: And that one just put me out. I said, really, tan impossible situation. It's tragic. And I had no more money to continue with, and I wanted to write and do other things, and do it on my own, not have overhead, and more tragedies, and more this and that. Get out from under.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]