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Oral history interview with John Clancy, 1970  
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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with John Clancy on 10 July 1970. The interview was conducted at The Rehn Gallery by Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. This is a rough transcription that may include typographical errors.

## Interview

PC: Paul Cummings talking to John Clancy in the Rehn Gallery. Well, why don't we talk about Rehn for a while.

JC: Yes, that's what I was going to suggest. Rehn was born in New York City in the Hotel Chelsea which was one of the first cooperative studios in the city.

PC: I didn't know that it was a cooperative studio.

JC: Yes, it was. In other words, he owned his own studio. And as Rehn used to say, the roof was a swimming hole. And then of course his father had a summer place up at Magnolia, Massachusetts where he always went. And also in addition to having a big house up there he also had a studio. In those days it was different than it is today -- you'd invite people for the weekend and so on. Maybe I shouldn't bring that in.

PC: No, people do that. Sure.

JC: and in those days artists were very good companions. And also he used to buy the pictures for... now, for instance, he swapped a picture with Sloan for rugs and a picture with Knabe for a piano.

PC: It still happens sometimes.

JC: I suppose so, yes. It does, but in those days it was not unusual; maybe not. But anyways, as far as I could find out from Rehn he was more interested in writing. In fact he was a critic on one of the early newspapers; I think it was the *Mail*. His father never encouraged him to be a painter. He said, "If you decide that that's what you want to do I'll help you in every way but you're in this environment and you're just carried away." And so he paid more attention to writing. In fact he even wrote a couple of short stories. He had one short story published in *Cosmopolitan*.

PC: That's great. I didn't know that.

JC: And people used to come to him for guidance in buying pictures. So his wife said, "Why don't you set up a little gallery?" Incidentally, he was the first manager of the Milch Gallery here in New York. That would be around, oh, gosh, 1918 or so. You know Milch before that was a frame maker and he branched out into the painting field.

PC: Oh, really? I didn't know that. Like Bob Ben who's now becoming a print dealer.

JC: Yes, yes. And you see Rehn knew all the artists. You name them and he knew them.

PC: Yes, because of his father.

JC: I think Alexander painted a portrait of him as a baby. I don't know where that is now; but that's beside the point. And then he left Milch and had what we call a private gallery at 6 West 50th Street where he could come and go as he pleased. Then in 1923 he hit on the idea of establishing what is known today as the Frank Rehn Gallery. At which time I came with him, in 1923.

PC: Oh, really? I didn't know that's when it really became a Gallery.

JC: Yes. Although you can say the Rehn Gallery has been in existence since 1918. But the Gallery as it is today

PC: Yes, the public gallery.

JC: Yes. His idea was to try to do in the American field what Druand-Ruel did in the French field: pick a group of men and represent them. And incidentally in the twenties and part of the thirties we were known as the avant

garde gallery of the era; we were the Sidney Janis of that time. Of course times have changed. In fact men like Speicher and Bellows and Hopper and so on were radicals. We had the last one-man show of Bellows when he was alive in 1924. You see Bellows always bought the work of fellow artists and he saw this Hopper show and he bought two watercolors. The last we saw of George Bellows was in December 1924 when he picked up those two Hopper watercolors. And of course in 1925 he died. Bellows was one of the early artists that Rehn featured.

PC: Well, how did you get involved with the Gallery?

JC: Well, I started with Knoedler. I was with Knoedler's for two years. I got into this field through a relative of mine who was with Knoedler. In fact he was really my first cousin but we lived together, we were brought up as brothers.

PC: Who is he?

JC: Edward Murphy. You probably don't know him but he was one of the bright boys at Knoedler's.

PC: I know the name.

JC: And Edward and his wife Ethel were very good friends of Frank and Peggy Rehn. And I must tell you that prior to going with Knoedler's I was with Henry Reinhardt & Son. That was a long, long time ago. But while I was with Knoedler's Rehn was starting this gallery in 1923 and I met Rehn through my cousin and Rehn wanted me to come with him in his gallery. And at the same time I got word from Paul Reinhardt who wanted me to come back. So I had to weigh the two situations which one I wanted. And I threw in my lot with Rehn. And here I am.

PC: How did you pick Rehn over the other one?

JC: Well, I rather not say; it's rather personal. The only reason I left Reinhardt was that I was told through the grapevine (you know things were getting kind of tough) that if I could get another job to do so. Which I did. You see Paul Reinhardt always liked me. In fact he even sent me to school to learn shorthand and typing. He had ideas for me. Well, maybe I was influenced to a certain extent by my cousin who, like your big brother, you listened to. And he said, "Well, with Rehn you can't lose; in fact as far as salary goes the salary should be nominal; I know he's going to do it, so go there." Well, it took me a long time but here I am. And of course I must say that being with Rehn was different from being with those other houses because I had more contact with the individual artists. And I learned a different aspect of pictures. My relationship with Rehn became very close. His problems became my problems. And I did everything for him. I kept the books, wrote the letters, found the pictures; all at the same time.

PC: Just the two of you ran the gallery -- right?

JC: The two of us. Of course his wife was there but she used to just come in now and then and bawl us out. You see Rehn was very much of an individualist. It was hard for him to work with anybody else. In other words, he had to be the top man. I won't say he was a prima donna; I'd better say he was top man. And I didn't compete with him. I fitted right in.

We'd just have people come in and they'd be with him for a while but it just didn't work out; because he had to do everything himself. And, as I say, my not competing with him made it just what he wanted. Well, as time went on he and his wife would sometimes have little discussion and she'd get mad and say, "The trouble is you have to do everything yourself." She'd say, "John should be doing this. John should hang your exhibitions." Well, eventually he came around but it took a long time.

PC: What interested you in the art business in the first place?

JC: Well, to be perfectly frank it was just a job. You see I completed what education I have at night. I started with a white goods house as an office boy and was advanced to the order department. And apparently they liked me, too, because when I left there to go to Henry Reinhardt & Son they wanted me back. And I said no, I'd thrown my lot in with the art gallery. And it so happened that even without having any prior feeling for it it was natural for me.

PC: How did you find out about Reinhardt as a job?

JC: Oh, there again through a cousin of mine. He heard that Reinhardt was looking for a young man. And I contacted Reinhardt and got the job.

PC: How old were you then?

JC: Oh, about 18, 19.

PC: You really started young.

JC: At least I had sense enough to try to go to school at night.

PC: How many years were you with Reinhardt then?

JC: I spent, oh, about three or four years. And I was two years with Knoedler's. I was a stenographer there.

PC: So you saw everything that went back and forth, all the correspondence and everything?

JC: Yes. In other words, when I came with Rehn I was an experienced man. I knew the names of the artists and could keep records. And I think I was a great help to him. I don't like to say this but I think I was as much responsible for the success of the Rehn Gallery as he was. Of course he was the front man but I was a great help in many ways.

PC: Yes. Keeping it all running while he was dashing around.

JC: Yes. And each summer he'd go up to Magnolia. He'd leave about the middle of June and leave me here. Then I'd close the gallery for part of August, for about three weeks, and come back. And then he'd come back about the middle of September. Meanwhile I'd run the place.

PC: Then they had long summers in the art world.

JC: Yes.

PC: They seem to be getting shorter every year, don't they?

JC: My greatest problem and a chore to a certain extent was writing him letters every day or every other day on what happened and maybe nothing much had happened but you had to try and build it up. Later on he did that by telephone.

PC: Well, what was it like moving from Knoedler's to Rehn? Because, you know Knoedler's was quite a different kind of gallery.

JC: Well, at Knoedler's I was in the office; I was a stenographer. I liked the idea of going with Rehn because he was building up something. And without my knowing it I responded to that. And of course I felt that I had more of a future with Rehn. It was just a one-man affair, Knoedler's was a big outfit and while it was a good training for me, I felt that going with Rehn was to my advantage.

PC: Did you have a preference over American or European pictures?

JC: No I didn't. As a matter of fact, (this will interest you) when I first went with Reinhardt I was exposed to all the greats: Rembrandt, Hals, Bellini; and then the English school, and then the Barbizon School. I think even to this day I have an innate love of a tonal picture. I think that is from my exposure to the Barbizon School, which was in flower back in those days: Corot, Daubigny, Dupre, Millet.

PC: Yes. Harpignies and all those people.

JC: And Jacque.

PC: Well, that's very interesting. Who were some of the artists that Rehn had when you came to the gallery?

JC: Well, he had Bellows. And I think Speicher just came with him then. He also had (but not entirely) Hassam. And another one he had great admiration for was Twachtman. He had Lawson. He knew Weir.

PC: So he was interested in the Americans impressionists?

JC: Rehn was always interested in the Americans.

PC: Yes. But the impressionists, that whole group.

JC: Yes. And I think through his father he had entrée to all those men. As a matter of fact, his father guaranteed the rent of J. Francis Murphy at the Chelsea when he came to New York. He was an unknown painter and so on. Of course in those days J. Francis Murphy was very successful. His pictures were sold as soon as they were painted. IN a sense people were just standing in line to buy them.

PC: That's very interesting. There's now a great revival of interest in him.

JC: Yes. And then of course an offshoot of Murphy was -- what's this other painter? Well... of course he used to handle various people. But he had personal contact with Hassam. I met Hassam when I came with Rehn. In

fact he taught me how to hold a hammer. I always used to hold a hammer next to the claw. He said no, get it on the end, get leverage.

PC: That's interesting. Well, did you get to know those artists very well?

JC: Oh, yes, I had personal contact with them. I remember going down to George Bellows' and picking up some lithographs, prints. And George Luks came with us in 1925 and I saw a great deal of him.

PC: I've heard wild stories about him from various people that knew him.

JC: Yes. Well, you know, I think some of them are just flavor. Of course he drank. Sure. But he couldn't be drinking all the time; the evidence is that wherever he went he worked; he produced. To show you what kind of potboiler George Luks was, we had a beautiful little picture he painted of a little girl, a charming little thing. And we sold it. And some friend of ours, a client, saw it and said that's the sort of Luks I want; if you ever get one like that let me know. So when George came in we told him, "George, if you ever feel in the mood to do a picture like that we've got it sold." He said, "I'll paint you another one." Well, some weeks went by and he called up all excited. Incidentally the last picture of Luks was always the best. He was like an art student. Anyway, lo and behold the picture comes up and he put it down. And Rehn and I didn't say much. And he kind of looked at us -- "What's the matter?" "Nothing, George." It was another picture of a child but completely different, a little boy with a pair of boxing gloves.

PC: Well, he was a boxer or something, wasn't he?

JC: Yes. The story is that he was known as Chicago Whitey. I don't know how true that is. He had a marvelous personality and he could adjust his personality to any company. He could talk to the average man on the street or go to one of the openings at the Whitney, I think it was the Whitney Studio Club at that time (I don't think the Whitney Museum had yet come into being), and they used to have these openings, and the artists used to be there. And the story is that George Luks was following Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney around the gallery. Finally she got annoyed and turned around and said, "George, why are you following me?" He said, "I'll tell you: because you're so Goddamned rich." Of course, she had a sense of humor and she laughed.

PC: That's very funny. Well, who are some of the other artists that came into the gallery then?

JC: When I came with Rehn we had Speicher, and then eventually we had Henry Lee McFee, Andrew Dasburg, John Carroll, Henry Mattson. In fact in those days we were known as the Woodstock Gallery. We had Charles Rosen; Bellows and Dasburg and Speicher and McFee and all those fellows lived up in Woodstock. And who else was there? -- I think that's all. Hopper didn't come to us until 1924. He walked in one day an unknown. It was close to the lunch hour when he came in and said he had some watercolors that he wanted to show Rehn. Rehn said, "All right. Go into the back room and undo them and I'll be right with you." So Hopper did so. Rehn got finished with what he was doing and he came back and he was perfectly fascinated with them. He said, "I like these; I'd like to show them." Hopper said, "Well, the Brooklyn Museum has promised me an exhibition and I don't know what will happen over there but suppose I bring them to you when that's over." Rehn said to do that. Which he did. Well, to give due credit to the Brooklyn Museum they did buy one. So Hopper brought them in. Then we began to show the watercolors to different people and they got all excited about them. John T. Spalding, the noted Boston collector was one of the first purchasers of Hopper along with Mrs. Elizabeth Blanchard. In fact John T. Spalding used to hang his Hoppers right close to his Homers. He had quite a collection including French as well as American. I remember when we first had the exhibition and people would come in to look at the Hopper watercolors, they'd say "Gee, these are beautifully done but why does he pick such hideous subjects, these old mansard roofs, these old houses and so on?" But the longer they were around the more fascinated they became. They'd say, "You know I like these. How much are they?" We started them at \$150. And then as they began to sell we gradually raised them -- I think after seven or eight years we got them up to maybe \$300. And then Hopper began to work again in oil. One of his first oils that we sold was to Stephen Clark; that was *The House by the Railroad*; which he gave to the Museum of Modern Art (which, incidentally, was the start of their collection). Hopper was the first picture they acquired. And later on Clark gave them another picture. Then, of course he fell out with them. He didn't like the direction in which they were going. Clark remained a great admirer of Hopper up until the time he died. And I think he bought more Hoppers than any museum or any collector in the country. He had a marvelous eye. He had a great collection. He had some of the finest of the French -- he had Cezanne, he had Matisse. In fact that famous Renoir that you've seen reproduced around, that little girl (in the little jumper) -- he has or did have, the original. I think it's gone to Yale now. But now I'm digressing.

PC: Well, as I remember, Hopper didn't have any exhibitions every year or every other year, did he?

JC: No. No.

PC: He was not a prolific artist?

JC: He wasn't prolific, no. The first things that we showed were watercolors. And then I think two years or so later (I'm not sure of the exact dates) we had a combination watercolors and oils show. As a matter of fact numerically we've had very few Hopper shows. The reason for that was in 1933, for instance, the Museum of Modern Art held the first retrospective show of Hopper. Well, that naturally precluded our showing. We never had enough new things together at one time to do that. I would say that over the years I don't think we've had more than half a dozen Hopper shows. And that's going from 1924 up until the time of his death.

PC: That's interesting. I've often wondered why he worked so little. Or was he very, very slow?

JC: Well, painting to him was a chore unless he had something to say. Now I remember back -- well, it was before 1939 because we were still in the old building -- it must have been around 1928 or so he came in on a Saturday afternoon very depressed. He had been up to the Metropolitan and he said, "You know I looked around there. I didn't see anything that interested me. I wonder what's the use." He was very honest. Another time a fellow who was in the gallery was telling me of an exhibition at another gallery of an artist who had painted some pictures while he was in Italy. And he said he was all excited about the pictures. Hopper happened to come in and the two began talking. "Aren't these beautiful? Don't they remind you of Italy?" Hopper turned to him, looked at the pictures and said, "I don't know. Never been in Italy."

PC: Everything was very straight out.

JC: Yes. Oh yes. You know, most of us would say, well, yes, yes. But not Hopper.

PC: Well, he wasn't a very loquacious person, was he?

JC: No, he wasn't. At times he could be very downright. Now, for instance, I'll give you a case in point: when he painted a picture he'd bring it up and he'd put it down in the gallery and there would be Rehn, myself and Peggy Rehn, Frank's wife. If she was there, but usually it was Frank Rehn, myself and Hopper and his wife Jo. And we'd all title the picture: we'd all suggest what it should be called. All the time it had a title on the back. So I remember this picture particularly. This was around 1951 or 1952. The picture was called *Rooms by the Sea*. You may not know it. It's an empty room and there's an open door and through the door there's a vista of the sea. And Jo started doing the talking. She said to Rehn, "Frank, this is Eddies' concession to abstraction." Quick as a flash Hopper said, "It is not! It's all me." And another incident about the Hoppers: You know they made three or four trips into Mexico. They used to drive to Mexico and of course their car was loaded down with canvases and personal belongings and so on. As a matter of fact in all his excursions into Mexico he never painted any oils; he did some watercolors. Well anyway, on one of the trips I forget where he was going through, perhaps El Paso or whatever the entry point into Mexico was, naturally they were stopped by the Mexican Customs. And later in telling about the trip Jo Hopper said, "You know, this Mexican Customs man spoke excellent English. He must have been educated in England. He stopped us and he found this book on Edward Hopper published by the American Artists Group and he became so fascinated with the reproductions and so on that he didn't even examine our luggage." She said, "You know, we could have brought in all kinds of weapons and bombs and what not." Well, to myself I said he took one look at the two of you and said, "Welcome to Mexico."

PC: So collectors got interested in Hopper very soon then?

JC: Very soon, yes. Well, Rehn was very enthusiastic. I mean he responded to a person. And of course had more the viewpoint of an artist. He was a dealer to some extent but he thought as an artist, being the son of an artist. He was brought up in that environment.

PC: He never exhibited his father's paintings, did he?

JC: No. Well, occasionally when we had a second floor when we first started we might put one of his father's pictures in the window. But that was the extent of it.

PC: Do people come to the gallery and ask about his father's pictures?

JC: They do. Yes. But I'm not interested. It's a personal reason.

PC: Well, what about some of the other artists that were in the gallery with these various other people? Because some of them had very good years.

JC: Oh, yes, yes.

PC: There was a point there where some of them were very popular.

JC: Well now, for instance, Speicher of course was one of our most successful (exhibitors) artists. And we did fairly well with McFee. And John Carroll, too. And Andrew Dasburg.

PC: I saw a little Dasburg the other day for an enormous amount of money.

JC: Really?! He's still living.

PC: Yes. He's started to work again -- to draw and paint.

JC: He's amazing. Because he's had some serious illness, you know.

PC: Yes.

JC: I'm trying to think of... Oh, of course we had a George Luks show. And one time we had a joint show of Luks and Gari Melchers (I don't know whether you've ever heard of Gari Melchers).

PC: Yes.

JC: He was quite successful. In fact, it was interesting because they came into the gallery separately. And I remember Gari Melchers speaking to Rehn, pointing out the different faults of Luks and so on and how much better his own work was; and then Luks coming in at another time and saying almost the identical thing about Melchers. I don't know whether I would say these things on the tap.

PC: What about some of the collectors who came to the gallery -- Duncan Phillips I think.

JC: Yes. In fact Duncan Phillips was an early friend of Rehn. They knew each other as boys. I'm a little vague about this but my recollection is that Duncan Phillips and his brother and Frank Rehn and another friend of Rehn's, George Olds, all went on an automobile trip out through the States. And Duncan Phillips was always very strait laced. And Rehn used to tell a story that either he or George would use a cuss word. And of course Duncan was mortified. Later on they began reading (passages) from the Bible where these words were used. Maybe I shouldn't tell this. But none of them are here so I guess it's all right. I wish I could tell it a little more explicitly but that's the gist of it.

PC: Well, Phillips collected quite a few of the artists that were shown.

JC: Yes. He liked a poetic thing. He admired Allen Tucker very much. And he had a Bellows in his collection, although I don't know that he responded very much to him. And he had one or two Hoppers. And I think he liked Burchfield; I think he liked that kind of romantic type of painting rather than other directions. And I remember Duncan Phillips being in the gallery one time when we had a show of Hopper's watercolors. And he remarked, "How dare he become so photographic but so utterly transcendent!" Some years later he was in the gallery and I reminded him of this. He said, "Did I say that?" I said, "Yes, you did." He said, "Well, it's true." But wasn't that a marvelous (observation)?

PC: What about the critics and people who wrote about the exhibitions? Were there any critics in the twenties who were really important?

JC: Oh, yes. There was Royal Cortissoz. There was Elizabeth Luther Carey. There was Henry McBride.

PC: If they wrote a good review of a show would that bring in a lot of people?

JC: Yes, it would.

PC: Would it help the sales?

JC: I think it did. Now, for instance, McBride used to have a column in *The Sun* every Saturday. And I remember one review of Hopper across the whole four or five columns -- "Hopper is not only good but sells." In fact I gave that to the Archives. It might be interesting to look that up. McBride was a marvelous critic. We always knew we were going to get a good review if we didn't talk to him because he would look at the pictures more. If we talked to him he'd say less and less about the pictures. But one thing about McBride: if there was a young painter just showing for the first time or so he'd be very gentle, very kind to him. But if you were established he might take a kick at you because he felt that you could stand it. But he would encourage new talent. I will say that about him.

PC: What kind of fellow was he? -- because there's practically nothing about him because he destroyed all his own papers.

JC: Oh, he did?

PC: And there's nothing.

JC: Well, he was a sort of aloof person. I mean he wasn't... He had a very dry sense of humor. I think he came from Philadelphia. He had a kind of standoffish attitude. I think it was very difficult to get to know him. This is just my feeling about him; all I know about him is from seeing him in the gallery.

PC: How about Elizabeth Carey? She wrote a great deal, didn't she?

JC: Yes. She was a very good critic. And Cortisoz, of course.

PC: He was *The Times*?

JC: No, he was at the *Harold Tribune*. Elizabeth Luther Carey was at *The Times*. And then of course the New York *Journal* I think it was, Margaret Bruning wrote for that -- no not the *Journal* -- the New York *American*. Elizabeth Carey was a very good writer. And then of course on the *Brooklyn Eagle* we had Helen Appleton Read who now is the head of Portraits, Inc. A very good writer, too, by the way.

PC: Well, do you think the critics in those days had as much influence as critics have had, say, in the last ten or fifteen years?

JC: I think so. It's hard to say. I think they did. It was very important, and I think you get better coverage, too, in those days.

PC: Well, there were fewer galleries.

JC: Exactly. And fewer artists. Now, for instance, going back to Rehn's father, during his time there were fewer artists and if you were an acknowledged artist you did fairly well. You didn't have the competition that artists have today.

PC: Well, what happened to the art business in 1929 and into the early thirties? How did the Crash affect it?

JC: Well, we were fortunate. We had just moved into the Air France Building in 1930 thinking that the Depression was over; little did we know that it was just beginning. And of course we had the whole floor there and we were paying what we thought was pretty stiff rent, \$5,000 a year. And of course we as time went on I will say that the Building had to adjust the rent; it was either that or get nothing. But about that time the Whitney Museum came into being and I will say they were a great help to us at that time. They bought that famous *Early Sunday Morning* of Hopper's. Of course what they paid for it then and what it's worth today is ----

PC: There's a long way in between.

JC: A long way indeed. I will say they were a great help to us. And of course we didn't have a big overhead. There was just Rehn and myself.

PC: Well, speaking of the Whitney, what about other museum? -- because the Whitney has exhibited many of your artists in one-man shows.

JC: Oh, and another thing, back in the twenties we acquired this collection of American paintings for C. Vanderbilt Martin. And in it was a famous Winslow Homer, two Homer D. Martins, a George Inness, and an Abbott Thayer: Then some lesser pictures: he had quite a few J. Francis Murphys. We sold that Homer to the Cleveland Museum of Art. And that helped to put us on the map because here is a picture by an American artist selling for a price in excess of \$50,000. In consequence it was news and that got in nearly every newspaper in the country not because it was Homer but because it was an American picture that sold for a price in excess of \$50,000. And I will say that perhaps at that time we were doing more business with museums than with collectors. There was the Cleveland Museum; there was the Albright; there was the Newark Museum, the Brooklyn Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago.

PC: Well, did you find that if the museum became interested in a painter the collectors would come afterwards?

JC: It helped, yes. It was a good selling point. I like to feel that I don't sell pictures, but that people buy them.

PC: Yes. Well, but I think people are influenced --

JC: They certainly are because they feel -- well, the museums are knowledgeable so they must know what they're doing. Oh, it's a help, there's no question.

JC: They hope the museums are knowledgeable. What about some of the other collectors who bought here? Did Gallatin buy from you, and people like that?

JC: Not very much. I know he used to come into the gallery. I'm very vague about whether he ever bought



anything. He may have bought a picture or so but he wasn't one of our big customers.

PC: Edward Root bought from you?

JC: Edward Root, yes, indeed. He bought all our group. We got to be very friendly. We met Edward Root through George Luks. You see, Edward Root taught Appreciation of Art at Hamilton College in Clinton, New York. He was hard of hearing so he turned to the visual. Edward Root bought all our men. And later on when he had exhausted our men he moved into the other field. He bought any number of Burchfields. In fact he was partly responsible for discovering the early Burchfields. We took Burchfield on in 1929. Edward Root lived up in Clinton which isn't too far from Gardenville where Burchfield lived (Gardenville is just outside of Buffalo). So Edward went to visit Burchfield. And Burchfield, by way of entertainment as much as anything else, began to show Root these early pictures he painted in 1917 and 1918. And of course Root became perfectly fascinated with them and told Rehn about them. Burchfield had already come with us but Rehn didn't know about these early paintings. So through Root's enthusiasm and so on Rehn went up to see Burchfield. He picked out these pictures and in due time we had a show of Burchfield's early pictures. And, incidentally also, the Museum of Modern Art put on a show of early Burchfields. I think it was in 1933. One is dated from 1916-1920.

PC: How did Burchfield come into the gallery? How did that start?

JC: Well, he was with Montross, you know. And of course we were a young gallery doing things. And I guess Burchfield heard about Rehn or some friend spoke to him. And I think Rehn wrote to him saying that if he was ever looking for a gallery he would be welcome. It happened some way like that; I think some friend told Rehn that... And, you see, at that time Burchfield was a Sunday painter. That is, he had a job.

PC: Yes, he worked in a factory.

JC: He worked at Birge and Son. Well, he called it a factory, you're right; but it wasn't exactly a factory. And so when we took him on Rehn got him to give up his job and devote his entire time to painting. Which he did. Though I found out later that he was scared to death about it because at the time he had three children and another one was expected. So he concocted a letter of resignation to Birge & Son and he went around to a public stenographer to have it typed. She read over the letter, looked up, and said, "Are you in your right mind giving up a job to become an artist?"

PC: He never regretted it, though, did he?

JC: No, no. But it was a struggle though. Later on he had another child so it was five children and to live off just his work as an artist was quite a job.

PC: Well, you didn't have any arrangement with the artists, as some galleries do, where they had a monthly stipend or anything, did you?

JC: No.

PC: None at all?

JC: No. All we do is we say we'll sell anything you send. Now, for instance, here's a letter Burchfield wrote to Rehn one time at the beginning of the season. He said, (Reading letter): "Dear Frank: I know this is early in the season but what do you think of the prospects for sales this coming season? My reason for asking this is we have this car. It's an old one. We've had it for several years. And would it be rash to get another old used car." Incidentally, we never had a contract with any artist.

PC: Really? It was just all verbal?

JC: All verbal. All a gentleman's agreement. Well, we feel that both sides have to be happy.

PC: I was just looking through the list of some of the people you've showed a few times.

JC: Yes.

PC: Henry Strader. And Corbino McFee. What's happened with the work of these people now because of the whole change of interest? And some of those are still alive.

JC: Oh, yes. Morris Kantor is still alive. As a matter of fact he shows with Bertha Schaefer. He's still a very good friend of mine. He's a wonderful guy. I don't know what's happened with Corbino. He first came to us as a young artist and at that time he was more interested in wood carvings. In fact that's a piece of his right over there. And he was struggling, really struggling. I don't know, he left us somehow. And later on he branched out as a painter and became very successful. I think he was with Macbeth.

PC: You showed Kenneth Hayes Miller at one point.

JC: Yes, he was in the gallery. But he didn't sell as successfully as perhaps a number of others. He was a great influence in the art world especially with people he came in contact with. He had a marvelous personality. He seemed to win them over. I mean that respectfully I mean he had such a philosophy that he was well worth courting.

PC: You had a Bradley Tomlin show?

JC: Yes, indeed.

PC: How did you get involved with him?

JC: Well, Rehn liked Tomlin both as a human being and as a painter. We had him back in the thirties I think. HE never produced much. He was a very frail person. I don't know whether or not you knew Tomlin.

PC: No.

JC: He wasn't a very robust person. He came out of Syracuse. He had a good academic training which later on he wished he'd never had. But I think he was wrong. I have an early illustration of his here. Then he branched out and became semi-abstract. Then he broke it up a little more. We had things going beautifully for him. Then he began to move in another direction, totally abstract. In fact, in the late forties I think it was, he wanted Rehn to take on Pollock, Gottlieb, and that group. He said I know you can get them, they'll come with you; and I think the stipulation with Pollock was that he had to have so much a month. Well, anyway, Rehn wanted to keep Tomlin as that kind of a not, you know. But Tomlin said no, he felt he would be more at home with those other painters. And that's the reason he moved to Betty Parsons.

PC: Well, have you tried to keep a certain balance in the gallery?

JC: Up to a certain point. I think innately I have a love of the representational. I was brought up with that. I think I'm liberal enough to...in other words, artists who've been at the gallery, who started in one direction and then began to move in another direction, as long as I believe in their sincerity I'm willing to go along with them.

PC: Some of your people get quite abstract.

JC: I know. I know. Botkin. I can accept that. And personally I think that art moves in many directions, not in any one direction. Although I know they love to pigeonhole you.

PC: Oh, sure. It's easy to say well he's things --

JC: He's in that direction. Sure.

PC: It helps conversation or something. What are some of the anecdotes about various artists that were here that might be interesting?

JC: Well now, for instance, I was very close to Burchfield. And every summer, in the late summer, I used to go up and visit him and spend two or three four days going over the pictures. You know there are problems with pictures. In other words, he felt he had somebody to discuss his pictures with. Now I remember -- and this is not so long ago -- there was this picture of a swan. And looking at it I said, "Charlie, you know, I can hear the frogs croaking." He said, "Of course." So when he sent the picture down the title was *June Moonlight*; then in parenthesis he put as a sop to me -- *Frog-Land*." There are any number of anecdotes; I started to write one down the other day; I don't know what I did with it.

PC: He never spent much time in New York, did he?

JC: No. It was difficult for him to come to New York for economic reasons. The only way he could work it was to get on juries. He was always on the Guggenheim jury and that meant a trip to New York and three or four days here. And also other juries; I think the Academy in Rome and so on. I remember when the Museum of Modern Art started in the Heckscher Building.

PC: Yes, in 1929.

JC: When they had that Seurat, Van Gogh, Renoir, and so on exhibition, Burchfield was down in New York and some people were saying that Burchfield reminded them of Van Gogh. I think when they said that they meant in the intensity. So jokingly he said, "I think I'll go up and see that guy that paints like me." Well, I think it was next day someone said, "Charlie, how did you like the Van Goghs?" He said, "Gee, you know, I never did get up there. I got walking around and I got fascinated with the sights." Although he did make a remark to the effect

that if he was here in New York he said, "I'd paint here. As far as I'm concerned New York is lousy with material."

PC: That's interesting. Were many of the artists in the gallery friends, you know, of each other? Were they close friends?

JC: A number of them were. Now, for instance, Bellows and Speicher were very close friends. And of course McFee and Charles Rosen who were up in Woodstock, they were all very close friends; they were a little, close-knit group. And Carroll was at Woodstock but he left there. Yes, I would say they were friends. And of course often an artist would tell you about another artist's works. I mean that's very important. Now, for instance, an artist I have in the gallery here now -- this was, oh, ten or twelve years ago -- you see I respect Morris Kantor's judgment. And I said, "Morris, what do you think of this fellow? I'm thinking of considering his work." And Morris said, "Grab him." I had virtually made up my mind but that clinched it.

PC: It's interesting, many, many dealers have said to me that their best recommendations have come from other painters.

JC: Yes, of course.

PC: More so than from collectors or curators.

JC: Oh, collectors -- no.

PC: Collectors are something else.

JC: After all, they're not trained. An artist's judgment is the best you can get in my estimation.

PC: Well, the gallery has moved its locations. It's been three or four different places.

JC: We started in 1923 at 693 Fifth Avenue. It was an old private house which had been renovated. On the first floor was Kennedy Gallery who had the street floor and the basement. And we had the second floor. And on the top floor was Stephen Bourgeois, the Bourgeois Gallery. And I've forgotten who was on the other floor but it wasn't an art gallery. And, incidentally, that building was owned by Paul Bonwit, of Bonwit Teller. I think they had visions of building (later on they did). So we were there for from 1923 to 1930; when we moved to the Air France Building just down the street at 683 Fifth Avenue. We took the whole fifth floor. It was the Dorothy Gray Building. We were one of the first tenants in there so we had a choice of almost any floor. We were there from 1930 to 1960.

PC: Boy, that was a long time. Fifth Avenue has changed in that time.

JC: It sure has. Then in 1960 -- well, Air France wanted the space -- but I wanted to move in any casae. And I found the place at 36 East 61st Street and moved there. It was to be a temporary location for me and I signed a lease for three years. Then I signed another lease for three years. I always had in the back of my mind, believe it or not, a second floor somewhere. But you know these temporary moves become permanent. This move almost became permanent.

PC: That was a long time.

JC: Yes.

PC: And then you moved into this place.

JC: I moved here in 1966. I took over the space, just the physical part of it from Sam Kootz.

PC: It's been a gallery space for quite a while now, hasn't it?

JC: Yes.

PC: You've had it for what? -- About four years? Five years?

JC: I'm going on my fifth year now.

PC: Sam was here for about three or four years?

JC: He came here in 1959 I guess and he had a ten-year lease; yes, 1959.

PC: How about working with various dealers around the country? Were there dealers you worked with in, say, Boston and Philadelphia?

JC: I don't do too much inter-dealing business. Neither did Rehn. It gets too involved. Well, frankly one reason is the expenses. I mean there's always a problem of who's going to pay for the packing and shipping and insurance and so on. And handling living painters as we do, we don't have a big budget for that purpose. Of course I have done some inter-dealing business with dealers and all, but that's minor.

PC: What about the museums? -- because so many of the artists here have had big retrospective museum exhibitions around the country. Do you find that they help the artist's career?

JC: I think they do. I think they help especially if there's a catalogue published. That remains as a permanent point of reference for people to use.

PC: Right. The illustrations and material.

JC: Yes. IT builds itself up in time because people are always interested in the printed word, and especially if it's illustrated. You know the old saying that a picture is worth a thousand words.

PC: I was doing some research on the Art Dealers Association. You were an early member of that, weren't you?

JC: Well, I was fairly early. I wasn't one of the original members. I think I came in two years or so later.

PC: Do you think it's a useful organization for the dealers and the art world?

JC: I think it is. I think they can kind of give us a code of ethics. And it is useful in this respect that with all this legislation going through now you have to have somebody to combat it. I don't think individuals can do it, but it can be done collectively.

PC: Who are the most successful artists who have been in the gallery as far as public acceptance, museum acceptance, and collectors are concerned?

JC: Well, I think offhand -- you see in the past it was Speicher but now that's changed. I would say that in the last fifteen or more years it's been Hopper and Burchfield and Marsh.

PC: You showed Marsh for a long time.

JC: Marsh came with us in 1930. Harper came in 1924. Burchfield came in 1929.

PC: Goodness! They come and they stay for a long time, don't they?

JC: They do. They do.

PC: Speicher did a lot of portraits at one point, did he not?

JC: Not too many. For a time there he wouldn't paint a portrait for any price. He was about to sell his easel pictures. And then I forget what year it was he said he would do a couple a year. Which he did.

PC: Is there much of that any more, people commissioning portraits?

JC: Oh, yes, there must be. I don't get much of it; I've gotten away from it, but people used to come to us to have Alexander Brook for instance, paint a portrait; or John Carroll; and of course Speicher. But I think, for instance, Portraits, Inc. must do very well.

PC: Oh, yes, there are a number of companies now that just do that as a full time activity. You had Gladys Rockmore Davis at one point?

JC: She was with us for a couple of years, yes.

PC: She was one of the few women artists that have been in the gallery? Or have there been some others?

JC: No. We had Elizabeth Sparhawk-Jones, Georgina Klitgaard, Roselia Hartman. Of course now I've got Joanne Schneider, and Yeffe Kimball, and this sculptress, Isabel Case Bugatta.

PC: So there've always been one or two around?

JC: Yes. Oh, yes.

PC: A little contrast.

JC: Yes. I'm never conscious of that but it's there.

PC: Are people as happy over women artists, do you think? Are they more difficult to sell?

JC: I don't think so.

PC: It really depends on the quality of the work?

JC: It depends on the work, on the picture, yes. I don't think personalities enter into it. They know it's a woman but I don't think that means anything to them as long as they like it. At least that's been my experience.

PC: That's interesting. Well, what kind of direction do you think the gallery is moving in?

JC: Sometimes I wish I knew.

PC: It's just maintaining its own level?

JC: That's about all, yes.

PC: I just wonder if there are any other anecdotes about some of the artists that you might mention.

JC: Oh, another man we had, too (he's no longer with us) is Franklin Watkins. Let's see, maybe I remember one of his favorite sayings. You know he was a friend of Hopper's. I mean he was as close as anybody could get to Hopper. They used to visit each other. That is, Marsh wouldn't have dinner with Hopper but Hopper would go to his house. Well, Marsh said, "You know the trouble with Hopper (he used to talk out of the side of his mouth) is that Hopper is constipated and I have diarrhea."

PC: They were the opposite.

JC: And another incident: this fellow, a friend of Marsh's Allen Sheets was down to his studio in the Lincoln Building on Union Square. So Marsh said, "Allan, why don't you wait around a bit and come with me to an opening at this bookstore; a friend of mine is having a cocktail party." So Allan said, "All right." They went up there and they got separated and there were quite a few people talking. Allan was in one part of the room and Marsh was in another. And Marsh was engaged in on conversation with this woman. She said, "What do you do?" Marsh said, "I'm an artist." She said, "What do you paint?" I really should have put these things down, I mean trying to get them off the cuff now is a little difficult.

PC: Marsh was a very popular teacher, too, wasn't he, and influential?

JC: Yes. And he was always studying. I mean he was always experimenting. I remember Georgia O'Keeffe being in the gallery on day. And there was some young artist (I've forgotten who) and I said, "You know he did this picture by way of experimentation." And she said, "Well, every picture should be an experiment." Well, of course it's true.

PC: I want to ask you about Watkins since you mentioned him. He was here for quite a while, was he not?

JC: Oh yes. You know how he came into prominence? That picture of his *Suicide in Costume* got first prize in the Carnegie. In fact, it's a picture he almost didn't send. It was going to the jury and he said to his wife, "What's the sense of sending that? Nothing will happen. It's going to cost me \$25 or so to box it and ship it." She said, "Well, do you believe in the picture?" He said, "Yes." She said, "Well, send it." Incidentally, Speicher was on the jury; I don't know whether he was the person who singled him out. Anyway, the jury was deadlocked; they couldn't decide on first prize. And here was this picture that came in, an uninvited picture. So they gave that the first prize. And right away the whole world was at his feet. And for two years or so Watkins couldn't paint. Suddenly everybody was knocking at his door. And it affected him so. I think even down in Pittsburgh they thought, oh, this is a fluke. In other words then, he had to go out and justify that award.

PC: Isn't that interesting. I didn't know that he had that kind of reaction to it.

JC: He was a very sensitive person.

PC: He had a show at the Museum of Modern Art then, didn't he?

JC: Yes. That wasn't received so well. In fact, Henry McBride didn't give a favorable review. Watkins always felt that McBride had it in for him. I said I didn't think so. In fact McBride came to the Gallery sometime later and spoke of the exhibition. I don't know how the conversation came about but he said, "Well, it's publicity. He should raise his prices." Some years later Watkins was on a jury with Joe Fraser and they were in the Gallery picking out pictures. I don't know how McBride's name came up -- oh, we were talking about how many pictures they would and so on. I said, "Well, you know McBride isn't working anymore." Watkins said, "Oh, all he has to know is that I'm having a show and he'll come to life." You see what Watkins resented in that review was, it was

as much an attack on Philadelphia as it was on Watkins. And McBride somewhere earlier in his writing had written, "What a name for an artist -- Franklin" I mean as if that had anything to do with painting. So you see that Watkins was supersensitive about McBride; and naturally so.

PC: Right. Did that show at the Museum of Modern Art affect his market?

JC: I don't think so. It's hard to say, though. Because he wasn't doing too much painting. Then he got involved in doing a lot of portraits. A case in point is these friends of ours, the Haswells, of Dayton. Alex Brook had painted Mrs. Haswell. And then she wanted her husband Anthony painted. Watkins was the man she would like to have do it. But we never got around to it. So one day Watkins was in the Gallery when Mrs. Haswell came in. She said, "Oh, I'm so glad to see you, Mr. Watkins. I'd love to have you paint my husband's portrait." He said, "Mrs. Haswell, do you know my work?" She said, "Yes. That's why we want you to do it."

PC: Did he paint it?

JC: He did. Yes. And he did a good job. Another case in point: there was a doctor in Detroit who was retiring. He was connected with a big hospital out there -- I think Harper Hospital. The alumni always have the retiring president or head of surgery or whatever painted. So since the doctor was a collector and so on they asked him to pick out a painter to do it. He picked out Watkins. In due time the painting was delivered. Of course none of the other doctors and so on liked it because it was too advanced for them. One of them said to -- I wish I could think of (the doctor's wife) her name -- "You really don't like it?" She said, "The truth of it is we do. We love it."

PC: You've been in the art business a long time, haven't you?

JC: Well, yes, all my life practically. Yes, more than half of my life. But it's interesting, you asked me how I came to get into it. I just kind of fell into it. It happened to be a thing that I had a feeling for.

PC: I was wondering if you've even developed a kind of theory about how you select artists for the gallery or how you take them on?

JC: I don't know -- I have to respond to them, I have to feel that I like it. In other words, I can't in conscience offer a picture to a person if I don't like it.

PC: So it's really your own taste.

JC: It's intuitive I guess. Yes, my own taste.

PC: That's interesting. Because I was noticing looking at the Henry Poor and contrasting it with the one by -- I can't think of his name now, the very tight realistic one up in front there—

JC: Wouk?

PC: Yes. John Wouk. And it's really quite a spread in taste.

JC: Yes. Yes. As I said before, I think art moves in many directions. Of course, frankly a lot of these young fellows -- now here's a case in point: I remember when we were on Fifth Avenue and I had an exhibition of one of my young artists who is still with me, and in the second gallery I had, oh, Burchfield and Hopper and so on. This story was told by a friend of mine. This person said to this young artist, "Are these yours, too?" He said, "Oh, no. The artists who paint those are responsible for my showing here."

PC: I see. Well, Poor has been with the Gallery for quite a while, hasn't he?

JC: Yes. He must have been with us since -- oh, God, at least thirty years. He was with Montross at one time.

PC: I really hadn't realized until I started doing some research how many of the artists have been here for so long.

JC: I think the only time the artists were together as a group was back in the 1940's. One of our artists hit on the idea...He said, "This is ridiculous. Here we are all with the Rehn Gallery. How many of us have ever been together at a dinner." So he conceived the idea of having a dinner at Keen's Chop House. In commemoration of that they presented Frank Rehn with a cigarette case and on the cover of the case is the year that each artist came with the Gallery. Everyone was there except Kenneth Hayes Miller and Henry Lee McFee. Incidentally, we assembled in the Gallery and I have a photograph of the group.

PC: Oh, marvelous!

JC: That might be interesting for the Archives of American Art.

PC: Oh, yes. Very much.

JC: Then at the dinner -- this is interesting -- we all came together for the presentation of the cigarette case (which, by the way, I have now. The last Mrs. Rehn gave it to me), and Speicher got up and made the presentation, he sort of being the dean in point of years as well as number of years with the Gallery. He had this deep voice and he said, "Frank, this is the first time I think we fellows have been together as a group" (I don't know why I have to mimic people but I do) --

PC: It works better sometimes.

JC: Yes. He continued, "In honor of the occasion we have this little token of our esteem for you..." and so on. Alex Brook jumped up and said, "John should be included in that." And Spike said, "Of course." You see, that's a side of Brook, he has great feeling for the underdog, so to speak.

PC: So it was a great party?

JC: It was. Yes. Yes.

PC: It's very interesting because the public generally thinks that all the artists in a gallery know each other; and very often they don't.

JC: Oh, no, they don't. No, no.

PC: In fact, I went into a gallery some months ago with a painter. There was a sculpture exhibition on. These two artists had been in this one gallery for five years and had never met each other. So the painter who was with me asked, "Who is the sculptor?" So I introduced them. Well, do you think there are any other things you'd like to talk about -- collectors or some of the artists?

JC: I suppose things will come to me. But right now you've kind of put me on the spot. You know, before this interview I should have put down little anecdotes as they came to me.

[END OF SIDE 1 -- END OF INTERVIEW]

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