



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Giorgio Cavallon,
1974 February 28

Funding for the transcription of this interview provided by the Smithsonian Institution's Women's Committee. Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National Park Service.

Contact Information

Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Giorgio Cavallon on February 28, 1974. The interview took place at his house at 197 East 95th Street in New York, NY, and was conducted by Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Funding for the transcription of this interview provided by the Smithsonian Institution's Women's Committee.

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

Interview

PAUL CUMMINGS: This is Paul Cummings talking to Giorgio Cavallon at 28th of February 1974. We're in his house at 178 East 95th Street. I'll start with the fact that you were born in Italy.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. CUMMINGS: And came here as a teenager, right?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: What was life like Italy? Because you came here really right after World War I in 1920.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah. Well, I was just [inaudible] was in a country, a farm, did farm work, and I was, ever since I remember I was working all the time.

MR. CUMMINGS: Never stopped?

MR. CAVALLON: Never had any childhood to play and all like that, really.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, was there a large family or many brothers and sisters?

MR. CAVALLON: Well, I used to be with uncles most of the time because my father was in the army.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, I see.

MR. CAVALLON: And my mother died many years when I was six.

MR. CUMMINGS: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. CAVALLON: And so I had two, three sisters; one died. And they put us in each family, each uncle.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, I see. Everybody got -

MR. CAVALLON: So that's, you know the way they are, the first thing they do they always put you to work.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right. Get to work.

MR. CAVALLON: We'd go to school only three hours a day.

MR. CUMMINGS: Only three hours?

MR. CAVALLON: Three hours.

MR. CUMMINGS: What kind of school was that?

MR. CAVALLON: Elementary school. It went up to fifth grade. So after you're 12 there you're allowed to quit.

MR. CUMMINGS: Really, that young?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, at that time. Now it's different, I know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Okay.

MR. CAVALLON: It was compulsory until 12 years of age.

MR. CUMMINGS: What town was that in?

MR. CAVALLON: It was little village, named Sorio. It was [inaudible] Gambilara. It's near the province of Vicenza. It's about 22 kilometers west of Vicenza. It was between Verona and Vicenza. It's quite a beautiful country there. It's very fertile soil.

MR. CUMMINGS: What was on the farm?

MR. CAVALLON: Huh?

MR. CUMMINGS: What was on the farm?

MR. CAVALLON: Well, wheat, corn, cows.

MR. CUMMINGS: Everything.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, but those days there was no machines and everything was done by hand.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, right.

MR. CAVALLON: I used to drive the ox, you know, to plow. I had to get up early in the morning. In the summertime you have 2:00 and then you work until 7:00. Then you had breakfast, which was always a meager breakfast: polenta and sausage. No coffee, nothing. Then you work until 11:00 and at 11:00 you have to drive the ox home to feed them and clean them, you know. And then you start out again. By 2:00 it was very hot, until 3:00. We work until 8:00 at night, see. And you stop at 4:00 for we call it merenda [phonetic], you know, just eat a piece of bread, you know, something, just for about an hour. Then you get home, you have to start working [inaudible] again. Then you eat and you have to go back to bed.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, that's a long day.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah. Then you get up at 2:00 again.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, what could you do when it was so dark? It's still dark at 2:00.

MR. CAVALLON: In the summertime, yeah, it was quite dark. You go out because for the animals it was cool.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, right. Right.

MR. CAVALLON: And after it gets so hot, you know. And when you plow the soil it was very tough. You had to use sometimes six; three pair of ox, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Really?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah. And you have just the guy in the back of the plow, you know. And it dug in about this deep, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: About 12 inches; 12, 14 inches?

MR. CAVALLON: Twelve inches. Not 14, no.

MR. CUMMINGS: Twelve, yeah.

MR. CAVALLON: Now they dig deeply with the machines so they get better crop, you know. They fertilize a different way too. So it was really, you know, hard work. In those days, you know, there was no cars. Whenever you saw a car you just run in the street and stand on the side looking. So I remember that part of life.

MR. CUMMINGS: Fantastic. And you worked on the farm until you came here?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did it come that you came to this country?

MR. CAVALLON: Well, I was here before. My mother died, she died [inaudible] Massachusetts. I came here when I was two and my mother died when I was six. And so my father took the whole family back to Italy.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, I didn't know that.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah. And then he got married again. As soon as he got married he left there and he came back here and started to work, you know, to make money to get the whole family here again, see. But the woman that he married, you see, was a street woman [inaudible] just go out with the men, you know. My relatives saw this

and they wrote my father, see. And my father one night came back, I think after a year, and chase her out. I thought he was going to kill her. So in the meantime the war broke out, see.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, right.

MR. CAVALLON: So he was stuck and couldn't come back again.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, I see.

MR. CAVALLON: So we were in war zone all the time. You could hear shooting, see flashes of guns constantly, all the time. Airplanes flying over. And after the war was over he left the army so I got the idea to come to this country. I was going to come myself, see, by myself. But instead at that time you only need the letter of recommendation from somebody that was here already, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, right. Yeah.

MR. CAVALLON: They say that they will sponsor, take care of it. And my father said, "If you can, also include me and the rest of the family with the sponsor." And that's how we came in. We came in 1920. So the very first thing I did when I was 16, just 16, his cousin he could not even write his name, you know. He had to sign a cross. He had a job in Worcester. Not in the city. A town named Greendale. A building, maybe two houses there. So he said to my father, he said, "I can take your son over and give him a job there." So he said, "Sure." So right there I took a train to Worcester, see, and my father went to Springfield. And then I got this job there and I was he asked me how old I was. I said I was he told me to tell them I was 21, although I didn't [inaudible] 21. I didn't speak any English. The other man didn't speak a word. He went to get some [inaudible] he didn't know what to call it. Anyway, so he made a kind of motion and like [inaudible] in those days, [inaudible] but anyway, I worked there for about a whole summer and then the job was finished and I got a job in the factory. And at the factory I told them I was 21 too, but then I wanted time to go to school so I went to school. And the people I was living with in the building said, "Tell them that you are 21 because [inaudible] going to get in trouble." Anyway, I didn't believe them, I told them I was-I told them my age you see, but then they gave me a card I had to sign by the boss, see.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, I see.

MR. CAVALLON: So I was caught. So they came over, two or three guys came over and they asked me how old I am. I said, so I said I was 16. The boss was very sorry because he said the youngest one he could hire was 18. So he said in a couple years I come back and he'll give me a job back again.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. CAVALLON: At that time the Depression came, see. Then I got another job. And then I was making like \$13 a week. With this other job I was making like \$30 a week, you know. It was a lot of money.

MR. CUMMINGS: In the '20s?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: That was a lot of money then.

MR. CAVALLON: I was working about 12 hours a day, though.

MR. CUMMINGS: Doing what?

MR. CAVALLON: I was like a truck man in the factory, you know, transferring one part of a machine to one machine to another, you know. It was just [inaudible] it was so boring. I just, the clock there, I kept looking all the time and it never moved.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] Yeah, yeah.

MR. CAVALLON: It was six days a week. I worked 10 hours a day, not 12. Ten hours a day. And then finally I was laid off. When I got the other job that finished too because there was Depression, so many people out of work. So I went back to Springfield with my father and there for about three or four months without a job. So finally I got a job in a candy factory, you know. And from there then I got a job with [inaudible] you know. I got a job in Westinghouse doing wiring, motor wiring.

MR. CUMMINGS: That was where, then?

MR. CAVALLON: In Springfield.

MR. CUMMINGS: In Springfield. Well, what was it like coming at the age of 16 to a whole new country in a way?

MR. CAVALLON: I was very excited.

MR. CUMMINGS: A new language.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah. The language was sort of, you know, I went to school in Greendale and it was mostly Swedish that lived there. The teacher, you know, walked through the door [inaudible] not walk in the door [inaudible] and it was well, of course, I was quite naive about a lot of things, you know. When you come from practically, you know, know nothing. In those days the kids, everybody were very subdued because they could not they're different than children now. Now a child can talk to anybody with an open face. Then you were so afraid for any adult to, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, they didn't have the mobility either.

MR. CAVALLON: No, no.

MR. CUMMINGS: Of children these days. Well, were you spending time with your relatives? Did you have relatives around then or were you just with your father really?

MR. CAVALLON: With my father and then I had the paisani, other people. Always we were around the same part of the time, you know, so you just go from one family to another, you know, visit each other and make wine. I was there making wine out of grapes. Raisins, prunes. We bought real grapes and we made, we just made about 250 gallons every year so we had wine all the time, you know. For lunch, you know. I used to go to work and brought a pint of wine with me instead of coffee, you know. And really it was a little bit too much because sometimes it would get you sleepy on the job. [Laughs.]

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, you know, say from 1920 to '30 then you-

MR. CAVALLON: In 1920, you know, then in 1926, see, then I went to Westinghouse. Then I got interested in art and I went to get and from there I was asking if there was any school I can study, you see. So finally somebody said, "I know somebody who is taking lessons in art," and so he took me over to him. He was a sort of little [inaudible] you know, and he talked with [inaudible] and he said he was going there every week, once a week to take a lesson. He said it was a very good teacher. Her name was Margaret Newman. So I made an appointment to go but then I didn't, see. So it went on for quite a few months. Then all of a sudden I said, "I'm not going to do my life just to work in a factory, you know, and do things."

MR. CUMMINGS: What got you interested in it?

MR. CAVALLON: I was interested in Italy too, drawing and all.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

MR. CAVALLON: I just, whenever I have a pencil there or something I just did things like, you know, scribble.

MR. CUMMINGS: As a child?

MR. CAVALLON: As a child, yes. Scribble, things like that. And even in school in Italy when there was a breaking point, you know, between class everybody went out to play and I just stayed in and drew [sic], copy something, you know, from a little book, you know. And the teacher was amazed. And I made myself a compass and all that sort of thing, you know. So but I was always, and I was also interested in mechanical [inaudible] too, that sort of thing. So after I start with this teacher and I went to her, so I start taking two lessons a week on Saturdays. I wanted to paint, see, but then she says, "Oh, no, you better draw for about a year or two years." And she made me draw. So we had a good principle and a good discipline.

MR. CUMMINGS: In what way?

MR. CAVALLON: I draw from cast, you know, from plastic cast. And then she made to use sort of a stroke, straight line, nothing curved, you know. The principle was quite correct, you know. Then I start painting.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did she give you other things besides casts to draw, still life or anything?

MR. CAVALLON: Mostly still. Painting was still life.

MR. CUMMINGS: The painting was still life?

MR. CAVALLON: Mm hmm [affirmative], still life. It never was a live model. Sometimes we paint outside the

flowers or things like that, you know. It was a landscape and she criticize it. But then she always talked about the National Academy in New York and [inaudible] so I did come here in 1926 and went to the National Academy.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, right.

MR. CAVALLON: And I was at the National Academy until 1929.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who did you study with there?

MR. CAVALLON: We had a bunch of teachers there. One good teacher was Charlie Hawthorne, see. When I went there it was his last year there. It was Ivan Wolenski [phonetic] and I forgot the there was another guy but I didn't study with him. They had several classes there. Then I studied with Wyman Nielson, you know. He was off working. And then Sidney Dixon. Not this Dickinson here.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, I know.

MR. CAVALLON: The other, did portrait painting.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, right.

MR. CAVALLON: He'd paint always brown stuff, you know. Once we was working with models and he criticized it. He came over and he said, "Can I have your brush?" So he start to paint all over the figure brown and I got so mad, you know, when I saw it. So after he got through I took the canvas off the easel and I threw it in a corner. [Laughs] And then I felt very bad about that, you know, I feel like it's an insult. And so then he had made an announcement. He said, "Anybody that wants me to paint [inaudible] they should tell me beforehand." So I went to apologize to him.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you like that school? I mean, the students -

MR. CAVALLON: Well, it was free. See, at that time you only paid \$20 a year and you go there nine hours a day seeing models and soon. At that time there was the [inaudible] there was, you know, a little more free and open. But that we had to pay. It was much more expensive. I couldn't afford that. I used to work six months a year, you know, doing carpentry work and then quit the rest of the time and just go to school, see. And then it happened that my father was here. He put about \$800 in the post office in Italy and exchanged about 20,000 liras. So my father went back to Italy and he had a house there. See, the Depression was here so he couldn't get work here, anything, so he decide to go to Italy and stayed here three years. So I traveled to Italy and then I traveled to England, France, Belgium. Then I come back here during the Depression, which I was worried as hell about it.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah. You know, before we get into the '30s I'm curious to hear a little more about the National Academy.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: You know, there were not many museums. The only museum in those days was the Met, really. The Whitney Studio was around. Did you go to the Metropolitan or any of the-

MR. CAVALLON: Oh, I [inaudible].

MR. CUMMINGS: the dealers' galleries that were around?

MR. CAVALLON: The dealers' galleries, there were not many. There were only about a handful.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. CAVALLON: I mean, the best gallery I liked was this which is gone now. It was a French gallery. It was downstairs and it had a skylight.

MR. CUMMINGS: Was that Rand [inaudible]?

MR. CAVALLON: Rand [inaudible] yeah. They had beautiful work there all the time there. In that time it was see, I forgot the name now of so many galleries, you know. The Rand Gallery is supposed to be the top one, you know [inaudible] portrait painting. And then it was the Dresdendorf, Dillendorf, something like that.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, Nearendorf.

MR. CAVALLON: Nearendorf.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, right.

MR. CAVALLON: And then it was the other guy was quite good was Valentine [inaudible].

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, yeah.

MR. CAVALLON: He had a, it was [inaudible] so everything was on 57th Street and so you go down and you saw every show.

MR. CUMMINGS: It was right down, yeah.

MR. CAVALLON: Right down, and you go from one place to another. It was really marvelous, you know. And it was such a connection, you know, which doesn't exist now anymore. You know, everything, I don't know, money, money.

MR. CUMMINGS: Galleries are all over. It's a whole different kind of thing.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah. There are so many artists now. And artists used to get together and talk about art, you know, and they all were interested in quality, you know. See, nobody was selling, see, so they talk about it. It used to be very wonderful. You had to see the [inaudible] and just get the [inaudible] with the writers.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, right.

MR. CAVALLON: So the whole thing was very, you know. It was a group, you know. It was always exciting. Sometimes I was deadly tired, you know, I couldn't move, but I just drag myself to go out.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah. Were there any students at the National Academy that you remember that you were friendly with or -

MR. CAVALLON: Well, there's Bill Atasky. He was a student. Lee Krasner. Pollock's wife, she was a student then. Ryan Bradley, but he's dead now. And let me see who else was there now. There was a guy, Umberto Romano. I don't know if you know him.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, sure.

MR. CAVALLON: We used to live together, as a matter of fact, for a while.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, really? In New York then?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, when we were students. And some of the others, more, but I don't know.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you like Hawthorne as a teacher?

MR. CAVALLON: I think he was very good.

MR. CUMMINGS: What was interesting about him?

MR. CAVALLON: Well, it was interesting that he always taught you in a certain color, you know, spots. All these spots of color. He had a, he could not pronounce the "S." And he never really draw, you know. He just put a spot of color in places, you know. So we had brushes about two inches bristles, you know, and you just -

MR. CUMMINGS: Were they pig bristles, or soft?

MR. CAVALLON: I don't know. They were so soft. They're not very soft either. They were, I haven't seen any of those things around. And you just, and the palette and then you scrub it on the canvas. So he just set a shape. Like I studied in Provincetown and there we made, he made you paint with a palette knife about an inch wide, very flexible. Grind it down to practically nothing, you know, so it was like [inaudible].

MR. CUMMINGS: But very flexible.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah. So he mixed the paint. Everybody was using [inaudible] paint. It was very cheap, you know. He put, you know, the palette in the sun and the whole thing just melt and wax.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, really, because of the heat?

MR. CAVALLON: The heat, yeah. So you mixed that and you paint a face every day. There's a model in the morning and one in the afternoon. And you use a [inaudible] board just to size it, you know. I just use a very small [inaudible] board. Then you did one every day. And you never put the eyes in, the details. Just block

always, you know. And with a palette knife you get some kind of crystalline quality, you know. With a brush, you know, it gets gray. So it was good practice in a way. But then, I don't know, to bring it farther out, you know, was I never [inaudible] but I don't think it was very helpful in a way. It was helpful for certain things but not too much.

MR. CUMMINGS: Why do you think he changed his teaching when he was in Provincetown and New York?

MR. CAVALLON: Who, Hawthorne?

MR. CUMMINGS: Hawthorne, yeah.

MR. CAVALLON: He used the same method, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: The use of the palette knife?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah. When you went in the studio when it was [inaudible] you could paint with a brush, see. Then he criticized once a week on Saturday. On Monday he came, he painted himself in front of class. He painted with brushes. And there was students there. They knew what kind of [inaudible] that he had. He used paint [inaudible] the palette, you know, everything. And then he was quite an actor, you know. And then after he was finished they all clapped their hands, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

MR. CAVALLON: They [inaudible] and then the artist, they clear the paint, the brushes, everything. And then at the end of the season he raffled his painting to different students, you know. But then on Saturday morning everybody brought their work, weekly work. And then he had, you know, quite a big what do you call it?

MR. CUMMINGS: He had that great big room, didn't he, with the kind of easel?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah. Yeah, but he had racks, you know, that he could put a lot of paintings on it, put a stack of paintings. And so then he says, "Whose is this?" and so then he give you a criticism, see. And then he goes to the other one and so on. It was quite, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: I'm curious about, you know, you're describing the painting in New York using the color and not drawing.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: In all the -

MR. CAVALLON: We start painting without drawing.

MR. CUMMINGS: So it was all really kind of modeled with color?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah. You start, block the forehead and you start on the forehead and then you went down and you put maybe the nose, you know. And you can put a spot different ways. You could build the thing up. It would be almost like putting clay, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, right.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, put in the right place, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, that's -

MR. CAVALLON: But we always, the color is always fresh, you know. It was very good color, very good.

MR. CUMMINGS: But he never painted thickly, did he?

MR. CAVALLON: No.

MR. CUMMINGS: I remember his paintings being rather thin.

MR. CAVALLON: What we use I saw his palette, you know. He used powder paint and then sometimes -

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah.

MR. CAVALLON: Sometimes in medium. Then he dipped in the powder and mix in the medium. So that way you never, the paint, the pigment is so much medium, you know, it becomes like a glaze or a varnish or whatever it

is, you know. Because when the paint is [inaudible] you squeeze all the oil. Just enough, you know. And the other way didn't get [inaudible] medium.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. CAVALLON: So it's like certain powder uses so much certain pigment, so much oil, you know, that if you leave it there, if you're trying to squeeze out you could probably, you can squeeze out about twice as much.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you have drawing classes at the National Academy?

MR. CAVALLON: Oh, yeah. When I got to National Academy I had to, you know, show your work. They put me in [inaudible] class so I had this guy Nelson in class. And then from there then I think it was every month or two months an exam, you know. So then he promotes you on. Like on probation [inaudible] there's no difference. They have the same models. And then Wolenski was at class, a drawing class, all the time. And see, there were about 30 or 40 students, you know, that was just around the model. Then each one had to get a number. He said, "Pick a number so you can place yourself wherever you want to," see. So 1, 2, 3. Number 1 to 6 Wolenski always kept in his pocket.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

MR. CAVALLON: To give to his favorite students.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] Oh, that -

MR. CAVALLON: I only got it once or twice he gave me number 1, number 2.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, that's a great way to control a class. Fantastic. But did you find that the woman you had studied with in Massachusetts, that her approach to drawing was -

MR. CAVALLON: Was very good, yes.

MR. CUMMINGS: It was good?

MR. CAVALLON: It was healthy, you know. It was not, you're not trying to be [inaudible] you're not trying to make a picture, you know. She really was interested in drawing. She was a [inaudible] teacher. She studied at Williamstown, something like that.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, yes.

MR. CAVALLON: Or Williams College.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah. Well, did her teaching conflict with what happened at the National Academy?

MR. CAVALLON: No, no, no.

MR. CUMMINGS: It was a good basis for that then?

MR. CAVALLON: As a matter of fact, the National Academy, I think I was there five years. Really, you know, it was too much, a kind of waste of time.

MR. CUMMINGS: You mean you spent too much time there?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, because you work sometimes two weeks on the model, you know, tickling with the charcoal to get the shape.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, to get a shape and all that. And I never, you know, I don't see the point anyway because it doesn't make you if you're that type of person to draw very, you know, you do it, see. And I was more painting, you know, trying to I never was the drawing particular, you know, like that.

MR. CUMMINGS: It always had been freehand?

MR. CAVALLON: Like that, yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, you were with Hawthorne one summer in Provincetown?

MR. CAVALLON: One summer in Provincetown. And then -

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you remember the year?

MR. CAVALLON: It was 1927.

MR. CUMMINGS: Nineteen twenty seven.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah. In '26 there was a night class only at the Academy. Then in '27 then it started day and night, painting and drawing all the time. Then you got into 1929.

MR. CUMMINGS: And then what happened, because that was -

MR. CAVALLON: Then from there I went to Europe.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's when you went back to Europe?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, I went back to Europe. And then I had a studio in Lonego. My father had a house in Lonego. And so there I painted. First I traveled, went to Italy. Then I painted and I had a show in Vicenza. That [inaudible] there was in a show in Vicenza.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. CAVALLON: That was my father. I painted there in 1931. And then there was an exhibit also, Carpezo in Venice.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, when you traveled in Italy in those three years did you sketch? Did you go to museums?

MR. CAVALLON: Just [inaudible] and churches, you know. I traveled three months. I took from, left Lonego and went three months, went through all Italy. Then I stayed in Lonego the rest of the time. The only time I just go to Venice, Verona, you know, and Vicenza. And then from there I went to, in 1933 I went to Germany, France, Belgium.

MR. CUMMINGS: And again going to museums and -

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, the same. Always museums, always looking buildings, you know, painting, sculpture, everything like that. Then when I came back here I have to face the Depression.

MR. CUMMINGS: Why did you come back here again?

MR. CAVALLON: Well, I had to come back because as a matter of fact, I got a permit to stay one extra year. Otherwise as soon as I got there the police there, they came over to my father. They didn't know I was home. But for the army, see.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, right, right.

MR. CAVALLON: I had a very [inaudible] so I was exempt here by the counsel and I had a certificate, you know. It was sort of like a rejection. So when I went there it must be the Sicilian policeman. I don't know. He was a very tough looking guy. And he says, he asked me why I become an American citizen, you know. Well, I say because from a lot of things. He says, "If I was Mussolini I would put everybody in jail," or something like that. But quite clearly he could not do anything anyway.

MR. CUMMINGS: Because that was the beginning of the whole political thing, right.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah. And when I was there, you know, I heard a story but I never was counseled about I could [inaudible] all the police mostly were from southern Italy, see. And there was this friction between one place and another.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, right.

MR. CAVALLON: In the north [inaudible] so -

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, that's fascinating.

MR. CAVALLON: You got all kind of a, like those civilian, you know, detectives dressed in civilian clothing. They keep an eye on everything. If you have a cigarette [inaudible] you know, they still take away from you.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

MR. CAVALLON: Everything, yeah. Everything. Any contraband tobacco or any kind of stuff, you know. I was

aware of that but I never, it never, I was not politically conscious at all. I was just, you know, I was just painting, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you get to know any artists those years while you were living in Italy?

MR. CAVALLON: No. I got to know one named Valenti. I don't know what happened to him. Where I was staying there wasn't any. There was some paint, you know, but not and see, most of the time the artists were in Rome or, you know, Milan. But what I got to know [inaudible] time. I knew Trompolini and Caraja [inaudible] around there. There were several people that I knew that I follow every year, you know. And that time they painted figure like made out of rubber hose.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, right, right.

MR. CAVALLON: See if that's, you know, it's the easiest way to paint.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, how did you because there was a lot of shift and change going on if you'd been through Germany and France.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did your National Academy background agree with what you were seeing?

MR. CAVALLON: Well, the National Academy background is, no, the National Academy [inaudible] always was against [inaudible] what they did. It was always, I just use it as a place because it was the only place I could go to use the models and things.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. CAVALLON: But I never, I always detested there [inaudible] you know. Many student too were against it all the time. They were talking about modern paintings. I remember once there was a Cezanne show which was the first time I'd seen it, and Wolinski saw it and he says, "I don't understand what the hell they see in Cezanne," you know, something like that. It's very [inaudible] it was not long ago, you know. I remember the first Gauguin show was at Fifth Avenue somewhere on the corner of 57th Street. It was a beautiful Gauguin show. It was the first time I saw. I'm not a Gauguin, you know, I'm not crazy about Gauguin anyway but at that time it was, you know, interesting.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, at the National Academy did you find that the students were interested in much more contemporary ideas than the instructors were?

MR. CAVALLON: No, no. They were still in the Renaissance period, you know. They were doing composition, all kind of Rafael type, you know. And they were still, no, there was no advanced.

MR. CUMMINGS: They didn't know what was going on, really?

MR. CAVALLON: No, no.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's fantastic.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah. Talking about modern, I remember once the National Academy accept modern. That time modern was just a distorted figure, you know. It's not abstract, anything like that. And they try and I think the building was, the gallery was where [inaudible] exist, some -

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, in the back.

MR. CAVALLON: On the back, yeah. And they try one year and then they gave up. I think now they do it, I heard, all this mixture of everything.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. CAVALLON: But the Academy is still the same thing, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. CAVALLON: So I saw a show I was in last year. It was last year, yeah. They asked me to and so I they asked me this year but I didn't go. So I send one and then they went through the whole thing, you know. Sort of like [inaudible] you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. CAVALLON: But a lot of people do portrait for a living and that's the only way they paint, see.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, yeah.

MR. CAVALLON: And we had one guy, Oppenheim or something like that. He's a commercial artist but he can draw a figure exactly. You know, it has no [inaudible] but just anyway.

MR. CUMMINGS: It looks good but it doesn't feel anything.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah; no.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah. Well, you came back here in what, 1933; right?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: That was really getting into the depths of the Depression.

MR. CAVALLON: The Depression, yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: You came to New York?

MR. CAVALLON: Oh, yes. I was there.

MR. CUMMINGS: What did you do?

MR. CAVALLON: I had a friend of mine named Arthur Parmer so he put me up for a few days. I said I had to look for a room so I went uptown. I look on the paper, you know. So I saw a room was between the court, you know, in the back where there's a court having light. So he showed me, the both of us there and I say, "How much is this?" He said, "Four dollars a week." It's so dark. I said, "I'm a painter." So he says, "You're a painter?" And I got the intuition that he misunderstood me, that I was a house painter, see.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, I see.

MR. CAVALLON: So I said, "Why, do you need a house painted?" He said, "Yes." So he says, "How much do you want?" So I didn't know what to ask because I said \$3 a day. He says, "Okay, start in the afternoon." I work for him for about a year.

MR. CUMMINGS: Terrific.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah. So I was making \$18 a week, you know. In those days \$18 a week was good money.

MR. CUMMINGS: That was pretty good, yeah.

MR. CAVALLON: You pay \$4 rent and the rest, you know, I could live by. There was no place to cook but I managed to get some electric thing, you know. And finally then after I apply for WPA after it started, you know. And I made a mistake saying that I was a carpenter. They give carpenter work, see, and painting. And they give me a job as a carpenter.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah. Now, what part of the project was that?

MR. CAVALLON: It was a building project. So I had a hell of a time to be transferred. You know, I explained what the problem was so they transferred me on the art project but then the art project put me to make scaffolds for the artists. [Laughs.]

MR. CUMMINGS: You're right back in -

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah. And then I was about a year or two in that place and then finally got transferred to easel.

MR. CUMMINGS: Where did you make the scaffolding? What was that?

MR. CAVALLON: It was for the mural people, mural paintings.

MR. CUMMINGS: Was that in different locations?

MR. CAVALLON: Different places, yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: So you traveled around and you built scaffolds?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, and [inaudible] there and make scaffolds. They were painting there.

MR. CUMMINGS: What do you think of the project now all these years later?

MR. CAVALLON: Well, at that time it was quite good, you know, but I don't think I have an idea. I don't know. It might put a little bit, I don't know if it makes [inaudible] didn't help or something. But in [inaudible] I don't think they do anything. Because there was a woman there named and she likes everything black, you know, painting dark gray.

MR. CUMMINGS: This was -

MR. CAVALLON: he was the head of the project.

MR. CUMMINGS: Going back to the project again, how long did you do scaffolding before you really got into -

MR. CAVALLON: It was a year and a half or something.

MR. CUMMINGS: Quite a while then.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, yeah. Maybe less. I don't know exactly.

MR. CUMMINGS: Was it in different places or just in New York?

MR. CAVALLON: In New York only. Different murals. So they need a scaffold so I go and build and scaffold. Mostly sometimes around studios, sometimes schools.

MR. CUMMINGS: Wherever they were going to work?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you find that being involved with the Federal Art Project sort of brought a lot of artists into your life? Did you meet a lot of people in the art world?

MR. CAVALLON: Oh, yeah. Of course, I knew a lot before. But then when I went, came back from Europe, you know, I know only the Academy students.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. CAVALLON: Which at that time, 23rd Street between 6th and 7th Avenue was a nest of studios there. And then with the RKO Building, 66th was being torn down. That was all studios. But 23rd Street was the most, you know. I remember everybody trying to get a it was like SoHo today.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, everybody was there.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: Why was that, do you think, in that area?

MR. CAVALLON: It was a lot of lofts there. You could get a loft for \$20 a month, \$25 a month. The [inaudible] used to be 21st Street, you know, for years.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, yeah.

MR. CAVALLON: A lot of people, you know. I try once to get a place too but I didn't get it. And the cheapest way was to have a loft, you know, the whole place.

MR. CUMMINGS: It would give you space to work in.

MR. CAVALLON: Space to work. You could not live in it but people just lived in it anyway.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah. Well, did you find that the project was a help to you as far as making a living?

MR. CAVALLON: I don't know whether it was help to me but it kept me painting in a way, you know. It kept me in contact with painting and things like that. But I [inaudible] I don't know, I think painting maybe depends on each individual, you know. Like there was [inaudible] the atmosphere was charged. I think that probably has more to do, you know, than the because in those days there were not, you paint still life and things like that. It was very

boring. You have to try to paint the same thing, you know. It was not exciting at all, you know. Then after you get through another piece of crap, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, you had to turn things in every week or so, didn't you?

MR. CAVALLON: At the Project, no. Once the painting was sized.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, right.

MR. CAVALLON: Twenty four by sixteen or 16 by 24 they gave you six weeks. Twenty four thirty gives you eight weeks and like that.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, so the larger the longer the time?

MR. CAVALLON: The larger the longer the time, yeah. Then in 1939 everybody was laid off automatically. So then to get in you have to apply for home relief again, you know. This was, and then you got home relief for a few weeks and then they put you back on the Project again. So then I was assigned to different things. I was assigned then in mural help, you know. So I work with Drawky [phonetic] for the year. It was doing stained glass, which he put it out once in a while, you know. It was [inaudible] the time.

MR. CUMMINGS: What was that project for?

MR. CAVALLON: See, I don't remember now. It was some church or some building. It never was executed anyway. The cartoon was there. I never touched the thing.

MR. CUMMINGS: What did you do in that -

MR. CAVALLON: I sat in the couch, you know. I had to stay there because the timer came around.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, would come around and see.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah. And then he made me read odd books, you know, to him, loud, which is not, it was not very [inaudible] reading. But then he paints different paintings. He talks. You know, we talk about different things. The beginning he was quite hostile, you know. He didn't want anybody. But then so we got along very well, you know. And he saw some of my paintings sometime and he liked it very much. There's a painting I have behind this wall here that he saw was going in a show. And so he saw some kind of respect, you know, what I was doing. And there used to be two, three artists that came quite often, frequently to visit him. It was de Kooning [inaudible] Hague from -

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, Raul Hague?

MR. CAVALLON: Raul Hague. And then there's another old man which is dead now. He used to [inaudible] every year. He was a German person. Von Wycks.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, Von Richs.

MR. CAVALLON: Von Richs.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah. Yes, yes, yes. So where was this being done, was this in Gorky Studio or was this in -

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, it was in the Gorky Studio. Yeah, but he hid in a closet, you know. He was trying to get out. It probably was about this high [inaudible] and then like from that window to here.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, it was just a cartoon?

MR. CAVALLON: A cartoon. And then Diller was the supervisor and once in a while came around, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: How was he in those days, Diller, because I've often been curious about -

MR. CAVALLON: How old?

MR. CUMMINGS: No, how was he? I mean, his effect on -

MR. CAVALLON: He was a very nice person. I liked him very much, you know. His theory in art was quite advanced. It was sort of Mondrian ish, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. CAVALLON: He kept it up all the time. But he had this job as the supervisor. He was quite a handsome person. He was a person who had no [inaudible] and that way you could talk to him freely, you know, about any. He respond to you.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you find that he did a good job as an administrator?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, I think so.

MR. CUMMINGS: There were no problems with him?

MR. CAVALLON: As good as anybody else, you know. He was trying to push for the [inaudible] and this other woman, Ms. McMann.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, right, right.

MR. CAVALLON: She was, she liked everything dark, you know. Some of it's funny how artists follow some kind of direction sometime, you know, what the person likes.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, how long did you spend with Gorky then?

MR. CAVALLON: I spent with Gorky one year.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's a lot of time then.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah. And then the war broke out so they start breaking up the project. So they transferred me to ship models and airplane models, ship models. You make a small ship for -

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, identification.

MR. CAVALLON: Identification, yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, right.

MR. CAVALLON: And that went on a couple of years almost, to 1943. Then I get a job creating some [inaudible] ship model down there so I was making more money so I quit. Sixty dollars a week I was making. At the project I was making \$23.86 because I was working 15 hours a week. And then the project eventually got dissolved completely.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, right. But while you were on the project did it give you enough time to do your own work?

MR. CAVALLON: Oh, yeah, sure.

MR. CUMMINGS: You could spend time in your own place and work?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, it was only 15 hours. The rest of the time you were just on your own, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you do that on one or two days or three days?

MR. CAVALLON: No, sometimes you wait until the end, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] Put it all in at once?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, and then after you find it didn't work then you ask for an extension. A lot of people in those days, they just go and they live in some place, they get their checks. There was a lot of crooked things, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, you ran into Hans Hofmann somewhere along there, didn't you, in '35 or '36?

MR. CAVALLON: Oh, Hans Hofmann. That was when I came back from Italy. Let me see. There was a fellow by the name Julie, Jewett, something like that. He's dead now. And Hans was teaching at the Art Student League, see. He had some kind of [inaudible] so he opened a school of his own.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. CAVALLON: On the corner of 57th Street and Lexington Avenue in the College Art building. And this guy was there when I came back from Europe and I was doing odd jobs, carpentry. As a matter of fact, I had a job for a contractor to do fixing things and all that. And I got, he had called me up that he needed a rack to build for the school. So I went up there and I did a rack and I built also some kind of a partition. Not partition. Something moveable. I forget what they call it. And then he said, "Do you want to be paid by money or do you want to take a lesson?" I said, "I had enough school. I think what I need now is I need money." But then I let it go. I didn't ask for it. So I let it go for several months so I decide, I thought about it. I [inaudible] try to take lessons. So I called Hans and I said, "Hans, I'm so and so." "Oh, yeah, yeah." "I didn't get paid for the job," I said. "I wonder if I could exchange, take lessons." "Yes, yes." Then he say [inaudible] for you to do so he gave me some working. So I went there about three nights a week, you know, taking drawings, drawing lessons. And that day I had met George McNeil. Soon I meet other people, you know. Which that sort of, it was a group where I swung. I was doing [inaudible] you know, realistic work. But I start doing abstract, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: What was it that appealed to you to make the shift? What was -

MR. CAVALLON: It was very difficult and it took me a long time to understand, to get the feeling. I sort of went in like going swimming, you know. You're just trying to stay afloat. And I think, I believe it was about six months before I be able to appreciate it, to get the feeling. Because, you know, in the Academy everything was you put what you see in front of you. Instead there if you don't like it [inaudible] so that's the freedom that you got by doing abstract. You can play, you can change them. And I find that much more flexible. So it gives you a much wider range, you know, to work.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, who else was in the Hofmann class that you remember from that time? Were there any others?

MR. CAVALLON: There were, yeah. Well, McNeil was there. You know George McNeil?

MR. CUMMINGS: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. CAVALLON: Swinden, but he's dead now.

MR. CUMMINGS: What kind of a fellow was he, because I haven't [inaudible] him ever.

MR. CAVALLON: Swinden?

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. CAVALLON: He was very quiet, you know. Once I met him. We had a place on 54th Street, a studio, a loft. And I asked, you know. I finally got to like him so I asked him, "Would you like to come over for dinner?" So he said, "Yeah, sure." Just like the guy just say, you know [inaudible] talk once in a while when you ask him. Otherwise he won't say anything. So I had some fish I cooked and he told me that it was three days he hadn't eaten. It was the first meal in three days.

MR. CUMMINGS: Fantastic. Well, he was doing quite abstract paintings at that time.

MR. CAVALLON: He was doing very abstract. He was very good and he was very [inaudible] he had a very, you know, disciplined mind. It's too bad that he met a woman who was awful.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, everybody says that about her.

MR. CAVALLON: Oh, gosh, she was a bitch.

MR. CUMMINGS: She tried to make him become a figurative painter or something?

MR. CAVALLON: I think she did eventually, you know. But anyway, he had to get a job, work doing drafting. And then I heard that he died from cancer.

MR. CUMMINGS: Because it's so little material about him.

MR. CAVALLON: Very little, yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, very little any place. And works -

MR. CAVALLON: He has a daughter, doesn't he?

MR. CUMMINGS: In California, I hear.

MR. CAVALLON: In California?

MR. CUMMINGS: She lives out there now.

MR. CAVALLON: Is the mother living here?

MR. CUMMINGS: She's still living here someplace, yeah.

MR. CAVALLON: She always pinning him all the time, you know, needling him, calling him stupid and so on. She was an awful woman. She was terrible.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, was McNeil doing abstract paintings then?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: He was already then?

MR. CAVALLON: Matter of fact, I got then it was the [inaudible].

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, right, right.

MR. CAVALLON: Harry Holtzman. Then American Abstract Artists, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, you joined that very soon, didn't you?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, the beginning, the very beginning.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah. How did that get together?

MR. CAVALLON: I think there were I don't know if it was Harry Holtzman started. And then Gorky got in but Gorky, you know, he couldn't take it because if he was not allowed to be the prima donna he quit.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

MR. CAVALLON: And de Kooning always followed Gorky, you know. What Gorky did, he was following. I think de Kooning always laughed at Gorky.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, he said that many times.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah. And now I heard something about Gorky, you know. My feeling about Gorky, he was like a cow with two stomachs. You know, a cow eats in the pasture.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. CAVALLON: And he goes in the stable at night and chew what he chewed again.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. CAVALLON: And Gorky just do that to Picasso, you know, all the artists. You swallow and then come out Gorky.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's fascinating.

MR. CAVALLON: Because, you know, he had always his own image, you know, in what he did. For a while it was Miro and Ang and so on.

MR. CUMMINGS: But there was still Gorky.

MR. CAVALLON: Oh, yeah, and Gorky. He had [inaudible] Gorky.

[END TAPE 1 SIDE A]

MR. CUMMINGS: This is Side 2.

MR. CAVALLON: I knew Gorky very well, you know. We just got along very well together. And I saw him after he was operated, had a cast on. But I never met his wife. He never introduced me to his wife, you know. Because I got married myself before and after that the project, so we never -

MR. CUMMINGS: Everything changed.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, it changed. And I met her a few years ago, you know. And I knew her brother very well.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who was that? That was -

MR. CAVALLON: I think her brother was married to oh, [inaudible] Ranker.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, right, right, right, from Washington.

MR. CAVALLON: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah. You know, I'm curious about just to kind of go back to Hans Hofmann still. What were his classes like in those days? How did he teach or what did he say to you?

MR. CAVALLON: Well, I only went, Hofmann I only went drawing. I never went painting. But painting I got some kind of, the atmosphere. Well, at that time you just, you drew sort of realistic. You saw somebody's drawing, painting, it was always figurative, a still life. Matisse, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Kind of thick lines.

MR. CAVALLON: You use a matchstick instead of pencil.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, that's -

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, you use a matchstick and ink bottle and draw, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, I see.

MR. CAVALLON: Always some kind of a thing.

MR. CUMMINGS: But what did he say about drawing? What would he say about what you were doing, for example?

MR. CAVALLON: He could hardly speak those days. It was very hard to understand him. You were watching what he did, you know. Well, I had to try to imitate him. You got the idea, you know. When he'd tell you that's good, that's good, you know. Then he goes over and show you which. So you get more by showing.

MR. CUMMINGS: Would he draw on the -

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, he'd draw.

MR. CUMMINGS: I mean on one of your drawings?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: Or other people's drawings?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, yeah. And sometimes he gave a long list and then sometimes sit on the back, you know, and listen to what the, criticize somebody else. And then he gave a lecture a lot but not in Provincetown he did mostly lectures.

MR. CUMMINGS: What were those mimeographed lectures that he used to hand out? Were they lectures or were they kind of notes?

MR. CAVALLON: No, I don't know.

MR. CUMMINGS: You never saw those?

MR. CAVALLON: No.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's interesting. Did you go to Provincetown very often?

MR. CAVALLON: I've been going to Provincetown since 1927 the first time, then I went in '28. Then I didn't go back until 1936. It's just I was [inaudible] going there every year but never for more than two or three weeks. The first two years take two months. After that only, you know, I used to break away from New York. I sort of like New York in the summer.

MR. CUMMINGS: Have you gone there lately or recently?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, I was there, we used to go there after Labor Day most of the time because that's when the tourists arrive.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, right. Yeah.

MR. CAVALLON: It's quite beautiful then, too. And if you have a garden here in the city, you know, and the air condition. And then it's very quiet here.

MR. CUMMINGS: In the summer, yeah.

MR. CAVALLON: You find plenty of parking space, you know. You can use your car in the city.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right. Did you keep track of Hofmann? I mean, did you remain friendly with him?

MR. CAVALLON: Oh, yeah, we were friendly all the time. We had dinner together many, many times. I was very friendly with her, you know, and it was very, very good. You know, and he was here I think on his 80th birthday. They had a party here for him, you know, Samuel Kootz.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, right.

MR. CAVALLON: And in Provincetown always, you know, is sort of just like [inaudible] and we eat dinner together.

MR. CUMMINGS: He's a marvelous man.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, he was a, he had a certain spirit, you know, really.

MR. CUMMINGS: Always enthused about things.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: Everything was marvelous.

MR. CAVALLON: I like a lot of his work but a lot I don't care for. He did one painting every day, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: He did an enormous amount, yeah. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: But you know, one thing that I'm curious about is the American Abstract Artists in the late '30s and the early '40s. When you became a member you exhibited with them quite frequently.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, every year.

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you think that served a good purpose as far as showing people what was going on, what was new?

MR. CAVALLON: I think it was very good, yes. And then I remember another painter used to make fun about the American Abstract Art, you know. And then all of a sudden overnight the whole thing began to paint abstract, you know. Then this guy just [inaudible] already a gallery and the American Abstract group thing get no credit at all for it, really. You know, left high and dry. Nothing. Because they started in '36, you know, and just kept going. Those days it was sort of more your influence and your opinion, you know, something like that.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, Albers was always active, wasn't he, when he joined?

MR. CAVALLON: Albers, yeah, he was. Mondrian was in the abstract group; Leger was in too. I remember Leger was, I was the treasurer. I send him the bill for the tuition, you know, and he resigned from the group.

MR. CUMMINGS: There was very little money, wasn't there?

MR. CAVALLON: I think it was I forget if it was \$5 or \$10. Not very much.

MR. CUMMINGS: Incredible.

MR. CAVALLON: But that's French guy. But Mondrian pays tuition. He was very faithful.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, what was it like in the end of the '30s and the early '40s when so many European artists started coming over here? What did that do to the Americans here, the community that was active in abstract painting?

MR. CAVALLON: Well, they don't have a discussion about it. I mean, European like who?

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, you know, I mean Mondrian came over here.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, Mondrian. No, it -

MR. CUMMINGS: And surrealists and so on.

MR. CAVALLON: In that way I thought, we thought that was very good, you know. It added more strength to the abstract, you know. Mondrian, he was a very nice person too. Very quiet. He didn't drink. He only drank tomato juice.

MR. CUMMINGS: Really?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, that's right. He was very health minded, wasn't he?

MR. CAVALLON: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.] Fresclana [phonetic] took care of him, you know, at the end.

MR. CUMMINGS: And Holtzman was -

MR. CAVALLON: Holtzman was the one that got him here. I saw Holtzman last night. I said, "How many Mondrian do you have left?" He says, "I got a load," or something like that.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, I was just looking at the show at Janis today.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah. Did he sell all his Mondrian?

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, no, the prices are tremendous.

MR. CAVALLON: Oh, it must be. How much is it, \$100,000?

MR. CUMMINGS: For a drawing.

MR. CAVALLON: For a drawing? Who owns it?

MR. CUMMINGS: Janis has them. The paintings are just hundreds of thousands.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah. I could have bought those things for \$500.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah. Absolutely incredible.

MR. CAVALLON: Well, this hundred thousand business now, I think it's a little out of proportion.

MR. CUMMINGS: You dropped your membership with the American Abstract Artists, didn't you?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, I dropped it.

MR. CUMMINGS: Why was that?

MR. CAVALLON: Because I thought there was no use anymore because it was just a cult and it had no more function anymore.

MR. CUMMINGS: You mean so many people were involved?

MR. CAVALLON: So many people involved in art and that was just a they have some people [inaudible] the group, you know, but I think for sentimental reasons. I think it doesn't work, you know. I think, you know, I felt no point to it.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, I noticed one thing. You had a Tiffany grant.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: In what, 1929?

MR. CAVALLON: Oh, '29, there was a that was Oyster Bay.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, to go out there?

MR. CAVALLON: To go out there and work, yeah. It was two months, you know. They gave you lodging, free meals, just to paint.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you like that?

MR. CAVALLON: Well, to me it was like a [inaudible] there because I had to work, you know, hard. And to get in such a place which I never experienced before was marvelous. But, I mean, from a painting point of view it was this guy Lothrop and the old Tiffany was there. He was 80, 81. And they used to go around every weekend. So this guy Lothrop just go with a chair behind him and they stop when the paintings [inaudible] but see, Luigi Diturni [phonetic] was the one. And Lothrop was the type like he tried to paint every leaf on the tree, you know. So he was not a guy that painted [inaudible] Cadmus was also there.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

MR. CAVALLON: And I did [inaudible] but I could never follow, you know. It's funny how all those people try to force us to do something.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. CAVALLON: I think the critics nowadays do the same thing.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, they want to have it in their way, the way they see it. It's very difficult for people not to do that, it seems. What were the war years like, because you -

MR. CAVALLON: The what?

MR. CUMMINGS: The war years, you know, World War Two. Because you worked for Gibbs doing the ship modeling. Did you have much time to paint? Was it difficult?

MR. CAVALLON: No, those days I didn't paint very much because of work, you know. Nine hours a day, I think, six days a week. So I painted a little bit on weekends or something like that.

MR. CUMMINGS: But all the energy was -

MR. CAVALLON: Was sort of, yeah, was time of war. Well, you kept doing things but I have an idea everybody else was the same thing, you know. Everybody was involved in something.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, the very thin years as far as productivity for a lot of people.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: You know, somewhere I was reading about watercolor paintings that you did in the late '30s or something.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: What exactly were they, because I don't were they watercolors or -

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, watercolor. I have quite a lot of those. Would you like to see them?

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, I was just curious, you know, what -

MR. CAVALLON: I do that when I [inaudible].

MR. CUMMINGS: I see. I see.

MR. CAVALLON: So I use watercolors. I used to, you know. So the abstracts and the as a matter of fact, one watercolor gave me sort of the influence to paint the way that I did in '48, '45 to '48, '49. It was the [inaudible] color on top of the other, which I was told made me they used to call me in comparison to Mondrian. [Laughs.]

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: I never heard that.

MR. CAVALLON: One critic said that because I had [inaudible] and I was a little bit [inaudible] one side or the other. And then [inaudible] I still had something in that painting, you know. The one on the [inaudible] later.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, how long did it take you to make the shift into abstract painting?

MR. CAVALLON: Well, it came very slow.

MR. CUMMINGS: Like two or three years, five years?

MR. CAVALLON: For many years nothing came out, you know. Nothing happened. But every once in a while something happens. You do a painting that's very good and then you think that from that day it can go on, you know, but it doesn't.

MR. CUMMINGS: It falls back and nothing happens?

MR. CAVALLON: Falls back then [inaudible] again.

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you think it's more difficult to paint that way than -

MR. CAVALLON: Than the other? Painting is difficult any way no matter which way you paint. I don't think it has no difference. If you're trying to paint a realistic thing, you know, then the realistic part takes away from the quality of painting or adds to it. So if you do abstract then you have to really it's more important what the painting itself is. You know what I mean?

MR. CUMMINGS: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. CAVALLON: But a good painter can do realistic, abstract, it doesn't make any difference. If you paint [inaudible] holds you or anything. If [inaudible] you don't ask what it looks like. You get [inaudible] with paint more, quality.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, do you think that the attitude of being interested in the paint is more modern? Because that wasn't the kind of thing one talked about through the National Academy, was it?

MR. CAVALLON: Well, I think paint [inaudible] was, you know, accepted except that they always talk about [inaudible] paint, you know. It maybe hadn't arrived now. Who knows? Something else can happen, you know. A lot of these things now, you know, these overblown things, you know, they can also get out.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, what happened in the mid '40s after the war when you finished working for Gibbs & Company? That was what, '45?

MR. CAVALLON: Well, then I did, for two years I was having a Social Security check. I worked, you know, and painted. And then after that I did, was doing odd jobs, you know. Whenever somebody called me up I did this and I did that. Then I got in a hi fi system. I did that also. And that gives me time to work. I just was my own, you know. I could quit and work, you know. I always kept free time and never tie myself too much, you know, just to spread out.

MR. CUMMINGS: What was hi fi system work?

MR. CAVALLON: Well, in those days we would buy components, you know, and build inside, build it in -

MR. CUMMINGS: Cabinets.

MR. CAVALLON: Cabinets, and then put things together. And so I had several things, you know, even the electrical work. I used to make a living anyway.

MR. CUMMINGS: When did you move into this house?

MR. CAVALLON: About '56, middle of '57 we moved in. We [inaudible] about eight months here. It was a rooming house once.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, it was?

MR. CAVALLON: It was all cut up, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: And you just opened it all up?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: How do you like having a house in Manhattan?

MR. CAVALLON: It was always my dream to have such a thing. I always wanted. It's quite a problem too, you

know. Unless you know how to do something yourself, you know, it's hopeless to get all [inaudible] because anything at all, like for the washer and the faucet you call a plumber and it costs you money all the time. If you don't know how to do little things or change a plug, you know, anything like that. But I do everything myself. I never had anybody since the thing was fixed, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's fantastic. You rented part of -

MR. CAVALLON: I rent, yeah. I used to have two floors once but now took it over. Before it was a multiple dwelling because you had three, two tenants. And always there are problems with the inspector. They always come in to tell you something, always some kind of a violation. So I got bored with that and it was costing me money so I transferred to semi private.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, I see.

MR. CAVALLON: So it hasn't been [inaudible] since.

MR. CUMMINGS: So you only have what, one?

MR. CAVALLON: One floor.

MR. CUMMINGS: Only one now. Have you always had art people over the years live here?

MR. CAVALLON: All the time, yeah. Once I had an editor.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who was that?

MR. CAVALLON: Katherine Carver. She's in London now. She lives in London. She's very good. She was [inaudible] editing.

MR. CUMMINGS: But John Ashbury lived here for years, didn't he?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, he lived here about he got it from Katherine Carver. And before Katherine Carver was another woman. It [inaudible] which was my wife once and I didn't want her because she was crippled and I was afraid, you know, if anything happened, if she fell down the stairs and almost broke her neck. Before I had Richard Linderman.

MR. CUMMINGS: Now it's Diane Kelder?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: It's an illustrious group of tenants.

MR. CAVALLON: [Laughs.] Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: But over all these years from the mid '50s to now have you found the neighborhood and having a house and the problems in New York, has it changed? Has it gotten more difficult?

MR. CAVALLON: Well, there has been times it was more difficult, you know. A lot of muggings on the street here. Lately it doesn't seem so much. I don't know. But they tear down all those houses, see. They were just [inaudible] if they would build [inaudible] down there. Daylight or day time it's not [inaudible] so I was [inaudible] twice and by luck I just called, "Linda, Linda," and I was behind the stoop near the house and ran across. And I couldn't get the key fast enough so I called, yelled to Linda and she came out the window. So when they saw her they ran away. I called the police and they were at the end of the corner there but they didn't, the police didn't do anything.

MR. CUMMINGS: No.

MR. CAVALLON: Unless they catch them on the act, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, they can't. It's hard, very hard to do anything. Well, what about Korkof, because you met him somewhere?

MR. CAVALLON: Oh, yeah, I know him for years. We were good friends.

MR. CUMMINGS: And you also have a great interest in food somebody told me.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah. Who, me?

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah. Well, I like to cook. I was exposed twice, one in the New York Times [inaudible] another one by House.

MR. CUMMINGS: House Beautiful or House and Garden?

MR. CAVALLON: House and Garden, yeah. So I had [inaudible] but I'm not a cook. You know, I just cook because I like it.

MR. CUMMINGS: What kind of food do you do generally?

MR. CAVALLON: Well, I do I think most probably more like [inaudible] and somewhat French, you know. I mean, I don't use much sauce or anything like that. It's mostly straight. If I make spaghetti it's simple but yet, you know, but it has a taste. Here you have no flavor, nothing. Just bland.

MR. CUMMINGS: Have you always been interested in that, in cooking?

MR. CAVALLON: Well, I was interested in learning how to cook all the time, you know. Where there's an artist you have to do -

MR. CUMMINGS: Do it yourself, sure.

MR. CAVALLON: You can't eat in restaurants if you're not, you know. There are some people that do that but I don't know how they do it, how they can survive.

MR. CUMMINGS: It's terribly expensive these days.

MR. CAVALLON: It's expensive and you have the lousy food. If it was good food -

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, terrible.

MR. CAVALLON: It sort of hurts me when if somebody asks me to take me out for dinner, you know. The money, they just look at the bill and then what you get is so bad, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: I know. It's absolutely awful.

MR. CAVALLON: [Inaudible] said something nice one night. It was long ago. He stayed here in the house and he slept upstairs, you know. So he said about a lot of people painted Mondrian, followed Mondrian along, see.

MR. CUMMINGS: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. CAVALLON: And he said something about me that I begin from Mondrian. You know what I mean? That I didn't follow him but I did something else, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. CAVALLON: Which never occurred to me because I never I liked Mondrian very much but I never was following, copying. You know, some people just exactly do the same thing, you know, as Mondrian. But I always tried to create my own things, you know. Even when I paint now each time to paint is always a challenge, a problem, so I don't repeat or the same. There are certain calligraphy, you know. You say it [inaudible] but there is no use one pattern and just keep following and a little variation, you know. I don't like that.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, as I remember seeing paintings of yours over the years you've always used a lot of white.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, I use. One time I stopped white. Now I use a lot of white, yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: What does white mean? How does -

MR. CAVALLON: I don't know. It's just it has some kind of a fresh breathing atmosphere, you know. Yes, sometimes I like I did work some dark color but somehow I didn't succeed very well in it, you know. Then my white is not used to one type of white. There's a different kind, variation. The color shows through. It's a part of the painting.

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you draw on the -

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: canvases before sometimes to figure out [inaudible]?

MR. CAVALLON: One canvas there that -

MR. CUMMINGS: Like that one, yeah.

MR. CAVALLON: I started drawing, you know, and that was not [inaudible] I do and then I keep on changing, changing. But it happened that particular one that I saw it and I stopped, you know, because I knew if I would do some more I will spoil it. Yes, sometimes things like that happen. And I think the painter [inaudible] know when to stop is [inaudible].

MR. CUMMINGS: Sometimes it is, yeah, because you just paint right through it and -

MR. CAVALLON: You can carry [inaudible] you can just spoil it like this, you know. Because you do something to improve it and you just, a certain quality. Then you have to go over and like start over again.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, do you find that your use of color has changed a great deal over the years? I mean, are there times when you would be more interested in one approach to it or a different one, or is it really the structure that -

MR. CAVALLON: Well, the structure and the color. I think you change, you know. You say you like coffee sweet today and tomorrow you like it a little bit bitter. You know, the same thing with color. Different mood, you know. Yeah, sometimes you follow the but you don't have the control. It just happens things, you know, and then you go that way. I think a lot of times it happens that way.

MR. CUMMINGS: You mean it just flows?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: The whole -

MR. CAVALLON: And then you develop and then the way I paint, for instance, I look at the paint most of the time, you know, and actually painting is not very much really. See, because if there was a lot of drawing I think that takes a lot of labor, you know. But only painting big masses and you change something then you have to get sometimes you get moving very fast all over, you know. If you're doing [inaudible] you get stuck again. Then you find it's okay but it's not right. The next day you look at it and you find you like certain sections, you don't like the other. So you try to balance it out and try to make some kind of a countermovement to make the thing unite itself. And it doesn't work, you know. Sometimes you look and look and look at it. And then finally for a while nothing happens so you just go, take a [inaudible] and then so you break it up in order to be able to start work again, see. Constantly doing, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: But you generally work in kind of a shallow space, don't you? I mean, on the canvas. It's not great distances.

MR. CAVALLON: No, sort of flat.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, right.

MR. CAVALLON: I [inaudible] I guess it has atmosphere. It has space.

MR. CUMMINGS: I'm trying to think, remembering photographs and the paintings. You've never really worked with very hard edge things.

MR. CAVALLON: No.

MR. CUMMINGS: They've always been painted with the brush quality and those things.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, yeah. Never use Scotch tape, you know. I think that's kind of Scotch tape is all right for, you know. I like to do a straight line if I can do without anything. If I do without any I can go straight, it will have a certain quality, that line. It doesn't look mechanical, you know. It has a certain -

MR. CUMMINGS: Personality.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah. Like you try to draw, make a circle freehand, you know. It will probably take you a long time to get it perfect but it's not sort of mechanical, you know. It has some kind of human quality. That's what I like. Like a piece of furniture, you know. If it's done by hand it has something that, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, you've designed a lot of furniture, haven't you?

MR. CAVALLON: Not design. I make them, you know. I made that bar there. I made [inaudible] myself. This here I made. Table, I made a table. The chafing dish, all those things. That's what I like to make things. It's like recreation to me. It doesn't distract my painting at all. As a matter of fact, I find it takes me away from painting.

MR. CUMMINGS: In what way do you mean?

MR. CAVALLON: Well, I can easily go to do something. You know, I get involved mechanical. Then I know everything has to be just right in order to work, see. Painting instead is much more different.

MR. CUMMINGS: In terms of what?

MR. CAVALLON: Well, painting, something has to fit there. It's more like the emotional part to your painting. It's nothing calculated, you know. You [inaudible] painting and then something like that.

MR. CUMMINGS: What about the days of "The Club" in its better days? Did you go?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, I was a charter member in "The Club." We were about, I don't know, six, seven, ten charter members, something like that. Yeah, I think it was very interesting.

MR. CUMMINGS: What did you find interesting about it, the fact that -

MR. CAVALLON: Well, discussion about art and, you know, it was all together. I don't know, there was some kind of a nice atmosphere.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you like the lectures and symposia that -

MR. CAVALLON: Some of the lectures was quite good. Some of them [inaudible] it was entertaining anyway.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, I bet.

MR. CAVALLON: Then at the end we all go out in the bar. Then you could get in the Cedar Bar. Now you can't anymore. Of course, the Cedar Bar is not the same.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. CAVALLON: It was an excellent idea. I wish they had it again. They try it again, you know, but it didn't work. Somehow some things you try it doesn't work and if it comes it works.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right. It's got to grow naturally.

MR. CAVALLON: We were trying to get a bar up here, you know, to do the same thing. A lot of artists are this way. We [inaudible] around, you know, but somehow it never -

MR. CUMMINGS: It didn't happen, yeah.

MR. CAVALLON: You really have to somebody has to find something there. My idea is about 10:00 at night, 11:00, you know, until 1:00. This idea to go out and then come back, you know, it's sort of like a discharged battery. When you get in and you come back to recharge again then you can go to the next day.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who lives around this neighborhood? How many artists are living here?

MR. CAVALLON: Well, there are, there were quite a lot here but they're all gone. There were two or three around these houses here. They're gone because they tear it down. [Inaudible] is not there anymore, you know. Just [inaudible] was there. The Petersons used to be there. They sold their house and they moved to 77th Street. Fritz Bolt next door. And [inaudible] in Provincetown, you know. And Warren Brown is up the street. There used to be Rothko and so on. At one time there was quite a lot, you know. And then some like 6th Street. But still there is some, you know, a lot of people you don't know. But somehow -

MR. CUMMINGS: Times are different, yeah. Did you know Rothko very well?

MR. CAVALLON: Oh, yes, sure. Very good friends. At the end of his life, you know, he was impossible mostly.

MR. CUMMINGS: Why was that?

MR. CAVALLON: You only had to talk about him, you know, how good he was. I always thought it was interesting to listen to. Like Franz Kline, you could talk about anything to him.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah. Franz Kline you could talk about. I mean, there are artists you can talk about different things. But Rothko was only interested in himself.

MR. CUMMINGS: I used to live on 72nd Street when he had his studio there on 68th.

MR. CAVALLON: Oh, yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: I would see him sometimes every other day. I just remember how he'd walk along sometimes with a little can of paint holding it in his hand in front of him, you know, a little half pint of paint. He always carried it in front of him like he was going someplace with it.

MR. CAVALLON: It was very sad.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. CAVALLON: It was such a mess, you know. He [inaudible] his family, the whole damn thing.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, everybody. Yeah, yeah.

MR. CAVALLON: You know, I'm curious about some of your exhibitions and things. You were with Charlie Egan for quite a while.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: How was being in that gallery in those days?

MR. CAVALLON: Well, Charlie Egan in those days had a very, he had a good reputation as an artist dealer, not as a business. He never sold anything. If you sold anything you never got your money anyway. But he had appreciation for art, for real good stuff, you know. So now other galleries, they don't have. They're all business, you know. They don't have any more that because now things have changed. I think when [inaudible] doesn't move then you get [inaudible] quality, I suppose. The money [inaudible] interested in money. I don't know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah.

MR. CAVALLON: It works that way too.

MR. CUMMINGS: What about Eleanor Ward? Because you were with her for a couple of years.

MR. CAVALLON: I was there, yeah. She was very, I mean, had a style. A very spirited woman and all that. But she was not very you sold painting, you know, and never get, and never tell you. Maybe sometimes it takes a year to find out, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah. So finally Kootz asked me once and then I left her. She was wondering why. She owed me \$3,000 so I had to get a, I think Vernon Rice got it. She sent it.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, how did you find Kootz?

MR. CAVALLON: Kootz, he called me up one day, you know, and asked me if I want to go with him. I knew Kootz, you know. So I remember when he opened the gallery the very first time you get [inaudible] there. It was the first show that he did. And Kootz was sort of a, always was simple and he talked to everybody. And so he asked me and I said I talked to Linda about it and she was surprised too. So I went over there and I said, "Well, I'm with Eleanor Ward and how am I going to do?" Well, he said it's up to me. So he gave me a few days to decide, to make up my mind. So I went to Eleanor and I told her she was dropped. Sometimes [inaudible] feel things very hard when you leave, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, that's true. How did you find him as a dealer? Did he do a good job for you?

MR. CAVALLON: Who?

MR. CUMMINGS: Kootz.

MR. CAVALLON: Well, one thing with Kootz, you know, was he was always pushing Picasso with people that bought, you know. But he sold some. One thing is you get your bills straight, accurate. When he sold you get, you know, he paid you. And you didn't have to pay for the catalog. He took care of everything, see, except

framing and then shipping. So but now you have a gallery, you pay for everything and then plus you have to pay half the expenses. So and then they charge you, in those days it was 33 and one third and now I pay 40. But all the rest of the people in that gallery pay 50 percent.

MR. CUMMINGS: Really?

MR. CAVALLON: He ask me [inaudible] and I say, "No, sir, I'm not going to pay 50 percent unless you make a good catalog and you pay for everything. Then I'll pay 50 percent." He didn't want to do that.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, yeah.

MR. CAVALLON: So I'd rather pick the gallery. So he said, "Okay." He said, "But don't tell anybody."

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, it's amazing how the business has changed.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, it's getting a little bit too much, you know. It's [inaudible] in a way too. I guess it always happens those things, you know. I remember like the American, the artists union started doing the project. It was for the job only. Then all of a sudden the communists came in and made the whole thing a political issue. During those days now when I think about it, you know, it was so awful. Well, a bunch of bastards, you know, just [inaudible] for their own purpose.

MR. CUMMINGS: It's very interesting, because people I've talked to who are active in the artists union are very ambivalent. They're very, you know some talk about it, some don't want to talk about it. It's still a touchy point.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, yeah. I just hated them. You know, I used to write papers. Because you could not be yourself. I mean, you had to be something. You had to be either a fascist or communist, so you were one. I don't want to be [inaudible] either one.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah. Why was politics so important in the art world?

MR. CAVALLON: Well, the Depression. The Depression was so bad, you know. So the communists came forward, you know. We always talked, we said when the communists come over there would be no more war, nothing. Everybody will be happy and free. It's a lot of bullshit.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] Yeah.

MR. CAVALLON: It never will happen.

MR. CUMMINGS: Never happen.

MR. CAVALLON: You go to Russia and they ask for money too. I was in Russia three years ago.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you like that? How did you go there?

MR. CAVALLON: I went there in 1970. I was going with Jack Mayer. He's the one that started. But he thought he could get a visa because he works for UNICEF. And he could get [inaudible] in Europe, see, but he didn't get it. So I was the only one stuck. I got it. So I was all alone. And traveling Russia alone is no picnic because if you're in a group you're better off. There's somebody ahead of you that, you know, they listen. When you go in a restaurant they serve you. So if you are alone they just put you in the corner and they never come to you.

MR. CUMMINGS: Really?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah. I was very surprised. One night I was there from 8:00 and it went to 11:00 to be served a meal, and I had to go protest at the desk, you know, finally. And then they serve you soup and then after they forget the spoon and you have to take a half hour. And then, I don't know, it's such a -

MR. CUMMINGS: Why did you go there? What was the reason?

MR. CAVALLON: I went to see Leningrad. I went to see, also get the feeling of Russia and all, see for myself, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Have you traveled a great deal, I mean, besides that?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: Like around this country or elsewhere?

MR. CAVALLON: Oh, yeah, I went through this country with my car, which is I find this country very beautiful. I

mean, the nature is marvelous here. A different feeling of space. You come west and you get expanded things. It's really and then the canyon and the redwoods. The redwoods, you walk and you feel like this big.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] I know. They're tremendous.

MR. CAVALLON: These giant trees. You look up and they're so beautiful.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah.

MR. CAVALLON: And then you see truckloads after truckloads of this lumber going all the time, all day long. Another 10, 20 years [inaudible] you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Everything gets used up.

MR. CAVALLON: Probably there will be only stones left. Then they have to go back like the [inaudible] build a house out of stone. It probably would be better, be more solid.

MR. CUMMINGS: One thing that interests me is the teaching that you've done. You taught at Pratt for a few years.

MR. CAVALLON: Well, that was just woodworking. Yeah, George McNeil was there. I didn't like it, you know. It was very frustrating.

MR. CUMMINGS: In what way?

MR. CAVALLON: Well, they had a big machine and I had no [inaudible] or hand tools, you know. And then they have to decide a project and they were all making a shaving brush handle, plastic. I don't know, it was something that was sort of -

MR. CUMMINGS: Useless.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah. I mean, I tried to create a project, you know. It was, I don't know, the whole thing was [inaudible].

MR. CUMMINGS: What about places like the University of North Carolina or Yale?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, there I was artist in residence in North Carolina.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you like that?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, I only took it for two, three two months. They wanted me for a half year. I didn't want to. And it was quite nice, you know. But then I found teaching quite you don't know how, if you penetrate other people, if you have or not. So it's very frustrating. It's very dissatisfying somehow, you know. If you make something and then you finish you see it's done. Teaching, you don't know.

MR. CUMMINGS: What happened, if anything.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: How were the students?

MR. CAVALLON: Oh, the students were quite nice, yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you find a difference between say North Carolina and Yale or Columbia?

MR. CAVALLON: Well, yeah, they're more sophisticated. But Yale, at Yale some of those paint, you know, you don't know what they you have to ask them what are they trying to do. The [inaudible] thing, you know. I don't know to somebody has something that is above your head in a way. You [inaudible] what to say.

MR. CUMMINGS: Can they talk about things like that?

MR. CAVALLON: They talk, you know, but of course you know I'm not much of a talker, you know. One guy that talks quite a lot was Freckstein. Freckstein, you know him?

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, Finklestein.

MR. CAVALLON: Finklestein, yeah. So we went together with Jack [inaudible] him and Johnson, Lester Johnson, to see students' work, you know. And Finklestein started to give a lecture frankly on nothing, you know, just a

[inaudible] somewhere. And he talked for a long time, you know. I could not see any point. Well, each one has different views, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Have you ever thought about a theory for your painting?

MR. CAVALLON: No.

MR. CUMMINGS: Some kind of scheme behind it?

MR. CAVALLON: No, no.

MR. CUMMINGS: Or things that have evolved from it? It's just an activity and -

MR. CAVALLON: It's an activity. I feel that I always feel as an artist, you know, trying to say something, you know, which can put in words. I think it's a failure on my feeling because I don't think it has anything tangible, painting. Whenever you try to do something you always fall flat on your face, you know. When you paint it should be painted [inaudible] itself whatever it is, you know. And I don't think it should be also put I mean the person, the painter himself should not be inside either. You know what I mean? That it shows his character. It should be sort of neutral in a way.

MR. CUMMINGS: The painting?

MR. CAVALLON: The painting should be by itself. It should be a creation of something that for instance, like Beethoven when he plays. You sense Beethoven [inaudible] certain things. Instead most art is something else [inaudible] I always say Bach, when you see Bach [inaudible] but yet the music comes first. Beethoven, I like some music but there are certain kind of Beethoven is a little pompous sometimes and I hate that pompous business. Like some shows that you see, you feel the [inaudible].

MR. CUMMINGS: So really the painting should have kind of its own life and personality?

MR. CAVALLON: It has its own. Like to me painting should be [inaudible] you know. It should talk to itself, you know. I try to force something, you know, it doesn't [inaudible] all this theory about things, you know, they talk about it but I don't think sometimes they show.

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you think the conversations and discussion helps, though, and criticism?

MR. CAVALLON: Oh, yes. Sure, yes. In many, many ways, yeah, because it clears your, you know, many things.

MR. CUMMINGS: One thing I noticed so often in your painting, at least the way I see it, is there's a kind of light, a luminosity.

MR. CAVALLON: Luminosity.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, that moves around.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: You know, the atmosphere. It's kind of an atmosphere of light.

MR. CAVALLON: It's not a realistic atmosphere.

MR. CUMMINGS: No.

MR. CAVALLON: It's sort of a sense of space.

MR. CUMMINGS: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. CAVALLON: That I like to have, yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: Is that something you can work with or does it just kind of evolve and happen?

MR. CAVALLON: Well, I suppose it comes. I say I'm not satisfied until something happens, see. So that's why I keep looking at the painting until that time. It takes weeks or months before you can see, you know, that something has to be done, changed. What takes time also, sometimes it takes a long time to see the painting is good, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: And how do you start a painting?

MR. CAVALLON: I just draw and then I fill in with color and then after the whole thing [inaudible] again. It has no, it's just something to be kicked off, you know, like you start a car.

MR. CUMMINGS: To get something down on the surface and then you can -

MR. CAVALLON: To get something down on the surface and then until you get to a certain kind of a something happening, when the picture begins to work a little bit or maybe some place it works but yet other doesn't so then, you know. Then you spend a lot of time to balance the things. Then it becomes two separate things so you have to go through the whole thing, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: How do you balance things? Do you mean in terms of color or weight?

MR. CAVALLON: No. It depends sometimes. I'll [inaudible] something, it just feels sometimes a little like I had a painting where I was not satisfied upstairs and it had a bar like a handle almost, like a flag, you know. And then finally I decided, I said that's [inaudible] so I paint it out and then I think it looks very good. It works. It moves so it's not hindering.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, so one panel doesn't jump out or fall back or -

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, so the whole thing has to go, you know. It has to work the whole thing.

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you think that those decisions are intellectual ones or are they just emotional ones, or feelings?

MR. CAVALLON: I think they're probably both emotional and intellectual too. I guess it works together maybe. I don't know. But your mind, you feel it. You know, you have some kind of reaction to it. And then also you think it's wrong or whatever. It's a combination.

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you think that there's much in your painting that you can look at and see that is reflected in the teaching that you've received?

MR. CAVALLON: No. You mean that I got from teaching?

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, from your instructors over at the Academy or Hawthorne.

MR. CAVALLON: Oh, no.

MR. CUMMINGS: Or Hofmann.

MR. CAVALLON: I have a feeling whatever I learned from I probably had some Hawthorne. I always respect him, you know. But the rest of the Academy, I dump their thing all overboard, you know. It takes time to -

MR. CUMMINGS: To do that.

MR. CAVALLON: To do it, yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: What about Hofmann, do you feel that there's any?

MR. CAVALLON: Hofmann, no. Well, Hofmann helped, you know, to start it. But I don't think, I never was crazy about Hofmann's paintings. Some painting I like very much, but yet -

MR. CUMMINGS: That's always intrigued me because so many of his students have said to me, you know, "I really liked Hofmann as a teacher and what he had to say and not necessarily all of his painting."

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah. A lot of people say the same thing?

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, a lot of people have said that, yeah. It's fascinating because so many people study with somebody because they like the painting.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah. I think he overpainted himself, you know. I think in a way it's more damaging than [inaudible] you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, they're too much. He did too much.

MR. CAVALLON: There's too much, you know. And after all, you know, you get excited yourself painting and then you become blind. You just say well, there's another painting finished, you know, and then you don't even look. Like somebody did 1,000 paintings one month. Have you ever heard that story?

MR. CUMMINGS: No. Great.

MR. CAVALLON: And work [inaudible].

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah. Well, how much painting do you do a year? How many paintings might you do?

MR. CAVALLON: Oh, I do about seven; six, seven. It depends.

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you still draw?

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah. We have a model here once a week. I haven't done any watercolor for the last two years.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's amazing. I thought you did -

MR. CAVALLON: See, watercolor I do is an entirely different thing than what I do in oil. Mostly work from nature. And it's just like something to look for. You don't follow exactly, you know. You just use it like a [inaudible] a feeling and not something that you can control. Watercolors, you know, you do either they come or they don't, you know. You do maybe 20 to get about two or three. It doesn't work so you have to tear them up.

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you feel that there's any relationship between the way you use watercolor and oil painting?

MR. CAVALLON: No, no.

MR. CUMMINGS: They're just totally two different -

MR. CAVALLON: Two different, yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: Any particular points you'd like to make about something? We've wandered around so many different areas here.

MR. CAVALLON: Yeah, well.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

Last updated...July 2, 2008