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Oral history interview with Andrew Dasburg,
1974 March 26

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Andrew Michael Dasburg on March 26, 1974. The interview was conducted by Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

ANDREW DASBURG: . . . I don't recall it, but at the time I was interested in life.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you come to see O'Keeffe's work so early? Did you know her?

ANDREW DASBURG: She submitted her work, I presume submitted, to Stieglitz's in New York. I happened to be at Stieglitz's Gallery when he had these things there which he showed me and told me about this woman. I've forgotten the name of the state - -

PAUL CUMMINGS: A Texan, she was.

ANDREW DASBURG: - - and that was before he had met her.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know, I'd really like to talk about you, all the things you've done here. You were born in Paris, right?

ANDREW DASBURG: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was your mother or your father an American? I don't understand the whole . . .

ANDREW DASBURG: I was brought to New York by my mother who came over to stay with her sister at the age of five, New York City. My mother's family, her father and sisters and brothers, most of them were living in Paris at that time. My grandfather had lived in a little town called Nittel on the Mosel which is across from Luxembourg, just a stone's throw, the upper Mosel. But that's how I happened to come to the United States, I was brought by my mother at the invitation of her sister at the age of five.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And then you lived here and went to school until you were - -

ANDREW DASBURG: Well, I did for a while, and I've been here, of course, ever since with the exception of several trips to Paris. 1910 I returned to Paris for the first time and that, for me, was the great eye opener.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Had you started drawing as a child? Very interested at home in art?

ANDREW DASBURG: Yes. Like all children. One of them is still around somewhere, I remember a drawing of a carrot that I did, a coloring of just a carrot which amused me when I saw it. I was probably between the age of five and ten, somewhere in there. But this lameness came on me at the age of five.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh really? What caused that?

ANDREW DASBURG: I'd been here for a short time. It was tubercular hip, and for a time I wore braces and I walked with a limp. Now I walk with two canes. But it never impeded me because I walked many miles in a day, many miles. I once walked, I and a lady and some friends went from Boston to New York, that sort of thing. A lot of walking. But Halley's Comet, 1910, Arthur Lee and I guess Morgan Russell and I and a couple of other friends, we wanted to see the comet, but we couldn't see it in Paris, I suppose because of the glow or mist. So we went to the outer fortification of Paris, the old ones, and began walking. Well, we never did get to see the comet, but we walked all night long, stopped occasionally for coffee, and by eleven the next morning, I got back to my studio. We made the complete circuit. I mention this in relation to my hip.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Someone told me the other day that you'd taken a walking trip in Europe even, at one point, going around from place to place.

ANDREW DASBURG: In Europe? That would have been later, during the war, 1940, when I and some friends - - John Reed - - wanted to, well there was the bombardment of Ranz, which was sensational at the time. Now, of course, you mention it and most people don't know where Ranz is. But it was not designed as a walking trip, it was our going out there where we never got because we were sent back to Paris under arrest for being where we had no business to be. [laughter] So I wouldn't call it a walking trip as such, just walking all day long, on our feet.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you come to know John Reed?

ANDREW DASBURG: This was about 19 - - you don't mind the dates, do you? I have to think - - 1913, I've forgotten the other painters, a small group of us sat at McDowell Club in New York. I dropped in there one afternoon to take a look. I noticed another chap in the room who was also looking at what we had there, so one of us made a comment to the other and we got talking. It was John Reed, he introduced himself. When he left, he invited me to one of Mabel Dodge's evenings which would come up that following week. And that's how I happened to meet John, who I got to know to know very well, John and Louise Brives, dear friends of mine. That's how that came about. I can almost say that the meeting in there that afternoon, is the reason I am here today. It is. The sequence of events. You see, Mabel, they separated and she married Maurice Stern, and I was very fond of her and she was really kind and very dear to me, invited me and Robert Edmond Jones and Mack, no Reed - - no, get this straight: Maurice Sterne had been working on the island of Bali, and he was disenchanted in New York yet he couldn't seem to adjust to his work for some reason or other - - this is 1917. Someone said perhaps he'd be interested in the American Indians, more primitive people. He came out and anyway, Mabel also wanted to see the American Indian with Maurice who, as I say, must have come to Taos, of course he came to Taos. One morning, Robert Edmond Jones and I, who had rooms opposite each other - - he was, you know - - received telegrams from her: "Taos is a wonderful place. You've got to come. I am sending you tickets. Go to such and such an agency and bring me a cook." So we did. [laughs] So you see, the sequence, meeting John Reed at the McDowell Club began the whole, brought me here. Of course in 1917, what is now Taos didn't exist at that time but was a beautiful, isolated Spanish town, primitive town.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was it like in those days out here?

ANDREW DASBURG: Well, there was only a dirt road between Taos and down as far as Espinola where they'd put some gravel on, the Santa Fe. For those 25 miles, you had the gravel. In those days, Taos was a great simplicity. There was none of all this hallybaloo of advertising going on or any of that sort of thing. There were other painters here who had come before, you know, like Cloust and Bloominshine and Sharpe and those earlier painters. They were here. But there were only two or three cars at the time in Taos; there was a good deal of horseback riding and wagons, mostly transportation was by wagon. In those days, the Indians still walked on their feet, they didn't ride going back and forth. They dressed somewhat differently, they wore these large, white sheets that they wrapped around, which you no longer see.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When did they stop wearing those, would you say?

ANDREW DASBURG: Well, I suppose it was a gradual casting off of that dress. Didn't come all at once on announcement, they just disappeared. The women still wore buckskin boots that they used to make, which were beautiful, and their walking was different. It was kind of a shuffling walk, you know. You can still see, of course, there are photographs of the period, many, but it's all changed so much it isn't the same place. It's a town on top of a town now.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was the great appeal for you to stay here?

ANDREW DASBURG: I suppose the spaciousness of it, the simplicity. You see, I had been living in Woodstock, yes, at the Art Students' League. I was given a scholarship to a summer school which they were just starting. That must have been about 1907, and Birge Harrison was the instructor. See, for a boy who lived on the Mosel out in the open all the time, to suddenly be confined like, on West 38th Street which at that time was called Hell's Kitchen. There were only two places to go: backyard or out on the roof. That confinement. So you can imagine being out in the open country a few years later, what that did to one. Now one may think, "Oh, Indian. Kids like Indians," but they were not that conspicuous here at the time. It wasn't that reason. It was, I think, the immensity, the openness of everything that touched me very deeply. I loved it and came back year after year. It's only in the last, oh, number of years, say 20, that I've been here all the time, stayed all the time. I used to go back and come out once a year here for a number of years. But always in touch with it. Well, call it the contrast to New York. Of course, New York had other aspects.

PAUL CUMMINGS: One thing that interests me a great deal are your days at the Art Students' League as a student. How did you pick that as a school to go to?

ANDREW DASBURG: I imagine it must have been picked for me because as a kid, with my lameness, I went to a school for crippled children in New York which probably no longer exists, an industrial school doing carving and making things, decorating perhaps boxes and burning the design on a mosaic. I think one of the teachers thought I had talent, as I was growing up thought I should go to an art school or something of that nature. I know that happened.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you like the League? Were these your first kind of professional classes there?

ANDREW DASBURG: Oh, yes, that was my first contact with the art world in the world. Yes, they put me in an

antique class that they had, and the instructor was Kenyon Cox.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you find him as an instructor?

ANDREW DASBURG: Well, I was just thinking, "Was the man well?" I don't think he was well, he was awfully fatigued. We had these lovely antique replicas, plastic casts, from which you drew, and he would come in and give each one of us a criticism. He'd say practically nothing but pick up your charcoal and the drawing that you had labored over so carefully, said, "I think I'd move this over," and a blackest, blackest line he'd draw around. He never talked about what we were looking at, you know. I think he was probably not well at that time. When I was given a scholarship to go to Woodstock to work in the summer class there, he asked me to come to his studio - he was a decorator, you know, Kenyon Cox. I haven't seen anything reproduced of his in many, many years.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It comes around every so often, you know. It's interesting.

ANDREW DASBURG: And he gave me advice: "Keep on, keep on trying."

PAUL CUMMINGS: What about Dumont? You studied with him for a little.

ANDREW DASBURG: Then, yes, Frank Vincent Dumont, that's where I graduated from the antique class up into the line class. He was a much more alert and alive person at the time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you like the atmosphere of the League? Was it very competitive, was it very relaxed?

ANDREW DASBURG: Oh, I don't think it was so very competitive. Of course, it's natural for students to compete with each other. You try against someone whose work is awfully good, and you're going to do better than he does. Probably these thoughts pass through your mind. But I think on the whole, beginning where I did and seeing the Greek replicas of Greek sculpture, was psychologically important, what you were looking at because you realize later when you first got into a life class that there was something in the antique class that the life class didn't have. In other words, you didn't reason it out - at least I didn't at the time, probably too young to reason it out, but the beauty of the Greek statue, it gradually entered into your psychic, without you realizing it. But in the life class, it presented something else, and that was the light on the model which you hadn't particularly thought about, and the movement of the model. All these thoughts which entered your mind. And I also found, later thinking back on it, that gradually a freedom came, a freedom of expression in what you were doing that you didn't have before. Probably came through the living model, you know. After all, she moved about. Might stand still for 20 minutes, but you did see her in sequences which you didn't statuary, it was stationary. There used to be a panel and you'd go, you'd cross the room and in the antique class and what should be for the vertical lines of the panel, I carefully watched to see where they touched the figure here and touched the figure there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Sounds like you used a system, almost.

ANDREW DASBURG: In other words, you use it as a crutch.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was Harrison like as a teacher? Could you work with him?

ANDREW DASBURG: Oh, Birge Harrison, yes, I did work with him. I was in, that's what the scholarship was for, was to work with Birge Harrison at Woodstock. He was a man who liked moods, the moods of nature, moonlight, gray days, the subdued aspects of nature, I think, he would emphasize and I don't know, suddenly I guess it was kind of a boyish revolt in me, and I formed a little small group of us, and we called ourselves the Sunflower Club.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I was going to ask you what that was all about. How did you become that?

ANDREW DASBURG: We can't go out in the moonlight and gray days. [laughs]

PAUL CUMMINGS: I love it, marvelous. How did you like getting out to Woodstock? That was in the summer, wasn't it?

ANDREW DASBURG: Yes, a few months in the summer. I, of course, loved it. I liked the country, always have, particularly a kid confined in New York as I was at the time. Only on Sundays, sometimes, my mother would take me over to New Jersey, and we'd go out and pick dandelions, that sort of thing. She was a seamstress, my mother, and worked for a French dress maker, went as I can recall, she was a - I don't know whether they call them "sleevisists" or what, but she always made the sleeves, shoulder puffs, that sort of thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you know Robert Henri? Was he around?

ANDREW DASBURG: Robert Henri, later. That came, I worked with Robert Henri, that was after Sunshine Club,

the revolt, started. I worked with Henri a few months in a night class. George Bellows was still there, and the year must have been about 1908, '09, because 1910, in the spring, we went to Paris, my wife and I – we were married in 1910. My son, whom you met, stems from that marriage. She was a sculptress, Grace Mott Johnson.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where did you meet her? Was she at the League?

ANDREW DASBURG: Woodstock, in Woodstock I first met her. And on some days in New York, my mother often took me up to the Metropolitan Museum to see the pictures. I remember that very vividly. Then one Sunday, there was a very strange painting there which fascinated me, its strangeness. It was the first Monet that was shown at the Metropolitan. I only learned that later, you see. This was one of the, a bridge across the water-lily pond. That's the first Monet I ever saw, the first bit of modern painting that I ever saw.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I'm curious. As a student, if you can remember generally, what did you talk about or what artistry were you interested in when you were going to the League.

ANDREW DASBURG: You mean at the League?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, at the League or ones that you saw at the museums or heard about, talked about.

ANDREW DASBURG: Oh, yes, and also by, well, of course it's a ladder in which the rungs change. We got to know that there were such things as art dealers, pictures to be seen, you see. Mike Beth is a name that's..., and Martin Tross.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Daniels?

ANDREW DASBURG: Daniels came later, yes. Daniels is much, much later. Actually, I was thinking about the years just before going to Paris, you see. And also reproductions were very important, some were such as my circumstances were. But there were always little lifts you got, a lift here and a lift there. Things were brought to your attention. I don't want to give you the impression that I didn't think well of Harrison, I did. But his moods, painting moods I think were.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was Henri like as an instructor?

ANDREW DASBURG: Oh well, Henri was immediately illuminating, what he brought your attention to, what he had to say about it. It wasn't just talk confined to what you did, but expanded from there into art in general. Oh, yes, he's a very stimulating person, Henri. Of course, he comes some years later, just before 1910. I think perhaps a month or two before we went to Paris. And of course he had such an able person working there, George Bellows, which in itself was a lift.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was Bellows regarded as by the students?

ANDREW DASBURG: Well you know, there weren't many students in that evening class of Henri, there were probably a dozen of us.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's all? I would have thought he would have more students.

ANDREW DASBURG: Well, it happened to be a night class and well, that limited it. I should say about a dozen, maybe 15 of us, fewer. After all, Henri was regarded as a radical by many of his contemporaries. Difficult for us to think of him as such after all that's occurred.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you think of him as a radical in those days as a student?

ANDREW DASBURG: Those words didn't have any dominance in any way over me. You made your comparisons with what you had seen in these – as I say, I'd seen at the Metropolitan, Sargeant, comparisons, but it was an atmosphere of freedom, and atmosphere of turning away from something that was nearby. It wasn't spelled out for you, but the conservatism of the Art Students' League in those days – of course you heard about Henri or Chase was another name at the time, he painted fish. I remember his painting of a fish for the class at the Art Students' League. Didn't think of him as a radical but an awfully good baseball player. [laughter]

PAUL CUMMINGS: You spent quite a time at the League, didn't you? Two or three years?

ANDREW DASBURG: Well, I must, I'm trying now to recall whether it was 1906 or 1907 that I first went to the League. I must have been there about three years, three winter sessions. Of course, the summer school was also part of the League.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Were there many of the same students that went up to Woodstock in the summer?

ANDREW DASBURG: No, very few, just a few. No, the summer school brought in students from the outside pretty much. You learned quite a bit from what some of them brought, the knowledge, I mean their experience – not what they can do but what they'd seen and had done and all these things together. Well, there is a division there of conservatism and radicalism, but it wasn't pronounced or spelled out. But I suppose it always went on, it must have, perhaps even in Henri's day as a student – not knowing where he worked as a student, whether he worked in New York or not or went to the Art Students' League. And then they had the National Academy exhibitions. They were fascinating. The first genuine.... comes to my mind is a Winslow Homer which hung right in the middle of the large gallery as you walked in opposite you, a boat with the mast torn off it and a Negro lying back. You've seen it, probably. I remember that so vividly, you know. There were the rank in the academicians.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So lots and lots of different levels.

ANDREW DASBURG: Oh, yeah. But when I speak of the National Academy Show, that's the first thing that always comes in my mind, that Winslow Homer which really rocked me to the bottom.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Fascinating that it's all very specific works of art that people remember, at least the artists that I've interviewed. Like you described that one and the Monet, all very specific.

ANDREW DASBURG: Well, that Monet, the Water-lilies and the bridge, at first you were looking at it, you didn't know what it was all about, you know. The change of color, the change of the atmosphere. This is before, I speak of that picture before I ever went to art school, but it fascinated me, and that's what it turned out to be. Now if there had been a Monet at the Metropolitan before that, I just didn't happen to see it because the only time I'd go to the Metropolitan was when my mother would take me. I recall, too, being fascinated by – of course a painting had been pointed out to me – immense detail of one of them, I can't recall its name, I think it was a picture of a chess player or something of the kind. But the detail. It had been pointed out to me, and of course you thought that was a really great accomplishment.

PAUL CUMMINGS: One thing that you mentioned a little while ago was the Sunflower Club that you had. Who belonged to that and how did you get it together?

ANDREW DASBURG: There was Jimmy Wardwell, his name was, he painted, and he kind of egged me on into – I had painted a cornfield, shucked – this was as a student, of course, I'm speaking of my first years in which, I don't know, I hadn't emerged, and I think even now when I see a photograph of it – I know one exists, I don't know whether my son still has it – painting that little landscape, I was completely absorbed in it. Saturday morning came along when Harrison would review our work of the week. My cornfield was up on the wall and of course I admired it. Harrison came along and he ignored it. I think having ignored it because it was not a gray day or a moonlight, that was the reason. That's how our little Sunflower Club got started as a revolt, a revolt against the moods of moonlight and gray days, the Wislitleerian moods which they probably were.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What did you want to replace that with though? More vital kind of –

ANDREW DASBURG: Well, that was, you know, sun on corn on corn shucking.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So brighter?

ANDREW DASBURG: Brighter, yes. I wasn't thinking of it at the time in terms of joy but it was my unconscious joy in doing it, you see, that led to that tiny bit of revolt that Jimmy Wardwell encouraged.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who else belonged to that little group?

ANDREW DASBURG: Oh. let's see. I've forgotten whether, possibly Conrad Kramer had arrived about that time in Woodstock – you may have seen some of his work, his photography – and who were the others?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was McPhee up there then or not?

ANDREW DASBURG: McPhee came in 1910. I first met McPhee in late 1910 when I returned to Paris, and he was the first one that I collared and taught Cezanne to. I was at that time an evangelist. I had seen my first Cezanne accidentally. I've forgotten the name of the street, I can't recall that, but I was walking, stroll over to where I lived in the quarter there near Marie Baba, when in a window at street level, here was this landscape that just fascinated me, just did that to me, halted me. I walked in the door and looked through the door, glass door, and there were more paintings he did in there. So the old gentleman inside asked me in which I did. I was overwhelmed. Something happened like a bright light coming on. He saw my interest, that these things were making me a bit intoxicated, so he invited me to the back room, and he showed me a number of larger ones, the Cardplayers. When I got back over to where I was living near the Café de Do, I saw my friends there, Martha Lee and Morgan Russell and a number of others. I told them what had happened. They said, "Why you damn fool, you

were with Vuillard." Well, I didn't know who Vuillard was and I'd never heard of Cezanne. That really opened a big door for me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you go see them again?

ANDREW DASBURG: Oh, yes, gosh.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have you thought over the years, what it was that you responded to in those works?

ANDREW DASBURG: Analyzed? The compulsion, effect on me? Well of course I've thought about it many times, but with the background, you might say, Birge Harrison's, and suddenly the blinds being opened, here is what turned out to be Cezanne - I'd never heard the name before, no one ever mentioned it to me, though Monet I had seen, you see, on one of my mother's Sunday pilgrimages, with her, the Water-lilies, which intrigued me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you go to Paris then to study, or was this to live there for a number of years? What was your real reason?

ANDREW DASBURG: There was no clear intention. We wanted to go to Paris, people were talking Paris and what was going on in Paris and the Impressionists, and it was a thing one did. One went to Paris in those days. I don't know whether one goes - I don't think in the same sense because practically all the instructors that I had, had been in Paris and studied in Paris. But that is not necessarily so today.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's true, a lot of changes. You spent quite a few years in Paris, didn't you?

ANDREW DASBURG: Stayed in Paris until the fall and didn't go back to Paris until 1914.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where did you meet Morgan Russell and all these people?

ANDREW DASBURG: Morgan Russell I knew at the Art Students' League in New York, I met Lee at the Art Students' League in New York, that's where I first got to know them. I knew Morgan, 1907, 1908, in that period before he went to Paris. I think it was Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney's sculptress who made it possible for him, for Morgan, to go to Paris. It was through Morgan that I met Matisse. I believe Matisse had a class over there for a short time, and Morgan Russell was one of his students and they got to be friends. He asked Matisse one day if he could bring me over to his studio to look at his drawings which he did. He, himself, was at work - that is, Matisse. He had a little stand about as high as, I don't know, about three steps up. He put Jim Vaness' portfolio which we were looking through, while he - and of course I was watching him all the time, I was watching his drawings. Here was this large painting of his of a ring of dancers, and there was something about the shoulder of the central figure that apparently he didn't like. He took some cheesecloth and wiped it out, put the line down again. Well, I watched him do that two times, it may have been three. And that's the famous ring of dancers, you've seen them reproduced many times. He was working on one of those. Now, whether it was one that had been painted a year or two before, I don't know, if he was making a change in it or whether it was one that he painted entirely in 1910. All that I know about it is this one fragment, something about it that didn't fit into the rhythm that he had set in the entire composition. I thought of that many times. And of course, I enjoyed seeing his drawings, Matisse was a kindly person. Instead of slamming a door and saying, "Don't bother me," he made it possible for us to be there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's fantastic. People so rarely seem to do that. Did you find the French artists accessible other than Matisse? Were you able to meet them or see them, visit their studios?

ANDREW DASBURG: Not in their studios, but I met Picasso at the Steins', and a few other men of note. Picasso happened to be looking at a group of his own drawings that the Steins had collected, I assume. They were his drawings and he was looking at them when I was introduced to him when I first met him and liked him. And all these things at that time seemed to be perfectly normal. You didn't say, "Oh, who do you suppose I met? So and so, the great Matisse." That didn't exist in the atmosphere at the time, you see, all that greatness they were crowned with later.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you come to meet the Steins?

ANDREW DASBURG: I met the Steins, well I must have met them through Arthur Lee. He had been in Paris, was in Paris, and he had been to the Steins' before I got there. Or through Morgan. One or the other of those two. I think it was Arthur Lee that arranged it with Leo to bring me over there one evening. I went a number of times.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you like the gatherings that they had, their parties?

ANDREW DASBURG: You know, Leo liked to make definitions of esthetics, so that I was more interested in listening to Leo and his interesting conversation and disposition than I was in Gertrude. I was not a Gertrude -

worshipper. Most became later though Gertrude was the one who was more in the right than Leo was, I believe, esthetically. Yes, Leo was an interesting talker really.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you find that kind of atmosphere congenial to your own work that you were doing? The fact that there were all these writers and painters, sculptors and people together that you would see? But the fact that there was this mixed group, did you like that? Was it stimulating for you? Was it rewarding?

ANDREW DASBURG: It never bothered me, I was just focused on one thing, and that was the painting. What could be said about it? I don't want to say what I could learn about them, they had some very lovely Matisses, they also had some Cezannes, the Cezanne Bathers, which was a beautiful thing, you've seen reproductions many times. It was in a lively, very living and vivid atmosphere that was there. Of course, there were arguments that went on that one listened to. I remember one evening there when an Englishman, may have been a young student also, completely disagreeing with Leo. And then you took sides, of course. And I got to see the Duran Royal Collection and all. A very deep circle, everything fits together, you know. Now when you say Duran Royal, you separate them into millions, billions of people. But then it was all a matter of course.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did all this affect your ideas about what you wanted to do? Your own work? All of these people and seeing all of these - it's a very different kind of life from what was going on in New York.

ANDREW DASBURG: Oh, well, for a time you're pretty much lost. You didn't come back with an absolutely, positive idea that had been thoroughly analyzed, that was part of it. In other words, you'd have to step over to the right or the left and say, "This is me." But you were never the same again, you know. At least you thought you weren't.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you speak French?

ANDREW DASBURG: Very little. They spoke French at home, both French and German, but no, I couldn't have possibly have got into an intellectual conversation with a Frenchman. I wasn't that well informed. But these were periods of revelation, they were, things being revealed to you. Maybe revealed, but that didn't mean that you could create them. As a matter of fact, it kind of left you up in the air for a time between Birge Harrison and Cezanne.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You came back then to New York where you stayed for a few years, and then you went back to Paris again, right?

ANDREW DASBURG: In 1910 we went to Paris, and I was there until the late autumn. As I say, I was probably, must have bored a lot of people to death by talking Cezanne, talking Matisse, having met Picasso. But Cubism hadn't, I didn't hear the name Cubism until somewhat later. I don't think it had made the rounds. Polly Nair hadn't yet said, or maybe he hadn't been quoted, "It has a cubical aspect," speaking of a certain picture. Well that hung, that word Cubism of course, established a whole period of revolt. When I look back on it now, I think of how privileged I was that certain doors were opened to me. After all, you've got to think of the Hell's Kitchen background. It's quite a step from Hell's Kitchen to Matisse and Cezanne and the Steins. Fame added the credit to me, but things —

ANDREW DASBURG: Of course, I visited her home in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, where they lived. But some of these things that seem like decisions when you say, "when did you decide . . .," you just kind of, it was decided for you.

PAUL CUMMINGS: During the 1920's, you seem to have moved around quite a bit and I'm curious about some of the things. For example, the Carnegie jury in 1926.

ANDREW DASBURG: Oh, yes. It was at that time, I think McPhee had already been with Rand, and Eugene Spiker was showing at the Rand Gallery, and I was also asked by him to exhibit with him. It was during those few years that I met the Gordons there, and I was invited to be a juror with McPhee and with Eugene Spiker by Saint-Gaudens That would have been around 1928 or seven or eight. Yes, I have a photograph of that jury.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But how did you come to pick a John King painting which was so controversial then?

ANDREW DASBURG: Well, you know, that's a very interesting question. We were sitting there, the row of us - there must have been about eight or twelve of us, and these large Pittsburgh portraits were being brought out and shown. This is just the picture as I see it, and suddenly a little picture, some dancing Scottish boys was brought out, and I was gently illuminated and delighted by it. So I had the nerve to get up before this jury and talk them into letting me have that picture in the exhibition. [laughs] Well, I didn't think about it, I just did it. They silently agreed. [laughs] Must have taken a hell of a lot of nerve on my part, but I was quite a different chap then. But it delighted me. When we got through, St. Gordon's took me aside and said, "Are you serious about wanting that picture in the show?" And I said, "Well, the only way I can prove it to you is how much is it?"

He looked. It was \$75. So I bought it. But if you'd like to see a picture of that jury . . .

PAUL CUMMINGS: We have to look at that.

ANDREW DASBURG: John King made quite an impression. The picture I bought was the first picture he ever sold, and he sold quite a few after that. Because of the publicity connected with the story. Better just having fun. I guess that's why.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I want to ask you about one or two thousand other things. In the Armory Show 1913, you had a piece of sculpture -

ANDREW DASBURG: There was a sculpture. I tried to do that, and it's the only piece of sculpture I ever did, and it was this plaster of Paris, something he had cast. I asked him if I could cut it which he was glad - we were very close friends. So I carved a head and it must have been an awful-looking thing. At the time, I called it Lucifer, looked like Lucifer. At the Armory Show, they put it right up at the entrance as you came in, and here was this head on a stand. Then I had a few landscapes in the show, too.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who selected you for that exhibition? How were you picked for it?

ANDREW DASBURG: I think it was Joe Day that when he first suggested to me, "Wouldn't you like to show?" telling me about this exhibition that they were working on. And so I said yes and showed them what I had. I think there were about three landscapes and Mr. Lucifer whom I destroyed after the exhibition.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You never had any desire to make more sculpture after that?

ANDREW DASBURG: Not particularly, no. It's another one of those impulses, you know, at the moment where you . . .

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was it like being in that exhibition and being involved with all at that point?

ANDREW DASBURG: Well, I tell you, there is a lift to that show that, for me at least, an elevation. Of course the show very soon, the nucleus of it, became the Duchamp, The Woman Walking Down Stairs, the Myo sculptures - for me. There was a contrast of spirits and what you saw, dreary relief from gallery to gallery in New York at the time just before the show, and these things that had an elevation, a lift, an expression which you saw in no other place because there was no other place like what went on at that Armory Show, you see, it was singular and isolated by itself.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What do you think of it after all these years? Has it taken on any special meaning for you as an activity or a point in history having been in that exhibition? All the influence that's exerted?

ANDREW DASBURG: Well, I tell you, for me every time I think back on it, there's an elevation of spirit. Since then, of course, we've had many other things that are just as significant. Damn, but its significance then was very singular. I don't know that even in Paris, perhaps, such a group of things had been brought together.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's true, the first time such a wide selection of work from so many places. How fantastic. What affect did it have as far as the artists you knew? What were they saying about it at the time?

ANDREW DASBURG: Well, at the time, everything under the sun was said about it. [laughs] Nothing that was left unsaid. But again, I think for those who responded - well I'm thinking of chaps like Mike Swaberg, fellows like that, who weren't already deeply immersed as Mike Swaberg was.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I've often thought that many people were kind of confused by it, artists who were a little bit older rejected it or -

ANDREW DASBURG: Oh, yes, of course. There was as much, perhaps a good deal more rejection than acceptance by the generality of the artists at the time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I read one place about, somebody had written something about you and they said about 1916 - which would be a few years after the Armory Show - you began to lose interest in abstraction, abstract painting. Is that true?

ANDREW DASBURG: No. What happened was, I think the first non-figurative painting I did of which there is any record, is in that book Mabel Lewhon - Mabel Dodge, whichever Mabel you want in his story - Moving in Checkers is the title of the book, and she mentions this. That was about the first or at the period, I don't recall, a few other things of the same nature, in which she wanted a picture that existed in itself without reference to anything else seen. In other words, a picture which was completely itself and not a picture of but a thing in itself. That was my idea. In 1916, McDonal Rice and Morgan Russell - who'd been doing somewhat similar things which

they'd called synchronisms – McDonal Rice's brother, Stanton I think his name was, he was editor of one of those magazines, organized a show in the interest of his brother and Morgan, I think more in the interests of his brother than in Morgan's interests. We were having lunch one day, Morgan and I – we call him Charlie; his name is really Charles Morgan Russell – Morgan said to me, "I am through with synchronism." And I said, "I feel pretty much the same with what I have been doing." I never considered myself, I don't know why, I'm sometimes associated with them. The first non-figurative picture of Morgan's that I saw was in 1914. 1910 when I was in Paris, he was still doing the same as Cezanne, apples, as many did at the time. Now, whether his distress with synchronism at the time was due to his sensing that the whole thing was a rig-up for Rice, I don't know. But that statement he made at lunch. He said, "I am through with synchronism." And I said, "Well I feel pretty much the same with what I have been doing," which was improvisations. What I had been doing was improvisations. Now, a synchronism just means "with color," doesn't illuminate what they were really doing. Yes, they were doing it with color. So was everybody else.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What do you mean, "improvising" that you were doing? In terms of what?

ANDREW DASBURG: In other words, you made your own shapes, your own depths. Your own projections in painting. You invented what you were doing. In other words, an invention of your own and not a replica, something you had seen, any recognizable things, but independent of an object, you just did independent of the visual familiarities.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why did that not sustain itself for you?

ANDREW DASBURG: Well, as I remember my feeling at the time was that I didn't have, that my sack that I was carrying was pretty nearly empty, that I was not inventive. That was my own feeling. A few of them still exist, a few were reproduced of what I did at the time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So they're still around someplace?

ANDREW DASBURG: Oh, yes, yes. Let's see, I have got, I don't know whether I've got a reproduction or photograph of one of them here or not.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Would some of them be in that retrospective that's being put together now for Santa Fe?

ANDREW DASBURG: Is there to be a retrospective?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Seems to be something going on, I hear.

ANDREW DASBURG: Well anyway – Oh yes, there's one in New York, I have his address. Of the painting, not the photograph. There are several still in existence.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How do you think the landscape in this part of the country has influenced your paintings and the drawings particularly?

ANDREW DASBURG: Oh, I think it has. I think it undoubtedly influenced me because my son who you met, brought up a couple of things that I'd given him about 1930, and I'm contrasting now between Woodstock and that later time. I think spatially, dramatically, the visual drama has influenced me quite a lot. I won't say consistently.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Today I was looking at some drawings of 1973-4 at the gallery, and looking very closely at the paper, it seems that you draw and then erase lines, there's a lot of working on something that ends up looking very simple and very sparse. Seems to be a lot of changing and moving and selecting with your work.

ANDREW DASBURG: Well, that's the way the work is going right at this moment.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The way the lines, they're much kind of sharper, the planes are very much sharper than say the 1940's or early '50's, from the photographs

ANDREW DASBURG: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They seem to be so much clearer in a way.

ANDREW DASBURG: Well what is it you're asking about?

PAUL CUMMINGS: I'm just curious about, how did this evolve? As an idea, or did it evolve from your just looking at the landscape, thinking about the buildings?

ANDREW DASBURG: Well me and it in combination, I think [laughs] . You can't credit all to one.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I was very intrigued by those and how they've become so spartan but tight in a way. Quite fascinating. Do you work a great deal in the last few years, or do you do a little work?

ANDREW DASBURG: I try to work every day, prey constantly. The work right now is going through a change. It's time I take much more - I like. And I think instinct perhaps dominates more than intellect.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you do most of the work in front of what you're drawing or do you make rough sketches and then work in the studio?

ANDREW DASBURG: Oh, no, I don't start out with the idea, "This is just a quick, rough sketch" because that immediately implies you've got it all in your purse but you're not taking the trouble to show it to you now.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But do you work on the drawings after you get back?

ANDREW DASBURG: Oh yes, I do, oh yes. No, well, it depends upon what your response is when you look at it. Sometimes you think you've done one thing when you later discover 24 hours later you've done something that you didn't realize. That is an out sort of thing. I'm not speaking of a realistic drawing. Well, you can't always tell what is hidden in your vision. But in the last few weeks, a change has come into what I've been doing. I isn't an intellectual change, it's a change of revelation to oneself, and it isn't as yet, nor do I know if it ever will be, completely, logically clear.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What do you mean revelation? Because you've used that word a number of times. Do you mean discovering something?

ANDREW DASBURG: Yes, suddenly -

PAUL CUMMINGS: Like illumination?

ANDREW DASBURG: - see it, like illumination, see it and respond to it. That is in the combination of these opposites that you're working through, harmonizing opposites.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How do you mean that? That's very interesting. "Harmonizing opposites." What are the opposites in terms of?

ANDREW DASBURG: Well, one panel moving to the right, perhaps, and another panel moving to the left, trying to find the medium between which would justify both because they deny each other. And yet bringing them into some kind of harmony.

PAUL CUMMINGS: One thing that I've noticed in the photos and the drawings that I saw today is that there's an incredible kind of harmony in the drawings in terms of, I guess, balance, but also the kind of light that's there.

ANDREW DASBURG: Well, I don't believe that if it can be reduced to a formula, it will never be any good, you know. I think there's probably the missing link, there will always be.

PAUL CUMMINGS: One thing that has interested me in some ways is, since you've lived here for so long, and you've lived here without leaving basically for the last quite a few years, from what you've said before, I don't think you were very attracted to life in New York. Do you have any -

ANDREW DASBURG: The life in New York and one's work are often two different things. By the way, is there any of the avant-garde left as an organization?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Pretty fragmented now. Pretty fragmented.

ANDREW DASBURG: Is Pollock the dominant figure in the group?

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, I would think it's changed.

ANDREW DASBURG: Who?

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's changing, yeah. Newer influences, there's a lot of interest in sculpture and sort of philosophy and different ideas, a lot of non-visual ideas.

ANDREW DASBURG: I've been so out of touch with what has been going on in New York that the only thing I get is through the art magazines.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you feel that that's to your advantage, that you don't keep in touch with what's going on there? Does it interest you or not?

ANDREW DASBURG: No, I haven't thought of it in those terms at all. For me, at least, my very recent work, it's undergoing a change and I can't see clearly exactly what it is. Nor do I want to pin it down theoretically, only that there is a desire for a harmonized conflict.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know, it's always intrigued me, that one of the things about Taos is that so many painters and writers have lived here for so long. Has that been an interesting milieu for you? Have you been associated with many of these people?

ANDREW DASBURG: You mean the people who have been writing, like Frank Waters?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh yes, and Lawrence and all the people that have been here over the years. Or have you not been – some of them you've been close to, but I mean –

ANDREW DASBURG: Do you mean, "Have they had an influence?" Not consciously because the fields are so varied, so contrasted. I mean, between painting and the philosophy of, say, Lawrence's time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But in terms of a social group, have you found it stimulating, living here with these people? Or doesn't that interest you particularly?

ANDREW DASBURG: It doesn't interest me particularly, no. They are other human beings, I either like them or I don't like them. When we say I don't like them, that's not a fair term, but I'm indifferent. There's no all togetherness here. [laughs]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think that's because so many of them are individualistic or is that just the way it happens to be?

ANDREW DASBURG: Like who?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, like Raymond Johnson was here for a while and Sloan and Marin and Hartley and all these people who have circulated through here.

ANDREW DASBURG: Hartley I knew and admired; Sloan lived in Santa Fe, I didn't really get to know him.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What about somebody like Mabel Dodge who you had such nice things to say about and who wrote about you in various pieces and particularly the book you mentioned? How about her in terms of a friend or intellectual –

ANDREW DASBURG: She's a very dear friend of mine to whom I'm greatly indebted.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I can't get a picture of her from the things that I've read about her. She seems to be lots of different people, depending on who's talking about her.

ANDREW DASBURG: I know, it's all yea or nay.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was the quality that sort of allowed her to do all these things, move around? I can't understand if she was –

ANDREW DASBURG: She was independent, the freedom.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But the ability to do it.

ANDREW DASBURG: I know she hated status. She was more interested in what was to be coming than what was being done or what had been done.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was she an intellectual person in a way, or was she a sensuous person? It's hard to figure out what her appeal to some of the people was.

ANDREW DASBURG: When you say sensual, do you mean instinctive?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Possibly, yeah. She did have a sense of, at least from what I've heard –

ANDREW DASBURG: Primarily, she had an independence. As I said to you, as I recall what seemed to interest her most was what would be coming, not what had already been accomplished.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Just to talk about the art market for a bit which we haven't said anything about, the selling of the works of art, have you found that a problem living here? Has it been easy, has it been difficult, is it something you've never really been involved with? You haven't pursued or been pursued, or is that your wish? For example, I asked the price of drawings today, and I thought the prices were extremely modest considering

the quality and your reputation and all of those things. In fact, I was quite startled. I wondered if that's been your desire to maintain it that way or is it just . . .

ANDREW DASBURG: No, I've had no, I take my work such as it is, to the Mission Gallery and hope that they can get something reasonably reasonable for it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So in other words, they've done a fairly good job for you then?

ANDREW DASBURG: Yes, yes, yes they have.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You've not had a New York dealer for a while, have you?

ANDREW DASBURG: No, I haven't.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Is there any reason for that or you just . . .

ANDREW DASBURG: I've, for some reason or other, had no particular desire to. I think I would find it difficult if I went to New York now. It may be - no, I really would like to see the best of things that are going on, I'd like to see what the Metropolitan Museum is like and the Modern Museum which I never got to see, see what the vitality of the things that are dominating, the most interests.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There's so much, it's very difficult to keep up with it all.

ANDREW DASBURG: It must be, particularly today.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When you think in 1930 there were 25 or 30 galleries in New York, now there's 350 or 400.

ANDREW DASBURG: Like this place. I remember when there was one art gallery here in Taos. Now they say there're about 80 in all.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you have any interests in other things? Do you read? Are you interested in music? Or do you spend most of your time working?

ANDREW DASBURG: Am I interested in music? Yes, I love music, of course, but I have very little opportunity of hearing much music here. As for reading, I've been very much out of touch. It's a matter of time - I haven't got the time to do more than my own day's work.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you have a regular working schedule? Do you work a certain time every day?

ANDREW DASBURG: Oh yeah, you become habituated. But no conscious program.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The mornings, afternoons?

ANDREW DASBURG: No. I try to work both mornings and afternoons. Of late, I haven't worked in color, that is what I'd hoped to be doing right now, but with this trouble I'm having in the last few months, hip and shoulder - this is my painting arm, it's moving more freely this afternoon than it has.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you still do watercolors so much or not?

ANDREW DASBURG: I have worked in watercolor. I've worked mainly in pastels, expected to be working in oil now but this hip and bursitis has interfered, so I do the best I can. I'm working in black and white. And in pastels, I will be working, that is small enough.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How do you select things that you will draw? Is it just things that you've seen frequently or do they just, that particular building or landscape -

ANDREW DASBURG: Well, I select them when I've seen them a number of times. Both intellectually and emotionally I feel, I always use the term "completely satisfied," but I take some pleasure in it. If I have no element of interest or pleasure, why I might as well bring . . . [laughs]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Are there particular areas around here, the mountains, that you've drawn over and over and over?

ANDREW DASBURG: Yes, I have done of late, up in... Particularly right now I'm working on the south side of it. It interested me because it's more the way Taos used to be than it is now. Going up this highway here to Taos, I don't say that the material which is there if you want to use it, perhaps will justify itself, but it isn't for me. It isn't a kind of thing - I'm thinking of this highway from here to Taos.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, it's getting pretty filled up with signs and motels and one thing and the other.

ANDREW DASBURG: All that sort of thing all together. I don't think, if the signs are usable, use them, and they are for someone else, they just don't happen to be for me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I was thinking today of some of the things, and so many of the works of yours that I've seen seem to be buildings and landscapes. They're not so often of people, although I've seen a few marvelous portraits.

ANDREW DASBURG: Yeah, my landscape is unpopulated – or depopulated if you like.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But I mean, there are not many paintings or drawings that I've seen of people. There are occasional portraits.

ANDREW DASBURG: No, I haven't done any in the last couple of years since I have the cataract operation in my right eye which turned out – fortunately – very well.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have you over the years done many portraits of people? I don't remember seeing many.

ANDREW DASBURG: Ann, will you hand me that portrait of Bonnie the Indian, 1927, I think of Taos Indians.

MAN'S VOICE: How about the picture of Cecil?

ANDREW DASBURG: Oh, Lefty.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Ah, now who is this?

ANDREW DASBURG: It was painted, that's Cecil Waldmen, Professor Waldmen's wife. Well, it was painted, she sat for it, for the Cookman Company, her father's company.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That was painted when? In the '20s?

ANDREW DASBURG: Well, the governor – let's have a cup of coffee.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There is a portrait of someone called Judson Smith which I've seen many times recently. Who was Judson Smith?

ANDREW DASBURG: He lived in Woodstock, he painted, he's well known there. He's later than McPhee, of course, and Eugene Spiker and Bellows and the rest of them. But for me, he's always had a Satanic look.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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