



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Paul Georges,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Paul Georges on 28 December 1965. The interview was conducted by Bruce Hooten for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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

Interview

[Informal chatter and child reading and singing until 5 min. 36 seconds into the recording.]

PAUL GEORGES: Well, let's make the Archives of American Art. I want Lisette to say something here. So, otherwise—

BRUCE HOOTON: what do you think about Paul's work, Lisette?

[They laugh]

PG: Say something.

LISETTE GEORGES: [Laughs.] I said something before.

BH: What did you say?

PG: She's being mild? What did you say?

BH: How do you feel about always being painted nude and pregnant?

PG: She's talking very quietly now. She should talk a little louder.

LG: I'm so sorry.

PG: Bring that thing over here.

BH: We'll pick it up.

[Loud noise]

LG: Why don't you kiss me? [inaudible] I always enjoy that.

BH: You mean for the archives? Somebody or other?

LG: That's right, for the Archives.

PG: You can't see it in here. What good will it do?

BH: It's in 3D.

LG: Don't you see? The kiss should be preserved. One of your kisses should be preserved.

PG: Turn this thing off!

LG: One of your kisses should be preserved forever!

[They laugh.]

PG: That is pretty good. Not bad, the story.

BH: That is pretty good. I think that is worth the—

PG: What's it worth?

[They laugh.]

PG: How long does that work? [Referring to recorder.]

BH: That works forever.

PG: Not forever.

BH: I sat down with [Philip] Pavia. We sat down for three hours, and I got absolutely cross. You heard the tape. I was actually sitting there, batting away, one after the other. It went on for three hours. Although he was really interested in talking about Art.

LG: What did he say?

BH: He was very good. I think I told you. We talked about the Surrealists and about the Waldorf. And he felt that they really broke the power of the Surrealists. And I think he is right about that. I mean, they were the chic, kind of, you know, Dolocher [phonetic], Tchelitchew, Max Ernst, all of that crap. There were the elegant, uptown—

PG: Oh, the Archives of Art and Politics.

[They laugh.]

BH: No, but I mean, it's true. That they did— I think he is right.

PG: Surrealism was a broken formal statement when I first met it, and I believe that you believe—

BH: No, I thought he was very good. He said wonderful things. [Aristodimos] Kaldis and [Landes] Lewitin used to fight all the time.

PG: They still do.

LG: Don't they still?

BH: I know. They would come to the Waldorf and they would start screaming at each other, and Kaldis considered all the Renaissance Italians a bunch of fairies and [Willem] de Kooning would pop up: "Fuck you. Michelangelo was the greatest artist in the world." You know, this is a—

PG: Well, I think it is very interesting, it all that comes under the heading of Abstract Expressionism, because half of those people really weren't exactly, like de Kooning, de Kooning is one of the most important people in figurative art in America today. He is one of those people that, when he became more figurative, hundreds of people became more figurative. When he became less figurative, hundreds of people became less figurative. So, it really isn't quite fair. They don't deserve the acclaim, quite—

BH: Well, I mean—

PG: What is a figurative artist? There are a lot of baloney figurative artists.

BH: I don't know. I mean, I don't know how it began. It has been going on, as you said, from far back, a long time. But—

PG: I think it would really be more to be in the tradition of themes rather than the figurative. There are iconoclasts and un-iconoclasts. People that believe— There were people that believed, it has been going on for a long time. There are all kinds of iconoclasts that really damned, damned ancient art.

BH: What did you learn from Abstract Expressionism? I mean, you came out of the war, when I was a little younger. I was out of the South then, going to art school. I was seven something like that. You came out of the war and—

PG: But that was all there was to learn. That's what learned out of. That was everything there was to learn.

BH: Was that the first school you went to? Hofmann, or you went to Paris first?

PG: I went to the University of Oregon first, where I learned something really like the Bauhaus, which is close to something like Abstract Expressionism, if you think that [inaudible]. It was really like, it was very much like Bauhaus. And I came— Then I went to Hofmann from there. And curiously enough, the guy that taught me the Bauhaus— I would go— he taught me the Bauhaus—like theme, but it really wasn't Bauhaus at all, it was something he invented it all by himself. It was like man who came down from the man who came out of the woods, having invented the typewriter in 1945.

BH: Who was that?

PG: But it was too late.

BH: Who was that?

PG: It doesn't make any difference who he was. He was too late. This guy invented the Bauhaus in 1945.

BH: You went under the G.I. Bill.

PG: Yes, the University of Oregon. And I went there to be, to do the right thing in my life, and I ended up by studying Art. And then— but the guy who sent me to Hofmann was not the person who I liked the best, which was also interesting, that somehow, well, he wasn't interested. And really, I just said I want to go to school in New York and see what is going on there. And he said, oh, you can go to Hofmann. This other guy, not the guy that I liked. The other guy, had no idea really of what was going on. And he also thought—

BH: In '45, wasn't he known? In '47 Pollock was known too.

PG: Yes. They were all known.

BH: Not by any big shows that might have been [inaudible].

PG: They had been known for a long time, they had been really known from '45 more or less

BH: Not by everybody.

PG: Not by everybody but still known. But even Pollock was a figurative artist.

BH: Yeah, early.

PG: Late too. He was very figurative. But I don't think— . Figurative is the wrong word. From my point of view, it really is more or less traditional.

BH: In other words—

PG: More or less involved with some form of representation rather than no form. That is, figurative is baloney, it was also something invented by the Museum of Modern Art.

BH: You mean the figure is also a formal thing instead of a felt thing.

PG: Well, it is not any cause at all, really. It is whether you think that there is some actual thing out. Even a Lausanne [phonetic] apple. You know, I have seen all kinds of drawings and they were done very quickly but they are representational. Is that Abstract Expressionism or is that figurative? Baloney, I would say.

And it is made up by dialecticians who sit in the Waldorf and really die a vociferous death. In my opinion. Of figurative art. But in so far, there certainly is a tradition that's down directly. That's what I think, really. It has never died, in spite of all the people who have tried to kill it. Almost every power that is— but it has been impossible really to kill that tradition.

And now [John] Canaday is the latest killer, to my mind. Nothing has done it. Those people are still working. That is the significant thing, and there is a direct link. After all, Bonnard, who not only influenced me, but he also influenced Hofmann's. He went to Hofmann's school, he'd say: "Bonnard is much greater than Matisse", or I don't know what he'd say. But he would go on and on about Bonnard.

BH: Do you manage to go to his show too?

PG: Yeah, the show is marvelous. Certainly out of the Hopper, and the Briard, and there were a couple of other shows, the Derain show, and Bonnard was the best show, I thought. They were right all there together, I looked at them and I liked it better.

BH: Was any of it unfinished, was he unfinished, in a funny way?

PG: Please B. [They laugh.]

BH: [Laughs.] No, but I thought the show was unfinished, in a funny way.

PG: Well I think that kind of finish is—

BH: Is dead. Yeah.

PG:— is not beautiful. Just—

BH: Not like Bronzino's finish—

PG: That thing right here is exactly what painting people think it's unfinished.

BH: I don't think that is unfinished at all.

PG: Well, a ton of people would think it isn't finished because it isn't finished according to some idiotic premise.

BH: No it isn't. That bathtub thing and some of the still lives—

PG: If you can't make the thing more beautiful then it's finished, and if some heavy handed guy would come along and, quote, finished, unquote, the thing, and made it worse Then it would be finished in your sense, but not better. And I consider that to be the most important issue here.

BH: What about, is Picasso really "finished" all the time?

PG: It seems to me that when a man works on a thing until it is as good as it can be, then it is finished.

BH: Has Picasso done that?

PG: Well, he says he abandoned it. Maybe he stops when he gets disgusted with it. It doesn't make any difference. It doesn't make any difference to me. Maybe I don't understand anything either. When it is finished is a stupid conception of small minds. That goes for you. You can say that to my dealer too. To you and anybody else who thinks that.

[They laugh.]

But it is true. It is finished when it is the best it can be. And if you touch it, if I touch this painting it will get worse. That's, it must, I mean— If you like worse paintings, then you can finish it. But if you like them to be as good as they can be, then you have to stop when they are done. That is hardest part of art, really. There are all kinds of people trying to get you to go farther and do something worse.

But the farthest you can go is if it stops at the best possible place. You read that or not by starting painting, you paint, and you paint, and you paint, and you paint. You see yourself at one point, it is better and then it gets worse and worse and worse and worse. And then it is gone. Until you learn yourself, and nobody can really tell you the best point but yourself. So, at that point, you abandon it. After all, some of those late Cézanne's weren't finished, either. As a matter of fact, I would say most of the greatest works, including the Michelangelo, "Descending from the Cross," aren't, quote, finished, unquote.

BH: No I mean [inaudible]

PG: So, what do we aspire to? Do we aspire to high school, regional shows, or do we aspire to a great art? Despite that?

[They laugh.]

But I think that's true. What do we aspire to? We aspire to make a great art. And a great art means you stop at the point of where it's at its greatest. Not at the point where it is most slick, or whatever you like. And Bonnard, that was part of his genius, that is, he stopped when the painting was as good as it could be. Don't call it finished, I don't care. Do a better one, if you don't like it.

BH: No, but I mean, did he have a concept with it? And if you think he had a concept, do you think he ever worked it out? I mean—

PG: Sure.

BH: Do you think he got frightened in the face of it?

PG: No. I don't really think so at all. I thought the show was complete. Much more complete than Hopper, who wasn't more complete, in my point of view.

BH: Well Hopper is, comes from a different school.

PG: But it was more complete. Hopper was trying to do a finished painting like Vermeer. He tried to stop it forever.

LG: He had certain values, too. One is color.

PG: I like Hopper, too. But compared to Bonnard, I don't like him. That's what I feel about that. I think, as a matter of fact, you can tell sincere people, because the sincere people like Hopper.

BH: Well, because they see something—

PG: Sincerity—

BH: They see something that talks to them.

PG: You don't have to think of sincerity as another value. If that is what you value, then sincerity is the best thing. But sincerity doesn't make great paintings either. Sincerity is just sincerity.

BH: In Bonnard's case, he painted his objects as best he saw them. He tried to find new approaches, putting figures in tubs and all that sort of thing.

PG: No, I don't really think so. Really I think he really just painted.

BH: I don't really think he did anything—

PG: But he didn't try to finish it, in quotes. He didn't try to make a finished work of art.

BH: But you do.

PG: No, I don't.

BH: You certainly try. I mean, you don't, well, you work at it. I mean, you work until you see it come to—

PG: I don't know what a finished work of art is.

BH: I mean, in terms of the actual touching. I mean if you are thinking about the painting of it, you don't finish it. But you really try to, try to get what you're after.

PG: I try to complete it.

BH: Complete it, well that is finishing it then.

PG: No, I think that is different. Because to complete it, it is complete when it is at its best. Not when it's finished.

BH: Isn't it really more of an idea though, than a—

PG: Well you just take, you take a piece of sculpture and first it must be rough. And then it gets smoother and smoother and smoother, until it gets to be what you would call finished. And when it is finally polished down, it is its best. You look—

LG: [Inaudible] at the Medici Chapel.

BH: That is exactly interesting.

LG: [Inaudible] chapel. It's the most beautiful thing.

PG: That is exactly right. You look at that thing they had at the World's Fair with the stars around and the blue behind it.

BH: I didn't see it.

PG: But, I didn't see it, either. I just heard about it.

BH: Heard of it, yes.

LG: I did.

PG: But that is not— That's finished, but it isn't any good.

LG: It's still finished.

PG: Well, no, just finished in the word's final sense.

BH: He worked it out.

PG: I'm saying that we are finished when they put us in a little box and put us away. We don't make any trouble for anybody. [Laughs.] We are not rough in any way. We don't say anything nasty. Because, simply because, we have been polished off.

BH: In effect, what you are saying is that you know that you can finish at any time, in effect, then.

PG: I don't know how to finish.

BH: Unlike an academician who finishes every time he strikes out to do something. In a sense, I think you are probably saying that you can, if you chose to, you could finish.

PG: No I don't think I can finish.

LG: What is the point of finishing? Isn't it, now, for the person who is viewing the thing to feel part of it and decide for themselves.

PG: I think a finished painting is a great thing, really, if it finished at its highest point. If you like. But if it is just finished, then it's finished art. You look, I mean, it is very interesting to look at some of these things. I am very sorry to do this to your tape, [they laugh], your dirty tape recorder, but you have to look at them anyhow. *The Night Watch* [1642] is not a finished painting. And Rembrandt is not thought to be a finished painter. So, yet, when you look at a painting that is really finished, in the sense that you mean, by Rembrandt, it is finished well, it really is something to see. But they're very rare. Look at this now. That is what you'd call finished, finished. There aren't very many of them. But it's quite magnificent. I have no objection, if that is its highest point.

BH: I think this concept isn't that really— I mean, what's the difference? Isn't it generally concept in art? It is not exactly—

PG: No, but the concept is that the finished is for me, the artist, to be beautiful. That is the concept. If I have a concept, that is it. I don't want to make an ugly thing, I don't want to make a horrendous thing, I don't want to make anybody angry. I want to make something that is so beautiful that it destroys itself, really, and becomes greater than itself. And to finish the thing, then, isn't to make it beautiful, it is to make it finished. It is a different definition altogether

BH: But I think concept is— if you take on the concept of beauty you can harness everything with it

PG: That is exactly right. Well said. So, there is no such thing as a finished. That is baloney.

BH: I understand, but I mean, the point is you start with a concept—

PG: If this drip of color in a painting like that is pure, as pure as it could possibly be, and to touch it will destroy that purity, and never to be regained again. Then, in that case, it is finished. But it is not finished in the sense that you mean. If it is as light as it could possibly be, and to touch it would be to deaden it, then it can't be finished in the sense that you mean. But it is finished in another sense, and what I would think to be a better sense.

BH: Isn't that also, again, the concept, again, of finding beauty in landscape and in life without really worrying about whether all the painting fits in? Whether all the paintings with its own stroke, its own action, its own— I mean, one could say that certain areas are flat, they are uninteresting, for example.

PG: But I think that if there is a unity in this thing—

BH: Well the unity then. Again meaning that you concept is—

PG: Yes, it's the whole thing. The abstract thing is going to make an object. It's not so different.

BH: That face could have been brought out a little bit too. Maybe that's, I don't know—

PG: That doesn't look to me like it would make it better.

BH: No, it probably wouldn't.

PG: So, I mean, like, in one sense, I mean, it's like, the idea of finishing something is a foolish idea, really foolish. Because it is, there is no— It really means the killing of the thing. Unless you have some other objective, like to make it pure, to make it glorious, to make it beautiful, or to make it anything. But to make it finished is not a quality. It is the quality of an artifact that if you polish this chair down it would get very smooth, I suppose that might be good. But a rough chair might be just as good too.

BH: Actually, I mean, that the Abstract Expressionists did feel that once their gesture was completed, that's when they were finished. Or they could rub into it and—

PG: I don't think Abstract Expressionists had any idea of being finished either.

I think they tried to make it, I don't really know, I mean I have a lot of ideas. I think they tried to make it an

object that was complete but not finished.

BH: That's quite a distinction. Complete but not finished. I don't know. Again, you're moving from some principle. I mean, or somewhere—

PG: Well the principle is, when I see a Klein, he was trying to make a beautiful thing, really. But to define it that closely, even, is not really— I don't really believe in that exactly. Because beauty is, beauty— what?

BH: One interview came out again in the Canvas, it said that Yves Klein, he, that you can go into Rembrandt, you can see in each Rembrandt portrait, the he really is doing something to the figure, and it moves up here and it comes around that chest and down, and around.

PG: Klein doesn't do that.

BH: Well it— Not exactly. But it's not really important, but I does sort of—

PG: Well, I don't believe in that. I don't believe in any of that. I think it's just painting, that these people, artists, always just painted. And they tried to make it as beautiful, whatever it was, as possible.

BH: But there certainly more to an artist than that, isn't it.

PG: Well, more to art than that, there are all kinds of things going on underneath that. All those things, really, are to make it beautiful. That's what was wrong with [inaudible.]

BH: Doesn't beauty change, though?

PG: Beauty changes too, but isn't really a vocation, really.

BH: No, you don't try to do that.

PG: Besides beauty is a lousy word. I only use it as opposed to finished. I use a word like leaving. Hofmann always used to talk about destroying an object in order to create a new object. And if I had some way that I had to— I think it is probably true. I think one of the ways, the most, the only really beautiful way to destroy an object is by painting is so beautifully. Like I think this thing is painted so beautifully, you forget it is painted, you forget it's an object and it becomes again a painting.

BH: It goes beyond just a human being. Beyond—

PG: Beyond all of those things, right. It becomes something quite more magnificent than an object destroyed, or an object reborn, or no object.

BH: There is really no way to learn that, though, is there?

PG: What?

BH: There is no way to learn that.

PG: Sure, I mean, if you can see that he did it, then you can learn from that.

BH: And you can learn in what way? That he—

PG: I mean, I look at this thing exactly, I mean part of the beauty of the thing as a matter of fact, in one thing, the space, the way that's really hollowed out between the two things. The little thing in front. The biggest thing is here. The way this thing, really, belongs to that back there, and it is very little, and the space is all wrong, really, when I see that he sits up, he's actually boosted up, if you look at it in his face way, it's way out here. It's all pushed down, and this is, well it's got an uplift, if you like. It's got an uplift and that looks good. I mean, there is something special about that. I think that's just knowledge, that doesn't really tell you how to do it either.

BH: That's pretty easy to do, wouldn't you say?

PG: That? No.

[They laugh.]

BH: I mean wouldn't it be easy to do? I mean just to—

PG: No, if you take the knowledge, but then you have to use it for something else.

BH: Then the concept, really— It's the concept or the driving concept that forces one to make paintings better

than they are, in effect. Or, something is going on, I mean, a painting is a painting.

PG: Well, I think that part of what it is, is that, part of what makes people do things, in my opinion, is that, you come into a world and there are all these things around you. And you get sick of it, and if you are a creative person, you want to do something about it. And I think the Abstract Expressionists came in the ash can world, in the thirties, in the American seeing world, and they wanted to do something about it. They didn't— They just got bored with it and they didn't really like it, they didn't relate to it, and as a creative person they wanted to do something about it. So it did something. I'd say, I mean, even about Surrealism. If they changed the Mozart, to Beethoven or the Schumann or to Schubert, it must be that people just got sick of Mozart. Nobody really wants to have a one—cylinder culture. They don't want to peek on one drama all the time. And that's really is the basic force that makes things move.

BH: You don't think there was a reaction to the—

PG: Well, in some ways, saying a reaction, but it's not really a reaction either. They enjoyed it while— After all, during my life I have loved everything from Mondrian to Rembrandt and back again, really. And I started, really, with Mondrian, in effect, some kind of Mondrian. And Abstract Expressionism, really.

There was a whole other tradition, though, that ran simultaneously, with [André] Derain and Giacometti and Picasso, really. It's completely unbroken and ran simultaneously and lost out in a certain way, but it didn't stop, it didn't go away. Bonnard, Vuillard. All these things are direct contacts, they didn't stop at all because something else took precedence. But, I guess, the Abstract Expressionists got sick, and they wanted to make their own stamp on the world. They made their stamp but this other thing was maintained, it was a tradition that you could pick up and start with again. So it's not a reaction, it is a continuous thing.

BH: So in other words, the museums are really full of the great art, even in color, I mean, all the way from Abstract Expressionism to Rembrandt, you use rags and uses his thumb and he squiggles the paint around and I think that was no great experiment.

PG: Well, want to take a listen?

BH: Yeah I can listen to it. Let's listen, out of curiosity

[audio stop]

BH: I'm afraid we are on.

PG: That is all right, let's be on, let's get it over, let's do the right thing.

BH: I mean, you can hardly help but be contemporary, man. I don't see the point. In my feeling, if you want to hear it, is the, and this is not going to be printed. [Laughs.]

PG: Right away you see all this tape is wasted. Why don't we shut up, and you shut up.

[They laugh.]

BH: I'll shut up.

PG: He's a very good listener, your recorder. All right let's hear your opinion.

BH: No, I think actually really, and you were somehow upset, I said before, that you, you know, you're, as far as I can figure out, I mean, you learned about paint through the Abstract Expressionists, and Mondrian, and Derain and Bonnard and all that. But, I mean, that is part of the school, part of the education. And then I think that actually you finally decided you'd just turn it to your own uses. I mean, I think you really, but again, I think you are idealizing, in a funny way. I think you are really making more than just politics—

PG: Me

BH: You are not a Bonnard or Vuillard. You are not a Raphael Soyer.

PG: To me, the past implies the future. If there is no past, there can't be any future.

BH: That is true.

PG: So that, if I have hope to have any place in the art of tomorrow, the art of the future, if I hope to live 300 years like Rembrandt, I have to find something in the last 300 years that it I think is worth looking at. And, even un—intellectually, I got here because I like all of those things. I like all of the art that I have known. I look

through an old gallery, when you go to the Metropolitan. There are all kinds of things that I can really relate to.

Even American scene painting. I saw once, there was a show in East Hampton where they had a bunch of Chinese screens. They were just magnificent really, fantastic things, a whole show of Chinese art with little bamboo shoots and stuff coming out, a those people about two inches tall crawling up and down those screens, and all of gold. They were just magnificent things. And then the other room they had a whole American scene show. Summer, summer, Summertime it was called or something like that. And they had people like, that guy, what's his name, Brooks, out there, Alexander Brooks, and [Robert] Gwathmey. All of these people from the American scene. And I really related to them more than I did the Chinese screens, which is really sort of disgusting of me. I knew perfectly well that the Chinese screens were better. I mean, there was no question about it. But they were really somehow, out of my culture, I mean just enough, that I couldn't quite, I couldn't make it to those Chinese screens. That's all.

On the other hand I really do like them, you know. I wasn't as though I didn't like them. You know those things have lived five hundred years, just to be able to—

BH: Five hundred? Two thousand.

PG: Two thousand? All right. I don't think those lived two thousand years. I think they lived five hundred.

BH: But no, some of them were, no?

PG: No. At any rate, those things were beautiful, and there's no question about it. It is marvelous that they have lasted these 500 years. They transcended all this time. And if I am going to damn them, and damn the American scene and damn everything else, then I haven't got very much hope either. Right? Art implies past art. The future implies the past. And that is just an intellectualization of something that is not intellectual. Something that— I just happen to like it. I like Abstract Expressionism, I like to see an old sport car made by, what is the name of that—

BH: Bugatti.

PG: No, not by Bugatti. There is a guy who made a picture of a sports car racing down a hill, in the 20s. I forgot what his name was now. He is like a latter—day Ashcan. Late Ashcan he was.

BH: Oh, yeah I know what you mean.

PG: Guy Pène Dubois?

BH: Guy Pène Dubois.

PG: No it wasn't Guy Pène Dubois, it was someone else, a little earlier than that. He made a fishing scene, very sort of impressionistic really I can't think of what his name was, but anyhow, not so important.

But obviously, every time I see something that is marvelous, if you go up to the Art world, world of art world with a closed mind, then the future is also closed. Because you know damn well that some guy, some punk in the year 2000 is going to go around, say, this guy is no good and that guy is no good, and this guy is better than that guy, and it's all baloney, it is not going to be interested at all. He is only going to want to pump his tire up.

And I think it— so, art implies the past. Anybody who wants kill the past, wants to start a revolutionary art is a fool, because it won't last very long. It's bound to destroy itself.

BH: But isn't that based on something else? I mean isn't it really, I mean, why save the past?

PG: I know, I am going to save it. I am going to look at it and enjoy it. Let somebody save it. You can save it. You're in a museum.

[They laugh.]

PG: I am going to go and put my greasy fingerprints all over the Rembrants. Then they put glass on them and they say, for the preservation of these Rembrandts and then in another room they will have the glass off, and they'll say, for your convenience we took the glass off. All very 1984.

BH: But I still think, if I have the right idea, you know, going through all those things, that, I mean, seeing that we're being honest, we are being recorded for immortality.

PG: That's all right to be honest, I'm not against that.

BH: I still feel there is a certain idealism comes up in your work, I mean, you really unlike, again, Raphael Soyer, who does his genre, just his genre and wonderfully so. I mean he does what he knows, only what he knows. And you do, I think, more than what you know. At least you always try to. You try to do what you know, but elevate it in some way. I mean, there is a certain kind of idealism at work. A certain kind of rational at work there.

PG: Well, I think that the only thing that I hope for is to have that magic happen. That it becomes more than a bunch of objects on a table.

BH: Yeah, I mean, that is certainly, that wasn't, I don't think that was Raphael's point of view.

PG: That is possible, yeah. I told Fairfield [Fairfield Porter] about tradition—

BH: Raphael, for example, he is continuing the tradition, but he, you're, I don't think you are, you simply learn from it. And you are really kind of trying to—

PG: Well I'm doing like Fairfield. I told Fairfield once: "I am preparing to make a great painting." And I'm going to do that my whole life. [Laughs] And some people don't prepare to make a great painting, and that's no sin either.

BH: He didn't really, I don't think. He just kind of—

PG: Who Fairfield or Raphael? Well he thinks he is making a great painting there, that Ode to American Art, you know that whatever it's called. He wants to make a great painting out of that. Maybe it is great, I haven't seen it, so I'm safe.

BH: I think he wanted to make a great painting, but— I will see it tomorrow.

I don't think he was preparing to make a great painting. I think he simply recognized the value of tradition. Whereas I think you—

PG: Raphael? Yes.

BH: I think he recognized the value, as you were saying, but I don't think you actually care that much about it. I mean—

PG: I do really care about it but I think the tradition has changed. Archibald MacLeish said, what I consider to be one of the most profound, from a painter's point of view, simple-minded thing, is that is that facts change. And tradition is a fact, and tradition changes also. It is not really a static thing at all. Tradition is added to by everything that comes along. And unless you are aware of the latest edition, you're not really aware of tradition. You're then aware of history somehow, or of past history. There is a current tradition that's really being born every day, I think. Not just every act of man is a fact.

And I knew Jan Muller. When Jan Muller died, everything on his canvases became final. And really entered tradition. But they had entered tradition before he even stopped painting them really. They were part of the History of Art.

When I took, I just took a painting to the gallery, today. And it was like committing suicide in a way. Because I couldn't paint on it anymore. I took it away and it's gone. It really enters some other phase. It enters the past, in some way or another, immediately.

BH: You just aren't going to go along with the idea [inaudible]

PG: No, I don't think I'm a romantic. Ideal— Well I don't believe in pipes and slippers, like that dirty guy from Newsweek said. You can put that in your damn— It wasn't his fault I was in there. So, he is to be forgiven for his lack of understanding. He doesn't understand anything.

BH: He's out now.

PG: Yes Kermit [Lansner] told me he was going to quit, he didn't quit, but he did quit. But that was over exactly the pipes and slippers that he quit. The guy didn't know anything about Art. He doesn't care about it or anything else.

BH: What was talk about reediting and all that?

PG: Well that was Kermit who reedited.

BH: Yeah I knew that.

PG: Well Kermit stuck me in there, I was in there over his dead body, literally speaking, which wasn't very nice.

BH: He deserved every bit of [inaudible]. He deserve we talked about it.

PG: He quit, I think though.

BH: Well I mean, quit or fired, it's kind of, in a job like that, it's hardly, that's true.

PG: Good for him. It's good and good for him. Anyhow I think, tradition is— I don't care if Raphael Soyer is in trouble, and you don't have to tell Raphael Soyer.

BH: No, no, no, no.

PG: I think the trouble with Raphael Soyer is, that he is really, he mixed— It is really the same trouble with Kennedy. Kennedy had the same trouble. Kennedy is a conservative, who is really afraid. So he tries to act like he is not a conservative.

BH: That's not true of Raphael, it think you are wrong on that, but go ahead.

PG: Listen, Raphael whole attachment to modern young youth, is really the fact that he is really conservative, he is really afraid to say what he thinks or to believe in the things he believes. So, he goes and attaches himself to some crapper that make a little mess, and he thinks it is very like John Daub [phonetic].

BH: What he had to learn. I mean, Raphael really did what he— He followed his tradition, that's how he—

PG: Well, I am going to get old someday. I have no objection to his, you know. But it is, a fearful man. He is a man who is afraid.

BH: He is a man who lived through a few revolutions.

PG: That is also true. A man who lived through a few revolutions. But he tried to make his own. Oh I've lived through a few revolutions, too.

BH: Well he's lives through a little more.

PG: He lived through a lot more, I don't really mind that. But I think that he is a conservative who is afraid to be a conservative.

BH: I think he painted for an audience, really.

PG: I think he becomes a conservative. No, I think he really is— He became a conservative. That is what a conservative is, a guy who is afraid, who doesn't think that his idea is current. He doesn't believe that what he believes is current.

BH: That is true, but he is, I would defend him, I mean—

PG: I don't want to attack him either, I don't want to attack him. I think he is a very nice man, really, and I think he has a point. But he is really still, painting a 1936 paintings.

BH: Oh yeah, absolutely. Without question. Earlier. 1890

PG: And he is coming into vogue, like a 1926 jacket, now. It's very chic, you know. They just come back into vogue. But it is really from a staid position.

BH: He was never staid or never vogue though really.

PG: Yeah he was, I got a book here on Raphael Soyer.

BH: But he was never in vogue.

PG: With all these guys.

BH: But he was never vogue though. That's what they said. You know, it's one of those things they said about—

PG: Here is a guillotine by Guy Pène Dubois

BH: They said about Soyer and all that. You know, that when he died, when he moved out of his apartment before he died—

PG: There is a Raphael Soyer book in here somewhere, right? Oh here they are. Alexander Brook, Glass, Rockmore Davis, Bonnard, Talbert, Caulfield [phonetic] I never heard of him.

BH: Caulfield [phonetic] I never heard of.

PG: Here I have him in my own house and I never even heard of him.

BH: Arnold Glass [phonetic]

PG: John Steuart Curry, Lemond Kroll [phonetic], Frederic Taubes. You look to see, when you find a Raphael Soyer book, Alexander Brook, let's find a Raphael Soyer book. You look at it. Is that it?

BH: No. Not here.

PG: It's here somewhere. Anyhow, Raphael Soyer made a little kind of Larry Rivers concession for much the twentieth century. That's what he did. So he did like Larry Rivers did. In the way everybody did.

BH: Later though, he wasn't really part of that. Actually, they said, you know, a lot of the Abstract painters, that the Soyers and the Shahns and Groppers and the Kuniyoshis they were the academy, and they really hated them.

PG: The Abstract painters said that? Well I'm not trying to kill the Abstract Expressionists either, I want them to live, let them live, you know, I think it's very good, I think because the good ones are good.

BH: Yeah.

PG: A man like de Kooning, I mean, he be labeled under some kind of a thing but he is all kind of. Right now, he is painting figurative painting, in the same sense that the Museum of Modern thinks that he is figurative. So, it's not really, that is baloney. All these files are so that people can be promoted. That's why you can't promote one guy, as a man, so you have to promote ten guys as a group. So you make a whole bunch people from Ad Reinhardt to Bill de Kooning in one group and you call them Abstract Expressionists, and Rothko. I mean, it is silly. That is what I think. And it is for promotion. Let them promote them. Let them promote this figure, for all I care. I doesn't have anything to do with anything.

BH: It's true, I agree with that.

PG: So they promote them. Maybe they'll stimulate a lot of interest in American artist. Very good.

BH: That is certainly what they are trying to do.

PG: I think that's good. I think that to be nice to an artist is a noble thing, because it think it breeds another artist. And you know Tom Durant? He was an engineer and he was climbing around buildings, you know, and now he decided to be a painter. And I am completely convinced it's because there is so much money in American art. He was painting all this time, but he never believed he could be a painter. Now it's somehow the belief, he's a very timid guy—

BH: So now you're equal to a dentist as a painter. You make as much money as a dentist.

PG: Well, all right. So you make as much money as a dentist, if you like. And now it's possible to be a painter. That can't do anything but good, I think it's marvelous that it's possible to be a painter. Because all kinds of people hope, you almost can't fail to have them making art that way, if you ask me.

BH: I think it is a little more complicated than that, but I mean—

PG: I don't think so. I think it's as simple as— If you get of 150,000 people, or if you get 3 million people painting, that will be equal to the population of ancient Greece. How can you possibly get out of that— How can you fail to get 10 out of that.

BH: Well there are 3 million people painting.

PG: Probably, at least. How could you possibly fail to get a great art out of that? That's all. Listen. All you need is 100 years of peace or 50 years of peace, and I really mean that too. Because in 50 years of peace and riches, any culture can make an art.

BH: Then again I think, doesn't it always come from the artist?

PG: Well, it comes from both peace and riches, it comes from man having a chance to ennoble himself. And not just having to go out— And that comes from peace, partly.

BH: I mean, [inaudible]

PG: The golden age of Holland was made purely out of peace. They had 50 years of peace.

BH: That's true, that's a good example, because they really didn't have any particular cultural—

PG: If the wars, if the wars are destructive, I mean, if they are not so destructive like they had in Italy, they have relative peace. I mean there is certainly no peace in New York, but there is a relative peace, a man can stay out of the army for 50 years and try to paint, or stay out of hiding. It's terribly important, those things, really. So I think that in America, there is ultimately going to be great American art.

BH: You don't think actually—

PG: Riches too, you have to have, because you have to have the time to do it. Just to be peaceful is not good if you don't have enough money or enough energy or enough time to take advantage of it. And a lot of people don't think it is very rich, when they are pushing up the end— when they got the business end of a shovel and they are digging in the street, trying to make a living. But there are possibilities. There are plenty of crumbs from all of these rich idiots that you are could live on.

BH: Did I ever tell you that wonderful story about [Robert] Rauschenberg, sending the letter to [Ben] Shahn?

PG: No.

BH: I didn't tell you about that? He sent a letter to Shahn and said: "You know, we like each other's work, etc."

PG: He said that? Rauschenberg?

BH: He said: "I really like your work and I've always been very close to your work, etc., and now I am really having a problem because of [inaudible] art, somebody's blocked it. And you know people with a fortune, Ben, if you would intercede in my behalf.

PG: I hear you. He did that?

BH: So he found the— This is 1954 or something like that, a fantastic tongue to do this, and so Ben obviously sent back a blistering letter, which Rauschenberg replied. We only have Rauschenberg's letter to depend on down at the Archives. And the other part of the letter said, "Well, I'm sorry. I guess I was a little forward."

PG: It's very funny.

BH: The second letter. He finally said one line, as you say about that, that really infuriates me, he said: "I don't have enough to eat." You know, and five years later he's in, seven years later he is in the New Yorker.

PG: Wow. Profile. Thirty thousand.

BH: So, don't be silly, you can kick through that. I mean nobody—

PG: Well, I know how little— I have had plenty of times I didn't have enough to eat.

BH: Really?

PG: I'm very sorry to say that.

BH: Sure, sure, I know.

PG: But still it is relatively rich. If you come here—

BH: He didn't have enough to eat because he didn't want enough to eat.

PG: Well, there is nothing wrong with having to—

BH: I mean he could have easily made money, made enough to eat. Anybody could.

PG: Well he could've, yeah, but that is not painting, either. I think you have to live on a crummy, you have to get some kind of crummy way to get by and devote yourself to your art. But I think that is possible, too. I don't— I mean, I am not against a government subsidy, but I don't think it is really, I mean, necessary. Because I think that if someone comes here and devotes himself to art, there is certain ways, there some way he can get by. I mean, he might not make a living from his paintings, but that is part of the test, whether you really care enough to go through all the trouble to do it.

BH: But you always did it, somehow.

PG: Yes, but that is a little bit easy, too, to ask a [inaudible] or something to make great art. I happened to work in a carpentry shop.

BH: Well if you didn't do carpentry you might have been painted more.

PG: That's true yeah, but then I might not have been, too. It was all given to me. Anyhow, I think with peace and riches, and then let the artist take care of himself. After all there is a whole culture with tremendous interest in art here, it's a very marvelous really.

BH: I told Peter Agostini once, I said I didn't really care, he started going on about not making money, I said I really don't care if you make a living or not. I said I really don't care, I said. Make Art!

PG: Well, he made a lot, Peter Agostini, he made \$30,000 or something like that and he spent it all on castings. What the hell?

BH: Yeah well. I mean, that's not my problem. Is that my problem?

PG: It doesn't matter how much he made. He made \$19,000 and he still owes \$15,000.

BH: Owing is better than—

PG: Well, I don't think, I'm not— I know plenty of artists who really don't have enough to eat, who are very good artists. Somehow they're surviving they're still painting. It think it would be very nice if they could get a subsidy, but if they don't I think they could still survive. Mainly what they need— if they'd get marched off to war, or a bomb falls on New York, it is not going to be very good for art.

BH: That is really not a position, though, I wouldn't call actually your work humanist, as a matter of fact, I mean, in the sense that it's not part of that '30s tradition.

PG: No, I wouldn't, it's not about—

BH: Well it's not humanist in that sense, I mean, it is a glorification of the figure and of landscape, and of—

PG: I always think that underneath a humanist lies a disturb— a fascist. Anybody that lies under all that humanity—

BH: Scratch the intellectual and you'll find a fascist.

PG: That's right. Actually it is interesting because I have a feeling, that, it's very hard, it hasn't really got any name as far as I'm concerned, you know, whatever you want to call it. Humanist, or figurative, or representational, or post—abstract, some name. Those artists have had a very interesting history too. Like you take a guy like Alfred Russell, who was reputed, I never heard him say it, reputed to have said horrible things about I don't know who. And I know he was a little bit wild. But there is, Derain also, apparently was in trouble with Hitler or something like that. And I have a feeling, I even suffered from that. What?

BH: I think that is probably a little erroneous, about Derain.

PG: Derain? Well anyhow I think I've suffered from that, too. I think people have tended to think that I'm some kind of fascist. And that I, I would want to try to kill somebody or something like that. Really, all I wanted is for somebody, any old person, to just move over and make room for me at the bottom rung of the ladder. It really wasn't much more than that. But I think it is an interesting thing that, that attitude has suffered from people making outrageous statements. And maybe there is something, maybe that all people who are interested in humanist art are fascists.

BH: I mean it's certainly—

PG: I don't know what humanism is.

BH: I don't, either.

PG: I am interested in the whole art, in so far as a I can. It think Art has a rich history and the interesting thing is, no matter how interested you are in a whole art, you've got to leave something out in order to do something else. You can't be Jackson Pollock and Michelangelo at the same time. That's a difficult world. So a whole art can be anything you want to describe obviously.

BH: Putting the nude in a landscape, though, or describing reality is, you know, ideally, is certainly considered in New York, or rather Nietzsche-an kind of idea.

PG: I don't understand how that relates to me.

BH: It's Idealism, you know it's really kind of your—

PG: Nietzsche was no idealist. Nietzsche was—

BH: Well, he was basing his philosophy on another reality, on outer reality in other words. Nude in landscapes don't exist.

PG: I don't, I don't live in the supermarket.

BH: And nudes, well—

PG: And I happen to have my studio in a landscape. And I stand a nude outside of it, and it does exist. And nudes has always existed, and landscapes have always existed. Anybody who thinks the world is made of supermarkets is not right, as far as I am concerned. Doesn't have any idea what the world is made of.

BH: I understand that. But, I mean, I think, again, that is considered by the people in New York, artists as a—

PG: Considered by the New York museum people, really. And a few artists. But I don't really think that's the world of Art. That is not the world of my time. I don't see one supermarket product throughout this whole place. It was all stuff picked up in the street At most. If it wasn't picked up in the street it wasn't picked up in a— And, this is a, one of those reels, you know.

BH: Spools.

PG: Spool. Where they roll up the— And I didn't go out and buy a lot of antiques or anything. That is just the stuff that's around me. Anybody that lives in a supermarket doesn't live where I live. And I've got my place out there and that is the view from my studio exactly. With a tree here. And I've got this model standing out there. And it's true that I've made three of her. But I think it is interesting to make a group of more than one person. So that's not so bad either.

BH: No, but I've been saying, they do say the New York attitude is simply—

PG: The New York attitude? I consider I make it so don't tell me what it is.

[They laugh]

PG: That's those fools who think they are doing it. That is another thing. That is, movements, just like John F. Kennedy, they write, what's coming next? The next great movement, the next thing has already been done, really. Or it's not going to be the next thing, obviously. So some artist whatever he thinks, is still doing the next thing, and it is the next thing of all things. For him that is just the thing he is doing.

I don't believe in Romanticism. I don't know what I believe in really. I don't believe, of all things— I know, I think as a matter of fact, that Art is made up of a lot of things that people don't believe in. And, well, it leaves certain things, there are only certain things it can literally, emotionally do.

Like Greenberg used to say, Jackson Pollock could paint like Michelangelo if he wanted to. But there is no such thing as being able to want to. I mean maybe he could've, I don't know. But he couldn't want to. That's the hard part.

For 10 years, to paint a face, at least among the people I know, and a picture, what was a heresy. It was really. And Alex Katz once said: "Before you can paint a portrait you have to get over your neuroses." Well, that's really, it was a fact, I mean, it was a literal thing. But there were still people who made that attempt, or at least made something without a face in it, if you like. It was a regular neurotic thing.

So, you could say, well, if they could've painted like a Michelangelo, but they couldn't want to. It's an emotional thing what you can do, really. Not at all like— Art is a feeling, it isn't, it isn't a fact. So you can only feel something. You have all kinds of potential, every man has a potential to be a Leonardo Da Vinci. But you can— Only certain ones can feel that it is possible.

The same thing is true of Pollock. Only certain people can feel like being Pollock. Maybe only one, Pollock. [They laugh.] And nobody else. You can imitate it, but you can't feel like it.

BH: That's really not, really a— I don't know what that quite means. Sort of—

PG: It means that you are driven to do what you do. You are not asked or even using your capabilities. You would only use the capabilities that you can use— You can't use other capabilities.

BH: How does one get the faith in doing all that?

PG: Well, beats me! I can't figure out how did that Reinhardt sit in his studio and make those black things look blue, red, this and that, but it's really black and in the form of a cross, one after another, after another, after another? How does he get that faith? Don't ask me. But obviously I couldn't do that, and you couldn't do that, and nobody could do it. Only Reinhardt could do it. And that all because of all the things he won't do. He is a perfect example, he's a perfect guy that won't do this and won't do that and won't do the other thing until he ends up with a blue and red and black cross.

Once I went to Fairfield Porter's house, and I stood in the back as he showed me some painting, and I said: "Why don't you change that" he had a green field there, "Well if you change that green field to black that would be really—." "Oh I couldn't do that."

[They laugh.]

And that's really what it is. All the things he couldn't do. He couldn't deviate from his idea of what was true. So you accumulate slowly. You start off as a young artist and you have no idea what you won't do. And slowly but surely, you accumulate these things you won't do, until you become yourself. You can always add things that you will do. But you can never add the things that you won't do.

BH: It seems kind of negative in a funny way. I mean, it sounds like the things you were talking about, about school, about Baudelaire, etc. That you really— He really forced himself until he could be no less than what, I mean, he could be no more than what he was.

PG: As an artist, it is not negative, because you are doing something. At the same time you have all these things you won't do, you are doing something. Until you are not doing something, like [Marcel] Duchamp. And even that's some artistic gesture. But I think as long as you are doing something, then it is creative, and if you have a lot of friends— I won't paint a non-objective painting. I can't say straight out. I never will, I never.. It is impossible for me, just something I can't do. I don't want to do it, I'll never do it. I even have done it. But now I won't do it. And that's something I feel. My personality is that far defined. I doesn't mean I'm not going to paint a theme. Maybe it means I will never make anything worth anything. I don't know. By a lot of people's standards that's true. And I won't do any Pop Art. But I have done things that look a little, I mean, I have been influenced by them.

BH: Were you influenced by them, or were they influenced, or did you influence them ? Or I mean how is that working out?

PG: I don't know I'm only influenced. I never count the people I influence. That doesn't interest me at all. But Pop Art influenced me a little bit, I think. And it's also in a way repulsed me a little bit too. And there are some things I don't like and there are some things that I do. So the things I don't like I don't touch.

But they do have, because they have subject matter, they have easier sailing, in a way. I don't even have really a subject matter. Although I do, you see a subject matter, but I don't have a positive— I don't go in the supermarket and know exactly what I'm going to do. I just sort of paint along and I might do something else tomorrow. I happen to do the same thing only because I can't do something else tomorrow. But I don't— If I could just paint a stop sign, I would be all set. I could just paint it very clearly and freshly.

I once, I went to the Kustolic [phonetic] Gallery, they had a painting of Lichtenstein, a lesson book, like you get in school, that was six feet high and four feet wide. And next to it was Schwartzkopf [phonetic]. And then Schwartzkopf had all kinds of doubts in it, it was scrubbed over and worried about. He didn't really know what he was going to do. But this guy knew what he was going to do, he did it in one blast and that was it.

So, they have a subject matter. Whatever the subject matter is, and the subject is clear, and it makes it easier. I think even Schwartzkopf has now been influenced by them to the point where he has lost his doubt, which was his greatest quality. But that's exactly— If he'd said: "I won't lose my doubt," in effect, then he'd be a personality, really. Now he's become another personality because he hasn't said, there is that one thing that I won't do.

BH: Do you think that is psychological, really? Or anything like that? It just means we just don't— we have to really find the, that is sort of an old song about finding themselves?

PG: You do something, you do something and there are certain things that you don't want to do it. It's simple

really.

BH: Simple yes.

PG: If you don't want to do it, you don't want to do it. If you want to do it, then you want to do them, and that is just the way it is. After all, there are hundreds of conceptions of thought. I have thought of all kinds of— you know. All my life I have thought of conceptions of one kind or another. But you accept them or reject them emotionally, you don't accept or reject them on a businesslike basis, as far as I'm concerned.

BH: Unlike Bud Hawkins, which I kind of insulted the other day.

PG: Yes? Archibald MacLeish said a feeling for the facts, that's what art really is. And the feeling enters in that part, you don't have a business about it, you just feel something about it.

BH: Well that is generally life. I mean, generally there is nothing—

PG: No, but Art is special because it's to feel about the facts. If you— And if facts change, so that your feeling could change, you can look at the same fact a hundred years later, and look, it's a different fact.

LG: You have to be honest in your recording of your feelings.

PG: That's right.

LG: And what about this Pop Art, do you think that is a feeling? Or do you think it's a—

PG: I don't know. I'm not moral about it. They know about it.

LG: What do you think they feel about it?

PG: I don't know whether they feel about it or not. I don't care whether they feel about it or not. I'll tell you, I like Marisol [Escobar].

BH: She's amazing.

PG: Yes, she is nice. I mean, what the hell. She's, if you can call her a pop artist, but I think she has feelings. And her facts are even South American facts. Partly, at least.

BH: That's part of her saving grace.

PG: I don't know if it saves her, but certainly it's a difference set of facts. Each individual has a set of facts to feel about. I don't feel— I mean, I don't feel anything about a Coca-Cola bottle. What can I do?

[They laugh]

BH: That's terrific. That's true.

PG: Well, it's true. And if they do feel something, they're into Coca-Cola bottles. Is that really the modern world? Is that the significant find of the modern world. If it is then they're—

BH: Well, drink them or don't drink them.

PG: That's right. In that sense, I suppose I am a romantic. If the modern world is Coca-Cola bottles, then I am a romantic. Unashamed, unabashed. [Laughs.]

BH: That's true. Really, it is silly, I mean all this talk about Coca-Cola bottles and all that.

PG: That's right! Is that really what? I don't see any Coca-Cola bottles here. I see a Gulden's mustard thing. That's the only product here [inaudible], with all these antique guides here of course.

[They laugh.]

LG: Be sure to bring a Campbell's Soup can too.

PG: That's right. Now, ice cream, pie and risotto for dinner. What world am I really living in? Napoleons for the Astor Place. What world are we really living in? I'm not living in their world, that's a world they're— And I do suspect they don't live in that world either.

BH: No they don't.

PG: I can't believe that Rauschenberg haunts the supermarket.

LG: That's what I'm asking.

PG: He is not the big pop artist.

BH: No he's not, Andy Warhol.

PG: Yes. Maybe he does. Maybe he loves them, you know. I not going to judge him. All I know is what my world is. And that is my world.

BH: That is really quite different. Even from someone like Raphael [Soyer], in some way, because he did, was hurt by it all. I mean, he really wasn't in a position— You always started from the position of doing what you want to do, but Raphael was in a position of power and they all lost it at one moment.

PG: Well, he was the king of something.

BH: They were the king, and also they got dethroned.

PG: He was an antique at that sort of thing. He is a different— I think Fairfield Porter, even as a modern, he does the same thing practically as Raphael Soyer does, only from a contemporary point of view. And I think that somebody like, like even Renoir in his last paintings was an antique, or Rembrandt in his last paintings, he was already outdated. Other people had surpassed him in contemporary eyes. And there is nothing wrong with being an antique, really. It doesn't make you any less significant. Maybe you really refine a real truth in the—

Monet was, he was ahead of his time, but at the same time he was ignored. He was really outlived. He was painting 50 years before and by the time, in 1922, he died only. Picasso had gone by, everything had gone by, sales of Fauves. Nothing was like a Monet is being painted in 1922, until recent years when they drag out the *Water Lilies*. We was great about the *Water Lilies*, nobody really thought of him as a modern painter, in effect. So, he was an antique, painting away really, and he did his best paintings. Maybe his best. Who knows? Who can argue? But anyhow, he certainly was doing something. And he wasn't at the height of favor. And he wasn't exactly the king *des pauvres* [of the poor]. He had to have been *des pauvres* with enough wealth to survive. Which is very good.

So I think there is nothing wrong with that. I am not worried about Raphael Soyer. But I think he does come from un—modern times. And that may be the world he lives in. It may be exactly, he may feel exactly about it, as I could believe. After all—

BH: He does live that way.

PG: That's right. There are people that live now in the Stone Age in Australia. I just read an article. They found this complete Stone Age culture in Australia. They're making Stone Age art. Am I supposed to say it's not authentic because we've got Coca-Cola bottles? I mean, everybody lives in his own world, that's all.

BH: So, did I ever tell you that story about Raphael and Jackson Pollock on the train?

PG: No

BH: So they were coming back on the train, and he said— He looked out the window as they were coming back, he looked out the window and, Jackson and Raphael were playing cards [inaudible]. He said: "Look out there Raphael, look up at the sky. That is where space is," and he points at an airplane. Raphael says: "I bet they are doing the same thing we are doing up there as we are doing down here. We're drinking and playing cards." And he said, he went to this trip about four or five years ago, three four years ago. Rome, for the first time. And he said: "You know, I was right, I flew. And they were playing cards and drinking."

PG: There's even movies now.

BH: That was his space. I mean, the space was the same, as far as Pollock's space was different. Raphael said, no they're the same, that is what they are doing right here.

PG: But both things were really true.

BH: Both things. I don't know. Absolutely. I'm not—

PG: No matter what you are feeling for exactly that. That is what Art is about. What is it that you feel about it? It's possible that the great artworks of the 20th century will be a Coca-Cola bottle. But that just doesn't have to be the world I live in.

BH: I'm not [inaudible] I don't want to take an intellectual position on that but I—

PG: Well I can imagine a Coca-Cola bottle enshrined. But I'm not going to enshrine it.

BH: I don't have that type of money.

PG: And I don't— That is not the world I live in, so maybe that is the 20th century, too.

BH: But, I mean, you do enshrine certain things.

PG: Let me put it this way, there were three million people in ancient Greece. I don't know the exact number. Maybe there were four maybe there were two. I am not going to argue that. But you get three million people who don't live in the Coca-Cola society, are those the 20th century? Or are all the other 190 million or whatever number there are? I think, and this is America. It is perfectly possible the three million will tell us what the— Those are the three million that count, in effect. That is where the fascism comes in, I suppose. Not that I, I'm not going to take anybody's life away from anybody, but I think that it is possible to understand you're the culture and to feel something about it, really.

BH: Why is it you don't hate your culture? Like many painters?

PG: Well look it has been very good to me, my culture. It's allow me to do what I wanted to do. Just like it allowed them to do what they wanted to do.

BH: I mean, why do you think painters do dislike their culture? I mean, why is it many intellectuals kind of despise their culture and really, kind of are against it and all that.

PG: Huh? Yes, I'll have some.

BH: That's brandy in there.

PG: Is that brandy in there? Who's brandy is that?

BH: That's mine. You want that?

PG: You want to drink that brandy and a wine too?

BH: No I'm just holding it for—

PG: Brandywine?

BH: I'm holding that brandy for—

PG: All right.

BH: You want that?

PG: No, that's all right. Give me some wine.

I don't really know that painters hate their culture. I don't think they are even concerned with it, somehow, curiously enough [inaudible]

BH: What do you think Marsh [Reginald] did, for example?

PG: What about Marsh?

BH: Marsh, when he painted Coney Island?

PG: I don't think he did letters, like they said, like however it was, John Kennedy said that was his significant contribution, was the letters in the background. Obviously, that wasn't what he was interested in at all, right? I don't think that was his significant contribution, either.

BH: Why do you think he did that?

PG: Put the letters in there?

BH: No why do you think he painting Coney Island and the dirt out and about, do you think that was a kind of—

PG: I think it was likely it was partly the style, you know. He probably liked groups of people. He liked to try to

figure it out, exactly like they did in the Renaissance. You don't think there is anything to glorify, so he took to those under. Those were the only people who even got into groups. But I don't really know, if you put things in words. What?

BH: That's pretty good.

PG: But I think if you put things in words, it's silly, too. I think it's not— If I can explain something, that I do, why I do it, that would be an outright lie. Even though I did it myself.

BH: It won't be a lie at the moment. I might be a lie later.

PG: Oh yeah but I mean, what were the reasons I did it for? I mean, explaining what I did, you explain it in words and it doesn't make any sense at all. It's part of the truth, but everything is a distortion.

BH: It's only one part of the truth, I mean, nobody damns anybody on one word. I mean, obviously, we

PG: Well everybody damns everybody on one word.

BH: We're bound live long enough, without damning each other on one word, one style, one doctrine.

PG: Well, that is true, I mean I think—

BH: After a while as you said years ago, you know, you're around long enough, I mean, people just kind of get used to it all. I am no longer mad at the Davis Gallery, and you're mad at—

PG: I was never mad at the Davis Gallery.

BH: Well, I was. I was furious.

PG: But I never cared.

BH: You never cared.

PG: The trouble with the Davis Gallery exactly was that it became the Davis Gallery. So that all the individuals were—

BH: Now they've completely changed, you know.

PG: So they have everything in there?

BH: Oh no no, they are looking around for little more exciting lights.

PG: Yes. That's typical, they've got tired of Mozart.

[They laugh.]

BH: They've got tired Mozart. That is a great phrase, I must say.

[They laugh.]

PG: That's true.

BH: That's true, they always thought those people—

PG: That's took the best thing in the world, that possibly existed and they put it on their wall, and they got tired of it. Where were they then with their over—excitement, like you said? Got to make it jazzy. Depends where you are coming from.

BH: There is something else, I mean, again. I really, I must say, I still, I hate to kind of harp, Paul, again. But I do think that the—

PG: By the way I am not in any way involved with Reginald Marsh.

BH: No no no.

PG: I don't mean to say that you are implying—

BH: Oh no no.

PG: But I really can't say what he thinks at all. I've seen very few Reginald Marsh's in my life. I've seen many

more Rothkos or Kleins than I have seen Reginald Marshes.

BH: I wasn't implying that. I was asking—

PG: I'm not saying you were implying even I just don't know. I never thought about Reginald Marsh.

BH: No, I know. But that's an outside kind of view, I mean, he certainly didn't idolized people. He didn't— He looked at them, he tried to group them, in the sense, that's idolization.

PG: Well, I don't know about that, people are in groups. We are sitting in a group here.

BH: That wasn't the point. I just brought it up [inaudible]—

PG: Anyhow I don't know anything about Reginald Marsh. It is very interesting because I was bored to death with Abstract Expressionists, even though I liked some of it. It was stuffed down my throat by a bunch of people. So I took a certain attitude. I can imagine that Reginald Marsh was shot at by Cubism, if you like. And he was bored with that. I can understand very well how he felt that way. But I was never bored with Reginald. I figure I never say any of it, my whole life, practically. I've seen a few things, I didn't have to go to that exhibit they had there. But they have— Obviously, what you are oppressed by is partly what you do something about. But I don't think it's what you'd would call exactly a reaction. Maybe it is reaction, I don't really believe in the theory of reaction either, if that's correct.

BH: I mean, everyone reacts.

PG: It think everybody does, more instinctively.

BH: We—

[audio break]

PG: But they have— Obviously, what you are oppressed by is partly what you do something about. But I don't think it's what you'd would call exactly a reaction. Maybe it is reaction, I don't really believe in the theory of reaction either, if that's correct.

BH: I mean, everyone reacts.

PG: It think everybody does, more instinctively.

BH: We all react, I mean, to a lot of things. I never liked Hemingway when I was young. I came around to liking him recently.

PG: Well, that is interesting. I have liked all kinds of things, myself.

BH: I mean, I didn't like him at the time because I was more interested in Yeats and Proust. You know, all the great Europeans and all of that.

PG: Certainly for a man who started out, I started out with something a little bit like Mondrian, really. And if you start out with that, you could hardly be sick of [William-Adolphe] Bouguereau.

[They laugh.]

That doesn't make any sense, right? To pretend. I pretended that I was sick of Bouguereau because everybody was sick of Bouguereau. All along I had no idea what Bouguereau was. I just knew it was really realistic. I will admit I don't like it too well when I see it now. But still I really wasn't sick of it because I had never seen it.

It's interesting. The one thing that I— You know those false Vermeer's that guy painted? What's his name? Van?

BH: Van Meegeren.

PG: Yes, Van Meegeren. He— those paintings fooled the people in 1936. And the interesting thing was, if you look at them now, they look like 1936.

[They laugh.]

PG: So, that really is— So people can only see what they can see. Vermeer looked like 1936 Vermeer to the people in 1936. That's all. We see it in another way. Which is a very nice thing, really, it seems to me. The facts change. That is really what it amounts to. Vermeer is a different painter today than he was because we see something different.

BH: You know, in the 50's, I mean the 1850's and '60's, they used to, they would talk, and they archived things about some painter, an American painter in New York would say: "Two ladies came by to see me and they wanted it Frenchy Style."

PG: They wanted what?

BH: Frenchy style.

PG: What does that mean?

BH: Well, French style, they wanted something, you know, something French. Like Meissonier or something like that. Bouguereau.

PG: Oh you mean not— I thought you were talking about sex.

[They laugh]

BH: No they wanted actually an American painters that didn't feel at the time that they really— People wanted French—style painting. They didn't want to hang American paintings. They weren't terribly good, particularly, or Hudson River School wasn't really hot.

PG: Well Eakins was painting then. Ryder.

BH: Oh he didn't do very well.

PG: Well, [Thomas] Eakins was a pretty good painter. I like him.

BH: But, he didn't sell, I mean, nobody really liked his work.

PG: He must of sold. He did an awful lot of portraits. He must have done some of them on commission, sold to somebody.

BH: He survived, I guess.

PG: Well, he was a good painter. Ryder was certainly, he never sold any, but he was a good painter.

BH: Why was he good?

PG: Because of that certain *quelque chose*. [something]

[They laugh.]

Well, anyhow, my essential view of the Archives of American Art is that figurative, or whatever they want to call it, but I don't call it figurative, has been going on, and it is not going to stop. They can't stop it. Nobody can stop it. The museums and the—

BH: Why can't they stop it?

PG: Because people obviously want to do it. And it has been being done, and for the last 20 years and it's been proclaimed dead every two minutes. There were plenty of people who got disgusted with it, like, somebody like Alfred Russell, is now an abstract painter. Grace Hartigan's an abstract painter. Larry Rivers does some kind of other thing really.

But every instance that you can think of, it seems to me, there's been some serious artist who took a shot at it. And plenty of people continue. Like, Porter, Leland Bell, Lester. In their own way, they've all attempted to do something.

I can think of, like Nick Marsicano he started to list of the names of people who are doing something really still significant. And people like Pearlstein, who started some place all together, and slowly is one of the most Philistine of the Philistines. Or whatever he's call. I don't know, most high of the priest.

BH: Philistine.

PG: I don't agree, you wouldn't call him a Philistine. He is the opposite of Philistine. The most Jewish of the Jews.

[They laugh.]

PG: The biggest— the littlest David of them all.

[They laugh.]

BH: That is an aside to me. Take it out.

[They laugh.]

PG: That's right, take it out.

BH: I can you take that out. Yes.

PG: Well it's true, though. I think that really is, it's something that is going to persist. And it seems to me in the whole art world, the museums and the critics would all be much better off if they would acknowledge that fact and allow things to come together. Allow Abstract—Expressionism to exist with something like figurative, with something like Pop.

BH: Absolutely.

PG: And not try to shoot one down in favor of the other, and try to raise the whole thing up at once that is on the subject of Art.

BH: Hear, hear.

PG: Because it has been going on, and it's going to go on, no matter what they say. And when they say what's going to come next year. What's coming next year is already here. And so is a lot of other stuff.

LG: I've decided on a 1965 style.

PG: That is exactly right. Which is such baloney because, I mean, Joe Stefanelli still paints, and Felix really kicked up completely, painting away, very helpfully. Nobody stopped him really.

BH: Howard Downs? [phonetic]

PG: Howard Downs still paints. He has gotten nowhere. That's right. And he is a very good painter. I mean, it seems to me, they look around for something called Camelot in the name of Art where ever they— [Laughs.]

LG: I'll call you Richard Burton then.

PG: That's right. The hell with the rest of the nonsense. Then I think they would do very well. So, when you come at me as this figurative artist, I am certainly not going to try to kill any other kind of art. Because I know what's happened to this, what they call figurative art. It has been going on. It pops up here. It pops up there. People get disgusted but someone else always picks up the mantle, really. Which is very nice. It is a very hard thing. So, no matter what they say, no matter what bring in and take out, it's still going to be there.

BH: All right. I always felt that. I mean, that kind of applies for a while.

PG: I always felt that something like Abstract Expressionism, whatever that is, gets started, that's also unstoppable.

BH: You can't change that.

PG: You can't turn it off. So, instead of trying to make art with a lot of warnings to artists, why don't they just look at what's going on and talk about it? Instead of only looking only at one second and one thrilling moment and another second and another thrilling moment.

It seems to me that pattern, what really the pattern is, they shop around for a year or so, and then they settle on something. And while they're shopping around, some things rise up and sort of do pretty well. And then when they sell on something, like on Pop Art, then they cram everything back in the box and they push Pop Art way up here and sail us along on the waves of the future. In about two or three years, they get sick of it, and they push it back down the box and then they bring everything out of the box and fumble around again, looking over, to decide what else to do.

LG: [Inaudible.]

PG: That's right. That's ridiculous.

BH: Crazy

PG: And they're the ones who are really ridiculous. And all the people who follow it are ridiculous. There is a

serious thing called Art that has been going on around here all this time and nobody really can stop it.

BH: That's pretty sure, isn't it?

PG: It doesn't, really, it isn't necessarily got to know either. Might just be a blotch of paint.

Is that enough for the Archives of American Art?

[They laugh.]

You ought to be able to fish something out of that. Do you want remembrances of past days?

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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