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Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Nathan Halper,
1980 July 8-Aug. 14

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

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Nathan Halper on July 8 and August 14, 1980. The interview was conducted in Provincetown, Massachusetts by Robert Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Marjorie Halper is also present.

Interview

ROBERT BROWN: This is an interview with Nathan Halper in Provincetown, Massachusetts, on July 8, 1980. How did you get interested in the arts? Was your education or family background conducive to this?

NATHAN HALPER: No, let's see, I don't know what is like nowadays. In the days when I was in grammar school and high school...

ROBERT BROWN: Where was this?

NATHAN HALPER: New York City. You had about one week when they would be drawing or water colors and then you'd - one hour a week they'd put one little vase or something—in grammar school I can remember one of my first disillusionments in the art world was a little picture with sort of a blue Dutch windmill on it and I drew that and I thought I was pretty good and the teacher came by and said is that the best you can do? And I thought well if That's the way she feels, I dais oh, no, and then she said, oh, well, Then I won't give you an excellent mark. But I was yellow . That was one of the first things I decided, not to be yellow in the future. But in high school, you'd make little decorative designs and then...

ROBERT BROWN: Was your family in the arts at all?

NATHAN HALPER: No, they weren't, but on my mother's side, they were pretty good in a crafts sort of way, that is mother's father and some of the others—in the synagogue he would always make the decorations; he was good at whittling and things of that sort and I think he drew at some point. He used to decorate plates either with prints wither with an iron - I've seen him do that—or else the plate would be on a disk revolving and making lines around and then something like a flower. But they were very good about things like that - I can see now that they didn't really have much taste, but they had sort of sensitivity to it and they weren't very sound, but that came on my father's side.

ROBERT BROWN: Your father's side came to what?

NATHAN HALPER: They were sounder, more intelligent I think, a little bit more learned in things but had no skill in those things, but anyway when I got to college, I was at Columbia when they had those general honors courses which is sort of a forerunner of the Great Books series. And once in a while a professor of ours would give a talk about either a Renaissance person or others and I'd come aware of those things and they'd show you slides. I remember way back then slides of the Seurat circus and things like that, and Modigliani and the guy would talk in a very dull way.

ROBERT BROWN: Showing nearly contemporary things though?

NATHAN HALPER: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Who was that teacher, do you recall?

NATHAN HALPER: No, it was two years, first to the Renaissance and then up to the modern period. I remember being very much taken by Modigliani and because maybe in a way it corresponds to the variations in literature which I was much more interested in - the distortions that you would get in the *Waste Land* or Joyce, or - they weren't the simple traditional things - that it would be a little bit awry.

ROBERT BROWN: And that would be particularly intriguing to you?

NATHAN HALPER: Yeah, without having any idea about, I just liked those things when I saw them, apart from those slides I would see them black and white, I'd look at books and see black and white, I liked certain people. Then I had my friends, my roommate Lloyd Frankenburg, got tied up with Lauren Carter who was still unknown then and starting to paint.

ROBERT BROWN: When was that?

NATHAN HALPER: About 1928.

ROBERT BROWN: Was that about when you got out of college?

NATHAN HALPER: I got out in '27. And he met her in '28, so I met her. And they were a permanent thing until he died recently. They even got married. And she wasn't yet painting herself in any thing that might have been considered modern then. She was going to Arts Students League, But she would go to things like (unclear) and talk about them and she'd talk about how Doug was and people like that and at the same time she would like Carroll and those other people. But she would take to some of those things.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you recall some of the things you saw when you went with her?

NATHAN HALPER: Like the Carrolton show at NYU. The Carrolton Collection which included some Picassos and other things like that.

ROBERT BROWN: Did those things astound you at the time?

NATHAN HALPER: No, by that time I knew that in the world of art you could look at anything by that time just as in literature things were - although I didn't know what the hell was all about, I still was looking.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, what were you doing at this time? Were you a writer?

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, and I do remember too that the man at Columbia was head of the department and his name was John Erston, he was famous in his time. He was an educator and a critic and then he - during a sabbatical he had written a book called *The Private Life of Helen of Troy*, a novel, which became a big best seller and famous, and he had also been to France, just lines and circled and he said he bought one - it's hanging in his house, and he doesn't know what it's all about it just makes him feel good to look at. I feel maybe something like that. She would take me around, I had no idea as to why some of the conservative things were good. I don't mean I know now why some things are good.

ROBERT BROWN: Did she try to teach you or explain?

NATHAN HALPER: Well, she wasn't very articulate. She was this good and so on.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, were you a writer?

NATHAN HALPER: I was would be. After college you see, during college I'd be writing about my own desires and things and I was pretty good at that but one of the sensible professors told me as soon as you run out of your topic you're going to be in trouble, which was true. It was about things that I knew. I knew how a guy my age might feel about different things. I mean but knowing what a guy 18, 19, 20 feels is one thing but when you're closer to 25, 26 that won't do - how a guy of 26 feels because - when he's 18 he's entirely in himself with just light adjustments in the outside world. Also, I got to a point when I had to know things about the outside world; I had to find what was lacking, it was habit. So I was just stumbling around. A funny thing did happen at the time. My father at that time used to go to Europe once in a while on business and some relative of his who is a painter who came from the same town convinced him he ought to buy some of those paintings for a minimal amount. He did. He brought them back. And I and my brother and sister thought they were terrible and would always, as much as we dare, razz him about it. A few years later, this was during the winter on the post where there would be very few people during the winter. He knew I was interested in art, even if it was only an aficionary way, and he said there's a fellow on board that boat you would have been interested in. he was a dealer. And I said J.B. Neumann, and he said, yes. I knew the name from Mclver etc. and I said what was he after, was he bringing pictures with him? And he said yes. And I said what was he bringing? He said some man showed me some funny figures and it was Mod-something. And I said Modigliani? And he said yes. And I said what did he want for them? He said about \$300.00 apiece. So I said now look pop why don't you get about three of them. He said look I got some last year and all you did was razz me. So to hell with it. (laughter)

ROBERT BROWN: That's the end of your father's...

NATHAN HALPER: yeah. He had learned his lesson and so that was that. Up here there were these guys very, very conservative.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you come up here thinking you would be a writer and live in New York?

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, I had been unhappy about some girl or something and I had a few hundred dollars. I thought I'd be up here and I was in the writer's project for a while but I knew a lot of painters, and I knew at the Beachcombers the *National Academician* and apart from that, we were probably the only place in the country that had an artists' and writers' project, not a project but the union, a union for artists and writers.

ROBERT BROWN: And what did that do?

NATHAN HALPER: It didn't do anything. I mean they were probably under the control of some of the communists or fellow travelers and they would get you to try to say... a statement somewhere - I would argue against that just as a matter of tactic, but we were all sort of semi fellow travelers in those days. And I'd say look if you're automatically everytime something comes up, a certain circumstance, it won't mean anything to anybody. Why the hell don't you pick your shots - one out of five or ten and then you have a little more clout, but I couldn't convince anybody. Anyway, there were guys on that like Ross Moffit and Carl Connaught; they were on the writer's project. And then the other fellows.

ROBERT BROWN: And they were quite radical about it?

NATHAN HALPER: No, they were not radical. They were what I would consider liberal. Fellows like those were liberal. I mean in any organization like this you have a few communists, pushing the liberals, you have - but they really didn't do anything, a few census and stuff, petitions somewhere.

ROBERT BROWN: They weren't trying to better conditions here?

NATHAN HALPER: How could they? They didn't even have votes most of them.

ROBERT BROWN: And the economy here was very slim then?

NATHAN HALPER: Very slim, fishing and fishermen, one of the communists was a fisherman, fisherman family, and he was just considered a joke by the rest of them.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you find it a pretty conducive place for work for you?

NATHAN HALPER: It would have been but again I didn't have anything to write about. I mean technically I could do things, But I didn't have a subject, I mean writing about myself was silly in the vintage because I was a 28 year old who didn't know what the score was about anything, and in order to write about a guy like that you've got to have a distance from him. Outside looking in. And here I was inside a guy who was completely incompetent at that time in that type of world. So what the hell?

ROBERT BROWN: And you spent...

NATHAN HALPER: Four years.

ROBERT BROWN: A good deal of that time going around making friends and...

NATHAN HALPER: And trying to write and gathering stuff - I've got a trunk full of stuff about Massachusetts I wish somebody would use because it's great material. But that was that. So I knew two kinds of artists those on the artists' project, WPA, and the successful *National Academician*.

ROBERT BROWN: Can we talk about the latter now?

NATHAN HALPER: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Who were some of those and what were they like as people?

NATHAN HALPER: They were rather impressive because you see they had been in France; they were what you might call good emcees. They could get up and just talk and even, like Richard Miller - do you know him?

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

NATHAN HALPER: He was from Missouri, and apparently considered the great figure in the Missouri art. He once told me that Miller suggested to do some murals or something there in the state house. They got in touch with Miller whether he was okay and he said yes. He would go around looking like nothing distinguished but he could get up and put on a very good act and they all could. John Ward, he really should have been an actor and so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean a good act in respect to sincerity; they really weren't? Con artists, you think?

NATHAN HALPER: Well, I think, they were men of the world, put it that way. A good act in that they could be sophisticated. He happened to be staying in Provincetown either to work or something, but they didn't have the limited horizons which these other guys did - I mean a fellow like Knox in one sense he didn't have a limited horizon - he would read books on philosophy or mysticism or things of that sort, which these guys didn't but in terms of the world as we know it, Knox was sort of a babe in arms. These guys weren't. Although they had dealers to act as their intermediaries; they knew how to act with dealers. They knew how to act with patrons. They knew how to act if some museum person came along. They could put on different shows. I'm not talking

about their sincerity as artists, which probably is unfair to those guys in general. But they were men of the world because they had been in the world.

ROBERT BROWN: You might say they were part of the last generation or so of the genteel tradition?

NATHAN HALPER: Well, yes and no.

ROBERT BROWN: Well traveled, well brought up.

NATHAN HALPER: Yeah, but they may not of necessarily been well brought up themselves, but they acquired...

ROBERT BROWN: The airs...

NATHAN HALPER: The airs of the well brought up, like Richard Miller was married to some woman, Billie Miller; she was called Billie; I think her name was Harriet or something, one of the people who had been brought up in the genteel tradition and if you went in their house which was ... everything was very antiequey, and very beautiful, beautiful garden which was all her doing and he knew enough to play along without interfering, but, in those days, which was very important, if he met a millionaire, he could speak to him as an expert in the other field; whereas, none of these other guys could in that way. And there were several of those ...

ROBERT BROWN: Richard Miller and John Ward.

NATHAN HALPER: John Ward.

ROBERT BROWN: What was he like? In some ways much more exuberant, eccentric.

NATHAN HALPER: Yeah. He was the brother of Richard Ward, the actor. He was a local, John Ward, but my wife's brother, who was in theatre, worked with Richard Ward, who did paintings incidentally in Hollywood; all the Hollywood people used to buy his paintings.

ROBERT BROWN: Now what was his name?

NATHAN HALPER: Richard Ward, the actor, and my brother-in-law used to say that they had it all twisted that John Ward should be the actor and Richard, the painter, but like the Gilbert and Sullivan thing, they got twisted in their cradle. He was a great raconteur and so on and so forth; he could put - most of them did their selling in New York, but John Ward was mostly in Boston, and he could put on a good Boston act, at one point he even got an honorary degree from Harvard.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he?

NATHAN HALPER: And to tell you the truth a big scandal there. At one point, the Harvard got an honorary degree for John Ward and Walt Disney in the same year I think everybody got fired. In the - I don't know - late 30's or 40's.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he a likable fellow?

NATHAN HALPER: Well, again, I mean you have to define terms.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, I mean to you?

NATHAN HALPER: Yeah, they all were. Richard Miller was too; they were very conservative politically and aesthetically, and in fact, we had a little trouble - that was you know the days of the Depression and the Beachcombers got a little bit of money and the Lions Club - nothing could be more conservative than the Lions Club here - and they had a little charity drive, so they got the Beachcomber to give them about twenty bucks towards the drive and the older fellows got furious. The Beachcombers had members and then voting members and after a while a member became a voting member. And they tried to pass all kinds of regulations to make it difficult for the younger members to become voting members. And give away money of the club. But they were conservative guys.

ROBERT BROWN: Did the Beachcombers play much of a role as a social club?

NATHAN HALPER: They met once a week. In one way they were something in their time. You had the Beachcomber Ball and the Art Association Ball and both costume balls and people would go to a hell of a lot of trouble for both of them in those days. They would spend maybe months making up what they would wear. Well, the first year, '36 or '37, I guess '37, they had some guy who worked puppets and out of paper mache he made a horse and a bull; and guys in them and I think I was a horse's ass. (laughter) But you know you worked on those things and...

ROBERT BROWN: Was the main purpose of the club just for people to get together?

NATHAN HALPER: Well, the purpose of the club goes way back about 1915, you know, you had a bunch of artists still living from the days of Hawthorne; you had artists of all kinds and it was partly to institutionalize their meeting together. They got away from their wives once a week. You have, one of the artists would cook and they'd split and they'd get away from their wives - and you'd play there.

ROBERT BROWN: Billiards?

NATHAN HALPER: Chess. Those were the two things; and you'd drink and there was piano, you know, it was considered good man stuff and you know the dealers would come up and go there for the day, and be with them. I was quite impressed by the older guys although they were dreadfully conservative politically and aesthetically.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean they were rock red Republicans or ...

NATHAN HALPER: Rock red, I can remember a situations, you know people'd read detective stories and they'd go there. I remember one came out in which a character was a Socialist and it turned out he was the murderer. And it was very well done, as you went along there was no reason - he was no more likely than a lot of others - but Richard Miller said, oh, I spotted him immediately.

ROBERT BROWN: Because he was a Socialist?

NATHAN HALPER: Yeah, course a lot of what he said was justified ... But I can also remember what was said about art. There was a show of some of Gauguin, Picasso, I mean Gauguin and Van Gogh, some of those people and I can't remember if it was Boston or New York. And Richard Miller went to see it and he came back and said very judiciously, you know, they aren't bad.

ROBERT BROWN: There is a certain breadth to them ...

NATHAN HALPER: Well, they could admire a certain skill or, although you look at Richard Miller, He was sort of a post-impressionist, but they were that way. John Ward was very much against any kind of union.

ROBERT BROWN: Why?

NATHAN HALPER: Well, I mean, I made his life miserable; I used to point out that his brother was in the artists' equity in Hollywood, etc. etc. But they were that way. I think for one thing, at that time, the art world to make a go of it, as far as I saw, you were sucking around rich people. Either they bought your stuff or they gave you commissions. It was very hard to think secretly that they were no god damn good and play up to them at the same time. An also it was part of making it, like Richard Miller, he married a well-brought up woman, so...

ROBERT BROWN: There was another conservative there then. Frederick Waugh, wasn't he there then?

NATHAN HALPER: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: did you get to know him at all?

NATHAN HALPER: No, but my wife knew him quite well. His family was one of the pillars of the Episcopal Church here and he had more money than the rest - I'm told he was the first one in town here who had a good sound system, Victrola, 78's with all the operas and symphonies and quartets and the artists used to go there once a week to listen to the Waugh's - and I was told - in fact, there is some evidence that he really - what he used to do ...

ROBERT BROWN: C stick ...

NATHAN HALPER: No only that, but it was a way of breaking a rock and he was skillful, I was told that he really wanted to do abstract pictures and to him abstract meant geometric and his gallery and his family would not allow it. The bit of proof there is to that, I heard it before this semi-proof came to light, after he died Hoffmann bought his house, and his studio, and Hoffmann found some notebooks where he used to write children's stories for himself and they weren't very good but he'd do illustrations for them and the illustrations were all pure geometric. Not something with squares and things, but all sorts of arabesques, geometric arabesques and a lot of his heart was in that. His son became one of the comic strip guys and at some point at the gallery I wrote to him and I said I understand that and I'd like to show some of your father's etc. No answer. I knew the son at the Beachcomber. Whatsoever.

ROBERT BROWN: These were people ...

NATHAN HALPER: He might have been an English liberal himself and the behavior was absolutely genteel, Episcopalian, music soirees, that sort of thing. A well-kept house and so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: The Episcopalian group of artists, that represented kind of a genteel flavor.

NATHAN HALPER: Yeah, it was, and there was like Mrs. Miller played in bridge tournaments which we had every week, which I got in on because I was fairly good at bridge – all these genteel people on that level.

ROBERT BROWN: What about the other group you said ...

NATHAN HALPER: They were comparatively unsocial.

ROBERT BROWN: Unsophisticated, by comparison.

NATHAN HALPER: They were unsocial, by which I don't mean they were anti-social. They didn't hate people or anything but they sort of kept to themselves and family. I remember at one point we were mildly friendly with Connaught; at one point we thought we'd look in on him and we went up there about 5 o'clock; we didn't have any telephone at that time, and we thought that would be a good time, and he was very much embarrassed because they were eating supper, you know, at 5 o'clock, Unless there was a special reason to stay up, they'd go to bed soon after. Maybe by seven. And then he'd get up early in the morning and Miller, well, he had the family, he didn't run around. The guys who did the running around were the younger group; I don't know of you know them now, Malakov and McCain, etc.

ROBERT BROWN: yes.

NATHAN HALPER: They were young then.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, these were you contemporaries.

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, McCain is older; Malakov, a bit younger, yeah, they were hitting 30 or a little over and they were interested – they'd drink a lot of beer or whiskey and play a lot of polo and they were more the old-fashioned people, but they were also provincial in a way. The came from small towns in the mid-west or places like that and they made the jump straight to Provincetown, whereas guys like the Millers and others may have come from the same sort of environment but they first passed through Paris, which made a difference. So these guys were and still are, now of course, having known all sorts of people including lots of psychoanalysts, they were all more sophisticated, but they still don't know the New York World.

ROBERT BROWN: They limit themselves.

NATHAN HALPER: Yeah, and it probably hurt them aesthetically and they learned something from their teacher here and that's where they were and they would refine it and so forth, but there never was a brand new influence, a new wind coming in to give them a little crisis and then to make it, so that's what hurt them.

ROBERT BROWN: Even when new people came in, say in the case of Malakov; Malakov looked much like Dickinson.

NATHAN HALPER: yeah, I don't know who he studied – he may have made it just in time – I don't know if he came after Hawthorne but then he fell under the influence of Dickinson.

ROBERT BROWN: Why do you suppose that was? Dickinson was quite a powerful, forthright character.

NATHAN HALPER: Dickinson was a very quiet man but he had a lot of character, so people respected him. We had a Dickinson show about four years ago and that little thing I put together from tapes I did with people, that all sorts of people who even liked De Kooning respected him just on account of the way he would walk down the street. He gave the impression of going his own way and painters seem to admire that in others even if they haven't got it themselves.

ROBERT BROWN: Sure, particularly when they are younger.

NATHAN HALPER: Yeah, well some of them as they grow older, like I think of people who were admired, Jan Miller was very much admired by the younger people of his gallery and Stankiewicz – very much admired. Lester Johnson was admired later. But all these guys have a certain integrity about them. Now one guy who in one way was a bit of a charlatan, yet other fellows, the fellows my age thought he had a certain integrity – that's Paul Berland, you know him.

ROBERT BROWN: Uh huh.

NATHAN HALPER: He was swashbuckling around. And he would tell people to fuck themselves, not because of his integrity, but just because of his nature and I think guys who considered that a form of integrity admired him very much, but I notice in these other cases and with Berland that if a guy seems to go his own way, no matter what the cost, painters will admire him.

ROBERT BROWN: In the case of someone like Malakov – It was the stuff – they not only admired him, they admired the style.

NATHAN HALPER: Yeah, he began making changes after he went to Greece. He got a slight bit of a new palette, a little browns and rusty reds came in then, but still Dickinson – the idea of two different kinds of paintings – one under Dickinson was called premier vue, an oil done as if it were a watercolor, one shot right the and there. In fact I remember one painting of his, where he was doing something on the Normandy Coast and the clouds began coming across the English Channel and after a while he couldn't paint and he just left the picture. It was a damn good picture even as it was, but that was it. Now the other kind would be a studio piece where he might work on – like the Ruins at Dal– it doesn't matter how many years. Malakov would pick that sort of thing up. That was the curious thing about Dickinson. I've seen him – there was a girl who was working for me and he thought she'd be very good to paint and he got her to come and be his model in New York City, and I saw her one day and said how are you doing? And she was getting a dollar an hour and she said well, I've collected about \$58.00 so far, and he's only got one corner of the eye and cheek bone. But I saw that painting. Jesus, it was good and it not only filled the canvas as such, but just looking at the eye and cheek bone, you knew it was this girl. I don't know how many could do that. And he was strange.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you get to know him a bit in the 30's?

NATHAN HALPER: Yeah, slightly. Playing chess. I got to know him a lot better afterwards, and my wife always knew him.

ROBERT BROWN: Had you met your wife when you were down here?

NATHAN HALPER: Yeah. I met her slightly in the 30's when I was down here. We ran around with different crowds. She ran with the genteel crowd and I ran with the other crowd. But then we met again after the war. And we got married here and just had the two kinds of people at the wedding.

ROBERT BROWN: In the 30's, there was still a cleavage between the two groups?

NATHAN HALPER: Cleavage is a little strong but ... they knew each other and they might even intersect. But as Dickinson affected Malakov and Dickinson would be in the genteel group and Malakov, the other one – they'd know each other socially, but there was a difference which wasn't entirely the way people lived.

ROBERT BROWN: Did the Art Association have much of a role in the 30's? Do you remember?

NATHAN HALPER: In the late 30's, I remember, and also I heard – it was important in a sense that although the painting life of the older people was not centered in Provincetown, there would be New York or Boston shows, yet since they were here, they met each other and it was a place where they had contacts with each other, but almost social reasons it became important to them, too – one upmanship or whatever. A lot of these guys didn't like each other but as I recall, and I may be exaggerating as memory sometimes does, that I had the feeling listening in – I was just on the outside and that one of the big moments of every year – they had two shows, the July show and the August show – was just to see who was rejected. And rejection was often – they might reject Brown and Brown might feel “all right, I'll get him when I'm the judge. “ Maybe I'm making it too programmatic, but everyone was rejected at some point. They'd be interested as to who passed and who didn't. Among the people who weren't that high in the hierarchy, it was considered something gainful to get in. Like players getting into the big game. Not like now where every Sunday painter feels they have a divine right to be in.

ROBERT BROWN: There were juries?

NATHAN HALPER: Oh, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: And they split into...

NATHAN HALPER: Yeah, eventually they split into periods. I think one month would be conservative and one would be modern. The modern one could be guys like Moffitt even; they just weren't Paris school.

ROBERT BROWN: Who would see the show, aside from the artists?

NATHAN HALPER: People would come through.

ROBERT BROWN: Who were the tourists or visitors in that day? Can you characterize them?

NATHAN HALPER: In general, people who would go to summer places, usually, people in the genteel tradition who knew that in summer you went to Normandy or Briton or Cape Cod, but Provincetown was a bit wrong side of the tracks, because along with it some of the Greenwich Village people used to come here. So you'd have an element that other places on the Cape looked down on.

ROBERT BROWN: What was there in that element that caused them to look down on? Bohemian life style?

NATHAN HALPER: Or anyway he didn't have the little parts that fit the code. You don't dress in a certain way; your voice -- you know, things of that sort. Going around needing a shave or whatever. You're the sort of person others wouldn't invite to dinner. There was a lot of gentility here as all over the Cape.

ROBERT BROWN: Which group did you more relate to?

NATHAN HALPER: I was more in the non-genteel -- A. Because I'd come here as a friend of some college classmate of mine who came up for the summer and stayed they were genteel and propertied -- they owned a house here -- so they were part of this rich group and so I was in the bridge group with genteel people. I was almost refined, got along well with Richard Miller's wife and some like that.

ROBERT BROWN: Were there among the visitors some who were art patrons or at least avid collectors?

NATHAN HALPER: I don't think so. There might be one or two who were patrons of a specific painter because they were related or a friend or something. Marge, do you remember in the period before the war any people here who were collectors?

ROBERT BROWN: No, well when Hawthorne was alive, people came down to him...

NATHAN HALPER: But after that, between his death and 1940?

NATHAN HALPER: No, I don't remember any.

ROBERT BROWN: No. So it was in the dumps both aesthetically and financially until the Hofmann thing started.

NATHAN HALPER: So this was a low point then?

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, this was a low point.

NATHAN HALPER: Because a good many people came and settled here without having much wider exposure before they got here.

NATHAN HALPER: Right. They skipped the intermediate points.

ROBERT BROWN: Now what was the afterglow of Hawthorne? He died in what...?

NATHAN HALPER: 31 or 32.

ROBERT BROWN: Had he been a big force here? He had a very large class.

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, he had a very large class and that affected the town. Originally, the people in town admired artists very much because they had an air about them, they'd been around, and they treated the people here the way they would the people in Normandy or Brittany. In '52 they had a Hawthorne show. I did something on it, and I had some articles in the Advocate about the sources called Nellie Barnes, which is in Minneapolis. She was a woman who had the artists' restaurant near his school and her husband was still alive. She wasn't. So went around and saw him to get information and he told me about Nellie. He and all the others would always say Mr. Hawthorne; they'd never say Hawthorne. They'd paint up the hill there and they'd say there'd be more than one hundred people there and they'd come here to listen to Mr. Hawthorne. And then he said, "Artists was artists then. They wasn't what they is now." (laughter) And that was the attitude the town had, that after Hawthorne and a few of the others who didn't have houses -- if a man owned a house like Miller and others, they were semi-respectable. But these other guys who came and then got WPA jobs and things, they'd see these guys in the bars afterwards. They didn't realize that they might be working and going to the bars. They would see them in the bars and looking around and they were sort of bums, maybe not quite, but it wasn't like in the days of Mr. Hawthorne.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, Mr. Hawthorne had also brought in a lot of students, hadn't he, which must have helped the town financially, because they all had to have quarters.

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, even when I came in '36, you'd walk down the street and see easels all up and down the

street, and people doing it.

ROBERT BROWN: They were still doing the landscapes, seascapes...

NATHAN HALPER: And doing Mary Heaton horses. There was a tree there which was the big subject; everybody was doing the tree on Mary Heaton hoses' lane. It fell down about '50. I mentioned about Miller, the way he kept his house, and Hawthorne too, kept terrific gardens.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes, I know he had a large garden.

NATHAN HALPER: And that impressed the town. These people were gentry. The people here had been fishermen and so forth, I won't say peasants, but they had an idea that there was a gentry that you respected. If they behaved in a way that you could respect.

ROBERT BROWN: Then came the Depression and WPA and hordes of...

NATHAN HALPER: And Hawthorne died.

ROBERT BROWN: And that was knocked things very badly. The Art Association hardly functioned. Most of the men were away and we women just took all the paintings we could find and put them up on the wall and Ralph Moffitt was here and he was the director I think and somehow we kept it going. And the after the war, we had big parties to raise money to get it going again. My brother was in theater and his wife was an actress and she knew how to put in very spectacular party at the Art Association so we were able to raise quite a lot of money and get going. Then gradually the artist men came out of the factories, like Malakov and Bruce McKay working away in the war factories and the younger men at war, so then it began to pick up. And then Hofmann arrived.

NATHAN HALPER: Hofmann was here all the time.

MARJORIE HALPER: But in the beginning nobody mentioned even studying with him because he was in such bad repute.

ROBERT BROWN: We're going to have to talk about him in a moment, when he first came. I wanted to ask one other thing too, about Hawthorne's direct effect on some of the younger painters. When you came here in the 30's...

NATHAN HALPER: Well, he was there already when I came.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes, There must have been painters around who were laboring with or under ...

MARJORIE HALPER: Yes, Malakov and Bruce Mc Kay were more or less. They came without any funds at all from the Middle West. I think they slept up in his loft in the school's studio.

NATHAN HALPER: he closed his eyes to it, he knew it but he pretended he didn't know.

MARJORIE HALPER: It was a whole group and of course Henry Hinshey was his assistant teacher and I went into a class in 1926 and 27. It was the beach class for beginners and we worked with a putty knife and I remember Hinshey would come down and give some criticism up at the big studio on Saturday morning. Everybody took everything they had done that week and it was put up on a revolving stand and then everybody sat on the floor of the studio and Hawthorne would come in and bow and everybody would clap.

ROBERT BROWN: My.

NATHAN HALPER: And you said that some boy friend of yours came and sat with you when Hawthorne came in and said, "Here comes God."

MARJORIE HALPER: Yes, here comes God, and they lighted his pipe for him and took his coat and he proceeded to say who's first on the rack and then he would criticize us in front of the whole class and then it would be turned around and he criticized the next batch. This went on all morning long with a slight break. On Friday morning he'd come down if it was a good day, to the beach at the foot of Dyres Street where the beginners painted a little kid up on a barrel against the sun. And we all painted with these putty knives. But on Friday morning he would come down and the monitor would lay out his palette - he always had a huge palette and we sat around in a big circle and a beautiful girl would be poised against the sun and then Hawthorne would arrive with his little dog and everybody would clap.

NATHAN HALPER: That was the artist in those days. Not what like you have now.

MARJORIE HALPER: And the palettes and the brushes and Hawthorne was a great virtuoso; it was just - there it

was.

ROBERT BROWN: Effortless.

MARJORIE HALPER: Looked effortless, beautiful colors. And there would be a break. The monitor would clean the palette off, wash the brushes.

ROBERT BROWN: And then would you get to work? Would the pupils then be working all the time?

MARJORIE HALPER: No, no we watched. That was one day we watched, Friday and Saturday morning was the criticism, but all the rest of the week – morning and afternoon – everybody painted. And up in the studio they painted still lifes and portraits and so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: It must have been rather daunting for many of the pupils. The virtuoso performance and the applause...

NATHAN HALPER: What was the story about what he'd do the first day? The big act he'd put on and he'd say is anybody here becoming a painter because they want to make money out of it or something. And I think it was an act because one or two people would put up their hands, and he'd say, "You may leave." (laughter) And the idea when he was probably getting \$5,000 or \$10,000 a portrait. But the thing is that I heard from Jack Tworok, his sister who is painter was up here first and she told him about Hawthorne and he came up and he said he was very much impressed by what Hawthorne said, his lectures, but then he saw his paintings and he couldn't recognize the connection. The he saw his water colors and he said the water colors were what Hawthorne was doing. The painting in general he did for commissions, but the water colors – and there were some because I've seen them – I hear now from some of the painters that what they are now getting out of his water colors is incredible.

MARJORIE HALPER: Yes, they were very beautiful, very loose.

ROBERT BROWN: Is that more what he advocated when he taught?

NATHAN HALPER: That's what they say.

MARJORIE HALPER: He would say, the beginner, he wasn't interested whether they could draw or not, they could go to school in the winter and learn to draw which they should do. He was interested in seeing that they learned color – what color made form – one spot of color next to the other. That was his big thing.

NATHAN HALPER: And incidentally when Hofmann had his place afterwards, up on the hill, there were some of his paintings, and Hofmann always claimed that he sort of fell in love with them. He thought Hawthorne was a great colorist and he thought his flesh tones were out of this world.

ROBERT BROWN: So Hawthorne left a long shadow then, did he?

NATHAN HALPER: Oh, yes, tremendous.

ROBERT BROWN: Well into the 30's at least.

NATHAN HALPER: Oh, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, Hinshey then continued as self-proclaimed disciple.

NATHAN HALPER: We just had a show of his.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you get to know him in the 30's? Henry Hinshey?

MARJORIE HALPER: Well, slightly.

NATHAN HALPER: He was another one of those guys who – he was respected, like I said about the Malakovs and the McKay's – he was a respectable version, also skipped the Paris stage but stayed respectable, unlike them.

MARJORIE HALPER: It's very strange, Malakov, in his old age now, is doing things really quite abstract.

NATHAN HALPER: Well, it's funny. Joe Cotton began doing that in his old age after being a violent anti – I mean he was still drawing landscapes, but he didn't really quite like them himself.

ROBERT BROWN: What, the things he did in his old age?

NATHAN HALPER: Yeah, he would say, people would want to have a little show of his things and he would say,

oh, no; he didn't want to show those.

MARJORIE HALPER: They were affected by Hofmann more than they knew I think and the abstract school.

NATHAN HALPER: Well, I think also that a lot of painters tend to become more abstract as they get older. It's one of the - usually they go one way or the other; they don't stay the same.

MARJORIE HALPER: And it took a while for Hofmann to get going. The Art Association - actually some of the so-called moderns who had been battling to get space in the Art Association before Hofmann arrived - they recognized him as a great master and I remember that some of them said, well we're on the board now, so we're making Hofmann the juror for the modern show for as long as we can; we want to get modern art really established here. And he was, he was juror of the Art Association for those shows for a great many years.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this beginning in the 1930's?

MARJORIE HALPER: No, this was late 40's.

ROBERT BROWN: In the 30's then, modern meant something rather conservative.

MARJORIE HALPER: Yes.

NATHAN HALPER: Modern would be what we call very mildly liberal.

ROBERT BROWN: Slightly expressionist.

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, or impressionist. In this period of '36 and '40, I didn't know the academicians; I mean I knew Miller and Waugh pretty well and I knew Connaught and Moffitt. It was from my organizational thing at the artists and writers union and Malakov and Mc Kay - we were roughly the same age and not too damn genteel and no money and so forth. We knew each other to some degree. The other thing Frank McIver used to come up in the summer and have place out in the Dunes, which they built with the aid of young Pfeiffer, out of driftwood. They'd gotten to know some of the Boston people so I do remember Hyman Bloom used to come in.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he?

NATHAN HALPER: yes. As a friend of McIver's and I would know him then. I put him up a few times in a little apartment here.

ROBERT BROWN: What was he like?

NATHAN HALPER: He was young and very much Jewish-conscious and mystical though. He said there were four people important to him, I forget who they are now, but one was Soutine. I remember once McIver said - he talked about Jack Levine, too, but I didn't meet him. He and Levine had come down and it'd be nice if I introduced Levine to a girl. He had the vague idea that I knew a lot of girls to introduce people to. But fortunately Levine didn't come, so I wasn't put to the test. No, I used to go to his shows, but I had no concept of anything.

ROBERT BROWN: Which shows were these?

NATHAN HALPER: In the Art Association and there weren't any other really. During the war I was in Iran.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you drafted?

NATHAN HALPER: I was drafted, but I got in very early - the oldest to get in. My brother was five years younger - his name came up later, but by that time he was considered too old. In Iran, I saw a lot of different kinds of art.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh you did? What were you in?

NATHAN HALPER: No, we had 30,000 troops in Iran to supervise moving supplies from the Persian Gulf to Russia. Fortunately, I was in Tehran most of the time, but when they found I could do paper work, they gave me every job on earth, much beyond my rank, but then whenever I wanted a furlough, I would get it. So I spent time in Isfahan and all those on the Caspian Sea.

ROBERT BROWN: Was the work at all interesting?

NATHAN HALPER: The first year was very interesting. I did a million things I'd never done before and when I came back I'd lost all feeling that there was a great mystique about business. I wanted to be a writer; I hadn't engaged in any of these business pursuits and I thought this was a very mysterious thing...

SIDE TWO

NATHAN HALPER: ...which my relatives and people were able to do, but in the Army I was put in charge of all sorts of things. Then I suddenly realized, it's a cinch, if you want to devote yourself to it, to organizing, to running things. There was nothing to it; you just had to be willing say that you're interested, which I didn't want to do, but now I found it could be done, so therefore a few years later the gallery situation came up after the war, I did marry Margery, who was a painter, but I also got to know the new group of painters who were here, like Adolph Gottlieb - quite well. And Boltman somewhat, the new modern thing that had a show here, in '49 or something.

ROBERT BROWN: At the Art Association?

NATHAN HALPER: At the Art Association; there was one down at 200 Commercial Street where they had a Pollock and all sorts of people. You may have come across that (interruption in the tape) who had been director of the Art Association.

ROBERT BROWN: Donald Wildestein?

NATHAN HALPER: Donald Wildestein and he had the gallery up there. At some point he got hold of 200 Commercial which had been a garage and I don't know if he had a regular business there, but his son-in-law, Cecil Hemly, a poet and later a publisher, and the cousin of Adolph Gottlieb. In '49, they had a thing there called Forum 49 which there have been some articles about recently, and at some point will be taken as part of the history of the thing - you may have heard about it. Once a week - Thursday I think - for from eight to ten weeks Weldon Keyes organized some special evening in a different field and one would get the tickets for the whole thing. One week Motherwell, Gottlieb, Connaught and so forth talking about painting. Another week they'd have some of the psychoanalysts from around here. Another week, the solicitor general. Another week Howard Nimerof, the poet, and I. He talked about Eliot; I, about Joyce. That was the first time I ever talked on Joyce.

ROBERT BROWN: You'd been studying Joyce?

NATHAN HALPER: During the war I got interested and I had published a few things by that time, by '49, I'd published some things on Joyce. They had me do that. And that was part of my getting friendly with that group.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, there must have been an audience.

NATHAN HALPER: After the war, there was a little reaction, anti-communism and so forth. A lot of the painter in places like Rockport were pushed around a bit. People thought they were communists which they may or may not have been. They found it uncongenial being there. A lot of them came to Provincetown, that was the old conservative group.

ROBERT BROWN: Who were some of them?

NATHAN HALPER: Wilson, Joe Kaplan, Marantz, but also now with the GI Bill of Rights, Hofmann's school just suddenly, out of nowhere, luxuriated and became a big thing.

ROBERT BROWN: He'd been here before?

NATHAN HALPER: He'd been here all along, for the summers. As Margery mentioned there were people in town who were afraid to admit they were Hofmann students, because people would think they were crazy, just like Hofmann was. That was in the 30's. People would say, there's a kook. But now came all these young and ardent painters. So you had the audience from both sides.

ROBERT BROWN: The new group of conservatives and then you had the Hofmann people. Was Hofmann's reputation suddenly greater than it had been?

NATHAN HALPER: Well, I think it was longevity. Here were all sorts of young people hearing about - it was an underground name to them. And suddenly they found the government would pay them if they wanted to go and study with this guy. It would have been just a Utopian dream otherwise and they all came. That's it. It was a sort of subsidized revolt against the stuffiness of the academy. So they came from all over.

ROBERT BROWN: So the life art intensified here.

NATHAN HALPER: It became again what it was in the days of Hawthorne. The only difference was that now because of the kind of painting that was done, you didn't have these people with easels all up and down the street. But you had people - by the time I opened the gallery - for a number of years, things were just popping.

ROBERT BROWN: The audience then - back to Forum 49 - meant all these people on the GI Bill.

NATHAN HALPER: Mostly some of the conservatives, but by this time they read books, they were interested in

symphonies and also some of the young ones – both kinds, but I don't remember many of the younger ones there. I didn't know their faces until a few years later.

ROBERT BROWN: But you were living down here?

NATHAN HALPER: Yeah, I got married here in '48, and I began spending six months a year here, not all year like from '36 to '40, but starting in '48, we'd spend a minimum of five months a year and then '51 or '52, I became the treasurer of the Art Association. My wife was a painter and also I'd gotten to know the abstract guys. I knew them because of their interest in literature and what they did, puzzled the hell out of me. I just couldn't get the point.

ROBERT BROWN: Really. And you mentioned that with Modigliani, for example, you admired his proportions.

NATHAN HALPER: Well, I could see it. I had a point of reference. It was a body distorted. And also most of those things I knew in black and white and a lot of it would be meaningless in black and white anyway. Even if I saw them, I just couldn't understand where they start, what gives. But I did know Gottlieb and other people like that.

ROBERT BROWN: You got to know him quite well.

NATHAN HALPER: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he try to explain what he was doing to you?

NATHAN HALPER: No, I mean my impression, when I was younger, all the painter I would meet would completely inarticulate. They couldn't explain anything. Later I found out – as far as I was concerned – they were still inarticulate but they were very talkative. They talked a lot, but to me it just never made sense. They had a new lingo. But being friendly with these guys, I was very curious about what they were doing. It was clear that they were not charlatans.

ROBERT BROWN: Why? Because they were very serious? Worked hard?

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, they were serious. They were working. And also because they weren't talking. Charlatan would shoot their mouths off, and sell you a bill of goods. These guys just went their way, and I think that impressed me when I began meeting some of the Hofmann students. They wouldn't talk either. Let me go back to something that had nothing to do with art. When I was here in the late 30's, I lived in the place where Eugene O' Neill lived, 577 Commercial; people lived there all winter. A lot of the guys there fancied themselves as ladies' men and they'd come down in the morning and each would try to upstage the other about what he did the previous night. Very often it was junk, but every now and then someone would reminisce about things that had happened in the past. They'd say do you remember so and so? And then he'd give a little detail and they'd say, yes, that's the one. The detail was impressive. Like, for instance, one time someone said oh, yes, right down the block, Chinaman, they don't forget, and you'd say, yeah, that's it. And that I thought was either probably true or everybody believed it at the time. Now, bringing it up now to these Hofmann students when they wouldn't say "the great man" or this and that but they'd make a very incidental little reference, and the fact that it was so incidental and them emphasized, made me realize that they thought he was a great man. It was so taken for granted by them that they didn't have to gush about it. So I found, okay, I don't get it so maybe they are full of shit. Or maybe the fault is mine. But I just don't know. So it was an open question. Now at some point we rather gingerly – Tinguely said Kootz would like to rent one of our houses. Sam Kootz. It was summer and a bit gingerly on our parts. He seemed to be a bit of an operator and a big talker. We never trusted him.

ROBERT BROWN: You never met him before this?

NATHAN HALPER: Well, I met him socially at these guys' houses in New York at a part or something. So we never quite trusted the guy. But it seemed to be a chance to learn what it all was about. And I remembered reading somewhere that the philosopher David Hume learned Greek because he once got a job teaching some Greek. He'd learned that day's lesson beforehand, and eventually he learned Greek. And I said well maybe I'll learn something about abstract art by having an abstract art gallery. But we were very wary of Mr. Kootz. My brother the lawyer and the Kootz' lawyer had lots and lots of sessions to make a contract where I wouldn't be left holding the bag.

ROBERT BROWN: Mr. Kootz had approached you?

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, there was a lawn in front of the house and it was a damn nuisance to mow it and one day Kootz had a few Picassos in the house and a guy had come up from Chicago and he bought one of them. But Kootz got the idea, suppose he had a gallery. He figured he'd make a fortune especially if somebody else would set up the money. Kootz was very good for that. So I was tempted because although I'd had a few articles published, I was still finding trouble, especially working in the summer. With all the swimming and social stuff

and all these damn cocktail parties. The used to call it the August madness. There was no use figuring on doing anything during the summer. Why the hell not have a gallery? Maybe it would be a business, too; we were living fairly close to the edge. And maybe I'd learned something. So he did this thing. I did the dirty work. I sat around. I'd watch Kootz. My worst fears were realized that he wasn't very trustworthy and that it didn't turn out well. I mean he wasn't selling. Gottlieb, I remember, was very much in despair in general, didn't see much future in what they were doing because there were only a certain number of buyers and a certain number of museums who were favorable and they buy one or two pictures of it, and that's it. They've got to - where are you going to get the new buyers? No new blood. Old blood was becoming exhausted.

ROBERT BROWN: This was just before the New York scene really opened up.

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, the scene opened up suddenly about '55. Detroit and Texas money began feeling that this was a prestige item. That was about '55 or '56 when it opened up. Before that I'd be sort of semi-accepted by various dealers as being a very low-grade comrade of theirs. And a number of them told me, even at the conservative galleries, that no gallery really is solvent with its American painters. That they have to support themselves either with - like Babcock did - Hartley or Eakins, the older American painters, or like Edith Halpert with Americans, or with French painting or framing and so forth. And would support the Americans and you were lucky if you even broke even. And about '55 or '56, Babcock told me, my god, this is the first year I broke even on my American painters - your contemporaries.

NATHAN HALPER: Well, there were a few guys who considered themselves, wanted to be avant garde among the collectors, museums and they'd get them but you're not going to keep getting the things. So until there was this explosion, nobody was getting anywhere. And furthermore - are these things subject to libel or slander suits? - I found out that if somebody was interested in something in the gallery, Kootz would try to get them to hold off and buy it in New York City, where he wouldn't have to split the commission.

ROBERT BROWN: You were partners up here?

NATHAN HALPER: Up here, yes. I mean what control was there? How did you know? And anyway Kootz was dead broke. He put up half the money for starting the gallery, but really he was in a very, very bad way. By '54, he was in terrible shape and you could see it by looking at him.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, as a partner, he was a real waste for you, wasn't he? A bitter dose, your first business experience?

NATHAN HALPER: Well, except I was learning things.

ROBERT BROWN: You were eager at least in that respect?

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, we weren't getting anywhere, but I was learning and I found out much to my surprise, delight, and eventual profit that I could hang a show better than Kootz could.

ROBERT BROWN: What do you mean? What was the gift you had? Could you explain or describe it?

NATHAN HALPER: Well, gift may be an exaggeration; I just knew say from writing and other things - in dancing or writing - just a sense of rhythm. I don't mean sense of rhythm has to be a high professional sense in any of these fields, but if you have some sort of rhythm and other people haven't got it. Kootz and a good number of other gallery people, had no sense of rhythm. They would say I want to hang this picture and that picture and they'd put them up and they just wouldn't - they weren't a collage, as it were. I didn't know that at the beginning, but eventually I began to feel that when you hung a show, you were creating a collage, so to speak.

ROBERT BROWN: Variations and repetitions ...

NATHAN HALPER: It was a picture of its own and the things related to each other. I found out you could improve pictures and you could destroy pictures, by what hung them next to, about an inch or one half inch on the wall could make a hell of a difference. And I've always enjoyed that much more than the selling part of it.

ROBERT BROWN: So that first year, '53, '54 you even then began ...

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, I began to my surprise, realizing that when Kootz was hanging, no I might move it a little bit over there, and his wife, more so than he, she wouldn't bother, she was lazy, but if I said to her, she'd say yes that's right. So he would let us and we would sort of do a little bit. A lot of dealers, when they hang a show, it becomes a perfunctory job to them, and after a while I found a number of guys here among the artists who really liked to hang shows and were willing to take the pains and to feel that the last one half inch and one quarter inch in the hanging is what gives the damn thing the magic. But anyway, the one thing that I found that my brother the lawyer and I hadn't realized is that after this year or so, we found working with Kootz so

goddamned unpleasant, that the whole was willing to forget all about the safeguards; by the end of '54, he'd finally gotten - he wasn't a sucker, but he'd gotten, he was looking for a sucker, but he found a guy - who was honorable in his own way - Albert List, do you know the name?

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

NATHAN HALPER: He sold him the idea that he could - Kootz owned a lot of pictures because originally he put his people on salary for a certain amount of pictures from them. So he had a big collection of them. He sold him the idea that List would buy a hell of a lot of pictures from him and then he would place them for him. I'm going by hearsay from Kootz himself, that he would place them around and it would be worthwhile for List. I mean in terms of taxes he might even gain money on the deal, and he'd end up with some pictures and become a benefactor and this and that; and his wife became very much interested in this art world also, and with some of his money Kootz got some Picassos and things again and by the end of '54 or '55, I forget, he realized that he could do well and he'd love to forget all about this thing here because he had the money and the backing, which he only had for a brief while because Kootz couldn't keep any friends for a long time. He pushed for every single little advantage; he never knew enough to humor anybody along so he wanted out and by that time I was delighted to be out, but I was faced with having a gallery, built, there it was, what the hell to do with it. So, meanwhile Kootz had had a falling out with both Motherwell and Gottlieb so they left him, but they said they'd show with me for that year.

ROBERT BROWN: That was that?

NATHAN HALPER: 1955. And Hofmann, too, and I had to get other painters; I formed another gallery. After we built this one, a lot of the other painters' tongues, so to speak, began hanging out and they formed 256 at 256 Commercial, but then they had an internal fight. And they left and they said would I take them, and I felt very unsure of myself and I'd gotten another partner, by the name of Cutter Hewitt.

ROBERT BROWN: So you had a new partner?

NATHAN HALPER: He'd been, the previous year, he'd come into the gallery a few times and he'd gotten very much infatuated with Motherwell's paintings.

ROBERT BROWN: Motherwell was down here at least every summer?

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, I think he came down here most summers, maybe every summer; he and his second wife had a place here. He fell in love with his pictures and he bought a few and he read a few of the articles I had published and when he heard I didn't have a partner and was scared, he volunteered to be my partner. He came from a very wealthy family; well, we finally couldn't get along. It was even worse than Kootz but for the opposite reason. He always used a phrase - he had 'conspicuous integrity.' He had so much integrity I always felt he was practically a crook.

ROBERT BROWN: What do you mean?

NATHAN HALPER: all right. They previous year he'd begun buying things around town and some of them just seemed to be in a different area than the Motherwell's, but he liked them. The next year when we started, we had to get painters and I got a few of the painters that he'd bought. By this time he'd decided they were no good. Still pro-Motherwell, and he thought Hofmann was no good. And somebody would come in and show interest in a picture and say tell me about it. Well, I didn't really know any of the sales routines, but if the guy asked me what it was, I'd say well he's done such and such and he's got pictures in this museum and museum. And this guy Cutter would pipe up. "That doesn't mean anything." (Laughter) And he felt he owed it to them and to himself not to let people buy those pictures even though he himself had bought those pictures the previous year, but he thought now he'd realized the light, nobody else was allowed. Like a sinner who gets religion, and then eventually somebody was interested in Hofmann, he would make the same remark about Hofmann, which is why Hofmann left me the next year and I would say, what's the big idea? And he would say, my integrity. It's a point of honor. I can't try to sell somebody that painting I think is no good. So I said all right you have a point here, but when you got Hofmann to be in your gallery, you were implicitly promising that you would try to sell him, at least you were implicitly promising that you would try to run him down. So he thought it over for several days and he said, "You're absolutely right. So I've decided the only thing I can do is just leave the gallery. Whatever money I've put in, we'll let that ride and I'll leave".

ROBERT BROWN: At mid-season?

NATHAN HALPER: Yes. And I thought well all right, but people here in town are going to ask you why you left the gallery. What are you going to say? So he said I will tell them I left because I think Hofmann's no good. Well, there we are back again. You'll be violating your implicit promise in taking Hofmann into the gallery and we can't have that. So he stayed until the end of the year. But we did even worse than we did with Kootz. So now I

decided I'd had one man who I thought was too honest for me. Maybe I'm a born loser on partners... but anyway I better go it on my own. So for the next twelve years I did on my own. When I started, all the old-timers said you won't make any money until your fifth year, and that's exactly what happened. The first year I was on my own for the first time I lost less than \$1,000. Incidentally, I had Bud Hopkins working for me the month of July and Kline's girl working for me the month of August. The fifth year I made some money. I got Ivan Karp; he was a good salesman.

ROBERT BROWN: Not as a partner?

NATHAN HALPER: No, as a worker. It's shameful - what one paid in those days was so little.

ROBERT BROWN: let's go back a bit to some of the artists. Hofmann - '55 was about the first year you showed him or with ...

NATHAN HALPER: no, no with Kootz, '53. This was a funny story. Kootz had four painters. Hofmann, Gottlieb, Motherwell and Baziotis. He'd just taken on Fritz Bultman, who left in the middle of the season.

ROBERT BROWN: Kootz had arranged these things.

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, they were the only four he had in New York. He was bringing samples of his New York gallery up here because part of the thing he was interested in for his gallery - he knew there were all sorts of potential buyers he'd seen around, like Peggy Guggenheim's sister and others - he'd seen people he knew could be buyers, and he thought he'd get a number.

ROBERT BROWN: So this was very different from the 30's. Important collectors were coming around?

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, but they weren't coming here in their capacity as collectors. They were coming here because well, during the war say, people like Peggy Guggenheim, George Grosz, Breuer was there. To some degree people were - a certain type of collectors knew them socially and well they traveled around. They wouldn't stay for the summer. They'd be in a half dozen different places during the summer. They'd spend a period not so much in Provincetown as in Touro, Wellesley; and in '53 or '54, Kurt Valentin was here for a few days. There would be people like that coming through. And also the Hofmann School attracted various people; of course, they knew of him, in general. People had come to know him in the social avant garde circles of New York and a lot of people who came as students were wealthy old ladies. And there were two very nice hotels here which these people liked, the Colonial and the Seascope, who were run by people who were sort of the wilder, Bohemian end of the social register who knew the monied people, and monied people whether they were social register themselves or Jews who had just made it, or even some of the older ones, would come to those places for a short period and they felt they were among their own.

ROBERT BROWN: There were two islands, so to speak.

NATHAN HALPER: Yes. There were two places in the small village in which wealthy people who played around a little bit with the arts, this was one of the places you could go to if you toured around, you know, a weekend and so forth. And they liked those two places very much.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, that got them here and then they could touch base with Hofmann or your gallery.

NATHAN HALPER: Well, the Kootz gallery, yes. With Kootz because they'd know him. And that was part of Kootz' idea and they would and then after a while my gallery became like that.

ROBERT BROWN: A place they came to.

NATHAN HALPER: They came and they'd step in; after a while you see, I'd get some of the second generation who had been up here as Hofmann's students. I began having - I no longer had Hofmann, but I had Motherwell, for about a year Gottlieb, but he was a hard man to get along with.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he?

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, Emmerich and Martha Jackson found that out too. I always would worry was it me, then these others would have the trouble too.

ROBERT BROWN: What, was he depressed?

NATHAN HALPER: No, very demanding and terrifically egotistical, self-centered. In fact, I met some guy who had been a classmate of his in high school and he told me. "I always used to wonder why Gottlieb was so arrogant. At that time, in high school he was no great painter, and I couldn't see any reason why - and as I got around in the world, I recognized his type. His parents were German Jews in the business world who believed in

hierarchies. A nobleman, and officer was ahead of you, but you had your place in society and looked down on others. A “pecking order.” And Gottlieb in New York City high school felt himself high in the pecking order. And although we were friendly he would talk to me in terms of pecking orders or artists. In '55, '56 David Smith had just left his gallery, Williard, very unhappily, and he was a friend of Bultman's, so I had a small David Smith show, drawings of his sculptures. And at the same time in the other room I had a show of one of the minor figures in the village called Nano de Groot. And Gottlieb – we were friends at the time – gave me the word, “You shouldn't do that. They are a different order of painters and reputations. Maybe you think de Groot is just as good as Smith and maybe he is, but Smith has a certain place and de Groot has another. You don't put them together.” And he was pissed off as hell. Every now and then I would buy a Motherwell and I never bought a Gottlieb and that really burned him, that sort of thing. But he gave both Emmerich and Jackson a hard time.

ROBERT BROWN: Why didn't you buy a Gottlieb?

NATHAN HALPER: Well, I could only buy a certain number of things. I intended to buy something of everybody, but it had to take time and there were a lot of people who resented that and every now and then we'd have a little blow. In fact, once or twice I'd see something of theirs I was going to buy. I'd always buy at the end of the season. Meanwhile the guy would explode at me because I didn't buy anything. And I had about forty different painters. I couldn't buy forty pictures. As a matter of fact although I liked Avery very much, I didn't buy any Avery until about the 3rd or 4th year I had him. The second generation, I got Avery, and Walker had put me on to the Hartley state and I had Hartley and I got Jan Muller and people like that. And so it became one of the places. The amazing thing – another reason why I went into the gallery, in the world of writing I felt that the heart had gone out of it. Those who had been the great figures. Something had happened. Either like Joyce and Proust, they were dead or even the good Americans and they weren't as good as all that, they no longer had it. Hemingway and the others, Fitzgerald. In the 50's there was nothing doing. And the one place I could feel their drive when there was nothing in my area. And I mentioned the Seascapes Inn. This was really amazing and I gathered at conversations over breakfast – some of the richer Hofmann students might be there and they would talk about some paintings. And if someone would have a painting that word came down was a good painting – I don't know who decided – if somebody at the Seascapes said that was a good painting, people would be coming in all day to see the painting by so and so, which they understood was good. It suddenly would become a place of – you really felt you were in on something. And I remember some people coming in – one of them Mrs. Sonnenberg, wife of Benjamin Sonnenberg, his wife came in with another woman, quite well-to-do and they looked at one painting. They both shook their heads and said, “Why does he show it?” The other woman said, well, if he doesn't show it, who will? I was showing these things which were pushing the horizons of art along, whether it was good or bad. To some degree I didn't know my ass from a hole in the ground.

ROBERT BROWN: Did these people seem to think that was good, you were broadening the horizons ... and yet they were puzzled. They couldn't make up their own minds.

NATHAN HALPER: That's right. They would like certain things, but this was the place they could expose themselves to the new, whether they liked them or not. They weren't blind, hard core cons; they were exposing themselves and maybe someday something might hit. And after a while it began taking until things died again. A. Hofmann quit his school.

ROBERT BROWN: When was that?

NATHAN HALPER: Maybe early '60's.

ROBERT BROWN: When he left your gallery ...

NATHAN HALPER: He was friendly.

ROBERT BROWN: had you gotten to know him a bit?

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, we were friendly socially.

ROBERT BROWN: What was he like? Could you characterize him?

NATHAN HALPER: He would still come into the gallery. He was, well, you see he had been brought up in the other tradition. What he didn't like about some of his own students even was that they didn't know the other tradition and in order to be good – the idea was – you had to have an inter-breeding, cross-pollination and the guys were starting in without it. I've seen him in houses where there were some strictly conservative paintings and he'd go up and he'd study them and every now and then he'd say, that's a good picture. And in the gallery, I've seen him very often stand in front of a picture for a long time. One Avery he stood in front of for a very long time. And he turned to me and said, “That's a masterpiece.” He was really very open about those things. He was an honorable figure; he was in some ways rather naïve. Well, Mrs. Hofmann sort of ran the business side of it, which didn't happen very often with these guys. Although I said he would look at these things, he had ideas about –

you've got to be avant garde. When it came to literature, he just accepted what people told him. I remember one time, people sitting around. Someone mentioned Gertrude Stein and Hofmann said, ah, yes, Gertrude Stein, with great awe in his voice and then he would repeat yes, a rose is a rose is, not without any idea or satirizing, but just isn't that a wonderful thing someone says something like that. So he was naïve in that sense.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think that crept into his own painting? Was there a straining to try to say something new?

NATHAN HALPER: No, I think ... he felt you had to say something new, but the idea was if you were saying something new, either from within yourself or else because you were pushing the technical limitations of what you were doing. Maybe, I'm just putting something in his mind. But this attempt is sort of self-propelling; it always is taking you a little bit further, every time you pass one horizon, there's always something right in back of that. But at the same time he would look at old pictures all the time. There was something there which he could use in his work. And he felt a lot about the continuity of art. I mean he wasn't like some of the next generation who said, oh, that's old stuff, screw that. I remember some of them told me the important thing is to destroy the ideas of the old art. I said what are you going to substitute instead? They said we don't know but once the old is destroyed, something new will come.

ROBERT BROWN: Which ones would talk that way?

NATHAN HALPER: Oh, like Bob Richenburg and so forth and that was the same sort of thing you'd hear later from the political students of the 1960's. Destroy the system; a new system will come and it will be better. And Hofmann would never be like that. At least the way I saw him, he always had an idea what he wanted to do each time. And often he'd look at an old Hawthorne and he'd think they were fine. Because with him it was always the idea of something new which was being built on the idea of the old. You always stand on the shoulders of the old; it's not that you destroy them.

ROBERT BROWN: In teaching would he hark back to the old or at least have the students not to put blinders on?

NATHAN HALPER: No, I think his idea and one of the themes of the abstractionists in those days was that they were doing what old the old-timers had done, that the good Renaissance people were really abstractionists too, and the fact that you could recognize things is an accident of the times, but they were making abstract pictures which superimposed on it. So in that sense, what I found in those days, talking to different painters that the abstract painters were the ones which went more to museum shows and bought the classical books than the other kind of painters. That they were the ones who could talk about the names of the past.

ROBERT BROWN: Whereas the conservatives could talk about technique ...

NATHAN HALPER: And they could talk about the last two generations. What their teachers, or their teacher's teacher - they would not talk so much about guys like - it was really the modernists ...

ROBERT BROWN: Such as?

NATHAN HALPER: The modern people who put people like Piero de Francesca on the map again. They would restore those reputations. And even at one point they would suddenly say, this guy Sassetta, look how abstract it is. And you'd never get that from one of these other guys.

ROBERT BROWN: Who are some of these abstractionists who would talk in this way?

NATHAN HALPER: Well, Motherwell.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you get to know him quite well?

NATHAN HALPER: In a way. In some ways, you never know him. In other ways I know him quite well.

ROBERT BROWN: What do you mean you never know him? Does he hold a good deal in?

NATHAN HALPER: No, well, I don't know if he holds it, because sometimes he speaks as if he'd holding nothing in, but what he's not careful about is the emphasis with which he says certain things. If he wants to say something, he may say what he feels at the moment, irrespective of he may not feel that way a moment or so later, also what he feels at the moment, to make it vivid, he may have to exaggerate the goddamn thing terrifically, to make it a quotable sentence, even to him. For some years I would just believe what he said.

ROBERT BROWN: Can you give an example?

NATHAN HALPER: Yes. It isn't exactly to the point but somewhat. At some point I had a few small Klines which I got from the gallery - this size.

ROBERT BROWN: 8 by 10.

NATHAN HALPER: Yes. Motherwell thought they were wonderful. No, that comes later. We'd look at them and I would say people like these very much. Or he'd ask me how people feel about certain pictures, I'd say these they like very much. And he'd say why don't they buy them? And I'd say well they think they are a little too expensive. And he would say, that is absolutely ridiculous. He'd say, a picture is either worth nothing at all or it's worth a million dollars. These Klines he liked very much and he'd say how much are they? I'd say \$150. That's too much. I said, they're not worth a million dollars? (laughter) He said, well, I meant something else at the time. Apropos of the thing. But there were a lot of little things like that - when he would talk to someone he was very outspoken. So and so is the most intelligent person I know. Always talking in headlines, which he might forget a day or two later.

ROBERT BROWN: He could be speaking sometimes in a very pedestrian way, thinking exactly what those small Klines were worth.

NATHAN HALPER: As a matter of fact, he bought one of them and he's been kicking himself ever since for not buying all four of them. But it isn't pedestrian to feel that something costs too much; for what you're ready to spend and what you have available, it might.

ROBERT BROWN: Right, o.k. Practical

NATHAN HALPER: Or to be not impractical. With the double negative. But he did that about lots of things. So that now if he says something, I don't know whether he's just being the Motherwell who always speaks in explanation points. He seems to have no scruples about saying the most revelatory things about himself at times, so that it isn't that he's keeping himself private, but you don't know. Like in a poll, somebody says they vote for so and so, yes, but they don't tell you how strongly they feel that. The intensity, you don't know.

ROBERT BROWN: was he very self-conscious then?

NATHAN HALPER: He's always been very self-conscious. As a matter of fact, de Groot said about him, being with him gives me the hives. He's less self-conscious, I think, now he was then. And the curious thing about him was this: (and is) you see his father was a banker, head of Wells Fargo and something. His father took him to Europe at some point, the Grand Tour. Took him around to all the important places, top-star Michelin restaurants and he had gotten hold of Ulysses and he was reading that and his father was a bit outraged, saying here I take you to Europe, to all the best places and all you do is keep your nose in the goddamn book. But he's the type guy who would get excited about things, very emotionally. Yet, and he's admitted this, not that it's been put up to him, but he came out with it recently, that he finds it hard to be the exuberant; he says he feels he's a Mediterranean, but he finds it hard to act like a Mediterranean. The noisy Jew, Italian, etc. but he likes being in that sort of circumstances. So he said this and when I reminded him of it this year - I've had a few conversations - he said it. When he first moved here, bought a house here instead of renting some ...

ROBERT BROWN: That was about when?

NATHAN HALPER: Maybe in the 60's. I guess so. I don't know when he married Helen; in fact, he bought a house when he was still married to Betty. That must have been late '50's. These Harvard and M.I.T. and New Yorker people at Wellesley and so forth whom he sees socially, they'd say we're rather surprised that you're in Provincetown. We thought you'd be with us. And a lot of these people were Jewish but he said you're too Anglo-Saxon. Whatever they were they were just too Anglo-Saxon; whereas, some of the people in Provincetown, although they may be Anglo-Saxon, by birth, he would consider them Jewish or Italian or Mediterranean. But that's what he wants. I used the image of the cat. He is like a cat. He wants to be with the people where the noise and warmth and so forth is going on, but in some ways he's really a very sentimental, warm-hearted man; but he doesn't quite know how to give it. But he likes it very much where he's in a place where it's sort of given.

ROBERT BROWN: He got along well with you when you had him in the gallery?

NATHAN HALPER: Oh, yes, we had ...

ROBERT BROWN: He wasn't as difficult as Gottlieb?

NATHAN HALPER: Oh no, in fact most of the guys I didn't have too much trouble with. Gottlieb - you had to pay attention to his ego.

ROBERT BROWN: Was Motherwell beginning to sell by '56, '57 with you?

NATHAN HALPER: We sold certain - see, here's the funny thing about Motherwell. In the gallery during the Kootz period we had the four painters and besides what we sold, I would just notice what people liked and what they

would consider. And this was a very curious situation. There would be about, during a summer, about 60 people who would consider buy Hofmann. About seven of them bought Hofmanns. They were very cheap then. At today's prices, we would have done very well. But then - there would be about 30 or 40 people talking about Baziotes. We sold one Baziotes. There'd be about 25 people who talked about Gottlieb. We sold seven Gottliebs. And there would be about 9 people who liked Motherwell and we sold seven Motherwells. And that's the way it always was, before he got the reputation and people liked him because the name was Motherwell. Before that a lot of people would not like his pictures. Those who did, liked them very deeply. And not one or two people. Seven different buyers. And that was always the same. So by the fifties, we sold ...

ROBERT BROWN: Were these big things, quite large?

NATHAN HALPER: No, we sold one or two large ones; most expensive one we sold was about \$1,400 - \$1,500; in those days that was a lot of money.

ROBERT BROWN: How do you account for the much higher ratio of like to buying for Motherwell and Gottlieb?

NATHAN HALPER: Well, because all the other three, there was something superficially very ingratiating about them. The Hofmanns had a lot of the German *gemutlich* about them; they were always warm and caressing. The colors, you could almost feel. I mean if you didn't know Hofmann just looking at the pictures that there was a sort of Santa Clausy man doing it, a big jovial guy who liked the world and things. Baziotes was really a romantic.

TAPE TWO

NATHAN HALPER: Much skeletal structure behind it. They got you. And Gottlieb had a certain amount of not barbaric, but luxuriousness and sort of and Oriental richness. And Motherwell didn't have any of that. His collages maybe had it. But that was another side of him. The other elegy-type things at first looked, especially if you were not in the field, looked ungainly and they would work on you. I'll tell you another story. My brother who is my lawyer arranged the thing - he came up to see what the gallery was like. We had a group show. He pointed to Baziotes and said, gee, I like that. Then he pointed to Motherwell - I think it was called *La Belle Flora* - and he said, gee, I don't dig this at all and he just sat there and after a while he pointed to the Baziotes and said that ain't as good as it was a few minutes ago. He pointed to Motherwell and said, "That's getting better." And I noticed too that some of the girls who liked Motherwell would say, I dreamed about it last night. I had this discussion with him though and he said something happened and he had begun to realize what he was doing, and I said Jesus, Bob, I always thought you were at your best when you don't know what you're doing. I mean there's one part that is your conscious taste that certain people like, but there is another part that just comes out of ...

ROBERT BROWN: The bed rock.

NATHAN HALPER: Out of somewhere, yes. And I don't know why I like it and maybe other people don't know why they like it and maybe you don't know why you do it either and he admitted - again, I don't know whether he was just being polite - he agreed - yes, and he amended the statement - I got to know what I was doing wrong in some cases. So it's different. He's so goddamn polite in that way - the well brought up young man - that you're never absolutely sure.

ROBERT BROWN: Uh huh.

[END OF SESSION July 8, 1980]

[NEXT SESSION August 14, 1980]

ROBERT BROWN: I think you wanted to begin by giving some further recollections of Hans Hofmann -

NATHAN HALPER: Of Hofmann, yes. I did know him fairly well - I mean, not as well as Wolfson did, of course - but some of my knowledge of him is personal things, no so much to do with art. But also some of the things, although, I saw him do, and also heard things that he said in his classes, which I think may be of some relevance. There are two anecdotes which I think ought to be on record somewhere. One of them I heard just as it happened. A pupil after - what do you call it, a criticism, the weekly criticism?—

ROBERT BROWN: Critique.

NATHAN HALPER: -- went up to him and said (or maybe it was a woman, I forget), "Mr. Hofmann, today in a criticism you said this, such-and-such. But last week, you said just the opposite." And Hofmann looked at the person - him or her - and said, "Your trouble is, you listen to what I say, you don't listen to what I mean." (both men laugh) The other one was told me by Vivian de Pinna, whom you may have heard of - the widow of that de

Pinna, ritzy mens' furnishings store on Fifth Art near the Modern Art? -

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

NATHAN HALPER: -- when she was about - pretty late in life, she began taking classes. Kuniyoshi, Hofmann. She told me this story, but then somebody else, when I told it to them, said she made this remark to every teacher she had. She would say as she started with Mr. Knuiyoshi and Mr. Hofmann, "I want to paint a mailman. I want to paint a good picture before I die." And then she told it to Hofmann. And then 10 or 15 years later - still taking classes with Hofmann - brought in the picture. He looked at it, and said, "De Pinna, you can die now." (both laugh) The story I just heard from Gahagan was that -

ROBERT BROWN: James Gahagan, who's with Monitor.

NATHAN HALPER: With the Monitor. And he said that as Clem Greenberg was up here, you know, " We come up here sometimes, and he was always ready with advice. And he said, Hans, you're into paint in too many styles.' Hofmann looks at him and he shrugs, ' Yes, but I'm a big man.'" (they laugh) So, but about other things, he was - you wouldn't think - he was really very timid. I don't mean personally, or cowardly, but about being a stranger here. You know, first he'd been in Germany, and left, you know, he was in France. And a lot of things where people did him and he was within his legal rights and things, he was awfully scared - he didn't know what the laws would be, and also what he as a stranger, what sort of treatment he might get. But along with that there's a funny thing about his - first he spoke German, then he was in Paris for a long while, spoke French; came here, and he was English. He once told De Pinna, he said, "But English, she is now my best language." (bouth laugh) Well, that;s Hofmann.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes. Would you say he was a fairly lovable guy?

NATHAN HALPER: Oh yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Anecdotes seem to -

NATHAN HALPER: Oh yes. He was a very - a jovial, a Santa Claus-y guy. I don't know that there's - of course he must have done it, we all do - I don't know of any mean thing he ever did. And most of his pupils loved him. And all the old women wanted to marry him, after his wife died. (he laughs)

ROBERT BROWN: Did he live here much of the year?

NATHAN HALPER: Well, he stayed here after - he had his school in New York, but he's come here and stayed here, you know. Then, after he gave up the school, he would stay longer and so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you visit with him a lot? Or -

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, Both here and in New York. I mean, so when he'd have these parties for his pupils, then we'd be included. And in New York they'd have us once or twice a year at the house. They were on 14th Street, we were on 8th Street, we would have them and so forth. I think, apart from anything I may have had with him, I don't know, I think his wife felt she had things in common with my wife - they were both small, spare, and blond, and having work neuroses - they always had to work, both of them

ROBERT BROWN: So there was the bond.

NATHAN HALPER: I think so. I think she felt that was her kind of a person; Mrs. Hofmann.

ROBERT BROWN: As far as your gallery went -

NATHAN HALPER: It was - we had him for three years - twice with Kootz, and once afterwards. And then Kootz or somebody fixed that up, ruined it. But then we stayed, you know, friendly after that. And even after his wife died.

ROBERT BROWN: But after that he had dealers only in New York? Or there?

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, right. It was Kootz. Yes, the final settlement with Kootz was that we could still show Hofmann, but then Hofmann withdrew after one year.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he give you explanation, Hofmann, or --?

NATHAN HALPER: Well, I don't remember. But in one degree, he didn't have to, because for the first year after, without Kootz, I was a bit scared myself, not knowing what the score was. And some guy who would come into the gallery just fell in love with Motherwell paintings and bought a number. And then he heard about this, he

said oh he'd love to be, the gallery to be a partner. So the next year he became partner -

ROBERT BROWN: I think you mentioned -

NATHAN HALPER: And he would tell people that Hofmann was terrible. And of course when - maybe Hofmann heard that even without it, but Kootz heard that one day. And he got, you know, angry, but there was a look of gloating on his face - now he really had something. You know, to push.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes. You said that, during the 50s, you told me somewhat earlier, that important artists and dealers came through Provincetown, important museum people and collectors very serious, careful - well, not necessarily careful but thorough -

NATHAN HALPER: they would stay here. I mean, like people in those two hotels I mentioned, Janis would come up, Martha Jackson, Katharine Kuh came up. And what's this guy from one of the other - some museum in, I think, New England or something, I forget his name - Bartley Hayes or something?

ROBERT BROWN: Bartlett Hayes.

NATHAN HALPER: he would come up - I think he's been a Hofmann - But there'd be all sorts of things - people from Boston and - in fact, for one year Mersky had a gallery here. Martha Jackson came up to have it for a year to try it. But there would be all sorts of people come - I may have mentioned to you that Curt Valentin was up here, just you know, came through to stay a while. And other people like that.

ROBERT BROWN: But given the nature of an old resort hotel, they would stay a week or so maybe?

NATHAN HALPER: Yes. Janis and the others would, I don't know whether Valentin did, but I know they were there and they would come in and I'd be introduced to them, and they were curious, as I thought, at first, a Kootz addict - a gallery and I think maybe James - I'm not sure whether it was James Malin came in. But all sorts of -

ROBERT BROWN: These people were serious buyer occasionally, weren't they?

NATHAN HALPER: Well, some - well, no. I think - I'll be bitchy, now - I suspect that if they were interested in something, which they knew they could see in New York City - you know, at first, I mean, the idea I would be sitting there but any things more connected with buying. Kootz would get involved in. And there would be one way or another, the suggestion, "All right, you come in to the gallery in New York." And then I'd be cut out, you see? Well, that was the nature of the beast.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

NATHAN HALPER: So they didn't do any serious buying here. They looked - in fact, those two years with Kootz, plus the one year with Cudahy, were the three most disastrous - at least, years in which less was bought - than anything in all the years that - than any year after that.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, after that -

NATHAN HALPER: I was on my own.

ROBERT BROWN: -- individuals began coming back to you?

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, gradually.

ROBERT BROWN: You had mentioned that in the late 50s, wealthy people rather than new to art -

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, well, that was in New York.

ROBERT BROWN: That was in New York?

NATHAN HALPER: That was in New York. And some of them would come. I mean that guys would, that slowly there were a number of people who would come in and would very often buy. There was this Canadian you may have read about, Riviere? From Montreal; this analyst; he bought some in New York but, you know, a number, he bought from me several Averys, Stouts and other things, you know, a number of people. And this museum in Montreal where - but he'd buy a number of things.

ROBERT BROWN: You said, in your show in 1958.

NATHAN HALPER: Yes -

ROBERT BROWN: The Avery show.

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, the Avery show, '58. That was the first of three important Avery shows. His procedures, I gather – let's see: he'd been here in '55, Avery; and then, I don't know if he's been here in '56, in '57, but he's kept coming back. His procedure was he would – the early part of the summer he would go out drawing, you know, and make lots of them. Later in the summer he would go through some of his drawings and use some for watercolors, and then, go through the watercolors and use some for oils. In '58, late in August, or middle of August, Mrs. Avery said to me, "He's painted a lot of big ones, you come and see them, why don't you make a show?" you know – right at the end of the season. I said, "Gee, I haven't planned anything at all." She said, "Well, come and look at them." So, I came and looked at them. They were the first of the big six-footers he did. And I don't know just how I got the word to somebody in *Time Magazine*. And I don't know why it was so world-shaking, but Avery had always been known for his – at most, you know, this size –

ROBERT BROWN: About 30 inches, yes.

NATHAN HALPER: -- but sometimes the 40 x 54s, that would be the big ones, and there'd be the 60s by 72. And they sent up a crew. I may have mentioned, did I, about – they had a crew took a lot of pictures of him against the pictures, and talked about the gallery and mentioned his name connected with Joys – a big story. But unfortunately, it didn't do us any good because the story did not appear until the end of September, which was – we were closed. But apparently he had been painting for years, and people had liked his work, but somehow had never got around to buying it. And they saw it in *Time Magazine* and people all over the United States said, "Yeh, I always wanted to buy an Avery." And telegrams and telephones began pouring in to Borgenicht, saying I want this and I want that. And from the moment on his prices have gone higher and higher continually. So he did this in '58 and '59 and in '60. And I think the cream of the pictures were in '59. They included that one that La Riviere bought, the one with the diagonal you know the one in the beginning of a Whitney book? And the one, "Tangerine Moon in Wine-Dark Sea" which Krieger in Washington bought, and a young stockbroker bought from Krieger just now for a six-figure price. And a number of pictures like that which were among his – most spectacular, anyway, in the 60s, some more of those. But in the middle of the 60s he got a stroke.

ROBERT BROWN: But some of them bought through you?

NATHAN HALPER: Yes. The La Riviere was bought through me. But even in the year before that, in '57, I suddenly began selling Averys; even the small ones. And along with these, the big ones, one or two big ones would be bought but a lot of small ones and watercolors, and Avery suddenly became my big boy, who have lots.

ROBERT BROWN: There was not trouble getting all you wanted?

NATHAN HALPER: All I, all I – I mean, no, we're still friendly.

ROBERT BROWN: What was he like to work with? Or did you mainly work through her?

NATHAN HALPER: Through her. He was really funny. People act as if, or talk as if he was a naïf, you know, who was just a simple, innocent goy (RB laughs) who just happened to be a good painter and didn't quite, you know, not intellectual or anything. And his wife – well, his wife did run things from the business side. But actually he was a very shrewd man. He didn't want to fuss with business or anything. He was much more intelligent than most of the city-smart people who were all around. He had a quick mind, a quick wit – which was a quiet one, sort of a New England or upper New York State type. And he was really a very sophisticated painter – that he really thought about a thing, you know. People thought he just got up and did it. And, you know, I think he talked a lot to me primarily because I wasn't a painter. So, I would say – there was nothing I would say – and he was just – he was one of the few guys I know who was willing to paint with other people around him, you know, in the room, going in and out. Well, you know, he just would talk – once in a while I would ask him a question that would start him off. In a quiet way. I remember once, just for the hell of it, I thought I ought to learn – I thought I ought to try painting myself. This was in the city. And I painted a little bit, you know, and I was like one of these French cooking guys, you know – start in and not know where the hell the picture is going – "we gotta add this and we gotta add that." And I'd seen enough pictures that eventually it would look a mixture of both a primitive and ultra-sophisticated at the same time. (he laughs) But you know, I'd puff around on a – trying to get a color; and I'd ask him. He says, "oh, no; you never had any problems about mixing colors. You may have watched me. I just stand in front of the easel. I don't do anything at all. I just stand in front of the easel and I think. I may go five minutes or so and not do a thing. Then I know exactly what I want, and I will mix the color without any trial and error." I mean, I'm translating to you – "without any trial and error, and then just put it on. And that's it." And it's very very rarely he revised. I've seen him paint scores and scores, maybe about two or three times he would say, "I don't think that corner there or that piece there is right." But that was almost never. And about some of the paintings, for instance, people think, you know he just got up and painted. There's one thing he did, he said, "You know, I wondered for two weeks whether I had the nerve to paint that." Because it would violate, you know, certain seeming regulations. And top of those things which he was very simple, in one way that's sort of outrageous. I remember one little one he had – horizontal, about 4x10. And it was just, you know, sea, horizon

- I mean, the line which was sea and sky; and there'd be a rock, and a gull on the rock. Well, what's amazing about this is, the gull is over here and about 4/5 of the picture is just the thing with the line. And that's all. And it held! You see?

ROBERT BROWN: It held together.

NATHAN HALPER: It held together. There was no question about it. Another amazing thing about him, -- as I say, sometimes he'd do a little one and then make a big one from it. Well, he almost had it down pat - but it wouldn't be that the big one was an enlargement of the little one. He just knew that you had to do a couple of things differently. And after he'd done his thinking, he'd do them almost automatically change all the colors, you know - I mean, after thinking. And you look at them. "My God, he does this one and now it's a different color." And you look at it - "Where the hell does he get this?" (he laughs) But, you know, an entirely different scale, I mean, a different range. But he did it. But I can remember, too, they'd have sometimes these parties with these word games - you know, charades, and other things. And people would go around and people would guess at things, and he wouldn't say a word. But if I'd be near him, he's whisper to me out of the side of the mouth, "The answer before all these goddam New York or Boston smarties -" (he laughs) And he and Hofmann, I would say, were the two guys that I've ever met - I mean, beyond a certain age, when you're 17 or 20, you know, you love painting - but these are the only guys who were mature who really loved it without any question; whose apparently greatest joy in life, except perhaps for their family, would be to paint. I remember Rothko once said to him, "If you painted less, you could sell for higher prices." But he's smart and he says, "Well, if I didn't paint, what would I do with that time that I'd like half as much?" (he laughs) And he was that way.

ROBERT BROWN: Rothko was?

NATHAN HALPER: No, Avery.

ROBERT BROWN: Rothko asked him that?

NATHAN HALPER: Rothko was saying, "Why don't you paint less?" Oh no, he was a very easygoing and simple man if you -

ROBERT BROWN: Simple man, in that -

NATHAN HALPER: Well, I mean in that sense of simple, and you got along with him if you didn't try to push him, you know. He didn't want noise or pushing around, he wanted a little, what people probably mean when they use the phrase "New England" - I don't know that any New Englanders are really (laughing) - but the idea of the New Englander that you're sort of laconic and this and that.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he have any other things that he would talk about?

NATHAN HALPER: Well, I know he was a very good - they tell me, he was very good at figures, you know, with that skill. But that he'd talk about?? Not really. She did most of it. Still lives, full of vim and vigor.

ROBERT BROWN: But he'd had a fairly lean life, hadn't he, until about the 50s when -

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, yes. They lived in a little place on, at that time on Tenth Street, you know, one of these small - I guess "brownstone" in the generic name for any house that's got one flat on each floor and about three - I don't even know if it - God, I've been there scores of times but I can't - but anyway they were on the top floor, so it means nobody would have to go any higher, so they could use the hall to put a pile of paintings, and there were paintings in every room and paintings under the bed. And when he did these big 60 x 72s, they were in an apartment here opposite Ciro's - it's now Ciro's, not then. And she said, "Come and look at the pictures." So I came there and there was nothing there. Then he'd go into the bedroom and come out with a big painting from it. And that's where he had to paint it. Then, you know, in '57 - this was the year before the '58, when we sold a hell of a lot of small ones here, and I got him a fair number of thousands, you know. So she said something about, "Let's - " Oh, I mean the next year too, I think maybe the next year they moved to Central Park West, a big apartment. And at that time I was selling more Averys than nobody before this Borgenicht explosion. Up to that I was -

ROBERT BROWN: He was the premier dealer, really.

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, in a sense. Although it was only the few months, you know. And he was saying, "Well, I don't know -" "He was scared to move. He says, "Maybe Nat won't sell as many." (he laughs heartily) Well, anyway, they moved. And their bedroom had two big walk-in closets. And then after they began selling a lot, you'd go in and you'd walk into her walk-in closet that was full of dresses and coats and everything else with the best labels. You'd walk into his - it's a pair of pants and an old sweater! (he laughs) You know - still.

ROBERT BROWN: So he continued his simplicity and -

NATHAN HALPER: Oh yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Then he had a stroke in what, 19 --?

NATHAN HALPER: Up here in the 60s, in the middle of - about the day before the show opened.

ROBERT BROWN: And did that then -

NATHAN HALPER: After that - his first reaction when he began to paint - I think I've seen this happen with other people who have strokes - their first reaction is the same: "My God, I'm alive!" I mean, "It hasn't got ME down." And his first pictures after that were in a much higher key of color than the previous ones - you know, the reds and yellows were much more startling.

ROBERT BROWN: They increased in intensity.

NATHAN HALPER: They increased in intensity. And then, of course, it began showing the other way. And for the first time, instead of flat color, there'd be agitated strokes. I have one of his last paintings, a picture of Sally. I mean, he used himself and his wife and daughter for models a hell of a time. You could always tell the daughter - he kept the contours. But for himself and his wife, he really didn't care, I mean, what they were wearing or an idea. And you very often couldn't recognize them except, you know, from experience. But if you take - he made lots of self-portraits, you'd very often doubt it was the same man. But anyway, this one of Sally, you can just see that he has her some of a fur coat on, and agitated -

ROBERT BROWN: Agitated lines.

NATHAN HALPER: -- very agitated strokes, you know. Whereas say for an area he would cover with a flat coloring or else with a simple almost art deco design, you know. And here it was just very agitated. I've seen others like that near the end which are agitated.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you keep in touch with him in those last years?

NATHAN HALPER: Oh yes, we'd go up there. And he - maybe as much as anything. He irked company. Because, you know, he would be around but he wanted much more quiet, because I know at this point, after all the years we'd been together, at this point he began objecting a bit to my voice being a bit loud, you know. He was almost very sensitive about things like that then. And he was - in a bad way. But she wanted, you know, she wanted to be spoken to, to have somebody around.

ROBERT BROWN: So he continued coming here?

NATHAN HALPER: No, after that he went to Woodstock. It seemed to be easier. And then he did a series of black-and-whites, up there. We see them, here, for a show here -black and white landscapes; a bug series of them.

ROBERT BROWN: When he was down here, now, he went to parties, he had friends, --

NATHAN HALPER: Oh, yes, he went to parties. But he usually sat and let other people - other people make the noise. He was more of a bystander, onlooker; you know, smoking - I think he smoked a pipe -

ROBERT BROWN: But one of your strongest impressions is the way he thought before he worked.

NATHAN HALPER: Yes - I mean, sometimes he'd know anyway, but -- I mean, for instance, if he took it from a drawing, sometimes that would be it. I'll tell you one curious thing: it may have been in '57. You know, we came up with a certain amount of pictures. They were here, and we sold some pictures to someone and he said, "Look, I'm going away, out West or up in Canada, and then I'll come back in the fall. Can I leave a picture here?" So we had a little toolhouse. I said, "That's OK," and I put it there. Then in a shirt while we sold so many that we felt, "My God, we need more." So they phoned down - his daughter was coming up; we said, "Bring up some pictures - smaller ones, these 9x12, 18x24s." She brought up and we sold another one. Some man said almost the same thing - he'd traveling, could he put it away. And then I put it - "My God" - I'd forgotten what the first one was like, they were almost identical, except the colors were entirely different. You know, they were just horizontal lines giving landscapes. I knew we couldn't have that one coming down and seeing another one like it. I said, "What is this?" - you know? He was puzzled. Then he said, "Oh, I did it from a drawing, and I'd forgotten" - when he'd get stuck, you know, usually he'd go through ALL the drawings - "and I'd forgotten that I'd done it." You know, before the drawing would just be plain, and the second time, a different set of colors. (laughing). But on things like that he wouldn't have to think long when he had the thing in front of him, except only when there would be some little problem would arise. And then he completely - but he said himself about himself that "if you watch me, you'll see that every now and then I just stand in front of the -" But you see, that

wasn't so damn often, or something with his daughter, when they were kids. She said every now and then Marge would come in and say, "My daddy painted four pictures today." (laughs) So, when he painted, you know, he was perfectly – even those 72x60s. Oh hell, he painted about ten of them in about a week or so (laughing heartily) because he –

ROBERT BROWN: He knew what he was doing.

NATHAN HALPER: -- and bang, bang, bang, and there would be flat areas, and so forth. So there it was. No . . . he was a nice, simple guy. He must have been, because when he was young, before there were Abstract Expressionists – Rothko, Gottlieb, and so forth used to come around, they were sort of protégés – you know, they'd look up to him. And Rothko would come around the house – Rothko always admitted, and told people, that he learned everything he knew about color from Avery. And Gottlieb denied it, until, eventually, he admitted it too. (RB laughs) Gottlieb was the sort of guy, you know, who wanted to show he was the god, you know. But the color, you know, went from one to the other. One planet went against the other, which I guess was a bit different than others. Yes, people would say, "very Matisse-y." But I think that the first things in Hartford – you know, he did some, the first show was in Hartford where his sister lived, he was born in New York State but I think they moved there – it'd very French and Van Gogh-y and others; but I don't think he'd ever seen them at first hand; he just picked them up, either by reproductions or by seeing their imitators; or he got there, you know, almost – every now and then, something is in the air and people pick it up in different places.

ROBERT BROWN: Sure.

NATHAN HALPER: So would say this – I mean, he always admired Matisse terrifically, and he thought he last cutouts were out of this world. Which reminds me, Hofmann remarked about the Matisses, when they had this book that was called "Jazz" or something – you know, the Matisse? I once was in there and Hofmann called me over and we looked through the thing together, and I'm keeping my mouth shut. And he finally said, "Look, look how close it is to being just taste." And taste was a bad word, because he didn't use the word "transcend" but it isn't, but you know Matisse is so good that he just sort of transcended it being just taste. He said, "But look how close it goes to being just that – a tasteful thing."

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

NATHAN HALPER: he didn't want a thing to be tasteful. A thing had to be big and expansive. He was an expansive sort of gemütlich guy.

ROBERT BROWN: But in Matisse he saw this refinement –

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, that it almost – almost but not quite, you see. But Avery thought they were out of this world. Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: On account of their color, their –

NATHAN HALPER: Whatever – the simplicity, you know, the absolute simplicity. He was always going towards it, in one way or another. All right – who else do you want??

ROBERT BROWN: You'd said to me once that you felt that when Hofmann was here, Provincetown was the place where a lot of what you called a cross-fertilization among artists went on.

NATHAN HALPER: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: But that when he was gone, that left them. Then you also said that some of the artists really begin to get into the money, I guess by the late 50s.

NATHAN HALPER: Middle 50s.

ROBERT BROWN: -- or middle 50s, that they were sort of divided them from the rest.

NATHAN HALPER: No. No.

ROBERT BROWN: Not to any real extent?

NATHAN HALPER: No, I don't mean divided them from the rest. I think – I'm just guessing at what I've said at other times – that probably in every field of art, or in anything where one starts in with a little bit of idealism, there isn't any money, every feels that there isn't any money to be made and you're just glad to be able to survive, once money begins coming in, you can make big money, the situation will just go bad. Willy nilly they'll be interested in money.

ROBERT BROWN: You saw that happening to some artists?

NATHAN HALPER: Oh hell yes. Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: You said Avery kept on painting -

NATHAN HALPER: Avery kept on painting.

ROBERT BROWN: He only had a few years. He only had a few years of that good -

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, but he wouldn't have any -

ROBERT BROWN: But others -

NATHAN HALPER: Others were -

ROBERT BROWN: Their heads were really turned, huh?

NATHAN HALPER: Well, put it this way: Some of them, their heads were turned; others were bothered by the whole situation that the fact that there - You see, the artist has got a very paradoxical situation. He wants to be ahead of his time; and he wants people to buy him. How the hell can you have both? And I can remember - I don't know whether I quoted to you from Franz Kline? You know, the artists used to be having to play ballgames on Sunday. Divide up, you know, among Sal's boys and Ciro's boys and the artists would come to play for one team and some for the other team.

ROBERT BROWN: These were Sal ...

NATHAN HALPER: Yes. But the artist not working for, like Alex Katz would be the pitcher for one team and the others would play on these teams. And there are various photographs, I mean, of some of them. Well, one day I was leaving the game, and I saw Kline sitting in a big long Continental. And I'm watching him and he looked unhappy as all hell - very unhappy. And I said, "What's the matter, Franz?" And he said, "I'm worried, I'm selling. Selling a lot." He said, "What's wrong with me?" (NH laughs) You know? But the people, like, that he didn't consider knowing anything about art buy him. So, you know, he felt very bad about it. And some of the others, they felt, you know, they liked to sell but they were worrying that maybe they're making concessions. And then some of the others had to worry that if they're on top at the moment, how do they And one or two would say to you, "As far as you can tell, what do the younger painters think about me?" You know, they'd just been the "younger painters," now they're coming up and they just felt—you know, the Shakespeare stuff, "uneasy lies the head that bears the crown"? They began worrying about their position, you know - where they stood in the pecking order. And some of them began worrying about who was getting the higher prices. And things like that. And there - a strange story - there was one guy who pretended to despise the entire - I'd give his name if he was well-known, but since he isn't - you know, pretended to despise the whole situation, and he felt most painters had no integrity, but he picked - you know George McNeil, the name?

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

NATHAN HALPER: He thought, "Now, there was a painter," he said, he respected terrifically, a "man with integrity." Well, this guy would paint slowly and he'd bring in a picture to me once every other week, I'd hang it." And if there wasn't a picture, I'd say, "OK, I'll put it up there. What's the price?" Well, prices were not so big in those days. And he looked around and he saw a McNeil, about the same size as theirs. He said, "What's George selling that one for?" And I said, "\$600." He said, "All right, make mine \$650." (RB laughs) You know, after - for years he'd been telling me what a great painter McNeil is and how he admires him. Yet he felt his picture has to sell for more. They were all worried about things like that. Not all, but a hell of a lot of them.

ROBERT BROWN: They felt that the quality or the public's esteem for them was commensurate with the price they were asking.

NATHAN HALPER: Well, I - as I said, they may have been, part of them, contemptuous about the public esteem but they felt also that even in the eyes of God, even if neither picture sells - if neither picture sells, McNeil is a \$600 picture but mine is in the eyes of God a \$650 picture. And so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: (laughing) Now, I think you were suggesting that Kline had misgivings that an ignorant public was paying -

NATHAN HALPER: Or that somebody, they were buying - the fact that he was - I don't about public ignorant public, I may be reading into it, but he didn't feel good that people were buying and they were - he didn't feel good about being "in," you know. That maybe there's something wrong - he said, "What's wrong??" He felt there was something wrong with his painting. Perhaps, perhaps there was something wrong if it appealed to

certain people.

ROBERT BROWN: He wasn't ahead of his time and people were buying.

NATHAN HALPER: Or wasn't ahead of his time, or they were buying him because it was an "in" thing, and maybe, you know, it just appeals to people because it's "in" and maybe because there is a cheap popular quality in him. Maybe he's begun to suck up to things, unconsciously -

ROBERT BROWN: Was he a man agonized quite a bit?

NATHAN HALPER: I never noticed - I never knew him too well, we just chatted about this and that, but he seemed to be really pretty worried about it. Because you see at first, in the early period of the Abstract Expressionists, they sort of went out of their way to act as if they didn't give a good goddamn about the public. They used bad materials - that's why a lot of their paintings are from the house paintings - badly stretched, bad this, they didn't put their names on, they would just show a general contempt. Then, of course, when they began selling, they began getting very careful as hell and buying only the best materials. (He laughs) But things began to get a bit sort of corrupt, it couldn't help it.

ROBERT BROWN: You saw this by even the mid-50s?

NATHAN HALPER: It began in - yes. By the 60s, definitely.

ROBERT BROWN: Then, you said, by the 60s there were so many changes in style -

NATHAN HALPER: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: -- that's another pressure, wasn't it.

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, beginning with the - beginning with Pop. You know. And then you have these guys like [proper name: sounds like Descartes], you know, in writing. That one year, you know, everything was Abstract and you tell people that these guys are the good guys. Then he got onto a Pop scene, and suddenly there was something else that was the good stuff. And he'd tell people not to buy these others and even in the gallery where he worked, for Castelli - I didn't see him do this but I was told that he, you know, downgraded some of the people in his own gallery whom he was operating in previous years.

ROBERT BROWN: Did that problem hit you, here, with your gallery?

NATHAN HALPER: No, no, it didn't. I had a very very slight problem that slowly, through the years, I began having some Representational people. I mean, they didn't object to Avery, because even the Abstractionists felt he was OK, (a) because of an abstract quality in his work, and secondly, the Color Field people felt that he was one of them. And when they had - they wanted him to join Emmerich, and then when they went to Rubin's or some - Larry Rubin - they wanted him to be one of them. But, you know, some of the others who were doing things, they felt, "Oh my God, this is treason." And one or two of them even for a while played with the thought of leaving me, but then they felt too friendly, so they didn't. Of course, in a year or two, when their galleries began changing, they played pool with all sorts of people. (He laughs) But I wouldn't, you see?

ROBERT BROWN: But the artists, then, could pressure you, to an extent? They would - "if you're going to show So-and-So, then I'll have to re-think my showing with you."

NATHAN HALPER: They didn't, well - all right: First, there would be some lower-grade artists who would put on airs about - I had one situation where two artists each of them put on airs about the other. So I ignored them both and neither one of them did anything about it. The only one who would get unpleasant about it - in being very very superior - was Gottlieb. And I heard, you know, that at Jackson's, and at Emmerich's, he'd been very tough too. I remember at Emmerich's, I went one time there, but he had Gottlieb in the City, and he said, "I heard you had a little trouble with Gottlieb." I said something, you know, that he wasn't very - (he laughs) because, I mean - anyway, he was gentelmantly but not very. Some crude words. And [mimicking the other speaker's voice] "Well, he always is." But Gottlieb - a strange chap. He had a funny kind of integrity, but the things he had integrity about were strange.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, you had said that once he said to you that "those who have me will want more of me" -

NATHAN HALPER: Will not want more -

ROBERT BROWN: Not - well! -

NATHAN HALPER: Those - I mean, at the point he was getting afraid, before the things began breaking and the Detroit and Texas people began buying. He said, "It looks bad, because the museums already have me" - have

their Gottlieb or two, and that didn't add up into any new addition.

ROBERT BROWN: Then the outlying collectors -

NATHAN HALPER: Began coming in and buying terrifically -

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

NATHAN HALPER: Of course, he changed his style once or twice, but it was always Abstract. But here's a funny story about Gottlieb. At one point - I knew he was full of the idea he was going to be a great name in the future years. And at some point, somebody bought - it as in the newspapers that somebody had bought a more or less standard American, maybe one he considered buckeye, but of an older generation, for some good money; and he was sort of outraged.

ROBERT BROWN: Buckeye? You mean -

NATHAN HALPER: Well, that's a term they always use about the calendar-type of pictures. But it was some - No, I take that back, not about buckeye, but about the kind of picture it was. It was a picture which he would have conceded was good but it was a well-known painter who already he considered didn't need any money or anything. And he would say, "Why don't people, you know, who have people and buy pictures, they should buy the pictures of younger artists." And I said, "Look Adolph, let us say 20, 30 years from now, when you're a famous, established man, do you want that collectors should not buy you but should buy these young unknowns?" And he was thunderstruck. He said, "Jesus, I never thought of that." (NH laughs) He always felt that somebody should buy Gottlieb no matter what it is. And here's another story. The first day we opened the Kootz gallery, I was sitting in the gallery with Kootz, Gottlieb and so forth, and waiting, you know, in the afternoon. And a taxi stops and out comes Hudson Walker, who had at one time a gallery, also. And Gottlieb said, "That son of a bitch." I said, "What's the matter?" He said, "I remember when he wouldn't show my Colorado, or something, pictures." "But I thought you told me they were lousy." He said, "But that's got nothing to do with it." He just refused to show him! (NH laughs heartily, along with RB) He was a very arrogant guy. But in certain ways, he was fair, you know, for instance, Picasso saw some of the American Abstractionists, and he was either quoted or misquoted or he engaged in a little hyperbole, something about a Baziotes and a Gottlieb. He said something to the effect of - and it was quoted later - he said, "Gee, look how young they are - and they knew some things about painting that I've just learned myself." And Gottlieb - Kootz wanted to quote that - and Gottlieb says, "No, it isn't true. Picasso is just talking." So that, in a way, was a kind of integrity. But about other things he felt that the world owed it, things, to Gottlieb - to buy, and everything else.

ROBERT BROWN: And he was a difficult artist to have.

NATHAN HALPER: He was difficult, he was difficult. He could get along with Kootz because Kootz had a very small stable that he pushed - he felt that the function of a dealer was to sell his pictures to the degree that one could sell them. He had a fight with Kootz; and he left him, because he discovered, just as Motherwell did, that Kootz would sell some of their paintings to people in California or so forth and had not told them and was using the money. So Motherwell was just outraged, but he also said, "Jesus Christ, if he was broke and needed the money, he could have asked me and I'd have let him use it and not pay me." So, he just left in a rage. But he always had a very weak spot for Kootz because he felt Kootz was working for him.

ROBERT BROWN: Well now, you say Kootz would do all he could to push his stable -

NATHAN HALPER: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, what was your attitude?

NATHAN HALPER: Well, I only had the stable for a month or two in the summer. Kootz was, had him for years in New York and pushing him in New York. At that point, I was just - the first year I knew nothing about it -

ROBERT BROWN: No, I mean later - then what was your attitude?

NATHAN HALPER: Well, my --

ROBERT BROWN: Your artists, in general?

NATHAN HALPER: My attitude was this: It was - up here, I had one hell of a lot of guys. What was my attitude - maybe it was my strong - I was no arm-twisting salesman, I didn't know if the world - if the conversation got into technical things, I maybe had to do bluff and try to evade it. I remember in the first year somebody would say - Dave Solinger, who was head of The Friends of the Whitney - "Do you think that's a gouache or just a simple watercolor?" And I wouldn't know what the hell - (RB laughs) you know! So I couldn't engage that. But I had one strong point: I could remember the faces of the people, and I could remember who the hell they were interested

in, in the previous year. So when they'd come in, I wouldn't try to sell them this artist or that one. I would remember that they liked either and Avery or Victor Candel, or so forth. And I would get around to the topic of the - I've got to tell you a glorious story. Do these names mean anything to you - Stephen Pace?

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

NATHAN HALPER: Gandy Brodie.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

NATHAN HALPER: And Angelo Ippolito?

ROBERT BROWN: (no audible reply)

NATHAN HALPER: OK. One day - there's another story beginning into it - some guy who was married into a Rhode Island department store, bought a small Avery. A 9x12. After he'd put it up against the wall, he saw light was coming through at one point. And he came to me - and he was the sort of guy who was - a lot of customers are - an he said, "In my business, we call this damage and we have discounts." I wasn't going to - "I'll speak to Avery about it" - not about the price, you know - what could be done about fixing it and so forth. And he'd come in early in the morning; he would, this guy; before my usual hours. So, I went to Avery. He was completely unconcerned. He said, "I put a thumbtack to it!" (laughs) I said, "Well, this damn guy is bothered." He said, "Oh," He took - I mean, he didn't use this kind of language, you know, but very submissively took a piece of scotch tape and put it in back. So, he held it up; there was no light shining through. So I take it. And in the morning the guy came and is satisfied with the picture; it wasn't a "second" anymore. But meanwhile, there I was in the gallery, you know, before the hours. And somebody is knocking at the door, and I started to say, "We're closed." Then I thought, "What the hell - what does it mean, 'closed'? Here we are. Here I am." And the guys come in. He's tall, distinguished-looking man, with a woman with him. Turns out his name was Pat Lannon - do you know the name? Patrick Lannon. I didn't know him at the time. And he turns out to be a financier, a stock broker, engaged in this and that - he owned a part of a baseball team. But anyway, he comes in, and he says, "I want you to recommend a few young painters to me." So I said, "Well, I don't think I should. I think you should buy what you like and shouldn't buy anything because somebody tells you." He said, "Now look: I'm a stock broker. People come in and they ask me what stocks to buy. And I feel it's part of my job to tell them what to buy. And I want you to do the same for me." I said, "Well, I still feel the same way, as I said. But what I'll do is I'll take you around to three different kinds of young artists. And you look at their things and make your decisions or say you like something in that area." He said, "Um-hnh." The best he could get - "all right." Well, the first one I took him to see was Paces, the next morning. And he lived in little shack on the other side of Road Six, which was brand new. This shack was maybe a quarter of the size of this room.

ROBERT BROWN: Only about 8x10 feet, or less.

NATHAN HALPER: Yeah. He had a cot, and an easel. He had a one-burner or two-burner range. And he had one knife, one fork, one spoon, a cup, and this and that. And just the absolute bare things. In the summer, he said he just did the watercolors, and in the winter, oils. So, could we go out. And Lannon said, "Isn't that wonderful, isn't that wonderful - here's somebody living only for his art." And he said, "Have you got any oils of his?" And I said, "Yes." "Big ones?" He says, "All right." He comes in the gallery and he looks and he buys the biggest Pace there is. Then I take him to Gandy Brodie. Paints in an entirely different way. He's in an apartment; his wife, who is a high school teacher but she was wearing one of these peasantry dresses, and their kid is crawling around on the floor. And Gandy was very gamey, a lower-class character in his behavior, whereas Pace, you know, was old-yankee Missouri - you know, old Midwestern, with all the laconic ways. And Gandy, he talks with him and he talks a lot of bullshit but you could see he's not the wild artist that Pascin, you know -

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

NATHAN HALPER: And Lannon says, "Isn't that wonderful. The fellow lives only for his art, just paints, you know" - he was busy painting all the time - "he's got a peasant wife to take care of his needs, the baby crawls on the floor, shits on the floor," he says, "and he throws them a rag, or his wife makes him clean up," and he says, "That's wonderful - you've got - where was I - big ones?" And he comes around and he buys the biggest Gandy in the place. Next day I take him to Ippolito personally?

ROBERT BROWN: No.

NATHAN HALPER: He's a bohemian, who's apt to be very poor - I mean, in the old days; now at least, he's got a teaching job for years. But always with a certain elegance about him. I mean, he may be in a second-hand - in a pawnshop he might find a little baby carriage which would land up in - or he'd find a sweater, or a crazy hat, you know, with some sort of elegant little thing, no matter what he had. He'd just been married and he had a place in on the shore in - where Treasure and Trash is, I think. And it was, you know, a ramshackle place. Anyway, I take

him there – and he’s a very fastidious guy, even though poor. And I could see it not going at all well. Lannon is getting angrier and angrier, although God knows what about. And as we go out, and I know it didn’t work, and he turns to me and he says, “That son of a bitch,” he says, “he’s got copper pots. That’s what I have.” (laughs uproariously) And you began getting guys of all sorts; something like that. I remember being at Castelli’s once and some people came in; this was in those days. And this guy – I think he was from Michigan or some place like that, and he said, “We’re from so-and-so. We heard that you are the most avant-garde gallery in town. We want to see something avant-garde.” They came to see avant-garde, but they came to Kootz and after that he was no longer so avant-garde. There was Castelli and others, you know – guys who’d begun making big money, or they had money for years but it suddenly was “the thing” –

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

NATHAN HALPER: -- the prestige symbol, to be avant-garde.

ROBERT BROWN: Sure. Bring back trophies.

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, and to do what

[END OF SIDE ONE]

ROBERT BROWN: Could we talk for a bit about collectors? You mentioned one just now –

NATHAN HALPER: Yes. Well, a few years ago, they had a little panel at the Art Association about collecting. They wanted to get across the idea that you can be a collector – you know. And they got a group of us, who they knew bought pictures. I mean, was one, and B. H. Friedman who was also once the head of Friends of Whitney, and so forth. And then when it came my turn, I said, “I don’t want to be called a collector.” To me collector’s a dirty word. And when a guy would come into the gallery and say, “I am a collector,” Nine times out of ten it was a prelude to an attempt to get a cheaper price – if you’re in my collection, you know, it’ll lend you prestige. I said, “I prefer the term ‘I’m a guy who likes to buy pictures’, and the word collector has got all sorts of bad things.” I’ve very rarely seen a guy in my 15 years there to buy a picture because they love it. And if somebody buys a picture because they love it, it was usually some guy who didn’t have much money and who didn’t know much about painting, and for some reason. Otherwise people who theoretically knew something about painting, or did some little painting themselves or collect – I’ve only in that period seen two or three times when you could just see the equivalent of the arrow striking and love hitting the damn picture. I mean, I can think of two different times when I saw somebody coming in and I could just see – it almost like a spark jumping from the picture to them. And once it was very funny . . . There was a woman, a Hofmann student who through the years when we had Hofmann, would come in and say, “That’s a beautiful picture, how much is that?” And I would say, “\$400.” “Oh, I wish I could afford that,” and so forth. And about other things that went on for years. And then one time I had Avery. And she came in, looked at it, and I saw the spark. And she said, “How much is it?” And I said, “\$5.400.” And after a lot of hemming and hawing, she bought it – after not being able – but she bought it on one condition: that I don’t tell any of the painters in town that she’d bought. They’d make her life unbearable! (laughs heartily) And then she bought the picture and at some point – it was a fairly light one, so it got soiled a bit – and I thought, you know, whether it would need any special treatment. And I called Mrs. Avery; she told me how she cleaned them, which seems to be a heretical way – she said, “A very weak ivory soap” she said she used. Which a lot – they got form their books are dangerous, but she could say she’d never had any hurt. And so I went up to tell her. She lived at either Hampshire House or Essex House in New York – you know the place –

ROBERT BROWN: Central Park South.

NATHAN HALPER: And I came up, and she pulled the goddamn picture, which was about 40” x 52” from under the bed. It had reached the point, when people came to visit her, she didn’t want, you know, not to think they’d bother her again. So there was this thing that she paid that money for, it was lying under the bed. Now what – she eventually left it to the Modern when she died. I wish she had left it here.

ROBERT BROWN: But this sort of person was the exception. They were calculating –

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, and about other things she’d be calculating. And about others was partly calculating – But she loved it, there was no question about it.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

NATHAN HALPER: And this other guy – I mean, and even the other guy, they tried to get a better price but I had the feeling very definitely they would have bought it anyway. But I felt, you know, I put up the other one, who knew the Averys, and I said so-and-so asked if you’d let him have it cheaper, and Sally said “All right, let him have it, for such-and-such a price.”

ROBERT BROWN: In view of this, do you feel that – what do you feel of the dealer’s handling an artist’s work versus the artists trying to do it themselves?

NATHAN HALPER: There are very few artists who are capable of doing it and capable of not being affected by it.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, they’d have to put up with what you’ve just mentioned.

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, a lot of them do. But certain ones don’t – are equipped themselves to handle it. And, you know a lot of them – there’s another point: a lot of them – some would come to their studio and a guy would say, “Let me have – you won’t have to pay commission.” I mean, if they’re contracted, or else they’d violate the contract; one way or the other. And they’d say, “You won’t have to pay commission, give it cheaper” and most artists did it. And they would ask me about it and I would say, “You’re just a plain goddamn fool.” I mean, not only if the word gets around, dealers will be wary. But apart from that, you paint the picture, you’re being paid for that picture, and you’re paying the dealer a certain amount of money for his efforts. If you’re selling it, you still should get – I wasn’t objecting to the fact that they sold from that, it was just that they were selling cheaper. “You deserve the percentage which the dealer gets. You work for that and you sweat for that and you take the lumps for that. And you’re just a goddamn sucker if you do that without anything extra. I mean, if it were a picture for \$3,000 and you only get \$2,000 when it’s sold in the gallery (then, it was 33-1/3), you’re a goddamn fool if you only take \$2,000 when you do all the dirty work.” (he laughs) But most of them – and the ones, I mean – there were a few – and I thought they were sensible: if a guy went to their studio, they’d say. “This is \$3,000 PERIOD.” They might be crooks and not pay the gallery even if there were a contract to that effect. But even so, they felt they earned it. And they did earn it very often, sucking around with the guy, you know, and –

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

NATHAN HALPER: -- whatever it was. But people bought pictures very often for the goddamdest reasons. Very rarely for love. I mean – oh, I say, only two I saw love: others liked the picture, yes –

ROBERT BROWN: But it wouldn’t be just for investment, either. There were other reasons.

NATHAN HALPER: Some would be for investment. And some to be “in.” Some would be to show off among their friends, or to give them an in with the artist – that they knew him a little bit. And some would be for how it fitted with the stuff they had in their room. And some had crazy ideas that the picture had to be a pretty picture. I remember – ever hear of this guy Geller, --

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

NATHAN HALPER: -- who’s supposedly the great Avery patron, and Mrs. Avery just hates his guts because he drove very, very hard bargains, just the way some of the other painters – people who claimed they were Avery patrons – but, anyway, he was up here, and either because he really liked Avery or he wanted to promote the sale of Averys to help his own stuff, he got chummy with a manufacturer up here and convinced the guy and his wife that they ought to buy an Avery. So, he brought him in, and we had an Avery that all the artists had liked very much, of two women sitting on a sofa and with all sorts of Avery distortions on it. And I brought it – they loved it, it was lovely pastel colors – you might almost call it a nice, popular, airy – and I brought it in, they looked at it, this woman, you know, “You call that a nice picture? You think that’s nice? My daughter, she looks much better than any of them.” You know? She thought the women weren’t good-looking. That was her idea – if the women were good-looking, and somebody told her it is a good thing to have, they’d do it. But – oh, I mean, they’d do it, but – it was just the thing to do. They have a spot on their wall, you know –

ROBERT BROWN: In general, you didn’t have a heck of a lot of respect for most of your collectors.

NATHAN HALPER: No. some of them were very nice. In fact, some of those who were the nicest maybe didn’t even buy. Or they couldn’t afford; or they didn’t have enough room. But it was very nice to have somebody around who either knew something about or seemed to like some of the things. Those people who were collectors I very often despised. And since then, in talking with some other dealers, some say, “the curse”. It’s the people they objected to, as collectors.

ROBERT BROWN: And yet, you’re in the business to sell.

NATHAN HALPER: You’re in the business to sell them. But, you see, but as opposed to other businesses – say, if you’re selling automobiles, guys will come and they’ll try to chisel you like hell to get more money on the return, anyway. But they need an automobile, they need a refrigerator. They need this – But who the hell needs a picture?

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

NATHAN HALPER: As Hirshhorn once made clear to me –

ROBERT BROWN: Hirshhorn – was he here?

NATHAN HALPER: He was here every now and then. And once he came in, you know, and some people had told he ought to buy a certain painter, you know. Of course, after we sold some of this guy to Hirshhorn, 40 people came in and said, “I got him to buy it.” (laughs) You know. That’s another story. But anyhow, he came and said he wanted to buy several and he said, “How much are they?” And I told him. And he offered me a price, and I said, “No.” And he looked at me, you know; he says, “No, look boy” – I was only about – how old would I have been then? about 60 – oh, approaching 60, maybe – no, no, I’m sorry, I was in my early 50s, early 50s; and he says, “Look, boy” (RB laughs) “I got more than 2,000 paintings. I need these three paintings like I need a hole in the head. Now, what do you want to sell them for?” (laughs heartily) But he, at least, was frank about it. And I knew – you see, I’d have understandings with various painters just how broke they were, what they needed, and I knew this guy wanted – one of the hard things was some guys would get sore as hell if I’d tell them – a guy wanted a painting but he didn’t want to pay the price. And if you didn’t sell it to them, they’d get sore. Others might get sore if the other way – if you did go down. So, after a year or two I came to an understanding with every painter – “Just which way do you want me to play it if a guy wants to buy a picture, sell it to him no matter what the price is? Or just hold onto it?” So, in this case I knew the guy wanted the sale. Hirshhorn, that was one good thing about him, he was very frank about those things. “I can do without them,” you know he’d say.

ROBERT BROWN: And did he?

NATHAN HALPER: No, in this case. He had them some pictures which he really liked. But he didn’t like the price. So he just – and it also depended on his mood, you know; and things like that.

ROBERT BROWN: You, then, unlike Kootz, didn’t just push your artists just for the sake of pushing them.

NATHAN HALPER: No, I –

ROBERT BROWN: They were perhaps, the nicest part of the business, weren’t they? – which, I detect from you, you liked many of the artists.

NATHAN HALPER: Oh yeah – some of them –

ROBERT BROWN: You liked their work.

NATHAN HALPER: Some of them I liked, -- yes – a lot of them o got along with. A few of them were pretty difficult.

ROBERT BROWN: You felt you wanted to be fair for their interests.

NATHAN HALPER: Oh, yes, I had to take care of their interests. But I wasn’t going to twist anybody’s arm for it. I’d only push it if, I mean, I knew a guy was interested in something – to try to do it –

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

NATHAN HALPER: It was interesting – in the early days, when I just couldn’t seem to sell anything, and I heard Mrs. Hofmann was very good, I went to her and I said, “Miz, how does one sell a picture?” She said, “Well, you show somebody a picture, you talk to them, let them look at the pictures. And then, at the right moment, you say to them, ‘I think you should buy this.’” And I said, “yes, but how do you know when is the right moment?” “Oh,” she said, “that you have to learn.” It was always that. (both laugh) “At the right moment.”

ROBERT BROWN: But after a few sales you developed that.

NATHAN HALPER: You begin to – I don’t know if either develop a sense or else I began to know individual people. You know, after you’ve sold a guy one year it was easier to sell them a different year. And you know, after a while you get the idea about certain people.

ROBERT BROWN: Maybe we could talk a little bit more about some of the artists you haven’t discussed too much so far – either that knew here or got to know to some extent. You mentioned, the first time we talked, Jan Muller. You had him in the 50s –

NATHAN HALPER: Yes. First, he was in the Sun Gallery. And the he didn’t like – you know, the walls were small and so forth; and then he painted bigger pictures. So whatever the reason was – and my walls were white and so forth – so I had him for a number of years and got along well with him, you know – no problems either way. And he was a guy – you see, there were always among these younger painters a few artists that the others had a hell of a lot of respect for. Not only for their, for the fact that they might be good painters but that they felt they

were very good, honest painters. And they respected Jan Muller one hell of a lot. I mean, they had this Hansa Gallery, this cooperative in New York, and it was really held together by you know, cooperatives always disintegrate – it was held together by Jan Muller and Stankiewicz, who both had a lot of moral force. And Jan Muller was – you really had to respect that guy, because he had a valve in his heart. And when he got excited, it would suddenly begin ticking like a loud clock. And you'd think the guy – you know, he'd get excited in an argument, about art and so forth. And you think a guy like that would watch himself; or about other things. His attitude was: by God, he wasn't going to let this suffoc – he was going to die with his boots on. And he did. So, he got married, screwed, drank, you know. At one point at some party, he even ran down a hill – a dune down there. He suddenly died at a dinner table. Put his head down; I was there. But he wasn't going to, you know, give in. At first he did these sort of tasch-like things for Hofmann. And all of Hofmann's students of very age thought he was wonderful. Then he had one of his shows at the Sun Gallery where he began doing these figures – Faust, and Hamlet, and others, and witches. And he and Hofmann had a big argument at the opening night. Both yelling at each other.

ROBERT BROWN: Hmm. Over what?

NATHAN HALPER: Well, Hofmann felt that it should be abstract, and he felt he used the abstract principles. Of recent years that's been downplayed a bit; maybe my memory was exaggerating it, but I remember what a sensation it caused at the time. Because he was the fair-haired boy.

ROBERT BROWN: Was Muller good, fast on his feet in an argument?

NATHAN HALPER: Well, no, he had a heavy German accent –

ROBERT BROWN: Yes, but at least with Hofmann he stood his ground?

NATHAN HALPER: Oh yes. Of course, neither one was an agile – it was more each one saying certain things with emphasis, in an almost ponderous statement of generalizations on each one. Oh yes, he held it –

ROBERT BROWN: Was he easy to show? Easy to sell?

NATHAN HALPER: He was easy to show. They looked good. There were certain painters that were difficult to show next to others. Like I hear somewhere that Kahnweiler always had trouble hanging Léger next to other pictures. No; we sold some; not big ones; a lot of them were on shingles and so forth. Maybe people felt they should – something unsubstantial. But we did sell a few medium-sized ones.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he someone you got to know a bit while he was with you?

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, I got to know him and his wife.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he a fairly private person, or --?

NATHAN HALPER: Well, he had these damn par – you know, he was sociable, gregarious. After this school, he got to know all sorts of people there. And he was friendly, say, with Gahagan and other of that sort. But he was not a boisterous person. A European, actually. The name "Hansa Gallery" got the name because of him because he came from one of the Hansa towns in Germany. (tape is interrupted for NH to see a visitor)

NATHAN HALPER: -- in today's studio, you know. I don't know if you saw the show there where all the painters were at some time. But he lived there.

ROBERT BROWN: Sure, the former lumberyard, right?

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, Hofmann had a studio there – he didn't live there but he'd come there. But Muller lived there. He got married to Dolores James, now known as Dodie Muv. And they had their wedding party there, and somebody objected to the noise and they called the cops. And the cops arrested him. He had to have certain pills for his heart, and Gahagan and certain others began saying, "My God, they have to have medical care" and they ignored him. And they arrested Gahagan and a few other guys and took them down to the jail here. So some people got in touch with Dr. Heber – one of the town doctors, but he knew about the case. And he came down and he said, "You can't do this thing, he's got to have certain pills every few hours and so forth, you know. And if anything happens to him you'll be responsible." These guys were tearing their hair. "My God, we had to pick a guy likes that to arrest?" (RB laughs) And they said, "OK, we'll let him go." And he said, "I won't leave unless you release all the other guys." So that hurt them but they had to release all the other guys. And then Dr. Heber offered them money to go to one of the hotels and have a party there, continue the party. But by that time he'd had enough. But there's a big saga about what different people did at that time. But he was a tough-fibered man. You know, he was lean – his father was a Socialist in Germany.

ROBERT BROWN: There were some other artists that you got to know fairly well which you also showed in your

gallery. We've talked about a number of them but - Lester Johnson: was he up here with you?

NATHAN HALPER: Oh, yes. He was another quiet guy. And he was also one who was respected a lot by the other painters. And at that time - I mean, it's hard to think, now, that he was at some time the Dean of the Yale Art School, because he seemed like one of the old not very articulate artists in those days. And also, the paintings he did then were very simple and straightforward - I remember - when I was saying that people didn't love his paintings much, I was thinking on the other hand of a stockbroker who came in. He didn't fall in love with a Johnson but he looked at it - he had a young wife who apparently was looking, and there wasn't anything particular, he just liked the idea - we had about six or seven Johnsons on the wall. And he said, "They're so honest!" And he just liked the idea of the paintings looking so honest, without any of the graces. "Which painting should we get, dear?" That it should be one of them, or it should be a Johnson, you see? (laughing) He liked the quality of honesty. They were that kind of paintings. Very direct, just simple shape, and so forth; and now they've gotten much busier. They may just as good or better, but the old Johnson lovers -

ROBERT BROWN: Regret that -

NATHAN HALPER: They can't get used to it. He works as a busboy in Colonial Inn, one of them. He still has a great fondness for Provincetown. We had this Joyce thing and I heard he did a few Joyce pictures. And he came up for the damn symposium.

ROBERT BROWN: This last June, yes.

NATHAN HALPER: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: But he was a young man when you first knew him here; fairly young.

NATHAN HALPER: He must have been, but he was married and so forth. He was very poor. Because I remember that of place he lived in -

ROBERT BROWN: This was before he got his academic -

NATHAN HALPER: Oh yes before - Fourcade bought a Johnson from me, you know. He liked the Johnsons, and then at some point I think he gave him a job. And then I guess he got a -

ROBERT BROWN: In fact, going into teaching was a thing that happened increasingly in the 1960s.

NATHAN HALPER: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: And did you see effects upon artists of doing that? Apart from financial security.

NATHAN HALPER: No, I didn't see the difference in the artist before and after. I did make various generalizations, however. You see, they hadn't been teaching long enough to really give them habits. I did make generalizations between those artists I had who were not teachers originally and those artists who were teachers when I first had them.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, what kind of generalizations did you make?

NATHAN HALPER: That those who were teachers, they seemed to be much more - well, I had the impression that some of them were almost painted paintings and treated their own paintings as they would like a painting that a student would bring them. You know, they said what it is, and the teacher looks at it and says to himself, "Composition: B+ -- composition good. How's the color? Good." And go through about 20 things and check them off - "That's a good painting." And they'd do that to their own. "It obeys everything. It's a good painting." And then they just could not understand why when somebody came in, they wouldn't buy it. "You know, it's a good painting! It hits every goddam thing on the checklist." And they would say, "But - "I told one or two of them, "Look: I've noticed that a guy buys a painting - except when he buys it for the other goddam reasons, you know -

ROBERT BROWN: Yes,

NATHAN HALPER: -- he buys it if the painting either kisses him or kicks him. It's got to have an effect. Nobody buys a painting because they think it obeys 20 rules, you know." And in fact, some of these paintings - this was really sad: a friend of a painter came in. "Do I understand - "He looked around the whole place at all the pictures. "I understand so-and-so is showing in the gallery. Can you show me one of his?" And I would say, "Well, that's one and that's one" - they were on the wall and they didn't even notice them! They were (he laughs) good paintings, but - you know - You're not going to see them. And I saw that much more in teachers. It was almost a negative standard. There's nothing wrong with them as they were. Whereas the other guys - I don't know, they were just trying to paint pictures.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think the people who were just trying to paint pictures, the simple directness could come through more likely than –

NATHAN HALPER: They would come through. They weren't set in their ways. Maybe that was it.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

NATHAN HALPER: -- either set in their ways, or they weren't painting for the standard that they would hold for their students. You know, a teacher can't hold a student and say, "Let this be" – you know—

ROBERT BROWN: So, the professor-painters you kept sort of in the minority. You didn't –

NATHAN HALPER: Well, no, I would say I would but I would notice that. I didn't start in with any preconceived ideas about any of – by various gradual –

ROBERT BROWN: But fairly soon you saw these –

NATHAN HALPER: After a while, certain things I would notice and – that was it.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

NATHAN HALPER: On the other hand, you can't say, "I will not shoe this guy because he's a professor." It's just the same a version of what they're doing, you know? (he laughs)

ROBERT BROWN: And then you distinguished between those people who were teachers when you started and then those who became teachers –

NATHAN HALPER: Well, those who became teachers – I think it took time for them. But I did notice something funny. I'll mention – you know Wolf Kahn?

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

NATHAN HALPER: He was originally a very lively, I would say unacademic guy. And he's got a lot of charm and everything else – and a lot of guts, though, and this and that. Just paints. And of course the first paintings he did – he worked with Hofmann, but he began doing just sort of Van Gogh-y paintings, you know. And then for a while Signac-y, and so forth; until he began developing – and Bonnard, for a while – developing a style of his own, finally. But even when he was doing those things, people would say – I remember he was up here with his wife before he married her, he painted her a lot – and somebody would say, "Look at those, those are Bonnards." Then he would say, "But are they good Bonnards?" You see? And then, when he got on the Signac thing, I mean, these little misty or snowy pastels – we had some. I remember a woman coming in. Form across the room: "Signacs, my God!" You know, sneer. And she walks over. And she herself looks, and she said, "And good ones!" (both laugh) He was that way. And then he began teaching a hell of a lot. And here I'll go into some things – egotistic or narcissistic. I said at some point I started – just curious – painting. And then did that for about a year and the quit. And then I was up here – in the early 70s we spent a winter here. So I went to sketch class once a week. And again – I said this thing I mentioned about painting: But I'd seen a lot of the good guys, so I knew certain things. So when they'd see my drawings – I'd show them to some of the painters – again I was able to make a division. About half the painters – and this would be guys like Motherwell, Myron Stout, Dolores Muller, Selena Tree from Bob Henri – and some others, and they'd say, "Wow, they're alive!" Others, including Sally Avery, you know, who's not like her husband, and Wolf Kahn, and Mervin Jules, and a few of the others – they would just lift their eyebrows and they'd see every goddam thing that was wrong with it. And I'm just leading up to Wolf, you know, who was just complete freedom, and I show it to him, and he says, "You've got to shoe that she's standing or something – make a little line, or a little penchant – that there's a little weight there." Whereas these other guys were just thinking in terms – the hell whether that was a nude, just relationship of one thing to the size of the paper, you know, things like that – In fact, this is interesting: when I showed them to Motherwell, he went to the little portfolio, and one of them he said, "That's beautiful." And I said, "Bob! Don't you see, I X'd it out after I half started." He said, "I can see that, but you put the X's in such a right place!" (both laugh heartily) That was what they cared about. And some of the others, that they were alive. (laughing again) You see?

ROBERT BROWN: Yes. Yes.

NATHAN HALPER: Whereas a guy like Wolf Kahn has become –

ROBERT BROWN: Very graphically.

NATHAN HALPER: Yes. And a guy like Wolf Kahn has become the other way because he's been teaching all of this goddam time; they've "got to be standing on something" – they're not in abstract space.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes. Tell me – an extension, perhaps, from this is you see, in the 60s and now in the 70s in the fine arts work center a lot of recent, newly admitted students up there. How do they behave? Are they bold? Are they getting into things the way they were 23 years ago?

NATHAN HALPER: No: no, no. The thing is all fractioned. And now, and beginning with Pop Art, you know. I mean, the years when they were boosting abstract art, people would come in, and I would listen to the Kutzes and so forth, who'd say, "It's new, you've got to do something new, that hasn't been done before." Then, when they'd already exhausted that, and they needed something else to show, they realized that they had something but it's got to be new. So every year it's got to be new, which meant that every year or two, you had to have a new style; just like with the automobile – a new flange, and a new material, and this and that. What was it – poly?

ROBERT BROWN: Polyester resins, or acrylics.

NATHAN HALPER: Yes. Well, acrylics you could see a point for. Except for those guys who say, "You've got to get this because is an acrylic. It's a new, it's a poly" – my wife belonged to a coop gallery in New York for a few years. I could see – they had a few famous people from a few different beliefs. And every opening you could see the different groups separate in c corner; and if the artist was not one of the group, the big sneers on their faces. And the idea was – someone would say – the idea was for one person to get hold of a new material and to show what you could do with it. And it didn't matter whether what you did with it was of any importance or not; or good. You were just doing a new thing. And as far as I was concerned, you had points of diminishing returns. I mean, I couldn't see any virtue in either a thing being new or old. If it's good – of course, don't ask me what "Is it good" means! (he laughs) that's another hard question. But that's the only question that's important.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

NATHAN HALPER: And on these ones, they seemed to be working hard, and caring. But I'll be goddamned if I see what need in themselves this is fulfilling.

ROBERT BROWN: What do you think they're fulfilling?

NATHAN HALPER: I don't know! I don't know. Maybe – I don't know, maybe I'm unfair, maybe it's the idea – but that's always been true: the idea of being an artist, or being an actor, being a – After a while, the psychoanalysts got this phrase that we do something "cre – a – tive"[he emphasizes each syllable, somewhat mockingly]. And I've seen people who should be happy, and living happy lives, seemingly; and they say "But I wish I could do something cre – a – tive." And they don't know that 99% of the creative people are NOT creative – you know. The analysts – I knew a hell of a lot of them here – they would want someone to say, you know, to get over their work life. But to them a very commercial piece of art was being "creative." And they'd talk about these things. And so, maybe, they liked the idea or being creative, and maybe there is something in their trying to express – I remember way back when I was in school, some teacher of literature who became a well known novelist for a while. He would say, "Now, when they're young some people have extra nervous energy, and that nervous energy gets them from the course." And I notice I think probably a lot of the young people are painting, because I've noticed again the age difference, that a lot of them when they begin here, they're 40, 45, they haven't got it anymore, and they're just doing the thing because that's the only thing they know how to do. And maybe they became good craftsmen, which there's nothing – there's nothing wrong at all – one can have all the greatest respect for a good craftsman who's a painter, or a plumber, or anything else, there's no distinction.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

NATHAN HALPER: And that's a very honorable thing to be a good craftsman, on a canvas. But they remember those phrases about ART, you know, and they want the respect for that. And it's much more honorable to be a good craftsman than an uninterested artist. So, I don't know what these kids are doing, I just look at – I just don't under –

ROBERT BROWN: You don't see that force that –

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, I don't see – what are they doing to themselves with – I mean, like some of them a few years – some guy was just hanging ropes of different sizes, you know. And when I go, there was this thing about neon lights, like these guys, I forget their names – Judd or something? Or Flavin?

ROBERT BROWN: Flavin.

NATHAN HALPER: A couple of neon – what's that doing to him? What's he getting out of his system? Maybe there is, but I don't dig it. And I never even dug – forgive me – I never even dug Rauschenberg. So who the hell cares if there's a fire around a goat?

ROBERT BROWN: Did you ever have any of such people in your gallery? Rauschenberg or Johns or –

NATHAN HALPER: No. At one period I did have, I picked up a few early Dines from Arthur Jackson you know, but it was in that sequence. But – all right, that I could almost see, I mean, what the hell – one guy paints. There was a fellow named who painted pears, or Morandi painted bottles. All right: so you're doing your little expert, you know, studies of different. That could be almost a slight version of that. (laughs) And some of the individual collages seem to be done with some skill and care.

ROBERT BROWN: What about sculptors that you carried? Were they a different sort from the painters we've talked about? I mean, did they present different considerations on your part?

NATHAN HALPER: No, not –

ROBERT BROWN: You had Nevelson at one time or another, didn't you?

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, yes –

ROBERT BROWN: And Davis you mentioned –

NATHAN HALPER: Yes. Well, Stankiewicz and some of those I could see, even if it was only for – maybe I sold them in a literary way; I'm not sure. But you could see proportions and things like that, so you could satisfy your conscience. I mean, you could see relationships between them and some of the more regulated abstractions. But also there was a literary element in those things, and a lot of humor in it. So you could like Bill Cain. You could like several of them for different reasons.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes. And you showed them up here.

NATHAN HALPER: And I showed them up here. Of course, I really went to town when Sidney Gordon came up. And he said, "Hey, why don't you have a sculpture show?" And then we did that for several years and that became almost an annual affair. And it was a hell of a lot of fun, because we got up various sculptors. You got one shot of some of the little ones without – and it would be a three-dimensional affair. Things would be on the walls, hanging from the ceiling (laughing) he would make special tables for little ones. And then we'd get a few black-and-whites, like Stout that would get with it; nothing with color. And you know, that was fun.

ROBERT BROWN: Is Gordon somebody you've known quite well?

NATHAN HALPER: I didn't until he came up and then we got to know each other quite well and – a year ago he visited here for the first time in 17 years and he stayed here. And then we went out to California last year to see relatives and we stayed with him. No, now we know him – we got to know him quite well. But when he first came up I didn't know him.

ROBERT BROWN: Back in the 50s, you knew Stankiewicz a bit?

NATHAN HALPER: Yes. Of course, I knew him through the Hansa situation. Karp was one of the two – Karp and Bellamy, Richard Bellamy. They were the two –

ROBERT BROWN: Managers? Or –

NATHAN HALPER: Well, you know, it was a coop, they were the two – the stories I hear, it it's true, it's very nice – do you know them individually?

ROBERT BROWN: No.

NATHAN HALPER: They're entirely different types. Karp is an operator, maybe not very scrupulous, and operator who plays a big swashbuckling type, always a big act. Bellamy is half oriental; I think his mother was Chinese or something. But anyway he underplays; Karp overplays. The story is, I've been told, they'd be sitting there in the Hansa together and somebody would come in and they'd look at each other and say "mine" or "yours" – because there are certain people who want to be let alone, and certain people who want to be told, you know. So that would be it. Now, Karp began working for me. And then he got some of the Hansa people to, you know –

ROBERT BROWN: Come up here.

NATHAN HALPER: -- I mean, to have their things here, like Stankiewicz. Stankiewicz would only come in for a day or so occasionally, but we brought his things – because the Hansa closed for the summer.

ROBERT BROWN: Was it easy to work with him?

NATHAN HALPER: Oh yes, I would – his studio when I'd come down, I mean, during the winter, I would drop in the studio – we had a very enjoyable conversation.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you ever show him Nevelson, and get to know her a bit?

NATHAN HALPER: I got to know her a bit, you know. She first showed at – do you know about Two Fifty-six Gallery?

ROBERT BROWN: Just a bit.

NATHAN HALPER: After we put up the Kootz gallery, some of the painters in town who'd just been maybe working individually for people coming through or else just painting here and taking it to New York, they could see that their tongues began hanging out, and they rented this place next to Town Hall, which is now a movie or something, they called it Gallery Two-Fiftysix – the number may have been 256 Commercial. And they got together a number of local – they got some people that they knew in the city who weren't really Provincetown, and one of them was Nevelson. And at that time her work was nothing like it is now – she was more or less doing terra cotta – things with animals, things like that; they were big, so they might be on armatures and so forth; but they were recognizable things, not abstract. And then after one year there was a big schism at Two Fiftysix because Peter B -- if you know him?

ROBERT BROWN: No.

NATHAN HALPER: He was one of the local painters, now teaches at Minnesota. And he – you know, they had to have a nominal guy running the thing. So he was the nominal entrepreneur. And then he tried to become so active that he really was the entrepreneur, and they all said, "No dice." And so they – and just at that time I split with Kutz. And they said, "Will you take us?" And I knew enough to tell them, "Now, look: you guys want to be with me until you find another setup. And next year it'll be something else." And they'd say, "No, no, no, no, NO." I just didn't believe them, but I was stuck too. So we got a bunch of them, and the next year it just happened they got rid of B and started again. And a lot of them went back, but some of them stayed with me. Anyway – I forget, now, the Nevelson thing; and when she changed to the black things, and you saw, some of them were small things, at first. And when they were small, at – I didn't find them that impressive. One or two of them were nice just as proportions. But I remember – Judith Rothschild, if you know her – she bought one; she thought they were fine. So – but I got, you know, to know her a bit. And we had her – I remember an interest – you know, she still hadn't expanded. Her brother-in-law, Milwolf you know, it all started when he gave a, the first big combination of rooms to the Modern. But we had a panel then – even then, in the 50s, late 50s, about women artists – the troubled they may or may not have. A pre-Lib thing. And she was on it, and Clara Thompson the psychoanalyst, and Harry Botkin the painter, and another psychoanalyst by the name of Eisner. And she talked about all the difficulties about them. But we got to be, you know, not bosom friends but fairly cordial. Of course, in the after years, even when she got well known and every now and then some collector would say to me, "I'd like to meet Louise Nevelson," I could call her and I could bring hi down. But – it's funny: this is something about her: at one point I would show her, and we were friendly, but Tirza Carlus came up and she showed some things with Tirza too.

ROBERT BROWN: Tirza was a New York dealer?

NATHAN HALPER: I don't know whether she'd been a dealer but she'd never had a real gallery. But she was a woman who really – I think she really was in love with being a dealer – the idea: just like some are in love with the idea of being an artist, she really wanted to be a dealer. It meant a justification to herself of living. And she would buy certain things. In fact, she did very well at buying some of Avery's very very early he'd now just selling for – but she bought one or two Nevelsons. And I had so many damn people that bought four or five things every year but I hadn't gotten around to buying a Nevelson yet. And after a while, Nevelson, while being completely a friend and I could always call on her, she said she thinks she'll just show with Tirza – I mean, she'd become well known by this time, Nevelson – because Tirza Had bought some, and I, no matter how friendly we were, had not. So that was her standard. But she was, you know, a good, bawdy woman. Can we get bawdy about her?

ROBERT BROWN: Oh yes.

NATHAN HALPER: Because I remember at one goddam time she was – I think it was Fritz Bultman who said, about some, he said, "Aw, fuck it." And she said, "No! Fuck ME." (both laugh heartily) That was her act.

ROBERT BROWN: But she was, I mean, she was accessible in the 50s and the early 60s.

NATHAN HALPER: Oh yes. And if I'd have bought a few things of hers, she would have continued with me indefinitely.

ROBERT BROWN: And she was becoming more of a business-oriented –

NATHAN HALPER: No; because there were two of them there, it was a kind of loyalty. All right, I mentioned Sally

Avery being furious about certain of the people who took advantage, she felt. On the other hand, she was very very friendly and grateful to people who way, way, way back then had bought some things and were decent about it. Somebody or other who'd bought a picture from her for \$200 and now it was worth \$20,000 - she didn't begrudge that; that's nice, she's glad. But was it was just when these Gellers or Newburgers or Hirshorns put this stuff about him. And incidentally, Mrs. Dickinson - you see, he was sort of a gentleman and wouldn't - often as he got older, he would let things out, and the people who'd bargained with him, he never forgave them. Because at one point, later, in the years when he didn't have many pictures, he stopped painting but he still had some around, and I heard him say, "In the old days," - you know, he began shooting the prices up and prices hadn't been - I mean, they weren't used to the way they are now; and he said, "I can remember when people would offer me \$15 or \$25 for a painting, and I had to have breakfast for the children and took it." And he said, "Now, no matter what price I put on, there are always one or two people each year who're ready to buy it and by God, I'll put the price on and they'll pay through the nose." So, I mean, a lot of these painters - painters like Sally Avery, they remembered that people stepped on them; and those who didn't, they did have a sort of gratitude, they didn't begrudge. But they really hated the indignities that they had to take.

ROBERT BROWN: Nevelson's splitting from you was understandable and amicable.

NATHAN HALPER: Oh yes, she'd been with both of us. But then she felt, "But look, who's somebody who supported me when I was there."

ROBERT BROWN: Sure.

NATHAN HALPER: Oh it was completely amicable. For, even after the Mrs. List wanted to meet Louise Nevelson, and she called her, and Louise Nevelson didn't have the time. You know Mrs. List?

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

NATHAN HALPER: -- didn't have the time. So Mrs. List spoke to me, could I do anything about it, so I called Louise. And she said, "Fine." And we took her down. So it was completely amicable. I haven't seen her for a long time, I don't know what it would be now. But it was very amicable.

ROBERT BROWN: What's your assessment of this place now? You talked earlier to me about - you felt there was some hope for - the 60s, you feel, there was disarray - beginning, I mean.

NATHAN HALPER: Yes, yes. In the late 60s, and 70s. The style. And also the thing which has never been straightened out here yet - that prices, rentals, got too high. That it wasn't like the old days when the guys could come up here without any money at all and live one way or another. You know - they were able in the winter to keep the house - you know, caretaker a house; or get fish from the fishermen - you could go out, all through the winter, and dig a bucket of clams on the flat in five minutes. And in one way or another you survived. And then it got tough. Nobody could afford it. And you had the Manso-Kandell School, you know. And they were able to get some of the people to make, like, fellowships, or for individual students. But then what would they live on? And they couldn't stay here in the winter. And then they couldn't. And then the Fine Arts Work Center started to some degree, but even there they'd for the winter. But some guy among them like it here. So what they do, even after their fellowships, and even the fellows, they knew they could work during the summer, get jobs as bartenders - everything else - and then stay here the winter.

ROBERT BROWN: Sure.

NATHAN HALPER: Well, I thought there was a little hope that although the other thing hasn't been solved, more and more seem to like being here for one reason or another and would reconcile themselves to the fact that they had to really get all sorts of jobs, especially summer jobs, and maybe forget it but, you know, get it and survive during the winter. And there's - well, I don't know, it's sort of ambiguous. Maybe - I see a hell of a lot more people painting - maybe the standards of painting (laughing) are lower than they used to be. But then when I think -

ROBERT BROWN: You really think so, don't you?

NATHAN HALPER: No, I'm not sure. Because I was thinking back, to way back, those who came for the Hawthorne thing, you know - a hell of a lot of them didn't have much talent but they knew that you just painted a realistic this and that; and a lot of them stayed and did that and were fourth - and fifth-raters. But they were dedicated for a good number of years. So I can't -

ROBERT BROWN: The same may happen with the young people here -

NATHAN HALPER: Yes. And some of them maybe haven't got it. But just like one or two of them, there wasn't any real first-rater coming out of them. But there were some, you know, who kept painting until there were 70s,

now, and are still painting and turning out not bad –

ROBERT BROWN: Creditable, as the say.

NATHAN HALPER: Creditable pictures. And I've always felt, hell, in order to have first-raters, you've got to have a climate of second-raters, and you've got to have a climate of third-raters because nobody gets it unless they go through it. So –

ROBERT BROWN: In fact, the people who've stayed on here steadily for many years, there are very few first-raters, aren't there? – that have really stayed here. The people have come repeatedly --

NATHAN HALPER: Yes. Well – it's a question whether you – like Malicote and Kain– you know, they have talent, they might have been first-raters if they'd been exposed to the cross-currents. But they learned something from Hawthorners, somebody else, and then just – that was it.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

NATHAN HALPER: Well – but at one point you did have Knott staying here. I don't know if he's a super-first-rater, but you know – but he stayed here summer, winter, all through. And I think now, seeing him, that I don't know whether I like this later simplification, you know – this pseudo-Americana – but his earlier stuff I think is quite good. But he kept on, although after a while he was forced to go to New York to teach. But he fundamentally stayed, and he stayed here many, many winters until he was driven to go to New York to teach because he had children growing up.

ROBERT BROWN: But it's expensive here now.

NATHAN HALPER: Oh, it's expensive as hell.

ROBERT BROWN: Is that because there's an element of outsiders who've bought much of the real state and prices have gone up?

NATHAN HALPER: That's right. Well, it's the real estate. It's even the people who buy along the seashore, which most of the artists didn't have anyway, but it's the rentals. The motels and things like that. And when the prices go up, all the landladies who were very glad to have somebody for a few dollars a week, now they know their prices are so many dollars a night. But it's true everywhere. It's very hard to beat. I mean, during this Joyce thing, when people came up, of course it was off-season rates, in June, but here it didn't, and prices which we oldtimers consider, my God, outrageous, they said, "My God, this is cheap as hell. Where has this place been?" (laughs heartily) At least in June, you see. But I guess the young artists really can't do it anywheres.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes, it's pretty hard.

NATHAN HALPER: It's pretty hard. So you can't do it anywheres. But there seem to be more and more of them. But I don't know that they've got anything to move them. Hawthorn – in those days, it's very hard to believe in those days he was offering something new, in a way. I didn't know that until we had the Hawthorn thing there, people began talking with their memories. He was considered a bit of a heretic at the National Academy and they didn't – he got in but they didn't quite approve of him. He was more interested in flesh colors (laughs) and color relationships, rather than the simple draftsmanship which I think was their idea. Draftsmanship if you want light and shade, you know. Whereas he would color and color.

ROBERT BROWN: There's no focal point here now – one great –

NATHAN HALPER: That's right. And there was Hofmann, you see. And now you have – put it that way: there isn't any focal point in the United States or in world art.

ROBERT BROWN: No.

NATHAN HALPER: So it's not only Provincetown on the blink, but the U.S. is on the blink, and the world is – it's fractioned all over.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes. What does the Art Association – has that played much of a role in 20 years in your opinion? There have been a lot of retrospective shows –

NATHAN HALPER: Well, yes. Well, no, for one thing the younger people have always – sometimes with reason – been very snooty about it. And now it would be two phases – one is that the people in the Art Association were painting the way they had a previous generation. And for good or real, each generation thinks the previous generation is a bunch of old hats. Now, for another thing, they feel, you know, the people who are the officers and such are the older people, so they feel is a closed establishment. They don't realize how much all these

older people hate each other (laughs) – I mean, everywhere. And how full of feuds that can be. It's never monolithic. So they say, "Oh, them," you know. But the younger people can't understand – this is what's never happened before, except – I don't know how long this has been, for 10 years, or 15 – they can't understand how anybody can reject their work, you know. They feel they've painted something.

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Last updated... *May 19, 2005*