



Smithsonian
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Oral history interview with Lewis Iselin, 1969
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Lewis Iselin on April 10, 1969. The interview was conducted by Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

PAUL CUMMINGS: I'll push the button here and say it's April 10, 1969 Paul Cumming talking to Lewis Iselin. Is'lin. Is that the way it's pronounced?

LEWIS ISELIN: That's right - Is'lin. Iselin is a Swiss name.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

LEWIS ISELIN: The Iselin family had their 600th birthday party four or five years ago. My original ancestor walked into Basle in 1367 or 1368. It was in June. And all the family were invited to come back and have a birthday party. Strangely enough, the most virile branch of the family numerically is in America. The French part of the family died out in the 15th or 16th century. And the Germans died out; also the English branch. So the Swiss branch and the American branch are the two more virile branches. My ancestor came over here in 1820. He was one of the very first Swiss to come to the United States. The Iselin family in Switzerland were basically professional people and bankers, but his particular part of the family were in the banking business. He was sent over here to look into this new country, what should we do, and so on. His report was that there was a mint of money to be made in the China trade. He shipped out as a supercargo, which we could call a business manager on a Clipper ship to go to China. And he came back and told the family that there was a mint to be made of money to be made in it but not from the point of view of the Swiss because of the fact that the whole key to the thing was the captain of the ship, and if you weren't on the job and didn't know who the right guy on South Street was you could lose your fortune. Then he said that what they took to China was basically cotton goods and he didn't think that the Swiss should get involved in the cotton business because that had to do with slaves and one thing and another and that was a risky situation. So he invented what is known as factoring, that is, the lending of money in the process of the manufacturing of goods, and this is a concept of business which is distinctly American and which was invented by my great grandfather Isaac. He set up a business here and went back to Switzerland. He had some children born there. There was a great fire in lower Manhattan, I've forgotten the date, but it was around 1835 and the warehouse and business and the whole thing burned up. So he came back and stayed. And that's why he made his life here, so to speak. And his son, who founded the family fortune here really, whose name was Adrian, was actually Swiss Consul in New York, although he as an American citizen. He married a Baltimore girl of Irish ancestry. And his children, who would be my grandfather's generation, were very prominent in the New York banking and social world and whatever you want to call it. It's from that background that I came. And the reason I was born in New Rochelle has to do with the Swiss - and this is a sort of interesting sidelight - all the Swiss traditionally come from some place else in Switzerland. In other words, there's always a little town up in the mountain where your family originally came from, and they consider it a very smart thing for the children who are urban to go back to the country for their vacation, primarily so that they can get to know country boys and country girls and have a relationship which is different than the city relationship. So my great grandfather Adrian bought a house in New Rochelle much against the wished of his wife who said it was too far away, it was unfashionable, and you couldn't get there, and his friends all said it was idiotic to go that far away. But he wanted the children to have a more rural summer. It's hard to believe that in those days New Rochelle was a small fishing village. The Swiss were not interested in boats, but the kids - my grandfather's generation, there were seven children - immediately took to the water and became interested in boating and sailing and fishing and all that kind of thing. And this had been a passion with the family ever since. I know a fair amount about art but I know a while lot more about boats, really. And this was a surprise to everyone. We all were brought up there in the summer. We went to Rochelle like people would go to the Adirondacks or to India, anywhere you like for the summer. And my mother who was the last to go there, and who is now eighty-six, still had a house there and she goes to New Rochelle for the summer. She lives in Park Avenue in the wintertime and she solemnly moves up to New Rochelle for the summer. And I must say as far as she's concerned the long view of Long Island Sound look just the same. But that's why I happened to be born in New Rochelle.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's marvelous. Did you grown up there?

LEWIS ISELIN: We grew up there in the summers and in New York in the wintertime. And I went to school here in New York. I went to a very bad day school called Miss Beauvais's School which taught absolutely nothing. And then I went at the age of twelve to St. Mark's School which is in Southborough, Massachusetts at which time they taught absolutely nothing, or as little as they could. To be a Christian gentleman was their idea. Sports were

a big thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: To use up all that energy.

LEWIS ISELIN: To use up the energy and keep you straightened out. I am called "Skinny," but everybody in the world because I was a fat boy. Actually, my older brother who is nine years older than I am called me "Skinny" because I was a fat baby. It was a classic joke. And it stuck. And I'm still called it by everyone. When I was thirteen years old I sent away to Lionel Strongfort of - you know, "I can make a man out of you."

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, one of those things.

LEWIS ISELIN: I was tired of being a fat boy. And I grew to the same size as I am now at the age of thirteen. So I was obviously suitable for football and that type of thing. I disliked football intensely. I played all of every game for the last four years that I was in school.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Football?

LEWIS ISELIN: Football. And I hated it. I used to pray that I would be hurt so that I wouldn't have to play again. I never was.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Were you active in other sports?

LEWIS ISELIN: Yes. The only one I really enjoyed and loved tremendously was rowing. And I was very good at it. It suited my temperament very much. The beauty of rowing as opposed to football in which the game is the interesting part of it and the practice is boring; in rowing the practice is delightful and the race is fantastically hard work. And it's not even very exciting. It's just a matter of stamina and so on and there's no excitement to it. It's like that old story, you know, watching the same. To do it is great fun. It's a fantastic physical situation. At St. Mark's School I became interested in art for the first time. I had always been interested in drawing as a child. And to go back to the Swiss for a minute, I might explain a little bit, my grandfather believed that everyone no matter who there were would be better off for learning a trade. So that with my father and my uncle, instead of having some young man as you would nowadays and teach them sports, he had a cabinetmaker who lived in the house in New Rochelle in the summer and my father and my uncle were taught cabinet making. And my father taught my 7 brother and myself, and my sister also. That got me interesting in working with my hands and working with tools and all that kind of thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Craftsmanship.

LEWIS ISELIN: Craftsmanship was very much a part of our whole, although everybody is a Swiss banker, but that was something that they were interested in. My father was an extremely good craftsman. He died when I was a little boy.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's very interesting because my grandfather was from Switzerland, I've forgotten where, but the same kind of thinking and attitude.

LEWIS ISELIN: It's very sensible to tell you the honest truth. You see, the only ancestor I have that is really of any distinction is a man called Isaac Iselin, and 18th century Swiss who was a philosopher, what they call a grande philosophe. And he and a man called Pestalozzi invented what we now call schools. They invented the idea of having classes interchangeable, so you could move from one school to another and fit in reasonably to what they were doing. Before that all schools were independently organized and if you moved you were in a mess. And now of course we consider that maybe they were wrong and that each person should go at his own speed. Who knows? But anyway, in order to get back to the whole art business, we used to go away from New Rochelle to Maine, this was when we got to be considerable older, to Bar Harbor, Maine, for a month in the summer. And Mr. Charles Dana Gibson lived there with Mrs. Gibson on an island. When he went to church Mr. and Mrs. Gibson sat in front of us, and I thought Mrs. Gibson was the absolute to all wiles. I had this boyhood crush on her. I thought she was just the nuts. So I figured that if I could get to draw as Mr. Gibson why maybe, you know, that's for me. And actually I always did a lot of drawing as a child. Then when I got to St. Mark's I got into it a little bit more. There was a man called Cleaver Hall.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you get to know Gibson, by the way?

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh, yes. He was a great friend of the family's. And Mrs. Gibson also. He was a wonderful man, particularly with children. Toward the end of his life up there he - again this has to do with this craftsmanship thing - he was very interested in masonry and he used to build stone houses. He built himself two studios and a sort of a stone camp on another island nearby. He owned an island called Seven Hundred Acres Island - well, not all of it but at least a large part of it. And his daughter still owns that house up there. And there's a brick studio which was built like a romantic castle on a little point where he used to paint. He painted a great deal up there.

He was an atrocious painter. His color sense to our eyes was just terrible. But he though he was the nuts. He painted a lot of scenes up there. I don't know whatever happened to them all. And a great many portraits. And they were just awful. But he was a wonderful man and, as I say, just wonderful with kids. We all liked him very much. You could go and bother him and take boats and go out to the island; it's a series of islands and you'd go over to his island. But then I got into sculpture because of the fact that the man who taught at school and I would get a better sense of form if I did some modeling. And I found that it was the thing that I really wanted to do.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How old were you about that time?

LEWIS ISELIN: About fifteen or sixteen.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So you'd been drawing -?

LEWIS ISELIN: Always ever since I was a little boy.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you remember the kinds of things that you drew?

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh, yes. They were very much involved in what I was interested in which was, oh, boats and pirates and adventure things, that kind of illustrative point of view. What I wanted to be was a back and white illustrator. This was the Gibson concept.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

LEWIS ISELIN: But and illustration thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Like Wyeth.

LEWIS ISELIN: Like old Wyeth. N.C. Wyeth was a big hero to me. And still is in a strange way. And Howard Pyle. Who was infinitely better than N.C. Wyeth actually, as an artist, and as a draftsman and everything else. Then I went on a graduated from St. Mark's. And to show you how different times were then, I never graduated from the school; I never got a high school diploma because of the fact that I got into a row with the French teacher, and he would not pass me in my sixth form year in French. So I got a certificate of attendance. And I was accepted by Harvard, Yale, and Princeton having not graduated from high school simply it was the depth of the Depression and anybody with a checkbook they were glad to have. I went to Harvard, I remember very clearly the first get-together of the freshman class, they said, "Look at the man on your right, look at the man on your left, one of you will graduate." Of course, it's exactly the opposite now. The whole screening out business is done beforehand. But then I started to concentrate in the fine arts at Harvard and I discovered that the Fogg at that time was entirely interested in the curatorial and art history side of the thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who was there then?

LEWIS ISELIN: Well, the fellow that I became interested in and who was interested in me was a man called Robin Field. He was fired subsequently to this and there was a big row. By fired I mean they never made his a full professor. Edgell was head of the Fogg at that time. He left the Fogg to become the head of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. I'm ashamed to say I've forgotten the name of the other fellow. But then I became fed up with the fine arts business and shifted over into anthropology.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Just one thing, how did you pick Harvard over the other schools?

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh, entirely family connections. My brother, who as I say is nine years older than I, had been there, and many of my uncles and cousins, and so on had been there. My father, no. My father being the oldest of his generation of boys was set to Columbia which was the local school. The snobbism of being sent away had not happened in 1890- whatever it was at least it hadn't hit the family at that time. My grandfather, for instance, and his brother never went to college. They went right to work. Their idea was that unless you were going to be a doctor or a professional man - but for a businessman go down to Wall Street, that's a nice place to learn how to do it. They were probably right. But I left Harvard... I got myself into a situation in which I had essentially taken all the courses that interested me. Or, put it this way, I couldn't take anything more than a field of concentration. They way it worked at that time was that you had to have so many courses in a certain field. And I had taken all the things I wanted to do in Fine Arts and Anthropology and so on. Anyway I got up the nerve and I don't know how I did it but I decided to leave. And I went to the Art Students League. My father had died previously. Also my grandfather and had left me some money. So I could do it. The family were anti; there were screams and roars and so on. But anyways I came down here o the Art Students League.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What did you specialize in at Harvard? Anything? Or liberal arts?

LEWIS ISELIN: Well, as I say, first I was in fine arts. And I didn't like the Fogg because their point of view was

entirely the historical rather than the creative sided. And then I shifted over for a year more into anthropology. But I had to take nothing but anthropology when I got through in order to get a degree. I didn't want to spend four years on something which really wasn't all that interesting to me. I was interested in it on a sort of after dinner basis. I really didn't want to get involved in it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How long were you at Harvard then?

LEWIS ISELIN: Two years. At the end of my sophomore year I quit.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you pick the Art Students League? Because it was in New York?

LEWIS ISELIN: because it was in New York. And also because of the fact that my brother-in-law, whose name was Thomas LaFarge, was a painter. Tome was more than a brother-in-law. He was a very close friend, he was my brother's best friend, and he was in the house from childhood up, and he subsequently married my sister. We were all brought up very closely. Tom is the son of Bancel LaFarge who was the son of John LaFarge and he had been to the Yale Art School. I had thought of transferring from Harvard to Yale, but on his advice I did not. He though that I wouldn't like it any better there than I did Harvard. It was very academically inclined, I mean, rigid, the format at Yale at that time was very set. And he had been fed up with it at the end. And he left it himself. And he said, "No." So I decided to go to the League.

PAUL CUMMINGS: This was that year about?

LEWIS ISELIN: This was 1934. That first summer I studied life drawing with George Bridgman, and I guess everybody who went to the League at that time was ruined by George Bridgman. He ruined more people than anybody that ever lived.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's interesting because I talked to a couple of people who studied with him and they just sort of roll their eyes and say, "Well, it was a tragic mistake." What was it in his teaching that was so -?

LEWIS ISELIN: Well, what he was teaching was a formula which he had invented. And his anatomy had absolutely nothing to do with God's; it was Bridgman's that he worked up in connection with Michelangelo. You know, Michelangelo's anatomy is about as far from real as you can get. And he was sort of out-Michelangeloing Michelangelo. He had certain stereotype solutions to anatomical problems. Things that are difficult like knees and ankles and so on, he had a regular way of representing them; you didn't look and study the form in front of you, you would fall back on his drawing. You had a book and he showed you, "This is how you draw feet. Anybody knows how to draw feet."

PAUL CUMMINGS: There was one Bridgman foot; that was it.

LEWIS ISELIN: That's right. And he would come in and sit down and look at your drawing that you may have spent a week on and just take a chamois and rub it all off and then make another drawing for you essentially to copy. Then that fall -

PAUL CUMMINGS: Just one more thing - those were life classes with a model and everything?

LEWIS ISELIN: Yes. Oh, God, yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They went on.

LEWIS ISELIN: Yes. Before my time and anyway he considered that I had had sufficient skill - he looked at the drawings to begin with - you did not have to do work from casts. If you were really a beginner you had to sit down and draw from casts for, oh, three or four months before he would let you into a life class. But because it was summer and because I had proven to him that I had sufficient skill to start out with to go into life class. Well, it was wonderful, you know. It was the depth of the Depression and everything was cozy and casual. And there weren't many people. A big class would have ten people in it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you remember any of the other students?

LEWIS ISELIN: Not so much in that as in the drawing business, no. I've forgotten most of them. But in the following fall when I went in and started studying sculpture then I do remember those people. Gurdon Woods who was the director of the San Francisco Art Institute, and is how dean of painting and sculpture, Dean of Fine Arts I guess at Santa Clara, which is the University of California in Monterey. Is it called Santa Clara? Well, anyway, I think that's what it is.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I don't know that one.

LEWIS ISELIN: Well, he and I walked in the same day together. And I think of all of the ones in the class... Well,

there's one other man whose name I'm ashamed to say I've forgotten (he's dead now), he was older than we; but I think those are the only ones of Mahonri's [Young's] students at that time that really stuck it out, so to speak. There were quite a number of girls, which is always the way. And some of them had more talent than the boys actually. But there got married and did other things.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you pick Young's class?

LEWIS ISELIN: Again it was on the advice of my brother-in-law who knew him and his work and knew – the most important thing he knew (which I didn't know) was that he was an extremely good teacher. And Mahonri, who became like a second father to me, I was very much involved with and influenced by. We became great, great friends. I was an assistant, I worked for him.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh, yes. And Bill his son is my closest friend now. He is now the Director of the Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts. We met at this particular time and we all became friends. Mahonri took to me and I took to him right from the very beginning. He made a wonderful remark when I went in that fall at the age of nineteen. He said, "How old are you?" I said, "Nineteen." And he said, "Well, you're just young enough to learn." Which is true. If you want to do this, this business of training the hand and eye, the sooner you start the easier it is.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

LEWIS ISELIN: And I have a feeling the reason for that is that we were never bored. If I had to sit and look at a model for four year every day I'd go crazy now. But we all thought it was very exciting and the monotony of it didn't seem to –

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, it was all new discover and ideas.

LEWIS ISELIN: And we had a lot of fun. I used to go to life modeling in the morning and drawing in the afternoon. I stopped Bridgman right off after that and studied with John Steuart Curry who was teaching at the League at that time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: He wasn't there very long, was he?

LEWIS ISELIN: No. I think only about two years. He was the worst teacher from the point of view of technical because he was tongue-tied. He never knew what to say. And he would stand behind the poor person's easel and you could just see the sweat coming out of his forehead because he couldn't think of a damn thing to say. He knew that you shouldn't paint on the person's picture and the technique of explaining without doing it physically was very much beyond him. But he was a sweet man, and to my mind the most interesting of those three – Curry, Benton and Wood. As an artist he was the most gifted to my mind, and the most original. And he was very uneven. Some of his pictures are much better than other. He was a moody guy and, as I say, inarticulate. And it comes through in his work.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Benton wasn't there at that time, was he?

LEWIS ISELIN: Benton was there but was teaching graphics, of all things. Lithography, I think.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really?

LEWIS ISELIN: Yes, but he was very much round – now you're pinning me down – was he at the New School or was he up there? But he was around. We were very much involved with him. And with Grant Wood. And at this particular moment, or shortly after this, while I was still in art school – you see, Tom, my brother-in-law used to show at the Ferargil Gallery. And Maynard walker was the assistant there. And we all became friends. And then Maynard set up his own gallery and Tom went with Maynard. Then Maynard, you know, was the fellow who invented regional art – Curry, Benton and Wood. And that was all done shortly after this. Well, it was actually before. The first show that Maynard had of their work was in 1933 or 1934 -- I've forgotten exactly when it was. But that's about when it started. And it was a great success/

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was that the Maynard Walker Gallery? Associated American Artists?

LEWIS ISELIN: He was for a while. But Maynard Walker had a gallery of his own. Ten the war came and he stopped. And then he set it up again after the war, as the Maynard Walker Gallery. But it was always called the Maynard Walker Gallery. And for a short period after the Second World War Maynard worked for the British American Art Center or whatever it was called.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I see. Well, who were the other sculptors in Young's class, do you remember?

LEWIS ISELIN: Well, Gordon Woods. And I can't remember this fellow's name; he was an absolutely fabulous guy. Maybe if I talk about him a little bit it will come to me. He was a drunk and he had been a newspaper man. And it was a physiotherapy thing that he got into sculpture – he was a reformed drunkard at the time – and he was a fantastic influence on all of us because he was about ten or fifteen years older than we were. He was a man of the world. He had been to Paris, he had been everywhere, he was a friend of Hemingway's and all that kind of thing. He wasn't a very good sculptor but he did go one with it for a while. And then he went back to the booze and is now dead. I'm ashamed to say I've forgotten his name. But to tell you the truth there wasn't really anybody of any distinction. Mahonri's class was in the morning and Bill Zorach's was in the afternoon. And there was considerable rivalry between the two. It's hard to think that Zorach was considered to be more advanced, but he was considered to be more advanced than we were. Strangely enough, there was comparatively little conversation about aesthetics. This was something which I don't know why I missed out on. We used to worry about it a little bit, that we ought to be thinking more about quote "art" unquote. But Mahonri and many of the teachers who were teaching there that I was involved with and any of the students I was friendly with were more interested in the craft. And I suspect that probably that was all right. I think that perhaps now there's a little bit too much emphasis on aesthetics and not quite enough on how you do it. But the whole atmosphere at the League at that time was training the hand and eye and learning how to draw and learning how to paint and learning how to model from life.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Like the cabinet-making thing again.

LEWIS ISELIN: Right. Very much that. And that was the atmosphere. There wasn't a whole lot of conversation. At least in the group I was running around with. The League was desperately poor at that time. You had to have nine people in a class to pay the model and the teacher's salary. The teacher was paid a hundred dollars a week, and the models were getting fifty cents an hour. We paid eighteen dollars a month for instruction. The ideal student was one who didn't come; in other words, some old lady who was doing it on an amateur basis and didn't show up. That was perfect. As I said, there weren't many people there. A class that was eight or ten people was a big class.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who were other people you studied with there?

LEWIS ISELIN: Essentially Mahonri and Curry. Of course in a sense I was involved with Zorach in that I was with his students and so on although I didn't actually study with him. And, oh, I'll tell you who was there and who I did study with a little bit, but it was more being associated with his students was [trying to remember name], fresco, you know, was the big thing at that time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The Mexican?

LEWIS ISELIN: No. He went out to the West Coast and became sort of a neo-Picasso. He's now dead.

PAUL CUMMINGS: LeBrun.

LEWIS ISELIN: Rico LeBrun. And his boys used to be setting fresco in the back of the sculpture studio. They used the back wall of the sculpture studio. So I was very much involved with them. And because of the fact that my brother-in-law Tom LaFarge was a fresco painter and I had worked with him doing plaster for him here in New York.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

LEWIS ISELIN: He was a great friend of Rivera's and had been to Mexico. Well, of course, the whole LaFarge family tradition was this mural painting thing. Tom did the frescoes at the New York Hospital. These are no longer on exhibit; they've been boarded up. It's a whole series of frescoes, one of the few true frescoes done in New York at that time. I remember when Rivera came to do the famous fresco for Radio City he came over to see Tom and me. I was to help Tom when they were building the New York Hospital. Rivera came to see us working there. And I went to see the fresco that he did for Radio City, which was subsequently torn down. And really you can understand why Mr. Rockefeller was not terribly keen on paying for it. It was something! I'll never forget that portrait of him sitting up there on the top eating gold.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really!

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh, yes. He was sitting on a pile of gold. Basically the oppressed masses were down below, sort of a pyramid form, that regular Rivera thing with lots and lots of figures but building up, and up at the top there was old John D. Rockefeller with a pot of gold and he was just spooning it into his mouth.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There were all kinds of interesting people in that mural, too, I understand.

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh, yes, very. I've forgotten a great many of them now. You know, ten thousand real portraits,

that kind of thing. Everybody who was around was involved. And it was very Marxist, if you want. Because that was the big deal that was on in those days. It was the Communist thing. We used to discuss politics, much more than aesthetics. In fact there was a guy who subsequently was jailed for political reasons as a Communist. His name I think was Williams; he was a Negro who was a model. He was a wonderful fellow. But I remember we went to the model monitor and asked that he not be assigned to us because of the fact that he was so skillful at getting the conversation going on political affairs that we would put our pencils down and spend the afternoon talking politics and not working.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's interesting. Some of the other people I've talked to have mentioned that the artists sit around in the Thirties and all talk politics, politics all the time.

LEWIS ISELIN: Right. No aesthetics – well, minimal.

PAUL CUMMINGS: No art history, nothing. Lots and lots of politics.

LEWIS ISELIN: Nothing. Politics, politics, politics. And this was the beginning of a lifelong interest in politics with me. I've always been interested in it. I took Government at college. But that was what we were interested in. Then the Spanish War came and I came within an ace of going in the Lincoln Brigade. But Sally, my wife – we were just about to get married and it was a question of which is it going to be. So I didn't go to Spain, thank God. I'd be dead if I had. That was the war that we were all passionately involved in. As involved I think as the kids are now about the Vietnam business. Who was winning in Spain was an everyday interest.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What do you think it was about the Spanish War that sparked the imagination of the arts world people, and the literary people so much more so than even subsequent wars?

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh, very much so. Gosh!

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was the quality about it? You know, all the writers seem to have been involved and so many of the painters and sculptors.

LEWIS ISELIN: Well, I think it was very romantic. And I think that for some reason or other the artists identified with the good guys against the bad guys and it was sort of to be against the Establishment. And there was something about Franco and the way that whole thing started that was – gosh, I don't know. It seemed like this was a new breath that was going to come through. And I don't think that anybody realized or was looking at it, at least the art students that I was involved with were not particularly Marxist. In other words, this they thought was a hope which was not necessarily connected with that. Then of course it turned out to be that in the end, much more. But in the very beginning, in the romantic period, to start with, it was just the good guys against the bad guys in liberating the poor and the downtrodden.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Social justice.

LEWIS ISELIN: Social justice, right. Oh, yes. This was the big battle cry of the Depression. Grapes of Wrath and all that business was very much on. And New York in the Depression was a – gee whiz, they really were – and when you were a young man like me with money in your pocket it was really a curious atmosphere.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In what way?

LEWIS ISELIN: Well, I mean people were selling apples on the street and you felt -- or at least I felt – I think most of the young men who came from a background such as mine, had a tremendous guilt complex. And you had this tremendous driving desire to do your part to help in a social way. I think we all felt that our parents' generation had somehow goofed and that to have allowed this Depression to exist there was something wrong and that there had been something wrong in our youth, which was in the Twenties, where there was money for everybody – if you know what I mean. And suddenly here we were and there wasn't much of anything you could do. And you felt frustrated I think in that way. Again, to go back to the Spanish War, maybe that's a reason for it. In other words, it was an active thing which you could do.

PAUL CUMMINGS: A way of doing something.

LEWIS ISELIN: Something. Right. Because to fight the Depression was impossible. I mean from a practical point of view what are you going to do? Give you money away to them? Well, that isn't going to be a big help.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's gone the next day and then what?

LEWIS ISELIN: That's right. But of course I believe the Depression was the greatest thing that ever happened to art in America.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In what way?

LEWIS ISELIN: Well, the WPA. And the fact that there was no possible way of selling anything. So that for once the market was not involved in the aesthetics and people could do almost anything. And the creation, the change in sculpture could do almost anything. And the creation, the change I sculpture from the classical way in which I was taught and brought up, modeling in clay and casting and all of that, was broken. And I'm sure that one of the prime reasons for its being broken was the economic one. That is, you couldn't afford to get it cast. So people liked around other ways of making three-dimensional objects which would be in a sense finished work but didn't have this vast expense involved. And I'm sure that's the basis of many of the people going in to welding and found objects and curious collages, and all of that kind of thing where you were making a finished thing but it was not expensive. Nobody had any money. But, as I say, I think the principal thing is that the dealers weren't running around, as they are now, trying to find the latest thing, trying to influence, and the boys wanting to make money, you've got to be rich before you're thirty, or you won't make it. Nobody had any money.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

LEWIS ISELIN: And for people on the WPA that was a wonderful thing. I have a book upstairs (that I could never lay my hand on now) which was gotten out, oh, about ten or fifteen years ago, which is a series of reproduction of all of the murals that were done for the Treasury Arts Projects. And they're not so hot; but they're not all that bad either. And, again, to go back to my brother-in-law, who was very much involved in all of that both because he did murals at New London for the Treasury Art Projects, but primarily because of the fact that his and my brother's great friend Olin Dows was the executive - he and Josh Billings ran the Treasury Art Projects, which was the more sophisticated or higher level of the things. The Project was just sort of anybody, but the Treasury Art Projects was a way of stimulating artists, of giving work to artists of quality and that was all the Post Office business, and because of our friendship with Olin it was very much in the house, so to speak. But that whole drive of the Thirties about mural painting and the interest in it and so on is now completely dead because everybody is now painting murals.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But there's more and more of those things being used in large office buildings.

LEWIS ISELIN: Right. But we thought in those days that in the classical sense you had to think as a mural painter. No, my God, Helen Frankenthaler paints a picture which is 18 x 9. What the hell! That's a mural.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

LEWIS ISELIN: She considers it an easel painting. Tom got to do these pictures in New Haven. We all thought they were gigantic. I went to look at them the other day and they're tiny. We thought they were great big pictures. But that part of it was good fun and exciting. Then the war came.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you have any other association with things like the Treasury Project or was it just through the friendship?

LEWIS ISELIN: Well, I worked on several murals with Tom, both mosaic and fresco. Oh, the other person I knew at that time who was a student was Gleb Derujinsky, who never was at the league. But I wanted to learn woodcarving, so I studied woodcarving with him. We became friends and I subsequently rented a studio with Gurdon Woods. Gurdon and I very soon became partners in the studio basis so to speak. He used to live in the studio and we shared it together. He would live there. We rented Gleb's for awhile. Gleb Derujinsky was a miraculous woodcarver. I think he is dead; in fact, I'm sure he is. But he was an incredible guy who came over here. He was a White Russian and he was a great friend of Yusupov, and when Yusupov, after killing, Rasputin, went into exile in the Crimea, Gleb went down with him and lived in the Crimea and was subsequently liberated, as we would say now, by the Germans when they came into the Crimea when the Revolution was going on. And they all escaped from the Yusupov palazzo or whatever it would be. They were told you to bring just funds. And Gleb said, "I'm a painter; everybody else is rich, can I bring my pictures?" They said, "Come on. Come on." He had a roll of canvases under his arm. What they were were four or six Rembrandts which he had cut out of the frames - well, before he cut them out of the frames he painted rather bad Impressionist landscapes on them and then cut them out of the frames and rolled them up. They are now in the British Museum. And that's what the Russian royalty have been living on; that's the basis of how they survived. Gleb had the brains enough to do this. They could be cleaned off; there was no trick to it at all. And that how they all got out. Gleb came over here. He used to say that he and Serge Obolensky were the only two honest Russian in the crowd. It was wonderful living with these White Russians and their whole atmosphere. We'd have these big White Russian parties with samovars and girls with long cigarette holders and everybody talking in foreign accents. Gleb always wore sandals. Real artist, you know. Flowing ties, the business. And he was a great man. His son young Gleb is a very distinguished fashion photographer now. He was a little boy in those days. Gleb was quite a manipulator. He used to teach at Sarah Lawrence at that time. I'm just trying to think of what other things I could tell you about the Depression business before we get onto the war.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I want to ask you one other thing. You've mentioned your marriage. Then did you get married?

LEWIS ISELIN: 1935.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, so you were 21?

LEWIS ISELIN: 21. We proceeded to have babies. We had two. They are now grown up and married, and we have grandchildren. My wife Sally comes from Boston. Her name was Sally Carey Curtis. Her father Charles P. Curtis is a very distinguished Boston lawyer and writer. And her background is literary and legal, what is known as the bright side of Beacon Street, a proper Bostonian. Her great-aunt founded Radcliff, Mrs. Agassiz. She was a Carey. Her father was on the Harvard Corporation and very much involved with absolute classical traditional Back Bay Bostonian background. She was born in Nahant, Massachusetts.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where did you meet her?

LEWIS ISELIN: I met her at college. Roommate situation; my roommate at Harvard had a sister and she was a friend of the sister and we went out; actually we went to a rodeo. It was as simple as that. We fell in love and were married and that's all there was to it. We've been going on ever since. Classic theft. I left art school after one year or so and then Mahonri Young was going to go to Rome as artist in residence at the American Academy in Rome and I was to go over with him as an assistant. He had been commissioned by the Mormons to do a huge monument to Brigham Young, his grandfather. We were all set to go. We were going to take Edith, the only child who had arrived at that time, and live for a couple of years in Rome and build this monument. Then the Germans went into Poland and that was the end of that. They closed up the Academy and we never went. But we were sort of geared to travel, so to speak. So my mother-in-law said she would baby-sit with Edith and we took off in the car to see America. Neither of us had ever seen it. We drove across country to California. And we were absolutely fascinated with Los Angeles and all of that. Before the war it was a very exciting place intellectually.

PAUL CUMMINGS: This is what?

LEWIS ISELIN: This was 1939. We were all ready to stay almost; you know really move out there and everything.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What did you find there that was so interesting?

LEWIS ISELIN: Well, Hollywood was a very exciting place. We had friends again through Maynard Walker; he had an art gallery affiliation out there. I can't remember the name of the girl and she introduced us to a lot of the painters out there. We went to see the Arensbergs and their collection which is now in Philadelphia. We hung around that house for a bit. Then I had a great friend, Shirley Burton, who was out there making movies. He introduced us to his movie friends. We felt that this was a wonderful kind of a place. Then one day we were at Shirley's playing a charade called the Game. And Sally and I tried to act out the Graf Spee - do you remember the German warship that was sunk in Rio de Janeiro? Well, nobody got it. And they said, "What is it?" We said, "It's the Graf Spee." They said, "What's that?" I said to Sally, "I thin we'd better get the New York Times." So we read the New York Times and then I said I think we'd better go home. So we came home. This was in the spring. And I joined the Navy, first the naval reserve. I didn't go on active duty - I was commissioned an ensign in June 1940 and I went on active duty in the fall and then really seriously on active duty in January on 1941; in other words, almost a whole year before Pearl Harbor.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you pick the Navy?

LEWIS ISELIN: Well, because of my interest in boats. I have always been very seriously involved with them as a family. That's a whole other side of the thing. Boating had been a whole life as a child and all of that. And even when I was in college I took astronomy to learn navigation. I got an ensign's commission just like that because of the fact that they thought I was a snob (which I'm not) and I knew how to navigate. I went right into it with absolutely no training at all. I was on a mine layer first, which was a converted ferry boat on the Chesapeake. I spent a year on her. I was on her at the time of Pearl Harbor. Then that winter after Pearl Harbor in 1942, they had invented small sub-chasers, and I went down to Miami and went out as executive officer on the PT boat. Then a month later I took command. And I was on her - well, I've forgotten the exact dates - for about two years. Then I came back and was put in command of the U.S.S. Atherton, which was a destroyer escort. I was on her for another two and a half years, ocean escort in the Atlantic. We sank the last German submarine two days before V-E Day off Rhode Island. Then we had the misfortune to be in Boston ready for sea and Harry Truman got up in Congress and said, "Our ships are on the way to the Pacific," and that was Escort Division 15. We steamed into Pearl Harbor and then on to Okinawa, arriving just in time for that. I was out on the Pacific - because we were low man on the totem pole, I mean having come recently from the Atlantic - so that we were out there until December after V-J Day. I brought her back here into Charlestown and left her there. And got out of the Navy. So I was almost six years in the Navy.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That was a very busy time.

LEWIS ISELIN: well, it was a very interesting thing to me. I learned more in the Navy than I've learned anywhere else in my career about people and things. Having been brought up in a very sort of sheltered kind of atmosphere - the art atmosphere was essentially a sheltered one - you're interested in little things and to be thrown with my fellow man in a cross-section of people I had to learn a lot of things. It was essentially extremely boring. It took forever and forever and forever. I remember in June before Pearl Harbor I was talking to an exec on this mine layer who was a regular naval officer and we were both saying it was going to be a terribly long war, "It will probably last two years." But I was so thankful that I left college because I gained two years there. If I'd lost two more years and then the whole six years - five-and-a-half years in the Navy -, why, it would have been an awful lot out of my life. So actually when I got back as far as the art business we concerned I was sort of starting all over again. And by then I was quite old, I mean comparatively speaking.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Had you been to Europe or anything before the war?

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh, yes. As a family we went back and forth. My grandfather on my mother's side was French, his name was De Neveu, you see, my father died when I was thirteen, of Bright's Disease. And so for practical purposes I had minimal contact with him. And in the teenage situation my relationship was much stronger with my grandfather than with my father. He was very keen on Europe and the whole family were very much European-oriented and went back and forth a great deal. My grandfather De Neveu moved back to Switzerland actually and two or three different times as a little boy we went and stayed with him and also in France. And my uncle owned a chateau at Brecourt which is near Rouen and we went and spent one summer there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was French another language then?

LEWIS ISELIN: Unfortunately, not as much as it should have been. My father and mother both spoke French but were lazy and I think it was - well, maybe because it was of Father's death and so on, but anyway we were unfortunate in that it was not a second language. I can speak French but it's a bastard language with me, I mean I never really learned it right. For my cousins who were involved with the same situation, it was a second language to them because their parents had energy enough always to speak French at table which the classic thing in those days. I wish my parents had, but they did not. My wife speaks perfect French. She went to school there for a couple of years. But it's very much of an internationally-oriented family in that way.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Because you all go back and forth for business and things.

LEWIS ISELIN: That's right. And the Swiss are tremendously family conscious. And there was a business connection right straight through. You see my father with his cousin Ernest ended up partners in the family bank, which was called Iselin Company. Then when he died my cousin Earnest couldn't go on with it alone. It was dissolved. But up until that time there had been a very close business relationship with the family in Switzerland. And even though my ancestor came over here in 1820 we are still friendly with the Swiss relations. We have a very distant cousin Monique who is a very close friend of ours. Her children come over and stay with us; our children do and stay with her, that kind of thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What other things happened during the Navy service, for example, that you remember other than that it took forever and ever and ever?

LEWIS ISELIN: Well, one of the most interesting things, one incident that made a profound impression on me: I stood watch for the better part of a year with a boy - by this time I was the commanding officer. But it was a little PT boat and this fellow was a gunner's mate. We sat and talked for eight hours a day for the better part of a year. And you learn a tremendous amount about people in this relationship just like I suppose people you might be in jail with. He was the only poor Southern white that I had ever known. He explained about the Negro situation, which I had always found completely impossible to understand, why everybody got so sweaty about Negroes and so on. So that when the problem came up I felt that I had had a good tutor, so to speak, and what their basic attitudes are and so forth. Strangely enough, my mother was very much involved in Negro affairs in that she was for years the head of the Social Service in Harlem Hospital, not on a technical ground but on a money-raising sort of thing. My family were never in any way racist of any kind. And I suddenly was put with people who were. Because the Navy had a great many Southern people in it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, it was a place to go and move up.

LEWIS ISELIN: That's right. Oh, very much so. This is why this boy is a classic example of what the Navy can - you know, "I can make a man out of you." He lived in Louisiana. His mother ran off with the first person she could. He said she was absolutely dead right. He was brought up by his grandmother. His father was a lumberjack and would come into town on Saturday night, get drunk, and beat up the children, and go back to work. The only way he could possibly get out was the Navy. And he couldn't get in the Navy because he didn't have sufficient teeth which met. Then they changed the regulations because of the coming war. And he was in the Navy. I presume he's made it his career. It was the only escape route. There were many, many of that kind before the draft. But to get back to the art business.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. When did you get out of the Navy?

LEWIS ISELIN: I got out in December 1946. The war was over in 1945. I got out in December and I had three months terminal leave. When I went in the Navy both kids had been born. And rather than follow the fleet, which I didn't think was a good idea, neither did my wife, she went to work for Newsweek magazine. And she continued on and in fact is still very much involved in the magazine world and that kind of thing. She worked for Newsweek during the war. And then, oh, gosh, Town and Country and Life. You know the magazine world is sort of musical chairs. They move around from one to another.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. They move around.

LEWIS ISELIN: She ended up being the fashion editor of Woman's Home Companion when that died. And since then she's been doing primarily free lance work in both fashion and travel but her principal interest to begin with was foreign affairs. But I just set up shop again after the war. The first big job I got or the first thing that really sort of started the whole thing really running again was doing sculpture for the American Military Cemetery at Suresnes, which is in Paris. And the way that was done was the architects were chosen by the American Battle Monuments Commission - they sort of handed the jobs out. I won't go into that. But anyway, can't squawk because William and Jeffery Black got the job to do Suresnes. Their father had done the original work there. It's a World War I and World War II cemetery and I was commissioned by the, to do the sculpture for the part of the building which commemorates World War II. I did a large nine-foot figure of a girl which is that white one you see over there. That's a maquette. And then two big reliefs, one of which is there and one of which is up there. They are in the part of the building that commemorates the people whose bodies were physically lost. Which was a new thing in World War II as opposed to The Unknown Soldier which was the World War I sort of idea. But so many people were just blown to bits that something had to be done about the people whose bodies were lost. And that took a long time. We were working on it I guess for a year or more.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You had the studio then, did you?

LEWIS ISELIN: I had the studio, yes. I moved in here in 1940 just before I went in the Navy. We decided to do it and that was it. I never used it for practical purposes; it was just a storehouse of things. And I came in and did that job there. Then I got a Guggenheim Fellowship. I think it was -

PAUL CUMMINGS: That was 1952.

LEWIS ISELIN: 1952, yes. And finishing this up was part of that. And I went abroad on the Guggenheim. And that began again a serious involvement with going back and forth. We spent a couple of summers after that with the children in France at Fontainebleau. Then to finish up the European thing pretty soon after that my aunt died. She left her apartment in Paris to my mother. And we have operated it since then. In fact we physically own it now as a family affair in Paris. So that has meant that since that time we've been spending part of each year in Europe. After the Suresnes deal was finished, as far as commissions are concerned, the next big one, I guess, that was General George Wingate Memorial High School which was one of the early high school to have a sculpture in it. It's up in mid-Brooklyn. I did a figure for them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: This was working again with an architectural firm?

LEWIS ISELIN: With an architect. That was with Kelly and Greusen. It was a fascinating job of just how to do things wrong. It's called a "banjo" high school. It's in the shape of a banjo; it's a central building which is round.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh yes, that's the one. There was some great problem about a few years ago.

LEWIS ISELIN: Right. There were to be three sculptures and a fret and mosaic. The sculptors were Chaim Gross, myself, and Gwen Luks. One was to do a modern abstraction, one was to do a carved piece (this was Chaim Gross), and the other was - I was to do a figure which would ultimately be cast in bronze so that they could show the children different approaches to the problem. Unfortunately, Chaim Gross couldn't do it because of his political connections - at least they felt he couldn't. There was a very embarrassing little business there. So there were just the two of us. Actually it ended up with just two pieces of sculpture and the mosaic. I'm ashamed to say I've forgotten the name of the mosaic man. He was never very much involved with my work there. But to say to do a thing wrong, what happened was that we all went down to figure out where we were going to put the stuff. And of course you couldn't figure out where to put it. The whole place was glass and had not been designed with this idea in mind.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It would look like art that was glued on.

LEWIS ISELIN: Exactly. Glued on. And this is the wrong way to do it. Sometime ago I was asked to give a lecture at Columbia Architectural School on the relationship between architecture and art. And I said I wouldn't do that. I wouldn't be bold enough to do that but I would give a lecture on the relationship between architects and

sculptors. And they all thought I was absolutely nutty. Because they were completely theoretical at the time and didn't understand this. And I said that if you're going to hire an architect and want sculpture or painting in your building, hire the sculptor and the painter the same day so at least they get off to run an equal race.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

LEWIS ISELIN: This brings me to the same kind of thing. There was a symposium down in East Hampton to do the same subject, the arts and architecture. It was in the evening. Anyway we went to somebody's house and had a lot of drinks and food and stuff. And then went to this. And everybody there was very swell and important in the art world and they were all shooting their mouth off about a lot of silly things. And I had got up after a sufficient number of drinks (because ordinarily I don't shoot my mouth off so much) explaining to a shocked audience that the person they forgot to talk about – who was the most important in the relationship between the artist and the architect – is the patron. And the reason we were having no luck with any of these things now was that the patron had reneged their function. The patron will never be the son of the bitch that he should be to keep the architect and the painters in line.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's what you have to do.

LEWIS ISELIN: And if the patron is a committee, nothing will happen. And you'll get a hodgepodge of nothing. And this is why the whole thing – working for the government and all that kind of thing, which I'm having a lot of experience with commissions and committees and business and so on –

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's unrewarding.

LEWIS ISELIN: No, it's just – you're being whittled down to nothing. In the end you don't know where you're...

PAUL CUMMINGS: You did something for Fairmount Park.

LEWIS ISELIN: I did. I did a statue of General Nathaniel Green, who is there behind you. Fairmount Park was part of a commission. I mean the Fairmount Park Association was given money to erect statues of Revolutionary War heroes. The assumption on the part of the donor whose name is – well, he's dead long since. He died about 1902. Anyway, the point of it was that these revolutionary war heroes were heroes who would be forgotten because they were not American citizens. He didn't click to the ideas that nobody was an American citizen till afterwards. And they were specifically named. And there are all the ones that anybody has heard of because they have a foreign clack going for them. People like Kossuth and Lafayette. And this was the end of it, and he specified the last, the sixth, would be the General Nathaniel Green because he was the second in command, and no one ever hears of the second in command. Which is true. And I became very interested in General Nathaniel Green. He's a fascinating man. And strangely enough, it turns out that he is a relation of my wife. So it's just a curious business. And I had great fun with General Green. I could do anything I liked with him because of the fact that there's only one portrait of him, which is by Charles Wilson Peale. And all Charles Wilson Peale's portraits look alike, so I didn't have to rely on that too much. But he was a very interesting guy. And then after that I did a statue of St. Vincent de Paul. (Those are the maquettes; this is St. Vincent de Paul). That's up at Rhinebeck, New York. That was done for the Astor Foundation. And I became fascinated with him.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did they pick him?

LEWIS ISELIN: St. Vincent de Paul? What happened was this: Vincent Astor – well, the family – had supported in an Edwardian way up there on the River a convalescent home for city people. It was a sort of 19th Century idea that you'd get well if you went to the country, and with good air and proper food you'd be all right. Then you'd go back and live in the slums and be all right for a while. Anyway it became impossible for him to operate this thing and so on. He had parted with Catholicism, and in order to get this thing off his back, so to speak, he gave it to the church, to Cardinal Spellman. And Cardinal Spellman immediately gave the buildings and this money into the hand of the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, who are the nuns who will look after children who no one else wants – I mean seriously disturbed children. They also look after incredibly deformed ones, you know, malformed at birth. I mean, really the human lives that just are thrown away. The sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul will look after them, and up here in Rhinebeck, it's fabulous what they do. I think they have forty children, and it takes fifty people to look after them. They come almost always from fantastically broken home situations, and they're in a mess, and by the time they are ready to go to high school, they are ready to go to high school. Only an occasional one they cannot make into something that can survive in society. But you can see it would be absolutely impossible for the nuns to go on because it would be so expensive that they couldn't conceivably do it. Well anyway, when Vincent Astor died he left a considerable sum of money to set this thing up forever. And they built a chapel, which was perfectly awful, and then Brooke Astor sort of stepped in and said that the statue of St. Vincent de Paul that they wanted to put outside was just too much. Anyway, I've known her, and she likes my work. And she commissioned me to do this statue of St. Vincent de Paul. It goes outside of the school chapel situation.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who was the one who commissioned it?

LEWIS ISELIN: Brooke Astor. She's Vincent Astor's widow. He lived up there in Rhinebeck. And she was pulling out of the whole situation. The statue is an eight-foot state. It's pretty good. I became interested in him as a person. Unfortunately, if I had to do both of those big statues again, I would not do them in this studio. It's a little small. They suffer from being done in a place in which you couldn't get quite far enough away from them. I learned a lesson: I didn't bother to tell the clients at the time. The other big thing I did at that particular time - actually before - was those two big heads of Wanamaker and Marshall Field. They're in Chicago in the Merchandise Mart.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you ever get involved with that?

LEWIS ISELIN: Well, I got involved with that in the most casual way, like all these things. I had an exhibition at the Maynard Walker Gallery. And there was a girl who is a painter who's become a great friend. Her name is Devon Meade. At that time she was working for the Merchandise Mart in Chicago as a publicity/public relations kind of girl. The Merchandise Mart is owned by the Kennedys. And Sargent Shriver was the young man who was running it. And she conceived of this idea of putting up a merchant's hall of fame and commissioning sculptors to do really good portraits of great merchants. She was in New York, and she went to see Andrew Ritchie, who was curator at the Museum of Modern Art at that time, for advice as to who she should go to. Andrew has been a friend of mine since we all got started in the world together, since the Forties. And he suggested me. She went to my exhibition and liked the portraits that were in that show - heads - and called me up on the telephone. She came up here. Subsequently she went to Chicago, and she called me on the telephone (I'd never been called on the telephone from Chicago). I went out there - I had a bad back at the time - thinking that I had the whole job. Well, there were four sculptors showed up that morning. I'll never forget it. All of us thinking that he had the whole job.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I see. Do you remember the other ones?

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh, sure. There was Umlauf and Benjamin Bufano and a Chicago sculptor, I think Kohn. He did one of the first four. I can find his name for you in the atlas; it's just gone out of my head. And they wanted just plain portraits. And we explained to them that if you have a building which is at that time the biggest building in the world except for the Pentagon you just couldn't put life-size portraits in front of it; they'd just look like nothing. So we conceived this idea of doing these great big ones in the course of a morning's conversation. And then there was the problem of how much they were going to charge. Well, we'd all thought that we had the job by ourselves and we'd all made mental reservations and evasion adjustments and so on. But they didn't realize that sculptors have to go to the bathroom like everyone else. So we all went to the can and cooked up a price. And came back. One to a customer. I was given the job of doing Wanamaker up there without a mustache. We would make maquettes, obviously, small sketches. And then when Bufano (you know his great work was Sun Yat-sen in San Francisco in Chinatown Park there; it's stainless steel statue of Sun Yat-sen.) Well, ever since he did that, everything he does looks like Sun Yat-sen. So there was a hurried call in the middle of the summer. They all had to be finished within a reasonable length of time - I've forgotten exactly how it went. But anyway, Devon called me and asked would I do Marshall Field, too. And I said yes. And it was the worst hot summer you ever saw in your life, I'll never forget it. I modeled that head in about five weeks right from the sketch, the whole thing. It was about halfway up, done, here, and it was a fearful hot night. I was sitting upstairs in the living room, and we heard this crash, and I knew perfectly well that had happened. The plaster had gotten so hot that it slipped off the armature. And Marianne who was our maid and general housekeeper and best friend - she is French - she came to me in the morning, and she said, "Monsieur, la Mareschel est tombé." He had fallen all right. But anyway it was great fun. I enjoyed doing those big heads. I had always admired those vast heads that the Romans did. To get to do a four-times life-size portrait was good.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. Do you still do commissions and stuff?

LEWIS ISELIN: Yes, sure. If anybody wants it. It seems to have slipped away a little bit. I do an occasional portrait commission. The last one I did, which was a year ago or more, two years ago, I did a portrait for Yale of the new dean of the Yale Medical School, and it goes in the New Haven School of Mental Health. He's a psychiatrist. That was the weirdest experience I ever had in my life. I had never been in a room before or any place in which there was nothing but a psychiatrist. It was really scary.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really? In what way?

LEWIS ISELIN: Well, they were just like people. Actually I hit upon a terrific idea. Maybe some day we'll get to do it. And that is, you have a picture book with twenty-five cocktail parties, perfectly standard cocktail parties. And then in the back of the book - oh, there's a list of who they are; there are baseball players, psychiatrists, you know, everything you want; then at the end of the book it tells you who is who. I enjoyed that. I had a wonderful times doing that portrait. Actually to me the most interesting thing - and the reason I like doing portraits and

have always done them more as a hobby than as a profession (because I never wanted to do that real portrait-portrait business) – is you get to know somebody invariably all of the people I have done have become closer friends than they were to begin with. And it's an experience that they seem to enjoy. And I know I enjoy to talk to somebody for eight or ten hours. It's a very interesting experience. And they have a curious feeling of watching this thing grow in front of them and seeing themselves as others see them, and it's interesting. I remember years ago I did a portrait of Mr. Joseph Choate. In fact I guess it was the first commission I ever got. He was a great friend of the family and a wonderful-looking old gentleman. And he was all finished and his wife came to look at it. She looked at it. And she looked at it. And she said, "Why Joe, I never notice that before. I've looked at you for forty years and I've never noticed... why, that is the way your nose is shaped." I get very involved and interested in portraiture. Except for sculpture, I don't think any good portraits have been done since the advent of photographs. They kill it. Because it persuaded people that the interest in portraiture was realism. Which it is not. Except in sculpture.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What is it to you then?

LEWIS ISELIN: That's of interest?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes.

LEWIS ISELIN: Well, it should feel like the person. And the likeness thing is that quality which – well, you can recognize your friends long before you can see their features. And this is not true of a photograph. If you take a photograph and take it a long ways away, it just blends into the horizon. Whereas you can look at somebody you know way, way away. I don't know if you have kids, but there's always that – when you went to see the kids come back from camp, am I going to be able to recognize them. And, gee, you can see them from so far away. And it's that quality which should be in it. Not just the little wrinkle around the eyes. That doesn't interest you. And which it's truly like them as a person. Portraiture is a fantastic responsibility. Particularly public portraiture because the person becomes that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In what way?

LEWIS ISELIN: By the people who are going to look at it. The original person will die and drift off and disappear. And Dr. Redlich, the head of the Yale School of Medicine -- now I have made him. In fifty years people will have forgotten what the hell he did or anything about him, but he's going to be sitting there as a psychiatrist in front of the Mental Health Institute, and that's him. He takes on this existence in the same way that Napoleon is Canova. If Napoleon walked in here and didn't look like Canova's portrait, you'd say the fellow is an imposter and send him away. It's really ancestor worship, and it gets very complex.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The artist's image becomes the real image.

LEWIS ISELIN: Becomes the real one. I did a portrait of my great-grandfather who died in 1905. And there were some quite good photographs which I used. And when it was all done – this was when I was just getting out of art school and was interested in this kind of thing – my uncle was interested in it and he gave it to me as a project. Anyway, I took it to my aunt, who was his daughter, who was a very old lady at the time (she was in her eighties). She said, "Well, it looks just like the photographs." And I said, "I know it looks just like the photographs, I did it from the photographs; but does it look like grandpa?" Which absolutely floored her. And of course she couldn't remember. The photographs had taken over – the images, which were sitting around the piano. That had become her father. His existence in thirty years had just simply evaporated. Mahonri Young told me a story, which is one of the reasons why I became interested in these things. He was a great friend of Ernest Lawson. And Lawson died. Or maybe it was Amiel Carlson – I've forgotten whether... he was a friend of both of them. It doesn't make any difference. But anyway after he died, Mahonri did a portrait from memory because he was a friend. And then he got Mrs. Lawson, I think it was, or Mrs. Carlson – it doesn't make any difference – to come and look at it after it was done. And she said, "it's no good, Hon." And he said, "you come every day for a week and look at it and don't look at that lousy photograph that's on your dresser, and then tell me what you think." And at the end of the week she said, "Hon, you're right. That is a lousy photograph." And of course this all has to do with visual memory and all that kind of thing, but this is something that people don't realize. The importance that these things can take. Of course the Chinese, the Japanese rather, you picked out your own portrait, you went to the artist and he had a book full of noses and eyes and mouths, and so on; and you said this is what you wanted; this is how you wished to be remembered.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's marvelous.

LEWIS ISELIN: Well, its somewhat done still. The guys that go down to Portraits, Inc. they're creating an image for the future of themselves.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Sure.

LEWIS ISELIN: It's the damnest thing. In Paris this year I had the spookiest experience - I hadn't gone out to Suresnes to see the statue for four or five years. And I went this year. And suddenly here is something that I made what I could have considered yesterday. And by God, it was dated. It was 1930's sculpture - or 1940's sculpture, not 1930's, sort of halfway between - but it was sure enough World War II sculpture. What the hell it was. But, you know, it gave you a turn that in your own lifetime to realize that this is - and you could see it. This is another I made, something I would never have anything to do with now. But perfectly good for the time. What the hell. We were putting up World War II monuments. But it would never be the same again. The girl was different; there was something about the whole thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes, I've just been sitting here looking at all the heads and the figures and things. These are the most recent ones, aren't they?

LEWIS ISELIN: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When did they change? How do you describe -?

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh. What happened was this: in modeling in clay I became more and more interested in the freshness of the modeling quality. And I got to do my own plaster casting; I got to make rubber molds directly on the clay so that it would be as fresh as possible. And the only thing I have is a quality that is somewhat nowadays, I have a direct fresh modeling technique, I mean a way of doing it. Sculptors are divided basically into two kinds, adders and subtractors. And I am an adder. I mean you put a little bit on and it's finished. And then the carver obviously is the exact opposite. But I try to make the bronzes as fresh as possible. And then I got fed up with making all the molds. So I thought I'll work directly in wax. And these openwork things are a result of working directly in wax. And it was perfect because it turned out that the technical thing, and what I was trying to say about girls and women in our time, seemed to blend with this technique. Which I was being frustrated from. Well, those white girls up there are basically the show before I started to work in wax. And they've become as you see, very sketchy. But not completely sort of realized. And then I got to work with this wax. And I could never have done it technically - this completely open thing - had it not been for Calvin Albert.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

LEWIS ISELIN: Who is a friend. And he invented a synthetic wax which is rubbery; it has what is known as memory. Unlike regular beeswax which bends and thins, this bends and comes back. It's a plastic which therefore has sufficient strength that you can build these things up. The early ones that I did, oh, I had three that fell on the Triborough Bridge on the way to the foundry. They just completely collapsed because for the interior core I used a dental wax which was strong but wouldn't take a jolt. This thing will take a jolt and it's flexible.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It works just like regular wax?

LEWIS ISELIN: Just like regular wax. All wax nowadays, no one uses beeswax anymore. It's all synthetic; it's all plastic, or whatever (I don't really know what it is), they call it micro-crystalline wax - whatever micro-crystalline wax is, I don't know, but it's a synthetic. And this is another synthetic. But I've been working more and more and getting it more and more open. So life goes along this way.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You've mentioned the boats so many times, and how involved you are with them. What kind of activity do you have with boats?

LEWIS ISELIN: Well, I've had a boat ever since I was - the first boat I ever had was given to me by a friend of my brother's when I was about eight or nine. My father would never allow anybody to go out with a lifejacket on because he said that meant you felt secure. So we couldn't go alone in a boat until we could swim a quarter of a mile with our clothes on. Which we all were able to do when we were about seven or eight. Then we were just shoved into the water and allowed to do anything we wanted. And I've been sailing all my life. As children we raced on Long Island Sound seriously and hard. My brother is an oceanographer. My brother really sort of took to the sea seriously in a sense. He's a very distinguished oceanographer. He was the director of the Wood's Hole Oceanographic Institute and helped set that whole thing up.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's marvelous, because I'm also doing a taping currently with A. Hyatt Mayor, whose father had been involved with the founding of Wood's Hole.

LEWIS ISELIN: Yes. That's right. Well, Columbus (my brother's name is Columbus, of all strange things) is retired now. He isn't involved with it anymore. He used to take schooners and do oceanographic work on them, and I would go with him. And then I started cruising in small boats myself by the time I got to college. And we went, oh, around Newfoundland, and St. Pierre, and Miquelon, and Nova Scotia, and all that kind of thing. And I've been at it ever since. And my wife and I have a boat, and that's our summer home. I mean we go away for weekends and that kind of thing and cruise. We've left the boat now in Maine. Last summer we decided not to

bring it back. It was our twenty-fifth round trip and we decided to hell with it, so we left it there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What kind of boat is it?

LEWIS ISELIN: It's absolutely classic forty-foot steel ketch. It's a Dutch boat. We've had it for -- this will be the fourteenth summer. We used to do it with the children. And then there was a period when we didn't. Because there's a period when the children really don't like going off with grown-ups. They want to be with kids. And at that time we had the other side of our summer life. We had a camp in the Adirondacks up at the North Woods Club, which was where Homer Winslow did all his painting. And that through involvement of other painter friends of ours and so on. And speaking of all of that someday you ought to get a tape if you're interested in the Woods on the whole involvement of the Adirondacks with Homer and so on. That Club is where he did it all. It's fascinating... Jim Vosburgh, the painter, is a great friend of mine and got us to go up there. It's through him that I know about it. But I mean he would be a much better direct source. He's even written pieces on Homer there, the fisherman. He was a great fishing guy. In fact, we had in the camp Sally and I owned for a while a fish that was stuffed by Homer. What they used to do -- it was a wonderful thing. They'd skin the fish, they didn't stuff it at all, and then they dry it and tack it on a board just flat out, and then they would make a trompe l'oeil with shading so that you'd get the three-dimensional -- the fish would appear to be fat, although it was flat. And of course in the room it would look just like a fish. It was marvelous. An original Winslow Homer.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that's wild. I want to ask you a couple of other things here. You've had all these outdoor activities. Did you have any interest in reading or music or any of the other arts?

LEWIS ISELIN: Yes. Reading. I've read hard all my life. But music, no. I'm almost tone deaf. It's been a tragedy with me. I love rock and roll; I mean that's about as far as I get through. But you take me to an opera, and I'm lost.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What kind of things do you read?

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh, well, I've educated myself in the arts. I've read art history. I've always been very actively interested in politics. I've read a lot of political kind of books. And then I've been involved in an interest in the sea. And as a specialty in that I've been very interested in people who go around the world alone single-handed. I have no desire to do it myself, but they fascinate me. I guess I've read almost all the books that have to do on that subject.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They're a strange breed.

LEWIS ISELIN: They're very strange. Oh, boy! That's a whole long business. It's very, very interesting why they do it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's an entirely different kind of world.

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh, yes, completely. I think it's very much like the medieval monastic orders and people flagellation. To my mind it's very much tied up in that. And people really truly like being alone. They really enjoy it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's one way to do it.

LEWIS ISELIN: And the other interest is Arctic exploration. I've always been interested in that. Someone once described me that I have more useless information than anyone else. I have a mind that will absorb stories and things, but when I have to think of somebody's name or something like that, I'm lost. But I have a tremendously scatterbrain mass of misinformation. Put it that way.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you're also involved with the Tiffany Foundation, aren't you?

LEWIS ISELIN: Right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did that come about?

LEWIS ISELIN: That all came about through my friendship with Henry Allan Moe. As I say, I got a Guggenheim long ago because of that. He was the head of the Guggenheim. And he's always been very friendly with the people... He had a rather family of the fellow, so to speak. And we hit it off together very well. He was a great friend of Mahonri's. And that whole world of the Century Club and all of that. And I was made a member of the Century Club when I was a child practically during the Depression. They goddamn well had to have somebody. Anyway, we became great friends. And he was on the Tiffany Foundation. Well, first of all, he asked me to be a juror for the Guggenheim when he was on the Guggenheim. I was a juror for several years for him. Then somebody died, I don't know who it was, and he asked me if I would be a trustee of the Tiffany Foundation. And I said yes. And then it became obvious that it had to be reorganized and I had ideas as to how to do it. As they

say in the Navy, "You should keep your bowels open and your mouth shut and never volunteer." Well, I volunteered. And he said, "Okay, you do it," in a sense. And we have reorganized it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When did this start?

LEWIS ISELIN: The reorganization? About three years ago. What happened was this: you see, Mr. Tiffany founded the thing on a completely different basis than would exist in the modern world. He invited young artists and craftsmen out to his place on Long Island to spend the summer and bask in the glory of his cultural world and so on, and they would sort of get culture by osmosis I guess. And he also put on the payroll his friends and so on to run it. It was a way of pensioning people and so on. To make a long story short, World War II came. The house was used as a Navy think tank. When the Navy got it back, it was impossible to operate it as a school any longer. The concept of the school was abandoned. And they started giving out awards in the classical way. The president of the Foundation was a great friend of Tiffany's Hobart Nichols. And Hobart Nichols lived to be ninety-six and was blind and deaf. He retired forcibly from being the president of the Tiffany Foundation - I mean director of the Tiffany Foundation. It was the last stronghold of academic art under his aegis. Then I got involved, and several others, but mostly me. I look like I'm the proper person to get around, but actually I'm reasonably radical. So it was a Trojan horse. But anyway, Bob Hale was the next president. And Ogden Fleischner was made the director. Then we tried to get better juries, and I got some better juries involved. But anyway the upshot of it was that it became obvious that we were spending a dollar to give away two dollars. Which was ridiculous. And the only way to break his syndrome was to stop having competitions whereby we would not have to have a director and a permanent secretary to run that part of it, and just give the money out using the expertise of acknowledged painters and sculptors, I mean really good ones, and the expertise of the good art schools in the country who, after all, do know who the boys are that have talent who were there, and our idea was that you just pick the school and say, "Who do you know that needs some money?" Then another program which I dreamed up that has been a fantastic success in the short time that we've been doing it, but I think it's going to be a success, is going back to the concept of apprentices. I was an apprentice for Mahonri, and it was a fantastic experience to me to work in a studio. And it seemed to me that so many of the young painters and sculptors today are being trained in a university situation. Which is where you don't get this relationship of studio life and watching a major work grow and get made and so on.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. You get history and literature and all kinds of things.

LEWIS ISELIN: Yes. But not the day to day work in the studio. So what we do now is we select artists, both sculptors and painters, and say to them, "Would you like an apprentice?" And it's up to them to pick the apprentice, to get the one that would obviously want to work with them. And then we pay them a little bit of money and the apprentice some money. And they make the arrangement between themselves. We give \$4,000 to the artist. He is allowed to keep \$1,000 for himself (but for practical purposes he does not), except that he can spend a little bit, but sometimes they have insurance problems and that kind of thing. The rest of it goes to the apprentice to spend it any way he wants. And one of the most exciting things is that without anybody asking them, two different universities are giving full semester credit for this. They just volunteered it. There was a boy from Brown who went to work for Mark Rothko. And another fellow from Hunter worked with Bob Motherwell; he was getting an M.A. from Hunter, and they gave him full credit for it. And of course well they should. But you wouldn't have thought they would have been that intelligent. And the boys have had a wonderful experience. The Tiffany is the only foundation that gives any money to crafts, and of course this is ideally suited for the crafts. So all the money we're giving to the crafts in being given on this apprentice situation. The craftsman teaches somebody really what he does in the shop, how to work, how to make it. And this had been a success. It sounds bad, and I'm sure that the boys from S.D.S. would squawk, but it's really a system of giving money via people you know whose opinion you trust. And to my mind this is a more sensible way than to just have it hit or miss. In relation to art I'm not at all that democratic. If it has to do with politics, I'm a terrific democrat. But in the arts I think there are very few good ones. It's a very aristocratic - not aristocratic - well, maybe it is an aristocratic thing. It's different. And now everybody can be an artist. Well, I don't think that's -

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, they all try.

LEWIS ISELIN: Yes, they all try.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Like everything else everybody can try everything. You're also involved with one other foundation, aren't you?

LEWIS ISELIN: The American Academy in Rome. I'm a trustee there. The same situation is going on there. And we're trying to reorganize that to make it make more sense. There is so much in the works at the present moment; I wouldn't really like to talk about it too much. But we are trying to make it more valid from the point of view of the visual arts, architecture, and painting and sculpture. The classicists and the writers and musicians are happy as larks. But the visual arts side of it is not as successful as it should be. Incidentally, I don't know whether you know it, but the French, for instance, have closed down the Villa Medici, the French Academy in

Rome. They couldn't get anybody who wanted to go.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They did? You're kidding! Balthus couldn't attract anyone?

LEWIS ISELIN: Well, they could attract them, but they didn't think it worthwhile. I mean they were getting VERY SECOND-RATE PEOPLE.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's fantastic.

LEWIS ISELIN: This has been our problem to attract people who didn't want to go.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, everything here is happening in New York. People want to come here.

LEWIS ISELIN: Right. All the French kids want to come over here. They don't want to go to Rome. And then of course the Rome thing with them is even more of a problem because – hell, you can get in a scooter, and you're in Rome. It's so close. The idea of going for a year to Rome isn't attractive anymore. And the same is true of our people. New York is where the action is. This is where they want to stay. So I don't know how that's all going to work out. But, as I say, that's in the process. And I'm also a trustee of a little foundation called the Chaloner Prize Foundation. That was founded by John Armstrong Chaloner whose original name was Chandler; he changed it to Chaloner. He was a very eccentric man who, in about 1905, set up this little foundation to give the family money to painters and sculptors to send them to Paris. It was called the Paris Prize in those days. He believed that Paris was where you went. Then his brother thought that this was a very silly thing to do with the family money and had him declare insane in the State of New York. All the Chandlers are eccentric; it was an eccentric family. And he escaped literally across the Hudson in a rowboat and lived happily ever after in Virginia. But because of all this the money was impounded. There wasn't a great deal to begin with. But it sort of built up if you see what I mean. Then he died. And finally there was a court order which set the thing up. For practical purposes, it's been going since 1915 or something like that. But it only has money enough to send one person. So that it's a very small affair. From any point of view, it's beautiful in that our total expenses for the year are something like \$200. We just give the money out. It works quite well.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Were you involved with the St. Gaudens Foundation?

LEWIS ISELIN: Yes, I am very much so. I'm a trustee of the St. Gaudens Foundation. And that is up in Cornish, New Hampshire. And Bill Platt got me involved in that. He is the architect involved in this Suresnes thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know lots of architects.

LEWIS ISELIN: Right. Well, the Platts, both of them, are particularly – well, they've been friends from childhood. We are good friends back and forth. And Bill... [Telephone ringing] I'd better answer that. The St. Gaudens thing is fascinating, but it's really a little bit too long to go into because I've got to get going. We can do that another time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Sure. We can do another tape.

LEWIS ISELIN: [Telephone still ringing] Hello. Hello. You've got the wrong number. It's so nice to have a phone that no one knows the number to. It's always the wrong number when it rings. The St. Gaudens Memorial is a fascinating sort of saga in itself. It takes a little longer. Actually I can tell you good deal about it – well, I don't know whether Bill... Maybe I could tell you as much about it as anybody, about certain aspects of it. But it's now a national historic site. We gave it away, fortunately. In other words, it's under the Park Service now. So from being very poor, it's now being properly looked after, and the Government will keep after it forever. The St. Gaudens Memorial goes on helping on an idea basis so to speak and also with little money. Because we keep some money. It's a beautiful place. If you're ever in Cornish, why, go and you'll see how nice it was to be a successful sculptor in the 19th century. Oh, boy! They really lived high on the hog.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's great. Well, you've got to rush now.

LEWIS ISELIN: In a couple of minutes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why don't we just stop, and then I can get another tape. Because there's only about ten minutes left.

LEWIS ISELIN: Okay.

[End of Side 1]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Today is April 24. You had actually just started talking about the St. Gaudens and Tiffany Foundations.

LEWIS ISELIN: Well, the St. Gaudens Memorial I didn't get into until about five or six years ago. But the reason I was involved in it was through William Platt, the architect, who I'd known all my life. His father Charles Platt lived in Cornish, New Hampshire, and was very much instrumental in the setting up of the St. Gaudens Memorial after St. Gaudens died. It was a trick system whereby they formed this foundation and raised money – a bit of it was Morgan money. And it was to look after the place and be a permanent memorial to St. Gaudens. Unfortunately, during the early years they had two disastrous fires. There was one fire – the dates I'm not exactly sure of, but about 1909 – and then another fire in 1940 in which the big studio – well, actually the big studio burned down twice. In other words, even in St. Gaudens' lifetime, just at the very end of his life, the big studio burned, and it was built again. The final work was done in the second big studio. Many of the casts of the big pieces were lost either in the first or the second fire. So that now up there there are not many casts of the big work, except for the Shaw Memorial, which was given to the St. Gaudens Memorial by Buffalo. Buffalo had it. It was a second copy, or a slightly different version of the one that was put up in Boston; the angel, which flies over the heads of the marching men, is slightly different than the one in Boston. Anyway this story will show you how tastes change. When Andrew Ritchie came in to be curator at Buffalo, it was in the cellar, and it had literally been walled in because nobody wanted to look at it anymore, and they wanted the place for something else. Andrew was reorganizing the situation, and he thought this was a silly thing to do to leave it like that. Either it ought to be looked at or something or other. He gave it to the St. Gaudens Memorial. Just about a year ago, he told me that on second thought that was a pretty punk idea. It shows you how people's tastes change with time. St. Gaudens to my mind will turn out to be the most important American artist of that period. In fact, of the late 19th and early 20th century people. I think he's a great deal more interesting than Eakins and Homer, who've gotten a big play. When I was young St. Gaudens was considered to be an old fogey. Mahonri Young, for instance, considered that the Sherman on 59th Street was the third finest equestrian statue in the world. And this is after the Gattamelata and the Colleoni. When you think about it – well, it's perfect... you'd have to think a lot to find any that are better than that. They may be equal but they're certainly not any better. The thing that fascinates me – and this is a real serious situation which is taking place with St. Gaudens and other artists of that period including Mahonri Young – they have now come back into fashion, and the dealers are casting from their plaster casts. And although when you now go to them and complain or you remonstrate with them, they say, "Oh, of course they will be marked." And so on and so on, but in truth they will not because the thing that no one understands is that the artist in those days worked on the waxes a great deal, some more than others, but all of them supervised the wax casting, looked at it, and said that it was okay. So they may have changed the plaster quite a bit when it was in the wax stage; and the plaster got beat up in the foundry besides, and were patched together by some fellow at the foundry, and you might find that the left leg has nothing to do with the right leg because it was made by a guy called Al, you know. In truth, you see, with modern casting techniques, if someone wished to make the best possible copy of a 19th century bronze, they would be better off by getting a really good bronze, one of the early bronzes which have been really touched by the hand of the sculptor, and then cast from that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That does happen sometimes.

LEWIS ISELIN: In that case, of course, it's not considered to be an original; it's a replica. The truth of the matter is that you may be getting a better statue, and it can never be confused with the original, because of the fact that it will be smaller. Bronze shrinks a sixteenth of an inch to the running foot, so that all you have to do is to measure it and see. There's no possible way of it not, because you're getting a double shrinkage. You see what I mean? In other words, the bronze shrunk from the original plaster and you're doing it from the bronze, so it's just simply got to be smaller. This is something which anybody in the profession knows about, but it means at least that you're determining that this has been done afterwards, and that it's a replica.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

LEWIS ISELIN: To get back to Mrs. St. Gaudens, she was very, very naughty about all of this. After St. Gaudens died she had many things cast, and she had reductions made from the larger, more famous works, which were sold as reductions. These have now gotten into the trade, and a lot of people think that they are the maquette for the large one – in other words, that it's a small version of the large. It is not. It was done afterwards from the big work, just has been reduced to this. And the problems of a catalogue raisonné of a man like St. Gaudens who was successful is just incredible. And this fellow Dryfoot that I told you about has got a very good catalogue now, really quite accurate of the St. Gaudens work which is in public collections. He's now working hard on the same thing for the private collections. It's being printed partially by the St. Gaudens Memorial and partially by the government because they're paying his salary, and also partially by a commercial publisher. Every single work will be photographed, and its provenance and so on will be on the opposite page, and as many as possible as to what collections they were sold into and so on, so that you can track back from this. It's a very useful thing that's being done.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Is there a publisher already?

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh, yes, because we were going to underwrite it, and we were rather loath to commit as much

money as was needed because it's quite an expensive thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I know.

LEWIS ISELIN: And then Dryfoot found a commercial publisher who was willing to put up the money. So the St. Gaudens Memorial didn't have to put it up... I think it was eight or ten thousand dollars. And they feel that it will be of sufficient interest so that they can get the money back over a long period of time. The reappraisal of the academic 19th century art to my mind is fascinating.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I think in Baltimore there's going to be a show next year.

LEWIS ISELIN: Is there? Of this type of thing?

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's not Baltimore; it's some place down just outside of Washington.

LEWIS ISELIN: All those fellows like Lorado Taft... Well, of course French has a place - his studio is a public memorial. I don't know, it isn't as swell as we are. We are a national historic site. But I think French is only a state... I've often thought that if St. Gaudens had lived the battle between the Titans as to who would have gotten the job to do the Lincoln Memorial would have been absolutely horrendous. Because neither of them would have given an inch. They were very aggressive.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's true. Is there any more about that that we should talk about?

LEWIS ISELIN: I'm just trying to think because I feel that really I don't know too much about it. I wasn't in on it in the beginning. The fellow who knows all about it and was there from the very beginning is William Platt. In fact he was one of the little boys who went naked in front of the chariot in which they pulled Mr. St. Gaudens up the hill after the famous Greek play. Maybe I'd better talk about that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When was that?

LEWIS ISELIN: When St. Gaudens had been twenty-five years in Cornish, his neighbors decided to have a play. He was very sick by this time. He died, as you know, of cancer of the rectum, which in those days meant that you died of starvation. This is really what it amounted to, but they gave this play. It's called a masque. There were twenty-five people in the play and two people in the audience - Mr. and Mrs. St. Gaudens. Charles Platt designed three Greek columns, which were set somewhat like the remains of a temple in the wooded dell with huge pine tree around it. Unfortunately, a great many of them were blown down in a hurricane. In the columns there was a setting so that there was a gold cup (the purpose of the masque was to present the gold cup to Mr. and Mrs. St. Gaudens from their neighbors for twenty-five years of friendship). The play was all in Greek - all written by the neighbors, who worked all summer on it, on the costumes and everything. One of the principal actors in the masque was Kyron, the wise centaur who was the teacher of Hercules and also the teacher of Aesculapius, the founder of medicine in mythology. But the person who took the part of the horse was the man who did the King Cole Bar in the...

PAUL CUMMINGS: Bemelmans?

LEWIS ISELIN: No, no. He lived in Cornish right up the road. It was meticulous, blue backgrounds... I can't think now (this isn't very good for the historian) -

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, we can find it from that.

LEWIS ISELIN: He was the centaur. He was very gifted at making toys and gadgets and that kind of thing. The back body existed up until - when Platt was a boy they used to go and play with it on rainy days. The chariot is up there to this day. At the end of the play the actors escorted Mr. and Mrs. St. Gaudens to this chariot which they built and then drew the up the hill to the house, to Aspet at the top, and little children like William Platt went in front of them, naked, casting rose peals in front of the chariot. Presumably, when they got to the top, they all got drunk and lived happily ever after. But it's the kind of thing - we talk about people having Happenings but this was really marvelous, the fact that they had time enough to do something as elaborate as this. Now the columns still exist because he died so soon afterwards that they were still very much there in the studio. They were carved in marble. They are at his grave site. He is buried next to them or under them at the place where this final masque took place, which sort of ends the whole thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's fantastic.

LEWIS ISELIN: Yes. It's extraordinary... He was a fantastically attractive person. And Mrs. St. Gaudens was very, very aggressive financially, and demanding. Mahonri Young always claimed that the reason that St. Gaudens was the great sculptor that he was, was the Mrs. St. Gaudens was so unattractive that he spent his entire life in the studio and would never go up the hill to Aspet - the house that they lived in was called Aspet. It was at the

tope of the hill, the studios were based around the bottom, down from it. He spent all his life in the studio with the boys and never went back up. I don't know whether that's true or not. I wasn't there. But I think that sort of finishes up St. Gaudens. So what now?

PAUL CUMMINGS: You had talked also a bit about the Tiffany.

LEWIS ISELIN: The Tiffany Foundation is a whole story in itself. Louis Tiffany first invited people out there to his house.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. You talked about that. I've forgotten where you stopped. We sort of jumped around.

LEWIS ISELIN: I have been involved the last four or five years or more with the attempt to bring various art foundations kicking and screaming into the twentieth century. And it is not finished yet by a long shot. There's a great deal that will have to be done. One of the most important concepts of the whole thing, to my mind, and what I've been fighting for right along is to abandon the traditional concept of a competition, which is what they were all based on. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, artists were poor, so that if you wanted to help an artist or art, all you did was give money to a foundation for the person who was the best. You had a competition, and that was all there was to it. But now artists are no longer poor. There are schools and so on. It's a big business, so that you're not getting the best people. What you're actually doing, to my mind, is sponsoring mediocrity, which is not what was originally intended. The best people don't compete.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

LEWIS ISELIN: So we at the Tiffany Foundation have changed things around and abandoned our competition and now give out grants directly upon the advice of either artists whose opinion we value or the chairmen and deans of art schools and college art departments, the theory being that they actually know the students. They've seen them in operation for four years, they know their character, and they know whether this person has the dedication to really go on with it. You're doing more than just giving somebody a free year in Europe while they're thinking about what they're going to do.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When did you start this?

LEWIS ISELIN: This is the first year full-time on this basis for the Tiffany Foundation. We've also gone back to my idea of the fallacy in teaching art on a college campus. In college we're spending our entire morning in an analytical concept, and then we're supposed to become creative in the afternoon. Well, you just can't shift gears like that. But we're stuck with the fact that a lot of the artists of the future in America are going to come off campuses.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. But I don't think so. I think they're going to come out of Cooper and Visual Arts and places like that.

LEWIS ISELIN: I hope so, but they're still going to want this degree business.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's so they can make a living.

LEWIS ISELIN: Right. But in a way that it is being taught now. My idea is that the big thing that is lacking is the apprentice situation.

PAUL CUMMINGS: We talked about that with Rothko. How many people have been involved in that?

LEWIS ISELIN: We have had two painters and one sculptor so far. Rothko, Motherwell, and Roszak. Now we have five craftsmen who are going it this year.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You didn't say who they were - the crafts people.

LEWIS ISELIN: I couldn't tell you right now. I'd have to go and look it up. Rita Korblick is one of them. And a Japanese girl called Tet? I would rather look it up. We have gotten a much higher level of people. But more than that, it has cost us a fraction of what the competitions cost us. We no longer have to have a director, we no longer have to have a full-time secretary, we no longer have to rent the space to have the competition. And more important than that, the young artists don't have to waste their time and money sending in pictures and all that. When you think of the amount of expense that goes into one of these things it is absolutely incredible.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I was reading today that the De Kooning exhibition cost \$40,000 to do at the Modern.

LEWIS ISELIN: Jacques Lipchitz told me when he had his big show at the Marlborough-Gerson Gallery about four years ago that he had \$300,000 tied up in bronzes. And after the David Smith show, there, that last big show with those cubes, he met Ted Roszak on the street and Ted said, "What are you doing?" David Smith said, "I'm

going to the bank.” Ted said, “What are you going to the bank for?” He said, “I’m going to borrow \$50,000 to pay my expenses.” This is big business.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yes.

LEWIS ISELIN: But this is one side of art that people would just as soon forget about.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh well, it’s there. It keeps the rest of it going. Let’s see, you talked about the Chaloner Foundation. You didn’t talk about clubs you belong to. You belong to the Century Club?

LEWIS ISELIN: Right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have you been a member there for many years?

LEWIS ISELIN: I’ve been a member there for many, many years. Actually it was a very unusual situation. It’s absolutely a joke. I was elected a member primarily because of my brother-in-law, Tom LaFarge. The LaFarges were very much involved with that world. When I was very young – twenty-six or twenty-seven years old, in fact – I was given a toast at a monthly dinner as the only man of draft age in the Century Club. But it was just a fluke. It was because of the Depression and one thing and another. But I have been a member a very long time. In fact the only other member on record who was younger than I am was Louis Tiffany, strangely enough. He was twenty-one when he became a member. He was a child prodigy of his day.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That’s incredible. I didn’t know that. Why do you think there are so many of the more established artists today who don’t belong to clubs like that?

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh. This is a very interesting problem, and the Century Club has been particularly plagued with it – although it is now changing –, but what really happened was that the conservative or academic artists who were very much in charge of all of these older clubs just simply – there was a generation gap. In other words, they failed because of the stylistic reasons to elect the normal percentage of young people as they came along and they ruled them out simply on aesthetic grounds, not personal grounds. Therefore there was, as I say, this whole gap, and they filled this in with very second-rate academic artists for the most part who were rich enough and could afford it. And there was the Depression, another element involved in this. But it was stylistic.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. Well, they controlled all the committees.

LEWIS ISELIN: That’s right. It was people like Paul Manship, for instance, who was adamant on these subjects. Also Mahonri; he was very cross about it in the end; which was too bad. But now the situation is changing and the people who were the enfants terribles are now turning out to be the Establishment. And Ted Roszak and Bob Motherwell and so on are becoming members.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh really?

LEWIS ISELIN: Exactly. They’re very much the Establishment now.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know, it’s amazing that – well, I suppose it’s not really – people like De Kooning and what not –

LEWIS ISELIN: Well, they want them to be in it. But I don’t think he will ever actually do it. But there’s no reason why he ... I mean he would be elected immediately if he would agree to it. Because they feel very much, particularly at the Century Club, that their whole purpose, their whole bond in common is supposedly an interest in the arts. In truth, it is not. It is a social club. What holds it together now is what the kids in college would call the Establishment. They’re everybody that is there. I mean from the academic worlds, and the publishing world, and the big time newspaper people, and big time lawyers, and educators, and foundation people, and that kind of thing. The artists are a very small percentage of it. But they still have the myth that what binds it all together is an interest in the arts and literature. There are a lot of good writers. The quality of the writers has kept up better.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It’s always easier somehow.

LEWIS ISELIN: And also the actors kept up much better. It was a matter of clothes and behavior and so on. Just in the same way the American Academy in Rome – one of the ideas when it was founded was that the young artist would go to Rome and learn manners. They had butlers and the whole thing so they’d learn how to behave and how to deal with clients when they got back here.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Now the clients are wilder than the artists sometimes.

LEWIS ISELIN: That’s right. Times have changed.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Are there other clubs that you belong to that you're active in?

LEWIS ISELIN: No. The only other club I belong to is the New York Yacht Club, which I became a member of by pressure from my uncle's generation. My family were involved in the founding of the thing. We had always been involved in it, and they finally put the squeeze on me. That is an absolutely fabulous place. Have you ever been inside of it?

PAUL CUMMINGS: No. That's a marvelous building.

LEWIS ISELIN: It is a marvelous building. It's an incredible place inside. They modernized the bar a few years ago. It was built by the shipyard on City Island by my nephew. That's the only other club I belong to.

PAUL CUMMINGS: If Manhattan ever slides into the ocean --

LEWIS ISELIN: It'll sail away. I'm sure it will.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that's marvelous. One thing - you said you wanted to talk some more about Mahonri Young because you seem to have known him very well for a long time.

LEWIS ISELIN: I did. I knew him extremely well. And the other day after I saw you I went to see the show that they have down at Knoedler's. There's a very good catalogue which has in it a little sketch about him written by Bill Young, his son, which they cribbed. It's obviously written by Bill because he refers to him as "my father," but he didn't get to sign it. So they stole it from some College Art publication. It's extremely good and describes the old man very well, but it doesn't describe him as a teacher because that's not what this is about. When I was first involved with him, it was as a teacher. He was extraordinarily gifted with young people. His concept as an art teacher was that you could tell who was a good teacher if none of the work of the students looked like the teacher's, and none of it looked alike. Then the man who was teaching the course was a good teacher. He said that an art teacher is a coach and not a teacher. He said that in a sense when you want to play hockey, you already know how to skate, and the coach will teach you how to play it better and "do your thing." He was adamant on that, that you were to do what you -

PAUL CUMMINGS: A very liberal attitude.

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh, fantastic for that period. Right. And he spent hours with us, wandering around in the museums and bookstores. He was an avid reader and book lover. He would give a criticism on Friday mornings, and then we would all have a few beers (somebody would go out and bring in beer), and then a great many of us would go with him to eat Chinese food. He was one of the founding members of an art group that ate Chinese food every Friday from 1902 until the Second World War. First they did it at night. And then they shifted; by the time I got involved in it in the 30's it was a lunchtime proposition. They would move from one Chinese restaurant to another, depending on which they thought had the best chef. It was sort of a club, and the only rules were that the lunch took place at such and such a restaurant on such and such a day, and you just showed up if you wanted to eat Chinese food. I don't think there were ever less than four or five, and I don't remember there ever being more than about ten or twelve. They were all old cronies of Mahonri's, but a few of us students would be invited and would go along.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who were some of those people?

LEWIS ISELIN: Well, there was a man called Burroughs who was a great friend of Mahonri's. The principal one that I remember and got the most fun out of was John Held, Jr. who also came from Salt Lake City and was a great friend of Mahonri's and was the prime mover in that while Chinese food thing. He was sort of the head gourmet in the crowd and would select the restaurant where we were going.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did they call themselves something?

LEWIS ISELIN: No, they were very proud of the fact that they had no formal name. These were friends, and you could bring along anybody you wanted. If he didn't sort of get along with the crowd and wasn't interested in artistic things, he would find the conversation rather dull. Many of them were people who had been art students at the time Mahonri was an art student and had drifted off into other parts of art. Many of them were layout men and interested in commercial art. There was one man, whose name I've forgotten, whose great claim to fame was that he painted the Aetna Life Insurance Company's pictures of the Rock of Gibraltar. There was a great interest one winter because he went to see it, and we all gave him a big sendoff. He was going to see the Rock of Gibraltar which he had been painting steadily for thirty years. When he came back we said, "How was it?" He said, "Small." But in any event, they were that kind of people. It was mostly just sort of his cronies but involved somewhat in the arts. Harry Hirschfield, the cartoonist, was one of the fellows. But very often you wouldn't know who the hell they were. They would just come in and they'd say this is Joe or Harry or something, and that was all. Just after gorging with food we would go around town either to the Metropolitan or over the Beyer's

Bookstore – Mahonri was a great friend of Mr. Beyer’s – or other bookstores and look at the new art books which were coming out, and sort of get to read them free. I remember one afternoon I said, “I ought to go to work,” or “I’ve wasted the whole afternoon,” or something like that. And he said, “What could you have done this afternoon which would have earned you enough money to give you as much pleasure as you’ve had doing nothing.” Which is a pretty good piece of logic. This is early “hippiedom” I suppose, but he was that kind of a person. Then after I had been at the League for about four years he got sick. He had a prostate operation and was out for six months. And I took over the class – I was the monitor – and then I took over the instruction of the class. Then I left after that. Always during my period in art school and afterwards, there was the problem of the huge “This is the Place” monument, the big monument he did to his grandfather out in Salt Lake, and it was forever just around the corner. There were the most endless negotiations and so on. Then in 1939, we were all going to go to Europe – Sally, my wife, and myself, and the baby, and Mahonri, and Mrs. Young – to the American Academy, and we were going to start work on the monument. And then the Academy closed down on account of the war. So we never went. I went into the Navy right after that. The whole project was sort of delayed, or he made the small models and small sketches for much of it. Right after the war I started work on the big monument. I enlarged one of the big equestrian groups and eight of the big figures on the back – was it six or eight, I can’t remember – and then I modeled on several of the reliefs and other figures. There was a boy called Storonartus, who was the other assistant on the job. He was more the regular assistant. I only worked on it at certain times and on certain things. Then I used to go out to stay with them in Branchville, Connecticut a great deal. That was where Bill and I became the close friends that we are. I’d sort of stay with Bill and Mahonri in Mr. Weir’s house. You see, Mrs. Young was J. Alden Weir’s daughter – it was like stepping into the past. It was one incredible house, full of pictures. The story of how it existed is rather interesting and will show you how times have changed. Mr. Weir was an advisor to the Metropolitan and bought a great many of his pictures for them, or pictures were bought upon his advice or his expertise. One day a dealer with whom he had done a lot of business buying pictures for the Metropolitan called him up on the telephone, or at least came to see him or something (I guess it was before the days of the telephone), but in any event said he had this farm in Branchville, Connecticut, which he had gotten in some sort of swap deal. He didn’t want to go and live there, but would Mr. Weir like to have it. Mr. Weir didn’t think there was anything wrong with taking what we would consider baksheesh from a dealer from whom he had been buying pictures for the Metropolitan. So he said, “Certainly.” He went up there, and he persuaded his friend, Mr. McKim – well, I don’t know whether it was White or McKim – but anyway McKim, Meade and White did it over for him, or at least gave him the fixing of the house. Then he built a studio which he painted in and which subsequently became a sculpture studio, because Mr. Weir’s studio was a painter’s studio and wasn’t big enough to do sculpture in. I used to go up there and help him as an assistant in and around the studio and enlarge things for him and help him with castings, etc. on an on and off basis. We were very, very close friends. There is another curious anecdote: there was a pond on the property which was called – I think it was called the Pennsylvania Academy Prize Pond, but it might have been another prize. At any rate, Weir used the prize money that he got for a picture to dam up a little stream and turn it into a pond. He had a scheme (which never came off unfortunately) to build a marble temple on a little fake island in the middle of the pond on which he was going to carve the name of all his painter friends who painted there. That’s the kind of thing that’s a little far away and wouldn’t be done today. But he lived up there in grand style, J. Alden Weir. At the time Mahonri came of course there was not that much money, but it was a very nice house. Mrs. Young had considerable; she was very comfortably off. She died tragically of cancer – I’ve forgotten the exact date, but it was in the 1950’s. And then Bill, his son, and Rhoda, the daughter-in-law came and sort of looked after him up there in the summers. He still went on spending summers up there. Then my things changed somewhat stylistically and Mahonri was cross at me because he didn’t think that I was hewing quite to the traditional path that I should have. And from being a very, very liberal person, as he got older he became much less so; he became much more determined. He worried about the fact that the world was changing, I think due partly to Dorothy’s death and one thing and another. Anyway in the very last of his life I’m ashamed to say I didn’t see as much of him as I did before, and he was a little bit cross at me. I was extremely fond of him and owe him a great deal in every way. He was one of the most fantastically – well, he was completely self-educated. He left school at the age of six or seven or eight, I think it was, to go to work. He was one of the best-educated men I’ve ever known except for a few holes which would have been filled in, in normal education. For instance, he knew nothing about math. He knew a great deal about natural science. He was fantastic on anatomy and animals and all that. Anything which could be observed he was very keen on. But a theoretical type of thing which had to do with mathematics just left him absolutely cold. He also was no good in languages. He had never taken the classics of course and was completely ignorant of that. Although he lived in Paris on and off – oh, I think it must have been a total if about six or seven years –, he never learned to speak French. Apparently many of those people who lived in Paris in the 1920’s never bothered to learn to speak French. It was not considered –

PAUL CUMMINGS: There was a little circle and that was it.

LEWIS ISELIN: That was it. They talked to each other and they didn’t mess with joining the natives. But I think it was also because he had not had the kind of education that would lead him to do that. But Henry Allen Moe describes him as the wisest man he ever knew. And, by God, if you asked Mahonri anything, he could tell you. He was incredibly broad. One of the interesting things was that he was one of the few people I ever knew that was

educated primarily from contemporary publications. In other words, he read every conceivable magazine, and it was contemporary commentary on the subjects he was interested in, as opposed to a classical scholarly background.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes, read all the old books.

LEWIS ISELIN: He didn't mess with that. He only read what was contemporary thought on any subject, which is both good and bad. It made him a fascinating conversationalist. He also had an incredible set of scrapbooks. He cut out every single drawing and reproduction that he liked, and he had them all in scrapbooks; and articles and so on that he was interested in, and he spent his evenings all his life fussing with these things. He knew exactly where every damn thing was. All his drawings were in scrapbooks according to subject. In other words, if he needed a drawing of a horse, he'd bring own a sketchbook of horses, and there would be what he needed. He was very methodically-minded in this way. On the other hand, in the sitting room where he lived in Branchville, the tables were just piled with books. He had a habit of never closing a book when he put it down. He would just leave it where he's been reading, so everything was open, and it made it very easy because he knew exactly where he could find his place. He would think nothing of leaving a book on a table for, say, ten years. That didn't bother him in the slightest. It used to drive the people absolutely wild that had to try to dust and keep it clean. He read a great deal in the early morning. Like many older people, he woke up early. And he never stopped reading until he died, three and four hours a day, every day from four or five in the morning until breakfast time. When little Tobey, his grandson, of whom he was very fond, was a baby and would wake up in the morning, Rhoda or Bill would dump the baby on top of Mr. Young's bed because he was always awake and would act as a babysitter. The baby would sleep with the grandfather. It was a wonderful sight to see those two. It was very cute. But he was also very, very, very proud of his Mormon ancestry.

[Interruption]

LEWIS ISELIN: I learned a tremendous amount about the West vicariously from Mahonri. He was a great student of the West and Westonia, so to speak, Western law. He had a very good collection of Western Books and accounts of the West, and exploration, and all of that. He was a great friend of Benny De Voto, who was another Western guy and a Mormon. And of course Johnny Held. You see, that was another thing: he was a Mormon. He was a Salt Lake City boy. Mahonri told me this first when Hitler was coming on and people were persecuting the Jews; he said he knew what that was like because when he was going home from school, the Mormon boys always had to go together because they invariably got into a fight with the Catholic boys. He was brought up on religious prejudice.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where was he brought up then - in Salt Lake City?

LEWIS ISELIN: In Salt Lake City and in a small town near Salt Lake whose name I've forgotten. His grandmother was the twelfth wife of Brigham Young. So he was sort of in the middle section of the whole bunch. His grandmother was English; she was one of the girls who was imported. The Mormons advertised - they wanted to get settlers in Salt Lake, and they were advertising that they would find you a husband. They didn't bother to say that you were going to be one of, say, ten or twelve. A great many of these girls came from the English Midlands, and that's where Mahonri's grandmother came from. Mahonri had twin brothers, one of whom lived in Salt Lake and was in the newspaper business there. The other one was in Hollywood and wrote scenarios for silent movies. He made a great deal of money. And Mahonri was very proud of him because of this. And the brother was very proud of Mahonri because Mahonri was a real artist, and he only wrote scenarios for silent movies. But the character of Mahonri, his incredibly searching mind - he was constantly studying life. I don't think there was a day in his life that he didn't make at least two drawings from nature of something or other. He would do it in buses and railroad trains and any old place at all. And he kept them. There were 4,000 drawings when he died, which are now in Provo because they sold everything back to the Mormons. Which would please him; he would like that. He always considered himself a Westerner and referred to himself as living in the East. This was not where he came from; he was a Salt Lake City boy.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Even after all those years.

LEWIS ISELIN: He lived his entire life practically in New York, in an around here, but he always considered himself a Westerner. That was the real stuff. That was the real America. He was very against anything which he considered to be effete. He was very virile in his approach to people. He liked men, he didn't like girls; he liked girls as girls, but I mean he was an anti-feminist. He considered that girls should look pretty and sit around and stay home and keep the house and that sort of thing. He used to get cross with Sally, my wife, on that basis -- that she went to work. He didn't think that was a good idea at all. And she used to get very cross with him on this. He was very frank that girls were lesser people. And strong boys were better than effeminate boys. He was proud of his ability as a boxer. And even as an old man with a fat stomach he used to -

PAUL CUMMINGS: Get out there.

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh, very much so. And show off. I remember him teaching his grandson how to box and that kind of thing. It was sort of in the Hemingway kind of thing. And of course he always was going to the boxing matches in all that boxing era of his work. I used to go with him. He and Johnny Held and some other people. He was a great friend of Luks, who was also interested in these things. I never knew Luks but Mahonri used to talk about him a lot. He had his studio in those days on 59th Street. Everybody has forgotten that 59th Street was an art street, was just solid studios from Park Avenue to Fifth Avenue on both sides. Particularly on the north side, between Park and Madison where most of them were. The building that he was in last is now Horn and Hardart's. Ernest Lawson had his studio in that building, too. I remember him. But those were all his friends. He loved the Century Club, he loved his old friends, his artist friends irrespective of whether they were good or not. That didn't bother him. He was in no way an art snob on skills or anything like that. He liked people and that was all there was to it. If he didn't think they were very good artists, it didn't bother him at all.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. And he liked sports.

LEWIS ISELIN: Yes, he liked sports. He was terrific on harness racing and all that kind of thing. I'm just trying to remember what else I can say about him. He was a great gourmet. He loved food and knew a great deal about it. He claimed the reason he had gotten fat – he said he never really was a fat man, although he did have a huge stomach. He said a fat man has a fat neck, and he'd never had a fat neck, so therefore he really wasn't a fat man. But the reason he had gotten a little heavier, as he put it, was that when he first went to Paris and had breakfast, he discovered that the French eggs were not as big as American eggs, so instead of having one egg for breakfast, he had two eggs for breakfast. Then when he came back to live in the United States, one egg was not enough because he'd had those two eggs in France so then he had to have two eggs for breakfast. And he could tell you a piece of nonsense like that without cracking a smile as if it was absolutely the truth. If you laughed at him he didn't think that was funny at all. No, you couldn't in any way criticize him on that level. He'd straighten you right out. He was a lot of fun.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was he interested in other artists' work and contemporary activities?

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh, very, very much so. But not as much in the contemporary world. It passed him by a little bit. As I was saying, in the end he got kind of bitter about that. But in his early career he was very much interested in what was going on. He was one of the people who was involved in the Armory Show, which he didn't think was of very great importance, to tell you the honest truth. He was a great friend of Alfie Maurer's. He thought that Alfie was... oh, he did a wonderful portrait of Alfie, a statuette about that high, an incredibly good little statuette, which the Mormons have now (or the estate). At least they have the plaster; I don't know whether they have a bronze of it or not. But he always thought that Alfie was much better before he became more abstract. He thought he sort of got off the track. Abstract art just left him cold. He never got it. He once gave a Guggenheim to David Smith, and he voted to do so provided they didn't say that it was for sculpture; he said he was a very gifted man, but this is not sculpture. Which is nice to show that he was very liberal.

PAUL CUMMINGS: He had a sensibility but there was still --

LEWIS ISELIN: Sculpture ought to be certain things. And there were certain rules that he wouldn't go against on certain kinds of things. But he had a great sensibility. He was an atrocious painter, of which he was unaware.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Like David Smith.

LEWIS ISELIN: Like David Smith, yes. Mahonri's color sense was just terrible. He was totally unaware of it. He made what were really just large tinted drawings, and they were pretty grim. I remember he had a big show of them at the Century Club one time. I said to Bill, "Gee, it must be a lot of work for the old man to get all this stuff together." "Oh, no," said Bill, "It's not as much work as you think. You see, he has almost a complete collection of his work." Well, the same thing was true of Charles Dana Gibson. He painted terrible pictures at the end of his life. He and Mahonri, who were great friends, would discuss painting techniques. And you couldn't joke with them at all. They thought it was all right; they thought it was great. Their friends were very nice about it – they didn't say anything.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That was a topic that was missed.

LEWIS ISELIN: Royal Cortissoz was another one of his very close friends. The critic.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really?

LEWIS ISELIN: Yes. Both as a personal friend and also at the Century Club. He was very much a star down there at that period. They revered Royal Cortissoz. He was a man whose opinion they all very much admired. If Royal Cortissoz said someone was a good painter, boy, he was a good painter and that's all there was to it. If he said he wasn't, he wasn't. And that would finish his career. He had tremendous power, financial power, if you want to put it that way, as to what was sold.

PAUL CUMMINGS: On commission?

LEWIS ISELIN: Right. And if Cortisoz gave an exhibition a good write-up in the newspapers, it would sell. People would come in and buy on the strength of it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's still that way with Canaday, too, to a certain degree on some kinds of things.

LEWIS ISELIN: Right. Some kinds of things. It'll bring them in. I don't know whether he has a much control over sales.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The only place that I've been able to discover it is if he likes a figurative painter or sculptor.

LEWIS ISELIN: Right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: This is important. Go and see it. It'll sell.

LEWIS ISELIN: It'll sell. Right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But if it's abstract it'll get a lot of traffic, but maybe not sell.

LEWIS ISELIN: Yes. I think it's a terrible situation.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But it's interesting. I don't think the art critics have the power that the movie critics and the theatre critics have.

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh, gosh, no. Not at all! Never did, I don't think. Even Emily Genauer... Henry McBride who was a sweet guy (I only knew him when he was a very old man), he was a very wise and sensitive person. I think he had considerable power at one time. The critics have a sort of negative power. In other words, they can sort of knock it. And I don't think that that's what the art critics - Cortisoz and McBride and Emily - did in the old days. They could make somebody, but they couldn't unmake him if you know what I mean. You just would have an unsuccessful show; that's all there was to it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Are there other artists that you've had long and close relationships with?

LEWIS ISELIN: The only other one - I rented a studio and studied with Derujinsky, who I think I talked to you a little bit about before.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes.

LEWIS ISELIN: That's the only other one like that. And Harry Wicke I knew quite well for awhile, but haven't seen in recent times. And Paul Manship, he was a great friend of Mahonri's. They were very close, and because of that I became a friend of Paul's. Paul Manship was a very interesting man. He was much more aggressive financially in his art than any of the other of that type of artist that I knew. He once told me perfectly frankly that he demanded \$25,000 a year out of his profession, just like a doctor would demand it. And this was in the midst of the Depression. He made a great deal of money out of real estate, which he sort of lived on toward the end of his life. He bought three or four houses on 72nd Street and turned them into big studios and so on. He did this in his heyday. Finally after the Second World War when it became fashionable up in the neighborhood, he sold out, and that's really what he lived on at the end of his life. Paul was... gosh, you'd think about getting a job, and he'd be there before anybody else. He was a wizard at commissions. And he was a wizard at getting the public work and particularly in handling Washington and the National Park Service or federal monies. [Telephone ringing.] But to go back to Paul Manship, he was small and like a bulldog. If he wanted to do something, it would happen, and he could control things in a tremendously capable way - his assistants and all that. He had a great many people working for him on various things. But the truth in the end was he could do the ornament better than anyone else; all that fine work, that was what he could do. To get back to Mahonri... Mahonri, as I say, was a great and close friend of Paul's, and his description of the Prometheus in Radio City was wonderful. He said, "Everybody in their life as an artist has one big job which is a failure. Paul is real lucky because all the other ones around it are failure, too." And there's some truth in it. Because you know, Noguchi is a hell of a good sculptor but that Noguchi thing there is just a dog.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's a big lump.

LEWIS ISELIN: It's no good at all.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I wonder why that is? It was a bad year.

LEWIS ISELIN: Well, one of the things about it was, you know, the letting out of jobs for Radio City. Of course I was too young to be involved in it, but I did hear about it a little bit. At first, the whole thing was to be given to

Carl Milles. He was to decorate all of it. Then for some reason or other that fell through. He became then very bitter about the thing. I was a tremendous admirer of Milles at that time. In fact, I went to Sweden just to see his work. But he only got that one job, that wooden sculpture (which is not very good), in what used to be the Life-Time Building. What's his name? - Lee, who did the big Atlas? - Lee Laurie got into the act. He also, like Paulanship, was real good at getting jobs. He got the ear of the Rockefellers or something, and he became sort of the artistic director - if you want to call it that - for the whole job and parceled out or supervised it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it's his taste.

LEWIS ISELIN: It's his taste, which was very strong in the thing. It's a very dated object if you look at it from that point of view. And I think it's too bad that the Italians - the Piccirillis - took down the glass, which is really terrible, but it was very much of the epic, to put this other thing in. It's terrible. It's not a good idea. That's about the size of it, I guess. Except it made me think of the Piccirillis. Has anybody talked about them? Well, you know, they were the great carvers. They had a huge studio up in the Bronx at One Hundred and Forty Something Street. There were four or five Piccirillis and they carved most all or a very large amount of the academic sculpture that was done in that period. They ran a shop up there with sometimes as many as twenty men working for them. It was very politically oriented - Italian politics. La Guardia used to go up there, and they would give big supper parties. The spaghetti was made in barrels out in the foundry and the studio, and gallons of bootleg red wine, real Italian stuff. The last of the Piccirillis I think is dead now. They more or less retired after - well, after the Second World War began, the place was shut down and became a foundry for a short period of time. Then that folded. In the meantime, the Piccirillis had gotten so old that they just - the only big statue at Columbus Circle, the little boy with his hands out. It's that period. They're Lorado Taft. That kind of thing is what they did. But it was a big carving outfit. Just in the same way the Roman bronze, they were the same period.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. Let's see, I just wonder if there are any other things that we should talk about. Do you want to talk about your exhibitions or things, how your work has changed? Because here I notice that there's a variety of things we really haven't gotten to.

LEWIS ISELIN: Well, as you sit here, they go up as they get older. But actually the primary interest, the focusing thing that has changed in my work I think is... as I said before, sculptors are either adders or subtracters, and I'm an adder. I wanted to get directly involved with the modeling technique and preserving the freshness of clay, and I went directly into wax. Now I'm thinking of doing it in plastic as a permanent medium that doesn't have to be cast. My friends tell me that there are all kinds of plastics now that act like clay and will be reasonably permanent. The only thing is I'm sure they're going to look like plastic. I used to be terribly antipathetic to plastic, but now I'm getting used to the point everybody else is. It doesn't look as bad as it used to.

PAUL CUMMINGS: We have talked a little bit about the openwork ones.

LEWIS ISELIN: Right. That's a development of just working directly in wax and supporting it - it's a creation of negative form; the interior part of that which you see, which is blue, is blue because of the fact that the wax that I made it from was blue. It was invented by Calvin Albert. And it has memory. Then I discovered that if you didn't paint it blue, it was more confusing. In other words, the two tones help to differentiate the inside from the outside.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see.

LEWIS ISELIN: I have a desire now - an idea - to make one of these heads huge, so that you could go and sit inside.

PAUL CUMMINGS: An environmental head.

LEWIS ISELIN: Right. Have something like a gazebo; just go out and sit in the head and contemplate your navel.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I notice you seem to be very interested in women.

LEWIS ISELIN: Yes, almost entirely. Very few other things. Primarily it's girls. My interest was also in - well, it's partially due - I got interested in drapery and to try to make the contemporary figure, which is related to our time and not related to classical and baroque and all that kind of thing. To try and do a full draped figure that has something to do with our time in the same sense that - well, I think the coming again of an interest in the figure as a symbol that can be used has meaning again. I don't know. For a while there it looked like the figurative people were all out in left field. I did some abstractions, but that was just simply not my thing, so I decided that I would concentrate on what I could do, which was to model and be addressed to the figure and so on. I've always been interested in portraiture; I like doing that. Now I have an idea that I'd like to do something bigger. But maybe that's just because everybody else is working on a giant scale. Maybe it's crazy. I like to do jewelry, too.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

LEWIS ISELIN: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What kind of jewelry?

LEWIS ISELIN: Well, it's - but I don't seem to have any of those here.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What are they? Brooches and pins?

LEWIS ISELIN: Yes. Things like that. But I haven't got any of the silver ones. I use to cast them in silver and gold. But I discovered (and this would make you mad) it took me about three or four months. I have friends who are jewelers, and even they won't tell you what the costs are to manufacture things. Finally, the bronze foundry who doesn't cast in precious metals, told me the name of a foundry on 49th street which makes jewelry. They cast centrifugally, which means that the mold is spun while it's being poured. An openwork head four inches in diameter in silver costs twelve dollars in labor and eighteen dollars in silver. Nothing. Of course, I had to work on it like mad afterwards to chase it all up and all that. But if you went to Tiffany's, it would cost you a hell of a lot.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's cheaper than bronze almost.

LEWIS ISELIN: It is. It's cheaper than bronze. Because they can cast it so quickly. And what's more, they give you same day service. I said, "What do you mean same day service?" He said, "Well, in the jewelry business you've got to work fast." Then they explained that if somebody comes in and wants something made, we'd better make it quick before they change their mind. It's all farmed out and subbed. The fellow who makes the castings has nothing to do with the chasing, and the fellow who designs has nothing to do with...

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's like the old, old, craft cottage work.

LEWIS ISELIN: Right. Cottage work. And, as I understand it, it's fragmented somewhat like as the clothing business in which people do parts of dresses and that kind of thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You've had exhibits with whom? Dick Larcada?

LEWIS ISELIN: And before that with Maynard Walker. I had four or five with Maynard Walker. Then Maynard didn't like what I was doing. He was not really very interested in sculpture anyway. I liked him very much and he liked me. It was more on a personal basis. His clientele was not interested in the kind of thing that I was doing, so from a practical point of view it didn't work too well. But then Dick left and formed his own gallery. I just went with Dick because of the fact that he was willing to show my work. That was really the reason. Maynard was very upset by this.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Had he worked with Larcada?

LEWIS ISELIN: Larcada had worked with him for three or four years.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

LEWIS ISELIN: Yes. What happened - well, I don't really know what happened. Maynard is a difficult person, and they had some kind of a row. And that was that. I wouldn't like to talk about it. I really don't know enough about it to know what happened.

PAUL CUMMINGS: He's now with Hirschl and Adler?

LEWIS ISELIN: Maynard is back at Hirschl and Adler, yes. I know he retired, and then he came back this year. I haven't seen him this year, to tell you the truth. To my mind he made a mistake. He could have gone on doing what he had been doing before, I think, much more easily. He's getting on in age. I don't know, he must be seventy-five or so. Then I saw him at group shows and all that kind of thing. Then I had a one-man show out in Columbus, at the Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was that a retrospective or a lot of things?

LEWIS ISELIN: A lot of things, yes; sort of a retrospective. Oh, about a five-year range. What happened was I had a show at Maynard Walker's, and therefore I had a lot of bronzes and stuff. We made an arrangement. I wanted to take it to two different places, but the other one - I was going to take it to California, too - fell through. Because I have a theory that the only way you're ever going to get anywhere in this business is to take the stuff out on the road. The chances of anybody coming to see it in your little bailiwick, particularly if you're not involved in a big ballyhoo stunt - you know, have the big museum pressures and all that other stuff behind you. You've got to take it out to the country. I'm happy to say that Dick Larcada feels the same way. And I think that

that's what's going to happen in the future: that galleries will have affiliated situation so that you can send the show around to more than one place. But to show the work of two or three years and have it all over in a month and have a snowstorm on the opening day and a newspaper strike – Boy!

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's interesting that that's one thing American dealers have fought against doing but the European dealers have been doing it for a long time.

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh, absolutely.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And now they're beginning to do it.

LEWIS ISELIN: Right. Well, in the old days the American dealers would tell you, you couldn't sell a picture outside of New York. I think that until comparatively recently this was true.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I don't think so. Look at the collection in Cleveland and Columbus and Milwaukee and Chicago and St. Louis.

LEWIS ISELIN: But they claim the expensive pictures were bought here in New York or in Europe.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes, they were brought in Europe and they just skipped New York, a lot of those people.

LEWIS ISELIN: The same thing is true in the fashion business. Up until very recently it was very hard to sell expensive clothes other than in New York and somewhat in Boston and in Philadelphia. The rich women would go to Europe to buy their clothes. Now I'm sure that with the advent of travel – and also the fact that state universities have become as active as they have in art, and the proliferation of people and interest in local communities – it has been made possible. Which was not true at all before. That's good. But to get back to Paul Manship, for instance, in the history of art field – this is something that nobody realizes – that that generation of people didn't have dealers. The hell with it. Why give a cut to anybody. If you want to buy my work you come to my studio; that's where you'll buy it. I remember Malvina Hofmann when she was going to have an exhibition, she would clean up her studio and have the new work arranged around very nicely as in a gallery situation. Then she would entertain on three different days. One day she would have a tea party for her tea party friends. The next day she would have a cocktail party. The third day she would have an evening soirée after dinner. And she just took these rich old people and beat the – twisted their wrist until they bought the stuff, and that's all there was to it. And Manship never had a dealer that I know of. He may have sent off a few other things on consignment. But not in the sense of it now. Oh, golly, I wish I had a better memory for names, but the sculptor that did the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, a fantastically successful sculptor of the academic world (the name will come to me in a minute) – but he told me that he had one exhibition – or no, he exhibited one portrait, and he sold it. And the next time he had a commission (somebody came and wanted to have a portrait done), and he said, "Well, fine, that'll be \$4,000." This is a young man in 1902 or 1903. That was the last time he ever exhibited anything. He said, "Let them come to me and I'll make it."

PAUL CUMMINGS: A different world.

LEWIS ISELIN: But it's a funny thing about the concept of working with architects and working in construction and working with civic people – it's happening again. All the big minimal guys are getting their jobs that way.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, are they ever!

LEWIS ISELIN: That's not being done by the dealers.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There are two or three dealers who just do that now.

LEWIS ISELIN: Are there?

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's all they do – handle architectural commissions and civic projects. They have offices. No galleries, no exhibitions. You go there, and you can look at plans, maquettes, and shows.

LEWIS ISELIN: That's fascinating. Just sort of a department store for architects.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

LEWIS ISELIN: And there's money in it. Enormous. Because the architects are discovering that you can buy sculpture cheaper than you can buy tile. In lots of ways, it's not as expensive as it looks.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And you can put it up, and it stays there.

LEWIS ISELIN: That's right. It's there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The tile gets dirty. Somebody throws a brick at it. Lots of trouble.

LEWIS ISELIN: That's right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Okay. Can you think of any other people or any other things we might have missed that we should talk about?

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh, gosh. Possibly just some anecdotes, but I forgot. One thing leads to another. I feel very strongly that the influence of the Depression upon the American art scene was the most beneficial thing that ever happened to art in America, because it killed off the Paul Manship-Mahonri Young group. Because there weren't any jobs, and so they could become out of fashion so to speak. There was no money to support that kind of thing so it just sort of stopped.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But there still existed.

LEWIS ISELIN: They still existed, but the impetus to go on was stopped by them. Then the WPA and the Treasury Art Projects supported everybody minimally. That was all right. And to my mind the biggest single thing was that nobody, none of the younger people ever had a thought of selling anything. So therefore they were completely free of the pressures of the dealer and the fashions of the successful boys and so on, which is on now. Then the other reason that the Depression I think was tremendously important was that it got artists thinking about working in other mediums than the completely classical technique.

PAUL CUMMINGS: New ideas.

LEWIS ISELIN: You could play around because there was no - you weren't going to sell anyway. And making things which were of a temporary nature. Which was an idea that had never occurred before that. We would never dare dream of showing plasters and that kind of thing, which now people don't mind at all and show any old thing. It doesn't make any difference what it is. This I'm sure was one - well, there was always the aesthetic reason more than the other, but I'm sure the financial reason was a very strong power in changing the whole concept of what was art and how it was going to be. The world changed, and that was it. And these old-timers that I've been talking about felt this very, very, very much in their old age. The Mahonri Young-Paul Manship generation lived beyond their time. I think that this is going to be something which to my mind is very interesting from the point of view of the future: that artists are going to live forever, and they're going to go out of fashion, and they're going to go right on painting just as well as they ever did. Witness Rockwell Kent right now. I went to see Alex Brook, was it at Christmas time? You ask some young kid around fifteen or seventeen who Alex Brook is, and they never heard of him. Sure. Fine. He's successful. He has a nice house, a wife, and everything. Like goes on.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Franklin Watkins?

LEWIS ISELIN: The same way, Franklin Watkins. My God, he's great. Retired, but I asked him the other day what he was doing. He said, "Well I'm doing religious pictures again." It's fascinating.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There are many levels.

LEWIS ISELIN: There are many levels at which it goes on. Actually all you can say about it is that someone is serious. And I think that you can't say whether or not anybody is a good or a bad artist because that's something which nobody really knows. They took their position seriously, and that's all there was to it. They did their best. The age thing fascinates me because I have this idea in my mind that all great artists - not all, but most great artists - lived to a great age. This is a phenomenon which I'm mildly interested in. A psychiatrist friend of mine, Dr. Schneider, is doing serious research on this subject. They not only live to a great age, they don't have cancer, and they don't have heart disease.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They're very healthy, and they live on and on and on.

LEWIS ISELIN: Right. Well, he has a feeling that this is all tied up with psychiatry, that the creative person (and this is not only the painter and the sculptor, but this will work also in allied things like theatre and writing and so on) has a way of getting rid of frustrations and aggressions and so on in a much more normal sort of way. Whereas the non-creative person, it gets them in the end. I am absolutely fascinated by this. He approached me on this. He's with a foundation whose job is to do research in this exact field. Now why is it so? Why should one group of people who are not any different than any other really apparently live longer, and they're going to continue to live even longer? Gosh! Think of Titian! Ninety-seven years old! My God, in those days if you lived to thirty years, you live three lifetimes. Imagine what the young painters in Venice must have been saying, "Won't the old bastard ever die so we can get some jobs?"

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Sure.

LEWIS ISELIN: Goya, if he died at the normal life expectancy would have been a second class provincial painter. He only got good when he got old.

END OF INTERVIEW

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