



Smithsonian
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Oral history interview with William
Kienbusch, 1968 Nov. 1-7

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with William Kienbusch on November 1, 1968. The interview was conducted at William Kienbusch's studio in New York by Forrest Selvig for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

FORREST SELVIG: This is an interview with William Kienbusch in his studio in New York City. The date is November 1, 1968, and the interviewer is Forrest Selvig. I'd like to start out first of all by asking you about your beginning as an artist. Did this start when you were at Princeton as an undergraduate?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, no, I think it started earlier. In the first place, I grew up in a household where there was a considerable interest in art. My father is a distinguished collector of medieval arms and armor, and he was always interested in painting. For example, when I was a kid after Sunday lunch at my grandmother's my father would take me - I must have been ten years old - to the Metropolitan Museum. So that at that age, I knew who Winslow Homer was, Thomas Eakins, John Singer Sargent, and all these people. And perhaps I got some idea at this point of the importance of art, or, you know, that it existed and people were concerned about it. I went to boarding school; I went to Hotchkiss Preparatory School. I was there from 1928 to 1932. And there were two big influences on me there. One was an artist, Robert Osborn, who is quite famous as a satirist. And Bob Osborn then was about twenty-five years old. And as far as I know, he was the first art teacher in a secondary boarding school, and he was a marvelous man. We used to work in the basement of the headmaster's house, and he would set up still lifes. And when the school declared a holiday for some famous person, we would all go out in the country and have a big lunch and paint and so on. And Osborn had a very great influence on me because he was the first artists I ever knew, and he was a very enthusiastic man. I think the second influence was that my father gave me a book by a Chicago art critic named Bulliet. It was called Apples and Madonnas, and it was about modern artists. And then the second thing was that I bought a book by Meier-Graefe on Vincent Van Gogh. And this book had a great influence on me. I must have read the book six times. And as will happen to a boy that age, I tended to fantasize in terms of Van Gogh. I don't mean I dreamed of cutting my ear off, but there was a very definite fantasy of becoming a fine artist - perhaps also in terms of the fact that I had had a rather unpleasant time at Hotchkiss. I didn't enjoy the school. And painting was the one thing I could do. And I fantasized about Van Gogh and how I would be a great artist, and then I no doubt would die and people would say, "Oh, poor Billy," and so forth, you know. Well, when I got to Princeton where my father had gone I continued to paint in the summertime. In fact the summer of 1934 and 1935 I studied with Eliot O'Hara, who was a watercolor painter whose wife had been a classmate of my mother's in college.

FORREST SELVIG: I lived with them in Washington. Isn't that incredible! Shirley Putnam O'Hara.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Oh, Shirley Putman O'Hara, yes. I went two summers to Goose Rock Beach. And O'Hara was quite a brilliant academic technician, and I did learn a good deal about watercolor, although at the end of the second summer, I got kind of mad at him and left because he didn't like my work. Years later, I might add that my parents asked O'Hara whether I had any talent, and he said he didn't think I had any talent at all. But during college a number of things happened. One was that the Museum of Modern Art opened in 1929 and I saw my first show they ever had there. And another thing was that I went to see Stieglitz's gallery, and it was at Stieglitz's gallery that I first saw Marin and O'Keeffe. I didn't see Hartley until later at Hudson Walker's gallery. That was much later. But Marin at that time was a very exciting influence to me. In college, I wrote my senior thesis on the history of American art. I believe it was the first time in Princeton that anybody had written on the subject. In fact, not very much had been written on the subject, except a few things like Dunlap, Isham, Alfred Barr's book and so on. I got out of college. And I had a very fortunate experience as I occasionally tell some of my students. My maternal grandmother left me some money, so I didn't have to get out and scrounge around right away. So the following winter I went to the Art Students League, and I studied with a number of teachers there, none of whom had much of an influence on me. The man at that moment whom I admired most was Henry Varnum Poor. I got to meet him. And that next summer I went out to the Colorado Art Center at Colorado Springs. And then Poor advised me that fall to go abroad. His stepdaughter Annie was in Paris. This was the winter of 1937-38. Do you want me to go on with this what happened?

FORREST SELVIG: Yes, I would. But I'd like to ask you one thing. At Princeton, was it possible to be a fine arts major?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: No. Princeton now has a fine arts department. In my day the only thing we ever had was a little course in rendering that architects got. And there was no such thing as creative art.

FORREST SELVIG: I see. But then you had a field of concentration though at Princeton.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I majored in the department of fine arts. I studied with a number of brilliant professors like Rufus Morey.

FORREST SELVIG: So it was really art history?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: It was art history. And Professor George Raleigh, who was an expert in Oriental painting. Burt Friend, who is the great professor in North German art. All these people were my teachers. But as far as painting went – I mean, occasionally in the fall at Princeton I would go out and knock out a watercolor. I would paint in the summertime. And my medium was watercolor. It's kind of the obvious medium that most people take up when they're starting out. But I didn't actually become, in my own eyes, so to speak, a practicing artist until after I left college, and by that time, I was going on twenty-two years old.

FORREST SELVIG: Then you went to Paris?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I went to Paris the winter of 1937-1938 and settled in 23 Rue Campagne Premiere; had a wonderful studio. I was twenty-four years old. And I had intended to go to the Academie Julien because Henry Poor told me to get a good, sound training in drawing. I went there for one day. The students didn't seem to be at all serious. So I left. And I went over to Colarossi's where you could simply pay a few francs, and you simply sat there and drew. And I did that. And then I met Abe Rattner, who is a great friend of the Poor's. Abie used to come in once or twice a week and criticize my painting. And during that winter I think the great influences on me were Cezanne and Bonnard. There was a great Bonnard show in 1938 in Paris. But I think the most exciting thing of all was the – well, in Paris all of us who were younger then tended to become left wing. It was the great days of the Spanish War. And by the summer of 1938, the Lincoln Brigade was coming back from Spain. And we used to have parties for the nurses and take them to movies. The two movies then was Les Goldwyn Follies and also Blanche Neige Et Les Sept Nains. And we had a real ball. And then on May Day, we would go out to the Port Versailles, wherever it was, and there were loudspeakers in the park, and everybody was talking like mad, you know. And then at that great big – what is it called? The Winter Drome or whatever it is in Paris – I saw the veterans of the Brigade march around the bicycle track. And I heard La Passionara speak, you know, with that black shawl on, and she looked just like El Greco in the front of that mike. And famous people like Duclos, Cachine. Well, in those days we were all very idealistic, you know. We all thought we were Sir Galahad or Joan of Arc or something. So when I got back to New York, I painted a great deal. I've destroyed most of those pictures. I settled in the Village.

FORREST SELVIG: Excuse me. What did you paint? You say you painted a great deal.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, I painted – I had a model, for example, and I must have painted thirty pictures of her. I painted endless still lifes of pots and onions and what I thought was Cezanne or Bonnard. And it seems to me in retrospect that what I painted or even how I painted wasn't terribly important. It was very much like logging up hours for a pilot. And when I went to Colarossi's, I must have made fifteen or twenty notebooks sketches. None of them very good. But I was in the process of becoming a painter. I wasn't very good. But I was painting constantly. I took back to New York – I think in the winter of 1938 – about sixty pictures, as I said, most of which are all destroyed now. But in those days in Paris, I mean I wasn't terribly sophisticated. I saw the Guernica. I remember seeing Picasso once. It was very funny because I was sitting with Abe Rattner having lunch on the Terrace – Abe and Bettina – and Abe said, "There goes Picasso." Well, the great man was wearing a large polo coat, and he was walking very fast, talking to a friend. And the truth was I never really got a good look at him. But years later I said to my students once – "Well, you know, I saw Picasso." I thought it would impress them. And then I realized I didn't know what to say, you know. I have to say something. So I thought of all the photographs I'd seen of Picasso, like his eyes are big and dark and his hands are like baseball mitts, you know. And so I would tell all this stuff to my students and they would get very interested. Oh, I saw Miró one day. I went to Lurcat's studio. Henry Miller was in Paris. But I don't think I was very aware of the big... For instance, I saw the great Surrealist show. But I don't think it made a great impression on me. I was strictly Cezanne-Bonnard. Well, I got back to New York that fall, the fall of 1938-1939. And in short order all these models and onions all disappeared. And I became very left wing.

FORREST SELVIG: When you say they disappeared, you mean you --?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I mean my point of view, my subject matter completely changed. For example, in 1940-1941, in there, with friends I went down into the anthracite mines in Eastern Pennsylvania, places like Mattanoie City where the Pottstown – And, oh, I used to play darts with the IWW workers. I would baby-sit for the miner's wives while they went to the movies. I went out to, I guess it was Patterson – I forget whether it was Passaic or Patterson – and spent three days drawing the fur workers in the factories as they cleaned up these rabbit pelts from Australia. And the result of all this was pretty bad painting. I really had a great respect for these people, but I really was not truly obsessed by them, I mean in the sense that, say, Jack Levine or Ben Shahn, Jacob

Lawrence, or Phil Evergood were. These were the great men really of that time. Well, what happened was that at a certain point, I met a new group of people. For example, Fred Farr, who is a very good sculptor, suddenly produced these Cahiers d'Art. And I remember Gorky is quoted as having said to an artist, "The different between you and me is I saw the Cahiers d'Art, and you didn't." In other words, as Bob Motherwell said, "The importance of the Art Project was that it ended." In other words, artists suddenly became interested in art again, and particularly a lot of my friends became interested in Picasso, Miró, and all these people. Well, the strange thing was that at the same time as I was doing these fur workers and so on, I went back to Maine in the summer of 1940. I went with two friends of mine. We settled in Stonington and the reason we settled there was that John Marin had worked there for many years. And we had a little shack, and it was a very happy summer. And it was then I felt that I really started to paint what I really liked. I mean the islands, the pine trees, the quarries, all those things which I saw. The influence was basically Marin. Well, then the weird thing was that when I came back to New York the winter of 1940-1941 - no, it was the winter of 1941-1942 - I went to Stonington for two summer - and became the monitor of Stuart Davis. By sheer chance I had a room right above Davis on Seventh Avenue. And I was his monitor over at the New School.

FORREST SELVIG: Well, what does that mean? What is a monitor?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, I have a monitor. I'm a teacher. A monitor is sort of like your sergeant. A monitor takes attendance. In my case, I set up all the still lifes. I would put away the easels at the end of the day. You do all the dirty work. And Stuart would come in, and he'd kind of grunt and look around and utter a few words of wisdom. It was very hard to get him to talk. But because I lived above him and he became interested in me, I used to see him fairly frequently. As you know, he was very much interested in jazz. And he had a favorite program that came on WNYC at one o'clock in the afternoon. Art Hodes would play the Muskrat Ramble, and when you'd hear the Muskrat Ramble you knew Stuart Davis was working downstairs. And, oh, once a week he'd come upstairs and look at what I was doing. He was very sympathetic. And one realized then, I mean of course he was pretty well known even then, but he was right in the process of becoming the great artist he eventually became. And he was living in rather straitened circumstances. I mean we both had rather small apartments. He hadn't had his kid yet. So this was very odd because I suddenly started to paint like Davis. I did pictures of Ryker's, Fourteenth Street subways, shooting galleries on Sixth Avenue and 46th Street in the old days. At the same time, that very winter I went back to Maine early in December and caught cold and spent most of my time in the kitchen of a fisherman's house and did ink and watercolor things very much like Hartley. Oh, I'd also seen Hartley at Hudson Walker's the previous winter. So I was working in two different styles really. This fisherman and I went out duck hunting; we didn't see any ducks. We stopped at a farmer's house for a drink, and over the radio Pearl Harbor was announced. You know that fatal day. And I knew then that things were going to change. So I think that more or less explains my life up to the war. You mentioned earlier, you know, some personal factors that influence you in your life as a painter. Being discreet, I would state that although my mother was always quite enthusiastic about my being a painter, my father was less than enthusiastic. In fact there was a considerable amount of opposition to my being an artist.

FORREST SELVIG: Even though he had taken you as a young boy to the Metropolitan and shown you those paintings?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, I think there was on the part of my father a considerable ambivalence here. I think on the one hand he himself would have liked to been an artist, but for various reasons went into his uncle's tobacco business. I mean one sees it constantly in his appreciation of works of art, his own collecting. He's a real connoisseur, a scholar, all of these things. It may very well be that on the one hand I picked, so to speak - I entered the obvious profession being his son in a way. On the other hand, I entered the one profession which he would have felt antagonism towards perhaps, or jealousy of, if you will, perhaps. And so I think all during his life he's always been ambivalent. I think on the one hand he may admire what I've done, although he doesn't understand it probably. But on the other hand he's hostile towards it because it's a question perhaps of his having wanted to do it. So I must say that during my period of growing up and even later on, there was a good deal of real mental anguish in my life to the point of needing medical attention and things like that.

FORREST SELVIG: He would have wanted to you have gone into the family business, I suppose?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Oh, yes, this was obvious.

FORREST SELVIG: Are you the only son?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I'm the only son. I had a brother who died when he was one year old and I was two. I have two sisters. Oh, I could tell you a marvelous story because it's so indicative of perhaps a guy in my position. When I got out of college my mother decided she was going to find out whether I really did have any talent. And she sent me to Stephens Institute in Hoboken where they give tests for various capabilities. And I flunked the art test. Well, the trouble was they showed you all these pictures and things like rooms or silverware or interiors and you were to guess which one was the most tasteful. The man who made the test had no taste himself. So all you

could do was to judge what his taste was. So I came out of this, they said I had great executive ability, I was highly introspective, and probably would have made a good businessman.

FORREST SELVIG: Oh, my God.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: But no artistic talent at all.

FORREST SELVIG: That must have just made the struggle much worse I would think.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: It was. As I said, I was very lucky I did have this money. It wasn't a great deal, but it was highly sufficient – believe me – in the period of 1936-1942. I mean in those days you could live on \$2,500 a year and live quite well. And when I think that I had a studio, a gigantic studio for which I paid \$40, you know, skylights and all that stuff over here on – oh, it was Jane Street, one of those streets. Oh, I forgot to mention that somewhere in there I also studied with Mervyn Jules, who was quite left wing, who is now a professor at Smith. But if you didn't live through that time you'd never know what it was like. When you think that in those days, it was people like Joe Jones, Bill Gropper, Mervyn Jules, Phil Evergood, these were all the men. It was the ACA Gallery on Eighth Street. If you could listen carefully you could have heard Hans Hofmann creep into New York, and everything was going to change.

FORREST SELVIG: But in those days certainly the intellectuals were all very much involved with the evolution of our society certainly, the New Deal and so on, and I don't think that it's at all surprising that you would have become involved in this philosophically as well.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I think that a young man at that time would have done pretty much what I did. In other words, as I said, we were idealists. I removed myself from the whole thing when I discovered that something was very fishy about the German-Russian partition of Poland. At that moment I got out. I couldn't take it.

FORREST SELVIG: You got out of what?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I mean I got out of any relationship to the left wing completely. And I think a lot of people got out then. We were completely disillusioned.

FORREST SELVIG: Isn't "left wing," however, a fairly relative term? In today's terms you would say that the Democrats are more left wing certainly than the Republicans.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, what I mean by left wing in those days was that we were far, far, to the left of President Roosevelt. As I said, I think there was so much idealism – this is a true word – we were very naïve. I mean, we did believe in a kind of – I don't think we ever believed in revolution really. It was a kind of vague term. We did believe in the working class, and we believed that the great glorious day would come when everybody would have some money and all that. But the important thing was that a kid today cannot realize how poverty-stricken people were. I remember talking to somebody recently. He said you never saw people selling apples on the corner of Brooks Brother, I mean. And to be sure in those days I had a fair income, I had a fair amount of money. But all my friends were on WPA. I was one of the few people I knew who wasn't on the Project. It was the time, for example – well, the great heroes were Phil Guston and Jim Brooks, who then became abstract expressionists. They were doing murals. For instance, I worked for Anton Refregier as his assistant. For example, we did the murals for Café Society uptown. Which was very exciting. Ref would project his sketches up onto these he walls in the dining room and we would paint them all in. And we were paid with due bills. And we saw Hazel Scott and Teddy Wilson and all these people when they were very young – and Zero Mostel when he was just starting out.

FORREST SELVIG: A due bill means what? Credit?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: A due bill is you're not paid in money. You're paid in food. And I used to go up there with various lady friends and act as if I owned the place. The waiters all knew me. And then when the time came for the bill, I would proudly write my name. Well, this was all very well until one night I started to write my name, and the waiter said, "Oh, no, you don't. You've used up your due bill." Oh, we used to watch – Barney Josephson owned it – and we used to watch him tasting various ice cream samples and getting the wine cellar in place. I'll never forget going in there early in the war. I was in a camouflage outfit at an air base stationed out of Richmond, Virginia. I had gotten a terrible case of poison ivy. So I came back to New York. I had to go to a doctor. It was all over my hands. Well, he bound up my hands so I could hardly hold a spoon. And I took this girl friend to the Café Society. And when I walked in the dining room, practically everybody got up and cheered, thinking that I had been wounded in the North African campaign, obviously not knowing that underneath all that gauze was just poison ivy.

FORREST SELVIG: You didn't dare tell them.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I didn't dare tell them. All I had on was my good conduct medal. But I think a number of things – in the first place, as I'm sure many artists have related, life was a lot easier in those days in spite of being poor. There weren't so many artists either. I mean one pretty much knew who was around. One could easily see all the galleries on Fifty-Seventh Street in an afternoon. I mean the great galleries in those days were Stieglitz, the Downtown Gallery, and ACA.

FORREST SELVIG: Was Betty Parsons going then?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Betty Parsons hadn't started. She didn't start, as far as I know, until after the war. But there was a feeling – perhaps it was because we were young – but there was a feeling of camaraderie, there was a feeling of “we're all in this ghastly mess together, and we're not having such a bad time of it.” And to be sure there were wonderful parties and so on. It was at a party that I met Jackson Pollock for the first time. Freddy Farr was having a party – this was in 1941 –, and Jackson was there. And I'd previously met him. He was a great friend of an Oregon artist – oh, gosh, I wish I could remember his name – he was a good artist, too... he lives in Oregon.

FORREST SELVIG: What did he paint?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: What's his name? Well it escapes me. In any event we were having this great party, and it got terribly raucous and people were filling paper bags with water and throwing them at each other. And Jackson was a pretty heavy drinker; in fact, he was drinking rather a lot. So I didn't realize who this man was, in fact – indeed how important he was to be, too.

FORREST SELVIG: Did people think then that he was important?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Oh, I think they liked him. I think they thought he had a great deal on the ball. To be truthful, I really didn't know him very well. He was a wild guy. He was kind of a tall, lanky guy from the West. All I did at that party that night was to – finally it was decided that I should take Jackson away from the party because he was getting pretty obstreperous. So we went over to the bar by the Art Students League and had a few drinks. And then I left. After the war I'd see them all. I was a member of The Club, and I would drink at the Cedar Bar. I didn't know anybody terribly well. But I mean I was asked to be on panels. I knew them all.

FORREST SELVIG: Going back to Jackson Pollock, did he seem somebody that was going to become significant? In those days, did they say this man was going to be somebody?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I never heard this. The first time I was aware that Pollock was important, or that people were talking about Pollock generally was when he had – he was in a group show at Peggy Guggenheim's, and I was on furlough. I think it was about 1943, somewhere in there. And Pollock had a tremendous – well, it was the size of a mural – a tremendous picture. And a lot of people, a lot of my friends stated to talk about this. You see, I was in the Army. I never knew anything about this – for example, the influence of Breton, Masson. I'll give you one interesting thing. Stuart Davis wrote me a letter in the Army the first year I was in, trying to cheer me up – I still have this letter somewhere –, in which he gives a long account of taking Léger out for lunch. And I think it was on Fourteenth Street. They walked up and down Fourteenth Street, and Stuart said how excited Léger was, you know, by the storefronts and all that. This would have been typical Léger material. But this is what I missed, you see. I never knew these artists. Some of my friends who weren't in the war, I believe one of them studied with Ozenfant. It was at this time that Hans Hofmann's School had started. I was completely unaware of all this. In the Army I eventually went overseas. In the last year of the war, I made maps for the 949th Photogrammetry Engineer outfit. These were maps for the bombing of Japan and the Japanese islands. I lived with this little outfit on Guam. And then after the war there were a few months before I went home. They had a competition to do a mural for the enlisted men's recreation center. Which I won. So I had a nifty time. They gave me an empty barracks. And I got some masonite. And somewhere I got paint from the Air Corps, you know, they paint little things on the noses of planes. And these paints were so punk that I had to mix white with all of them to get them to come out right in consistency. I have photographs of the mural. The subject of the mural was Native Life on Guam. Here's a picture --

FORREST SELVIG: Is it still there?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I don't know whatever happened to it. Here's a picture of me on Guam in the Army with my goddamned mural.

FORREST SELVIG: Native life, my gosh.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, there's a bombed out church and a ghana, you know. And people are throwing nets in the water. And women are scrubbing clothes in the Guamanian brooks and so on. So then I got home. And I got out of the Army. I don't know what happened to that thing. It's probably destroyed by now. But it was at that time when I got out that I had all sorts of strokes of luck. I mean, God, when I think back on how fortunate I was

in that year of 1946. Shall I continue about this?

FORREST SELVIG: Yes, sure.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, I got out. I'll never forget it as long as I live. I got back from Fort Dix. I'd had ear trouble. I had to go to the hospital for a few days - I got back with all my little ribbons and so forth. I was a sergeant in the Engineers. The first night I got home my father asked me whether I was going to go into the business. He had previously indicated that perhaps I should stay in the Army and paint on Sundays. Which was a great laugh to my buddies.

FORREST SELVIG: You mean to make a career of the Army?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes, make a career of the Army and perhaps paint on Sundays, you know. And oh, I stayed for a few days with my family I guess. It was at this time that I met a woman who had an enormous influence on my life. I don't think I'm being indiscreet here. She's the artist Dorothy Andrews. She used to show at Georgette Passedoit's. She had two or three shows. She has presently been living for ten years in Kania in Crete, on the island of Crete. By chance I met a friend in the Museum of Modern Art - I was still in uniform - and the classmate and I really didn't like each other. So George said, "Well, you should meet this friend of mine Dorothy Andrews." Well, we met and we were quite taken by each other. But it was through Dot that I met almost everybody that I was to know after the war. I think in terms of your history here that this would include the following people. There was the artist Reuben Tam, the artist Hyde Solomon; as I said to you, the artist Carl Nesjar, the Norwegian painter.

FORREST SELVIG: I've heard of him principally in relation to Picasso.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, that's what he's famous for. But he's also famous in Norway.

FORREST SELVIG: He's a sculptor.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: No, he's an oil painter - well, I mean he's a sculptor doing Picasso stuff. You see what happened was that he and a friend invented this mural technique. What it consists of is - on a wall it's sort of like an Eskimo Pie: it's as you move into the wall, you go from a layer of concrete to a layer of small pebbles to a layer of concrete. Well, now, when you take a blast - a sharp blast gun -, you blast through the initial layer of concrete, revealing pebbles, and the pebbles give you an actual contrasting texture. And Carl has done many murals including his own. Well, we all met. And there were lots of people. Freddy Farr, his previous wife, Dorothy Farr, Jim Brooks, and Charlotte his wife. And that summer I went back to Maine. I settled -

FORREST SELVIG: This was in 1946?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Dorothy Andrews lived in a small village called Trevett on Hodge's Island near Boothbay Harbor, Maine. And as I said, I think she was for all of us artists in those days a kind of Madame de Sevigne. She used to live over at 68 East Twelfth Street and we all used to go there and have parties. Well, I forgot to mention one thing. In the Army fairly early in the war, I met this fellow who came from Chicago. His name is John Wally. And he knew Shiva the paint maker. I was still in this camouflage outfit. And one day he started to do some sketches in the barracks using a type of paint I'd never heard of called casein. And when I got out of the Army, I went to see Mr. and Mrs. Wally in Chicago. And John said, "Come on, we'll go over and see Shiva. I want you to meet him." So Shiva was very nice, and he said, "Here I'll give you a set of these caseins." So when I got to Maine that summer - as I said, I was living in an empty house in the kitchen - and I had started to work in oils, which had been my medium prior to the war. And one day I wanted to make some sketches, took the stuff out, squeezed it, and I had a marvelous time. Honestly, I took to that stuff like a duck to water. And there were many reasons for this. But primarily it dries fast, it's easy to repaint, I was temperamentally unable to work long lengths of time on a painting, and I loved the colors. The colors tended to be slightly matte. And also I love to work on paper. So all of these things combined with what was emotionally a very happy summer, and that fall I had produced, oh, I guess twenty of these caseins. Is this of interest to you?

FORREST SELVIG: Yes, sure.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: And I lived in a sort of hot water tenement in New York at 109 East Third Street. Well, Reuben Tam, who I got to know, and Stuart Davis recommended that I go see Mrs. Halpert. And I'll never forget it because up to this moment I had had really no success at all, and I was thirty-two years old. So Edith said, "Well, you leave your stuff here and come back for it." So the next week, I walked in. I'll never forget it because Jake Lawrence was there, and Jake Lawrence was a great hero of mine. Over the years since, I've gotten to know him. He was already famous. So Edith said, "Look, these are the most interesting things I've seen all year." And at this point I practically fainted. And she said, "I want to see your work over the following year." So I lived in New York that winter. I continued to paint Maine although I was living in New York. The following summer I went back to Trevett - I lived in Trevett in the summertime until 1962. Well, I took my work back that fall. And for

some reason Edith said that she was not going to handle anybody at that point, but she would make me a part of a three-man show. And she said, "If you don't want to do this, you'd better peddle your stuff around."

FORREST SELVIG: What did she mean when she said she wasn't going to handle anybody at that time?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, at that time she said she was not going to take anybody else on.

FORREST SELVIG: I see.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, later on she indeed did. Which kind of miffed me. But in many ways she was very nice to me. So she said, "You're going to have to make up your mind." So - I tell my students this - I simply peddled my stuff around Fifty-Seventh Street. I went to Betty Parsons, who was terribly nice to me and liked my work, but said my pictures were too small for her gallery. And then I went to see Mrs. Willard. Apparently she didn't care for my work at all. Then I went to see Nierendorf. Well, the old man was awfully nice. I explained my situation with Halpert, you know, about having a three-man show. He said in his Germanic voice, "Mr. Kienbusch, this is no way to lose your artistic virginity." And then the poor man died the next week. Then the fourth dealer I went to was Miss Kraushaar. And I'll never forget it. I laid all my stuff out on the floor and we all looked at it. I explained the situation with Mrs. Halpert. And she said, "I am interested in your work, and you'll have to make a decision." She said, "I'll take you on, I mean I'll show you for a few years," and that was it. She became my dealer, and she has been since 1947.

FORREST SELVIG: So this stopped the three-man show with Edith then?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: No, that same fall - I had done those three collages which I mentioned to you and, as I said, one of them is hanging in the Modern - she did say, "Look, Bill, Margaret Mill [not Dorothy] is organizing a show of collages at the museum of Modern Art. You ought to take your collages over."

FORREST SELVIG: "She" meaning Edith Halpert said this?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes. Which was very nice of her. I didn't know anything about it. So that's when I went over to the Modern. And again they ask you - they always ask you to come back in a week. So I came back. I was wrapping them up thinking that nothing was going to happen. And she said, "Oh, we'll take this one for the show." To me, this was the greatest thing that ever happened; it's going to be shown in the museum! And then Alfred Barr bought it for the Museum.

FORREST SELVIG: Who was Margaret Miller?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, she was a very pleasant lady. She's no longer with the Museum. She was there for many years, though. She organized that collage show long before Seitz had the Assemblage show and all that. There was never any catalogue of it. But if you're interested, I'd like to tell you what it was like in the 50's.

FORREST SELVIG: Yes.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: In The Club and all those things.

FORREST SELVIG: Before we get into that let me just ask you, the three-man show with Edith Halpert did come through? Or did not?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: No, I turned it down. You see there was no follow-up. I mean, what do you do?

FORREST SELVIG: She wasn't taking you on so -

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: She would show me, she would have all the big shots come in, a lot of publicity. But what do you do? You use up one-third of the pictures you would have used for your own one-man show, and that's it. And there's no follow-up.

FORREST SELVIG: Who was she planning on showing you with?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Oh, heck.—

FORREST SELVIG: It isn't important.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: One of them was a woman. I can't remember - I don't know whether it was - I get the funny feeling it might have been Hedda Sterne - I'm not sure. There were three people involved. I don't think it was Miss Sterne. It was somebody... Oh, later on she bought a picture of mine. She's always been very gracious. And I'm quite fond of her. But I was kind of miffed at having worked a whole year for her and nothing happened. Well, the strange thing here was that when I finally got to know the art world after the war - I came in kind of

late – I must have been aware of Pollock, say, but 1947, 1948 because I saw the great show at Betty Parsons's. And I eventually became aware of abstract expressionism through Art News and so on. And I was elected a member of The Club. I went there for many years. And although I never knew any of the artists very well, I did know them all. And, you know, one can remember the first time he saw all these kids – they were kids then – like Larry Rivers, Grace Hartigan, the poet who died at the Museum of Modern Art, Frank O'Hara. Well, there they were. And they were all probably in their twenties at that point. But I think there were two things about the period. One was that this was the last time I think that there was a sense of camaraderie and a great sense of excitement. I think afterwards that people like Hess tended to overdo the whole thing, that the thing was pushed almost beyond its limits. Frankly, I feel sorry for the artists who were not on the first team of abstract expressionism. Because they were left hanging with a style. And I think the great thing from my point of view about my own work was that I didn't get, so to speak, plugged in to abstract expressionism until after I had become solidly involved with landscape itself and basically in the tradition of Arthur Dove, Marin, Hartley, and these men. So that when I did become influenced by abstract expressionism in the fifties – and obviously there are pictures I've painted which I would never have done if it hadn't been for Bill de Kooning and Franz Kline – nevertheless the major drive was still my own. And I wasn't ever going to remove myself very far from some sort of personal rapport with my work.

FORREST SELVIG: You mean that this would not be possible with other artists? You feel that they did remove themselves?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes, I did feel this to some degree. I'm not going to mention names, but I do feel that there are certain artists who went so overboard on this style. In retrospect, it's really kind of mannerist painting. You know, so much had to do with the gesture, the manipulations of the paint, and so on. At their worst they were no better than bad John Singer Sargent's, I mean they were John Singer Sargent's. It was just as cold creamy in its way. At their best, in the case of Bill de Kooning, some of Phil Guston's best work, they were marvelous artists. And I think they've taken a terrible beating since. I still think that Phil Guston's best work is underrated. This last show at the Jewish Museum, which got terrible notices, I thought, was a remarkable show. In any event, we all used to go over to the Cedar Bar. And in those days before the girls from Mademoiselle magazine and all the people who came in to see all the famous brush pushers, we had a wonderful time. And – oh, who wrote that wonderful book called The Golden Spur? She died recently. She was a wonderful writer. Well, it's a book about that – it's the only book that exists about that period which really tells you what it was like. Dawn Powell. A book called The Golden Spur. Actually The Golden Spur is the Cedar Bar. Well, what happened? Pollock would come in – he was living in Springs – he'd come into the Cedar Bar with his blue jeans on. And I remember one night we were drinking. And he said, "I can't seem to make any money. So I'm going to incorporate myself like Rockwell Kent." And that's all he talked about. He said, "I'm going to incorporate myself like Rockwell Kent. I'm going to make some money." And here was a man, you know, whose work in a few years would be worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. Franz would come in every night and have his beers.

FORREST SELVIG: Franz Kline?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes, he paid me a very high compliment once. I've never forgotten it. We were in there one night. Is this too garrulous?

FORREST SELVIG: No, no, this is fine.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, we were sitting there. Gus Peck, who was my boss at Brooklyn, and Franz and myself, and somebody else. And some drunk came over and said to me, "I don't like your work. I think it stinks." I said, "Well, that's your privilege. I don't care." And he said, "Well, I don't only not like your work, I don't like you." Well, I'd had a few drinks, and besides which Gus Peck – Augustus Peck, who is the artist and Director of the Brooklyn Museum Art School – is a very big man, about six feet six, you know. So I got up and said something like, "Well, what do you want to make of it? We'll go outside and decide this." And Gus got up. He was all full of vinegar. Whereupon this guy chickened out, you see.

FORREST SELVIG: I bet he did.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well then Franz said to me, "You know, Bill, artists in our position must expect this." Well, for Franz to say this to me was like being given the accolade because I was a great admirer of his. He was a very, very sweet man. But as the years passed, there were more and more onlookers, more and more little girls – as I said, from fashion magazines –, more and more strange people who weren't artists, and they were just in here to listen to what the famous artists were going to say that night, or maybe somebody would beat somebody else up. And after a while people started to move out. They'd go to the Five Spot, or they'd go to some other bar. And then of course the Cedar was all torn down eventually. But there was this glorious moment when... And we used to have all these panel discussions once a week.

FORREST SELVIG: At the Cedar Bar?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: No, no. First they were on Eighth Street. Then they were on Broadway. Then they were on Fourteenth Street. I think there were three different places. And I was there. As a matter of fact, I was sitting next to Alfred Barr the night that they had the memorial meeting for Jackson Pollock. And de Kooning was on the panel. And there was a little bit of argument between Greenberg and de Kooning. The moderator said to Bill, "Bill, what do you think of Jackson?" And he made this famous remark. He said, "You know," in that Dutch accent, "Well, Jackson was the icebreaker. He was the man who broke the ice. And after Jackson we could all get going." Well then, as I recall, Greenberg turned around and said, "I think what you're saying is that the implication is that although Pollock was an icebreaker, he was not inherently a great artist, and I think that Pollock was a great artist. He was also an icebreaker." Do you follow?

FORREST SELVIG: Sure.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Apparently de Kooning was not going to commit himself on the ultimate value of Pollock's work. But it was quite a meeting and one thinks it in the past now. I remember seeing Pollock on Eighth Street and Sixth Avenue one day. I was going over to have breakfast at Riker's and this tall guy with the balding head and the fierce face and the blue jeans, you know, striding down the avenue. I guess he was - well, he was a great brilliant man but he was kind of mixed up, too, you know. He was a terribly, terribly heavy drinker. Well, all of a sudden one day the bottom fell out of the whole thing.

FORREST SELVIG: Why did the bottom fall out?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, I think there are a number of reasons here. I think that in some ways the movement was over inflated. As I said, I must say candidly that I always felt that Hess blew up that marvelous balloon too big. I mean in those days if you weren't an abstract expressionist, you just weren't anything. And if you weren't one of Hess's boys, you were just out. This was the art magazine. Of course, the Art Digest had some influence, but compared to Hess, it had very little.

FORREST SELVIG: Why was that?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: well, Tom Hess apparently was the discoverer of de Kooning. Although I don't really know all the ins and outs of this. I think he discovered de Kooning perhaps through Elaine de Kooning although de Kooning was well known among artists. Greenberg of course discovered Pollock. It's interesting if you look back at Art News prior to Hess's discovery of abstract expressionism, the years before, I think, Hess had just come in.

FORREST SELVIG: When did Hess come in, do you remember? After the war?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I don't know. I wouldn't dare say. I think probably 1946 or 1947, somewhere in there. But if you look at the issues just before his discovery of this movement it seems to me, in recollection, you would have had no idea that any of this stuff was going on. It was even true of Greenberg. His review of Gorky's last show was not good. I think he apologized for it later on.

FORREST SELVIG: You mean Greenberg himself -?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Greenberg himself apparently made a very bad mis-estimate of Gorky, when Gorky had his last show at Julian Levy's. But the moment this thing burst, and there was considerable antagonism to the movement, I mean particularly from, say, Miss Genauer, to some degree from Howard Devree of the Times, and so on. Actually the movement won on an ad that Huntington Hartford put in the newspaper in which he damned de Kooning.

FORREST SELVIG: I remember that.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, this ad somehow rebounded off the wall in favor of Bill. And it was at this moment that everybody - prices started to go up and so on. But you asked me how the thing stopped. Well, I think it was over-inflated. An when, for instance, Canaday wrote that famous lead article, his first article in the Times as editor damning the abstract expressionists the trouble there was - I have to say this - the trouble there was that the third and fourth-team boys were simply not very good. Well, this is true of almost any movement. So there was a certain modicum of truth in what Canaday had to say, although I'm not exactly a great admirer of Canaday's. But that was one thing.

FORREST SELVIG: This was around 1959 or 1960?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes, no - it was the winter of 1959-1960, right in there. The second thing was that I have a feeling that to some degree, for the most part the abstract expressionist boys had said about all they could say. The best of them go on in that particular style. Now the second thing that happened was, at that moment, Jasper Johns had his show, and a new point of view suddenly appeared. In other words, this was a kind of surrealist --

FORREST SELVIG: This was at Castelli?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes, at Castelli.

FORREST SELVIG: These were the numbers and the flags?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes. And you see, this was another point of view. Basically I think this was a surrealist point of view. And right on top of that, within a year we had Warhol and Pop Art, and then on top of that we had Op and so forth and so on.

FORREST SELVIG: But going back to the abstract expressionism, this was something that sort of swept the whole country. A boom like that was pretty explosive. It seems to me it was a new way of looking at things, a new way of thinking about the whole function of art, wasn't it? Wasn't it a whole day of life really, a philosophy? It completely cut off the past, it seems to me.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, yes, it was a new point of view. Rosenberg's famous article in Art News - Rosenberg in that article wasn't quite right about everything, but generally speaking it was like this. He said that when the artist approaches the canvas, he approaches it now as an event: on this canvas he will now paint. But he will not paint with preconceived ideas. He will not paint as a navigator who is commencing a voyage would know the end of the voyage. He paints now toward an unknown harbor. In other words, one thinks of de Kooning constantly repainting his pictures to the point where they have to grab them out of the studio finally. It's almost like an endless boxing match where you are constantly shifting. In other words, if everything happens you shift, and if then a certain thing happens you shift again. The whole painting is in a state of continual flux. It was a new point of view. In some ways it was very metaphysical. It was also in many ways very lyrical. And I think that the thing that influenced me was a certain lyric quality about it in terms of the manipulation of paint, your brush, and all of this. Now these are things today which are completely out. In other words, I mean the use of a brush per se, and so forth, is out, you know, with hard-edge painting, cool painting, and so forth.

FORREST SELVIG: Yes.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: It was fundamentally expressionist in that it had great gusto, great verve, great excitement. I think these paintings sometimes were what I might call difficult poems. You read a poet and he leaves out all the verbs. You don't quite understand what he's saying. But nevertheless he's saying it, if you just take the trouble to really look, but in a metaphorical way. And of course the great excitement about the movement was that for the first time, as we well know, American artists were influencing Europe.

FORREST SELVIG: Yes.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I think American artists had a vivacity, I mean if one compares, say, Kline with Soulages, Kline has a kind of Whitmanesque brutality.

FORREST SELVIG: Ruggedness.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Ruggedness. Whereas Soulages is slick.

FORREST SELVIG: Exactly. Elegant, yes.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Elegant. He varnished the pictures and all that. Well, you know, it's interesting as you look back now, you know, when the great tidal wave washed out again how many people got left on the beach. And in some ways, to some degree, I think for the artists who are now of my generation in their fifties, if you were lucky - and I think this is important - somehow you maintained some sort of historical place in your country's art. And it's almost as if critics kept pushing you into an historical pigeon hole. Like one might say of my work, "Well, he was a tie-up between Marin and Hartley and that gang and abstract expressionism, and so forth; some sort of continuity developed through Kienbusch's work there." But then they place you in this, and that's the end of you. You've had it. Or a museum director will say, "Well, why should we show you. I mean, after all we've shown you; why buy more work; we bought you." And this is understandable. The artist if he's lucky has a brief period of success, and I think it's much truer today than it was in earlier times, then he is really left stranded. You know, you think of certain artists, and you say, "My God, think what publicity they had two years ago. Whatever happened to Joe Smith?" you know.

FORREST SELVIG: Yes.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Where are the pictures of yesteryear? All of a sudden they're out. We have an absolute genius for committing obsolescence.

FORREST SELVIG: Yes. But now don't you think that that is something that is relatively new at least in America, new since the Second World War? I don't think it existed before. Of course, people weren't so art conscious

before either.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: People weren't so art conscious. The tempo of life was slower. Nevertheless the public was quite cruel I think to many fine artists in those days. I mean one thinks of Max Weber, Alfred Maurer, Stuart Davis as he was getting started. I mean these men were known to be fine artists by their friends. And Marsden Hartley and so on. But the tempo was slower. I think a number of things happened after the Second World War. One, I think a great deal of money was made in that period of the 1950s, a great deal of new money was made in the United States. And somewhere in there it was discovered that art was a commodity which paid off awfully well if you bought the right men. And that a good deal of interest even in the abstract expressionist movement was the result of discovering that a Pollock which had been worth \$1,500 in 1950, by 1960 would be worth \$50,000, and by 1968 would be worth \$150,000. I think this was part of it. I think people built new houses. I think they had walls to hang pictures on. I think that art which had previously had not so much status, so to speak, now suddenly in the late 50s and 60s became a great status symbol. I mean we think of collections – I don't mean that those people were seeking status, I mean we'll take Mr. Heller who has a great collection; we'll take Mr. Hirshhorn. These are great collections. They're famous. I mean they're just as famous as Ambrose Vollard was famous in his day, you know. I can tell you of a couple I saw last winter – I don't know their names – they're quite wealthy I guess, you know, marble floors and all that stuff. And there they have these pictures on the wall. They're really not very good. But they're there. I mean these are real works of art. And this gives them status. They're art collectors. I think all these things militated – an extraordinary art movement, a great deal of new money, a great deal, really of new houses, the status of being a collector, which I think was a new thing in terms of its importance. For example, we had organizations like The Friends of the Whitney Museum and so forth. You belong to that. You buy pictures. You give them to the museum. You establish a status within the community.

FORREST SELVIG: That's a very different thing from buying pictures because you like them.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes, well, I think that of course some of these collectors really do love their paintings. I think, for instance, Mr. Hirshhorn probably is a marvelous man in his way in terms of, you know, he really does like his pictures and so forth. I think there are of course people who don't care for them really. I mean we hear all sorts of stories about Texas bankers who are simply storing away paintings they bought and then taking them out like stocks five or ten years later for resale. I remember Miss Kraushaar saying to me that the great tragedy of the American artist today is that he really never quite knows where he stands.

FORREST SELVIG: How? In relation to what?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, in the sense that – well, I remember Jack Heliker. We were looking at a Verve magazine, a picture of Jacques Villon in his studio in Saint Cloud or some place, you know, out with his dog, ivy growing up the wall, his easel, and his paintings, and a few people around. And Jack was saying, "God, how I wish I had that kind of life!" In other words, how I wish that at a certain point, people would buy my work, I would be considered not the hottest thing in the market, but I would have some respect, continuing respect in the community. Speaking only for myself, I don't think that – well, you mentioned very early in our conversation – you paid me a high compliment – I was quite shocked at the moment – because I'm so far out of things for the most part that unless I chance to meet somebody who says, "I've seen a picture of yours and I liked it," and so on, you feel – at least I feel – more and more disoriented in terms of the society I'm living in now. Maybe that's one reason that artists tend to congregate: because it gives them some sense of identity because they're with each other, you know. But when I'm in Maine I have much more of a sense, say, that I am an artist, that I am respected.

FORREST SELVIG: In Maine?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes, in Maine. Because obviously I paint in Maine a lot, and my pictures derive from Maine. The people I know today of my generation, my age – and most of them have been, as we think of it, successful at some time during their lives, quite successful – today I think are living for the most part in semi-isolation with not much sense of any rapport between what they're doing anymore and this resent art public. I think the artist is lucky if he got all those ribbons at some point in his life, and he continues to do his work, and you know; and that's it. Otherwise, I'm not sure. I think we were all a much happier crowd back in the 40 and 50s than we are today. And I think that even goes for the very famous artists like Bill de Kooning. Perhaps I'm wrong. Perhaps I'm talking from too personal a point of view in terms of my own personal circumstances, you know.

FORREST SELVIG: Certainly in those days this movement was new, it was starting, it was exciting. Everyone was, you know, involved.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes. We were full of beans. There was a great wave of affirmation.

FORREST SELVIG: But it wasn't only the artists. It was the museum people, too. People who wrote about art. Everybody. It was this national pride that you were mentioning, too. But in those days did you ever think back to

the people you had known before the war, people like Ben Shahn and Jack Levine and people of this nature – maybe you didn’t know them –, but how they must have felt left out and sort of old hat?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, what happens in any generation is that only a few artists who are working in a particular style or general point of view survive into the next generation. I mean, as we’ve mentioned, people like Phil Evergood, whom I admire – I admire his best work – and Ben Shahn and Jack and – who else? There are a few others. I can think of other artists who have not survived, who are teaching in universities, who have tenure, and so forth. They have New York shows. And they get a raise in salary and so forth. But I know how they must feel. They were true to themselves I think. Particularly the social boys, I think.

FORREST SELVIG: They should remain true to themselves, shouldn’t they?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes, well obviously. But that doesn’t mean that they all are. I’ve seen plenty of artists who just turn around when the winds are going the other way. But, no, what I mean is that too often today art is treated as a kind of fashion. A friend of mine said that in looking at certain pictures today – he was, I think, referring to Rauschenberg really – that one has the feeling that they are making an advertising presentation. You know, as if one walked into the office of the bosses and said, “Now look, this is brand new.” And one dealer was quoted as saying, “I don’t give a God damn what it’s like, as long as it’s new.” Art is a commodity. It’s a kind of chic product. I tend to admire Warhol because I think he is the only Pop guy who pointed this out in a really satirical way. For example, in multiple image business he had originally used, I understand, in the shoe ad or leather pocketbooks he’d used that image. And then he used it of course in his famous things of soup and Marilyn Monroe. But I think Warhol is good. I mean, these other people, who shall be nameless, I don’t think so much of.

FORREST SELVIG: He was good because of his – what?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Because just what we’ve been saying. He was good because he was true somehow to something. He did discover something quite satirical. In its way maybe it’s not profound, but maybe it is, too. I would lay my money on Warhol that he is the only man who actually did it in terms of so-called popular art. I don’t know – I think that today – well, there’s a kind of malaise that seems to infect everybody. For example, there’s a wonderful expression: so and so is “doing his thing,” which I found out the other day comes out of Emerson, so they say. Well, if you analyze this expression it means that everybody who is doing their thing are all of equal merit. Like you’re doing your thing. I’m doing my thing. The janitor outside is doing his thing. Do you get what I’m driving at? In other words, one of my best friends, an artist who teaches with me at Brooklyn – it’s Reuben Tam – says that since he has many advanced students he has to make a point of seeing exactly what is going on. He said what’s going on now is that the concept of the avant garde is breaking down, that everybody is doing their thing. In other words, the concept of the avant garde, which is like somebody shooting a pistol off at the Oklahoma land rush, and you all get set and run... you see, the people who are ahead are in the avant garde. This is collapsing.

FORREST SELVIG: They’re all running in the same direction for the one thing. And you mean that now they’re not running in the same direction? Or some of them aren’t running at all?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: No, that isn’t quite it. It’s that the winners don’t count. That the concept of winning in the sense of running, you see, in a race is beginning to peter out. In other words, it may even be that various styles are now accepted much more. I mean the days of Art News and Hess... I repeat myself. If you were not working in this style, buddy, you were out. But today I think, oddly enough, the hard-edge boys and the rest of these people kind of say, “Well, now you do your thing, and I’ll do my thing, and we’ll meet at the corner drug store later.” This is what I feel.

FORREST SELVIG: Now do you think that this is something that will last? Or does it just appear to break down one system and be the beginning of another one?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, the only thing I see today, which – we talked about this before the interview – was the possibility that the cooperation of the artist and the engineer may produce some wonderful things. And I think the word is “thing.” We use the word all the time. Mr. Nordess is having a big show now called “Art as Objects” or “Art as Things.”

FORREST SELVIG: Which is really craft work, though?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes. Nevertheless, I think something very extraordinary might come out of this. I haven’t seen it yet. I haven’t seen anything. Occasionally I will see a piece of what we call minimal sculpture, which I find quite exciting. In some ways, at the moment maybe art is being thought of as making toys. You know, it’s kind of large toys. Toys have symbolism, don’t they? Like dolls or things; like you were hugging a kid. See, that’s a symbol. But these things are not really symbolic. They’re sort of big, non-objective play toys. One might think of late Miró’s or something like that kind of thing.

FORREST SELVIG: Yes.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: And I think some handsome things can come out of that.

FORREST SELVIG: One might also think of Calder.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I think that's a great example because I think he's a great sculptor. And the element of play is so important in Calder. The fact that the first thing he ever did was a little circus, little things going around. And Miró's harlequins, and the potato man, all those pictures. On the other hand, I must repeat that – well, we could investigate one more thing here, and that is the breakdown of any kind of iconography in the 20th century. This sounds like Art History 101. But it seems to me truthfully that in the 20th century the artist, as Motherwell once said I think, came face to face with himself to a degree that he had no iconography to fall back on. And the result is that – one result would be expressionism in which the artist is shouting at you, right at your ear about his personification of his own agonies and things which he sees or feels. Now the opposite of this, you see, would be, say, Mondrian. Sociologists said that when civilization changed from hunting into agriculture in this great crisis, there were three different basic approaches to art: one was the terror image, in which man seeing all sorts of dreadful elements made pictures of them in order to localize them and conquer them. Then there was the labyrinth, which is Pollock or Tobey, in which man made a labyrinthine maze of the world he lived in. And the third approach was Mondrian, where man said, "I am going to make a picture so perfect, you can't bust it. I'm going to make this thing absolutely perfect." So these were three methods that man used to come to grips with his environment. And of course, we see them everyday. We see them in hard-edge art. We see them in expressionism. We see it in Pollock, Tobey, and so on. But basically man discovered in the 20th century that he didn't have an iconography which incidentally would immediately communicate itself to other people. In some ways art is terribly personal, isn't it?

FORREST SELVIG: Yes.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: One thinks of a great artist like Paul Klee and so on. I mean, when Raphael was commissioned by the Doge or whoever it was to do a picture of the Virgin Mary, Raphael would go get his girl friend and set her up on the stand and say, "Snap into it." And he would do this great picture of her. And everybody would say, "Well, you know Raphael is knocking out this picture of his friend Ruby." And the moment that that picture moved from his easel into that church, it became a completely different picture. It was then, indeed, the Virgin Mary. It was no longer his girl friend. And it could be appreciated on many levels, couldn't it? First of all, the iconography of the Christian religion. Secondly, that it was a good-looking girl. Thirdly, that the intelligentsia of the period would understand what a marvelous piece of painting it was. So think what the artist had going for him then. And what's more, he could communicate on all these levels. You know, when Giotto went through those towns, it was like Joe di Maggio. Everybody got out and screamed bloody murder. "My God, Giotto is coming!" It was like Lindbergh or something. The only phenomenon we have like this is Andrew Wyeth today.

FORREST SELVIG: But this is something that the people who were protest painters and still are protest painters talk about: apropos of the Abstract expressionists. The abstract expressionists gave up a real means of communicating directly to the average person and sort of turned in on themselves. And yet, expression itself was there. But expression how? In an emotional area only, would you say? Expression through the properties of the pain itself rather than through any kind of subject matter?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, I think for the average person these paintings are very difficult. This is the most obvious thing to say. In other words, if I were to take, for example, a fisherman friend of mine into the Museum of Modern Art and show him Motherwell's Spanish Elegy, he would wonder what the hell that was all about.

FORREST SELVIG: Whereas he could look at a Ben Shahn or something.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: He could look at a Wyeth. My Lord, you go to the Farnsworth Museum in Rockland, and they have a Wyeth collection, and it's chock-full of people, you know. It's immediately identifiable in terms of their life in that area. I didn't quite get your question but I think these pictures are not easy. I really do believe to some degree that there was a definite business of, you know, "Screw the bourgeoisie. We don't care if you get these things or not." I think that was true.

FORREST SELVIG: I think the question really boils down to, to whom are you communicating in an abstract expressionist painting? Or are you communicating to anyone?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, I'd rather have you phrase the question and ask me what I think my paintings are doing because in that sense, you see, although my paintings have been influenced by abstract expressionism, I feel that I have always attempted to – well, maybe I haven't always – but I feel that I've attempted a great deal to give clues in terms of the material I was using; and not just for the sake of giving clues as if one were to hand out little clues to people, but because I personally feel this way about the work. I don't think it's necessary to

understand a picture in the sense that this is about Whistler's mother, or this is about something we can specifically re-state, you see. I think a picture could – I mean Motherwell's shapes, although I've been told they go back to phallic symbols of the bull, nevertheless, you don't really have to – I'm not a terribly great admirer of Motherwell particularly – but nevertheless looking at those pictures, you can get a sense of tragedy by the shapes themselves. Looking at Bill de Kooning's Gotham News you get a wild sense of subways in New York and old newspapers flying across Union Square sidewalks and sick little white powdered girls going out of Kline's and so forth. You get this immediately without having to know that's a girl, that's a paper, and so on. In fact in some ways abstract expressionism comes out of the great mainstream of art, in the sense that... I try to explain to my students like this: that if you paint the ocean and a rock and a pine, you don't catalogue them – at least I don't. What you're really ending up with is ocean-rock-pine. In other words, these things interlink, they elaborate each other. And the result is a new shape out of these shapes which may not be easily identifiable, but still gives you a sense of the whole thing. As, for example, in poetry like some of Dylan Thomas's early poems, it's pretty damn hard to understand what he's doing.

FORREST SELVIG: Yes.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: But you do get a sense of the whole thing. I mean Ad Reinhardt's famous cartoon, you know, where the painting points at you and says, "Well now, what do you represent?" Why the hell does the painting always have to be about something that can be immediately identified? Life isn't like this. I can't in words say exactly how I feel at this moment. I couldn't really write it. I know how I feel. It's like being in love. You can't describe the thing. If you could you probably wouldn't be in love. In other words, there are all sorts of things you really can't describe. I think the thing about Wyeth is that in spite of this incredible descriptive business in his work, there are all sorts of things in a Wyeth which really aren't descriptive in a strange way. And that's why his art at best has a really true attraction for people and not just people who say, "Oh, boy, there's an old man in the woods." I'm afraid I've been terribly garrulous here.

FORREST SELVIG: No, this is great. This is just what we want.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I was trying to think of stuff that would be of some interest, you know, in the sense of the historical business that we might have known about.

FORREST SELVIG: Have you ever had a confrontation, an argument, or a discussion with somebody who represented the more traditional school? Such as the group of people you worked with before the war.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, you see, in those days I believed what they were saying.

FORREST SELVIG: How did you happen to change really?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: The real change came when I discovered what it is I really loved. From my point of view, I think that you cannot paint unless you have a real obsessive identification with what you're doing. Otherwise you might as well take up knitting or something else. I find it terribly hard, in fact impossible in most cases, to commence a painting unless I really am engaged in this thing. And in my own work I have a feeling that very often I tend to symbolize or personify personal feelings which somehow get – there's a catharsis in the landscape. Do you follow? In other words, I'm able to project it primarily into aspect of landscape.

FORREST SELVIG: Yes.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: But I don't recall having – I don't see these people any more. I don't know what to say to you on that question. I just don't see them, that's all, so I won't discuss it. I do find among my friends who are not painters, and this includes a few relatives too, that they are not a bit concerned about my being a painter. They never ask me how my work is going. As I said to you earlier, I feel terribly removed at times. I remember reading something Paul Brock wrote in one of the art magazines, some little statement saying it was still just as lonely as ever in the studio. And it is. It is. When you get to be middle-aged, believe me, this business of constant recommitment to what you're doing, a constant ability to experience joy in some sort of new fashion rather than, you know, painting the old stuff is not easy. It's very hard. And also for obvious reasons. Now, for example, I feel at the moment, well, luckily I have all the pictures from my show, which was in January, so I don't have to worry, but I feel exhausted. I don't seem to have any new material. I'm about to commence a new picture. I think once I get into it I'll start to feel excited. I think the thing is when you get in your middle age – this is not self pity – you start to run down a bit. I mean your body isn't quite as spiffy as it used to be. I used to paint large oils on that wall there. God, I haven't done one in two years now. I just cannot get the energy or the oomph to go ahead on it. It seems to me that the really great artist so often – oh, God, one think of Picasso's body. You know, that great barrel of a chest. Or one thinks of Matisse, that big hulking man. On the other hand, I suppose there are artists who were very slim little men. But you somehow have to have the physique, too. There's an old expression about burning yourself out. I think it's very possible for an artist to do this. You could just absolutely, given the amount of energy and body oomph and everything else you've got, you can just absolutely burn yourself out. I think de Kooning – I shouldn't tape this, but I think de Kooning burned himself out.

And I think the pictures he's recently done are simply the burnt ends of what he previously had done.

FORREST SELVIG: Is this because one can run out of the joy of working?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes. I think you can run out of the joy of working. Although I think as an artist you always somewhere have it inside of you still. You always dream, you know.

FORREST SELVIG: Maybe the flame is not as high.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: All sorts of thing militate against this, you know. But – I mean you can have tragedies in your life. I mean, you didn't marry the girl you wished you'd married. You're starting to drink too much. You wish you had more of a rapport with your family. All of these things – you've got to take the laundry out tomorrow. From the sublime to the ridiculous, there are all sorts of things. It's not only true of artists. It's true of everybody. This business about the artist being so damn special. You know, we have this tradition of the artist as a hero, which is one of the big things in our society today. Particularly the tragic artist. This is the artist who gives his all for God and country, and then he blows his brains out. And this of course goes back to Van Gogh, and the romantic tradition of getting tuberculosis in the garret and dying on the stage. This had been the whole part of the century. I must say that in my own life... I wrote a story when I was very young – I guess this can go on tape – in Scribner's for August 1936, there's a story about my father and myself. It was quite a good story, too. And in one section of the story I'm describing what I was like in boarding school. I had been to see a movie – Journey's End. And I'd had a fight that night with these other guys in the dorm. And in the morning I had to go out of my room with my roommate and beat the shit out of these guys. And I kept dreaming about being a great hero and dying and so forth. And then I would project this, say, in terms of Van Gogh, poor man, you know, and his poor ear, and so on. Well, in many respects this is laughable. This is what a kid might think. But nevertheless, to a great degree, it seems to me that the dream that you have when you are very young to some degree you try and hold to it the rest of your life. Every once in awhile I see myself – I should never say all this... But I think the one thing about my own life as an artist is that I really did what I wanted to do. When things get messy I have this one sense of pride in myself that I never screwed it up as regards my work. I wish – who wouldn't? – I wish I were a better artist; I wish there were all sorts of things I could have done I apparently am not going to do. But nevertheless the most exciting thing of all was that the dream became, to some degree, a reality.

FORREST SELVIG: Yes.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: You know, I think of Hurricane Island. I think of the islands. There were days when I went out with the fishermen and Fay Dyer would let me off at Hurricane, and I'd walk up that hill with the apple orchard and the abandoned houses of the quarry workers and the goldenrod and everything. And I had this incredible sense of being right in my own land. I don't know how many people ever experience this. But there's a marvelous sense of enchantment. And it was this as an artist that I liked to get down. This is what is so exciting. And of course this point of view today, which is the point of view of the communication of an intimate sense of what has been perceived; this is out, you know. But that's all right. When Tam and I get feeling lousy we think of Bonnard. This man, think of all the periods that went on while Bonnard was pushing that brush.

FORREST SELVIG: Yes.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: And he persevered. And it was his own. And one fine day when I was in Paris in 1938, they had that marvelous Bonnard show. I wish I could have gotten that poster. And everybody woke up and said, "My God, old Pierre was quite something." But he simply stuck by his guns. And I think of Edward Hopper, that last show he had at the Whitney. When I went up to congratulate him, this huge, hulking, stooped man saying to me, "Do you really like it?" My God! His life's works! "Do you really think it's good?"

FORREST SELVIG: He was a lonely giant working by himself.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: You know I was told he had long periods when he didn't know what to do with himself. He had to have some sort of, as Cezanne would say, motif... so apparently he went to the movies a lot. He'd just go to the movies and sit there all day.

FORREST SELVIG: There's a great sense of alienation in his work.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I think so. I think enormous. Some writer said of Hopper that the asphalt road was the great symbol of a Hopper. The road, the lonely road, the chance to look. You know, what town are we in tonight.

FORREST SELVIG: Yes.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: In that sense Hopper relates to Thomas Wolfe, I think. Although Wolfe was an enthusiast and Hopper was basically a much more sharply defined man. But the awful loneliness of this goddamned country.

FORREST SELVIG: This is something you feel in everything he painted that I know of.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes. Over and over. Even his women, you know. His women are never going to get into bed with anybody. They look awful cold, don't they?

FORREST SELVIG: Yes.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: And then of course in his late life he painted a few pictures which are really disturbing. There's one of a house in Truro with a beautiful girl at the door wearing a kimono. You think this is Hopper having his final dream. You know, this beautiful blonde girl standing in this doorway of a typical Hopper clapboard house in Truro. It reminds me of some of Marin's very late work, where he had mermaids and ocean and so forth. The old man dreaming of -

FORREST SELVIG: Were you a great friend of Hopper's?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Oh, no, no. I just met him - I was introduced to him a couple of times. I've known quite a few artists but... This may interest you because I did meet Mr. Marin several times. One night Dorothy Andrews and I went out to the Marin's for dinner at Cliffside. And Edith Halpert was there. He wasn't feeling too well. It was very exciting though because you walked down this absolutely nondescript street which ended in a dead end at the river looking over toward New York. All the houses were identical, sort of brown clapboard shingled. And then you look in this one window. And there was this great Marin over the fireplace. He had this beautiful piano. He played Bach. And we went upstairs. He was in his rocking chair. His studio was simply a bedroom. He had an easel and junk all around. So I sat at his feet; there wasn't enough room. So I had the temerity to say, "Mr. Marin, what do you think of Marsden Hartley?" And the old man rocked. And he said, "Well Marsden was always Marsden Hartley." That's all he said. And I couldn't figure whether this was a real nasty dig. I don't think it was. I think what he was trying to say was that this man Hartley was always true to himself. I saw him one day at the Winslow Homer exhibition, and I overheard him talking. I was interested because he thought that Homer's oils were better than his watercolors. And I suddenly thought that he was right. After looking at the Homer watercolors over all those years, I think the oils are much greater. I gave him his book of letters to sign. And he wrote in it, "To Bill Kienbusch, may he survive. John Marin." Well, you know, that's kind of nice, isn't it?

FORREST SELVIG: Yes.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: And one time a friend of mine and I went down to Cape Split. No one was there. I didn't know John Jr. then. It was a foggy day. And there was this house on the point looking out toward the islands. We were looking for souvenirs, like maybe the master had left a few pictures outside. Well, we found in an outdoor fireplace some old tubes of paint. Believe me they were the most expensive - Lefere Fournier - you know, one of those blocks. So we gathered up some old tubes of paint and took them away as souvenirs. I met Hartley once. I was going into the army, and I had a few weeks left. And he was having a show at Macbeth's. And I went in I guess to show Macbeth my work. And there was Hartley. This was the next to the last year of his life. This was 1942. This big, gigantic, portly man with his Cyrano de Bergerac nose and a little blue cornflower in his buttonhole. His eyes were very blue, too. And he was terribly kind. He said, "Mr. Kienbusch, I can't see you work now but if you'll come down to the Hotel Algonquin, I'll look at it. Just call me up." Well, I went in the Army so shortly, there was no time to see him.

FORREST SELVIG: You literally just carried your work around and showed it to people?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, you see, casein - since I worked on paper it was quite easy.

FORREST SELVIG: Then on the basis of this they would say - apparently they usually wanted to keep the things about a week and look at them more, I gather?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, you know, dealers are pretty cagey. After all, it's their business. Miss Kraushaar used to say to me, "I run a store. If I don't sell the work, the store will fold."

FORREST SELVIG: That's true.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: And I think in those days, though, that they - maybe I'm prejudiced because she was always so sweet to me - but I think in those days, they were a kinder gang than they are now. I think that an awful lot of those dealers today are a pretty bloodthirsty bunch.

FORREST SELVIG: Well, wasn't it a different attitude? I mean in those days it wasn't something that was selling like pancakes; people were not buying like crazy as they are now. And now if you strike it right you make a great deal of money on it.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Antoinette used to say that when she was a kid and her father had the gallery on Fifth

Avenue on Saturday in the late afternoon, Luks and Bellows and Sloan would come in. And they usually had a bottle in the back there. And they'd all have a tug at it. And So-and-So would say, "Well, you know So-and-So is having a show. We've never heard of him." And everybody would say, "Well, good luck. I hope he makes a good thing out of it." There was a kind of warmth in those days, a wishing to the other person that he might be successful. Things were quiet. I mean you read Ira Glackens's book on what it was like, say, prior to the First World War. I mean you know all that group that revolted then. Boy, that wasn't much of a revolt! They had a hell of a good time of it, you know.

FORREST SELVIG: The Ashcan artists?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: The Ashcan. You know they were all eating at Mouquin. And they lived in nice houses on Tenth Street in the Village and so on. I had dinner with John Sloan one night. He said to me, "You know when I was a kid I knew every single artists there was." And he said, "Where were they? There were only three places: Philadelphia, New York City, and Boston. And I really liked all of them." Of course that isn't the case now. I would hate to be an artist starting out today. Thank God I don't have to start it all over again.

FORREST SELVIG: Why do you say that?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, I look at the students. Now my students are mostly housewives and do not intend to become professional artists. But of course a great many students. And they come from all over the world because we have the Max Beckmann scholarships. They come from England, Japan, India, all over. Tam told me of a student he had last year. And English kid, a very bright kid. And Mr. Tam was going to have a class criticism. So he said to the kid, "I wish you would put a picture of yours up." I don't know whether this is irrelevant, but the kid said, "Oh, I don't feel like it." "Well," Reuben said, "You know we're all going to have to put pictures up. I think you should put yours up too." The kid went over to the rack, picked out a completely blank canvas and put it up on the easel and said, "All right, if you want to criticize it, criticize that," Well now, what is implied here, you see, is a basically negative, hostile point of view toward any relevant criticism. Well, later on Reuben said he got to know this kid quite well. I said, "What did the boy do?" He said, "Well, my God, he spent the whole term over in a corner of the room on one canvas kind of tick-tack-toeing all over the canvas with no apparent structural basis at all. And the kid finally said, "Look, I can't..." He said, "Art today is not relevant anymore. We English artists are way ahead of you American artists in 1968. We get the point. The point is that art as you know it is over, buddy; you people are just behind the times now." And I bring this up because I think it really is relevant, that there is a strong feeling of negativism today among the young people in art, that art as we have known it has no relevance anymore, it's no longer a communication they feel in the sense that Dadaism or implications of Dada have become the most important thing perhaps. I think maybe the tragedy of this is that, whereas in the period of Dada it was really a political movement and had some real relevance to the times, that these kids find themselves hopefully committing atrocities which nobody really cares about. Do you follow me?

FORREST SELVIG: Yes. Nobody is shocked anymore.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Nobody is shocked at it. A friend of mine was saying that they watched a guy walk up the street from Washington Square with no clothes on the other day. A few girls got kind of upset. He said nobody else gave a damn. The cop finally stopped the guy on Eleventh Street. He was stark naked. In other words, it's not even fun to be irrational today. In other words, it doesn't have any meaning. You might carry this implication further to the point that you can't do anything today that anybody is really going to get worked up about it.

FORREST SELVIG: Why is that? Do you think that the society is just unshockable?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, to use the image of screwing the strings up on a violin, I think that we've screwed them so tight that we are in a great degree unshockable. I think also we try and protect ourselves constantly as human beings from excessive shock. Let me give you an illustration. A friend asked, "What do you read when you open the newspaper?" I said, "You won't believe it, but I read the obits, you know, who's died today. This always interests me. Then I read the sports section. And I also read Craig Claiborne on cooking because I happen to enjoy cooking. Though I can't do much of it." In other words, the last thing I get to is all that murder on the first page. For example, I like to read Sports Illustrated. And that makes me a big square. But the thing about sports, as a friend of mine said, is somebody wins, you know. We have been so conditioned to the loser, to the tragedy, the shock that we've finally reached the point where you have to protect yourself. One of our greatest poets - incidentally the only really famous person I know - is Marianne Moore - I know her quite well. She writes poems about little animals that have armor, and why does my father collect armor? We're all encasing ourselves against really these terrible slings and arrows I really do believe. Oh, such weird things! If you fly between here and Tokyo, you should take a day off to get used to the time. Do you follow? In other words, the events, the newnesses of our life now are so much that we're not able to catch up with them. A brilliant writer said recently that the tragedy today is that with all the knowledge we have, we are so far behind what we could do with it. For example, he gave an amusing instance, of the postal system. Here we are, a great nation. Why can't we get mail to people on time? Well, this of course is a minor aspect.

FORREST SELVIG: Well, we have all the machines and the tools, and we've developed our technical ability but we haven't developed our moral concepts of what we're going to do with all of this technique.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes, I think the word moral is the important word. You take, for example, the hippies. To be sure, they really don't bathe very often. But nevertheless there was something important in this hippie thing that was a much more conscious effort to really love your neighbor as best you could.

FORREST SELVIG: And I would say they're certainly carrying that out against pretty great obstacles

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: The trouble of course is that the hippies are all over now in the east Village. This is all for the birds. And these poor kids are on drugs and so forth. And it's awful, you know. To be sure, alcohol is bad enough. But the drugs are really awful.

FORREST SELVIG: They permanently damage the brain in many cases.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes. And what's more, they can damage the chromosomes so that a woman can give birth to a monster. You know, I have one idea - this should be called the exaltation of the tape - I got the idea recently that all these museums in New York are frantically trying to dredge up new and exciting shows when indeed there really aren't the possibilities unless you go back and start the whole thing over again really of new and exciting shows. Do you follow me?

FORREST SELVIG: Yes.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: In other words, I think there's an awful business today in the museums - let's get on this whole business of the museums because obviously it affects the artists. He sees in a show too frequently that what that director was doing was putting on the boards something which was of momentary importance, or even something which the director hoped would affect the artist. And the artist I think resents this. For example, they had a show on Surrealism - I didn't see it - because at this moment Surrealism is still very much in the works, as if to say, boy, we're going to get in on this quick now and we're going to show you artists how we feel about what you should do next.

FORREST SELVIG: Do you think a museum really does this?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I really do. I'm sorry to tell you I really do.

FORREST SELVIG: I don't really mean to get my opinions on this tape very much but I must say I'm not aware of this except in some New York Museums.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Oh, I would compromise my statement by saying that as an idea becomes important, the museum will then give a show illustrating it.

FORREST SELVIG: Yes. I would agree with that.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: But I think sometimes they go farther. And of course I think also that the fundamental loves of the museum people reflect in the museum obviously.

FORREST SELVIG: Sure.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I mean I could say, for example, that I have always though - he's always been very nice to me and a good friend - but Alfred Barr fundamentally loves Surrealism and that this colored I think his ideas to some degree in the history of the... And he's a great, great man in the field of American Art. I think, for example, that another man whom I admire very much is - well, you take, say, Lloyd Goodrich who is primarily a Homer, Eakins, Ryder man, having done the great books - that book of his on Homer and the one on Eakins. But Lloyd would think in these terms. And Jack Baur I think is primarily a 19th century man. It would be indicative of Jack that he would put on a Kensett show. I don't know how we got onto this but I do still think that the museums tend to - for example, I think that the Whitney has the hardest time of any of the New York Museums. Because the Whitney is sort of like a fashion designer. The Whitney has to turn out every year new models.

FORREST SELVIG: Because of their Annual, you mean?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Because of their Annuals. And it's very interesting to see a Whitney Annual because once in awhile you'll see a picture by an old-timer. You've forgotten all about the painter. And you realize that what's happened is that Lloyd Goodrich, God bless him, has tried to help this painter out, you know.

FORREST SELVIG: I didn't realize that he would do things like that. I knew he's a very kind man.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Listen, he's a marvelously kind man. He's always been very kind to me. I can tell you one

wonderful episode about Lloyd. Years ago I went up to visit an old-time artist, he's a very good artist, he's now very elderly - he's living over on one of these streets - I'm being very discreet. And there was Lloyd. And he was picking out a picture for the Whitney. Well, I don't recall having seen a work of art by this man in the Whitney for a number of years. But he was going to do it. And this is what the artist - I mean it means so much to him. It's not that he can't face the facts of his own career and so forth. There's a kind of - I mean, we've been all through this in this interview. That's the end?

FORREST SELVIG: That's the end of this but I'd like to do the other side.

(End of Side 1)

Side 2 - November 7, 1968

FORREST SELVIG: This is the second interview with Bill Kienbusch, this time in his room in the Fifth Avenue Hotel in New York City. The date is November 6, 1968. Before continuing with the interview with Bill Kienbusch, I should mention that Mr. Kienbusch wrote a story called *Father and Son, Two Lives* under the pseudonym of Stephen Clarke (C-l-a-r-k-e), which was published in Scribner's magazine for August 1936. And this is generally autobiographical. Bill, I found the story very illuminating especially about your years at Hotchkiss and your relationship with your father and so on. This is pretty largely true, isn't it?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes. I'll tell you how the story happened to be written. In my senior year at Princeton, I was on what was called the no course plan which meant I didn't have to take any courses or I could choose any course I felt like. I chose a course in creative writing my first semester. And we had to write about 5,000 words every two weeks. Well, I kept writing all of these stupid stories about my trip to the Gaspé Peninsula; how if the prizefighter won he lost the girl, and how if he lost, he won the girl. And finally my fellow students said, "Don't you have anything serious to write about?" So I'll never forget it. I went back to my room in Pine Hall. This was I think a Friday. And starting Saturday morning and continuing well into Monday night I wrote that story from beginning to end. I made a short synopsis before I started but the story practically wrote itself off. I brought the story into class and the students were simply amazed. And the mother of one of my fellow students was a literary agent, and Frank said, "Could he take the story and give it to her." She might be able to get it published. So I said, "Well, if she is going to try she might try Scribner's because Dean Gauss's daughter Catherine Jackson is on Scribner's, and she knows me. So in due time, much to my astonishment, I received a letter or something from Perkins, the famous editor of Thomas Wolfe. I can't remember his first name. He said to come and see him. Well, I went down to New York and went into Scribner's. And the same day I went to Scribner's, I happened to see Thomas Wolfe on the street. He was my great idol. He was a gigantic man. He was about six feet six. He was wearing a black homburg, and he was just like a lighthouse; he was so tall walking up that street. So I went to see - oh - Max Perkins. Just as you read about him, he was wearing his hat, and he had his feet up on the desk. And he said, "Young man, I'm interested in your story. I think there are a few things we could change here." I said, "I know what you mean. I guess they're a little bit too much like Thomas Wolfe." So he said, "Well, I can see your point." We had a discussion about it. So I went back to Princeton, and I made the changes in the story, mostly in tightening up the end of the story. I sent it back to him. Then there was a long hiatus when I didn't hear anything. I remember I was in the shower - this was after I had taken my final exams - and somebody said, "Hey, Kienbusch, there's a Western Union boy outside." So I went downstairs and there was a telegram saying, "We have accepted your story for a hundred dollars. Signed Maxwell Perkins." Well, I had written before; I wrote poetry, very bad poetry and so forth. I had even attempted to become the book editor of *The Princetonian*. I had flunked on that one. And I was reading serious literature. But all my friends were on various important periodicals at college. And here I was the only person who had been accepted by a real magazine. So they sent the galley proofs, and I corrected them. And in due time - I was in California when the issue came out. But one of my friends, Bessie Brewer, the author (she was the wife of Henry Varnum Poor) said to me later she thought it was one of the earliest stories ever written on psychoanalysis. Well, as regards the story itself, there's a certain amount of literary license in the story, but I would say that on the whole the story is very true. It's based primarily on what happened to me when I was I think eighteen your old going on nineteen, my freshman year in college and just prior to that. It was at this time that my father and I were having great difficulties. In fact, he wasn't speaking to me. And my mother had gone to a PTA meeting at the Brearley School, and a doctor -- I can mention her name --, Dr. Florence Patamaker, the famous psychoanalyst --

FORREST SELVIG: Oh yes!

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: -- who died recently. My mother talked to Florence about me. And then she came to me and she said, "Bill, I would like you to see this doctor" - she didn't say what the doctor was about. She simply said, "Well I think the doctor can help you." So I never will forget that day. I went over there and went in that room, which is just like the story. And years later I asked Florence what I had been like. And she said, "Well, you were the greatest manic depressive I ever met. You spent the whole session trying to figure out ways of killing your father." And she said, "We finally calmed you down." All during the time I was in college I went to see Florence I think on an average of once a week or once every two weeks. As I said, this went on through my whole college career. The sections about my brother, although not strictly true, the episode of slapping me

comes from another context in which he indeed did do this, because apparently I cried so much. My sister told me this. The episodes about Hotchkiss are all true. The episode about my being up late at night, and then the fight is the result of two different episodes. One, when I did come home from college, and he did get mad at me because I was up late. But also relates – no, it relates to that time. And the remarks about his family and his personal life are for the most part pretty accurate.

FORREST SELVIG: Your family is a noble German family I gather?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, one of my ancestors was the chief forester to a German principality. And he was a noble. He was made a baron. And Father occasionally chuckled and said he was made a baron because of his relation to the local princess. In any event, he became a baron. Now his son was in the revolution of 1848. He was a liberal, and he was on the wrong side. And the whole family got out and beat it to – I believe it was Tennessee at that time that Carl Schurz and many famous Germans came to this country. And he became a spy – my father knows a great deal more about this than I do – he became a spy for the Northern side of the Civil War. And he used to hide out in a cave up in the hills. One day, his son said, “We’d better beat it because the Confederates are coming.” And they beat it I think to the – what river is Cincinnati on? The Ohio.

FORREST SELVIG: The Ohio River.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes. They beat it to the Ohio. They took a flatboat up to Cincinnati. And the whole family was dead broke. And I guess it was my great grandfather and his son, my grandfather I guess, got jobs in the tobacco business. It was a big tobacco business. And there were a great many German-Americans in Cincinnati. In fact, my grandmother talks about seeing Lincoln when she was a very young girl come through the streets. So they were pushing tobacco cases around. And in due time my grandfather married, so to speak, the boss’s daughter. This was the Stiffner family, who had their headquarters in New York City. So my grandfather lived in New York.

FORREST SELVIG: This would also – I’m speaking about this to myself – this also explains your father’s interest in armor which sort of ties in with the medievalism and titles and all this sort of thing.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes, I think my father had always had a very profound sense of his background, his ancestry. But I don’t believe he got started on armor for that point of view. Although we could go into the whole psychology of collecting armor.

FORREST SELVIG: That isn’t necessary.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: No, he started by collecting Japanese sword guards. And it was from there that he got interested in armor.

FORREST SELVIG: This wouldn’t be really related at all.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: No. You’re quite right about his profound sense of his own aristocratic background. As, for example, when he traveled in Germany at one point he would always use the “von.” In fact, he traveled as Baron von Kretschmar von Kienbusch, which is the family title.

FORREST SELVIG: Do you use von Kienbusch?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: No. It’s very funny. Because my father was a lieutenant in Washington making armor plates. In fact, there’s a book, I wish I could find a copy of it, showing photographs of him wearing breastplates and things like that. During the First World War it was not a good idea to have the word “von” in front of your name.

FORREST SELVIG: It was too German.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Too German. So he omitted it. Well, after the war was over at some point he then proceeded to use the “von” again. So later on he said, “I think you should use the ‘von.’ After all, we are aristocrats and so forth.” And I’d say, “Well I don’t see why I should. I’ve always been Billy Kienbusch. All the name plates on my little pants for school always said W. Kienbusch. I sign my pictures Kienbusch. It’s a little late to use the ‘von.’” It may also be that I had a certain hostility about using it. Is there any other factor about that story that you want me to answer?

FORREST SELVIG: No.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: We were talking about Hotchkiss. Well, you must remember if you could have seen photographs of me as a kid – I’m fairly tall now – I was very short, I hadn’t gotten my growth, I went into school I think not at all equipped to face a kind of English public school like Hotchkiss was at the time.

FORREST SELVIG: Kids are very cruel at that age, too, aren't they?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: They're very cruel. And I used to get into a fair number of fights most of which I lost. Or I was just too scared even to fight. And the most important thing to me in my whole life was this man Robert Osborn. You must have seen in the Sunday Times. He did the cover for the magazine section on the - I haven't got it here. Well, he has a color cover on the New York Times magazine of a voter with goggle eyes, and then Humphrey and Nixon --

FORREST SELVIG: Oh, yes.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: -- all in armor.

FORREST SELVIG: Yes.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, that's Bob Osborn. That was my teacher. And I think we talked about this in the last tape. He had an enormous influence on me. As I said, I was very unhappy in school. I read a good deal. I painted. My marks were very poor. A very funny thing happened to me in that I flunked my final senior English exam. At the same time I was awarded the poetry prize. And as I said, the moment I got into Princeton I was so much happier in spite of various problems I had. I had a room to myself. No one could get at me. I immediately started to work in the department of fine arts and my marks went up and I had a very good academic record.

FORREST SELVIG: You know reading the story, I would say that Osborn's influence it would seem to me must have been that here was a person who was understanding and kind and it must have been a great escape from all the other things at Hotchkiss. And maybe it wasn't so much art as it was --

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, it was a sort of "in loco parentis."

FORREST SELVIG: Yes.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: But Osborn was the first artist I ever met. I mean hanging in his room he had, for example, a Derain landscape. We had the studio under the headmaster's house where they used to store things for the garden, you know. It smelled like a garden, all sorts of earthy smells. And he would set up these still lifes and maybe five or six of us would go down there and work. As I said, on holidays we'd go out into the country and paint like I said in the story. I remember after I got to college writing Osborn a great crushy letter about how much I admired him and never getting a reply to it which hurt pretty badly. But years later I remember going to a party - oh - I saw him twice more in my life. I saw him once on the street. He was very smart looking. He was wearing a blue overcoat. Then I saw him at a party once, a very swanky party. Then Hotchkiss gave me a show many years ago, and they asked me to write something for the newspaper, which I have somewhere in my file. And I decided that rather than write a horrible diatribe about school I would write an article in praise of Osborn. So I got a very nice letter from him. That was the one letter I ever received. But I don't think I can tell you much more. He lives in Salisbury, Connecticut now. He's very famous.

FORREST SELVIG: We were talking before we started the ape about your picking the French Consul on Fifth Avenue.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Oh, we got talking about what it was like in the 30s in this country, and I was saying that -

FORREST SELVIG: When did you get out of Princeton? I've forgotten.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I got out of Princeton in 1936.

FORREST SELVIG: 1936. Right in the middle of the Depression.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Right in the middle of the Depression. As I said, I was extremely fortunate. I had some money my grandmother had left me. Certainly it was plenty to live on in those days. I remember that episode because I was talking recently with a friend of mine about her son who was engaged in these Columbia University so-called riots. And in the course of our conversation, she said, "Well, you ought to remember what you were doing back in the 30s." This was an episode regarding the attitude of the French government - I guess it must have been about 1940 - to the Spanish refugees who came over the border after the Spanish War. And we were protesting the conditions under which the French government was forcing these refugees to live. So a few of us went up to - I guess it was the French Consulate on Fifth Avenue around 49th Street. And I was told it was all going to be very peaceful. We would simply picket. At a certain point we would shout a few things. And that's all. I remember beforehand we went into the foyer of the French Consulate and I was so amazed to see all these men around. They were all reporters. I had never even seen a reporter before. So indeed we did picket. And there seemed to be nothing going on. Several people raised placards. And all of a sudden out of the side street by St. Patrick's Cathedral and Saks-Fifth Avenue, all of these cops rushed out right across the street right

into our midst. And I was grabbed by a plainclothesman. I remember he was wearing a polo coat. And I was absolutely scared out of my wits. And I gave him a tremendous shove with my knee and beat him off. And I noticed that a lot of people were racing around the corner toward Radio City. In the meantime the Black Maria was there. Cops on horseback were running after people and grabbing them by the collar and shoving them into this Black Maria. So we finally got down to Radio City and we reformed our lines. And we walked up to I guess it was 50th and then about half way back up to Fifth Avenue. And then we sort of dispersed. I guess we were too scared to go back to Fifth Avenue. But, as I said, I remember this because it was my only, shall we say, contact with the police. And I never forgot it. But, oh, we marched in Day parades. As I said, we went down coal mines. And then we did all these pictures, most which were pretty bad.

FORREST SELVIG: But for somebody with your background, which was a very well-connected background and – well, the phrase that’s used today “the Establishment” – you were very much a part of the Establishment, you were born into the Establishment, and yet you sort of rejected it, after getting out of Princeton.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, I rejected it for one obvious reason. I suppose it was a revolt against my father. Also I soon found myself, as I say, studying art at the Art Students League and in Paris with people of very different backgrounds and people whom I liked. And during those years after Paris I lived in the Village. As I said, at one point I lived over Stuart Davis. I lived a typical Greenwich Village life of the late 1930s and early 1940s before the war. It was a very good life. We had a lot of fun. Perhaps we had no more fun than the kids are having today. And one can easily romanticize about it. We had mad parties as I’m sure kids do now. None of us had any success at all. Oh, maybe I showed at the Philadelphia Watercolor Society or something like that. Maybe I was in a couple of little tiny group shows. So that when I went into the Army I had had no success as an artist whatsoever. And by the time I came out and got into the Kraushaar Gallery, I was going on thirty-three years old. I thought one thing you might be interested in – two things actually. One was I took this trip when I was in Paris in 1938 that summer around Europe. And I took it at the very moment that the Munich crisis was in the making.

FORREST SELVIG: Yes, that would be very interesting.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, I started out with a third-class ticket all the way around Italy up into Austria and Germany.

FORREST SELVIG: Excuse me if I ask you something here. Was it necessary for you to travel third class perhaps? It wasn’t, was it?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I think to that degree it was. It seems to me in retrospect I figured out that during that year in Paris I spent I think \$4,000. And that includes a huge studio at, say, \$40 a month. Oh, I could have blown it all in, you know, but I don’t think it even –

FORREST SELVIG: In other words, what I’m getting at, Bill, is how much of this was necessary and how much of this was by choice?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I don’t know. I think in terms of I was taking such a long trip that it occurred to me I would do it in third class. I had a book put out by the Dutch American Line called a “Hand Me Down,” which told you where to stay in all these cities. A very good book. Well, I started out and I remember coming into Milan the next morning over the Alps and looking at the mountain and thinking, “My God, these things look just like Giotto.” The rocks and the Giotto. And I got to Rome. I’ll make this brief until we come to something more interesting. I went to Rome; I went to Naples and so on. Neither place interested me much. I then went to Assisi and had a marvelous time looking at the Giotto’s. And then on up to Florence and Sienna and so forth. Then I saw the mosaics at Ravenna. And then I went to Venice. I was in Venice in August, sleeping under mosquito netting in something called the Pension Ruskin and reading, of all books, Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice*. Which was pretty depressing. And of course he was the prohibited author in Germany at that time. And then I went to Padua. I took the train that night and we went up across the Brenner Pass. I was in this compartment with a young Dutchman. And the Nazi train officials came to the compartment and looked at my passport and said, “You will have to get off the train at Innsbruck because your passport has not been renewed.” The Dutch boy translated. He said what happened was all your other visas are good for two years, but this one is only good for a year, and you’ve now been abroad a year according to this passport. So I remember getting off the train at Innsbruck about four in the morning and stumbling into a hotel and was quite astonished when the man addressed me by my name. I guess the police had told him. And the next morning I walked through Innsbruck in a drizzling rain and saw all these great posters all over Innsbruck, anti-Semitic posters. You see in Italy you’d never believe that Fascism was really going on much. You didn’t see much of it. So I went to this brown house which has been the town hall, walked in, and there were some more posters on the walls all saying, “Wir müssen Heil Hitler begrüßen,” or whatever it was – “We must say Heil Hitler to each other.” My God, I walked into a room and there was a man on a phone saying “Heil Hitler” into it. Well, you see I hadn’t really believed this was actually true. There it was. I went upstairs and the man there also gave me the salute, and I simply said “Good

morning,” and he said, “Oh, you must be an American.” So he renewed my passport and was very polite and said, “I hope you have a good time, and buy a camera,” and so forth. So I took a train to Munich. And I stayed at a pension and I saw all those things. I mean I walked up the great steps to this memorial to those twelve gangsters who had been shot in –

FORREST SELVIG: In the Putsch.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: In the Putsch, yes. Well, just like a Wagner opera. There were these two German soldiers standing at parade arms, or whatever it is – parade rest – present arms. And everybody was “Heil Hitlering.” So I had a trick I would use. I would pull out my Baedeker at the very moment when they got to the Heil Hitler stuff I would lean over and start reading Baedeker. And I managed to avoid all of that. As I told you, I went to the Neue Pinakothek and wondered where the Renoirs were, the Cézannes, and all the modern paintings. The guard said, “Oh, we don’t have room for that; they’re all down in the basement.” Which he believed, too, that that was the reason. I went to the Alte Pinakothek, which was very exciting. Then I went to the Hitler Museum of New German Art. Which was simply appalling. For example, they had pictures of the Fuhrer on horseback looking like Joan of arc. And Goebbels and everybody wearing trench coats. They had countless pictures of happy German families in which the mother is usually nursing somebody. They had of course pictures which were I’m sure really erotica, which were erotic. What the artist did was he would copy a Cranach – in fact I can think of one picture – I still have the catalogue somewhere – in which all the sexual organs were done with great detail. And it obviously was an erotic painting. Well, while I was there, the Munich crisis – I was right in the middle of it. I remember one night standing in front of a radio shop where they actually seeing people salute the radio. And I finally went to the Consulate, and the consul told me to get out. He said he thought that within two days there might be war.

FORREST SELVIG: And you spoke German?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I spoke it terribly badly. I took German in college but I’m afraid I never learned how to speak it. I used to speak some sort of horrible thing of German, English and French all at once. So I realized I wasn’t going to be able to get up to the Netherlands. So I got my ticket changed and I boarded the train from Munich to Paris. And I remember on the train in this compartment there was an Austrian and a young girl. And he was very, very pro-Hitler. And we had a long talk about Germany. And he made disparaging remarks about Einstein and various famous Germans and so on. And I asked him what he was doing. He said he was taking his niece – he was going up to the border at Strasbourg to evacuate his family because they lived on the other side of the Rhine, and if war was declared, this whole house would be wiped out. So we got to the border. It was night. And the Germans of course looked through my passport. Then we got across the river at the bridge there. The French came through. And they were very gracious and cheery and so forth. And all that morning in my third-class compartment there were all these French people looking like Cézannes. They all looked like they were the card players of Cezanne. And we passed the cemetery of Chateau Thierry and they would all look at me and they would point it out, see, this is where all the Americans were. We got to Paris and I took a cab back to my apartment. And I couldn’t understand why there was nobody on the streets. It was absolutely dead. Absolute silence. I got to my studio. And all of a sudden about six in the evening I could hear it, as if the whole city was waking up. My concierge came in and said in rapid French, “Oh, Daladier has gone to Munich. It’s all over. We’re not going to have any war.” And by eight o’ clock at night, the streets were crowded with people all cheering and excited. You know, they’d made this great agreement at Munich. And the next morning, although I didn’t see him, Daladier came back and they threw roses at him, and so on. So it wasn’t until about three days later that in *Ce Soir*, which is the Communist evening paper, Aragon came out with a bitter article on the way the French had been betrayed at Munich. But the French themselves were, on the whole, it seemed to me, very pleased by the whole thing. You could understand why. I mean if you go to Chartres and stand in the public square there and look at that monument of the First World War and you look at four sons all dead. So I left Paris, oh, about a month later. By that time air raid sirens were being tested all over Paris. I went down to my favorite cat house, I might as well add, a wonderful girl I knew, we had a last fling and she said good-bye and she’d write me postcards and so forth. And I put everything into wicker baskets and took the Lafayette, the French liner Lafayette back to New York – or was it the Champlain? – I forget which. I guess it was the Lafayette. But it was a marvelous year. I look back on it now and think really what a wonderful time I had, that whole period. I don’t think I can add anything to it now that I haven’t said.

FORREST SELVIG: You certainly lived through changes of empire.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, you know, coming back to New York then, I think the Spanish War has such an influence on young people then. I remember getting to Paris and a newspaper friend of mine was going across the border into Spain. He asked me whether I wanted to come along. I got terribly nervous and said, “No, I don’t think so.” I said, “After all, I’m supposed to paint, you know.” But back in New York, as I described in the last tape, having painted very much under the influence of Cezanne and Bonnard, then started to become much more fascinated by people like Goya and Daumier, and so on. These were not the real influences. They were really the result of a political point of view rather than a real artist’s point of view.

FORREST SELVIG: That's what I was going to ask you.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: And I remember years later being on a panel with Jack Levine out in Detroit. There was George Grosz, Jack Levine, and myself. And Jack said somewhere that he was having a hard time painting because everybody wore Brooks Brother suits. And he said, you see, the politicians in the old days wore lemon checkered vests and they wore wonderful derbies and they wonderful clothes, and these were marvelous to paint; or obviously for Jack to satirize. But it was becoming hard for him with just these Brooks Brother suits to do much with it, he said. And Grosz was wonderful. We all had a drink afterwards in his room. And he explained something I hadn't realized. He said that his early drawings, although they are indeed satirical, he said in a way he was very - what's the word? - sympathetic to all the people -

FORREST SELVIG: The Ecce Homo he did in Berlin -

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes. I remember his saying, "I'm really an actor, you know. I can take all these parts." Like the Prussian officer, the tired old whore, the pitiful poor woman, and so on, the man with the leg - with only a stump. He said, "You know, I can project into all other people." I think what he said was that it wasn't so much satire as it was a real identification somehow as an actor might have with all these people. But then I said later on in the last tape that that fine day arrived when we all suddenly began to look at Picasso's work. And at that time, of course, I went to Maine. I was very much influenced by Hartley. I'd been to Hudson Walker's.

FORREST SELVIG: Then this business about Grosz again, does this explain some of your looking to Goya and Daumier.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: No. You see, this all happened after the war. In other words, I didn't meet Grosz until the 50s. No, no, I should have told you the time element here. I was in his class I think for two days in the 30s - in 1936-1937. But it was so crowded I got out. I could hardly see the model.

FORREST SELVIG: You mean he taught at the Arts Student League?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Oh, yes, he taught at the Art Students League. But the class was so crowded I got out. I couldn't even see the model.

FORREST SELVIG: Did you have anything to do with Robert Beverly Hale? He was at the Art Students League. Well, he's still there.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: No, the teachers I had there - and I used to go from teacher to teacher - frankly I ever seemed to get much out of anybody. Oh, I had John Sloan. I had Raphael Soyer. I even studied printmaking with Harry Sternberg for a month once. But none of these teachers made any impression on me. It was that winter that I met Anne Poor and used to go out and see Henry Varnum Poor and Bessie Brewer. And it was the following summer of 1937 that I went out to Colorado Springs and studied with Poor.

FORREST SELVIG: At the Colorado Springs Art Center?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Art Center, yes. Oh, I did a lot of landscapes. They were pretty terrible. No, I really as an artist got started very late. I mean when I read about my fellow artists who were, you know, in their early twenties and really getting going. I can't think of a single picture I did until, oh, say, the summer of 1940 or the summer of 1941 which in retrospect seem to have any relevance to what I was to do after the war.

FORREST SELVIG: Who did you say you met through Hudson Walker? That you met at his gallery?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Oh, now who? It seems to me I met Hudson Walker through Mervyn Jules. Because Huddy showed Mervyn. And I saw Hartley's work. The first picture I ever bought was a Kathe Kollwitz which I bought as a print. Which I then turned around and sold, and with the money I bought a Ford car.

FORREST SELVIG: Wow!

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: A second-hand Ford car. Huddy was terribly nice to me and has since bought a number of my paintings. Actually we traded pictures. He gave me two Alfred Maurers. My friends in those days were who? Well, I guess among the prominent artists today would be Jim Brooks; Freddy Farr and his wife were very good friends of mine. I knew Stuart Davis. I met Philip Guston. I met Jackson Pollock. Oh, incidentally on that tape last week the Oregon artist who knew Pollock was Louie Bunce.

FORREST SELVIG: Oh yes, I know of him.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, he was a great friend of Pollock's. And he was at the party that night.

FORREST SELVIG: You were talking about another party at the Luce's earlier.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Oh, yes. This is very funny.

FORREST SELVIG: When was this?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, this party was 1949 I think. What happened was that Life magazine and the Metropolitan Museum collaborated on a show of one of these things like "Artists Under 35" or something, and they held it in the second story gallery of the museum. And Life did a big article on it. And two of my friends - Rueben Tam and Dorothy Andrews - and myself were in it. So one day I was in my hot water tenement. After the war I lived for three years on 109 East Third Street. It was a fairly cheesy place, you know, dead cats and a lot of noise, and I was up five stories and so on. But when you're young, it doesn't make much difference. Well, in any event I was working. And the doorbell rang and here's this Western Union kid. I signed for it. It said something like, "In relation to the Metropolitan-Life magazine show and so forth in which you are represented, we would very much like to have you come to a party at the Waldorf Towers, 48th floor, at, you know, four p.m. on such and such a date. Signed Henry and Clare Luce." Well, I called up my friends and they, too, had gotten telegrams. So we met at Georgette Passadoit's Gallery. I remember that afternoon. We walked down Park Avenue. We were singing and having a good time. So we got there and took the elevator up. A maid took our coats. Dorothy had to go to the bathroom. She said all these posters of Mrs. Luce's plays were all around the bathroom. So we walked into a rather large living room and this very beautiful elegant woman greeted us and said, "I am Mrs. Luce." We introduced ourselves. Then the most extraordinary thing happened. She remembered each of our pictures. She said, "Mr. Tam, I like so much your seascape" or whatever it was. "Mr. Kienbusch, I like your orange fences," and so on. And we were terribly flattered, and I said to them afterwards, "You know, there's no reason why this woman had to remember these things." After all, this party was probably a very minor moment in her life. So the living room got crowded. And over in one corner Henry Luce was talking to Edward Hopper. Apparently he had a few of the famous types in there with us younger under thirty-five's. There was also a number of dealers and art critics. I remember three things that afternoon. One was - when I got out of the Army I continued to wear GI boots because I always had weak ankles and I enjoyed wearing these boots; they supported my ankles. So I was traipsing around after two or three highballs and managed to step on Mrs. Hopper's feet. She was seated and she let out a tiny but anguished shriek. And Hopper was sitting next to her. So I apologized profusely and showed her my shoes - they weren't GI, they were actual boots, laced up boots. So Mr. Hopper and I got into a discussion as to where I got the shoes. He was quite fascinated. And then the other thing was that Emily Genauer the critic was there. She had written a rather scathing review of the Met show, not too good, in which she particularly damned Bob Motherwell's picture (which I thought was pretty good). So Charles Alan the dealer asked me whether I would like to meet Miss Genauer, not realizing that I had had three highballs and didn't like Miss Genauer at that moment very much. I don't know whatever got into me. But when I met her I said, "Miss Genauer, I've read that review of yours." I said, "How do you measure the value of a picture? Do you hold a piece of litmus paper up to it and if it turns pink it's good, and if it's blue it's bad?" She was perfectly flabbergasted by my impoliteness. And I said, "Of course you realize that Bob Motherwell is in the room here. If you'd like to meet him I'll introduce you." Although I really didn't know Motherwell. So I think that cooked my goose with the Tribune for quite a few years. And then at the end of the party there was a rather pathetic episode when Mrs. Luce got a few of us over in a corner. She was debating what artist to commission to do a memorial to her daughter who had died tragically, you know, a stained glass window. And I suggested Abe Rattner whom I thought would have done a very good job. I don't know who she actually got. So then we all got out of the party and went home. We had a good time. It was a marvelous party. You see, at that time - it's strange. I went to parties that I never went to again because at that moment, say, around 1950, I was, so to speak, quite a good deal in the public eye then, due to some critics, particularly Howard Devree. And I can recall going to parties and probably I never was invited again, you know. It was kind of social status stuff then. I don't think they were so interested in me as they were interested in the fact that I was a new artist and had gotten publicity. I remember Edgar Kaufmann invited me to see his collection. I must have been an awfully brash man because at some point he asked me what I thought of Joan Miró. He had quite a few of his pictures. I said I very much admired his early work but I didn't really care for his late work too much, and I thought it was all full of rather boring sexual symbols and so forth. I realized afterwards I should never have criticized his collection.

FORREST SELVIG: Is this Kaufmann who is at the Museum of Modern Art?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes, Edgar Kaufmann. In those days then it seems to me there were quite a few parties I went to. But later on - well, the truth of the matter is if you don't make an effort in that direction eventually the whole thing kind of poops out. There was that great night at the opening of the Museum of Modern Art, "The history of Abstract Painting in America." I can still remember seeing Pollock and de Kooning and everybody there. This is when the papers were damning them, you know. One forgets what a poor critical reception these men got except by Art News. So even though I tend to, as I said in the last tape, damn Hess for over-inflating the movement almost, nevertheless it was Art News and Greenberg and a few critics who really did see the value of the movement.

FORREST SELVIG: Harold Rosenberg also.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Harold Rosenberg indeed in that very famous article he wrote in Art News.

FORREST SELVIG: Sure.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Also, Art Digest on the whole tended to be sympathetic. It had a very good editor, Belle Cransey, who is now married to Senator Ribicoff's brother. She was a very good editor. For example, we all did covers for the magazine. Kline, Stuart Davis, myself, Reuben Tam, and other people, we all did covers for it. Any other questions? I'm trying to think of what to say about the fifties that I haven't said already. I think one thing about myself is, I remember a couple of years ago, Donald Judd wrote a review of a show of mine when he was a critic on I forget what magazine, and he said in the review that I had never been a member of the New York School. And I was rather pleased by this kind of a guy painting around the edge of it. And it seems to me in my social life with these artists I was also a man who was on the edge of it. I was never in the inner sanctum of the movement. And in retrospect I'm damn happy about it because, oh, God, it was so overdone at times. I mean with all respect for Hans Hofmann who I used to have breakfast with at Riker's. He looked like Santa Claus; he was a charming man. But they overdid it, you know. I mean they had the gospel. They were the members of the true faith. And if you weren't in that and if you weren't working like that they had no pity on you whatsoever, and very little regard I think for your work on the whole. Many of them. And in retrospect, as I said, so much of it, except for the really outstanding artists, was style. It was simply style. It was a kind of method. And the good young artists, oh, gosh, what's that woman's name, gee, I don't remember, but there were good young artists.

FORREST SELVIG: Is she an abstract expressionist, too?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes. You'd know her immediately. It's not Frankenthaler or those people. Joan Mitchell!

FORREST SELVIG: Oh, Joan Mitchell.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I think of all the younger artists I knew then that she was one of the most outstanding. I've seen her pictures since then out of context with the movement. I still think they hold up beautifully. But there weren't many of them. And I think a number of artists have kind of sold themselves down the river.

FORREST SELVIG: How do you mean they sold themselves down the river?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, it's a very nasty remark to make. I shouldn't have made it. I was thinking of this one artist. Every time I see his work I grit my teeth when I think of the talent the man has and what he did with it.

FORREST SELVIG: But you mean that he adopted a style that was not really his, is that it?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I think what started out to be a genuine impulse became after awhile a kind of deliberate shock, business to shock the public, that's all.

FORREST SELVIG: I'm trying to think who that might be.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, it would be pretty easy to guess. But I just sort of like - well, I mean after all this is on tape - it's a very bad thing to say of an artist that he sold himself down the river, that's the trouble.

FORREST SELVIG: Is this one who later on painted genitalia and so on?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: This is the one that just did the Paul Revere murals for the Boston -

FORREST SELVIG: It's exactly the same one I'm thinking of, yes.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I saw pictures of it. I just couldn't believe it.

FORREST SELVIG: Oh, I thought that was a hideous painting.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I thought it was hideous.

FORREST SELVIG: I only saw it in a photograph. I haven't seen it.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I've only seen the photograph, too, so maybe we shouldn't judge it. But I just thought, well -

FORREST SELVIG: Does he know he's bad, do you think?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I really don't know. I haven't seen him for years. When I really knew him - I didn't know him at all well - he was a young man, he was sitting at a table with Grace Hartigan, as I told you, and the poet Frank O'Hara and Joan Mitchell, you know. They were all the kids at The Club. And it seemed to me that he was a

remarkably talented young artist. He was part of the Jane Street group. There were some very good artists in that group. Nell Blaine, who I knew when she was in Greece just before she got polio. I used to go see her in Mount Sinai Hospital. My friend Hyde Solomon. And of course, Larry Bell. They were all good painters. But it's very true in this country that if you play your cards right and you know the right people, I firmly believe this that you can go a long way. A great deal of ass-kissing went on, believe me.

FORREST SELVIG: Frank O'Hara certainly promoted Larry Rivers.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: yes. Well, one could easily make remarks there, but it's not important. But the thing is that there was a clique - and there usually are cliques in the art world. I make no bones about the fact that Howard Devree, whom I was devoted to, was devoted to Miss Kraushaar, my dealer. In other words, there was this factor that they knew each other and they liked each other. And this may have had something to do with Howard's... Because Howard had promoted Hartley, you see, so he would have liked my work. Well, let's face it, it helps to know people.

FORREST SELVIG: Sure.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: You know, we talked about this previously. I might as well tell you, for example, that Stuart Preston and I both went to day school together years ago. This doesn't mean that Stuart wouldn't have knocked me if he had felt like it. One of my early friends was Dore Ashton, the critic, and I've known Dore and Adja for years. So all of this did help -- let's face the fact. And I was very fortunate. Lloyd Goodrich liked me work. But it seems to me that in American painting, about every five or six years you get a whole new set of critics, and you have to face these guys, this new team that's coming in. I have to hand it to Devree. He had a card file - he told me this - and he said that he always reviewed the show of the artists that he had in the file. In other words, his sidekick would do the other people. So that when he would go to a show of mine, he would say, "Look, Bill, I remember what your previous shows were like and I have some basis for criticism of whether you're pooping out or whether you're progressing." Well, the artist hopes this will be the case. I remember Edith Halpert telling me about some kid girl just out of Vassar or some place reviewing a Marin show, and the girl I don't think had ever heard of Marin and simply said, "Oh, well, some of those pictures look a little bit like Jackson Pollock's." I think another interesting factor here is what a shock it is when you're middle-aged to hear the youngest kids talk. Because the people, whom to you were your peers or associates, they think of as old masters. It's like looking through the wrong end of the telescope. God, they're way back there! When you say to them - well, look, Marin, Hartley, Stuart Davis - well, Davis they might be a little bit - but these are all people that are back in some dim past. I wonder sometimes whether it isn't terribly important to the artist to have been born, let's say, artistically at a certain moment. Maybe it's not true. But think of some of the poor guys who got hooked up in the 30s on this Commie art stuff who never really made a move out of it much. And that was the end. Or, for example, think of the artists who got hooked up in a kind of slightly phony Cubism which they thought of as modern art.

FORREST SELVIG: Yes. Well, certainly Shahn and Jack Levine continue to paint in a social protest type today.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes, but as I said on the other tape the thing is that this was their real heart, this was them. Like Jacob Lawrence, Phil Evergood, Of course they were very talented artists. That's the point.

FORREST SELVIG: You mentioned Larry Bell. What is he doing now?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I don't know. You know I don't really know him much. I know that for many years he's been doing a series of self-portraits at which I think he's very good. His wife paints too. She's Icelandic. I don't really know much about him. I think I saw him on the street a year or so ago and said hello. The real truth of the matter is that it seems to me that in middle age, it's very hard to some degree to keep up with what's going on. For example, I don't really read the art magazines very carefully anymore. I don't go to shows very much. I go to my friend's shows, I go to museum shows if I think it's important; I want to see them. I remember Franklin Watkins told me he once said to a student who was bemoaning the fact that he (the student) was so influenced. And Watkins said to the student, "Well, you'd better be glad you are influenced now because later on it's going to get so damned lonely." And it seems to me this is true for all artists who have some sort of personal business in their work. After a while it does get this way. I mean you're stuck with yourself.

FORREST SELVIG: But isn't this what we're trying to reach all of the years before you get there?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes, indeed it is. Indeed it is. But then one fine day comes along and you have it. At least you have it for that moment. It's always a succession of moves. You do have it. But then there comes a moment after that when if you don't make some real move, some kind of push, somehow to some degree you're stuck with yourself. Do you follow me? In other words, you're within the context of yourself as a person and your emotions, hopes, and obsessions. You have to move on from the position you were in.

FORREST SELVIG: But changing as you yourself would naturally change - no?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes. Well, you hope damn well you will change. For example, there are many different kinds of artists. Would this interest you?

FORREST SELVIG: Sure.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: First of all, we have the very great artists like Matisse and Picasso who are constantly able to renew themselves, who have a multiplicity of ideas and so on. Then we have the artists who, I think – one could characterize Georgia O’Keeffe, Ben Shahn as this type of artist. This is the artist who finds himself early, usually with a bang. Like Shahn with the Sacco-Vanzetti series.

FORREST SELVIG: Yes.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Now these artists the rest of their lives tend to elaborate the original oomph. And they start fairly early. After all, I guess Shahn was in his thirties or twenties. Now the other kind of artist is just the opposite. This is, say, Gorky or Hartley. These are artists who, up until, say, the last years of their life are fundamentally eclectics. I mean it would be true to say of Gorky that if he had died ten years earlier – and it would be true of Hartley, that one would have thought of them as significant pioneers but not basically eclectic artists. Do you follow me? In other words, there seems to be three types: the giants who just push like steam rollers right through everything, the early starters, and the late finishers; there are the three kinds. And as for myself, you might call me a sort of middle-of-the-road guy. I really got going about the age of thirty-two or thirty-three. I do believe, though, for the artist that if you don’t get it by the time you’re, oh say, in your early forties, you really don’t have much chance, I have a feeling, most of the time. I think somebody could take up writing, you see, any time and create a masterpiece, but I doubt it very much. I mean everybody talks about Gauguin. Well, actually Gauguin was painting as a sort of semi-amateur when he was a businessman. And he was quite young. I’ve read two biographies of Gauguin recently. A marvelous one called Gauguin in the South Seas. And he didn’t just pick up a brush overnight. This man had painting in Denmark and Paris for quite awhile before he took it up as his true profession.

FORREST SELVIG: But, in other words, are you saying that it takes a certain length of time to develop and by the time of middle-age it’s too late?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I think in some ways it is. I don’t know why I feel this.

FORREST SELVIG: I mean is this sort of a concept with everyone?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: No. No. God knows it couldn’t possibly be a rule. I think that so much is required in the way of training to be an artist. In other words, you have to have a lot of training. Most of the artists I know, on the whole, are pretty intelligent types, and they’re interested in other things besides art. I mean they’re interested in writing. They read poetry and so on. I must confess that the actors I’ve met have all struck me as being horribly stupid. I haven’t met many actors. But they never really talk about anything but themselves and the next part they’re going to play. Writers can be pretty obtuse, too. Of course I’m putting in a huge plug for artists. Many writers I’ve known don’t really know much about art at all. I’ll bet you many times that I’ve talked to a writer about writing, and this man can’t turn around and talk to me about art. I don’t know why that is. Maybe it’s question of the exigencies of the profession.

FORREST SELVIG: Of course you read a great deal, too, I must say.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, you see I started out – this is one thing I don’t go into – I started out – all through school – I wrote, you see, when I was at Hotchkiss. I used to write book reviews. I wrote short stories. I have some of those magazines, and they’re important because Johnny Hersey, the famous author --

FORREST SELVIG: Oh, he was at Hotchkiss?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: He was in my class at Hotchkiss. And his first stories were in the same magazines. And when I wrote that story at Princeton the summer I got out, I suddenly realized – I thought I should earn a living, you know, although I had all that dough. And that fall, I’ll never forget among other things, I went to Fortune magazine. The editor was Jim Agee, you know, the great --

FORREST SELVIG: Yes.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes. Well, there was Jim Agee, a thin young man. And he said, “Mr. Kienbusch, I’m very happy to see that you have been published, but first of all unfortunately we don’t make any money and I would suggest that you try the Reader’s Digest,” or something or other. And I didn’t get anywhere with this job hunting business. And then I simply walked over to the Art Students League and signed up. But that was a dreadful winter because I didn’t know much about life or what I was going to do. After college I went back to my family, and like a fool I lived with my family. My father was absolutely livid about that story. And I would sit at the table

that winter, and he wouldn't say a word to me.

FORREST SELVIG: Oh, your father knew that you had written the story that was published?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Oh, yes. Well, what happened was that I wrote my mother about it, and I think I wanted to get to my father, you see. And he'd been on a fishing trip in Canada. He came out of the woods, took a train, and at Van Buren - I'm surprised that Van Buren would have a copy of Scribner's - (this is no insult of Maine), he picked up a copy. And his friend Carl Cully, a businessman, said afterwards - I said, "Well, Carl, what was his reaction?" Carl said he opened the magazine, he read as far as the episode where the father hits the boy, and he turned and said, "But it didn't happen that way." Well, the answer is it didn't. The funny thing is that my sister told me something he said to her. She had never told this to me. I told you I apparently cried a great deal. And he came in one night - he said to my sister - perhaps he was trying to absolve himself or something - he had spent the entire night hitting me, this little kid in a crib. And every time I'd cry he's hit me until I stopped. Apparently by the end of the night, I stopped crying. Well now, I didn't remember this. Do you follow?

FORREST SELVIG: Yes.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I didn't remember this. And so the episode in the story turns out to be a memory that actually was true in its way although not specifically in relation to my brother. So in any event, to finish this up - God! Dr. Patamaker - I was still going to see her - talked to my sister's nurse, Mickey Welker, who was a cute young girl, and said to Mickey, "For God's sake, get that guy out of the house." So the first move in my life was made by my sister's governess. She went down to 64th Street off Park Avenue, found me a nice pleasant first-story room, you know, somewhere, and said "Come on! Scram! Get out! Before, you know..."

FORREST SELVIG: That was a pretty courageous thing for her to do. After all, she could have gotten fired easily.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: She could have, too. Yes. Well, it was pretty outrageous of my mother to go --

FORREST SELVIG: To go along with it.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Because he came over afterwards to Patamaker and said something like, "If you continue seeing my son I'll make it very difficult for you." She turned around and said, "If you make it difficult for me, I'll haul you into court and say you're unfit to be a father." I've forgotten one thing. By the time I was a sophomore at college things had gotten so bad that it was agreed by Patamaker and my family that for one year, I was to have another man as my legal father. They actually drew up a document and signed it, and for one year this other man - he was a young man we both knew out of college - paid me my allowance and so forth and so on. And although I used to go home for Christmas and so on, there was no - it was a weird setup. I actually had apparently another father for a year legally. So it was quite a mess.

FORREST SELVIG: Certainly I feel sorry for your mother and your father as well as you.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, my poor mother, you know, she did the best she could. She was devoted to me in her way and admired me as an artist. Marianne Moore once said to me, "You know, Billy, your mother thought you were as good as Picasso." And she bought my paintings to help me out and so on.

FORREST SELVIG: But then in your home you were surrounded by poets and so on apparently? People in the arts - Marianne Moore.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: No. I mentioned Marianne - Miss Moore - I know her quite well because she and Mother went to college together. But my family was not really close to Miss Moore. I mean Mother used to see Marianne when people would get together for Bryn Mawr teas or something. In fact, I know Miss Moore a lot better than my family ever did. She lives right down the street here. No, people who came to the house were for the most part businessmen or authorities on armor, medieval arms and armor. I'll never forget when I was a kid, you know, my father had the suit of armor for a prince. One would imagine that the prince would be much bigger than myself because I was a small boy then. But people were smaller in those days. So my father would have me get this suit on and parade around before dinner. But I could never understand it. Because my father was an extremely charming man. He can be utterly charming. And he was a great raconteur, and so forth. I couldn't believe watching him, and then I used to get the other side of the stick.

FORREST SELVIG: You see your father now though, don't you?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes. I don't see him very much anymore. I've seen him this fall two or three times. But I suppose I should say for the tape once and for all that the man was the greatest influence on my life, and the man was enormously hostile, enormously hostile. You said yourself you had some experience with these matters. I mean you can judge for yourself all the effects that could have taken place. And I think there are many reason for it. I won't go into all of them. But the most obvious one would be the fact that he himself would have

wished to have been an artist.

FORREST SELVIG: Yes.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: And one would have thought that a man in that position would have said, "Well, go to work; if I can't make it, I hope you do." Unfortunately that was not the case.

FORREST SELVIG: He's apparently a very brilliant businessman, very successful.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: He's very successful. My estimate of him as a business man is that he is basically very conservative. He had marvelous training with his uncle, who was, I believe, a great businessman. I think Father learned his lessons very well. I think he's very shrewd. I don't think he's fundamentally a very creative businessman. I think he's a very - what's the word? He has a great excellence, great shrewdness, basically conservative; he knows his beans. My estimate of the man is that he's not fundamentally in that field creative. Whereas I think in the field of scholarship he could have been a brilliant man.

FORREST SELVIG: There are businessmen who continue to keep up their scholarly activity, too, but I presume if you're really involved with business you simply don't have any energy left.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, he apparently did. For example, he could have been as a scholar a very good writer. He wrote the introduction to the Bashford Dean Collection, which is a matter of some sixty odd pages I think. His own collection has been catalogued in a limited edition. He wrote the long introduction to that. He used to write short essays for the Angler's Club Bulletin, for the Grolier Club bulletin, and so on. Which I've read. I've collected my own father. I have considerable of his writings. He writes with great consciousness, and considerable wit. And I once wrote him, you know, shall we say, to try to appease him once in a while. I said, "You know, I've been reading one of your articles. You write so well, it reminds me of Thomas Mann, a kind of very concise German style." Which I thought would please him. Whereupon he wrote back and said, "I can't afford to write. You see, I have to be in business to pay all your bills." I'm afraid the man was rather incapable of receiving love. But, as you know, he was offered a full professorship at Princeton when I was in the Army. I remember I was at Fort Belvoir. I was going overseas. He turned it down and for the same reason, you know. We never talked about my time in the Army, what it was like for an artist to be in the Army.

FORREST SELVIG: Tell me about it.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, it was very funny, Forrest, because I got in, and in the first year I was in this lousy camouflage outfit outside of Richmond, Virginia in the Air Force. I must say that in the Army I was always well placed according to what I was capable of doing. Which was not true of many men. So an order came down that they were looking for artists to go overseas and do sketches of people wading into the shore and roaming the desert and so forth.

FORREST SELVIG: They had artists attached -

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes. Well now, for example, Jim Brooks was an artist attached to one of the Armies. And there was a guy in my outfit named Al Gold. He was quite well known in Philadelphia as a cartoonist, I think, and satirist. And if you go into this thing you got tech sergeant's stripes right off the bat, and you were shipped over. And I thought to myself, "I won't do it, I simply won't do it. I'm not interested in making sketches of this stuff. I have no desire while I'm in the Army to work at all even if I have the chance." So I never applied for it. That must be the maid. Excuse me.

[Interruption]

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I was telling you that when I first got into the Army I had a chance to become a sort of roving artist with a tech sergeant's rating. At that moment I was a p.f.c. or something. And I simply turned it down because although I probably could have made fairly good sketches of people in action and so on, I had no desire to do this. And when I look at the war art since then - you have to be something like the late Dave Friedenthal. I mean you have to have the real oomph for this kind of thing. And when you realize that I had previously studied with Stuart Davis, I didn't really care about it. Stuart wrote me this wonderful letter that I told you about. He said, "Well, you've done some good work now, you can afford to take a few years off, don't worry about it." It was a very kind letter. But I was fortunate in the Army. As I said, first of all I was in about a year doing construction work in camouflage for the Air Force. For example, camouflaging Air Force installations, gun emplacements, building, all these things. Then they were looking for people to teach. And it was then that I kind of sprouted. And I traveled for almost a year or more with just fourteen men. My rank was sergeant. I traveled with a lieutenant. We went all over the South, the Middle West. I think we must have taught, oh, certainly 15,000 people or more. We'd give a three-day course. And I would lecture. And this was very important because I learned how to teach by teaching in the Army. To give you an example, we used to lecture in movie theaters on the bases. I did. I was practically the only man who lectured. And I gave a lecture on camouflaging a bivouac.

Well, we usually did this in the morning. And these poor GI's were half asleep. This was a good place when the lights went down to go to sleep. So the first thing I did - I discovered somewhere that you could buy a film of the invasion of Tarawa, the Pacific Island. So on my own hook without Army money, I bought this film. And it was a lulu. I mean, guys are coming in, they're having their helmets shot off, and they're sneaking around gun emplacements and everything. So I would have my corporal run this damn thing off. By that time they were all shaking. At the end of this thing, I would tell them that the reason for so many deaths on Tarawa was the excellent camouflage the Japanese had installed on that island. So our intelligence completely mis-estimated the strength of the Japanese forces. Well, that shook them up. Then I would go into my lecture. Well, how to keep these guys awake. I had all these little things I would do. I had what is called the tennis game trick. This is where you walk up and down the stage from left to right and right to left and everybody has to follow you. And then I had what I called the chalk thing. That's where I had the blackboard near the first row, and I would bang the chalk on the blackboard, and it would fly all over the first rows and wake them all up. But the biggest trick of all was to stop in the middle of a sentence. Well, you know yourself listening to a speaker that you start to get panicky realizing that the speaker doesn't know what he's saying. You see, what I would do is go into a long sentence and then stop, sort of look at the ceiling, bite my nails. And all these guys would wake up: "My God, this fool doesn't know what to say." So when they were awake I would then snap through the rest of the sentence. Well, I did that for at least a year and a half. Then one fine day somewhere in Florida they decided to ship everybody overseas into the infantry with the exception of thirty men. I was one of the thirty. And we were sent to Fort Belvoir in Virginia near Washington and given a cram course in making maps. And believe me, in college I never had anything as tough as this. This was really something. So then they shipped us via Seattle, Hawaii, Eniwetok, Saipan, over to Guam to fill out a Photogrammetry Company making maps. Well, the only art thing I can remember was that when I went overseas I took about thirty reproductions of pictures I loved, so I could look at them. But also in some sort of romantic way I took them along because it seemed to me that if I were going to die in battle or something, that this was the thing I was going to die for. Do you follow? Believe it or not, one of my best friends who was in the Medics and saw action, which I never did, said he did the same thing: that in his duffle bag he took with him a couple of small art books because this was the one thing he really believed in. That if we were going to fight Fascism, by God, we were going to fight so you could paint. And I said, it sounds pretty corny, but there is a reason. Well then, as I said, over there we really had it very easy. I used to either work all night or I'd work all day in a Quonset hut. And my job was to make the manuscript of the map for the B29 bombing raids on the Jap islands and Japan.

FORREST SELVIG: What do you mean by a manuscript?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, when you make a map somebody obviously has got to make it. I mean the actual map, don't they? Well, what they do is they give you a number of things. They give you the coordinates of the grid. This is made for you. You don't have to do that. Then they give you photographs in stereo pairs, enlarged to just the grid that they've given you. The grid is acetate.

FORREST SELVIG: Yes. So you can see through it.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: See through it. Then they give you those pairs, and you have a stereo gadget through which you look, so that when you put the stereo pairs under the map in relation to the grid, and then you take up your fine fountain pen or whatever it is, you start to run off - actually in a sense it's a copying job, but with a difference. You're looking like you were from a plane right down on this thing, and you start doing this. But what you have to do as a manuscript maker is to put down what you consider to be the essential geographical features and also any landmarks of importance to a bombardier. In other words, coming in on the target - that's a different kind of map, though. Well, in any event you also had the relevant Japanese imperial war maps. Early in the war we captured a complete set. The Japs were absolutely furious. I think it was in Burma or some place - no, it must have been earlier than that, or Singapore or someplace. We got this entire set. Well, the Japs were very cagey because in every map they would leave out a section on the theory that if you captured the map. You still wouldn't know all about that area. But since we had all the maps it didn't make any difference. Then we had the United States - what do you call them? - Hydrographic?

FORREST SELVIG: Yes. Coast and Geodetic Surveys?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes. Geodetic Survey hydro maps. So we had all of that. So I would go through this whole business of making these maps. And then the manuscript would be taken by the fellows down in the Quonset hut there and they would re-do the entire map in different colored inks, all mountains blue, all roads red, and so forth. Then this in turn would be photographed or lithographed by the boys in the lab. And they'd crank out thousands of these maps which would go over to headquarters for the flights. Well, it was very interesting work on the whole. We had General LeMay, who recently was candidate for vice-president, as our general.

FORREST SELVIG: Yes, indeed.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I luckily never had to see General LeMay for anything. There was a marvelous thing where

I don't know whether it was LeMay got on my commanding officer or just a major. They had flown this business. And then the recon goes up and photographs the damage. Well, it had been discovered that all these bombs had dropped on these rice paddies. You know, they'd missed it. So I guess it was LeMay or Pinky O'Donnell, the other general, got on the tail of my commanding officer and said, "Your mapmakers are lousy. We've wasted all these bombs." But we finally figured out that the maps were correct - the bombardier was wrong. But as I said in the previous tape, after the war I did do this mural out there, I never actually finished it. I had done all the cartoons for it and was just starting to paint it when my number came up, and I went home.

FORREST SELVIG: Did you find being in the Army a rather oppressive experience? Or no?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: I think the major emotion I had was one of terrible boredom. This was less true when I taught camouflage, when I actually was teaching it. My overseas experience was really quite brief. It was no more than eight months I think towards the end of the war. I found this on the whole very interesting. And I was so glad to go overseas. I might add it irritated my father no end because he had never gone overseas. In the Army it's the guy who's in combat versus the guy who's in the rear ranks. The guy who's in the rear ranks but in combat against the guy who isn't anywhere near it. Then the guy who's overseas against the guy who's in this country; and so on. It's an endless chain of who's the big hero stuff.

FORREST SELVIG: You mean your father had been in the Army?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes, I told you that in the First World War he had been in Washington in ordinance. He made these breastplates and all that stuff - helmets and so on.

FORREST SELVIG: Oh, yes, yes.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Being in the Army was terribly boring. I remember in all these towns I would go into I would go into the drugstore looking for a pocketbook that might be interesting to read. My God, if you found a pocketbook Hemingway, this was a real big business. Oddly enough I got into the Army by my own choice. Because I had broken my ankle and had it reset and it didn't set well. And I had been classified 1B. And then it was reset again. I had an operation on it. I went out to Governor's Island. We were all stark naked, jumping up and down in front of these doctors. And he realized something was the matter with my ankle because I had no spring in it. So I'll never forget it. He said, "Do you want to be 1A or 1B?" So I said, "1A." You know, to hell with it. And I think the reason for that was to get it over with. And I might add there was considerable pressure on the part of my father, like you're not doing your all for your country stuff and everything. So I thought the hell with it, I'll do it. So the next minute I was in the Army.

FORREST SELVIG: But in what were you doing, I would think you would be surrounded by people who would be more likely to be interested in things you were interested in.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes. Well, for example, the only painter I knew well was John Wally who is now a professor at the University of Illinois. I knew him for a good two years in the Army. However, I had one buddy, a young man from somewhere in Brooklyn - I don't really know what Sammy Katzen did - we just got along well. We were both in the same field, camouflage. One of my best friends overseas was Bill Barner who is a well-known architect in Wilmington, Delaware. On the other hand, the four men who I went through the whole war with - which was very unusual - since we transferred many times - one was a bartender from Jersey City, two of them were truck drivers, and one was an interior decorator. The four of us actually went through the whole war, went overseas and everything and were mustered out at the same time. To be sure you never get used to being unable to talk about certain things, although, as I said, I was fortunate. I did have a few friends. I can remember reading War and Peace in the Army. It's a terribly heavy book to drag around.

FORREST SELVIG: I read it in the Navy.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Did you read it?

FORREST SELVIG: Yes. I was on a destroyer off Okinawa, and I read it.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Really? Well, you probably know a lot more about this stuff than I do. But I remember reading it. I was still in this country. Well, you were in the Navy. I remember... boy, that damn troopship going from - we got to Eniwetok. And I was reading on the deck. I wasn't paying any attention. All of a sudden all these yells. And I looked over and there was another vessel coming right at us. And then we all looked up at the captain who was on the bridge. He had the right of way. But the other boat was on a direct collision course. So he cut across our bow. At this moment we knifed them literally; we hit the other boat. Our captain kind of backed the boat up and we could see this great sliver all the way down the other boat and all sorts of sailors pushing mattresses in there and everything. And then we looked at the captain, and he was laughing like hell. We had very little damage. Our bow was just very slightly bent. So we all thought, "Oh, God, we're going to be on Eniwetok forever!" But oh, no, we set out the next day. As I said, we were there after we conquered Guam. The

only Japs I ever saw were prisoners of war. And all they did was to sell you dirty handkerchiefs. You know, they go around picking up cigarette butts.

FORREST SELVIG: Dirty handkerchiefs?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Pornographic handkerchiefs.

FORREST SELVIG: Oh.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: You know, filthy pictures and stuff, and they'd have these handkerchiefs with all sorts of people making love on them. God knows, the war is no place for anybody, but it's certainly no place for an artist. I mean when you look through what was done in the war in the art field there was none of it that was of any importance really.

FORREST SELVIG: They had artists who were commissioned to go around with the Navy and Army and so on to paint things, to paint action. What's the name? - Biddle who did this.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: George Biddle, Jim Brooks, Phil Guston, Dave Friedenthal, an artist named Boris Miller, there's a whole gang of them did this. I mean the great thing in war is film, is photography.

FORREST SELVIG: But the war was not an important influence on your life? An important sort of period of transition? Well, it was though, wasn't it, because before then you'd been painting in one way and then when you came out you made quite a switch? So it was the period of the ending of one thing and the beginning of another.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes, well in a way, you know, it's strange, but maybe the war, since I survived it, wasn't such a bad idea in the sense that I was completely away from art. As I said, when I got out I had all this luck at once. Like meeting this remarkable woman and through whom I met all these people, and my whole life after the war developed. Getting off on the right foot in Maine. Perhaps having been in the Army so long and coming to Maine again, I could see it obviously freshly. That was another point. And the third point was perhaps this luck of meeting a man who knew Shiva who introduced me to the casein medium. Presumably I might have used it even if I hadn't known about it.

FORREST SELVIG: How long altogether were you in the Army?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, I was in from August 1942 to the beginning of February 1946.

FORREST SELVIG: I was in the Navy from December 1942 to February 12, 1946.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, we must have gotten out within a few days of each other. I think I got out on February 4. You know, I was thinking the other day how many people who were of importance as artists after the war who were not in the war at all. I mean I can rattle these names off for you. For example, Jackson Pollock was not in. Bill de Kooning was not in. To be sure, Brooks, Reinhardt and Guston were all in. Motherwell was not in. You know, in other words, a great deal went on during those four years which a man in the Army would have known nothing about really.

FORREST SELVIG: They were far away from it. But it went on here in New York, wouldn't you say?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Yes. And as I said, the first time I ever saw Pollock was when I was on a furlough. I saw his work at Peggy Guggenheim's. And there were artists who got out of the Army who changed their style radically. I mean the great example would be Brooks and Guston. There is a famous story about Guston. He was still painting that semi-romantic style, you know, the kids in their little paper hats and everything. The story I heard is that he was at a party with Pollock and Jim Brooks. And they took him to task. They simply said, "What you're doing is just some sort of romantic stuff, and you ought to get hep." And it was as a result of that that Guston started to change his style completely. You know one of my friends who I think was very important in those days in the art world was Lou Pollack, who ran Peridot Gallery, and particularly when it was downtown here on 12th Street. Because he handled a lot of those artists. He used to be my framer. He was a hell of a nice egg, too.

FORREST SELVIG: You mentioned Passedoit sometime ago. How involved was Passedoit with all of this?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Not much. Not much. She handled Charles Nordfeldt. She handled my friend Dottie Andrews. She handled Charles Shaw. Her artists were not in this movement at all. I mean the people who took all the gambles were Betty Parsons, Lou Pollack, Charlie Egan. And then of course Kootz took a lot of them over. And then of course the man who really reaped it all at the end was Sidney Janis. But the real pioneer dealers there would seem to me to be Peggy Guggenheim, Betty Parsons, Lou Pollack, and Charlie Egan. They're the four I automatically think of. Some of them got an awfully dirty deal because after they pushed and pushed the artists simply up and left them.

FORREST SELVIG: It's still happening.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Betty Parsons handled Bradley Walker Tomlin who I thought was one of the finest artists in that movement. I used to know him somewhat.

FORREST SELVIG: What was he like?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Oh, he was such a sweet man. He was rather slight. He had a mustache. He was very much a gentleman. And very considerate. A man who it would seem to me would praise other people's work. Great intelligence. Physically I believe always in ill health. He died of heart failure. And I think he had considerable influence on other people. He was also an artist who had a great background as an artist. He was painting handsome pictures way back in the 30s. It's true of many of those artists, with the possible exception of Kline and of Motherwell - but it certainly is true of people like Bradley Walker Tomlin, de Kooning, and Pollock and Jack Tworckov that they all had long backgrounds of hard work and excellent draftsmanship. They all knew how to draw. They all had, as one would say, a firm foundation. And in the case of most of them, they carried most of their baggage with them. What I mean is they just didn't suddenly toss it all overboard. I mean de Kooning of, say, 1950 develops over a long period of time. Kline is the only man I can think of who just suddenly overnight - as for Motherwell it seems to me that Motherwell was always extremely theoretical, intellectual, a kind of super-brain athlete to me. I might also add that although I have great respect for his work, his collages particularly and so on, he happened to be born at a time when you didn't have to have a great deal of dexterity of a sort. Do you follow me?

FORREST SELVIG: No, I don't understand.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well, let me explain it. Maybe this isn't very nice to say. But if Motherwell had been born, oh, in the latter part of the 19th century or something, say, at the time of Eakins or Homer, I don't believe Motherwell would have had the talent as regards the handling of the brush and so on. Do you follow me? In other words, it was possible to make a picture in Motherwell's time --

FORREST SELVIG: Yes, I see.

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: - you see, without having to have really great ability in terms of how you handle the brush and so on.

FORREST SELVIG: Do you think that drawing is still important?

WILLIAM KIENBUSCH: Well - this is quite a few years ago - I had lunch with Bill de Kooning one day and we got to talking about drawing. I've never forgotten this - I mentioned that I had seen Jack Tworckov. Tworckov had just come back from teaching in some Middle Western university, and he was kind of upset because he thought the students weren't really drawing, they weren't really getting the foundation of drawing. And Tworckov had said, "All they want to do is skim the cream off the top," meaning all they wanted to do was make Tworckov's and see how it's done. And then de Kooning said, "Well, maybe drawing is no longer important." You know, this is typical de Kooning. He really meant something by it, too. Maybe drawing as we think of it is no longer important. Obviously I do think it's important. I think what he may have meant here is that we always thought of drawing in some sense as being an equivalent in relation to nature. And certainly one doesn't think, say, of Stella's or Poon's relation of drawing as that at all. In that sense it becomes almost engineering, don't you think? Drawing becomes engineering.

END OF INTERVIEW

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