



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Klaus D. Kertess,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Klaus Kertess on October 1, 1975. The interview was conducted at New York City, NY by Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

PAUL CUMMINGS: Let me say it is October 1, 1975. Paul Cummings talking to Klaus Kertess in his loft on Bond Street. I'll start at the beginning. You were born in New York City, right?

KLAUS KERTESS: Born in New York City in 1940, grew up in Westchester, started going away to school when I was 14 [inaudible]—do you want schools and things like that as well?

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh yeah. Well, you were born in New York City. You lived here until when?

MR. KERTESS: I didn't live in the city. I was born here. My parents had a home about 20 miles outside of the city.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, where was that?

MR. KERTESS: In—first in Briarcliff and then in an apartment in Ardsley [ph] and then a house in Ardsley. So I grew up [inaudible] years and when to Andover and then went to Yale, got a B.A. at Yale. I went to Europe for a year, thinking I was never coming back.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: Worked in an auction house there and studied—I took courses at the University of Bonn and the University of Cologne, partially because I wanted to, partially to get out of the draft.

MR. CUMMINGS: Ah, well, practical. Anyway, we've jumped 20 years.

MR. KERTESS: Jumped 20 years.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Inaudible]. What was Westchester like? Do you have brothers and sisters? Are there more of you?

MR. KERTESS: There's more. There's a brother that's a year older and a sister that's 14 years younger.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh. What are their names?

MR. KERTESS: My sister's name is Barbara; my brother's name is Hans.

MR. CUMMINGS: Um-hm. Now, in growing up, was there art around the house or books or movies? What kind of ambiance was there?

MR. KERTESS: My father was clearly involved with music. He was near blind. He always had bad eyes. My mother had studied some history of art. I mean, from a fairly early age I was instructed in art. There was some art around the house, nothing incredible. I mean, the thing that most impressed me was a copy of a Vermeer that's in the Louvre that my parents got on their wedding trip. There was a German sculptor named Kulver [ph]. There's a piece of his and a couple of nineteenth century paintings that my father had inherited from his father.

A lot of my early experiences were of looking at art. And for awhile, I guess for about five years, I drew a lot [inaudible].

MR. CUMMINGS: When did you start that? Was that very young?

MR. KERTESS: Well, starting in the first grade. And I stopped when I was about 10 or 11.

MR. CUMMINGS: What schools were you going to then?

MR. KERTESS: It was in the local public school. I mean, in Irvington, until I was—I guess I was 10 or 11. Then I went to private school in Tarrytown called Hackley. When I was 15, I went to Andover.

MR. CUMMINGS: You went to where when you were 15?

MR. KERTESS: To Andover.

MR. CUMMINGS: To Andover. How come Andover? Was that—

MR. KERTESS: Purely [inaudible] choice. I had a sense that I wanted to get out of the house. I wanted to go away to school. A friend of mine had gone to Andover, a person my father was fairly close to it. The school had a lot of interests in what I was doing and what he thought I was going to do.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who was your friend who had gone to Andover?

MR. KERTESS: Johnny Dexter-Cayler [ph], who I have never seen since.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: Almost everybody I went to school—it was a small neighborhood, almost everybody went to Hackley.

MR. CUMMINGS: Um-hm.

MR. KERTESS: I wanted to get out of my family's house. So I went up to look at Andover. I liked the feeling of the place, applied, and was told it was too late to apply. I got in my sophomore year rather than freshman year. So I went to Andover for three years.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, what kind of drawings did you make when you were young? Were they school drawings or things started in school to continue at home?

MR. KERTESS: Well, I tended to be like a fairly lonely child and I couldn't like play with too many people. I read a lot. I dreamt a lot. And I started drawing. After awhile I started drawing from the how-to-draw books, essentially just copied things from books.

MR. CUMMINGS: Um-hm.

MR. KERTESS: Occasionally, [inaudible].

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, was there any desire to be an artist at that point?

MR. KERTESS: No.

MR. CUMMINGS: Or were you just kind of—

MR. KERTESS: I mean, it was like an activity that really involved me. That, swimming, and walking dogs were the only things that I seemed to enjoy. I never thought at the time of being an artist. When I was about eight or nine years old, I got very involved with reading history books. For a long time, I had this thought that I was going to go into government service and be a diplomat. But I never thought of becoming a painter.

MR. CUMMINGS: What intrigued you about diplomacy, the government?

MR. KERTESS: I really don't know. I probably dealt with it on the same level of fantasy as I did with drawing.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: I got involved with reading like books about history, like some Roman history. And I got involved with certain explorers like Halibut, who [inaudible]. It was—I guess it was a replacement for what now would be television. I mean, I never—wasn't permitted to have a TV in the house. Wasn't permitted to go to the movies more than once a month, only when it was approved by my father.

MR. CUMMINGS: Why such a strict regime?

MR. KERTESS: My parents were like very—well, on the one hand very liberal, but on the other hand, like both my parents—my father is dead. My mother is still alive. Both of them were German. My father had a very traditional European sense of family. It was that he—the parents were supposedly mainly responsible for the education of the children. Television was an outside influence that he didn't accept. Movies, he didn't accept. It was like a very traditional nineteenth century German intellectual attitude.

On the other hand, he did very little to, you know, like educating his children. And the same [inaudible].

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. KERTESS: But it was the same way, like when I wanted to go away to school. It was my father's idea that that was wrong because one would stay together as a family until one was 21.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, what about—did they speak German? I mean, both of your parents?

MR. KERTESS: Both of my parents spoke German. My grandmother was with us until I was nine. And I spoke German before I spoke English. The first help that—well, the first four years of my life, I didn't see another child other than my brother and spoke only German. And then when we moved into an apartment house I learned to speak English within like six or seven months.

MR. CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. So were there any teachers in high school that you remember, or grammar school, that were particularly interesting?

MR. KERTESS: There was a first grade teacher who was the one who probably trained me on the painting and drawing. I used to make paintings of clouds for her. Most public school teachers are a total bore and I have no [inaudible]. When I was at Andover, there were three or four people who were very influential in terms of what I was going to do later on.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who were they?

MR. KERTESS: Well, two art teachers and one English teacher. The art teachers were a man named [inaudible] and Patrick Morgan, who was mentioned in everybody's biography as being "Patrick the painter" and also taught, you know, a so-called art appreciation course there.

MR. CUMMINGS: Now, what about his wife who comes into so many stories?

MR. KERTESS: Maud [Cabot Morgan]?

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. KERTESS: The story was, I worked for the paper when I was there. I wrote a fairly typical prep school humor column for the paper. And the way we had—every two months we had to put in some blurb in the paper that Maud was touring with her self-portraits again, and it usually meant that she was in a sanitarium somewhere. And Patrick had—I mean, one of the big status symbols of being at Andover was if you were invited to Patrick's house for dinner. And it usually meant drinks afterwards, which was fairly exotic.

But he had a fairly intense spirit. You know, he had the ability to open one's eyes to look at art. I mean, experience was fairly important too. Joe Temply [ph] was his assistant. He wasn't as organized or as intense, but very—like, we would go [inaudible] fairly good teacher.

The other teacher was a man named McCarthy who was an English teacher who like started the curiosity for writing in me. The rest of them have become a blur except two that tried to get me kicked out constantly.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who were they?

MR. KERTESS: The dean of students and the swimming coach.

MR. CUMMINGS: An odd combination.

MR. KERTESS: It was an odd combination.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: The dean of students wanted to groom me for Harvard.

MR. CUMMINGS: Aha.

MR. KERTESS: The swimming coach wanted me to be a varsity swimmer. I didn't like organized competition, so I tended not to show up at swimming practice most of the time. The dean of students took umbrage at my humor column, and once a week I had to go in to be told that I was vulgar and I was a very bad influence on the school at large. Apparently, a reasonable amount of time at faculty meetings was spent discussing like how to shut me up or how to get me out of school.

MR. CUMMINGS: But they let you continue writing the column.

MR. KERTESS: They let me continue writing the column because it was what they called a liberal school.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, I see.

MR. KERTESS: My grades were too good to prevent me from—well, you know, there was very little that could be done.

MR. CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. Well, did you have any particular friends at Andover, people that, you know, that were not—

MR. KERTESS: That I still see?

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, or that were influences then in terms of either art or writing or general life?

MR. KERTESS: Not really. I mean, I had—you know, like two or three fairly close friends at school. It was small enough that almost everybody knew each other in some fashion. There are people I still see from there. There's no friend I had at the time who like influenced me in one form or another. My roommate at Andover turned into my roommate in college. His wife is now a painter showing in New York.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who is that?

MR. KERTESS: That's—well, her name is Mia Westerlund [Westerlund-Roosen]. She showed with Zabriskie and Willard.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, right, right.

MR. KERTESS: Also, I grew up about two miles away from her in Hastings. She's from Hastings.

MR. CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. You know, you mentioned you didn't like organized sports. Were you interested in anything other than swimming, which was offered? Or—sports—[inaudible]?

MR. KERTESS: [Inaudible] water. I was—one of the epithets that was thrown at me by my housemaster, who was a football coach, was that I was a half-man because I was cultivating my mind more than I was cultivating my body.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, I see.

MR. KERTESS: I refused to take part in—I mean, it was mandatory to take part in athletics, and I always found a way of getting out of it. I liked swimming, but I didn't like swimming forced numbers of laps or—

MR. CUMMINGS: Against the clock or somebody else?

MR. KERTESS: Swimming in races. I used to run around the block and walk into the infirmary and say I had an asthma attack and get a medical excuse.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, what about the museum at Andover? Do they have a nice collection of things? Was that of interest to you then?

MR. KERTESS: It was of interest. It wasn't—it's funny. I feel stronger about the museum now than I did then. I mean, you know, in spite of the fact that my column in the newspaper was taken up with endless bitching about the school, like, the experience of being there was very important to me. I've never felt like blind devotion to any institution was worthwhile. Don't like notions of school spirit. But I feel very strongly about the experience at Andover as having been like very important to my life.

MR. CUMMINGS: In what way? As opposed to Yale, or—

MR. KERTESS: [Inaudible] Well, Yale was just another university for me to go to. Andover at that time seemed like a very specific experience. It's hard for me to define. A lot of it had to do with getting away from home, which seemed very important. It gave me like my first sense of myself. It gave me certain feelings of independence. I mean, relative to like most prep schools, Andover is fairly open, somewhat more democratic, less like lust-oriented [inaudible] prep school. It felt good to be there. I was encouraged to do my own work. That seemed—I mean, in retrospect, was a very good thing.

I mean, by the time I got to college, was more or less doing what I wanted to do. I probably could have—I mean, I have a feeling I could have gone to any university. I don't have any feeling per se for the college I went to, whereas I have a specific feeling about Andover, which is hard to define.

I mean, I have—same things with college—I have like a very strong feeling about the museum at Yale. I don't have that strong feeling about the museum at Andover, although it certainly had like some good things in it. The

things that I remember the best are like American paintings from the 20s, which have never really interested me particularly. I mean, people like Bellows, you know, are good painters, but I've never felt any rapport with them and those were my strongest impressions of the museum. So really like more through like, say, Patrick Morgan's lectures or his kind of enthusiasm.

And I traveled a fair amount with my parents. I went to Europe almost every summer with my parents.

MR. CUMMINGS: Starting when?

MR. KERTESS: Starting at the age of 10. And was—I mean, my first involvement in terms of art really was—well, say, like from there and certain Dutch painters of the seventeenth century, and then primarily with the fifteenth century painters of Florence.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did that come about?

MR. KERTESS: Really through just looking and feeling. I felt closest rapport with the Florentine painters of the fifteenth century. And there are a lot of likes that I don't—I mean, when I was 13 or 14 I thought Botticelli was the greatest painter in the world. I still like Botticelli, but I'd rather look at a Piero della Francesca. I've always liked Florentine painting, and there was a point where my feelings were split in terms of, like wanting to devote myself to like fifteenth century Florentine painting as versus like contemporary art or twentieth century art. I used never to accept the fact that it was possible for like contemporary art to be seen or shown in Italy because I identified it so strongly with Florence.

MR. CUMMINGS: Hm. Well, where did you go with your family, generally, when you went there?

MR. KERTESS: The first time, just to Germany. And then after that—

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, that was what, about 1950 or so?

MR. KERTESS: It was 49 was the first time.

MR. CUMMINGS: So there was still a lot of war damage in the time period?

MR. KERTESS: Damage—my grandmother who had lived with us went back to Germany after the war. She lived in a neighborhood that still had bombed-out buildings.

MR. CUMMINGS: What city was that?

MR. KERTESS: In Hamburg. I stayed with her for a little while.

MR. CUMMINGS: What did you think of all of that or don't really remember?

MR. KERTESS: I had very little sense of it. I mean, what I had more are—like remember like more distinctly at one point was either 49 or 50, when did—the Korean War broke out at the end of 49, right?

MR. CUMMINGS: Uh, yeah.

MR. KERTESS: As that was brewing, there was—in a bombed-out block near my grandmother's there was a Communist demonstration. And I still remember a big sign saying "Hands off Korea." I joined the demonstrations because I was curious, my grandmother got hysterical because bricks were flying all over the place and she didn't know where I was. I was there with my little Brownie Hawkeye taking pictures.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: With very little sense of what was going on.

MR. CUMMINGS: Fantastic, yeah.

MR. KERTESS: I had—at the time I didn't have much feeling for like the fact that a war had taken place or what that war might have been. I didn't have a sense of that until much later in my life when I spent a year working in Germany. But we traveled. The first summer we stayed in Germany, went to Bavaria. Then went to Salzburg for the music festival, did that like fairly regularly in the summer. We went to Salzburg almost every summer for five years. Went to Paris, then to the south of France.

MR. CUMMINGS: How was Paris?

MR. KERTESS: Paris, I liked. I always liked. I mean, my brother came with us the first time and he was angry because we went to too many museums. My father, in spite of not seeing very well, has been very involved with

Rodin. I still remember going to the Rodin museum for the first time and like wandering through the Louvre. I think, yeah, now when was it? It was I guess at the age of 12 like started getting involved with notions of the possibility of collecting, which I've long since given up. Bought my first artwork when I was 12 in Bavaria.

MR. CUMMINGS: What was that?

MR. KERTESS: It was a page out of an illustrated manuscript from the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, a tri-point drawing of a horse. It was fairly harmless. And it gave me great pleasure at the time.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, how did you like this contrast of being in Europe in the summer and being at Andover? Did they augment each other, or were they kind of different experiences?

MR. KERTESS: They were different experiences. I liked traveling. It was the strongest sense I had of my parents was when we went away during the summer of we traveled in Europe. I don't have much sense of like having seen my father except in Europe for like a number of years. I always liked the feeling of traveling.

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you still like to travel?

MR. KERTESS: Yeah. I haven't done enough of it in the last years except on business. Yeah, I have—in a way, it's—besides seeing things that I really like, it's satisfied like another side of my life that it seemed I was always involved with fairly organized patterns and a fairly organized routine. Traveling was never about that. It was much more unexpected, without much routine.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you ever develop an interest in music, given your father's influence and the Bach festivals? Or was it just—

MR. KERTESS: Not a serious one. I mean, you know, in spite of my involvement with Philip Glass's music at the moment, which has gone on for some time, I like music. I like having it around. I have fairly strong likings for Mozart. It's not something that I sought out. I mean, I have strong impressions of hearing music when I was young. I mean, in the summer we went to private like the Bach festival in a little town in Bavaria. I still have strong impressions of like sitting in a Romanesque church and listening, you know, like to the Bach being played and really liking it. But it's not something I ever like pursued. I have a rather—I mean, I have a fairly good sense for music, a bad ear for music.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: I got as far as trying to play the accordion when I was about 13 or 14—never got beyond the—well, I was in an all-accordion band.

MR. CUMMINGS: Marvelous. When was that?

MR. KERTESS: But I always played by rote. I think I was 12 or 13. The highlight of that was when the whole band was supposed to appear on the Paul Whiteman show and I got sick.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: And lay in bed crying.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, dear.

MR. KERTESS: As it was going on. It was not a serious devotion, however.

MR. CUMMINGS: But during the years at Andover do you make any decisions about where you wanted to go, what you wanted to do? Was Yale the obvious place to go? Or how did you get—

MR. KERTESS: Most of my choices have always been intuitive and then rationalized afterwards. I mean, when I saw Andover, I didn't want to look at another school, so decided to go there. When I was about—well, at the time to choose colleges, my parents, being European, wanted me to go to Harvard because that was the name that had the most clout in Europe or the one that they had heard of the most. My father had business with someone at Princeton; he liked the atmosphere at Princeton. So those were the two choices that they would have had.

I didn't like Princeton because it looked too much like the suburb I grew up in. Having gone to school near Boston and Cambridge, I always felt like I was a character in *Ethan Frome* whenever I went to Boston.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: And decided offhand not to go to Harvard because it was too depressing. I went to look at Yale

and it just happened that whoever it was that was taking me around campus seemed sympathetic. It felt good to me at the time, so Yale was the only college that I applied to. I went there. If I did it again, I wouldn't go to Yale.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, really? Why?

MR. KERTESS: I'd prefer like going to a college in a city somewhere. It seems like a much more interesting experience to me.

MR. CUMMINGS: What did you go to Yale to study? Do you have—

MR. KERTESS: History of art.

MR. CUMMINGS: You decided to—

MR. KERTESS: Well, I didn't decide that until after I got into Yale. Through—when I was at Andover, I had like a short, intense flirtation with notions of becoming a writer. A teacher, the English teacher I'd mentioned before was a fairly eccentric man named McCarthy. Almost succeeded in converting me to Catholicism, to the horror of my parents. I went through a brief religious phase that was somehow that I can't explain inspired by Shakespeare and reading Shakespeare.

MR. CUMMINGS: Hm.

MR. KERTESS: I was writing like very sort of maudlin, romantic, Poe-like stories for a brief period of time. And besides that, I mean, I vacillated between that and still thinking I was going to go into government service.

By the time I got to college, the first two years I was in a special program that was like one of those marvelous mish-mashes of a little bit of everything more intensely than you'd normally get it, and gradually got more and more involved with history of art and began to take history of art courses to the exclusion of everything else, which I now regret.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who did you study with at Yale?

MR. KERTESS: At Yale? Took a Renaissance course with Charles Seymour. Took George Hamilton's courses. George Hamilton probably was like a fairly strong influence on me or was important to like my road to becoming an art dealer and getting involved with contemporary art.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

MR. KERTESS: I didn't like his courses. His courses tended to be about name-dropping or having tea with Leger or Duchamp. He took a fairly active interest in me, and I talked to him outside of class a fair amount. Bob Rosenblum, had been a student of his, Henry Geldzahler had been a student of his. Some—I mean, it was going through the experience of Cubism that finally like led me into the twentieth century. And Bob Rosenblum's book on Cubism was like a very important experience for me in terms of learning about, you know—learning about all art, but like opening the twentieth century up to me.

George would, you know—like he gave his chic little cocktail parties in his house so we could see his art. And he was very glib. But he also was like very good in terms of like pointing like paths to me or like sending me to New York and introducing me to Henry, who was a mess at that point, was beginning to cement—

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: He just—

MR. CUMMINGS: Um-hm. How do you like that, the fact that he took an interest in you outside the normal classroom routine? Was that exceptionally important to you or expected?

MR. KERTESS: It wasn't expected, I don't think. I mean, it was important. He doesn't really know it. I mean, I run into him from time to time now, had one very bad scene with him about two years ago, three years ago. His interest in me was fairly important. I mean, I'd gone through like—I guess like seeking out a series of father replacements that were all on the fantasy level that ranged from Ted Williams to Bernard Berenson to Pablo Picasso, all of whom I wrote letters to, none of whom responded.

Yeah, George's interest in me was fairly important to me. On the other hand, like Charlie Seymour took a fairly strong interest in me. I was told that I could consider myself extremely flattered because I was the only undergraduate whose name George Kubler could remember on the street.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: Probably Seymour and George Hamilton were—as an undergraduate, were the most important people in terms of, you know, like helping me to find like some sense of direction.

MR. CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. What about the other instructors you've had? Were they there? Or were any of them—

MR. KERTESS: Some of them were good. I mean, you know, Vince Scully is a person that I never took classes from, but I sat in on his courses like off and on. I never was very involved with architecture. I have difficulty understanding things in three dimensions. But I liked Scully's lectures a lot just as everyone else did and still does.

Bill Crelly taught a course in Baroque, which was real good and which introduced me to Rome, for which I'm thankful, the seventeenth century Rome at any rate. The other teachers, as an undergraduate, didn't interest me at all. I mean, I had a philosophy teacher the first year I was there—well, combination philosophy—well, a philosophy history teacher who was very good. Took a course with Henri Pere [ph] [inaudible], which was a lot of strutting and posing, but introduced me to a fair amount of French literature that I hadn't read before.

MR. CUMMINGS: Were you familiar with German literature? Or didn't you read German?

MR. KERTESS: Reasonably familiar. I took and almost flunked German at Andover because, although I could speak it fluently, my knowledge of grammar in the academic sense was quite lacking.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: I read a fair amount of German literature, was fairly interested in it. My first two years at Yale, I spent a goodly deal of my time reading *The Magic Mountain* in German and in English and in German again and in thinking I was going to cast it and make a movie out of it.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's a marvelous idea. [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: And I don't think I could read it again at this point.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, what other activities were you involved with at Yale? Did you write for the papers or anything?

MR. KERTESS: Yeah. I was consciously not involved with any activities. I didn't like the sense of being at Yale. I had some patience with it as an institution. I wanted to write for the paper. They told me I'd have to go through like all the normal processes, whatever they call that, of joining the paper—

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, right [inaudible].

MR. KERTESS:—doing a lot of shit work and [inaudible].

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: I refused to do that. Then I was going to join the literary magazine, whatever that was. I didn't like that either. And finally I went back, I think in my sophomore year, and talked to the people at the newspaper and said I'd like to write an art column for them. And they let me do that. I didn't do that very often. But I, you know, in the course of the next two years may have reviewed like three or four shows that were at the museum, and which was what I'd wanted to do anyway.

MR. CUMMINGS: Now, how did the museum become important to you? Because I know in your—in a preface to the exhibition you did there in 1973, you mentioned that the museum at Yale became an important place for you.

MR. KERTESS: Partially out of refuge.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: I liked some of—I mean, there were things in the museum that I cared about a lot that I still like now. I think, you know, like it's an extraordinary museum. It's something—the museum is like very humanly scaled. It's an early building of [Louis] Kahn's. It's one of the best museum spaces that I know. And I like the Italian primitives in the collection a lot. And then there were things—some of the things that Stephen [Carlton] Clark gave to the museum, like there's a Picasso called *First Steps* that I used to go and look at endlessly. There's the extraordinary Van Gogh that he himself described as a room that at any moment a suicide or a

murder could take place in, a billiard room.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you like writing about the exhibitions for the paper?

MR. KERTESS: It was pretty glib, the writing I did. I liked doing it. I mean, I'd always—all my life have depended very heavily on words and totally mistrusted words at one and the same time.

MR. CUMMINGS: Why is that, do you think?

MR. KERTESS: Well, you can't like them or can't love them without hating them.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] Because they're all so independent.

MR. KERTESS: I mean, like verbalization was like primarily, like form of communication for me for a long time. And it's still obviously as important to me now.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: At the time, you know, I was totally involved with verbalization and almost nothing else was repressed and almost all other senses. The writing was important to me.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you write more at Yale? I mean, did you continue your interest? Was that a possibility or not?

MR. KERTESS: Off and on. Yeah, I—well, in a naïve sort of way. I mean, I'd go to Paris for a summer supposedly to study at the Sorbonne and I was staying at a 50-cent-a-night hotel on the top floor. And I'd sit out on the rooftops thinking about Rimbaud and Verlaine, the French Symbolist poets and writing love letters to a woman in Florence that I thought I was going to marry at the time. And then I started a novel. I kept a very self-conscious diary that I was keeping in the hopes that it would be read and published. It always came in kind of fits and starts and I'd throw it out or save it for awhile and then throw it out.

My main concern was—well, most of the time it was about looking at art. The museum at Yale, it was a place I could always go to and feel good. It was a place where I was always going to see something that would make me think. And it was—I mean, I had no sense of Yale as a place. Didn't like New Haven. Had some very good friends, but tended not to be involved with the university activities at all.

We had—there were four of us in a suite of rooms. I tended to work very hard during the week and be very drunk on the weekends. There were always parties in our rooms.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who were the others? Were they close friends after that time?

MR. KERTESS: There was my roommate from Andover, Einar Westerlund. My closest friend was a South American named Ernesto Alvarez who is from El Salvador, but, you know, I see every two years in New York now. Well, there were three of them. The third person besides me was a person named Peter Perez who—I mean, went back to the Midwest and is working for Alka-Seltzer or something like that.

I also met in college the person who became like the backer and partner in the gallery, Jeff Byers. We were all in the same college.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, as you were going through the experience of Yale, did you decide to become an academic or a dealer? Where were your tendencies directed?

MR. KERTESS: The slow process of elimination. I mean, by the time I was in my third year at Yale, or my junior year, I had fairly complete knowledge that whatever I was going to do would be involved with art. I had some thoughts of teaching. My father was encouraging me to teach because my father was something of a spurious academic. And he really liked—

MR. CUMMINGS: What do you mean by that?

MR. KERTESS: Well, that he liked the idea that—of non-moneyed pursuits and thought it would be a really good idea to be a teacher at an academic—

MR. CUMMINGS: Was there also that sort of that sort of Herr Doktor Professor business?

MR. KERTESS: No, not really. It was—you know, I mean, he enjoyed—I mean, my father was a businessman, enjoyed his business, but always claimed he would have preferred, you know, like the more academic life. And liked the notion of the university, liked—I mean, when I was at Andover, he really liked coming to Andover to

visit me. He became fairly close to like William Sloane Coffin, who was at Andover and then at Yale and the headmaster at Andover and liked the atmosphere. Always encouraged me, you know, like to teach, which was in the back of my mind for awhile.

I mean, the alternatives were like teaching, museum work, or gallery work. I didn't gravitate that strongly to any one of them. Well, there's actually one teacher I failed to mention before who probably was real important to me, as well as a man named Mike Thomas, who, when I was a freshman taking my first history of art course, was teaching like a section of the introductory art course. And he was a graduate student at the time. Very caustic, but with an incredible eye. And his classes were important to me.

At some point when I was at Yale, I guess my second year, I went to work at the Metropolitan Museum for the summer, thinking that was like a test as to, you know, whether I'd be interested in that.

MR. CUMMINGS: What was that like?

MR. KERTESS: Pretty grey.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: I was to be like incredibly flattered that I was permitted to be a volunteer in the paintings department.

MR. CUMMINGS: Aha.

MR. KERTESS: It meant doing occasional dirty work for Ted [Theodore] Rousseau. The teacher who I just mentioned, Mike Thomas, when he left Yale, went to work at the Met—was involved together with Margareta Salinger in cataloging all the French paintings in the European paintings department. Didn't like the Met. Left, he says, to be able to support his ex-wife and his new wife and several children and make money.

I felt like very good that I had his office when I was there for the summer. And I spent most of the summer doing research work at the Frick. Really liked doing kind of mop-up of the things that Charles Sterling and Margareta and Mike had been doing on the catalog. And occasionally, Ted Rousseau would throw me a more interesting tidbit to do that—but what bugged me, I guess, was that, even though everybody knew I was only there for a summer, there was not enough to do in the department to keep everybody happy. So there was some jealousy in anything that may or may not have been given to me to do.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: But I mean, Margareta Salinger is a fantastic person. I still see Margareta from time to time. We had lunch in the spring. I liked working with her and decided categorically after a summer, which may have been premature, that I could not work in a museum. Tend not to like to work for anybody or to like work in a bureaucracy or with a group of people. I did not like Ted Rousseau very much, did not like the feeling in the paintings department. It was—well, it seemed too much about connoisseurship and not enough about art.

MR. CUMMINGS: What do you mean?

MR. KERTESS: Well, it was about having good taste and being elegant rather than having any experience. Certainly taste interests me and style interests me, but that didn't seem to me what art was about.

MR. CUMMINGS: Um-hm.

MR. KERTESS: I never knew Ted Rousseau well enough to know what his commitment to art may or may not have been. At any rate, he projected himself as like a very nineteenth century man style. And I didn't respond to it particularly well, nor did he respond to me particularly well.

Anyway, that decided me against working for a museum.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you enjoy writing about art?

MR. KERTESS: Yeah. I don't have like a very—I mean, when I wrote those things for the paper at Yale, I mean I don't have any strong images now of having done that. I have a stronger image of the absurd humor column I did at Andover than I do of the reviews I wrote for the few shows that I did at the museum at Yale.

MR. CUMMINGS: But you must have had papers to write and all that kind of thing?

MR. KERTESS: A lot of papers to write, always. I mean, I did the usual. I procrastinated a lot and tended to do them at the last minute. But I enjoyed—always liked writing them. I even wrote a few for one of my roommates

from time to time because he never did any work. And he always got better marks on his than I got on mine.

MR. CUMMINGS: It shows the instructor wasn't aware of style, right?

MR. KERTESS: [Laughter] Or something.

MR. CUMMINGS: So what happened? Yale went along, and by the time you graduated, had you decided? That was when you went to Europe, though.

MR. KERTESS: By the time I graduated, I had some sense that I might want to start an art gallery. I had an intense disliking for both Yale and New Haven, which spread over to America in general. I had some curiosity of going to Europe, but didn't have the nerve at the time. I mean, I never considered dropping out and just leaving. There was a point at Yale where I was encouraged to leave for a year and go to Europe because I was trying to move off campus together with a group of people.

MR. CUMMINGS: By whom? I mean, how did that occur?

MR. KERTESS: There were four or five of us that wanted to rent a house on the beach and live there rather than live in a dormitory. It just seemed like—it's changed some now, not that much. It always seemed like vaguely absurd to me that the contradictory clichés that we have to live with that on the one hand that we were the hope of the future and we were now independent young men, and on the other hand at the end of every weekend there would be a campus policeman that would come up and check out our rooms to see if we were hiding women there.

I never liked the regimen of the university as such. I spent—if I went to New York, the Paramount—if I wasn't working or having drunken parties in our rooms, I was either at one of two black nightclubs or in the museum. Really didn't like Yale as such, although I ended up going back to graduate school there.

MR. CUMMINGS: What did you do in New York?

MR. KERTESS: Drove in—at the time, I guess it was my debutante phase. Drove in with like Ernesto, usually. Sometimes went to the theater. Started to like look at galleries, go to exhibitions. I mean, at that time, which was what, around—you know, well, I graduated in 62. There—at the time I was taking history of art, there was no teaching of contemporary history of art. I mean, George Hamilton, who would, you know, go up and through Rauschenberg and Johns, but at that time it was still hard for me to look at a Pollock, say, and really like make contact with it or understand it. I got as far as deKooning because deKooning seemed so easy to relate to, like Dutch painting or Baroque painting, for me.

I started to go to galleries in New York. We'd usually drive in, you know, for a day, for a night. Go to the theaters. Go to parties, go to El Morocco. I had like, well, Ernesto was like really socially conscious [inaudible].

MR. CUMMINGS: But what got you interested? I mean, this was say the early 60s. Rauschenberg was still very new on the scene. I mean, he had only appeared a few years before.

MR. KERTESS: Yeah. I had very little sense of—I mean, at that time—I mean, every—there's much more—well, communication in a superficial way now than there was then. I mean, at that time there was, say, nobody doing graduate work in anything more contemporary than the end of the nineteenth century. And Yale was considered to have like a more up-to-date art history department than almost anybody else.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you escape being locked into [inaudible]?

MR. KERTESS: I slid out from under.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: I really—it just like was a liking that developed gradually.

MR. CUMMINGS: I mean, Hamilton and the other people didn't put it down, so it was still open.

MR. KERTESS: No. Yeah. I mean, no one said, you know—I mean, until I got to graduate school, no one tried to discourage me in graduate school. I was downright discouraged about contemporary art or as to working with contemporary art or even twentieth century art. It was left open to me, but there was no one that really taught it. I mean, I have—I mean, and at the time I—

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you think you can teach art that's so contemporaneous, with classes? I mean, by the time it's made and it's shown and assimilated, do you think it can filter back into the university?

MR. KERTESS: It depends. It depends on the goals of the teacher. I mean, I've taught contemporary art to—well, students, such as myself at, say, at Trinity. I mean, my primary concern—I also taught at Visual Arts, which was somewhat more impossible. But my primary concern was not so much to teach facts or to teach dictums as it was to open eyes toward maybe just to show somebody where the doorknob was, but not open the door necessarily; let them open the door.

Yeah, I think you can like make people aware certainly of the possibilities of the experience of contemporary art. I don't think you can teach the history of contemporary art, because that can't really be done. I mean, that's a mistake of most contemporary critics, is the notion of making instant history of what's here. I never had the desire and the ambition to do that.

What I guess gradually began to turn me off—I mean, that having written off museum work after my two months seemed to develop here at the Met, I began to get annoyed at the notion that history of art was about slides rather than about art.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] True. You discovered that.

MR. KERTESS: That—yeah, fairly early on. And that made me a little edgy. But I hadn't—I mean, when I left Yale and went to Europe, some of it was like—I mean, what I started to say before was that at the time I didn't feel freedom to just say, "I'm going to Europe." I could always count on my father sending me 100 or 200 dollars if I ran out of money. But I didn't have the inclination to go unless I had a job. I needed that security.

So a true friend of my father's, I got—I mean, it's totally absurd. I got a job at an auction house, which was like probably the best auction house in Germany. They also—

MR. CUMMINGS: Who was that?

MR. KERTESS: It was Lempertz in Cologne.

MR. CUMMINGS: All right.

MR. KERTESS: In between auctions, they did exhibitions, usually stuff that couldn't sell at auctions.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: The man who ran Lempertz was interested in opening a contemporary gallery. He asked but I knew much too little to do that. Certainly could not and should not have done it in Europe. But I went with that in mind, and he never having met me made that promise, that within two years I would, you know, like open—

MR. CUMMINGS: Have the gallery.

MR. KERTESS:—a contemporary gallery. Within a month of being there, I couldn't stand it. And I didn't stay longer than a year. But I went with the intention of staying at least for five years, if not longer, and maybe moving to Europe permanently.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, how did you like working for Lempertz? I mean, they do an international business.

MR. KERTESS: I hated it.

MR. CUMMINGS: Big print sales and all sorts of things.

MR. KERTESS: I was—you know, I mean, I don't know, some good things passed through. There were one or two people that worked there that I liked. There wasn't much that passed through the place that I was really interested in.

MR. CUMMINGS: Um-hm.

MR. KERTESS: I couldn't stand the—I mean, the boss of the company was one thing. The man who was so-called business director was pretty outrageous.

MR. CUMMINGS: In what way?

MR. KERTESS: Just in being like a cliché German executive, was very uptight. Would call me into his office and tell me things like that in Germany people didn't walk around with their hands in their pocket all the time. Or my business letters were too short.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: Or would take—I mean, it was in Cologne. Cologne is intensely and provincially Catholic.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: Having grown up in a WASP suburb in Westchester, it was rather odd to be discriminated against for not being a Catholic. I mean, I was very aware of that in Cologne. It didn't bother me. The only way I survived the year in Cologne was, I spent all the money I made at Lambert's going to Paris once a month to like—my roommate Ernesto had an apartment on Rue St. Louis one flight over Chagall. I went to Paris and I either stayed with him or stayed in a hotel. That was the only thing that kept me alive was really that.

MR. CUMMINGS: For sanity.

MR. KERTESS: And the few people in Paris was a Hungarian actress that I was going out with, just being in Paris and having a decent meal, seeing people that looked more attractive than what I saw in the streets of Cologne.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, how did you like the auction business as an aspect of the art milieu?

MR. KERTESS: I don't know—you know, with the—I didn't have strong feelings towards it one way or the other. I was surprised at its occasional fraudulence. I once was almost fired for telling—Germany has like fairly strict laws. I mean, everyone says one of the reasons London became like such an incredible place for auctions was because there are not very strong reclamation laws. And a great deal of things that came to auction after the Second World War were things that were stolen during the war.

Germany has reasonably strong reclamation laws. They had to—I was upset. I mean, I—you know, the only time I ever really got upset at working there was when an extraordinarily valuable piece of porcelain had been smuggled out of Poland and brought to us for auction. The rightful owner was an impoverished nobleman who was a friend of friends of mine. Didn't know how to go about reclaiming it, had an absolutely shitty lawyer. I went to the library and found a book with an illustration of the piece of porcelain, called his lawyer, told him the name of the book, what page the illustration was on, and how to go about reclaiming the piece.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: And was all but fired for doing that.

MR. CUMMINGS: I'm sure.

MR. KERTESS: And occasionally, I was surprised, I guess, at the fake fitting or, you know, the jewelry dealers who'd sit in the front row and work in the combines. But I can't say that—I mean, I wasn't strongly morally outraged. I just wasn't very involved in it. I mean, my birthday present to myself that year was quitting and leaving for Italy.

I came—you know, I went there, I suppose—it's like I went to Germany like partially because I spoke the language, partially to come to some kind of terms with whatever my heritage was, and partially because I had a job offer there. The only other place would have been London.

MR. CUMMINGS: Um-hm.

MR. KERTESS: Because my French wasn't good enough to work in Paris. I mean, Cologne is just an incredibly depressing city. I lived in, you know, what—in a sort of slum apartment that was half whorehouse, half apartment house. Didn't like most of the Germans that I met, except, you know, like one or two people. Really had very few friends. So I always gravitated towards Paris.

MR. CUMMINGS: Why did you select Italy as a place to go?

MR. KERTESS: Oh, that may be some of the German in me, is the pull towards the Mediterranean.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: I've always felt comfortable in Italy. I have now not been to Italy for 10 years—always loved Florence. When I traveled in Europe alone, I would spend between three and six weeks of the summer in Florence for about a three- or four-year period. That summer, I spent three weeks there. I don't like green landscape. I prefer the ocean. The landscape that I respond to is like a dried-out landscape. I feel like a lot of sympathy for the landscape that's close to me. I love, you know, Florence, like the towns in Tuscany, and like the art a great deal.

MR. CUMMINGS: Um-hm.

MR. KERTESS: Florence—I mean, I couldn't live in Florence. It seemed like the prototype for like New York, to me, without its madness.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] Well, there is a certain influence a few blocks from here, you know.

MR. KERTESS: Yeah, the way the city is laid out, its reasonableness appealed to me. I've never enjoyed Rome that much, although I like it. Like, I've traveled really only in European countries and I've always felt the best in Italy.

MR. CUMMINGS: Hm. How did you—what did you do in Bonn at the university and at Cologne? Because that was at this time, wasn't it? Or was that—

MR. KERTESS: It was at that time, yeah. I took—god, I don't think I took more than three courses. I took one course at Bonn with a man named—oh, Christ, I've forgotten his name. With a man who looked like he walked out of a George Grosz drawing and, of course, taught German expressionism.

But a lot of what was going on in Germany at the time in terms of art was about getting rid of the guilt of the war. I mean, there was nobody that you could meet or talk to that would admit to having had any part of the war. A lot of people, including Ribbentrop's widow, were buying German expressionist paintings to prove to the world that they hadn't been involved with the war.

There was absolutely no understanding of American art at the time. I remember people telling me how much better Volz was than Pollock. At the time, I was working at Lempertz, Schmela tried to auction off a Pollock at Dusseldorf and was almost laughed out of town. Zwirner, who had a tiny gallery in Cologne at the time, had a Twombly show and was almost laughed out of town.

The Germans at that time, and still today, had yet to build up a culture of their own. So they tended to swallow American culture, I guess like everyone else.

MR. CUMMINGS: Japanese, yeah.

MR. KERTESS: Yeah. When I was there, they were involved with American theater rather than American art. And I mean, Tennessee Williams and Edward Albee were on everybody's lips.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: I mean, I actually went and saw a performance of Edward Albee's like *The American Dream*, done in German, which seemed pretty absurd.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] How did you like that? I mean, it must have given you an unusual perspective on looking at American culture, its manifestations there?

MR. KERTESS: It made me want to come back to New York [inaudible]. I mean, I hadn't ever lived in New York. But I mean, within a month and a half of my being in Germany, I wanted to come back to America. I came back at Christmastime to be best man at my roommate's wedding to see what it was like here out of college. I went up to New Haven. I talked with George Hamilton because I was confused as to what I wanted to do next. George convinced me to come to graduate school the following year.

MR. CUMMINGS: Which must have been, what, 63?

MR. KERTESS: Sixty-two, sixty-three I was out. Sixty-three, sixty-four, I went back in. I accepted his arguments on the condition that they would let me—my first condition for going back was that they would let me teach right away, which normally didn't happen until you were in your second or third year of graduate school.

MR. CUMMINGS: Why did you want to teach?

MR. KERTESS: Well, the only thing you could teach as a graduate student was—the way they had the introductory history of art course set up was that there were probably 300 people taking it. And once a week, there would be a lecture by an expert in that field, you know, so Scully would lecture on Greece. Charlie Seymour would do the Renaissance. And then the 300 would break down into like discussion groups, and the teaching assistants, which is what we were called, would run a discussion group.

[END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A]

MR. CUMMINGS: This is side two. Did you start teaching then?

MR. KERTESS: Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you make a deal with them?

MR. KERTESS: That was the first of two deals I made with them.

MR. CUMMINGS: Uh-huh. What was the—

MR. KERTESS: Well, I went back, spent the summer in Europe, mainly in Italy, then came back here and decided I wanted to do a masters thesis in one year. Was told I couldn't do that unless I promised to get along. Another teacher from undergraduate days just pops into my head. Anyway, I was told I couldn't do it unless I committed myself to a doctoral thesis, and I said I wouldn't do that. So finally after—

MR. CUMMINGS: Why was that?

MR. KERTESS: I wasn't sure how long I wanted to be there. So I mean, it was a time—I guess just probing—I mean, I went back partially to teach, partially because I didn't know what else to do. And it's always easy to go back to school if you're that age and you don't know what else to do and your parents are paying for it. If all else fails, you can always go back to school.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: So I convinced them that I could do my masters thesis in one year and that I could teach and that I could carry a full course load all at the same time.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: I did all of them. I did none of them well. I didn't like being in graduate school. I was ambivalent about my teaching experience. I had like two extraordinary teachers, one of whom—both of whom were to be my advisors for my masters thesis. One of them, I never really consulted because his intelligence was too overwhelming for me to deal with.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who was that?

MR. KERTESS: It was Bob Herbert, who I also had an undergraduate. I think—I mean, Bob is totally extraordinary, but he is a person with like machine-gun intelligence, and you would walk in to his office, and he would tell you everything that you were going to tell him in three minutes. And it would have taken you 45 to tell him.

MR. CUMMINGS: Um-hm.

MR. KERTESS: So it was always that feeling that there was no way that you could teach him anything.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] Uh-huh.

MR. KERTESS: Bob actually was—well, Bob got me very involved with Seurat when I was an undergraduate, which was also important to me.

MR. CUMMINGS: In what way?

MR. KERTESS: Well, Seurat indirectly opened me up into Cubism. And it was like—I mean, in terms of getting into the twentieth century, it was fairly natural, or seems a fairly natural extension, say from fifteenth century Florence to Seurat in terms of the way he painted, what his ideas were, and how he made his paintings.

I mean, for a long time—I mean, Seurat was—I mean, if Botticelli was my youthful love replaced by Piero della Francesca, Seurat was an adolescent love that would have been replaced by Cezanne. But like the gateway into the twentieth century like for me came like through Seurat, whereas for other people it would be more likely to happen through like Cezanne or through Monet. I mean, plainly they are all artists unto themselves. But it was like the experience of Seurat like helped open my eyes to the possibilities of looking at things of the twentieth century.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who was the other instructor?

MR. KERTESS: The other instructor was a man named Leopold Ettlinger, who was a guest professor for the year. He teaches at the Warburg and Courtauld Institute in London—a totally phenomenal man. I mean, he has one of the broadest intelligences, if I can say that, of anybody that I've ever met. And his interests were so wide. His generosity, like both mental and emotional, was so large that he was really beautiful to work with. I mean, I did the best work I ever did as an art historian for him, with him.

I mean, his interests ranged from, you know, he was a Rembrandt scholar. He was doing a seminar on

nineteenth century Romantic painting. He seemed—I mean, he had broad knowledge and love of everything as one of those rare art historians who really cared about art.

MR. CUMMINGS: You mean got beyond the slides and the dates?

MR. KERTESS: He got beyond the slides, you know, could ride with Panofsky and his knowledge of iconography, you know, at the same time could sit down and talk about Josephine Baker. Was, you know, a fairly extraordinary person to work with. He was—

MR. CUMMINGS: What did you work with him on?

MR. KERTESS: A totally absurd, ideal like masters thesis. I didn't really know what I wanted to do my thesis on. I was—the man who ran or was head of the department at that time is a man who's still there named Begemann [Egbert Havenkamp Begemann], who is a typical, I suppose, good academic whose main interest—he was Dutch. His main interest was Flemish painting of, you know, sixteenth-seventeenth century. And he was a genuine European academic. And he ran a course that everyone in graduate school had to take called Methods, or something. One of the things we had to do in the Methods class—I mean, in Methods, you'd—I mean, in one week you'd do the history of criticism. The next week you'd do the history of the history of criticism. Learn how to be a proficient academic.

One of the things we had to do was, you know, a paper on something in the museum. I ended up doing a paper on an artist best forgotten named Heinrich Campendonk—

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah, I know.

MR. KERTESS:—who was the youngest member of the Blue Rider Group. The Societe Anonyme collection had the largest number of Campendonk anywhere in captivity. There had been virtually nothing written on him except one little German pamphlet, a eulogy by his son. So it was—

MR. CUMMINGS: A wide open field.

MR. KERTESS: It was a wide open field. And I did start a paper on him, and it ended up like doing a thesis on him. Like primarily—well, like partially because I was encouraged to, partially because I was really interested in like the change from the turn of the nineteenth century into the twentieth century and like the will towards abstraction and how that led into Cubism, how it led into, you know, like German expression, whatever.

MR. CUMMINGS: But he kind of walked the line, didn't he?

MR. KERTESS: Well, he went through the same kind of stylistic syndrome that somebody like Clay went through. I like didn't—I mean, having been involved with Seurat was like—you know, one of the graduate classes I was taking was with Bob Herbert, and it was working on a catalog of Arthur Altschul's collection, which was primarily of the Nabis.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: So it was like fairly involved with, you know, like people like Maurice Denis and Gauguin. And some of the Germans—or people like van de Velde. I mean, the people were like beginning to inch towards notions of abstraction that, you know, like finally came out with Kandinsky and with Mondrian.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: But in like their formative stages like went back to the 1880s and 1890s. And Campendonk went through all those phases of influence. So it was, you know—it was that interest that drew me to doing a thesis. And the only part of the thesis that's really interesting is, you know, the early part of it and his development. As I got more and more involved with the thesis, I got to the point of just totally despising the work.

MR. CUMMINGS: What happened to him, do you think?

MR. KERTESS: To Campendonk?

MR. CUMMINGS: I mean, he was just a minor figure?

MR. KERTESS: He was a minor figure. He wasn't a bad artist. I mean, the Guggenheim owns one. I mean, every now and again, somebody like Leonard Hutton has one.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: I don't have much love for any of the German expressionists. He was a minor artist who went through the same kinds of phases that some better artists did. And I mean, as he got older, the work got more and more brittle and more and more boring.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, right.

MR. KERTESS: As I went along in my thesis, it got more and more brittle and more and more boring.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] Ah, so you were accurate then.

MR. KERTESS: And Ettlinger—well, Ettlinger was quite—I mean, Ettlinger really wanted me to be a teacher and go on, and kept encouraging me and telling me that I could make a doctoral thesis out of Campendonk.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, heavens.

MR. KERTESS: And I kept telling him I was despising the work so much that I couldn't possibly. And it was like—the whole kind of conflict became like clear, open, and absurd to me when, you know, I was told that the quality of the writing was more important than the quality of the art. I knew I had to get out of there fairly fast.

MR. CUMMINGS: Hm.

MR. KERTESS: I had grave trouble escaping, I must say.

MR. CUMMINGS: Why was that?

MR. KERTESS: Well, Ettlinger had no idea what protocol of the university was, well, partially because he was very badly treated by a lot of people in the History of Art department because he was Jewish and he was the first full professor who had ever graced the department for any length of time that was Jewish. Was made quite aware of that and was quite unhappy about it, partially because he was constantly lecturing around the country.

But he had the rough draft of my thesis with him and went on a lecture tour to California and came back and had a meeting with me. And I said, "What do you think?" He said, "The beginning is really excellent. I learned something from the beginning." He said, "It gets weak as it goes on. It needs four more months of organization and rewriting." What he didn't know was that it was due in two weeks.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: And at that point I was so determined to get out of there that I couldn't imagine—I would as soon have given up like getting a masters rather than rewriting the thesis. So he told me very frankly—

[A telephone ring tone is heard.]

Can we turn off the mike?

[OFF THE RECORD.]

MR. KERTESS: Before the interruption—

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: Like the masters thesis—and Ettlinger just said, you know, he couldn't support it if I wouldn't rewrite it. So I told him I respected that, not to support it. I rewrote the thesis with a lot of speed and my father's secretary in one weekend, and handed it in and awaited for the verdict. And it was accepted, finally. While all that was going on, I made it clear to people there that I wasn't coming back, that I couldn't go on with graduate school. And got—I just repressed the man's name from my head.

The head of the department got me into his office and was—

MR. CUMMINGS: Begemann.

MR. KERTESS: Begemann.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. KERTESS: And asked me what I was going to do. And by that time I was fairly firm in my ideas of opening a gallery, but didn't know how, what, or when. And asked me what I wanted to do, and I told him that. And tears welled up into his eyes.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: And he said, "How did we go wrong?"

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] You mean, they lost one.

MR. KERTESS: And kept asking me how I could possibly choose to go to the commercial world. I said I found it less dry than the academic world and in some ways more challenging. And he didn't quite cry, but he was ready to cry. I left his office to literally screams of horror following me down the corridor. Anyway, left graduate school with a masters thesis.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you like teaching, the teaching you did there?

MR. KERTESS: I was too uptight at the time to teach. I mean, my students were—you know, ranged from one to three years younger than me. I wasn't very comfortable teaching because I had to discuss like virtually all history of art with them. I still—Bill Crelly was the advisor for the teaching assistants. And the first discussion group was on Egyptian art, about which I know almost nothing. And I walked up to Bill and I said, "How do I run a discussion group on something I know nothing about?" And he turned to me and he said, "Just don't let on that you can't read hieroglyphics and everything will be okay."

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: And he was absolutely right. A lot of teaching was faking at that point.

MR. CUMMINGS: Ah yes.

MR. KERTESS: I mean, when I didn't know enough or was frightened I was going to be asked a question, I just crammed the box full of slides and showed so many slides no one could ask a question. The classes I liked the best was when we were dealing with like Florentine or Italian painting from the fifteenth century or when we got to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

I have—it's very hard for me to deal with groups of people. I mean, all my teaching—well, I've taught like three more times after that. The difficulty always was not knowing whom to talk to. I mean, good teachers or some good teachers focus on just, you know, a couple of the brightest students and aim the class at them. I always felt like I had to find a common denominator and work up from there. And they usually turned into an exercise in frustration. I tend to be fairly intolerant with groups. So I didn't like really teaching. I didn't dislike teaching. I've learned enough about it to know that I didn't want to make a career out of it. But the experience was good. I probably learned something from it. I'm not sure what.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, what happened as you wandered down the hallway with a chorus behind you of one?

MR. KERTESS: I sat—I went to the other extreme and had lunch with Bob Herbert, who told me he knew I wasn't cut out for the academic profession. Was so exaggerated in his saying that that I was almost insulted by that more than I was at the screams of horror that followed me down the corridor.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: But I left.

MR. CUMMINGS: Why were you interested in becoming a dealer at that point? I mean, did that seem of the options the only one that was left, or—

MR. KERTESS: It really always seemed like there—I mean, it was like a process of elimination. I mean, I really didn't give either teaching or museum work a fair shake, but at the time I was convinced that I didn't want to teach. I knew I couldn't survive in an academic atmosphere, even as an undergraduate. I mean, I knew a number of faculty members—there was an Italian woman in the language department. I went to faculty parties with her. I didn't—it always seemed like too tight and too inbred and always turned me back to the smallness of the neighborhood I grew up in that very tight and restrictive.

When I left graduate school, I had a strong idea that I wanted to open a gallery. I really didn't know enough about contemporary art to do it, had no money to do it with, didn't really know how to go about it. Ended up taking a job with a man that was mentioned at the beginning. He was a friend of my father's, whose name was Marion Harper, and was a 60s advertising genius very much along the lines of [Marshall] McLuhan in terms of his thinking.

He over the years like would read some of the things that I had written, always was interested in what I was doing, and always said he wanted me to work for him. So the next step was what I was going to do for him. And

he called back. We had a series of conversations about the possibility of putting together an art collection.

MR. CUMMINGS: Now he was doing what at that point?

MR. KERTESS: He was the head of an advertising agency known as Interpublic that started with this McCann Erickson. And he had—was one of those American success stories. He had risen out of the mailroom and become head of this company in an extraordinarily short period of time and turned it into like the largest advertising agency in the world—was the person that brought the word "research" to Madison Avenue. And what made the company was him bringing in, you know, so-called scientific principles and getting away from what they called like the creative or design side and getting involved with market research.

MR. CUMMINGS: Like psychology.

MR. KERTESS: Yeah, motivational analysis. And when I started working there, they were playing with, you know, subliminal perception and all those fun and games.

MR. CUMMINGS: That was what, 1960—

MR. KERTESS: That was then the fall of 64.

MR. CUMMINGS: Um-hm.

MR. KERTESS: I moved to New York. And we had like three or four preliminary sessions, him and me and a man named Carl Steilfolgel, who was meant to be my boss. And I proposed like a budget of two or three hundred thousand dollars, with [inaudible] put down the efforts that had been made at corporate collecting via places like CBS and to some—well, Chase was the only one that seemed like acceptable to me on any level. And they all nodded their head in approval [sic].

I mean, the reason they were hiring me, partially was because Marion wanted me to work for him—was partially because at that point on Madison Avenue, Doyle Dane Bernbach and a couple of other agencies were beginning to forge ahead with so-called ideas of creative advertising, and the whole like market research number was beginning to be played down. So on Madison Avenue I was brought in, to some degree, to fluff up their creative image.

MR. CUMMINGS: Aha.

MR. KERTESS: And make it seem like that mattered to them as well. The whole thing was pretty outrageous. I ended up working there for—I think three years. I generally walked in with an attaché case that had a bathing suit and a towel and read the *New York Times*, went to a health club, and spent my afternoon either at the Museum of Modern Art or going to galleries. I was, in retrospect, under a very generous scholarship.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: It turned out. I made my—once I was hired, as soon as I like proposed the budget for the first year, which was 50,000 dollars, everybody collapsed. At the time, I didn't know that the company was going through extreme financial crises. They had the money to pay me very well, but no money to buy art. So I had virtually nothing to do.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] You had a well-paying time.

MR. KERTESS: I made more money at the age of 21 than I did for the years that I was working in the galleries.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, what did you do? I mean, you must have had some sort of activities.

MR. KERTESS: There's—I mean, besides going to galleries, the Museum of Modern Art, and swimming with Buster Crabbe at a local health club, there's only two things I ever remember doing there. One was mounting a Richard Avedon show. The other one was being sent to Chattanooga to give career advice to a Norwegian artist who just happened to have married the daughter of the local distributor of Coca-Cola.

MR. CUMMINGS: She must have been a client or something, right?

MR. KERTESS: Coca-Cola was the biggest account that Interpublic had. Marion called me to his office, showed me photographs of work that looked like fifth-rate retreads of Edvard Munch and asked me what I thought. And in horror I assumed he had just bought out this poor guy's studio. And I said they were just terrible. And he said that was too bad. And I said why? And he said because I was going to Chattanooga.

MR. CUMMINGS: Tell the artist—

MR. KERTESS: To tell the artist how to make it in New York. I quit.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: And he wouldn't let me quit. So I said I'd go, but I would go—I'd look at the word—it was the first time I'd ever been in the real South. And it lived up to every possible cliché I could have imagined, including a black woman who had a medal for 40 years for service in the family household, a house overlooking a famous battlefield, and the local distributor of Coca-Cola telling me that it all could have been much worse; his daughter could have married an Italian instead of this longhaired artist.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: I spent, I guess, three days there, and flew back. Those are the only two things I have any memory of doing for them.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you ever buy anything? Was there ever any corporate [inaudible]?

MR. KERTESS: There were crazy plans. I mean, I began to have an intense disliking for Carl Spielvogel, who had, not an intense disliking for me, but some suspicion because I had immediate access to the head of the company, which almost no one in my position had. And he kept thinking this was a giant moneymaking thing and they would have an international network of art galleries together with their international network of advertising agencies. And my idea on taking the job was that I would see it through to putting the collection together, and by that time would know enough and know enough people and artists to start a gallery.

I mean, I'd get like pretty nutty calls every now and again saying, you know, we were going to run an exhibition of art by the employees of the company and purchase the best things.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: And would hang up the phone. I'd get a memo to that effect. I'd write back 10 memos to the effect that it was an absurd idea; or I'd be called and told that I was leaving on the company plane for Spain the next day to buy art.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: And liked the idea of going to Europe. And would proceed to call Spielvogel until three o'clock in the morning to find out when the plane was leaving the next day, in the meantime, it having been decided I wasn't going at all because Marion's wife was bringing back furniture and there was no room for me on the plane.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: So I was so angry that I persisted in telephone calls until three in the morning. It began to wear on me after awhile. I mean, the first year or two was really good because I really didn't know very much. So it paid me to look at art. And I didn't really know any artists. I saw a lot of art, began to form like, you know, some opinions, some feelings. After the second year, began to look around for someone to put up the money and start a gallery. I went through, I guess, three potential backers.

I mean, all the time this was going on, Jeff Byers, whom I mentioned before, was in New York. Jeff was in the position to back the gallery. I mean, we were friends. But it was very gentlemanly. I never felt I could ask him if he wanted to because he knew how badly I wanted to. So he had to make the suggestion to me.

And the other people—I mean, the people that I ran it through were, you know, in one case it was a person who wanted to choose the artists together with me. And although I didn't know much, I knew that that wasn't possible. The other person was a girl that I knew. The money she was going to put up was her entire inheritance. I didn't want that responsibility because I knew it wasn't a large profit-making undertaking. Then there was one fairly crazy woman that wanted to open up a gallery in Palm Springs and New York together with me. I wasn't too interested in that.

And finally, you know, I was on the verge of considering any job anywhere in America because I felt so debilitated that I wasn't doing anything. I would walk down the streets and avoid people that I knew if I saw them because I was too embarrassed to explain that I was still working for Interpublic. Yet there was a bathing suit in my attaché case.

I was talking to Margaretta Salinger at the Metropolitan. Friends—I was even on the verge of moving to Kalamazoo to run the Kalamazoo Art center.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: When Jeff at dinner one night asked me if I would make a proposal as to what I thought was necessary in the way of money, what future projections there would be and what artists I was going to—

MR. CUMMINGS: He was aware of your interest in—

MR. KERTESS: Yeah. And Jeff in college at one point had said to me that, you know, he thought he might open a gallery. And I always—I remembered that. He had like a lot of interest in art. He didn't know that much about contemporary art, was getting involved with modern at the time. For him, I guess, like it was a way of getting involved with contemporary art. He himself couldn't open a gallery because he had like stronger materialistic inclinations than I. So it was an entrée for him into the contemporary world, and also living out like a certain fantasy through me.

MR. CUMMINGS: Um-hm.

MR. KERTESS: I made the proposal. I wrote it up. And he had it for about two weeks. And we had dinner, and it was never once mentioned at dinner. At the end of the evening, his wife finally said, "Well, are you or aren't you going to do it?" And he said, "Yes, of course."

MR. CUMMINGS: Um-hm.

MR. KERTESS: I still didn't know very many people. I was pretty much an unknown quantity and factor in New York. I had talked to Gayle Suller one more time about what I wanted to do, told him I wanted to start a gallery, told him some of the people I was interested in. He was extremely encouraging. The next night turned around, and at a party told Jeff Byers he was a complete fool if he put up the money for the gallery.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: I mean, all my meetings with him had been on again, off again like that. Anyway, you know, Jeff committed himself to a certain sum of money, which was vastly exceeded over a period of four years.

MR. CUMMINGS: Now, what did you do? Set up a two-three year plan with him?

MR. KERTESS: He had wanted, you know, like a rough breakdown of what I thought the overhead would be, you know, yearly.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: You know, projections of sales, what artists I was interested in. It was pretty much fumbling in the dark in terms of projections of sales. I mean, I had—I mean, my estimate of what the early overhead was too low, but reasonably accurate. But I hadn't a clue really, seriously, as to, you know, like what, you know—how long it would take before the gallery would be on its feet. I mean, I made Jeff understand, and he understood fairly clearly, that he would never make any money on such an undertaking. You know, he was in a position where he could write it off and was interested enough so, you know, he said yes.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you talk to other dealers to get information?

MR. KERTESS: [Inaudible] No. It never even occurred to me.

MR. CUMMINGS: So you just made it up, well, the rent's going to be so much—

[A TELEPHONE RING TONE IS HEARD.]

MR. KERTESS: [Inaudible] The gallery was, relatively speaking, like a shoestring operation, I mean relative to like a number of other galleries, as to what the rent would be, a pretty minimal salary for me. And it started off with part-time help two days a week. None of that was very hard to figure out.

MR. CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm, mailing lists [inaudible].

MR. KERTESS: You know, mailing lists—over—well, one of the things I did while I was working for Interpublic was, whenever I went to an exhibition that had names of whoever owned the painting or collectors, I had already started making a mailing list. [Richard] Bellamy gave me his mailing list. I had a reasonable idea of what expenses, like that, would be. The first couple of years, we hardly ever took photographs. It was all kept down, pretty much.

MR. CUMMINGS: Um-hm. How did you go around selecting your artists? I mean, you must have had somewhere to start, some people you met or somebody who directed you in certain ways?

MR. KERTESS: I had met like—well, I'd met a few people. I mean, I'd met Frosty Myers. There was a Canadian artist named Terry Severson [ph] who has half stopped painting, who is still here in the city. Through a woman that I knew, I met Terry. I met a lot of Canadians. I mean, at the time there was that school in the northwest of Canada that [Clement] Greenberg and Barney [Barnett] Newman had been at, and Bob [Robert] Murray was there.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. KERTESS: As in Saskatoon. Terry was there. [Laurence] Alloway had put Terry in one of those Guggenheim international shows, and he was the youngest artist in the show. Doing fairly interesting paintings. Terry was one of the few artists that I knew fairly well. Clem [Clement] Meadmore, I knew. Not a hell of a lot of people.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, Bellamy?

MR. KERTESS: Bellamy, I didn't really know. I mean, I went to the Green Gallery. I mean, I saw most of the shows there. The show that I guess like knocked me out the most was Ralph Humphrey's show in 65. The framed image paintings were—they're called framed paintings; that wasn't what they were about. That was a show that really perturbed me. I kept going back to it over and over again, initially couldn't deal with the blankness of the canvasses at all. Did a fairly typical number about, you know, it couldn't be serious. It must be totally negative. By the fourth time I went back to the show, I was totally knocked out by the paintings.

The experience of Ralph's show in 65 was a very seminal one for me in terms of looking at younger artists. In my mind, like when I was thinking about artists for the gallery, you know, it always started with Ralph. And Terry, I wanted to show. No one knew where Ralph was at the time. Everyone thought after the gallery, after the Green Gallery had closed, that he went back to Ohio; he was nowhere to be seen in New York. Gayle Suller didn't know where he was. And I really didn't—you know, I had seen at Park Place David Novros's two-man show with Mark diSuvero; really liked David's paintings; didn't know David.

I'd met Frosty Myers a couple of times. And then like slowly began to meet people and then start to go to studios. The first person that I spoke to in terms of the gallery—well, I'd seen a couple of Agnes Martin's shows and I liked her a lot. Someone had told me that Agnes was going to leave [Robert] Elkon and I should talk to her. And Agnes was the first artist that I really spoke to. And I was still working for Interpublic. I probably could still be working there now.

MR. CUMMINGS: You mean you could have been paid all these years?

MR. KERTESS: Yeah. And nobody would have known.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: Anyway, I was still working there. And I wrote Agnes a letter, said I'd really like to come to her studio. She called me, made me convince her for half an hour that I really cared about her work and wanted to come to her studio, and I did. She didn't want to leave Elkon. It was the beginning of a very nice friendship. Her work was fairly important to me at the time.

MR. CUMMINGS: Had you decided at that point that you wanted to show new people and young people and not—

MR. KERTESS: Well, what excited me or interested me the most was, you know, to, you know, like show younger artists. And it wasn't—I mean, there were—there really weren't any older artists that I knew of that weren't exhibiting their work that I thought should exhibit their work.

MR. CUMMINGS: You also couldn't offer them any money, right?

MR. KERTESS: Yeah. And it wasn't—I was neither of the inclination nor in a position to like, you know, buy them out of other places. I mean, all the time that I was at the gallery, the thing that like interested me the most was to like keep the gallery growing and, you know, to try and make paths for work that I cared about that wasn't getting out any other way. I mean, it seemed like senseless to approach somebody that was already in another gallery even though I really liked their work, I'll say, "You know, I like the work. Come to my gallery."

MR. CUMMINGS: Where did you go from Agnes Martin?

MR. KERTESS: I started, I guess, to—I'm trying to think like, how—I mean, people at the time, you know—Green Gallery had closed. There were hardly any—I mean, other than Park Place, there were no galleries that were actively looking for new artists or no galleries where younger artists could turn to in the hopes that they would

show their work. Everybody dreamt of going to Castelli's if there wasn't too much room at Leo's. So—

MR. CUMMINGS: This was also the great way they could talk [inaudible].

MR. KERTESS: Yes. Yes. It was, well, like—well, like Jeff made it himself to the gallery in the spring of 66. The gallery opened September 20th of 66. As soon as word began to get around that I was opening a gallery, that I was less than idiotic and less than unsympathetic, an extraordinary amount of goodwill was extended towards me. I mean, I had no previous history of the art scene, no previous experience as a dealer.

MR. CUMMINGS: But now, I'm curious about a couple of things. One is that, you know, here's a period where the abstract expressionists were the—had become the old men, in a sense. And the [inaudible] from certain optical painters and a few other people, Johns Rauschenberg, du Bois, that was very—yet, you come in and almost all the people were picked were, except for Close, I guess, later, nonfigurative kind of hard paintings and had quite a different sense than anybody else had going around. Did you—

MR. KERTESS: It wasn't a conscious decision. I mean, the scene was so different.

MR. CUMMINGS: I mean, it seems as if there was no sense of having, you know, a gallery that's had a variety of painters—felt sort of different.

MR. KERTESS: Well, in my head I liked the idea that the gallery would be fairly varied. And I didn't start out with the idea, well, there's this kind of art that I think I want to show. As it turned out, as I went to more and more studios, most of the younger people whose work I saw that I responded to were, if not in the same room, at least in the same house aesthetically, except for Deborah Remington.

It wasn't—I mean, I had no intention of making a manifesto or pushing like one group. It just seemed to happen.

MR. CUMMINGS: It evolved?

MR. KERTESS: Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who were the first people you took in? You know, you said, "Well, okay."

MR. KERTESS: Well, Terry Severson, whom I knew. I mean, for a long time, there were all these sort of round-robin games that kept going on and on because I hadn't had—I mean, I had yet to rent a space. There was no one that had committed themselves to the gallery, and no one really knew me. So Terry knew me. I told Terry I was opening a gallery, offered Terry a show. Terry said yes. Hardly anyone knew who Terry was. So that didn't do me an awful lot of good. Then I made contact with Ralph.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you find him?

MR. KERTESS: In the phone book.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: When all else fails, there's always the phone book. I talked to Ralph. I liked the group of work that showed me, a lot. Offered him a show. He said he wanted to think about it. And then—as all—I mean, like it began to escalate. I went to the opening of the Primary Structure show at the Jewish Museum. I had met Carlos Villa once before. Carlos came up and talked to me. Carlos had the fattest phone book in New York, knew everybody, and started to ask me who I was interested in.

I told Carlos that, you know, I really like Ralph Humphrey's work. He said, well, if you like Ralph Humphrey's work, you should see Brice Marden's work. I said, where is he? He said over there, drunk, leaning against the chest of silver.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: So I went to see Brice's work. I called up David Novros. David was in a funny sort of position. He was showing [inaudible] LA. Virginia [Dwan] had opened a gallery in New York. She hadn't expressed any intention of showing David's work. David and Brice were friends.

David was a fairly strong influence on me in the first couple of years at the gallery. Like David got me to look at Bob Duran's work and Dick van Buren's work and Paul Mogensen's work. So there was, you know, like a certain group that all did know each other.

Deborah I called up. I had seen, you know, a painting of Deborah's at—I guess at a Whitney Annual and then they bought one. I called up Deborah, went to the studio, offered her a show. There still was no space.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] How did you finally find a space?

MR. KERTESS: Well, it sounds absurd at this point. I mean, at the time, you know, certainly I knew what the Green Gallery was. But I had had so little contact with people in general that I had no idea of, you know, like what the state of Dick Bellamy's myth was that week—that week or, you know, altogether.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: And I wanted to be on 57th Street. I started looking at spaces. Couldn't find anything that Jeff or I could afford. Looked at the old Green Gallery space, really not thinking too heavily about it. It was very cheap. Wasn't in very good shape, but the space was nice. I took the space.

Two weeks later, somebody told me it was a terrible mistake because of the ghost of Dick Bellamy that would haunt me. And it was presumptuous and it was this and it was that. And I couldn't do it. And I never really was conscious of like Dick's presence there or, you know, like of walking into a space that had, you know, like a history, all that history until Dick got off the elevator one day after the gallery opened and we just stared at each other very oddly because we were in reverse roles. I hadn't really known Dick. I had just nodded to him whenever I went into the gallery. I never really had spoken with him before the gallery opened.

Anyway, while all that was going on, you know, David Novros would say to me he'd show at the gallery if Brice or Duran would show at the gallery.

MR. CUMMINGS: Now all the politicking?

MR. KERTESS: Yeah. He'd do it if David and Brice would show. It kept going round and round, and they all kept saying, "But what happens if you only have an 800-square-foot space?" And what will happen? So finally, I think I convinced Brice that somebody had to break and say "Yes, I'll do it," because then everybody would say, "Yes, I'll do it." So Brice said yes, he'd have a show at the gallery.

MR. CUMMINGS: Aha.

MR. KERTESS: And then David said he would, contingent upon like working out whatever was going on with Virginia. Duran and van Buren said yes. And it started off with like Brice, Humphrey, Novros, Duran, van Buren, Mogenson, Deborah—I think that was it. You know, I mean, that was like the people that showed the first year with a couple of group shows, I mean, once the space had been gotten.

MR. CUMMINGS: Now, that's interesting because, in those days everybody was looking for great ballroom galleries. And you took a space that was really like two large living rooms, sort of large on a meeting size.

MR. KERTESS: It was a loft house before like the over-scaled spaces of SoHo.

MR. CUMMINGS: Um-hm.

MR. KERTESS: But at the time, I mean, other than Park Place, it was a fairly decent-sized gallery space. Someone's loft—if there was a loft on 57th Street, it was about 2000 square feet. And was, you know, it was in funky shape. But it was a space that was very sympathetic to, like the showing of art.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: And you know, it sort of all welled up real fast, once it started going. I mean, there's people like Carl Andre who were like very supportive who would send me to studios. And I mean, once it all got going, then it seemed very simple in terms of starting it, in any rate.

MR. CUMMINGS: You had people who would make things?

MR. KERTESS: How do you mean?

MR. CUMMINGS: I mean, you had artists?

MR. KERTESS: Yes.

MR. CUMMINGS: I mean, you knew that—how did you get to 81st Street?

MR. KERTESS: It was when—I mean, I took the lease on 57th Street. Nobody told me, nobody knew that the building had already been sold to the Sheldon [inaudible] whoever built that diagonal monster.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: And it was, you know, whatever that clause was. After two years, they could give me six months notice, which they did. So it was, you know, like where to move next? Fifty-Seventh Street had gotten more expensive in the interim; couldn't really afford that. And then Feigen was like moving out of his space, and I didn't have to worry about any ghosts in Richard Feigen's space.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: And some of it was ironic because I almost worked for Richard at one time.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

MR. KERTESS: I'd met Richard in the south of France hustling Picassos and Braques from the Riviera. Once he came in for a lunch when I was in New York, like talking to him about getting a job there. I tried to get a job at a couple of galleries so I wouldn't have to work for Virginia. I wanted to work for Betty Parsons. And I was curious about Richard.

MR. CUMMINGS: Didn't work?

MR. KERTESS: Never did it. No, I had a letter from Jock Truman after the gallery opened telling me to come in for an interview.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: That was as close as I got.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, here you were, set up with a gallery, with a group of artists. And what did you do?

MR. KERTESS: What did I do?

MR. CUMMINGS: You picked up and you said, "Well, this is the date and we're going to open and this is" [inaudible].

MR. KERTESS: Yeah. Worked out the schedule, you know, leaving space for a couple of group shows. Probably took on—I mean, it was the initial anxiety of opening, took on more artists than I had to. You know, was frightened of having any month where there could be no—

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, right.

MR. KERTESS:—where an exhibition hadn't been preplanned. So I over-planned.

MR. CUMMINGS: What did you do in terms of collectors? You know, how did you attract people to the gallery?

MR. KERTESS: Gosh.

MR. CUMMINGS: I mean, you knew a number of artists who were around. So there must have been some following.

MR. KERTESS: In no definable way. They didn't have—I mean, say, like Ralph, for instance. When his show was—it was one of the last shows at the Green Gallery. One painting was sold after the show. The prices were low at the show. They were—I mean, the price he sold the painting for afterwards was downright seamy, I mean, how low it was and who bought it.

I'm not an aggressive salesman. I really didn't know any collectors. I had the idea—I mean, I didn't expect much to be sold the first year. I was horrified when Bellamy told me his first year he sold two drawings and said that I would jump out the window on top of all the liquor bottles he had left there if that were the case.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: And I had some expectation that Jeff, who was getting involved in the modern—knew a number of collectors, was the son-in-law of Bill Paley—I assumed, you know, that Bill Paley would buy a couple of paintings from the first show and that Jeff's name would certainly help. That was not the case. Jeff in my first couple of years in the gallery always was very supportive of me, supportive of the undertaking, but a little surprised at what he'd gotten involved in and wasn't really willing, you know, like to admit to his involvement in the gallery until, you know, like three or four years after it was underway.

So in the short run, I have great pessimism. In the long run, I have a fair amount of optimism. My basic attitude was that you put up good art. Sooner or later somebody will come in. And some people will understand it; some

people will buy it; some people may do both. And I rode on that optimism.

I mean, you know, I had a mailing list with a lot of Bellamy's relatives on it and friends. And whatever I had sort of put together, I spent days in the library with all these names that I had garnered from museum shows going through phone books again. And I wrote letters to people and sent photographs, which wasn't very effective. But it was the only thing I knew to do at the time. Sometimes, I had results that were good; sometimes no results; sometimes negative results. And Phil Leider called me on the telephone, said he was totally incensed that I had the nerve to send him photographs of artists in the gallery, that he was not in the habit of talking to dealers. He was never in the habit of making a command performance at a gallery at the wish of a dealer.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: And I kept protesting that I'd merely wanted him to introduce him to the artists in the gallery and to their work, not to them.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: It was slow going. I mean, because there really was so little going on in terms of younger artists, people didn't storm into the gallery, other than a very glamorous opening that was threatened to be covered by *Vogue*, which I prevented. There was no immediate rush to the gallery.

But because there was like a very large amount of goodwill and really no other place where younger artists were showing their work, word got around in New York fairly quickly. Young people began to come in. Very little was sold, you know, the first year—more than one drawing, not too much more.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, what was the attendance at the gallery like? I mean, did you get a lot of people? Were they students or friends of the artists, critics?

MR. KERTESS: Well, within—I mean, there weren't as many collectors as I would have liked. But at the time, like 57th Street was much more bustling with art activity than it is now. So there was—whatever went up and down 57th Street tended to come by the Bykert Gallery. And we were next door to—like Pace was next door at the time. The traffic was pretty reasonable.

Also, at that time it was still that time of where there was much more glamour in the art world and much more social life in the art world. And there were a lot more people attached to the art scene who just wandered around and looked for whatever reason. So within a reasonable amount of time there was a fair amount of traffic.

And they would say, like, you know, Brice was unknown in any public way, but he hung out at Max's a lot. He had a large following of young groupies, you know. Brice's opening was packed. I mean, the openings tended to be like fairly large. Those were the days when everybody would go to Max's after an opening and Mickey would give them free champagne.

And if it—you know, people from out of town were like very slow in coming to the gallery. Collectors were pretty slow in arriving, pretty resistant to most of what was shown there. But it really just developed, you know, like slowly, more by word of mouth than anything else.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah. Going through the bibliographies of some of the artists, I notice they did generally quite soon start getting reviewed and written about.

MR. KERTESS: It seemed never soon enough.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] Did they—you know, if the *Times* covered it or one of the magazines—old magazines usually came out after the shows were over with. But could you ever see any direct response from that kind of public notice?

MR. KERTESS: No. Still don't. I mean, if there was a review of—I mean, the only time—the only direct response I ever saw—whenever a show was reviewed in the *New York Times*, which was actually very seldom, a lot of people would come in, whether the review was good, bad, or indifferent. It always brought them in.

MR. CUMMINGS: The fact that it got the *Times* coverage—

[SIMULTANEOUS CONVERSATION]

MR. KERTESS:—a lot of people. I mean, there was no direct result in terms of sales. I mean, there have been out-of-town curators that have said to me, if I could show—I mean, as absurd as they knew it was, if I could show them a positive review of—by Hilton Kramer or John Canaday, they could guarantee that their board would buy

the painting. If not, there would be difficulty. But I mean, my experience is that—I mean, all publicity, good or bad, in some ways helps the artist just because his or her name is put in the public. It's gotten so diffuse. The cover of *Artforum* doesn't mean a thing in terms of sales immediately. But it certainly has like some accumulative effect in terms of placing that artist in the public consciousness and then ultimately affecting further [inaudible] sales, whatever.

MR. CUMMINGS: What about [inaudible], which is still a [inaudible] library? Would that make any difference?

MR. KERTESS: No.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you get response from European dealers much?

MR. KERTESS: None whatsoever. I mean, there was really no response from Europe until about maybe the third or fourth year of the gallery. And then it was pretty hesitant still.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who were they interested in then?

MR. KERTESS: Well, Schmaler was the first dealer I—European dealer that I ever dealt with, and that, you know, was primarily because I spoke German and his English was so bad.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] That's exactly why Castelli's artists were so good abroad, because they speak those languages.

MR. KERTESS: And Schmaler used to come into New York and we got along pretty well. And he'd come in the gallery and I would do his telephone calls for him. And I liked his eye and I liked the way he worked. He was very independent. He was one of the—he and Hans Miller and a couple of others were amongst the first dealers in Europe who I considered the possibility that there were good artists in America. And he'd been with the—he was involved with Lewis, who was involved with Bob Morris in 65, which was pretty incredible, you know, at the time.

And he was very interested in Ralph Humphrey's work. He bought a number of Ralph's paintings. He was going to have a show of Ralph's. We had a fight over it; I canceled the show. And he sort of—I mean, kind of dropped from the scene altogether in the last five or six years, which is too bad, because he was one of the few people that seemed to know what he was doing.

MR. CUMMINGS: Hm. Well, you know, did you plan your season? Because you had mentioned you left space for group shows after awhile. Was that because of the holiday, Christmas, New Year's business? Or you just felt like a change?

MR. KERTESS: I wanted some flexibility in the schedule, and I liked the idea. I mean, the gallery opened with a group show, mainly of people flocking—everybody in the show except Leo Valledor was in the gallery. I liked the idea of doing group shows with, you know, people that might not be in galleries or might be in galleries whose work I was interested in seeing in a group show.

MR. CUMMINGS: Was that a way for you to kind of test it or look at it?

MR. KERTESS: I don't know.

MR. CUMMINGS: See what would happen?

MR. KERTESS: I've gotten endless flack for some of the group shows I've done and endless praise for some others. I mean, there were like essentially two different kinds of group shows. There were—as the gallery went on and, you know, it became a larger organization, it was harder to think about taking on very many new artists. I went to endless studios. There were, you know—enough of the learning process came from going to studios. And there were all these people that I thought, you know, should have the opportunity to get one painting or one piece of sculpture out, both for them and for me.

I mean, you know, I wanted the opportunity to have the work around for two or three weeks because maybe, you know, I really didn't know whether I thought it was good or bad in the studio, or I was ambivalent enough, but still thought it was good enough so I should try it and see.

MR. CUMMINGS: Would things change a great deal for you in a case like that? As you lived with the work in the gallery, did you decide yes or no?

MR. KERTESS: During—I mean, in the years of the gallery, in terms of artists that hadn't shown—when you say, like Humphrey had shown before, I was addicted to the work. David Novros, I saw a two-man show at Park Place. So I knew David's work. I knew Ralph's work. All the other artists that became part of the gallery, with the exception of Brice and Alan Saret, whose work I immediately responded to almost literally upon entering the

door of their studio, was like me adjusting to the work, the work adjusting to me, me saying, "Let's put one in a group show," wanting to see, you know, like how it would hold up over a period of two or three weeks, what I'd feel about it.

Also, you know, it always seemed like for artists that are trying to get their work out and haven't yet shown, like it's a very—like the first time you show a painting or a piece of sculpture or whatever outside of your studio, it's like a fairly important experience. I mean, it was a learning experience for them, a learning experience for me.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, right, right.

MR. KERTESS: A lot of the group shows, as time went on at the gallery, did—really were about, you know, that kind of testing, playing. There were other shows where, as I put the show together, I knew that I really liked the work, I just wanted to see it around. And it was at a time—I mean, you know, like the end of the first year was a group show with Agnes, Dick Tuttle, Brice, I think Bill Bollinger. No, Bill wasn't in the show. Carl Andre—all the people that, you know, like were not unknown at the time, but weren't receiving like—

MR. CUMMINGS: But also in that kind of ambience that it was beginning to go for—

MR. KERTESS: Yeah. And there were shows like that where, you know, time it seems like people should see that work more or deal with it more seriously than they were. You know, it was like their work wasn't being purchased, wasn't being dealt with critically very much. But those were always shows where I knew in advance the shows would be beautiful.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. KERTESS: I did those less and less as there seemed less need to do them.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B.]

MR. CUMMINGS: This is side three. As you selected the artists in the first go-round, the first group, what was it based on? I mean, the fact—well, Humphrey you talked about looking and trying to get involved. But what about in terms of the other people? What were the qualities, intellectual, emotional—were they things that, you know, were difficult and that interested you? Or did they seem to relate in a way or contrast in a way?

MR. KERTESS: I wasn't about like relating or contrasting, although like assuming for the first couple of years—the initial group in the gallery was more related than I would like it to have been. It just happened that way, as I said before.

The choosing process—boy, there's no way of defining that rationally.

[A TELEPHONE RING TONE IS HEARD.]

MR. KERTESS: The choosing process.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah. I mean, did the personality of the artist affect you in some ways, do you think, sometimes?

MR. KERTESS: Indirectly. One would like to say no always. But of course, you know, like that affects you, sometimes positively, sometimes negatively. I can only say like really general things. It would be nice if I could be more—or you have to ask me more questions and see what happens.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] Yeah, yeah.

MR. KERTESS: The basic thing, I guess, that I cared about—I mean, and that wasn't like consciously walking around saying, "I want to learn, I want to learn"—were things I was—I mean, and it wasn't about looking for things self-consciously that were difficult. But I was always looking for experiences that I hadn't had before or a way—you know, something that made me question it. And it wasn't as simple as, is it art or isn't it art? It was, you know, like whatever terms or intentions that artist had, you know—god, it's hard to talk about it without sounding like really pretentious.

Some of it was just—well, say, like the intensities that the work was able to project, its ability to make me question it or make it question me.

MR. CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. I'm curious about [Leo] Valledor, who was in your show, but never really had a one-man exhibition, did he?

MR. KERTESS: Leo kind of disappeared. I don't know. You deal with different people in different ways. I'd been to Leo's studio. He was essentially like, I mean, firmly committed to Park Place.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: There was nothing, you know, that I—responded to the work. Had a painting in a group show, but it wasn't about saying that he should be in the gallery. It seemed, you know, like a nice idea for the opening show.

MR. CUMMINGS: And what about Deborah Remington, who seems to be quite different?

MR. KERTESS: Deborah was a visceral response. You know, like I walked into the Whitney. Image was very powerful to me. I responded to it. I mean, I've often questioned myself afterwards as to what it was I liked in a work. It's a little more obvious than most things that I was involved with. I don't tend to respond to imagery that is that specific or, you know, like that, you know, delineated.

It was immediate response, you know, I made, and, you know, like the basis of her showing in the gallery came out of that. Over the years, she's probably suffered some from being odd man or odd woman out in the gallery.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah. I mean, she's always been such a contrast.

MR. KERTESS: Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: Generally.

MR. KERTESS: I have like really high respect for her as an artist, but over the years, come to feel like involved (sic) with the work, you know, say, in the same kind of level I was involved with Ralph's work or with Brice's work.

MR. CUMMINGS: What caused the differentiation?

MR. KERTESS: Finding the work seems too literary to me. I mean, it seems about like known experiences. It doesn't change enough from painting to painting, for me, in terms of the experience of those paintings. Seems about like she's become a better painter. She does that work better. It seems too tight, finally. Doesn't give me enough room to get into the painting or the painting to get into me. But those are all like very vague terms. I've never had, even standing in front of two or three paintings, and say why you think one is better than the other with, like, a formal vocabulary that we're all burdened with in some sense.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: In other words, at a point like right now, where we're all trying to reject that formal vocabulary, but it's all we've got.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: And there are like one or two people that I think of that are attempting like to bring new words into art criticism.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who's that?

MR. KERTESS: Well, I think like Bob Wilson is like making a strong attempt to try to admit the possibility that human beings make art.

MR. CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm, that's a new discovery.

MR. KERTESS: Bob, I think, is, you know, like potentially really interesting. When you say something like—I mean, not in criticism of painting or sculpture, but what Roland Barthes like tried to do recently with a book called *Pleasure of the Text*, without going back to Susan Sontag and talking about the erotics of art, was trying to include like a larger spectrum into the vocabulary of art. I mean, one can like talk about an [Jules] Olitsky or a [Kenneth] Noland or a Marden in like purely formalist terms or like Michael Fried, Stella. That doesn't seem satisfactory.

I mean, I could sit and say what I mean and, you know, could talk about Brice Marden as, you know, like going back to Pollock through Jasper Johns, extending, you know, like what Frank Stella had started and like trying to grow out of that. That's partially comprehensible, partially incomprehensible.

MR. CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. But now, you know, as the gallery went along you did add people here

and there, although many of the people were there all the time. I mean, Marden was there.

MR. KERTESS: Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: And some of the others. But what—you know, as the gallery began operating as a business and, you know, one had mailings and advertising and all this peripheral stuff, did you find that you had, say, collectors who became interested in what you were doing, or would they become interested in a particular artist and sort of buy, or was it very difficult?

MR. KERTESS: It was very difficult. I mean, for the first five years of the gallery—

[A TELEPHONE RING TONE IS HEARD.]

MR. CUMMINGS: You were saying about the first five years?

MR. KERTESS: The first five years of the gallery was difficult. You know, always run in deficit, always needed outside support. After that, it wobbled with extreme difficulty on the break-even point, was, you know, sporadically hysterical in terms of whether or not the rent was going to be paid, whether the electricity was going to be turned off, whether I was getting my salary, the woman who worked for me was getting her salary, et cetera.

MR. CUMMINGS: But now some of the artists in those years emerged, you know, in quite a public way.

MR. KERTESS: You know, it's gotten—like, every year that the gallery has been in existence, its realm, you know, in terms of like gross sales and, you know—but every year the overhead has gone up as well. And yeah, like, you know—I mean, three, four, five people were making rather handsome amounts of money. I mean, like most notably, like Brice, Chuck. Dave Novros did incredibly well the last couple of years. But there were always a lot of other people that weren't doing so well, or there would be an 1800-dollar bill to bring our show's sculpture in for two days, the rigors that were relatively unexpected. As the gallery progressed, it was no longer permissible just to have two photographs of every artist in the gallery.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: One had to have every painting or every piece of sculpture and every drawing photographed.

MR. CUMMINGS: Slides and all, right, and biographies.

MR. KERTESS: Slides and transparencies. So like the expenses grew as the sales grew. The situation remained roughly relatively the same. I mean, essentially, you know, after nine years I was in the same position as Leo Castelli was in, except Leo's overhead was 10 times what the gallery's was.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. KERTESS: So everything seems to escalate. I mean, with the exception of Pace or, you know, like Larry [Lawrence] Rubin, or out-and-out speculators, it's hard to think of any dealer that was making like real money. The people that make the most money are the collectors. And I think they choose.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right. But now did you—you know, going back to people who became interested in you or the gallery or artists, did you have collectors who became interested in particular artists and would either buy things or—

MR. KERTESS: Yeah. I mean, always—I mean, some people like coming to the gallery would be focused on just one person—would buy that person or be interested or not be interested in anyone else. Over the years, there were certain collectors that started collecting about the same time that the gallery opened. Because I had to make more effort than some other dealers, began to get involved with me. Took my advice, not categorically, but would certainly listen hard if I'd call up and say there was an artist that they should consider. Didn't always say yes; more often than not, said yes.

Other people, you know, were like total strangers, came to look at one thing. I mean, it runs the whole gamut, from decorators looking for something that matches the perfect sofa to, you know, like people that are totally committed to like the art that they're buying. There aren't too many of those.

MR. CUMMINGS: Why not?

MR. KERTESS: Well, just as there aren't too many really good artists, there aren't too many really good collectors.

MR. CUMMINGS: Good collectors—well, what about, once the museum people began showing interest in your art, some of them have had enormous amount of exposure in museum survey shows at various times. Did that make a difference? You know, if somebody was going to Whitney Annual or Chicago—

MR. KERTESS: Well, it made a difference to the artist. The Whitney Annual—every now and again an oddball thing would happen, just because the Whitney Annual, in spite of, you know, however much we all put it down, every year or now every other year, attracts a much larger group of people than would come into the Bykert Gallery or the Castelli Gallery or the Paul [inaudible] gallery or whatever. So every now and again, somebody totally unknown to me and completely unheard of would walk in and say they saw the David Novros at the Whitney Annual, really liked the painting, and would like to consider buying one.

That didn't happen too often. You know, I mean with serious museum exposure, say, like Brice's show at the Guggenheim or Brice's inclusion in Jenny Licht's show at the Modern last year—that's come pretty much after the fact. I mean, in point of fact, I mean, Brice, who is now the most successful, was for five years the hardest artist to sell in the gallery. I really truly could not give them away. The Whitney turned down a gift of one from me. His first show, not one painting was sold out of—his landlord bought one drawing. Roy Lichtenstein bought the drawing. That was it. And for five years, Brice never really sold anything. When it hit, it hit hard. And, you know, now—

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah. Well, now, what, for example, could you do? I mean, you didn't have enough money to pay your people money every month to do it, could you?

MR. KERTESS: If they—some—erratically—I mean, there was never enough money to say to 10 artists, "Each of you gets a stipend of 1000 dollars a month as an advance on sales." So by hook or by crook, if there was money in the gallery, whoever got there first and said his rent was unpaid would get his or her rent paid.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: In the case of sculptures or people who had really heavy material expenses, it was a little more organized. I would try and commit myself to specifics. There was money for—I would say, like David Rabinowitch—I had no idea how expensive his show would be, more than he. But I had committed myself to fabricating the show. I did the same for Bob Gordon. Alan Saret, when he was with the gallery, required more money than was possible, for a year and a half. Whatever Alan sold, I never took commission on so he could have more money for materials.

But it was pretty erratic. It was about somebody calling up and said they wanted to buy a ream of paper and it was 100 dollars; did I have 100 dollars? If I did, they got it; if I didn't, they didn't. It got a little hectic from time to time. But we all lived with it somehow. And it was, you know, occasional bitching, dissatisfaction. Everyone always complains about their dealer, no matter what they're doing or how they're doing it.

MR. CUMMINGS: There's always something else.

MR. KERTESS: Right.

MR. CUMMINGS: But now, what about dealers outside New York, after you've been around for a few years? Did you have interest shown? Was it very little or was it difficult to establish?

MR. KERTESS: Extremely difficult. It's like—I mean, it always comes right at the point where it's not necessary anymore. The first dealers say—I begged people like Nick Wilder, who when the gallery opened, the European market hadn't really exploded yet. Artists in New York were more interested in showing in LA than anywhere else. And, you know, people with the gallery were most interested in showing with Nick Wilder.

Nick and I, you know, like we got along. Never came to any terms. I all but begged Nick to show Brice, to show David Novros, and to consider that. I always had the impression he felt I should commit myself to one of his artists. Since he being the senior dealer, I should make that gesture before he made it to me. We'd never got anywhere. You know, three years ago Nick finally offered Brice a show. At that point, it was completely superfluous and there wasn't work around, you know, and it was more to Nick's advantage than it was to Brice's.

Gordon Locksley is the first dealer who, you know, put up money for Brice's work. And it was right at that kind of breaking point where, you know, anyone that was vaguely smart could see that Brice was going to sell really well. Gordon, however, you know, like was the first one to put up. Essentially, I regard most out-of-town dealers as parasites. Though not universally true, they tend to be totally dependent upon the New York dealer doing all the work for the artist, all the groundwork.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: They have cash. New York dealers don't have cash. Just as that artists' market is about [inaudible] after it's broken—

[A TELEPHONE RING TONE IS HEARD.]

MR. KERTESS:—they'll come in, buy work, and start showing it. They're the ones who tend to make the money.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah. But don't you think that the outside dealer also is in a position where you can't sell his local artists as well as you can the artists who's established in New York?

MR. KERTESS: Except in LA, most out-of-town dealers tend not to deal with local artists. And there are some, you know—I know one—I mean, it's important—

MR. CUMMINGS: I mean, while the local—I mean, LA and Minneapolis all have galleries who show local people. But they want to show national people.

MR. KERTESS: Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: They are mostly people who are established in LA or in New York.

MR. KERTESS: See, like, I mean, Gordon has never shown a local artist in Minneapolis. They tend—I mean, most dealers out of town—say, it's not true—I mean, it's not true of somebody like Daniel Weinberg in San Francisco or like the Texas Gallery in Houston.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, Dayton's Gallery 12 only shows, you know, New York [inaudible].

MR. KERTESS: Yeah. But then there's the other—and they tend to show people that were well established.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, right.

MR. KERTESS: If they bought well, even if they didn't sell them in Minneapolis, they could hold on a year and sell them in New York.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: So I mean, it's like Kasmin in London used to get his quota from America and he'd fly to New York with the transparencies and sell them here. It's in—if there's work around—I mean, it's important for artists to show outside of New York.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: So, you know, there's some reason for—certainly for dealers to exist outside of New York.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: So I mean, you know, it's a mixed blessing.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you ever get to the point where you had, you know, split contracts with artists and with other dealers, or didn't that transpire?

MR. KERTESS: It came close with Brice, but it never was. I mean, it always tends to be like fairly vague verbal agreements, which usually get screwed up somewhere along the line. When Locksley was buying Brice's paintings, then was going to give Brice a certain amount of money every month, Brice was doing so little work that I realized, you know, like unless I could match that, Gordon would control all of Brice's work.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right. Right.

MR. KERTESS: And I couldn't really afford to match it. I asked four other dealers to split it with me. They said yes. I called Gordon and told him. He had to give Brice less money, talk to Brice, and—I mean, I was in the position where Brice needed the money. I couldn't say, "You can't do that because he'll control your work."

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: I either had to do something about it—or I could make him aware of the problem of having all his work in Minneapolis. But, you know, could only make another offer, which is what I did. I ended up having to carry the whole thing myself, but at that point, you know, like Brice was beginning to sell the work. So it all, you know, evened out.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. KERTESS: So that's the only time that came up.

MR. CUMMINGS: Um-hm. What about in terms of collectors? Who were people who sort of became interested in the gallery? And were there many who bought a variety of artists? Or would they buy usually one or two?

MR. KERTESS: Usually, it would be a variety. I mean, when the gallery opened, there were still like big name collectors, right? You know, like John Powers or the Tremaines, Scull. And there were like maybe, you know, 10, 12, 15 names of collectors that, I mean, you know, I thought I'd faint away if they came to the gallery.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right. Did they appear, many of those people?

MR. KERTESS: Slowly, yeah. Almost none of them bought anything until very recently, you know. But the situation of the scene is so diffuse now in every sense. Like, instead of names—I mean, there's still tons of them, there's still Mrs. [Dominique] deMenil, and one or two others, but less than a handful of really incredible, like big collectors.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who buy a number of things at once?

MR. KERTESS: Yeah, and who buy in depth.

MR. CUMMINGS: And can pay for it.

MR. KERTESS: And who pay for it in a reasonable amount of time.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. KERTESS: There are a lot more collectors than there were before, you know, with somewhat more modest means than the big name collectors. Some of those people are like one-shots or it turns out that they'll be turned on by friends. And as long as that friend keeps pushing them, they'll buy something. And then they'll stop. Or a curator will be important to them. If that curator leaves town, there's no more art collecting in that town.

MR. CUMMINGS: Uh-huh.

MR. KERTESS: It's not quite that extreme, but it's happened close to that. There are lots of collectors, say, that I've—I mean, it was nine years.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: So there are certain people you have a fairly personal relationship with that you see socially from time to time and that, you know, like learn to trust me and would, you know—whether I've said so or not, like consider everything in the gallery, you know, like seriously—wouldn't necessarily buy something by everyone, but—I mean—

MR. CUMMINGS: They would at least look and give it a chance.

MR. KERTESS: Yeah. They would at least look. I mean, say, after maybe four years or so or three years when, you know—generally agreed that it was a serious undertaking, you know, then certain people would come into the Bykert Gallery, say, more predisposed to being impressed than they would another gallery.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, right. Well, what about Byers? Did he ever become a collector of many of these people? Or did he once in awhile buy an occasional piece?

MR. KERTESS: It varied. I mean, the first person—well, say, you know, it was fairly obvious he, you know, Humphrey was the first person in the gallery he bought because that was—I mean, when the gallery was opened, that was the only one who had any kind of reputation or really sold anything for the first couple of years.

Jeff—you know, is—his collection is very varied. He has a lot of things that he bought from the gallery. I mean, one of the things that, you know, he had the right to do was to buy without gallery commissions, since a lot of it was his money that made it possible. He was slow in coming to Brice, for instance. He bought three or four paintings as well. He's got a number of David Novros paintings. I mean, he didn't go right down the line and buy everyone or everything in the gallery. He had, you know, those people that he was more interested in than others.

MR. CUMMINGS: Would you discuss things with him a great deal? I mean, if he showed interest in an artist? Or would he kind of do it on his own?

MR. KERTESS: He tended to be—it had a lot to do with me. I mean, in the beginning when I had more time, if there was an artist I was interested in, I'd take Jeff to the studio, you know, the second time I'd go. If there was somebody I thought the gallery should show, I would discuss with him and then take him to the studio. We only twice had serious disagreement, once about an artist he thought should be in the gallery that I didn't want; once an artist that I wanted in the gallery he didn't want his art in the gallery. But, you know, it took awhile to overcome that.

Essentially, I made the choices. In the beginning, I always wanted him to agree with it or understand what the process was that was going on.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: And then it got to the point where I just didn't have the time to do that. I also like had sporadic role in his collection. I mean, some things he bought, he bought with my advice. Other things, he, you know, like surprised me when I'd walk into the apartment and I'd see for the first time. So it was, you know, pretty open in those terms.

MR. CUMMINGS: What about, you know, for example, Saret, who was early on? But he didn't stay, did he?

MR. KERTESS: Popped in and popped out.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. KERTESS: Alan had three shows. He was in a group show, then had three one-man shows.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: And was in very strong disagreement with the gallery system—could never find a proper replacement, but—and also extremely difficult to work with as a person. I mean, Alan—I wanted to show him as soon as I saw the work. I went to the studio five times, and every time I went I kept walking down the stairs telling myself, no matter how good he is, you can't deal with him every day of your life.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] What was the difficulty? I don't know him. What was the difficulty? I mean, just in terms of how he wanted to show his things, or what?

MR. KERTESS: Some of them were pure—you know, mainly emotional. I mean, one of the big problems of, say, running a gallery of contemporary art when you are the same age as—or roughly a peer of most of the artists—any dealer faces that. I suppose it's more intense if you're roughly the same age or the same generation as they are. I became a funny kind of like father replacement for like many of the artists—combination shrink, big daddy, and, you know, like conduit for the world outside.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: Alan was totally screwed up in terms of his relationship to the world outside, was constantly in fear of being taken advantage of, very suspicious of people, and had ideas about showing art and making art that can be described no other way as being like part of the hippie generation of the 60s, which he's not really part of, but he kept wanting like a communal thing.

MR. CUMMINGS: That time, yeah.

MR. KERTESS: He wanted direct contact with the people involved with his work with, like the naïve idea that he would learn from them, they would learn from him, and there would be a direct exchange.

MR. CUMMINGS: Which doesn't happen.

MR. KERTESS: It doesn't happen that way.

MR. CUMMINGS: No, it doesn't.

MR. KERTESS: Then he objected to the idea of being part of a gallery and being identified, you know, like as part of the Bykert Gallery and kept saying, you know, he thought lots of dealers should be able to deal with his work.

Then like a certain point of diminishing returns, where it all sounds good. It would be nice to say you can all come to my studio. I'd like all of you to deal with the work. But we all try and sell things to the same people.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] Right.

MR. KERTESS: And sometimes it takes six months to sell one piece of sculpture, and it happens like, you know, casually at an opening or in conversation. I could work three months to try and sell a piece of Allen's, and someone could walk into another gallery and he could say, "Well, let's go down to Alan Saret's studio." That's the moment that person would buy Alan's piece.

MR. CUMMINGS: What happened?

MR. KERTESS: What happened, yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: Allen never understood that.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah. No, that's true. I think being close in age is a problem. Having been through that myself, I can believe it. Novros came in very early, too, didn't he?

MR. KERTESS: Yeah. Novros—when David had a show with Virginia Dwan in LA. And Virginia moved to New York, not telling David she would show him.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: David wanted to show with the gallery, told Virginia. Virginia said no. Then Virginia decided she'd show him in New York. David and Virginia didn't get along very well. He had the show, left the gallery. Along came the Bykert Gallery. He for all intents and purposes was like there from the beginning.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MR. KERTESS: In spirit if not in actuality.

MR. CUMMINGS: How about [Peter] Gourfain? How did he appear? That was a little bit later, wasn't it?

MR. KERTESS: Yeah. Peter was somebody whose studio went to, I guess a couple of times. He had—I'd been to his studio before. Roughly the time the gallery opened [inaudible] did—what was the name of the show at the Guggenheim? It wasn't Serial Art.

MR. CUMMINGS: Systemic?

MR. KERTESS: Systemic. It was the Systemic show. Peter was in that. I went to the studio off and on, was ambivalent about the work. Then I guess just finally, you know, decided, I knew a group of paintings that I really liked and we went ahead and showed them. It was about a year after I first saw his work. He'd been in the Guggenheim already. Ivan Karp really liked the work and I think would like to have shown Peter, but he never like had a show. At the same time, he and Bill Bollinger were fairly close at the same time like I got like fairly involved with his work and had like three shows at the gallery and then left.

MR. CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. What would you do after you'd been there for a couple of years and you brought a new artist in like that? Would you call your collectors to let people know, or would you just present it as a new exhibition [inaudible] special gestures?

MR. KERTESS: It depended on the artist. I mean, in the late 60s—well, it's what's happened in the last five years that's happened, I guess in the entire like country or culture is that things have tightened up. People have become more cautious. In the last 60s, generally speaking, collectors were more adventurous than they are now.

MR. CUMMINGS: Money was more—

MR. KERTESS: Yeah. It wasn't—it's not—the money is still there. It's that people would like to be a little more secure in how they spend it. I mean, going to a studio in the late 60s and spending 700 dollars was not being like very loose with money necessarily. But a lot of collectors would come in and ask me if there were things that they should see that weren't being shown or artists I was interested in. And I was always taking collectors to studios. I mean, that in the last three or four years had almost dwindled down to nothing. I mean, I can only think of one—

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah. There's no adventuresome collector anymore who would spend 500 or 700 dollars.

MR. KERTESS: Yeah, or a few thousand, whatever. I mean, there's a few. I mean, I still go to studios with Patrick Lannan from time to time.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] Yeah.

MR. KERTESS: Patrick got like one of the younger minds around. But it just varied from artist to artist as to what was to be done. I mean, after awhile you get to know like certain collectors. You have a sense of what you think they'll respond to, you know, whether they'd like going to a studio or not. So yeah, when new artists came to the gallery, I would think of those collectors that I thought might be interested in the work, you know, would show them transparencies or photographs in the gallery first, or, you know, have one piece at the gallery and ask them if they wanted to go to the studio. Tend not to like to go to studios that much with collectors because it's like—

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: I mean, on the one hand it's easier to sell a work of art out of a studio very often than it is out of a gallery because—

MR. CUMMINGS: Why is that?

MR. KERTESS: Well, there's that connection with the artist and being convinced that it's done by a real live human being.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: And if the artist is like, you know—

MR. CUMMINGS: They're attractive, talk well.

MR. KERTESS:—an attractive—it helps. Very often, it would just be awkward because the artist would be expecting a sale, the collector would feel under pressure to make a purchase, even if he didn't want to.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: You could sense that tension.

MR. CUMMINGS: Awkward.

MR. KERTESS: And it would be an unpleasant experience. So I would tend not to take people to studios of artists in the gallery unless I was fairly convinced that they were going to respond to the work. If they weren't going to buy something, then they would sooner or later, and that was a good introduction.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, right. Now, what about Lynda Benglis, who worked for you, right? Didn't she?

MR. KERTESS: She worked at the gallery when the gallery opened.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you find her? Or did she find you?

MR. KERTESS: I went to see her husband's work, which was in a group show. He had a one-man show at the gallery last year.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who was he?

MR. KERTESS: Gordon Hart.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh.

MR. KERTESS: And she was looking for a job. I hired her. She worked there part-time for two-and-a-half years. She was making art at the time, but, you know, like a lot of artists when they're starting, not talking about—I mean, I knew she was an artist, but she wasn't at the point where she was ready to make that art public. As she made the art public, she didn't want to work there any longer.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right. [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: We also started going out together—

MR. CUMMINGS: Which changed things.

MR. KERTESS:—which changed things. I showed Lynda's work in two group shows and was very strongly committed to it. The art world being as inbred as it is, didn't feel that I could take the risk, either for her or for myself, of both going out with her and showing her work. So, you know, like there were those two group shows

and that was it. She like later on had, you know had started to show.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, right, right. How about Chuck Close? He did he—how did you find him? Because that's a totally different kind of—

MR. KERTESS: Chuck was a friend of Brice's. Brice would come up with the most erratic suggestions of people for me to go and see. There was never any predicting of what the work was like. I mean, other people like, say, David Novros has like a very narrow vision in terms of contemporary art. And what David likes is only what's fairly close to his own work or deals with similar issues. That's—well, almost always the case.

Brice is a little more quirky and a little more open. And Brice came in once and said there was a guy he had been to school with who had done an 18-foot nude that was pretty crazy. He was too stoned to really tell me much about it. But said maybe I should look.

Chuck came to shows at the gallery fairly often. And we talked off and on. You know, we'd have drinks now and again. I was always impressed with his head and with his intelligence. And then he came up and he showed me photographs. From the photographs, I thought they were pretty awful. But I said I'd go to the studio. And I went to the studio, thinking—because I'd always enjoyed talking to both him and his wife, thinking, well, that was the last time we'd ever speak because after that—.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: That we wouldn't have drinks anymore. And we sat and we talked for two hours. And I very reluctantly got up and went into the studio and saw a painting called *Frank* that he was all but through working on. And I was knocked out by the painting, sat and looked at it for an hour, telling myself constantly that I couldn't possibly like this nine foot by seven foot black and white painting of a head.

Then put one up in like a group show—it was beautiful, actually. Chuck had that painting on one wall and Luna did a poured latex piece on the floor.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, right, I remember that, yeah.

MR. KERTESS: They were—I mean, the tension in the room was incredible. They were both very aggressive pieces, but totally different and really nice. But I kept coming in the gallery every morning thinking I was in the Kodak gallery or something and telling myself that it was absurd to have that painting there.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: But it got more and more complex every day as I looked at it.

MR. CUMMINGS: In what way?

MR. KERTESS: Well, like, visually it just kept getting richer and richer. Chuck—there were formal things about it that really interested me. I mean—

MR. CUMMINGS: For example?

MR. KERTESS: It was a very controlled, totally absurd way of trying to find a way to make a mark on a canvas, which is like the basic painter's problem.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: You know, and one that, you know, like ever since the late 50s, has been of primary concern to painters is, you know, like how can I make a mark that seems fresher, that seems real?

MR. CUMMINGS: Um-hm.

MR. KERTESS: Chuck went about it, you know, inside-out and was making a mark that wasn't a mark, but it was still a mark. The whole notion of, you know, like mocking the medium of photography or sort of like translating one medium into another medium—making that obvious and mocking both painting and photography in the process, but adding something to painting—I mean, the closer you get to one of the paintings, the more involved you get with the physicality of the painting. And the surface—the further away you get, the more photographic it becomes and the clearer the image becomes.

So it was in a curious way like—I mean, like—

MR. CUMMINGS: A contradiction.

MR. KERTESS: Yeah. There was that kind of contradiction. Just like its visual richness and then in some ways like it was related, say, to concerns that people like, you know, Bob [Robert] Ryman have or Brice has about, you know, like making a mark that isn't totally self-indulgent, like covering a surface in as uniform a way as possible.

MR. CUMMINGS: Um-hm.

MR. KERTESS: And using the hands, but keeping the hand out at one and the same time.

MR. CUMMINGS: What is it that a collector, say who's been coming to your gallery—what would their reaction be when all of a sudden there's a Chuck Close painting staring at them, which is not what people sort of felt is the ambience of the gallery in many ways?

MR. KERTESS: I mean, Chuck and I were more surprised than anybody else was. I was surprised I responded to the work that strongly, offered him a show. Chuck was surprised, you know. I mean, we had a series of surprises.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: And we were both amazed that, you know, people would buy the work. It wasn't—I mean, people weren't as surprised, say—I mean, people that would come into the gallery to see Deborah's work, for instance, would never look at anything else that was in the gallery. There were people that only arrived when Deborah had a show, and it was a fairly small list that I had, but, you know, was always called upon when Deborah has a show. People who would generally come to the gallery would very seldom look at Deborah's work. With Chuck, there were some people that expressed surprise, but not very strong surprise.

MR. CUMMINGS: Really?

MR. KERTESS: Which was surprising.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] Another surprise.

MR. KERTESS: Yeah. And I can't really—well, it's like a combination of circumstances, you know. Like I can't rationally explain that. The first people that bought Chuck's work were people that were into so-called super-realism and wouldn't normally come to the gallery. Once Chuck started selling well, because he did so little work and was concerned where it went, we began to make an effort like to sell the work to people who had broader collections or weren't just specifically into all this super-realism.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you find that popular super-realism that was generally running around in those days? Or it was beginning to burst forth, I guess, since this was 69 or 70. Do you think that it made people look at Close's work more in those terms, or—

MR. KERTESS: When Chuck began to show, that madness was just really beginning. I mean, you know, Chuck and Malcolm Morley are the only two people that are usually grouped with that group that really interest me as artists. I mean, Malcolm had been showing, was known, sort of like not dealt with, was selling work and was known as an artist, but wasn't categorized in any way.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: Then, you know, like when the Estes madness started and all that—

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: You know, Chuck was brought into the sphere in the beginning. Chuck fought to separate himself from it, I mean, would refuse to be in realist shows, for instance. He finally gave up doing that because it seemed just as bad to insist that he wasn't, as to say, okay, you know, be in the show.

I wandered. What did you start asking? How did we get into that?

MR. CUMMINGS: How did people react, people's reactions?

MR. KERTESS: Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: Actually, I wanted to lead into something else from that.

MR. KERTESS: You were asking me about like how I felt about like the super-realists?

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah. Right.

MR. KERTESS: I don't like the idea of movements. I mean, somebody once asked me what the next movement

was going to be, and I said, "Oh."

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: Some of the people like classist super-realists are reasonable artists. I find most of them bad illustrators.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. KERTESS: And it's part of like the provincial tradition of American painting.

MR. CUMMINGS: It pops out every so often.

MR. KERTESS: Yeah. It has every right to exist, occasionally produces a good artist or more. But when it was dealt with as a, quote-radical-unquote movement and the newest thing in the newest group, and the prices were so inflated and so outrageous and being speculated with so heavily, I was purely offended at that. It seems to be in the throes of dying down some. So what you're always left with is like those few artists who were good, from whatever that madness was.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right. You know, speaking of the market and everything, how did you start setting prices for your artists? Because many of them hadn't been seen that much, certainly hadn't been—hadn't exhibited consistently anywhere. And you had to sort of—

MR. KERTESS: It's arbitrary, always.

MR. CUMMINGS: I know.

MR. KERTESS: You know, I mean, there—in like I guess the middle 60s, late 60s, there was general guidelines for—I mean, the general thinking was for a first one-man show, a large painting shouldn't exceed 1000 dollars. And I mean, my general approach was that I'd ask the artist what he or she thought the prices would be and we would adjust around what my feelings were, what his or her feelings were. Tend to be pretty much the same. Some people were more flexible than others.

David Novros, for instance, made in his mind some kind of direct connection with what he thought his work was worth aesthetically with what the prices should be. So he was way overpriced for, you know, three or four years. And people resisted buying David's paintings because they were too expensive relative to the amount—I mean, it's generally based on how much exposure, how much attention, and the size of the paintings. But it is totally arbitrary.

At any rate, David had to wait for his market to catch up with his prices. And once it did, and the prices weren't changed for maybe three years, whereas it usually happens when an artist starts selling, you begin to raise the prices.

MR. CUMMINGS: It moves up.

MR. KERTESS: Generally, like we'd start, you know, like large paintings somewhere around 1200 dollars. And as the years wore on, the large painting would be 1800 or 2000 dollars the first time around. And you know, sometimes artists would push me and tell me. I tend most of the time to be fairly conservative in terms of raising the prices, always with the [inaudible] of closing out one market and not having enough market beyond to justify a raise.

It sometimes would just be the difference of months. I mean, once Brice pressured me to all but double his prices. I thought it was a dangerous thing to do because he was just beginning to sell well, and that might really screw it up. We compromised, raised them 50 percent. There was a little resistance. Within a couple of months, it was all gone.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you find that there were people who would come in and really become interested in an artist once they reached a certain price level?

MR. KERTESS: Oh, yes.

MR. CUMMINGS: I mean, at 1500 they wouldn't look. At 3500, they started to show up?

MR. KERTESS: Oh, yeah. It's—I mean, as the market opened—I mean, the market gets bigger the higher the prices are. When Morris Louis's prices hit 40,000 dollars, Frank Sinatra decided to buy one.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: It's pretty much the same. I mean, you know, Frank Stella couldn't give his paintings away for a long time. I couldn't give Brice's paintings away. As the prices rose—I mean, the first people to buy Brice's paintings were like a small corps of collectors that were really committed to his work who had been badgered by me fairly hard over a period of years to look again, bought them, you know, out of real love and commitment finally.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] After they had been educated.

MR. KERTESS: After they had been educated. Then, you know, like once the market begins to get big, then a little word of mouth goes out, well, there's this artist Brice Marden who is supposed to be real good. Then, you know, like people that, you know, saw the paintings years ago and said no, you know, what is that piece of grey?—all of a sudden come in and they want a Brice Marden because it's the thing to have. So, you know, then the higher the prices are, the larger the market is.

MR. CUMMINGS: It's curious, isn't it, how that works?

MR. KERTESS: Well, yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: Were there any collectors who you feel were particularly involved with you or with the gallery?

MR. KERTESS: You mean, enough—

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, I mean, say, who bought frequently over the years?

MR. KERTESS: Yes, some.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who would you say would—

MR. KERTESS: Well, say, like Patrick Lannan, after a slow start. Patrick, you know, was pretty supportive. Over a period of maybe three years, bought quite a bit from the gallery. One of the first collectors I ever got involved with or like was really interested in or really liked was a couple from Chicago, was Irving and Natalie Forman, that came to the gallery.

They flew to New York to be in the peace march. When they got to 57th Street, came to the gallery because they had seen Humphrey's paintings at the Green Gallery. Bought a painting of Ralph's, rejoined the peace march, and came in regularly after that and were the first people, you know—they bought, you know, like a painting of Brice's, and they bought a drawing, and they bought another painting. They bought a piece of Van Buren's, bought another Humphrey and had, you know, a fairly marvelous collection. It was not very well known. They in the meantime have stopped collecting, pretty much.

MR. CUMMINGS: Why is that?

MR. KERTESS: It was a very strong lifestyle change. I mean, sometimes people stop collecting because they only collect one generation and can't get themselves into the next.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: In their case, they got very politically involved in the late 60s, early 70s, changed their lifestyle or kept trying to change it, never did it successfully. Also, like, their art collection was beginning to overtax their commitment to it. I mean, you know, they bought a house that was built by one of Frank Lloyd Wright's students. They climatized the house for the art, air-conditioned it, you know, did all this. And they, I guess, reached the point where they couldn't completely devote themselves to their collection any longer.

They considered leaving the country and moving to Mexico and starting a clinic there. Were going to move upstate. I mean, in essence, they wanted to drop out in some form, were honest enough to admit they couldn't find a way that wasn't as compromising as the way they were living already in the terms they were thinking in. And, you know, they still—they're close to a number of artists. You know, they're good friends with Jack [inaudible]. They know Chuck pretty well. They're still interested. They're just not, you know, really buying.

You know, I mean, when [inaudible] Walter is not a big collector. He has, you know, a really good drawing collection. Paul comes to the gallery regularly, has bought, you know, really good drawings when they've existed by a lot of the artists from the gallery. Occasionally, he'll buy a painting or a small piece.

And, you know, there's others that, say, I'll be connected with for a year or two years. And then we'll never see again or—

MR. CUMMINGS: What do you think brings someone like that in? Just word of mouth, their friends?

MR. KERTESS: It's mostly word of mouth.

MR. CUMMINGS: They see the magazine or something?

MR. KERTESS: Well, it's mostly word of mouth or, you know, just having come for a certain amount of time, you know, taking the faith and losing the faith.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. KERTESS: You know, and people—you know, I don't know. People move from orbit to orbit. Like, say, Patrick is a person that likes strong connections with whoever he deals with. Patrick, you know, was very involved with Paula's gallery for awhile.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: Then he became very involved with the Bykert Gallery.

MR. CUMMINGS: What does that mean, "involved"? I mean, does he—

MR. KERTESS: Well, in terms of like, you know, coming to the gallery a lot, buying things, you know, occasionally commissioning something, taking a strong interest in a couple of the artists in the gallery.

MR. CUMMINGS: I mean, would he want to know the artists and go to their studios?

MR. KERTESS: Yeah, well, yeah. And there would, I mean—say, Patrick would do that. Or when he got involved with me, it didn't exclude Paula, but he tended, you know, like to drift away.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. KERTESS: Then, you know, like he's not collecting very much now either. But to say somebody like Si Newhouse, like—you know, like in a given year, like I may take Si to a couple of studios or have the feeling that he's really interested in my opinion or what I say. The next year he may be drifting off, you know, somewhere else and talking to someone else.

A couple of times, like people have come in totally out of the blue. I mean, there was a man who walked into the gallery a year and a half ago that I'd never met before. Somebody called me and said there's this really obnoxious rich man coming in from the Midwest. We don't know what to do with him. We're sending him to you.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: You know, maybe you can sell him something. But he's awful.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. KERTESS: Well, he turned out—he is obnoxious, but he's like really curious and he's a sweet man. And you know, he walked into the gallery and the first thing he said is, "I want to open a gallery with you in Atlanta." And I said, "Why?" And he said, "Because there must be a market there." I said, "Save your money."

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] What a great [inaudible].

MR. KERTESS: And he just said, you know, four or five people that he respected told him I was a really good dealer, that he should talk to me. You know, was—I mean, he was carrying his heart in his hand when he walked in. And I didn't sell him a lot. But I mean, he would—he lives in Omaha. And he would fly from Omaha to Chicago to see a show at the Contemporary Art Museum that Brice and David were in because I said, you know, he should look at their work. And he bought a painting out of that show. And that's pretty rare. That doesn't happen too often.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah.

MR. KERTESS: He has—sounds like he's got to build a new house if he's going to be a real collector. I mean, he's just started buying—I'm always impressed when someone starts buying and they buy difficult things. He was interested in [inaudible], Brice, [inaudible], he bought a Humphry. Although they all have reasonable names for a collector starting out of the blue. To submit himself to that is always interesting to me.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, but sometimes people just look around and all of a sudden they lock into something.

MR. KERTESS: But I feel there's not—or there's somebody like—

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you think collectors grow? I mean, that's what observation implies, I mean, they evolve. They change, I think.

MR. KERTESS: They change. I wish I could say they all grew.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: Some do, you know, not many.

MR. CUMMINGS: What—in terms of operating the gallery, what became the largest expenses over the years? I mean, did the rent go up enormously or the telephone or was it—?

MR. KERTESS: Everything went up.

MR. CUMMINGS: Just kind of general increases?

KLAUSS KERTESS: Yeah, it was everything together. I mean, there's no one single expense that seems to outweigh all the others. The rent is the most constant expense, obviously, and salaries. But some months I'd have a photography bill that would approach a thousand dollars and some months it would be two hundred dollars. Moving bills, crating sometimes would be outrageous. Or if you get involved—like when David Marinovich [ph] had his show [inaudible] I wasn't in the habit of spending five thousand dollars for fabrication or to get a show to the gallery. So that—then there'd be irregular things like that, but generally, I mean, everything went up together.

MR. CUMMINGS: What about other dealers? You mentioned Castelli and Isen and Dick Bellamy. Were they helpful? Or were they not? Were they interested in your artists or did collectors just go back and forth, or was it fairly independent?

KLAUSS KERTESS: It's—the arts—well, I don't know the whole art business, arts are so small generally speaking, say what's good for one dealer is good for another dealer. There's no real gallery competition between galleries. Occasionally there's competition over an individual artist, and when the gallery opened there was a group of artists that tried to pit the Bykert Gallery against Dwan Gallery because we were both called the minimalists. Even got to the point where jokingly we were talking about forming bowling teams.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

KLAUSS KERTESS: And bowling against each other once a week. Leo was the most supportive, you know, in his polite, diplomatic, and removed way. I mean, I can't say, I don't feel close to Leo in any way. He's the dealer I have the most genuine respect for as a dealer and the most admiration, you know, he's just a really good dealer.

MR. CUMMINGS: What makes a good dealer? You say that, what—how do you define that, in terms of what?

KLAUSS KERTESS: In terms of contemporary art, well, making good choices is the start of it.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

KLAUSS KERTESS: However—

MR. CUMMINGS: You mean in terms of his business or promoting his artists?

KLAUSS KERTESS: Well, in terms of his business, no, he's not a good dealer. No dealer is good in terms of his or her business, I don't think.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, some would disagree with that. [Laughter]

KLAUSS KERTESS: I'm sure they would. But it's all such—if you think, Leo is somewhere in his sixties. He's at the top of his field. What he is worth and what money he makes is peanuts compared to somebody in a comparable position in another field. In that sense, he's not a good businessman, you could say. What makes Leo good, besides having chosen an extraordinary group of artists when he started his gallery, is his commitment to their art and what—and his constant plugging away. His loyalty to the art, to the artist, which is pretty unflagging over a period of what, fifteen years now.

MR. CUMMINGS: Longer.

KLAUSS KERTESS: Yeah. On a personal level, I have no interest in Leo, but he has the very restrained flair—you know, I've never seen Leo when he's not been a dealer.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's true.

KLAUSS KERTESS: You know, and some of us have been wrecked and wasted at open and Leo has his blue blazer buttoned and he's always smelling for—

MR. CUMMINGS: Yep, a mark. [Laughter]

KLAUSS KERTESS:—another collector and somebody with money. Whereas the rest of us think, well, it's about time we enjoyed ourselves I guess. At this hour of the evening we can get drunk or pull our tie down. Leo is always the dealer.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's true.

[END OF TAPE 2, SIDE A.]

MR. CUMMINGS: Side four. What about—you know, there are other dealers, and there are people like Janis who have done a different kind of dealing in a way.

MR. KERTESS: Yeah, I mean, in terms of, say, what I was doing or what I was interested in doing, which was, you know, making a path for not new discoveries because there are no discoveries, but for, you know, like new work or work that wasn't being seen or shown—I mean, Leo is the one that I had the strongest regard for.

Janis as a dealer in contemporary art either doesn't interest me at all or makes me hostile. I mean, as essentially—his dealings with contemporary art were essentially a parasitic operation of skimming the cream off the top when the cream rose. I don't find that interesting. I think Janis is incredibly important to American art, but it comes from him having like brought the Picasso and Mondrian and Schwitters to like the attention of the public at a time when nobody was willing to regard them as very serious artists. But that's finally, you know, what Sidney's contribution is. And it certainly isn't negligible.

MR. CUMMINGS: You'd prefer Betty Parsons' kind of philosophy.

MR. KERTESS: Betty is more interesting. You know, when there's—there was—I don't know if there was a need for Sidney Janis to exist as a contemporary dealer. Betty may be too erratic to have gone on dealing with those people. Certainly someone had to deal with their careers a little more professionally than she did.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: So maybe in that sense, you know, Janis and Marlborough and whoever else was necessary. But I can't say. But I'd like to [inaudible].

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] Well, I don't think any of the artists in your group have become—so far what they call traded artists, which means they have markets in [inaudible] cities and can sell on the telephone. Marden might, well—

MR. KERTESS: Brice and Chuck, the thing that saved them to some degree is the fact that both of them have very, very limited production.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. KERTESS: I mean, there is—like Brice has, you know, a lot of people that are after his work. There is some heavy speculation that's gone on over the last couple of years. His work outside of New York sells for up to three times as much as it would at the gallery.

MR. CUMMINGS: Really?

MR. KERTESS: I could sit on the telephone right now and sell four paintings in about 10 minutes at fairly high prices almost sight unseen. Chuck, because the prices are so extreme, isn't quite as easy.

MR. CUMMINGS: How many things has Close produced in a year?

MR. KERTESS: Any—well, three is the most. Sometimes only one. I mean, in the last couple of years he's done so many drawings. But never—I mean, they take from like three to six months to do, depending upon how obsessive he is during that period.

MR. CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. So you don't really have a lot to work with?

MR. KERTESS: No.

MR. CUMMINGS: What about—now, we've gotten most of the people. What about Barry Le Va [ph]? Where does he appear? How did he—

MR. KERTESS: Oh [inaudible].

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: Barry is one of the more mysterious artists I know. I mean, we all first heard of Barry Le Va when he was on the cover of *Artforum* in 68 with a very extraordinary group of work that was related to what Moss was doing at the time. I remember the other people, except that Barry seems to have grown out of nowhere and done it earlier and by himself in Los Angeles on very unfertile turf.

And Barry went from LA to Minneapolis, was teaching at Minneapolis, and whenever he came to New York, would come by the gallery. We'd always talk. I always looked at photographs of his work, but I never saw anything. And only felt fairly not—I never felt like I could commit myself to an artist unless I had seen some work. In fact, that was fairly difficult when people were doing things as situational as Barry's.

Then the only two pieces that were shown in New York was one in that anti-illusion show that Marcia Tucker and Jim Monte did at the Whitney. And there was a piece of flour, just on the floor—

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, right.

MR. KERTESS:—in a rectangular shape. I didn't like that piece at all. And the next piece he showed was in a group show at 112 Greene Street, which was a meat cleaver piece, where he just put meat cleavers in the wall. I didn't like that piece either.

Meanwhile, we kept on talking all the time. And finally, I offered him a two-person show. And my intention was that Dorothea Rockburne should have the large room and he should have the small room at the gallery. He kept saying he needed large spaces to work in. I kept saying, make an offer, you know, or make a proposal. Tell me a space that you'd like.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: And we'd always go round like that, but we'd never arrive at anything. Then the two-person show never worked out. Then Barry was very sick for awhile. Then I heard he was at Reece Pelley's [ph]. And I was sort of angry that he'd never told me he was going to do it, although I'd never made a full commitment. I ran into him in the city. He was only showing a few drawings at Reece's. Then Reece's closed. Then he and I were in a bar together one night, both pretty drunk. I asked him if he'd have a show in the gallery. He said the space was too small. I said, "Was 5000 square feet enough?" He said yes. I said I had a downtown space that was being worked on; would he do it? I mean, I challenged him, finally, to do a piece there.

Some of it was like back—kind of reluctance on my part, not having seen enough work. Some of it was the self-destructive side of him. I mean, he should have come to New York in 68 with slides and said, "Give me a show." He didn't. He is kind of laid back. I love Barry's attitude. I mean, he's one of the sanest artists I know in terms of his attitude.

There was a period where he seemed almost self-destructive in his staying away from showing his work.

MR. CUMMINGS: Why was that, do you think?

MR. KERTESS: I don't know, you know, like how much of that is fear. There are all those funny kinds of like, you know—there's always that pain that every artist goes through, like getting his or her work out into the public that, you know, showing themselves, naked to the world outside.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: Sometimes it makes them very hostile, as a defense against whatever may happen. Sometimes it makes them withdraw for an extended period of time, you know, until they're begged out of—.

MR. CUMMINGS: Poor things. [Laughter] Yeah.

MR. KERTESS: In Barry's case, I don't know that a lot of it—I mean, you know, he was close to getting the work out, then he'd pull back. Then he became sick with cancer. You know, it's cured at this point. But for two years, you know, like he lived with death that made his attitude toward his art somewhat more negative. Other people, it might have made it more positive, you know, at that point. I mean, he might sit here and totally disagree with me.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: Saying it—you know, those really are like my impressions, that there was something like holding him back from wanting his work out.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah. Hm. Is his early work the same kind of thing?

MR. KERTESS: He showed like two early piece uptown last spring when he did a new installation downtown. The earlier work, the first work that he showed was torn, shredded felt like spread out across a large space with ball bearings.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: He did pieces with mineral oil and paper towels and acid. And they were more complex. I mean, everybody dealt with him on a purely material level. When people were talking about, you know, process art around the 60s, they always had like a kind of system that was then violated or not followed through with, so that you could walk in and you'd be given clues to an arrangement. And then that arrangement would be violated somehow. So [inaudible] it appeared totally random and you'd really have to fight through to get him to see some of the order in it. So it was never just say about presentation of materials or materials interacting or, you know, like saying, this is what the art does when you throw it into a corner.

MR. CUMMINGS: Um-hm. Who else has worked for you in the gallery besides Lynda Benglis? You had other people drawn to do other things?

MR. KERTESS: Lynda worked in the gallery. There were a lot of people that worked there. [Inaudible], but mainly women who were artists worked in the gallery. After Lynda, Nancy went there and worked there. And another was a woman who is now writing rock lyrics out on the Coast named Tammy Groalee [ph]. She was replaced by the wife of a poet who went crazy in the course of working for the gallery.

MR. CUMMINGS: The wife of a poet?

MR. KERTESS: She was the wife. She went totally nuts. And I mean, she—there wasn't—I mean, I was pretty crazy at the time. It was the time of the art strike. She ended up being in and asylum, thinking that I was involved with black magic.

MR. CUMMINGS: Uh-huh.

MR. KERTESS: And that she was pregnant by the devil. Brantley Rose of SoHo News came and worked at the gallery briefly, very briefly.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who is that?

MR. KERTESS: Rose Hartman did the gossip column—

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

MR. KERTESS: I mean, when I hired Rose, I swore I wouldn't hire another artist. And what I would really prefer would be either a middle-aged man or woman who didn't know anything about art, but could type real well and answer the phone real well.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] Right.

MR. KERTESS: Rose appeared, and she wasn't quite what I had in mind, but she seemed very sane, very serious and started working at the gallery. And it turns out that she spent her entire day on the phone looking for art parties.

And then Linda Patton and Jean Blake worked at the gallery. And then after that, Mary Boone was there. Now they're both doing art.

MR. CUMMINGS: What does she do?

MR. KERTESS: I don't know, you know. I mean—

MR. CUMMINGS: I mean, she's an artist?

MR. KERTESS: She's a painter.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

MR. KERTESS: I mean, she paints like quite a bit. But, you know, again, she's like very young. She's 21, 22, very bright.

MR. CUMMINGS: More than that now, isn't she?

MR. KERTESS: Maybe 23, I don't know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Really?

MR. KERTESS: She can't be more than 23. At any rate, she's not at a point where she's showing her work to anyone.

MR. CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. Now, let's see. We've talked about—let's go back. And we talked briefly about traveling before, which you did so much of and then you said most of the travel recently is for business. What do you mean, in terms of visiting exhibitions or—

MR. KERTESS: I collected—some of them like flew off to be collected. I mean, say—I mean, if I—the few times I've been to Europe in the last four or five years have been to go to Germany for documents or for prospect or for some fairly big show. And I would always flee to Paris afterwards in desperation, again.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you ever do any of the Wagnalls [L'Annuels] in Paris?

MR. KERTESS: No, I refused.

MR. CUMMINGS: No? Why?

MR. KERTESS: Well, it's too much—like too much circus. It's a billiards game. I mean, Wagnall doesn't make any sense unless you can go where the few expensive objects that are small in a suitcase, sell them, make some money, pay for your trip, and leave.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: It's not a place to show an artist for the first time. It's not a place to show an artist who's unknown.

MR. CUMMINGS: It's a trading post.

MR. KERTESS: It's a trading fair. And the people that I could take to something like that either have very good dealers in Europe—I'm meaning like say Brice, essentially, or there's no work around. Like to say, you know, I couldn't pack 10 drawings of Chuck Close's in a suitcase and three or four of Brice's and leave.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: So it never made any sense.

MR. CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. Now, what happened in the last year or so? Because you've changed the whole way of living.

MR. KERTESS: Way of living. Over an almost three-year period. It started three years ago. God, I didn't—it—for say a third—five, six years of the gallery, a lot of it had to do with like my style, the way I am, how I work. The gallery existed almost solely in my head, was completely my doing. Thrived on my personal chaos and was run fairly sloppily because there was no other way of running it. It was always about, you know, like if someone walked in and said this had to happen, you know, I would try and make that happen, and to the detriment, occasionally, of somebody else.

MR. CUMMINGS: Um-hm. Did you feel that you gave it direction or the gallery gave you direction?

MR. KERTESS: A combination of the two. I mean, it was—

MR. CUMMINGS: Back and forth.

MR. KERTESS: It was back and forth. I mean, there were times always when I was unhappy, you know, off and on where I felt like all of a sudden the gallery was running me rather than me running the gallery. Or, you know, I'd get—the first three, four years of the gallery, my entire life revolved around just the art scene. I was at Max's every night. I, you know—all my social life was involved with the artists in the gallery or other artists that were close to the gallery. Occasionally, that got out of hand.

MR. CUMMINGS: In what way?

MR. KERTESS: Well, it's very hard to like have the friendship and the business relationship at one and the same time. What happened—I mean, and I didn't start the gallery to make new friends. Essentially, you know, my involvement was with the work. But there always were like very heavy psychological demands made on me, which I was very willing to give, probably invited those to a point, in fact.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: Because, you know, then all of a sudden could find myself walking down Canal Street in tears, yelling that I'd never let them do that to me again. That didn't happen too often.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah. But what was Max's Kansas City—useful for people? What does it do? I mean, besides a place to drink and go and see people.

MR. KERTESS: It was an exciting place to be. I mean, all the art bars that exist now are totally boring. And they smell of opportunism or junior executives trying to hustle their wares. And they have no style. I mean, the art scene still interests me. Its public manifestation is totally boring to me. I mean, what seems to be happening now is that there are, you know, as good artists now as there were 10 years ago or 20 years ago. But it's much more private. It's just as—like New York as the city has become more private, or the glamour as it still exists is more about nostalgia than anything that's alive. The same is true of the art scene. I mean, you know, the whole pop scene of the 60s grew up.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. KERTESS: Its discotheques opening every night. Max's was part of that. In its own funky way, it was a glamorous, exciting place to be. You know, it was the Warhol world, and the back room extended its glamour to the front room and some of its freakiness.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right. Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

MR. KERTESS: There wasn't, you know, an endless amount of intelligent exchange that went on there.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: But there were a lot of good times, and they were—and artists went there. I mean, there were endless nights of, you know, listening to Carl Andre monologues or arguing with Bob Smithson or just sitting around and getting drunk and laughing. Or just sitting around and getting drunk and fighting. But it had like a real spirit to it.

MR. CUMMINGS: Why do you think there's so much drinking now? The drug scene seems to have disappeared or has gone on—

MR. KERTESS: Alcohol is going through a strong revival.

MR. CUMMINGS: I see that, yeah.

MR. KERTESS: But there's always been drinking on the art—I mean, it's the—somebody once asked me if I thought all artists were alcoholics. And I said, "No." But I mean, as long as I've been involved with the art scene, there's always been quite a bit of drinking. There was more dope around five years ago than there is now. You know, I mean—or there's more different kinds of dope.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, right.

MR. KERTESS: And I mean, you're more conscious of alcohol being around now than you were then. But if you walked into Max's in 66 or 67, there were a lot of people doing a lot of drinking.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] That's true. That's true. But now, what's happened? You said there's changes to the art of three years ago.

MR. KERTESS: Well, it's like a combination of things that the gallery, like grew to a point where it required like more organization than my wants could give it or my style could give it, where it needed better filing systems and I couldn't remember every title of Brice Marden's paintings anymore or their dimensions. I didn't know where every painting that had been sold had gone to.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right. And it had become a business.

MR. KERTESS: It had become a business. And you know, that's what it was meant to do. I found like some of my energies or more of my energies going in that direction than I wanted them to. Also like, I was beginning to suffer from psychological overload. I mean, I was doing too much. I mean, I was going to studios endlessly when I really shouldn't have been going to as many studios as I was. I felt since there were so many artists and so few people going to studios that part of my role meant that I had to deal with, you know, seeing a lot of people's work.

And for a long time, that was very important to me, and I learned most of what I learned from going to studios. It had reached a point of diminishing returns, where, you know, I learned less and less because I'd seen so much.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: So that it was like beginning to wear on me. Then, you know, I had for the last five years, I've been writing, which wasn't in direct conflict with running the gallery, but I began to want more time to myself.

MR. CUMMINGS: Now, what provoked the writing? I mean, this has been floating around in the background with the—what started it?

MR. KERTESS: I mean, to say I've been writing regularly for the last five years is something of an exaggeration. But I've persisted in writing, rather than starting and then like giving it up for three years and then thinking, well, maybe it would be a good idea. And then in the last five years, I have consistently thought of myself first as a potential writer and then as a writer. It started as a sheer act of desperation.

MR. CUMMINGS: In terms of?

MR. KERTESS: In terms—it started around the art strike, which concurrently consumed me.

MR. CUMMINGS: Why was that?

MR. KERTESS: Well, because I had spent like—for the better part of my life, making fairly clear perimeters for my life and assuming that, you know, I had the world that was separate from the rest of the world and I chose to deal with like art that I was really—I mean, things that mattered to me were the art that I cared for and the few people I had close personal relationships with. And everything outside of that, I could take it or leave it. But I tended, simply put, to think that what was outside wasn't affecting my world.

At a certain point, that world versus the outside world, burst into my world. And I felt very threatened by it and totally horrified at what was going on.

MR. CUMMINGS: What was the manifestation of this? How did the artists like serve the moment?

MR. KERTESS: Well, it started when the School of Visual Arts did that manifesto about artists withdrawing their work from exhibitions. There was that show at the Jewish museum where, it was called On Walls ["Using Walls"], or something, where Bob Morris and Peter Brookbane [Daniel Buren] and [Mel] Bochner and three or four other artists were supposed to do pieces directly on the wall. And I mean, Art Workers Coalition had been like rising, you know, like protests within the art scene against both the politics of the art establishment—meaning the galleries, collectors, and museums—and the political situation in the country.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: I had always stayed away from the political situation in the country, although I didn't like it. All of a sudden, it seemed to be getting so bad that, either I had to leave the country or do something about it. And I think we all tended to think in black and white terms at that point. And all the actions that were taken were naïve, but worthwhile thinking.

At any rate, when people were withdrawing their work from the shows, I became like totally incensed because that seemed like the very worst thing one could do under the circumstances was to hide the work rather than to expose the work. I fought that like tooth and nail, and then from there went into getting very involved with the political actions that were going on in the art scene and going to meetings with dealers who were feeling very threatened. There was that mass meeting at the Loeb Student Center at which like I spoke for the dealers to 1500 people as, you know, to what we were going to do about stopping the war in Vietnam and making the art establishment like more responsive to the demands of the artists.

I found myself spending all my time with Bob Morris, Irving Petlin, Max Kozloff, and Phil Leider. Then the gallery turned into a second-rate Goddard movie, with people with portable typewriters, phone calls to Russia, phone calls to Washington, and all of us sitting around like trying to figure out what we could do to be politically active.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: It extended to like fighting the metropolitan expansion, canceling the Venice [inaudible], trying to get the My Lai [Massacre] poster on the cover of all the art magazines, which we almost achieved, but not quite.

MR. CUMMINGS: What do you think all that produced, all that ferment to carry on?

MR. KERTESS: Immediately, nothing. I mean, I still remember 15 of us going to Washington and pounding our feet off talking to white liberal Senators and being smiled at and being welcomed and coming back totally debilitated, with Leo and Bob Rauschenberg on the plane. And Bob and I went to Remington's and had about 15 margaritas apiece to get Washington out of our system.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: And we'd all gone somewhere in the back of our minds with the naïve idea that the next day there would be headlines with all the newspapers saying, "Art Scene Stops War in Vietnam."

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: None of us had the sense at the time to say, "All right, that was a beginning," and pointed back to Washington—was curious about us being there. It had extended to paranoia in Nancy Hanks's office, her unwillingness to see us, certain Senators taking advantage of our presence for more publicity. It was clear that there was a certain power or weight that the art scene had and could have wield if it thought about it carefully. Artists don't work very well as groups.

At any rate, we left Washington, never to return, when we should have like sat down and said, "Well, instead of 15 people going and doing a grand march, three people will go the next time and just talk to two Senators and come back again."

MR. CUMMINGS: Keep it going.

MR. KERTESS: Just to keep it going.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah.

MR. KERTESS: There were no concrete results. I mean, well, in terms of the Met, I think we prevented the staircase from being replaced by an escalator. But there were a lot of ideas that were tossed around that I think were good ideas. I think people learned things. And I think, you know, like we made what miniscule contribution we made towards, you know, like finally, yes, ending the war and finally, you know, like yes, having like an investigation of Watergate and putting all the shit out on the table and saying, "This is what's been going on." At any rate, I was—that was my only—

MR. CUMMINGS: Turmoil.

MR. KERTESS: My only activity. I had felt guilty when a business call came into my office. I was so wound up with that, I was leaving for Europe for the summer. Even activists take vacations.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: I was to meet Lynda in Paris, and I missed my plane, thinking it left at 9 at night, not at 9 in the morning, because planes aren't supposed to leave at 9 in the morning. And I got hysterical at the airport. I had been so wound up. It was the end of June, the airport was crowded. Lynda didn't know what hotel we were supposed to stay in. She had come and gone in the airport in Paris.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: I had kids stepping all over me, and I was losing my luggage, my magazines, everything I was carrying. And I was literally desperate. I thought to myself, either I'm going to buy a notebook and start writing in it or I'm going to pick up the next child that steps on my feet and throw it over the railing. Those were the only two choices I had open to me.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: I bought a notebook, and I started writing. And it really started out as sheerest therapy. From there it grew into a novel, which, you know, was two years in the writing, which is not very good—had some very good things in it. It's not worth salvaging, can't be salvaged. It's followed by like a large group of very short stories that has led into the beginning of a second novel, which I hope is better than the first novel.

But it, you know—I've always like off and on toyed with writing them. It became like a fairly serious endeavor. It

wasn't as though I was painting and running a gallery at the same time. But then it became a matter of time. And I needed more time to myself. I thought I could arrange that and still stay at the gallery. There was no way, you know, I could leave. Some of that was my own compulsiveness and my own being used to, like a regular schedule. I kept telling myself I'd stay home this day or I'd take a long weekend in the country. It never would work. Or if I'd get away, I'd be on the phone all the time.

Then a year ago, I thought I would close the gallery, which psychologically would have been the simplest and cleanest thing to do. And I went away for two weeks of desert isolation in Baja. And it just seemed that closing the gallery—I mean, I'd already gone through preliminaries with some of the artists in the gallery. I hadn't told them what I wanted to do. But I kind of hinted at the possibilities of other places to go to. They tended to either put down those places or, you know, just not want to.

And then it seemed, you know, like with the exception of three or four people who could go almost anywhere they wanted to go, closing the gallery would mean like breaking, you know, careers—not destroying careers, obviously, because I'm not in a position to do that as a gallery, I'm not in a position to do that. But it just seemed to be breaking stride and screwing up the careers of a number of artists that I was like very committed to.

So the thing that seemed the sanest was to find somebody to run the gallery, with me very substantially in the background. I came back from Baja. I had a slipped disk, which gave me two more weeks to think. And there were three people that I was considering, you know, that I was interested in. Frank Kolbert was the one that seemed to promise to work out the best. I suggested it to Frank. He was very enthusiastic. We spent a lot of weeks talking about it.

Frank is very young, but has a good eye and a lot of enthusiasm. And he and I don't disagree on a lot. So I mean, the way it's mapped out now is that, you know, for the next two years or so, I will sort of stay in the background to, you know, do what has to be done, help the transition, act as consultant. What happens after that, neither one of us knows.

You know, I mean, ultimately, you know, Frank will put his own stamp on that space. In the first round, I mean, some of the artists left. Some of the artists are very angry. Last spring, it was hysterical for about two months. I couldn't go out.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] In the street.

MR. KERTESS: I mean, Chuck Close told me he couldn't go shopping without 12 people standing in line with him, asking him what was going on.

MR. CUMMINGS: I'm sure, I'm sure. But now, what happened to Jeff Byers? What happened to him in all of this?

MR. KERTESS: Well, it was my—see, I told Jeff after I'd made the plans. I mean, at first like I had to straighten out—I mean, the last year, while all that was going on in my mind, I did what I could, you know, like to straighten out the gallery in as rational a way as possible in terms of, you know, business things, doing all that. I mean, the gallery kept probably better biographical and bibliographical records than most other galleries. I mean, certain things were well done; other things were not so well done. Anyway, it was about like trying to make it as straight as possible.

Jeff, I assumed, would—I mean, there was nothing to sell. Frank wasn't buying the gallery. It was about him taking it over and then me getting some kind of remuneration, but probably in the future. Jeff, when I told him, I thought he would want to pull out of it altogether, get some kind of paper agreement from Frank about, you know, percentage of sales or something. Jeff was surprised, then decided that he'd like to stay involved in the gallery, which was really very nice, you know.

So there is all stock, right, that isn't worth very much. [Laughter] A third of it has now been transferred to Frank. Over the course of the next three years, the rest will be transferred to Frank, you know, together with—

MR. CUMMINGS: Piecemeal, um-hm.

MR. KERTESS: You know, whatever is legally necessary to—some promissory notes about, you know, like future percentages or immediate percentages. But in any rate, you know, like Jeff is, you know—it pleased me that he wanted to stay. He's been supportive of Frank, is very supportive of whatever I want to do—liked the idea that he's still involved with the gallery.

MR. CUMMINGS: So what are you going to do? Are you going to deal privately here?

MR. KERTESS: No.

MR. CUMMINGS: Or through the gallery? Or at a mystic eminence somewhere?

MR. KERTESS: Well, I didn't—I mean, for awhile there was the thought that like having done what I was doing that the three or four artists who wanted me to deal with their work and that I was just going to sit here and deal privately—that is much more lucrative than what I was doing at 81st Street, but requires the same amount of energy.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: It's not nearly as interesting to me.

MR. CUMMINGS: You may as well be a stock broker.

MR. KERTESS: Yeah. So I mean, that was not the point. I mean, so there are these vague things that are going on. Brice has left the gallery, for instance, but doesn't have a New York dealer. So I will do some work with Brice; he's promised me a couple of paintings. Jo Baer wanted somebody else to deal with her work as well, wasn't sure she wanted another gallery.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: You know, so I'm trying to do some things for Jo. I mean, those are really the only two people I'm dealing with directly. Other people, you know, like yesterday afternoon I spent the afternoon in Joe Zucker's studio. Well, I really like Joe's work. I like Joe. I went over to see a drawing for a very large, you know, like commission for the rodeo in Fort Worth. That is the most pleasurable side of the gallery work, essentially.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: What I wanted to do was like—you know, it's not about closing a door and saying, "That's over. I never want to see all you artists again or any of your work."

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: There are, you know, four or five people whose work I've learned a lot from and am still committed to. I don't want the daily responsibility of either their rent, their girlfriend's abortion, or—

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] Whatever disaster.

MR. KERTESS: Whatever disaster or psychological problem or material problem comes up. I still, you know, like to maintain contact with, you know, like a number of the people. So it's—I wanted to get rid of the day-to-day responsibility, the burden of 18 people's lives, you know, on my hands every day for 24 hours. If I want to leave the city for two months, I wanted to leave the city for two months.

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you have a writing schedule now, or are you just kind of putting things together still?

MR. KERTESS: No. I'm not disciplined enough. I mean, I spent the summer in Easthampton putting my head back together again. It was—last spring was extremely emotional, very traumatic on all sides. I mean, it was—for nine years almost all the energy in my life went towards the gallery. So it was like a very, you know, radical, painful break.

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you think that there are things that you accomplished by operating the gallery and showing these people? I mean, is there some—do you get some sense of, you know, accomplishment, satisfaction?

MR. KERTESS: Do you mean would I do it all over again?

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] Well, that's something else.

MR. KERTESS: Yeah. It depends, you know, how you look at things, where you look at things. I mean, I feel I learned—I mean, part of the thing that I liked was being able to grind down, as I was beginning to learn less from running the gallery because there were so many things going on. In the history of, you know, the short history of Klaus Kertess, running the gallery was like very important to me. It seems to have been like the best way that I could grow and go on learning at the time when I did.

MR. CUMMINGS: What do you—you use the term "learning." What is it that you've learned?

MR. KERTESS: Jesus. [Laughter]

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: If I could tell you that.

MR. CUMMINGS: That would be the next book.

MR. KERTESS: That would be the next book.

MR. CUMMINGS: I mean, I—you know, you've learned obviously a lot about people and art and business.

MR. KERTESS: Well, it seems like watching, say, like different artists' work that I care about grow, experiencing the work on a daily basis, interacting with the work, interacting with the artists, you know, was, you know, much more of a learning experience than going to college was.

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you think that it's possible to, you know, continue—for a gallery to continue that is not more focusing toward the business of running a gallery?

MR. KERTESS: It's extremely hard. I mean, say, Frank [Kolbert], for instance, has more inclination toward business than I do. I don't have a bad head for business.

MR. CUMMINGS: You choose not?

MR. KERTESS: I just choose not.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: You know, my lifestyle is much more expensive than I can afford. I don't dislike money. I have no respect for it, essentially. Never thought of like just earning money or needing money. If I have it, I spend it or spend more than I have.

The gallery, you know, needs—I mean, it's been wobbling there for a couple of years now, like breaking the account, like, you know, how much larger the gross sales are last year from the year before. It needs a stronger business hand than mine.

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you think it's possible to sell the kind of art that you have been showing in terms of, you know, young people? Difficult ideas—you know, one can go to Wally Findlay and they will sell you a painting with a horse and green grass in a gold frame that will look pretty.

MR. KERTESS: Short-run, no; long-run, yes. I mean, that's—the friction always is, you know, will you catch up with the short run in the long run?

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: There's not—I mean, I can't hold out an incredible amount of hope. As long as, say—I mean, the thing that interested me about the gallery was its continued growth. It would have started making money sooner if I had cut off and said, all right, I'll just deal with these three or four people primarily and that's it.

MR. CUMMINGS: And really did a job in terms of the business.

MR. KERTESS: Yeah. And some of those three or four people were sort of pissed at me that I kept taking new people into the gallery that either they didn't like—I mean, every time a new artist came in the gallery it was like bringing a new baby home.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: There was intense jealousy. The work is no good, you know, what are you doing, can't see anymore.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Inaudible]

MR. KERTESS: Then, you know, sometimes there was acceptance, sometimes never that acceptance. There was—well, the people that had been in the gallery the longest, a few of them felt somewhat alienated that it was no longer their gallery. And there were other people—but my interest was always in making it continue to grow. I didn't want, you know, the top echelon to leave and go to Marlborough or Knoedler or Janis. I wanted them to stay, but I still wanted the rest to grow.

MR. CUMMINGS: Um-hm.

MR. KERTESS: That's almost impossible to do financially—almost impossible. I mean, most of the interesting galleries that, you know, like what Virginia Dwan did—I mean, galleries in the culture that we live in are in a very ambivalent position. They're selling art, they're supporting—I mean, they are selling art, but they're also

supporting and patronizing art.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: And like, dealers, finally—I mean, you know, with the exception of one or two collectors, dealers are much more interesting in terms of the art they've shown, chosen, supported than almost any museum or any collector or any critic.

MR. CUMMINGS: But don't you think that, you know—and you mentioned museums supporting. But somewhere in the 60s when a museum curator decided that the museum should be the tastemaker, that they should give the art the correct perspective at the age of 21 before they've had a first exhibition—

MR. KERTESS: Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: That in a sense the museums lost a great deal of their purpose, and they began competing with the dealers that way?

MR. KERTESS: Well, I think there's something like very dangerous about our young stars. I mean, when the Guggenheim wanted to do Brice's show, my first advice was not to do it. And you know, in the end I was glad that Brice did it and I really was pleased with the way the show looked.

MR. CUMMINGS: What changed your opinion?

MR. KERTESS: The fact that it wasn't a full-scale retrospective. The way Brice chose the paintings, a certain nonhistorical look—I mean, it was about groups of paintings from different times. It wasn't about a knockout retrospective. And the fact that there were so many good paintings there and Brice is such a good painter.

Also, my confidence in his ability to withstand his stardom and to go on growing as a painter. Essentially, I think it's a bad idea. I don't think any artist who is 35 should have a full museum retrospective.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah. It's too young.

MR. KERTESS: The problem with the world that we live in is that art is totally homeless. So everything is an ersatz solution. It shouldn't be a dealer that has to fabricate the work or give an artist, you know, a monthly stipend or do this or do that. You know, museums don't have to give like full-scale retrospectives at the age of 21 or 35. They don't have to put immediate stamp of approval.

They can do things like a project show at the Modern, which are very unpopular with Richard Oldenburg because they don't get a lot of press and because some of them are bad. They should, you know, like buy the work of younger artists. I find it totally repugnant that the Museum of Modern Art has almost no budget for a purchase of contemporary art.

MR. CUMMINGS: Never have.

MR. KERTESS: Either they should say, you know, "That's not our job," you know, or they should hustle a lot of money to buy more art.

MR. CUMMINGS: They've never had money for any—for new art.

MR. KERTESS: They've had more than they have now. But they claim to be interested in contemporary art when, you know, if they do a show once every five years—

MR. CUMMINGS: Look at their new acquisitions. In 1908 or something, Matisse?

MR. KERTESS: Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: I mean, [William] Rubin hasn't looked at a modern painting after 1950 [inaudible].

MR. KERTESS: No. I couldn't care less. So don't, you know—

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. KERTESS: And has undermined, you know, like the younger curators to some degree. So then they just should openly state that, for the time being at least, they're not—

MR. CUMMINGS: There is no modern art. [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: Yeah. There's no way that this can point to contemporary art. So they're [inaudible].

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah.

MR. KERTESS: But, you know, where does the art go after it leaves the studio? You know, like what happens to it?

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. KERTESS: You know, the gallery, in terms of like what it achieved or what it did—sure. I mean, a gallery is meant to sell art. But 98 percent of the people that came to the gallery came just to look and to learn, to see, to whatever.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: The public service function that any gallery that deals with contemporary artists that's open five days a week, 10 to 6 is extremely important and totally un-lucrative and wildly expensive.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: You know, there are certain things that artists could change. I mean, when, you know, like people like bitch about the overhead or like complain about the gallery, you know, I'd say, "Well, you know, there's nobody that would be happier to stop advertising an art forum than me." But—

MR. CUMMINGS: Can't do that.

MR. KERTESS: You know, until the 18 people stand in front of the desk and say "We don't care whether we have ad in *Artforum* or not" don't do it, you know, split the money between us, whether it's 50 cents or not, we know that can't be done.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, because they're all competing with their friend down the street, too.

MR. KERTESS: Yeah.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: But it tends—I mean, like—it's just—I mean, galleries like to serve such like so many functions in such an ambivalent way that it's very curious.

MR. CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, um-hm. Wow. So you're going to have an observing eye, but a peripheral amount of activity?

MR. KERTESS: Essentially, yes.

MR. CUMMINGS: And you're going to write. I hear you're putting a house up or something?

MR. KERTESS: I have a house.

MR. CUMMINGS: You have a house?

MR. KERTESS: The only thing that's kept me sane for the last four years—I have a house at East Hampton.

MR. CUMMINGS: Uh-huh. Whereabouts?

MR. KERTESS: It's between Sag Harbor and East Hampton off Route 114. It's Agnes Martin's house.

MR. CUMMINGS: Agnes Martin still.

MR. KERTESS: I had a painting of Agnes's that I bought from her [inaudible] show. The only way I could build a house or start to build a house was to sell Agnes's painting. It's before the prices went really high. So I called—I was sorry to sell it, but it got me what I wanted when I wanted it. It's Agnes's house.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah. Wow. Good. What you didn't mention is the exhibition at Yale in 1973 that you were involved with that opt for opinions and alternatives.

MR. KERTESS: Options and alternatives—

MR. CUMMINGS: Or options and alternatives.

MR. KERTESS:—part of the title.

[SIMULTANEOUS CONVERSATION]

MR. KERTESS: We may have to call it art from A to B.

MR. CUMMINGS: And back again? [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: [Laughter]

MR. CUMMINGS: How did that come about? I mean, you keep going back to Yale as much as you didn't like it.

MR. KERTESS: Well, some of it was—it was a series of prejudices that I always fought. One of the things that I always had to live with that I resented was that dealers were biased because they were in it for the money, whereas critics weren't biased.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: And when I pointed out to Larry Poons one night that I had been party to a sale of three paintings belonging to Clement Greenburg that totaled twice the gross sales of the gallery in the last year, he could not make that claim quite so strongly.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] Uh-huh.

MR. KERTESS: I'd never, you know, like—or like walking into Bob Scull's house in East Hampton towards like the end of his career as an art collector and being told that art dealers were not generally invited into his home.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: [Inaudible] Tom Hess turning to me after the opening of the Elie Nadelman show last week and asking me, "What does it feel like now that you're an intellectual?"

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: All these things annoyed me. Also, I think the state of curatorship in the contemporary field is really disastrous.

MR. CUMMINGS: Why is that, do you think?

MR. KERTESS: I don't really understand why it is. I mean, there's never—I mean, in my memory haven't been that many good curators around. But there seem even fewer now.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. KERTESS: And, you know, that kind of thing combined with—I really did feel like the museum at Yale like was the most important part of my dealing with Yale as a place. That was the only part of the institution that meant anything to me. And I always liked being in that place. So—and I never sent in my class dues and I never go to class reunions and do any of that shit.

I thought at one point, when I was told they were getting more interested in contemporary art, I would like to do a show there. Jeff Byers is one of their trustees—I mentioned it to Jeff. Andrew Ritchie was still head of the museum. Andrew Ritchie came to Jeff's apartment. I told him what I wanted to do. He said it was immoral because I was a dealer.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: Forty years later, Annette [Michelson] and I did the show there. The irony is that the only way, or the dubious way they could raise the money to do the show was to do it in honor of Andrew Ritchie.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] Marvelous.

MR. KERTESS: Who was eulogized at the dinner precluding the opening?

MR. CUMMINGS: How did she get involved?

MR. KERTESS: Well, this specific show—then what kind of a show it was was that I had at a certain point got very involved with a group of filmmakers. It was about being bored with barriers between what was called painting, what was called—or what was called art and what was called filmmaking and whether artists were filmmakers and filmmakers were artists. And Annette and I spent a fair amount of time together. I was very interested in some of the people she was interested in. I showed two of them. She wanted to do a museum show of films.

MR. CUMMINGS: I see.

MR. KERTESS: And Guggenheim took an interest.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: At one point, Martin Friedman was interested. Everybody was horrified to deal with Annette because she doesn't deliver too punctually.

MR. CUMMINGS: If ever.

MR. KERTESS: If ever. I, you know—so then through talking with Annette and those shows sort of falling by the wayside, we talked about how nice it would be to do a museum show that gave equal weight to like performance, you know, painting, sculpture, what-not. That's how, you know, like that came about. So that's happening at the same time as Alan Shestack who became the head of the museum, said, yes, he'd be interested, you know, if I'd do a show. There were problems, but, you know, couldn't get too many people from the gallery in it. But we'd work it out somehow.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right. Was it successful for you as an endeavor in any way?

MR. KERTESS: Yeah. It was. Since I'd never put a museum show together and been so critical of other museum shows, yeah, I enjoyed doing it. I liked working with Annette. It was frustrating because she didn't deliver and—the show—there were the hysterical edges of the show that tended to overwhelm both of us. I mean, the show had to be involved with the students, which was fine.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. KERTESS: But then a woman whose class it was that was working on the catalog had an extreme distaste for Annette, assumed that she and I would teach her class, kept saying we weren't being helpful, when in point of fact I'd be sitting in the gallery talking to one or another of her students about one or another artist in the show. Or—

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, essentially—

MR. KERTESS: Did experiment—I mentioned George Heard Hamilton before being important. I mean, it was—in some ways, I really felt like I was doing that show to repay a debt to George, to the teachers that I cared about, and to the museum. Well, at the opening, by the time the opening came around, I was so angry at Anne [Coffin] Hanson, who was involved with the show with her class, that I rented a Cadillac limousine and brought a lot of champagne, and six of us drove up to the opening and got quite drunk and were wondering, you know, like what damage we could wreak at the opening.

Also, it got so paranoid that my only friend in the history of the art department was consciously not invited to the dinner before the opening, in spite of the fact that I—

MR. CUMMINGS: Who was that?

MR. KERTESS: It was Neil Levine—in spite of the fact that three times I called and demanded that he be presented personally with an invitation. Everyone else in the history of art department had been invited.

MR. CUMMINGS: Why was he not?

MR. KERTESS: Because of infighting with Anne Hanson and a number of other people.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, academic politics.

MR. KERTESS: At the opening, after the dinner and the eulogy of Andrew Ritchie, I was walking around the show with Ronny Greenberg, who is a dealer from St. Louis. And Brice's painting was, say, hanging there. And in front of it on the floor was a piece of David Rabinowitch's.

And George Hamilton walked onto David Rabinowitch's piece, which was essentially a slab, and looked at Brice's painting. And I really began to bristle, was furious. And then he turned to a woman he was with and he said, "Step up here, you can look at this painting better from the sculpture."

I almost cried. I didn't know whether I wanted to go up and hit him or yell or just stand there and not notice it. And Ronny [Ronald] Greenberg and said, "Excuse me. You're standing on a work of art." And George was instantly offended by this stranger in what was George's museum telling him he was standing on that miserable slab of metal to look at that miserable gray painting.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: I just—I crumbled under the weight of that short exchange, thinking, well, in that sense it was a naïve undertaking.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: There were endless incidents that went on. I mean, Alan Shestack could not believe that a work of art could be made of two giant pieces of lumber. He kept saying, "What happens after the show?" I said, "Sell them back to the lumberyard." This is Richard Serra's piece. He said, "Well, then, how can it be art?" He said, "Can we keep it?" I said, "No." I said, "When the show's over, the piece is over." Well, he could not accept that at the time. Now he can.

At any rate, Richard Serra's piece, when it was delivered the next morning, the guards walked in. I was there installing the show. The guards walked in and there were termites all over the museum. They had come in the wood.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. KERTESS: The next thing that happened after the show opened, the fire inspector came in and said the piece was blocking the exits and was a fire hazard. And unless it out within a half an hour, he'd close the museum down. So that was—Richard left the show. And Richard being Richard, took up a very, very large space in the show.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's fantastic. Well.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]