Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Bernard Langlais, 1973 Feb. 21

Contact Information
Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington. D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Bernard Langlais on 1973 February 21. The interview was conducted by Robert Brown 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 they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

ROBERT BROWN: February 21st, 1973.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Okay, you just let me know how you want to conduct this and the procedure.

ROBERT BROWN: Okay. I would like to just ask you some rather broad questions and could I begin by just asking if you could describe something of your childhood in Maine. Is there anything, as you talk about your childhood, is there anything that you think maybe led you into eventually becoming an artist? What was it like? What was your childhood filled with mainly?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, of course, living in Maine, I come from Maine and was born and raised in Maine, and a childhood and a child, that type of thing can really fill a book, but you want a reference to the art, and I always wanted to be, ever since I can remember, wanted to be an artist but at that time, I was pretty limited, the exposure for an art student as far as teachers or schooling. I didn't have hardly anything, if anything, in the pubic school system, so that I was just biding my time, waiting to finish high school so that I could go somewhere else.

ROBERT BROWN: You really consciously wanted to be an artist.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Even when you were a child.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Or a teenager, anyway.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yes. Of course, at that time, my concept of being an artist was being a commercial artist, so that was the whole idea, that you did art and as a result earned money and my approach to it was this would come through commercial art. And that again was more or less the type of ignorance that you have you know, or did have at that time, not being exposed to other artists or to situations where you could learn.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you exposed to anything in your childhood that would have made you eager to be doing something with your hands?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, no. I just wanted—I was interested in drawing and I wanted to paint and you know, do things along that line. At that time, I had no—there was no suggestion or no reference to what I was to do later except that—and I still don't know whether that had any—any connection, I just used to do a lot of things with tools and now all my work does involve tools, but that was just—I don't think that had anything—any relationship whatsoever to what came later.

ROBERT BROWN: When you were doing things with tools, what sort of things did you do?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, what children, most kids would be involved in; like I lived near a river, so that meant that we were on the river playing all the time, so we all built our own little boats, things along that line, mainly for one's own amusement.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you interested in crafting things well?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: No, not really because I never even considered it, never thought about it, just what had to be done and the craft part of it wasn't a concern.

ROBERT BROWN: Just so long as the boat floated.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah. And it's interesting because I actually had a course, because again, I wanted to be

an artist, and to me the educational bit was kind of ridiculous because what did that have to do with being an artist, so I more or less, more or less played my way through school, and to get by, one course I had to take, which was quite easy, was a woodworking course. It had shop, a woodworking shop and I actually made several projects, but they were pretty horrible because—I remember making a chest which was like about the worst that there has been done in the class.

ROBERT BROWN: It didn't fit together or what?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, there was—yeah, it was crude and it was—I just really wasn't interested in it that much, like you know, I don't know. I had never thought about it before, I suppose it was just—unless I was particularly interested in something, or unless it had—I thought it was creative, then I couldn't be interested.

ROBERT BROWN: You weren't interested in making the exact measurements and fitting things that you had to do to get the chest.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: It required so much patience and so much time and effort that it didn't seem worthwhile. The chest wasn't bad. I still have it, of course, but it was nothing that all the other students didn't do better.

ROBERT BROWN: And your father was a carpenter so did you have anything for a model for what you—

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, that's been mentioned in other articles, but actually had very little to do except that I was exposed to the tools and to that environment which I always benefited from all my life, the knowledge of tools. It came in handy in many ways, but it's hard to say how much an effect it had because the tools that I use now are things, power tools which I basically had to pick up and learn on my own.

But knowing how to use a saw and a hammer and a chisel and a plane just came natural, and I suppose there was a contributing factor there.

ROBERT BROWN: Was there encouragement from anybody when you were growing up for you to be an artist? Or did you keep—did you express the desire openly?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: I had, I had—my parents really couldn't care less, and they thought I was wasting my time but I did have an aunt who lived in the Washington, D.C. area and who encouraged me a lot by sending me materials, sending me books on art, things like that, so she was a big help and eventually invited me to come to Washington where—which is the first school, art school that I attended. And although I didn't live with her, her being there was a great factor in my encouragement and—

ROBERT BROWN: The books and all she sent you, what sorts of things were they? Contemporary art?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well no, they were just basic things like what to do with pencils and how to use watercolors and things like that.

ROBERT BROWN: Manuals.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Manuals and they were very basic, but at the same time didn't really help that much because I didn't have any guidance that would have made all the difference in the world. It's not that simple to read a book and to come about, you know, come—gather knowledge from that, whereas if one person can just say a few things, they can make all the difference in the world. This I didn't have until I went—I went to Washington.

ROBERT BROWN: About when was that?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: This was—would have been in 1940, as soon as soon as I graduated high school, because that was also a promise that by graduating, I could go there, which was a way of leaving, and—

ROBERT BROWN: Did you feel you had to leave Maine to—

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yes, definitely. Yes, I would have gone somewhere. Just the fact that there were relatives there then made it a little bit easier, and helped a lot because I always knew on weekends that I could get a meal or two if I was desperate. There was always a certain amount of encouragement which in the beginning, being exposed to a big city life, made a big difference.

ROBERT BROWN: As a kid in the big city for the first time, were you kind of overwhelmed? Did you get your bear—did you go right to school right away?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yes, I started school right away, and of course, I still had to support myself so that meant I was going to school nights and found employment during the day, but I don't know. I don't remember too much

about all the problems. I don't think there were too many problems. I guess I just adjusted and learned as I went along as far as the big city, but it was all very exciting and—

ROBERT BROWN: What was the school like? It was the Corcoran School, was it?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, first, before I went to the Corcoran, I went to a small commercial school and learned quite a bit, but then I decided that I needed more of another form of training which meant models and the painting part and all that, so then I went to the Corcoran and it was while I was at the Corcoran that the war started and then I was—I enlisted and although in the service, I did a lot of—right away I learned that my destiny was—and I knew enough, I had learned enough about art that I could manage in the service as an artist, so that my term was six years and my art actually was interrupted for that long time, even though the actual work was a process of all learning.

ROBERT BROWN: What was—was this in the Navy?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: And what were you in in the Navy that you could be an artist and work with other artists? Were you an illustrator?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, I did a little bit of everything. I soon learned that the whole military establishment was a little bit ridiculous and that I felt that I could contribute more, you know, at least I thought I could, by painting or painting signs or doing something instead of just drilling with a rifle all day. I was interviewed and was soon in a new shop that they were beginning and there we did everything for the base itself. It could involve painting a portrait of an officer or painting signs, or painting scenes of battles or just—almost anything, so it was a great kind of schooling, and there were other people working there that had different abilities from around the country, so that they helped in the acquiring some of the knowledge and some of the things I didn't know about.

ROBERT BROWN: Were there some pretty experienced artists among the group?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yes, yes. Like we were involved in visual aids and all these different types of things so there were cartoonists and there were a lot of different types of people so that the exposure was—was pretty well-rounded which later in the service helped me a lot because then I did many other things—worked with magazines, worked with newspapers, worked with different functions along that line, that called for anything from illustration to—illustrating to cartoons to the portrait work or whatever.

ROBERT BROWN: And did you develop a pretty good facility in things like portrait work? The short time that you were at the Corcoran before you enlisted, had you had any training?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Not really, not really, but I had enough training that I knew that by working at this, that I could you know, become better and it was more or less a necessity to stay in this situation because it allowed me to do what I wanted to do, plus it was a protection, and by working at portraiture, then I became fairly good at it, and the work seemed to satisfy the different personalities that I did along the way

ROBERT BROWN: Did you enjoy doing this?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, I was doing what I really liked most, so that I enjoyed it, and I had certain privileges, and it was a way of life, even though I was an enlisted man, that I couldn't have had otherwise, so it was all very enjoyable, plus very knowledgeable, plus you know, fun.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this—were you mainly stationed around Washington or in the States?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: No, this was in the beginning. For a couple of years, I was in Norfolk and then later went to California and out to the Pacific and then back to California, but there wasn't really any appreciation or recognition of art for art's sake in the service so—but you had a rating, I had a rating of a painter which a painter is where you could do anything from just painting bulkheads to whatever branch of the service you're in—airplanes, whatever.

So when I was transferred out of Norfolk, the first thing I found myself was in Alameda in California painting the interiors of airplanes, the gasoline tanks, you know, which wasn't really my field, and this happened several times, but the first time was kind of a shock, so I proceeded to pick up a photograph of the Captain of the base and did a large portrait and immediately was transferred into something that I could do better than spraying airplanes.

So it more or less went along that line and there were always specialists doing things like this, but they were never given the credit or the proper rating, so I went through this several times.

ROBERT BROWN: But you were always kept in that one slot so occasionally you were thrown into these routine—

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yes, yes.

ROBERT BROWN:—house painter type things, ship's painter.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yes, and finally I got into the publication part of it, even though I still wasn't protected, I had no official kind of rating, I was still technically a painter, but then I did the other part for what? Three years. So I was an art editor of a magazine that we had, about 15,000 circulation for the Naval Air Transport Service and which gave us a lot of freedom. The enlisted men did the whole thing. It was a color-processed magazine and we did everything from the stories to the photographs to the illustrations, traveled all over the Pacific as we had the air branch and if you came up with an idea, whether it was in Tokyo or the Philippines, you could just jump on a plane and do a story.

So that was a quite interesting involvement because actually writing and photographing and illustrating and laying out the magazine, as soon as the war ended, I still had three years of service left, and so we lost all the staff, and there were just two of us left—myself and the editor. So it was a great kind of experience, having to do everything from the photography to the layout to some writing and a little bit of everything.

ROBERT BROWN: By this time you were in your early 20's. Were you beginning to get a sense of what you wanted to—of where your art was heading?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: I knew then, as I did before, that I wanted to be an artist, but my concern was still commercial art. I still wanted to—that is what I thought would be the field and I then got out of the service, and having the G.I. Bill at my disposal, went back to Washington and then went back to the Corcoran.

ROBERT BROWN: What was it like then? Was it any different from what you had first known?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, it wasn't different, it's just that I sort of took a different course. I went into just strictly painting, and somehow just didn't go into the illustrating, or the illustration or the commercial art aspect. I thought that the painting part would be a good background eventually.

Well, I won a scholarship to a school in Maine, the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture and then, that exposure just convinced me that fine art was really my field.

ROBERT BROWN: What happened up at Skowhegan?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, it was strictly an art school for painting and sculpture, and students were from all over the country, and more or less the biggest percentage were on scholarship, so that meant they were pretty high caliber, and even then at that time they were still, most of them younger than I was, but they had this—these vibrations and this excitement, and all we did was talk about art and practically day and night, and it rubbed off, and I decided that this was the—this was the type of thing that I was really interested in.

So then I won a scholarship from that school to a school in New York which was the Brooklyn Art School, so that was the beginning and the continuation of the fine art. I really just more or less gave up or forgot about the commercial art thing.

ROBERT BROWN: But at the Corcoran School, you weren't quite certain, you weren't really certain until you went to Skowhegan.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: No, it was just a continuation then and I was sure that the commercial art the following year, I would probably go to a good commercial art school, but then the exposure at Skowhegan really settled me on fine art as to a career.

ROBERT BROWN: What do you think it was mainly? The fellow students or were there certain teachers who were important then?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: The whole physical aspect, the teachers, the student body, everything. It was strictly an eight-week jammed, night and day type of activity, and it was just exciting, and I just didn't want to do anything else after that. I just figured that that was it.

So then having the scholarship in New York and then finding a place to live there, and again, with the art students at the school and the environment, the people that I knew, the other artists where I lived, just was kind of a—the kind of life that seemed exciting, the type of thing that I really wanted to be involved in.

ROBERT BROWN: Could you describe some of your teachers and fellow students of this time at Skowhegan and Brooklyn?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Those take up quite a period because I had quite a long time on the G.I. Bill, so—plus the scholarships and the G.I. Bill meant about six years of schooling, so I could—a lot of ways, could live off of the money because when I received the scholarship, then I would be refunded the G.I. Bill money so that it gave me enough money to live on.

So I really could be independent and work freely, and these schools, the Brooklyn School at that time was one of the best schools in the country, which meant that they could afford to hire some of the best teachers, and they had people like a Max Beckmann who was one of the great painters of our time. He had been a German who had to leave, and came to this country during the war, and had decided to become a teacher as well, to support himself I suppose, but he was a great inspiration and everybody really got a lot from him. His classes were always quite jammed.

As a result, when you get one good teacher like that, then people will come from all over just to work with, to be able to study with a person like this, and then again, there were just many others.

ROBERT BROWN: Did Beckmann give you much time? What was his teaching method as you recall?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, he was very European and actually he couldn't speak any English so it is strange that he would be such a good teacher, but he really inspired everybody because he was such a force in himself. We just respected him. He had more or less made gestures of what he wanted and what he expected, and after the second or third appearance, if you hadn't—if he hadn't gotten that across, he would just pick up the largest brush you had and just swab it in the black paint and just work on the canvas himself, and you got the message very, very quickly.

His wife went with him, and she would do a lot of the translating, but more or less, he would just grunt and say a few words, but you just somehow knew what it was he—for one thing, he was a great draftsman and was one of the better known painters at that time, so you had respect for his work and for his station in life, and all that contributed, plus the European attitude which is he is the master and what he says goes. You do what he says or you are not in his class.

But the class was always jammed. It could take as many as I think up to 40, 45 and there were always a lot of students wanting to you know, to work with him. And then there were other people, of course at the Skowhagen School I worked with Henry Varnum Poor and Dave Ratner and Sidney Simon and you know, there were—at the Brooklyn School, I worked with Ben Shahn and Dick Methkano (phonetic) and a lot of pretty well-established—John Ferren—a lot of pretty well-established artists in their own right.

ROBERT BROWN: Were these guys at Skowhagen and the others at Brooklyn, were they quite different in the way they worked with you from Beckmann?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, they would be—yeah, anybody that teaches is quite different. Each one brings his own personality, his own approach, his own system, so you get something from everybody in different ways, but certainly there wasn't anybody quite like Beckmann because you wouldn't believe that somebody could teach, for one thing, without being able to speak English but he certainly could.

ROBERT BROWN: In effect then, he demonstrated that visual arts are best expressed not in words, huh? You can't really describe them and convey it.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, that's right, because there was one teacher that I had that you could talk about the painting for like an hour or two hours on-end, and that would only confuse you, whereas this other man, Beckmann, he would just grunt a few words, and that was all the communication that was needed, so it has to do with personality and the ability for that personality to enter into the one-on-one situation whereas what it is all about, it wasn't a class type of thing. It was like each student he brought what he felt that that individual student needed and strictly in a physical way because like I said, there wasn't any communication.

ROBERT BROWN: He would come around almost every session to each person's work?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, no—

ROBERT BROWN: They were big classes.

BERNARD LANGLAIS:—they were big classes so he could only probably work with a dozen each time, or depending on—he had different approaches. Sometimes he would say a few things to almost everybody, whether it was approval or disapproval. Sometimes all you needed was just a nod, and that was it. And like I say, if you hadn't attempted or accomplished what he had in mind from the previous critique, then he would just pick up the brush and—which was really a great way of his demonstrating, at least for me, I could grasp that much easier than a lot of language.

ROBERT BROWN: When he did that, did that mean he was trying to radically or correct something?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yes, and like I say, he was a great draftsman, so his basics were of the structure of a painting, and having a painting work like in that sense, pulling it all together with form, and the best way to do that, and of course, he worked a lot in his own work with a lot of heavy line, heavy black, a lot of the draftsmanship was always evident in his own work, and so this was easy for him to bring out in other people because this was his strongest aspect, his strongest you know—

ROBERT BROWN: The composition.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he stress that too?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: What color—what teacher do you think you grasped as much of color as you—

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, I don't know. Color is such a personal thing that I don't know if anybody really teaches you, so there were little fragments here and there from different teachers.

ROBERT BROWN: But this is something you can generate, you can educate yourself in as you got into painting.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yes, there is a sensitivity that you have and then other—your teachers can sort of help you in the direction that you are heading at that time, telling you how to relate a tone or this color to that color, and it becomes a very personal thing and so it's almost like very difficult to teach it as a thing in itself. It always depends on what you're doing at that time.

So everybody—it's a lot more than an abstract kind of idea and so it is very difficult to pin it down, you know. But there weren't any what you would call colorists that I studied with such as a Bernard or a Matisse. There just weren't that many people.

ROBERT BROWN: What was Shahn stressing in his teaching?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, Shahn was strictly a—was more of a talker, you know. He would get off on dissertations. He would have long manuscripts that he would read off, and to a lot of students, it was just boring. He went into the philosophy, into the whole business which is a whole other thing, and very seldom worked on a one-to-one basis, like criticizing individual canvases. It was more and less a class. He was more like a professor would be in a—

ROBERT BROWN: A lecturer.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: A lecturer, yeah, you know.

ROBERT BROWN: And you weren't really interested in philosophical—

BERNARD LANGLAIS: No.

ROBERT BROWN:—grounds for what you were doing?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: No.

ROBERT BROWN: You were more interested in doing.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: I was more into doing and being shown you know, how to do it or where I was wrong—primarily where I was wrong and you know, I needed the kick in the pants kind of teacher rather than the philosophy.

ROBERT BROWN: You could—you were never—were you ever chagrined when someone was kind of brutally, they would say this is bad? Or is this what you really wanted, you wanted correction of any faults?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah, but you know, very simplified and just a natural kind of—you know, in a very simplified way, complicated like—which really is basically what teaching is all about. It is you help someone with their shortcuts or their rights and wrongs, and that's really about it. The rest is up to them.

So you know, after you've worked a whole week, and the teacher comes and you might be stuck on a situation, and what you want him to do is tell you, help you with what it is that's bogging you down. And generally in my case, it was just a few words was all I needed. I didn't need an hour's dissertation because that would only

confuse me. By the time the first ten minutes, I would lose what the instructor had in mind anyway. All I wanted was to just unplug that—that temporary block and just go on, and each time have that kind of help. I didn't need the whole philosophy of art which some teachers, some would bring to each and every painting, that what you are doing relates to all the whole history of art which is kind of a little ridiculous in any phase. It's not necessarily true and it has no bearing on anything.

ROBERT BROWN: Had no bearing on why you were a student in art school, did it?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, it also had no bearing on my approach to it, and what I was attempting to do, you know, but I feel teaching is strictly a one-on-one thing, and the better the teacher, the better his ability to fit into the student's shoes. By that I mean understanding his problems at that time, not what led up to it or what will happen the next week or the next year, but what he's dealing with right at that moment. That could be anything from he is mixing his—his colors are dirty, or he needs work on his design or his draftsmanship or his composition, or whatever would apply at that given time.

ROBERT BROWN: In your schooling, did you mainly work from set-ups and models or—

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, a little of everything—models or set-ups of still—for still life's. Everybody was working in their own way. Some people did complete abstractions and wouldn't refer to the model or anything else. That's where you—that's the biggest help of all because you constantly—the instructor might come in. You see an instructor probably twice a week, and the rest of the time, you are just working, and talking and exchanging ideas and criticism with other students. You really benefit mostly from this.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you develop some close friendships among fellow students then?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Oh yes, uh-huh. You develop friendships that last for a lifetime, especially the ones that continue and make it like, you know, become successful, then somehow you constantly—either you remain friends, or you constantly run into each other because the art world is relatively small. Wherever you are, you will run into someone you've known at one time or another, whether you were in Paris or New York or London or San Francisco, whatever.

ROBERT BROWN: Who are some that you stayed close to, or at least were close to during your school days?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, it's hard to say because you—the relationships are different and they change, you know, as you go along, and—

ROBERT BROWN: Any you could describe whether they are still close or were close?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, there was one fellow I started school with at Skowhagen and I still see him all the time, and he is still very active and paints all the time and his name was Tom Bodden. Then another fellow that I started school with right in the beginning who is doing quite well, Alex Katz. There were quite a few, you know, like William King. They were just all around. Sometimes it's hard to keep track of when you met these people, whether you met them right in the beginning. I'm thinking of the ones I met right in the beginning, but then I've met other artists that are quite well-known all along the line, and not necessarily always in the school. You do make friends, and generally you stick into the field that you're in, and there is always discussions and kind of knocking heads about whatever about what he is doing and what you're doing. So it all rubs off one way or another.

All these are contributing factors, and so it is always hard to remember where these individuals might have fit in, or you know, not necessarily there being co-students or whatever.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. In general, what do you suppose has been most important to you in your friendships with other artists? Is there any—

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, in the first place—well, like I say, you know, as you go your own way and later on there is not that much that you have in common, but in the beginning it is because you are in the same situation and you are involved in the same—with the same work, and so you have that much in common, and generally the financial situations are the same. So you talk about what you know most about, or what you're involved in, and that's art, so the younger you are when you are really involved with it, then you are very excited about it. You have all these ideas and thoughts about the future. So all that can be very exciting.

Then as you develop and become set in your ways, then you don't need that as much. Then of course, locales can make a difference. It's easier when you are in an area like New York because these people are there all the time. Whether they come to your home, or you to theirs, or if you run into each other on the street or in a bar, they are there and it is so much easier.

But now in this situation where I am more or less away from that, then there is not much of that. Really, again, I don't know why, what happens is as you get further along in your own thing, that there is less that you can communicate with someone else, because someone else might be an entirely different thing. So now when I see old friends, we talk about all kinds of things, anything from sports, politics, but we very seldom talk about art itself because, like I say, each person takes a different road. I suppose it is unfortunate but I guess a person figures they know more of what they are doing than the other person, so it's best to stay away from that subject.

I really don't know, but this does happen.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, just as you passed out of your formal schooling into making your own, also in your formal schooling, it ended with you going to Paris, and then you had this Fulbright to Norway.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, it wasn't the end of formal schooling, it was just a continuation actually, going to Paris because I was still on the G.I. Bill.

ROBERT BROWN: What did that consist of? What did you do in Paris? Could you describe that?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, at that time Paris was and you know, it still is but it certainly was then and before, the place to go for an artist because students from all over the world were there, and were going there. It was a real melting pot, and again, the cultural life and the aspects of the city, all the museums and just the tradition was very exciting. Plus at that time, living was more reasonable and you could really live quite well and comfortably on a small amount of money.

So I had heard about the Grande Chaumiere, and it was more or less a free school, and there were a lot of Americans studying there, plus I think I was basically going there because of understanding or having read or knowing about the way of life.

ROBERT BROWN: There is something that appealed to you.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah, not so much the schooling because by this time I really didn't—wasn't using teachers or instructors any more, just facilities. When I went there, I was actually into the abstract thing by then, and most of the school was involved in a more figurative thing. So I worked in a separate atelier or a studio for abstract people, and there were only three or four of us.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean they were trusting you to yourselves to—

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah, because—

ROBERT BROWN:—do the work as you would.

BERNARD LANGLAIS:—well, at that time, abstraction wasn't too popular, especially in that school so they isolated the abstract people into the coldest studio because we got the last of the coal and it was always the smallest amount so that we were always the coldest studio. Maybe because we didn't work from models. Whatever, although the Crokey (phonetic) class went on all day, you could walk into that any time and just sit and draw. Models just worked steadily day and night but the abstract people were more or less isolated. This was kind of nice. It's really the way we liked it and wanted it.

So I was working with another Swiss guy and a Cuban, and the three of us were just working very happily together on our abstract thing.

ROBERT BROWN: What were you doing then?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, at that time—

ROBERT BROWN: You were still painting?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah, painting, but geometric shapes and what they call purists that in this country became what they call hot edge, but there was a group that called themselves the Purists, and this studio, this atelier, they would meet. A lot of them were on their own, professionals, but they had these meetings at the studio which was quite exciting. All of these artists would come there to conduct, to hear or talk because that what happens in Paris. One group will get involved. They stick together and they have everything going. They have their own writers and their own critics and their own magazines. Sometimes they put out books. It is just within that group and their philosophy and their attitudes about what they are doing and why and all that.

So the fact that this whole group met once a week in the studio was a very exciting thing because I met a lot of the artists that were very active in this, and learned a lot.

ROBERT BROWN: You who have—you said before you did not like lecturing or anything like that, but at this point in your life, you took to it, huh? You had now was much similar to—

BERNARD LANGLAIS: I wasn't doing any lecturing or like that.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean you were listening.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Listening, yeah, and exchanging ideas.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: But within that group, we were the ones that were working there. We were more or less students, but a lot of the people in the group, some were pretty established like Herb and people like that would come and discuss their work or give a lecture or so. That was very, very exciting. Like it was really feeling like you were being part of a movement. Actually the movement itself was so new at that time that it wasn't really completely recognized, although some of these people were known and did have galleries and stuff.

But it was just sort of the groundwork for what happened later, because they really became even more active and more or in greater involvement.

ROBERT BROWN: What, as far as you remember, what was the outlook of this group, as far as you were drawn to it?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: You know, the simplification. Just the simplified arrangements, the form, the color. It was just strictly a continuation more or less of a Mondrian attitude, but a different approach.

ROBERT BROWN: How was the approach different?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: There was more freedom. The shapes—I guess a lot of this had come out of the Bauhaus, the school, the—and the ways of working were a little bit less refining than—you could work with bigger form, bigger shape, and simpler color idea. Again, because they were a group, there was a lot more philosophy and a lot more in it because there were many different opinions, whereas the Dutch, and the Mondrian thing was really on a much smaller scale in the beginnings of that, like you know.

And a lot of it was quite intellectual and because there was just striving and struggling for recognition, all this made it I think pretty exciting, you know.

ROBERT BROWN: Was the attitude of painting should exist on its own? I mean, there was no thought of representation nor of—

BERNARD LANGLAIS: No, there was no representation.

ROBERT BROWN:—of a social philosophy or anything?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: No, no, no representation whatsoever. It was strictly a purist kind of—and I went into the writing and the theater. There were movements in the theater and all that, relating to that, like you avoided brush strokes, you avoided any kind of feeling. You avoided, became as simple as possible. As far as I know, this is where using tape for outlining edges and stuff was introduced.

And then later, ten years later or so, there came to be a big movement in the New York School to, as I mentioned, it is called hot edge painting, but these people were doing it way, way—a long time before, plus as it happens in Paris, or maybe in Europe, when there's a movement going, there are many other side contributions that are all in this. You know, it is not just painting. It goes into the philosophy and a whole, a whole—practically a religion.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you subscribe to that at the time?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, up to a point because I was restricted, I was limited because of the language barrier and all that, and I didn't really—except for the excitement and hearing what these people had to say, I really didn't want that kind of restriction. I was still in the process of experimenting and doing different things.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes, you mentioned they talked about—you characterized it as avoiding this, as avoiding the brush stroke, as avoiding other evidence of how you went about putting the paint on. These are negative terms. So you did find it restricting?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: But you were excited by the movement of people in various arts together?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: This was what was rather heady to you.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah, yeah, because like all the different people that were involved—you know, there were—well, one fellow was in the thing, his name is Daphnes (phonetic) and he later became a pretty well-established painter along that line, you know, strictly a geometric painter. You know, they just disregard anything that doesn't contribute to that philosophy, and you know, this—I had never been exposed to this sort of thing, and it was quite intriguing that they could have this kind of attitude and membership, and this whole philosophy that just knitted them all together.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you discipline to them?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Oh yeah, definitely, yeah. And again, you could see, you know, and of course, this has always happened there, whether it's the expressionists or the impressionists or the cubists or any school, they just would work out these things, you know, in a group. Compared to an individual's doing something, there is a world of difference because you just learn and the whole process is so much faster because of the exchange of ideas. It makes a big difference, whereas if you are struggling along on your own, maybe another person in one part of the world, and another person in another part of the world, doing the same thing but there is no communication.

So it just makes it that harder than when you have a whole group that are working to find solutions and you can see what this fellow has done, and what this fellow has done. Then maybe releases problems that you've had. Each one influences the other. I mean, I enjoyed seeing it, I enjoyed being part of it. I wasn't actually like so-called one of them. I didn't continue it, although I continued working that way after I came back to the country.

ROBERT BROWN: You very carefully laid out things.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you—

BERNARD LANGLAIS: But I wasn't that much of a purist. I mean, for me, to brush, the paint was still evident and the strokes were still—you could see the hair, the scratching you know, from the—

ROBERT BROWN: Sure, but you at this stage, you were working abstractly.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yes. Non-objectively, abstractively, abstract.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you come back—when you came back then, did you come back to New York?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: And what did you do then? How long were you there?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, then I went back to Brooklyn where I was a part student and partially working.

ROBERT BROWN: When was this, the early '50's or so?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: No, this—yeah, yeah, this was the early 50's, yeah, '52, something like that. Like I say, I still had time left, G.I. time, so I was partially a student, and because by then I was sort of more or less established as a student. I was a moderator and I was different things, plus the school gave me a job. I was doing enameling which I was being paid for which sort of helped. They had a guild, sort of a craft guild where they would produce some things, ceramics and different things, and then they were selling them on the market and the proceeds were going back into the school fund.

So that was very exciting.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this to your own design, these enamel pieces?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah, yeah. You had complete freedom. Then I just ran the time out on my schooling and then just the question was starting off on my own, you know, working in your own studio and just doing your own thing. So it was responsibly still a search and just working out different approaches and different techniques and different systems.

Oh, you know, I might work the Cubist way or abstract expressionist way, or a figurative way or anything, you know, for months at a time or a few weeks at a time and you could then switch to something else. I was just trying to find my identify and try to you know, give it—get an identification in what I wanted to do and how I wanted to do it. And this is always the hardest period. Sometimes students will more or less establish an identify in school and just continue working it. Most students are sort of groping along and just trying to find a niche, to do their own thing. That can take years.

Of course, by this time you are all alone and that's also a difficult process because it's the kind of thing you have to establish your identity with yourself, which means a discipline. It's easy in school because if you don't feel like working, well, there is always someone you can talk to or have a cup of coffee with, or just fool around. When you are all by yourself, then you have to sort of work out ways of self-discipline and work. You really find out that you are only responsible to yourself, and that's it. Nobody can do it for you. You have to do it yourself, and the sooner you learn this—it is very hard. It's one of the hardest things.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you feel you got your feet on the ground pretty fast after you left school finally?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, it was a question of just struggling and groping, you know, working odd jobs, earning money to survive, to buy materials, paint and stuff you know, and then painting.

ROBERT BROWN: But you no longer had any thoughts of turning your art into say a commercial thing at all?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: No, no.

ROBERT BROWN: Where you could have found say maybe financial security?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah. Well, of course, I had this background so that did come in handy because there were different jobs I could do and that included commercial art. You know, I could still do that.

ROBERT BROWN: But the main thing you were devoting your energies to was experimentation.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Trying to find where you wanted to be going.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah. I mean, just painting, but painting in different directions, experimenting with different mediums, different techniques.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you excited? What was your frame of mind at this time? Were you still pretty enthusiastic?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Oh yeah, because there is always a bond, there is always a brotherhood. There are always other people who are doing the same thing, and there are places where you get together and you know, you just have that in common. So it is very exciting because you all have dreams and you all have ambitions, and at the same time, you have a lot of fun together and stuff. It's a very exciting kind of time. You don't think about too much. You don't really worry about it. It is a day-to-day thing and you keep meeting new people and some people drop out and things like that. It's a whole way of life that you can't find anywhere except in these big cosmopolitan cities where you get large numbers of anybody and everybody. That's what makes it very exciting.

And you know, you think a little bit about the future. Everybody thinks that they're going to make it, and they are going to be great and all that, and you really don't know, and you don't really care that much. It's like a day-to-day thing.

ROBERT BROWN: There wasn't any—you didn't feel any great pressure to make a success?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: No, no, because as long as you eat something everyday, and you have a place to stay, those are basically the problems as long as you find enough money to buy materials, and that's it. So it is sort of—it is a youth thing . You just sort of go with the stream and let whatever happen happen.

ROBERT BROWN: You didn't feel at this point the pressures of the commercial gallery and collector world?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: No, because you know, you realize it's almost an impossible dream. So you are constantly on the edge, or you feel what luck, so you are always going to the exhibits and seeing maybe some of the teacher's shows that you knew, or some of the older artists, or somebody of your contemporaries that have been lucky enough. And you always think well, tomorrow or next year it will be my turn, or whatever.

So you have these dreams and you have to have this sort of thing. You are making a big sacrifice. You know, a lot of people you know are making big money and have all the comforts, and so you could be doing that too. You

have to have something to carry you on, to give you that strength and energy because when nothing is happening, some people, they go for years and years, and nothing happens. You have to continue producing or continue to grow, that dream, keep that fire going.

ROBERT BROWN: Would you have been strong enough to just have continued on your own without ever being recognized, do you think? Or was recognition an essential thing for you?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, it didn't come for a long time so I don't know. I really don't know. You can never say. But you see, I really sort of more or less trained myself not to do anything else, so I was really in a sense stuck in this. Now, I don't know whether or not I might have gotten into some other sideline, gone into a very realistic kind of method of working. I actually did realistic stuff though but not really completely or real, real, real stuff, realistically.

ROBERT BROWN: And this was—

BERNARD LANGLAIS: So people could go into side things like that, and say you know, that's all right to themselves. That's okay. Well, at least I'm a working artist. I don't know. That would probably have taken a long time to resolve something like that, I really don't know.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean you might have gone the way of realism and have been able to sell earlier or something like that?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah, or it could have been, who knows, like there were people that I knew then that have had hardly any recognition, and they are still working away, and they just feel that one of these days, you know, it will happen for them, or to them. Who knows what carries them on and why, it just does, so that it's hard to say what happens, what could happen if, there is no way of knowing.

ROBERT BROWN: Where, looking back, do you feel your painting was taking you during the 50's? I mean, where was it, itself, going? Was there development that you can remember?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, you see, I had always returned to the more or less figurative or representational, although it wasn't, like I said, completely realistic, it was expressionistic or whatever. So I suppose that if I had continued painting that I probably more or less—but I don't know, I don't really know. But I would sometimes, I would spend a year or two working, doing abstractions different, not really completely non-objective things, but they could be landscape, you know, ideas in abstract methods, or maybe they would be figures done in a kind of abstract way.

But you see, in a sense, when you don't have an identity, then you have more freedom. That means you can do almost anything, whether it's taken from this source or that source, you make it your own. It is more or less of a cubist tradition or an abstracted tradition, so the thing is that you can experiment a lot. Once you more or less establish a way of working, it becomes identified with you and then you are stuck or more or less continue in that direction because this is what you become identified with and known as.

And you also don't mind, you enjoy it because even doing that, you can continue to grow because even within that limited scope, you still keep experimenting and doing things differently. So—

ROBERT BROWN: But you preferred not to get locked into that.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, it's just that I never felt that comfortable in anything that I had done where I wanted to continue, and the closer I came to that was when I was in Norway, I did, for a year and a half or so, just this kind of a figurative, a figurative representational kind of approach, which was still expressionistic, and you know, things were suddenly real, like a real geranium would be kind of a symbolic kind of geranium.

You know, I was interested more in patterns and the idea of things rather than the thing itself, you see. In other words, composition working successfully rather than just imitating a plant. So I was always interested in that sort of thing, so I suppose if I had continued painting, I would be more or less doing something along that line. There comes a time when you do have—you know, you just can't be doing abstractions for three months and some kind of geometric –

ROBERT BROWN: In Norway you moved ahead in one track?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: What was your—

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Basically I had gone there for different reasons, but one of them was that I was always interested, or for a long time interested in the Norwegian painter, Edvard Munch, and he—most of his work was

there, and so that encouraged me to go there. In my own way, I was sort of influenced by him without imitating what he had done. I was very impressed with his work.

ROBERT BROWN: What particularly stuck with you about his work?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Just the directness, just the simplification and you know, putting it down in a very quick and very strong way.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you interested in the moods he conveys?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: No, not really. You mean the—because he was quite involved with the mental kind of thing, a sickness and that sort of thing, pathological.

ROBERT BROWN: Rather morbid in a lot of ways.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah. No, I wasn't interested, I had no feeling for that myself. I enjoyed the work but I couldn't care less about you know, trying to depict somebody sick or express the type of feelings that he was—that was him and that was his experience.

ROBERT BROWN: But you were interested in the way he had put the paint on.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: On his composition.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: His approach to the whole thing which was very direct and very forceful.

ROBERT BROWN: This was the mid-50's, and this time you felt for the first time you were getting your feet on the ground, kind of a sense of direction, after that time in Norway?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah, because like just the getting the fellowship, plus you worked for a number of years and you get more security. You feel that you know what you're doing and you are getting close to a professional status. That is a kind of a—I mean, as this goes on, this happens over a period of time, you are not really completely aware of it, but you just are a different—I still didn't know—I wasn't on to my own direction but at least I wasn't a student any longer, you know. I knew that I could manage and continue on my own. So that was kind of satisfying.

So then it was just a question of becoming as good as I could and then you know, then I was starting to have some shows and stuff, and it just, you know, when is it all going to happen, you see.

ROBERT BROWN: And it did begin to happen then.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah, yeah. But then I went back into abstractions again, see? And started doing complete abstractions. I had a couple of shows of abstractions and I was really involved in abstract work. Really, at that time abstraction, especially abstract expressionism and impressionism was going on pretty strong in New York, so you couldn't help but be affected and influenced.

Right at this time, sort of the height of this is when I hit on to the wood and then, from there on, it just—that was it.

ROBERT BROWN: Really.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: So then the wood continued. The first things I did in wood were abstract ideas because it was still continuing from the painting thing.

ROBERT BROWN: How did you hit upon the wood?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, I had this cottage that we had purchased after returning form Norway, and it needed a lot of work, repairing and stuff, so these odds and ends were just stacking up. I just hated to burn them or destroy them, and I had—there was some wall space that needed filling, so I just started fooling around.

Then right around that time, returning to New York—this was a summering in Maine—and I lived over a—I lived above a lumberyard so there were always all these odds and ends, the leavings, so then I had some wall space there and I started making these arrangements. It was very exciting. Then I started making them different sizes and frame-like, as easel pieces and it just continued. I mean, basically it was the same thing. It was like painting except I was using wood. I wasn't using paint and brushes the way I had been, you know. But the physical, the attitude, the approach was the same. You know, you have to—how does that shape go against that shape or that

form? How does that color go against that color?

So I didn't think about it, it didn't occur to me. But I just continued and I continued and although I have used color paint quite a lot in combination with the wood, I never returned to pure painting in that sense. It was just a question of—and then I started realizing that painting, you know, I think was frustrating for me because I couldn't really—I could have but I just, I didn't. I mean it was the brush, the brush distance, you know, and it wasn't until I really got into the wood that I realized that maybe that was one of the problems. If I could have just found some other source working with tools or something, or applying it with a spatula or something like that, or different things, I would have been more satisfied and painting would have meant more.

But somehow—so then as soon as I got into the wood, the thing about working with my hands and the material, you know, and the glue and all that was just like a—it was entirely a different thing and it was very exciting. It just opened a whole world. It really—but I couldn't have done it without the background and the knowledge that I acquired.

ROBERT BROWN: Well. You just described, when you are with wood, you are right in it. The gluing, the cutting, you are directing the—well, if only with the brush's distance, you are removed that much at least from the paint when you were putting it on a board or a canvas.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: You see, even then, it was a little different than what I do now because then I had all of the material. You know, I would just pour a lot of glue on to the surface and I would have basically an idea, but it would grow as I went along, so I could apply these pieces very quickly and move them around. It was and is still an expressionistic approach, except it was manipulating pieces of wood instead of paint, you see.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Spontaneously.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: It was very exciting, plus it was a lot of fun. Then I could go further, I could gouge things out with the tools or with sanding devices or whatever, burn the wood, add color and then remove it, and all these different kinds of things that you could do in a spontaneous way that were very exciting.

It was an awakening. It was—even though I wasn't aware of it right then and there, but you know, the excitement over a year of time in that work I think shows it like—and then I continued this way for quite a while. I had several shows.

ROBERT BROWN: Did the same galleries that had shown your paintings pick up your—

BERNARD LANGLAIS: No, no.

ROBERT BROWN:—wood?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: No, the paintings were just in the mediocre, small time galleries, and after the wood—well, right around this time I got involved with some other artists in a co-op gallery that we fixed up and had it going. I had my first show there, and—

ROBERT BROWN: When was this? The late 50's or so?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah, yeah, it must have been. I don't know, '58 probably.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: And one gallery person came in and bought several pieces, and I was very encouraged. I got some good write-ups. This was just again, an insignificant gallery down on the eastside, downtown. So then I decided well, I will get a bunch of photographs and approach some of the commercial—no, no, somebody was very excited about my work and arranged an appointment with one of the top galleries.

ROBERT BROWN: Which gallery was this?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: This was Kootz, Kootz Gallery. So I went—I had an appointment with them and I went there. Of course, he said he had a full stable. He liked the work but he just couldn't take on anybody new, so I decided that since I was all cleaned up and dressed up, I decided I might as well go to the next one I would like to be in. This was the Castelli, the Leo Castelli which was the top gallery at that time, especially of contemporary work.

He was very interested, but it took me, you know, a year from that time before he took me on, so it was I continued to work and just frustration, waiting for that opportunity.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you go see him from time to time?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Oh, I would see him. Yeah, you know, I was in the gallery at the different shows and talking to him. He came to the studio several times, and you know, but these things move very slowly because a gallery, they don't pick people too often. They pick them very slowly so that they fit into their scheme of things and all that.

So you know, he wasn't completely sure, and you know—

ROBERT BROWN: How did you like having to deal with the dealer?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Oh well, it's fine because that's where you get the exposure, you know.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Especially a top guy like that, as soon as you are there, then people will buy your work, whereas they could see your work at other places, and not be the least bit interested. Once this person, this authority takes it on, that gives everybody the green light more or less. They depend on his taste, on his prestige. They can't go wrong.

So immediately I was successful. I started selling and then not only that, but then museums—museums the same way, they are organizing a show and they go to the top galleries and they see your work there. Then they will like it whereas like I say, they might come to your studio and not be crazy about it. If they see it in a top gallery, then that says well, if he likes it, then it's okay I guess. So it's all that type of rat race. You know it was exhibiting all over the country. I had nothing to do with it. That's what the gallery is all about. That's why they take their third or 40 percent or 50 percent. It's worth it because it's a whole field in itself.

I had a show there and then I got frustrated because I got spoiled. I had all this success and I wanted the show again the next year. Well, it is a slow thing, and they line things up two years, three years in advance which is really nothing. It comes around like you know, but I couldn't wait. This other guy, this other gallery, he was buying my work and he was offering me a show and things, so I grabbed at that chance.

ROBERT BROWN: What gallery was that?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: This was Allan Stone. You know, it would have been fine. He was doing very well. Like my show was opening on a Tuesday and he had like oh, six reserves on the work, and then the Monday was what they call the blue or black—a blue Monday I guess, that's when that Kennedy's time, when that big stock market thing hit, so everybody cancelled out on their reserves and I ended up selling four or five small things, but that was it.

ROBERT BROWN: But I mean, this is a—you feel this is an end result, one end of your work is to present it to the public through a top gallery.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Oh yeah, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: This is something you look forward to, you are working toward.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yes, anybody—anybody—that's the objective. You have to have an objective whether you are a pianist or a dancer or you know, you want to perform in top places and to a top audience. So you have to have this outlet, and naturally today it's New York and there are half a dozen top galleries out of the 300 or 400 that are there, that are worth—I mean, there are another hundred that are maybe good standards and good galleries, but I mean, there are always like a half a dozen or ten at the most of the really—that's everybody dream, to be in those places.

But it is not easy. It's very difficult, especially when you are not really known and there is a lot of struggling. They really hesitate about taking someone on. But once they take you on, even a good gallery will hold off—once they have committed themselves, it doesn't matter, if nothing happens for three or four or five years, they will still continue working for you and helping you, but it is only a question of time. They have the in's, they have the contacts, they have the knowledge and that's what it's all about.

They are doing the thing that you can't do yourself because you just don't have the time or the contacts or the energy. A gallery or a museum in California or Texas or Chicago wants to put on a certain show, well, they will go to the top galleries, and they pick what they like of those galleries to put on their show. They don't have time to go to every artist's studio and all that. You see, it's being in, and this is a big factor. The more your work is seen, the more your reputation grows, and the more reputation you have, the more people are clamoring to buy your work. It's strictly a question of economics. Publicity and all that contribute, but that's what it's all about. People have to be told whether they read it in a magazine or newspaper or someone is sponsoring, they are very few people that really go out and take chances and gamble on all that is tasteful.

Even the best ones still, they don't always do everything right. They always have a lot of potboilers, bad selections along the way. If you have a tastemaker, somebody that's really into it and knows and have a high average of success, then this is what would happen, but if they don't go to him –

ROBERT BROWN: Did you develop friendships at this time with some collectors who were very discriminating?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah, yeah. There were several people that bought—you know, this was before I was in the gallery. This was—several people bought large numbers of my work, of course at reduced prices, but I mean they bought large amounts so that that was okay, you know? But they—they felt that there was something there. I don't know. They didn't need the gallery kind of assurance. They were just doing it on their own, you see, which was kind of a nice thing.

ROBERT BROWN: Did they discuss your work a lot with you, these collectors?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, you know, in a sort of a personal way like just a conversation. These people are—a lot of these people are so accustomed to looking at work that they more or less make their judgments up very quickly. It has nothing to do with what you say or your philosophy about it or anything. It's just you know—I mean, it doesn't always happen, but generally they know what they—what they like.

ROBERT BROWN: And the same thing would apply to a top dealer. He knew what he liked.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah, yeah. I don't really know what goes through their minds or how they assign this. I suppose that it is different from say other people that they have in the gallery. I really don't know but I guess it could be as simple as that. They just don't want everything to be the same. They try to get something that is unique, as unique as possible. I don't know.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you continue through the 60's with important galleries in New York?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yes. Yes, I had three galleries in about four years I guess. Then I switched to the animals or the representational work.

ROBERT BROWN: From these framed abstractions.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: And then I worked about oh, a year and a half, two years, and I had a body of work, and there were several galleries that were interested in the work . They had seen the work and they were interested. One of them gave me a three-man show, but then this other gallery gave me a good offer and so I took it. I had a very successful show.

Then the guy, I was the last show of that season or next to the last, and he just kicked everybody out. He just decided he was going to go into a whole different kind of approach, so he had like 15 people in the stable, and he just got rid of everybody. So here I was left high and dry again after this two years of work.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this in the mid-60's or so? This was—which gallery was this?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: This was the Waddell. Yes, this was—well, it was shortly before I came up here.

ROBERT BROWN: So it was '65 or so.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah, I guess so. Maybe '66.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this a factor, the fact that you had been through three galleries? Now, the Stone Gallery did not take you when you brought your animals to them. They had handled—

BERNARD LANGLAIS: No, I decided to leave because it wasn't that much—again I was frustrated, I felt that all these things should be happening and they weren't, so I was blaming them. Instead of just—you see, if I had been living in Maine, then it wouldn't have mattered and I would have just stuck with the first gallery.

[BREAK IN RECORDING.]

ROBERT BROWN: Just say a word.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yes, it's unbelievable. The thing is that when once you get into the top, the professional gallery, everything is taken care of. You have no worries. They want—the gallery man will come down and he will

say I would like this and this and this. They send a van down, they send people down. You know, there is respect as things are done in a very high class way. This is why there are no expenses, nothing. It's great, and this is why artists are so desiring to get in these top galleries, you see. Well, it's hard to think or remember all the humiliating episodes and facts that went on before.

Like I remember you know, carrying work and the guy says yeah, I would like to see your work, bring it up someday. Okay, you jump on the bus. The driver gives you—the hell you mean, what are you carrying this stuff on the bus and sometimes they kick you off or whatever. You are standing there with a bunch of work, a cab won't stop. You get there and the guy is not there. He's gone to Boston that day, so you have to cart the whole stuff back.

I remember one time the school where I was going, they gave shows but they had no money so I was definitely working doing very large canvases, so they gave me a show but late at night, take all these things down into the subway. I did it late at night because there weren't many people, pass them over the gate thing, put them—I had to hold the door open to get all these paintings into the train, because the train closed the door, and there are ways of keeping the doors open, and getting that stuff all the way over to Brooklyn, and then carrying it all the way up the stairs and into the—oh geez.

Well, once you get some kind of recognition and success, you don't have to worry about any of that. It's—that is one of the—but I think the way life is set up, that you forget all the unpleasant things, and they all become part of the whole romantic picture that was all worth it after all. Most people, most of the public are not aware of all these—of all the things that you go through, I mean, to get there. Most everybody does go through some kind of—like I was mentioning, I know people in this business for 25 or 30 years, and nothing really has happened to them, and they still continue, whether they might have a wife that works every day at something and always that dream that they are going to break into the big time.

And it's not always the commercial thing, the commercial aspect, the success, the money thing, it's just the prestige, being in a gallery and having a show once a year, or every two years. That's what most of us are all about, so if you can sell and that makes it that much more pleasant, and on your terms, not having made compromises or to do what you want to do, and then have it accepted on those terms, this is very gratifying.

ROBERT BROWN: You were able to do that.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah. Yeah. Well, I was lucky you know, in a sense that what I was doing was kind of unique. In other words, nobody else was doing it. There were other people that started doing it and were influenced by what I did, but I mean they didn't continue, they didn't do it, so even today it is still a pretty unique approach to the whole thing. There were times that I was compared to Louise Nevelson and other people, but it really was entirely different because my whole approach was working with wood, and the wood itself was important—I mean, to let the grain, the color, the different aspects of wood.

So maybe there were similarities in how we approach the work, but it was entirely different because the way she worked, it could have been any material. Wood had nothing to do with it. She would just paint everything white or black, and so it was just that wood was available and more abundant than other things. That's the difference.

ROBERT BROWN: How do you feel about her kind of work?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Oh, I like her work, and she was a very strong sculptor and I'm very good friends with her and she's a fine person. I am very happy that this happened for her. But—well, again, see, like she's—the thing is that if you're right there in the city, you've got to be right there on the scene, and that makes a big difference. So you pay a price for that, you know. I feel that success isn't worth that much, so if you can make it somewhere else and not have to put up with that kind of pressure. That's another aspect of that whole art business that people don't realize the pressure, and maybe it's an American thing but I used to hear about a writer that had worked for years and years, and finally his book becomes very successful. It is picked up by the book-of-the-month club. He makes a million bucks with his first book, and he can never write again. He can never duplicate that because the pressures from his contemporaries or the business, or the whole market thing, are just—they won't allow it to happen.

Well, the same thing is true in the art world. Once you are in a big time gallery, then the pressures to succeed and to make this so-called splash are unbelievable. I remember when I got into the Castelli, people I had never seen before stopped me on the street and invite me to their home for a party or for dinner, just strictly because I was in this gallery, you know. There could be other artists, or they could be very influential people. That represented the ultimate to them, that you were represented by this gallery.

So this opened all kinds of doors, but at the same time, it brought on all these pressures, so you drank more and you are supposed to more or less be a character or whatever, I don't know, but it just—all this added on, and people like Pollack and Kline and well, someone still living, these people really literally drank themselves to

death and it was basically because of the pressure that was put on them. All of a sudden a guy that is struggling away for years, and here he is getting $15,000 or $30,000 for a painting, it's going to affect them. He questions himself the next day, well, can I do a better piece, a better painting than I did before. You know, will they like this show, or you know, will I get bombed by the critics, and all these things add on.

As soon as you are some kind of a celebrity, then if you hang out in a bar or something, then everybody is there slapping your shoulder and all these things contribute, and it makes it very difficult. A guy like Pollack, you know, of course, he was always a problem drinker anyway, but he was still a relatively normal person being an artist and all that, but after all that publicity like the article in *Life* magazine and *Time*, and the European show and all that, for one reason or another, it just got to a point where he lost control. He might have anyway, but I doubt it. I think the fact of the success, and this is a whole, whole disputed theory—

ROBERT BROWN: Did you witness some of this?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: What?

ROBERT BROWN: Did you witness some of this happening?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah, yeah.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: To Pollack and Kline?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Oh yes. We used to hang out at the same bar that they did, like, and they were—I knew them even before they were—because it happened very quickly. All of a sudden, they were—the artists knew who they were and stuff, but they were nobodies. I remember seeing a Pollack show where you could buy some of his things for $200 or $300, like some of the smaller things. Two years later, they were $3,000 and $4,000, the same pieces.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: And it just happened like almost overnight, and he just—he just couldn't cope with it.

ROBERT BROWN: The expectation is out here and he feels he is still here, he feels inadequate?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah, or you know, like it is such a change. It's a quick change, you know, that he somehow hadn't had an opportunity to prepare for it, you know what I mean? I mean, who would think that all of a sudden, out of the clear blue, you are getting telephone calls invited to this or that where you wouldn't have before.

Well, its got to have an effect on you, like you know. It's hard to explain and it is sometimes a very subtle type of thing, but just thinking well, how am I supposed to behave? How am I supposed to react? What am I supposed to do? Plus you are all of a sudden exposed to a whole different way of life, like you know the best of the liquor, the best of food, you know, the world itself, the influence of the important people, all these things contribute. This is a very, very important, a very serious kind of thing. I don't think a lot of people, you know, these are what happens with success, and what the pressures, the pressures do.

ROBERT BROWN: You had seen this happen to Kline and Pollack. Were you then able to adjust eventually to your success? Could you cope with it?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, I didn't cope with it too well in New York. There was, once I came to Maine, then that made a big difference. It wasn't the same kind of success, but it was still—it's like it's happening. Well, it's a different thing. In New York, you are sort of right there and everybody is aware. In Maine, it's a kind of isolated kind of thing. You are not as self-conscious as you would be in New York. It's almost like well, maybe it has happened to somebody else, it is not happening to you. There is an article in the newspaper about you, or you read it and while you are reading it like in a most or less objective, or a different way.

ROBERT BROWN: But if you—

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Nobody—you know, people react but they don't react the same way. In New York, you might get 20 telephone calls or again, it's unbelievable the difference, you see, because there it is an art conscious world. There are just thousands and thousands of people that are listening and watching, reading every word. This is their way of life, and so somebody that is smart enough to make it, well, this is kind of a successful story that is important in strange ways to everybody.

Some people feel well, then they don't want anything to do with you when you are not successful, I mean. I'm not talking about everybody, but a lot of these people, but as soon as something happens, then you become on their important list, which then changes. I mean, like I used to love parties. I always loved parties. Well, there

was a situation from say practically poverty, you know, eating in an automat or to all of a sudden be invited to some of the very important places in New York, and being dined and wined like you are really someone, this is hard to cope with.

I mean, I know what I'm talking about, it's just that I don't know exactly how to describe it, but I saw a lot of people, they are not always artists but writers, like people like Mailer and Dylan. I used to hang out in this bar where Dylan Thomas used to hang out, and this was before I really knew who he was or understood that much about his poetry and so many people did know about him and who he was and all that, even then, and they gave him all of this acclaim and all of this attention. He literally, it really suffocated him. He just couldn't cope with it.

I mean it is not anybody that—you are in a place where everybody knows you and they buy you a drink.. How are you going to refuse not drinking it? Well, by the time it gets to 30 drinks, what are you going to do, drink them all? You are bombed and then the next night the same thing. Everybody is saying great things and well, that's what I mean by the pressures.

ROBERT BROWN: And if you don't—if he doesn't appear, then he is letting his public down, huh?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: He feels guilty about that.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, at the same time, you see, he wants part of that acclaim too. He feels like it is deserved. You know, he deserved it and that's the way it is with everybody. Like all these people like you know, the Pollacks and the Klines, they would come to these places where they knew that their fears, you know, what they were, and where they would be accepted and respected.

You know, it goes into all kinds of other factors like women and girls would be there clinging to them and stuff like that. Well, after knowing that it doesn't exist for years, and then all of a sudden, there it is. Wow, it is not easy to cope with. Especially like Kline was a guy that came from a coal-mining area and all that, and came to New York and really struggled, and did like everybody else, all kinds of odd jobs. When he died, they found him dead, he had like a thousand dollar bill stuck in all different pockets. I mean, here he was from making nothing to making all this money, and he couldn't resist. He would buy—the first time I met him, I was introduced by someone who knew him and right away, you know, come on, have a drink. He would buy drinks for everybody which was nice, but the thing is that there were still these pressures. You know, you just couldn't sit there being completely relaxed the way a completely unknown person would have been.

ROBERT BROWN: And he felt he had to say something.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, you know—

ROBERT BROWN: Be a character.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: He felt, you know after everybody taps him on the back, that he probably felt that he was more than what he should have, and he probably felt like he was more than what he was. I mean, that's what I mean, you know.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: There are a hundred ways of approaching what pressures are, but I think—like for instance, in Europe, I used to hang out at the Dome and when I was there, Giacometti used to hang out there and come to these classes, and Picasso would come into that place, and some of the writers and some of the actors. Nobody would make any kind of a fuss, you know. Everybody knew who they were. They would come in and sit down and have their privacy, even in this whole crowded place.

Well, in this country, it's not that way. If a celebrity, the equivalent of a Picasso walked into a public place like the Dome, you know, there would be all these people coming over, and if he was a certain kind of—well, he wouldn't be there anyway if he was another type, but being a certain type, he couldn't help but react to all this. This is human nature.

But you very seldom see these Europeans falling back on drink or—because this is the only relaxation, the only way they can relieve this tension that has built up, and so they get carried away with the drinking or whatever, like you know.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think Europeans have other ways of relaxing?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: It's a culture, it's a cultural thing that's gone on for a hundred, thousands of years. So it is all there and they learn how to cope with it, and it very seldom happens that fast anyway. A writer slowly—he

gets one thing published and then you know, another and another. Here it can happen like boom, just like that, a guy is a star, he's a—he might have been struggling all along, but he is in production and overnight he is a star. The next day he walks down the street and his whole life has changed. Nobody knew him but people are stopping him and wanting his autograph on the street. Well, it can't help but affect him, right? It's a very subtle type of thing I'm talking about, but it's there and it's a really sad kind of thing with Americans.

ROBERT BROWN: The American art world needs newness, doesn't it? Weren't a lot of the things that say Castelli would try to find an unknown, and this would be the new star of the year.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah, but he is not—he is not saying either that every year he's got to have a new star, it is just this is what the public does, you see, or like for instance, in Europe, once a gallery took a person on, and then he continued to develop and he would do it without any kind of problems. He wouldn't say well, gee, am I going to be there next year, or you know. Is he going to give me a show.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Is he going to give me another show next year? All that kind of stuff, you know, which is really unnecessary but it's what happens. And it happens in all of—you know, like with writers, it is very common that they will get a $50,000 or $100,000 advance. God, how is a guy expected to continue the – in Europe it doesn't happen that way.

In the first place, I don't think they ever had the kind of market, you know, that they have had here, and until recently, look at the whole film thing. They didn't have that great big star thing, or well-known actor in a film. He would do a film and get a certain amount of money, but it wasn't $100,000 or today they get a million or—

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Or a million and a half. So it's—I don't know where I'm going on this thing.

ROBERT BROWN: How did this time with great pressure on you, did it have a marked effect on your work?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, indirectly, indirectly. Like I was saying all of a sudden, you have these invitations and of course, you can always say no, but you don't turn down unless you know, you have had so much of it that you can say no, thank you. So you get these invitations and you do turn some of them down, but the—so you end up getting home at 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning, bombed, so it is a lot harder to get up the next day, you know.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. So in other words—

BERNARD LANGLAIS: So in that sense, your work then is affected.

ROBERT BROWN: It affects your production for one thing.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah, yeah. A lot of people, their work depends on their production, you se.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean just sticking at it takes a while for them to do it.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Doing quantities to arrive at quality, you know, but—

ROBERT BROWN: Is this the way it is with you?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: You select out from a rather large body of work, the things emerge that are the best quality.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yes, like it's easy—I will have a better show if I can pick out, say, if I have a hundred things to pick from, rather than say if a show is going to be 20 pieces, rather than having 22 or 23 pieces. I don't know, I suppose a lot of people work on that basis, but I always—like I always have two or three, three or four similar things, not the same, but similar, and out of that three or four, there will be one that will be better and it is very seldom it's the first one. It's generally in the process of from the first one, you learn or you have seen ways that you can improve and better the thing. Also the more you do, the free-er you can be by the time you have done the third or the fourth, where at first, you can tell you feel a little tighter, a little bit more—

ROBERT BROWN: Which one would you usually select for showing? The third or fourth one?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, it's hard to say, you just never know.

ROBERT BROWN: Sometimes the first struggle one is the one that pleases you most.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Very seldom. Once in a while, it will be the first one, but generally, you know, you progress through mistakes and other things.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: I was looking at the photographs of your work, the late say '59 to the mid-60's or so, there seems to be a rather small deviation, it's all within abstract terms most of it, for a few years anyway, there will be a change from a rather rigid form to forms that seem are more randomly arranged, but always within a frame. Thus it looks, looking at this, although you worked within a rather small range, looking back, but when you were actually doing these things, were you aware that you were working within sort of a certain observable limit of this part?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Of course, no, I didn't feel that way. I felt that you know, I had to restrain myself actually because I felt that, you know, so many of the ideas were getting too far off. In other words, there is always the attempt to have consistency in a body of work, and sometimes I feel that well, that idea is getting too far off and I better stick more to a given idea or limitation. And even now, looking at these, they aren't really that similar, but again, when the individual is doing something, he by his own personality is really, has limitations like .

In other words, people think of Picasso as having such range and all that, but when you see a large body of his work, you can't help but be aware of the consistency, even if you go back 20 years or whatever, in either direction, it all fits in to you know, a picture, a whole—it's a process so not like one way out idea, it's like very consistent. You often think of his work as being way out in this and that, and maybe it was related to other people, what they were doing at the time. But in his own work, it's still—and no matter what he had in mind, he couldn't go beyond his restrictions.

And in a sense, even if I had gone ahead and done what at the time I restricted myself, done the wildest things, there would have still probably been in a still restrictive, you know, phase.

ROBERT BROWN: We are talking now about these wood painting group of saints.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: All of which have kind of this framed quality to them or within the frame there is a great deal of variety.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: At the time, why did you restrict yourself to this framed thing, what you called wood paintings? Or was it no restriction? Was there a real sense of freedom?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Basically wood reliefs. Well, it's because you always think of these basically think of what they call easel pictures and you think of a restrictive frame, you know.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: To work within, and it really doesn't matter whether a piece has a frame on it, it is still in your mind has a frame, because you are working within a given area, because the composition and everything has to work within a given area, whether it is a free form or not. I don't know if I am answering your question, but—

ROBERT BROWN: You were accustomed to working in this way, and perfectly content.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: And manipulating within a given area which is the nature of it.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, everybody works within a frame.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes, whether it is a gargantuan outside piece such as you have been doing lately.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah, yeah, right, because it's all within an imaginary frame one way or another, you are restricted by that. It is pretty hard to just go off in all different directions, but even then, you would still be within a framework.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, this installation photograph we're looking at here at the Castelli Gallery I think it was, each one stands off to itself, so it seems from the photograph.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Is that the way—they weren't meant to interact, they were each to be seen in its turn.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah, right, because that's—each one has to work within itself, you know, but then again, even in this, the art show itself is working within a frame, which is the gallery.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: And each piece is picked to relate to the other, or hung to relate to the other. You know, everything is thought out. Why does a circle go next to a vertical, or a horizontal next to a square, or whatever. All these things are picked out of a number, the best things to work with each other, but yet each one is done within its own framework because they do have to hang independently of themselves, they can't always rely—so you couldn't possibly do a show—well, you could but what would be the point—doing a show where everything relates, or is dependent on the picture next to it.

ROBERT BROWN: Uh-huh.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: So you work within the frame all the thing that you are doing, and try to do the best you can with that particular thing because it might never relate to other things you have done again.

ROBERT BROWN: This is a very interesting problem then of the exhibition, because that's a passing transient time that is unlike your experience of the works before you had them in the show, and it is unlike what it will be like when they are scattered individually after the show.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah, yeah. This is again one of the aspects of the thing, is when you really are putting a judgment, you, yourself, and the public. You know, when you hang a body of work in a cold white gallery, there it is, there is nothing more you can do. So what you have done to the best of your abilities is there, being judged.

ROBERT BROWN: But this arrangement that the gallery makes, does it—did it make it in consultation with you? Did you sometimes help work out the arrangement?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, that depends. Sometimes you know, the artist can do that completely himself, or sometimes the gallery does it completely themselves, or it's—I don't think that's very important. You still try to hang within the best taste or the best ability that you can put into it, like considering the spaces around the individual pieces, how few pieces, how many pieces, all these things are considered, then the success more or less depends on the hanging. That can contribute a lot, but it still has to do with the work itself.

And of course, everybody sees it differently. You might think that every piece is a masterpiece, and yet other people might see one decent piece or might not like it at all, so it's—

ROBERT BROWN: But you were always willing to accept this risk from the public and exposure.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: You have to, and you learn too yourself, but you are seeing your work in this objective—in an entirely different light, and you are seeing it as a viewer too. Sometimes things will happen that you weren't aware of, you know, a glaring weakness or error that you just couldn't see any other way except—

ROBERT BROWN: In this new setting.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you also learn then—did you get feedback then from other's reactions, critics, people just talking to you?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Oh yeah, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Once you started these exhibiting.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Has this been a part of your growth or progress?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, everything, everything is part of growth and you know, sometimes, you never know where it comes from. Seeing a show of yours hung on these stark circumstances might or may become very embarrassing or make you feel very self-conscious, or whatever. So sometimes you learn from that. Sometimes a completely amateur or person that has nothing to do with art or anything, might just make a little suggestion, make some remark that will snap something in your mind that could give you for years. The thing is you just never know.

You constantly try to be alert and try to improve and one never knows how they come about that, whether you just constantly look—you can be an non-objective painter and yet constantly look at nature and constantly see things that might help your non-objective approach, you know, and whatever systems you have, they never stop. There is always the desire to improve.

ROBERT BROWN: And this continued despite the—earlier you were mentioning also the disruptive effect of success in New York, but this growth process continued also.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Being very sensitive to images and the effect of the work.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, you see, that's why—yeah, the thing is that that was only, what I was talking about is only one aspect and one more or less a detail in life. That's why a place or a cosmopolitan place can be very important because there is a stimulating—there is kind of an electricity that goes through the air that you get charged up on.

Now, it can take place in many ways. Of course, the opportunity always—there are 200 or 300 shows going on every week in the city, and you can see any number of those, or museums, or just about anything, and you are constantly looking, constantly really studying and so you never know, or talking. Like I say, these people that are—like in New York, once in a while you have your friends come up and just tell you what they think, what is your opinion. It matters but it doesn't matter, but sometimes one of them can hit something on the head that has been a real problem, and you didn't know, but then they can just make it as clear as day.

Well, this is why the city is in that sense so important. Whereas you don't, get as much of that say in isolation, other than the country, but supposedly you reach a point where you don't need that anymore. It is strictly developing on your own, and the process of looking for a work, one piece leading into the next piece supposedly to be better, or you know, say every ten pieces, you are going to make some kind of a jump and get better and better.

These are the ideals.

ROBERT BROWN: You really believe those.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: You think you can get to that point where you can be autonomous and not have to have this feedback from others.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, like yeah. I can look back at my early work and see once in a while something that I don't mind, you know, but I don't think that I had as high a success percentage, you know, in all kinds of ways like artistic and the—the desired effect, this desired, sought after effect, rather than a spontaneous effect. Do you know what I mean?

ROBERT BROWN: Uh-huh. Now though there is a momentum.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Within yourself you can carry on.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, I can attempt something and get a higher percentage of the desired effect, you know. It still has to do with this three or four pieces, but the standards, you know, are higher.

ROBERT BROWN: The whole group is a little higher standard.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Is this one reason you could come to Maine and leave New York?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, no, a lot of this has happened in Maine, and you know, it might have happened there. You see, there so much that goes on, and sometimes you change for change sake. Well, now I'm here and the pressure is off and so you know, it is either sink or swim, you know. You are going to be great stuff, or it is just going to be what it is. But it is going to be what I want to do, and not this thing about doing it because it's the thing to be doing, you know?

ROBERT BROWN: Uh-huh.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Now, that sounds very simple and—but still quite a sophisticated, quite a complicated jump as far as maturity.

ROBERT BROWN: So when you came here, you hadn't quite gotten that in the 30's, had you?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: No, no.

ROBERT BROWN: You came here when you were still rather uncertain.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Right, yeah, yeah. Still there was a lot of influenced, I was very much influenced by what was happening.

ROBERT BROWN: So when you first came here, did you find yourself going down there, or trying somehow to know just what was going on in New York?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: No. Well, not really, no, but the methods of work and all that was still quite influenced by you know, the past. Slowly that just sort of left.

ROBERT BROWN: How did the methods change? Could you contrast them?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, they are very subtle. It is just strictly a conditioning of doing it for your own sake. You always did that anyway, but it seemed like in New York it was more for art's sake, you know. It still is, but I mean it's—it's not, those pressures aren't there, they aren't the same. It's a more, you know, a relaxed thing.

You see, you say I do what I do with anybody else, but if you are in New York, you are really subconsciously always affected by what other people think. So one of the things I limited was I just don't care. I just do the best I can to satisfy myself and that's it, you know what I mean? I think. I mean, there is always that one need for acceptance, especially by or from your peers. Like it is always nice to have artists pat you on the back, you know. It's nice to have anybody, but especially artists, somehow it has more meaning to it.

ROBERT BROWN: Why did you choose this exposed situation here? That is where as you said, even today in the winter, some 20-odd people have come to look at your work, and perhaps none of them were artists.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: You see, that was really for my benefit or accidental. One thing I had the physical terrain of the land, and I really started thinking, well, if the land is there, and why not do something that I can see, you know, or it was always, it's always a challenge to do something large, whether it is an easel piece or—you know, it is just—I think it's more of a—it's harder and it's more demanding, you know.

And you know, the larger it is, that the more ridiculous it is because the less chance there is for it to fit anywhere, so it is strictly a thing within you and the thing itself. So I started putting these things around, and especially the fact that this had been a farm and it seemed logical that animals would be interesting placed around. And then I got into the figures and other things. Basically there are, like I said, for my own enjoyment or stories, they are too big to put into it. And then the public, you know, became involved which I had no intention or I had no idea they would come to what it has come to, you know, because this is basically a pretty isolated road and there weren't that many people using it.

I really—I mean, I have an ego and all that. I don't know if I had done the same thing if I had known. I probably would have, I don't know, but I didn't realize that a lot of people come due to the publicity or through word of mouth, they just hear about it and they just come to see things themselves. I don't mind it that much, but it is—it does get to be a nuisance sometimes. But I really enjoy looking out and seeing things, and again being able to do things that I couldn't have done in New York because of strictly the limitations of space and well, the materials themselves. How are you going to cart things like that size around?

ROBERT BROWN: These are things that you have not been able to do at all before on this scale.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: No.

ROBERT BROWN: The size of this football player out here who is 15 feet high.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: He's more than that, about 18, yeah, right. I mean, I would have had to approach it in a different way like either I would have had to have a different physical situation in New York, or design it so that it would come apart, but somehow, you know, it's like just fun to do something that you feel may be nothing that would ever amount to—you know, like it would never go anywhere else or be so, but it is just the idea that you can have the opportunity to do something on that level.

ROBERT BROWN: You can enjoy it for yourself too.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: It's important.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah, and you know, you see them under different conditions, you know, what they—how they are affected by the rain, you know, when they were soaking wet or covered with snow, or how they react to strong winds. You know, all these things, and their character. It affected in all the different, the climates, the different situations. And then they change as they weather, the coloring is affected. They are constantly going through that kind of thing, so that is all kind of interesting.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you have to go out and conserve them once-in-a-while, take care of them?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: If these were all sold and carted away, would you repopulate your grounds with something else large? Do you have continually an interest in building new colossal things?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Oh yeah, because I have really enlarged the property by you know, cutting down and opening up areas that were pretty densely you know, forests before, so that—but further back so that I will have room to put up more things. It's just that there is a certain kind of a challenge like it's enjoyable to do something large, but it is also enjoyable working outside. So the inside, the outside, the good weather, the bad weather type of thing, is doing one thing or the other.

And the problems again are entirely different from the small things, so that always opens up new avenues of how to resolve these things, like whether it is an engineering problem or just plain physical thing like how to get them physically up in the air, how to erect them, how to resolve this or that. So many of them I also have to do like also flat on the ground, so I have no concept really what they are going to look like, so you are trying your best to do something that is going to be seen from a distance under these restrictions, you see.

So I like the idea of the challenge, you know. That's what—that's what is fun to do and to get involved with. And it is not only just having acceptance or having it admired, it is all these other things.

ROBERT BROWN: You are doing.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: The challenges, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you feel that you need to people a landscape? Is this part of it? I mean, do you put them in certain places in relation to a woods behind them or a field or a sky?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: No, not really. It is just strictly—oftentimes it just where they are done and then—

ROBERT BROWN: A matter of convenience.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, it is simply a question of I did it there, and so just lift it up there, just put it up there. And somehow, you know, nature—they sort of fit in without planning, and it is hard to say. Well, again, I suppose that's only natural that you can take almost any setting, and you take a person and put a person in front of that setting and the person is going to fit in somehow, some way, like you know. So that aspect doesn't really matter too much.

ROBERT BROWN: That is—

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Unless there was a commission and it was going in a specific place, then you would probably have to consider that, where it's going and what's going to happen as far as the relations between the piece and the nature that's there.

ROBERT BROWN: But you feel it can be kind of accidental. Have you had commissions where you have had to consider placement?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: No.

ROBERT BROWN: What of the Indian and scout?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah, but you see, I did the Indian, even when it was finished, they, they—they finally got a place, just about the time it was finished so they had three or four different spots, and you know, even though where it is, it is not the best spot in the world. It is still, it still holds itself there like it is an unnatural kind of place because it is an Indian and it would have been better in a natural kind of surrounding. So now it is a man made one surrounded by buildings and background and the side and all that. But it still is a thing in itself. It still

holds up all right, you know. But I would have much preferred it in a natural environment.

ROBERT BROWN: What was your intention in that Indian? What did you mean to do?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, to depict the Indian as he was before the white man came to the country and you know, which he is this—is a symbolic creature of the town. There were Indians in that town, and the people still use the Indian as a symbol in their slogans and in their schools and all that. Their suggestions were to make him what you think of as Indian, with the long feathers, the head feathers, and all that.

So when I started it, I wasn't in that much aware of myself and I did a lot of research and found that the Indian didn't wear a headdress that way except probably in Oklahoma, so that was unreal and the Indian in the Northeast wore one, two or three at the most, feathers and then to depict him as he really was, and in my research, I discovered that they were mainly agricultural, trapping and that fishing type of people, and unwar-like, peaceful.

So all these factors contributed to the eventual type. And this Indian sort of has a cloth. His garment is more like a skirt because the Indian, before the white man came, didn't know about trousers. He knew—he wore leggings and stuff like that, but they didn't know about trousers, so they wore furs and things along that line. And then like I said, made him fishing where they understood the principle of wares and spears and they stand there kind of primitive netting or like these wares that they would build out of shoots. So this is the way they depicted them. It's hard to simulate a ledge, or a concrete form, and I mean, there is a lot more involvement, I just can't think right now.

ROBERT BROWN: Why is he so big?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, that was kind of an accident because originally the project, you know, they expected something around 25, 30 feet high, but the wood was donated by the merchants there, and they had all this wood, so I decided as long as I have the wood, I might as well use it. So it ended up being more like 65 feet high. Again, the challenge of making something big was much more intriguing than just making a 20 or 25 foot, plus there would be more—

ROBERT BROWN: Because you had some sympathy for the Indian and trying to make him seem imposing by just making it bigger?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, I figured that that would help, you know, the bigger and the more imposing it would be and it certainly was here, anyway, in the yard. It became a very impressive, and just the size just was all that, whereas I don't think that it would have made much difference, you know, it would have been—well, you know, it wouldn't have stopped traffic if it had been only 25, 30 feet high.

And again, the challenge wouldn't have been there because the difference in their height became a real engineering kind of factor. I had to go into things that I'd never gone into before just because of the problems that a figure that size presented.

ROBERT BROWN: These colossal forms are all fairly representational. Why are they such representations?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, they are not really—well, they are representational only because you can see a pattern.

ROBERT BROWN: They suggest football players.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah, but basically most of them, they are really symbolic figures. In other words, they are more or less suggesting things, rather than what things are, which is the combination of trying to use the timber in its pure state, and still make a creature or something out of it, whether it is a human figure or an animal or whatever. And they are certainly not realistic in a realistic manner.

In other words, like I did this large basketball player and the only—I wasn't necessarily—the basketball player wasn't important, it was just that the problem there was to use two poles, two telephone poles vertically, and that suggested the figure—the arms and the legs. So what would be the best type of object to—you know, to go along with that. Then the basketball player became the secondary idea. Basically it was just using those two poles that way. So then by sticking hands on one end, and toss on the middle with a ball and a top, it became a basketball player.

But generally, I prefer the problems, the ideas rather than trying to do a figure of an animal, or a figure of a man or whatever, you know. The same thing, the football players out there, I wanted the symbolic kind of feeling of the thing rather than just a series of realistic players, you know. Anybody can do that. So the thing I got the biggest blocks I could because to me they –football represents or suggests very massive or brutal kind of force,

and how best to depict that? Well, just by using whatever number—eight just giant blocks which are anywhere from 18 feet up to 15, and then the rest was incidental. So then what to do? Just making football players to carve out faces and suggestive helmets and masks and just arms and legs shooting off in all directions, but basically the idea of the huge timbers didn't change. They are still very evident there, you know.

ROBERT BROWN: This is where you began, you began—

BERNARD LANGLAIS: That was the whole idea, you see. That was the idea in the beginning.

ROBERT BROWN: The timbers, huge timbers.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah, the part that the football players, yeah, part of the football players is incidental.

ROBERT BROWN: I see, that came out just as with about—

BERNARD LANGLAIS: That could have been a group of human figures standing there, you know, but the idea that there would be represented by these blocks of wood, and so the fact of it was the football theme helped to make this sort of the size, something that makes sense for the size because of the sheer power of brute force.

ROBERT BROWN: The faces look a lot like those on totem poles, on those football players.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Is that conscious?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: No. No.

ROBERT BROWN: Are they faces that go well with the thickness of those timbers? Is that why you maybe developed them?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, because of them didn't destroy the line, I kept the faces more or less the same size and it was nothing destroyed the feeling. I would have had to cut into the timbers and make a small round head which realistically what it would be to keep the line of the timbers as they are, you see.

And then to make the faces themselves very, very simple, you know, very crude and simple. Again, just to emphasize that type of mentality, that type of brute you know—because I mean, you know, just again, do that, you get the suggestion of force and anybody who is using force that way, their faces aren't going to be nice polished kind of you know.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, you work in this vein and then you have also, as we have mentioned when I first came today, you moved into very delicate things as today you were carving some nicely, finely modeled reliefs of birds and other animal forms. Do you alternate this sort of activity? Do you sometimes ever go back to the tighter framed wood paintings of the early 60's?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: No, no, I don't go back, I haven't gone back to—I could but I haven't gone back to that sort of thing. I don't know if I ever will. But again, the reliefs which are a body of—the basis of my work and are really the things I've done right along since I went into the wood, even though they have changed to more figurative things, are still the basis in what I consider my serious work.

Now, the three-dimensional work are something I never did before, and really the three-dimensional work was completely influenced by the terrain, the land. That has only happened since moving to Maine, but as far as the reference to a more sensitive thing, I'm not always aware of that and sometimes it might be the conditions may be—I have been working in a smaller, enclosed space because of the winter or just that I want to go into a contrast kind of approach.

Then I will do that and then probably do something very rough and then I will allow the wood to sit outside, the piece to sit outside for a long time so it will weather so that it will have kind of a nature, a nature feeling about it. I don't know, it is hard to say because some days you just feel like seeing how capable you are of doing something entirely different say than the week before or the day before. That could be how small you can do something, or how—in a certain way, how finished a product, how delicate. It is hard to say because I'm still involved with the problems that I bring, I bring to the piece in mind.

They are still all related in a sense I was referring to before, but the technique might vary some, you know. Well, not to be repetitious, or not to be bored by the work, you constantly have to impose or present challenges or problems, and still keep within the overall framework of the work, and I really in one sense tried to continue restrictions. I hardly ever introduce other materials. Once in a while, I might use wire or a few things like some metal, but 99 percent of the time, I try to keep—it would be very tempting, it is very tempting oftentimes to use

stones or use other materials, but to me that's—you know, that's failure.

So I try to continue restricted just to the wood.

ROBERT BROWN: This is a discipline that you are talking about.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Yes, because I found that I have no problems as far as ideas and the approaches. It is never monotonous or dull or boring because the tools or the approach is always fresh ways of using the wood. So introducing other material would sort of be cheating to me. It really wouldn't but it is just the way I feel. As long as I continue to have the idea where wood itself is the complete background, that's enough.

ROBERT BROWN: Is there a—

BERNARD LANGLAIS: I could use the grain in different ways, or the different finishes or whatever, but it's—as long as it—I feel that I am constantly growing and material is not just being used in repetitious ways, then I'm satisfied.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you feel at this point that you are pretty much in the balance of where you want to be as far as pressure goes, as far as being known, as far as the way you can organize your work? Do you feel you are pretty well set-up?

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Well, no, not really. You know, like I feel that I could be known, be better known and be better represented but then I feel also that will take care of itself. The important thing is I am really working and I feel that the work is going well, and the other things will just fall into place. It's a question of time and if I contain this level for another ten year anyway, then you know, I will really maybe in ten years, I won't be completely out, but a good ten years of work and I will really you know, feel like—well, yeah. That will sort of, I hope anyway, serve as the climax, the peak.

ROBERT BROWN: Ten years you will have been able to work through a number of solutions and variations when you got to be into something you don't even—

BERNARD LANGLAIS: Everything will—yeah, everything will be able to gel completely. Not that they don't now, but it is just that that's the way I feel it. In other words, there are so many aspects like, you know, the creative thing, the subject matter, the problems, the craft, the skill. When you try to wed all these into one and that's what I'm saying, like my average is to still to say well, I really don't know whether I—you know, I like probably like two things out of ten, but I mean, then that's one level.

But I mean, I don't know, maybe only one really high piece out of a hundred, say, so I could bring that average, but I don't know if that's possible right now, I really don't know. But anyway, that's something that you have worked towards. It's an objective, but it is a very personal kind of objective. It means—it means nothing because one never knows. I might have done my best work and maybe my best work is yet to come, but you just have to continue, that's all. So it is the only thing that matters.

That's why it helps, and that's another—it's the satisfaction or the joy of doing what you do, and then the recognition if it comes. I mean, a recognition on a high level. I guess recognition as it is, but I mean on a—you know, it can always be on a higher level, or a higher plane like, you know. Who knows? Because I haven't had—you know, like I still haven't had a museum one-man show. I don't even know if I would still be in New York—you see, which would have made it easier like to be on the scene or it might have happened or it might not have. I don't know.

But those are kind of objectives or dreams, but they are not important, that important. They don't mean everything, but they are sort of the frosting on the cake and it is kind of nice to have, you know, a certain amount of recognition. Like I got a Guggenheim grant, and it was great, it was a nice feeling, but I couldn't forget also that I had been applying for 18 years, and when I really needed it, I didn't get it, you know. But it still came in handy to get it at any time.

So now that I'm going to get a—which is kind of funny, the joke, but at the same time you get some acclaim or some respect or some acceptance of your so-called peers, no matter what you feel, that feels good, so the University of Maine is going to give me a doctorate. Now, with my background, and I told you about pulling my weight through high school, and that's a joke, really, but it's okay, you know. I don't mind. I will take it.

But these are things that somehow, again I say I still do all—if I do it, you know, I work everyday or whatever and I have got some of these things, because you do, you get into a system, into a pattern, into a habit or a discipline, and boy, you know, if you don't follow through everyday, it is almost like missing a meal or missing a day's food like. So then it becomes like a whole way of life, see?

Okay, so then that's that, right? Okay, then what else is there? You try to become as good as you can possibly be, you know.

Now, who decides this? Do you decide this or does the world or the public? So you strive for it anyway, but you have to have these. These are kind of like kicks or like these little things that hang there, you know. Each time you reach one and get it, it's the satisfaction, but then there is always that one further beyond that you've got to, you know, and that's one of the nice things. That's one of the rewarding things because like I say, in the early days, you know, there was and still is an effort to—or some days I just don't like feel like working, and boy, to make myself work, wow, it's like pulling teeth.

But in the early days, you just find other things. You sit in a bar all day or walk down to the Village, or do other things that you can find a million things to do.

ROBERT BROWN: Sure.

BERNARD LANGLAIS: So that's—it takes so many years just to get some of these other nonsensical things into shape, you know. Discipline is so important, and it takes such an effort and a long time, just that, and then you don't know what kind of ability you have and there are all other things. It is pretty wild so you have got to be a little nuts, a little crazy to be in this business and put those demands on yourself.

But again, you know, when you think about it, anybody that does, it's always—you respect them like whether it is a guy, a grey-stripper or you know, athlete or whatever, or great writer or a musician or anything. You know that the guy has had to put out extra, so then you try to emulate that, and I think just the desire is important enough because it is not to reach that goal, but at least life will be full if you have the desire, you know?

ROBERT BROWN: Uh-huh. All right.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]