



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

**Oral history interview with Charles Sheeler,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Charles Sheeler on June 18, 1959. The interview was conducted by Martin Friedman for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: I would like to ask you a little bit about your early influences and your early interests in painting as a result of your trips with Chase to Europe. Could you tell me a little bit more about that, Charles? What interested you most at the time?

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, of course, I was susceptible to the Spanish influences and most specifically though to Velasquez who was a great hero with me, and others too, Goya, but Goya was never, and still isn't as great a [inaud.] as Velasquez for me. And, of course, the Dutch painters which we saw very notably in the National Gallery. That was a direct part of Chase's influence because that was his primary source. Greco he admired very much as a great painter. But I've said many times to friends in such a discourse that, standing beside him one time in the great corridor of the Prado in Madrid before the long line of Greco's, "Look at him! Magnificent painter! But don't look at his drawings." Well, at a later date, I took a chance on opening the other eye, and the drawing is just as good as the painting, I felt. But it represented his particular interest in painting as such. That was an end in itself. It didn't matter what it was if it was brilliantly painted.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Well, I was curious at what point did you become interested chiefly in the industrial landscape? Was this a result of your work with architectural photography?

CHARLES SHEELER: Oh, no, no. It didn't have anything to do with that. As a matter of fact, that came very, very much later than that period, oh, 1929, around there. The Upper Deck, which is to be in the present Moscow Show, was painted in '29, and that was the inauguration of a period that followed for a good many years, planning a picture very completely before starting to work on the final canvas, having a blueprint of it and knowing just exactly what it was going to be, not the accidental things, the touch of the brush here that might be brilliant in its application, but having a basic plan, like building a house. You don't build the house first and then make a blueprint afterwards. And that was really the beginning of my interest in the architectural phase which continued for -- well, it continues until the present time with a little different approach to it.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: I was quite interested in looking over at Edith Halpert's Gallery the collections of your scrapbooks, and it's quite -- I think that there is, rather than a feeling of evolution, a kind of subtle fluctuation between a very definitely polished realistic style and then a departure into a pure abstract form, and there doesn't seem to be any kind of steady development. It seems to be more or less a kind of cyclical thing. You at times work very abstractly with flat planes of color and even Cubistic pictures, so to speak, and then come back again. In other words, do you feel that you've necessarily evolved towards a definite kind of abstraction? Have you sampled it? Have you gone back to it to . . . ?

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, even in reviews of shows in which I've been represented or my one-man shows, I'm still -- of course, there always has to be a label attached to everyone --

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Yes.

CHARLES SHEELER: I'm still fussing around being written about as a realist. In after a period of, well, roughly ten years or so in the really straight realism

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Beginning from about when?

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, 1929. Then I realized that, when we look at any object around us and walking around among other things subsequently, we have to bring it up into a conscious plane because -- at least I didn't realize it or think of it in that light for some time -- but when we look at the next thing in sequence to the first object that we have gazed at, there's still an overtone carried over of what the retina has just previously recorded. And in these later pictures, I make use of that as an element in the final picture. There may be two such images playing against each other or possibly three, no definite number arbitrarily decided, but certainly two.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Well, I recall reading, I think it was in a Constance Rourke book, that, on your return from Paris, you had become very much imbued, as so many of the young painters had, with the Cubist spirit and had actually gone through a period here in this country . . .

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes. Yes. Yes.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: . . . of Cubist painting. I think this is an interesting phenomenon. A number of American painters of your time did go, for instance, people like Weber and Hartley and Dove and all, worked for a time in Cubist style and, for some reason or other, Cubism as such never took root here in America; it never seemed to

CHARLES SHEELER: No, not as emphatically as some other influences, certainly. I had a Cubistic period following the Armory Show. That would be 1913. But it was of brief duration, maybe two or three years. I had a trip abroad -- the two previous trips, Chase trips, trips with Chase were 1902 and 1903 -- and in 1909, I had an opportunity of going abroad again, that time with my parents, they were going, and, as they would, they always included me, and I had the opportunity of seeing what I had only read of and seen illustrations of what was going on in Paris at that time; that is, Matisse and the Cubistic group, the Picasso's and Braque's and -- well, you know that whole list. And I had the opportunity of seeing those. Well, I wasn't among those that said, well, they could go home and duplicate them in their studio. I never said that; I didn't understand them in the least, but they did carry the conviction that the artists knew what they were doing; and if I were interested enough, it was up to me to try and find out what they were doing.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Did you meet any of the artists?

CHARLES SHEELER: No. I didn't meet any artists at all. But I had the opportunity -- the Steins, Michael Stein and his wife, they had a big apartment there and a big salon, and the place was plastered with those pictures that I have just mentioned, and they had open house. I was there one night just from a verbal introduction of someone I knew who also knew them, and I went there that evening and just circulated around. There was a roomful of people, a large roomful of people, and, well, you talked to anyone you could that happened to speak English. They were largely French people. And that was my principal source of information about them. I went to a couple of galleries, but I didn't see as much there as I saw at the Steins on that one evening.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Well, how much time did you spend in Paris?

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, not very long; a week or ten days at the most. Then I went to Italy after

that, and there was where I really became as much as I am presently acquainted with the Italian Piero della Francesca outstandingly and others who are well known to all of us. And they made a very vivid impression. Also, that was where I probably got the clue to what I described as the picture Upper Deck, being the first of mine that indicates -- I reasoned for myself that, for instance, still just sticking to one example, that Piero della Francesca didn't just set up a canvas and look up at the ceiling and then, well, what shall I paint today? I mean he must have had his engineer plans for the picture before he put brush to canvas. And that was, as I say, it was my instance later on but that wasn't to come for a long time. Following the 1909 visit that I've just been describing, when I came back, I couldn't resume where I had left off. I had to bail out, as I've called it before, for about ten years before I really got started in a new direction. It was no longer possible just to set up a model, either literally a model or a landscape, and go out and paint a landscape. I had to plan it ahead of time as to what ingredients it would have in it that would be to my satisfaction as near as I could arrive at them. So, there was a period of about ten years that was neither fish nor fowl, sort of like the tadpole that still has its two hind legs. You know, he has the front ones, but the tail is still on.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Well, I was rather curious; for instance, this idea of a group of painters working with almost a pristine approach, people like O'Keeffe and yourself, do you think that there was some particular quality at the time, some particular ethos that promoted this? Was it a sudden interest in America for you? Or was it an interest in the machine? Or the clarity of a technological viewpoint? In other words, what do you think produced this particular quality in American painting which has since more or less become a very important mainstream?

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, it's pretty hard -- at least it would be for me -- to put your finger on, say, with any real conviction or assurance that it was any specific happening. It just seemed to be a natural inclination, and I think of a number at that time that were later to be known as purists or the immaculates or any of the names that were dubbed on them.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: But these were merely names, these names did not apparently

CHARLES SHEELER: They didn't represent a cult on the part of the artists because the artists had no association with each other or practically none.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Did you know O'Keeffe? Do you know her at all?

CHARLES SHEELER: Very slightly. She's a person I don't think I'd ever know if we lived in adjoining rooms. Over these many years, I've seen her at intervals, maybe for a half-hour or an hour on one of her visits. She doesn't come to the East very often, usually once in several years, so I don't really know her closely. And I never actually have sat down with her and chewed the fat and had a discussion of our respective points of view towards our work. I've never had that. It's just been a pleasant social occasion.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Well, from this perspective, do you see any affinities, particularly either in style or in motivation, between your work, let's say, and O'Keeffe's?

CHARLES SHEELER: No, none whatever. I think we are quite diametrically opposed to each other and not in an unfriendly way or a professional way, but I mean our points of view, I think, they're quite different. There's a large element of symbolism in O'Keeffe's work, as you can readily see, and none whatever in mine. It's purely a visual thing, and what you see is what you intend to see and no overtones of symbolism.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: That interests me very much. In the Chicago Art Institute painting of Portrait

of the Artist, which has almost a surrealistic surface, had you intended at all to do anything beyond -- was this intended as a kind of pun?

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes. It really was, of course.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: But no homage to surrealism

CHARLES SHEELER: At the time, it was a sport because there was nothing ever -- other than that except one canvas -- there was nothing else that tied in with that in the sense of a group of pursuing the same ideas. There was never anything else that unique among works of that time.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Well, do you yourself have any interest in surrealism as a form? Does it have any fascination for you? Did it ever?

CHARLES SHEELER: No. No, not particularly.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Because undoubtedly you've been claimed by the surrealists too, I mean, as about everybody else has been.

CHARLES SHEELER: No.

[MACHINE TURNED OFF.]

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Well, I was reading through some old reviews and I came across an article by [Dorothy] Adlow of the Christian Science Monitor where she made a fairly strong point about the surrealistic element. I suppose that this is the idea that an empty landscape devoid of people would have this kind of quality, and I would just be interested in knowing, did you yourself have any particular affinity for surrealism?

CHARLES SHEELER: No, I didn't. It never touched me.

[MACHINE TURNED OFF, AND IT WOULD SEEM THAT SOME CONVERSATION WAS LOST BEFORE RECORDING RESUMED.]

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: . . . that it had elements of derision about it. Do you remember when it first came into use?

CHARLES SHEELER: No, I don't specifically.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: You don't know who invented it or . . . ?

CHARLES SHEELER: No, I don't. It was just -- well, it was fairly generous; somebody, whoever it may have been, and I can't possibly identify him, but someone said it first -- there always is a person who says something first and then the others just picked it up and it was sort of a label that was used. I know you said or anticipated sort of ridicule.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Well, I know that label

CHARLES SHEELER: I never felt that there was any particular justification for it. It seems not descriptive. It just happened that a group of painters of their own volition and their isolated position just began to paint in a more exacting way, and I would say even -- at least I will speak for myself, I can't speak for anyone else -- it was the desire to (this is very specific with myself because I have written that on occasions for notations in catalogues) to eliminate the means to the end, meaning

the technique as far as possible and to present the subject in itself without the distraction of the means of achieving it. And that meant a precision and, well, as I say, absence about this technique. And that is as near as it comes to being justified which I think at least it does to me indicate it wasn't justified at all; it's the same as the immaculates; it didn't mean anything as a term.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: No. Do you have any idea informally who this group was supposed to be? Who was included besides yourself in this appellation?

CHARLES SHEELER: Oh, well, there was Demuth and I guess Preston Dickinson would be. He never quite reached the point of precision that Demuth or myself did, but I suppose he might in a general way come into their group. And O'Keeffe, I would say. Well, George Almaine, yes, in his technique; his technique at that time; but there was also with him -- I don't know as that would rule him out -- but there was this kind of symbolism that was involved in his pictures, too.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: You don't think Guliami [phon. sp.] was a surrealist?

CHARLES SHEELER: No, I don't know just where the boundaries are, the zones of surrealism.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: I think they shift.

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes, I think so too. There's expansive or retrogressive.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Did you ever show in a group exhibition with these people, a specific exhibition which might have inspired this kind of title? Did you ever show together with Demuth and that kind of thing?

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, I mean we were always mixed up in a miscellaneous group on various occasions in one gallery or another, but I can't just name any particular exhibition in which we happened to all appear.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Yes. In other words, there would really be no official basis at any point for making this kind of generalization?

CHARLES SHEELER: No.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: How long has it been since you've done figure painting? How long has it been since you've been interested in figure?

CHARLES SHEELER: Oh, a very long time. Way back in the '20's, I did a couple of figure pieces, sort of semi-portraits, but in later years, I destroyed them. I didn't keep them. They never were a part of the overall of my work.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: I wondered, is it just that you don't find the figure as monumental or as enduring? Is there some reason that you do not paint the figure, or did not paint the figure?

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, the best reason is I just wasn't very much interested in the figure as subject matter. It didn't fit in with the approach that I had in these later years, that is out of direct realism into this description not previously given of the overtone of one image recently seen over, combined with the one presently being viewed.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: I was very interested in that aspect of an overlaying of images when you mentioned various trips that you had taken looking around for a subject. Very often, you make a

trip, and you retain the idea for a while, of course you make some sketches, some notes? And very often the painting itself is not developed until considerably later.

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes. That's right. For many years now, I've never worked on location. I always gather the nuts and bring them home and chew them over there and arrive at a picture.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Do you ever use photographs?

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes, sometimes, just for specific details. No drawing can give you the actuality to the extent that the photograph is, and I can pick out and make references for a form that I want to use with greater definition than I could by making a quick sketch from the subject, which would fill the considerable latitude from what I actually saw on location.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: I wondered, for instance, -- if I can come back to this earlier point -- just looking at these two things across the room; I'm referring to the houses in the upper center and lower right, which in a sense are very close together in color but have a considerably different quality, one being far more geometric than the other. I'd like to come back to this point again of the geometric element in your painting. Is this something which you return to consistently? Periodically? Is there a reason? Is it a kind of discipline for you?

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, it isn't a conscious thing; it just seems to be a logical thing for me.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: There's often a fusion of highly realistic elements with these abstract sections
....

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: In other words, it is not necessarily consistent throughout the surface of the painting, and that interests me very much. I wondered whether this is calculated, intentional; where one can find actual surfaces which are painted so precisely that they're actually tactile.

CHARLES SHEELER: It is intentional. I do like contrasts. I think they're important; that's an important consideration to me. It may be contrasts of forms or of color. I like a black, not as a rule, but at times I like a black coming right next to a white, kind of like a pistol shot in the still air.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: A quality that underlies most of your painting is a quality of stillness and, to a great extent, openness. I wonder again about this; is it maybe a result of a single motif? Or is it a matter of placement? This is a quality that I get and that I think is often mistaken for a kind of haunted or haunting surrealist quality. This is something that invites contemplation, the absence of people, the austerity. I don't feel these are austere but often there is a kind of isolation.

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, you can see in the long range of my work, as has been said by others, that I'm interested in a manmade world. Bill Williams refers to that in a recent [inaud.]. My inhuman forms, as he calls them. But never cool off the [inaud.].

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: I don't think they're inhuman.

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, in the sense that he means, that is, absolutely there's never a person.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Depopulated landscape.

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes. Depopulated landscape. Well, it's my illustration of what a beautiful world

it would be if there were no people in it.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: I'm not sure that I really accept that completely. You seem to be far too gregarious for that. But I wonder, for instance, in the painting of barns and in the painting of -- they more or less break up into barns and industrial things and so on, does this, does your interest in architecture extend to an interest in development of today, for instance, something like the Mies van der Rohe Seagram Building, have any effect on you? Would that be an interesting subject for you as a painting?

CHARLES SHEELER: Which is this?

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: The big Seagram Building downtown.

CHARLES SHEELER: No, I hate that building.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Why? I'm just curious.

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, it just doesn't seem to be inspired architecture.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: So the architecture that you paint is in a sense architecture that is accidental to some extent?

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, are you referring to barns?

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: I'm referring to barns, I'm referring to factories.

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, people -- they built their own barns largely, that is, I mean the community built the barns for the individual, and they always had, first of all, its utility in mind; and that wasn't accidental because they knew how the barn had to function for their purpose. They weren't building a work of art. That is as a family objective. If it's beautiful to some of us afterwards, it's beautiful because it functioned. The functional intention was very beautifully realized.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Well, like the River Rouge paintings?

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, there is functionalism too. I mean it's an efficient plant for its purpose -- industry -- or industrial plants for its purpose.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Of the realist painters working today -- I'm using this term purely as a convenience -- who interests you among the younger people who are producing, let's say, somewhat in the same vein, the same direction? Do any of them have any particular interest for you?

CHARLES SHEELER: I couldn't say very specifically. In recent years, I go around to exhibitions less than I did quite some years ago; I find it a little bit distracting in relation to my own work. That is, it's like stirring a pool with a stick and destroying the reflected images on it.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Of those painters who are more or less identified with the precisionist development, some of the younger men -- well, Spencer, who is no longer around, and Crawford have always been very closely linked -- [are] extremely interested in your work.

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes. Well, they were very definitely influenced.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Did you ever work with any of these men?

CHARLES SHEELER: No. No.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Did you know them?

CHARLES SHEELER: No. In both cases, we have been associated in a gallery that showed our work. Both Spencer and Crawford were at the Downtown Gallery, and, in the case of Spencer, whom I knew much longer than Crawford, he was down in the flotsam and jetsam that existed on 8th Street when I was down there. The Whitney Studio Club where I used to be a frequent visitor, as I would be, because I lived over the Whitney Studio Club when it was at 10 West 8th Street, and I saw him more frequently. Crawford I came to know much later when he was associated for a time at the Downtown Gallery. But I always felt that they both were influenced by my work to some extent.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Oh, I think that's admitted certainly. Do you think that Stuart Davis falls within the context of the group of artists we are discussing? He's the only American artist that I can think of really who has more or less made some kind of translation of Cubism in American terms and sustained it.

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes. Well, I think he has. He is one of -- I won't say any one because, in any field, doctor, merchant, Indian chief, I don't think there is one that is most whatever it is that he's supposed to be most of -- I think he's one of rather than "the" and I have a very strong liking for Stuart's work. I've known him and his work, of course, for a long time, since we first met down at the Gallery when it was on 15th Street, which was away back. My association there was in 1931, I was invited by Mrs. Halpert to join the Gallery, if I wished, and they were already there. I don't know just exactly the number of years longer, but the Gallery had been functioning, I think, about five years before I became affiliated with it.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: I wondered about your interest in some of the early American realist painters. I've come across some comments that Eakins never particularly made a dent on you.

CHARLES SHEELER: No. That's true. That's reported in Constance Rourke's book.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Or Bingham?

CHARLES SHEELER: No, not particularly.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: How about Harnett?

CHARLES SHEELER: I feel that when photography became in general use I felt that it eliminated the points of those paintings which were immediately preceding photography. I don't know of anything they added. In fact, I think photography in the same vein added a lot more than those paintings.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: You did have an interest in Harnett though, didn't you?

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes, I liked Harnett. I would say it's less though than it was when he was a novelty. That's when this fellow was suddenly excavated from the past and brought up into prominence.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Do you think there is -- well, obviously there is -- but do you in any sense relate yourself to a tradition then of American realism? Do you think that the American realism, let's say, of the 20th century, the kind of realism that you represent, is in any way related generally or contextually to the same spirit, let's say, that produced an Inness or an Eakins or a Harnett? Do you

think that there is some affinity? Is this explained within the American context -- this is getting to be a rather long question -- but I was wondering if you might first just talk about it a bit. It's a point I'm concerned with.

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, I don't consider that the names that you have mentioned of the past have any direct relation to the continuously called "realists" of later years. The later ones were -- well, it is still justified to call them realists. It was a more selective realism than it was with the earlier people. What remained as being the elements selected from the overall subject were just as realistic, but there is a lot of extraneous matter that appeared in the original subject which was not carried over into the picture. For greater emphasis of the forms to be developed, extraneous matter was eliminated to a marked degree, I think, between the time of Inness, Bingham and those which you've mentioned and the later people with which I would be included in a list.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: When you say 'extraneous matter,' do you mean a form necessarily or do you also mean perhaps sentiment and literal qualities?

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, I mean more just explicitly a form. There are many forms in nature that later-day realists don't intend to picture, and, just because they're nature, which is the source of all our supplies for everything, they don't enhance the nature in itself. They're more or less accidental forms that crop up here and there, and if they don't add to the subject, they must detract; they can't be just neutral.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: I'd like to ask you a question about this matter of time and space, this quality of location. I think all this comes back to an earlier point, but in looking at your paintings, there is a kind of -- well, very often, for instance, when the shadow is cast at a certain point, one can almost say it's such and such a time of day. But I'm sure this is pretty much outside of your interest?

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes, it is; it's only for the sake of that -- time has nothing -- it's not a registration of time.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: In other words, you don't particularly attempt to arrive at a quality of a season or a quality of the time?

CHARLES SHEELER: No.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Or even specifically -- I don't want to lead you into this -- but location is important, isn't it?

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, what kind of location? In time or . . . ?

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Location in space specifically. Well, for instance, the painting upstairs of Birds Nest, this is fairly specific and so on The barn, as we look at it directly here, could be anywhere, it could be

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes. That's true. Well, the tendency -- you see, that's an earlier picture, the one upstairs and this, and that element of environment is, well, as you've anticipated very much taking care of, that is I mean in the sense that it is timeless and locationless. It doesn't matter where that building was. The other -- well, that was a personal thing; I mean that painting Birds Nest was painted shortly after we came here in the excitement of doing something with your new house you're living in and so forth.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Well, do you think there's any particular kind of tendency, do you feel this

about your own work -- do you work towards a more general feeling, or is it, in other words, having done a whole series of very specific things like the River Rouge paintings, and like Birds Nest. In this spirit, do you feel that you are moving in your own work? Are you more interested in a kind of general location without any specific reference to time or space?

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes. Oh, yes.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Do you occasionally sit down and do something different?

CHARLES SHEELER: It doesn't matter where they are. There's a picture I spoke of -- for a good many years, I can't say what, but we'll say -- this is an approximation -- 10 years past, 10 or 12, where there are images, overtones of things previously seen before the present one which carries the principal design for the picture. That tendency still persists but those images could even be as remote from each other as in the picture called New England Irrelevancy. Have you ever seen that?

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: I'm not sure I know that.

CHARLES SHEELER: I could show you one later. That has some forms in it that were from Ballard's Vale, which is adjacent to Andover, where Phillips Academy is, and Manchester, New Hampshire.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Is this one of the pictures that you did when you were up [inaud.]?

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, no, it came after that, quite a number of years after that. It was in the [inaud.]. I was up in Andover, artist-in-residence there for Phillips Academy for a month. And, that small barn is from that vicinity. And a picture which I painted for them because that was a part of the program. I would be on tap on the campus if the students wanted to stop me and ask questions, and also I was looking around on my own. I didn't do any teaching there. I looked, went in, had the opportunity, in fact a request to visit the art classes which were in session there, but I was not an instructor.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Have you ever done any teaching?

CHARLES SHEELER: No, I never have. [inaud.] I've had quite a number of invitations to join mostly colleges, mostly in the Midwest, from time to time. The first one I had, when I was scarcely out of the Academy, was Professor Lorsch who -- God bless him, he's a very nice person -- blew into my studio in Philadelphia and saw whatever I had been doing then and wanted me to come out and teach drawing at Ann Arbor. He was head of the Architectural Department there, and, since my show out in UCLA, I even had a note from him saying he'd seen the show, and he'd like to see me again. If I'm ever passing through there, I want to make a point of stopping in.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Well, do you have some feeling about an artist teaching?

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes, I do, very definitely. That's the reason I've never taught. I've spoken of the way Chase . . . naturally because he had tremendous enthusiasm for painting, he certainly was dedicated to it, naturally it could only be from his point of view, and -- well, we could have been just a bunch of little Chases when we came out of school if we hadn't had diverse ideas as to what we wanted to paint. He was an inspiring teacher, very inspiring. This is partially a quote from Constance Rourke's book: "You begrudged the time that you had to sleep because you weren't able to paint during that time." I mean he was that inspiring. And I think any teacher that is good, just without his volition, does impose himself on the pupils because they're in a very impressionable state of wax that records everything that is projected in their direction, and we see so many instances of entirely different schools of painting where we had a Henri group of students. You just knew, when you

went in and saw some new and unknown, you knew that he was a pupil of Henri, or in my case, that you were a pupil of Chase, and you can see Kuniyoshi in most recent years. That is of my specific acquaintance, and I've already said that it took me about ten years to bail out what proved to be a wrong direction for me as a result of Chase's teaching. And I just refuse to impose the same pattern on other people as a result of being a teacher in whatever association, college or art school or whatever. So that's been my principal reason for never wanting to teach. It would have had its economic advantages at the time when ways and means were pretty hard to maintain of continuing what you wanted to. But even so, I did other things that solved the same problem, and yet I didn't have that guilty conscience of having imposed myself on my pupils.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Do you think that there is -- this is a very grim question -- such a thing as American art today?

CHARLES SHEELER: Oh, yes, I think so. I think so.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: What do you think are its qualities?

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, that's the sixty four million dollar question.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: I raise this question because certainly painting has become so completely internationalized that, if one walks into an exhibition, it's very hard to tell whether you're looking at a show from Paris or from Italy or from America. And I wonder what you think are definite features or aspects of American art, qualities of American art which seem enduring to you and which will persist in spite of the press, changes of fashion. Do you really think there is such a quality? Is it something in the attitude or is it something in the way that the artists produce or in the way they think?

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, I think I would have to grow up maybe before I could answer that question. I can't be that specific.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: It's a terribly hard question. But, for instance, the Europeans, well

CHARLES SHEELER: [inaud.] the group of painters that are particularly conspicuous now, we'll name de Kooning as present leader, Pollock before him and so forth. Well, it would be pretty hard to say just what is American; it just seems to be a sort of universal outlook -- doesn't have, as far as I recognize, it doesn't have anything very much to do with locale.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Well, I wonder if it's -- well, let's put it this way: Edith Halpert was telling the other day that, when some distinguished foreign visitor came to this country. After having toured the museums and galleries, when he saw your paintings, he felt he was looking at American art. This summer, I support him now. Lots of people feel this way, and I'm sure that abroad that your art in its clarity and organization does represent a kind of vision of a technology and -- well, a vision of the country. Now, in other words, we have the dream of technology, if you will, or the dream of pure and simple people as you have, let's say, in these things. I think that these, both of these, whether we're talking about barns or whether we're talking about factories, seem to express a kind of American dream, a kind of Utopian quality.

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, that's the nearest I could come to

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: I find your work very romantic which

CHARLES SHEELER: That's on the shelf, too; that is, others have reviewed it from that standpoint. But that doesn't necessarily apply to other American contemporaries, I think. The forms I use, as far

as I am aware, today are not -- they're not found, their equivalents are not found in European locations, various countries of Europe, in which we have traveled at some time and, even if we haven't traveled, we've seen photographs of what goes on there, I mean just in the nature and the man-made adjuncts that have been imposed on nature. I think in that sense, I still confine it to myself, I don't think I could go any farther than that -- that is one distinction of American painting, that is indicating American painting in the forms that I use. I mean even industrial subjects or farm subjects, farm buildings. But I don't know whether that would be included. For instance, in Stuart Davis, there's usually an American clue very frequently in a word that is superimposed. It couldn't, wouldn't naturally be a word in any other country. There was a canvas of -- just recently, I saw in some catalogue that came in, Stuart's picture was titled Standard Still Life. I remarked that to Edith the other day. I said, I take my hat off to Stuart. I think that all things should have that similar title appropriate with the variations to the subject, Standard Still Life, well, that exists now. Standard Landscape. Then you have an anchor post from which to deviate, sub-standard, or super-standard and so forth, having really a hitching post to tie your boat down. Well, of course, that's just facetious, but, in fact, in his case, I think it's more than that, but that is certainly a part of it, that is, that word does give you a clue. I'm sure a Stuart Davis picture in any European exhibition would stand out underscored as an American picture.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Of the younger painters, the sculptors now working, do any of them have any particular appeal for you? Who of the younger generation do you find . . . ?

CHARLES SHEELER: I don't know. Well, in sculptors -- to repeat from luncheon, Lippold is away, he's away up in outer space as far as I'm concerned. There are other artists somewhat in his category but, for me, and that's as far as I . . . , are not anything like him in his field of achievement.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: There's been a change certainly in the personality of the artist, don't you think?

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: That, I think, is a very important thing, isn't it?

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes, very much.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: It's almost a kind of revival of the personality as seen through a variety of enlarging and reducing glasses of what the artist might have been like, let's say, at the turn of the century.

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, for instance, let's say the Windsor tie of the past doesn't in the present day drag across the wet paint.

MR: No.

CHARLES SHEELER: That I think is a marked difference.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Well, do you think there's a -- well, obviously there's less concern with technique in the sense of ending up with a surface which does not show the evidence of a struggle. I think there's every intention to show that the struggle itself becomes the subject [inaud.] that aspect. Of course that's quite diametrically opposed to the way you work.

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes, that's one thing that I'm -- in fact, it could be a quote from Constance Rourke again when I was quoted as saying that I like the picture that arrived at its destination

without the scene of battle; that an efficient army buries its dead. For instance, there's a notable example of that in Eugene Meyers, who lives over on Fifth and part of the time in Washington otherwise; they have four very outstanding Cezannes, and those are very important ones. They're always reproduced in any of the big books that are supposed to be definitive ones; with Cezanne, no book can be definitive. And there's one of roses, pink roses. Well, you can almost hang your hat on some of those lumps of paint in those roses because he worked on them evidently for years. Nothing was removed of the underpainting, he just kept adding to it. Well, for me that is a hindrance to my integration with the picture. The underpaint doesn't enter in; in fact, in the final painting, when he felt it was completed, it was just a hindrance. I just want to see what was the last thing that he felt really made the picture, and I sort of stumble over him -- well, I'm referring to [inaud.] in general, but piled-up paint, even in our more recent artists, some of these present-day expressionists and so forth, various names, categories. I just don't want to see any more than is absolutely necessary of the materials, physical material that goes into a picture.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: I notice that you're working -- if I can switch the conversation a bit -- are you -- would you like to take a small break or how are you feeling? Can we continue?

Mrs. CHARLES SHEELER: Yes, why don't we rest. You'll probably be finished in a minute. So finish this tape.

CHARLES SHEELER: All right.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Could you just give me some idea of this: I saw that you were working on plexiglass material. How long has it been since you've been experimenting with this?

CHARLES SHEELER: Oh, 7 or 8 years, I guess.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Well, it's beyond experiment.

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, the approach, I mean the reason for it is, that's just a switch suggested and provided for by Bill Lane. I used to work on a piece of glass, regular window glass, the point being that I usually have for a good many years now, say, 8 or 10 years, completed to my satisfaction a small version of the picture which is essentially going to be 25" by 30" on canvas, and in arriving at the point where I stopped because I didn't just see the possibility of developing it farther with my experience as of that time, there are many things that occur in the areas of color and also possible changes in forms.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: These are in oil, aren't they, the small sketches?

CHARLES SHEELER: No. They're tempera.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Oh, they're tempera.

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes. And I found that on the glass -- the principle is the same -- I found that on the glass, which is what I used first, that I could just -- the physical greater ease of being able to remove that with a wet sponge in an area that I wanted to change than doing it on the watercolor paper, that is, a nellis [phon. sp.]; you know what a nellis board is?

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Yes, sure.

CHARLES SHEELER: Watercolor painted on a very stiff board. Because you couldn't take it off so readily on that paper as you can obviously on the glass, and it would be again objectionable

because it would be so much of the material -- just keep piling another color on top of another color where you wanted to mix several successive changes, maybe just from one area that was proving puzzling to you until you felt you had it. And that was the reason for that. Well, then when I became acquainted with Bill and he used to be stopping in here fairly frequently, he proposed, he said, "I think you would find it better -- well, for the matter of durability, accidents, the avoiding of accidents -- if you'd work on plexiglass which would be the same kind of a surface, but, if it fell over or dropped, the picture wouldn't be broken before enough . . ." That's the only reason for changing to that. And that I've been doing. He, every so often, on request, he sends me down to some place to get this nearby, a group of these 11 by 14 like you see in there, 11 by 14 pieces of plexiglass. But that's the reason for doing it because it's another illustration of what I said at the beginning of this direction of questioning: that I want the picture as complete as I am capable of making it by some means, first of all, in my mind, and then visually on the smaller form, smaller areas of what I want the ultimate picture to be and to have that all settled before I come to the larger picture.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Again, in other words, you usually will develop a single sketch, a color sketch, work it over, and there's not necessarily preliminary drawings. You don't do many drawings, do you?

CHARLES SHEELER: No. No, only the preliminary drawing, of course, in which the small sketch is confined.

[END OF TAPE 1]

[IT WOULD SEEM THAT SOME CONVERSATION WAS LOST BEFORE RECORDING RESUMED]

CHARLES SHEELER: . . . that would be about the only point of possibly passing. He just would ignore me entirely. It was a personal affront to him, personal affront.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Well, both you and Schamberg were in the Armory Show?

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: And you each had about six pieces?

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes, I had six definitely, and I'm sure he had just that same . . .

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: And Davies organized it?

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes. We were both invited by Davies, and Davies was, of course, the mainspring of the exhibition.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: His own work was never particularly effective.

CHARLES SHEELER: No. No. Those awful harlequin nudes that he did were disastrous, I think. But the spirit was all right, and he was buying himself the French things. He had a very fine collection when he died. Sometimes Americans too. And he was a tremendous influence. He was the center, the king in a group of prominent women who were collectors of various sorts. Mrs. John D. Rockefeller most especially; Lizzie Bliss, who he was just a god to as far as she was concerned. She had enormous numbers of his pictures and commissioned him to do murals, for instance, for International House. I was photographing at that time. I photographed those murals up there and so forth. Well, he was in a very nice spot for the influence that he was very anxious to disseminate among these people who would be the people that would carry the torch on, that is, in the sense of encouraging these people that he admired very much, I mean the younger Americans.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: You were still a student then when you exhibited in the Armory show?

CHARLES SHEELER: No, I wasn't a student; I was in a studio. I left the Academy in 1904, and I have had no formal education, art education from that date. I never went to any other post graduate course or anything like that.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: But Chase was hostile to the whole business?

CHARLES SHEELER: Oh, yes! Bitter.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Did Schamberg show some of the constructions like the analytical Cubist drawings?

CHARLES SHEELER: What?

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: What sort of things did he show in the Armory Show?

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, they were more realistic in appearance, but the color was entirely arbitrary, a landscape might have a pink sky, or trees might be pink and the sky blue, or -- well, just purely arbitrary color but still semi-naturalistic forms.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Oh. Because the piece that I know in the Arensberg Collection is anything

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, that was a later development.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: That was [inaud.].

CHARLES SHEELER: I don't know what the date on those was. There was a group of those things that were based specifically on machines and, as I said the other time when we were talking, I just don't know what became of the other. The one that you know, of course, is in the Philadelphia Museum; the ones in the Arensberg Collection came with that. What happened to the others I just don't know.

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: Tell to Martin, you know, about you and Schamberg Walk around, you know, in a little village by foot, you know, to try and get some material that we went, you know, on this trip, you know, in Pennsylvania.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Recently?

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes, last spring.

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: In your youth.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Oh.

CHARLES SHEELER: Eh?

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: In your youth.

CHARLES SHEELER: Oh, in my youth. I just don't -- that's very vague, I can't identify that.

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: Where we went in a one-room village that is very lovely, we tried to find a place where you used to hunt for material, cemetery and things like that. Tell that story.

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, I don't know what the story is except I just looked around, I mean I didn't have a diagram or any plot to uncover or to project, I mean I looked around

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: It was so dear to your heart because you were with your very dear friend there. Go on now. You remember.

CHARLES SHEELER: I don't have any more clue to it than just that I was always looking when I was out there. I had at that time -- well, let's see, that was post-Academy, beginning to work in the studio -- I came -- I was always interested in that we used to both go out with our boxes which was a part of our -- our sketch boxes

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Who was this, Charles?

CHARLES SHEELER: Morton Schamberg.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Oh, Schamberg.

CHARLES SHEELER: And we used to mutually like the country around Doylestown and we would go out there frequently with our sketching, we were educated by taste at that time and that, I guess, seemed more reasonable afterwards, or presently, than it did then. I recall his painting a picture of one girl, that is, it might be a half day working on a picture and then it was supposed to be finished. Well, we really didn't see any more than we could do at that time so that wasn't really imposing anything. And we used to go around there and then on one of the trips out there we called, we got around the neighborhood of a little pre-Revolutionary house, 1768, which was unoccupied at that time. Well, that intrigued me and, by somehow making inquiries, we found Dr. Mercer who was very prominent there, and he was very -- he wasn't interested in painting at all but he was interested in Americana, and he was a pioneer in collecting it in a big way: objects of domestic utility, farm implements, early farm implements and things like that. He had amassed an enormous collection. Also he built himself an enormous house of concrete, even the window frames were concrete, the whole thing was poured except the roof. And he had a pottery within walking distance of his own castle. Well, somehow we managed to get entree and he was a very delightful person, very outgoing and we were received on first meeting as though we were old friends and so forth. And of course he liked meeting people that had the same interest as he had, namely an acquaintance with Americana. So that was a good plus of an association, to encourage the association. And this little house that I noticed, it was just in the next large field to his land and I asked him about it, what he knew about it and did he think it might be available for rent, and so forth. Well, he couldn't say that but he told me the man's name who was then the present owner of the farm. Well, I went over there and asked. Well, first the fellow wasn't interested, and then I reported that back to Dr. Mercer. Well, he called him up and said that he wished he'd rent it to me as a personal favor to him. Well, he was an uncrowned king and a very benign one but Dr. Mercer sat up on the top of the totem pole in Doylestown in a very, very nice way, always for the good of the town, and, being a wealthy man as well as a very intelligent one in his specific interest which contacted mine. He was very influential. Before he hung up, the fellow had consented to rent it to me just on Dr. Mercer's request. So that was negotiated, and I had that for, I don't know, four or five years, I guess, and, in the latter part, I had already moved to New York, well then the chance of using it was so very slight that I just gave it up. Also, the farm had changed hands, and they were planning to make a development of small houses on the farm and this house would have been right -- instead of in a nice open 12-acre field, it would have been right in the midst of the development. And principally, as I say, I just didn't get over very often, maybe three times a year I'd get over for a week or something like that. Well, it wasn't worth maintaining it for that. But that was where I became acquainted with the American-Pennsylvania subjects as of that time. And you know it was

in the most advantageous way, that was long before I even dreamed of having an automobile and everything that was gained was done by shank's mare, if you know what that means, mare's shanks -- walking. And walking lengthy distances, ten miles or so around in circles in that area. And you really see better that way. You whiz by in a car, "Oh, that's something." Well, by the time you say, "that's something," it's ten miles back; you say, "Well, let's don't go back; we'll come to something else ahead." Well, maybe you see it in time or maybe you decide and are able to decide in time that you'd like to stop and consider it but there's a 50-50 chance that you're already too far past to bother going back because you can't make a trip if you're constantly retracing your steps.

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: Well, that's not quite true.

CHARLES SHEELER: Well

Mrs. CHARLES SHEELER: I'm the driver, and I go very slowly when I see something that you are interested in, and I go back too. So does Bill Lane when he takes you around.

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes, well I still stick to my story.

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: He doesn't like cars plus. Why don't you ask questions?

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: I was, you know, quite interested in Arensberg's Collection. I knew him in Los Angeles.

CHARLES SHEELER: Oh! You did?

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Yes, very briefly, very briefly.

CHARLES SHEELER: Where?

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: In Los Angeles, when he was there.

CHARLES SHEELER: Oh, you did?

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Yes.

CHARLES SHEELER: He was a Pittsburgher, you know.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: No! Really? I didn't know that.

CHARLES SHEELER: I guess fragments of his family still live there. His father had some sort of a crucible plant there. And he had two brothers.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: But I was curious as to the kind of salon that they used to run.

CHARLES SHEELER: That was something, you know.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: This is where you met Duchamp?

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes, I did. He lived right in the same apartment house they lived in, not in their apartment, but he had a small room and bath upstairs somewhere in the building, but he was living in the Arensberg place most of the time. Every night there was an influx of some of the prominent French artists following the Armory Show that migrated to New York and were there for a spell of -- some of them two or three years. Marcel, of course, never went back, that is, not for French

residency; has been here ever since.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Who else used to come in?

CHARLES SHEELER: Picabia and Marcel's brother-in-law, Jean Crotti. He wasn't very impressive as an artist. Picabia and Marcel were, I would say, the two high spots among the artists in there, [inaud.] or whatever term you have for [inaud.].

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Well, did you talk about your painting with Picabia and Duchamp at all?

CHARLES SHEELER: No. I had no -- well, Marcel spoke beautiful English then because he had been partly educated in England. But Picabia had none. Marcel was the only English-speaking one of that group.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Did he see your painting?

CHARLES SHEELER: Gleizes was there.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Uh-huh.

CHARLES SHEELER: And their -- all of them -- their wives, the wives frequently did some writing of some sort.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Did Duchamp see your painting at the time?

CHARLES SHEELER: Only occasionally. I remember once -- we became quite friendly. He was, I would say, not a very outgoing person, at least he wasn't as far as I was concerned but pleasant, he was all right. And I lived up at 147th Street and Convent Avenue at that time, had an apartment. And he was up there one night. And he never commented within my hearing on any of the American things that Arensberg might have had at that time because he had a few American things, not very many. I never heard any comment. But one night he was up at my apartment and there was a drawing that I had just completed, called Self-Portrait, a Conté crayon drawing. Did you ever see that? It's been published a good deal.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Mmhmm.

CHARLES SHEELER: And he sat down, pulled a chair up and sat down before it for a few minutes and when he got up, he said in that mild voice of his, "I like it." Period. That was all there was to it, but that was the only comment I ever heard him make. He was so much more involved in things that I didn't at that time, and I still don't because of course {inaud.} a variation on a repeat of an earlier remark that I made: those overtones that I never felt had any bearing to -- I still maintain for me painting is a purely visual matter. There are other media for other forms of expression and interest: literature; it might even be music. But there are always mysterious overtones in -- well, they would be, or at least maybe that's my inadequacy, I would call them nearer surrealism than

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Than Duchamp?

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Oh, yes, I think so.

CHARLES SHEELER: Some of the fancy things that he used to make, that is, fancy in the sense of

imagining, bore no relation to anything that anyone had ever seen before, individual parts, a ball of string and something else totally irrelevant combined with it in an arrangement.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Well, do you think that Duchamp and Picabia by their presence had any particular effect on American painting?

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, I couldn't say that.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: In a way they were interested in the machine as a

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes. Well, they had a purpose in being there, I think, of course. Maybe that wouldn't include Duchamp but the majority of the others it was the hope of good picking, that is I mean to say pick up sponsors, you know.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: They got around.

CHARLES SHEELER: And they did too.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Yes.

CHARLES SHEELER: This one wanted to publish a magazine, very extreme and radical magazine, that is I mean in the sense of advanced in regard to literature -- I don't mean political connotations -- but literature and expositions on painting and so forth. Walter would very frequently, I believe -- I know of instances where Davies provided funds, none of which were maintained for very long; they'd come out with a few issues and then you wouldn't hear anything more of them. And there was a lot of that business.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Now they've become documents.

CHARLES SHEELER: I don't know whether that -- that wasn't continuous -- that was at a later time. But, well, the French, various French people, would trickle over to New York, they'd scratch around in the barnyard to see if they could uncover anything that they could take back with them or that they could spend to what they hoped was an advantage to themselves.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Well, didn't Duchamp get involved with Dreier here?

CHARLES SHEELER: There was one -- I can't tell you his name at present, but we would be in a gathering, this was down on 8th Street, that was at a later date, but they were still in evidence, that is the French migrants and there was one fellow you'd see looking up and down if there were some people there that -- women that represented means of some kind and so forth, looking up and down deciding whether the fur coat represented anything more substantial that might be picking, you know, sort of as taking inventory.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: You're disillusioning me.

CHARLES SHEELER: A lot of that went on in those days. It made me sick.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: You're disillusioning me. That's good. What about Katherine Dreier? Didn't she get involved in this too?

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, she was madly in pursuit personally of . . .

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Duchamp?

CHARLES SHEELER: Marcel.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: It's interesting that you didn't think . . .

CHARLES SHEELER: I just knew her very slightly, a few times at meetings. Well, I have such a pronounced allergy that it was intentional that I only saw her a few times. One time -- Walter didn't like her either -- but he was a very shy person, and he never wanted to offend anyone consciously. And she used to sort of hang on to him too, not from the economic standpoint, because she was evidently very well situated, but he became a pivotal center instinctively because of the magnificent mind that he had and his comprehension, ready comprehension, of all that was already stirring, and, just to be associated with him, she'd be there sometimes. One time he had an engagement to take her to lunch and he postponed it as long as he could and then he had to do something. He called me up, then I was living in New York, and asked if I wouldn't join them just to ease the situation of taking her to lunch. So I talked about the beauty of outside plumbing all during lunch. I don't think it was a great success.

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: Who was that?

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Katherine Dreier.

CHARLES SHEELER: I don't think it was a great success but at least . . .

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: I hope this isn't going to be published.

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: Well, I hope not.

CHARLES SHEELER: . . . it caused ripples in the image that was being reflected on the otherwise still pond.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Charles, who else of the American artists used to come to the Arensberg's?

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, Louis Bouche.

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: And Isadora Duncan.

CHARLES SHEELER: Oh, Lord!

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: That's a funny story. I wish you would tell him. You better not publish it but anyhow . . .

CHARLES SHEELER: . . . a number of times, it was just the counterpart, it was the uptown branch of Grand Central because every night that place would be filled with people, particularly that appeared when all the French decided to come over and look over New York and specifically the Arensberg place. And among those -- I didn't meet her-- one time she came in there with somebody, that is somebody who knew Arensberg, and, as she was leaving, -- Walter wasn't prepared for it -- she threw her arms violently around his neck and her considerable avoirdupois and -- he wasn't prepared -- she flattened him to the ground, they fell on the floor and when he got up two front teeth were missing. He was going around for several days this way with a handkerchief up to his face 'til he got repairs. But there were silly little things like that haven't anything to do with -- of importance.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Well, do you think that the French group, that advance guard had any

particular -- first of all, I'm sure they had no interest in American artists?

CHARLES SHEELER: Oh, no! No. Because they didn't know I existed. When they were at Arensbergs particularly -- Walter and I became very devoted personal friends, very promptly, it was just one of those things that clicked right away when we met -- and Walter to some extent liked my pictures and, as you know, he had a group of them. But the French people they were polite to these friends. Anybody that was there was there by just as much right as they were, even if they didn't know him or her, and even if he were American. Because they were very strongly at that time, well, as they always are, the French are always France over all. That's a quality in the French that never made me very sympathetic to France as a people. It's so very pronounced. You know that. You've seen it just as much as I have, I'm sure. And why, I don't know what it's based on. Well, for instance, you look at the war. France was in a hot spot. We were very surprised to find that she was not more in a defensive position than she was because we'd heard for years that France had one of the great armies of the world and all that sort of thing. Well, what happened to it when really it was needed? And there was a call of "Help! Help!" to the whole world: "Save the gem of the world!" I mean "France is in danger." That meant something more than any other country. In their crises, they're always that way.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Well, it interests me

CHARLES SHEELER: And they're on the point of, as you may have read, of more or less dropping out of NATO which is for her own skin as much as any of the other countries that are, you know, on account of this placing missiles on her. She doesn't feel that other countries, notably, of course, England and United States, have kept her up to date on missiles.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: She's been overrun a few times. I can understand . . .

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes, I know.

MR: . . . it's a pretty understandable thing.

CHARLES SHEELER: But wouldn't that encourage you to try and not go on repeating history so often? They always leave it to the last moment, the invasion and so forth.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: You know, what I fail to understand, I'm afraid, is the fact that these Frenchmen came over, Picabia and Duchamp, of course they were both in a sense pranksters . . .

CHARLES SHEELER: They were what?

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: . . . they were pranksters, they were sort of

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes. Well, Marcel had officially stopped painting before he came over.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Well, they were never really seriously part of any movement, they were both very playful characters and their painting was in a sense almost a kind of a spoof of what was going on at the time.

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: But I don't understand how -- well, what I'm trying . . . to get at

CHARLES SHEELER: Marcel, of course, was in a class by himself, I mean he was vastly superior in

every way to them. He had a very fine mind and I think his pictures are very outstanding in French art or any art. I mean, you know, the pictures like -- I'm sure you know as well as I do.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Yes.

CHARLES SHEELER: Nude Descending a Staircase, and The King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Mmhmm. I like . . .

CHARLES SHEELER: All of those things.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: I even like The Bride.

CHARLES SHEELER: Do you?

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Oh, yes. I think it's a fascinating sociological record, you know. I don't think it's a painting.

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, it's pretty hard to be -- there has to be a new name invented for much of his work, I think.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: You know that's a very interesting story about the Arensberg Collection. I guess you know that it was offered to UCLA?

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes, I do.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: And I was there during all this business.

CHARLES SHEELER: Were you?

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Purely as a student and listening to it. And the condition was very simple, it was merely to put up a building.

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes. Well, that's it. I had frequent contact then with them even when they were out there. Walter never wrote, he hated to write a letter and so he just didn't write letters. But Lou would keep us posted, an occasional bulletin. And one of her letters was all out on what had happened. They were at that time -- I never heard beyond that -- they were at the point of suing and I suppose that maybe they had to break the contract that they had. Didn't they?

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: I didn't know anything about that. All I know is that every museum in the country was trying for the Collection.

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes, I know.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: But I think it was well that it went to Philadelphia, and they show it very well there, don't you think?

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes, I thought it was a beautiful .

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: I mean the rooms open up properly and . . .

CHARLES SHEELER: Oh, yes.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: . . . you can follow every development.

CHARLES SHEELER: I thought it looked very beautiful, very, very beautiful. I showed you that corridor of Brancusi's. Isn't that magnificent?

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Yes. I thought there was more of a serious contact between American and French artists, you know, at the Arensbergs and somewhere, but apparently not? I didn't realize it was quite so superficial. I guess, whatever influence the American artists may have had, they got by being in Paris and working and not necessarily .

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes, all but Duchamp and Picabia -- the people that came over here because they were busy digging their own ditches [inaud.] being any influence on anybody.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Well, Picabia has always sort of remained a kind of a cabaret artist, really.

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes. Well, he was really -- drawing was sort of an avocation for him, anyhow, because he was pretty substantially fixed, I understood, at that time -- and, well, this is a form of occupation that is not to be too forward. I never thought of him as really a very serious artist. I could be wrong, of course.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: There was just you and Bouche really of the American group?

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, not quite. Let's see, who else?

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: This is lethal. [Drinks are being served.] Thank you gratefully.

CHARLES SHEELER: Schamberg went there. I don't think Schamberg was there more than two or three times.

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: Schamberg is the one that I asked you to tell the story how you used to go and walk around

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes. I don't know what there was except

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: He was a dear friend of yours

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes. I know that.

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: Because I put it on to make the tape.

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes. Is that still running?

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: It's running all the time.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: It's running.

CHARLES SHEELER: Oh, well, it's not very much now, it's more just sort of conversation.

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: Well, go ahead. Tell him about Schamberg. Isn't that right? Wouldn't you like Martin to know more?

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Well, I think he's an enigmatic figure, and nobody knows anything about him really, and I only know one painting by him, only one.

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: Well, the fact is that he was such a terrifically good friend of Charles'.

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes, well, that I guess almost everybody knows.

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: And I think Martin would like to hear the end of it.

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, I don't know how to put that in words. It was an association, and we had similar likings, and when we could manage it economically . . .

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: You keep him going, Martin.

CHARLES SHEELER: . . . we would go somewhere after a few days to see -- maybe there would be things that either of us would want there, but I don't know anything more that could be put into words. It was certainly a most sympathetic friendship. And it was just an overwhelming blow to me when he was suddenly taken off in three days with the Spanish flu that was -- I was home and stayed in the house because people were just dropping in Philadelphia like flies during this -- it was very hard hit, Philadelphia -- and Schamberg, we were in the same building, we had studios, separate studios in the same building out on Chestnut Street and he was confined to the house with what just seemed to be a superficial cold, and I had just a suggestion of one and the doctor said, well, I think you better just stay in the house for the time being because, as I said, there was this very pronounced epidemic. Well, I did that for about three days, nothing more than that, and then I went down to the studio and I saw that there was mail in his letterbox. That's funny because evidently he isn't around. And then I called up the house or the apartment where his family lived and where he lived and it was just the last few hours. He developed the flu and then spinal meningitis on top of that and that was that. Three days! Well, of course, that was something that you didn't adapt yourself to immediately.

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: Charles, was that [inaud.] published a book telling to Martin about a man I don't know his name exactly, who -- you had quite a time, you know, about some paintings, and he was going to buy it when you start.

CHARLES SHEELER: Oh, yes. That hasn't anything to do with this; we're not going into things like that or anything.

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: All right. That's very interesting.

CHARLES SHEELER: [inaud.] he's one of our very wealthy New Yorkers but that's

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: Well, you don't have to mention the name.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Well, I mean I think that

CHARLES SHEELER: Oh, well, I don't think it means very much. We're -- I believe that, as I understand, he's trying to get some facts about what I think in relation

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: Yes. Oh, yes. You keep on asking him questions.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: No, I really don't think that

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, that's just gossip, that's all, and he's not making

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: Well, it isn't gossip. It's factual. Such thing can happen.

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, I mean

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: [inaud.???] a girl . . . one day . . . she was starved, and that's a very nasty You keep on asking.

CHARLES SHEELER: This man came into the gallery, he saw one of my Conté crayon drawings that now belongs to the Museum of Modern Art . . .

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: You keep going.

CHARLES SHEELER: . . . it eventually belonged to Mrs. Rockefeller, and she gave my group that she had, some six or seven or whatever it was, pictures, she gave the whole group to the Museum of Modern Art when she divided her collection three ways several years before her death. One part went to Dartmouth, and one to Northampton, I guess, and the third to the Museum of Modern Art. And on request through Edith Halpert, she, instead of dividing them up where she had several, she did agree [inaud.] to give my group as a block to the Museum of Modern Art, instead of dividing it up three ways.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: I wondered, since we seem to be going on with this -- on this matter of technique, I'd like to come back to an earlier point, if I may.

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes. Sure. Anything you want.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: You were talking about doing the small sketch on plastic, first on glass and later you switched over to plastic. As far as procedure, do you enlarge? Just a pencil drawing or an ink drawing on the canvas?

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: And then underpainting? Could you just give me some idea of the technique you favor?

CHARLES SHEELER: No, I don't do any of that underpainting, like the Italians notably -- well, most of the Europeans up to an early date though oil painting was invented by the Van Eycks. The questions pertaining to technique: I don't see what significance they have because it isn't -- I mean everyone instinctively finds their own vocabulary, and I don't see what good it does.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: I think the only real significance that it would have is that you've done most of the layout and it's a matter of then executing the final painting. If you've done most of it through your sketch, all the struggle is on the small thing?

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes, that's it. Well, mostly. Sometimes you run into blockades on the final thing but it is largely worked out in the preliminary. Going back to my remarks that an efficient army buries its dead, I don't want to see the pictures that I like and I don't see the struggle that was passed through in order to arrive at what we are presently witnessing in the picture.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: One of my favorite paintings has always been the Smith College Railroad.

CHARLES SHEELER: Oh, yes. That's been a very popular picture.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: I liked your story about the engineers.

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes. Oh, did I tell you that?

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Well, you started to tell me.

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, just that they wrote -- some club that had to do with the Army services -- they were a group of engineers and they had a club somewhere in Maryland and they had come across a reproduction of that. That was one of my paintings that I did, one of the six paintings that I did published in '39 by Fortune, "Sources of Power," and that was then the modern streamlined engine. And there was the Yankee Clipper. And all that remains of Yankee Clipper now is that painting, which is up in the Rhode Island School of Design. And also we lost Leslie Howard on that trip, too.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: The Walker paintings, you know, the two pictures that we have, were painted about where? What area, do you know?

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, the one Midwest was painted around the Milwaukee area.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Oh, the Milwaukee area.

CHARLES SHEELER: While I was out there, I was out a number of times, it was under the sponsorship of Otto Spaeth. Do you know him?

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: I know of him.

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes. And Eloise, of course, is very active in the American Federation. She probably works on a 24-hour schedule.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: She just retired.

CHARLES SHEELER: Has she?

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: At least I read a bulletin to the effect that she's just

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, it couldn't be because she's having another baby; that's in the past. Yes. Well, I don't wonder because she's had a pretty hectic life. First of all, Otto has been a great source of anxiety, you know. He doesn't have any vocal chords any more and she's been very, very tirelessly devoted to him in helping him in every way return to some form of intelligent speech.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: But you painted the Midwest barns through [inaud.].

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, it was while I was in that area. One of his salesmen was going out into Wisconsin some distance, I mean an all-day drive, and Otto suggested, or offered, if I wanted to I could ride along with him -- always with the idea that maybe I'd see something along the way, and that's where that one occurred, somewhere in Wisconsin, but I haven't the slightest idea where. We'd just stop -- he was a very amenable person of course engaged by Otto. I could stop anywhere I wanted to. It was all right with him. He had several objectives of people that he had to see on the way, but it left a lot of open space in the day and but we could stop just wherever I wanted to. And the other one, as you know, is Shaker Barn up at Lebanon in Upper New York State.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: They're both quite different, I think. They illustrate two different aspects one uses a kind of flat planes of color intersecting.

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, that represented a period in which things were of a similar nature and we have the two phases there, as you've just said, very plainly in the later one where there is the memory of a view that was imposed on the present view.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: You know, just coming back to some earlier notes here that I made, I was quite interested in your comments on Goya, you know, to go to another topic.

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, maybe I was too brief on that because it certainly wasn't meant to be, but it is an emphatic preference for me, but Goya can be just as great an artist -- it isn't any wit -- far be it -- I couldn't do it if I wanted to. And I wouldn't want to first of all. But Velasquez was a more direct appeal to me than Goya was. Well, a good bit of Goya's work and I suppose somebody should do it or good if they do, it had a good bit of propaganda, that is, I mean connotations, the times, you know . . .

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: He was very involved in his times.

CHARLES SHEELER: . . . where people were slain. Have you been in the Prado?

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: No. No.

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, [inaud.] used to be, it's all rearranged -- I've heard from somebody, oh, in the last few years that's been there that it's all been rearranged in divisions and locations in the Museum. That's a very, very special Museum, of course.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: I think there was -- when you come down to this Goya as an artist who had been through this himself, was interested in the Napoleonic revolution, is, of course, for me a very major figure.

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes, because he was very outgoing in the politics of his country. Velasquez is just the opposite, so far as I ever have read.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: The fact that an artist gets involved in these things -- well, look at a man like Shahn, for instance.

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes. Yes.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: I don't think he's any a lesser artist. I think it made him a more significant artist.

CHARLES SHEELER: It may be. It may be. Well, I can't determine those things. The things that -- this is not for inclusion, of course.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: No.

CHARLES SHEELER: I don't know why that's running because this isn't material you want, is it particularly?

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Well, it's all mixed up, it is, and it isn't; I mean it's just conversation at this point but

[MACHINE TURNED OFF.]

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: What's this? Oh.

CHARLES SHEELER: What is it?

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: It's about William Lane. William H. Lane. I should probably know as much as I could about him. I heard somewhere yesterday that -- not yesterday but the other day, that Lane just strolled into the Downtown Gallery and became interested in your work and then gradually began building a collection. Did he begin building his collection with your work, Charles? Or did he . . . ?

CHARLES SHEELER: No. Well, I was early, but he spread out; he spread out very promptly. I was probably the first that he bought.

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: It is probable that he started to collect Charles's paintings and then went and spread out.

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, that's exactly what I said. But it was all very close together. He did buy one of my pictures and then there may have been a little space before he came back and -- well, he'd like to have some more, that is, I mean more pictures from the Gallery. Then Dove became a very outstanding favorite of his. He has a beautiful collection of Dove's, very swell. And Dove is a very great favorite of mine, too.

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: But why his collection is unique, there is no other American collector has bought, you know, the way he did of serious work from beginning, periodically changing.

CHARLES SHEELER: He said he has 40 pieces of all fields, I did several lithographs at one time; he has those. He has the only available -- that was available -- Conté crayon drawing. He looks longingly to some of the larger ones which are owned but nothing can be done about that presently at any rate. And he has oils; he has temperas.

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: But he has from the beginning to the end, the periodic changes, you see.

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes. He came in here one day with a -- when he used to be visiting every several weeks -- and a sort of a Cheshire, the corners of his mouth turned up. It turns up when he's pleased, and he had that look on him, and he had a little package in his hand, and he said, "I bet you don't know what's in his box." I took -- I started at the top. "I know. A little Van Cortlandt," one of those little cabinets. No, it wasn't that. And then finally, he got around to opening it -- announcements from the dealers in sort of the same categories of American pictures, contemporary American pictures. They know, it's gotten around that he's collecting Sheeler's and, if they come up on one in a sale they notify him and he has a look at it. Well, one of them had told about a little early panel that he had. And, when he opened the package, it was a little panel about that size, about 3 1/4 by 4 1/4. That went all the way back to 1904, which is the Chase days. Both Schamberg and I had small sketch boxes about that size that went into your jacket pocket and two little wooden panels in them. It was our theory you should never be caught with your sketch boxes down or not present. And it was one of those little panels -- a beach scene. And it also had traces of Chase's suggestion, he did it in his own pictures, notably his still life paintings -- fish and other . . .

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Glittering?

CHARLES SHEELER: No. He mixed white enamel with his regular oil paint on his palette and it gave it naturally an enamel quality. Well, this had that. But 1904, that's the earliest one.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Was it a fish?

CHARLES SHEELER: Oh, no, it was a little beach scene, just people. It was very sketchy, just little dots of color representing people on the beach.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: I was interested in your comments earlier about Demuth. You didn't really know him very well?

CHARLES SHEELER: No. Well, I saw him just in passing through the Academy, in opposite directions because he was working in the illustration class and I was just in the painting class, still life, and life class and drawing from the cast.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Don't you think he was kind of a fascinating phenomenon? He really divided himself in half as two different people, didn't he? But the little beach scenes and the illustrations and then the highly geometric pictures like My Egypt.

CHARLES SHEELER: Mmhmm. He did a good many of -- there is a prominent collection of those also. I think Frank Osborne -- he isn't around any more -- collected most of those. They were illustrations certainly far removed from what we have been accustomed to think of as illustrations as being -- because they were quite abstract except that they did deal with figures. He was very fond of Henry James --

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Yes.

CHARLES SHEELER: . . . you know, The Turn of the Screw.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Of course. They own that in the Barnes Collection.

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes. Well, Barnes got -- had a group of them too. Well, he didn't . . . they're quite

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Don't you think it's interesting that an artist could divide himself in quite this way, because he was really painting these architectural subjects at the same time?

CHARLES SHEELER: That I couldn't say.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: I'll check that. But it really does seem like a

CHARLES SHEELER: I would think -- but that isn't necessarily authentic -- I would think that the illustrations came before the Sir Christopher Wren church and all those things, that group of things; I think they came before.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: But does Demuth's work interest you at all? Were you particularly attracted to it?

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes, to some extent. He never was a favorite artist of mine, American artist, not to the extent that a Stuart Davis is, for instance.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Of the earlier men, let's say when you were in school, who were your favorites and who still stand out? I know your admiration for Chase. But he was a terrific teacher.

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes. And he was -- well, he was a great technician in the direction that he was aspiring to. He had a great deal of [inaud.] all right . . . to parrot.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Did Davies himself have any interest for you as a painter?

CHARLES SHEELER: No. Well, he did in my earliest experiences, that is, way back in, well, a little post-Academy days. And I had a sort of a dreamy period there for a while, you know those -- it wasn't necessarily, but it was in the spirit of, you know, those large women walking out through a bucolic landscape.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: When was this?

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, I said shortly following the Academy days.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Before them.

CHARLES SHEELER: Mmhmm.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Well, Davies is generating a great deal of interest again today, you know, and I think it's wonderful because I think

CHARLES SHEELER: Is he!

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Yes, he is.

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, that I don't know.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Only recently there was a -- well, about a year or two ago, there was a rather important series of showings that included Davies, I think it was the Zabriskie Gallery; and just yesterday I saw three of them.

CHARLES SHEELER: Is that so?

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: I think he's kind of a fascinating person, and

CHARLES SHEELER: Oh, he's an attractive personality, that I know. Of course, he was a very -- he had his peculiarities. I suppose that could be said of anyone, sometimes they're more conspicuous in some than in others -- but he was a very, very shy person and it was something extraordinary if he ever invited anybody to his studio, especially any of the younger artists. And I was up there once or twice on his invitation, then I used to, with a slight pickup of friendliness, I went on a couple of occasions to galleries where he was going to pick up a Picasso or some French painting that he had engaged. He was very friendly and he would occasionally send me a significant book like -- oh -- well, it was a Berenson book that he sent on

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Italian painting?

CHARLES SHEELER: No. Tactile values, I think. Didn't Berenson write a book on that?

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Well, I don't know. Conceivably.

CHARLES SHEELER: Then he sent a book on Kandinsky. Things like that he did. I was living in Philadelphia so that was following our very vague association other than his invitation to show at the Armory Show. Then I didn't really know him; it was just that he knew I'd been in the Show. Then later, when I moved to New York, as I say, I did see him occasionally. And also I was associated with the De Zayas Gallery for several years in the mid-20's. And Davies -- we showed, I mean I was associated as co-administrator of it -- with the financial

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: You were showing photographs though, weren't you, at the De Zayas?

CHARLES SHEELER: No, I was there to sell paintings when I could. They were darn hard to sell at that time.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: He was showing primitive art and all sorts of things, wasn't he?

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes. He had Negro sculpture over from Paris. He made frequent trips. I always stayed at the Gallery on 5th Avenue, several of two locations on Fifth Avenue, 630, and I forget what the previous one was, on the opposite side of the street. Well, Davies was one of our 3 or 4 customers. Eventually, in a matter of 3 years or so, the gallery had to fold up because 3 or 4 customers weren't enough to support an expensive gallery on 5th Avenue and the expensive pictures he showed. We had all the French moderns and some of the best examples of them: Matisse, Picasso, Braque, well, you know, the whole list. But there was Miss Bliss and Davies and John Quinn who was a very big collector, a very lavish collector. And, well, that was about it. They couldn't absorb enough to keep us afloat. And so the gallery closed.

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: You also did photography for that charming man. You remember, we went in -- he had a private gallery.

CHARLES SHEELER: Who?

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: . . . that died from diabetes.

CHARLES SHEELER: Oh, yes. Joseph Brummer.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Oh, Brummer. Yes.

CHARLES SHEELER: He was a very close friend. There was a time when I -- I don't think it's necessary to go into this in your record -- but there was a time when, in order to continue painting, I had to find some means of supporting myself until such time and if I could really live in some scale at painting.

MRS. CHARLES SHEELER: Well, you don't have to be ashamed of that.

CHARLES SHEELER: I'm not ashamed of it. Not at all. And because it was the experience of everybody unless they happened to have had a fortune to start with, the experience of practically everyone in the professions -- somewhere along the line I met Brummer. I was photographing then, a good bit of the time, for various prominent collectors and galleries. Brummer was one of my star clients, and Knoedler's, I made a number of photographs for them. Harris Watson, the great Persian, oriental dealer on 5th Avenue; you know where that is. I don't know whether he's still in business. He isn't, is he?

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: I don't think so.

CHARLES SHEELER: What happened? Did he die or just retire?

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: [inaud.]

CHARLES SHEELER: Well, I did a good many things for him.

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: You learned photography where? In Philadelphia at the Academy or . . . ?

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes. Self-educated, because I had the usual \$5 box Brownie when box

Brownies were the greatest thing, and you were really big. Well, I just used that ineffectually as a teenager, early teenager, and then came a time later with art education and how to keep on painting and so forth. Well, Schamberg and I both -- he was in about the same situation -- and we thought that photography was . . . it was difficult to decide what could you do that wouldn't be detrimental to what you were aiming for, you know, that could easily be, I mean it could be in a separate channel and needn't cross the path of painting and all that sort of thing. He went in for portrait photography

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Schamberg?

CHARLES SHEELER: Yes. And I went in for architectural photography, starting right at the bottom with the architecture of Philadelphia, and that was after learning the rudiments of photography and processing. It was encouraging. I had quite a good many architects engaged me to photograph the house that had been completed. And then I began to add to that, I had commissions. I'd go around to see these people and show some of my photographs, and people would respond to them, and then they'd call me later and would I come and make some photographs of their house or whatever, and I got to -- took on, in addition to the architects, collectors of notable things. Eventually that built up to Mrs. Eugene Meyers' famous Chinese collection which is one of the great private collections in the world, I believe, and others, Brummer. I connected up with him. Well, that was love at first sight as far as Joe was concerned. Oh, I was the photographer that he had been waiting all his life for, and he couldn't be enthusiastic enough about the work that I did. And I worked for him during that period of years whatever it was. As I just said, several times, Knoedler's -- I did some fine things for them, and others

MARTIN FRIEDMAN: Well

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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