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Oral history interview with Victor D. Spark,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Victor D. Spark on August 5, 1975. The interview took place in New York City, and was conducted by Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. The sound quality for this interview is poor throughout, leading to an abnormally high number of inaudible sections.

Interview

PAUL CUMMINGS: Hello. It's the fifth of August, 1975. And it's Paul Cummings, talking to Victor Spark, in his office—apartment, in New York City. Background. You were born in Brooklyn, right, 1898, May 16. Uh, and you went to New York University after that. But how—what was Brooklyn like? Was there a big family or an art interest? What—

VICTOR SPARK: Now, I was two years old, when we moved from Brooklyn to New York. Although, when I was first married, we lived in Brooklyn, on Columbia Heights. And we had left—my family still had friends in Brooklyn. One in particular, a neighbor, was a colonel in the Civil War.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who was he?

VICTOR SPARK: Colonel Ricketts [ph] was his name.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: And when we'd visit with him, that's how I became infected with an interest in military things. He took out his sword—

PAUL CUMMINGS: No. All the—

VICTOR SPARK: —showed me how he cut down a Confederate that was comin' up in back, uh.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] Uh-oh, how—

VICTOR SPARK: In those days, kids always played so—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right—uh, they still do, I think—[laughs] look around.

VICTOR SPARK: —so much.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's great.

VICTOR SPARK: They're a little sophisticated now, with television.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, I guess it changes the name of the game but it's still the same game.

VICTOR SPARK: Well, kids six to seven years old can watch a Western. But in those days, they played cowboys and Indians and Buffalo Bill was playing. And they played soldiers. I forget just how it was played. But usually, if they—they picked up objects around the house and could transport them, you know, into [02:00] weapons and so forth with a bit of imagination—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Uh, right, everybody's, uh—

VICTOR SPARK: —especially with a [inaudible] that was adopted. You had a few that [inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] Uh—now where did you come to—when you moved into Manhattan, your family?

VICTOR SPARK: Uh, we went to Harlem.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

VICTOR SPARK: And that was in—

PAUL CUMMINGS: So that was in 1900.

VICTOR SPARK: I think, like when I was about three years old, we were near there. Probably 109th Street and Park Avenue. And then we moved when I first started school, at the age of five, uh—I remember the number. Eighteen-Fifteen Madison Avenue, one block from the school. I passed there recently. It is a mess.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] It's another world. Yeah. Uh—well, what schools did you go to, then?

VICTOR SPARK: Well, I went to elementary school.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: And then we moved to the West Side. And I continued. And I went to elementary school a block away. I think it was P.S. 103. Then when we moved to the West Side, to West 119th Street. I went to P.S. 10, which was a school famous for athletics.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Were you involved in sports?

VICTOR SPARK: Uh, well, I used to tag along with the, uh, teams.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

VICTOR SPARK: But, uh, I'd run—class athletics there. They had top athletes, even though, uh, they were small. But every evening, we, you know, we would have athletics where we lived—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really?

VICTOR SPARK: —run races near the park. And then I went to Townsend Harris Hall and there I went into athletics. I was on the tennis team and the track team and basketball team or—it was good, right. And then, for fun, we'd play [04:00] soccer.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] And now soccer's becoming the whole new, uh, the new game. Well, did you have—I noticed you went to, uh, New York University—

VICTOR SPARK: Yes. Then, uh, I went to—we moved to Hamilton [ph] Terrace.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

VICTOR SPARK: And, uh, that's where I went to Townsend Harris Hall. It was only a block or two away. Later on, it moved downtown. But it was like a prep school for CCNY. And then I spent a half a year there, transferred to NYU, where I spent another half year. And then I enlisted in the Marine Corps and I served—

PAUL CUMMINGS: The war. Uh—

VICTOR SPARK: —two years in the Marine Corps.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What did you do in the Marines?

VICTOR SPARK: I was—I went overseas. I was in a combat outfit and was in the 6th Regiment. They had one brigade attached to an Army division. And I was a sergeant when I got out. And then I was discharged. And I went back to NYU and finished. Got married soon as I was graduated. Went to Europe for seven and a half months.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You got a bachelor of science.

VICTOR SPARK: Yeah. Well, that's because I didn't want to take Latin. Like I wasn't any good at—

PAUL CUMMINGS: What did you major in?

VICTOR SPARK: I think I majored in French, because I could speak it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] Was that a language around the house or—

VICTOR SPARK: No, with friends [ph].

PAUL CUMMINGS: —you picked it up in the Army—uh, Marines?

VICTOR SPARK: Uh, the service—yes—active was in Germany [ph].

PAUL CUMMINGS: I see.

VICTOR SPARK: Part of the time—in between fronts, they, there was a billeting [ph]. There were only two of us could speak French, in the whole regiment—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really?

VICTOR SPARK: —at that time. Now everybody can speak it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] Oh, that's fantastic. So why did you then go to Europe, right after school and getting married?

VICTOR SPARK: Well, I was going to work with my father in the hotel business. And that was a summer [06:00] hotel. It would fill in the time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Uh-huh. Where—what hotel was that?

VICTOR SPARK: Uh, he had a—he was a member of a small company. They had three or four—three places, I think. And one of them was a summer place. That was his. But they had three—uh, he had two—one hotel in Brooklyn and one hotel in Manhattan. And they—you know, in those days, it took quite a bit, you know, to buy a hotel. And then, uh, we went to Europe, you know, went to the museums and all that. I used to go to museums—like any other kid, when you were five years old, six years old. You went to a museum by yourself. You didn't need any escort.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, you only had the Metropolitan, at—

VICTOR SPARK: Yeah. Well, that was enough.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That was it. Uh [laughs]—

VICTOR SPARK: Uh, that was it. So I would go see the mummies.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

VICTOR SPARK: Funny how—uh, I remember two pictures vividly, in those days.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really.

VICTOR SPARK: One was Winslow Homer, *The Gulf Stream*—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah. Right.

VICTOR SPARK: —and the other was the Meissonier of Napoleon, you know, Friedland and Danzig [ph]—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, right.

VICTOR SPARK: —two Meissonier, Friedland and I think they called another one *1812* or something like that. I forget the name.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And I forgot—

VICTOR SPARK: *18*—but they were in a sort of an alcove. And I don't why. I guess, a child attaches himself to certain things.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative], but you—in college you didn't study art history or, there was no—

VICTOR SPARK: No. No. I had an accelerated course. When I came back, I was more mature. So, uh, I did three years in two and got out, got married. And I was in the hotel business with my father 'til 1929. But I used to do decorating for the different places—

PAUL CUMMINGS: [08:00] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

VICTOR SPARK: —uh, buy antiques and so forth. And through contact with that field I went into the art business when the hotel business went sour. So I had to start late in the art business, what there was left of it—very [ph]—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, that was not—

VICTOR SPARK: Wasn't too much left.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —a very grand time to come into the art—

VICTOR SPARK: Uh, was a good time to learn. But it wasn't a good time to make money.

PAUL CUMMINGS: For business. Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: Well, you didn't have to make much. Those dealers who could make some money were quite well off. But the, uh—it was very rough. Those who had been dealers for 10 years and had accumulated some money and hadn't lost it, they were all right. But a great many of them, uh, couldn't take the difference between the '30s and the '20s. There were quite a few suicides at that time—a great—I would say almost a great number, along with stockbrokers. Common form of suicide was to jump out the window. But starting in then, I mean, your object was just to make whatever you could, however little it was. And, of course, the bigger dealers would sit there moaning about what a wonderful time they had in the '20s, and how terrible it was in the '30s. But there was also a type of dealer developing who probably would have made money in anything, because they were unscrupulous, you know, and they did all sorts of—and almost—today they sound interesting but—

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

VICTOR SPARK: —at the time, they were pretty raw. And they—you know, they had a good selling point.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: They were selling pictures for someone who had lost his shirt in the market and had to raise money—any [10:00] kind. Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Whatever they could.

VICTOR SPARK: They might have borrowed the picture from another dealer. And then they were just trying to make money from each other. I think it was so bad that if a dealer had 30 days' credit in the auction house, he would buy the picture, take \$25 profit, just to have the use of the money. One day—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Turn it over.

VICTOR SPARK: Yeah. And then put pictures—his own pictures in the paper, what he owned [ph]. Uh, it was pretty raw.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Don't you think that sometimes, and when times are more difficult, that, uh, one is more inventive and, you know, kind of—

VICTOR SPARK: Well, you were up against a stone wall! I mean, it wasn't a question of materials so much. It was a question of being able to go out and sell. Some succeeded, like old man Newhouse [ph]. And, uh, it was surprising that, at that time, when you could have had anything you wanted from any dealer on loan—they—a lot of these salesmen weren't interested. They preferred to get something worthless and cheat the client, you know. Then it was all their money. And some were all right. Some weren't. Some made fortunes. They swapped pictures for land and then oil was discovered on the land, and [inaudible] had been poor, became a millionaire.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah. Right.

VICTOR SPARK: Hall and Long [ph]—They knew absolutely nothing. They never looked at the front of the picture.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

VICTOR SPARK: They looked first what the label was on the back.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There's still dealers like that!

VICTOR SPARK: Well, they liked pedigree.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: There were firms who were substantial. But I think, uh, some of them went to the wall. Uh, they d—[ph]

PAUL CUMMINGS: You never worked for another dealer, did you, uh?

VICTOR SPARK: Well, I started at the Weitzner [ph] Gallery as a sort of an apprentice with an arrangement:

whatever [12:00] I bought, I would bring in and we would divide profits. Played in to that, so much [ph]. Uh, when you sold a Thomas Doughty you were using for \$200, there wasn't a great deal to divide.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: And you—and then, prices were very low. But what amazed me is, in looking back at the records for the 1920s, they were low also—much lower than you think. But the clients didn't go to auctions except on rare occasions. And the difference between the retail price and what you'd get it for at auction was enormous—enormous.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you have people—did you buy for collectors, in those days—?

VICTOR SPARK: Well, the only we had—not having any clients and not any great knowledge, the only thing you could do was chase around and try to buy something you could sell at a profit. I mean, you soon learned, in your small way, what you could sell. Uh, perhaps your art world was limited by the few dealers you could sell to. So if you could sell to them, then you look for what they wanted.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Right.

VICTOR SPARK: And then occasionally, you had a private client. But it isn't like now.

PAUL CUMMINGS: No. Well, there are no—

VICTOR SPARK: You tried to find clients.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: Or someone would tell you about a client. But you usually didn't succeed. The ones who succeeded, I would say they had a sort of modus operandi. They would go up, pack a trunk with pictures, go out west, and then, uh—or to Texas in the train, and stay away for a month or six weeks.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Uh, set up in a hotel or do—

VICTOR SPARK: Set up in a hotel and—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: And, you know, one way or another, they found somebody who was acquisitive and didn't have too much—they probably, uh, often did sell 'em. They couldn't pay a hotel bill.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Uh, give 'em some pictures as, uh—

VICTOR SPARK: Had to sell some—give 'em a [14:00] buck. Or they'd borrow money on pictures.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: But, uh, for instance, if you were friendly with a museum, they didn't have any money either—you could leave a picture there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: For years!

VICTOR SPARK: And it would stay there for years! We lent a picture at the Wadsworth Atheneum. And while it was there, it got published in some Dutch magazine with the right name. And at the end, I lost out. I was glad. Because it was there for \$3,000. And I was beaten out by someone who had a picture by Honthorst or someone like that. And his was \$3,000. Uh, mine was six. But I didn't sell. I didn't have the right name either. But eventually, I got the right name and we sold it for 12.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So you won, in the end?

VICTOR SPARK: And cost \$10 originally. You could do marvelous things. On 15 percent of \$58 [ph].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: Nobody seemed—you know, give it to you anymore. Took the trouble of buying, uh—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, still today, people seem to go to Parc Renet [ph] or Plaza or somewhere and they'll buy something for \$100, uh, clean it up and fix it up, do some research, and—

VICTOR SPARK: Well, sometimes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, not frequently but it still happens.

VICTOR SPARK: Well, I mean, or I can make a discovery. Between making the discovery and selling it—a long drink of water. Last season, before I went to the hospital, we sold a picture that I had for 30 years. I looked up what it cost. It cost \$50. It was twice—twice the size of that. I bought it at auction for \$50. And very little expense. And was in one or two exhibitions. And we sold it, you know, for \$6500. Uh, the best sale we ever made only cost \$100. I bought it from a dealer. You could buy Heades from a dealer for \$35. I bought two in one week, hummingbirds and orchid. [16:00] And if something came up in the off season like that, you'd get it for nothing. That, uh, Quidor of, uh, subject of Rip Van Winkle—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: —that's in the [inaudible], turned up in New York. We bought it for \$100.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Hm! Fantastic.

VICTOR SPARK: But how much—but you couldn't sell for much, see.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: Certainly, if you had the experience and some money, you could have made millions—no question about it. But you had to have that feeling. But don't forget, whatever I—if I learned something when I was a boy or when we went to Europe—Well, I didn't even know who Corot was. But we thought he was a beautiful painter. I never heard his name. And as a kid, you don't remember the names. And, you see different things. But if, in those years, you had knowledge and, uh, latch onto some money, you could have made millions. But, I mean, we have things around here from the early days—furniture and art objects.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why did you—did you stay in the furniture activity very long or—?

VICTOR SPARK: No, I did decorating for the hotel.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: And when I went out, I knew a furniture manufacturer who made copies of English furniture.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: I just stayed a year. That was enough.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I see. Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: I knew that that wasn't for me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Uh, how, then, did you really get into the—to the pictures?

VICTOR SPARK: Well, I came in contact with the picture trade.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I see.

VICTOR SPARK: So I started to hang around Weitzner's. And he had a set of files. I used to cut up catalogues. And I became interested in that. Then when my family went to Florida, I had nothing to do in the evenings. So I would go over and cut up catalogues and mark 'em. That way, I learned a lot about names. But [18:00] just somehow or other, uh, we found some good pictures. In those days, you could find them. We also found some bad ones.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: But I would imagine you found more bad ones when you were pushing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: You know, for instance, we bought a portrait in Coleman's, by Ghislandi for \$25. But I thought it was Goya. Uh, that was kind of—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Yeah, but that's part of learning and—you know.

VICTOR SPARK: —yeah, yeah—but you find that your knowledge is not secure unless you immerse yourself in it, keep learning every day. I study more today than I ever did.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really? Now.

VICTOR SPARK: Yeah, look at more books. Uh, you learn how to study.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: The first 40 years, you learn where to look. The next 40 years you try to make something out of what you learned, or learn as much as you think you should.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: But there were some wonderful exhibitions. And like, when the Germans sent over that German exhibition—German paintings from early times through—uh, I never forgot it. It was in Philadelphia. That's one of the cities we used to work at. I must have seen it—how many different cities it was in—10 times. So you retain an interest. Now we have a number of German, 18th-century pictures. And I knew the names, you see—Mahlbache [ph] and all that business. I knew that way back, just from seeing these exhibitions. And great exhibitions. You know, they have the exhibitions of Géricault and Rowe [ph] and David. Knoedler used to have fine exhibitions—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah. Right.

VICTOR SPARK: —and, in the '40s, uh, Wildenstein [ph] and many more exhibitions than they have now. I remember when he had the exhibition of Cézanne and said, "He's a fine artist but he's someone [20:00] who never succeeded." And then this woman from Africa paid \$105,000 at auction for a Cézanne still life, and overnight he became a famous artist.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And, uh, the money influences a lot, doesn't it?

VICTOR SPARK: Uh, I always go back to that story of the fellow who, in the early 19th century, was out at the Grand Canyon. And in those days, in the '50s and '60s, it was a desperate struggle for survival. And when he retired from that life, he came back east. And he said, if he had known when he was out there that the scenery of the Grand Canyon was going to be so famous, he would have looked at it. It's [they laugh] the same—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Marvelous!

VICTOR SPARK: —with pictures. I mean, when the pictures were for nothing! Seligmann, who was a hardboiled antique dealer—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: —uh, not this Seligmann, his father—he bought the entire atelier of Degas—126-item lot, oil, pastels, crayon, and so forth [ph]. He got tired of it, after a while, and he put them in the Parc Renet in 1929.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: And he guaranteed that there were—none of the pictures had any additions. In those days, they didn't want sketches. Now they do like sketches. You know what the whole thing brought?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Not very much.

VICTOR SPARK: Two hundred and twenty-five thousand.

PAUL CUMMINGS: No.

VICTOR SPARK: Hundred and—one item, today, would be—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Would bring that.

VICTOR SPARK: It's absolutely impossible to believe. Not even stocks have gone up that much. I mean, even if you bought stocks for \$2 a share and they went to \$2,000. There isn't that difference.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [22:00] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

VICTOR SPARK: Don't forget when you could buy an Impressionist picture for \$4[00] or \$500. And it becomes a million or two million. Uh, now, the art world is a very strange world.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's true.

VICTOR SPARK: Still you had people who were in Paris who sat next to Modigliani, probably, that, uh—even Lipchitz had a portrait of himself and his wife by Modigliani and he traded it with somebody. And he claims that he, you know, wanted to get a fee.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: He traded it because he thought it was a lot of junk.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: But, you don't know. That's the baffling thing about art. YDo you know?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: I mean, do you really—

PAUL CUMMINGS: What do you ever know?

VICTOR SPARK: Do you recognize it. Yes, if somebody says, "This is by Raphael," and you believe it. [Inaudible] uh, the picture looks wonderful, I mean, provided it is a Raphael. But suppose you never heard of Raphael.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: So, you see. You would say, "Well, it's a wonderful picture." Now, uh, I know this because, when we were first married, we went to the Louvre and we fell in love with Corot. I didn't know who he was. We just said "the painter who paints wind in the trees."

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. [Laughs.]

VICTOR SPARK: And then there was a picture—I bought a photograph and sent it to my father. I said, "I think this is one of the most wonderful pictures I ever saw"—*L'Homme au Verre du Vin*—with a big hat And in 60 years, they have graduated from Flemish school to Portuguese school. They never found out the name of the artist.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

VICTOR SPARK: It's still there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: But it's a great picture. And that's what happens.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: But you take some of the artists—even hardboiled people like Rosenberg, Wildenstein [ph], they had these artists—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, sure. For years. [ph]

VICTOR SPARK: —and they didn't care for them. Take Rosenberg. Rosenberg thought that Cézanne was as [24:00] great as Leonardo da Vinci. At least he said so. And he certainly has cashed in on—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Uh, sure.

VICTOR SPARK: He just sold—he just sold—but, no. And he sold a Picasso recently, a million and a half. He was partners with Wildenstein. And Picasso—he liked Picasso and Wildenstein got rid of him [inaudible]. But I know Vitale Bloch told me he used to walk into Bollard's [ph] place and he had the pictures stacked against the wall, unframed, according to artist—Cézanne, Pissarro, whatever artist he handled. And like—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Flip through them like you would—

VICTOR SPARK: And you'd flip through them like you do in that, uh, [inaudible] place.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: And 2,500 of them [ph]. That's how Sam Sault [ph] got started. He didn't like—Bollard didn't

want Rosenberg or Wildenstein to come in his place, so he used to send Sam Sault.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right.

VICTOR SPARK: And he got wise, you know, and, uh—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Uh, have some for himself. [Laughs.]

VICTOR SPARK: —started to buy some for himself.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. But do you think that, you know, over the years, had you ever been able to sort of judge where the collective pace is going? I mean, you know, Corot was popular [inaudible]—

VICTOR SPARK: You know why? I think the taste of the dealers, in my opinion, very often came from the client, or a client.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh really?

VICTOR SPARK: I think so. I think it stemmed from other people. I mean, because what do you know what is done with the dealers [inaudible], you know? What would old man Newhouse know? [Inaudible.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: What would they [inaudible]?

PAUL CUMMINGS: So that they were selling—[inaudible].

VICTOR SPARK: But you would talk to people, for instance, LeRoy Ireland—who, in advance, he said, "I'll give you some advice, for [inaudible] Ernest [ph] Floors [ph]." But when he bought 30 Ernest Floors [ph], because he sold them for peanuts or traded them, he said, "He'll be a great—he'll be a man that [inaudible] well." [26:00] He only went so far.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: Most expensive loss, we sold one for I think [\$]18 to [\$]20,000 beautiful one, but it didn't go so high. Then a lot of people thought Ennis was great, but he didn't go so high. The ones—I'll tell you, I think that with the Impressionist paintings, they would get—intelligent people in France, including the painters themselves who knew they were great pictures, beautiful. They knew they were great pictures, and I don't think they gave two damns whether they sold them or not except that they had to live.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Ah, but then after awhile, some of them made—[cross talk]—made the—

VICTOR SPARK: —was so; I sold one picture [inaudible]—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: So he was looked up to as the most intelligent of all [inaudible]. You know what a hard time [inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh yeah, yeah—[cross talk].

VICTOR SPARK: [Inaudible]—what's his name—for the [inaudible] that they've been here, you know, with the beautiful picture, that's in the Phillips Gallery.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: [Inaudible]—Renoir—[inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Renoir.

VICTOR SPARK: —[inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: I don't think they—I don't think Renoir cared for those people. They wanted to be artists and go out there and paint. They hoped to get recognition, exhibit in the salon; they were overjoyed if they sold something but they were real honest. They weren't smart in the business world as a contemporary artist—[cross talk].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, but Degas was a shrewd businessman.

VICTOR SPARK: Well, I mean, if they didn't need the money, or at least, you know—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: —independent. But Monet was always broke. But look what he would do in order to be able to just get permission to paint a picture. He went into the [28:00] Gare du Nord, and told the manager there that he could go to the Gare de l'Est to paint but he thought his station was so much more interesting.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

VICTOR SPARK: And [inaudible] was always delighted to go in to see his fine pictures there. He didn't hardly think of what he was going to get, but how much did you need to live?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, well that's true.

VICTOR SPARK: I mean, did you read that book by Henri Murger, *Scènes De La Vie de Bohème*?

PAUL CUMMINGS: No.

VICTOR SPARK: The opera's taken—[inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: They were, were nothing. I mean, they something, but if they could live the Bohemian life.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, they could trade pictures here and there, and—

VICTOR SPARK: Or sell or something, you know, and—

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's very hard to do that today, and it—

VICTOR SPARK: It's very difficult. I mean it's very difficult to live a Bohemian life. But they were remarkably intelligent people; people intelligent about art. This music critic latched on to Cézanne. He didn't buy anything. You know, not in the 1900s, I think anyway. I met his wife one time. And he used to write about the opera principally. I'll think of his name.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: But he, bought that Cézanne—[inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative]. Now I'm curious. In the early '40s, or right up to the '40s, you, you organized an exhibition, of Al—

VICTOR SPARK: Of Arro [ph]?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, you know, in American still life scenes, 1941—[inaudible]—

VICTOR SPARK: Well, you see, I think—I meant, we always dealt in foreign pictures but they cost more, but you couldn't go out, like you would go to Philadelphia, Boston, and other cities, and you could go with \$200 and come home with five or 10 pictures. And you accumulated them, and once we had an exhibition in our apartment—*101 American Painters*.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, you never had a real gallery—[inaudible]?

VICTOR SPARK: Oh, we always had a place like this—an inside floor at [30:00] 38th [ph] and 53rd [ph] for which we paid \$200. It had nine rooms—this has 12 in it—nine—[inaudible]. And there was an empty yard there where they kept the—[inaudible]. So, when your—[inaudible]—here's the 20 or 30 cases with my name on it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

VICTOR SPARK: We used to give the fellows a dollar for bringing up a case, you know. In those days, you had things that, you know, took taxis. We never, dealers, took taxis. We thought—[inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

VICTOR SPARK: We took the subway. And they were—what, you could have gone to Gimbel's when they sold the

Hearst collection—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh right.

VICTOR SPARK: You know, it's hard to believe—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why do you think that—

VICTOR SPARK: —how little money you had. You—and there—nothing had value except money.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But why do you think people weren't as art object oriented as they seem to be in the last 20 or 30 years?

VICTOR SPARK: Because there was a change. Don't forget, before the First World War, the United States was actually a rural nation.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: And the industrialization was bought [ph] and complete. There was no air conditioning, no radio, no television.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Train took forever.

VICTOR SPARK: Yeah, and the train service wasn't very good, and uh, many—you didn't do much traveling. If you went to Europe, if you were a school teacher, you could go to Europe and pay \$50 for second class.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you go to Europe in the '30s much or not?

VICTOR SPARK: No, only in the '40s.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In the '40s, after the war.

VICTOR SPARK: No, in '20s.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Or in the '20s, '20.

VICTOR SPARK: Twice, my family spent a year there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh really?

VICTOR SPARK: Yeah. In the '20s we went. The travel was very expensive. You get nice—[inaudible] on it—[inaudible]—get two couples—[inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. [32:00] But that was a lot of money in some depending on how they looked [ph] at it.

VICTOR SPARK: Well, you still could—I mean, a high-class type of—[inaudible]—hotel would be like two million [ph], you know. And you could—[inaudible]—I think anybody, even in the '20s which was a boom time—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: —it was a boom time because of the war. But there was one depression during '22, was a north year [ph] was a readjustment. But when you look at the price of the things in the '20s, I mean, an extravagant person had an apartment on Park Avenue, made [\$]500 a month. People would get, during the depression, would get the same apartment for [\$]200 a month, or [\$]150.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And that was a lot of apartment [ph]; now it's two rooms—

VICTOR SPARK: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —or one room, for that.

VICTOR SPARK: Yeah, it was quite—it was quite different. The city was different. I mean, you didn't—actually, you didn't really need a lot of money. And if you went away for the summer before the First World War, you could do very well in a nice hotel—[inaudible] which I know is a week long here. And if you wanted to stay with a farmer, it was five dollars a week. They didn't have these super, super resorts. And if you wanted to go to Europe, then why not a bicycle? You could go all over for nothing, practically.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know, I'm curious about uh, the late '30s and the beginning of the war, how that affected —

VICTOR SPARK: Well, I'll tell you one thing: there weren't a great many collectors in the '20s comparatively, but they were—uh, I would say that if a man was a millionaire, a real millionaire with a lot of money, he was a potential collector. Some people turned out as such [34:00] but the people like Duveen, Knoedler and Wildenstein had their hands out. And, the others, you were outside looking in. The only others who could grapple [ph] them were these very shrewd connivers who could get an individual and convince him that his picture was good as the high-priced ones in those places and he was looking for a bargain and they'd give to him. And there was one dealer used to buy portraits [ph] in with portraits with the—[inaudible]—he used to buy them at auction, and now they're in the hundreds, hundreds of dollars. And then he would consign them out to these hot salesmen for \$50[,000] to \$100,000 dollars. And sometimes one would sell.

PAUL CUMMINGS: For a [inaudible]—

VICTOR SPARK: And they would—you know, they had *The Blue Boy* painting, then they found *The Pink Boy* and they—

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

VICTOR SPARK: —then they kind of, they capitalized on it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: But you see that the millionaires would only buy from the very big places, and I remember one man saying, if he had a great picture, he would take it to Duveen or someone like that. Of course, they— [inaudible]. But, if you were very, very intelligent, and some financial strength, you could get along. And in the '20s, there was a trade—[inaudible]—uh, at least bigger pictures, they were building movie theaters—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, right.

VICTOR SPARK: —filling them with these, uh, can't we call them candy-box [ph] type of things.

PAUL CUMMINGS: All the big—[inaudible]—

VICTOR SPARK: Yes, here you might sell a movie theater 30 paintings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: For they put paintings in the lobby, and Wanamaker had a painting department for many years. They was all private people. If you knew someone and he liked you—believe me, you could sell something. And once in a while we'd sell them pictures but it was very rare.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you develop clients, though, or [36:00] was most of the dealing through the dealers?

VICTOR SPARK: Well, I would say at the beginning, you could see you had—you had to make up your mind whether you wanted to learn and be able to buy, or whether you just wanted to be a salesman. You just wanted to be a salesman, you could go to a big firm and get a job for the drawing, and patent and sell what they put in your hands to sell for better or worse, and I didn't want that. I started the business late in '32. I felt that if I could get to a point where I knew what I could—what to buy and selling the thing [ph], then I could get along, but it took much longer than I thought.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Was there a reason—

VICTOR SPARK: It was more than what, 20 years before we found a real—[inaudible]—and we made \$50,000 in one, but—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Was there a reason why you went into European paintings?

VICTOR SPARK: I went into both.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, and you had both?

VICTOR SPARK: Oh yes, I always dealt in both.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it was really whatever there was that you could do to keep—

VICTOR SPARK: Whatever they wanted, or not, uh—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: And going, you know, bit by bit, and uh, get to go look at exhibitions and so forth. But it took a long time. I think it was a good—before you had, you know, some kind of confidence in yourself. I don't mean confidence in every field that's possible—but in what you were interested in, American and foreign paintings, not contemporary.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: But you watch those, too, you see. And it was a good 30, 35 years to gain confidence—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: —even 40 years to be sure of yourself. I mean, if I look at a picture now, in this period, I could tell—[inaudible]—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: —but in those days, you were always worried stiff, in those days.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well one thing that interests me is you had these [38:00] various, um, lists of American paintings. Uh, you did the one, "Early American Still Life and Scenes," and another one—

VICTOR SPARK: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —"America from 1780 to 1880."

VICTOR SPARK: Right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Um, how—was it easy to pull together a number of pictures like that, or—

VICTOR SPARK: Oh yeah, yes, well, for instance, we always had a dozen Heades.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs] yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: And half a dozen Peale [ph] still lifes. Sometimes you got things on consignment.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: And I think that uh, there wasn't too much at first in American pictures until Parrowick [ph] came—[inaudible]—and where there was great interest was at the time the Hudson River artists were alive.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: Then, there was that later group who you know through Mack [ph] Betton [ph]—the Ashcan School and all that, and during the war, people became interested in American pictures because you couldn't import things—[inaudible]—Europe.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: That's why Ennis [ph] got—[inaudible]. And then, some of those went way down there because at the first—but, for example, in Detroit, there was only one person that was—and he really wasn't interested in the pictures. If Richardson found something that he wanted, he would ask Mr. Ferry [ph] to give him the money, and if Mr. Ferry hadn't used up his years' allowance and uh, didn't—[inaudible]—money to give away to buy it. But there was nobody. There were people always interested in American furniture like Dupont.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: I know in the '30s, Dupont was probably the only collector there was for early American pictures.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you deal in American furniture, too? No.

VICTOR SPARK: Once in awhile—

PAUL CUMMINGS: But not—

VICTOR SPARK: It was too tricky. You see with American furniture, the competition was keen.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [40:00] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

VICTOR SPARK: And they would pay a thousand dollars to make 10 percent. But they had—you had to know what you were doing. I was attracted to Americans, and I had studied American history, and I became interested. But they're alive [ph] too. You could see that. The American 19th-century painters had gone to Europe.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Oh, sure.

VICTOR SPARK: The earlier ones were influenced by—[inaudible]—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Engravings and things.

VICTOR SPARK: Yes, engravings, and later went—[inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: What about somebody like Edith Halpert? Was she—

VICTOR SPARK: Oh, Edith Halpert.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —[inaudible]—in any way?

VICTOR SPARK: —and her—had a friend, and they had \$3,000, and it was a toss up whether they'd open a delicatessen or go in the art business.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

VICTOR SPARK: So they decided to go in the art business, and she's pretty shrewd. She started there was at the—uh, contemporary artists—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right—[cross talk]—

VICTOR SPARK: —Stable, and then, through Cahill she got that idea of—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Folk art.

VICTOR SPARK: —of the folk art, and uh, she wasn't always on top, you know. I tore up the receipt because I didn't want anyone find it, but when in the early days, I sold her a picture for \$50, she gave me five dollars down and the balance payable after the summer. And then you had that kind of things too. But she would go out of town, get the sheriff of the town, get—[inaudible]—get a hearse, and go to knock on everybody's door. You couldn't do it now. And that's the way she collected these pictures, and she thought she could corner the market. She didn't know that there was an infinite number, but she got some very good ones.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, but she kept a record on everything.

VICTOR SPARK: Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And they all were card [ph] \$12, five dollars—

VICTOR SPARK: Yeah—[cross talk]—then she latched onto Harnett or, got stuck with Petos, but they turned out to be good also.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: And uh, she had a deal with Frankenstein. And then she tried to uh, [42:00] pick up another artist, but he had only painted about a dozen pictures. Before the—[inaudible]—you know, the—the scene in the oyster house and war news from Mexico [ph].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: [Inaudible]—she showed me one; she said, "Now, don't tell anybody about this." And I looked at her; I said, "Well, Mrs. Halpert, that's a copy of—[inaudible]." And, she didn't believe it. She thought she was going to promote him, but there weren't any—

PAUL CUMMINGS: No.

VICTOR SPARK: —and there were Harnetts. She promoted primitives and only stayed in that business—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: —and all, all—[inaudible]—

PAUL CUMMINGS: She did very well.

VICTOR SPARK: Then she cleaned out her stable. She gave some fellow working for her all the artists who didn't sell so well and then the best one. I'm going to get a drink. [Audio break.] I have a great deal of—[inaudible]. I would presume that whatever business she went in—

PAUL CUMMINGS: She would have done well, right.

VICTOR SPARK: Yeah, I think so, and she was a hard worker, and ruthless. I mean, like you wouldn't—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: —skin anybody—but you didn't have to—[cross talk]—

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

VICTOR SPARK: But when she uh, got in trouble with buying one of the phony Harnetts; she just wrote a letter everybody saying that they could have their money back, but nobody wanted it—

PAUL CUMMINGS: No.

VICTOR SPARK: —because Peto would be—[cross talk]—I said, "If they're Petos and we bought a good picture, but what"—[inaudible]—they didn't want [\$]500, 1,000, 1,500, 2,000—

PAUL CUMMINGS: It wasn't very much money.

VICTOR SPARK: But don't you see, when the—her artists became big, she became big.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: And then when [inaudible] grabbed him, so he could claim he got—[inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: I don't think there was much an interest in [inaudible] of some pictures.

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, I don't think so.

VICTOR SPARK: She bought the house for very little on 51st Street.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: And she never liked it [44:00]—[inaudible]—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: —because she was like a fish out of water.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, and she moved to the Ritz—[inaudible]—it never worked.

VICTOR SPARK: Had a place downstairs. When she saw her things in storage, she had a breakdown. But everything was sort of orderly. Though she had a few bad experiences in the [inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh really?

VICTOR SPARK: She was—[inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh no, oh no.

VICTOR SPARK: But she was tough. You know a lot of collectors are tough too, but she was tougher than they were.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Do you—

VICTOR SPARK: But—[inaudible]—to be hardcore a businessman, she could handle them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you find the collectors a different thing in the 1970s than they were in the, in the '30s or

the '40s?

VICTOR SPARK: I would say that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Or personality pretty much the same.

VICTOR SPARK: Well I think they're more intelligent. There were some top collectors, you know—in those days, for instance, the fellow uh, gave the museum [ph] to Williamstown, [ph] you know—[cross talk]—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —and park, yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: I think that's still a park, but a very knowledgeable collector. He sold them a few small things. But I think in those days, that type of collector one, was very intelligent. When he did want to buy something fine, he wanted to buy it from a good—[inaudible]—but he had more confidence. I would say that today, I think the art business is better if you can get material, first of all, you can sell people who wouldn't have talked to you 40 years ago. They wouldn't [inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh really? I mean, how, in what way?

VICTOR SPARK: Well, they was sort of snobbish; they would only go to a good—[inaudible]—and that's why in the '20s, there were dealers who entertained in those places. They could work—[inaudible]—and they had these, their showing rooms, with a picture out and have a flunkie [ph] there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

VICTOR SPARK: You know, do the same thing at the lodge [ph]. What was—[inaudible]—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: [46:00] The renegades could beat those fellows sometimes because they could concentrate on one client. Think of nothing else.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: And usually, in the '20s and '30s, the client had one dealer, and his dealer wouldn't buy from anyone else. But now I think it's open house.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They shop around.

VICTOR SPARK: Yeah, they shop around.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Well people—[cross talk]—

VICTOR SPARK: I think there's more intelligence now. But of course, there's another factor; there's this trust in the auction houses—really, in the actual, in the retail business.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: And—[inaudible]—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well that never happened until the last 20 years.

[END OF TRACK 01, SIDE A.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: How do you find that the shift in the auction market has affected your dealing?

VICTOR SPARK: Well I think that the uh—you have a better record of [inaudible] that prevail. And you can understand the business better, but sometimes it's hard to get pictures.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: But when you do get a picture, you know when to ask for it. The other way, how would we know?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: See now, same way, if you—if someone gives you some stock, you look it up in the newspaper—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right—[cross talk]—

VICTOR SPARK: —the same thing, especially since they stopped them from quoting prices of things that weren't sold.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: If many a new record [ph] was on a picture, that meant it sold.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: But they—I would Sotheby's, they're no [inaudible] and I believe they have a course in training, where they teach their employees to be fresh to people. They're very—[inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, but that's kind of an English style that they have too.

VICTOR SPARK: I'd rather they uh—

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

VICTOR SPARK: —put on an accent, but that doesn't stop them from sticking their hand in your pocket.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right. Well, you know, tens of millions of dollars—[inaudible]—

VICTOR SPARK: Well I always feel this way with people like that: if they had genuine knowledge, they wouldn't do it. But what they lack in knowledge, they make up in insolence, and you find that in a lot of art places.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah, that's true. Do you find though that during the last 20 years, since there are more books published and more exhibitions, that that influences people, that, you know, somebody will come to you and say, "Oh, I saw an exhibition in Denver, or Minneapolis."

VICTOR SPARK: Yes, oh yes, I think it has.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: Well it's like music, isn't it? Don't you like to listen to music that you're familiar with? And if you don't know what it is, you'd be able to—some hard thing [ph] they're playing. I think several people know [02:00] the name, that's why the person who's engaged in another business, he doesn't have the mental capacity—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: —the dealer he had the deal with doesn't do anything else but learn art training and the names of painters and looks at painting. The other fellow may only want to concentrate in one field—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: He can be very successful and learn as much as the dealer in that field.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have you had many collectors over the years who were specialists like that, who bought—

VICTOR SPARK: Yeah, a great many, almost all of them were specialists.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: They buy American Ashcan, you know, Impressionist paintings, or they buy 19th-century American paintings. Or they buy Dutch paintings. Or they'll buy early German 19th-century paintings, and others want to buy these fancy figure pieces. Everyone has some kind of a—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Just another—yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: Except the bargain hunter will just buy any junk that's cheap, fill his house with all—[inaudible]
—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. But they never—that's really an accumulator, the collector. Um, well, have, have you worked with many European dealers over the years? Or do you not so much?

VICTOR SPARK: Yes. Oh yes, almost from the start, yeah—from the early '30s came in contact with European

dealers, and that's what you—why you—well, for instance, that the Polish [ph] dealer would come looking for Gierymski, and various Polish painters. A German dealer would come looking for German painters. This is in 1930, '31—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really? They were—they were coming here?

VICTOR SPARK: Always coming. And then you would get a French dealer who wanted French things, an English dealer who wanted English things or Dutch painting. From the very beginning, we came in contact with a Scandinavian who would want a [inaudible] or Munch, or people like that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [04:00] Well, are there many, you know, special dealers that you worked with for a long period of time, or that you had, you had close—

VICTOR SPARK: Well, we [inaudible] James Raymondson [ph] who [inaudible] but since [inaudible] in the '40s. And I have a friend out of town I worked with, Ken [ph]—I worked with—[cross talk]—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —dealer would say.

VICTOR SPARK: Well, we did until one fellow died. I mean, we gave them things, our memorandum and they bought something from us and we bought from them and uh, now I—well there are dealers in Europe, I don't, but I have shared with them. Other dealers do, the new houses in particular.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: They buy with foreign dealers, but we sell to them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Hmm. So you still have a flow of people coming through.

VICTOR SPARK: Oh yes Italian dealers, yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: Oh yeah, that's probably the biggest part of the business, the trade business, is with foreign dealers. You don't bother to sell. We did do a lot of business with Wildenstein, with George Wildenstein.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh yeah, that's right.

VICTOR SPARK: And we would go look for things, you know, that were out of our reach. I couldn't, you know, put up [\$]50 or [\$]60 thousand—for one picture, but he could—and get a commission or I'd tell him about things, and then we ended up by buying things together, and a number sold and we still have some very good things—[inaudible]—I think, about 10 pictures.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, do you find that, you know, you were able to locate paintings in this country, that you then have, and a European dealer comes and looks for them, or, or do you—

VICTOR SPARK: Yes, I mean, yes, you have things—[cross talk]—but it was drawings and art objects and paintings, and maybe one trip they won't buy it and the second trip they would. Well, and I know what they're looking for. We've done very well with buying [inaudible] because they have the outlet in their countries.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. [06:00] Well pictures always sell better in the country of origin, they say.

VICTOR SPARK: They could. Yeah. And reason here that I haven't done much with any English dealers, because they'll go to an auction in England and then, finding it is difficult.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: And uh, they'll come and ask you for a little early flower painting or—[inaudible]—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: —or a low light [ph] Drysdale and things—something. Who the hell needs it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, they're just a little bit decorative and—

VICTOR SPARK: Yeah. And, they—you know, they'll buy \$100,000 picture for \$20,000. But you don't need them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: They'd have to argue with you if it's just treated in [inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Oh. Well, you know one thing that's interested me is how did the, the popularity of uh, abstract painting, and super modern painting, affect the areas that you deal in, or, or is it so separate that there's—

VICTOR SPARK: No, I think when you sell to museums, and which you try all the time, you may be in a position that the representational painting you have is pushed out by an abstract painting. It happened to us. *The Grains and I*, [ph] a painting for [\$]22,000—we made a special price of [\$]18[,000], and it got pushed out by an abstract picture for which they paid a million and a half.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well there's hardly any relationship. [Laughs.]

VICTOR SPARK: Pardon me?

PAUL CUMMINGS: There's hardly any relationship, is there?

VICTOR SPARK: Well, I personally think the picture we had was better. What can you do? And I think that museum directors are susceptible to famous names. They can't get away. I think the trustees are susceptible.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, because this—they can always defend what they've done by saying, "Well, everybody knows Picasso or Jackson Pollock," or—

VICTOR SPARK: Exactly.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —whoever it is, you know. "We have to have one in our collection."

VICTOR SPARK: Yeah, we have a [08:00] law case with Frank Buchser, and their lawyer wasn't too smart, but he got away with it. He said, in the summation to the jury, he said, "All of you people on the jury heard of Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo, and how many of you ever heard of Frank Buchser?"

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] Oh.

VICTOR SPARK: I mean, [laughs] the same way, you go to an exhibition and [inaudible] every—who doesn't know Picasso?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: The Blue Period, or the Pink Period.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: And if a two-headed monster comes up, oh, they want to be certain if it's genuine.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative], right, right. But you know, going back to the American paintings of the 18th and 19th centuries, work that you had during the '40s in particular with, you know, were people very interested? Was it difficult to turn them over? Or do they—

VICTOR SPARK: Well, I would say that when, during the war years when Karolik was collecting, I doubt seriously if there was another collector—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who really actively—

VICTOR SPARK: —active, and he didn't pay very [ph]—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: But you were selling each other. If you could sell a dealer a picture and he could figure he could show it to Karolik, that often happened.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

VICTOR SPARK: Sometimes it was more convenient to sell it to a dealer, because he could get paid right away or thereabouts, and then Karolik, who walked in his place, he might buy it. And uh, you would, we—in the position I was in, we tried to find pictures of the original source. You also could go right to museums and buy them. They wanted to get rid of a lot of paintings sometimes because good things—but the—I think that Karolik, in the East, anyway, stimulated 19th-century American paintings to a far greater extent than anybody up to that time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really?

VICTOR SPARK: Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [10:00] And do you think the catalogues that they published had helped that?

VICTOR SPARK: Well they weren't so many.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, they published a few—

VICTOR SPARK: Bower [ph] would—Bower had done a series of exhibitions in Brooklyn—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: —he had Bingham. He had uh—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Quidor and—

VICTOR SPARK: —Quidor and he had Theodore Robinson, and he had the sea and the coast. He had a number of —why he had some others, also—but uh, he'd call you up and say, "Do you want to borrow some Theodore Robinson? Come over." But all that money, we didn't have any money.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: Even with the two hun—we were in 38th and 51st Street for 11 years. I remember \$200, and there were times, you know, when you'd see a good picture before rent day and gamble with the \$200 and wondered where you would get the next dollar.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: There were times also when we thought, how can we keep up these expenses? Had a maid. And here you had no—when the dealers—see, some dealers had money but they didn't have such great brains. They were narrow-minded. But, if you, you know, had a broader and more catholic view of the art world, you wouldn't have been able to resist the [inaudible] if you had the money. I always found, whenever we made a sale, we found a picture, and when we didn't have any money, we didn't find any.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

VICTOR SPARK: Which, you sort of didn't want to look at it [inaudible]. But bit by bit, you built them up, and now, of course, you would like to buy many things, but you can't.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: But the only way you can uh, get ahead of these auctions, if the picture's half a million dollars and taken on consignment—that's all the English dealers—or they'll buy them; they'll get a backer to pay for it and they handle it. There are very few [12:00] firms can lay their money on the line, at big amounts [inaudible]. Knoedler can.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh no, yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: And uh, there's nobody else. There's some here at Rosenberg and Stable [ph].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: But they limit themselves, too French [ph] furniture and things like that, but they got things from Rothschild on consignment. You see, you can do that but you had to give them the retail price, less a small commission, and you can make something from the buyer sometimes, but if you can sell a picture for half a million, and only make 10 percent, it's still \$25,000. And all you've invested in is insurance and a few other things. You just couldn't—but the situation is such that the average dealer cannot afford to pay a good price, and some of these pictures that are bought at auction, there are four or five dealers.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh—[inaudible].

VICTOR SPARK: —and then when it sold, what do you make?

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's—[inaudible]—

VICTOR SPARK: And you'd wait forever. So I think all you can do is, is do what you can to find what you can to

split [ph] out.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You've never been interested in the idea of having a gallery in that kind of operation.

VICTOR SPARK: [Inaudible] it meant you were tied down and I didn't think, physically, it was a good life and it was better to be active—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative], and move around and travel.

VICTOR SPARK: —and get good [inaudible] it was more, certainly more pleasant, and I think it worked out because, if we were tied down to a gallery, you would do what everybody else did, have exhibitions and contemporary artists, or get together pictures—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: —and have—I could never—[inaudible]. In the beginning, it was interesting when people came in and Edward G. Robinson was starting just at that time. And you met people, and you learned, but—

PAUL CUMMINGS: After a while—

VICTOR SPARK: —after a few years, it was [14:00] better to go out and find things.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have you traveled a great deal around this country then—

VICTOR SPARK: Oh yes. Yes, in Canada and—[inaudible]. Oh yes, and we bought collections too, you know, substantial collections, but at a bargain price.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well you had the [inaudible]?

VICTOR SPARK: We had it on consignment.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: Well, the best things went to—[inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: But the most expensive drawing we had was \$1,500. We had the Gauguin jesters [ph] for \$10 each. I imagine we sold probably, to the exhibition, sold \$1,000 worth.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really?

VICTOR SPARK: Yeah, probably made a hundred dollars.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

VICTOR SPARK: Everybody came in.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: Well, Boston had an exhibition at the Wadsworth Atheneum in the early '40s, masterpieces under a thousand dollars. I mean, imagine having such an exhibition—they wanted—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Could you do it today?

VICTOR SPARK: No, no. Unless they take your word for it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

VICTOR SPARK: I'm glad those days are gone; they—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. There're too many people and too much money and too much activity.

VICTOR SPARK: And too much money. I like the business better now because if you do find something—you can cash in. But it's not easy to—first of all, you just don't want to buy merchandise to make 10 percent. There's no sense in that. And then, they wouldn't be very good paintings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: No.

VICTOR SPARK: And then you see that people attach importance to things that really have no merit, in the American field especially. The matter of the contemporary art, I think, outside of those artists who would be artists in any day and age and the dedicated, you know, the compulsive artists—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: —I think a lot of them are in there for what they can get—[inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: [16:00] Yeah, but they can—some of them are very shrewd.

VICTOR SPARK: Yes, and manipulate, make it a point, you know, to interest people in their pictures and buy things. I, I don't have too much faith—

PAUL CUMMINGS: In a lot of them—yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: —and a lot of it is promoted.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's true.

VICTOR SPARK: And there are a lot of big mistakes today, I mean enormous mistakes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The thing that bothers me the most I think is they tend to run prices up so fast—

VICTOR SPARK: Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —that by the time an artist is 35, he's getting [\$]40[,000], [\$]50,000. What's he supposed to get when he's 60.

VICTOR SPARK: Probably worth \$300.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, but what do—you know, what's he supposed to get when he's—you know, mature.

VICTOR SPARK: I always say why [inaudible] any of them commit suicide.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why—that's true.

VICTOR SPARK: Probably yet they realize that, while they're getting prices, it doesn't mean anything.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: I would say a man like Wyeth is a real artist, and his children imitate him, and there are the—his family's out there more than he is, but he was overjoyed to sell the greatest picture he ever did—when he sold it to Karolik for [\$]5,000. The same picture today would be [\$]150,000.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really!

VICTOR SPARK: Yeah, the picture sold; it's called—[inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: Well you know, the great Winslow Homer watercolors were \$250 apiece.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative]. And now we're—

VICTOR SPARK: [Inaudible.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: But he said he'd buy [inaudible] 100,000.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh.

[Audio break.]

VICTOR SPARK: But I think there are two values to a work of art: one is the art value, and one is the money value. Now, many pictures are saleable, but if they repel you and you don't see any quality in them or anything else and they don't understand it—there's no sense in dealing in them. I think a smaller dealer [18:00] should extract as his compensation the pleasure and satisfaction of dealing with what he likes to deal in. I can't buy and sell every kind of a picture on the market. Nobody can.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh no—[inaudible].

VICTOR SPARK: If you train yourself and you have the confidence that you know whether a picture is genuine or not And I went down on record as saying that the Fragonard that came over from France is a copy. I know 100 percent it's a copy. And that article they wrote in the Louvre [ph] about it, just a pack of lies.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs] yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: And I put it down in the paper and I signed it over to Wildenstein—because just to be on record—and I saw the one painted a few years after it, that came over from Russia. There's no comparison. They made a mistake. If they hadn't made a mistake, they wouldn't have sent it over here.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. [Laughs.]

VICTOR SPARK: They paid a million dollars for it. Oh, mistakes had been made before—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh sure.

VICTOR SPARK: —but they wanted a million dollars for a [\$]50,000, [\$]100,000.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you know.

VICTOR SPARK: Yeah. Now you make a mistake [inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right, right. Maybe that shows what the money is worth, rather than the picture.

VICTOR SPARK: Well, I think money is still worth something because why would the banks charge you for it if it's not worth anything?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: it's still hard to get.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Still, it's never—it's never—

VICTOR SPARK: But there's—I don't think there's any connection with the art business of yesterday—absolutely none. [Inaudible.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's a whole new kind of—

VICTOR SPARK: —absolutely different. But there's a connection in your own mind, because you can't forget when days of the year [ph]—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right, turn into the other.

VICTOR SPARK: You have to develop a certain intellectual integrity. Otherwise, you'd go out of your mind.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: You wouldn't know what [20:00] to do. So you run and buy something that just sold for [\$]100,000, go to the gallery that handles it, they wouldn't give you the time of day.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: You have to buy what you're ready not to sell. Do you know what I mean?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

VICTOR SPARK: Buy it for yourself, and if you sell enough, well, what more can you ask?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: You're not going to take it with you.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, no. Do you think that the books that, you know, people seem to be writing endless numbers of books on art these days—[cross talk]—but do you think that they're useful in terms of making people aware?

VICTOR SPARK: Well if it's a serious book that has a catalogue raisonné and you have respect for the artist, for

the writing, you know. He's done 20 years research—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: —and he's uh, sort of separated the school pictures from the other. If the book is useful—if it's somebody who's just trying to make himself money as an art historian. Jack Twelia [ph], he wrote a book on Truesdale [ph] and Blount, [ph] and the review, just tore him to pieces, and rightly so, because there are art historians who write books without any preparation.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: They wouldn't know a genuine painting if they saw it, except if someone else in the library—

PAUL CUMMINGS: They saw the flyer for it.

VICTOR SPARK: Yeah. That's right, yeah. They wouldn't know the difference.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: And of course, you know, some artists are not receptive. I mean, some dealers are not receptive to certain kinds of paintings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: They're limited, and we happen to want to deal in everything we feel is good, but we couldn't. Nobody in the world can go into the market now and buy what he wants. Even Norton Simon can't, because in order to buy the Old Masters, he has to sell his Impressionist paintings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: In those days when somebody could buy Impressionists in the low thousands, he didn't have to sell [22:00] because he had another business. And those pictures became worth in six and seven figures. The same way with great Old Masters, because we—I know two collectors of Dutch pictures would pay up to a million dollars.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Hmm. Can you find them anything?

VICTOR SPARK: When you find them, they won't give you the sale.

PAUL CUMMINGS: No.

VICTOR SPARK: They don't want to sell them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: I know where there are pictures, these collectors would buy and pay a good price for them, but they don't—but you can't get them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That, that fascinates me because I've heard so many dealers in almost every area, say exactly the same thing, that, you know, you can offer more and more money to people that don't want to sell—[inaudible].

VICTOR SPARK: Really, first, they don't want to pay the taxes. And uh, they say, "Well we think that we have enough money."

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: I mean, if you have enough money, what good does it do you to sell something?

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Inaudible.] Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: That was just more money.

PAUL CUMMINGS: If you like the picture, you can't get another one.

VICTOR SPARK: Suppose your income is quarter of a million a year or half a million a year, and you like pictures, why should you sell it?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

VICTOR SPARK: Or you may want to give it to your children. You don't know these things [inaudible]—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: But people sell things when they get tired of them or when they want the money or when they become dealers. A great many American art collectors become dealers.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What do you think of that? I know, I didn't—I know in the modern field [cross talk]—

VICTOR SPARK: Sort of, uh, they like the idea of, of having bought something for a low price, and then sell it for a big price and that shows they're very smart.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

VICTOR SPARK: I guess it's human nature. Of course, in the old days if the family bought pictures, they wouldn't sell them, unless they went bankrupt or someone died in one of these proud, noble families, they—

PAUL CUMMINGS: So [cross talk] part of their household.

VICTOR SPARK: So, you know, family portraits.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: Still in Boston, there are people [inaudible] Copleys [ph] who would not sell them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh!

VICTOR SPARK: They'd give them to the Boston Museum when they [24:00] died.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: They already have about 60 Copleys.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That many there?

VICTOR SPARK: Everybody in Boston gave them a Copley.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] Well—

VICTOR SPARK: If all these pictures circulated quickly, they wouldn't command the same prices—[cross talk]—it has to have a certain feeling of scarcity. I mean, if every week, a Raphael came on the market, say, well, he's a fine painter, but there's a limit.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: Not too many of them. The uh—I would say it's terribly hard to buy good things today. And, what you have to do is buy lesser things of quality. I could buy a good drawing—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: —or a good art object—[inaudible]—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you find a lot of people collect Old Master drawings [inaudible]?

VICTOR SPARK: Oh yes, it goes up all the time. We've sold a good many drawings. We can't get enough, and I just heard of a death in the family; I didn't know that this man died, but he left a group of very fine drawings to the daughter. I tried to reach her, but uh, the—they're opportunities. Look, you can walk around the corner and pick up some, still pick up some.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: You still can.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What about something like *Master Drawings*, that magazine, does that affect very much, or does it sell—?

VICTOR SPARK: I think it interests people. We get people through that sometimes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: But of course, the people who collect drawings as a rule are rather keen and have studied a great deal, and if you have something they can fit in their collection, they'll buy it. We sold, we—someone turned up with a fine Dutch drawing, 16th century. It didn't take two weeks to sell it to the Morgan Library for a good price. And they would buy more, you see. Every, every museum—

PAUL CUMMINGS: They have their—

VICTOR SPARK: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: There are 10 top places where you can sell fine drawings, 10 top places. [26:00] But can you get the drawings [inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Which meant, everybody's out [inaudible]—

VICTOR SPARK: How many can find American drawings, can you get, where there's real art value?

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's true. I had—[inaudible]—

VICTOR SPARK: And early American drawings, they're very—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Even, even 20th-century drawings.

VICTOR SPARK: But if you're to get a fine one—

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's very hard.

VICTOR SPARK: I think the mistake is to give up your taste, and handle things that are beneath your intelligence. It's better to try to find, you know, in another field perhaps, an Oriental field, or important ancient wood carving. Whatever it is, I think you should try it to get something good. But I know when we started, the only thing that mattered was, could you sell it?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Do you find that the collectors now are interested in the provenance, the background, where the painting's been—?

VICTOR SPARK: Well, for purposes of reassurance—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: —or of feeling that their investment is secure. The better provenance you have, the better it is, but many discoveries have no provenance.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh!

VICTOR SPARK: It builds up. Someone publishes the picture and develops the provenance. If you found a great picture, it would be—[inaudible]. I think, if you know how to separate the scholars from the ones who have integrity and intelligence, the others are just in it to make a buck.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. [Cross talk]—the other field, even—

VICTOR SPARK: Yeah, yeah. There are charlatans among art historians—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: —and there are wonderful scholars also. But I'm always suspicious of somebody who can write two books a year.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Two art books a year?

VICTOR SPARK: Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's pretty good. [Laughs.]

VICTOR SPARK: Well, it might be pretty good, but the books aren't so good.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] That's a lot of fast typing.

VICTOR SPARK: And apparently, [28:00] the type of art, what we call "coffee table art book"—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: Where it's put down on the coffee table for people to see—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, a big plate—

VICTOR SPARK: —but you have a book.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. But I think a lot of people find out about art through those books.

VICTOR SPARK: Well, they become acquainted with—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, I mean, they see what things look like—

VICTOR SPARK: Don't forget, it isn't so long ago that people bought bindings for their book faces [ph]—in their books.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, they still do.

VICTOR SPARK: They still do?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Still do. I have a friend in that business. You can call up and order as many yards of brown binding, [laughs] as you wanted, or green or whatever color. [Laughs.]

VICTOR SPARK: Well, I would say this, as far as our library is concerned, no book ever goes on the shelf before I read it. I don't just put it in the shelf, forget about it. I order it for a purpose, to look up something, or try to find something out. It, it pays. You can make some money doing research in your own library.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Oh, absolutely.

VICTOR SPARK: Of course, a catalogue—but not—I think that now, uh, it's so you say, but mainly because of television and radio, people stay—and air conditioning—people stay home. And in that way they like to have a nice home and they become interested in art. And there was a time about 20 years ago when it was a novelty, to say the general population is interested in art, and very few went to the museum [inaudible] before—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Now the Met gets 60, 80,000—[cross talk]—yeah, and—

VICTOR SPARK: It's a way of life for the general public. Whether they have things or buy things, they go to see them or learn about them or read about them. I think art it is part of everyone's self-education. Art plays a very important part and [30:00] it would be very difficult for somebody not to be interested in pictures or furniture or something. Some, of course, are interested in china or—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: I think people develop a sense of beauty. Of course, there are two kinds of collectors: one who collects because he really likes and understands something and the other one who collects because it's become expensive or famous—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Do you find that there are many people in your areas who collect mainly for investment purposes?

VICTOR SPARK: Some do.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think they're successful as collectors?

VICTOR SPARK: Well, they, they're a—it's more in Europe where they invest money. But when friends have asked us about investing, I'm always discouraging. I say, "I think if I were you, I'd put the money in a savings bank."

PAUL CUMMINGS: But then the—[cross talk]—I've had a man who wanted to buy American drawings as purely an investment, buy them and put them in the bank, you know.

VICTOR SPARK: Well, that's alright if he likes drawings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Inaudible]—you know, he doesn't. I mean—[inaudible]—

VICTOR SPARK: How does he know what he's buying?

PAUL CUMMINGS: He just got a whim, you know.

VICTOR SPARK: Well I mean, how—you can't—if you put money in a savings bank and protect it up to [\$]40,000—and you're at five percent, that's guaranteed. But how can you guarantee somebody that his American drawings are going to—

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's right.

VICTOR SPARK: And one American drawing—sure, I think if today, you bought a beautiful American drawing for a thousand dollars, and you wait four years, it should be worth more, but suppose it's worth less? I always say, I don't know the future. But I would say that if you buy something that has a real art value, in good condition, that the tendency is for a good thing to go up, and a bad thing to stay where it is.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How do you define that, a good art value? And what—

VICTOR SPARK: Well you had—you develop a feeling. But you may not, until you get somebody to [32:00] agree with you, you don't sell it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: But somewhere along the line, you have to have a marriage of the owner and the client, otherwise, there's no sale. Well, the same way people fall in love with each other, they can fall in love with an object. And not everybody is a collector and not everybody wants to be a collector. Not everybody wants to have the care and trouble, insurance problems. But I think it does supply a great outlet for many business people, doctors especially, who have become art collectors.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, why do you think that is?

VICTOR SPARK: Well, they're in a kind of gruesome profession, seeing blood and bones all the time, and uh, sick people, and it's a big release for them to come home and they look around—I mean, suppose you removed every picture from the wall here, you wouldn't get the same thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, no.

VICTOR SPARK: I mean what would you have on the wall?

PAUL CUMMINGS: I've often wondered—

VICTOR SPARK: A mirror?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, well, even that gets a little old after a while you know, but I've noticed so many doctors and also a lot of lawyers seem to collect.

VICTOR SPARK: Lawyers used to collect prints. Now, I guess they collect uh, pictures.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: Of course, it was de rigueur for a dentist or a lawyer or a doctor to have etchings in the city.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: So when he opened his office, he'd go down to a print place to [inaudible] thousand dollars, and uh—[cross talk]—all sorts of—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, everything.

VICTOR SPARK: American prints.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's true.

VICTOR SPARK: I would say it—to generalize, I would say a very large proportion of the people in the United States and in many other countries are definitely interested in art of one nature or another, whether they like the things or they like the [34:00] idea of buying them cheap and selling them here or making money on them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I think it changes, though. I've had people who—[cross talk]—

VICTOR SPARK: Oh, it's like tennis. They still like to play tennis, but look at tennis today and what it was.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, big business, more people play it anyway.

VICTOR SPARK: —but the play is still enjoyed, playing and winning.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: Football players want to win and they get paid for it. They don't say to each other, "Why should we knock each other's brains out?"

PAUL CUMMINGS: For nothing.

VICTOR SPARK: You know, but they're getting paid for it. But they still do.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: And, you forget—I think they could get the money part of it. But if they weren't getting paid above the board—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: —they would be tennis bums, that's all. They wouldn't be making a living and they'd get some little expense money under the table.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right. I was going to ask you about the development of the museums in this country since uh, World War II, and so many have been built.

VICTOR SPARK: It takes the place of the churches on Sunday, you know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's interesting how many people say that?

VICTOR SPARK: I don't know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: A lot of people have said that.

VICTOR SPARK: Yeah. Maybe they're like the cathedrals used to be when people came to cathedrals to trade, to buy, to sell, to look at the beauty—

PAUL CUMMINGS: The big building in the market [ph].

VICTOR SPARK: Yeah [inaudible] it was usually near the market, and I think there's a spiritual effect when you go to a museum and see things of the past, and the beautiful things, one room after another. I think there's a real spiritual effect. I can't imagine anyone being influenced to murder somebody after he's had two or three hours in a museum Looking at the beautiful exhibitions.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well have, you know, the directors and curators of the new museums or say, the universities, which they've built so many, have they found their way to your door—[inaudible]?

VICTOR SPARK: Only the university; I think the museum is primarily—[inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: [36:00] Yeah but some of them are building quite large collections.

VICTOR SPARK: [Inaudible.] Well, they get money.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: But the thing is, with a museum, you can't stand still. Did you want another one?

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, no.

VICTOR SPARK: The museum can't stand still because it becomes moribund.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: No more than you as a person—[cross talk]—keep standing still.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: I mean, can you say, "Well I knew him when he was in high school"? Well the boy was 14 years old when you knew him.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: Now he's 60 years old; how do you know what happened in between?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Totally different.

VICTOR SPARK: Very often you'll hear someone say, "He was a dumbbell in high school" [ph], or maybe he wasn't interested enough to be.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: And vice versa. He may have been a good student and nobody knew. But I would think museums are a way of life in the city. It's a focal point in the city when they have a beautiful museum. It's also a social center and it supplies that. Now I remember, if you wanted a social life, you went to whatever religion you were, you went to the church, the synagogue and met people and in that way you got to know other people and then you met girls, and girls met the boys.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: A lot of marriages took place, it was like a summer hotel—

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Inaudible.] [Laughs.]

VICTOR SPARK: And they would have church summers [ph], especially in the small town. Where else could you go?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. The games and all those [inaudible]—

VICTOR SPARK: Yes, you had no other place to go. But I think where there's a museum, they do create a social program, and also one for education. I think education is a part of the museum. I think it's a necessary thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, it's interesting, you know, the Metropolitan is now closed two days a week.

VICTOR SPARK: Well, that's stupid.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And, they were saying, when it was announced, that it's the largest single tourist attraction in the city. More people [cross talk]—

VICTOR SPARK: —it's stupid but they got themselves into trouble. You see, the desire [38:00] of a director to get his picture in the paper with a write up, if he feels that's more important than servicing and devoting his life to the service of public, he's going to get into trouble, and they all do. He can't think of anything else except to buy something that will be publicized all over the world. He makes—he thinks he's a great man; he's nobody.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah. I don't know why they fall into that; maybe they're very insecure people who become museum directors.

VICTOR SPARK: Well, I think a great scholar wouldn't fall into it. He would be too much interested. He wouldn't be looking—he would—might write a book if he were a great scholar, not a—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: —a professional scholar who then, I mean—like some people are in the church group [ph], the salary, and the emoluments [ph] but others go into religion because they're religious people. And of course, the churches lose out. But also, maybe they lose out because they don't provide enough for the people. I mean, what's wrong with having a baseball team in the nave [ph] of the church? [Cross talk]—tennis—[cross talk]—you know, you can read the Bible yourself which isn't always the most interesting book in the world, but when a fellow gets up there and reads a chapter from the Bible and doesn't mean a damn thing—

PAUL CUMMINGS: What are you going to do?

VICTOR SPARK: Yeah. [They laugh.] It's boring.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: It's very boring, but they don't make the church interesting. I would say that it's a very, very serious mistake, regardless of being a tourist attraction—that's part of us, our civilization—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I know, I know.

VICTOR SPARK: You have to—you can't treat it like a [40:00] secondhand object.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, it's a—I think sometimes it takes a certain amount of sophistication to observe that, and all the people—

VICTOR SPARK: Well [cross talk] a lot of people go into the museum and they just like to walk around and look at the things. They're not necessarily intellectual. Well I mean, after all, how did the common people in Florence or Rome realize that a great picture was being put up in the church and come there to look at it? They could recognize it. I don't think you have to go to college to develop a—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I don't think so either. In fact, sometimes the more education you have, the less taste you have.

VICTOR SPARK: Yeah. On the other hand, it is a period where you have the time to get an education.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: And look, you know, in different directions. Especially if you have your way paid, you can cultivate reading and so forth.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you—what do you think, you know, some kind of projection on where you think the art market's going to go? [Cross talk]—pictures get more and more [inaudible]—

VICTOR SPARK: You have to realize that there's a very solid basis for the art market because you have all these great collections. And you have them here; you have them abroad. You can just see a small group of pictures in [inaudible]. You know that they have five thousand times the museums in New York. That's a part of their, uh, the culture of the country, just like the trees and the canals and the rivers and uh—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think that they—

VICTOR SPARK: As long as there's an art world, there's an art business, because you have to have somebody who's a go-between and, I think a man would like to collect and then give the pictures to a museum, perhaps the city of his birth or [42:00] where he lived. And you have to have someone in between.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well what do you—how do you think that affects the market? I mean, there are only so many paintings of—

VICTOR SPARK: Well, then they dig deeper, and they recognize that other artists have merit. And uh, there isn't so much difference between, say, not the greatest artist, but next to the greatest artist and someone just below him. And then there are still a great many artists that aren't recognized yet, especially in old paintings but of course, you might get a picture that's just as beautiful as the picture of a great artist, but because he doesn't have the name, he doesn't have so much. But I think the more experience people get, become—the more they're recognized merit regardless of the name. That's why an art object can be a great price, but it has no name—[cross talk]—just a period, yeah—most of the market on it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: I think they should come to recognize that an anonymous picture could be a great picture.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But that's still more prevalent in Europe than here though, isn't it? [Cross talk]—going on in pictures here?

VICTOR SPARK: There are a lot of Americans who are very sensitive to [inaudible] and there are a great many people there also.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

VICTOR SPARK: Now, you know, it depends; when you say the art market, of course, the times are a bit easy. There isn't any opposition to buying things. It's not easy to sell pictures when something serious is going against the economy.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: But, pictures have a way of surviving Depressions. It also depends on which way the world goes. If it becomes Communist, we can kiss the art business goodbye—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: —and, [44:00] who's going to buy pictures? You have to have a wealthy man [inaudible] or lesser things that may be so natural [ph]. I mean, if a doctor, a surgeon makes [\$]200,000 a year, he can use part of his income on it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: Especially someone—[inaudible]. But of course, there aren't enough old pictures to go around.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well that's—[cross talk]—

VICTOR SPARK: —contemporary.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: And some people are more interested in artists than they are in the pictures.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: I would separate the two, or say if you're a dealer in older things, you're dealing with art objects and things. If you're dealing in contemporary art, you're dealing with artists, their personality—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh yeah, absolutely.

VICTOR SPARK: —and potential, the probability that maybe they'll become Gauguins or Picassos, and you speculate in that way. In one way you're speculating that perhaps somebody will recognize the same beauty you do, and you price it to include the price of the future. It's not very often you're right; sometimes you are. But you shouldn't say because you haven't sold a picture that there's something the matter with it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: But with contemporary artists, they don't sit still. They fill the artist up, because they can't sit still. They have to supply the artist with money.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, then they also have the source of supply, yeah, you—

VICTOR SPARK: Or you'll go elsewhere. If you're not—if you have a gallery, and you tell an artist that you appreciate his paintings, the only kind of appreciation he wants to know or hear about is a check. Whereas, you could have an artist—for instance, like we do a great deal of appraisal. And uh, I suppose if I wanted to, I could make a living just [46:00] doing appraisals. I have never gone out and asked for appraisals. They—

[END OF TRACK 01, SIDE B]

VICTOR SPARK: But if I wanted to concentrate on it, I could build a business.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I'm sure.

VICTOR SPARK: But it wouldn't be interesting.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: I'd rather go out and look for pictures and find them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right. Now, I was going to ask you, how contemporary do you come, in terms of—

VICTOR SPARK: Well, I mean, the better names, if something turns up, I wouldn't—You know, if I had a Picasso, I would try to sell it. There are contemporary paintings. But what do you call contemporary? People call contemporary paintings—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, [cross talk].

VICTOR SPARK: —but they should look at themselves as a living artist who are painting in today's way. Well if someone asked me to send, sell Andy Warhol, I wouldn't—[inaudible]—

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, that's—

VICTOR SPARK: I mean, that type of painting [inaudible]—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: I wouldn't, or a de Kooning; it's hard to say. I don't have any clients [cross talk] don't understand enough. You have to be able to say, "We have this picture here today. It's [\$]20,000. Tomorrow it'll be [\$]30[,000]. You better buy it now because next season, they're going to charge [\$]60[,000]."

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: Nobody ever says, "Isn't this beautiful?" like you would say about something—[inaudible]. But I think the smaller dealer depends a great deal on someone wanting to [inaudible]—either he finds out the museum wants to buy a certain picture, certain kind of picture, or client. I guess that if you had a big gallery, you could develop the work of a certain artist over the years and have exhibitions and so forth, like [inaudible] used to keep plugging with Monet until it clicked, and with one of the other artists. You can do that, take 40 or 50 years and constantly bring them before the public and then when the public starts in on it, he can't get enough.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [02:00] Right. Well that's the reward of all the other.

VICTOR SPARK: Yes, that's right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Um, well how do you find the art market in the last, um, two, three years because of our economic situation?

VICTOR SPARK: Well, I would say that I seem to run in cycles. Uh, quite, the '20s rolled [ph]. They were considered prosperous. The '30s were terrible. Then when the influx of Modernism in Europe in the '40s, it went up. And then, it—after the war was over, there was a three-year period where the market was depressed and with Wildenstein and—the Korean War caused a lot of inflation [ph] And then it started—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well the '60s were very—yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: Then the '50s got bigger, the '60s—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: —bigger than the '50s, then the '70s, with the exception of '71 when there was a big market crash—[inaudible]. Now the prices, I think, are as high or higher than it ever was before. Or just as high.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: But there's a limit to some, you know, deals. It goes so high, then there's no money left to buy.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right. How does one tell what that figure is though?

VICTOR SPARK: Well, I would hate to [inaudible] a syndicate in Europe bought a Chinese object for [\$]800,000.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative], oh yeah, that's right.

VICTOR SPARK: One year later, they were offering it for half. Or you know, the one—[inaudible]—but that came in.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: That's what happened.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Doyou know many syndicates like that in this country? Is there—[cross talk]—

VICTOR SPARK: —there were, yes. There was quite a few.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Not, not so many as—

VICTOR SPARK: Yes. Well, I was approached once; they wanted to buy pictures and hold them for five years, but they wanted to sell stock to buy them. So I said, "How much does the stockbroker get for selling the stock?" They said, "One third." [04:00] [Inaudible] crooked.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's a lot, yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: Sure it's a lot.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: It's all right for the stockbroker.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

VICTOR SPARK: And then there would be other expenses.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, sure. Oh, sure.

VICTOR SPARK: I—what I'm fighting for is the small dealer who buys what he can and you know, and tries to please the client with a good picture. And if he sold it too cheap, I don't see—[inaudible]—But there are dealers who feel if they don't get the last nickel—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, they get upset.

VICTOR SPARK: —they disgrace their country [ph].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. I was going to ask you if there are any special stories or anecdotes about, you know, particular paintings over the years that are—

VICTOR SPARK: Well, you could take the—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —anything unusual?

VICTOR SPARK: —the one of the *Steelworkers Noon* [ph] that was offered to Cleveland in the early '50s, for uh, \$1,200, and one of the trustees was against it because it glorified the working man.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Ha!

VICTOR SPARK: And then, I got it from the source, and I sold it to [inaudible] for \$2,000, and he kept it a year, then we turned it and said it interfered with his—[inaudible]. It was a painting of all this [inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh yeah, that's right.

VICTOR SPARK: And then I sold it, where I never met the client, and I sold it over the phone and priced it for \$2,750. And he kept it 10 years. I had an offer from a director of the Pittsburgh museum. The union wanted to spend \$10,000 for a picture and that would've been ideal, so I called up and offered [\$]10[,000]. He wouldn't sell it, and for a client I offered [\$]20[,000], a year or two later and he wouldn't [06:00] sell it, and he sold it, it got to Burton [ph] for [\$]30[,000] and then Burton put it in for sale, and sold his collection, and they finagled this client in to pay \$250,000 for it. And the client turned it back to Kennedy [ph], and along came Rockefeller and bought it, whether it paid a profit or not, I don't know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: Well that's the tale of a timeless actions [ph]. We're sitting here with 100 of them; we don't ask anything like that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, do you have [inaudible] drawings or anything like that?

VICTOR SPARK: Oh, we had—[inaudible]. We have 100 watercolors in—[inaudible]. Some few [ph] a year or something, but nothing like that. There was something—he only paid about half a dozen something. But if he painted like that, he would've been another—[inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: But he, he came off [inaudible] and it's important. But just on the name, we sold a watercolor recently, I think, for about [\$]3,800. We would be very happy to sell the ones we have, the much more modest paintings. We don't ask anything like that, but that's considered a unique picture.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: At the time it was on the market, anybody could've bought it for \$1,200. And I would—I had to explain why I was asking so much, because Richardson always liked the picture.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: I suppose if I had a pre-signed, signed, you know, if I thought that—but we had it for quite a while. And uh, suppose I kept it. How can I refuse an order with \$10,000 in it? But whatever you made would be dissipated by taxes by another painting.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But can't you as a dealer reinvest—[inaudible]—

VICTOR SPARK: Well, I think, but [08:00] sometimes you do, you know. Sometimes you don't get as good as you sold. And sometimes, I think, in this market anyway, if you kept everything you would've been better off, but what would you have lived on in the [inaudible] pictures important—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: —support the family or, or have any feeling and how would you know? How would you know you would be alive after five years? It's rather presumptuous to make that, the age of 35, if you can speculate for the next 40 years. How do we know we'll reach the age of 75?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: And then, what you going to do with the money? You couldn't sell the things. Like Thannhauser, he built up a marvelous personal collection then found out he couldn't even leave it to his family. He had to give it away.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: Who would pay the tax on it? He probably gave \$10 million or \$15 million worth of pictures to the Guggenheim.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, yeah, yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: But he—we had no choice. I think it's—you can't be foolish, you know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: And don't forget, a lot of our foresight is accomplished by circumstances. Like one fellow who had a piece of property on Third Avenue before the boom. He almost broke his neck trying to sell it, and when the boom took place, he made a killing. He admitted that; he said, "I don't claim any"—he said, "I tried my best to sell it and I couldn't." How many great pictures did Wildenstein sell for a fraction of what he could get today? You can't, uh—you have to live; I think that's the important thing. And if you could get along and have your health pretty good, you can't ask, you can't ask—[inaudible]—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, it sounds so much you've been telling me that you've enjoyed this activity over the years.

VICTOR SPARK: [10:00] Well, we've had some hard times. I would say, as long as you're doing well, it's enjoyable, it's not so enjoyable if you're not.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Ah—[inaudible.] [Laughs.]

VICTOR SPARK: Yeah. You have to go through a grim time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: But in retrospect, you had—just had to have faith that somewhere along the line, you'll sell something. But it isn't as if you were forced out of the business.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: You can always be an art dealer.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You guys haven't done a great deal of advertising or promotion or things like that, have you?

VICTOR SPARK: No, the year we [inaudible] and had these exhibitions—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: —and, uh, we advertised in a few scholarly places.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: We advertised in the *Art Quarterly* but that went out of existence. The *College Art Journal* and the *Master Drawing*—[cross talk]—and I think we advertised—[inaudible]. I think if you have an outside gallery, you have to.

PAUL CUMMINGS: On the street, you have to, yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: [Inaudible.] I think I—we can do better, Mrs. Spark and I, with an individual effort in a direction that we choose. I think the chance of us succeeding are better than trying to do business in general, you know what I mean? I mean, we're not Exxon.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] Yeah, but it sounds like it's gone along, you know.

VICTOR SPARK: Well I know, but if you pay your taxes, you don't get rich. I don't want to go into the dirt of the business, but, that's another—because, then I can say, "Well, it isn't any different than any other business." Only you're supposed to do it. But I would say by and large, if a dealer, if he hasn't inherited the money and has a great deal of cash—he's cheated the government—[inaudible]—it would hardly be [12:00] possible otherwise. He undoubtedly has a Swiss account. Yeah, I don't give a damn if they do it. Every European dealer cheats [inaudible]—but I don't like them to feel like they have any special standing, you know, with the world because they have money. They have—[inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Some do, some don't have any money; they have a lot of pictures and objects and say—

VICTOR SPARK: Well, of course, that's easy enough.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

VICTOR SPARK: It's easier to get money because you don't—you pay taxes on the money. If you didn't pay any taxes, you'd be rich.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: You'd really be rich. But if you didn't have the pictures, what would you have to sell?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So it's got to keep going around and around and around and around.

VICTOR SPARK: I think if it keeps you actively engaged and interested, that's a great deal. That's more than you can find in other businesses and we do a lot of court cases and appraisals, and they're always problems [ph]. And I think that it's a very interesting thing, and I think you can help people rather than have them fleeced with these spurious pictures, protect them. Going out on a job tomorrow, and uh, it may be that I could be of help. I've had people stop checks [inaudible] from here before the picture and the show.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Oh, sure. Do you find it difficult, when you're in a position like that and you happen to know where the picture comes from, or another dealer is involved—

VICTOR SPARK: [Inaudible]—I wouldn't. If someone asked me to go to another dealer [inaudible]—

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, but I mean, if you happen to know the painting belonged to somebody.

VICTOR SPARK: That rarely happens.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: If someone would say, "I looked at the picture in such and such a gallery can you go and look at it?"—[inaudible]—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, [inaudible] pretty difficult.

VICTOR SPARK: If you don't [14:00] buy it [inaudible]—

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs] yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: Ah, we have enough appraisal work without getting in trouble. I don't want lawsuits [inaudible.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative]. What is the appraisal mostly for, estate and insurance?

VICTOR SPARK: Estate and insurance, and damage cases.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: Uh, gift taxes. Against the government and for the government. I don't take any gift tax cases unless [inaudible] feel like [inaudible] even if it is the government [inaudible] it's there and very [inaudible]. And if it is a client, then we'll try to help them [inaudible] a bad picture. I've been on innumerable cases with government and when someone gives a bad object or picture, it's a good [inaudible.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. [Phone rings.] Is there—

VICTOR SPARK: Press that thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh. Is there much of that in terms of older paintings? I know there seems to be in contemporary field a—

VICTOR SPARK: Oh yeah. They give a great many old paintings [inaudible] good names—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: —pictures are no good. But, but the government [ph].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Ah. It's a marvelous business.

VICTOR SPARK: Well, it isn't marvelous. I mean, you see, the best thing is to be able to sell important things— but you take Wildenstein, they have some, made important sales, but what is it, a picture they had for 20 or 30 or 40 years? They have [inaudible] backlog. My theory is that you should try to build up, you know, your stock, but that if you sell enough to live comfortably, you have no income. They don't have to turn over everything involved.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: I mean, if you—that's all right if you don't—I mean first of all, you couldn't do it tax-wise. You never would be able to pay the taxes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: But if somebody is [16:00] dealing through a Swiss bank or a Swiss account, what the hell does he care? The more profit he makes the more cash he has. But if he gets caught, I feel sorry for him. They can give you the business too, you know. They gave it to Nixon. I don't think he came out so well.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] He still is a little—

VICTOR SPARK: They—they've caught some dealers. I've know one of them had to pay \$450,000—American— [inaudible]—we probably stole much more. They will [ph] one day. The tax bill was [\$]950,000.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Wow [inaudible]—

VICTOR SPARK: They took everything he had. But what the sense—if he had paid his taxes, he would be a rich man, but not as rich as he wanted to be. And it isn't fair in the first place.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: Why is it a guy working for \$100 a week in a factory, his tax is taken out, and just because a man is an art dealer—you know, privilege—he could be a crook.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. No, but [inaudible] in that, people are susceptible.

VICTOR SPARK: Well, and if he gets caught [inaudible]. I mean—[inaudible].

[Audio break.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah. Okay—wondering if there is any, you know, particular events or activities that you'd like to mention.

VICTOR SPARK: Well, I think that in the future, that, whether I would live long enough to do it, or someone else, someone should come out and settle this question, if you can settle it, this business of modern art because I have the feeling that the—it's very meretricious, if I may use the word.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Starting when, would you say?

VICTOR SPARK: The last 20 years. You see, if people—I don't expect anybody to paint the way his grandfather painted because it wouldn't be sensible.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: And now, we went to Washington, and [18:00] on the way down and on the way back, there was a large group of oil [inaudible] facilities, you know, with the stacks.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, in Jersey, right.

VICTOR SPARK: Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: And, and someone with the greatest taste in the world had painted, used three or four colors and painted it, not entirely, blue, gray, white, yellow. And I want to tell you that it just was one of the most beautiful pictures you could see.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: And we looked for it on the way back. It was beautiful. So, there are paintable subjects. But I, what I cannot understand is how a museum like the Whitney has an exhibition of a publicized artist, and there's absolutely nothing on the picture except a black or a white background—no lines or anything, and the fellow's name. Now why can't any house painter do this? I don't say they could paint like Picasso or Monet or Braque or Miró. I think that those things are unfamiliar. You have to live with them and learn to understand them. But this great, great mass of artists, I mean, why is it that in an industrial age where we pride ourselves on the machinery and science that we use, that all of a sudden, we have 50,000 geniuses in painting? I don't believe it. We never had that much in any—not in the Renaissance.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: There weren't 50,000 great artists at the time of Michelangelo.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, there are only 5,000 or 6,000 that live in Manhattan.

VICTOR SPARK: Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

VICTOR SPARK: Well, I think the question has to be settled.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: I think the public is getting the swindling it deserves. If they think those are great artists, let them buy them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well—

VICTOR SPARK: And they'll be down in [20:00] someone's basement or—[inaudible]—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Make the words [ph] right, right? [Laughs.]

VICTOR SPARK: Yes, but they use [inaudible], you see.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah—

VICTOR SPARK: When the writer for the *Times* said the public had been had, there was a big petition to have him fired [inaudible]. Even the present—[inaudible]—and they have writers there who know nothing about art. They just use words—[cross talk]—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —journalists, you know.

VICTOR SPARK: There's a lot of flimflam. It's not all solid.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I think it all gets sorted out by the collectors and the next generation of artists.

VICTOR SPARK: Yeah, that's correct.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know, the people who look at it and worry about it.

VICTOR SPARK: Well, we know from past history that certain great artists have been forgotten because tastes change.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: But it's a different thing now. People are well aware of everything.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, look at the rise of interest in American painters of the '30s and the '40s. The figurative painters that in 1965, you could hardly give them away.

VICTOR SPARK: That's correct.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Now, everybody's looking back, seeing that well [inaudible]—

VICTOR SPARK: Well, because they dig deeper when they're a top person [ph].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: You—one time you could get Winslow Homer, and then now it's too expensive. Or you take [inaudible] or somebody else.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: That's the way it goes. Well but not only that, but you can discover artists who were better than you thought. You used to pass them by.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, they tend to look different at different times after other paintings—

VICTOR SPARK: Yes. I still think that if you're in art, you have to change also. You can't go along with what you thought at 20 years old, when you've seen pictures for 30 years or more, 40 years more. Then you have to make up your mind, and, you know there's a limitation to everything and every piece of sculpture, but of course, without any training, when we walked into the Medici Chapel in Florence, [22:00] we didn't have any real art training, but we were flabbergasted.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: It just—I think we might have been sensitive people, but we were just flabbergasted. You, you felt like getting down on your knees. And that it—I couldn't say that I knew anything.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: And that has been the case with a number of paintings. I think that's the way people must've felt at the time these pieces, these—this art was created. But if you publicize, and you're bending your ear [ph], and Andy Warhol was the thing to buy, and some stupid-ass German paid [\$]75,000 at auction, or that idiot in Australia, two million for a Jackson Pollock, and \$590,000 for a de Kooning that you could buy here for [\$]40,000, thinks it's a reasonable price. He's a crook!

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, it's just that, it's fascinating, and the Pollock was, was sold for two because the man had been offered one, and he said, "If somebody would pay one, somebody else will pay two." So that was maybe true business—

VICTOR SPARK: If he hadn't sold the other one he had in the Museum of Modern Art for [\$]300,000—[inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: I know the two pictures. I was up there for an insurance [inaudible]. Had a little [inaudible] and uh, he, I don't know what he paid. He bought them from Janis for a few thousand.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Inaudible]—pay \$36,000 [ph].

VICTOR SPARK: He did. But he wasn't asking for—[inaudible]. I think at one time—well, he sold one for [\$]300; he couldn't been asking more than [\$]400,000. And then he got this idea. Maybe the fellow said, "Oh, you want to sell the picture?" He put a check up for half a million in a Swiss bank. "You don't want to sell the picture?" But it was nice to have [24:00] known.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh. [Inaudible.]

VICTOR SPARK: [Inaudible] although he said, "Buy it," two million dollars.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: We don't know what happened.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who, who will ever know? [Laughs.]

VICTOR SPARK: [Inaudible]—the only one to know is Heller [ph] himself.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: And the fellow who bought the picture isn't going to tell you.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: Whether Heller—that was another number [ph]. I—there's a lot going on. Look, in the old field [ph], there's this great literature—[inaudible]—and still, a client has an opportunity to use his taste; he'll look at it and he understands it, otherwise there are—[inaudible]. But those, they—who understands anything? Does the artist understand them?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Sometimes.

FEMALE 1: Vic!

VICTOR SPARK: Yes? Would you like to be in the business selling a lot of second-rate sporting goods just because, you know, and somebody, you know, telling your client that these are the things to have?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, but, you know, the same words are often applied to a great variety of objects, yeah.

VICTOR SPARK: No, look. Out of the whole group of artists, I'm sure some are dedicated artists, and some are charlatans, and if you go back to the olden days, some were charlatans and some were dedicated artists.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

VICTOR SPARK: You have a lot of junk you wouldn't, that was painted for a small church; it isn't worthwhile looking at it twice.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, absolutely.

VICTOR SPARK: I mean, I don't go along with the fact that everything that's old is good, you know, as it used to be—[inaudible]—but uh, I still would want to say that, if you buy something you don't understand, you're making a mistake.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right, right.

VICTOR SPARK: And that would go whether it's an old picture or a modern.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Or a new one.

VICTOR SPARK: The chances of getting stuck are a strongly in favor of the seller with contemporary art.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [26:00] Well, I think so because it is very adventuresome and people are trying things, and they find, "Well, I tried that and it didn't work, so I'll try something else."

[END OF INTERVIEW.]