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**Oral history interview with Elayne H. Varian,
1975 May 2**

Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National Park Service.

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Elayne Varian on May 2, 1975 and May 9, 1975. The interview took place at the Finch College Museum of Art, New York, NY, 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.

Interview

PAUL CUMMINGS: —acoustics on here. It's May 2, 1975. Paul Cummings talking to Elayne Varian, Finch College. Why don't we start at the beginning? You were born in San Francisco, right?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And did you go to school there?

ELAYNE VARIAN: No.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was that—you didn't stay there.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, yes. I-I did go to—

PAUL CUMMINGS: School.

ELAYNE VARIAN: —kindergarten. It was some kind of very progressive school where it kept me from learning how to spell properly.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] But your family didn't stay there very long.

ELAYNE VARIAN: No. Then we went to Chicago.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that's probably—well, it was University of Chicago. Hm. How old were you roughly when you went to Chicago? Was it right after kindergarten, or grammar school, or high school, or—what would you say?

ELAYNE VARIAN: About 10 I think.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. So your real schooling started in Chicago then.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yeah. Except I went to school in St. Louis and I went to high school when I was 12. And uh, I was in college when I was 16. And uh—

PAUL CUMMINGS: What high school was that?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Oh, it was just a private boarding school that my mother liked.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In St. Louis.

ELAYNE VARIAN: It was very nice and very uh, proper, you know. And it was co-educational, but the boys' dormitories—we could have dates. We could sit out on the campus and couldn't hold hands, couldn't wear any makeup. And um—

PAUL CUMMINGS: How horrible.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Oh, very prudish. That's my upbringing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's, but what's—in St. Louis? Is it that one that, that people go to all the time, the name of which I can't remember.

ELAYNE VARIAN: That's the one.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Because I've just been interviewing Sue Fuller who went there and taught there later. Um, so you went there and then that was high school, right?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Then I went to college in Chicago.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In Chicago, but—now, what was at the Art Institute? You had some classes there or—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL CUMMINGS: What, what were they? What was that?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Uh, well, it was very good kind of psychology teaching classes in art.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Very interesting.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who, who taught that? Do you know who taught that?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Uh, a Mrs. Howlett [ph] taught it who used to be head of the department. I doubt that she's there now, but she was a very energetic, spontaneous, marvelous person to be—work with.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Um. What about the university? And were you interested in art already or what—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. In art history. Yes. Because I did a lot in high school.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You mean painting, drawing?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yeah. Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was your family interested in that or were they—

ELAYNE VARIAN: No. No.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was just—

ELAYNE VARIAN: No. Separate interest.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Your own thing and they let you carry on and do it.

ELAYNE VARIAN: That's right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, that's good. Um, how long did you study at the Institute?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, uh, four years.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Four.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL CUMMINGS: I mean, and going to college?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yes. Well, they had a combination system.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh.

ELAYNE VARIAN: You get your academics at the University of Chicago and some academics at the Institute. And uh, then I was also allowed to attend the Bauhaus, Chicago Bauhaus, where I later taught.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I didn't know that.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who, who did you study with there?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Oh, some marvelous people in films. That's where I developed all my interest in films before I did that book. And uh—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really. That—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. He was this Czechoslovakian man whose name I don't remember now, but he went to Hollywood and became quite famous. And he gave—I studied film history with him and I enjoyed it very much, learned a lot about it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Because that's the—Moholy was there then, right?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And that was the, my basic, the beginning of all my interest in films.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, heavens. I didn't know that's when it started.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Uh-huh.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You had the jump on everybody. Well, how was that as a school to go to?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, the part that I attended was absolutely marvelous. And they did uh—I think that they were able to pose problems to their students to force them to be inventive, which can be done, and so many people don't give that kind of added push. They just either let it happen or not happen. And you can arrange things in certain ways and interests so that you can force people to be more creative than, uh, than they really are sometimes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did they do that? I mean give, so, one example, if you could think of one that—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, it's the same thing that—Brian O'Doherty, the way he teaches, he can force people to be uh, you know, as creative as possible by the kind of problems he poses. I think it's sort of hard to give an example offhand. It would be very involved. But you can do this. You can—uh, and I think Tony Smith does this, too, in his teaching, in my conversations with him at Hunter [College]. And um, you can be the kind of sort of relaxed teacher that just lets anybody do what they want to do, or you can watch them and then make suggestions or pose a kind of problem which you think will force them to do something. And, and uh, it's very helpful.

And I felt that they were very much in the design class at Moholy-Nagy—at uh, the Institute of Design. Uh, they were especially very creative with materials, the—you know, feel free to try any kind of new material. They would bring them in for possible use. And they did marvelous things. Little, a little funny old closet, they'd put a piece of plastic in front of it and it would look pure on the outside and then you'd move this little door and everything is all stacked up inside. But you don't see it. You know, that was the nice thing about it. They had this way of, in the design class, of building designs, redoing apartments, and furniture, this type of thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you study all those?

ELAYNE VARIAN: No. No, I didn't, but I—because I taught there I saw a lot of what was going on. It was very interesting.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, were you interested in teaching? Was that a career direction in the—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, I thought so in the beginning. And I did some teaching. Well, I needed the money, too, to finish my master's degree. Well, that's only—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who did you study with at the University of Chicago? Anybody in any of the classes you remember particularly?

ELAYNE VARIAN: No. Art history, you mean?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, anything, you know.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Peter wasn't there then. Peter had—Peter Sells [ph] had left. Oh, I don't really remember.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Or in any other classes or you know, history or language, or?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, the heads of departments, usually I tried for that because they were more interesting and I—some of my classes I took at night and I was tired. And I'd find if they weren't very stimulating I'd go to sleep. So I usually tried to get the heads of departments. I know when I studied musicology I got the head of the music department and he was very stimulating.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, good, good. Uh, when did you start teaching at the Institute then, of Design?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, I was working on my master's degree.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The same time.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Same time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You had a full schedule, didn't you? [Laughs.]

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yeah. I did. Yes, because you see, the, my master's was—took as much time as usually a doctorate. I think that's why I bogged down on getting a doctorate, because it was 36 hours at Chicago University, and 36 hours at the Institute.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that's a lot.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Which is 72 hours. And it's usually 36 hours for a master's degree.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was the M.A. on? What did you do?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Uh, fine arts, art history, and education. I did both.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, goodness. So you were taking studio classes, as well as art history, as well as the academics.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL CUMMINGS: How'd you find time?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Oh, you do.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Yeah.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Just do.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's incredible. Well, who were some of the painting teachers that you'd studied with, or drawing people? Do you remember any of them?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Nobody really great.

PAUL CUMMINGS: No. Just this, whoever was there.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Whoever was there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. That went along.

ELAYNE VARIAN: I hadn't thought about this. You should have prepared me for this. I would have thought back and tried to get some names, but I'm afraid uh—well, most of them were teachers who had studied with someone great. One teacher who had studied with Hofmann over in Europe, Hans Hofmann in Europe. And so, of course, she taught in that manner, which was very interesting. And then later I went to some of Hofmann's classes in New York. Um, but of course, she did not progress from the point where she had studied with him, whereas he was going on and developing and she stopped.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see.

ELAYNE VARIAN: You see? That kind of thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Uh-huh.

ELAYNE VARIAN: There weren't perhaps the greatest teachers at Chicago, but um, there were interesting teachers.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, there weren't very many art galleries to go to in Chicago, were there?

ELAYNE VARIAN: No. No. Very few. There were like four or five, plus the Art Association. And even then, the Contemporary Museum wasn't there when I was there studying.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The Arts Club I think was the only—

ELAYNE VARIAN: The Arts Club was there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Kind of modern activity.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. They sort of kept things up. And the Art Institute did stress a lot of modern things, which was always interesting. And I taught at the Institute, too.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. How long did you teach there?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Oh, just a couple of years when I was working on my master's degree.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you like teaching there? Because that to me has always sounded like such an unusual place, you know. Uh, the instructors were so busy in the academic world, as well as in industry or business, or whatever else their, their interests were.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, I thought that that was good, sort of healthy, because they kept abreast of what was going on. And uh, I liked that part of it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, good. How did, how did you find that as a place that might have influenced your own ideas about teaching? Did it, as opposed—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. I think it did.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. The philosophy I thought was very good, their philosophy of teaching. And that's, that's the important part of it actually.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Uh, how did you come to uh, to New York? Because that was—was it when, much before you—

ELAYNE VARIAN: I used to come uh, with my mother and we'd do the theatre, and concerts, and opera, and things like that uh, periodically. And then I just came and decided to live here where all the action is.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] Uh, is that when you started working for Duveen or was there—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Shortly after that. I was married and then I started working for Duveen.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. How did you come to work for Duveen Brothers?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Um. Well, I don't really know. They interviewed five or six people and um, I don't know why they chose me, but I was quite delighted. And I enjoyed it. It was certainly an unusual

world to live in. It wasn't an American world at all. It was an English world. The whole place was run like an English household. And uh, I was the only one there with an education beyond high school.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. The president of Duveen's, Mr. [Edward] Fowles had never gone beyond high school. No one had.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How marvelous.

ELAYNE VARIAN: And no one there had ever studied art history, it had just come in through their veins through working there for years and years. And there were attendants on each floor. Do you know anything about Duveen's?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, a little bit. I'm very curious about what, what it was like, you know.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, there were lots of attendants, but no one ever saw them. They were sort of back stairs, you see. And they would listen as I would go through. I was hired to do the three galleries on the main floor. And I arranged the exhibitions there, and took care of the general public because it had just begun to be open to the general public. Before that, it was by appointment only. And they didn't believe in those—really letting in all those peasants off the street.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. [Laughs.]

ELAYNE VARIAN: They thought this is sort of a good idea. So that was what I was supposed to do. And there were two partners, Mr. Boggis [ph] and Mr. Fowles, who were president and vice president, and they were equal partners. And Mr. Boggis died after I was there for about four years, four-and-a-half years. And he was the one who did the selling. And when things got busy, then I would sell, but I, for as long—as long as he was there, I was not allowed to make a final sale. I would, uh, you would say you wanted a Rembrandt, we'll pretend, and I would show the Rembrandts and I would talk to you about them, and I would show you which books they were illustrated in, and give you the history, and so forth, and you would finally make a final decision. You may come back three or four times to keep viewing this Rembrandt again. And then when you finally decided you wanted to buy it, then I would introduce to Mr. Boggis and the sale was finalized.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And they would talk all the money.

ELAYNE VARIAN: They would talk the money. And then after Mr. Boggis died, then I did that myself. So I was the person who did that and uh, it was fun sometimes because I would get a man who would, you know, expect to be taken care of by another man. So I'd say, "Well, now, if you'll just sit down a moment, we'll go, well, tell me about your bank accounts." And we would go through which banks he used, and how he wanted to pay for this, whether he wanted to pay for it all at once or by, over a period of months, whatever it was. By the time I had it all finished, he said, "I guess we don't need to talk to anybody else."

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

ELAYNE VARIAN: But you see, we arranged the payments [phone ringing]—should I take the top off that?

[Tape stops, restarts.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: There we go.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Okay. Um, people with a great deal of money um, had it all tied up. They didn't have—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, it was working.

ELAYNE VARIAN: —ready cash. It was working for them. So we would always have their payments. We'd find out when they paid their insurance, and those were always very large amounts of money. So then we would work out that they would pay us on other months. And we would work out a contract of exactly when they would pay, and so much. And we had been doing that for years and years, long before the small galleries began to take monthly payments or something, instead of complete cash. So that was interesting. Then I was going to tell you about the back stairs and I sort of got switched off.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Um, as I would take people through the different upstairs galleries, I would drop little hints. They would probably tell me that they were interested in a Botticelli or some kind of a drawing or something. And so as I would go through the galleries and pass through, I would say uh, "Oh, yes. When we get to the fourth floor, I will show you such-and-such a drawing that we have," or a painting. And then the attendants would tear up the back stairs and get these out and have them in a little velvet room all set up like magic.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, my word.

ELAYNE VARIAN: No one knew how this all happened.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But it was a busy back stairwell.

ELAYNE VARIAN: It was a very busy back stairway. Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, marvelous.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Uh-huh. And so all these things went, went on back there. And then, the caste system, of course, was there, too. And being American, I was perfectly willing to fill in for anybody if they needed to have a little extra time to go to Bloomingdale's or Sak's or something. And Molly, who was the attendant on the second floor, would get another attendant, her equal, to give her a little extra time to get uptown to make a purchase. And she couldn't get someone one day. So I said, "Well, Molly, I'll do it." This would consist of uh, just watching her floor and being one of the back stairs, people listening. And um—

PAUL CUMMINGS: How could you hear, though?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Ringing the bells. Well, you could hear. They'd keep the door cracked a little bit.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see.

ELAYNE VARIAN: And you'd, you'd hear. They heard everything, or they'd sneak outside when you were in a gallery and listen.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see. Yeah.

ELAYNE VARIAN: And then hide the moment you came out.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

ELAYNE VARIAN: [Laughs.] It was a wonderful world. Uh, so I did offer Molly this and she was quite indignant. And she said, "Mrs. Varian, this would be beneath you." And I said, "No. It would not be beneath me. I feel I could handle it. And so you just go ahead and take it." And she said, "When you have been here a year, then you offer this." So I wrote it down. I kept, had to keep a diary of all the people who came in and what they were interested in and so forth. And so I wrote it down. It was a year from that and I said, "All right, Molly. This is your day, one year later, to go to Bloomingdale's." And she couldn't believe it and she laughed, but she wouldn't go. She wouldn't allow me to do it because she felt this was wrong. It was amusing though, all the funny little things that happened.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There were quite a few people working there, though, weren't there?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Oh, yes. There were a lot more than you ever saw. You never saw anyone at all. They were all hiding. And then, of course, if someone would come in, I would have to get sneaky ways of getting information about them, you know, the social register. I had all these books in my office. I would sit outside in the marble hall and then I had an office in the back. And I had back there all the uh, the books of New York businessmen, how to look them up and find out where they were, and how, all their banks, and social register, and so forth. And of course, as long as Mr. Boggis was there, if someone wasn't in the social register; he didn't want to take care of them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

ELAYNE VARIAN: [Laughs.] Oh, really. Yes. That was so—

PAUL CUMMINGS: How marvelous.

ELAYNE VARIAN: [Laughs.] It was a lovely world.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what kind of, you know, what kind of collectors came in in those days?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Oh, big collectors and museums. After all, museums don't just buy contemporary things, you know. They fill in in departments if they need. And we had marvelous Renaissance pieces, and 18th-century French, and English, and had quite a storage area of great things.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah. It's fascinating, the whole, the whole back stairs uh, business. Uh, and you were the only American. Everybody else was English there.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. Yes. English or Irish. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yes, I was the only American.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's amazing.

ELAYNE VARIAN: [Laughs.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did that make you feel different or in—

ELAYNE VARIAN: No.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —in any particular way?

ELAYNE VARIAN: No.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Or was it all—

ELAYNE VARIAN: No, it didn't at all really.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Yeah. Um, what—

ELAYNE VARIAN: I couldn't get used to the caste system. I never could get used to that, but you could see its points and you know, you read English book—I read a lot of books about England at that point to try and get seeped in the whole thing so that it wouldn't seem so foolish.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what was—

ELAYNE VARIAN: The Upstairs and the Downstairs that we've been watching lately, that's what that was.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's the same kind of—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Same kind of thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —thing. Yeah.

ELAYNE VARIAN: You stay in your own position.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. How did you find it, though? You know, coming out of college and having studied art, all of a sudden to be selling it to places?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, of course, I didn't go in to sell it in my original thing, and I didn't start selling for—I would take people through as sort of goodwill, someone, if I found they were from out of town and they had longed to see Duveen's. So that I began in that way as sort of PR work to take them through and show them our great uh, French 18th-century palace furniture, and our beautiful English furniture, and the Chinese porcelain, and so forth, and let them see the galleries that were set up upstairs. I didn't show them anything special, but just the galleries that were set up. So I started doing this and learning the prices and the code system that they used. Uh, and then, sometimes from this, a sale would develop. I also worked a lot with decorators. [Phone rings.] Sorry.

[Tape stops, restarts.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, uh, did you have any idea of how the, you know, the history of Duveen's before you came there other than what, or was it just more general?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, the books, Behrman's books and things in general I had read just out of interest, because I reread them afterwards, and uh, enjoyed it thoroughly. The history and—was quite, quite fun. I always assigned them to my students because it was an era which has passed and it was rather beautiful.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, they were very strong in decorative arts, weren't they? I mean, they always had a lot of furniture.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Oh, yes. Both English and French. But the finest. The best. Just the ormolu itself was marvelous.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Incredible.

ELAYNE VARIAN: You know, it was sculpture. Just beautiful. Everything was perfection.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think that you, you, you acquired different tastes or, or got different ideas about art living with it every day like that? And the quality, and the ambience, and—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, perhaps. Uh, I have great knowledge in 18th-century French furniture, but I wouldn't want to live with it myself. I have the knowledge, which I did not have when I went there. I knew really very little about furniture. I think that this is something that uh, art history doesn't spend much time on really. And so I was not knowledgeable in it when I went to Duveen's. And I developed knowledge and an interest, and I have great interest. And uh, but I'm not, you know, out to purchase French furniture for myself. I don't—you'd have to have a lot of care and a great deal of help in your home to take care of it. And I—it really isn't the kind of thing I like to live with, but it's very beautiful. I like it in museums, and I liked it at Duveen's, but I don't have it in my home. But I do like Italian Renaissance, and I do have that in my home.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, do you um—you know, what were the collectors like? Were there certain people who, who sort of bought everything from or through Duveen's, you know?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, like the Fords, you know. I remember when uh, Mrs. Henry Ford the second came in with her decorator and we looked for things, little tables and sort of this and that. And then they might see a great French painting that would be just right, and we would send it out on approval so that—sometimes you'd come in to, they would come in to buy a painting or a drawing and might end up with a piece of furniture. And just the reverse might happen. And people would dash in the last minute to buy a birthday present.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

ELAYNE VARIAN: And you know, it was terribly hard because sometimes I got—

PAUL CUMMINGS: What kind of birthday present would you buy at Duveen's?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Twelve thousand dollars was the least thing we had. And it's awfully hard. There, there was sometimes some young married people who had collected all their money and they wanted to buy one something from Duveen's. And there was nothing to show.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was just, yeah. Too much money.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Do you—what, what were the collectors—were there people who bought frequently, you know?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, Bobby Lehman and people like that would buy frequently from us, as gifts or something to give Yale or, or he would take on another apartment or an office or something, and would want a piece here and there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think that many of the people who bought uh, in those days thought of it as an investment? Or was it really for their own pleasure and uh—

ELAYNE VARIAN: I think that they were very knowledgeable and they realized this was an investment, as well as something to live with.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So they saw all the possible points—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —of what it was.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Yeah.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, they were very knowledgeable people. I don't think you spend a \$150,000 easily, unless you realize what you're doing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Even if you have millions.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Even if you have millions.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's still a lot of money.

ELAYNE VARIAN: It's still quite a bit of money.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Yeah. Do you know, I'm curious. The contrast between Duveen's and then contemporary art, which is—

ELAYNE VARIAN: [Laughs.] First, I was always interested in contemporary art and I used to see—you remember with John Washburn and the Graham Gallery, and remember all the openings on Tuesday nights?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Tuesday nights. Right.

ELAYNE VARIAN: I loved it when I could get to about five. And when people would come in who were not knowledgeable in contemporary art and I would explain the different exhibitions to them. They could accept this from me at Duveen's, whereas they could not accept it at Rosenberg's or any of the other contemporary galleries, because they thought um—because they were in a place with Old Masters.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see. I see.

ELAYNE VARIAN: You see. So they could accept the kind of educational viewpoint. And then I used to have some people who would come in and, and they'd say, "You don't belong here. Let me take you out of all this."

[They laugh.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that's marvelous. But did Duveen's do much business with other dealers or, or not very much?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Uh, no. We dealt mostly with collectors and museums. Sometimes if uh, some great work of art were for sale and, as happens, might come up at auction, no one wanted to plunk

out a half a million for it, and then maybe have to keep it for seven years before they could turn it over. Uh, two or three dealers would go in together and make the purchase, and then they would decide ahead of time who was going to show it first, and who, whose gallery it would be in first. And then this way we weren't, didn't tie up too much money.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And just one, pieces in various things. Yeah.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That occasionally happened.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Were you ever involved with, with any of their acquisitions or—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Oh, yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. Later, you see, after Mr. Boggis died I would find furniture and different things or, or a client would pass on and we would, we read the obituaries constantly. And then we would ask to purchase the collection of either furniture or perhaps the paintings, and like that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So then there were a lot of—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Constant.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —daily rituals on—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. Oh, yes. Constant movement.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But did you have a great deal of correspondence with scholars about the works?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Or did somebody else really?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, usually Mr. Fowles did that. That's what he loved. He didn't like to sell anything and he didn't want any part of that, but he loved being with museum people and the scholars. That was his great love.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They had a great record system for all the things they bought and sold.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. Complete. All those records were purchased by the Clark Museum.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, right.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And they have them all.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Is there a library up there, too?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It is.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's fantastic.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Um, why, you know, after that, you um, you came to Finch, right?

ELAYNE VARIAN: No. I went to the Village Arts Center for two years.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh. But did you have any interest in being a dealer after all that?

ELAYNE VARIAN: No. It wasn't really—uh, Duveen's was more like being in a museum. It had all the museum quality. And even though one made a sale somehow it was such a, there was nothing high pressure about it. It was—the person who came to you wanted it. You weren't trying to push anything. You weren't trying to—I'm not aggressive. And so I guess I was a pretty soft sell. Sometime I guess they can be—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, but that's, you know, that's sort of an area of, of art dealing where it's very difficult to be hard sell, though, isn't it?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, I couldn't be what—it isn't my nature. Yes, there are people who can, but I couldn't be. As a matter of fact, I spent more on an advertising program than it cost to keep Finch Museum. I spent 50,000 a year on an advertising program.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. A lot of English magazines. We'd take two or three pages in color.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, right.

ELAYNE VARIAN: You know, and this sort of thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But it was a multi-million dollar business.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes, it was.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But you know the, one of the things that always intrigued me I think about going into Duveen's was that you know, there was never anybody there.

ELAYNE VARIAN: No.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Once in a while on a special exhibition there would be people. Um, but you rarely saw more than one or two people.

ELAYNE VARIAN: No. People were afraid to come in.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really? Why, do you think?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, all those big iron doors in the beginning, you know, sort of kept out a lot of people. And uh, well, and then for so many years they'd been a private gallery. Then it was just until I was there that they were open to the public.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Do you think that improved their business in any way,

opening it to the—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes, it did. It did improve interest. Uh, we would be written up in the New York Times, and then we'd have a lot of people coming in. And—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was that just traffic or, or did it bring in business?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, it brought in business like the editor from Time Magazine, or the art editor from Life or some other magazine would come in because something had been written up in the New York Times. And then they would have a friend who was interested in something and, and ask if the friend, if he could bring his friend in to see something. And it did, it did help.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So in a—

ELAYNE VARIAN: It created an interest and it widened the scope. The scope had gotten very narrow.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah.

ELAYNE VARIAN: And so it did widen the scope. I think they were very wise to do that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I mean, I had the feeling Duveen's clients were maybe a couple of dozen people or something.

ELAYNE VARIAN: No. No. Uh, even had a charming young man from France who was a scholarship student in America at Columbia in art history, and he tutored in French in order to keep himself here. And he must have gotten enormous amounts of money. And he would come with the bills in his hand, a wad, a huge wad. And he was interested in Chinese porcelain. And he would sit for hours with a little pot in his hand and look at them through the light and so forth, and make his decision on—and he would—where he would get \$1200—

PAUL CUMMINGS: To pay you in cash.

ELAYNE VARIAN: —paid in cash. Ten thousand dollars in cash. Got out the bills. He saved it up in a stocking some place.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that's incredible.

ELAYNE VARIAN: It was incredible.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's very French, though.

ELAYNE VARIAN: [Inaudible.] And very amusing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] There weren't many people who paid for things in cash, though, were there?

ELAYNE VARIAN: No. No. He was the only one.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that's incredible. Were there people who bought expensive things who would just write a check for it or was it mostly the contracts and paintings?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Mostly contracts.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, Bobby Lehman would buy something. He would give us a check. Uh, but some—not always. Sometimes. If it was just before income tax and he wanted to make a gift, then he would pay for it all at once, but other times he would pay for it over a period of time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That must have been interesting insight into uh, how those people collected and what their interests were.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did their interest change very much? I mean, if somebody really liked English painting, could you get them interested in French or Italian?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. So they were open to—

ELAYNE VARIAN: They were open to—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —some kind of suggestion.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that's incredible. Well, and, and they closed in '62 then, right? Or thereabouts? You were there till what? '60, '62?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yeah. They closed uh, about a year-and-a-half after I left. About a year or two. And I was getting a little bored actually. It wasn't challenging enough anymore for me. It was sort of becoming like an old man's toy. He didn't want me to sell anymore and that was the most exciting thing that—one of the most exciting things. We weren't buying very much at the end, and we weren't selling very much. And I would sell, oversell for one year and I'd have to sell into the next year. No one could pay until the next year.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, because of taxes.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Because of taxes and things. And um, so that's when I went to the Village Arts Center because that presented quite a challenge. And uh, it was.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They must have had tremendous overhead, though, running that building with the people and everything else.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And they kept it up so beautifully.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I remember that.

ELAYNE VARIAN: It was absolute perfection.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Fresh flowers and everything.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yeah. But I was thinking of the, you know, painting the walls and the roof, or the tiles on the roof. I remember one time it leaked and everyone was horrified that such a thing would happen at Duveen's.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Um, how did the, how did you come to the Village Arts Center?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, I met someone who was having difficulty running it. See, it was a non-profit organization that had a membership. And it had become ingrown. There was—nothing was happening from the outside coming in. Nothing—

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was just a little circle going around.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Just a little circle and they would have, uh, exhibitions where, it would be juried. And then out of the juried show, let's say there were four chosen. And they would have a four-man show, and out of the four-man show, some would be chosen for a one-man show. But it was all within their membership. And it needed to be opened up.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh. So it just was passing the same thing around year after year.

ELAYNE VARIAN: That's right. It was just who would go in this year and who would get that year. It was a very confined thing. And that—and they couldn't get money. They couldn't get uh, foundations interested in it because it was too ingrown. So I went there to open it all up, which I did.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Hmm. How'd you do that?

ELAYNE VARIAN: The members just hated me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

ELAYNE VARIAN: Because they were losing their little place that they had had in the world for so long. And I did get money from foundations when the Ford Foundation was watching and they would come to different exhibitions. I was very pleased with what was happening. And then I came to Finch.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. How did you come to Finch then?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, when I was at Duveen's, you know, the art world is very small.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. [Laughs.]

ELAYNE VARIAN: And you just mention something and then later it happens. Uh, Dr. DeMarco was the President of Finch. Came to Duveen's when he had a—he used to have exhibitions for the students in the student lounge, very much like this one, upstairs. And the, he believed that one should live with paintings, not just look at them in a standing—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Public place.

ELAYNE VARIAN: —situation. And so, the girls have different clubs here like the French Club, and the Italian Club, and, and science clubs and different things like this. And they used to have their own meetings usually at luncheon. So he arranged exhibitions and the girls would have their luncheon sitting down in this room with paintings, beautiful paintings and sculpture in the room. And so they would be absorbing it while they were there at luncheon. And there would be a little opening for the girls, and they'd have a little listing of what was there. And he started this and I helped him several times at Duveen's. And I came to an opening one time. They were always very, very sweet, with champagne and this sort of thing, very nicely done. And he told me that he decided

that the girls needed to have, know something about contemporary art. And did I know anyone who would like to be the director or the curator? And I said, "Yes. I do."

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] Oh, my Lord.

ELAYNE VARIAN: It was just as simple as that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

ELAYNE VARIAN: So then I came back next week when he was redoing this building and he'd uh, gotten down to the brick. And I was hoping he would leave the natural brick, but it was a little difficult because where the fireplaces were, they had to take—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, right.

ELAYNE VARIAN: —that out in and fill it in. But he did leave the brick and painted it. And he was pleased. And he said, now I had saved him my whole year's salary because he didn't have to plaster the whole building.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Wow. Fantastic.

ELAYNE VARIAN: And I like the natural brick, don't you?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

ELAYNE VARIAN: In some place. I mean, all, the whole room isn't that. It's just one wall in each case.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So did you develop a program with him beforehand? Or how, how did you start, because here was a new—

ELAYNE VARIAN: A whole new thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: A new project. Yeah.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Uh, well, what he wanted and what I wanted were two different things. I wanted to start out with an exhibition program. And he felt that I should start out by getting people to give us paintings. So I tried, but you can't get people to donate until they know what you're going to do. It has to have a kind of character to it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

ELAYNE VARIAN: And to know what you're doing. So we sort of worked it out together and did both together. And uh, have had many, many gifts. We've never had a purchase fund at Finch, so that our permanent collection consists of gifts.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's all gifts. Everything.

ELAYNE VARIAN: It's all gifts. And the artists liked what we did here. And they would give gifts of drawings and so forth. So that made it very nice.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you had still some of the good years when the artists could give and get a tax benefit.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Oh, yes. And we did have. And they did give. Yes. Yes. I have a wonderful Jungermann [ph] upstairs, a beautiful painting, which is illustrated in an Abram's book written by Barbara Rose. It's a magnificent painting and he gave us that. And that has gone up quite a bit in value, his donation.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did, how did this shift in the tax laws affect the gifts?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, of course, it did affect the gifts tremendously. And I think it's a very unfair law. I don't know how you feel about it, but there's no reason why an artist shouldn't give the gift and have it the same value as it is with anyone else. Why should the artist only be able to—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Be penalized.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Be penalized and take off for the paint and the canvas and anyone else be able to get \$80,000 for it? That's very unfair. I hope that they repeal that law.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They, they're having a terrible time trying to change it.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, it doesn't seem fair.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, because it's you know, the Nixon papers, and this and that, and all that stuff. It's, it's part of that whole thing. And it's come to—

ELAYNE VARIAN: I don't see how that makes—the papers have anything to do with that awful law that affects artists.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, self-generated things that have, have increased in value or something. I don't know what the legal term is, but it's terribly difficult.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, there are ways, of course, of getting around everything. And there are ways of getting around this.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, people exchange and give this, and there are all kinds of ideas.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's always a—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, artists have always uh, had their own collections anyway, collections of works of art by their friends.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah.

ELAYNE VARIAN: And as you go into their studios, there's always one area which has their collection of the art that they enjoy. And I have many gifts before this law went in of works of art that were given to the museum that friends had exchanged.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

ELAYNE VARIAN: And um, this is a very normal thing to do.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But you know, it's, it's um, I think your first exhibition here was an artist select exhibition. Uh, did you have much time to plan you know, for—I don't know

when you started and when—

ELAYNE VARIAN: I started in March and the first exhibit was in October.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, so you did have some months to—

ELAYNE VARIAN: So I had some months to plan. And this was a show that Dr. DeMarco asked me to do. He thought it would be interesting. Unfortunately, the press sort of treated it like a game, and to see—and—

[Tape stops, restarts.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Anyway, did uh—you've always gotten a lot of coverage on the exhibitions here.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. Fortunately. Uh-huh.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Uh, did he, you know, review your exhibition plans? Did he make suggestions—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Oh, yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —for many shows or?

ELAYNE VARIAN: No. After um—well, I went to him with each exhibition as I planned it and asked if, you know, any suggestions from him. And after the first year, then I just turned in my—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Program.

ELAYNE VARIAN: —my, my schedule. And once in a while—there are certain, of course, activities in the college that I would know about or have to know about in order to be sure to have an exhibition on at that time, such as Father's Day, or Parents' Day, or uh, various other alumni things and things like that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

ELAYNE VARIAN: And it would be very awkward if this were the time I was changing shows.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I see.

ELAYNE VARIAN: So, of course, I have the college schedule to go by, as well as my schedule. And I have to work it in so that everything works out with the college.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Um, you know, I think it was in that first year that you started the famous Art and Process series.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did that idea come about?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, uh, I don't know. I just, I had been thinking about it for some time. Dr. DeMarco liked the idea very much. It was an educational uh, thing. And I am sort of educationally minded. And I thought that it was a good idea to see the process as much as we could show in a museum. Now, like uh, the Lichtenstein, I think that he was in the first one. I had the original little

thing from the funny paper, the comics I guess you call them. Uh, the little square was cut out and framed. And then I had his drawing that he drew from that, and showing the changes in it. Then the uh, the final piece was to be a metal—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, right. The—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Uh, what's the word?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Enamel, wasn't it?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Enamel piece like a, like a refrigerator is baked now. Uh, then he made a full-scale drawing. In this case, it happened to be four feet by four feet of Vicki and in color, exactly the way it, the enamel piece was to be finished. Then there were all—then there were stencils made at the factory, so they could stencil in the right color. And what I showed was the, the comic strip, the drawing from the comic strip, the four-foot drawing. The stencils I'd had put together so that you could see the process, and the final enamel, which was a multiple of four.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

ELAYNE VARIAN: And this was the process I used. Now, of course, some artists do not work from sketches. They work from an idea, something they see in a book, uh, some kind of crystal that they might be looking at. So in this case, I would display the book with the page open to the thing that had interested them, as was the case with Robert Smithson. And with his piece, it was derived from, from the crystal. And uh, this is what I showed. Or sometimes it was an event that happened, as with Robert Indiana when he did the Bridge series. It started—he lived in down in Coenties Slip.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Coenties Slip, right.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Uh, which was right by the bridge. And there was a tremendous fire one time, and the fire boats came out, and the fire engines on the bridge. Some boat blew up or something and they had all these fire things. And this, and he went back and wrote in his journal—several of the artists who lived around there, they wrote it up because it was such a spectacular event. And it impressed them so much that they didn't forget it. So his whole Bridge series came out of that. And he does work from little thumbnail sketches. So I had various little thumbnail sketches and his um, what he wrote in his journal, and what we he asked me to have someone else from their—someone else had written was also in a vitrine along with his drawing and his final painting. So all these things come from, in different ways.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. They were very successful exhibitions, weren't they?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Very. Very.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Uh-huh. So you, they attract a lot of people.

ELAYNE VARIAN: A lot of people. Oh, after the first one, then colleges from Connecticut, New Jersey, and of course in New York, would send art history students here to do papers on the show.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

ELAYNE VARIAN: And I would come up and they'd be all sitting on the floor, lying on the floor, writing up all these things. And it became very important from this educational point of view.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So that was a terrific thing for Finch, too, in terms of—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Oh, yes. It was very good. And I still get letters, when am I going to have the next one?

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

ELAYNE VARIAN: England, from all over.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. The catalogues are very scarce. In fact, I'm out of quite a number of them. Of course, the catalogue was not a catalogue in itself. It was part of the exhibition.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Because the catalogue showed the artist in his studio so that you'd have the visual part of the artist, and you'd get the kind of studio he had. Some are very neat. Some are sort of messy and, and it's nice to see this kind of thing. And a statement by the artist. And a listing of what was in the show. So that the two went together to make a whole.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Were, were there programs that, that you developed to use the students here in organizing the exhibitions, doing installations, curating, or?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Oh, yes. We had a museology class and they, well, they learned different things. [Laughs.] The most difficult thing is how to write a letter to borrow a work of art. The letters, the first time they write, all come out very demanding as if it were a great feat, that Finch should ask you to borrow—they just don't get the point at all, that we have to really be very ingratiating to borrow something, a great work of art for a show. So they have this to learn. They learn about long forms and insurance values. And then uh, when the show comes in, I used to have a gallery right over one of the main gallery—classroom uh, where we would hang in the classroom. And we would—they would learn that one painting can absolutely kill another one, or it can make it very beautiful. And they would learn, of course, by trying it and seeing what happened. And then they would see the final show the way I had hung it. So that they really learned a great deal—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, they really work with the objects and everything.

ELAYNE VARIAN: They worked with the objects. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that's terrific.

ELAYNE VARIAN: And the worked with the show.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Were these art history students?

ELAYNE VARIAN: All art history students. Yes. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And we, I now, and also independent study students who were usually fourth-year students who can really go through a whole show with you, and then have—I try to give them some kind of independent study outside, like with the gallery for three weeks maybe or something like this, so they can get some, some—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Another point of view.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Another point of view.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah. But—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Or with an artist, something like this. Like Brian O'Doherty needs to have his work catalogued. And so one of my independent study students is going there one day a week and working with cataloguing his things. He's been very remiss also. He would send five or six drawings to Texas and someplace else, and—

[Tape stops, restarts.]

ELAYNE VARIAN: An emergency came up. Should we just wait? What were we talking about?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Brian's uh—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Oh. Well, yes. He would send them out and then he was so busy with all his other things that he was doing, he would forget. And so he's still down in Texas. And now it's time that he's going to have a show, start organizing his things for a show, and he's realized that these things are all over—

PAUL CUMMINGS: All over.

ELAYNE VARIAN: —the United States, and Ireland, and a few other places. So he's—she's going to, she's writing letters to bring them back and so forth, and get them organized. And I think this is very good for a student to learn. And so I—there are different projects of this kind that I have them work on.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You, you had a—uh, I think, I can't remember if I got it correctly anymore. You had an assistant who was a student frequently, didn't you?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. Uh, well, they usually are finished their master's degree and they would come in for a year to learn museum procedures. And then uh, by the time that they had been a year and that they were really being helpful to me, then it's time that they go on to another museum as an assistant curator or director, what—they learn everything here because it is a small museum. They learn registration and cataloguing. And one girl went on to be a cataloguer. And sometimes they prefer being a docent. So they, they go through all the procedures and then sort of choose what they like.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, that's great. So they can try everything.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Learn the whole system.

ELAYNE VARIAN: They learn all the procedures, which you could never do in the, in the Metropolitan or most museums.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. They're too large.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You'd learn a great deal there in a different way, and more as a connoisseur, but here you have to do everything. We all do everything. And uh, this grant, these grants have been given to me through the New York State Council in the Arts, and I'm very grateful because it helps me. And I train someone. And then they have someone that they can send upstate to a museum.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Who has been trained.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I see. So it's, so are many of those, those people now working in, in museums?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. There's one in Syracuse and um, there's one in Vermont. And of course, some of them go commercial and go in galleries.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who's done that?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, there's one girl has been four years at the um, Bertha Schaefer Gallery. One girl's at Museum of Modern Art in the catalogue—not in—I shouldn't use the word cataloguing. In the um, I don't know what—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Registrar?

ELAYNE VARIAN: What?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Registrar?

ELAYNE VARIAN: No. It isn't registrar. They call it cataloguing, but they actually are working with future catalogues.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, you mean exhibition.

ELAYNE VARIAN: It has to do with writing. Yes. It has to do with exhibitions, only they—she only works on the catalogues, you know, working with the photographs and they find someone to write each catalogue. And it's that kind of thing. So really working with a catalogue. I should put it that way. It's—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Exhibition catalogues.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. Exhibition catalogues.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that's fun.

ELAYNE VARIAN: They have that kind of a department there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So your students are around [inaudible].

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yeah. It's wonderful. If I need a little help I can usually get it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] That's marvelous. Um, but you know, you—there are many exhibitions which, which happen that are quite interesting, other than the, the Art and Process series, of which you did one every year almost, didn't you? For—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, I did six.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Six.

ELAYNE VARIAN: So it's not quite one every year, but—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Almost.

ELAYNE VARIAN: For, for I think the first three years, I did do one every year, and then I sort of stopped a while.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Uh, what about some of the other exhibitions? How did things, uh, let's say for example, Art de Penko [ph], uh, or some of the private collections come about? Were they authors to you or were you interested in, in showing them?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, you go to someone's home for cocktails or dinner or something, and you see that—what they have, and then they open a closet door. It looks like Fibber McGee and Molly's old closet door all full of things that they don't even know were there. And uh, I was thinking that especially happened with Jack Kaplan [ph]. Uh, I found a Rembrandt etching in his closet. He had never kept a list. He didn't know what he had. And so I really had to catalogue everything for him before I showed his collection. And uh, I don't know—things just happen, you know. I don't—I plan them after I find them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, could you plan many of the exhibitions very far in advance? Or were you working on a six-month or a year program?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, I work two years ahead. I planned—I'm now through '77, into '78. But uh, in the beginning, of course, I couldn't do that. I had to go from exhibition to exhibition.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right after another. Yeah.

ELAYNE VARIAN: And so those were planned very quickly. And of course, one can do that in a small museum, but that, that cannot be done in a larger museum. It affects too many departments.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right. But here you had your own—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. I had a kind of freedom here to do that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you, you didn't, never had more than one assistant at a time, did you?

ELAYNE VARIAN: No. Never.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. So you really did every—

ELAYNE VARIAN: [Laughs.] Well, sometimes I wonder how I did it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, how—you know, some of the exhibitions are very different from the kinds of things that were going on generally around town. Uh, for example, the Art and Jewelry exhibition. I haven't been to a jewelry exhibition in New York in ever.

ELAYNE VARIAN: I know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did that ever, you know, where did the idea come from? What stimulated it?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Um. Well, I thought it'd be nice to have an international one to show what was going on in contemporary art internationally because I had been to Germany and I had seen what was going on there. And I had never been to Finland at that time, but I did have a Finnish artist, and also one from Japan. And I thought it was a very interesting show. It was a small show, because jewelry doesn't take up a great deal of room.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Um, but it commanded a tremendous amount of attention.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Now, would an exhibition like that bring in a lot of people from you know, the jewelry trade, for example?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Oh, yes. It did. It did. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Brought in a great deal.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So that each exhibition had kind of its own audience in a way.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yes. This is true. Plus a regular audience that always comes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think there's any discernible effect for Finch from, from having these exhibitions? Did anything happen here? Did it attract more students or funds for programs, or?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, it attract—the PR, of course, was good for Finch. And I have, for some unknown reason, always received excellent writings in the press. And, of course, this uh, this is very good for the students, to bring in students and to keep the college before—

PAUL CUMMINGS: The public.

ELAYNE VARIAN: —the world and the public. Yes. This is one thing that it has done.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What did you—you know, you've mentioned a number of times correspondence from abroad. Did it take very long for, for people around the country or outside the country to find out about your projects?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, I don't know. I sat here in itty-bitty Finch and then I would receive a letter from the Tate Museum for one of my catalogues. And this just seemed like such a thrill, you know. And from different great museums throughout the world would write for a catalogue. So this was always, each time it happened, it was thrilling. And then, of course, I developed an exchange program with catalogues with these people who asked. Sometimes they would ask if we would do it on an exchange basis and, and I hadn't, I didn't even know about that at the moment. And so now I have a very nice exchange, things that I have catalogues from all over and I see what's going on.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Wow. Perfect.

ELAYNE VARIAN: And they have ours.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ELAYNE VARIAN: And then the artists do it because uh, I've always had at least one very contemporary show a year. And the young artists these days travel in Europe a great deal. They're uh, the—I think the conceptual artists are better known in Europe than they are here.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

ELAYNE VARIAN: And they'll be in Holland and in Germany and Italy, and all over, having their own exhibitions. And they take the catalogues with them that I do. And so this is another way that they get known.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you were one of the first people to really start showing concept artists.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL CUMMINGS: What, what interested you in their work?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, um, I go to the artists' studios and I follow what they're doing for several years. And usually there are two or three things running along together, like with videotape and the conceptual art. That sort of all started to happen at the same time. And it was an interesting concept in that it didn't matter who did it. It was the idea that counted. And like with Sol LeWitt. It was his idea to put so many strokes of a pencil on a wall. And he didn't have to put those strokes on. He merely indicated the angle and the degree that they were to be put on. And, and someone else could do the work. And various things like that that I found extremely interesting and I wanted to see whether they, whether they would work, and whether I could tell which wall the artist had done, and which art students had, had uh—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Can you tell?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes, I can.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Uh, I saw a show of his in—I was thinking about before in Paris, and I knew immediately which wall he had done.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Uh-huh.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And uh, how, how could you differentiate?

ELAYNE VARIAN: I don't know. I just—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Just sensibility or?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Just—I guess so. Just a kind of knowing thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Hmm.

ELAYNE VARIAN: That's right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's fascinating. So that, so that it really comes back to the drawing line of the artist is different than—

ELAYNE VARIAN: That, that's right. You know, there's something—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Individuality.

ELAYNE VARIAN: A kind of sensitivity there, that even though the other person is also an artist, it isn't his really project.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh.

ELAYNE VARIAN: And somehow you—I feel the difference. Now, a lot of people don't see any difference at all. And then, of course, I did have Sol Le Witt here and he did such a thing. And uh, the greatest, the most terrible thing for me to do—it was devastating—was to have to paint over that wall.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, wow.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Or the whole room actually. He did the whole room. And either that room was sealed as his, as his gallery for the rest of the life of Finch—it could never have been used with anything on top, because then it would become wallpaper.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

ELAYNE VARIAN: So we actually had to, we, we had to finish—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Paint it, paint it off.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Hang on.

[END OF TRACK.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Okay. This is side two. It's May 9, 1975. Paul Cummings talking to Elayne Varian. [Tape stops, restarts.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: —where the exhibitions came in, in terms of time. Uh. Well, one such exhibition was the, the projected art show, "Films by American Artists," right? In '67.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Um, you'd mentioned your interest in films, but how did this particular exhibition come about? Why did you decide to do it at that time?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Because uh, artists get into different things. Like now they're into video. And at that time, they were experimenting in films and doing a lot of experimental work. And I just thought it would be good to show what the artists were doing. And they were all painters and sculptors who just found this interest and were—and some, of course, were good and some were very poor. They enjoyed their—what they were doing. And I used to go to the theatre on Lafayette Street. I've forgotten what it's called now.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Uh—

ELAYNE VARIAN: And—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where the Joe Papp projects were and things.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, across the street from the Joe, from the Shakespeare Theatre. And they

would always have one specific, or two films that were advertised to go to see. And then the artists were free to bring in their partially finished films and show them to get uh, audience reaction. And I used to go and sit there for hours and hours, and maybe come out with one film after having sat there for four hours that was worthy of exposure. Uh, and I did this for many, many weeks. And uh, also would view artists' films in their studios and here. They would bring them into me here. And this was the way that I got actually five hours of films together. Some of them were like George Kuchar's, those 20 minutes, uh, Hold Me While I'm Naked. Remember that? Very charming. And he has a delicious sense of humor. Both of the brothers do. So it turned out to be five hours of films. And I showed that in the gallery and people could come in and out at will. Um, there was a schedule and some people would come on their lunch hour every day at a different time so that they would eventually see all the films.

PAUL CUMMINGS: See the whole thing. Wow.

ELAYNE VARIAN: And uh, there were chairs and two projectors. And then there was lots of floor space. And they would sit on the floor. And Schoener, Allan Schoener, who was then the head of the visual arts of the New York State Council on the Arts—oh, I also had things going in all the other galleries. Um, one of them was a—I can't think of his name. We had 20 projectors in there. So it kept me very busy just keeping all of these projectors going, and the lights in, and everything.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, heavens. Yeah.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Uh, but Allan Schoener liked the way that I showed the films because he said upstate uh, whenever they get a film, it immediately is an auditorium thing at two o'clock in the afternoon. And it was not informal. So later, quite a number of years later, I did another show, Projected Art II, which were artists at work, which I combined with slides. And uh, actually I was hired to put together the films, which again was five hours of films, but they were much longer. They were more 20 minutes and half-hour films. And he asked me then to show them here in the museum and invited all the museum directors from upstate to give them an idea that you don't have to show them in an auditorium, that they can go all afternoon and be a more relaxed situation.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Create an environment.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. It really does. People come in and out and so forth. So.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did many of the exhibitions lead to other projects like that or?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, this one did. The first one led to the second one. And uh, he just called one day and said, "Are you still keeping up with films and what's the new thing now?" And I said, "All the artists are either filming other artists or filmmakers are doing it, and it shows them at work, and uh, I think in a very educational, interesting way." I thought the one on Claes Oldenburg was excellent. And the cinematographer on that was um, Eric Saarinen, the grandson of Eliel Saarinen. And they all stay in the arts.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know, over the years, were many of the exhibitions uh, traveled?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did they—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. This one is still traveling.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Uh, yes. They're both still traveling. They're traveling out of Syracuse University because they have a large film library there. And they come back in between showings and get cleaned, and uh, repaired if that's necessary, and sent out again.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Hmm. Oh, fascinating.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yes. And the whole show traveled. All the slides and the films traveled all over the State of New York. And then they were released, and now all over the United States. It's been in Texas and—

PAUL CUMMINGS: For years.

ELAYNE VARIAN: —Michigan, and California, and all over.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, fantastic.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have there been many of those shows over the years that have been picked up and—by other institutions and traveled?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Oh, yes. Uh, the Art Deco show went around. And it could have gone to 50 other places. I never received so many letters in my life wanting a show.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really?

ELAYNE VARIAN: But of course, it was a delicate show to travel. And it did not start out that way. Actually, none of my shows originally started out as traveling shows.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I know. They were just for here.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. Uh, and some of them I was able to keep together and let them travel, get permission to travel. But the Art Deco show with all the glass and the [inaudible] you know, was very delicate. And so it did go to three other museums and that's all. But the Art Deco Architecture show that I did this year was planned to travel. And that is now going to open in Texas. Mr. Goodall [ph] was here yesterday. We've run out of catalogues. There'll have to be a reprinting.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, for heavens—

ELAYNE VARIAN: And uh, that's going to go for two years.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really?

ELAYNE VARIAN: And that doesn't include New York state. This time it started out to go to two museums before it went through the, all the museums in New York state. Since the Council gave me the money, I always feel an obligation to have it in New York state. And uh, it's just going on and on. But it's the kind of exhibition that will not, I don't believe, be damaged. I can't see that it—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, those are pretty—

ELAYNE VARIAN: There's big panels and they're pretty sturdy. And they travel being covered with

plastic. And I can't see that uh—I think it can go on for a long time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They could go pretty well. Yeah.

ELAYNE VARIAN: We just put corners on it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Right.

ELAYNE VARIAN: And uh, I think it will last a long time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Away they go.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL CUMMINGS: One other thing that in the late '60s uh, or was it 1970? You did an Art in Process IV, which is conceptual art. Uh, Finch sort of became the New York center of concept art in various manifestations it seems at one point. Uh, what was the appeal to, to you? I mean, how did you get so involved with all those people and—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, I guess I'm just involved with artists. And uh, I watch and I listen. And I go to their studios, and the symposiums, and watch something develop. And then when I feel it has reached a maturity, a kind of maturity, enough to present it so that the students and the public can also become aware that this is happening, and I guess I do it early. Because it seems to me that it's four or five years before uh, other museums do it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

ELAYNE VARIAN: But, and then I choose the artists carefully that I think are involved in a very healthy way and have made some decisions on the subject.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think that the fact that you're so close to the dealers on Madison Avenue is an aid? Or is that a—doesn't really make any difference?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Um, most of these shows that I've done early hadn't gotten into the galleries yet. I did them before the galleries picked it up. Other times, I do use the galleries, of course, to borrow from.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. But I mean, just the fact that you know, the—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Oh, the fact that—

PAUL CUMMINGS: They're around.

ELAYNE VARIAN: —that they're all here and that SoHo is here, and the artists are here, I don't suppose I could do this if I were out in Detroit, or Iowa, or Ohio, or someplace like that because it's difficult for them to spend that much time to go around, where I can go three mornings a week and keep watching what's happening. Now, I think that this has been a great advantage to be right here where the action is.

PAUL CUMMINGS: To be [inaudible.] Yeah. Well, you know, some of those exhibitions were controversial in the sense that they were presenting a kind of survey of things that were very new and not really out into the world. Uh, what's the, what was the attitude of the students here?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Oh, they loved it and the fact that it was new and interesting, and they'd never heard about it. It was something that they um, would be you know—it was to study, too. And uh, then the openings, you see, the girls are—the girls who are in the art history department are on the museum committee. They are hostesses and they get to meet the artists and talk to them. So this is very helpful to them. And they can ask questions and if they want to do a paper in-depth, I make appointments for them to visit the artists and discuss it with them. So that this is a part of it. And I think that they should know what's going on in their own time, you see. Not just have it—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Not just history.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Not just history and not just something from a book, but live research. And I think this is an important part for them to know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What, what do they do as members of the museum committee?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, uh, sometimes they'll help do research. Uh, they—at the time that uh, I had the Art Nouveau exhibition, they did research on getting dates of the artists' birth and death, and also on objects, to follow them through and research on things that I couldn't—didn't have time to do myself. They do other mundane things like address envelopes because we believe in Emily Post and have them hand addressed. They are hostesses. And they do quite a number of things that we need. The press releases. They address the envelopes for the press releases and a number of things that we need.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So they do a lot of little things that are in a—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —in, involved in every exhibition.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, see how—the students are here for how many years?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Four years.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Four. How long would they be on a committee like that? Would that be a one-year thing? Or two years?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, the committee, the chairman of the committee is a fourth-year student who's to graduate. And she usually has a vice chairman who's a third-year student so that she can then take over, having been through all this and organizing the different committees that the girls are on. Uh, but they can come in when they're a first-year student if they wish to be on the committee, if they know that this is what they want. And a lot of them do. Ms. Long, who uh—Jennifer, I think her first name is. Her father is a very important dealer in Texas. And she knew right from the moment that she got—in fact, because of the museum involvement, was part of the reasons that she came here.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really? Well, that's Meredith Long Gallery people.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that's fascinating. So the, the—

ELAYNE VARIAN: She's done independent study with me and usually the first-year students are not allowed to do it, but they gave her permission.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Now, what does that mean, independent study with you?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, it's not easy for me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

ELAYNE VARIAN: Because everyone has a different thing that he wants to do, or she wants to do, I should say. Uh, in other words, when I teach a class in museology, this is two hours for an afternoon and I know what I'm doing and what I'm presenting, and I present it in an orderly, organized manner. Uh, when you're working with students who are doing independent study, each one is doing something else. And you have to make your time their time. They come in with problems and difficulties, and then they come in when they're excited and things are going well and so forth. And beside uh, usually when it's—most of them want to do it two semesters, not just one semester. The first semester, we work pretty much on museum things that I am working on in the museum and doing. [Door creaks.] And—come on in and don't let the door squeak.

[Tape stops, restarts.]

ELAYNE VARIAN: So part of the second semester, they usually get into the industry in some way or other. Uh, one student is helping to catalogue Brian O'Doherty's work and writing letters to bring things back from various parts of the United States because he's so busy he doesn't—

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it's essentially a very practical course.

ELAYNE VARIAN: It's a—part of it comes to be very practical. One girl is at the Martha Jackson Gallery two afternoons a week. One student is at Park Burnett [ph] two afternoons a week.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How, how amenable are people in the trade to—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Oh, they like it very much.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do they? Yeah.

ELAYNE VARIAN: It gives them an extra hand and these girls aren't stupid girls. And furthermore, they're art history majors. They know uh, they know all the names of artists. They know about artists. And they fit in very well. And with the gallery, they can do cataloguing and whatever needs to be done they can take care of. So that it's good for them, good for the gallery. One girl is at Staempfli two days a week, and then they've hired her for Saturday.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, terrific.

ELAYNE VARIAN: So it's, they get paid sometimes and it really works out very well. And they get a kind of practical experience. And when they are in a situation like this, they do something of everything that goes on in a museum because it is a small museum. So we have this advantage. Some of them might want to be docents when they finish in a museum, or a lot of them, cataloguing seems to be the last thing we go into, and they just love it because they're really working with the works of art.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Right.

ELAYNE VARIAN: So that that is understandable, too.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[Tape stops, restarts.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: I have to, to go back to the exhibitions. Uh, you've done some uh, sort of unusual one-man exhibitions, like the Hans Richter, for example, who's uh, he being a figure who's been around forever it seems, but never really seen in any way. Uh, how would, how would he as a subject approach you or you approach him, or—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, I thought that he was such an important figure, especially in films, you see. All the early experimental films uh—and I wanted to show him as the whole man, not just his drawings, which are very important for that period because he did them with films.

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

ELAYNE VARIAN: Um, so I showed his films. I showed his books. He's written books. And books have been—many books have been written about him and that period, the Dada period. Uh, and his works of art. And I got his early drawings from Yale and from Harvard that he had, which were important reflections in his films. And that's why I did it, because I wanted to do the whole man.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What happened to uh—you know, what kind of reaction do you get from somebody like that who's the subject of a one-man exhibition here? Do—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, he was delighted and I enjoyed planning it. We uh—I worked with him on the show. I wanted him to know what I wanted to do and see if it was agreeable. I always do that because I don't want to do anything that's in—not agreeable with an artist. And I planned it also with his dealer. And he unfortunately was not here at the opening. He was very ill and not expected to live, in Switzerland at the time. And he rallied forth and he's still very busy and active today. And I don't remember exactly when that show was, but he was 80—

PAUL CUMMINGS: '68.

ELAYNE VARIAN: —then. That was his 80th birthday.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really? So my goodness. That's what? Seven years ago.

ELAYNE VARIAN: He's very busy. Still active and still working. And he is still interested in films, and sometimes is working on films, and has a student that he might bring over from Europe working with him.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You did in, in I think '69 here, the Documentation exhibition, which is quite talked about and, and a very interesting uh, look at what goes on sort of behind the scenes in a way. First, you know, really shown publicly. How did you decide to do that? How did that appear?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, because I, the year before I had students who were, who had funds of their own. And we would go to auctions and purchase drawings and things that they could afford. And one girl just threw the bill away. And I said, "No. This is a document. It's an important part if you ever want to sell this. Uh, this shows what you paid for it. And then you must find out what it's worth several years later. It might be worth more. It might be worth less." And so I told them how to preserve this and their documentation. And then, uh, from this, I thought it would be a good idea to

uh, to demonstrate it in the form of an exhibition, and show the different documents that a painting might have. If it has to be restored, the letters that go on between the restorer and the owner. Uh, and the x-rays, so forth, that prove where it's been restored and why it was necessary, because of some accident or other. And I just felt that it was an important thing. And I think now it is important. And most people said they felt they were walking around in a book because there was a lot of reading.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Right. I remember that long wall of Harris Steinberg, and the Pollock material.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. Wasn't that interesting?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Just a marvelous thing. Uh, now what, you know, what kind of public reaction would you get from an exhibition like that?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Excellent, because people learned from it. Large collectors know how important it is to keep all the documentation, but people who just buy a few graphics uh, they don't know. And they don't keep their bills, except maybe to find out how much tax they pay. And so they did learn a great deal from this and from the catalogue, too, I think.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Now, you had things from private collectors in that.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was it difficult to get them to—

ELAYNE VARIAN: No, they were delighted.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —make this material public, which is also private, you know.

ELAYNE VARIAN: I know. No. I had no problems at all. Uh, Richard Brown Baker, okay. Richard Brown Baker was um, delighted to let me have his painting that had uh, been restored and the material for it. And Mr. Steinberg was delighted because that one had been a court case about whether uh, it was Jackson Pollock or not. And then there's the proof of the check and so forth that Lee Krasner, his wife had given to him and helped him with. So I thought that that was an interesting point of view. Um. No. Everyone—the museums were very nice about uh, being helpful. So it worked out very well.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Terrific. I think some of the, some of the exhibitions had a certain sense of humor. Uh, the one that Walter Gutman was involved in called, The Dominant Woman.

ELAYNE VARIAN: [Laughs.] That was really fun.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh. Was that your idea? Was that his idea? Or how did that—

ELAYNE VARIAN: He wanted something like that to happen and approached me. And since he had a private foundation, he said that he would help with the catalogue for—with the funds, which I do approach people occasionally to get funds. And so that was nice. And of course, he loves big, strong women. And he loves circus women, the trapeze artists and so forth. Uh, it started out when we discussed it together, we thought it would be interesting to show women in the Old Masters, early 19th century and 18th century, perhaps 17th century. But uh, it probably—probably what I should have done—and I really liked that idea and I wanted to pursue it. Uh, there wasn't space

enough to do Old Masters and on into contemporary work. It probably should have been in two parts. And I think it would have been uh, more significant had I done that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Um, have there been many exhibitions like that that have sort of come from the outside to you?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Um. I don't have a—well, sometimes you know, we see something and it gives us an idea from which we work. When I was in Cranbrook, uh, lecturing there, they had a show of holograms, but they were not on the subject of art. And it were more science. And I thought it belonged in a science museum. But this was my first introduction to holograms. And I was very interested and excited about the whole thing. And I spoke to the scientist who, whose idea was it—made it workable, usable. He had invented a way of using the laser beam to make holograms. Um, I won't go into the technical part of it, but he made it possible to make this in an easier way than, than other institutions were doing. Also far less expensive. So I went to his studio and I asked if artists could do this under his direction. And we just—first he thought no. And then the more we discussed it and I had ideas on how artists might work. Uh, and there are very good artists in Detroit at both the university and um, and in Cranbrook. Uh, so we started with the artists who were available to him. Then he became so excited about it and interested in it that he came here and set up a working studio so that artists in New York could go to him and work. And that's how the uh, exhibition evolved, because I felt it had to be an, an art and a studied approach if I was going to do it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I think in 1968, it was—you did the Destruction Art exhibition.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Which was another first for Finch.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Um, that was Ralph Ortiz and all of those people.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. Lil Picard and, and that whole group.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Um, was that again an exhibition that you kept seeing things around? Manifestations and—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. Especially um, I don't know who destroyed the violins in the, in all of that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Armand?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Armand. And I'd seen photographs of Armand with the hatchet destroying things in Europe. And then uh, I'm not going to be able to recall these names. Uh, a man—a lot of Europeans, Germans, and so with who were coming and began to lecture at universities. And they would have a carcass dripping blood up on the stage with them and destroying it in one way or another. And, of course, Ralph Ortiz did that thing with the chickens and, and killed them. Of course, he ate them afterwards and so the ASPCA sort of let him off, but uh, that was his destru—one of his destructions.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, he did furniture and all sorts of things. Yeah.

ELAYNE VARIAN: He did furniture and pianos, and sofas, and all that sort of thing, too, but there was this controversial thing about the chickens. So that when I got into the show, I had to make very definite statements to the effect that we were not going to destroy anything live here at Finch. And so that's uh—the New York Magazine had a whole page on the show called, "No Blood at Finch." But uh, got very good reviews. And then you have very gentle people like Fontana, who slit the canvas, who destroyed the canvas and made another image. And this is really what I was showing, that you destroy in order to create sometimes. And I thought that this, this is an important part of art. You can even say you destroy a beautiful clean canvas or a clean piece of paper when you draw on it, because the drawing may be good or it may be very poor.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. You know, it's interesting to me and in doing research for this, I've observed that um, most the exhibitions you did, even if they were controversial, got favorable press.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL CUMMINGS: And I couldn't remember of any incidents where the museum was attacked the way the other institutions in New York City are. Why do you think that was?

ELAYNE VARIAN: I really don't know. I have no idea.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It just uh—whatever you did seemed to be the right thing. [Laughs.]

ELAYNE VARIAN: I really don't know why that was, but I'm very grateful that I didn't do anything where I was attacked. And yet, I was rather fearless.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yes. In many of these things, for the first time they'd really been seen in-depth in New York.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Uh, certainly before some of the large museums ever even showed some people in, in various things.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. True. The only thing that happened once was that an Art In Process show that I did, the first one I believe, I had 16 artists in it and showed the process of what each one went through to arrive at the final decision of his work. Um, John Canaday came, was entranced with the whole idea, thought it was marvelous, educational. He said he'd learned some things from the show. Wanted to send his own photographer to photograph a—showing the whole process, which I did not have photographs of. I had photographs of the end result.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

ELAYNE VARIAN: But not the whole process. Wanted to send, got permission, called me several times to get permission to have his photographer come. So I was really very pleased about this. Apparently, as the week went on, he either became irritable or something, and instead of doing what he decided he was going to do in the beginning, he selected one artist and just slashed this artist to pieces.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Hmm.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Uh, and never mentioned that there were 15 other artists in the show. I have seen this before and the—after the, I think it was in a Saturday newspaper, and gave it two long

columns. Just enjoyed doing this apparently. And there were people lined up to get into the museum to see this artist's work because they thought that the whole show was just this artist's work.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, isn't that [inaudible]?

ELAYNE VARIAN: And but that's the only time—and he really was not, he didn't take anything out on the show. He was not against the show. Just this—

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was just that one—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Just this one artist for some reason or other.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

ELAYNE VARIAN: It was a well-known—I just decided to leave her name out of this context, but uh—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you know, look in the newspaper and see.

ELAYNE VARIAN: [Laughs.] Yeah. If they want to go back that far.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Um, you know, you had mentioned Walter Gutman and his foundation. Uh, in terms of operating the museum, did you have to raise money on the outside during the course of this uh, 10 years?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. Well, in the beginning, I did not have to. There was funds for the exhibitions and the catalogues, and every exhibition had a catalogue. Then, somehow—if I had anything um, expensive like purchasing film, something that like that I wanted to do, I would have to go outside to get the funds for that. But that would be like one thing a year. And I didn't always think up things that were going to be terribly expensive. But then as the years went on, we became more poor. I now raise all the funds for every exhibition that we do.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Hmm. How, how do you like getting into the fundraising business?

ELAYNE VARIAN: I don't particularly like it, but I want to do the show enough, and I have enough confidence in the show that I do go out and raise the funds in order to do the show.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Uh, do you get money from foundations or the arts councils?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Foundations.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Individuals or—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Individuals, family foundations, large foundations, uh, banks, the New York State Council on the Arts, and the National Endowment. I'm very grateful to all these people that they have enough um, what's the word? That they believe enough in what I'm trying to do that they would give the funds for it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. How do you like, you know, being involved with the National Endowment, for example? Do you, have you found them difficult or—

ELAYNE VARIAN: No. I never found them difficult. I, the only thing that I find disturbing is that it

takes so long and I don't know whether I'm going to be able to do the show or not because I don't hear from them. Uh, but one does understand that bureaucracies, it takes a long time to, to make decisions.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What, what have been the best sources for you? Have they been the public institutions like that? Or has it been—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. I would say that New York State Council has been—

PAUL CUMMINGS: The best, one of the best sources.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Best for me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

ELAYNE VARIAN: It's been wonderful. They're quicker at making decisions and they really find out about the shows. And if I have, it's the kind of show where I've done research and have photographs up, then they present these with the possibility of doing the show.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How have the private uh, foundations been? Have they, they been difficult or have they been—

ELAYNE VARIAN: No. They've been very helpful.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do they take a long time?

ELAYNE VARIAN: No.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They're quicker.

ELAYNE VARIAN: No. They're quicker. It depends. If one asked for a tremendously large sum of money, then of course they have to have a board meeting and other people on the board are also presenting people who needs funds, projects that need funding. And so of course, they go through these and the decision is which one needs it the most? Uh, and so for a tremendous amount of funds. But mine, I can do a show for \$5,000 dollars or \$10,000. Five thousand dollars, they don't have to have a board meeting, these family foundations.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Is funding from, from individuals the most difficult, or other people who are interested and, and sort of—

ELAYNE VARIAN: I usually approach the people who are interested in the exhibition and get funding that way.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That way.

ELAYNE VARIAN: It's more difficult to have to fund each one separately. Uh, it would be—I somehow have not been able to go out and raise \$50,000 for the year, which—but I, somehow or other I make—

PAUL CUMMINGS: One after another. Just, right. Go through the, through the ritual. Um. You know, in the years of doing these exhibitions and as they've become more elaborate, because some of them are quite complex, have you found that the, that your operating costs have increased enormously or?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, everything's gone up. Like for a great number of years, things went up four or five percent every year. Now, it's more like 10 percent in the last couple of years that things have gone up—seven to 10.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So you have to adjust the budgets. The budgets—

ELAYNE VARIAN: You have to adjust and actually I've been operating on less money than before, even though things have gone up. Don't ask me how.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] That's the secret everybody wants to know.

ELAYNE VARIAN: [Laughs.] I know. That's what I should write a book on, how to run a museum without any money.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Absolutely. Um, are there any individuals who have been particularly helpful to you in terms of um, continuing programs or uh, supportive of the museum over long term rather than, say, just for one exhibition?

ELAYNE VARIAN: No. I would have to say the government agencies continue to support. And the other people that I approach are for each exhibition really.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Um, oh, one exhibition that was only a couple of years ago was, was the Les Levine exhibition on Troubles in Ireland, the Irish exhibition. Uh, what kind of attendance did that draw?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Enormous. Enormous attendance all the time. He was given a grant by the Architectural League of New York. I don't know why. I mean, this had really nothing to do with architecture, but they did give him this grant to go to Ireland for a month, and uh, note what was going on, and to make some kind of report. He made a film. He taped conversations with controversial people on both sides. Um, also the church. And he came back and also photographs. He's a great photographer. He came back with all this material. And at a cocktail party, he was telling me what he had done for the summer. And he had all this material. And I said I would be very interested in seeing it. And he brought the uh, the photographs and the film, which I ran. And the, and I looked at all these photographs, which were many, many photographs, hundreds really. And we went through. And in a lot of them, I saw the barbed wire. I kept seeing this all the time. And the more—and then when I finally said, "You know, I'd like to do the show," he still had some funds left apparently, so that he could make some blow-ups of the photographs, which gave it a lot more impact. And I kept saying, "You know the way I see this? And I want to tell you about it to see if you are agreeable. But I would like to see barbed wire in front of these photographs to, to give the kind of feeling that this is a war, and what was happening in the streets and all the barbed wire and so forth." And he liked the idea. So that's the way it was installed. And I do think that it gave the kind of flavor of what was happening in Ireland.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What do you, why do you think it attracted so many people?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, because what was happening at the moment. It was in the newspapers and it was very important and very current. And um, so that the fact that it was here and that he had all this information was very important. He also brought back—the men who were in prison had nothing to do. And linen apparently is quite cheap in Ireland. So they, they had linen handkerchiefs and they drew on these handkerchiefs. And we had some of these framed and on the wall. And this was not artists' work. Some of it was folk art, but it was work of the moment of the prisoners who

were political prisoners. They had not committed any crime except to be Irish and on the other side.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Depending on the other side.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. Depending on which side you're on, this is why they were in prison.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Um, you did, in '72, '73, the Italian Visual Poetry exhibition. Um, how did that come about? Because it seems so—

ELAYNE VARIAN: I was approached by the—I have worked with a number of governments. Um. Sweden, Finland. Finland invited me to go over to Finland where I'd never been. No one knew about their artists. And to—they were very nice. They left me on my own. If I saw things that I thought worthy of showing in New York, I could make up an exhibition. And if I felt that they weren't worthy or would be condemned in New York, then I would not show them. But I was—I found a great deal of very good work and brought it back. And uh, worked with Belgium. Did art from Belgium one time. And um, what was this?

PAUL CUMMINGS: The Italian Visual Poetry.

ELAYNE VARIAN: The Italian Visual Poetry. I was approached by the cultural center uh, here in New York about a show. And there was a large—a meeting of all the visual—of poets. Uh, the first time they were to meet in New York. They meet every year or every two years. And it was the first time they were going to meet in New York. So we thought that this would be something to do, and to have an exhibition of visual poetry at the same time of the meeting. So we had an opening and then we had another special day for them to come. And that's how it worked out.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How was the response to that?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, the public response was enormous, but it got absolutely no press at all. Uh, apparently the art page thought it was—belonged on the poetry or the literature page. And the literature page decided it was art, so nobody came at all.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] Really?

ELAYNE VARIAN: It was reviewed. One magazine sent a poet whose name I can't remember. He's just a darling, sensitive young man with red hair from Art News. And he did write a very uh, sensitive, penetrating review of the show, which of course, came out two months after the show, or a month after the show. But it was very odd that all these people came and it was word of mouth about this marvelous exhibition. And they all came in. And of course, we have a lot of visual poets in America.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

ELAYNE VARIAN: And of course, they all came from all over. Ohio and all over the United States.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really?

ELAYNE VARIAN: They came to see the show. So that was a great tribute I think.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah. What, what do you think in, in, out of all these exhibitions was the most successful in terms of you know, what it did for the students, say?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Oh. Oh, I don't know. That would be hard to say. Because they're all different.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what about the public—well, what about the public response then?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, I would say both of the Art Deco shows, and the Art Nouveau show, because I created—in both of those, I created an ambience for the period. And uh, some of these people would come and they'd say, "I want to sleep here."

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

ELAYNE VARIAN: Oh, they couldn't go away.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How many people would an exhibition like that attract?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, we've never kept count, but there were so many. Um, people from all over would come. And of course, movie shows, shows with films are just packed all the time. They love—the public loves movies.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Hmm. And—

ELAYNE VARIAN: So I couldn't really say which one had the largest attendance, but they all seemed to get pretty well—

PAUL CUMMINGS: A lot, a lot of the—

ELAYNE VARIAN: —attendance.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I notice that over the years you've belonged to various, you know, the associations involved with museums, College Art, things like that. Um, have they been, have they been useful in any way, being—

ELAYNE VARIAN: The College Art Association?

PAUL CUMMINGS: The College Art Association, museum, ICOM [International Council of Museums], all those various things.

ELAYNE VARIAN: The only thing that ICOM is very useful for is if you have their card, if you are a member, you can get into any museum all over the world, any place in the world without paying. This I find very advantageous.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

ELAYNE VARIAN: Especially in New York where it's so high. I mean, two dollars and a dollar and a half. Uh.

PAUL CUMMINGS: If you want to see three or four museums, you've spent a lot of money.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. Yes. It gets to be very expensive. So I do find that the magazines that they put out are very interesting, and helpful, and useful in classes. And the subjects that are being written about are very helpful. Um. I—this I find very, very gratifying. I find also that the books that the Smithsonian put out on various spaces of museology extremely helpful for teaching. They have one called oh, something about a small museum. So You Want a Museum.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I see.

ELAYNE VARIAN: It's very good. It's excellent. And I use that as one of the texts for teaching.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. How do you find texts for teaching?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, there's more material now than there used to be. When I first started 10 years ago there was nothing but this one little tiny text. So You Want a Good Museum, I think it's called. And now, and of course, an excellent book on registration of works of art, cataloguing. That uh, was written by two people. Um, trying to think of the names. She was the registrar at the Museum of Modern Art for so long.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah. Right. Right.

ELAYNE VARIAN: And that's an excellent book, which is still the definitive book on the subject. But now there are some more books coming out, and the Smithsonian is publishing them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it was really you began, brand new—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Brand new world. Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: A brand new world. Um. What about the students now that, you know, your first students are out in the world doing things.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL CUMMINGS: And you had mentioned some are in various museums around New York State. Uh, but Finch has attracted students from all over the country.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Oh, yes. And other countries, too.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Uh, do those students keep track of their school? Uh, it seems that women's schools have always had a problem.

ELAYNE VARIAN: They seem to have—men seem to have a greater alliance and uh, give more funds to their alma mater than women do. I don't know why that is.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's a, it's a curious problem.

ELAYNE VARIAN: It is curious.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But have they, you know, sort of kept up with things that go on here? Or is it hard for you to tell whether they—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, they do occasionally come back. I, a student came in the other day who I think I taught about eight or nine years ago. And now she's decided—she's had some children. They're grown up slightly, and now she decided to go back and get her master's degree. So she wanted me to write, fill out some kind of form for her, which we seem to be doing constantly. When I'm not writing for an artist to get a grant, I'm doing something for our alumni.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] So that uh, you can see a kind of continuing interest in, you know, what you taught them in a sense.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. It's, it's very gratifying.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So that it's all—they're all out there doing things.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And they're in museums, working in museums or galleries, or on boards of trustees.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Right.

ELAYNE VARIAN: And the knowledge that they got here is very helpful to them, especially I think in understanding uh, the amount of work that goes into an exhibition. It all looks so beautiful and easy when it's up on the wall.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's supposed to.

ELAYNE VARIAN: And invest—well, yeah. Of course. You're not supposed to show the difficulties. But when you've been through the process, I think that these girls are, have been informed and can understand when they're on a board of trustees of a museum, what the work that they have to go through in order to produce these exhibitions. I think that that's very helpful.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you arrive at the time that an exhibition would be up? I mean, because they're usually about six weeks, aren't they? Four, four to six weeks.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. Yes. Well, um—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think some could stay longer?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Oh, yes. I have extended some of them, but um, you see, I probably have a shorter—I do have a shorter span than other museums. But then I want to have enough excitement and interest going on for our students, as well as those from Connecticut and all over to come again and see another show.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So there are lots of uh, lots of factors in the decision.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. A lot.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. I sometimes think that, that museums who do take a lot of time and spend a lot of money putting together shows don't have them available for a long enough period.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Not long enough.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, this is true. Sometimes it takes four years to do a show. And uh—

PAUL CUMMINGS: If it's only six or eight weeks, you think—

ELAYNE VARIAN: It's too short. Well, it should be at least two months, I think, for a good show so that enough people can get there. Sometimes you go to a show like the two at the Met now and the lines are so long that you just don't have that much time to stand in line. So you leave and then have to go back again. And uh, it's too bad because we do want to see these shows.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You never had to get into the numbers game here, though, have you? Saying that we had 400,000 people.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Oh, no. I haven't.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Yeah. Um, well, you know, you've also served on various uh, committees, to go back to what you've done outside the Finch. Uh, McDowell, the New York State Council on the Arts and various—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. I've been advisors, advisors to other museums.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Um, how—have those things come about because of what's happened here?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How, how do you feel you could function on those committees? Do you think that—I mean, I serve on certain committees and sometimes I think, oh.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Uh-huh.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Nothing ever happens. And in other ones, you know, you are able to see a certain amount of input and evaluation, and, and reaction. Uh, how's your experience been with, say, the New York State Council?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, I've advised in certain areas. And some people spend so much time talking about it that they don't get anything done. And I'm a doer. And I think perhaps that's my greatest asset on a committee, is that you know, after it's been discussed and decided, then let's do it. And uh, we're finished with discussion now. And I think that there is a time when this has to happen. And I think that's probably something I'm good for.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have, have you found it useful uh, being on those committees, just meeting the other people involved from other institutions?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. I've found it useful in uh, perhaps getting grants and things like this, through, through meeting other people.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. They get to know you and it's, it's easier.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. We all before the meeting starts or afterwards perhaps have over cocktail or something, discuss what we're doing at the moment. And I'll say, "Oh, I know someone who's very interested in that. Why don't you approach him?" So that I think that although we are giving of ourselves and our knowledge, we're also receiving by being on these committees.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Because I've heard many museum people say, "Well, you know, once you've gotten to know the people in your field, it's much easier to get loans and to do one thing or the other."

ELAYNE VARIAN: That's true. That's true.

PAUL CUMMINGS: If you don't know them, everybody's sort of hesitant and takes longer.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You can't call them up and say, "Can I have this?" And then you write a letter.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. It's true.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it, it works. Um. Well, just to um—you don't write for any of the publications very often, do you?

ELAYNE VARIAN: I have, well, I am, you know, this is like a one-man band here. Outside of one assistant, I haven't really had the time—

PAUL CUMMINGS: To do. Yeah.

ELAYNE VARIAN: —to do other than the catalogues that I do here. I have written uh, I've written for Art News, and Art in America, and The Art Gallery, and Art International. But not continuously. Just certain things that they've asked me to do.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Do you have, you know—

ELAYNE VARIAN: And I also wrote something for you one time for drawings or something. I reviewed a book and I wrote something else I think, too.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Um, do you have time for any other activities, outside of the art world, and the museum?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Oh, yes. I have a husband and I do many things with him.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Right. But now, I mean, the last what, year, you go back and forth to Florida.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. Three years.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Three years is it?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Three years I've been commuting.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It is really that long already?

ELAYNE VARIAN: I know. Just—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh. [Laughs.]

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How do you find that? You know, getting out of New York.

ELAYNE VARIAN: It's really nice. It's like having the best of two worlds. It wasn't the first year, because I commuted every other weekend. And I felt like a guest in my own house. I wasn't there really long enough to meet people. And it was a new place where I didn't know anyone. My husband didn't know anyone except his business acquaintances. And it was a little awkward really. It was probably the best thing to do then because we both missed each other very much. And that was very nice. But, and then I kept missing things in New York by having these weekends off like that. So then it evolved one time that I had a catalogue to write and I thought, "Why am I writing it in New York when I could be writing it in Florida just as well?" I had all my materials. I had all the photographs. And I just had to sit down and work, and rewrite, and so forth, as one does. And so I just called the president of the college and asked if this would be all right. And he said, "Absolutely." He said, "You're so conscientious. We know you're working all the time anyway, that if you want to do this in the future you certainly may." And so this is the way that has developed. And it's really

much nicer. When I go down now I stay a month and take care of a lot of things there, or three weeks, or whatever it is. But it's far better. It might be two weeks. And I go over the vacations, too, because my students are then. And of course, I have to work this all out with what my students are doing and so forth, and keep them busy. But uh, this really has been very good for me. And it's so nice to be down there when it's warm, to go swimming and I read about the snowstorms up here.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, you're really missing something.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yeah. So it, it really is very enjoyable.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, good. Good. Uh, I wanted to ask you one other thing um, about the combination of operating a museum and teaching.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Um, do you think there are advantages in that from the students' point of view, where they're, you know, in the next building and they come into the museum where you are. And they do—

ELAYNE VARIAN: No. I teach right upstairs.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, that's what I mean. You know, it's right—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. Yes. It's right here.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So you're right there. Yeah.

ELAYNE VARIAN: Yes. Uh, well, I think for the students it's great. It's a little hard on me to be very truthful. Uh, but for them it's really great. And I think that one could only do this in a small museum.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Now, when you have an exhibition, do you use the exhibition as a teaching device?

ELAYNE VARIAN: I do when I can resonate for them. And I let the, I break the students into either pairs or singly, whatever they want to do. And they can try to hang the show their way. And they learn from this. Or one painting can hurt another, or it can make it more beautiful in the kind of space it needs. They, they think sometimes you know, that you just put one painting like close to another. And I teach them to plan it out and that sort of thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But I mean, would you say, use an exhibition uh, the works of art instead of slides about that period?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I do. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think that works well or—

ELAYNE VARIAN: Well, I also use our permanent collection instead of slides. And as the girls are doing their own papers, if we have a Lichtenstein and one girl is doing a whole thing of the many phases he has been through, we bring out the drawing and we bring out the painting, and whatever else we have of his. And of course, this is very helpful. That they're seeing something live and all the rest of them see it. Although we may not be showing it at the moment, we have our storage area right there by the classroom.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So they can use the real—

ELAYNE VARIAN: They have to ask and we have to—a procedure to go through when we get them out for them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think there's an advantage in the using the real thing over just slides and books?

ELAYNE VARIAN: Oh, yes. Oh, far, far more. Far more. People are always saying, "Well, this isn't a very good slide and the color isn't right."

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

ELAYNE VARIAN: And I get so bored every time I go to a lecture and hear that because you know, it's probably the best you can get. So why apologize for it? Either you have that or you have the real thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

ELAYNE VARIAN: So I think it's very nice to have the real thing whenever possible.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[END OF INTERVIEW.]