



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

**Oral history interview with Ad Reinhardt, circa  
1964**

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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Ad Reinhardt ca. 1964. The interview was conducted by Harlan Phillips for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. This is a rough transcription that may include typographical errors.

## Interview

HARLAN PHILLIPS: In the 30s you were indicating that you just got out of Columbia.

AD REINHARDT: Yes. And it was an extremely important period for me. I guess the two big events for me were the WPA projects easel division. I got onto to it I think in '37. And it was also the year that I became part of the American Abstract Artists School and that was, of course, very important for me because the great abstract painters were here from Europe, like Mondrian, Leger, and then a variety of people like Karl Holty, Balcomb Greene were very important for me. But there was a variety of experiences and I remember that as an extremely exciting period for me because - well, I was young and part of that - I guess the abstract artists - well, the American Abstract artists were the vanguard group here, they were about 40 or 50 people and they were all the abstract artists there were almost, there were only two or three that were not members. Maybe the most prominent non-member was Stuart Davis. And he really should have - well, maybe not, he loved being with the American group, that's the social protest group. I guess he was friends with Kuniyoshi and Shahn and all those people. I had a studio next to Davis on Seventh Avenue and, of course, I admired him. He was important, his work was important for me. I actually worked, I did two or three paintings that looked exactly like his. Well, this is why I wanted to document it a little bit more because the period is lost in - - I said it was exciting for me. Whereas I was part of that group in the '40s now called the New York School, which was a kind of exciting time too, but it wasn't as important to me as the early group because I was younger. And while I have a lot to say about that, too, because that's been documented from a variety of points of view and I had an extreme point of view on it, that isn't as documented even though I've been commenting on it. From an artist's point of view I don't like to object to the art world personally, I mean I suppose critics and curators and historians have a right to think and feel and do what they do but when it comes to history or documentation I've made it a problem of heckling a lot of the curators and museums and historians simply because I was a witness of the last thirty years and a participant, and - - well, I think history has been made into a kind of careerist racket. And so I wanted to offset just I suppose to make the documentation as objective as possible and not introduce my personal point of view but introduce a more impersonal point of view. I think the documentation of the Whitney Museum is fairly disgraceful and I objected about four or five years ago to a show they had called "Geometric Abstraction in America", which was kind of a little bone that they tossed to that direction. Now, under that heading - - I don't like the term, but under that heading would come all the central ideas and the most important painting theoretically. I'm leaving it over practically leaving it open - -

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: But theoretically the abstract art is the central fact in the twentieth century and the important idea and it's not another school or another idea to be balanced off with some other

style of something like that. It's a mistake - - to think of even calling something geometric abstraction is a mistake. Anyway, I have this idea and then the documentation would center around that. Now not to have all the early work of the American abstract artists documented in the '30s is disgraceful, you know. Later on the mixture of abstraction and surrealism called abstract expressionism has been documented, you know, especially by *Life* magazine -

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: - and *Time* and *Newsweek* AND every mass media, or documented anyway for certain artists with a variety of emphasis on this and that artist. And then another - - well, there's the disgraceful fact that the abstract painters of the '20s have not been considered very seriously - - Macdonald-Wright and so on. Their work looks pretty strong again now. And it looked dated twenty years ago maybe or - - And so there was still then a funny kind of Ash Can Mexican painting, social protest painting history which climaxes in Ben Shahn or something like that. Now I've had a sort of a rich background in terms of, oh, posters and political cartoons myself. I was on the newspaper *PM* in the '40s and so I have a kind of feeling about what one might make of political and social comment but I certainly don't think any painting of any kind has had any kind of effect socially and politically in that way. I think painting anyway can't really be used that way. There's a question about whether political cartoons are any good anyway. I don't think that there's been one that's affected anybody's vote. But the whole idea of using art as a weapon in the '30s, I think almost it must have been, almost everyone must have some kind of a social protest painting. I know that someone like Cavanaugh has made one painting with picket march, picket signs and marchers and so on. I've never done anything like that, I just somehow sensed all the time that painting wasn't that kind of communication. Besides advertising uses itself, uses slogan techniques for visual communication or something like that. But that was a central problem in the '30s - you know, can art do anything? Or can a painter by way of painting influence people? Or even reflect ----? I don't mind that Philip Evergood painting - - the old lady that the Met has, the old lady sitting in the rocking chair in a little - - thing, but I don't know whether that's the '30s or '20s or -

[Interruption for phone call]

DR. PHILLIPS: Well, can you give me some idea of what you brought out of Columbia by way of commitment and luggage, you know, in '37?

MR. REINHARDT: Well, I've always been an artist or a painter ever since I guess I was two years old with crayons or something like that. But at Columbia I was the editor of a magazine up there, *The Columbia Jester*, and I also - - well, instead of, when I got out of high school - - this was in Queens, New York - - I was the only one of the students, art students, who felt compelled to go on to college and not go to art school - Pratt or somewhere. I think this was important, I don't think there are many artists older than myself that did go to college. There weren't any kind of painting departments in colleges at that time, but there was Meyer Schapiro at Columbia and I was a fine arts major in art history. I had a B.A. degree from there. And then ten years after that, in the Second World War, after that I went back to the Institute of Fine Arts and studied with Salmony there, that was specialization in Eastern Art - Indian, Chinese, Japanese - - And lately I've been teaching Islamic art. Anyway, I had the interest in art history that I got from Columbia and that a lot of - - well, cartoons and a lot of variety of type design. I worked as a typographer and industrial designer with Russel Wright in the late '30s on the World's Fair and a few other things when I got off the projects. But I guess it was just a general background. I suppose I went to college to know that it wasn't as important as it might have been. I think artists who haven't gone to college, or anybody that hasn't gone to college, I guess always has a feeling they've missed something.

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: Even if it's just dances or something like that.

DR. PHILLIPS: What is it --? culture being a deposit of things forgotten?

MR. REINHARDT: But it was an important discussion a little later on because especially in the Artists Club in the '40s where the idea that an artist doesn't have to go to school or has nothing to learn there, or he shouldn't go to school. And I guess I could say - - well, at the age of 51 now that all artists older than myself didn't go to school and they all had a feeling that an artist didn't have to go, or they talk to young artists about saying that artists shouldn't go. And all artists younger than myself all have gone to school and the whole argument is dropped. It used to be an argument in the College Art Association meetings too and it absolutely dropped because everybody goes to school. If they don't go to school, they just didn't go to school. It has nothing to do with whether they're going to be an artist or not.

DR. PHILLIPS: Mmhmm.

MR. REINHARDT: And it was funny how that dropped in the '40s. But it was around in the '30s to some extent - - there weren't too many - - it was refreshing to have Holty and Balcomb Greene, who were intellectuals, around. Later on someone like Rothko and Motherwell became friends of mine because they were intellectuals too. I never liked the image of the artist as some kind of a victim or a dope or a drunk or an inarticulate. Though some of the artists did have that Dostoevski idiot idea of the artist. But all the good artists that I knew always were shrewd even if they played that role, and I objected to Pollock and de Kooning playing some kind of a role a little like that, some kind of romantic artist role that -- The '30s were full of Van Gogh sufferers and expressionists, especially the inheritors of the German Expressionists. I guess Peter Selz is the one that champions and documents them from Beckmann back and forth, all the talk about love and death and sex and life and - - this to me is I guess the most offensive, these are the most offensive activity in the history of art - - German Expressionist, Italian Expressionist, the Futurists and some of the Fauve painters. It was interesting in the Rudy Blesh-Harriet Janis book on collage - - and collage was an extremely important activity in the '30s - - all abstract painters used to make little sketches, little paintings in gouache or little paintings or little collages and then make large paintings from them and then adjust to large shapes and large - - That was a kind of process that changed. As far as I know all abstract painters did that. But in the middle '40s I suppose Pollock symbolized the, you know, using the dripping stick and the paint can to get a more continuous line instead of the brush, and in working quite directly and obviously not from sketches that the idea of painting more directly on the canvas and not from little sketches became then very common, that technical thing. But I think that was quite important because that changed - - and my work reflects that kind of change too, from a lot of little collage, a lot of little sketches, to big paintings and then later on direct painting entirely, even the hardest edge kind of, type of painting.

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: Or the most finished kind of painting is always painted directly, I didn't have any sketches. Or even someone like Mondrian still moved tape around, had little sketches and had charcoal sketches, had studies and things like that. Well, those were abandoned. I think that - - that's probably - - those things are extremely significant. I don't, you know, I don't know, I would want to pin down all the meanings but anyway from an artist's point of view - -

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes, it's a matter of - -

MR. REINHARDT: Just like the Impressionists' painting was such a tremendous change from previous painting. I guess since Manet there was this kind of, more direct kind of painting or the abandonment of the - - or having the sketch something in its own right and not as just prefatory to painting. But in this book on the collage, and I've been thinking now that the collage is also a kind of anti-art, or anti-painting and a kind of a corrupt aesthetic thing - - this is a Cubist and Surrealist plot - - but it was interesting that these two writers indicated in the introduction that a whole stream of painters who objected to the term "fine art" is interesting - Lautrec, and the Fauves, Duchamp, the Surrealists, Dadaists, the German expressionists - - and this has been important for me because I made - - lately I've been writing a kind of aesthetic dogma in which the term "fine art" was the idea of fine art or free art or abstract art or pure art or art anyway that's separate from the useful or the practical. Even the 17th century I guess invention or separation of the term "liberal arts" from other arts, manual skills and practical useful arts, commercial, industrial arts, and in the art schools you have a fine versus commercial. The idea of fine art was real achievement and awareness I guess in the 17th century just as aesthetics was. And in the late '30s I was one of the ones in the American Abstract Artists that insisted on a strict purity, and when there were painters like Pereira and Schanker and, oh, a variety of painters that put eyes on their shapes and did - - Byron Browne, too - - I was one of the ones that also urged the paintings not to be shown, I mean there was a censorship of those paintings because the, all the critics, all the unsympathetic critics - - of course, and everybody would pay attention to those - - and it was a real kind of gimmickry. I've always thought of putting eyes on a shape anyway as a kind of disgraceful gimmick. But in the '30s it was - - there were people that still thought of neo-abstract or semi-abstract and so on. But the term "fine art" I suppose now you'd have to coincide it with abstract art without an hyphenated term. I don't see any sense in using the term otherwise, or pure art, anyway the emphasis on the aesthetic entirely would be the fine art and would be the abstract art. And later on when Motherwell was to say that in abstract expressionism the abstract part was the art part and the expressionism was the human part, I thought that was disgraceful too because the idea of the human or humanism is another absolutely outrageous idea. And Ben Shahn is perhaps the most guilty of that. I used to make fun of that on *PM* when I had animals in cartoon with balloons saying, "People who paint people like people" or "people who don't paint people do not like people", that kind of idea. Anyway, that's such a low aesthetic discussion but for some reason it was around all the time. I think even the extreme left-wing, whoever they would have been in the '30s - - I guess critics on the *Daily Worker* always complained that Epenep, who was their hero, was always making workers too ugly, or not handsome enough. The labor movement I think objected, the C.I.O. later on objected to Shahn's posters because he made, oh, automobile workers, steel workers, look foreign and looked like rats with pointy noses and so on. I was asked on *PM* once about this objection and I thought it was quite valid, these caricatures of people were objectionable to me too. They weren't anything that you could use. Well, they did look like rats. Someone asked me once about that Kuniyoshi painting of a woman. Some congressman said she looked like a truck driver and I was approached as an authority and I said, "Of course she does." Those huge shoulders and so on, I had no sympathy for that kind of distortion, caricaturing human images. Anyway, I finished up - - maybe I've been the most consistent since the '30s on this point of view now as a kind of insisting on imagelessness. There wasn't so much talk about an image at that time. I think the Abstract Expressionism introduced the idea of the image or something like that. But the idea of meaninglessness then, George L.K. Morris and others - - the abstract painters were always attacked as being meaningless and sterile and cold and intellectual. And later on those terms I picked them up and they became good terms. Meaninglessness became very respectable, everybody was reading Kierkegaard and Kulick and Sartre. And then I picked up the idea of imagelessness myself in Islamic art, Byzantine iconoclasm, and the Puritanism and - - well, the ancient Hebraic and Islamic distrust of images. I kidded around with them about it but anyway I maintained that point of view. I still have it today. So I've been - - anyway the idea that the - - and

then the idea that you were cold became cool later on and so on and so forth. And terms like academic and dogmatic and everything were terrible words but they were absolutist but I picked them up and I stuck with them and they're good words now for me, emphasizing the absolute aspect or the timeless aspect or the aesthetic aspect in art or - - and then even the work dogmatics, Karl Barth wrote a book on that - - And anyway, I wrote though a little tongue-in-cheek, but it was very serious too, *Twelve Rules for New Academy*, and *The Artist in Search of an Academy*. And these are titles of articles. Then later *Art is Art Dogma*. I wrote *Ten Rules for a Code of Ethics* in which artists that sinned had special fit punishments, a little like that Gilbert and Sullivan - -. Anyway, then here is also the moral problem among artists. These ideas come up so much. In the '30s everyone thought the morality was in social consciousness of an awareness of the political situation. Actually the morality was simply in relation to artists who stuck to the, or who were secure enough as artists to continue their work. An artist who looked to a good social and political idea to support his work, all the work vanished, the work didn't hold up. I've always known anyway that painting didn't need any other ideas outside. Somehow I knew this in the '30s all the way through even though I was a young man then. And I was a little disappointed later on when some of my heroes, like Helien, who was very admired here as a writer and as a painter - - you know his work, of course.

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: And Balcomb Green and others who sort of abandoned abstract painting and went to the figurative. I, you know, I was sorry for them to do that but they must have had personal reasons for doing that. Well, and then later on I was to write about the fact that the morality is an aesthetic morality, and then there's an artistic conscience and that artists who don't - - and artists themselves have an artistic - - in using - - well, even in the idea that there are aesthetic means, or there are means to use for some other than aesthetic ends is immoral. I think every artist knows that. Well, then if an artist doesn't know that, then he just doesn't know, he's a dumbbell or something. And then an artist who does but there are all kinds of benefits around and I would say then there's rascality there involved, and I think that's - - I guess I've accused every one of the abstract expressionists of being a rascal one time or another. Because even the terms they use like vision which is - - or they talked about image, and they talked about impact, they talked about moving people, action, the whole idea of action painting is a corrupt idea from a purely aesthetic point of view, from the point of view of -- . And then I think the - - and I've been moving more and more to as extreme a position as possible primarily by the activities of other artists. I think this is common. I think someone like James Joyce said that he felt that everything he had to do was - - that he was forced to do and it wasn't by choice.

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: I have this feeling that this is again right out of the '30s that even the terms, as I said before, meaninglessness and academic and geometric, whatever words we used, those were forced, they involved ideas of course, somebody talking about emotion in painting versus intellect involved in a lot of funny ideas, or somebody talking about humanist painting or figurative painting, or a painting of images of some kind is involved in a lot of ideas so that anyway it forced me into the opposite position and then I've accepted all the bare ideas that somebody comes up with but actually in one way or another they were only just the aesthetic ideas were respectable, all the others were - -. I criticized Stuart Davis once in the '30s for having too many light bulbs or too many gasoline pumps or flags or something in his paintings. And then later on when he had to do a large mural he did a kind of impersonal abstraction, he left out the -- But then he also was revived by the pop artists as a hero again because he had lettering and --

DR. PHILLIPS: Back in the '20s.

MR. REINHARDT: -- brash coloring, everything. But I had this criticism of Stuart Davis even though I was an admirer of his. Lately I've been pushed into -- of course along with the using art as a means the whole problem of -- see in the '30s there were terrific artistic communities and I belonged to all of them. I got right out of Columbia into -- well, I was part of a student peace movement there and I had people like James Wexler and Thomas Merton, who became a Trappist monk, they were all in my class, and a whole series of others -- poets -- John Burns and so on. And they were involved, though I was really the only artist at Columbia, I mean painter. But I got right into the Artists Union down here somewhere on Sixth Avenue. I got onto the WPA projects, and then later on there was the Artists Congress. And those were terrifically stimulating to me. And I liked the idea of the project where everybody made \$24 a week or something like that, somehow it was a good feeling apart from whatever work it was that was done. And then later on, of course, in the '50s when affluence hit the art world, or when artists began to make a lot of money and there was such an emphasis on sales, I thought that was pretty terrible, there was no way I could recommend sackcloth and ashes for everybody but I guess now I'm still in a kind of compromise position, I don't really like art dealing and private art collecting. I think the museum is the natural place for important work finally. I like the idea of the museum of fine arts especially separate from a museum of decorative arts or industrial arts, or separate from naval arts or military arts. This Malrauxian idea anyway of bringing the art of all time into a kind of timeless idea. Well then, the making, selling has always been a problem to me, I've always objected to it, I don't know, I'm sure it makes every artist feel a little funny about it so that I suppose at some point somebody is going to have to say that the selling of paintings and the dealing of paintings isn't proper, that's all. And it isn't. Now in the '30s there wasn't any problem for abstract painters. I think maybe Gallatin was the only one that bought paintings and paid \$100 or \$150 or something. He has two of mine in the Philadelphia Museum. I remember his going around collecting work and so on. And this collection over there at N.Y.U. it was quite important during project days, it was the one, the only place in fact to see, as a matter of fact, a few good Mondrians. You couldn't see them anywhere else. So that was important in the late '30s. So I liked the community of artists then, it was very easy to be friendly with everybody and to talk to everybody. Now I think artists can't look each other in the face very easily any more. I say this as a general statement about not every artist. So there was a kind of academic situation during the project days in some of the groups like the Artists Union. It was later on the Artists Club was about the same thing. That's an academic situation but artists talk to each other.

DR. PHILLIPS: Right.

MR. REINHARDT: And then when, of course, a romantic situation is when artists start to gear their, start to turn their attention to a mass or a public or something for whatever benefit -- money, publicity, they can get out of that. That's too bad. So I don't, you know, I'm not nostalgic and I don't have any feeling about going back to anything. But the late '30s was a much better situation for artists all the way through, even though they were on a pauper status most of the time, had to be to qualify to be on. The WPA, the work itself I think -- there weren't many abstract painters on the easel division that were purely abstract I think, I was, I think Irene Peraira may be, and then once or twice I was loaned to --

[Interruption]

DR. PHILLIPS: You were saying once or twice --

MR. REINHARDT: Yes. I was loaned to a project along with Refregier and Lou Jacobs, some practical projects, we illustrated some of the Federal Writers Project books, little drawings or

something like that. Most abstract painters were shifted to the mural division and they were busy making murals in lots of places. So the importance of an artist like Burgoyne Diller, he's been my colleague, he was my colleague for about twenty years at Brooklyn College, and he was important for me in the '30s too, I forgot to mention him, he was the first artist here to know about Mondrian and I remember I first met him because he qualified me as an artist for WPA at the time.

DR. PHILLIPS: Did he?

MR. REINHARDT: Yes, and then later on he became a colleague of mine in Brooklyn. He died last year.

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes, I talked with him.

MR. REINHARDT: And he was head of the mural division as he was very important for abstract art as a supervisor. He supervised Leger and the Gorky murals, and someone like Leger and Gorky had, their early assistants were de Kooning and Cavallion and McNeil and Balcomb Green and Spivak and all those people. But I was on the easel project and the only practical thing I did was on some of the Guidebooks, the Writers Project and I made a few maps. Otherwise it was a very, very free, a very free situation, very stimulating. There were terrific debates. They were primarily aesthetic. From a political point of view I don't really know what went on but I'm sure that the political thing wasn't very, very serious except by some artists who felt they needed it in relation to their work or something.

DR. PHILLIPS: Mmhmm.

MR. REINHARDT: It's true finally that the American Artists Congress broke up because I think it had something to do with the, ah, maybe, I'm not sure whenever it was, when Russia invaded Finland and there was a debate between whether the Artists Congress should support a protest or not -- I don't really know -- I remember Meyer Schapiro and Jerome Kern and Davis, all kinds of people having a terrific-- Jerome Klein not Jerome Kern-- having a debate about it. I don't remember too clearly but the thing is I think after that the political organization of artists-- well, there were never any real political organizations, the Artists Union became part of the city employees, or -- I don't know, city projects council or something, something that had to do primarily with unemployed. That was an economic thing. And then the Artists Congress was, I don't know, sort of general culture. And then, of course, the political -- there was an undercurrent of Stalinism and Trotskyism and so on, but I don't think any of those artists were especially very serious, I never treated any of them very seriously. When somebody used to ask me, I'd say, "Well, I don't see eye to eye with Stalin on aesthetic matters." Or Trotsky or whoever it was.

DR. PHILLIPS: [Appreciative laughter]

MR. REINHARDT: And there was a way of controverting, in that you went and got into an argument at least I countered my position by being anti anti-Trotskyist or anti, anti, anti-Stalinist. It would depend on who I was arguing with anyway. I don't really -- that didn't, that had nothing to do with the artists as far as I could see going back. I think some of the social protest painters, though, became extremely bitter and -- well, you know, I used to be on panels all the time with Evergood and Gwathmey. Gwathmey actually thought that his paintings helped disperse racial prejudice, and you know, that was an idea around in the '30s. I remember meeting William Gropper on the street one time and he had some idea that there was an abstract conspiracy that was directed against him personally and that he wasn't able to get a teaching job or something. That's fantastic. That was like the reverse of McCarthy looking for Communist conspiracy everywhere. I think it was just



simply artists that either didn't understand I guess what happened in art history and then were left high and dry with a couple of skills, you know -- I don't know. I know Gropper did some interesting cartoons, I don't know how they hold up particularly but you know he'd spatter it and he did a couple of things but, gee, his paintings were sort of weak. They were weak but this was always a problem. And maybe the strongest painter will be Evergood because he's a primitive really. This is an interesting thing about the late '30s, is that the paintings, you know, don't hold up at all despite all the Whitney Museum efforts to, you know -- they just never could possibly let go of Soyer, Levine, Refregier, those artists. I think Lloyd Goodrich is so committed to them. Well, so I suppose I inherited and I maintained most consistently the point of view of the '30s, of the purist point of view, not purism in the sense of Ozenfant or anything, or even the Constructivist point of view where there was always a tendency to move into three dimensions and into work that might relate to commerce or industry like the Bauhaus ideas and so on. I then maintained Mondrian and Malevich's point of view however different those were. And what I've maintained too is there was a nice abstract surrealist tension in the '30s in which abstract and surrealist painters realized they occupied completely separate worlds and they never usually mixed across so that a gallery like Julian Levy's and so on -- I knew of course Gorky and Matta and so on, but I absolutely opposed every idea that Matta stood for, or Kiesler or the Iolas Gallery or --. Wherever they were the surrealists always had, there was an emphasis on good time, parties, and on a kind of political, another kind of political activity that -- well, I don't know what kind of political activity they were but they were always claiming they were more communist than the communists or whatever they were. And I think Matta even just recently -- or is he down in Cuba now painting murals or something like that --? Anyway they were like the Mexicans or Siqueiros felt compelled to just like the I guess surrealists and Dadaists had something to do, I don't know what the political situation in Germany was but they were confronted obviously in the '30s with Naziism. But I never liked the, I just didn't like the whole Bauhaus idea even though I was trapped in it in an academic setup that was emphasizing it -- the Brooklyn -- I think we had all the Bauhaus people, we didn't have Moholy-Nagy, he went to Chicago -- but there was Obermayoff and Wolfe and Mundt and I think the architect, Sert, and there was also Schawitski, you know at Brooklyn before -- and then there was Diller and myself later on who later on even though we had Kurt Seligman out there -- everybody was sort of fond of him personally and he was a terrific teacher though his work, of course, was close to Albrecht Dürer's or somebody. We used to kid him about it. But he died too. We had two deaths out of Brooklyn and we miss both Seligman and Diller. Anyway, so I didn't like the artists who claimed they descended from the surrealists, like Motherwell, and Rothko and Stella and Pollock. Pollock I guess had a Mexican period. But I know they were all called abstract painters later on but then later on there was always -- I could see no matter how abstract they got there was always that pictograph or that in Gottlieb, or Rothko or in Motherwell some surrealist, something from Miro or Klee or something. I suppose later on when Motherwell and I documented some of the activity -- because it wasn't documented -- in a book called *Modern Artists in America*, I was the one that chose an awful lot of painters from the '30s but at the opening there was Mondrian and Miro as the true heroes --

[Interruption for phone call]

DR. PHILLIPS: You were indicating that a book was published with two heroes as Mondrian --

MR. REINHARDT: At the beginning, yes. Yes, that was -- Wittenborn put it out two or three years late but that was the first sort of documentation of the New York art scene, I suppose from an abstract expressionist point of view. But I included a lot of painters from the '30s, abstract painters, and so it was a sort of a broad representation. Later on because of, oh, a number of critics, I think primarily Greenberg and primarily a couple of galleries Kootz and Janis, and so on, they've --

emphasis was placed entirely on, you know, half a dozen painters that became, you know, these sort of famous abstract expressionist painters. But I suppose I was the only one that, maybe I was the only one that bridged both groups, you know, I was the only one from the American abstract artists in the late '30s that was part of the Betty Parsons, Kootz group that became the abstract expressionists or whatever they -- and I was part of that. I think once I wrote about -- Balcomb Greene and I did the leaflet for the protest against the Museum of Modern Art, the American abstract artists had a picket line around the Museum. And then there was a protest against the Metropolitan Museum. I think Newman, Motherwell and Gottleib and I did that one mostly. I thought those were two key activities and they represented an important idea in both cases. Anyway, I was part of both of those. But in the '30s -- this is why I would like to prepare something, I had an exchange once with Alfred Barr about the history of the '30s and he knew I objected to what I call the kind of Ben Shahn history in which I heard Ben Shahn give just a couple of times and he always finished up with himself as the most, as the man that represented the whole '30s. And it didn't to me, so Alfred Barr would always say, "Well, why don't you write it then?" And I always, you know, I'm not an art historian and I had no reason, or had no desire to do it. At some point I felt maybe I should do it and then I had this quarrel with John Gordon and Lloyd Goodrich about this geometric abstraction show because there was an attempt to document it and they didn't have the right attitude. First of all they tried to make me a geometric pioneer with Albers and Glarner and so on and that wasn't proper. I was only 22 years old. And then besides I don't belong back there any more than I belong to any particular time. I would -- I think I sort of feel I also belong to a whole new group of young guys who are ten, twenty years younger than I am. I was pleased when Barbara Rose wrote a piece called "ABC Art" recently in *Art in American* in which -- I wasn't aware of it -- but she thought that I had some relation to a whole new kind of geometric or ethnic painting or whatever it was -- imageless painting. But one thing in terms of my change, and I think this has been a change on the whole seeing that abstract art was -- in the early abstract art, especially in the '30s and Mondrian represented perhaps the greatest, most consistent painter, was asymmetry and a kind of color, pure color, the kind of thing that later on I was to insist on a kind of symmetry and colorlessness or monochrome. Now I don't know if that had in effect, I don't know whether I would be, you know, I wouldn't make anything of in any way kind of credit. Actually Albers had been working symmetrically at least from side, left to right for a long time. But impersonal ideas, also repetition of identical units, question of all-over surface and so on, I've been involved in that for a long time, you know. Anyway the '30s represent something and the abstract art of that time has been dealt with very unfairly. Now it's very easy to pick out work that looks weak or terrible and dated and that's what's happened. If somebody would select an abstract show from the '30s they could put on a terrific show, you know. But nobody has had a desire to.

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: And nobody has had the desire to because this would threaten the vested interest of the abstract expressionist, you know. There's no other explanation. Nobody wants to -- apart from, as I said, maybe political reasons. It seems to me everybody was afraid to make lists of the Artists Union or something like that because it would look like, sounded like a list somebody could use. I don't, I mean I really don't know why it hasn't but I know later on there was nobody wanted to -- everybody thought -- well, painting started with Pollock. And, gee, there were very good abstract expressionist painters around in the '30s like Ralph Rosenberg, George McNeil and so on. This -- there's no way of -- I mean I don't want to diminish whatever anybody feels about the abstract expressionists except that the '30s got this -- well, you know, got this political -- I'm using political now not in politics but just this careerist operation and this kind of, and the thing that offended me most was Clement Greenberg using the ideas of the abstract artists in the '30s and using them in exploiting expressionist artists that really didn't fit those ideas. But there wasn't

anything I could do about it -- well, except heckle them. It always looked like I was being either involved with sour grapes or else attacking my colleagues on personal jealousies. Well, I think that's dropped out, there isn't that, I mean but there was that for a long time.

DR. PHILLIPS: Well, were you comfortable on the easel division --

MR. REINHARDT: Yes.

DR. PHILLIPS: -- in terms of the demand that the WPA may have made on artists?

MR. REINHARDT: Well, I never felt any pressure or demand. And I also worked with supervisors on the easel division that gave me no trouble now like George Picken and John Monaghan, you know, they were all painting Provincetown scenes or something themselves but they -- I know Irene Pereira was doing Leger-type things -- no, she was doing her textures already. As far as I know she -- I don't think she made murals either. I don't remember who else -- I know there were a lot of semi-abstract painters like Jo Solmon and all kinds of people that were making abstractions of street scenes, corners. Well, they were assigned to document New York, you know, and that was sort of funny because they were doing -- but anyway they were doing it abstractly, it wasn't really the document of the '30s, funny, you know. I remember there was a whole batch of easel painters that were sent around to make street scenes and since they were doing something like that anyway, there was a whole series of them -- McCallum -- Henry Callum and who else -- ? -- Liberte and deMartini and all kinds of people. When they weren't doing their seascapes they were making street scenes. Yes, there was a -- I think maybe Joe Solmon was the most prominent of them but there was, oh, I don't know, see I don't remember all those names any more. DeMartini comes to mind because he and, oh, another fellow who -- I met him in Paris sitting around -- Kerkam, Earl Kerkam, three of us, I didn't know the other very well, I got to know Kerkam later on. I don't know whether Kerkam was on the project, I don't remember that. But there was a whole series of -- they weren't really social -- well, like Sol Wilson is another, and they were not -- they were scene painters, American scene painters in the '30s more than they were social protest painters.

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: But they had kind of expressionist manner in one way or another. Yes, I forget all these things, all these people from the '30s because if you don't stay around, you know, and insist on your presence, there is a tendency for everyone to forget, I mean that's the scene of political events.

DR. PHILLIPS: Right.

MR. REINHARDT: I just have a catalogue of a retrospect--, a memorial show of Harry Bowden up at the 30th Century Galleries up there in the same building as Grace Borgenicht. Now he was -- I shared a studio with McNeil and Bowden. And Bowden just retired from the scene, moved to California, did some photographs. I think he was a good friend of de Kooning's and a good friend of Cavallon's and he was an extremely good painter. He had a show at the Artists Gallery when they first opened, but then he sort of, you know, he wasn't part of the scene in his -- And I suppose at some point later on somebody like Karl Knaths was to exploit a certain kind of mannerism like triangular-like strokes with pieces of color and so on.

DR. PHILLIPS: But you had no sense of pressure exerted from the easel division at all?

MR. REINHARDT: No, none at all.

DR. PHILLIPS: And almost a free lunch counter of idea in terms of the organization?

MR. REINHARDT: Yes. No, I -- maybe I was -- there was a lot of people thought also that the communist party was hanging over them and pressuring them and I don't know who objected to that, I didn't feel any of that at all. I didn't -- of course I knew people who called themselves the communists and so on, you know, they were obvious around, I can't remember who -- they're not around anyway now but they were people who were head of the, oh, who -- ? -- somebody like Harry Gottlieb or somebody. I don't know whatever happened to him but and he's married to Elizabeth Olds I think or married to -- he comes to mind. Well, he represented himself all the time as I don't know what. But I never got any kind of pressure. And when I was assigned to do a kind of -- gee, I just mentioned Harry Gottlieb, maybe I shouldn't do that on the tape --

DR. PHILLIPS: It's all right.

MR. REINHARDT: You know the last thing I want to do is get anybody involved in name-calling or any kind of --

DR. PHILLIPS: No. But this is part of the scene.

MR. REINHARDT: Yes, it was part of the '30s, must have been like that.

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: You couldn't -- I was called everything in the world myself too. Well, at *PM* everyone was still calling that an organ of the communist party somewhere, which was pretty wild. But there was no pressure to do any kind of special kind of work. So I did a certain kind of post-Cubist, semi-Stuart Davis kind of thing, you know, little Picasso-like. As I said, somebody could put on a terrific show, for example, every now and then I see a little show of Morgan Russell or Bruce or -- and it looks sometimes a little uneven and it looks like there wasn't much sense, but I was up in Buffalo and there's a, must be about a fifteen-foot square Morgan Russell up there. Do you know that?

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: Well, that was a fantastic work at that why -- why that should be, and the date on that, that's fantastic, you know that was -- Motherwell once said that he thought modern art -- he was born into modern art, he thought modern art was born for him and so on. I modified that a little by my saying then that I was slated to have been born the year abstract art was born, and that it was born for me. I was born in 1913 and that's roughly the date, except with Morgan Russell or Kupka or one or two -- try to push it back to 1911 or something like that where you know the first -- .

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: Most of them looked like art nouveau or something though if you go back to that date except, you know, there was a lot of Cubist painting, that is, great Cubist paintings were done right before that or right during that. But then you know I also joked around not only with -- As a matter of fact, Sidney Janis had a show called "1913" once and it had, somehow it had a climax of all the movements in the year and it was about 15 or 20 movements all -- anyway -- special. Anyway I was born on Christmas Eve so I talk about, you know, I was on the verge of exploiting that.

DR. PHILLIPS: [Appreciative laughter.]

MR. REINHARDT: -- because, you know, people get into that. It was the kind of writing Thomas Merton finally was doing, he would -- I suppose it's legitimate -- he would be saying goodbye to his father and mother and getting on a train and then he remembered it was some saint, St. Teresa's say or feast or something like that, well, I'm sure every day is some saint, some special celebration you could be -- But also it, you know, since then I'm as old as abstract art all the time, I sometimes announce that. So that actually though I wasn't an aware abstract painter until I got out of college and I met someone like Carl Holty. I also studied with and became a good friend of Francis Kriss. I was very fond of him, he was such a terrific fellow. Do you know him?

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: And he was part of a group that Niles Spencer, sometimes Davis was thrown in there as a kind of Cubist regionalist or something I don't know. There were a number of others who were doing buildings, mostly flattened buildings. None of them were quite as free as Davis.

DR. PHILLIPS: No.

MR. REINHARDT: Also Kriss made Renaissance portraits like nobody could and he made -- I think Refregier had a mural in the Hotel Lexington or something, he made it American Revolutionary and he wanted to make the faces look like the Mayor, I don't know who was Mayor then, and some of the political leaders or something like that.

DR. PHILLIPS: LaGuardia, was it?

MR. REINHARDT: I don't know. But anyway Kriss had to paint them in because Refregier could never make any face that doesn't look like himself or his wife's, you know. You know he was a kind of standard thing and he just can't get away from that whatever it is some idealized portrait of especially women, you know, they're always -- I just can't get rid of this mannerist. Anyway, Kriss made terrific Renaissance-Picasso type portraits and so on, you know. I don't know -- and he had fantastic technical equipment but he was never anywhere near as free as Davis -- makes Davis --. I guess Kriss, yes, I'm sure he's still alive, I think he teaches up on 23rd Street still.

DR. PHILLIPS: Was abstract art part of the instruction at Columbia?

MR. REINHARDT: No. No, the course I took with Keyer Schapiro was just simply modern art and there were those exciting performances he put on mostly in the '30s, later on he was to lecture to left wing groups down here on soap boxes and so on, but he put on such a terrific performance.

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: And he was so stimulating. No, he wasn't really talking about Mondrian and people like that until much later. But he was such a terrific eye-opener for everybody in terms of the expressionists and post-expressionists then. It was later, you know, someone like Hauser was to really write the book that Shapiro should have written I suppose, like a chapter on impressionism and expressionism. I just sound like my notes from Shapiro's classes, you know, all the emphasis on the divided touch and the broken color and the -- all the very profound analysis before -- Now it's all quite common. Now it's impossible to write or read anything on Gauguin, Van Gogh and Lautrec and, you know, like -- I don't teach modern art history any more. I prefer Islamic art history to it because, you know, they've been run into the ground in movies and everything is so obvious. Even when they had the Cezanne show at the Metropolitan they had a roomful of how to paint like it before, you know, little photographs how to make an apple like Cezanne, so something so

completely known that it's --

DR. PHILLIPS: How did you bump into Carl Holty as an important among a series of keys and since the WPA period or the project period appears to be experimental both in terms of work and in terms of idea and discussion about idea. Carl Holty - how did you bump into him?

MR. REINHARDT: Let me see, I had a studio next to Stuart Davis on Seventh Avenue. Right around the corner there was a school called the American Artists School and I think -- I met Kriss and Holty there I'm sure. There was a girl in Holty's class that I was interested in, I think I got into that class -- it seems like --.

No, no, it's not true, I heard Carl Holty give a lecture either there or at the Artists Union, I got excited about it and I went over to see him, yes. It was Kriss that I met I think by going over there with a friend and looking around. It was a place to work from a model, nude model and so on. It was right above Torch's, no, right near Torch's Art Store on Seventh Avenue. And then I don't remember exactly how I got on the WPA projects but I remember going down to hear the Union. I heard a very exciting debate once I think Balcomb Greene and Gorky and Rosalind Bengelsdorf, you know, who became Mrs. Byron Browne, I heard a terrific debate once and this was the real excitement. At Columbia I was doing kind of Cubistic illustrations and something like that. And there was a painting class at Teachers College under a man by the name of John Martin. I went over there also to take classes, I did a certain kind of thing there but I didn't really know what I was doing, I was just simply reacting against the -- oh yes, and then at the same time I also went up to the -- I forget -- I was up at the National Academy, I studied with Sherwood Anderson's brother, Carl Anderson. This was all at the same time, all in '36.

DR. PHILLIPS: Mmhmm.

DR. REINHARDT: I got out in '35. I spent a year at the National Academy. And I did a number of portraiture, there was a tendency for me to try to stylize them and get a rise out of, without being especially aware. I didn't really, I wasn't really aware of the implications of Picasso and Cubism, not really self-conscious or aware about them until I met Holty. Yes, I think his lecture was on Cubism. I think Vytlačil was also an articulate painter, he and Holty I think were very unfortunate, but I didn't know Vytlačil very well but he was -- they were also in a way both students of Hofmann, and Newman too. I've never studied with Hofmann but I still felt that I became part of the trend, men like that. But I don't know what -- Hofmann of course was extremely important for everybody else. I didn't -- I visited his school, I was never there, and I also heard him lecture but I couldn't really understand him very well. But there was a kind of an excitement around that I sensed, though I didn't have any relation directly. I had no relation to the Art Students League either even though I visited my friends up there. I don't really know why because those were two important places in the '30s I'm sure for other painters it must have been terr-- Yes, and I don't really have anything to say about those two either as institutions or influences or events or --

DR. PHILLIPS: Well, one important feature to the period is the existence of organization which had a wide enough tent so that you could take idea and exchange idea.

MR. REINHARDT: Yes, yes. The artists -- that was a great thing and it was a real artists community.

DR. PHILLIPS: Right.

MR. REINHARDT: Yes, you could -- well, that lasted right all the way through the Artists Club period. I had a studio -- I've been here about fifteen years -- but I had a studio before that around on

Washington Place and that was not even the park and Cameron, de Kooning and Rosenberg and a whole group of people, we were always in the Park there. That later on became a club, we used to meet over in the Waldorf Cafeteria too, but that was in the middle '40s, late '40s, and that was sort of interesting. Later on the club became a kind of de Kooning club, which was all right because he sort of dominated a lot of the people, but I was -- within the group I always sort of represented again an opposite point of view, which was good, because it made clear a lot of ideas of mine in opposing de Kooning. There was some times when de Kooning would talk about how an artist ought to be kind of a nomad and projecting a kind of Paleolithic idea about the artist. I found myself defending the Neolithic artist, you know, the guy who's settled. And I was defending Egyptian art and Neolithic geometry against the artist as a free, wild man, you know. Whatever it was I really moved into an opposite position by -- I didn't have anything to do, and I've always resisted having any kind of relation to the surrealists, too. So it's funny, I didn't -- the surrealists, and the whole Hofmann setup, and the Art Students League, those three I didn't touch at all. I know -- I was aware that the surrealists were around but I really objected to everything they were, you know, whether it was Dali or Hofmann. Klee and Miro were fairly acceptable, they could be looked at as abstract artists. I guess Max Ernst would I suppose ultimately at some time be the best surrealist for me because he's the one that has explored the most and had the widest kind of work, the most work maybe, I don't know, I guess Max Ernst he's only very recently been getting shows that show the breadth of his work. An interesting thing he had one show that was entirely Mondrians, he painted linear black lines, spatial divisions, but he made a landscape into each area though, the attempt was amusing that he felt that he needed to make Mondrian into empty windows and then he put the scenes in the windows. That to me was a very significant act on his part because there was absolutely no -- nothing that Mondrian ever felt compelled to do in the other direction at all, you know, he was -- I think Parker Tyler was trying to make some of the Mondrian paintings surrealist by saying that they were like American flags, or clocks stopped, hands, or I don't know what, or bars in prison and so on, but, gee, that was like Motherwell's black bars being called bull's testicles and tails hanging on the walls. That kind of poetry I've always objected -- I've always objected to titles. And the whole idea of bridges this was also an issue in the '30s all the time. And later on when someone like Kuniyoshi asked me to start, or help, I made I think a leaflet, a kind of funny poster, they had a dance and a couple of things to start Artists Equity. That was I think the one organization, artist's organization -- you know I once said I've always been an organization man, but that was one organization I never joined on principle and I heckled them at some of the early meetings because I didn't think that there was a profession or a trade there. And of course they finally -- and I was right there, they finally had to dissolve, they just couldn't maintain -- . I know they helped some guys once, they had a benefit or something but there was just no way of having, they couldn't even tell who was an artist and who wasn't. They decided, you know, someone had three one-man shows, or who had shown in a national exhibit -- well, you know, primitives or somebody could buy shows. Anyway there was no way of making professional standards without --

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: So if you didn't have the unemployed organization or some kind of a large social organization like the Union or Congress, an Artists Equity like Actors Equity just wasn't possible.

DR. PHILLIPS: No.

MR. REINHARDT: Even now I know there's an international museum curators association, there's a new art dealers association, a couple of years old. And there's no artists group at all.

DR. PHILLIPS: Right.

MR. REINHARDT: There's not, absolutely not -- one is absolutely all alone now, which is all right. I don't mind. Even when I was writing *Twelve Rules for an Academy*, and I was setting up the -- it was sort of humorous because there was only one artist that was qualified to be a member of this academy. Or even when I talked about professional organization or even anything it's always implicit there's only one thing to do and there's only one artist. It was carried through logically what's happened, but it's true it's just the business on the outside and then the artists, I don't know, making their personal -- Then of course you do have milieus, or you do have groups of people that get together I don't know on what basis, sometimes on the basis of galleries like I think it's Castelli or at the Green Gallery there was some I don't know what -- it was an organization anyway, it was just a group of artists that either worked together -- there were three Cleveland artists that wanted to make themselves a group, called themselves Anonima. There was an international artists group, artists association around Zero and No and things like that with sort of -- but they seemed awfully naïve to me, I met one of the Frenchmen, Yvaral -- that's Vasarely's son -- visited me here but he realized that I wasn't really part of anything they were doing. And then the Germans Mack and Piene and Uecker they also -- I heard them talk, and you know, they had nothing really much to do with my ideas. But someone like Bob Morris and Frank Stella and so on, they sort of somehow related themselves to me and I don't really know what -- otherwise I haven't felt any relationship to anybody. Especially opposed to that Still, Rothko, Newman and Motherwell idea, and I think it's all pretty much the same idea. And then whatever groups there like Greenberg is involved in I don't know. But there's certainly no organization or no community of any kind. I thought maybe the Academy, university academics would be -- I know the market place is absolutely impossible and even though I would have to admit that was where a lot of the stimulating activity was maybe, you know, for twenty years or ten years, it's like the projects were the most stimulating area. I thought maybe the university academies because the amount of activity and outside of New York almost every artist is connected with a school or a museum school, but gee, you know, they're deadly. Of course they're always in a kind of crisis. But I think the situation of learning or also a situation where an artist can feel at home -- that's a dangerous term -- all the artists that feel at home in their university don't consider themselves artists, you know, they're living well, they build houses and raise families but I know there were four or five guys from North Carolina that kept asking me about New York because they thought the artists were in New York. And once someone asked me why there weren't any artists outside of New York, it's been a joke here anyway, I think Harold Rosenberg called op art "out of town" painting. But there was this whole business of New York and outside, but outside if a guy's -- there's a tendency if you're going to settle into a job or settle into living, you settle for living and somehow artists, a good thing about artists in New York is that they don't do that. You don't settle for living whatever you do, you don't; you have something else. This was always true since the '30s, it's funny, a statement like "an artist has to eat" for 30 years now I've been saying he doesn't. And I was always questioning why an artist would have to say that, and no artist has ever said that except apologetically. So he knows he's up to no good, you know. There would be absolutely no reason to say that unless you feel compromised. And it isn't any good, you can't use that as an excuse. I was always saying, "An artist doesn't have to eat any more than anybody else." It implies that an artist has to eat more. But that comes up now for some reason. There was a pressure in the '30s, it was purely intellectual I think, it wasn't in the project but the idea that an artist ought to relate himself to society. But, you know I think there wasn't any kind of pressure on me because it was always silly, if I wanted to relate myself to society I would do it, you know, or if I had to make a living and I always was either by doing something -- commercial work or teaching or something, I wanted to always be free of the idea of living from one's painting. I always thought that living from one's painting was an absolutely offensive idea. And I think it'll be borne out more and more that this is impossible.

DR. PHILLIPS: For the clarification in your own thinking do you still need, or find that you need the



opposite viewpoint expressed, ably expressed with which you can contend. This seems to be in the '30s.

MR. REINHARDT: Well, it's always, yes, it's always there.

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: Yes, I've always found it somewhere. It was amazing sometimes I'd be on a panel with Kiesler and he was involved with not only new words like "relational" or "environmental" or something like that and of course by then I would have -- he was talking about not paintings but spaces between the paintings and then moving them into structures and everything being all one thing -- architecture, sculpture, painting, all being a kind of cave or an egg, and then I would force myself into a strict rectangular frame with absolute limits nothing to do with any relation to anything outside that space. Yes, that was always a way of clarifying --

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: But it was amazing like someone like -- well, the social protest painters were really not -- I guess they were social expressionists and they were not really - there was really no way of arguing with them, you know, that was another -- But later on someone like Matta or Kiesler or Mattawan or someone would be good to use as a -- When Motherwell wanted to do a second book, one of his ideas was titling it *Art into the World* or something like that, so I said that that left me my title *Art out of this World*.

DR. PHILLIPS: Well, I suspect, you know, the '30s were fortunate in this sense that a lot of these questions were open-ended questions and it was a fluid period in which one could find, you know, people who were also - - thought and idea so that it was like going to school in a sense - -

MR. REINHARDT: Yes.

DR. PHILLIPS: Or a continuous seminar of -- and this is the secret of it.

MR. REINHARDT: Yes. Yes, I would say that, you know, it would be important for somebody to document by good paintings to show the spirit of the '30s, I don't know who would do it, or who could do it. I wouldn't trust any of the museum curators because they haven't done it and they're the same people - - It was also shocking to see at the College Art Association - - well, the College Art Association, of course, that's not of the '30s, but that later on became important to me, and they were absolutely boring but I liked staying in the hotel anyway for two days and get away from the city, but I liked Harry Knight, I was the only one, I was certainly the only artist from New York who could stand those sessions. But I did. There for about at least ten years I'd go to all of them regularly. Sometimes I was a participant, sometimes not. So I liked the academic situation but, you know, the academies are absolutely deadly, but that's the one big fact anyway, not the prosperity of making money but the fact that the universities are all full of artists now, and art is such a concern now, and maybe there's too much ratification or too much therapy and amateurism. There's a lot of objections. Malcolm Lowrie -- what is that he's been objecting to -- ? art buildings being too big and too expensive and everybody --

DR. PHILLIPS: Popular.

MR. REINHARDT: But I mean you can't object to that, it's like objecting to the housing that's going on. You can object about the buildings and about the whole idea and everything but you can't object to just the -- you can't -- there's no way of defending the terrible slums every place anyway,

even though sometimes the slums are more colorful and better in a number of ways but in terms of health or in terms of whatever sanitation or something like that, you know, it was -- . Anyway I feel that the universities are the only place and that art should have something to do with learning and not -- and then I imagine that the bohemians would be over except in the universities -- well, that's where all the beatniks are anyway or whatever they would be, the young painters who somehow come, all come out of some university. I was amused at the College Art Association the way the old art historians just like the old curators here the way they've loved and latched onto pop art because here is an image again and iconography again. - - book that came out. Do you know *The Shape of Time*?

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: I hear that's, you know that's a kind of underground bestseller, nobody seems to have mentioned it much but I thought that was a terrific book, an art historian questioning iconography, which, you know - - I know at the Institute I studied with people like Panofsky and Friedlander and a few others so I know the Institute situation pretty well. But this was, I thought this was quite an event. I wrote a review of it for *Art News*. I think it will appear next month. But the '30s, you know, should be documented and I mean the documentation should be of course abstract. I don't see any reason documenting anything else, it seems to be documented.

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: There's no problem of documenting all the activity of Shahn and the Soyers and all those people, you know. They have. But like now, why does Morgan Russell, is a mystery or surprise when you see it, why a big painting like that? The Museum of Modern Art finally got a Picabia, you know, one of those edtaonisl paintings.

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: Now I don't know how many there are, four or five, they're large, and you know those paintings they're much, much better than any of the Duchamp, *Nude going down the Staircase*. I mean he's just from an abstract point of view while modern anything even though they came -- well, I don't know how -- maybe they're not as clear as certain Legers but those Picabias were done quite early and, you know, without knowing them I would say they influenced the whole '30s, the style of the '30s, but I don't know of anybody who knew them then.

DR. PHILLIPS: No.

MR. REINHARDT: It's amazing because they absolutely have -- it's the source of everybody like I -- certainly -- well, of course of all the post-Cubist work and yet this wasn't a Cubist painting, it was called something else. But that kind of geometry, there was a non-suggested geometry, it was pretty pure there. And whereas I think the Morgan Russell and the Macdonald-Wright and Patrick Bruce -- well, no, I can't say that -- they really had quite an influence in the '30s, too, that style --

DR. PHILLIPS: Sure.

MR. REINHARDT: There were people working like Bruce very much and people like Morgan Russell, the Morgan Russells, yes, there were people painting like that.

[END OF SIDE 1]

[SIDE 2]

MR. REINHARDT: All right?

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: I would like to help somebody document the '30s from an aesthetic point of view, who would be an abstract, same as the abstract point of view because it's here that the documentation is really at fault. I know you always make up when you go back and maybe we're free enough now to go back to the '30s to re-pick and re-show. Somebody should do it. I don't know whether the museums are interested in it. There was a show a couple of years ago that Poindexter put on called "The Thirties." It was organized by someone like Milton Resnick with a number of other people - mainly de Kooning, and one thing the '30s was not, it was certainly not de Kooning and Gorky standing around as the center of the scene. That absolutely is not true at all. There was certainly an activity around Gorky's mural at Newark, but de Kooning was -- nobody paid any attention to de Kooning in the '30s any more than they pay attention to pictures in a catalogue. I think he got a commission for the World's Fair but it was such a funny kind of cartoon mural he made out there, but you know since de Kooning got such a terrific lot of attention later on there was a lot of people going back and making --

DR. PHILLIPS: - - back into it, yes.

MR. REINHARDT: -- a great deal out of -- well, that's quite natural. All the way through it's interesting that the same things that are often said now -- well, someone like Canaday is always talking about abstract art being dead. This was said, you know, by Thomas Craven and by all the people in the '30s.

DR. PHILLIPS: It may be that the critics suffered from a form of compulsive --

MR. REINHARDT: Well, also this -- it's funny how more and more the problem of meaning comes up and I realize that using art as a means to something is -- but also the pretense that any kind of meaning is impossible, too. And I heckled artists mercilessly, as you may know, let's say on *PM* when Edith Halpert announced Ralston Crawford was documenting the first atom bomb. He went out there and he came back with some paintings of some crooked lines or something I mean and this was supposed to be documentation. She said that the miles and miles of movie film was not as important as this one artist watching the thing, he came back and made some kind of abstractions like anybody else was making but he made the shapes a little jagged or something. I thought that was absolutely disgraceful. Why an artist with some kind of an attention would want to let himself in for that -- but then I think Motherwell has let himself in for that. I was just recently on a religious panel up at the Museum of Modern Art with Motherwell. I objected to his Spanish Loyalist government titles, his Spanish Republic titles, and his Irish Rebellion titles. And I objected to, you know, Larry Rivers' *The Russian Revolution*, I guess he thought he was camping around maybe, I don't know. But then when Louise Nevelson's *Homage to Six Million Jews* that's absolutely -- I can't think of anything more disgraceful than that. It's, you know, a callous activity and it's such a shameless exploitation for -- and, you know, whatever they do doesn't mean that, you know, I mean Louise Nevelson making a black or white wall or pieces of furniture, you know, or something like that, that doesn't -- how can she -- ? And then I thought -- you know I've always said that the worst, disgraceful exhibition in modern times was that "Image of Man" show by Peter Selz. Harold Rosenberg called it Bump Painting in which everybody was supposed to be some kind of a protoplasmic or rock or, you know, a human being as what's left after the atom bomb drops -- just a piece of matter. But I added, I said that that was "Bumpkin Painting" because to me the painting is always manneristic or mannered. I think artists, I would say now that artists have always worked the same way in the East and West all through time, that there is the same kind of process, it might

vary like I said from the '30s to the '40s whether you worked with sketches or you adjust them or you worked directly but essentially it's the same kind of routine and process that art comes from art all the time, not from any kind of experience, any kind of other meaning. And there's nothing to do if you don't work continually. There are no instances where commercial industrial artists-- lots of them think they'll work and they'll make money and then they'll retire and work. If you don't have the reason to work you never have a reason to work.

DR. PHILLIPS: Right.

MR. REINHARDT: If you're not doing anything there's nothing to do either. Anyway I think this has always been true in the endless artists whether they work I don't know in any tradition the endless figures of Buddha that have become really very empty images, or I got interested in Islamic architectural decoration which seems to me the most monumental and the essence of Islamic art, you know, not the minor arts, rugs or manuscripts or anything, but anywhere, or in Chinese painting just the endless repetition of conventions and traditions of painting, that's all there is, and I like Kubler's idea saying that you could, now that books and paperbacks have come out on Central Asia there are no mysterious areas any more and nobody's going to find anything that is going to shock anybody so the whole thing art history can be closed almost and you can chart all the forms and all the, you know, and the endless possibilities within very really extremely narrow limits all the time, which I believe too. And when you go into a museum, a museum of fine art, and I think that's one museum of fine art like Malraux would say you try to cover 25,000 years as if you can get a piece of Paleolithic cave or something and then it's all extremely similar and you could say it's almost one thing and a curator implies that it's almost one thing by making it, calling it fine art. I know when Yale University got a lot of Dura Europos with the Damascus Museum they picked some of it and sent it upstairs and that became fine art and the rest of it went to the Peabody Museum, then they were objects of material culture there. Well, somebody made -- absolute decisions are made all the time like that and that's on the basis of almost just one point of view, it's not on terms of -- all this work would be equally valuable from an ethnological point of view or archaeological point of view or whatever it is. I don't think -- and of course fine art doesn't give you more information than other objects, but when it goes into a museum it turns out it gives you less information. And in the cleaning up of the Metropolitan Museum the Egyptian rooms - it was about time - you have to let go of the boats and the mummies and everything. And then like the Greek and Roman rooms you just have to get your best pieces and just put them around by themselves, no relief maps, no pictures of houses or archaeological sites or the way people lived or anything like that. This is a trend that goes on everywhere - in Asia, in the Middle and Near East, and I think all those objects love their religious value when they become fine arts. I've written this-- that nobody goes to worship in a museum also when a place, a temple or church becomes a national monument - with the exception of less than half a dozen places in the world - all the worshippers are chased away, they become a site for tourists or scholars or something.

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: And I think this is true and I think this is the only direction that's possible. And so then I've been stressing them the timeless aspects and trying to -- well, in the '30s they called it getting to the bare bones of the painting or the skeletal structure or something. There was an implication all the way through the '30s that abstract art was form and then meaning was content. And again Shahn is disgraceful. He wrote a book called *The Shape of Content*, and I said one time that even *The Content of Shape* is not a good title but it would be a little better. But you wouldn't separate those at all. I mean if there's one lesson to be learned in this century is that there -- and I think Susan Sontag's article in *Partisan Review* this month, this last issue, brings it up again that there's nobody willing to defend this form versus content ideas but practically almost every critic still

practically operates with this idea. And it's true, she points out, and this is I think again and I always knew, and I made a statement maybe in the '40s, but it was a statement that people like Balcomb Green had made in the '30s or something, that abstract art was not an empty structural form like a vase and you poured meaning into it, or content, or something like that, or you don't have some kind of meaning outside and then you have tricks which you lay it out, or you structure it, or you compose it, or something like that. As a matter of fact, the word composition has vanished completely, and it's about time, you know. Anyway I had a feeling and I knew this, if I didn't articulate it in the '30s I articulated it all through the '40s but I knew this was absolutely false dichotomy, the form versus content. And not only that -- oh! another event -- I discovered that not only was abstract art born in 1913 but Clive Bell wrote his book published in 1913 and thought the Clive Bell and Focillon and the Kubler book now - I would say are the three most important statements myself. Now I re-read that Clive Bell book and it was terrific even the statement he would say that not only trying to isolate something like aesthetic emotion which means it's not any other emotion, it's only negative idea or significant form and so -- but he said that the representation is something stolen from pure form, it's not an addition, and a number of times I knew that the whole problem was never edited, you didn't have empty means or empty forms that you could use for something else, or you didn't have some meaning outside of art and then you could find things to make it art too, so that the whole idea about art as being editable, art plus something or art as something else too, I would always question it's being art in the first place, you know, I mean the thing is you take something away, you don't add anything to it. I like Motherwell's sort of black and white paintings because they were some of the strongest monuments made of that whole abstract expressionist period. But there's meaning taken away from them by the poetic titles and somebody making them a free for all association of images or something.

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: So it was terrific to see that Clive Bell made these statements. Also he's willing from a whole world history of art, he's willing to jump from Giotto to Cezanne as being a kind of interruption. That's the most shocking statement he could have possible made at that time. After all, that's when everybody thought that was the only area in art, you know, they didn't think of Chinese or Indian traditions were very important. As a matter of fact they really haven't taken their proper place still in world histories of art.

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: And Islamic Art has no place yet - one page.

DR. PHILLIPS: One page.

MR. REINHARDT: And I was looking through Arthur Upham Pope's book that just came out, an absolutely fantastic book. And I was in Isfahan for one or two days and I covered the Near East a couple of times and that 1200-year tradition of Islamic art, God! That's a fabulous thing. So I've been using that to beat art historians over there. Well maybe you can't - maybe it can't be done - as Kubler indicates - until you have an art history that's meaningless too. And in searching around for -- funny even Arthur Upham Pope and a number of other people -- and a few others, or Ettinghauser, I mean a few Islamic people who are working in the field, it's fantastic how they absolutely can't resist, and absolutely have to find meaning. And Arthur Upham Pope -- well, somebody, one of the other books when somebody said it was all done for the glory of God, well, that's all right but when there's a geometric interlace or an arabesque and it has to be related to a plant and then the plant has to be given the old iconographic meaning of fertility and abundance in a desert area in relation to an oasis or as a life-giving thing, God! You know the old -- you don't

really have that tree of life in Islamic decoration at all, you might have a leaf or a form but it's not whatever magical property it might have had in Sumer or Acre or somewhere in Babylonia, I don't know whether it had that meaning then anyway - maybe. But the attempt is sort of desperate to find some meaning and you can't. Funny that nobody has picked up the -- I think the next thing apart from a certain kind of iconography of course, somebody is going to try to psychoanalyze it because it looks as obsessional as anything you can possibly imagine, you know, this Islamic decoration. And here you have repetition of, endless repetition of identical units, you know, somebody wants to make that already then endless space and infinity in relation to space and time, just like everybody was wanting to relate Pollock to the astrophysical or the microphysical world, you know, just in order to be able to accept it, make it -- Anyway, this is certainly a thing from the '30s, a form versus content thing. And that - it was a sharp observation of Susan Sontag's that people still write that way. Of course Canaday is the most obvious. And yet that's an impossible idea, nobody would say it's not defended.

DR. PHILLIPS: How do you prevent your own interest and orientation in art history from affecting your own work?

MR. REINHARDT: I don't. I've been -- I was on a religious panel and I always start out by saying I, you know, I've been called more religious things than anybody, - a Zen Buddhist. Harold Rosenberg called me a black monk, that's not true, but even in the '30s it was escapist all the time, ivory towerist, and it was all, you know, I thought those were all right, I thought that the University academy even today should be an ivory tower or cloister and not success school or trade school or whatever it is, you know. I thought it shouldn't be an academic market place, that's what they call it. It's exactly like -- and that's the trouble with teaching jobs, you get teaching jobs on the basis of your reputation in the market place.

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: But the -- I've been called a Puritan and a Calvinist and I've been called a Protestant and a Muslim, an iconoclast and all kinds of things, Byzantine, I've been called Kierkegaard; I've been called -- and the thing is that I, you know, I make a point of, I reject all these meanings, you know, indicating that, gee, most artists just love all these meanings and think, boy, there would be nothing more flattering to them to -- can you imagine embracing all that? You know - Buddhism and Calvinism and the Hebraic-Islamic traditions in relation to art at the same time? Gosh! But, you know, on TV one time I heard an interview with - somebody was asking Richard Lippold about God and he said yes, he was - his things were religious. Albers when he was asked that question somebody said that "you were making the religious essence of God in the universe" or something like that. And Albers said he wouldn't say that. "It's a nice idea," he said. But I mean I like the way he rejected it because, God! I'm always embarrassed by artists taking on these meanings and there was nothing more ridiculous in the '30s than all the artists who were all essentially politically dumb pretending to be socially and politically knowledgeable.

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: I -- it was just absolutely -- and then later on it was also funny when de Kooning was talking in public at the Club or at the museum he would make a statement that science is silly or ridiculous and everybody thought that was such a great statement. It's absolutely insane. You know the word "science" whatever that is you know he used to sort of make fun of outer space, he said, "all the space he needs is the space he could fling a brush or something, or reach." That's a nice poetic statement but it was picked up as if he was anti-religious and spiritual or he was anti-science or anti-materialistic or I don't know he was just ridiculous.

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: And you know artists like everybody else pick up fashionable ideas. There was a tremendous amount of irrationalism and automatism and I think the surrealists were quite disgraceful about it you know. Max Ernst would get up at the Club and say -- somebody would ask him how he did a painting -- and he said he didn't do any of his paintings, he just woke up in the morning and there they were already finished. This is all right to tell the bourgeoisie but I don't know what it meant to tell other artists that. So this is something I just couldn't stand in the '30s is this pretention to meaning that art couldn't possibly have. I can now say meaning and be apt because I've been involved now for thirty years with absolutely anti-meaning, anti-meaninglessness. I mean as much as anybody I think I've made the most extreme statements on that. Lately there is an attempt to make an artist a religious person not because of religious content or religious meaning particularly but I think not so much Coomaraswamy but Suzuki and Tillich and Buber and Maritain. That covers all the religions except the Moslem. Try to make the artist process his own ritual and routine. As a matter of fact even when talking about artists' rituals you know so that there's a feeling that an artist is a religious person more or less like a monk in the course of his process, but I for myself have rejected that. The only thing I would say is if artists -- artists may be more religious in only one sense if they're better than business men, if they're not involved, let's say, in exploiting other people for profit or something like that. I think Eric Fromm had some idea about the artist being a freer man in this. Then an artist of course shouldn't sell his work either. And he could be a better man but in a kind of primitive Christian sense or something. He, you know, is not going around bothering anybody or exploiting them or anything like that he is just doing his own work. Well, I would - that's all right and you know in that kind of -- but you know there are a number of artists doing religious murals and I objected in the '30s, in the '40s I guess, or in the '50s when Motherwell was making those synagogue murals, that was a lot of baloney. Of course it was not that they just wanted to do walls, it was Kootz saying that this was an integration of architecture, sculpture and painting the greatest since Giotto or something like that. And then when I said they could have the jobs and careers and money but I refused to let them have the ideas. I said that, I don't know, over and over again now for twenty years. But this is certainly a continuing '30s debate.

DR. PHILLIPS: It is. It's still - -

MR. REINHARDT: I always liked the way Gallatin and Morris who did some kind of writing, especially Morris for *Partisan Review*. I think Greenberg was to pick up some of his ideas but I like the way he always wrote. But then in his own work he later on abandoned a pure abstract position. I think that was just like A and L (Helion?) and others. Well, I've know that to happen. Another thing that was a problem from out of the '30s is especially when it's involved in getting attention or encouragement not so much success yet but the kind of artists and the amount of artists who were encouraged and then went on to do more and bigger work or more significant work, and then artists who weren't, who turned to something else, or gave up or withdrew and so on. Now I don't know what the problem would be here. Maybe it's no problem aesthetically but I often wondered whether a certain kind of encouragement would have, was important there for one artist or another, or whether one artist is too weak to continue. You know I don't know whether it's answerable or not. Sometimes it's a little like wondering how many artists haven't been, you know weren't born or how many artists - there used to be the idea is how many artists, how many geniuses have starved in garrets that we don't know about. The thing is the problem of whether a certain kind of encouragement, attention, appreciation helps and I don't really know, you know. But I've seen so many artists I've admired from the '30s who've given up and changed and then had nothing to say, you see, then they weren't strong enough, I mean I thought they should you know, I mean I would have liked to have seen them stick to whatever they had, to their guns despite it but -- now it

seems to me maybe you need a little encouragement, it seems to me I've always had enough encouragement or enough discouragement to fight, you know, inattention in one way or another but it seems to me I look not nostalgically back at artists I admire who - - you know I don't like the idea of just saying, "Well, they didn't have the strength or perseverance or conviction or whatever it is", I don't like conviction and dedication and all those words that have been bandied about so much but they just didn't stick to them or not so much believe in themselves but believe in or - - well, I know I can sound religious, have a kind of faith in art or whatever it is or your own art but the minute you start to make it positive it sounds terrible, you know, I've always talked negatively anyway. That sounds religious too, the negative kind of theological approach where you never especially in the Hebraic and the Islamic where you wouldn't pin down God or the minute you make Him a thing it's not Him or not it, or it's a vulgarization - - just like to keep it free whatever it is but the attempt of people to make a certain kind of quality or to pin down an essence is always amusing. You know the 17th, 18th century critics like Keel and so on would make lists of Rembrandt, Raphael or somebody, Poussin, then they'd have columns: color, line, composition, and then they'd get 40%, they would be graded and that's sort of amusing. I think there are lots of people still think a little like that. I once, at the Club, raised a question about what's an artist good at, what's a good artist good at? Living. Answered yes. It was a popular attitude that artists shamelessly used like this, there is a notion that artists know how to live better, especially the rich imitate the way artists live sometimes. The loft living, you couldn't get lofts for a long time around, or studios, because people who used to own big mansions were moving and taking them up because that was the idea about how to live or something. But the notion that an artist knows how to live better than somebody else has always amused me. Or that an artist - - well, should have some kind of political or social insight or that he should feel more human than somebody else has always tickled me. Well, this is in the '30s, it wasn't very obvious then you know, it was hard to answer somebody, like Evergood would talk about Breughel, Goya and himself. I think lately even the idea about Goya is questionable whether he hated war or whether he relished it or not. I know that he certainly didn't get indignant at some horrible real event and then keep that hot passion and run to a studio and engrave plates and dip them in acid and then run them through a printing press all at this white heat of indignation, you know, which everybody assumes, you know, that you have a direct experience and you put it down - - And Huxley said, you know, he was like that, Goya would have a dark horrible area and then he would have a nice shape of a white leg that was related to Manet or somebody. Then obviously he's enjoying the whole process. Well, whatever it is, it isn't as - - I was aware of that, that simple notion that is still around in such a - - especially in pop art despite the camp element or the convoluted aspect the preoccupation or the concern or the pretention to meaning is just hilarious, you know. I always feel a little unfair also when I get on panels with other artists to get - - and it always sounds belligerent to bring it always up. I remember I was on a panel with Harold Rosenberg and shared it with Motherwell and Guston and Tworkov in Philadelphia once and it was a little like something that might have happened in the '30s too but - - they presented themselves and talked about their work, the other three artists, I didn't, I got a little mixed up and I didn't know exactly what to say so I begged off from starting the discussion. But the other artists presented themselves and they were extremely popular, the whole audience just loved them. Motherwell is really best at that, he can suffer and he can project a certain kind of process, struggle or whatever it is. But then it was my turn again and I raised a lot of questions and really attacked the other three artists for what they'd said, you know, it wasn't true what they said. They said a variety of things that I could say wasn't true, it wasn't my opinion, it was either true or it was right or wrong. And then the audience started on me. They just assaulted me, you know, they just - - . And it was awfully funny because then the other three artists had to defend me. And this is what's happened so many times. And the other three artists had to defend me because they had to defend themselves as artists. Before that they were making some public pitch of some kind, you know, and had gotten a lot of clichés together about what they do and don't do in their studios, and what they mean and don't mean



and I simply - - anyway it was funny that - - and this of course confused the audience completely, they just I mean it must have been a real puzzle, why should these three guys defend me after I attacked them you know, why I didn't defend them and so on. So I think this has been something that I have always - - even on *PM* there was in a few weeks I would have exhausted every possible way of drawing a little spot or drawing thick and thin lines, crooked or rough, or whatever. And then I started to paste up little 19th century drawings. I think I was the first one to do it in a newspaper you know that Max Ernest had done twenty years before.

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

[Interruption for phone call]

MR. REINHARDT: Max Ernest had been involved in these kind of collages and books and so on whatever it was but I - - it was a way of just avoiding this impossible way of drawing you know. A commercial artist has to learn how to do a certain thing a certain way then he has to stick with that.

DR. PHILLIPS: Right.

MR. REINHARDT: And then you vary the - - this has always been quite obvious. I guess the art historians don't seem to know this. Every now and then somebody finds Steinberg, Rosenberg or Gombridge or something, they find that Steinberg is making fun of means or whatever it is. And you know he's been making kind of hilarious geometry in the *New Yorker* - - he got three pages last week or the week before.

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: Yes. Well, I think an awful lot of artists are aware of that and I don't, I wouldn't continue it. Later on of course except when you get to doing the same thing maybe because there's an inevitable way of not being able to do them anywhere else, finally there isn't any reason for doing it any other way. But everything is a mannerism the most realistic technique and the most elaborate kind of demonstrative technique is just as much decoration or manner or convention as anything else.

DR. PHILLIPS: What do you do with - - let me dilute that - - most people enjoy the warmth that illusion affords, even an artist I would assume, at least they use these clichés, as you have pointed out. They make a pitch which is an illusion.

MR. REINHARDT: Sometimes a pornographic element?

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes-s. Or it can be just the fact that somehow, some way it's suffering, you know, an illusion that they have about themselves in relation to their work.

MR. REINHARDT: Yes. Well I don't accept that, I mean when somebody says - - there was a movie on TV recently and suddenly some guy said that "every brush is something torn from my guts" or something like that. Well, gee, I'd absolutely murder an artist who is pulling that kind of stuff. That never happens at all. That Van Gogh image - -

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes - -

MR. REINHARDT: - - with Kirk Douglas and Anthony Quinn was sort of funny in that movie.

DR. PHILLIPS: Very. But is there no room for illusion in a meaninglessness?

MR. REINHARDT: Yes-s. Well, there's room for everything that goes on but in a very serious discussion I don't know you know that would be it. For example, you know you could justify any kind of work in any kind of terms giving pleasure or doing whatever it does, but you know you can't maintain it seriously if you're having an aesthetic discussion.

DR. PHILLIPS: No.

MR. REINHARDT: Or if you're, or ad nauseam because this is what bothers artists you know if an artist painted a picture and then Ben Heller bought it and made him happy you know everybody knows that's no justification for anything especially if, you know, Heller thought it represented, the color represented hope or faith or charity or whatever it was to him. So there is an artistic conscience, an artistic guilt, an artistic essence, an artistic problem that all artists know. I once, at the artists' club, gave a talk called "What's Wrong?" I asked a question and then the cards went out and there was a mistake on them, it was called "What's Wrong with Wrong?" or something like that, "What's Wrong with Right?" I had at one time - - but then that evening you know there were artists who wanted to argue but it sounded funny and I carried it to an absurd point. Someone would say, "Well, why shouldn't an artist live like anyone else, why shouldn't he eat" - you know - - not - - he has to eat "But why shouldn't he eat good food, or the best food, or why shouldn't he have the best house, why shouldn't he have a yacht?" You know and Gottlieb represented this out in East Hampton I think in a Newsweek interview or something he said he was so glad that now stockbrokers and bankers accepted the artist, that they, you know, are nice fellows and they thought he was a nice fellow and so on. Well this is really quite stocking to everybody, now I don't know whether he was, you know he may have been saying this for some particular reason, but I mean he wasn't camping or anything like that. But I don't think it's - - to make an artist like everybody else it seemed like a virtue, people in the '30s thought that artists should be a worker or be part of the working class or whatever it is that somehow an artist worker could give more conventional painting. Well, of course, that didn't last very long. I think even in Russia there was criticism of painters for not painting workers heroically enough. I think there was a kind of somebody by the name of Schlansky or somebody was involved in - - well, the questions was always how heroic can you make a worker in a painting? I guess Eisenstein did about as well as anybody.

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: But somebody thinking like that here I don't know. There's a painting by Al Westley at the Whitney that's about twice as large as lifesize and it's very heroic I don't know what he's doing and so forth. It's a funny thing to try to think about it as a profession and somebody when I picked up the expression somebody sarcastically referred to painting as a profession of pleasing and selling, which sounds about as corrupt as anybody - - well everyone knows it isn't that even though - - and then fifteen years ago it was quite possible for one artist to call another artist an old whore. You can't do that now.

DR. PHILLIPS: No.

MR. REINHARDT: There isn't one artist who would call another artist that any more. Because the whole situation has flourished so. Well, that didn't seem to be a problem in the '30s. I know that there was a political cartoonist on *PM* who used to - - occasionally a number of artists would do them, I did one once or twice but it always was a kind of problem because the editor would have an idea and he would try to get an artist to do it and I always thought the idea was pretty corny I don't know why, that's because I didn't think about it, maybe. But there was some guy who would - - also I had I guess a political opinion one way or the other and sometimes I disagreed but this other artist would put down - - he didn't have any political ideas, and he would put down what the editor told

him to and he was an impossible guy also as an artist. Had absolutely no respect for any kind of line or drawing or anything, he could do something in five minutes without any kind of quality, finally did sports cartoons too. But the thing is he couldn't - - you know this would not be -- there is a commercial and industrial art process where somebody has an idea and then you're an artist with some skills and you carry it out and then you check back, the art director or somebody tells you whether you did it good, right or not, whatever it is. But this is no fine art process at all and then later on the abstract expressionists were to say, "Well, I don't know what I'm doing," which was always untrue, but the idea that you would get to where you get without knowing exactly when you start what it might look like but you did have some idea - - at any rate you had your own idea about beginning and finishing and the whole thing was finally yours, it wasn't - - it was inconceivable that somebody would say, "Well, - -" well, of course some artists have seen other artists and they see well that's a good idea and then they try to do it but that's all right when you're young but then when they see older artists change, to move in and see a social protest painter change into an abstract expressionist and then into a pop artist, I mean an artist of 60 or 70, it's pretty pathetic. That's one of the things to say about that. But you know there are lots of them around.

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: It would be better to - - So there's something - - I don't know about Evergood absolutely sticking to his thing you know even in last Sunday's *Times* you know I mean that's it and that's the way it should be.

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes. Well, do you find - - this is going to sound like a play on words, but I don't mean it to be - but do you find meaning at all in meaninglessness?

MR. REINHARDT: Well, obviously, I wouldn't want to say what it was, there would be no way of saying it, obviously there is, it isn't quite clear, it's just as clear as somebody making a decision about - like a museum curator saying that "this is a good piece and this is not a good piece and one is art and the other isn't," could be. In Asia you know you have just endless hundreds of Buddhas that might be found or some place and then two or three become art and the others aren't and they go back to the temples or churches or become folk art or whatever it is. I don't think you can articulate.

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: Maybe sometimes you can because of some finer finish or more obvious qualities that are technical, sometimes you can do that but often you can't.

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: And then of course that - - referred to often as the spirit or the I don't know what, the feeling of it or whatever it is but they're always very vague.

DR. PHILLIPS: Well, the '30s were quite a period for you?

MR. REINHARDT: Yes. Well, as you can see they gave me a certain support if I had that idea before anyway but it gave me - - well, there was a sense of not only an artist's community but a sense of history and a sense of a certain kind of political action in art, you know not politics but in art, the avant garde activities, for example, artists getting together and protesting. But I'd like to be - as I said before I'd like to see it recreated with a certain kind of respect in - - because they've done that with almost every other period, every other area. You know there have been good shows of the

Fauves, the good shows of the surrealists, good shows of the Ashcan, and so on, but there just hasn't been a good show of the '30s.

DR. PHILLIPS: No.

MR. REINHARDT: And the idea that sometimes painters who made their careers in the '40s, or curators say that there wasn't good work done, it's just not true.

DR. PHILLIPS: No.

MR. REINHARDT: I was shocked to come across those Picabias which of course are not the '30s but earlier and then, and I think you could find just very, very good work. Actually the aliens hold up very well from the '30s, just still is - - that is they were - - there are a lot of beautiful Legers and Mondrians you know, the old masters too but the Americans are the ones that - - I guess it would have to be - - somebody would have to have a real reason for doing this. This backward look is always fascinating and I suppose the history of an era is always looked at from something that's very crucial, very important in the present. So that as I mentioned before if somebody goes back to write the '30s from the point of view of some reason he has here, now if an artist becomes prominent and - - a single artist - - and then somebody goes back and rewrites the whole 30 years in his terms. And it's come up once or twice where somebody says, "Well, you want it written in your terms," and then I would have to say, "Yes," but it isn't simply I would like to get beyond just my view or your view into something not necessarily more significant but something that's probably more objective and of course for me it would be a proper history of abstract art would have to do it. There haven't been any good ones. There was a Sidney Janis book, it might have been the first at one point but that had surrealist, abstract and surrealist, and also Stuart - - people he was interested in and he left out people he wasn't interested in. It was all right. And then even lately I had a couple of fights with Sam Hunter and he has written a couple of books and I told him to leave me out in some cases but some cases where, and I had these endless fights with him, I mean I've written more nasty letters to him than anybody. I guess because he kept sticking me into what's known now as a second or third generation abstract expressionist with some painters that - - well I don't like, it hurt my feelings anyway, this is worse than being left out. So last summer there was this huge Los Angeles show, it was called the "First Generation of the New York School," the First Generation. Now why that should be a first generation, actually I was left out because I was before the first generation you know.

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: I had been doing a certain kind of work before this first generation became famous. But it's funny that everybody should think here's where the thing started. Anyway I was graduated up to my old class. They're still a little older than I am mostly, not Motherwell but the others are. But it's funny because the - - I was going to say something - - in a number of instances when I got into the American Abstract artists and I exhibited right next to Mondrian and Leger I began to feel a little like an old master and so on, it was sort of amusing, and actually I wasn't called, I was never called the young artist until I was 45, 44 years old in the Brussels World's Fair show. Motherwell and Baziotis and I made just the absolute line. It was called "Seventeen Younger American Painters." That's the first time I was called a young artist. And I used to be pleased sometimes in a discussion with Davis, he would say, somebody would say, "Well, about how old is he?" And Davis would say, "He's about our age," and I think Davis was about 25 years older than I was. I enjoyed that kind of relationship but why they should get to be called first generation just because these paintings got an international reputation - - I think there's no question whatever credit should be given to their work but, gee, it has become such a racket that - - and then the

amount of critics that just parroted these kind of things over and over again. Greenberg had a terrific effect on most everybody's thinking. I was glad to see that pop art finally ran it into the ground in one way or another, anyway it ran all the meanings, you know, ran all the - - Motherwell's humanism or whatever it is, or the part the expressionist part, all that into the ground. And it ran the success thing too. There was a notion, so many artists were thinking that commercial success is a sign of aesthetic strength too and I made a joke that this was aesthetic strength through market place joy.

DR. PHILLIPS: [Appreciative laughter.]

MR. REINHARDT: In other words you know there was a feeling that the artist was strong enough not to be corrupted and I think it wasn't true. I think in time we'll see that - - and I don't think there'll be quite a lot of rewriting and in different terms but I think we're going to go back to always the formalist to the meaningless and there'll be an abstract art that will give us the continuity, the fine art continuity.

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

MR. REINHARDT: Well, the other thing I can relegate to fashion or to temporal concerns, careers or so on. And already I've been asolderized for taking the timeless point of view or a historical point of view as if - - which is all right, I would stress that more than - - the historical then would be simply a way of reaching or clarifying the timeless anyway.

DR. PHILLIPS: Right.

MR. REINHARDT: I like the - - the Malraux books were quite important for the Club and for everyone because - - and the art historians none of them liked him either because - - and of course he had much more authority than the art historians because he could paint pictures so beautifully so the books that came out were just fantastic, everything was terrific and he had such an eye for pictures. You know I don't know what to say about the '30s except what I said. I would like to - - I think there's an awful lot to say and do about them, I don't know whether anybody will ever get around to organizing it, I feel myself that I ought to organize, there's no question I will organize my own material at some point. As a matter of fact I'm getting ready for a big show at the Jewish Museum. You know Sam Hunter came by and asked me, and the thing, the problem is that he's going to have to, in dealing with me, is going to have to change all his ideas or change whatever he's written before, you know, he just has to do - - and he knows it and he - -

DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

[Telephone rings]

[End of interview]

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