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Oral history interview with John Grillo, 1964
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Contact Information

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

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with John Grillo on November 18 and December 29, 1964. The interview was conducted at in New York by Dorothy Seckler for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

DOROTHY SECKLER: This is Dorothy Seckler continuing an interview with John Grillo on November 18, 1964, in New York. At the end of our first tape we were discussing a period in your life, Mr. Grillo, when we had gotten - you were in the Army in Okinawa and I thought we might pick up at the period that followed the war.

JOHN GRILLO: Well, all I can say is that the war suddenly ended and I found myself in Shanghai, China, of all places. Now why did I find myself there is that they gave vacations, so-called vacations, after all the government is very generous, and a few of us landed in Shanghai on a spree, so to speak. And we landed very late in the evening and we were not allowed to go on land, but some strange, unusual thing happened. It was almost like a land that one had not even imagined. It was something unusual. For instance, I recall next morning that the sky felt very close to you as if you could touch it. It was some strange... perhaps it was my own fantasy. But there was something physical about the Orient or this part of the world that was very unusual to me and it really struck me in a physical sense as something very different than I had ever seen in my life. Well anyway, we landed there and we had about ten days. And I went here and there and all that. And I experienced a certain experience about my own way of thinking. I went to some Buddha temples and all that. And bars, lots of bars. And lots of girls and all that. I won't go into it deeper than that. But anyway - because my wife is listening --

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, tell us about the Buddhas and the bars.

JOHN GRILLO: Well anyway, we went back and the final day I recall that ...well, anyway, during that trip I recall many different physical images such as people with turbans, White Russians, and Chinese, and as I was saying, Buddha temples that I visited. It was all very strange and most unusual that I had never experienced in my life before. And suddenly we went back on a ship. We were all there with the exception of one man that was missing for some strange reason. He happened to have come from my home town. He never came back on the ship and we sailed back to Okinawa. And we stayed there a while and then from Okinawa we were shipped back to Paradise Island? - I think it was called - it sounds like a nice name but something like that - Treasure Island I think it was. Close to San Francisco.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mmhmm.

JOHN GRILLO: And Long Beach. And I heard about this GI Bill of Rights. And I decided to take advantage of it and go to school and carry on my art - go back to an art school and try to find out what I missed or try to learn something or other. So I walked in one day in my uniform to San Francisco and I went to a school. Somehow - I don't know where I heard of it - but I walked on Chesnut Street and I went into this building and it was the San Francisco art school - I don't recall what it was called - and as I walked in I saw the director who turned out to be Douglas Mac Agy --

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mmhmm.

JOHN GRILLO: And I showed him my drawings. I had a whole portfolio of drawings that I had done in Okinawa. And he was very enthused. And I was very amazed to see that everyone was doing somewhat - I don't know I would say it was modern work but something of what I was feeling or wanted to do. And in fact I think someone gave me a private showing of these drawings in their personal studio. And Mac Agy said he would be glad to have me at the School. And so after I was discharged I decided to go to school. Then while I was there I began to paint. I had several different teachers. There was Bischoff--

DOROTHY SECKLER: You were now out of uniform?

JOHN GRILLO: Yes, now I was out of uniform.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You didn't go back East first? You stayed right on in San Francisco?

JOHN GRILLO: Yes. I settled there. And there was all kinds of activities. And we had class and we had many different teachers. I remember especially one teacher. His name was Clay Spohn. But I also had a man by the name of Parks who is now dead, and Elmer Bischoff --

DOROTHY SECKLER: David Park? He's dead?

JOHN GRILLO: David Park. And Elmer Bischoff, and Clay Spohn. And I recall that Clyfford Still was there but I never did take any of his classes. For some reason I didn't. He was teaching some kind of a design course or something. Anyway, I took all these courses and I finally became quite rebellious about the whole thing. And I ended up in a little studio of my own that they gave me.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Tell us a little bit about the rebellious – what were you rebelling against? You had mentioned that you saw things around that were sort of modern. Was this a breath of modernism that you disliked? Or was it more traditional that you were--? Or --

JOHN GRILLO: Well, I don't recall exactly what they were doing really, come to think about it. I was too concerned about my own expression. And somehow they were giving courses in this and that. I even recall doing things like Mondrian because for some reason I saw it somewhere or that Elmer – what's his name? Who's that man?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Erle Loran?

JOHN GRILLO: No. Hassel Smith – I took courses with Hassel Smith, too. Well anyway, it doesn't matter. Some man who's teaching at the University – you remember him. He was the chairman. Well anyway, I can't remember. But anyway, he was a Mondrianite. I took courses with him and I painted that way for awhile. And I painted with Hassel Smith and the Clay Spohn. Clay Spohn was the most influential because he was completely free. He would want you – he gave no real principles. He simply encouraged you, which was very helpful.

DOROTHY SECKLER: The others you felt were all full of principles?

JOHN GRILLO: Well, they were not principles really. But they became confused. You had to somewhat almost copy their personalities. And as for Still, who was there at the time, which was in 1946, he had never had a show as yet and I recall that ...Anyway, finally I began to become somewhat very expressive in my own way and I remember a few of the students there. There was John Hultberg, and there was Jerome Anderson who became a sculptor and still lives in San Francisco; Diebenkorn who had gone and come back; and Corbett, Edward Corbett would come back to the school and would study then with Balcomb Greene and who was --

DOROTHY SECKLER: Not out there but in New York?

JOHN GRILLO: In New York. And was doing things very similar to Balcomb Greene at that time. All these people didn't quite influence my work. I was sort of searching for someone, something on my own. And there was Harlan Jackson, a Negro who was a very talented man. There was Eckel and all kinds of people. And all these people somewhat or somehow encouraged me into doing something entirely different to what they were doing. I tried to do something on my own. Anyway I became so-called rebellious in the sense that I was going down into their own cellars and picking out doors and I would paint on anything. I made hundreds of paintings – not quite hundreds but it seemed like quite a few and I would paint on anything, in any way, anywhere. Finally they gave me a studio of my own. And Mac Agy encouraged me. And slowly I was just simply doing what I wanted to do.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Could you describe a little bit what you were doing at this time, John? What did it look like?

JOHN GRILLO: Well...

DOROTHY SECKLER: What was your medium? What kind of – ? What would be – ?

JOHN GRILLO: Well, they were oil paintings. But they were abstract and sort of – I can't really describe them in a sense – but I recall that the early period after I had done my Okinawa studies or Henry Moore or – those are the only two I can recall at that point.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Were they abstracted from forms that you had in front of you at all?

JOHN GRILLO: Oh, no, no, no. They were abstracted from my subconscious – things and sometimes the influence came out what things I had felt and seen.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Were you aware of – did you formulate it to yourself at that time that this was material from the unconscious? Or did you formulate that later?

JOHN GRILLO: I can't recall.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But you would simply sit down with brush in hand and let your imagination go and fantasize shapes?

JOHN GRILLO: Yes, I think that was it, yes. I mean one time I would have a model in front of me and then I would just forget about the model. I remember recalling one day I set up the biggest canvas the school had ever seen in the model class and I worked on it on my own. And slowly they became sort of images of some kind. They were - they had some kind of points coming from the top. I don't know whether they were subconscious or whether they were images that I had seen or something I had digested somewhere or something to that effect.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Did they have any relationship to, for instance, the kind of images that you now have in your sculpture like the monster images? Was there anything of that type? Were they very amorphous?

JOHN GRILLO: Yes, to a certain extent they were more formalized.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mhmm. Did you have a formalized concept of space? To what extent were you aware of Cubist space or working on the plane at this time?

JOHN GRILLO: Well, I really wasn't aware of space at all. The space came in somewhat unconscious. But I recall one day I had a painting that I exhibited in a museum as part of a group show. And this young man came over to seek me out. He asked for me. And then I got to know him. His name was Bill Gallagher. And after looking at my work - I showed him - at first I was in the cellar and then I had my other studio right at the school on Chestnut Street... And he said, "But, you know, have you ever studied with Hans Hofmann?" I said, "No." He said, "Your space is very similar to that." He had been in New York and had studied with Hofmann. And somehow unconsciously I was making some kind of space. I didn't really know exactly what I was doing. But I was working mostly intuitively. Well anyway, to make my school period short I finally left school and I got myself a studio on my own. And in the meantime as I worked on my own I met other artists who had taught at the school or had been at the school and we had some kind of rapport and they would pat you on the back and you'd pat them on the back and everything was great and it became almost like Hollywood, you know. "You're a great artist and this and that." And all that. And nothing came from nowhere. You don't know where you were or what you were doing in a sense. But you were working and trying to discover. And I experimented a lot. I would drip paint and all this and all that, you know, make all kinds of imagery. I remember making a painting, oh, quite a large painting in a very small room. And at that time I recall I was also much influenced by Miro to a certain degree.

DOROTHY SECKLER: When had you first seen things by Miro? Quite a long ways back? Or just very recently?

JOHN GRILLO: Oh, recent at that time. Perhaps - I don't know, I don't remember exactly - in the late forties I would say, I mean 1945 or 1946.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. About the end of the war.

JOHN GRILLO: Right after the war. And anyway I made this painting. I recall one instance where I decided to take two brushes and with one in my left hand and one in my right and I painted an image of it. And I went along with it, you know, and all that kind of thing. And I experimented in some way or another. But I didn't know exactly what I was doing. And then suddenly anyway I felt I wasn't - not getting anywhere but I felt I was in somewhat of a stalemate with my work, with the environment, and also the fact that I wanted to know what the other artists were doing in the East and what was Europe like and where my forefathers came and all that, something to that way of thinking or feeling was in --

DOROTHY SECKLER: Was your wife and child with you at this point? Or were you alone?

JOHN GRILLO: Oh, no, I had my wife and child, yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: One other thing I wanted to ask you before we get you back to New York or somewhere else, in this period you were apparently working along, as you say, on fantasies and on an intuitive level --

JOHN GRILLO: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: --and trusting unconscious, let's say, impulses which you assume were arising from the unconscious.

JOHN GRILLO: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, this would, let's say, seem to reflect a certain awareness of a surrealist point of view. But you haven't mentioned coming in contact with that from teachers or friends specifically that, you know, that the unconscious was the real source of artistic imagery or anyone ever saying that to you. It seemed to be just something that was in the air? Or was there any reason why you were so willing? It's unusual, I think.

JOHN GRILLO: Well, no, I think that the most important influence in my period at that time was an Oriental feeling, I think. I think that San Francisco and then my being in Okinawa for a while and my going to China and coming back to San Francisco was still part of one thing. And I felt that in my work in some way there was - I did

many watercolors – but at the same time I also had seen a few of the Eastern painters' reproductions.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Ancient or --?

JOHN GRILLO: I mean people from New York.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh.

JOHN GRILLO: Especially Rothko who coincided somehow with a way of thinking or feeling that I had that went along with the atmosphere or the environment that I had already been through.

DOROTHY SECKLER: In the Orient?

JOHN GRILLO: Yes, in the Orient.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Had you seen much actual – let's say, painting of this same time period, in China?

JOHN GRILLO: No, I hadn't seen anything. No. Except I remember seeing – Hans Hofmann had a show at the Museum.

DOROTHY SECKLER: This was in San Francisco?

JOHN GRILLO: Yes, he had a show in 1946 I believe. But it didn't affect me too much. I mean most of his work was black and white as I recall.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Were you affected by Tobey or Graves out there?

JOHN GRILLO: No, not really but I recall that I did do a drawing – a couple of drawings in San Francisco and one time someone said they looked like Tobey, which I had never seen. They were linear, quite linear.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Was your work very often linear at this time?

JOHN GRILLO: To a certain extent, yes. I would say that. Until I got to San Francisco they were more in mass color. But the color was very subdued. It was mostly blue and dark browns and black with the exceptional – at one time or another there would be a yellow. But my main concern with color was blue.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And these were rather large areas pretty much on a flat surface? Were they fairly flat?

JOHN GRILLO: Yes. And they were concerned with circles, eyes and circles which most likely might have been influenced through the subconscious and through the conscious, the fact that perhaps seeing reproductions of Miro, which I thought was a very strong influence in my work and feeling to a certain degree. That's it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: So Miro is the main thing that you can think of as a source for being interested in these circular forms?

JOHN GRILLO: Yes, I think so, too.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Would there have been anything in the Oriental experience to promote that kind of interest in circular forms?

JOHN GRILLO: Well, I think in the color. In the color sense I think there was a certain atmospheric, nostalgic feeling about the Orient. Well, I felt somehow and I also thought that – I recall one day before leaving Okinawa or China or wherever it was that I would like to go back. I felt that there was something unfulfilled in me and I almost made a vow that I would always go back to the Orient or I would go back somehow. And that there was something that I would like to explore. It could have been a fantasy about it. Or it could have been a physical thing that I would like to feel again somehow.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's very interesting. I don't want to take you too far from your next – you were going I believe at the end of your San Francisco experience and you were thinking of going East when I interrupted you.

JOHN GRILLO: Well, yes. God, I think I'll get another drink.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Do you want to stop for a minute.

JOHN GRILLO: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: As we paused for a little while you were talking before about the various things that had attracted your attention to New York and I gathered that you were thinking about leaving San Francisco at this

time.

JOHN GRILLO: Yes. I think I felt that I wasn't satisfied with my work. I wasn't satisfied with the life around me. I felt I was getting too many compliments. And I gave too many compliments. Things of that sort. And there was no public acceptance. There was only one gallery there which was hardly showing anything.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Which gallery was that, John?

JOHN GRILLO: I think it was Carl Lobell. I don't remember. And even then I had nothing to do with it. It was just about beginning when I left.

DOROTHY SECKLER: So you had had one show there, had you?

JOHN GRILLO: Oh, yes, come to think of it; yes, I had one show. That was in Berkeley, California. And that was in the vicinity or territory that I later saw again which I - I didn't see the gallery. It was right near the University of California in Berkeley. The place was called Daliar and this man who was a disciple of Henry Miller came down to the school, saw my work. He talked to the director and he asked the director if I could have a show, asked the director to write something about me. And he wrote my catalogue. And I had a show. In fact he was very excited and enthused about it. He thought he even would sell out everything. And so I had the show. I believe it was 1946. Watercolors and paintings. And consequently I didn't sell anything. And I didn't see any of the notices. I got some of the notices. I don't remember whether I met Henry Miller or not. It was sort of a bookshop and gallery and it was on I think Telegraph - I don't recall the name of the Street - it was right in the college area.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's alright.

JOHN GRILLO: I remember they had a train and I arrived there about a few minutes late. A train that went from San Francisco to Berkeley which now they have --

DOROTHY SECKLER: Discontinued?

JOHN GRILLO: Yes. It's not in existence anymore. Now one travels by car or bus. Anyway, it was an exciting evening and I enjoyed seeing my paintings up. It was in reality my first show in the public, although I'd had two or three other shows at a school that I went to in Connecticut. But this was my first public appearance. And I didn't know what to think about it. But it was interesting. I recall that people said this or that. I recall people were against it. People thought I had thought out all of these paintings scientifically or logically. It was written about to a certain extent. Anyway it all came to pass that consequently I didn't sell anything although the dealer himself was very excited and thought I would really go over big for some reason or other in the public's eye. But as it happened we both parted very humbly and no money was made one way or the other.

DOROTHY SECKLER: When did you make up your mind to go East?

JOHN GRILLO: Well, I received a fellowship. I think it was \$1200. And I decided to go back East to find out what was going on and to study again and to see how I would fit in with what was going on. And also --

DOROTHY SECKLER: When did you arrive in New York then?

JOHN GRILLO: Well, I think it was late 1946. And then we had the big storm in New York which I believe was 1947 or 1946. I don't recall now. It was the biggest storm we've ever had here. And at that time I was living in a loft. And the reason I was living in a loft - I probably was one of the very few that ever lived in a loft in New York at that time - I met a man who was from San Francisco. He was a very strange young man, deformed, physically weak. He had come from San Francisco. I met him on the street and he said he had found a loft and would I like to share it with him - my family. And I said fine, I would. And so we all started to live together. He lived in one section and I lived in another section. And this was on Crosby Street. At this time a friend of mine, Miles Forest, who studied at the same time I did in the late forties, was still living there. Well, anyway - what were we saying?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, you were saying about your arriving in New York and you mentioned the snowstorm? Does that have any connection with your arrival?

JOHN GRILLO: Oh, yes. I recall carrying up half a ton of coal all by myself up this loft in bags, one bag at a time. The next half-ton that I took I had somebody else, two other people help me. But it was quite a struggle all winter long to keep the place warm. It wasn't heated. You just had a little stove. And my wife baked apple pies in the stove and did dinner, which is the truth. And I improvised a sort of shower that I had seen or participated in in Okinawa. Something where you poured cold water on top of a big tub, you know, and then you got underneath it and you turned a little faucet and you got your shower. It was very strange. Anyway, it was rugged living. But I couldn't stand it any longer. My child had to go to school and all that. I decided to leave my poor friend all by himself and get him someone else to live with. And we parted. We found something else. In the meantime I also

decided to take some more advantage out of my GI Bill. Before I did that I had had a show, another one-man show in the Artists Gallery in New York on 57th Street.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Was that in '46 or '47?

JOHN GRILLO: This was 1948, in October 1948.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Had you been making a living some way between 1946 and 1948?

JOHN GRILLO: Well, no, I had my fellowship and I had money or insurance or something to that effect from the Navy or the Armed Forces that I got by on.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And you were not studying yet, were you, with Hans Hofmann?

JOHN GRILLO: No. No, not in 1946. But I started to study with him in 1949 or late 1948. I don't remember the date. And I recall when I walked into class he said, "Why, yes, I remember you." He said, "You had a show on 57th Street. I saw a painting of yours I remember and I walked up." He said, "Why do you want to study with me?" I didn't answer him really because I wanted to continue my - oh -

DOROTHY SECKLER: GI?

JOHN GRILLO: Well, I wanted to continue my GI and I wanted to learn what he had to say. And I wasn't so sure of who he was or what he was. But I still somehow landed here and I felt - I don't know whether he was, but I still somehow landed here and I felt - I don't know whether it was through recommendation or something or other - and I felt I had much more to learn. So I began to take his classes. And, of course, he tried to discourage me because he said he had seen my work and he went on to say why did I want to study with him. I didn't really tell him the exact truth. It was probably because I was very poor at the time and I wanted to continue my studies with him, or with art in general, and so I took his courses. I didn't choose any other place; I don't know what the reason was. But somehow I landed with Hans Hofmann. Well, in order to understand Mr. Hofmann I had quite a struggle. In fact, everything that I had learned intuitively I had to unlearn. And his language was very difficult for me to understand. He kept insisting on "push and pull" or this and that and it became quite a problem for me. And slowly when he was encouraging my own way of thinking and working I was very discouraged because I wanted to understand what he was talking about verbally and otherwise. And I thought I was missing something. And so slowly I changed drastically to a different way of thinking. And there were people there and somehow or other I think Michael Lowe was there and a fellow by the name of Isreo and they were doing sort of Neo-classicism or Neo-Mondrian or something like that and somehow I was influenced by them or something to that effect. And I started to do it either on my own. I had done it previously years ago in San Francisco not understanding it. And so I decided since I didn't understand Hofmann and what he was talking about, I would change over to this. And I remember the first few paintings I did, or drawings, he said, oh, they were terrible and awful. And I said to myself, you know, I said that Hofmann some day is going to come over and really think these things are good one day. And aside from that I just said well, I'll just go on and try to discover what this is all about. I tried to discipline myself and get away from my intuitive sense and try to get some more or an awareness of what I was doing and to coincide with his way of teaching and try to become aware of what I actually had done or what I would try to do or what I was doing at the moment.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Was he talking a good bit about space? You know, divisions of space and plastic ways of ...? You talked about the "push and pull." Was he demonstrating in classroom criticisms how to make the space work and so on?

JOHN GRILLO: Well, he did to a certain extent. We always worked from the model. And I remember working from the model and instead of making the model I would abstract it sometimes, or most of the time, on my own and sometimes it was influenced through his way of thinking.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Wasn't everybody in the class abstracting?

JOHN GRILLO: No, not really.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Really?

JOHN GRILLO: No.

DOROTHY SECKLER: They would just draw it and -- ?

JOHN GRILLO: Yes. I recall - to my mind offhand the image comes of Milton Resnick. And Larry Rivers was there. And a guy named Dine. And many others which I can't remember offhand. I mean they were art men but I didn't remember them at that time. And there were many others. And the only one I remember physically was Milton Resnick and Larry --

DOROTHY SECKLER: Was he working abstractly? Or --

JOHN GRILLO: No. No. That's what I'm trying to say. The thing was that strangely enough I remember a certain day and a certain time in a classroom where Milton Resnick was making a drawing of a model. And his interpretation of the model was quite realistic and the fact was that he made it - or rather he placed it in the middle of the paper, a huge piece of paper right in the middle. And I recall that Hofmann came along and he said, "Now what are you doing?" He said well, this and that. And he said, "now I don't know what you're doing but there's something..." In the meantime a few students, and I included, always would follow Mr. Hofmann around and listen to him. And he said, "You know, I don't know what you're doing," he said to Milton, "but I think you're an artist somewhere." You know he said, "You're an artist." I remember the words stuck in me as being quite - they were very profound somehow. And he sort of supported his point of view and at the same time he disagreed with the idea of what he was doing completely because it wasn't really working in the middle of the page. It was just the nude in the middle of the page. Where Milton got the idea I don't recall, you know. I won't go back to something else, but I recall that later on I came to the fact that Milton was my own age, which I didn't realize, with the exception I can come back or got back or become president. Well, we'll go back to that another time.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Alright. Well, we've almost finished our tape. I wondered if there's anything else that you'd like to recall about Hofmann's way of presenting these new space ideas of push and pull and so on.

JOHN GRILLO: Well, I tell you, I never really did quite learn or really realize what he was talking about until many years after. I think that Hofmann was in a sense a father image and to a certain degree he either submerged many people or that people had to fight to get their own personalities but when they did all the imagery or all the ideas and theory and ideas would come to them only to think in my case through my own way. And when I began to teach I found out that his way of thinking and his theories were very valuable only to the extent that you had to go through your own personal experience to find them out and you can't be exactly told -

END OF SIDE 1

SIDE 2

DECEMBER 29, 1964

DOROTHY SECKLER: This is Dorothy Seckler interviewing John Grillo in New York on December 29, 1964. At the end of our previous interview we had been discussing the period of about 1949 at the conclusion of your work with Hans Hofmann in his school and where you as teacher had come to realize that you have to discover things for yourself. Just for the record the cano is delicious.

JOHN GRILLO: Well, I tell you it reminds me of my childhood since you wanted me to talk about my childhood in a sense - I don't know, one becomes a little bit self-conscious when he's talking on tape, doesn't he?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, I don't even know where you were born, John.

JOHN GRILLO: Oh. Well, I'll tell you. I was born - I guess I was born in Massachusetts and, oh, the only thing I remember - or rather I remember lots of incidents but I remember one day at a certain age - I was very young - and I opened a closet and I felt some little things in the closet and I started to squeeze them and they happened to be tubes of paint. And I got them on my hands and face and - this is true - I went to school that way. And I later found out that my father had been a painter. In fact, when I look back to my early years I recall a very large painting of his that he had done on a wall. And it was a very primitive, romantic style with a couple of lovers and two pigeons or doves or whatever you call them, you know. And I guess that was my beginning of thinking about something or other about becoming a painter. I don't know, I don't recall really. But I did draw a lot.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Was your father alive at this time?

JOHN GRILLO: Yes, I think so, but he wasn't with me at the time. He was away in Europe.

DOROTHY SECKLER: So you were drawing when you were how old roughly? Do you remember?

JOHN GRILLO: Well, I was very young. I remember drawing all kinds of different things from Mickey Mouse to designs, you know, of some kind, or personal inventions, just copying something. And this was quite early. And I was determined to do something with it, I don't know what. I don't know what I was going to do with it. Until one day when we moved to a different city and I suddenly went into a museum and then all of a sudden these two dimensional surfaces which were paintings I was very impressed how real they were. These portraits, especially portraits felt like they were coming right out of the canvas and saying, you know, something to you. And I said to myself, my God, this is really a marvelous thing, you know, this kind of reality to get on a canvas or whatever it was I thought it was, and how could you ever do it, you know? The eyes and the face and the mouth looked very real. You look at me very strangely, you'd you? And so I determined I'd become an artist.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How old were you then, John?

JOHN GRILLO: Oh, I must have been thirteen, something like that, or fourteen, I don't remember, about that age. Well, anyway, they had a little class there and I did some drawing.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Where was this?

JOHN GRILLO: In the museum in Hartford, Connecticut.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh, in Hartford.

JOHN GRILLO: I decided to become a portrait painter. In fact, I wanted to be a great portrait painter. I didn't know what the word "great" meant but that's what I decided that I would like to make things live the way I felt them when I saw them at the first visit in this small museum which I had attended or had gone to. Well then, after that I think some time elapsed and I went to an art school at night and then I went to a regular art school.

DOROTHY SECKLER: In Hartford?

JOHN GRILLO: In Hartford, Connecticut. My family was against it. My father was against it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Even your father who had been an artist!

JOHN GRILLO: Yes. Well, he had a lot of dilemmas in his life. I recall that he was extremely belligerent about being an artist and for some reason or other at that time I couldn't figure it out. But anyway he allowed me to a certain extent to go to an art school where I had received a scholarship. And then I worked for summers to pay my fees for the materials and that sort of thing. Anyway I recall one night when I was studying by myself... And during that period I would like to work in the evenings. In fact, I felt that I had so much to learn that I would stay up most of the night. One time I tried an experiment in trying to stay up day and night. One night he came in and he saw me drawing and he took this drawing board away from my hands and threw it across the table. He said, "Well, you're wasting electricity." He said, "How dare you waste electricity!" He said "How dare you draw anyway!" Things to that effect, you know. He was very furious. I think he was very jealous. I don't think he had ever fulfilled his promise and his drive or ambition or idealism, whatever you call it and I felt that he had wanted to be a painter but something happened and his environment or the world around him that he didn't quite get to do what his real ambitions were or his ideals.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Were you an only child? Or were there other children?

JOHN GRILLO: No, I have two brothers and two half-sisters.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Were you the only artist?

JOHN GRILLO: This sounds like a psychoanalyst's tape.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I won't keep you on it too long. But I'm just sort of curious in view of the drama between you and your father.

JOHN GRILLO: Oh, well, no... Yes, I had other brothers who were very sensitive. One became an actor and then gave it up and he also was a director. There was talent somewhere in the family. I later saw some of my father's paintings. And then during a certain period he would try to help me paint. I started with copying Franz Hals and things like that, you know. And there were moments when he would encourage me.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Was is - did he express a fear that you couldn't make a living? Or was it just a general --

JOHN GRILLO: Well, I think it was the fact that --

DOROTHY SECKLER: --hostility?

JOHN GRILLO: No, I think the idea of not making a living with art, and then a certain kind of hostility on his own part.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What was your mother's attitude towards --?

JOHN GRILLO: Well, I don't recall because I had two mothers, so I don't really remember. My second mother came rather late in my life in my teen age. But I don't think they played any part in my role as an artist. But I feel my father did to a certain extent.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. But you managed to defy him or at least to continue on --?

JOHN GRILLO: Oh, yes, I definitely not only defied him, I fought against this idea that he tried to discourage me.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Was there anyone around to admire the things that you made at that time?

JOHN GRILLO: No, I don't think so. Well, to come back and think about it, I think that - this was in the thirties - I went to school from 1935 to 1938.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Which school was that?

JOHN GRILLO: It was the Hartford Art School.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. And how old were you when you began roughly at the Hartford Art School?

JOHN GRILLO: I don't recall. I must have been in my teens.

DOROTHY SECKLER: In your teens somewhere. That's good enough, yes.

JOHN GRILLO: And I think as I recall Dugmore was in my class.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How nice.

JOHN GRILLO: -- one of my classes. We went to school together. But anyway we had some fairly strange teachers. Looks pretty strange - like this kind of nonsense in a way.

DOROTHY SECKLER: No, it's fascinating to me. What kind of teachers did you have? You were still bent on portraiture, were you, at this time?

JOHN GRILLO: No. No. We began - well, when we went to school - when I went to school and began to take lessons - we had different classes. We had commercial work by a man by the name of Litoff, I don't remember his name. Then there was a girl names Ahrens. Then there was a man named Hind? Hyde? I can't recall really - Hyde? H-y-d-e, I don't know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Were any of them people that made an impression on you as teachers?

JOHN GRILLO: Oh, yes. I think this man Frederick Hyde did. He made a tremendous impression. But I recall that I was - now when I go back to think of it - I was terribly interested in sculpture and I began to take a sculpture course with a man named Christler, was his name, who has died I heard quite a few years ago. And then I had drawing and painting. And during that time I couldn't stand the sculpture course because I felt that working with clay, which was the medium I was handling at the time, was so monotonous and so time consuming that I didn't want to go through with it. I didn't have the patience. I was a very impatient young man. And I decided I would take more drawing so I gave that up and went back to drawing and painting. And I got very excited. I recall being very excited about drawing models. And this man was rather helpful although I think at that time he didn't know too much of what really was going on in the plastic sense or in reality in the pictorial sense of what painting really had come about. He still was in - only, I would say he was backward in his thinking. He had studied with Nicholai here in New York at the Art Students League and Nicholai had written a book and he recommended a book by Vernon Blake called - I don't remember the name of it --

DOROTHY SECKLER: The Natural Way to Draw is the Nicholaides work.

JOHN GRILLO: Yes. Yes, but there was something else by Vernon Blake that he recommended very well. And I read that book. But now that I look back at it they misinterpreted the Renaissance and they misinterpreted the real pictorial way of thinking and working on a two-dimensional surface. And the reason for that I don't recall. But anyway I went along with their idea and I was very enthusiastic and this man was very helpful to me in different ways. He got me enthused, or I enthused myself. He said certain things that helped me to related to my own fantasy or whatever, or ambition or drive or things like that that I felt --

DOROTHY SECKLER: Can you recall anything specific? Any one attitude that he might have given you in looking at the model?

JOHN GRILLO: Oh, yes. I recall that when I was drawing and when I was looking at a model he would say, well, as you look at a model don't forget that you just don't see the model, you have to follow it as if you were in a Ford, you know, and as you're in a Ford you're driving here and you're driving there. Yes, that's exactly what he said. And you know, sort of - made you feel sort of a physical sense in relationship to what you were doing. And it was rather helpful because it tied in to my very emotional or neurotic state of being or perhaps I would say --

DOROTHY SECKLER: Would you describe yourself as neurotic at that age, John?

JOHN GRILLO: Oh, I've always been neurotic. I think I still am. It's very important not to be but I'm not too unhappy about it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: No. Well, I mean I was interested at that time you felt you were a kind of different type person from the so-called normal fellows around what --

JOHN GRILLO: No, no, no. No, I don't think I ever gave it a thought. Whether I was normal or abnormal or whatever. I thought I was just someone. I don't think I was really any different than anyone else except that I wanted to draw, paint, or whatever.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But in your regular relationships in school and in sports and so on you were one of the fellows and kind of commonplace --

JOHN GRILLO: Well-I, in art school, yes. In earlier periods I don't think I really did like sports and all that, I mean I was sort of mostly alone; I kept to myself most of the time. But I related somewhat to reality or to people in general.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And your brothers and sisters - did you get along well with them?

JOHN GRILLO: I think so.

DOROTHY SECKLER: These may seem like very extraneous questions but it's kind of interesting sometimes to see whether there are situations in a family or in a specific environment that would tend to make art a kind of retreat perhaps? Or an avenue of escape from things that were sometimes oppressive? And I don't want to suggest that there was. I'm just kind of curious to clear it up though.

JOHN GRILLO: Well, I don't know. I think that art in general is an escape from reality anyway to my way of thinking today. But I think there is no such thing as really reality anyway. But the thing is that I feel that art may really bring you back to reality. It depends on the point of view. There are all kinds of realities, you know. It's hard to say. I think that in general... This evening, for instance, I walked into my studio and I had arranged things for somebody to see and I had many of my sculptures which I've done in the recent few months, and I had a self portrait. And I felt that I had already died somehow. And I felt rather sad in a sense but I felt that there was a tremendous amount of depth there somewhere.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Death or depth?

JOHN GRILLO: Depth. And death. But I've seen this happen many times. And I think an artist does see themselves in many different lives. He may be like a cat - I mean to put it superficially - a cat with nine lives where he has many shows and he sees himself and then he dies again and he comes up and alive again. And somehow I think an important thing is that the artist does his work in relationship to other people and himself so that he can grow on, or if he doesn't grow at least he's had the satisfaction of knowing that he's accomplished something and somehow he can foresee a future of some kind. And the future may be a romantic kind or it may have something to do with an idealistic state or spiritual state or anything you can call it, you know. But there is something there that goes back to a past. It may be way past in civilization or it may be just a personal past or something of that sort.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's very beautifully put, John. To take you back to your own past - I don't want to root you too long in childhood but it's sort of fascinating what you were telling me, I wondered if you could recall about the time when you were in this class and doing things in life and so on, what kind of things did you think about? Or were you much concerned with reading or music?

JOHN GRILLO: Oh, yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Did you dream a lot?

JOHN GRILLO: No, I don't recall drinking. I think I got drunk once.

DOROTHY SECKLER: No, dreaming, I said.

JOHN GRILLO: Dreaming. I know you said dreaming. Well, no, I think I got drunk once on some beer. I drank a lot of beer and I went home and I started drawing and I don't recall anyway... But the thing is that I did read on - Van Gogh was my idol. And Van Gogh, Picasso, and all the others, Dali

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's quite a range. Were they all at the same time?

JOHN GRILLO: Yes, within a period of one or two years I would say.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You saw them in reproduction I suppose largely?

JOHN GRILLO: Yes. Only in reproductions. And I was very much interested in them. And I also remember seeing Rewalt and I recall Klee. In fact, they had a show of Klees in the Museum. And I never did understand them but I was very intrigued. I recall in the early thirties I met Tchelitchev, and I met Berman, and I met Calder. In fact, I was helping with a ball in some kind of festival of some kind that they had in Connecticut or in Hartford, Connecticut during that time. And a fellow by the name of Austin - I recall seeing Picasso's paintings that they owned.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Everett Austin?

JOHN GRILLO: Yes. Everett Austin. He ran the Museum.

DOROTHY SECKLER: The Wadsworth Atheneum.

JOHN GRILLO: Yes. He was very alive and we as students helped in whatever went on with his ideas he had about what he wanted to do with the Museum. They had a piano, I mean they had music and they had ballet dancers and they had a great big festival where I met all these people that I mentioned. In fact, I recall doing something or other on the back stage. You know, they would tell you what to do. You painted a statue green or you helped Calder pull the string to make his mobile work. That kind of thing. And it was exciting. And then at the same time we saw Paul Klee's work in the Museum. And I felt it was a strange kind of world. I didn't understand it. In the meantime my teachers didn't... What I'm trying to say is they took us to the past instead of what was happening in Europe or in fact even in America they didn't quite know. They kept it a secret. Or they didn't care. Or something of that sort. And I would read all kinds of books about Van Gogh who was my idol at the time. And then Picasso. And one of the most interesting artists I thought and who I was much influenced, and I did some experimenting was Dali at the time. This is about 1938 or very early forties.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You were still in Hartford at this time?

JOHN GRILLO: Yes, I was in Hartford.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Were you out of your teens by that time?

JOHN GRILLO: Oh, yes, I believe so; I don't know. How old am I today? I can't remember.

DOROTHY SECKLER: We don't care too much to check up on your age. I'm just trying to get the picture, the sequence of your passions in art, which ones that you were attached to. When you were so involved with the Dali - did you then have a kind of interest in that kind of - well, painting based on uncon... did you understand what he was doing in terms of any kind of psychological theory? Or was it just that it was a kind of a novel, strange image I suppose?

JOHN GRILLO: No, I don't believe I did understand his work. I think that I understood Van Gogh closer. Sort of an emotional outburst. And I read everything I could get my hands on. But I don't think I understood Dali and I don't believe I understood Picasso. But Van Gogh was very close to me for some reason or other.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, what kind of work were you doing at this time? Were you still painting from the model? And was your work affected by these museums?

JOHN GRILLO: Well, the type of painting I was doing were drawings. I recall having two or three shows after I left the school. And they were based on -- I was very much interested in the common man. I was interested in Daumier at the time also and his drawings and his paintings. And I felt also a kinship with the Ashcan School which I had seen reproductions somewhere or other. And also a personal feeling for the poor people.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But this was after the Depression? Or was it still the end of the Depression?

JOHN GRILLO: Well, this was from 1935 to 1938 I would say 1936 or 1937.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's alright. It was till the Depression.

JOHN GRILLO: -- I don't remember.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's fine.

JOHN GRILLO: But I know that I did many drawings of things that I saw around me, you know, the struggle of an ordinary human being trying to get along in whatever he could do. Of course, I saw the surface thing of it. I never saw the other classes or whatever, you know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Was your own family struggling very desperately in that period?

JOHN GRILLO: In a certain sense they were, yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Then how long did you stay in Hartford? Did you go on through your early twenties being there? Working there?

JOHN GRILLO: Yes, I recall – the last thing I recall was I painted a mural for a friend of mine just for the fun of it. It was a mural of what I thought was the height of depression perhaps because it was based on a figure that I had seen in a Daumier drawing or lithograph. If I remember, it was a man that was sitting at a table without anything on the plates. And so I made a version of a family like that, the man and his wife and his child. I still have a photograph of it, parts of it. And if I recall, in spite of all my training in the Renaissance way of thinking, my work became quite primitive looking. No matter how hard I tried to make it either flowing or stylistically as I look back on that photograph which I have seen now and then, there's a certain primitive feeling about it, which I liked very much. Of course, I used my own interpretation. I believe that was probably 19— late 1938 or 1939. I don't remember.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Just before the outbreak of the Second World War? Would you think?

JOHN GRILLO: Yes, just before.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Getting into the Air Force was never something that entered into your life I gather? You were too young to have been --

JOHN GRILLO: Well, no, I don't believe I was too young. I think, if I recall, I tried to apply for it for some reason or other and something happened along the way. I don't remember if I worked for them or not. But I think that I seen got married after that in the forties, early forties.

DOROTHY SECKLER: There in Hartford?

JOHN GRILLO: Yes, in Hartford, Connecticut.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And how did you begin to make a living? Did you have some kind of a job?

JOHN GRILLO: Oh, yes, I worked in the defense plants. And I would paint. Sometimes I painted all night and worked all day, or I worked all night and painted all day, I don't remember exactly.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What kind of work were you doing in defense plants? Drafting or -- ?

JOHN GRILLO: No. Oh, no, I worked with machines.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Making dies or something like that?

JOHN GRILLO: No. No, I worked making guns.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You did!

JOHN GRILLO: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Did that go against the grain in any way?

JOHN GRILLO: Oh, no. Not at all. No.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It was just part of the cause I suppose.

JOHN GRILLO: I don't recall whether it was a cause. It was a job in a way. I mean I enjoyed doing it do a certain extent. I remember one time I was – it was quite frustrating – I remember working on a pistol and at night it was a terrible job because I'd come home and I'd just be full of oil but then I would paint, continue painting. In fact, I got a studio away from my apartment where I was living. We had a child then. But went on and --

DOROTHY SECKLER: Were you alone at this time? Or did you have --

JOHN GRILLO: No, I was married then.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You were married but I mean did you have other artists that you were close to?

JOHN GRILLO: There were a few. Not too many. There was a mad one named Ruvolo --

DOROTHY SECKLER: Felix Ruvolo?

JOHN GRILLO: No, no, no, someone else. A man who has been in and out of insane asylums. A very brilliant man and after the army he was put away and I don't think he's ever been the same since. And there were several other people: Dugmore was a close friend of mine. And a fellow by the name of Harris. A couple of other people, I can't recall their names.

DOROTHY SECKLER: So essentially you were working on your own. You were more or less I suppose, you know, a loner in a sense.

JOHN GRILLO: What?

DOROTHY SECKLER: You were somewhat on your own in your painting?

JOHN GRILLO: Oh, yes, I was struggling. I didn't know anything about the markets.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes, or what was happening much here in the art world.

JOHN GRILLO: Or what was happening. It was just what I happened to come in touch with. And personally I was struggling just to keep myself alive and try to paint as much as I could. And then the war came along and --

DOROTHY SECKLER: Did you work in this plant all through the war?

JOHN GRILLO: No, I went into the Navy, or the Army and Navy at the same time. It was called the Amphibious forces. And I think I could have stayed away from it. I believe I was 25 or 26 years old and it was the time when a man with a child could stay away from the Army or Navy. But I felt that basically I had to do something and basically I was unhappy with my own situation all the way around.

DOROTHY SECKLER: In what sense were you unhappy, John? I mean were you in painting? Was it a specific -- ? thing in relation to your work?

JOHN GRILLO: No, not in painting. No, just life in general. And I became very unstable about things. I felt that something had to be done one way or the other. And it was very good to do something for --

DOROTHY SECKLER: So you enlisted, did you?

JOHN GRILLO: Well, I was drafted but enlisted at the same time. You see I could have got out of it but I was very happy to find out and I thought that perhaps I might come to a certain realization about life in general.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. What was your actual experience in the armed forces?

JOHN GRILLO: Well, that's a long story but --

DOROTHY SECKLER: You don't have to go into --

JOHN GRILLO: Do we have to go into --

DOROTHY SECKLER: But was it in any way involved with your work or your thought about your work?

JOHN GRILLO: Yes, I think towards the end it became very involved with my work. I think it was a very important thing that happened to me. I think that once I was shipped across to the Pacific and I was in what they call Amphibious Service, and I was neither sailor nor soldier, and to tell you the truth we didn't have too much training in shooting. We had some.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What were you supposed to be doing?

JOHN GRILLO: Well, we were supposed to --

DOROTHY SECKLER: Like the Seabees.

JOHN GRILLO: Yes, very... We went along with the Seabees in fact. And we landed on Okinawa and I tell you that if there was enemy going or coming anywhere we probably would have shot ourselves. We were so frightened about everything in general. But we were very fortunate to have stayed on seas. Not that we were really frightened in the sense of meeting the enemy because we were told, you know, where we were going and why we were going and all that. Anyway we landed and slowly... We didn't see too much action except that when we landed a few ships came over. And there were several hard moments. I recall a day when the commanding officer came out and said now don't forget that you must wear your gas mask and never leave it, never leave your gas mask. Always have it by your side. He said something terrible is going to happen. This was toward the

end of the war. And you must be prepared. So we were prepared and we practically slept in it or close by it. It was almost like our beloved one – the gas mask. But anyway we – it is funny when you think about it – but he really frightened us. He stood out in the square like he was on the square sort of like he was a great big Greek Philosopher there and frightened us to hell, you know. But anyway, nothing really serious ever happened. Shortly after that we had a war. But in between that I met someone there towards the end of the war a few months who was an officer. And we got to talking. I don't know how I met him. Anyway it was in a strange way. His name was Atkinson. And I showed him some of my drawings that I had done on the ship. I was always drawing. I did very fine details. Some were beautiful in composition. And I still have some of them. And he said, well, you know, why don't you let your hair down? He said do anything you like. You don't have to draw representational. And he showed me certain magazines and prints and I don't know how he got them but... And he recited certain letters that he had gotten from an artist close friend of artist with him and we began some kind of a relationship, I would say a spiritual or whatever, he encouraged me very much. And so I went back into my tent and I began breaking away from representational drawing.

DOROTHY SECKLER: This is still on Okinawa?

JOHN GRILLO: Yes. Okinawa. And it's about 1945. And I began breaking away from what I'd been doing and I started with what looked like child drawings and then I showed him a few. And then I just let myself go and I used sand and I used this cocoa, whatever I had on hand and threw them on the canvas and then I showed them to him.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Where did you get canvas on Okinawa?

JOHN GRILLO: Well, it wasn't canvas. I think it was paper. I don't think I had any canvas.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. It's amazing you even had paper.

JOHN GRILLO: Yes, it was on paper. On my days off I would go out and draw. And so I was introduced to a different way of seeing other than representational.

DOROTHY SECKLER: No one in Hartford had presented this to you, I take it?

JOHN GRILLO: No. No one at all. No one. And I had to go to Okinawa to see --

DOROTHY SECKLER: What was his background – this Atkinson?

JOHN GRILLO: Well, he had been in New York and he had seen – and he was an artist himself to a certain extent. He was a much more sophisticated man and he had been up on with the so-called what was going on in the present.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But you didn't feel – when you were doing these things you didn't feel insecure or lost? You seemed to find – something in it.

JOHN GRILLO: Oh, no, no, no. I felt I was doing something. In fact, some of my old background of thinking about Dali and people like that came into focus.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It was sort of literary. Did you follow a series of fantasies? Or were you working more in terms of an abstract – oh, something perhaps out of geometrical relationships?

JOHN GRILLO: No, they were sort of fantasies and they were fantasies of things I saw around me there on Okinawa – landscapes and urns, and bones and that kind of thing.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You mean in terms of battlefield?

JOHN GRILLO: No, no, in terms of the formation of, oh, the landscape. For instance, I was very much impressed about the caves and how they made the upper level of a cave in the shape of a woman's womb.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Really?

JOHN GRILLO: It was very impressive. Yes. I mean a woman's – actually a woman's vagina.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What period did this stem from?

JOHN GRILLO: What?

DOROTHY SECKLER: The cave that you're speaking of now. Were they ancient?

JOHN GRILLO: Oh! Very ancient, yes! They still have them. But they have a formation which is based on a certain --

DOROTHY SECKLER: fertility?

JOHN GRILLO: Fertility image - that's what it was, yes.

END OF SIDE 2

TAPE RECORDED INTERVIEW WITH JOHN GRILLO - Tape 3
IN NEW YORK
December 29, 1964

DOROTHY SECKLER: This is Dorothy Seckler interviewing John Grillo in New York on December 29, 1964. The third in a series of tapes continuing an interview in which our last part we had been discussing the year 1949 when you, Mr. Grillo, were finishing your work with Hans Hofmann and had done some teaching of your own. I believe your first show in New York came along about 1952. What was it that led up to that?

JOHN GRILLO: 1948.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Was it 1948? Well, let's go to that then. Or had we discussed that last time?

JOHN GRILLO: We had to a certain extent.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes, why don't we - or whatever else you'd like to that's important about that period in your life.

JOHN GRILLO: Well, I think it was a period where if you have to put a label on things which they labeled later on like the Abstract Expressionist School. There wasn't a title or a slogan that went along with the painting that was done in those days. I recall when I showed at the same time or a year or two later other people who now have become a symbol of a decade or a little more of what we call abstract expressionist group for some reason during a certain period they began to put everyone so-called into a soup so that everything was called abstract expressionist. Even today with all the many movements they're all fighting against a certain slogan, against a certain name or against certain painters and I don't think most of these dealers or people who have given slogans or names to these movements have any idea what actually went on and who they were or what they were and how many years they struggled to get to a certain position in their own style of painting. In my case I gave up so-called experimenting where if you want it named it was in reality abstract expressionist whereas I think for me it began in San Francisco and I didn't continue it for a few years and I had my second show in 1952 in a cooperative gallery. Why a cooperative gallery I think it was one of the very first with the exception of another one thereby beginning a whole swing I would say of a new type or a new rebellion coming into New York. Before that time I don't recall being here in the thirties - but the fact was that there were very few places to show with the exception of the Artists' Gallery where I had a show and Egan who really gave the first show to a few artists who became internationally famous. Now these artists were older and had been struggling along for many years and they were enticed to show for some reason and somehow the public's or museum people seemed to be all dead before that or they had all kinds of regional schools, or the Ashcan School and all that, and they all had much publicity including the fact that they were in Life magazine and I recall at our present moment we seem to be getting that all over again. But the fact is that the artists had been underground and I feel in general the artist is underground most of his life. It all happened that America somehow for certain reasons became culturally conscious and during the early fifties there was even a fight between the idea of the French versus American point of view in art and all that. There were lectures going on. Motherwell led some of them. And there seemed to be a striving for a cultural existence in America. Most of the attention had been going to Europe. Somehow we in our European background with our painters were trying to reaffirm or reestablish the idea of culture of some kind. It sounds like I'm making a speech or something.

DOROTHY SECKLER: No.

JOHN GRILLO: Shall I go on?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

JOHN GRILLO: Well, I think that I recall certain moments I think every artist was asked during the early fifties was a point where the artists become very close friends and they looked at each other's work and sometimes they gave me criticism, sometimes they just nodded their head, but there was a wonderful feeling about being very close everything. The market wasn't there. You had to struggle even to show. That's why the cooperative galleries began. And they began downtown with a few people but then suddenly these few people became ambitious, which is very natural in the way the social life was going and artists had to make a living or they

thought - or we all thought. And from one small cooperative it turned into a dozen. Then the whole place downtown became a whole bedlam of publicity thereby everyone attached themselves to a certain so-called movement. Well, an example would be the fact that if someone came to your studio later on the prices they wanted you to sell your painting would be the prices that everyone else was selling at. So that after awhile the whole thing became sort of a communism without taste and without a sense of expression or evaluation or - and I think this all came about by the fact of publicity. Now since then so much has happened with the fact with painters, and sculptors I don't think as much, but in painting I feel that certain people with tremendous ambition or drive, it doesn't matter about the talent, looking for certain attention which they could get and pushing gallery people into position and consequently we've had America get into the Biennale and get a grand prize. I mean I'm not mentioning any names, I'm not really envious. But the fact is, what I'm really trying to say is that at one point, and which I think was healthy or unhealthy but the thing is that now today as we are it appears or seems that they want the artist to change. In other words, I'd like to go back to the classroom of Hans Hofmann. Now the reason for that is that I think that Hans Hofmann, what he tried to show you was not only how to look at things, but I think that he was trying to teach you a whole history of how painters worked, and basically they were European ideas. But I think that there was a moral issue involved. And by that I mean that we're living in such a stage of overpopulation or whatever you call it in which rich people who are throwing their money away, who in reality are becoming aristocrats, who need court jesters at the galleries and who need to have attention are neglecting art and who at one time were for it. But in reality they would attach themselves to any kind of movement. Now I feel rather hurt about this in a sense but in another sense I feel quite strongly that the artist works really or in reality in a studio. Of course he's very much aware of what goes on around him in a social sense, psychically, intuitively and the very things that he does in his studio are sometimes completely overlooked for the reason that they're what we call today the gallery dealer who is gaining power for himself. I should really try and explain that a little bit better. The fact that our age has become such that anything that's advertised is becoming or can become known and I'm sure that people in general or people who have a moral concern about living are very much aware that the artist exists. Now the artist will exist but I think that the times today is making it more difficult for him. And if there isn't much more concern I think that just the sense of the superficial aspects of living are going to be satisfied and --

DOROTHY SECKLER: Is the main danger from your point of view that it's in a sense a loss of anyone to evaluate what you do? It's as if it doesn't matter whether it's good or bad?

JOHN GRILLO: No, I think that the evaluation - there are many, many people that have good taste and would like to acquire good things but you are suppressed for these people to see them or to show them to. They have been brainwashed the same thing as when you have a TV program with all the commercials on. Who knows what brand is better than another? And I think that TV program is taken on into the social and money-making aspect of art. Which I think is perfectly all right. But I think that one point we had a wonderful opportunity during the fifties and early sixties where I think America for the time being in spite of the imitators and all that it was really getting known in the cultural sense that they were really artists. And I mean not also the fact that they all kinds of experiments were happening, but the fact that there was an integrated or - the word is a very honest way of thinking and trying to develop en masse into being a cultural... or rather I should say that the artist was working all by himself but the mass was getting benefit by it when they were discovered through the galleries. But the galleries in a sense perverted this kind of thing and they still continue to do that. Now if this continues any longer it means that you have to fight it as a social human being and leave your art outside of it or to show your art for what it is because I think that there is demand for culture and I think it's very important that America as a whole doesn't give the idea that it's simply a passing fad that everyone else in Europe and everywhere else is catching onto, or vice versa. Confused.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Tell me a bit about the period when you thought it was very good, when artists were coming around and you were sharing things and they were looking at your work very seriously and so on. What kind of things were on your mind? What kind of things did you talk about? Or what kind of remarks would the artists make that would sort of indicate an attitude toward the work? Could you remember any specifics there?

JOHN GRILLO: Well, I really don't want to sound like it's the past age of Hollywood. In fact, Hollywood has now appeared in the art world right now. I would like to say that I don't really want to go back to the sense that that was really our best period. I think our best period is from day to day. But there was a much more honest feeling toward one's work. And I think they're there now. But I feel that the social atmosphere has changed many artists. But if I recall - well, if someone came into the studio there would be encouragement or they would put forth their point of view and we would discuss it and things of that sort. And I don't exactly remember the words of the time but I feel that whereas at one time when we were fighting the machine, it seems that the whole society including the majority or a certain number of artists is trying to get inspiration out of the machine. And what I mean by inspiration is that they just are going along with it and not fighting for themselves any more as individuals. I'm just wondering whether how long can one keep struggling trying to express oneself as a moral human being.

DOROTHY SECKLER: When you speak of artists who are going along with the machine are you thinking here

specifically of Pop Art and Op Art and movement art and so on?

JOHN GRILLO: Yes. I think that all these things are valuable. I think that they were valuable. I think they're still valuable and I think that they're part of certain ideas. I think sometimes it becomes a little too literary. I think that they don't follow traditions. And we've seen that happen right here in America with the Ashcan School, with the regional school, with all kinds of things that have been passé. Now the only reason that we have become even more known with these new movements is that we have more influence internationally on the market. I mean as a country itself we have much more power sociologically speaking. But to think that we have power as artists to lead a sociological point of view is completely wrong. I think that every artist is connected only through the human standpoint and through the studio and in searching for himself and in searching through a tradition that has happened before and a tradition that is very slow in changing. And if you say, well, the surface can be entirely different than it was before and you wouldn't know it, but, no, it's not necessarily so because I think you can tie up the Renaissance painting with the Cubists and you can tie up a certain amount of surrealist paintings with other types of painting that have happened and it all goes back I think to a moral point of view. And the moral point of view is, and can be expressed through technical means that one has to acquire or learn and I think it includes all these other movements. It includes the eye, titillating the eye, it includes the found objects, it includes all that. But to make a fad or something called a movement out of one little aspect of art is becoming almost as if you're putting the painting into a computer and out comes the answer. I feel that it isn't enough and I think that - I wouldn't like to point my finger - but I think that it's the patron's fault, they want to be amused, pleased and in a sense where there is much common feeling I think that - I don't really know how to say it - but I think that many patrons have been misled and I think that they themselves are becoming inhuman instead of human. Not all in general, I mean there are a few. But also the museums are in a very confused state. But I don't think that we have to really worry about anything.

DOROTHY SECKLER: John, do you feel that the artists whose work was grounded back there in the early fifties even though you didn't recognize at that time that you were part of a movement because everyone just seemed to be doing what he was interested in, that those that were and got a good start then, do you feel that they are going on and doing what they felt was important to do before? Or that they are adjusting to some extent or changing in response to these new - well, as you call them, bad and machine art and computer art and so on? Or is there a sense of discouragement because of the existence of the great attention paid to so many new movements? Does it lead to a kind of paralysis would you infer? Or do you think it simply means that the real art is going on being produced somewhere but not getting attention?

JOHN GRILLO: Well, I think that it is discouraging to one to a certain extent but I think that you can gain a lot and reopen your eyes to the fact that these things are in the aesthetic sense and make you aware of your own knowledge or what you like to do and see. But one has to be aware that there's also that false issue, that demand, supply and demand, and if you don't get supply and demand you don't try to go along with it as certain people have done. They feel that they will die as moral human beings. But the fact is that they will not. And I think that you have to place things for what they are and the fact is that it becomes very dangerous to certain people when you have a TV program always broadcasting one thing that's much better than the next product and people begin not to know which product is better or not or they'll buy the one that is broadcast the most.

DOROTHY SECKLER: A new improved product.

JOHN GRILLO: A new improved product. Or they'll find new slogans. But I think that all these things - like one product has the same ingredients as another product or one is better and one can learn from one or the other. But in general the fact is that you can take a little thing and make it very big. Now I feel that the artist is to find out those little things and gather them all together and try to make them as big as he can through the human process of finding himself and I think that it will amount to just about that. And even if he has to go back to struggling without selling paintings or just simply doing it part time and all that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Is it your feeling, John, that the artists who are doing this so-called computer art and so on, that they are not really engaged through their work in discovering themselves as human beings? Do you feel that they've turned their back on that kind of experience deliberately? Or--

JOHN GRILLO: No, I think that they're trying to become aware of what human beings are or what they are. But perhaps we reach an age where the young people are not concerned with moral principles anymore.

DOROTHY SECKLER: This is something that I think it would be a help for us to define here. I think I know what you mean when you say "moral principles" or "moral content in art," but from the point of view of someone dealing with this tape a hundred years from now the word "moral" turned up in a great deal of the discussion of art, of course, in the nineteenth century, which was literary art which had a kind of like, you know, the pre-Raphaelites and that sort of thing --

JOHN GRILLO: Oh, yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: -- where art was supposed to have symbolic content. Now, of course, in the group that are now called the abstract expressionists I think I know what you mean by "moral content" in the sense that there's an implication of man being involved with certain existential coming face to face with his existence in some way. But I wonder if you could define it a little bit in your own terms? I don't want to put any words in your mouth here but I think that word "moral" is puzzling to people.

JOHN GRILLO: Well, it certainly is particularly in view of the fact - I really don't know how to begin - I know that one can't not express something unless it goes through the mind. I mean if you had a certain reaction, if you started a painting one day and you had an emotion, how could you express that emotion? I mean what really was that emotion? Or where did you get it? Or how was it? And how are you going to express it? You don't just go ahead and - well, throw something on the canvas or something like that. And the fact is that people have named this kind of thing and they have given it a movement. Now the thing is that for me personally I feel that the emotion can only be expressed through your knowledge of painting. It has to be expressed through your mind. I mean there are accidents that happen but one has to be aware of getting the idea digested so that it can be expressed. Now when we start talking about ideas I'm doing something else but the idea of - what I mean or meant by "moral" was that you are trying to rediscover -

[Note: Mrs. Seckler mentions that this is about Tape #5. We have only 3 tapes on John Grillo, this being the third.]

DECEMBER 29, 1964

DOROTHY SECKLER: This is Dorothy Seckler interviewing John Grillo on December 29, 1964. This is one of a series of tapes, this is about #5, and we were talking just before about a manifesto that you composed about 1950 - right?

JOHN GRILLO: 1959.

DOROTHY SECKLER: 1959. I'm sorry. 1959 - in which you were attacking a manifestation of a certain kind of painting that had appeared in the galleries occupying enormous wall spaces, paintings typified by the work of Barnett Newman and - would you like to name a couple of others?

JOHN GRILLO: Well, several others but it doesn't matter. The only thing is that I think that they brought along the idea, as you said, a certain emptiness that should fulfill itself as art. Now really the fact is who can define art in reality? But the sense that people make money on art, people make money on people that have died and who made no money at all, but somehow even certain of these people were trying to get in to certain movements but somehow they had moral principles involved now if we call them moral principles. The thing is - what I mean by that is that one does exactly what they want to do in a traditional sense in order to further one's personality. Or in order to by furthering one's personality you are furthering mankind in general. It's kind of a broadened statement.

DOROTHY SECKLER: This was kind of the moral outlook of that group, of your original group, wasn't it? - that by realizing your own personality and your own humanity --?

JOHN GRILLO: Well, to a certain extent, yes, until you got to know that they were characters or personalities in there who were really more ambitious in a social sense than they were in carrying on the tradition of painting in general.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You mean some of the ones from your original group that were pretty close to you back in 1949 and so by this time were becoming --

JOHN GRILLO: Oh, yes, there were many, many that have become well-known. They've been pushed and they've directed their point of view and consequently --

DOROTHY SECKLER: What evidence did you see of this?

JOHN GRILLO: Well, I knew exactly - I could at one time just simply tell somebody what they could do to become known. It's as simple as that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What would you tell them to do?

JOHN GRILLO: I mean to do something very different, very bizarre, unusual before finding yourself. And it sort of always worked. I mean I could still go on telling someone and they could become very well-known in the commercial sense. It's as simple as that really. You encourage anyone in that sense. But the thing is that that is not the sense that I believe in. I think that what I believe in is finding myself. Well, if someone else wants to find and get satisfaction by the fact of either making money or getting recognition, and it seems that the two go

together in America here to a certain extent – but I think I believe almost in a sense it's becoming so that the romantic way of simply working by yourself and finding out about yourself and when you find out about it yourself you find out about a lot of other people. And simply continue what you believe in. I mean that's in a superficial sense because you still have to have a tremendous amount of knowledge and training to know what direction you can take towards becoming yourself.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You've spoken a good many times here when we've been speaking about a moral point of view or position in art coming out of tradition. And I assume there you mean tradition in the sense of Hans Hofmann --

JOHN GRILLO: Well, I think that Hans Hofmann made you look back on tradition, the tradition of what every other painter that has ever lived or existed in different periods ever worked with their space, their knowledge of how you make reality out of a two-dimensional surface. There are certain principles and I think they are live principles and they have to be shown. They have to go through a certain amount of experience to gain them. And the fact that to make a thing look in reality a real thing on a canvas is in one sense a technical problem. And I think that the art of the present day today in which they advertise simply design in the sense that they are not going into the surface and analyzing it and making the real thing about it consequently that's why I say that it's sort of machine-made. I know that this all seems very confusing but --

DOROTHY SECKLER: You mean in a sense that well, Hofmann's space is plastic in terms that it has push and pull?

JOHN GRILLO: Yes-s.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It creates a sense of reality?

JOHN GRILLO: Well, it makes you go back to the tradition of even Greece and to the Egyptians and the Renaissance and so on up to our... I mean it carries on to the French tradition of Cezanne and after Cezanne to the Cubists. And Cezanne actually went back to the Renaissance and so on, etcetera and so on. But the thing is that by going back to the traditional way of thinking and changing it, it changes its surface but the fact is that by going back to it not only is it technical but that's what in a sense I mean by a moral principle, by trying to rediscover a new way of saying it without being filled with just simple a surface that would please your eyes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mhmm. Jack, recently you turned to sculpture. Does that represent any one way of resolving this kind of problem for you? Or how would you account for the fact that after so many years of being mainly concerned with painting you now find it satisfying to do sculpture along – of course, I assume you're continuing to paint too?

JOHN GRILLO: Yes, I'm continuing painting. But the fact is that one summer I had a very productive summer and I painted many pictures. And all my ideas came to a standstill. And I seemed to have expressed everything I had to say at that point. And there was no alternative left for me. I ran out of my special or intuitive ideas. I was concerned basically – in my painting I'm talking about – with a certain spatial sense and geometric sense. And I felt that I was being part of our time in a sense, perhaps even going beyond the time that I was even living in. I was painting in reality space age. And I ran out of these ideas. And I painted them through an emotional personal point of view.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You're thinking here of your rather yellowish paintings --

JOHN GRILLO: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Light saturated like these?

JOHN GRILLO: Well, yes. And deeper. They became a mixture of different colors. But they were basically yellow and orange and some blues and things like that. And I rediscovered geometry to a certain extent.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes, there was some of that in the paintings you showed in Provincetown.

JOHN GRILLO: Yes. That was my last period. Well, after that I sort of ran dry. And I decided to rest a while. And I've always wanted to do sculpture. I felt I didn't have any around. And I was interested in it. I had done some before; very little. And I took it seriously. So one day I simply started to melt wax. And that first day that I melted wax President Kennedy died. And anyway I decided I'd spend a certain number of months. And I did. I spend eight months. I had seen a lot of things but I decided I would just do it the same as I had done my paintings although I had less knowledge in my sculpture than I had in my painting. But how would I go about it? Well, I just simply decided to do it intuitively. And I started with some little thing. And then things began to grow. And slowly my sculpture began to take the shape of animals, organic things, something groping from the earth of some kind. And I continued it. And after awhile I went back to painting. I don't know whether it helped my

painting. I think that the two arts are quite different. I'd like to do more sculpture. Just in the last couple of days I went back to sculpture after some painting. And I've seen that the ideas are very similar to when I started doing sculpture. They still turned out to be sort of things in the subconscious would turn out to be sort of mythological figures of some kind and through the subconscious, intuitive sense. Whereas in my painting – I think in my sculpture they go back to the past; and in my painting I think I go forward to the future.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mhmm. And certainly there seems to be a Miroesque sense in some of your sculptures. I mean a kind of organic thing.

JOHN GRILLO: Yes, but perhaps it's a kind of way of thinking.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Sometimes there's a kind of playful --

JOHN GRILLO: No, they're not playful. But there's a kind of --

DOROTHY SECKLER: He's more playful. But there's a kind of --

JOHN GRILLO: Well, it's the way we probably think alike to a certain extent. I mean --

DOROTHY SECKLER: The earth is in his a great deal too.

JOHN GRILLO: Yes. And I think that our minds are very similar. Although we come from different cultures and different civilizations. But perhaps it's – I'm Mediterranean myself. Or my parents were. There may be a kinship somewhere in personality.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mhmm. We were looking at some things in your studio last week, they often do suggest, as you said, strange animal presences rather than specific animals.

JOHN GRILLO: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Something like a winged thing or something that might be lumbering and heavy or something strange.

JOHN GRILLO: Well, I did something just yesterday and it turned out to be a Minotaur.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes? A Minotaur?

JOHN GRILLO: Yes. It even happens to have goat feet. And it was just simply the function of making something as a base and it has a monster head with goat feet of some kind or some kind of an animal. I'll show it to you. But perhaps I'm just thinking of the fact that I have seen these things before in pictures and all that. But I think that perhaps I'm also tied up in a sense if you go back to your unconscious or your intuitive sense that perhaps certain forms come out that have a kinship to a traditional way of thinking. And it could be called a moral way of thinking. I don't know what it could be called. A thinking in general about one's own personal fantasies and one's own personal history that goes back to the history of mankind in general.

DOROTHY SECKLER: So sculptures with you seem to always be involved with the ideas of maybe earth and fertility and the big ideas that have been through all art?

JOHN GRILLO: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And you would not feel any impulse to do something like a gadget from modern life or something – of that sort?

JOHN GRILLO: No. No. I don't think so.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That would be to you an abomination?

JOHN GRILLO: No. I tried that at the beginning because I had seen some of that done in California about two or three years ago. And it just wasn't satisfying enough. But then I just simply take something and it turns out to some kind of beast form or something that has just come out of the earth, something like that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Does this form rather readily?

JOHN GRILLO: Oh, yes!

DOROTHY SECKLER: I mean it isn't something that you work over and over?

JOHN GRILLO: No. No. It just forms and I simply work for form's sake and sculpture's sake. I'm learning how to

get technically better or getting the form somehow as part of the hands, I mean the form sort of – I don't know, you get to know about volume by touch. And somehow it gets to be a very intuitive thing. And yet it's very classical I think.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What sculptures have you admired most? I mean – or do you feel your sculpture does grow more like painting and so on?

JOHN GRILLO: No, I don't – I think sculpture does always grow out of sculpture anyway. I mean I've seen lots of sculptures that I've liked in the past. I think some of the best sculptors were painters to begin with. I think Matisse. Gauguin was a good sculptor.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Do you like his work?

JOHN GRILLO: Yes, I like his work. I mean I like Matisse better. Picasso to a certain extent. I think that although the two are quite different I have a feeling that the painters have much more – in general painters have a much more intense feeling for form than the average sculptor. Now I'm not sure. There are rare sculptors that do have that. Gauguin. But he did many beautiful drawings. And others – I think Renoir even did some beautiful sculpture in two dimensions. But it's so entirely different from the two-dimensional again at the same time I have a feeling that by the design element of the two-dimensional you are able to control your forms better. You're able to control a restricted material. You don't let it get away from you. And it can be designed better. I can live much more by the sense of using the same principles that you discovered while painting. Although they're entirely different. And yet there are certain elements – they're completely different feelings.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It's interesting, I suppose the average person finds your sculpture and painting very different in some ways too because your paintings are so light-saturated and often very airy, except of course, some of them in recent months, as you have pointed out, you have also introduced geometric elements and so on. But still one thinks of your painting in general as being very soft and still creating a sense of space, but doing it without any sense of, you know, earthy solids. Whereas in the sculpture the earthiness predominates.

JOHN GRILLO: Well, I think that's true to a certain degree but I think that the structures behind my paintings are very solid and they're hidden. The imagery usually is hidden. Sometimes when you think you see a gay image it's really a very frightening one.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Even in the painting?

JOHN GRILLO: In the paintings.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Even those that look the most beautiful?

JOHN GRILLO: Yes. And the imagery... That's why I sometimes can put one of my sculptures against one of my paintings and there are certain images that are very similar, a certain design quality, a certain primeval or whatever you call it – very ancient animal-like, but because of the color and because of the ideas that I have about space in general, and the idea that I have about geometry taking over --

DOROTHY SECKLER: You mean that that's a good or a bad thing?

JOHN GRILLO: No, it's good. For painting I think it's marvelous. And I think it's much more for me difficult than sculpture. And more satisfying. And physically it's more satisfying to do sculpture. I think that in sculpture you can simply go back to the past and in painting you have to look forward to the future with the past behind it. I suppose a sculptor would talk differently but I think that sculpture can still remain [inaudible] way of analyzing how I feel in relationship to painting sculpture. But I feel that with sculpture you can go back to the way past. And I think in painting you do that in a sense but in painting it can be shown in a very modern way. And in sculpture you can show it in a very traditional way. And the idea can still come out. Now I'm not certain about this.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Were you ever very much influenced by primitive sculpture?

JOHN GRILLO: Well, I don't know whether I have but I've seen some of it. And I think that if you feel and go back to your subconscious you have primitive sculpture.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mmhmm.

JOHN GRILLO: And I think it will come out intuitively. Because I had that idea one day I went to Washington and I saw some primitive sculpture and I said my God, I've got that idea in one of my sculptures! I had never seen this piece of sculpture before.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What kind of thing was it?

JOHN GRILLO: Well, it was an Aztec or something.

DOROTHY SECKLER: A figure?

JOHN GRILLO: Well, a figure of some kind. And I think the forms... In other words, I think that forms in general - what I'm trying to say is that forms are inborn within us and that they're intuitive in a sense and if you tap a certain channel within you that they come out. And they will look not exactly like something that has been done in ancient times but they will look similar. I mean they will have the same kind of feeling or forms about them although they will not have the same social attachment to it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's very well put. We have just a little bit left on this tape. Is there anything you'd like to say about, you know, what you're doing right now in respect to looking ahead? Or did you cover that pretty much in sculpture?

JOHN GRILLO: What do you mean by respect to looking ahead? To the future?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, yes, and what you have in your mind right now. What are you going to do tomorrow in your studio?

JOHN GRILLO: Well, I'd like to finish up these three pieces of sculpture that I've done and then I think I'll go back to painting.

DOROTHY SECKLER: As you go back to painting do you think you're likely to continue with this - well, sort of making a synthesis of more cloudy, amorphous aspects with the geometric? Or have you a new direction that you feel is coming through?

JOHN GRILLO: No, I think that I will just simply continue my own way of thinking and simply try to make it more positive. I think the things that were not solved I'm going to try to solve them much better. I think there are paintings that I've always said what I had to say and I simply have to go on trying to rediscover what I would like to say.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, it sounds like you've got a challenge right there.

JOHN GRILLO: Well, it certainly is. But I don't know. With all the pressures in life behind you, one has to make a living. It becomes quite a chore. But I don't think I would change. I think I simply feel that I'll go ahead and if it's accepted fine, and if it isn't accepted then I don't know what to do. I'll just simply go on. I know at this point I have many paintings hidden away in some little room which should be shown. And I think that people would like them. And I know that if they're shown in the public I think people will become aware of what I have to say and I feel that they understand my paintings. And I simply have faith in the sense that I have faith in myself. And having faith in myself I think that I have faith in other people.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Do you have any sense of an audience when you paint? Of anyone that particularly --?

JOHN GRILLO: No. None at all. None at all. Just myself. By myself I have as I say, an audience.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Some artists have said that they paint more or less with the awareness of some friends of theirs, that sort of thing.

JOHN GRILLO: No.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You have a sense of an audience in the future though? That there will be.

JOHN GRILLO: Well, no, not really. I think that the future one can't really foresee. I think that if you have an audience in yourself and in your everyday thinking and feeling and also feeling about what's being done and what has been done in the past, I think you're feeling then as a human being and I think that human beings can change. But they can't change into machines.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I hope not. On that positive note I guess our tape has come to an end. And so the next time that you have a revelation.

JOHN GRILLO: Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW

[Return to Top of Page](#)

[Return to List of Archives of American Art Oral History Interviews](#)

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