



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Nathan Halper,
1963 July 17

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

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 Nathan Halper on July 17, 1963. The interview took place in Provincetown, MA, and was conducted by Dorothy Seckler for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

DOROTHY SECKLER: This is Dorothy Seckler interviewing Nat Halper – Nathan Halper, Director of the HCE Gallery in Provincetown on July 17, 1963. Mr. Halper is continuing his discussion of the early years of his gallery here.

NATHAN HALPER: I think I was talking about the groups who were getting together and saying maybe we could do something of the sort. Now perhaps the most important one was the group that became known as “256,” that is because they rented part of the church near town hall at 256 Commercial Street. They formed a cooperative. I believe their first director was John Frank. Among their members were: Henry Bodkin, Leo Manso, Peter Busa, Will Barnet, Byron Browne, Seong Moy, Myron Stout, and I think they got people like Booth Cameron to come here, and he also had a few people who were not in Provincetown at the time at all, I think they were the first, for instance, Richard Stankiewicz and a few others – Adja Yunkers – who were not Provincetown people and didn’t even come up for the purposes of being in the cooperative – Louise Nevelson also. I forget whether they formed it late in 1953 just to get going, or started it in 1954. In 1954 it was certainly going. Now also I think at some point in 1953 the Boris Mirsky Gallery started something back on Brattle Street near Town Hall and tried it again in 1954, where Peter Hunt is now. It’s just very possible I have places reversed but I think that’s right. They ran for a couple of years too just as the Kootz Gallery of New York did, but I think they found it wasn’t quite worth their trouble. That is, he, - it’s something like Martha Jackson did later – wanted a place where his help – the people using his place in Boston, which was also a frame shop – could have a sort of vacation without too much trouble. So they could alternate in groups for two weeks at a time.

The one thing we hadn’t counted on in making all the contracts with Kootz was that after two years we just – well, we certainly couldn’t stand him, living with him, and I daresay he couldn’t stand it with us. But since we had the property and the important thing was that here we were and we couldn’t stand him although we had a contract for eight more years. He, meanwhile, was in pretty bad shape and he looked yellow and green and backwards bent – people remarked how awful he looked – and then suddenly he got someone to bail him out of a tax situation. He got hold of some money to clear his debts and also a loan of some money to get another bunch of Picassos. And business began booming for him. That was in the spring of 1955 I think when business began improving in the abstract world all over the city. Now this gallery which he had in Provincetown which he had gotten certain use from although he had lost money from it – I think I might as well digress and mention this. This may be libelous but I say it advisedly because I think I can show it. He was able to funnel a number of possible sales from Provincetown to the New York situation. So although the Provincetown operation lost him a certain amount of money, a lot of it, or maybe even more than he lost there, he was able to make on New York sales which perhaps I was not connected with. He made a number of customers, some of whom became fairly good customers in New York and he could almost mark the Provincetown loss off to advertising. And then in the third place he was very much interested in architectural commissions. Architects would come to visit here and he was able to make a show of the Gallery and so forth and maybe make new connections with architects going through. So instead of summer being dead for him, in making whatever negotiations with architects stopping in Provincetown on their way to Europe or wherever, they were able to meet together in this place in Provincetown and at the same time they could look at a display of Hofmanns or Gottliebs or other people. So they had paid their way for him despite his losses. But now with business becoming so good in New York, Provincetown became comparatively a place of minor profit, and the idea of having to spend eight more years, as he felt, piddling along when he could be in Europe with Picasso was not to desirable to him; especially since it is also possible that he found us as distasteful by this time as we found him. So after we had a few quarrels about what to do, or what plans he wanted for the next summer, or what percentages he offered for certain pieces, the idea intruded that maybe we should separate and call it quits; he has no more rights, whatever he’s lost he’s lost, the gallery is mine and he’s out clean. At first I was terrified at the thought of eight more years with the Gallery, not having any idea whatsoever how to run it or what to do, and I felt that he was obligated, that maybe I ought to get some sort of recompense. But my brother who was wiser said, “If it came to you in a different form how much would you pay to get rid of Mr. Kootz?” I said, “A fair amount.” And he said, “Okay. Don’t push him too hard. He might decide to stay.” So it was agreed and we took over the Gallery. And there I was left with nothing except having to run it. Oh! One thing that influenced me was that just at this point some young man who had become a customer – he had bought the first picture he ever owned at the Gallery – A Motherwell, became infatuated with Motherwells, sound some interest in art – said to me when he heard I was having some trouble with Kootz, “Gee, maybe it might be fun to run a gallery with you.” And I though had a partner who was

congenial, etc. etc. I thought, well, all right we'll do it. So there we were and we have to have artists. By this time, during that year, both Gottlieb and Motherwell had split with Kootz too having found certain shenanigans not to their liking. So they said yes they would show with us. Hofmann was still here and I insisted as part of the deal that we still be permitted to show Hofmann – feeling he was a figure here. So we still had the rights to Hofmann. The last year just showing them alone people had gotten bored by, although offered in judicious quantities along with other things people still wanted to see them. So the question was of getting more artists to fill up the shows. At this point “256” came rather questionably to our rescue. They meanwhile had been having their troubles. Peter Busa who had been their nominal agent, that is, the one who signed for the group as a whole now claimed that that made him owner of the whole thing since his name was signed and he could run the place just the way he pleased. There were lawsuits with everybody on one side and Busa on the other. Busa got the gallery because he was the one who signed for it. Now the “256” people came to us and said, “Here we are; show us.” There wasn't very much time left. In general I was not too much taken with this group. Whatever justification I had for not being taken I must admit was just in my own ignorance. I felt that whatever was in the Kootz Gallery in New York was good, that that was in any other gallery in Provincetown was terribly bad. So this was an awful comedown. I mean whether my attitude was right or wrong I just had nothing to go on and was just taken up...But anyway here we had a few days in which to get a group. We took on “256” pointing out, now look, we know you people are in a fix also but we won't give you this gallery space for one year and then at the end, after you've had time to get yourself a nice little place, you'll say go to hell. So they said, “Oh, no, no, this is it.” All right. We formed this association; had them also. We got a few more people some of whom in our ignorance – either his or mine – we thought looked nice. Some of these “256” people, like Bodkin, considered themselves professionals and objected very much to the other people we got. They were below them in the pecking order. They didn't like that. They wanted to be with Hofmann and Motherwell and Gottlieb, to have some of their luster at the time rub off on them; they didn't want it to rub off the other way. But we made those associations. They had no choice but to play along. Well, this year was even worse than the Kootz years. Down at the other end was Busa running some sort of organization of his own which was quite disastrous. And we were having our disastrous little time here. Although this was not a cooperative we had all the troubles cooperatives have – everybody was worrying about which room they were being shown in, whom they were hanging next to, why weren't they here, why weren't they there, etc. Also neither I nor Cudahy, my partner, had any idea whatsoever about selling. We were two of the worst incompetents there were. And Besides that he was a man of conspicuous integrity. I say that bit ironically. He felt that he had to admire one hundred percent every single picture that was hung. And if he had any reservations about any picture, if he didn't think it was one of the great pictures that was painted this year, he would not want anyone to buy it. And if they would say, “What does this man do?” and I would say, well, he's in this museum and that museum, he would pipe up, “But that doesn't mean anything whatsoever.” So we sold less than \$3,000 worth of pictures.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What year was this?

NATHAN HALPER: This was 1955. That was the lowest point we ever reached. And perhaps the important thing about that year was that it gave us a change of name. We couldn't use “Kootz,” that was the agreement; I mean part of the agreement was we couldn't use the Kootz Gallery in New York, although we could say in the advertising that this was formerly a Kootz Gallery in Provincetown. We examined various names. Anything we thought of having to do with Cape Cod or Cape Ann or shores or bays or vistas seemed rather corny. So we took the two names and called it the H.C. Gallery. And that was frightful. Apparently I am not suited to partnership situations because it seems...I gather since by having analyzed other partnerships that most partnerships are like marriages but you get all the troubles of marriages without any of the fun. It's very rarely that they take. Well, neither of mine took at all. They were conspicuous disasters. At the end of that year Mr. Cudahy was out and I was even more in the hole and I had seven more years to amortize the place. And it looked like it would cost me, besides my time, we had begun to keep it open more hours – even under the Kootz regime the two to four idea seemed to be just a little bit Utopian – I found that I was going to have to kill seven more summers and I'd have to take a few thousand dollars' loss every year. And that seemed rather terrifying. Also before the next year Kootz had finally worked it that I lost Hofmann although I had the contract. I really was ready to give up completely. If it had happened a week later I would have but it gave me just enough time to have a reaction upwards from the lowest point. I said to hell with it, I'll try it one more year; if not, we'll just try to sell the property. Because by this point, you see, another group had become interested. Carmen d' Alessio of Babcock used to come up summers. A lot of his people live here, like Wilson, Martin Friedman, Moran, Manso. Well now, maybe let me go back a little bit again. I think it may have been in 1955, if not 1956, that Harry Salpeter had a try at it. Yes, he was there in 1955. He opened in the west end right around the bend. He had a little – probably just a store which was converted with lights to make a little gallery and he had, oh, people like the old Rockport group, Kaplan, and then some people like Wilson and others. Carmen d' Alessio of the Babcock Gallery had begun to come to town a few years earlier. Some of his people like Wilson who I just mentioned, and Martin Friedman, Moran, Manso, and even Bodkin at the time were here. I mean I think that's why he originally came. They also began talking about the notion of instead of showing at the Shore Galleries which they did, or some of them showing with Salpeter, why couldn't they have a gallery with him to some degree-

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, how about Bodkin? Hadn't he been with your "256" group?

NATHAN HALPER: That's right. In that year, 1955, Bodkin and Manso, the "256" people were showing with me.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

NATHAN HALPER: Some were showing at The Sun during 1955 and some were showing with Salpeter. And some were showing with The Shore. Now, as I think, it may have been an - all right I'll get around to their leaving - but anyway people like Wilson and others who were not affiliated with me, thought wouldn't it be a nice idea to have a gallery run by a professional- as opposed to the non-professionals like us - like d'Alessio who'd had fifty years of experience, and then there wouldn't be any intermediaries, they'd just stay in their Provincetown gallery and their New York gallery working.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What was the gallery that d'Alessio represented?

NATHAN HALPER: The Babcock.

[INTERRUPTION IN TAPING]

NATHAN HALPER: And also, you see, it was a known fact that we were doing badly here. Good Friends would come along and say, "Of course you're doing badly. You're showing this difficult art. You could do much better showing these people who sell, Sol Wilson, Joe Kaplan, etc. Why don't you do that?" And people like Wilson would make hints, why don't you form some sort of group and work out arrangements, etc. etc. So although there was no desire to do it I thought I would have one more year and then, by God, if I still kept losing my shirt I would either let d'Alessio have it if we could agree on the rental, or work some way to just show these people who, although I didn't know much, interested me a lot less than some of the people that I had. Now when I said that in '56 I was - part of the despair of Hofmann was also several other things. By this time "256" had decided that I wasn't doing well and there was no future. And since Busa had dropped out of the picture, they got hold of the same old lease. And despite their former suggestion that they were with me permanently, they went back there. And the word was passed around to all the members that I would not be in business that year so most of them joined up. And then when they found out that I was, a few of them came back and said, "We're sorry. We were misinformed. We intend to be with you next year." But anyway, I had no Hofmann and none of the "256" people. The one thing which I did have, though, - that was before the Hofmann situation arose where I lost him and which left me for a year or two quite bitter - and knowing already that "256" would leave me, I had spoken to Mrs. Hofmann and a few people in the Hofmann group and asked for suggestions. And they suggested some of the more promising Hofmann ex-students - and to the degree that I looked at their work and liked some of in cases, or some of their work in all cases, I first began showing - I mean I first became affiliated with McNeil, Pace, there was also Richenberg, and a few others which Mrs. Hofmann had suggested. I also went out and got some of the younger people who had been showing, I don't know if it was The Sun or a gallery prior to The Sun run by Earl Pilgrim down the line; I think it was The Sun where younger people had been showing. And there I got for the future people like Ippolyto, Gandy Brodie, Wolf Kahn - youngsters around town who were ready to show. So the roster in general I think was quite a great improvement over the roster that I had in 1955. But I also decided now, since I was going to really try to make my last fling, I might as well get some hired help who'd had a little experience. So for the month of July I had Bud Hopkins who had been working at the Poindexter Gallery. And for the month of August I was supposed to have Betsy Zogbaum whom I presume you know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

NATHAN HALPER: She was going to work for me in August. Also, I had formed some sort of affiliation with Chaim Gross to show some sculpture, etc. And meanwhile there was the idea of talking with these other people in case things turned out badly. Salpeter also showed that year but whereas the first year he had a very good year comparatively, sparked by one of those things which sometimes happen in a Provincetown gallery, that is, a terrific run on one person. In this case it was Joe Kaplan who just had a hot show which made the whole season good. The next year all the people who felt that they ought to have a Kaplan had had it; they bought the Kaplan. So Salpeter did badly. I think that was his last year in Provincetown, 1956. Now there was no Mirsky there. Let's see if there were any other there besides this little gallery, I think it was The Sun, by this time with Yvonne Anderson.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What year are we up to now?

NATHAN HALPER: 1956. And I think they were showing Jan Mueller.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

NATHAN HALPER: Lester Johnson and others. Jan Mueller by this time - we had become interested - or by this time it's I - had become interested in Jan Mueller. Jan Mueller had become interested in showing here if for no

other reason than that the walls were better. When he talked to the younger people like Kahn and, the other Hofmann students, he said, "Yes, my friends are showing here and that's where I ought to be, but they've been very nice to me at The Sun and I feel I ought to stay with them."

DOROTHY SECKLER: Who was he with at this time?

NATHAN HALPER: Yvonne Anderson. They were just sort of open at night. She and her husband did some work during the daytime to keep it going. The rent was very nominal and they kept it going in an unprofessional way. They lost money but it really was sort of an idealistic venture and people always had a soft spot for them although it never came down to the point of their buying pictures there. But it always was a good place for the younger people and then you showed them eventually. So they were operating for these younger people and perhaps in a way they were the best gallery in town at the time, I don't know. Now in 1956 we did better. Oh, yes, I got some Nadelmans up that year because a friend of mine lived near Mrs. Nadelmann. She introduced us and after a while I got some little plaster figurines and a few other things. So we had a little run on those. They didn't amount to anything as we sold them at \$60 or \$75. But it got people into the habit of coming in, they felt for the first time that maybe they could get some things there which they couldn't get otherwise, that besides the staples, there might be some little novelty. And so a large number of people really began coming in then. So in that year, in that way it was a bit successful. Also for what it's worth, some people would come in to see Chaim Gross and a few of the others and we began getting for the first time since the first year of Kootz a bit of attendance. Well, I lost money again but this time, and it was the first time, I was down to only a \$700 loss. And also we sold more than we'd ever sold in any of the Kootz regimes. So I tried it again. This brings us to 1957. Now there was no more Salpeter. I think by this time I had Jan Mueller.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You had Milton Avery that year.

NATHAN HALPER: That's the first year I got Milton Avery whom I'd met. He'd been up here in 1956 just in general, you know, not showing anywhere, but I had become acquainted with him and then without knowing much about his work even, I went up to his house, we had a talk, and we decided to have a show - aha - retraction: I had Milton Avery's in 1956; because Betsy Zogbaum was present during the show. Yes, 1956. He'd been up here in 1955 or so and I got talking with him. I did have an Avery show in 1956. I think also that 1956 was the year - one little small item - in which I tired keeping it open till October 1st, for this one time. And I think we may have sold one little Avery which paid for the fellow that I hired for that period. I broke even but it didn't seem to be worthwhile holding it again. It may have been 1957; I mean it's one of those two years. All right. Now in 1957 I also got - which turned out to be a bit more important - Ivan Karp to work for me that summer. And that may have been the summer when I started to stay open at night also. And Ivan Karp was the first salesman I had. Also he got me affiliated with the group at the Hansa Gallery where he was one of the directors. So now I found I had some connection with Stankiewicz, Vorst, and so forth. Incidentally, of the old "256" group one of the few that stayed was Myron Stout who was also a member of the Hansa. So now I had that group which was a bit better. I mean Mothwell had stayed with me all this time and we had Gottlieb in 1957 too.

DOROTHY SECKLER: When did Tworkov _____?

NATHAN HALPER: Tworkov. I think that was after Karp moved from Hansa to Jackson. Let's see, I don't know that we got any Jackson people because of that. But from Jackson he moved on to Castelli. I began showing some of the Castelli people. That was I think maybe about three or four years ago that that happened. But 1957 was the first time we made any profit though it was meager. I mean in 1956 we got the first out-of-town collector coming in. That was Julius Fleischman from Chatham who bought a Gross. He began looking at things here. And then in 1957 we began getting this Canadian, LaRiviere who bought - I forget what year he began buying Averys. The important thing in 1958 was that we had that first big Avery show. We had a show in 1956 but that was stuff brought up from there - the Averys weren't here - they were pictures from all sorts of years. In 1958 he was up here. The show was not unpremeditated. We just had a certain number of pictures. During the summer of 1958 he was just doing sketches and then in August he began painting these very large oils and at some point Mrs. Avery said "I think we have enough for a show here." And I looked at them and agreed. I think 1958 also brought Tirea Karlis. 1957 I think brought Martha Jackson.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. Well, could you go into a little more detail on Martha Jackson and Tirea Karlis?

NATHAN HALPER: All right. Now I'm not sure whether Tirea Karlis wasn't here in 1957 also; it was either 1957 or 1958. But Martha Jackson came up as Steve Joy was working here. Both Joy and Ivan were together at one point but I think Ivan had left already. Steve Joy came up. They had the place that "256" once had.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

NATHAN HALPER: She also said she wanted a place where her help could work in the summertime, that they shouldn't go off some place and that she should not have them. It's my impression she broke even during that period but as she decided it was too much of a nuisance too, from time to time she'd make overtures towards

me, how much would I want to sell my place, the gallery and the house and so forth? We never got around to it because by that time it looked as if I was making money to some degree. And after those lean years it was delightful and I began liking some of the pictures by this point, instead of, you know, being rather cold and just having a personal relationship. Before it was a matter of liking some of the artists and while talking to them here I got to like some of the pictures. And it also became fun after a while to hang pictures. And that sort of became my creative element. Although I had somebody else doing it, no matter who was hanging them the shows after a while began having a certain similarity although any of the six or seven people hung them so I decided I was the one common factor they had. Let's see, after Martha Jackson - let me see, that was the year Lannan showed up.

DOROTHY SECKLER: The collector you mean?

NATHAN HALPER: Yes. It was either 1958 or 1959 that he showed up. Yes, because it was the period - yes, probably 1958, we began getting used to the idea - for the first time - with Lannan and LaRiviere and so forth, and then Chrysler appeared I forgot what year that was; that was the first time we began getting used to the idea that, my God, somebody might buy a picture which cost over a thousand dollars. That was something you know. It never had been considered even under Kootz; I mean if somebody bought something for \$400 it was a very good sale. Now I don't know why that happened, why these people began coming through. [INTERRUPTION IN TAPING] I think it was the Hofmann School. I mean LaRiviere knew the girl there and he showed up I think in the later years of Hofmann when the GI Bill began running out you began getting a number of wealthier people and if not wealthy people, people from other places. I mean here was a girl from Montreal, a collector from Montreal came to see her. It becomes a ticklish question of remembering exactly which year each one was and the other one and the exact order because you had the Martha Jackson interlude, Tirea Karlis, The East End at some point -

DOROTHY SECKLER: Tirea Karlis was here by 1957.

NATHAN HALPER: It might be because when I talk about the Avery show in 1958 I know Tirea Karlis was here already; that I'm sure of. It's just 57 I'm not sure of; but by 1958 she was definitely her because, inelegant or unkind as it sounds, I remember bitching to Mrs. Avery about Tirea Karlis showing Avery also. 1957 was also the first year in which we began selling a number of Averys - no, that was 1958 that we really began selling the Averys. I mean before that in 1956 and 1957 for those two years, although people liked him we sold one \$200 Avery. In 1958 the Avery explosion started. East End I don't know; I think it was after that, 1959 or 1960. Chrysler - let's see, it may have been in 1957 he showed up. Ivan's first year was 1957 and that's when we first became aware of Chrysler.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

NATHAN HALPER: He showed up and we didn't know who he was; a man would come into the galleries once in a while and then suddenly - oh, yes, that's right: I remember it was 1957. It was about that year too, or the year before, I began showing Hartleys which I had purchased from Bertha Schaeffer. That was an important year in the early part of the gallery and then Hudson Walker put me onto the Estate and I'd go down to the Estate and get Hartleys from them and show them here as a regular feature. As a merchant I can remember the years in terms of sales more than anything else. We had a situation where one of the New York galleries bought four Hartleys from me which they could get cheaper from me who got them from the Estate than they could in the normal market. And then there was the Chrysler situation where he made me an offer for four pictures and the total amount of the sale was over \$2,000, and that with the Hartleys sale amounted to \$4,000 that week and I just never heard of a thing like that even under Kootz. You know, he was always talking big but we didn't sell \$4,000 altogether the second year. It was just amazing. But, then, of course, one became aware of how absolutely unpredictable it was - dice falling or lightning striking. But we knew for the first time that things could happen. Now also, alas, for the first time I became aware of the fact that some of the people I had were not too damn good. So just to give you a list of the various problems the gallery began developing: I don't think they were restricted to me, I think they apply to any gallery at some point; unless you start annulling your taster completely you begin realizing that your taste has changed in many cases. And most of us are not able to go to an artist, and say, "Excuse me, I think you're lousy. Please don't show with me this year." So there you have a problem. Then with a little success you begin getting another set of problems. After the "256" affair the artists, although they wanted sales, were not happy unhappy about their representation. They felt everything was very, very, fair and so forth. But as soon as some of them began getting sales I began getting unhappiness, more claims. I mean, "You're not giving me advertising, the attention, the pushing, etc." Also as soon as you begin to get sales you have the problem which they have in every gallery in New York too, as I understand it, of who are the artists selling to in their studios. So you suddenly find yourself having more and more problems. The more you sell and the more help you have, you find that it's taking more and more of your time. Now that I have four people working here it takes me personally twice as much time as it did when I was there all by myself. Now you'll have to pull me back about -

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, you were back in 1957, 1958 and the boom in Averys, and perhaps you'd like to talk

about the changing character of the whole town during those years that was bringing in this business. Do you have any theories about that year?

NATHAN HALPER: Or for several years after. Well, for one thing, a lot of art-loving wealthy people were brought up here by the Hofmann School and Hofmann. The first boom in the Hofmann School was for people on the GI Bill who had no money of their own. A few of the wealthier women got in but as soon as they began painting themselves they didn't buy, unless occasionally as a gesture toward Hofmann or making up to him they would buy a Hofmann. As time wore on several things happened. Some of these students became well-known, which was to the glory of Hofmann among art-lovers. When there was more room in the School after the GI Bill stopped operating, people who were impressed by this teacher of so many artists began coming and they were apt to be buyers. Or even if they weren't in the School it became almost part of a cult, a pilgrimage, - you know, you were in the Cape area, you came up this way and maybe you spent a few hours with Hofmann, or maybe you had dinner with him, or you knew somebody who knew Hofmann and would get to meet him. That became a pretty important thing. Terrific numbers of museum people began coming up to see Hofmann, and other people came up to meet them.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What about the Chrysler Museum? Did that affect you?

NATHAN HALPER: Well, let me continue this. Now a corollary of that was, that as these people began coming up to here certain of the hotels became known as the art-loving crowds' hotels. They were the equivalent of the Cedar Bar in New York. But they were the more expensive hotels, primarily the Seascap and the Colonial. These were run on a rather well-healed basis but at the same time very easy-going. That is, if they thought you were the wrong person you wouldn't get the time of day, but once they accepted you, you sort of had the run of the place - you came in at night and went to the icebox. Everything was run on what turned out to be in later events a very gentlemanly fashion, you just ran up huge bills, nobody asked you anything. All right. Various people in the art world like David Solinger and others would be staying there. When Janis or Martha Jackson came up they would stay there and other people staying there, when they were interested in something, would always ask their advice. The wine-and-dine crowd, wine-and-dine artists used to go up there in the morning and try to hook somebody down to their studio for the next day, woo them, and sell a picture to them. But what concerned me or any gallery like mine was this: These people in general did not buy because they're a smart crowd and they always know they can make a better deal, I mean the Solingers and so forth. His collection is a solid collection. In the first place he's got to think of something that will look right in the Solinger Collection. In the second place he's got an eye to the future market values. I mean if he puts out money he wants to know that this is a very, very good investment and it's better to buy So-and-So than A.T. & T. or something of that sort. They're all very conscious of that. Or in some cases they become good friends of a certain artist; they can even in some cases buy from artists and bypass galleries. Or a man like Solinger can do some legal work for some artist or gallery and take a picture as his payment. So in that sense many of them just don't buy. But they're known as big shots. When they say "So-and-So has got a nice picture down at the H.C.E.," they don't have to buy, but everybody within hearing begins trooping down to the H.C.E. And even though I may not get any purchases it gives you the excitement. But what is perhaps more important is that these people at the Seascap flatter themselves that they're in the know. Once you're "in the know" you don't have to buy anything. But they had friends who had stayed at, let us call them the "square" hotels, the Provincetown Inn, and so forth, and they would ask what shows to go to around town. These people who had gotten it from Solinger or somebody like that would pass it on to these other people and they would buy. I don't know if it was a healthy situation but it was a promoting situation. All right. Then you had the Chrysler thing. The effect was not good. The first two years were absolutely demoralizing for the art colony in town. The unknown always has certain mysterious aspects and nobody knew what Chrysler was like. They just knew there's this legendary figure who's apt to drop into your studio when you least expect him and say, "I'm Walter Chrysler. I would like to look at your pictures." And if he liked them maybe he'd buy thirty or forty. Or at least that was the rumor anyway. And you know that would be like lightning striking, would take care of your summer, or even take care of your year. And how wonderful! We began hearing of certain artists with whom he did that, I mean Busa and Yamamoto and others. Of course, in their cases he gave them outrageous prices but since they sold forty or so they really made a fair amount.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You mean outrageously low?

NATHAN HALPER: Yes. Yes. At first the rumors began that he gave incredibly bad prices but you found that, since he might buy in bulk, you might be ready to forgive that.

END OF INTERVIEW

Last updated... *August 25, 2004*