



Smithsonian
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Oral history interview with Abraham
Walkowitz, 1958 December 8-22

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Transcript

Interview

AL: Abram Lerner

AW: Abraham Walkowitz

BC: Bartlett Cowdrey

AL: Well, you know what we have to do here, Walky, is to be as informal as possible because you understand how the tape operates you can do anything with tape it can be used or not used cleaned off. So that you don't have to get the feeling that whatever you say is there for good and you can't correct yourself or anything of the sort. But primarily what we are interested in is finding out all about you, it is simple as that. You have to go back to your childhood and tell us a little about yourself.

AW: Since I can't see, I don't remember too well, there's a reason. How can I talk if I don't see? AL You find the connection? People talk in their sleep, you know.

BC: Well, we are very much interested in your earliest memories even if they don't go back much beyond.

AW: I don't remember much of my youth, you know. I don't know why; I was sick once, measles or something. Maybe it's a good thing I don't remember.

AL: Where were you born?

AW: I was born in Siberia. The same place where Irving Berlin was (born) . . .

AL: How old were you when you came to this country?

AW: Eight or nine. I don't remember much of Russia. But the traveling was wonderful. It took us two and a half months to get here. I remember gypsies and all those things. It was fantastic. I remember my father. There was a certain legal thing, where you must take the children. And so they ordered him to come there and explain what Judaism is, to those who didn't know.

AL: And this was to the young Jewish soldiers.

AW: So he was in the government there, you see, and that's where I was born. And he explained to them what Israel, the Jewish religion is, and so on, they didn't know anything, they took them away as children. So they knew they were born Jewish. So he explained to them what it is, and he was the leader of them all. He was there for many years. Then he went to China, he sort of became a legal person, and he didn't want to become a Rabbi. He was a scholar. And he brought over Irving Berlin's father. And Irving Berlin was born in the same place I was, in Siberia. And he went to China when I was about four years old, not quite four, and I don't remember my father. He died there, you see.

AL: Did you have a large family?

AW: There were my two sisters, one died, and the other one died not long ago, and I was the only one of the three of us . . . And so Irving Berlin's father I knew him as Baline. Not Berlin. His name is not Berlin. But I haven't seen him in a long time. Once I had a chance to see him, Irving Berlin, during the Second World War. You know in those canteens? I met a man from the Journal (American) who was a music critic so I said, "Hello, what are you doing here?" "I'm here to contact Irving Berlin." So when I heard that name, you know, not meeting him since he was 12 years old, I said, "I'd just like to, I'm going with you." He said, "Sure, come on." So I came there to the Canteen and he wasn't there yet. Some of the people appeared, it was in a sort of basement. So I waited for Irving Berlin. People began to sing, I don't know their names. And then they wanted to announce Irving Berlin. But they said, "No, he's not here." They said, "He'll be here soon, in five minutes." I stood near the door, and he came in. And I tell him, "How can I make myself known?" So I said, "(spoken in Jewish)" And he said, "I'm busy, I gotta go down." So he went down. And he appeared on the stage there singing, and he sang like a dead cat. What he sings is good, but if he didn't sing it it would be much better. So then he sang a couple of songs, and I was so discouraged, I was much disappointed.

AL: Well, he was a song writer, not a singer.

AW: Yes, so I kept thinking, what can I do to make him know that I have known him since a child. So I saw him; "I'm going out," he says; "You know, I have to appear somewhere," and he is busy. So I says, "You're Irving Berlin, Moishe Balin's son," and he says, "I'm busy," So a couple of months later, there is a show on Broadway, where his music was. And he was in the musical himself. And I stood in the door, in the corridor where the photographs were hung, and I looked at them, and I didn't even know what it was, I stood there, and looked at

the photographs it was the second night. So he comes out, I recognized him, he had to get a pack of cigarettes. So I said to him, "You know, I stopped you, and I come from Siberia, born the same place as you." Quickly, I said this. So he said, "Come to my place, I haven't got time, my publishing house." You know, he had a publishing house. So a month later I pass by and I see his office, and I said, "I'll make another attempt," and I walked in, I saw the secretary, and said, "I want to see Mr. Irving Berlin; will you please tell him I am Walkowitz, the artist from Siberia, so he should know." She said he was busy, in a conference. So I said, "All right, I'll wait." She gave him my card, you know, and I told her my name was Walkowitz from Siberia, an old friend of the family. And I waited about twenty minutes, and when he finished the conference, he walked out and forgot about me. So I followed him and I says, "You know, that's the third time. First and second, you probably didn't know. Now I tell myself, "Something's wrong," He says, "I'm very busy, I have to go to the Equity." It was just a few blocks from there. So he said, "Come along." In the street, we were walking, and I explained to him. And he was thinking of all the things he had to do and so on. Until I walked him up to the Club, and he said, "Here's my address. If you want to see me, write to me. Otherwise I don't want to see you at all." And that's all, that's the last I saw of him. A:; He was evidently not interested.

AW: I am going on 82; I was 81 last March. But in black and white I am only 78. My mother made me two years younger in order to get me out. They needed the boys there for the Army. And so she had to fool them, make me younger. Not the girls, but the boys.

BC: Mr. Walkowitz, we would like to test this tape to see how it is coming through.

AL: I guess I should ask you the most pertinent question.

AW: Why was I born?

AL: No, not why you were born, but what made you become an artist? How did you know?

AW: You know artists are born and not made.

AL: Well, what led you to become an artist?

AW: A spirit. When I was a kid, about five years old, I used to draw with chalk, all over the floors and everything, you see. I suppose it's in me. I remember myself as a little boy, of three or four, taking chalk and made drawings. I suppose I just had to become an artist.

AL: You always drew, in other words. Did you get any schooling in art while you were in Russia? You were very young, you said.

AW: No, I used to draw copies from pictures.

AL: Did you draw in school?

AW: Not very much. At home I used to draw.

AL: You got mostly a religious training, didn't you?

AW: No, not too much.

AL: Did you go to a Russian public school?

AW: Yes, a private school. We were rich people in Russia. My father was a wealthy person. We had a maid, and she was Russian, and I never spoke Jewish; I had to learn Jewish here.

AL: Well then, what happened when you came to the United States?

AW: Well, I came to the United States with my mother and two sisters. My sisters started to work, and my mother had to do something. And I went to school, I was young, and I wanted my education. And in school I was a very good draftsman, the teacher was proud of me.

BC: What school was this?

AW: The school is already long gone. It was Chrystie Street. They demolished it. In the beginning I lived on Essex Street, where the park is now. It has been destroyed.

AL: Oh yes, near where the Educational Alliance is, at the moment.

AW: That block and two other blocks have been destroyed, so there is no record of all this.

BC: How long did you attend the public school?

AW: I hardly even graduated, because I had to go sell newspapers.

AL: Here your family was not rich. Here they were poor.

AW: They took everything away from us, we couldn't save a thing.

AL: Did you go to Art School?

AW: When I was about fourteen, I started with the Cooper Union art school for a few months. Then I went to the Artists' Institute on 23rd Street. The teacher there was Walter Shirlaw, a very fine teacher, and he really has taken a great interest. In fact in that very same school [Henry] McBride was also a student.

AL: He was a student of painting?

AW: Yes. Then McBride was a teacher at the Educational Alliance. He started in there probably about 1898 or something like that. Before 1900 I was studying at the National Academy on 23rd Street. Then it moved up to 109th Street and Amsterdam Avenue.

AL: All this time you were still living on the lower East Side.

AW: And then I moved up on Third Street. And near Third Street, a few blocks away, on Second Street they had a cafeteria, G and G. And I used to walk to 23rd street to save carfare to the National Academy.

AL: With whom did you study at the National Academy?

AW: Numerous teachers. The fact is, I didn't want to study with them. Whenever they came around to correct my drawings, I'd go away. I knew there was something wrong.

AL: You mean you didn't trust the Academicians from the start? You had a prejudice.

AW: I had a prejudice. I don't know why. Francis Jones was there and Ward. Ward, he was not bad. I had many destructors, I call them. I call everyone, instead of an instructor, I call them a destructor.

AL: Were you teaching at that time already?

AW: No, later on. At the Educational Alliance. I started in 1900.

BC: But Shirlaw was your first teacher?

AW: Yes, because in Cooper Union, I don't remember who it was, I was there just a short time, about a month.

AL: What about your fellow artists?

AW: I already exhibited in 1900. And in 1902 I arranged an exhibition at the University Settlement, with many other artists. But I arranged it. The University Settlement was a Guild, you see. Down on Eldridge, or someplace around there. I still have the catalog. (Mr. Walkowitz presented a copy of the catalogue to the Archives)

AL: It would be very interesting for us to have.

AW: I'll bring it in.

BC: What was the name of the exhibiting group?

AW: It was the Art Cultural League.

AL: Connected with the Settlement House?

AW: No, we just used the room.

AL: Who were some of the artists who showed at that time, any we would know?

AW: No, they are all dead; I am the only one that survived.

AL: Well, you knew Jacob Epstein.

AW: Yes, sure, I knew Jacob Epstein, and I knew his friend Gussow [Bernard Gussow; 1881-] who was there at that time but Jacob Epstein just left, he left 1902.

AL: Did you know him before he left? He was an East Side boy.

AW: Yes, in fact, he was knighted about three years ago. I met his brother (he was a physician), and I met him in the garden of the Modern Museum, and he was standing near one of his [brother's] statues. The mother and child. And I said, "Isn't that nice, that Jack (we called him Jack) was knighted?" He says, "Yes, Sir Jacob Epstein from 102 Hester Street, Bakery and Bagel."

AL: Was his father a baker?

AW: Yes, his father was a baker.

BC: Who else do you remember as prominent in the art field in 1900-1902?

AW: I knew them, but they died, or went away.

AL: Did you know any of the important figures? Did you ever get to meet some of the artists who at that time were already very famous or fashionable?

AW: Oh, I've known many, many of the Academicians.

AL: Did you know any of The Eight aside from Sloan?

AW: Oh yes, I knew Sloan, Childe Hassam, all The Eight, you know.

AL: Did you know people like Chase?

AW: Oh, yes. I attended his lectures on 57th Street. The building is now gone. And what his lectures made me do is this. Whenever he would lecture on Dutch art (he would lecture on Spanish art and so on) he would always say, "Rembrandt the Jew." And when he came to Rembrandt he would say, Rembrandt the Jewish artist. So year after year, I attended his lectures because they were very interesting. And in 1906 I went to Europe. I went up to his [Chase's] studio at 51 West 10th Street. He made a sketch for me too at that time, he gave it to me, but I lost it. And I said, "I'm leaving for France, but I'll be in Holland, but whenever you lectured on Dutch art, you invariably said, Rembrandt the Jew." He says, "Sounds better that he's a Jew."

AL: He was his own kind of scholar. Did you know (men) like Kenyon Cox?

AW: Very well. I studied sculpture with George Grey Barnard for a short time. You would go up there and change the teacher for a couple of times, and then not appear.

BC: Well, the Art Students League has only been in existence . . . [Established in 1875]

AW: For a short time, yes. I was mostly at the Academy.

AL: What made you go to Europe to begin with?

AW: Well, you see at that time it was important to go to Europe. Not now. I don't advise nobody to go to Europe, because we had the best exhibitions, we have the finest collections now, in New York. The best Museums. The Metropolitan is really a classic, and all the rest of them. But in those times there was no spirit, there were no schools, or just a few of them. So I thought, I'll go to Europe, because Epstein went to Europe, so I must go too! I was planning to go at the same time as Epstein, in 1902, but he illustrated that book** called The Spirit of the Ghetto about and I was to do that book too, but I said I have some other things to do, so you go ahead. And for that money, he had \$400, he went to Europe. First in France and then he made his home in London.

AL: He stayed on.

BC: I wonder if the names alone would recall.*

AW: Artists of Walkowitz. Well, this is real it takes an idiot to do an experiment like this, to pose for 100 artists. A whole year it took me, morning, day, evening, to make arrangements. I didn't pay anything to them, you see; it was all free.

BC: Well, I think it was a wonderful idea.

AW: It's an experiment, and as I told you it takes a madman to do a thing like that. It's a wonderful experiment, it's a research job. I told Nelson Rockefeller, I says, "You know, I'm entitled to at least \$100,000 to make the experiment of 100 Artists." And I said, "You know, I did the equivalent of what the Rockefeller Institute is doing. I'm going to send the bill for \$100,000 to the Rockefeller Institute." He says, "Keep on sending it."

BC: You must have had very interesting reactions to the portraits.

AW: I could write a book about it.

BC: Well, this is your chance, you just dictate it, Mr. Walkowitz. Any of your thoughts.

AW: How can I remember all those things a whole year. It was a struggle. When I came to look at the exhibition, it was in the Brooklyn Museum; it opened on March 8, 1944. I came there and suddenly I see people with cameras there, ready to take movies with lights and all. I was scared. I didn't expect that. So I had to announce the exhibition, and be in the lights, and I thought I would become a movie star. I was afraid of that. That movie short was shown at Broadway and 47th Street a few days after that.

AL: So you were a celebrity in the movies as well.

AW: Everybody knew me and would say, "Here come the man with 100 heads."

BC: They took a movie? A newsreel? That's something we ought to locate for the Archives.

AW: Oh, yes. I don't know Paramount or somewhere? I never acquired one.

BC: The Brooklyn Museum could tell us about it.

AW: At that time Baur was there, you know, the one at the Whitney. He was the man who arranged it, he probably knows. It was a surprise to me, the whole thing, and I sat there looking at the pictures, and I couldn't believe that I did it. But you see, after that I lost my vision. After looking at the portraits, I lost my vision.

AL: You've never really lost your vision, Walky, only your eyesight, temporarily.

AW: I blamed it on the portraits. They did this to me. I always say, "I'm kill-proof."

AL: Well, let's get back just for a moment to your first trip abroad.

AW: Yes, I left in 1906 and I stopped in London for about a week. I met Epstein for a bit, and then from London I went to Holland for awhile, about two months. And of course I went to all the museums, and to all the fishing places, and I made a lot of pencil notes, material. Then I went to Schevegnan that's were Israel (lived), Joseph Israel you know he died in 1911. I was there in 1906, and I visited him in his studio and we had a nice conversation. I told him the experiences I had, and I said, "Mr. Israel, who do you think is a good Jewish artist?" He said, "Well, Rembrandt, of course."

AL: He and Chase agreed.

AW: Yes, and Max Libermann too. In Germany, in 1930 I went to Germany, and I got together with Max Libermann, and I say, and he says, "Of course. Inevitably. Somewhere in Rembrandt there is Jewish blood. He may be a half one." So we agreed.

AL: From Holland you went to . . .

AW: Then back to England for about three or four days, and then to Paris.

AL: How long did you stay there?

AW: I stayed there until 1907, and in 1907 I went to Italy. I stayed there, and I came here in 1908. I was three different times in Paris. 1914, before the war, and then in 1930 I had a big exhibition of Isadora Duncan, a memorial. A hard loss.

AL: When you were in France, you must have met some American artists there.

AW: Oh, I met many artists.

BC: Mr. Weber.

AW: Yes, Weber, we went together to the Julian Academy.

AL: You were good friends.

AW: I met Max Weber there 1906. In 1906 when I came to Paris, [Cezanne died, not on account of me.] However, all the newspapers came out; it was October 22, 1906. All the newspapers came out this way: "Cezanne, an artist, died. An artist of no importance, no loss to the world. He had the distorted eye of an ape."

That was about Cezanne, in all the art magazines, with the exception of one or two who were a little more favorable. He was a modern who was the father and mother of modern art.

BC: He was important enough to hit the headlines, in spite of their criticism.

AL: In a negative kind of way. Well, had you been familiar with the work of the so-called avant garde in Paris at the time?

AW: Well, I seen them in papers here, and magazines.

AL: Did you see exhibitions of their work, the Impressionists, in Paris?

AW: Oh, I seen a lot of course. From the first day on. Just a week after I came, Cezanne died. The whole town was mad about Cezanne. It was Cezanneitis, Picassoitis and Matisseitis. Those are the three poisonous things for the artist. The American artists began to ape Cezanne, and that was a disease, you know. I called it Matisseitis, Picassoitis, and Cezanneitis. It's a dangerous thing. I never did that. In fact I was ashamed if any of my paintings resembled a Matisse, Picasso, or Braque. Or Cezanne. I was proud of them, but I never wanted to imitate them. It is not putting flowers on their graves, but putting manure.

AL: Picasso and Matisse were already well-known when you came there?

AW: Well, not too well known.

AL: Weber was studying with Matisse, wasn't he?

AW: Yes, when I left for Italy. He came a year later than I did. So then we were in school, and went to Italy together for a short time. And I remained in Italy and he went back to France. And I came back a year before he did.

AW: Well, tell me Walky, what attracted you to this new mode of expression? After all, your background had been National Academy, Art Students League. What made you become attracted to this new way of looking and seeing?

AW: Because I felt the reality of it. I prepared myself in a way to see it. I had seen the Monet exhibition here; it was in the old Parke Bernet* Gallery on 23rd Street. There was a whole big Monet exhibition. Of every church painted at different hours. And that made me see modern art. And when I came I was already prepared.

AL: Did you see it as anything distorted or unusual?

AW: No. There was no prejudice. It seemed right, and everything first has to be wrong and then to be right. In order to be right you must first be wrong.

BC: But it is interesting that you saw this European art here in New York City.

AW: Sure, I saw the Claude Monet Exhibition, where the church was painted every hour different. And that made me really think.

AL: That was the big Monet show here.

BC: That would have been perhaps 1905.**

AW: Oh, no, way before that, I think.

BC: We can hunt up that.

AW: But I had seen exhibitions at Durand-Ruel; they had modern art. I was scared but it impressed me as being very, very logical.

AL: Do you feel that your trip to Europe when you were such a young man, do you feel it reflected itself into your work? It stimulated me. It made me see. In fact, the trip to Italy, looking at Giotto, Cimabue, the primitives, we couldn't see here. Now we have primitives, but not at that time. It certainly opened my eyes, but I was ready to see it.

BC: Did you have the feeling that you would like to continue to live in Europe?

AW: No. I always looked forward to get back. I was there three different times. In 1906, '07, '08. Then I was there 1914, and I was stuck there, I had to remain another year on account of the war. I went to Greece, to stay about three months. And two days before I left Greece, they knew there was going to be the First World War. I met a

sister of Bernard Berenson, and her husband, who was Mr. Abbott, he was from the Smithsonian Institute (sic.). And she says, "You know, Mr. Walkowitz (I had told her I was planning to go to Israel, Egypt. Egyptian art I wanted to study, and so on) she says, "We just heard about two days ago, there's going to be war, definitely so. So we are changing our plans, and I would advise you also to change plans." I say, "I will follow your advice." So I took the boat in the morning early, at 6:00 o'clock, and the first stop was Trieste. Venice was just about an hour away. So I arrived about 11:00 in Venice, and by 1:00 the papers came out, "Deutsche alla Guerra!" That means, "The Germans are at war." And I am safe with my Russian name. If I had remained in Trieste, I would have been locked up as a spy. So it's a fortunate thing that this thing happened. So I stayed another year in Italy. I went to Venice for a few months, and Florence again . . . END OF TAPE 1 TAPE 2

AL: What happened after you came back to the United States, after the first trip in 1908?

AW: I went from one gallery to another to see if I could arrange an exhibition. They looked at the drawings and said, "My dear Mr. Walkowitz, you don't expect us to show these works of art. We'll lose our clients." Of course at that time, in 1908, there were only about eight galleries, not like the 220 now.

BC: Milch?

AW: No, Milch came later on. There was about six or eight galleries. I was discouraged. I walked up and down Madison Avenue and decided I would play the violin. I was not a master player, but I had played for some years. But I didn't like my violin the sound of the violin, it hurt my ears. So I said, "No, what's the use of playing if I can't listen to myself." And about all this, I couldn't play somebody else's music. I had to create my own. So it scared me, harmony, counterpoint, and all those things. I was foolish. I should have not listened, and played my own music. Well, however, I got so mad at the tone of the violin that I broke it. One morning I wouldn't go near the violin. If it were a Cremona, I certainly wouldn't do that. That's the fault, I didn't have a Cremona, or a Strad numerous artists I have known here [and dealers], Mr. Brummer, Kraushaar, and of course Epstein came later. Then I met Weber, and I met Hopper, there. Numerous artists, I met there. And then the Russian artists whom I met spoke French. I visited the Rodin studio once a week in the afternoons. And at that time I met Brancusi and Despiau who worked for him as laborers.

AL: Worked for Rodin?

AW: Yes, it was a beautiful place. It was an inspiration. You grew in his presence, he was such a wonderful person. And there I met other people, artists. I went to exhibitions, at the Louvre, and I attended concerts. I was in the spirit. Paris was really Paris at that time. There were not many Americans. I lived, of course, in the American quarter, and I didn't learn French. I had to speak to the French in English. They wanted to learn English from me, and I had forgotten. When I came back I found I had improved my English in Paris. I studied, of course, at the Academy Julian. For a short time I went to the Academie des Beaux Arts, but I didn't like it. That's where I met Weber, in the classes there, and we became very good friends. Then I decided to go to Italy, it was just at Easter. And Weber followed me a couple of days later. He just happened to make one of those excursions, you know, one of those cheap excursions. I met Weber and we went to Florence and Venice together, and then to a little country place in Anticoli-Corrado, it's near Rome, about an hour and a half. And I remained in Italy and Weber went back to Paris. I was to go back to Paris, but I received a letter from my sister that my mother took sick, so I had to come back. So I came back earlier than I expected. When I came back, I found it very, very hard to get an exhibition. I walked from one gallery to the other. Nothing. I used to play duets with this man, Julius Haas. I lost track of him. But I walked down Madison Avenue between 59th and 60th Streets, and I see a man standing in his store; a little gallery. He had no pictures, except in back there, but he used to frame photographs and Gainsborough prints. He had fairly nice clients there. And he stopped me, "Hello, Walky." "Hello, Julius. Listen, Julius, say yes," when he showed me the back gallery.

AL: Where was the gallery?

AW: Between 59th and 60th, it's demolished now. On the west side of Madison. So I said, "You have a nice little place here. You say yes to me, and I'll tell you what it is." He says, "Yes." "Do you own this?" He says, "Yes." So I says, "Listen. I'd like to have this gallery for about a month or six weeks." He says, "You can have it. I'll take all the things out, you can have it tomorrow." I said, "I can't have it by tomorrow, but in about a week. I have to frame those things, mount them, mat them and so on." So in about a week after that I arranged an exhibition of drawings and paintings, and that was the first modern exhibition held here, of modern art. In 1908, the end of January.

BC: That was just a short time after the exhibition of The Eight.

AW: Yes. I was to be really in that group, but I was away so long. I knew all of them.

BC: But yours was a one-man show.

AW: Yes. And the newspapers just roasted me. With the exception of one critic. It was at that time, there was a critic, Rehn's father was a critic on the Herald Tribune. He was a marine painter, but he was also a critic. And he just slapped me silly. "Of no importance." But one person, who had just started to write about art a few months before, it was a woman critic, I've forgotten her name. She had written a book about that time, I believe, on William Blake, and you have to know something to do this, so she was very good.

BC: Elisabeth Luther Carey.

AW: Yes. She gave me a very nice criticism. But the others just roasted me. But one, DuBois, who was a critic on the Journal, he commented that, "That the first Fauve (madman) like Matisse, is Walkowitz with his monstrosities on the walls of Julius Haas [Gallery]. This brought a lot of people. You know, like they went to see the gorillas and monkeys in the zoo. They came. Crowds. Crowds after crowds. I had to extend the exhibition for another three weeks. It attracted great attention no sales, except good roastings. Of course I was discouraged, I knew my subject well, I was a good fighter. I knew at that time Emma Goldman. You know, I was a radical. I was fearless. There were no "Ifs" with me. I knew I was right. In order to be right you must first always be wrong, and then you are right. I always say there are three things we have to go through in life. First state is fear, second state is sneer, third state is cheer. First they fear an idea, it disturbs their equilibrium, so they fear it. Second state is, they say, "Only a few cranks like it, so it's not popular." Then when everybody begins to like the thing, they all cheer. So it's fear, sneer and cheer, that we have to go through in politics, and in all progress we have to go through those three states. I was a good fighter, and I was fighting day and night at the gallery. In the weekend, I was invited to the Society, to all the rich millionaires, at tables, to talk. And they invited Professors from Columbia, History of Art, and so on. So I made nothing out of them at the table. Because I knew they were laughing at it. So when they were laughing at it, I said, "The joke is on you."

BC: The following year, did you have another exhibition?

AW: Yes no. The following year Weber came. I met them the first day he came, and I went to Brooklyn to see him at his father's place. I had known already where his father lived, because we used to correspond, and I told him, when I came from Italy, "I'll see your father, and I'll give regards from Max." His father and mother were very religious. And he couldn't even open a drawing there. So I said, "Max, you come to my studio." I had a studio on 23rd Street, right near the Parke-Bernet at that time.*(pg21) So he came the following day, and I had a cot, and by pulling out the cot this way, we slept in one cot. almost three months he was with me. I had to do something else in order to earn a little money, and he was there in my studio, and he had to go out and find out for himself what I told him, "You go into the galleries." I wanted him to get the same experience that I did. He became discouraged, and said, "Oh, I'd like to go back to Europe. I can't take this. There's nothing, nothing. I can't arrange an exhibition. They don't even want to look at photographs." So I went to Julius Haas, with whom I had had that exhibition. I said, "Julius, you must do me a favor." He says, "You know, I lost many customers on account of you. There was a lot of noise, and the people and I lost a lot of trade." I said, "Julius, you're a sport. Do me a favor. He's a very good artist. I believe in him. Give him an exhibition." I pleaded with him until he decided. And I took Weber over to the gallery, and he gave him an exhibition. Otherwise he wouldn't have had an exhibition. And through me he met a collector who was his lifelong friend, who helped him, gave him money, and bought from him. Because he met her through me, she was a friend of mine Mrs. Miller, whom I've known for many years. [She's dead now] And she took an interest, and she introduced him to her friend, who was a rich woman, Mrs. Nathan Miller, banker's wife. And she took interest in Weber, and she bought, and she helped him, and so on. That's the way it happened.

AL: This man, Hess, continued to show art in his gallery?

AW: Not for a long time. He had a mastoid operation and he died.

AL: Well, then you were sort of picked up by Stieglitz, weren't you?

AW: Then, later on, 1911 I was picked up by Stieglitz. In 1910 Weber was with Stieglitz, for a short time, they had a quarrel after that, in eight or ten months. And then Hartley came over to me and brought me out to Stieglitz, and I had an exhibition at Stieglitz in 1911. I was with him until 1917, because the building came down. It was 291, a little brownstone. And that was the smallest gallery, but the biggest gallery. Small in size, but big in activity. He was a live wire. Stieglitz was Stieglitz. And I stayed with him. I used to come into the gallery at 10:00 o'clock and stay until 10:00 at night. And I lived at that time about 18 blocks from him. He was on 83rd Street and Madison Avenue, and I was on 103rd Street and Madison Avenue, with a cousin of mine, who was a doctor. And so I used to be with him every day, from ten in the morning to ten at night.

AL: You used to help him out in the gallery.

AW: Yes. I used to hang and advise him. He was a good fighter, but he didn't know too much about inner things. But he was like a good lawyer, he could fight. And that's where he put it all. And then he met his wife. She was of the Obermaier Brewing Company family and she was very rich. He had a little money that his father left to him,

but he couldn't pay the expenses. There used to be a Holland House, eight or ten people at a table, and he would walk off with the bill for \$40.00. That meant a lot, not like now. And he used to have all the critics, and musicians. Stieglitz was instrumental, through the gallery, and through Weber and myself, and Arthur B. Davies, and The Eight to organize the Armory Exhibition. Walter Pach was the man they sent over to Europe, and Kuhn. Kuhn did much of the work; with Walter Pach; he was instrumental to collect, because he knew all the artists, and he was really responsible for the Armory Exhibition. With the exception that Arthur B. Davies he was the spirit, and he got the money for it. He was a very popular man, Arthur B. Davies, at that time. And they got together, and they made an exhibition called the Armory, the famous Armory Exhibition. 26th and Lexington Avenue. It was held there for six weeks. [February 18 to March 15, 1913]

BC: That building is still standing. [Lexington Avenue and 25th Street]

AL: Previous to the Armory Show, to the decision to have the show at the Armory, there was an organization wasn't there? An artists' organization set up sort of to counter the Academy?

AW: Yes, that was the Artists' Equity. I've forgotten the name.

AL: Wasn't there a disagreement within the organization as to the effect of the Armory Show?

AW: No. After it was organized, it all went well. It was the most wonderful exhibition ever held here.

AL: As I recall, St. Gaudens was part of the organization.

AW: St. Gaudens? No. There were 20 directors.

AL: Well, I recall reading that there was a split in the organization.

BC: The Society of Independent Artist?

AL: No, that was later on.

AW: That was started in 1917; this was 1913, the Society was started in 1917, at the Grand Central Place on Lexington Avenue. The first exhibition.

AL: Well, tell us a little about the Armory Show.

AW: The Armory Show was just simply crowds day and night. And what made popular the Armory Show was the Nude Descending the Staircase. They all thought they did see the nude, and they didn't see the staircase. It was the title, you see. And hundreds and thousands of people paid admission to the Nude Descending the Staircase. It was the name that attracted the people. Of course the publicity was tremendous. And then it went to Chicago, the exhibition, and many of the pictures were sold, not too many. (Arthur Jerome Eddy) was a rich lawyer in Chicago, and he bought numerous pictures.

BC: I suppose John Quinn?

AW: Yes, John Quinn was helpful.

BC: And Lizzie Bliss.

AW: Lizzie Bliss. She was very helpful too. Because she was a great friend of Arthur B. Davies. He decorated her music room. I was there when they opened the music room. She was a wonderful person, Lizzie Bliss, a princess; the Lady in Black, we used to call her. Arthur B. Davies and Lizzie Bliss were instrumental in opening the Modern Museum. I happened to be in Arthur B. Davies' studio when there was a meeting held, unexpectedly. Lizzie Bliss came there, Mrs. Sullivan and Mrs. Rockefeller, and another member of the salon. And that was the first meeting they had to organize the Museum of Modern Art, in Arthur B. Davies' studio. I was on 57th Street, near the river. But the Armory was the whole thing organized, and it brought Modern Art to the United States.

BC: What about Katherine Dreier?

AW: She was with the Society of Independent Artists.

BC: Did she have any relationship with the Armory.

AW: No, not with the Armory. She was the Society of Independent Artists. She was the one who organized. She used to write and lecture, she was sympathetic to the idea. And she was the one who organized the Society of Independent Artists. It was based on the French idea Societe Independente. And of course we can write books about the Armory exhibition, it was day and night, the press, the publicity. There was a very good man by the

name of Greg, and at that time James Huneler, he was a music critic he was one of the earliest men to encourage modern art. He had written already in 1904 about Richard Strauss, and then he published a book *The Promenades of Modern Art*.*(pg 26) There he speaks already of Cezanne. He was one of the very early critics who encouraged modern art. Fearlessly. But who discouraged it was Kenyon Cox. He hated modern art like poison.

BC: Then Willard Huntington Wright, in 1917 . . .

AW: He wrote a book on modern art, he mentions my name there. By the way, that's the man who later on became Van Dyne, and has written detective stories.

BC: The world lost a good art critic.

AW: His brother is Macdonald-Wright. He is a good artist.

AL: Do you feel generally that the critics played a positive role in advancing the cause of modern art?

AW: Well there James Huneker McBride probably was one of our best critics. He was instrumental to further modern art here in this country. Fearlessly so. He just started to write a short time after the Armory Show, the following year. There was a man by the name of Swift, and he took sick, and he took his place. McBride was the first modern art critic. He himself (was) a very good artist.

BC: McBride succeeded Samuel Swift?

AW: Yes, right after the Armory.

AL: Do you feel that criticism has had any effect on your work at all?

AW: No, I am never a slave to criticism. Only men like McBride and Huneker used to come a great deal to the Stieglitz place. Stieglitz's place was an organization where all the artists, musicians critics, would come together to the Holland House, to a table, and sit all together, eight or ten, and he would pay all the bills. It was an outlet for all ideas. And Stieglitz was of course very sympathetic to all those people. He would make modern art exhibitions, Rodin, Cezanne, Brancusi, all the best artists started with Stieglitz. He was the pioneer of modern art. Weber had an exhibition there. Many of the best exhibitions of that time were held at Stieglitz, up until 1917. Then Miss O'Keeffe, not her, but a friend of hers, came to the gallery and showed him charcoal drawings, and said, "You know, I have a friend and she sent me these drawings from Texas; a schoolteacher; her name is O'Keeffe, and I would like you to look at these drawings." (I've forgotten her name she was a little girl) So we unrolled it. The gallery was very small, like an incubator, but there was a back space about 12 foot square. And when unrolled it and put it on the floor, and Stieglitz looked at it, and finally he said, "What do you think of it, Walkowitz?" I said, "I think, with woman suffrage and all, I think it would be a good idea to have a woman on the walls. He says, "Good idea!" So I put it up, I put O'Keeffe on the walls. She wasn't here, and I put it up on the walls. Stieglitz was occasionally sick. He had a bad heart, so he didn't appear at the premier, the opening. But who comes up the critic took sick, so who comes up but another man on the paper who reports fires, and horse-races, and so on; they sent him to cover the exhibition. And he comes up to me and says, "You know, the man who writes about art is sick, and they gave me this assignment to write about this exhibition." And I says, "My dear sir, I can't talk about the pictures, but I'll explain something about it." So he said, "I'll follow your advice; what would you tell me?" I said, "I'm not telling you anything, but I am telling you that this is a very advanced art, you have to see it in an entirely different way than you came here; besides that, you don't understand it very well." So he said, "I'm gong to send somebody else." But the same thing happened in 1911 with me. Also, something happened to the critic, and they sent another man who was also a reporter who had nothing to do with art. And Stieglitz wasn't at the gallery. Something happened to him, he fell. So he came up to me and said, "I was sent here because the critic couldn't come. I have to cover it." I said, "I tell you Mr. Boswell (that was his name the father of the son of the Art Digest). I am going to speak in the second person, not about my art, but of somebody else's art, not mine. And I'll explain something to you." And I spent with him over an hour. And he said, "You know, I have three more assignments for tomorrow. I have one at the Knoedlers, one at the Durand-Ruel. Can you help me out? If you can do it by tomorrow, and come to the gallery, I'll be there at this hour." "I'll tell you what, I'll call up Stieglitz or his wife, and find out if he can be here tomorrow; otherwise I couldn't do it." So I found out that he'll be here the following day. So I came there to the gallery, and I spent with him two and a half hours.

AL: This was Boswell, Peyton Boswell.

AW: Yes, the father, Senior. And he said, "From that time I became a critic." He used to call me papa. I used to call him son.

BC: This was 1911.

AW: Yes, 1911. So I made many critics. At the Societe Independente I made many critics. I was Vice President. I knew my subject well, and there were a lot of amateurs.

AL: Well, tell me, how did the Society of Independent Artists begin?

AW: Well, Miss Dreier was the moving spirit. They rented on Lexington the Grand Central Place. Everyone paid \$5.00, and everyone could exhibit, two pictures, one small one, and one large one. There was no art galleries, no outlet for artists to exhibit. So the Society of Independent Artists functioned to give people a chance to exhibit. And that's the way you find out the best talents. That's the way (it is done) in Paris.

AL: What was the first year of the Independent Show?

AW: 1917. It lasted for 25 years, and then they found out that there were too many galleries, and they don't need them any more. And the person who really kept it up is Mrs. Payne Whitney. She paid the bills, she was a wonderful person. She was an angel to art. Mrs. Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney was an angel to American art. She was really a marvelous person. She used to send money to European and American artists, and she was one of our best patrons.

BC: And the Whitney Museum is her memorial.

AW: Yes, she was a wonderful person. She was the director, too, before she died.

AL: There were a lot of very well-known and already established artists who belonged to the Independents.

AW: Yes, because they wanted to encourage those who were not known. I didn't have to exhibit there. I just exhibited because I was interested in finding new talents. You know, in Paris, Rousseau and all those people, the very best artists have been found in the Societe Independente.

AL: Walky, that seems to have been the spirit of the time. A kind of brotherhood among the painters, the older painters helping the younger painters. Do you find this to be true now.

AW: No, not now. Now they hate one another. They are friendly enemies.

AL: Competitive.

AW: Yes, competitive, friendly enemies. There's no art spirit any more.

BC: When did you feel the art spirit disappear.

AW: Especially in the last twenty years.

BC: Perhaps the end of the Depression.

AW: Something happened that there's no art spirit. They are friendly enemies.

AL: The tape can't take the gesture of cutting one's throat. Also in those days aside from the brotherhood among the artists, it seems to me that the artist was a more social creature. He was interested in the political scene, and the social scene, and so on.

AW: Art was made too easy, with modern art. They think they can all paint. It's just pink, red, blue, yellow is modern art. That is just what modern art is not. There are so many artists. Now I am looking for a woman who doesn't paint. I can't find one actually I can't. They get to the age of 45 or 50. You know, they have children married, a son, a daughter. Then they have nothing to do so they think they're sick. So they go to the family doctor. The family doctor says, "Nothing is wrong with you, my dear lady; just take it easy. That's all." No she's got to go to a psychiatrist. She tells the psychiatrist, the doctor said, "There's nothing wrong with you, just take it easy." The psychiatrist says, "I'll tell you what to do. You go ahead and take lessons in art; you'll have a hobby, you'll forget to be sick." So they make sick art. What did art do to them, really?

AL: They either paint or open an art gallery.

AW: So they let it out on art. Those innocent three letters A R T. What they do to it!

AL: During the Independent Show, you came in contact with Eilshemius, didn't you?

AW: No, I knew him before. Oh, I knew him before I went to Europe. I knew him since 1900. When I came back in 1908 I had a studio and he had a studio right near the old City College, across the street.

BC: Near 23rd Street?

AW: Yes, right on the corner, at Lexington. That's where he had a studio, and I used to see him a great deal.

BC: Was he discouraged and disgruntled them?

AW: Yes, he was discouraged. But you know he was a rich man, from a family of bankers. So he went his own way. He was an unusual talent. I always said about Eilshemius, he went from the sublime to the ridiculous. Mostly ridiculous, very rarely sublime. But when he's sublime, he's sublime. That's all there is. He's really sublime.

AL: Do you think this unevenness so-called, could have been created by his social environment?

AW: I don't know. He was an unusual artist, Eilshemius. In this country we have great artists Ryder. I used to see Ryder from time to time. And Eilshemius was in contrast to Ryder, entirely different. He would get a quality of his own which is really remarkable. There is a certain niceness and creativeness, even in the academic things. He was academic. At times he forgot about the academy at moments. Those were his best moments. An inner spirit moved him. Of course he was a peculiar person. He was into everything, a magician, a poet, a musician. There isn't a thing he couldn't do. His visiting card was long.

BC: He spread his talents. Eilshemius was really no positive influence during his lifetime.

AW: No, but he was really a good fighter. He used to encourage people, and he made them to be free too. He like artists to work freely.

BC: I think the tape has come to an end. CONTINUATION OF RECORDED INTERVIEW WITH ABRAHAM WALKOWITZ
New York, December 22, 1958. Tape 3

BC: This is December 22, 1958

AW: All day.

BC: All day. And Mr. Walkowitz has come to let us talk to him for the second time.

AL: Well, what will we talk about this time, Walky?

AW: Anything you want to know. Anything. Ask questions, I'll answer.

AL: Well, let's start with the present. Why don't you contrast what you think the differences are between what the young artist has in front of him today and what he had when you began.

AW: Well, the trouble is that too hastily they become artists, and the schools turn out trade school artists, not artists. Years ago they had patience in learning, and they took the pleasure of drawing with great feeling. Now the teachers are not sincere in their criticism, and they're most interested in the "right" of the thing, instead of the feeling. You see. Artists' feeling cares not what right is. In order to be right you must first be wrong, and then you will be right, as in everything. They all go through three states: fear, sneer and cheer. First they fear a thing, because it disturbs the equilibrium of the people. And they don't like it, they don't understand it. The second state is "sneer"; only a few people understand it so they say, "Oh, only a few cranks respond to it." Now the third state is "cheer", when everybody absorbs the thought. That happened to Picasso, Matisse, and all the others. When the Armory Exhibition was held, people came there by the thousands, it was like in a menagerie, like a real . . .

AL: Don't you think people are less inclined to sneer today than they did let's say forty years ago?

AW: They are. They are more open-minded, in a way. But not enough. You know, people can only see as much as they understand. What they don't understand, it doesn't mean anything. Because they don't depend upon the feeling; they depend upon what they have seen, in art, in books, catalogs, and so on, and that's what they want.

AL: You mean, even if they accept it, but don't understand it, it doesn't mean anything?

AW: Art is not in understanding; art is the feeling. Just like music; music has no words, you feel the thing. Music is a language without a language; art is a language without a language. And the more language, the more misunderstanding. The more people speak to one another the less they understand one another.

BC: That's good.

AW: Language merely stands in the way of understanding.

BC: Well, Mr. Walkowitz, if you can remember back to the 1920-26 period, when the Quinn collection was

outstanding, did it have much of an audience? Were there many people who knew and liked the collection?

AW: Well, when the Quinn collection was shown, people were already educated through the Armory Exhibition, and New York's galleries already began to show modern art. But previous to that there was a real dislike for modern art. It disturbed their equilibrium, at the Armory Exhibition. People would come there and laugh, loudly. I was there every day, answering questions I knew my subject well, of course and I said to them, "Well, see. Just write down on a piece of paper what you just told me, and put in an envelope, open it 20 years later, and you're going to laugh at yourself. That's inevitable, in every progress, we have to go through those three states. Some, it takes longer, some less, somehow; some people hate modern art, because it doesn't represent the object. But the object has nothing to do with art, and art has nothing to do with objects.

AL: Well, Walky, when you said just before that the schools are now turning out mechanics rather than artists . . .

AW: Trade-school artists.

AL: Yes, trade-school artists . . .

AW: Art is not a trade. Art is an unusual experience, you have to have reverence and respect for what you are doing. In schools they have no respect or reverence; they teach it as a trade. It's not you can't learn art. It's in you or it is not in you Caruso had a wonderful voice as a peasant.

AL: What I was getting at, Walky, is: Did you find that this was so when you were a student; did they also turn out artists, or was the attitude somewhat different?

AW: Yes, because they were not hasty. They had patience to study and they had no idea of exhibitions. They take five lessons now and they want an exhibition, they can't wait.

AL: Could this have anything to do with the form of modern art?

AW: There's a vulgarity in art. You see, the reason why, we have the G.I.s, all those men that came back (from the war). They go to school to finish the college degree. Meanwhile they take an art course, as a side thing. And then the mind is architectural and scientific, in a way, so they begin to paint modern art in a scientific way, and not in a way with a feeling. So that they turn them out by the thousands now.

AL: In other words, you're implying that standards are lower than they were.

AW: Of course they are. There was a reverence and respect for art. Now it's commercialized. And they think it's easy, modern art, red, green, blue and yellow smeared this way, that way, that's modern art. This is just what modern art is not.

BC: Mr. Walkowitz, do you think the great amount of advertising that goes on today had helped to lower the standard?

AW: Oh, of course, very much lower, and at the same time, in rare cases, it has made great contributions.

AL: It has also popularized art.

AW: Popularized it, yes, but in a commonplace way. Not with the reverence and respect. because it became a trade. And art has nothing to do with a trade. It's a rare thing; it's like a beautiful Cremona violin. You have to love it, you have to cherish it, see, with a respect. Wherever there is no reverence or respect, there is no understanding. That's all, that's a great principle in life. As in art, in life, in everything.

BC: Well, it was people like Stieglitz . . .

AW: He was a great fighter, he really has put through art, he was responsible for the Armory Show. He contributed, with Marsden Hartley, Dove, we were called the Stieglitz quartet: John Marin, Hartley, Dove and Walkowitz, were called the Stieglitz quartet. That was at 291, not later.

AL: Well, that was the avant-garde of that period; now what about the avant-garde of our period? What about the younger painters today, how do you feel about them?

AW: Well, the younger painters have many talents, but talent is not art. It takes more than talent to be an artist. As I this pianist was born who was a great youngster who was a great pianist, they all claimed he was a great pianist. And a friend of the family said, "I'm going to take your son to Moriz*(pg37) Rosenthal to become a great pianist, and I want him to listen to him." They took him up to his studio, and the father and mother, before he listened to him, said, "You know, Mr. Rosenthal, everybody thinks my son is a great pianist, everybody." "Well,"

he says, "well listen to him." And he listened to him, one solo, and a second, and he came to his father. "You know, your son is not a talent, but he is a genius." He made fun out of it, the talent. It takes more than talent to be a genius. And there's a great deal in that. In the sense of humor. He just wiped the whole thing out.

AL: Well, wouldn't it take time, simply time, to discover whether the so-called talents are eventually going to be the geniuses of our period?

AW: Well, it does, yes and no.

BC: I was wondering how you would pick the talent.

AW: Well, that's a very rare thing. I never sat on a jury in all my life.

BC: That's interesting.

AW: I refused to sit on a jury. I wouldn't. They would put me in a hotel room and everything, and I said, "I'm sorry, I don't accept any jury." I belonged to the Society of Independent Artists, director and vice president for 23 years, and there were no juries, and everybody could hang the way he wanted, according to the alphabet. I could hang next to a shoemaker, or a bricklayer. I encouraged free art. And many talents have been found. (It was the) same as L'Artistes Societe Independente, in Paris, where they found out a talent like Rousseau, and many, many others. Among thousands, you will find two, or three, is enough. The others are junk.

BC: I just thought of something; in conversation with Isabel Bishop the other day, she implied that juries should be made up of artists (only).

AW: Well, there are juries made up of artists.

BC: Well, but not mixed, not say private collectors or museum people.

AW: No, there are only artists; well, in some cases they have museum directors, of course. Well, some of the museum directors have knowledge of art. Of course, not all. In rare cases.

AL: Well, not all the artists have a knowledge of art . . .

BC: Well, that was something of the point of Miss Bishop.

AW: I had a very interesting thing with a museum director. I had an exhibition about ten years ago, in a Chinese gallery, of watercolors, I'm a very well-known water-colorist, and I happened to go to Parke-Bernet Gallery to see the exhibition, and I met Francis Taylor, former director of the Metropolitan Museum. I know that he doesn't go to one-man shows, because if he goes to one one-man show, he has to go to another. So I said it was the last day of the exhibit, I said, "Mr. Taylor, I know you don't go to exhibitions, but I just have an exhibition just three houses down, at the Chinese Gallery. And there, if you like, you can . . ." And about twenty minutes later or so, who comes in? Taylor. walks around the gallery, goes one way, another way, then goes up to one picture, and I was standing the other way; kisses the picture, and then kissed to me. And he says, "You know, I've never done it. Never done it."

AL: Never threw a kiss to an artist in his life.

AW: Then he comes over and says, "You can send that picture to the museum. I have no right to buy because it has to pass the committee. A few, three, four, five months go by; well, the price was \$750.00, sounds all right, six, seven months later, I got a check of \$750.00. But that was rare for Francis Taylor. A beautiful gesture.

AL: It was a Chinese gallery, which is no longer in (existence).

AW: It only existed for a year or two, that's all.

BC: I think we'd better play this back.

AW: Yes, and see whether it works right. END OF TAPE 3 TAPE 4 [In a test play-back the tape snagged so we could not continue to use roll #3. Tape #4 was put in the machine at this point.] [On the Tundlberg measuring device the tape #3 runs from 12: - to 1:55. The rest of the tape is unused] (Talking about the book, 100 Drawings, by A. Walkowitz)

AW: . . . introductions. Which was that?

AL: Well, you have introductions by four people.

AW: No, no, there's that was written about 1931. And that's all there is to art. If you understand this it's a poem to art. [Printed on small sheet of paper and posted in the book]

AL: I'm looking at a book called 100 Drawings, by A. Walkowitz, which has introductions by Henry McBride, John Weichsel, Charles Vildrac, and Willard Huntington Wright.

AW: Published 1925.

AL: 1925. You have a little introduction here, you pasted into the beginning of the book.

AW: Yes. "To abstract art."

AL: It says: "To abstract art. Art has nothing to do with imitations of objects. Art has its own life. One receives impressions from contacts or objects, and then new forms are born in equivalents of line or color improvisations. A record of experience; the artist creates a new form of life by imbuing the atom of life into the line through sensitized touch that palpitates with life and continues to live forever." And you have this signed: A. Walkowitz. 1932.

AW: Yes. '32. Carrel*(pg41) was very much impressed with that. You know, he told me it was at Stieglitz, he came to see my exhibition. He says, "This "Art from Life"," (I had a whole exhibition which contained pictures called 'Art from Life') abstract. You know, just a painting. And he says, "You know, you've done something equivalent to what I've done with my (study of) the skin of the chicken, which still is life and growth. In the Rockefeller Institute." He said, "You've done a similar thing . . ."

AL: Well, these are very beautiful drawings, and I'm familiar with a great many of them.

AW: It was lying for ten years in a dummy form. That means forty-four years ago, before I could get a publisher and that's one of the finest books even now, considering. When Matisse was here, and he saw that book, at Stieglitz, he said he couldn't believe that and the same thing (with) Despiou in Paris, I had a copy and I showed it to him, Maillol. They couldn't believe that I was an American.

AL: No.

AW: Just couldn't believe it. It's not in Americans.

BC: Well, we are very grateful to you for the gift of the book, Mr. Walkowitz.

AW: Well, it gives me great pleasure. My last copy except one paper copy which is no good.

BC: And then that other very interesting catalog, November 1, 1902, Exhibition of the Art Culture League.

AW: Which I formed; I was the President of the Exhibition; I formed before that the 1898 one, the East Side Group. Most of the artists were killed in the First World War. I was the only one that survived.

BC: Well, it's a fascinating publication. I haven't seen any other publications of the organization.

AL: Was there a lot of activity on the East Side in those days?

AW: There was some activity. I went to the [National] Academy which was on 23rd Street at that time. Not too many, considering the time.

BC: The Art Students . . .

AW: Art Students League? I called it "Art Students Leak." All art leaks out. Art leaks out.

BC: Then were you ever a part of that organization?

AW: Oh, occasionally I went to study sculpture there when Jacob Epstein was there sculpturing. But it didn't last too long, I didn't like schools. Every instructor is a destructor. He takes away your personality. Each person has a certain color. And if you take the color away from a person there's nothing left. And you want to draw like the instructor. You never can do anything like the instructor. You can only do something within your own self.

AL: How else does one learn how to draw and paint?

AW: Well, you can't learn art, it's in you. Just like a person who had no balance will never walk the tightrope, because he has no balance. You can't buy balance. It's in you or it isn't in you. If you have no voice, you'll never sing.

BC: But suppose a young man or boy wants to become a tightrope walker, what does he do, does he go to the circus and watch the performers?

AW: He might, but he'll always fall if he tries to take lessons. You learn a little, but not enough. He has to walk freely on a rope like the rest do, or he'll always fall, because there's no balance in him. One can't be an artist when he isn't born to be an artist. He'll always draw right, but it'll be wrong. The real artist feeling in him is not there, therefore, whatever you teach him, it has nothing to do with art. That's a trade-school artist.

AL: But the voice can be improved.

AW: Improved, yes. That's all. But you have to have the voice in you. You know, Caruso was a poor boy, a peasant, everything? He became a great singer, while rich people, and their sons, they'd spend millions, to see them become a singer, when they can't, they have no voice.

BC: Well, the question I'd like to ask is, suppose you were with a group of young art students. How would you be able to pick out the ones that should be encouraged?

AW: The only way is not to criticize the, (saying), "This is the right (way), this is wrong, wrong. But to make them love the drawings they do. The only way of criticism is to make them feel and love what they are doing. Wrong and right is relative.

BC: The real artist loves what he's doing.

AW: Well, that's relative.

AL: Are you against schools?

AW: Yes and no.

AL: What does that mean?

AW: It means that occasionally schools do good, but most will do harm. It takes you 20 years to learn, and 40 years to forget, what you've learned. In order to bring yourself out. And therefore it's a great deal association is good, in the classes, you learn from one another. The better person stimulates the other person, you see? It's all right to stimulate a person, which is good, in teaching. But the teachers don't stimulate. They just come (and) correct.

BC: In school you get education from association.

AW: Association and when you stimulate a person. The only way is to stimulate a person in loving the thing he does, and not holler right at him. Because right and wrong is relative. Whenever he says you're right, that's (the) first (step) in being wrong, because he says your right.

BC: That's wonderful.

AL: Walky, in the development of your work, of your own painting . . .

AW: I have no laws and no rules to make up.

AL: What I was going to ask is, do you consider that you had different periods of your art? I mean, where you changed, where you saw things in a different way, where you can almost trace the beginning and end of a certain attitude, a certain feeling, certain development?

AW: As a student, I was very faithful . . .

AL: How do you account for the shifting in style in an artist's work?

AW: Well, I've seen many pictures in museums, and I was sincere in what I was doing, and I was a very good draughtsman. In school, I tried to do very well, I imitated things, not the way the instructor wanted me to, the way I felt of doing it nearer to the great masters. Not to the teacher.

BC: It's a good point.

AL: But then you did have different phases.

AW: Yes.

AL: I know some of you city skyscraper scenes are rather different from the Isadora Duncan scenes, and so on.

AW: Everything is different, surely. Isadora is movement. I watched her dances, and I never had her pose, I just watched the movement, that's what makes the dance the feeling, the movement, the grace. That's what I got.

AL: I think you ought to tell us a little bit about Isadora Duncan, and how you did all these thousands of drawings, of Isadora.

AW: Well, I have done more Isadora Duncans than I have hair on my head.

BC: When did you first see Isadora Duncan?

AW: In Paris, 1906, I met her in Rodin's studio, and again the following day in a salon that was given by a very rich French and Russian. She was dancing there, waltzes, and Schumann, Schubert, some things, you know. And I saw her again. And when I came back she came from Paris here, in 1908, and she had a big recital in Carnegie Hall with the Damrosch Symphony, with her small children, the adopted children. In 1909 she gave a few concerts, and she went to Boston and so on; she was really an inspiration. As Channin, I think, says about her, "His goddess. Walkowitz's goddess." He made an introduction.*(pg44) So, she was a Muse. She had no laws. She didn't dance according to the rules. She created. Her body was music. It was a body electric, like Walt Whitman. His body electric. One of our greatest men, America's greatest, is Walt Whitman. Leaves of Grass is to me the Bible.

AL: Didn't you once tell me, Walky, that you were teaching at . . .

AW: Children at the Educational Alliance.

AL: No, didn't you teach somewhere in Germany, or an Austria?

AW: No, no, I was never a teacher. In Salzburg, I was the director of the school, I was at the school then. And I took some girls there, (while someone) was teaching them, but I just would select occasionally, and (when) I took interest in a certain person, I would tell him what to do. But I was never a teacher. They offered me (a position) at the League to teach, I refused. I was only teaching when I was in the Educational Alliance in 1900 to 1906, and that was young people, children as well as old ones. Since then I was never a teacher.

BC: Can you tell us about where your work is represented? I know that there's a large group at the Brooklyn Museum.

AW: Well, the Brooklyn Museum has small things, the Newark Museum has small things, the [New York] Public Library has a hundred, Hartford Museum has a hundred when I was sixty, I gave a collection to numerous museums, you see. And the Public Library has a hundred. And the Brooklyn Museum has one, but all small things. And Philadelphia Museum has a large collection, of intimate, small things, and a large collection I gave to Israel, a very large collection. They're planning an exhibition. To the Newark Museum I have a large collection of small, intimate things, see.

BC: What about easel paintings, are . . .

AW: I don't easel paintings?

BC: Didn't you paint in oil, or was most of your . . .

AW: Yes, I painted in various mediums, etchings, monotypes, lithographs, drawings and watercolors I painted in all mediums. Many of my things were destroyed. I had a fire about 10 years ago. Many of my last things burned. Can't help it.

AL: Walky, what, if any, help did you get from private collectors? Or encouragement.

AW: They've taken the things with helping me.

AL: No help, in other words.

AW: It's a fact. Sometimes, in the studio selecting, while I was looking for others, they'd put things in their portfolio and take them along. Not much. Art to me was a deficit; I never made a living out of art. Art cost me over \$100,000, but I got out of it maybe \$15,000.

AL: I didn't mean necessarily in terms of selling.

AW: I gave to art, I didn't take from it.

AL: Did you encounter two or three very sensitive people among the collectors who made you feel that your

efforts were worth while? I don't mean necessarily in terms of purchasing.

AW: Yes, a few were sympathetic. Yes. They've taken more out than they gave me. And I gave away many things. More than I sold. I gave Isador Duncan like my visiting card to people; the small ones. And large ones. In the hundreds and hundreds. I gave 250 to the Public Library. I gave 50 to the Music and Art Library, on 58th Street.

BC: You gave me 25 for the Smith College Museum. About it was in 1953.

AW: Well, I don't know, I can't remember. I gave freely. I gave to collectors, and the collectors one collector of mine, Shapiro, in Boston, gave 60 of my things to the Boston Museum when I was 60, in honor of my 60th birthday. And when I was 60 they gave me a very big evening at the Educational Alliance. Music, dances, and so on, about 300 - 400 people, and when I was 75 they gave me a big dinner, about 300 people as well, speakers, and so on. Thousands [????? I've given away].

BC: I'd like to ask you about your attitude towards your audience; that is, as a creative artist, do you think of the people who may be looking at your work, or are you not concerned with that thought?

AW: I'm only concerned when the people are responding to things; it gives me great pleasure; and the rest, I don't take them seriously.

BC: Yes. Well, you're beyond criticism, because it doesn't touch you.

AW: I don't look for what a critic will say about me. If I don't know what I'm doing, it's a shame that I need to wait for a critic to tell me. I made many of them . . .

AL: Walky, you haven't painted or produced any art in some time now.

AW: Yes. Not in the last ten years, I haven't touched a brush.

AL: How long ten years, is it?

AW: No. And before that I was working on my books I have material, but, I began to a regular basketful. You see, on big cards, 6 x 8; pasting them on, that probably made me sick. You have no idea what work there is in those small books.

AL: I have some idea.

AW: Tremendous.

AL: Because I've prepared catalogs.

AW: Making out cards with pictures on them this way; it takes years of work. I took me almost two years. A year, I have here; it cost me more than that.

AL: Why did you do that? Instead of continuing as a painter yourself?

AW: It was an experiment, and I wanted to show how the eye and the mind see one person.

AL: I can understand it as an experiment. But not giving up your own work. Why did you do that?

AW: An experiment is worth while. To see how the eye and the mind sees one person. It's a very important scientific demonstration. Equal to anything that the Rockefeller Institute does. I think I'm going to send them a bill.

AL: Did you perhaps feel that you had already accomplished a large body of work, that you'd already made a place for yourself in art?

AW: This thing I had a long time planned to do. I said, I'm going to take a year, or more, and have this done, which I did. And I'm awfully happy that I did.

BC: Well, you feel rewarded, because you carried your experiment out.

AW: Yes. Rewarded. Because I made a movie from it, and Life magazine had 25 of them reproduced, but the whole catalog (contains) a hundred, all of them reproduced in the catalog. It cost me quite a lot . . .

AL: Well, what I'm trying to get at, which you're swiftly evading, is that at some point you stopped producing art. I'm trying to find out why.

AW: For a short time, I just wanted to see. I wanted to take a rest for a year or two, and look at things, come fresh to them . . .

AL: Well, did you continue after that?

AW: Oh, yes, I continued working.

AL: Until your eyes were bad.

AW: Bad, then of course I had to give it up. Of course, no question. It's almost ten years.

AL: Do you feel that you've been sufficiently recognized as an artist?

AW: Oh, no, no. Not at all. What I've done in this book, 44 years ago (it was published) 34 years ago. And ten years it was laying in a dummy form, and it's 44 years ago, there isn't one person can publish it now. Hasn't got the material. It's not in it. This is a very wonderful book. People haven't seen the value of this book. This is very important and it's almost half a century (old). Forty-four years ago. That was done in the middle of 1912.

AL: You think the public still has to catch up with your production, with your art?

AW: Well, here and there people can grasp it. Not many. You can count them on your ten fingers, or less, because they really don't see the feeling in that book. It's a very . . .

AL: But I don't mean the book alone; I mean generally, your whole life's production. Do you feel that you've been sufficiently I don't mean rewarded, an artist is never sufficiently rewarded, but do you feel that you've made a place for yourself in American art, that people show you the proper respect?

AW: A few people here and there. Very rare.

AL: Do you feel the museums have acknowledged you sufficiently?

AW: No. I've been neglected by museums. I've given to the museums more than they bought.

AL: Well then, what are your feelings after let's say 50 years, or more, let's say 60 years of working as an artist?

AW: Well, I loved to do it, that's all, I didn't do it for any other reason, because I just liked to do it, that's all. Now, I never paint pictures to sell.

AL: Would you do it again, Walky?

AW: I guess I certainly would.

AL: Well, that's what I wanted to know.

AW: I lived in Paris on chocolate and bread; (while I) went to different places, all through, three different times, I lived two years almost in Italy and Greece, to study the primitive art and even in the starvation form, I'd still repeat it.

BC: Mr. Walkowitz, could you tell us some of the people the names of some of the people you feel really understand and know your work as an artist?

AW: It would be very difficult for me to pick select some of them. Not many. And those that were, they died.

BC: Well, even if they have departed this world, we'd be interested if you cited a few names.

AW: I really don't know if they really did understand me. This book is when I look at this book, I wonder how I did it. It's a fact. It's not conscious. A rushing force made me do this.

AL: Walky, do you think the young artist today understands you a little more than let's say, the artist 40 years ago?

AW: Young artists are just interested in themselves. They have no respect. They have no respect for their own self, either. They paint pictures . . .

AL: They don't respect the tradition, is that it?

AW: No. They have no respect, they are just photographers. Court Photographers. You know, years ago, it would take a big rock, say 20 x 15 x 20, to lift it up they would take ropes, you know, and pull, and a hundred people

would pull them up. Now you know what they do, take this cable, and push a button, and it lifts up. Now court photography does what the artist has to do and sweats on it, and it produces a court photograph. It's really enlarged colored photographs, that's what they are doing, most of the artists. Most of the artists, 90% of all the artists, and more . . .

AL: Even the abstract artists?

AW: Well, the abstract no. The abstract artists are careless, and are as bad too. Here and there, like Jackson Pollock has made a very interesting contribution to American art. Even if disliked by most people. But he's made a great contribution in freedom. One of the rare, one of the great American artists, who will remain in history, as making a contribution to art. Not his imitators.

AL: Do you feel that all the work you did in your youth, and the work that men like Stieglitz carried on, do you feel that that created the atmosphere for a Jackson Pollock?

AW: Yes. It did. He used to look at my books, and this he had. And he used to call me Papa. "You have encouraged me." And I know when he was studying with Benton at the Art Student's League, he had my books and this was published way before he died when he was 44. This was published thirty-four years ago, when he was 10. He had all of my books.

BC: Mr. Walkowitz, I notice the names of men who wrote the introductions for your book Henry McBride and . . .

AW: McBride was one of the best critics. One of the very best.

AL: You told us he began as an artist himself.

AW: Yes, he was an artist. He studied with Walter Shirlaw when I was at the Artists' Institute, on 23rd Street. He was a very able artist. And (while he) got Walter to teach him, he was teaching at the Neward School, and then at the Educational Alliance.

BC: Well, you must have felt encouraged that this group of men were writing various introductions to your book. Willard Huntington Wright . . .

AW: Willard Huntington Wright was in New York. He saw my work, and he was very much interested; he's written a book on modern art.

BC: I have a copy of Mr. Wright's book here.

AW: He mentions me in the book. Then Huneker & McBride, I've known. And Vildrac. It was sent the original drawings, the dummy, was sent to France, and there was a young lady who the publisher knew. And she took those (to him), and he has written I never even met them. All this was Vildrac, who I never met.

AL: Well, then there always were people who responded, even if they were few.

AW: Well, yes.

BC: Well, I would say that you probably never felt lonely as an artist, because you were . . .

AW: No, I couldn't be lonely, I was with my art. I was happy. I was married to my art.

BC: And impervious to the critics.

AW: Critics be damned. I, at my age, have to look forward to what a critic writes in the morning? Take the Times and all that? It's all a joke. Not at my age.

AL: Well, how about when you were a young man?

AW: Not even then. They didn't scare me. I had no respect at that time. I was foolish.

AL: Would you say criticism is on a higher level today than it was?

AW: Oh yes. Very much so.

AL: Thirty-five years ago? Forty years ago?

AW: Very much higher.

BC: Well, there's a lot more of it, we have more art magazines.

AW: Yes. We have more art magazines. And we have learned a great deal from the French artists, and French spirit in art. They are the only people who contributed, in music and art, in the last 75 years.

AL: Well, how about our contribution here and now, Walky? What about present day art in America? What do you have to say to us about that?

AW: Well, we're developing, art develops here in America, but there is much of a misunderstanding in art, and they overproduce. It's an over production in art, it's quantity, not quality. It's a rare thing. It's quality, which means art.

BC: It's an American failing.

AL: Yes. That's just what I was saying.

AW: It's sought too much. I encourage modern art, I like it, but where there's no respect for it, then it's just ugliness. I like academic art as well as I like our modern art. I don't dislike academy good academic art is very good. Bad modern art is worse than bad academic art.

BC: There are many more private collectors today than there were . . .

AW: Since the German refugees and others came, there became a great spirit here in art. They introduced it; they began to buy, and speculate, in the last 15 years; since the Second World War, art became really a part here, of interest. Not in the Americans, it's the refugees. Because in Germany they were interested in it, and they came over with the same interest. And there's more interest, through them, than ever existed before.

AL: Do you think it might also be, Walky, that the young American painter today has a higher regard for the past history of America, that he's a little more conscious of his being American, that is, a little prouder of . . .

AW: The GI's came back and they wanted to finish their college studies, so they go to college, you see. Meanwhile they have an art course there, a side thing, and instead of taking to education, they more attended to the art, you see. And then they became in just a year or two they came here, and they become artists here. And they really have no knowledge of it. It's an illusion, the knowledge. And it became easy, impressionism, modern art is easy, this way, that way, red, green, blue, and yellow that's paint, you know, that's not art. There is plenty in the paint stores.

AL: But Walky, I'm sure you'll admit that there has been a tremendous interest in art here, in the past ten or fifteen years. Unprecedented. Isn't that so?

AW: Yes. But it is forced, and it became a business. You know, there's over 220 galleries now. Well, they all rent out the galleries, and they take the Sunday painters, Monday painters, and whatever there is, or everyday painters, and they have a year or two, and they paint, and they put up an exhibition, and the critics come there, the paper has to pay the critics, you know, they have to advertise (the shows). If you don't advertise, they don't write; it's like the Chinaman who says, "No tickee, no washee." No advertising, no critic.

AL: Walky, what would you say to a young painter if he came to you today for advice? If you were convinced he was a talented young painter.

AW: My advice would be: Try to develop yourself in your own way, in the image of yourself. Don't imitate anybody. Look at pictures and forget about them. And bring your own self out. Don't be in a hurry to exhibit. Art existed before exhibitions. They never had exhibitions, only in the last hundred years or more. They became exhibitionists. Art has nothing to do with exhibitions. That means too often dullness, this exhibitionism. As I told you, I'm looking for a woman that don't paint. I can't find her. It became a disease. It's painters measles.

BC: Well, couldn't it, perhaps, be looked upon as a healthy sign?

AW: It's a healthy sign, yes, but the abuse of it is not healthy. You see, they don't that the respect for art. They have an exhibition, this is not art. They make out of art the trade, and art is not a tradeschool art. That's a difficult school, you learn how to do things, but an artist not only learns, he has to know more than that. He must be creative, not imitative. You see, art is creation, not imitation.

BC: I agree.

AL: Well, that would apply to the serious artist, to the one who . . .

AW: Of course, there's more; those who are academic, they imitate, they're trying to be faithful to (the rules), but that's stupid.

AL: Yes, but all the ladies and all the gentlemen who paint on weekends, or who paint for a hobby, you have no real objection to that . . .

AW: No, if it were a real hobby, but there is no hobby there, the beginning is ugly. The beginning is ugly, you understand. The result is ugly as well. That's what it is, there is not feeling, they don't do it. They merely do it for exhibitionism. It's not the real feeling. Take the Douanier Rousseau. There was a god, and he worked, he loved it, it was a religion to him, it was to him great worship, but now they're vulgar, they come in a vulgar state. It's vulgarity, not art. A child does some beautiful thing, she doesn't think of exhibition. Children's works of art are more beautiful than many of those artisans. Much more beautiful. I love children's work. Because it's naive, it's real. And that's just what it means to be an amateur. It's nice to be an amateur. But they begin already as artists, not as amateurs. And they remain that way.

BC: You mentioned Jackson Pollock.

AW: A very unusual artist; he has made the greatest contribution to art in America, even if he studied the French, but he created his own way, his own approach, and he is one of the rare artists.

BC: Does he outshine . . .

AW: Mostly. Those younger ones, like de Kooning now, and here and there three or four or five are very good artists. But the others are artisans, imitators of Jackson Pollock by the thousands of them, and I think it is about time that we should go to City Hall and take out licenses to paint pictures, just like marriage license it's about time, to have a marriage license to paint a picture. It's just like Prohibition. You know, we have to declare Prohibition in art. (With) what's going on in art, there ought to be Prohibition. A teacher wants a picture, she'll go to City Hall, and take a license because it's so overdone, the disrespect; I like the freedom, but the abuse of freedom is bad.

BC: Well, you perhaps have seen too much bad art right here in New York City, and that irritates you. You'd rather have it more highly selected.

AW: Well, selected. I mean they imitate, it's all imitations, and no dull exhibitionism. They wait for the idea of an exhibition. That's already bad.

AL: Why is this?

AW: Because that's the fashion, to start. Art is a fashion now. It's a style. And you know, you go to Park Avenue, they all want art now, they want to buy Picasso, and they buy the Picasso portfolio, or etching, or litho, or something, they pay a thousand dollars or five hundred, they put the portfolio away, and they don't even look at it. Because somebody else, their next-door neighbor, has a Picasso, they want it too. It is a fact, you know.

AL: It's fashionable.

AW: Fashionable. Park Avenue, they all go to exhibitions you know, it became like a tea party. And that way, they have pictures; yes, they have pictures now. They buy them. But there is no love for them.

BC: It's hard to measure one's love for art.

AW: They buy pictures for the ears, not for the eyes. What somebody else tells them, they buy. Not with their own eyes. They buy pictures through the ears. And . . .

AL: But don't you think that even if this is not the ideal way of developing a love of art, that it's better . . .

AW: It's better, yes, better something than nothing, eh?

AL: Yes.

AW: Nothing is something, something is nothing.

AL: You've got me there.

BC: Well, Mr. Walkowitz, the young art student is concerned with earning a living . . .

AW: I'm going to tell you about making a living. Once Whistler was approached by a bad painter, one of those pot boilers, that he should look at his work, because Whistler would just ignore. But this pot boiler had seen Whistler sitting in a cafe with a friend. And he appeared to have a studio nearby. So he runs quick and brings in about a dozen 8 x 10's, and runs in the cafe and says, "Whistler, this is my work." Whistler was unsuspectingly sitting with a friend, so he looked. He looked one, two, three, the whole dozen. And the artist was standing in the

background, and Whistler said, "You think you ought to live doing this?" That's (what he said about) a living. That's a book. Whistler was a wonderful person. He said, "Do you think you ought to live doing this?" That's apropos to living. They all do that.

BC: Well, the museums believe that they are perhaps building up collections that will . . .

AW: Museums buy names, not art. Many of them, they let the living starve and buy many of those things which are of no importance, even if they are old. They are restored; many of the pictures in museums, most even, are all restored; there is nothing of the artist left. In the museum, they restore everything, in a hundred years or two. And the restorer is (there), but in a very rare cases that artist is there. The only few things that I see in the Metropolitan, is the long two panels by Piero de Cosima. That's the only thing hasn't been restored. I remember in knee-pants seeing it, in the old museum, that has never been touched. In that one you see the artist is there, the drawing there. I've seen it again and again, that's the only picture that I know that no restorer has ever put a hand on it. But the others red paints, green paints, all the paints; the restorer is there now, not the artist. You see, the artist has a sense of light the restorer has no (sense of) light. He's a business man, he's in trade. And therefore many of the best pictures of all, you take even the Louvre; there is the Tintoretto, and the grass is black, because the haven't restored it with green, it remains black. When they restore it it will be green. You know, all the paint is mostly green, red, yellow it fades; well, they fade; in a hundred years, two hundred or so the artist is not there. That's what's been done in all museums. They try to save them, but they kill them by saving them.

BC: Then you feel it's a mistake to buy paintings that are in the past . . .

AW: No, it's not a mistake, the past has done much more than we do. Because they really have felt what they were doing, there was no cameras, they had to do this way, the way they did. Now we have no excuse for painting like a camera. Life magazine, Geographic magazine, have such wonderful photographs, that it's a waste to paint like that. I don't discourage it, because there's many people who paint like it, who are very good, but in most cases they just enlarge photographs and put paint on the top. That's all it is.

AL: Well, good painting is just rare no matter how people paint.

AW: Yes, academic art is good, but in rare cases. And in rare cases, modern art is also good. In most of the cases, bad.

AL: Good art is rare. To get back to the museums for a moment, you would agree though, that it is true that museums are buying more contemporary art today than they ever bought.

AW: Of course.

AL: Well, that's progress, don't you think?

AW: Yes. That's progress. We can't stand still, we're living in a changing age. If Beethoven were to live now, his music, melodies would be entirely different, because the sounds are different. And Bach. We are living in an age where we our modern music is different from the old. New melodies, new sounds, and the same thing in art. I couldn't (paint) New York years ago. I could do it now, because it exists. And I'm not imitating, I call mine a symphony in lines. You see. It's the spirit, not the imitation. You can't count the windows, so what? I never worked that way. I love New York, it's music to me. I was a fairly good violinist in my day, and I didn't try to imitate New York, but I got the spirit of New York. The skies. The equivalents. But most people try to imitate it, that's stupid. Photography can do it much better. And most of the artists waste the time, which color photography does it far better. Much to-do about nothing.

BC: These are fascinating pictures, these of New York.

AW: That's an early one. But as I say, this book was published 34 years ago, it was laying in a dummy form for ten years, before I could get a publisher I took a chance and published 500 of them, and he didn't make any money, and I lost (money), so we both have deficits on this.

AL: What about this "Improvisations of New York," that's more recent, isn't it?

AW: Which one?

BC: This is 1945, I think.

AL: "Improvisations of New York, a Symphony in Line."

AW: No, that's some of them there, no, also 34 or 35 years ago. But that belongs to history. Some of them are 35, 40, 30 years old. These are old things, none of them are new.

AL: I was thinking just the other day, Walky, I was looking at one of your New York City Improvisations, and it seemed to me that you did these let's say thirty years ago, forty years ago. How is it that you at that time saw the city sometimes as a huge monster?

AW: Well, it impressed me.

AL: It couldn't possibly look that way; it has become that.

AW: It's been a monument, because I've seen that New York, they hate a building, when they see a one-story building, they couldn't stand it, it had to come down. They have no business to stay. So you see how it built up? One building is jealous of the other: "I want to be taller," "I want to be taller." They all want to reach the sky.

AL: It's almost as if you could foresee thirty or forty years ago . . .

AW: Because New York really takes after my book.

AL: . . . how New York City would yes, it seems that Nature is imitating Walkowitz.

AW: Of course.

AL: Absolutely. You notice how crowded the city streets are.

AW: Yes, I'm really proud of it. I love New York. It's the greatest city in the world. The more I go to Europe, the more I love New York. I can't stand it until I come back to New York.

BC: Mr. Walkowitz, were these drawings originally in black and white?

AW: Mostly in black and white; some of them in color. I have many, many more.

BC: Did you use the drawings as a basis for painting?

AW: Some of them. Not too many.

BC: You actually did some New York paintings.

AW: I did ten times as many watercolors as I did drawings, I guess. I have given a large collection to Israel, and I had a big fire which destroyed hundreds and hundreds of my things.

AL: There were other painters who were interested in aspects of the city, people like Marin.

AW: Sure, John Marin.

BC: And Joseph Stella.

AL: Stella. You knew Stella very well.

AW: Yes, he painted my portrait later on and so I knew him very well, ever since he was a young man. John Marin is one of our outstanding American artists. He really felt New York. He felt the earth. America will be proud of an artist like John Marin. Creative, wonderful mind, I knew him well, every day (we were) together. One of the rare American artists. He has really enriched American art.

BC: This book with 100 portraits, do you want to make any comment about which portraits you think are the best?

AW: I think I said it print; they asked me many times, I says, you know I want to be ethical to all the painters. I don't say, this is better, or this is not. My own portrait is very good. Painted 1908.

BC: Yes, that's the cover. Where is that portrait today?

AW: It belongs to the Brooklyn Museum; they have ten. I've give (them) ten from this collection, I gave about 35 to the Newark Museum, from this collection, I gave about eight to Israel, and some of them were destroyed, some of them were sold, and many the artists have; I haven't got one.

BC: The Kenneth Hayes Miller . . .

AW: That is the earliest painted portrait, 1924.

BC: Yes.

AW: It's an interesting thing, Kenneth Hayes Miller. He wanted to go to Europe at that time. And he says, "Walkowitz, will you take my class? I want to go to Europe for about a year or two. I won't go unless you take it." I says, "Kenneth, I don't want to teach." And so he didn't go to Europe. He begged, and said, "I wouldn't give it to anybody else."

AL: This is really a very intriguing group of portraits.

AW: I could write a book, with the experience of hundred primadonnas to deal with, and from morning till the afternoon. It's only an idiot like Walkowitz would do a thing like that. It's a great experiment, but what work! I was never a model, to sit quiet and still. And what it cost me, quite a few thousand dollars, treating these artists, lunches and so on. Even many times I had to bring color and canvasses too. And then I popularized the, most of the artists, many of them were never exhibited in a museum. Then it traveled for two and a half years, coast to coast, fifty of them. I put them in museums, they travelled, I publicized them. They don't appreciate that.

AL: It's interesting how many of the artists in doing Walkowitz somehow managed to get themselves into the portrait.

AW: I ought to be ashamed to look at myself.

AL: You begin to look something like the artist.

AW: I'm beginning to look like it. I know that during the time I posed I had many people come, and wanted a commission to paint portraits. And I refused. I says, "I haven't made this exhibition for business." I don't paint portraits; I never paint portraits, and I refused commissions. And I had agents come over to me, they wanted to dress me up, take me to Los Angeles and so on; they wanted to make a contract with me, that they get commission, 50-50, guarantee \$50,000. I said, "I'm sorry, I don't accept any commissions, I don't do that." So you see, I didn't do art as a business. I did it as an experiment, like a scientific experiment at the Rockefeller Institute. As I told Nelson Rockefeller, I knew his mother I says, "You know, I'm going to send you a bill. I made an unusual experiment, equivalent to what you are doing in the Rockefeller Institute; I'm going to send your lawyer a letter." He says, "Keep on sending them."

AL: Walky, out of this whole group here, there are 100, and out of all of them, as I turn these pages and look there's only one abstract treatment of you. That's Adolph Gottlieb.

AW: Yes.

AL: Isn't that interesting, this was one when? Nineteen hundred and what?

AW: 1943. The exhibition was held 1944.

AL: Isn't it indicative of what painting was like in the United States in 1943?

AW: Well, he was already advanced, he was exhibiting at the Society of Independent artists. When he did that of me, he was already beginning to be progressive.

AL: But there's a very realistic portrait of you by Joseph Stella.

AW: Yes, most of them are realistic.

BC: That might have been at an earlier age.

AL: No, this is of that period.

AW: Same year, one year, 1943. 1944 there was the exhibition. Read what I said in the introduction. That's a very interesting introduction; read it.

AL: "This exhibition is the presentation of an experiment; the relationship between the artists and the object he sees is complicated and little understood. The experiment, 100 artists and one subject. Each artist was completely free to choose his medium, his interpretation, and form. The results vary with the personality of the artist. If proof were necessary that no two persons see an object alike, this is proof indeed. But what is more important, here one discovers that no matter what or whom they paint, artists always reveal themselves. The exhibition offers a unique opportunity for study to laymen, art students, artists and psychologists. With very few exceptions, all the portraits were made during the year 1943. I extend my sincere appreciation to all the artists who helped me carry out this project." You really treated it as a scientific [project].

AW: As a scientific project, that was my beginning idea of it. It's a very important contribution to science. People have not as yet discovered the importance of this scientific experiment.

AL: It was an astonishing thing, and I saw the exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum. It was really something. I think I went home and dreamed about Walkowitz, after 100 portraits.

AW: And I've seen exhibitions and the movies come and took it, and so on, and that probably made me lose my vision. END OF INTERVIEW