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Oral history interview with Bernard Braddon
and Sidney Paul Schectman, 1981 October 9

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Bernard Braddon and Sidney Schectman on October 9, 1981. The interview took place in New York, New York, and was conducted by Avis Berman for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview was conducted as part of the Archives of American Art's Mark Rothko and His Times oral history project, with funding provided by the Mark Rothko Foundation.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

AVIS BERMAN: ...Sidney Schectman and Mr. Bernard Braddon on October 9, 1981 at Mr. Braddon's house at 44 Grammercy Park. What I'd like you to start off doing is to state your name and spell it and when you were born. And just tell me a little bit about how you became interested in art and how you came to run a gallery or be interested in being in the art scene. And, Mr. Schectman, you began with the Mercury Galleries first. Is that correct?

SIDNEY SCHECTMAN: I started with another gallery in another part of town in a building that I had at that time owned. And we had the gallery as a loft, a large loft, overlooking the Sixth Avenue subway system.

BERNARD BRADDON: Sixth Avenue El.

MR. SCHECTMAN: It was the El, really. And it passed by our window. We did some atrocious things such as putting out some marvelous nudes and causing crowds on the platform to peer in, blocking traffic up there. And finally we were visited by the police to inform us to take down these paintings--we were obstructing the traffic of the Sixth Avenue El. It was a serious enterprise. Incidentally, my name at that time was Paul Kollmer (K-o-l-l-m-e-r). It's a family name and Paul is my middle name, Sidney Paul Schectman being my name. So I combined that. The reason for all of this is because I was then in the social service system of the City of New York after getting out of Cornell University, fortunate enough to have a job in those days of the Depression, which later led to my being able to rent the space for a gallery in a very fortunate location on Eighth Street which became known as the Mercury Galleries. At that time Mr. Braddon joined me. We were graduates of Cornell and we had known each other up there and had the same interests. And he remained down there most of the day taking care of all the details and being the gallery director and I was in later on in the afternoon when I'd come down and we'd join forces. So the origin of all this was really our being able to be present at the right time, but also because we both felt that something was happening in the art world in general that was rejected. I'm speaking for myself now, but certainly we rejected what was going on at the Whitney Museum on Eighth Street which had exhibition after exhibition devoted to people like Brackman and Luigi Lucioni and the Blanche pair, Lucille and Arnold, and Alexander Brook. We called it silo art, paintings of barns. And we never had any shows like that at the Mercury Gallery which was established at 4 East Eighth Street. Our Gallery was an avant-garde gallery and attracted, I think, the great painters of New York at that time. We let it be known that this is New York. And, as I said, it was a great location. At this point you asked me what the origins were and I'm doing the best I can now to tell you now this all came about. I and Mr. Braddon were in the Village all the time and we felt this great need. So the gallery was organized. Would you like now to ask some questions of me and then go to Mr. Braddon or would you prefer to speak to me at this point so I can get all my things out?

MS. BERMAN: Well, I have a couple of questions. What was the first gallery you mentioned? What was it called and where was it located?

MR. SCHECTMAN: The gallery was located at 412 Sixth Avenue, as it was known then. Are you surprised that I know the address? I owned that building.

MR. BRADDON: I remember it.

MR. SCHECTMAN: It was a family operation. I was very young. When I say owned it, it was part of the family interests. And I ran that piece of property, getting my first taste of real estate. It was known as the Art Mart (M-a-r-t), and we had many, many shows (papers here would all indicate that) of a rather good nature. On the other hand, we attempted to serve a very wide national group of artists without heavy or concentrated discrimination, but good people, people who were very famous but whose art wasn't necessarily to our liking--people like John Rude, an important sculptor, who had many, many shows, many write-ups, and probably is well known in some part of the United States. He is now gone. But we formed at that time a group called the Art Mart Art Association and people could belong for a fee and exhibit. We built racks and had thousands of paintings in the place. It was a huge loft. We carried this through to the Mercury Galleries and formed an association called the Mercury Art...

MR. BRADDON: ...Circuit.

MR. SCHECTMAN: The Circuit Art Association which entitled people to join. And many of them joined, artists whose work was quite inferior, and we ran into problems because we never exhibited their work even though we claimed we would. We just couldn't. This was our feeling at the time. It was rather, I think, a peculiar thing to do. We returned the works to the people when they said, "Our things are not being shown." We said, "Well, we can't." and we returned them, giving them their fees back. At all times we maintained an extremely high level in the Mercury Art Gallery. So that the beginning was the Art Mart, a terrible name. But it appealed to a great many people that came up and bought paintings. We were shocked because there was a market in the Depression.

MS. BERMAN: Who were some of the people that you were selling that were selling well?

MR. SCHECTMAN: All kinds of young people mostly who came in to buy a painting in terms of having something original and who really weren't discriminating. They were primarily interested in the colors so that it matched the furniture in their living rooms. There were some very great things that happened then and happened later on about delivery of these things to people whose homes we felt....

MR. BRADDON: I think we should point out that the general policy at that time was to offer these works at prices from \$5 to \$50--very interesting practice in view of today's market.

MR. SCHECTMAN: Incidentally, the \$5 to \$50 included very important paintings.

MR. BRADDON: Very important things, but you could put it into context because you could buy a Matisse or a Pascin or Modigliani for \$200 or less.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Well, who were some of the important painters that you had who were in this \$5 to \$50 range?

MR. SCHECTMAN: Well, I think we carried that on with the Circuit Art Association in the Mercury Gallery. I would say that almost every artist of the time had some small work that they were willing to get any price for. They were not living. The WPA was organized at that time and they were simply not able to sell a painting. It didn't differ much from the days of van Gogh when he couldn't sell a painting in his lifetime. There was no market for oils or for anything. Dali was \$100. These were the people in there. You could buy things for up to \$50 of any school. Hard to believe.

MS. BERMAN: What were those nudes that you put...?

MR. SCHECTMAN: For example, in this \$5 to \$50 category, if I were to tell you that we had a series of very important etchings by Picasso, Masson, Tanguy--in that category, Hayter was in that group, which was put out by a society for the support of the Spanish War of Liberation and signed by Paul L. Wolp with a forward to it. And we paid \$12 for how many etchings, ten?

MR. BRADDON: Retail.

MR. SCHECTMAN: It was the retail price. We each bought a number of them, and I donated mine.

MR. BRADDON: This is the one that you were admiring.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MR. SCHECTMAN: I donated mine to Cornell University and they greatly appreciated this.

MS. BERMAN: I can well imagine that they did.

MR. SCHECTMAN: Today's value is possibly more than \$12.

MR. BRADDON: It was a collection called Solidarite.

MR. SCHECTMAN: Solidarite, yes. And that collection is probably worth between \$15 and \$20 thousand. We paid \$12 for it. That's why almost anybody fell into that \$5 to \$50. The \$5 was applicable to people of much lower quality, let's say, people like...who was the young man who did this? His name was...? Edward Delugile.

MR. BRADDON: She continues to show--Cleo Hartwick.

MR. SCHECTMAN: Yes, she's famous. A famous woman sculptor. She exhibited with us. They formed the Clay Club and I think the Clay Club is still in existence.

MS. BERMAN: I don't know, but the Clay Club was also on 8th or 9th, wasn't it? I was close by.

MR. BRADDON: Well, I think it has to be pointed out that this was the center of artistic activity. There was no upper Madison Avenue art center at that time. Uptown was 57th Street. Eighth Street, which was the other art center and the environs, had, in addition to Mercury Galleries, the Whitney Museum on the next block, the ACA Gallery, the Artists Gallery (a very fine gallery) on Eighth Street, the Downtown Gallery, which at that time was downtown, as I recall it, on 13th Street.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, West 13th.

MR. BRADDON: So that was a very important art center then. There was nothing on upper Madison Avenue. Fifty-Seventh Street was the other....

MR. SCHECTMAN: They catered to the famous--Brackman, Alexander Brook. Was it Alexander Brook?

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MR. SCHECTMAN: People were painting pictures of the Lindbergh family and getting huge sums--\$50,000. In those days it was possibly like half a million today. And there was really no communication with what came up later in the New York school or the artists who were struggling so hard and the sculptors. And the field was wide open for anybody who recognized this or appreciated starving artists. And the starving artists were for everybody.

MS. BERMAN: What I'm looking at, it says on it, "An invitation to artists. The Circuit Art Association, 4 East Eighth Street, offers an opportunity to exhibit and sell work in all media and in every style. For information communicate with Circuit Art Association, Mercury Galleries, 4 East Eighth." Why did you decide to call it Mercury Galleries? Did you admire Orson Welles?

MR. BRADDON: No, it had no relationship to Orson Welles.

MR. SCHECTMAN: I had a feeling for that although we both concurred. I had a feeling for Mercury. Still do.

MR. BRADDON: I came across some time ago a list of prospective names that we were considering. We liked the mercurial aspect, the silvery quality. The connotations of mercury were good. The mythological aspects appealed to us. And we chose it after considering a good many others, some of them....

MR. SCHECTMAN: Some were good.

MR. BRADDON: Including our own names.

MR. SCHECTMAN: We toyed with that.

MR. BRADDON: In retrospect, it might have been better from the standpoint of self-interest. I think if I were to start a gallery now, I would use my own name--from the practical standpoint, because every bit of publicity reinforces that and it rebounds to the general credit. If it had been called the Braddon Gallery or the Schectman-Braddon Gallery, then we would have been in a position to continue that kind of activity later on had we wanted to. It's academic.

MS. BERMAN: You remember, you started your gallery in the pre-publicity age for art.

MR. BRADDON: Not entirely. I'll come to that. When I talk to you, I'll give you some idea of....

MR. SCHECTMAN: Really not. We recognized that there was a lack of proper PR in those days and we did some things about it. An example of that was to give a very famous poet who wanted very much to paint who had never painted...we had her do some paintings and they were quite good. And we felt that she was so unknown, famous I think in Ohio, Cleveland, was it?

MR. BRADDON: Yes, I think so.

MR. SCHECTMAN: And we retained someone to do the publicity for her. I woke one morning and the World Telegram, one of the most important papers in those days...do you remember the World Telegram?

MS. BERMAN: No, I don't. I remember Genauer.

MR. SCHECTMAN: Emily Genauer was the queen of the whole thing. A headline--"Rachael McWilson." I looked at it and I could not believe my eyes. She describes every painting. It was ecstatic and she became famous as a painter overnight. The PR was there, but she recognized something in the artist. There was a very wonderful

quality of poetry in the paintings. And, incidentally, I saw you turn your nose up a little bit. I felt Emily Genauer was kind to people. She was perhaps not the greatest critic but very kind and very knowing at times because she really picked out some people who were unknown and recognized that quality. She's still around, doing a lot of good things today.

MS. BERMAN: I want to go to Mr. Braddon now. If you could tell me how you became attracted to art when you were younger. Were either of you art majors at Cornell, by the way?

MR. SCHECTMAN: Well, I had an art minor. I was a premedical student at the time. But most of my other subjects were in the art field and I am still continuing with the Johnson Museum. I donate paintings now from my collection. It's a continuing interest.

MS. BERMAN: How about you, Mr. Braddon?

MR. BRADDON: What shall I start by saying? I'm Bernard Braddon.

MS. BERMAN: Well, I wanted to know how you became interested in the idea of...?

MR. BRADDON: Well, my entire background and interests have always been aesthetic, almost equally divided in music, literature, and painting. I was a music major and a foreign language major and shared a lot of it with English and comparative literature. Mr. Schectman and I were close friends. We came together really through music, through our mutual interests, which at that time too in music tended to be a little avant-garde because Bartok was virtually unknown in 1932 or '33. He was a bond between us. At any rate, that was an all...those were all-consuming interests. My thought at the time as a career was to become a critic, not in the narrow sense that we generally see it now, but someone who would move easily among the fields of painting, music, literature, dance, architecture, with very serious qualifications, perhaps including study at Paris Conservatoire in that field and comparable things. Needless to say, it was folly from the commercial standpoint, I wrote musical criticism when we were at Cornell. Now Sidney neglected to mention that he was a painter himself, still is. And had the notion of opening the Art Mart which he described to you. It was an interesting enterprise because it was intended to provide two things: to provide means for artists to dispose of their works (and I remind you that this was a Depression atmosphere), at the same time permitting people to enjoy works at home. The stress that we placed on this was original works of art and we in our publicity listed the various aspects of art that they could find at the Art Mart. He had started that, and we joined and we talked. And I decided that I would like to participate with him in view of our close coincidence of tastes and personal friendship. We joined at this Art Mart that Sidney has described so well. The Mercury Galleries was a much more serious undertaking from the aesthetic standpoint. At the Art mart we attempted to provide anything that anyone could possibly want. There was no discrimination in styles. Things that we personally disliked still had a place there because the object there was to effect this kind of flow of material between artists and the public. The Mercury Galleries had rather higher aims. While continuing in the Circuit Art Association, so-called, which was very easy access...we charged a dollar a month which is nominal and provided us with an enormous reservoir of paintings, prints, drawings, so we could answer almost any demand. If they wanted abstract art, we had it. If they wanted landscapes of mountains, we had it. If they wanted seascapes, we had that, and nudes. Now again, I want to refer to two contexts. First all, the Depression atmosphere and also I would almost say an artistic depression atmosphere insofar as the artists were concerned whom we personally liked very much. And the other thing was this geographical center, secondary geographical center, around Eighth Street. In the course of this, we began to foster the artists whom we really enjoyed and came together with The Ten. They liked our concepts, our approach, our appreciation, which was very genuine. And the idea came up...I don't know who first suggested it but, because of the proximity of the Mercury Galleries to the Whitney Museum, the notion of a show of the Whitney dissenters came about. As a matter of fact, we were on the adjacent blocks. And, when we were talking a little earlier about exploitation, that was an example. In retrospect, I'm amazed that these two very young men, in our early 20's, had the business acumen and the aesthetic acumen to bring these things together.

MR. SCHECTMAN: In retrospect, if I may interrupt for a moment, we talked about this recently. Going back, I can't believe at that age we could have accomplished these things. I mean it just doesn't seem possible the way we are today that we were like that--that insight.

MS. BERMAN: That's youth.

MR. SCHECTMAN: But that insight!

MS. BERMAN: How old...excuse me. When were you born, by the way?

MR. BRADDON: I was born in 1915 and Mr. Schectman was born in...?

MR. SCHECTMAN: 1913.

MR. BRADDON: 1913.

MS. BERMAN: And when did you.... So you...?

MR. BRADDON: Well, Art Mart was 1937.

MR. SCHECTMAN: At that time, yes.

MR. BRADDON: Twenty-two and 23 1/2 respectively. We were entrepreneurs.

MS. BERMAN: So the Mercury Gallery was established in either '37 or '38?

MR. SCHECTMAN: We had that problem recently because of a showing of Louis Schanker's work in the Diamond Galleries. And I think we agreed that it was '37.

MR. BRADDON: No, it was '38. Oh, you mean the Gallery, '37. But The Ten's memorable exhibition was 1938.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, I had that as November, 1938.

MR. BRADDON: That's right.

MS. BERMAN: What other artists were you interested in besides The Ten? When you were at the Mercury?

MR. SCHECTMAN: We had exhibitions, group shows. It's all explained here in some of the things. We had Miro. At that time Miro was really very out, not as acceptable as today, as he is today. We had Matisse. We had...really, here's a little show that we had of some of the lesser known people, people like Botto, Mathai, Zoltan Hecht. They really became quite well known later on.

MR. BRADDON: I don't know if we list Takis.

MS. BERMAN: Right. And Schanker was in this too.

MR. SCHECTMAN: Schanker was, yes.

MR. BRADDON: We also put on some interesting theme shows. For example, we had a show called Visions of Other worlds. That was devoted almost half and half to drawings and paintings by the insane who had more than just a curiosity value. They had an interesting aesthetic value as well. The other half being African art--Visions of Other Worlds. Art that had something rather than an aesthetic objective in its origin. A number of shows of that nature. As far as The Ten is concerned and, as far as the kind of surrounding activity, we two, with the late Louis Harris who at that time was a member of The Ten, went on the air on Station WNYC and, with the confidence of youth, we gave a discussion called "What's Wrong with American Art," Monday, November 21, 1938.

MS. BERMAN: Is that actually the script of what you said there?

MR. BRADDON: This is the script.

MR. SCHECTMAN: Quite incredible. Quite incredible.

MR. BRADDON: This was timed for the exhibition of The Ten: Whitney dissenters. Mr. Schectman's saying.... We divided this material. It was jointly composed. "Four years ago ten progressive artists who shared a distaste for conservatism and a desire for experimentation conceived the idea of exhibiting as a unified articulate group to be known as The Ten. Not long after, one member dropped out, but they have optimistically continued to call themselves The Ten, filling the vacancy at each exhibition with a guest artist," and so forth. I won't take the time to read this but I'd be glad to give you a copy of the script.

MR. SCHECTMAN: It's really our ideas.

MS. BERMAN: That would be great. I'm sure Bill McNaught will be very excited.

MR. SCHECTMAN: It's an historic document.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, it is. And I'm delighted and amazed that you saved it. Why did Lou Harris, as opposed to any of the other ones, go on with you?

MR. SCHECTMAN: I don't know. I can't recall now why Lou Harris....

MR. BRADDON: I think he was a very, I think, illiterate type of person, in a way. And he wasn't terribly articulate.

MR. SCHECTMAN: I thought he was.

MR. BRADDON: He liked to talk but, well....

MR. SCHECTMAN: Perhaps we don't recall the same things about....

MR. BRADDON: Well, Rothko was the secretary of The Ten and extremely articulate.

MR. SCHECTMAN: Yes, he had much to say.

MR. BRADDON: Voluble and full of ideas and full of strong convictions about the condition of American art in general, about his own work. I think it's interesting in passing to note, as has been pointed out in this surrounding publicity regarding The Ten, that The Ten were unified really just in their general aims. They were not a school or a group. They were opposed to conservative representational art, but they were all at that time....

[END OF SIDE 1]

MR. BRADDON: The Ten had a history of being together. They showed at Georgette Passadoit previously and at some other places. But I think this was perhaps the ultimate in attention that was paid to them.

MR. SCHECTMAN: I would like to say one thing in this connection that you may not recall. Perhaps you do, but I'll mention it. We would have meetings in the evening. Every one of them would come. We had a desk, a very large desk, very impressive. I don't think we paid more than three dollars for the desk. But nevertheless, we redid it and decorated it. And they would sit in front in a semicircle and what came through to me then very clearly was that they have to do something to counteract the trends of art today. And they threw questions at one another and they got answers, and at us. And it appeared then to me that some of it was based upon an idea that, by doing something quite differently from anything else that had been on the scene then, they would be achieving something. I reacted to that. They felt then that they must do something about the conditions, and it seemed a little artificial. I was aware of that when I left these meetings. Of course, it may have just come out that way in the course of the conversations but it didn't take long before that actually took place. It was an astounding development after that. Incidentally, we had everybody in our gallery who really represented art in the world today, including some things of, say, abstract artists like--

MS. BERMAN: Pollock?

MR. SCHECTMAN: Pollock. We had some of his things which were really not important then. Neither was anyone else, if you'll go through some of these things. You'll see Rothko was denigrated. But that's the feeling I had then.

MS. BERMAN: Did Rothko know Pollock then when you...?

MR. SCHECTMAN: It did not come out in our dealings whether or not Pollock...Pollock was not an active member of the group. But we showed all the works of all these people.

MS. BERMAN: When did the people from The Ten start hanging around and coming to meetings at your gallery?

MR. BRADDON: A few months prior to the actual exhibition which took place in November, November 26. As I said, Rothko was extremely articulate and very much involved, very serious. And we worked very closely together. I don't know if you have a copy of the catalogue of that exhibition. I'll be glad to give you this. The foreword to it which was conceived and written jointly... am I correct?

MR. SCHECTMAN: Yes.

MR. BRADDON: Defined it very well.

MS. BERMAN: Written jointly by whom?

MR. BRADDON: By the three of us--myself, Sidney Schectman, and Rothko.

MS. BERMAN: Mr. Braddon, do you think you could tell me, when you say that Rothko was articulate or had ideas, I was wondering if you might be able to elaborate or recall his conversation, if at all possible, or what used to strike you when he talked or what he was concerned about?

MR. BRADDON: He was extremely serious. I remember that.

MR. SCHECTMAN: Never smiled.

MR. BRADDON: No, he never smiled. It was really unalloyed seriousness about what everybody in the group and ourselves felt was a misguided view of American art. That was the fundamental tie that kept The Ten together and which we shared with them. For example, the foreword to this catalogue which, as I say, was done jointly, was in a sense almost an emotional complaint about the current situation. It began, "A new academy is playing the old comedy of attempting to create something by naming it. Apparently the effort enjoys a certain popular success since the public is beginning to recognize an 'American art' that is determined by non-aesthetic standards--geographical, ethnic, moral or narrative, depending on the various lexicographers who bestow the term."

MR. SCHECTMAN: I don't know why you say that, but I think you did.

MR. BRADDON: "In this battle of words..." see, I held back. I could have said logomicy.... "the symbol of the silo is an ascendancy in our Whitney Museums of modern American art. The Ten remind us that the nomenclature is arbitrary and narrow." He felt very, very strongly as, indeed, all of them did. And, as I mentioned earlier, that was the element that united them because they were diverse. The group at the time in this exhibition consisted of Ben Zion, Bolotouski, Gottlieb, John Graham....

MR. SCHECTMAN: Who's now becoming again quite important.

MR. BRADDON: Louis Harris, Earl Kirkham who was the guest (he was the tenth man), Ralph Rosenborg, Marcus Rothkowitz, Louis Schanker, and Joseph Solmon. And the diversity of approaches is self-evident. they don't resemble each other.

MR. SCHECTMAN: Not in any way. Certainly Bolotowsky retained his geometric art for all time. It's only since the Guggenheim show that he's become so famous.

MR. BRADDON: There's sort of little side aspects here that the reviews make. Incidentally, again going back to the context, at that time the WPA adult education program sponsored art tours. I'll give you this list of them. They ranged from the Museum of Modern Art to a studio visit to Warren Wheelock, studio visits to other people. And at Mercury gallery, The Ten, this famous group of progressive painters, present their first show of the year of vital interest. Mr. Anton (that would be Harold Anton, a strange and wonderfully articulate man who is a painter himself..

MR. SCHECTMAN: Incredible.

MR. BRADDON: ...conducted the tour. So it was a nice time in that respect. It was very exciting.

MS. BERMAN: So this Art Tours, so this was November '38?

MR. BRADDON: It's indicated there.

MS. BERMAN: So that's great. They went to the Museum of Modern Art, the Rhen Gallery, a pottery studio, Federal Art Gallery, and the Mercury Gallery. So people were to have exposure to that. Did The Ten come to you or did you go after The Ten for the show? Do you remember that?

MR. SCHECTMAN: I would say that they came to us because we simply did not go after anybody. We were involved very deeply in our gallery work and I don't recall who began this project. But we had actually been in communication with most people in those days. We talked and met them in the great artistic bars of those days and I guess they just drifted up to us and then found that we were so sympathetic that they wanted us to represent them. We were quite loose with things then. We thought that everything will remain the way it began and nothing would ever change and one could simply exhibit things and buy them at will for the same prices of \$50 to \$100 to \$200 forever. This is the theory that we had. And actually it lasted till the '50s, believe it or not.

MR. BRADDON: We referred earlier to that broadcast that we undertook. I saved this letter from the editor of a publication called "The Black Mirror." "I have not seen your show. Perhaps I would not like it, but I want to compliment you on your broadcast. Seldom have I heard anything of such sound artistic sense as contrasted to the criticism which is but words, words, words. I trust that for the good of art, you'll be on the air again soon."

MS. BERMAN: What's the "Black Mirror?"

MR. BRADDON: I don't know.

MS. BERMAN: The person didn't sign his name, his or her name, just the editor of "The Black Mirror."

MR. SCHECTMAN: I don't know whether he wanted to be anonymous. But you asked the question before as to the people we showed at the gallery. Now here's an example. It's a comment from the "Village Jaywalker," a newspaper of those days. "Allow the Village Jaywalker to recommend the Mercury Galleries, 4 East Eighth Street,

presentation of an exhibition of surrealist paintings, primitive African sculpture, and work by the insane. The surrealist group includes work by De Chirico, Joan Miro, Salvador Dali, and Max Ernst, Yves Tanguy, and Hans Arp. How can I say anything further except that...." It went on to a much greater list than that, I assure you. And some marvelous work by primitive Africans, absolutely priceless things that were available in those days.

MS. BERMAN: Did you get into the African sculpture through Graham who was very influential?

MR. BRADDON: No.

MR. SCHECTMAN: Through another person.

MR. BRADDON: I remember though we had some copies of a little book of his available....

MS. BERMAN: Of Graham's book?

MR. SCHECTMAN: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, that's the dialectics book.

MR. BRADDON: Yes, that's right.

MR. SCHECTMAN: I think we were introduced to African sculpture by a great collector of those days. I don't know whether he's alive or not.

MR. BRADDON: I wouldn't say we were introduced. We were introduced to exhibitions of African art.

MR. SCHECTMAN: Introduced to exhibitions, not introduced to the art.

MR. BRADDON: Right.

MR. SCHECTMAN: A fellow by the name of Seghi.

MR. BRADDON: He's still around.

MR. SCHECTMAN: He must be very old now.

MS. BERMAN: What....say that...?

MR. SCHECTMAN: Ladislos Seghi.

MR. BRADDON: I think he changed his name to Segi.

MR. SCHECTMAN: S-E-G-I.

MR. BRADDON: S-E-G-Y.

MR. SCHECTMAN: A great collector.

MR. BRADDON: Incidentally, a little sidelight on the climate of the criticism, most of which was favorable for the show of The Ten. But there was one that Sidney...just before that was a little nasty in the New York Post. That must have been Jerome Kline. "The Ten, now affiliated with the Mercury Gallery, will open a group show there November 5 as 'Whitney dissenters' (were you invited, boys?)." In answer, "Dear Mr. Kline, The Ten are 'Whitney dissenters' on principle. Actually Louis Schanker and John D. Graham have been invited to the barmicide feast in the past. Ilya Bolotowsky has been invited to the impending annual since showing at Mercury Galleries." I think he had this reply. Do you have this? The complaint?

MR. SCHECTMAN: The complaint, yes. But no, I didn't know that. Incidentally, did you give Avis this Art Tours...?

MS. BERMAN: Yes, we looked at that.

MR. SCHECTMAN: The Museum of Modern Art, and the Mercury Galleries. And there again, De Chirico, Dali, Miro, etc., no small thing.

MS. BERMAN: However, any of The Ten who happened to be invited to show at the Whitney didn't refuse, though, did they?

MR. BRADDON: No. I think they never would have refused any thing of that sort. It was the most prestigious museum in the City.

MS. BERMAN: By the way, after the show or during the show did any of the people from the Whitney come by, like Lloyd Goodrich or Herman Moore, or Mrs. Force? Did anyone come by?

MR. BRADDON: I don't recall. They must have. We were virtually neighbors and the show got a lot of publicity.

MR. SCHECTMAN: Tremendous publicity. I'm sure they drifted in and we disdained recognition.

MS. BERMAN: I was just wondering if you ever heard anything from the curators about the show.

MR. BRADDON: No, no.

MR. SCHECTMAN: I'm sure if some of the people are around somehow they would recall it. This is Art News, an important magazine. Is it still in existence?

MS. BERMAN: Art News, yes.

MR. SCHECTMAN: Not this small?

MS. BERMAN: No.

MR. SCHECTMAN: This in itself is a document. This is a description of the show. This is Art Digest which I think was a better magazine in those days.

MS. BERMAN: Art Digest became Arts.

MR. SCHECTMAN: This is the review. I pulled together as much as I could in a hasty manner. I thought it might help you.

MR. BRADDON: I can give you copies. You don't want to give away your....

MR. SCHECTMAN: She'll return it to me, I'm sure.

MS. BERMAN: Let me put these aside anyway because I want to go on with what was happening at the gallery. How come you only gave The Ten one show? The next was at the Bonestall Gallery.

MR. BRADDON: I think we were crowded at the time. We didn't have an opening but we made the following proposal. Pity that it never really came to fruition. These are some pencil notes that I made at the time.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, this was a proposal by the Mercury Galleries to The Ten.

MR. BRADDON: To The Ten. And again, in retrospect, I wonder that we had the acumen. We started saying that there was a necessity for a new method because ordinarily they had isolated and sporadic shows maybe two weeks during the year, no cumulative effect, the publicity is dispersed. Second, lack of intensive publicity. The pictures are merely hung and critics are offhand and the public apathetic. Sales were infrequent, a small restricted list of purchasers; and the artists were not really built up. The only means of increasing the value. A general lack of organization and coordination, no extensive pressure on museums to purchase, critics, collectors, universities, in any integrated form. Now we said what we would propose was to have the works of the members continuously exhibited for the entire year. In other words, what we were proposing to them was in effect to have the Mercury Galleries devoted virtually exclusively to The Ten collectively and individually. It was a very interesting proposal I thought--the equivalent of two shows every month, a comprehensive view of the artists' work, constant publicity without sensation during the entire year, a possibility forming true critical evaluation because of the wide scope of the work rather than isolated examples. And then on the side of exploitation, using every possible means of publicity outside of the announcements, those of individual shows, advertising including unconventional means, reproductions of work in magazines, radio, and art tours, etc. So we felt there would be a mutual benefit there. We would arrange for out-of-town exhibitions, art tours, and so forth. What happened was....

MS. BERMAN: Why would they ever turn that down?

MR. BRADDON: Here is the sad answer why it was turned down. And this is a letter from Rothkowitz, secretary. "Mercury Galleries...."

MR. SCHECTMAN: That's a good letter.

MR. BRADDON: "Gentlemen: I am sorry to inform you that The Ten will not be able to exhibit in your gallery during the rest of the season. Since our exhibition in your gallery, certain problems of reorganization have arisen which have made it necessary to abandon all exhibition activities for the present season. We hope that you will

have no difficulty in rearranging the exhibitions for whatever time you had intended to allot us. We want to thank you for your efforts in our past exhibition and to wish you a successful season. Signed The Ten, M. Rothkowitz, Secretary.

MR. SCHECTMAN: That's a good letter.

MS. BERMAN: It certainly is. Why...?

MR. SCHECTMAN: It's an historical....

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MR. BRADDON: I lost it. It must be around someplace.

MR. SCHECTMAN: But you have the copy.

MR. BRADDON: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: What were these problems? Did you investigate what was meant here? This was December 26, 19...?

MR. SCHECTMAN: We were a little fancy free.

MR. BRADDON: And we were busy. In answer to your question as to why they didn't show...?

MR. SCHECTMAN: They were not important.

MR. BRADDON: We had other commitments and we wanted to undertake this rather exhaustive and sort of innovative program. It would have been very good for us had we continued, and it might have speeded recognition of some of those people by five years or more.

MR. SCHECTMAN: Maybe the whole school of abstract expressionism would have moved ahead. We did these kinds of things. We helped with this. Joe Solmon doesn't even remember this. I had this printed up.

MS. BERMAN: This is a ticket to an invitation saying "Saturday night, October 8, The Ten open the new art season with drinks, music, and pictures, at Solmon's Studio, 111 East 28th. Admission, 35 cents."

MR. SCHECTMAN: I think that's a marvelous thing.

MR. BRADDON: Yeah.

MR. SCHECTMAN: I saved a few things like that. I'm going to give you these if you'll promise to return them to me.

MR. BRADDON: Incidentally, Joe Solmon was very well received. In Cue: The Ten, this group's still together. We see them again at the Mercury Galleries. "They are dangerously near the Whitney and risk finding themselves one of the 109 some day. Keep an eye on Solmon who is shockingly good. Graham, Schanker, Gottlieb, Rothkowitz, Ben-Zion are others.

MS. BERMAN: I wish we knew what these problems were that they had to refuse, or that led them to refuse, such a comprehensive offer because it would have been the real ticket for a lot of them I would think.

MR. SCHECTMAN: I would think so, for them and for us. We got along very well personally. They had confidence in us. We had great regard for them.

MR. BRADDON: They weren't selling.

MR. SCHECTMAN: No.

MR. BRADDON: And wherever we came along and bought anything for ourselves, and I bought a lot of things which I subsequently sold in one package to someone.

MS. BERMAN: Which ones did you buy?

MR. SCHECTMAN: I bought everything that was around. And then I got everything together and made a deal with someone who took it all over. I don't know what happened to that particular group. They were everything that I could have possibly conceived of as being important at that time. The war was coming on. I did a lot of other funny things. But I wanted to bring to your attention the quality of our announcements. They were very unusual.

We had not....we were never commercial.

MS. BERMAN: Well, I guess I would have to ask you, if The Ten weren't selling, how did you make money and pay the rent and keep the gallery going?

MR. SCHECTMAN: We didn't make much money, but we kept the gallery going to some extent by our own resources, salaries that we were making out side. And we sold.

MR. BRADDON: And in a certain sense, The Ten were subsidized by the minor works that had an easier sale. They sold for less and they, also, had an easier appeal, an easier commercial appeal to the public. So we did sell a certain amount of that. We didn't show it. We'd produce it on request.

MR. SCHECTMAN: We had tremendous racks.

MR. BRADDON: Yes. We had hundreds, thousands, perhaps of paintings. And we could fulfill any kind of request, as I mentioned earlier. That subsidized us to some extent and subsidized The Ten. And Schanker and the others who we gave one man shows. Well, we bought. These date from that period and these, and Rosenberg and Schanker--they were all....

MR. SCHECTMAN: We had second favorites, by the way. Schanker was one of them and Kerkam was another.

MS. BERMAN: Well, they were more developed than Rothkowitz was at the time.

MR. BRADDON: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: Did he realize how unresolved he was in his painting at the time?

MR. SCHECTMAN: I thought so.

MR. BRADDON: I think so, yes.

MR. SCHECTMAN: I thought so. I think it's a very good question. I thought in a sense the seriousness of his demeanor was because of his inner conflicts and I wonder if this didn't play apart in his later life, I mean this constant aspect of being unresolved in this life. Whether or not he believed in what he was doing is a question as far as I'm concerned.

MR. BRADDON: Incidentally, the work that was exhibited at that time by him and by Gottlieb bore no resemblance at all to the things for which they've become famous.

MR. SCHECTMAN: Remember what I said before, that they seem to have been arriving at some solution to the problem of art by doing something that would be totally different. And maybe this almost abrupt change is what created what happened. I just wanted to show you this "Visions of Other worlds," this art of the insane, the kind of things we did then, and the nature and quality of the paintings that were brought out. If you think any of these things sold for \$100 or \$50, you're making a mistake, They were not selling. Am I right?

MR. BRADDON: Not a sale.

MR. SCHECTMAN: Not one sale.

MR. BRADDON: One hundred and fifty, two hundred dollars--we're talking about substantial oils.

MR. SCHECTMAN: That are worth in the, let's say, hundreds of thousands today.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, certainly. These Miros and Ernsts and Arps. When did you close the gallery, by the way, the Mercury Gallery?

MR. SCHECTMAN: 1940? When the war started breaking. I think that was about it.

MR. BRADDON: Two very talented young men. People we liked.

MS. BERMAN: These are very nice cards. You did lovely announcements. And did both of you go into the Army? Is that what happened?

MR. BRADDON: No, I was in the Office of Censorship.

MR. SCHECTMAN: I was in the War Department.

MS. BERMAN: Did you first meet Rothko in late 1938?

MR. SCHECTMAN: Greenwich Village was a small world and a very beautiful place in those days. It's nothing like what it is today. There was no commercialism at all in that place. There were marvelous sculptors and wonderful painters. Marvelous. Aimlessly working very hard to try to do something, having outdoor art shows once in a while (not the kind we have today). I remember one sculpture show on a lot on Sixth Avenue. Everybody who is today immensely famous and successful showed for nothing.

MR. BRADDON: For all the lack of commercial success, there was a most enjoyable yeasty time, a lot of things happening, a lot of excitement, and real pleasure in participation.

MS. BERMAN: What did Rothko's work look like then?

MR. SCHECTMAN: We don't see much of it around now.

MR. BRADDON: The catalogue of this show, the title, will remind me. For example....

MR. SCHECTMAN: I think you gave it to Avis.

MR. BRADDON: If I remember the Gottlieb, that was a depiction of an old-fashioned phonograph.

MR. SCHECTMAN: In the Whitney dissenters show, Gottlieb had a painting called "Pete McCarty's Place." Let me see about Rothko's. Louis Schanker's was "Street Scene from my Window," which was a nice painting, incidentally.

MR. BRADDON: I can tell you that it was thoroughly representational.

MR. SCHECTMAN: Rothko wasn't even...Ilya Bolotowsky was....

MR. BRADDON: In the review, they didn't pay much attention.

MR. SCHECTMAN: No, he was disregarded to some extent.

MS. BERMAN: Was he interested in myth theories and Oedipus, and Antigone, when you knew him?

MR. BRADDON: He didn't refer to it.

MR. SCHECTMAN: He was very introspective.

MR. BRADDON: Extremely.

MR. SCHECTMAN: And not communicative. Others in the group were. At times he would come out and they would all listen to him, but he was silent and then he would come out with his own approach to things. I'm impressed with the fact that he was so serious.

MR. BRADDON: Very serious. Unsmiling.

MR. SCHECTMAN: Everyone else was too, in a way, but Louie Schanker, for example, was a kind of a playboy amongst them. An extremely handsome man who later married Libby Holman, the singer. I saw him in his last days. I'm just trying to see what did Rothko have then.

MR. BRADDON: They're listed there.

MR. SCHECTMAN: What was it?

MS. BERMAN: What were his activities...?

MR. SCHECTMAN: "Water Colors and Conversation."

MS. BERMAN: What were his activities as the secretary or what did he do?

MR. SCHECTMAN: The group was not a particularly cohesive organization and he sort of pulled it together in a very serious vein. He held it together as a group whereas the others tended to wander off. There were many reasons for it. They weren't earning any money. For example, was it Rosenberg's wife who had the art store?

MR. BRADDON: Harris.

MR. SCHECTMAN: She had a very well-known art store on Greenwich Avenue. Very well known....

[END OF SIDE 2]

MS. BERMAN: Lou Harris was doing sign painting?

MR. BRADDON: Yes. He wasn't very good. I saw some examples of his work and the lettering left much to be desired. Joe Solmon, as you know, went out to Spokane. He taught. Kerkam of course was the quintessential painter. He starved and he painted. He was the most serious painter I've ever encountered.

MR. SCHECTMAN: He had previously been enormously successful as a commercial artist for those days. I think he even was in Hollywood for a while.

MR. BRADDON: Yes, he worked for movie companies.

MR. SCHECTMAN: He gave everything up. He had a stroke and he continued to paint in his awkward way.

MR. BRADDON: I have to correct that. The painting wasn't awkward but he was awkward.

MR. SCHECTMAN: Yes. His arms were limp and he talked with a terrible stutter. And yet his paintings were fine drawings, marvelous. And some day as we talk, something will happen on the New York scene again with him. There isn't anyone I've spoken to recently who remembers him who says he's going to have his place again.

MR. BRADDON: I can't say this as a certainty. I think all of them were on the WPA art project that gave them a little sustenance.

MS. BERMAN: And they could get their art supplies a little more cheaply I assume through Mrs. Harris?

MR. SCHECTMAN: She was cooperative, but I'm not certain as to what their relationships were.

MS. BERMAN: Did you ever give any of The Ten a stipend or was it just straight sales, what you could sell?

MR. SCHECTMAN: I'd like to think about why they gave an oil to us at that point.

MR. BRADDON: Because we were showing their things. We were sympathetic. We provided them with a forum, an exhibition place, and were very sympathetic individually and collectively. Individually we were in the course of giving them some man shows. This is very interesting. I didn't know I had this. This is an article, a critical article, by the Daily Worker which takes an entirely different and I would say an interesting point of view about it.

MS. BERMAN: This is November 15, 1938. Yes. I'm looking at the political...the struggle between the progressive artists and the public on the one side and the conservative critics on the other, coming perhaps to the right conclusion for the wrong reasons here.

MR. BRADDON: "The New York Times in dismissing it in a few irrelevant statements gives no indication of the widespread enthusiasm which all but the most reactionary elements have shown." [Laughter] That's true, but artistically reactionary.

MR. SCHECTMAN: That's right. It had nothing to do with that other emphasis.

MS. BERMAN: Did you ever go to Rothko's studio, by the way, or his house, or did he come visit you?

MR. SCHECTMAN: I don't think I visited his studio.

MR. BRADDON: No, never did. I visited Rosenborg, Kirkam, Schanker, Avery, Harris.

MR. SCHECTMAN: Many of our artists were rather close to us--Solmon.

MS. BERMAN: Did you observe the relationship between Rothko and Avery which was of course very important?

MR. BRADDON: Avery didn't attend these meetings.

MR. SCHECTMAN: I don't recall Avery being present. You know, people walked in and out. He undoubtedly came up to the gallery. But there is no memory on my part of Avery participating.

MS. BERMAN: How about Rothko and Gorky?

MR. SCHECTMAN: I know nothing about that. We showed Gorky's work.

MS. BERMAN: The reason Avery didn't enter into this was because he was not at that time a member of The Ten. He had shown with them on other occasions, but there would have been no reason for him to attend these meetings. He was not a member of The Ten.

MR. SCHECTMAN: They were kind of a little club really.

MR. BRADDON: But they admired Avery.

MS. BERMAN: Well, who were some of the other artists who Rothko admired?

MR. SCHECTMAN: Rothko? I had some knowledge of these things many years ago. He hated a lot of people.

MS. BERMAN: That would be interesting to know.

MR. SCHECTMAN: He hated many people. In fact, I think he wrote some things about some people. He was a little like Barnett Newman in a sense. He did criticize people he didn't like. But I don't recall. As a matter of fact, I again say he was very introspective and he did make his feelings known at times, but it's passed into time.

MS. BERMAN: That's quite all right. You're both doing wonderfully but I have a list of questions from the Rothko Foundation and I do want to go through that. Did he ever...was he ever interested in surrealism or automatic writing? Did he ever talk about that or anything?

MR. SCHECTMAN: Never.

MR. BRADDON: No indication of any of that, no.

MR. SCHECTMAN: And we had meetings at our gallery. He never brought this up.

MS. BERMAN: What did you used to talk about at those meetings besides the...?

MR. SCHECTMAN: They were very angered by the trend of art. This was the substance of many of the meetings, and that something had to be done about it. They couldn't stand what was happening at the Whitney Museum.

MR. BRADDON: A lot of the anger was directed--most of it perhaps---at the museums, which they felt owed them the recognition that they rightly deserved. You couldn't really complain about the public which is notoriously slow in recognition, but they were very, very bitter about the museums. And indeed, the very theme of that show indicated it. But it wasn't confined just to Whitney which perhaps was more adventurous than some.

MR. SCHECTMAN: I guess the reason they talked about the Whitney so much is because we were so near them and there were these glittering shows going on, famous people coming in and fine openings, and where were they? Out in the cold somewhere, unrecognized, hoping to be recognized.

MS. BERMAN: Did they talk about shows, for example, at the Museum of Modern Art like cubist and abstract art which was held in '36?

MR. BRADDON: Well, they did revere Picasso and Braque--no question about that--and were very sympathetic to abstract art even though most of them were not practitioners of that kind of art at that time. Bolotowski might have been. That's about it.

MR. SCHECTMAN: They were not against...they were against it, not volubly against, the representative art of any sort, including the impressionist school. They were not very concerned with it. Anything that smacked of total representation was not looked at with any great glee. On the other hand, their work did not, as Mr. Braddon says, really go out into the areas that it later did, which is a surprising thing. I mean here is the beginning of it, and yet we didn't see too much evidence with the exception of Bolotowski and to some extent Ben-Zion who has an illustration, I think, in the Art News. And we regarded him as an interesting painter. He just disappeared. He's alive but....

MR. BRADDON: He doesn't like to show.

MR. SCHECTMAN: Totally rejected the life.

MR. BRADDON: He wouldn't show. He paints but....

MS. BERMAN: Where does he live?

MR. BRADDON: In the city, in New York City.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, really?

MR. BRADDON: Joe Solmon goes to see him sometimes.

MR. SCHECTMAN: Rosenborg, on the other hand, no one knows anything about. There was an announcement

that he died some years ago. He might have put that in the paper.

MR. BRADDON: No, it wasn't in the paper. It was reported.

MR. SCHECTMAN: Who reported it?

MR. BRADDON: Someone called Joe Solmon and....

MR. SCHECTMAN: It wasn't announced publicly?

MR. BRADDON: He passed it on to me and we were saddened about it. And then we learned, we were told that it was not true.

MR. SCHECTMAN: So he might be alive today. No one hears of him.

MS. BERMAN: Did you ever watch Rothko paint or see him draw or do anything like that? I'm wondering.

MR. SCHECTMAN: No, we never visited his studio, unfortunately.

MS. BERMAN: In the show that you gave, did you hang the show or did the artists and did you select the paintings?

MR. BRADDON: We hung the show, and then paintings were selected jointly. They indicated what they would have liked to have shown and we chose from that. There was an easy relationship.

MS. BERMAN: Did Rothko ever talk about books that he liked? You said that both of you were so interested in music. Did he ever discuss his love of music with you?

MR. BRADDON: No, I don't think so. Do you have any recollection?

MR. SCHECTMAN: He talked about art and nothing else in this terribly serious way. Sitting on the floor with the rest of them is a scene I'll never forget. Night after night, they would come up and discuss what the approach should be. And, as I said, it always struck me that something would come of this but it seemed that they were so anxious to break away that they would do anything in order to get away from it all. And really, violence took place after this. I mean the explosion some years later I think was the result of this desire not to repeat the past history. I'm not alone in this feeling.

MS. BERMAN: It seems to me that they talked maybe more about the art scene than art theories.

MR. BRADDON: Exactly. Because the context was such that that was the kind of subject that was discussed. They were talking about how best to show their work in a favorable light and familiarize the public and try and win critical acclaim, not so much because they respected the critics so intensely but because they felt it would have some practical value and because every artist likes to be appreciated. So it dealt largely with the American painting scene and what could be done about it practically. And that's how this thing took shape.

MR. SCHECTMAN: We of course recognized the various movements. And I'm reading from a simple little brochure that we sent out, and on the cover of it are the schools that we fostered--impressionism, minimalism, expressionism, futurism, surrealism, myriadism (which we invented), purism, neoclassicism, naturalism, realism, constructivism, all these, fauvism, Dadaism, cubism, on and on and on. We had examples of these. And I think no one ever did anything like this before.

MS. BERMAN: Did the artists come in and look at these examples that you had? Were they interested in saying, "Oh, let me see your surrealist paintings just for fun" or anything like that?

MR. SCHECTMAN: They came in droves sometimes. It was amazing what this little place would have. We had flexible conditions. Our walls were...our partitions were on wheels and we could arrange any kind of a show by simply shifting around these partitions with great ease. I don't know why that isn't done any more. That was an excellent approach. Sometimes I see it.

MS. BERMAN: I saw one recently where they had panels hung from the ceiling. It was a very clever installation, large transparent panels.

MR. SCHECTMAN: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: At the time was Rothko interested in having his works hung a certain way or was he very choosy?

MR. BRADDON: No. We hung his show.

MR. SCHECTMAN: We had full power to do it.

MS. BERMAN: Did you talk about any sorts of techniques that he used in terms of priming canvases or grinding his pigments or paints that he used or anything?

MR. BRADDON: Do you recall?

MR. SCHECTMAN: Nothing. None of them discussed anything like that.

MS. BERMAN: Did you know the books that he was reading or anything like that?

MR. SCHECTMAN: No.

MS. BERMAN: Who else did you know at the time who also knew Rothko?

MR. SCHECTMAN: I guess most of the artists. We would talk casually. Nobody had anything bad to say about any of these people. Nobody derogated their work. Nobody said that they're doing terrible things or they're lousy painters. There was always a kind of a sympathy for them. If I could remember one person who ever said anything cruel about them, I would bring it up. But you don't recall anything?

MR. BRADDON: No.

MR. SCHECTMAN: Not even the opposition or even the Whitney people or other museums?

MR. BRADDON: Well, they were comfortable....

MR. SCHECTMAN: And they just went along. This was a little bumblebee buzzing at them.

MS. BERMAN: Who were the people that Rothko was closest to?

MR. SCHECTMAN: Well, I know he liked Schanker. I once talked to him about him, but he told me that Schanker was a playboy of some sort even then, but a great painter and a great wood block...you know, painted, the greatest. "But I don't know where he's going to go," he would say because he thought he was frivolous. And that's the kind of person Rothko was, terribly, terribly serious.

MS. BERMAN: But he did admire those color wood-cuts?

MR. SCHECTMAN: He admired them tremendously. He thought he was one of the most talented people. I remember clearly the conversation.

MR. BRADDON: His demeanor and his facial expressions tended to be sour.

MR. SCHECTMAN: Sour and dour.

MR. BRADDON: Yes, not a cheerful man.

MR. SCHECTMAN: I can't remember him ever smiling.

MS. BERMAN: Also, I don't know if this made a difference to you but he was, what, 15 years older than you were and maybe you also looked...maybe it was a different relationship also because you were quite young.

MR. BRADDON: Not on our part. We felt ourselves equal or superior to most people. [Laughter]

MR. SCHECTMAN: We did, really. We had the feeling that they thought the same of us, the way they sat around and listened to our opinions and thoughts and never allowing themselves, for example, to interfere with what we were to do.

MR. BRADDON: Age did not enter into it.

MR. SCHECTMAN: No, not at all.

MR. BRADDON: Ben-Zion was considerably older. He's in his 80's now.

MR. SCHECTMAN: I met Gottlieb shortly before he died in East Hampton where I had a home for several years. And I met him at Guild Hall and he was in a wheelchair and he saw me. I hadn't seen him for years. And he saw me. Suddenly he said, "Please come to my house. Come tonight. Please, I want to talk to you." And my wife was with me and I said to her (he was very ill), "I'm concerned about this moment. I don't know whether I ought to do this or not." I didn't go. The following week he died. It was very strange. But his eyes lighted up and I thought,

well, here goes the whole Ten thing all over again.

MS. BERMAN: When was the last time you saw Rothko?

MR. BRADDON: Never saw him after the dissolution of the gallery.

MS. BERMAN: How about you?

MR. SCHECTMAN: You're not the only one that calls us and wants to know about The Ten. It's a very strange thing that's happening--this interest in the group, I think because there is an aspect of the art school in New York that must I think have its beginnings with these people. I always thought there were others, but I don't know. Who were they? Were there any others around? There was no Motherwell.

MR. BRADDON: Oh, no. Later.

MR. SCHECTMAN: These were later people and they all took off from there. So this was a very vital group. WPA....

MR. BRADDON: There were people a little older, like Stuart Davis.

MR. SCHECTMAN: We showed Davis. He meant nothing.

MS. BERMAN: You showed Stuart Davis? He had Edith Halpert though. He had the Downtown Gallery.

MR. SCHECTMAN: We had some of his work. I had one. I liked it. I was overwhelmed by it.

MS. BERMAN: Did you keep up relations with some of the other people who were in The Ten? Solmon certainly, and then who were some of the others?

MR. BRADDON: Yes, he's a very close friend of mine. Schanker's a good friend, Louis Schanker, and I've seen him many times here.

MR. SCHECTMAN: Very close.

MR. BRADDON: At the time I lived near him in Brooklyn Heights. Schanker lived on State Street and I lived on Remson Street, so I visited him. And I've seen Schanker in subsequent years. The same with Louis Harris. Kerkam I'd seen frequently.

MR. SCHECTMAN: I had been buying Schanker's work fairly recently until about a year ago. He had a show at the Associated American Art Gallery two years ago and I bought four of his early (wood cuts). I thought they were magnificent, and I just did that. I'm not collecting right now, yet I couldn't resist it.

MS. BERMAN: Were you sad or did you feel resentful that some of these people you never saw again, I guess like Gottlieb and Rothko?

MR. BRADDON: No, not sad, because we could have seen them had it been our initiative. We were not rejected by them. We were simply out of that business. As Mr. Schectman points out, the war intervened and we were very preoccupied with other things. And subsequently our careers took different turns. I was in the record business thereafter after some years and we were simply appreciators of art and occasional collectors rather than active promoters of art. So, with the exception of these few people who were friends, no, I had no negative feelings about it. As I say, I could have seen them....

MR. SCHECTMAN: No, anytime. Although, in recent years, I felt that I should have been more concerned with them and visited them and so forth and so on. But I somehow thought that time will never, never go on and I'll drop in one of those days. That's characteristic of our lives, I think. We have our own interests. I can speak for Mr. Braddon as well. I bought a piece of sculpture by David Hare many, many years ago and I didn't like the way it was mounted on some stone and I wanted it to be redone, and signed differently. And I called him up and he said, "My God, you have the falling thigh?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, come down. I'll redo it. I never liked it." And I made an appointment with him and I forgot about the appointment. I never communicated with him after that. That must be 15 or 20 years ago. And, when I look at this piece, I say, "Maybe I'll call him up some day and have this redone."

MR. BRADDON: I saw Bolotowsky just a few weeks ago at a service, a little memorial service for Schanker. Bolotowsky spoke very charmingly, very rapidly--he reminisced. But we had a nice meeting with him. We were glad to see each other.

MR. SCHECTMAN: And that's where it remained.

MR. BRADDON: We'll probably never see him again except for a chance encounter.

MS. BERMAN: Were you surprised that some of these people, Rothko and then Gottlieb, became so famous?

MR. BRADDON: I was.

MR. SCHECTMAN: When you talk about famous and that kind of commercial success, I was rather disturbed by all of this. I mean for a painting to go for \$500,000 or more, or a million, and having these things at one time and not thinking that anything would ever happen in the world like this, I get kind of a twinge. We could have had every one of these paintings for barely nothing. And it wasn't the idea then to buy for the purpose of values appreciating. In those days nobody thought of that, because subsequently we bought Picassos at terribly low rates just before the war broke. We could have walked in and bought anything we wanted at ridiculous prices, all of which I've given to Cornell.

MS. BERMAN: Was Rothko worried about money or talked about that or had problems?

MR. BRADDON: He didn't talk about it.

MR. SCHECTMAN: He never expressed himself. Nobody did. Nobody did. They were anxious to sell things but they never....

MR. BRADDON: Very anxious to sell. Their prices were very low. I wish I had a price list here. They probably ranged around \$200, \$150-\$200. They would have sold for \$50 if they had an offer.

MR. SCHECTMAN: Oh, easily. Fifty dollars would take any painting. There was an artist who was in Perls Gallery years ago, John Nichols. And John would say, "Look, all I want is \$5 for this oil." I would say, "John, I can't give you \$5. I'll give you \$20 for it." He'd say, "I can't accept that." And I have this "Horses at Work and Horses at Play." I gave it to my son. He loves the painting. And whatever happened to John Nichols I don't know, but he painted in a Matisse-like manner and then went off to his own approach. But Perls thought highly of him. He had marvelous reviews. I think money was not really the thing. They painted to exist, I guess.

MS. BERMAN: Did you know Mrs. Rothko at the time, the first Mrs. Rothko, at all?

MR. SCHECTMAN: Did she ever come up to the gallery?

MR. BRADDON: No.

MR. SCHECTMAN: This was a group of painters who merely got together....

MR. BRADDON: I know Solmon's and Schanker's first wife and Ben-Zion's wife.

MS. BERMAN: How about politics? Did they used to talk about that?

MR. BRADDON: Oh, yes. They were very left.

MR. SCHECTMAN: The Daily Worker.

MR. BRADDON: I think virtually all of them. I don't think Rosenberg was terribly political if I remember, but I'm not sure. Joe Solmon can tell you. I don't know about Lou Schanker--maybe. They were in the whole left radical group. I don't know about...there may be exceptions. I don't know about Ben-Zion. I think...yeah, maybe so. I guess they all tended to be fairly political.

MR. SCHECTMAN: There's no doubt. It was an accepted thing in those days. I don't think anybody of any quality was not anti-Catholic and really not terribly radical. They weren't radical. They were just left wingers. The whole WPA art World was the left wing labor approach to things.

MS. BERMAN: Did you notice the influence of Rothko on Gottlieb or was it so? Did you notice? They seemed to be...?

MR. BRADDON: I would not have even noticed it.

MR. SCHECTMAN: I have a distinct feeling that they left each other alone in terms of their own approaches. The best examples are Schanker and Bolotowsky who suddenly went their own way or Kerkam whose work never changed from a lovely and exquisite line.

MS. BERMAN: I was wondering because I had talked to Jack Kufeld and he felt that.... Of course, he dropped out of The Ten before you had them. He felt that Gottlieb at one point was an echo of Rothko and I was wondering....

MR. BRADDON: Well, Jack was in that. As you point out, he had been a member of The Ten previously. He may have picked up some overtones that we might not have known about.

MR. SCHECTMAN: I didn't see it. I didn't see this influence from one to the other. Rosenborg had his own style and never varied.

MR. BRADDON: Jack would have spent much more time with them over a period.

MR. SCHECTMAN: He might have been to their studios also.

MR. BRADDON: Sure.

MR. SCHECTMAN: Did he say that he had visited their studio?

MS. BERMAN: I guess so, yeah. He said he had spent some time in the summers with the Rothkos. Where would one get to contact relatives of Lou Harris? Do you know where they live or anything?

MR. SCHECTMAN: I think possibly his wife or somebody might know.

MR. BRADDON: Maybe. Is that shop still there? I think she had a sister who... her shop was in Greenwich. I don't know.

MR. SCHECTMAN: I would like to track down Rosenborg. I've thought about this for the longest time. I gave him an exhibition many, many years ago, and it was part of a group show. He came up. He was livid. He was so anxious to get something sold and was worried about not selling. And I remember I thought his paintings were wonderful. I was going to buy one myself and I didn't buy a Noguchi for nothing either. There were a lot of things I didn't buy either. But the idea is he may be alive and it would...nice little Georges Simenon approach to track him down.

MS. BERMAN: When you said you gave him an exhibition after the war, did you have a gallery out on Long Island?

MR. SCHECTMAN: No. This was a show for charity, and I included in that show people that I admired.

[END OF SIDE 3]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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