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Oral history interview with Jacob Kainen,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Jacob Kainen on August 10 and September 22, 1982. The interview took place at the artist's studio in Washington, DC, 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: [In progress]-oral history interview of Jacob Kainen with Avis Berman on August 10, 1982, in his studio on 10th Street in Washington, D.C. Well, let's begin with Waterbury and ask how your parents ended up there.

JACOB KAINEN: Well, my father was born in Russia. So was my mother. And my father escaped Russia in 1905, at the time of the Russo-Japanese War, because it was obvious that Rasputin was not very competent and that he was sending training rifles to the soldiers at the front. They didn't have weapons to fight with. And he escaped at the age of 23, 22, 23, and got to England. They had forged passports and so forth. Then he came to the United States shortly thereafter, I guess about 1906.

He had to learn English. His brother-in-law had a farm on the outskirts of Waterbury, Connecticut. So my father could always get a job because he was a very skilled mechanic, that is, toolmaker. He had worked since he was 10 in an industrial town in Russia, a town that was called Hughesovka [Yuzovka], after an English industrialist named [John] Hughes. Later the name of the town was changed to Stalino, and what it is now I have no idea. But he had a great gift for invention and a great deal of initiative, so that he would invent safety devices for the machines and he had many inventions himself. In other words, he could make anything with metal. He knew all about it. In Waterbury he worked for Chase Rollin Mills, Schofield Manufacturing Company. So my brothers and I were born in Waterbury, Connecticut.

MS. BERMAN: What was your mother's maiden name, and where did she come from?

MR. KAINEN: She came from Odessa. Her maiden name was Levine. But she had an interesting background. That is, she loved music and she had volumes in Russian and Yiddish, stories of [Guy] de Maupassant and some other folks. She would go down to the Metropolitan Opera by herself and listen to the great singers. She had no formal education.

Early on she would go to the Metropolitan Museum and pick out a painting for me to copy to send to relatives who were about to get married or to have children. That started me off. I copied about 15 paintings there.

MS. BERMAN: Do you remember any of them?

MR. KAINEN: Oh, sure. She had classical taste. She liked Claude Lorraine. I copied a Ford. She liked [John] Constable. I copied Rembrandt on my own. But [Camille] Corot, [Nicolas] Poussin. She liked George Inness. I copied *Autumn Oaks*. That was in the Lenox collection at the New York Public Library. That was before your time. They had a whole room with some very good paintings.

MS. BERMAN: So there was-first of all, what was your mother's first name by the way?

MR. KAINEN: Fannie.

MS. BERMAN: So there was a great deal of culture in your house, and you were encouraged. So they realized that you were talented very early on.

MR. KAINEN: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: And did they want you to become an artist?

MR. KAINEN: Well, they thought I'd become a commercial artist. But by that time I had been to the Art Students League. When I was 16, I studied with Michael Ives. He used to draw without looking at the paper. That was before-I guess it was at the time of the Surrealists. I didn't realize the connection. But we would draw. He said the reason for doing that is to learn to trust your hand at drawing. You don't want to watch your hand like a hawk. You draw better if you look at nature or whatever you're looking at and let your hand go. But he also said

not to take the pencil off the paper. Let it run around and move around in forms. I was 16 and that was, I think, the best training I ever had.

MS. BERMAN: That sounds very valuable.

MR. KAINEN: I used to practice.

MS. BERMAN: How did your family get to New York?

MR. KAINEN: Well, my father's brother opened a garage and prevailed on my father to help him. My father, being a good-hearted person, left his fine job [he was told he could get a job anytime he wanted to come back] and came to New York to help him with the garage. But there wasn't enough for him after a short while, and he got a job improving on the latest inventions for some outfit. He had about 22 inventions recorded, many not in his own name, I mean, aside from those.

MS. BERMAN: What was your father's first name by the way?

MR. KAINEN: Joseph.

MS. BERMAN: There was a story in one of the articles about you that your first paint box belonged to William Merritt Chase. How did that come about?

MR. KAINEN: Well, I knew a number of painters in high school as friends. And they knew some old painters who lived around 10th Street. They visited Chase's old studio that he abandoned and saw this little paint box there that they had no use for. I said, "Gee, I'd like to have that." So they let me have it. It was a guy named Charlie-I forget his name, a friend of James Halifax.

MS. BERMAN: That's the famous 10th Street building, 51 West 10th Street. Did you ever go down and visit, and meet any of the painters who were down there?

MR. KAINEN: 51 West 10th? What painters are you talking about?

MS. BERMAN: Well, that was the-

MR. KAINEN: Do you mean Chase's school?

MS. BERMAN: Yes. And also it was a big studio. La Farge had his studio there, and [Childe] Hassam was there for a while, but the painters of that generation were in that big building. And other people would rent it too.

MR. KAINEN: I didn't know that.

MS. BERMAN: I guess it's a real historical building for American artists. I mean, it wasn't just Chase, but a good many other painters were down there.

Did you decide that you wanted to be an artist yourself, or was it your mother's encouragement?

MR. KAINEN: Oh, no. I have a drawing I did when I was 10. I copied a drawing in *Cosmopolitan* magazine. Was it *Cosmopolitan*? Yes. But I also used to read Howard Pyle's stories of the round table, King Arthur and so forth. Howard Pyle was an art nouveau artist. That is, it was a carryover of art nouveau, and he had a great sense of pattern-black and white, lines, he'd have texture with dots, some little dashes. I was very young and reading about Lancelot and all the Knights of the Round Table. And Pyle wrote the books himself, transcribed them. He had a [Sir Thomas] Malory-like style, like clay through his armor.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MR. KAINEN: It gave a certain flavor. He handled it very well. I always was interested in art. I was filling up sketch books when I was pretty young. Of course, I haunted the Metropolitan. I remember the time I saw the plaster casts. They had a room of plaster casts. I saw the *Discobolus* [Myron] and all the famous Greek and Roman statues, Michelangelo and others. And I saw seams on the side and dust. I was very much disappointed. I thought these were the classical great statues of antiquity. That's how naive I was.

MS. BERMAN: You were really disillusioned?

MR. KAINEN: Yes, I was disillusioned, but I found out shortly thereafter that they were just casts.

Oh yes, my parents used to subscribe to the *Jewish Daily Forward*. On Sundays there was a rotogravure section and a painting was always reproduced, lots of Rembrandts. But they had other artists, you know, art history. I

began clipping out these painting reproductions and pasting them into scrapbooks. Very cheap paper and I used rubber cement, but I finally had a pretty good collection. I learned a lot about art that way.

Then, when I was 17, I worked for Brentano's during the summer, and Brentano's published their volumes on artists. A friend of mine was in the shipping department so he gave me books on Rembrandt, Titian, Rubens, Dürer. I learned a great deal. The titles were in English, French, and German. It's a good way to pick up a smattering-

MRS. KAINEN: [Inaudible.]

MS. BERMAN: When you went to the [Art Students] League, what was it like? You were very young.

MR. KAINEN: I was 16.

MS. BERMAN: Who were some of the other students that were there?

MR. KAINEN: I went to a night class.

MRS. KAINEN: That was later.

MR. KAINEN: No. At the League, I went to a night class, even when I was 16. I remember some of the people physically but I don't remember their names.

MS. BERMAN: It interests me that you were actually painting very young, too. Most kids are just coloring and drawing.

MR. KAINEN: I painted on a piece of cardboard. I copied paintings in the *Forbes*. I remember copying a painting of Lady Diana Manners as an adolescent. It was painted by John Lavery or one of those guys.

MS. BERMAN: Were you doing any original paintings, any original compositions, or just copies?

MR. KAINEN: Well, I did originals. I put little-this is about a 10 by 12 box and panels. You could have canvas board panels covered with canvas. I used 12 by 16 later. But I'd go out and paint. I went out with my high school buddy, Jules Halfant. There are still a couple. I guess my brother has some of them. He has one.

MS. BERMAN: And you were at the Educational Alliance too?

MR. KAINEN: Yes, I went evenings just around that time, 16, 17.

MS. BERMAN: Was the teaching different than at the League?

MR. KAINEN: Yes. I studied with Abbo Ostrowsky, who was an etcher, basically. But he was very literal, and he obtruded his teaching too much. He was giving orders, instructions. So I didn't like it very much. He was downtown somewhere.

MS. BERMAN: Also it seems by the time you were 16 or 17, besides being precocious, you were very proficient, since it seemed you had a lot of practice. You were painting and drawing a lot.

MR. KAINEN: I was painting and drawing and looking at old masters. I've had occasions to-that background's come up. I remember at the University of Maryland there was a primitive painting. It was based on Titian's painting [*Noli me tangere*, 1511-1512].

And George Levitine, who's head of the department, didn't recognize it. He said, "That's a very funny composition for a primitive. It shows that: they have some imagination." I said, "George, that's right out of Titian." He was very embarrassed.

But when you look at these paintings, and I looked at them for years, there are artists who have a sense of what puts a painting together.

MS. BERMAN: Well, it seems that you started then to build a base of the museum in your head and you could reshuffle or reorder the paintings.

MR. KAINEN: Yes, that's right.

MS. BERMAN: And pull them out when you needed them in a way. Then you went to Pratt. What was the instruction like there? What did you learn as an artist from being at Pratt?

MR. KAINEN:

I'll tell you, very little. The main painter, painting teacher, was Paul Moschowitz, M-O-S-C-H-O-W-I-T-Z. He was a Pole and he did religious paintings and he made portraits for a living. He had a studio on 41st Street, just off Fifth Avenue. I visited his place a couple of times. And he started giving us a palette. Among his colors was Harrison red. I wouldn't use a color like that. It was a hard, synthetic color. Then he said, "Emerald green." I said, "Mr. Moschowitz, that's a poisonous color. That contains arsenic. A pupil of [Adolphe William] Bouguereau died from getting emerald green into a cut." He said, "Oh, is that so? Well, nevertheless, you can't replace it. That's a very easy green."

He would also come in on Monday. You see, we painted every day. In the portrait class, he'd paint three times a week—Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. And he'd come in and pose a model, or sometimes the monitor would pose a model. He would always come in Friday afternoon and sit down at each person's easel or stand up and start painting on it. I didn't have too much respect. He came to work on mine. I said, "Don't touch it, Mr. Moschowitz. You'll spoil it."

MS. BERMAN: Is that what led to your dismissal from Pratt?

MR. KAINEN: No. Actually he said I was the only serious student there. By that time also, I was beginning to have a few Cézanneish touches and things like that. I can show you some of the paintings. I have a couple left. But the instruction was pretty bad, but we could paint.

MRS. KAINEN: You were setting up your own classes.

MR. KAINEN: Finally I began setting up my own classes.

MS. BERMAN: You did at Pratt?

MR. KAINEN: At Pratt. I didn't want to take the commercial art classes. I set up a class in still life just for myself. I was a little too much a bone in the throat, so they got some excuse to kick me out.

There was a new director. The old director used to give lectures on art history and he'd show [Henri] Matisse and [Georges] Rouault and talk about how insane these artists were. Well, the new director came in. He wasn't nearly as good. The old director at least had a background, Dr. Walter Scott Perry. The new one, James Boudreau, was an administrator and he wanted to iron out all the problems. So one afternoon a friend of mine in the painting class prevailed on me to begin a chess game. I said, "I don't play chess." He said, "I'll show you how." We only had about ten minutes more. So I sat down and put out the chess board. At that moment Boudreau came in with visitors from Cleveland. He was livid, of course. He called us in to give us a calling down. He suspended the other fellow but he kicked me out. This is a month before graduation.

I had it all prepared. I said, "Well, [Percy Bysshe] Shelley was kicked out of Cambridge [editor's note: Shelley was actually expelled from Oxford University College, in Oxford, England]. [Max] Weber was kicked out of Pratt Institute before me." I had somebody else, I guess. "I'm proud to be in their company."

MS. BERMAN: Evidently you were quite ready with the wisecracks when it served you.

MR. KAINEN: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: You knew so much more than the other students too.

MR. KAINEN: Well, sure. I remember in one class with Moschowitz, there was a model posing and it was the exact pose of Titian's *Man with the Glove*. There was a fellow in that position. I said, "Would you mind moving? I'd like this position." He said, "I won't move." I said, "Look, I need his position." So finally I shoved him out and took his position. He complained to Moschowitz. He said, "He just threw me out of the way and put his easel there. I want that place." Moschowitz said, "Look, you can't do things like that. Take another place." I said, "This is exactly the position of Titian's *Man with a Glove*, exactly the pose." He said to the other fellow, "Fairfax, take another position."

MS. BERMAN: In retrospect, what do you think of your preparation as an artist in the typical system of the time? Do you feel that you were adequately prepared to go out into the world as a painter, although you would be a young painter?

MR. KAINEN: Oh yes. We had good training. After all, we used to draw from a model. For homework, we had to take the drawing—it was done on a sheet about 12 by 9, maybe a little bigger; I might have one of the drawings. We had Dunlap's anatomy. We had to take the model and draw the model in the same position but just the bone structure. Then we had to draw the model in the same position, just the muscular structure. The osteology and the myology. So I knew at least the muscular physiology, the anatomy of the body, the pronations and synchronizations. I don't know how good it would be. You can forget it. But still I don't regret having done it.

MS. BERMAN: Well, I think you need to know it in order to forget it in the right way.

MR. KAINEN: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: Did you have any sort of grounding in, say, some of the strong American artists? I mean, did they talk to you about people like, say, [Thomas] Eakins or [Winslow] Homer, or some of the-or even El Greco or people like that at all? I mean, were you learning about-

MR. KAINEN: Do you mean in art school?

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MR. KAINEN: Oh, no. They brought it up to the late 19th century. He mentioned some of the moderns but just to criticize them. We did go to see the Brooklyn-Pratt Institute is of course in Brooklyn-to the Carnegie International which went to Brooklyn a couple of times. And there I saw my first Kokoschkas and some other artists, and quite astounding. I hated Kokoschka the first time I saw him-okay, it was a crazy kind of painting, but at least it was something. We could visit the Brooklyn Museum show. It had a lot of [John Singer] Sargent watercolors and so forth.

MS. BERMAN: What ideas were influencing you in the early '30s in your painting and in what you wanted to accomplish as a painter?

MR. KAINEN: Well, my friend Jules Halfant was particularly crazy about Franz Hals and Velazquez. And I was, too. You know, a young man likes vigorous brush work, a little bravado in the painting. I'm trying to think-in the early '30s. Well, I used to copy old masters, that is, in black and white, Degas and others. Just reduce the design to black, white, and gray to study composition. It took a long time before it sank in.

Actually in the summer of 1929, I found out that there was going to be a show in Boston of [Georges] Seurat, [Vincent] van Gogh, Cézanne, and Gauguin. So I borrowed some money from a working girl-\$8 round trip overnight from New York to Boston, Sunday night. I had a quarter in my pocket. I thought I'd see the show, somehow survive the day, and come back. Well, I got there Monday morning, walked up Huntington Avenue to the museum-closed Mondays. So I had to kill a day.

I don't want to go into the whole story, but anyway I finally saw the show the next day, came back. Then I found that in the fall the Museum of Modern Art was opening with that very same show.

MS. BERMAN: I was just going to ask you, but it turned out to be.

MR. KAINEN: Yes, but I don't know how much it sank in. I liked it. I liked the work, but it took some time for it to sink in.

MS. BERMAN: You mentioned that your friend liked Velazquez and Hals. Were you aware of the Ashcan School and their influence?

MR. KAINEN: Yes, I think so.

MS. BERMAN: Had you ever had [John] Sloan as a teacher or any interaction with him?

MR. KAINEN: No. I saw him once. He gave a little talk. The American Artists Congress was against it,

MS. BERMAN: When do you think you first began to understand what really goes into a work of art, what goes into painting?

MR. KAINEN: I think probably in the late '30s really, although I did some things in the early '30s on instinct. The National Museum of American Art [now called Smithsonian American Art Museum] has 18 of my paintings and the Phillips has nine. But I think that-I knew Joseph Solman, and Solman was a member of The Ten and he helped a lot, you know, to flatten out.

Now there's one thing I should mention, that is J. B. Neumann's gallery. He was there from 1932 on, maybe before. But by 1934, I used to be visiting it, and I'd see the [Paul] Klees and the Beckmanns. He had lots of [Max] Beckmann all the time. He also had some [Ernst Ludwig] Kirchner, Heckstein. I think The Ten used to see Neumann. Neumann was the most agreeable of all the dealers. After all, he showed Rothko in about 1935 or 6 with Solman. You could always talk with him and he had such a vast background.

The Germans, I think, were closer to the Expressionists, closer to us than Matisse. We admired Matisse but Matisse didn't have the feeling of the streets in him and the Germans did. So we used lime to flatten it out. I think it's an unacknowledged influence.

MS. BERMAN: So you feel that I guess the tension and maybe the grittiness of the Expressionists is probably what drew you to Expressionism?

MR. KAINEN: Yes. I think the streets. Well, Gorky-Graham, sure.

MS. BERMAN: I'm going to ask about that tomorrow. It's a little bit too much to get into today. I'm also only going to ask you briefly about the graphic arts, because I think that's really very well covered in the O'Conner book [Francis V. O'Connor. *Art for the millions: Essays from the 1930s by artists and administrators of the WPA Federal Art Project*. New York, NY: New York Graphic Society, 1973.]. But I wanted to ask you how you became involved in the graphic arts project [Graphic Arts Division of the Works Progress Administration].

MR. KAINEN: Well, I was unemployed like everyone else. I knew all the artists. I knew Stuart Davis very well. In 1938 he gave me a lithograph as a wedding present, and I used to visit his studio. So I said to him, "I can qualify for either the painting project or the graphic project." I hadn't done any graphic work to speak of, but I asked him what he would suggest. He said, "Don't be a fool. Don't go on the painting project, because all your paintings will disappear forever in some veteran's hospital in Utah. Go on the graphic project. You can do your graphic work at night. Paint during the day. You can't paint very well at night. Paint during the day. All your work will disappear. But if you go on the graphic project, you can do the graphic work at night, paint during the day and keep your paintings." That was good advice, because I have a lot of paintings of the '30s which very few artists do have. Most of them are lost. The WPA [Works Progress Administration]-think of how few. Rothko, Gottlieb, and the rest of them, they disappeared. You know what happened to them?

MS. BERMAN: A lot of them were just thrown away. They used the canvas to wrap pipes in.

MR. KAINEN: That's right. You know about that.

MS. BERMAN: Right. About [Jackson] Pollock certainly. What was your interaction with Stuart Davis like, and what did you talk about?

MR. KAINEN: You know, I was sort of left wing, and Davis was interested in left wing causes. It was a different kind of left wing in those days. You know, you were thinking of Russia as the hope of the earth, society without exploitation, et cetera. And Davis always had been a socialist. The American Artists' Congress [founded 1936] was formed against war and fascism, so that I saw quite a bit of him. He said to me, "Kainen. Painting is space division." I never forgot.

But I think my interest in left wing causes probably prevented me from being more daring in the work, because no matter how I patterned and so forth, I had still a proletarian angle.

MS. BERMAN: Actually, I think that some of that may have persisted, because it was very interesting, this New York group that you had. There seems to be a conflict in the way of resolving in the statement of aesthetic-what did you say here-resolving, you know, keeping the image of the streets and doing it and yet of course wanting the work to be judged on its artistic merit too as well as its statement. I felt that there was a difficulty in resolving what to do. And I don't know if all the artists felt that. Who wrote this statement on the art?

MR. KAINEN: I did. I was the only one with experience.

MS. BERMAN: I want to talk about your experience as a writer but let's talk about the New York group for a minute or two since I mentioned it. When and why was the group formed?

MR. KAINEN: I think it was basically Joseph Vogel and [Herbert] Kruckman. There's some others around there. But the idea was to have something social but at the same time not illustrative in the usual sense, even modern. I can't remember who picked the people [Inaudible]. Hoagland went to Spain and he fought in the Lincoln Brigade. He was lucky he got out alive.

MS. BERMAN: Was this the first exhibit in May, 1938?

MR. KAINEN: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: Who were the leaders of the group, if there was such a thing?

MR. KAINEN: Well, I was, because I was showing with ACA [American Contemporary Artists Galleries, New York, NY, est. 1932] anyway. I had shown in group shows there before. I knew Herman Baron [founder of the ACA Galleries]. And Herman Baron was quite left wing. He was editor of a trade journal of some kind, I don't know which. There wasn't any specific connection with the John Reed Club, but I was more precocious in that direction than most of the others.

MS. BERMAN: Did you attend a lot of meetings at the John Reed Club?

MR. KAINEN: I did in the early days-1934 and so forth.

MS. BERMAN: What was it like? What went on there?

MR. KAINEN: There were writers and artists. And there was a head of the writers' section and head of the artists' section. There would be little exhibitions and discussions. Nothing much went on. It was mainly a matter of bolstering the opinions we already held.

MS. BERMAN: Convincing the convinced?

MR. KAINEN: Yes. But of course, at that time, *Partisan Review* started as a left-wing organ. Before [Philip] Rahv and [William] Phillips took it over on their own, it had been a John Reed Club publication.

MS. BERMAN: Did Rothko go to the John Reed Club? No? Did you ever meet the great-like did you meet [Diego] Rivera and [Frida] Kahlo and some of the other people?

MR. KAINEN: Well, I heard Rivera give a lecture at the John Reed Club, and it was a scandal. Louis Lozowick translated. Rivera was speaking in French and Lozowick was translating, Lozowick in German, Russian. And shortly after he began, he was heckled by people from I guess the *Daily Worker*. "Why do you speak in French, the language of the oppressors? Why do you work for Dwight Morrow? You're suckling at the breast of imperialism." And Rivera said, "What do you want me to do, suckle at my mother's breast? I have to make a living." It ended in a wild uproar. It was standing room only. People were standing all over because Rivera was such an important figure. And members of the John Reed Club said, "I resign. This is a disgrace to him. You have to let him talk."

MS. BERMAN: What was the subject of the lecture?

MR. KAINEN: I don't know. Probably proletarian art. That was the forgotten subject in American art history.

MS. BERMAN: To go back to the New York group, was there a kind of conscious program of exhibition and publicity?

MR. KAINEN: No. We used to meet once in a while at the ACA Gallery just to plan the exhibitions. But it was thoroughly unplanned. We didn't know whether or not the people were going to exhibit. That's why when Kenneth Fearing did that introduction to the second show-he had a very nice phrase: "The six separate and distinct personalities of this exhibit." So we took out six because we didn't know. But the separate and distinct personalities isn't the same as the six separate.

MS. BERMAN: Absolutely. How many shows did the group have together?

MR. KAINEN: We just had two as a group.

MS. BERMAN: Did you feel that there was a need to form a group in order to have either visibility or you wanted to have a name?

MR. KAINEN: Well, we wanted to make proletarian art more modern, show that it doesn't have to be workers with their fists raised and all that. We wanted it to be quite flexible. [Joseph] Vogel had a surrealist point of view. I wonder what happened to those early paintings of his. Herman Rose just did street scenes.

MS. BERMAN: It seems to me that you were trying to fit in, say, between the Ten and the Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors. Is that correct?

MR. KAINEN: Well, between the Ten-but we didn't know about the Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors. The Ten, but more consciously connected with social problems. That is not really a social problem, but we were in depths of the Depression, and also the problem was, what is American? We didn't want too much foreign influence. That's why any Cubist devices immediately made the work not native.

MS. BERMAN: Whereas expressionist devices did?

MR. KAINEN: No, because it fitted the-I know it sounds odd, but it was a natural current for Americans.

MS. BERMAN: Why did the group break up?

MR. KAINEN: 1940-the dangers of war and things like that. I really can't remember why. I don't think we had any real officers. That was one of the problems. It wasn't as well organized as the Ten and some of those had been.

MS. BERMAN: Do you think the group served its purpose, or do you think it just didn't-

MR. KAINEN: Well, I think a lot of people saw those exhibitions and there were reviews. I remember what's her name from the *World Telegram*?

MS. BERMAN: Genauer, Emily Genauer.

MR. KAINEN: Yes. She said, "There's a cleavage between the stated purpose and what they actually do. There is no real social comment."

MS. BERMAN: Were you planning on having other members? Was it going to be-

MR. KAINEN: No, no. It was just a small group.

MS. BERMAN: Because as you know about the Ten, the Ten who would be nine or eight and they'd always get fill-ins.

MR. KAINEN: Well, they were better organized. Somebody was running it, and they'd have John Graham one year, Lee Gatch another year.

MS. BERMAN: Here you said-I was wondering when you wrote this if you were referring to the Ten or another group. You said, "In this enterprise we feel that we do not encroach upon the legitimate domain of any constituted group. On the contrary, we feel that we are removing barriers from a road which already exists and which many artists are prepared to traverse." With that were you basically announcing, "Listen, Ten, we're not in your territory?" Was that the purpose?

MR. KAINEN: Yes. Basically that. To me there was another group that thought it was a viable direction. It really wasn't, but that's-

MS. BERMAN: Do you think among critics and artists there was an interest in the Ten? Do you feel it was an influential group among peers?

MR. KAINEN: Well, yes, I think so, because it was an expressionist direction. Expressionism was natural in that period. It was being modern. It was actually giving a direction.

MS. BERMAN: In the reviews you found the Ten quite exciting, whereas everyone else gave them rather lousy reviews.

MR. KAINEN: The thing is no one paid much attention to those reviewers because they weren't terribly much use to them. The *Times* critic, who was it then? Either Howard Devree or Edwin Alden Jewell, either one. Their favorites were Eugene Speicher, the accepted big names in their period. Don't forget, the Ten was just an odd group that showed at the Gallery Secession [West 12th Street, New York, NY].

MS. BERMAN: It started with a man named Pat Codyre.

MR. KAINEN: Pat Codyre.

MS. BERMAN: Who was he?

MR. KAINEN: Joe Solman can tell you better. He was an Irishman. He liked art. We had a little-we started him. We had a show. But then Robert-what his name?

MS. BERMAN: Godsoe.

MR. KAINEN: Godsoe, right. I knew Godsoe well. He had a group gallery called the [Gallery] Secession. That was about '35 or '36. Solman was about a year older than I am, and he got started earlier since he lived in New York, downtown, whereas I lived in the Bronx. So at that period I wasn't terribly connected downtown, and Solman knew more. He was talking with these developed artists. Of course, I was talking with [Arshile] Gorky and Graham- [End Side 1.]

In 1934 I had a studio on the corner of University Place and 14th Street, in a meeting house. It was a real studio. It had a skylight about 18 feet up in the air, cubical, a tiny skylight. And the light came through very gray, dim, mournful. You could see everything in a gray haze. The light was constant.

MS. BERMAN: Did moving down there have an effect on your painting?

MR. KAINEN: Oh yes, because I had been painting at home before that. Downtown, you know, I could line up paintings, do slightly bigger ones. But very few artists were doing big paintings. We used to show-John Wanamaker [of Wanamaker's department store] had a gallery. There was a man named Nathan Eijur E-I-J-U-R

who later became particularly fond of Gorky and collected him. But he put on shows and there were shows elsewhere, the Hudson Walker Gallery, I used to show there, a canvas or two, once in a while. But the only way to get the canvas there was to take it in the subway. Nobody used taxis, never. So that canvases were generally small enough to be taken easily on a subway.

MS. BERMAN: Well, even the well-off artists, I should say, were painting fairly small compared to today's standards.

MR. KAINEN: Yes, easel paintings.

MS. BERMAN: Right. What other galleries were you going to besides J. B. Neumann and more stimulating places that you went to?

MR. KAINEN: Julian Levy, there were many good shows there. [Alfred] Stieglitz had a gallery. I don't know where it was then. He was a very standoffish person with his black cape. He'd glower at artists when they came in. Then there was [Karl] Nierendorf. Nierendorf had German and French artists, a very good dealer. But I was in there once with Jules Halfant. Jules was whistling some Beethoven, and Nierendorf gave him a terrible calling down for it.

There were other German galleries. There was Brummer, Joseph Brummer. It must have been in 1933 or so, he had a big [Jacques] Lipchitz show. Lipchitz was a Cubist sculptor. That was very impressive. I could appreciate that but in my own work I was fighting shy of those influences. There was another German gallery, Lilienfeld. I don't know when that started. Now Kurt Valentin came in in 1937, the Buchholz Gallery and his first show was a Kirchner exhibition. He didn't sell anything.

German dealers were giving things to the museums. And they were also giving one-third off to museums to buy, if they wanted to buy prints or anything. So that they really were promoting German artists. Not only that, the German dealers had more background than the American dealers.

MS. BERMAN: They had *kultur* [German for culture].

MR. KAINEN: They had *kultur*. [J.B.] Neumann did the first catalogue raisonné of the prints of Rudolph Bresdin in the '30s. He also had a publication called the *Art Lover*, which he put out from time to time. He published and he knew art, old art, new art.

MS. BERMAN: Didn't he have antiquities, too?

MR. KAINEN: Yes. He had quite a number of Flemish surrealists of the 17th century, people around Brueghel, the 16th century. Yes, we were amazed. Neumann doesn't get the credit he deserves. It's always Stieglitz. Stieglitz didn't influence us much.

MS. BERMAN: Well, Stieglitz could be a very destructive personality at times, too.

MR. KAINEN: He was good in photography, but so was Julian Levy. He really had some great shows.

MS. BERMAN: Did you see [Eugene] Atget there?

MR. KAINEN: No, I saw Clarence John Laughlin; I guess it was 1936. I was very much impressed. He had small oblique photographs. They were very good. He always was a good photographer.

MRS. KAINEN: So was Gus Mayer.

MR. KAINEN: Yes. There was Gustavus Mayer, who had a print gallery. And you'd see old master etchers there if you wanted to go up, one flight up.

MS. BERMAN: When did you first meet Mark Rothko, or Marcus Rothkowitz, then?

MR. KAINEN: I'd say around '36. I saw him in New York from time to time. He didn't go to the cafeterias often. I was in the cafeterias almost every night before I was married and moved out to the Bronx. But once in a while he was there. And of course, I'd see him on the projects from time to time.

I remember seeing him at a World's Fair when paintings from Italy were shown. It was Titian's *Portrait of Paul III*, Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*. I remember standing in front of the *Birth of Venus* with Rothko and saying how wonderful it was. And Rothko said, "Yes, it's nice." I was very disturbed by his reaction. He wasn't terribly impressed. But we knew each other as artists knew each other around then in that period.

MS. BERMAN: Do you know how you-excuse me.

MR. KAINEN: Of course, I met him later.

MS. BERMAN: Do you know how you were introduced?

MR. KAINEN: No, I can't remember. But you know the story of Max Weber and Rothko.

MS. BERMAN: And the cigarette?

MR. KAINEN: And the cigarette ash, yes.

MS. BERMAN: Were you there?

MR. KAINEN: I was there.

MS. BERMAN: Oh really?

MR. KAINEN: I mentioned it and Joe Solman mentioned it.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. I interviewed Joe Solman last year, so he did tell me about that. And Rothko took this all benignly?

MR. KAINEN: Benignly, yes.

MS. BERMAN: Did you ever talk about Weber with Rothko?

MR. KAINEN: No.

MS. BERMAN: I was wondering if Rothko felt that Weber had influenced his work at all.

MR. KAINEN: Well, he certainly influenced his early work in his figures. But I don't think he mentioned Weber very much.

MS. BERMAN: When you knew Rothko in the middle and late '30s, were you impressed with his talent as a painter?

MR. KAINEN: Well, I saw very little of it. I saw it at the Ten shows. And yes, I did a review in *Art Front* in which I praised Gottlieb and Rothko for getting to the core of their feelings. That I could see.

MS. BERMAN: Well, it seemed to me that most of the best notices went to Solman or at times [Jack] Kufeld or at times [Louis] Schanker.

MR. KAINEN: Schanker? I'm surprised.

MS. BERMAN: It seemed that there was a sense that Rothko was floundering. Did Rothko feel this?

MR. KAINEN: This matter of floundering. It is assumed that artists take one point of view and follow it in a sort of continuous way making minor changes. That's true of certain artists. I don't know if you saw the [Raphael] Soyer show ["Raphael Soyer: Sixty-Five Years of Printmaking," Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC, Aug.5 - Oct. 3, 1982].

MS. BERMAN: I'm going to see it this week.

MR. KAINEN: All right. Soyer was always saying, although in his early days he did work in a sort of primitive style, but he emphasized color more and more as he grew older. He had one kind of outlook. On the other hand, he's not a very speculative artist. His great talent is his marvelous feeling for paint and color, yes. But if you take someone, say, like Picasso, I wouldn't say he was floundering if he tried one thing or another, because this is the 20th century and artists are complex.

In fact, some of the more important artists-I won't say more important, but artists of a wide range like Rembrandt, Goya, Velazquez, were classical at one period, or highly finished, and became quite loose at another period. In fact, at the same time Goya would be doing these classically drawn portraits and then do wildly painted canvases. I mean, every artist has a certain classical side and romantic side or expressionist side. Why shouldn't he give weight to those sides. He isn't going to worry about what critics say.

I think Rothko tried certain things, and I think he was all of a piece. When he did figures, they were rather loosely painted, expressionistically painted. He just became a little more serene later on, or he began thinking more in terms of forms. He told me, and he told other people also, that he had been influenced by Michelangelo's Medici Chapel. We visited the Medici Chapel a couple months ago. He said not the sculpture, the rooms before you get

to the sculpture. The rooms have rectangular walls, rather low ceilings, a very elongated curve. The rectangles are bordered by another color of marble. I don't know whether it's marble or whether it's painted that color. But every form has a sort of frame and they're rectangular, different sizes. It's suited to a chapel.

MRS. KAINEN: Somber.

MR. KAINEN: The somber vault. He wasn't trying to show off his talent as an architect, like [I.M.] Pei, for example. He was thinking of the function of the building which was a memorial to the Medici. Rothko said that influenced him more than anything else he had seen.

MS. BERMAN: That's fascinating because the de Menil's [John and Dominique] of course are the modern Medicis in a way for artists, too. So he made this connection. When would he have said this to you?

MR. KAINEN: He said this after Kennedy was elected and there was a luncheon for people in the arts field. I sat at a table with him. Actually, it was after that. I sat at a table with-

MRS. KAINEN: It was President Johnson, wasn't it?

MR. KAINEN: Was it Johnson? Yes, the Great Society. I guess that was it. Rothko came and for a change he was pretty well dressed, for him. He was the world's worst dresser. I sat at a table with Giancarlo Menotti and the dancer, [Maria] Tallchief, Robert Creeley, and some other people. But afterwards, I got together with Rothko and he invited me to come to his studio which, like a fool, I did. He mentioned this. What else did he mention?

He was very relaxed. I had seen him before. He came to Washington, I guess it was in the mid-'50s. I can't remember exactly when. He went to visit Pietro Lazzari. Pietro Lazzari also was with Pat Codyre. He was a friend of Rothko's. He said whenever Rothko had to leave, couldn't pay his rent, Lazzari would come and help him move. Lazzari was a good strong Italian.

MRS. KAINEN: In the middle of the night.

MR. KAINEN: Yes. Well, he came to see Lazzari. Lazzari phoned me. I went over with my first wife [Bertha Friedman]. Lazzari had-Rothko had either just had been fired from Brooklyn College, or he was about to be fired, because he wasn't following the curriculum. Rothko was very profane at that time. He could also be very courtly. And he said that he was being fired, but some of his paintings are beginning to sell, and people are beginning to like his work. I think this was before Phillips had bought the Rothkos.

Of course, I saw him later in 1968. Do you want to talk about that now?

MS. BERMAN: We can in a minute. But one of the myths, and perhaps the truths, of that New York School was the terror of success, and how much of it ruined them. Was Rothko ambivalent about that? Was he-

MR. KAINEN: Oh, he was very ambivalent about it.

MS. BERMAN: What was his reaction when he said people were liking his work and it was beginning to sell?

MR. KAINEN: His reaction was that-this has to go to 1968 then.

MS. BERMAN: Okay. But in other words, did he talk about this in '53, or was he just happy and excited that his work was going so well?

MR. KAINEN: He was excited, yes, that he was getting some recognition. But later on he got very disillusioned.

MS. BERMAN: Well, let's talk about 1968. It seems a natural thing to do right now.

MR. KAINEN: I saw him in Provincetown. He had just had a massive heart attack. He was recovering from it. I was in an inn just opposite his house, but he had a studio elsewhere. He said-I saw him with my son, who can vouch for a lot of these things. He said he hated the art industry. "If you can convince me I love art, I'll give you a painting." So immediately I was put on the spot. If I started to convince him that he loved painting, it might have been out of cupidity.

He said, "You're working for a museum, aren't you?" I said, "Only part-time, two days a week." He said, "That doesn't matter. You're part of the art industry." He hates the art industry. He said he wasn't with any gallery. All he had to do was sell one or two paintings a year and that was enough for him.

MRS. KAINEN: Did he ask Ben what plans he had?

MR. KAINEN: He asked my son what he was doing. He was about 18, 19. He said, "Oh, I'm an artist." And Rothko

turned and shot me a look and said, "You ought to be ashamed." He was wearing a tie that had been knotted in the same place for years, a funny shape, spotted. He was drinking very heavily, although he was recovering from a heart attack, and chain-smoked. But he was very cordial. He had a group of people to his house including Warren [M.] Robbins, who's head of the Museum of African Art [National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC]. He used to have my son once or twice drive him to his studio. He wouldn't let me see what he was doing. I was part of the art industry. He was mad.

MRS. KAINEN: But Ben had said something to him about the Phillips?

MR. KAINEN: Sometimes his driver didn't show up so my son would drive him there. And I saw him once and he had a speck of blue acrylic on his forehead. It was very faint but I knew it was acrylic. I said, "Oh, you're using acrylic." He said, "I'm using everything." He said he wasn't permitted to paint anything over 40 inches high. That's why he's working on paper. He said he had it marroflaged to canvas. There was this fellow in Brooklyn- what was the name? Goldbrayer? He said, "I recommend him." He paints it on paper and it's fastened to canvas.

That's why I was amazed when I saw that he was painting these large paintings. Did he paint them himself? He wasn't permitted to.

MS. BERMAN: In other words you're saying, as far as you understood, he was working on the works on paper, because physically the effort would have been too great to go up?

MR. KAINEN: Yes.

MRS. KAINEN: The doctor ordered him.

MR. KAINEN: The doctor ordered him not to.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, how interesting. But you didn't get to see what these works on paper looked like at all?

MR. KAINEN: No. I asked my son. He said they look like his other paintings; they're just smaller. I think he'd begin in acrylic and finish in oil, because it doesn't have the feel of acrylic. I suppose sometimes he'd let it be. But they all had softened edges, and I understand that some of the late paintings were done by assistants.

MS. BERMAN: Where did you hear that from?

MR. KAINEN: Well, certainly the paintings shown at the National Gallery which were taped on the edges.

MRS. KAINEN: Someone told us that recently. E. A. Carmean.

MS. BERMAN: That's certainly an authoritative voice.

MRS. KAINEN: He said that about the [inaudible]-

MS. BERMAN: At the what gallery?

MRS. KAINEN: In the [inaudible]-

MR. KAINEN: Did he say it about those or the-

MRS. KAINEN: Those, those are the ones he was talking about. He said Rothko didn't do them.

MS. BERMAN: I guess my question would be, just as an artist, what would be the satisfaction of having someone else do your paintings?

MR. KAINEN: Well, a lot of artists do that. When Gottlieb couldn't move, he directed others and it looked pretty good. Look at Matisse.

MRS. KAINEN: You said he was very unhappy about it though.

MR. KAINEN: He was very unhappy about it. I saw him at that show, told him how well the paintings looked. He just shot me a look of disapproval. I immediately saw that he didn't paint it.

MS. BERMAN: Now when you say he, do you mean Gottlieb?

MR. KAINEN:

Gottlieb, yes.

MS. BERMAN: At his retrospective?

MR. KAINEN: Yes, when he was in the wheelchair.

MRS. KAINEN: No, it was the big show at Marlborough, yes.

MR. KAINEN: Marlborough, yes; not retrospective.

MRS. KAINEN: After he had had a stroke.

MR. KAINEN: Well, Matisse when he couldn't do anything. He'd cut them out and tell the people where to put them. Sam Francis, among others; he forgot his blue, white, and red. Everything keyed to white. Renoir would tell the sculptor how to sculpt. You see it all the time.

MS. BERMAN: I guess so. I guess because Rothko seemed to just hate to paint after a while too. Did you get the feeling?

MR. KAINEN: I don't know if you know the story of Maurice Sievan. We were in Provincetown after Rothko had killed himself. Sievan said that only about a week before that, he met Rothko in the street and Rothko wanted him to come up to look at his recent work. Sievan always said what he thought, not diplomatic. He said, "He showed me these paintings. They're all black." So I said to him, "They don't look like Rothkos." "Do you think I could have had any influence on him killing himself?" We all said, "Oh, no. He was painting like that for some time. And he was in bad shape. You wouldn't have done that."

Sievan said he used to discuss Nietzsche with him. The book *Ecce Homo* where [Friedrich] Nietzsche talks about how great he is; a nutty book. That was after he went off his rocker. Rothko was a reader. A lot of artists are. They may not seem to read, but I'll bet even Picasso read. I'm always surprised. Soyer said that Hopper was very silent, never talked, but he once sent him a note. It was a quote from [Johann Wolfgang von] Goethe. He said he was a reader.

MS. BERMAN: That quote from Goethe, I think that Gail Levin said in a book that he used to carry that around in his wallet. But that's the one. I mean it seemed to be his favorite.

MR. KAINEN: I don't know if this is it. It says, "Gray, my dear Faust, are all our theories, and green the golden tree of life." I don't know whether that's it or not.

MS. BERMAN: I'll have to look it up. Do you know what else Rothko used to read?

MR. KAINEN: No. [Philip] Guston used to read.

MS. BERMAN: You can tell that Guston was a reader. He's not literary, but it comes out in his art.

MR. KAINEN: Good artists have a speculative intelligence. When they read, they're always trying to apply it to their own work, trying to deepen it, get some clues they could use.

MS. BERMAN: The incident with Sievan and seeing the paintings; was there anything else to that about, maybe, did Rothko make any commentary about these paintings?

MR. KAINEN: No. Sievan didn't mention that. He just wanted his opinion. Do you remember the time we called Rothko?

MRS. KAINEN: Certainly I do.

MS. BERMAN: What was this?

MR. KAINEN: Well, Rothko had no dealer then. We were in a New York hotel. Ruth said, "Why don't you call him? Maybe we could get some work on paper or something." So I called Rothko, got him on the phone. He was very subdued. I said, "We'd like to come down and get something. We like your work." He said, "I'm sorry. I signed up with Marlborough just recently." He said he can't do it, he isn't permitted to. And I knew why. His wife was an alcoholic. He's on his last legs. What's going to happen to his estate? He had small children.

MRS. KAINEN: He had been drinking heavily and we weren't sure-he said he would call you the next day. Do you remember? He said, well, he'd think about it and he'd call, the next day. Of course he didn't, and Jacob didn't call him. Later after we got home, Jacob said, well, he might not have remembered the next day.

MR. KAINEN: Oh, I don't think that.

MRS. KAINEN: That's what you said.

MR. KAINEN: I think he probably wanted to put me off. He didn't want to say no exactly. But he had signed with Marlborough. After all, Gottlieb was with Marlborough.

MS. BERMAN: Well, they all were at the time. Really, he had gotten-

MR. KAINEN: It was after he had told me that he hated the art industry and wouldn't have any dealers, and he has to tell me this.

MS. BERMAN: I'll retreat right now to Rothko in his days in the Ten and the reviews. Did he ever talk to you about your work as a writer and a reviewer at all?

MR. KAINEN: No.

MS. BERMAN: Did you ever visit his studio in the early days, in the '30s?

MR. KAINEN: No. He was out in Brooklyn, wasn't he?

MS. BERMAN: Well, he was all over.

MR. KAINEN: He used to visit [Milton] Avery.

MS. BERMAN: Did you used to go to Avery's apartment, too?

MR. KAINEN: Well, I went twice. I went with Joe Solman. I knew Joe very well.

MS. BERMAN: How did you get to meet and become friends?

MR. KAINEN: Through Jules Halfant. Jules was a good painter, but he became an art director.

MRS. KAINEN: Didn't he live near you?

MR. KAINEN: Who?

MRS. KAINEN: Jules.

MR. KAINEN: He lived in Brooklyn.

MRS. KAINEN: How did you know him?

MR. KAINEN: I knew him from high school.

MS. BERMAN: I'm asking you this because you were writing so much then. Did you know that Rothko was writing a book in the '30s?

MR. KAINEN: No, I didn't.

MS. BERMAN: Was there ever any discussion about that? Also that-

MR. KAINEN: Is that so?

MS. BERMAN: Yes, which was some book on art theory, but it's lost and no one's ever seen it. I think it was almost, maybe possibly a dissertation topic, but no one remembers.

MR. KAINEN: Do you mean from Yale?

MS. BERMAN: How about driftwood sculptures he was making? Did you know anything about them at all?

MR. KAINEN: No. He probably got the idea from Gottlieb. Gottlieb painted driftwood sculptures.

MS. BERMAN: I don't know, possibly.

MR. KAINEN: Do you mean Rothko actually made things from driftwood?

MS. BERMAN: Yes. That's what Bonnie Clearwater, the curator, said. Driftwood sculpture and grotesque carvings on pieces of wood.

He was also evidently using the term "troglodytes." Did you know anything about that?

MR. KAINEN: Troglodytes. Was that about the general public or his critics?

MS. BERMAN: No. It seemed to have something to do with his book that he was writing. I think some of these statements may have been transformed into the things he said in the *Tiger's Eye* but I'm not sure.

MR. KAINEN: Was that before he became interested in myth?

MS. BERMAN: I don't know. When did Rothko's paintings begin to change from the Expressionist paintings to the myth paintings in your recollection?

MR. KAINEN: I think in the early '40s.

MS. BERMAN: Would you recall-and this is a very difficult question-what any of the specific paintings looked like that Rothko showed in the Ten?

MR. KAINEN: *The Crucifixion*.

MS. BERMAN: Can you tell me what that looked like?

MR. KAINEN: It was very expressionist. I once had a reproduction of it. It was reproduced in a magazine with a painting by Joe Solman on the other side. And I can't remember where that is. Yep, he did some crucifixions.

MS. BERMAN: When you say some, there was more than one?

MR. KAINEN: He did more than one.

MS. BERMAN: What colors were used?

MR. KAINEN: They were somber but quite vigorously painted, not like Weber. It didn't have that-it wasn't Averyish, more Weberish.

MS. BERMAN: Do you think you could describe it literally?

MR. KAINEN: Well, there was a figure on the cross, light against a dark background. But it was very pasty paint he put on, very expressive.

MRS. KAINEN: What kind of drawing?

MR. KAINEN: It was an expressive drawing. The figures were put on. It was closest, I think, to-take a small [Oskar] Kokoschka without the Slavic, without the-it was a little more-would Solman know where a painting of his, *Streetcar*, was reproduced quite early in the '30s? On the other side is-it was written about-I don't know where it was from.

MS. BERMAN: Well, that's a clue, because I have a list of paintings that they don't know what they looked at. And that's one of them. Was the crucifixion right in the foreground or was it in the middle distance?

MR. KAINEN: Right in the foreground. It was a real crucifixion.

MS. BERMAN: Well, in the first show of the Ten that was at the Montross Gallery [New York], there was a picture of a woman sewing and there was also *Subway*, *A Seated Nude*, and something called *City Fantasy*. I was wondering if you remember what any of those looked like?

MR. KAINEN: No, I don't. What year was that?

MS. BERMAN: That was December, 1935.

MR. KAINEN: I must have missed that show. But I saw-they had a show at-

MS. BERMAN: The Municipal Art Gallery had *The Crucifixion*, and there was something called *The Sea*.

MR. KAINEN: I'll tell you who you should see. Do you know Marchal Landgren? He ran Municipal Art Gallery.

MS. BERMAN: He lives here, right?

MRS. KAINEN: Right here. I wonder what shape he's in.

MR. KAINEN: Yes, he's getting on.

MS. BERMAN: There was also something called *Portrait*, but we don't know who it was a portrait of. How did he use paint at the time when you saw him?

MR. KAINEN: Well, the paint was put on more vigorously than when he started to become influenced by Avery. Then he spread the paint. It's a difference really, a tradition of modern painting. The paste paint comes from Manet. The spread style comes from Degas. Degas liked to spread the paint, and it influenced a lot of the people in New York. Solman, for example, liked to spread the paint.

MS. BERMAN: This is a generalization, but it seems to me when the younger artists of the period began, they started with the thick, just enjoying putting it on and feeling it, having the canvas weigh several pounds. And then as they went on-

MR. KAINEN: It's true.

MS. BERMAN: There was another show at the Municipal Art Gallery. One was called *Portrait*. One was called *Interior*. One was called *Music*. And the other was *Composition*. Would you remember anything from that second show?

MR. KAINEN: No, even though I was in the show. I had a painting which I destroyed, but I have a photograph of it-some man in a rooming house buttoning his shirt with a hole in the wall with the lattice showing. But very formal, that is-now lost forever.

MS. BERMAN: Then there was the Mercury Gallery, the Whitney dissenter show. He showed two pictures, one called *Movie Palace* and one called *Conversation*. Would you remember either of these?

MR. KAINEN: I remember his subway paintings. You know that too.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. Why didn't you join the Ten by the way since you had friends and the outlook was sympathetic?

MR. KAINEN: I was not in the community. That is, I really lived in the Bronx.

MS. BERMAN: When were you married?

MR. KAINEN: In 1938.

MS. BERMAN: So that effectively isolated you and took you out of the social life.

MR. KAINEN: That's right.

MS. BERMAN: Who were Rothko's favorite artists at the time that you knew him?

MR. KAINEN: Well, Avery. He liked [Albert Pinkham] Ryder, [Mardsen] Hartley. They're more in the American grain.

[Audio break.]

MS. BERMAN: You just talked about the Medici Chapel and Rothko's feeling about it. You were going to say about the mood.

MR. KAINEN: You come into the Medici Chapel and immediately you get the Elegiac mood. The ceiling is not very high as its long inverted scoop, and these rectangular walls with the rectangles, emphasized by a band of another deeper color than the center rectangle. You come in and you have to go through this to get the main chapel where *Night and Day* and the other pieces are. And the Lorenzo sitting there. But it's typical of Rothko to be impressed by the architecture, by the nonfigurative. But Michelangelo did that deliberately. Obviously he didn't make some fancy interior.

MS. BERMAN: It's also interesting that Rothko went back, if you know what I mean, to European art, because it seemed that he wanted to disown it and there was a period where they were despising it.

Did he ever talk to you about [Joseph Mallord William] Turner at all?

MR. KAINEN: Yes. Turner came on-yes. Turner has a much greater influence than most people think, because he wasn't French. But long before the Impressionists-after all, Turner had practically abandoned nature. He couldn't see anything except invented colors. The colors aren't the colors of nature either. It's a kind of ecstatic quality.

MS. BERMAN: Were you ever in any of Rothko's studios?

MR. KAINEN: No.

MS. BERMAN: Of course, you mentioned before when he didn't want to talk to you about what he was doing, you saw the tell-tale dot of acrylic. But did he ever talk about art materials or anything like that?

MR. KAINEN: No. He was very secretive about it. He used to prepare his canvas with an absorbent surface. Clem Greenberg says he primed it with tempera. Tempera would mean-it couldn't have been tempera, because a canvas with tempera would crack. So it had to be a half chalk probably. That is where you mix chalk and white lead or zinc white with glue, water and oil. You can mix oil with water if you use gelatin. Gelatin will emulsify the oil and the water. And when you put it on, I do that myself, you put that on and you have an absorbent surface depending on how much oil you put on. But there is enough oil to make it really flexible. If you put checkered white on a canvas and paint on that, especially when he rolls it up and so many of his canvases were rolled up, it would crack all over. So although Greenberg said this to a large audience, it's not true.

He used to prepare it. Sometimes he'd use egg and water in place of the gelatin. In other words, you need something to emulsify. Egg is an emulsifier. It has grease, it has oil, and it has water. And it will bring them together.

MS. BERMAN: How do you know he did this?

MR. KAINEN: There's a person who-first of all, I used to hear it. But in this book on the Rothko case, this woman talks about the guy who helped him. He said Rothko would mix the egg himself moving it from one part of the broken egg to the other to remove the white. You can also use both of it. He used to prepare a whole series of canvases. That means emulsion.

MS. BERMAN: I ask you these things for the sake of the conservator so he knows how to treat the paintings.

Did he ever talk to you-as you know, he was very tyrannical about how he wanted his paintings exhibited. Did you ever talk about that?

MR. KAINEN: Yes. He used to come down to the Phillips and tell them to reduce the lighting more and more. He thought that the tones set-I don't know, I assume he thought the tones were set by the atmosphere. If you make it too bright, it's punchy. It's all right for a certain kind of painting. His painting he wanted low lit especially in a room. I mean he is still thinking of the Medici Chapel. What is that room? They say the Medici Library but it's not the library. There's nothing in the room.

MRS. KAINEN: It's just a vast room there. Somebody from the Phillips told us every time he was at the gallery they'd turn down the lights. You could always tell when he'd been there by the light.

MS. BERMAN: Did he ever talk about color at all with you, color intensity or anything like that?

MR. KAINEN: No. I'm trying to think now.

MS. BERMAN: When he also mentioned the Medici Chapel, did he talk about the idea of murals and the evolution of his thinking really into series of paintings?

MR. KAINEN: No, he didn't. He talked about the effect of the walls. That was the big thing. He was probably the first artist who really noticed it to that degree.

MS. BERMAN: On the works on paper which you didn't see, did your son Dan say any thing to you about the works and what Rothko talked about or what the works meant to him at all?

MR. KAINEN: He just said that they looked like his usual works. They were softened on the edges and he left a little border of paper.

MS. BERMAN: Well, were they white or were they grays and browns?

[End Tape One.]

MS. BERMAN: [In progress]-with Jacob Kainen on August 11, 1982, at his house in Chevy Chase, Maryland. Yesterday you told me a couple of stories after we had turned off the tape. I was wondering if you could repeat them. The first was Rothko when he was desperate for money and went to the museums.

MR. KAINEN: He told me when I was in Provincetown, in the presence of my son Daniel, that at one time, just before he made it, just before he started to-his work started to become attractive to museums and collectors, but he was still known as one of the leading artists, he said that he had offered two paintings to three museums-the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney, what's the third?

MRS. KAINEN: The Guggenheim.

MR. KAINEN: The Guggenheim, yes. He offered them for \$300 each and they wouldn't buy them. They weren't interested. But a year or so later, his work became very attractive to collectors. And the museums came back; I think it was especially the Whitney-

MRS. KAINEN: No, it was the Modern.

MR. KAINEN: The Modern, I guess it was the Modern, and offered to buy the paintings or at least one of them. He said he wouldn't sell them. He wouldn't sell the paintings or anything to them. I don't know if I should use his exact language.

MS. BERMAN: Well, I wish you would.

MR. KAINEN: Yeah. And the representative of the Modern came to him. He said, "I wouldn't sell you shit."

MS. BERMAN: I'm actually surprised about the Museum of Modern Art because both Dorothy Miller and Alfred Barr were very enthusiastic about the paintings since the late 1940s. And Dorothy Miller did give them the shows I think in the '50s. Do you think it was before that?

MR. KAINEN: I don't know. I think it was around 1950, because he was already pretty well-known. Well, he said the museum paid \$30,000, eventually, to get one of those paintings.

MS. BERMAN: Why don't you tell me about the Rothko watercolor that you own?

MR. KAINEN: Well, the watercolor was done, obviously, in the mid-'40s. It's very hard, of course, to describe the watercolor. It's basically a gouache opaque watercolor with washes, of course, crayon, and it's watermarked, J. Whatman 1945. The paper is watermarked.

MS. BERMAN: Does it have a title?

MR. KAINEN: I don't think it has a title.

MRS. KAINEN: The National Gallery wanted to reproduce it in a volume they were publishing of works by Bill Sykes. He wrote about this at the time it was done apparently.

MR. KAINEN: Then I suppose he would give the title?

MRS. KAINEN: I'll look and see. I think we have the title.

MS. BERMAN: What led you to buying it? What appealed in particular?

MR. KAINEN: Well, it had a very spiritual quality; it's a very deeply felt work, also beautifully done.

MS. BERMAN: You also told me that Rothko was inquiring of you about a price Newman was getting.

MR. KAINEN: Yes. When I was in Provincetown, it was 1968, Rothko knew that I worked part-time for the National Collection of Fine Arts. One day he said to me, "Is it true that the National Collection of Fine Arts has bought a Newman for \$100,000?" So I told him it couldn't possibly be true. The National Collection didn't have that kind of money. And if it did, it wouldn't pay it for a Newman.

MS. BERMAN: And what did Rothko say to that?

MR. KAINEN: Well, Rothko didn't say anything specifically about Newman; but from his attitude I could see that he was very much irked by the idea that Newman would be getting more than he would, or that Newman even would be considered on the same level as artists who had worked for a long time, who had training and had gone through the mill.

MS. BERMAN: Did you also tell me that Rothko was considering giving a painting to the museum?

MR. KAINEN: Well, he invited me to visit him, visit his studio. He didn't specifically say that he was going to, but he was talking about the museum.

MRS. KAINEN: But you were trying to get things for the museum at that time.

MR. KAINEN: Yes. He knew that I was trying to build up the collection, even though I was in the Graphic Arts Division.

MS. BERMAN: Do you think he was less hostile toward the Washington museums than the New York museums?

MR. KAINEN: Oh, definitely. He loved the Phillips Museum, the Phillips Collection, and the National Gallery of Art. He liked Duncan Phillips. Phillips wasn't the usual museum director.

MS. BERMAN: No. Do you recall anything that he ever said about Phillips?

MR. KAINEN: No, I don't.

MS. BERMAN: I guess the Phillips displayed the paintings the way he wanted them to and also bought a group of them.

MR. KAINEN: Well, they gave him a room. Also, they had a lot of other artists of his generation and the earlier generation. And he liked Phillips. I know that because he used to visit it even before they bought his works.

MS. BERMAN: Did you want to say something, Mrs. Kainen?

MRS. KAINEN: I think he ought to say why he didn't get the painting for the museum.

MR. KAINEN: I don't think so.

MS. BERMAN: Okay. Now I'd like to go back to the '30s. And I was wondering if you observed any relationships or friendships that Rothko had with other artists. We'll start with your friend, Joseph Solman.

MR. KAINEN: At that time Solman was one of the most advanced of the artists. He always, Solman always was fond of Paul Klee. And in the '30s he was an extreme Expressionist, and he always was quite articulate. Solman was close to Avery, as Rothko was. I don't know how close they were personally, they had different temperaments. Rothko was much moodier. Rothko never involved himself in any of the organizations that I remember. I can't even remember him in the Artists Union. He steered clear of all entanglements. He was more single minded than most of the artists I met. So while Solman wasn't terribly active, he was active in the Artists Union and on the board of *Art Front*. Rothko was just not involved with any of the things that were going on so that you'd see him once in a while in the cafeterias.

Cafeterias were a great place for the artists. Any night you could go down to Stewart's on 14th or 23rd or 8th, Stewart's or Waldorf or whatever it was, I can't remember exactly, see a group of artists around these white topped marble tables and always talking about art-the importance of color, what composition was. We talked about older artists or contemporary European masters. We never talked about ourselves or contemporaries. It was amazing.

It's hard to place Rothko. Rothko was just with his group artistically.

MS. BERMAN: What about Rothko and [Willem] de Kooning?

MR. KAINEN: Well, de Kooning wasn't very active. He wasn't around much. I had a studio on 22nd Street-this was 1938, '37, or '38-that I shared with Martin Fuller. He was a commercial artist, and he did a lot of work at night. So we'd string a clothesline across the room with sheets and I would sleep on one side while he worked. But de Kooning also had a studio on West 22nd Street. We'd meet in the cafeterias at night. Artists hadn't seen de Kooning's work. This was, say, 1938. We knew from the way de Kooning talked that he must be pretty good.

So one of the artists, I forget who, said, "I'd like to see your work sometime." De Kooning said, "My work is terrible. You don't want to bother seeing it." But Max Schnitzler said, "Don't believe him. I've seen it. He's terrific." Max Schnitzler was very gifted. I don't know what happened to him. He was also a member of the New York group. So we took Schnitzler's word. He had a good eye. It was absolutely, had great integrity. But de Kooning wasn't showing. And at that time the story was that de Kooning will never make it. None of us thought of making it. We thought he was kind of hopeless because he could never finish a painting. He'd work on it and change and go over it. This is what we heard, but we didn't see his work. He wasn't exhibiting.

The first time we saw his work was at his first one-man show.

MS. BERMAN: Was it 1948?

MR. KAINEN: 1948 at the Egan Gallery. So he must have shown perhaps one or two things. But [John] Graham knew it. See, Graham knew everything.

MS. BERMAN: What did Graham say about [Willem] de Kooning's work?

MR. KAINEN:

"One of the important young American artists." And he mentioned Avery, David Smith, Max Weber. That's about it.

MRS. KAINEN: Did he mention Pollock?

MR. KAINEN: He wrote this in 1936, don't forget, or earlier because it was published in 1937 in Paris. You know, he showed me the manuscript of it. I didn't know-well, Harry Rand mentioned some of the things briefly. He used to take me to Gorky's studio, say, 1935 and '36. I had posed for Gorky in 1934. Gorky had great respect for Graham. Graham dressed like a gentleman, very erect, and absolutely no small talk. He didn't discuss things; he pronounced. I mean, he was such a stimulating man, and his insights were incredible, how he'd pull things out of the air. So Gorky admired him, and he admired Gorky, but surprisingly not as a painter. You know, in his book he didn't mention Gorky as one of the important young American painters. But he mentioned him as a man of great taste, because at that time he thought Gorky was too much of a follower, I assume.

Now there's one thing, I don't know if this is in Harry's article. He came in with a volume of reproductions of sculpture from the middle ages, early Italian sculpture and early European sculpture. And he flipped the book open from page to page and said, "What do you think of this," like a teacher. Gorky and I would respond, but after a few pages Gorky went away because he didn't want to play; but I kept on. Finally he said, "What do you think of this one?" I said, "I don't like that sculpture but the background is terrific, that wall." He said, "That's right, that's right." For some reason, he had a high regard for my art mind because one day he said, "What's the finest Gothic cathedral in Europe?" I said, "Burgos?" I had never been to Europe, but I had taken a course, in fact, I was taking a course, in the evening. You know, I worked at WPA during the day and went to NYU in the evening, taking the history of architecture. The teacher hadn't said too much about any of this, but I was just looking through Banister Fletcher [*A History of Architecture*. Oxford: The Royal Institute of British Architects and the University of London, 1896]. He said, "Unbelievable. How did you do it? Sure," he said. Well, things like that. And we'd discuss things.

And then one day, I guess it was sometime in '36, it had to have been early in '36, because it took some time before his book was published, he came to my studio with the manuscript. He said, "Tell me what you think." But when I read it, I said, "This is impossible. You'll never find a publisher." Such violent judgments. I was used to a more reasonable tone.

MRS. KAINEN: Balance.

MR. KAINEN: Balance. And he talked about S. [Salvador] Dali and things like, you know, these odd things. But obviously he was cutting to the bone. But all this business about involving psychology and music, everything together. He came back a couple days later and I said, "It is quite terrific, but the title-*System and Dialectics of Art* [John Graham, 1937]-it's not grammatical. 'System of Art'-I can understand dialectics. Question and answer." He said, "Well, that's the way I see it," and he didn't budge. He had to have *System and Dialectics of Art*. But that was my only comment on it.

MS. BERMAN: Were you too awed to say very much more.

MR. KAINEN: It was so much of a piece. I wanted to say that condensation is splendid, but you don't explain your terms. It was a little arbitrary to say the least. But I said, "He has all this background and he's doing it his way. If someone else did it, it would be rewriting. It would lack that kind of boiled down quality. And that very arbitrariness made it more provocative. But I thought it couldn't be published.

MS. BERMAN: What did you think of Graham as a painter?

MR. KAINEN: At that time I thought he was rather imitative. I thought he was a very strong painter. In fact, I did a review once, I can't remember where, of the show of the Ten. Graham was in it then. Graham's *Fish*, the one that's in the Phillips, I said, "It's a very strong painting without particular originality." Now I look at it and I see in a way he was doing what Gorky was. He was influenced by Picasso but he was doing something totally different.

We didn't see too much of his drawing. He didn't exhibit much. At that time he had just married. He had married Constance Wellman and I was in their apartment once. He took me there. Of course, I knew Constance later in Washington after she and Graham split. Then she married a Turkish doctor, Abushadi [ph], who died after a few years, and Constance came to Washington as an employee of Voice of America [new organization]. She spoke a beautiful English. A very forceful woman. I could see why eventually she and Graham parted.

At that time she was very fresh-faced, rosy cheeks and Titian hair. In her apartment-I had never seen French doors like that. It was very nice. I think it was Greenwich Street or something like that. But he had a piece of African sculpture there, wooden sculpture. Anyway, Graham was very subdued there. He made a living as an antique dealer and he also collected for Frank Crowninshield. He had carte blanche to buy all the primitive sculpture. He probably was the greatest authority on Negro sculpture at that time. First of all, his sensibilities,

and he could really go over and study something very thoroughly. He probably had traveled all over. So he had a certain income. He wasn't making a lot of money, but it cut into his painting time. Later on he became very bitter.

MS. BERMAN: In what way in particular? I know he turned against a lot of artists.

MR. KAINEN: Well, he thought that Picasso had done him a lot of harm, and he became very anti-Picasso. I met him a year or two before he died at the New York Central Supply Store. I was coming in and he was leaving. He had a beautiful overcoat, crisp cut, and a black fedora. I hadn't seen him in years. The first thing he said was, "Kainen, you know how crazy I used to be about Picasso?" I said, "Oh, yes, the greatest painter, et cetera, in the past, present, and future." He said, "Well, now I think compared with the spirituality of Raphael and the razor clarity of his line, Picasso looks a little cheap." It's funny but that is the aristocratic of this expressionist sloppiness he didn't like.

MS. BERMAN: Do you happen to know why he ever changed his name to John Graham from Ivan Dombrowski? John is Ivan.

MR. KAINEN: Graham, I don't know.

MS. BERMAN: I just thought it odd to take such a Scottish name.

MR. KAINEN: Well, you know, he was supposedly fluent in 12 languages. But Graham? Well, he knew Avery and used to be at the studio all the time. Some people think that Avery got a lot from him. But he spotted Avery very early.

Then he put on that show of Pollock, [Lee] Krasner together with some Europeans in the 1940s, something like that.

MS. BERMAN: Did Rothko spend much time with Graham to your recollection?

MR. KAINEN: I don't know, but everybody knew Graham. Everybody had something to mention about Graham. Yet he was never in the cafeterias, never at the union meetings of course. But somehow, I don't understand it. Now Werner Drewes, I know he knows a lot about Graham. He was a neighbor. Werner Drewes is over 80 now. The thing is to talk to some of the old-timers who were in New York. You might find something.

Then there was Peter Busa. Where is he now, Milwaukee or someplace?

MRS. KAINEN: He has a summer place on Long Island though and he comes back every summer.

MR. KAINEN: He was there and he knew everybody. He has a good memory.

MS. BERMAN: What about Rothko and Gorky? Were they particularly friendly?

MR. KAINEN: I don't think so. Gorky just had rapport with a few people. If he didn't have rapport with you, he was generally hostile. It's surprising. But I don't think he would have liked Rothko's early work. On the other hand, he would have respected him as a person. But Rothko never went to the abstract artists meetings. Gorky went once, but he wasn't a member of any particular group except the Ten.

MS. BERMAN: How about Rothko and Stuart Davis?

MR. KAINEN: Well, everybody knew everyone else. And Stuart Davis was one of the best known painters in New York, even though he wasn't selling anything, or very little. I never saw them together.

MS. BERMAN: Was Rothko interested in printmaking at all?

MR. KAINEN: Well, he was at Hayter's. [Stanley William] Hayter says that he did something in the Atelier 17. This is when it was in the New School, 1940-41-42, around there. [William] Baziotes was in there, quite a number of people worked with Hayter, because the Surrealists came there. [Yves] Tanguy and [Max] Ernst, [André] Masson. He was big time, after all. Pollock was there. Hayter still doesn't get the credit he deserves.

MRS. KAINEN: Hayter might remember something about this. I was the one who found out Rothko had been over.

MS. BERMAN: What sort of prints was he making there?

MRS. KAINEN: Hayter had no proofs.

MR. KAINEN: They had no proofs. Everyone was on his own. But Hayter would tell them to ruin the plate. Start without sketches, take proofs, re-etch, dry point, do everything. The idea was to make the artist lose his fear of the plate and also to make it an intuitive process. So that, I think, had a lot to do with the development of the automatic point of view. [Robert] Motherwell was there too, you know. Of course he was. He can't deny it.

MS. BERMAN: You experimented with automatic writing, didn't you?

MR. KAINEN: Yes. Well, actually a number of people used to try the exquisite corpse idea, where you'd write something and fold the paper and someone else would write. But not automatic writing as such. Automatic drawing, yes.

MS. BERMAN: Rothko's painting during the '30s-did he himself see it and recognize it as being expressionist, deriving from Expressionism?

MR. KAINEN: I think so. I think that-after all, I did a piece for *Art Front* called *Our Expressionists*. I think Dore Ashton mentions it in his book, *The New York School [The New York School: A Cultural Reckoning]*. New York: Viking Press, 1973]. And there I talk about how it's pretty evident that there's a revival of Expressionism in this country. It had been here before in a more limited way in artists like [John] Marin, [Arthur] Dove, [Max] Weber, [Marsden] Hartley, [Abraham] Walkowitz, and some others. I said, "The American point of view leans more toward a descriptive realism than emotional turbulence. But at times like this when it seems clear war is coming, an expressionist outlook has developed."

So the idea of Expressionism was in the air. Sheldon Cheney wrote a book [*Expressionism in Art*. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1934] on Expressionism in 1935-36. He took everything under Expressionism, including El Greco. But he knew the Germans. You know, he used to go to J. B. Neumann. After all, he showed there. And I mention Avery as an Expressionist, talk about "our Expressionists," yet, there's a whole new wave, because it's a reflex of what's happening in society. So Rothko knew very well what he was doing.

MS. BERMAN: Do you remember him ever talking about either Beckmann or Klee?

MR. KAINEN: No. I just used to see him at the project. We'd exchange a few words. He just wasn't with the groups. The meetings of the Ten, I don't know how often they took place, was where people could note what he said. As I mentioned, meeting him at the World's Fair about the Botticelli and at various other places. There are individual times I remember, but there are others when we passed, would exchange a few words, never a real discussion.

MS. BERMAN: You mentioned your writing. I'd like to talk with you a little bit about your writing. Maybe you don't like to be known as a writer. It seems to me you're a natural writer. And I'd like to know when you started and how it came to you, just when you realized that you could write.

MR. KAINEN: Well, I used to do a lot of reading. Probably I did more reading between the ages of 16 and, say, 23 than I ever did afterwards. This included English poetry. So if you read a lot-I also used to write poetry. I had things published in the *Poetry Quarterly* and a few magazines, you know, these fly-by-night, small magazines when I was 20, 21. Then I did forewords. I did a foreword for Walter Quirt's show at the Julian Levy Gallery in 1956. I did it before I left. I used to write for the *New Masses*, I reviewed [James] Soby's book in *New Masses*, after it came out in 1935. I reviewed it favorably. So I was trying to do two things-push a modern point of view and be left-wing.

MS. BERMAN: Well, your reading, you were reading art books and the classics and what else were you reading? Were you reading texts on psychology?

MR. KAINEN: Yes. I read Karen Horney's *Instinct and Intelligence*. It was one of the great books of the '30s. I tried to read [Alfred North] Whitehead's-what was it? Well, I read [Arthur Stanley] Eddington's *The Nature of the Physical World* [New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929], and so forth. I couldn't get too much of it, especially with the math. Whitehead's book was very important, because in one part he said that Wordsworth's description of a mountain was just as valid as a physicist's. A physicist will see it as a collection of molecules.

MS. BERMAN: Were most artists as intellectual as you were?

MR. KAINEN: To a certain degree. I think an artist would have a natural feeling for structure, for the flavor of words, their relationships, the form of a sentence. So most artists I know, in spite of people like Clive Bell who was always knocking artists, his *Landmarks in Nineteenth-Century Painting* [London: Chatto & Windus, 1927] is one of my great influences, short essays on [Honoré] Daumier and [Jean-Auguste-Dominique] Ingres and [Eugène] Delacroix, and other artists. But Roger [Eliot] Fry, *Transformations [Transformations: critical and speculative essays on art]*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1926]-he used to read the Germans in translation, Herman Barr and Expressionism. Well, the New York Public Library was great.

I don't think the other artists I knew did quite as much reading, because I was more interested in literature. But I had to make a choice.

MS. BERMAN: So in other words, when you say you had to make a choice, was there at some point a conscious decision on your part not to become a writer, although you did, but a full-time profession?

MR. KAINEN: Well, writing of sorts. Well, I guess at about the age of 19 or 20, I decided to do what Ingres had done, use writing as anger.

MS. BERMAN: You said that you were trying to push the modern point of view and be left-wing; when did you become left-wing? Was it in the household, or something that you came to gradually, or what?

MR. KAINEN: Well, in the Depression, in 1929, I used to see entire blocks evicted, people with their bedding out in the street, not just one house, no place to go, their mattresses out there. So I took part in the unemployed councils. We used to take the furniture back upstairs and the police gave only half-hearted resistance. So I think that got me started. The government seemed to do nothing about it. [Herbert] Hoover's only solution was to let veterans who were unemployed sell apples. They had little stands. They were more like boxes, crates on end, and they would sell apples for a nickel or so. So that was the only conscious move he made. All his money went to organizations like the banks, the railroads. His vice president [Charles Curtis] was Charles G. Dawes [sic], one of the big bankers. You know, it was so blatant. There were no jobs.

I got out of Pratt Institute in 1930. I was kicked out a month before graduation. But I saw an ad for a job for the Italo Gravure Company. "Bring samples." So I brought two small paintings and a couple of drawings, figure drawings or street scenes. This had to be about 1932. And the man who ran Italo Gravure Company was a very intelligent man, Daniel Decovan. Well, there were commercial artists with lots of samples. He looked at my sample and said, "You're hired. I don't want a commercial artist because the idea is to make drawings that can be reproduced by photogravure so that they look like etchings. They can be used for high-class greeting cards, black and white."

MS. BERMAN: That was unusual for the time. I mean usually everything was so corny.

MR. KAINEN: I saw the basins put in for the acids, made a couple of drawings. I don't know what happened to them. Reproduced. But after about six months, he went out of business. He thought there might be some revival. Everybody was going out of business. So there just were no jobs. The government wasn't making any effort. So that helped people to want to change things.

MS. BERMAN: How did you get involved in writing for *Art Front*?

MR. KAINEN: Well, I had already done some writing. After I was on the editorial board. The first editor was Clarence Weinstock who later changed his name to Charles Humboldt. He was a writer.

[Audio break.]

MS. BERMAN: -*Art Front*. You were saying the only trouble with Weinstock was that-

MR. KAINEN: He wanted to have a sensational piece once in a while. And a review came in from the West Coast about some book, and I think the review was by Kenneth Rexroth. It was a very insulting review where he talked about the writer's diaphanous mind. I said, "That doesn't mean anything, it's just abuse. I don't see any real criticism in it." And Weinstock was annoyed. He said, "We want to have this provocative publication. Rexroth thinks that's the way it should be." Anyway, I was on the board only a couple issues.

MS. BERMAN: Why did you leave?

MR. KAINEN: Well, Weinstock was a little too dictatorial. After all, he had a board. The other people didn't seem to mind. Stuart Davis was on it. Harold Rosenberg. He came a little later, he was there. I remember him.

MS. BERMAN: What was Rosenberg like in those days?

MR. KAINEN: He was very masculine. He was leaner. And he wasn't writing so much. He was an assistant on the mural project. He had some art-

MRS. KAINEN: Wasn't he mostly a poet then?

MR. KAINEN: Yes, he was writing poetry, but not much of it was published. He wasn't connected with any of the organizations that I knew of.

MS. BERMAN: What about Ben Shahn?

MR. KAINEN: Shahn was a brilliant man but very devious, brilliant in the sense of-well, he was brilliant. But he also was not as left wing as people thought. He was left wing in his drawings, but I don't think he was connected with any organization. He was very articulate and very sensible. But his dealings with women, that's another matter. But his second wife, Bernarda Bryson was around.

MS. BERMAN: Did you ever talk about your work with him or did he ever say anything about it?

MR. KAINEN: No. I really began exhibiting in about '37. You know, I had shown a couple of things in the Hudson Walker Gallery [Provincetown, MA] early, in '36, part of a general show. Then I was with the ACA from '37 on. I showed in a group show in '37, and '38 was the first New York group show. My problem was that I lived basically in the Bronx. I'd come down to work and sometimes I'd stay late, but my home was in the Bronx, so that I wasn't-and a lot of my paintings were in the Bronx. After I got married, my studio was in the apartment, mostly in the kitchen. So this was a problem.

MS. BERMAN: I see. You seem to have been quite friendly with David Smith. Is that correct?

MR. KAINEN: That's right.

MS. BERMAN: Could you tell me about how you met him and your association?

MR. KAINEN: Well, we both used to be on the project, of course. He was on the sculpture project. He would come to the cafeteria fairly often, and everyone would discuss things there. He could be quite profane too, that is, "salty," you'd say. At one time we were discussing Tiryns [Greece], the sculpture in Tiryns-he said it was-he was in Crete. You know I forget what it was now. I wrote it down. I can't remember what. It appears we were both right-different aspects of the same place.

MS. BERMAN: Did you appreciate his sculpture?

MR. KAINEN: Oh yes, all the time. But many artists appreciated his sculpture, painters especially.

MS. BERMAN: Why was that?

MR. KAINEN: Smith, of course, had been a painter. Not only that, he left a body of something like 650 paintings, more than most painters do, while he was doing his sculpture, in upstate New York [covered in] polyethylene. Someone who wanted to do work on his sculpture, I guess Miranda McClintic [*David Smith, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden collection, Smithsonian Institution*. Photographs by John Tennant. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1979], said they wouldn't take the polyethylene off. So she had to photograph them through the polyethylene.

He also was associated with Graham. I saw him once or twice on the street with Graham. Graham thought very highly of him. Oh yes, he included David Smith among the young painters. But he would send me cards after I was in Washington. In fact, when he came to Washington, he visited Kenneth Noland. He got Noland to phone me and I came down to Noland's place.

Smith then-I don't think he was married to Jean [Freas, married 1953-1961] yet, but he brought her with him. It must have been in '52 or 1951. Noland was just beginning but he had been to Black Mountain. I can't say too much about Smith except that he was a man of great force. He had weight as an individual. I know he used to write. He wrote poetry, not very good. He hadn't read any. But he had lots of potential.

MS. BERMAN: I wanted to ask you just a couple of questions about Gorky. As I said, I'm not going to ask you lot because I think it's been covered. But you said that when you walked into his studio, you saw the portrait of the artist and his mother, the Hirshhorn or the Whitney version?

MR. KAINEN: It was the Whitney. But that's in the National Gallery. Hirshhorn doesn't have any.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, the National Gallery. I'm sorry.

MR. KAINEN: No, the Whitney.

MS. BERMAN: Did he talk about these paintings and the portraits and his family and anything?

MR. KAINEN: No. He talked about-he had reproductions, mainly postcards. He was always talking about shape making and about [Paolo] Uccello, who he admired greatly, because of the shape of the horses and the background was black. But he also talked about-yes, he did talk about his instrument. He had this guitar-like thing. He said-it's true, he talked about a lot of other things. He said that last Sunday he spent the whole Sunday looking for skin to cover part of the instrument. He had to have the skin of the heart of a calf.

MRS. KAINEN: The skin of a heart?

MR. KAINEN: Yes. He went all over New York trying to find it, but he finally got it. And every once in a while he'd strum it and sing in that high wailing voice. That very fact alone showed his attachment to his past because he didn't sing in English. He did this a couple of times. But he didn't talk specifically about.

MS. BERMAN: It's such a great, moving painting. When you saw it, were you surprised?

MR. KAINEN: Oh, yes, the clarity of it. Well, it was Ingres, but different in that the pigment is different. The pigment is more dense. But at that time, he told me that he scraped the canvas like they did in the [inaudible].

Just before painting when the pigment was just about dry, he'd scrape it with a razor blade, because he wanted to get very smooth, smooth gloss, on that smooth surface but he still wanted a painterly quality. Whereas Ingres, of course, painted it all in black and white first. That's why you see so many painting. They hadn't gone over it. That, of course, was a tradition before Manet. Most paintings were under painted in monochrome. You read letters of Thomas Gainsborough. "Diary, today I put in the dead color on the portrait." You know, his gray-green. Every artist had a different color he was working with.

You look at the El Grecos and you see this brown-violet, deep brown-violet background, against which he painted with a white, emulsion white, that would dry faster than oil, but still would take oil. This was a Titian method. And when he wanted a grayish color, he would drag it over, dry brush, letting the dark color come through so that the drawing was separated from the color. That's why they could do portraits so beautifully.

They painted in monochrome letting the under painting come through in the Titian manner. But there are other ways of doing it. Then they would put these washes of color on it, semi-glazes. The drawing is there. If you had to paint it and draw it at the same time, it not only becomes hard but in time the paint sinks in. That's why you look at a Manet black you see, who is it, Edmund Keene as Hamlet? Whoever the guy was. The black has turned dead. If you look at [Diego] Velasquez black or at [Peter Paul] Rubens black, it's completely differentiated from the darks to the pale grays because of the methods of under painting. But that didn't suit the modern way which as Hassam said probably came from the English watercolorists, the light brown. I don't know how we got onto this.

MS. BERMAN: That's perfectly all right. We were just talking about Gorky. Was it a surprise to see this painting? I mean were you mostly aware of Gorky emulating Picasso and Cézanne or the other way around?

MR. KAINEN: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: Did it seem to mark a break in his work?

MR. KAINEN: Yes. I hadn't thought of it in that way but it had this serenity that he hadn't had before. And also the classical style. But I think that might have summed up his early style because after that-well, he was also doing Picasso, his variations on Picasso. But like most artists of complex natures, he liked one ancestor and another. You don't have just one path, one kind of point of view. You like to be classical and you like to paint loosely. But basically he was working formally no matter what he did.

MS. BERMAN: Did he ever give you a reason or did you have a feeling why when he went through the portraits, I guess which lasted until around 1938, why he decided to stop painting them?

MR. KAINEN: Do you mean the portraits?

MS. BERMAN: Yes. Not a portrait most of the time but really recreating his family in a way.

MR. KAINEN: It would be difficult to gauge his reasons. But I think by then the work was becoming more abstract-his and others. They're more abstract conceptions. He began to leave the figure but he kept painting on older canvases, refining them, making them more classical, as he did with my portrait.

MS. BERMAN: During the sessions in which you posed, did he talk much while he painted?

MR. KAINEN: Not only didn't he talk, but he didn't tell me when to rest. You know, I was leaning on a hand. After a half hour, it got very tiring. So I'd put my hand down and he'd look like of impatient. But after all, I had worked from a model. At Pratt a model posed for 20 minutes and rested for five minutes. I didn't rest for five minutes, but I got the stiffness out and went back to it. He didn't say anything. He really concentrated. However, he did it sitting down. Of course, the ceiling was low there. He had a slanted skylight. Of course, he could have stood up.

MS. BERMAN: Did you see any other paintings there in his studio?

MR. KAINEN: Oh, yes.

MS. BERMAN: How did he keep them? Were they out to be shown?

MR. KAINEN: No. They were in a separate little room. I think there was a curtain, say a drape in front, maybe part of the room. They were leaning against the wall, quite a number of them. In the piece Harry Rand did, I mention how he brought out each painting and said, "Who does this remind you of?"

MS. BERMAN: Uh-huh. It's a funny question to ask I guess.

MR. KAINEN: Well, he wanted his sources. He wasn't ashamed of his sources, which is more than you can say for a lot of other artists who deny everything.

MRS. KAINEN: I think he was testing your intelligence.

MR. KAINEN: Well, no. Graham might have done that as a teaching thing. But Gorky, he wanted to know if I got what he was working at. But there's one other thing about that. I think when he painted me, he used a model stick, an old-fashioned stick with a ball at the end that had padding around it usually covered with chamois and tied there so you could rest your hand. He didn't do that all the time but he used a model stick. And the palette on his hand, a big palette.

MS. BERMAN: Just like Rembrandt at the Frick [Collection, New York, NY].

MR. KAINEN: Well, the first artist I knew who didn't use a palette was Stuart Davis who had a table with a white top covered with glass. His paint was on that. So he painted with a color against white whereas most artists paint with a brownish color. And I suppose that might be one reason why brown was such a prevailing color. Except, also, they thought of color in a different sense in general.

MS. BERMAN: To go over some of the other people you knew, were you friendly with Byron Browne?

MR. KAINEN: Yes. Byron Browne and Rosalind.

MS. BERMAN: Were you interested in what the abstract artists were doing at the time? What was your feeling about that?

MR. KAINEN: Well, I liked the abstract artists but I had this sort of social hang-up. I reviewed their show. Anyway, I liked them. I liked George McNeil. I liked the people who were more painterly. But I knew a lot of them. It just wasn't the way I was working but I could understand why they were doing it.

It's surprising-in those days artists were very tolerant of other points of view, except for straight, descriptive realism. That was more for people who just did pretty pictures.

MS. BERMAN: Why do you think that people became so much more intolerant which, I guess, I would date from the early '50s?

MR. KAINEN: Competition. For the first time there was an art market. I mean, people were interested in acquiring their work, and then the jealousy started to set up. In the '30s and '40s if an artist sold anything, great. No one was known outside the local confines except people like Stuart Davis, people who were with the Downtown Gallery, Ben Shahn. But they mingled with everyone. There was no star system there.

MS. BERMAN: Do you also think that possibly because there were fewer museums and the work of living artists weren't bought very much, that it was also even getting into a museum was pretty much out of the question for them, too?

MR. KAINEN: Oh, it was out of the question, yes.

MS. BERMAN: So there wasn't the competition to not only get into a museum, but later to have rooms in museums, too.

MR. KAINEN: Yes, that's right. There was the Whitney Museum, the Whitney Annual. But no one really respected it. They'd have one or two so-called moderns and the rest, Ivan Albright. He was among the better ones. The weight would be so heavily on Leon Kroll and Eugene Speicher that it was something to get into it. Artists were required, who were invited, to bring their paintings to be looked at by a jury. A lot of artists didn't want to do that. Take your paintings down and wait.

MS. BERMAN: I forgot to ask you, by the way, what you felt were the most important ways your association with Gorky and Graham influenced your own art.

MR. KAINEN: Well, they taught me the importance of composing a painting, the importance of the feeling of

pigment, the importance of one edge of an area against another. It was the kind of thing you could get only from artists advanced in their art. There's nothing of the school about it. I mean it was the feeling of the art of painting. And they were so intense about it, and knew so much about it, that it affected me. Also, the idea of using your imagination-even if you paint from nature-change it. So that association with strong, gifted personalities can't help but have an effect if you have any sensitivity.

Davis was different. I admired Davis, but he didn't have the kind of visionary quality that Graham and Gorky had. They were more poetic in their work, more imaginative. Graham would talk about the enigma of these qualities, these intangible qualities. Stuart Davis was just putting down one color next to another. He had a jazzier, livelier, sort of "accept the world," kind of, point of view for an American, let's say. While I liked Stuart Davis, I leaned more toward the Russian mentality.

MS. BERMAN: You mean the spiritual?

MR. KAINEN: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: You said they talked about how you had to invent things. But it seems from the paintings I saw yesterday, you were inventing before that weren't you? I mean that was never a stumbling block for you.

MR. KAINEN: No. The only stumbling block was my commitment to a social point of view which created problems. Otherwise I probably would have been much more abstract much earlier.

MS. BERMAN: Did Gorky and Graham try to dislodge that?

MR. KAINEN: Gorky did. Graham pretended that he was socially conscious. You know, "Oh yes, the working man," and that stuff. But he didn't paint that way. Gorky, he came up to my studio and I had some paintings there. I had a lot of them in the Bronx. But I had done a painting, I have a photograph of it, of a model wearing a brassiere with a cup of coffee, pot of coffee, on an electric heater on a table, simplified in form, rather plastic, to use that old-fashioned word. And Gorky said, "Too much modeling. You don't want it round like a sausage," even though it wasn't. "Keep the shape flat." I hadn't kept it flat. He said, "Just a little on the edges, all you need is to turn it. That way you have shapes. The way you're doing it, you're not having any shapes." That was very important. After that, he asked me to pose for him.

MS. BERMAN: What finally disabused you of this eye of keeping the primacy of this socialist or left-wing point of view in the picture?

MR. KAINEN: It's a kind of humanist outlook, let's say. I was doing that in the '70s, abstract paintings with a figurative implication, because I didn't want just handsome abstraction. There had to be some kind of view.

MS. BERMAN: I didn't mean that you didn't have these things, but you said that this caused problems and "I would have become abstract earlier." So what I'm trying to isolate here is what you felt, how it came about that you jettisoned something that you feel was an obstacle in your work.

MR. KAINEN: Probably after I came to Washington. That was probably it. The street scenes changed, became much more abstract. From that I went to rooftops that were kind of tormented shapes. You haven't seen those.

MS. BERMAN: Well, I saw a couple of the prints that might almost be called that.

MR. KAINEN: The painting had color and was fresher. And from that I went into abstraction which was even a carryover from some of the rooftops.

Have you been to the National Museum to see what they have of mine there?

MS. BERMAN: I haven't. I'm going to go tomorrow probably.

MR. KAINEN: Well-

MS. BERMAN: Yesterday you told me about how Edith Halpert [founder of the Downtown Gallery, New York, NY] had confided [Edouard] Vuillard's advice to her. I'd like you to tell me-

MR. KAINEN: Yes. As I remember, she told me that when she was in Paris as a pretty young woman-I think she said, I forget, it was 1920, probably, I imagine, a little bit later-she met Vuillard. She was a very pretty girl then, and she was interested in being a dealer. Vuillard said, well, or words to this effect, "You have to play it smart. Ask artists who are good who they think is the best young artist, who has a good body of work. Or he doesn't have to be so young but someone who is not properly recognized. Then you go visit him and you buy out his entire studio, buy up everything. Then you start having other dealers show his work. You can show his work and have quite a number of other dealers build him up. You keep the best work. After they've built him up, you'll

have the best work, and you can get the highest prices for them."

And Edith Halpert said, "Oh, that's a very unethical thing to do." Vuillard said, "Don't worry about ethics. It's art dealing."

I don't have it quite right, but it's something that had the same kind of point of view. That is to have other dealers show the work, but you have the best work.

MS. BERMAN: Somehow she would have had to parcel out the lesser work to the other dealers.

MR. KAINEN: Yes, that was it.

MS. BERMAN: Or sell it to them.

MRS. KAINEN: Let them do the work. That's really it.

MS. BERMAN: Or let them think they're participating in it but not getting the best-

MR. KAINEN: Yes, that's it. He probably said that he made a deal with other dealers, but he kept back the best work. But the artist had to have a lot of work, so it probably couldn't have been too young an artist.

MS. BERMAN: A neglected artist. But definitely going to the other artists for advice.

MR. KAINEN: That's right. Well, he always did that, Vuillard. He mentions it in his biographies.

MS. BERMAN: I guess we are getting pretty much to the point of your decision to move to Washington. When you decided to accept the job, when you were going, were you aware of the far-reaching consequences of the decision?

MR. KAINEN: When I took the examination, it was in 1939. There just were no jobs. I was still on WPA. I was married. But I wouldn't have taken the test, except that a friend of mine told my wife that he had seen this notice for an opening in the Division of Graphic Arts in Washington. My wife said, "Well, we need a job." The project was still going, showed no signs of folding. I don't know if the war had begun in Europe yet, but it was pretty imminent. So I took a trip to Washington in the old Chevrolet. And I saw that the Division of Graphic Arts had not only fine prints but had other aspects of the graphic arts-photomechanical processes, stereotyping, linotype, and all that sort of business.

So I went back to New York and studied up on photomechanical. I didn't have much problem with the history of graphic arts, but I studied that too. And the exam was given in 1939, and I got second in the country. Now people who had written books on graphic arts took the test, but they didn't know anything about photomechanical prints.

Well, nothing happened much. I knew that some people who had been on the project, Ted Witonski, for example, had this job. I knew I was second, so I came to Washington and saw the curator, Ruel P. Tolman, who was also acting director of the National Collection of Fine Arts. I said, "Who got first?" Well, I didn't ask him then.

I came there, and he saw me, and talked to me, and saw that I wasn't some strange character. A few months later, I received an offer from the Smithsonian for this job. Well, when I came, I accepted, came in May, 1942. I asked Mr. Tolman who had got first on this exam. He said, "Oh, I had to fire him. He didn't know anything, incompetent." I said, "How did he get first?" He said, "Well, he typed out the test." He was a boyfriend of a librarian and the librarian had him take the test. Whether Tolman knew about it or not, I don't know. But he certainly shouldn't have accepted it. He knew all the questions.

MS. BERMAN: Well, he was cheating.

MR. KAINEN:

He was cheating, yes. And then there were a couple questions that were ambiguous anyway, like when did printing from moveable type first begin? So I said-what can you say? The first Bible was 1455, but printing from moveable type began earlier, right? What can you say? So I said about 1450. No, the answer was 1455 because when-a couple things like that. But they had some methods that people in the United States didn't know about, like the Baxter method of picture printing in the mid 19th century, whereby artists printed from about-they went to about as many 20 woodblocks and one steel aquatinted plate over it. It made the most uncannily realistic glossy pictures you could imagine. Well, Baxter was very successful, and he leased his method to others. But the work is not great, and we don't know about it here. But I had seen it here. I mean, that was among the reasons I got such a good mark on that. So that's how I started in the Division of Graphic Arts. Of course, I knew all the technical methods, since I had been on the project and worked on them.

MRS. KAINEN: Tell them about your marriage.

MR. KAINEN: Also, my wife was pregnant.

MRS. KAINEN: That's still not what I meant.

MR. KAINEN: Well, that would come with my schedule.

MS. BERMAN: Well, I'd like to just pursue the impact of coming down here. Excuse me-

MRS. KAINEN: Just the bargain with his wife.

MR. KAINEN: Well, yes.

MRS. KAINEN: I think you should put it on the record.

MR. KAINEN: Before we were married, I said, "I'll marry you on one condition-that you work for five years, and allow me to establish myself as an artist, just five years." She agreed, but as soon as we got married, she began having health problems. She couldn't work. She was physically weak and so forth. So I joined the WPA and worked on WPA. She never did anything. Of course, now she's working.

MS. BERMAN: Does she live around the Washington area still?

MR. KAINEN: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: She was also a young woman then, if you were 28.

MR. KAINEN: Well, 22.

MS. BERMAN: She must have gotten pregnant very soon after you were married. But soon after you were married, you agreed to work nonetheless.

MR. KAINEN: Well, the thing is, I suppose it's the old Jewish background. I should have been more ruthless. I mean Shahn, Rothko, and others would let nothing stand in their way. But I felt sort of committed to a family, more her family than mine. But I kept working.

MS. BERMAN: That was in the beginning of your marriage too. You'd assume that maybe you could work things out or you'd make a go of it. You don't give up on it immediately.

MR. KAINEN: That's right.

MS. BERMAN: What was it like moving down here after being in New York? What was the adjustment period like?

MR. KAINEN: Well, when I came there were two Washington papers, actually three, but two of them had art reviews-the *Washington Star* and the *[Washington] Post*.

[Audio break.]

MS. BERMAN: -talking with Avis Berman on August 12, 1982, in his home in Chevy Chase, Maryland. Let's begin with your discussion of the cultural climate in Washington when you arrived.

MR. KAINEN: In the art field, there were critics on two newspapers-the *Star* and the *Post*. A little later on the *Herald Tribune*, the *Washington Herald Tribune*-not *Herald Tribune*-yes, it was the *Herald Tribune*, which is a Hearst newspaper, had an art critic also. But when I came here in May, 1942, I looked at the Sunday newspapers-that's when the reviews appeared, every Sunday without fail, even though there were very few commercial galleries. There were two aside from framing shops. But there was a review by Leila Mechlin of a show at the National Gallery of Art. She was criticizing Cézanne severely.

Mechlin said that everyone knows that a painting should be like a window on the world. And with Cézanne, you just don't see anything. Things don't go back, they're not rounded. So she can't understand why people think so highly of him. I read this and I wondered what I was getting into, 1942 and this kind of criticism.

But shortly thereafter an artists group was formed called the Artists Guild of Washington. There was an old Washington group called the Society of Washington Artists which took everyone. But the Artists Guild of Washington was supposedly more modern, and there were some interesting artists here. Of course, Pietro Lazzari had shown with Pat Codyre in the Gallery Secession, and he was a friend of Rothko's. But there were some people at American University, William [Howard] Calfee and Robert F. Gates, who were studying with [Karl] Knaths.

The big influence in this town was the Phillips Gallery on artists. Phillips even had classes. Karl Knaths taught these classes and Phillips supported Knaths. The problem was that Knaths would set up the still lifes. They all did still lifes. He picked the colors; he picked the shapes, so that all the students looked like Knaths. But in the Phillips Gallery, you could see contemporary art, you could see modern art, you could see the connection between the older art and the new art, because the gallery was devoted to modern art and its sources.

Now, shortly thereafter-I don't know when it was, '43 perhaps-Caresse Crosby opened a gallery here. Do you know Caresse Crosby?

MS. BERMAN: Absolutely, Caresse and Harry [Harry Grew Crosby].

MR. KAINEN: Yes, she's the widow of Harry. Black Sun Press in Paris. She was a free spirit. She put out a publication called *Portfolio*. On the board were people like Seldon Rodman, who took care of poetry; Henry Miller, prose; Romare Bearden, the art; Samuel Rosenberg, who I mentioned earlier as a literary detective, also took care of photography and various other things. And they had other people of note. The magazine came out quarterly. It came out, I think, for two years. Caresse Crosby also had openings. It wasn't exactly a salon.

Well, she also put on exhibitions. She put on an early show of [Giorgio] de Chirico. That was quite a show. I don't know how it was handled in the reviews. She had older artists, that is Surrealists especially. I remember one opening. Thornton Wilder was there, David Daiches, a Scottish literary critic, Charles Olsen, Samuel Rosenberg. Wilder and Daiches were the people I had heard of. I'm sure there were other people I didn't know about.

So she had this gallery going and the literary activity. Then in 1943, I guess, David Porter opened a gallery. Caresse Crosby had been on 19th Street, and then moved to G Place [The Crosby Gallery of Modern Art, 1944-1947]. It was a one block street above G Street between 9th and 10th. Yes, I guess so. And Caresse Crosby was upstairs-was she upstairs or downstairs? I don't know. David Porter had one floor and she had another floor. David Porter worked for the government at that time, as an economist. Later on, he became a painter himself. He had some success.

I had my first Washington show with the David Porter Gallery [on G Place, Washington, DC]. This was January, 1943.

MS. BERMAN: What did you show?

MR. KAINEN: I showed a couple of things from New York and a number from Washington. I still have the catalogue. But I did show one painting called *Man of Sorrows*. The show was reviewed by Florence Berryman who was a successor to Leila Mechlin. She was rather ambiguous about the paintings until she came to the *Man of Sorrows*. And she said, "Well, Christ painted in green and purple is not the Christian's idea of Christ." I forget what the colors were. Anyway, this is an amusing story.

David Finlay came in. He liked one of the paintings and reserved it. Then he came back and said sorry, he has to cancel that. His wife won't let him get it.

So there was activity, but it was more or less below the surface, the general surface of Washington culture.

MS. BERMAN: What was Caresse Crosby doing in Washington?

MR. KAINEN: Well, I read her book called *The Passionate Years* [New York: Dial Press, 1953]. She talks about Paris, and she talks about Italy, and about this mountain she had in Greece with her foundation. She doesn't say a word about Washington.

MS. BERMAN: Did you get to know her?

MR. KAINEN: Oh yes, I knew her.

MS. BERMAN: What was she like, I mean seeing her first-hand, aside from the legend?

MR. KAINEN: Well, she was a very attractive woman. I suppose she was in her late 50s then. She had dyed titian hair, a very nice voice, you know, a warm voice, and she was graceful and a free spirit. She also showed Pietro Lazzari.

MRS. KAINEN: You might as well say it.

MR. KAINEN: Who was her boyfriend here.

MS. BERMAN: How long did the gallery go on for? Did she have to close it for lack of enthusiasm on the public's part or did she want to leave?

MR. KAINEN: She was here-I remember three locations for her gallery. But I suppose nothing much was happening here. There was no clientele for art. At the same time, on G Street, there was another little gallery run by a man named Dante Radicci [ph]. He formed a group called In Transit [Gallery, 2004 M Street NW, Washington, DC]. It was supposed to be for the real moderns in Washington. Lazzari was a member. I was a member. Laura Douglas was a member. She had been a pupil of [André] Lhote in Paris and had a few Cubist passages. And a woman named Jane Love, who was kind of a frantic abstractionist. I don't know how I'd like it now. But the painting then seemed abstract in the most undisciplined possible way; that is, flailing about. And this was in the '40s. Clarence John Laughlin was a member too, a photographer.

There were a few publications we put out. I don't know what happened to them. Laughlin wanted to write the forewords. We used to have fierce battles, because he would say, "Now when the black disc of hate is going over-" I would say, "Clarence." I was always fighting him to get the melodrama out of it.

MS. BERMAN: The purpleness.

MR. KAINEN: The purpleness. And the rest of the people weren't particularly interested.

MS. BERMAN: What was the Washington Artists Guild, the difference between that and the In Transit? I assume you were in the guild?

MR. KAINEN: Yes. The guild had a purpose to exist just during the war, to help in the war effort. I can't possibly see how. The guild existed for a few years and closed at the end of the war. It had shows for a few years. The Society of Washington Artists always had shows. It was a society of landscape painters. The Society of Washington Artists at that time had separate categories. This was typical of New York too, all over the country. You could enter your painting in landscape, still life, or composition or portrait. And prizes were awarded in the various categories, medals, silver and bronze medals. So this was standard in academic circles. They weren't particularly academic. It was a catch-all sort of organization. Someone had to be recommended, but the standards were not very high, whereas the Artists Guild was more exclusive. It had about 15 members, I think, at the most. In Transit had about seven members.

MS. BERMAN: Did you think you were finding your way into a community of other artists with these groups?

MR. KAINEN: No. I had nothing in common with the artists. My point of view was entirely different. By this time I was using flat shapes and using color in a different way. And most of these artists were really illustrative in the pejorative sense of the word. I know that French Impressionists were influenced by illustrators at times, but these artists-even when they were modern-were not even in the Knaths tradition. Knaths probably started about-it was during the war. The only one was Lazzari, who was basically a sculptor and a draftsman. He also worked on cement. He was an Italian who knew how to mix the dry colors with the wet cement, so he was sort of a maverick. But as far as painting was concerned-

MS. BERMAN: Was it possible to become friendly with the Phillipses?

MR. KAINEN: Oh, yes. In fact, with Duncan Phillips, because Duncan Phillips early put on a show of local artists; that is, artists could submit paintings, and he would select. This had to be at the latest '43. I know it was '43, because one of my paintings I still have. That was in a Phillips show. Phillips liked my work, said to bring some paintings up to his office, and leave them there. Duncan Phillips liked to look at paintings against the wall for weeks because he said, "Some paintings look sensational when you see them for the first time. But when you continue looking at them from time to time they sort of fall apart. They have nothing solid in them. Other paintings might look very modest, quiet, nothing striking about them; but the longer you look at them, the stronger they get." So he said, "I don't like to be in a hurry to make up my mind." I'd leave them there, but he kept buying paintings and he put on a few shows; that is, of local artists.

At one time he asked me if I'd have a one-man show there. Do you know how dopey I was? I had promised Franz Bader that I'd have a show at Bader. But this was still months in the future. So, honest me, I said, "I'm sorry, I promised Franz Bader I'd have a show there."

MS. BERMAN: Oh, a show at the Phillips-

MR. KAINEN: Well-so he never asked me again.

MRS. KAINEN: He didn't live much longer, did he?

MR. KAINEN: Yes. This was, I think, my first show at Bader; I guess that was in the '50s.

MS. BERMAN: Let's see. I have the chronology here. Well, Phillips died in 1966. And this says one-man show, paintings, abstract with figurative implications, Franz Bader Gallery, 1958.

MR. KAINEN: No. I had numerous shows before that. I'll tell you when, '52. Let's see. I had a show at the DuPont Theater in '52. But before that, I had a show at Bader when I was doing the rooftops just before the abstract show at the DuPont Theater, in fact two years before. In 1950, I had the show at Bader, early in 1950. Do I have it there?

MS. BERMAN: I have a one man show at Whyte Gallery.

MR. KAINEN: Well, Whyte was run by Bader until he founded his own gallery.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, I didn't realize that.

MRS. KAINEN: When did Bader go on his own?

MR. KAINEN: It says I had a one-man show at the White Gallery? Maybe it was called the Whyte Gallery then, 1950. Before he moved. He was thrown out by Polly Whyte, who wanted to take over the art stuff. That was certainly after '50.

MS. BERMAN: February, 1950: city subjects verging on abstraction.

MR. KAINEN: Yes, that's right. Hey, you're pretty good.

MS. BERMAN: Just to get back to Phillips, to me a very great man as a collector and as a thinker. I'm interested if he had any other things that he said about his habits and the way he looked at art-if you would recollect them.

MR. KAINEN: Yes. I had quite a number of conversations with him. I'd go to the gallery often, and most of the time he was there. He was a slender, elegant man, with a reddish-sandy mustache and hair, and a thin narrow face, extremely gracious. When I'd come into a room, he would walk across the room to greet me, shake hands, and ask how my work was coming along, ask about myself. He'd walk around and he'd speculate, ask my opinion of this artist, that artist, and we'd have discussions. I remember he once asked me how I liked Dove. I was very undiplomatic. I said, "Well, I don't particularly like him. I would call him modernistic rather than modern." Phillips was annoyed. He paced up and down. He said, "Dove is very much of the earth. He is fruity, nutty. He gets eternal changes in nature, growing things, the sky. It's all part of his outlook." I said, "Yes, but as a painter, he's kind of thin, rather hard-edged. He's not very painterly to me."

What I didn't realize then was that Dove had a medium of his own, using wax in a certain way, combining it with oil, which gave it a surface I was unaccustomed to. But the fact that you could talk with him on that level, and he wouldn't hold it against you, is quite remarkable. He also asked a lot about Solman.

He had given Solman a show. He said, "I like talking with him. He has good ideas. He can discuss it." He liked talking with me. You know, he talked with artists who had unusual points of view to back up what they were saying. But he said that later on, Solman went back too far. He said, "I like his early work." He noticed a relationship between Solman and me which he didn't know. We came from the same place and we were friends and I said I learned from him. But he didn't like the Hogarthian tradition.

I mentioned Evergood to him, because Evergood was a friend. Evergood had sent me a letter of congratulations on my first show in Washington. He said, "Congratulations. Use your imagination, because you've got a good one."

I was saying, "Evergood is a very independent artist. He has a very fine feeling for the material." He said, "Well, I don't like the Hogarthian tradition. I like the more serene, the poetical feeling. He liked [Pierre] Bonnard. Nevertheless, he liked [Chaim] Soutine. And I remember one time he said, "What do you think of [Milton] Avery?" I said, "Oh, a wonderful painter." He had been buying some Averys. This was quite some time ago. He said, "Avery is very good. Of course, compared to Soutine-" So I said, "Well, I'm not so sure. Avery has another point of view." I was defending Avery. But here supposedly he was more in the autumnal tradition, autumnal grace, and yet he could like Soutine.

MRS. KAINEN: Tell what he said about Picasso though.

MR. KAINEN: Oh yes. I said, "You don't have many Picassos." He said, "Well, I'm a little suspicious of him because he's too much like a Roman candle."

MS. BERMAN: He had lots of Braque's though.

MR. KAINEN: See? Braque's was more of his tradition. Braque was a good painter, but he had more in a tasteful vein, very handsome. Of course, Braque had more than that, but compared with Picasso-Picasso had some spleen. I guess Phillips didn't like his kind of spleen. On the other hand, he was crazy about Daumier.

MRS. KAINEN: It was probably the mood.

MR. KAINEN: But it was so nice to talk with Phillips. Here's a man that owns the place, and he's asking you your opinion. How many museum directors would do that?

MS. BERMAN: Plus he was a museum director who had exquisite taste too. I mean he had that great eye.

MR. KAINEN: That's right.

MS. BERMAN: It seemed he had learned it. You say he was sincerely interested.

MR. KAINEN: Oh yes. That's why he asked people's opinions. Maybe a new insight would come up that he might be able to use in a different way.

MS. BERMAN: Did he ask a lot of people, or did he tend to ask mostly artists?

MR. KAINEN: There were very few artists. What was he going to do, ask someone with out much background? I think he asked artists whose opinions he respected. I remember when he did that book on Giorgione. I don't know if you saw the book.

MS. BERMAN: No, not that I remember.

MR. KAINEN: At the head of every chapter, there was a kind of fancy type giving the title of the chapter. He said, "What did you think of the book?" I said I admired his analysis of Giorgione. I said, "Although I'm not a scholar." He said, "What did you think of that typeface?" I said I didn't like it.

MS. BERMAN: Was there anyone within the Smithsonian that you were meeting with who provided that much intellectual stimulation as Duncan Phillips?

MR. KAINEN: No, there was no one in the Smithsonian. At that time, I was curator of graphic arts at the old Division of Graphic Arts. My superior at one time, in fact twice, my superior was an engineer, once an economist. So there was no connection. At the National Collection of Fine Arts, only Ruel Tolman, after him Thomas M. Beggs, who came from the same place, Pomona College. I don't want to say too much about them.

MS. BERMAN: When you got there at the Smithsonian, what was your job and how was the collection as you found it?

MR. KAINEN: Ah, yes. When I found the collection, the first thing I did was to go through all the drawers. I checked with the card indexes, the card catalogues. There were some amazing things. Prints were indexed according to the artist and sometimes the etcher, engraver, lithographer, and the painter after whom it was done, if it was done after a certain- here you have painters, three painters, I think, four- Titian, another one for Tiziano [Italian for Titian], another one for Vecelli [family name for Titian], the same artist, but whoever catalogued them didn't know that. And then the media-aquatint, there was another one called lavis, it's the French word aquatint. It was all like that. There were unidentified prints. There was an etching by [Jusepe de] Ribera in color, a beautiful etching. They didn't know who it was. I suppose it came in with a group.

So I would go through. It would fascinate me. I tried to clean up the catalogue cards. Now, we provided a service for the public, answering their questions. We'd get all kinds of letters from people who had pictures, prints. Sometimes I'd tell them to send them in, but often they would describe it, and I knew it was a reproduction. Once in a while you'd get something good, but very, very rarely. It was a great education in graphics of all kinds.

MRS. KAINEN: People brought things in too, didn't they?

MR. KAINEN: People brought things in. Well, I used to do the letters for Mr. Tolman's signature. I'd bring it over to him at lunch time. He was at the National Collection of Fine Arts which at that time was in the Natural History building. I was in the old Smithsonian Building. I'd walk across, take the letters all answered and he'd sign them, and we'd go out to lunch at some real greasy spoon off Pennsylvania Avenue. But there wasn't too much to talk about. I'd let him air his prejudices, and every once in a while he'd drive me home, since he was somewhere in the same direction.

But we used to put- and this began with Tolman- traveling exhibitions showing how prints were made. We had seven of them. They were in different boxes, crates. We had mat board with windows cut out and explanations of the various media. And we'd also have original prints, usually of small value, but original. This is an etching, a lithograph, an aquatint- even the photomechanical. And the big ones, anyone could order either one. They were free, but the organization that scheduled it had to pay for the transportation to their museum or their school. And the next one had to pay to get it from the other place.

So we'd send these invitations, these descriptions, out to various museums, schools, all over. And we'd make the schedule at a certain time of year. We'd try to schedule exhibitions in the same area. And this kept up for some time. Tolman started it, I suppose, in the late '20s. It kept up for a long time. Every once in a while it would be refreshed. I kept it up for a while, but it became difficult. Some place in Texas refused to pay the cost of receiving the show. This was a big one. And this happened, you know, what, \$35 or something like that-too much. We had holes where they could hang it up on the wall. So I decided the best thing to do now, this was in the middle of the war, was to end it-no more.

And of course, we had exhibitions in our hallway in the Division of Graphic Arts.

MS. BERMAN: Why is it that you had prints from European artists? Did the Smithsonian collect that?

MR. KAINEN: At that time it was the Division of Graphic Arts, and it wasn't the art that was important; it was the technical method. The Division of Graphic Arts was part of the Department of Arts and Industries. Printmaking was considered as an industry, along with fisheries and other things, to show that it's part of a common heritage. So we explained that the processes were beginning with cave art, cave drawing. We described not in the traveling exhibitions, but when I did the scenario for the full exhibition, I began with pencil, crayon, explained what they were, took in everything.

MS. BERMAN: I also have some notes here saying that the collection had been left the same, since 1895, until you got there. Could you explain that please?

MR. KAINEN: Yes. We had-we didn't have any funds for acquisition. The people there made no effort to acquire. The person who had acquired was Sylvester R. Koehler, who had been director of prints at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. He had written books on [Albrecht] Dürer, had translated [Maxime] Lalanne's *Treatise on Etching* [1880] into English. He was a real scholar, an old German. He organized the exhibitions to begin with. He even got the photomechanical prints. We had the greatest collection of photomechanical prints anywhere, even more than that place in England. So he was a real curator. But he died in 1895 and after that no one did anything.

So I came. I saw all these gaps. We also had, on the walls, prints tracing the history of each method. We had a woodcut by Dürer with a green chiaroscuro tone on it, against the wall, next to the window. The green had faded in proportion as the light hit it. Nearer the window it was more faded.

The first thing I did when I became curator was to take them all down, because there were some great prints. The idea supposedly was to teach the public. It wasn't like that when Koehler was there, because it was in a different building. I suppose Tolman's predecessor, who was a librarian, had put them up, and Tolman left them there. So we had not only Dürers and Schongauers, Rembrandts, everything on the wall, forever.

Well, I was wondering how I could-first of all, I used to acquire from artists who showed there, as I didn't have money, but they would often give something. But I found that when we made out the annual reports, we had one category called equipment. We could get all the money we wanted for equipment which meant map cases, cases of some kind, or desks, typewriters. So once, I idly asked whether or not the map cases included what was put in the map cases. I thought it was too foolish. They said, "Of course, it's part of the equipment." I couldn't believe it. So I began buying. I had to write a memo to my superior explaining why this piece of equipment was necessary. I said, "To fill out the history of this medium, to fill in gaps in the history of the medium." I bought Manet, a color mezzotint by someone around [Louis] Legrand, Bonnard color lithographs, Toulouse-Lautrec, Picasso, even Daumier. Nothing was there. So I bought German Expressionists. They're all wasted there now. But there was no-this was the old Division of Graphic Arts. The National Museum of American Art wasn't in existence-well, the National Collection was in existence, but it was in abeyance. So that's one way I was able to bring it up to date.

Also I did photomechanical work. I got early silk screen work. Went out to Cleveland and saw Burt Zion, who I had written on, that old-timer. So all this early photomechanical stuff, after Koehler, who had really collected up to his time. I picked up after him. The others were really practically time-servers. Also, of course, I did some publication.

MS. BERMAN: Where are those now, the works of Manet and Toulouse-Lautrec, where in the Smithsonian?

MR. KAINEN: Still in the old Division of Graphic Arts, just in cases, hidden.

MS. BERMAN: People don't know, by and large, that they're there?

MR. KAINEN: No.

MS. BERMAN: That's astonishing.

MR. KAINEN: Well, at one time the National Collection of Fine Arts, when I was there, tried to get them. But the Division of Graphic Arts wouldn't budge. The Secretary wanted them moved over.

MRS. KAINEN: It became a fight between two divisions, including the director of the National Collection.

MR. KAINEN: See, they don't need this. If they want to show what engraving is, they don't need Dürer's *A Dream*, which I acquired, or Marcantonio Raimondi's *St. Cecilia*. Beautiful impressions. They could just put a steel engraving explaining what engraving is.

MRS. KAINEN: They also have things like that Hassam collection. You might mention.

MR. KAINEN: The old Division of Graphic Arts was the only museum in Washington to deal with prints. Even the National Collection of Fine Arts had very few prints. The only prints they had were given to them by the Chicago Society of Etchers, the most uninspired etchers of the '20s or early '30s.

Well, when Mrs. Hassam wanted to place Hassam's prints, she gave them to museums and libraries around the country. Hassam was famous as a painter, but his prints were too modern, you know, his style. In that period printmaking was so far behind painting. So there's a full collection of Hassam, almost full, etchings, lithographs. They don't need full collections. The same with Pop Hart, a big collection given by his daughter, I guess.

MRS. KAINEN: And the other things they'd given through the National-

MR. KAINEN: Yes. It was the only place in government, the National Collection of Fine Arts or the Division of Graphic Arts. Oh yes, so there was in the 19th century Samuel [Putnam] Avery. He gave Bauhaus [Felix-Hilarie Buhot], all kinds of things around this period, [Mariano] Fortuny, who was a very good etcher, and there were others like that.

[End Tape 3, Side A.]

MS. BERMAN: [In progress]-Gene Davis and these wild abstractions he was doing in his studio and you would go up once a week.

MR. KAINEN: Yes. And I'd tell him I didn't see any relationship between any of the parts, nothing was happening in composition. I said, "The eye isn't being given an interesting journey in any way. You don't see any structural elements that give you a sense of order." He said, "Well, I don't want composition. I don't want any of that stuff." I said, "You have composition whether you like it or not, and it's very bad composition." So he began to get very sober.

I would bring reproductions, old masters, modern, and show him how they were put together. He said-after all, this was all new to him. After all, he-

MS. BERMAN: He never studied art?

MR. KAINEN: Never. He never studied art. He was an old-I wouldn't say old. Anyway, he started. He used to see shows in New York, and he got interested, but he never drew from life. He never made much about it. So we would discuss it and that would bring in the literary references. Well, anyway, it was association with me that a lot of it rubbed off so that-I visited him as a matter of fact for seven years. Then when I got the grant to go to Europe-when was this?

MRS. KAINEN: In '57?

MR. KAINEN: Oh, yes, this was '56; I got the grant. Kenneth Noland took over for a couple of months when I was in Europe. Now Gene used to pay us a small amount, but obviously you just don't go over for nothing, and often he would take me to lunch, because after all, he was 3A making a big living. But he had tremendous drive. He did a lot of work. He'd get up, as I say, at 4:00 in the morning, work until 8:00. I was amused that he'd leave his palette to be cleaned by the maid. He taught her how to clean the palette.

Then he began working on newspapers later on. He was putting colors on newspapers. He said he heard that Picasso did that. This was quite a bit later. But I don't see how it could be done unless you taped down the newspapers. Maybe you could do that. But then he has a good mind and he saw a lot of shows and was very forceful.

I also arranged for his first show at the DuPont Theater Gallery of Art, which was a good gallery then and did a foreword for his catalogue.

MRS. KAINEN: Drawings.

MR. KAINEN: Drawings, yes. A new book on Gene is coming out soon. I just wonder what will be. He mentions it as a friendly interchange. We'd visit our studios once in a while.

MS. BERMAN: He doesn't admit that you came once a week?

MR. KAINEN: That's right.

MRS. KAINEN: He denied in print that he had ever been paid. Noland called Jacob and we found out that he paid Noland more than he did Jacob.

MR. KAINEN: Well, Noland was more realistic.

MS. BERMAN: Besides talking and bringing in reproductions, did you give him painting demonstrations and teach them how to use the color and things like that, the technical stuff?

MR. KAINEN: No.

MRS. KAINEN: You did show them about color reactions though, didn't you?

MR. KAINEN: Well, you'd discuss it, sure, as part of composition. But no, he just learned. He did so many drawings. But I did show him a lot of reproductions.

MS. BERMAN: Six or seven years of critique, that's like going to school. It's being tutored really.

MR. KAINEN: That's right, come to think of it. Well, he was always dependent, at that time, on somebody. He had a psychiatrist. He'll still be going to the same psychiatrist. That's another matter.

MS. BERMAN: How did you meet Noland?

MR. KAINEN: Well, Noland had a show at American U., somewhere around 1950. It had to be before 1950, shortly after I came here. The work was very good. Very few of those paintings remain because he destroyed them. He destroyed everything before the color-field school. Fortunately some remain in private collections. One is at the National Museum of American Art-beautiful paintings. Sometimes little hints of Pollock or Klee, but very lyrical, nice paintings.

Well, Noland arranged for a retrospective at Catholic University. He was teaching at Catholic University. We also had a retrospective of David Smith, a big show of David Smith. No catalogues, not even a leaflet. Fortunately there was one review of the show, my show, by Florence Berryman. She liked the landscape, the only ones she really liked. "This is one the layman can understand. He got more and more abstract until the last work is so totally abstract you can't make anything out. What will he do next?" But it was a big show. There must have been 50 or so paintings or something like that.

MS. BERMAN: Except for this lucid landscape, most of what you were doing though was involved with myth and ritual. Is that correct?

MR. KAINEN: Do you mean in the '50s?

MS. BERMAN: In 1952, in that show.

MR. KAINEN: No. In that show it was a retrospective.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't catch that. I'm sorry.

MR. KAINEN: But when I showed at the DuPont Theater, that's the one that-that was '52, early in '52. That was totally abstract. I just wanted these cryptic symbols and evocations but using shapes. I didn't quite know what I was expressing. And I thought that was the best thing, because you never express what you think you're expressing.

MS. BERMAN: I don't think you know till later, too, when you can also look at the time. You're putting something into it what's going on all around you.

MR. KAINEN: That's right. You shouldn't editorialize. You trust your instincts.

MS. BERMAN: Let me turn this off for a second.

[Audio break.]

MS. BERMAN: This is Avis Berman interviewing Jacob Kainen at his studio in Washington, DC, on September 21,

1982. I want to begin repeating a couple of the questions we missed because of the defective tape. When I had left off, we were talking about your curatorship at the Graphic Arts Division at the Smithsonian. One of the questions I wanted to ask you was how do you think your being an artist influenced how you conducted your job in the Smithsonian and how you acquired and chose?

MR. KAINEN: I was in a museum that didn't really specialize in art. The Division of Graphic Arts of the U.S. National Museum took in graphic arts basically as an industry. It was involved not only with fine printmaking but with photomechanicals. And there were great gaps in the collection, since the only person who really had a background before I was there was Sylvester R. Koehler, who also was curator of prints at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. He collected everything to begin with, not only fine prints but photomechanical.

Well, I began as an aide, and then became assistant curator and curator in a few years. When I was curator, I could make decisions. Before that, that was 1946. So after all, I was a New York artist. I put on shows. But those shows had been put on for a long time prior to my putting them on. But my superior was ultra-conservative. He thought [Paul] Gauguin was a fake, and El Greco's drawing was rotten, as he said. So I had to practically start from scratch with modern art. And I mean Daumier, Manet, Bonnard, and so forth. So I started building up the collection there.

With contemporary artists, I put on shows of Adja Yunkers. First show, I think, in this country-Josef Albers, Hayter, Louis Lozowick, and people like that. And I think that my being an artist gave me a certain security, a feeling of security, in my own judgment.

MS. BERMAN: Was it an attraction; was it an asset to them that you were an artist? Did they consider that?

MR. KAINEN: I don't know what they thought, probably not, because I was never included on any of the exhibition committees at that time.

MS. BERMAN: During the time when you were a curator, you had a very busy work schedule. So why don't you tell me about what you did.

MR. KAINEN: I was curator, of course, during the day. And part of my job consisted of identifying things brought in by people and work sent through the mail. I worked during the day, got out at 5:15, and drove up to 31st and M where I had a studio. I'd work there from, say, a quarter to 7 to 11 or so, drive home, and start doing my research because we couldn't do research on the job. We couldn't do any writing. I was the only one in the department to begin with, and then later I had an aide. So I'd work on my research and I'd work pretty late, sometimes till 2:00 and later, then get up around 8:00 in a nightmare fog, dress, and get down to work by-I was supposed to be there at quarter to 9. Sometimes I'd come closer to 9:00. And often there were times when I had classes at my studio, two classes a week. I always had some classes. When I didn't have them in my own studio, I worked at the Washington Workshop, Center of the Arts. I worked at American University for one semester to pay for the cost of the studio.

MRS. KAINEN: How cold was the studio?

MR. KAINEN: Well, on M Street there was no heat. So I had a little radiator, but it didn't give off much heat. So often during the winter I would work wearing an overcoat, rubbers, but I didn't wear gloves. After a while, my fingers began to crack. I still have problems with that.

MRS. KAINEN: He also worked part-time at Hecht's on his vacation as a salesman.

MR. KAINEN: The point is that I was always busy.

MS. BERMAN: Wildly so.

MR. KAINEN: And sometimes I'd write poetry late at night which I still have a store of. Nevertheless-

MS. BERMAN: How long did this continue for?

MR. KAINEN: Well, from 1942 to I guess it was 1968. And I remember I told one of the guards, a Spanish guard, named Irisari, he was a very intelligent man. He was asking me questions. He wanted to teach me Spanish. He saw me come in. He said, "How much sleep do you get?" So I told him. He said, "Mr. Kainen, don't do it. Don't do it." I still remember that.

MRS. KAINEN: The doctor said he didn't know why he had not had a complete physical breakdown due to such-

MR. KAINEN: Well, I produced. And I remember when I went to New York to visit de Kooning and [Jack] Tworok, who had studios side by side on Broadway and 10th, something like that. I came there at 12:00 and neither of them was working yet, was in. There was a vast pile of mail addressed to Willem de Kooning, which he hadn't

opened. Of course, this might not fit in with what you're saying now. But when I went up, they came in about 12:30. I told Bill, "You have all that mail downstairs." He said, "Oh, if I open it, all kinds of obligations." Even if there were checks in there, he wouldn't-that's the way he is.

But I used to travel, too. We had field trips. So I traveled around the country to various places.

MS. BERMAN: That was probably more relaxing.

MR. KAINEN: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: When did the Smithsonian start allowing the curators to write their exhibition catalogues [not] on their own time?

MR. KAINEN: It was after 1970, maybe the late '60s.

MS. BERMAN: Why were they so odd about that?

MR. KAINEN: There was no-well, the British Museum was the same thing. Arthur M. Hind wrote his catalogues on his own time. Supposedly we had a half hour for lunch. Of course, no one paid much attention to that. But you couldn't take days off to do any writing.

MS. BERMAN: Even though the copyrights would be from the Smithsonian.

MR. KAINEN: The copyright belonged to the government.

MRS. KAINEN: That Jackson book is a very important book, and it's lost, because the GPO [Government Printing Office] published it and didn't keep the plates.

MS. BERMAN: Well, I want to get into the-you taught at the Washington Center of the Arts. I'd like to know what dates you taught there.

MR. KAINEN: From 1947 to 1954. The workshop supposedly started in 1945. That's what I read in the publications, but it wasn't really the workshop. It was the Potomac Cooperative. The workshop was a part. The workshop actually opened in 1947 on the top floor of the [Walsh] McLean mansion which is on 21st and Massachusetts.

MS. BERMAN: Near the Phillips.

MR. KAINEN: Near the Phillips. We had a whole floor, but no cardiac patients could come there because of the long flights of steps. It was mainly adult education in the arts-painting, sculpture, the dance, writing, various other things.

MS. BERMAN: What sort of people came there, a typical student?

MR. KAINEN: Intelligent people but mostly grown-ups. They were not professionals. Some good artists came out of it, but not many. Most people were lawyers or people in professions who wanted a hobby. But some serious people came up too. They were all serious. I mean, professionals.

MS. BERMAN: What did you teach?

MR. KAINEN: I taught painting and I also taught printmaking. I opened a class in etching there, got a little press.

MS. BERMAN: In the teaching of painting, what did you concentrate on teaching your students?

MR. KAINEN: I would set up still lifes and I would have models. I wanted them to learn to draw. And to me, drawing was making shapes, making interesting shapes. While learning to draw, they would also learn to compose and to make shapes. But many of them were beginners and I didn't believe in just letting them flail about. I wanted them, first of all, to match the colors so that they could mix what they wanted. So I set up still lifes with certain shapes and color arrangements and I would help them in telling them how to mix the color. I never worked on their canvases. I told them to make their own decisions. If they got completely hopeless, I'd help, but only then. Because if I made all the decisions for them, it was bad for them.

Anyway, there was drawing from nature but simplified patterning. I didn't mind if they painted directly from nature. They could always be creative later. I know when Morris Louis came there, he had them put the canvas on the floor and pour, but they had no prior background so I felt it didn't mean anything.

MS. BERMAN: It wouldn't be a breakthrough for them.

MR. KAINEN: No. They had nothing to break from. So I thought, I'll give them the fundamentals. They can take it from there.

MS. BERMAN: Let's go to Gene Davis, who was one of your first students. This is still what we lost before. I'd like to know how you met him and how you influenced him as a painter. We'll start from the beginning.

MR. KAINEN: In 1950, Gene started coming to the workshop. He looked around at various classes. He never was officially a pupil there. He came to my class and then he started bringing little works to me, paintings on canvas board where he'd embed little stones and things of that sort. First though, he did little things that were very Klee-like. The line was rather uncertain, but I could see he had a lot of courage. He used to go to New York and see the shows. He knew the names of the painters and their work. Then, after a while, he asked me to visit him at his home during lunch hour.

MS. BERMAN: When you say he came to the classes, what was he doing? What was his job in his other life?

MR. KAINEN: He was editor of the *American Automobile Association Journal*. Before that, he had been a White House correspondent but was fired from his job, because he had leaked news to Drew Pearson. Truman found out about it, so he lost his job.

MS. BERMAN: So he had never studied art before?

MR. KAINEN: No, he had never studied art.

MS. BERMAN: He just wanted to be an artist?

MR. KAINEN: He wanted to be an artist. Then he began working furiously for years. He'd get up at 4:00 in the morning and make numerous, hundreds of drawings in ink and wash on paper, on a fairly thick paper-gristle board. Then he began painting. I would come in once every two weeks or so and look at his work. And he'd pay me. After all, you know, I was coming in, and he wanted me to come there. So he really worked.

I would bring in reproductions, because his painting was very chaotic. He was being abstract but he didn't know what he was doing. So I'd bring in reproductions, old and modern, and start analyzing the compositions. He said, "I don't want any composition." I said, "You have composition whether you want it or not. It happens to be very bad composition. Things relate to one another or they don't." Some of the things were half modeled out, some were flat, didn't know how he was looking at it. We'd go to galleries and museums and this kept on for seven years, with one break in 1956, when I went to Europe for three months. Kenneth Noland took over.

Now at the workshop, I gave Gene his first exhibition, since I was a member of the committee at the DuPont Theater Art Gallery. And we had some very good shows there. We had a show, Alma Thomas, Kenneth Noland, and some other artists in Washington. I wrote the foreword for his catalogue. Well, I also did a piece on Gene for *Art International* 1966. Andrew Hudson was supposed to do it. At that time he was a critic for the *Washington Post*. He kept delaying and delaying, and finally Gene said-well, he wrote to James Fitzsimmons, and Fitzsimmons said it would be fine if I did it. So I did a piece. Gene said, well, it had to go through him, so I gave it to Gene and I have a letter from Gene in which he said, "I made a few changes. It didn't alter your point of view, but for the sake of accuracy-" What he cut out was the fact that I had said he was influenced by his friend, Kenneth Noland. He said, "That wasn't so at all." But it appeared in *Art International*. It was "Gene Davis and the Art of Color Interval." I was trying to give some formal basis for his work, and Gene has used that since. He's interested in color interval. But it made me persona non grata with Andrew Hudson, because the next exhibition I had, he gave me a withering review.

MS. BERMAN: I don't understand what made you persona-that you wrote it, or that you didn't put Noland in? I don't understand.

MR. KAINEN: Why-

MS. BERMAN: Hudson was angry with you.

MR. KAINEN: Oh. Hudson was angry with me, because he was supposed to have written it.

MS. BERMAN: Oh.

MR. KAINEN: But he kept delaying. And Gene said, "Well, we want it in pretty soon." So I had undercut Hudson, who wanted to write for the journal.

MS. BERMAN: But you feel that Davis's stripes did come from Noland.

MR. KAINEN: Davis's whole idea of using masking tape, for example, yes. And stripes, too. But we used to visit

Noland. That is, I remember a time when Gene and I visited Noland's studio. He had a studio that one arrived at through a trapdoor up a ladder. There was some very small business downstairs, and he had a room with no heat. He also had a little stove. We came up to see it, climbed up the ladder, pushed open the trapdoor. Noland had paintings all over the place, flung around. Noland said, "I'm trying to make it as bad as I can to arrive at something."

So certainly when Gene went into color-field painting, he had some model.

MS. BERMAN: What do you think Noland's position was in the development of this new phase of art in Washington?

MR. KAINEN: I think it was very important. Noland was-in the beginning, Louis just did dripping. It was like Pollock. It was black on white. But the painting had a sort of grayish tone. It wasn't on raw linen, on raw cotton duck. But it was dripped in the same way, but without the authority of Pollock. He had a show at the workshop, Louis. I think it was late in 1953, the year he got there. All those paintings, which he eventually threw away. Noland was using color, painting in pastel, a little de Kooning-ish, but beginning to be a little more geometrical. After all, he had studied with Albers and [Ilya] Bolotowsky. But it took him some time to get his own point of view, but he did beautiful paintings, a touch of Klee and a touch of Pollock, and a touch of de Kooning, but beautiful because he had a very good sense of color. And Louis hadn't done anything like that until after '53, about '54, maybe.

MS. BERMAN: What the books say about Louis was that the breakthrough in color came after seeing *the* Helen Frankenthaler painting. Do you agree with that?

MR. KAINEN: Yes, I think so. I don't think too much of the Helen Frankenthaler painting. I think it's very tasteful. There are certain echoes of Gorky in it. It's a little flabby. All her work is. It's like flabbiness to me, you know, not firm. But it was an extension of Pollock with color, and I think that's what Louis was looking for.

MS. BERMAN: Regardless of the merit of the painting itself, I think the point that it was supposed to be a springboard for them.

MR. KAINEN: Oh, yes. It wasn't only that. It was the fact of staining, because in 1961 when Noland was very well-known, he came back to Washington, visited the Jefferson Place Gallery where we were showing, there was a group show. He said to me, "Painting up till now has been sculpture painting. What I'm interested in is sensation painting." That I think was what they got from the stain, the idea that it was an avenue. I think that's true.

MS. BERMAN: Sensation was the word he used?

MR. KAINEN: Sensation painting.

MS. BERMAN: Because sensation, of course, was the great word of the Impressionists. They were always talking about their sensations.

MR. KAINEN: You mean Cézanne?

MS. BERMAN: Uh-huh.

MR. KAINEN: "You've stolen my little sensation," about Gauguin.

MS. BERMAN: Uh-huh. You mentioned that de Kooning came to the Center?

MR. KAINEN: Yes. De Kooning came there in 1953 and he gave a talk. Leon Berkowitz put on very good shows. He was running the Center. There was a show of Motherwell's collages, the dress pattern things, early. There was a show of de Kooning, and de Kooning came down. He gave a talk. De Kooning said, "I don't know if my work's any good. The insurance executives, bank presidents, if they don't like my work, maybe it's lousy." He said the way he paints is like going through a thick forest. You bump against one tree; you bump against another until you finally see some daylight. He also said, "What I'm interested in is hallelujah painting," which is probably better than Abstract Expressionism with him.

MS. BERMAN: Did he actually lecture or did he just talk off the cuff?

MR. KAINEN: He talked off the cuff. But de Kooning is really very brilliant. He has unexpected terms.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, that's what I was going to say. He has an unusual point of view. If you can coax it out of him, he'll give you something very interesting.

MR. KAINEN: Certainly, if he has somebody to rub his mind against. Otherwise, he won't.

MS. BERMAN: Now you mentioned Alma Thomas who was certainly another famous pupil of yours. So why you don't tell me how you met her and about her.

MR. KAINEN: In 1957 I was asked by people at American U. to teach a class of advanced students. Robert Gates was going on sabbatical for a year, maybe more. So I accepted, two evenings a week. But when I came to the first class, I found that I had 32 students. It was an enormous shed. I said, "Advanced students?" There were people who were afraid to squeeze paint out of a tube. There were about four advanced students. I'd come there and there were mousy little people in the corner. So I'd have to come early to try to give them courage to squeeze the paint out of the tube and mix it to put on the canvas. So I felt I was neglecting my good students. Alma Thomas and Caroline Huff were good.

Well, I told American U. I would just teach that semester and that was it. I wasn't going to teach the whole year, because I'd come in early and I'd have to stay late. I had prepared something to give people their final polish when you look at their work, which presumably had something in it, and give them the little shuffle they needed. But when you had so many students, it was impossible. Then I couldn't set up a still life. I had to set up three or four. The still life would not be there the next time, because other instructors had taken everything. They wouldn't pay much for models. It was a very unsatisfactory situation.

But Alma Thomas then was painting from nature, painting with a palette knife in very low-key, sort of hoarse, tragic colors. Then she began working abstractly. She also asked if I would come and give her some criticism. She'd pay me. So I came from the Smithsonian, visited her home on 15th Street, give her criticism every couple of weeks. She'd have a little lunch there, a sandwich, pitifully small sandwiches. She wasn't a great eater. But she looked at everything. She really wanted to be a great painter. She not only read all the art magazines, she knew about the Bauhaus, Johanna Itten's color theories, and we would discuss whether, she said, well, should her stripes end before the edge of the canvas or not. We'd discuss what would happen. It was a different conception. But she knew Piero Dorazio, who was doing stripes, too, in Italy, with a triangular end. But also we discussed things. This kept on for a year, I would say.

In the meantime, she was interested in, she liked Gene Davis. She liked Noland. She never said anything bad about any artist, but she had a very decisive character.

MS. BERMAN: She must have because she wasn't crushed. Certainly all the odds were against her, don't you think, to become an artist?

MR. KAINEN: Well, you know how old she was. Yes. Of course, she at first was timid, because she went back to slave days. She remembered all that.

MRS. KAINEN: She also was older than she admitted.

MR. KAINEN: Oh, yes. She was at least 90 when she died.

MS. BERMAN: So how many years did she subtract from her age? Ten, do you think? How do you know about her age?

MR. KAINEN: Some friends of hers said, "She's as old as my father who would be 90 by this time, or the same age." People didn't know. She kept herself in great shape. She used to go to New York and see the shows. After all, she got her M.A. at Columbia. She'd dress up very nicely and go to Wildenstein and Duveen. They were always so nice to her, she said.

She finally took heart, afterwards, to become a real painter. Then she tried so hard. She used to paint with the paintings on her lap because she couldn't stand up long. But she'd turn the canvas over or get people to turn it over. At the very end, she had herself wedged in, to be able to stand up to paint, she was so weak. She said her body was dying, if only she had a body. But when I think of that kind of determination, you see it in the work. There's a decisiveness in the way it's put down.

MS. BERMAN: You say at the time, in 1957, when you were at American U., she was an advanced student. When did you start working with her?

MR. KAINEN: I'm trying to remember now. In the early '60s. She was still doing-she was making the change, just before she made the change to brighter colors. That came through her water colors actually. She was doing water colors, and she used acrylic in the water colors. She used acrylic. She could use acrylic because she'd put it on and it didn't have this dead flatness. There was something about it. She kind of scorned finesse. She had great conception.

MS. BERMAN: What do you think her strengths as an artist were?

MR. KAINEN: She had a good formal sense, a sense of structure, and her character. She had a very good color sense too. The colors are not routine colors. They can be unexpected, and it's rather subtle, because colors come through, background colors. Her strength is in her strength of character, too. Because even if you didn't know her, you'd look at the painting-some of the Washington critics said, "Well, there's a primitive quality in her work." There's nothing primitive at all about it. It's just that it's not precise in that sense. It's still a little expressionistic. She was the only one of the color field painters who painted like an Expressionist.

MS. BERMAN: What do you feel were the most important things that you taught her or that you brought to her that helped her flower?

MR. KAINEN: Well, I encouraged her to use color because her color was very drab. And after all, you know, she saw my work. Some of her work, as Harold Harts said, you could see her transitional work from her early work to the color field in my work. After all, it was the mid-'50s, '57, '58, and she began changing. And undoubtedly also, she saw the color field painters and that encouraged her.

MS. BERMAN: That's what I'd like to know. Exactly what part of the color field movement does she fit into, and did she know these men, and all that.

MR. KAINEN: Yes. Well, I told her her colors were murky, to get them cleaner. They're so drab. I said, "You have such power. Use cleaner colors. All modern art is clean color." She saw that. She saw Gene Davis's stripes but she didn't use stripes. She broke them because essentially she was, let's say, Tachist. I imagine it's like cyclopean masonry, put a slab here, a slab there. I mentioned I called her the Sigma of wash and color patterns. So it's a later development, but it's not the same thing. It's building.

MS. BERMAN: But she knew Noland and Louis, and I guess it was a small community. But was she friendly with these artists?

MR. KAINEN: Well, yes. There was a gallery called the Barnett Aden Gallery which had black sponsorship, and she was one of the sponsors. This was in the '40s. Noland showed there. Louis showed there. I showed there. So she knew the people, but they hadn't seen her work. I took Gene Davis over to see her work which was very encouraging for her. Gene said he liked her work, good, keep it up, and so forth. But she didn't really know them socially. I mean, she knew them, she knew their work because she kept up. But her own work, as I say, had this kind of strength, this touch. Every thing was sort of dynamic.

MS. BERMAN: What did she feel, when, at the end of her life, she did get some recognition? What happened? How did that affect her?

MR. KAINEN: Well, she changed her style. She began getting these little art nouveau hooks and rhythms and away from that kind of structure, which I thought was incredible. A new idea came to her. She was following that at the end of her life.

MS. BERMAN: But did she feel vindicated, by the way, not just in terms of a personal breakthrough, but that suddenly other people began paying attention to her?

MR. KAINEN: Oh, yes. She began to realize that she had something. But her family and everything was against her. She said, "Our people don't support art," talking about the blacks.

MS. BERMAN: Perhaps this is a crude question, but do you think that because her art was abstract, and there were no images of black people or black life, that that may have held against her in the black community?

MR. KAINEN: No, I don't think so. I think even if she had painted blacks, the black community didn't support painters.

MS. BERMAN: Now I want to go to Morris Louis and I want to know how you got to know him, if you met him in New York in the late '30s, or if you met him while you were down here and just how that started.

MR. KAINEN: I was a very active painter in Washington, and I also was curator of graphic arts at the Smithsonian. Morris Louis came in to see me one day at the Smithsonian and said that Duncan Phillips had sent him to me. He had gone to Duncan Phillips and asked him for a job. Duncan Phillips said "Well, he had no job but perhaps Jacob Kainen knows of something." He told him to go to see me.

So Louis came in to see me and said he was looking for a job. He looked me right in the eye and said, "I'm an Abstract Expressionist." I said, "So am I." He said he comes from Baltimore. Now they say he moved to Washington in 1947, which is really impossible. It had to be 1953, maybe '52. He said, "I'm from Baltimore." I looked at him. We exchanged a few statements and I somehow felt that-the strange thing about Louis, you kind of felt an integrity in him. He had a very warm look about him, very intense. I said, "Go and see Leon Berkowitz

at the Washington Workshop. There might be some jobs open."

So he went there and Leon, evidently, was very much impressed. After all, without even seeing the work, he gave him a job teaching. So that had to be 1953. But I'd see Louis at the Workshop, never privately, never personally. When de Kooning gave the talk, it had to have been before Louis was at the Workshop. It must have been early in '53. Maybe Louis was there, because afterwards we went to a gathering at the home of one of the students. Ken Noland was there, but Louis wasn't there. Gene Davis was there of course. That's when de Kooning said to me, "Oh, yeah, you used to write too." Noland said, "Oh, are you a writer?" I said, "The less said about that, the better." So he said, "Oh."

Also, at the end of '53, it might have been '54, there were open houses at the Washington Workshop in which painters always did something, portraits, and there was a little auction-fundraising. The artists really kept up the place. So Noland and Louis at that time were beginning to do some things jointly, and they invited me to work on the floor, too. It was an invitation but I felt I couldn't do it. You know, it wasn't my style because I felt I didn't want to sacrifice mass. Pouring, soaking in the canvas, you gain something, but you lose something, too; a sense of density, body, which was part of what I had in mind.

MS. BERMAN: Do you regret that decision?

MR. KAINEN: No. It wasn't my way of doing things.

MS. BERMAN: When you first met Louis, although you just sent him over to Berkowitz, you hadn't seen his paintings. But when you first saw his work, what did it look like?

MR. KAINEN: It looked like it was heavily influenced by Pollock. At the same time, it had another kind of quality too. First of all, it was monochromatic and the canvas itself wasn't-you could see the canvas, except-

[Audio break.]

MR. KAINEN: Yes, yes. It had a freshness, directness. But he was pretty mysterious, because he'd disappear after class, never invited anyone anywhere. Of course, none of us did much inviting in those days. We had families. We worked during the day.

MS. BERMAN: Besides being mysterious, a word applied to Louis is "secretive." I was wondering what you thought. Was he secretive about his methods?

MR. KAINEN: Oh, yes, once he began his staining. I suppose he was ingenious in certain ways. Well, de Kooning is ingenious too. No one really knows what his vehicle is. Water is involved. Yet when I saw the work and he's painting with oil paint, you can't paint on a water surface. Maybe some paintings are done directly with oil paint and others with that emulsion medium which combines water and glue and water and egg and so forth.

MS. BERMAN: Did you ever have-I'm interested in conversations you may have had with Louis in talking about art or just his ideas on things.

MR. KAINEN: I can't remember any.

MS. BERMAN: Was he a talker?

MR. KAINEN: No, he wasn't.

MS. BERMAN: Did you ever go to his studio? What was your association with Greenberg?

MR. KAINEN: Well, I just knew Greenberg by reputation. I had seen him once or twice, not in New York, because I left New York in 1942. I knew Harold Rosenberg because we were both on the editorial board of *Art Front* for a while. But Greenberg, I can't remember exactly where I met him. I know I met him in Woodstock. I don't know-it couldn't have been the first time.

MRS. KAINEN: You said you knew him, that he was here at a show.

MR. KAINEN: Oh, yes. Well, I can't remember exactly when. But in Woodstock we had a long discussion. I forget if it was his place or-

MRS. KAINEN: Sally's.

MR. KAINEN: Not Sally's. You know that painter who now does very severe black and white big things, geometrical. You remember his name.

MRS. KAINEN: Oh, he was just a guest at Greenberg's.

MR. KAINEN: Yes, but what's his name? Well, that's what-

MRS. KAINEN: [Robert] Murray.

MR. KAINEN: Yes. He gave advice to Gene Davis and Howard Merritt. I heard him. Gene Davis had arranged-he knew that Greenberg was coming in-so he arranged for Greenberg to come to the Jefferson Place Gallery to look at his work. Gene would staple them on the wall. Greenberg looked at them. At that time Davis was doing absolutely monotonous paintings, one, two colors all the way across. Greenberg was nodding, not saying much. He stapled up one that was monotonous, but had one color that was a little different. Greenberg said, "That's it." So, thereafter, Gene began varying his color. But Greenberg also-well, we won't go into that.

I saw Greenberg but I didn't get to know him. But meanwhile in Woodstock when we were talking, we had quite a discussion. Greenberg was probing. I wasn't agreeing with him. I didn't realize I was contradicting Henry VIII. He suddenly said, "What do you think of [Georges] Rouault?" I said, "A pretty good painter, but painting like Rembrandt in the late 19th century." He was trying to probe to get some weakness. "What do you think of Levine?" You know, well-known painters. I forget. There was kind of a bitter argument, not bitter, but acrimonious on his part. Al Held's wife said, "Why don't you get into it?" And Held said, "Not on your life."

Greenberg was very forceful. Part of his idea is that man can change society just through his own pressure. And that's the way he is as a critic, too. He would force it through. Man makes history, but not out of the whole cloth.

Then Greenberg invited me to visit him at 300 Central Park West, the same building Sally Avery lives in. We were there a couple of Sundays.

MS. BERMAN: And John Koch while he was alive.

MR. KAINEN: John Koch knew Greenberg?

MS. BERMAN: No, no, the same building.

MR. KAINEN:

Oh, John Koch. Yes.

MS. BERMAN: Excuse me for interrupting. Go on, when you visited.

MR. KAINEN: That's all right. So we'd have discussions. I told him I didn't like Frankenthaler. Well, okay. So nevertheless, he respected me evidently because no matter how abusive he got, he got very abusive, he had enough yes-men around him.

MS. BERMAN: Did he ever criticize your work? I don't mean particularly in the negative sense, but look and what did he say about it?

MR. KAINEN: Yes. He came to my show at the Pratt Manhattan Center. I had a show there in '73. What did he do? Did he phone or what?

MRS. KAINEN: He left a message for you.

MR. KAINEN: Yes, he left a message saying he liked the show. He liked one painting in particular. That's at the National Collection, the National Museum. But he liked my water colors best. They're really turpentine washes on paper. They look like water colors. He said, "Be a little looser. You inscribe rather than paint loosely." That's why he likes the gouaches, the works on paper better. So then he came to our house for-

MRS. KAINEN: Dinner after the-

MR. KAINEN: Yes. And we had a party for him, and I said something about, "Well, I don't know about inscribing. I'm making shapes." He said, "Oh, don't pay any attention to that. Work the way you're working. It's all right."

MS. BERMAN: I was going to ask you if you felt that that criticism that he made was valid about inscribing.

MR. KAINEN: No. If I wanted to paint like an Abstract Expressionist, that's one thing. One of the reasons I didn't like that loose kind of painting is because in the end, you don't know what kind of space it is. What kind of shape is it? It's a brush mark. If you have a line, that's something. But if you have a flat area, that's something. You have relationships. But if you just paint like that, in the end you're going to say, is it an object that's painted? What is it? What is a kind of space? And that's one of the problems, one of the reasons why Abstract

Expressionism finally disintegrated. They were doing it in the colleges. Society ladies were doing it, and they would just splash the paint around. You'd look at it and there are shapes but they're not really shapes. Whereas I suppose I'm more of a classical draftsman, even in the abstract work, there's a shape emulated. I think in the end that tells. Because even the Impressionists had a formal conception.

MS. BERMAN: I forgot to ask you before, but a couple of other questions about Louis. What was he teaching, and what was he like as a teacher, and what did he stress?

MR. KAINEN: Well, the students loved him, but he had people who I think treated it more as a sort of therapy, because they would splash paint around, they would express themselves. He had one pupil who was pretty good. I forget her first name. Her last name was [Liz Whitney] Quisgard. She had a couple of shows, and then she disappeared.

I have an idea he was a good teacher, but not for beginners, because you take someone who's very timid and he's supposed to splash paint to express himself; it might be fine, but there's nothing to build on. Much of that happened in that period. Artists didn't draw. They expressed themselves. Then when the climate changed, they had no options. They couldn't do any thing else.

MS. BERMAN: Louis was himself a rigorous painter, though. So I wonder that he advocated such an undisciplined way of learning for others.

MR. KAINEN: Well, they had to begin from scratch, and he wasn't going to teach drawing from a model or from a still life. He should have been given another kind of class.

MS. BERMAN: Did he realize, do you think, that they were going to be beginners?

MR. KAINEN: Oh, I think so. He needed a job. He was going to teach in his way of working and that was it. Ken Noland, on the other hand, taught drawing. He had a more thorough background anyway.

MS. BERMAN: What did Leon Berkowitz say basically about Louis's tenure at the workshop?

MR. KAINEN: Well, he's crazy about Louis. And he and his wife Ida knew him a little. I think the idea of *Charred Journals*, in fact I know, it comes from Ida Berkowitz, his wife, who was a poet, heavily influenced by Dylan Thomas, all the wrong things about Thomas she picked up. So I know one of Leon's paintings was burned. I used to see Leon. In fact, I wrote an introduction to his first exhibition at American University. He had a painting that was burned, and his wife called it *Charred Journal*. And then some of Louis' early work, she titled them for him. She always titled Leon's work. He couldn't get away from her. Finally he did.

MS. BERMAN: Do you mean things like *Unfurled* and *Veils*?

MR. KAINEN: That I don't know. Leon might know. But the only trouble with Leon is that there's a lot of wishful thinking involved.

MS. BERMAN: When Louis made this big breakthrough, say, in 1954 or so, were the people around him, were you aware that something was happening in Louis's painting at the time it was happening, or was it later?

MR. KAINEN: We saw it only in New York. I remember seeing Louis' show and he had paintings that were 12 feet high, took up all of French and Company's wall, and very diaphanous. I guess they were the *Veils*. I remember talking to Greenberg saying that I thought the *Veils*, the size was too great for the butterfly delicacy. I said, "They look gross, like a blow up." He said, "You know, you're right. Louis's vertical shouldn't be over nine feet." He had it all worked out.

MS. BERMAN: How did you feel that obviously he and Noland were working toward the idea of the primacy of color expression? During the time when you saw this happening, not now, how did you feel about it then?

MR. KAINEN: Well, I respected it. I mean they're both very good artists. But they talked about-Tom Downing talked about it, he was a pupil of Noland's. He wanted to free color, liberate it. I said, "You might as well do it with colored lights. Painting is a physical operation. Think. You're denying it." He said, "Well, that's the only way you can free color." To me, freeing color is like an extreme form of anarchism that is very self-indulging, because color is in relationships. And just using brighter color isn't the answer. Of course, Noland and Louis didn't just use bright color. They used good color. But I felt that they had given up something, too. At the end it was like a large watercolor, less in Noland's case, because at least he had shape of a certain kind. Louis was still expressionist, even in his stripes. The *Veils* were very good, a lot of nuance. They had a monumental feel about them. Actually I liked some of the later *Veils* best of his.

MS. BERMAN: You said you saw these enormous paintings that Louis was doing. Did that influence you to start painting larger? I guess when you started getting into bigger canvases, I guess. When did you do it and what

were some of the reasons why?

MR. KAINEN: One of the reasons was that I had a bigger studio. I had small places. I had no place to store the stuff. I thought that an artist should do a large painting only for a special purpose. All paintings aren't suited to a large scale. I thought many large paintings are just blown up. If they were one-third the size, they wouldn't be so impressive. Sheer size, you can do almost anything. Make it simple but large, and it's going to be impressive. It's like the pyramids. A pyramid two inches high won't be the same as a pyramid the way it is. But of course, a pyramid is a great shape. But if you make everything huge-of course, I don't think it was Louis or Noland, because everybody was doing large paintings any way. Even Gorky, toward the end of his life, did larger paintings. So did Avery. He really didn't do large paintings to begin with. We didn't think of it. Large paintings were done for biennials and salons where you competed for attention.

MS. BERMAN: Do you still have the same attitude toward large paintings?

MR. KAINEN: No. I think large painting is part of our way of life now. Museums are different. They have these huge spaces. Large paintings are not suited for cabinet size, I mean, in the cabinet sense. Paintings used to be for walls. And even Delacroix said, when you paint, you have to think of the eventual place the painting will be shown, the kind of light and so forth. He said it's all right to express yourself, but it has a social purpose also. So that you do a painting even five feet by six feet, it used to be a large painting. It's not large any more. In the old days, the big paintings were only for the salons. People didn't have them afterwards. They were machines to attract attention.

MS. BERMAN: We haven't mentioned Howard Mehring yet. Did you know him?

MR. KAINEN: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: Would you like to talk about him for a little bit?

MR. KAINEN: Yes. Mehring had a delicate, lyrical outlook. He had problems, psychological problems. He went into a Reichian cabinet [a form of psychological therapy based on the work of the Austrian psychiatrist / psychologist Wilhelm Reich]. But suddenly he started snipping his canvas, cutting them and pasting them on. He painted with sponges. He claimed he didn't, but he did. He painted with sponges and he had nice textures and sensitive color. He'd go over it until he got it the way he wanted it. Then suddenly he began cutting them up and making Ls and half windows, you know that kind of work, Ts, double Ts, cut very sharply. And he had this delicately textured conception.

So I remember being at a Noland opening, actually before it opened. I didn't realize he was opening at [André] Emmerich [Gallery, New York, NY]. I came up there. Nobody was there except Noland and Greenberg. Greenberg said, "How do you like Mehring's new work?" I said, "It just doesn't relate right. It has this delicate, dappled quality, and then these severe sharp edges. There's no relationship between his method of application and his formal image." And then Ken sneered, "Clem told him to do that." Clem shrugged his shoulders and said, "I thought we'd give him structure."

Now one thing Mehring didn't need was structure, because he had this vaporous-that was his whole quality. I won't say that's what finally did him in, but after that he couldn't seem to develop anything. He went to pieces.

MS. BERMAN: I guess I want to ask you, how much were these other Washington artists paying attention to Greenberg? How much were they listening and doing? I mean what was Mehring-

MR. KAINEN: Didn't you know Greenberg's famous postcards?

MS. BERMAN: I don't know. Why don't you-

MR. KAINEN: He'd type a postcard analyzing their work, criticizing them, and telling them what to do, fill the whole card. He still writes cards. I saw a card to Gene Davis in which he told Gene what to do. Gene wrote him back disagreeing slightly.

MRS. KAINEN: It was a rude card?

MR. KAINEN: It wasn't a rude card. Anyway, he wanted him to make the colors softer. The color is a little too sharp and hard. Make them more delicate, quieter. Gene wrote him a card, saying, "I know that your point of view is more toward delicacy than mine." Greenberg wrote him a card, and his exact statement-"Don't criticize my motivations." So it's known that he would even put it in black and white.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Well, I guess Mehring followed it rather slavishly.

MR. KAINEN: Of course. Greenberg didn't expect him to take it so much to heart.

MS. BERMAN: Were the others following as closely, do you feel?

MR. KAINEN: Well, I saw Noland another time and he talked about how difficult it was to see the people he liked. He was stuck out there in Vermont. He had to have a show a year just to fight the, not so much the destruction but the-

MRS. KAINEN: Pressures.

MR. KAINEN: Pressures of people who gave him a lift of the eyebrows, who wanted him to paint in a certain way. And he's supposed to make it a little different each year. He said it's really great pressure.

Now [Jules] Olitski, you know, Greenberg had been pushing Olitski as a name figure, saying, "No one in the history of painting has understood the framing edge with the certainty of Olitski." You know, he puts things on the edge and soaking it in. So then Olitski started painting heavily. See, they resist, artists. Greenberg's telling them and he takes it up to a point.

I remember talking about Jack Bush. He was saying how telegraphic Jack Bush was. I said, "That's not telegraphic. He paints around it." I said, "Gottlieb is telegraphic." He got mad. He greatly admired Gottlieb. Gottlieb threw him out of the studio, because he started telling him how to use color. He should use more color and all that. And you know, Newman threw him out of the studio. That's why Greenberg said, "Newman is good up to a certain year." That was the year in which-

MS. BERMAN: They broke off.

MR. KAINEN: Yes. So he's a forceful personality, but some artists don't like that.

MS. BERMAN: But I think it's more complex than that because they were certainly welcomed, they wanted suggestions up to a point. So, I mean, he was certainly encouraged to do it too, besides his own position as well. So it wasn't as if Gottlieb had never listened before. He was and then suddenly it came to a point that he wasn't interested.

MRS. KAINEN: He always spoke highly of Gottlieb at other times, very much.

MS. BERMAN: We were just talking about some of the specific young people who did and who didn't pan out. And I was wondering in general, I guess I have some notes that you had some interesting things to say about the work and outlook of a younger artist as compared to an older artist and maybe some reasons why many people don't hold up over the long stretch.

MR. KAINEN: I didn't get the image of the younger artist and the older artist.

MS. BERMAN: The work, the outlook of a younger artist as compared to an older artist. You evidently have a theory on that?

MR. KAINEN: Yes. I think a younger artist takes what is current at his time as some thing to develop, to work, to progress with. He takes if he has any desire to do something. He comes from a certain background, the background that's forging ahead, say. Some artists have a prior background and some don't. Some artists know something about earlier art and some don't. Those who know something about earlier art usually turn out to be the better artists.

There are young artists who are very ignorant, they will take something of their own time, but they can't do anything with it, because they "don't know nothing." They're very hot; they're very emotional, whereas there are young artists who are cooler. They have more perspective. Then they can proceed with it, go with it. But in our day, an artist can't do the same thing all his life. Times are different; he's different as a person. History moves much more rapidly than it did a century ago or earlier. So a change is necessary, because he looks very out of date after a while if he does the same thing. He has to keep going ahead. It even began, say, with some of the poets like Yeats. When you get older, you have to get wilder. You change from the Celtic twilight to-you could handle everyday things, but he had the ear, he had the background. This happens with the better artists. They can change, and they can keep changing.

I mean you could take someone like Avery. He got simpler, more monumental. That was inherent in his approach. Some of his early work gets kind of cute, humor, early American. Or someone like Stuart Davis who was surprising all along so perhaps is not a typical example. But I think when an artist gets older, in our day he becomes more classical. In the earlier days, artists might begin more realistically and get looser and looser as he got on because it's toward the modern-Titian, Rembrandt, Velazquez all got looser and looser. They were quite analytical to begin with. But, say, beginning with Cézanne, Cézanne was wildly expressionistic to begin with, incredible. And he got more and more classical.

MS. BERMAN: He got like Poussin.

MR. KAINEN: Like Poussin. Well, he was crazy about Poussin. But order-when you get older, you want a certain serenity and balance. But if you look at his work, it still has this tension; the touch has a vibrancy to it. It's not slack. Sometimes Avery gets slack, but that's because he did so much work. But I think that certain moderns get more and more classical. Even someone like Rothko, who was pretty expressionist to begin with. He was a pupil of [Max] Weber and social concerns. But even these vaporous things had a serenity about it. Then of course at end he got these black things. They were far from expressionist.

So I think in our day the Expressionists now were young. The only problem is that the Expressionism is only in the handling. You know, it's not in the feeling. It's chic. It's called fashionable ineptitude. So those people might become more classical later on. Now you're beginning as an Expressionist in our period when it's already safe. It was different for the Fauves and the German Expressionists. Now it's going all over, the cycle.

MS. BERMAN: Are you saying that a main reason that many of the artists who don't hold up over the long run were the ones who couldn't be flexible, or didn't have the learning to be flexible?

MR. KAINEN: Yes. Didn't have the learning to be flexible and they didn't basically know how to put a picture together. Because a picture is a rectangle and if things don't relate, after a while you get an uncomfortable feeling. You look at a master. Suddenly you can breathe freely. Everything seems right. If you look at, say-I remember a statement of Cézanne I read a long time ago: "Nothing looks so ordinary as a masterpiece."

For example, you look at Raphael's *Baldassare Castiglione* sitting there with that hat. At first it looks like not much color, but it gets stronger and stronger, the longer you look at it. You see why Rembrandt used that as a basis, it passed through Amsterdam at one time, and he saw it. But it's in the absolutely flawless relationships of things but where it's not too evidently so. You look at a Velazquez and you don't even see the composition. That's the best way, because if the order is thrown in your face too much, then it becomes too obvious. And obviousness is always the enemy of art. If it doesn't have anything hidden, it's not so good.

MS. BERMAN: Well, what is the role, say, of the natural talent in this if the artist is untutored? I'm thinking about some of the great folk artists, for example.

MR. KAINEN: Well, how many great folk artists were there? Henri Rousseau. There could be an innate sense of space, of feeling, and that exists. I mean they intuitively know that it would be wrong to have fingers end right at the edge of the canvas, you know, or to have a canvas cut off at the wrist. It's just a sense of something fitting in there. I guess there are intuitive painters, but there aren't too many. Many of the folk artists tend to look alike, the primitives who put in every brick, things like that, because it takes a certain sophistication to-

MS. BERMAN: Well, John Kane was a great artist I think.

MR. KAINEN: Yes, John Kane.

MS. BERMAN: [Horace] Pippin.

MR. KAINEN: Maybe he saw paintings. Maybe he saw reproductions.

MS. BERMAN: I think Pippin may have, but I don't know about Kane.

MR. KAINEN: Yes, few painters do it. But it's still good to look at. It's fitted to be seen.

MS. BERMAN: Well, to round out your theory, who are some of these younger artists who perhaps didn't know that much, who started off well, and you feel did fall apart, or didn't work, because they didn't have the sense of learning or composition and knowledge of how to keep a picture going?

MR. KAINEN: Well, take someone like Larry Poons. I think he was pretty good at one time and, you know, had this optical business, so he knew something. But there are many artists who-

MRS. KAINEN: Mehring.

MR. KAINEN: Well, Mehring knew something. He used to go to museums all the time. It's just that they become followers. They start and it's all right. It's new at that time. But then it becomes evident that they're followers, that they have nothing of their own. Obviously an artist has to have something fundamentally resolving in their work.

Youth carries you on. You have great energy and verve and great ambition. But if you don't make a dent, after a while that's when it becomes hard, going through the long years just because you want to do it. And there are many good painters who did that. But yes, an older artist would naturally have a more philosophical outlook.

There were artists like Paul Burlin. Toward the end of his life, he became wildly expressionist. He was a great friend of George McNeil. But he went blind, and he even tried to do some things blind. But that's a rare instance. He hadn't done much, and he had been a sort of romantic painter. Very few people know his early work. He was like Franklin Watkins except a little more romantic. I think he painted better than Franklin Watkins, but a little sentimental. Very late in life he suddenly realized that he had to be more drastic. Maybe that has something to do too with simplification and taking the extreme position to get over it in a more serene way, and not just scatter all over.

MS. BERMAN: Maybe also by now you don't care what the critics say. Although criticism may still hurt you're at a point where you just want to use the years you have left and to hell with everyone else.

MR. KAINEN: Yes, because by this time I have seen who the hell are the critics. By and large, there are some good critics, but mostly they're people who've taken a course in contemporary art at some university and have a certain facility to write. But by and large, it doesn't matter much.

MS. BERMAN: Also you've seen cycles and fashions in painting itself, sculpture, what ever your medium is-and you know by now your own time is the history of art, too, if you're 75, as opposed to 25, so you can see that.

MR. KAINEN: Yes. I know this expressionist binge is going to end soon.

MS. BERMAN: What do you think of this, for lack of a better term, Neo-Expressionism and those young painters?

MR. KAINEN: I think they desperately want to be significant. And of course, there's no such thing as an avant-garde any more. Everything's wide open which is great for certain dealers because the public really likes nice, sentimental pictures. Suddenly they realize that it's acceptable as high art. So these people want to do things that are ugly. It's a reaction against not so much photorealism but the sentimental kind of realism, 19th century realism, Victorian realism, which is mentally nothing. So they're doing it, flailing about, but they haven't added anything to early Cézanne.

MS. BERMAN: Do you think that younger artists are hurt now or at a disadvantage because it's impossible to shock anyone?

MR. KAINEN: Yes, I think so. That's where the media come in. Now people have seen, you look even at Atari. The whole thing is abstract. You see things moving there. People don't mind it. They've seen abstraction used in so many different ways. Just look at television a little and you'll see all kinds of patterns and things of that sort. Even sex. You'll see it in all kinds of paintings, movies. People are jaded. The population continues growing. Standards go down. The young people have been so coddled from the time they were young until they were-

[End of tape.]

MS. BERMAN: [In progress]-Avis Berman on September 22, 1982, in his home at Chevy Chase. First, before we go back to where we were yesterday, you had a couple of things you wanted to say. The first was that you said that Ad Reinhardt and someone else visited you in Washington, and you wanted to talk about that.

MR. KAINEN: Yes, Ad Reinhardt and George McNeil. I think this was-well, first before that, George McNeil visited me, I would say, in 1944. It was still during the war, perhaps earlier, right after I got to the Smithsonian. He was in a sailor suit and he was attending Columbia University. He wanted to apply for graduate work so that he could get his Ph.D. in art history. So he asked me to write a recommendation. Of course, I was assistant curator so it had to be '44. I had an official title. So I wrote a glowing recommendation for him, and he eventually got his Ph.D., of which he is very ashamed. He makes great efforts to hide it.

But in 1940, I would see him from time to time. He came in with Ad Reinhardt and visited our home early in 1946. I had a couple of paintings on the wall. One was *The Walk*, and a couple of others. So later in the same year, Reinhardt did his *Tree of American Art*. Of course, he knew me-we knew each other from the '30s. And he put me on the same branch with Rothko, Gottlieb, and Loren Maclver.

Now about Noland. There was a time sometime in the '40s-no, no. This was actually in 1961. I had a show. I was at the Smithsonian as Curator of Prints and Drawings. I had a show of Jan Gelb who was Boris Margo's wife. I had already had a show of Boris Margo. Boris came in to see me and to see the show. While he was there, Kenneth Noland came in with his little daughter. I introduced Noland and Margo. Noland knew who Boris Margo was, but Boris Margo had never heard of Noland.

I said, "Boris, Ken is famous. He's showing in Paris, London, New York. He's one of the best known contemporary American artists." And Boris said, "Oh, is that so? Well, young man, I hope you don't mind, I'd like to tell you about Jon Corbino. Do you know about him?" Noland had never heard of him. He said, "Well, in the 1930s he was probably the most famous American artist. He was showing everywhere. He was on the covers of all the

magazines. Everybody wanted his work. Suddenly one day at the end of the '30s, maybe early '40s, nobody wanted his work." He said, "Nobody. He couldn't sell a picture. He went broke. He had no money. He suffered quite a bit. In fact, he died shortly afterward." He said, "You're doing well now, right?" Noland said, "Well, I can't complain." And Margo said, "Well, I would suggest to you that you save your money." Noland was very amused because he knew that Margo was saying it because he really wanted to give him advice.

MS. BERMAN: In a way, that says more about Boris Margo than anyone else.

MR. KAINEN: Now I had given Margo a show earlier. Margo had invented a method of printing by both etching and relief methods by using acetone on a plate. He'd also use it on a piece of masonite as well as copper or zinc. Let it harden and then etch it. I guess the acetone was for etching. You could etch into this-what was the material? Some plastic. I forget.

MRS. KAINEN: Celluloid.

MR. KAINEN: Yes, it was like celluloid. Yes, it was whatever celluloid was. You could float it on and then etch through with acetone. Then it would harden and you could print both relief and intaglio at the same time on it if you wanted to. It had a very special kind of effect. It was quite a development but only Margo could do anything good with it. Then other people began using it.

MS. BERMAN: Were you and Reinhardt friends before you moved to Washington? What was your relationship with him?

MR. KAINEN: Well, I used to see him from time to time. It was a pretty close group around 14th Street. We just knew each other. But Reinhardt in the '30s wasn't terribly active.

MS. BERMAN: When you knew him in '46, what sort of work was he doing?

MR. KAINEN: He was doing abstract work.

MS. BERMAN: Well, I was just wondering what you found memorable or what struck you about Reinhardt.

MR. KAINEN: Well, Reinhardt was absolutely fearless to begin with. He didn't mind being a newspaper artist. That is he was a very good letterer in a very original way, and he would do cartoons, comic drawings for the various periodicals. That didn't prevent him from being a very adventurous painter. He was highly respected, but he just didn't kneel, you know. I suppose he was in the Artists Union along with practically everyone else.

MS. BERMAN: But you know, besides that drawing, his scathing cartoons and all. Do you think they had an effect on people?

MR. KAINEN: Do you mean the various trees?

MS. BERMAN: Not just the trees but the satirical versions of the art world he would turn out.

MR. KAINEN: Yes, it had a certain effect because it upheld standards because there always is a tendency like the Coca-Cola awards for example. And there were some artists who were pretty good who received awards, people like Stuart Davis. Nevertheless, Reinhardt put him on the rotting branch with a Coca-Cola bottle. So in a way he was a conscience and that always has some effect.

MS. BERMAN: Did you know Clyfford Still?

MR. KAINEN: No, I didn't.

MS. BERMAN: Even when he lived up in Maryland?

MR. KAINEN: No. I'd have to visit him, and it would have been a difficult thing.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Well, I was just checking because he was geographically so close. Also, in the '50s and '60s or early '60s do you think you were influenced by de Kooning?

MR. KAINEN: It's very difficult to say. I don't think it was de Kooning. I think it was Gorky because-I mean those were my origins-Gorky, Graham, even Stuart Davis. There were forms, shapes. And I didn't like painting that was amorphous. Even though I admire the late Turner, it's a different thing.

MS. BERMAN: In 1956 you went to Europe.

MR. KAINEN: That's right.

MS. BERMAN: Was that the first time you went?

MR. KAINEN: The first time I went to Europe, yes.

MS. BERMAN: And that was on the grant for the Jackson book [Jacob Kainen. *John Baptist Jackson: 18th-century master of the color woodcut*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1962]. Is that correct?

MR. KAINEN: Yes, that's right.

MS. BERMAN: I'd like you to tell me, I guess, what you saw and what impressed you there and eventually anything you saw you felt affected how you painted afterwards.

MR. KAINEN: Well, first of all, I was rather disappointed in the way the old masters looked. They looked so much better in reproductions, many of them. I found out later that it was just the way in which they were shown, the fact that so many had darkened. I was particularly bowled over by Michelangelo. *The Prisoners* in Florence, the sculpture, half in the rock half out; it seemed far out of its time. In the Uffizi [Gallery, Florence, Italy], the Leonardo [da Vinci], *Adoration of the Magi* which was a drawing with a few touches of black and gold and the perspective lines. And I could see that Leonardo liked it that way. And I could see that was one of the reasons Michelangelo and Leonardo so rarely finished anything. There was also the *St. Jerome* of Leonardo, just in silhouette, the line in silhouette.

I think it did influence me because when I came back, it wasn't long before I started going back to the figure. But that was also because Abstract Expressionism was becoming so current; it was losing its meaning as a rebellious expression. And also I began looking and seeing that my Abstract Expressionism was different from other Abstract Expressionists, in that I had actual forms. I said they look three dimensional anyway; I might as well make them recognizable as unrecognizable.

MS. BERMAN: So what countries did you go to besides Italy?

MR. KAINEN: Well, I was in London, I was in Paris for three months, in the Netherlands. I think the second time I was there I went to Vienna and other places. But I was surprised by [James] Ensor in Antwerp, I mean how original. The color was so beautiful. It was so independent. I have to think about that, because it's a big question.

MS. BERMAN: Do you think you were too old to go there in terms of being influenced very much artistically? In other words, were you too old, too well formed as an artist to have any big impact?

MR. KAINEN: No, I don't think so. I used to hear people talk about Europe and I knew more about the geography and where the places were than most of them because I had read all these books. So when I went to Europe, I was very well prepared for what to see.

I was very much impressed by Tintoretto and the *Scuola di san Rocco*, in the grandeur and his conceptions. And, of course, in Spain, Velazquez was kind of a miracle, that almost nonchalant ease and also because it was more than it seemed to be. The structure was concealed but it was there. In his late work, the painting was so fresh, so clean. The color was so clean compared with other paintings. He seemed like the first modern painter. Blacks transparently clear in the whole range from the palest grays to the deepest darks. So you can't get that by just painting directly on the canvas with black. You have to have something underneath.

MS. BERMAN: Did you meet any European artists while you were there?

MR. KAINEN: Yes, as a matter of fact. A group of Russian artists had come to the United States. This I guess was the second time I was in Europe, yes. Among them were a couple of painters who showed reproductions of their work. They were very much like Manet, very bold, free painters. The expert on American art was particularly crazy about [George] Bellows. Of course, they were saying that art should be-this is later, '62-the second time I was in Europe.

But I met one of these Russians in front of Velazquez's *Innocent the Tenth* in the Doria Pamphili [Rome, Italy], which I had missed the first time. It's easy to miss. And we hadn't agreed when they were in the United States, talking against abstraction, nature is the thing, what you see. We had a little discussion. But there we spoke in French, both in broken French, but we could understand each other perfectly because we sounded about the same. So we could look at it. But other artists-I saw some artists, say, [Aristodimos] Kaldis, in Rome.

MRS. KAINEN: Didn't you know some French artists in Paris?

MR. KAINEN: Well, in Paris. I was there three months, yes. I used to have conversations almost every night with a French artist. There were a group of us, a couple of Americans, an economist, and a couple of other people and a French artist. He was all for abstract art. I had a catalogue with me of my show at the DuPont Theater Gallery in 1952. He thought the painting was very curious. It wasn't the kind of abstract art he was accustomed to. He

liked-that was the period of Poliakoff de Stael. Those were the people he admired and I admired them too. But he had no English and I had very little French but we managed to get across what we thought. I got a couple of letters from him. Of course, he never invited me to his home. Like the French. I got a couple letters written in that beautifully clear ornamental hand. But otherwise I didn't know any artists. I was doing research.

MS. BERMAN: You didn't learn Russian at home, in other words, when you were a child?

MR. KAINEN: Well, I knew a few words and I have the accent. I could easily learn it.

MS. BERMAN: What were the French artists interested in about American art? Or what were the aspects of the scene that they wanted to know about?

MR. KAINEN: Just this artist who was interested in a certain kind of abstract art which was quite severe. He didn't like any fussing or messing around, but done with a feeling for paint. It's strange how the Russians, how other nationalities, seem to dominate in the art of Paris aside from Matisse, say, and Bonnard. But there were so many Russians there. But they weren't interested in American art. You know, French artists are never interested in any other kind of art.

MS. BERMAN: This question, I guess I want to straighten out something I had read that you said. I guess as a devil's advocate, I'm asking this. You said that you were in Washington in the early '50s. You were an Abstract Expressionist and then you went back to the figure when other people caught on, and then you returned. You went back and forth. When I read this, I was disturbed because it sounded as if you were really reacting to what other people were doing as opposed to having it come from within yourself. So I'd like you to explain this swing back and forth.

MR. KAINEN: Yes. Some other artists have done it like [Richard] Diebenkorn, of course, at about the same period. Well, the whole idea of abstraction, the expressionist approach, was pretty well finished in the late-'50s because it no longer was an underground activity. We accepted it. It was the kind of thing that people did without thinking. So its validity was in question. I had been to Europe and had a wider perspective. Color field painting was coming in. After all, I was working with Gene Davis and Noland and Louis. I didn't want to stain. Obviously, things were changing.

Also, the McCarthy period was over, and I think a lot of Abstract Expressionism had to do with the feeling that the artists had no real image. There was something internal that he didn't know, couldn't identify. But he had to flail a bit. This never happened before. And I think it was the whole atmosphere, the fact that the artist was being persecuted for his good intentions in the '30s when he had been the conscience of the world. Suddenly, he's not only an enemy of society but the worst kind of enemy-a traitor.

So many of the artists had the same kind of background I had in one degree or another. So I think it was logical that abstraction should come, especially since the surrealists were here. But of course, the Americans were lustier painters than the surrealists. But nevertheless, their image or lack of image came from the fact that they couldn't identify with what was going on, with the general tone, emotional tone of society. That was fading, and the reaction took place in different ways.

One was to go into staining. In other words, more water color treatment. You could thin down your paint, soak it into canvas. No matter what you did, it would look pretty good. You know, if you take any color, especially acrylics, thin it down with water and put it on a canvas, it's hard to miss, really. I saw some people-really, it belongs on a small scale, most of those things. But it was sort of a substanceless painting, by and large, I mean except for a few artists. But I couldn't go for that. You know, I was still a painter. I was still part of a long tradition. Perhaps it held me back. But as I say, I wanted something monumental and I saw that my abstraction was tending toward three dimensional, toward the three dimensional.

I also had classes where students would be drawing a model. I'd take a notebook and I'd draw the model too. And I did a lot of drawings. So I would take these drawings and I painted the figure. I never painted from the model because I had painted from the model long ago in school. So I'd paint from these little sketches so that I could reshape and pattern and so forth. So I had mainly monumental figures, first against a very deep blue background and quickly against a very pale background, dark against light, because I wanted to reverse Caravaggio. Caravaggio made the first great break in the Renaissance tradition, the first break toward modernism. That is he had the figure in a beating light so that the features were almost obliterated, shadows under the eyes, so-called cellar lighting.

I wanted dark against light, but it didn't work the same way as light against dark because light against dark radiates out, but dark against light stays there. So I would put colors around the edges, but the color had to be part of the figure, maybe some touches of color inside. I did this for quite a while.

Very few of them sold because-Once in a while, one of them sold and then the purchaser brought it back. He

said, "It's too strong in the apartment. My wife doesn't like it. It's like another woman there and it's not quiet enough." The colors were quiet but the form was-I don't know. But that didn't bother me. I kept on painting. I had a couple of shows in New York, one in which Ad Reinhardt came and signed the book, probably didn't like what he saw there. Then I got some pretty decent reviews. But after ten years, I began very expressionistically, it got more and more simplified, not quite realistic because it was still patterned.

But then I began to-I don't know why. I'm trying to think. Around, when was it, the late '60s, always around the end of a decade, '69, I began to treat the figure more imaginatively.

[Audio break.]

MS. BERMAN: Later on.

MR. KAINEN: Later on the figures were less expressionist. But around '79 I began to do something more with the figures because basically I'm not a literal painter so that other things began to come to up. I had the first show of figure paintings in 1960-61 at the Jefferson Place Gallery ["Jacob Kainen: Paintings" Jefferson Place Gallery, Washington, DC, November 8-25, 1961]. Howard Mehring came in. He looked at it. He said, "It's very daring to paint like that today," because the color field and abstract painting was so widespread.

MS. BERMAN: When did the geometric shapes, the squares and the rectangles, begin coming into your painting, the work that you're doing now?

MR. KAINEN: 1969. Do you have that? Perhaps-*The Pale Nude*. Well, I began doing the figure and making the figure very pale, nude, but the background was quite abstract. I had a number of things like that. The figure is very cryptic, but more emphasis on color. Let's see, this was '69, '70.

Generally, there's no specific reason why an artist changes. I mean, he should trust his intuition. I begin working in a certain direction. Whether I like it or not, it seems to go in that direction. I'm not really mad about the way I'm painting now, but it's the only way I can paint now. It's strange that you have to have your own, I won't say reasons for doing things but you have to follow the way your conceptions go.

MS. BERMAN: Why do you say you're not mad about the way you're painting now?

MR. KAINEN: Well, I'm always a little worried that it has too much, what Gene Davis called rectitude. He saw my paintings at the show at the Lunn Gallery [Lunn Gallery/Graphics International, Ltd., Washington, DC]. What did he say? He said, "It has great rectitude."

MRS. KAINEN: A great feeling of rectitude, a great sense of rectitude.

MR. KAINEN: Well, I want a drastic image. I feel this, and I'm reducing it to what I think is essential for me at this time. So there are not only rectangles but steps and things of that sort. There's a slight ambiguity but you don't see it at first in general. It's blank enough so that you can bring something of yourself to it. There's no subject per se. But it has a physical quality and it's freehand, and the edges always have some sort of vibration. But what the real content is, I don't know.

You know, I can paint freely. I like lusty painting. Yet you could only do abstract expressionist work or the figure that way and there doesn't seem to be much promise really in either direction. I think Expressionism today is only valid when done by someone who's a real Expressionist, like de Kooning, McNeil. They've been doing it all along. I mean they're Expressionists. There are artists who are both classical and are Expressionists at certain times, like Picasso, basically a classical draftsman, classical painter, but he did some very expressionist things. They are different personalities. Goya was very classical. His portraits were always classical, but he did some wildly expressionist things too at the same time.

MS. BERMAN: It seems to me what you're saying right now with your own painting is that given your fondness for and roots in Expressionism, perhaps what bothers you is the austerity of some of the paintings at this point.

MR. KAINEN: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: Maybe they're not, as you say, lusty or bloody.

MR. KAINEN: That's right.

MS. BERMAN: They're not drastic enough. First of all, I want to go back to something you said about the early '50s. As you were saying, the artists felt they had no image during that time. Did you feel you had no image?

MR. KAINEN: Yes, I felt I had no image. Of course, I was pursued because I had signed petitions and had done some writing in the '30s. And at that time, the government agencies were trying to get rid of as many people

who could be connected with anything left wing as possible because Congress was hounding them and the Republicans were hounding them and so forth. So people at the Department of Commerce or various other departments were fired for almost anything. And the reason was "not in the best interests of the department." There was no real reason, you see. But the Smithsonian was a different place. They had scientists and economists. And they said, "Well, suppose he wrote for such-and-such a paper, what does that have to do with it? There's no overt action."

Anyway, I had to answer lots of questions. Why I had done this, why I had done that, and so forth. And I was cleared. I certainly wouldn't have been cleared I don't think in any other government agency. But you have anthropologists and like that who are accustomed to dealing with ideas. I hadn't done anything overt. I had written on art and so forth.

Nevertheless, a situation like that can't help but affect your outlook. And I became more abstract. Of course, this started in 1948, '47.

MS. BERMAN: That's when you were investigated?

MR. KAINEN: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: Did you have any idea you would be investigated? Did you think they would get to you sooner or later or were you surprised?

MR. KAINEN: Well, I wasn't too surprised. My brother was fired. He had done nothing.

MRS. KAINEN: When?

MR. KAINEN: He had signed one petition in 1930, just a petition, mind you. He was fired from-he was a meteorologist. I guess it was the Department of Commerce.

MS. BERMAN: He had ended up down here too?

MR. KAINEN: No. He ended in Tampa, Florida, hiding away from this one thing. Some pretty girl came to the door and asked us to sign a petition. If they got enough names, they could put the Communist party on the ballot. She said, "It's just to be on the ballot." A pretty girl. I signed, my brother signed. My father was there. He wouldn't sign. Probably if he had come there before he would have told us not to sign. He was from Russia! "Oh, no," he said, "don't sign anything." Now all these years later, he was fired for that. He had no connection. He was a mathematician.

MRS. KAINEN: It ruined his life. He couldn't get a job under those conditions.

MS. BERMAN: Did he change his name?

MR. KAINEN: No. But he couldn't go for his Ph.D., had to go to remote places, East Texas State, things like that, far away from everywhere where they needed mathematicians.

MS. BERMAN: I thought you said he was a meteorologist.

MR. KAINEN: He was a meteorologist. He was a mathematician, making a living as a meteorologist.

MS. BERMAN: I see. As people became more liberal, as the climate improved, did he return to-

MRS. KAINEN: If you're fired, that's not good for the government.

MR. KAINEN: "Not in the best interests of the government."

MS. BERMAN: I saw a reference-perhaps you could explain this- that you attributed keeping your job to J. Edgar Hoover. Is that correct?

MR. KAINEN: Well, at an early date, in the early '40s, I was asked by the FBI to train a group of FBI students, FBI members in various printing methods. They were trying to find out where such-and-such a publication had been printed. So at the Smithsonian we had lots of examples. I had them get a linen tester, glasses, 10 power. I'd tell them how to tell the difference between letterpress printing, offset printing, gravure printing, collotype, everything. I had about 10 sessions and I would give them exams, give them samples. And they were so grateful.

I told them that in gravure, there are only four presses, gravure presses, in the United States. Because rotogravure is an enormous cylinder and it keeps going night and day to make it worth it. So Louisville,

Kentucky, all the stuff for *Potomac* magazine, all these magazine gravures are printed somewhere else. That's why they have to have four weeks notice. I did pieces for *Potomac* magazine. It's a nuisance. Four weeks, color reproductions, and so forth. Baltimore. However, Mexico was different. But they got all this business. Then I received a letter from J. Edgar Hoover thanking me for helping these people. "You've done our country a great service." I have two letters from him, but I think it was three times. Suddenly it stopped. No one asked -

MS. BERMAN: When you say "it," do you mean the sessions stopped?

MR. KAINEN: The sessions, yes. The FBI didn't come anymore. Then I got a phone call from some fellow, or was it a letter, saying that he thanks me for all I've done for them. He said, "If you ever have any problems in the future, just call me and we'll see what we can do to straighten things out." So obviously they had found this out, but he didn't believe I was an enemy of the country. It was very interesting.

MS. BERMAN: This wasn't Hoover though that you had talked to.

MR. KAINEN: No. This was one of the people, the person that was in charge of this section of the FBI, that is paper and printing.

MS. BERMAN: In other words, they were probably trying to trace where maybe some subversive material had been printed in your original sessions?

MR. KAINEN: Oh, yes.

MS. BERMAN: They wanted to see where it was emanating from.

MR. KAINEN: That's right.

MRS. KAINEN: And fake passports and all kinds of fake stuff.

MS. BERMAN: I guess, yes, during the war.

MRS. KAINEN: All kinds of stuff.

MR. KAINEN: And different kinds of paper and all that. Because at the Smithsonian, we knew that.

MS. BERMAN: So did you call this official when you were being investigated?

MR. KAINEN: No. This was-oh, sure, this was before I was investigated. But I didn't.

MS. BERMAN: I just meant during the course of the investigation.

MR. KAINEN: No, I didn't. Because I didn't think-if something happened, then I might have called him.

MS. BERMAN: Did you show the, I guess it was the Smithsonian Loyalty Board, did you show them your letters from Hoover?

MRS. KAINEN: Yes. You have lots and lots of copies of those letters. Lots of them.

MS. BERMAN: That's certainly-it must have helped.

MR. KAINEN: It must have helped, yes.

MS. BERMAN: I was also interested that you were saying the pull of-you were talking about a validity of a style of painting, your Abstract Expressionist, for an artist personally. And then there was also the feeling that things were changing, that staining was coming in. So where do you see changing a painting style? Do you think styles in art impinge upon it as much as personal necessities, in other words, noticing that other things are coming along and trying-

MR. KAINEN: Styles in art I don't think really affect an artist.

[End side one.]

MS. BERMAN: [In progress]-styles in art affect an artist?

MR. KAINEN: Well, it's not good that an artist should be affected by styles because styles come and go. I think one of the reasons why Picasso was so greatly admired by the artists is that he couldn't care less what critics thought of his approach. He would do a classical painting. He would do an abstract painting. He would change styles just when it was acceptable. Of course, he already was famous, but he did that even in the beginning. In

[Daniel Henry] Kahnweiler's book, Kahnweiler talks about Picasso changing from his Blue period. Kahnweiler said to Picasso when he began changing, "Your former collectors don't like your new style." I guess it was Negro sculpture, but I'm not sure exactly what now. He said, "They liked your older style."

MS. BERMAN: It must have been from Rose period to the African work because the Rose period is the most acceptable; I mean is the easiest to take.

MR. KAINEN: Yes, it is the easiest. But it had to be the African. He said, "Your former collectors don't like your new stuff." And Picasso said, "Good. At this rate, we'll disgust the world." So the styles, the artist can only do, I feel, what he feels is necessary for him because otherwise it's an external sort of thing. There are a lot of people who do follow styles. But as de Kooning said, "As soon as you spot a style, as soon as you spot a bandwagon, it's too late to jump on it." I know for myself, I certainly try not to follow any style. But it's quite possible that classical abstraction may be the next really valid style. Where else are things going to go?

MS. BERMAN: What do you think of as your major work, looking back on the paintings that you've done, paintings and prints?

MR. KAINEN: Do you mean individual work?

MS. BERMAN: You can mention some of them, or what you think was sort of a period in which you turned out the art that you're most satisfied with.

MR. KAINEN: That's a very difficult question to answer because the '30s were a totally different period. In the '40s when I came to Washington and saw new surroundings, new architecture, I did many street scenes, mostly the buildings in Washington with strange turrets and shapes. I think no one has done anything like it. It's because it's a new way of treating buildings. You know, it made something of the buildings beyond the buildings. And it's not just shape making like Avery. There's a psychological quality to it, almost a predatory quality. But I don't know. I think I have an attachment to every period because I felt what I was doing at the time.

MS. BERMAN: How did you get out of-you said you felt you had no image. Can you define at all what sort of things personally made you feel that you had a sense of identity or image again.

MR. KAINEN: I think I had students and was drawing again from life, from a model, and the European experience. I don't know how, but everything came together. That is the bankruptcy of Abstract Expressionism.

I came to Abstract Expressionism from my street scene paintings in Washington. But the last ones, the roofs were practically flying in the air. Everything was-the buildings were just an excuse for these movements. But coming out of it, coming out of the abstract period, there was just a different change. I think an artist is sensitive to the social vitality whether he realizes it or not, and this affects the way he works.

MS. BERMAN: What sort of function did your printmaking serve during this time, post-New York printmaking?

MR. KAINEN: Now that's very acute because here I was doing abstract paintings but I would take a plate out with a dry point and just draw on it, you know, street scenes. I didn't feel that-I did a few abstract things. But to do something abstractly, I'd have to contrive to get textures and things of that sort. It would take away from its life. So I mainly kept up the drawing no matter how I distorted and shifted. Some of the subjects are extremely twisted around like *The Corner Store*, based on a sketch I had made in the early '40s. But it was still based on what I had seen during the '40s and in the '50s. Through the '50s I was still doing drawings. I did plate. The prints were not as abstract as the paintings and more related to drawings than to the abstract works. So it was quite possible that the calligraphic quality-I always had a certain calligraphic quality which I abandoned in these late works because a line isn't going to work with this. But I always did like that calligraphic quality too.

MS. BERMAN: In the '50s and '60s were you doing color prints?

MR. KAINEN: Not too much. I did woodcuts in black and white. Sometimes I would do them in color. I have a few examples. But I didn't do any editions in color.

Oh, yes. I tried but they're very sparse. I did one of the abstract ones in 1953, *Transit*. It was sort of a figure and I inked it in color and printed it, but I only did one example. And I did a woodcut or so where I applied stencil color. It pounds through. It's very nice. But not much.

MS. BERMAN: What was the impetus for you turning to monotypes?

MR. KAINEN: I guess Ruth was pushing me to do monotypes.

MRS.KAINEN: From the time we married.

MR. KAINEN: At first I started doing monotypes like paintings. I'd paint on the plate and I'd take an impression and I didn't like it. It looked like transferred paintings. Then I began using rollers and transparent paint. I'd always use oil paint because printer's inks-I always used, with few exceptions, oil paints in prints when I'd use color, because printer's inks are so intense, much more intense than artist's colors, and they're just too raw.

So once I started using rollers, I started using simpler forms. They appealed to me more. It might have something to do with a change to this way of painting because paintings in the early '70s were much freer and had circular forms, and they had some relation to the figure because I just didn't want handsome abstractions.

MS. BERMAN: The monotypes of course were different because of medium and size. But were there different emotions or feelings you were trying to express in the monotypes?

MR. KAINEN: Yes. The monotypes, since they're on a smaller scale, I thought required more delicacy. Because if you have punchy color in a small format, it's raw in a way I don't like. So monotype you can do things with that you can't do with painting. It's true that I could use the back of a brush; I could take a paper with a very coarse texture and put it on the plate, just rub it a little and get all kinds of natural textures that you couldn't get in painting. It's a graphic medium and yet it has a lot of physical qualities that are different from painting. And I think a monotype is successful to the degree that it doesn't look like a painting.

MS. BERMAN: Could you tell me about your relationship with Bill Hayter please?

MR. KAINEN: Yes. I knew Hayter, I had met him very early, that is, 1941, at his place. But I didn't meet him again until I was in Washington. First I had seen him at the-ICA. What is that called again?

MRS. KAINEN: Institute of Contemporary Arts.

MR. KAINEN: Institute of Contemporary Arts, which was run by Robert Richmond. And he had lots of artists there. There was an exhibition of Atelier 17 and Hayter gave a little talk. This had to have been 1946. He gave a talk and I had a little talk with Hayter there. Then in 1948 I gave Hayter a show. Sometime later, maybe the same year, I got a press. I went to Baltimore to visit the Hoen Lithograph Company [A. Hoen & Company], one of the oldest lithograph houses in the United States. And I saw a beautiful press, a 36 inch cylinder, and it was immaculate, just beautiful. Old man Hoen said he'd like to sell it to me. He said, "I have to get \$200 for it because that's the value of the scrap." They wanted to get rid of it. They used to use it for transferring engravings.

They printed in lithography, but you could get much finer lines by engraving, inking the plate, pulling an impression, and then while the impression was still wet, transferring it to a lithograph stone. No drawing on a lithograph stone could be as fine as an engraving. He said, "But they don't do that any more. They haven't been doing it for some time. It's taking up space. We'll deliver it for you and install it for the \$200." I said, "It's too big to fit into my basement. But I'll write to Hayter and see if he can use it." So I wrote to Hayter, and he said he couldn't use it, but a pupil of his could. So this pupil paid \$200, Hoen delivered it to New York, disassembled it, brought it upstairs, and reassembled it, all for the \$200, because he couldn't stand seeing such a beautiful press destroyed for the scrap. Then I got to know Hayter, I gave him a show at NCFCA. Then also he visited Washington several times. Of course, he had a show of paintings here in Washington and I did a foreword for his catalogue.

MRS. KAINEN: Harry Lunn started showing him, because Harry knew him in Paris.

MR. KAINEN: But I never wanted to go into Atelier 17, because no matter how Hayter talked about giving everyone carte blanche to do everything, all the students looked like Hayter in the end. He had so strong a personality; no matter how he tries they can't get away from him.

MRS. KAINEN: Not those early ones.

MR. KAINEN: Oh, [Joan] Miró, [Wassily] Kandinsky, after all, [André] Masson, okay, real artists, that's true. But his teaching-

MS. BERMAN: What does he teach?

MR. KAINEN: He takes people who have a little bit of experience, and he teaches them intaglio printmaking, mainly in color. But they all learn the deep etch method, whereby you can get different colors on one plate in one printing.

MRS. KAINEN: We have some prints upstairs. Avis might like to see what he was doing-

MR. KAINEN: It was quite remarkable.

MRS. KAINEN: In the '40s.

MR. KAINEN: In the early '40s.

MRS. KAINEN: Late '30s.

MR. KAINEN: His color was very strange. That is, he'd have green and violet side by side, and sort of acid yellows and greens next to oranges and so forth. So people said Hayter was not a good colorist. A great engraver, but his color I couldn't stand. But 15 years later you had op art, psychedelic art, and Hayter had done this much earlier. It's strange. However, it will take a long time for that to straighten out.

MS. BERMAN: Now I want to I guess pretty much finish up with your time at the NCFA. So I'd like to know I guess the circumstances, why you decided to go there and what needed to be done.

MR. KAINEN: Well, when I was at the old Division of Graphic Arts-was this before I got the divorce or after?

MRS. KAINEN: Before.

MS. BERMAN: Well, you went in 1966 to the NCFA.

MR. KAINEN: Oh yes. I wanted to quit. And I told them I was quitting. I went to see the personnel manager. I said, "I'm quitting." He said, "You can't quit. You'll lose your pension." I said, "I don't care. So I have to make a living some way," but I didn't want to spend all my time there. He said, "How can you leave all this money? You'll need it."

Anyway, David Scott said, "Work two days a week, work three days a week. You're supposed to work more than half a week in order to receive any payment." So I said, "Three days is too much." So David Scott, who was director of the National Collection then said, "Well, just work two days a week. We'll iron it out." So they allowed me to work two days a week, supposedly. I got paid for two days a week. But then Scott would always arrange meetings on the day that I wasn't scheduled to be there. So it wound up with me working more than that and I was getting only two days a week pay. In the meantime, I could keep my pension. But I really wanted to quit. I said poverty might be good for me. I'd make a living somehow. I'd have classes and do something. Other artists have done it. I was talked into working two days a week. But then of course I'd go on field trips and paint more, I got a lot more work done.

Of course, my wife then started to look around for some kind of job. She got a little job somewhere.

MS. BERMAN: What was the collection like as you found it and what did you decide had to be done?

MR. KAINEN:

The National Collection of Fine Arts?

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MR. KAINEN: I was in charge of prints, drawings. But the only prints and drawings there consisted of a body of prints by the Chicago Society of Etchers, a society mainly active in the '20s and early '30s, the most uninspired print makers of the period, absolutely dead. They had one or two Whistlers and that was about it. So I really had to start from scratch. But I knew the dealers. I had very little money to begin with. So I started with the older artists, mainly with the Ashcan group. I got [John] Sloans and I got a drawing by [George] Luks for about \$75. You know, you could do it in those days. And I started building up.

Then one day I was making out my annual report. I saw that I could get all I wanted for equipment-

MS. BERMAN: This is still in the NCFA. This isn't the original print place. I'm asking you in 1960-

MR. KAINEN: Oh, no, the NCFA. I'm getting this mixed up. I did have a little money at the NCFA.

MRS. KAINEN: You had a lot of artists, too.

MR. KAINEN: Yes. Now I also put on shows. I'm getting them mixed up. I have to remember it was after '66.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MR. KAINEN: Yes. I built it up. We had some funds, but not much.

MS. BERMAN: Excuse me for interrupting you, but just to get things clear.

In other words, at the NCFA, it wasn't the Chicago Society of Etchers. That was at the Graphic Arts when you arrived.

MR. KAINEN: That was the Graphic Arts when I arrived. That was the old place.

MS. BERMAN: Right, when you arrived in 1942. But what I'm asking is, in 1966 what did you find at the NCFA collection of prints and drawings?

MR. KAINEN: The NCFA they had very little. They did have a couple Whistlers. Not much was—they had what was given to them. They didn't have much. So I had to start really from scratch, but I knew some of the smaller dealers like Miriam Rodine [ph]. And I built up something. You know, Janet Flint we had there. I'm trying to remember how I built them up.

MRS. KAINEN: You went to lots of artists, too, for gifts.

MR. KAINEN: Oh yes, that's true. Seong Moy and people like that. Moy was earlier. I'm afraid that was still the old place.

MRS. KAINEN: The problem was there was no place to receive American work at the NCFA. And they've never been able to get that American work transferred out of that old division. There was a fight with the—a bureaucracy fight. Obviously, the donors were giving it to NCFA, but it wasn't in existence at the time.

MS. BERMAN: Did you actually have a plan at the NCFA of what you were going to try to get first or it was whatever you could get?

MR. KAINEN: I was trying to get the older artists first. But there came a time when I received a letter from a woman in Arizona who said that she had been a friend of Jackson Pollock's and he had given her a lithograph dedicated to her. Now she wanted to sell it. So I wrote to her and said, "Could you send it to me? I'd like to see it." So she sent it and it was signed "For Fern Miners," a wonderful lithograph.

I told Dr. Scott, "Of course, we have to have this. I'll offer her \$300." He said, "Make it \$250." I said, "Let's not quibble because it's about the lowest I can ask for it." So I wrote to her and told her that we'd like to have it and how was \$300. So she accepted it. So we got that. It was still early.

MRS. KAINEN: Was it Tatiana Grossman?

MR. KAINEN: Tatiana Grossman came there at the very beginning, her husband driving and she'd bring in the stuff. I bought Jasper Johns's *Coat Hanger* for \$75. I used to buy from her. Larry Rivers, a lot of the stuff. She'd leave material there. She said, "Maybe you'll have more money later." So I bought quite a bit, and she wouldn't let me send it back, because she's so fussy about packaging. I said, "We'll send it in a crate." No, no, she'll pick it up. She doesn't want anything through the mail. So I bought from her during the whole period when I was there.

I know later on when I wanted to get that Newman, she gave me quite a reduction on it. She sent it in a crate, because I was one of the few people that was buying from her in the beginning. She wrote me a letter, too, saying how she appreciated my support in the early days.

MS. BERMAN: It seems to me that the NCFA prints and drawings are very catholic. There's really an attempt to get just about everyone's serious work in America. If you'd refine that, or what the slant was?

MR. KAINEN: I think that's a good idea, a good description. Anyone who was really serious and had some quality in the work is there, because I don't think it's up to the curator to take just what he thinks is best. There are artists who did a couple of good things, and artists who did a good body of work. I think the collection should reflect what was done in the United States, not so much the followers but the people who had some point of view and even some followers. After all followers of Whistler also were part of the vitality of the period.

I know some people didn't like pop art, some curators. They said they wouldn't take any pop art. But I took pop art because, you know, it's serious. It's a point of view.

MS. BERMAN: It was an aspect of the printmaking activity.

MR. KAINEN: Yes, that's right.

MS. BERMAN: In other words, you really felt it had to be national, and maybe some of these things were good to have as historical documents as it would turn out.

MR. KAINEN: Yes. It had to be inclusive rather than exclusive since this is a museum of American art. We had to take everything that was a valid expression.

MS. BERMAN: Did you collect the posters and some of those graphic works too, some of the advertising posters?

MR. KAINEN: Not too many.

MS. BERMAN: But the lines that you set up, is that still being followed largely or how has it changed since you left?

MR. KAINEN: Yes, I think so. Janet Flint did some very original work. She discovered the wood cutters, especially the women wood cutters of the '20s. There's some very good ones. We had some in the old Division of Graphic Arts, people who worked in a sort of Japanese method, but they were very good. And there were some men too. I mean, Gustave Baumann and [Bror Julius Olsson] Nordfeldt who were really good print makers.

MS. BERMAN: At the NCFA can you get gifts from private individuals, that is, gifts of money, or did you just have to get gifts of works of art?

MR. KAINEN: Well, I got gifts of works of art mainly, although you can take gifts of money.

MRS. KAINEN: The only thing now is the Smithsonian takes 30 percent of it.

MR. KAINEN: For administrative purposes.

MS. BERMAN: Who were some of the collectors who were interested in prints and drawings there that you were able to work with and who were generous?

MR. KAINEN: Well, the Weyhe Gallery, for example, before Gertrude Dennis was there, there was Martha Dickinson, much the same, but more amiable. She gave us a Goya lithograph. She thought it was defective. That is someone who had it wanted to donate it, because some of the lettering was missing. And she thought it wasn't worth much. But over the years I had been a big help to the Weyhe Gallery, because since Zigrosser left, they never had anyone who kept up with things. They even asked me what to price things at. Every time I'd go there, they had things to be identified. There were only certain curators they'd ask. They'd ask curators who don't expect anything in return.

You know, I told them what things mean on the print. "What does this 12 mean?" I said, "Don't you read auction catalogues?" They said, "Yes, but we can't remember everything."

I got paintings. There was a man in Provincetown named Emil Arnold who had quite a large collection. I got some paintings from him-Knaths, Soyer, Peter Busa, and others. I visited his home several times on 57th Street. I went there once with David Scott. I used to go to New York with Scott every once in a while. So he gave us quite a bit.

But there were some jealousies at the Smithsonian because I was collecting paintings. I was supposed to be the print man. And the person in charge of 20th century painting didn't like that very much, but, you know.

MRS. KAINEN: You could have gotten much more.

MR. KAINEN: Yes, because I knew the painters.

MS. BERMAN: Well, what do you think were the most important things you did do as curator at the NCFA?

MR. KAINEN: I wrote a little book on Canaletto's prints for the NCFA [Jacob Kainen. *Etchings of Canaletto*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Press, 1967]. I got a whole collection of Canaletto etchings. Was that the NCFA?

MRS. KAINEN: No.

MS. BERMAN: No. That's what I'm confused about. Plus the Goya lithograph that you were just collecting-

MR. KAINEN: The Goya lithograph was at the NCFA.

MS. BERMAN: Even though you were just collecting American art?

MR. KAINEN: Well, that's because-where was Peter Morse? That was at the old place.

MRS. KAINEN: That's the old division. I think at the NCFA mostly you just got very expensive things. Americans weren't very expensive. Jacob has a gift for knowing where things are. He would go to all kinds of strange places. Janet has it too.

MR. KAINEN: Even Hacker's bookshop.

MRS. KAINEN: Janet has it.

MR. KAINEN: I found they had some prints tucked away that nobody knew about. In fact, they were covered with dust. Well, you'd just try every place, that's all. You'd spend a lot of time. You'd learn a lot too. But after all, I was at the NCFA three, four years.

MS. BERMAN: Four years until Silverman came in.

MR. KAINEN: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: I was just wondering, not just buying, but if you had established any files, or did any shows or anything like that, that you feel had a lasting impact.

MRS. KAINEN: You did shows.

MR. KAINEN: I'm trying to remember.

MRS. KAINEN: You did the opening show.

MR. KAINEN: What was the opening? I can't remember.

MRS. KAINEN: I don't remember, but you must have had the print section when the museum opened. You did the Hayter show.

MS. BERMAN: Well, I guess that's it for questions. Thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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