



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Michael St. Clair,
1994 March 14 and April 28

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Michael St. Clair and Guest John Driscoll on April 28, 1994. The interview was conducted by Gail Stavitsky for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

[Tape 1, Side A (45-minute tape sides)]

[The moderately poor audio quality of this recording prevents comprehending some of MICHAEL ST. CLAIR's words-Ed.]

GAIL STAVITSKY: . . . with Michael St. Clair on March 14, 1993. Let's see how this works. Okay. Well, we can either start in order and talk about your early years and your early interests in art and move forward, or we don't have to be chronological, but sometimes that's easiest.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: The beginning is probably. . . . Is that what you really are curious about?

GAIL STAVITSKY: Um hmm. . . .

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: It's hard to define because I was raised in Oklahoma in the twenties-late teens and twenties-in [Mogey, Mobile], Oklahoma, and there wasn't much in the way of support for an art interest. But I found a little-in perhaps a flower shop or an antique store, that kind of. . . . I wanted to go on to college, but I wasn't able to because of the Depression and a circumstance in my family at that time. So I was determined to do something about my career-or education-so I went to the Kansas City Art Institute, and this was in the early thirties so it was rather a bleak time for going into a career in art. But I nevertheless did it, and I was able to be awarded a scholarship my first year so I could come back, and I did for three and a half years. And my second year there was the installation of Thomas Hart Benton as head of the art school. And I became his class monitor for full-time. That was part of my scholarship, I suppose. I finally tired of the impracticality of being a studio artist. I could see that I was not going to be able to make much of a living as a [painter]. So in the middle of the term I notified the director-[Roster] Howard, who was a very influential man in my station at that time-notified him that I was leaving-and he was very generous about giving me letters of introduction when I would arrive in New York. And one of the letters was to Jackson Pollock, who had been Benton's class monitor at the Art Students League-which I did, to find that Mr. Pollock, at that time at least, was doing little imitation Thomas Hart Bentons all over the studio, which didn't intrigue me very much.

GAIL STAVITSKY: This was about the mid-thirties?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: This was the late thirties. This would be, I think, around '38. So he wasn't, of course, any help to me because he, at that time, didn't have anything like the position he now has, of course. And I went from place to place including galleries at that time-there was Ferargil and Knoedler-and also went to [Art for] _____, which was located at that time on Madison Avenue at [Fifty-seventh, Fifty-second] Street. And, of course, looking for a job-anything to do-at any of these places was nonsense. So I knew that I had to do something, and there was an ad from Dale Carnegie advertising his How to Win Friends and Influence People, and I thought, if there's anyone ever that needed that, I did. So I signed up for a course from Dale Carnegie-which was very interesting. And during the course I met the people in the group, of course. There were about, I think, there were around a dozen, dozen and a half people. So we all got to know each other, got to be kind of a family. So the time came when I was to stand up and give my extemporaneous speech. They just called you at random to do this, to speak on any topic, any subject which you cared to, and so I thought, "Well, the most important thing I could speak about was a job, something to support myself so I could stay in New York." And I gave my qualifications, such as they were, and at the end of this speech I was handed a card from one of the members in the group, who was the sales manager for the Silver Cup Baking Company. When he handed it to me, he says, "If you're really looking for a job, here's my card. Look me up." And on the back was a [personal]. So I made a beeline for this Silver Cup Baking Company and ended up getting a job as a carrier. I was given a route to sell bread. I had to first learn how to drive one of their trucks. I had to apply for a chauffeur's license and had to be tested and all that. They gave me a test in one of their trucks, and they parked it on a great incline and I had to back it in and park it without touching the curb and all that, which I was miraculously able to do.

GAIL STAVITSKY: [laughs]

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: I doubt if I could do anything [Gail laughs] like that today. But, anyway, I got the job and it

took me into what is now the very exhausted part of the Bronx. It's the southeast Bronx, which is just terrible. But at that time it was a mixture of all ethnic groups. There was Irish, there was Jewish, there was German, there was Italian. You just name it. It was just marvelous, and having just come to New York, I had a marvelous time meeting these people, and I was able to do all right with this job that made me leave my bed at 3:30 in the morning to get to Long Island City in time to be on the route by 5:30.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Did this leave any time for painting?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Not a bit. But during this time there was a friend of mine who had kept doing this, and he suggested that this was not probably my life's work and suggested that I sometime look into maybe going back to the Art Students League-not going back, but going back to study and get back on track, so to speak. Which eventually I did. After about a year and a half or so I built up a little capital and reserve so I could feel comfortable about living in New York and going to the League, where I studied with George Gross and had a wonderful time with him as an instructor. And I felt very privileged to have that experience.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Was that a better experience than with Thomas Hart Benton?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Oh, Thomas Hart Benton was an interesting personality as a teacher. But as a teacher he was just that-a personality. He was not, in my view, a teacher at all. He only had his method of doing things, and that's what we all did, when we were making the clay models for the paintings that we were interested in doing. We did the sketch where we would make a little clay relief, sort of, and we couldn't get to the point of painting and all that. It was fascinating. It was a very interesting approach, but it didn't give you a very wide band of interest. Roster Howard, on the other hand, was a wonderful history teacher and had marvelous classes, which was part of the curriculum at the institute.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Well, I was curious-then Thomas Hart Benton, you felt, kind of encouraged people to paint in his style, more or less, whereas did someone like Gross maybe encourage you more to find your own direction?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Well, the contrast was that Gross came individually to each of us, and he would speak about the form that we were developing in the drawing class, and how the form would turn and the drawing should indicate that and then there was a poetic, almost, poetic, love for the experience. And he would almost always run over his time. It was a morning class, and by the time he would satisfy all of us it was well into the early afternoon. And this was such a gift that we all appreciated. Thomas Benton was always in controversy. I mean, at the time I was his student he was having a great feud with the critics here in New York-and that's why he left, you know, to go to the Midwest, because he thought that the critics weren't _____, and he had no patience with this _____. And he would do infrequent lectures and exchanges, but it was most always a show of Thomas Hart Benton. He was always on stage. He was very genial, and the students would be periodically invited to his home, where Rita Benton would make this big pot of spaghetti, which was delicious and we'd have lots of wine, and there was that kind of informality about, and [feminist], I guess, hospitality that was charming.

JOHN DRISCOLL: Was Benton at this time teaching out of a sense to teach, or was he teaching to support himself? Was he supporting himself with his art, or did he rely on the teaching at that point?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Well, I think it was an even balance between. I don't think he was. . . . I think he was doing well as [a process while] selling his art at that time, but not as well as he became, as . . .

JOHN DRISCOLL: Later.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: . . . later. Yes. No, I think he was very interested in having this cushion-this position teaching-because it gave him the comfort of pursuing his work. He was a very interesting artist, I think, in the way that he hears about what was going on around. In other words, the Mississippi flooded in those days, and he was quite taken with all the hardship and the devastation that it caused. He was also interesting, as far as a student is concerned, with having large commissions. He was during this time working on the Jefferson. . . . It's Jefferson, mural for the statehouse, I believe, in Missouri. And that was very interesting to see, which he was very generous about sharing with us, his approach that he took to the mural, which was very interesting. And the way he insisted that the . . . on the motion. He was very interested in the composition and the tensions and the movement and the motion within his work, in his painting. And he wanted that to be revealed in his mural. He would take you in, as he said, take you in one side and then push you back into the composition and then take you over the door and across the [frame]. You know, all of that was very dramatic and theatrical and very effective. I'm not sure, but I think some of his students helped in some way. No, not really. I think most of it was his own work. He may have hired someone to help him mechanically, but his _____.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Do you think that he had an impact on your aesthetic and your growing interest in American art and _____art field through his offices? [There's an unrecorded "blank" moment in the middle of this last sentence; it doesn't appear that the conversation or tape recorder was stopped-Ed.]

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes, I think he did. I think it. . . . Oh, one of the things that I think it did in that regard would be making it clear to us how much we were, up to this point, influenced by western Europe, and the influence that he had was suggesting that we had our own culture and that we had our own work and it was just as good, if not better, than anything from Europe or abroad. It wasn't that he discounted the Western culture, but he was just emphasizing the influence and that he felt that we [had] more or less been intimidated to a degree, [and, when] we were just coming out. So I think that was a very big influence.

GAIL STAVITSKY: It's interesting then. You had George Gross, a European artist then. You were studying with him at the Art Students League.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: But George Gross was just as enchanted with America as Thomas Benton or anyone I've ever met. He was just in love with America and just was endlessly praising ____.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Did you study with him the whole time you were at the League?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: It's the only. . . . I only had one class, and it was a short one. I think it was only a half year. And it was during that time that I said-or felt-that the world was changing very rapidly and that I had been away from home for quite a while and I thought maybe this could be a good chance to go home for a bit. Because I think we all knew what was in the wind and knew what was about to happen. So in order to make my journey home a little less expensive, perhaps, I asked George Gross, because he was a good friend of Boardman Robinson, and Boardman Robinson was then at Colorado Springs ____-he was head of the department-and I asked if he would mind recommending me for a scholarship so that I could go to Colorado Springs. George Gross was delighted and wrote a very handsome letter, and I was able to go, as a result of that, to the Colorado Springs [Fine Art Center]-in '40, I think it was, the summer of '40-where [Yashuo-Ed.] Kuniyoshi along with Boardman Robinson, of course, Adolph Dehn, Arnold Blanch, Doris Lee, and a whole coterie of artists were there at the same time, not studying but just working in and around the studio. And we'd go off on excursions, sketching the ____ scenery, painting, which was very interesting. [A police or fire siren at this point obscures some of the conversation.-Ed.]

GAIL STAVITSKY: Did you mention Kuniyoshi was one of the artists at the center ____?

JOHN DRISCOLL: Well, I recall looking through a book one time, and an illustration of a Kuniyoshi that was done in Colorado came out, and you sort of leaned over into the image, and so I remember that. I remember being there when he did this painting.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Yes.

JOHN DRISCOLL: You might want to talk about just some of the impressions you had of some of those artists that you met there.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Well, the impressions were. . . . There are not too many that I recall. We were all there in this group and doing our own thing, I think, not necessarily social. I think maybe Adolph Dehn and Doris Lee and Arnold Blanch, maybe they would socialize, but it was, as I said, a very short period, and I think most of us were-at least I was-not only intrigued in their company, being in their company, intrigued with [their ____], I was also enchanted with the country itself. The mountains. I had not ever, up to that time, experienced the beauty of the country that it is.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Did you paint a lot of landscapes as a result of that?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: I did some sketches and some material. . . . I did a painting that would be of that period. But they were sort of experimental works. By this time, I had a little departure from the studio and the work, and it was not just as easy as you might think to get back into painting. I did mostly drawings and that kind of work.

GAIL STAVITSKY: And how long were you studying in Colorado Springs?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: It was just that one summer session. After that, again I pursued "What am I going to do to live?" I made an application-I sent out a resume-all over the country, to see about work as an instructor. I sent it to everywhere-private schools and the like, ____, listing my credentials, and it was remarkable. I got a few replies from this, which was surprising to me. This was a suggestion that somebody made to me to do, you know, ____? So I had nothing to lose and I did this. And I was amazed to find that a few. . . . And I'm not sure but I think one of the schools was-I'm not sure-maybe [Hutchins] or one of the. . . . One school-or maybe more-would send back and say that they were sorry they didn't have anything at this time but they were very interested and they would keep the resume on file and so on. It was not a cold experience, in other words. So then I went back to Oklahoma at the end of this, and my family at that time were living in Oklahoma City-my mother and father-and I wanted to stay with them, and was able to get a job as art director for the Oklahoma City Art Center, I believe it was called. And the kind of influential guru of Oklahoma-not just Oklahoma City but Oklahoma-was a

woman by the name of Nan Sheets, and she was in charge of the government's art projects, and this art center in Oklahoma City was under her control, direction. And she gave me this job as head of this school, and I held that job until I was drafted into the service in '42, the summer of '42.

GAIL STAVITSKY: And then. . . . [laughs]

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Is this [a help, enough]?

GAIL STAVITSKY: This is fascinating, because we get to see how your career is evolving towards what you eventually became.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: And this was quite interesting. I was able to do a little work, but mostly I was spending my time teaching. I had a group that would work in the studio, such as it was. Some things were very inadequate. So we, in weather permitting, spent most of our time going out into the country.

JOHN DRISCOLL: There was an artist at that time by the name of Sheets. Was Nan Sheets related to him in some way.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes. Nan Sheets, N-a-n, was woman and she was an artist.

JOHN DRISCOLL: Wasn't there a Willard Sheets? Or Millard. Millard Sheets.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Yeah, that's right.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: You're thinking of Millard Sheets.

JOHN DRISCOLL: Yes.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Not related?

JOHN DRISCOLL: Not connected.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Not connected, no. She was a very powerful and effective bearer of the flame in Oklahoma, not just in Oklahoma City but in Tulsa and wherever. I think she was, for a long time, the leader-you know, the sort of the standing bearer of the flame, in a sense.

GAIL STAVITSKY: So she did a lot to encourage you?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Oh, yes. Of course, all of this was reinforcing. . . .

JOHN DRISCOLL: It seems in your description of this period, though, that it's a constant struggle between the desire to try and develop yourself as an artist with the very essential need of having to support yourself-doing everything from driving a bread truck to finally getting this post in Oklahoma City, and then you're there for, what, a year and a half, and then you're drafted into the military service. So it seems like a series of challenges every time you turned around.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Well, it began even before this, because when I was in-if this is of any interest-when I was studying at Kansas City, I would, of course, have my summers free, and I would take a job working with a gang [up] working on the pipeline in Oklahoma, which was very rugged and very tough work. In fact, between high school and my going off to Kansas City there was a year in which I worked full-time on this job, which was a real test of something or other. But it paid very well, and I was able to accumulate some funds to go _____. And I was also fortunate enough that they allowed me to come back during the summers when I'd come home from my art school to go back to work on the pipeline. So, yes, the answer is I always had to [parcel, hustle] my ambitions to my pocketbook.

JOHN DRISCOLL: And then everything was interrupted by the Second World War.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: That's correct.

JOHN DRISCOLL: And what happened after the War? Did you go back to Oklahoma? Did you come. . . .

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: I was discharged in. . . . I was not enlisted; I was . . .

JOHN DRISCOLL: Drafted.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: . . . drafted in Oklahoma, so I had to go back to where I had been drafted. And I only spent a very short time, because I had to get on with it. I'd had enough holiday, so to speak. [all chuckle] And I couldn't wait to get back to New York and did immediately. But then the whole thing started all over again. "Now what am

I going to do about supporting myself?" And I thought of going to Columbia Teacher's College on the G.I. Bill, and I tried that for a brief try, but I wasn't relaxed and geared to that after my other experiences. It was much too slow-paced for my psyche at that time. So I ended up working at the Museum of Modern Art, working behind the counter when they were just beginning to sell calendars and reproductions and various things. And that was in the early days of that enterprise, which has taken over today. And it was very interesting to have Georgia O'Keeffe come walking in past the counter, going up to see [Alfred-Ed.] Barr. She always was very outstanding in her appearance, but not particularly friendly or social.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Were any of the artists social? I mean, would come up and talk to you, at that time?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Just in the most casual way, because they weren't interested in reproductions, and it was just kind of like. . . . It wasn't any kind of a job, except just a service to sell what you could. We didn't even have the importance of selling tickets _____. We just _____.

GAIL STAVITSKY: I guess that probably gave you an opportunity to get to know the collections of the Museum of Modern Art?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes. And in those days, of course, the museum was so much smaller than it is now. Of course, it was just a candy store for me. Just everything was there.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Although it usually didn't have that much American art there at that point.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: That's right. The Whitney was still down on Eighth Street in those days, and the Whitney was rather disappointing, I thought, to have survived as well as it did in that location. But, of course, they moved up eventually and came closer to the Museum of Modern Art, as an extension. But that was much later than my [earlier years, earlier days] there.

GAIL STAVITSKY: So you were at MOMA for . . . was that for a few years and then you moved on to something else right after that?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: It was pretty meager pickings while I was at MOMA. Then I was fortunate to get a job as a freelance artist for Macy's in their display and interior design department. The director was very good for me, because he just thought I could do anything, and he would give me all kinds of assignments that were just ridiculous, in a way. It was a job, and I liked it very much because I didn't have to punch that timeclock. I could come and go as I pleased, and had my wonderful place to work, and that went on for quite a while.

GAIL STAVITSKY: So was that something that you kept doing on a freelance basis for a number of years while you took other work on?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: I had practically by this time been divorced from the easel-you know, working for myself-and was doing these commissions-you know, whatever assignments I would get-and would do that. And it entailed all kinds of things, like he would be designing a room, say, a bedroom, and promoting a chintz, a flowered chintz, as an example. And he would circle one motif in this flowered chintz, and he'd say, "Now I'd like that transferred to the wall." And [you we] had to transfer it, not just a suggested facsimile-and that kind of thing. I would help with the Christmas displays, what to do about this and that department, and then we got this work on the mechanics of how many of this and how many of that. Well, this did continue for quite a while, and I also did some freelance work outside of Macy's. One series of commissions I took were doing window displays for [Russig's]. It was a Fifth Avenue ladies ready-to-wear store on Fifth Avenue that had a format of lining [up] the mannequins-maybe six or more mannequins-all with the same gesture and with just a slightly modified dress on each of the mannequins. And it went on like that. You know, they had a series of windows. So they wanted to break that kind of look, so they hired me to come in, and I would do large free-form designs on no-seam paper that would be put up. I would submit a design that I figured I could accomplish in limited time, because this was a very taxing assignment. I had my other work I mentioned, at Macy's, and then I would leave there and go to this task, and by about a seven or eight o'clock that no-seam paper would be up so I could begin working. I would work one window to the other and sometimes until three or four in the morning. It was very high-ceilinged, and I'd have to use the ladder, but I would use big brushes and large energized strokes. [laughter] It was really quite interesting and quite effective. In fact. . . .

[Tape 1, Side B]

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: . . . so, anyway, at Bergdorf Goodman they have . . . not the same thing but it's a similar kind of treatment of their windows.

JOHN DRISCOLL: Right now.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Did you see them?

JOHN DRISCOLL: Yeah, I'm not sure if I saw this one. I saw the one on Friday

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: This black and white?

JOHN DRISCOLL: Yes.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: There's a suggestion of a frame ____ [moves away from microphone]

GAIL STAVITSKY: It sounds like this all kept you so busy that it was probably hard to get back to some of your original interests in gallery work and. . . .

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: That's true. Well, this went on and on, and I had some other experiences, not necessarily related to what I ended up doing. To find that I was in the fifties I was running out of steam at this endeavor. It was dead end for me. So I was approached by the people at Babcock, the estate. When Carmine DaLesio passed, why I was approached to come to the Babcock Galleries, which I did, with no preparation in the gallery business at all. But, knowing that the artist needs someone. . . . I experienced how much the artist needs help. It made me very eager to pursue this avenue.

GAIL STAVITSKY: How had you been approached? They had known about your work in general?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes. It turned out that the lawyer handling the estate had known me for some time, and in fact had been sort of, shall we say, not necessarily stressed but concerned about the fact that I wasn't pursuing my work as an artist. When this came along, he thought that I would be very good in this position. And it was a great challenge for me, because I had a group of artists that were associated with the gallery, and of this tradition that the gallery had. So it was a big challenge that I accepted ____.

GAIL STAVITSKY: I think you were mentioning earlier that as far as the history of the gallery that was not necessarily. . . . You were aware of it in a general sense, what you were inheriting, but not really the details of the history going back to 1852 and its various directors.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: No, it's true. I learned of that, but I was not that familiar with the art world, actually. [My link was, I linked, the] with the commercial art world. You have to recall that during the fifties the climate of the art world was just becoming alive again and it was just beginning to stir. It was in the fifties that Babcock Gallery moved from Fifty-seventh Street up to 805 Madison, where it was located when I came in. Because Parke-Bernet [auction house (now owned by Sotheby's)-Ed.] had moved up on Madison Avenue, and the rents were becoming very prohibitive here in the Fifty-seventh Street area. So what there was of the art community moved along with Parke- Bernet. You know, Graham and the other galleries ____.

GAIL STAVITSKY: And you were mentioning that the change at that time was the art galleries just beginning to stir itself from a period of sleepiness from right after the War?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: That's right. The whole art movement, including the galleries, of course. There wouldn't be a gallery without art movements, you know? But I remember that the Gallery of Non-objective Art on Fifty-something Street and Madison Avenue where the showing of very advanced art was being seen. I'm not sure but I think it may have been part of Peggy Guggenheim's . . . [Museum of Non Objective Painting (later the Guggenheim Museum), 24 E. 54th Street-Ed.]

JOHN DRISCOLL: I think so.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: . . . first venture. But that was, you know, primitive . . .

JOHN DRISCOLL: You go ahead. I just have to check the. . . . [leaves temporarily?-Ed.]

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: . . . in the forming days of what is now the New York art scene. There was a lot of activity, and it was building all the time in the fifties, but it didn't just happen overnight. Things still continued, this movement, into the sixties, and of course we're ____ with ____.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Now, for you was it different inheriting essentially the stable of artists that you inherited when you became director of a certain group of nineteenth-century artists-[George-Ed.] Inness, [Albert? Worth?-Ed.] Ryder, and [Ralph Albert- Ed.] Blakelock-and then a group of earlier twentieth-century American modernists? And was it hard getting attention for these, say, older artists at a time when Abstract Expressionism is the new, great movement and soon to be followed by Pop Art, and all of this. You know, there's all of this attention on contemporary American. I wonder what it was like for you dealing with some of the earlier American modernists and masters, getting attention for them.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Well, there was a contrast, and it was really a situation of a complement, in a way. There was a residue when I came to the gallery of not many but a few Thomas Eakins, for example, and, of course,

Blakelock, Inness, and Ryder and so on. But there was a fresh air-I mean, a fresh spirit that was coming in, and I was quite taken with Marsden Hartley that was in the gallery at the time, as well as Alfred Maurer, and they were in good supply-a good inventory of these two particular artists. And it was in the spirit of what was taking place at that time. There was more play, more interest I thought, [in the, than] Inness and the more traditional nineteenth-century painters. We also had a wonderful opportunity with Childe Hassam in those days. And I was also very interested-having, as I said earlier, being an artist, trying to survive as one-I also had an interest in contemporary artists that were already in the gallery. There was Sol Wilson and Martin Friedman and a whole stable of artists. Sam Adler and so on. And I was eager to perform to them, if possible, because I felt that I had inherited _____, and I didn't seek them out, but I wanted to do as well as Carmine DaLesio, my predecessor.

GAIL STAVITSKY: But of all of these artists, was Marsden Hartley the one who interested you the most?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Well, he was the one that kept rising with the tide, and he is one that I was fortunate enough to be able to have in inventory, due to Hudson Walker, who was formerly an art dealer that showed Marsden Hartley. As a result, I had a good inventory and was able to supply the gallery with marvelous works.

GAIL STAVITSKY: And he also developed quite a collection on his own. I believe it's in Minnesota.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: What?

GAIL STAVITSKY: Didn't Walker also develop quite a collection that's at the University of Minnesota?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes. The story is that he and the book store. . . .

JOHN DRISCOLL: Oh, [Ways, Weighs] Book Store.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yeha, Way. When. . . . Oh, that wouldn't apply. I was backward, was thinking of the reference to Alfred Maurer. The collection that you speak of as far as Marsden Hartley, I think was the result of his connection as a dealer. I think he supported or helped Hartley by buying his works and acquired this collection in that way. I believe that's correct.

JOHN DRISCOLL: Yeah, I think in the late thirties Hartley had sort of drifted away from [Alfred-Ed.] Stieglitz and had tried to connect, probably, with Edith Halpert, and if I'm not mistaken she had actually given him a show in the mid-thirties. But maybe it didn't work out, so that at some point in there Walker started to show Hartley's work, and I think was his patron for the last years of the thirties and then till Hartley's death.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: You know, that Walker. Walker was only short-lived. As I. . . .

JOHN DRISCOLL: I think by the time the Second World War broke out, Walker was finished as a dealer, that he had abandoned being a dealer. Is that right?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes, I think prior to that.

JOHN DRISCOLL: Okay.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: And at the time of Hartley's death, he was with [Rosenberg].

JOHN DRISCOLL: Okay.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: I think Walker's gallery was open about a year. Something like that. Very short. And it was in that very difficult period when people-you know, in the thirties, were not buying paintings.

GAIL STAVITSKY: So then you became the primary dealer handling Hartley's work from '59 onwards?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Well, I think, I was perhaps the leading gallery, but not solely the leader because Bertha Schaefer had Hartleys, and there was still Rosenberg, who had Hartleys, and there were other people. I was perhaps promoting the work perhaps more than other galleries.

GAIL STAVITSKY: You were the most devoted, it sounds like.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Really, as I said at the beginning, it has always increased. It just continues to rise with your enthusiasm, and your reward is always there, you know, constantly.

GAIL STAVITSKY: It sounds like also you played a big role in the rise of Hartley's reputation in other people's eyes, in terms of a lot of museums acquired Hartley's work from you.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Well, Carmine DaLesio had done quite well with Hartley. Although Carmine DaLesio. . . . I

never met him, but I feel that he was sort of second-chancing Marsden Hartley. He didn't quite understand or appreciate what Marsden Hartley was about. However, he made some important sales to museums of his work _____.

GAIL STAVITSKY: I think you were just saying that there was a book about . . . photographs of Hartley's work that. . . .

JOHN DRISCOLL: Yeah, that we could get out, maybe, some of the Hartley photographs and you could look at those. Okay? I think Gail's question was geared towards an inventory that I made a couple of years ago of Hartleys that you had handled that found their way into public collections, and I think I made a list, came up with fifty or sixty, starting with the National Gallery and going through the entire list of American museums. But I can bring one of those books out, and we can sort of look at some of the paintings, and any recollections or thoughts that you have might be of interest.

GAIL STAVITSKY: I know there's so many artists that you [would have to be] involved with that it's hard to focus on one, but I think Hartley seems to be one you were very interested in.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Well, he is. I would and I wouldn't like to know him. In fact, it's just as well at times not to know an artist, because _____.

GAIL STAVITSKY: I know you were mentioning several contemporary artists that you were promoting, and some of them weren't always as easy to work with as _____.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: No, and that's unfortunate that it's like that. For example, I had a show scheduled by Carmen DeLisio. He was suddenly taken, you know, and so his schedule was presented to me, and one of the artists scheduled for exhibition was Sam Adler. [That, Then] I responded to very keenly and was looking forward to that particular exhibition. But he decided that he wanted to leave the gallery. He didn't know my performance and he had an offer from another dealer and left. But then soon after that he said he made a mistake and he wanted to come back. So I gave him another show and then, by george, he up and goes with another dealer. So you can't win them all.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Yeah, right. [chuckles]

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: I liked his work very much.

JOHN DRISCOLL: This is the first book of photographs. It takes into account 1908, 1909, up to 1916.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Oh, yes. This particular one is thought to be one of his [as a studio, as a student], but it's never been ascertained as to whether it was or wasn't by Hartley.

JOHN DRISCOLL: Do you know where that picture is now?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: No, I don't.

JOHN DRISCOLL: This is just an early still life, photo number . . . inventory. . . .

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Photo, isn't it?

JOHN DRISCOLL: Yeah, negative number 779. But it must be a very early picture of 1905 or '06.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Elizabeth McCausland was very interested, of course-as you know-in Marsden Hartley, and I don't know if it's through her auspices that this came into my hands or not. But she wasn't able to do much about that.

JOHN DRISCOLL: Now this one is Storm Clouds, Maine, at the Walker Art Center from 1908.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yeah. Now this one was. . . . I think we just have this here as a record, not as one that passed through our hands.

JOHN DRISCOLL: Okay.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: This one did. This was the Carnival of Autumn. Do you want the catalog number?

JOHN DRISCOLL: No, I think, when we're talking about some of these, just to give the title. This is Carnival at Autumn, and that's at . . . is that at Boston now?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: This is at Boston, yes.

JOHN DRISCOLL: The 1908 Hartley at Boston.

GAIL STAVITSKY: The Museum of Fine Arts?

JOHN DRISCOLL: Yes.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes.

JOHN DRISCOLL: It's a marvelous picture.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: I think the director at the time, who's now . . . his son is at _____, isn't he?

JOHN DRISCOLL: Oh, Rathbone. Perry Rathbone.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: [Right, You're right].

JOHN DRISCOLL: Did Perry buy this for the museum?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yeah.

GAIL STAVITSKY: That's the kind of work that always makes me wonder if Hartley knew of someone like [Giovanni-Ed.] Segantini at all.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Um hmm.

JOHN DRISCOLL: Oh, yeah. I'm sure he did.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Well, there's been much linkage _____ and _____ time, yeah. But Segantini is. . . .

JOHN DRISCOLL: Even [Ferdinand-Ed.] Hodler in some way comes to mind.

GAIL STAVITSKY: By the way, you mentioned Edith Halpert earlier and her interest in Hartley. I was wondering if you knew Edith Halpert?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Oh, yes. Yes, indeed.

GAIL STAVITSKY: She has such a strong reputation, too . . .

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Very.

GAIL STAVITSKY: . . . as being one of the earliest of the modern American art galleries.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: She was a real pioneer. I think that there's hardly anyone I can mention of that period that had quite the personality and, I would say, the accomplishment of Edith Halpert. She had a wonderful stable. And it was not. . . . I know Edith. . . . Let's see, how to put this? The feeling was that if Edith Halpert showed your work that was of very great value and importance, and the artists [would jump into that OR: would . . . got into that]. She was very positive in arranging shows. I think very. . . . I don't know what it was about her and Hartley, however. I don't think that she. . . . I think she admired Hartley, but I don't think they ever had a going relationship for some reason. Maybe she just was [didn't need] another artist, or something like that _____. But Edith was able to survive, you know, in one location. I think she . . . I don't think ever moved her gallery. The art world moved around her, in other words. She stayed at the same place. Which is interesting.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Now, as far as your changes, I know they're kind of documented in here, but you were at 805 Madison at the beginning of your. . . .

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Of my [day], yes.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Yeah, and that was for quite a while that you . . . it was located there?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes.

GAIL STAVITSKY: And there was the move to, for the record . . .

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: . . . 67th Street.

GAIL STAVITSKY: . . . to 67th Street, and then that's when you came aboard.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Well, I was there before.

JOHN DRISCOLL: Michael was at 805 for . . . it must have been eighteen years-well, or more-from '59 to '77, '78? The first show at 20 East 67th, was that the [John F.-Ed.] [Kensett] drawing show?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Not the first.

JOHN DRISCOLL: That was not the first?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: No.

JOHN DRISCOLL: Then it must have been in '77 then. . . .

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: It was in the early seventies, I know that.

JOHN DRISCOLL: Because the Kensett show was '78, and I think that was fairly early.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Right.

JOHN DRISCOLL: So he was at 805 Madison for eighteen years or thereabouts, and then went to 20 East 67th Street and we were there until 1990. And I joined the gallery in 1987, so you were there for a good long time, too-at 20 East 67th Street.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yeah, quite a while. We had the Hartley show, as well. I think that preceded the. . . . Or was that after the Kensett?

GAIL STAVITSKY: This one of 1980?

JOHN DRISCOLL: Yeah.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: That was after the . . .

JOHN DRISCOLL: That was after Kensett, yeah.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Actually, that would be an interesting question to ask. When you started in 1959, what was the first show that you put together?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Well, as I say, when I came in there were scheduled exhibitions.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Ah, yeah.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: About the first exhibition under my auspices was the. . . . I had a two-part show. I was able to acquire a vast collection of Childe Hassams, and I had a two-part show of Childe Hassam. The first part was oils and the second part was pastels and watercolors. It was really a knock-out of a show.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Was he appreciated that much at that time?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Childe Hassam?

GAIL STAVITSKY: Yeah.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes. Yes, he was. In fact, I would say that Childe Hassam has had a pretty steady course or position all the way through my experience. He may have been even richer at that particular moment than he is today, but [our, however]. . . . See, the point must be made that there are fewer opportunities for exhibitions or _____ work has been sold in place but largely out of the market at this time. So, consequently, it makes it a problem.

GAIL STAVITSKY: So there were still the opportunities.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes.

GAIL STAVITSKY: But then in the case of Hartley at that time, you were talking about his reputation rising, so I imagine that at that time there wasn't necessarily that much appreciation of his work when you first . . .

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Of Marsden Hartley?

GAIL STAVITSKY: Yeah, when you first started working with it.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: There was interest. Morbid curiosity. It was largely curiosity. I'm speaking of the public at large, not the museum _____ and so forth. I think that segment has always had a very keen interest in Marsden

Hartley that has never waned. But the public at large was, in the early days of Marsden Hartley, curious about [it], and [I noticed] not until I had a number of shows, and one of the last shows. . . . It turned out to be a real event for the gallery, and it was signaled by the attention that the young artists, the students, were finding in his work, and they were coming in clusters and groups, and they would sit in the gallery and discuss the work and make notes, and it was quite a thrilling experience. You know, these strange-strangers to me. . . . The word was out that Marsden Hartley was being shown and they would not just. . . . It was day after day. It just went on. So that's what I mean, I guess, by the rising tide.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Did you notice a big change around the time of the bicentennial? I'm thinking of, say, artists like Alfred Maurer, who people probably know the least about him among the three that we've been talking about-Hassam, Hartley, and Maurer. And then I believe it was around that time-maybe a little bit earlier than that-that the National Collection of Fine Arts finally did a major retrospective of his work, and it seems like the attention, in terms of focusing on these artists, has been a little slow in coming. I wonder if you noticed it kind of growing around that time in the early seventies, maybe culminating in the bicentennial year?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: The effect that the bicentennial year had, in my experience, was on the attention given people like the _____, you know, the . . .

JOHN DRISCOLL: The Hudson River [school, School] artists?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Hudson River. . . . and how it had. . . . I don't know, it was kind of magic about the way the interest was turned to the nineteenth century, and I think that was largely due to the centennial. I think a lot of it was. About the subject of Alfred Maurer, there's a whole history of misfortune that plagued Alfred Maurer from his earliest to his latest days, and it's always been a mystery to my part of the art world about why this is, what has happened. Everything in the world has happened that could happen to. . . . For example, I had a show of Maurer's work-just a minor example-and it was a beautiful show. It was again a two-part show that I had arranged in cooperation with the University of Minnesota. I had worked from their collection and what I had. One section was abstract still-life and the other was figurative. But the whole time of this exhibition the New York Times was on strike.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Ohhh!

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: There was absolutely no way of communicating. That's an example of what I mean when I [say] he's been plagued.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Yeah. _____.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: So the only message that we had for the New York public was to advertise the show in the Christian Science Monitor, and that helped a little but it wasn't the same.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Sounds like you had better luck with Hartley. I think you were saying there were twenty-five Hartley shows that you put together?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: I don't know the number.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Is that what you were saying?

JOHN DRISCOLL: I can't remember the number either, but starting. . . . When did you first. . . . If you start in, was it 1962 or '61 that you maybe had your first Harley exhibition. . . .

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: I think I had the first Hartley exhibition in '60. Right after _____.

JOHN DRISCOLL: In 60? So then over the years. . . . And your efforts on that probably saw some reward in terms of the show that Barbara Haskell did of Hartley's work at the Whitney in the seventies. That was probably the first public exposure for Hartley at a major New York museum like that in some time.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: There were traveling exhibitions of selected works from the Walker, from the center, but there were no retrospectives until Barbara Haskell came along. And, unfortunately, I believe it's true that the budget for that was greatly reduced, and so that she wasn't able to achieve what she had wanted to be [showing, shown].

GAIL STAVITSKY: I don't know if we want to go through more of these or. . . .

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: I don't know. . . .

JOHN DRISCOLL: Maybe what we should do at this point is maybe Michael and I should sit down and go through some of the exhibition records and some of the paintings that he's handled and isolate some of the more

significant or important moments in his career and then have you come back and we could be more specific about addressing. . . . What do you think of that sort of idea, Michael?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Fine.

GAIL STAVITSKY: That would be fine with me. Sure.

JOHN DRISCOLL: Because I'm reminded of all of the. . . .

[Interruption in taping]

JOHN DRISCOLL: [We] can go over this later.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Oh, okay.

JOHN DRISCOLL: It was the first exhibition of its kind ever mounted by any Hudson River school artist.

GAIL STAVITSKY: This was the Kensett show in nineteen . . .

JOHN DRISCOLL: No, this was the Kensett drawings exhibition. There had been exhibitions that surveyed the field of Hudson River school drawings, but there'd never been an exhibition which focused on the drawings of a Hudson River school artist, and Michael brought a group of these Kensett drawings to my attention. I was at Penn State. He encouraged me to do some research on these, and we not only got the research done but we were able to produce a catalog that for the first time identified exactly what the technical and stylistic elements of the Kensett drawings were, but also to eliminate [a, the] whole range of drawings from the National Gallery, the MFA in Boston [Museum of Fine Arts-Ed.], and the Detroit Art Institute that had always been attributed to Kensett. We were able to say, "These are absolutely not by Kensett." And, of course, the Hudson River Museum then picked up on this, and much to their credit, they subsequently did exhibitions of the drawings of Asher B. Durand, [Jasper-Ed.] Cropsey, Thomas Cole, and a whole group of these Hudson River school artists. But that was an initiative that Michael took that has turned out to be very important in terms of subsequent scholarship on the drawings of these Hudson River school artists.

GAIL STAVITSKY: And when was that show?

JOHN DRISCOLL: That show was in 1977-78. It was shown at what is now the Palmer Museum at Penn State and then Michael showed it here in New York.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: 20 East 67th Street.

JOHN DRISCOLL: Yeah. And when it hit New York it really created tremendous interest both among collectors and among museum people to suddenly explore this whole area of American art history, the drawings of Hudson River school artists, that had never been thoroughly explored before. And I don't want to overshadow some of the work. There was a show at the Brooklyn Museum of Hudson River school artists' drawings and some of these surveys, but for the first time people began. . . . And I remember John Caldwell, who at that time was a curator working with Jack Howat at the Met; he was particularly excited about this notion of exploring the graphic work of a single Hudson River school artist. And when we were discussing with him the idea of doing the Kensett show, we asked him specifically if we should put some paintings in, and he discouraged it very heavily. He said, "Don't do that. Don't detract from the drawings by putting in a painting-or a group of paintings-because then people will come and they'll just look at the paintings."

GAIL STAVITSKY: Right.

JOHN DRISCOLL: So we did the show. We took his advice and just focused on the drawings. And if there was a painting that was involved in terms of being the product of a preliminary sketch or something, we illustrated it in the catalog or whatever. But. . . .

GAIL STAVITSKY: I don't know if we want to get into this another time, but I'd be very interested in hearing how you discovered these drawings, and then brought them to John's attention.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: That, my dear, is one of the errant causes, I suppose, of the whole art world at large. Sometimes it's possible to reveal that, you know, and. . . .

[Tape 2, Side A]

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Sometimes it's possible to reveal that, you know, and there are other times when it's simply not. Sometimes. . . . Oh, I'll give you an example of. . . .

[Interruption in taping]

GAIL STAVITSKY: Okay, I think we're okay here [with the tape recorder-Ed.], just making that this is all going all right here. Okay, actually, to tell you the truth, the first question that I had, had to do with the Hassam-that was actually on the top of my list-the painting that was sold to the Brooklyn Museum-because I understand that that was maybe one of your earliest major sales to a museum.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes, that was early on in the sixties, early sixties. And it was soon after I acquired this collection of Hassams that came to me. And, of course, this was one of the outstanding paintings of the collection. It was, of course, a pleasure to me to have it go to the Brooklyn Museum. It represented a very encouraging moment for me, since I hadn't at that time been connected to the gallery for very long. I don't know. . . .

JOHN DRISCOLL: Since we're talking about Childe Hassam, why don't you recount for us what, in retrospect, seems like the extraordinary experience to acquire a group of Hassams and the dimensional magnitude of what you acquired.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Well, it was a collection from my. . . . John Fox of Boston, a collector, who had been collecting everything that he could lay his hands on, I gather, over a number of years, and he found himself in a financial [depression, pressure] that made it necessary for him to raise funds and he was liquidating the collection, and one day he came in to see me, looked around and said, "Would you be interested in these paintings?" And I said, ["I don't know."] And on second thought he said, "Oh, no, I don't think you would be," and made reference to the fact that it was a small gallery and he was looking for someone to take over the whole. . . . And he said, "I don't want to sell it just a piecemeal. I want to sell the whole collection." So the work was brought to New York and put in some associate or friend of his rug sales room somewhere on 57th Street, and we were allowed to go in and look at this collection of watercolors, pastels. [There is an ambiguity here: MICHAEL ST. CLAIR may be saying that both watercolors and pastels were in the collection or he may be correcting himself to saying "pastels" instead of "watercolors"-Ed.]. In depth, they were just a magnificent collection. And oils, as well. But in addition to this there were a number of oils that had been put at Parke-Bernet to sell, you know, and they didn't make the reserve. So he was really desperate to get hands on these funds, so we were able to acquire those paintings in addition to the ones that we were reviewing previously. So the whole collection came out to be close to a hundred. I don't remember the exact number, but it was a very impressive collection. And, of course, as soon as I could I arranged a number of exhibitions of his work, and one was on the watercolor and pastels and another was on the [oils]. This was not a very upbeat time in the art world when all this was taking place. Otherwise, had it. . . . Had such a thing happened today, of course, they would have gone in no time.

JOHN DRISCOLL: It's hard enough to find one Childe Hassam today . . .

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: That's true.

JOHN DRISCOLL: . . . let alone think about buying a hundred of them at once.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: [chuckles] Exactly.

GAIL STAVITSKY: When was this again that this happened?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: I believe it was in the. . . . It was prior to the sale that I made to [Frombach, Grumbach] with the Brooklyn Museum, and the Brooklyn Museum I think acquired that in '62.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Yes, it was.

JOHN DRISCOLL: Yes, 1962.

GAIL STAVITSKY: So it was before 1962. Boy.

JOHN DRISCOLL: Late Afternoon, New York Winter, of 1900, that oil.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Right.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Now, did the oil actually come out of this group of one hundred?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Oh, I see.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: It was one, I believe, one of the ones that had been offered at Parke-Bernet.

GAIL STAVITSKY: I see.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: We just missed out on the. . . . In this ____ I'm referring to, this man had The House of Flowers, this. . . .

JOHN DRISCOLL: Oh, Arthur Altschul's picture?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes. That was part of this group. But Nan Fox, who was offering these, had gone to Milch [Gallery-Ed.], around the corner from where I was, and Milch gobbled that up before I even had a chance [laughter], and he was discouraged with Milch because Milch said that he wanted to pick and choose, and he didn't want this whole collection, because he apparently had inventory of Hassam at that time.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Lucky for you then.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Very! Very lucky. One of the sides that I think is rather amusing in a way. I won't mention the name of the critic. However, it was a critic, a newspaper critic with one of the newspapers at the time. At the time I had the Hassam watercolor arrangement, we had about, well, it would be the equivalent of three exhibition rooms, and we needed that space to show his work, and this critic came in and looked around and she turned to me and said, "Well, what's the story?" And I was just dumbfounded about what to say to a question about this rare accumulation of Childe Hassams. But the public responded and we did very well with this.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Now Hassam's reputation at this point, he was certainly not as well-known as he is now. I mean, I would think that these shows probably contributed to kind of a revival of the appreciation of his work?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Well, he died in '32, I think.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Yeah.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: I think.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Yeah, it was pretty early on. I think so, too.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: 1932, I'm pretty sure.

JOHN DRISCOLL: '35.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: '35?

JOHN DRISCOLL: Yeah.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: And so this was early sixties so it was this period. His popularity was pretty strong. I don't think it was on the level with what it is today by any means, but he had always held a very high appreciation in the public collectors. The thing that this collection didn't have that was unmentioned is that there were none of the flag pictures, and they were a special sort of interest for the collecting public, and that was unfortunate. And I think Fox was unable to get them because the popularity, you see, of Hassam made it impossible for the market to supply them. Otherwise, he would have had them in his collection.

JOHN DRISCOLL: So even that early on, in the fifties and forties when he was collecting, those pictures were hard to get even then.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes. Oh, yes.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Oh, I see. So then it truly was an unusual opportunity that you had to get them.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes, absolutely. Al Milch had a relationship with the Academy of Arts and Letters, and had an arrangement to be supplied from that source. Most of that work, however, was in the late period of Hassam's production, and they were, sometimes, large and unwieldy. But he did have that entrée that I wasn't able to have.

GAIL STAVITSKY: So this one collection of work, then, this is really an introduction of, I assume, a kind of ongoing interest in Hassam? Were all the shows that you did specifically out of that collection, or were there other shows as well?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Most of the exhibitions of the Hassams, for the large part, were from this collection. I did some exhibitions where I would make a selection from the group and make a theme exhibition. But it really served me very well. In fact, it occurred to me, had I been in a position to do so, I could have just retired with this collection, you know, ____ rest. But that isn't the way you survive as a dealer. You've got to go on. That was

a very nice beginning.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Um hmm. So that was a strong send-off. After that, did any similar opportunity present itself with the body of work of another artist?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes, I don't remember the dates, but when I came to the gallery, Hudson Walker had had a relationship with Carmine DaLesio, my former director, and he, as a dealer himself, had an ongoing interest in the work of Marsden Hartley, and very generously continued the relationship. He had consignments with Carmine DaLesio that he advanced with me. And it was through this source that I was able to get a very good base of work from the artist Marsden Hartley. He also, because of his connection with the museum that he was very instrumental in forming at the University of Minnesota. . . . He had endowed a large body of Alfred Maurer works in this museum, and they had so many works that they were interested in acquiring other materials for their collection and were interested in selling off works so that they could have funds to purchase and [really] increase their collection. And I was able to work with the _____ museum with a number of exhibitions of _____ Maurer's work.

GAIL STAVITSKY: You mean a show that was cosponsored by you and the University of Minnesota Museum?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Well, it was not cosponsored in the true sense. It was an exhibition that I organized and advanced with consignments from the collection. I was able to go to the collection and make a selection.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Oh, I see.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: And this was all prior of the retrospective-the Maurer retrospective that was . . . at the time, it was just beginning to become of interest. Before there was very little. With the exception of Elizabeth McCausland's monograph on Maurer, there hadn't been very much-and her book; there's both a book and a monograph-there hadn't been much in the way of exposure. To this degree, at least.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Yeah, I was noticing, speaking of Maurer, that I seem to recall that the big show at the National Collection of Fine Arts was in 1971, and you had shows before that.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Much earlier.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Two shows in 1963 occurring here, so that's quite a bit earlier. And those were the shows. . . . Now, were those the shows at the galleries or at Minnesota?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: In the Babcock Galleries.

GAIL STAVITSKY: In the Babcock Galleries.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: On Madison Avenue at that time, 805 Madison. There was one little aside about Maurer that is rather interesting. The [Horowitz', Horowitzes]-Margaret and Raymond Horowitz-were great friends and active collectors and were regularly visiting the gallery, and they were buying ever so many different things, and I kept saying, "Why aren't you interested in Marsden Hartley? You don't have Marsden Hartley. Or Maurer?" I said, "I have all this. . . ." But it was explained to me that Marsden Hartley was out of their range of interest. They were focusing on a different period of American painting, and they had drawn the line, so to speak, that nothing beyond that line or later date would be of interest to them, but anything prior to it would. And they said, "Well. . . ." And I said, "How about Maurer, because he did reach into the late nineteenth and very early into the twentieth century." And Raymond said, "Do you have [McCausland's] book? [Elizabeth McCausland, Alfred Maurer, 1951-Ed.] I'll show you the one. That's a Maurer that I would like to have." So I got the book, and he thumbed through it and he had it right at his fingertips. He said, "That's the one." And I said, "Well, of course, who wouldn't?" It was a beautiful early. . . . Figures on the Beach, I believe was the title. And it was so far out of range because it was in a collection and I never thought that I would ever have a chance [at the thing]. So it's always dismissed.

JOHN DRISCOLL: It's called At the Shore? [checking in a book-Ed.]

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: At the Shore.

JOHN DRISCOLL: From 1901? Twenty three and half by nineteen and a quarter?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Right.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Oh, God, it's beautiful.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: That's the painting. Well, not more than three or four weeks after this, the owner of this painting came in, and, because I had been showing the work of Maurer, he said, "Would you like to have this

painting? Would you be interested? I'll either consign it or you can buy it, whatever." And now, of course, there was no question about me being interested in it, but I completely forgot about the request that Margaret and Ray had, their interest in this painting. Whereupon, they came in soon after I was able to buy this, and I said, "I have something to show you."

GAIL STAVITSKY: [laughs]

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: And I put it on the stand, and Ray said, "Do you want me to faint?" You know, he says, "I really. . . . Are you playing games with me?" And I said, "Well, I just thought that this was something that you would like to see." And he said, "Don't you remember me telling you that that's the painting?" So, of course, that was the end of that. It's very much a prize in their collection.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Wow, that's amazing how. . . . Now I see it says it was in the sixties that this happened. So that was exactly when you were having your Maurer show here.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Now did those shows focus on the early work, or were they retrospectives of his career?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: They were retrospectives, to the degree that we were able to do it. They were largely, though, the later. . . . We had many more works of the later period than of the early. I'd, prior to this, found another Maurer that the. . . . This Maurer.

JOHN DRISCOLL: Cafe Scene?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yeah.

JOHN DRISCOLL: 1904?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yeah. They bought this before the other one, I'm quite sure, certain. Does it say?

JOHN DRISCOLL: It says '68 on this one.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: '68?

JOHN DRISCOLL: And the other one was '63.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Oh, well, then this came in later, then. But it's very hard to remember these dates.

JOHN DRISCOLL: This looks like a pretty good painting, too.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Yes, it's wonderful.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: It is. It's quite a large. . . .

JOHN DRISCOLL: Yeah, thirty-six by thirty-four inches.

GAIL STAVITSKY: And this was part of the Walker collection.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yeah. Beautiful. Going on with the Horowitz, the next thing of importance that went to them from me is the [Maurice-Ed.] Prendergast, which is. . . .

JOHN DRISCOLL: Picnic by the Inlet?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes, Picnic by the Inlet.

JOHN DRISCOLL: 1916?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: And quite a large, impressive painting. That came directly from Eugenie [wife of Charles Prendergast-Ed.].

GAIL STAVITSKY: The widow of the. . . .

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: The Prendergast, yeah.

JOHN DRISCOLL: Charles Prendergast's widow.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: I was able to get a number of works from the estate, but this was kind of outstanding. It's

oil.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Yeah, it's wonderful.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: It's very important in their collection. It's stunning. This is a wonderful little. . . . This was in the collection that I. . . .

JOHN DRISCOLL: This was in the original Hassam group that you bought?

GAIL STAVITSKY: Original ____ his collection.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: A little pastel.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Yeah, it's beautiful.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: It's called the Pastel of the . . .

JOHN DRISCOLL: Poppies, Isle of Shoals. 1890.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Isle of Shoals.

GAIL STAVITSKY: 1890. That's a classic.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yeah. It's beautiful.

GAIL STAVITSKY: So the Horowitzes, really, they bought quite a range of work from you.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes, they did. They bought a. . . .

GAIL STAVITSKY: I was just looking.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: That one didn't come from me.

JOHN DRISCOLL: That didn't?

GAIL STAVITSKY: Oh.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: No. Not the [Theodore-Ed.] Robinson. The [Charles Webster-Ed.] Hawthorne they had, The Lady in the White.

GAIL STAVITSKY: April?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: April. [This from May]?

GAIL STAVITSKY: 1920. That's beautiful. And that came directly from the estate of the artist?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes, yes.

GAIL STAVITSKY: How were you able sometimes to make these contacts with the various artists' estates? I was wondering if there are some interesting stories there.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Well, there is no clear avenue. It came from many, many angles. I think the reputation of the gallery brought in people, you know, with consignments [who would] approach us because of our reputation and our interests.

JOHN DRISCOLL: It can be very unpredictable sometimes. Sometimes you have a relationship with people and you think that when they're ready to sell they'll call you and they don't, and then other times you just have somebody in the gallery who was in for five minutes and you treated them nicely and the next thing you know eighteen years later they come back and they have twenty-eight pictures they want you to sell for them. It can be very, very unpredictable. Here's a little Robinson.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Oh, I see; this Robinson came through you in 1961. That must have been one that was out of the first paintings that you sold.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes. That was a painting that I was able to buy at auction.

GAIL STAVITSKY: It's a self-portrait of Robinson from 1884-87.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: The Horowitzes were very interested in Robinson and were delighted to have that added to

their collection.

GAIL STAVITSKY: You mean, as an American Impressionist; they were really trying to get the range of those kinds of artists, I assume.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes. Exactly. It was very centered in their point of interest.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Which is, I guess, why Hartley didn't quite fit in there.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: See, Hartley was much too modern for them, and too late for their interest and then for their collection.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Were there other collectors who you worked with who did have a particular interest in Hartley?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Excuse me?

GAIL STAVITSKY: I just was wondering if there were other collectors who were very interested in Hartley, _____?]

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Oh, yes. One outstanding example was the [Barney-Ed.] Ebsworth collection in St. Louis. I was able to sell to that collection a Marsden Hartley, one of the German officer series [that they]. . . .

GAIL STAVITSKY: Oh, yes. That's a great painting. I just remembers they had a traveling exhibition which featured that work.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Right. That came from me.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Oh, I see. That's _____. Yeah.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: And that was, of course, quite a bit later.

GAIL STAVITSKY: In the eighties, I suppose?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: No, it wasn't that late. It was, I'm quite sure, in the seventies sometime.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Yeah. Well, apparently that. . . . That was probably after one of your major sales, which I see is 1971-the Mount Katahdin to the National Gallery of Art.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes.

GAIL STAVITSKY: That was kind of a landmark for you.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: That was. . . .

GAIL STAVITSKY: Which is a late painting then, 1942.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes. That probably I think was Elizabeth Carter. Carter-Brown I think was director. Or curator. I've forgotten. Anyway, this was purchased by the National Museum.

JOHN DRISCOLL: A couple of years ago I made a list of the American art museums that have Marsden Hartleys that came from you, and I think, if my memory serves me, there are approximately sixty museums that have Hartleys that came through your hands. They may not all have been sold directly by you, but they were maybe sold by you to collectors who then gave them to museums subsequently.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Oh, yes.

JOHN DRISCOLL: [I was-Ed.] going through the books there and seeing Hartleys that Michael sold and where they are today, and, of course, many of them many of them did go directly from Michael to museums.

GAIL STAVITSKY: That's amazing.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: This was the [Carnival of Autumn] that went to the Boston Museum.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Oh, yes. That's a wonderful early picture. 1908.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes. This, I think, was purchased in '68, I believe. Anyway, that was an outstanding Hartley.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Yeah, that's a major example.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: This is the Hartley that went to the Sheldon in Nebraska-Sheldon [Museum].

GAIL STAVITSKY: Young Worshipper of the Truth, 1940.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes.

GAIL STAVITSKY: And this is a portrait of Abraham Lincoln?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes. When it came into my hands I called Norman Geske and said, "This portrait of Lincoln, it only deserves one place-the Lincoln, Nebraska, museum.

GAIL STAVITSKY: It's a wonderful painting. Was that also through Hudson Walker?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: That came from Hudson Walker, yes. Young Worshipper of the Truth.

GAIL STAVITSKY: So Hudson Walker seems to have been really a major source for you then. Was he sort of the major. . . .

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes, he was. And it was an ongoing relationship. Extended over my whole . . . the whole time I was in the gallery until he died [in, and] that. . . .

JOHN DRISCOLL: Didn't The Great Good Man that Bill Lane bought . . . was that from you also?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: That came from the gallery. That was sold by Carmine DaLesio.

JOHN DRISCOLL: Okay. So there were two of these portraits of Lincoln?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes. I think there were three. I think this is one of three Hartley Lincoln portraits.

JOHN DRISCOLL: I've seen both of these, and they're both really tremendous paintings.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Um hmm, they're very powerful. You mentioned that you got this from Hudson Walker. Did you have a choice? In other words, you saw this, you recognized how strong it is, and wanted to work with him with that particular painting?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Well, yes and no. You see, his collection was one of his personal interests as well as. . . . He would, for some reason of his own, would say, "I have to get rid of this or that." And the quality and interest of his paintings was well known to me, and anything that he would want to put on the market I was only too willing to accept. We had a very good ongoing relationship. It was mutual. And even one time, which surprised me, he wanted a Hartley that I had acquired that he liked very much that he wanted to trade. So we swapped painting for painting. And this was after the period where he was disposing of things. He still was interested in the artist's work, admired this work, this one painting.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Had he purchased most of his works directly from Hartley?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Well, as I understand, he-as a dealer-wasn't very successful. You recall-or we once recalled-it was in the depths of the Depression when Hudson Walker decided to do this gallery. And Marsden Hartley-like everything else in the art world-was of very little interest. So he felt so committed to Hartley that I think he may have some exchange with the artist to sort of help him with Hartley's livelihood at that time. And I think he bought things-quite a number, if not all of his things-in this way. I'm not in a position to know, but he did acquire a large number.

GAIL STAVITSKY: I think you had another example here you were going to point out here of Hartley?

JOHN DRISCOLL: Michael had a very, well, almost a complete set of the pictures that Hartley did in Mexico, and one in particular that has gone through the gallery in the last few years was [Heliastra, _____ Astra], sometimes known as Paracelsus, from 1932, which is now at the National Museum of American Art.

GAIL STAVITSKY: I know that's a major piece. I remember seeing this in the Spiritual in Art exhibition at the L.A. County Museum.

JOHN DRISCOLL: These are in some way, I think, from our point of view, some of the most powerful pictures that Hartley did, but also the most difficult to come to grips with on a visual basis. They're very challenging pictures.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Um hmm. Yeah, the iconography, too.

JOHN DRISCOLL: Yeah.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: They almost, in a way, were related to the early German officer series in their power and their individuality and striking qualities. And, of course, this is an outstanding example in this group of works. I

think the museum is very fortunate to have that particular one. It's an outstanding example.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Oh, yeah. Would you say of all of the artists whose work you've handled, is Hartley your favorite?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Artists . . . rather dealers can't allow themselves to be. . . . They're not collectors; they're dealers. But there are artists that dealers become involved with, perhaps attached to in a certain way over others, for some unknown reason. I still have an ongoing champion, [feeling], championing the work of this particular artist. It lives very well.

GAIL STAVITSKY: I had some questions about other artists but you look like you have something there that you. . .

JOHN DRISCOLL: Well, this is sort of the tail-end of another story about the gallery, but also part of the beginning of Michael's career, and that's the Thomas Eakins of Doctor Thomas Fenton, which the Delaware Art Museum acquired in 1963. Michael may want to comment a little bit on that.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: When I came to the gallery there were only a handful of Eakins in inventory, and this was one. It is a very imposing, almost life-sized scale painting that had not found its way into. . . . But I was able to sell it to the museum in Delaware. And, of course, it's a wonderful ____ place for it to be.

JOHN DRISCOLL: The gallery handled the dispersal of Eakins' estate, beginning particularly in the late twenties, but going right through the thirties, forties, fifties, and so by the time Michael arrived, as he said, there were few Eakins left in the estate, and this was one of the last ones that was sold. Even though today it's the kind of picture that anybody would jump at immediately, it took a long time even for that one to be sold.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yeah.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Were you able to continue handling Eakins' work or was it pretty much that the estate was pretty much dispersed with the sale of this work and a few others?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: The estate was practically depleted before this. The gallery had been the representative of the Eakins estate, and the widow brought the work to ____ Babcock Galleries. That was in the twenties. And so the gallery has had a long association with Eakins, and with ____.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Actually, I was also going to ask you about a few other nineteenth-century artists that the gallery has had a long association with, and I was wondering about your continued involvement. Of course, one of them is George Inness, who I guess, really his history's connected back to the origins of the gallery and the sale in 1866.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes, it's one of the. . . . You've seen the little memento, I guess, of the. . .

JOHN DRISCOLL: . . . the 1866 ____.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Yes, it's reproduced in here?

JOHN DRISCOLL: Yes.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes, that's it. Which is, of course, at the Metropolitan now. Oh, yes, the history of Inness is closely identified with the gallery. There was a period, though, we have to say, where the nineteenth century was not enjoying the popularity that it once had had and had gone in decline for some reason or other, and that was during that decline, of course, that I was. . . . I came about in the gallery, and my. . . . The interest was very high, but I wasn't able to do very much in the way of selling Inness in those days. It really wasn't, speaking of the decline and almost the. . . . Maybe I'm jumping here, but the interest that we were able to engender with a collection of Kensetts that I was able to acquire. . . . And this took place in the seventies. That may be jumping too far ahead.

GAIL STAVITSKY: No, that's fine. That was another artist I was going to ask you about, and the wonderful show that you did in 1978 of his drawings.

[Tape 2, Side A]

GAIL STAVITSKY: . . . and the wonderful show that you did in 1978 of his drawings.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes. This was really quite an interesting breakthrough that John Driscoll was able to, what shall I say, manicure or present?

JOHN DRISCOLL: I guess. . . .

[Interruption in taping]

JOHN DRISCOLL: . . . of our association was the purchase by the Pullman Museum of Art at Penn State of an Alfred Maurer called Chinoiserie, a very early figure piece by Maurer that I was involved with. And that was the first time that I was really in the gallery and made Michael's acquaintance. And then over the years we acquired some other things-Marsden Hartley drawings and a few other things-and in the course of it Michael introduced me to a portfolio of drawings that had been attributed to John Kensett, who came with a provenance that suggested that that was the case. So we began investigating the drawings and organized this exhibition. We were able to document them and discover circumstances in some instance in which Kensett himself described how the drawings were made.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Oh, were there also certain notebooks or diaries where he had described these?

JOHN DRISCOLL: Yes, or letters.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Or letters.

JOHN DRISCOLL: Letters where he was writing home describing the drawings that he was doing.

GAIL STAVITSKY: And was that archival material also part of this find of the portfolio ____?

JOHN DRISCOLL: No, that was scattered all over the place.

GAIL STAVITSKY: And the portfolio itself, was this through descendants of Kensett?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Indirectly, yes. It was really kind of discarded in one part of the studio in Connecticut and was discovered and retrieved in [a] rather disheveled state, [in some instances] because of the water.

JOHN DRISCOLL: They basically, I think, descended through the Vincent Collier family . . .

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes.

JOHN DRISCOLL: . . . and Collier was a close friend of Kensett's, and he and Kensett, in fact, owned an island off the coast of Connecticut, where many of Kensett's paintings were actually done.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Oh, was that Contentment Island?

JOHN DRISCOLL: Yes.

GAIL STAVITSKY: So this show was the first, and I imagine it really generated a whole lot of interest.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: I think it did, yes. And I think John would support that.

JOHN DRISCOLL: Well, it was the first exhibition ever held of the graphic work of the Hudson River school artists. And it was very gratifying in subsequent years to see the Hudson River Museum pick up on this theme and subsequently do exhibitions with catalogs written by fine scholars of the drawings of Thomas Cole, Asher B. Durand, Jasper Cropsey, and a whole host of other American draftsmen. There are still a couple that need to have their drawings looked at-like John Casilear, for example. But John Caldwell, who was then an associate curator at the Metropolitan, wrote the introduction for this and really called our attention to the fact that it was the first time anything like this had been done. And I think this . . . there was so much interest. Michael sold many, many of these drawings to very, very fine collections, including the Metropolitan and other major public and private collectors. Dan Flavin took a . . .

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes, I was about to mention he was working with the [Die, Dye] account.

JOHN DRISCOLL: Yeah, [DIA] Foundation.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes. And he made the selection a large number of the drawings from the exhibition for a collection, I think, that's on view at Bridgehampton Museum.

JOHN DRISCOLL: I think so. It was intriguing that an artist like Dan Flavin would take such a profound interest in the work of John Kensett.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: And he did, and it was a very sincere, devoted interest.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Do you think it had something to do with the luminosity of Kensett's work or was it just. . . ?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: I don't think it had anything to do with, in any way, the relation of what his art was or is and Kensett's work. I think it was simply the communication of one artist to another and one never knows quite what that is unless you're on that same level.

GAIL STAVITSKY: This was a great find. Those drawings are beautiful. Were there other groups of Hudson River school drawings that you worked with since this?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: No.

JOHN DRISCOLL: They're really very difficult to come by. And this of course led to the Kensett paintings exhibition which was at the Met in, what was that, '83 or '84, something like that.

GAIL STAVITSKY: I see. Were there drawings juxtaposed with paintings in that show?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: No.

JOHN DRISCOLL: Yes. Yeah, there were drawings in the show.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes, I guess you're right.

GAIL STAVITSKY: That was probably thanks to, again, this show and the interest generated. That's great. Now, I do get the impression [with-Ed.] the Hudson River school that there are a number of those artists-[Robert Swain-Ed.] Gifford and others that you've handled through the years. Or has that been a more minor emphasis?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Of course, most of the artists that come to mind have been in the gallery, handled and so on, over the years. Our records will prove that. [It] goes back to -[George-Ed.] Fuller, and even [Worth-Ed.] Ryder was one of our interests, of course, and Blakelock-and still is, of course. If ever this material is made available we'd always be interested.

GAIL STAVITSKY: I would imagine with Ryder and Blakelock that's it's scarce, I would think, very hard to find.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Ryder particularly.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Right.

JOHN DRISCOLL: There are Blakelocks around. We've sold quite a number of Blakelocks in the last five or six years, but Ryder is hard to come by. Very few of his pictures.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Is there any particular Ryder that you would want to talk about as a museum sale?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Well, one Ryder that I can't personally take glory in selling, but it's the very poetic Ryder that is in the . . . a private collection here in New York. Can't remember the name of the collector, but it's the very well known ship . . . sailing vessel in the moonlight . . .

JOHN DRISCOLL: ____ Wave.

JOHN DRISCOLL/MICHAEL ST. CLAIR? Yeah.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: It's a glorious painting. And, of course, we're not completely overlooking the other late nineteenth-century painters. There's Ryder. . . .

JOHN DRISCOLL: . . . Ryder, Blakelock, Newman?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: All those.

GAIL STAVITSKY: [Hans] Homer?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Homer! Homer is the one I was searching for. Of course, the gallery has had a long established interest in Homer. We haven't much at the present, but there's been activity in the past. Winslow Homer.

GAIL STAVITSKY: At the beginning of your career here were there still some Homers available that you were able to. . . ?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes. And a few little Ryder drawings.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Oh, Ryder drawings. Boy, I would think those are pretty rare.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Very rare. There was a series he did of the windmill at. . . . I'm not going to say where it is because I'm not sure, but they were very sketchy and very interesting drawings.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Were the drawings, again, from descendants of Ryder? That was the source of those?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: I think they were probably purchased at auction. I don't know, and that's sometimes very difficult to trace.

GAIL STAVITSKY: One thing I find very interesting is some of the discoveries you've made, and I understand that one of them-now we're sort of jumping back to the twentieth century in the list of artists I have here-is Ambrose Webster. Was that. . . ?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes. Ambrose Webster was, in almost the truest sense, a discovery because his body of work was stored in Provincetown-and poorly stored, I might add, in some neglected place-and was brought to my attention through the efforts of one of my contemporary artists who had been going to Provincetown for years. Sol Wilson was a contemporary artist and the heirs to the Ambrose Webster material. [I?-Ed.] went to Sol-they were friends-and Sol offered to do what he could to make a contact. And it was through that connection that I was able to acquire his estate. And had an exhibition early on in the sixties, which was, I think, his first show in New York.

JOHN DRISCOLL: Yeah.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: He'd had exhibitions in Boston along with Prendergast and some others in a group show.

GAIL STAVITSKY: I think he'd also been in the Armory show, as well?

JOHN DRISCOLL: Um-hmm.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes.

GAIL STAVITSKY: That's fascinating.

JOHN DRISCOLL: He may come to be viewed as the principle exponent of Fauvism in American art. He was a modernist painter, born in 1869, but he was not caught up in the fracturing of planes that came out Cézanne and the Cubists. He, rather, was caught up with color experimentation. He actually wrote a book on his color theories. And through the misfortune of history, after he died in the Depression the work was essentially forgotten until Michael brought it back into the attention of the public. And we continue to work with the paintings today.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: It's a very powerful statement and worthy of public attention.

GAIL STAVITSKY: I was just wondering if there were other. . . . I know you have a list there and we don't have too much more time.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR/JOHN DRISCOLL?: We've covered this list pretty effectively.

JOHN DRISCOLL: Did you discuss the acquisition of the Hartleys at the beginning of your career here?

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: No.

JOHN DRISCOLL: Because you essentially bought, for all intents and purposes, a truckload of Hartley's work [of that period, of that day].

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes, well, the Hartley estate was being handled by an attorney that during the fifties had consigned. . . . This was after Rosenberg, the release. I think the Paul Rosenberg Gallery was the dealer for Hartley at the time of his death, and then it fell into the hands of the estate. The work was being disposed of in whatever way this man could do it. Carmine DaLesio had taken a large number of works on consignment, and when I came along they wanted to close out the consignments. They wanted to clear out the estate as well as they could. So I was able to buy a large number of works in that way. And they were works throughout the artist's production. There were drawings, pastels, oils. Largely oils.

JOHN DRISCOLL: Was that ____?

GAIL STAVITSKY: Amazing. [Graphic works?]

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Amazing opportunity.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yeah. Well, this was an example of the times. It was just a different time in our history, and these things were going on. I suppose they're still going on today, but if they are I don't know of them.

GAIL STAVITSKY: I think not nearly as much as it was at that time.

JOHN DRISCOLL: Well, it's pretty extraordinary to look back and think that in that time you bought a hundred Hassams in one fell swoop-or thereabouts-and I can't even imagine how many Hartleys were in that group that you bought, but. . . .

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Well, not in numbers, not to that extent, but there was a goodly number.

GAIL STAVITSKY: [Thanks for telling me.]

JOHN DRISCOLL: Yeah.

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: The collection that was referred to earlier, of coming from Mexico while he was there in '32, these were all practically intact, the entire production that came from that excursion. So it was really a wonderful feast. In retrospect, it's an unusual experience.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Um hmm. Thank you. Unfortunately, I think we're going to have to end here, but I think the idea of a feast is a good place to end. [laughter]

MICHAEL ST. CLAIR: Yes, thank you.

GAIL STAVITSKY: Oh, Thank you.

[End of interview]

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