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**Oral history interview with Bernard Chaet, 1997
June 18-August 15**

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Bernard Chaet on 1997 June 18-August 15. The interview took place at Chaet's home in Rockport, MA, and was conducted by Robert Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

ROBERT BROWN: —interviewing Bernard Chaet at his house in Rockport, Massachusetts, June—

BERNARD CHAET: 18.

ROBERT BROWN: —18, 1997. All right. Let's just see how—perhaps you could talk a bit about some of your early memories, your family background.

BERNARD CHAET: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT BROWN: You were born in Boston.

BERNARD CHAET: Boston, nineteen hundred and 24 [1924].

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: According to my older cousins, they remember that I was drawing all over the wallpaper in this apartment, and they're talking about age two or three, and they were, I was drawing animals, and as I told you the last time we talked, I showed you photographs of a book that I drew all over, and they looked like some of the cows I started painting 50-60 years later. It's very scary to see that. My second-grade achievement—and the first grade when they gave out colored pegs for people to play with before instruction took place—I did *Amos and Andy* with colored pegs, and my teacher brought all the other teachers in to see it; and this was what I did at home all the time.

Fortunately, and unfortunately for me, my only talent has been drawing. If I had to do something else, it would have been very difficult. Fortunately for me, too, that I took to teaching when I had a chance.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, did your family encourage this drawing, or were they—

BERNARD CHAET: Well—

ROBERT BROWN: Were you one of several siblings?

BERNARD CHAET: No, I was the oldest of two—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: —and my father didn't know what to make of this. My mother would have

accepted anything I did. He didn't know exactly. When I went to school, finally went to art school, he was happy because in my generation, if you were good enough, you'd get a scholarship to the Museum School [the School of the Museum of Fine Arts], and, I mean, it was the only school that—because all the people I knew who were in these high school classes went there. There was no other school possible to go to. I remember my junior year, I sweated. Was I going to make it? The summer before, I think I didn't sleep nights, thinking of what I was going to do to win this scholarship, and I worked—

ROBERT BROWN: What school?

BERNARD CHAET: The Museum School.

ROBERT BROWN: This—this is while you were still in high school?

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Because, you know, you started out art, formal art training even in high school, didn't you?

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. Well, this group—in those days, you took a test in the ninth grade and—

ROBERT BROWN: What did you have to do on the test?

BERNARD CHAET: I remember you did some drawings, and if you won, you could get from your high school permission to go at one o'clock three or four days a week, and of course I thought I was the best in the world. When I got there that first day, and saw how good some of these people were from all over the city, I mean, I was flabbergasted. I was—at the museum, at the museum.

ROBERT BROWN: The Museum School? [Cross talk.]

BERNARD CHAET: That's right, with Rosenthal and Alma LaBrecht [ph].

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, Ralph Rosenthal?

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: Alma LaBrecht was in charge, and he worked with her, but when I—there must have been 20 or 30 people, and I was—I guess you went three years. So, in my first year coming in there, and seeing how good these people were, I was amazed, because I really thought I was something.

ROBERT BROWN: Some really had technical facility.

BERNARD CHAET: Oh, yeah. The drawings that these people made. I found that some of them, it came very easy, and some finally gave up because they were bored. I had the same experience years later. I had a young woman in my drawing class, and she drew like a dream. At the end she became a French major at Yale, because the drawings didn't mean anything to her. She just had this facility. I think what that day—the first day of that class when we were all making an assigned drawing of some such, when I saw what the others did, I could feel my body moving in all directions at the same time. I realized that I was not as hot as I thought I was. Maybe in my junior high school I

was hot, but not here. So you—what happened is the concentration of this crowd was so great—

ROBERT BROWN: Was it?

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. And—

ROBERT BROWN: Very serious?

BERNARD CHAET: Well, I mean, they were trying to draw in an old masterly style, which I didn't know enough about.

ROBERT BROWN: And did you—well, did you draw from the set-up, was there— [Cross talk.]

BERNARD CHAET: Well, this is how this—they had different things on different days. If you came on an extra day, for example, Tuesday, you would draw in the so-called "cast court," a cast court, which I have a postcard of some place.

ROBERT BROWN: That was?

BERNARD CHAET: —showed all the Greek sculpture in—in plaster form. I mean, this is a huge room, huge room, and I—I always felt they didn't tell us why we were doing this. We were—they were set up, and you would go—the Parthenon.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: All the great sculpture of the Greek period. The Delphic, the guy holding the chariot—the chariot—

ROBERT BROWN: The charioteer.

BERNARD CHAET: Well, I'll tell you. Thirty years later, I got to London and saw the Elgin marbles. I knew every one of these figures by heart. I realized I knew the pose of each one. So without much instruction, every time I go, this is the drawing I do. I draw the Elgin marbles in the fountains and there's a lot of parts missing, heads.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: I try to put in the missing parts. This would be a terrific student thing if I was teaching in London. You draw what you see, now add the parts that were destroyed. What I found that when I saw the sculpture in Greece and on the—the originals that I knew—I learned more about drawing the figure. From these—from this cast court thing, I think we were all assigned there one day a week. Some people were doing huge charcoal drawings. I didn't know what the reason was until years later.

ROBERT BROWN: Why did you think you learned so much from drawing from the casts?

BERNARD CHAET: Because you learn the structure of the body without knowing you're learning it.

ROBERT BROWN: You just record it, but you—

BERNARD CHAET: Well, you try to figure out how it was put together—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: —and I think back of some of the drawings I made. They weren't very great, but I was studying how one form moved into another in the body.

ROBERT BROWN: And did the teachers, Rosenthal and LaBrecht, kind of intimate that you were supposed to look for structure?

BERNARD CHAET: No.

ROBERT BROWN: They didn't?

BERNARD CHAET: Somehow, I don't remember what they were saying. I only remember that we were exposed to these great sculptures, and I learned the poses of these sculptures. Now when I see them, I think [inaudible] the sculptures because you're doing the same—this was a huge room. There must have been 50 casts set up and I—I'll send you the—I'll make a Xerox of it.

ROBERT BROWN: This was as big as an exposition gallery?

BERNARD CHAET: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Exposition.

BERNARD CHAET: And so you spent one day a week, or two days, if you came an extra day, and it was a long streetcar ride from Dorchester but this—this is what we lived for.

ROBERT BROWN: You came from the Dorchester section of Boston?

BERNARD CHAET: Right, right. From—there were three of us who—or four—who were in that class—in that group. There was Robert Burkes, who was a senior, and David Aronson, and I was in the class below. So, we went there at least three or four—the classes were legally going on three days, but we would go Tuesday, also Wednesdays. One day, the teacher would give an assignment, a subject matter, and then you would make up a composition, whatever it was.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: And then the third day we would actually be copying textiles with watercolor.

ROBERT BROWN: Hmm.

BERNARD CHAET: Don't ask me what I learned there. I guess I got to hate watercolors, and what I remember is going in the garden of the museum doing water—watercolors of flowers, and not only did I hate watercolors for years because of doing this, but to paint a flower, I mean, this is—this is what I'm painting now. This is—but for years I could not stand the look of the paint box with these little cubicles of color. So, when I started doing watercolors in the late '70s, I bought tubes, because I didn't want it to look like those paint boxes because I had to—

ROBERT BROWN: You associated it with what, the tedium?

BERNARD CHAET: I couldn't—I couldn't control this medium. I couldn't—I—I suppose some of the things I did were okay, copying the paintings. We were copying Chinese paintings with watercolor, and I remember doing—copying textiles.

ROBERT BROWN: Textiles.

BERNARD CHAET: I suppose I learned how to handle watercolors but hated it.

ROBERT BROWN: Was the aim there to try to—

BERNARD CHAET: I have no idea.

ROBERT BROWN: —approximate it very close?

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: They didn't explain, these teachers? [Cross talk.]

BERNARD CHAET: No. Well, it didn't—if they did, it didn't stay with me. The idea was the competition between people. People were doing extra work, too. They would come in Sundays with extra work.

ROBERT BROWN: And then was the work put up—

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: —and critiqued or—?

BERNARD CHAET: Oh, yes, it was critiqued, but people were doing astounding kind of things at home, besides these three days.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh. And then those would be brought in?

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. And these people were not just people who could do art. Someone like Reed Kay was going to Latin school. I'm sure he—as a matter of fact, I think he could have gone on in science. So, there were a collection. There's one, I'll think of his name, there was a young man my age who was from North—he lived near North Station. I can't remember his name at this moment, but his drawings were heavenly to me. He was my age. But he didn't go on. He didn't go on to the school. I felt that he was a great craftsman. So, there were people from all over the whole city. It was a real collection of the best people from the whole city.

In some ways, when one got to the Museum School, it was a slight letdown—

ROBERT BROWN: I see.

BERNARD CHAET: —because we'd been through a tremendous push. I still have the drawing I did to get in the Museum School. It was a drawing— [Cross talk] go ahead.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you—excuse me. Were you—in the ninth grade, did teachers encourage you to sit—

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: —a competitive exam?

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. I mean, I was—I was the local hot shot, you see. Years later, I would see the same thing with graduate students in graduate—at Yale, who were coming from the local hot—no. I would say in our summer school we had juniors from all over the country. They were all the best because they came free. When they got to Norfolk and saw 35 other people who were ahead of

them, you learn in a hurry that you're not so hot.

But these classes were frustrating and wonderful at the same time. To travel by streetcar was no fun.

ROBERT BROWN: No.

BERNARD CHAET: But you got used to it. It—it got your mindset about what you wanted in life and—

ROBERT BROWN: It did?

BERNARD CHAET: Oh, yeah, yeah. Well—

ROBERT BROWN: You must have realized—

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. I didn't know how I was going to make a living. I never thought about it when you're in high school and the idea was to go to this great school. Of course, by the time I got there, the war was starting, and the school was—it was—it was strange. And then I had a slight fight with [Karl] Zerbe and—

ROBERT BROWN: When you got to the Museum School?

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. After—

ROBERT BROWN: But—

BERNARD CHAET: After two years there, he gave a lecture. He didn't like a painting I did. Without mentioning my name, he went after me in front of the whole school, and I was so furious that I quit school. I went back ultimately a few years later.

ROBERT BROWN: You competed—you got into the Museum of Fine Arts School in 1942, wasn't it?

BERNARD CHAET: Right. And—

ROBERT BROWN: You got a scholarship?

BERNARD CHAET: Right. Most of us who had this training in the museum had—we were ahead in that we learned how to draw. I still have the drawing I did for this thing.

ROBERT BROWN: Were most of you from fairly poor backgrounds at that time?

BERNARD CHAET: Well, you don't think of yourself as poor.

ROBERT BROWN: It was the Depression, right?

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. Well, I mean, most—some of the—most of the people I knew from my neighborhood were first generation parents who had come from Europe, but they came from slightly different circumstances. If you're poor, you don't know you're poor. I never thought I was poor, or anything else.

ROBERT BROWN: Had your own father in business or was he in—

BERNARD CHAET: Yes, he was a very interesting person. Some of my classmates could talk about him. He was quite an interesting character. He started his own automobile business, but he was against buying an automobile because he told me there are too many cars on the road. Can you believe this? In the '30s? And also was polluting things. So he liked going to work. He was a very happy man who left when it was dark in the morning and came back—came home singing at night. And he was also a philosopher, and he didn't believe in making money. He was a follower of a certain philosopher. I'll think of his name in one second here. He was an economist philosopher, left-wing in many—Scott Nearing.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: Not many people know who he is today. He was more known at the end for building his own house—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: —and so forth, but he spoke at the—at the community church once a year and I went with—I had to go with my father by streetcar, and my father had everything he ever wrote, and my father explained to me the following: "Just look at him. He's wearing the same suit for the last 30 years. The same shoes. This is how we all should be." And he believed in this man, that he was helping, he was helping the world and so forth. He was a real follower.

My father also, his place is now where BU [Boston University] is, and one day, I was already in high school, he said, he was telling me about a young black man that he—giving—giving him advice on the Bible, and—and politics. Years later, we're in the '50s, '60s, I'm visiting, I'm already at Yale. He said, "This is the guy I told you about that I knew." Martin Luther King. I said, "This is the guy?" "Yes, he came in quite often. We talked about the Bible and we talked about what the blacks should do to organize." He called him Martin. I mean, I could not believe this. My father was a very interesting guy, very happy man, but he was puzzled by—I mean, he wasn't against what I was doing, but when I quit school, he started calling me Professor, which was very funny. That was his name for me because I knew more than the teachers, because I was quitting school, and so—

ROBERT BROWN: It was a bit of a dig.

BERNARD CHAET: Oh, yes. "Well, Professor." So, I got a job after the two years in the Museum School working at the *Boston Post*. There were several of us—I worked from six in the evening till two in the morning. I mean, I think I made a year [inaudible]. I never saw the daylight, but then I went back to school.

ROBERT BROWN: What kind of job did you have there?

BERNARD CHAET: Well, I was working in the so-called art department there. There was so much time, but I remember I was illustrating books. I illustrated some Dostoyevsky. I still have these drawings.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you have a lot of time on your hands?

BERNARD CHAET: I had a lot of time reading all of Dostoyevsky, doing the Karamazov family. I did—I found the drawings recently. Some of them are interesting.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: But I spent a year or two there.

ROBERT BROWN: You had—because you had this falling-out with Zerbe?

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: You object— [Cross talk.]

BERNARD CHAET: I went back.

ROBERT BROWN: Zerbe—could Zerbe be a rather cruel and abrupt sort?

BERNARD CHAET: Well, he played favorites.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh.

BERNARD CHAET: I still can think in my mind's eye. I can see him praising a painting, not going to tell you by whom, and I thought it was awful. He played favorites, but what he did is introduce us to what was happening in European painting. I don't think anyone else in Boston knew anything about it, and he was—I think I've written about this a little bit. I mean, his favorite was [Pablo] Picasso, [Georges] Braques, and later on when [Max] Beckmann showed up at the school, these became our artists. But at the same time, Zerbe was preaching something else. He was telling us that [Joan] Miró was one of the great artists and no one paid attention to him. He was talking about Matisse and Miró. So he was aware of—he wasn't aware of everything, you can't be, and as I recall, I may have written about this, too, he didn't understand what [Piet] Mondrian was doing with those lay paintings at all. This was not for him, but he could talk about things that weren't influencing us, especially Miró and [Henri] Matisse.

ROBERT BROWN: He could talk about them anyway?

BERNARD CHAET: He talked about them as being significant and—

ROBERT BROWN: Would he talk typically fairly often?

BERNARD CHAET: He gave a lecture once a week and we brought our lunches. It was Friday.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: And he would talk, give us, and it was a religious hour. He'd have details of wonderful slides of Rembrandt and whatever, and it was the inspiration hour for the whole painting group.

ROBERT BROWN: Did it actually work?

BERNARD CHAET: Oh, well, it was inspirational.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: And this particular time he—he spoke against the painting I brought in without mentioning my name. I—I almost turned 40 colors, and so forth. What he was preaching against was automatically becoming a third-generation Expressionist, and his theory was Expressionists don't live long. They don't have—they burn themselves out young. So that's when he was trying to open other doors. Now I look back at it, it was great advice. It's not always easy to take advice.

ROBERT BROWN: But you were crushed at that moment?

BERNARD CHAET: Well, yeah, because what was in the air is what's in the air now, that the work had to have a subject matter, a significant subject matter. What I tell people, this is where I came in, where the whole thing has to be political and have—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: —long philosophical ideas. I remember doing a lithograph of a capitalist and Christ on the cross, and the capitalist smoking a cigar. I mean, we were—this is what was going on in our brains. The political ideas were the thing to be concerned about, and it's only years later, like English critic John Berger would write about art in the '50s, that the only great art is the work that had the working class. He was the most famous critic, a Marxist critic in Europe, at least that I knew about at that time, that if it didn't get the working class to claim their rights, then it wasn't great art. So, he went against Picasso. Of course, his favorite artist was [Fernand] Léger because he celebrated the work.

ROBERT BROWN: Zerbe?

BERNARD CHAET: No. This Berger.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, John Berger? Sorry.

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: And so, I mean, I put it together. The influence in my brain was that art had some political message or some philosophical political message, and it didn't last long in my head. I mean, I think it was someone like the—like Hyman Bloom who went out for beautiful painting that changed my idea of what painting should be, and I'm reminded in this conversation of a recent story. There was an interview on television with Robert Pinsky, the poet, and he quoted a famous jazz man, I think—why can't I think of his name? He made a thing, *Midnight*, about a saxophonist in Paris. What the hell—? Why can't I think of his name?

At any rate, someone asked him what inspired him, and he said two words. He gave the name Leslie Young [ph]. So it's: find a great artist. My luck was growing up in the [Boston] Museum, I got to see what paintings look like. I saw what [Paul] Gauguin looked like. I saw what [Paul] Cézanne looked like. I saw great art in the Boston Museum.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: I think it's very difficult to grow—want to be an artist and not see real art. You can't do this with slides. You can't do this with CD-ROMs. To explain it, years later I had a wonderful student at summer school who was from L.A., and we were in the Berkshires and I said, "I want you to go, Paul, and go to the Modern Museum and see what these paintings look like." And he came back very disappointed, because he owned a [Lente] Scura book where these colors were so bright. He said, "You didn't tell me the colors are so dirty and the Matisses are so dreary."

So if you don't see what art looks like, and live with it, I mean, that Greco painting of that young man in the chair, I remember when they cleaned it—

ROBERT BROWN: At the Boston Museum?

BERNARD CHAET: At the Boston Museum, yeah. I remember when they cleaned it. The whole picture was green-brown. When they cleaned it, there were these dull reds coming in from the background. That was a revelation to me. So, my gift was that I was near the Boston Museum and all those years when—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: —people didn't have to pay to go in, and it wasn't a box office attraction.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: You went in there because you wanted to go in.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, yeah. Did you start out at the Museum School? What was the curriculum? You'd had art.

BERNARD CHAET: It was a real curriculum. I was allowed—when I think of the kind of student I was, I hated these kind of students that I was when I was teaching people who didn't want to take this course or that course.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: But I think back of it, it was a school with course structure.

ROBERT BROWN: And you had to do that?

BERNARD CHAET: You do it whether you wanted—Many years later, when I finally wrote a book on drawing, when you do something like this, you're answering your teachers, what they didn't say to you, what you think are important came into the book, and one—one publisher that turned down the book said, "I'll publish this if you put in a section on perspective." I said, "You know, I got a C in perspective. I don't know anything about it, and if you want a book on perspective, you've come to the wrong guy." But the fact that we had to take all these courses, like Anatomy, and so forth, well —

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: —I didn't like it too much, but I knew it was important later on. I hated every minute in that class—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: —and so the way I taught Anatomy was quite different. I didn't realize it. I was reacting. But it was the school with a curriculum. When I went back to the Museum School in the '80s, one of the teachers asked me to, what I told them, I said, "When I went to the school, this was a school, one class led to another, one—one part fit into another. It may seem ridiculous to you, but you're all here to learn something." And when I think about the courses like the design course, which we felt was a joke, they, they all—it was a structured program that made sense to me, years later. Not when I was doing it. And I didn't like the idea of drawing naked people every day.

ROBERT BROWN: Why was that?

BERNARD CHAET: Well, who wants to draw naked people?

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: And now I'd love to be able to hire models.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: It was a privilege, but I learned how to draw from these casts and being forced to draw and paint from figure.

ROBERT BROWN: You still had to do cast drawing once you were in the Museum School?

BERNARD CHAET: No. This was all in high school.

ROBERT BROWN: You were—you were a bit ahead then in standing because of your —

BERNARD CHAET: No, no. I wasn't. I mean, I knew more, because I—

ROBERT BROWN: You mentioned a moment ago the design class.

BERNARD CHAET: There was a design class.

ROBERT BROWN: What was—

BERNARD CHAET: Well, as ridiculous as it sounds, we—this teacher who came from RISD, a Mr. Brown, I'm sure others of my classmates must have talked about him, one of the assignments I remember, never forget it, was to do paintings in pastel to music. I can still hear the [Julius Christian] Sibelius in my head doing that. I thought this was the most ridiculous—I was probably right here—doing pastel abstractions to music, and when I finally got to Finland, there was this big statue of Sibelius. It's 12 feet high. I had my wife take a picture of me in front of it.

And then the funny things about Sibelius, we sort of—Ninon and I were in the same class. He sort of pursued us—

ROBERT BROWN: Ninon Lacey, your wife.

BERNARD CHAET: Ninon Lacey, my wife. When we were at Norfolk summer school [the Yale Norfolk School of Art], there was one room in this music and art division. There was the Sibelius Room, because he had actually performed there. So, one summer we spent in the Sibelius Room. I said, "This horrible room. We have to stay in this room because we did those bad pastels to his music." So, I kept thinking of Sibelius. So to me, this was a ridiculous class, but perhaps I learned something. I think that what happens today is there's no curriculum in art schools, and I feel sorry for the people. They have nothing—they have nothing to fight against when they're out—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: —because everyone is told to do their own thing. You have to know something to do your own thing.

ROBERT BROWN: It sounds as though you aren't very happy when—

BERNARD CHAET: No, I was an unhappy student all the time.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: But I think I learned a lot.

ROBERT BROWN: When you came back after, what, about a year or two, after you quit and went back—

BERNARD CHAET: Yes, I did go back. I did go back.

ROBERT BROWN: —what year? [Cross talk.]

BERNARD CHAET: I—

ROBERT BROWN: About 1945 or—?

BERNARD CHAET: No. I went back, it was already '48. I was one of the first ones back to the new program in Tufts, and, fortunately for me, there was no program put together, and I could do what I wanted. So I—

ROBERT BROWN: Great. They had an affiliation with Tufts?

BERNARD CHAET: That's it. That's why I went back. I said, well, I'll get a degree, maybe I'll get a job.

ROBERT BROWN: You got that in 1949?

BERNARD CHAET: That's right, and I did it part time.

ROBERT BROWN: And, once again, Zerbe was still there, wasn't he?

BERNARD CHAET: He was still there. Yeah. And I—I went there another year, made it three years, so I could go into these courses in Tufts. I did Tufts part time, one summer, and one semester here. I didn't—I want—I was painting, you see, and the fact that I had my freedom helped me. I had my first show in '46.

ROBERT BROWN: '46.

BERNARD CHAET: Yes. I was 22.

ROBERT BROWN: So you already had a career.

BERNARD CHAET: Well, I didn't have a—I thought I did. I mean, I—I let myself go, which was wonderful to get things out of your system before I went back to school. See, this was in between when I quit.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: I painted like crazy, alone—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: —and I think I learned a lot by being alone. You see, what people don't realize when they go to art school that the important thing is to learn how to be alone. A painter is alone. And if you're in school, it's fun and games all the time, and I tried to tell my students that. I said,

"This is not a painter's life when you have visiting artists and you're talking to the person next door every day, and there's a hundred people painting."

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: The painter's life is being alone with finding out who you are, and for some artists, it takes a long time. Now I look back at my work, I see patterns of where I was going, because I'm old enough to look back, and if you're young, you don't see how one thing—

ROBERT BROWN: You were going somewhere pretty early because of this exceptional circumstance of being—having dropped out of school.

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. I was put on the spot.

ROBERT BROWN: You were on your own.

BERNARD CHAET: Right. I was put on the spot. I was working at night at the *Post* and—and painting. I was able to get a studio very inexpensively. [David] Aronson and I shared two or three rooms. He had one room and I had another one.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he about your age?

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. And he was already starting to teach at the Museum School.

ROBERT BROWN: He was already out of the school?

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: He was out. And, of course, the big change in my life came actually before I started teaching and it has to do with [Boris] Mirski. Mirski—

ROBERT BROWN: Boris Mirski?

BERNARD CHAET: Boris Mirski, who at that time, when I first showed, had just moved into Newbury Street from Charles Street. He really made us feel important. We were, after all, in our early 20s. He gave me a show at age 22.

ROBERT BROWN: Would he go around to your studios?

BERNARD CHAET: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Or did you go to him?

BERNARD CHAET: Oh, he'd come to the studios.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: And all the people were—who were in the school were going to Europe winning, you know, winning these scholarships. One day he came to me.

ROBERT BROWN: These traveling scholarships.

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. Traveling scholarships. They're still—

ROBERT BROWN: Would you—did you try for one?

BERNARD CHAET: I didn't try for one, no. I went to Tufts instead.

ROBERT BROWN: And you went there so you'd have a vocation?

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. I—

ROBERT BROWN: Something?

BERNARD CHAET: —began to be worried.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: What the hell's going to happen to me?

ROBERT BROWN: Were your family putting pressure on you or anything?

BERNARD CHAET: No, they weren't. I was in a pressure, and I had a part-time job teaching at a place—

ROBERT BROWN: You taught— [Cross talk.]

BERNARD CHAET: —at the Roxbury YMHA and I figured I think I could learn to teach people and I—I had a group of older people, and so you couldn't give them art—art world talk. You had to really be basic.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: I think I learned how to teach teaching amateurs, and children because I was—I was also doing substitute work in schools. They would send me to different schools, very dangerous kind of schools in—it was like the *Blackboard Jungle* kind of thing.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean some very tough—

BERNARD CHAET: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: —situations?

BERNARD CHAET: Absolutely. Mostly in South Boston. Once I took the place of a teacher who had been thrown downstairs, and they broke—the students broke her—the fall had broken their legs and arms, and I had really tough kids there, and there wasn't much teaching.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you get to turn any of them around a bit?

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. Twenty years later, a guy came up to me at one of my shows and he made a drawing on a piece of paper. This is the drawing you put on the board of a human skull at the—what's the—High School of South Boston. He went on to art school. He never forgot that drawing. I explained the difference between an ape skull and a human skull, and he wrote it. He drew the whole thing out for me. First, he came with the drawing and then I said, "Who are you?" and it was very funny.

But at that point in my life, I'm getting to the point where in about 1949, Mirski wanted to come over and see what I was doing. I was on the corner of Boylston and Mass., and this building is still up there.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. Recently, I was in Tower Records and one of the guys caught me looking over there and I was hypnotized looking at that window that I painted for years, right in there, and so I said, "Well, I used to live there." The guy thought I was crazy. I was just standing there. I didn't know what I was doing, but Mirski showed up, and we went out for a crummy sandwich down below. There were kind of restaurants like Waldorf's and Walton's down below—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: —and I think I had Boston vegetable meal. It was horrible. He said, "I want to talk to you about something. I've decided." We're talking about—I've never talked about this. It was Spring '49. He said, "I've decided you should go to Europe." I says, "Swell, let's go down and have"—and he said—and we went down to the restaurant, and he took out of his pocket round-trip ticket, boat tickets. He said, "While you're over there, I'm going to support you." And he was not doing that well. I mean, I didn't know what to say. I remember that night I dreamt I was in Paris, and the colors are—so I went over there. A lot of these people were there.

ROBERT BROWN: This is about 1949?

BERNARD CHAET: '49.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: Of course, I got there and about five months later, we didn't have any money. Fortunately, I had friends that I could borrow from. I was—I had a ticket home on a boat.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: Open ticket.

ROBERT BROWN: Open ticket.

BERNARD CHAET: But I didn't have any money. I think my younger brother sent me a \$100. In those days, let's put it this way, \$25 a week in Paris, I could eat out two meals a day and have a hotel room, a nice room. I had the biggest room in this hotel.

ROBERT BROWN: How was life when you got there? I mean, were you surprised? Had you been looking forward to—

BERNARD CHAET: Oh, yeah, sure. This was it. I mean, I was going to—

ROBERT BROWN: Paris was—

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. And that first time we got there, there were four of us rented a car, we spent two months in Italy traveling all through Italy, and there—and we rented a French car and the places we arrived in France, they had never seen a French car. It was a Renault. They had never seen a Renault. They all came out to look at it.

ROBERT BROWN: In France?

BERNARD CHAET: In Italy.

ROBERT BROWN: In Italy, you mean?

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. France they knew what a French car was, but they—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: —were looking at it and they wanted to know. We told them it was a horrible car, a French [inaudible]. We let them know it was bad. That's what they wanted to hear. But traveling through Italy in two months, it was maybe two and a half months, it was wonderful. I mean, we went every place.

ROBERT BROWN: What were you doing? Looking?

BERNARD CHAET: We went to the museums. That's all we did. From one end to the other, and, I mean, from Naples. We—we went along the coast, the Riviera, and that was the time we met Picasso in Antibes.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, you did?

BERNARD CHAET: Yes, and we were also—

ROBERT BROWN: You were all art students?

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: And what was it like meeting him?

BERNARD CHAET: There he was, and there was this man, he must have been 60. It was the time that you saw the famous picture of him holding the umbrella over Françoise Gilot's head with the little kids playing. He was setting up his museum in Antibes. There he was—alone! And we went up to him. I'm the one who spoke French best, let him know we were American artists. He was very nice to us. He told us to work hard like he did, and I gave him a Lucky Strike, and I could see he liked it. Those days we all smoked. I gave him the pack. I was so thrilled to be there. But he looked like he was a god from another—I mean, he had this orange sweatshirt on, enormous shoulders. He looked like a lot of the figures in his work, the legs. I remember looking at them. I said, my God, he's doing himself, the body type, and so forth. I mean, this was a thrilling moment, aside from the fact that Mirski never told anyone that he was sending me, no one ever knew about that he was sending me, and that was the first couple of months that we traveled all over Italy, and then on the way back, I got very sick.

ROBERT BROWN: Who didn't know you were going to be there? I mean, the other—

BERNARD CHAET: I mean, they didn't know how I got there, all the other people from the museums. I couldn't tell them that Mirski was paying for this trip.

ROBERT BROWN: No.

BERNARD CHAET: I just didn't say anything.

ROBERT BROWN: Who were you traveling with, the other three people?

BERNARD CHAET: Well, my wife-to-be.

ROBERT BROWN: Ninon.

BERNARD CHAET: Ninon Lacey, and David Aronson who was my apartment mate in the sense we shared—

ROBERT BROWN: You had known him for a while?

BERNARD CHAET: Yes. We had gone to these high school classes, and then there was a fourth person, and we traveled all over Italy, and spending time in each major city, all through Italy and both coasts. And so when I went back years later, I knew what I wanted to see.

ROBERT BROWN: Was that system—did you make notes or make sketches?

BERNARD CHAET: I made—yes. What I did then, I remember making drawings of some of the buildings in Assisi. When I got to Paris, I had spent the winter, from September on until I left, in Paris. I did—I did gouaches from these drawings, and I thought they were the best things I did in Europe. I did a lot of things. As a matter of fact, I just showed Sinclair one that I found.

ROBERT BROWN: Sinclair Hitchings?

BERNARD CHAET: Yes. Sinclair Hitchings. Right. And—

ROBERT BROWN: In Paris then, what, you set about—

BERNARD CHAET: I had a studio—

ROBERT BROWN: —finding a teacher or—

BERNARD CHAET: No.

ROBERT BROWN: —having a studio?

BERNARD CHAET: Just painting. And going to the Louvre, and going to the Modern Museum, being with my friends.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: And as I said to you at lunch, we didn't have too many things to do, so we spent some evenings drawing each other, and now we look at these drawings. They were from another—I mean, over 50 years ago. And you learn a lot about your friends when you see them in another country because everybody—their—their basic character comes out, and you find out a lot about yourself. I found out what paintings I missed, and what artists I wanted to meet. I would have liked to have at this time have met Bonnard [ph]. I mean, he was my favorite, besides [Max] Beckmann. I wasn't going to see Beckmann, but we saw Picasso. We saw the king. But we were there looking at what was going on in Paris. I remember seeing a [Francis] Picabia show, of white dots on black. I didn't know what to make of it at this time. I think it looked pretty good in my head today. But there were major shows in Paris. The first major show was a huge Gauguin retrospective, and I realized that that painting in Boston, the large one, is one of the great Gauguins. You don't realize it if you only know one painting. And then there was another great show that was in Paris

was the [Fernand] Léger show, a huge Léger show, and I'd never seen more than three or four or five.

My education before then about contemporary art was all Institute of Contemporary Art where they did have great shows.

ROBERT BROWN: They did.

BERNARD CHAET: They did. They had wonderful shows covering the whole set of—of—of European art.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you run into or meet Léger when you were in Paris?

BERNARD CHAET: Oh, no.

ROBERT BROWN: See him?

BERNARD CHAET: But I have—

ROBERT BROWN: He was teaching at— [Cross talk.]

BERNARD CHAET: Yes. I had a friend who was studying with him and I went to hear one of his critiques and, of course, the whole idea was that you did Léger. They all looked the same, and if someone did not do Léger, he would say to them at this weekly critique, "This painting is not in the spirit of this school." I always remember that. "This painting is not." And he had it all set up as a Léger with ladders and ropes and models on ladders and so forth. He came in once. I only went to one critique to hear him talk but I wasn't—I just wanted to find out about myself and paint and I—also, I did a lot of work, and only a few things I saved at that time. I think I made—

ROBERT BROWN: To find out about yourself. You've mentioned—

BERNARD CHAET: Well, I didn't know I was finding out.

ROBERT BROWN: You didn't.

BERNARD CHAET: It's in retrospect, but the drawings I did were—I turned into paintings when I came home. There was one drawing I did based on an El Greco. There's a boy with a map, holding a map of Toledo. When I went home, I did my own version of a boy in front of Boston. I remember going there with Enrique [ph] . He was the first one I knew worked outside, and he gave me a kind of easel he made, and I remember going in Roxbury and drawing a big church, which is in this painting. I did little paintings and drawings, then I did this huge painting. It was the largest thing I'd ever done—of a boy in front of the city, but in my mind it was based on that, and I showed that about 1951.

ROBERT BROWN: And that was a great horizontal painting, wasn't it?

BERNARD CHAET: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: I think you might have a Xerox of it.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. I've seen it. Huh.

BERNARD CHAET: And what I did, all the things that I did when I came back to Boston were based on my experience in Europe. I remember that whole year was based—the work was—I was ready to go. I had to finish up at Tufts. I had a few months, one semester.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: And I was working like a—. Mirski gave me a show, and the show was in May '51.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: And—and what happened, Mirski and his schedule, very strange. It was the end of the season, and he had nothing to follow it up with. So, he left my show up for months, drove me crazy. I was embarrassed, because one month all right. It went on. He just left it up. But what I learned was about myself. I gave myself my first critique. I said, "My color is bad. These pictures are all in—all tonal," and—and this time Zerbe, who liked this show, recommended me to [Josef] Albers, who was looking for a teacher—

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, yes.

BERNARD CHAET: —and I was terrified because the only thing I had seen of Albers's, was a painting that was in Mirski's. It looked like open books and squares, and so finally I hadn't heard from Albers, and Mirski called Zerbe. Mirski—and—and in my presence Zerbe said, "Call him up!" So I called him up with a strong German accent, much stronger than Zerbe's, and I said, "Can I send photographs of my work?" He said, "Boy, painting is color." This is what I was telling myself hearing it on the phone. He said, "I want you to come down Wednesday." This was Monday. "With your paintings. I don't want slides and photographs. I want to see what your work looks like."

Well, I had a car that was my first car that would have used 10 gallons of oil to get to New Haven, and this was a real oldie, and fortunately Mirski had a collector who also collected our work, all of our works, who drove me there, who knew New Haven. They took me in a new Pontiac station wagon with my paintings. I showed up. This is—it's already July or August. I had signed up.

ROBERT BROWN: This is '51, and you—

BERNARD CHAET: Yes. I had signed up for part-time jobs all around Boston.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: Teaching jobs. I come in, and he gave me a criticism that was amazing, telling me what he—about the way I was painting—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: —where the color was meaningful, where it was awful.

ROBERT BROWN: But extremely acute—

BERNARD CHAET: Oh—

ROBERT BROWN: Right.

BERNARD CHAET: —I was dizzy with this. At the end of the thing, he said, "Tell me how you would

teach drawing." I mean, I was not prepared for this. But what—

ROBERT BROWN: Did you know whether—

BERNARD CHAET: I didn't know what—I mean, I wasn't prepared with the philosophy, the way years later where I was placing students, I would tell them exactly what to be ready for. Here it was. Fortunately, it was exactly what he wanted to hear, that I would teach drawing based on line drawing. I had no idea that this was where he came from, too. He said, "This is enough. You start."—

ROBERT BROWN: So, line drawing?

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. Line rather than modeling with the side of the crayon.

ROBERT BROWN: Right.

BERNARD CHAET: And he asked me a few questions about it. I had one or two drawings with me, and this was—it was already July.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: End of July. He said, "You start in September." I said, "Oh, my goodness" in my head—well, I went back to college and then she wasn't—she didn't think anything would come of this. Well, we were a little serious at this point and she was away or something. The next day I told her. She thought I was making it up. I had to be in New Haven and—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. Were you married by this time?

BERNARD CHAET: No, no.

ROBERT BROWN: No.

BERNARD CHAET: There was no way we were going to get married at this point. I didn't have—we had no means. So, I left about four weeks down the line. And there I was on my own in New Haven in 1951, and the salary was so low, and it was underneath, below the announced salary level that Albers was authorized to give me, that the university sent me a check for \$500 at the end of December telling me that I was underpaid. So, I was—\$500. I think I bought an automobile then.

ROBERT BROWN: Why did they— [Cross talk.]

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ROBERT BROWN: Your salary was under —

BERNARD CHAET: It was about \$3,000, and—

ROBERT BROWN: Who was the dean then?

BERNARD CHAET: Charles Sawyer.

ROBERT BROWN: Charles Sawyer, oh, the museum man?

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: He's the one—he's the one who brought [Josef] Albers to Yale, and started the revolution of changing the school.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: He was interested in the Bauhaus, and he was the first one to buy Albers's work actually. I found out reading the *Andover Bulletin*, that big book on the Andover Museum last summer, and that's how Albers got there.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: And the school had no money. I taught intermediate drawing, intermediate painting, and—and second-year drawing.

ROBERT BROWN: This was to begin with?

BERNARD CHAET: And—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. Albers was teaching what?

BERNARD CHAET: Albers was teaching the basic courses, color and drawing, and then he gave criticism to the few graduate students who were there. At that time Yale gave a BFA. I asked if I could sit in his color course. I wanted to see what he was doing, and it was fascinating to me, and it strongly influenced me about what color meant. I was ready for it.

ROBERT BROWN: Did—did you hit it off with him right away?

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah, he was very nice to me.

ROBERT BROWN: He was very nice.

BERNARD CHAET: He was very nice to me until I—he picked me to head the school after he left and that's when he was terrible to me, because he thought I was changing things. I'll get to that part.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. In fact, I wanted to back up just a little bit.

BERNARD CHAET: Go ahead.

ROBERT BROWN: Before we get to New Haven, I want to ask a bit more about Boston and particularly Boris Mirski. He was obviously a generous man, or could be.

BERNARD CHAET: Yes, he could be.

ROBERT BROWN: You said he—he was almost always at his gallery. Did he not want to be around the home?

BERNARD CHAET: That's—that's the "surmisa!"

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: It was rumored that he was even there on Sundays.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: Ralph Coburn would know because—

ROBERT BROWN: For his work. [Cross talk.]

BERNARD CHAET: He—he was in—I'm sure you've heard a lot of funny stories that we share about him because he could be very funny without knowing he was funny. And he had a frame shop down there that supported the gallery—

ROBERT BROWN: Sure.

BERNARD CHAET: —but he also ran a school at the beginning on the third floor where he had some of his people teaching there—John Wilson, Esther Geller. I mean, there was—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: He tried to— [Cross talk.]

ROBERT BROWN: He would teach.

BERNARD CHAET: I was with him when he bought that building.

ROBERT BROWN: The building on Newbury Street?

BERNARD CHAET: On Newbury Street.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: I went with him and he bought that building for \$500 down. I went with him into the office, and the guy said to him, "Mr. Mirski, don't you have more than this?" He said, "This is every nickel I have," and they sold him the building for \$500. I mean that's how bad things must have been in that year of 1945 or '44, whenever he bought it. It might have been '45, something like that—

ROBERT BROWN: But you got to know him while you were still a student?

BERNARD CHAET: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he pretty nice and warm to you, or—

BERNARD CHAET: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: —was he—

BERNARD CHAET: He was very nice. We got to know him through Hyman Swetzoff, who at that time was the front man downstairs at the Institute of Contemporary Art.

ROBERT BROWN: Downstairs?

BERNARD CHAET: Well, he was the greeter.

ROBERT BROWN: I see.

BERNARD CHAET: I mean, he looked like he owned the building, but he was downstairs, and he advised Mirski who to bring into his gallery.

ROBERT BROWN: The Institute of Modern Art—Contemporary—

BERNARD CHAET: Contemporary. It was on Newbury Street.

ROBERT BROWN: That had a good reputation then?

BERNARD CHAET: It had wonderful—

ROBERT BROWN: You said it had— [Cross talk.]

BERNARD CHAET: —paintings and there was something called a "Member Show." If you were a member and you paid a few dollars. So, I had a painting in it, and Swetsoff recommended me to Mirski, and there were about five or six of us in this group, and we were—you know, I mean, he was sort of like a father image.

ROBERT BROWN: Swetsoff worked for Mirski for a bit, too, or—

BERNARD CHAET: He worked briefly.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. Didn't work— [Cross talk.]

BERNARD CHAET: Before he went—no.

ROBERT BROWN: He had his own gallery, too?

BERNARD CHAET: He finally went to his own.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: It could have worked out but didn't.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. You mentioned once the first—maybe it was one of the only visits you had to the Mirski house in Medford.

BERNARD CHAET: Ahh. In a way, I helped engineer it. I was leaving for New Haven, and I was getting scared.

ROBERT BROWN: In '51 or so?

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. And I said, "Boris, you know, none of us have ever been out to your house." So a grand party was set up and this—there were groups of us who had to do—Ninon remembers going out there to polish the silverware. He had all kinds of stuff there, all kinds of silverware, and it was a huge house in Medford.

ROBERT BROWN: And he'd never—they'd never entertained, I guess?

BERNARD CHAET: Never. This was a grand party.

ROBERT BROWN: Was his wife—

BERNARD CHAET: Yes, she was wonderful.

ROBERT BROWN: —social? Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: Some place I have pictures of Mirski and his wife, letta, visiting us after we got married, and were living in a cabin part of the summer in New Hampshire that Ninon's family owned, and it was a wonderful evening. This was the only time the whole group of us were together at a banquet, and we never had any idea of what his house looked like. We knew the family. We knew letta. We knew the son and daughter, but this was—it must have been '50 or '51.

ROBERT BROWN: And the house was this—

BERNARD CHAET: Oh, magnificent.

ROBERT BROWN: —big—

BERNARD CHAET: Well, see, Boris bought anything that anyone brought in.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: Silverware. I mean, he had runners all over the place, and so if he didn't use it in the gallery, it was in the house. It was a grand—we still talk about that party.

ROBERT BROWN: And did he preside over it?

BERNARD CHAET: Oh, yes. I remember he made—

ROBERT BROWN: He rose to the occasion?

BERNARD CHAET: He had something I've never seen before. He had cut-up peaches in Chianti, so after you drank the wine. I mean, it was a wonderful—an evening that you when you're young you don't think you—you think this is something that happens in life. You don't have many crazy banquets like this.

ROBERT BROWN: No, no.

BERNARD CHAET: And that's one of my last memories leaving Boston. Of course, he thought I was being sent over to Europe because I was a 173 miles away.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean, you might as well be?

BERNARD CHAET: New Haven, my God, this is out of the world. His final words to me were, "Don't worry. We're going to bring you back," as if I was going—we'll bring you—

ROBERT BROWN: He must have been extremely proud that you were—

BERNARD CHAET: Oh, sure. Even my father was impressed that I had a job.

ROBERT BROWN: He wasn't easily impressed.

BERNARD CHAET: Well, I mean, I wasn't going any place. He wasn't crazy about my work, not that

he knew anything about it, but, I mean, I had a job, so I could get married.

ROBERT BROWN: Your father was very tolerant of all this?

BERNARD CHAET: Well, he was. Yes, he was, he was. I mean, he was worried, but he never said anything, didn't look like I was going to—well, I was going to Tufts and getting a degree, so that was all right.

ROBERT BROWN: On the other hand, you said he was very idealistic himself.

BERNARD CHAET: He was, but at least he—he went to work. What I did, you see, I mean, I wasn't going to work. My father was a great humorist, too, and my brother and I probably still carry his jokes, and I didn't know, although he was a great humorist because even I use a lot of his lines. But I had a student of mine who got a job at BU, and he went to my father's place. By then, my brother owned it, and he heard the same jokes that I was telling him when he was a student from my brother. He was—so my father was quite a character. Let's put it that way. Impossible in many ways, and over-idealistic in many—he refused to buy the *Boston Globe* when it went from two cents to five cents. This was exploitation. So—

ROBERT BROWN: What was his name?

BERNARD CHAET: His name was David.

ROBERT BROWN: David.

BERNARD CHAET: The name of my son-in-law.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. So, your father. Boris was another person you were very lucky to be—
[Cross talk.]

BERNARD CHAET: Yes, he was—yes, I felt I was strongly influenced in many ways by Boris.

ROBERT BROWN: What did he intend for you to get out of that European experience?

BERNARD CHAET: I should see the great works of art. That's all.

ROBERT BROWN: And he presumably had some acquaintance with them, did he?

BERNARD CHAET: Yes, I—he—yes. He knew that this was what I needed.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: And, I mean, how could you thank a person like—I tried to help him. When I was there, we bought some—I bought some [Marc] Chagall etchings that were just coming into vogue, and I brought them back with me for him to sell. So, at the end, I think that he made enough money out of the things I brought back for him that we were practically squared up financially, because traveling in Europe was not that expensive in those days.

ROBERT BROWN: No.

BERNARD CHAET: I mean, the boat trip was too much for me, but comparatively it wasn't expensive.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. Uh, Mirski had, you mentioned to me earlier, had relation with—with Edith Halpert at the Downtown Gallery.

BERNARD CHAET: Yes. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT BROWN: What did they—

BERNARD CHAET: Well—

ROBERT BROWN: —exchange—

BERNARD CHAET: —There was an exchange. We showed our work at the Downtown, which got a—I think it was *Newsweek* did a big story on the work at the Downtown Gallery, and one of our group, Michael Tulechefsky, got a nice big reproduction. I still see the painting. It was a beautiful little painting called *Poet in Landscape*, and it was an exchange, a real exchange, and the downtown people showed at Mirski's, and so Edith Halpert never had met anyone like Boris. And he had a gift of gab that she was crazy about. She wanted him to come move to New York to help her manage her gallery because he was a good salesman, at least she had some money behind it. He didn't. He had the—he had his—

ROBERT BROWN: Frame business.

BERNARD CHAET: —frame business, and he had to refinance that building more than once.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: He was not making much money, believe me. He lived for the gallery and—and his—he was sort of the father image for a lot of—some of the people didn't get along with him. I felt, I suppose I was one of his favorites, but only one.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: And, of course, it also went hand in hand with the only critic we paid attention to, Dorothy Adlow.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes, who wrote for the *Christian Science Monitor*.

BERNARD CHAET: Yes, right. I mean, I was completely spoiled. Here she was coming to shows at the Museum School, writing about the shows, and giving us big publicity.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: By the time I got to New Haven, I had one or two big feature articles on me, and I was only 27.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: And when I came back, I had my—the next show I had in Boston, she had a big headline, my name on the top, "Returns to Boston." I mean—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: —so by the time I got down to the New York art world, I was absolutely spoiled.

ROBERT BROWN: Yep.

BERNARD CHAET: I mean, she was someone who was trailing all of us and helping us—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: —and I assume this is the way it went—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: —that you had somebody—I mean, the four or five of us who were getting major reviews in the *Christian Science Monitor*.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: I'll never forget the time my picture appeared in the back page when she would put reproductions of great art, and she did a whole first—she did a whole thing on a still life I did, and—and my first show. My work was starting to change and show in New York, '54, and what she did, I sent her the slides, she wrote an introduction, and I read it a few years ago. In just a few sentences she summarized the changes in my work and what I was doing that I didn't know about. Well, I think we're all spoiled. I mean, to have a critic like this—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: —writing in this paper—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: —a paper that you know is going around the world at the same time.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, yeah. I was looking here. It must—may have been one of her first reviews, the group show at Boris Mirski in 1946, October, Dorothy Adlow's comment was, "Boston artist honors Zerbe, present and former pupils."

BERNARD CHAET: Yes, I remember that show.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. I wanted to ask. She says that they'd gone through the classroom, learned the rudiments of good drawing, been led to the rich reservoir of color, and one or two had imitated the idiom of the teacher but others had cultivated mannerisms and so forth. Do you think she "capsulized" it?

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. I think—

ROBERT BROWN: You all were pretty young, just fledgling. [Cross talk.]

BERNARD CHAET: It's pretty good. It's pretty good.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: I remember that show. I think—

ROBERT BROWN: And then you referred earlier to the show at Burton Shaffer, your first New York show in—

BERNARD CHAET: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: —in 1954.

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. That was exchange show. I got someone a show at Mirski's and Mirski sent that one on—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: —to—to New York. [Cross talk.]

ROBERT BROWN: Mirski also worked with—for a time with Sam Kutz, who was briefly a dealer.

BERNARD CHAET: Well, it's because he met him in Provincetown. See, one of Boris's collectors helped sponsor a gallery in Provincetown in the summer, Mirski Gallery.

ROBERT BROWN: Who was that? Do you recall the collector?

BERNARD CHAET: Charner. Why can't I remember? Stone.

ROBERT BROWN: Stone?

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. A family out of Brockton.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh.

BERNARD CHAET: Judge Stone.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: And they helped sponsor this gallery, and Ralph Coburn worked for him a couple of summers there, and this must have been in the mid '50s, and that's where he met Kutz who had a gallery in Provincetown.

ROBERT BROWN: Provincetown.

BERNARD CHAET: So he brought some of Kutz's artists there. I think this was the first Hans Hofmann show in Boston, was at Mirski's.

ROBERT BROWN: Hmm.

BERNARD CHAET: And that's the connection.

ROBERT BROWN: Okay. What reception were contemporary modernist artists getting in Boston in the late '40s—early '50s?

BERNARD CHAET: I don't think it was too great.

ROBERT BROWN: Not much?

BERNARD CHAET: No, I don't think.

ROBERT BROWN: You mentioned, for example, you brought back Chagall prints.

BERNARD CHAET: That stuff was selling.

ROBERT BROWN: That would sell.

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. That would sell. I brought some. I found—I also found masterpieces that I remember the Lucerne where I got sick, and I had found the great Picasso. It's this great print of the bull walking along, and the man going up the stairs. I forget the name of it. And I think it was for sale for \$1,200. I wired Boris. I said, "Get yourself \$1,200. This print is one of the great prints of the 20th century." He never answered me, but I think to this day, if I had—this was this huge print. Why can't I think of the name of it? But at any rate, I brought back a set of Chagalls that I found in Paris and he sold them. It was easy to sell Chagalls, but there were a few collectors and they would buy things from Boris of the whole group, and some people went into New York and went—and a lot of people went separate ways, but he tried hard. At one point, Mirski was going to open a gallery in New York.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. You mentioned that Edith Halpert tried—

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. But he was going to open his own branch, but the particulars got too involved that he would send the show down. I mean, this was all very exciting and very heady, but it never worked out because he was a dreamer. He was a dreamer. And at least he showed his group, and he believed in them. He knew how to sell to people who—who were willing to take a chance on young artists.

ROBERT BROWN: A couple of other galleries in the early days, the Margaret Brown Gallery.

BERNARD CHAET: She was showing.

ROBERT BROWN: That lasted through the '50s.

BERNARD CHAET: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: What was that like? Was that anything like Boris's?

BERNARD CHAET: She—no.

ROBERT BROWN: No.

BERNARD CHAET: She was bringing some shows in from New York, and was more into surrealistic arts, and abstract art. The first Franz Klein show I saw was—was there.

ROBERT BROWN: Boris wasn't particularly interested in purely abstract?

BERNARD CHAET: Not—well, Hans Hofmann he could take. I mean the rich pigmentation.

ROBERT BROWN: Right. But a Klein was too spare to—

BERNARD CHAET: Well, he didn't have the contacts. A lot of it was personal.

ROBERT BROWN: And Margaret Brown evidently had that.

BERNARD CHAET: I think she had a different taste, which was wonderful because it had nothing to do with his taste. They were—I think they really complemented each other, and they were only nearby, but you realize there were fewer galleries then, but they got more publicity because there wasn't only the *Christian Science Monitor*. Even the *Herald* had a critic. Even the *Globe* had a critic.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: So, it would be possible to get two or three reviews, one show. I mean, now any gallery that has a review, it's a miracle.

ROBERT BROWN: Right.

BERNARD CHAET: And there are more galleries and less criticism.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: So, I mean, in a way we were spoiled. I mean, here I went to school for nothing, and we had a gallery would show our work. We had a critic who would write about it—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: —and I didn't know we were spoiled until I got a little older and I was—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. There was another gallery that—about that time, maybe a little earlier, the Stuart Gallery.

BERNARD CHAET: Yes, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: S-T-U-A-R-T. [Cross talk.]

BERNARD CHAET: At one point I was having a little trouble with Swetzoff, who didn't want to show me or something, and there was some magazine interested in me. He wouldn't even follow through.

ROBERT BROWN: This was later? This was—

BERNARD CHAET: This was at the—before—this was in the '40s.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: But Jean Deering came on. She had a lot of money and she was on Stuart Street. That's why it was called the Stuart Street Gallery, and the major show she put on, she would bring things from New York, but her major show was the Hyman Bloom Show. This was some show. This is the one that had the dead bodies in it.

ROBERT BROWN: Right.

BERNARD CHAET: This was—and had the—the cutoff leg and the frontal nudes of males, dead bodies, and, as I pointed out to some people, when that show hit New York, they didn't show those in the front room. Dulocker [ph] was afraid to put them out. He had them in the back room.

ROBERT BROWN: Here?

BERNARD CHAET: At Stuart Gallery, they showed everything that Bloom had. They framed the pictures the way he wanted them framed, and, I mean, Bloom, of course, was a very secretive guy. We had no idea what he was painting. He had only shown once or twice in his life.

ROBERT BROWN: Did many of you know him?

BERNARD CHAET: Oh, yeah. We knew him. He was the prince. As a matter of fact, he had a group around him. They went to a certain cafeteria every day, and ate eggs or something like that, and he didn't at that point like some of my humor that I—I did a terrible thing to him. [Laughs.] I—I think we brought him to buy some clothes, some shirts or something at Filene's. He didn't have anything to wear.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he pretty impoverished?

BERNARD CHAET: No. He didn't care.

ROBERT BROWN: He didn't care.

BERNARD CHAET: He had a nice studio on Huntington Avenue that looked like a dentist office from the outside, but he had all the—but he never would show you anything. Come in, you could hear the music and all this. The paintings were all to the wall, sort of a Boston secret society, and people from Boston at that time never showed each other work, which is a big mistake. After I left New Haven—went to New Haven, people showed each other their work.

ROBERT BROWN: And in Boston, you didn't— [Cross talk.]

BERNARD CHAET: Not at all. Never showed anybody anything.

ROBERT BROWN: So when you showed—

BERNARD CHAET: Suddenly this was something and, of course, he was sort of the king of Boston. And Levine had left during the War—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: —and never came back. So, this was a major show. Part of this show was—and the show last summer in Brockton.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

BERNARD CHAET: So I knew a lot of these pictures—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: —and the Deering show was a huge show, and for us it was a major show. A lot of the other things she showed were not that interesting. She had artists that we didn't know.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: But this was something.

ROBERT BROWN: Was Bloom not approachable? I mean, did he—

BERNARD CHAET: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he love to talk? He hung out—

BERNARD CHAET: Well, he would talk in parables.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: He was a true leader in that, and he had a lot of followers, people who would sit and listen to him.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: We were very mystical at this point, the conversation was not my kind of conversation, but he was the first artist I ever met. I was 18 years old, and one of my friends was Seymour Swetsoff.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. The brother of? [Cross talk.]

BERNARD CHAET: Yes, and he—and my first year of school and Bloom had appeared in *Time* magazine, "Americans 1942," and they said he was one of the great colorists, and he took me up to his studio. Boy, was I knocked over to see this dump with no heat and a little stove in the corner and I could see he had no food. He had one hangar on the wall with a Navy-blue suit, and a white shirt. I mean, I ate up everything in the room. And he was feeding a coal stove. Of course, we didn't see any of his work. He was very nice to me. He let—he let me know he didn't like the way I was dressed, that I didn't look like an artist. I must have had a camelhair coat, or something.

At any rate, that was in '42—'43, something like that, and, I mean, I didn't know what. I said, look at the way this guy lives. I said, I guess that's the name of the game, but here he was just painting, and it was a very tiny room, believe me. It was a very tiny room, and these huge canvases with their back turned to us, and although he admired Seymour and his work, he didn't turn anything around to show us.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: So, it was four years later, three-four years later when we saw—

ROBERT BROWN: He had a show? [Cross talk.]

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. All we knew was things he had shown at the Modern Museum and "Americans 1942." No one ever saw anything else, although he came to openings.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: I remember he came to an opening on Charles Street of the Mirski group, and he told me he liked a painting of mine that was there, and I thanked him. You know what he said to me? "Don't thank people for this. Get used to being a professional. You don't have to say 'thank you' for the compliment." Well, I was thanking him, not somebody else. I mean, I look at that painting. It's not—I wouldn't want to show it to you.

ROBERT BROWN: He would—he would—

BERNARD CHAET: He came, and I said, "I like your painting," and no one had ever said that. I mean, a real artist had never said anything like that to me, but—

ROBERT BROWN: He could be rather gruff.

BERNARD CHAET: He was very—he was—

ROBERT BROWN: Enigmatic.

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. Right. But he was the leader, and he had a lot of people with him, and he was approachable—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: — as a person. He had something to say.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: But it was all—a lot of it was secret society stuff, never to show your work to anyone else.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: But that was the society then. That was the culture of—of art at that time.

ROBERT BROWN: And were some of his followers non-artists?

BERNARD CHAET: No.

ROBERT BROWN: Patrons, these were?

BERNARD CHAET: No. Yeah. I met one of them was Jerry Goldberg who was a patron.

ROBERT BROWN: A collector. Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. And Jerry Goldberg bought mostly his, but he bought other works.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. And he was involved—Hyman was close to musicians and things like that, too?

BERNARD CHAET: Yes. What's his name? That Armenian composer.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, sure.

BERNARD CHAET: Do you know who I mean?

ROBERT BROWN: Yes. Ovanis [ph]

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. That was someone in his crowd.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think that this was something that most people in the arts in Boston were aware of, the Hyman Bloom?

BERNARD CHAET: I don't think so.

ROBERT BROWN: No. It would be the younger students? [Cross talk.]

BERNARD CHAET: Well, we knew his work. He had achieved something. He was a national figure. I think also I told you previously about the summer [Willem] de Kooning came to our summer program, must have been '55-'56, and the minute he heard I was from Boston, that's all he wanted to talk about to me was Hyman Bloom. What kind of a person he was, how old is he? I said, "He's younger

than you are." That shocked him. And he told me that he and [Jackson] Pollock felt that those paintings they saw in the museum were the first abstract paintings that they had ever seen.

ROBERT BROWN: These were at the '42 show?

BERNARD CHAET: No. The Christmas trees and all.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: And if you think of the Christmas tree, and you see what Pollock did with that painting and so forth, they—they were looking at his work. He was an important person, and that's why Thomas Hess, the editor of *Art News*, and de Kooning sent Elaine de Kooning down to interview him. And he made her cry. She went home. She was a tough person. To make her cry you had to be something.

ROBERT BROWN: Who? Bloom did?

BERNARD CHAET: Bloom made her cry. She went back and said she's not going back, and they convinced her to go back. Finally, the article appeared in the mid '50s on "Hyman Bloom Paints a Picture," [Elaine de Kooning, *Art News*, January 1950], and the only reason that article appeared is because de Kooning was a great admirer, and he was really in charge of that magazine through Tom Hess who was one of his big writers. And that book on *Abstract Art in America* that Hess wrote about Bloom was in that book. All the rest of them were New Yorkers who were all friends.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: So he was an influence.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: And so here I was, the fact that I knew Bloom made me a big hero to de Kooning. And we had a wonderful weekend together.

[AUDIO BREAK.]

BERNARD CHAET: I said, "Hyman, you'd say now that you would not sign this thing and not protest this." I said, "These people were out to get you. You are painting dead males."

ROBERT BROWN: This is, you're recalling this— [Cross talk.]

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. I'm recalling and you're telling me—

ROBERT BROWN: —forty years later?

BERNARD CHAET: —Yeah, that you would not sign anything against the institute now, but they were—that statement that they wrote was about you, and now, 40 years later, because you don't like the way art went, you're telling them you're on the wrong side of this. And, of course, I knew I was going to be interviewed next. So I—

ROBERT BROWN: This was for this program on— [Cross talk.]

BERNARD CHAET: For this program.

ROBERT BROWN: —on contemporary art?

BERNARD CHAET: With the—the problem of changing the name to the Institute of Contemporary Art.

ROBERT BROWN: From—

BERNARD CHAET: They wrote a document saying why—

ROBERT BROWN: Right.

BERNARD CHAET: —"Chicanery" and so forth, and now years later, Bloom is saying he was on the wrong side of it. I said, "You were the target," but it's easy to forget that.

ROBERT BROWN: He was the target of—

BERNARD CHAET: Well, of course.

ROBERT BROWN: —this by the other artists?

BERNARD CHAET: He—no.

ROBERT BROWN: The target? [Cross talk.]

BERNARD CHAET: He was a target of what the institute wrote was wrong of Modern art.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. That's right.

BERNARD CHAET: And I thought the—and the guy who wrote the—who put the program together, they may have made too much of it because it was a big event in Boston, and it did get national attention.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. It was about 1947, something like that?

BERNARD CHAET: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And—

ROBERT BROWN: And Hyman wouldn't believe that he had been the— [Cross talk.]

BERNARD CHAET: No. He didn't remember it.

ROBERT BROWN: He didn't remember it.

BERNARD CHAET: See, the way art went, it was all bad, and this guy was defending something conservative, which he himself believed in now, but he forgot that he was a radical at that point, and that's what they were trying to not change the name of the place, and it was ridiculous.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: There was no reason to do it, except that Steuben Glass, which really put in a lot of money.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. And—and one other thing. Didn't they want to distance themselves a bit

from the Museum of Modern Art?

BERNARD CHAET: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT BROWN: To make the Boston Institute—

BERNARD CHAET: Well, that's what they said. I didn't believe it for a minute.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: Because they were showing the same work as the Modern Museum was showing. There was no difference. You look through the catalog. There was a wonderful Kandinsky show. There were all—they were showing the same work. It didn't make any sense, except this corporation didn't like modern art and was willing to buy a place that would back their more conservative views.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: But it was an event in our lives, of course, that made you feel that you were in the right, and you were aligning yourself with great art of the present, and, of course, the institute changed then. There was no more member shows. They asked the artists not to come to the openings with the excuse the floor was too weak to take crowds and the stairs. That's the kind of thing that Plaut told us.

ROBERT BROWN: That—that—

BERNARD CHAET: The reason we weren't invited to the openings anymore, because—

ROBERT BROWN: Really?

BERNARD CHAET: — the building was too weak.

ROBERT BROWN: Whereas there had obviously been events that were important for young artists.

BERNARD CHAET: Well, of course!

ROBERT BROWN: They were exciting, weren't they?

BERNARD CHAET: They were closing us out.

ROBERT BROWN: Was there sort of a social—a certain cache being developed around it? Is that what they were doing?

BERNARD CHAET: Well, I mean, we felt we were part of this organization because we loved the shows, and during—during the War, the people who ran it would ask us what kind of shows we wanted, and they'd put them on.

ROBERT BROWN: Who ran it during the War? Was that Metcalf?

BERNARD CHAET: Metcalf.

ROBERT BROWN: Thomas Metcalf?

BERNARD CHAET: And he invited us to his home.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: Come in, and I remember I went there for tea on a Saturday afternoon, and what is on the wall? That great Cezanne self-portrait with the beret. Years later it went to the museum, but I couldn't get my eyes off this painting. To me, it was like a Rembrandt there sitting in the hallway. The light was on it. And those people cared about what the young artists wanted to see. We wanted to see an artist.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: We wanted to see Ansoy [ph]. We wanted to see Suting [ph].

ROBERT BROWN: You—

BERNARD CHAET: They brought it.

ROBERT BROWN: And after the War, a new spirit swept through?

BERNARD CHAET: Well— [Cross talk.]

ROBERT BROWN: Is this when James Plaut came—

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. Plaut—

ROBERT BROWN: —or he came before the War?

BERNARD CHAET: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: He figured the substitutes were out and he was going to run it and we felt that we were cut out and so it was an event. We didn't take it that serious. I mean, it was something.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: It wasn't the end of the line, by any means.

ROBERT BROWN: But did you ever have any meeting with Plaut, or you just knew of him?

BERNARD CHAET: Ralph did. I'm sure you—

ROBERT BROWN: Ralph Coburn?

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. I'm sure you've talked with—

ROBERT BROWN: Because Ralph was—

BERNARD CHAET: He was active, and he was the one who read Bloom's statement from the stage.

ROBERT BROWN: Right.

BERNARD CHAET: And he was so angry, I don't know if Ralph told you this, Plaut was so angry, he came down to Mirski's where Ralph worked part-time. He lived in the building, and he wanted to beat him up, said he [laughs]—and Boris was so brilliant. You know what Boris said to him? "You can't do this. He's Cleveland Trust." I mean, out of clear air, I mean, there's no—there's no connection. Scene changes, 20 years later, I'm in Cleveland at a meeting, College of Art meeting, and I pass by this bank, and it was Cleveland Trust. I went in there. I was with people and they said what are you laughing? I said, "There's Cleveland Trust." I mean, I had to explain the story. I didn't think there was such a place. I went in and I got one of their advertisements and I sent it to Ralph, "This is from your bank," but Boris, out of the clear air, said, "You can't touch him, he's Cleveland Trust," and there was—can you imagine saying something like that?

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. Was it simply out of the air?

BERNARD CHAET: Out of the air.

ROBERT BROWN: Because, in fact, Ralph had no—

BERNARD CHAET: No connection.

ROBERT BROWN: It stopped Plaut in his tracks?

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. Right. He was going to—he—he blamed Ralph for being one of the instigators of this thing. I don't think he was. Maybe Mirski. Bloom blamed Mirski for this, and he may have been happy about it but he—he didn't. He didn't have that much influence.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: That's a funny story.

ROBERT BROWN: Very. [Laughs.]

BERNARD CHAET: Well, Mirski was very inventive with language. He would come up with things you would never believe anyone could say, and we who knew him would make jokes about it. Now I think about it, he was very clever, very clever. He knew what to say at the right time, and out of the air would come these crazy things.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: So, when you're young, you don't appreciate people like this because you don't have enough experience. In my life, I haven't met too many people like this.

[AUDIO BREAK.]

ROBERT BROWN: Continuing the interview with Bernard Chaet at his summer home in Rockport, Massachusetts. This is July 9, 1997.

To begin today, you wanted to say something further about your many years with Boris Mirski with whom you had your first one-man show in 1946.

BERNARD CHAET: Well, last time we spoke, I talked about what Mirski did for me, and I left the gallery 30 years ago, so that would make it 1957—

ROBERT BROWN: '67.

BERNARD CHAET: '67. And I want to give the reasons because a lot of people felt that I had no business leaving Mirski for all the wonderful things he did for me. But—and I couldn't even tell these people why I left. At this point Alan Fink had left Mirski's and started his gallery.

ROBERT BROWN: Fink had been the assistant?

BERNARD CHAET: He had been the assistant to Mirski for years, and he decided to go off on his own, and it was in the back of my mind. Mirski and I had had some recent problems, and it had to do with another artist whom I recruited for the gallery, and that was the Los Angeles artist Rico Lebrun, who was spending a year at Yale.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: And what happened is that Mirski got caught in a kind of dilemma that he often did in scheduling. I had also gotten someone else's show there. It was Neal Welliver's first show, which I got for—who was—he was then an assistant professor, or an assistant at Yale, whichever, instructor, and I had presented his work to Mirski, and Mirski had offered him a show.

Somehow the scheduling got ruined, and he wanted me to get Welliver to change the dates radically so he could shove in Rico Lebrun, who demanded a certain date. Well, this was this guy's first show. I couldn't budge him, and I had—nor did I want to try. Well, Mirski said this was my fault, [laughs] that I had presented these both people, and, of course, the big show was the big Lebrun show whom Mirski had many shows. He showed his work many times after the first thing.

ROBERT BROWN: And, of course, he was a big name at that point.

BERNARD CHAET: Yes, he was a big name. Now, here I am. At this point Lebrun never talked to me again, because I couldn't seem to manipulate it fast enough for him, and Welliver, I mean, and so here I was in the middle, and Mirski was angry at me because I just couldn't get these people to move.

Well, that was lingering in the background. It wasn't the reason I left. What happened is this: Mirski had an aunt who had a house in the west end of Boston, and he stored some—a lot of paintings there from the gallery. At a certain point, some people broke in and stole a lot of paintings, including a lot of mine, and a week before I actually left, I met someone on the street. He said, "I was going to call you." He's an antique dealer. I think he's still around. Willie Postar [ph]. I think he owns a lot of Blooms, I noticed, in the last Hyman Bloom catalog, 1990s. He said, "I have to tell you something. I heard the following. The people who stole the paintings sent a delegate to Mirski offering to buy my paintings back," trying to sell my paintings that were stolen, and Mirski's answer was, "I have a lot of these paintings, I'm not buying them back."

Now—and he said I can verify this, if you want. I was furious, and so if ever I was pushed over the top, it was this action, and some of these paintings I still remember fondly, and over the years, now we're talking 1997, I've gotten three or four letters from people who have these paintings. One was somebody who worked in Washington in city planning, and a colleague of mine in Planning at Yale gave the guy my address and he sent me a diagram of the painting which he thought was abstract. Actually, it was a view of Boston along Charles. For him, for this man, it looked abstract, and I had some other paintings of that time.

Even recently, say a year ago, I got a letter from a man who sent me a little photograph of a painting of three figures and he wanted—he called me up. I said, "Well, these paintings were stolen,

but I don't want them back. You understand?" And then he—then he had another painting, which I had no idea how he got it, from the '60s. At any rate, I told him I was having a show in Boston at the time, and his conscience was cleared. He went in and bought a new painting, but—and—and then I heard from somebody else—at least three people out of this.

So, the anger of the moment, I was—I was furious. If he didn't—and I also found out from Mr. Postar that he wasn't—the—the representative of the crooks, of the thieves didn't ask much money for my paintings, but Mirski wouldn't give any, wouldn't give them a nickel. So that was it. I went in to Mirski, I was trembling, and I said, "Look, Boris. Here is the story." He wouldn't confirm or deny. I said, "I just can't take this. I'm going to leave and go to Alan's. You said enough," and that was the end of it, and I never saw him again.

ROBERT BROWN: Hmm, hmm.

BERNARD CHAET: And a lot of people were not interested, people who were friends of Mirski's and friends of mine, weren't—they weren't interested in my reasons. I was somebody that wasn't responsible enough to care for the person who had helped me so much and Mirski, I'll repeat again, he—he sent me to Europe. He helped get the job for me at Yale because Zerbe had recommended me, and nothing happened, and Mirski said, "We're calling Zerbe right now." Called him on the phone and Zerbe told me what to do. He remembered recommending me, but if Mirski hadn't made that phone call, I would not know how to proceed.

So I owed him all this, but what he did to me, I just couldn't shake.

ROBERT BROWN: Was there any premonition of that in the earlier years on the part of Boris Mirski?

BERNARD CHAET: No, no.

ROBERT BROWN: Straightforward?

BERNARD CHAET: Well, he was a strange and wonderful person and he was—he was juggling everything, the frame shop, the mortgages. He kept refinancing the building which he bought for a song, but sometimes business was bad and the thing that held the gallery together was the frame shop, and so he managed. This was his life, this gallery, but — so I can't praise him enough, and at the same time I have to make it clear if anyone's ever interested of what happened there.

At this point, I don't know how many people left Mirski to go with Alan Fink, not too many, not too many at all. He was just starting in. He had a partner and he started out from scratch for the most part.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: I should say that in the last few years before I left, he was sort of handling my account anyhow with Mirski. He was handling my work and he was — he handled certain artists and I was one of them.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm, Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: So, however, I could trust Boris to do that. It was just this thing was too much for me.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: And even though I felt I was a traitor, I had to do this.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: So, I just want to close that gate.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. Well, I wanted to ask, before we talk a bit about some of your earliest exhibitions and work, Boris was financing your trip to Europe. Did he urge you to do this or did you approach him?

BERNARD CHAET: No, no.

ROBERT BROWN: How did that come about?

BERNARD CHAET: I think—

ROBERT BROWN: You may have mentioned it.

BERNARD CHAET: —I may have mentioned it and I'll repeat it. He said he wanted to see my latest work. He came over at 6 o'clock and we — we had a crummy meal down below at the corner of Mass. and Boylston. It was a famous Walton's Restaurant. I think we had a New England boiled dinner, you know, for a dollar or so. He sat there, he said, "You know, I'll tell you why I really came. I think you should go to Europe." I said, "Well, what else is new? I think I'll have another coffee." And as I came back with my coffee in my hand, he had the tickets on the table. It was a round trip on the U.S. Line.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: Open, and so I sort of looked at them. I was stunned and he said, "I will send you money every month."

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: And I was trying to help him. I remember when we got to Switzerland, at the end of four months, there was that great Picasso etching of the Minotaur, and I wired him. It was \$1,200. I said, "Look. This is going to be worth a fortune." It already to me, it's a great—I never heard from him. At any rate, after I was there four or five months, the money ran out. Fortunately, I had people on the G.I. Bill in France that I could borrow from—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm, Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: —and so I managed to stay most of the year because it was very inexpensive living. The first four months, four of us rented a French car and we went—the funny story is, the people who were driving, myself and David Aronson, neither of us had driven alone. We had just gotten our license. Can you imagine what it was like picking up this car in Paris? And so I think I was the coach telling him what to do. Took us hours to get back to where we were staying, going around circles and—but we took off the next day, and we went all the way gradually down the coast, and the Riviera, and then to the Italian Riviera, and then all through Italy. It was a dangerous time. People were starving.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: We had some crazy adventures, especially by the time we reached Naples. There were huge strikes going on, demonstrations. You can't imagine. We were sitting having coffee. People carrying huge signs. It was the summer that *The Bicycle Thief* came out, which we saw at an outdoor movie. That was what was going on. People were living in caves, and the police told us never to leave—not to leave our hotel at night ever in Naples. We were right along the ocean. Even the people who ran the hotels were suspicious of us. They thought they had recognized GIs who would destroy their hotel, and so they were terrified. So they were terrified, the police kept us up. Even during the day, it was dangerous walking in Naples, because there were all kinds of people attached to you.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: People were hungry, and we only saw it there. We saw all the war ruins as we went through France and so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: But did you spend a good deal of time going to museums?

BERNARD CHAET: That's what—that was the plan.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: We had a map of all the museums. The funny thing is, the first time—stop was Dijon, and this was the first time, I went to the top of the hill, and I did a serious landscape drawing. I felt that I wanted to—and it's coming from that Boston school. No one was interested in doing landscapes.

ROBERT BROWN: Really?

BERNARD CHAET: It was years later, I think, maybe three or four years later, that Reed Kay and I went out. I didn't even—

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BERNARD CHAET: —In '51. Now I'm going to go back a few years. We saw the museums of Italy, and on the way down there, there was—I don't know if I described our meeting with Picasso. I think I might have.

ROBERT BROWN: You did mention that.

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. And so, after that I was determined to try to see, hopefully to see my favorites, Bonnard, Matisse. Of course, we never saw anyone. But it was years later, I did meet [Alberto] Giacometti due to one of—through one of the people from Boston who had remained in France, one George Sheridan. He was one of our group—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: —who went and never came back to this day. But it was a great adventure, because you're opened up to art that you only knew in books and slides—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: —even though we had a grounding in what we had seen in New York, and Boston, but coming face to face with all the periods, you felt—at least I felt rich in what I had seen in all directions. I still remember coming into Vienna [ph] and seeing those mosaics and those — I can see the color combinations that never left me, the greens and browns. All these things filter. You filter them, and you use them because you're trying to invent yourself at this stage. I had no idea where I was going. I remembered what I missed. Before we left Boston at that time, our hero was Max Beckmann because he had been to the school, and so kept thinking about him and we couldn't see anything like that because we didn't go to Germany. We only went to Italy for that summer.

ROBERT BROWN: Beckmann had come and given a talk—

BERNARD CHAET: No. [Cross talk.]

ROBERT BROWN: —or a lecture?

BERNARD CHAET: He came to the school. I think I mentioned it in the last session. The school—the students helped pick the work, and he had spent two or three days in the school, and at that point he was our great hero—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: —strongly influenced, of course, he was, by Matisse and Picasso, but he had transformed it. At any rate, in Paris, where I ended up, of the group, I— I stayed in Paris after the— after our trip. Most of the others that we were with went home, but at this point, there were a lot of people, a lot of Bostonians there.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you know most of them?

BERNARD CHAET: Oh, yes. I knew them all because they were all from the Museum School.

ROBERT BROWN: The Museum School.

BERNARD CHAET: And so, we would meet some evenings and draw each other's pictures, so we didn't have televisions. We went to the movies a lot, but this was one of our activities, drawing people, drawing each other.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: So if you see all these drawings in the Boston Public Library, that's when they were done.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: And being in Paris was very exciting at that time, because the museums had all our great favorites in abundance, and you could also see gallery shows, you see, and think of all the Miró shows of drawings and prints that I saw. I keep thinking of all these things that were there, and, as a matter of fact, I went to one dealer and I saw a wonderful Modigliani. She was willing to sell it for very little, but Mirski couldn't come up with money. And one thing that really tempted me, I had no money, it was a Ray [inaudible] pastel, I still see it, and a small Ray [inaudible] painting for \$1,200, but \$1,200 meant six months in Europe and no one had this. But these are the kind of things that were there. I also remember a book of etchings, real etchings sewn together by Ray [inaudible] in a package, 15 etchings, and it was a give-away.

ROBERT BROWN: Hmm.

BERNARD CHAET: They were sitting there, because no one was involved.

ROBERT BROWN: Hmm.

BERNARD CHAET: And you also could see fakes going on, people were faking Sutines [ph] and so forth. The place—at this point, I was doing a—I had started doing landscapes from drawings, of drawing executed in the trip to Italy, through Italy. I remembered making drawings, which I still have in red ink of buildings in Assisi, and I did several large gouaches in Paris of those drawings, and it was a wonderful paper store. They had all this handmade paper. This was very thick colored handmade paper. It's still made in France. And I noticed that people were coming in to buy old paper. Naïve me, I figured out later what they were. They were people who were doing forgeries, and they could really buy paper from all the centuries.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: I said, what in the world would someone want to buy paper from 1850? But this guy had—these people had them.

ROBERT BROWN: So the — it sounds like there was quite a market in Paris—

BERNARD CHAET: Oh, sure.

ROBERT BROWN: —that Paris had rebounded pretty fast?

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. Oh, sure. But prices were low on everything.

ROBERT BROWN: Prices were still low.

BERNARD CHAET: But, you see, we could see the latest Picassos. At that point, he was painting his children, one of his daughters in a rocking chair, a white painting. I mean, the show—the picture—the paint wasn't even dry. The thing that was amazing is a month later three or four young artists would be imitating these pictures exact.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: I mean, I'd never seen anything like it.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: And, of course, the place was filled with GIs going to school, some studying with Léger, some going into the Beaux Arts and so forth, but I wasn't there to study. I just wanted to paint, and being—

ROBERT BROWN: You did. You spent much of your—

BERNARD CHAET: I spent my time doing drawings and paintings, and I carefully shipped them home. Most of them I don't like, and the things that I saved are the drawings, the drawing of the room I was in, a drawing of the stove, a drawing of people along the Seine. Those are the things I still have from that six months, and the gouaches I did in that—in that hotel room from my drawings of Italy and that's what I showed in Boston when I came back. That's all I have is a few—I have photographs of these and I wish I could see them again. In a way, I think that they weren't well

framed, because Mirski didn't want to use glass and he sprayed them with plastic and I don't think it's the best thing for them. It changes the way they look.

ROBERT BROWN: Hmm.

BERNARD CHAET: And what he would do is spray them with Krylon, and then put wax over them, so they looked like oil paintings, but they were gouaches on—on this heavy paper and that was my experience. And, oh, one of my great trips, of course, was to Spain, taking the train overnight. When you're young, you can do this, taking the train at midnight and arriving in Madrid, and the Spaniards had not seen too many Americans. When they—when they discovered the two of us and Ninon Lacey and I were Americans, they stopped at every stop to buy us a present. This was overwhelming. We still have drawings which I can Xerox for you of the people on the train that we did that night, fathers and children, men. They all posed for us. Got to Madrid, of course, we didn't—hadn't slept, but we were not ready for the poverty that we found in Madrid, and as we've just returned from Madrid over 55 years later where everything is—it's another city. What there were—were people in Mercedes, very few, and mostly donkey carts.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: And—and beggars everywhere.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: And blind people selling tickets to lottery. I had made a painting like that and also we got to Escorrio. I remember the paintings there, and I've seen them three times now, but this is what I remember: In the main cathedral, somebody would come out and ring a bell and all these starving people would come out of the woods with cups to take soup, and we were watching this. It didn't look real. I tried to draw this later but it—so two things were happening. You're seeing these great works and, of course, Escorrio still looks pretty good to me, although they don't seem to have everything—one section was closed in '97, March, and so I missed one of our favorite gouaches by Jura [ph] of angel wings, red, yellow, blue, white, and I was afraid I wasn't going to see some of the Grecos, but we saw them. And so these pictures that made such a dent in me, not a dent, an impression, I have in my head, and when you see the great works, they—they're with you all the time. You—you own them, whether you have—and, of course, collected photographs and—and they didn't have slides in those days, but you could get 8 by 10 photographs from the museums. So, I still have a lot of these photographs.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: And it grounds you. I mean, you—you're busy trying to figure out who you are and what you want, and when I got back to Boston, I was strongly influenced by a certain El Greco where a young man is holding a map of Toledo and you see the city behind him.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: So that's the first painting I—the big—largest painting I did. I did a view of Boston, and that—so—

ROBERT BROWN: I want to talk about that.

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. Well, it all comes from that El Greco. I didn't have a model for that figure of the boy.

ROBERT BROWN: Was the large figure part of it? [Cross talk.]

BERNARD CHAET: The figure has his arms raised—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: —behind his head and then you see Boston. Actually, it's that large church in Roxbury. At that point, Reed Kay was the only one I knew who was going out. So I—with him, I did all these drawings, but I made up the figure. Now this is interesting. In the Boston Museum, and I talked to my students about it, what we prize more than anything else is working from imagination, and although we had school—we had to paint from models and draw from models every day, I think I might have mentioned I'd love to have models today [laughs], this was not important.

The important thing was to invent, but in order to invent what I wanted, I had to go out and do the buildings, but the main figure, I had nobody pose for me. I made this up, the figure, and so forth, and I suppose he looks a little Italian, this boy, or Spanish, because I was—I had—I had also painted boys like that based on the horror of seeing very thin kids in Italy, too. But this was the main painting I did for that '51 show, and the painting is about 75 inches long by 30 [inches]. I still have it.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: And—

ROBERT BROWN: This business—can I go back a little bit?

BERNARD CHAET: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Now in the '40s, you know, you just mentioned here, your imagination and the stress put on that.

BERNARD CHAET: Right. It was all—the most important, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: And when you had your first show in Boris Mirski—

BERNARD CHAET: That was all—

ROBERT BROWN: —in 1948, I've been looking at some of the reviews—

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: —and one of the reviewers goes on about that you're an out-and-out "distortionist."

BERNARD CHAET: Well, he's right. He's right.

ROBERT BROWN: This reflected on what you said before you went to Europe.

BERNARD CHAET: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Your reaction to the Second World War, partly?

BERNARD CHAET: Well, I think that was part of it. It was in the air, and they were violent pictures. To me, they were real events. I mean, no place am I working from nature. I did some self-portraits,

but they were invented self-portraits. What I tell students is the following about this: that if you read Van Gogh's letters, Gauguin is telling him, "Vincent, you have no imagination, and in order for you to paint, you've got to spend our money going down to the flowers and buying those sunflowers and painting them," and if you want to see what Gauguin thought of Van Gogh at that time, look at the painting Gauguin did of Van Gogh painting the sunflowers. He made him look very ugly, and he's sitting there painting. He said, "Listen, Vincent, you want to be a painter, come in to my room next door. I'm painting a picture with my imagination, Jacob wrestling with the angel, and you want to be a painter, you've got to invent." Now Van Gogh transcribes this to his brother, and he thinks that maybe Gauguin is right. So he tries it, and he fails badly.

There's two kinds of artists, and those who work from what they see and translate it as they go, like Van Gogh, and I use this a lot in my teaching for people who think that you have to have this—use imagination. My advantage is and my education is that we prized only things done from our imagination, but we were working from nature all the time. That's what feeds the imagination. So I feel even though I was a terrible student protesting everything that we were doing there, I realize I was lucky in the kind of education I got. And I think that's probably what made me a certain kind of a teacher, because I still believed these things, that you don't know the forms of nature, you can't invent anything, and those who didn't believe this at all, someone like [Robert] Motherwell came to our school in our summer program, and he said, "Well, working from nature is like running for dog catcher when you could run for president." He himself never went to an art school, so naturally this was his theory.

And so he's wrong. He's wrong. You have to start—all the great artists of our century, all the ones who started working from nature, if you look at the great artists, Matisse, Bonnard, Picasso, you name them, they—it isn't that they had a classical education. They learned how to transform everything in their environment, whether it was a person, a cup, and from there, you go. You may end up simply as someone like [Edward] Hopper whose only change was he changed his way of painting. Instead of painting in a—in a [Édouard] Manet style, he somehow got into this very simple kind of painting which threw me off for many years and took me away from Hopper until I realized what a great artist he was.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: But he's lucky. He could stay—he stayed on track and—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: —I think most 20th-century artists spent a long time inventing it themselves and at least my generation. I think—

ROBERT BROWN: Inventing themselves?

BERNARD CHAET: Inventing themselves because—and I was lucky being exposed to so many different things when I think about those Romanesque paintings I saw in Barcelona, and I still have that book I bought which was published during the war in Spain and, of course, we had seen Romanesque paintings in Boston. But you make preferences early, and Picasso said that all the ideas you have as an artist appear by the age of 25. When I read this, I never believed it. Now that I look back at my slides once in a while, I realize this is absolutely true. You develop things.

Now as I paint, I said, oh, my God, I did this painting 30 years ago. I mean, this idea—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: —and I said, well, I hope I make it this time. I recognize things in me that come out.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: I'm old enough to have painted that many years.

ROBERT BROWN: Relearn.

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. Well, it's—I see what this is. I remember in the '50s, I tried to do this and —

ROBERT BROWN: But you can let your imagination go. In your early works, you had some confidence because you had this strong foundation, didn't you?

BERNARD CHAET: Yes, but I look at some of these and they look a little crazy to me. I wasn't ready to be galloping off on my own that fast, but I had to try it out and, and as I had mentioned last time, I left school for a while—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: —because I had to try.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, this reviewer, Lawrence Dame—

BERNARD CHAET: Well, he— [Cross talk.]

ROBERT BROWN: —at your first show, he quotes here, here he's describing a self-portrait.

BERNARD CHAET: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: "It's the most unusual we've ever seen. He's unbelievably elongated, spatially narrow, wraith of a fellow, with a greenish face and hands, and a long mane."

BERNARD CHAET: Well, it's—it's actually true. I was very thin, and my skin was probably greenish at that time. As you look at me now, I don't look like that, but I—I was making this up, too. It was not in the mirror, and I can see that painting as you describe it.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: And I did a whole series of those over those early years.

ROBERT BROWN: He makes another point.

BERNARD CHAET: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: "Like most," he says, "of Mirski's youngsters," he's commenting about—

BERNARD CHAET: Yes.[Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: —how he handles them, "he," you, "is capable of almost anything." So, he's

aware of the firm grounding you all had, it seems to me.

BERNARD CHAET: Well, yeah, and if you have Dorothy Adlow's review there, she—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: She looked a little harder, because she—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: She had a background in art.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: Lawrence Dame really didn't know too much, and—but he had to review these things. Even the guy at the *Globe* had no idea what I was doing. He didn't—he couldn't review me. It was Edgar Driscoll, as I recall.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, yes. Yeah. He came on about then or maybe a little later.

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. He never could figure out what I was about in those years.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, yes. Dorothy Adlow, I think it's this very first solo—

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. Right.

ROBERT BROWN: —show, says that, "every picture seems to be exact and laborious occupation, but then the contours are sprung out from," I think she means, "and then Mr. Chaet bursts forth into song, brooding but rich harmonies."

BERNARD CHAET: Well, that's closer to what I was trying to do, and—

ROBERT BROWN: You weren't brooding in— [Cross talk.]

BERNARD CHAET: Well, I was probably a sad person at this point. I mean, I was working. If you ever worked at the *Boston Post* for a few years at night, so that would be enough to get—to do that.

ROBERT BROWN: Right.

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. But I was not unhappy. I was doing what I felt I should be doing, and I was lucky, as I said before. I had someone with Dorothy Adlow's background writing about me every time I had a show.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: And it helped me figure out who I was, even though I was—I didn't think I was changing, but I was changing.

ROBERT BROWN: These critical comments were important to you then?

BERNARD CHAET: Of course!

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: I mean, someone cared enough to—there it was in the newspaper. I could, middle of the night, get up and say, "Someone has looked at my work."

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: I wasn't making many sales. Mirski had a few collectors who would buy what he was selling.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: But it was never—I mean, it was just enough to encourage you, and that's all you wanted at this—

ROBERT BROWN: Well, as a dealer, did Mirski talk about people's reaction to your work?

BERNARD CHAET: Oh, sure. He would—and sometimes it could be cruel but he—he would let you know who liked it. He was making sales, but he would spill it all out at you, and it did—I look back on it. It was probably a good idea. Some people who hated my work and so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: But it didn't necessarily devastate you?

BERNARD CHAET: No, because he had— [Cross talk.]

ROBERT BROWN: It didn't—

BERNARD CHAET: They were people off the street who were buying things, you know, and I thought I was at the center of art, of the art world in Boston.

ROBERT BROWN: You—you did?

BERNARD CHAET: Well, of course. I mean, after all, Mirski had arranged for an exchange show with the most famous gallery in New York, the Downtown Gallery, and so this was—and even the magazine reviews said that there's something wonderful and strange going on in Boston. So, I did feel I was at the center of the universe. I found out I wasn't when I went to New Haven, but that was something else, because I was exposed to a whole other cultures and painting. So once you're exposed, but I did feel that I—I was at the center, and when I left, I felt I was going to the end of the world, you see, a 160 miles—167 miles away. I was leaving the center of the art world by going to New Haven.

ROBERT BROWN: What about New York?

BERNARD CHAET: Well, I was living in—

ROBERT BROWN: You had a little experience.

BERNARD CHAET: I think I had been to New York once, and that was a very exciting time. As a matter of fact, the time I went, in '46, I saw the first Jackson Pollock show, and I remember coming back and saying I saw these, this wonderful painter. And I tried to draw him out all those she-wolf paintings. They were wonderful, and no one ever heard of him at this point. So not only did I see the museums, the Modern Museum, but I saw the first Jackson Pollock, and other shows which I couldn't appreciate at the time. It—it wasn't New York. It was the museums in New York. The art world in New York didn't mean that much to me, because I felt I was in the great art world.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: The one artist that I met in Europe was Robert Quaffney [Gaffney? ph] who sort of took care of a lot of young people. We weren't eating that well all the time, and he'd invite us and he'd say—he said to me, "You really know how to eat meat. I'm watching you." We were—we were doing all right, but he'd try to help me in New York. The people that he showed my work to, they thought my work was very strange in '51, or when I came back. So, I didn't think too much of it, because I felt that I was where I wanted to be at the time.

ROBERT BROWN: The show—you had several other shows, group shows at Mirski—

BERNARD CHAET: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: —during the later '40s —

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: —before you went to Europe—

BERNARD CHAET: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: —and you had a show of the pupils of Karl Zerbe.

BERNARD CHAET: I remember that show.

ROBERT BROWN: That was in '46, a little later in '46.

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: In '47, a show of recent art school graduates from Boston area.

BERNARD CHAET: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: And then finally there was a show to benefit Artists Equity.

BERNARD CHAET: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT BROWN: Now was Artists Equity, by the way, something that you were at all caught up in?

BERNARD CHAET: Yes. We were all caught up. This was—

ROBERT BROWN: Okay.

BERNARD CHAET: And it was, I think, [Yasuo] Kuniyoshi was the president in 1947. As a matter of fact, to bring it up to date, I joined Artists Equity again last year because I was dealing with some dealers in other parts of the country that I was suspicious of, and it saved me because one guy wouldn't send the work back. One phone call and everything came back.

At that time, it was a way to protect artists not only against unscrupulous dealers, but to help people get insurance and everything else. It wasn't a political organization. The idea was to get everybody in, and I remember a big meeting at Mirski's on the second floor. He had a lot of space. Kuniyoshi came there, and all the artists involved, the older generation, Lawrence Cooperman,

Zerbe, so forth—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: —became officials of the organization, and we joined because we wanted to stay up to date with the kind of information that was coming. That organization had to protect itself because at that time the State Department had been—sent a show to Europe of contemporary American painting and the right wing went after it—"your money paid for this,"—and there was this avenger on Kuniyoshi, all these Communists, and in a way, I'll take it back, it was political. We were trying to protect art that was going to represent us. The Europeans wanted to see all this art, and I remember the man who put the show together, J. Leroy Davidson, was fired by the State Department. He put the show together and so he was at Yale.

[AUDIO BREAK.]

ROBERT BROWN: Continuing interviews with Bernard Chaet in Rockport, Massachusetts. This is August 6th, 1997.

And Bernard, you wanted to start out talking a bit about—we talked a bit about your work, and you wanted to say something here.

BERNARD CHAET: Well, I'm reciting this.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: At age 73, and sometimes I find it painful to go through my life's work, and it's because the tapes replay after you leave, Mr. Brown, and I don't want to fill my—but as I just spoke about my work to students, I know exactly where we left off. I want to talk about the last paintings I did in Boston, and then show the continuity. I think I mentioned—

ROBERT BROWN: And you just gave a lecture in Provincetown.

BERNARD CHAET: Yes, and so I have—I have all the slides of my work going back 40 years or more, and as we left off before, I was about to leave Boston, and I talked about the influences of my European trip in '49. When I came back, I did a large painting of a boy in front of—called *View of Boston*, where I did all the notes of buildings around Boston and then I put it all together in my studio. And I was giving myself a criticism, mainly because my gallery at the time, Boris Mirski, never took down my show. I had a show in May, and nothing—and the show was up for two months, and it was very painful, but it gave me a chance.

ROBERT BROWN: Painful because?

BERNARD CHAET: Because I—to have it up—

ROBERT BROWN: It was there.

BERNARD CHAET: Yes, and so it gave me a chance to study myself, and I may be repeating something we talked about. I gave myself a criticism that my color was not what I wanted it to be. It was—that was my main criticism of that show, 1951. And when I try for this job at Yale, I asked Joseph Albers, I think I talked about him before, if I could send him photos or slides. He said, "No, slides lie and painting is about color." This is what he said to me. I said, "Oh, my God," and so he was reading my mind after he hired me, and so forth.

I came under his influence in the sense he was teaching the interaction of color, and so when I came to New Haven, I did this painting over again of this boy—

ROBERT BROWN: *View of Boston?* [Cross talk.]

BERNARD CHAET: Yes. I did it simply with color plains.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: And some place I know what collection it's in, and it was sort of a closure and a release that I had moved into another way of thinking and although I think I was influenced a little by Albers and what he was doing with color, I was also influenced by other artists who were working with color. Bonnard has always been a great favorite of mine, even, and I had arguments with my close friends in Boston about Bonnard. They felt—some felt that his work was accidental, he couldn't draw, so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: But he was also one of my favorites. I think I was also educated in all the possibilities of contemporary art through the shows at the Institute of Contemporary Art on Newbury Street.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And that was a pretty instrumental—

BERNARD CHAET: Well—

ROBERT BROWN: —local institution.

BERNARD CHAET: Right. They had everything from the 20th century, things that I'd only seen in books, or things that one could see only in New York, and they would ask the young artists what they wanted as the war progressed and so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: This held through the late '40s—

BERNARD CHAET: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: —and then it changed.

BERNARD CHAET: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: And it helped me to see all these great artists. I remember having arguments with—arguments with my friends about Kandinsky, who knocked me over. I think the show must have been 1950-'51, just before I left, and when I came to New Haven, I talked to Albers about Kandinsky. Well, like all artists, Kandinsky was one of his teachers, and he had a lot of Kandinsky drawings, little tiny ones, and he said, "Well, don't you?" He thought they were like Russian eggs, you know, that they were a little bit—the colors were too pretty, and like folk art, he called it.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: But, I mean, that threw me off, too, but when I got to New Haven, my—my work started to change. It was also artists I discovered, like [Nicolas] de Stael, that was just beginning,

who was just beginning to come into vogue —

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: —and so I started thinking about color, and in my first show in New York was 1954, and the one I could turn to to write an introduction was Dorothy Adlow. I mean, I think she was a little shocked at the change in my work, but she went with it, wrote a very short thing—

ROBERT BROWN: The critic with the *Christian Science Monitor*.

BERNARD CHAET: Right. And—right. And— [Cross talk.]

ROBERT BROWN: Beautiful reviews.

BERNARD CHAET: And you had all—you have all my reviews and—and she wrote a little thing, which is in the introduction to that show, which you have in the files there, little red thing—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: —and I felt that I hadn't really changed that much because the content was the same, but what it brings up is what—what are themes? This is what—and at one point I wrote something which I'm going to read to you now about themes, and I got the notion about what thematic material is from having on a slide table, a large slide table a hundred Cézannes of all—of all the different subject matters, and I saw that the thematic material were constructions that he used over and over again, whether it was a portrait or landscape, and so the theme is inside the artist and it's not something that he looks for. He finds it because it's already in his head. So there's certain—and this—this is what I wrote about it.

ROBERT BROWN: This was a revelation to you—

BERNARD CHAET: It was.

ROBERT BROWN: —at the time.

BERNARD CHAET: Well, also, at the same time I read that Picasso said let all themes that an artist uses, he has in his head by the age of 25, and I thought this was a lot of baloney, but now that I'm 73, I know he hit it. You paint the same picture in different disguises all the time because you have certain preferred constructions in your head, things that give you pleasure that you can't account for. I'm sure someone has done research on composers who favor certain things. This is what I wrote, themes. This is—I wrote this in '85:

"Preferred structures, configurations, patterns reside in the memory tracks awaiting the call to action. Painting, seeing these already acquired sensations in nature provides the catalyst. This reaction takes place irregardless [sic] of outward subject matter. Here, abstraction works, works to boil down these sensations to make vision real."

So I wrote this after I saw that there's certain kinds of crosses, diagonals, bumping into each other that you find in Cezanne's portraits, landscapes, and still lifes, and then I began to see it in my own work gradually, and you don't really—you're not aware of this. And as I've been painting for 50 years, sometimes I'm in the middle of something, I said, "Aha, I did this in—pictures in the '50s," and so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: Years and years before.

BERNARD CHAET: Yes! Because there's certain—you go to the pleasure principle. Things that appeal to you, you find in nature, and then you say, oh, there's something to paint. So the theme is in you, it's not in finding something. You find something that hits you, and then you realize it's a preferred structure.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm, Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: And sometimes you see the structure, but you're not able to put it down and years later you find it in—in another disguise, even though your work changes.

I've been going through an old catalog of Philip Guston's, old in that it's in the '60s, and if you look carefully at it, you can see what he's going to do 10 years later, although it seems to be a cutoff, and you can also go backwards. And so I'm at the stage now where I can see forward and backwards, and I don't know why I go to certain rock formations, except every time I see them, it hits my head. I say, "That's it!" And it happened this summer.

I thought I found something, and I realized I had painted two weeks before the same—I said, oh, isn't that wonderful? And I—it was something that attracted me large against small, certain kind of light—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: —dramatic light. So that's—that's what I think themes are.

ROBERT BROWN: And you don't consciously—you didn't consciously paint that rock—

BERNARD CHAET: No.

ROBERT BROWN: —two weeks ago? That's why you didn't remember it?

BERNARD CHAET: That's right. That's why I can go around here and go to two or three sites and be thrilled each time, not knowing why, and sometimes seeing variations. Sometimes these variations take a few years to breathe and come through. For example, I found something last year that I see now I'm developing. So these themes develop as you go, and there's no way of going out looking for a place to paint. You—you're looking for something that gives you pleasure, and you don't know it. That's my theory, at least for those of us who work from nature. The danger of working from nature is you think you're holy because you're working from nature, and this is a false idea.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: It just, you have to be looking in at the same time. But I want to get on with—

ROBERT BROWN: You always were accepting of abstraction. You just mentioned Kandinsky.

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. Well, I didn't—I didn't consider—to me these were real events, you see, and I didn't think of them as something that was different from what I could appreciate and incorporate in some way, and at one point my work looked very abstract, but to me was very real in what I was doing. And that was a period, we're going ahead 10 years, where I started doing fragments on raw canvas. They were memories of frescoes I had seen in Europe, the idea they

were broken up, and that got into my landscapes. I started doing landscapes when I started going to Norfolk to teach in the summer school in 1953.

ROBERT BROWN: Norfolk, Connecticut?

BERNARD CHAET: No—yeah. And at the same time, my wife's family has a cabin overlooking Keene [New Hampshire] and before that, I started doing drawings of Mount Minetta [ph] and paintings, and I would carry it through when I went to the summer school that at that time was a month, and I had dreamed in my—in Boston of doing landscapes. I would stop places and make drawings and somehow, it was not the thing to do. It was not in the school feeling of inner expression, you see, but I was attracted to landscape, without knowing why.

ROBERT BROWN: Could it be from your earliest days?

BERNARD CHAET: That's right. I was doing drawings of rocks.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: I was—I was a camp counselor in the early '40s. I found—in the afternoon I'd go out drawing trees, which, I mean, this was way out of my training, and what was accepted.

ROBERT BROWN: You were doing work, what, from still lifes?

BERNARD CHAET: Well, no. [Cross talk.]

ROBERT BROWN: Seascapes?

BERNARD CHAET: The whole idea, and I tell this to students, is the—my training was that all work done from imagination was true art, and anything done from eyeball was exercise, and I tell this to students by reading Van Gogh's letter to his brother where he says to Theo that Gauguin called him into his room and he said, look, Vincent, you have no imagination, and you have to go to the flower mart to get these damn flowers, and it's breaking our—we're spending too much of—you're spending too much on flowers. And he said, and I want you to see what I'm doing and—and he took him in to his room. You can't go those places studios, and he was doing Jacob wrestling with the angels, which is a wonderful painting. And he said, Vincent, unless you can work from your imagination, you're not going to be a first-rate artist.

Well, that was my training in the Museum School. All this eyeball stuff was just getting—was fun and so forth, but it can't be serious art—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: —and I—Van Gogh bought it—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: —and he tried to work from his imagination two or three times, and they're awful. And I think I bought it, too, but my advantage is that I can do both because I can—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: I can start out without—from imagination, because that was everything that counted—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: —and we had to work from models in the school, and I thought this was boring. Today, I would love to have models pose for me. What kind of artist you are takes a long time. You're developing yourself, and as I look back, I see repeats, and so when I left Boston, I started working on landscape, and started drawing outside with landscape, part of it, because I was teaching landscape drawing in the summer, and I got hooked on it myself—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: —more so than any of the students I trained, maybe some stayed with it, but looking—it was something I wanted, you see. I wanted it. I had already started it, and when I look back at my work in the '50s, very fragmented ideas of landscape and so forth. At the same time, I was doing very large drawings, equally spending as much time on the drawings, and then gradually other themes developed.

One of the themes I wanted to talk about is the flowers. In the Museum School, I think I painted some wax flowers, it must have been in my home in Dorchester, and I loved doing it without knowing it. I mean, it's a cornball idea. Maybe it came from my early interest in Van Gogh, but by the time we got into the early '50s, at the summer school, there were wonderful zinnias, and I started doing these zinnias and blocks of colors. I'd say they were in my first show in New York, and I've been doing flowers ever since one way or another, and some years, even some decades, none. But coming here to Rockport, my wife is growing all these flowers, and I started in again, and I've been, the last five years, I think some of my best work have been the flowers. And although they don't look like what I did before, the spirit is there, and the power of light and color and it always excites me. I come in, and you'll see in our dining room table behind you all these flowers. I find the ones I want, and I think it's now seven or eight years that I do maybe 10 or 15 a summer, very small, very fast.

ROBERT BROWN: What do you suppose it is in flowers?

BERNARD CHAET: It's the color. I mean—

ROBERT BROWN: The color.

BERNARD CHAET: —it could be all yellows and, first of all, you can't get pigments as bright as what the flowers are, and if you—and somehow I'm drawn to the impossible subject, the subject that's a cliché, and I think also in my choice of landscape, I started working here on sunrises. Most people see them as sunsets.

At the beginning, I'm going to go backwards and forwards here.

ROBERT BROWN: Do.

BERNARD CHAET: At the beginning, I went out and just did drawings of landscape, very careful drawings of the rock formations. I'd say after being here for two or three years.

ROBERT BROWN: When you first came here to Rockport?

BERNARD CHAET: When I came here in '67, and the first couple of years, I might have done one or two watercolors, but mostly careful drawings, in Folly Cove, especially, and before I—I took a chance to let myself go with these landscapes, I knew the terrain inside and out.

ROBERT BROWN: And these would be drawings, pencil drawings?

BERNARD CHAET: No. They were pencil mostly, yes, and some watercolors, just a few watercolors, and then suddenly I started getting up at dawn and, I mean, a dawn 'scape or a sunset is really cornball in many ways. How am I going to make this a painting? I didn't think about it. I just did it, and it started out in the late '70s. And so I got into it because I had skipped doing landscapes for a while, and was working with other subjects in interiors and so forth, and I'm going to skip back and forth.

The flowers took a chance—a change—in the '60s. They became more fluid, almost baroque. I did very large ones.

ROBERT BROWN: Had your earlier ones been more tightly drawn?

BERNARD CHAET: Tight—well, the early flowers were more block-like, and—and then the landscapes sort of fit into them in some strange way, and it goes back to my idea of themes, certain configurations and groupings. The sunrises were in the sense almost like some of the flowers with that red ball suspended in the sky, and when I first went out showing my work, I would show students 20 or 30 watercolors of the—of these things, and I want to get into how I started doing watercolors.

ROBERT BROWN: I wanted to— [Cross talk.]

BERNARD CHAET: Well, it's—it's strange how I—over the years, I was doing one or two watercolors. I remember in Keene, West Keene. I did one that's now at the Addison Gallery, and it sort of reflected my oils, but I started doing them seriously here, and I'll skip back in a minute on what I was doing before that.

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ROBERT BROWN: Most of them were somewhat or considerably older.

BERNARD CHAET: Well, they were—they were very successful wonderful artists, very famous artists, but as I was teaching this course, then occasionally they'd see that I could teach in caustic [ph] because, after all, Zerbe's the one who got caustic going.

ROBERT BROWN: And they were interested in—

BERNARD CHAET: They were—well, no. They were interested in the things they didn't know about, techniques that they thought I might know, and I started questioning them, too, and it so happened that a friend of mine, whom I met at our summer school, one Vincent Longo, had been writing a column in *Arts Magazine*. Now we're in the mid '50s.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: On studio talk, and he was going on a boat ride, and he said, "You know, you should write this column." I said, "I can't write. I don't want to do this." He said, "I'll tell you what. Why don't you write a sample column?" He was trying to convince me, "and I'll bring you to the editor." So I said, "What the hell. I'm going to learn how to write." So I wrote the column, and I met the editor, Hilton Kramer, and I wrote for three years. I learned how to—you know, when you have to write 2,500 words every month, 12 months a year—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: —and I started writing about all these people I knew. I remember that year, [Conrad] Marca-Relli came. Here's a wonderful story about Marca-Relli: He called the young teachers in. He said, "I'm thinking of hiring a guy whose work I just saw at the Stable Gallery. Please tell me what you think." So we all went in. He was going to hire him anyhow, but at least he asked us to see.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean he hired the visitor? [Cross talk.]

BERNARD CHAET: Hire the visitor for the position.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: Also, I should tell you when de Kooning left, he wanted to get the job for a friend's client. At this point, Albers didn't want Klein, didn't like his work. They became fast friends years later. At any rate, he had discovered Marca-Relli himself. These were black-and-white paintings of figures and landscapes, and we were—all of us who were asked—were kind of knocked out. I was in the room when he called—when Albers called Marca-Relli to invite him to be the visiting artist.

The first question he asked him, "Do you still have that beard?" He had met him, you see. And to him, a beard was someone who was a radical, you see, and I didn't hear the answer. Marca-Relli became a very influential teacher at Yale. He was there two or three years.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you know him beforehand?

BERNARD CHAET: No, I never heard of him. But he's—so he was one of the kind of people I would write about for my columns, all these people I used as I went—I think I wrote, you know, 12 a year, and I had to look for people that I didn't know. And I wrote one on James Brooks who I still think is the most underrated of the abstract expressionists, a very gentle wonderful person. Marca-Relli attracted people more. He was more dynamic as a teacher, and he helped people personally. I remember when William Bailey won a traveling fellowship to Italy in maybe '56-'57, Marca-Relli fixed him up with an Italian artist and got him a studio and so forth. He was really helpful to everyone.

Brooks was a delightful person who was a very subtle and good critic who got to know all the people. Some were not popular with the students. The students didn't like Ad Reinhart too much. They wanted him out of there. The only time I've seen any political moves at that point. They wanted to have him thrown out.

ROBERT BROWN: Huh.

BERNARD CHAET: But I went to talk to them. Albers wanted him, and he stayed, but the parade of these visiting artists meant a lot to me.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, did Marca-Relli stay around longer than most?

BERNARD CHAET: He stayed two different years and—and so did Brooks.

ROBERT BROWN: And so—

BERNARD CHAET: The idea was to move them and have different—someone different every year.

ROBERT BROWN: And not too many of those people in those days were inclined to settle in as

teachers particularly?

BERNARD CHAET: Well, there was no position. It was a very small school, and first year I was there, there was an article on Will Barnet does a lithograph, and a very clay-like thing, and so Albers asked him to teach lithography once a week and there wasn't even any equipment at Yale for this. So I became friendly with him. I started doing lithographs the days he was there. It was not my teaching day, and he got me my first show in New York. 1954. It was an exchange show where Will Barnet showed at Mirski's, and I showed at Bertha Shaefer's.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: And I was spoiled, and continued to be. This was my first show in New York, and the *New York Times* headlined me. Other—I was knocked over by other critics in magazines, but the dean called me out of class. I wasn't reading the *New York Times* in those days. There it was. You probably have the review there, and it helped me a lot in New York. It got me started. I wasn't making sales, but to have a headline in the *New York Times*, I think it was Stuart Preston—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: —but at that point—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. I wanted to ask you about that.

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: We can get back to that another time.

BERNARD CHAET: But here we're in 1954.

ROBERT BROWN: So, this is the inter-relations that occurred. I mean—

BERNARD CHAET: I think—

ROBERT BROWN: —in general, do you think the students—there was not much danger of their being confused by this great parade?

BERNARD CHAET: Yes. There was some of them confused, but it was good education.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: I said, "Look. You find out." Albers would hate paintings that they liked, and [laughs] vice versa. Some of them were protective of these older students. They would have two lines of paintings going, not that Albers wasn't prejudiced. There were artists, student artists that he went after all the time. I think he [inaudible] the Joe Raphaeli. That's what we called him. Now his name is Joseph Raphael. And he went after—for no reason, he went after him. He just didn't like his work.

ROBERT BROWN: Huh.

BERNARD CHAET: And he went after Robert Vermillion [ph].

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: And these were very talented—certain kind of artists he didn't like and he—he—he could be cruel, Albers could, but, in general, I mean, maybe I learned more from him than some of the students, but he had—I'll tell you how wide—I may have said this in the last tape.

Albers was in San Francisco for some reason, some show, whatever, and he came back, he said, "My mind is on an El Greco." I said, "What?" "I've never seen a black, blue, and gray as in this sky, never in my life, what these colors do." You know, it took me 20 years to get to San Francisco, at a meeting, and I went just to see that painting, and he was right. He had a way of looking at painting that was uniquely his own, and he was wider in his wide tastes than most people would have ever believed. For example, when [Louise] Nevelson first started showing the work, the sculptures at Yale who were certainly more Bauhaus in, you know, doing only geometric work, were—were coming down against her, and he said, "Oh, no, you're wrong. Imagination is important. Fantasy." They had no idea what he was talking about.

So his range was—was much greater than he had ever been given credit for, although he could be very cruel to students. When he left the job, we're going—the position, at that time you had to retire at age 70, it was 68, they let him to go to 70, he made me the chairman, which was the dumbest idea. Well, it got me tenure at an early age, but once I was in the position there, his former students who were around the school were telling him how I was wrecking the school. So now I'm going ahead a little—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: —to end up this thing on Albers. He—'58 was his last year, and in our summer program, he had Rico Lebrun, and Albers was leaving. I said, "Well, let's bring Rico Lebrun for a year." Well, Albers went bananas that someone like Rico Lebrun would be coming. He was the enemy, you see.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, he was?

BERNARD CHAET: Ohh.

ROBERT BROWN: He didn't share the appreciation?

BERNARD CHAET: No, no, no, no. I mean, this was a year appointment.

ROBERT BROWN: What— [Cross talk.]

BERNARD CHAET: No. This was the year appointment after Albers left. At this point, Albers had made me chairman, and put me in a good spot. I had been there only—I was 35 years old, and—and I said, "I won't take it unless you give me tenure." They gave me tenure. It would be impossible. And he said, "I trust you." However, besides the Rico thing, I had made little changes, and his henchmen said that I was introducing a figure into the school. I was the only one teaching the figure in the school. He had old teachers there from the old days, but he had nothing to do with them. He just let them do what they wanted.

Now the—the person I heard it from was Philip Guston who had heard it from people at the Modern Museum, but Albers went to the Modern and—and told them that I was wrecking his school. You know what it was that I did? I made an elective for figure drawing Friday afternoon from four to six when there's no one in the school, with young Bill Bailey teaching a figure drawing class and his—his henchmen told him that I was wrecking the school.

ROBERT BROWN: By including—

BERNARD CHAET: By including this course, an elective, and also who else told me about it? The one who called me up about it was very upset, was George Heard Hamilton, the famous art historian.

ROBERT BROWN: Why was he upset?

BERNARD CHAET: Because he thought this was ridiculous—because one course. Alfred Bard [ph] called him, because Albers had called him that I was wrecking the school. At this point, before that, Albers hated Bard because Bard never included him in any shows, and Bard's daughter applied to the school and Albers made me interview her. He usually did the interviewing, but—so once he left being chairman, it was impossible for me to deal with him. He went after me, and I was—I was really hurt because I was not about to change the school. So I went ahead, a little ahead there, but—

ROBERT BROWN: Huh.

BERNARD CHAET: —I guess Albers left in '50. It was a horrible scene with Rico Lebrun. Now—

ROBERT BROWN: That was just before—

BERNARD CHAET: Albers left. Albers had left—

ROBERT BROWN: —Albers said he was—wanted you to be chairman?

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. I was already elected chairman, and then the idea—the dean at that time was someone who knew Lebrun at UCLA, and Lebrun was a weekend visitor—no—was teaching at our summer program for a month or two in Berkshire. I didn't see any harm in bringing a famous artist in for a year teaching one-to-two days a week, but Albers blew his top.

At that point I was being appointed, and there was Rico Lebrun, and I said to Albers the following: Andrew Ritchie was the head of the museum, and he knew Rico Lebrun, and he gave him a show in the museum, and I said to Albers, "It's important that you come to this opening to show that we're all together. This is a school here." He said, "I'm coming for you, I'm coming. I'll show up." So he showed up, and his grand—he had a wonderful way of dressing. He had a dark gray flannel suit, a light gray shirt, and a light gray tie, way ahead of his time, and he came, and I said—he and his wife came, and I said, "I'm going to introduce you to Lebrun." Now he said, "You will notice as I walk in here, I'm not looking at these horrible paintings. Just notice that." So I brought Lebrun over, a quick handshake, Albers exited.

Now we go three months later, the art historians, Albers had retired, he was coming once in a while to teach graduate students, you know, give them "crits," and they asked him to give a public lecture on color. This was not on color, this was on Rico Lebrun. I'm sitting in the audience there listening to this.

ROBERT BROWN: And he's giving—

BERNARD CHAET: A thousand people in the audience, and it's supposed to be about color and without mentioning Rico Lebrun, he starts talking about "Walt Disney Expressionism" that suddenly appears in my school. I mean, there is Rico Lebrun in the audience.

ROBERT BROWN: Lebrun is teaching?

BERNARD CHAET: Yes, he's teaching there! For a year. As he felt that Lebrun was trying to take over his school, which was not true. After that lecture, Albers never spoke to me again and Lebrun thought that I was collaborating with Albers on this. So, you can imagine the year I had with these two guys. I mean, I was totally destroyed that year. I got a little ahead of my—I mean, I was continuing my career and so forth, but I had just—I was on the verge of becoming chairman, and that was '59. But what a year that was. Lebrun never spoke to me again, and Albers never spoke to me again.

ROBERT BROWN: Hmm.

BERNARD CHAET: So we ended up badly.

ROBERT BROWN: And did Lebrun stay around much longer? No?

BERNARD CHAET: He was on his way. Well, he was the old-time teacher in a sense who expected students to do his work. In other words, he would like to get two or three students to collaborate on a big collage. He'll give the composition on the Crucifixion or some important subject matter—in quotes—and he felt, Lebrun did, that he and de Kooning had a lot in common, and which was his fantasy, and that they were in touch with each other, but it was one miserable year that I had before I took over, which was no pleasure. I—I managed three years.

ROBERT BROWN: This was just in the transition period?

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. As Albers was leaving. Lebrun went on to be artist-in-residence at American Academy in Rome, and I tried to explain to him while we were still friendly that this was not a teaching position. He thought he was hired to teach there. I said, "The fellows are there, and if they want to talk to you, they talk to you. You're not teaching them." Well, Lebrun made the following mistake. He didn't listen to me. He didn't—what do I know about it?

The first week he was there or the second week, whatever, he went to Lennart Anderson's studio. Lennart Anderson was doing a huge painting, a wonderful painting of young children or adolescents along a sidewalk and a stoop, a big painting, and Lebrun had the nerve to go and give him a criticism—uninvited. I heard about this from people who were there, not from Lennart Anderson, and so Anderson threw him out of his studio. So, I mean, this is the kind of people we're dealing with.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: People were getting criticism from both Lebrun and Albers, because Albers came once a month, said it was a great experience, totally different, but you have to figure out who you are in a hurry. In a way, the whole Yale system in those years was good, because the student was sandpapered from both sides with different directions. It wasn't the school idea one style, and I found that very valuable.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: Very valuable way of teaching. That isn't the reason all these people, some of them became famous, because none of the people who became famous were in the school at that time.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: But there were very good people there.

ROBERT BROWN: Very were good people.

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. I think it was a lively school.

ROBERT BROWN: You mentioned Vermillion [ph].

BERNARD CHAET: Vermillion was there. Welliver was there, and Bailey.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: And actually, in those—in that course of Albers on the color course, in the book that's published, some of the examples are done by Bailey, and Bailey was an assistant to Albers in basic drawing when he was in graduate school. So, he had that very strong education.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: He had come in to the school out of the army, out of the—right out of the army. Albers—

ROBERT BROWN: You were chairman in 1959 then?

BERNARD CHAET: Through '62.

ROBERT BROWN: To '62.

BERNARD CHAET: And by then, I was very happy to get out. I was not too popular with the Albers's people, and—

ROBERT BROWN: Meaning what? People who were still on faculty?

BERNARD CHAET: The young people that trained Albers, who felt—

ROBERT BROWN: Trained?

BERNARD CHAET: —that this was the Third Reich that should last a thousand years exactly as it was.

ROBERT BROWN: Ah.

BERNARD CHAET: And they didn't like the artists I brought in as visiting artists, and I tried to bring in younger people, a man named Jon Schueler who was very good. I brought in Gabor Peterdi in a full-time job to run the print department. They didn't want him either, one of the great teachers of print-making in this century. He had a tenured full-time job in New York City. Albers had originally hired him to come once a week to teach etching, and he proved very popular, and so I got him a full-time professorship at Yale to give up the other job and he—he spent many years there at Yale and the Albers's people didn't like this.

I'll tell you. In the end, it was very good for me because—because of that end of my three years, I got a whole year off with pay and it brought us—this time we had a five-year-old daughter, brought me to a free year in Rome.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. At the Academy?

BERNARD CHAET: At the Academy.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: And so I might—I gave you a brief history—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: —of my teaching career there.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

[END OF chaet97_2of3_cass_sideB.]

ROBERT BROWN: [inaudible]

BERNARD CHAET: I'm going to skip back in a minute to talk about the interiors and—but when I started doing watercolors seriously, it was only a fluke. I had been doing watercolors here and there, you know, two or three or four a year at the most, and I was in an art store in—in New York, very strange, wonderful, crazy man named David Davis, and he said to me, "I want to close out my watercolor paper. I need someone to buy the whole thing." I found—before I knew it, I had bought 100 or a 150 sheets of wonderful watercolor paper, the likes of which I haven't seen since, but not knowing much about watercolor paper, I got here. I said, "Well, I'm going to start doing these." If you buy five sheets of paper, you can't do anything, and if you have a hundred, it's exciting, and that summer of '77—

ROBERT BROWN: You mean you can just—

BERNARD CHAET: You just go. I mean, if four or five don't work, you still got hundreds and—and it's also an expensive hobby because the materials for watercolor are more expensive than oil and so I started going out, and painting inside. I was doing painting—painting inside things that we—like strawberries. We'd go pick them—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: —in the '70s, and then I started going out early in the morning, and that led to the oils, and I—I—when I dreamed at night, all my dreams were about doing watercolors. I was working, and then, finally, about '78-'79, I was having a show in New York of watercolors, a show that went to the Delaware Museum and so forth, and someone wrote something about them and I told my dealer, Marilyn Pearl, I don't like this. I'll write something, and this is what I wrote one afternoon. I want to read—

ROBERT BROWN: This is for Marilyn Pearl.

BERNARD CHAET: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: I remember her essays.

BERNARD CHAET: Right. This is something about what it feels like to do a watercolor, and I wrote this in August 1977, and this was my first feeling about what watercolor was about:

"The intense white of the beautiful paper, much more tactile than any painting surface, stimulates the approaching act of painting. One's sense of touch is already operating. A performance, one

chance, a heightened state, all senses focus simultaneously. Witness the process, distributing marks, organizing the rhythm, the choreography of shape and inter-space, the color light. The white of the page equal partner to color strokes in a time clock, not too fast, not too slow. Too slow, head and hand don't mesh, too fast, hand running the show. Perception and conception merge. Total awareness. One can put time in slow motion to record and store the decisions. Exhausting and exhilarating."

And I wrote that because what was written had nothing to do with what I felt I was doing. And from that day on, I have been doing watercolors seriously, and so some years more than others, but it changed the way I painted. There was a certain airiness that came into my oil paintings, the fact that you could feel like watercolor paper, the white underneath, giving off a kind of light—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: —and—

ROBERT BROWN: You let the ground come through.

BERNARD CHAET: That's right.

ROBERT BROWN: In your oil paintings.

BERNARD CHAET: And I felt at one point after doing them for years, I decided, well, oil could be different—a different feeling, and I would tone the ground off-white so that you—I wouldn't be too dependent on the white, because playing off a lighter color I could do something a little different, and play light against dark, but in a sense, it gave me a kind of freedom, and I was able to use my drawing feelings into the watercolor. And before I got this explosion of going outside and starting watercolor seriously inside and outside, I had been doing interiors, and the interiors were in the winter in my home in New Haven, and documenting this very house we're sitting in. From the room behind me, I would paint all the way down to the kitchen. Part of it had to do with our daughter. I had trained her to pose for me and in a very cruel way in that I had the only television set up in my studio on the third floor in Connecticut.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: A very primitive black and white set, and she could come up and watch it as long as she was posing but I would say, "Hold it!" and she wasn't—she didn't know she was posing, you see, and so the way someone 12 or 13 or 14 or younger sits in a chair and so forth. That was the start. I did portraits of her, but then I started doing the interior, and I would paint the interior and put the poses from the drawings. I must have had a hundred drawings, and I did a whole series of those—

ROBERT BROWN: Well, were these—

BERNARD CHAET: —in the late '60s.

ROBERT BROWN: The interiors obviously weren't simply to document the—

BERNARD CHAET: No.

ROBERT BROWN: —Connecticut house—

BERNARD CHAET: No.

ROBERT BROWN: —or the Rockport house.

BERNARD CHAET: No. I think I was documenting the light that would come in. I think the architecture of both houses was a little exaggerated, and this small house, I made it look very large, and things came out of these that I—that I don't—I didn't remember doing. For example, I see the slides. After the student revolution in the '60s at Yale, I posed my daughter in a very agonizing way in a chair in this room over here, and it was my pose, you see. I said this is what I—I didn't know why I wanted it. I see this painting. I don't know who owns it. This is a very agonized pose. It wasn't natural for her to take this pose, and the—all the symbols fit together because in the hallway you could see part of an American flag. The reason the American flag was there, I had a big hole in the wall, and I covered it up with the flag, you see, and so it all adds up. So, I think that symbols sometimes happen, and it's too—one reads into them.

But I did—I think I've had—I had several shows in Boston and New York of these interiors, and it was the watercolors that got me out of that into the landscapes, and also before that into the landscape, I was drawing a lot in the summers in the '50s. I was doing large drawings with turkey feather quills, much larger than I would attempt today, 40-inch drawings. Two or three of the faculty would go out of a Sunday at lunch and come back at nightfall, and one day as I was doing the landscape, a herd of cows moved in front of me, and I said, well, look at those marks. They look like paintings to me, and so people who kid me about painting cows, they're simply the black and white spots in the landscape. I was doing very large drawings, gutsy things that I don't think I could do, because I didn't think that I was drawing. I was just getting it out, and I painted from these drawings.

The last thing in my mind was thinking of painting outside. It looked messy to me. I didn't paint outside until I moved here and started working directly from the landscapes, slowly, first with watercolors, and then I found I could do any size with the oils outside.

ROBERT BROWN: You mentioned a couple times making drawings and then doing paintings. Are they just adapted from those drawings?

BERNARD CHAET: Yes, they're—well, they're adapted and changed, and that was my training, and I never dreamt that I would be thrilled to go outside and paint with oil paints and so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So you made the drawings?

BERNARD CHAET: I made the drawings outdoors, and I had a show in '67 just of the—of the cow paintings, and I even did cow prints and so forth, but it wasn't the cows, it's the way they interact, the shapes interacted. I mean, it came from art, and so when people would bring me pictures of cows, I mean, I'm amused, but it isn't what got me there, but I'm still doing them. There's a friend of mine here, he said, "Well, I've seen your cow paintings. Can I take you out to this place?" And I like being driven, and when I went to Vermont to teach starting in 1990 when I retired, there were the cows again. So I started—I said why not? So I followed the herds, and I'm doing them here now, not as many, but they look better to me, and they look different. So certain themes keep repeating, and you see them differently as you change your ideas what painting looks like.

ROBERT BROWN: These are themes that you don't seek out necessarily?

BERNARD CHAET: No.

ROBERT BROWN: No. I think themes—

ROBERT BROWN: You read earlier—

BERNARD CHAET: I think themes find you, and you think you're through with them, and then suddenly you—you're back if the opportunity arises.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: I was always drawing heads, and as I—I don't like working from models that much, although I did in the '70s. My wife was with a drawing group, and she had access to models and so I—I've always done portraits of my family, my wife, my daughter, of course, I did hundreds of them, and I started doing self-portraits mostly because I didn't have a model, and people think they're a little crazy, but I enjoyed doing them, and I must do 10 a year. And my wall in Connecticut, I have a whole set of small watercolors. I think the people who get the biggest kick out of them are my two grandchildren who think they're very funny because they see 20 or 30 and they laugh like hell. They know it's me, even though I'm in disguise, you see. They can tell. It's amazing what a child can see.

I did a portrait of my wife before we were married—from memory—because that was my training. It was something from the '40s and — and here 50 years later my grandchildren, seven and five, know who it is right away. To them, it's a real picture. So, I wonder who's really looking at pictures.

Everybody has limited themes. and if you go off your themes, and not true to yourself, your work doesn't add up. It happens with different artists, but then artists also challenge their times.

ROBERT BROWN: You—you had—you challenged sometimes when you were an art student—

BERNARD CHAET: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: —didn't you?

BERNARD CHAET: Well, I—I was not— [Cross talk.]

ROBERT BROWN: You were bored, and you were a bit rebellious.

BERNARD CHAET: I was, and also I was doing things that my teacher I wasn't crazy about. Without mentioning my name, he gave a lecture against what I was doing.

ROBERT BROWN: Who was this? Zerbe?

BERNARD CHAET: Zerbe, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: I was doing—there was a man who played the—who had an accordion, and he had a little girl with him. I did a very dramatic picture, and Zerbe went after me. I mean, everyone who he was talking to, he didn't mention my name. I quit school, and my father went wild. I remember that was only two—but in a sense I had to do it, because I went out and painted on my own before I came back—for a couple of years before I came back to school. So, I think I—in a way, I was thinking about how do you teach art, and it was only lucky that I got a job. I was ready for it.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: And when you're teaching, you're arguing with your teachers. I tell my students

you're going to argue with me on these points. I'm still arguing with Zerbe 50 years later on things he said to me.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: There's a give and take that never ends.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: And so being out of school those two years, I didn't think I was going to teach. That was the last thing. But when I had an opportunity, I could—I could bring things forward about what was wrong in my education. So my whole theory about drawing had to do with the kind of—the way I was taught. There were good things that I was taught, but what—what my criticism I put into action. The way they taught anatomy, I didn't agree with, and I did my—I discovered my own way.

ROBERT BROWN: Hmm.

BERNARD CHAET: I took it seriously. The teaching for a lot of people is just a way to making a living to supplement your—your—keep you going, but I found that I got serious about it, and John Ferren, a painter from the '30s, '40s, and '50s, said to me, "Your problem is you're going to the kiss of death known as a teacher." I said, "Well, you're probably right, but I spend more time painting than teaching. But I think about teaching. I just don't want to go in and hang around."

I have—I want to—what you find out as a teacher as you go along, you teach what you believe. And if you don't do that—and there's some teachers I've found who change their way of teaching with what's going on in the art world—and the only reason I started writing is because what I believed was going out of fashion, and I had all these wonderful student drawings, and I was arguing with the faculty at the time, and I said, "Now or never," and I started writing, and I'd write every night after finishing this course that met three times a week.

ROBERT BROWN: This began when? Back in the—

BERNARD CHAET: In the—in the '60s, late '60s.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: The student revolution, so forth, and then I found when I had this wonderful manuscript that I was turned down by six companies. They said, no one's interested in drawing. That's what we found. I did it because I felt that drawing was going out. As David Hockney said when he came to Yale, his was the last class in England that had drawing as a requirement in the late '60s, and so finally I found a company, only by accident. They had put out a book called *Drawing* by Daniel Mendelowitz. They thought it could be useful in classrooms. They found there was an interest in drawing, great interest, but this book didn't meet the needs, and one of my friends, Begoshian—

ROBERT BROWN: Barasham.

BERNARD CHAET: Barasham. He was in that book. So, the salesman came and wanted to know why they didn't use this book. They told him it wasn't good in the studio, but he had a friend who—who had such a manuscript. So when they called me up, I was furious. I said, "When your flyer came out, a huge flyer called *Drawing*, I said, I sunk into the ground." So this guy said, "Relax. We want to

see your manuscript." My manuscript had been redone every time it was turned down by good companies. Some companies wanted me to cover things that I couldn't possibly cover—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: —printmaking, and one company said, "We'll publish this book if you do something on perspective." Well, I said, "You know something? I don't know anything about perspective. You should have someone do it." So that's how I got into this book. Begoshian told them about it. They bought it in a week and a half.

At this point, I would have signed anything. I would have given it for nothing. It was six years.

ROBERT BROWN: And you're happy with this publisher then?

BERNARD CHAET: Oh, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: This was Holt, I guess?

BERNARD CHAET: Holt, and I had a wonderful editor, and he actually wanted the changes, and he was right. He said, "This is what you need," and they bought it, and in a sense I thought I was teaching what I believed and if you don't do that, you're just going along with the flow, which a lot of people find easier to do as things change, and now I think we're—the whole idea of art schools is going out the window right now, and—

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think rightly or—

BERNARD CHAET: Wrongly.

ROBERT BROWN: —wrongly?

BERNARD CHAET: I mean, because the idea is just to let them do what they want, because such horrible stuff is—is shown as great art. While we speak, a show just came down from the Boston Museum by Roy Lichtenstein, and they write about it as if they're lucky to get this show of Chinese landscapes. Well, I find that there's nothing there. The house is empty, and unless you can exercise what you believe, at least I had a forum for it, and I never regretted the energy I put into that book, or my whole teaching career, but I felt it was not separated from what I was painting, and people think that you're giving your whole life. I was teaching two and a half days at the most, and I planned what I was doing, and I was painting most of the time. That was the great advantage I had teaching at a university where the demands of your time were only half time, and so that you could feed your work.

[Tape cuts out and back in.]

ROBERT BROWN: You mentioned at one time or another when you first began, there was an old guard around that I guess, who was that, Dean Keller was the principal one?

BERNARD CHAET: Yes, he was the principal one.

ROBERT BROWN: And then how did Albers handle him?

BERNARD CHAET: Well, he handled it very well. It was a very small school that gave a BFA, and a few MFAs at this time. We're talking now 1951, and at the time there was a big Cezanne show at

the Met, and I had the same students that Keller had, and I was very upset when his—these same students told me that Keller told them that Cezanne was a big fake put on by French dealers, and suggesting perhaps maybe they were Jewish dealers, and I was in an uproar. I went into Albers and I said, "How can I teach these students who are—when somebody else is telling them and some of them seem to believe that Cezanne's a fake?" Well, he laughed like hell. He said, "Sit down and relax. Boy, don't you know we've already won this war." It was a great lesson for me. That's the kind of a guy Albers was in handling the school. It was a very small school.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: And then it grew up.

ROBERT BROWN: You mentioned that you—right away Albers also made you a member of the Museum Committee.

BERNARD CHAET: Well, he had the dean, Charles Sawyer, who, of course, was the former museum —

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: —person, and he wanted to have—they always seem to have someone from the art school on the committee, and as I was the new person on the block, I was put into this committee. And I was there one or two years when this happened, and the art historians sort of looked at me and I didn't say too much. They were talking—they were talking about future shows they had planned, and perhaps might plan for the distant future, and George Heard Hamilton turned to me. He was the chairman. "And what do you think we need?" And I said, "I think you need a contemporary drawing show." And he looked around, and he said, "Fine. You will do it." And I said, "What?" And he said, "You and I will go in in a week or two. I will introduce you to all the dealers, and you'll pick the show. Just show me what you write." And he took me on this—I really felt like I was an outsider. He took me through all these galleries.

When I think of what I saw—

ROBERT BROWN: Why do you feel—felt an outsider? [Cross talk.]

BERNARD CHAET: Well, here I was in the Yale Club having a martini—

ROBERT BROWN: Ah.

BERNARD CHAET: —that had me on the floor. That was the end of the day. But during the day, I came into the—Sidney Javits [ph]—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: —takes one look at George Heard Hamilton, he seats us down in this satin environment, and he brings us out these Mondrian plus and minus drawings, and he thinks that Yale is there to buy the drawings.

ROBERT BROWN: Hmm.

BERNARD CHAET: And so it went at all the galleries, and when I think of what I saw—

ROBERT BROWN: And Hamilton was very smooth.

BERNARD CHAET: Oh, yes, and he said that I was in charge. So, they assumed that I was a museum man. So when I'd come back the next week, you see, and I said, "When will you come back?" and they—they were serving me coffee and drinks and so forth, and what I saw, I mean, it still boggles the mind. I saw in one gallery that handled Matisse huge drawings, fresh drawings, \$3[00]-\$400.

ROBERT BROWN: Huh.

BERNARD CHAET: I've only seen one or two of them reproduced. I reproduced one of them. So that was my introduction to the museum world, and I felt then and I felt one more time where I picked a show of the drawing in the drawing section, supposedly for the drawing students. The other faculty were supposed to have—work on this weren't interested, and as I put this huge Mondrian drawing, which they seldom have up, and put them all together, I felt the way I guess museum curators feel, that you have done all these drawings.

ROBERT BROWN: Huh.

BERNARD CHAET: I mean, I—I had the feeling that this is what happened. I looked at this. This was my show. I put this together. And now I knew how museum curators felt. You feel that you have created this whole thing, and it is the same thing as being an artist, and so now I understand.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: I understand now a curator's arrogance, where it comes from, because I would be arrogant the same way.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: So that was my experience.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: But—

ROBERT BROWN: Well, you contacted various contemporary artists and Americans, too, for some —

BERNARD CHAET: Oh, yeah. I wish I had—

ROBERT BROWN: There's a—I know we have—I read a letter to you from Jack Levine, for example —

BERNARD CHAET: That's right.

ROBERT BROWN: —saying, "meet me at such and such a time."

BERNARD CHAET: See, I was— [Cross talk.]

ROBERT BROWN: Of course, he was someone from your boyhood you knew.

BERNARD CHAET: I never met him.

ROBERT BROWN: But you knew of his reputation as a senior—

BERNARD CHAET: He was—of course, he was—he was someone from my region that went out and made good.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: And so he gave me the choice of several drawings, and I had—I didn't save all the letters, and I should have. I think I gave you one from Abraham Rattner.

ROBERT BROWN: Right.

BERNARD CHAET: And what I found was that all my prejudices came out in that show, although I discovered artists I never heard of. I looked in every gallery, and I found artists, one artist who went to school with me, Michael Tulechevsky. He had a beautiful drawing in the show.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm, Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: And I tried to bring that in, and Yale did a nice job, and if you don't have a copy, I'll give you a copy.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm, Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: I'll send that to you.

ROBERT BROWN: All right.

BERNARD CHAET: Ten reproductions.

ROBERT BROWN: You sort of laughingly said that I became—felt I'd done everything.

BERNARD CHAET: That's right.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you sense an arrogance in museum people that you'd met up to that time?

BERNARD CHAET: Oh, no.

ROBERT BROWN: Not really?

BERNARD CHAET: No.

ROBERT BROWN: Who was the director of the art gallery at that time?

BERNARD CHAET: Well, I don't even remember. He was—

ROBERT BROWN: It wasn't Andrew Ritchie, was he?

BERNARD CHAET: No.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he—he came a little later.

BERNARD CHAET: He came later. I'll say this about Ritchie, that he included the artists in. One time he was considering a life-sized Bonnard. He called us in—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: —and I said, "Buy it." Of course, he didn't, but he—he—he was more friendly with the artists. I'll say this about him at Yale. Before him and after, this did not happen, he decided he would show everyone who taught there, shows of one or two, and if we had somebody in for a six-week seminar, he would call that gallery and put up the show. And so he was—he worked hard and, however, there was a problem before I became chairman in '59 or '60 that we invited Rico Lebrun for a year, and he and Albers—Albers was on the way out. I don't know if I told you this story.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes, you did mention Albers retiring.

BERNARD CHAET: And this was—Ritchie had known Lebrun, also, and he put on Labrun's show, and I—I told Albers he had the show, but Albers somehow came because I asked him to. He—this was the end of the world for him, someone like Rico Lebrun.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: He gave a devastating talk against him that caused terrible shocks in the school that year, and some students actually had Lebrun and Albers together and I was—both of them hated me, thinking that I was responsible for it, that I was against each one of them, but that was too sad a case.

I want to get back to—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. I want to ask a couple. You mentioned Charles Sawyer. He was dean of the school when he came in.

BERNARD CHAET: He was dean of the school and—

ROBERT BROWN: How did he work out? Pretty well?

BERNARD CHAET: Well, it was easy for me because he also—he's the one who brought in Albers and changed the art school.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: And as the years went on, and as I actually found out last year, 1996, when the show of 75 years of the Addison Gallery, that he gave Albers his first show, and he was interested in Bauhaus, and he took a big chance bringing Albers in, because the artists—the artists who taught at the school had been there for years, and had real insight into how the university worked, and knew everybody. And they went after Albers as much as they could, and so when I came into town and I was considered a great radical because I was part of Albers's team, and it was very difficult, and Sawyer—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: —did that, and he also changed our summer school, which was nothing. He brought in the head of a hot school at the time, a wonderful man, Ray Dowden, who ran our summer school.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, yes. He came from Cooper Union, too.

BERNARD CHAET: From Cooper Union, and he—and he started the summer school off in a wonderful way and he was a little suspicious of me because he wanted his own people, but Sawyer wanted someone from Yale, and I was not told I had to go. I decided I would go.

ROBERT BROWN: So you began teaching fairly—

BERNARD CHAET: I began teaching—

ROBERT BROWN: —soon.

BERNARD CHAET: —there in '53.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: And Ray Dowden and I became very close friends over the years.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. How long did the—were the sessions, the summer sessions?

BERNARD CHAET: They started out in the early '50s for a month, and then in the—in 1962, music and art joined, and I became the director of the program, and I used it to recruit all these famous artists that we have in America today to come to Yale.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean you'd check them out during the summer?

BERNARD CHAET: Oh, yes. I mean, if there was somebody I wanted, I—I got them into Yale.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: I had enough power to get them in. After a while, the committees of admission became impossible. I couldn't even get people in. So that's when I gave up teaching. It wasn't worth it.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean they had all sorts of criteria, abstract criteria?

BERNARD CHAET: Well, there were too many people voting—

ROBERT BROWN: Oh.

BERNARD CHAET: —and they wouldn't take my word for it. I mean, Close would have gotten in because he was good to start with.

ROBERT BROWN: Chuck Close?

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. And—but people like Nancy Graves wouldn't have gotten, in because she didn't have enough background, they thought, at this time.

ROBERT BROWN: But you'd spotted her and somehow—

BERNARD CHAET: I spotted her day one. I—I said to my wife, I said, "I'm watching this girl from Vassar paint. She doesn't have a background, but she's got a touch that's unusual."

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: So I was able to get these people in.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: Also, Richard Serra, he did not have the proper background. He was an English major in California, and started—he studied with a student of Rico Lebrun. I don't know if I told you about this. He studied with Howard Washam [ph], and we took a chance on him, but we—what we did in those days when I was in charge, we made a separate program for each student, someone like Serra or Graves who ultimately married. We gave them a program that gave them—sort of gave them basic studies, didn't let them go off to be masters students working on their own. The first year they were there, they were painting white cups and saucers with William Bailey.

ROBERT BROWN: Hmm.

BERNARD CHAET: And I don't know if I told you this story. Please interrupt me.

ROBERT BROWN: No.

BERNARD CHAET: But Albers didn't like the way I ran the school. He made me chairman.

ROBERT BROWN: The summer school?

BERNARD CHAET: No.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, oh.

BERNARD CHAET: I'm talking about—

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, yes, you did start talking about that. That's right.

BERNARD CHAET: I don't want to go back, but the summer school, I was teaching two days a week, and I had — I had a wonderful group of faculty who took responsibility for our print-making program. We had two artists working there, Albert Blowski and Richard Klodzine, and they ran — we were all doing prints. Everyone was working there and it was—Klodzine sometimes had done drawing, I started there teaching drawing, and I worked there with Lois Finklestein, who was a terrific teacher, various people. Lebrun was there for one summer. Marca-Relli was there before I was director. He was a very—in the late '50s.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: And we were lucky. It was all subsidized and we had the choice of juniors from all over the country. So, we had 35 wonderful students.

ROBERT BROWN: Juniors, you mean juniors?

BERNARD CHAET: Juniors in art school and—and art school, art schools, and colleges, art majors. We let the schools pick them and we knew.

ROBERT BROWN: And then these people, the ones you really liked, you would urge to come to the Yale Art School?

BERNARD CHAET: Oh, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: And the Yale Art School, by then, was only a master's program?

BERNARD CHAET: That's correct. It turned [inaudible] master's program.

ROBERT BROWN: In the early '60s?

BERNARD CHAET: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: And I worked in bringing these people in and it was fun for me, because someone was really talented, I could really encourage them to come.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. In a month or how long did it eventually become? Six weeks?

BERNARD CHAET: It was six or seven weeks.

ROBERT BROWN: You had enough time to really—

BERNARD CHAET: Of course. You were—

ROBERT BROWN: —tell?

BERNARD CHAET: —ate with them and you—look. I also made them work in landscape whether they wanted to or not. Brice Marden didn't want to go outside. I said, "Brice, you're going out," and he did. He found himself a little place in the woods where he did 8 x 10 green-and-black landscapes, which I still remember to this day not so far from what I was doing. Well, he wasn't hard to recruit. He came from BU, and his favorite teacher was Reed Kay, and when he—

ROBERT BROWN: Reed Kay is someone you've always stayed in touch with.

BERNARD CHAET: That's right. And when he had a big show at the museum, he demanded that Reed Kay and he could say a few words about him. But those years at Norfolk, 13 for me, six as director, were very happy years for me. I was painting there. I loved being with these students.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: It was one of the highlights of my teaching, were those summers, those 13, and I only gave up because I had a grant that I didn't apply for, I may have said this before, that said I couldn't teach for a year, and I took it and in my strange way I thought the school would collapse without me. It probably did, but once I got here for that year that we rented this house, I—I decided that was it, 13 years was enough.

ROBERT BROWN: That was in the late—

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: —late '60s then?

BERNARD CHAET: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I want to go back to one other thing.

ROBERT BROWN: Sure.

BERNARD CHAET: My teaching—

ROBERT BROWN: Please.

BERNARD CHAET: —of materials and—

ROBERT BROWN: Which you've said you had just such grounding in from Zerbe—

BERNARD CHAET: Differently.

ROBERT BROWN: —at the Museum School in Boston.

BERNARD CHAET: I want to keep going. This is something I wrote about media that I got from an art historian, too.

"The artist imagines his future works in terms of familiar materials, colors, tools, and media," and at that time, turning to myself, "watercolor with its translucence and immediacy had affected my use of oil. I needed the sense of improvised urgency," and to talk about materials a little more, I want to quote from Bruce Cole in the book *The Renaissance Artist at Work*. I wrote him. I think I met him before. But I wrote him after this book came out. This is what he says about the materials of art, and this is what I think that people who don't paint who write about art don't quite get.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: I was very happy to see an art historian, and when I won an award for teaching, I read this out.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: Bruce Cole in the *Renaissance Artist at Work*: "The materials of art have their own logic. When an artist of talent makes a painting or a sculpture, he is always aware of the potentials and limitations of his materials. The better the artist, the more likely he is to know just what he can and cannot do with them. The entire creative process from first idea to last touch is conditioned by the physical properties of materials."

This is a radical statement from an art historian, and I feel that he probably tried to paint or draw, whatever, it makes sense. It's the inner feelings—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: —that you have.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: Of course, you can get these inner feelings if you organize a show and think you figured out how to do things—that I understand.

ROBERT BROWN: But this did ring true to you?

BERNARD CHAET: This was right.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: I mean, I feel that this is—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: —what's missing in criticism.

ROBERT BROWN: That was 1986 when you got the College Art Association Award for Excellence in Teaching. [Cross talk.]

BERNARD CHAET: I read other things out but that was it.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: Fits into what I'm doing here.

ROBERT BROWN: So that as with Brice Marden forcing him into the landscape, as with others, you forced them to learn something, get some grounding in medium.

BERNARD CHAET: Right. First of all—

ROBERT BROWN: The materials.

BERNARD CHAET: —I could tell them what to do.

ROBERT BROWN: That's true. By the time they got there as graduate students—

BERNARD CHAET: As graduate students, they were on their own.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: Because they had earned the right to have criticism on—on things that they invented, but also people who didn't have a big background, like Nancy Graves and Serra, they had gone through a first year of very disciplined study. As a matter of fact, I organized a show in the late '80s of the collector Leonard Bokore [ph], the art manufacturer—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: —and he had traded in Nancy Graves. He never turned anyone down. He traded her for a still life that she did, and I picked that still life up only to show the students, the current students 10 years later, what the training was at Yale the decade before. It's a wonderful still life.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: It made it possible for her to move on to something of her own choice. Most students who move on in an emphatically opposite way that they work as graduation students—not all but most choose radically.

ROBERT BROWN: Most will.

BERNARD CHAET: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: She did not. She maintained a bit of a progression.

BERNARD CHAET: Well, she changed. She found her own way. The most depressing thing about teaching is to find students 10 years later and still doing the same work they did in school. Believe me, they have found the secret of art, and staying with it, not moving one inch and that was the depressing part. The other depressing part of teaching is finding people who become professors who take it too seriously, but they aren't bored because of it. They have some title after their name. Those are the—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: About teaching, you can't take credit for the students who go on to great things. When I first started teaching, I thought I could predict, and I found that I couldn't. So and so, look at this, he's going to—I was always wrong. You can't tell about somebody's internal development or external development, and art school in a sense, there's a lot of entertainment, hence you're getting criticisms from people, you're having visiting artists, [inaudible] Yale perhaps had too many. We saw everyone who was anybody, and it was entertainment.

The hard thing about being an artist is being alone in a room, and these artists who became famous who were at the right place at the right time in New York. They're doing their own things, and galleries were opening up. It's not that easy anymore.

ROBERT BROWN: No.

BERNARD CHAET: And there's no way of predicting. Some of the artists whom I think are very talented that went to Yale have had no success at all. So there's no way of predicting, and you have to be tough.

ROBERT BROWN: Hmm. Did this discipline in terms of what you taught them, at least, do you think that helped them to discipline themselves afterward?

BERNARD CHAET: Well, some of them.

ROBERT BROWN: Some simply couldn't work on their own?

BERNARD CHAET: Well, Yale was kind of a place where you could pick—could practically pick who you wanted to study with.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: So, I didn't have direct contact with these people once they got to Yale, not all of them.

ROBERT BROWN: Those who studied with William Bailey learned one kind of thing, and those who studied—

BERNARD CHAET: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, the thing is that you could pick and choose when you became—most schools, they think that you teach there, you're teaching all the students, but that was not true at Yale.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: The people I had in my drawing class I could see them grow and move, and those were the ones I could really control, but you can't take credit for these students. You only can

take credit for the ones who didn't do well, [inaudible] something wrong some place that you didn't get—couldn't respond to what you were doing. You only can take credit for the failures. It's too easy to say so and so's studying with me and so I—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: —do have lots of letters from students and I never—I did not give them to you and if you want, I'll give you a whole set of wonderful letters that tell me how wonderful I was.

ROBERT BROWN: Terrific.

BERNARD CHAET: And I—I think on purpose I didn't send them to you. I don't know what the purpose was, but I did not send you—include letters from students when I retired in 1990, because it wasn't that I was embarrassed, but I thought that they were personal, but if you want them—

ROBERT BROWN: Okay.

BERNARD CHAET: —I'll give them to you.

ROBERT BROWN: Interesting. Yeah. Why—why did you become a graduate school, only a graduate school?

BERNARD CHAET: Well, Albers was against it. He had retired.

ROBERT BROWN: He—he was against making it solely—

BERNARD CHAET: He was doing this—he said that all education was basic and had to give basic courses, and it's true. The people who came to study with him had to take basic drawing and color. They were people who already went to art school. So when Begoshian, whom I knew slightly in Boston, came and Albers said, well, that he should study with me, I said, no, he shouldn't study with me. He came here to study with Albers. Begoshian was in my class one day, and people—I tell people in his presence I had to send him back to basic studies because he just wasn't good enough. So he tells people I booted him out of this class.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. [Laughs.]

BERNARD CHAET: My class. The truth is they came to find out what Albers was teaching and to be influenced by him. So he had all graduate students, too. They came.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: But the school was such, this is what happened. The then-president, A. Whitney Griswold, decided that all undergraduate courses would be only through Yale College, and that all professional schools would be then graduate. At that time, the music school also had BFA, and the art school was now mostly BFA. In order to get into the art school, you could come mostly directly from college. When I got to Yale, in order to get into Yale Art School for an undergraduate degree, you had to have two years of college or art school to start as a beginner.

Griswold decided in 1959-1960, only graduate students would be in the professional schools. Albers felt it was a disaster, and it was not easy. I had to arrange it. I became—

ROBERT BROWN: Because you were the chairman, right.

BERNARD CHAET: When the undergraduate program ended, and the graduate program started, and it was—it was a tough transition.

ROBERT BROWN: So thereafter the undergraduate at Yale had some other kind of laboratory or studio thing.

BERNARD CHAET: The undergraduate at Yale suddenly became an art major.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: A studio art major, and we developed a big program, took many years.

ROBERT BROWN: But they had nothing particularly to do with the art school, is that right?

BERNARD CHAET: No. They were—

ROBERT BROWN: They had their own faculty?

BERNARD CHAET: No.

ROBERT BROWN: No.

BERNARD CHAET: They came in—

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, they did?

BERNARD CHAET: They could—they were part of our school. We had a very big undergraduate program, but they were considered art majors, studio art majors, and we had—it gradually grew. It was very strong in sculpture under Irwin Heller [ph], and all our faculty loved teaching these people. As a matter of fact, the people that I'm in touch with, half of them at least, were Yale college undergraduates, and I tried to steer them to the right graduate program. We did not like taking them into our own program, because you can't stay in one school for all these years.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: They had already known these people. They were some—they were some of the brightest people I met.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: I loved teaching them, and in my book, half of them that I reproduce in drawing are from the Yale College program.

ROBERT BROWN: Hmm.

BERNARD CHAET: The very best became scholars of the house, an unusual program that ended a few years ago. As a senior, you could just do art and get credit for 10 courses. We had a studio in the art school and in my mind's eye, I see two or three of them were very good, Frank Moore, George Negroponte, people who are active in the art world, who didn't go to graduate school.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: So that Yale was very good about this.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BERNARD CHAET: Yale was different from the other schools because it had professional art school, from other major Ivy League schools.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. So on balance, as you look back, it worked out pretty well?

BERNARD CHAET: It did work out, but it took a long time doing it.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: It was very painful.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: And these people—suddenly we attracted very good undergraduates who came to Yale because they were good in art, and they were good in their academic studies. These people could handle the academics, and they'd be painting, and I could never figure out. They were bright. That's all. I'd see a lot of them in my mind's eye that seemed to be painting as much as anyone else.

ROBERT BROWN: Whereas before they would have come in as undergraduates—

BERNARD CHAET: And they were—

ROBERT BROWN: —solely as studio—

BERNARD CHAET: Yeah. They would have some—but they're not much. They would take the basic courses—

ROBERT BROWN: Right.

BERNARD CHAET: —and gradually we developed a whole curriculum for these studio art majors.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

BERNARD CHAET: And some were double majors.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]