



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

**Oral history interview with Bernard
Harper Friedman, 1972 Nov. 10**

Contact Information

Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with B.H. Friedman on 1972 November 10. The interview took place in New York, and was conducted by Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Daisy Friedman, B. H. Friedman's daughter, has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. 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

PAUL CUMMINGS: Let's say it's the 10th of November, 1972, Paul Cummings talking to Bob Friedman. Why do they call you Bob all the time?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: It's my nickname. My real name is Bernard Harper Friedman. I was named for a grandfather named Bernard but my parents didn't like the name so they've always called me Bob.

PAUL CUMMINGS: 'Cause I've always known you as, you know, as Bob and I just—

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Although when I write I use B.H., but my real name is Bernard.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, when did you start? Were you interested in art at home as a child growing up?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: No, No. I don't think I was. Well, I used to go to the Museum of Modern Art a lot, when I was in high school. So those would be the years—well, it was a six form school, really beginning with Junior High. So in 1937-'43 I began going to the Museum of Modern Art, partly because of a very close friend of mine at that time, a boy by the name of Eric Cohen, had a membership there. His grandmother had given him some money or something. And we used to go there mainly for movies. But that was my main first exposure. But in my home we had no art, not only no visual art but no library to speak of, no records to speak of, so that I never really got interested in art till after college. In college also I never took any art courses, never was particularly exposed to art. I went to Cornell, which is fairly isolated in Ithaca. It had no museum; it had a comparatively undistinguished art department. I married my wife in my senior year at Cornell in 1948 and, when we came to New York that spring and lived in the Village, it was our first, really our first exposure to art. At first mainly because of second-hand bookstores: they all used to stay open late at night and we'd wander around and we bought a lot of books in those years. Also, the Whitney was just down the block. We lived at One University Place and the Whitney was there on Eighth Street.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, it was on Eighth Street, right.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: So we went to a lot of their shows and continued to go to the Modern. But my first real interest in art galleries, and I'm sure I must have been in some art galleries before my marriage, but the first regular going to art galleries that I remember was the following year, 1949-50, when I took a job with Cross and Brown Company which was a real estate company and I was canvassing for prospective office tenants. The office building boom was just beginning in New York and one of the firms that Cross and Brown was the agent for was Uris, my mother's a Uris. Anyway, they were building a building at 57th and Madison on the former Parke Bernet site, 56th to 57th, and I began going around to these buildings in the 57th Street area looking for prospective tenants. And the one gallery that I began going to most frequently was Curt Valentin's which was at 32 East 57th and Curt became a very close friend and in those next few years I bought quite a few things from him.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What were your first purchases, do you remember?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Well, I think the very first if I remember was not at Valentin's but nearby. The Hacker Gallery at that time, which I think was either on 57th or 58th, had a bookstore and gallery combination and there was a Schwitters show and there were two Schwitters [Friedman points to the art] that were for sale for fifty dollars apiece and at that time I was earning fifty dollars a week and I remember Abby thinking it was insane to spend, you know, two weeks' salary for two little Schwitters. But in any case, we bought those. I think I paid for them on time. But anyway, I think that those two collages were the very first things we bought. Then, well, they're of a particular period of Schwitters which is slightly more rigid than some of his work and we began kind of groping for an image that was freer and more open and what I first bought from Curt was two Arps—an Arp relief and an Arp collage, and then a little bit later we bought yet two more Arps. But it was a sort of movement toward a freer, more flowing image. But the single show that really, certainly speaking for myself, turned me on was the Gorky memorial show at the Whitney. Although I had seen isolated paintings by contemporary Americans, I had never seen a big retrospective of an artist, an American artist who I really respected. And when that Gorky show went on at the Whitney we fell in love with a painting called *Table Landscape* that was done in 1945. It's a big, important Gorky, late Gorky and it seemed outrageously expensive for twelve hundred dollars. We hesitated and

hesitated, and it was for sale at the Whitney and we didn't make up our minds until after the Whitney show closed and the estate had gone to Janis. And we bought it from Janis for very slightly more. I mean he knew we had been interested in it there. But that was really the beginning of an interest in American art. Then I began to become more aware of what was happening to American art; I mean I did go to all the Pollock shows in those years and de Kooning and Kline a little later.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But did you start making the rounds of the galleries then when you had time on Saturdays?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Yeah. Well, part of what I wanted to make clear is that when I was canvassing for Cross and Brown, I was a much shyer young man than I am now and I must say it was very hard for me to go into offices cold and ask to speak to the President or if I was kicked down to the office manager, and I found it quite a strain. And, as relief from ringing doorbells, in effect I would go into galleries for a little therapy. And that was how I got to know Curt. So I did a lot of it on office time, you know, I mean maybe forty minutes of canvassing and twenty minutes of art therapy. But anyway, that was when I really began and then pretty soon—my wife was working then—and on Saturdays we'd go to galleries together and we were thinking partly in terms of, you know, decorating an apartment. We still had the place in the Village and in 1951 we moved to Two Sutton Place South, which is on 57th Street. So then it was, you know, very convenient to go to galleries on Saturdays and, within a year or two,, I had been—Maybe I should go back and say that from college on I had been writing in my spare time, nights and weekends and—.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was that an early interest?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Yes, the writing was but it had never been art writing as such; it was almost all fiction and poetry, which was an interest that began in high school. It intensified in the years that I was in the Navy and when I got out of the Navy in 1946 I really thought I had a lot I wanted to say and I did a lot of writing as an undergraduate at Cornell. I was on various magazines and—.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you study with anybody there?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Yes. The main teacher, and I guess the strongest influence, was a man by the name of Baxter Hathaway who had come to Cornell from Michigan where they have a big writing program. And he had once himself been a Hopwood prize winner. Anyway, he came to Cornell right after the War and started a creative writing department there and by 1948 he started a magazine called *Epoch*, which is still going, which is rare for a little magazine. It's been going over twenty years. He was very encouraging to me and published the first short story I ever had published in anything but an undergraduate publication. I mean this was a magazine that had published almost entirely writing from professionals. It was very exciting to be published with people like e.e. cummings and on, I can't—who all was in it, I think Masle was in it and Barry, but anyway—I was published actually almost immediately after graduation. I mean it was a story I had done as an undergraduate but it was published just after I had graduated. And I kept submitting fiction and poetry to little magazines, literary magazines, not to say that I didn't submit them to the *New Yorker* as well. But they weren't accepted. But anyway, in the Fifties I was becoming interested in art and groping for, well, where the excitement was and I felt it was in those years mainly in painting and jazz. Jazz has been a lifelong interest of mine; I mean that goes back even further.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did that start in college or before?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Jazz?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: No, that would be way back in high school. I mean certainly by the first year of high school and I think maybe even earlier than that. I was—I was collecting jazz records I think when I was eleven or twelve, and when, I think it was in the third form, so I would have been thirteen, I graduated from high school fairly early. But anyhow, a fellow by the name of Avakian who was a very close friend of mine in those years came to Horace Mann and his elder brother George Avakian had been a rather famous jazz critic and had reissued a lot of stuff for Columbia records whom he worked for: Bessie Smith and Louis Armstrong and so forth. Anyhow, he and I used to go—At that time there was still an El on Sixth Avenue, I'm going back a long time, and all the second-hand record shops were there. We used to spend our Saturday afternoons hunting for records. Anyway, the jazz interest had existed. But of course after the war jazz changed a lot, as did painting. But I do see a tremendous analogy between what happened in jazz in terms of extended improvisation, much freer type of association, moving away from the melody and so forth, and what was happening in painting. And also in scale, I mean at the same time as paintings were becoming much larger and even endless by implication, so was jazz. I mean whereas I grew up in an era where every jazz record was approximately three minutes, now suddenly twenty-minute records were coming out and so forth. But, anyway, I discovered that it was very hard to get short stories and poems published commercially. I remember it was a lot easier to get criticism published and I began submitting some articles that were really quite highly subjective to the various art magazines. If I remember

correctly, but I'd have to check it, I think the first piece I ever had published in an art magazine was in *Arts* and it was a symposium on the role of the art dealer. And my guess is that was about 1953. At that time a fellow by the name of John Marshall, I think, something Marshal, was at *Arts*. Soon after that we talked and I had an idea about what was happening in Abstract Expressionism as being quite analogous to—well, in other words, Abstract Expressionism coming after Cubism as the next, you know, to be gigantic movement, being analogous to the Baroque and Renaissance. And I did a piece for John called "The New Baroque" and I think that was published about 1954. Yeah, I think that's right because I know that when I met Pollock, which was early in 1955, that piece had been published and Pollock and I talked about it. And Pollock was the focus of the piece. And, as illustrations for the piece, I used a right side up Rubens and an upside-down Pollock, trying to emphasize some of the analogies in terms of rhythm and freedom of line and so forth. But anyway, from that time on I was published increasingly more frequently in art magazines and then some time later the fiction began to appear more frequently.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you know, it's interesting because, I remember in the late Forties and even the early, say the first half of the Fifties, there were very few art books around. I mean there were really, you know, just the magazines.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Yeah, as far as contemporary art went, you'd say.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Oh, when I say that my wife and I used to go out in the evening hunting for books, it was mostly books of, you know, classical and traditional art. You're perfectly right. I mean, quite early on, we became members of the Museum of Modern Art and got all their publications, but really the idea of doing monographs about an artist in his thirties is a pretty recent idea. That didn't exist then.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But what interested you in writing about these artists and ideas for the various—You wrote for *Art News* for a while and *Art in America*?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Yes, a great—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Quite a number of *Art in America* articles.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Yeah, and then also I was American correspondent for the *Burlington Magazine* in '55, '56. Alfred Barr interviewed me, an interview which still amuses me because it was so high-powered. But he had me over one Sunday and Sir Kenneth Clark was there and, if I remember correctly, Anthony Blount was there. And the first question was if there were a Goya show in New York, would you be willing to review that, too? Goya happened to be one of my favorite artists and I said yes, I'd be very happy to review a Goya show. And that seemed to clinch it; I mean they didn't want me to write only about Pollock and de Kooning and Kline and I didn't want to. In the year I wrote for them I wrote on everything that was happening in New York, I mean, selectively, I couldn't cover it all. But, for example, there was a show of Ruben's sketches at the Frick. But I wrote mostly about contemporary American art. The way it broke up was strange. I guess it must have been '56 there was a show at the Museum of Modern Art on British Romantic Painting, with an emphasis on the pre-Raphaelites and the so-called visionary painters, like Palmer and Blake and so forth, and they interested me particularly and I evidently paid much more attention to them than to Constable and Turner. Anyway, I got a very angry letter from Benedict Nicholson who edited the *Burlington Magazine* saying that I was typical of American prejudices of the moment and that anybody who thought Palmer and Blake were as important as Constable and Turner shouldn't be writing for an art magazine. And that was the end of that, although it was perhaps said in more cordial terms. But that was the message.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how did you like the experience of writing about contemporary things and older art? You covered such a broad range of topics.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Well, I must admit that I was writing mainly to clarify my own thoughts.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it was an opportunity to go into different forms—?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Right, and from a very subjective point of view. I mean I'm not trained as an art historian. I certainly would refer to art historians; I'm in their area. I was writing really about what the paintings meant to me; what I thought the relationship between various kinds of traditional art and contemporary art were. I even did pieces for example on jazz and art. I remember doing a piece on Thelonious Monk who was at the Five Spot at one point. And I don't remember if it was Pollock or de Kooning, but looking for analogies—I mean it was a cultural exploration. I guess a lot of the work I did during those years would have to be considered amateur but I hope amateur in the best sense of loving what I was writing about. I don't think I ever wrote a negative piece; I was just really writing about my positive responses to what was happening through all that period. I guess another part of the story you would want is my developing interest in collecting. I was in business during those

years, from 1948 until '63, except for the first year during which I was resident manager at One University Place down in the Village, and then the next year I was at Cross and Brown. But then the next thirteen years I went into a family business which became a public corporation, Uris Buildings Corporation. Neither of my uncles had sons and there was an opportunity that seemed and was exciting for me and good for them. I mean I think they certainly needed people. It was a very small organization when I joined it and, during those years, when I was giving a great part of my energy toward real estate, I had much more of a collecting drive than I do now as a matter of fact. When I left business in '63, I've really not collected since. I mean occasionally I see a little print or something I buy, but during those years—

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was that, do you think?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Pardon me?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why was that?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Well, my guess is, and I don't want to make any, you know, vast Freudian generalizations, but I think collecting is a way of sublimating more direct creative activity. All I can say is from my own experience that once I left business and was writing full-time, the collecting urge pretty much left me. but there is one area of my collecting history which might interest you. When I went to high school at Horace Mann, going back to that time, I would occasionally see on the subway a fellow who went to a neighboring school. I was going to Horace Mann and he was going to Fieldston and all of the students of both schools got off at 242nd Street and Broadway, the last stop on the subway. And this fellow, I simply knew or knew of, I mean I don't think I'd ever met him, because he and I at one point took out the same girl. His name was Ben Heller. And so we were aware of each other but had no contact beyond that. The years go by, I get off to college, I interrupt that with two years in the Navy, complete my B.A. at Cornell and my senior year of college I marry my wife. Actually we eloped our senior year, and I didn't get around to a honeymoon until a year later. When we took our belated honeymoon, suddenly this fellow Ben Heller and his wife, then Judy, turned up in Zurich, Switzerland. One day we were walking along the street and this car came to a halt and I think they had some kind of a honeymoon spat and hadn't been talking and both of them were anxious to talk to someone and Ben Heller got out of the car and said, "Don't I know you?" So we established that contact and Judy talked to Abby and it was clear within a few minutes of talking that Ben was very seriously interested in art and I guess it was clear that I was too. Anyway, we said we'd be sure to look each other up when we got back to New York. I guess another year went by and one day I ran into Ben at the Janis Gallery and by then we were sort of, well, we had moved to Two Sutton so it must have been two years later, because I remember it was at Two Sutton. Anyway, we happened to be having some people over for cocktails that evening and I said to Ben and Judy, "Why don't you come over," and they came. In our apartment by then was basically the kind of collection I describe in the introductory chapter of my recent biography on Pollock, there were four Arps, if I remember correction, and there was an Arie Laurens collage and there was a Klee and by then the Gorky that we had bought, not yet a Pollock. But anyway, Judy and Ben were quite astounded by this stuff and they said, we'd have to come over to their place and they too had an art collection. It was an equally, I mean an equally unfocused collection at that time. I remember they had a Modigliani Caryatid, they had an important Braque that they bought in Europe on their honeymoon, I don't remember if they yet had a Dubuffet. But if they didn't have it then, they got it very soon after, a rather major Dubuffet. But anyway, various things. And we became quite close friends. Ben had gone to Barnard, he had done most of his undergraduate work at I think either North Carolina or South Carolina, but after the War he went to Barnard and had become very interested in the arts, and was interested in things that one doesn't associate with him particularly today. At that time he used to practice the piano about an hour a day and he was my first introduction to Bartok. I mean I remember his playing Bartok sonatas. He was quite interested in ballet. Although I was more interested in literature than he was, I had never read Proust, and after he got to know me a little he said, "That's the author you'll really love most," and he was perfectly right. Proust is I think the single author who's made the most profound impression on me. Anyway, with that start we used to talk about collecting and what was happening and within a year or two after I did buy a Pollock, a fairly important Pollock of 1949 which, alas, I had to sell last year to help pay for a house we're building on St. Croix.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was the name of that?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: I think it was Number 12 - 1949. I know it was a number, I'm almost sure it was twelve. But in any case it was a four foot by four foot typical Pollock of 1949—green, yellow and brown palette of dripped enamel with some silver. But Ben and I used to talk a great deal and kid around a lot about trading things with each other and so forth, but we never consummated any trades. But anyway, as I became more and more interested in American art, Ben became increasingly interested in primitive art, which again was an interest we shared. I mean we both had some primitive art when we met and continued to buy some through the years. But in the early spring of 1955 when Ben had decided that he wanted to buy a Pollock and had gone out to see Pollock, he brought Pollock around to my apartment, really with a view to bringing Pollock into a congenial environment where there was a Pollock hanging. And that was how I met Lee and Jackson and I went on to spend a great deal of time with Pollock during the last fifteen months or so of his life, and Ben saw a great deal

of him too. As a matter of fact, some of the incidents in my biography of Pollock where people aren't identified, in a few instances Ben is one of them, although I just say that some of us were with Pollock at Jimmy Ryan's or with Pollock at such and such, but in several instances Ben was the other person. Ben I think greatly admired Pollock both as an artist and a person as did I, although perhaps my emphasis was more in terms of trying to interpret and present his work in words and Ben went on to buy much more of his work. Except for that one painting that I bought before I met Pollock, I never bought anything else by him. He gave me one very beautiful drawing for my birthday just before he died, and my son, whose name is Jackson, was given a drawing. Those two drawings we have still. But I never went on collecting Pollock—through Pollock, and through—Well, very soon after that we went out to spend a weekend with the Pollocks in Springs and that really was our introduction to I think the most vital part of the art world at that time. Pollock did take us to Ossorio's and I went to the Cedar Bar with him many times and got to know Guston and de Kooning and Kline. Not at the Cedar Bar but elsewhere he had introduced Still and Barnie Newman and so forth. So that that was really my introduction to the art world. I mean until then it had been paintings on the walls of galleries and in homes and in museums.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really the first time you started meeting artists.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Started to meet the artists themselves. And then it wasn't really till just after Pollock's death that I met the next generation of artists, largely through Morty Feldman who had done the score for the Pollock film. Almost as soon as we met Jackson there were two names that came up right away. It was a shame I hadn't known Bradley Tomlin because Pollock thought we would have been very good friends and he saw something similar about us. And the other was he thought that I'd really like Morty Feldman. But we never met while Pollock was alive; we met at Pollock's funeral. Then the next year I saw a great deal of Morty and through him met Rauschenberg and Johns and Cage and that part of the art world.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you were writing still; all through the Fifties you wrote a great deal, didn't you?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Yes. Well, I've really been primarily interested in fiction and although I'd written several novels before the first was published, the first one that was published was a novel called *Circles*, which was published—

PAUL CUMMINGS: About '62?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Well, it was January '62, because I know it was, well, I shouldn't say I know, I'm almost sure it was accepted in 1960, but you know it takes about a year. And it happened it was the end of '60 and came out January, it was January that it came out, so I guess it was January '62. Before that I had one little book that I edited and wrote the introduction for called *School of New York*, published by Grove. And then at the same time as the Pollock book was published, almost within a month or two, there was a monograph on Robert Goodnough, that I did with Barbara Guest, but it wasn't a collaboration in the true sense; she did the art critical section and I did the biographical section.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you pick him as someone to write on?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Goodnough? Goodnough just happened to be an artist whose, well, whose work appealed to me. But also by then I was somewhat aware of art history and he had been very involved with—what was it called, the school that, well, it started as subjects of the artists and then it became—but it was the school that Tony Smith and Motherwell and all were involved in and so there was that historical interest. There was the interest in his work as a visual experience, but I mean Goodnough was not someone I was ever particularly close to, as a friend I mean. I have great respect for Bob but we didn't see each other much socially. But I just felt he was a younger artist that had been somewhat neglected. I thought he was a very sold painter, and I guess part of it—At that time too, although I said through Feldman I met Rauschenberg and Johns and people like that, there was one other part of the next generation that I had met independently. I mean, even before I met Pollock I had somehow, in the course of my travels, come to Johnny Myers, Tibor de Nagy Gallery, and gone there a lot, and one of the artists there, Helen Frankenthaler, was someone I had known since childhood, I mean she went to a high school I guess that Horace Mann had dances with. So I knew her, and then I got to know the work of people like Larry Rivers and Grace Hartigan and Al Leslie and when I did that *School of New York* book, they were all in it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, during the Fifties did you go to the club ever?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: I was only there once in my life and it was the New Year's Eve of '56-'57, in other words it was New Year's Eve '57. I never went to a lecture there; I don't know quite why, several times people asked me and, although I was very aware of the kind of thing that was happening down there, I was only there that once.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you know I'm curious about *Art in America*, because you wrote quite a number of articles for them over the years. Was it your ideas? Or proposed by the editor? Or things that developed together?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Well, I'm trying to remember what I wrote for them. The first time, oh, I can answer you exactly. The first article I ever did for them they titled, I mean it wasn't my title, they called it *Profile of Jackson Pollock*, and that was done in 1955, December '55 if I remember correctly. And when I met Pollock in the Spring of '55, after spending, you know, quite a bit of time with him, first meeting in our apartment and then a weekend out in East Hampton and subsequent weekends and nights at the Cedar and so forth, I began to think of him as the most, I shouldn't say typical, but the most potent myth, mythic figure, and in many ways the most charismatic figure among the Abstract expressionists. I mean I don't want to get into invidious comparisons of that quality of work or anything of that kind, but just as a personality, as a symbol of a break-through as the most publicized artist of that group. I felt there was something extremely potent about the facts of his life and he was extremely open about various experiences he'd gone through, different Jungian psychiatrists, his early interest in mysticism and things of that kind, the impact of Surrealism. Anyway, within several months after I met him, I believe it was that following fall, in other words it would have been fall '55, I wrote him with a view to doing a biography and wanting to write about some of these things he had talked about. And he called me; he wasn't a letter writer. In the time I knew him, I only had one letter which wasn't even finished, it was a begun letter that ended in a drift. Anyway, he called and he said he thought it was a little early for a biography but that *Art in America* wanted to do a biographical piece on him and that he wanted to recommend me to do it if I wanted to do it. I said I'd love to, and that was the first piece I ever did for *Art in America*. I'm trying to remember, I guess I wrote for *Art in America* three or four times but several of them were, in answer to your question, suggestions by Jean Lipman. I know I did one piece for them on contemporary furniture and furnishings by artists. Do you happen to remember what other pieces I did for them?

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, I'm trying to—there was one with dealers I think at one point, wasn't there?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: I don't think for *Art in America*, I did that for *Arts*. But anyhow, I know I did do several pieces for *Art in America*, but the beginning of my contact with them was surely through this Pollock piece.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what about your interest in him, in that whole milieu of people? Because he was living out of New York practically all of the time.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: All through the year I'm talking about, '55, '56, he was coming in weekly for therapy and when he came in, I think he only had one session, then he'd have a couple nights. And almost that entire year I would see him one of those nights he was in so that, although my contact with him was short in terms of his life span, it was intense during that year. I would guess that that year I saw him as much as anybody did. And I mean it was quite a different relationship from people who grew up with him, I mean in terms of a Guston. But still we had a lot of interests in common and I think he understood how strongly I felt about the impact of his work. This was the most despondent period of his life and I think it meant a great deal to him to have some younger admirers, and I would guess Ben Heller fell into that category in the same way I did. However, because I was very interested in jazz, I mean one of the things we did was to go hear jazz a lot, I also liked drinking as he did and we'd do that together. So there were rather profound bonds although it was, you know, a comparatively short period.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what about the collecting? We've just touched on that here and there. Was this pursued with any program in mind at any point, or did it just happen?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: No, not at all, It just happened. I mean at One University Place we had a small three-room apartment, and at some point we decided we wanted some things on the wall. We began by getting a few prints at Dauber and Pine and places like that, and then gradually we took some of those off and replaced them with original works, like those Schwitters, but I never thought about collecting in any systematic or programmatic way. We moved from One University Place to Two Sutton, which was an apartment about twice the size and now we had some more walls and we added a few more things. I was just buying really what seemed vital at the time and reasonable in terms of price. But at that time you must realize everything was reasonable. I mean the change is much more dramatic than most people realize because when my wife and I first bought things, I mean, for example, Valentin had many, many Klee shows, and Klee was an artist we admired very, very much, except for the big oils and I don't think there was any Klee that couldn't be bought for five hundred dollars up through the early Fifties. And then as to large oils, I remember in those years looking at big Monets that were five thousand dollars. We've never spent that kind of money for paintings. Typically we've always, you know, bought things that were comparatively reasonable and that we enjoyed with no sense of investment. I mean the only two paintings I've ever sold were both in connection with building this house on Saint Croix, which turned out to be a very expensive proposition. But we did sell that first Pollock that we bought, and subsequently we sold a Gorky to the Museum of Modern, the Gorky that I spoke about before, to the Museum of Modern Art. But the rest of the things we bought we've either kept or, in a few cases, given to the Whitney where I'm a trustee to fill in gaps in their collection.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you became involved with the Whitney about 1960?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Yeah, it must have been, well, I left Uris in '63 so it must have been three or four years before that—whenever the Whitney went public in a sense.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Open to Friends.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Yeah, it was a family museum and then David Solinger formed the Friends. And when the first outside trustees, meaning outside the family, were selected, one of them was Roy Neuberger, whom I'd known socially and he suggested that I might — they wanted some young blood. Most of that first group of trustees was a generation older than I am, and Roy suggested that they ought to get a few younger trustees and I was in that first wave of young trustees. I had, I think, also at Roy's solicitation, become a Friend, but was put on the Acquisitions Committee and, well, evidently some people thought that I had some knowledge of what was going on and thought I'd be a valuable trustee.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you like the activities of being a trustee there and going to meetings and seeing people and doing all those things?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Well, I've always liked that kind of thing. I mean it's a hard thing to explain to someone who, looking at it from a distance, thinks it must be the duller thing in the world, sitting at trustee meetings or committee meetings, and there's validity to both views. I guess someone once said that committees are formed to avoid decisions. There's a little bit of that, but in the end I think the trustees of a museum or a library or a hospital or a university do assume a very important area of responsibility. Well, for example, at the Whitney I've been a proponent for many years of putting artists on the board, and the objection has typically been, other than the possibility of conflict of interest and axe grinding and so forth, that most artists don't want this kind of responsibility, I mean won't assume it. Well, it's debatable.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You can find one or two.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Well, I came up with a lot of names and I did speak to them informally before I even suggested their names, and I agree with you, I think there are a lot who would do it and render a very valuable contribution. But anyway, although there is some ambivalence in my feelings about it all, I have enjoyed the work as a trustee. I wrote a novella some years ago; it was published in '66 in a literary magazine called *Quarterly Review of Literature*. It is a fairly long piece, it runs about 60 pages, called *Museum* which has to do with all of this and, rather than try and summarize that much writing, I refer it to you. But anyway, I do find it fascinating in the same way that somebody like C.P. Snow finds the corridors of power fascinating. Not that I in any way, I hope, in my own mind confuse being a trustee and painting a great painting. I mean I think they are very different kinds of activity. But I think of my writing as my private function and, except for the Pollock book and the criticism we've talked about, I mean I really do feel much more strongly about my fiction. I think of that as my private voice and the other as a more public aspect.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, have you been able to accomplish ideas and projects that interested you in being a trustee there? Or has it been a very politic kind of thing?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: No, I think there's no question that I and other trustees, I don't mean to take any kind of sole credit, have influenced policy. I think the Whitney has moved increasingly to the left, I mean if you remember what the annals used to look like with that great effort at being democratic and all-inclusive. I think they are somewhat more committed, more open, to new styles and forms than they used to be and I think that some of that comes from several of us on the board who have urged that kind of openness. Actually, I would guess, although nobody has ever said it to me, but when I was made a trustee around 1960, I was still at Uris and by then there was discussion of moving from 54th Street where they pretty much had been dominated by the Museum of Modern Art. Anyway, I was asked very soon after I became a trustee to become chairman of the Building Committee and I was directly responsible for finding the site that they ultimately built on, and I handled all the details of the construction of the new building and, with the Committee, selected architects and so forth. And a lot of the planning for that building in effect dictated a whole different kind of museum. In other words, once you decide that you are going to have an auditorium, it's pretty clear that you may want to do films and things like that they had never done before. Once you decide that you want at least one floor to have an eighteen foot high ceiling, it is clear you are going to go to a large scale work that they were never able to show before. So that I mean we were aware of things that we wanted to do and that could be done in the new building. Time goes so quickly that that building now seems small. But, in any event, I think it's strange; it's been an education to me, I don't think you could imagine a group of men and women who were more disparate and yet there has been very little, and I'm not being politic now, very little dissention at the Whitney as compared with other institutions I've been active with. Although one hears all of these different voices on the board, somehow we've moved in a direction and I think we'll move still further. In this piece that I spoke of, this novella called *Museum*, I wrote a lot about the shift from the custodial function of the museum to what I consider a basically educational function with less emphasis on collecting and more emphasis on exhibitions and, perhaps to use a fashionable word, relevance. But I think that feeling is not mine alone at all; I mean I think the

board has moved in that direction and probably will move still further in that direction.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what about—You know, it's interesting because Lloyd Goodrich looms as such an image in that institution. How receptive was he to these new ideas, bringing in an architect like this and doing such a radically different kind of building?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Well, I have great respect for Lloyd but his real commitment is to 19th Century American painting and early 20th Century American painting. I mean that is what he has devoted his life to. I don't think he was ever obstructive in a way but I certainly don't think he was enthusiastic. One of the things that had to be done was to give him time to devote to the kind of scholarship he was interested in. He was finishing the further expansion of his book on Winslow Homer; he did the Eakins show. I think Lloyd is a wonderful scholar and even up through the Thirties I think he was very much in touch with what was going on in America, in American art. But one of the things that really had to be done, and I say it was done not against Lloyd's wishes really, but for his benefit as well as everybody else's, was to shift the leadership of the museum to Jack Baur. Now this many years later, Jack is expected to retire in two years and there will be yet another shift, a research committee has recently been formed.

PAUL CUMMINGS: One thing that interests me is what was the kind of ultimate reason that Breuer was selected as the architect?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Well, there were arbitrary factors for that. We made up a list if I remember correctly of ten architects who we thought should be considered, and then that was narrowed down partly for reasons external to their architectural ability. For example, Philip Johnson was so closely identified with the Modern and, since one of the reasons for the move was to break away from the Modern, we didn't consider Philip, although I think he's a fine architect. We did consider Louis Kahn, but his ideas about architecture included every room must have light, natural light, which would have forced us into such a vertical building, something like the original Huntington Hartford, that it wasn't practical on this site. Well, there were other considerations. Some of the people we considered were just so busy at the time they couldn't do the job, but when we narrowed the list down to four or five and these various architects made their presentations, it seemed to us that Breuer had the best understanding. By then we had selected our site and it wasn't a mammoth site. I mean it would have been lovely to have a block front but we couldn't afford one. Most of the funds for the site and for the building itself came from the Museum of Modern Art. In other words, they wanted that former Whitney building on 54th Street. But in any case, given that fairly difficult site to work with in terms of wanting some monumentality, some identification that they hadn't had alongside of the Modern, it seemed to the committee that Breuer came up with the best solution, and I mean I think it is an excellent solution to that site. Even more than a blockfront I would have liked a square block and have some sculpture gardens and so forth but we couldn't afford it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, that cost would have been tremendous.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Yes, even a little building like the one we have, or comparatively little like the Lehman building, came close to 6 million dollars which is modest today. But it was all we could handle.

PAUL CUMMINGS: One of the things I wanted to ask you about was the Hilton Hotel project commissioning—?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: I was still at Uris then. I mean that was the year I left but the planning for that had begun two years before.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Whose idea was it; where did that come from?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: I guess that was mine. I'm beginning to sound immodest but that was a joint venture in which the firm I was with, Uris Buildings Corporation, owned half and Rockefeller Center was in for a quarter and Hilton Hotels for a quarter, and Hilton Hotels had pretty definite ideas about how hotel rooms should be decorated which had to do mostly with mass-produced hotel prints that they had used successfully. I think their most recent hotel when we began our association with them was the Pittsburgh Hilton and I remember we were all flown out there to look at the rooms and John Benz, who was in charge of the project as far as the Hilton organization was concerned, at some point said quite proudly that they got these prints framed and up on the wall for—I don't remember the exact figure but it was close to twenty dollars, around eighteen or nineteen dollars. And I said I thought we could use really good contemporary American artists for that price or less. Anyway, the Rockefeller Center representative supported me in exploring that possibility and it was easy to do. What we did was I had one of the people in our office, a fellow by the name of Seymour Levine, consult with the Whitney and with the Brooklyn Museum. There was a lady at the Brooklyn Museum, a print woman, I can't remember her name, but anyway we made up some master lists and then contacted all of these artists and asked if they would be willing to do editions in a number acceptable to them, I mean depending on the medium. They couldn't always be large editions but typically they ran from 50 to 100 and we would commission such a series of prints for a thousand dollars so that in many cases the prints were costing us ten dollars and in some cases even less than ten dollars. And we used many of the best artists available at that time. Then that program

expanded; they wanted some original paintings in some of the lobbies and in some of the public rooms. We got works by, well, Rivers, Rauschenberg, Johns, and some lesser known print makers like Carol Summers, for example, who was somebody I had never heard of at that time who did some beautiful prints for the Hilton. We also had some major commissions in terms of sculptures and murals. We needed two sculptures, one in the driveway island which Philip Pavia did, and we wanted a hanging sculpture for the main stairwell over the escalator to the public ballrooms and Ibram Lassaw did that. A woman, I think her name was Casaba, did a mosaic mural behind one of the bars. Alex Katz did a series of murals for some rooms that had a theme of New York writers.

[END OF TRACK AAA_friedm72_8571.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: This is side two.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Well, I was talking about the New York Hilton and I think most of the details on this are in an article that I wrote for *Craft Horizons* about the various commissions there. I had to be fairly politic about some infighting that went on at the time, but my biggest disappointment, which I didn't write about in that article, was originally you may recall that the New York Hilton goes up four stories and then sits back into a shaft which has the regular hotel rooms with the public spaces on the lower, and, anyway, I contacted David Smith whom I knew by that time to furnish a group of six or seven major sculptures for that terrace where we were going to have a garden and we agreed on a price which, in retrospect was extremely cheap. And I guess he caught on faster than I did, because, although we had agreed on the terms and everything, he backed away from it so that was never done. But anyway, that was one of several commissions that I was connected with while I was at Uris. In many ways I think the most important commission that I ever had anything to do with was the two very large mosaic murals at 2 Broadway. I don't know if—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, Lee Krasner.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Lee Krasner did it. And I think in many ways that's the most successful commission that I ever had. They were difficult sites of entrances on Broadway and Broad Street and I think she came up with a very exciting solution.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What are your feelings now in retrospect about the Hilton Prints Commission activity. Do you think it was successful? Has it held up over the years?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Well, I have had really no contact with Uris since 1963 when I left. Not only did I leave my job as Vice-President and Director but, for various reasons, I just haven't had much contact with them. The couple of times that I had since then I had the impression there's no great interest in what's there. I mean for example, the Museum of Modern Art tried to form a complete collection of Rauschenberg's prints and one they were missing was one that he did for the New York Hilton called *Abby's Bird* (my wife) and all I know is that, when the Modern wanted this and they were making a call to the Hilton, I had the feeling that they were very glad to get it off the wall and it's probably a very valuable print.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, many of those must be costly.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Considering that they were bought for around then dollars. Well, two other incidents I myself had noticed and then I ran into Wehe at a party and he remarked on it. But they let the sculptures on the driveway island on Sixth Avenue get terribly dirty and dull and they would be comparatively easy to clean. And I called about that one time and I don't think I even went down. There had been complaints about an assemblage, a large Ossorio, it's a circular painting that's in the lobby and evidently was found to be unappetizing by people going into the restaurants. Ossorio was perfectly happy to buy it back but by then they decided that maybe they had something valuable so they simply shifted that away from near the restaurant entrance. So I mean, I don't mean to sound smug about all this, I just don't think the Hilton organization is geared to an art program and I don't know that there is any real interest in it anymore. Quite soon after the Hilton, when the Chase Manhattan building was built, David Rockefeller of course instigated a large art buying program there but there the real interest came from the top and they had them maintained. And recently, you know, a big Dubuffet sculpture was installed on the plaza. But my interest I guess came from the middle. I don't mean to present myself as having been at the level of Laurence Rockefeller who was involved with our project about he himself I don't think is that profoundly interested in art, and certainly no one in the Hilton organization was and I don't think anyone else at Uris besides me was that interested. So I think when I left there—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, of other art organizations you have been involved with, one was American Federation of Arts at one point, wasn't it?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: I'm still a member of the American Federation of Arts. I was a trustee there and I dropped my trusteeship when I became a trustee of the Whitney, or I guess about a year later, because as I became more involved with the Whitney and particularly during the building program when it took a great deal of time. I was

writing mornings and meeting several times a week with all the details that went into building a new building. I just felt that I couldn't devote enough time to both so at that point I resigned as a trustee of the American Federation of Arts. At that time Roy Neuberger was President and I just said that I really couldn't do both. It would be like being back in business and I felt that the Whitney was more important. After the new building was built, although I remained on several committees which take a good deal of time at the Whitney, they don't take anywhere near the time that the building took, and so in recent years I've become more and more involved with a program that actually was initially sponsored by the American Federation of Arts called the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown. That's a program where young people, typically at the graduate school level, and most of them have graduated college, writers and painters and sculptors, come to Provincetown for a year and work in a situation of absolute freedom. There, with a visiting faculty which I'm on, but there are half a dozen writers and half a dozen artists who are available for consultation.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How many months are they there? Is it for nine months or the summer?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Most of them end up staying until the summer but the school year, if one can call it that, it's not a school structure, is about nine months. In other words, September to June.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Are there any other organizations that you're involved with now?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: The only other organization as such would be at Cornell. I was an undergraduate at Cornell and I went back there to teach in the calendar year 1966-67.

PAUL CUMMINGS: A creative writing course?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Creative writing, right. But I became involved with something called the Fine Arts Advisory Council and it has nothing to do with art in the sense we've been talking about. It's all of the humanities. Anyway, I've continued on that committee which is an advisory committee but it has to do with social sciences, I mean we get into all kinds of areas. We're looking for teachers, we're looking for new courses, new structures to the academic program. But, again, that is an area that does interest me. As boring as some people find it, I find it interesting.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, that sounds like a very cross-discipline, crosses a lot of lines.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: And I really feel they nourish one another. I mean I'm always a little distressed—. Well, for example, Bob Motherwell is a close friend of mine and a neighbor on the Cape and so forth and when he was here the other night—once again, I mean I've heard the speech before—he talked about how boring he thought novels were because novels are indirect and digressive and this and that. And in the same way I have found much stimulation for my writing in painting and other visual arts, I would expect most painters could learn a lot from writing. I think that cross-fertilization is valuable.

PAUL CUMMINGS: A lot of them listen to music while they work.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: A fair number, I don't know a lot, but a fair number read poetry and some fiction. Not really a lot of fiction, though.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: I mean actually Bob Motherwell, I would say, is one of the more well-read and articulate artists around yet quite intolerant of fiction. But I mean in the sense that if any artist, any painter, that I'm interested in has a show, I feel that I want to see it, see what he's doing, what kind of ideas he's representing on canvas. I would expect that the painters would conversely be interested in what the writers are saying in their books. And a lot of them are, I mean a lot of my closest friends are painters and really have been extremely valuable critics of my work. When I finish a book, I welcome the criticism of painters almost more than I do that of other writers. I very often send my books to John Schuller who is one painter I think is very intelligent in a literary way. Jimmy Dine is a close friend of mine who has read all of my books and that exchange is very valuable to me. But I'd hate to feel it's just a one-way thing; I hope that whatever I give them is as valuable too.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you know, *Circles*—I'm just trying to think about that. It had something to do with the art world, did it not? I mean I had a copy somewhere; I couldn't find it.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Yeah, that book is set almost entirely in East Hampton and New York within the art world. It went through many metamorphoses. I really wrote that in first draft around 1955, I would say. It may have been even '54, shortly before I met Pollock and in the original draft it was a rather simple story involving two principal characters, a very elegant art dealer and, although he's not based on any one art dealer in New York, there is no question in my mind that some of it came for Curt Valentin and some came from Pierre Matisse and a little bit of Castelli. And this dealer, whose whole identity is in his gallery and where he feels that his taste is his identity, is

having an affair with a young woman artist who wants to show in that gallery and there is a moral conflict as to whether he can show her and still retain his integrity. Curt Valentin died in the summer of '55 and then Pollock died in the summer of '56 and at that point I completely rewrote the thing and turned it into a triangle in which the girl had an artist boyfriend as well as the dealer. The artist was not in any sense Pollock, although again I used a little bit of his wildness and so forth. But anyway, I must have finished that book certainly by early '57 although it was not published until about three years later. So that came out of my art world experience and was the first novel I had published. But I had written three novels before that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There's something I'm trying to remember about that book. You had one character, I think the artist, that smashed the Brancusi or something.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: That was the young artist called Spike in the book.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. What provoked the idea of using a Brancusi in that way?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Well, I don't want to get too fancy but I thought a Brancusi sculpture as such would be the most elegant accepted modern sculpture that I could think of. In other words, I didn't want it to be anything as early as a Rodin and I didn't—I wanted that sense of elegance which was part of the characterization of this particular dealer. It just seemed appropriate to me in terms of an artist who, if you remember, made his paintings by firing a machine gun at canvases. So there was that kind of violence and destructiveness and so forth as opposed to this elegance —

PAUL CUMMINGS: Cool elegance.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Calm and coolness, that was what I was after.

PAUL CUMMINGS: A real sense of contrast. Well, you haven't written about art recently, have you, in the last few years?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: I did three or four articles for *Art News* in the late Sixties. I did one on Helen Frankenthaler, I did one on Joellen Hall, I did a piece on Howie Kanovitz. It seems to me I did one other one for *Art News*.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, there was that Scarpitta article.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Oh yes, I did a piece on Scarpitta.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Ossorio there is one on.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Well yeah, I wrote one for *Art News* and then I did two for *Art International* on Ossorio and in the course of doing the Pollock biography which I actually started in 1967, the fall of '67, I was asked by Harry Abrams to do a monograph on Ossorio and when I got to the point when Pollock meets Ossorio around 1950 or '51, I don't remember exactly, I stopped the Pollock book and did the Ossorio book and then went back to the Pollock. It was related research and Ossorio happens to have more letters from Pollock than any other living person that I know of. It was just an accident. Pollock wasn't a letter writer but when Ossorio went to Europe in '51, I think it was, Pollock wrote to him a great deal during those years and it's the only batch of comparatively late letters in Pollock's life that exist. I mean the brothers have early letters but, to my knowledge, no one else has late letters of Pollock to any extent.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Occasional postcards.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: That kind of think, right. I was surprised when I interviewed Clem Greenberg who of all people would surely have a lot of Pollock letters I thought. But his answer was just what you said, "I think maybe I got a postcard once but I didn't keep it."

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, I think there is one in his papers in the Archives.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Is there? Because I went through the material at the Archives and I don't remember seeing any Pollock material at all.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Maybe it was one that came recently in the Bertha Schaefer papers, I think, but very, very little. One thing that has interested me is your association with Ossorio which has been over quite a number of years now, and one sees him around the house now, here and there, the works—How did that develop?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Well, I described meeting him in considerable detail in the first piece I wrote for *Art International* on Ossorio, but anyway Pollock introduced us which would have been 1955 when my wife and I and Jackson drove over there and came to The Creeks and were somewhat awed. And, as the years went on, we became very close to Alfonso and Ted Dragon, and Abby and I have spent many weekends out there and I

became interested in Alfonso's work. I think I say in one of my articles, or maybe it's in the monograph I did for Abrams, that Ossorio, to the extent that Pollock seems to be presenting his image of energy in paint, an image of energy, Ossorio does it with objects. I'm fascinated by the use of a palette of objects and in that whole studio he had the most fantastic things to see in the art world. Alfonso is an extremely cultivated man; he shares many of my interests in literature as well as art, so I mean I can't explain it much beyond that. I respect him and his work and we just continue to be friends. And Alfonso certainly introduced me to aspects of art that I had never before experienced, particularly the whole concept of *l'art brut* and its relationship to Dubuffet. I didn't know Dubuffet's work nearly as well before I met Alfonso and I didn't know *l'art brut* at all and I read all of Dubuffet's writings on that and, as an aesthetic, it interested me and I think has certain relationships to abstract expressionism and some of the things that have happened in recent years, but a kind of anti-Cubist, anti-formal aesthetic.

PAUL CUMMINGS: One other thing is Scarpitta. How did you get involved with him? He's such a kind of withdrawn character from the art scene.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: I'm trying to remember how I first met Sal. I've known him many years although I only wrote on him recently for *Art News*. Maybe I met him through Joellen Hall, who is a painter married to George Rapée, of Jon Schueler, to whom Jody was married, one marriage back. But anyway, it seems to me I met Scarpitta originally in the late Fifties and we got to talking at parties and so forth and he has a very amazing mind, something like Ossorio's. I mean they are the only two people that I have ever met who go off on quite the kinds of paranoid, with no value judgment intended, but something like a paranoid fantasy. I've always found Sal very interesting to talk to. He too happens to be one of the painters who reads with great sympathy, although he isn't one I give manuscripts to. Anyway, he's extremely original in his perceptions, uninfluenced by other people, I think. I don't know, I just got to talking to him for a number of years.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Kanovitz you wrote an article about.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Well, Howie I met at that same time that I met some of the younger artists through Feldman. He was a close friend of Morty's. Then subsequently we were casual friends but became closer after I left business in the spring of '63 and from then on we've been going to the Cape every summer. Mary [Rattray] and Howie have a place up there not far from us so I got to know him better up there. And he went through a lot of changes — I mean, when I met Howie he was an Abstract Expressionist and then he did fairly romantic landscapes for a little stretch, but then moved into a photographic image-type painting. And that as a theory interested me; as a matter of fact I just finished a new novel in which the central character is a photographer. But I've always been very interested in photography.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really!

B.H. FRIEDMAN: So—

PAUL CUMMINGS: And its relationships—?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Yeah, partly.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you pick the Cape? Was that because of the artists that you knew who went up there?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: No, it was really a wanting to get away from them. We had spent many weekends and some summers in East Hampton. When I left business I was anxious to be a little further removed. Although I like the Hamptons, it is really an extension of New York, plus I felt that I would be too available if some little thing came up at Uris and they wanted to call me in for a day or a weekend. When I left business I was about a third through what is my longest novel to date, a novel called *Yarborough*, which was published the year after I left business. It's a book that has nothing to do with the art world except there is a lot of visual material. It has more to do with game theory and drugs particularly; some critics called it the first psychedelic novel. Anyway, I was at work on that during my last year at Uris and I really wanted to go someplace quiet and finish it. Abby flew up to the Cape and I think it was Motherwell who suggested that we'd be very happy there and Abby found a house deep in the woods in Wellfleet and the first summer on the Cape we were there in Wellfleet and every summer since then we have been in Provincetown itself, and early in 1967 we bought a house. As a matter of fact it was the house that Joe Hirschhorn built up there. He divorced his wife and she had three houses in a row and we bought one of them and what had been its garage which I use as a studio.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So that's still the summer place.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: That's the summer place.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What's the Virgin Islands going to be?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Well, that's the winter white elephant. We had some fantasy about spending more time down there. We really hadn't thought it out very clearly with the children's school years and so forth so we find that we really can only get there Christmas and Easter and we go down with the children then. We spend very little time there. It's a beautiful house. I guess everybody should have that experience of building his dream house. I mean it's the nearest thing to a dream house we'll ever build. It's just so exciting visually. It's built on the side of an old 18th Century Danish windmill and the mill is in the center of it and we have branched out from the viaduct going down from the mill and leads to what was a waystation and a rum distillery which is now my studio, but I've yet to write a word down there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So eventually that is going to be a place to live and work?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Well, our hope is that when the children are away at college or away permanently, we'd spend the winter there and then we'd use New York mainly in the spring and fall. I mean I do feel that my roots are in New York; I've spent almost my entire life here except for a couple of years in the Navy and at college. But anyway, that would be our winter Provincetown although it's nothing like Provincetown except the climate is beautiful.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know, I'm curious about—just to go back to the collecting and the art for a while, I'm still intrigued by the idea of the collecting drive dissipating when you left business. Do you think it really relates back to that kind of relief from business, being able to look at art and going to the galleries?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Well, I think it's more like I said originally, a kind of sublimation of a more direct creative act. I mean in the years in business, although I wrote a great deal and I don't really write any more now than in the years when I was in business because I had a lot published during those years, and a lot more that weren't published, but there was some frustration because there simply wasn't the time for contemplation, for reading sheerly for pleasure and stimulation. Once I got out of business, that frustration about time disappeared and, strangely enough, all I can say is that I haven't really had the desire to own things. As a matter of fact, I have some desire to get rid of a lot that we have and most of it I want to give to the Whitney. I mean we'll keep some things, especially things that were gifts I would never give away or sell. But I mean I don't suppose there are any rules about it. I suppose for some people—I mean not everybody wants to write or paint or do anything of that kind—collecting I guess can be a very satisfying and maybe a final experience in itself. For me I think it was a substitute for what I really wanted to do and all I can say is doing now what I want to do, I don't have much desire to collect.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, in those days when you were acquiring things, did you pick them out or did you and your wife pick them out? How did it operate actually?

PAUL CUMMINGS: There were some checks and balances but I don't think my wife was ever quite as involved with it as I was. She's not particularly acquisitive. Once in a while we'd get something that we both liked very much. But first of all, at that time the large-scale painting was the most dominant type of American painting and she never particularly liked large paintings, so that the smaller things around here are more representative of her taste, although again I guess most of them I actually chose but she went along with them. I have a feeling that had I been at all interested in collecting as such in those years when I was in business I might have collected on a much grander scale, but I never did. I mean she slowed me down and I have no regrets about that. I think she understood that maybe there was something a little bit neurotic about collecting as much as I might have, so I never did it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was there, you know, because in those days you weren't spending really a lot of money? Was there any investment idea or was this really more enjoyment and pleasure for you?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: I think it was purely enjoyment. I mean I think I said earlier we've only sold two paintings actually. I forgot that one thing, the only thing I've ever—And those two we certainly didn't buy for investment. It's just that they were paintings that we bought for around a thousand dollars each that suddenly were worth around a hundred thousand dollars each and did pay for this house in Saint Croix, that was just about what the house cost. But the one other painting we ever bought that we sold was a fairly large Klee on burlap that Curt Valentin just said, "Fred,"—it's the one time where a dealer said to me, "This is so cheap you really should get it; it's bound to be worth a lot more." And I believe it was twelve hundred dollars and it was soon after published in a monograph on Klee and the Pittsburgh collector—something Thompson?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, G. David Thompson.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Right. G. David Thompson called long distance one night. He'd seen the reproduction and wanted to know if it was for sale and I hadn't even thought about selling it at that time. But I said that if I did, I'd do it through a dealer and have the dealer get back to him. And I talked to Eleanor Saidenberg and she said she thought it was really worth five thousand dollars. Well, that seemed an enormous profit from twelve hundred to five thousand in about a year, and actually, I'd forgotten about this, with that profit we bought the big Pollock.

We bought this Tomlin you're looking at, we bought a Clyfford Still which I gave to the Whitney, and we bought the Lassaw sculpture that's hanging in the stairwell. But basically I think that's the only exception to the statement that I've never thought about investment. I really can't imagine having something hanging here on the wall that I, you know, just bought for investment. I mean if I did that I guess I'd put it in a vault.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Or buy stock or something like.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Yeah, and I really, I think, I mean, inasmuch as I was in business and had some knowledge of the stock market and so forth, I still think it would have been pretty hard to do as well on art as on I.B.M. or something.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, were there any pictures or sculpture or things that you were interested in that you didn't acquire, that you wish you had? You know, things that got away, you might say.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Well, they didn't really get away. I remember at one point liking very much a Kandinsky called, I think, the German word for "naked" or "nude" and it was a bargain. It was a great big Kandinsky oil of the 'teens and it was something like less than five thousand dollars. But we never went that far. In other words Abby felt that five thousand dollars for a work of art was just outrageously extravagant. I think the most money we ever spent for anything was somewhere around two thousand, and I think the breakthrough was that Giacometti sculpture you're looking at. But typically the things we got were in the hundreds. Now, for instance, that Motherwell which is a big one, we bought when he left Kootz and just before he went with Janis and he really needed the money and we liked the painting very much. But a painting that size at that time was just a little over a thousand dollars and that was more than we had spent for most of the things we have, I mean most of the things you're looking at cost in the low hundreds. The Tomlin did, the little Brancusi head, a thing like that Picasso with the three etchings and the hand was a hundred dollars, the Schwitters I told you were fifty dollars apiece. There's nothing that I know of that we have that was much over a thousand dollars. But it was very apparent to anyone who was at all knowledgeable about the art field and art prices that, for example, the late Monets, which every artist on the New York scene was talking about when I first met them, which was certainly by the mid-Fifties, you could buy any late Monet then for five thousand dollars. But we never went to that category of purchase and I have no regrets about that. I really don't want a lot of expensive paintings. If I had them, I'd probably give them to museums.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They'd go away somewhere, yeah. Well, it's interesting, you know that through all of that, that you have maintained your interest in the Whitney although you're not involved with collecting anymore.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Well, I am very interested in doing what I can to help the encouragement of the arts and the Whitney program has been broadening. I mean, as you know, they've had photography shows lately and they have a film program; they're reestablishing the print department and I think all of that is valuable and I really enjoy it just as much from whatever contribution I can make to various committees as I would buying things. And occasionally when I buy things I give them to the Whitney anyway so that really I guess my purchases have become a little bit more institutional. For example, even something like—I don't know if you noticed downstairs there was that wrapped Christo.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, the Christo, yes.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Well, now there's an example of something I saw that appealed to me immediately and I mentioned it to some of the people at the Whitney that I thought it was something they should get and next thing I knew I'd offered them mine. And then I missed it; I mean that's the first one in many years so I got the second one. But anyway, that doesn't happen much and that's not a, you know, particularly expensive item or anything.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Do you think you'll continue writing about art? Or is that a less and less interest?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Well, if you define art broadly, I mean I doubt very much if I'll set another novel in the art world and, if I wrote *Circles* today, it would be a very different book. That was a fairly simple, short novel and something like a finger exercise. But various aspects of art and stimulation by art are in almost everything I write. I mean *Yarborough*, although the central character is involved with drugs, I don't think I would have created the kind of visual images I did; I mean a lot of writing for me is something like painting. This novel I've just finished and just turned in to McGraw Hill last week has a photographer as a central character. Then a lot of the theme of the book is what is reality, what isn't reality, etc. etc., comes right out of my art experience, although it happens the central character is a photographer. A novel of mine that's going to be published December 11th, called *Whispers*, alludes to the art world a little bit. I mean parts of it have appeared in *New American Review* and other literary magazines, but now it's coming out as a full novel. But it's, I mean I can't imagine writing anything without, you know, my experience going into it, and part of my experience is the art world. But if you mean more narrowly writing about the New York art scene and so forth, at this moment I have no plans to, nor do I think I'll ever again attempt a biography. Although the biography I did of Pollock was not

intended as a full or definitive biography, in many ways it was like going back into business. I mean when one just has to in dealing—in writing a biography it's just not as free as fiction or poetry. You have to deal with people on permissions and get permissions from estates and reproduction rights and it's all the mechanics of interviewing. I found it a very interesting experience but that it isn't any where near as free as writing fiction.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, did you do many interviews in gathering much, you know, documentation for that?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Oh, yes, I spent almost four years on it. I did other things in between, as I said. I did the Ossorio book in between and I completed *Whispers*, but almost all of four years was devoted to that book. I must have interviewed thirty or forty people who were close to Pollock. I read everything that I could find in any bibliography on Pollock. I did spend several afternoons at the Archives of American Art and I went through everything I could find, but I didn't try to do anything exhaustively. I once read a biography called the *Quest of Cormo* and it was more like that kind of idea that I had. And I say in the introduction of the book that these are leads to Pollock. I don't honestly believe that there is such a thing as a definitive biography and I certainly don't think it's possible with a figure like Pollock. Leon Edel can do it with James or with Proust; there's so much documentation. But that doesn't exist with Pollock. I mean Pollock didn't write many letters; many letters that he did write have been lost, and there's too much art politics that distorts a lot of things.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right. Well, what about monographs and articles on particular artists? Does that still interest you?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Yes, and I'll do those occasionally. For example, the next one that I know I'm going to do is on an artist who hasn't received an awful lot of attention, but there's something about her imagery that interests me. Elise Asher, I don't know if you know her.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh yes, yes.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: She's married to Stanley Kunitz; they're friends on the Cape. I'm interested in the idea of using words as part of her imagery; she very often uses fragments of Stanley's poetry and her own poetry. But they'll typically—I don't think there'll be many of them; one doesn't ever know in advance. My guess is they will be in a form more like appreciation than detailed art criticism. When I do those pieces I try to give the biographical facts one wants, but I'm not terribly interested in making judgments. I believe I'm more interested in just presenting the work; I feel the function of criticism is something like the way one states it in hand, but I really think it's an introductory function. I really wouldn't be interested in ever writing put-downs, or saying which is better than the other, or—

PAUL CUMMINGS: That whole confusing kind of language criticism has gotten into some areas, you know.

B.H. FRIEDMAN: But the writers—the criticism I like is not particularly respected by critics. I mean I really do like reading Baudelaire and Diderot and, you know, Delacroix's *Journals* and what not, but I'm not very interested in formal art criticism.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you read people like Hess or Greenberg?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: Yes, I read them all, with varying degrees of pleasure and—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Distress?

B.H. FRIEDMAN: —distress.

[END OF TRACK AAA_friedm72_8572.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]