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Oral history interview with Victor Candell,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Victor Candell on September 1, 1965. The interview was conducted in Provincetown, Massachusetts by Dorothy Seckler for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

DOROTHY SECKLER: This is Dorothy Seckler interviewing Victor Candell in Provincetown on September 1st, 1965. Mr. Candell, it's difficult to know in beginning an interview with you whether to jump into your importance as a painter because here, of course, in Provincetown, as in many other centers you are also very important as an educator and as a man who has had wide influence on his contemporaries. But I thought it might be best to go back to the very beginning, to your early life, to your boyhood years, perhaps where you were born, whatever factors in that early environment may have indicated or stimulated some interest in becoming an artist.

VICTOR CANDELL: Well, I should like to answer your first question by saying that I was born in Budapest, Hungary in 1903, and that there was no one in my family that I can recall who had any artistic gift or bent or talent, but that I started sketching and drawing at the age of five, which as you know I'm sure having talked to so many other artists is par for the course. Most people start very early. So we start with a family in Hungary with two boys. Both had artistic leanings, one toward writing; I toward sketching and drawing. But no precedent in the immediate family, no talented uncle or aunt to foster the young boy, and so on. Now how this inclination or aptitude for drawing became something more serious I probably can answer as we go along. I have certain ideas of what the role of talent and the role of need and necessity happens to be in the formation of creativity.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Could I ask you this: In Budapest did you as a child see, oh, anything that impressed you in the way of paintings, pictures, sculpture, or architecture, or folk art forms perhaps, or icons, or whatever might have started your childish imagination going?

VICTOR CANDELL: The only thing that I can truthfully state influenced me as to imagery is posters. And in particular motion picture posters. Later on as a growing boy I became a professional maker of such posters at the age of fifteen. But by then there was a need due to family circumstances. In other words, I had to make a living. And there was nothing else immediately that I could turn to apart from tutoring, which I recall I used to do, and got some kind of fee for it. But later on when my needs became more pressing I thought of exploiting the inclination, as I call it – other people like to call it talent, but I don't – the idea of being able to draw, being able to do something with a pencil or paints, I began exploiting it by the curious expediency of going out at night on the streets of Budapest where they have cylindrical advertising columns which are so famous in Europe. And I was very much attracted to motion picture posters, to the whole idea of making movies anyway. And I would go with a knife stealthily at ten or eleven o'clock at night and cut out certain parts that I found myself very weak in drawing, like hands, for instance, faces; even lettering. And I built up a morgue, a filing system of forms which was a kind of anatomical course for a growing boy. And I would practice by copying these parts. And there came a time around the age of fifteen when I took my courage in hand and tried to deepen my voice and appeared at some kinds of film companies stating that I could make a poster as good as anybody else. Then I thought that my deception as to age and maturity was successful; now I know it wasn't; what they liked was the spunk of a little boy walking in saying that he could do it. So they said, alright, if you can do it make a sketch for such and such a film, here is a ticket, come to the preview, look at it, and let's see what you can make. Show us a small, colored, finished sketch of what the poster should be like. And they exchanged glances, so to speak. And the upshot was that I did go to see the film, did make the sketch, did present it to them. And they did not exchange the same type of glances but another kind. I got the commission. They saved money on me. I carried out that poster. It was my first published work.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What film was it, by the way? Do you remember?

VICTOR CANDELL: Oh, I can't remember that. Probably an American importation, you know. Or a Swedish film, which at the time was quite famous in Middle Europe, you know. The Scandinavian countries were making films at that time.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You know it's amazing to me that the film industry was that much developed in Europe or in this country at that time. You were only about fifteen.

VICTOR CANDELL: I think that they were going pretty well around the time that I'm speaking about, which should be placed around 1914, let's say, 1915, 1916.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Before the World War?

VICTOR CANDELL: Oh, yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Then you were only ten or eleven.

VICTOR CANDELL: There was already a big American industry. I used to know the names. I still remember the names of long-defunct American firms, you know, that used to distribute their films all over Europe. Of course, I pronounce them phonetically but I remember it. It's way before the time of Paramount and Warner and Zukor and all the rest of them. But there were films alright at that time. And there was a corresponding industry in Europe. I mean there was an Italian industry – a very good one. A Swedish. And a Danish one. And then the Hungarians took part in it. As you know, there are an awful lot of Hungarians in Hollywood; there always have been in the film industry, and the inception of that interested me right from that incipient, starting form, you know, which was around that time.

DOROTHY SECKLER: So at fifteen you were a successful poster-maker?

VICTOR CANDELL: Yes, and then I branched out into making caricatures and illustrating articles in theatrical journals and magazines. The caricature idea was a felt need, as I look back, in order to secure models for nothing. You have to assume that I had no money whatsoever. I lived along actually due to family circumstances. And I was very glad to be able to go to these people and say, sit down and I'll make a portrait of you, a caricature of you for nothing. My idea was that I could practice drawing, I had a model, because I had no idea of where to go for education; an art school was out of the question altogether. And consequently I practiced drawing on personal friends. And finally in these public places – the European coffeehouse is a meeting ground, you know, where I approached actors and motion picture people and so on. And they were very glad. They were always intrigued by this kid, because that's all I was, who had the boldness to come up with a pad and say, "I'll make a portrait, you don't have to pay, but just sit." And I made hundreds upon hundreds upon hundreds and hundreds of these. And eventually this also led to other things, social contacts with people. I got into the film studios and learned a good deal about picture-making and so on. But, as so many other artists before me, I found my models where I found them – right on the street or in coffeehouses. Otherwise – I think this is important to mention – I had no idea of what is now known as fine art. I was not in contact with it. I was aware of the history of great art and I probably knew names like Rembrandt. But I had no real contact with it. Even though there is a very beautiful museum in Budapest, at the time I hadn't visited it. I was more immediately in contact with the idea of making an image with pencil or with color, you know. Art came much, much, much later, in New York.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What kinds of colors were you using? Watercolors?

VICTOR CANDELL: For the posters one uses tempera; it's a watercolor, as you know. And you had to do it in those days in the original size. They didn't have our advanced techniques of photolithography. They were always transferred to stone – stone lithography. And they were very big. I remember how I had to have a drawing board in the place where I lived, a partitioned off little place. This was made by a carpenter for me and it was immense. It was much bigger than I was and I had to take it home, affix it to a wall and then I would put the drawing paper on it and stand on a chair and start drawing and coloring it, painting it with – well, tempera colors. The file that I mentioned before was most useful to find the kind of lettering that I had to do because everything had to be finished completely. Then it went to a large printing concern and they reproduced it. And I had the great joy which I will never, never forget: I was invited in as the artist, you know, a small boy, and I saw the method of reproduction, the various stones, the yellow stone, and the blue stone. And the one thing that I couldn't get over was that I saw my own name, my signature on this poster on the upper left corner. And when it was printed and it was pasted all over town I would go from one cylindrical column to the other untiringly just to discover that there was another one and that was duly signed, too, you know. I was a child at the time.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's amazing. How did you move from there to becoming either more interested in fine arts or in some other professional work there?

VICTOR CANDELL: Well, there are two circumstances that can be mentioned. One was a physical change in my situation in life. The other is an interior change, a growing awareness, a precociousness even because I was early burdened with so-called grownup cares, adult cares, and therefore you become meditative, thoughtful about certain things very early about life and death. My own mother died when she was thirty-two when I was nine years old. My father had to go to the First World War as a soldier and broke up the family. There was a second marriage, a rather banal history of what happened, and the family broke up. This is really the background. But such happenings very early in life make a person quite thoughtful even if you are very, very young – the fact that you have to shift for yourself, make your rent, and try to educate yourself. And there were choices to be made whether you wanted support from the family, or whether you wanted to do it all by yourself. This matures a child rather fast. And this maturing process is the one that I alluded to. You begin to think about the world, about life, and death, and art, and family. And I remember how curious I was, just about this time. I wanted to find out how people looked when they were dead. So somehow through these acquaintances whom I

drew in the coffeehouses I secured permission to go to the Morgue. I went there to see what dead people looked like. Now this is already something very typical; there are many, many artists who have done this. And the counterpart of this came much later in 1928 when I was living in Paris and acting as an artist. There I went into La Maternite, which was a very great hospital run by a midwife with a flank of doctors exclusively devoted to the idea of helping women to give birth. That's the only function of this place. And I went in as a doctor, as a young man in a white coat to witness a birth. In other words, the two polarities, death and life, intrigued my imagination equally. Nothing unusual about it; I found out that most artists were like that. They wanted to discover reality because eventually you work out of the consciousness of --

DOROTHY SECKLER: Were either experiences enormously shocking to you at that age?

VICTOR CANDELL: Well, I remember I was very shocked by a very zealous attendant who was very bored at the Morgue, you know, and he wanted to show practically every case, as he put it: this is gas, and that is knife, and that is shotgun, this is a streetcar accident. And after a while I felt that I had enough. But the other experience made an enormous, never-to-be-forgotten impression on me. I remember that my wife Clara was at the time in New York and right after the experience I sat down and wrote a sixty-four page letter, completely up in the clouds about it because it was a most beautiful thing to witness.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Did you make drawings? I suppose not on the spot but I wondered if you might have.

VICTOR CANDELL: No, but it does constitute an ingredient, a component part of one's imagination and later on I imagine one's subconscious.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes, it would be most likely. That's fascinating. How old were you at this time when you were going to the Morgue?

VICTOR CANDELL: The Morgue episode occurred in Budapest. I couldn't have been more than sixteen at the time. I came to this country at the age of eighteen by myself.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Had you met your wife at that time?

VICTOR CANDELL: No. No, that all occurred much later here. And the other episode was on a return trip after I saved enough money in this country to invest in self-education, to go back to Paris where I stayed three years. And that's where I really became a painter. By doing no work whatsoever, just painting. Up till then in the intervening time which was from 1921 to 1928 I did every kind of work that you can name in the book. That includes making settings, murals, portraits, illustrations for children's books.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That was where - here?

VICTOR CANDELL: Here in New York. And I was saving up money by then consciously to get to Europe and do no other work, commissions, let's say, but paint. So I had to finance this thing. I financed it by doing every kind of commercial work that I could think of doing and I was quite good at it. I had picked up by then a good deal of technique and, mind you, all this without having gone to an art school. That was out of the question too - I had no money for that. But by practice, by actually doing the thing, I taught myself these various techniques, and I was pretty successful at it. That's why the money lasted three years.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How had it happened that you came to New York rather than going directly to Paris?

VICTOR CANDELL: Well, there was an opportunity to come to New York, and not to go to Paris. So I took it. It was offered to our family who would take this opportunity. My older brother would not. I brought him here years later when I became prosperous enough to afford it. But I was adventurous enough and curious enough. And I also wanted to get away from Europe because already we had the First World War that broke up the family - and the early signs of Fascism were already present in Hungary in the form of numerous clubs and laws and violence in the streets, and all the rest of it. So I began feeling rootless, denied my own right to be a citizen of that country, and so on. So I thought I might as well start a new life. I might add I always have been curious and enterprising. I always had initiative, which is, of course, in the nature of any artist.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You were already an American before you got here.

VICTOR CANDELL: In a sense you might say so. Not as a virtue, but as a result of need, a driving need. I believe very much in the idea of capacity developed through necessity. I notice that with my numerous students, you know, those who have probably no money at all produce an awful lot of good work and at the same time are capable of working for their living. Yet others who have the same type of aptitude, let's say, a level of competence in drawing, but they may be the only sons from well-to-do families and like breakfast in bed in aesthetics as in real life; they want it to be brought to them. They haven't got the initiative. They don't have this fire built under their feet. So necessity is, as is well known, more than the mother of invention. It's also the

maker of athletes because people who have a fire under them become good runners away from the fire.

DOROTHY SECKLER: When you came here somewhere along the line you were headed into a career as a fine artist. At what point did that change come about? Did you know that there was something beyond commercial art that you were going to be dedicated to?

VICTOR CANDELL: The period that I mentioned between 1921 and 1928 was sufficient for me to see the inner workings, the parallel between, let's say, the relationship between money, commission, and individuality on the one hand, and the independence and the lack of money on the other hand of the fine artist. Now making the money as I did here with various jobs, commissions, I became quite experienced in knowing from the inside how this whole thing works. Like advertising, for instance. And frankly my whole temperament did not agree with this. I didn't like it very much. I was yearning for a freer life where you could do what you liked. And I had the kind of personality, put it this way, where I could trim my needs. I was reasonable when it came to expenditure, for not wanting things that were not available, which I regarded as not necessary, and then looking at some other things, like educating myself, learning languages, finding out about literature, and making myself into an artist, was far more important.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Had you gotten to know some artist friends in this country?

VICTOR CANDELL: None whatsoever. At this period that we are talking about I only knew commercial people – art directors. One famous personality for whom I worked was a man named Willy Pogany – have you ever heard of this man? A famous illustrator who was called the New York Rubens at the time – quite erroneously as he had nothing to do with painting. And I used to do a good deal of his work. I was quite efficient technically. And this is what enabled me to go to Europe. I was already awakened to the idea of fine arts but I didn't have the means. I started painting, of course. Anybody can buy canvas.

DOROTHY SECKLER: When did you start painting? What kind of things did you paint? What did you feel that you wanted to do?

VICTOR CANDELL: Well, I was drawn to imaginative presentation of people, cities, streets, woods, compositions more than things. The real aesthetic education came much later upon my return from Paris, and in Paris too, where I wanted to make up for something. Now the meaning of this last statement is that after I became quite an efficient artist in Paris and joined the group known as Les Surindependents, which was more than one group, and began exhibiting and saw my name in the papers, works that I produced, and that kind of thing, I suddenly realized due to a very serious study of the masters – I had nothing else to do but to go to the Louvre every day and work sixteen hours a day during which I really educated myself – I really found out what makes a man like Cezanne tick. And towards the end of this period I was absolutely convinced that while I was quite capable of understanding and producing a good Cubist work, which I did and exhibited it – I still didn't have the painterly qualities and skills and knowledge and insight and practice of a man like Cezanne whom I greatly admired. The next one was Degas. These two. I always called them my teachers. And I after three years was quite capable of self-judgment saying that making a good design, let's say, in the modern manner is not sufficient. I have to laugh because I still believe this when it comes to Pop Art. A pattern is not yet fine art. I was quite capable as a young man of making very fine designs or patterns. But I knew that there was some indescribable, intangible something in a good Cezanne and I wanted that something. So upon my return after three years, which was really a liberal education--

DOROTHY SECKLER: What years were they in France?

VICTOR CANDELL: They were actually 1928, 1929, and 1930 when I was there. By that time I was married to Clara.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Was your wife an art student?

VICTOR CANDELL: She had art training but she subsequently became a lawyer. She's a member of the New York Bar and practiced law for a number of years, which she has given up now. I keep saying that she is the only person I ever discouraged from continuing in the arts because as an art educator and a teacher my role is to raise generations of youngsters and I've done a good deal of it. But Clara is the only one to whom I said "you'd better give it up," which she gladly did. She had no great ambition about it. So where were we?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, you had finished your three years in Paris and were coming back here.

VICTOR CANDELL: I came back. And upon coming back with my accomplishments – really the three years amounted to five or six years of forced marches and self-education – I really had understanding by then. I knew what was lacking. That three years was just the beginning of this thing that I really wanted. By then I was fully in love with the idea of being a painter. I studied all the old masters, lived this whole life and no other thing at all.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I wish you would tell me a little bit more about your relationship in Paris with the group and with Ozenfant. What ideas were they developing at that time? And how did you respond to that too?

VICTOR CANDELL: Well, this was, as you know, the post-cubist period. And Andre Masson was developing the Surrealist angle. There were a good many people we know of who were in this group. You, of course, know about the purist style at the time of Ozenfant. Also Corbusier. They were associated at the time and exhibiting in this group. I myself was following up a kind of geometric Cubist organization of space allied to an imagery that curiously is still with me after so many years. In other words, it's not sheer design or it's not sheer formal relations but formal relations in service of an idea.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What ideas cropped up most often? What kinds of things?

VICTOR CANDELL: They usually were associated with people, concerning literal human relations as against ideas of humanity or general ideas; literal figures, let's say, fishermen, piano tuners, and the like. Somehow the whole idea was to weave into the work a judgment, a reaction, as it were, and always plastically organized, of their character, of their life as far as I could penetrate it, perceive it. And somehow incorporate that as if it were a kind of interior journey into the character of people, and present this on the level of formal organization. To this day this is what intrigues me.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Back in the early 30's, would a spectator have known that it was a figure of a fisherman? Or would it have appeared to be a formal organization?

VICTOR CANDELL: Yes, it would be as clearly visible as, if you recall to yourself, Dorothy, the Cubist images of Braque and Picasso as they started with mandolins and people quite recognizable in those forms.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes, I thought so. I just wanted to be sure.

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DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, so that you were using a synthetic Cubist approach, adapting it to your own personal subject matter. Was that more or less the form your painting was when you returned to this country?

VICTOR CANDELL: To this country in 1930-1931. And at that moment in New York there came a very important thing in my life: the realization that I already touched upon: that I could be regarded as a coming artist, a young, gifted person, as others expressed it in print. Yet I had a very clear realization that I wasn't a good painter. I explained before that Cezanne had an intangible something which we call the painter, a painterly experience that is to be gotten from one's own talent plus its cultivation in museums to understand the historic values, but a far greater part of it would be direct contact with nature, still-life, figure, and all the rest of it, not on the academic level but on the level of just being confronted not so much with the idea or concepts of space or style but concrete reality and learn from it. This was my understanding that the great men had this as a kind of ante chamber to their main work, that they had years and years of very serious, close study of nature in terms of landscape, in terms of figure painting, which meant not only an extra penetration and deeper insight into nature and its processes, but it also meant becoming a good craftsman. There was something about proceeding with the materials a certain way. And I resolved to get this. So at this point I gave up all idea of exhibition, which I began doing in Paris, as I told you. And for about a period of fifteen years I went back to school - I call nature school, you see. I actually went back to school with youngsters who were - well, very much younger than I just to draw the figure.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Where did you go?

VICTOR CANDELL: I had friends who had classes, you know. You wouldn't know their names. But they engaged models and I went there regularly and did it in my own studio. Then there followed a period of twelve years of outdoor painting, after the Cubist period. Just direct from nature. That, of course, did a lot of things for me as it would do for anybody, and also made me understand fully the Impressionists and all outdoor painting. I credit the European trip as the educative process that made me conscious of what the need is to cultivate what I called aptitude. And how to run it into a magnitude - like a seed running into a larger something by cultivation, a similar process. You can run the smaller something, this aptitude, into a larger dimension by doing whatever your understanding tells you to do. If you don't have a school, if you don't have a teacher who tells you you must have at least a precocious sense of what you need. Otherwise you'll never self-educate yourself in the sense of the desired outcome. Consequently you learn from the older people, and the reproductions, and the Louvres, and the Metropolitan Museums of this world by actually studying those works and kind of replaying of what was put into them. You understand what was needed because you know that you don't have certain skills if you are really honest with yourself. You can put together, let's say, a fair Cubist painting as a very young man but you still don't understand the whole process of painting. That has many departments including the crafts. So for me

the next period in this country until I was forty-three years old was nothing but one long and serious continuous process of studying and self-education. I was reading in four languages and so on. After that I was ready for my first show when I was forty-three years old.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And this was mostly painting out of doors, you say?

VICTOR CANDELL: Mostly painting outdoors and then, of course, a development came: a slow, very slow return to conceptual space and ideas. Having gotten the substance of painterly experience, what is now called, what I myself as an educator would call a substantial and sound groundwork then you can build on it individual forms as I myself I believe to this day. Since I've done all this I have developed a very personal way of working. But then this is the story of all painters who started copying old masters in museums, like Matisse. And they have done an awful lot of work directly from nature and then veered away from it and developed their own style. I understood it by an analytical and perhaps intuitive way in combination. And I followed it literally. During this process I had no exhibitions, no artist friends, because the few that I had – well, they simply thought that something had gone very wrong with me because there I was returning from Paris where I was exhibiting, I was going, promising gifted artist with reviews and so on, and suddenly I gave all that up. And for some kind of foolish idea, they considered, I became a student again and one by one they sort of disappeared from my life.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How did you make your living during those years?

VICTOR CANDELL: During those years I would take commissions for portraits and the like, you know. And I eked out a living. Later on, of course, we all got on the Project.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What years were you on WPA?

VICTOR CANDELL: Well, I'm not very good about years actually, Dorothy, but I was right there right from the beginning when it wasn't called the WPA Project but it was called the Whitney Project when artists in this country were categorized. They were put into categories, A artist, and B, designations of quality. Well, I was much gratified that I was an A.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Were you invited by Mrs. Whitney to come in that first group?

VICTOR CANDELL: That's right. The Whitney Museum, that first group. That's when I started. And I was in it like so many others, present-day painters, quite well known painters.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Were you on the Easel Project most of the time?

VICTOR CANDELL: Easel Project definitely all the time.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What kind of work were you turning out on the Easel Project?

VICTOR CANDELL: Well, I believe they were elements of figure composition, paintings of social content, landscapes and the like.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Would you have been probably classified as a social realist in those days, do you think?

VICTOR CANDELL: I shouldn't be surprised. Especially due to the fact that I was during those years also very active in an organization known as the American Artists' Congress. I became chairman of its exhibition committee because by then I was known. I met and formed friendships with many of the well-known American artists. During that time a good many of us were involved with this. But this coincides with the slow awakening of the idea of going back to myself in a sense, conceptual space and so on. But it took several years before it actually happened. My first show in 1943, perhaps 1942, still had representation and landscape and people, portraits and so on. I remember in particular a whole show made in Scranton, Pennsylvania of miners. I went down and lived with them. It produced the whole show at the Brandt Galleries on 57th Street. And later I was invited to the Eberhardt Museum from there. And this constituted anything that the miners did: the way they lived, their portraits, and their children, and coal or dynamite to be made into still-life arrangements, their backyards, the chickens, roosters, the flowers, and so on. Their whole life was sort of chronicled in these paintings. And only after that I began more and more rapidly to return to the early ideas of geometric organization of space and Cubism and so on.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Where would those paintings be now – the ones that you had done of the miners? Do you know where they are?

VICTOR CANDELL: Some of the paintings I kept as – well, what would you call them? – tokens of art work done. The great majority I have destroyed with great glee and relief because they were really baby shoes of a person who in years may have been more mature than my own students are now, but who had to go through this hard school of self education. And they were really studies actually, a great number, but that doesn't mean that they

were of any particular value in my eyes. So I destroyed them.

DOROTHY SECKLER: In those scenes of miners – would this have been painted rather Impressionistically? Or with much emphasis on tone? Were they more dark than light conceptions?

VICTOR CANDELL: I would say that they were dealing with light a good deal and yet underlying it there was a kind of consciousness of, awareness of structure that accompanied my work throughout.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But it was a full palette of painterly concept?

VICTOR CANDELL: Yes. Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It was not mainly graphic?

VICTOR CANDELL: No. No, I would say that it bore the earmarks of my early stage and my great love for Cezanne – the Cezanne form would be present.

DOROTHY SECKLER: So that this was your first show at the Brandt Gallery?

VICTOR CANDELL: In 1940, early 1940.

DOROTHY SECKLER: The mining subject was the main core of that show?

VICTOR CANDELL: That's right.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That was a good gallery at the time, wasn't it?

VICTOR CANDELL: Yes, it was quite a good gallery. It was at the place where Sidney Janis is now, the whole floor, if you remember. And later on it was split up and Parsons Gallery became part of it. But it used to be one floor, Brandt Gallery. Also dealt in Old Masters, if you recall.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, what was the critical reaction to it?

VICTOR CANDELL: A pretty fair reaction as I remember. I even kept some clippings, very encouraging and so on. I was called a strong and individual realist at the time by critics like Genauer and Devree.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And you were off the Project several years by this time?

VICTOR CANDELL: By this time I was off the Project and completely immersed in the idea of developing myself and this time I mean a stylistic impersonal development. You see this whole story is a very old-fashioned one of a young boy being inspired by the general idea of art and later on specifically of certain masters and their quality and trying to understand that quality and finally finding out what made them and then conceiving the idea that you could do it yourself to the point where you have the understanding of the aesthetic process, the creative art, and a good deal of self-understanding and therefore have the discipline to be able to build and to wait until your own work can come into being instead of an unseemly haste which we witness so often now – to be young, accomplished, rich and famous at the same time.

DOROTHY SECKLER: In 1943 then you were beginning, right after this first success as a realist, to work in a more formal kind of development?

VICTOR CANDELL: That's right.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What was inspiring this most? What did you look at most? Or what were you thinking of most? You had been thinking of Degas and Cezanne before. Were there some new orientations now?

VICTOR CANDELL: Certainly there was a very strong orientation and a veering away even during the previous ten years as a parallel process. But the dominant thing was, as you say, Cezanne and Degas. But don't forget at the same time there grew up great masters like Picasso and Braque and the rest of them. So, of course, I just went on quite normally because Picasso himself comes out of these masters. I just continued normally back into Cubism and through that into the newer forms of art that embraces the contemporary history of painting we all know – Mondrian and the rest, Klee and the studies of all these people. That would include the Expressionists. Later on I met and became friends with people with Kokoschka and Max Beckmann with whom I taught in Brooklyn a number of years. So by then I was in. And I was part of this whole living history of being a painter. And I was taking vitamins, aesthetic vitamins where I found them according to a felt need and also an understood need. When you're also a mature man between forty and fifty years of age you ought to know what your need is. And I did. So I very consciously went after it and developed my personal style by which I am known – not the present one – but the one immediately before that. And that, of course, is the period of explosion, as I

call it, a very dynamic form which lasted from that time, let's say, in the 40s to about four years ago when I started changing to a new form, my present form.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You had, of course, begun to teach at some point here.

VICTOR CANDELL: In the 40's.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And this was a nice change, to be able to make a living some way.

VICTOR CANDELL: That's right. It certainly was a good change. It started with a wartime contribution to the Red Cross. The Brooklyn Navy Yard and attached hospital, the Navy Hospital in Brooklyn had a Red Cross program of arts and crafts. It dealt with the rehabilitation of battle fatigue cases. And by then I had a few private classes and I began having experience as a teacher. And somehow people who had been in contact with this process told others that I was rather efficient at teaching. And small wonder since I had to teach myself, you know. I became very efficient, very good at getting very good results with these American boys who for one reason or other had lost themselves a little due to the war. And the practice of art replenished them. Maybe I shouldn't be so modest about it. This was really successful. The people at Brooklyn heard about it and I was invited directly by them for this program.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Would you like to say a little bit about what you did with these boys? What your method or approach was?

VICTOR CANDELL: Well, I don't know, the only way I could express my own method, if you can call it a method, was to try to find out what the individual differences among these men happened to be and what was a kind of aching core inside, and try to build their ego, try to make them, or guide them into a preoccupation away from that troubled core. This meant that you had to have an insight into people, into the difference in people. But then I always had this gift. If I have anything, I have this great important gift. Also my being always with grownups, due to the circumstances I've described already, gave me from boyhood a precocious type of maturity and later a normal kind of maturity which somehow gave me an insight into people, a sense of reality about their being and about their troubles. The search into myself because I had to guide myself in teaching myself how to become an artist meant a detached point of view about myself which enabled me to discover in me even the negative qualities. So therefore, knowing myself quite deeply I was enabled to see others as well. And for me teaching really starts and ends with this whole point of knowing the individual difference and building on that difference. I have an intuitive awareness plus experience as a mature human being and artist because you cannot dole out impersonal segments of knowledge, you cannot just package information impersonally without any involvement with other human being when you teach. Teaching itself is a kind of involvement on the most intimate, personal level. And you cannot teach two people exactly the same way. So when you ask me what have I done I couldn't tell you. Mostly intuitive improvisation and response to that difference in the human beings. All I can tell you is it was useful, it was unsuccessful. And even later on when I began teaching at the Brooklyn Museum School of Art, from 1946 on, they used to send me so-called hard cases, when they couldn't make headway with certain people. They would send such ex-soldiers or Marines to my studio. Perhaps I could tie up with them and do what from their point of view was therapy. I frankly was understanding this, having a lot of doctor friends with whom I would discuss these things at the time. I had no particular interest in the medical aspect or therapeutic aspect, but I have a great interest to this day in the psychological aspect of teaching.

DOROTHY SECKLER: So that Brooklyn you were actually dealing with the GI's influx at that time, I suppose, a good deal?

VICTOR CANDELL: Yes. Like everybody else I had very large classes due to the GI Bill.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Hofmann had them too at that time I remember.

VICTOR CANDELL: Yes. And at the same time I was developing my own classes, private classes which later on grew into forms like the Provincetown Workshop, my own school here, you know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

VICTOR CANDELL: And still talking about teaching in 1954 Cooper Union invited me and I'm still with them. And then a good deal of guest teaching all over the country and guest critic and lecturing. That grew up after my own painting became really - well, I don't know how to put it, accepted, and museums began buying my work and displaying it, including, of course, most of the leading --

DOROTHY SECKLER: We've lost track a little bit there of the sequence of exhibitions. We left you back in France and then, of course, you must have had exhibitions once your work was becoming more formal.

VICTOR CANDELL: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Where were they?

VICTOR CANDELL: Well, I stayed with Brandt until he actually closed his doors and went back to dealing with old masters. Then I was invited by Grand Central Moderns to become a member of that modern group of painters. The event that brought it about was a three-ply exhibition which you may recall at the Metropolitan Museum: A Survey of American Painting one year, a Survey of American Sculpture, and then a third one, I believe, was Graphics, Watercolors, and so on. And I participated in it with a painting which the Metropolitan subsequently bought called Magister. And this painting was responsible for the invitation to the other gallery and I'm still a member of it now. Magister was a symbol of war. I mentioned before that I was preoccupied with explosions and something at the time I used to call violence, the spirit of violence footloose in the world. This was after the second World War and past Hitler and all that. Small wonder that there were so many people in and out of the arts who were equally preoccupied with the idea of violence and cruelty. This took the form in my case of the development of a speedy dynamic explosive form. And this kept up, as I said before, until about four years ago. And most of the work that has found its way into public collections and private collections is of this period with the exception of last year's change in style, my first show in the new style, the new development, which also began to be taken up by museums. These shows were at the Grand Central Moderns throughout.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And then after that?

VICTOR CANDELL: I'm still with them. I'm showing the new work with them.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I think it would be helpful before we go on to your very last stage, your current work, to analyze a little more the thinking-feeling - we should hyphenate it - the explosion stage and perhaps it might be helpful to think of specific canvases here. I mean the one you mention, Magister, would be one. Is that one where you might be able to retrace its development a little bit, the way it was thought up?

VICTOR CANDELL: Well, I propose another canvas here. I understand your idea. Let's take Ascendant which was bought by the Whitney. It's a large painting and it's really an embodiment of my then motivating ideas. And I can tell you the origin of it if you are interested in it. I remember having supper one time with Clara and opening a bottle of beer. And the bottle opener, which was not a fancy one, but the old-fashioned pull-up type engaged my attention. And that moment I conceived this painting; that is, that the action of reading, tearing, forcing upward cutting into the metal ring of thing with this form which itself had this spiky, aggressive, horny forms lifting became at that moment a kind of symbol. It was one of those moments of recognition which served as a point of ignition for a whole series of work, drawings, graphics, and finally painting whose culmination was this painting which is a very cruel-looking thing and full of the mechanism of mechanized cruelty because after all even the concentration camps had to be efficient in killing. And they did employ timesaving, efficient machinery for it. Our whole technological equipment, and here I'm thinking of the atomic bomb, is now in the service of destruction. So the ominousness of the whole situation, the idea of cruelty, the idea of destruction and violence was embodied in this form. Only its starting point was related to an actual object which I just described. Then, of course, the whole thing went into what I would call an abstract region. The whole period that we are talking about, the period of explosion in painting was called unanimously abstract and specifically an abstract expressionist form of working.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, would you think of yourself as an abstract expressionist?

VICTOR CANDELL: Today, no. I have the idea that artists don't call themselves by the official categories at all, that this is the work of either other artists who with tongue in cheek will call others Fauves or Cubists or aestheticians, or critics or writers on art whose business it is to make history of other people's lives and work. And it is their good fortune sometimes to coin a category or a title for a group that sticks and becomes a historic name or label. But an artist never feels that he is a Cubist or he is an expressionist. Indeed I recall Picasso how he refused to be called anything. Somebody saw him painting a tomato plant and this man didn't know and used all kinds of professional names and labels trying to say is this such and such a type of painting. And Picasso said, non, I'm just painting a tomato plant. Of course, I'm painting it my way, not yours or any other way, and that is what you call Cubist or expressionist. So my answer to your question would be similar: that I know these categories and you deal with them, you use them, they are convenient handles but as to feeling an identification with this title - are you a Cubist? You can't see that or feel it. I always regarded myself as me, as somebody interested in ideas to be put into an image that is plastically organized.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

DOROTHY SECKLER: This is Dorothy Seckler continuing an interview with Victor Candell in Provincetown on September 1, 1965. At the end of our previous tape we had been discussing your work of the period that extended through the 50's and up until several years ago, a type of work that was exemplified by two paintings we discussed. One was Magister and the other was Ascendant, which is owned by the Whitney. I was interested in the fact that although you didn't identify yourself as an abstract expressionist you had thought of the painting

as being abstract expressionist. As I recall your work, it was certainly expressionist and it was abstract. But I would have thought that the existence of a plane structure, which seemed to me always evident in your work, would have made it incorrect to fit your work into the category of abstract expressionism. Most of the abstract expressionists that I have known would have rejected ideas of plasticity to some extent as they related to a definite plane structure, although Hans Hofmann is something of an exception there. So it's a little bit confusing.

VICTOR CANDELL: You really answered your own quite logical reasoning about it. There are those who have gone into abstract expressionism to the point where it was called action painting. All you have to do is recall the image of Jackson Pollock and from then on for a number of years there was a real influx of people who rejected the image and dealt with chance and accident and an organization of feeling at the moment of its happening. So in that sense you are absolutely right, Dorothy, that I could not be categorized as an abstract expressionist. But by the time you got through with your own question you mentioned an individualist among them, Hans Hofmann, who certainly to this day uses on the one hand, and now in his latest period, a combination of the freest forms, practically improvisatory in nature, and rectangles and planar structures, which is a dominant trait in him, possibly for similar reasons of origin and training, being European also. Consequently you cannot really make the sharp distinction that categories would demand. And this is the reason why artists refuse to name, as I did just before, themselves this or that because the category always includes its own paradoxical contradiction.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Certainly it does.

VICTOR CANDELL: So in this sense you may call me a maverick if you wish in that the sense of structural organization is so strong – it is such a need to incorporate whatever expression I may give to my feelings and thoughts that it might go contrary to that period in American art that simply wanted to see, say, Ouch for Yippee, an explosion of feeling without the restraints of structural, planar, or Cubist organization. It was a period of trying to be untrammelled, completely free. And what we experience in our day now is a strong reaction to this concept of freedom.

DOROTHY SECKLER: A strong reaction you feel against it?

VICTOR CANDELL: Against it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Would you like to enlarge on that a little bit?

VICTOR CANDELL: My feeling is that there have been during the years of the rule of abstract expressionism in the sense of freedom, in the sense of action painting where everybody painted in terms of what came to his mind and to his wrist, to his fingers without any restraint, indeed making a virtue of the most outrageous, whimsical action on canvas with materials and justifying it on the grounds that it is, that it happened. As against this you have numbers of people in and out of the arts, that would include critics and collectors, who never emotionally could put up with this. They may have gone along with their intellect but a good many collectors as I know them, and the public, the art-loving public, too, just did not really love it as far as the emotions were concerned. They could understand explanations, aesthetic writing on the subject. Also it was the thing, the going thing. A good many people always missed the image, the recognizable thing, the representational in art. Of course, necessarily on a very high level Picasso is representational. Rouault is. And so is Matisse. And so on. Therefore we should think of the highest examples of representational art. So these people were very much relieved when the reaction set in against action painting because it brought back representation, it brought back the figure. I'm now thinking of Diebenkorn and the artists on the West Coast, you see. We showed them. So when the figure came back, when representation came back people were very much relieved because they no longer had to put up with the – well, the seismographic needle of other individuals having earthquakes of emotion which they couldn't follow, and they were tired of. They also felt that it was impersonal and faceless at a given point. What paint could do in the end was epitomized by, if you recall, a monkey painting abstractions, and inventing machinery that made paintings or rather designs. And finally the reaction set it, as it had to set in for good or bad reasons. Primarily because there needs to be a renewing, there needs to be a reaction to supplant what is getting to be old. This country consumes novelty on a very large quantity basis. And the forms that it took had to be contrary against the previous period. So representation in its various forms even to the point where it meant the incorporation of real objects into the painting – Pop Art, came as a relief to a lot of people who no longer had to guess what they were looking at. They could identify the object and for many people the art experience is identification of subject matter and not at all the enjoyment of sometimes very subtle and even hidden relationships. So the person who says, I love Rembrandt is not necessarily one who understands the formal organizations in Rembrandt but he likes to look at a person, let's say, an old woman paring her nails. Because this is accessible from an area of life other than painting. So recognition, familiarity is really the conditioning element which leads to pleasure in viewing art for a good many people. And among them were former collectors and owners of abstract art.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Of course, some of them were initially put off in this recognition by the fact that the forms they recognized as being so unaesthetic, you know, from being from supermarkets and so on, so that it was not

so easy to accept it at first. I think, however, many people did gradually make the adjustment. How would you treat students in your classes who would come in and want to not only, let's say, paint a can of beer but maybe instead of doing a Picassoesque can of beer just to take a can of beer and shove it onto a board or to make a plastic facsimile of it. How would you handle such students?

VICTOR CANDELL: Well, strangely enough one doesn't have as many as the public might think. There is no schooling for Pop Art, as it were. It seems to be a self-generating process. Anybody can do it without going to Cooper Union or some art school, you know. But occasionally you do have one. I'm thinking now of a young girl at Cooper Union who was quite frail and who had a terrible fight with an inner tube, as I recall, that she dragged into the classroom which she wanted to affix to the surface of a canvas. Of course, it wouldn't stay down. She discovered that she would have to have a regular construction behind it to which she could attach it. And this took weeks, indeed months to do because this living rubbery thing had, like, so many arms of an octopus, a life of its own and she was a frail girl. Consequently she tried sawing, tacking, nailing, everything under creation just to make it stay there. And when we came to the end of that year and she was still at it. So my answer to your question, what do I do - since we live in an era where the greatest violation of the rights of a young artist would be to tell him what to do, or especially to demonstrate as of old, this is unheard of. You don't do it. You consult with people. You encourage people. You try to clarify their ideas and, if possible, guide them to a better making, a better creation. But the choice remains always with the students. The responsibility also is the student's for their choice. This is made very clear. And in that sense you educate a young person that you take choices but you are responsible for them. And for the rest you try to help them in whatever they do because you, being a mature and an older artist, you're presumed to have gone through all this. And indeed you have. All the possibilities of the technical approach and also the aesthetic understanding of what is behind them. So my answer briefly would be, I tried to help her. But it was very difficult because this was a ten-pound Mack Truck inner tube and more powerful than the two of us together. But this is really an exception. Most students that I know are dealing with a sector roughly between Cezanne and de Kooning. And they work very hard at it. They experiment. They make collages and assemblages and constructions and fun things occasionally. But the very great bulk of their interest lies in the painterly exploration, as they should. And also, curiously, in becoming good draftsmen. In which, of course, we encouraged them very much.

DOROTHY SECKLER: So that you have, of course, your students drawing from models, live models?

VICTOR CANDELL: At all times. In all my public and private teaching quite regularly at all times. Because after all that would be the same thing that I myself have done, if you recall, you know you have to go back to teacher which is nature, which is the school, the real school. Now what an artist will do with this, of course, is the measure of his talent and the quality of his imagination. But I think that he should have the equipment. And this is done - today a lot of people are surprised to come to a school like the Workshop and find there every day models and still-lives because they think that this is in limbo already. But it isn't. The development of a young artist still follows certain almost classical requirements. And the imagery or the radical concept of space or symbol that can become so outrageously personal, that is quite another matter. That is a personal quality that people can then build into doing work with the passage of time in which case they will unlearn a good many things that they had to first acquire. And I've just stated my own concept of how to teach.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, I'm very glad you did because I wanted to get that at some point. We might just for the record perhaps put in when the Provincetown Workshop - it is the Provincetown Workshop?

VICTOR CANDELL: Indeed it is.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Is that the way it's called?

VICTOR CANDELL: That's the name.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And when was that - what year was that?

VICTOR CANDELL: Seven years ago. So it was 1959 tight? 1958-1959 when we started it with Leo Manso, a friend, a good painter and excellent teacher. And our idea was to do something upon the retirement of Hans Hofmann who, as you know, has taught here long years and is responsible for a whole period in American Art. And when we found out at the dinner table that he was not going to come back the next year we thought that this would be a good time to start a serious school. The big problem being how to bring to a sea resort which is very expensive as to prices, rent, etc. those talented youngsters who are notorious for not having money if they have talent. The two seem to go together. Consequently we had to find a form, since we had no public funds and/or private funds to provide this. And the inspiration was Cooper Union. As you must know, Cooper Union is an all-scholarship school. Nobody pay tuition and therefore people go through a comparative examination in the beginning. The selectively assures high intelligence, and basic gifts, and the will to make something of them. So we couldn't copy it exactly but we set up a scholarship program which was very modest in the beginning. And some friends saw merit in this idea and provided the funds for these young people who we began inviting from

various good art schools. The base of selection is their own performance in the particular school, their written examination and recommendation on the part of teachers and department heads plus actual work sent in if they are from those parts of the country, of course, where individual interviews would be not practical. If they would be near New York and its environs, well then they would come in and we would see them in person. This was started the first year with six people. The others were bread-and-butter paying students. And today we have had - this year nineteen of them. In the seven years therefore it approached something like one-hundred scholarship students, twenty percent of whom became Fulbright grantees and went to Europe and had their shows there, and here too, or went into teaching, and continued on. So this is the basis of this school where in number of young people who have to work for their living while they paint. And we enable them to make up in painting for lost time while they are doing their part-time work earning by keeping the school open for them until midnight and over the weekends - Saturdays and Sundays as well. So that any time one of them has odd hours he can make up for those working hours since they practically run their part of the school on an honor system. And we also help them to get this employment. We also have fortunately a student aid fund in case there is an emergency of work, materials, or health. So the whole thing has become quite successful. This is the first year when we had to close registration before we came up here. And it's also the first year when there were applications from Europe.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, that's very interesting. It's significant for the whole American art scene in a sense that Europeans now come to this country to study. I'd like to get back to your own painting and perhaps talk for awhile about the work that you embarked on in the last several years and the character of the changes that have come about, perhaps some of the reasons or impulses that led to it insofar as you may be aware of them.

VICTOR CANDELL: I'm glad you mentioned it, Dorothy, because an artist is like the proverbial iceberg. There are parts that are above the level of - not the sea, but the consciousness, and we know only those parts that are visible to us. And the motivation beyond that we not only do not know but I don't believe that there are many artists who would like to stir that area and become conscious. It would depend a good deal upon its functioning its own proper and natural way without becoming overly aware of it. So I may tell you whatever I know but I'm absolutely certain that somebody else observing the same process, not necessarily an analyst or a trained person, but just a good observer of art and people, could bring enlightenment and an explanation of which I'm wholly unaware. But to come back to the change itself I observed towards the end of the other form that the explosions began dealing less and less with war and atomics and more and more with nature. Nature itself has its explosions. The burst not only of bombs but of buds in springtime are forms of energy that may engage the creative imagination of the artist. It is a need I believe that comes with change in seasons in art and life, that after the great powers of youth are over - don't forget I'm past sixty now - you're quite alive and interested and turn to less topical, less immediate areas for subject matter. And there is in the recurrence of seasons and in the cycles of nature and plant life and animal kind and mankind the more lasting questions which begin to intrigue the mind possibly because having participated in the topical and having probably suffered certain defeats, having expressed them as much as you could, having found there are no - as the youthful mind thinks - immediate solutions anyhow, you might as well slow down. And then on top of it comes what I call the changing seasons, you do slow down with the oncoming of maturity. You turn to processes like nature and you find in it, as I have found, explosions in them that I could use. For instance, in large canvases dealing with springtime the opening up of forms of life in water that was locked in ice, and biological processes, the growth of plants striving to explode, come up and meet daylight, flowers and the rest I found a good deal of "subject" quote unquote for the tail end of that period that we were talking about. And this in turn brought needed adjustments in the work which led to what I call white space.

DOROTHY SECKLER: White space?

VICTOR CANDELL: White space. Because all the present work you might see is white. And this space is a greatly simplified one. The other one that we spoke about had a deep space where things had to occur. This one is flat, conceptual, poetic, very decorative and tries to unite paradoxically that which is two-dimensional, flat, and that which has a certain three-dimensionality but always a kind as if in dreams that it occurs between two ears, a very shallow space. Organization is very important in such a painting. Indeed it's harder to do in the sense that it does not deal so much with at least fragments of reality as the former painting. And it works by metaphor. And each painting is a kind of philosophical concept dealing with various departments of personal experience or human experience. It has a good deal of sex in it. It has a good deal to do with various kinds of responses even satirical or occasionally humorous. My present feeling is that I don't want to follow and preconceived notion even of my own; that I try to incorporate into these paintings daily occurrences of my life, not necessarily on the level of a log book or a diary. That would be far too exact. But just as I incorporate into their physical being additives. And this is the great change too. For the first time in my life I began adding things. First very mildly and not even originally sand to the paint. By now, of course, if you look up you can see all kinds of additives in terms of plastics and wood, veneer, and so on.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And poker chips. Very interesting.

VICTOR CANDELL: And this is poker chips what we're now looking at. Corrugated paper and so on. All of these things serve to emphasize the surface, the immediacy of the experience. Yet they are arranged so that they should tough the imaginative viewer. They should present an image that should be eloquent on more than one level. The one that you're looking at has something to do with the flag. It has something to do with Negroes. It has something to do with chance. It has something to do with red, white, and blue. It has something to do with the motif of lips. This being almost obsessive in my current work. I made a series of paintings based on Buddha's lips, specifically those statues in Japan that are known as the Nara Buddhas, because the forms of the lips somehow became as a diving off point for images that seem to give me a feeling of lovers embracing. And this came back in many ways and became paintings of sea and gulls and musical instruments and the rest. So I'm now in the very happy position of ranging far and wide into my own self in imagination and, I'm afraid, self-indulgence in the sense that if I happen to feel gay or humorous on a certain day the painting will become gay and humorous and will incorporate objects from my table or whatever happens to be around that is suitable for a very precise meaning. Because what I now feel I should do is through the employment of these forms and all the skill that I now possess as a mature painter to direct the mind of the onlooker toward a fruitful participation, indeed a collaboration with me toward an area sufficiently precise to establish it or to be present in a title but not specified as to a single happening. So the present work is my freest work that I can think of all my life. It is wholly personal. I think much more so than the previous work by which I am known. And I'm not alone in saying this. Many of my artist friends are very much in favor of it and the one thing they'll say is that it is wholly, wholly individual. It's the flowering of a lifetime of work in the sense of not looking right, not looking left. The work is very much present in me, so is the world of art and the history of art. So that I use them in a way that I don't have to be very conscious about in terms of quotations but simply live it, express whatever is sufficiently agitating to mind, to bring it out and have no preconceived notions as to its viability, its stylistic category, its possible fate but do it because it's a great joy to do it.

END OF TAPE 2 - SIDE 1

SIDE 2

DOROTHY SECKLER: That was very beautifully expressed and I didn't want to interrupt. I was fascinated by what you said about incorporating things that are part of each different day, something that just happens to be here and yet it might be somehow expressive of an activity or an idea, a memento that can be fitted into an idea that's already going, that's already in work, and still not discombobulate your harmony or your image or your total expression of it.

VICTOR CANDELL: It is a very curious process as far as I know how you may have a preconceived notion on a certain day, getting up and feeling that you want to do a certain kind, or even a certain shape or size canvas, or that the general color of it should be such and such. Other days it may be just a relation of substances and materials that awakens, stimulates, irritates the well-developed creative resources, the imaginative life so that the responses then are very critically examined by this foreplay and then the formulation sort of involves and engages the awakening emotions and once you are caught by it you can be said to be pregnant with ideas.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I think it's very interesting the eroticism that runs all through this.

VICTOR CANDELL: Well, why not?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes, it's certainly a very important part of art. I'm also sorry that the machine can't get your very interesting hand gestures when you explain things.

VICTOR CANDELL: Well, maybe next year we'll have something that will combine - maybe it's fortunate that it's not --

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, since we've been talking about this particular painting a good bit - does it have a title yet?

VICTOR CANDELL: No title for this one.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Will this one be shown in New York this fall?

VICTOR CANDELL: Yes. I have been preparing these paintings throughout the summer partly for a smaller showing at the local gallery, HCE, here where I had a showing of them but they are like a kind of rehearsal for the larger show that's coming in January at Grand Central Moderns. And they are mostly done already and I am very happy that when I go back and have to start again with my regular season of teaching that I don't have to be anxious about it since the work is pretty much done. It will be presented then in January 1966.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Will there be a general recurrence of the white background or the whites dominating the painting?

VICTOR CANDELL: Very much so. The whole thing, including framing, is white. A whole roomful of white paintings, you know. There are, of course occasional very strong colors incorporated into this white space. The white space, as you know, is not that of the whiteness of a wall but it has many whites and you feel within that whiteness and the color quite a considerable feeling of depth as well. So it's both.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It's certainly not completely flat. It's very much in the tradition of plasticity and planar composition. But they're also very free. And, of course, I think you've always had a wonderful feeling also for blacks. I've noticed in your painting over the years that the blacks have always been something very dear to you as are the whites. And there's a very strong alternation of blacks and whites.

VICTOR CANDELL: Yes. I would say the idea of contrast is something which both in my painting and in teaching as well seems to play a very consistently constant role. And I am very intrigued that you should put your finger on this. I remember it was with pleasure too. But it's really true that the whole idea of contrast intrigues my imagination. And a good deal of my present work in one way or another not necessarily only in the black or dark and light sense but in the sense of upper and lower in any way whatsoever the whole idea of shapes, smaller or larger, the whole idea of contrast which, of course, is part of all art, seems to have taken hold of my imagination. At moments I suspect that it ain't necessarily so for everybody. But for me it's something that I seem to be thinking in terms of pairs, of contrast. And this thing that you mention, the black and white of it, is a part of that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And also I would imagine activity against rest.

VICTOR CANDELL: Very much so. Very much so. I'm very intrigued by it because I'm so cognizant of the fact of what would happen to a Mozartian symphony or sonata if pauses would be taken out. Music would be reduced to noise. And articulate and meaningful sound would resemble a factory, you see, or siren. So that I think articulation and orientation toward meaningful relations depends on that which we call a significant confrontation of opposite elements establishing a mutually sharpening focusing condition.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's very, very interesting. And almost serves very nicely as a summing up unless there's something else that you'd like to add at this point.

VICTOR CANDELL: Well, I think we have ranged very far, if you recall, from Budapest, Hungary. We have ranged very far and I think we have covered it pretty well.

END OF INTERVIEW

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