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Oral history interview with Sylvan Cole, 2000
June-October

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Sylvan Cole from June through October, 2000. The interview took place at the Sylvan Cole Gallery, New York and was conducted by Avis Berman for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written prose.

Interview

AVIS BERMAN: This is Avis Berman on June 28th, 2000, interviewing Sylvan Cole in his gallery at 101 West 57th Street. And at the risk of being a little bit redundant, would you begin by stating your full name and your date of birth?

SYLVAN COLE: Sylvan Cole, Junior – that's the way I was born, no middle initial. And I was born January 10th, 1918.

MS. BERMAN: Now I will start, and ask you how did you get the name Sylvan?

MR. COLE: I am a junior. And Dad got the name – It's interesting; Dad was Sylvan Cohn, C-O-H-N. And right after I was born – I actually was born Cohn – I guess I was a year old, and the name was changed to Cole for business purposes and all the rest. And the funny thing is, all Sylvans – or most Sylvans – are Jewish. But that's neither here nor there; that's how it happened.

MS. BERMAN: Uh-huh. And Sylvan, was that any sort of family name or anything?

MR. COLE: I don't know how he got it. Theoretically, I had heard that it came somewhere from Alsace Lorraine, where there was a family root. And it was a fairly common name there.

MS. BERMAN: Well, why don't you tell me a little bit about your family background?

MR. COLE: Dad was a – a rare reversed Californian. Dad was born in Los Angeles, moved to Pomona when he was very young. And my grandfather had a dry goods store in Pomona, when it must've been a real backwash place. I never forgave my grandparents or great-grandparents for not – who headed out to the gold rush and ended up in the wrong city. But anyway, Dad moved to Los Angeles to be bar mitzvahed. And my grandmother – Grandpa, I think, had passed away very early; I never knew him. But my grandmother took in boarders. And they had this big house. And I think the population of Los Angeles was roughly 50,000 people. And one of the boarders carried the Arrow shirt line. My uncle Walter – he became my Uncle Walter. And his territory was the Mississippi River, west.

Dad was born 1889. And – Uncle Walter and Dad got together. He – Uncle Walter became Uncle Walter by marrying Dad's sister, Rose, my Aunt Rose. And he became Uncle Walter, and he and Dad started Dollar Shirt Shops. They prospered. They had several stores in Los Angeles, several stores in San Francisco. And time came to make their fortunes, and the two of them came east to set up a company, which became National Shirt Shops.

And at that time, on a blind date, my dad met my mother. Mother came from a very long, illustrious Jewish family, whose family root was Ballin, B-A-L-L-I-N. And the Ballin family were wealthy Germans. Huge families. Eight, ten, twelve kids, every – almost every generation. And the Ballin family, part of it was Albert Ballin, who owned and directed the North German Lloyd Line before World War Two. And theoretically, an uncle, Hugo Ballin, who was a painter and designed the sets for the *Wizard of Oz*, and lived in California. We trace our family back to the Bellinis in Italy. And the Balin, B-A-L-I-N, who did the Gardens of Versailles in France. And so they were all one happy family.

And Mother grew up, born of – A grandmother of mine who was born in Mississippi, and a grandfather of mine who was born in New Orleans. Mother grew up here in New York, and went to Ethical Culture, which was a very fine school, and to Horace Mann. [Phone rings; tape stops, re-starts]

MS. BERMAN: You were talking about the Ballins.

MR. COLE: So – And Mother married Dad. She had graduated Horace Mann in 1915; taught at Ethical Culture. She – I just realized she didn't go to Ethical Culture, she – she went to Horace Mann. She taught at Ethical Culture. And Dad, she married – when Mother was nineteen. And I was born the following year. And I graduated

Horace Mann almost twenty years to the day that my mother had graduated. Isn't that amazing, that - And when I was born, I had a great-great-grandmother living in Holland, five generations.

MS. BERMAN: Well, that's also amazing that even on your father's side, that they would come - There were very few Jews that came as early as they did. I guess they were almost Yankees on your father's side, as well as your mother's.

MR. COLE: Well, Dad has little books I have somewhere of the Jewish families in Los Angeles in those days. And they went to film. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Almost all the film people were Jews.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, but they weren't born there, and they weren't born in California.

MR. COLE: No, that's true.

MS. BERMAN: I mean, obviously, your father was born in this country. [MR. COLE: Yeah, yeah] That was very early, so you're - At least your grandparents or great grandparents came. Also, yes, Hugo Ballin was also a very successful academic muralist. There's actually quite a bit about him around.

MR. COLE: Oh, I'm sure. And the funny thing is, I just heard from a cousin in Washington. And he was so excited. He went to the - He's writing a guided tour of Washington, D.C. And he went to the Renwick Gallery, and there were two paintings of Hugo Ballin.

MS. BERMAN: Well, no, he was quite powerful in -

MR. COLE: I'm surprised; nobody's ever heard of him but you. [Laughs]

MS. BERMAN: Well, I have, because he was involved in the early National Academy of Design, and he was - he was a friend of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney's.

MR. COLE: He even left money at the American Academy of Arts and Letters for funds for needy artists. And there is a fund there that I've applied for once, for an artist who was being evicted.

MS. BERMAN: Well, that's very interesting, that you never researched it more.

MR. COLE: I never researched him at all.

MS. BERMAN: Now, just to explore the family a little bit more, Irving Berlin's original name was Ballin. Did you ever find Irving Berlin to be a relative?

MR. COLE: I think all Ballin's were related.

MS. BERMAN: Mm-hm. And now, did you have - did you have any brothers or sisters?

MR. COLE: I have two brothers, younger. One's still alive, just reached 80 years old, and lives down in Texas. And I have another brother who died about 1969 or '70 in an auto accident out in the Hamptons. He was a - probably at his age - Let's see, in 1968, I would've been 40, he'd have been 28. In 19 - No, I'd have been 50; he'd have been 38. He had the biggest and best print collection. Sort of a sibling situation. He had - And his widow, who's remarried to Jack Greenberg, the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] founder, legal founder

MS. BERMAN: The lawyer, right.

MR. COLE: - and she still has [Toulouse]Lautrec, [Pablo] Picasso, [Edvard] Munch. Fabulous, fabulous collection of work.

MS. BERMAN: Did you - did you make that collection?

MR. COLE: Some of it.

MS. BERMAN: Well, let us now - This sounds like quite a cultivated home, in terms of education and culture and curiosity. And I'd like to ask you what sorts of - you know, were you exposed to art when you were a child?

MR. COLE: It's interesting. My parents were not collectors, but they did have, interestingly enough, mostly prints, which was very much the vogue. I can remember [inaudible] panel huge, ugly, dark etchings in the living room. But Mother was interested, and I remember, even as a teenager, going gallery hopping with Mother, or going to museums.

And one of my favorite places was Stieglitz's American Place, and seeing my first O'Keeffe show, which was *All*

Camellias, and practically swooning, it was so beautiful. And Stieglitz would come out in his gray smock and pat me on the head and tell me about the pictures, and – and – I was one of the few youngsters that ever went into that gallery. And I remember him very vividly.

But I think the real seminal change in my life was – My closest friend at Horace Mann was a boy named Herbert Hirschland. And Herbert's family was a Dr. [Franz H.] Hirschland, who was president of American Metal-something – I won't remember this – which became American Can. And his mother was Swedish, lovely lady. [Phone rings; tape stops, re- starts]

MS. BERMAN: You were talking about [MR. COLE: Oh, yes] Herbert Hirschland.

MR. COLE: Anyway, Dr. Hirschland had a Daumier, "Third-Class Carriage" – or second class, I forget. A small version. El Greco that maybe is not an El Greco. Van Gogh, Renoir, Degas, Cezanne, and a host of other wonderful paintings in his home.

MS. BERMAN: Paintings, not –

MR. COLE: Right. And I almost became a weekly weekender there, and – [Door bell]. Can you get that? [tape stops, re-starts]

MR. COLE: I was a constant weekender. And I do know that I – I remember something that Herbert denies could have been true. But I remember Dr. Hirschland talking to a scruffy old guy at breakfast, when Herbert and I just were dying to get excused so we could play war upstairs in the attic. And that scruffy old guy was Albert Einstein. And Herbert says that is – I couldn't make it up.

And the other thing I remember is that at the end of the – behind Dr. Hirschland, on the wall in the dining room, was a Cezanne of a view of a hillside. And that Cezanne [Gardanne, 1885-86] is now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. And I go and visit it – to see my Cezanne. And in my bedroom, I remember two paintings. One was a painting of [Paul] Klee of the famous cat with the whiskers [*Cat and Bird*, 1928], which is now at the Museum of Modern Art. And I remember there was a Franz Kline of blue horses. And that's all I remember. But Dr. Hirschland used to take me around and explain the pictures. I was the only kid that had any interest in that.

Other memories I have of growing up is going to the Met, and having the whole place to myself, gallery to gallery; and falling in love with George Inness. I can't remember that painting, *Good and Plenty* [*Peace and Plenty*, 1865] or something. This huge, huge picture of a bucolic landscape; and I think it had a rainbow and – as a city boy, he was my favorite artist.

MS. BERMAN: George Inness.

MR. COLE: Yeah. And – Then I also remember starting a collection of postcards of all the works of art I could grab a hold of. And I still have it in a file box somewhere at home, and I don't know what to do with it, but – Even when I went to Europe in my college days, I would collect cards from various museums. That's sort of up to college. I graduated Horace Mann in '35.

MS. BERMAN: So I just – So Hirschland, is that H-E-R-?

MR. COLE: H-I-R-S-C-H-

MS. BERMAN: Oh, ok. L-A-N-D?

MR. COLE: L-A-N-D.

MS. BERMAN: Did you – but did you draw or paint? Did you like to do it yourself?

MR. COLE: No. Never.

MS. BERMAN: Mm-hm. Now, Stieglitz was actually – Was he interested in your mother, or he just sort of made a pet of you?

MR. COLE: Yeah, I think he was just interested in people that were interested in what he showed.

MS. BERMAN: Did you ever meet any of the artists that came into the gallery?

MR. COLE: Never. I don't remember ever meeting any artist – before I got to Associated American Artists [AAA] in '46. Certainly, if I did it was no artist of note.

MS. BERMAN: Well, Stieglitz was an artist, of course.

MR. COLE: Yeah. Well, he was my first art connection, I guess, to the art world.

MS. BERMAN: Well, did you – did you have any sense when you looked at his gallery – did you have a sense of the gallery itself as a gallery, or interest in it as sort of an environment.

MR. COLE: I – I just was fascinated with Georgia O’Keeffe. And I did go to a few of the shows. I presume I went to some others, but I don’t remember them. I only remember – and it’s funny; in the Whitney retrospective [1970] of O’Keeffe – I don’t think it was in the Met; it was an earlier one – there was a piece of graph paper, and it had a line with a sort of bulge in it, like this; and then it had a zigzag. And it was *Man and Woman*. And I – that – Stieglitz explained that to me. And it was so abstracted, of course, but – I just remember that little tidbit.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, he explained it to you. It would be interesting to recall what he said. Now, you – you went to Cornell, and you majored in English and minored in art history. Was there a reason that it was that way, rather than the other way.

MR. COLE: Art history at Cornell University consisted of one hour each semester, elective, your junior or senior year, period. And it was a slide course, which took you from Egypt right through to Picasso. And it’s the only course I ever got A’s in. And now they give a doctorate. It’s just amazing. Two hours, one hour each semester, was all that it had for the history of art.

MS. BERMAN: Well, why did you decide to go to Cornell?

MR. COLE: It was just something people were doing in those days. Dartmouth happened to be my first choice, and I didn’t get into Dartmouth, and I did get into Cornell, and Penn and Columbia, and I didn’t want a city, so I picked Cornell.

MS. BERMAN: So now, did you collect – I think I read in one of the articles that you may’ve been collecting prints in college? Is that correct?

MR. COLE: No.

MS. BERMAN: Ok. That’s a mistake.

MR. COLE: Mother was the collector. Let’s see. Associated American Artists was started in 1934. And Mother was one of the early people that were buying the five dollar prints. And while I was in college, I would come home and Mother would have the catalogues. And I’d say, “Get this, get this, get this,” and she’d buy them and put ‘em in her sollinger box, or occasionally I think they hung a few of them, but I don’t remember that.

MS. BERMAN: Now, she would listen to you.

MR. COLE: Yes, but she also had some definite opinions.

MS. BERMAN: In those days, what were – what were you telling her to buy?

MR. COLE: I do remember I told her to buy Grant Wood. I don’t remember any of the – I remember Marion Greenwood was another person that I thought would – and Earl Horter. Those were prints that were being published by – and I thought were very interesting.

This is almost an aside, but I must tell you that years later, when I got to Associated American Artists, and I took it over – this was 1961, ‘62 – Mother came to me and wanted to sell the Grant Woods. And I said, “You know, Mom, they’re worth about twelve hundred apiece, and I’ll only take a 20% commission, and –” And she said, “Oh, if that’s all, I don’t wanna sell ‘em.” I forgot all about it. About 1966 or ‘7, few – few Grant Woods came up at Sotheby’s. And they sold for over three thousand dollars. And I called my mother and I said, “Mom, you won’t believe it! These Grant Woods are selling for over three thousand.” She says, “I know, they’re mine.” [Laughs; Phone rings; tape stops, re-starts]

MS. BERMAN: I must ask you, why did your mother decide to sell them at Sotheby’s and not tell you?

MR. COLE: I have no idea. [MS. BERMAN Laughs] I guess she thought she’d get more money than getting it from me, that’s all I can say. [Laughs]

MS. BERMAN: Well, just by the way, you told her to buy Grant Wood. Do you remember what she had picked out from Associated American Artists?

MR. COLE: No, not really. It was – it was a very nice cross section collection. And frankly, I don’t know what happened to most of it. I think they gave it away to friends and wedding presents and whatever.

MS. BERMAN: But you decided, evidently, you didn't get enough art history or you - and you went to Rutgers as -

MR. COLE: My first job out of college was with Sears Roebuck. And I was an executive trainee at eighteen dollars a week. And I was in New Brunswick, New Jersey, at the store there, running the men's clothing department, which consisted of overalls and work shirts and a few dress shirts and socks and stuff. And - I went to Rutgers just to take some art history, further art history courses. That was it, just night classes.

MS. BERMAN: Mm-hm. 'Cause I didn't think that Rutgers had any kind of great shakes art history department then.

MR. COLE: Didn't. Whatever they had is what I took.

MS. BERMAN : Mm-hm.

MR. COLE: And I have very little memory of who taught it or anything like that. It was mostly slides, I do remember that.

MS. BERMAN: So you were living in New Brunswick?

MR. COLE: Yes, at the YMCA.

MS. BERMAN: Mm-hm. So this must've been - I mean -

MR. COLE: Well, this lasted a relatively short period of time. I got out of Cornell in 1939. And I was drafted on February 26th, 1941.

MS. BERMAN: Seems early.

MR. COLE: Before we were at war.

MS. BERMAN: Mm-hm. Yeah. Why do you think you were drafted? You were -

MR. COLE: Oh, the number came up.

MS. BERMAN: Mm-hm.

MR. COLE: We were all registered for the draft, whether you liked it or not, if you were over eighteen. And my number came up. So I went from New Brunswick to -

MS. BERMAN: Camp Kilmer.

MR. COLE: No, what's the fort in New Jersey, the big one?

MS. BERMAN: Hoboken. Was Hoboken there? No, Fort Dix?

MR. COLE: Fort Dix. Went to Fort Dix, got mustered in, got uniform, took a few weeks of latrine duty and peeling potatoes and marching, and finally they called us all out, and each platoon got into a train. And it zigzagged back and forth; we thought we were going to Alabama, to Georgia, to Texas. We didn't know where we were going. And we finally get out, and we were at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. After two hours - three hours in the train from Fort Dix, shunting back and forth. And we're in the Signal Corps. And I am in the signal construction company, which means you climb telephone poles and string wires. And there was a fellow soldier by the name of Denny [ph], Robert Denny, I think, who was a Princeton graduate. And he found out I was a Cornell man. And he then found out that we never should've been in signal construction; we were supposed to be in radio intelligence. And I often think about this as the complete twist of fate of our sitting opposite each other, all happened in that moment of time, when a sergeant, rather than call the roll and assign the positions for every soldier on the train, just took one car and made them radio intelligence, another car signal construction. And that was it. And I was in the signal construction. And most of the guys who were in radio intelligence were sent overseas and got killed. I think it is the one twist of all my life that is as capricious as that. Anyway, that's neither here nor there, but it's - it's always struck me.

MS. BERMAN: So were you in this country the whole time?

MR. COLE: So I'm in signal construction, climbing poles. Finally got a good job wiring up a hospital. And then they wanted a typist. And with my two fingers, I went to headquarters and got a job as a typist, where I typed on the old mimeograph paper. You know, where - with that blue paper, [MS. BERMAN: Yeah] and I would type the orders for the day, transferring soldiers or bringing them in or - And then I became a Private First Class. That, I think, was my highest rank; I don't think I ever became a corporal. And around me were all these master

sergeants and staff sergeants, with all the stripes. And of course, the general's office was right across the way from me.

And then comes Pearl Harbor. And I remember being in New York. And I was with my grandmother. And Roosevelt comes on. And we were ordered back to our posts. And that night - I should say before Pearl Harbor, we lived the life of luxury. I think I saw every show on Broadway. We got weekend passes. And you'd go to 38th Street, I think, and Lex [Lexington]. But it was a soldiers and sailors place, and they had all these tickets, and I'd get two tickets, call a date, go to the theater. Two tickets, buy.

Anyway, I remember I had a car, which totaled eventually. But - the thing that I remember that day was heading back to post and wondering what's gonna happen to us. And the thing is, nothing happened. You know, we went on with our lives. Signal people were being sent abroad, of course, and we were busy. And the other thing I remember is on my desk, I had the Congressional medal - Not the Medal of Honor, a Medal of Distinguished Service for [Joseph] Lockard, who was the guy in Hawaii who alerted the fact that the Japanese planes were coming, and they ignored him. He was all alone, and he picked it up on his radar screen. And I remember I had his medal, and he was brought to the post, and we had a big parade when he got the medal. And I wrote the orders for it, the citation.

Anyway, by February, I guess, they were starting officer candidate schools. And I applied to the adjutant general's department, which in peacetime, you had to be over 40 to be in, which was the Army administration. And lo and behold, by March, I was sent to the first or second class of the adjutant general's department at Fort Washington, Maryland. And over all of the other sergeants and the master sergeants, they couldn't believe that a Private First Class would be sent to officer candidate school. And I got out in three months as a first - as a second lieutenant. In another two weeks, or three weeks, I was made a first lieutenant. And in three months, I was a captain. Let's see, this is 1942, 18 - 22 - I was 24 or '5 years old. And we were stationed - if I - I had leave and went into Washington, D.C., the MPs would come by and say, "Sir, can we see your ID?" [Laughs] Which was very funny.

Anyway, I then was retained to teach. For a guy who had flunked speech making or - at Cornell, because I was so scared, here I was now made a school teacher. And I became a very good one. And I taught military record keeping, military decorations, on and on. And I taught other officer candidates. And I even commanded a company one term. And I stayed teaching at the officer candidate school until I was discharged, five years later. We went from Fort Washington, Maryland to - At that time, I'd - By then I'd gotten married to my first wife [Vivian Vanderpool]. We then went to Fort Sam Houston, Texas. And that's where my first child, my daughter, was born. I was transferred before she was born to Fort Oglethorpe in Georgia. And my wife and daughter-to-be went into Brooke General Hospital. We were transferred, because they thought the casualties in Japan would be so great that they were going to take over the entire fort to become a hospital. And then Nancy and my first wife joined me in Fort Oglethorpe, and - And that's from where I was discharged, in March 1946. That's the whole Army story that I can think of.

MS. BERMAN: Let me just - just - I realize we're missing, just in terms of names - What was your mother's first name?

MR. COLE: Dorothy.

MS. BERMAN: Dorothy. And your first - your first wife's name was Ruth?

MR. COLE: My first wife?

MS. BERMAN: Was Ruth?

MR. COLE: Vivian, yeah.

MS. BERMAN: Ok, I only knew Ruth, so that was your—?

MR. COLE: Wait, no, Lillyan.

MS. BERMAN: Lillyan, right.

MR. COLE: Lillyan, you knew.

MS. BERMAN: Right, Lillyan, ok. So your first, her name was Vivian?

MR. COLE: Vivian Vanderpool, and she was from Norman, Oklahoma. But she was in Washington, working with "Wild Bill" Donovan and the OSS, oh so secret. I never even knew what she did. She never told me.

MS. BERMAN: And you weren't curious? Or you knew you'd -

MR. COLE: Yes, but she just said, "Don't ask me, please."

MS. BERMAN: Mm-hm. Well, 'cause war time, it made sense.

MR. COLE: Yeah. Well, I mean, shortly after we married, she left the job.

MS. BERMAN: And so your eldest child is named Nancy.

MR. COLE: Right.

MS. BERMAN: Ok. So that's the Army story. Just in curiosity, when you used to go in on leave, either in New York or Washington, did you - was it mostly kind of theater and dating? Or did you go to any galleries or - ?

MR. COLE: I do not remember doing any art-wise things during the Army. Except - Oh, wait a minute. Yes. At Fort Sam Houston, it was - There were 40 posts around - Fort Sam is in San Antonio. There were 40 posts around that - There were Army airfields right around, there were other military posts, there were small posts, there were big posts. There were literally thousands of soldiers in that area. So housing was unbelievably difficult. And the first house I had, I remember, was a garage apartment. The garage was underneath, and on top of the garage was a so-called apartment. And I kept trying to get better quarters. And I had heard that there was a woman named McNay, who had some cottages to rent. So one morning - At that point, am I a captain? Yes, I'm Captain Cole. Goes and knocks on the door, and this strange looking woman in a huge purplish kimono opens the door, and I said, "I'm here to ask about -" She said, "I don't have anything for rent right now." And I said, "Is that a Renoir over there behind you?" And she said, "Yes, come in." And this was the McNay who -

MS. BERMAN: Marion Koogler McNay.

MR. COLE: That's right. And I'm the only person, when I go down to San Antonio, I am the only person that ever knew her. Even John Leeper didn't know her, Bob Towbin didn't know her. Mrs. Towbin may have known her. But - Anyway, she and I became friends, and we exchanged Christmas cards until she died.

MS. BERMAN: So what was it like? You used to visit her, and what would -?

MR. COLE: Oh, I - Very seldom. You know, I was busy, I was - The military was not really a picnic, not during wartime.

MS. BERMAN: No. That's - that's interesting, that you saw that and then - Well, all of a sudden [inaudible].

MR. COLE: I don't even remember some of the other paintings she had. I know she had [Joan] Miró, I know she had - I think she had a Cezanne, I think she had a Monet. She had that sort of impressionist school.

MS. BERMAN: But did you get the cottage?

MR. COLE: No.

MS. BERMAN: [Inaudible].

MR. COLE: But years later, I visited John Leeper, who was director of the museum, and he was in one of the cottages.

MS. BERMAN: Mm-hm. By the way, I realized why I had called Lillyan and said Ruth Cole, because Jacob Kainen, you know, Ruth Cole.

MR. COLE: Ruth was Cole.

MS. BERMAN: Called Ruth is Cole, that's what I meant.

MR. COLE: Sure, I always call her cousin.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, ok. So alright. So we're - we're now going to discharge you from the Army.

MR. COLE: Right.

MS. BERMAN: And you and your family move back to New York City?

MR. COLE: At that point, I had one daughter, and we got a place in Mount Vernon. An apartment. But I think I stayed with my parents for a month or so. And they lived on 125 East 72nd Street. I remember the apartment well. And at that time, my younger brother was - Charles was in the service. And Dick was home. [Phone rings; tape stops, re- starts]

MS. BERMAN: So you were – Ok, you're with your parents.

MR. COLE: And – Dad said to me, "Son, you're going to work for more part of your life than anything else. And the best thing for you to do is find something you like." In the meanwhile, Sears Roebuck wanted me back. Didn't want me, but was willing to have me back in the executive training position I had. They had given me profit sharing while I was away, and asked if I wanted stock or the cash, and I ended up with 5,000 dollars in cash, which was an unbelievable amount of money. 1946. I should've had the stock. But anyhow – So I went down to apply for a job, and had an interview with Reeves Lewenthal, the founder of Associated American Artists. And I was still in uniform. And he hired me.

MS. BERMAN: Well, but how did you just fasten on, you know, the whole –

MR. COLE: Well, it all came because my parents had subscribed to AAA, and I had worked with them on buying these five dollar prints. And I was in charge of the mail order. Now, my first – And also, all the production catalogues. And my first job, within one day, I had to do a brochure – which was literally a four page, five and a half, eight and a half thing – on – on Aaron Bohrod, who was an artist/war correspondent, just come back. And these were drawings he had made of New Guinea and all the rest of that. Anyway, I then remember, went over to *Life Magazine* and got a picture of him as a war correspondent, which was on the cover. And I made a picture of one of the New Guinea things, listed all the prints, all the gouaches that were in the exhibition, and a bio, which I wrote, and produced it, and took about a week to do this, and Reeves was very pleased.

But then I do remember working – And here is the part that really affects the oral history. I do remember working on the catalogues and the supplements offering the prints for five dollars, or six for 25 dollars. The procedure was to work with two sollinger boxes, both of which were filled with unmatted proofs of etchings and lithographs and woodcuts. Some wood engravings. One of the cases was something they sorta passed by, that they didn't think it was appealing, and they didn't – probably would never publish it. But I would lay out on the floor in the gallery – which was at 711 Fifth Avenue, which was this huge space, mostly paintings, with a small print room – and I would lay out on the floor about 40 or 50 proofs. And Bob Parsons, who was the executive vice-president, just out of the Navy, and Reeves, and a woman named Estelle Mandel, who was a vice-president, and really, my boss, and myself would get together and discuss what prints to put into the next supplement. And they'd say, "Well, we certainly want this Gordon Grant; we certainly want this Luigi Lucioni." They were staples. And then they'd say, "Well, we can't have all landscape; we can't have –" And then we get a figurative one, and we get this and that. And we usually would pick out of the 40, 12 to 16 prints that would go into the next supplement. And then I would take over.

I would have halftones made of each of the prints. If the proofs weren't signed, we'd fake a signature. Just for the halftone. On a single print. Because it was a matter of time. Reeves would – or Estelle would order the printing of the prints. Sometimes we didn't ask for the full 250. It would – The edition would be 260. 250 for AAA, and ten for the artist. The printing, if it were wood, was done by the artist. Like Asa Shepherds did his own. I think there were a few other, if it was wood, but not too many. The lithographs were all done at George Miller. And the etchings were all done in Brooklyn at Anderson-Lamb, right under the Brooklyn Bridge. The plates would be gotten from the artist, or the stones would be at Miller. And the editions would be ordered. Sometimes we'd only order a hundred at a time. Save money. The print – The artist got two hundred and fifty dollars for signing the prints. We paid for the printing. At George Miller, the printing at that time was 25 cents a print.

We then would get the prints matted in non-rag mats. And a biography for each artist would be attached to the mat. And I would write the biography. And it would say, "*Fog Brown*, original lithograph; signed original lithograph by Gordon Grant." And then they would tell a whole brief biography about Gordon Grant. And then at the bottom Associated American Artists, 711 Fifth Avenue, and a little "copyright." All this would come together. The catalogue – I would write each artist that was in the catalogue, and ask for the artist to send me a brief commentary on the particular print that was going in. So when the catalogue – or the supplement, the supplement was the 12 to 16 pieces. The supplement would have a little introductory page explaining what these were, and how much, and how it worked and all this, and framing and whatever. And then each page would have the illustration of the print with a little gray halftone border, and the signature, and that's – And then it would have the artist's comment and then a brief bio. And that was on each page of the supplement.

[BEGIN TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO]

MS. BERMAN: The last thing we had talked about was the framing of these, which were –

MR. COLE: Right, well that's probably listed in –

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MR. COLE: Did I – did you have that supplement, or give it back to me?

MS. BERMAN: Oh, here it is.

MR. COLE: Ok, well, let's - I don't see anything on framing on this one.

MS. BERMAN: That's ok.

MR. COLE: But - Anyway, it seems like one of the pages is gone from this.

MS. BERMAN: But I still want to get back to - You thought of no other gallery? This was the only place you went? This was the -

MR. COLE: Only gallery.

MS. BERMAN: This was just what you fastened on.

MR. COLE: You've got to realize there were not that many. 57th Street did have a group of galleries. I do remember going into Milch. I do remember Kraushaar, when it was on the corner of 57th and Madison, the southeast corner. I remember Knoedler's was at the corner of 56th and Fifth, the northwest corner. Very fancy - No, no, Duveen [Galleries] was there. Knoedler's was on 57th, right about where the IBM Building is. I do remember going to those galleries. I - And Kennedy was where? Kennedy - I think it was up right near the Savoy Plaza, between 57th and Eighth or Eighth and Ninth. That's where I met Albert Reese.

But getting back to the supplement. Because this is part of an amazing moment of time. The prints were five dollars each, or six for 25 dollars.

MS. BERMAN: Still, in '46.

MR. COLE: 1946. It went on through to 1950. During World War II, if you bought a War Bond for eighteen dollars and seventy five cents, which at maturity was 25 dollars, you still would get your six prints.

Once the supplement was finished, it would be accompanied by an order form, separate, and a return envelope. So those three pieces would go into an envelope. The mailing room - Well, before we got to the mailing room, I would discuss with Estelle and Reeves who were we going to mail this to? We certainly were going to mail it to the purchaser list. The purchaser list consisted of those people who had purchased prints. But besides having a purchaser list, we also had a remove purchaser list. You must realize, by 1946, people had been buying since 1934. Now, every so often - three years, five years - we would take the purchaser list and call it remove purchaser, or RP. RP-1, RP- 2, RP-3. Meant remove purchaser. We would mail to the remove purchaser list. And every time they bought, their stencil - These were metal -

MS. BERMAN: A mailing list label?

MR. COLE: Mail address labels. Done in metal. They would be punched out in a machine. We would remove that name and make them purchasers. So after a supplement would go out, let's say we had only 500 purchasers, and several thousand remove purchasers. Eventually, we would weed out from the RP-3 list all the people that may've bought the one print for a wedding present, and never again. So we kept the purchaser list as active as possible. Otherwise -

As it was, the purchaser list - And here, I am not completely positive on figures. But I do know that we would mail - especially, like a Christmas catalogue or something, or a Christmas card catalogue, 50,000 people. And our total mailing list grew to well over a 100,000, if you counted the remove purchasers. I don't recall what postage was. We used third class mail. So it obviously was the least expensive way to mail, but we had a mailing room on 42nd Street, between Eighth and Ninth Avenue, which I was in charge of. There was a woman there named Marguerite Bright [ph], who ran the mailing room. And she would address all the envelopes. I'd say, "Address the P list and the RP-3." So she'd address them all. It'd be a 25, 30 000 mailing.

Then I would, of course, have the catalogues and the order forms and the envelopes all printed. They all go to the mailing room. Then we would get day people in, pieceworkers, that would pick up the envelope, pick up the order form, throw it in the thing, throw it in the envelope, seal everything. Moving faster than hands could - I mean amazing. They - they - A pieceworker would do 10,000 pieces in a day! Wonderful people. Crazy group of people. I just remember being in awe. And they sat at long tables with sort of sides, and just bang-bang-bang, bang-bang-bang, bang-bang-bang, all day long. And they would be paid so much per thousand. And again, unfortunately, I have no memory of - But it was so little. Maybe five dollars a thousand would've been a lot. You know, probably was about right. And that would be the story of the patron supplement. Then every so often, we'd have a new product. I remember we had a bust of Roosevelt. And I still remember the return envelopes being filled with excrement and stuff like that. People that didn't approve of our bust of Roosevelt. I know we had a bust of Lincoln.

Then, in order to get new people onto our mailing list that didn't know about Associated American Artists, we would advertise. And Schwab and Beatty was our advertising agency, a very well known advertising agency. And they also were the advertising agency for a new startup company called Harry Abrams. And also for George Macy's Book of the Month Club, which had been well established. Those were sort of the real culture gang then. Of course, the publicity that Associated American Artists got was constant. Because not only did we have the print program, but by '40 - the middle forties, we were showing George Grosz, we were showing Sigmund Menkes, Doris Lee, Arnold Blanch, all the roster of 60 artists that we represented exclusively. Raphael Soyer, Chaim Gross, on and on and on. And in addition to my doing the supplements, I would also be doing the gallery catalogues for these things. And when I came aboard, we also had a gallery in Chicago, which I closed in '47, myself. I - I went out to liquidate - Can't believe these things.

Anyway, following the mail order program, trying to have some sense of logic for what I'm saying - We would advertise in the New Yorker or the New York Times. We would take full pages in the Times magazine section saying, "Is your home picture poor?" [MS. BERMAN Laughs] You know, "You can own original works of art for only five dollars." And we'd key the ads with a coupon. The coupon would come into our gallery. We wouldn't even open it. It would say, "Box NYT6, NYT4, New York Times, or NY -" Whatever. We had all these codes. All of it would go to the mailroom, who would tally what came in from each ad. And they would then send out a catalogue, rather than a supplement. And a catalogue looked like this.

Now, this is one I did, six-oh-five. And what it would consist of would be all the prints that we had put in our supplements that hadn't sold out. So we would then re-catalogue it, and hopefully, eventually sell out. Eventually, this catalogue would become obsolete, because we'd be selling out too many and it was silly. We'd mark - we'd have a rubber stamp. And we'd write, "Edition exhausted," stamp it right over the picture.

MS. BERMAN: I shouldn't get off the subject, but I just was flipping through this catalogue, and I see you've got a print by Arthur Danto in there?

MR. COLE: Oh, yeah.

MS. BERMAN: I didn't know that Arthur was a printmaker.

MR. COLE: Oh, yeah!

MS. BERMAN: Mm-hm, with AAA. That's fascinating.

MR. COLE: I— I met Arthur when he was still sort of an artist, and before he became the critic-philosopher.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MR. COLE: And that little print on top - Let me look at that again. Yeah, the little one on top as one of - Oh, did that sell! I think that's Susie, his daughter.

MS. BERMAN: Well, it's a child -

MR. COLE: Yeah. Well, those weren't all five - those were now ten dollar prints, you see. That happened when I took over in '58.

MS. BERMAN: Ok, well, I didn't mean to interrupt you, but I -

MR. COLE: That's alright, but it gave you the flavor of what we were doing.

MS. BERMAN: Mm-hm. Well, it's also a name I - I did not expect to see there, so it's - it's very eclectic. Anyway, this mailroom operation sounds absolutely -

MR. COLE: It was amazing. Then we would cut a stencil on these - And these were NPs, new purchasers. And we'd have an NP-1, 2, 3. Because every year, those who had never bought would become obsolete. We would mail them occasionally, just hoping they would nibble back. And everything was coded on the order forms, on the stencils, so that when the order forms came in, we would analyze - The letter P at the bottom right of the order form would mean it's a purchaser. Then we'd check on the NPs and the non-purchasers and remove purchasers. So we would know what lists, and the cost of mailing, and whether it was worth mailing to a list like that, and what they were really interested in. It was really fascinating, in a sense, the scale at which we were operating back in 1946, '7, '8, '9.

MS. BERMAN: Well, to think there would be fifty to a hundred thousand people, not just the population being smaller, but the group who would be interested in art, the pool was much smaller.

MR. COLE: Oh, yes. We'd rent our lists and get money for that, through Book of the Month Club, or to some

record company or something like that. We'd always see what the mailing was before we'd ok that. But you have to realize that that operation was one of three parts of Associated American Artists. The reason - I know that operation. Besides my doing the catalogues for the gallery and the mail, getting the artists, selecting the works, which I worked with them on, keeping records of ads, and placing ads, and all this, besides - Well, usually, the placing of ads, we'd have a budget come in from Schwab and Beatty, and they'd say, "This is for September through December," for 1947. And it'd be approved, and they'd take over from there.

But I also was Mary Ashland. Mary Ashland was the lady that you wrote to for all your problems or all your correspondence. And anything to do with mail order, I would get. And I would have a secretary, to whom I'd dictate. We didn't have machines; or if we did, we didn't use 'em. And I'd dictate answers to these - I'd probably answer ten, fifteen letters a day. Eventually, it got so big we hired somebody to do Mary Ashland correspondence.

I would also have museums come in to look at our prints. I remember Bill Lieberman getting a supplement and coming in and buying a few of these five dollars prints for the Museum of Modern Art. A lot of the Rockefeller family started buying prints there. Sandy Smith still swears that his first thing art - work of art he ever bought, he bought from AAA. And when I'm at a fair, I guarantee at least 50 or 100 people come up to me during the course of a fair and say, "I bought my first print." And there's no question that it started so many people collecting. And of course, in the forties, people collected because they couldn't afford paintings. So we'd lose collectors as the affluent, more affluent disappeared. But we had a real core of steady collectors. Prints was what they wanted, and that's all they wanted. And of course, I lived - have lived through the days where the print is no longer a second class citizen now, thanks to people like Picasso and [Marc] Chagall and Jasper Johns and a few others.

But I was saying the AAA was divided into three major parts. One was the mail order. Two was the gallery and the gallery operation. And the third was called special services. And that is when we would try to get corporations to use art in some way or another. Like Brown and Bigelow, a calendar. Or playing cards. I can remember Grant Wood playing cards of the fruits and the vegetables and the wild flowers on the playing cards. I can remember Grant Wood placemats. Reeves was incredibly creative. I mean, he went on the Medici role of art was - could be used anywhere. I think the most brilliant thing he came up with was using art as a publicity vehicle for department stores. And I think the first one was in St. Louis, Scruggs, Vandervoort, [and] Barney, for a hundred thousand dollars. It was a huge amount of money! I mean, in one fell swoop, a hundred thousand dollars, they would get fifteen or twenty artists that would go into Missouri and would paint aspects. I remember Lawrence Beall Smith did the city; Aaron Bohrod did St. Louis; Peter Hurd did the ranches and the center part. We wanted to get Benton to do something and he - That was our falling out with Benton. Benton felt: How can a guy from Chicago paint Missouri? He wouldn't know Missouri. And he - It made all the newspapers, that the whole project was a farce, getting people from New York and all this around the country to come in and try to interpret what Missouri was, and only Missouri artists should really be used. And then Reeves kinda said, "That means if you have an opera, you want only Missouri singers; if you have a concert, you want only Missouri musicians. How ridiculous this is."

Anyway, Benton was pooh-poohed in the long run. And they would then get a total of about sixty, eighty paintings, plus all the preparatory drawings. And this would circulate throughout their state. And reams of publicity! I mean, any time it got to a college, a university, a museum or whatever, it was reviewed, it was this. Scruggs, Vandervoort, Barney Collection, their collection, their collec - So for their hundred thousand dollars, they got almost a million dollars worth of advertising.

And the next buyer was JL Hudson in Detroit, and the last was Gimbel's in Pennsylvania. And I have a feeling that at that point, guys like Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Franz Kline, and a few others, were suddenly becoming noticed. And somewhere around '49 or '50, the American scene, and the artists represented by AAA just were no longer of any interest whatsoever. It just stopped. Where every museum in the country had been buying - We had gotten all the top prizes at the Pennsylvania Academy Annual or the National Academy Annuals, all our artists were all represented. The Library of Congress, they had their Pennel fund and had annuals. And out of the ten top prints selected for prizes, six would be AAA five dollar prints. It -

But when it died, it died. And somewhere around - I'm trying to remember. I think I left AAA in fifty - I'd have to look up records, but I - I think I left AAA around 1950, which I don't put in my bio. And I went to work in the menswear business for five years. AAA was taken over by Albert Landry. And - Well, actually, Reeves struggled with it for several years. Oh, what am I saying? I went back in '58. So it must've been '53 that I left. Can't imagine what happened in those late forties, early fifties. The mail order did stay up pretty well, and there was business there. But I went in the menswear business, which my father was in; and five years later, I took over AAA. Reeves was then the president of a greeting card company called Russkraft. And he called me to come back to Associated American Artists in 1958. And life begins at forty; that's how old I was. And what did I take over? I took over a mailing room at 42nd Street. I took over 17,000 unsold five dollar prints. - And that's it.

All the paintings and everything else belonged to Albert Landry, who was running Associated American Artists. So suddenly, there were two Associated American Artists. There was the print department, and there was Albert. And Albert finally just changed it to the Albert Landry Gallery, because it was stupid. And Reeves evidently owned the name Associated American Artists. And I started from nothing. I rented a floor-through at 605 Fifth Avenue. I seem to remember something like seven or eight thousand a year. And – hung in the front gallery – I had two offices, and then a gallery space. I hung some of the old AAA prints. And then I had a shipping room, and then a mailing room in back. I consolidated; we gave up 42nd Street, so I consolidated everything.

And then I started contacting artists. I got a hold of Luigi Lucioni; I remember Raphael Soyer, Joe Hirsch. I remember having – At this point, all these artists had their own different galleries. Lucioni was with Milch; Hirsch was with Herman Baron at ACA; Soyer was at ACA, I think.

MS. BERMAN: Yeah, 'cause Bella started at ACA, right?

MR. COLE: Oh, yeah. And then she took Soyer when she formed Bischoff. Anyway, I contacted the artists. And I printed editions of 250, ten dollars; I put out my first catalogue. And it was very well received, and we were in business. Actually, we never lost money. Even in 1958, I managed to pay the salaries and pay the rent and make a few dollars. So anyhow –

And then as it grew, I went to Europe – about 1959, '60, I took my first trip – and would buy Chagalls and [Auguste] Renoirs, Picassos, God knows what all. I remember I have a diary of my first trip, of which I spent seven thousand dollars. [Laughs] God, I'd buy a single print today and don't think about it. And brought back multiples of things; so twenty Renoir re-strikes, twenty of this, twenty of that. And catalogued, and I got some [James McNeill] Whistlers from Harry Katz, and that went around. And added on a whole new dimension in our catalogues. But I must – Ah, you see, this is the trouble with trying to do this from memory; you miss things, and it's hard to track back.

But in 1947, I think it was, we put out a special catalogue, which contained Rembrandts, Whistlers, [Albrecht] Durers, [Jean Baptiste-Camille] Corot, [Jean-Francois] Millet, Picasso and Lautrec. And I – I must try to dig that up and find for you, because it's fascinating to see the prices. But those catalogues, I remember I went to Bill Collins, who subsequently became director of the Clark Museum, but Bill was at Knoedler's, and asked if I could have a Rembrandt to catalogue. And he's sitting in front of a counter, almost that big, and he says, "Which one do you want? These are all Rembrandts." I mean, I'm not exaggerating, five, ten, fifteen, twenty, thirty to forty solander boxes filled with Rembrandts. And I said, "I have no idea. Something like a hundred dollars, maybe." So I remember the first one was a Gold Weigher, a little print. And he showed me six of them. And this was 75 dollars, this was a 90, this was a hundred and twenty five, this was a hundred and twenty five, this was two hundred and fifty. I said, "How can they all have different prices?" He said, "Look at them!" [MS. BERMAN Laughs] And, you know, "Don't you see, this is very late and light, and this is crisp, this is perfect." Anyway, I borrowed a hundred and twenty five dollar one. I think he gave me fifty dollars off on sale. And it was catalogued among all the others I mentioned. And I remember getting a call from Michigan, "I wanna buy that Rembrandt."

MS. BERMAN: Who did you get it from?

MR. COLE: Somebody in Michigan.

MS. BERMAN: Oh.

MR. COLE: What excitement! We had a sold a print by mail for a hundred and twenty five dol – And a Rembrandt! Then, shortly thereafter, hour later, I get another call. So I call up Bill Collins. I said, "Do you have another I could have for a hundred and twen –" "Yes." Third call, fourth call; finally, he said, "Mr. Cole, Rembrandt is dead, you know." [MS. BERMAN Laughs] Yeah, but – Those catalogues were really seminal. While some of the auction houses in Europe had been auctioning this material from the 1900s or earlier, nobody had ever gone to customers, private like this, across the country. And that was some excitement.

In 1959, '60, I sort of formed a umbrella called Associated International Artists, which then allowed me to start publishing artists from all over the world, as well as some of the stars. I remember going to Curt Valentin to get a Rembrandt— a Picasso. Just gotten in one of *Three Graces*. And he got five of them, because he was on the Picasso distribution, 50 edition. And he said, "How many of these do you want?" And I said, "Well, I'd like one to catalogue." I said, "How much is it?" And he said "75 dollars." I said, "That much?" I didn't sell one! And I brought it back to him and I said, "I'm sorry, we didn't sell it." He said, "Why don't you buy it? I'll let you have it for 35 dollars." And I said, "I don't have the money." That print today is probably eight to twelve, fifteen thousand dollars. Yeah. But I was selling Chagalls for 80 dollars, the large suite Picassos for a hundred, a hundred and a quarter. Yeah. And usually, you could get three or four of the same print.

MS. BERMAN: So the audience was growing more sophisticated. You know?

MR. COLE: That was the beginning of the print boom, the sixties. That was the beginning of the artist making larger prints, selling them for 25, 40, 50. [Gabor] Peterdi, [Mauricio] Lasansky. It was a period where the printmakers had their own world; they had the biennial in Brooklyn every year – or the annual in Brooklyn every year. And they did fine. It was – it was a moment of time that – And Associated American Artists' only competition was Weyhe Gallery, which by the way, is right up here. When [Carl] Zigrosser was there and – Well, maybe he left. I think – I forget her name. But, you know – And of course, Weyhe had [Georges] Rouaults and Chagalls and all that material, too. And Downtown Gallery had people like Stuart Davis, Curt Valentin had [Lyonel] Feininger. Feiningers were fifteen bucks a pieces; Stuart Davises were fifteen dollars. And Edith [Halpert] – And she also had [Rinaldo] Cuneo; she – she never showed them. Never. She was too busy trying to sell a drawing for a hundred bucks.

Anyway, I've gotten us up to about the early sixties.

MS. BERMAN: That's what you think. [Laughs] So I actually – I wanna track back – I mean, I'm only gonna – Let me see how – I wonder if this might –

MR. COLE: I know I have to stop in about ten minutes, because I have somebody coming to look [MS. BERMAN: Right] at some Milton Avery.

What I'll try to do between now and the next time is start putting together some of these catalogues and just giving 'em to you for the Archives. You might have 'em; I don't know.

MS. BERMAN: Well, some of the Associated American Artist papers were microfilmed, so we may; but it's – it's fine to have some –

MR. COLE: Well, these are the physical catalogues that were published, and I've got a stack of 'em; I'll put 'em together, and you decide what you wanna keep or what you don't.

MS. BERMAN: Why – why did Reeves Lewenthal leave the gallery?

MR. COLE: I think Reeves was – There just wasn't enough money in it. I think rents started up. I mean, I think we were renting 711 Fifth for something like ten thousand a year. Today that space would be close to a million. I think the artists were getting dissatisfied. There weren't sales, they weren't making money. Reeves had literally supported these artists. He – One of our biggest clients was Abbott Laboratories. And they put out a publication called *What's New*, on medical things. And it was probably one of the outstanding medical publications put out by a pharmaceutical company. And the illustrations. If a woman was taking a certain pill because she was pregnant, there'd be a Raphael Soyer woman, pregnant woman, and all these, and— and fees were gotten for all this.

Abbott stopped. There was no more future in the department store thing; it had sort of run its course or the energy wasn't there. And the art world changed. And he [Lewenthal] went into various things. He went into – He wore so many hats, he – First was the gallery. He started when he was 24 years old. He was a public relations guy. He – he represented, I think, a guy named [Douglas] Chandor, who was the world's famous portrait artist at the time.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, he [Douglas Chandor] did Roosevelt; he did all the hands of Roosevelt down in the National Portrait Gallery.

MR. COLE: Well, Reeves was his public relations guy. And he was doing so well, you know – Early twenties, he was making deposits in his bank of fifty and a hundred and two hundred dollars at a time. You know, what's he doing? And then he took ill. And I think for several months – And then he conceived the five dollar idea. 1934, the height of the Depression. And his insurance man put up the money, and became an albatross too, because – His name was Mory [ph] – I just heard from a daughter. It won't come to me.

Anyway, Reeves had to pay him off every month. Reeves, of course, lived a fairly flamboyant life. He had a beautiful apartment on 71st and Madison, in that apartment house that goes from 70th to 71st on the east side of the street. And I know Harry Abrams lived in that building. I remember some member of the New Deal cabinet was in that building, friends of my parents. And he had a country place. But when things tightened up, he had divorced his wife, and he – he just retrenched, and he went into this greeting card business, and then he dropped that after a while; he went into mining, coal mining, West Virginia. And when he died, that's what he was doing. But, you know, he was a good friend of the Alan brothers. In fact, the memorial services for Reeves was held in their office.

MS. BERMAN: The Alan brothers?

MR. COLE: Charlie Alan and – multi-trillionaires, you know. They're still around. One of the – one of the sons runs

some big motion picture company. Oh, there was a whole thing in the magazine section of the Times years ago about this very quiet family. I – I've been to those offices with Reeves. It was in 711 Fifth. On the fourth or fifth floor. They had the entire floor. And it was their personal trading floor. With people at [inaudible] desks and all the – Amazing. Wealth, real wealth. [Phone rings]

MS. BERMAN: I think that this is probably a good time to stop.

MR. COLE: Ok.

[BEGIN TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE]

MS. BERMAN: This is Avis Berman, continuing the oral history with Sylvan Cole on July 11th, 2000, at his gallery at 101 West 57th Street.

And we will be going back to the early days of Associated American Artists. But first, I think we need a little bit of biographical housekeeping first, which is would you state the names of your wives, when you were married and when you were divorced, the second one, when you were married and, you know, when she died, the third one, and – and the names, and when your children were born.

MR. COLE: Oh, dear. I don't have this to memory. I was married in – first time, in May 1942. Or it could've been '43. At Fort Washington, Maryland. I was at that post called Fort Washington. And it was along the Potomac, and it is the fort that supposedly the guns were spiked when the Washington – when the British came up to sack Washington. We got married in a chapel there. I married Vivian Vanderpool, V-A-N-D-E-R P-O-O-L, who was born in Norman, Oklahoma. And she had been working in Washington with the OSS, Office of Strategic Services, and was working with "Wild Bill" Donovan, who was the general in charge. And all of whatever she was doing was top secret.

Nancy Cole was born in Fort Sam Houston Texas, at Brooke General Hospital, in 1945. Right, 1945. In May. And the second child, Robert Vanderpool Cole, was born in New Rochelle, New York in March of 1947. And the youngest, James Michael Cole, was born in Port Chester, New York in March of 1949. I was divorced from Vivian in 1952. A Mexican divorce. Flew down with my wife-to-be, Lillyan. And we were each divorced from our respective spice [MS. BERMAN Laughs] in Tijuana, and married by the same judge.

Lillyan died in October 1987, and in December of 1998, I married Mary Rowena Myers, M-Y-E-R-S, in New York at a Catholic chapel on First Avenue and 55th Street.

MS. BERMAN: What was Lillyan's maiden name?

MR. COLE: Spurber [ph] – No, that was her married name.

MS. BERMAN: Spurber was her married name.

MR. COLE: Yeah, what was her maiden name? It'll come to me later.

MS. BERMAN: Ok. Now, did Lillyan have anything to do with the art world?

MR. COLE: Lillyan, I met at Associated American Artists. She was assistant to Reeves Lewenthal, who was the founder and director. And we fell in love and that was what happened. And she had studied painting under Leo Calapai, who was a Chicago artist and who died in Chicago; but Leo taught at Columbia, and Lillyan had taken courses there. Lillyan's name, by – spelling is L-I-L-L-Y-A-N.

MS. BERMAN: Now, besides Lillyan, I want to go back and talk about – You had mentioned some of the people you had worked with at Associated American Artists, but I kind of wanna go into what they did and sort of who they came from, what their, you know, their contributions were and –

MR. COLE: Well, the founder of Associated American Artists was Reeves Lewenthal. Reeves was just a brilliant publicist and public relations person. He – At about the age of 23 or '4 was the agent for the most important portrait painter of the time, named Douglas Chandor. I'm not sure of his spelling, but I think it's C-H-A-N-D-O-R.

MS. BERMAN: That's correct.

MR. COLE: And he was, oh, a society painter and portrait painter of that time. And Reeves did public – He had come from Rockford, Illinois, and had news background, public relations background, and hit New York, got this job with Chandor. And whether this is apocryphal or not, I'm not sure, but supposedly, Reeves took ill, spent quite some time in the hospital, and during that period of 1933, '34, conceived the idea of Associated American Artists. It was the height of the Depression. He felt that the one work of art that people could afford across the country was an etching or a lithograph or a woodcut, priced at five dollars. And he then proceeded to contact,

when he got out of the hospital, a group of artists, who met with him and formed Associated American Artists.

I don't really know - Somewhere in the archives are the various artists that he met with. I have a feeling it was Arnold Blanch, Doris Lee - whether [Thomas Hart] Benton, [John Stuart] Curry and Wood met at that time or were subsequently contacted - But they were artists from Woodstock, from Manhattan and in New York and that area. And they all agreed to make prints. And Reeves then peddled them to Marshall Field in Chicago, to Thalheimer's in Virginia. I think Altman's was the outlet in New York. And he did that for, I guess, 1934. And they ran ads in the newspapers, "You can own an original work of art for only five dollars by America's foremost artists."

Anyway, at that point, he discovered that while the sales in Altman's were unbelievable - to my knowledge, they - again, might be apocryphal - that they sold out the first two days, all the prints that were allotted to them. However, Thalheimer's in Virginia, or some department store, after several months, marked them down to three dollars and Reeves couldn't tolerate that. So he didn't think that was the way to sell these works of art, so he decided to go into it by direct mail. And he produced the first catalogue of works that had been commissioned by Associated American Artists. All were to be in editions of 250, though at the time, not full editions were printed; and some never sold too well, so the editions were a hundred and six, a hundred and eighteen. And they also could've been numbers that Reeves pulled out of his hat.

And this catalogue was started by - it was promoted by an ad in the New York Times Magazine, which was a small ad. But according to Reeves, the figures - again, apocryphal, possibly - they got 9,000 responses, and sent out 9,000 catalogues, and they were in business. And with his ability of - of promotion, the press was unbelievable. The press books, I think, may have been turned over to the archives or destroyed, but I do think I did, years and years back, when I discovered them. And these were clipping books that were kept of every single thing. And they even had a clipping service that would send them the clippings of anything said about Associated American Artists.

I think it was around 1939 that Reeves decided to open a public gallery. Up until then, they had been all mail order; and then they had a small showroom on Madison and 49th Street or so, so people could come in and see the prints, which were all framed, in the little showroom they had. And the price was five dollars, six for 25 dollars. In '39, they opened a gallery at 711 Fifth Avenue, with a huge brouhaha. And the opening exhibition was Thomas Hart Benton.

MS. BERMAN: Well, you know, in your - I agree. You're telling me this, all about, you know, this promotional genius. You have not mentioned - did he have an aesthetic sense? Did he have an eye? I mean, what was he like as any kind of responder to art?

MR. COLE: He had an instinct. He was not a discoverer of talent. He - Art was a vehicle. This is not meant to denigrate him in anyway. He - he got on wonderfully well with the artists. He could charm any of them. He was an absolutely charming person. I mean, he - And there were times when they'd be a pain in the neck to him, and he'd avoid them. And he'd be in conference, or he'd be out.

The offices at 711 Fifth were extraordinary. They had a huge gallery space on two levels, a mezzanine and an upper floor. And then surrounding this area of gallery were Reeves' office, which was right at the corner of 55th Street and Fifth Avenue. The St. Regis [Hotel] was across the street. And his office was at the corner. Then there was a vice-president's office - at least when I got there - which was occupied by Robert Parsons, who had just come out of the Navy and had run the art program for the Navy, and was very familiar with many of the artists. A true gentleman. Very unassuming person, very kind. But truly a gentleman. Between Bob's office and Estelle Mandel's office - And Estelle Mandel started with Reeves. She started in '34 or '35, and she, too, had - was a dynamo. And Estelle's office was in between where the two secretaries sat. And then came my office, which was vacant when I got my job; or who had it before, I have no idea. And then came a large area, which was sort of secretarial, reception, and accounting. And then came all the shipping area and back office of racks for pictures and stuff like that.

MS. BERMAN: Huge space!

MR. COLE: Oh, it - I mean, I would just - Off the top of my head, it was ten or twelve thousand feet. It was the size of Marlborough today. It was one of the largest square foot galleries, I guess. It was the entire second floor of this building, which was 711 Fifth, which today has, I think, the Coca-Cola and Warner Brothers or Disney -

MS. BERMAN: How did - how did Reeves pick the artists?

MR. COLE: They just accumulated.

MS. BERMAN : [Laughs]

MR. COLE: Mostly artist to artist to artist. I mean, the whole Woodstock gang, which was Ethel Magafan, Eddie Millman, Arnold Blanch, Doris Lee – I think Sigmund Menkes was up there. One of the great things we had – persons we had in the gallery was a woman named Pegeen Sullivan. And Pegeen was just a household name in the American art world. She was director of the gallery. And she also was very close to George Grosz. In fact, I still think some of the nudes that George Grosz painted were Pegeen. Especially up in the cape.

But Pegeen also got a lot of the foreign artists – Sigmund Menkes, Joseph Floch, George Grosz – just because she was acquainted with so many of the artists. And Marion Greenwood, for example, knew – Her portrait was painted by [Alexander] Calder, by [Max] Beckmann, by goodness knows how many artists. She was just a most gorgeous, gorgeous woman, and – My feeling when I got there was just in awe of all these artists. The roster was roughly 60 artists, which was a huge roster of artists. And all of them were established; they were not naive or beginning artists. Raphael Soyer, Chaim Gross – just on and on. And they were all basically representational. But these artists, this roster won all the prizes. They won the gold medals in Chicago and the gold medals in Philadelphia, the gold medals at the National Academy. It was a lock – And the only artists that were not part of Associated American Artists were those in the stable of Edith Halpert. And they were the avant garde, which was a little ahead of what Associated American Artists was. They had Stuart Davis, they had Ben Shahn, [Louis] Gugliemi.

MS. BERMAN: Rattner.

MR. COLE: Who?

MS. BERMAN: I think she had Rattner.

MR. COLE: Abe Rattner. Well, she also had Jack Levine.

MS. BERMAN: Right, and she had [Charles] Sheeler.

MR. COLE: And, but she did have Sheeler, and – That's right. And – But the Downtown Gallery, I don't remember being a big deal, for some reason. It may be I was prejudiced in those late forties years of AAA. But you know, it was such – '46, when I got there – '46, '47, '48 were unbelievable years. I mean, the gallery was constantly busy. The artists were begging for work. Beyond just the easel paintings and the graphics. I mean, there was a – The gallery had paintings. The gallery also had a small section for the prints that were being published in the five dollar program. The gallery also was commissioning artists to do works or renderings for people like Abbott Laboratories, or fabrics, a big – Lowenstein Fabrics – Aaron Bohrod did a repeat pattern, sort of a trompe l'oeil pattern. And it sold thousands of yards! And it was the first time that there was a royalty on yards per sold. I mean, this was Reeves' genius. He was able to use art anywhere. Lampshades, neckties, playing cards, calendars. He – Anything that he could – Placemats. Anything that he could use – He would go to these manufacturers and say, "It's prestige for you to do this, or that, or the other thing." And they would then get the copyrights and – or the reproduction rights for quite a fee, which the gallery would then take its third, or 40% commission, and the balance would go to the artist. And artists were begging for commissions. I mean, there were letters – I can recall artists like George Schreiber saying, "I'd love to – I can use the money; can I get something from Abbot Laboratory?" And George would get some sort of pittance of a job to do. I would say that thinking back as to who art – which artists really became great, great American artists, beyond Benton, Curry and Wood, there were not very many. Certainly, George Grosz. But he was part of the foreign contingent, refugee contingent. Adolph Dehn, [Arnold] Blanch, [Doris] Lee. History's gonna have to see what happens to some of them. Joe Hirsch. I'm sure – Again in the archives, I can remember lists being published of the roster of Associated American Artists. It was during my time – When I got there, there was a gallery in Chicago; and then subsequently, they opened a gallery in Beverly Hills. The Chicago gallery, I think, was closed around 1947 or '48, because it was not doing that well. And the theory being that people in Chicago did not wanna buy art in Chicago, they wanted to come to New York to buy art. And they closed that gallery. In California, the whole Hollywood contingent was gathered together for various boards or whatever and – I don't know, I remember King Vidor, I remember, oh – Trying to think of –

Reeves also then got involved with bringing in some of the Impressionists and perhaps one of the most famous – And again, I won't remember everything, but the theory is that he did discover this [Vincent] Van Gogh of a self-portrait. Self-portrait by Candlelight. He's in a bar, the car broke down, he's lighting a cigarette; and there is this Van Gogh by – completely Reeves' story.

MS. BERMAN: I don't quite understand it. He found a Van Gogh?

MR. COLE: In Eur – in France.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, in France.

MR. COLE: Outside of Paris.

MS. BERMAN: And his car broke down –

MR. COLE: Car broke down.

MS. BERMAN: So he couldn't get –

MR. COLE: He goes into a bar to make a phone call, he lights up, and there he sees this painting.

MS. BERMAN: Mm-hm. Did he buy it?

MR. COLE: He bought it, brings it back. And I'm trying to remember who bought it. He became very friends with Dr. [Jacob] de la Faille. And Dr. de la Faille authenticated it, and he was the expert. And there were other experts – Sandburg or somebody – says it wasn't a real – It's an amazing story. I think the painting was sold to some California major magnate. I – Eugene Salberg or something like that [the painting was actually sold to William Goetz].

MS. BERMAN: Irving Salberg.

MR. COLE: Irving Salberg. I wish I – I can't remember what – But when it got questioned, he returned it, and it was in the lawyer's office. Guy named Ross; I can't remember his first name. Roth or Ross. Who was an attorney for Associated American Artists. And a secretary opened a file drawer and tore the painting. So the painting was sent to Holland for restoration. And – Then it was a question when it came back. Duty? No duty? What's the story? So according – Then the U.S. government tried – used the first chemical tests on a painting and found that the pigments were of the time of Van Gogh, and since he died penniless, who would fake a Van Gogh? Especially a self-portrait? So to this day, I don't know whether it's real or not. I mean, I – I don't know if it's accepted; I don't even know where it is.

MS. BERMAN: Well, maybe it's in Philadelphia, the *Van Gogh: Face to Face* portrait show [Philadelphia Museum of Art, October 22, 2000- January 14, 2001].

MR. COLE: I don't know; it'd be interesting. But this was just giving you the breadth of Reeves. I mean, he started getting paintings all the way from Cezanne to Van Gogh to feed his Hollywood clients.

MS. BERMAN: Well, just out of curiosity, now, it – You know, a lot of these artists had other – were represented by other galleries, had other dealers; but it was alright – they were allowed –

MR. COLE: Oh, no, they were exclusively AAA.

MS. BERMAN: Really? Ok, there was –

MR. COLE: It was sort of a pirating thing. I mean, he got Soyer, Hirsch from Herman Baron at ACA [American Contemporary Artists]. I mean, there were many dealers that – Well, whether they volunteered to leave or they were coerced – I have a feeling everybody wanted to be with AAA. They were making money as artists. 'Cause Reeves – They were not, to my knowledge, on retainers. But Reeves would find ways to either sell their work or promote it through an exhibition, or use their talents in some commercial way. Like there was Lucky Strike ran a series of ads of tobacco growing in the fields. And there's one of James Chapin; there was a famous one of the guy looking down a leaf. Benton did a painting of tobacco, Chapin – I don't know who all. And I remember Maxwell House Coffee used a whole series of American scene paintings in their "good to the last drop," with a cup of coffee, and it's dripping down, and a big painting of [Luigi] Lucioni or [George] Schreiber or somebody.

I mean, this was all going on when I first got there, because Estelle Mandel, who was the – Bob Parsons became executive vice-president. But Estelle had been there. And so she was Vice-President in Charge of Special Services. And Special Services consisted of using art commercially in any – advertising or any way that it could be used. And she was a wiz at it. I think at that time, she was working with Ohrbach, and they did a whole series of paintings of New York, which are now at the Museum of the City of New York. I don't know if they ever exhibit them or not; probably individually, they do. But these were paintings that we used in Ohrbach ads. And then assembled as a collection, exhibited, and then turned over to the museum.

And Estelle was working on that. It would be interesting to know the finances of that period, but I don't. I mean, I have a feeling two to three thousand dollars for a painting in an ad was really good money.

MS. BERMAN: Did Estelle have an art background?

MR. COLE: Somewhat. Public school and Hunter. A real dynamo person. Big woman. Wonderful. I mean, she was my boss, and I adored her. I mean, she was a very, very special woman. She was a single lady for a long period of her life. And then she ended up marrying a guy by the name of Ray Brock, who was a New York Times foreign correspondent, whose real claim to fame was 1942, '3. He got a double byline on the front page of the New York

Times, and he covered Turkey and Ataturk. And he wrote a book on Ataturk. And he and Estelle had a stormy marriage. She sort of managed him the way she did so many of the artists. [MS. BERMAN Laughs] And I remember they – As she got money, she ended up with a flat in a brownstone, a beautiful flat, on 80th between Madison and Park. And then with the money from Ataturk, she bought a house in Hillsdale, New York — a big deck around — and I can remember going up there and staying as a guest and— and getting a poker game up with people coming from Woodstock, because it was just across the river, and Fletcher Martin, Julio de Diego and a group of others all coming over to play poker.

MS. BERMAN: We haven't discussed Robert Parsons.

MR. COLE: Well, Robert Parsons was sort of, as I say, quiet, dignified. He was the – I don't know how to phrase this, but he was the gentile elegance for Associated American Artists. And Robert would be used as – in that capacity for the certain types of clients that he would be perfect for. He married the receptionist at AAA, who was just the doll of the world. Farenhorse [ph], what was her first name? I still talk to her. And I was an usher at that wedding. And – This is a real blank I'm pulling; I mean, this is such a close friend of mine. Her daughter's Linda.

Anyway, he then got the post of director of the Jacksonville Art Museum, [MS. BERMAN: The Cummer] which was –

MS. BERMAN: The Cummer Art Gallery?

MR. COLE: No. Jacksonville Museum of Art, or something. And he – It was in the process of being built. And he went down, it was built, and I think he died the opening day, or the day before, of a heart attack. And – His widow still lives in Jacksonville; I still keep up with her. I'm just so amazed that I can't get a first name out. We were all so close, and –

MS. BERMAN: Did Parsons have an art background, or –?

MR. COLE: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: Of course –

MR. COLE: He had an art background, and he ran the art program for the Navy [MS. BERMAN: Oh, that's right.] in World War II.

MS. BERMAN: Was that combat artists, or –?

MR. COLE: Combat artists.

MS. BERMAN: In the Navy –

MR. COLE: Yeah, he commissioned them and sent them to the various places.

MS. BERMAN: You know, going back to – You said you didn't have the Edith Halpert artists; well, that's because you would've had to – You know, she never would've given up her –

MR. COLE: Well, she also had Hofmann, I think. Hans Hofmann, yeah. No, she didn't.

MS. BERMAN: She never had Hans Hofmann.

MR. COLE: No, she didn't have Hofmann.

MS. BERMAN: Hofmann – I don't think Hofmann had a gallery in the '30s.

MR. COLE: Well, there were other good galleries. There was Perido[ph], there was – That woman, what's her name? The other one besides Edith. Elegant woman.

MS. BERMAN: Well, you're not thinking about Eleanor Ward's –

MR. COLE: Right.

MS. BERMAN: She was post-World War II. [Phone rings; tape stops, re-starts]

MS. BERMAN: So I – See, what I was trying to get at is that people who were in Associated Artists were in it totally; they wouldn't have had another gallery, so –

MR. COLE: No, they were exclusive.

MS. BERMAN: Exactly. I didn't know if they just had prints with Associated American Artists, because -

MR. COLE: Oh, the artists that had prints were freelance. I mean, we did not put them on our roster, unless they were somebody like Adolph Dehn that also did lithographs. I think Gordon Grant was on our roster. I know Luigi Lucioni was on our roster. But there were many, many artists that were doing prints that maybe did one for us or maybe three and just - That was a separate - separate operation entirely.

MS. BERMAN: Right, 'cause I thought that - I'm not sure. I thought that Lucioni at one point may have been with Milch or Brand[?] or -

MR. COLE: He was with Milch before he was with AAA, and he went back to Milch.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Now, also, you never had Rockwell Kent?

MR. COLE: No. Nor did we ever commission him on anything. I mean, there were lots of artists that you'd think we would've used that we didn't. I don't know how haphazard it was. I have a feeling that most of the print thing came with artists bringing in proofs, and going into the proof box. And if - I don't know whether Reeves actually pursued some of the other artists, or whether we'd just pick 'em up. I mean, I know Ernest Fiene was on the roster, a painter, and Lily Harmon; they also did prints for the gallery. Adolph Dehn did.

MS. BERMAN: You know, someone like -

MR. COLE: Even Gwen Lux, who was a sculptor, she did one or two prints for the program.

MS. BERMAN: So you never had [John] Sloan, for example.

MR. COLE: No, we didn't have Sloan. We did have Marsh. Marsh did two prints. We had [Utagawa] Kuniyoshi; he did one - [MS. BERMAN: Oh.] which was an Edith Halpert artist. [Reginald] Marsh was Rehn.

MS. BERMAN: Right. So that was -

MR. COLE: We never had Sheeler, never Stuart Davis, never Feininger. Oh, there were -

MS. BERMAN: You had [Louis] Lozowick.

MR. COLE: We had Lozowick. Not on our roster, but as a - just for prints. Now, who he was with, I have no idea.

But we have [William] Gropper on the roster, and also did prints. Joe Hirsch, both.

MS. BERMAN: Let's see. Is there anyone else that we should talk about who was on, you know, who worked there?

MR. COLE: Well -

MS. BERMAN: Wait a minute, your mic - Just a minute, your microphone's just slipped. Oh, I see what you've done. Ok, here. Ok. Anyway -

MR. COLE: No, the other - I remember the gallery staff. I remember there was a fellow named - I just had his name and I lost it. Bobby Price. And he and Pegeen were a team. They adored each other. And Bobby was part of the sales in the gallery. I think Pegeen retired. She had a daughter who she felt needed attention. She was married to a concert violinist, wonderful guy. And - But Pegeen was the real Bohemian of the world. And when she retired, a man by the name of George Fortson, F-O-R-T-S-O-N, became gallery director.

I should go back a little, because in 1946, '47, shortly after I got there in March of '46, I would say two or three months later, Andre Emmerich became part of the gallery and worked with me. And the two of us were quasi-mail order and quasi-promoters. Both of us would go to churches and schools and give little talks on collecting art. And then shortly thereafter, maybe six months later or so, Frank Perls joined the gallery. And Frank was just unbelievable. I mean, I still remember - There was an artist whose name I've forgotten - Reeves would often show artists that were just dreadful. Because the husband was a big collector, or the husband had this, or the - whatever. And I remember he showed, in the lower gallery, a woman who did Noah's arc. And it had pairs of animals, all going up to it, on each side of the walls, to the end, which was Noah's arc. And when Frank was hired, I was to take him around and introduce him and show him what all the gallery - where the stacks were, bookkeeping, everything. And I remember when we got down to the lower gallery - I think her name was Schweibel[ph] or something like that. And Frank goes around, and so he's spitting. [Makes spitting sounds] He's spitting as he goes down. I was in utter shock. [MS. BERMAN Laughs] And anyway, Frank ended up taking over the California gallery. And when that closed, he then was in business for himself out in California.

MS. BERMAN: So that's how the Frank -

MR. COLE: That's how the Frank Perls Gallery started. Andre didn't stay very long. I think he then went into his pre-Columbian - His family were diamond merchants or something out of Belgium or Holland, and - Shortly thereafter, he opened his own gallery and - with the pre-Columbian and a roster - I think that's when he got Helen Frankenthaler and a few other artists.

MS. BERMAN: Well, that's interesting. I had no idea he was ever in the mail -

MR. COLE: Well, of course, Helen Frankenthaler was also - did her junior year at Bennington working at the gallery.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, really?

MR. COLE: Yeah, when I was there.

MS. BERMAN: Mm-hm. Well, what was she like?

MR. COLE: Hardly remember. She was just a little girl. Sat in the gallery desk and - sort of learning the commercial area of that. I think she did some odds and ends. You'd have to ask Helen. But that's - Helen and I had known each other before, because I knew her older sister Marjorie. When I was going to Horace Mann, I would know Marjorie or date her, and - Helen was then just a youngster. [MS. BERMAN: Was she -] Nine years old, when I -

MS. BERMAN: Was - was Helen painting when - when you met her?

MR. COLE: She was at Bennington [Bennington College, Bennington, Vermont]. I'm sure her junior year she had been painting or was painting.

MS. BERMAN: Mm-hm.

MR. COLE: I don't think she ever thought much of the paintings that were in the gallery in her junior year. I mean, I could almost figure out about when that was, was probably '47, '48. I was class of '39; she's ten years younger than I - So forty - I'm probably right on the button.

MS. BERMAN: So she was also probably seeing what was going on at Betty Parsons and all of the other, the - the action -

MR. COLE: I'm sure.

MS. BERMAN: Mm-hm. But that— that did not immediately touch Associated American Artists, those kinds of - the -

MR. COLE: Didn't even know it was going on. I was once on a panel for the 50th anniversary of the Museum of Modern Art. They put together an interesting panel of - for discussing prints. And I think there was Albert Reese, myself, Bob Motherwell, and somebody else, I don't remember. And all I remember is Bob talking about the [Stanley William] Hayter Atelier 17 in New York and the interaction of Pollock, Motherwell, all making their first prints. And I remember saying - We were talking about this era of the forties. And I remember saying, "I can't believe that Bob and I were in the same city." Because my view of what I was doing in that period of time was just - I didn't even know that existed. I mean, I didn't know about the Cedar Bar; I didn't know until years later. Years later.

MS. BERMAN: Well, besides your art, you were also sort of married with several children. And then also, you probably weren't hanging out at night.

MR. COLE: No, that's true. I mean, I did not go to many galleries. I did go to Knoedler, I did go to Kennedy, those both -

[BEGIN TAPE TWO, SIDE TWO]

MR. COLE: - World War II ended in '46 and here we are. I'm fresh out of the service; a lot of the artists are out of the service. A lot of the established dealers are mostly into European material. Bill Hayter is in New York, and he's got a pretty thriving print operation going. He certainly had a lot of the artists that came to him then. He had - Miró was here, Chagall was in New York, [Fernand] Leger - No. Was Leger in New York?

MS. BERMAN: Briefly.

MR. COLE: Yeah.

MS. BERMAN: But he went back immediately after the war ended.

MR. COLE: But some stayed. I remember meeting Miró. Reeves got Miró to make wrapping paper, 'cause - [MS. BERMAN Laughs] I'm not kidding! Wonderful wrapping paper.

MS. BERMAN: Well, Miró probably could've used the money then, [MR. COLE: Well -] when he was here.

MR. COLE: It was amazing, who he got. I mean, I remember Miró coming in the gallery. He was a little, short guy. Pixie. Oh, yeah, Reeves - His - his imagination was endless.

MS. BERMAN: Now, you - did you meet Chagall while he was here?

MR. COLE: No.

MS. BERMAN: Now, when did you become aware of Hayter?

MR. COLE: Probably at AAA in the early sixties. And that's when I met him in Paris and - It - I was never - Of all the artists - As I say, I'm I'm really a - a groupie when it comes to the artists. But of all the artists that made a friend of me, Bill Hayter was to me the most important in many ways, because he was the god of the print world. And he encouraged me, and he worked with me. He took me to the Atelier and I'd have exhibitions of the students that were there, and commissioned him for prints, and - It was, until he died, a most fabulous relationship, just - I mean, I knew him when he was married to Helen Phillips, and then I went through when he was split, and we were close enough that he'd tell me, you know, he - He'd say, "Can you buy something of Helen's," you know, or, "Can you do something?" I mean, he really was such a great human being, and then when he met Desiree [Moorehead] and - I'm still very close to Desiree and - But Bill Hayter made me feel important in the print world personally, because of his relationship to me. I - I really felt that he was the - the - the master and - Here is the man who taught [Alberto] Giacometti and Picasso and Jackson Pollock and on and on and on. And - My respect for him never waned.

I remember when Bill was 80, I think they asked me to write part of a tribute book. And I wrote a rather simple thing, but in there was Roland Penrose and major writers in this book. And I guess about a year later, Bill was in New York and we were having dinner or something, and he said, "Oh, by the way, Sylvan, I forgot to thank you for that nice tribute you wrote." And I said, "Oh, Bill, it was nothing." He says, "Sylvan, I'm going to do the same thing for you when you're 80." He was long gone. But it was a wonderful thing. Yeah, I think -

I was always very touched with most of the artists. I really cared about them; we were good social friends. And my life is very charmed. I mean, when I'd be in Europe, I'd see Francois Gilot, and I'd see a lot of the artists, both like Michael Rothenstein and Tony Gross. And then in this country, a lot of the artists were friends. Certainly, because I went to Provincetown and - We'd be there five minutes, and we'd almost be booked for three weeks with dinners or lunches or something. Sol Wilson and Dick Florsheim and that whole gang of - Chaim Gross. I mean, Reenie [ph] had this wonderful house out in the dunes - still does, I'm sure. And she would entertain ten, fifteen people twice, three times a week. Collectors or whoever was around, and dealers and - Usually, it was the most wonderful Jewish lobster or something. [MS. BERMAN Laughs] I mean, it was really amazing.

I can remember Lily Harmon fixing me a five pound lobster saying, "Now you're gonna get all the lobster you ever want in your life," and my eating the claws and my eating everything. And finally, I get to the center of the lobster and I was too full to eat. [Laughs] But -

Then came my first disillusionment, which - I guess this has to all wait until everybody's gone. Most of them are gone. But one of my closest friends was Fletcher Martin. And he was married to a wonderful writer, Jean, and lived in Woodstock, when I was close enough that I used to stay with him in Woodstock. He and Jean used to come up and visit us in Provincetown. We had sort of a guest room. And he'd play endless games of gin rummy with Lillyan and - who was a card player, loved card playing. The two of them would play for hours. And Fletcher would slam the cards down and, "Beat me again," or something. And -

Then I remember Fletch coming to me one day. I had commissioned him for two or three prints. They were color screen prints. And then I had him do three editions of 200 prints each, 600 prints, of women on the beach - different versions or variants, different images. And they were given free to my sponsor members. I had 600 sponsor members who gave us a hundred bucks a year. Sixty thousand dollars, wow. And they had special things, including getting a free gift. And the reaction to this gift was not good. A lot of them did not care for it. And some wanted to know if they could exchange for something, and I'd give 'em - And I'd say - We had very good clients. They were all good clients.

I'd say, "Ok, pick a ten dollar print that you'd like instead." I'd exchange it. But then Fletch came to me shortly

thereafter and wanted to know about another print. And I remember saying, "Not right now. You know, I've still got a few left of this and a few left of that." And that was the end of our friendship. And it was such a shock that I then understood for the first time that as a dealer, with very few exceptions, the artist was concerned as long as I could do something for them. And that was amazing, that it took me so long to learn that lesson. But once learned, I was very careful about the socializing from then on. I still have artist friends like Clare Romano and John Ross and Will Barnet from the beginning that are truly friends. They are not concerned with how much I do for them or whatever. But even after I left AAA and started on my own, the number of artists that bothered even to come visit me dropped down to a fraction. I mean, when I was handling 600 artists over those years, I would say - I would say maybe I see 30 or 40 out of the 600 anymore. Maybe two and three year spans. That's the way it is, I mean - And some artists that I was really close to, I -

Well, this, I guess, is part of oral history, but I remember Mario Avati, a French mezzotint artist, whom I met and socialized with because he showed with the Weyhe Gallery. When the Weyhe Gallery changed and Mario was on his own, he came to me at AAA. And I checked with Weyhe and I took him on. I think I commissioned him to do some prints, I don't remember. But he was a very well established European artist. And I gave him two shows at AAA. He was very close to Tom Hoving, who I remember coming in. And they had very good connection to collectors. And then I think until I left AAA, I bought five of every edition. And after I left, I saw him a few times; I still see him occasionally. But I know he was in town two weeks ago with his wife; never called. And I learned that from a client of mine who buys work from him.

MS. BERMAN: Mario who?

MR. COLE: Avati, A-V-A-T-I.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, ok.

MR. COLE: Mezzotint - Very extraordinary. Makes a fortune selling his work in Japan. Not well known here. He - Mezzotint is very difficult to sell in this country. And his prices are pretty high. There was a gallery on Third Avenue in the Sixties that handled his work and - I don't know whether they still do or not.

MS. BERMAN: Why is mezzotint difficult to sell?

MR. COLE: It - it's very rigid, it - it appeals - It's the kind of a print that is cold, rigid and you respect for its incredible black and whiteness or color, I mean - I don't know, it's - There are a few mezzotint artists today. There's [inaudible], there's Carol Wax. But some do very well. Look at Craig MacPherson, who did a mezzotint of Yankee Stadium at night for Mary Ryan and -

MS. BERMAN: I love that -

MR. COLE: Big one. And my gosh, that's up to twelve or fifteen thousand dollars.

MS. BERMAN: Mm-hm. It's beautiful.

MR. COLE: But Craig is extraordinary, yeah. But he's done many since, but nothing as -

MS. BERMAN: That's - that's his best.

MR. COLE: Yeah, that's a terrible thing when that happens, especially - He's done some wonderful ones since, but -

MS. BERMAN: That one's magical.

MR. COLE: Yeah. Just - It's very - You know, it's fascinating when you think of, even Picasso, like the *Tauromachia*, I mean, is obviously his major, major print. And all the prints he did since, nothing matches that; but I don't think it ever affected his market.

MS. BERMAN: When you said working with Hayter, what did you mean by - You said, "He worked with me."

MR. COLE: Well, I did shows with him. We'd pick student artists that we'd make a group show out of. I did one show with him of Hayter and his students. And Bill helped me get a Giacometti that was done, or he'd lend me some things that he owned. And these shows, especially the one of Hayter and his - and his influence, would usually get me a good press. I - I - At AAA, I must say that we normally got an extraordinary press from - starting with when Hilt Kramer was there, though he wasn't that strong on prints, but - Brian O'Doherty and - and certainly, John - certainly, John Canaday. And then John Russell. As long as that type of news critic was on the Times, we would get six reviews a year, which was quite extraordinary for a print gallery. But you have to remember, Associated American Artists was the only exhibiting all-print gallery in, probably, history. From the time of '58, when I took it over, until the time in '83, when I left, 25 years, we had an exhibition program, we'd

do ten, twelve shows a year. We had shows that were never even done before. [James] Ensor, [Felix] Vallaton. I mean, one man shows of major artists. Picasso, Durer, Rembrandt.

We had certain annual shows. Every summer we had an annual old masters show which went from [Giovanni] Tiepolo to Rembrandt to [Marcantonio] Raimondi, whatever. Every Christmas, we had a show of prints framed to give as gifts. But in between – Like, I remember Chagall Bible show, I remember [Georges] Rouault *Miserere*. And – but – Then I remember Japanese shows that I worked – we had a [Kitagawa] Utamaro, we had a Kuniyoshi. We had an Osaka print show. I remember the first Russian prints we showed, from the graphic workshops in Leningrad and Moscow. I worked – I had the first Art Nouveau shows of [Alphonse] Mucha and artists like that. I mean – I saw one in London, and – I worked with Estorich then and did the Russian show when they – And when I got to Paris, there was all this Art Nouveau for nothing. I mean, I could get the famous Mucha *La Plume*, buy twenty posters at a time.

I remember dealers who were just now into this as wholesalers coming in and saying, “You’re selling below wholesale.” But all the – What I think is possibly something important to me was that I kept learning. Learning, learning, learning. I mean, every artist was a new thing to learn. Ensor. Who – Nobody ever heard of him; I’d hardly ever heard of him. [Childe] Hassam. I mean, you couldn’t do this today. I mean, I would gather Hassams, I’d hide ‘em away and hide ‘em away, and finally I’d had 30 or 40 Hassams, 50, and I’d have a show. I remember the Hassam show – God knows how many years ago – but I remember I finally decided to have it and I scheduled it, and I forgot where I’d hidden ‘em. [Laughs] It drove me crazy! It took me three weeks to finally realize I had hidden ‘em in an upper cabinet. I woke up in the middle of the night, I said, “I know where they are.” But – I would store away and plan on shows sometimes years in advance, and try to get – You needed certain prints to represent certain artists. Like, you had to have the *Lion Gardiner House* with Hassam. You had to have – And – But I started with [John Taylor] Arms back in sixty-something, when I got that estate. And I still have it. I regret I didn’t have some shows. I never had a Mann show. But I never had enough to get together. I had many Stuart Davis shows, I had many Feininger shows.

MS. BERMAN: When you said about the Hassam, “Oh, you couldn’t do this today,” what did you mean?

MR. COLE: You just really – It’s not – I don’t know, to get 50 or 60 prints of Hassam within a period of a year or two would take a lot of – I don’t think you could just own it. I think you’ve have to borrow some and things like that. Though at times, I did borrow; I would – I remember for the Ensor show, I got a couple of rare prints from the Museum of Modern Art. Yeah, I was – I was very serious about these shows, and most – I was very serious, also, about putting catalogues out for almost every show. I have a feeling the New York Public Library probably has a pretty complete archive of that. But even if they were only four page things –

MS. BERMAN: How did you get to know Françoise Gilot?

MR. COLE: I saw a print of hers. I used to go to the workshops at Desjournbert. I was there one day, and – I think Dick Florsheim was working on something, or somebody was. And I saw this little lithograph of a little child sitting in a chair. And – They gave me the name of F. Gilot and her address. And I wrote Mr. Gilot. And Mr. Gilot wrote back and gave me a back – All I remember is it said *Atelier Après*, near Picasso. And I had no idea who she was. And I think I commissioned a print before I knew who she was – or knew it was a she, because she signed her prints F. Gilot; never signed Françoise.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, you were probably one of the few people who just accepted her on her own merits, without knowing the connection.

MR. COLE: But there’s another case. I mean, Françoise is here in New York now, and she’s not well. I should call her. But she never calls me. You know. As long as I’ve known her – and I’ve certainly done a lot – In fact, I affected a lot of her life. I mean, we were so close, when she was courting Jonas Salk, Lillyan and I would meet them for dinner at a Russian restaurant and stuff. And he’d be holding her hand, just acting like a little puppy in love. But – but I’ve known Claude and Paloma since they were kids; they never call. I mean, Paloma, I think I gave her the first job she ever had. She went to an auction for me to bid on some prints in Paris. Kept calling me. “Sylvan, suppose I win the print, who pays?” I said, “I pay.” [MS. BERMAN Laughs] “How do you get the money to me?” I said, “I pay the auction house.” [They laugh] She was so funny.

MS. BERMAN: Was she considering becoming an art dealer? Or was she sort of a runner for you, or what?

MR. COLE: She was just – just something for her to do, and – I asked her, I said, “I can’t go to the auction; I don’t speak French. And these are some lots I’d like.” And she said, “I’ll do it.” I said, “Alright, I’ll pay you a percentage on every lot you get.” But Claude is – I mean, my son Jimmy lives in Paris, and he’s two years younger than Claude. And he’s looked up Claude; he’s visited with Françoise, but – Claude wrote me one day and said, “Jimmy shouldn’t be in Paris; he doesn’t speak French.” Of course, today he’s been there for 25 years and it’s different, but –

It's - it's a very complex art world structure. The artist, the dealer - And - and - You know, I've always bent over backwards to help the artist. And I do it to this day. I mean, I do - Occasionally, I'll have a personal friend say to me, "Sylvan, can you help this artist." I say, "No, I can't." "Well, will you at least look at the work?" "If you make me, I will." And try to help, but you know, I keep saying I really am less and less helpful than I used to be.

MS. BERMAN: Well, let's - Now, going - going backwards, we haven't talked about some of these artists you probably met in the forties. So let's begin with Thomas Hart Benton. How you met, anything, you know -

MR. COLE: Benton, I met early on at the gallery. And I think I said in the previous interview that Benton and AAA had a falling out when Reeves did that Missouri project. But then one time when I was in Provincetown, Estelle Mandel was up there. And she took Lillyan and me to visit Benton in Chilmark. And we took the ferry, you know, all that stuff, and - Rita took us around, took us swimming and - In fact, these pictures here - Oh!

MS. BERMAN: I'm sorry. No, let me get it, 'cause you're wired.

MR. COLE: Yeah, it's - These pictures have -

MS. BERMAN: Oh, those [inaudible].

MR. COLE: Pick 'em up.

MS. BERMAN: Now, these are snapshots of Thomas Hart Benton and Rita. And -

MR. COLE: Yeah. Jessie may be there.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, yeah.

MR. COLE: And Estelle and my wife. Yeah, the - This is the two of us. Rita, Sylvan, Tom, Lillyan; Tom; Rita and Tom. No, I don't - This is Lillyan way in the background.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, ok.

MR. COLE: Yeah, I think Estelle took those pictures; that's why she's not in 'em.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, that's - that's great.

MR. COLE: 1968, I think.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, well, he really was -

MR. COLE: Or '63?

MS. BERMAN: Well, anyway - He's in good shape.

MR. COLE: Oh!

MS. BERMAN: He's tiny, but he's in good shape.

MR. COLE: He was amazing. You know, when you look at his self-portraits, you'd think he was six foot five.

MS. BERMAN: Well, that's obvious, because he's so short.

MR. COLE: Yeah.

MS. BERMAN: Whistler did the same thing.

MR. COLE: He was a real curmudgeon. He - Very anti-paying taxes. That was a real bane of his life, that artists shouldn't have to pay taxes, they contributed so much to the culture of the United States. He was a little heavy in the drinking toward the end. He would have bourbon and branch water. I remember when he was honored at the Salmagundi Club, and I went down there for this big dinner. And I had loaned them 40 or 50 Bentons that the gallery had at the time, and they put 'em up all around the walls. And Rita said - And then he'd come over to me and say, "Give me another drink." So I'd go to the bar and get it. And Rita'd say, "You better water them down from now on." And so I'd water 'em and - He never noticed. But - All I remember is Sanford Low, I think, who was head of the New Britain Museum, after the thing, suddenly said to me, "Can you make a deal, and I'll buy 'em all." And he did.

MS. BERMAN: These must've been prints?

MR. COLE: All lithographs.

MS. BERMAN: Mm-hm. Sanford Low was one of his biggest supporters when other people weren't interested in Benton.

MR. COLE: That's right. Well, the schism came '48, I guess, '49, when – American scene died overnight. Just overnight. Suddenly nobody came in the gallery. No museums came in the gallery. Except for the print program, which was starting to falter, too. It – it – it was unbelievable that it could happen so quickly. And suddenly the Museum of Modern Art had a Pollock show. I guess '48 – '49. And Rothko and all these – [Clyfford] Still, all this stuff. And it just – When that – And that was the end of Associated American Artists, and the paintings, in a way. And, you know, that was a terrible period, that was – I guess at that point, I left AAA about '51 or '2 and went – I think I mentioned that I went into this manufacturing, and then came back in '58. But –

The artists besides Benton, I had met Curry, but I never got to know him. I think the artists in my young days that I adored were Luigi Lucioni, Gordon Grant, who was just the sweetest man in the world. I still have to find my collection of envelopes and turn 'em over to you, just for fun. And of course, I was madly in love with Marion Greenwood. She was absolutely the handsomest woman. A big buxom – Bobbed hair. And a perfect face. And she had really been around. I mean, I sort of tried to deny it, but she had slept with almost everybody. She – Diego Rivera, Max Beckmann, Alexander Calder, Ernst, on and on and on and on.

MS. BERMAN: And both sexes.

MR. COLE: Possibly, I didn't know about that. But I think you're right. Yeah, I remember years later cuddling up to her one time, and she said, "Oh, Sylvan, we can't get intimate." She said, "I've got scars that are too embarrassing to show." [MS. BERMAN Laughs] Yeah, and then she started drinking. And that's what killed her. But I almost – We had a Christmas party every year, and all the artists – And what a variety. I mean, everything from Karel Appel to, you know, some just beginning young artist. And it was always just something we all looked forward. And Marion, I'd get my shipping guy, Murray Kaplan [ph], I'd say, "Murray, you keep an eye on Marion, and get her into a taxi." That was his job.

MS. BERMAN: So – so Benton besides this sort of seeing him later on, I mean, do you have any – Did you ever talk with him about printmaking or anything substantial or –?

MR. COLE: Mostly Rita. Rita sort of – I remember begging her for an edition of prints. And she said, "Well, ya can't sell 'em for ten dollars anymore." I said, "I know, but how about twenty five dollars?" "Too cheap." I said, "But these are young people just starting. What a privilege it would be for them to have one of Tom's things." "They can afford fifty dollars, seventy five." Ya know, whatever. And I did finally get two editions from her in the seventies, *Sorghum Mill* and *Discussion*. And I did offer them at seventy five dollars, and they sold out overnight. Yeah, it was hard to get – My problem with most of my print publishing was getting really good artists, the way AAA started, with the best. And the only way I could get major artists was to buy ten, fifteen prints out of an edition. I remember I – I flipped over a Robert Motherwell that Harry Abrams published. And I bought twenty five of them and catalogued them. I did Alex Katz, I did Jim Rosenquist. I did a number of – Then I did some of the younger artists, like – who's the girl that does – Jennifer Bartlett. Usually they were published by somebody else and I liked the image.

MS. BERMAN: Well, what about George Grosz?

MR. COLE: He, I hardly remember, except that I did the catalogue at AAA for the *Stick Men*. And also, the *End of My – A World Without – A Piece of My World in a World Without Peace*. And both times, he was so gracious, and thanking me for the wonderful job I did in the catalogue. That's all I really remember. I remember the shows. And I remember how disturbing they were. He was really getting it all off his chest. There were two separate exhibitions, probably '47, '49. But very much a gentleman; always impeccably dressed. Shirt, tie. Very of the old school artist. Very dramatic. But he was around the gallery a lot because of Pegeen.

MS. BERMAN: Did you visit his studio?

MR. COLE: No. I seldom visited artists' studios. I only remember – I remember Gordon Grant. I remember he lived in the same building Cornelia Otis Skinner lived in, on the corner of 65th or 6th and Lexington. Beautiful building, duplex apartments. And I remember his taking me up to the penthouse. And he was starting to go blind. And –[tape stops, re-starts]

MS. BERMAN: You were saying that you usually didn't visit artists' studios.

MR. COLE: That's right, yeah, and then I told you about Gordon Grant. [MS. BERMAN: Right.] And then I did go up to his – He had a little penthouse studio and – He had an apartment below in the penthouse. And I remember he was going blind, and he was almost throwing away all his drawing books. And I kept saying, "No, Gordon, don't

do that, don't do that." And I don't know whatever happened to them. But I do remember his coming down to the gallery one day. And I had some unsigned proofs. And I remember holding his hand, saying, "Alright, right here." And then he'd sign. But he was one of my -

I guess the most important artist, the most - The print that I published that has become the most valuable were the two David Hockneys. I published *Jungle Boy* and *Edward Lear*. And I had met David at an exhibition in London of - at the Royal Watercolor Society. There was an exhibition of the students. And my wife Lillyan took one look at a print called *Three Kings and a Queen* and said, "Wow, this is some artist." And she discovered David, as far as I'm concerned. And we got to know each other. I guess I bought some of those prints for twenty dollars a piece, *Three Kings and a Queen*. And David came to the - to the United States. He had won a hundred guinea prize, which gave him enough money - it was less than 500 dollars - round trip New York, and money to stay. And he came here. And he made two stops, one to Bill Lieberman at the Modern, and one to me at AAA, when we were between 52nd and Third, on Fifth. And I remember his walking in - Oh, no, this is before that; I was down on 49th Street. And that's when I first really met him. I guess I had met him sort of in passing.

And I right away bought from him, I guess, a hundred, hundred and fifty dollars worth of prints that he had rolled up in newspaper. He didn't speak English. He was still speaking Welsh. Hardly - Just enough that we could get by. And with that money, he got to California! And that's how he never came back.

MS. BERMAN: Now, I don't understand when you say he was speaking Welsh; he grew up in Yorkshire.

MR. COLE: Well, isn't that Wales?

MS. BERMAN: No, it's northern England.

MR. COLE: Well, whatever it is.

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs] I mean, maybe the accent was so -

MR. COLE: Oh, the accent was unbelievable. Anyway, then I commissioned him to do these two prints. I think at that time, I also gave him the first show Hockney ever had in America, of *The Rake's Progress*. I bought the portfolios from Kasman [ph] in London. And - There were, I think, fourteen, fifteen prints. There's seventeen in the portfolio. And I showed them, but I only sold them as portfolios. And I remember putting - I must've had ten or twelve of them. I kept ordering them, and I sold maybe five or six. And I remember having a few aside, putting three aside for the day they're gonna be very valuable. And then David did these two prints. I remember we had to go out to Kennedy, to get him out of customs. And then - And he signed 'em out there, because they were - No, what's the matter with me? It wasn't Kennedy. Oh, it was part of *The Rake's Progress* he had to sign out there. But Leo Calipai printed the prints. He's the guy who taught my - taught Lillyan. And David signed them at the gallery. I think I paid him - Editions of fifty. So it was a hundred prints. I think I paid him a thousand dollars. And I put 'em out in the market at forty bucks. Sold next to nothing. And finally, I sold almost the balance of all the edition to Kasman, who was then buying 'em for fifty dollars. More than I could sell 'em for. But today, I think *Jungle Boy* is six or seven thousand dollars, and *Lear* is somewhere around three or four. Yeah, I think - I don't think I published anything like that in my career. I mean, not that some of the prints aren't a lot more valuable than when I published them, but - I know there's some Soyers that sell for pretty good money, and a few others, but - I'm afraid that I just never can give credit to AA - that Reeves got of publishing Benton, Curry, and Wood.

MS. BERMAN: Now, on David Hockney, does he ever acknowledge you in his career?

MR. COLE: Not really. He - personally, he does. I mean, whenever I see him, he - there's no question. In fact, he had a show in France, and I had my son Jimmy go to see him. And Jimmy was told by David that I was his first dealer in America. But Henry Geldzahler wrote a book on David, and I'm not mentioned. Nor is AAA. I have a feeling we never had the prestige as a print gallery, compared to -.The first major show that he had was with Charlie Alan. And then he went to Emmerich.

MS. BERMAN: That's interesting. Does Andre know you were the first - his first dealer?

MR. COLE: Maybe, I don't know. We've never talked about it. But I do know that we worked together when the suite came out - which was it? The very Picasso thing that David did. Early on. I won't remember. But he did a suite of prints, and - and I think one day Andre and I started comparing notes and found out that he was paying a lot more for the suites than I was. [They laugh] And there was hell to pay and - but - No, I don't think there was ever any connection. Andre and I were never that close. We were both on the board of directors together of the Art Dealers Association. One year when he was president, I might've been vice-president. I know I was vice-president under Eugene Thaw and Klaus Perls and Harold Mills. Maybe Andre was president after that.

MS. BERMAN: Was there a temptation to try to hold onto an artist like David Hockney, to -

MR. COLE: Never.

MS. BERMAN: Or?

MR. COLE: Never. I never wanted an exclusive on any artist. And the few exclusives I had – one was Jake Landau and the other was Dick Florsheim – on their request. But it was a responsibility I really didn't want. When you're dealing with prints, the ability to produce large quantities was just more than I could handle. Especially prolific artists like both Landau and Florsheim. In fact, at the end, before Dick died, I was getting him down to editions of forty and fifty and – Because they just couldn't be absorbed. And I said I couldn't even house them all. And I begged him to go off on his own. And he did find a dealer in Scottsdale, and I think he also worked directly with Garelick in Detroit. And it just – You cannot take an artist – especially a printmaker – And I don't think even today, big houses like Gemini –

[BEGIN TAPE THREE, SIDE ONE]

MS. BERMAN: This is Avis Berman, interviewing Sylvan Cole for the Archives of American Art, on July 18th, at his gallery at 101 West 57th Street. And Sylvan, last time when we stopped, you had said you wanted to tell this story about Hans Hofmann, so why don't you begin with that, and we'll return to other things when you're done [inaudible].

MR. COLE: I don't know where I started or left off, but many years ago, I met and became friendly with Jack Levine. And Jack had a studio on Bleecker Street. And I remember I was anxious to have him do some editions for Associated American Artists. Ok.

MS. BERMAN: Ok.

MR. COLE: So I went down to have lunch with Jack, went to the studio. I remember fascinating things. I remember he was doing a portrait of a German general sitting at a desk, with figures behind the general. And he was puzzled as to what to do with a corner of the painting. And I kept looking at the picture, and I said, "Why – how 'bout a syringe or some sort of a thing that you inoculate – you know, a deadly serum or something?" And – and I do think he eventually put in a syringe-like thing in the corner. Anyway, be that as it may, we talked about his etching. He had not done prints for years and years and years. And I did get from him three prints. One was *Maimonides*, one was the one of a horse, and I can't remember the third edition that he did. *Adam and Eve*. And anyhow, he and I went to lunch. And we went to this little restaurant right around the corner somewhere. And in came Hans Hofmann. And Hans, the big, burly bear that he was, and he came over to me, we hugged each other, "Oh, how are you? How are you?," and this and that. And there was deadly silence between Jack and Hans, and so I introduced – "Hans," I said, "Hans, this is the American artist, Jack Levine. Jack, this is the famous Hans Hofmann." And there was a grunt from Jack, and Hans shook his hand and said, "Oh, Mr. Levine, I know your work and I've been a great admirer. You're a wonderful artist," and a little chit-chat. And Hans went over to his table, where he was having lunch with a couple of people. And Jack turned to me and he said, "There's the guy who set art back twenty years." That was the story I remember in this thing. But it was such a shock, you know, to get this from Jack, but that was the world at that moment of time. I don't think I can date this. I think it's got to be –

MS. BERMAN: Well, it's gotta be –

MR. COLE: I'd say late sixties, early seventies.

MS. BERMAN: Well, it's got – Well, I think, didn't Hans Hofmann die in something like '66?

MR. COLE: Oh, I thought he died later than that.

MS. BERMAN: I'll have to –

MR. COLE: Yeah. But I – I would have to find out when we published those three Jack Levine etchings, and then I'd have a clue as to dating it back.

MS. BERMAN: Well, I think it shows a lot about both of their temperaments, 'cause Hans Hofmann was always so expansive, and Jack was –

MR. COLE: Oh, what a sweetheart. And Jack was always the dour, sardonic person. We see each other from time to time now. And every so often we threaten to have lunch, and for some reason it just doesn't happen though I would like to catch up with Jack and just see how he is. I mean, I knew Ruth, his wife, and I knew his daughter when she was growing up, and – and I used to visit him at his house down in the Village.

MS. BERMAN: Well, that's exactly where you've gotta go, and then you gotta take him around the corner to Anglers and Writers. You've gotta go to – You've gotta pull him out of his studio physically and move him [MR.

COLE: Yeah] two blocks; and that's as far as he goes.

MR. COLE: Well, the strange thing about what I see in Jack's work is that it holds a very, very high level of accomplishment. And I think even his latest shows are truly wonderful. I mean, he has gotten this sort of masterly look about everything he does and – It's very precious. I think he's alone in the world, in many ways, as all of his people that he really cared about are gone. And he's still relatively young, he's – 1915, I think, makes him 85.

Other stories, I guess, of artists, I think they're more vignette anecdotes. Like, I can remember Raphael Soyer, whom – to whom I was really quite close. And Raphael was my real bete noir. There was something about my height and his height [MS. BERMAN Laughs] that was a problem. And I always felt Raphael wanted to cut me down to his size. He'd ask very personal questions about, you know, sex or, you know, sort of as if I was a stud or something, and – and – and ask me, you know, things that were a little embarrassing to me. And I probably avoided answering. I do know that one time we were having a drink. He always came to the gallery around four or five in the afternoon. That's if we had a meeting or – Often, I would go to his studio, but – You know, it was pretty evenly divided as who would go where. And I'd say we probably met, oh, once a month, once every two months, either one place or another. And I remember having a drink with him. And, you know, Raphael, with two drinks, was almost drunk. I mean, I'd put him in a taxi to get home. And we both drank scotch. And his – I think I remember he used to drink it straight; and I – I always had mine with water.

And anyway, one time I remember his saying something to me that his dealers have always set him back. And the statement always bothered me. And I used to say, "What do you mean by that?" And he would say, "Well, they try to control what I do." And I said, "Well, I never did that." He said, "Oh, yes you did. You remember I brought you a lithograph with a girl with buck teeth, a proof, and you didn't wanna publish it because you thought it was unattractive and wouldn't sell." And I said, "Oh, yes, I remember. And we made an edition of fifty and it sold out right away." And he said, "See?" [MS. BERMAN Laughs]

But I do think Soyer had a way of being sloppy at times. Very casual in his work. I don't know quite how to express it. I think he'd get interested in a facet of something and do it. Often – It was almost a challenge. It would be usually a nude that was not particularly attractive, that was either very scrawny or very obese, one or the other. And – and while he had beautiful models, he also had models that sort of made him challenge what he was doing. And as a publisher of many, many of Raphael's prints, or a distributor, I – I would have trouble working in editing.

And then of course, I worked with Raphael extensively in 1965 and 1966, when I was doing the catalogue raisonné of his prints. And I wanted it out, and I wanted an exhibition to coincide with a major retrospective of his work at the Whitney. And this took an incredible amount of time. It was the first major catalogue raisonné I'd ever done. And it was fifty years of his prints, from 1917 to 1967. And slowly but surely, amassing all that material. And then trying to date it, and trying to figure out edition sizes, if he remembered, and – And often, he really had trouble remembering exactly what it was all about.

I remember one time – I lived at that time at Park Avenue and 90th Street, and I had this large living room. And I took the master set of prints up to the apartment and I started laying it out on the floor, moving back furniture. And Raphael and Rebecca both came to the apartment. And I went from 1915 to, let's say, 1930, laid that out; and then thirties; I laid out forties – just so that we could see. And I would say, "Raphael, stylistically, you have this in 1946, and it seems it's more a fifties print than a forties." And Rebecca'd say, "Oh, yes, you did that in the fifties, and – It was early fifties. Remember this, remember that?" So we would juggle them around. And many of the dates I had circa instead of actual, because he just didn't know. And I think we did as good a job as we could. I do know one time there was this nude leaning forward, with her breasts sort of hanging down. And he said, "Now, that was Ros." And Rebecca said, "Well, you shouldn't name who it is." And it came to me that it was Ros Roose, [MS. BERMAN: Right] who was the wife of a psychoanalyst whom I knew very well, and both of them used to go up to Provincetown. I think Ros is still alive, though.

MS. BERMAN: She is, she is, and she lives on the Upper West Side.

MR. COLE: 90th Street?

MS. BERMAN: There was an article in the New Yorker once about her and her career, and she discussed all of the people she'd modeled [MR. COLE: Yeah] for, including Soyer and – and Grosz and [inaudible].

MR. COLE: Yeah, well anyway, that was funny, getting this little aspect of this print. I do know after the book was finally published, in 1967, and we had it in time for the show – And then I think ten or twelve prints showed up that weren't in there. So we did a revised edition. And I've always wanted to complete it, but I've worked with Raphael's grandson, Joey Lieberman or Liederman, I'm not sure. Joey – think it's Liederman. He's Mary's son, with her first husband. Though I don't know if she's ever remarried since, though she's been living with somebody forever. And we did try to do a master set, and we did try to come up with some way of going on. But

it never came to pass. From 19 – I'd say '75 or so, Raphael was making tons of etchings with various printers, and he was making some – He even made some lithographs in the late – early – middle sixties, with Irwin Hollander. And once he had the freedom to do whatever he wanted, he just went on and on. And he – I – I felt that the later work just started to decline, and – I must say at this point, I'm not as interested in doing it as I was. I still think it should be done, but I don't think I'm the one to do it anymore. And somebody should probably do a brand new catalogue raisonné incorporating a lot of the early material that keeps showing up. In fact, there was a Swann auction in May of this year, or earlier – may've been May – where there were a lot of prints that I never saw. Early 1917 etchings that a guy by the name of Arnold had collected, and it was his collection that came up for sale. And obviously, works that Raphael had forgotten all about.

MS. BERMAN: I just wanna backtrack for a minute. How did you meet Hans Hofmann?

MR. COLE: Up in Provincetown. I would go up there, starting about 1960, I would say, or '61. And for six or seven years, I went to Provincetown every summer for two to three weeks. And the reason I went there was Dick Florsheim. Dick had a house there. And he had already introduced me to Hudson Walker, who became my strongest patron. And I adored all these people. And then I went up and, you know, I met Sol Wilson, and I met Joe Kaplan. They were all part of a regular poker game. Somewhere in that period, Helen Frankenthaler and Bob Motherwell were married. And I had known Helen, so I met Bob. Through Dick, I met David Smith. I met Rothko, who sort of had a shine for my youngest brother, who got killed in an auto accident in the late sixties, and used to come over to my brother Dick, Richard Cole, and have drinks with him almost every other day or something. And it was, you know, an artists colony that I loved. There was Chaim Gross, there was [Jack] Tworckov there was the great poet up there that I liked so much. Oh!

MS. BERMAN: Stanley Kunitz?

MR. COLE: Stanley Kunitz. And his wife, Elise [MS. BERMAN: Elise] Asher, yeah. But it was a very wonderful community. It seemed there was a six-ish cocktail party almost every day. And the same gang would show up and all. I remember Françoise Gilot was writing her first book on Picasso, *My Life With Picasso*. [Coughs] Excuse me. And we were good friends. And Françoise came up and spent a week with us up there. And she was sort of the rage of everybody meeting her, and she was quite the center of attention.

MS. BERMAN: Well, what was – I mean, I realize your brother had the stronger relationship, but what was Rothko like?

MR. COLE: I hardly met him. I mean, I saw him. He was a big, burly, friendly person. He – he was the one I always had the most guilt about, in the sense that – I used to always say, "What does an artist do when he gets up in the morning and says, 'What color blobs am I gonna paint today?'" [Phone rings; tape stops, re-starts]

MS. BERMAN: You were talking about Rothko, and you were saying, "What –" You know?

MR. COLE: Oh, yeah, I – Get up and two blobs. And when he committed suicide, I always sort of felt that I understood. I mean, he had, I thought, painted himself into a corner. Which was not his reason for suicide, but – I remember the day it was in the papers, I was at Longchamp's for dinner, on 78th Street or 77th, 78th, on Madison. And I remember Adolph and Esther Gottlieb coming in. And I went over to Adolph and talked to him about how sad it was about Mark. And I knew they were very close, and – And I realized Adolph had such a different temperament. He – He knew what he was doing and where he was going. And Mark, I think, always was feeling his way. I – It's just a theory on my part.

Speaking about Adolph, I found out that he was doing some screenprints down at Pratt Graphic Center, through either Fritz Eichenberg or Andy Stasik; I don't remember who was in charge then. But I did go down and – And then I went over to Adolph and asked him if I could buy an edition of prints from him. And we didn't discuss money or anything; we didn't discuss size of edition. But a week or two passed, and I called up Adolph and I said, "What's happening with this possible purchase of an edition of your work?" He said, "Oh, Sylvan, sorry, you're not getting any." I said, "What do you mean?" "Well, I spoke to Frank Lloyd, and I told him that you were interested in getting an edition, and he bought 'em all." [Laughs]

MS. BERMAN: Now, how about Tworckov? Were you –

MR. COLE: Tworckov, I hardly knew. I did publish a print called the *Double Self-Portrait*. And it never did well. And I sort of got that print indirectly; I forget whether it was Mervyn Jules or one of the artists up in Provincetown that mentioned it to me, and I found out where it was printed, and saw the proof, and – and decided to negotiate and get it. And that's all I can recall. I don't know whether papers regarding that are in the AAA archives or not. So much of this was verbal.

MS. BERMAN: Of course.

MR. COLE: Most of the arrangements with the artists were verbal. Not that I wouldn't often put in writing an understanding regarding an edition, where I'd say, "It's our understanding that you will do this edition of a hundred prints, numbered 100[sic] through a hundred, plus ten; that AAA will pay for the printing; and that you will sign and number the prints; and all the numbered prints would become the property of AAA. And the artist's proofs would be yours and -" It was a very informal sort of a letter. I remember early on, in the - probably late fifties, early sixties, I would put in a clause in the letter that AAA owned the reproduction rights of the work. And I guess some time in the mid-sixties, I sold the rights for a record cover to some record company - it was a very prominent one; I can't recall - for an etching of Harry Hoehn, H-O-E-H-N. And never thought about it. I guess I got 200 bucks for the rights, or something like that. And I got a letter from Harry Hoehn saying that he saw his work on this record cover, and what right did I have to do that? And I wrote and said that that was part of the understanding of our publishing that particular print. And he said, "I didn't realize that. And I am going to write letters to every artist I know telling them never, never do business with Associated American Artists." I was really shocked. So I called him up and I said, "Come on in, let's talk." And he was very angry, very upset. And I calmed him down. I said, "I'll tell ya what, I will take this clause out of all future letters, and I'll give you the 200 bucks." And he suddenly was as nice as a lamb. [MS. BERMAN Laughs] And everything ended peacefully. But I - I had so few altercations with artists that they literally stand out in my mind - as minor as that was - where I'd be dealing with hundreds of artists. I mean, I think probably when I say I've dealt with 3,000 artists, I think I'm right. That some were just in passing, or some were commissioned, some were not; some work I looked at and couldn't use. And I never, never had problems. You know. And - and here was a problem. And I think that the only other problem - I had two other problems. I had one with a man, an artist whose name I've forgotten, who did architectural renderings. And Lever House was being built. And on spec, I discussed with him that it might be interesting for him to do this as it was being built - it may be another building, but I think it was Lever House - which he did. And I had a lady who handled sort of special things like that, and she took the renderings over to somebody at Lever House and whatever. And they rejected 'em; they didn't wanna buy them. And I told him that. And he sent me a bill for a thousand dollars or so, and - And I said, "No, this was not our arrangement." He said, "Oh, yes it was." And I - We had nothing in writing. And rather than go through aggravation, I think we settled for 500 dollars. And he kept the drawings.

And the last one I remember was Bernard Childs. Bernard Childs, I met at the opening of the Huntington Hartford Museum at Columbus Circle. He just charmed the hell out of me. He was a printmaker. I told him what I do and - And I just - We had quick rapport. And I know I spent a lot of time at that opening with Bernard. I called him Bernie in those days. He had just come from Paris. And he asked if he could make an appointment and come in and show me his work, and I said sure. I think within two days, he calls me up, and I make an appointment. And he brings in his prints. They are absolutely fantastic. They - Just jewels. And I - I said, "Oh, I'd love to handle six of them, just to get started." And I said, "This one, this one," and I picked out the six. And I said, "What's the selling price?" He said, "Well, this one's two hundred; this one's three hundred." I said, "Oh, I can't sell 'em at that price." And he said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Oh, I don't have a market at that kinda money for these prints, and -" And - I mean, maybe we'd sell one or two a year, at most. Most of the prints at the time, a hundred dollars, a hundred and fifty was a high price.

Anyway, he said, "Sylvan, try." And so I said, "Alright." So I took 'em in, matted 'em. And they went into the bins of all the other prints. And nothing happened, and - I guess a month passed, and he called me and he said, "How you doing?" I said, "You know, nothing, they're really - I told you this." And he then went on, and he called me suddenly almost every two weeks. And finally it got sort of upsetting, and I said, "Look, Bernard, if I'm gonna sell a print, I'm gonna let you know. And if you're gonna keep bugging me, I'm gonna ask you to take the prints back and we'll be friends." He kept bugging me, and finally I said, "Bernard, come up and pick up the prints." So he comes up to pick up the prints, and I gave him five; he says, "Where's the sixth?" I said, "I sold it." He said, "Well, keep these." I said, "No, I'm not gonna keep 'em. I'm gonna pay you for the sixth, and that's the end of it." Which I did.

I guess three or four years passed, and Aldis Brown, who had worked with Peter Deitch, came over with my gallery director at that time. And things were sort of flourishing. And Aldis comes into the office, he says, "I just found the most wonderful artist." I said, "Who?" He said, "Bernard Childs." I said, "No." [MS. BERMAN Laughs] He said, "I'd really like to do it. I really think we can sell 'em." I said, "Alright, Aldis, but it's your responsibility. You make the financial arrangements, you do everything." Financial arrangements were fairly simple; we got 50:50 across the boards with all artists. With no exceptions. I stuck to that because I wanted every artist being treated equally. I didn't wanna have one artist getting 60% and another 50. And I stuck to that, I mean - And so I said, "You take care of it." So Aldis did. And sure enough, time went on, nothing was sold. Aldis left to form his own gallery, and I decided it was time to give Bernard his prints back. And by then, he wasn't Bernie anymore; he'd married Judith, and it was now Bernard. And he wouldn't even come up to get 'em. I think Judith got 'em. And then he called me and said, "These prints are not acceptable. They've been damaged." I said, "What do you mean, damaged?" He said, "Well, the hinging is wrong, and this is wrong, and I - and I gave you pristine prints. So these prints belong to you, and I want payment." So I said, "That's ridiculous." And I really thought Judith was wonderful, and we're still good friends. And I called Judith. I said, "Will you get this guy off my back?"

Anyway, it ends up that her father's a lawyer. And suddenly I got a letter, legal lawyer letter from her father on behalf of Bernard saying they want payment for 50% of the retail. Well, this went on and on, and I said no. Finally, I know we did settle. And I did buy them. And I do know I then put 'em out for sale at 50% of what he had for pricing. And he blew up at that. I said, "They're my prints; I can do with 'em what I want." And that was my vengeance.

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs]

MR. COLE: But I guess I could've gotten persnickety, too, but I was really, I think, generally very good with all the artists. I mean, I - I think they respected the gallery, respected me. And I always felt comfortable. And I was to the - I was to the dot on payment. They got paid the 20th of the month following sale, whether we were paid or not; it was too much trouble to - with all this volume of business. But I would sign the 20th of every month probably between twenty - which would be minimal - to 60 or 70 checks to artists. It was really - And I loved it. I loved signing those checks. And they loved getting 'em. I know we threw a Christmas party every year for the artists and the staff. And that party would be about the 15th, 16th of December. Or, you know, pretty near the 20th. And I'd have the checks made out early, and at the Christmas party I'd go around with envelopes, handing artists the checks that they got. 'Course, there were some artists that didn't get checks that were at the party, but it's - it was a nice thing. Sort of a Christmas present.

MS. BERMAN: Well, and you mentioned - Let's - let's pick with somebody that you really knew well. You said Hudson Walker. Now, tell me about - You evidently had a real relationship with him?

MR. COLE: Oh, Hudson was just wonderful. Hudson, I really was - became very close to. I met Hudson through Richard Florsheim. Dick Florsheim, of himself, was such a close friend. I mean, we used to talk as if we were brothers. We were intimately close; we knew each other's personal lives, personal finances, personal hopes and dreams. I think I, in an earlier tape, mentioned how I got to meet Dick. Did I?

MS. BERMAN: I don't think so.

MR. COLE: I may be confusing it with - I'll repeat. There was an exhibition of American prints at the Rorschach[sic] Museum at 103rd and Riverside. It's not Rorschach -

MS. BERMAN: It's Roerich.

MR. COLE: Roerich Museum. I'm mixing up my Freud. And there was a print of ships at anchor called *Masts*. And I just knew that was a winner. So I - I think in the catalogue, they had the names and addresses of the artists, so I got it in some way. Dick was in Chicago, and I wrote Mr. Florsheim and said that we would like very much if he would consider doing an edition similar to that for Associated American Artists; that the edition was 250; he'd get ten impressions; and we'd pay 500 dollars, I think, at the time; and the print would sell for ten dollars. So I got back a lovely letter; he'd be delighted. And Dick asked all the - Dick was very precise. Like: Who would supply the stone? Who would pay for the printing? Who would pay for the paper? All these very precise things. I answered 'em. And I did get my first edition; I think it was *Anchorage*. And I think it sold in two weeks, all 250 gone. And that was the beginning of our friendship. And I would say that I was selling at least a thousand prints of Dick Florsheim a year from 1962 right through to the end of the sixties.

MS. BERMAN: Astonishing.

MR. COLE: Astonishing! He - he would go to Paris, and he made the first two color lithographs for Associated American Artists. I can't remember the titles. One was a vertical, almost 30 inches high by twelve inches across. And the other was a horizontal, same measurement. The one was a sort of skyscape or city scene, and the other was a scene of Provincetown, of the weirs and the nets and - And those two we put into a catalogue, a little four page thing with both in color. Thirty dollars a print. It was astounding. We had checks with orders this high in one day! A foot and a half high. Just all with thirty dollars, sixty dollars, or whatever it was. And that - those editions sold out. So then we kept doing black and white 250 editions for ten dollars, and then color ones, and - It just went on and on, and I did a show with Dick, his first major print show. And of course, Dick's prints were in probably 75, a hundred collections across the world. I mean, they were in the Bibliothec Nationale, they were in the British Museum. I mean, he was sorta well known. At one time, he was president of Artists Equity. And Dick was a very popular guy who - You know, he - he went on through, I guess, to the end of the sixties, being as popular as he was. He showed at Babcock Gallery. And there, he had a smash success with a write-up in Time Magazine and the New York Times, and notoriety like that. And then, as quickly as this media rose, it died. Evidently, we had really saturated a market.

I mean, there were just so many people that could buy so many of Dick's prints. And - So I commissioned him to fewer editions. And also, I didn't do any more color prints with him, and things like that. But Dick kept going. He was always at Murlot at the rock pile and - or at Desjournbert making prints. And he was very popular in both these places. Dick had spent some time as a youngster in Nice, where his family set up winter quarters at the

Negulescu [ph]. And of course, Dick spoke fluent French. And so when he'd get to these workshops, they all adored this American that not only did nice work and knew how to make prints, but also spoke French.

But I think Dick had trouble toward the end in – in just having lost that recognition and – And here he wanted me exclusive to handle every edition he ever did, and finally I had him get somebody in Arizona or New Mexico to handle his work, and Garelick in – in Detroit to handle his work, and Frank O'Shalger [ph] in Chicago – prints as well as the paintings they were handling – so that I wasn't the complete source for the print distribution.

There's nothing much more to say about this, except Dick died and – He was having lunch at some club in Chicago and went to the men's room and had a heart attack, and that was the end of it. But I keep thinking that toward the end of his life, he was very needed by having had this great success, and then going into – And I think this is a problem that I have always had with artists who sort of go past their prime. And especially when I was working on shows like WPA [Works Progress Administration] and I'd go to the artists and say, "I'd like to see if you'd sell me or lend me WPA prints," and they'd say, "I don't wanna do that; what about what I'm doing now?" And it has happened over and over again. And you see it. You know, you – You see it with every artist. For some reason. I mean, even Jasper Johns, you want the prints of the sixties or the work of the sixties. Picasso, from 1904 to about 1940. On and on and on.

MS. BERMAN: Well, and artists who are primarily easel painters or sculptors, there's a certain high point. I mean, everybody that – Well, they're still working.

MR. COLE: You keep wondering which artists seem to – I think [Edward] Hopper sort of never had a real decline. I have a feeling it takes a certain isolation and a certain type of mentality to keep the adulation and all the recognition away and – and – I look at somebody like Rauschenberg, where, you know – He has his low moments and his high. But [Robert] Rauschenberg was determined not to be caught into a trap. And so he kept moving on and moving on and moving on. Whether he moved on well or not, history will determine that. But I think – I know Dick Florsheim used to say, "I can't copy myself." And I'd say, "Well, Dick, this was the sort of stuff that sold better." And he – he was absolutely – He'd almost go the opposite way to avoid being trapped by the marketplace. And yet I know artists that – I remember one whose name – Well, I guess none of this is going to be released, but I remember Umberto Romano had a show at AAA back in the late forties. And one of the paintings was sold. And this woman came in, she said, "That's the one I'd have bought." He said, "I'll paint you another one," and did.

MS. BERMAN: Well, don't forget that there are also artists like [Alexander] Archipenko that went back and they'd redated it, they'd – you know, it's –

MR. COLE: Oh, yeah. And I think the same thing is said about [Giorgio] de Chirico. Painted his early stuff later on in life.

MS. BERMAN: Well, Stuart Davis was an artist who did not decline. He got better and more [inaudible].

MR. COLE: It's true, there are some that just seem to get better.

MS. BERMAN: It's very rare, though.

MR. COLE: But again, it's the artist that – Like Stuart Davis never – I have a feeling it's a matter of acclaim, in a way. I think the market and the acclaim is a very corrupting influence. And so if they don't have that, they can keep doing their thing. And if they can survive –

[BEGIN TAPE THREE, SIDE TWO]

MR. COLE: – integrity, where the artist does not want to make potboilers of what he's done. I mean, I know there's a printmaker, Harold Altman. And I am the only dealer in prints that I know of that has never had an exhibition of Harold Altman. And Harold Altman, I'd say in the late fifties, early sixties, was the child prodigy of prints. He was unbelievably talented. The University of Wisconsin – And he started making these wonderful linear prints. And then he made – went into parks and – and that sort of thing, subject matter. And Harold – I haven't seen him probably in eight or ten years. But he was making a million dollars a year, churning out his prints. Wonderful. If you saw one or two, you were aghast; if you saw them over the years, you realized that it was just one after the other. And he showed with Weyhe Gallery, with every gallery I could think of that handled prints in New York. No loyalty to any one gallery. Still shows, I think, at Art Expo, where his kids sort of manage his material, and I think it still sells; I don't know.

MS. BERMAN: That's interesting. This is – I'd never even heard of him.

MR. COLE: Well, he was – I did publish a few of his prints, but I never gave him a show.

MS. BERMAN: Well, I wanna kinda get back to Hudson Walker here.

MR. COLE: Oh, I'm sorry.

MS. BERMAN: That's alright. These other things are fine.

MR. COLE: We haven't even talked about Huddie. I met Hudson Walker through Dick Florsheim. They were neighbors in Provincetown in the summer. Dick's house - Next to Dick's house was called the buffer state, which was - The Walkers owned, I think, two or three houses right in a row on - right on Provincetown Bay. And then came Huddie and lone's house, where the girls grew up - Hattie, Berta and Louise. Berta and Louise are twins. And then another house, which one of the relatives may've owned, I don't remember. But Hudson and lone were the king and queen of Provincetown. They were the supporters, the arbiters, the - And I think it was pretty early on after I met Hudson - which was probably '61, '62, somewhere in the late sixties - he said, "Sylvan, I wanna buy every - a print from every edition you have ever done at AAA, starting back in 1958. And I will continue doing this every year." And I was publishing probably twenty to thirty prints a year. And while the earlier years, I was publishing fewer, I got this master collection together, and it all went to the University of Minnesota, where they framed them and gave them to students for their rooms. For a semester. Oh, they maybe borrowed 'em, or they had a small fee to pay. And at the same time, Hudson was buying every print - The prints that were part of the Print Council of America. Well, IGAS, International Graphic Arts Society. They were also publishing prints. And those prints would all go out there. And every year, Hudson, lone, sometimes some of the - Berta or Hattie or somebody would come on in, and I'd take them all to dinner. But before they went to dinner, they'd come to the gallery around six in the evening - the gallery'd be closed - and I would then show them that particular year's publications. And they'd make their comments and they'd - You know, they were buying it anyway. And of course, I gave them a very special price. But it was a considerable purchase for me, and - and it was an honor. And it was sort of an archive of the gallery's publications. But I don't think that archive exists today; I think that works were stolen. I know IGAS had published an Escher that disappeared that today sells for ten, twelve thousand. I had published a couple of David Hockneys that I think I was told they had disappeared. And I think a few Soyers, or something like that. But it was just - I also had a couple of Bentons that I had published. So those all - And I don't know to this - I know at one point before Hudson passed away, he had stopped doing that. And - Maybe it was pretty late. Just - I don't remember when he died, but -

MS. BERMAN: But he didn't give any of these to museums; this was just for the university.

MR. COLE: Yes. Never got - He did other things for museums. Like, he might see a print that I had published and say, "Now, that I'd like to go to the Milwaukee Art Center," or something like that, and so he'd buy a duplicate impression.

MS. BERMAN: Now, did - did - Did you ever talk to Walker about artists who did well, like say Marsden Hartley and -

MR. COLE: Oh, yeah.

MS. BERMAN: That would be very interesting.

MR. COLE: Well, that - I must say, we talked about it. But he had two great loves. One was Kathe Kollwitz, and the other was Marsden Hartley. And I do know that he used to tell me about getting those estates and - and not Kollwitz' estate, but getting a big block from some dealer who passed away - Norman or something - and getting a block of the Marsden Hartleys. And I do remember he had several Hartleys in his home. I don't know whether he had that *Dinner at the Thresher's* - What's - what's it called, where these - all these brown -

MS. BERMAN: The fishermen -

MR. COLE: Yeah, the fishermen at the table.

MS. BERMAN: I'm not sure if that's the right -

MR. COLE: Somehow that -

MS. BERMAN: *Fisherman's Supper* or something. *Dinner at the Thresher's* is a Grant Wood.

MR. COLE: Grant Wood, yeah. But - He would talk vaguely about the Hudson Walker Gallery. And I remember Joe Hirsch used to tell me that he was one of the artists that was in the gallery. And - But I must say - Most of the time, we would have lunch together about once every two or three months, at the Century. And he would ramble on about the art world as it was at the time, more than the Hartley material. I think the Hartley material was being handled by Babcock, even though Hudson owned it or - They were the distributors and handlers. And I think Hudson was sort of not as involved with the actual sales and merchandising of that estate. I think he did

give away some to important collections and stuff like that, on an annual basis, for tax purposes. Actually, Hudson is – when I knew him, and as long as I knew him – was in the jewelry business.

MS. BERMAN: I had no idea he was in the jewelry business.

MR. COLE: Oh, yeah.

MS. BERMAN: Well, he was also involved with some lumber or timber, there was –

MR. COLE: Oh, that's the family business.

MS. BERMAN: Right, right. That's what I – Because we looked through that in various Abbott guides of commissions – to photograph – and photographing along the camps.

MR. COLE: Yes, actually, Berta was very close to Bernice Abbott. They lived in Forest Hills in a very nice house. Certainly, loaded with art. I mean, Hudson was an avid buyer of art. Never bought anything expensive, though I think his eye was good, and he certainly ended up with a wonderful collection. I know after he died, I remember going out and lone asking me if I could handle this or that or the other thing. But he had stored away a Lautrec poster, or some [Honore] Daumiers, or goodness knows what all. And I think he also had an interest in Max Weber, collected quite a bit of that. Very much his own person. Nobody advised him. Hudson, liked something, he'd say, "How much is that?" He never haggled, he never wanted special prices. He – If you gave him special prices, he was appreciative, but he would never say, "What's my best price?," or "What can you do for me?" He was very much a gentleman that had very, very strong likes, and very, very strong dislikes. He was not a person that – If you were on his good side, great; if you were on his bad side, just forget it. I mean, he was rigid about it. And very outspoken about people that he didn't think much of. Like George Biddle was somebody that he would fuss over.

But Hudson was also very instrumental in founding the Artists Equity. And he was – founded, in a way, the Print Council of America with Lessing. While Lessing Rosenwald was involved, Hudson was certainly involved. Joshua Binion Cahn, who wrote with, I think, [Carl] Zigrosser, "What Is An Original Print?", eventually married Hudson's brother's widow. And they both passed away with the past five or ten years.

MS. BERMAN: Now, just also in Provincetown, of course, you mentioned Robert Motherwell, who was certainly a prolific printmaker. Did you have anything to do with him, with –?

MR. COLE: Never.

MS. BERMAN: Never anything?

MR. COLE: We were neighbors in Provincetown and knew each other. And friends. I mean, I – I remember going in his studio. I remember two wonderful stories about Bob. One is walking downtown with him one morning. And I was meeting Hudson over at the Provincetown Inn, which was the other side of town, for lunch. And Bob may've been invited, too; I don't remember that. But I asked Bob how things were, and he said oh, he was exhausted; he had painted ten paintings that morning. And of course, with his action painting, he'd have ten canvases, and he'd just go. And then he would sit for hours in front of each one, and probably destroyed all ten, or maybe kept one. The other story is a doctor Seley, S-E-L-E-Y, or S-E-A-L-E-Y, I don't remember. I remember him and his wife Marsha. And the Seleys were vacationers in Provincetown, much as my wife and I were. And one day Dr. Seley borrowed Dick Florsheim's sailboat, which I think was maybe – If sixteen feet long, it was big. It was probably nearer twelve. It was tiny. And I think it was called AAA. And they borrowed the sailboat, went out into the bay. And a storm came up. And I think Dick, through his glasses, saw the boat capsize. And he was gonna call the Coast Guard. And I went over to Bob and I said, "The Seleys just capsized in the middle of the bay." He says, "Come on, let's get it." Bob had a power boat. So we jumped into the power boat. He revs up and he starts – boom! And there's a jetty right – I said, "Bob, Bob!" We just missed the jetty. And he head out, and it's pouring rain, and he's trying to light his Gitanes Bleu cigarette and – and finally – I never forget it – he says, "I've always wanted to rescue my doctor." And it was his doctor. In fact, it was this doctor that had given Bob his heart – What is the monitor thing?

MS. BERMAN: Pacemaker?

MR. COLE: Pacemaker, yeah. What a line.

MS. BERMAN: Mm-hm. Well, I hope you got 'em.

MR. COLE: Oh, yeah, we got to them. And we took them back, and I think the Coast Guard came and hauled in the boat.

MS. BERMAN: Well, we – It occurs to me, as we're sitting here and I'm looking at one wall of prints by Will Barnet,

that we have not discussed your long – with Will yet –

MR. COLE: Well, Will, I started with back, I guess – On and off, we’ve known each other, almost 40 years, I’m sure. He’s somebody I just got to know better and better as our friendship grew, and – and – I’m trying to recall what started first. I’m trying to remember. I think – It must’ve been when I gave him a – I’d planned to give him a retrospective, and at the same time, publish a catalogue raisonné of his work. And – Working at the gallery was somebody who had been around the art world and was handling publications, whose name I’ll forget; it’s George somebody. He was sort of a Hassam scholar. And he had worked, I think, with ACA and a few other galleries. But anyhow, he did a lot of the legwork on helping get this together. And then Will and I would work on dating and edition sizes and all this. And Will – We had our retrospective, and it was a smash success. And he was so happy to have a catalogue raisonné. And over the years, I don’t think there’s been anything special; I – I think at times, I published some of his big color prints. And of course, it was a moment – I’d say throughout the seventies – when demands on Will’s prints just kept rising. And he was doing prints for Circle Gallery and for a lot of the more – I wouldn’t call ‘em schlock galleries, but galleries that didn’t have the prestige, and they were commercial vendors of work. But his work was selling at – And I know Will would tell me that the amount of money I gave him for an edition was a fraction of what he was getting from some of these big galleries. But I didn’t want editions. I’d have an edition of a hundred; these guys would have editions of 250, 300, 40 artists proofs. I mean, on and on and on. And I remember at the time – I think Elena used to sort of call me Will’s conscience, because I would try to say, “Will –” You know, he was one of the few artists that managed to stay away from falling into the abyss of a LeRoy Neiman or a schlock artist. I mean, he – But he just scaled that. It’s a very narrow thing of these artists that were mass producing prints in large editions and being sold by people like John Soke [ph] and – and others. Will managed to sort of stay above that level.

He always had good dealers. He had trouble staying, because dealers would fall apart. I think his first dealer was Scott Waddington. It was a guy with W. Very nice dealer on 57th Street [Richard Waddell, Waddell Gallery]. And then he died or committed suicide — something strange happened. Then he went to Kennedy. Maybe Dintenfass, Kennedy – And then Hirshl & Adler or maybe Hirschland. And then when Hirshl & Adler changed, they got rid of all their contemporary artists, including Will. That’s when he probably went to Kennedy. And then Dintenfass. And now he’s with –

MS. BERMAN: Tibor de Nagy.

MR. COLE: Tibor de Nagy. And quite happy. Philip Alexander over there is – knows Will and seems to be – Because Philip came from Dintenfass and – And they had their first show of Will’s work, of the very abstract period, which got good reviews and good coverage. And I know Will – I just spoke to him yesterday, and he’s on top of the world. He took these prints that I had shown at the Print Fair, had a big show of these prints, about fourteen or sixteen of them, in the Hamptons over the weekend. And he said, “Sylvan, they sold out. There were eleven prints sold the first night.” So he’s really happy, and tons of people, lots of people.

MS. BERMAN: Just are – just for the tape these are prints of the forties.

MR. COLE: These were prints from 1936 to ‘46 that he had never editioned. [MS. BERMAN: Right] Found the plates, and made editions of fifteen to twenty five. And they have done quite well. The price range is somewhere around 600 to 1200 dollars.

MS. BERMAN: Well, I remember when they found the plates, because – I think it was also last November, I was over there – or October – visiting them, and you came by, and I was helping them tack them up in a taxi. You and Mary came by as they were – They had just gotten – I don’t know what book they were.

MR. COLE: Right, well –

MS. BERMAN: They happened to be doing –

MR. COLE: I remember I first saw them last September. And that’s when I said, “I’ll put ‘em in the Print Fair.”

MS. BERMAN: In October.

MR. COLE: In November, and I sold 85 prints in four days. But I had very special opening prices, which were only good for the fair. People did take advantage of that. I sold – let’s see – to Block Gallery at Northwestern, I sold to a museum in Missouri. Yeah, I did quite well.

MS. BERMAN: That art, yeah, that print fair and that art fair in February, everybody did magnificently, as far as I understood.

MR. COLE: Well, I think so. I didn’t go in the Art Fair this year; I’d gone in 1999, and I had a disaster. I went in 1998, and sold moderate six figures, which for a print dealer, was fine. But ‘99, which I broke my rule of going

every other year, 'cause I'd done so well in '98, and I got killed. I think I did twenty five, thirty thousand dollars worth of business. And I had the best material I'd ever had, I mean - But it wasn't that inexpensive, and probably competed too much with paintings.

MS. BERMAN: Now I'm gonna go back to - I - I have this long list of other artists that we've mentioned. Oh, also, I just - for Will, you know, in - in terms of that, I mean, how do you evaluate him as a printmaker, his contributions to American printmaking.

MR. COLE: Whew! I think Will's very hard to place. He - He is probably the most knowledgeable in all aspects of artistic making, whether it's painting or gesso or etching or wood or what. He is completely professional in these areas. He has done 'em all. He has actually been a printer at the Art Students League when he was younger. And his knowledge is vast. He has had his students, tons of artists. He's loved and respected. His work - He's trapped by different periods. He went from a very Depression era type Americana. He, at the time, looks at a couple of his works, like *Air in the City* and *Child on a Tenement Window* as the first dealing with ecology and that sorta thing. He then goes into a semi-abstract movement with color in his prints, as well as in his paintings that get into that area; and then into very abstract, completely abstract, wonderful images. The *Big Duluth* and others that are standards. And then he comes out of that into family and cats and sort of a Oriental style of - muted palette, serene and soft. Which most of art cognoscenti thinks isn't very good. And this is, of course, what's been selling like hotcakes in the print area. I think with Will, it's an endless struggle for recognition. He isn't jealous; he just feels that he never gets quite the recognition that the stars get, like Rauschenberg, Johns. He's very close to Jim Rosenquist.

MS. BERMAN: That - he was a student.

MR. COLE: And - Yeah, and Jim is very devoted to Will. And - and - You know, I don't think Will resents Jim's success at all, but he feels that he should be there, too. I don't know how Will works out economically. I know he's comfortable. He has a rather small studio, which you've been to, in New York at the National Arts Club. And I think he's leaving probably end of this week to go up to Maine to visit Una and her family, and the kids have now grown; I mean, his two grandchildren with her. And it's also Elena's grandchildren. And I keep saying, "Will, you're adored, you're loved, you're honored; you get honor after honor. Be at peace, you know; don't try to be something that you're not." And I think he is more comfortable. I mean, he's just overwhelmed and bubbly with what happened at the Hamptons this last weekend. He needs it; it's the adrenaline. He said, "I'm worn out, but there were hundreds of people that came to the show, and I met so many people, and old friends, and it was just wonderful," he says to me. He stayed with Judy and Gus Leiber. And evidently, they have a palace, which I've always wanted to get to. 'Cause I showed Gus when he was just a youngster, in a way. And his name was then Gerson Leiber, still is. And he - I gave him a show years back, in the late fifties, early sixties. And he was working - He was married to this Hungarian that he had met during World War II or something, maybe, I don't know. And suddenly, she was making success selling ladies purses and pocketbooks, and suddenly Gus was busy being - handling those shipments. And suddenly Judy became a household thing, and so Gus made art. He's got the most fantastic studio, I mean, in the East Thirties, right off Park Avenue South. I mean, it's just so vast, with a front sitting area and sort of a place for fixing things, and then you go in back and there's all sorts of presses and woodworking material and this and just, just amazing! And he goes there every day and works, of course. They're now in the Hamptons for the summer. They live in a penthouse on Park Avenue and 34th. They live a wonderful life. And of course, Judy got bought out about three or four years ago for, evidently, millions and millions and millions; she was retained as an advisor, but she finally just stopped that; it was just a show thing. And I don't whether the Leiber bags today are anything like what she produced. But Will and Elena stayed with them for the weekend, and he said it was so elegant it was amazing. But he's a happy man today. I mean, whether that'll last a week, two weeks, three weeks or something, I can't tell.

I know in the fall, there's gonna be a show of some of these prints at Tibor de Nagy, plus a drawing show.

MS. BERMAN: Well, he had that retrospective at Montclair [Will Barnet Traveling Solo Retrospective 2000-2001. Montclair Art Museum, Montclair, New Jersey. May 14-August 20, 2000] recently. I mean, I know it's -

MR. COLE: Well, you see, there is, to Will, [MS. BERMAN: It's never enough] a waste of effort. I mean, Montclair, he's delighted, and it is traveling, I think, to someplace in Maine, someplace in Florida. And I know it's going to the Arkansas Art Center. But the venues aren't the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. It isn't enough. I understand that. It should've been at the Boston Museum. It should go to the Whitney. I don't think - You know, I do not think he is not at least worthy of that. I really feel that he is. I really feel that certain artists just fall through the cracks because it just doesn't work. I mean, Soyer did get his Whitney show; Will will never get one.

I remember years ago when Lloyd Goodrich was director and Tom Benton was gonna be, I think, 80. 75, 80. And I remember when Picasso and Braque became 80, all of Madison Avenue made it the biggest thing that ever happened. And I went to Lloyd and I said, "Tom's gonna be 75." I think it was 75. "Why don't we do something for American artists?" And this was several years in advance. And I'll never forget it; they were booked, they

couldn't do it, didn't work out. Whatever. And I do remember on Tom's 75th birthday, I had a major, major print show of all his prints. And the Whitney had a show of Helen Frankenthaler.

There's no answers to these things. I think the trendiness of this art world gets very confusing. It's very confusing now. I mean, it's - I don't know how you follow it as an art historian. I mean, I look at the papers and see ads for artists or reviews on artists I've never heard of and dealers I never heard of. And maybe this is a normal turning over, but it seemed to me, 30, 40, 50 years ago, you knew everybody and you went to openings. I don't know. It's too much with this.

MS. BERMAN: I think there are many, many, many more artists now. There must be over a hundred thousand artists in New York City, easily. Easily.

MR. COLE: Easily.

MS. BERMAN: And now there are several - you know, there are many more galleries. But you yourself said at one point that you were on a panel with Motherwell, and you said, "Bob, I can't believe we're in the same art world. [MR. COLE: Yeah] So you didn't know everybody.

MR. COLE: That's right.

MS. BERMAN: So, you know - And there's - I mean, there are some - You know, all these struggling artists out there are doing something radical that I don't know anything about because they're, you know, they're talking to themselves and, you know, and I - I can't be in Hoboken and Williamsburg and the Lower East Side and in SoHo and all, you know - Unless you're -

MR. COLE: I have no desire. I don't know whether it's a complete turnoff. I mean, I can't remember - I think I went - I didn't even go to the opening of the Whitney Biennial. First one I probably missed in 40 years. And I - I went to a private thing, where there were about 40 people and you could really see it, and spend an hour there and saw what - I don't remember too much. But I find - You know, thinking I - When I became a private dealer, that would be wonderful; I'll be able to get out and see all the shows I wanna see, and I'll do this and I'll do that. And I don't do it, I - I'm a member - Museum of Modern Art, I haven't been to in almost a year and a half. Used to go at least three times, four times a year. The Met, I still go to quite often. Had to see Tilman Riemenschneider. I wrote a paper on him in college.

MS. BERMAN: Let me see how much time we have. Well, we can start. You know what I wanted to ask you about was Lozowick. Did you have a relationship -

MR. COLE: Oh, Louie was just the sweetest person. I never had a close relationship with him. I never even published a print. He had given me two prints of - proofs of prints to possibly consider publishing, probably in the late sixties. And I didn't. I didn't think they were extremely interesting. But Louie had really been hid under a rock for a while. And then Dane [ph] somebody sort of took him on. A framer. And started advertising it as the greatest American artist or something. And somehow, the Whitney gave him a show of his prints. I don't know whether Judy Goldman had something to do with that or it's before her time. But that suddenly brought Lozowick into view again. This was early seventies. And I think he died shortly thereafter. I thought: How wonderful that he had this show while he was still alive.

And then I became very close to Adele, his widow. And I did one or two Lozowick shows. I remember we did one of Lozowick's New York, in which the catalogue had a map of New York City, a street map. And then I had numbers of where Hanover Square or the Fisk Building or whatever. And Coney Island, the whole thing. And then - But Lozowick was like so many artists I've known, where works they had done early on were mouth dropping. I mean, really. New York and Minneapolis, Chicago, Luna Park. I mean, among the greatest prints made in America. And this happened to me with two other artists, where - it couldn't happen today - but one was Spruance. And Benton Spruance, I gave his first show ever in New York. And it was sort of a wily game. I mean, I liked Benton Spruance, and I liked his work. It was either allegorical or religious or landscapes. Big color prints, which he printed himself. Color and all. He was an expert printer. And so we had this show in New York. Sixties, late sixties. And I knew, too, that he was a friend of John Canaday, so I figured: Ah, we'll get a review. And Canaday never covered the show; I think Brian O'Doherty or somebody else did. And -

But then it wasn't 'til after he died that I suddenly found this early work, the people work, the precisionist work. I mean, it was incredible. And I guess it was early eighties that Margo Dolan of - who was then Dolan Maxwell - and I had left Associated American Artists. She used to run AAA in Philadelphia - bought this massive collection of Spruance. It's one of almost every print he ever did, from Father Fletcher. And I negotiated, bought this collection from him; brought it in, divided it with Margo. And we had some shows, and of course we had a great success with that early material. I - I sold some things to the Whitney, some other museums; Margot did the same. So that was a surprise, based on what I knew of Benton.

And the third artist was Werner Drewes. And I don't know if I covered him before.

MS. BERMAN : No, we haven't.

MR. COLE: Well, Werner Drewes – In 1958 or '59, I gave him a purchase prize in our twenty – AAA's 25th anniversary print competition, to celebrate AAA's 25th anniversary; so it had to be '59. I know I told you, I think, that Una Johnson and William Collins were the jurors. And they gave certain prizes. But I also gave purchase awards, where I purchased an edition at a fixed fee, which I arranged with the artist, from all the works that had been submitted. And I – Werner Drewes did a black, green, and white small woodcut of – *Reflections*, I think that was the title, of trees reflecting in a pond. And I bought the whole edition. And that's how I first met him. Whether he was still in St. Louis then or not, I don't know. I do know he moved to Reston, Virginia somewhere in the course of probably the sixties or seventies. I know his wife had passed away and he's remarried. He had two grown sons, one of whom I still see, who –

MS. BERMAN: Well, one of them sort of still either manages or [MR. COLE: Yeah] takes care of the – the – the estate.

MR. COLE: Yeah, Wolfgang.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. [MR. COLE: And –] he pronounces his name Drewes. [MR. COLE: Yeah] He Americanized it.

MR. COLE: Right. And anyway, I was handing Werner's prints; they were mostly landscapes, California redwoods, and a few abstracts from the late seventies. He sort of – Which were very marketable, very corporate-like. Corporations were buying those. And I published a second print of a – of a harbor scene. And boats and – Pretty scene. And it did very well. And then he kept bugging me for a retrospective. And he kept saying, "Well, you gave one to Karl Schrag, and one to Louie Shanker and Dick Florsheim – I forget who all, I – Will Barnet. You know. And he wanted a retrospective. So finally I gave in. And I think it was 19 – shortly before I left, 1980, '81. The show was to be in January or February. And I went down – I'm sure it was January that I went down, it was – And I flew down to Washington, rented a car, and got lost finding my way to Reston, and got there at noon. But before I left, I had called him and I said, "Werner –"

[BEGIN TAPE FOUR, SIDE ONE]

MS. BERMAN: – interviewing Sylvan Cole for the Archives of American Art on October 11, 2000. Now, Sylvan, why don't we begin where we left off, at which you were going to see Werner Drewes, and you were – had just arrived in Reston, Virginia, where he lived.

MR. COLE: As I – This may be repetitive, but Werner had been after me for a retrospective. He had sort of cited all the retrospectives that I had given to various artists, like Will Barnet and Karl Schrag and Louie Shanker and on and on. And he said that he certainly ranked with them, and I should've given him one. So I agreed to. And I remember in January I went down. And probably around 1981, or '80, I'm not sure, I went down to – flew down to Washington, rented a car, and drove to Reston. I got lost on the way, but finally got to his house, roughly around noon time. And they wanted me to have lunch, and I said no, I'd like to go right to work; that I didn't – I had so little time, I wanted to definitely be getting back to New York around five o'clock.

And I had already told Werner what I had in mind. I had in mind for the retrospective that we would take ten prints from the thirties, ten from the forties, ten from the fifties, ten from the sixties, and ten from the seventies and early eighties, which would give us about sixty prints, and we'd have a balanced show. When I got upstairs into the studio, where he had made the piles of these decades of prints, we started off with the late twenties and thirties, and it just blew my mind. It was absolutely material I had never seen. It was wonderful. I don't think it was common knowledge about – that he had done this. At least, it certainly wasn't anything I knew. And I kept saying, "Werner, I want this and I want this." Oh – And he kept saying, "Well, wait until you get to the later material." I said, "Oh –" And before I knew it, I had at least twenty prints from the late twenties, early thirties. I had no trouble picking ten prints or so from the forties. And at that time, we broke for lunch, we came back. And by the time we got to the fifties and sixties, there was a relatively weak period of production. He had moved from the –

I should go back a little. In the thirties, he not only had these wonderful abstract, almost Kandinsky-like images, but he also had a lot of cityscapes of New York and bridges and things like that. And it seemed that one was done for commercial purposes, and the other for his own use. And – Getting back to the fifties, he had redwood trees, sequoias, portraits, a whole variety of fairly uninteresting, though professionally done work. I think in the fifties and sixties, I probably took six or eight prints each decade. And then when we got to the seventies and eighties, he went back to this color abstract imagery, which again, was very strong, surprisingly strong. The thirties and forties were mostly black and white. But here he had added color. And we put the show together.

I think I mentioned in the previous interview that once the show was on the walls, it just was wonderful. And I hit

what I call a homerun, because I do know the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum, the New York Public Library, the Modern, and the Brooklyn all bought from that show. And that, in a way, sort of brought Drewes back into being a major, major artist.

He died shortly thereafter, and the – I wish I could remember the name of that suite of ten prints that was the major achievement. It had a cover of a swastika-type thing. And I – I have to look that up and just give it to you. But he did a major suite of ten prints. And I think I had most of them in the show, though I did not have the suite itself. And as a matter of fact, that suite, I've only seen probably twice in my life, because I think it was always broken up and sold separately.

MS. BERMAN: Were there any other artists that you were close to that, you know, you think we might – should discuss?

MR. COLE: I think I was close to a lot of artists. I'm just trying to think if I've left any out that were important in my life. Did I talk about Dick Florsheim at all?

MS. BERMAN: Yes, extensively.

MR. COLE: Because he was sort of a real friend in my life, and he lived up and down, the life of a typical artist, where he had a certain amount of fame, and then just got forgotten. I don't think I can add too many to – that I haven't mentioned. I mentioned [inaudible], I know. I think I mentioned – Joe Hirsch?

MS. BERMAN: Well, you didn't go into him in detail at all, you just mentioned –

MR. COLE: Well, there was such a variety of artists. I mean, I do think that – I would not be exaggerating if I didn't say that during my career I worked with at least a thousand artists, of which probably twenty or thirty were of major import, and the rest were itinerant, almost, artists that just did their thing. And some arose to fame, like Peter Milton, in his own way or Carol Summers in his own way. There – there were certain printmakers that became strong individual image makers. And – But I think – One must realize that by the time I hit my heyday, which was sixties and seventies, coming on at the same time with the beginnings of Tatyana Grosman's workshop out in Long Island, June Wayne starting Tamarind – And the big names were emerging, which I had little or no contact with. The Jasper Johns, the Rauschenberg, the Warhol. Subsequently, [Roy] Lichtenstein, [Joseph] Stella, [James] Rosenquist. I – I knew Larry Rivers sort of in passing, and we still sort of nod when we see each other. I did meet all these artists at one time or another. But it was never on a – I never worked with any of them professionally. Whenever I had works by these artists, I always got 'em through the publishers that were publishing them.

MS. BERMAN: Well, let's also – let's – let's talk – What – Did you have any kind of relationship with Tatyana Grosman?

MR. COLE: She came in several times. I went out to see her. I just missed the boat. I mean, she showed me prints of a coat hanger done by a young artist named Jasper Johns, to retail for seventy five dollars. And it – it just was nothing to me. It – it – I can't explain. I do remember vividly that print. And I remember Jill Kornblee took over, because I wouldn't show these artists. And she had a show in her gallery. I think it was 1018 Madison or something like that. And they were all these, coat hanger and the other works of the artists that Tatyana produced. I do remember I had a *Stones*, which Larry Rivers did with Frank O'Hara. I remember buying a set somehow and – and selling it. I – I remember having various of her artists at different times. I do remember getting involved with Motherwell. But – My clients did not come to Associated American Artists to buy that kind of material. They were following the Benton, Curry, Wood tradition, the Americana, the representational. Sloan, Marsh. And also the old masters. And the French. Certainly, the Picasso, Braque, Chagall, Miró. And this was what was our stock in trade. I mean, this is what I kept buying. And – While I think I was adventurous at various times in – in the historical area, where I put on an Ensor show or put on a show of the French late 18th, early 19th century of [Felix-Hilaire] Buhot and [Auguste] Lepère and – and various artists, I did not get adventurous in the contemporary.

MS. BERMAN: Now, it just occurred to me, another artist – And also, you can – I'd like you to discuss him as and artist and then as a curator in force in the print world, I want to ask you about is Jacob Kainen, because I remember, when you said coat hangers, that Jacob bought that very early on at the Smithsonian, and was looked at very strangely.

MR. COLE: Jacob Kainen used to come in the gallery frequently. We were friends, very good friends. I remember when I was once on holiday in Provincetown, Jake was there at the same time, and we had a chance to be together. It was right after he had a split with his wife, and he was not a happy camper, and it was before he married his present wife. Jake would buy prints from AAA. He had an amazing eye. He – I remember one of his most important purchases, which is important to me, was Stuart Davis. And I had done a pretty important Stuart

Davis show early on. I – I did at least two. But I know I did one, and a lot of the museums bought. Jake was one of them. And he wanted a discount. I had traditionally given a 10% discount for all museum purchases. And I was sort of proud of museum sales. To me, it gave credibility to the gallery when a museum bought something that Avis Berman could buy or somebody. You know: Look, a museum bought this. And it was sort of a Good Housekeeping stamp of approval.

Anyway, Jake wanted the 10%. And I called Roselle Davis, and she said, “No, they’re not entitled to 10%. Where were they when Stuart was alive? Why didn’t they buy then?” So I remember telling Jake that. I remember saying, “Jake, Roselle said you should’ve bought sooner. Why did you wait until he had passed on?” And Jake said, “I tried. But Edith Halpert would never bother to show me prints.” She wasn’t interested in ten or fifteen dollar sales. And now, of course, the prints were certainly no longer fifteen dollars. I think – I think I had *Barbershop* at around three thousand dollars. And I only had one to sell of the thing. And I had plenty of *Theater on the Beach* and *Two Figures & El*, and they were each eighteen hundred. And the French – eleven French prints were very difficult to sell, and they were all in the four to six hundred dollar range but Jake used to tell me he was taking money he could get easily for typewriters and desks and put it into art.

MS. BERMAN: Right. That’s true. Supplies, that’s what –

MR. COLE: That’s right.

MS. BERMAN: Now – now, how do you evaluate him as an artist, as a printmaker?

MR. COLE: Oh, I have trouble with that. He certainly was – did many very good WPA prints of the traditional Depression era type. His abstracts? I think they’ve always been in good taste, beautiful. I published one or two. I’ve gone to almost every show Jake has ever had and I’m familiar with his work. And in fact, his last show was just over on Fifth, the Fuller Building, and still – almost in a wheelchair, but still doing interesting and wonderful work. I know one time there was a black tie thing in Washington, which I went to. I can’t recall what it was, but I do remember that my wife and I went to his home, where – We used that as a changing place. And I remember his showing me his – part of his collection of the German Expressionists and things like that, which were so extraordinary.

MS. BERMAN: Without a doubt. Did he show you the Munch prints, that they – they have Munch, as well.

MR. COLE: Oh, I don’t think I saw them all at that time. I mean, I do remember seeing the Beckmanns and – and some of the others. In fact, he had even bought some of the German Expressionist prints from me. Ruth was – He was married to Ruth then, and he was living in sort of the grand style. It was a marriage really made in heaven. Ruth Cole, my – We call each other cousins. And she was just great for Jake, and – and – He deserved what he got. He deserved all the happiness that he got from her, and the fact that he was financially able to buy works personally, and – You know, he’ll go through – Even at the recent Print Fair, he went through my cases and, you know, and – Then he said, “Well, I’ll go through this again,” and he pulled out a couple of Averys and he said, “I’ll buy those.” I mean, he’s still sensitive, and still acquiring and – I don’t think the purchase was made because we were just friends; I think he really liked the prints and wanted ‘em.

MS. BERMAN: Mm-hm. Definitely –

MR. COLE: But he hardly ever goes to a fair and doesn’t buy something from me. It might be a five hundred dollar print.

MS. BERMAN: They have a wonderful collection, and they have – Well, they have John Graham, and they have a wonderful Rothko watercolor.

MR. COLE: Oh, I haven’t been down there in years.

MS. BERMAN: Well, I think that we should – we should progress and –

MR. COLE: By the way, I forgot to tell you, one time Jake’s son worked for AAA. I think he lasted a month.

MS. BERMAN: Dan?

MR. COLE: What?

MS. BERMAN: Dan Kainen?

MR. COLE: Yeah.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, no.

MR. COLE: When I went to the opening at the Fuller Building about a year ago, he came over to me and he said, "Hey, remember, I used to work for you." And -

MS. BERMAN: I didn't know that.

MR. COLE: I had some amazing - Did I tell you about Lessing Rosenwald's granddaughter working for me?

MS. BERMAN: No.

MR. COLE: Betsy, yeah. Yeah, I think I mentioned that.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, I think - Well, you had mentioned that Andre Emmerich had worked -

MR. COLE: I worked with Andre. We were both hired at the same time, 1946. Same year. That's when Helen Frankenthaler was still at Bennington.

MS. BERMAN: Right, right. Well, I - I wanna talk about the impact of, you know, about some of the major print curators. And I guess I would start with Hyatt Mayor over at the Metropolitan, or if you had any [inaudible].

MR. COLE: Hyatt was a really good friend. He was just wonderful. He had an enthusiasm that - and a love of prints that - It seems that that era of curator were - had the time to be scholarly and to know about prints from the playing cards of the 15th century to what was being produced that very decade. They were very free in sharing information, very enthusiastic about somebody as - like myself, who was younger, loving prints as they did. And it was a wonderful relationship I had with Hyatt. I'm sure I told the story of the Feingers.

MS. BERMAN: No.

MR. COLE: When I got the Feininger collections?

MS. BERMAN: No, no.

MR. COLE: Bill Lieberman, on his birthday, February 14th, [Laughs] took me down to Julia Feininger for supper. And this was 22nd Street and Second Avenue, I think, in a very ordinary apartment. Living room, kitchen, dining area - and the area was like a closet - little hallway, which had a bedroom - a bathroom on one side, and a closet on the other, and a bedroom. And Feininger even worked there in that apartment. We had some cheese and crackers and stuff and goodies that Bill had brought. And then we discussed my taking over the estate for prints. And she said fine and I made an appointment with her. The following day or two days later, came down, spent the afternoon with her. We sort of inventoried the prints that she had. And I guess it took us a couple of weeks to do that, organize them - And they ended up in, I would say, three boxes. It was over a thousand prints. And after we were through with the inventory - There were interesting things that would happen. Like we'd find two prints, both the same, and one would be marked first state and the other second state. And we'd be looking. And I'd say, "I see it." And she said, "Don't tell me, let me find it." And in one print, he had a little window, in the other he didn't. And - Or sometimes she'd say, "I wonder if Lyonel's playing a trick on us, [MS. BERMAN Laughs] in making a first state and second state."

Anyway, finally we got through with the inventory, and so she said, "Well," she said, "Take 'em." So I got on the phone and I called the shipping department at Murray Kaplan, I said, "Murray, get a taxi, hold the taxi, and come up and help me carry these cases down." And we carried 'em down, got back in the taxi, took 'em to the gallery. So there we had all these prints. And then I got involved with Leona Prasse, because she went through every one of them, and she was doing the catalogue raisonné.

MS. BERMAN: Leona Prasse.

MR. COLE: So I gave her an office where she could work. And it was on the - We were on the - at 605 Fifth Avenue, which is between 48th and 49th. We had started on the third floor of that building, and we grew to the fourth and fifth floors. So we had three floors in that building. It was a - sort of a brownstone, floor-through floors. And she was up on the fifth floor, and through the intercom she'd say, "Sylvan, come on up, I found another state." So I'd go running up and - Anyway - And I used to tease her. I'd say, "Ya know, Julia's never gonna live to see this." And she said, "Well, you're a dealer and I'm a scholar." I wanted her to hurry things up. The only other person that ever said that to me, too, was Gail Levin. But - And ah, God - I got involved with her on the Hopper prints. She didn't know an etching from a lithograph. Anyway, that's an aside.

Finally, Bill Lieberman suggested that the first show be called Ships and Seas. He knew the work so much better than I. So I picked out a hundred prints, I think with his help, that dealt with ships and seas from big to small little sailboats and - And he wrote the essay for the first catalogue. And Julia was alive. And Edith came to the opening, and so did the one who taught up in -

MS. BERMAN: Was that T. Lux or -?

MR. COLE: That's right, T. Lux Feininger, the one who taught up at Cambridge. And so I met them for the first time. And - But before the show was mounted, I called Hyatt. And I said, "Hyatt, let's have lunch. I want you to see the Feininger -" I - I never let on that I had so many prints. I mean, this was a hundred I was putting on the market. And we went to lunch and - at Longchamps, which was my hangout, between 48th and 49th. Came back to the gallery, and he started going through the prints. And he said, "Oh, Sylvan, what a dessert. Best dessert I've had in years!" And he was so excited, so excited. And "Oh, isn't this wonderful?" He got through all hundred, and I looked at him, and he said, "Sylvan, this has been a privilege." And I said, "Well, Hyatt, are there any there you'd like?" "Oh, I'd like 'em all!" I said, "Hyatt, are there any there you'd like to buy?" And he said, "Oh, Sylvan, we don't have the money. And besides, we're gonna get 'em all anyway." And it was the thought that everything that was important or great would be - go into commerce, and then be willed to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. And out he went. Not a one!

So the second person I called was Harold Joachim from the Art Institute of Chicago. Harold flew in. Went through the hundred, picked fifteen - which in those days was probably, I don't know, twelve, fifteen thousand dollars, the price of one print today - and picked, without question, the fifteen best. There wasn't one other in the other 85 that you said, "Well, that's - probably he missed that." He picked the fifteen best. Unerring eye. Complete - And he did it quickly. He went through them once, he went through them a second time, put 'em aside, and then he, without any review, he said, "These are the ones I want." I said, "Well, you can't have 'em 'til after the show." He said, "That's fine." And that's my story with those two.

I subsequently, I think, [Eleanor] Sayre came in; I think [Carl] Zigrosser came in, didn't buy anything. I think Philadelphia was the only museum I didn't sell. But - And then years later, John McHenry[ph] came in and bought Feiningers from me. And I remember I gave them one as a personal gift, which - He called me, he said, "Sylvan, you're in our New Acquisitions show," and I sort of felt very proud to see "Gift of Sylvan Cole" on the wall, with a great print. But yeah, McHenry sort of tried to fill in some of the strange gaps - even Grant Wood - that Hyatt had not bothered with. Not that Hyatt had made mistakes. It was just his way of acquiring, and he was more concerned with building the - the collection to having the best impressions of everything they could get, whether it was Chandor or Rembrandt or - or Feininger. But Feininger was too close to his thinking to go out and spend money on it.

MS. BERMAN: Now, I'm - I'm confused. Now, wasn't - Was it [Carl O.] Schniewind who was [Curator of Prints and Drawings] at the Art Institute, or -?

MR. COLE: Schniewind had died. Or had resigned - or I - I never knew Schniewind.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, ok. Right, ok - so you dealt with Joachim.

MR. COLE: No. No, Joachim, in the early sixties - I think the first show was 1963 - was the curator. And highly regarded.

MS. BERMAN: Right, definitely.

MR. COLE: Yeah. Sayre was in Boston. Zigrosser was Philadelphia, Mayor was New York and Joachim was Chicago. And those were the biggies.

MS. BERMAN: So - Well, I - And also, Bill Lieberman, of course.

MR. COLE: Oh, well, Bill Lieberman was usually modern art.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MR. COLE: And Bill had no interest, because they had so much gifts from her. I mean, they had a great Feininger collection. And Bill, I - I first met in '46. Bill and I have known each other now 64 years - 54 years. I mean, my God! We were just in our twenties. And he had been made curator of prints at the Modern. I think he had had that job for a few years. I had just come out of the service and was starting with AAA. And Bill would come over once or twice a year and look at our five dollar prints. And occasionally buy something. He was never snobbish about it. It was just part of his job. And I know I usually worked with him. It's funny, years and years and years later, I remember he traded me a [Paul] Gauguin from Estampe Moderne for a couple of Grant Woods that I owned personally. And it went into the Museum of Modern Art collection. But that was years later. That had to be in the sixties.

We worked - He was really a very good friend. I mean, he was, I would say, always a professional. Even with your friendship, it was a professional - And with all his relationships - and I've known Bill with - We used to have dinner often together at Louise Smith's. And he's very fond of my wife. I remember when Lee Krasner died, he -

he took Lillyan; I couldn't go out to the service. Very conscientious of maintaining – knowing what the relationship's about. I mean, recently, Emilio Sanchez, who was a friend of both of ours, a Cuban-born, Yale-educated artist, passed away. And Bill called me and said, "I just got word that Emilio died." And the service was on such and such a day, and he knew I'd wanna know and go. And of course, it was in the papers, but Bill called me before. And we went to the service, and Bill gave a beautiful eulogy.

But Bill – This would have to be off the record until both of us died. Bill was very aware of his strengths. He was devastated after the schism came with the Museum of Modern Art. He – When Rubin was brought on – And it was a troika arrangement, after Bates Lowry had been there and wasn't working out. And Bill was made Director of Collections, Rubin was made Director of Exhibitions, and Oldenburg was made director of whatever. All the rest. Administration or something. And then Rubin pushed Bill out. Rubin said, "I cannot be Director of Exhibitions without having the collection at hand." And the board offered Bill a year sabbatical and director of the department of drawings. He could not go back to prints, because Riva Castleman, his assistant, had become Curator of Prints. So Bill took the sabbatical. And I remember his – See, he and I had a community apart in Fire Island, so I see more of him in the summer than I do all year round. And I remember Bill discussing being offered a job in Washington at the – I think the National Gallery, I don't remember that, but I – I think it was. And I used to say, "Bill, you're a New York person. You cannot possibly leave New York." I said, "The department of drawings isn't the worst thing in the world. You love the Modern, and you're still – Everybody who knows you knows who you are and your scholarship. Nobody is gonna look at this as a demotion or anything."

But then Tom Hess died. And – and a miracle. I mean, you think of strange things. Henry Geldzahler decides to leave the Met, where he could be forever, to become commissioner of art, city affairs, or whatever. Tom Hess leaves Art News, goes to become curator of 20th century art at the Met, and dies suddenly. Who is the most perfect person for that job in the whole world? Bill Lieberman. Absolutely the most – Absolutely. 20th century art. Knew it backwards and forwards. Under Alfred Barr, under [Rene] d'Harnoncourt. So, I mean, it was never – I mean, I was so sure he'd get it. I mean, and I think Bill had worries and concerns, but it happened relatively quickly. He got it. And he's gotten a couple of brickbats since, they – But he has done so much good for that museum. That collection he got from Chicago, which the Modern would've gotten; certain paintings he got from Louise Smith's collection. I mean, on and on. He really knew where these things were and I – I – I know – Bill, to de Montebello, is one of the fair haired boys of the world. In spite of some criticism that he gets from art publications on his purchases of contemporary art. But that's – Nobody's ever gonna not get criticism for that.

And Bill is very private. He is – He has so many assets – aspects to him. I mean, he's one way with one person, he's one way with another, he's – he's – But as I say, he's a consummate professional. And he's working all the time. Even at – socially. I mean – He was – Oh, the – Whatever name, the people, the two yachts from Mexico that gave the great Matisse, *The Sailor*, to the Met.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, oh, yeah, the Gelmans.

MR. COLE: The Gelmans.

MS. BERMAN: Gelmans, mm-hm.

MR. COLE: I mean, Bill used to tell me unbelievable stories! Here are these people, with twin yachts. In the Mediterranean. He would join them in Rome or something. Go onboard one of the yachts. Laid out on the bed were shorts his size; shirts, sport shirts, his size; money, hundred dollars, in the currency; robes, whatever. Then they would take off, let's say for Naples, and at night, the ships would come together. And one night they'd eat on one ship, and one night on the other. And the chefs would vie to make the best meals ever, ever, ever. And I think la Paz, is he the writer?

MS. BERMAN: Mario Paz, or Octavio? Octavio. The one – One of them won the Nobel – there was Mario Paz and there was Octavio Paz.

MR. COLE: Well, I think it's Octavio was aboard and – I mean, all these amazing people. One time they did Turkey. And Bill – All these days, they'd just go in and out. But that's another connection. I mean, of course the Rockefellers, he knew well. Philip Johnson. Who's the lovely guy who was acting director of the Met for a while – of the Modern? Heavy, a big collector.

MS. BERMAN: Paley, no.

MR. COLE: No, no. It's not – But another good friend of Bill's. Oh. German Expressionist. German born. I think it begins with a B.

MS. BERMAN: An artist?

MR. COLE: No, he's a wealthy industrialist. American now. Lives here. And he was on the board of the Modern

forever, and he was acting -

MS. BERMAN: Oh, oh, Walter Bareiss.

MR. COLE: Right.

MS. BERMAN: Ok.

MR. COLE: Gosh, I'm glad you're - You are so perfect for this; you know all these people. Yeah, Walter Bareiss. Also very, very close to Bill. But people like Julia Feininger. I mean, Julia used to cry that Bill wouldn't take her calls. I mean, Bill had done his job with her. He had placed the watercolors and things with Marlborough. Colin, Ralph Colin was her attorney. Sylvan Cole took care of the prints. And it was done. And Julia would call him. I - I'd call him, I'd say, "Bill, Julia is crying. You've got to at least say hello to her once in a while." He said, "Sylvan, I really am very busy."

When Bill's out in Fire Island, nobody knows he's there. He rents a house, where he rents the front part of the house, with linoleum on the floor - Living room, counter, kitchen, bedroom, bedroom, bath. And a little deck. Sits there, reads all day long. Fixes Scotch and sodas all day long. Loves gossip. I mean, I've met Rockefeller kids out there, I've met Stuart Preston. I mean, he - The son of the king of someplace, you know. Amazing.

MS. BERMAN: Well, yeah, I imagine - I imagine that on vacation, he doesn't - he just wants to sit there and chill [inaudible].

MR. COLE: He goes out - He takes the train or the bus. He goes on Friday, he leaves Sunday around two. I cannot get him to come over. He used to come over and visit with me constantly, but he hates the lateral ferry, and he doesn't wanna walk anymore. And I'll say, "Bill, the bay is like glass." And we would play Russian bank hours on end. Just - Never for money. Bill refuses to gamble; he's not a gambler. And it was just pure pleasure, never talked shop, hardly at all. I miss that, I really do. I don't make the effort to get over to him that often and vice versa. We're only two miles apart, but - I'll drop by once in a while in the past few years. But he doesn't come over to see me anymore. Though he did -

[BEGIN TAPE FOUR, SIDE TWO]

MS. BERMAN: That's - Now, the other - You had mentioned before, we haven't spoken about June Wayne. Except that you mentioned her. So I think it would be interesting to get your take on her.

MR. COLE: I met June Wayne through Dick Florsheim, and fell madly in love with her, and vice versa. We're both real print devotees. And we were kissing cousins. And then June got the money from Ford to found Tamarind. And suddenly, the prices for prints for artists that I knew that went out, for the prints they did at Tamarind, were almost double or triple what the artist was selling for, what I was selling the artist for. I remember Jake Landau. Jake was one of the first ones out there. And he said he couldn't even take a proof to his hotel or his room to look at it, because everything had to be structured within the rules and confines of the workshop. And then she was doing those work in motion analysis that you do: Proofing was so many hours, this was so many, that was so many, and printing per print. It - And I thought that she was not producing, or getting any of the important artists - though [Josef] Albers, I think, did work early on. But I was - then became very - Tatyana Grosman. [Phone rings; tape stops, re-starts]

MR. COLE: Part of the politic of that era, where I was a Tatyana Grosman fan, and whatever June did - And June had it all rigged. She had collections of her prints placed in museums. Paid for by subscribers, of which she got about six who gave her, I don't know, 20,000 a year, whatever. And then they took these fantastic tax deductions, because the prices were so much more than what they put up. And they never saw the prints. And I guess the second year - I think Joachim said he didn't want 'em anymore, or something happened. He wanted to pick and choose; he didn't wanna get a block. But I think the National Gallery got 'em, I think the Modern got 'em, I don't remember. And then one year, she went to the Art Dealers Association of America to get an appraisal on a collection. And Albert Reese - Herman Wechsler of F.A.R. Gallery, Albert Reese of Kennedy, and Sylvan Cole were the three - the panel of appraisers. And rather than each of us going separately, we all met at F.A.R. Gallery. The prints were put there, and we went and evaluated all the prints at a fraction of what June thought they were worth. And from then on, June Wayne and Sylvan Cole were not very good friends. I told her that I - before that, that I thought her price scale was too high, that prints were supposed to be a democratic thing, and that's what I believed in; and I was selling prints from ten dollars up and - And she said, "Let 'em buy reproductions if they can't afford good prints." I never forgave her for that. And we just had a philosophical falling out. I mean, I think I've only seen her - I haven't seen her in twenty years. That's about all I can say about June Wayne. I - I think she had a fortune of money given her from Ford. I do think that the only real good that came out of it were not the prints that were produced, but the printers that were produced. Judith Slobodkin, Jack Lemon, Ken Tyler, Gemini. I mean, that was truly perhaps a contribution to the world of contemporary printmaking that came to pass. But it all stemmed from the philosophy of Tatyana Grosman, who - I mean, they

stemmed. Because they got the good artists.

I don't know if I mentioned Ellsworth Kelly.

MS. BERMAN: No.

MR. COLE: In Paris, he had done two suites of prints for Galerie Maeght. One were these large color prints, where there'd be trapezoid with black and yellow-black, and forms like that; and the other were the flowers and the plant forms. I think - I do remember pretty clearly that I would buy a suite of each of them, which may've been 25 or 30 prints in each, for twenty seven dollars a print. And I came back and I was selling those in the mid-sixties for seventy five to ninety dollars. And he came into the gallery one day and asked to talk to me. And I was very impressed meeting him. I told him I admired his work and all. And he said, "Well, Mr. Cole, I've been hoping that I could get out to Gemini" - I think Ken was still there - "But they feel that my retail price structure's too low for them to be able to work with me. And is it possible you could reconsider the selling price of the prints?" I think by then Galerie Maeght had practically sold out. Or he had gotten them all purchased by friends or whatever. And so I still had the last 40 or 50 Kellys for sale at the price. So we discussed price. And I do remember I went up to somewhere around a hundred and seventy five to two hundred dollars. And then he did go to Gemini and he did do some prints.

MS. BERMAN: No, he only worked with Irwin Hollander and -

MR. COLE: Well, Hollander was another Wayne person.

MS. BERMAN: Now he's with - out in L.A. The one who used to be at Tyler, but split to - Sid.

MR. COLE: Sid Felsen, yeah.

MS. BERMAN: Right, right, right. Yeah, he did - he did a - He [Ellsworth Kelly] was honored at the Archives benefit last year [1999], and he [Sidney Felsen, co-founder of Gemini G.E.L.] did a little print for us. And I did an Ellsworth Kelly print show last year.

MR. COLE: That's nice.

MS. BERMAN: It was. It really looked great on the walls, because, you know -

MR. COLE: I still remember that Henry Geldzahler, when he did his show and he had Kelly right across the whole top of the [MS. BERMAN: Right] Metropolitan Museum of Art.

MS. BERMAN: Well, Kelly - I had wanted to focus it, but he wanted - You know how small that space is. He essentially wanted a print retrospective in that little space. And when you have twenty to do - But we started - We used the Paris posters, and we used some of those handmade pulp paper, and the plant, couple - I mean, considering that I think I had seventeen things in there, [MR. COLE: Yeah] it looked pretty good.

MR. COLE: What got us to where we are? Oh, we were talking about Wayne.

MS. BERMAN: Right, right.

MR. COLE: Yeah. So that's all I can say about her, I - I think she also had a highly inflated opinion on her own work. Which I thought was fairly pedestrian, though she was a - she is a pretty good lithographer, you know, but she never - Very symbolist type of work.

MS. BERMAN: Well, I think she's a real force out in California on the art scene, too. You had mentioned Albers. Did you ever -

MR. COLE: I have one little aside. My - she - Michael Mazor told me the story about how he told June that I had bought several - bought out several suites of his called *Artist and Model*. I think twenty five of them for probably 500 dollars a suite. Something like fifteen thousand dollars. Which was a lot of money. And of course, it was very little for all that I got. And Shuman [ph] said, "You never should've sold Sylvan Cole. I mean, he's so niggardly in what he pays artists," and all that. And Michael said, "Well, he's the only dealer that agreed to buy my work." Yeah, the - Michael just had a major, major, major retrospective at the Boston Museum of Art. And I went up for the opening, partly as his guest, and he told that story. [They laugh]

MS. BERMAN: Had you - You had mentioned Albers. Now, did you know him or ever work...

MR. COLE: I had met him - I met him once, and I - At - at the - It's funny, I was handling Kelly - Now that I think of it, I was handling Albers when those square portfolios came out. In a way, I put myself down that I missed - in a way, I did miss. But I did have that available at the gallery, and - And I remember Albers had a suite of his just

come up for auction – or a print, I forget – and it went for an extraordinarily high price. And I remember asking him was – had he been aware of the high prices that his things were fetching. And he seemed very pleased that there was that sort of recognition. He was a lovely guy; I remember that distinctly. And his wife was lovely. He did come to the gallery once, I think, to buy Feininger. Because I had mentioned that I had that estate.

I always used to encourage artists to buy prints. I think Richard Haas had a big article in the Times several years ago, in which he described going to Sylvan Cole and saying it was such a nice thing to buy prints from him, because I would never ask the artist to pay for ‘em; I would take it out of the proceeds that I’d owe them as I sold their work. But – It always fascinated me. Like, perhaps one of the best collectors was Philip Pearlstein. And Philip ranged all over. He’d buy everything from [Frida] Kahlo to Japanese prints, and just loved them. And he had a great eye. And I always say to artists, “You have the eye. You know. You should collect.” And it was – And some would, and some were just the opposite, wouldn’t buy anything but themselves, or trade with artists. But Philip was one. Raphael Soyer also collected.

MS. BERMAN: He had a great collection.

MR. COLE: And he had so many things that he loved and collected, he – I remember he bought Avery from me and – Karl Schrag collected. I sold – I guess the best thing I ever sold an artist, I sold to Alex Katz. Years ago, he bought a Degas monotype from me, when it wasn’t a lot of money, but he still – And I – whenever I see him, which isn’t so often, he talks about having that monotype and – And Alex and I became friends. It’s sad in a way. We – I notice in the art world, it’s very difficult to maintain long, long, long friendships as different things happen – the artist fails, or loses, or – or the museum person gets promoted way to the sky or whatever. Like, I knew Jack Lane very well when he was just an assistant at Brooklyn; then he became something else. And it’s now, at my stage of life, I – I used to know so many museum directors; now I know so few. But – I’m trying to remember my train of thought.

MS. BERMAN: It was Alex Katz.

MR. COLE: Oh, yeah. And Alex then told me that he, when he was a youngster in New York, used to do the frames. I can’t remember the name of the framer who did the frames for AAA. And Alex knew the – So it was just a sort of small world coming back. And I bought prints from Alex directly. He sort of played an independent game. I think I published one print, I don’t remember, or published a part of an edition. But I do remember going down on Broadway and – West Broadway to his fabulous studio and meeting Ada and Alex when their son was just a youngster.

But artists collecting has always been interesting to me, and I’ve always encouraged it.

MS. BERMAN: Now –

MR. COLE: Talk about collecting, Dick Florsheim dies, and one of his possessions was a [inaudible] of Picasso, which I was in charge of as a trustee of the Florsheim Fund, of selling; and I sold it at Christie’s probably five or six years ago for 90 thousand dollars. And I remember discussing whether we should sell it or not. And our financial advisor on the fund, a gentleman from Chicago, Philip Ba – Peter Barrett, who’s with Stein Roe, Peter said, “We’re better off having the 90 thousand now and investing it than waiting for its potential,” since 90 thousand seemed like a high price at the time.

And it’s very interesting. We sold it and got 90 thousand net; that was the deal with Christie’s. We got the 90 thousand, turned it over to Peter. And I’m talking eight or nine years ago. And now there’s one coming up at Christie’s in their sale the end of this month, or early November, and it’s estimated at 90 to a hundred and twenty thousand. So we did the right thing. But that was part of Dick’s collection. He had some very – He had a lot of Mexican artists, [Jose Clemente] Orozco, [David] Siquieros. Of course, Jake Kainen falls into that group, too.

MS. BERMAN: Right, well, he collected, and Ruth – Ruth was also collecting. That’s how they met. The great story, they were at a lunch and he very condescendingly turned to her, ‘cause he had been talking about German Expressionist prints, and just condescendingly decided to explain who [Ernst Ludwig] Kirchner was to her. And she just snapped back that she knew very well who he was, and she happened to collect him, and – Well, that was the beginning. He went up to see her etchings.

MR. COLE: Oh, that’s a nice story.

MS. BERMAN: It is, they got together through prints. I know it very well. And neither of them – I don’t know, they didn’t – Neither of them wanted to go to this lunch; their friends dragged them, and they were next to each other. [MR. COLE: That’s funny] That’s how it started, through prints.

MR. COLE: That’s good.

MS. BERMAN: German prints.

MR. COLE: What's next on your agenda?

MS. BERMAN: Well, we've got – Now, we haven't discussed Una Johnson and any relationship you may have had with her, and her –

MS. BERMAN: Well, Una was amazing. She was the dominant print curator of contemporary prints all through the – my early stages of the late forties into the – And certainly, when I came back, in 1958 on, she was everything. She had the power, with her biennials, to almost dictate what the print world was all about. And it was the time when the printmaker was in a world of itself, as opposed to the painter, who were doing abstract expressionist work. And because of that, we always presumed, that sort of imagery, they could never make prints, they would never be printmakers. So the world of the painter, until Tatyana Grosman really started getting these painters to make prints for the first time – And the world of the printmakers was theirs. And she championed – championed three artists: Gabor Peterdi, Mauricio Lazansky, and Antonio Frasconi; those were the big three [MS. BERMAN: For Una] in the print world. And it wasn't just for Una, it was the way life was. And getting in the Brooklyn was a major, major accomplishment. And she was the dictator.

In 1959 – I had been director of Associated American Artists all of one year – I decided for their 25th anniversary of AAA, we would have a print competition. And we would offer a prize – I think it was two thousand dollars, which was tremendous – for the best print submitted. And there would also be purchase awards. And my jury was Hyatt Mayor; Bill Collins, who was then at Knoedler's, who subsequently became director of the – What's the nice, wonderful museum in Massachusetts that's not in Boston, not – right in the middle?

MS. BERMAN: Worcester?

MR. COLE: No. Clark.

MS. BERMAN: Oh.

MR. COLE: Yeah, Clark Museum.

MS. BERMAN: Clark Institute.

MR. COLE: Whatever.

MS. BERMAN : Right.

MR. COLE: He became director of that, from Knoedler's, when Knoedler's changed hands; and Una Johnson. Una ran the show. And the first prize went to Gabor Peterdi for *Triumph of Weed* and – Yeah, I think it was two thousand dollars, because we got an edition of a hundred prints, I think, for that. Which, when you think of it, was twenty bucks a print. But then I picked some purchase awards. I remember Mervyn Jules, Luigi Lucioni, Werner Drewes. Can't remember the others. There were several. But Una was very autocratic about – She knew these artists.

I remember in a subsequent competition – I think I ran it for two or three years, I don't know why. But Al Blaustein got first prize of two thousand dollars for a print that she had rejected from her biennial. And I was not the jury at that time.

MS. BERMAN: Did her influence last, or did it fade? I mean, what – what was the situation?

MR. COLE: Well, it lasted until she retired. And even after that, she was always around. I remember I used to go up to Karl Schrag's for dinner with Karl and Ilsa, and Una'd be there, occasionally Sally Avery. You know, it was wonderful to be there. They had this wonderful house on 95th Street. And it's so amazing – I just sold a lady who was with Citibank – Citibank, the art consultant – Oh, what's her name? Heavyset. Anyway, it'll come to me. But she came in and wanted to get a Benton for a guy who was going away. This lady knew about it, and she wanted to see the three Bentions that this woman had made notes of. Suzanne Lemakis. Do you know her?

MS. BERMAN: Only over the telephone. I had to get permission to publish something that they own, but I've never met her.

MR. COLE: Well, anyway. So this lady – The art world's a small thing. So she – I put three aside. She comes in, we get to talking, and she gives me her address, and I said, "Oh, Karl Schrag lived up there." She said, "Yes, right across the street from me." And what – and she knew them very well. And she had gone to his memorial service. And I said I spoke, so – [Laughs] It was just a complete aside, but it's always amazing how small the art world is. I was in Rochester, and they have an appraisal day at the fair in the morning, on Sunday. And this guy comes in with a Martin Lewis. And it was a print I knew very well called *Chance Meeting*. And I turn it over; on

the back is a certificate of authenticity from Associated American Artists, signed by me. At 605 Fifth, which meant that it had to be prior to 1968. Is that a - [MS. BERMAN: Yeah] There's a print - [Laughs]

MS. BERMAN: Did - did he realize that you were the same person who'd signed that?

MR. COLE: He didn't realize the certificate was there; he had never thought much about it.

MS. BERMAN: Mm-hm. That - that is - that is quite -

MR. COLE: Funny.

MS. BERMAN: Now, how about - how about Riva Castleman, where does she fit in here?

MR. COLE: Riva fits in as perhaps being a curator - being what a curator should be. After she got to the Modern from Chicago as Bill's assistant, she was really sort of mouse[?], and not very much until Bill got kicked upstairs, and suddenly she became the curator. And - Her dealings with AAA were not very much. If I had something contemporary or early avant garde, like the Werner Drewes - She was busy with Grosman and Wayne and all the workshop new stuff that was coming out. And that - [Bell] that was her - [tape stops, re-starts]

MR. COLE: I used to resent Riva at first. But then I realized that Riva was doing a fabulous job by getting and judging and evaluating the contemporary material as it was being produced. And she did - she - And in a way, that's what a curator's supposed to do. They're supposed to be with their time, and - It's my only excuse for even talking to a Whitney curator. [Laughs] But you know, I mean, I think philosophically, that you live within your time. And whether you're a dealer or a curator or what, I think collectors have a moment of time, and they can't go beyond it. I think art writers sort of have their moment. I - I think almost any honest person in the art business or the art world has that moment of time where they're comfortable, they're - they're knowledgeable, they evaluate well. And I always say it's so easy to be avant garde; you can just embrace any new thing. But to be honest with yourself - I know my moment of time, in a way, in American prints, stopped at 1960. I think beyond that, I have regard and respect for some of the major, major printmakers that came in in the sixties and on; but it was never something that I loved. I mean, my heart wasn't there. I mean, I - I did a lot. I know there were - there - Bob Motherwell did a print called *Red Sea*, which just blew my mind. I just absolutely fell in love with it, I mean - And - I - Harry Abrams published it. I think I - Out of the edition of - of forty or - out of the edition of a hundred, maybe, I must've bought thirty or forty of them. And I sold them, and I got another order. Harry Abrams was sold out. And I remember calling Bob, and he sold me three or four of the artists proofs. And then I asked him where to send the check, and he said, "Oh, no, keep it; I'll come in and buy something else." Which never happened, but he ended up saying, "Oh, Sylvan, I don't have time; send me the check."

Oh, he also pissed me off, because he said, "Now you're making a lot of money and - compared to what you paid me." I said, "Bob, I sold 'em for exactly what I told you I'd sell 'em for. And I - I said, "I am sending you my invoices." And I sent him copies of the three invoices of the proofs that I said. And I sent him a check. We made up. We used to play poker. He was a good poker player. The poker games, I think I told about, in Provincetown.

MS. BERMAN: Well, you said you -

MR. COLE: It was Bob Motherwell; Dick Florsheim; Lily Harmon's third or fourth husband, the framer; Joe Kaplan, painter; the guy who ran Here Comes Everybody Gallery up in Provincetown [Al Hansen]. A really amazing mix. A fun game, I'll tell you. It wasn't too expensive, but I then played occasionally at Edith Hunter's [ph], Sam Hunter's ex after they split. Bob was always there. I forget who all was in that game, but suddenly it got - Bob got into really expensive games. He wasn't interested in the little pickup games anymore.

MS. BERMAN: Oh. Well, what we haven't discussed, actually, is that the - the Whitney and prints, and just in terms of them not having a curator - I mean, in terms of the museum and its very checkered history as to prints. And perhaps we should discuss, you know, your deal, as the, you know, Amer -, the museum that would be most receptive to your material, I think we should sort of start from the beginning there.

MR. COLE: Well, there is hardly a beginning, because - Mack Doty did a show a long time ago - probably in the late sixties, early seventies - in which it was, I think, all prints. I forget the thrust. Then somebody else curated a Precisionist show. And everything was - Jack Bower [ph] was the first one I got involved with. It wasn't Jack Bower.

MS. BERMAN: Lloyd?

MR. COLE: Well, I knew Lloyd, but Lloyd didn't have much interest in prints. But - It was very sporadic. I don't remember their buying very much of anything - not until Judy Goldman became their advisor. And Judy would run around the day before the acquisition, or two days before the acquisition meeting, and say, "Sylvan, I want this, this, this and this. We'll send a truck man to pick it up, present it," and often sold. I know that was more

from Sylvan Cole Gallery than Associated American Artists. I remember the first big purchase they made was Spruance. They bought some Lozowick from me. But Judy also was going into the contemporary. But she always had a hand in – with the historic. Like that print, they have the painting.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MR. COLE: And then I had the print. She bought it from somebody else.

MS. BERMAN: For the tape, we're talking about *Dempsey and Firpo*, [MR. COLE: Yeah] George Bellows.

MR. COLE: Yeah. Anyway, she finally – When she resigned, then David Kiehl was the perfect person for the job, and David got it [in 1996]. And I guess over the years, I've sold David odds and ends of prints that he sort of sees and decides the museum should have. It's never been a – He, too, has been sort of all over the map in his buying and presenting, but he's – He knows what he wants, and he's got a wish list, and he gave it to me, and every so often, I'll find a good print on the wish list. He's – he's erratic, in the sense that he always has too much on his plate. I mean, I'm sitting with three prints that he wanted, goodness knows, from West Coast WPA. I got this collection of twenty WPA prints from the West Coast at an auction in Butterfield. I didn't even know what I had. But David came down and – And I documented it, because they all had labels on the back of who the art – David took my documentation, he added voluminous notes of full names, of years, of who they were. And there are three prints in that group that he wants for the Whitney, and God knows when he'll get around to even asking for them or whatever. And I think he's just forgotten, and I forget to tell him about it.

But I did sell the Whitney – Oh, the first attempt I made to the Whitney was when Judith was still advisor, when I attempted to sell them the complete Stuart Davis prints, with accompanying drawings.

MS. BERMAN: That would be a natural.

MR. COLE: And – This was probably the – '78, '79, I'm guessing. Tom Armstrong was director, and a good friend. I think I wanted eighty, ninety thousand dollars. I had already arranged for them to have bought *Barbershop Chord*, *Sixth Avenue El* – [Phone rings; tape stops, re-starts]

MS. BERMAN: You had arranged for them to buy –

MR. COLE: For them to buy *Sixth Avenue El*, *Barbershop Chord*, *Two Figures & El*, and *Fiddler on the Beach*. And this is – I think it was a ridiculous price. Fifteen thousand dollars. I mean, I've sold *Barbershop Chord* for eighty. And Mrs. Davis would give them *Composition 1931*, so they'd've had all five 1931 prints. So when I came to them with a full collection, they already had the key prints. And – But I had all the accompanying drawings. And I said that I would then serve as agent for them to sell the others, at some commission rate. Patterson Sims I think offered me something like fifty thousand bucks for the lot, and that was insulting. So then I took Tom Armstrong – I remember I rented a car. We went over the Verrazano Bridge to the Museum of Staten Island, where a Stuart Davis scholar teaches – she's probably in her sixties, or late –

MS. BERMAN: Oh, you're talking about Diane Kelder.

MR. COLE: Diane Kelder. Diane Kelder had organized the Stuart Davis show for out there, and took the whole thing from me. And so Tom and I went out there, and he saw the whole thing on the walls and – Nothing came of it. And this is very disjointed, because it isn't in sequential order, but that was a – I ended up selling it to the Amon Carter for 200 thousand dollars. And they got a bargain.

MS. BERMAN: Right, then you did the –

MR. COLE: And of course, it was – The Whitney should've bought it. The next thing I got, which I couldn't sell the Amon Carter, I got a complete [Charles] Burchfield together, of published prints. And that consisted of the three lithographs that Burchfield did, and the eleven or twelve wood engravings that were cut by Lankes, the woodcuts, I think, cut by Lankes from drawing on a block by Burchfield. I could not sell that to the Amon Carter, because that was the period where the Amon Carter was broke, having just bought a [Albert] Bierstadt and [Thomas] Eakins. So – Out of the blue, walks in about – [Phone rings; tape stops, re-starts]

MR. COLE: Out of the blue, a friend brings in a completely unknown Burchfield. Print, lithograph, with CB. But in there is the cartouche that Burchfield has. It's a Burchfield. I brought David Kiehl; he looks at it, and he knows it's a Burchfield. We both can show where it relates to drawings that he did at the time. We dated it. And I took it to the Print Fair, with the idea that it would only go to a museum. And finally I decided the right museum was the Whitney. So I put the package together of the wood engravings – by then, the lithographs had been sold – and this unknown lithograph. And it was fifty thousand dollars; I figured it was worth seventy. Sixty five, seventy. Special price to the Whitney, fifty. And they finally bought it. But it took a year of hard negotiating work. And I know that this has been a problem with the Whitney, from other dealers, where they've had major collections

purchased by the Whitney and just – just ambivalence and – and – Well, now, there’s been a change of director from the guy on the West Coast to Maxwell Anderson. I have very little to do selling them. And I sell nothing to the Met anymore. Colta [Ives], for some reason – Her money all goes into rare old master prints, or things like that, and occasionally very contemporary. And I never seem to have anything that they need. They have a woman named Elliott Davis, that – the so-called American prints, took David’s job over. But I find the Met print area very moribund. They – very little is happening. I don’t know if anybody sees them or sells them.

MS. BERMAN: It just had occurred to me, had you – did you ever meet Hopper or have anything to do with him?

MR. COLE: Hopper, sure.

MS. BERMAN: Well, I think we should –

MR. COLE: Hopper – I had always wanted to get some Hopper prints. And – He used to say, “Oh, I have hardly anything left, and nothing, you know, I wanna sell.” And one day, I was at a wedding of Peter Pollock, who was director of the American Federation of Arts, to Kreely and I went to the wedding at Cornelia Otis Skinner’s apartment on 65th and Lexington. And I think – I forget who all was there. I think there was Jack Levine and Ruth Gikow; and Edward and Jo Hopper. It was a very small wedding party; I don’t think there were twenty of –

[BEGIN TAPE FIVE, SIDE ONE]

MS. BERMAN: – interviewing Sylvan Cole on October 17th, 2000, at his gallery at 101 West 57th Street. And today we’ll be starting out where we left off last week, which is you were – You were beginning to tell me how you met Edward Hopper.

MR. COLE: Peter Pollock was a good friend of mine. I knew him shortly after he came East from the Art Institute. I met him through Dick Florsheim. And Peter eventually became director of the American Federation of Arts for one year. Peter got married to Kreely, whose maiden name I don’t remember, whom he met in Texas on an AFA junket that he headed. And the wedding party was at the home of Cornelia Otis Skinner, which was on 66th and Lex, or 65th and Lex, in those wonderful duplex apartments heading toward Third, on the south side of the street. I know Gordon Grant lived in one of those at one time. I don’t remember all who were at the wedding reception, but I don’t think it was much more than twenty to thirty people at most. But the Hoppers were there, both Josie and Edward. I know Ruth Gikow and Jack Levine were there, and an assorted group that I should remember, but I don’t. And they were all pretty prominent, either as artists or in the art world.

I remember sitting with Josie in the duplex living room, with the portrait of Otis Skinner by Sargent over the fireplace, this immense expanse. There was the fireplace, and then there was the big portrait, and there was just air all around; it was a huge room. So I attacked Josie again, and said how much I’m still wanting to get some etchings from her husband. And I’d been wanting to do this for years. I’d spoken to him a few times by phone; he grunted and no, he didn’t have anything for sale. Anyway, I do recall her saying, “You like his work?” And I – I remember her sort of being surprised, and she said, “Don’t you think it’s cold? Very cold? As cold as he looks?” Or something to that effect, and – And I think Gail Levin mentioned some of that in her book, though I don’t – I never read Gail’s book, but I – I do know that Josie also was an artist, and she was possibly interested in my seeing some of her work. But when I told her I specialize only in prints, that dropped the whole thing.

There was no sense in trying to talk to Hopper. I mean, all he did was grunt. And very stoop-shouldered, and – Very big man. And very powerful in – in his demeanor. But that’s my only memory.

MS. BERMAN: Well, which –

MR. COLE: An aside, of course, is that Peter was sort of Cornelia’s stud for years and years and years, and that was a relationship that started in Chicago and went on for a long period of time.

MS. BERMAN: But she – but she gave the wedding there, just – even though he was marrying someone else?

MR. COLE: Oh, sure, they were – They – they always stayed friends. And I just fell in love with her. What a big, wonderful, ballsy woman. Yeah, I do recall seeing her a few times afterwards and – In fact, I can’t recall the occasion, but I do remember somewhere along the line, she either was a guest of mine at some party or something, and I do remember introducing my parents to her, and my dad was very impressed.

MS. BERMAN: Now, when you said – When – when Jo said, “Well, don’t you think his work is cold,” what did you – what – Can you remember –

MR. COLE: I don’t recall answering it. I just thought – I said, “I think his work is wonderful.” You know – I was sort of caught off guard. [Laughs]

MS. BERMAN: Mm-hm. Well, right, exactly, ‘cause it was such a telling remark. But it’s – but a truthful one.

MR. COLE: Yeah.

MS. BERMAN: So did you ever get any Hopper etchings?

MR. COLE: Never. No, I remember I got several in the late sixties from the Whitney Museum, that sold me their duplicates or – I worked on a commission basis, I don't remember, at Associated American Artists. And in those days, I think the prices were somewhere in the three thousand dollar area; whereas some of the ones I sold are now selling at sixty to ninety thousand.

MS. BERMAN: Now, the other thing – You had said you wanted to mention something. You had said you wanted to talk about Karl Fortess.

MR. COLE: Oh, yes. Karl Fortess had the reputation of being Yas Kuniyoshi's little puppy dog. And he absolutely revered Yas, and they were really very close friends. After Yas died, I got to know Karl, and he would come around the gallery. He, I think, was the world's least salable artist. He just painted dead trees, made prints of abandoned farms and dead trees and that sort of thing, and – One day we decided that I would publish a print of his and he was going to Europe. So he sent me some proofs that he had done in Europe, and I picked one out. It was a color lithograph. And I told him which one I would buy a hundred of and how much I would pay him. And he had a hundred printed, and either shipped it or brought 'em with him when he came back. Was a relatively small print, I think. Somewhere like eight by ten or nine by twelve. I think the retail price on it was something like twenty five or thirty dollars. And I asked him what to do with the proofs. And he said, "Well, you go ahead and sell the proofs for whatever you think is right." I said, "Well, what price do you think I should put on 'em?" He said, "That – You're the expert. He said, "But I'd rather not sell them at a high price than not sell them at a low price."

He finally persuaded me to have a one person show. And it was a bomb. And I was so embarrassed. I think the prices ran from fifteen to maybe a hundred dollars, at most. And based on how many proofs there were, and things like that. And I think there must've been sixty pieces in the show. And I did a catalogue. And I was so embarrassed that we had only sold two or three that I purchased ten, at 50% off the selling price, so that I could send Karl a check of some amount. And I remember his writing me saying that he got the check, and thanking me, and I had put him in a whole new tax bracket. [MS. BERMAN Laughs]

He was an absolutely charming guy, and he went on to decide to tape the artists, which I gather the Archives have these tapes and – He was very serious about it. And I always felt that from his description of the kind of taping he was doing – An artist interviewing another artist had the perception, had sort of the level ground that each were on. And I'm sure that these tapes probably go into greater depths to most artists than a critic or historian might get out of another artist. Is that so?

MS. BERMAN: Yes and no. The questions are good, but most of the time it's only one tape. And two, he's intrusive, in that it is a conversation rather than an interview, so he interrupts before the person is done occasionally, 'cause he does get interested in what somebody has to say, so he contributes. And there's nothing wrong with that, but we can't do that in an interview. You – In – in this sort of – In an oral history, you must learn to shut up and wait until the person is finished, or you will lose a lot. And it's better to have silences than to cut the person off. Or even so-called rambling is better. But that's – But he wasn't a professional interviewer, but – but I hear – I have heard a few of these, and he gets great stuff, but in the middle he cuts them off, and he doesn't even know he's doing it. But it's still a –

MR. COLE: Well, I've never heard any of the tapes.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BERMAN: Well, if you –

MR. COLE: Yeah, I should hear some. Bringing up Karl, who was Woodstock, reminds me of another anecdote, which had to do with Julio de Diego. Julio was also Woodstock. And Julio was probably the homeliest, most attractive man you can imagine. There was a charisma about him. And he always had some very nubile, attractive woman around. Usually in her twenties, maybe as old as in her thirties, but I think mostly in her twenties. Usually tall, statuesque, blonde, very large bosomed and large featured – Julio was one of the first artists, I guess, back in the early sixties, that used to come and drop into the gallery. And we'd chat. And one day he showed me a small screen print – again, about eight by ten, nine by twelve – of sort of a voluptuous, curvilinear couple, as best I recall it. And it was sort of a black and white print. And he said to me – I said, "What do you want me to do?" He said, "I'd like you to buy the edition." I said, "What did you plan to do?" And he said, "A hundred." I said, "Well, I'll pay you five dollars apiece, five hundred dollars, and I'll probably retail at around twenty five dollars, and give my special customers the price of twenty dollars." So he agreed to that. And he went off, and about two or three weeks later he called me. He said he had the edition, could I come in? I said, "Of course," and he came in, he brought the edition. And he said, "You gotta pay me eight dollars apiece; I

added two colors.” So sure enough, he had added a green and a red or something, and I said, “Ok, I’ll pay you eight dollars.” But it was so funny to see him, “Yo, you gotta pay me eight dollars; I added two colors.”

Julio, I think I mentioned, was also part of the Woodstock poker game, and the few times I played, Julio – It was usually a nickel and dime game, and if Julio put in a nickel, you knew damn well he either had four of a kind or a straight flush, [MS. BERMAN Laughs] because he would not gamble unless he was a sure winner.

MS. BERMAN: That’s very interesting, what you said about his female companionship. You know, at one point, he was married to Gypsy Rose Lee.

MR. COLE: Sure, I remember.

MS. BERMAN: He was also a surrealist, too. He was out in Chicago –

MR. COLE: Oh, yeah.

MS. BERMAN: Yeah.

MR. COLE: Well, he was another part of Peter Pollock’s good friends. Yeah. And that’s – Through him, I met Kiriki, the daughter, and – And I did meet Gypsy Rose a few times. In fact, to this day – Lillyan, my second wife, who passed away in 1987, always wore big hats. And Doyle [ph] had a sale of Gypsy Rose Lee’s possessions after her death [Lee’s possessions were auctioned off by Sotheby Parke-Berret in Los Angeles, March 10, 1971]. And there was a shoebox full of hatpins, which I bought for, I think, 200 dollars. And mostly glass and – big things. And I still remember I – After I bought it, I spoke with one of the girls in the gallery, Susan Teller, who’s now a dealer in her own right. And she said, “Well, now you’ve gotta get some hatpin holders.” Well, I didn’t even know what a hatpin holder looked like. And that started a collection of about twenty-some-odd hatpin holders, which I’ve acquired over a long period of years. The key to a hatpin holder is that it looks like a salt or sugar shaker. It’s about five inches high, and it’s got a lotta holes on the top. But it doesn’t have a hole at the bottom. If it has a hole in the bottom, it’s probably a salt shaker or a sugar shaker. If it doesn’t have a hole at the bottom, it’s a hatpin holder. And interestingly enough, just the past three years, they’ve been making hatpin holders to look like antiques, either in China or Japan, and putting it on the market.

MS. BERMAN: Now, Sylvan, there’s something that I realized, I don’t think we have this absolutely sort of straight, was when you left Associated American Artists, I don’t quite understand why you decided to get out of art and go into another field.

MR. COLE: Oh, way back in the –

MS. BERMAN: Yeah right, in the fifties.

MR. COLE: Oh, that’s a part of my life that I never talk about. But I did leave Associated American Artists. I started there in ‘46, and I left about ‘51. Or ‘52. Let’s see, I got married in ‘43. I guess it was – I’d been married about seven or eight years, and I fell in love with somebody that was working at Associated American Artists. I had split with my wife and three kids. It was a bad break. And I was living on – a hotel, I can’t remember the name of it – Latham, something like that – on 27th Street between Fifth and Madison. And I needed a job that would pay more money. So through my father, who was in the men’s business, menswear business, I got a job with a company called Berk-Ray B-E-R-K, hyphen, R-A-Y – which manufactured men’s outerwear. Jackets and things like that. And they had a factory in Troy, New York and in Cordele, Georgia – C-O-R-D-E-L-E. And I got a job there, and handled relations with the salespeople, and then I got put into writing the orders for the factories, because we had set up a very, very early IBM computer system, which is so primitive. I mean, this huge computer. And we would feed into it all the orders, with the sizes that were wanted, and we would accumulate a certain number of a certain style, and then I would tell the factory to produce it And I had to keep these two factories running. It was a major, major job. It meant coordinating piece goods with the needs of the factory and all the rest of it, buttons, zippers, whatever. And it was not a comfortable period for me, because the families, owners would compete with each other. And I remember they criticized that this kid, Sylvan Cole, who knew nothing about anything, was really running these factories. That’s all sort of irrelevant. But I did this.

And then Reeves Lewenthal, who had sold Associated American Artists to Albert Landry, became president of Russkraft Greeting Cards through a funny twist of events that I can’t recall right now. And he decided that there were lots of prints left from the old AAA, and that maybe a gallery devoted to prints run by Sylvan Cole might make sense, and he – So I left Russkraft. I know at that point, I was offered by Reeves probably twenty five thousand a year or something like that, which was so much better than what I was getting.

MS. BERMAN: You left – You didn’t leave Russkraft –

MR. COLE: I mean I left –

MS. BERMAN: Berk-Ray.

MR. COLE: Berk-Ray. And it was 1958. I was forty years old. And it was a really life begins at forty. I rented space at 605 Fifth Avenue, which is right between 48th and 49th, took a floor-through. It was nine thousand dollars a year rent. I got all the inventory. And then I started calling up the artists that I knew and were friendly with. Soyer and Lucioni, Hirsch and a bunch of others. I think I – I covered that aspect of it in a previous tape. But those five years were just a gap in my life. It's – I don't even refer to it in any of my bios; I act as if I was started at AAA in 1946 and became president in 1958.

MS. BERMAN: But now, were you at – But you were hired by Reeves to, in other words, he was – What I don't understand is even though he'd sold AAA, he was still controlling it?

MR. COLE: Oh, yes, 'cause – That was a very awkward period. I started and what – 'Course, I knew Albert Landrey. And what I – So there were two Associated American Artists. One was paintings and the other – And I ran Associated American Artists Print.

MS. BERMAN: Ah.

MR. COLE: And I think that went on for about a year, when Albert just decided to change to the Albert Landry Gallery, so there was only one Associated American Artists. But for about at year, it was not – it was pretty sticky, a little confusing. Never bothered me, but I know it bothered Albert. And so I ended up with the name, with evidently, Reeves had the right to do. I mean, he had sold Albert the paintings part; Albert did not want the prints. And that's what he got from Reeves, for a very modest amount of money. And Reeves had hoped that Albert would hold this stable of artists; but Albert got rid of most of them and brought in the own artists the he thought were more important. So that's what went on that – I guess '58, '59 at most.

MS. BERMAN: Well, what kinds of changes do you feel, you know, I guess the most important changes that once you were, you know, on your own and running it, that you were making there?

MR. COLE: Well, I had – I had sort of a carte blanche situation. I must say I made a profit from the first year I took over. We never, never lost money. It grew quickly. But I would say Reeves' involvement with it didn't go on for more than two or three years, when he was replaced as president of Russkraft by other people. Associated American Artists was a wholly owned subsidiary. The Berkman family were the principal owners of Russkraft and Associated American Artists. I do remember how it happened. Evidently, the man who ran Russkraft had designers. And they would design Christmas cards and greeting cards. And then they would be produced in America, but I think there was also a production operation in Canada, in which the then president of Russkraft owned the Canadian operation. Canada got all the artwork at no cost, and the profits went to him. And through a stockholder's injunction, which went into court, the president was kicked out. And the Berkman family bought up shares, and Reeves became president. And that's when he, shortly thereafter, came to me to take over a moribund AAA that had existed in a warehouse on 42nd Street, right off Eighth Avenue, toward Ninth, where the mailroom had gone and – mailing list. And 17,000 five dollar prints that hadn't been sold. Which fortunately, there were some Grant Woods in there, there were some Bentsons, there were [Ivan] Albrights, Kuniyoshi. I mean, strange as it may seem, among the most important prints AAA had ever produced, there were still remainders of five, ten, twelve, whatever. And that was the material, plus putting out immediately a catalogue. And by '59, or '60, I made my first trips to Europe. All with Reeves' encouragement, with a budget of, like, 10,000 dollars. And I would then come back with all sorts of Renoir restrikes, Cassatt restrikes, anything I could get in multiples, and – But the gallery prospered right away. I mean, evidently, there was a need for what had been lost for those few years, five years. And I hit it right. I mean, the sixties were a boom period for the print world, and then it boomed on through the seventies and eighties.

MS. BERMAN: Well what made you decide to sort of, you know, to become the Sylvan Cole Gallery?

MR. COLE: In 1979, there was no longer a Russkraft. It became another company, merged in with all of the Berkman holdings, which included radio and television stations. And Associated American Artists was part of this conglomerate. And in 1979, Marshall Berkman, who was then the son of Lou Berkman, a Harvard Business School graduate, became my boss. And he took over the greeting card business. And the radio and television was run, I think, out of Pittsburgh. He was up outside of Boston. And he sold the company. He sold it to Ziff-Davis. At that juncture, Marshall's father Lou – Those two were on one side. Marshall – Lou's brother Jack and his son Miles got into a family feud. Jack, I gather, was in Italy when Marshall sold it. He was on the board of directors. "How come he could sell it without my knowing?" And he rushed back and he – "Booah, you can't sell this without my approval." Well, this went on; it was an embarrassment. [Phone rings; tape stops, re-starts]

MR. COLE: So that – it was a big embarrassment. I mean, it was very awkward. I mean, Wall Street was sort of thinking: What's the matter with this? Anyway, to make a long story short, I think Ziff agreed to pay another few dollars per share. And he made the whole thing private. In other words, whoever owned stock got money. It wasn't a stock exchange or anything. And I remember meeting with Bill Ziff, who turned out to be a pretty

dynamic sort of a guy, and I explained what I did, and said I would like to continue; that I was a professional in the business; and it was a business that you had to develop, depended on trust. I mean, it was unbelievable what I could have done if I were a dishonest person. I mean, take an inventory; nobody knew a Chagall from a – from a piece of something that was worth nothing. So he said, “Don’t worry, Mr. Cole, you’ll stay on.” But in the final settlement, Associated American Artists, the stock that Marshall had bought in telecommunications, and – I don’t know if it’s all the radio stations or one or two, became a company called Associated Communications Corporation. Its value, I remember distinctly, was six million dollars. And AAA was two million of the six. I remember I had to meet with all sorts of Wall Street types to – who evaluated what Associated American Artists was worth. I would show inventory, I would explain, I would do this and that. So Associated Communications, so – that was given to Jack Berkman’s son. That was the bone. And Miles Berkman became my boss. Marshall Berkman went on into a totally different business, went back to Pittsburgh. And Marshall eventually, he got killed in that plane crash, the U.S. Air crash right outside of Pittsburgh.

Anyway, this is 1979. Jack, Miles meet with me. I remember they met up in my apartment. We discussed everything, my role and how I’d go on, and everything was hunky-dory. I explained the whole operation from A to Z. And off they went. And suddenly – It went pretty well, ‘79, ‘80. What am I saying? When did I leave? ‘83. It was five years. ‘79 and ‘80. By ‘81, suddenly I was involved with three or four meetings a year, where I would meet with Jack, Miles, Jack’s wife – by then he had remarried Lillian Berkman – four of us, at Canada House, where they had an office for Jack; and the other office was in Pittsburgh. And they were awkward meetings, as if I were challenged; was I doing this right? Why did I buy this? Should – and this didn’t sell. I – You know, it was very uncomfortable meetings, I – It sort of got worse. And I think I refused to go to one once. Because I had asked for a raise and Miles wouldn’t give it to me. And so then I just took it. So that caused a little thing. And one day I said to Miles, I said, “You don’t like what I’m doing, fire me.” Well, they really couldn’t fire me. I mean, there was no way. Nobody – I knew everything. I knew where things were. Nobody else knew. Things that I had bought and squirreled away in file drawers. And values of things, what things were worth. I mean, I set the prices, I did the buying, I did all this. Whether it was a Max Beckmann or a Munch or a Lautrec or whatever.

So our lease was up. A ten year lease. Let’s see, ‘68 to ‘78, and then it was a five year lease to ‘83, at 663 Fifth Avenue. And the lease was up in ‘83. So ‘82 was sort of looking around, where we could go to. I think we knew we could not stay where we were, because they had other plans for the space. And I found a wonderful space right opposite the New York Public Library on Fifth Avenue. That was pooh-pooed. It was a dangerous area. The steps of the public library, you know; bums were hanging out and stuff and – And I kept trying to sell it because it was large – equal large space, seven or eight thousand square feet; comparable or lower rent; and right near Grand Central and Penn Station. And we did a huge, huge business with all the suburbs, the people coming in. And it was convenient to Manhattan, too, New Yorkers.

Anyway, things just got sticky. And I’m not sure what happened, except I do know I had a five year contract – only contract, employment contract, I’d ever had in my life – which went from ‘78 to ‘83. And in 1982, around September or October, I asked for a renewal of the contract. I did not want to go through the move to a new location and not have a contract. It would just – put out all that work and all that effort and everything. And they refused to give me a new contract. So I said, “In that case, I resign.” And there was dead silence. And I have a feeling that Miles was in seventh heaven. He finally got this one bone in his side removed. Or thorn in his side. And I would say it took ‘em one day to suddenly have four people show up from the Pittsburgh office to take inventory. Make sure that Sylvan Cole wasn’t gonna go running out with –

So they show up, and I call Miles, I say, “What the hell is this all about?” He said, “Oh, we gotta take inventory. You’re leaving, and –” And I said, “Alright, but how are they gonna know how to take inventory? Who’s gonna show ‘em how?” I said, “I don’t have time.” It was October or November. I said, “I’m still here. I’m not resigning until the end of the year,” that was my arrangement, “And we’ve got a Christmas season going.” I said, “I have no time with them, and neither does my staff.” So I gave them a desk and I opened one of my drawers of 200, 300 unidentified old masters. And I handed it down and I said, “Go ahead and take inventory.” Walked away. Well, they lasted less than a day. And I said, “We can take inventory between Christmas and New Year.” And that’s what was done. Came out clean as a whistle. All our inventories were absolutely correct. I mean, we never – I – I – I always could account for everything. We were on a computer, we had a printout. I could always account for everything we had. Occasionally, there’d be a print that we just misled – mislaid or something and couldn’t find. All my editions that I bought, if I bought a hundred prints, I put in 95. And cost ‘em the same as a hundred. If I bought 200 prints, I put in a hundred and eighty five or something. So I always had a cushion, because with full editions, there could be damage, there could be things. We always came out having more inventory than the books had, because if you added in the cushions. And all I know –

But the behavior on the part of the Berkman was unbelievable, I – I could not take prints that I owned out of the gallery. I could take it after everything was settled. After – I think the deadline was January first; I think I stayed on ‘til the 10th or 15th, because there was cleanup to do. And that was the end, the last check I got. My bonus for 1982 was cut by ten or fifteen thousand dollars – very meaningful money to me at that point – based on the fact that orders had been written but hadn’t been paid for. They charged me 12,500 or 15,000 for the fee paid

to the headhunters that were to replace – find somebody to replace me. And they paid so much in ‘82 and so much in ‘83, and they put that as an expense in ‘82 against – So I even paid for –

MS. BERMAN: How so?

MR. COLE: They just put it on the books, and so that – it decreased the profit. And my bonus was based on pre-tax profit, where I got 10% of the pre-tax profit. So if it was 15,000, that was fifteen hundred dollars out of my pocket that I paid for a head hunter. They took off in sales 50, 60 thousand dollars that hadn’t been paid. I mean, I – I had sold a Lautrec to Pace in December for ten or twelve thousand; of course it wasn’t paid yet. But they said, “Well, it wasn’t a sale.” They did everything to screw me. It was really unbelievable!

MS. BERMAN: Did you contest any of this?

MR. COLE: Of course I did. But I couldn’t, you know, I couldn’t fight them; I was single, I had modest savings, modest bank. You know, I really had – couldn’t go against them on a legal premise. In fact – And then of course – The thing that really hit ‘em, I guess, was that I stayed the member of the Art Dealers Association of America. Associated American Artists was out.

MS. BERMAN: Good. [Laughs]

MR. COLE: And that bothered them really very much, the thought of – But they went on, they were very happy. They got space over at 20 West 57th, and they – they made a fiasco; they had a Columbia architect do a rotunda –

[BEGIN TAPE FIVE, SIDE TWO]

MR. COLE: And there was, you know, real animosity between – Even my old friends, the staff there, you know, they – they weren’t supposed to talk to me. I was not supposed to be let in. I could see the exhibitions; they couldn’t stop me from that, it was a public gallery. But if I went to go to the back room to say hello to Knute in shipping or Mary Jackson, I mean, people I’d hired, [inaudible]. And slowly but surely, all my group – Estelle Yanco, who had been with the gallery for 25 years, and even before that, was asked to resign. Then Hilda Castleman [ph] left, and – One by one, they all just left, except for Knute and Mary Jackson, the two black people; Knute in shipping, and Mary Jackson had been in mailroom, but now she was sort of a computer and order handler. And of course, when they closed, I think they gave them – They gave everybody six months pay, regardless of whether they’d been there one year or 25 years. And these two had been there all their lives. And I even called Lillian Berkman said, “I think this is outrageous. You should – they should get double.” “Well, it’s all arranged,” you know. And that was that.

MS. BERMAN: Had you somehow had a rapprochement with Lillian Berkman, that you could call her?

MR. COLE: We’d see each other once or twice a year at different events; there were art shows or something like that. And she was always very cordial. I still have some – I guess I haven’t spoken to her in about two or three months, but I – They called me to see if there was any value to the blocks or plates that they had tons of, from old AAA days. And I went down to the warehouse and looked through and said, “No. There – there’s no sense to keeping those. I mean, might as well just trash ‘em.” The only thing is, I thought there may have been some Feininger blocks which I had. And those would’ve had some historical importance or value. And I didn’t find those, but I think I had given most of those – and I only had twelve or thirteen – I think I’d given most of those to museums before I left.

MS. BERMAN: Now, was Lillian Berkman knowledgeable about art? Or did she become so?

MR. COLE: Not really. I think she was on the board of the Brooklyn Museum. You know, one of these wealthy patrons. Lillian Berkman had perhaps a career that’s worth looking into. She was a poor girl from the Bronx, sent to CCNY [City College of New York], and met this Jewish Dutch refugee, who was also going to CCNY. I guess this was during World War II or – Yeah. They fell in love, married. War ends. He inherits this huge collection of paintings. [Anthony] Van Dyck, [Aelbert] Cuyp, a supposed Rembrandt, couple of [Giovanni] Tiepolos, God knows what all. Dutch collection. And – He’s a whiz. The war’s over. He goes into farm machinery and equipment, from scratch, with a little money from the family. It survived the war. And builds this up, gets bought out by Deere. And I remember she told me that they were in their middle twenties, and they were millionaires. Whatever this guy touched, evidently, turned to gold. He went into something else and prospered. They were building this mansion out in Long Island. Just two – two kids. I guess this is – now they’re in their forties. Fifties? I don’t remember. But two things happened. The house burns down, he dies. No connection one to the other. So here’s this widow with lots of money. And she buys this townhouse on 64th Street opposite Wildenstein and sets it up. There’s a [Antonio] Canova model in the lobby and paintings. I remember there’s Canalettos in the dining room. And lots of Dutch stuff – some of which may not be correct. I have a feeling that she’s looked into it and – ‘Cause I don’t think she’s being chased a lot by institutions or museums. But that’s how she got on the Brooklyn board.

She marries Jack Berkman, who's then a widower. And she's then part of that Berkman gang. Jack just died about three or four years ago, and she still has huge stock holdings. But evidently, a lot of what Jack owned went to his son. And the last I spoke with her, the relationship is still very -

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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