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Oral history interview with Joseph L.  
Brotherton, 1999 March 5-2001 January 23

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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Joseph Brotherton on March 5, 1999 and January 23, 2001. The interview took place in San Francisco, CA, and was conducted by Paul J. Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

## Interview

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, an interview with Joe Brotherton, painter, collector, and actor at one time, a number of things. At any rate, we're here because of Joe's involvement with art. The interview is being conducted in his home in San Francisco on March 5, 1999. The interviewer for the Archives, another San Francisco resident, Paul Karlstrom. Joe, we've decided to divide the interview really into two parts, and today, with the time available, which is a bit limited, we'll talk about your own personal background, your time in the west in Montana, connections with -- the world of Charlie Russell, and a number of other things, and moving it finally to New York, not your moving, but our moving in our discussion to New York and your connection with Tony Smith through your cousin, Jane Brotherton. So let's just start at the beginning. You were born where?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: I was born in Bozeman, Montana, in 1918.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Okay.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: My folks came from Michigan to Montana in pursuit of an idea that my grandfather had to start a dynasty of food processing, and he had picked out the lovely, fertile Gallatin Valley to be the site of the first plant of this prodigious dream of his. He sent my father and my uncle to be the administrators, another uncle to be the seed germinator, and another uncle to be the promoter of the thing, and it all worked very well, except perhaps for my father who was killed when I was two years old. They were genteel people. My mother's family were the -- her uncle was Chief Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court, and another was the senator from Michigan. Her father was the sheriff of Wayne County and so on. And she came to Bozeman in 1916 or so. It was a community impoverished beyond our imagination, I think, and there was simply nothing there. When my father died, obviously her cue was to go back to Detroit where she could pursue her origins. She chose to stay in Bozeman.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Why?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Because she recognized it as a magnificent place to raise a young boy. She was a woman of great consistency of purpose; she married a cowboy to carry on this intention. She married a guy named Richmond Gex (Gex spelled G-E-X), who was a Basque. He was literally a cowboy and he had, among his other activities, driven a stagecoach in Yellowstone Park. One night at the south entrance to the park at Cody, Wyoming, he got drunk and broke into the Pahasca Teepee, sacred to the memory of Buffalo Bill, and stole the ceremonial bridle from the teepee. When later he gave me a horse and equipped it, here was this lovely Indian rawhide and horse-hair bridle. In the process of being a cowboy, he had to move to Great Falls, Montana in 1926, and we moved into a small apartment. I had to get something to do, so I decided to start another empire as a lawn mower. At that time, I was eight years old, out mowing lawns. When the lawns were mowed, the cut grass put on the curbside and then I'd pick it up and sell it to the livery stables. One day, here came this buckboard with this really great looking Indian driving an exhausted looking horse. He got off and started loading my grass into his buckboard. And I was shrewd about this. I realized that this guy needed an assistant more than I needed to fight with him over the grass, you see. And I got on the buckboard and I rode around just looking in amazement at this guy because he was, or he claimed, at least, to be the cousin of Two-Guns White Calf, the Blackfoot chief who posed for the buffalo nickel, and to my observation, he looked exactly like the man on the buffalo nickel. He didn't say much and I rode around with him.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: What was his name?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Joe Longboy.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Longboy?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Yeah. And he and his horse became a big part of my life that summer. I asked him to take me into the Blackfoot tribe and he said that that was nonsense. On the other hand, he said he would take me to see the house of a guy who had been initiated into the Blackfoot tribe sometime before and I said, "Who is that?" "Well," he said, "He's an artist, a painter named Charlie Russell." And that meant absolutely nothing to me. But we went over in the buckboard and pulled up to this curb and he said, "Come on," and we went up to the back

porch of this big, white house and the lady inside said, "Hello, Joe. How are you?" And he introduced me to Mrs. Russell. Charlie Russell had died I think that August in 1926. And the reason he went over there was really not to introduce me, but to check on something that was important to him. The members of the Blackfoot tribe had created a memorial tepee to Charlie Russell, which he said was the most beautiful tepee ever made in his lifetime. The skins were all deer skins, pure white, chewed [sic] by the ladies of the tribe with various herbs to tan them, and then erected as a very large tepee with pictograms illustrating Charlie Russell's life painted on the sides of the tepee. They had a memorial service and a dance and so on for Charlie Russell, and erected this tepee on the grounds of his house. A few days later, according to what she told us that day, the ladies of the neighborhood objected to the presence of this heathen object in their midst and complained that the sun reflected off the tepee and gave them headaches. They got the mayor of the city to order the tepee removed. Joe came to see Mrs. Russell to find out why he couldn't see the tepee any longer when he drove by. "Oh, Joe," she said, "it's just so sad." Then she said, "Joey," (which is what people called me then) "Charlie isn't here anymore, but would you like to go out into the studio and maybe make a picture with some of the crayons and things?" Of course, that sounded wonderful to me, so we did.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: How old were you at that time?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: I was between seven and eight years old.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: You were really young.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: So we went out to the studio. Here was this painting on an easel. I forget what it was called. Anyhow, it was, to me, just the most beautiful thing and she actually let me sort of mess around with the paint and stuff that was still sitting there, just as Charlie Russell had left it. And she told me that downtown, if I liked Charlie's painting, there was a place called "The Mint" which had been a saloon. There was still prohibition at this time. This was in 1926, and I can't remember whether there was actually -- whether this was still a saloon or whether it had been converted to a pool hall, but anyhow, there were, I suppose, 50 paintings by Charlie Russell on the walls of the Mint. I didn't belong in there, but this bartender noticed that I liked looking at the paintings and so he said, "Come here." And he reached down under the bar and he got out this row of little clay figures, all of which were falling apart and breaking up. There was -- I can't remember exactly, maybe an antelope, a prairie chicken, a coyote, a bear, a bison, all about three inches high, and he put them out along the counter. He said, "How do you like these?" I said, "They're great." And then he gave me sort of a look that I suddenly realized, I said, "You don't mean these were made by Mr. Russell?" "Yeah," he said, "they were. They were his kind of -- "You know he stopped drinking," he said, "An when all his cronies were standing around the bar drinking, he would be making these animals. He played kind of a game with them. You know, everybody would see what he was doing. He was making a gray wolf, you see. Then he'd put his hand over it and he'd bet them that they couldn't guess what kind of an animal he had under his hands. And so they'd say, "Well, Charlie, we all seen your doing; it's a gray wolf." So he'd take his hand away and it would suddenly become a coyote. He had transformed it without even looking, you know, he was able to do this. And here were all these small sculptures, you know, breaking down into dust that Charlie Russell had made. He was a good sculptor, too. I believe his sculptures are agreed to rival Frederick Remington's. This is really the end of my recollection of Charlie Russell.

Rich, my cowboy stepfather, was a judge for rodeos. Livingston, Montana, Bozeman, Billings, Sheridan, Wyoming at that time, were all holding championship rodeos, all of them. "The World's Championship Rodeos." And Rich was the judge of bulldogging and calf-roping. And, of course, by this time, I had my own horse, this beautiful horse with Buffalo Bill's bridle. And Rich and I rode side by side in the morning parades of these rodeos with all the performers in the rodeo doing their stuff, you know, the ropers roping and the trick riders. It really just wiped me out. The Indian -- the whole tribe marching in full regalia . Drumming and dancing and dragging what they call a traverse or a travois behind a horse with the old folks on it. I got to ride right up with Rich in the front of the parade because he was one of the judges. And then in the afternoon, I would be in the arena. By this time, I had my growth and he trained me to be a pick-up man in the rodeo for the bronco riders who had finished their ride and had to be taken off the back of the horse. I could do that kind of stuff. Anyhow, that -- except for a brief experience with another cowboy writer and artist named Will James --

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: You mentioned Will James. You have that book which he inscribed to you.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Right.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: It was his autobiography.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Yeah. One time I was sitting in the lobby of the Murray Hotel in Livingston drawing pictures and he came in on his horse. He had this habit of riding his horse right into the lobby of any place he wa headed.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: A cowboy.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Really. And so he got off the horse and looked at what I was doing and then he took a piece of the stationery out of the desk of the hotel and wrote on it "Joe, you'll always draw, Will James," and so I bought a copy of Lone Cowboy, his autobiography, and pasted it in the front. Later, he turned up in Bozeman, did the same thing, riding into the front door of a restaurant, in this case, firing a couple of shots through the ceiling 'cause he knew the owner of the restaurant was sleeping upstairs, but there was no harm done. At that time, Bozeman, you know this was a very rough community indeed.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: This was Bozeman?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Right. I owe a good deal to my mother for staying there. My father and my uncle pursued the dream of their father to establish this pea-canning business called "The Bozeman Canning Company," which later actually succeeded enough without my father. My uncle moved to Mount Vernon, Washington and expanded the company which later had 13 plants for freezing and canning fruits and vegetables. His daughter, Jane Brotherton, went to the University of Washington a few years before I did. Then she went to New York and became quite a spectacularly successful actress and singer. She played the lead in "Oklahoma" when it opened and then the lead in the London performance. She played opposite Beatrice Lily in a revue called "Inside U.S.A." She played opposite Walter Houston in "Knickerbocker Holiday".

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Why don't we, Joe, if we may, hold this for a minute, I have a couple of questions about the earlier thing.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Sure, sure.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And then I'm very interested to pursue this. Do you remember the name of the bar where Charlie Russell's paintings--

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: "The Mint" saloon -- later a pool hall.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah, that's where the little modeled animals were?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: It was -- oh gee, I did -- I think I mentioned it up above.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Okay, because that would be interesting because that's a very interesting story and it would be nice to have that. I want to make sure also I'm clear on something here. During the time after your father's death and when your mother remarried Richmond and then you moved to Great Falls, obviously, the big business endeavor was proceeding. Your uncle was still --

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: In Bozeman.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah, and then eventually, if I have this right, he went to Mount Vernon to set up -- to expand the business?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: And my mother was alone in Bozeman until she married this cowboy and his earning power --

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: So the business, it did remain a family business?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: The business went right ahead very well, but we didn't happen to be part of it.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Okay.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: And so we lived on what Rich could earn, which was a good deal like catch as catch can.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: In other words, your circumstances then weren't necessarily all that comfortable?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: They weren't comfortable at all.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: So we took just a brief pause there and learned that despite the fact your family moved to Bozeman to establish an empire, food-processing empire, and that the business was successful, that because of your -- due to your father's death, at that point, your immediate family then was no longer beneficiaries of this --

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Exactly.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Which then gives us some idea of -- little better idea of -- of, you know, the situation for you there. But you did then get to the University, to the University of Washington, and I gather one of the reasons was that your cousin had gone there?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Yes. I went there because -- I think because it wasn't too far from home. And so I divided my time between Mount Vernon, Washington where Jane and my uncle's family lived and in a rather elegant state, and in Bozeman where my mother and Rich lived. Rich was a tragic figure, actually. He simply outgrew his job. He no longer had any position. The cowboy thing lapsed and he finally vanished into Alaska. Nobody ever knew what happened to him.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: He just took off?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: He was too proud to go broke.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Basically deserted your mother?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, he left her. He just -- but -- and in Seattle, at the university and so on, I was able to take some courses and drawing, nothing in painting, and also to act in the University of Washington, Penthouse and Studio Theaters, which were actually professional theaters that ran. Each show ran six nights a week for six weeks.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: So you were what we would call a theater arts major?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: No. I was actually in journalism.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Oh, journalism. Tell me about Jane?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Jane--well-- I don't know at what point she met Tony Smith, but my impression is that they were married fairly early in her career as an actress.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: So they met in New York?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: They met in New York, and just as a sort of a sidebar, they were good friends of Tennessee Williams. The only novel that Tennessee Williams ever wrote is involved with the problem of getting a package from New York to New Jersey to deliver to Tony and Jane Smith, you see, and that's -- I forgot the name of the book, but that's the plot of the book. And Tennessee Williams wrote the part of the sister in "Streetcar Named Desire" for Jane.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Stella.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Blanche's sister Stella, in A Streetcar Named Desire.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Based on Jane?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: No, but he just wrote that part in the play for Jane. But she never played it because she went to Europe to try to sing in the opera. Which she did. She auditioned for Sir George Solti and he put her in the opening performance of "I domeneo" in Salzburg. She sang the role of Elektra.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Do you have some idea about when that was?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, it must have been in the fifties, I think. Jane went on to become leading soprano of the Nuremberg Opera and a guest star with many of the big companies. It was sort of a family anecdote that her father came over to see her do Tosca at the Berlin Opera. She went to some lengths to get him a seat in the front row of the orchestra. At the climax of the second act when she had killed Baron Scarpia with the fruit scissors she puts the candelabra at the head and feet of Baron Scarpia, who's lying on the floor. The music, of course, is tremendous at that time. She glanced out into the orchestra where Papa was sitting and saw him sound asleep in the front row of the orchestra during her performance of Tosca at the Berlin Opera. Anyway, when I went to New York to visit them, it was a nifty way for me to meet a good many of the painters who were active at that time. Tony, of course, who had been Jackson Pollock's close friend and -- but what may be less well known is the fact that Tony, all through this period, was developing a collection of paintings of these guys. His criterion for the acquisition of a painting was that it be from early in his career. And he had a fine antique collection which he later gave to the Wadsworth Athenaeum. The curator there was a friend of Tony's. Before Tony became well known as a sculptor, he was a teacher, and I always think of him more as a teacher because he was so incredibly articulate and he knew so much. He used to teach at Hunter College, and when I was in New York I'd often have dinner with him and then go by Hunter College to sit in on one of his night classes. And these were wonderfully dramatic because he took a platform from the front of the classroom and set it on edge and sort of balanced his chair up on the edge of this platform. It was as if he anticipated the presence of one of his sculptures to sit up there and lecture in his brilliant fashion. This was the original role that I think he played among these artists, all of whom were his friends-- a kind of spokesman. He could articulate their ideas, their purposes in their paintings to a perfection that they'd never encountered before. And I think it was helpful to them or interesting to them for Tony to speak of them in this fashion. One time much later after he'd become

well known sculptor, we were sitting in the house in South Orange, and the phone rang. He kind of gestured to me to get on the extension in the other room. It was Barnett Newman on the phone saying, "But, Tony, you know, we never expected this of you. This wasn't really your role to become famous, to become a sculptor. You were supposed to keep us informed about what we were doing, let the world know what we were really about." Tony was a good host, he liked to entertain, and there were often a gathering of people around. And he had these little three-by-five index cards and a roll of Scotch tape, and while he'd be sitting talking in his brilliant fashion, he would be taping these things together without ever really telling anybody what they were. They were maquettes, you know, small scale models for his sculptures. Now the sculptures -- this house that he lived in was a house he had been raised in.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Where was that house?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: In South Orange. Tony's family was in the iron-founding business. The article in Time magazine says that these sculptures were fabricated by a different plant, a different foundry than the Smith family foundry, so I'm not sure about it. In the first evolution or first phase of his sculptures, he would execute it in plywood, full size, and then he would finish it with a kind of black matte substance that's used on the underbody of automobiles.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Joe, let's -- would you just hold that because I have to turn this over.

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 2]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: ... continuing this first interview session with Joe Brotherton. This is Tape 1, Side B, and it's being conducted by Paul Karlstrom at Mr. Brotherton's home in San Francisco. You were -- let's wrap up your thought -- include your thought of -- or rather your description of Tony Smith working with these maquettes.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: So he would make the sculptures after these small index-card miniatures in full size, and they were enormous, in plywood, cover them with this black, underbody substance, sort of like a tar or something. But then they would go in the backyard of this big residence where he lived as a child, and I can remember going out and seeing these massive, almost Egyptian shapes. They were enormously impressive in the dark, out in the back. Tony, I think, had plotted this all along.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: How do you mean?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: I think he had expected to become well recognized as a sculptor when the time was ready, because he certainly was ready for it. But he would never discuss it. I'd ask him, "Where does it come from?" you know. For instance, there were two perfectly simple rectangular box-like figures which, taken together, looked somehow reminiscent of Karnak. But to him, that was terribly sentimental. He didn't like that kind of reference. For instance, he would never allow himself to use the word "beauty" or "beautiful." He said it was a meaningless term.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: So you actually did have the presence of mind to ask these kinds of questions?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Sure.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: "How did you get here? What is this? What are these sculptures?"

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well -- you know, Tony was a really very decent guy and he kind of accepted my own pretensions to being a painter. He also did some teaching at Bennington College and he gave me an exhibition of paintings at Bennington.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Really? What year was that?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: I'd have to look it up. It would be in the sixties.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Okay.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: And, you know, he was great.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: But he wouldn't -- he really -- I'm trying to get this to make sure I'm right on this. You would ask him questions about his work, about specifically with sculpture?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Sure. It was part of an ongoing conversation.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: -- and he was reticent? He wasn't forthcoming in discussing the work with you or he did finally?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, he didn't want to discuss his work in what t you might call a literary context.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I see, okay.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: He didn't like the idea of saying that these two twin sculptures set on edge looked like some vast structure at Karnak.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Oh, okay.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: He wouldn't accept that kind of an idea. Meaningless. Sentimental.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: He was basically a formalist?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: He was a minimalist, but he was not trying to create any--

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: -- romantic associations.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Right. But I was a graduate of the Literature Department and I had a kind of poetic imagination that I insisted upon, you know.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And you're probably not all wrong.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: And he had -- he was an amusing guy with a magnificent sense of humor. He told me once that these artists, these painters, in their thirst for recognition and notoriety were very much like gangsters. He said they liked to be recognized in nightclubs, and they liked to have a good-looking gal on their arm and so on. And I thought that was sort of unlikely. I couldn't -- but have we room for a kind of digression here?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Absolutely, absolutely.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, in San Francisco at this time, you know, there was a very good friend of mine named Peter Martin who later moved to New York. Peter Martin was the son of an Italian patriot named Carlo Tresca who was an anti-fascist martyr and was shot down on the streets of New York by either the Mafia or by Mussolini's version of the Mafia. His son Peter came to San Francisco and he started the City Lights Bookstore and he and I became good friends. As a matter of fact, when he went back to New York, he wanted me to take over the City Lights thing, but I never had enough money to make it work. But anyhow, one time I went to visit Peter when he was living in a loft in New York and so I said for some reason, I said something about Tony's theory about these gangsters. "Well," Peter said, "This is Franz Kline's studio. As a matter of fact," he said, "he's coming over here so stick around." So pretty quick -- this was a studio with one of those trap-doors that open up into the loft, and here came the head of Franz Kline and a pretty girl on his arm and the snap brim hat and the velvet coat collar turned up and so on-- absolutely the persona of a guy in films playing a gangster .I thought of Tony's description. I also thought that Tony bought the first painting that Franz Kline ever sold, in the pursuit of this collection which later went to the Wadsworth Atheneum.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: This is funny. So do you think then what this signified for these artists, this gangster image, was an idea of being "outlaw", outside of -- well, outside society, but certainly as artists, that they were breaking -- they were breaking rules? Do you --

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: They were breaking rules and they were establishing a kind of romantics, unsocial, picturesque identity. And so this, I think, led to the Cedar Bar where all this became kind of a shrine.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Didn't you spend some time with de Kooning , both in San Francisco and New York and Long Island.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, if we should digress again --

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: No, these are good digressions. These are your experiences, right? You're the only one that really knows them.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: That's true.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Okay.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: I was living on Alta Street in San Francisco--a location where Russian Hill and Nob Hill are exposed to this place where I was living, this little house that we had. And one day about 6:00 in the morning, the doorbell rang, and I looked out and here is this absolutely naked little girl about -- a cherub of about, I don't know, maybe four years old. I said -- I was irritable. It was early in the morning, "What do you want?" She said,

"Is Rosie there?" And I said, "No, she's asleep." Rosie was my four year old daughter. Well, so she assumed this statuesque posture pointing at the city and sunlight across Nob Hill. "It's a pretty nice day out there. You better get her up." This was Lisa de Kooning; she's the daughter of Willem who had moved in right next door to us.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And you didn't know this?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: And I didn't know this at all. He was with a girl named Joan Ward. She came ahead of Bill, I guess and became quite friendly with people I knew in de Kooning's absence. Then when he came he stayed for quite a while and, I don't know, I was sort of the only person around for him to talk to because he was trying to maintain a sort of incognito.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Oh, really?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Which, of course, didn't work at all.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Was he sort of escaping of the New York scrutiny or --

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Yes, but then, of course, de Kooning liked parties quite a lot, so almost immediately, the word got around that he was here and I'd get calls from people asking me to invite him to come to a party and I didn't take too kindly to that.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Did you start visiting back and forth quite a bit then?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: When I went to New York, I would look him up.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: You spent some time together then?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, one thing that is an eternal regret in my life is that the art department at U.C. invited de Kooning to use -- to take two very large, beautiful lithographic stones that they had and make two prints, which he did. And he made ten copies of two prints at the U.C. Art Department and he gave me one of each. They were big. They were maybe 48 x 36 inches.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: You mean de Kooning did?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: He sure did. He wrote "To Joe from Bill" on each of them and you know I didn't keep them. I gave them both away, like an idiot. But then when I'd go to New York, I would always call him up and either go out -- at this time, he had just built a beautiful, big studio on, oh, I don't even remember exactly where in New York. It was a studio --

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: In the village somewhere?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, it was more uptown. It may have been on Broadway on the west side. I can't remember. I remember that the ceiling was supported by a series of cast-iron pillars and he had connected some of these pillars to make a living room. And the rest of it was this beautiful, big, open space. But then at about that same time, he had built the studio on Long Island. I'd take the train out there. But the thing that struck me again, we're getting back to Tony's idea, when de Kooning and Joan were in the city, they'd go out in the evening usually to the Cedar Bar. Immediately, a whole group of people would attach themselves to them and they'd sit - go someplace and have dinner and they'd always sit together.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: So who would be in these little gatherings?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: I never knew who they were.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Really? So it wasn't like the whole gang of abstract expressionists?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: No, no. Bill wouldn't dream of it.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: So this was like de Kooning's entourage, whoever they may be.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Precisely.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: When did Elaine de Kooning come into the picture?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, I think she had come in and gone.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Oh, she was gone already?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: I thought they were divorced, but I'm not sure.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Are we talking about the sixties now?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: That's right. De Kooning told me a couple of things that I thought were interesting. First of all, de Kooning was, among all of these people, the most spectacularly well-trained artist. He had been in Holland, taken out of school when he was quite young, and put in a special training program for gifted artists. And he knew so many disciplines and techniques that are not, in this country, part of an artist's training. For instance, he was perfectly capable of putting his name on a window in gold leaf. He could do this kind of glazing. He knew theater design very well and costume design. He didn't necessarily use this training in his work, but he was able to do it and it gave him an enormous self-confidence. He came to the United States first on a Dutch ship. He said he went uptown and wandered into Woolworth's and he looked at a pair of socks. He concluded that a man could earn a good pair of wool socks with one hour's work. Whereas in Holland, it was going to take him two days, so he decided to come to America. Now I'm not pretending that he actually came as a result of that, but this was his analysis of the thing.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Not unreasonable. In fact, don't you think a good many immigrants turn up in these shores for precisely those reasons.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, exactly, whether they expressed it to themselves in those -- in such terms.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, Joe, how -- how would you describe -- this is very interesting. I -- I believe we're talking about -- mostly about the Sixties.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Early Sixties.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And de Kooning was here in San Francisco in the early -- I should know this, but I don't. When was it?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: I should know what the date was, too, but I don't. But my impression is it would be around 1963 or '4.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And then so that's when you actually met one another because he came -- or Lisa came and wanted to know where your daughter was.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: That's how we got to know each other.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Her age.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: -- from her age.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And how old was Rose?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: She was the same age, so she and Lisa were -- they remained friends.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: How old is Rose?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, let's see, she was born in 1953.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, so --

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: We're talking about 1957, I believe. My gosh, I never thought of it in those terms. It wasn't the sixties; it was pre-figuring the sixties.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: So what kind of a relationship did you and -- how would you describe your relationship with de Kooning? Number one, you were neighbors. Your daughters played together, but beyond that, he knew you were a painter, that you --

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: He knew I had pretensions to --

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I mean was that part of then that figure in your -- or was it just simply agreeable neighbors?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: It was simply -- well, it was simply a coincidence that we met and I think I had no role in his life whatever except as a passing friend, a guy to talk to.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: There's nothing wrong with that. But you did talk about art. You see what I'm getting at?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: But he was not like Tony. I mean he didn't want to talk about why he painted the way he did and so on. It's an interesting and maybe a rather ironic sideline on these things, that Tony, who was very well aware of what was going on in American painting at that time, had no particular respect for the abstract

expressionists, for the so-called action painters, at all. He called them decorators.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, I thought you said that he was supposed to be kind of a spokesman?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, the academic scholar who understood.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: No, but for Barnett Newman and people like that.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: That's right, and Franz -- not Franz Kline. He would be one of the decorators, but for Pollock. Tony -- as a matter of fact -- Jackson Pollock.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Why wasn't Pollock a decorator?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, because he was --

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: He was an action --

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: He was the master of the trade. I think this may be actually true. In Jane's collection of paintings, there's a portrait of her by Pollock which was dripped from an oil can and I swear to heaven you can recognize Jane perfectly easily in this portrait, dripped from, you know, three or four feet above the floor in an oil can. Tony had an enormous amount of respect for Pollock, I think. I remember going once to an exhibition of Pollock's at Betty Parson's with Tony, and there was an absolutely beautiful painting there, blue with kind of a starburst across. And Tony said, "You better buy that. You will be sorry if you don't." It was \$9,000. How could I buy that? I was, you know, getting along as an actor and singer in San Francisco. I couldn't possibly. But he said, "I just bought one. Oh, come on," he said, "I'll loan you the money if you want." I said, "No, I can't." On the subject of money and Tony -- who's the painter -- oh, God, I'm having one my lapses remembering, the guy that does the beautiful, big canvases with just a wash of color.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Morris Louis?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: No. This is just --

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Mark Rothko.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: That's the one. Rothko came to Tony once, said, "You know, Tony, you work so hard teaching and you never get any time." He said, "You know, I'm making so much money right now. I would like to set up some sort of a fund that would enable you to drop Hunter College and just do some work." So Tony, of course, refused, but it was a nice gesture on Rothko's part.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Why did he -- was it a matter of pride? Or he didn't want it to interfere with friendship perhaps? I mean why would you think that --

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, I don't know. Tony had sort of, what would you call it, a gentleman's ideas about money. Jane and Tony lived in the house where he'd been born in Orange-- a big, roomy type of mansion. About a mile away in South Orange, he bought Jane a beautiful Georgian house. He told her, "You belong in this house. You're the type of person that should live in a Georgian house." And they never furnished it. Jane said it was miserable trying to live between the two places because anything you wanted was always at the other place. The only furnishings Tony put in this house were his collection of paintings, so you'd go to the house and in each room you'd find paintings by all these people and it was beautiful.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: It was like a museum. But he wanted her to live there?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, no. He just felt that this was something that was becoming for Jane, that she should have.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: An appropriate environment.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Appropriate, precisely. That's exactly the way --

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, how nice and how interesting that he would think in those terms.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Isn't it?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Not everybody would.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Oh, you know, he was a stylish guy. He dressed very nicely and so on. I went to the World's Fair with him, Flushing Meadows. And I was astonished at how much he knew about New York

restaurants and this kind of stuff. Not fashionable restaurants, but very good ones.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: So he wasn't -- he was like a more elegant version of these gangsters?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: No, I wouldn't say that. But a powerfully independent guy.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: His image was important?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, no more than to anybody else.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Let's, Joe, leave Tony and Jane and Pollock. There's going to be more I think to say about that. I would like to ask you more specifically about Tony and his very famous -- that's a very famous friendship, as a matter of fact.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: With Pollock.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: With Pollock, but I feel a little uncomfortable because we have left your earlier career sort of -- sort of hanging, your earlier -- we had you at the University, and I don't know if there -- if you feel there's much more to say about that, but we know that you majored in journalism. But there was acting and some -- some art. Then you were in the Navy, which I imagine could, if we got into that, would be -- would open up a real big story.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Yes, but not much to do--

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And I'm not sure how much --

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Not connected with anything here.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah. That was 1941 to '45. I'm just looking at these notes here. But then what gets interesting again from the Arts standpoint is when you then went back and spent, I believe, some more time in Mount Vernon and, at that period, had some contact, I gather from what you said, with some of the Northwest painters like Morris Graves, and Toby, Anderson. Why don't you tell me a little bit about those years, post-war?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: La Conner, Washington where I lived, was ten miles west of Mount Vernon, Washington --

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: You lived in -- lived in La Conner? I know La Conner! My uncle lives there!

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: My God. You don't mean it!

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Isn't that wild?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: La Conner is sacred to the memory of Louisa A. Conner, first white child born in the Oregon territory. That's what it's named after. But this had been a community where Mark Toby and Morris Graves and Fitzgerald and his wife and Guy Anderson, and others whom I can't remember, all had been active at various times. Unfortunately, at the time I actually lived there in the big house on the hill where I took an apartment, Graves and Toby were pretty much absent. I mean, there's a whole constellation of anecdotes about Graves and his life in the Irish castle and so on. I was a good friend of Jan Thompson, a girl who --

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I've met her.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Have you met her?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: That's right.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Oh, for heaven's sake. How?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I think maybe with an archives interviewing project. I do believe possibly we interviewed her.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Is that right?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And I don't think I'm mixed up.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: No, I wouldn't--

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And she was very much a part of the -- was she ever a model?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, she might have been, but not that I know of. She was a good painter, and she was a

very attractive girl.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: She really was. Well, I'm pretty sure we interviewed her. Anyway, that's a sidebar.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Yeah. There's a sidebar; there's a great sidebar there if you wanted to take a moment for it.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Absolutely. That's what we're here for.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, she was living with Morris Graves in Ireland in some sort of a castle and he had managed to achieve the enmity of most of the people in the community to a point where they poured cement down the drains and that sort of friendly gesture.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Wow.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: So she finally got out of it and went to Ischia. And she was marching up a hill in Ischia and this guy drove by and said, "You want a lift to the top?" So she got in the car. So they got to chatting. He said, "Listen, are you busy right now? I want you to come and meet my girl." So now remember Jan had been living in Ireland for two years. She was not a person who paid a lot of attention to contemporary society anyhow. So she went and met the girl. She said, "There was this lovely looking woman and I'll never forget her violet eyes who watched this guy all the time, just stared at him." And she said, "I didn't know who they were at all, either one of them." But, of course, it was Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor just having finished The Movie. But the reason - and Jan apparently became very good friends with them and very much feted by them. I think the reason being that she still had no idea who they were. She must have been the only person in the Mediterranean who didn't recognize them.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Now where did this take place?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: At Ischia in the Mediterranean. She left Ireland and the fog and rain to go to the sunny Mediterranean.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Ischia? What island is that?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: I don't know exactly where Ischia is. My impression is it's sort of like, you know, the famous islands. I don't -- I should know better.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Off Italy. Did you say she was with Graves?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: No. She'd left Graves.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Back in Ireland?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Yes.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Okay, that's right. Now I recall. Well now why the heck would she be living with Morris Graves is an interesting comment. Serving the standpoint of sexual preference, it doesn't --

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: No, it doesn't mean anything.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: No, no, so --

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, he -- I think he usually was surrounded by rather attractive girls.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Nothing wrong with that.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Not at all. Let's vote for it.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Let's -- you know what, we're getting awfully close to the end of this tape and, in fact, I think we're almost to the end. We haven't quite finished this Session 1, but that doesn't matter because we can do so when we meet again before we get into the Asian --

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: I'd like to get into the Asian thing.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: So let's just call it a morning and I thank you very much. We'll do another one soon.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Thank you, Paul. It was fun.

[JANUARY 23, 2001]

[TAPE 1, SIDE A]

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: When I was young I got interested in World War I aviation – Eddie Rickenbacker, Baron Richthofen and all the flying aces of WWI. I read the book Eddie Rickenbacker wrote describing how he became America's leading ace with 26 victories. He called it "Fighting the Flying Circus." On one page of that book, as I remember, there is a paragraph which says that October 22nd, 1918, "Lieutenant Joseph Brotherton flew over the German lines and was never seen again." Something like that. That is the date of my birth and a truly spooky occurrence.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Now I like that story a lot. We might keep this in because . . .

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Let's check it out. It was a long time ago.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: But that's how you remember it and what I would ask you – I think it's spooky, too and that's a real coincidence -- but did that in any way match your own kind of world view, you see what I mean? Something beyond the merely logical?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Now certainly at that point of my life when I was, you know, a school kid in Bozeman seeking an identity. And I think maybe that was important because . . .

PAUL J KARLSTROM: You found a connection. You found a kind of emotion . . .

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: I felt that this was a kind of an acknowledgement that Joseph Brotherton actually was alive, you know? I mean, the guy was gone but there must've been a connection there. I never pursued it. I never, for instance, tried to find out if there was such a pilot in the AEF . . . that sort of thing. But . . .

PAUL J KARLSTROM: But did it give you, in your mind in some way, a special place in the world, and maybe [presented] some promise for what you could be? Is that possible?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Something to think about privately.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Um-hmm.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: That was totally outside the context of my life in Bozeman during the thirties. Something like that, yes.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: That's great.

[TAPE OFF - TAPE ON]

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is a second session with Joe Brotherton and we're recording again at his dining room table in his home in San Francisco. The date is January 23rd, 2001. The first session was almost two years ago. I think it was in March. I don't have it right in front of me but March '99. And so there's been a big gap between these sessions and we're taking this opportunity to complete the story, or round out the picture, of your career in the arts and other things, as well. The interviewer, again, is Paul Karlstrom. We started taping a little bit earlier with an anecdote about your namesake as a World War I pilot, RAF, I guess. Is that right?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: No, American. AEF.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Oh, he was an American pilot? Okay. And that, just to explain here, starts this particular tape. This is tape one, side A and I thought that it was a quite interesting story and it led us – it led you to go get a catalog of an exhibition of yours – it was at the Pacific Heritage Museum in 1998. And I guess – well, it was a group show but it was called "Shining Stars -- Four Cultural Visionaries of Contemporary Painting". What I want to know is, how this visionary idea fits in with . . .

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Should I explain where that came from?

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Okay. But before – and I would like you to do that because two things we're going to talk about today, I think, or at least focus on -- your own work, your career as a painter. You're also then going to show us that that's just one arrow in your quiver. That you are a painter and an artist but you've had a number of other interesting involvements with the arts. But here is a painting that you pointed to in connection with the little anecdote you gave earlier and it's called Stella Maris. Okay. And . . .

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: That's a very pretentious title for a painting. It's a portrait of my mother whose name was Etoile, or Stella, in Italian.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: I see.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: And my mother is suspended in a bos'un's chair over the ocean. So the title of the painting becomes "Stella Maris", or "Star of the Sea".

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Right. And it's a large painting -- 54 x 96", mixed media on Japanese kozo paper.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: It makes an enormous hanging scroll, or a nine foot wide Kakemono - maybe the biggest Kakemono outside of Japan . . .

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Wow.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: There's a group of five paintings in this format.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Well, what, the reason you brought this out to show me was that there's a little tiny airplane . . .

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: So there is . . .

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Bi-planes, I guess --

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: A German and an American plane in a "dogfight," as aerial combats were called.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Yeah. And they're fighting right under the chair your mom is suspended on, over the ocean.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: That's right.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Why don't you, again, describe what we have here.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, this is almost an unconscious reference in the painting, and I'm not even sure when I was doing the under-drawing that I realized why I put those planes in the picture. The reason is that when I was young, I became interested in WWI aviation and the names of Von Richthofen and Eddie Rickenbacker and so on were magical to me. Reading Eddie Rickenbacker's book, "Fighting - A Flying Circus," I came across - I think in that book or somewhere -- a statement that -- on October 22nd, 1918, Lieutenant Joseph Brotherton flew over the German lines in a single-seater pursuit plane - probably a Spad or a Nieuport - and was never seen again. On the day I was born, halfway around the world, in Montana.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: And that's the little lesson story that we started the tape with . . .

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Right.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: . . . and what I was interested in then - it struck me - that, at least in this one instance, that, seeing your Mother's innovative look, there's this autobiographical aspect to your work. I would be curious to know - you said it was almost an unconscious reference . . .

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: I think so.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: . . . but would you describe your own work as autobiographical in general? That its imagery comes from your experience or from your own story?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, I think all imagery has to come out of experience. Anyhow, I deliberately painted a group of paintings in this very large format. Actually, I think the format derives from Japanese screens or from a segment of the Japanese e-makimono which, as an aside, I suspect might be the basis in Japanese art for the development of the wide six and eight panel screen - as a large expansion of the small episodes illustrated in the e-makimono.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: How do you spell e-makimono?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: E hyphen M-A-K-I-M-O-N-O. E-makimono just means 'horizontal scroll.' These horizontal scrolls are usually very long - but they're only about 18 inches wide. They consist of episodes of painting followed by segments of calligraphy. The painting episodes are in about the same ratio of width to height as the screens and so - consciously or not - I did these five paintings in this screen-like format.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Now was this a practice, a format, that you used beyond this series or was it just these five paintings?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, I usually work in a large horizontal format whether it's in ink on paper, or ink and color. Here again, in the same catalog, is a detail of another very obviously Japanese derived painting called

“Forest Energies” -- a black and white painting of a forest -- maybe in the late afternoon: So, this is a, this is a continuing idea even in stuff that I’ve been working on just over the last weekend -- drawings and . . .

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Not so big?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: But still in horizontal format. I can show you later. I think to go back to the reasons that I started painting, when I lived in La Connor [WA] right after WWII, I was strictly a Sunday painter. During the war, for instance, I had been in Karachi, India and I did a painting in La Connor called Side Street in Karachi which was accepted in a show at the Seattle Art Museum, God knows when, maybe in 1948 or ’50. Very beginnings of an idea that I might try to be a painter.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: About how old were you then?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: I would be about 28 and I was fairly active as a painter. I remember living in La Connor and being a good friend of Guy Anderson and once kind of . . . mentioning to Mark Tobey that I was living in La Connor in a house that he had occupied. This caused him to open his blue eyes very wide and say, “Well, I haven’t the slightest recollection of it.” Anyhow, when I came to San Francisco I kept on working at painting. But what really transformed my work happened this way: One evening I was walking home from some place -- and here was a plaque on the side of a building on Bush Street, “American Academy of Asian Studies.” So, I walked upstairs and met this sort of slender gent who was very affable and forthcoming. His name was Alan Watts and at that time he was sort of headmaster or curator of this organization, The American Academy of Asian Studies. I got quite well acquainted with Alan Watts and gave some very sparsely attended lectures on Asian art at his Academy. One night he called up and said, “Joe, I’m terribly sorry to do this to you but I have this Zen Abbott in my office here in full canonical fig and he insists that he wants to teach calligraphy at the Academy here. Starting here. Tonight. So what am I going to do? Could you come over?” So I hustled over to the Academy and here was this rather brusque, bald-headed, bullet-headed Japanese man in the robes of a Buddhist abbot. His name was Hodo Tobase, apparently in Japan a famous calligrapher because the seal that he used proclaimed him to be Kobo Daishi number 54 or 56. Daishi was the ninth century father of Japanese calligraphy and any calligrapher entitled to use this name on the seal that he puts on his paintings has to be a very formidable calligrapher indeed. So we started. Alan had dragooned several other people to attend, including interestingly enough Gordon Onslow-Ford to come to class every Monday night at the Academy and study Japanese calligraphy with Reverend Tobase. And he was fantastic. He was a superb teacher. He would work very hard composing these sort of Zen homilies, that would be the week’s study. He would write a profound statement in four or five Japanese characters which would translate into something like “Daily Life is Important”, or another one that I remember affectionately was, “Toss Out the Short, Keep the Long”. Then we would write these statements with a big broad brush. He would give us each a sheet of good “rice” paper for our practice writing. Then and he would come around and if you weren’t holding the brush right he’d jerk it out of your hand. Take the thing away from you entirely. He’d use a fat red brush to correct everything you’d written and I loved it. To me, it was so liberating because I wasn’t using a pencil between my thumb and forefinger anymore, I was using the lively brush, held six or eight inches above the paper, held in sort of like the way you’d grip a choptstick, and using full-arm, the complete apparatus of the body to make the stroke. In other words, the stroke started in the shoulder and not in the wrist -- there wasn’t any question of a supported wrist. The only reason I mention this, in the two years I studied with Tobase I think my work as a painter was transformed. This not only gave you a feeling of freedom in drawing but the calligraphy itself had an organizing effect, because the school of calligraphy that he taught -- I’m not sure this is typical of all schools of calligraphy -- composed every character in a nine section square. No matter how many strokes there were in the character you were writing, it had to lie comfortably within that nine cube format . . .

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Um-hmm.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Anyhow, this nine cube universe gives you a quick feeling for composition. You know, as you work into the more advanced construction of a 22 and 27 stroke character, it still has to fit comfortably into the square. Altogether I think this was an important discipline. Gordon, I think, if he talked about it might date many of his innovations as a painter to this time. It’s also interesting that a Japanese artist named S-A-B-R-O, H-A-S-E-G-A-W-A . . .

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Oh, yeah.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: . . . was living in the Academy at this time -- and willingly submitted himself like the merest neophyte to Tobase’s methods. He came to the class each time without fail but he was puzzling to me because Hasegawa would only write one, two, and three. The numerals. One stroke, two strokes, three strokes. Over and over again. The floor was covered with rejects. Mechanically like a robot almost. I said, (you know, he spoke good English) I asked him, “Why?” He said, “I’m trying to get it right. I’m trying to write one that I will accept as a thing fit to be mounted on a wall.” He always wore a Japanese kimono or yukata and he was a very elegant guy.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: What year was this?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: This would've been in about 1958 or 1960. No, I don't remember. One time I got a call from Sabro's wife, who had come to live in San Francisco. "Would you come over," she said, "Sabro has been diagnosed with cancer of the hard palate. Would you come and visit him and not say anything about my having asked you to come?" I went over and here was Hasegawa in a yukata, barefoot, smoking incessantly. His wife made tea and we chatted and he went on smoking as he always did. I remember his giving a lecture once at the American Academy. He came to the apron of the stage with his cigarette and started talking. Somebody in the back of the room hollered, "Louder." Sabro lowered his cigarette reflectively, looking at this person for a long pause. Then he said, "Later." You see, he was a brilliant sort of a guy, and we talked that morning and had tea and chatted on for an hour and as I was leaving he said, "By the way, I wrote something this morning that I'd like to show you," and he got out this beautiful piece of calligraphy. No more one-two-three. A long horizontal unmounted sheet. It was wonderful. I said, "Sabro, that's terrific. What does it say?" He said, "I believe in God and Buddha and expect nothing from either one of them," and that was the only reference made, in the whole morning's conversation to the fact that he was dying.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: You never discussed it when you visited him? You never discussed that until later?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Later I went over to see him. I'd never seen anybody who was in the final stages of this disease and it was just appalling. Hard to take. I remember writing Dr. Morley, Grace McCann Morley at the time Director at the San Francisco Museum of Art -- I didn't know her awfully well but I was emcee on a TV program, one Museum sponsored, so I knew her. When I wrote this letter I said, "Hasegawa is dying and I hope you're not going to wait until he's dead to give him a show," and she, in her very gracious way, ignored the hostility of my behavior and said, "You know, Joe, you do get carried away at times. I happen to have a small UNICEF grant and I can give you a month in one, unfortunately, small gallery at the Museum if you will organize Mr. Hasegawa's show," and so I was elated at this and I went back and we actually got a show up for him. A handsome show. Hasegawa had been interned by the Japanese government because of his non-military posture and when you're exiled in Japan you're usually put on an island -- all the way back to the time of Genji -- so here was Hasegawa marooned on an island and on the shore of the island things kept washing up and one of the things that washed up was a fishboat that had sunk and the grain of its timbers had become exposed by wind and water and waves. He made rubbings of the pieces of the fishboat for a screen and paintings of these fragments that washed ashore. Karl -- I hate to prolong this.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Not at all. It's very interesting.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: In Japan there's a very inexpensive food called kamaboko, which in one form is a dried fish paste -- perhaps one of the cheapest, most plebian food stuffs in Japan.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: T? It starts with a T?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: It's the name of a food. Tamaboko. T-a-m-a-b-o-k-o.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Okay. Thanks.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: On this island was a fish factory that produced this stuff on little fragments of wood -- scraps from a nearby lumber mill. They spread the fish paste on the wood and it dried and was sold that way in food stores and people would scrape it off for soup. So, Sabro would take these fragments of wood and compose them and make rubbings of the composition. Then he might write some characters, or a Zen nomily on his painting. He made this beautiful big screen of the timbers of the fishboat, which was later bought by Mrs. Rockefeller in New York. He had a show in New York and she bought this screen. I think this was something she fondly kept and rarely exhibited but anyhow here was Hasegawa with quite a reputation as a modern Japanese calligrapher doing one, two, three with us behind the kitchen in the Soko-ji temple here in San Francisco. But to get back to the exhibition, I was able to rent a wheelchair and go to Sabro's house. By this time the show opened, he was speechless and in very bad shape but I wheeled him over to the Museum and up in the elevator in the wheelchair through the galleries. He saw his show there before he died. Also, I remember that he had a show at Gump's Gallery one time and in a sort of innocent way, he would turn up at the Gallery every day, of the thirty days that Gump's had the show up, in his kimono and hakama, smoking and talking to people about his paintings. And you know in a really charming way he would sort of interview them; Then of course he passed on and that was the end of it.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Do you remember the date of the Gump Show?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Before 1955, I think.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: The one at Gump's?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Yes.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: And what about your show that you put together . . .

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: At the museum?

PAUL J KARLSTROM: When, what year did he die?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: It would've been the year he died and I think he died in about 1956 or '57. Something like that. 1955 to 1957.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Okay. When were the art classes?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: The art classes were, I never kept any notes, I would say the art classes were 1953 to '55 or something like that.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Okay. That changes what you remembered earlier that these classes were like '58 to '60 so it must've been . . .

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, it must've been around '55, I think.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Okay. Just checking.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: The Academy of Asian Studies moved from it's downtown location into a big Victorian house in Pacific Heights that Mr. Gainsborough, the head of the thing, rented when Alan Watts became the Director of it. This was Alan Watts, at this time an ordained Church of England minister and he had written what I suppose remains the best book on Zen Buddhism. "The Book of Zen".

[TAPE 1, SIDE B]

PAUL J KARLSTROM: This is Session 2, Tape 1, Side B and [on the previous side we] happily found ourselves talking about your experience with Alan Watts Academy and experience with Hasegawa - meeting him and then you told some stories about that and obviously had - you were both students in this class given by the Zen Abbott . . .

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Tobase.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: . . . Tobase, that's right.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, I should say first of all something about Tobase. I understand that later he became the head of what was called the Soto Zenshu or Soto Sect of Zen Buddhism which in Japan had 11,000 temples and 11 million adherence, so he was very honored -- sort of [a] cult [figure], you could say. Speaking of Alan Watts, this was long before he became in the '60's a kind of guru in the, what would you call it, the movement toward the new enlightenment.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: I think that's well said. Okay.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: And he played an important role in that movement of the sixties. He changed his lifestyle completely. I had had as a client of my public relations business at that time The World Affairs Council of Northern California, which was a well-funded institution. I got Alan to give a series of lectures at the World Affairs Council and that was sort of my last acquaintance with him.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Could you, I'm sorry, I don't mean to interrupt you but I'm trying to piece some things together, there's a theme which shouldn't surprise us at all in these discussions, that the focus is right on an interest, your own interest in and experience with things, what we used to say Oriental, an Asian connection . . .

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Exactly.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: . . . and especially with Japan, I believe, and certainly the art experience. You mentioned your experience of studying calligraphy as transforming to your own work. But what I would like to also touch on a bit -- you had contact with these people -- what about ideas, Eastern ideas, Eastern philosophy or even Eastern religion? Certainly with Watts you must've been talking about that. Was this the case? Was it strictly the art?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: I don't know. I was - I think too diffident in those days. It embarrassed me to talk to Alan about Buddhism, about Zen, for instance. I wasn't clear on his own relationship to it and I thought maybe he had - his - at that time he was so conventional. I couldn't see any connection between his rite and Zen Buddhism.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Um-hmm.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: I mean he was a very productive kind of a professional director of the Academy and I sensed that the Zen business and the Church of England – his being an ordained minister -- all may have related to a time of his life in England that he didn't particularly care to talk about. So I don't think there was any superficial aspect of Asian studies or Asian philosophy in these relationships except maybe the unspoken, rather Zen-like acquaintance with Reverend Tobase. I remember one sort of hilarious evening -- You know, we would bring our amateur calligraphies up to the front table and he would correct them with his fat red brush. Mostly he would rewrite the character. Writing right over what you had written. Occasionally he would put down a mark of approbation -- a spiral or sort of a clamshell shape in red beside your effort and this was high praise indeed. You had written well. And I remember one evening when I took up my sheet for him to correct and he looked at it and then he took his fat brush and he wrote a big double circle beside each character that I had written and then he taped it up on the wall and he awarded me a nom de plume, a sobriquet. I became Murasaki no kumo, "purple cloud." When the Buddha comes next into the world he will come riding on a purple cloud so my name as a painter or a calligraphist, I should say, became something more than a nickname to live up to. Then he motioned to me – he didn't speak English at all, of course - to stick around. By this time the classes were being held in the kitchen of the Zen temple here in San Francisco on Bush Street, at about Laguna, which had big tables in the kitchen. So when the class was over and everybody else had gone home he got out this large jug of sake and turned on the stove and what he did -- which I thought was charmingly sort of, I don't know, sort of Zen or free form -- was to cook our dinner. At about 11:00 at night with the sake flowing and no conversation whatever but plenty of communication, which truly surprised me. I mean, I remember going away from the temple about 2:00 in the morning quite drunk on sake and realizing that I hadn't said a word and he hadn't said a word all during that whole long business of cooking the dinner and eating it and yet there was no discomfort or sense of, you know, culture-clashing or East/West bashing at all. It was a nifty experience.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Well, what was it for you then a spiritual experience or is that . . .

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, I guess the practice of calligraphy becomes a kind of spiritual thing, because no matter how much you take it away from the original oracle bones of Shang China where it all began into the various forms -- as Shosho and Kaisho and all the rest -- calligraphy still remains a pictorial art. It's essentially pictorial and if you take it back far enough you can discover the visual, usually quite homely origins of any character. And I like to think that this was somehow going forward in my own work. Not necessarily in any kind of a spiritual sense but in the sense that if a character, well, let's think of a character. Let's say a character basically was representing fish.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Um-hmm.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: You take that character back far enough you'll find an ideogram that is the simple presentation of a fish. It may be brutally battered out of shape by the time you deconstruct it but it – but anybody who studies calligraphy and goes back far enough can read decipher it. You can see the successive forms of it over its historical development.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Right.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: But I didn't mean to make a lecture on it.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: But this is – it seems to me that it's important because somehow you feel this process – this discovery for you had an effect. It affected your own work.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: That's why they say – they don't say painting. They say writing.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Um-hmm.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Writing a landscape.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: But what I also gather is that despite this very interesting contact with individuals who were quite focused, perhaps practitioners of Zen Buddhism . . .

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Yes?

PAUL J KARLSTROM: . . . of your Eastern thought, Eastern religion . . . that you yourself didn't – probably you respected this, of course, but didn't really participate. You yourself are not a Buddhist. Is that true?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: No, I never joined up. I was simply a – now here's a class at Alan Watts Academy. He would come into the class and write. Gordon Onslow-Ford. Saburo Hasegawa. A girl named Lucienne Bloch -- whose father was a famous composer.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: And she is a famous mural person.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Really?

PAUL J KARLSTROM: She assisted Diego Rivera in Detroit, you know.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Is that so? It was, well, that's another subject. Rivera and the California School of Fine Arts and the Pacific Stock Exchange – of all places.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Well, good. I like Rivera so we can talk about that later.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Okay. But all these people came to this class.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Um-hmm.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: And I don't know whether Gordon has ever acknowledged any influence of this class on his work. Lucienne Bloch I know very definitely did. I believe also that, what's his name? The Japanese artist . . .

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Hasegawa?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: No, no.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Obata?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Obate. Chiura Obata. I believe that – although I didn't know him at that time and didn't recognize . . .

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Was he in that class?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: But I think he came to that class, too.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Well, okay. Let me, if I may, shift it back even earlier 'cause I'm trying to track your own – the evolution of your work, of your style and of your interests. And you were in the northwest which also is a center of interest in Asian art, that's for sure, with Fuller's . . .

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: That's true.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: And when you look at Toby, or Graves – all of these people are explained to a certain degree in terms of the East – of Asia, of looking across the Pacific. So when you lived in La Conner, before you went to San Francisco was this something you were aware of? Was there, in your own work. Were you attracted to – interested in this kind of Asian connection?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Oh, for sure. The trouble is that – when I was living in La Connor I was tryin' to be a writer and I was – there was – Theodore Roethke at the University in Seattle at that time who used to come up and stay over weekends with my wife and me. Graves was no longer there, although he had been in La Conner.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Your interest was really writing, but that wouldn't preclude an interest in Asian themes?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: No, not at all.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: That's what I'm asking. Was that developed at that early stage?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Oh sure. I became very interested in – for instance, at the Seattle Museum I got to know Dr. Fuller, Richard Fuller, quite well and I remember once when I moved to San Francisco I had just at that time acquired a – because I was always trying to collect Asian art – I had acquired a Shang bronze and a Momoyama armorial mask – a piece of armor in the guise of a demonic mask. One time when I was going back to Seattle I took them both of them to Dr. Fuller to show him. And he looked at me and he said, "You know, Joe, you gained a good deal of your present interest in Asian art from the time you were living near the Seattle Museum," (My uncle was Bishop Arthur Huston. He was the Episcopal Bishop of Seattle and the Olympia Diocese). The residence house was at the entrance to Volunteer Park where the Seattle Art Museum is located and I had dinner there every Sunday. Afterwards I'd walk over to the Museum. I had just come from Montana and this was my first exposure to Asian art and I loved it; I'd go over there every Sunday and that was when I struck up an acquaintance with Dr. Fuller. Rather to my horror he sort of, what do you say when you simply take possession of something? He said, "I'll put these in the collection. Your gift."

PAUL J KARLSTROM: These were yours? Your things?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: My stuff. My treasures. Here went the mask and the Kuei. Of course the Shang vase was

at that time was not worth a lot because they were not so scarce, believe it or not, I agreed with the notion of a gift . . . I thought it was a funny, maybe sort of characteristic thing for him to do and I've always been glad he did.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: But wait a minute, you were a young man, probably not with a lot of available means . . .

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Not with all the cash in the world, that's right.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Yeah. Right and so this seems incredibly arrogant.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, he was a direct descendent of Margaret Fuller and he had every excuse for being slightly autocratic because he and his sister had built the Seattle Art Museum. That beautiful Museum in Volunteer Park. They actually paid for it, both design and construction. So, I think, he felt that he could sort of act as his own, you know, ethical guide or whatever. Expropriate good stuff for the good of the museum.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Lets, this is perfect because I really would like to move us on towards the discussion of your own interest in Asian art – I guess particularly Japanese, but it sounds like it's broader than that and that in San Francisco, if I have this right, after a brief time in La Conner, you had enough interest that you began to collect here. Is that right? Your collecting really began in San Francisco?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Oh, sure.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Okay. So, tell me about that. How did that come about? Where did you find these things?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Oh, this is good timing because it, this definitely brings into the picture the figure of Harry Packard who we really should talk about . . .

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Right.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: . . . There was in San Francisco at this time, oddly enough no Asian art whatever. In the early '50's there was, for some reason, a big marble hand in the De Young Museum which was I think labeled the Hand of God. I've never seen anything like it in Asian art. I'm not even sure it was Asian. Then there was the Leventritt collection of blue and white Chinese porcelain which was, I think, divided between the Stanford University Museum and the De Young Museum of Art. Ad that's literally all there was. But! There was also in San Francisco at this time a valiant group of true believers who met once a month at a member's house and exhibited a piece of Asian art -- a print or painting, something they had in their own collection or had found. It was an interesting group of people, one of whom was the custom's appraiser for the Port of San Francisco, Carlton Heymann, H-E-Y-M-A-N-N. One day Carlton Heymann called me and asked, "Could you come over here? I've got this guy here in my office with a bunch of Japanese paintings. You're the one in our group that's supposed to be the Japanese addict and I frankly just can't believe what I'm seeing. But the guy won't talk to me." So I hurried over to the Appraiser's Building on Battery Street and here was this small rather rotund guy who was just speechless with anger at Carlton Heymann. I can't remember exactly why. He showed me first of all a late Heian or Nambokucho painting of a Buddhist divinity of, I'm forgetting this now, the divinity -- Jizo Sama asl --simply beautiful painting. Then he got out another painting which turned out to be by Sotatsu, perhaps the most important Japanese artist in the Momoyama period. It was an ink painting of "The Bird's Nest Hermit", now in the Cleveland Museum. Anyhow, I asked him, "Mr. Packard, why don't you get over your fury here. You know, Mr. Heyman has to examine your paintings. We have in San Francisco a group called The Society for Asian Art." (I mention this because this was the group was later instrumental in bringing the Brundage Collection to San Francisco . . .)

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Really?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Sure was. So I said, "I'll schedule a meeting of the Society at my house or wherever we could do it, so will you show us your paintings? We've never seen Japanese art of this quality." Grudgingly he agreed. Two days later he called me to say that he'd arranged things, so I should call my friends. Well, the meeting occurred and it was a revelation – a complete transformation of Packard's character.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: So, this was Harry Packard?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Yup. This was Harry Packard as ever was and Heymann had released the paintings . . .

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Packard brought them to hang as his collection?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: No. He brought 'em in to sell 'em.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Oh. Okay.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: He was a dealer and that's how he financed his great collection. He was the leading dealer in Japanese art at the time. I'll have to explain how he operated as we go along, but anyhow at this point, this was his first trip to San Francisco, and to the U.S. as a dealer. I should say, with his sale collection. Karl, I didn't know how much time we should spend on this. I described the whole thing in the obituary I wrote for Harry in 1990.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: I wanted you to give a bit of the basics or skeleton or framework of the events, main events and interesting perceptions and things like that.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Good. Packard was a native of Rodeo, California. He was the world's champion ping-pong player. He traveled with Bill Tilden and Don Budge giving exhibitions. When he'd barnstorm around the U.S. playing tennis, people always cheered for Harry because he was so small. I guess he made Tilden and Budge look big and clumsy. He was really a champion tennis player and he later married Hideko Goto, who was the National Singles Champion of Japan and also the All Asia Singles Champion.

So, we had this meeting of the Asian Art Society at which he was a totally transformed guy and he was perfectly charming and informative in discussing the paintings he was showing. He was astonishing. Very authoritative and eloquent giving the history and background of the artists. It was a brilliant lecture. Anyhow, my friendship started with him at that time. I was a little more affluent then and I wanted to start collecting Japanese art in a small way and he was quite willing to help me. As a dealer he was looking for customers and the genesis of the thing was that he would come to San Francisco and stay with me and my family. I had a small, old house on Telegraph Hill and a job as a bass singer with the San Francisco Opera Company -- as understudy for certain roles and member of the chorus. That was my total income. So Harry would stay with us at the house on Alta Street, sleeping on the couch. When his shipment of art started arriving from Japan and I'd go downtown to float a bank loan and get the paintings out of customs. He had spent all his money getting set for the trip. (He was a member of SHAEF or the U.S. Army occupying Japan). Before the trip, everything he had would be beautifully mounted and boxed. He developed here and across the U.S. a group of private collectors and major museums who bought things from him.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Excuse me. Again, I didn't mean to interrupt you -- the role of the group in bringing the Brundage collection to San Francisco is very important -- but I'm unclear about Packard, was he based in New York then?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: No. He was based in Tokyo.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Okay. He was over there.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: He was by far the most influential collector of Japanese art in the American colony there and maybe in the U.S. as well. He used the sale of these splendid objects that he sold to develop a kind of a triangular trade across the U.S. and Europe. I would rent him a car with my credit card and he would start out in this exhausting itinerary -- driving from here to Salt Lake and to Phoenix, to Dallas, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, New Orleans, New York, various routes across the country selling from his car like a peddler these splendid Japanese paintings and screens and art objects. If you look at the collection of Japanese art today in any of the major museums of the U.S., many or most of the important pieces came from Harry Packard. He was the principal dealer and he lived very frugally. He sold his house in Tokyo once to buy a Japanese painting. (All of this is recounted in the obituary I wrote for him in Orientations, February 1992.) In those days, when I'd go to Japan he would sort of take charge of my visit. In 1955, I had some sort of long illness and three months' recuperation in Japan and I was able to study and travel with Harry . . .

PAUL J KARLSTROM: We'd better put in a new tape.

[TAPE 2, SIDE A]

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Okay. This is continuing an interview with Joe Brotherton. This is a second session conducted on January 23rd, 2001 and this is tape 2, side A. Continuing an interesting discussion of your involvement with Harry Packard and we left off with you were recuperating from an illness in Japan and having a real opportunity, I guess, to really study objects with Harry and perhaps history and the cultural context. Is that right?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: That's right. I started making a modest collection of Japanese paintings. I should mention that I had been collecting Asian art very modestly at the time I met Packard. Then, I thought that Chinese art was the cat's pajamas. So I had managed to get myself a good archaic bronze and a Tong horse, and a Tong camel, and a Tong pot, and several paintings. You know, I was inordinately proud of these things. And I had to live on my salary from the Opera with a wife and child, and I tell you, these things represented a kind of major accomplishment. On one of Harry's first trips, before we were well acquainted, I asked him to come over and look at my treasures. It was then I learned that Packard was a very plain-spoken guy. He looked around and then

he looked at me and shook his head and said, "Where did you get all this junk?" It made me furious, you know? I mean, I didn't understand anything about him, why he should be so patronizing. Can you believe I suspected he was defaming my precious hoard so he could buy it all on the cheap! What an idiot I was! Luckily, I kept my mouth shut. Then he said, "Look. You know I sympathize with you. I can see that you're having a tough time with this opera business, so why don't I help you? Why don't sell this collection at auction? All the objects are okay, genuine, but no good. Put it at auction and sell it and keep the money and I'll help you. I'll refrain from collecting in certain areas for a time and help you buy an excellent group of Japanese paintings." So that's what we did and I must say he was perfectly fair and very helpful. He didn't try to sell me stuff that he couldn't sell elsewhere. He gave me first refusal of many paintings and refrained as he promised from dealing in certain areas in paintings of the later periods so that I could develop my own collection more coherently.

We were talking about his trips across the country and this triangular trade that he developed to finance his own collecting activities, which were enormous. He set up two dealers in New York. One of them who was also a dealer in other kinds of art in addition to Oriental, named Mathias Komor; the other - who also became very successful -- Nat Hammer. (This is not the Hammer Gallery.) These two dealers were very active in selling Japanese art and the objects Harry had not sold on his trips across the country. Then from New York he would start out, go to London to buy English watercolors and furniture. Then to Paris and buy Impressionist and Paris school paintings. He would go then to the Middle East and buy Persian and Islamic art. Everywhere he went yielded something to his colossal appetite. In Arizona he bought Santos sculpture. He had a faculty for judging quality, authenticity and value. I have no idea how much money he handled but enough to finance his own magnificent collection. In Tokyo I had met this young student who asked me one day if I could arrange for her and her friend to see some of the Packard Collection, which was by then famous in Japan as a scholar and collector, although there were more than a few dealers in Japan who at that time virtually lived off of what Harry was able to sell for them in the West. So this girl, whose name is Julia Meech, and her friend and I crowded with Harry in a Tokyo taxicab, and we went to all the places where he had stashed away in a friends' and dealers' attics and basements his collection, an unforgettable afternoon. Julia Meech went on to become curator of Japanese Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. One day I took her to lunch at La Grenoville to congratulate her on this splendid appointment. "Well," she said, "It's nice to see all the treasures of other cultures, but what am I supposed to curate?" I asked her what she meant. "They don't have any Japanese art. There's the Korin Iris Screens and a few other objects . . ." "Well," I said, jokingly, "You'll just have to buy the Packard Collection." There was a small silence and we looked at each other and it wasn't a joke at all. So I went back to San Francisco, and about two weeks later the phone rang and this very peremptory voice said, "This is Wen Fong." I thought it was a friend pulling my leg because Dr. Wen Fong was Professor of Asian Art where my daughter was studying. And he was also advisor to the Asian Art Committee of the Metropolitan Museum in New York.

Dr. Fong said, "I understand from Julia that you think the Packard collection is for sale." And I said, "Well, I don't know for sure. Why don't I call him and find out." He said, "All right. Call me back." So I called Harry, I said, "Harry, the Metropolitan wants to buy your collection." He was silent for quite a long moment and then he said, "Joe, do you think we ought to sell it to them?" I said, "I don't know how you could do any better." "Don't say that," he said, "I can do very well with the collection here in Japan, you know." "Harry," I said, "I'm not trying to put your collection down. Selling it to the Metropolitan is not a put-down for your collection." You see how temperamental he could be now and then he said, "You started this so you carry it on. I'm not going to do anything. You go to New York on your own money and you talk to the Metropolitan and if they want to pursue this thing why you carry on the initial negotiations and if it looks promising, well, I'll come on over." So that's what I did. I went out to the Metropolitan and Dr. Fong came out - a very formidable, nice guy - and he said, "I can't talk about this in the office. There's a hotel across the park so we went over and sat in the coffee shop. He said, "I've got one hour, till 10:30" At 1:00 in the afternoon we were still talking. "First of all," he said, "You should understand that I don't really like Japanese art." He said, "I think it's a degenerate offshoot of Chinese painting.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Derivative?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Yes. He said, "You can't point to a school of Japanese art that isn't derived from China or Korea." I said, "I can point to one very lively, beautiful school that's strictly Japanese. Nothing to do with China or Korea." We went on like this and the upshot of it was that I carried on the early negotiations with Dr. Fong and the people at the Metropolitan and the thing finally materialized, largely with the expert help of Harry's attorney, Bill Johnson. Harry came over, you know, after we'd reached a certain point. I couldn't stay in New York all this time. So he came over and he and Bill Johnson took it on from there.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: You mean he came to San Francisco?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: No, he came to New York.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Harry came to New York?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Yeah. He and Bill Johnson. And, oh this was all – you know, it was very complicated and so . . .

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Well, what role did Miss Meech – is that her name?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Julia Meech. She had already been hired by the Metropolitan.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Right. Was she involved in these conversations or . . .

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Not in the early stages. They were about money.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Why do you -- if I can digress -- why do you suppose that was? She was the curator.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, first of all, she wasn't the Chinese curator. I'm sure she was consulted when the discussions got around to the actual objects to be acquired.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: I see.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Dr. Fong really was interested primarily in Chinese art. Now, you know, he retired recently and he has been an enormous force at the Museum and Princeton and the whole field of Asian Art for a very long time.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: I just think it's interesting that if she was hired with the idea that yes, they probably should have some Japanese art, that in something this important – after all, it was your conversation with her that got this started.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: But you see, she was hired before any of this was on the fire. I believe he, Dr. Fong, had a presentiment that something of the kind might come along.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: It's pretty interesting.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: I've heard that Dr. Fong had the reputation of ignoring his curators and Julia was a handful – her own woman and very articulate -- but he didn't know that.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Good for her.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, let's see what happened. Harry sold his collection to the Met. He sold it for the largest sum ever paid at that time for a private collection -- \$11,800,000.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: What year was that?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Oh, Lord. I've got it right here. I never keep any notes. I think it was in 1976 or '78 or something and the interesting thing . . .

PAUL J KARLSTROM: That's fairly recent.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Yeah.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Relatively.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Relatively recent. And the interesting thing about it is that Harry set up – he took \$11,800,000 for the collection and established a trust called The Metropolitan Art Research Institute – He put \$5,600,000 in trust for that institute. He gave back to the Metropolitan \$6,000,000 in objects against taxes. And so, out of the \$11,800,000 he got almost nothing. He got – the Packard Foundation, as it was called. And the thing that was so astonishing about Packard was that he had a parallel collection on reserve in dealer's hands all over Japan and Asia, which he considered as fine as his own collection. If only he could have gotten the money to buy it. And these things were simply put away on trust by these owners and dealers because he had been such an astonishingly good customer in developing the collection that went to the Metropolitan. I don't want to go on and on about Harry except that he was a great friend and a fascinating person.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: But I'm trying to figure this out. It would seem to me that he should be able to realize something, you know, perhaps even for – to buy back that house he sold, you know, out from under his family.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, you know, later on he built them a wonderful house. That is a really crazy story.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Weird?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: No. Hilarious. There's a section of Kyoto called Ohara. It is the earliest section, matter of

fact -- when they were moving the capital because of geomantic reasons -- f'eng shui -- what's the big city -- Osaka.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Right.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: To some place geomantically mmore promising -- in the 7th Century the Emperor came disguised on a hunting trip to decide whether or not to bring the palace and government to Kyoto, and he stayed in Ohara. Ohara was a place then before Kyoto was settled.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Isn't there a pretty good museum there?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: I believe so.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Little one.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, Ohara's a big district of rural Kyoto. I lived there for about 10 years. It's the most beautiful area -- rice fields, forests, Mount Hiei-zan looking down, thatched roof houses . . . Anyhow, Harry sold his collection to the Metropolitan, and as a result, the Metropolitan Art Research Institute is now the largest source of grants-in-aid for students wanting to come from Asia to the United States, and vice versa, to study art. I have various documents left from that period that we can look at. Copy of Geijutso Shincho -- a Japanese art magazine devoted entirely to the Metropolitan acquisition. And other stuff.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: What did the Japanese think of this arrangement? Were there any protests at a high level?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: You bet there were. You've put your finger on the crux of a very difficult problem for Harry. On his first trip to the U.S. that I mentioned he had with him a Wei Chinese Dynasty Buddhist gilt bronze -- a figure about 18 inches high with this lovely filigree mandala behind it and three manifestations of Buddha seated. Packard sold it not realizing that the trinity had been registered in Japan as a National Treasure. This was on his first trip. He sold it to -- not to the Metropolitan. To the Cleveland Museum, the Director, of which, oh heavens, what's his name?

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Sherman Lee.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Right. How could I forget? The object had been classified as a National Treasure and here Packard had just sold it to Cleveland. So he had to go back, refund the money, luckily not very much, around \$10,000 and return the trinity to Japan. At that time there was actually a bill before the Japanese diet naming Packard and the intent of the bill was to deport him because he was regarded as pirating these sacred objects out of Japan. Later, at the time of the Metropolitan sale, I think he handled it very well by donating a marvelous Song painting from his own collection to a principal Japanese museum. Then, of course, when the Bunka-cho, or Cultural Properties Commission, discovered that the collection was going to the Metropolitan, there was great cooperation, you see. Luckily, this charming man whom I got to know quite well -- the Director of the Nara National Museum -- who spoke flawless English. He was in large measure responsible for making the Cultural Properties Commission look with favor upon this transfer of Harry's collection out of Japan to the Metropolitan. But, you know, the terribly ironic thing about all this is that Harry could be so difficult to get along with and so peremptory about everything in his collection . . . He had regarded the sale to the Metropolitan as a chance to improve the quality of scholarship on Japanese art in America. He assumed that he would be able to direct the scholarly apparatus relating to the various objects in the Metropolitan by using his Trust to bring Japanese scholars to the Metropolitan to prepare the catalogues and describe each object. This was really the reason that he sold it. Not because he needed the money but because . . .

PAUL J KARLSTROM: And besides, he didn't keep any of the money, right?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: That's the point. Almost none of it. One thing I think he overlooked in his negotiations with the Museum was the role he was to play because once the sale was made. Packard presented a program at the Metropolitan by which he would fund out of the money he had scholarships or would you call it? What is the word when a scholar studies in another institution?

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Fellowship? Scholar-in-residence?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: In residence. Right. He would fund it out of the money he got from the Metropolitan. I think that's why he founded the Art Research Institute. But, you know, Dr. Fong refused entirely. He said, "We are quite competent to conduct our our research and scholarship." Harry was so offended that he refused to attend the opening of the magnificent installation that the Museum gave his collection. He refused to attend and he never saw it. Such a shame. What was I trying to tell you about his -- the money and so on? Could we go back?

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Sure. Then go back.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: All through his career as a collector and dealer Harry was lucky enough to persuade Dr. Shujiro Shimada, S-H-I-M-A-D-A, one-time curator at the Tokyo National Museum who then became -- I think because of his command of English and his great reputation -- Professor of Asian art at Princeton -- to become his mentor. Harry would never add a piece to his collection without Dr. Shimada's approval. But anyhow, Harry and I had built the two houses together at Ohara and the third member of the group was Takashi Yanagi, Y-A-N-A-G-I, who is probably the principal art dealer in Japan. It would be interesting to talk about him and his brothers as a major source of the finest Japanese art.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: What's his first name?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Takashi, T-A-K-A-S-H-I.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Okay. You say he was the third member of a group that included you . . .

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: He was the third builder on the property. At the time we built our houses at Ohara he had six different residences in the Kansai -- the area around Kyoto and Nara.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: What was the purpose of this compound? The three of you with adjoining houses?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, it was such a lovely place to build. It was so beautiful. And we were all good friends.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: And you shared interests obviously in art.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: That's true. But this project resulted from Packard's glee at outsmarting the Japanese bureaucracy. It was forbidden to build any private residence in Ohara. It lay within a quarter-mile of three 9th Century Buddhist temples and everything was under strict architectural control. The principal crop grown in Ohara is called shiso-no-ha -- that fragrant green leaf that you get with good sushi. So Harry presented to the Kyoto Planning Commission a proposal to build a plant at Ohara for pickling shiso-no-ha, called Shibatsuke. Three buildings. One was the office and one was the warehouse and one was the processing plant. And these were the three houses of Packard, Yanagi and me. I happened to be in Ohara the day the members of the Kyoto Municipal Planning Commission came out to inspect the progress of the pickle factory. Of course there were only three residences going up and the future of our Shangri-la compound became very uncertain. I've always believed that the Japanese bureaucracy has very little sense of humor. But I have to tell you that the final judgment made in this matter was truly a comedy -- if our wives -- my wife, Keiko-san, Packard's Hideko-san and Yanagi's Sadako-san -- would dress one day a year in the costume of an Ohara me . . . (In Japanese art the most beautiful women are the maidens of Ohara, the Ohara Me. You see them in Japanese painting from Ashikaga and later with a bundle of kindling on their heads, dressed in a distinctive blue-and-white costume, which they still wear.) So if our wives would dress up as Ohara me and sell shiso-no-ha pickles one day a year by the side of the road we could go ahead and build our houses. Of course, it was a joke because nobody ever, you know, turned up in costume even for a day, although Keiko did develop most of the garments of the costume.

I should say one further thing about Harry and the U.S. museums. Dr. Shimada was oddly enough rather unwilling to see all Harry's collection go to one museum -- even the Metropolitan. He too had worked hard building the collection, and he felt --

[TAPE 2, SIDE B]

PAUL J KARLSTROM: . . . Joe Brotherton tape two, side B for a few final remarks wrapping up this interesting story. You were talking about Professor Shimada at Princeton, I believe.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: And Dr. Shimada felt that the sale to the Metropolitan was too elitist, too inaccessible lodged in New York. He insisted on reserving 28 objects from the Packard collection which he would offer to another U.S. museum at a fixed ridiculous price, I think, of \$600,000 for the entire group of objects. So I made it a project of my own to assure that this second Packard Collection came to the Brundage, to the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Which by then was already well-established in San Francisco.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Yeah. I jumped right ahead.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: That's fine.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: So I went out one day to see Rand Castille, now Director of the Asian, who had formerly been Director of the Japan House Gallery in New York of which I was one of the founding members. I told Rand that these 28 objects from the Packard Collection were available to the Asian Museum at an incredibly ridiculous

price and did he want to speak to Harry Packard who was standing in the hall outside Mr. Castile's office. The Asian Art Museum of San Francisco now owns the 28 objects from what they properly call the Packard Bequest. Beautiful things -- no different in quality whatever between the things that Dr. Shimada offered here to San Francisco and the things he approved selling to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: How many objects did they acquire?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: The Metropolitan?

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Yes.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: 300, I think.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: 300?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Yes. I can show you a magazine -- unfortunately all in Japanese . . .

PAUL J KARLSTROM: 300?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, wait a minute -- here we go -- Connoisseur in its issue of March 1987 devotes a long article to the Packard collection. Also Orientations in February 1992 has my obituary of Harry.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Well, do you want to move . . . Was there more you wanted to say on this?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: No, not really. It's an endless subject. At least, I'm difficult to stop once we get started.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Well, I mean, it's fascinating and what I thought we would do before we wrap -- when we started we agreed there were a few things we just wanted to touch on.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Okay.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: And some of them we've actually covered -- the emphasis on Asian, especially Japanese, art and your collecting and your involvement and that we talked about -- with Gordon Onslow-Ford. We talked about some other things that we hadn't even put down but I see in my notes here -- Noguchi -- there was some anecdote about Noguchi. Is that right?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Yes. Well, only this -- one night my wife and I went over to visit Gordon and his wife and Noguchi happened to be present. God knows how it happened to come up but my father and his brothers were educated by my grandfather in a special way to start a food processing business. And he was -- my grandfather, that is, he was very independent in his thinking. As an example, he sent his sons to a school that had just been started up in the Michigan woods called the Interlocken School. This was to be a school of handicrafts as well as more formal education and it turned out that Noguchi, to my astonishment, was a graduate of that school. The only other person I ever met who had gone to that school was the janitor at S & W Fine Foods -- of which I was advertising manager when I got out of the Navy after WWII.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: So your father went there? Your father went to the Interlocken School?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Yes. Interlocken School still exists, although I think it's a music school now.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: That was in Michigan?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Yes. In Michigan in the Woods on the Peninsula.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: But you didn't -- that was the only contact you had with Noguchi?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: That's right.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: I mean, you never saw him in Japan or anything like that?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: No, not at all. I was interested in talking to him. This was before Packard; we talked about Western art. I had never been to Interlocken School. I didn't know anything about it. I had only a big copper bowl that they had made as a wedding present for my father and mother.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: But do you remember anything from the conversation with Noguchi? He knew that you were very interested in Japanese art and did you get -- I don't know, did he know that you were an artist as well? Did you just talk about art at all or was it . . .

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, at that time I wasn't exhibiting at all. Well, that's not exactly true. By then I'd had a

one-man show at the De Young Museum and other places. Gordon – did you know him at all?

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Gordon Onslow Ford?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Yes.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: I'd been over there a few times.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, you know he's a very gentlemanly guy and I think he probably carried on most of the conversation that evening. About Paris in the Twenties and his own career as a painter.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Now in that conversation -- that was directed by Gordon Onslow Ford, perhaps -- what were the topics? I'm curious to know about that.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, you see, this is a very odd thing to say but, you know, I was known if at all in San Francisco in those days as an opera singer and I was also with the Actor's Workshop until it moved to the Beaumont Theatre at Lincoln Center. So I think what we talked about mostly was Gordon's painting and his famous career.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Music?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Not much. No. And I felt that Noguchi was nothing but bored with the idea of my trying to talk to him about the influence of Japanese art was on his sculpture.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: He didn't want to talk about that? But you would've liked to ask him about that?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Sure, I'd have liked to talk to him about Japanese art, but I guess it never came up.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Too bad.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, I used to know in the Opera chorus a guy named – oh God, I can't think of his name. The name is all important. His father had been an instrumental figure in the early days of the Impressionist School in Paris . . . Peter Pach – Son of Walter Pach, P-A-C-H. Peter Pach had been raised in Paris, fondled on the laps of Picasso and all the artists. All these people he knew, had seen -- and all he could talk about was opera. He wanted to be a tenor and I'd say, "Peter, tell us a little bit about," you know, any of the members of the Paris School or Madigliani. Lautrec. Seurat.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Monet.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Let's talk about Monet.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Or Mauet. Better yet.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Right. Well, Peter was around them certainly but he'd say, instead -- "You know there's a part in 'Luisa Miller . . .'" The high notes – intoxicating. And he'd be off on that. It was awful. Well, I think the conversation at the Onslow-Fords' that evening was a little like that.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: I see.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: We also wanted to talk about Avery Brundage. I can't really remember what – I did – in helping to bring the Brundage Collection to San Francisco . . . I wrote a film script did the narration for it. Earlier I'd gotten to know Mr. Brundage fairly well. I remember once going to visit him at the – he owned the La Salle Hotel in Chicago -- and I went up to see him. He had a little anteroom outside his office. Every surface was covered with archaic Chinese bronzes.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Wow.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: So we looked around and we talked. Then he said, "Do you want to see more?" So we went up from the 11th floor on a little back stairs up to the floor above which was sort of a feeding area. He became very furtive and looked around. Then he took a key out of his vest – and unlocked the door to this sort of store room. It was a room with a long table and then these bins or cupboards along the sides where beans and flour and sugar had been kept. Every surface in that room was covered with archaic Chinese bronzes and the bins – he walked along beside the table pulling open the bins. More archaic Chinese bronzes. You know, these were fragile objects. And every bin was full of them. This was – so when I went to the opening of the Brundage Collection and I came up to him in the reception line and he looked at me and said, "Well, are you satisfied?"

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Well, tell me just a little bit – sort of as a final point of discussion – in the beginning of this

session - taping you mentioned the group in San Francisco interested in collecting Asian art and it was the group that somehow came together to bring - ultimately to bring the Brundage collection to what became the Asian Art Museum. How did that come about? I mean, how was the contact made? Did you play a role in that with Brundage himself?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, I went to see him in Chicago.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: With that in mind? You knew he was a major . . .

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: On my own. I asked him if he would consider giving his collection to San Francisco.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: You were the agent - the emissary?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: No, no, no. On my own. No authorization whatever. I told him I believed there was a possibility of a municipal crusade to raise the money to do it. And he wasn't responsive at all. He said we could stand in line with the other museums.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Well, okay. I mean, he's in Chicago. What's his connection to San Francisco?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Nothing at all. The home in Santa Barbara - not even close.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: So that's pretty good. I mean, how did you guys . . .

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: How did we work it around?

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Yes.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, Mr. Brundage was a tough man to deal with. You know, he was an athlete when he was younger . . .

PAUL J KARLSTROM: And that's well-known.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: He was on the podium with Adolph Hitler in the 1936 Berlin Olympics, you know.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Oh, that's right. He was head of the Olympic International . . .

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: He was greatly criticized for that but I don't think his personality changed. No fascist, he.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Right.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: He let it be known. You know, that his collection was up for sale.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Um-hmm.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: And who got there first got it.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Um-hmm.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: But - oh, he was a very gentlemanly man. He had been an Olympic athlete, too. Maintained a fine rigidity of posture and so on.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: What was the selling point, do you think? Because you obviously were in competition. Your group, on behalf of San Francisco, was in competition with the Chicago Art Institute . . . other places . . .

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, I think it was simply the - a sense of civic pride and that here was San Francisco, Gateway to the Orient - with three "World-Class Museums."

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Um-hmm.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: And no Asian art. The largest Chinatown outside of New York. All this sort of thing.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Um-hmm.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: I think it was civic pride, which certainly the crusade, the campaign to bring it here, played upon.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: So he liked it that you weren't actually attached - you weren't museum trustees or anything like that or staff going but a community group, actually?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, I was a member at the Society for Asian Art. But I was a pushy guy in those days and it rankled me that the city had no Asian art. I couldn't understand why nobody had called on Mr. Brundage.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Um-hmm.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: But it was the Society for Asian Art and the municipal "Brundage Committee that actually brought the Brundage collection here.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Well, I think, unless there's anything that we've forgotten that you can think of - that this is really a pretty good moment . . .

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, I want to tell you one further thing only. Brundage - I tell you the reason I went to visit Mr. Brundage.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Go ahead.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, first of all, he and Packard were sort of competing. You see, there was talk that at one time with Brundage about his acquiring the Packard collection, before it went to the Metropolitan. Oddly enough he and Brundage signed a legal paper that neither one of them would dispose of his collection without the consent of the other. And I believe Harry actually got Brundage's consent. You see, in this unusual relationship, Mr. Brundage bought quite a lot of Japanese art from Packard. Things that later came to San Francisco.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Really?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: And Packard actually acted as an advisor to Mr. Brundage in the Japanese things that he bought and he was also the purveyor of many of them.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Wow. This is very interesting. I mean, we've gone from - you know, here you are - it's hard for me to give you one descriptive label in terms of an interview like this. Usually I start out and I say, "An interview with artist or painter or print maker or teacher so and so."

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Yes.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: And what we cover in these discussions is really a number of different things.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: We got into pretty free fall, all right.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: But it's very interesting because you've lived art and not in a very limited way at all. I mean, professionally with your music, your singing, performing, um, as a collector and a student of Japanese art and culture, inevitably and then the fact that you were a writer . . .

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: I guess.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: All at one time, and I don't know if - can you . . .

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: I won an O. Henry award once. For a short story.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: There you go. So what do we call you?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Obsessed. Here, I'll show you that painting.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Okay. Well, let's wrap this. You want to look at art? Shall we conclude our interview for the day?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: This is something different. This is . . .

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Oh, you want it to - this to be on the tape?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Oh, I'm sorry. I've got the wrong painting here.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Oh.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: But this was my Aunt Helen.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Oh, the Aunt Helen?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Yeah. She was - did we get into the matter of the Russian sculptor Nisan Tregor and so

on?

PAUL J KARLSTROM: No, and if you should talk a little bit about that we better do it where the tape can pick us up. Well, if you want to touch on it. But you do have some things written already. Okay. Final story. Aunt Helen and Nisan Tregor.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Here we go. My mother, although she decided to stay in Boseman, Montana after my father's death. But my mother would go back to Detroit in the winter sometimes to put me in school and just to get a change of air. Her sister, Helen, a beautiful woman, had married a Russian sculptor named Nisan Tregor, N-I-S-A-N, T-R-E-G-O-R. Nisan was in Russia quite a famous artist. He'd grown up with Heifetz and they were regarded as equally important. In America Nisan made portraits of most of the Detroit auto tycoons and prominent people of the time. My last recollection of Nisan was a picture in the New York Times, or Detroit Free Press of Nisan in his smock beside a sculpture on which was the head of General Eisenhower and General Eisenhower himself looking quite a lot like his portrait head. That was the last time that I had any connection with Nisan. But anyhow - let's see, what was the connectino here?

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Well, you were gonna talk about - well, first of all you pointed out the painting, your painting . . .

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Yeah. Now I remember --

PAUL J KARLSTROM: . . . of Aunt Helen and did it have to do with her connection then? Is part of the imagery there the connection with the Russian sculptor?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: With Nisan, yes. Well, I'm not sure it's really that important. Anyhow when we came from Montana - my mother and I met Nisan in the Union Station in Chicago by train in the early morning. Freezing. All the time there had been this sort of an apparition dashing through the great halls and corridors of that station in full evening dress with the top hat and the cape. And I knew in my bones the minute I saw him that this was Uncle Nisan and so it was. From that moment he was very important in my life - I was 12 or 13 at the time.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Well, do you mean personally or as an example?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Personally. And as a model.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Was he sort of a mentor?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: I guess. I just thought he was the funniest man in the world. His sort of caricatures of himself and so on, you know, coming to the station in evening clothes - sort of a typical Russian emigré in the freezing midwestern U.S.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: He was like a performance artist.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Performance artist. Right on.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Well, do you suppose, though, that he really was a specific role model for you?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Exactly.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: You were talking, you know, a few moments ago about the many hats you have worn -- and here he was a concert pianist, is that right?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: No, no. A sculptor.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: But I thought he was a musician, as well.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, maybe. Heifetz, the violinist was his friend and . . .

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Oh, okay. I misunderstood that. I thought he had a musical side.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Oh, perhaps he did. He was sort of a man of many talents.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Well, it seems to me that you have a series of interesting contacts in your life that have stimulated in you . . .

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Yeah.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: . . . this variety of activity and it's pretty rich. You've had a - you have a rich life.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Well, he gave me a – he was, you know, beautifully dressed and very urbane and tough.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Um-hmm.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: I mean, this time we were in Chicago – he had a suite rented for us at the – one of the Ambassador Hotels. There was a guy named Phil Baker, who was an accordionist – a Broadway kind of a musician of whom Nisan was doing a bust. I remember going down to see the bust as he was making it. Nisan looked at it and then he just started punching it out.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Punching it?

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Yeah. It was a beautiful bust. I mean, to me the real guy was – the portrait and Phil Baker himself was only a likeness – kind of an intruder. So Nisan took the thing and pounded it into a sort of an oval egg. Phil Baker tried to stop him for a minute. I thought Nisan – in spite of the fancy clothes he wore – was going to punch Phil's head into an egg. Helen said he'd been a cavalry officer in Russia.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Well, what about – let's bring it back to finish up here and I think how we got into this particular story is the painting there hanging on the wall – a portrait of Aunt Helen.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Uh-huh.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: And I gather, although we haven't examined it carefully, that that brings to mind for you, I would think, this experience, this youthful experience.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Yeah. Exactly. Well, I got – before we left Bozeman I had bought my first suit – a Harris tweed, a red Harris tweed. When Nisan met us at the station, when he took us in a cab to the Ambassador Hotel and when we got out of the cab and into the room he finally looked at me and he said, "Where did you buy that horrible suit?" And I was offended. I mean, I was wearing my first grown-up suit. It had two pairs of pants and I was proud of it. But he said, "We will take this fine big Jascha of yours and we will buy the clothes. We will outfit him properly."

PAUL J KARLSTROM: And you thought, "That's the way I want to be."

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Exactly.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Okay.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: And then – but he had been a cavalryman, what's the famous cavalry in Russia? Not a Cossack, I guess. But he was a tough guy and when he punched out the face of Phil Baker I think it was really a comment on Phil Baker. But let's see, what can I say about him? Why did I bring him up? I think the reason was that in the museum there is a sculpture of Avery Brundage.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Aha!

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: And I'm afraid to look at the back to see if it's signed, but I'd give you any odds that Nisan sculpted it. Someday I'll find out.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: There you go.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Yeah. I think this is a good place to shut off me and the tape.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: You've brought it all the way back.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: We came full circle after all.

PAUL J KARLSTROM: Well listen, we're about done with it -- we've done two hours of an interview. And I want to thank you. Now, maybe we should get some lunch.

JOSEPH BROTHERTON: Off we go.

[TAPE OFF]

[END OF INTERVIEW]