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Oral history interview with Herbert Palmer, 2004 Dec. 6-22

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Herbert Palmer on December 6 and 22, 2004. The interview took place at the Hebert Palmer Gallery in Los Angeles, California, and was conducted by Dr. Susan Ehrlich for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Dr. Susan Ehrlich and Mrs. Lillian Palmer have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

SUSAN EHRLICH: This is Susan Ehrlich interviewing Herbert Palmer at the Herbert Palmer Gallery [Est. 1963] in Los Angeles for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is December 6, 2004, and this is tape one, side one.

Herbert, let's go back to your background. Tell us where you were born, when you were born, and something about your family life, your early family life - you were born in New York in 1915.

HERBERT PALMER: Brooklyn, New York, June 23, 1915.

DR. EHRLICH: And your father - what did he do?

MR. PALMER: My father was a - part of a company that did - sale of general merchandise. He started this company in New York. It was one of the first companies to sell merchandise on a time plan, before department stores did it. He was angry with department stores when they stole his idea.

DR. EHRLICH: [Laughs.]

MR. PALMER: And that is what he did during his living years.

DR. EHRLICH: Yes?

MR. PALMER: Before that - [laughs] - he did some other things. He was a motorman for the railroad - conductor, a motorman - I think on the BMT [the West End Line, now a subway line in Brooklyn, New York], before he went into business for himself.

DR. EHRLICH: Did he, or did your mother, have an interest in art? No. Did you have any brothers or sisters?

MR. PALMER: My mother's interest in art was taking me to art school. I had a brother, Sydney Pomerantz, who was a professor of history at the City College of New York.

[Lillian [Mrs. Herbert] Palmer's [LP] note: Dr. Sidney I. Pomerantz (Columbia University, Ph.D., 1938) was an authority on the history of New York. He wrote several books on the business, journalism, and cultural life of New York City of the 18th and 19th centuries - e.g., principal monograph, *New York: An American City: A Study of Urban Life 1783-1803*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1938, in which Herbert drew the map of New York City at the close of the 18th century (centerfold). Moreover, Sidney contributed to numerous scholarly publications on various aspects of New York history and journalism, including the "Election of 1876" (Hayes v. Tilden: The Electoral College Controversy of 1876-'77) in Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., ed., *History of American Presidential Elections* [Philadelphia, Chelsea: 2002]. His reviews often appeared in such journals as *The American Historical Review* and *The Annals of the Academy of Political and Social Sciences*. His many graduate students included soon-to-be prominent American historians, sociologists, and politicians, e.g., Daniel Patrick Moynihan, among others. He studied under prominent professors of political science and history at Columbia University - Evarts B. Green, John A. Krout, Allan Nevins, to name a few. His library was donated to the Rockefeller Library at Tarrytown, New York, in 1970 upon his death. A special award in his name is granted annually from the History Department at CCNY.]

DR. EHRLICH: Where did you go?

MR. PALMER: Yes, that's where it all began. She took me on Saturdays to classes. One was at Pratt Institute. Another, different class was at the Heckscher Foundation.

DR. EHRLICH: The Heckscher?

MR. PALMER: Yes, I think it's spelled H-E-C-K-S-C-H-E-R - Heckscher Foundation - in whose building was the first Museum of Modern Art in New York. It was on West 42nd Street. We used to go to class, and we also went to the first exhibits of MoMA.

DR. EHRLICH: Really?

MR. PALMER: Same building. Isn't that interesting?

DR. EHRLICH: Very much so. Do you remember any of the exhibitions?

MR. PALMER: Oh, I remember going, yes. I don't remember too much about what I saw except they were then trying to find out if children liked modern art. They had, I think, some ambitious scholar who wrote a paper about children's preference for modern art over more conventional art, and it was in that building that it took place. Heckscher was one of the first people to organize the Museum of Modern of Art. I'm sure it was in the same building.

DR. EHRLICH: And you took drawing and painting classes?

MR. PALMER: Oh, yes, for children.

DR. EHRLICH: So you had an early interest in art?

MR. PALMER: I must have been 12.

DR. EHRLICH: And then that continued through high school?

MR. PALMER: Yes. My other experience in art was in the public school system of New York.

DR. EHRLICH: They taught children art in the public schools?

MR. PALMER: Yes.

DR. EHRLICH: Did you decide to be an artist at that time? Was it going to be one of your major career goals?

MR. PALMER: Yes, I took classes on weekends at Pratt, which was still in Brooklyn.

DR. EHRLICH: And you lived in Brooklyn or in Manhattan?

MR. PALMER: I lived in Brooklyn then.

DR. EHRLICH: And then you went to the [New York] University.

MR. PALMER: Well, you know, I went to classes at Pratt for ages [laughter] - and I also went to hear Walter Damrosch, the Saturday program for children at Carnegie Hall - wonderful experience.

DR. EHRLICH: Tell me about it; I am not familiar with that.

MR. PALMER: He was the conductor for the New York Philharmonic, and he gave these children's classes and then music appreciation. They were wonderful. He would give a whole speech about the different instruments of the orchestra, and he'd play them, and we would hear the sound. That was great. I still remember that.

I remember his voice. He had a big booming voice, you know, and he had all of these little kids listening. It was nice.

DR. EHRLICH: So those two fields of art - music and the visual arts - impacted you -

MR. PALMER: Oh, yes, they were a big influence.

DR. EHRLICH: - as a child.

LILLIAN PALMER: What about the Children's Museum?

MR. PALMER: There was another class I took in drawing at the American Museum of Natural History. That's where it was taught. And our teacher was Henriette Riess [1889-1992].

DR. EHRLICH: Henriette Riess.

MR. PALMER: R-I-E-S-S. There were lessons in repetitive drawings for fabrics, and we used exhibits at the

Museum of Natural History as a basis for the motifs. I remember her well.

DR. EHRLICH: Well, it sounds like you had a very modern and progressive kind of arts education there as a child in New York - as a youngster, as well.

MR. PALMER: I think so.

DR. EHRLICH: Let's talk some more about your training in the early Children's Museum in Brooklyn.

MR. PALMER: Oh, the Children's Museum [1928] is earlier than the American Museum.

DR. EHRLICH: What can you tell me about that?

MR. PALMER: The Children's Museum starts when I was 12 and I went weekdays to the Children's Museum after school. I went to the American Museum on Saturdays.

DR. EHRLICH: And you had art classes there?

MR. PALMER: I was in a class taught by Ibram Lassaw. He died recently [1913-2003].

DR. EHRLICH: And he was teaching classes there?

MR. PALMER: Yes, and there was another woman named [Dorothea] Denslow. She was a sculptress. She taught sculpture and Lassaw taught sculpture. Lassaw became a very important sculptor.

DR. EHRLICH: So you had sculpture classes there as a child?

MR. PALMER: Yes, as a child - it was the first Clay Club.

DR. EHRLICH: - as painting and drawing -

MR. PALMER: I was 13 years old. The Clay Club related art and nature in all of these classes, and we did drawings from life in the older classes. Henriette Riess taught what was called the Henriette Riess method of drawing, repetitive drawing, which was mostly used for the design of fabrics. She was quite famous and wrote a couple of books on the subject. The relationship of nature was always very strong.

At the Children's Museum, if you wanted to draw a bird, you could take a real bird - a stuffed bird - and take it home for the weekend and make your drawings. They had all kinds of things there to take home, to borrow - it was a lending library of natural objects - how wonderful, and it's still going.

DR. EHRLICH: That's perfect.

MR. PALMER: I went to see it a couple of months ago - the building is different; they knocked down the old building and put in a new one, and they now have money to build a new building. It was a wonderful place. The specimens they have are both live and stuffed.

DR. EHRLICH: They had live specimens, as well?

MR. PALMER: Yes, right now they have a boa constrictor.

DR. EHRLICH: Oh, my goodness. [Laughter.]

MR. PALMER: Can you imagine?

DR. EHRLICH: You want to take that home, huh?

MR. PALMER: I don't know if they would let you take that home, but it is there now and he just sleeps in a big cage.

DR. EHRLICH: Oh, that's nice. [Laughs.]

MR. PALMER: I'm not so sure that's a very good idea. One of these days he's going to grab somebody if they are young enough and small enough. But that was a very dominating principle in drawing - to relate to nature.

DR. EHRLICH: And that was very much in tune with early modernists, too - Arthur Dove and Georgia O'Keeffe.

MR. PALMER: Well, we saw those at the Museum of Modern Art. That was also connected to nature, though they were different. Different institutions, like the Museum of Modern Art, wanted you to enjoy modern art, and there

were lots of tests to see how you reacted to modern art.

DR. EHRLICH: So you were involved for some time, then, with the Children's Museum in Brooklyn, correct?

MR. PALMER: For many years.

DR. EHRLICH: And you collect natural objects - collect shells or -

MR. PALMER: I did.

DR. EHRLICH: Tell me about that.

MR. PALMER: Actually, my favorite of the all of the subjects was shells. I still have some of those shells, and most of them, I went to the sea to collect, and I gave them to the Children's Museum, and they are still there.

DR. EHRLICH: So they have the Herbert Palmer Collection?

MR. PALMER: I don't think they call it that. [It was the founding gift to start their collection.]

[LP note: A fund on nature and art has been established by Mr. Palmer's family at the Brooklyn Children's Museum in his name.]

DR. EHRLICH: Of shells?

MR. PALMER: I visited the museum last year, and they have them neatly classified in drawers. You could pull out and examine any one of them. Wonderful. I put the Latin name on the shells.

DR. EHRLICH: [Laughs.]

MR. PALMER: I identified all of the shells of Long Island. I knew them all well.

DR. EHRLICH: Wow. This was still before you went to college?

MR. PALMER: Oh, yes, it was before.

DR. EHRLICH: So you were very much interested in these natural forms.

MR. PALMER: Yes, in elementary and high school. My high school was Boys' High School. That was the name of it. It was just for boys. There was a Boys' High School and a Girls' High School.

DR. EHRLICH: That was public school in New York?

MR. PALMER: Public high schools, yes. But that's later. I'm older. Well, all of this continues until I go to college.

I go to New York University, and the courses I took were both art and nature. I took geology, botany, zoology - in fact, I knew all of the species of plants and animals for a radius of at least a hundred miles of New York City. In fact, I knew them so well that I used to give classes when I was a freshman in college. I gave classes to people who were going to be teachers in the high schools. I gave classes on botany, New York flora and fauna.

DR. EHRLICH: Terrific.

MR. PALMER: Yes, I went to see the Children's Museum a couple of weeks ago, and when they pulled out the drawer of shells, I knew the Latin name of all of those shells.

DR. EHRLICH: So you still remember it?

MR. PALMER: Oh, yes.

DR. EHRLICH: You were some specialist on that.

MR. PALMER: I'm amazed I was. [Laughter.] Really. They would pick up a shell, and I would look at it and I would give them the Latin name, and they all looked at me with surprise. [Laughs.]

DR. EHRLICH: That's terrific.

MR. PALMER: So that stayed with me for my life.

DR. EHRLICH: So you had - you took all of these science courses and then also art and - did you have art?

MR. PALMER: Art courses, too.

DR. EHRLICH: And art history.

MR. PALMER: Art history comes later. The earliest classes I took were introductory courses in art history. I took that early, but specializing comes later at the Institute of Fine Arts.

DR. EHRLICH: Do you remember any of your art courses at - remember any of your art courses at NYU? What were they like then?

MR. PALMER: Yes, I studied painting with Winold Reiss.

DR. EHRLICH: Winold Reiss.

MR. PALMER: R-E-I-S-S. Do you remember the paintings of Indians for the Santa Fe Railroad? Do you remember that far back - [laughter]? He was my teacher. He used to travel out West where the Santa Fe Railroad went and painted posters in his style - very stylized Indians. And I studied painting with him, but my painting did not look like his.

DR. EHRLICH: [Laughs.]

MR. PALMER: I remember him, though. And I had other teachers, too, like Donald Desky. Do you know that name?

DR. EHRLICH: Donald Desky.

MR. PALMER: Desky - D-E-S-K-Y. He painted - and he was one of the first people to do stage design and industrial products. It gave me a technical background, which I used for employment later on - much later on. Donald Desky and Winold Reiss, and there were other names that are not important.

DR. EHRLICH: And you earned a number of scholarships, as well.

MR. PALMER: Oh, yes. Those are mostly graduate.

DR. EHRLICH: And so that was in the late '30s -

MR. PALMER: Fellowships, yes.

DR. EHRLICH: A Carnegie Scholarship in 1938.

MR. PALMER: The date is about - between '36 and '40 - in that period. Those were at the Institute of Fine Arts.

DR. EHRLICH: So after NYU, you went to the Institute of Fine Arts.

MR. PALMER: Which is also part of NYU. It's a graduate school.

DR. EHRLICH: So tell me about that.

MR. PALMER: My undergraduate professor was a man named [Amos P.] McMahon. His specialty and mine was criticism. So we did heavy reading in aesthetics. Now that's late '30s when that took place.

[LP note: Among A. Philip McMahon's (1890-1947) most noted books on art theory and criticism is *Meaning of Art*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1930.]

But NYU at that time had a very progressive policy of hiring all of the famous art historians and museum directors who were leaving Europe. They all could count on a semester at NYU in the graduate school. They were allowed to speak in their native tongues for the first lecture only. But that was no problem for the Europeans; they could speak several languages.

But the first lecture was fascinating. At the first lecture, we wore tuxedos; we had drinks afterwards - it was a great time. Many of those students became museum directors - John Walsh was one.

DR. EHRLICH: Really.

MR. PALMER: Yes, and the fellow who now is the head of San Francisco museums was another scholar who went to school with me. Harry Parker [director of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco].

DR. EHRLICH: Harry Parker is associated with the Institute of Fine Arts at NYU.

MR. PALMER: Parker, right.

DR. EHRLICH: So they were students when you were a student?

MR. PALMER: Yes.

DR. EHRLICH: Yes. And John Walsh was, too?

MR. PALMER: Yes. Walsh switched to Harvard later, but he had courses at NYU. And Milton Brown -did you ever hear of him?

DR. EHRLICH: I sure did - the great American scholar.

MR. PALMER: Yes. And his wife - Blanche Brown - she was a good scholar, too - all in our classes. Milton was the expert on the Armory Show. You can still buy his book [*The Story of the Armory Show*. Greenwich, CT: Joseph H. Hirshhorn Foundation; distributed by NY Graphic Society, 1963]. Milton Brown.

[LP note: John Walsh was a graduate of Yale and Columbia Universities, but Harry Parker was a graduate of NYU's Institute of Fine Arts (IFA); both, however, attended university many years after Mr. Palmer. Later, as a prominent art gallerist, Mr. Palmer knew them both professionally in California, but they did not attend classes together at the Institute. Milton Brown and Blanche Brown, Phyllis and Harry Bober, however, were indeed Mr. Palmer's classmates and friends at IFA. They kept in touch over the years, e.g., in the 1980s Phyllis Pray Bober, who became a professor of art history at Bryn Mawr [College, Bryn Mawr, PA], gave a lecture on "Food as Depicted in Art through the Ages" at the Getty Museum in Los Angeles; Mr. Palmer hosted the reception at his residence for her. She published a book on the topic a few years later.]

DR. EHRLICH: So he was a classmate at NYU?

MR. PALMER: Oh, yes, yes.

DR. EHRLICH: Phyllis and Harry Bober?

MR. PALMER: Harry Bober was a classmate. Harry Bober was a classmate in high school.

DR. EHRLICH: Oh.

MR. PALMER: That goes even further back. He went to Boys' High - Harry Bober. I understand his wife just died- Phyllis Bober - Phyllis Pray Bober - she was in class then. These were students; they weren't professors then.

DR. EHRLICH: So you knew them when they were just developing.

MR. PALMER: Yes, that's how I met them.

DR. EHRLICH: And Harry Bober became an art historian.

MR. PALMER: He became a very important professor; he was a medievalist. And I even had Meyer Shapiro as a professor.

[LP note: Under Meyer Shapiro's tutelage in 1934 for a class that he gave at the Metropolitan Museum [of Art], Mr. Palmer wrote a paper on "Cézanne: The Man." He received an A with handwritten comments from Shapiro acknowledging Mr. Palmer's insight and intelligence on the subject. The paper is in Mr. Palmer's archive.]

DR. EHRLICH: Oh, wonderful.

MR. PALMER: Meyer Shapiro was a professor in graduate school. He taught the one class on modern art at NYU, because we didn't have anybody on the NYU faculty who knew anything about modern art. That was a naughty word - modern art.

DR. EHRLICH: Really? At NYU?

MR. PALMER: Oh, yes. There weren't any professors in that field. There were only two - two men. One came from Columbia and that was Meyer Shapiro. The other man, who taught modern architecture, was Dimitri Tselos, and he later became professor of art at Minnesota -University of Minnesota in Minneapolis - that was where he was. I'm sure there are more important scholars that went to school with me, but I didn't know them all. [Laughs.]

DR. EHRLICH: So you received a good background, though, in art history, and I would imagine in connoisseurship too? Connoisseurship - studying the original artworks.

MR. PALMER: Yes, oh, yes. I took a lot of wonderful courses at New York University, because these were these great scholars who came from Europe. I had Richard Offner. Do you know him?

DR. EHRLICH: Not personally, but of him.

MR. PALMER: Well, he is the world's greatest authority on Florentine art. Richard Offner. I had Wolfflin -

DR. EHRLICH: Heinrich Wolfflin?

MR. PALMER: Yes. [Laughter.] He came for a series of lectures. Heinrich Wolfflin. I had to read his stuff in German.

DR. EHRLICH: Oh, my goodness.

MR. PALMER: That was not easy. [Laughter.] Wolfflin.

DR. EHRLICH: And he had the two lanterns - the side-by-side projectors?

MR. PALMER: Oh, yes, I ran slides for all of them.

DR. EHRLICH: Did you? [Laughs.]

MR. PALMER: Yes. They relied very heavily on slide projection. In fact, the first slide machines were carbon arc lamps - they weren't electricity - carbon arc. It was a source of light.

DR. EHRLICH: How do you spell that?

MR. PALMER: They ignited by electricity, and they projected beams of light, and they projected them through slides. You had to use glass slides, because the plastic that came later would have melted under the heat.

Who else did I have - Panofsky.

DR. EHRLICH: You had Panofsky?

MR. PALMER: Erwin Panofsky - he was - and I had the guy who taught Christian art - what was his name? He came up from Princeton. That was the beauty of NYU - all of the great professors, and no matter what school they were in, they all came and lectured to us. And Julius Held on Dutch art - wonderful. And Bernie Meyers on German art. Who else was on German art? Oh, Karl - he wasn't German; he taught classical Greek art - Karl Lehmann-Hartleben. [Laughter.] I don't know how I can still remember their names. He had such a heavy accent; nobody could understand him. He had an assistant who would explain what the words were, because they were with a German accent - he used to talk - everyone used to laugh - he used to talk about - zig-zag drapery - zig-zag drapery, you know, on the Greek sculpture.

DR. EHRLICH: [Laughs.]

MR. PALMER: That was so funny. Hartleben - yes. Good man. And they all were such experts on their subjects. They knew everything real well. He was the one who found the parts to the *Winged Victory of Samothrace*. He told us in class where he was going to find it from his historical research. And then - I didn't go, unfortunately - one summer he took the whole class there, and he had divers go down, and they found the *Winged Victory*, which is now in the Louvre - The *Winged Victory of Samothrace*.

But he picked out the spot they were going to find it, because he knew the Greeks - no, rather the Romans - came and threw them all off the cliff because it was Greek, you know - the Romans were very destructive - and he says, that's where they threw it, and his divers went down and found it. And they still find pieces of it, because, you know, it was smashed. [Laughs.]

The Romans were terrible. They kidnapped Greek sculptors and brought them to southern Italy - I remember that - when these guys predicted something was going to happen, it happened - amazing.

DR. EHRLICH: So this was all in the 1930s that you were taking classes there?

MR. PALMER: Late '30s.

DR. EHRLICH: Late '30s -

MR. PALMER: That is when they were running away from Hitler - it started - that started, 1937. They all came to New York. And little by little, they were spread all over the United States, these guys, because the university couldn't keep them forever, and they found jobs at Berkley and Princeton and Harvard - Charles Rufus Morey -

he was the man that gave us lectures on Christian art. He started a big library on Christian art, which is still going at Princeton. They went to all of the eastern colleges first and then western, and Chicago - every place - all of these Europeans. It was a great thrill to have known them for a short time. Wolfflin - he was the most difficult to understand - God almighty.

DR. EHRLICH: [Laughs.]

MR. PALMER: Because I have his book now.

DR. EHRLICH: I do, too. [Laughs.]

MR. PALMER: Use it.

DR. EHRLICH: Of course, but not in German. [Laughs.]

MR. PALMER: In English. [Laughter.] Don't try it in German; it's so complicated - the German - not really; I got through it.

DR. EHRLICH: So, how exciting - how stimulating it must have been to be there during these years. *

MR. PALMER: Oh, yes. We especially spent a lot of time on Panofsky - our professor - my professor MacMahon - really loved him, so we got a lot of him. Panofsky's backgrounds of art history - *Der Begriff des Kunstwollens* [*Foundations of Art History*] - that was wonderful. It was a tough book, but it gave a feeling for the history of art. It's too bad it didn't continue. Well, then I moved to California after my graduate years.

DR. EHRLICH: Did you go to Gallatin Museum of Living Art?

MR. PALMER: Gallatin?

DR. EHRLICH: Yes, the living museum.

MR. PALMER: Gallatin had his collection at NYU. There was a study room; it never was a museum all by itself. A.E. Gallatin. The university used his room just for study - a study hall - and you would sit and look at the paintings, and you would study.

DR. EHRLICH: And he had them on the wall, without any guards?

MR. PALMER: Yes, they were always there. He never appeared, though. He never gave classes or anything. He was not as learned as the Europeans, but he was very wealthy and bought all these pictures direct from the artists.

DR. EHRLICH: Right.

MR. PALMER: A great thing to do is to go up to his house in Greenwich Village - his apartment - and look at more of his stuff. Gallatin, Hamilton Easter Field - all of those people were alive then. And there was a woman, professor of art history. She was a great scholar. Her name was Agnes Rindge; she was at Vassar [College, Poughkeepsie, NY]. She taught American art - one of the first to write about American art history. She was very good. But she came down from Vassar for lectures.

[Audio break.]

DR. EHRLICH: This is Susan Ehrlich interviewing Herbert Palmer for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, at the Herbert Palmer Gallery in Los Angeles, on December 6, 2004.

Herbert, we were talking about McMahon and some of the points that he communicated to you. He was your mentor. What can you tell us about him? I didn't know him and the other people -

MR. PALMER: About him? He began as an English professor at Harvard. And then he switched to art history when he came to New York University. But we surveyed all of the famous books on aesthetics. We had to read all of the original aesthetics - you know, like [Benedetto] Croce and - a great philosopher. I tried to determine his theory of aesthetics - that was the procedure.

DR. EHRLICH: With your mentor - McMahon.

MR. PALMER: Yes. That was the McMahon efforts. He's written four or five books on aesthetics, so they should be available if you want to look at them. I have them all.

DR. EHRLICH: Your daughter, Meredith [Palmer], said that you wrote on Lucese crosses - that you wrote - you

were preparing a thesis on Lucesian crosses?

MR. PALMER: My thesis for the master's was on [Paul] Cezanne. Especially *Mont Saint Victoire*. I didn't realize he did so many of that one mountain. [Laughter.]

DR. EHRLICH: So you had a lot to write on.

MR. PALMER: Yes, I know all about Mount Saint Victoire. If you dropped me there, I would find my way. The Cezanne paper was for Meyer Shapiro. We had to pick one artist and one picture and write a minimum of 25 pages - one artist on one painting. That was quite a chore.

DR. EHRLICH: Wow.

MR. PALMER: Meyer Shapiro was wonderful.

DR. EHRLICH: So then you came to California?

MR. PALMER: I came to California in 1940. And that was the end of my art history studies for a while.

DR. EHRLICH: Why did you come to California?

MR. PALMER: Oh, just for fun, a holiday.

DR. EHRLICH: Just for fun? [Laughs.] Did you come alone?

MR. PALMER: Yes. I came alone, and I met a guy on the way named Johnny Brown, on the train. He was coming from Texas, and my train was coming from Chicago. The two trains hooked up together. And we got to know each other, and we roomed together when we got to California. But his interest was aviation, and he got an airplane as a gift from his father. I got the trip as a gift from my father.

DR. EHRLICH: [Laughs.]

MR. PALMER: Johnny got the trip plus an airplane waiting for him in Glendale Airport at - Glendale, California. So I was glad to meet him, and we roomed together in Glendale. The first thing we did when we got to California was to buy bicycles, and we lived in a little cottage, as roomers, in the home of the chief of police of Glendale. And to go to the airport, which is on Brand Boulevard right down the hill from our apartment, our home, which was one room - we coasted on our bikes right down to the airport in Glendale - Glendale Airport. I don't know if there is still a Glendale Airport or not. That is where his plane was waiting, and we did a lot of flying together. He taught me how to fly.

DR. EHRLICH: So you know how to fly?

MR. PALMER: That's where I learned - in Glendale. I know the terrain pretty well between Glendale and Palm Springs. [Laughs.] We used to go there on weekends - to Palm Springs. But 1941 - the world changed, and we began to take courses on aviation at the airport. The people who gave the courses were engineers from the local aircraft companies. There was Lockheed and Consolidated - Vultee. And oh my, there must have been 10 different aircraft companies out in Burbank -

[End Tape 1 Side A.]

- and they would drive to the Glendale Airport and lecture to us on aspects of aviation. We studied aerodynamics and hydraulics, and strength of materials, and all of that stuff.

I really didn't have any choice about it. He enrolled because he was going to fly an airplane, and I went along to be a good buddy. It was very interesting. I had learned a good deal about aviation and about flying. So in 1941 - '41, yes - I enrolled with a company called Curtis Wright Technical Institute. They were giving classes at Glendale Airport.

DR. EHRLICH: Are you speaking of Burbank Airport?

MR. PALMER: No.

DR. EHRLICH: No, there was a Glendale - it was different than the Burbank?

MR. PALMER: Not Burbank, no. Maybe it grew into Burbank; I don't know the history of the airport since then. I don't know if it's still there. It has been years since I went back.

Anyway, this Curtis Wright Institute, which was a branch of the company that made motors and propellers for

the aviation industry - Curtis engines for airplanes - and they trained us. And the companies that were putting motors on airplanes ran the whole process. Then in '41 the war came. So we didn't have any choice to do anything else; we had to stay. And that was fine with everybody; we all stayed there and studied aviation. I'm a certified aeronautical engineer. I spent a couple of years there, and then we were all grabbed up by the aircraft companies and given jobs.

And I went to work for Douglas Aircraft - engineering department. That was in El Segundo. And I worked there a few months, and I was promoted to chief statistician for the engineering department. And I was there, I guess, six years - in the engineering department. We had a thousand engineers in El Segundo. It became a navy plant. My job was to help in the design of airplanes.

The airplanes we worked on were the SB-D and the DC-3, and then the SB-D dive bombers, SB-D torpedo bombers - oh, you know, they grew into other kinds of airplanes - and I had to make sure we finished the design and sent it on to be manufactured by the manufacturing division of Douglas Aircraft, which was manufacturing - one plan we really made a lot of were dive bombers. And that was made in El Segundo, and I worked on it.

DR. EHRLICH: So you were participating in the war efforts then?

MR. PALMER: Oh, yes. You didn't have any choice in those days. So it was exciting. I knew everything that was going on in the war. It's a miracle that we won. Because there were so many problems with the first airplanes. The gunners - we had to put guns on the planes. This was the first big problem that we faced, and I had to set up the schedule for installing it on the airplanes. The first problem was if you're shooting a gun, and you're going straight ahead and you start shooting the gun, you have to make sure you don't hit your own propeller. Could you imagine the timing so that the bullets went in between the rotation of the propeller? That was a tough one. So we did that successfully.

The second problem was when we had two-seaters - the pilot and the rear gunner - and the rear gunners were coming back dead. We got the message from Hawaii that the rear gunners are coming back dead. Fix it. I don't know how many would die before we were able to fix it, but we found the exhaust from the engine would creep along the airplane to the tail of the airplane and then go inside the airplane, and the first thing it hit was the rear gunner. And it killed him from carbon monoxide poisoning. It was a simple repair - we just put in a bulkhead and directed the fumes elsewhere and they were fine. We figured it out in Cal Tech's [California Institute of Technology, Pasadena] Wind Tunnel. Now, we did it quickly and, thank God, we didn't kill any more. But there are so many little problems like that when you install guns on planes. Lots of things happen.

DR. EHRLICH: A whole new technology. So you did that during the war?

MR. PALMER: I did that for six years, I guess. And then we were supposed to have an airplane in every garage. That's how optimistic we were. [Laughter.] Obviously it didn't happen. And I then left. A lot of people left; that must have been 1947.

DR. EHRLICH: In the mid-'40s?

MR. PALMER: By 1950, everyone was leaving. It was not easy to stay in aircraft. There were no jets then; they were all propeller-driven airplanes. We did develop the DC-3, so it became the workhorse for commercial flights.

DR. EHRLICH: So when did you meet Lillian? And how -

MR. PALMER: I met Lillian in the '40s. We were married in '45.

DR. EHRLICH: And what was Lillian doing at the time besides, marrying you?

MR. PALMER: She was a photographer, and she was working for an aircraft company - Lockheed Aircraft. She was taking pictures for publicity and for their testing program.

DR. EHRLICH: So you and Lillian married in 1945, and then you stopped your work with the aircraft industry. And what did you do after that? *Minicam* photography [magazine]?

MR. PALMER: Yes, that's right. In the '50s I went to work for *Minicam* - I was western editor for the magazine. I interviewed all of the famous photographers in California - wrote articles about it. And Lillian and I wrote some articles together about photography.

DR. EHRLICH: Oh.

MR. PALMER: Oh, yes. We did a lot together then. That was great fun, and we met some famous photographers. Lillian still does a lot of photography. She became a full professor in film and television at the university.

[LP note: Professor Lillian Palmer was instrumental in building the first multimedia (audiovisual) center on a California State University campus, the Instructional Media Center at Cal State, Northridge. She was individualizing instruction by computer and at a distance with television; this innovative academic approach forged interactive teaching with independent instruction by computer. She worked with professors as well as students in the field of communication, instructional media, film, television and photography. She studied art, photography, as well as psychology, at UCLA for her B.A. and for graduate work at Mills College in Oakland, California, where she received her master's degree.]

DR. EHRLICH: You met a number of the photographers you were writing about?

MR. PALMER: I interviewed people like Edward Weston, and I lectured at the Art Center School - the Archer School of Photography.

[LP note: The Color Society would meet at the Art Center School. There were a cluster of schools at that time located around MacArthur Park: Art Center, Chouinard [Art Institute], Fred Archer School of Photography, and Otis College of Art. The Color Society drew a multidisciplinary group interested in color theory, including professionals from art and architecture, even agriculture and government. Al King, a prominent ceramicist, was the expert in color glazes. Even the actor Harold Lloyd came to the meetings on color.]

DR. EHRLICH: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] The Fred Archer School of Photography.

MR. PALMER: Yes, that was a G.I. school.

MRS. PALMER: Lillian went to Fred Archer lectures, and she had studied with Roi Partridge at Mills College in Northern California.

DR. EHRLICH: So in the late '50s, you left California briefly for Saint Louis. Do you want to speak briefly about that before we get back to California?

MR. PALMER: I had a friend who owned a manufacturing business in Saint Louis. He had manufactured photographic cameras and supplies, and they were early in the manufacture of single lens reflex [SLR] cameras. They knew about my writing, and they thought I would be the one to be in charge of their fairs and displays and their commercial fairs and so forth. So I did - I traveled for them for a while and designed their photo exhibits.

DR. EHRLICH: And then you came back to California in the early '60s.

MR. PALMER: Sixty-three - that's when I came back. I met Richard Feigen in Chicago, and he was interested in getting into the art gallery business in L.A. And one day, he heard that a gallery in Los Angeles, on La Cienega, was leaving. We bought the lease of the Dilexi-Newman Gallery.

Anyway, we bought this gallery - that is we bought his lease. And the manager then was Rolf Nelson - do you remember him?

DR. EHRLICH: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. PALMER: And Rolf Nelson moved across the street and opened his own gallery - the Nelson Gallery. We took over his old gallery, which was a branch of a gallery in San Francisco. He continued to have the San Francisco gallery for a couple more years, and then he retired. And we continued - and we're still here.

DR. EHRLICH: Right.

MR. PALMER: And that is where I began.

DR. EHRLICH: But at that time it was the Feigen-Palmer Gallery, early on.

MR. PALMER: Feigen-Palmer, yes.

DR. EHRLICH: And that you operated from 1963 to 1968.

MR. PALMER: Till now.

DR. EHRLICH: And around 1968, you became the Herbert Palmer Gallery.

MR. PALMER: That's right.

DR. EHRLICH: So tell us about La Cienega Boulevard in the '60s.

MR. PALMER: La Cienega - it was a hot place; very active. Irving Blum was there with his gallery, and quite a few

others. There must have been a dozen galleries on La Cienega between Melrose and Santa Monica Boulevard. That was the whole scene in California - in Southern California. And we all had different galleries, different shows. And then someone got the bright idea of opening up Monday nights, and we all liked the idea, and we all joined together -

DR. EHRLICH: I remember those Monday night art walks.

MR. PALMER: Monday night art walks.

DR. EHRLICH: With drinks and goodies, and art.

MR. PALMER: David Stuart had a gallery then. Who else?

DR. EHRLICH: Felix Landau - Felix Landau.

MR. PALMER: Oh, yes, of course.

DR. EHRLICH: Do you remember Felix?

MR. PALMER: Sure. Felix Landau.

DR. EHRLICH: Ester Robles.

MR. PALMER: Yes, that is right. Ester Robles was there then.

DR. EHRLICH: Zeitlin, Jake Zeitlin and his red barn.

MR. PALMER: The red barn, yes - a book shop and an art gallery.

DR. EHRLICH: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. PALMER: We were all active then. Ceeje was another gallery.

DR. EHRLICH: Ceeje, yes, Ceeje.

MR. PALMER: Ceeje. Whatever it is - somebody named Jerome something.

DR. EHRLICH: Yes. That was a very active gallery. Charles Garabedian showed there, among others.

MR. PALMER: Yes.

DR. EHRLICH: And Ankrum had a gallery.

MR. PALMER: Who?

DR. EHRLICH: Joannie Ankrum.

MR. PALMER: Joan Ankrum, yes. She was on La Cienega then.

DR. EHRLICH: Now, Paul Kantor was the gallerist here earlier on, in Beverly Hills.

MR. PALMER: Not on La Cienega.

DR. EHRLICH: In Beverly Hills, right. Do you remember him?

MR. PALMER: Sure. Paul Kantor.

DR. EHRLICH: He was in Beverly Hills along with Frank Pearls, who was also in Beverly Hills at the time, same street, Camden Drive.

MR. PALMER: That was a time.

DR. EHRLICH: And Molly Barnes, who came later. What about the '70's? What about Molly Barnes?

MR. PALMER: Molly Barnes, who came much later, was my secretary to begin with.

DR. EHRLICH: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Tell me about that.

MR. PALMER: She was my secretary when Cage performed at the gallery. John Cage came back to California - he

had been a student at Manual Arts High School in Los Angeles. And he came back to Los Angeles. He wanted to give a concert, and everybody turned him down. They thought he was crazy. [Laughter.] And Betty Freeman - do you know her?

DR. EHRLICH: I don't know her, but know of her.

MR. PALMER: She came to me - I had a big gallery in those days - and she said, how would you like to have John Cage perform at your gallery for a night - for a concert? I said, I would love it. I had heard of him and believed in what he was doing. So we agreed to have John Cage perform at the gallery.

DR. EHRLICH: That was in 1965 - in January 1965 -

MR. PALMER: Yes.

DR. EHRLICH: You had this show with John Cage - performance of *Variations Number Four* [*Variations IV*] - [laughs].

MR. PALMER: Yes, that's the piece - he wrote it for our gallery. We were the first gallery in which he gave a concert.

DR. EHRLICH: Do you remember it - things about it that you could share?

MR. PALMER: Oh, yes. People interested in avant-garde music were crazy to come. John Cage wanted to charge for admission, and he had a foundation that he was going to give the money to. And Molly Barnes took it upon herself - [laughs] - to let her friends come into hear the concert - [laughter]. Most of them hadn't paid; I thought it was terrible. I was real mad at her. I told her, you just can't let people in because you know them. People were sitting outside on the street. We had filled up the gallery.

Anyway, that's when we had the John Cage concert.

DR. EHRLICH: And did he come for the concert.

MR. PALMER: Oh, he gave the concert. He had David Tudor as assistant.

DR. EHRLICH: Was it a big turnout?

MR. PALMER: Yes, a couple of hundred people.

DR. EHRLICH: That's a lot for a gallery.

MR. PALMER: Sure, he came, and they had it all set up in these two rooms I had.

DR. EHRLICH: There were two rooms?

MR. PALMER: I had two rooms. David Tudor was in one room, and Cage was in the other, and they had a stack of records, a stack of CDs - no, they weren't CDs - whatever they - there weren't any CDs yet. They had records; they had tapes; they had a console, which John Cage operated. And he would turn on the tapes, and then he would turn on some other recording. And David Tudor in the other room would do the same thing. So if you would sit someplace, you would hear one kind of music. If you moved 10 or 15 feet away, you heard some other kind of music. So it was just wild, with all of the different kinds of music going at once.

DR. EHRLICH: Wow.

MR. PALMER: And that was his concert. His sheet of music was published by a music publisher, Everest Records. It was really a map of where to place all of the instruments - all of the production instruments and the sound recorders. You would never know where anything was coming from. They had a good time.

[LP note: In addition to the sheet of music, there was a record cut by Everest Records of the entire concert. The album cover showed the black dots on a white background that served as part of Cage's score. In the first room of the gallery, Mr. Palmer hung other examples of Cage's score; all were black dots on white backgrounds.]

DR. EHRLICH: It sounds that way, and I have a copy here of the gallery invitation, where it says the audience may feel free to move during the performance. [Laughs.]

MR. PALMER: That's right.

DR. EHRLICH: To the bar or outside and to return.

MR. PALMER: You had to pay to get in, and then you could move wherever you liked - inside the gallery, outside the gallery. And they listened to the music - some music, some confusion; it was really chaotic. But that is what Cage wanted.

DR. EHRLICH: It sounds that way. It was given at the Feigen-Palmer Gallery, 515 North La Cienega Boulevard, in Los Angeles, on January 12, 1965. And the map shows the gallery, a bar, a bartender, where John Cage would be in one room, and where David Tudor would be in another room, and the desk, and where the recording equipment would be.

MR. PALMER: We had a lot of people we never saw in our art gallery, because they were interested in the music.

DR. EHRLICH: And so Betty Freeman was a major sponsor of the show.

MR. PALMER: Yes, she got John Cage to go for it. She always helped young new musicians. I don't know if she still does it or not. She might.

DR. EHRLICH: And it says on the invitation that John Whitney was a technical assistant on this. So he was there, too.

MR. PALMER: Sure, he helped place the equipment around. Everybody was there.

DR. EHRLICH: [Laughs] You gave some other exhibitions at the Feigen-Palmer Gallery - a number of British artists and exhibitions -

MR. PALMER: There was one show called "Rule Britannia."

DR. EHRLICH: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. PALMER: Yes, yes.

DR. EHRLICH: And then another show with Allen Jones -

MR. PALMER: That was a one-man show.

DR. EHRLICH: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. PALMER: He was a British Pop artist.

DR. EHRLICH: Did you bring them over yourself, or did you work with another gallery in London? How did that happen?

[LP note: Mr. Palmer was aware of the active contemporary art scene in London at that time; he followed the exhibition program of the prominent Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), among others, who were presenting important shows of new artists, including the Pop Artist group advocated by curator Lawrence Alloway, among others.]

MR. PALMER: Feigen was just in New York. He had nothing - really nothing to say about the California gallery. We made the contacts ourselves.

DR. EHRLICH: So these were really your decisions, then?

MR. PALMER: Yes.

DR. EHRLICH: Now, before the John Cage show, you had an Andy Warhol show in 1964. That is pretty early on, and you showed the film *The Kiss*. Tell us about that.

MR. PALMER: *The Kiss* - oh, yes. That was the first time it was shown - an underground film. The kissers were Marisol and - who was the man? [Laughs.] Maybe it was Andy Warhol. I think it was Andy Warhol in the film - Andy Warhol and Marisol were kissing.

DR. EHRLICH: And it was interminable? It lasted forever?

MR. PALMER: No, when Andy Warhol agreed to give us the film, I guess, he said - you'll like it. He said, I have never shown it before. And then he said to me, how many minutes do you want? I said, what do you mean, how many minutes? How long is it? He said, it comes in seven-minute units. [Laughter.] He says, how many seven-minute units do you want? I said I've never seen it; he said, you'll love it. So we got three units - seven minutes each - and we had a projector going constantly in the gallery projecting this film. They were all of this big kiss between Marisol, who was then very hot in New York - a sculptor, you know - she did these figures on horseback

and so forth. They were wood-carvings mostly - painted wood-carvings - and she was kissing Andy. And it was a film in slow motion because the audience would roar when anybody would make a movement otherwise; it was dead in that kiss. If an eyelash blinked, everybody would applaud.

DR. EHRLICH: [Laughs.]

MR. PALMER: It was a fun film. But that is the first film that Andy Warhol released. He did many more later.

DR. EHRLICH: So you showed it early on -

MR. PALMER: The first time, yes.

DR. EHRLICH: And did people come in droves or trickle in?

MR. PALMER: We only showed it one night, and we couldn't get word of mouth out fast enough. But it was a popular gallery; we had quite a crowd.

DR. EHRLICH: The list of your exhibitions also mentions Harold Stevenson in '64 - Harold Stevenson.

MR. PALMER: Harold Stevenson. [Laughs.] He was being shown by Iris Clert. Do you know her? C-L-E-R-T.

DR. EHRLICH: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. PALMER: In Paris, Stevenson was the first artist to hang his paintings from the Eiffel Tower. [Laughter.] That appealed to us. We didn't have an Eiffel Tower, but I called up Iris and I said, how many paintings can we have for our show? And we talked about the size of the gallery, and she said, "Harold requires one thing - that you show his entire installation." I said, what is that? She said, this is a picture returned to Harold Stevenson by the court, because Lord Profumo didn't pay for it. Lord Profumo in London was going to have a nightclub, and all the walls around the nightclub would have Harold's pictures. And especially one room had a big pink nude. She said, you have to show it.

So I spoke to Harold on the telephone and said, tell me about the nude. He said, it comes in seven panels - wall paintings - and one movable panel. I asked, are you sure we can hang it? Do we have enough room? I told him we had 20 feet by 20 feet. He said, I have yet to find a room it wouldn't fit. So take my word, Herbert, you'll be able to hang it.

Well, it came. It came in several big crates. We brought the crates out of Customs down to the gallery, and we opened them up, and there was the big pink nude. And there was - one panel was cut in half horizontally, all the others were vertical.

[LP note: The Harold Stevenson nude was recently sold to the Guggenheim Museum at the suggestion of curator and art historian Robert Rosenblum.]

DR. EHRLICH: One panel was cut in half horizontally and the others vertical[ly]?

MR. PALMER: The others were vertical and were cut in half like this. And that one - was the penis. So when someone came into the room and lifted it up - you lifted up the penis - that was the entrance to my gallery. [Laughter.] Everybody had to walk through that when they came to the show, and that was the piece that would fit any place. It fit all right. Everyone was really giggling for an hour or so. It was a great show.

DR. EHRLICH: So were there irate reactions to it?

MR. PALMER: Well, I never sold that piece; I sold all the others.

DR. EHRLICH: [Laughs.]

MR. PALMER: I don't know what he did with it. I don't think he ever sold it to anybody. After our show, he went to see his mother in Texas - no, in Oklahoma - and I think she talked him out of showing it again. [Laughter.] It was quite a show.

DR. EHRLICH: Were there any irate observers? [Laughs.]

MR. PALMER: Oh, no.

DR. EHRLICH: No, everyone took it in good stride?

MR. PALMER: Yes, everyone was having a good time. It was a great show. One of the great historic shows in my gallery.

[End Tape 1 Side B.]

DR. EHRLICH: This is Susan Ehrlich, on [mini] disk number three, interviewing Herbert Palmer at the Herbert Palmer Gallery in West Hollywood, on December 22, 2004 for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is session number two, [mini] disk number three.

Herbert, I'd like to go back to New York and to pick up a few elements that we haven't discussed in last session.

MR. PALMER: Elements of -

DR. EHRLICH: Your life in New York. You had mentioned to me the Weyhe Gallery Bookstore - tell us about that.

MR. PALMER: Erhard Weyhe - W-E-Y-H-E - was a German book dealer, and he came - I don't know when he came to America - but he opened his bookshop to artists - this must be in the '30s. He opened his bookshop to artists. And artists new to America, who were running away from Europe in the late '30s, all came to his shop. One referred another, and he would give them a show. In his upstairs, he had a gallery. Downstairs was his book collection. He sold books to the public, mostly art students, and upstairs he held exhibits of artists' work. The exhibits were mostly Europeans, and some Americans, and the curator of the upstairs gallery, at first, was Karl Zigrosser - he later became an important curator in Philadelphia, but he began with the Weyhe gallery. And one of his guests in the '30s was Diego Rivera and Frida [Kahlo] and a woman who helped him paint his murals in Radio City - can't think of her name right now.

DR. EHRLICH: Was it Lucienne Bloch?

MR. PALMER: Sure, if she's a - Bloch, Bloch, yes! Lucienne Bloch. She was a wonderful helper to Diego Rivera. A lot of things we call Rivera are Lucienne Bloch, and she used to come in overalls after working at Radio City. We'd sit around and have tea and liquor and chat. I was quite young then. I was a young boy, and for me it was - just being in the presence of a great celebrity. Incidentally, Lucienne Bloch's daughter lives in Humboldt County, and Lucienne herself was a photographer. She took pictures of the progress of the mural in Radio City - the famous mural that isn't there anymore, because Rockefeller took it down.

DR. EHRLICH: Right - [laughs.]

MR. PALMER: You know the story of the mural. Rockefeller objected; he didn't like the picture of Lenin in the painting. He wanted it removed, and the workers were very docile and they kind of agreed with Rockefeller. He was paying the bills. But not Lucienne - she was the photographer, and she was afraid that if Rockefeller got mad, he would take the whole mural off the wall, which he did. So she took pictures of the mural - the only pictures of the original mural are by Lucienne Bloch, and you can still see them in the collection of her daughter, who lives in California.

[LP note: At Rockefeller's request, Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo came to New York in 1933 after Diego finished his work on the murals for the Detroit Institute of the Arts (1932). Known as Rivera's "Rockefeller's Murals," they were intended for Rockefeller Center, but because of Mr. Rockefeller's objection to the inclusion of Vladimir Lenin's portrait in the mural, which Rivera refused to remove, the mural was destroyed.]

DR. EHRLICH: And so you were allowed into this group? Yes, they were very sympathetic with children and interested in art.

MR. PALMER: I was just a young boy. After all, I was born in 1915 and this is in the '30s. I must have been just 15, 16 years old, 17 [at] most. But she was a good photographer, and you can go up to Gualala - that's the city where Lucienne Bloch's daughter lives - and she will show you the photographs, marvelous photographs of Diego Rivera's hands and close-ups and everything of that mural. So that's the story about the '30s. I don't go back much before that. I was a student, obviously, in high school then, studying art at Boys' High School in Brooklyn. And Saturdays, I would come to the Weyhe Gallery. I was not one of those foreign émigrés; I was a local boy who loved to go to see art.

DR. EHRLICH: Do you remember any other exhibitions or artists who were there?

MR. PALMER: Exhibitions there.

DR. EHRLICH: Or artists who came by?

MR. PALMER: Yes, he showed the whole school of Paris. He was, in a way, a competitor - a minor competitor - of [Alfred] Stieglitz - Stieglitz.

DR. EHRLICH: Stieglitz, yes.

MR. PALMER: Yes. He was doing the same thing. But he didn't go to Europe to find these people, which 291 [Stieglitz's art gallery] did. But they had the pick of the artists, really. But Weyhe got a few of the lesser-known artists - Diego Rivera, of course, was one of the exhibits they held there, and Cesar was another artist - Doris, I think her name was. Cesar, I don't know if you know her. She was a sculptor - sculptress - and he showed her sculpture - very beautiful Expressionist sculpture. I have catalogues of a lot of those exhibits - I guess I ought to show it to you, maybe give them to you - of the Weyhe Gallery exhibits.

DR. EHRLICH: So -

MR. PALMER: Now when Karl Zigrosser went to Philadelphia, Weyhe's daughter - her name was Denison - she took over the Gallery part - the exhibitions. And this continued - Weyhe continued as a source of books. Whenever you wanted an art book, you used to go there, because it was before Wittenborn, and that, too, was a wonderful art book gallery in New York.

And he published books, too. He published the lithographs of Diego Rivera. I think there were six of them - a portrait of Diego, several portraits of Frida Kahlo - and Weyhe published that book. I mean it was a portfolio, and it's all long gone. Unless we can find Mrs. Denison; she may still have some.

The Denison family in the summer went up to Nova Scotia - I don't know why I remember that - [laughs] - and I was never invited to go up there. I was too young, I guess. But the artists went there in the summer, and they did a lot of their painting and drawing up in Nova Scotia - somewhere near the town of Digby, Nova Scotia - don't ask me why I remember. I used to go to Digby, because in college - I was then a young man in college, a freshman - I took geology and my professor said, some of the most beautiful amethysts in American soil - of course, there are great ones in Brazil - but in America come from Digby, Nova Scotia. So I went there, and I still have some of those amethysts. The owner of the mine would set up a blast, blow up the hill, and all - and we rock hounds would go in - and pick these beautiful gems free.

DR. EHRLICH: I want to come now to California -

MR. PALMER: Well, that was then - then -

DR. EHRLICH: Now we move to California - this was to pick up some things that we hadn't gone over before. And you -

MR. PALMER: Then we come to the '40s, when the war heats up in Europe.

DR. EHRLICH: Right, last session we discussed the '40s, the '50s, the '60s, and then when you started in California.

MR. PALMER: I came to California in 1940.

DR. EHRLICH: Right, we discussed that last session, and I wanted to come up to the '60s, when you entered the gallery business first with Feigen -

MR. PALMER: Yes.

DR. EHRLICH: - in 1963, on La Cienega Boulevard. In the '60s -

MR. PALMER: Oh, in the '50s and early '60s, I was living in St. Louis.

DR. EHRLICH: In '63, you established the Feigen-Palmer Gallery, here in Los Angeles.

MR. PALMER: Yes, between '58 and '63, I was really in St. Louis. And one day, or I should say, one night, at midnight, I get a phone call from [Richard] Feigen. We had visited him in his gallery in Chicago, so he knew us. And he called me and he said, guess what, we're going into business together. [Laughs.] That's typical Feigen, he decides everything. So I said, we are? And he says, yes. There was a gallery in San Francisco which had a branch in Los Angeles. I think the gallery in San Francisco was called Dilexi. He was going to give up the one in Los Angeles, which was then run by Rolfe Nelson.

DR. EHRLICH: Nelson?

MR. PALMER: Nelson, right. And Nelson, evidently, didn't do a good job, so he was willing to sell the gallery. Nelson didn't want to give it up; he moved across the street, which we should have put in our contract and not let him do. Anyway, he moved in with a shipping company and he held exhibits there. I think it was called Cart and Crate, something like that, and he held exhibits there.

DR. EHRLICH: And so your response to Feigen, when he said, we're going into business was -

MR. PALMER: I said, well, wait a minute, let me go out and see where we're doing this. He says, in California - he says you can go back to California. I said, that's good, my kids will love that. So we did, and we bought the lease from Dilexi or - I'm not sure of that name - and that was the name of the gallery in L.A. then, too. Anyway, we bought the lease from them, and we took over and started Feigen-Palmer.

DR. EHRLICH: And you showed a good deal of British art.

MR. PALMER: Yes, the first show, Feigen insisted, was a professor friend of his from Northwestern University, George Cohen, who was a Surrealist. Surrealism was pretty hot then in Chicago in the '60s. And he said, our first show is George Cohen. I came to California; I looked at the property; it looked great. It was owned by Brad Miller. [Laughs.] I don't know why I remember his name; he owned the property. And we had a thousand feet - square feet - of space, two big rooms, and we started with George Cohen. And of course, Surrealism was new in L.A., so we had a lot of good business. A lot of people bought his work, especially a man named [Donald] Winston. Winston was a man from Minneapolis, a wealthy oil man, and he came from Minneapolis and he had property - oil property - in Texas. And he loved us, and he bought something out of every show.

DR. EHRLICH: Great!

MR. PALMER: Donald Winston, and he was a wonderful man. I remember when he would buy some - when he bought the George Cohen; I don't know what we charged him. Maybe $1,500. He would say to me, Herbert, are you sure you're getting enough money for that picture?

DR. EHRLICH: [Laughs] Great; that's great.

MR. PALMER: He was a gentleman, the kind of client every dealer dreams of.

DR. EHRLICH: You bet.

MR. PALMER: And he said, I'm not going to keep any of these pictures I buy. I'm going to give them to the places that were good to me. And he gave paintings to the L.A. County Museum, the Minneapolis Institute - the other museum in Minneapolis?

DR. EHRLICH: Walker?

MR. PALMER: Walker. The Walker Art Institute [Walker Art Center]. He gave to all of them - in Texas, where he'd struck oil, he built a museum - a small town in Texas. It's still there and they still show art. Who is that painter who painted scenes of the West - cowboys?

DR. EHRLICH: Remington? Frederick Remington?

MR. PALMER: No, a good painter.

DR. EHRLICH: Are you talking cowboy scenes or -

MR. PALMER: After Remington.

DR. EHRLICH: Landscapes of the West?

MR. PALMER: Well, usually a portrait with a little landscape.

DR. EHRLICH: There were a number of artists who did that. You'll think of it.

MR. PALMER: I'll think of it. Yes, but he started a museum in this town where he struck oil, and the museum prospered and is still there.

DR. EHRLICH: Great. So you got off to a good start, the Feigen-Palmer Gallery. You had a number of interesting shows, and among which was one for Bridget Riley, the British artist. How did that come about?

MR. PALMER: Right. How did that?

DR. EHRLICH: How did it come about? What was it like to work with her?

MR. PALMER: It was the beginning of what we call Op Art. There was [Richard] Anuszkiewicz, Bridget Riley, [Victor] Vasarely. They were the big names in those days. And they went to pure, abstract, geometric forms, all of them. The best of all of them was Bridget Riley, and since that was the hottest new thing, I said to Dick, I think we ought to get her - and show her. And he said, well, we'll try; she's getting very hot. I don't remember who had her in New York. I don't think anyone really yet. So we snared her, and we promised her a show in New

York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. That was big; we could open three locations.

DR. EHRLICH: So Feigen was in New York as well?

MR. PALMER: Not yet. A dealer named Herbert -

DR. EHRLICH: How fortunate [laughing].

MR. PALMER: I forget his first name, but it was the Herbert Gallery. And he had it - oh ,yes, he had Bridget Riley, and that's why we - Feigen bought out Herbert. I don't know what the deal was because that's how he was going to get into New York - the Herbert Gallery. Anyway, that's how we got Bridget. We gave her a one-man show in New York, and then everything moved to California. And Bridget said, I'll show in California, provided you put in my exhibit my installation. I didn't know, of course - I didn't know what it was.

[LP note: It was the David Herbert [Gallery] which became the Feigen-Herbert Gallery, New York, not to be confused with Feigen Palmer Gallery, Los Angeles (Mr. Herbert Palmer).]

DR. EHRLICH: [Laughs.]

MR. PALMER: Well, it was a 10-foot-square Bridget Riley painting that went around in a circle, like that. Ten feet, you know, that's eight feet, so 10 feet. And you have to walk into it. Well, several times during the show, people walked in and they couldn't get out. It was so powerful - the horizon line was non-existent. It was very confusing to walk into a maze like that.

[LP note: The piece was called *Continuum*. According to the artist, who showed her work recently at the Dia Foundation in New York City in 2000, this installation work no longer exists. However, there is a photo of the artist standing in front of the work, shot by Lord Snowden. Also, Lillian Palmer photographed a series of installation shots, which records this piece, as well as Bridget working, at the time of the exhibition in L.A.]

DR. EHRLICH: So that was in 1964,1965.

MR. PALMER: In 1965. Bridget said - and there's another thing - I don't know where to stay. And I gallantly said, oh, you can come stay with us. We had just bought this house in Mandeville Canyon, 1965. My son was driving along the street, and he saw the sign, "House for Sale," so he told Lillian and me about it and we ran down. We were then renting a house in Mandeville Canyon; so we ran down to look at this house. It was gorgeous, and Lillian said, "We have to have this house." And I said, "Well, let's find out about the price."

So we asked the price - we had $70,000 - and I think he wanted 90 [thousand dollars], or 80, or 90, something like that. And we said to him, "We can pay you your down payment, almost." He said, "How much are you missing," and we told him. He said, "I understand you're an art dealer." I said, "Yes, and I have a gallery on La Cienega." I said, "How about making up the difference with a picture?" He said, "Absolutely." So he picked a Picasso linocut, which was worth the difference. Now it's gone up a lot. He got a good deal. [Laughs.]

So we closed the deal for the house with money and with this Picasso picture. It was a linocut of a woman looking out the window. I remember the picture. Anyway, he had to move from his house because he had an autistic child who would always crawl to the street when the cars were going. You know, it drove him crazy. So he wanted to move away, and it was perfect for us.

DR. EHRLICH: So -

MR. PALMER: He was president of the Thompson Ramo Woolrich Company, a big aerospace company. And he moved in the neighborhood; he still lives there. And that was how we closed the deal on our house, and we still live in that house.

DR. EHRLICH: Great, and Bridget came and stayed with you?

MR. PALMER: Bridget came. She was the first person to live in that house besides ourselves. We had no accommodations, nothing. She said it was okay; she'd make it work. We had a portable bed for her in the extra room. She stayed there during the exhibition.

DR. EHRLICH: So a month, a couple of weeks?

MR. PALMER: A couple of weeks; we had no problem selling her pictures.

DR. EHRLICH: Really?

MR. PALMER: We sold everything.

DR. EHRLICH: Great.

MR. PALMER: It was a great show.

DR. EHRLICH: And she was a good guest?

MR. PALMER: Oh, yes.

DR. EHRLICH: And she did some work while she was out here, too; I see from some photographs.

MR. PALMER: Maybe a little, yes. Right.

DR. EHRLICH: So it was a good experience?

MR. PALMER: Oh, yes. Wonderful. She was pretty young then. It was a wonderful experience. We had a chance to talk way into the night, every night. And then we'd get up early and go to the show. It was a great experience.

[LP note: Bridget Riley had individual paintings, as well as an environment that was flown from England. The environment was confusing to most people. She set a new style of painting. All kinds of designers wanted to use her designs, but Bridget was very concerned about the appropriation of her designs into fashion. She tried to protect her art, and even sued several designers, including Larry Aldrich, who had purchased her work. She lost that suit initially because the copyright law did not protect artists in that way at that time. Later she was more successful in protecting her interests. She now has a room dedicated to her work at the new Tate Museum in London. Her work is very sought after and has achieved record prices.]

DR. EHRLICH: Good memories. You also showed Vasa [Mihich].

MR. PALMER: Yes, he was another artist. Vasa was assisted in coming to the U.S. by Eleanor Roosevelt.

DR. EHRLICH: Really, *the* Eleanor -

MR. PALMER: Yes, he was a Yugoslavian, and he and his wife were fleeing from Yugoslavia while it was still under [Josip Broz] Tito. But a lot of people were leaving - especially White Russians - were leaving Yugoslavia. Tito was not interested in White Russians. And Eleanor Roosevelt helped them come to America, and they said they wanted to come to Los Angeles. And by chance - Vasa walked into the gallery, and I saw his art, and it was very close to the Op period - very abstract. Lacquer paintings on wood, and we immediately set a date - I gave him a show, and we became good friends with him and his wife. They lived in a little apartment in Hollywood. And he began to develop his art on wood.

And then plastics came along, Gall, and he switched to plastics. He saw the opportunity for mass-production. He became so American, I tell you.

He wanted to be a mass-producer of art. He began to make art in plastic. However, in my house, I have a painting he did on wood, which I treasure - in beautiful lacquer. Yes, on wood.

He was an excellent artist, but when we moved our gallery to Wilshire Boulevard, he started teaching at UCLA and to make his own career in plastics. He first began with little ones, then they became big ones, then they became giant ones.

DR. EHRLICH: [Laughs] In the mass-production world, yes?

MR. PALMER: He bought a building on Exposition Boulevard. [Laughs.] It was for making his plastic molds - he had three employees. He had extra space; he rented it out. He still is in that building; he still rents rooms to other artists. He married one of the other artists.

He always says, I will always acknowledge that you gave me my first chance.

DR. EHRLICH: Then in 1968, you split with Dick Feigen and became the Herbert Palmer Gallery.

MR. PALMER: Yes, Feigen went to New York, and he had a gallery in Chicago and New York. He had two galleries now.

DR. EHRLICH: So then you stayed in the same space on La Cienega and dissolved the partnership. And you showed - in that new incarnation - you showed recent work by David Hockney.

MR. PALMER: A lot of English artists.

DR. EHRLICH: A lot of English artists, and Hockney, very early.

[LP note: Mr. Palmer was the first to include David Hockney's work in any gallery exhibition when Hockney first came to Los Angeles. Several works were included in the exhibition, "Rule Britannia," as well as other exhibitions in the early 1960s, when Palmer started the gallery.]

MR. PALMER: Jones.

DR. EHRLICH: Allen Jones.

MR. PALMER: Allen Jones.

DR. EHRLICH: You showed Henry Moore.

MR. PALMER: Yes, we showed him when we moved to Wilshire Boulevard, to a suite on the fourth floor, where Barney's Department store is now.

DR. EHRLICH: At 9570 Wilshire Boulevard -

MR. PALMER: Right.

DR. EHRLICH: In Beverly Hills, you were there for a short time.

MR. PALMER: Yes, 1978-'79, we had the whole fourth floor.

DR. EHRLICH: The whole fourth floor. You were the Herbert Palmer Gallery from 1968 to 1978 and then for a few years on Wilshire Boulevard [1978-'79] in Beverly Hills on the fourth floor. And that's where you showed the Henry Moore.

MR. PALMER: Right.

DR. EHRLICH: You had a fairly big exhibition, a memorable one.

MR. PALMER: We had sculpture and his drawings. A lot of sculpture, and a lot of graphics. It was a good exhibit, excellent. We went to England to meet Henry Moore - make the arrangement to show him and select pieces for the show. And he was thrilled to show in California.

DR. EHRLICH: Great.

MR. PALMER: It was nice. He had a Russian wife [Irina]. I forget her name. And we had tea with him. He had a piece of sculpture, which he called the *Sheep Piece* [1977]. He said, people always ask me, why the *Sheep Piece*? He said, because after I built it, I leased my land out to a shepherd, and the sheep liked to stand in the shade of this piece. So he calls it the *Sheep Piece*.

And one interesting expression he made - he said, you know, I never thought that, at my age now, I can sell everything I make. Touch wood - [laughs]. Touch wood, I thought that was so nice. We're having tea and he's thrilled that he can still sell his art.

DR. EHRLICH: That's great.

MR. PALMER: Yes, Henry Moore.

DR. EHRLICH: You published an exhibition brochure, and there were a good number of pieces - bronzes and graphic works - and how did they do here?

MR. PALMER: Fine. Sold all the sculpture. We didn't sell all the graphics. Actually, I still have a couple of the graphics.

DR. EHRLICH: Really?

MR. PALMER: Yes.

DR. EHRLICH: Did he come to Los Angeles with it? Did he come to Los -

MR. PALMER: No.

DR. EHRLICH: He didn't come to Los Angeles -

MR. PALMER: No, he didn't come. Too hard for him to get away, he said.

DR. EHRLICH: Right.

MR. PALMER: He had a crew, several crews working, and his foundry was in Germany. So he had to go to supervise casting. He was a busy man.

DR. EHRLICH: Tell us more about the tea. Was it at his house - the tea that he had for you?

MR. PALMER: Yes. We talked about everything. He talked about his work. Another interesting thing he said, I have a little shed - you see it over there? Come on, let's go. We went to this little shed, and it was shelves all around the shed with little Henry Moores - sculpture. He said, if you want to buy a Henry Moore that's a hundred percent mine, buy the little ones, because I made them all. He says, the big ones are made by my helpers. He said, I supervise it but - the mockups, the little mockups, he said. I don't know, do they call them mockups?

DR. EHRLICH: Yes.

MR. PALMER: Yes. Those are all mine.

DR. EHRLICH: Or modellos.

MR. PALMER: Well, we bought a couple of those.

DR. EHRLICH: Good for you.

MR. PALMER: Which we sold, you know, over the years.

DR. EHRLICH: So that went well. You also had an exhibition of Hans Namuth - of his photographs.

MR. PALMER: That was also on Wilshire Boulevard. We also had an exhibit of early American tools. I remember a man selling American tools out on Long Island. I called him up and I said, I'm a photographer who wants to take pictures of your tools. He says, come and do it. So Namuth went out. And you know, this is all over time. Went out there, photographed his tools, and made a book - portfolio - of American tools. And we made a poster of that - I don't know if you got one or not. And we had the tools and the photographs. Oh, it was a fantastic show, I think.

DR. EHRLICH: Sounds great. And who was the collector - the man who collected the tools. Maybe you got his name?

MR. PALMER: Completely unknown to me.

DR. EHRLICH: Now, it was his collection?

MR. PALMER: It was a local man who collected them out on Long Island. He'd go and visit old farms and buy them. Nobody in particular; I don't even know his name. Oh, I could look it up.

DR. EHRLICH: So you sold the Namuth photographs then?

MR. PALMER: Both! Oh, we sold the tools and the photographs. And I think that we sold the book, the portfolio, too. Hans Namuth, yep. So that was a nice show, and we had Moore, and we had - we had a guy who made columns. What was his name? He took columns of cardboard from a rug company and he wrapped them with his own cord in different colors. They were seven, eight feet high, and when you came into the gallery, it was like coming into a forest. All of these columns wrapped in color. What was his name? I'll think of it.

DR. EHRLICH: You also showed works by David Hockney?

MR. PALMER: We sold everything. Mostly drawings. Those were the good ones, the '60s. We got the Hockneys in New York from a gallery that Felix Landau has an interest in.

DR. EHRLICH: Landau was a dealer in Los Angeles.

MR. PALMER: Yes, he was on La Cienega. He married and moved to Paris. He used his foreign birth in Vienna and knowledge to collect a lot of very fine art, which I bought from him.

DR. EHRLICH: Oh, really?

MR. PALMER: And he was very good - good dealer. He lived in Paris - outside of Paris. I went to visit him. He lived in a lovely house, a studio for the artist in the suburbs of Paris. Felix had a knack of finding some great paintings in Europe after the war; there were a lot around. But that's history.

DR. EHRLICH: And he showcased a lot of Los Angeles artists when he was here?

MR. PALMER: Yes, he began to. After we moved to Wilshire Boulevard, we showed Los Angeles artists, too. Not too many, but a few. Mixed. But Felix stayed on La Cienega, while his wife continued the gallery. Mitzi Landau. She continued the gallery and raising the boys. She had two boys and they became photographers.

DR. EHRLICH: Really?

MR. PALMER: Now they're photographers. Mitzi got the Gaston Lachaise estate, the artist who did sculpture of women with large breasts. She did well distributing them all over the country. And she had a lawyer in Boston who supervised the sale. But this was all posthumous - the artist had died - so she had made a living out of that one artist.

DR. EHRLICH: [Laughs] So, let's move back to La Cienega -

[Audio break, tape change.]

- you established the Herbert Palmer Gallery there.

MR. PALMER: Right.

DR. EHRLICH: But in another location - in another address - and again resumed your very astute exhibition schedule. At 802 North La Cienega?

MR. PALMER: I don't know if it's 801 or 802.

DR. EHRLICH: Two? That was '90 - you were there from 1982 to 1993. And -

MR. PALMER: I was there seven years.

DR. EHRLICH: Okay, well, we'll corroborate those dates. And your daughter, Meredith, came to work at the gallery for many years.

[LP note: Meredith Palmer came back to Los Angeles in 1983 to work with Mr. Palmer as director of the gallery until 1991. After graduating from Harvard University in the arts in 1973, she managed the international visual arts program in the Department of State and U.S. Information Agency from 1973 to 1982 in Washington, D.C. Tapping museum professionals and curators throughout the U.S., she managed exhibitions of American art for overseas presentation. Among other international exhibitions, she handled the first official art exchange between the U.S. and the People's Republic of China, "The Exhibition of Archaeological Finds of the People's Republic of China," which opened at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. in 1974 [December 13, 1974-March 30, 1975] and traveled throughout Europe and to the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum in Kansas City, Missouri, and the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, California. In 1981, as a reciprocal exchange, she managed the first American painting show presented in China since the 1940s, which was organized by the Boston Museum of Fine Arts from its permanent collection. Because of her past experience in the Far East, Meredith organized exhibitions at the Palmer Gallery such as contemporary sculpture and drawing from Japan ("Bunka-viewing," 1990), which included new artists, such as Shigeo Toya and Kimiko Tsuchiya. More established Japanese artists, such as Yayoi Kusama, were included in group shows, and she organized several one-man shows for the innovative paper artist from Kyoto, Shoichi Ida (1941-2006).]

MR. PALMER: Right, right, at the second gallery on La Cienega.

DR. EHRLICH: She said in the early 1980s; the second gallery is what we're talking about now. And one of the exhibitions you did was "Arman's Orchestra."

MR. PALMER: "Arman's Orchestra."

DR. EHRLICH: Tell us about that.

MR. PALMER: Arman - there's a story with every artist I showed. Arman decided to make an orchestra in bronze. And of course, he was busy cutting them up - as he made the instruments - he cut them up in pieces and exhibited them in a new arrangement. I personally think it was the influence of John Cage on Arman. He'd never admit it, but he cut up all these bronzes and then re-assembled the pieces, which was clever and beautiful. And the great *piece de resistance* was the baby grand piano, solid bronze.

DR. EHRLICH: Wow.

MR. PALMER: You couldn't lift it. You couldn't move it. You couldn't budge it. It came in a truck, two trucks. One

with the little pieces - the trombones, the violins, the cellos - the cellos were the best. And then in another truck - they came late in the day, and the piano wouldn't fit in the door. So I said, well, we'll take it around the back. And we measured the back, and we figured they could get in the back door. But it was too late; it was getting dark. So we decided to leave it just sitting outside all night. A little scary, but we did.

DR. EHRLICH: Yes.

MR. PALMER: Because nobody could move it. We couldn't move it. The next day - the crew came from the trucking company and got it in the back door. But we wanted to put it in the front room and it wouldn't go. We had to break down the wall between the back and the front to get it into the front room.

DR. EHRLICH: So it was an expensive exhibition?

MR. PALMER: Ah. Well, we sold a lot of pieces. Didn't sell all of them because he's not cheap, but we sold a lot. And there were no prints. He wanted to show everything - he liked to pile up his exhibits, just as he does with his art. He likes to pile things up. I think one of the great things he did was filling up a room with garbage in Paris.

DR. EHRLICH: Oh, really? Oh, not in your place.

MR. PALMER: No, but, way back in the '60s. He did that in Paris - filled up a room with garbage, and when people came, they opened the door - you couldn't get in. But that's Arman.

DR. EHRLICH: Did the bronze piano sell?

MR. PALMER: The bronze piano. Well, we had a broken wall now, so we could easily get it in and out, and we couldn't sell it. Somebody should have bought it - the Music Center or someone should have bought it, but they didn't. I guess if we'd kept it a little longer, we would have sold it. Anyhow -

DR. EHRLICH: Did he come out for the exhibition?

MR. PALMER: Oh, yes.

DR. EHRLICH: And what was he like?

MR. PALMER: He was a charming European gentleman. And he helps sell his art, and he loves it. You know, there are artists who love to sell their work, and there are others who never want to sell it. There are artists who finish a painting and never touch it again. There are others who are still painting when the show is opening. George Cohen was one of those who was still painting when the show was opening, and he wanted to help us hang the show. And we said, absolutely not; there is no show unless you walk out the door and get out of here. George Cohen said, yes.

But anyway, Arman loves to sell his work. He's a great salesman. He has a studio in Paris and another one in the south of France, and he does very well on his own. People come to buy his work from all over, and he just sits there and thinks of new things to slice. [Laughs.] And he's a jovial fellow, very capable sculptor.

DR. EHRLICH: Speaking of a jovial fellow, you also had a great exhibition of Red Grooms in 1986.

MR. PALMER: Yes. [Laughs.] Red Grooms, at the last minute, says he's not going to come.

DR. EHRLICH: Oh!

MR. PALMER: So we didn't know what to do. My son, William, said, I have a friend; he's an actor. And he's redheaded, just like Grooms. Why don't we have him come and pretend he's Red Grooms. So I called Red Grooms and said, look, you've disappointed me; you're not coming for my show. We're going to hire an actor to represent you. And he says, that's great! So we did. An actor who is an artist now, years later; fooled the people completely. Everyone thought he was Red Grooms. They talked to him about why he did his things. It was a hilarious show.

[LP note: Herbert's son, William Palmer, lived in L.A. until the mid-1980s. His own business was real estate, but he was an active art collector and patron in the community; he was a founding member of the L.A. Museum of Contemporary Art, helping the museum to raise its first million-dollar donors. He moved to London in 1986 to start his own self-storage business, and he continued his involvement with the contemporary arts, serving on the board of Artangel, which promoted public art, and again, acting as a founding donor of the Tate Modern in 1999. He moved to New York in 2002, where he now is active on the board of trustees for the New Museum of Contemporary Art, among other contemporary arts organizations.]

DR. EHRLICH: [Laughs] That's funny.

MR. PALMER: [Laughs] It was a good show; we sold everything. We had graphics and little constructions - we had *Charlie Chaplin*; they were very saleable. Those Red Grooms constructions are now made in Colorado.

[LP note: Many of Red Grooms's printed collections were being published by Bud Shark in Colorado. But Red was still creating his unique works himself - watercolors, paintings, and constructions. Meredith Palmer, who knew Red Grooms and his work from USIA's presentation of his large work *Rukus Manhattan* overseas, organized the exhibition at the Palmer Gallery to coincide with a major retrospective of Grooms's work at MoCA Los Angeles. The MoCA show included a large movie theater that Grooms constructed with his wife, Lizzyann, so several of the works in the Palmer show also related to the theater.]

DR. EHRLICH: Really?

MR. PALMER: So he doesn't make his work anymore anyway. [Laughs.] The idea of an actor was perfect. But who else was in the show? I know *Charlie Chaplin* was.

DR. EHRLICH: You had *Dali's Salad*.

MR. PALMER: *Dali's Salad*, yes.

DR. EHRLICH: *Salvador Dali Salad*.

MR. PALMER: Oh, yes. *Hello Dali*. Well, there were a lot of good pieces. It was a fun show.

DR. EHRLICH: You also showed Chuck Close, one of the -

MR. PALMER: We were the first to show him in LA. Our daughter Meredith's idea. Oh, yes, we borrowed them from Pace Gallery. We had about six giant portraits, and we sold one to Max Palefsky.

[LP note: These were Chuck Close's first manipulated paper-pulp portraits in shades of gray.]

DR. EHRLICH: You've had a long-standing relationship with Lee Mullican, starting early on.

MR. PALMER: Oh, yes.

DR. EHRLICH: You had some shows with him in the '80s on La Cienega. Nineteen eighty-five was the first one -

MR. PALMER: Yes.

DR. EHRLICH: And then it went into the '90s.

MR. PALMER: Yes.

DR. EHRLICH: And tell us about Lee and his art, and how you found him -

MR. PALMER: Lee was then exhibiting with a gallery across the street, yes. I don't remember the name of the gallery. All I know is that the man played the violin, and whenever I went in there, he was playing the violin like he was giving a concert. There were always a half a dozen people listening, and he played the violin. And he never paid any attention to selling Lee's art. People would come in and ask about the art, and he'd just keep playing the violin. I can't think of his name, though. But he had a gallery on La Cienega for years.

I guess people like their music with their art. He was a nice guy, but not an art dealer, so Lee switched to me. And I had a relationship with him until he died in 1998 [1919-1998]. He's another guy I had to keep from helping me install the show. He wanted to help. Lee lived part-time in Taos, New Mexico, and part-time on La Mesa Road, in LA.

DR. EHRLICH: In Santa Monica?

MR. PALMER: Yes. And he had a gallery in Taos, New Mexico, and I never showed any of those pictures. But I'd show things that he'd made at UCLA, because he was a professor of art at UCLA. And he was very productive. There are many portraits in his exhibits. He liked amusing heads, and he made them out of all materials, these heads. In his early years, in Taos, he did a series of mythological sculpture in wood. I have one here; you've seen it?

They are long black pieces of wood. Some of them, they look like bows and arrows. They were all Indian-type images from the Hopi people, because every year in August, he went to the corn dances. And you'd think he was the chief of Indians there, this six-foot-six guy with white hair walking around, and he looked like an Indian - red-faced. And he walked all around, and he'd get so much attention there, as if he were an Indian. People thought

he was. And he was born in Chickasha, Oklahoma. But that didn't mean anything; that had nothing to do with it. He just loved that role he played, and he did a lot of paintings and sculpture, which finally ended up being exhibited by the Selwyn gallery [Marc Selwyn Fine Art], after he died.

DR. EHRLICH: Marc Selwyn.

MR. PALMER: Yes, after he died, Mrs. Mullican turned it all over to Selwyn. I had pioneered him, put him in a lot of museums, the British Museum, and the LA County Museum. And we had an exclusive arrangement. I don't know how long it lasted, 15 years at least. And I got him exhibits in many museums. One in particular went wild about him - the state museum of art in Utah State College [Utah State University].

DR. EHRLICH: The Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art in Logan, Utah.

MR. PALMER: That's the name; they bought Mullican wherever they could. And they have a lot of good ones.

DR. EHRLICH: They do. They have his head - and it looks like a tribal head - of 1954.

MR. PALMER: Right. That's the only time I had a battle with Lee. After his show at UCLA - he had a one-man show, which we arranged - he sold the *Ninnekah* [1951], which was a very famous "burst," to Utah. But he didn't sell it through me. He sold it through a gallery on Beverly.

I got mad as hell, because he didn't tell me about her. And she talked him into it, I think. That was the only battle I had with Lee, but that's a private matter. Well, it's sort of a private matter. That's one of the downsides of being a dealer. That is, when some people like your art, they'll try heaven and earth to get it without buying it from you, because they know they'll get it a little bit cheaper directly from the artist. It happens. That's business; it's not art.

Anyway, she sold Utah the *Ninnekah* and also the head with the sticks. They'll be shown at LACMA [Los Angeles County Museum of Art]. Lee felt terrible about it. You know, it's one of those ethical questions. Anyhow, that was sad, because I would have liked to have ended our relationship on a happier note.

He tried to make up to me, and he gave me drawings and pictures and all to make up for it, because they were expensive pieces. Well, I accepted it and finished. Anyhow, that's one of the blue points.

DR. EHRLICH: And I was going to ask you about that, too, the drawbacks to being a dealer.

MR. PALMER: Oh, yes, well, that's always a drawback. Anyway, this is something. [Points to a Picasso bronze sculpture.]

DR. EHRLICH: You've got to talk about this; tell us about this Picasso.

MR. PALMER: This is May 1982.

DR. EHRLICH: Yes. May 1982.

MR. PALMER: This is the *New York* magazine [May 31, 1982], and this is the portrait of the guy, and this is my Picasso.

DR. EHRLICH: This is on the cover of *New York* magazine. Tell me the story, why they were on the cover.

MR. PALMER: It was Christmastime; this was on La Cienega. The piece was in a case - a plastic case. To get into the case, you had to get a screwdriver and take out the screws. It was in the case with three Picassos, three bronzes. This is one of them.

DR. EHRLICH: This is a Picasso bronze that we're talking about that was in the case - a bronze.

[LP note: The Picasso bronze sculpture in question was a small standing nude, *Femme Debout* (*Standing Woman*) from 1945.]

MR. PALMER: And one Christmas, I left a few days early to go skiing. And I get a phone call from the young lady who was working here then; she said, Mr. Palmer, did you put the Picasso away for safekeeping? I said, I don't think so. She says, well, it isn't there.

DR. EHRLICH: [Laughs] Oops.

MR. PALMER: I said, do you think someone might have taken it? She says, no the case is screwed down. I [She] went back there and after 10 minutes on the telephone, she comes back; the screws are not in the case. She

says, I know who took it. I said, do you know his name? She said, no. The man with the trench coat, he came in twice. Once he came in, and he looked around. The second time he came in, he asked me to show him a picture, and I had to go to the back of the gallery to get the picture.

DR. EHRLICH: Oh.

MR. PALMER: And at that time, he took the Picasso and slipped it into his coat, which was designed specifically for stealing small sculpture. It had big pockets.

DR. EHRLICH: Wow.

MR. PALMER: Big, padded pockets. She says, he took it. I said, you have no clue as to his name or anything? No. I said, call the insurance company, call the police, and don't you leave - Christmas Eve - don't you leave until the police come. They came and they wrote it up - you know, the paperwork.

While they're writing up my case, the police get a phone call. A woman is screaming. He took my Rodin, she said; some crazy woman is yelling, hey, somebody took her Rodin. I said, I know who it is. If you're quick, you can catch him. It was Feingarten, Mrs. Feingarten. She had a gallery on Melrose, and this guy - same guy who stole from me, went down there and did the same thing - sent her to the back; while she was in the back, he took this Rodin hand she had, and put it in his coat, and walked out with - and she saw him do it. And she screamed at him, put that down. He said, don't come close - threatened her, so she didn't; she called the police.

And she said, wait a minute - I have a clue. He left a phone number, because it was Saturday, and I had to open the gallery for him out of hours. The police called the number, and they went down there to a little house in Culver City.

And there was a lady there, who lives there, and the police said to her - I'm imagining the conversation -the police said to her, you have a husband or someone who is stealing sculpture? And she says, absolutely not. And they said, well, we have proof that your phone was used. My phone? Yes, this phone was used to steal a Rodin sculpture. We have proof now that you were involved. She says, I was not involved; I don't do anything with sculpture. Wait a minute; we have a houseguest. They had a houseguest, but he didn't bring any sculpture home. And where does he live? He lives in Philadelphia. You have his phone number or his address? Oh, sure, he's a friend of the family.

So they got his phone number, and they staked out his house in Philadelphia - the Philadelphia police. And they found he had 170 pieces; that's what this story is about.

DR. EHRLICH: And it looks like your Picasso is about, half a foot, eight inches?

MR. PALMER: Yes, it's this big.

DR. EHRLICH: About a foot high.

MR. PALMER: And they caught him. He was a doctor.

DR. EHRLICH: A physician?

MR. PALMER: And he collected art that way. And the police said - if you're talking about that little Picasso, it's right by his bed. I said, I'm honored. It's right by his head. [Laughs.]

DR. EHRLICH: Frank Waxman.

MR. PALMER: That's the guy.

DR. EHRLICH: Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania.

MR. PALMER: He was O.D. [Doctor of Optometry], he wasn't a regular M.D. At least that's a little better; I don't know. He had some cock-and-bull story about why he did it. His uncle was the district attorney for the city of Philadelphia, so he was familiar with the ins and outs of theft.

DR. EHRLICH: Here they have your piece - Picasso's seven-inch-high Standing Woman, as it's titled, was taken from the Herbert Palmer Gallery in December 1981. So right at Christmastime.

MR. PALMER: Oh, now you've got the date.

DR. EHRLICH: That's right. But he took a lot of other work, too, I see.

MR. PALMER: Oh.

DR. EHRLICH: A Joseph Cornell, a Jasper Johns.

MR. PALMER: Friends of the Philadelphia Museum [See New York magazine article] came to his apartment, where he lived. He lived in a very famous neighborhood in Philadelphia [Rittenhouse Square]. I forget the name of it. And he lived very well, but when the Friends of the Museum came, no dealers were allowed to come and see his collection.

DR. EHRLICH: Because he'd stolen them all. [Laughs.]

MR. PALMER: He didn't sell the stuff; he kept it all.

DR. EHRLICH: Just kept it.

MR. PALMER: He was a real nut.

DR. EHRLICH: They list a number of other galleries -

MR. PALMER: So the trial was held a couple of years later in L.A., and we had to go and testify. We all had to tell our story to the court, and he was put away for I don't know how many months, and given some sentence for therapy - psychotherapy - and our insurance company paid me for the piece, but then they wanted their money back.

DR. EHRLICH: When you got the piece back.

MR. PALMER: When I got the piece back. So I had to give the insurance company the money back.

DR. EHRLICH: Sure.

MR. PALMER: And in the meantime, the piece had improved in price, so it was no problem for me. So that's the story of my stolen Picasso.

DR. EHRLICH: Well, Jim Corcoran here in Los Angeles had - James Corcoran had a Joseph Cornell taken, as well. They're showing that, and Blum Helman [Gallery] had a Jasper Johns that was taken by him.

MR. PALMER: Oh, yes.

DR. EHRLICH: And is it Ernest Trova, from the Pace Gallery -

MR. PALMER: Yes, Trova, he deserves to be stolen.

DR. EHRLICH: But a Henry Moore? From the Rosenberg galleries, and a Louise Nevelson from the Hoken Gallery [Chicago, Illinois]. So it looks like this doctor was all over in major cities.

MR. PALMER: And maybe by the same guy.

DR. EHRLICH: Yes, they all were by this "collector."

MR. PALMER: Oh, it's all in that article. There's a copy of it.

DR. EHRLICH: Okay, great.

MR. PALMER: That's my only copy, proof, in color.

DR. EHRLICH: That it happened.

MR. PALMER: How a quiet doctor squirreled away millions. [Laughs.] He was a squirrel all right.

[Audio break.]

MS. EHLRICH: This is Susan Ehrlich, interviewing Herbert Palmer at the Herbert Palmer Gallery on Melrose Avenue, in West Hollywood, California, on December 22, 2004, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is session two, [mini] disk four.

Herbert, we were talking about exhibitions at your gallery on La Cienega Boulevard in Los Angeles. You also showed Jose de Rivera, "Constructions," in 1989. Tell us about that.

MR. PALMER: Right. The show came from Chicago. [LP note: The Palmer Gallery collaborated with Richard Gray Gallery in Chicago, who was handling the work of de Rivera at the time.] Rivera was dead, and his son was arranging exhibitions. And that's where we got a collection. We showed, maybe, 20 pieces. It was a straightforward exhibition, nothing unusual. The leaf objects had bright colors in them, orange and yellow. They were leaves, and they were wire sculpture with polished brass or polished chrome - very handsome exhibition. We did well.

DR. EHRLICH: A popular exhibition? You had a show of Alexander Calder, as well, in 1984 ["Gouaches and Mobiles"].

MR. PALMER: Yes.

DR. EHRLICH: How did that come about?

MR. PALMER: Nineteen eighty-four was the year of the Olympics in Los Angeles, so we thought we'd have to put up something very good. And we gathered Calders from all over the country - mobiles, stabiles, everything - we had little ones, all sizes. It was a great show, just Calders. We also had gouaches by Calder. I think we had six gouaches at that time. Yes, but the rest were mobiles. We didn't have Calder; he wasn't alive then; otherwise we would have had him out here. But we were able to get Calders in Paris and in New York.

DR. EHRLICH: Through galleries there?

MR. PALMER: And people here who had Calders. It was a typical, good show.

DR. EHRLICH: You showed Norman Bluhm, as well, in 1985 ["Paintings"].

MR. PALMER: Oh, yes. Norman Bluhm. I asked Norman. These were gigantic pictures. He didn't want to show any small ones. I said, they're not saleable. He said, I don't care. He said, are you going to show my work? Then I'll have to tell you what to show. He was a tough guy. Norman actually was a World War II pilot, and his inspiration comes from flying - clouds. And that was very interesting - beautiful, big cloud forms. And that was his show, nothing unusual about it, no mystery. But he was the toughest artist I ever showed. He wanted to have something to say about everything. His work is very poetic - nothing to do with being tough or the war - nothing about the war. It was just the beauty of flying in the clouds; that's his show. Good man, good painter, but he's gone now.

DR. EHRLICH: He was tough in what ways?

MR. PALMER: As a person, he was tough. Maybe he'd behaved like a soldier, like a pilot; I don't know why.

DR. EHRLICH: He wanted to pilot your exhibition with his work?

MR. PALMER: He never got rid of that complex.

DR. EHRLICH: Did he come out for the show?

MR. PALMER: Oh, yes, he came out. He was very hesitant about showing with us because he didn't think we could show big pictures. But in the end, he did. He gave in. He was a good painter. He'll get a little more recognition posthumously.

[LP note: Meredith and Herbert organized a poetry reading during the time of Norman Bluhm's show with the young, talented critic and poet John Yau and with the noted poet and critic John Ashberry. Both were friends of Norman Bluhm from New York and great admirers of his work.]

DR. EHRLICH: You showed works by Christo, as well, the drawings of Christo?

MR. PALMER: Christo, oh, yes.

DR. EHRLICH: And how did that go?

MR. PALMER: We showed it at the same time as the *Umbrellas*.

DR. EHRLICH: So this was in the 1990s.

MR. PALMER: We had a lot of publicity. We had a gallery full of his work, all projects for things he's accomplished and for things for the future. We had examples of the *Yellow Umbrellas*, the *Blue Umbrellas*, the cliffs of Australia, buildings all over, the bridge in Paris -

DR. EHRLICH: The *Pont Neuf*.

MR. PALMER: *The Reichstag*, we had all that. A very good show.

DR. EHRLICH: How was it to work with him and his wife, Jeanne-Claude?

MR. PALMER: You don't work with Christo; you work with his wife.

DR. EHRLICH: Okay.

MR. PALMER: She runs everything, Claude. But we didn't have any trouble with them, because we gathered all our art from different sources - private collections. Yes, that was a good show. Then we had two great Japanese shows. Two? Three - three Japanese shows. I think we were the first to show Japanese contemporary art of the 1980s in America - certainly in Los Angeles, and we specialized in painters from Kyoto.

DR. EHRLICH: You had an exhibition in 1985 and 1986, the winter - December '85 to '86 - Soichi Ida and - Shinohara.

MR. PALMER: Yes, that's one of the Japanese shows.

DR. EHRLICH: Right.

MR. PALMER: Right, Ida.

DR. EHRLICH: And you had a number of shows of Soichi Ida and other Japanese artists in the '80s.

MR. PALMER: Well, we included him in lots of shows.

DR. EHRLICH: And how did that do here in Los Angeles? How was that received here in Los Angeles?

MR. PALMER: It was too soon for Los Angeles. We had the Japanese newspapers write it up, Japanese Chamber of Commerce; we did everything we could to get some Japanese interest. But Japanese are not collectors, at least not in Los Angeles - Japanese. Maybe it's different in New York. In New York, they have the Japan Society, so they get a lot of action from them. But we showed Shoichi Ida and Ushio Shinohara, and we couldn't sell too many - not Los Angeles tastes.

DR. EHRLICH: Your daughter, Meredith, was involved with those shows?

MR. PALMER: Oh, yes, she got them together. She went over to Japan to select them. Yes, absolutely.

DR. EHRLICH.: And how did she become involved with Japanese art?

MR. PALMER: Because she liked the idea of traveling in Japan.

[LP note: Meredith was very involved in Asian art via her job with the U.S. State Department.]. After she graduated from Harvard, where she was the art editor for the *Harvard Crimson*, she joined the U.S. State Department and became the diplomat to exchange art between countries. She ran the first major art show that came from the People's Republic of China to the United States (the Chinese Archeological Exhibition, 1974-'75) and she was in charge of returning it to China after it traveled to the Nelson Gallery, Kansas City, Missouri, and the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, California. In 1981, while still a arts specialist in the Foreign Service, she managed the first American painting show in China since the 1940s which was organized by the Boston Museum of Fine Arts from their permanent collection of colonial works up through Color Field painting. She also managed exchanges with other countries in East Asia, including Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Korea and Japan, e.g. exhibitions of American artists such as Sam Francis, "Print Publishing in the United States" (works from ULAE workshop, Tamarind, Landfall Press, Crown Point Press, etc.) She has also spent time in Japan.]

DR. EHRLICH: Other exhibitions you've had - another one was with Peter Saul.

MR. PALMER: Oh, yes, we had a Saul exhibit. It was wild.

DR. EHRLICH: Tell me about it.

MR. PALMER: His stuff is historic, pseudo-historic pictures - figurative. But all with a satirical bite.

DR. EHRLICH: And what was it like working with him - with Peter Saul?

MR. PALMER: He was a person very much like Bluhm. He's a tough artist. He had his own opinions of a lot of things,;he's satirical. But that's all right, because, well, you can't expect all artists to be the same. Some of the

pictures were unmentionable, but I didn't censor the show. I showed whatever he wanted to show. But there was no pre-information, no pre-publicity to warn people what they would get from Peter Saul. He lives in Texas, in Austin. I think he teaches on the campus of the University of Texas. He came.

DR. EHRLICH: You've had a long relationship with Gordon Onslow Ford. You showed his works in group exhibitions and one-man shows. Tell us about him and, if you visited him, what that was like.

MR. PALMER: Gordon is an old friend. We've known him for 20 years, maybe more. He is part of the group called Dynaton - three artists, Mullican, Ford, and Wolfgang Paalen. He was completely wrapped up in his work. He thinks he was painting the 21st-century painting. He lives up in space. His paintings are all of space. They are the wonders of space, if you can conceive of yourself going through it. He invented symbols for planets and put them in his paintings. He wrote books about his paintings, constantly writing. I think he would have been a fine writer as well as a painter. He liked to write about his art. Gordon's greatest pictures are his surrealist pictures, which were done in the '40s. He used to live in Sausalito.

DR. EHRLICH: Inverness, California?

MR. PALMER: That's later.

DR. EHRLICH: Oh, okay.

MR. PALMER: That's the last place he lived. But he lived on a houseboat, and he was a well-known figure in art society in San Francisco area. Everybody knew him. His wife was a poet; she wrote poetry, and then he bought this piece of property in Inverness, California - beautiful piece of property. I think it was 300 acres, and it's a forest of bay leaf trees called California laurel. And as soon as you come close to his property, you can smell the bay leaves. It's like living inside a turkey. He had a trail that he took you on through his property. He also was very sensitive to the warnings that the Japanese were going to bomb everything, and he built shelters on his property, not for himself, for his paintings. He wanted them to survive. He had five houses full of paintings, and he had some paintings of Lee's [Mullican] and Paalen and a few other artists that he knew from his days in Europe.

He was trained as a midshipman, as a sailor. He jumped ship - biographies don't say that - he jumped ship and went to Paris and did his painting there for a while, then New York and then Mexico City. And Mexico City is where he met Lee Mullican and Wolfgang Paalen [1905-1959].

DR. EHRLICH: Paalen was in Mexico City. Lee Mullican he met later in San Francisco.

MR. PALMER: Gordon was the oldest [1912-2003] of the three. But Paalen committed suicide in the late '50s. It is said - I never researched it - but it is said, because his wife had a romance with Lee Mullican. Whether it's true or not, you're on your own. I really doubt it, but he died very young. He published a magazine called *Dyn*, D-Y-N, which has now been reprinted, so you can buy them all in one book. D-Y-N. Paalen believed that - he was Jungian - and he believed that the history of the race is wrapped up in the individual. He came from Austria, and he believed that when you exhibit your work, you should show its influence. In other words, if you collected pre-Columbian art, you should show the pre-Columbian art when you show your paintings. Or if you collected some other art, you have to show it. He believed in the transparency of history - a very brilliant man who would have been much more famous. He, too, was a writer, and most of his writings are in that magazine, D-Y-N. He did hundreds of drawings. In Mexico, he painted on Mexican parchment. His work is divided into two or three periods. Paalen lived a short life. Ford lived to be 92.

DR. EHRLICH: Right.

MR. PALMER: He had a kidney problem. He didn't want to go on a dialysis, so he just let it go. That killed him; he didn't have good medical care; neither did Lee Mullican. They both would be alive if they had decent medical care - too bad. Oh, all three were very talented people. Paalen philosophized about everything - wonderful thinker. Mullican's philosophy was based on his career in the army - he was with the signal corps, mapmaking - and his pictures are maps.

DR. EHRLICH: Mapmaking in the Second World War

MR. PALMER: A big influence on Mullican - dividing up the spaces as you see it from the air. That was Mullican. They were very faithful to each other - those three artists. And Pepperdine [University, Malibu, CA] had a show put on by Ms. Halpern.

DR. EHRLICH: Nora Halpern.

MR. PALMER: Nora, yes. She put on a show showing the best of each artist - of all three. I don't know where Nora

is now. She went to England for a while.

DR. EHRLICH: With her husband Kerry Brougher. She may be in Washington, D.C. Kerry Brougher is now in Washington, D.C. Tell us about Gordon's space there in Inverness.

MR. PALMER: In Inverness. Well, he had all these studios, and he had a staff, and he ran it very efficiently. Everyone was assigned jobs in the office building. He lived in a small cottage surrounded by Mexican - things he did when he lived in Mexico that he found - part of his collection is still up in Inverness, I think. He gave all his land to the Nature Foundation, and he gave all his paintings to the Lucid Art Foundation - at least that was in his will.

DR. EHRLICH: We can move on into the 21st century, where you are now here in West Hollywood on Melrose Avenue, and you have been a frequent participant in the "Los Angeles Art Show." You have been a member of a number of art dealers' associations; you were on the board -

MR. PALMER: The Art Dealers Association.

DR. EHRLICH: So tell us about that, your involvement with the Art Dealers Association.

MR. PALMER: It's a small organization organized, I think, by Ben Horowitz, originally. And its members are all art dealers, and they hold educational meetings three, four times a year to improve the status of art in the community. It's a well-meaning, but not influential group. I'm on the board, and there are I think four or five members of the board, and we try to help it grow, but it's not easy.

DR. EHRLICH: This is the Art Dealers Association of California.

MR. PALMER: Right. I'm also a member of the College Art Association, and also the American Museum Association, and I go to meetings once in a while of those associations.

DR. EHRLICH: And you've been an active participant in the "Los Angeles International" or "Los Angeles Art Shows" for the past several years. And those are gatherings of dealers, too.

MR. PALMER: I participated in the big shows they held at the Convention Center years ago.

DR. EHRLICH: At the Los Angeles Convention Center.

MR. PALMER: And I show now with the L.A. Art Group in L.A., each time it meets every October at the airport.

DR. EHRLICH: At the Santa Monica Airport.

MR. PALMER: It used to be L.A. Right. And I exhibit there, a cross-section of the work of the artists I represent. Right.

DR. EHRLICH: And what have you found most gratifying about this business, about being an art dealer?

MR. PALMER: I like discovering art, old and new. The chase is exciting - finding rare pictures and buying them or getting consignments. I like meeting artists. My goal is to weed out the imitators and just show people with something original to say, and that's fun. I should write more, but I don't - too busy living with the mundane tasks of owning a house. I have a house with nine redwood trees, which are now, in the 50 years we've lived there, big trees.

[Audio break.]

DR. EHRLICH: You were speaking about your house with big redwood trees. And caring for the gallery is time-consuming, as well, I imagine.

MR. PALMER: We originally thought we would have exhibits at the house, but we never did.

DR. EHRLICH: And what do you find most disappointing? What do you find is the downside of this business?

MR. PALMER: The downside in California is it's a very small town. There have only been a half a dozen serious collectors in this city, as compared with New York, which has hundreds. In New York people are very serious about collecting and they're serious about supporting their museums, and we don't have that civic pressure in California. That's a disappointment. It's not a downside; it's a disappointment, which I suppose becomes a challenge.

DR. EHRLICH: Have you seen changes in recent years?

MR. PALMER: Yes, new people come along, and they always want to do something new. But it hasn't materialized. Usually, if they're young enough, art dealers are drawn away from Los Angeles. They end up in New York, which is the center, or London, or Paris. Those are centers of art. The critics keep writing about Los Angeles being this center of art, which is proof that it isn't. They're hopeful, then, they would become more important critics.

DR. EHRLICH: So you still find -

MR. PALMER: What do you want to be the center for? I don't know. I like the Getty. It is doing some nice things. That's a wonderful thing for Los Angeles. But people are not using it to the extent other cities would use it, if the Getty were in different cities. But they do - their research program is good. They do research on a lot of wonderful topics, and they're worth attending - their research meetings. So the Getty has made an influential change in Los Angeles. Even though their interest is Old Masters, their research is in more contemporary. Of course, the younger people are doing the research, and young people tend to be interested in their own culture.

DR. EHRLICH: What about your own sales? Your own sales of the gallery, collectors here in Los Angeles with whom you've had associations? Tell us about people who have collected - collectors who have bought from you. You had mentioned a few of them.

MR. PALMER: Well, we have had a number of collectors over the years - some came from Europe, brought over with them the European influence, which is very strongly to collect art. We helped people like Billy Wilder build a collection. Tony Curtis started to become a collector for a while, until he decided that art is such an easy thing, he was going to become an artist and he began to paint himself. He copied Joseph Cornell. There are some producers who do collecting, like Mr. Gene Corman.

[LP note: The gallery has sold to a number of serious collectors. To name a few: Claire Booth Luce; Dominique de Menil; Billy Wilder; Betty Freeman; Marsha and Fred Weisman; Ed and Bill Janss; Dr. and Mrs. Judd Marmor; Gregory Peck; Donald Winston; Phil and Bea Gersh; and many Chicago collectors. A few of the museums: LA County; the British Museum; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden; Pasadena Museum; and several museums in Japan.]

DR. EHRLICH: You had mentioned Robert Halff.

MR. PALMER: Yes, he was a client of ours. He was influenced by his Minneapolis family - who were big collectors in Minneapolis and in Texas. He has a brother, or a cousin; I forget. He's a good collector of contemporary art. Unfortunately, he has a size problem. He thinks that if a picture is big, that he shouldn't buy it - only little pictures. It holds him back a little. But we sold him a number of pictures. He wouldn't admit it - he wants to make it look like he found all that stuff himself. That's ego, but that's all right. We don't inquire into the motivation of the collector.

[LP note: Halff did buy a large painting from Herbert Palmer, a Franz Kline, *Herald*, 1953, which he sold in the 1980s to S.I. Newhouse, who paid at least $1 million. He purchased it from the Palmer Gallery in the 1960s for less than $5,000.]

David Bright was a good collector, but he died young. His wife, Dolly, is still a client of mine. People are influenced by other agents who collect art. But the others are strictly collecting names - Picasso, that's a big name. Miró, that's a big name. Pick a new artist, no; they haven't got the confidence in themselves, in their own taste. That is why they need good advice from dealers.

DR. EHRLICH: What advice would you give to someone starting out in this business? What advice would you give them?

MR. PALMER: You have to start by having a knowledge of art history. If you don't have that, you have nothing. Otherwise, you have your taste, and everybody has taste, good and bad, but everyone has taste. We used to have a critic on the newspaper who I asked, what is the process you go through when you review a show? He said, I stand in front of the pictures and see how it affects me. [Laughs.] He's not a critic anymore.

We had a critic at the *L.A. Times*. He died young, too. He was the critic 10 years ago, Henry Seldis. He was very able. He went to college, studied art history.

DR. EHRLICH: So you'd say to a would-be art dealer, study art history.

MR. PALMER: Oh, yes. I think that is what the Getty should do - should develop the field of criticism, so that it reaches the public level, and give grants to people who study criticism. And that will enter the critical world. The daily critical, the books, the magazines - I think a new person should read all the art magazines. You'll see the ones that are influenced by the advertising and those that are influenced by history. Go to as many shows as

you can, and keep reading art history yourself.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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