



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

**Oral history interview with Richard Gray, 2007  
Dec. 9**

**Funding for this interview provided by The Art Dealers Association of America. Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National Park Service.**

**Contact Information**

Reference Department  
Archives of American Art  
Smithsonian Institution  
Washington, D.C. 20560  
[www.aaa.si.edu/askus](http://www.aaa.si.edu/askus)

# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Richard Gray on December 9, 2007. The interview took place at the Carlyle Hotel in New York City, New York, and was conducted by James McElhinney for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Funding for this interview was provided by a grant from the Art Dealers Association of America.

Richard Gray and James McElhinney 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

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Good morning.

RICHARD GRAY: Good morning.

MR. MCELHINNEY: This is James McElhinney, speaking with Richard Gray on December 9 [ , 2007] at the Carlyle Hotel, 35 East 76th Street in New York. I've recently learned that the address has been changed to Madison at 76th Street. Is that correct?

MR. GRAY: That's what it says on the pad here.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Okay. Good. Well, now, hopefully we've got all kinds of technology working for us, so we should have success with this conversation surviving.

MR. GRAY: I'm sure we will. I'm confident.

[McElhinney laughs.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: I'm interviewing Mr. Gray for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

How are you today?

MR. GRAY: I'm feeling pretty good, actually.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Good. Nice to see you.

Where were you born and -

MR. GRAY: I was born in Chicago.

MR. MCELHINNEY: In Chicago, Illinois.

MR. GRAY: On December 30, 1928.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Wow.

MR. GRAY: In a little hospital called the Woodlawn Hospital, which was located about two blocks

south of the University of Chicago campus.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So is that also Hyde Park? Is that the neighborhood?

MR. GRAY: That's Hyde Park, yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's Hyde Park.

MR. GRAY: Right on the edge. Actually, I think where the hospital was, was actually just outside of Hyde Park, Woodlawn; called Woodlawn, yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: How did you first come into contact with art? With the world of art and culture?

MR. GRAY: How did I come in contact with it? Well, I have to say - I was just having a conversation with someone else about that very subject the other day. People have often asked me - I'm sure everybody in our field - you know, how did you get interested in art, and the answers that I think I used to give them probably had to do with the fact that I became conscious of my interest in art when I was in high school, actually.

I was going to high school in Chicago at Hyde Park High School, a public school in Chicago. My parents and our family had just returned to Chicago after having lived in Florida for three years. My father had temporarily retired, and decided to go back to work. We moved back to Chicago and moved into Hyde Park, having lived in South Shore before that, where I had started high school. And then I spent three years in high school in Miami Beach. And we moved to Chicago and I went to Hyde Park High School, because the requirements for graduation in those days from a public high school in Chicago were that you must have one full year of music and one full year of art. Now, in public schools these days, of course, they don't even offer classes in art or music in most cases.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yes, more is the pity.

MR. GRAY: Either, right. But because I had to complete a year and I'd already been in high school three and a half years, I had to actually stay in high school an extra semester to take these music courses and art courses. And in the course of taking one of the visual arts courses, the teacher I had, whom I can remember well, although I have no recollection what her name was, seemed to single me out. I had no idea why at the time. But we had to make art, you know, in the class. And she seemed to observe that I had an eye, a certain facility in the visual arts. So when she pointed this out to me and suggested that I even maybe consider taking weekend courses and stuff down at the Art Institute in Chicago, it was the first time anybody had ever suggested to me or made me personally aware of the fact that I had an interest in art.

Okay, but what I started out to tell you was that - the question you asked me was when I first came in contact with art, and I guess I've given you the answer to that question. I mean, later on, I came to start thinking about my own youth and realized that it had more to do with my interest in collecting than it did in interest in art, per se. So I think that's about it. Just really it was in high school that I became really conscious of it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I remember you told me before that your dad was an avid collector of opera recordings or something.

MR. GRAY: Recordings in general. Mostly classical - some semi-classical but primarily classical music, yes. Recordings, discs, even going back to metal discs -

MR. MCELHINNEY: Wow.

MR. GRAY: - and things like that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So your household was one that was full of music, at least, and -

MR. GRAY: Full of music, at least, and that's well said, because it was not full of art. There was not a particular interest in any other members of my families, either my immediate members or my parents, in the visual arts.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Were your parents and siblings big readers? Were they very -

MR. GRAY: Not especially. My father was an immigrant, as a child, came to the United States uneducated. You know, he went to night school after he got here. He came over when he was 12. My mother was a high school graduate who was born and raised in Chicago, but it was not an especially cultured household. They were not especially well educated.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But they had an enthusiasm for things of beauty and -

MR. GRAY: Going back to the situation of my father. My father was, you know, born and raised, up until the time he came to this country, as I said, when he was 12 years of age, in Russo, Poland, the border area there. His father was a manager for - I don't know - aristocrats, I guess you might say, of timberlands. He was Jewish, and as Jews often were put to work working for other people because they were presumed to have a certain level of intellect and capability in managing things.

He had a job managing. So he used to take my father with him when he went to work often. So my father grew up, when he came to this country, with the knowledge and with having had the experience as a youth of being in an environment that was somewhat aristocratic, got into the homes of aristocrats, got into their gardens. So he developed a kind of instinct for things of some beauty, I guess you would say that, whether it was garden sculpture or paintings and Victorian art, furniture, stuff like that.

And that was something that manifested itself a lot as he developed in this country. So he did do a certain amount of collecting from a point of view. And he went to antique stores a lot, and he went to public auctions, and he acquired a certain amount of decorative stuff. Let me put it that way. So I guess there was that instinct on his part. And he used to tell me, actually, now that I'm thinking about it now, he said that I was named after, I think, an uncle of his. It was an uncle or a grandparent. I think, pretty sure, it was an uncle, who was, in fact, a sculptor and who spent his lifetime, as he used to describe it, lying on his back on scaffold and painting and carving on ceilings in churches in Russia and Poland. So I guess there is a background there.

MR. MCELHINNEY: There's an art gene there somewhere.

MR. GRAY: Something somewhere.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So what kind of courses did you take at the Art Institute of Chicago?

MR. GRAY: I didn't go.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, you didn't go to the school.

MR. GRAY: I didn't go. No, it was recommended, but for one reason or other - I don't have any

recollection - I never actually went. I went to visit on occasion, I remember, but I never did take courses there.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So how do you begin to pursue an interest in art as a collector, as a connoisseur?

MR. GRAY: When I got out of high school, I went to the University of Illinois, which had then just started a new campus in Chicago out on Navy Pier. And I matriculated into the field of engineering, because I thought I would have - I mean, this was just as a freshman, of course. I didn't know what that meant, really. But because I assumed that when I grew up and I got out of school, I was going to work for my father, who, by the way, was in the construction business. Construction and construction-related services; demolition and things like that.

And I only went one semester there and then decided to go to the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana, where they were headquartered. I went down there, and I shifted when I got down there from an engineering track into architecture. I matriculated into the school of architecture. And the coursework in architecture then, and I suppose still now, included quite a number of studio art-related courses. I mean, architecture, which was partially art history and applied art courses, which seems appropriate - you know, you learn drafting, of course, but you also learn to work with other media, painting media, watercolors, and things of that type. And we had regular courses in - I think, at least a couple of years, I had a constant string of those courses. And then while taking those courses, I manifested some skill here again, now several years after high school.

And I entered a competition, a visual arts competition, which was for mostly people in the fine arts division, but I was one of the few people from the architecture school. And I put a couple paintings, works on paper, into the exhibition and won an award. So that was the first, really, relatively serious indication to me that I, you know, had a particular skill and talent in that area.

And following on that, you know, over the years, I was developing an interest in visual arts, and I would go to art shows, street fairs, and every opportunity, you know, to look at things visual.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So did you have anyone in particular who was a mentor or - you spoke about your high school teacher, who encouraged an interest in art but when you were at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, was there a mentor or person who sort of advised you?

MR. GRAY: Yes, that's right. You were reminding me now, and this is coincidental. And I don't know if I told you the last time we talked or not. There was a young man who - he was older than I was. He was a GI who had come back from the war and had matriculated into the University of Illinois, and he was in the school of fine art. Now, I don't remember to this day, I don't remember. Maybe he was even a teaching assistant or something in the school of architecture, but I got to know him. We became friends, and he became, without any question, a kind of mentor, because I can remember specifically him giving me one particular - I remember it very clearly, now that it comes back to me - one particular lesson, actually.

I think the first quarter - I think they had the quarter system, I'm not sure, or the first semester I was there and I was taking this course in casein painting or whatever you call it; not casein but anyway, a water-based painting - paintings on paper. We worked on paper, and we would get marked or judged on the basis of some individual works, and then at the end of the grading period, we'd get marked on the body of the work. Well, the first couple of times that I got some criticism directed towards me by the person who was conducting the class, I got sort of mediocre response to what I

was doing. And we were doing still lifes, I think, if I remember, at the time, setups in the studios and working on them.

And I think I'd gone through two or three grades and they were of a mediocre nature, and one night I was sitting and talking with this fellow, whose name now escapes me, and he said, let me see what you're doing. I told him I had some apprehension, and I didn't know if I was going to get a very good grade, but the teacher didn't seem to like what I was doing too well. And he said, okay, you know, pin this piece of paper up on the board, get your brushes out, get your paint out, and now here's a little still life. Now go ahead.

So I started doing what I had been doing in class, and I started to draw what I was going to paint, and he said, put down the pencil. Stop the drawing. Look at it directly and put a brush in your hand. And I got out a little bitty fine-haired brush, and I was about to put it in the paint, and he said, no, no, no. Put that aside. See that one over there, that brush there? And remember saying, yes, that's what I use to wet the paper with. He says, I don't want you to wet the paper. I want you to use that one to paint with. And it was quite a big - I think we call it a number 12 or something like that, a big brush. And he put that in my hand, and he put his hand on my hand and he said, now just relax and go with it.

And he started to manipulate my hand. Put it in the water, put it in the pigment, and started to apply the paint in a much more direct, much quicker, much more - he says, don't think about it too much. Just, you know, keep your eye on what you're painting and - anyway, what he did is he broke me loose in a way, loosened me up. And after he had - and I don't think he had his hand on my hand for than two or three or four minutes, and he said, now, now, go ahead with that work.

And he walked away and he left me there, and I did a watercolor in about 15 minutes that used to take me an hour to do. And he said, well, what do you think? [Laughs] He came from around, and he looked at it, and I said, sure, that's kind of nice - [laughs] - or some such reaction. Turned it in, got a high grade, and that was the beginning of my activity in making art. And I supposed it had something to do with breaking my eye loose, too; I'm not sure.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, it's a good story because I think the lesson in - it's, as a teacher over the years, I've got to smile; it's one of the things that people always do. It's to try to get the student to see, you know, the big idea. So you have to start with the broad forms, the big shapes, the big directions, and composition, and not worry about - it's very counterintuitive, because everyone who, prior to training, prior to any kind of guidance, assumes - most people assume that it's about descriptive ability or something else, style. And really, at the end of the day, I find the most personal thing that artists do is compose a space, organize a space. And so it's a great lesson.

MR. GRAY: The guy I was talking about, by the way - I've got to tell you this. After the year was out, he graduated, I think, after that first year, went on to become - because I didn't see him then for several years - went on to become an employee of the Smithsonian [Institution] in Washington [D.C.] and eventually to become their chief exhibits planner.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh.

MR. GRAY: Yes, I wish I could remember his name, because I did see him off and on for a few years after that, when I would come to Washington.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So he was at the -

MR. GRAY: At the museum.

MR. MCELHINNEY: - at the SAAM [Smithsonian American Art Museum].

MR. GRAY: Yes, that's right, the main museum.

MR. MCELHINNEY: At the American Art Museum or at the National Gallery - no, I guess it would be the American Art -

MR. GRAY: No, the Smithsonian Institution Museum. Not the spin-offs.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. Okay. Well, they've changed, you know, the name a couple of times. The NCFA [National Collection of Fine Art] and now it's SAAM. So -

MR. GRAY: The old building. The old Castle, you know.

MR. MCELHINNEY: The old Castle. Okay.

MR. GRAY: I think so. I think that's my recollection of it anyway. I wish I could remember his name.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That will help scholars track him down. What years would he have been there at the Smithsonian?

MR. GRAY: I would have to say - when was I in college? Fifty, '48 -

MARY GRAY: Forty-seven.

MR. GRAY: Forty-seven was when I started college?

MRS. GRAY: Yes.

MR. GRAY: He would have been there about '49 or '50, and then I think he was there for 15 or 20 years. I think he retired.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Okay, so yes. Up until about 1970.

MR. GRAY: Do you remember his name, Mary, by the way?

MRS. GRAY: I don't ever remember hearing that story.

MR. GRAY: You don't? [Laughs.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: It's a great story.

MR. GRAY: I don't think I remembered it the last time we talked.

MR. MCELHINNEY: No, I don't think I do.

MR. GRAY: This is new. He was a tall slim guy. You know, obviously older than I was, because he'd already been in the service, and a very nice guy. We were really good friends; he lived in the suburbs of Washington somewhere. Wait, now I remember his name - Ben Lawless!

MR. MCELHINNEY: So did you have to do a turn in the military as well?

MR. GRAY: Yes, yes, subsequently, after I got out of college. Well, I didn't quite finish. I didn't graduate. I went into the air force, and I was only in it about a year or so, stationed first in this country in Newport News, Virginia, a short period of time. Was attached to a U.S. B-26 air wing, you know, light bomber wing. We went to Europe, and there was a war going on in Korea. As you know, most everybody was going off to Korea, and I thought I was going to wind up going there. Instead, they sent our whole outfit to France. I went on a USS *Hodges* troop ship. From New Jersey; I think it was Camp McCoy; I think is in New Jersey?

We went over there, landed on French soil on December 7, 1951, 10 years to the day of Pearl Harbor. We landed in Rochelle, on the coast of France, and then went down to Bordeaux, where there's an air base [Bordeaux-Merignac Air Base]. We were the first U.S. Air Force outfit to return to French soil following the Second World War. And I got - I was in the air police and I got a job - I was the only guy with an education at all, I think, in our whole outfit. I don't think anybody even graduated from high school. So even though I was a private, I worked myself up to staff sergeant in a few months' time. And I had a job of some considerable responsibility on the base, working directly for the colonel in charge, running the pass and identification office, which handled security on the base. And we dealt with all the French civilians who worked on the base and issued passes and - anyway, a variety of things, and I got to travel around quite a bit. And I got free rides on airplanes all over Europe. So I would go to Germany and various places. Sometimes on business and sometimes just for the fun of it, because I could almost write my own orders and then give them to my colonel, and he'd say, you're running this thing; you tell me what we need - he just signed off on most things.

So I had a chance to get around, and I spent quite a bit of time visiting. In Spain and in Germany, and, of course, around France. And we stayed, I think, not much more than four months, really, at that base. And then we moved up to a base north of Paris, Laon, L-A O-N [Laon-Couvron Air Base]. We stayed there another few months. I spent, again, a large part of my time mostly on air force business, but in Paris as well as in Frankfurt. And then in the following year, I finally got orders cut to send me home. I came home in July of 1952, back from - oh, what I forgot to say is that within two weeks after we had landed on French soil, our entire airplane contingent - pilots and engineers and all that - were shipped off to war. Off to Korea, right?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah, Korea.

MR. GRAY: And we were left - the rest of the base people were left to welcome, over time, people who had come over from the States as they rebuilt the wing. When it got completely rebuilt, that's when we went up to Laon. And that's when some of us were already being sent home. We didn't have to stay in the service too long in those days.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So your trips around Europe when you were overseas, you went to the museums and other historic and cultural sites?

MR. GRAY: Yeah, I remember driving to Paris - through or from Bordeaux into Spain. And this was at a time when there were almost no cars on the road anywhere, even in France. But in Spain, zero - carts - and I was driving a car. I had a car. [Laughs.] And I went to Barcelona to see the [Antoni] Gaudí's that I'd heard all about. And I went across the Pyrenees and down the coast into Barcelona, came across to Madrid, then up through Valladolid, and finally back across the border at San Sebastian, Spain - St. Jean de Luz is the crossing point - and back to - but this was a trip that took about a week or eight days. And on the road, there was almost no opportunity to get any gasoline. You're driving a car, but - so I can remember on a couple of occasions, going into little towns. There were almost no cars around, but there was a gas pump, would be a gas pump. And maybe the mayor or somebody had the keys, so it would take me hours sometimes to find somebody who



would sell me a little gas so I can go on a little further. It was a very interesting experience in my life.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Was that the first time you had traveled to Europe?

MR. GRAY: That was the first time I'd traveled to Europe; that's right. And then, after I came home, met this lady over here on a blind date within a couple of months after I got back in the States. This was in - when did we meet, Mary, in August?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, she's in the other room.

MR. GRAY: She's gone. We came back. I came back to the States, I think, in July, and I got out of the service, went home to Chicago. I had a series of dates, blind date. My sister and brother-in-law set me up with this woman I'm married to, to this day. We met, I think, probably within a month after I got back. So it would have been in September sometime. We were then engaged by Thanksgiving of that year. And the following March we got married, March of '53.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I think I recall you telling me that her parents were interested in the arts and actively engaged in -

MR. GRAY: Yeah, that was the next major incident of my getting seriously involved in the visual arts, because when I first got back - yeah, I went to work for my father; I did. It wasn't in the construction business, but that's another story. I think I might have told you something about that. But that was related to his interest in recording music.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, he had a business. He wanted to do some kind of -

MR. GRAY: He wanted to manufacture a device that he, together with an engineer, had developed for handling records in record stores. In those days, when you went out to buy a record, you walked into a record shop or a record counter at a department store, and they would hand you the disc. I'm talking about the days of the 78 [rpm] - we were just coming out of the 78 era. We were just into the beginning of the LP area. And records then were sold - were kept in the stores standing up straight in an envelope, not sealed up like years later.

And if you would come in and you wanted to buy a record or you wanted to hear it, they would hand you the record in the envelope, and you would take it, probably, and go into a booth. They would have a whole series of little booths, listening booths. And they would have a phonograph in there. And you'd take it out of the envelope, and you'd put it on the record player, and you'd pick up the tone arm and set it on it; you did your thing.

And what happened as often as not, of course, people handling all of these with their bare hands and things not being sealed in packages, records got damaged. And of course, you would listen, and you would like it or you wouldn't like it. And then you might return it to the guy behind the counter. He'd stick it back in the envelope and up on the shelf for the next guy to find. And very often, records got damaged. My father experienced that. He experienced many occasions when he wound up buying records. When he got home, he discovered they'd been damaged. And he had the idea that somebody could do better than that, and he put a guy to work. And they developed this machine.

And when I got out of the service, they had this machine where they had already applied for a patent. It was a machine that you could play a record and you couldn't damage it because there was no tone arm for you to get your hands on. It was all concealed. And you'd put - so we started to make these things, when I got out and sell them to people in the business - Lyon & Healy's in

Chicago, Schirmer's in New York, all the department stores and stuff.

I made these things for years; it was a machine where you would put the record on a turntable, but there was no tone arm. It was all concealed in the machine. You'd push a button, and the machine would close up and the tone arm would come out from a hidden compartment. And it would lower itself onto the record. And then, if you wanted to move the tone arm, you pushed a knob on the outside, which raised it off the record and then you could manipulate it. But you couldn't drag it across the record and do any harm with it.

Okay, so it worked. It was a thing. There was a business there. And I got out of the service, and I had a certain facility with things mechanical. And as a kid, I'd always been involved in fixing bicycles and electronic devices and making kits. There was a company called Heath Kit Company back in those days, made kits for all kinds of electronic radios and things. And I built a lot of that stuff in my youth, in my early teens. So it was sort of natural for me.

And by the way, I stayed in that business for over 10 years. Never did really wind up in my father's business; it was only after I got out of that business 10 years later that sort of I accidentally wound up in the art business. So really in between, here I was, I'd met this woman.

So the story about how I met my wife. As I said, she was a blind date that my sister and brother-in-law had set up. They had known the family, I guess, and knew they had this daughter who had just come back from graduating from Bryn Mawr [College, Philadelphia, PA]. She had just returned to Chicago, too. So the timing was kind of good. And I went to pick her up on the blind date, knowing little or nothing about her or her family or anything else, except that my sister said, I think this is somebody you'll like, from what we know. Her husband and she had some acquaintance with the sister of the woman I married.

And I ring the doorbell in the apartment where they live in the north side of Chicago. And when the door was opened, there was a young lady standing there much younger than the one I knew I was supposed to pick up for the blind date. This young girl was probably 14 or something like that, 15. It was Mary's younger sister. And she greeted me. She was expecting me, I guess. And she invited me into the apartment and says, you're here to see Mary. I said, yes. So she let me in the front door of the apartment, and then she said, I'll tell her you're here. And she walked off down the hall. And I was standing in the front hall. And as I started to look around, I saw something I'd never seen or experienced in my life.

I saw the residence of an obviously educated, cultured family. How could I tell that? Because on the wall just opposite me in the front door - and I knew enough about art and what was going on in the world. So I immediately recognized a few things on the wall. There was a Jackson Pollock on the wall. There was a [Fernand] Léger on another wall. There was a [Paul] Klee over there. And as I turned to look around the apartment, I see two big Steinway grand pianos in one corner, and there's a cello standing in another corner, and walls of books. And I was in a household that spoke to me in a way that I never had experienced before.

So that was the introduction, and then I think I told you about how the relatively short period of time after that we really clicked, and got engaged. And we got married. So I was introduced into this milieu. They were collectors, obviously. They had all this art. They were amateur musicians. My father-in-law played the cello. My mother-in-law played the piano. Their friends were all cultured people in the arts. The rest is history.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So they ran something of a salon, where people would come, and would they do

performances?

MR. GRAY: Yeah, to some extent that's right. They had chamber music. They played. I mean, that's what - they performed for themselves for the most part, every week. And when I came into the family, one night a week we'd always go to my in-laws' house, and there they would be with a couple of other advanced amateurs playing other instruments, and they would play chamber music. No question about it.

So my father-in-law was a jeweler; that's what he did for a living. Graduated the University of Chicago - but his father before him had been a jeweler, so he was a jeweler when I met the family, a jeweler whose own father, who was an immigrant, was in the silver business, more or less, in Chicago and jewelry. And after he had died, my father-in-law had taken over the business and turned it into much more of an upscale - what we call - they call the white goods business, dealing in diamonds and precious stones and stuff like that. And he had a shop in Chicago, which was the eminent - the preeminent jewelry shop in Chicago, with a branch for a while on Fifth Avenue, New York, and for a long time a store in Rodeo Drive in Los Angeles.

MR. MCELHINNEY: May I ask the name of the company?

MR. GRAY: Lackritz Jewelers, L-A-C-K-R-I-T-Z.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Lackritz Jewelers.

MR. GRAY: And it remained for a number of years after my father-in-law passed away, and then the store was closed up.

MR. MCELHINNEY: No younger members of the family interested in the jewelry business?

MR. GRAY: In the jewelry business, no. Not at all.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So, now we're in the early '60s, and you become involved in the art business. How does this occur?

MR. GRAY: Well, we skipped 10 years. Okay, I spent 10 years in this manufacturing business, that's right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah, that's with the recordings -

MR. GRAY: Bringing up a family. You know, we have three children. And we collected a little bit, but, I mean, very modestly, mostly from street art fairs and stuff like that. Although, because of my father-in-law's interest, we came to know - they were friendly with serious collectors in Chicago and a few of the dealers. And there were very few. The few that there were, they knew; they did business with. So we were sort of on the fringe of that milieu, although I never saw myself as being anything other than someone interested in the visual arts and collecting a little bit at a certain level, very minimal level; certainly had no notions of it at all as a profession.

But at the end of those 10 years or so, for an unrelated reason, I wound up selling off my business, liquidating my business, which was this business that I got involved with my father - the phonograph business and related devices that we made. And I got out of it primarily because my family - my own father's business - he already had passed on - had gotten into trouble. It was a business that all - I have six siblings. So we were a family of seven kids and the parents and a few hanger-on cousins and so forth. All were sort of dependent upon this construction business that my

father had built over the years.

He had started in 1920 or '21, I think. So this was now '60. So it's 40 years later. And it had got in serious difficulty; they got into doing some work they had no business doing. It's all a long story unto itself, and got in trouble. And so, this happened coincidentally with the time I was getting out of this business I'd been involved with for so long. I was sort of tired of - I was beginning to think about doing something else with my life, but not clear on what it was going to be.

And I had to be thrown into this family construction business on short notice, along with my youngest brother who was a lawyer - Harvard [University, Cambridge, MA] graduate. Both of my youngest brothers are Harvard-graduate lawyers in practice, separate practices. But my youngest one, for a whole host of reasons temporarily at the time, he set his law practice aside. And he and I, having been hanging free at the time, both jumped into this family business to try to see if we could pull it back together. And he is just now today just beginning to retire from that business. He never left. I left it within four or five months afterwards because I was not cut out for it; I wasn't interested in it.

And I had helped, together with my brother. We had found somebody new to run the business. We got new lawyers, got new accountants. Got a search firm to hire us a construction guy to run the business and actually stop the problems with it. And the business finally went on under my brother's management, my younger brother. And today, it's a big international construction company that operates all over the country.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And what's it called?

MR. GRAY: It's called Graycor. And its business - got a number of divisions - but its business is largely heavy commercial and heavy industrial. The steel industry and the power industry and oil industry - it does a lot of stuff. And it has a commercial division that builds shopping centers and stores all over the country and occasional high-rise construction here and there. As I said, it exists as the principal family members involved in the business today are my nephews; my youngest brother's two boys run the business. I still have an interest in the business, along with my brother. There are just the two of us. No other members of the family have any interest in it anymore. That's long since changed. And it's something I'm on the board of, so it's a side activity for me.

So how did I get in the art business is really what you want to know? So when this thing happened - and I don't mean to go into all the other details except to say that my father, who was very entrepreneurial and had a lot of interests - I mean, he was in the construction business, sure, but as I told you, he had this interest in recorded music and classical music. But he was also dabbled a lot in real estate. He would buy property and stuff like that, all this aside from his main thing.

And one of the things he had done in 1937 - I'm backing up a long ways - coming out of the Depression - where he was pretty hard hit with a very large family living in Chicago. He bought a piece of property up in Michigan, on the lake, two hours out of Chicago, which had been a farm, and even before that, prior to the turn of the century, around the early 1900s, it had been a little resort like. Most of the hotel that had been there had burned down back in the teens, was long gone. But there was the house there and a farmhouse, and it was being run kind of as a farm - some orchards, chickens, cows, a few of everything, a little family farm.

And he bought it as a place to take his family - me and all my siblings and all - in the summers with the notion in mind that if the Depression came back or something, that there would be a place where we could go as a family and we could raise our own food and we could be independent.

Okay, it was an idea to create some security. But among the things that he wanted to do to make it viable was he built some small cottages that he could rent out to other people, so there was a little source of income, too.

When he passed away in the early '60s, this resort called Sleepy Hollow had grown to over 100 units over the years; he kept adding to these cottages and was running it as a summer resort as a sideline for himself. When he passed away, he left the resort to my mother, of course. She was his heir, primary heir. And so their children, her children now, all gathered around about what we're going to do with this property he had up in Michigan, because he wasn't around to pay attention to it anymore. He had a hired manager who was only so-so, and it turned out had been losing money most every year since he built it. It was a hobby.

So to shorten the story quite a bit, we went through a whole process of trying to sell the place initially to cut off the losses and found out that it was practically unsalable, because it was fairly well rundown, too, by this time. And I had - at this moment - just gotten out of my own business. I had just been helping my younger brother straighten out the construction business. And I was the only one around who had the time to pay some attention to this resort to keep it from losing any more money than it was losing.

So I took it over with an understanding with the family that if I could get it back on its feet, that I could have maybe an opportunity to buy it from the family. We made an arrangement like that, and so I started to operate it. And within one year's time - this was the summer, I think, of '62 - within one year's time, I stopped the bleeding. I was able to do that mainly because I fired this guy who was running the place. And we ran it ourselves, me and my family. We all pitched in there.

And that first year that we started running it ourselves and we were on an even keel with it, in order to make the place a more attractive to an audience, I decided to exercise my prerogatives controlling the place and to do the things there that appealed to my interests in art and culture. So we started an arts program there. And we started having folk music concerts and chamber music concerts. And I had an artist-in-residence, a guy who came up there with his family to have their vacation. And he made his art there and did an exhibition there and did demonstrations for the guests who would come up. So a mini - what's the name of that place in upper New York State - a Chautauqua kind of thing.

We had artists come in, and, as I say, we took the old barn. There was a real barn there, where the cows and horses had been. And I cleared it out and turned it into a theater. Did a lot like that with it, and the artist-in-residence. Okay, so at the end of that summer - this is the summer of 1963 we're talking about - we had been running the resort. We had put it back on its feet. And I went back to thinking about what I was going to do really with my life, because that was no way of making a living really, running that resort.

And we're sitting around with this guy who was our artist-in-residence at the time, who became a friend and we spent a lot of time with.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And his name?

MR. GRAY: His name was Harry Bouras, who was both a painter and a sculptor and a highly intellectual guy, very well educated. He'd come from Buffalo, New York, actually, to come to Chicago. And in his portfolio was a regular radio show on WFMT in Chicago, which is our cultural radio station, even then. I forget what he called it. But anyway, he was a critic and commentator on art and culture in the city of Chicago. He was there for a long, long time, very good guy. And he wrote a

couple of books. Anyway, so he was the artist-in-residence that first year. And at the end of the summer, he said to me, when we were in conversation about what I was going to be doing in the fall, he said to me, well, why don't you open an art gallery, just sort of in passing. And the idea just touched a nerve, because I didn't have any other ideas exactly what I was going to do, even though I was looking into a couple of things. And the idea appealed to me.

So we went back to Chicago. And inside of two-weeks' time, I had rented a little space. I spent about a week of it going around visiting all the art dealers and the collectors that I'd gotten to know through my in-laws in the community, and talked to them about my crazy idea of my maybe opening an art gallery. Now, these were the days when in the city of Chicago, there wasn't a half a dozen galleries of any significance altogether in the city. And I knew the few people that there were. And some of them are still around. There was Allan Frumkin - well, he passed away now. But he was in Chicago, was in business then in Chicago, and a few other people.

So based on that suggestion and the notion that, well, this sounds like something I would enjoy. And I think I could do well at it. And Harry Bouras, I bought him an airline ticket, bought myself an airline ticket. We came to New York, visited with a couple of art people I knew. He introduced me to others, some artists, some dealers here in town. Alan Stone, one of the first people I met, and I met him on that first visit to New York. And I took \$25,000, which is how much I was going to devote to this lark of opening an art gallery. And I spent about half of it on art that first week, because I knew that I had to have art, and presumably by people that somebody has heard of or nobody is going to come to Richard Gray's gallery, because he's a complete unknown.

So, on that trip I bought three or four works of art, spending 10 or \$12,000 on it. It was a lot of money to spend on a few pieces of art in the early '60s.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Who did you buy?

MR. GRAY: I bought - the most important I wound up having bought was a [Willem] de Kooning work on paper, early '50s collage, about 30 inches high by 22 inches wide, from Allan Stone, and a 1930s early India ink drawing by [Arshile] Gorky, I bought. I bought a Léger from André Emmerich, whom I met in that first trip and who became a good friend and colleague over the years. And a couple other things, I don't know.

I met a few artists, and I went back to Chicago, and I opened up within a month's time, in October of - I think of '63 - I opened a gallery with these few pieces of art, sent out a mailing card with the names of the artists on it. And I had also agreed to show the work of a couple of unknown Chicago artists whose work I liked. And that's the way I got started, with the idea of, we'll see what happens. And I'll enjoy it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Where was your first gallery and what was it called?

MR. GRAY: It was called the Richard Gray Gallery. It was at 155 East Ontario Street, which is a half a block east of Michigan Avenue in Chicago, which the site of that - it was a three-flat - little three-flat building turned into galleries. B.C. Holland, Bud Holland, was in business already, had been in business two or three years at that point in Chicago, was in that building. And B.C. Holland, by the way, was a protégé of my father-in-law's. He had been in an entirely unrelated business himself. And through his relationship with my father-in-law, got interested in the visual arts and wound up going in business with, then, Noah Goldowsky, who was a New Yorker who was living in Chicago, married a Chicago girl, and had very good connections with the entire Ab Ex [Abstract Expressionist] people. Franz Kline was a very good friend of his. And they opened the gallery

together [Holland-Goldowsky Gallery]. So he was in this building - that's where his gallery was. He was on the ground floor. I rented a space on the second floor, tiny little room-and-a-half space. And I opened the gallery.

Bud helped me out a lot, let me have access to his mailing list. And as I say, I had a fair number of connections and was able to have a basis for starting a business.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So the office was the gallery; the gallery was the office.

MR. GRAY: It was everything. It was a room and a half with a few little racks in it and, you know, the walls.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Did you have a powder room down the hall?

MR. GRAY: Down the hall, down the hall, yes, somewhere else in the building. I guess there was one such facility. I don't even remember that part. [Laughs.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: One takes a look at the number of the galleries here, and some of the larger ones have the registrar's office and the preparators, shipping and handling; they build crates. You know, it's almost -

MR. GRAY: We have some of that ourselves now these days. But I had one employee, part-time, a woman who was a sort of volunteer. She was a friend. And when I would be out of town or traveling, which I did quite a bit right from the get-go - I decided I had to travel - I used to go to Los Angeles, and I came to New York regularly those first few years. And little by little, over the years, for most of the years, I had maybe two employees. And one was probably part-time. And that was it. And now we've got, I don't know, 15 or 18 or 20 people.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So what was the name of the woman who was your receptionist?

MR. GRAY: The first one, what was her name?

MRS. GRAY: Shirley.

MR. GRAY: Shirley Litt [sp], that's right. And she was a collector-type woman. The first real person I had working for me was probably a couple years later, and that was Barbara Lewis. And she worked for me probably for 15 years, until she retired and her husband retired and they moved out to California.

And over the years, I had a lot of young men who were assistants and various people. One assistant I had, she came to work for me in the early '70s as a young woman named - I just saw her. Oh, gosh, I just saw her the other day. She had just moved to Chicago with her husband, who was a professor at the University of Chicago. She came to work for me, worked for me for about four years. They moved back to Princeton [University, Princeton, NJ], where he was on the Institute for Advanced Study. Judith, Judith Kirschner by name. Then they moved back to Chicago, and when she came back to Chicago, she went to work for the Museum of Contemporary Art as a curator. And she taught for a long while at the Art Institute of Chicago. She's an art historian, by the way. I'd forgotten to mention that. But she had been my assistant; she'd been terrific for a long time.

And as we sit here today, she is the dean of art and architecture of the University of Illinois in Chicago.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, good. Yeah, that would be one of my next questions was were there any people from the early days or from the history of the gallery who have gone on to either open their own galleries or gone on to academic careers or worked in museums?

MR. GRAY: Yes, I am thinking of one other one, a young man who worked for me as a preparator or crate builder or handyman. His name was - came to New York at a certain point in time. He went to work for Leo Castelli, worked for him for a long time. He was his right-hand man. Mary?

MRS. GRAY: One more question.

MR. GRAY: Here's my memory. If I let her get away, I won't have anything to talk about.

MRS. GRAY: I sometimes sat in the gallery for you when you were away.

MR. GRAY: That's right. Oh, I forgot. That's right. Mary reminds me that she also -

MR. MCELHINNEY: Would not be a good thing to forget.

MR. GRAY: When she wasn't busy with her three kids. What's the name of the young man who worked for me in Chicago and then came to New York to work for Leo Castelli for a long time and then married Bill Rubin's daughter - no, Bill's brother's daughter.

MRS. GRAY: Morgan Spangle.

MR. GRAY: Morgan Spangle. There's one. He was only one of them, but he worked for a long time.

MRS. GRAY: What was the other young man, before Morgan, I think, that died?

MR. GRAY: Who has also had his own gallery down in - so many people went through the space over the years. A lot of them came here. A few of them wound up being dealers. That's still happening. I mean, we've still got people. We're the training ground.

[END MD 01 TR 01.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: So how long were you at the first location?

MR. GRAY: About a year and a half to two years. And then I moved onto Michigan Avenue into another building, having followed, actually, Allan Frumkin, who had also been on Ontario Street off Michigan, and I had moved onto Michigan Avenue. And he was in this building, 620 North Michigan Avenue, which was right adjacent to the then-Arts Club of Chicago, in a space that [Ludwig] Mies van der Rohe had completely remodeled and built, created for the Arts Club. They were there for years, and then we were neighbors. Our back doors opened up onto the same back hall.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And what kind of exhibitions were you having? Were you having mostly exhibitions of contemporary artists, or were they solo shows? Group shows? A combination?

MR. GRAY: A combination of all those things, yeah. It was a rather opportunistic kind of an operation. I certainly had a fairly strong sense of my own visual competence, my own eye. So I tended to show things that I liked, that I really felt strongly about, whether it was historical or contemporary things, so I had quite a variety of shows over the years. I just showed the work of the Color Field painters that I got involved with very early on. I got to meet Greenberg, what's his name.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Clement Greenberg.



MR. GRAY: Clement Greenberg, very early on. I spent quite a bit of time with him and got interested in Color Field Painters at the very earliest stage of the gallery. And I went beyond that or put that behind me after a few years, but early on, I showed the work of [Jules] Olitski and [Kenneth] Noland and [Morris] Louis; sold and showed their work. And then, as I say, I had developed a good relationship with a few dealers here in New York that used to feed materials of sorts. And I showed some of their artists, which I do to today, you know.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So [André] Emmerich was one?

MR. GRAY: André was certainly one of the first ones that I worked with on a fairly regular basis. Allan Stone, as I said, I don't think I ever showed any of his living artists but certainly bought a lot of material from him. And that was the Color Field stuff - I mean, Ab Ex things.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Abstract Expressionism. Yes, he had a large inventory of that for a -

MR. GRAY: Tremendous. As we know it from the recent auction, which I think we just scratched the surface of material he had; unbelievable. I visited him many times at his house up in Rye [NY].

MR. MCELHINNEY: So he was also a collector like you are a collector.

MR. GRAY: Oh, absolutely. Oh, no, not like me at all. No, he was a collector like no one else. [Laughs.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: Like no one else. But I'm saying that I think that a lot of dealers are not always collectors for -

MR. GRAY: A host of reasons.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yes, a host of reasons.

MR. GRAY: In the minds of a lot of people, it was an inappropriate thing for a dealer to be a collector.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Why?

MR. GRAY: Well, some people believe that they would wind up being competition for their own clients, that they weren't able to be focused on the interest of their clients, which they ought to be, if they were focused on, you know, stealing off the best for themselves. You and I know a whole lot of people who, I think, disproved that. Gene [Eugene] Thaw is one we were talking about before, and Bill [William] Acquavella is certainly another one. So some of the most significant, admirable collectors that ever existed were art dealers; Sydney Janis, a perfect example; Leo Castelli, I don't know. I think maybe the best dealers have always been collectors.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's quite a thing to say because I think, yeah -

MR. GRAY: I think there's probably some truth to that. I think dealers that don't collect at all - I'm trying to even think of, even today, a really first-rate, admirable dealer that isn't collecting. I guess you can't get out of the way. If you're going to be a good dealer, you're going to have feelings about works of art that are going to -

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, I won't name any names, but there have been some other people with whom I've had conversations who have told me that they were not collectors.

MR. GRAY: They flat out don't approve of it. [Laughs.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, perhaps there's a conflict of interest, but as an artist, it seems to me that one of the jobs every dealer has to embrace is to educate their clientele or to connect with their clientele as colleagues. And if you're asking someone to express the confidence they have in their taste via the acquisition of work of art, the expenditure of huge amounts of money, it seems like the dealer should be willing to walk that walk, too.

MR. GRAY: I think there is a distinction. The distinction is if you're a dealer in the business of representing the work of living artists, if you're in the primary market business, then I think absolutely, that's right. But if you're in the secondary market business and, you know -

MR. MCELHINNEY: Historical artwork, let's say.

MR. GRAY: Historical artwork or the works by artists who are no longer around or at least that you don't represent or maybe or two or three steps removed from, then it's a little different situation. And I think I feel it to some extent, even today, that I have become really much more a collector than I am a dealer.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's what you were saying.

MR. GRAY: Yes, and I see it with some of the people who are collectors and friends of mine over the years, some feeling that maybe what I'm doing, at least in the area that interests them, which is the secondary market material, that maybe I'm competing directly with them. It's a small - I don't know. It is what it is.

MR. MCELHINNEY: What was the most - well, I'll ask you just one more question about collecting. Do you ever buy shares in artwork?

MR. GRAY: Yes. Yes, that's very common; I'm sure you've discovered this in talking with other people. It's very common particularly, but not all exclusively, in the secondary market and especially in more recent years. I mean, it's been going on a long time at a certain level, but it's certainly much more common today, simply because of the price levels where certain works are. There are not a lot of dealers who've got that kind of wealth that they can really afford to buy most of the stuff they're dealing in.

My own experience is that for most of the earlier years, the most important things I dealt in, and did well in, let's say, there was no choice but to be able to go out and buy them. You couldn't get them on consignment. You couldn't borrow them, and so you had to be able to buy your material. As time has gone on now, though, as prices have escalated over many, many years, it has become increasingly difficult for any dealers to deal with a great deal that they can actually afford to own themselves. So you get involved in a lot more partnerships, or you get involved in getting things on consignment much more often than they used to; otherwise there's no access to the material. You can't afford to just to buy it outright.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, is it safe to assume that the works bought in shares are intended to be resold at some point and time?

MR. GRAY: Yes, oh, yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And that the works that you would acquire outright as a collector would be acquired outright as a collector.

MR. GRAY: Oh, as a collector, you don't buy in shares.

MR. MCELHINNEY: No, this would be a speculative investment in -

MR. GRAY: Richard Gray the dealer is not Richard Gray the collector. [Laughs.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: Understood.

MR. GRAY: There is a distinction. I mean, I wear different hats, but everybody, as I said, just about any dealer who is also a collector is really two people, for me.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It would also seem that by buying artwork in shares, a consortium of speculators, investors, would be able to control a larger inventory of a particular genre of artwork or a particular corner of the market. Is that true, do you think?

MR. GRAY: Yes, I think, only theoretically.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, okay.

MR. GRAY: As a practical matter, I don't think there's much of that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's not how it really works. It's a matter of opportunity. This piece becomes available; you want to buy into it.

MR. GRAY: Dealers are largely individualists.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's important.

MR. GRAY: They're not great on - it's important, it serves a purpose, but they're not great on cooperating really. You know, there is that context, you know, within which a certain relatively limited number of dealers do partnerships together. But, you know, it's the exception.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So the divorce lawyers like to sneak off and have lunch with each other, but not art dealers. Insider -

MR. GRAY: It's a small part of the activity, yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yes, okay. Well, I know that -

MR. GRAY: I mean, we have personal relationships with other art dealers, and on that level, I mean, I come to New York, you know; I live in Chicago after all. Okay, I have an apartment here and it's sort of a second home. There have been years when I've spent a lot of time here. I don't anymore. But when I come to New York, there are a few dealers that I have real good personal relationships, which doesn't necessarily line up directly with the business relationship.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Understood.

MR. GRAY: You know, so we'll have lunch together. Shoot the breeze and sometimes some business thing will come out of it and sometimes no, more often not.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So these deals with share acquisitions of artworks are not happening out on a golf course. It's somewhere over, you know, a table in a restaurant, or how do they occur? How do you -

MR. GRAY: Art dealers don't play golf so much. [Laughs.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's helpful to know for anyone who is aspiring, because you don't have to learn that sport. But how would one find an investment opportunity like that? Is it -

MR. GRAY: How would one find an investment? Oh, the kind where there's partnerships?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Where, you know, you buy, let's say, a share in a Rembrandt [van Rijn] painting or something.

MR. GRAY: I'll give you one example of something that happened to me, maybe five years ago. I became aware of a painting, a Léger painting that was going to come up in a secondary auction house in Europe - in Germany, actually. I don't even remember how I became aware of it because it isn't - although I stay in touch with a certain number of auction houses across the globe. I have for many years. I don't remember how I found out about this one. Maybe, I think I got a mailing from them or something like that. So I thought, wow, that is something I would know exactly what to do with it.

And I looked and I found out - I think I called on the telephone and found out what the estimate was on it, and it was expensive, but I thought at a level that was relatively reasonable, you know, anyway, but it was still not something I could go, at that point in time, to run off at sea. And the auction was coming up soon. So I called a colleague of mine in Paris. A friend, a guy I had done other kinds of things with, and I said, are you aware of such and such, huh huh huh huh, and he said no. He wasn't aware of it at all. I said, well, you know, I suggest you go to the effort of calling or getting your hands on it, and if you'll be interested in it, it will be easy for you to go to look at it. And if you look at it, let's try to buy it together. It's just that simple.

And I've got a client for it, by the way. You know, I'm bringing up so I got first dibs on having the sale of it if we succeed. And we did succeed. We bought it. He went to the sale. He looked at it. He examined it. We discussed it on the phone and we talked about value and so forth, and he did the bidding and we bought it. We bought it, you know, at a very reasonable price, and the picture was then shipped to us in Chicago, and with in a couple of months' time, I had the picture sold. We did extremely well on it, and we split it. You know, we had an understanding of we would split it.

So that was one example. But there's dozens others, you know, people here in town. I don't want to get into specifics, but there are people in town that I've done that with regularly for years and years and years. There's almost no time when I don't have some partnerships out there. I had a lot of partnerships with European dealers, I'll say for years, not just this guy in Paris but people like Ernst Beyeler, in Basel, Switzerland; I've been in a lot partnerships with him. We still own some pictures together, even though he's not very active and I'm not very active. One of these days, you know, willingly, it will get sold.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. GRAY: So it's part of the business.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So, have you ever had a collector-client of yours ask you or say or indicate that they would like a piece of the action sometime, like at, you know, if you want to - looking for somebody, you know, to buy in on a piece that's being acquired or, you know, that -

MR. GRAY: If you're asking me, have any private clients ever offered to -

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yes, I'm sorry.

MR. GRAY: - to invest in something that I might want to buy; yes, I've had them ask, but have I ever done it? Absolutely not.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Please explain why.

MR. GRAY: Because - and I think that anybody you talk to who is a real pro and has been around for awhile will tell you the same thing - because unless you have another dealer as your partner, who also has an equal opportunity of maybe getting access to a client, what you've got is a completely silent partner who is just putting up money, who can't help sell it, and who has a different interest. Your interests aren't aligned, and the interests have got to be aligned; otherwise, you'll get into a situation if the market softens up when you're into this thing together. Then what happens? What happens is you are the dealer. It's inventory. You got it. You know, you're used to that. You own the inventory, and if you have to sit with it two years instead of two months, you do that. But this guy who is the independent investor, you know, might get kind of antsy after awhile.

MR. MCELHINNEY: One would think.

MR. GRAY: He's got no way to liquidate, so he puts pressure on you. It's almost always a bad idea, and any real pro who has been through it a few times or maybe even has been tempted by that kind of a proposition - and I'm sure there's plenty of them out there; there's no question about it. In periods of the market like we're in now and we've been in before where there's a lot of - you know, where everybody thinks the sky is the limit and things will always go straight up and blah, blah, blah. There's plenty of younger dealers, less sophisticated, haven't been through the cycle, maybe two - and they'll be happy to accept somebody's money as a partner.

But I think knowledgeable, sophisticated dealers wouldn't get the money there. If they need money, I mean, they either have it or they borrow it from a bank or whatever it is. In a businesslike basis, they do that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you need to confine such practices to agreements with other people with whom you've got some kind of parity, and you're aligned in the same way, towards the same goal.

MR. GRAY: That's right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's interesting because with, you know, the revelations about some of the gallery woes here in the city and even auction house woes, the sort of Tennant-Taubman adventure, which Alfred Taubman [of Sotheby's auction house] went to prison and Anthony Tennant [of Christie's auction house] can't come to the United States anymore - well, maybe the statutes of limitations is almost up. [Referring to a price-fixing scheme between the two auction houses.] I don't know. But I think more scholars and artists are becoming aware of the practices of galleries and dealers that perhaps never before concerned them. They were not aware of them. And of course, you know, it's an extremely -

MR. GRAY: It's a business.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yes, it's a business.

MR. GRAY: And the world is full of businesses, much bigger businesses and more complex businesses all over the world. So these practices, they're nothing unique about them. Everybody in every other - whether it's in stocks and bonds or widgets, you know, there's various kinds of devices for greasing the wheels for making things happen.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So, rumors flying around about links between Hollywood and the gallery world or Broadway and the gallery world and money laundering and all of that is just sort of sensationalizing the -

MR. GRAY: Yes, yes, I think so.

MR. MCELHINNEY: - actual truth of it.

MR. GRAY: And you haven't asked about or you haven't yet touched on it, but I presume you're headed in this direction, is, you know, there's so much conversation today about the competition between the dealers and the auction houses.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, yes.

MR. GRAY: [Laughs] And a lot of people are taking positions. Well, you want to know what my positions are about all that?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Please.

MR. GRAY: You know what a lot of my colleagues' position is, I'm sure, because it's been widely published and so forth, and a lot of them talk about it. And they sit back in their chairs and they get very high and mighty about what is right and what is wrong, and that everything that the auction houses do is wrong and immoral and inappropriate, and everything the art dealers are doing is, you know, they're the underdog.

I don't believe in any of that. I think the relationship between the auction houses and dealers is one of being competitors of sorts, of course. But they're not just competitors; they are other business people. Their business has a little different - maybe more than a little different, but a different take/slant. They're involved in the art world, where there's a little different - but there's as much overlap as there is difference, and I think that's the free world. You know, this is a free country, and I think they're entitled to do it that way. They're entitled to act like a dealer if they want to act like a dealer. Nobody should say they can't make private deals if they want.

And it's fine; it's great, because there's nothing healthier in this world, or in any other business world, than competition. It's what keeps people straight. It's what encourages them to do well. It's what washes out the underperformers, you know. They have good, strong competition. And I just think it's a waste of time and energy and inappropriate to spend one's time complaining about the fact that the auction house are invading our territory. I don't hear it so much from the auction houses saying anything about the art dealers invading their territory. They seem to be - [telephone rings] - excuse me a minute.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Sure. Would you like me to pause?

MR. GRAY: For a second, please.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Why don't we do that?

[END MD 01 TR 02.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: I paused the recording so that Mr. Gray could take a phone call.

Could you repeat what you just said, because I think, you know, we were talking before about the

galleries complaining about competition from the auction houses. You were saying that you feel this is a free-market economy, and you know, whoever sells a picture helps everyone else who's trying to sell pictures, I guess.

MR. GRAY: Yes, that's exactly what I am confident about, and I feel strongly about, and I think it's just a waste of energy to devote oneself to knock the so-called competition, because, you know, your competition - all your fellow colleagues are your competition, too. Your competition are the jewelry stores; your competition is everybody out there, and nothing could be more appropriate or more healthy for you or for them.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Do you feel that whenever scandal attaches itself to the auction business or the gallery world the way it has recently, that that's injurious in any way to, you know, the business in general?

MR. GRAY: Yes, absolutely. I think that's obvious. But most of that is temporary; most of that's natural. You know, people tend to react to make people a little bit - they get a little nervous, a little gun-shy, a little bit suspicious, or whatever it is. But again, there's nothing unusual about that in any field, you know, and it doesn't even have to be something that happens just in your own backyard; it can be next door. So maybe the controversy that comes up is not in the art world, but it's in - [laughs] - I don't know what. Almost anywhere else, but it could be something that gives the market a jolt.

Okay, case in point recently: the meltdown in the subprime mortgage world, for certain, made an awful lot of people who are very active players in the art world uneasy and nervous and hesitate. And I wouldn't be at all surprised, because of the timing - I'm sure there's a connection, and we recently had the most recent series of auctions in New York - right, New York? And the first of the whole series of auctions was at Sotheby's, and it was the Impressionist-Modern sale. That was the first of two weeks of auctions. And it did badly; there were a lot of disappointments, and it made a lot of people uneasy. But why did it do badly? It did badly, I think, through a great extent - I mean, there was all kinds of explanations: it didn't have as good of material, blah blah blah; they had too many guarantees, all sorts attempts to explain it.

But part of the explanation, for sure, is the fact that we had just been hit with this boom or this bust or whatever you want to call it, this situation that happened in the subprime mortgage market, and a lot of people, at least for a little while, were uneasy and a little gun-shy, and probably went into that auction room and weren't quite as aggressive as they might have been otherwise, or decided, well, I'll wait and see what happens and this, you know, I don't know what. Which is part of the problem, by the way, with selling things at auction, because it's so dependent on timing, and you just never know; you know, an auction can happen at a certain point of time when something, bad news, just happens to come out, and that will affect what happens in the auction room. So that's one of the disadvantages and one of the things that dealers, you know, like to talk about, and they're right.

It's one of the things that makes the people in the auction house a little uneasy; they can't get past that. Once they've committed to a certain date and time, that auction's got to take place, snowstorms or no snowstorms. But if there's a big snowstorm, some people aren't going to get into that auction room or can't get to a telephone, and so they're not going to participate. So that can change the whole character of the auction. That's a risk.

But if there's - getting back to the original point - if there's a meltdown of some kind in the financial markets at a certain point of time, or even just a temporary piece of bad news that one - how about

bad news about a dealer, as we've had a few cases like that? That's not lost; you know, that has an effect on some people. So they're going to act differently that day or that week, and then they'll adjust to it; you know, another piece of bad news, okay, it's history, and then they'll go back to doing what they did before.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So let's talk a little bit about your gallery again. What would you say was the most successful exhibition you ever had, the one that would be, you know, the most memorable?

MR. GRAY: You mean, the one that got the most publicity? [Laughs.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: No, the one that you feel, for all reasons, was a huge success. You loved it; your clients loved it; Chicago loved it; the world loved it.

MR. GRAY: [Laughs] That's an interesting question. I never thought about that, actually.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, any examples out of the top 10 will do.

MR. GRAY: Well, okay. I mean, but notoriety would have to play some role in that, I suppose, in answering that.

Two shows that I did over the years that I was most proud of, I suppose, and in fact probably did as well as I'd ever done in sales. One was an exhibition of de Kooning's work, and the other was a [Pablo] Picasso exhibition. Now, obviously those are two very high-profile artists, and dollar signs were probably a lot bigger in connection with those shows; notoriety would automatically be greater when you got people with those reputations. But each of them had some particular characteristics to them which I view, and viewed, as making them stand out.

[Doorbell rings.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: It's okay, we can pause again. We're pausing again.

[END MD 01 TR 03.]

MR. GRAY: Pursuing this particular question, well, first of all, as I mentioned to you before, when I first went in business, one of the first artists of note that I had had a strong interest in - the first of things I bought for my inventory, one of the things was a de Kooning.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right, the work on paper.

MR. GRAY: A de Kooning, so my interest in de Kooning dates back to before I went into business, okay, and I was very much influenced by the fact that I had such strong feelings about de Kooning early on. So years later - now that was, mind you, 1963 - by the early '70s - so, seven, eight, nine years after I went in business, I had the occasion where I became involved in handling a particular de Kooning of great, great importance and great reputation at a time in the market when the market was relatively calm, certainly compared to anything we've seen all through the '80s or now and the turn of this century here.

And that picture was the picture *Woman V* [1952-53] by de Kooning, which had been in a collection in Chicago from the time it was painted and first sold by Sidney Janis. I had known the picture. These were the people who collected it and knew it, were actually neighbors of my father-in-law, who had his collection on a floor in the building. They lived on another floor and this picture was in the family. The man who had bought it had long since died. His widow, who had remarried, had the



picture in her home, and at a certain point in time, the notion - and I didn't originate it; I didn't, you know, go after the picture particularly, although I knew the woman quite well. And actually had probably sold a couple things for her out of her collection.

Her second husband wasn't so interested in art, but she, you know, kept the collection that she had put together - her husband had put together with her - many years earlier. And I had the opportunity to consider helping her do something with the sale of that picture. And I went to see the picture, and I was knocked out by a great, great picture, wonderful picture. And I - well, I don't want to spend our time talking about this one particular picture, but what happened is I wound up getting an agreement with this woman to handle the sale of the picture. This was at a point and time when the most that any picture by de Kooning had ever sold for was the picture that belonged to [Robert] Scull, a collector in New York, cab business guy. Was it *Police Gazette* [1955]? I don't remember what the name of his picture was; it might have been something like that, and I think it sold for like \$280,000 or something like that.

And that was the most expensive de Kooning ever been sold by far, by a big stretch. Now, this now was - I can't even remember what year that was, but this was two, three, four years later that I got this picture, *Woman V*. It had been valued before I even got into the picture - it had been valued at about \$300,000, which was more than - okay, right. And a colleague friend of mine had even made an effort on behalf of this collector to sell it and had not succeeded in selling it, maybe six months to a year before she talked to me about it.

And so she gave the picture to me on the same basis at the same price. And I took it back to the gallery and I did my homework. I researched the whole field - where all the other *Woman* paintings were, and found out pretty much about them, and I began to start thinking about offering it to sell, you know, where to sell, and I came to the conclusion that the only place that it should even be offered, you know, were major museums. It was a picture that belonged in a big, public collection, so forth.

And I had given, as they say, a lot of consideration, and the more time I spent with the picture, the more I came to the conclusion that it was certainly the most singular thing I'd ever had my hands on. But I really believed that nothing to compare with it had ever been on the market or was likely to be on the market for an awful long time. There was only, I think, one or two others in private collections. Of those series, one of them was in California. And I decided that no matter what the experience had been in trying to sell it before, no matter what was the rationale for setting the value where it was, I thought this picture, if it sells at all, it should be even much more expensive. And I increased the price before I even offered it to \$850,000. And on the basis of that, I came up with a campaign in my mind that I was going to only offer the picture - I think it was to four different institutions. They were the National Gallery of Art in Washington. They were the Stedelijk Museum in Holland [Amsterdam]. They were the Australian National Gallery [Canberra] and got on the list simply because they had bought the -

MR. MCELHINNEY: The [Jackson] Pollock.

MR. GRAY: - the Pollock painting just a year or so -

MR. MCELHINNEY: *Blue Poles* [1952], right.

MR. GRAY: *Blue Poles* a year or so before that. I think there was another museum, but what was it? I can't even remember what it was.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So this would have been in the mid-'70s then.

MR. GRAY: This was in the early '70s, actually.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Early '70s.

MR. GRAY: Early '70s. I decided that - so how did I offer it? I offered it by sending, I think, a registered letter to each of these institutions, describing it, no illustration, and no price and said thus and such a picture is available. It's being offered very exclusively to you and only three other - I mean, it was very straight and very transparent and open about the whole thing. And if you have an interest in it, I would appreciate a response, at which time we will be willing to quote you a price and see that you get a transparency.

Well, I heard nothing from anybody - [laughs] - for about a week's time. When I did get a call - I got a wire or something; I don't remember, but from the Stedelijk Museum, said that it was a great picture. We'd love to have it, blah, blah, blah. But - oh, no, how much is it? And I quoted the price, and they simply couldn't afford it. This is sort of what happened, I think, with the National Gallery, too, but I never heard from the Australian National Gallery. And so the first ones I had heard from, all of them turned it down. No ability, and I was beginning to feel like, well, I sure blew it. My head was hanging low.

And I get a wire one day or a phone call - I can't remember - from - his name will come back to me in a couple of minutes. He was the director of the Australian National Gallery, and he said to me, we're interested in the picture you've offered us. This almost 10 days, maybe, or so, after I had heard from everybody else. And what's the price? And I told them the price, and he said, can you reserve it for us? We're very interested in it, and I will get back to you within a few days.

I mean, this all happened so darned fast at that point. Quoted him the price then. No response, reaction at all to the comment about the price, and I said, yes, I'm willing to hold it for you. And three or four or five days later, I get back a confirmation that we're prepared to put up a deposit, and we're prepared to - no, I'm going to come or somebody was - I don't know whether he came himself or somebody else just to actually see the picture and that, subject to only to its being as represented, that we're prepared to buy it.

Okay, anyway, we wound up selling the picture at this price, world record price. The word got out immediately. We certainly didn't let it out, and it was - except for New York - [laughs] - no, that's another whole story unto itself. It was headlines across the globe. I mean, I'll tell you; I've got a box this big, you know, with clippings, because I had a clippings service. Somebody bought it for me at the time. The stories about this world record buy. The highest price ever - not only for a de Kooning, but even Picasso hadn't sold for that price. No living artist had ever sold for a price anywhere close to that.

So it got a lot of sensational attention, and part of the deal I had with them, they agree to let the picture stay with me so I could do an exhibition around it. So I'm getting around to talking about the exhibition. And with having that picture, of course, I was able to borrow all kinds of things that I would have never been able to borrow otherwise, including from Allan Stone, by the way, but even from museums.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Wow.

MR. GRAY: I put together a really, knockout, gorgeous - the centerpiece was *Woman V*, and there's

nothing, you know, put my gallery on the market - on the market - what's the word?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Map.

MR. GRAY: On the map - [laughs] - like *Woman V* and that de Kooning exhibition. It was a gorgeous exhibition. It was absolutely wonderful, and it was all pictures of the early '50s - late '40s and early '50s - around it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And that was at the gallery space that you had on -

MR. GRAY: This was at the second gallery space we had moved in -

MR. MCELHINNEY: At the Michigan Avenue.

MR. GRAY: - Michigan Avenue - 620 North Michigan Avenue, yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: What living artists have you successfully promoted? Who do you feel the proudest of among any of those?

MR. GRAY: Well, there's a lot of those, really. I mean, I had some outstanding Louise Nevelson shows. Certain outstanding Jim Dine shows over the years, I've shown regularly for 30 years. Just saw him down in Miami the other day. He reminded me it's been over 30 years that we've been working together. But [Roy] Lichtenstein had two or three, I can't remember which. I think I did, while he was alive, major painting shows, and after he died, we did a show. It was just the last works on paper that he had done. We did a big show in Chicago at the time.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Are there are any careers that you launched?

MR. GRAY: Any careers that I've launched, yes. I mean, but not anybody who has that kind of profile. You know, we have an artist called David Klamen that we show. We've shown for 10 or 12 years. We've built up a wonderful career for him. He's been showing here in New York, too. [Jaume] Plensa, the sculptor, who we're showing now, or we just sold that at the art fair. A \$1,650,000 sculpture, monumental sculpture, the morning after the opening of the show in Miami this year [Art Basel Miami Beach]. And we're selling them all over the globe, and we launched them. I didn't start them. I saw them at an art fair in Madrid, you know, 20-odd years ago, and then followed him for four or five years before I was convinced that I was right about the guy, and then brought him to this country. Did the first show of any significance for him in this country, then been showing him ever since then, and we started to share representation with - what's his name from Paris, who's got a gallery here in New York, because he had had one show at their gallery there in Paris [Daniel Lelong].

MR. MCELHINNEY: How do you spell his name?

MR. GRAY: P-L-E-N-S-A.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, Plensa.

MR. GRAY: Jaume, J-A-U-M-E. First word, first name. So we've certainly put him on the map. You know, he did the big monumental sculpture, which costs - I don't know, north of \$12 million or \$18 million. I don't know what. In Chicago, the *Crown Fountain*, so called, the one with the big -

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, yes.

MR. GRAY: - images on it. And we've gotten, I don't know, eight, 10 different, major commissions all over - in Canada, we've got a couple of them. Did one in Montreal in an airport and another one in Manitoba somewhere. It's just building, but it's very strong. I mean, from our point of view, it's a great success already because it's so broadly based. And he's shown all over Europe and the Far East and China and Japan and the Moore Foundation [Henry Moore Sculpture Trust, Halifax, England], in Paris.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Here's another question, you know, since the art world has become so much more global. I recently went to a bunch of exhibitions over at Christie's in Rockefeller Plaza and it's huge, huge auction of Latin American art that was very successful and also large auction of Indian Art, contemporary art from India that was also setting records, and I don't recall ever seeing these kinds of things before in the past. So how has this increasingly global economy of art changed your practices as a gallery owner, as a dealer, or as a collector?

MR. GRAY: Well, as I think I indicated to you, this certainly is not a secret that I'm really, as a dealer, mostly retired. [Laughs.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. GRAY: I'm not that active as a dealer. But, of course, I observe how the gallery is responding to these experiences. And mostly, it's my son [Paul Gray] and Andrew Fabricant, who's really the director of the gallery here in New York. I can't say that it has affected the gallery particularly. Obviously, the way you're describing is right, that it's become much more global. There are many more artists, dealers, and collectors from elsewhere, other cultures, China, most obviously, or Russia, you know.

MR. MCELHINNEY: New money.

MR. GRAY: New money. New money. A different aesthetic feeding into it. More appreciation finally in the West, Western Europe and in the United States. More appreciation for other kinds of aesthetics that are coming from these other cultures, so more people here are collecting those things. The market, of course, was - how can I say this - the auction house - well, here's a perfect example of what I was talking about before, about the auction houses' role and how it's a role that serves the interest and is beneficial to the dealers and the collectors.

The auction houses have had the most to do with confirming the importance and generating a market for work from China, just as an example, because they've done a few sales and they get - even though those sales may be to their countrymen at first, who have come to London or come to New York to attend these auctions, which take place in the West. Well, all the western collectors and everybody and dealers begin to take notice, and now you've got a, you know, smattering of, but a critical mass of dealers and collectors in the West who are buying that stuff, too, and are part of that market. And that didn't used to be true. It was very rare.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Is that because they're turned on by the aesthetic or because they see how well, you know, the products in the marketplace are performing, or both?

MR. GRAY: All of the above.

MR. MCELHINNEY: All of the above.

MR. GRAY: Like always.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So when did you move from your Michigan Avenue location to the space you're in now?

MR. GRAY: Unfortunately, I don't remember exactly, but I think it's, like, 12 years ago or so.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Okay.

MR. GRAY: And that was because some New York developers came to town - [laughs] - and bought the building that we were in, along with the Arts Club of Chicago, was in an adjacent building. The whole square block was bought. Actually, it wasn't a New York developer. I take that back. It was a Chicago developer on that project.

But anyway, they tore the whole block down. So they chased us out, and we were moved down the street to the Hancock building, which was then being managed by a guy who was a friend of mine and a client of the gallery. He says, if you move down here, I'll give you all our public plaza and the lobby space and all, and you can use all for display of your art. It will be good for you and it'll be good for us.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I remember that. Yes, that's a nice arrangement.

MR. GRAY: And that's what we did, and, of course, the building has been resold twice since then and had different managers, and we've had an ongoing relationship with them, so we're still there. I never really expected to be there that long because we had been used to a just-above-the-ground floor location on Michigan Avenue in Chicago. It couldn't be a better location for a gallery in Chicago, and I assumed I'd find another such space when we moved. At the time it was very hard to find other space on Michigan Avenue, and I thought this was going to be temporary. But it worked out very well for us. It's true, we cut down on our street traffic considerably, but the serious people, the people that we really hope to, you know, attract to our space, came anyway. A lot of them, because we were a little less accessible, I suppose, and we've been there ever since. And we attract - there's a half a dozen other galleries in the building now. There were none when we moved here.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, we were talking about this a little before we actually turned the equipment on, but it seems like in New York, you know, as the galleries move from SoHo to Chelsea - or some did and others opened up there - and now new condominiums are looming, and probably the galleries will have to leave Chelsea, because the rents are about to go up and other reasons. And we were talking about whether or not the idea of a gallery neighborhood still made sense, whether you need this "circle the wagons" attitude or, as you indicated during our earlier conversation, artists are in a much stronger position now, economically, than they have been in the past and as are, you know, the people who represent them; therefore, you know, is it questionable that these kinds of communities, these kinds of commercial clusters, are inevitable? And you indicated that it already changed in Chicago.

MR. GRAY: It had changed; it had changed, but the real change is the expansion, not the distribution, the expansion of the numbers of galleries, the quantities of galleries. Let's talk about New York because we're sitting here in New York. You know, when I first went into business, of course, New York was at the center of art then, too. And I don't know how many galleries there were in New York in those days, but there was probably 150 or 200. And I don't know if there's, what, 2000 today. I don't know if anybody's counted them up lately. And in the neighborhood that we're sitting here in, the Carlyle Hotel, up and down Madison Avenue, there are, I am certain, more galleries up and down Madison Avenue now than there were then. Okay.

So everybody didn't move out, and for everybody that moved out, two or three people have moved in since then.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's an interesting observation.

MR. GRAY: Same is true on 57th Street and the same is even true downtown. There are still, I'm sure, as many galleries down above Houston Street - no, below Houston Street -

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. GRAY: - as there ever were, in spite of Chelsea. Now, some of them are the same people from both places in a few cases. So the whole universe that we inhabit has just expanded and continues to expand. It's the proverbial stone in the pond, and it's happening not just locally in New York, but it's happening across the whole globe. So the whole idea of a center has a different meaning now than, I think, it used to have.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And art fairs have changed this and the Internet has changed this.

MR. GRAY: All of the above, yes, right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So do you think - in your opinion - it's easier with art fairs and the Internet and this expansion of geographic clusters of galleries to reach clients and to sell artwork?

MR. GRAY: I think it's a given that a certain concentration, a certain critical mass of people in the same world, whether it's gas stations coming together on the corner or whether it's the department stores coming together in the same neighborhood, certain kind of concentration is good. It's real, good for the individual people involved, and it's good for the people in the market, and they can get it. So, that's why art shows have a - their measure of success is because people can come there in one place, in one day, they can see more than they're going to be able to see in six -

MR. MCELHINNEY: Art fairs, you mean, like the Miami art fair that you just attended.

MR. GRAY: Yes. All these things have a place. It isn't that the whole world is changing; it's just that there's an expansion continuing to go on. That's all.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So, if you were going to give advice to anyone who is like you 45, -6 years ago, opening a gallery, what would you tell them to do? What would you tell them to avoid?

MR. GRAY: Now?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Now. If they were going to open a gallery now.

MR. GRAY: So what do you mean? Well, first of all, there's nobody coming into the situation today who you can really say is like me or my counterpart -

MR. MCELHINNEY: No, well, I didn't mean -

MR. GRAY: - forty years ago, because they come with an entirely different set of experiences into an environment that is entirely different.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I mean, let's say that a person with some knowledge of how to make money, how to be a business person, who is attracted to art and wants to go into the business of art. How would you -

MR. GRAY: Well, what I'd like to see or what I do see?

MR. MCELHINNEY: What you'd like - [laughs] - well, let's start with what you'd like to see and then maybe that could be a critique of the other.

MR. GRAY: Ideally, I'd like to see people - you know, I wouldn't like to see people just like me now anymore. I would like to see people who are, first of all, much better equipped for the job. Better educated, if you will, than I was.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Maybe it was poor choice of words but I meant like you in the sense that you have a knowledge of art, have a knowledge of how to be a businessperson.

MR. GRAY: Well, I guess in that sense, I suppose it's not any different than it was except, as I say, this is a different environment; it's a different thing, and the people are going to be different, okay. They're products of a different time and different place. Certainly, to be serious - well, I would hope that they would be seriously committed to art for art's sake, really believe in it, have had enough experience, visual, what have you, to have convictions about the aesthetic experience, what it is, know how to see it in themselves in their own mirror and to be interested in it for that purpose and not be driven by the all-mighty buck.

Sure, it's okay to want to make a living and to have a, you know, some kind of a bottom-line attitude, but first and foremost, to really have a serious commitment to dealing in and being with, living with artists and art, except at - that those artists that they should have a serious interest in being and interacting with shouldn't be those artists and we've got plenty of them, too, just like dealers, who are in it for a buck or for notoriety.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. GRAY: Yes. So that's what really I would hope, and have the patience and understanding to know that in order to get ahead and have some measure of success is going to take a while. It takes time. It just takes time, and you cannot - only to a limited extent can you speed things up. You know, you can throw a lot of money at it, which a lot of people come in and do and take a lot of ads in a lot of fancy magazines and build a lot of big fancy spaces, which everybody's fond of doing these days. Getting architects and having huge spaces. We never had such things. Nobody did. I mean, not the biggest dealers in the city of New York had a huge, clean, well-lighted space that seemed to need to do that. You don't need all that. It may come in handy when you find yourself dealing with a lot of contemporary artists whose work, the scale of it, is big, I suppose. We can get to that. But that shouldn't be the fundamental part of it if you're trying to get yourself established for the first time.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, you're also active in philanthropy. We discussed the fact that you have a fabulous collection of drawings that will end up at the Art Institute of Chicago or -

MR. GRAY: Or some other -

MR. MCELHINNEY: Or somewhere and other places to be determined.

MR. GRAY: Yes, right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I didn't mean to speak out of turn. But I know also, just from reputation, that you're active in local cultural organizations, you know, museums and orchestras. So this is an indication of your seeing yourself as a member of a community, as a citizen, as a promoter of art,

and that would be in keeping with the advice that you would offer to a young wannabe art dealer.

So, what plans exist for the future of the Richard Gray Gallery, either here in New York or the one in

MR. GRAY: Well, I don't know if there's plans. I mean, what I see and what is and -

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yes, what's your vision of the future for the gallery?

MR. GRAY: - is its continuing more or less of a track that it's been on all these years. Obviously, it's being moved by new leadership - my son, again, as I say, and Andrew Fabricant, who is here. The business continues to grow very steadily. We're winding up with more people working for us. We're even expanding our spaces but very, very gingerly. I set a pattern long ago that is still being followed by the new generation of people of being very conservative about things like overbuilding up overhead, becoming too ambitious or to appear too ambitious, anyway, with overreaching in terms of space and everything, because it is a cyclical world we live in and this business is cyclical. I don't care what anybody says, we will go through periods when things will slow up and downturn, and you've got to be prepared for it at every moment or you won't be able to ride it out.

So, you know, overstretching, overreaching, I think, is a way to get yourself in trouble, because just when you've reached out and taken on more overhead and so forth is exactly when the market suddenly stops, and you're burdened with this and you've got a lease signed or you've got too many employees or whatever, and then you've got to correct for all that or, you know, pay the price. So anyway, but the question is - I see a kind of a steady expansion and growth of reputation, of course, as long as we keep doing the right thing and doing it well and keep our nose clean. And we'll continue to expand the reputation, and presumably the clientele will continue to grow.

Access to art and artists, you know, follows on developing a good reputation and doing your job right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So does your son share the same attitude as you towards his relationship to the Chicago community? Is he also active in -

MR. GRAY: He is quite active in the community, not quite like me but he followed his own directions. He's politically active -

MR. MCELHINNEY: Okay.

MR. GRAY: - which is something I have not been particularly. I mean, just last night he had a benefit in his home in Chicago for Obama [Senator Barack Obama, IL, 2008 Democratic presidential hopeful], and about three or four weeks ago, he had done one for our senator, [Richard] Durbin. So he and his wife both have an interest in that area. They're also very involved in theater. There's a couple of theater companies that they support and are active in. And that is something that I've done, too. I've been very interested in Steppenwolf and Goodman Theater. I've been on the board for years and years; the symphony. I've been on the board of public television. Art Institute, which I'm very proud to say I'm probably one of the only dealers in the country who can say he serves on the board of a major art museum.

MR. MCELHINNEY: You were also, I think, for a long time, head of the Art Dealers Association [of America].

MR. GRAY: I was president of the Art Dealers Association here in New York for six years, which is



longer than any other president ever served and the only one who has ever served who lived outside of the city of New York. It was six years of pleasure, joy, strain - [laughs] -

MR. MCELHINNEY: Extra work, I'm sure, a lot of extra work.

MR. GRAY: - extra work, a lot of extra work, a lot of extra traveling, and something that - but I found quite rewarding, and I'm kind of proud of the organization. It's got its problems, and it's got, you know, dealing with how it sees the future. It's got its own art show that it deals with.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, it seems like we're in a time when everybody has to become more entrepreneurial, including artists, because they can. And obviously, everything that changes in the economy of art is going to have an impact on everybody who is involved in it. And as you said, it's a fluid, cyclical world, and the only thing you can really count on is change.

MR. GRAY: Yes, but I hope, and I'm fairly confident, that it hasn't changed so much that for artists whose instincts are towards the private nature of being an artist and making your art, for those people, whom I have a great admiration for, I don't think it's changed that much. And in spite of the fact that the universe out there has changed, and it has, as you say, made it possible for some artists, at least, whose inclinations are right, to become more entrepreneurial, I think that's fine, but I think it's still quite admirable that there are numbers of artists who are so focused and so sincere and so inner-motivated, inner-driven, that these changes out there that are going on don't have that much influence on them. I think that's as it should be.

MR. MCELHINNEY: If someone were to raise a monument to you 50 years from now or whenever - [Gray laughs] - and glean from all of the archives surrounding your activities as a man in our society, as a citizen, as a cultural proponent, try to lift one quote, or if you wanted to craft such a quote now, what would that quote be? Some advice to the future or some - I don't want to use the word epitaph, because it attaches itself to, you know, unpleasant things. But what bit of philosophy would you like them to carve on the monument?

MR. GRAY: [Pauses.] That is a very difficult question.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I want an ideal that you represent. That you'd like to be identified with.

MR. GRAY: I guess I'd like to think - well, like all human beings, I guess I have a certain sense that life is limited. That everything I'm doing or everything I'm involved with, all of which I have become in all these years, is associated with the reality that it's going to come to an end. And taking that into account, in what respect am I unique? Maybe because of my acceptance of that reality, real acceptance of the limited nature of our time and therefore our ability to do what we do or influence society. But I genuinely do - I genuinely am comfortable with the idea that life is limited. I'm not young anymore. It's all relative, of course. I know everybody always tells me that but, you know, there is a reality. In a year and a half, I'm going to be 80 - [laughs] - so -

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, congratulations.

MR. GRAY: - so no matter what - the facts, sure, we've all got a friends who are in their 90s, or we all know people now who are living past 100, all the rest of that and all that's true. But the reality is sooner or later, but not so much later, it's all going to be all over for me, and I accept that. I know it. It doesn't change one iota my ability to continue to, every day, be active and involved and committed, to gain from everything around me, what people are doing, artists, musicians, family. But I know - every day I know that, you know, it'll come to an end. So I don't know if this at all addresses the kind

of the question you asked me. You said something about if somebody was to raise a monument.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, let's say the University of Chicago or the Art Institute were to, you know -

MR. GRAY: There's a pattern that's coming into play, and I'm amused by it because it plays into this thing I just said to you about my feeling about life and what's the word for living forever?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Immortality.

MR. GRAY: Immortality. And it's not an accident. It happens. But I've already, in the last couple of years - two or three years, found myself the center of certain amount of adulation and being an honoree and so forth. I've been honored doing this, that, and the next thing.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, you're a champion of the arts.

MR. GRAY: Well, whatever it is, but why now? Why now, because it's the time when this sort of thing happens. Nobody - I don't know if everybody out there is saying we better, you know, pay some attention to Dick Gray because he's going to be dead in 10 minutes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: They don't hand out laurels to 20-year-olds, though. [Laughs.]

MR. GRAY: So, I found myself in that position. I was made a living landmark by Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois this past year. A big dinner - not just me, three people - in music, a musical guy, Ramsey Lewis, by name, myself, and John Bryan, who is the most recent chairman of the board of the Art Institute, was the chairman of the Sara Lee Corporation, and he's got a major international reputation for being a corporate leader and community leader. And the three of us were made living landmarks by the Landmarks Preservation Council. Obviously, they do this kind of thing like everybody does this kind of thing, mostly to call attention to themselves as an institution and to raise money.

But the fact is that they do take people who - maybe people who will sell tickets. [Laughs.] I don't know what it is. So why me? I mean, I'm another citizen. Yes, I'm more active than a lot of people. There are plenty of other people who are doing a lot of the same kinds of things I'm doing. And it's going to happen again, by the way, next October; it's going to happen, too. I'm going to be honored again with a big dinner in Chicago for being a collector, not an art dealer, "a collector of great distinction." Well, I'm touched, flattered, but it's not just the first time I've awakened to the reality that an awful lot of people out there think I'm a collector of great distinction. Not notoriety, mind you, but distinction, and there's a big difference. I mean, I've never had my name spread across *ARTnews* or anything like that, and I don't think it's likely to happen. But people who know what I'm doing and are seeing what I'm doing - well, you were there. You were there. They keep telling me because I still have -

MR. MCELHINNEY: It's a fabulous collection.

MR. GRAY: - trouble kind of accepting it entirely. You know, I think people are trying to flatter me into something, that is true. But I guess the truth is that I am a collector of great distinction. I've done something there. So they're going to be honoring me for that or for whatever else. That's the excuse, I suppose, to do it, and there will be a big dinner and there will be a speaker and there will be, you know, all the usual stuff. A lot of the kind of thing that I did for others for a lot of my life, because I have been so much involved in organizations and on boards and active as leadership in a lot of - [telephone rings]. Oh, Christ, no.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oops. Pausing again.

[END OF MD 01 TR 04.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: We'll just keep rolling. Just to give you a warning, we're down to five minutes worth of disc space, so we're going to have to wind it up.

MR. GRAY: We've had a lot to say. I don't know.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, your collection - at least, you know, the part of it I was lucky enough to see - was mainly drawings.

MR. GRAY: It's mostly works on paper. It's what interests me.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And I think it takes a certain kind of collector to be able to really engage drawing, which is, sort of, the most immediate way that an artist shapes ideas and connects with the world, and it's not the most popular or saleable genre, but, you know, just, without spending a lot of the time that we have remaining on that, just the idea that what you had collected, from my perspective, was just very impressive and very satisfying to witness.

MR. GRAY: And as you know, there's something inherent there that has led me to not just collect contemporary drawings or to not just collect modern drawings or not just collect this, that, or the next, French or Italian, but to collect all of them. And I don't even know what it is precisely, but it's something more, I mean, what it is that is motivating me or that drives me; it stimulates me. It's not just the aesthetics of particular kinds of things, because people tend to get somewhat disciplined, you know. And when something touches them, or if it's Pop art, let's say -

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. GRAY: - or conceptual art or something like that, they tend to get in a kind of focus that explains what drives them to collect it. And since I have found whatever it is that drives me and motivates me, keeps kind of moving - I don't know what I'm trying to say, but, as you know, the collection consists equally - of equal significance and importance, breadth in things that are contemporary, things that are early 20th century, things that are 19th-century French, 18th, 19th, 17th century, Italian works from the 15th century on. And every one of these areas interests me a lot, and I don't collect in one area and then move on to another, although - well, I guess my collecting universe, like the universe of art in general, is constantly expanding. It goes back to that metaphor, again, about dropping the penny in the pond. One thing always leads to something else and something else in time, something else in style, something else in general aesthetics. I don't know.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, perhaps it's like the sort of private vision that you were describing earlier that artists pursue - collectors, likewise pursue. What they do with a deep private inner sense that's always expanding, that's always continuing to grow, and that makes it always exciting. I'm going to have to -

MR. GRAY: Cut it off.

MR. MCELHINNEY: - I think we've been talking for a long time. It's been great.

MR. GRAY: I don't know how long it's been.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And I'm going to thank Richard Gray for his time.

MR. GRAY: It's a pleasure.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Thank you, sir. It's been a pleasure for me and -

MR. GRAY: I've enjoyed it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: - this is for the Archives of American Art, and we're concluding it.

MR. GRAY: I would like to think of it, however, as a chapter. I suspect that the Archives of American Art thinks that when they do this kind of thing that they're going to, you know, create something, which is sort of contained, that's going to stand for the individual and the individual's life or career or whatever it is. But to me, this part in it - the notion that it should stand for me makes me very uncomfortable. [Laughs.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, I don't think it will because you-know-what, sir; I think they'll probably want to talk to you again in another 20 years - [Gray laughs] - and I hope they ask me to conduct the interview.

MR. GRAY: Thank you.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Thank you so much. It's been great.

MR. GRAY: [Laughs] - I like that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Thanks.

MR. GRAY: I like that. That's very good.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

Last updated...August 11, 2008