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Oral history interview with Eugene V. Thaw,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a digitally-recorded interview with Eugene Thaw on October 1 and 2, 2007. The interview took place at the dealer's home in New York, 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.

Eugene Thaw 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: This is James McElhinney interviewing Eugene Thaw at his home at 726 Park Avenue in New York, on October 1, 2007.

Good morning, sir.

EUGENE THAW: Good morning.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Where and when were you born?

MR. THAW: I was born October 27, 1927. And I was born in New York, uptown, in the Washington Heights area. And it's just 80 years ago.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, happy birthday. That was just a few days ago.

MR. THAW: No, it will be the 27th of October.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, of October. I'm confused. I'm already into October. Well, almost happy birthday.

MR. THAW: Yes, almost happy birthday.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Eighty is a big year. They're saying 80 is the new 60, so congratulations on reaching it.

When you were growing up here in New York, was the household full of art? Was there interest in art?

MR. THAW: Not very much. My mother was a high school teacher. My father was an engineer - a heating contractor and engineer. The family had some strong family connections to Mexico, where one of my father's sisters lived and had married a very wealthy man. And members of the family would visit Mexico quite repeatedly. My father lived down there for some years. And they had some Mexican art around the house. We even had a couple of Diego Rivera watercolors. But in general, there was no real interest or knowledge about art in the house. That was my own sideline, as it were.

MR. MCELHINNEY: How did they come to acquire the Diego Riveras? Were they acquainted with him?

MR. THAW: No, but they - my father spent several years in Mexico as a chief engineer on the Pan-American Highway that was being built between Laredo and Mexico City. And he built about half the highway, and then there was some kind of revolution there, a brief revolution, and he was forced to come back to America. And so I really only saw him for the first time when I was six years old and went down to visit my family in Mexico, my cousins. The Mexican art was just part of Mexican silver, Mexican this, Mexican that, which came from my mother's buying things and my relatives giving us things. And it wasn't any kind of a real art collecting.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you had the family who were Mexican, or who lived there?

MR. THAW: No, lived there.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Who lived there.

MR. THAW: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So the interest in the art -

MR. THAW: They had business there - large businesses, and they lived there.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So the interest that you had in art came from -

MR. THAW: From my college days and from my -

MR. MCELHINNEY: Your own calling.

MR. THAW: - my own calling, yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: When you were a kid, did you draw, did you collect things, did you go to museums?

MR. THAW: I collected coins a little bit, but I really came to my interest by the fact that I drew pretty well. And actually, at the age of 14, I would go Saturday mornings to the Art Students League, and, actually, you could sit in on classes. You could pay to take a class, which was not professional, but people who wanted to work from a model in a classroom, with help from a teacher, would come to those things. And I was young. The teacher I had in those days was a woman called Ann Goldthwaite, who was a very well-known, at that time, American woman painter. And she taught Saturday mornings at the Art Students League.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I teach there now.

MR. THAW: Do you?

MR. MCELHINNEY: There's a lot of interesting people who have taught there and studied there. I saw [Jackson] Pollock in your hallway. He studied there.

MR. THAW: Right, I know he did.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It's an interesting place, because it is not a professional school, but there are people there seeking professional training. So it's all a democratic environment.

MR. THAW: Right, yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So that inspired you?

MR. THAW: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And how young were you when you started working from the figure?

MR. THAW: I don't remember nude figures, but we worked from the figure from the time I got there, at the age of 14. I just took my pad in and drew.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Did you used to go to museums as well?

MR. THAW: A little bit. My mother took me to some famous exhibitions which I didn't understand at the time. I saw the great "Picasso: Forty Years of His Art" [November 15, 1939 - January 7, 1940] show that Alfred Barr did in the mid-'30s at the Museum of Modern Art [New York City]. I stood in line as a child with my mother to see the van Gogh show ["Vincent van Gogh." Museum of Modern Art. November 4, 1935 - January 5, 1936] that came up at about the same time that the *Lust for Life* [Irving Stone. New York: Heritage Press, 1934] book and film [*Lust for Life*, 1956] emerged on the scene, making van Gogh even more famous.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you continued studying art in high school, too? You continued to go to the League -

MR. THAW: No, I went to the League a little bit, and I don't remember taking any art courses in high school. I don't think you had any choice. I went to New York City high schools, and I think art was not part of the curriculum, as I recall, in those days.

MR. MCELHINNEY: You were probably still taught penmanship, though. I'm sure they taught that, which of course -

MR. THAW: I was left-handed, so I was probably immune from that discipline, too.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Were you able to travel? Apart from going to Mexico, did you go to Europe? Did you -

MR. THAW: Not at that time.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Not at that time.

MR. THAW: At the age of about 19 or 20, I went to Europe, just having gotten finished with Columbia University [New York City], where I took courses for my master's degree, but I never finished the thesis.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Did you travel elsewhere inside of the United States, to places like Chicago, let's say?

MR. THAW: No.

MR. MCELHINNEY: No.

MR. THAW: No, not very much really.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you went to school at Columbia.

MR. THAW: I went to St. John's College in Annapolis, the Great Books program, and I graduated from that during the war [World War II]. I went at the age of 15 and a half, having graduated high school early. Everything was being moved up in those days when they were looking for soldiers. And so I went to something called Townsend Harris High School, which was part of City College [of New York]. And the last year, they closed that school [1942], and I went to DeWitt Clinton High School for my last year in the Bronx. And then went to Columbia right after that for graduate work in art history, not painting but art history, studying with Meyer Shapiro and some of the other greats who were there at the college at that time - a man called Millard Meiss, who was one of the great Renaissance scholars. And I got into that side of it, but -

MR. MCELHINNEY: How did you choose art history? Was there anyone at your high school or anyone else who kind of helped to direct you in that way?

MR. THAW: It was mainly from the trips I took into Washington, D.C., almost every weekend by bus. It was only a 40- or 50-mile drive to go to Washington from Annapolis.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. THAW: And I would go in with a friend or alone on the weekends and go to the Phillips Collection. And go to the new National Gallery [of Art], which at that time was only eight years old or something. And I got really - I have a pretty good visual memory - and got really taken by, especially, Early Renaissance painting, gold-ground pictures and things in the [Sandro] Botticelli area. I wasn't ever taken so much by Baroque art, and they didn't have a lot of great Baroque art. And I've always had a prejudice in favor of the early material, a kind of Berensonian sort of snobbism [referring to Bernard Berenson].

MR. MCELHINNEY: So people like Angelico or -

MR. THAW: Fra Angelico -

MR. MCELHINNEY: - students of Giotto [di Bondone], even as early as that.

MR. THAW: Oh, yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah, and the Florentines, yeah.

MR. THAW: Sieneese, Florentines, all of those early painters - Duccio [di Buoninsegna].

MR. MCELHINNEY: They're sort of the bridge between, you know, the Medieval and the Byzantine or, you know, the Byzantine and the Medieval and the Renaissance. It's an interesting period, for sure.

So did you start collecting at all when you were in school?

MR. THAW: I had no money.

MR. MCELHINNEY: No money.

MR. THAW: No money at all and lived very, very frugally. My father was not a poor man, but he was not a rich man, either. And he kept me on a pretty short leash financially.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Was that useful in the long run do you think?

MR. THAW: I don't think it really played a great role. But certainly, if I had had a lot of money at that stage of my life, there would have been incredible opportunities in the market, as it turned out later. But I would not necessarily have taken them correctly, because I didn't know very much then, and I was learning. And if I knew what I know now and had the money at that time, I would, you know, have the greatest collection in the world.

You do what you can. I mean, I would go into Baltimore with friends from college and go to an antique shop or two and buy some little Canton blue-and-white plate or something like that, because I did have an instinct for looking at things and judging them and seeing if I liked them enough to own them as a work of art.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So I would imagine you would have stopped in at the Walters collection [The Walters Art

Museum].

MR. THAW: I did, yes. I didn't study it as much as I should have, though.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Interesting place.

MR. THAW: It was an interesting place but not well laid out in those days, very musty, and in a way almost behind the times as far as what you could see at the National Gallery.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you graduated from St. John's and you came back to New York, Upper Manhattan, studying art history with Meyer Shapiro and Meiss. And then earlier you stated that you abandoned the thesis.

MR. THAW: I really found in those days, with gossip and with friendships and with visits, that to become a Millard Meiss or to become an important art historian in the university world or even a major curator in the museum world, you really had to have some kind of backing of funds. And you also had to be, in the old sense of the term, a gentleman. And my background was not that, and my funds were not that. And I decided that I really wanted to go to Europe for a while and see stuff on my own. And I planned to become an art dealer, because that seemed to me to be a point where you'd use what I was already attracted by, namely connoisseurship, choosing better from the worse and choosing real from the inauthentic. And I felt that I had some gifts in those directions.

So I took a summer and went for four months over a long summer to Florence and Paris and to a little bit in Rome. I didn't get down to Naples, but I went to different cities and sort of bummed around Europe for the summer, staying in Florence at a pensione that was mainly occupied by art historians. This was right after the war, and things were just awakening again and art historians returning. John Pope-Hennessy was a young scholar from England, older than I was, but he was doing a book on Fra Angelico. And he was working at San Marco, the convent where Angelico painted the cells, determining which were painted by Fra Angelico and which by his school or his followers. And that was exactly the assignment that Millard Meiss gave me to go through the cells and decide which were Angelico himself and which were by followers.

I met Richard Offner, who taught at the Institute of Fine Arts and who was the rival to [Bernard] Berenson in authenticity matters on early Italian paintings and lived in a house just outside of Florence. And I had an introduction to him from Millard Meiss, who was his colleague and had once been his student. So I met people. I attached myself to a woman who rode her bicycle around Florence, and she was a kind of marvelous English woman who had married briefly a Yugoslavian military officer. And she was called Evelyn Sandberg-Vavala, with a hyphen in between. She was poor but had lived in Florence through the war. She had written a guide to the Uffizi [Gallery], a small little thing you could buy for a couple of dollars. And she was afraid of dogs, so I would run alongside her bicycle to chase away the vicious dogs, and we became great friends.

MR. MCELHINNEY: How long did you stay in Europe at that time?

MR. THAW: Only for the four months; that's all. But I spent much of the time in Florence. I just had more to see there in my field. And then I came back via London where I met and stayed with an old college friend of mine from St. John's who was working at the Old Vic Theater. And he wanted to come back to America. This was in '48, '49. He needed an excuse to get back, so we decided to open a gallery and bookstore together.

And we found space when he did come back. We found a space at the Algonquin Hotel. Above the restaurant there's a two-story, separate building with a street entrance. And we rented that and had a gallery on the top floor and a bookstore on the mezzanine, sort of half, six-stairs-up floor. And we opened up for business there on 44th Street. The wrong neighborhood for an art gallery.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, I was about to say it's an interesting kind of location, with the New York Yacht Club and the, you know -

MR. THAW: Used to be the *New Yorker* magazine -

MR. MCELHINNEY: - and the Algonquin Round Table gang. I guess that would have been earlier. But then, you know, all of the university clubs around there. And of course, it's in the theater district, or it's on the edge of it. What was his name, the name of your partner?

MR. THAW: Jack Landau. He's long since dead. He only stayed with me for two and a half years, two years.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you've explained that to become a professional scholar in the university world, you almost had to be born into a certain privileged class. You had to have had a certain kind of preparation by having studied somewhere, having been equipped, as it were, as a gentleman.

MR. THAW: It seemed to me that way in those days. I don't think it's so true anymore.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, that's what I'm sure will interest a lot of people who consult this interview, because they think it's much more egalitarian today. Of course, you know, the university world, who attends university, is a lot more inclusive today than it used to be. But I think that's probably a situation that few people today even ponder, that there were certain class obstacles to moving into certain occupations. So what was your family background? Your dad was an engineer; mom was a teacher, two incomes. Where were they from?

MR. THAW: My father was born in what's now Romania and came over here when he was 18 months old.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Wow.

MR. THAW: And his family immigrated. And my mother was born in this country but from Polish Jews. And they were secular in every way but from very Jewish backgrounds.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. THAW: And my father was a Socialist. He named me after Eugene Victor Debs, who ran for president on the Socialist Party at one time. He died the month I was born. So Eugene Victor Thaw is named after Eugene Victor Debs.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's a great story.

MR. THAW: And he knew lots of people. I mean, he spoke fluent Spanish. He had spent a lot of his time in both Cuba and Mexico. He had lived a fairly adventurous life before he married. And he was a trained engineer in his early days, in the early 1920s. He was in Palestine at the time of the founding of the Hebrew University [of Jerusalem], when Lord [Arthur James] Balfour came and presented the Balfour Declaration [1917].

And he was invited to create the sanitary code for the city of Tel Aviv [Israel] which was a new city and needed an engineer to set up the rules. And there were no words in Hebrew for most of the plumbing and waste and whatever kinds of implements that you needed. So he sat down with a great Hebrew poet called [Hayyim] Nahman Bialik, who is a sort of legendary figure in Hebrew in language and the history of Israel. And Bialik - my father knew German. He gave him a German word and the English word, and Bialik made up a Hebrew word for each of these implements or objects. And that scroll is still at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's a wonderful story. One seldom imagines a partnership between engineering, science, and poetry, but it makes perfect sense.

MR. THAW: He was a master in that language, so he was able to create plausible words, that are still in use.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So if a path into the history of art as a scholar in the university world was, at that time, open mostly to WASP-y patricians, what was the background of your friend Jack Landau?

MR. THAW: He had been ahead of me in college. He was a senior when I was a sophomore. But he went over. He was very interested in theater. He was a brilliant theater person, director and what have you. Even in college, he did some extraordinary things. And then he went over to work at the Old Vic. He drew very well, and he painted very well, and he was a set designer originally but then moved in to directing as well. And coming back, he was a member of the set designers union, and he got jobs. He worked; he even got directing jobs. So he did that in the theater district there while he was a partner of mine - sort of sometime partner of mine, when he could hang around the shop. And he knew a lot of people. He was full of ideas and everything. But eventually we sort of went in different directions.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So how long were you operating as a partnership with him?

MR. THAW: About two years.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Two years. Let's talk a little bit about -

MR. THAW: We each borrowed money from our families to start. We were supposed to put in \$4,000 each. That's how we started. I got the 4,000 [dollars] from my father, but he never got the whole 4,000 [dollars] from his brother. And he, you know - buying him out finally was the simplest thing to do. But he helped set the thing up in an artistic manner.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yes, I'm curious if we could talk about how you organized the gallery. How does one, at that point in history, start up a gallery? We talked about the location. Obviously, it was more convenient for him than for you because -

MR. THAW: Well, we had also a fairly good rental deal with the Algonquin, and we had some extra office space in the back of our building, which we rented - sublet one floor to a publisher, another floor up above to two

theatrical directors. And we had a gallery on the top floor which was a big room, like a ballroom, which I divided up a little bit.

In that gallery, we gave Joan Mitchell her first show. We gave a show to Conrad Marca-Relli, his first show. We had the American Abstract Arts there two years running. We had space, and we sort of attracted some people, because we had space. Harry Jackson, who later became a Western sculptor and artist - is still alive and famous. He did his Jackson Pollock-like work, his early abstractions, and we had a show of his work there. I did some of these shows. I never was a vanity gallery. I never charged artists to put up shows or bring amateurs or, you know, the wives of rich men or anything like that. But we did have some decent, younger artists who we tried to help make careers.

But it wasn't my style really. I was an antiquarian by mental state. I kept studying Old Masters. I kept thinking about all of that. And so little by little, after three years, I gave up the books entirely and changed the pattern of the gallery from contemporary art on consignment from the artists, as it were, to being a buyer and a seller of what I liked.

And when I could find the money or find the art, New York City was full of chances and opportunities in those days. I mean, I bought a five-foot-long, maybe four-foot-long, Murnau [*Landscape*, 1909] [Wassily] Kandinsky from a family over on the West Side, a refugee family. It was in a little book called Junge Kunst series. And this was the book on Kandinsky by Will Grohmann. This painting was the frontispiece. It was \$2,500, and I borrowed \$2,500 from a cousin of mine to buy it. He was in the import-export business, and he needed his \$2,500 back a couple of months later, and I couldn't sell it. So I sold it to a fellow who used to come sniffing around my gallery called Richard Zeisler. And he ended up with a great collection. He became a trustee of the Modern Museum [Museum of Modern Art, New York City], and he only died last year. And his Kandinsky, the last valuation on it was \$6 million.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Good Lord.

MR. THAW: So from \$2,500 to \$6 million; that was the kind of different world it was then. I used to have a friend working as a floor salesman for the great Curt Valentine Gallery up on 57th Street, where they had good European art. You know, Juan Gris and Picasso, and he was the representative for [Daniel-Henry] Kahnweiler in New York. And he had wonderful German things as well. And this friend of mine would consign without consulting his boss. He would just consign to me still lifes by [Giorgio] Morandi for \$300 each. And I would sell them for 350 [dollars] or 360 [dollars], whatever I could get on top of the 300 [dollars]. And those go for half-a-million-plus now. And it was like that.

A small amount of money could achieve wonders in New York in those days. I had a Kandinsky watercolor that went to David Solinger's collection. He was married to a Gimbel heir and put it together. You know, he died a couple of years ago or a year ago. And this Kandinsky watercolor, a study for *The Last Judgment*, a 1911 picture or '10 picture, the watercolor was \$600. And I had it for nearly a year before I could find someone to buy it. An abstract watercolor, it's in every book now. And that's the way it was.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you started out representing artists, and then you -

MR. THAW: Always at the same time finding things and selling them.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Finding things and selling them.

MR. THAW: Yes. I found a Rembrandt [van Rijn] drawing, a real Rembrandt drawing, for \$75 in a collector's box. He thought it was a school drawing, and it had the Joshua Reynolds stamp on it. I wrote to Fritz Lugt in Paris at the Institute Neerlandais, and he wrote back, "We've been looking for this drawing for years." You know, so on and so forth. It's a genuine, early Rembrandt of a beggar leaning on a stick. And I sold it for \$1,200 to the man who was my new best client for things in those days. And it paid the rent for three months. So I could do - I started with little coups, little deals like that and - which you could do in New York if you had a good eye - and it grew.

And when I moved uptown to between 57th and 58th Street on Madison Avenue, up above something called the Mayhew Shop, which was selling porch furniture and other things, I took a second-floor space there, more in the 57th Street sort of ambiance. No books anymore. I had sold out, and I slowly paid off all the publishers that I owed money to. And I had a show of Odilon Redon. I had a show of [Emil] Nolde. I had a show of new acquisitions. You know, I had all kinds of little group shows that I put together of interesting items that I was now involved with in terms of better-known, European art.

MR. MCELHINNEY: When you opened the first gallery with Landau and then even afterwards while you remained at 44th Street, when you did the space over as a gallery, did you use an architect?

MR. THAW: No.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And how about in the other space, you know, in the next one?

MR. THAW: No. No, we just fooled around ourselves, and we got a workman to come up and put some plywood walls and painted them and that kind of thing.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. Hang lights, that kind of thing.

MR. THAW: Right. We put tracks in, and we could use track lighting. We had no money to hire a professional in those days.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So was there any kind of a goal, ambiantially, to try to create an atmosphere of a particular sort?

MR. THAW: In the new space up on 57th, 58th Street, when I started showing - like a secondary market - Masters, which you didn't represent but which you had - I got deeply involved with German Expressionist things at that time. And I sold a painting that a colleague of mine who did not have a gallery but was a sort of runner, older Dutch refugee man who liked me. And he went around to different places, and he found things, and he knew what I was looking for. So if he saw something that was being discriminated against by going for too low a price somewhere else, he would tell me about it or bring it to me.

And at one point, I bought, through him, a large, very distinguished painting of the South Seas by Nolde, a 1914, or a 1913 painting. And I sold it to a trustee who immediately gave it to the Minneapolis Art Museum. A man called Donald Windham. And I sold it for \$13,000, and that was more money than I had ever had together in one place since I had been dealing - in the four years or whatever since I had been dealing. And I took a trip to Germany with that money and visited all the dealers who had come back alive after the war. And I got an awful lot more credit for being able to put something down. And I bought quite a lot of paintings and drawings by leveraging that \$13,000 to pay some here, some there, and owe the rest, because sales were sales.

And actually, when I made a little group purchase of about six things from Norbert Ketterer in Stuttgart, who ran the Stuttgart auction, Ketterer's auction. He had a stock as well, and he represented the [Ernst Ludwig] Kirchner estate. And I bought some important early Expressionist pictures. He rang a bell throughout the gallery. He walked around from desk to desk ringing this bell, and all of the secretaries and employees came together in his office to toast me, because I had made a big purchase. And I guess it wasn't so common in those days.

MR. MCELHINNEY: What year was that?

MR. THAW: This must have been 1954, something like that - and I started at the Algonquin in the winter of 1950. And 1954 - this was about four years later. And one of the major pictures that I bought, one from Ketterer, by Kirchner was *Two Women* [1911-12], in the street dressed [in] blue with big hats, a large picture, seven feet tall or something. And I sold half share to Paul Kantor, who had a gallery in Beverly Hills, and I worked closely with him at that time. And he sold it to the L.A. County Museum [of Art, Los Angeles, CA], where it's now one of their great modern treasures. And the [Karl] Schmidt-Rottluff that I bought called *Night [Houses at Night, 1912]*, lighted houses, facades with beautiful lighting on them by Schmidt-Rottluff, I sold to Alfred Barr for the Museum of Modern Art. They didn't have one, and this is still their great Schmidt-Rottluff there. And the [Erich] Heckels, Fauve - I bought the best periods, the Fauve periods and all of that. And it all went very, very well at the prices of those days. If I had kept them all, I would have probably been even better off. [Laughs.] But you did what you could. But you know, Kirchners of that kind are now selling for 15 [million dollars], \$20 million.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you had more or less abandoned representing artists and moved into this secondary market arena.

MR. THAW: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: How did it feel going to Germany after National Socialism?

MR. THAW: It was very interesting, because most of the people I had anything to do with had been themselves victims or were just getting back there. Not necessarily Jews. They weren't Jews, but they were distinguished Bohemians who were not pro-Nazi, ever.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. THAW: There was a woman called Hannah Becker von Rath in Frankfurt and a great dealer in Munich called Günther Franke, who had a famous business there. But they were just getting back on their feet and recovering some of their lost art, or their "degenerate" art, getting it back. And these men and women had private collections which they hid during the war. And so things were surfacing and for, you know, for derisory sums by

what's happened since.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But did you maintain strong ties to these German dealers?

MR. THAW: Not really. I corresponded with them. I never went back for another load, but I sort of kept active in that field.

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MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, how did you then evolve? It sounds like this is an evolution, where you're evolving as a dealer, also as a buyer. I mean, I think a lot of art dealers who depend upon consignments from artists or from collectors for their inventory, you know, have a different outlook than somebody who's actually buying things, even if there is a margin or you have a line of credit with somebody or you can - you know -

MR. THAW: What happened in those days to me was that I learned the technique of buying in shares. And more or less from the time I got into the international market for good paintings and good art, I found I could have better opportunities if I had more things but owned them in shares with other dealers who trusted each other. And I began to work closely - I did work closely, even through the beginning era, with Stephen Hahn, who was my first contact for buying in shares with major things. And then I bought with [William] Acquavella [Acquavella Gallery] and with other firms, and that's really how my fortune grew and how my business grew. Because you not only had more opportunities for buying, because they gave you shares if you gave them shares, but you had more opportunities for selling, because they all had their own circles of clients. And if one didn't sell it, the other could.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So a work of art becomes like an apartment building in a way.

MR. THAW: A little bit, yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: You could own it in partnership with a bunch of other investors. It's an interesting model, and it's one that I don't think is really, kind of, on the radar a whole lot to, you know, the majority of art lovers or even artists or maybe even art dealers, the idea that there is kind of a consortium of dealers and collectors, or dealers, I guess. But then as you were acquiring this work, living with it, seeing it every day, how did you discover a direction as a collector? Obviously, you're a collector. You have these wonderful drawings on the walls.

MR. THAW: Well, I started in a very small way. I bought Tiepolo drawings, single figures by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, beautiful washed drawings. You could get them, in those days, at the Weyhe Book Shop on Lexington Avenue and about 62nd Street. And upstairs from the Weyhe Book Shop - it's an art bookstore - there was a little gallery. And in there they had some boxes with old drawings, and they had Tiepolo drawings. The first time I looked, they were \$500 a piece. I could afford one or two of them, and I bought some more later. And they had, you know, good things like that that you could pick up.

I went to see a couple of older refugee dealers who had an apartment in the Dorsett Hotel, which was torn down for the new Museum of Modern Art. It was on 54th Street and Madison. And the Dorsett Hotel had an apartment there which was a showroom for two men. I don't know what their first names were, but the firm was A&R Ball. And they had furniture, mostly good French furniture. But they also had a whole bunch of drawings by or attributed to Rembrandt from the collection of Friedrich August of Saxony. One went to the Lehmann Collection, and one went to the Rhode Island School of Design, RISD [Providence], and one narrow landscape, which I have upstairs on the wall, went to me for \$3,500. But I didn't have \$3,500. They let me pay \$300 a month until it was paid off. And it was a genuine Rembrandt drawing. It's not in the best of condition, but it's universally accepted. And you know, Rembrandt has been redefined over and over again the last number of years. They keep throwing out drawings, but this one has survived the re-attributions. And it was just an amazing thing. If I had \$1,000 more, I could have bought some more Rembrandts. They had a box had about 12 of them.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So what happens to fakes if something becomes discredited?

MR. THAW: Well, it may not be a fake in the case of Rembrandt. It may just be a school drawing. He had 40 pupils at one time. But you know, they go from having some value to no value, but they should be saved, because Rembrandt's scholarship changes every generation. Those which are thrown out now may come back in the fold at some future time.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I guess the example that has hit the radar again because of a book recently is the [Han] van Meegeren story of the fake [Johannes] Vermeers, which before the war, I guess, a lot of them were accepted as real Vermeers. And it turned out he had painted them; this guy had painted them.

MR. THAW: Yes, he's the most famous modern forger. And he was very clever, because the art historians all felt

that Vermeer was so Caravaggian in his lighting and so precise in the way his pictures were composed between light and dark that he would have had to have known Caravaggio's work, and he would have had to have probably made a trip to Italy as a young artist. But we had no record of that in his known biography. So van Meegeren invented an Italian period for Vermeer, and he produced some paintings which were exactly what they were looking for - earlier versions of his style in a closely Caravaggian manner, larger pictures done presumably in his Italian period. And he got one of the leading art historians in Holland at that time to accept them. And there are always camp followers. There are always people who will go along with the trend. And so it ended up that there was a whole group. And he sold some of these to Nazis, to [Hermann] Goering. I think one to Goering himself. And he was tried after the war for collaboration. And he painted one of these in jail to prove that these were by him.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's a great story.

MR. THAW: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Where are those paintings now, I wonder.

MR. THAW: Oh, they're all carefully taken care of in Holland. I mean, they occasionally go out on world tours to show. That's a story.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. THAW: And it's a very interesting example of how the art historians were fooled. The public loves anything which proves that art professors or art connoisseurs don't know very much. They love to have us debunked.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. I think they like the idea. I think the general public is very invested in the notion that artists are mountebanks and charlatans and snake oil salesmen. I certainly think - well, at the time that you're opening the gallery, you have Abstract Expressionism. I mean, here in New York, you've got artists like Pollock, making artwork that nobody really had, very few people had, sort of, the code book to read. And I think there was a lot of anger and humor directed at that work initially, because it didn't seem to have any craft, didn't seem to have any idea. So what was it like showing semi-historical work? I mean, Nolde - when did Nolde die? In the war, I guess.

MR. THAW: After the war, I think.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And Redon was -

MR. THAW: He died in 1916, I think.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you're dealing with artists who are no longer - who even if you chose to represent them, all - maybe you could have their estate, I guess. But what was it like working with that kind of artwork, at a time when there were all of these painters and sculptors and others raising a ruckus further downtown, creating this whole excitement about American painting again, even the beginnings of what some people today call the international contemporary art world, people like the abstract - [Conrad] Marca-Relli -

MR. THAW: I always kept my hand in with them in some ways. I had also [Willem] de Koonings and Pollocks and other things, which when I didn't represent the artist, I was able to occasionally buy something or get something on consignment. And I worked closely with a good friend of mine at that time who helped me a lot, even in the Algonquin. He hung the Joan Mitchell show, and that was Leo Castelli. I was very friendly with Leo, and Leo was, before he opened his own gallery, was very friendly with me and helped me make some crucial sales. I sold some things to Sydney Janis, because Leo was his runner and would find a [Piet] Mondrian or something with me that he would buy with Sidney. And because I, you know, I was always on the lookout to get something or to buy something good. I didn't have very many big clients to sell them always. Sometimes I had to sell them in the trade. And Leo was a tremendous help.

MR. MCELHINNEY: How did that work, selling them, as it were, in the trade?

MR. THAW: It was a sale. I mean, it gave you some of your money back - all your money back plus a little profit, you know.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It was a way to flip it and -

MR. THAW: That's right, and go on to the next thing, you know.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yes. So if we move up to about 1960, early '60s, what kind of direction is the gallery taking now? Is it still evolving, or have you -

MR. THAW: At some point, I left. Three more years after I moved there, I left that location and went up to 78th Street and took a space in what was a sort of like a doctor's office, street entrance, in a building at 50 East 78th Street, off Madison Avenue. Adam William is a dealer who is there now. [Ira] Spanierman was there for many years. When I left, Spanierman took over that space. It was a small gallery, but it was a good location, and it was kind of an elegant little jewel box. And I operated there for years.

All through the '60s I was there, and I put on shows of good artists. You know, things that I had. And I had a very wide-ranging taste. I mean, it wasn't just American or just European or just expressionist. I had - whatever I could find that I knew was good, I tried to go with, and began to develop more clients and museums. And then I, because of my training at Columbia and others things that I had done, I moved very much into Old Masters, started to get into that world a little bit and learn about it.

And some time in the '60s - I think it must have been late '60s - I got a telephone call when I was out in East Hampton, where we had a house in the summer. And it was from a man called Nat Hammer, who was a dealer in Oriental things, Japanese and Chinese works of art. A private dealer, but a good man. He thought he was the life of the party always. He always was telling jokes and entertaining and a little bit of a bore that way. And he was learning how to play the guitar. His guitar teacher was a half-Spanish, half-Irish fellow whose name I can't remember right now. And he said, have you ever heard of the [Adolphe] Stoclet Collection? And I said, of course I've heard, everyone has heard of the Stoclet Collection. It's in Brussels [Belgium]. It's the famous Stoclet Palace in Brussels, which was designed by that Austrian Secessionist architect [Josef] Hoffmann. And Adolphe Stoclet had a great collection of Old Masters, and it's all in their house as a museum. He said, well, how about if I can get you something from the Stoclet Collection?

Well, to make a very long and complicated story short, one of the daughters of Adolphe Stoclet, Michèle Stoclet, moved to Barcelona and married this Spanish artist called Regas [ph]. And he came to New York several times to meet with me and bring me photographs of what they had. And I never believed any of it until finally one morning - I think it was a Sunday - I went out to the airport with Nat Hammer and met this man Regas [ph]. And he had in his laundry bag six panels by Giovanni di Paolo from the St. Catherine altarpiece, famous Sieneese paintings that we knew Stoclet had. And I put them in my safe in the gallery overnight.

And the next morning went to - at that time, the Bankers Trust had a branch where Sant Ambroeus restaurant is now on 78th Street and Madison Avenue. And we went upstairs to their meeting room - board room, and Regas [ph] produced the paintings again. And I had Mario Modestini, the great restorer, and Rudolph Heinemann, the great private dealer who made the [Baron Hans Heinrich] Thyssen [-Bornemisza] Collection, sitting there with me. And we passed the pictures around, and they nodded. And I told the banker to release the letter of credit that I had waiting in Barcelona. And so I bought these six paintings by Giovanni di Paolo.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Fabulous. Where are they now?

MR. THAW: Two of them are in Cleveland [Museum of Art, OH]. One of them is in Thyssen Collection [Madrid, Spain]. One of them is in Detroit [Institute of Arts, MI]. One of them is in the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City]. I think that's five. There's one more, I don't remember. Two of them are in the Thyssen Collection, I think.

And I had sunk all the money in the world that I had at that time, \$60,000, in my half-share, and Heinemann had put up his half-share. And he took them over, and [Mario] Modestini sent them to Vienna to be transferred to new panels, because they were starting to crack. Then he cleaned them, and we framed them. And it took a year before I had the courage to go to Heinemann and say, what's happening to our pictures? Please tell me, because I'm broke; I need that money back. And I didn't put it quite that way to him, but he knew what I meant. And he said, well, they're almost all ready. And anyway, he sold them all. All six of them he sold in a week. And at that time, he gave me a check for my share, which was at that time around \$300,000.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That was a good deal.

MR. THAW: That was the first real, what I would call Old Master money, that I made and could use and spend and had resources. Because that was much more money then than it is today. Today it hardly buys you a decent drawing, you know. But it was a lot of money at that time.

MR. MCELHINNEY: What year would that have been?

MR. THAW: I can't give you precise years, but it would have been some time in the mid-'60s, mid- to late '60s.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So by that point in time, you had, sort of, more or less moved away from showing any of the contemporary artists.

MR. THAW: I still had a piece here and there, but I had a Franz Kline, and I had a de Kooning, a famous one that I

sold to Robert Scull. And I had a great [Alberto] Giacometti still life of bottles that Leo Castelli and I had together, and he helped me sell it. And in those days, I had some Giacometti sculptures. I got friendly with Pierre Matisse, who also helped me. He had, of course, an endless inventory of his artists.

And he was so funny. You'd go in as a client or as a friend and say, do you have anything by [Joan] Miró? I'd love to look at what you have by Miró. He'd bring out three pictures, different periods or different types, and he'd say, that's all I have today. And he had 2,500 Mirós in the warehouse, you know, but he'd say, that's all I have. And that was the way he worked.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, I guess it wouldn't pay to flood the market, you know, offer them all at once. What kind of relationships did you have with scholars, museums? Did you find that, you know, the patrician WASPs in whose footsteps you would have been challenged as a young man to follow, were you now, as a successful dealer, finding a different kind of relationship?

MR. THAW: I kept up with a lot of them, yes. I socially would regularly see Meyer Shapiro from time to time, not every month but once in a while at an event or at a party, always remembered me. He always told a story about me when we were standing and talking to other people. He'd say, you know, Thaw, I remember you in my class. And this really happened. He asked a question of the class or something, and I raised my hand. And I can't remember what it was, but I gave him this sort of pseudo-philosophical answer. And he pointed to me and said, you went to St. John's College, didn't you? And I had to admit that I had. And he sort of spotted my intellectual process as a St. John's student. He was amazing.

And then I kept up with a man called Rensselaer Lee, who moved to Princeton. He was a great expert on iconography and [Nicolas] Poussin and that kind of thing. And I met him in Paris once when I was young. And we wandered around the Left Bank getting into architectural treasures. My French was terrible, but his French was a little better. And we talked our way in past the guards to go to the president's office and to this and to that, these wonderful Rococo interiors that still exist in these government buildings and these wonderful Left Bank palaces. And I had good relations with the academic world. Julius Held, the [Peter Paul] Rubens scholar, became a great friend. And I -

MR. MCELHINNEY: Seymour Slive -

MR. THAW: Seymour Slive is still a great friend, although he's not well anymore. Agnes Mongan I got to know quite well.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann.

MR. THAW: Egbert I saw just yesterday.

MR. MCELHINNEY: How is he?

MR. THAW: He's fine.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I took a class with him at Yale [University, New Haven, CT].

MR. THAW: We had the show of my van Gogh letters to Emile Bernard and to [Paul] Gauguin. That's now at the library. It opened on Friday, with a lunch for the Dutch museum, for the Van Gogh Museum [Amsterdam, The Netherlands] people and Egbert and others who worked on the show.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Which library would that be?

MR. THAW: The Morgan Library [New York City].

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, the Morgan Library.

MR. THAW: Yes, it's a show that just opened at the Morgan. Got the front-page review on Friday of the art section [*New York Times*].

MR. MCELHINNEY: I was out of town. Sorry. [Laughs.] I won't miss that. So moving on, you've got this great rapport with leading scholars. What about museums? What museums did you -

MR. THAW: Cleveland was my chief -

MR. MCELHINNEY: Sherman -

MR. THAW: Sherman Lee was a good friend, and he bought interesting things from me and came around a lot. And you know, he became a good friend.

And also I didn't have a good relationship with the Met at all when Theodore Rousseau was alive. He was such a snob, and he was everything I was against. And I remember once I brought - he wanted [Eugene] Delacroix. The Met is very weak in Delacroix, they still are and more. But they were then almost totally devoid of Delacroix. And I had the greatest Delacroix watercolor ever, ever, ever - the guards - a gouache, a very meticulous finished gouache of 1832, which he had painted in Morocco of these soldiers smoking opium, lying around with the uniforms on and weapons on the wall. A fabulous - [Alfred] Robaut said it's unique for its completion.

And I called Rousseau and said, I have this thing, and would you like to see it. He said he wanted me to bring it up under my arm. He didn't want to come into my gallery office. Bring it up, and he'd see me at two o'clock the next day. Well, at two o'clock the next day I sat there for an hour, until three o'clock, when he finally came back from one of his long lunches. And he wouldn't talk to me. He said, oh, just leave it with me overnight. I'll take it into my office. So I was by that time so distraught that I let him have it. And he took it into his office, and he called me two days later to say that it's not what I'm looking for. When you get a better one, let me know. When you get another one, let me know.

And anyway, I was just - I mean, this was when I first moved to Madison Avenue, and I was very small potatoes in the business at that time. And this thing was \$15,000, and it had come from Japan. I had gotten it from a great collection in Japan, and I didn't know what to do.

And Peter Nathan, a private dealer from Zurich, came to see me. And I told him what had happened, and he said, don't worry, let me have it, and I'll take it to Switzerland, and everything will be all right. Don't worry. Give me a month. And sure enough, he took it to Switzerland, and sold it to the great collector in Winterthur, Oskar Reinhart. His collection [Museum Oskar Reinhart am Stadtgarten] is now considered to be like the national gallery of Switzerland. And Reinhart bought it, and Nathan sent me the check and sent me the money, and I was fine.

And that summer - Nathan later recounted to me that that summer, Rousseau took a group of trustees on a trip through Swiss collections, and they went, of course, to Reinhart. And he was with them, because he was helping to guide them around and give them transportation, like you help - from a good museum - you help to organize the logistics. And he was standing there when Reinhart took them into his library, and on an easel like this was the Delacroix watercolor. And Reinhart said, I must show you my latest acquisition, which is the best Delacroix watercolor ever. And there was this one that Rousseau hadn't bought. And of course, he didn't make a peep. And everyone, all the trustees were ooing and aahing over this latest acquisition of Reinhart. So I had some feeling of comeuppance.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's a good story. So did you deal at all with the people down at the National Gallery or any of those, you know, museums in the Baltimore-Washington area that sort of sparked your interest early on?

MR. THAW: A little bit with [J.] Carter Brown [director of the National Gallery of Art, 1969-1992]. Not much, because their standards were so high that I didn't very often get works of art that were at the level of what they were buying in Old Masters. But I did some business, and I did a lot of business with Mellon. Andrew Mellon became - I mean, not Andrew but his son, Paul Mellon, became one of my great clients. And since his office is just across Park Avenue on the south corner there - there's a building which was the Old Dominion Foundation and the Mellon Foundation. And he would always - that's his office in New York, so he'd always ring the bell here and come in, and we would sit. And he bought quite a lot of things from me which later went to the National Gallery.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Was it he who also gave a lot of work to the Virginia Museum [of Fine Arts, Richmond] as well?

MR. THAW: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And actually Katherine Lee, Sherman Lee's daughter, was the head of that museum for a while.

MR. THAW: Right. And then she went back to Cleveland, and now she's out of Cleveland again.

MR. MCELHINNEY: She's out of - you were saying earlier about Harry Jackson and Jackson Pollock. He's living now in Cody, Wyoming, which is Jackson Pollock's hometown.

MR. THAW: Right. Born there, I know.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So it's a small world always. So are you a collector?

MR. THAW: Very much so.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Okay.

MR. THAW: That's all I do now.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, I've heard of some other activities that you've been involved with, like, the Pollock-Krasner Foundation.

MR. THAW: I was president, and I helped to create that foundation. I was an executor of Lee Krasner's will.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I see.

MR. THAW: And she did not specify that in the will, but she had wanted her estate to go for something like that, and I knew it. So we created - her lawyer, who was the other executor and I - created the Pollock-Krasner Foundation, which has been very successful. And Charlie Bergman has run it extremely well and gives away money to needy artists all over and has proved itself to be a great asset for the art world benefaction.

And I have a foundation now, which I've had for many years, the Eugene [V.] and Clare [E.] Thaw Charitable Trust. And we give in three areas. We give animal rights and protection; we give in the arts of any kind and in environmental work and studies. So both the Pollock-Krasner and our foundation are about the same size - about 50 [million dollars] to \$60 million foundations. And small as they go these days but able to do some good.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you knew Lee Krasner as a neighbor.

MR. THAW: Very well. Well, not so much as a neighbor but -

MR. MCELHINNEY: East Hampton -

MR. THAW: East Hampton - we had a house in Amagansett, and she had a house in Springs, the Pollock-Krasner house. And they were near enough. But Lee would not stay alone overnight if she didn't have a house guest or a weekend guest to stay with her. She'd call up Clare, my wife, and say, get over here. And Clare would go and spend the night with her.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I'm curious. Was the house haunted, did she think?

MR. THAW: I don't know why. We never figured it out. She once wanted to tell Clare but then backed off. She must have had a bad experience as a child, maybe an attempted rape or something. I don't know, but she wouldn't stay alone in her own house. In the apartment in New York, yes, absolutely, surrounded by people, but not in the country. So Clare became a really close friend, and I looked after her interests when she was getting old, sold some of her pictures to the Tate [Modern, London] and to the other major galleries that didn't have Pollocks, the Beaubourg [Centre Pompidou] in Paris.

MR. MCELHINNEY: You know, there was an interesting show, I think last year, at the [Robert] Miller Gallery of the Art Student League, drawings, life drawings and so forth. Charming to see that.

So you helped organize, or oversaw the organization of Pollock-Krasner Foundation, which is, of course, today a really important organization that helps emerging artists, artists who are in need. And what specifically does your foundation do in art? What would the mission be?

MR. THAW: We help the Santa Fe Opera very much. We help produce some art books from time to time. We support exhibitions. Every two years, we do a biennial report of all the grants, of all the things that we do. And it's quite extensive. We give away about \$3 million, \$3.5 million a year.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Wow.

MR. THAW: And so -

MR. MCELHINNEY: Very generous.

MR. THAW: It's not mine anymore, so I have to give it away.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, of the organization.

MR. THAW: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But, you know, the vision is a generous vision.

MR. THAW: Yes. And we occasionally, very rarely, buy a work of art. But once in a while we do. Mostly the works of art I have to buy out of my own funds that we give away to museums or to the Morgan. The Morgan Library is really my life work. I mean, they get my drawing collection, which is now up to about 300, 350 works. And I've

made another large collection of oil sketches, of plein air oil sketches done by artists in the late 18th or early 19th century, mainly in Italy. Artists around [Jean-Baptiste-Camille] Corot and the northern painters who went south and painted this dazzling new light. And they painted the most wonderful, fresh, free pieces on paper, usually from on the site. There are quite a number of them in that other room. And I have about 120 of them. And the Cleveland Museum is going to show them first, in 2009 or '10.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, great.

MR. THAW: And then they'll go to the Morgan Library for the second showing.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I think there's a lot of interest in oil sketches now, the process, like drawing, reveals, you know, the process of an artist's creative enterprise. I think the oil sketches are -

MR. THAW: Well, some of these artists who did some of these plein air oil sketches that I have did the most God awful machines that they sent to the salons. You know, the big history paintings. But the backgrounds, the mountains, and the stuff that they kept in their studio, these oil sketches, they used for parts. And they traded them amongst each other, and they preserved them. And Corot, until his death, had almost all of these. He never sold one of them. He kept them until - these wonderful Italian Corots.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Inspirational, too, I think, to artists like the Barbizon artists who -

MR. THAW: Right, absolutely.

MR. MCELHINNEY: - in their own way were involved with nature conservancy, trying to save the Forest de Fontainebleau, you know.

MR. THAW: Yes. Well actually, Theodore Rousseau was an artist in the oil sketch tradition. His best things were done in 1830 on paper on the site.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Do you call him Ted?

MR. THAW: Just by mistake. I was confusing him with the guy at the Met.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, you've got to know these guys well, in a sense. You own their work; you see it every day; you care about it. You're a steward. I think you, you know, you could call him Ted. You could call Corot, you know, Cammie or whatever you want. I mean, they've got to be, at this point in time -

MR. THAW: My friends, yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yes, your friends, surely.

This is probably a good time to take a break, I think.

MR. THAW: I think we ought to quit now. Are you coming back tomorrow?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah, I think tomorrow I'll quiz you a little bit more about the business and how it ran and some of the people who worked for you and with you. And we'll just allow the conversation to take its own course again.

MR. THAW: My memory for names is not so good anymore. [Telephone rings.] Let me just get that now that we're quitting.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Okay, signing off.

[END MD 01 TR 02.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: Good morning.

MR. THAW: Good morning.

MR. MCELHINNEY: This is James McElhinney interviewing Eugene Thaw at 726 Park Avenue in New York on October 2 [2007].

How are you today?

MR. THAW: Just fine.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Great. I thought we could perhaps talk a little about the gallery operations that you've

overseen over the years. What was the first gallery that you opened with Jack Landau called?

MR. THAW: The New Gallery.

MR. MCELHINNEY: The New Gallery.

MR. THAW: Yes, it was called actually - the whole thing was called the The New Bookstore and Gallery. And then as I gave up the books a couple of years later, it became just The New Gallery. And it remained The New Gallery through our move to the 57th Street area, between 57th and 58th, that I talked to you about. And then when I moved up to 78th Street in a sort of maisonette apartment at 50 East 78th Street, I became E.V. Thaw & Company. It was the same firm, but we put my name on it. First of all, it wasn't new anymore. And secondly, it was now a private dealer by appointment for the most part, although I still had the occasional exhibition there. It was a big room which you could walk into. But for the most part, I worked by appointment. And so for the rest of my business life, it was E.V. Thaw & Company.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It's interesting, because a number of formerly walk-in galleries of the traditional stripe, such as the Kraushaar Gallery, have gone to a private, appointment-only mode. And they have an exhibition space, and they have a preparator, and they have an archivist, and they have, you know, a staff. However, it's no longer a walk-in operation. I think the same thing is true also with Phyllis Kind, who is now operating kind of on the edges of Chelsea and in an upper-story space that's a combined-use operation, has a gallery, has a staff, but is not the traditional. So it seems like you were, in a way, maybe at the time old-fashioned but, in a way, maybe ahead of, you know, the next curve, which it seems like a lot of galleries are heading that way. Is that your -

MR. THAW: I think so, because the ability to have enough work on hand to put up fresh exhibitions began to get to be impossible. You just couldn't have enough inventory, enough stuff, unless you were a Pierre Matisse or a Sidney Janis or someone like that, with contracts with artists who are world famous or enormously wealthy like Sidney was. And you had, you know, a few pictures. And if you put those up already, you couldn't put them up again. And that's why I told you we, as private dealers, we migrated to the half-share and quarter-share ownership of paintings so you could have more and more opportunities to sell them. But big inventories of important names were harder and harder and harder to maintain, and now today impossible.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So just to take a few steps backwards in the conversations, when you opened the New Gallery with Jack Landau, what was your staff like? Was it just the two of you, or did you hire?

MR. THAW: We had one other person, who had worked at Brentano's Bookstore, a man called Frank Strasser. And he was sort of the general factotum, secretary, and he was an unambitious but very civilized man. And he stayed with me for many years, until his death actually.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Really?

MR. THAW: And that was my operation. I mean, I was always pretty much a one-man show, with Frank Strasser to answer the telephone and do some correspondence. We never had a staff. At one or two points in Frank's career, I hired an extra person for a while. And then when Patti [Tang], who you met this morning, came along, Frank was still working, and they worked maybe three or four years together, until Frank was ill and couldn't do it anymore. And so I've just really operated mostly as a one-person gallery. And I always felt that if you had the right picture, you could sell it out of a closet. You didn't need to have a big overhead. And so I always skimmed on overhead. I skimmed on advertising. I almost never advertised - for a while, very, very little. And I just operated in that minimalist fashion.

I had a good library always. I had an obsession myself to research these things and to know what I had bought and what I had. But I did it that way, and I didn't ever have a salesman or anybody who would have clients of their own. That was my fashion.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Who among the other dealers in New York did you regard as being sort of in the same genre as art dealers? You're describing a mode of operation that's almost completely the opposite of what was increasingly common in the day, which was, of course, shameless hype and stunts and self-promotion.

MR. THAW: And the architect-designed spaces.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. THAW: And a new coat of paint for every show. And people on staff called registrar, I mean, curator. They had these museum-like titles in the galleries.

MR. MCELHINNEY: A lot do still.

MR. THAW: Still - and I never went that route. And it worked. I mean, I could have a whole afternoon with Norton

Simon sitting where you are, for instance. No, he would sit on this side near the phone, because he was always talking to his broker at Goldman Sachs while I was showing him pictures. [They laugh.] He was a man who liked to do several things at once. And it's just the way my style developed. And it worked for, you know - I worked with Acquavella a lot. I worked with Stephen Hahn a lot. I worked a little bit with André Emmerich, who just died. I've known him the longest.

In the beginning I was in the print business as well. I mean, at the Algonquin. I mean, I couldn't afford paintings. I had [Henri de] Toulouse-Lautrec posters, and I had all kinds of prints and lithographs. Bill Lieberman discovered me, and we became good friends. And Bill showed me some of the pointers about prints. And I became a good print dealer. And then I went out of the print business and taught it, supposedly, to a man called Peter Deitch, who became a very important print dealer until his early death.

And so it's a pattern that simply happened over the years. And it's all so far back now. It's 55 years ago or something, you know.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Wow. Well, who were the other galleries who you regarded as being sort of in the same orbit? You know, not the big, sort of, splashy, contemporary white-cube spaces, the fresh coat of paint, you know, the registrar, the archivist, the sales teams.

MR. THAW: Well, at that time, there was a girl who had worked for Curt Valentine, who opened an apartment showroom type of thing on 65th Street and Madison Avenue, called Jane Wade. And she was a dealer I worked with. And she was doing my kind of thing out of an apartment, and she knew everybody, from having worked at the Curt Valentine Gallery.

And there was Harold Diamond. I don't know if you've ever heard of him, but he was a terribly important dealer on the West Side. His widow remarried now, but she still calls herself Hester Diamond. She's a major collector. And they were very much in the mode of Constructivist painting, Mondrian and things like that. They went to Holland every summer and bought things there. But Diamond was an important dealer. Joe Hirshhorn was one of his big clients, and he sold all the de Koonings that Hirshhorn bought to him. I mean, they would go out, take de Kooning out and get him drunk and buy pictures. And he also did business with Nelson Rockefeller and with other people on, you know, Cubist paintings and major works. And he himself bought terribly important things and kept them. Hester recently sold her Kandinsky. She had a *Bird in Space* [1926] by [Constantin] Brancusi, which I sold them from the [Edward] Steichen Collection. That was the one that had been stopped entry into the United States in the '20s, because Customs says it wasn't a work of art. And it was a famous case where the judge overturned the Customs. But there were private dealers like that strategically around in New York. There are some other names I can't remember right now.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, are there any dealers who are out there now who you could regard as protégés, people you mentored or anybody who worked?

MR. THAW: John and Paul Herring, the drawing dealer and painting dealers, two twin brothers. Paul Herring worked for Stephen Hahn while John Herring worked for me for a few years, and they went off on their own.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And worked for you in what kind of capacity?

MR. THAW: Well, they were literally trainees, in the sense that their father and mother had been good drawing collectors, so I knew the parents as clients. And the boys, when they wanted to get into the art world, they took these jobs, first John Herring with me and then a couple of years later Paul Herring with Stephen Hahn. And you know, they learned. They just were around and learned things and became very good dealers on their own. And still collectors, too, by the way. That's always the pattern. The ones who were private dealers were often also collectors.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So these are people who are not just working with - it sounds like a lot of drawings moving around here.

MR. THAW: Yes, but also paintings. Billy Beadleston used to work for Acquavella, then he went off on his own. He had a townhouse, and he still is a private dealer. It became a style of operating. And it was really - the only other alternative, either you built a real institution -

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. THAW: - with a full staff, and those who did do that kind of thing, if they were clever at the same time, like Acquavella, they got all the Japanese trade. People wanted to buy from a gallery that had real estate, that had a handsome building. And you know, it's still going on. Warren Adelson went from the Mark Hotel to now to a beautiful townhouse, where they had that [John Singer] Sargent show this past year, "Sargent's Venice" [January 19 - March 3, 2007], which was a marvelous show.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It's wonderful work.

MR. THAW: Yes. And Salander-O'Reilly [Gallery] is now operating from a luxurious mansion on 71st Street near the Frick Library.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So did you used to use the Frick Library a lot, like a lot of dealers?

MR. THAW: A lot, yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah, it's one of those treasures that few people are aware of, I think, outside of New York.

MR. THAW: And I was so disappointed when Charles Ryskamp - when he was director of the Frick in his last two years there, the library wanted to merge with the Frick Collection, because it had been Miss Helen Frick, for a long time, from Pittsburgh, who supported the library, and they needed to raise an endowment. And Helen Frick left only a certain amount of money but not nearly enough. And I gave them a half a million dollars, but I was hoping that the art dealers who used it would come forward. And it was pathetic. They didn't do a thing. But that's getting better, too. The art dealers are getting more philanthropic as time goes by. They've done well, and I think they're - if that campaign were waged today by the Frick Library, I think they'd do better.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It's interesting to look at, you know, the recent attempt by Alice Walton to acquire, you know, the [Thomas] Eakins [*The Gross Clinic*, 1875] and how everybody sort of objected to -

MR. THAW: Its leaving Philadelphia.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah, and, actually, it's staying there.

MR. THAW: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But another Eakins is leaving [*Portrait of Professor Benjamin H. Rand*, 1874]. And meanwhile, New York [Library] lost, you know, the [Asher B.] Durand painting [*Kindred Spirits*, 1849] that -

MR. THAW: Yes, Asher Durand, the two friends on the rock there. That was very badly done by the public library that owned it. They didn't tell the New York museums until it was a fait accompli, and there was hardly any chance. It was Sotheby's who did the whole thing, and they more or less made their deal and then announced it, and there wasn't any time to raise money.

[END MD 02 TR 01.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: So we're resuming.

I'd like to put some very particular questions regarding the operations of the gallery to you -

MR. THAW: Sure.

MR. MCELHINNEY: - just to make some bullet points for any future scholars and researchers. So you had one employee really, Frank Strasser, and now you employ Patti Tang. But you had other people coming through, like the twins. Did you ever have interns in the gallery that worked for you? No. Any other kind of trainees?

MR. THAW: Well, I had extra people here for short periods of time. When Frank Strasser retired and left and then died, Patti had another woman working with her here for a while, but then she left, and I didn't replace her.

MR. MCELHINNEY: How did you find her? Just through -

MR. THAW: From the Morgan Library connection. Her father was a donor and a trustee.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I see.

MR. THAW: And she was, you know, well brought up, well trained, civilized person and knew what the names of the artists were.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And could pronounce them.

MR. THAW: And could pronounce them.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So unlike a lot of the big galleries operating in a kind of museum-like mode with a registrar and archivist and curator, you were more or less taking care of all of that yourself. Or Frank would sign things in to the gallery.

MR. THAW: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Do you maintain an archive of the years in operation?

MR. THAW: Yes, but my son is now in the process of refining it and keeping only the necessary and serious material. Financial records going back 40 and 50 years, we're not keeping anymore.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So mostly just the traffic of artwork.

MR. THAW: Yes, and interesting correspondence we're keeping.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, yeah. Is that going to be available to -

MR. THAW: I haven't decided yet what is the home and end result of our redefined archive. But probably it will go to some permanent home, either the Archives [of American Art] or some other, Metropolitan Museum or whatever. Mostly it involves - the serious stuff involves older pictures or classic, major 20th-century works, so that it doesn't fit so much into just an Americana kind of study group.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So it would be -

MR. THAW: It might be better at a big museum or at the Morgan Library, which, for instance, got the Pierre Matisse Gallery archive.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. Well, I'm sure you'll find an appropriate home for it.

MR. THAW: We'll do the right thing.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Did you ever work for museums or collectors? Did your E.V. Thaw & Company ever send people or hire people to go work with collectors or museums or work as consultants for catalogues, art books, publications, anything like that?

MR. THAW: No. No, except for the catalogue raisonné of Jackson Pollock's work, which I and another man, Francis O'Connor, put together over seven years. And when he was working on that with me, I paid him a salary, because he had no other source of income. And he's an academic, Ph.D. and everything else, and I don't know if you've ever seen our Pollock catalogue but it's -

MR. MCELHINNEY: I may have, I'm not sure.

MR. THAW: - it's the classic. There are four volumes, Yale University Press. It's the classic American art catalogue raisonné. I mean, it came out in 1978 at \$250.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Wow.

MR. THAW: If you want to buy it now, it costs \$5,000 from a rare book dealer.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Darn, I knew that was -

MR. THAW: A mistake.

MR. MCELHINNEY: - [laughs] - that was a mistake to not buy. Well, I was in school at the time so I couldn't have afforded it anyway.

MR. THAW: And Lee Krasner was still alive -

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. THAW: - so we had her expertise on things. And my catalogue raisonné is even a little unusual, in that we have a whole section of fakes in the fourth volume in the back.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's very useful, I think.

MR. THAW: Yes, showing the different types of fakes. And you know, we've published a supplement now, and one small supplement of additional things that have turned up. And when you have a Pollock now, it has to have an O'Connor-Thaw number, like a [Ludwig von] Köchel listing for Mozart, you know.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. Where is O'Connor teaching now?

MR. THAW: He's an independent scholar. He does some teaching, but he's done a major book on WPA [Works

Progress Administration] murals, which is about to come out, I think. And he's helped the Pollock-Krasner Foundation. I don't know if you've seen all the newspapers in the last few months about these 32 Pollocks that are supposed to have turned up in Herbert Matter's estate. And one of our colleagues says that they're genuine. Well, they're not, I can assure you. But O'Connor has been doing all the research to make our case.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, I'm sure these controversies are going to rage throughout time. We spoke yesterday about van Meegeren.

MR. THAW: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So I'm sure that whenever an artist achieves value, especially an artist like Pollock, where the discernment is not purely one of craft and touch but, you know, a whole host of other things as well.

MR. THAW: Well, I mean, I think these particular pictures have already met their waterloo, because both Harvard [University, Cambridge, MA] restoration labs and Williamstown have determined that much of the paint used was not manufactured or even patented until long after Pollock's death. So I would say that's pretty open and shut.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah. So is the Clark Institute [Sterling and Francine Clark Institute, Williamstown, MA] or -

MR. THAW: There's somebody at the Clark lab, but there's a new scientific section there that does work on things like this.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I was at the Clark the other day. They're in the midst of all kinds of expansions. It's real exciting.

How did you handle things like shipping, photography? Did you usually hire outside contractors do to that?

MR. THAW: Yes, we had a photographer who came around whenever we called him and did the shots. And we had two or three in the course of the many, many years that we were in business. And they kept the negatives, and we could order more prints whenever we gave them the number. And that's what we did. And we had a company that we used since the very beginning, Grosso and Company - they still exist - having trucks, and they helped us move things. And when we would have to hang an exhibition, they helped us hang. And they were good friends as well as burly truck men.

MR. MCELHINNEY: They could move a piano if they had to.

MR. THAW: Right, if they had to, yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So they were basically your contractor preparators -

MR. THAW: Right, right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: - shipping and handling and all of that. What about any other support services, framing?

MR. THAW: For important pictures, we used, first, Julius Lowy [Frame and Restoring] Company for many years. And then Guttman [Picture Frame Association], who was already here. As we moved up here, he's on 73rd Street and sells antique frames a lot. And he does regular carving and all of that, but he sells a lot of antique frames, which is what I specialize in putting on the pictures. And they've become wildly expensive now and very hard to find. But for years, he had a big stock, and Guttman was my source.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I've seen a number of galleries dealing in historic artwork, but there are reproductions now available of frames -

MR. THAW: Of frames -

MR. MCELHINNEY: - designed by -

MR. THAW: - Stanford White.

MR. MCELHINNEY: - Stanford White, et cetera.

MR. THAW: Yes, especially in American pictures, Americana now. We've had these really elegant reproductions of the turn-of-the-century type of frames. But if you want a Louis XIII frame for a drawing, beautiful, carved frame, you have to go to a place like Guttman, or Lowy is another, and there are one or two other smaller ones around. But frames now go for 35 [thousand dollars] and \$40,000.

MR. MCELHINNEY: They are themselves works of art.

MR. THAW: Works of art, yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: By the same token, you can go to a museum and see a [Richard] Diebenkorn from 1968 with a piece of strip lattice around it that he obtained at the lumber yard. So I guess it runs the gamut. So you would offer those kinds of services to clients.

MR. THAW: Right. I often helped people frame works that they bought elsewhere, because they liked my eye on framing.

MR. MCELHINNEY: You helped them install the work in their home?

MR. THAW: Sometimes, sometimes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So apart from, you know, the pictures and works of art and frames, did you ever deal in other kinds of objects or antiquities as well?

MR. THAW: No. I bought them for myself, but I never dealt in them. I had a few major museum sales of objects of that kind that came along through my picture dealing. For instance, that fellow that I had mentioned yesterday in our interview who got me these Giovanni di Paolos from the Stoclet collection -

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. THAW: - Nat Hammer. There was also a major Cambodian sculpture that Adolphe Stoclet had. It was likened to an Apollo, even though it was Eastern, because it had classical features. As an echo of whatever Alexander the Great brought to the Far East in the way of Hellenistic art, this was still echoing that. And this great sculpture which was first published by Roger Fry in his book on sculpture, and it was a legendary piece - the torso with a head.

Hammer had had a heart attack and couldn't handle important, tense dealing at that point. So he gave me a share in the piece and asked me to handle it. And I sold it to the Cleveland Museum, where it is now. And then they found out later that Mr. Stoclet also owned the legs of this statue, which he had buried in his garden because he didn't want them. And they found where they - so the legs were recouped and attached to the statue. So that's all in Cleveland now, and it's a world-famous sculpture. But I did something like that because it was a special opportunity.

But in my own field, I sold also the bust of Pope Urban VIII to the National Gallery of Canada, a [Gian Lorenzo] Bernini marble bust which turned out to be the original of the one that's in Rome that had developed a crack in the marble as Bernini was finishing it. And so he had to make another one for the commission that he had from the Barberini family or whatever. And the one that I had was, first of all, legally out of Italy, although they raised some trouble over it. But it was legally out and went to the National Gallery. And it was, you know, not a thing that I normally handled, things like that.

But the National Gallery in Canada bought major paintings from me, and they bought a Poussin from me and so on and so forth, so it was a natural development to sell them a sculpture. And since it was published by [Rudolf] Wittkower in the Bernini book [*Gian Lorenzo Bernini: The Sculptor of the Roman Baroque*. London: Phaidon Press; New York: distributed by Garden City Books, 1955] and all that, I didn't have to pretend to have any further expertise on it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's kind of an interesting story about the legs in the garden. It's funny.

MR. THAW: Yes. Sherman Lee researched it and found that, and he got the Stoclets to dig up their garden, and there they were.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, how much did that cost?

MR. THAW: I don't know. I have no idea.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs] It's pretty funny.

MR. THAW: It was out of my -

MR. MCELHINNEY: Half of the piece now and half of the piece later.

MR. THAW: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Anyway, how do you see the current direction of the art world, you know, right at this moment? Well, the contemporary art world is a mercurial thing. A lot of the dealers I've interviewed, as a kind of lament, said that the recent decades have been mostly money-driven. The idea that, you know, a [Andy] Warhol is really just nothing more or less than a stock certificate.

MR. THAW: There's not much hand work on them. They're mostly -

MR. MCELHINNEY: No.

MR. THAW: - silk screens plus just a dab of color.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Apart from all of the theoretical architecture that gives them a certain kind of historical value and interest to people, I guess. I mean, a number of the people I've interviewed have said that they think that the economy of the art world has become more important than anything else. It's sort of going after the dollar trend.

MR. THAW: It's why I retired. I mean, I'm still capable of running E.V. Thaw & Company as a business if I wanted to. But quite a number of years ago I retired, because I just couldn't - everything had turned into money. And people were buying trophies rather than collecting art.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's interesting. They're buying trophies instead of art. So it becomes a kind of a nouveau riche status acquisition, black tulips, 17th-century Holland and that kind of thing.

MR. THAW: That's right. When somebody refuses to buy the last tulip, the whole shooting match collapses.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, people are saying that that realm of the art world is sort of on the precipice at the moment. That the galleries in Chelsea are sort of teetering on the brink of oblivion, or a number of them. A number of them aren't real anyway. As we know, they're -

MR. THAW: Well, they're all supported by family money or investors or whatever.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right, right.

MR. THAW: But it just didn't become fun anymore. And I did this thing out of love and out of interest. And so I continue to collect in the areas that I've told you about, and that satisfies my need to acquire and my need to study and my need to be up on some aspect of the arts. But I can't play in the market anymore in the big way that I was doing, you know. And you know, if you look back, I've sold a lot of great paintings, and I've helped to make some great collections. I'm going out now later this month to Norton Simon's 100th birthday - it would be. They're having a symposium. It's actually my 80th birthday on the 27th of October, and I'm going to be, on a Saturday, heading a panel discussion of people who have been asked out there who knew Simon.

Anyway, the joy went out of it. And I made enough money I could retire and live on what I had and could be a philanthropist. I created the foundation that we have now, and I'm enjoying what I do. And I don't have to have the satisfaction now of another deal.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Have you undertaken any new directions in your collecting?

MR. THAW: Yes. A few years ago, I gave a collection - only three or four years ago, I gave a collection to the Metropolitan Museum, which they exhibited called, "Ancient Nomadic Art of the Steppes" ["Nomadic Art of the Eastern Eurasian Steppes: The Eugene V. Thaw and Other New York Collections." October 1, 2002 - January 5, 2003]. Two hundred pieces I gave them, and they had a big exhibition there. And they put out a beautiful book of all of them. And the belt buckles and saddle trappings and horse trappings of the so-called Ordos desert period and peoples outside the Great Wall of China.

All the way across the Steppes to the Mediterranean were these nomadic tribes who really bridged the vast space between the Chinese empire and the Mediterranean and the Scythians. And so stuff that Peter the Great collected in Russia in gold pieces, a lot more of it exists in bronze, in gilt bronze, and I got interested in it and made a collection, which I gave to the Met. And if you go into the Oriental wing upstairs off the big open hall there, off the balcony, the first cases that you come to on the wall are a lot of these pieces which I gave them, and they're listed as Thaw Collection.

MR. MCELHINNEY: A lot of people are acquainted with Scythian art.

MR. THAW: Right. Well, this is in that same period. It's the first millennium before Christ.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Scythians - Sarmatians, I guess, were later.

MR. THAW: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And I recall that some mummies wearing plaid were exhumed in Kirgizia or someplace at some point in time. Would this be part of that same culture?

MR. THAW: Well, yes, but I collected mainly the metalwork -

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. THAW: - all of the small metal pieces.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Have you ever been tempted to get into the ancient art of the Southwest like I guess a lot of the -

MR. THAW: You don't know about my American Indian collection?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, yeah, but that's -

MR. THAW: That includes a lot of ancient art of the Southwest. I have, you know, mimbres, bowls, and Hohokam pieces and things from Chaco Canyon and all of that. And I don't have any pre-Colombian art from Mexico all the way down to Peru. I don't have that. I didn't go into that, although I like it. But I just concentrated on the early American Indian material.

MR. MCELHINNEY: The Anasazi.

MR. THAW: Yes, exactly.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah, I don't know your collection well, but I did live for a while in Denver, and they have a pretty extensive Native American collection. I was curious if you knew, you know, the Mayers, Jan and Fred Mayer, up there, big collectors.

MR. THAW: Of American Indian art?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Spanish Colonial and a little American Indian art.

MR. THAW: The woman who did my show for the Met of the Chinese and Scythian and Siberian art is called Emma Bunker, and she works at the Denver [Art] Museum, and she's in their Oriental department. She's the great authority in the world on that stuff.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Wow.

MR. THAW: And she did their catalogue of the [Arthur M.] Sackler bronzes in Washington at the Sackler Museum [Arthur M. Sackler and Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution]. And she helped me with the collection.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So what do you see as the future of the art market in general? I mean, you're sort of outside of it in a way. You're no longer dealing. It seemed like you started out as a dealer, dealing with some contemporary art and then moved sort of away from that, more into secondary market and Old Masters.

MR. THAW: I think there are probably things being made today which in 100 years or 200 years will be looked back upon as fine works of art and by important artists. But I don't think they're the same ones that are being touted in the art world right now. I think a lot of the fashionable art at the moment is going to be downgraded the way academic painting of the 19th century, has been and all the endless [Jules Adolphe] Breton farm girls and herds of sheep and all of that. I think that what is fashionable at the moment, if it's looked back upon 500 years from now, is going to look like a very, very poor phase of the history of art. I can't see right now that the - who's the fellow who does the sharks in formaldehyde? Damien Hirst.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Damien Hirst.

MR. THAW: Damien Hirst, that Jeff Koons, that people of that stripe who sell for millions of dollars will maintain that hold. And for me, the so-called Pop artists, the best ones, Lichtenstein and even Warhol and a few others, I think will survive as important figures. I think the Abstract Expressionists, the great generation of de Kooning and Pollock and their cohorts and [Mark] Rothko, I think will survive. I think that's real painting. And it's the last period that I really feel I understand and have some intellectual access to.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you're saying you think that a lot of the artists who are going to be treasured by the future are even off the radar now. People like Vermeer, who was, even up to 100 years ago, undervalued and really didn't start to become interesting to people, oddly, until -

MR. THAW: Mankind has not all of a sudden lost its talent for making art. But just what is out there right now, that I can see, I don't feel is a permanent and responsible addition to the history of art. And I think there are things being made that we don't know about right now -

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. THAW: - which will be that valuable addition.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you think a pickled shark will be much the same as a rosy-cheeked milkmaid in 100 years or a diamond-encrusted skull.

MR. THAW: It got sold.

MR. MCELHINNEY: A dashing cuirassier with rosy cheeks himself. [Laughs.] Yes, I heard. But if you were to - well, obviously, you're busy at the moment creating a legacy, and it would seem being very successful at it as well. But if you were to try to, you know, put your career into a clever phrase or a memorable - I want to avoid the word "epitaph" as being too - [inaudible] - what would it be, your motto under your coat of arms?

MR. THAW: It would be, don't neglect the hand of the artist, because the hand of the artist and what that creates is the sign of civilization. When [Albrecht] Dürer came to Italy as a young artist to, first of all, meet everybody and to show off and to absorb some of the Italian Renaissance material and culture, he failed to meet Raphael. For some reason, the timing was wrong. So they exchanged drawings by mail, by whatever they'd do at that time. And Raphael sent a drawing to Dürer with a note saying, I send you this to show you my hand. And we don't have what Dürer wrote back to Raphael.

But we're in a period of multiples and art ordered from machine shops, by measurements, like [Donald] Judd and Tony Smith and things like that, where the directions are the work of art and who makes it doesn't really matter. For me, all of that, without the hand of the artist, is, for me, missing an essential ingredient. It's not unlike handwriting or, in the case of an artist like Pollock, releasing the unconscious in what he did. So there are humanistic reasons to cling to the hand of the artist, and that's what I feel is what I look for.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, I'm sure we're all improved by your efforts, because to gather such important collections together and to make them available to people is to reinforce that idea and to continue to send that message. That's great.

MR. THAW: Let me show you something before we break up here.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Okay.

Mr. Thaw just left the room, and he's going to get something to show me, which I will describe on the recording when he returns.

I think it's interesting you're speaking about the minimalist aesthetic of somebody like Donald Judd, and you think about somebody like Dan Flavin, who I was stunned to learn recently that he was a passionate collector of Hudson River School drawings.

MR. THAW: Really?

MR. MCELHINNEY: And they're now in the possession of the Dia [Art] Foundation [New York City], who loaned them to Vassar College [Poughkeepsie, NY]. But he was a big collector of very traditional drawings and admired them a lot. He was very, very bent on their having a good home and having access to scholars and the public, et cetera. So people are complex. You see the surface, and you think, well, it can't just be about a fluorescent light bulb in the corner or all the critical, theoretical architecture -

MR. THAW: Have a look. Just flip through that a little bit.

MR. MCELHINNEY: This is the art of the North American Indians. This is your collection.

MR. THAW: That's my collection, yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Where is the collection now?

MR. THAW: Cooperstown, in the Fenimore [Art] Museum.

MR. MCELHINNEY: There's a lot of interest in this now. I mean, have you seen and how do you feel about the new American Indian Museum [National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.] at the -

MR. THAW: At the Smithsonian.

MR. MCELHINNEY: - at the Smithsonian, yes.

MR. THAW: It's a good building, but they haven't known what to put in it yet. It's just a tragedy that they don't really like old works of art. They want to stress the new Indian art, what they're making now.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. THAW: And it's a sort of feel-good kind of thing for the local cultures. But they have a great collection, and they don't show it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, I'm sure your comments will be noted. [Laughs.]

MR. THAW: Well, I've been on their board and everything. I mean, they hear from me.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, I know that an artist from Oklahoma, Edgar Heap of Birds, was part of the [Venice] Biennale this year.

MR. THAW: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: He and I are old friends.

MR. THAW: Let me show you just - look in the back there, the last third of the book, and you'll see some of the great Northwest Coast pieces.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, yeah.

MR. THAW: I mean, those two are great masterpieces.

MR. MCELHINNEY: These wonderful carvings of totemic images in wood. These are hats?

MR. THAW: They're helmets.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Helmets.

MR. THAW: Tlingit helmets.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And this one with the abalone shell - it's wonderful, gorgeous stuff. Well, they also had a very, sort of, plastic sculptural style and extremely Asian influence, it would seem. Some kind of close ties - these are gorgeous as well. Well, this also speaks, sort of, to the Viking and Celtic art, too.

MR. THAW: Right, that came later.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. THAW: This is what developed into that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So the influence of the classical world and -

MR. THAW: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: - influence of China. Yes, it's a part of the world that we don't really pay a whole lot of attention to. I think -

MR. THAW: Well, now the Met has the greatest collection in the world of this material.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Wow. I think mostly because people traveled by water until fairly recently.

MR. THAW: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: You know, the majority of humankind were waterborne. And in fact, 95 percent of all cargo today still travels by water. These knives are interesting, too. This bronze - 13th century B.C. - oh, I see. So these are -

MR. THAW: Belt plaques - right and left side of a belt.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Gorgeous.

MR. THAW: It's all this animal-style art.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. THAW: You know, fighting each other.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And, sort of, the interlacing the complexity of the decorative pattern, the use of patterns. Gorgeous stuff. How did you - where does one acquire these kinds of objects?

MR. THAW: All over, Hong Kong, dealers that have sometimes - [Giuseppe] Eskenazi in London, the great Oriental dealer, sold me a lot.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Beautiful, beautiful.

I think we've covered a lot. What advice would you give to a young dealer, somebody who loves art like you, who has a lot of energy and has a vision, has a desire to not exist in the academic world? I'm sure there are many reasons why people choose not to exist in the academic world or the museum world, want to chart their own course. They think opening a gallery is the way to do it. In other words, if you were to meet somebody who's 25, 26 years old who looked to you like a young Gene Thaw, what advice would you give them?

MR. THAW: Don't sell anything or handle anything that you feel you wouldn't want to have back in 10 years. [McElhinney laughs.] But if you handle things that you feel you would want to have back in 10 years, you might actually either help make great collections, or if they came back on the market, you'd have a chance at them again. And always, always, always try to keep something for yourself.

Clients sometimes resent a dealer who collects, but it can't be helped. Your eye is improved and your relationship to art is cemented when you collect yourself. And in fact, if you think of academics who give Ph.D. degrees out and teach at Columbia or Harvard or any other great university and spend their whole lives going to Europe and writing articles and lecturing, and if they don't own a work of art, I'm suspicious of their scholarship.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So if they have the passion to study something, they should have enough confidence in their taste -

MR. THAW: To keep something, to buy something.

MR. MCELHINNEY: - to acquire something.

MR. THAW: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Thank you.

MR. THAW: All right, thank you.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It's been a great pleasure.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

[Top of page](#)

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