



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Gilbert H. Kinney,
2009 Mar. 9-17

Funding for this interview was provided by the Widgeon Point Charitable Foundation. Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National Park Service.

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Gilbert H. Kinney on March 9 and March 17, 2009. The interview took place at Kinney'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 Widgeon Point Charitable Foundation.

Gilbert H. Kinney 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 speaking with Gil Kinney at his home [. . .], in New York City.

Good morning.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Good morning.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Rainy morning.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Let me start by asking you, what's the first recollection you have of being in the presence of art?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, that's a tough question. I was pretty young. My parents collected everything but painting and sculpture. They collected furniture - antique furniture, rugs, silver, glassware, et cetera. But I was always attracted to art for some reason. And by the time I was maybe eight years old, I was getting catalogues from the Museum of Modern Art. And when I went away to school at 14, St. Paul's [School, Concord, NH], I took reproductions from MoMA like [Vincent] van Gogh's *Bridge at Arles* [1888] and the fish painting by [Paul] Klee [*The Golden Fish*, 1925]. But they only had two paintings, one a Gilbert Stuart, which I many years ago gave to the Corcoran Gallery [of Art, Washington, D.C.], where I was very involved; and a painting by Sir Henry Raeburn, which I have kept and will go to one of my children.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So what was the first piece that you actually acquired yourself?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: The first piece I bought was - and I still have it in the bedroom - was [Maurice] Utrillo *Maison des Soeurs*, which I purchased in Paris in 1958. And this launched me really into serious collecting in the French area for many years, which I'll discuss later.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, as a kid, did you collect stamps or coins or any of the -

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes, like most collectors, I guess, I collected stamps. And I was away in school in Arizona for seven years, having a sinus problem, and that's where I met Carter Brown [Director, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 1969-92], for example. But I collected stamps. And every Christmas I'd get another valuable stamp to add in my collection. But talking to other collectors, I find this is fairly normal, coins or stamps or something, before they get into fine art.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So at what point was the passion for collecting, the curiosity or the appeal of objects, at what point was that overcome by an attraction to fine art, you know, paintings, sculpture?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, I think the first time I really had an opportunity was in 1958. When I graduated from Yale [University, New Haven, CT] in '53, stayed another year to get a master's in international relations. Was pointed towards the Foreign Service, my first career. And then went into the military, in air intelligence, for over three years. And so, really, the first opportunity I had was 1958. I'd passed the Foreign Service exam, but there was a waiting period. And I decided to go to Paris to look up a girlfriend, and that's when I bought my first painting.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Who did you buy it from?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: I bought it from a French dealer, Galerie Dramat-David. And I can give you that in a minute.

JAMES McELHINNEY: But a gallery.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: I bought it from a gallery, yes.

JAMES McELHINNEY: As opposed to from another collector.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Oh, yes, I bought it from a gallery. And it was an Utrillo, and I knew – even at that point I knew the white period of Utrillo was probably better painted and more valuable, but they were more expensive. So I settled for this one, and it hasn't disappointed me all these years.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Let's take a few steps backwards in time from the first purchase, and let me ask you, when you were either at Yale or before at St. Paul's, were there any people, teachers, profs, any individuals who were for you inspirational, mentors?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Not at all for the art. That was something strictly on my own. I was very programmed towards, as I say, the Foreign Service. I think – I can't recall even going to the Yale University Art Gallery when I was there. And frankly, in those days not many undergraduates did. So it was something quite apart from my general education and career pattern.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So you didn't have any contact with the [Josef] Albers School. That was about – you would've been in school at the time when Albers came up from North Carolina and –

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Right.

JAMES McELHINNEY: – and took over the Street School, or the Yale School of Art.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: No, as I said, there was a complete blank. And I never took an art course, until much, much later I audited two courses at Harvard [University, Cambridge, MA], when I was there for the State Department, just before I left the Foreign Service.

I was very much self-taught. And my family didn't particularly know artists or art collectors or whatever. So it was just something that – I always say that some people are born with a voice, and take some training, and they can sing. I couldn't sing a note. I also can't paint or draw. I did a few watercolors. But I can hardly draw a straight line. So with me, it's all in the eye, and it's a matter of self-training and voluminous exposure once I got into the art world, and voluminous reading and so forth.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So you never took an art history course at Yale?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Never did.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Were any of your friends at Yale, either in, you know, the programs that you – I assume you were in a liberal arts program.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Right.

JAMES McELHINNEY: What was your emphasis?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: No, it was history and international relations, language, and so on, actually. No. And the only peripheral contact at all, one of my roommates was the son of an American ambassador who had been incarcerated in the Vatican during the war. So I heard something about the Vatican. But I really had no art exposure at all.

JAMES McELHINNEY: No one at all on your radar was interested in art or involved in art. So here you are in this bastion of learning –

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes.

JAMES McELHINNEY: And you're art historically a complete autodidact. [Laughs.]

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Right. That's the word.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Self-taught.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Self-taught.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So what motivated you to start collecting art? Did you start collecting prints or drawings or anything like that before the Utrillo purchase?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, actually I did, something. I bought a few prints, Japanese prints, when I was in – part of my navy service was two tours in Japan. And I bought a few prints, and I've really kind of, you know, I don't even talk about that very much. We may have a couple. And my wife, I'll speak about later, spent a lot of time in Japan, and she bought some prints. But it was really going to Paris, going to all the museums. And I went down to Spain, Portugal with a French friend of mine and had that exposure. But I sort of jumped right in with paintings. And just look at my notes a minute. After the Utrillo, which was 1957 – correction, not '58.

Then the next significant event was I got married in 1959. And Ann, my wife, and I went on our honeymoon to California. And I bought my first American painting by a man named Raimonds Staprans, who was born in 1926 and still painting. I see an ad for his work occasionally. And we bought several paintings, minor things, mostly artists that, well, now you may know the name, but not famous artists. And my wife shared my interest, which I was glad about. And then we went back in 1960 to Paris, and I bought the [Marc] Chagall and subsequently [Pierre] Bonnard, [Kees] van Dongen, and things in the '60s. But I was in the Foreign Service, and this was kind of on the fly between posts.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: – going to the Far East and coming back through Europe.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Where were your posts in the Foreign Service?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: After initial training in the State Department for two years, I went to Tokyo. Had a fascinating assignment at the embassy in Tokyo, lived right in the embassy compound. It was the time the U-2 was shot down, the Eisenhower [President Dwight D. Eisenhower] visit. And my job was assistant security officer. So I was right in the thick of things. And then two years there, then two years in Vietnam, which was extremely interesting and extremely dangerous. During the coup d'état, we were almost killed in 1963. And then '64 I came back to Washington and worked on the Vietnam desk and the Japan desk. Then I went out and had my own post in Indonesia, in Surabaya, East Java. So I had a very exciting and rewarding Foreign Service career.

But even during that time I was acquiring art in a small way. But it really wasn't till I left the Foreign Service – I was in Indonesia from '69 to '72. In '72 – and of course we – then we bought a great deal of art, which was ceramics, which were being excavated at that point. These Indonesian dealers would come around with baskets of porcelain, and we bought some. And we also bought some bronzes and so on. And that was in '69 to '72.

Then I went to Harvard. And Harvard was where it really began seriously, because two factors: I took my first – audited two art courses, one by Michael Fried, who is well known – he was a [Clement] Greenberg person; [Kenneth] Noland, [Jules] Olitski, and [Anthony] Caro. I was able to audit his course for a year, and I urged him to get all the way up through Jackson Pollock, because I was already starting to focus on the American Abstract Expressionists, and he did. Then I also took a course on museum management from Daniel Robbins – which was prescient, as long as I was in that course. But then I was told to leave the course because I wouldn't write a paper; I couldn't write a paper because I had a full course load through the State Department. I will get back to that later.

But the other significant event was the first auction I went to, a groundbreaking auction, the Edith Halpert Sale, in 1974. Half of that collection was shown at the Busch-Reisinger [Museum, Harvard Art Museum], for about a month, in Cambridge. So I took a good look at those works and then went to the auction. I was anxious to bid on a painting, but the prices went out of sight. The one picture I focused on was *Hot Still-Scape for Six Colors* [1940] by Stuart Davis. Fabulous artist. But it went totally out of sight, as did everything else there. So I didn't buy anything. But getting ready to go to the auction, I went down to MoMA, and I looked at what they had in American of the 1930s and the early '40s, which was basically the Halpert material. I then looked at what they had in the Abstract Expressionists, and I said to myself, That's the wave of the future, and I'm going to go that way.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So what was the first Ab Ex piece you bought?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: The first Ab Ex piece - well, predates this a little, so I was already into it - is the [Mark] Rothko.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Which I bought in 1971. I should backtrack and mention that before I went to Surabaya in 1969, I was principal officer, and had an official residence, and we wanted to bring some American art. That was sort of a precursor of the Art in Embassies program. So we came to New York shortly before we left and looked at some paintings, bought the Rothko two years later on home leave, but never took it to Indonesia. We did buy some other works that were not very expensive: a Frank Stella work on paper, a Jasper Johns multiple. Also a Helen Frankenthaler, and a William Baziotis was bought later. That was in 1969. The big plunge was the Rothko in '71. And then my focus very much concentrated on that.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Who did the Rothko come from, if I may ask?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: It was at Marlborough [Gallery], and it was before the scandal.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: And fortunately, in fact, I had a letter from the attorney general asking when I bought it and so forth. Because you remember Frank Lloyd, who eventually went to prison or had to leave the country and so on. And I was smart enough that they offered me something, a work on paper, and I said, "No, I want an oil." So I bought this oil, which is probably one of the centerpieces of the collection. And it is *Untitled*, 1953.

JAMES McELHINNEY: That's the one we saw out there.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: That's the one you saw out there in the Abstract Expressionist room.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, at that time, collecting living artists, I would imagine that you began to cultivate acquaintances with these artists.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: To a limited extent. Frankly, and I'll get to it later in our interview, but I really didn't know living artists, particularly. And because of the Abstract Expressionists, I was focusing on people who were gone. Although I did meet [Willem] de Kooning a couple of times. And this sort of leads into my involvement with the Archives of American Art, which I went on the board in 1974, and a few years later with the American Federation of Arts. And also joining art museum boards and so on. But my real focus was on artists who were no longer living, and although I knew some widows. And when it comes time to talk about Ad Reinhardt, I knew Rita Reinhardt very well, and that's a whole major chapter of my collecting history. But I did have some interaction.

But I'll say right off the bat I never was particularly interested in going to artists' studios, and I rarely did; because I am very candid, and I cannot go and admire something and say I admire what I really don't. And also I don't want to hear - when I'm buying, I don't want the dealer even in the room. If I'm buying from a dealer, I say, don't give me a sales talk on this. Just let me look at it. You can give me a little biographic information or something, but I like to make my own decisions.

And this has changed a lot. You know, recently many, many people are very - sort of get their kicks out of the association with the artist, the explanation of the artist about their works. And that may be more understandable in the kind of art that's being created today, which is, in many cases, a far cry from the traditional painting and sculpture where I have stayed.

JAMES McELHINNEY: We're right, as we speak, kind of standing at the edge of a bloodbath out there. And at the close of a weekend of art fairs and art shows, a lot of people have been wondering what the future will hold. A lot have been making a comparison to this 1990 to '91 collapse of the gallery world here in New York and around the world, but mainly here in New York. And saying that this is going to be a lot worse. There are going to be fewer galleries. That one of the dealers here in town, one of the bigger dealers here in town, offered the opinion that with, you know, the death of the art market, perhaps the art world will rise again. That there was something that happened where it became more about the acquisition of social status - or if you want to be friends with a movie star, you go shopping with this dealer - and less about the art;

whereas what you're speaking about really speaks from the heart about taste and about the things you care about as art, as opposed to things that bestow status.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, that's true. There's a huge difference between my big time in the art world – I mean, to launch my start was in a depressed time in 1973-'74. And things were very, very reasonable. Also, it was frankly much more fun, all through the '70s, through the '80s, when we were a small number of people. And you knew people; you went to the auctions; you sat with the same friends year after year at Christie's or Sotheby's. And it was a very different world.

Now I should say right off the bat, one reason I have such incredible notes and documentation of the collection and so forth is that I, about 20 years ago, started to write a book about collecting. And I'm just now starting to get back to that. And I have given several lectures and so forth. But I really have amassed an enormous amount of material. And I've shifted my focus.

It might be of interest – the first approach I was going to take to the book was walking around my home in Georgetown, Washington, D.C., where we lived from the time of our marriage up until 1998, when we moved to New York, '96-'97. But I was just walking around the house and talking about the collection and the stories that went with each artwork. And you could talk for hours about that, because I read somewhere that collectors have almost total recall of everything they bought. And I must say it is amazing because now, at my age, my memory for names is failing, but I can still pretty much remember the circumstances of buying everything. But anyway, that was a very good time to start.

And I'll give you an example of why, you know, the art world was in trouble. One of my major purchases was sculpture. I was buying Abstract Expressionist both painting and sculpture. And one of my major works was *Voltri XII* [1962] by David Smith, which I bought at an auction in Los Angeles, California, from Sotheby's, in February 1975.

Sotheby's had an auction of a big collection in Massachusetts where the man had gone broke. It was sold without reserves. They never did it again. It was also, I think, the first time they had paddles, but I'm not sure about that. Anyway, I went out to that auction, and they had very good things. And this work came up, and it was extremely inexpensive. And I waited. There was one movie actor who bid a couple of times and quit. And I put my hand and bought it and left the room. And then a couple of other prominent people who are well known, you know, were in the paper the next day. But I was totally under the radar and had left. And the dealers had no money. So that was a period not unlike now. And I don't think that had any effect at all on the artists that, you know, period when things went so inexpensive.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, artists always have a lot more inventory than they can ever sell. So I guess they lower the prices and exhibit them more widely or whatever.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, I think –

JAMES McELHINNEY: You do what you need to do.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: They do what they need to do. Well, I think that they will – this symposium I went to yesterday, where you had Chuck Close talking and Irving Sandler talking, artists will hold on. I mean, it used to be that people took years – they were in their 40s – before they sold their first painting. I mean, the sole struggling artist syndrome, and you read about the artists of the New York School. And now people are being rated when they're still in art school at Yale or wherever.

And I'm on the board of the Yale Art Gallery, and we used to, when we had our board meeting, we'd go and visit the artists working in the studios. And the head of the art school would maybe pick four or five of probably the most representative. And this was very special, and we went in there. Now for the past two or three years, people are coming up from New York, dealers, and looking around and then getting these guys to promise to come with them. And you know, it's instant gratification for some artists, just like it's instant gratification for the hedge fund buyers.

JAMES McELHINNEY: I think that's a good kind of comparison. It's like speculating on racehorses, like the yearling auction in Saratoga every August.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Right.

JAMES McELHINNEY: You know it's, sort of, unproved, but it's exciting because it is unproved. And then you're there at the beginning. But what other collectors – as you began to collect, what

other collectors did you start to form alliances with, friendships with? You spoke about seeing the people at the auction or at the gallery opening and so forth.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Right. Well, somebody I sat next to for years were Hunk and Moo Anderson [Harry W. and Mary Margaret Anderson], major collectors out in California, down in Atherton. And they're still – the museums out there are in rivalry to see where his collection is going to end up. Also I went on the International Council of the Museum of Modern Art. I was asked in 1975. I said, I have to wait a year. In 1977, I joined as, perhaps, the youngest member and got to know those people.

One very important group I belonged to for just three years was Dominique de Menil, who was just a giant. She and her husband and the Menil Museum in Houston [TX]. And she got a group – we were called Friends of the Beaubourg, and this was kind of a fundraising group for the Beaubourg [Centre Pompidou, Paris]. And these were very top people. The Bagley Wrights from Seattle and Jane Davis, a major collector, from Seattle; David Mirvish from Montreal. And we would have a 10-day trip together in England or France. Then there were, well, just, you know, it was very easy to meet your fellow collectors, particularly in the same area. And that was before we got into the Asian art, which is a whole different group of collectors, a much smaller group.

JAMES McELHINNEY: And what kind of Asian art were you collecting, mainly the artwork of Southeast Asia, where you were posted?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: That's right. We were – and it's sort of, you know, you asked about first purchase. In 1963 we bought a Thai bronze roof phoenix; it's 19th-century. It's not a valuable piece, but it's still in our library with the bronzes, and we have the stone sculptures in the gallery. But because of being in Indonesia, we – and also Ann was interested in, knows a lot about Japan. But we never really got into Japanese. We concentrated on Southeast Asian. In 1987 we bought a Nepalese bronze.

The big break was 1989. I went to an auction in Amsterdam of Indonesian material. And because we didn't buy any Indonesian material in Indonesia, and there was always – well, now there's the provenance issue. But even back then we were aware of it. I went to an auction in Amsterdam and bought two major stone sculptures, which you see in the hallway. And five bronzes, three of which were auctioned by the Rijks Museum [Amsterdam, The Netherlands]. Then we branched out to Khmer and later on into Himalayan, which was more my wife's interest.

JAMES McELHINNEY: How interesting.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: But the other thing I should mention was the year after I left the Foreign Service, the reason I was able to spend so much time in New York – because we were living in Washington from 1973 on – I volunteered as a dollar-a-year man at the Asia Society to raise money to restore Borobudur Monument [Central Java, Indonesia], which was the most important single Buddhist monument in the world. And it was in my territory of responsibility in Indonesia. I had Central Java, Yogyakarta, East Java, and Bali, and a couple of islands beyond. Mr. John D. Rockefeller III had said he would help with this cause, but nothing was happening. So I went and said, "I'll be a dollar-a-year man. Give me an office, a secretary, and I will organize an American committee for Borobudur and raise the money for the American contribution to go through the UNESCO."

And so that year I spent four days a week in New York living at the Union Club and taking my laundry home to – just like being back in prep school – for the weekend [they laugh] in Washington. And that was a great opportunity for me to live in New York that very crucial year. And also be doing something that made my reputation as a fundraiser, which I've spent as my other avocation, both political and arts organizations and so on. But I knew the scene; I knew Pertamina, the oil company. And the head of the oil company organized a dinner. We raised a million dollars in one night. It was all very exciting. Meanwhile, I could run around in galleries. And Sotheby's was then, you know, newly opened.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Over there on York Avenue?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: No, no. Sotheby's was on Madison [Avenue].

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh, oh, on Madison.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Opposite the Carlyle [Hotel, 35 East 76 Street].

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: And the great fun was to go to auction. Sometimes with my wife but mostly by myself. And then buy something and then go across to the Carlyle and celebrate.

JAMES McELHINNEY: That's right. It's up the street where Gagosian [Gallery] -

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Directly across from - yes, right.

JAMES McELHINNEY: - is now in that building. That's right. And then in the '80s it ended up over on York Avenue.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Right, but much later. Much later.

JAMES McELHINNEY: I was at school then. Yes. With all of these interests in collecting, very specialized fields. I mean things like Indonesian sculpture or thangka [scroll] painting or Khmer sculpture or arts of Asia, where there isn't necessarily a lot of scholarship existing about it. I, for a while, had a passion for Suda and had to learn the hard way how to, you know, how to understand them. So in a funny way collecting turns you into a scholar.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, it does. And actually there is a lot of scholarship, and particularly Ann was more scholarly. Now, she has a Ph.D. in economics.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

GILBERT H. KINNEY: And she's - she wrote, as I've mentioned in my biography I sent you, this book on the sculptures of East Java [*Worshipping Siva and Buddha: The Temple Art of East Java*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003], which she spent seven years writing. And we knew collectors in this area in Washington. We were involved with the Asia Society, both down in Washington and here. And, for instance, for the purchases I made in Amsterdam, the Christie's curator was a very close friend - still is a very close friend - of ours. And we were close to the curators here in New York.

And so in those fields you relied more on - you had to talk to other people and read things and so on; as opposed to when I saw Ad Reinhardt, you know, I knew just instinctively what I was looking at and what I liked and so on. So it is true. There's a difference when you get into the more - and frankly, thankas I left entirely to my wife. But we found out the best dealers, and we would - once we flew - one of the two times I ever flew on the Concorde, we flew over to Paris to meet a dealer and buy a couple of major pieces. And then we had obligations on Monday. So we just went for three days. I'm sorry the Concorde isn't here anymore.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yes.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: [Laughs] It worked.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, I'd imagine with a lot of Indonesian art, a lot of the scholarship is probably in Dutch, which, of course, it was within the colonial realm of the Netherlands. So do you speak the language, read it?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: No, no, no. I don't speak or read Dutch. I did learn the Indonesia language professionally when I was there. But, no, but there is a great deal written in English, and there's books. And as you can see, this is just part, a small part, of our art library. And we have another room in the back where my assistant is part-time registrar, which is just floor to ceiling with books. And there's just, you know, a lot of information.

JAMES McELHINNEY: I'm intrigued because I'm having a look at your library, and it looks like a scholar's study. I mean, I live - my wife is an art historian.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Right, you mentioned that.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So I live with lots of giant binders full of stuff. [Laughs.] And I'm having a look at the shelf over here behind you, and I see one, two shelves just packed with these things. So I'm imagining that these are your scholarship -

GILBERT H. KINNEY: In line with your question about -

JAMES McELHINNEY: I'm curious about it.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: - about who I knew. Somebody who was a childhood friend and his children were - he was a major collector - was William A.M. Burden - you've probably heard of.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GILBERT H. KINNEY: And he was a friend. And so when I came to an auction to buy a Franz Kline painting, he said, "Well, you can stay with me, Gil." And so I stayed with him and had dinner in his apartment just filled with great art, which certainly gave me an added incentive to bid on this pretty major work. And I said, "Well, how do you keep your records?" And he showed me these books. And this is what I have done, and you'll see there are -

JAMES McELHINNEY: It's a whole catalogue.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, a catalogue with the information on the left and the reproduction on the right.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Okay. So -

GILBERT H. KINNEY: This is a very minor little work.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh, I see it right here.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Right there. You see, there it is. Now here is the Kline. And this - you know, that's the study. I guess the Kline, which I sold, is in another book. But that's the way it works. And in some works, some cases, there's very little about it, and in some cases there's much more.

JAMES McELHINNEY: There's a Mitchell, a Joan Mitchell.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: So every single work is in these books. And just to summarize, I have not made a lot of decisions in terms of purchasing, considering it's 1970 - I mean - what did I say? I mean 1957. I mean, that's 50 years, over 50 years.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yes.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: But I totaled it up, and we have bought 604 objects. Currently in the collection are 377; 223 have been de-accessioned. Part of this is I had some income I could spend on this, some assets. But I wasn't a wealthy man. And as I went through life, and particularly after I left the Foreign Service, I was not earning a salary. And so as I purchased art, as our tastes changed, I de-accessioned.

But it was not that art was an investment. People always ask about that, and I think it's a terrible term. It's apparently quite prevalent recently. But, you know, people have come a cropper that have been major collectors, like that Swedish man went bankrupt. Tastes change and so on. It's not a good idea in the first place. But it's - but I've passed up things which I knew were very reasonably priced. But it wasn't something I wanted to acquire or hang, and so I didn't buy it.

But it's also a matter of your upgrading, your tastes. Or changing. As I say, we started very conventionally with the Utrillo, Chagall, and [Maurice de] Vlaminck. They are not giants. Well, Chagall has a special following. But, you know, compared to Rothko, Pollock, and de Kooning, there's quite a difference. But also we have bought - we've liked to help local artists. So living in Washington, I made a list. We had 27 different Washington artists, very few of whom you would've heard of. There's a very active - always has been - an active art scene, but it's not New York.

JAMES McELHINNEY: But it's the Color - they refer to it as the Washington abstraction - the Color School.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, the Color School I did buy. I had a major Morris Louis. Almost as big as the Mitchell. And we had - let's see. I never bought a [Kenneth] Noland. I'm trying to think of the other ones.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Gene Davis?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Gene Davis. I had one - I liked, knew Gene Davis. Liked him. Had a painting, but eventually sold it because it was large. And many of them we gave to the Corcoran Gallery or gave to art auctions. Same way in Maine, where we summer; we have 24 Maine

artists. Again, not big names at all. But most of those we've kept. And Maine, of course, since the early 19th century, has been a great place for artists. And you can make wonderful acquisitions there for a few hundred or a few thousand dollars even today. Very good works.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Where do you go in Maine?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: We go to Mount Desert Island.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh, yes. Sure, sure.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: And there are a few art people: Allan Stone was up there. Richard Estes is up there. Major Washington collector Mitch Rales has just moved there.

JAMES McELHINNEY: There's a sculptor out on Cranberry Island, [Philip] Grausman, does these giant heads.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Oh, yes. There is an exhibition at the Portland Art Gallery of artists from Cranberry Island, as we speak. It opens very shortly. I hope to see it.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It's a wonderful part of the - I used to go there as a kid, actually.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Oh, really.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Every summer, yes. Where on the island is your place?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, Northeast Harbor originally.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh, okay. Right.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: And then in the late '80s, I bought a big piece of property on Blue Hill Bay in Pretty Marsh, looking at Blue Hill.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Over on the western, wild half of the island.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes, the quiet side.

JAMES McELHINNEY: The quiet side.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: The quiet side.

JAMES McELHINNEY: The non-tourist side.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Not Bar Harbor, the opposite of Bar Harbor.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right, right.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: And we have almost only Maine artists there. And interesting, we decided we wouldn't have any abstract art there. Everything we have is figurative.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So did you buy people like [Neil G.] Welliver and Rackstraw Downes when he was there?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Porter?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: No, no. Those were really Welliver and some lesser-known people. But also, like my favorite artist, Malcolm Morley, my favorite living artist, did a painting which I bought just two years ago, *Port Clyde* [1993]. So I bought that at auction and hung it up. We have a second little home up there that we've - gave us an opportunity to get things out of storage and so forth, put up.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So when you are collecting regionally, do you go to dealers? Or are you acquainted with the artists? Do you ever acquire things from the artists?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: No, we know - we really buy them from art galleries in either Northeast Harbor or down the coast. And there are some very good art galleries. And we do know a few of the artists, the photographers that work there. But just kind of casually. I mean, they're not close

friends. We enjoy talking to them. But again, my focus is really on the works and not meeting the people so much. Except for the few. I can talk about the few artists that, aside from Ad Reinhardt – and that may be saved to another day.

JAMES McELHINNEY: We can talk about that the next time. But just to –

GILBERT H. KINNEY: I've met Malcolm Morley, and I have 14 Morleys. He's the most depth, after Ad Reinhardt. And we met him a long time ago through Xavier Fourcade, who is my favorite dealer. Maybe we want to talk about dealers versus –

JAMES McELHINNEY: Sure.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: And because I think it's very important. I haven't done – analyzed – what was bought at auction as opposed to what was bought at dealers. And there's probably more weighted on the sell side at auction, because I find consignment is difficult because – with living artists – because the dealers want to sell the latest work, and the artists want to sell the latest work. And you may have what I may think is a superior work from five, 10, 20 years ago.

But that's apt to stay in the back room while the new work is out front. But anyway, Xavier Fourcade was a giant in the field. And I forget how we first met him. But we became very close friends. And he had a broad taste, and he introduced me to de Kooning and also to Joan Mitchell and a number of other people. And he was really a close personal friend. And I can't say that he was almost alone – we met [Sidney] Janis. We knew [Leo] Castelli. I like some of the older ladies, like Joan Washburn, who is still around and was honored by the Archives. She was and remains a friend. And we did buy a couple of important works from her years ago.

But back to Morley, he's a fascinating character. As you probably know, he was imprisoned at the age of 16 for stealing a loaf of bread. I mean, a [Charles] Dickens story. And he learned to paint, draw and paint, in prison. And then he got out, and he got to America a few years later and is now an American citizen. And it's amazing. He got the first Tate award for contemporary art.

JAMES McELHINNEY: The Turner Prize?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: The Turner Prize, yes. Which was quite astonishing, given his background. And I'm just checking to see the first Morley – I guess it's the best Morley – *The Sky Above, the Mud Below*, bought in 1985 from Xavier Fourcade. And a few months later it was in the Carnegie International. It's the large painting hanging in the dining room. And then subsequently I just liked his work and kept buying it. When Fourcade died, he went with Mary Boone. So I got quite acquainted with Mary Boone and did some business with her. And then if things came up at auction, I would buy them at auction. But he was a real character. I think he's on his fourth wife now. One of them committed suicide.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh, dear.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: It was never – and he was really a wild guy. But now he has a lovely wife and has settled down. His collection is all being digitalized and put on computer.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Not bad for a ruffian who learned to draw at her majesty's pleasure, as they used to always say.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Right, right. Yes. And the other artist I knew was – is – also a wild character was Joan Mitchell. Again, met through Fourcade. And we actually visited her in France a couple of times.

JAMES McELHINNEY: She's at Giverny, right? Near the –

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes, right. Where –

JAMES McELHINNEY: [Claude] Monet. What I like to call “Club Monet,” because you'd go into the studio, and it's a gift shop. Yes.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Right, right. Yes. And we visited Mitchell there, and we had lunches in Paris with her dealer. I really got acquainted with her because I was very active at the Corcoran Gallery. And Nick Serota curated a show of her work which opened at the Corcoran. Ann and I had a dinner for Joan Mitchell, and we invited some of the VIPs in Washington. Gifford Phillips I put on one side and Zbigniew Brzezinski on the other side of her. And, of course, she drank like a

fish and misbehaved.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Good for her. [Laughs.]

GILBERT H. KINNEY: And it was the usual scene. But she was a great, great artist. So I had, I think, four paintings of hers. One was too big to get in the apartment, unfortunately; I had to sell it. But that triptych, I think, is just fantastic.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Outstanding.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: So that was another artist I knew. But there were very few. And the other thing, I mean, now, since I'm on the board of the Yale University Art Gallery, we know Carol Lewitt, Sol Lewitt's widow, and Bob Mangold.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yes, who's an alumnus.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: He's an alumnus. And yes. And the seminar yesterday, the symposium, they were talking about the greatest class that ever attended art school was Chuck Close, [Richard] Serra, [Robert] Mangold, Lewitt. It was '62 to '64.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Sixty-two to '64. Yes.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: You know that -

JAMES McELHINNEY: Rackstraw Downes.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Rackstraw Downes.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Janet Fish.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Janet Fish. The lady who died tragically, the sculptor, you know.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh, Eva Hesse. Eva.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: No, Nancy Graves, I think.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Nancy Graves, right. I'm sorry. Not Eva Hesse, no.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: And so that's fun, too. I don't mind talking to artists. I just enjoy not in the -

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, you're talking to one now, so - [laughs.]

[END MD 01 TR 01.]

Well, how would you compare the kind of conversations you have had, or have and still have, over the years with dealers - how do your conversations with dealers shape your taste, shape your approach to collecting or just art in general versus how your conversations with artists influence? I mean, how were you influenced by either, and are you able to contrast?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, I would say very little by either.

JAMES McELHINNEY: [Laughs] Oh, okay.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: I, basically, because I take four or five art magazines, I read books, I visit museums, exhibitions all over the country, I sort of discover - well, I see somebody, a dealer - go back to the dealer. The dealer is having a show of an artist I'm interested in. I usually see an ad in the magazine the month before. A little tip I have. I have a number of tips, which I'm going to put in my book about how to - tips on buying and collecting. But one of them - I'll give you two of them right off the bat.

One of the means, you get a notice from the gallery. They choose a painting - it's primarily painting; it could be sculpture - that they have pre-selected. They think - in some cases it's the work that photographs the best. But usually it's the work they consider the best. I go to the gallery; I want to look at that thing, that work, first. And I have bought a number of works like that. A Hans Hofmann from André Emmerich. That's another dealer I knew fairly well. But André, for some reason, didn't make much fuss over me, and we were kind of bouncing around. And we bought some pre-Columbian and so forth. And strangely enough, you know, I never did a lot of business with him after a few years, although we remained friends. But anyway, so I would see

this notice. Or I would see their ad in the magazine. And I've even called up out-of-town galleries and asked about a work that they advertised in their magazine. But I've had a general idea.

And the major dealership that I dealt with was Marlborough. And that leads to another discussion. I would only say, at Marlborough, the person I dealt with was a very good friend, whose wife worked at a jewelry store. But he also had worked at a jewelry store and was not especially knowledgeable about art – it wasn't Pierre Levai.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Jack Mognaz was a lovely fellow and a good friend, who came up to Maine and took us to see [Alex] Katz's studio, Welliver's studio, had lunch, and so on. So that was fine. I'm comfortable not dealing with the head guy, who's trying to convince me to buy something. I just want to see what they have. And that's been sort of the relationship. But I keep very much track of what's coming up.

Then with the auctions, of course, it's a totally different situation. And I like auctions. And I like to go in person if I can. If I can't, I'm quite confident bidding on the phone. And I have a theory of bidding, and that's why Yale asked me, like I did the other day, to go with the curator and bid on the work for them. Because I know how to bid, and I'm pretty confident.

But, for instance, this work - which is the latest thing I bought at auction, which is back to our Southeast Asian field - I happened to be in Maine when it came up, and I'd seen it. And so I had to bid on the phone. And I did. And my wife - maybe I shouldn't say this - but said, "Oh, it's getting over the - you'd better stop." I said, "I have a sense of it. I'm going to bid one more time." And I got it. And that's often happened. I just kind of have a sense.

And when I bought *Port Clyde* - this is an interesting story about Morley and auction. I went down, and it went for five times what I was buying Morleys for 15 years ago, of course. And even though he's not a Richard Prince or a [Jean Michel] Basquiat or somebody. But I went to the auction, and it was the end of the day. It was a long day, and it was the afternoon sale, where I used to be able to pick up some things very reasonably. You know people will - well, I looked around the room. There wasn't anybody I knew in the room. And I thought, oh, boy! Here's my chance. And so, you know - but then, of course, the auctioneer bid up to the reserve. And then finally I jumped in at X. And I thought, boy, good, I've got this. It's below the highest estimate. Or they're maybe at the highest. The phone rang. My heart sank. Because nowadays most bidders are bidding on the phone. They're either abroad, or, you know, they have - they're up in a booth or something. Anyway, this wasn't an unusually expensive article, but it was \$150,000, something like that. So anyway, the phone bid. So I bid again. Boom! Bid it again. So then I bid and waited. Of course, the auctioneer sort of waited, waited. Nope. Yours. Paddle number, please. Okay.

So I rush back home to call up Malcolm and tell him, "I've got it!" He said, "I know you do." I said, "How do you know I do?" He said, "The under-bidder just called me up furious that he lost out to somebody in the room. He was on the phone." I said, "Well, who was that?" He said, "It's my dealer in Europe, in Belgium." I said, "Well, you're fortunate, Malcolm. It's in my collection. He'd have to ask 50 percent more. Forget about it."

JAMES McELHINNEY: That's an interesting story because in a few of the conversations I've had with dealers, there's a certain amount of unhappiness expressed by the fact that they have to now compete with collectors on the auction floor; whereas I think historically the auctions were seen as, like, a wholesale opportunity and then come to the gallery. But the collectors like you seem to really like the sport of auction.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Oh, well, but, I mean, going back to my first one in '74.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: And then I was at the famous [Robert] Scull sale [Sotheby's, 1986], and you know. But we were there at least in that - they must be looking back to the early 20th century and 19th century. And I think it's true out in the boondocks.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: And Yale has bought a number of things, including some fairly pricey, you know, miniatures from an auction house, Skinner, in Boston.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh, Skinner, yes.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Skinner. Well, and they asked the committee to approve a sum way over the estimate because they think it's ridiculously low. And most of the time we've gotten it just a little bit below that. But anyway, the New York auction, you know, and now they have the Internet. My experience in what I've gone to since Internet bidding is they never get anything worthwhile. People are just looking for some bargains.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, you have to see the piece, I think, you know.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, sure. But everybody buys with JPEGs, which is a phrase I didn't know till a couple of years ago. You know what a JPEG is, probably.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yes, you look on the website. You click on a thumbnail, and there's your JPEG. But it's not the same as being in, you know, the gallery and seeing whatever itself, no.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: I don't think so.

JAMES McELHINNEY: But perhaps because a lot of the people who were buying were buying speculatively and not buying out of taste or out of some kind of vision, like you spoke about earlier, and having an eye; they're buying it because they think they're going to buy it, they're going to hang it on their wall, and in a couple of years they're going to -

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Flip it, yes.

JAMES McELHINNEY: - flip it, and they're going to make more money, and then they're going to buy other stuff.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Oh, yes. Well, you read the MaGravy article.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right, right. And Holland Carter a couple of weeks ago in the [*New York Times*].

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes, right.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Arne Glimcher in the [*Daily Beast*] and other, sort of - but a lot of people are talking about how art as an investment was really something that degraded taste in a way. Is that fair to say?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, I think - I don't think it changed the true collectors. I think it did, well, it did sort of give a bad image. I don't know whether I would say degraded. I just felt that that was nothing that I or most of the serious collectors that I knew, you know, ever was a factor.

I will say I have a theory about collectors, which is borne out by the numbers I give you: that some of the major collectors I know have never de-accessioned a work. They have thousands of works. And it'd be great if you were super rich and you can have thousands of works. But I tend to tease them a little and say, Have you learned nothing over your 30, 40, 50 years of collecting? Has your eye not improved? Have you never made a mistake?

And, you know, if you have unlimited resources, you don't have to think about that. But in the first place, I don't believe in having a lot of things in storage. I have maybe 40, 50 works in storage now, and we rotate things. And we have, you know, several homes - only three, really. Plus one that I've given to my daughters. So we can show a lot of things. And these little bronzes like this, you can always have more of those. But I find, then, some people, you know, are much more selective. Maybe their tastes change, or maybe they decided that some things are really more permanently worthwhile than others.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So you do make a distinction between buyers, collectors, and accumulators?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes, I would say so. Yes. But the accumulators - I wouldn't, you know - can be people with great taste and great resources. But it's somewhat different. I think most people have to make choices in life, and you'll probably see some making some choices now they didn't expect to make.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, perhaps some collectors have a kind of serial passion, you know, like people who might start out collecting coins or stamps, then move to prints, or they move to

porcelains, and then move to sculpture -

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Right.

JAMES McELHINNEY: - painting, photography. And might collect for a period of time one thing. And then move on to another thing.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, and I think that - I know some of the younger people I know - prints are a good place to start. I just never got into it, with a couple of exceptions, one of which was my [Andy] Warhol Maos, which I sold recently. [Laughs] And the other thing, a set of prints, I gave to the Corcoran. And photography is a good area to start. And then I never collected drawings. I know there's a good argument for drawings, and people that collect drawings really say, this is how you understand what the artist is about and so on and so on. Well, one issue there is you can't show them very much. You have to keep them away from the light.

We knew [Abram] Josephovich, a great drawing collector in Switzerland. We went and visited him once. And he took out drawers and drawers and drawers and looked. But I, you know - that didn't interest me. And so I moved directly into painting and sculpture, which I found was for many years unappreciated and still is somewhat. And yet there's a great, great variety in it. And I think it's very enjoyable. And it's tactile. And, you know, you can have fun with this figure. You can't go to a museum and touch the sculptures. And sculpture is basically tactile and wants to be touched. So that's another reason you see Max Ernst in the hall and [Barry] Flanagan, in addition to the Indonesian stones.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, sculpture just because of its, you know, the dimensionality, the weight, and just simply the cost, it's just much more expensive for sculptors to make what they do.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Right.

JAMES McELHINNEY: And it takes longer and is harder, I think, in a lot of ways than painting, which is addressing that one surface.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Right.

JAMES McELHINNEY: But, yes, it does seem like it. A lot of drawing collectors I interviewed, a couple like Eugene Thaw and Richard Gray, who have wonderful collections, and expressing an appreciation for that insight into process that one gets from looking at drawings.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Do you have any outdoor sculpture at any of your other homes?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, we had a very important sculpture garden in Washington.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Okay.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Which was the *Voltri XII* I mentioned, David Smith. Which incidentally was the poster for the opening of the East Wing [National Gallery of Art]. So it was -

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh, that David Smith.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes. That David Smith. [McElhinney laughs.] Which is now owned by Charles E. Schwab. Because when we moved to New York permanently in 1997, we had to sell the Georgetown property and sculpture garden. So I sold the *Voltri XII*. I sold Tony Smith's *Gracehoper* [1971], which is the small - the medium-sized. The large version is outside the Detroit Art Institute. I sold something I regret, and I don't regret many things, but maybe next time we'll talk about another major thing I sold but I don't regret so much. But it was de Kooning's *Clamdigger* [1972]. That was a wonderful piece. And that - so there were these three. Plus a [Anthony] Caro and a George Rickey. His structure is steel; it goes like that. Anyway, the *Clamdigger* we tried in the living room here, and it just didn't work as well as it worked in the garden. But in hindsight, I'm sorry I sold that.

There's always a problem of, if you have things and you get approached by dealers - I had a [Alberto] Giacometti *Femme de Venise* I bought a long time ago. And when Arnold Herstand opened his gallery here - and he was a friend - he borrowed it. And I found that's a fatal error unless you're willing to sell something. Because you will get an offer you can't refuse. A Swiss

collector flew over here twice. I was offered something multiples of what I'd paid for it. Fortunately, although that is a far more valuable piece than what I replaced it with, the Flanagan, but I really enjoy this Flanagan. And this Flanagan is special because it has, as you may have noticed, a stone base. So it is not a multiple. I'm not a fan of buying multiples in most cases. And here is something you may not have noticed: the David Smith Ridge Runner [1953]. So I still have one David Smith. And another David Smith I traded long ago on a Pollock. But maybe next time we'll talk more about the individual items of art.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yes, that would be great. And other artists and more stories about the dealers and, you know, we - I guess we carried the chronology up somewhere into the 1980s.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Right, right.

JAMES McELHINNEY: And now we can explore the last decades of [inaudible].

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes. And, you know, it's funny how you surfaced, you know, belatedly on the art world. Of course, I had all these connections with the Archives and the AFA [American Federation of Arts], both of which I chaired, and with the Corcoran Gallery, where I was once acting director for a year till they found Peter Marzio. But then in all the art lists, I was looking back - fortunately I'm just a pack rat and saved, you know, art magazines back to - but then I found - one day a few years ago, I went to Mary Boone's, who has them all. I said, Why am I saving them? But then I've been working with my part-time registrar to go back over the magazines, tear out what I want, and so on. But they do these lists of the collectors. And I was in the list from 1987, the top hundred, through 1993. And then for two years - that's the top hundred in *American Art and Antiques* [now *Art & Antiques*] - and in 1992 and [199]3, I was in *ARTnews* in the top 200 in the world. And, you know, I would be off the radar now. But this was -

JAMES McELHINNEY: Although in another year you may be at the top of the list again. [Laughs.]

GILBERT H. KINNEY: [Laughs] Well, hardly. But that's sort of based on what have you bought lately? And anyway - but it's been fun. And it's a passion, obviously. And you really -

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, it seems like the way you were talking about you going to see the collector in Switzerland and him having, you know, all the drawings in the flat files,, it seems to me that you like having your art in the environment. That's sort of a criterion for you. You know, that it's part of your everyday experience.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Oh, absolutely. It's like living in a museum. And I'll say both my children are interested in my art. And Ann, my wife, has been interested from the beginning. And we have a very good relationship. I basically make the decisions, except she is more expert on the Himalayan, for example. And equally on the Southeast Asian. She doesn't have a veto. But if there's something that she really doesn't like living with, I will generally sell it, and one case I particularly regretted. It was a little Barnett Newman. But anyway - and the colors, too. I mean, she loves celadon. And you've seen our bedroom; almost everything is celadon. I'm sort of partial to Yale blue [they laugh], which appears. And it's funny. I had a - and she doesn't like brown. And so we had a brown [Joan] Miró over the bed, and that went with some other things on a deal I'll talk about next time. And that's a factor. But I do.

And my daughter worked 11 years at Christie's, my older daughter, Sarah. And she and I did a lot of purchasing together, because Ann was still in Washington, basically. And my younger daughter is interested, has some work I've given her. And then even my Indonesian houseman - I brought back from Surabaya, and worked with us for, for us, for, oh, almost 20 years - took a course at the Corcoran [School of Art]. So even he, who had three years of schooling, kind of got - by osmosis he got an interest in art. So I think you develop that. And I think that was the other thing, living in New York - I should say my parents, you know, went into antiques. But I did go to the museums with them.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Where did you grow up, here in the city?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes, 765 Park.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh, okay.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: A block away. So I'm home.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So this is home turf.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: This is home. And so, I mean, it's a great advantage to grow up in the city, with these cultural resources. And as I say, I don't know how I happened to - somehow I found, you know, these books from MoMA when I was very, very young. And obviously we must have gone there.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, perhaps this would be a good time. It's nearly noon.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: To break, okay.

JAMES McELHINNEY: We've spoken for close to 90 minutes.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Close to 90 minutes, right.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So we'll sign off.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Sign off.

JAMES McELHINNEY: And I'll just say thank you. And I look forward to continuing the conversation on the 17th.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Great. Next week.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Thank you.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Not at all. Thank you.

[END MD 01 TR 02.]

JAMES McELHINNEY: This is James McElhinney speaking to Gil Kinney at his home [. . .] in New York, on St. Patrick's [Day], March 17, 2009. Good morning.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Good morning.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Any thoughts about our last conversation? Any things we want to start with today?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: No. I enjoyed it. I would just mention a couple of corrections in names I couldn't come up with it at the moment. I spoke of my good friend, major collector in Chicago, Muriel Newman, who gave many of the Abstract Expressionist paintings at the Metropolitan Museum. And the other person whose name I couldn't come up with was the artist Stuart Davis, whose painting the *Hot Still-Scape for Six Colors* impressed me so much at the Halpert Sale, the first auction I attended. But I was not successful in buying it.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Let's talk about your collection a little bit today.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes, that would be fine.

JAMES McELHINNEY: You have some range and also some depth in it, as well. We started out last time speaking about your Abstract Expressionist collections.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, that is the major focus. We did talk about that and the fact that I still have the highlights in the living room, although I had to sell the sculpture, the garden sculpture, when we moved to New York.

But I would like to talk about the question of depth because, in general, most of the artists I own, I only have one or two examples, with three exceptions. And the most prominent exception and the most - the real signature of my collection - was my Ad Reinhardt collection. And there was an exhibition of my collection at the Corcoran Gallery curated by Jane Livingston in 1984, which was entitled "Ad Reinhardt, Seventeen Works." Subsequently, I purchased three more. So at that point I had 20. And these were all oil paintings or works on paper, most of them oil painting. And that was an exception for me, because I - several things attracted me to Ad Reinhardt.

I first saw his work in 1974 at Marlborough. And Marlborough actually became the source for many of my works in the Abstract Expressionist field, which I was purchasing throughout the '70s and early '80s. But he wasn't very well known in the States, mostly shown at their galleries in Europe. So it was kind of a discovery.

And I was attracted to him because I admired the whole range of his work, which started with Cubism in 1939, ended with the Black Paintings at the very end of his life when, in effect, he had sort of painted himself into a corner. And I never knew Reinhardt. But I did know Rita, his widow, quite well. She told me that when he finished the Black Paintings, he really was thinking about taking up photography, because he felt he had just exhausted the art of painting.

But anyway, this exhibition was very exciting to me because it was the first time I'd seen all these works in one place. And then some years later there was a very major exhibition of his work, a retrospective, at the Museum of Modern Art and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, to which I had loaned eight or nine paintings. And so that was an interesting experience, to see Reinhardts in enormous depth.

The other two artists that I've been attracted to particularly - one is Malcolm Morley. Did I speak of him? I can't remember.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yes, you did. You did.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: I think I talked about him a little in the last - in the first interview we had.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yes, you spoke about acquiring the piece that's now hanging in the dining room from Fourcade.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Fourcade, that's right, which was in the Carnegie International. And then almost the most recent painting I bought was a scene in Maine for our summer house. And the other - and Malcolm Morley I know. The other artist I knew was Joan Mitchell. Again, I think, first painting through Fourcade. Then we visited her - and I think I spoke about her, too, the dinner we gave for her in Washington.

JAMES McELHINNEY: I don't know if that was on the record or not. I think it was in the hallway, maybe after the interview.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Okay. Well, Nick Serota, the British curator, did a major exhibition of Joan Mitchell when we were in Washington. And my wife, Ann, and I gave a dinner for her. And then subsequently we saw her in France several times. And I actually, checking my records, I think I bought six of her paintings. But I only have two left. But I have this very major painting, *Chicago* [1966], the triptych, which hangs in my living room and will never move again. They tried to borrow it for the exhibition at the Whitney [Museum of American Art, New York City]. But it's so big, it barely got in in three pieces through the window, hoisted up from the street.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Wow.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: And so it's not going to move again, as long as I'm living in this apartment. But she was a very talented artist who went to France and kind of dropped out of the New York art scene, the auction scene, and so on, until towards the end of her life. And now her paintings are very much sought after. In fact, just the other day I was in a gallery and saw an extremely beautiful work of hers from 1953. But I'm afraid it's a little out of my price range now.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Fortunately, I was able to buy most of my works when they were very reasonably priced. And I think, like we have probably seen the top of the stock market for a long, long time, I think we've probably seen the top of the art market for a long time. Although as the sale of [Yves] Saint Laurent in Paris and his friends showed, the top works will still receive top dollars.

JAMES McELHINNEY: That seems to always be true. Most collectors I've spoken with have expressed the opinion that, you know, it's much wiser to buy something that's absolutely the best example of any artist's work. If you've got a choice between two or three middling, respectable works and buying one really terrific work, you always want to buy the best work you can. And I guess - I mean, part of that must be just the passion of taste, but part of it is also, if you ever have to sell it, it's easier to sell a top example than -

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes, that's exactly true. And I don't know if we touched on before - I think I mentioned the fact that [there are] two kinds of collectors: those that have never parted with any work - and those are primarily people with deep pockets - and people whose tastes have changed, have evolved. To repeat a little of what I said before, we started with the French

paintings, and we still have a few of those. Then concentrated on the American, the Abstract Expressionists. Then we got into the Asian field, which I don't think we've discussed much at all.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Not yet, yes. We'd like to do that.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: We'll get to that. And so I think, as I sometimes tease my friends, did your tastes not only perhaps change, but also improve? And I think experience does improve your taste, really.

JAMES McELHINNEY: You spoke about Ad Reinhardt saying towards the end of his life to his wife that he had felt like he had exhausted all the possibilities for himself in oil painting, and then was having a look at possibly becoming a photographer. I mean, have you experienced that as a collector, where you sort of exhausted all the possibilities of a particular genre of artwork, and the allure of some kind of new frontier of collecting and study appeals to you?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, I think so. I don't think you lose – I cited that Mitchell, just by coincidence, I saw a couple of days ago. And I was very much attracted to it still. And if I had a lot of spare cash, I would probably try to buy it. But certainly the allure of the new is interesting.

And that brings us to the Chinese contemporary art, which we're looking at. My first purchase here, which is Fang Lijun, who is now about 50, and is one of the most recognized, not the most expensive, Chinese contemporary artists, but quite well up there. And we saw this in Berlin about five years ago.

We visited a fellow collector from the International Council of the Museum of Modern Art, who actually wasn't there but had a large contemporary collection. And she was interested in purchasing a large work on paper for the Museum of Modern Art, which she did. And I asked her curator where – who sold this artist. And luckily she said, Well, the dealer, Mr. Ochs, who has a gallery in Berlin and also one in China, in Beijing, was just three doors down. So I went down and looked at what he had available for sale and bought this on the spot.

Then this was just about the time that Chinese contemporary art was hitting the market in New York. And we have been involved with the Asia Society for a long time, since – I may have mentioned I ran that project, American Committee for Borobudur, there in 1974. So they have an annual fundraiser at the – it used to be at the Armory. And about four years ago, we went to the opening, and I saw this Chinese painting, *The Paper Bride* [2005], which is hanging in the hall, and was very taken with it and taken by the dealer at the gallery, a very attractive lady who lived partly in London and partly in Shanghai. And so I bought that painting and the three small paintings by another artist.

And recently I bought a large painting from L&M Arts, which is [Robert] Mnuchin's gallery, which traditionally carries postwar American. And their current show is [Donald] Judd. And they had [Philip] Guston. But they gave a Chinese painting – Chinese artist – named TianBing Li his first exhibition in New York. And because I know Mnuchin, I was able to get the pick of the paintings. I went in there when they'd just arrived, before they were hung, and selected one, which I subsequently purchased.

So next question?

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh, sure. No, I'm just absorbed in your narrative here.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, I should mention one thing: That my total collection by prominent collector standards is not enormous. Of course it depends. If you collect Japanese netsukes [kimono sash toggles], you may have hundreds of thousands more. But I actually purchased 604 works to date. I still have 371. I de-accessioned 233. So about a third were de-accessioned.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, you spoke about collectors, that you have, you know, the big potlatch chieftains with the deep pockets, who just buy. Then you have others whose tastes change over the years and who evolve and who acquire and sell in a very careful way, and that would be you, I suppose.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Right.

JAMES McELHINNEY: And then you have other collectors who are probably required to do a little dealing on the side just in order to support their habit. If they want to buy something, they've got an ambition to change their tastes or to acquire a piece, they've got to sell something in

order to buy other things. But in all models, in all of those three -

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Right.

JAMES McELHINNEY: - models you have, you have an evolution, like with, you know, the career of an artist. You spoke about Ad Reinhardt, and that he came to the end of an idea and was, at the end of his life, having to look at another path.

So can you talk a little about how your tastes evolved? I mean, you're attracted to something. You acquire it; you study it. You acquire some more. And then how do you come to a point where, let's say, you decide to undertake the collecting of Southeast Asian art, of which you've got quite an impressive collection?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes, well, I think that was a combination of things. Partly because I was fortunate enough to get into my serious collecting when I was best known and so on in the '70s, '80s. Although it was only until about 1990 that I started appearing on these lists of the Hundred Great Collectors in the country and the 200 in the World and so on. And at that point I'd already purchased most of my major works, outside of the Asian field. And I should mention one - probably the most important work I ever purchased was an iconic painting by [Edward] Hopper called *Summer Evening* [1947], which I bought in 1974. And that, going to Maine in summer, I'd always been interested in his work. But all the time I was in the Foreign Service, I wasn't in New York in the art world. The purchases I made were mostly on the fly or passing through Europe.

So anyway, I had a dealer I met, Harriet Griffin, from whom we bought a couple of quite modest purchases, a couple of Albers's paintings, for example. But we also bought another important work from her, which is one of the - which is still in my collection - which is the Clyfford Still, which fitted right in with my Abstract Expressionist concentration. But anyway, she mentioned to me that she had a piece, a major work by Hopper. And I said, "Well, gee, I would be interested in this." So she said, "Well, let's go over to a warehouse on Third Avenue and look at this painting." So I did. And I was tremendously impressed, but I tried to play it very cool and said, "Yes, that's interesting. It looks like a good painting. I'll think about it." But then I went to his dealer on Madison Avenue. And we'd been in there, I guess, previously to see if he had anything. And he had some engravings. As I may have mentioned earlier, I never got into engravings.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Works on paper that much.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, that kind of -

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: I mean, paintings on paper, but not - so anyway, I went in, and I talked to Mr. Clancy, and he said, "Well, I think I'm on the track of a great painting. And I don't have it yet. But I know about it." And I said, "Well, could you show me?" So he opened this book on Hopper, and there it was, *Summer Evening*. So I went home, and I called my wife, who I'm not sure was even in New York - may have been in Washington then - and said, "I've seen something fabulous, and we've got to get it." She said, "Well" - I named the price, and she said, "Well, that seems, you know, quite expensive." I said, "Yes, but this is a great, great painting." Anyway, I bought it. And it was sort of the centerpiece of our living room in Washington. It's very well known. I mean, if you Google me, you'll find many references to this work, because it was loaned a couple of times to the Whitney and had its own wall in a Hopper retrospective.

Anyway, after we moved to New York, we brought it up, and I had it in the library, which we spend very little time in, and it's almost entirely devoted to our Southeast Asian and Himalayan collection. And just wasn't, you know, didn't spend much time with it. And Sotheby's got wind that, you know, I had this painting, and came over, and talked to me and so on. And ultimately I sold it in a private sale for a very significant amount, although probably a fraction of what it would be today. But anyway, it went to a good collector, a major collector. So these things happen. And, you know, I still have a nice picture of it and postcards of it and so forth. [McElhinney laughs.]

The other thing about it was that it was an iconic work. But it really was not in our area of collecting. But because it was such a great work, and it was also a quiet work - and I might talk about that a little. Because I skipped over Pop entirely, even though I knew Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol and Bob Rauschenberg. The reason I knew them was that I was working on Jimmy Carter's campaign in 1976 when I - just two years, three years after I'd gotten out of the Foreign Service and was living in Washington. And I and a fellow named Frank Fowler in Tennessee - I

may have mentioned this before - organized his art project, and we commissioned five artists and sold their prints. And the artists were Warhol, Rauschenberg, Lichtenstein, Jacob Lawrence, and the Maine painter.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Wyeth?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes, Jamie Wyeth. And we sold those. And my wife and I actually gave a party for those artists and the art party in general at the inauguration. So that was interesting. So those people I knew, but I just somehow - I like paintings that are more subtle. And these are great artists, but it's a quick take, in my estimation. And what you see is what you've got. So not to say I don't have a lot of figurative and colorful paintings, but really I like abstract art that you can spend a lot of time looking at. You see something different, often every time you look at it. And so I just skipped that school. And I also don't like in-your-face work. Partly, I guess, because we have this Asian taste, too, and time in Japan and so forth. And quiet art, subtle art that mixes and goes together very well.

JAMES McELHINNEY: You spoke after we stopped taping last week about liking art that was fun.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes, that's true.

JAMES McELHINNEY: How do you characterize fun in art?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, it's kind of a rare thing. I think the example I cited was that I had a wonderful Giacometti, *Femme de Venise*, part of my period when I was concentrating on French or European art. And I eventually loaned it to a gallery show - a friend of mine was opening a gallery - which is a mistake if you don't want to sell something, because somebody flew over from Switzerland a couple of times and I got an offer I couldn't refuse. So I sold it. And then some years later, I saw this Barry Flanagan in the hall, which is a unique piece, bronze piece, on a stone base. Most of his works are one of seven and two artist's proofs and so on. Now that is a piece that is amusing. People, you know, it makes them smile when they see it. The little Max Ernst out there, which is, again, a European piece and a relatively recent purchase, since we moved to New York. And you can spin it around. It's a very amusing piece. The frog we have in the dining room, which - actually, it's a toad. It's an enormous toad of one piece of wood. It's a Japanese work purchased in Hong Kong many, many years ago, probably in the '70s. And, you know, grandchildren like to climb on it, and, you know, it's fun. So that's what I mean by [fun] art.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right. Well, even, you know, the David Smith that we're having a look at on the windowsill, a kind of - it looks like a bird. It's a -

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes, it's called *Ridge Runner*, whatever that means.

JAMES McELHINNEY: *Ridge Runner*.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, it's almost like a roadrunner.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Right.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It looks like it's, sort of, speeding along. Made up of an old wrench, and it looks like a piece of some agricultural equipment.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Right.

JAMES McELHINNEY: And so it - I mean, it has a kind of charming quality.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes, charming is a good word, I think, for it. But let's talk about the Southeast Asian bronzes and sculptures.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yes, how did you get started?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, I was stationed in Tokyo, then in Saigon, then back in Washington. Then I was principal officer in Surabaya, East Java. And when we were in East Java, we bought Chinese export ware. They were digging it up in the islands north of Java.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yes, we talked about that.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: We talked about that. But then we brought that back, and we decided that really we were more interested in stones and bronzes. And I'm just looking for a couple of notes here I had on – yes, "Chronology of Major Asian Art Acquisitions." One early piece, 1963, there's a Thai bronze phoenix, which, again, is sort of an interesting feel-good piece, bought in 1963 in Bangkok. But then it wasn't until 1974, when I was out of the Foreign Service, I was on my New York Abstract Expressionist kick, we went to Amsterdam, and we bought an East Javanese guardian head from a Mr. Vecht, who was one of the leading dealers in Amsterdam. But then there was a big time gap after that. And we also bought a Balinese kris [dagger] holder, which is in my wife's office, a wooden piece.

But in 1987 we went to Willy Wolf, who was a prominent dealer in Asian – South Asian – art really, Nepalese. We bought a Nepalese piece. And then in '89 I went to Holland – Christie's Amsterdam had a major auction. And my daughter was working at Christie's here and had a relationship with the office there. So I went over to this auction, and it was a great sale. And I guess '89 was another depressed year. The bubble had just burst, I think.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yes, it didn't really hit the galleries until the next year.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: A little later.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yes.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: The next year. But anyway, I bought the two major stone pieces in the hallway and five bronzes, including three that had been exhibited at the Rijksmuseum that they were de-accessioning. And the Parwati [Hindu goddess] in the hall is a very major piece, loaned to the Sackler Gallery [Smithsonian Institution Freer-Sackler Gallery of Art, Washington, DC], was at the entrance of their Southeast Asian Room for over a year. So we were – then really got very active in that. There was another one that was important, another piece that we loaned the Asia Society.

And, you know, we ended up with about 75 works ultimately, many of them small. And, particularly, Indonesian works are small. And back to your earlier question, if I had it to do over again, we would buy less small works and concentrate on more major pieces. And in recent years we've bought some quite major works – including this one, which I just bought last year – which are, you know, many multiples from these other things. But you live and learn, and I think partly that was the case where we didn't have enough knowledge or confidence to really take a big plunge.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, I think that many of the people in the future who are reading the transcript of this interview may be trying to understand something about, you know, the logic of collecting or how a collector ticks. And how would you characterize your own program of collecting? I mean, do you find a path and then try to buy objects that, sort of, represent a particular taste or particular aesthetic? Is it informed by the scholarship you do? Because we see notebooks on the shelves. You do study the things a lot.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Oh, I study a lot of them, and I'm very proud of our collection. I think maybe I showed you the book last time when we talked about –

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh, yes, yes.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: But also I do a tremendous amount of reading, not of art criticism so much, but just art commentary: who's doing what, what exhibitions are on. What do I want to see? Do I want to go down to Philadelphia and see the Barnett Newman show? And I spend a lot of time at it. It's part of my self-education, and I think it's very important. And I think we touched on it a bit. And now, of course, I get gallery notes from all over the country, places I've never heard of. But at least I'm aware of what's going on there.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yes, you're on a lot of mailing lists at this point.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: I'm on a lot of mailing lists. Although they're turning over to e-mail now, which I'm not so crazy about. But anyway, so keeping up with what's going on, I think, is very important. But, you know, we have had pretty defined areas. And including, as I think we talked about a little last time, the sort of support-your-local-artists syndrome, which is partly out of support because, particularly in Washington, unfortunately, I didn't get into the big – I did ultimately buy a Morris Louis. And, well, I had Gene Davis and so on. But we had a lot of small works by artists that we just liked and knew and would ultimately dispose of in some way.

But in Maine, we bought a lot of artists because we really liked them. And we made a decision to not have abstract work up there, that this was our summer place, and we had a lot of friends who didn't know very much about the art world. And we thought we'd just buy some good examples of Maine art, and we did. And we went, you know, up and down the coast, and we visited all the art galleries and the museums in Maine and bought quite a number of things there. So that was, again, sort of a focus and a purchase. But I rarely go off message, so to speak. I mean, there's a pretty clear vision of what I'm interested in or what Ann has a particular interest in. And she focused on the Himalayan art.

JAMES McELHINNEY: That's what you were saying, yes.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: The thangkas and the bronzes. Because she got very interested and went on the Silk Road a couple of times. Went to Tibet and so on. We talked about that. And that's been her department.

JAMES McELHINNEY: How did she come to that interest?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, I think because of our association with the Asia Society and with the Freer-Sackler in Washington, where she was on the board for a long time. And also we knew this European collector who lived in Nepal, and we flew over to Paris to see him. And he had really major, important works. And we had friends in Washington. One couple, the Fords, who lived in Baltimore, had a very important Himalayan collection. And she got interested in that -

JAMES McELHINNEY: I see.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: - area.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Can you share the name of the French collector?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, he was a French dealer.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh, a dealer.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: I'm sorry, he was a dealer. And we called him Cino, but he had a longer name [Cino Roncorani]. But he lived part-time in Nepal. And also it was sort of fun because it was a small area. There were many fewer collectors in it. A friend of mine, a good friend of mine, Michael de Havenon, who's now on the Yale Art Gallery board with me, but his father was a dealer in, I think, African art. And Michael has an Asian collection, and we would see him at Willy Wolfe when we went there. Willy Wolfe, this dealer I mentioned, was kind of - was very well known - and he'd, sort of, have open house on New Year's Day and serve champagne. And you'd go and sit in the back room with him and talk about things. That was sort of a rare occasion of schmoozing with a dealer. Generally, if I go in, I ask the dealer to leave the room basically, just let me be alone with the work. With the exception of somebody like Fourcade, who I greatly respected and we got to know personally and so on. I didn't want any hard sell.

And there are lots of little tricks in collecting, too. I found that when I've - from time to time I give a talk on my collection. I've done it at Yale; I've done it to graduate students here in New York; I've done it in Washington; I've been asked to do it at the Smithsonian - and certain, sort of, tips to collectors. If I go to a show and some of these are not that original, I go in, and I look around the room, and I decide, which work do I want to take home? I do the same thing if I'm at the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York] to see the current exhibition. You try to see which you think is the best work in the show and go with that. And another thing I think I've mentioned before was getting the announcements, what is put on the cover. Or what's advertised in the magazines. And those are all, sort of, little tips.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, that would be adhering to the advice that you sort of stick with a canonical image of the best example that you're able to acquire.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Right.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It's interesting that what you're doing when you're in an exhibition or actually having a look at work to acquire or not, that you're asking yourself, what would you want to buy? What would you want to live with? But beyond that, do you have any particular set of criteria other than just sort of - is it intellectual, is it more visceral? I mean, how do you feel you connect with artwork?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Oh, I think it's very visceral. I say, it's a love affair.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh, okay.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: I mean, no, it's definitely emotional. And I don't like to read a lot of – that's why I say I don't have much truck with art criticism, because it's sort of trying to explain it all. I think you have an emotional reaction to it.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: And this is probably why I find it difficult with so much of the art today. That if I go down to Chelsea or go down to the New Museum and so on, that it takes somebody walking around to explain to you what the artist is trying to do there and so on. And this just, you know, I'm perhaps too old to go down that road. But I think it's a problem with a lot of art today.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, maybe you could share your opinion of all of this sort of media support, you know, the didactic information. You have these wall murals of just text, with herds of people going – you know, the roving herd reading the wall. Or the headsets. I mean, what are your opinions? Since you're involved with art museums and art museums offer these amenities to visitors, do you feel they are either illuminating or obstructing?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, I rarely take a headset unless it's some area that I really know nothing about. And then it can be informative. But I don't like to listen to curators talk about art. You know, the group talk going around.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Gallery talk, yes. Docents.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Gallery talk. I break away immediately from those things.

JAMES McELHINNEY: I do, too.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: I think, you know, I have enough – now, if I went to some school of art that I knew absolutely nothing about, you know, that might be different. But I have pretty broad knowledge now of conventional painting and sculpture.

JAMES McELHINNEY: But, by school, you mean, like, style or genre or a group?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, I mean –

JAMES McELHINNEY: As opposed to, you know –

GILBERT H. KINNEY: – Islamic art, for instance.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh, okay.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: That kind of thing. You know, I can see something is beautiful, but I probably would need to know a lot more about what they're buying and do buy. On the other hand, Italian art, though I never studied it, my daughter Sarah went to Christie's, took a year in Florence before. And I have some feeling for that in art. But I wouldn't – I couldn't competently, you know, choose the best work necessarily. Although serving on museum boards – I should mention that's another very educational experience.

JAMES McELHINNEY: On the list here to ask you. [Laughs.]

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Oh, right. Well, I've been doing that from the get-go. I mean, 1974, I became a life trustee of the Corcoran Gallery. And I served on that board for a long time and was even the acting director for a year. And then I went on the board of the Archives in 1974. Trustee, Corcoran Gallery of Art, '74 to '94; chief executive officer, 1977 to '78. Trustee of the Archives of American Art, '74 to '91; president, '78 to '82. Trustee, American Federation of Arts, '78 to present. Then, Friends of the Pompidou, that was this group with Dominique de Menil I think we spoke about.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Last week.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: With a handful of top collectors. That was very educational. Whitney Painting and Sculpture Committee, 1981 to '84. International Council of MoMA, 1977 to present. And then member of the Yale University Art Gallery governing board, '91 to present. So that's

been a lot of time.

JAMES McELHINNEY: A lot of service.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: A lot of service. And a lot of education with the interaction with the curators, the directors, and so forth.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So as a collector, as a patron of the arts, as it were, do you feel that that's kind of an obligatory thing to do? That because you have this practice of patronizing art, that it's another way of offering your help and energies to -

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, it just is, you know, became my life really. And it's just thoroughly enjoyable. And I would recommend it to anybody that has the means to contribute somewhat financially. You don't have to be a huge benefactor, an Eli Broad or whatever, or an Aggie Gund, people whom I admire very much. But I think had it - obviously the people that sit on these boards are people with a deep interest in art. And they may be in very different fields, but they have the same commitment. And that's why I think that in recent years this heavy involvement of corporate figures on boards is understandable from the institution, and I guess most of them are collectors, but probably don't have the time - I mean they're busy corporate executives - to really, you know, be as devoted. They have people advising them and so on. But I think it's the institutions need them. But I think they also need people who really, you know, are more, sort of, self-taught kind of collectors.

JAMES McELHINNEY: One may only hope that people who are perhaps not passionate collectors but who feel draw in some way to serve on these bodies will learn something from these experiences and will become patrons.

[END MD 02 TR 01.]

Let me ask you a kind of a question about a touchy subject. Which is in the recent art market, which is now, as you observed earlier, past its peak -

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Right.

JAMES McELHINNEY: - which is a nice way of putting it, I think. It's been observed that a great deal of people, in the last 10 years at least, who got into it and who were practicing collecting at a very high level, financial level, were not really as engaged in the art as they were in the acquisition of art as a way to bestow, reflexively, prestige on them. So I mean, the true collector, obviously, is a person with a passion for what they bought. But what's your opinion of that genre of collector, if we can call them true collectors, versus - see, you're here in the middle. You're not a [Joseph] Hirshhorn, and you're not a dealer. You're in the middle. You've had to sell things. But how have these other people -

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, it has always been - and it's not just a phenomenon of the 21st century - it's always been social cachet to own great art and display great art. So there's nothing new about it. It's just that I think it's gotten so much media attention and hype and the numbers of people involved and the numbers of the - I used to call them the Greenwich Housewives, the art consultants, and, you know, there's a whole industry of this.

JAMES McELHINNEY: [Laughs] The corporate art consultants of the '80s and '00s.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: But I don't want to put down - I mean, there are a lot of very serious people who are consultants, and they're knowledgeable. I suspect there are a lot that are not. But the whole thing just exploded. The question of art as investment has always been there, and I think will probably always be there. I hate that term. But, I mean, it can and is a good investment if you do it wisely. But that's not the reason to get into it, I think. And some of these people like the famous Swiss - not Swiss but Swedish - collector; I can't remember the name - who in his business took a tumble, and he had to, you know, had to sell everything, less than he paid for it. The Japanese, I think, were absolutely crazy when they were trying to buy everything in America, golf courses and hotels and Impressionist paintings at the auction houses and so on, and paid ridiculous prices. And then, you know, that extreme case: you remember the man that bought two van Goghs, and wanted them buried with him?

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh, the irises? Or was that a different picture?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: I think it was -

JAMES McELHINNEY: That was at a college in Maine, right?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: No, no. It was - or were they van Goghs? They were two priceless paintings, and he took them back, and he wanted to be buried with them. Eventually that got stopped. But, I mean, that was kind of the extreme of crazy purchasing. But I think as things will settle down that you will probably have less people participating. And I just - I worry now for the art institutions. They're all cutting back, even the Getty [J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, CA]. I'm reading in the paper today, their portfolio is down 25 percent. So they're -

JAMES McELHINNEY: So also is the Met's.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: And the Met, and so on. Yes, it's rather shocking.

JAMES McELHINNEY: They just laid off a couple hundred people, mainly in the -

GILBERT H. KINNEY: In the merchandising.

JAMES McELHINNEY: - in the gift shops. But this whole idea of buying art because you love it - it's a love affair, to use your own term - versus as a way of seeking to enhance your own social standing -

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes, I think that, you know, there's a lot of that. But, as I say, it's nothing new.

JAMES McELHINNEY: No. I've seen a few instances where it's been compared to, you know - the tulip craze in Holland, I think, is a frequently in vogue to comparison.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, the tulip craze was, yes - more, I think, the comparison was the bubble. And the other was - I had a clipping once, the big - there was something to do with trading in England. And I remember in the paper something about there was an enormous bubble in England which collapsed. Something to do with the shipping. But these things pass.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So you would say to a young serious collector -

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Right.

JAMES McELHINNEY: - a person who has the means to start acquiring art and who has a passion and who has a desire for it, how would you suggest that they commence collecting?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, I would commence by looking, going out on Saturdays, going to the galleries, going to the auction houses. I mean, the auction houses are a great experience. They get fabulous art constantly going through there. And most of the people I know - many of the people, for instance, many of them live downtown now; young friends I have on the American Federation of Arts board and so on are downtown, are more apt to do the scene downtown. But I tell them to also get up here and go to the great traditional galleries on Madison Avenue between 57th and 86th Street, and go to Sotheby's and Christie's. And learn a lot and take the catalogues.

I think the catalogues have gotten completely out of hand, too. I mean, the money that the auction houses have been spending on catalogues, that's one place they can really cut their budget in a hurry, because it's about selling the work. And this ridiculous thing they started doing of comparing the work they're selling with five other masterpieces, well-known, and trying to draw some comparison. I don't understand it. I have very close friends in the auction world, but this has just gotten, you know, completely out of hand.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, you've got a good point, because they don't have to kill all those trees to print the books. You have an online catalogue that's easier.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, I would hate to see everything done with JPEGs. The couple of auctions I've gone to recently, I had to bid on something for Yale. Several times the curators have asked me to go with them to bid because they, sort of, want my experience.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh, yes, you told me last week.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: I mentioned that. And you usually find the people online are dropping off. They, you know, even on an inexpensive item, they just think it looks like a good deal. And if somebody's serious about it, they won't go up to the reserve. But if I showed you the catalogues

I have from the Halpert sale and the Scull sale compared to those things under the table, it's a different world.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Night and day. No, these things are big, and they're glossy. Well, maybe they will eliminate them now that the cost is -

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, I wouldn't say eliminate, but they'd surely scale them back to just what you need to know about the work.

JAMES McELHINNEY: More modest documents.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Modest, yes. Not this long - and they must hire dozens and dozens of people to write these things.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Okay. So young collector goes around to galleries and museums on Saturdays. They hit the auction houses. They, kind of, train their eye. How else would you train your eye? Would it help to become a part of a Friends' organization?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Oh, yes. I think so. I think it would be good to become Friends of whatever, Friends of Asian Art or Friends of the Met, in whatever field you were interested in. And I think many people understandably begin with prints, which is inexpensive and good quality. The issue I have with prints is they're vulnerable, as multiples of many; you know, can be 10 or it can be a thousand. But it's a good way to start, and they're attractive. And then photography, there's a lot of interest now in photography. As I mentioned, we never went there with a few exceptions. But we have a collection of photographs of artists we own. But one problem with photography is where do you put it? So we haven't all -

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right. You need light-safe, environment-safe -

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes. And also that's probably one reason I didn't gravitate much towards drawings. But I think we talked about that.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yes, we talked about that last week.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: But, you know. And you've got to then start making a few decisions and buy things. And if you get tired of something or see something you like better, don't hesitate to de-accession and move on.

JAMES McELHINNEY: In a lot of your acquisitions, did you start with a goal, saying, I want to buy an Ad Reinhardt; I need to get an Ad Reinhardt? Or did one just become available at a moment when you had the means? Or with the Asian art, were you collecting along a certain path in terms of, you know, the genre of object or subject matter, medium? Or did something just happen?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: No, no, no. We just looked for what was available. I was wondering on Ad Reinhardt; I think, you know, I was in Marlborough, where I first bought the Rothko at Marlborough in 1970. And then I saw Reinhardt, and I liked it. And then I kept, you know, looking for more. And at that I was, as we discussed earlier, I wanted to have a whole body of work, because I never saw one that I didn't think was a good painting. Now, there were a few what I call muddy ones that actually I bought for very little and sold very well. But they weren't - the pure [inaudible - siren sounding] painting.

But, no, I just - if there was a show of an artist I liked, I'd go see it. The auction catalogues are very useful because you'll see hundreds of works. And if you're interested in something, you go. And if you're really interested, you bid. And I'm not afraid of bidding. And I have little strategies about bidding.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, would you like to share some of them?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, yes, sure. I mean, I jump in late. I'm never the first person with the paddle up or the pencil up or whatever. And I sort of wait until it's about to die, and then I'll bid. And then in the old days there wasn't nearly as much phone bidding. There was always some of that, but now that's become very prevalent. And usually it's somewhere around the high estimate. And I know - I've known from the beginning, which I think many people go to auction now it's been pretty well exposed, what they call chandelier bidding. I mean, if you're inexperienced and you see the auctioneer saying, alright, I have 200 over here, and I have 300 -

but you know he's just looking over there. There's not a real person there. And I can tell that. I know well enough what's going on.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So he's leading the crowd into a frenzy. [Laughs.]

GILBERT H. KINNEY: He's leading the crowd, yes. And they can do that up to the reserve, which has to be just below the low estimate. So then I jump in. And sometimes, and particularly on the phone, I'll kind of weigh - I'll sense that it's time, and I'll go maybe one more than I had expected to pay. But if I really want it, that doesn't bother me. And so you have to be a little venturesome. But sometimes you know it's hopeless. But I have rarely lost something at auction that I was seriously interested in.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Have you ever won a bid and then you got home and just started kicking yourself? And saying, "Oh, my God! What did I do?" [Laughs.]

GILBERT H. KINNEY: You mean, if I bought something?

JAMES McELHINNEY: If you bought something.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Oh.

JAMES McELHINNEY: And then you had an instant regret?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: No, no. Never.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Or a gnawing regret?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: No, not really. Not really. I like the auction game. And I like bidding on the phone, which I've done primarily to Europe, because the auctions in Amsterdam, where we bought a great many pieces on the phone, with the Christie's representative, who was a personal friend, and actually he went to Tibet with Ann, and we both - and so I'm very comfortable. There's sort of a feeling of power, because they don't know who's out there. It's a bit like the people on the telephone in the auction house, which I always sort of worry about, and we talked about that last time on the Morley, which I ultimately got. But it's not for the timid, and it's kind of like a racehorse, which I never was a betting man; I never went to the races. But I can see how it can turn people on.

JAMES McELHINNEY: But you've got the confidence of your own taste and judgment.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: And a knowledge of the market.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: That's something else -

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: - I should mention, you really - and that's where the *Art Newsletter*, for example, is invaluable. And for a young collector starting out, they should get some idea of what the market is for the objects that they're interested in.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Do you feel like your acquisitions are confined by a kind of canny awareness of what the prices ought to be? Or have you ever just loved a piece enough that you ignored the parameters of investment, let's say, and just said, I'm going to go for it; I'm going to get this piece no matter what?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Not really. No. The few mistakes I have made, and probably early on, were buying things sort of on the fly. I bought a Vlaminck painting, I know, that wasn't very good and immediately regretted it. But, you know, ultimately traded it in on something. So with the general escalation that's occurred, even your so-called mistakes are, you know, usually turn out okay.

JAMES McELHINNEY: If you wait long enough.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It will pan out.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Pan out.

JAMES McELHINNEY: But so you've acquired works at auction. You've acquired works from the dealers. And you've been very active in serving on boards and other advisory bodies where, no doubt, you've encountered other collectors.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Right.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Have you ever exchanged work between yourself and another collector, or acquired work directly from another private collector?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Never done that. I suppose that is done. I'm pleased if a collector I know buys a work that I put up at auction, for example. And this was more common in the '70s and '80s when, as I mentioned last interview, there were a small number – a smaller number of us – and we sort of knew each other and kind of sat together.

And I'm pleased – well, I know that several of my works that I sold, an important Jackson Pollock, an important de Kooning, have ended up in the collections of friends of mine with a Yale involvement. But we didn't deal directly. The Pollock went to Japan, which I sold through Aquavella, and it went to Japan. And then the buyer purchased it from there. And it just happens it was somebody whose wife I was serving on a committee with in a Yale context. And so I found out about it and visited their collection subsequently and so on. But that's nice when you know. So I know where at least a half a dozen of my major de-accessions found good homes.

And even the Mitchell, which I sold because it was really too big to use, it went in the Whitney show. *Chord VII* [1987], a dealer, the other day told me – the one that had the Mitchell that I like very much but can't afford at today's prices – that that painting that somebody else owned, the Whitney subsequently acquired. So I'm going to check that out and see. That would be nice to know where your things end up.

JAMES McELHINNEY: A lot of your pieces – or a lot of the pieces that you sold over the years – have ended up in museums, have they?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: No, very few. They're mostly in major collectors' hands, except what, you know, I've given to Yale or given to the Corcoran. But I haven't given a great many works away. I gave the Corcoran a Reinhardt because they did the Reinhardt show. I gave Yale a Morley; I've given them several other things, because Morley is my favorite living artist. But eventually – people always ask, Well, what's going to happen to your collection? That we're always asking each other. But I suspect a lot of it will be sold. Certain things will go to certain museums. But probably the bulk of it will ultimately go back into the marketplace.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Let's talk about the marketplace a little bit because there's a lot of interest, I think, now, there'll be a lot of interest in the future, by people having looked at this period of time where art has been so widely discussed and understood as an investment or as an instrument of finance. And you expressed earlier a kind of displeasure with that. And wondered if you could elaborate on that perhaps.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, I think it's, you know, it's sort of like our whole economy now and the greed factor and the hype. And I should say that it's not completely across the board. I mean, as I mentioned earlier, the Chinese contemporary was one of the most egregious examples of it, and it was partly due to another factor, that the Chinese decided they'd like to buy back some of their heritage, which they would for a long time, you know, they would buy vases and vases and so on. But now there are collectors interested in Chinese contemporary. But these works just were – same thing is happening in Indian art. There are some very prominent overseas Indians who are paying huge prices for, frankly, fairly mediocre art.

And I went to a very interesting symposium at Asia Society last week – and that's another source of knowledge: go to these art symposiums. And this had four famous dealers in Asian art, and it was – the moderator was the U.S. editor of a London newspaper, who was the only person I didn't know personally on that panel, and was very good. But the most talked about and out of control was, sort of, the general contemporary market, not only Chinese contemporary, but the Andy Warhols, the Richard Princes, the –

JAMES McELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Jeff Koons, Damien Hirst.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Jeff Koons, Damien Hirst. Or, for instance, John Currin, who I think is a very

good artist. I heard him speak at the American Federation of Art. We had a series of art talks which were very good. And that's something else for young collectors, to get involved with an organization like that. They have art talks by artists; you learn there. And Currin was - and this was before he was so famous and he had his rather pornographic show at Gagosian and went with Gagosian. He had a huge profile in *New Yorker* magazine. Now things sell for \$3 million. Well, I mean, five or six years ago, I might have bought something for \$30,000.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: But on the other hand, the Old Masters really hardly moved during all this. And now I think people are turning to that.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, because perhaps they had more of a steady performance in terms of prices. Not as volatile.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, yes. And there's quality. There's real quality there. And it's interesting that it was, sort of, so ignored, but I think it was ignored because that's what the steel barons, that's what Mr. Frick [Henry Clay Frick] bought, that's what Mr. Mellon [Andrew W. Mellon] bought, and so on. And the kind of people of, you know, the '50s, '60s, '70s, '80s, they were interested in something new, and they saw the newer - I think that's always the attraction, for something new. But my prejudice, I think something new now has gotten so far from traditional art and performance and video, and this just leaves me cold.

JAMES McELHINNEY: How about an artist who will sell you a DVD for \$100,000?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Right.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right. That kind of thing. Well, we just had a conversation with a contemporary dealer, actually, yesterday who stated -

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Who?

JAMES McELHINNEY: Ron Feldman, who -

GILBERT H. KINNEY: I don't know - I know of him. I don't know him personally.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yes. He has a - he's been in SoHo for -

GILBERT H. KINNEY: A long time.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Forty years or so.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes.

JAMES McELHINNEY: But I asked him about, you know, the pricing thing, like what happens when the market goes soft? And he says, you've got to bring the prices down. Well, this completely goes against the logic that a lot of the eager, new collector investors have that, I'm going to buy this; I'm going to hold onto it; the price is going to go up. The price may go up, may go down. May go up and then go down and then up again. But he was saying that if you want to, you know, if you want to keep the work - right, this is what he said: If you want to keep the work in play, you've got to price it to the market, and the market rises and falls.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes. Well, that's very true. And I think the exception, I would say, was if it, you know, a great de Kooning comes up or a great Rothko or whatever, it's not going to be 70,000 [dollars].

JAMES McELHINNEY: No.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Supposedly Mr. Cohen [Steven A. Cohen] paid \$63.5 million for a great de Kooning. I think it's interesting now that he's putting his paintings, some of his collection, on display at Sotheby's.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GILBERT H. KINNEY: And some of us wonder. He says he's not going to sell. But some of us wonder why he's doing that, even though he's a very wealthy man. And if you read *Forbes*, he's worth 1.4 billion [dollars]. On the other hand, it's great, you know, great for people in New York

to go see it.

In the same way that Christie's is showing the great collection of Betty Freeman from L.A. She was painted by [David] Hockney. It was not a name I knew. But she had Clyfford Still and Rothko and people. And that will be at Christie's space on Sixth Avenue and 49th, which is a display space, for several weeks. So this is good news to get. And I think Peter Brant, I read, is - has a building; he has a huge property which we visited with the International Council of MoMA, with Cohen and Brant and [Richard] Fuld, and a couple of others, Allan Stone, before he died. And he is going to sort of set up a temporary museum space and have some of his major works there and outdoor sculpture. He has a huge Jeff Koons puppy. That's great and gives people a chance to see it.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Maybe we could speak a little about the elusive issue of taste, because I think that when a collector is studied, remembered, they're usually spoken of in terms of taste, which is a very vague term.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Right.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It alludes to sensibility or to a pattern of collecting or certain kind of, you know, artistic genres that they were attracted to. How would you address the whole issue of taste or the cultivation of taste to a young collector?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, that's a tough one. I think it's just a matter of experience and knowledge and really testing yourself. You can talk to people - I mean, because I don't particularly want dealers to try to convince me to buy something; if you were starting out, I think it's not a bad thing. And then you can decide for yourself. But taste is a funny thing. I mean, people collect all kinds of things. We talked about that last time.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: The collecting instinct. I happened to start with stamps as a boy. And I think most collectors do, and I've always been interested. *The Proud Possessors* [: *The Lives, Times, and Tastes of Some Adventurous American Art Collectors*. New York: Random House, 1958] up there, Aline Saarinen.

Proud Possessors was the first art book I read, and I was really interested. That kind of turned me on, too, to find what these people had done and how they did it. And then I think you probably should take an art course. That's something else which I didn't really have the opportunity to pursue.

JAMES McELHINNEY: That's what you were saying earlier, that you didn't really have an art history course in college.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: No, I didn't have any at all. And I audited one much later on. But actually, I did that just before I plunged in in a major way here at Harvard; in '72-'73 -

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: - the collection really got going. And also it was the recession. So a lot of things came together.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Were affordable.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: But there's a lot of luck in this, too, you know. And it used to be that dealers - I always got a collector's discount, which was pretty general. I don't know if that's so prevalent anymore. It was generally 10 percent. And - except for Pace [/Wildenstein]. And Pace had a firm rule, no discount. But they were very much alone in that. I haven't noticed lately, but that was a little help. But taste is an issue I really haven't thought much about.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, but you've exercised it a lot. [They laugh.]

GILBERT H. KINNEY: I've exercised it.

JAMES McELHINNEY: You don't think about it; you use it.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: That's right.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, it seems like you've shared an appetite for humor and fun in work; you've shared an appetite for a certain kind of – I guess the Abstract Expressionism is a certain kind of – how would you characterize it? – assertiveness, expressiveness, boldness.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Boldness. But also a sensitivity. In fact, as I mentioned earlier, you're getting into something, now finding something new in the work. In fact, I do something that sometimes irritates my wife, because I can often look at an abstract work and find figures in it. And I don't know if everybody can do that so easily. I can't do it, actually, with anything in here, but either with the Joan Mitchell or the Pollock, the late Pollock, that is quite – because they were kind of moving from totally abstract to a kind of figuration.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Or you could look at this piece here.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes, the Al Held was.

JAMES McELHINNEY: The early Al Held and see the –

GILBERT H. KINNEY: The sunrise over the mountain.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right. A landscape.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes, landscape. Oh, definitely. Yes. And I like the boldness of that.

JAMES McELHINNEY: He was a bold fellow, Al Held.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes. I knew a collector who's on the MoMA group who had a business in Cleveland, I think; it had this warehouse just totally filled with huge paintings. And I think another issue that's difficult for collectors today is, if you're in painting and sculpture and even photography now, is the size issue. When people were collecting Impressionist paintings or classic photographs or works on paper –

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: – you know, you could hang a lot of things. But now artists got so demanding; they wanted to fill a wall in a loft in SoHo. And I think that's rather challenging, and I wonder if that's going to change any. Because I find, even with great paintings, they're more difficult to sell, a very large, sort of, oversized Joan Mitchell, for example. And something really – it takes a museum. And I'm worried now whether museums – on the one hand, the price of art is going down. On the other hand, their endowment has probably gone down more rapidly. And it may be difficult for them to acquire some of the good new things – great things – which I think will start coming on the market now.

McELHINNEY: Right. Well, a lot of abstract painting, Abstract Expressionism, and then afterwards Color Field painting, that are very enormous, enormous pictures. And some, I guess, in art history would say that that was somehow informed by these artists having worked in the WPA [Works Progress Administration] and having a kind of Left-leaning sort of politic of scale that was not a domestic scale; it was not for wealthy people. It was for public spaces. That the big scale –

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Oh, really. Yes, I could see that. Yes.

JAMES McELHINNEY: – was more informed by that kind of aesthetic. That it's more of a public-sized painting rather than a private-sized painting.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: That's interesting. No, I hadn't heard that theory.

JAMES McELHINNEY: There are a lot of theories out there.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Right.

JAMES McELHINNEY: But it's true, I think, that even if you look at the historical art, Old Master art, you know, you've got the enormous things by [Peter Paul] Rubens.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Oh, right.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Versus the Dutch landscape.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes.

JAMES McELHINNEY: And obviously it's a reflection of the patronage.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Right. Yes. A lot easier to collect Dutch landscapes. [They laugh.]

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, you can collect a lot more of them, that's for sure.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, you wonder about [Anselm] Kiefer, for example, who I think is a great artist.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh, yes.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: How many private individuals can own Kiefer?

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, he makes watercolors and other things, too, that are smaller. Or at least he did, anyhow.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: He made drawings and so on, too.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right. Yes.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: You could do that. But I think the power of his work, of these enormous pieces - and my good friend Lou Manilow in Chicago owned a wonderful one, which I think he's loaned to the Smart Museum [Chicago, Illinois], and I trust he'll give it there eventually, because he's moved into a smaller home.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So you really haven't been led that much by dealers or by critics in the development of your own taste as a collector. You've really sort of evolved on your own.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes, I would say I've pretty much evolved on my own. And if you found a dealer that you know and trust - I mentioned Alex Maguy, from whom we bought a number of paintings. Cher Alex, which is a pun, you know: dear as a friend and expensive, in French. Or Xavier Fourcade. But, no, I think it's been sort of following a path and then finding an artist I'm interested in. Ideally, I guess I would like to own three works: an early work, a midlife work, and maybe a late work. Although some artists live too long, and I think the late work is not of the quality of the early work. So I don't necessarily do that.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, some artists have no late work, too.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Really.

JAMES McELHINNEY: What kinds of artwork are you looking at now? Are you -

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, frankly, I'm resting. [They laugh.]

JAMES McELHINNEY: You're resting. You're not -

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, I used to say, you stop being a collector if you don't buy something. And that's what I said in my talk at Yale last fall. But this year I'm not sure. I may completely rest. I - unless, you know, I find something that really grabs me. But as I mentioned, I did see something, but I -

JAMES McELHINNEY: By Joan Mitchell.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes, I think that's beyond me now. And one of the problems for a person who's had my experience is that if you've bought a lot of great things at a very reasonable price, then you hesitate. Although, obviously I've paid more for Reinhardts I bought later than what I bought earlier. That's always, sort of, still with you, and, you know, you hate to take that plunge. Whereby if it's something totally new, you may be less reluctant to. If I'd never bought a Chinese painting, I didn't think this was very expensive when I got it. And it actually wasn't by today's standards. But maybe people at the time thought it was.

JAMES McELHINNEY: But are there any other new styles, new genres, or other - Islamic art, we spoke about earlier, is an area that you have no expertise in.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: No.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Especially, I mean -

GILBERT H. KINNEY: No, I really - I will probably continue to go to the auctions of the things that I know. And if something comes along, maybe a small work on paper or something, you know, I might go for it. But we've had to downsize with the move here. And also, for instance, up in Maine, very apt to pick up something in the summer that is nice and is a few thousand dollars or less and is a good work. But I'm really in sort of the end of my collecting career probably. But you never say never.

JAMES McELHINNEY: What advice would you offer to someone who's beginning a career as a collector?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, I would say this is probably a good time to start. But I think you have to - there's so much variety out there in what is called artwork that I think you have to be pretty clear on what direction you want to go.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Stay focused on a path.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Or become knowledgeable in one field.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes, I would suggest that you do that.

JAMES McELHINNEY: And then expand.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: And then expand. And there are some people that are fascinated by video and, you know, have them going 24 hours in their house and whatnot. But to me that's kind of entertainment of a different -

JAMES McELHINNEY: It's not your taste.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: It's not my taste at all.

JAMES McELHINNEY: What would you say to scholars or art historians who are trying to understand the process of collecting and what a collector does? Again, speaking about this interview we just had the other day, you know, the dealer whom we were speaking with said that - expressed the opinion - that art historians didn't get it. In other words, they wanted to see the art market in a particular way; it was always the wrong way. And I'm curious if -

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, I wouldn't agree with that. I think - like I went to a talk next door, another panel discussion, which are really valuable, and it's fun if you know the participants, which I usually do. But Irving Sandler was there, a great friend of mine. We want to have him over soon. He hasn't seen our living room. And, you know, *The Triumph of Abstract Expressionism*.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Classic book.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Classic book. And I believe it's my Rothko on the back cover.

JAMES McELHINNEY: *The Triumph of American Painting* [: *The History of Abstract Expressionism*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970], I think.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: *The Triumph of American Painting*, correct. *Triumph of American Painting*. And I think he's very interested, very knowledgeable. And I wouldn't put down so many art critics. I think they're, you know, like anything else, there are good ones, and there are not so good ones. But I don't think they -

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, I think what he meant was that - the comment wasn't to say that people tend to look at the market as a model, as a knowable thing. Where actually it's a labyrinthine, Byzantine realm full of individuals who are all in some way operating on their own.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, no, it's very complicated. And of course, there's sort of a built-in stress between dealers and auction houses.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: And the auction houses sort of became the big bullies of the art world, so to speak, and were kind of setting the pace with their gigantic record sales and so on.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: And I think the dealers, who feel, quite correctly – and I've heard these dealers talk about this at panels at Yale and elsewhere – that they really focus on the artists and nurturing their artists. Whereby the auction houses just want to get the works and sell them and flip them and move them and so on. So there's this sort of – but it's also said that there used to be a long time – and Chuck Close was talking about this. This panel had Chuck Close, Ganz's [Victor Ganz] daughter who's living abroad, Irving Sandler, and who was the fourth person? I can't remember. Anyway, you know, it used to be artists become 40 or 50 before they really sold things.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: And certainly when you go through the Abstract Expressionists. And now they're raiding the graduate schools at Yale and elsewhere, the art schools, and trying to get them to come to Gagosian or whatever or Pace or the biggies. And I think also there's probably a kind of a resentment among some of the smaller dealers. And I think Mr. Feldman's the one I read about who's been down there, never left SoHo.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right. He's a great guy, yes.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: He's bringing up some older artists again. Well, a bit like Joan Washburn, who's an old friend of mine. And have nurtured people and didn't –

JAMES McELHINNEY: Ivan Karp's another one who's been there a long time.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: A long time, right. As opposed to a Gagosian or Knoedler [& Company]. Of course, Marlborough was a big gun. And I had a very good relationship with Marlborough. But, I told you, I had it with the salesman who wasn't an art person at all.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Except he was working there. And he became a good friend. So he didn't have to deal with a lot of pressure.

JAMES McELHINNEY: If you could have a look at your career from a hundred years hence and have a look at what you did as a collector, for what would you like to be remembered [Kinney laughs] in, you know, the biography?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, I think just for the generally high quality of the work that we collected, including the things that were sold along the way, in many cases, as well as the things that, when I pass on and my wife passes on, will go elsewhere. And I'm very proud of what I did in terms of Ad Reinhardt, just as I think that will set a very good example for people who want to collect in depth. I've really enjoyed it, and I think it's been important, my involvement with art institutions, both museums and advocacy organizations or, you know, the American Federation of Arts, what they've done. We're about to celebrate our hundredth anniversary. The Archives of American Art is really performing a valuable function.

So I think it's a combination of – and the opportunity to meet a lot of great fellow collectors from all over the country and enjoy the experience of art trips with them. MoMA, the International Council, for example, we went to Japan. And despite the fact that we'd lived – I was at the embassy; my wife was in Japan before the war – they had three members who were the top developers in Japan and art collectors. And we had experiences we would've never otherwise have an opportunity to do. And that applies every time you go on a trip with an organization like that. And we went to China with the director of the Asian department at Yale, the chief curator, and that was a real learning experience. So all these things are kind of cumulative. It's not just the buying and owning of art.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: But it's all the experiences that come with it. And the fact that, frankly, this has been, for me, a second career after a Foreign Service career – military service and then Foreign Service career, where I was pointed to as a young teenager – and then in a very, kind of,

structured career path, into something that was very free-form and could make my own decisions and answer only to myself and really enjoy the art world. And enjoy meeting certain artists, meeting certain dealers, and participating in a very active way and feeling that I was my own man. I don't want to sound conceited. But I just, you know, I relied on my own gut, and to some extent my brain, with what I was doing.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right. You did it your way, to quote a popular song.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Exactly. Exactly. Yes. And that's been a source of satisfaction.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Is it safe to say that, if you're an artist that, the collection is your art?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Huh?

JAMES McELHINNEY: It's been often claimed that collectors are expressive in how they amass a collection or how they assemble objects –

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Oh.

MR. MCELHINNEY: – together. That becomes an expressive activity.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, oh, I think so. I think that's correct. And particularly for someone like me that can't, as I mentioned last time, hardly draw a straight line. I just have no talent, and I never took an art course in grammar school or a drawing course or anything like that.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Or perhaps it was another talent that manifested itself in this way.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Right.

JAMES McELHINNEY: The assembly of a collection.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, I think so.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Then you have an eye.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Yes.

JAMES McELHINNEY: You have a passion for art.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Right, right.

JAMES McELHINNEY: You have a call to service. And so is it safe to say a good collector is a good citizen?

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, I hope so. I think it's – most of them I know are pretty good people. And I haven't, you know, sought out ones that I didn't think were really collecting for the right reasons. Fortunately, my generation was rather different.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It was a different world in a lot of different ways.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: It was a different world. And maybe it will come back somewhat to that, I think. And great art is going to continue to be produced. It will be interesting to see what form it takes, because I'm obviously in a very, you know, relatively conservative path. And there are others that will take a different path.

JAMES McELHINNEY: But you did it your way.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Right.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Thank you.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Okay. I guess we've covered enough.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, we could probably continue. You seem to be a wealth of information.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Well, thank you. Well, I've thought about the whole subject a great deal. And it's been fun, frankly, just reviewing, kind of reviewing everything in preparation for this.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, I really appreciate your time.

GILBERT H. KINNEY: Okay.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It's been very interesting, and I thank you very much.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]