



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

**Oral history interview with Hugh
Mesibov, 2012 Dec. 4**

Contact Information

Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Hugh Mesibov on December 4, 2012. The interview took place at the artist's home in Chestnut Ridge, New York, and was conducted by Jame McElhinney for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is James McElhinney speaking with Hugh Mesibov at his home in Chestnut Ridge, New Jersey [New York], on Tuesday, December the 4th, 2012. Good morning.

HUGH MESIBOV: Good morning.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, we're taking a look. You've just come downstairs with a folder full of material and clippings from your work done in Philadelphia at the end of the '30s and early 1940s. There's a sketchbook here.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And would you like to tell us a little about this?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah. [Mesibov Reads.] "I had a show of prints, drawings, paintings from the 1930s and the 1940s. The work created by Hugh Mesibov during the '30s and '40s, his work and as an artist very involved in the social and political issues of the times. I created prints, drawings, watercolors, and paintings in an Expressionist figurative style. My subjects included people, bars, restaurants, subways, union meetings, contracts, and work. My style was the—was unique. I did not change the more formal social realistic style as popular as its time. [00:02:04] My images reflected the energies of my subjects and their surroundings through my choice of media. I was one of the artists on the WPA, on the graphic arts division. It was there that I was the co-inventor, along with Dox Thrash and Michael Gallagher, of the new print process called the carborundum print. Thrash did the first early experiments with the process, and Mesibov—and I went on to perfect making the first financial print. It was called *Mystic*, a self-portrait painted in 1938. It was an increasing process which attracted national attention and was the first subject of the *Sparrow* [ph] special bulletin issued by the WPA and a special exhibition at WPA headquarters in Philadelphia in the fall of 1940. I went on to make that color carborundum print. Colors would be applied to the surface of the plate at the time, eliminating the need to carborate plates for each color. [00:03:59] In the early '40s, I briefly chose a more realistic style for some of my images as a commentary on that war. One of the powerful blueprints, *The Dictators*, in 1942, depicts in a very angular black-and-white shapes an image of Hitler, Franco, and Mussolini. In the early 1950s, in '51 and '52, I made some experimental black-and-white abstract screen prints. It was quite unusual, since the benefit of testing the carborundum print that was an immediate, direct way of making a print of many colors. These prints were minimal." Well, then I'm repeating.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, can you talk a little about how the carborundum process worked?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah, okay. We had a printing press in the print room on Broad Street, and uh, we did a lot of etchings and made regular etchings and so forth. And to make a lithograph, you had to take a stone and grind it down, and ink it up and, make a print from that. [00:06:02] That could be scraped and so forth. But the carborundum print came about when Dox Thrash ground a print, and I said, "You know what? If you could burnish it and so forth, it will make a print." But my thing was that I made black-and-whites, and uh, up—by, and it had black-and-white and color—by rolling the print and pulling [ph] it off and stomping out the highlights, I could get greater contrast.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, how was the carborundum used? Carborundum being a grit—being a powdered grit, abrasive, that you would mix with water. In lithography, right, you make a slurry of carborundum and you move the stones against each other in order to achieve a smooth surface, right?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And then you would draw on that with a crayon and then you'd do—

HUGH MESIBOV: —wipe it off and run through the print, pull it off, and there it is.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But how is the carborundum itself used, the grit used, in the process that you're talking about?

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, printmaking goes all the way back, you know, to medieval block prints, carbon and then printing, so you get a printed surface. With the advent of carborundum, you get an irregular surface. But my contribution was when Dox Thrash made a print and it had a gritty surface, I said, "Why don't you burnish that

in?" [00:08:13] And voila, he got a print with variation of color. That was the first type of print of that sort.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So what was the material for the printing surface? Was it stone or metal?

HUGH MESIBOV: No. It was stone.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Like a lithograph.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. So it's a variation on the lithographic process.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Could you tell us a little about this sketchbook here?

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, this sketchbook? Okay.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Does that have your address in it?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What was the address at that time? It's 1940.

HUGH MESIBOV: Nineteen forty in Philadelphia, and it describes—it's a sketchbook, and it—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay. And what was your address? I can't read it from here.

HUGH MESIBOV: Seven thirty-five Wellens Avenue, January 4059. That's a sketchbook. Now, I'm going to show you some of the sketches.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you're drawing in ink in a really Expressionistic style.

HUGH MESIBOV: Expressionistic, yeah. I was—this is a wharf in Camden. I crossed the river and I was looking towards Philadelphia. [00:10:00] Here's another picture of the wharf.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow.

HUGH MESIBOV: Sketch [inaudible].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Looks like a shipwreck.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah. Here's an ink and wash. Oh, this is very interesting. That's an industrial area.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, that's that industrial area down along the Schuylkill River.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah. Here's a wharf.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Uh-huh [affirmative]. So last time we spoke, you had told us that you worked at a shipyard —

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and that was—so would you have done these drawings at work or—

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, I'll tell you. In the shipyard, I was—I had a degree on construction. I went a year, the WPA trained me, and then I was qualified to get a job. And to get a job at the shipyard was great. But what I did, instead of going during the day, I took the night shift, and the night shift, you'd go in around seven o'clock and you'd be through at 11. So I had to take the trolley car to do that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So that was down—you'd have to go all the way down South Broad Street to the navy yard. Or was it at the navy yard or near the navy yard? Was the shipyard where you worked, was it on the Delaware River?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes. And it was called Cramp's Shipyard.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Cramp's, right. Yeah, we got all this I think in the last conversation, um—and you talked about painting the nude on the smokestack. [00:12:17]

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, that was a good story.

HUGH MESIBOV: That's a good story. I made—told you about that already.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, you did. What about—it seems like a lot of your subject matter was industrial and wharves and images related to sort of, you know, the gritty, urban Rust Belt world that that was—

HUGH MESIBOV: There's something else I didn't tell you about. When I was on the WPA, guys turned in one painting for—you know, for they get paid. So what I did, I had a bicycle, and on the back of the bicycle, I strapped a watercolor box, and I went all over the Philadelphia. From [Inaudible] to Conshohocken, to Delaware river, and Fairmount Park.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Conshohocken's pretty far out there. It's almost to Valley Forge.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes, it is, it is.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Twenty miles.

HUGH MESIBOV: That's right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So did you get down to Chester and Essington and those places?

HUGH MESIBOV: I had to take a book. Now, the great thing was—did I tell you about the Barnes Foundation?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A little bit, yeah. There was a mention here that in the late '40s, a piece of yours had been bought by Dr. Barnes and that you—but why don't you tell us again? [00:14:10]

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, Dr. Barnes had a great collection. He went to Paris, and he had—he made a friend whose name was Gulalad [ph]. And he was able to have Sloan, Courbet, Picasso, Matisse. The great mural Matisse is in the main room of Philadelphia with the big arches.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, *The Dance*.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah. Now, the thing is, when Barnes looked at it, there was a piece missing, and he says, "I can't do that. You have to do it all over again." You know? Barnes was a perfectionist.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So what kind of a person was he? Did you know him well?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He's a very controversial guy because he had this feud going with Walter Annenberg and the high society people in Philadelphia in the museum, and lived in a kind of eccentric way, as I understand, with his wife in one wing of the house and, you know the girl—Violette in the other. But what kind of a guy was he?

HUGH MESIBOV: Was Barnes? He was the most powerful person I ever met. He had a very powerful presence, and he had a tremendous amount of discipline, and beside he—Glackens was his friend, his best friend. So— [00:16:02]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: High school buddies.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah. So his collection has Seurat, Cézanne, Matisse—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Renoir. Lots of Renoir.

HUGH MESIBOV: —Renoir, Sloan, the whole—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And Mesibov.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Well, it's—so in what contexts did you know him? As a—

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah, okay. We were—before the lecture—we'd get a lecture every day.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, you attended his school.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah. I attended his school. The school was made out of stones that he got from Paris, and he re-erected the museum based on the architectural dimensions of that work.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, the building itself is now abandoned, and they've reconstructed the interior—

HUGH MESIBOV: I haven't been there yet.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —in what I think was the old—it used to be the family court building or it was—I haven't either, and I need to get down there. But if I recall, I mean, when I first went there, which was years after you did, um—it was very hard to get in. You couldn't just walk in the door like a museum with operating hours, you had to make an appointment or you had to wait in line. [00:17:57] There were half—like on weekends, you could—half the people allowed in the museum I think was maybe over the course of the day, 200 people, 100 with reservations and 100 without, and it was tricky to get in. And he didn't want people who were in the history of art, or journalists, or critics, or people like that, he wanted regular people, ordinary people. He wanted the art to be enjoyed by people without, perhaps, an invested interest in the art world. There's a story, perhaps apocryphal, that Kenneth Clark tried to get in and they wouldn't let him in, or they kicked him out when they discovered who he was. It's perhaps an apocryphal tale. But that—so, but you say he was a powerful presence. How did you—did you know him socially, or just in the context of his school?

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, I knew him socially, but he used to—when we came into the museum, he would be sitting by the window with the three arts things, and it has a second floor. To get the best view, you go upstairs and you look down, and you see the thing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, and when you would go up the stairs, there was the Matisse painting of the *Joie de vivre*, right? And African art up there. It was—did he talk about at all his rather eccentric ideas about combining modern art with, you know, like a Pennsylvania German ironwork? All those hinges and—[00:19:58]

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, you know, there was some—there was a Mary Currant that was head of the WPA art process. And they had the great Cézanne mural in the Philadelphia museum. I studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of Art, and—but I got to tell you—did I tell you the story about the shipyard, with the pots of paint?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think so, yeah. I think we did hear that one.

HUGH MESIBOV: And I made a big mural.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, the nude on the smokestack. When you were studying at the Barnes school, did you work at all with Violette de Mazia? Was she also there?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And what was your—

HUGH MESIBOV: Motherwell, Lipchitz, [inaudible]. These are the artists that he brought.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, I mean, were the school—the teachers at the school was Dr. Barnes, but was his assistant also there? A woman.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yes, Vinell [ph].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Violette de Mazia.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Violette, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So back to the sketchbook. Did you do a lot of work in sketchbooks? Was that one of your —

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —standard?

HUGH MESIBOV: And I did washes, watercolors, used the blotter. I used black ink, I used different colored inks, and they're all very—and I found the most important thing in life and life-giving is creativity. [00:22:00]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you were finding a lot of interesting subjects in things that most people would not regard as picturesque, like collapsed wharves and piers, industrial sites, urban spaces. So it makes me think about other artists, like perhaps Francis Speight, who was at the Pennsylvania Academy. Did you know him?

HUGH MESIBOV: I knew him. We used to have meetings called "the Club," and every night they used to have—they used to go, but I had a job at the Lenox Hill neighborhood center.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is in New York, though, now. We're still in Philadelphia. I'm wondering, you know, what excited you about painting things that were, you know, these industrial sites? Because you—think about people like Franz Kline—

HUGH MESIBOV: I knew Franz Kline.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, we talked about that a little before.

HUGH MESIBOV: —and there was Prendergast and other painters from that period.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Now we're talking about the Barnes again. So um, I'm asking you about what excited you about the industrial world, the industrial landscape.

HUGH MESIBOV: I'll tell you. Before I became a painter, before—I was very curious. I used to take things apart to see how they worked. [00:23:56] And my father was a great artist himself, and he won a gold medal from the Spingarn Institute. And so that's about my father. Oh, by the way, I did a sketch of my father when I was about 18 years old. You'll see it, it's up in the stairway. I have a sketch of my mother that my father did.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow. So a family in art.

HUGH MESIBOV: A family in art.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Continuing with Deb, right?

HUGH MESIBOV: There's my daughter, my wife, and me. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So apart from Franz Kline, did you know other people who were sort of working in the same way? People like—I mean, I'm imagining industrial imagery, people like Elsie Driggs or Charles Demuth or any of these people.

HUGH MESIBOV: [Inaudible.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. Watkins, Speight, these people.

HUGH MESIBOV: [Inaudible.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, not—yeah, but people who were in Philadelphia, so.

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, we used to sit at a coffee shop called the Heel, and we—the intelligentsia—used to sit around the Horn & Hardart, and for a nickel you could get a cup of coffee. And we were there—it was a jive.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, Horn & Hardart was—yeah, I think we had this conversation last time, about Horn & Hardart. [00:26:03] So what maybe we want to do today is talk a little about some other aspects of your work. It seems like after you made the connection with Dr. Barnes and—you began to, or perhaps at that time you began to work in a more abstract style, a geometric style.

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So how did that come about?

HUGH MESIBOV: It was very interesting. The first show I ever had was at the Carlin Gallery in Philadelphia. And so, Dr. Barnes came in and he saw a picture of a man reading, so he said to Carlin, he said, "Mail me that sketch," and Carlin wrapped it up, and when Barnes opened it up, he said, "I don't want that stuff," But there was another piece I liked called *Byzantine Figure* and Barnes said, "That's the one I want." So that was acquired, and it is still hanging in the Philadelphia museum.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So your more geometric, abstract style, how did that develop?

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, abstraction came from the industrial parts [ph] of a ship in Philadelphia. If you have [inaudible], you have cannons, you have upper level, older level, you have bulkheads, you have open sights, you have rivets, you have noise. [00:28:09] It's a hell of a place to be. In winter you froze, and in summer you were burnt.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So the forms from these paintings came, again, from your shipyard experience.

HUGH MESIBOV: Correct.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That inspired you. So it also says here that um—and I'm having a look at a biography of you, an overview, and just trying to remind myself—it says that you exhibited in Aspen. You were in Colorado for a while?

HUGH MESIBOV: That's right. My wife was a singer.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, that's right.

HUGH MESIBOV: And we went to Aspen.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yeah, and I had a scholarship at the institute of [inaudible].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Aspen Institute, yeah.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: From 1951 to 1954, I believe it was. And my teacher had—Hepta Klaus [ph]—had been at the—in 1950, there was a festival for—oh, God—a very famous German [inaudible] man, and so she—Schweitzer! What do I—of course.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Schweitzer.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Schweitzer, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Schweitzer.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yeah. So it was 1950, and she had been one of the artists at that festival, and then they decided to make it a festival for not only the arts but also the intellectuals, and it was paid for by a group of Chicago businessmen. So I was there for the next four years, and the following years I was hired as a performer. [Inaudible] I was a student. At any rate, so Hugh first of all did the sets for some of the uppers [ph] we did, and he became sort of an artist of residence. [00:30:06] So that's the—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was unofficial, or it was just—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Unofficial, unofficial.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —by opportunity?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: By opportunity, yeah. And so that was the—and that was a very important part of both of our careers, because we met many, many wonderful people, people who had influences upon both of us, and it was a very enriching experience.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, Philadelphia, I mean, having worked there as a young artist and working through the Second World War in the shipyard and meeting Barnes and exhibiting there, I mean, I also grew up in Philadelphia. It's a very self-sufficient, self-contained—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Oh, I know it. That was my hometown also.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's very self-contained community. I mean, it may as well be a thousand miles from New York in many ways. And so interesting you'd go to Colorado, and this going to the middle of nowhere, effectively, opening up all sorts of new connections with other artists.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yes, but at that point it was—I keep thinking of it—I'm visualizing instant coffee. You know, just like throwing the power of the powder suddenly into this tiny hole in the mountains, and there were all these greats from all over the world, whom not only you listened to, and listened to, and then they had symposiums every night. No university experience like this. This was top of the line.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is the Aspen Institute, which is of course still in operation—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yes, yes, it is.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —involved with like a public policy and—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: That's right. That comes out of the business section.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Did you know any of the patrons, of the businessmen?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Well, you get to meet them. I think the guy's name was Paepcke, who was the

inventor of this whole thing. [00:32:04] Hugh, do you remember the guy? Was it Paepcke, the guy's name, who was the Chicago industrialist? I think Container Corporation of America was behind him. At any rate, it was businessmen who ardently and very sincerely wanted to understand the arts and philosophy, whether the philosophy of the ancients and all the way to their present.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it was purely designed as a kind of utopian—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yeah. Yes, that's a good term. But they were honoring—even though the Schweitzer festival was in '50, they continued to honor that concept of the all-around person who could get involved in many things.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And I suppose they still are.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: I have no idea.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think that—well, there is an Aspen Institute—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: That I know of, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —I imagine it's the same organization as it's developed and morphed over the years.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So how long were you there, in Aspen?

HUGH MESIBOV: In Aspen? We went about four years, every summer. And there was a mountain there—what was the name of the mountain?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Well, there were a couple, but there was Red Mountain—

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: —which faced us all the time. And Aspen Mountain—

HUGH MESIBOV: And not only that, I wrote poetry, and I did about 21 poems describing the sunset, the sundown, the wind, the quietude, the grass, the rocks, and the heights. And I took this little girl up on top. [Laughs.] [00:34:01]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How did the—how did that experience change you or affect you?

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, it opened up new avenues of creativity.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So that—the terrain, or was it the community, or a combination—obviously combination of both.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But having come from the East Coast and sort of an industrial, urban world, what was your first response when all of a sudden you're at 10,000 feet and the air's a little thin and the world around you looks very differently than what you knew?

HUGH MESIBOV: Do you know—did I ever tell you about the Wiltwyck School?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, but that's—

HUGH MESIBOV: The Wiltwyck—I worked at the Lenox Hill Neighborhood House.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, we talked about that a bit.

HUGH MESIBOV: And then I told you I went to the Wiltwyck School, and there were boys from social deprivation, and Eleanor Roosevelt used to invite them on Christmastime to their house and have a party. And she would invite them over, across the Hudson, where her home was with Franklin. And I saw Franklin when I worked in the shipyard. He came by three months before he died—it was 1943—and he had high [ph], he had eyeglasses, he had a crutch, and he says, "What, I have to wear this goddamn thing." [00:36:03]

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Hugh, I think from my experience during the '50s, one of the greatest exposures you had—and I know it changed your art—was the Wiltwyck School, and you haven't mentioned that, and you spent many years there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, Wiltwyck School. Wiltwyck School. Talk about the Wiltwyck School. How did you get started working there?

HUGH MESIBOV: I had a—I was working in social field, like the Lenox Hill. I had a friend, her name was Julie Arden [ph], and she says, "There's a place upstate you might be interested in."

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Esopus.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is the Poughkeepsie—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Esopus, New York.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, Esopus, Esopus.

HUGH MESIBOV: Esopus.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Near Kingston. Yeah, right.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah, 10 miles south of Kingston.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So the Wiltwyck School is in Esopus.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: His job was as an art therapist, which he had no preparation for but learned on the job from the first art therapist, who was Edith Kramer.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Edith Kramer and Julie Arden?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Well, Julie was part of the drama department. Edith Kramer is considered the first art therapist. I've never seen her name attached to anything else. And that's where Hugh learned art therapy before it was known of anyplace else.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Now it's taught in universities, you can earn degrees in it.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Exactly, exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. So this was—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: And I feel that that's a very important—I saw him change. I saw his work change, I saw his attitudes change, I saw his respect for himself change. So it's interesting that he's left it out. I've been dying to talk about it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So Edith Kramer was the founder—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: —of art therapy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —of art therapy, a pioneer.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And Julie Arden was teaching in the theater department.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Right. And I don't think Edith and Julie even knew each other. [00:38:01]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But Hugh, you knew Julie from the Lenox Hill school?

HUGH MESIBOV: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay. So how'd you get up there? Was there—I mean, there's not a train on that side of the river.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yes, yes, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There was?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yes.

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, I had a friend who was a lawyer, and he had a car and—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: That was years later.

HUGH MESIBOV: Before that, you could take a bus, get off at the Broad Street station, and then you had to walk about two or three blocks to get to the Barnes. And at the gate, you had to show them your pass, and then they let you in, and you had about an hour to roam around and look at the work, and then you had a lecture. And I can't remember the guy's name, but he was very erudite, and he gave a very thorough lecture, and he was basically the person that I was mostly in contact with.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Merion Pennsylv[ania]—just off of City Line Avenue. Now all that property I think belongs to Saint Joseph's University—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Oh, really?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —or a lot of the Barnes's guest houses were acquired by Saint Joseph's University. But let's go back to the Wiltwyck School. Wiltwyck School, Esopus, New York. Your friend Julie Arden from Lenox Hill gets you a job there, and you learn a different way of teaching art from Edith Kramer. Can you talk about that?

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, when I first came to the Barnes—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, Wiltwyck, Wiltwyck.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Wiltwyck, Dad, Wiltwyck. Remember the boys?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: And all the drawings you did of them. [00:39:59]

HUGH MESIBOV: Okay. The first time I came there, the outside of the building was all full of colored paint, and I was shown this studio, it had a broken floor, the walls were broken, and so forth. And I said, "I can't work like this." So they—for a few weeks they fixed it up and they made it habitable. And then I had my students. Now, the students I gave them—I poured out cups of colors, and they had watercolors, not oils, but I don't—they didn't have acrylic.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it would be like tempura paint.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. Water-soluble paint. And what kind of things did you have them do?

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, you know, it was said that the blacks never understood they were black; they always thought they were white, because they lived in a white society. So I had an idea that—a reciprocal idea that you draw me and I draw you. I wanted to see what color they were. But they were all white. So then I instituted color, and they were able to paint.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So these were kids who were from like disadvantaged—they're sort of like the equivalent of a Fresh Air camp in the summer, or were they—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: They came from the New York City courts. [00:41:59]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, this was actually kids who were juvenile delinquents.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yes, and they had witnessed terrible things in their childhood with their families, whatever family they had, so they were sent there directly from the city courts. It was not the kind of—it was a tough crowd.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So were they confined there?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yes. Eventually they—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it was a correctional facility, basically.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: —yes. Eventually they would be released. Some of them were very innocent kids, they were simply products of terrible, terrible families. What are you going to do if a six-year-old boy, when there's no place to send him and you know he'll be in an institution—he'll be institutionalized for the rest of his life? And I saw the change in Hugh's whole *Gesicht*, his whole attitude in painting. He changed tremendously, and if you look at the works of that time—and it came not that far after his shipyard experience, which had a dynamic effect upon him—but when he had been in contact with these boys, he had changed again. He changed

into a much more understanding person.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: I'd like to get Dad to tell stories about the boys, because there were a lot of them.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: I would love to.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Do you remember? Some of them were very funny.

HUGH MESIBOV: I used to take them on sketching trips on the Esopus Creek. They went around sketching and so forth, and I said, "I have an idea. Let's make a totem pole." So we dug a hole in the woods, stuck a pole in, and actually made a totem pole.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Carving or painting?

HUGH MESIBOV: Carving and painting, like usual totems are. [00:43:59]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And what kinds of totems were on there? Were they like Native American, or were they like Mickey Mouse or—

HUGH MESIBOV: [Laughs.] The totem pole is a tribal—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

HUGH MESIBOV: —piece.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I mean, what kind of images were on the totem pole?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah. And did I ever tell you about the *Byzantine Figure*?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, you did. We're still talking about Wiltwyck here and, you know, the boys at Wiltwyck, so we want to hear more about them.

HUGH MESIBOV: About the boys?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

HUGH MESIBOV: Okay. The boys, out of 100, 20 were selected, and I kept a portfolio of each boy. And there were cooks, psychiatrists, caretakers, and maintenance people that took care of the institution. And did I tell you about Eleanor Roosevelt?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, you did say that she would invite the boys to come across the Hudson to—was it her place in Hyde Park, or there was another place she had?

HUGH MESIBOV: It was 10 miles south of Kingston.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, Esopus, yeah, but where Eleanor Roosevelt would have these picnics was across the river. Dutchess County, so.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Do you remember, Dad, telling me stories about sometimes the boys would try to play tricks on you, and they would get a mat on [ph] or something like that?

HUGH MESIBOV: Okay. [00:45:59] Well, we had a big lunchroom, and I kept a portfolio of each child, and the best pictures I put up, I stapled to the wall of the lunchroom, and the boys would see the stuff they did. But beside that, I did a portrait of each boy, and the portrait of each boy, is my work, but the portrait of me is abominations. You see how a disadvantaged kid looks at a white—he—a bad cop, he had scars on his face. A big head means he has a swollen ego. A small head means he feels diminished. And one time they took my—one of the boys grabbed—got the staple gun and it disappeared. I said, "This class is all over. Can't work anymore. Can't put your pictures up." So the kid found the staple gun and got it back in.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's amazing how that works. So were most of the kids African American or Hispanic or—?

HUGH MESIBOV: Both. African American, Hispanic. Oh, I got an interesting story about that. There was a kid who was a tough kid, and he would go into different rooms where the kids—there's about 10 kids in each room. [00:47:59] And he—this kid took—I told you about it, he took—I told you about the staple gun.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So he took the staple gun.

HUGH MESIBOV: So one time—got an interesting story—I walked into the room, and it smelled very badly. And I

opened a drawer, and I found a defecation. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow. Hmm, I guess they weren't all potty-trained. [They laugh.]

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: It's worth gold, according to Freud. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So—

DEBORAH MESIBOV: What did you do about that, Dad?

HUGH MESIBOV: What?

DEBORAH MESIBOV: What did you do about that?

HUGH MESIBOV: What did I do about it? I said, "Don't do it again." [Laughs.] You know. Oh, and I told you how I made the studio? It was all painted white, and they couldn't mess up. If there was any mess, they had to wash the walls and make it clean before it was dark.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So the floors too were white? Was everything white?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, that's an interesting tactic. So that made them be more attentive to cleaning up and taking care of their materials.

HUGH MESIBOV: I had one incident that happened. This one kid, Spanish kid, that was a bully, and he would go in and beat up all the kids and so forth. And so one time, I told you about the circle [inaudible].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. So the staple gun thief was a Hispanic kid? [00:50:04]

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Staple gun bandito. [They laugh.] So you were there for four years, huh?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, how did that change your work? I mean, it made you more patient, more compassionate with these kids, but how did that affect your own painting?

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, my watercolors, my oils, and tempura.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, but I mean, that's the materials, but I mean, how did the way that you looked at your own work change as a result of being involved with art therapy?

HUGH MESIBOV: Okay. My travels—I traveled all over Philadelphia and Camden. I had a sketchbook, and it opened up many different avenues, because I had all that work to look at, like Marsden Hartley.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. I mean the Wiltwyck experience. To get back to Wiltwyck School and the boys and working with the boys, how did that change your art?

HUGH MESIBOV: How'd that change my art? It didn't really change my art.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: He was there between nine and 10 years.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, that's a long time. So you were there for almost 10 years.

HUGH MESIBOV: Ten years?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: At Wiltwyck.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So that would have been in the 1950s. Okay.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: But into the '60s, because Dad was—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yes, that's why I say it's between 9 and 10 years. Exactly.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: —I remember, you know, living here and—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Mm-hmm [affirmative], I remember that too. [00:52:01]

DEBORAH MESIBOV: —he was gone like three days a week.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I think he quit that job—he started working at the college in '64, and he stayed with Wiltwyck until about '67.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I see.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: So it was between nine and 10 years.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A long time. Well, there's a mention of Monhegan Island. So is this post-Aspen?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Monhegan—yes, it would have to be. Monhegan, he was still going to when we moved here, so—

HUGH MESIBOV: Can I read you about the Aspen series?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sure.

HUGH MESIBOV: [Mesibov reads.] "Ellen Sragow Gallery, December 1969, New York City. Sound of the West, the Aspen series, watercolors of 1951, start off the decade [ph]. They refer to the trip to Colorado in 1951 made because the artist's wife had gone there as part of her musical career. They are particularly exciting because they reflect a creative force, a moment which the edges blue and soften, when spaces deepen, and the atmosphere fogs and breezes enter the rigid places. Great of the year. Nearly it gives way to the brilliant vistas bounded by mists and mountains. [00:53:58] Softly the gesture, the calligraphic signature of the theatrical historical decay enters with quiet confidence of an increasingly abstract image in which the—gathers it all. The streets are central quadrants capable of holding eternal bursts. The 1950s, a decade of transition for most of the world, is for Hugh Mesibov a period of dramatic maturity and creative confidence. Susan Teller. Susan Teller Gallery, New York City."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So in your bio it also talks about your spending time in Maine at Monhegan Island. How did you get into going there? How did you start going there?

HUGH MESIBOV: We had a friend who—I think George Morrison. I think he used to go up to Monhegan because it was a good site for artists to work. [00:56:02] We'd take a bus and we'd get off and walk away a few blocks to Latch's Lane.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Latch's Lane, we're at the Barnes Foundation. But Monhegan Island, you'd have to take a boat.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And it'd be from Rockland? Where did you go, Rockland?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: No, the first times he went from Manhattan.

HUGH MESIBOV: That's Massachusetts.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: No, Rockland, Maine.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Rockland, Maine.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Oh, yes, of course.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Rockland, Maine. You'd have to get a boat to go out to the island.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So who—was there a person who inspired you to go to Monhegan the first time? Did you go to see friends, or—?

HUGH MESIBOV: I had to take a train. I had to take a train—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: [Inaudible.]

HUGH MESIBOV: —and then I'd have to—oh, by that time I had an old car, and I was able to drive up to Maine.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A long trip.

HUGH MESIBOV: A long trip. But I could also take a train from the New York Central.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, you had to go through Boston and up to Portland, through Portland, up to—

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —towards Camden, I guess, and—Camden, Maine, and then stop at Rockland and take the boat out to Monhegan. The Wyeths were in Monhegan. That was a big hotbed of Wyethdom.

HUGH MESIBOV: How about Kline?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And Kline was also up there. [00:57:58]

HUGH MESIBOV: And, well, the whole New York gang.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So—were you there, too?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: I went, I think, for two summers. I had to get—I think I had to get back early. I had costume fittings. And so I didn't spend a whole summer there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So what was the—what was the, you know, milieu like there for you?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: I think it started getting over. He had gotten sort of at the last—you know, at the tail end of the importance of the place for artists. When we went there, there might have been one or two well-known artists by then, but they were going to other places, like on the island.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, so Monhegan had been a sort of earlier destination. People like Hopper and—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —others were going up to Monhegan, and this was sort of—was it like sort of Cape Cod but sort of an outpost of that? Because it was the same people who were going to like—like Hopper had a place in Truro.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yes. Well, it was different. Where we went, it was much rougher. And Truro was pretty easygoing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, yeah, it's very domesticated.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Exactly. And I think the artists then started to go to the island because it was simple. The milieu had changed. It was a more social one than one looking for beautiful places to paint. It was very easy to go and to meet your friends once you went on the island, and it was more social.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The island, you mean Long Island, places like East Hampton and—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yes, the Hamptons, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And of course people like William Merritt Chase and others had been out there at the end of the 19th century too. So these are all these external kind of destinations. But was this sort of inspired by your experience in Aspen? You liked getting out of the city and—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: I think so.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah? [01:00:01]

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: But a completely different terrain.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Well, you know, Dad, do you remember when you and I went to Monhegan in the '80s, around 1986, '87? Because even then, Monhegan, when you go up there, and I'm sure it's true today, is a very, very brutal—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Mm-hmm [affirmative], that's a good description.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: —it has a very brutal, primeval feeling when you climb on the rocks, you know?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah. It's the center of a fishing industry. And there were shacks, paraphernalia of fishing. So you had all this material to work with. It was very inspiring. You could see sunset, sunrises, mountains, et cetera. And it opened—it enlarged my vocabulary.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: When you look at that painting, that is so Monhegan to me.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This painting above my head here, above the couch.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, artists had for a long time—and still do—go to Cape Ann, and, you know, go and paint Motif #1 with the red shack on the stone wharf with all the nets and junk hanging off of it. But as I understand it, the Maine coast was more authentic, it was more real nature, no longer domesticated, kind of well-behaved nature. It's interesting, because Hartley—did you ever know Hartley? Did you ever meet him?

HUGH MESIBOV: I didn't know him, but I admired his work. He did very small paintings. And Prendergast, I didn't know him. Of course, Susan Teller, of course, and all the artists she represented, and she gave me several one-man shows. Another gallery was the Sragow Gallery. [01:02:01]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The what gallery?

HUGH MESIBOV: Sragow.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sragow.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Was that—

[END OF TRACK mesibov_1of2_sd_track01_m.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is James McElhinney speaking with Hugh Mesibov.

HUGH MESIBOV: Pleasure to meet you.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Pleasure to meet you too. Where were you born?

HUGH MESIBOV: I was born in Philadelphia.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And 1916?

HUGH MESIBOV: No, my father came from Russia, and the family, because of the pogroms, the family moved to Argentina, and they were set up as farmers. This was during the Depression. And in Argentina, the family got together. And some of the family, it wasn't compatible to them, so they moved to New York and to Philadelphia. And they were in the garment business. Oh, my father went to the Spingarn Institute, and he got a gold medal. And he was an artist, and he did a lot of painting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So where were you born, actually?

HUGH MESIBOV: I was born in Philadelphia.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Do you recall the name of the street where you were born?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah. Berks Avenue.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay, so north Philly. [00:02:01]

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. So your dad came originally from Russia to Argentina, and then moved up to the US.

HUGH MESIBOV: That's right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And at some point prior to beginning this interview, you told me that he had been a chicken farmer for a while.

HUGH MESIBOV: No, no. My brother was a chicken farmer, Marvin—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I see.

HUGH MESIBOV: —was a chicken farmer. And Marvin was a very bright guy, and he farmed a lot, and then finally, he went to school and he got a degree. And what happened with Marvin, during the war, he went to—he went during the war, uh—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He was in Europe? He was in the Pacific?

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, my father moved to New York, and his brothers were in the garment business.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And your dad was an artist.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah. So what.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, well, it's just—I'm trying to sort of piece together the history, because one of the other artists I'm interviewing now, or just interviewed, Raquel Rabinovich, she just got the Lee Krasner Award from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation—

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah, I know them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —Raquel was from a Russian family that also moved to Argentina to escape the pogroms, so. [00:03:59]

HUGH MESIBOV: How do you like that, it's a coincidence?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, small world. Also I had an interview with someone else who had connections with Roosevelt, New Jersey. That's sort of a utopian town. And that there were a number of experimental farms in New Jersey that were created to—there was some social experiment to try to prove that Jewish people could farm in America.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah, my brother was a farmer.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He's a successful farmer.

HUGH MESIBOV: Not only that, during the war he went to Japan. Oh, and he was—he had a—he was—they went to training school, and they sent them to Europe, but Marvin was sent to China, and he was a lieutenant for bringing supplies to the Chinese, who were at war with the Japanese, and they went up the Ho Chi Minh Trail that was up the side of a mountain.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow.

HUGH MESIBOV: And Marvin said, "Look at them. The Chinese are laughing. A cart went over the hill," you know, and they were excited.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, you mean it was a steep track and a truck or a cart spilled off the side of the mountain with all of its contents.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay. Well, that wouldn't have been good news, but I guess, you know, if you can, you have to laugh about these tragedies. It's one way to survive them.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So tell us a little about your early life. You were born in Philadelphia.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah, on Berks Street.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The north side of town, right.

HUGH MESIBOV: I remember kindergarten, and when I was about kindergarten, went to about six years old or something, and we had a—when I first went there, they—we played with blocks, and I had a good time and everything. [00:06:19] And that was fun. But then when we got into first grade, things—they took away the blocks and they gave us lessons, and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: More work, less play.

HUGH MESIBOV: More work. So anyway, they had us—gave us a sketchbook, but every time I did—I wanted to

play, but I wouldn't get involved with drawing or anything because my mind was somewhere else, so the teacher took the book away. And this happened for about a month, and finally they called me in and, "We can't do anything with him. And he gave us the sketchbooks but they were all blank."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh. I have a student at the Art Students League of New York who is a neuroscience student at Columbia, and she recently shared that a study has proved that kids who doodle in class, who doodle during lectures, actually score higher on tests than students who just write down what the teacher is saying.

HUGH MESIBOV: I'll tell you a story. When I went to school—this is later on—the teachers would call attention to us, and I'd pay no attention. I'd stand at the blackboard with two pieces of chalk, and I would draw like this, symmetrical drawings. [00:08:06] And you walk away from it, and you could see the drawings. But I was being disobedient.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, that's something to be expected among young, enthusiastic people. So I assume you went to the Central High School?

HUGH MESIBOV: That's right. Oh, the Central High School. This is interesting. I went to Central High School, I went there, and things were changing, and I designed a mural, *The Life and Ideas of Benjamin Franklin*, and I had the whole design complete. I'll show you the mural design upstairs.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You had the key and the lightning bolt and the—

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah, that's right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —you know, water piano or like whatever he did, yeah, all these inventions, contraptions, yeah. So, well you know that Central High School, now called Boys High in Philadelphia—

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah, and that happened right after—and then moved to the outskirts of Philadelphia.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. It's up now in Overbrook area, I guess. Was where the first drawing and penmanship class had been taught in the United States. It was sort of the birthplace of drawing instruction at the high school levels.

HUGH MESIBOV: Central High School is the oldest high school in America.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's right. Rembrandt Peale started that course. So what were they teaching you when you were at Central High School?

HUGH MESIBOV: Drawing. Drawing and composition and proportion, placement. [00:10:04]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So everybody—

HUGH MESIBOV: Perspective.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —learned how to draw in high school.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. Did you do any kind of mechanical drawing as well?

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, when I was in high school, before I decided to be an artist, I wanted to be a mechanical engineer. And the old Central, they had a big organ and like a two-story auditorium. It was designed after the—what is the—the spiral in France, you know. They had that kind of architecture. And when I—I went to Dr. Haney [ph], who was the president, and I said, "I would like to get a scholarship," he says, "I'm sorry, we can't give you a scholarship," and I was very disappointed. So what I did is I joined the Art Students League, and from there, they gave me a scholarship to the Pennsylvania Academy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you studied—after high school you went to the academy.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Who did you work with? Do you remember your teachers?

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, yeah. Fred Gill. Fred Gill—it was on the Roosevelt Boulevard. That was about four or five blocks away. And he used to invite me to his studio at night because he was teaching during the day, and we shared paintings. And we had a wonderful relationship. [00:11:56] There was another teacher there by the name of Beatty [ph], and—oh, and then there was a teacher named Volge [ph]. He was in the science department, and

he'd give us experiments, but they wouldn't work, so he says, "Gentlemen, the experiment has failed, but the principle remains the same."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So he was not product-oriented.

HUGH MESIBOV: No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He was process-oriented.

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, he gave me a commission. He had a bulldog, and I didn't have any paints, I never had oil paints, and he gave me a set of oil paints, and that was the first time I used oil paints.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So what did you use to do the mural of Franklin? Was that later? Was that in high school, or that was—?

HUGH MESIBOV: That was in high school.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So why don't you tell us about that? That sounds like a major work of art.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes. I made—it had to do with the settlers that—out in the states who settled farming, engineer. It was based on invention. And invention, invention, invention. So I made a mural called *The Life and Ideas of Benjamin Franklin*. And I have a picture of it right up in my [inaudible].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We'll have to take a look at it later. So how large was, you know, the final mural?

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, the final mural—oh, how large was it?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, what was the size?

HUGH MESIBOV: It was eight by 43 feet.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow. [00:14:00]

HUGH MESIBOV: And that, by the way, that's right up here.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's—where is that?

HUGH MESIBOV: That was *Book of Job*. That's later on.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's later on. Well, a lot of those subjects were popular during the Depression and with the WPA and the artists' project and the—I mean, the arts project and the—

HUGH MESIBOV: I want to tell you something. Did you ever hear anybody talk about the Heel?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The Heel?

HUGH MESIBOV: The Heel. The Heel was in New York, at a Horn & Hardart restaurant. For a nickel you could get a cup of coffee, and all the intellectuals used to sit around and gab.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And where was it?

HUGH MESIBOV: Where was it?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, the address of the Heel.

HUGH MESIBOV: The address.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, we can look that up.

HUGH MESIBOV: Twenty-three South—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: It's in Philadelphia, not New York.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, it is in Philadelphia, okay.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: And it's on Broad—we don't have—Philadelphia doesn't have a 14th Street; it's on Broad Street.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, it's Broad Street. So you went to the Pennsylvania—

HUGH MESIBOV: So the point was that was when they moved out and I couldn't paint the mural.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, I see.

HUGH MESIBOV: So anyway, by that time, there was another artist, and he was—after they moved, he finished my job.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you're going to the Pennsylvania Academy. Did you have any contact with some of the other artists who taught there, like Franklin Watkins or Arthur B. Carles? [00:16:03]

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And could you speak a little about them, their influence on you, if any?

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, we shared our ideas. You know, and the guys used to have fights. Oh, now, there was one thing was they used to meet down on 10th Street, and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The academy.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That was years ago, though. That was the 19th century they were on 10th Street. Wasn't it?

HUGH MESIBOV: Well—well, what happened was they—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: The academy was at Broad and Cherry.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes, it still is. We're talking about the Pennsylvania Academy location. The first location was at 10th and Walnut, I think—

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and then it moved in the 1860s, I think into the Furness building at Broad and Cherry, and that's where you would have gone to school.

HUGH MESIBOV: That's right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Which is sort of a magnificent building. It's recently been restored, and the school is much larger. They've expanded, as you might know, into an adjoining building that used to be Atlantic Richfield oil company's office building.

HUGH MESIBOV: I remember enjoying the paintings, like Prendergast and de Kooning. The whole gang. we used to—that was the club; we used to meet. And I had—by that time I got into the shipyard, and I was working in the shipyard.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: At the navy yard or just a shipyard?

HUGH MESIBOV: Cramp's Shipyard.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Cramp's?

HUGH MESIBOV: Now, they worked on the SS *Miami*. [00:18:02] You remember when the Japs were—they didn't build it there—when the Japs destroyed Pearl Harbor, some of our ships got out, and the SS *Miami* went to—was—had to—oh, they had to strengthen the ships, so they put in three-inch plates. Now, I worked on the night shift, and the really—the good thing about the night shift was I had my mornings to paint. I always had a job where I was able to paint.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So did you—you worked at the shipyard, you worked the night shift, and the name—

HUGH MESIBOV: I was a first-class shipfitter. Oh, by the way, they were—we—I read in the paper, you know, there were jobs open, and it was a great idea. So I was accepted into the shipyard, and I had a year's training to be a shipfitter, and I learned how to draw prints and everything like that. And one time through the night, I fell down and broke my arm. And I went to Lenox Hill Hospital, and there was a great surgeon there from Vienna, and he was able to set my elbow and stitch me up.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Good for you. So this happened in Philadelphia?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. So—and tell us again the name of the shipyard?

HUGH MESIBOV: Cramp's Shipyard.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Cramp's, C-R-A-M-P?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah. [00:19:59]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And I presume that would have been down in the south end of the city, near the—near the navy yard?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah. Oh, now, when I got into the shipyard, there was a woman there by the name of Mary Currant [ph], and she—there was a union there, and she didn't like the union, and so they got rid of her and they got somebody else. And the thing about the shipyard was it was a—it was a tremendous, terrible place to work because in the summertime, if you touched the steel you would get burned. And one time I fell in a hole stepping back because I was watching a riveter. I stepped into a hole, and I fell in, and I hit my back, and I had—I was operated on, and I stayed out for six weeks, then I went back again.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow. That was a tough job.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But you were able to paint in the mornings.

HUGH MESIBOV: That's right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Franklin Watkins, who taught at the Pennsylvania Academy at one point in his career, probably during the First World War, was involved with designing the dazzle painting, camouflage that they used on the battleships. Did you have any contact with him as a teacher, Watkins, at the academy?

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, yeah, I knew him. I knew him. [00:22:00]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And how would you characterize him? How do you remember him?

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, great guy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Influential on you?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In what way?

HUGH MESIBOV: I was interested in all those artists. We were a group of about eight or 10 artists, and we used to sit around and talk, and—oh, I've got an interesting story. Down at 10th Street, where we had—the guys would have a bottle of wine or beer and sit up, and drink and tell their stories, and we shared everything. Now, I couldn't come during the day—I mean, during the night. No, I came at night, and Franz Kline and Pollock got into a brawl. And Pollock was a big, muscular guy, but Kline was a short, strong guy. And they'd have a fight. And this was Christmas. And Kline would hit Pollock, and Pollock would fall down, go down 20 steps.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow.

HUGH MESIBOV: And that happened the following Christmas.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Where did that happen, again?

HUGH MESIBOV: Down on the 10th Street.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In New York?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, well, yeah, those stories are kind of legendary about Pollock and Kline, and Pollock and Gorky, and all of the arguments. [00:24:00]

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, you know an artist had a great influence on my work was a Greek by name of de Chirico, and I loved—a great influence—I loved El Greco. When I saw El Greco, I had an emotional experience. And one of

the first etchings I did was based on the *Pieta* of El Greco.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So when you were a kid growing up in Philadelphia, where did you go to look at art? Because I guess the Philadelphia Art Museum was just new then, it was just opened.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah. Oh, by the way, I had a tough teacher. He was very critical of everything. And at the end of the week, he would review our work, and we'd put up a sketchbook. He says, "Get out, I don't like them anyway. But who did that?" I said, "I did." He says, "You got a good career ahead of you."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Who was this? What was his name?

HUGH MESIBOV: What was his name? Begins with White—oh, Professor Gill.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Gill.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You talked about him before.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Fred Gill, Pennsylvania Academy.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You know, Arthur B. Carles had a huge influence. A lot of his students were still alive up until a few years ago, and there's still a sort of tradition of lyrical color abstraction that follows his sort of method, his school of Paris kind of influence. Was he at the academy when you were there? Did you attend any of his critiques?

HUGH MESIBOV: Who, Hawkins?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Carles. [00:26:00]

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, Carles?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Arthur Carles.

HUGH MESIBOV: No, but I liked his work, so I was influenced. I was able to absorb anything. I don't know if it's—oh, I got one good, great thing about philosophy. John Dewey was an intellect that Barnes—he's a friend of Barnes, and he wrote his philosophy was, art in education.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Trying to promote art in education. Well, did you know Dr. Barnes at all? Did you—

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A very controversial character.

HUGH MESIBOV: I know. I went there for—oh, I had a fellow artist from the Heel, his name was Shannon [ph], he said to me, "You ought to go to the Barnes Foundation." I said, "What's that?" He says, "Well, it's outside of Marion, Pennsylvania." So I said—I had to, "I want to go." So I enrolled at the Wiltwyck School for Boys. I have to go up to Poughkeepsie. Finally I had a car and was able to drive there, up along the Hudson. And it was—Esopus is 10 miles south of Kingston.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And what takes us to Esopus?

HUGH MESIBOV: What's that?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Why are we in Esopus now?

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, by the way, Eleanor Roosevelt was on the board. [00:28:02]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Of? The school?

HUGH MESIBOV: And she would come over from across the river or something—oh, we would go to her house across the river, and she would give prize—for a party, she would give prizes. So it was hop, skip, and jump. And I have a picture of Eleanor, a photograph of her.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What were you doing—what was, again, the name of the school, the boys' school?

HUGH MESIBOV: Wiltwyck School for Boys.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wiltwyck.

HUGH MESIBOV: There were 100 boys from the slums of Philadelphia, without parents, and this was a rehabilitation school, and we worked with psychiatrists. And once a month—we'd keep a portfolio of every child. And that was the beginning of psychiatry. There was one person before me—right off the moment I don't remember her name—but she shows me what you do. Well, by the way, when I first came there, they had—the school had—they had groups, 10 in a group, and the boys lived on campus. I didn't live on campus. I lived—I went to town, and I stayed overnight there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How often did you go there? Was it a full-time job?

HUGH MESIBOV: No, it was three days a week.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's quite a commute. You were living in New York at the time? [00:29:58]

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah. I used to take the Pennsylvania Railroad, go out there at first. And after that I got a car, and I got my license, and I was able to drive there. And these were tough kids. These were tough kids. Oh, and I started a drawing class there. I gave them paints and so forth. And they—kids used to say, "Mesibov"—they never called me—they called me Mesibov. They says, "Mesibov, draw me a horse." So I said, "You can do it." They said, "Oh, no, no, no, you draw it for me." So I used to draw them a horse, and they'd paint. Now, of all the hundred kids, about 75 came—maybe 50—came to class. And the walls had been—the classroom before, but everything was covered with paint, even in the outside. So I got into the classroom, and I said, "The first thing that I want, I want all the paint—all the walls painted white." And then we supplied them with color, and the kids painted, and then they made a selection, and the best paintings were hung up in the auditorium.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So let's go back for a minute to Philadelphia, because I'm still curious—how long were you at the Pennsylvania Academy? [00:32:03] How long did you study there?

HUGH MESIBOV: Four years.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Four years. So in those days, was it a certificate program? Did you get a certificate?

HUGH MESIBOV: No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You just went and you studied and you moved on? Because I know later they started offering a certificate and they started working with Penn to give degrees, which they do now. But that was not happening then. We were talking about Dr. Barnes, though.

HUGH MESIBOV: You know, Glackens was his best friend.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes, that—he was his advisor. Did you ever encounter William Glackens?

HUGH MESIBOV: No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But did you meet Dr. Barnes?

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Did you take any classes out at the Barnes Foundation? Because he did have a little school out there, and his—

HUGH MESIBOV: Franklin—Franklin Watkins, I knew him. There were about 10 artists at that—but I can't even pull up their names right now.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, there—a whole group of people from the Philadelphia scene, I think, from that time, like Benton Spruance was one, Franklin Watkins, Arthur Carles. Later on, Francis Speight, Hobson Pittman, but they were a little bit later. They'd be in the '40s and '50s. Wharton Esherick—I don't know if he was involved with the academy at all. But there were quite a few schools in Philadelphia. Did you have any interactions with any students from the other art school, the museum school, later called the Philadelphia—on South Broad Street? [00:34:00]

HUGH MESIBOV: Encounters with other artists?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I mean, there was another school a mile away. On the other side of City Hall, you had that Strickland building, the temple, and that was an art school back in those days, wasn't it?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah. Well, one of my pieces is in their collection.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, what motivated you to leave Philadelphia, and what year was this, do you remember?

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, it was 1943.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay, so you're going to school, you're working the shipyard, and '43, in the middle of the war—so you didn't go into the service?

HUGH MESIBOV: No, no.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Was it on account of your—

HUGH MESIBOV: You know why I didn't go into the service?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Why, why?

HUGH MESIBOV: My two brothers died, and I was—I got a 4-F. And so I didn't have to go to war. It kept me out of the war.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You had these injuries, right?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. Well, you were injured in a way serving the war effort as a shipfitter.

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, I got to tell you an interesting story. During the welding period, they had to get paid, so each welder was given—a burner was given a pot of color, and by the color, they knew which worker had to pay.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I see, so you signed your work with this color.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah. And I told you about Eleanor Roosevelt.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. What did she give prizes for? [00:36:00] Were they just sort of like a party hat, or were they gold medals, or?

HUGH MESIBOV: She gave them, you know, things to eat, hot dogs, barbecue stuff.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So that was very—and this was these very challenged boys, so she would hold parties for them. That's very admirable. So you moved to New York in 1943. What motivated you to do it?

HUGH MESIBOV: You know—it was a job.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You were going to Poughkeepsie, and that was—

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah, I had a job.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And you had to go up there either on the train or had to drive.

HUGH MESIBOV: Both, both.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So how did you keep a car in the city? Did you live in the city?

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, I had a big, massive Buick, and when I was up—I found out—I used to go up by train, but up in the wilderness, I saw that big Buick, and for \$50 I bought it. And it was great, because I used to be able to pack paintings in the car.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So then how did you keep a car in the city?

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, it was very difficult. [Laughs.] I used to—oh, because of the time. I was in the city all the time, so at night, when cars are out, I used to park the car there. And that was about three blocks from the house.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You remember where you lived in the city?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Where?

HUGH MESIBOV: Twelve twenty-five [inaudible] Avenue.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: [Inaudible] Third Avenue, New York City.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Twelve twenty—[00:38:01]

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Thirty-fourth and Third.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay, so Murray Hill area.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So what kind of apartment was it, or house?

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh. Where I lived? Oh. I had an Uncle Al who never had children, so he had the front and we had the whole back of the house by ourselves.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You say "we," who was we? Were you married at the time?

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, yeah.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: He's in Philly right now. He's gone back to Philly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay, okay, okay. But in New York, you moved to New York—here's a question. Stuart Davis was quoted as saying that during the '30s—and probably true in the '40s—that the only person, the only artist he knew who had a studio that wasn't where he lived was Gorky, that everybody else painted in their kitchen or whatever. So where did you paint when you first moved to New York? The bedroom, the kitchen?

HUGH MESIBOV: A five-story walkup. And then that's where Debbie was born.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A five-story walkup, Third Avenue.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay. And—

HUGH MESIBOV: We used to take the carriage down in the back—Debbie was born there. Is she here now?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes, she is. She's—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: There were two rooms, which had a wooden door between them, and he took the door out, and thus he had two large rooms, and they were in the front part of the house, and it was a very large—almost as large as what we have here. It was a very large area.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it was a floor of a building.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: It was a floor of the building. We had the whole floor. And he had the studio, which would have corresponded to, 100 years earlier, to the parlor and dining room. [00:40:09] And they were—it was quite large. And then there was simply a little tiny room and then a small living room, and then a kitchen.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How long did you live there?

HUGH MESIBOV: In New York?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Third Avenue.

HUGH MESIBOV: Third Avenue? Oh, about 40 years.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: From '43 to '59, beginning of '60, actually, when we moved here.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So 1943 to 1959, at which point in time you move out here to Chestnut Ridge, New Jersey, where we are—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: New York.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, you're in New York. This is—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: It's a mile from Jersey.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay, you're right on the border.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yeah.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay. Chestnut Ridge, New York, which is just off the interstate, the Thruway, and the Garden State Parkway. So it's a suburban area, and it's—how old was the house when you bought it?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: At the time, looking through records, which the last one—there was a fire up at the old hall of records, so the last one was referred to—the last record referred to a second mortgage in 1805. However, in looking at the architecture of these rooms, and from the basement, it was—a certain cement was used—was not used after 1740. A certain way of building the basement. And so going by that, I'd have to say that it was built around 1740 or before.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So this is the house you're in, the house you bought after leaving New York, to leave New York, presumably because having a child in New York—was that your reason for leaving New York? [00:42:04]

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: That was the biggest reason. Also we were getting disgusted with the art scene.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Let's talk about that a little later, but just, you know, do housekeeping on the dwelling here. So what you have occupied is a kind of composite house, the oldest part of which is probably 18th century. It's an old house.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: No, no, the oldest part would have been 1740.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: He said—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, 18th century, yeah.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Eighteenth century.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow. That would make this house rather unusual among all the houses around you.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: There were no houses around when we came.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There were no houses around.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: This was the only one. The kitchen is the youngest part. That was built in 1897.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it's an old, composite, add-on house that—

HUGH MESIBOV: Across the street, there was a—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In a subdivision, now a subdivision.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yeah.

HUGH MESIBOV: —there was a hermit that lived across the street. His name was Charlie Lake [ph]. And the Lake family was very well established in the county, close to New Jersey. But Charlie never got married. And Eudice, tell them about the strawberries.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Oh, it's—[inaudible]. Charlie came over one day—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Why don't you come over here?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: —came over from his house across the road to our house with a little—his hands filled with some wild strawberries that he had picked.

HUGH MESIBOV: Why don't you sit over here?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, please, why don't you come over here. I think let's—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Okay.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: I'll take [inaudible].

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: The cat always takes precedence. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We're going to invite Mrs. Mesibov into the conversation.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: At any rate, Charlie had come over this one—he would always come over for something or another, and he came with his little—his hand—he was a little guy, so it was a little hand—filled with these wild strawberries, and he said, "75 cents." [00:44:11] And I figured, well, you know, he needs the money, and I gave the 75 cents. He said, "Can I use your phone?" Sure. So he went to the phone. He called his stockbrokers. And listening to him buying and selling—and we're talking about big—the electric company, the gas company, and he's buying and selling on a big scale. And I figured I won't buy any more strawberries from him.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, eccentric neighbors. So you moved to rural New York with eccentric neighbors.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yeah. With one. There was only one neighbor.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: With one eccentric neighbor—or maybe more, depending upon which of the personalities he was inhabiting.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: That could be. [They laugh.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Let's go back to New York. Now, you move to New York in '43. Did you get married in Philadelphia?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: But not to me, but we did get married [inaudible].

HUGH MESIBOV: My first wife was Dina, and she got a—she went to school at the Art Students League.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In New York.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And you met her in Philly, and—

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah, and we got married in Philly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —she was another artist.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So what kind of art did she practice? Painting, sculpture, printmaking?

HUGH MESIBOV: Painting. Not sculpture. Painting and oil.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you moved to—you get a job at this school for three days a week up the river, so you moved to New York—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: That was many years—he got the job up the river in the '50s.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In the '50s, okay.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: And he moved to New York in the '40s. [00:46:00]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you moved to New York in 1943, you said, so. With Dina. Okay. So how is your work progressing as an artist? Are you beginning to exhibit at this point?

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, yeah. Oh, absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, let's talk about your exhibiting career. Did you start exhibiting in Philadelphia—

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —before you left New York—or, before you left for New York?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes. Philadelphia?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

HUGH MESIBOV: I was studying at the Pennsylvania Academy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. But were you exhibiting? Were you showing?

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Where?

HUGH MESIBOV: At the Print Club on Latimer Street.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Still there.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you were doing mostly painting or mostly printmaking?

HUGH MESIBOV: Mostly printmaking, and some painting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So were you doing intaglio or litho?

HUGH MESIBOV: Everything.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Everything. Just whatever. Were you involved at all with the Sketch Club?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah. By the way, we invented—we made an invention. The invention was a certain type of lithograph called a mezzotint. Now, a mezzotint was made by taking a copper plate and crisscrossing it—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Using a rocker.

HUGH MESIBOV: —yeah. And then burnishing out the highs to catch the color and smoothing out the other part to enhance the print. [00:48:00] And then I invented a new method called the color carborundum print.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So were you using powdered grit to create—

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —oh interesting. And were you exhibiting at any of the commercial galleries? Were there any dealers in Philadelphia that you—

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, my father. My father had a studio down on Locust Street, and he used to paint oils on velvet. It was very stylish. And he sold over 200 paintings. He worked—and he went to—my uncle [inaudible] in Florida, and he showed some of my work in an exhibit down in Miami.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: No, not your work, his work.

HUGH MESIBOV: What's that?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: He sent his work to Miami.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, his work.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: He was very involved at WPA, and to answer your question, where did he do his printmaking and the invention of this particular medium that he spoke of before, it was through the WPA.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So through the support of the Federal Arts Project.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Absolutely, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And in—where was the studio? I mean, a printmaking studio, I would imagine you working in a printmaking studio with other people. I mean, the equipment is very expensive, it requires a lot of ancillary stuff required—hot plates, exhaust fans—so most printmakers I've known—very few can afford to have their own

private studio. [00:50:14]

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yes. Where was the studio that you worked in under the auspices of the WPA?

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, I went to the Graphic Sketch Club, and the Graphic Sketch Club was drawing in charcoal. And it was founded by a man by the name of Fleischman [Fleisher], and he was a philanthropist, and he had that sketch club. And we used to go—I went there five days a week.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Fleisher or Fleischman?

HUGH MESIBOV: Fleischman [Fleisher].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Fleischman [Fleisher]. Because there is the Samuel Fleisher Art Memorial down—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: That's the right one.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, that is the right one, okay, at Eighth and Catherine. So that is still going, you know. That operation is now part of the Philadelphia Museum. It was sort of annexed years ago—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Well, it should have.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and I believe it's still being run by Thora Jacobson, who's run it for years very well.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Oh, I'm happy to hear that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And it's a terrific resource in Philadelphia. Works a little bit like the Art Students League in New York as a continuing ed venue for people from the neighborhood, or from the city who want to just come and take sketch classes, or learn how to do printmaking or whatever. There's no grading, no attendance. Um, they also have an exhibitions program that's pretty highly respected. I see Chelsea [Cooksey] has a new assistant. [Laughs.] So you worked there down at Eighth and Catherine, at the print shop down there. Okay, so you moved to New York. [00:52:03] So there's all of this energy in New York. You've got the new art, you've got all these European artists got the hell out of Hitler's way, so you've got Léger, and you've got in Connecticut the Surrealists, you've got all of these other artists like Beckmann—I don't know if he was in New York yet—but, you know, during the war, a lot of artists who had escaped from the Nazis, from the intellectual persecution of the Nazis, not just the genocide of Jews and communists and Poles and everything we know, but the intellectual—the attempt of intellectual genocide also, they escaped, and they all came to New York. So what was it like, you coming from Philadelphia and landing in New York? Was it exciting for you?

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, I wasn't—I was born in Philadelphia.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I know, but you moved to New York in '43. At that time—

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, at that time, my wife and I decided—my first wife and I—decided to come to New York, and she came from a well-to-do family, and I helped her get a scholarship to the Art Students League. And later on, three years later, we were divorced, and through friends of ours, we met different—I had a friend by the name of Professor Gill, who I told you about, and he was—I actually exhibited with him on several occasions. [00:54:04]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Can you recall where you exhibited with him? The galleries or museums?

HUGH MESIBOV: No, the museums.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay. So you come to New York with your wife Dina. Can you share her maiden name? Do you remember?

HUGH MESIBOV: Kevles, K-E-V-L-E-S, Dina Kevles.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay. So you divorced after three years, after helping her get into the league. What are you doing? You're teaching up the river—no, that's not—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: No, he's working at—there was a place called Kaiser's [ph] that sold women's—and made, I guess, also—lingerie, and he was working there doing window dressing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So this was—a lot of artists found work as window dressers.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And this was a job that you were able to find through your uncles?

HUGH MESIBOV: Through an uncle.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And his name? You remember his name?

HUGH MESIBOV: Uncle Al.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Al—God, I don't remember his last name.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you were just hiring out as a freelancer, or did you work at one store like Macy's?

HUGH MESIBOV: I had a studio near Macy's, it was like a block away, and I had—I was able to do large canvases there. My studio wasn't large enough, but I was able to do large canvases. But the problem was, how do you get them out? So I rolled them up. I was able to transport them that way. [00:56:01]

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: That was many years later.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Where were you exhibiting at that time? In the '40s, did you have—I mean, you must have been just working all the time to make a living, and working on your own artwork in the morning or the evening or—

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah. I worked—I got a job, worked on the swing shift, and now, the swing shift was in the morning.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, so that let you—that left you with—

HUGH MESIBOV: Time to paint.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —time to paint. Okay. And what were you painting at that time? What were your thoughts? What were you doing?

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, I was painting with tempura paints on the walls, on the walls, of the—below deck. Oh, the paints were like oil paints, and—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: I think he's at the shipyard right now. Are you talking about the shipyard here?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What ideas were you interested in painting in the '40s? Were you—when you got to New York, were you excited by Abstract Expressionism?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. So you were painting in that manner?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes, right.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: No, he wasn't.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Where's your studio at this time?

HUGH MESIBOV: The studio at that time was in New York, at 500 Third Avenue. That's where Debbie was born. [00:58:00]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Why don't we take a little break, and we can have a look at the notes, and then maybe we can try to catch up a little bit.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: I think it might be very helpful if you looked at his dossier so that you'll be able to get the idea of the dates and where he was.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I have. I just—I like to try, if possible, to get as much sort of primary narrative as possible.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yes, but it's extremely confused. The decades are in and out.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, let's take a break.

[END OF TRACK mesibov_2of2_sd_track01_m.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you'd gone to Cape Cod, you'd gone to Cape Ann at Gloucester.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: When did you go to Gloucester, Hugh?

HUGH MESIBOV: [Inaudible.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So—

HUGH MESIBOV: And there was creeks, water, and Rocky Mountains and so forth. And it opened up a whole new avenue for my work.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So is it kind of like the battleships inspired the geometric abstraction, so the Rocky Mountains and the rocky coast of New England inspired other forms?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Well, that would be starting really with the rocky forms of Aspen.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, with the rocky forms of Aspen, and then after Aspen, then you find—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —similar forms—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: That's a very good analogy of what happened and why.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —with the New England coast. So that allows you to sort of continue developing this visual language that you had started, that you had discovered in Colorado. Is that a reasonable—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yes, that's a very good movement. And I suddenly realized that—which I didn't before—I can see it happening.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, an idea, yeah. So you could go from the battleships to the geometry of the mountains to the geometry of the coast. So there's always been a certain appetite in your work for like a geometric structure, you think.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Is that fair to say? So after Wiltwyck, right, what caused you to leave your job at the Wiltwyck School, the boys at Wiltwyck School?

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, we moved down here.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, you moved down—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Got a better job at the college.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —oh, you got a better job, okay. And that was at Rockland County College? [00:02:01]

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yeah, Rockland Community College.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Rockland Community College. So, yeah, that would have been right in the early days of the community college movement. They were starting to form these—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yes, the college started I believe it was—let's see, I started working there in '60. We moved here in '60, late '59. And it was just the beginning of people making their move from Manhattan, Bronx, and all that, into the next—the bridge had just been built, the Tappan Zee Bridge, so coming over was easier. And I think at the time we had a like 60,000 people population here.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yeah. They thought it was going to become just a—blue-collar people. It didn't. It actually went on to professionals.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But there were artists up here. There were people like Henry Varnum Poor—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —New City, Vaclav Vytlacil—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: And that's why we moved up here.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —over in Piermont or whatever. Did you know—

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Pousette-Dart.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —Vytlačil? What?

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Pousette-Dart.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Richard Pousette-Dart, right. So did you know Vytlačil?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What was your relationship like with him?

HUGH MESIBOV: I admired his work, and he was a very inspired artist.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How did he inspire you personally?

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, we talked a lot, and we showed each other our media, and we just exchanged ideas.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, the way artists do. You'd go to his studio, he'd come to yours. What about Poor, Henry Varnum Poor? Did you know him at all?

HUGH MESIBOV: No. No. I knew his work. [00:04:01]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Well, I saw that you had also done some work as a muralist, so I was wondering, maybe there'd been a connection with him. And what about Richard Pousette-Dart?

HUGH MESIBOV: I knew them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Where did they live, exactly?

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Pomona.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: I'm trying to remember where in Pomona. It's been so long.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Probably, you know, between Pomona and Mount Ivy, because their kids went to school with my friends who were at the Ramapo, so we all kind of knew each other. Then his son had a band.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: That's right, that's right. The kids weren't that much difference in age and here and there.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: You might want to talk about the Rockland Foundation and how that—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: I will get to it, if you—if I can—

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah, sure. I think we have to do what we can to get as much as we can.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: There was a large artist community out here in the '50s. And we had been visiting friends. I think Barnum [inaudible] was one of the—someone we had visited with a friend, with Maggie and David Diamond [ph]. And we realized suddenly that this was a kind of place—it was very beautiful, and it seemed to have so many artists, and there was an artists' club. And we thought that this would be the best place. And it wasn't that far—it was far, but it was certainly closer to Hugh's work at Wiltwyck than going into the city. And just about that time—I think it was in '58 or '59—that a colleague was selling her old car, and we said, "Let's try it." So we—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So had they built the New York State Thruway at that time that was part of the Eisenhower highway system? The new—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yeah, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —you know, the military roads that they were building all over the country. [00:06:00] And so it was easy to get up to Esopus.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yeah, once—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Hour and 20 minutes.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: —once you have a car and freedom, it means that you could go wherever you want to whenever.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, this area is interesting, because it's not well-known as a sort of artist—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: It was then.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —community. But yeah. But Arthur B. Davies also had a place up here back in the early years of the 20th century.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Oh, yes, the farm is still here.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Yeah, and Hopper.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Huh?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Hopper was here.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: The Hopper House.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Hopper was a Nyack native.

HUGH MESIBOV: Maurice Prendergast.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Maurice Prendergast?

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Was he up here?

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, well, I don't think he was here, but I knew him.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Interesting story about Arthur Davies. I knew his great-granddaughter, and apparently when he died, the funeral occurred here, Rockland County. There was a woman in the back of the church weeping and mourning, and the family didn't know who she was and invited her back to the house. And it turned out that this was his mistress of 25 years. [Deb laughs.] He had lived up here with his wife, who was a doctor, and had their family and had their kids, and then he died in New York with, you know, the mistress, who was this actress or dancer or something. And she came to the funeral, they invited her back, and it was only—I think they asked her to spend the night, and it was only like the next day over breakfast that she confessed who she was. And apparently they—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: They accept that?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —well, like, what are you going to do? [They laugh.]

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: You can't yell at him. [Laughs.] Oh, that's a wonderful story.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But his granddaughter, who was named Georgia Deal, told me—or great-granddaughter—told me this. She had been a student of mine years ago at Skidmore. [00:08:04] So, interesting.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: That's a great story.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: It is. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Funny story. But so this Rockland County area, just to sort of establish it in the canon of sort of, artistic destinations, it was actually—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: For the amount of people who lived here at the time, it was a large artistic community. However, so many other people have moved in since then that percentage-wise, it's probably very small.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's not that cheap anymore, either.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: That's true, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Plus people—artists are always trying to find ways to get out of the city, get more space, more storage space.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yes, that certainly is true.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you moved here in 1960, 1959.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: It was the last—the waning days of 1958.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay. Nine, 1959.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Fifty-nine, I mean, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So who else was here—artists, writers, people whom you knew, whom you may know still?

HUGH MESIBOV: Pousette-Dart.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Pousette-Dart, we know about.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Der Harootian.

HUGH MESIBOV: Der Harootian.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: He was on Route 9W.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: He was a great sculptor.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah, a sculptor. He was a great sculptor.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Vytlačil.

HUGH MESIBOV: —I think I even have a piece of his here.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Vytlačil.

HUGH MESIBOV: Vytlačil.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: [Inaudible].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So of all of those, with whom were you most closely associated?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: To Harootian.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Harootian?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yeah, without a doubt. We were really dear, dear friends, and with the death of Hermione, it was devastating, but when he went, that really—he was going home from this house with his new wife, and we had been sitting around, not even drinking, just having tea, coffee, and they went through the Palisades Parkway, and it got—it was dark, it was getting dark. And he wasn't sure where he was, and so he got out of the car right there in the parkway to use a phone. [00:10:09] This was before you had, you know—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —cell phones.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: —cell phones, and he was hit by a car.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, my God.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: And this—his wife, it was the first time we had met her, and she was maybe a couple of months that they had been married. And she called us with—she was hysterical.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Of course.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: And so were we. Who would think that once we said goodbye to them, that would have been the final goodbye?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How old was he at the time when that happened?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: When Harootian died, was he in his late sixties?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes. Der Harootian?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yeah.

HUGH MESIBOV: He was in his late sixties. Oh, he had a tragic accident.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yes, I just—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, we just heard about that.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: We have a piece of his around the corner over there, a head he called *The Princess*.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: I think you should maybe try to recollect some of the stuff about the Rockland Foundation, because that was really the—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: It was a seminal place for the artists—

DEBORAH MESIBOV: —yeah.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: —and it was a very—the first visit, the first couple of years, actually, it was a very warm, loving place. The artists were very kind to each other. It was quite a bit different from Manhattan, where everybody was trying to kill each other. And we loved the atmosphere. We moved here because of the artists. And we had friends who were not artists who told us that we should really move here, it would be ideal for anyone in the arts. And it was.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Do you remember some of the people who were involved in the Rockland Foundation at that time, in the early '60s?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: At this moment, I don't. You're talking about the artists, not the—

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Or musicians or writers or—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yeah, I really—but it was mostly the visual arts. [00:12:00] Unfortunately—and I guess I'm coming out of an artist's contempt for business—unfortunately it was taken over at some point by the business community and it simply changed.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: But it burned down.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: First it burned down, but then I guess the business community then put a lot of money into rebuild it, and they felt that they owned it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Where had been—where had the structure been? Where was the—

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Where it is—it is now called Rockland Center for the Arts. And it's a wonderful—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: It's in West Nyack, isn't it?

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Yeah, it's around the corner from where I live. It's a terrific place. It's mostly an art school now, but also, you know, they have a lot of exhibitions and—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: And the exhibitions are fine, but the community of artists is no longer—that comradeship that I remember from the old group is no place there.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: I don't know, I think it's a different group of artists now, and certainly there are a lot of artists that are there now.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yes, but it doesn't have the—

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Artists, writers, musicians.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: —there. In the old days, you'd look across the room and see someone you knew, and everybody would say hi and come together. It was a community. Now you see people that you know, but you just don't do those things. That's crass. It's not done. So that comradeship that was so important in the beginning is simply not here now as it was before.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Got it. See, I remember these things from my childhood when I was running around as a little kid, you know, with all the other little kids who were children of the other artists. [Laughs.]

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Kids don't run around nowadays.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, these exurban areas are interesting to study, because I think a lot of emphasis is placed on Manhattan, you know, or you know, these urban art centers. Whereas in fact, like you said, eastern Long Island, Cape Cod, Cape Ann, the hills of Connecticut, the Delaware Valley where I grew up, in, you know, the New Hope area, that whole area was full of—[00:14:22]

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yeah, I remember, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —like actors and composers and people in a broad way, artists, writers. So there is this sort of realm within the orbit of New York, in this case, where—and Rockland County is not as well-known, I think, as these other areas. So it's interesting to have an insight into that. So it is, even today, you've got places like Old Church and—or is that New Jersey? And the Edward—you know, the Hopper House in Nyack and—

HUGH MESIBOV: We were there last week, Debbie and I. We go to—Debbie and Richard, and Alex are great sailors, and just weeks ago, we were down there, and I take pictures of Debbie and Richard, but Alex now is in New England.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: England.

HUGH MESIBOV: England.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Old England. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Your husband's Richard, Debbie?

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, he's a great sailor.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So where does he keep his boat?

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Well, in Nyack, at Nyack Boat Club, but right now, in our backyard. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What kind of a boat is it?

DEBORAH MESIBOV: It's an Ensign, which is an old competitive sailing, it's about 23 feet. And he races it on the Hudson, at the boat club, and we've been members there over 20 years, so. [00:16:06]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's a centerboard boat?

DEBORAH MESIBOV: No, full keel.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Full keel, that's right.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: So a full keel sloop. And it's—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A good river boat.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: It's a perfect daysailer. It's a wonderful, wonderful daysailer. One of the things about Nyack Boat Club is it's been around for about 100 years, and it's a member-run club. And there are plenty of artists that keep their boats there too [laughs] because it's beautiful, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, Hugh, can we talk a little about your time at Rockland Community College?

HUGH MESIBOV: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Coming to New York, somebody said, you know, New York, you got to get out of New York. Everybody was at the club, but we decided to come up here, and we discovered Rockland County, and it opened up our whole life. It changed us dramatically. So all—most of the creativity occurs here: my studio, my oils, my paintings, and several—about 20 collections all over the country, including England.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: That's true.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So when you started teaching at Rockland County College, what were your primary duties? What were you teaching? What courses were you teaching?

HUGH MESIBOV: I taught painting, drawing, etching, and graphic arts. [00:18:02]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So quite a bit. Were there other colleagues in the art department? Who else was teaching there?

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, Hopper—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: He was not.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: John Murphy.

HUGH MESIBOV: John. Lassaw.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So—

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Remember John Murphy?

HUGH MESIBOV: And John Murphy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: John Murphy.

HUGH MESIBOV: John Murphy was the chairman of the art department.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Remember Hochhausen?

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, Hochhausen.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Bill Hochhausen?

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Oh, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I know Bill Hochhausen.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: I studied with him. He's an extraordinary sculptor. Extraordinary.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, he teaches at Pratt now. So.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Does he?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. He's a colleague of mine in the foundations department. How about that, Hugh? We both have—we have a colleague in common.

HUGH MESIBOV: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Tell him Deb Mesibov says hello. He may not remember, but he might. [Laughs.] I was his student.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I will—when I see him, I will certainly tell him hello. So he was teaching—Hochhausen was teaching here, sculpture, right?

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Yeah.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And then he moved on. So how long were you teaching at Rockland?

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, since the 1940s.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay, so—

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Nineteen sixty-four, I think?

HUGH MESIBOV: Nineteen sixty-four.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Nineteen sixty-four. And you were there until the—

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Did you retire?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —the '80s, '90s? Just consulting here. It said you left in the late '80s, so that was just a retirement. You had reached a point in your life where you could step away from your teaching. [00:20:03]

HUGH MESIBOV: So, I'm 95. And I'm still going.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So what were—did you have any interesting students at Rockland County who later went on to achieve things of note? Are there any with whom you keep in touch?

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, Pousette-Dart, I don't know whether he's still alive. Lassaw, I don't know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Didn't Pousette-Dart also teach—didn't he also teach at Sarah Lawrence?

DEBORAH MESIBOV: That sounds familiar. I'm not sure. But I know—Dad, didn't you teach a woman named Nina—what's her last name?—who later on went to become a reporter and journalist at NPR?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Totenberg, I think? Did you teach her? Was that—?

HUGH MESIBOV: Hultberg.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Paul Hultberg was another teacher, right?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Great, great artist.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Nina Totenberg, you mean the radio journalist?

DEBORAH MESIBOV: I think—yeah, I think she was one of Dad's students. He taught thousands and thousands of people, many of whom went on to do lots of things. He doesn't remember them all. But sometimes they come up to me and go, "I had your father." [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, great. Great.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it's a two-year school, right? You would get an associate's degree from going there?

HUGH MESIBOV: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And so they would go on to other colleges afterwards, or they would just go into the workplace?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah. I'm a professor emeritus.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes, you would be by now. [00:21:58] So, since retiring, though, you continued working, and where were you exhibiting at this time, in let's say the '80s and the '90s? Where were you exhibiting your work?

HUGH MESIBOV: At the Susan Teller Gallery, at the Sragow Gallery, during this period. Sragow Gallery. Oh, Woodmere Art Gallery.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Woodmere Art Gallery in Chestnut Hill. That's—right, that's in Philadelphia. So from Chestnut Ridge to Chestnut Hill, so. And was that a solo exhibition, or was that a group show?

HUGH MESIBOV: A group show. Talking about—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: At Woodmere.

HUGH MESIBOV: —Woodmere. Woodmere, I think it was a group show.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So—

HUGH MESIBOV: No, wait a minute, I think it was—no, it was a major show.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was a solo exhibition?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Are you able to verify that, Deb? Do you remember?

HUGH MESIBOV: No, I'm not able to verify.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: No, I don't remember that. I know that Dad had shows in New York during the '60s. He had a number of galleries in New York, which I know are listed here somewhere. But I don't—you know, I was fairly young, so I don't remember all of that stuff.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, you know, I think the purpose of an oral history interview like this is to try to sort of find connections, anecdotes, try to sort of help leave a sort of trail of crumbs to sort of help scholars and people researching the history of art in America to sort of find elements in your dad's life that are going to connect—
[00:24:09]

DEBORAH MESIBOV: To other lives, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —things, you know, concepts, ideas, trends, other lives, to help keep rebuilding the canon of American art. You know, because the more information is out there, the more—

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Maybe ask him some questions regarding some of the gallery shows he had in New York. I'm sure that we have a list here somewhere. Just to inspire his recollection, you know. Because that—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How many minutes?

CHELSEY COOKSEY: Twenty-nine.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay. So in the 1960s—you remember, you're now teaching at Rockland County College, you've moved up here—what was the most memorable exhibition you had during that period of time?

HUGH MESIBOV: Memorable?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, the most memorable exhibition.

HUGH MESIBOV: The Susan Teller Gallery.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Susan Teller. And where was that located in New York?

HUGH MESIBOV: Down on Prince Street.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay, so it's SoHo.

HUGH MESIBOV: That's right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And it was early years of SoHo. It was just getting started. And how did you meet her? Susan.

HUGH MESIBOV: Susan?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

HUGH MESIBOV: I think through other artists.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You remember who it was?

HUGH MESIBOV: How did I meet her? Well, she was a main artist, a main gallery. So I was looking for any venue to exhibit my work. And first I went to Sragow Gallery, and she was very good, but when I got—I had a choice between the Sragow Gallery and the Teller Gallery. Sragow was very good, but some instinct—I had to make a decision. [00:26:09] I decided on Susan Teller. And Susan Teller is a wonderful person. I'm in tune with her. I hear her. I exhibit with her practically every year.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So who were the other artists in the gallery? Can you recall?

HUGH MESIBOV: The other artists at the gallery?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HUGH MESIBOV: Hultberg.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's a lot to remember. So how long did you exhibit with her?

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, about 30 years.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow. There were a couple of people you mentioned in the past, just a little housekeeping with last—the last interview we did, is your acquaintance with Franz Kline?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay, so how did you meet him? How did you meet Kline?

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, through different artists. Through different—I used to go to galleries, and Susan Teller was the most promising for me, and I've been with her ever since, to this day.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I see. [00:27:57] But Franz Kline—because I'm asking you about him because his early

work has a lot of similarities with yours in subject matter, the idea of—he's from Scranton, Pennsylvania, or Wilkes-Barre, or up there in the coal regions, and he liked the sort of industrial imagery of trains and cities and factories and stuff. And I was wondering if you and he were friends, how you would describe his character. Do you have any stories about Kline that are funny?

HUGH MESIBOV: I've got one story. We used to have meetings—I was working at the time at the Lenox Hill, and on Fridays, they had on Tenth Street—there was a Tenth Street [inaudible], and it was up along a 20-foot stairwell, that we had a symposium. And the artists used to get up and make statements, and they were discussed and so forth.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think we—

HUGH MESIBOV: So one time—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We're over? Are we over?

CHELSEA COOKSEY: No, we're okay.

HUGH MESIBOV: One time, Franz Kline and Pollock had a fight. And Kline hit Pollock and knocked him down the stairs.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow. He recovered, though.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. Do you remember what the fight was about?

HUGH MESIBOV: The fight was about being tipsy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Who was tipsy? Pollock?

HUGH MESIBOV: Pollock [laughs]. And Kline knocked him out. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That doesn't seem right, hitting a drunk man. [00:30:02] But they weren't quarreling about some artistic matter at the same time?

HUGH MESIBOV: I think personally they didn't like each other.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's been known to happen that artists do not necessarily enjoy the company of every other artist. [They laugh.] So, yeah, just trying to find a purchase here, some—

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Can I make a suggestion?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, please do.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Dad, you have work in the Whitney and you also have work in the Metropolitan. Can you tell us how that work came to be there, in those two museums? How did the work get in the Whitney?

HUGH MESIBOV: Work got in the Whitney?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, your artwork in the Whitney Museum.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah. Well, the Whitney Museum, I applied to the Teller Gallery, and my work was exhibited, and it was exhibited at the Barnes Foundation, and there was—now, the Barnes has moved—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

HUGH MESIBOV: —to Philadelphia.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Yeah. But we're not talking about the Barnes, Dad. We're talking about in New York, at the Whitney and also at the Metropolitan. So I'm going to ask the question from a different point of view. The Metropolitan Museum has, I think three pieces of yours. How did it get there?

HUGH MESIBOV: It was purchased.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Ah, okay. All three together, or at separate times? [00:32:01]

HUGH MESIBOV: I don't know whether—I don't know whether it was—how it got there, whether it was donated

or acquired. Or—oh, I had a collector by the name of David Orr.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: David Orr, okay.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah. So David Orr had amassed about 100 pieces of mine, and he did the negotiations.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you talked—you spoke about him a little bit last time as well. So he made the donation to the Met. Was he the same donor to the Whitney?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: He was a significant collector of artwork, and also a significant collector of Dad's work.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So he was also a source of artwork for the Met and for the Whitney and other museums as well, I would imagine. We're going to just check the media here, because I think we might be close to the end of this disk. So before we do, is there anything else you think we need to—

HUGH MESIBOV: Do you want to look around and see some art?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, we could turn the recording off and have a look around at the artwork.

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, let's—my—Eudice is probably making lunch or something.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Very good. So shall we conclude for the moment? Would that make sense?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes, let's conclude.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: I think so.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Thank you so much. Thank you.

[END OF TRACK mesibov_1of2_sd_track02_m.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We're resuming. Tell us a little about the 40-foot nude.

HUGH MESIBOV: [Laughs.] The 40-foot nude was painted on the side of a smokestack.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Where?

HUGH MESIBOV: In Cramp's Shipyard.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's in Philadelphia, so this was—was it part of the ornamentation that was ordered for the ship, or was it done on your own?

HUGH MESIBOV: It was done on my own.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And who was the model for the 40-foot—

HUGH MESIBOV: Model? There was no model. [They laugh.] It was the perpetrator. [They laugh.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So I'm imagining sort of like a bomber-nose babe from World War II, the sort of, the pin-up on the bomber nose. And how did you do this, and why did you do this, and how'd you pull it off?

HUGH MESIBOV: You know, there were lots of pots of paint around to mark the welders, I used to take the pots of paint and use that. There were plenty of scaffolds, so I went up and down the scaffold and painted it. And I stopped—when I finished it, the whole shipyard stopped. The whole shipyard stopped, because Eleanor Roosevelt came to launch a ship. [Inaudible.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, take a bottle of champagne and smack it against the bow, and the ship would slide into the channel.

HUGH MESIBOV: Right, down the waves. Bye-bye. [00:02:03]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So how did you do this? Was it at night? Did you do it secretly?

HUGH MESIBOV: No, it was a swing shift.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Swing shift.

HUGH MESIBOV: It was during the day I was able to paint.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Your own paintings, but this was—

HUGH MESIBOV: My own paintings.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —this was—the swing shift, you were able to get up on the smokestack and paint this nude. Was there a photograph ever taken of it?

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, I'm talking about—a photograph of it? Oh, yeah, there are photographs of it. I have to look up to see the ship [inaudible].

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: What did your boss say?

HUGH MESIBOV: What?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Your boss, what did he say?

HUGH MESIBOV: My book?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Your boss.

HUGH MESIBOV: My boss. Oh, yeah. I can't remember his name. Wait a minute. I'm not sure about—Watkins.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But when your boss saw the nude on the smokestack, what did he say?

HUGH MESIBOV: "Nice work." [They laugh.] "Nice work, buddy-boy. Keep it up." And 100 people, men and women, came to see it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So that's sort of your first major public art commission, right?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah. [They laugh.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Tell us a little about David and Stymean.

HUGH MESIBOV: David and Stymean were very good friends of mine. [00:03:59] Now, Stymean used to—is a poet, and she used to come to my house, and my mother says, "Hey, you know, she has a yen for you." But she was highly homely, so I said, "Listen, I know another guy, his name is David Weiss," so I introduced her to David Weiss.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And they hit it off and—

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes, and they got married.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So tell us a little about your relationship with them.

HUGH MESIBOV: Good, very good.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But they were poets, and they were—

HUGH MESIBOV: Poets.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Were you also writing poetry at this time?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Did you publish any of it?

HUGH MESIBOV: No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was just done for pleasure and done as a mental exercise?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And so how did the friendship develop? How did you meet them?

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, Gill? Oh—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Gill is someone else.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —David and Stymean. I mean, how'd you meet them? Were they just in the neighborhood, or they—

HUGH MESIBOV: They were part of the intellectual group.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, okay.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: They met at the Heel. That's where we get back to the Heel.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: At the Heel, okay.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Horn & Hardart is the Heel.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Horn & Hardart is the Heel. Which Horn & Hardart was this?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: This was the one in Philly at Broad—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Broad.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: —and—are you familiar where the Academy of Music is?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Across the street.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, okay. Because there were a couple in Philadelphia, as I recall.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yeah, but this was I guess the main—where the intellectuals met.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Horn & Hardart is I guess a store, is a restaurant nobody thinks of anymore. [00:06:00] They barely exist for a while—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Well, because you have to have a nickel, [laughs] put it in the slot to get the pie. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, right. For a while they used to sell hot cross buns and so forth at the train station, but I think now either Horn & Hardart in New York is now called Mange—it's an Italian restaurant—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: This is the one on 57th, huh?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —57th Street. Yeah, right.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Oh, I used to go there a lot [laughs].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was—I remember as a kid they were very popular. Automats.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yes, yes, the automat.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you would meet at the automat. And why'd you call it the Heel?

HUGH MESIBOV: It was—you know, it was a macho name. You know, like out West, heel [inaudible] the whip.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: I notice a Heel also in the younger section, the junior high section, and we always talked about the Heel, but I don't know why. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's Horn & Hardart trivia, I guess, but—yeah, the automat doesn't sound too macho. Ladies in hairnets behind these panels of post office boxes you put nickels into to get pie out of. Yeah. So interesting history of American fast food and intellectual hotbeds. So how did friendships with poets and other kinds of artists inspire you or feed your own creative activities?

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, I was interested in poetry. And we went out to Colorado, and—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Years later. [00:07:59]

HUGH MESIBOV: —we went to—we stayed at a hotel, Lenox.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Hugh, you skipped 30 years.

HUGH MESIBOV: What's that?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: We didn't go out to Colorado until the 1950s when I went to music school there. But you're being asked about the Heel and the poetry in Philadelphia, how you got together with the other poets.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So there was no publishing? Did you read poems to each other? Did you—

HUGH MESIBOV: No. Mary Currant [ph] said, "You are very good at drawing. I'm going to give you a box of paints, and I want you to go out and paint." So I got on a bicycle and I went all over town to Wissahickon, Fairmount Park, I even cycled to Camden, and I painted debris, the wreckage that I saw. I was all over.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Did you go to Manayunk?

HUGH MESIBOV: Manayunk, and Conshohocken.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Conshohocken. We used to call that the Polish Poconos.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: [Laughs.] I never heard that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Because it was so hilly. Anyway—

DEBORAH MESIBOV: That time was the WPA, wasn't it, Dad, when you went on the bicycle?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah, that was the WPA.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You told us earlier about receiving the box of paints. No, but I'm curious—it's okay if we don't stay in a strict chronology here, because you're talking about going to Colorado, your relationship with poets, and that sort of inspiring your work as a painter and as a printmaker, right? So you were saying that you went years later to Colorado. For what reason did you go to Colorado?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: I had a scholarship at the—I had a scholarship at the Aspen Institute for three years, and the fourth year I was hired as a singer, soloist. [00:10:07] So we went—1950 was the Goethe festival, and then I went—well, let's see—I went '51 to '54, so it wasn't four years, it was three years.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you were there all the time, or intermittently?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Just the summer.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Just for the summer.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: And for the whole summers, and Hugh was doing—we went by—I thought we might go by bicycle, we were so poor—but we went by bus, and then when I got paid, I went—Debbie was born and she was three months old, so we flew. And once there, we were living with another young couple and their children. We were very fortunate—

HUGH MESIBOV: The Poshans [ph].

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: —yeah, in order to survive all summer long, and he was doing construction with our friend's husband, so it worked out very well. I have—we both have very loving memories of those summers. Did I answer your question?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think so.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: [Laughs.] That's pretty bad.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, we were just talking about sort of the interface, trying to get an idea of sort of the creative climate, the intellectual climate.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Well, those summers were certainly very indicative of the creative and intellectual.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you had other people there.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So who else was at Aspen Institute, and what were you doing at the Aspen Institute? Painting?

HUGH MESIBOV: Painting.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Moving furniture, also. [Laughs.]

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah, I would sit on the porch and paint, and I was inspired by the climate, the sunsets, the sunrises, and it was—I did several books of sketches.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So who were other artists who were there at Aspen when you were there?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: There really wasn't anyone from let's say the graphic arts or the painterly arts. [00:12:01] It mostly was poets and musicians. But it was a wonderful atmosphere, and most important was the evening lectures, which great philosophers from all over the world had come and were telling us about their experiences.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, Aspen Institute is also known for encouraging economic thinkers, political thinkers—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: They had business meetings there also. This was brought together by a bunch of Chicago—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —statesmen.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: —businessmen, so of course you would have business ideas there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it was the—but the role of the arts was sort of enrichment or—I mean, because you've got kind of a think tank—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: It was a think tank, and there weren't—now that I think about it, mostly it was businessmen and their idea of what the arts should be. There were many times when I sat in the audience and wanted to spit, but, you know, this is—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.] Good manners prevented you.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Good manners. But it did have discussion, and I must say, the artists who were there, musicians—who are notably quiet—there was still a great deal of questioning, and angry questioning, many times, to these businessmen.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So back in New York, were you getting involved with any kind of regular meetings with other artists?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Sure, 10th Street.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Tenth Street.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Tenth Street Gang. That would be the whole bunch of abstract expressionists, what would become then the outer circle. Name it, the guys were there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So who were you close to, other painters, in those days?

HUGH MESIBOV: Kline.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Franz Kline. [00:14:00]

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yeah.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He was from Pennsylvania, too, wasn't he?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: I think he was. I think a place outside of Harrisburg seems to come to mind.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Some coal regions or somewhere like that. I'll have to look that up. But he was a friend of yours?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And how did you come to know him?

HUGH MESIBOV: I had an art collector by the name of David Orr, and he knew all the artists. And by the way, David Orr kept us alive because every time he would buy a painting—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: —we ate.

HUGH MESIBOV: —[laughs]—we ate.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Other than that we'd have to go look in the gutters at six o'clock every evening for dimes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you were working off and on as a window dresser still?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: No, not at that point. At that point, no, he was working in Esopus.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In Esopus, okay. So you were working at the boys' school a few days a week.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah, the Wiltwyck School for Boys.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: What about the settlement house for ceramics?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yes, and you're very—that's very important, thank you, because that only occurred—the boys school only occurred just before he moved here, in 1958, I think, but Hugh was working at Lenox Hill community center, or whatever they called it—Neighborhood House.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Do you remember Lenox Hill, Dad?

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, yeah.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Do you want to describe it?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Thank you, Debbie. We forgot about that. That kept us alive.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That was also teaching? What were you teaching? Drawing, painting?

HUGH MESIBOV: Drawing and painting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Ceramics.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: [Inaudible] ceramics. You have to tell that story.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, tell us about ceramics.

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, I learned to throw on a wheel, and I was able to make pots, and one day, Virginia Zubritsky [ph] says, "Show me how, show me how." And I held her hands, and she was able to throw a pot. [Laughs.]

DEBORAH MESIBOV: But you were learning it and then teaching it like the next week. [00:16:04]

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: He was studying formulas all night in bed, and the next day he'd—

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, I had a book of formulas.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: —mix the stuff together.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: And teach it.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: And teach it.

HUGH MESIBOV: How to [inaudible], how to roll, how to spin the wheel, how to make the ink, and how to make the print, and do a resist process. Every conceivable process. I was curious, and curiosity didn't kill the cat.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, this is sort of a bit of a surprise, because we don't hear about ceramics until now. And in those days—still even today—some people make a distinction between fine art and craft, and if you're a potter, you know, that's what you're about, if you're a painter, that's what you're about. You know, there's not a whole lot of crossover unless you're Picasso. So what inspired you to get into ceramics?

HUGH MESIBOV: A job.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you had to teach, it was—

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah, I had to teach, I had to make a living, and I went on the swing shift because I could stay in my studio and work in my studio. I lived on [inaudible] Avenue.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So somebody came—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: He's back in Philly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Somebody came to you and said, "We'd like you to teach a pottery class, a ceramics class, at Lenox Hill. Can you do it?" And you said yes, and then that night you learned how to do it and the next day you were teaching it.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, that's a neat trick if you can pull it off.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Well, wait, but you were teaching other things there first, right? You were teaching drawing and painting.

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, drawing and painting. The whole thing. You name it, I did it. [00:18:00]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So tell us a little bit about Gil Orlovitz.

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, I had a friend who lived on the next block, his name was Ralph Novak [ph], and he said, "You ought to meet a guy by the name of Gil." So, "Gil, who's Gil?" He said, "Oh, he lives up on the Boulevard." So I said, "Take me there." So he took me there, and I met Gil.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is back in Philly?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah. And I was overwhelmed with the prolific amount of work already. We were only about 18 years old, and Gil had piles of books and poems and everything. He was interested in James Joyce and the great poets.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So how did that friendship then develop?

HUGH MESIBOV: Very strongly. We were friends for years, until we moved to New York.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, were you, like, writing together, painting together?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But what kinds of things were you doing together, like, with your painting?

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, I did lithography.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So he was interested in Joyce. So did that get you more interested in like literature?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And—

HUGH MESIBOV: So I used to get all the books I can, and I was interested in the poet by the name of Coleridge, and I would read a poem, and it would inspire—he was a great poet, and I'd go through all the poems, and every once in a while a poem would pop out at me and I said, "Haha, aha." [00:20:14] Every time I said, "Haha!" I made a painting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So your relationship between your painting and literature is that a lot of your painting is inspired by reading, by poetry—and by writing poetry. Well, this is what I'm curious about when you're hanging at the Heel, down the Horn & Hardart on South Broad Street in Philly, back in Philly. I mean, all you guys and women are writing poems and making art. You know, you got to be—are you seeing it in each other's studios? Do you have a gathering where people will stand up and like read their poetry, like recite it?

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, yeah. There used to be a place in Philly, on—let's see—on the west side, about a few blocks from Broad Street, and we used to go down there, and they would have violin—somebody would play the violin, some music. And that was part of the process. We'd pay 10 cents to get in.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you'd read poetry to each other there?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So—yeah, I'm trying to imagine if there was something at that time—I guess the Horn & Hardart was sort of like the beatnik coffee house thing.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Absolutely. But I'm just wondering where this last place is that you're speaking of, in New York or Philly. [00:22:04] You said 10th Street, West 10th Street?

HUGH MESIBOV: Tenth Street.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: West 10th Street? You're in Manhattan now, or Philly?

HUGH MESIBOV: Tenth Street is in New York.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: In New York. It was on the East Side, and he's right. It was on the East Side. It was called the 10th Street—"You're going to 10th Street tonight?" "Yeah." All the artists accumulated there, and all the—you know, whatever names—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A lot of galleries were there, and a lot of—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: They didn't come until after we started to make 10th Street the place to go. And I can't remember, I think it was between Second and Third. I could be wrong, but it was in that—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: East Side, East Side.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yeah, it was all the way to the east. And it was a very—you'd have the important guys up on—there was like a stage, a platform, with a long table, and the guys would be sitting up there with the booze, getting drunker and drunker, but everybody could stand up in the audience and ask questions, and it was a very intellectually stimulating time.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I—it's interesting, because I remember my own life, going to the YMHA down on East Broadway in the '70s—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Mm-hmm [affirmative], that's a later thing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —which was a later thing, but there was just a room where people would gather and artists would show slides—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Mm-hmm [affirmative], exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and give talks. It was very much an extemporaneous—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And there would be fights, and—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Big fights, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —there would be arguments, yeah. So were you a big scrapper, Hugh?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Oh, God, no.

HUGH MESIBOV: I wasn't a scrapper. You mean a scrapper?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A scrapper. Were you a big fighter?

HUGH MESIBOV: No. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: An arguer?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: He's a gentle soul. [They laugh.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, like, what did you do when Kline went off on someone, or Pollock, or one of these guys?

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, did I tell you the story about the fight? [00:24:00]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, you did earlier, yeah. So—no, just trying to paint a picture, or encourage you to try to help us imagine what it was like in those days.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: It was very [inaudible]. In fact, there was a—later they'd leave that place and go to

a bar on 10th Street, and I think that was at Third Avenue, and the knock-down, kill-'em fight would continue there at the bar. It was a wild time. But Hugh, never. If he saw a fight was going on, he'd say, "Let's go." [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, you mean real fisticuffs.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: I'm talking fisticuffs where they pick up whatever barstools were around, and *boing*.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, that's passionate work, I guess.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: You know, the philosophy—one guy had one philosophy and the other guy had another philosophy, and don't you step on my philosophy.

HUGH MESIBOV: You know what, a poet that I was interested in very much, a writer, was John Dewey.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: John Dewey. And how did you find him?

HUGH MESIBOV: How did I find him? A friend of mine told me about him, and John Dewey wrote a book, the experience of the artist. Very important.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, you were speaking earlier about how much you were impressed by his ideas about art and education. So how did reading his work, knowing about his ideas, how did that help to shape your own work?

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, the literature, I would do some reading, and the poetry would inspire a work, and that was a trigger for me to do a painting. [00:26:08] Now, there were lots of poets, but Coleridge was my main one.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But he was not a living poet, he was long dead. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and so forth.

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, it was the imagery, the imagery. I did about 100 paintings based on that, watercolors.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: On Coleridge?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Do you recall which poem of Coleridge, or which poems?

HUGH MESIBOV: He—out of maybe 100 poems, there were about 12.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So we talked a little about Gil—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: —Orlovitz.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —Orlovitz.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Dad did paintings of Gil and his friends.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you did paintings of each other, too? This is—

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes. Oh, there were three people in my area. One was named Paul Gariabean [ph]. He was Armenian. His people were—it was a wealthy family. And Gil Orlovitz had a brother who was killed—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Where? How?

HUGH MESIBOV: —in an auto accident. And Gil suffered from that. And Gil felt like he was Van Gogh, you know. He just poured out. He was very prolific. [00:28:09]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, even—did you continue to keep in touch with him even after you left?

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So he's a lifelong friend.

HUGH MESIBOV: [Inaudible] died in 1973.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And did he remain in Philadelphia?

HUGH MESIBOV: No, he was dead.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: He came to New York.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, he moved also to New York, okay. Another person of interest is Hugh Stix. What can you tell us about Hugh Stix? That you met him in 1948.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah. I don't know. We used to exchange ideas.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: He was an art collector.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He was a collector.

HUGH MESIBOV: A collector.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: He was White Rose groceries.

HUGH MESIBOV: David Orr was a great collector of my work. Where, if I didn't sell anything every year or every six months, I would be in contact with him.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So he kept you in diapers and coffee and whatever you needed, so—

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Do you want to tell the Clement Greenberg story?

HUGH MESIBOV: [Laughs.] Oh. This is interesting. Clement Greenberg was a well-known art writer and collector, and he came to my studio once.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: He came on I think it was a Saturday. I'm sorry, I have to interject, because the time is important. He came at around nine o'clock, and he stayed—[00:30:05]

DEBORAH MESIBOV: In the morning?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: —in the morning. And he stayed, and he stayed, and he stayed. And I thought he'd never leave. And finally at five o'clock, he left, and he had an interesting statement when he left. He said, "Well, genius is not for everyone." Do you remember the exact statement? What did he say about genius? All right. He said, "Genius is not for everyone. Some people have to—you just have to suffer with it." So he left. And we told the story to a number of people, "Why did he stay so long?" and then somebody, an artist who was what I would always call a political artist, and he said, "Well, he stayed all that time because he was waiting for you to give him something, and since he didn't get anything from you after all those hours, he just blamed it all on being a genius. If you had left—or given him a drawing, even, you would have had a nice thing in the *Times* the next morning."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Do you remember who made that statement?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Who made that statement? It was someone in the know, that we used to think was in the know.

HUGH MESIBOV: I think Greenberg himself.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Who?

DEBORAH MESIBOV: No.

HUGH MESIBOV: Made that statement. No.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: It was not another artist, but it was—

HUGH MESIBOV: Der Harootian? No, it wasn't him.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: At any rate, but that's a good question.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So he kept hanging around hoping you would grease his palm with a work of art.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Exactly. [Laughs.]

DEBORAH MESIBOV: You also mentioned that you had taught Virginia Zubritsky. Was that Zubritsky of Zubritsky Gallery?

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, yeah, yeah. So she came to my studio. She was in painting, but she wasn't in sculpture. She says, "Hugh, I'd like to see what throwing a wheel is like." [00:32:03] So we went to the wheel and I held her hands—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: You just told that.

HUGH MESIBOV: —and I helped her move the clay, and she said, "Oh, I can't do it, it's too messy." [They laugh.]

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Yeah, but were you part of the—were you connected with her gallery at some point later on?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So tell us about that. You met her first in class, you taught her how to throw a pot—

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and then did you exhibit with her at all? Did you exhibit?

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, I exhibited—with Zubritsky? Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Have you any stories to share about her, other than learning to throw?

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, there was just camaraderie, that's all.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I mean, was there a particular kind of conversation that you had with her, a particular connection that you had with her that was unique in some way, that you felt is worthy of recollection?

HUGH MESIBOV: Well—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Wasn't there something to do with you actually saving the life of her daughter?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Their daughter was in an accident and you came across the—

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah, at Aspen, Colorado.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: I don't know where it was, but I remembered her thanking you. There was some connection there with her daughter. I don't remember. It wasn't that long ago, even, that we discussed it. And he did—I think her daughter—with someone else was in an auto accident, and it could have been in Aspen, and Hugh came by and helped the girl out of the car and made sure that she was okay before he left the scene. [00:34:04] And I remember Zubritsky thanking him a couple of times.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Are you remembering anything of that?

HUGH MESIBOV: I can't—not right now. Not right now. After I think about it, I'll—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: He'll remember, because it—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We'll take some notes—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: —just recently he spoke about it again to me, and that's why it's still on my mind.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You know, this process, this oral history process, interviewing, is tricky, because, you know, there are a lot of dots that we're trying to connect, and it's not just simply a matter of making—

HUGH MESIBOV: Did I tell you about Dox Thrash?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, tell us about that.

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, Dox Thrash was a black artist, and he came into the lithograph place and he took a plate, and he made an abrasion. Now, did you ever hear of a mezzotint?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes.

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, a mezzotint was when an artist would take a plate and crosshatch it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, they would use rockers. We talked about this earlier, that there's a rocker with teeth on it that would impart a kind of pattern, would stipple the plate and you'd burnish out the highlights. Yeah.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah. Now, Dox Thrash was abraising a plate, and I said, "Burnish it." And it became an ongoing process. Now, my contribution was I took a plate and etched it out, and the lower parts, I burnished, and the upper part that it was gridded would hold the ink. [00:36:08] So that was the carborundum process. Now, that became very well-known. That adaptation was nationally written in the *Art in America*.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So the kind of carborundum abrasive-based aquatint. Not really an aquatint, but—

HUGH MESIBOV: The difference between the mezzotint with the rocker and the mezzotint with the acid. And my contribution was with the acid.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: That was under WPA? Hugh? Under WPA?

HUGH MESIBOV: WPA.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So I understand that when you moved to New York and you were trying to get your work exhibited, that your first wife, Dina, sort of acted as your rep, your agent. How did that work? How did she do that?

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, she made a portfolio, and I helped her with it, and she went to the—went to the gallery, and it was accepted.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So what—did the—what was the portfolio like? Was it actual real works of art, or were you using—

HUGH MESIBOV: Real works of art.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —photographs or—

HUGH MESIBOV: Photographs.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Just examples of your work. I mean, today, everybody puts everything on a CD, you know, you just have a computer and you get a thousand images on a little disc. [00:38:00] But in those days she's actually walking around with a portfolio under her arm with prints?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: That's right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And black-and-white photographs.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: I think they were paintings. She was going around with—did she go around with photographs?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: She did? I'm not aware of that. When I spoke to Dina about it, she was going around—she said she was lugging canvases.

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, yeah, yeah. She made canvases. I have a painting of hers.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I mean, but when she was trying to sell your work. I'm trying to—

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —I'm trying to learn about your working process as an exhibiting artist, not just as a studio artist but an exhibiting artist. So that's pretty smart. You send your wife out. She's your rep, so you don't have to talk directly to the gallery the first time; she can do the negotiations. Because you're home painting, right, doing whatever?

HUGH MESIBOV: Well, I did my own painting, and I helped her get a scholarship.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: He was working then at Kaiser, and she wasn't working. She was a student. And she really went from gallery to gallery, and she did get him his first show in New York, the Chinese Gallery.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Now was that at the Chinese Gallery? Why don't you tell us about that?

HUGH MESIBOV: The Chinese Gallery? Oh, that was a wonderful place. We used to meet there, and we actually did works. We did lithographs and block prints, etchings, mezzotints.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Where was it located?

HUGH MESIBOV: Chinese Gallery?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HUGH MESIBOV: Down at 10th Street.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: No, it was at 57th—it was a 57th Street gallery. [00:40:03]

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, 57th Street, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We don't happen to recall—I can look up the address. So it was called the Chinese Gallery?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: It was called the Chinese Gallery, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And do you remember who owned it, who ran it, the person who ran it?

HUGH MESIBOV: It was a group.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Who was the guy you talked to there at the gallery, the dealer? What was his name?

HUGH MESIBOV: David Orr.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: No, it was not. I'm sorry, and I can't remember.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We can look it up. So what was that experience like? Were you nervous?

HUGH MESIBOV: That was wonderful. Every year he used to come to my studio and pick out the choice painting. And also I went to his place often, and he would show me his collection.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So this is his own private collection?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yes. David is a very well-known collector, and he kept his stuff down in the basement, and he could take out these great paintings—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Like the Vogels a little bit. You know about the Vogels—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yes, yes, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —Herb and Dorothy Vogel, who—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yes, very much, very much like that.

HUGH MESIBOV: The funny thing is he used to take a light in dark places and show me the work.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yes, it was a basement. [Laughs.] It was dark.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: It was completely dark, and he would turn on a spotlight to show you the artwork. Other than that—he was so afraid of light ruining the artwork.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, I see, it was an archival consideration.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There are also things that happen when you don't have light, like mold and other things, that are equally vexing to the well-being of a work of art.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: That's right.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Right. [00:42:02]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So how did you make a business arrangement with the dealer? What—was the work sold

on a percentage? Do you remember how that worked?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah, 50 percent.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: In those days?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Split it right down the middle. Really?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: In those days? It's 50 percent now, but in those days? It was a third.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: At least.

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, no, maybe it was one third.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: One third. It was always 30 percent [inaudible], the whole time we lived in Manhattan.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What year was that? Was that—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: The Chinese show? I think—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Nineteen forty-six, '45?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: You moved to New York in '43, and I believe Dina got the show within a year, so that had to be around '44-45, when you had that show.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Before the end of the war?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Was it, Hugh? Do you remember the date of the show? We can look it up.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, we can look that up. So was the show well-received?

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Was it reviewed?

HUGH MESIBOV: There was a dealer by the name of Mrs. Monty [ph]—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: No, that's many years later.

HUGH MESIBOV: —Monty, and she loved my work.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: That was 1950s. Dr. Barnes came to the show at the Chinese Gallery.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Dr. Barnes, your friend?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: And bought something. Bought an encaustic, a small encaustic, and it's at the Barnes Foundation now.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, there were a few contemporary artists in that collection. Another one is Kaldis. Did you know Kaldis?

HUGH MESIBOV: Kaldis, big, heavy guy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Aristodimos Kaldis, the tuft of hair growing out of his nose?

HUGH MESIBOV: And he was very sarcastic.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Always a beautiful girl on either arm. He would—even when he was ancient, very advanced in years, he always had good-looking women. People would say, "How does he do it?" because he wasn't much to look at, as I recall. [00:44:00] Kaldis.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yeah. I don't know. Greek shipping magnate. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Shipping money, something. Personality. So you knew him. He was also in the Barnes collection, I know a piece of his is in the Barnes collection.

HUGH MESIBOV: [Inaudible.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So Barnes came to your show. Was he by himself, or was he with Violette?

HUGH MESIBOV: He came by himself, and he saw a painting called *The Reader*, and we shipped it to him, and it came broken. He said, "What the hell are you doing? Don't you know how to pack a painting?" So, I did it right the second time, and he got it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So how'd you fix it? I mean, I assume the painting wasn't broken. The frame was broken?

HUGH MESIBOV: The painting was cracked.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, well, encaustic can be a pretty fragile surface.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it must have been struck or dropped or something. So you repaired the painting and he kept it?

HUGH MESIBOV: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And do you remember any of the press around that show? Who came to review it, any of the reviewers?

HUGH MESIBOV: Dore Ashton. Dore Ashton wrote a review.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, that might have been a few years later.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: I think it was Dore Ashton.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Dore Ashton is—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: At least I'm repeating what Hugh told me, so.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, 1944, Dore Ashton would be about 10 years old, I think.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Then it wasn't—

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Then it wasn't her. [Laughs.] [00:45:59]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Somebody with a name like that. We can find it out. But you did know her at some point in your career?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes. She was a poet.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There was another artist we wanted to talk about, Der—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Der Harootian.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —Harootian. So—

HUGH MESIBOV: Der Harootian lived up on the hill, up on a hill.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: At Piermont.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, here, in Piermont.

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah, in Piermont.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In Rockland County.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: Did you know him in the city? You knew him in the city, didn't you?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yeah

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: I don't think so.

DEBORAH MESIBOV: No?

HUGH MESIBOV: No, no, I didn't know him in the city. I discovered him up here. He had a farm.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: He lived on a lot of land. He didn't farm any of it. He simply had his whole life spent—he was able to spend his whole life sculpting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So he was a person, then, I gather, you would have met following your move to the city, or did you know him—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: I think yes. We met—I'm pretty sure we met him through the—when we moved here, I think one of the reasons was that there was a large artist community here, and he was one of the people.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You had people like Henry Varnum Poor up the road, and others.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: And many others, yeah.

HUGH MESIBOV: Vytlačil.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Hm?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Vytlačil, mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Vaclav Vytlačil. Yeah, his home is now the exurban campus for the league.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Yes, yes, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. What was your relationship like with him?

HUGH MESIBOV: Very good, very good. [00:48:00]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He's a very influential teacher for a long time. So were you still teaching at this point in time? Were you—

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes. We had a relationship until he died.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So when did you meet Vytlačil?

HUGH MESIBOV: I guess in the '50s.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: All right, so he was already well-established at the league. Did you ever teach at the Art Students League of New York?

HUGH MESIBOV: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: For how long?

HUGH MESIBOV: Oh no, I didn't teach at the league.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, not at the league, no, no. He did. He taught at the league. Well, perhaps this would be a good time to take another break.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: I think so, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay. Thank you very much.

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: I don't know what time it is. I realized the clock is—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Just for the transcriber, I'm going to mention that in this conversation with Mr. Mesibov, we've been joined by two voices, his daughter Deborah and his wife—

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: Eudice.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —Eudice. Spelled E-U-D-I-C-E?

EUDICE CHARNEY MESIBOV: E-U-D-I-C-E.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay. And we will resume in a little while.

[END OF TRACK mesibov_2of2_sd_track02_m.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]