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*Archives of American Art*

Oral history interview with Ray Kass, 2015  
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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Ray Kass on July 9-10, 2015. The interview took place in Christiansburg, Va., and was conducted by Liza Kirwin for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Ray Kass and Liza Kirwin have reviewed the transcript. This transcript has been substantially edited by Ray Kass. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

## Interview

LIZA KIRWIN: This is Liza Kirwin. I'm interviewing Ray Kass for the Archives of American Art Smithsonian Institution at his studio and home in Christiansburg, Virginia, and it's July [9th], 2015. And Ed [Bisese] is also with us. I'd like to acknowledge. We tend to begin and the beginning, so could you tell me when and where you were born?

RAY KASS: I was born January 25th, 1944, in Rockville Centre, New York, which is on Long Island, in the community hospital there.

DR. KIRWIN: And did you grow up in Long Island?

MR. KASS: I grew up nearby in Baldwin, Long Island, South Baldwin, and that's most of my childhood—my parents had recently moved to Long Island from Brooklyn.

DR. KIRWIN: What did your parents do?

MR. KASS: My father owned a commercial truck painting business that had been a wagon painting business started in 1907 by my grandfather, and transitioned into being a commercial vehicle painting business. And that was in East New York, Atlantic Avenue. And my mother was a full-time mother and then later did some odd jobs as a food demonstrator and things in supermarkets, but when we were little, my brother and I—my brother Warren, who is two years older than I am, we were just at home all the time.

DR. KIRWIN: Your father's name is Jacob?

MR. KASS: Jacob Kass, yeah.

DR. KIRWIN: Jacob Kass. And your mother?

MR. KASS: Jacob James Kass. Juliette Van Den Langenbergh, and that was her maiden name.

DR. KIRWIN: Van Den Langenbergh

MR. KASS: Van Den.

DR. KIRWIN: Van—could you spell it?

MR. KASS: V-A-N, D-E-N. They're separate words, and then her real name is Juliette Marie Antoinette Van Den Langenbergh. She shortened it to Juliette Lang when she was a kid because she was like in vaudeville and things.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh.

MR. KASS: Van Den Langenbergh is V-A-N, D-E-N, L-A-N-G-E-N-B-E-R-G-H.

DR. KIRWIN: Is that Dutch?

MR. KASS: It's Flemish. It's Belgian.

DR. KIRWIN: So did you just go to public school in Long Island?

MR. KASS: Yeah, I went to Steele School for elementary school, which was, we walked there every day. It was not quite a mile from the house, something you wouldn't be able to do today, and then I went to a different junior high school that was up near Merrick Road, Grand Avenue, in Baldwin. These are schools that are still in use. And then I went to the senior high school, which was in North Baldwin.

DR. KIRWIN: Did you—

MR. KASS: I graduated in 1962 from high school.

DR. KIRWIN: From high school. And did you have an early interest in art there?

MR. KASS: I had an interest in art as a child, and because of the paint shop and I could go in with my father on Saturdays, when my brother and I did odd jobs. We actually worked. It was pretty dirty work, too. I had things to play with, enamel paints and all the things that a commercial paint shop would have. But I didn't make art self-consciously until I was in high school or junior high school. Mrs. Eddy, a teacher I had in the eighth grade, took me to the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum, and it was a real experience for me. Transformative. I came home and on the backs of Sanitas wallpaper I painted imitations of Pollocks and de Koonings and things that I'd seen that I liked. What I thought were imitations of them.

DR. KIRWIN: And was your father—he was painting vehicles?

MR. KASS: He was painting vehicles, mostly trucks, fleets of dairy vehicles, fleets of moving vans.

DR. KIRWIN: Did you detail—

MR. KASS:—I followed my uncle Charlie around, pulling paper off things that had been masked out on the trucks, or I prepared the surfaces of trucks for lettering or for spraying with lots of chemicals and standing on lots of ladders. We would jack up, my brother and I would jack up the trucks and then pull the hugely heavy wheels off them as little kids, with crowbars, and once in a while get pretty slammed. But this was done then, as everybody did it, you know. Nobody thought—in fact, I would rather do this than stay at home. We'd make a dollar, sometimes. My uncle Bill always paid us as little as possible. And I liked it. I got to go to see where gold leaf was made by the old rabbis who would pound gold in little dark rooms, and there were a lot of things that were going on in New York that were real carry-overs from, like, the 19th century. Brooklyn particularly, East New York. There were still horse-drawn carts. Not lots of them, but when the Divco wagon came along as the milk wagon, a lot of the carriers were kind of heartbroken, and they never really adjusted because they were so close to their horses. Every block had a stable. You know, and this wasn't true when I was a kid, but our paint shop was a former horse stable, because New York was a city of horses and dogs, you know, and side-lot gardens. My grandfather had a big garden next to our paint shop.

DR. KIRWIN: So you really grew up with extended family around you?

MR. KASS: Yeah, Alabama Avenue, where the paint shop was, at one point my father and uncle Charlie and all lived on that street. It's still a completely un-gentrified part of New York. It's the remaining part of New York that has not come back. A lot of it has been razed. It's at the end of the Canarsie line, the 14th Street Subway line.

DR. KIRWIN: It sounds like a collaborative art venture right from the beginning, with—

MR. KASS: I liked it and never had any problems there, really. My family, my father's mother and father moved to Woodhaven, which wasn't that far away, and they had a house, a freestanding house they bought on Woodhaven Boulevard. And my mother's parents lived in Greenpoint, an area where now I wouldn't be able to afford to live, in a little \$70-a-month apartment.

DR. KIRWIN: Did you want to go to college? Were you always destined to go to college?

MR. KASS: No. My parents didn't finish high school. It's a debate whether my mother finished high school or not, but everybody had to work, you know? So there was not a lot of discussion of this, though my parents were in favor of education in general. I was inspired to, you know—we didn't really have books and things. We had *Tom Sawyer*. I'm trying to remember. I recently remembered we had another book, *The Cream of the Jest* or something. It was a party joke book and a Bible. But then our neighbors in Baldwin, which was, you know, the street we lived on was kind of a mixed street. Everybody was usually in business for themselves, but there were a couple of Jewish families and some Catholic families and some Protestant families, and there was a schoolteacher and a fireman and stuff like that. And some of the friends I developed growing up, they had lots of books, and so it was always fun visiting them. They were also super proactive about education. My mother went to PTA meetings. You know, parents were really involved, and she would invite whoever was my elementary school teacher over to our house—it must have been tough on them, because I'm sure many of the kids did this. They'd go to lunch once a year in the spring or fall when the weather was okay, they'd come home with you and have lunch at your house. That must have driven them crazy.

DR. KIRWIN: [Laughs.]

MR. KASS: But my mother did that.

DR. KIRWIN: Did your brother go off to college?

MR. KASS: Yes. My brother went to Adelphi College and then for a year at London School of Economics and he wanted to be a teacher, a high school teacher. And some difficulty came up that had to do with, I guess, a teaching supervisor, whoever. In his senior year, you had to do an internship to get a teaching certificate, and he never got that certificate. He didn't get passed on the internship. So that was kind of a curveball. I didn't particularly want to go to college, and I quit a number of times, but circumstances of the '60s is I kept going back to avoid getting drafted, you know. So then I ended up a college professor. What a great irony. My fate was to be in college my whole life.

DR. KIRWIN: Where did you start at college?

MR. KASS: University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, which was very affordable in those days, even for an out-of-state student. My freshman year, for everything in 1962, was \$1,716. And if I didn't write my mother a postcard once a week, she wouldn't send me a \$20 check. She was strict about it, so I had to write to her once a week, and then my little check would come, and I'd go to the bank and cash it, and I could live on that.

DR. KIRWIN: And what did you, what were you interested in studying when you started there?

MR. KASS: When I enrolled?

DR. KIRWIN: Uh-huh [Affirmative].

MR. KASS: I began in journalism, and I was lucky. I had Walter Spearman who was a very well-known teacher at Chapel Hill for Introductory Journalism, like how to write a news story. I lost interest in journalism because I found the people enrolled in the courses, some of them became distinguished journalists, were very egotistical people who thought they knew better than anybody else in the world, and could tell the world. I guess this rubbed me the wrong way. I don't know. By learning to write a news story, I was able to write whole series of successful grants over the years.

DR. KIRWIN: [Laughs.] That's good training.

MR. KASS: Yeah.

DR. KIRWIN: To write clearly, and to—

MR. KASS: Clearly. Get—

DR. KIRWIN: Get the point in the first paragraph.

MR. KASS: Right, in the first two sentences.

DR. KIRWIN: Right.

MR. KASS: Get the story out right away.

DR. KIRWIN: Hook them.

MR. KASS: Right. Get it so it jumps-up on the table. So I did a lot of that here at Tech. When I first started here, they seemed to need everything.

DR. KIRWIN: Did you encounter significant art teachers when you were UNC?

MR. KASS: I think they were, but they were very different. They didn't—it wasn't critique-driven like it was here. When I first had students in a painting class, I liked it if the students all did something different, or if we were painting the same thing, we would have a critique every class almost. I could smoke cigars then, too, and point at things with the cigar.

DR. KIRWIN: [Laughs.]

MR. KASS: All things you can't do.

DR. KIRWIN: You can't do that anymore.

MR. KASS: No.

DR. KIRWIN: Those were the days.

MR. KASS: So I enjoyed my teaching life. And I had good moral support in that. I had the mountain lake programs. I had people I met through my gallery, Allan Stone in New York, so I had Wayne Thiebaud, Richard Estes, and later Susan Shatter and Jane Freilicher, come down to visit, and Wayne was always encouraging me to keep my job.

DR. KIRWIN: So you kept your day job?

MR. KASS: Yeah, and if they hadn't hired me at Tech, I would have gone back to California. I would have had a completely different life. And I was offered a job by USC, but then I was already kind of started here, and I liked living in the Appalachians. I had taught at Humboldt State University immediately out of graduate school, which I took at Chapel Hill. UNC gave me a really terrific scholarship, and I was able to save money off it.

DR. KIRWIN: Wow.

MR. KASS: So not only didn't it cost me anything to go to get my graduate degree and kept me out of the Army, but it was like almost \$4,000 a year, which was huge money in 1967.

DR. KIRWIN: So was that—so how did you make that decision from undergraduate to graduate school, to what you were going to do?

MR. KASS: Well, I didn't major in art. That's what was odd about getting the scholarship. I majored in philosophy, which I could not understand. I didn't grasp the idea that it was based in consistent rhetoric and logic. I had to rewrite my paper on Descartes like five times for Professor Chastain because I just didn't get it, you know?

DR. KIRWIN: But that was your major.

MR. KASS: Yes. I had philosophy confused with a quest for personal spirituality or mysticism, or something like that. Dr. Falk, who was a German, kind of romantic philosopher, took care of me. Yeah, I think I graduated the last in the class, and there were only like 32 majors. I thought it was about seeing God, you know?

DR. KIRWIN: About a spirituality?

MR. KASS: Yes. I didn't think it was about, like, language philosophy or, you know. I had it confused with a lot of things that maybe would be trendier now.

DR. KIRWIN: You could go back and take philosophy again.

MR. KASS: Take it again. Well, I think I got something from it. I'm interested in it now. I mean, I still read it—

DR. KIRWIN: Yes.

MR. KASS: Imbibe in it a little bit. And I understand things about Descartes now, and Kant. I always understood some things about Kant, but you know, the school at that time was very, very dominated by the British empiricists, you know. So it was not susceptible at all to Continental rationalism or Romantic mysticism.

DR. KIRWIN: Uh-huh [Affirmative]. Yeah, yeah. Wow. There's a broader range now, if you go back.

MR. KASS: So I suffered in that. But then when I went to California I was suddenly—I wrote a handwritten letter to Humboldt State University after I got my MFA degree or when I was getting it, and I got the job. It was unbelievable. A little handwritten resume and handwritten letter!

ED BISESE: What did you tell them in your letter?

MR. KASS: I was applying for a position that they had advertised, and they gave me an interview, but I didn't schedule the interview ahead enough in time, and when I went to Boston through the College Art Association conference Max Butler who was then head of the art department at Humboldt was so backed up with interviews, that he couldn't fit me in. So I met Keith Crown on the floor of the convention with Jules Heller, who was a kind well-known print maker, and they called Max Butler, and Max saw me in the hallway between this long line of other candidates. I mean, the atmosphere was like, if you didn't hold tight to your portfolio, the kid next to you would grab it and throw it out the window.

DR. KIRWIN: [Laughs.] That's quite miraculous then, that you—

MR. KASS: I got the job.

DR. KIRWIN: Got the job.

MR. KASS: Yeah. And, well, they had two positions. They ended up getting an extra position, so I got the extra position. Larry Gray, a kid from Yale, got the primary job first, but we were treated exactly the same, and so that introduced me to teaching. It was terrifying. I had taught a little bit in graduate school, and I'd have to really kind of rehearse and figure out what I was going to say to my students, and once in a while I would just freeze up, and I developed a—because I stuttered. I stuttered extensively as an adolescent and as a child, to where I really couldn't talk on the phone very coherently. The phone was an obsession. And so if I suddenly relaxed into where I thought I was going to get tongue-tied or confused, I would just excuse myself from the class for a minute and go outside and collect myself and go back in. I can remember this, but it's hard to have feelings about it in the same way as it was when it was—

DR. KIRWIN: Happening.

MR. KASS: Yeah. I can remember standing in front of 12 people trying to give an assignment and talk to them about something that was important about the assignment, you know, that I thought they should pay special attention to, and it being a real effort to do that. But then later, you know, you keep being called upon to give talks and public speeches. I quickly developed a technique that was not unlike a technique some actors use to where, if I didn't have to read something literally, I could perform it, giving myself certain range and latitude, and then there'd be no stuttering. And it actually enhanced the performance. But if I had to do something didactic and follow it in a very tightly scripted way, that would have been very hard. So, you know, I don't read commendations awarded by the Kiwanis Club. I don't do master of ceremonies things unless it's all jokes. Although eventually I got to where I could do about anything. I mean, I was surprised at this myself. Then I found out about large audiences being different than small audiences. Talking to 60 people is different than talking to 500 people or 1,000 people. And I had to talk about John Cage and China in Shanghai for the University of Shanghai, and there were more than 1,000 people in the audience. And it wasn't students, it was mostly older people. It was professors from all the various universities, and teachers. And the topic in general was the influence of Buddhism and Asian philosophy on the work of John Cage, and I knew something about this, but it was the last time I was kind of mildly terrified. But I got through it, and it seemed to go off all right, and then a very elderly lady in the first row raised her hand and stood up and said, "Professor Kass, what does any of this have to do with Buddhism?" And I said, "Americans do a great deal with things and ideas that they don't understand."

DR. KIRWIN: [Laughs.]

MR. KASS: I had a good comeback. I was lucky it just came to me.

DR. KIRWIN: Uh-huh [Affirmative]. What year was that when you gave that lecture?

MR. KASS: It would have probably been 1997 or maybe '98.

DR. KIRWIN: How long were you teaching in California?

MR. KASS: I only taught two years at Humboldt State University, and I fell in love with my first wife [Laurie Gunst]. She was miserable out there, and I really liked it in California, but her family was from Richmond, Virginia, and they wanted me to come back, to be supportive of her and live on this commune in New Hampshire that my ex-brother-in-law, Russell Banks, novelist, set up with Laurie's sister, Mary Gunst. They [Laurie's parents] were wonderful people. Her father owned the Sergeant's Pet care products company.

DR. KIRWIN: Her name was Laurie?

MR. KASS: L-A-U-R-I-E Gunst, G-U-N-S-T.

DR. KIRWIN: Okay. When did you marry?

MR. KASS: Well, we lived together for seven years, and then we only married, I guess 1974. Now, marriage was kind of the end of something, not the beginning of something. Laurie had flunked out of Boston University when I met her and came out to live with me in California. We went back to live in Northwood with Russ and Mary in New Hampshire, and she started going to night school with the nearby University of New Hampshire Durham, and she did better. And then she finished a Master's degree and then went to Harvard for a PhD. So that's—I moved on to Cambridge. I was very supportive of Laurie and did a lot of household things—I cooked breakfast. I actually did things that Jerrie [Pike, to whom I've been married for more than 20 years] wouldn't believe, because I don't do anything now, it seems.

DR. KIRWIN: [Laughs.]

MR. KASS: Yeah. And when she finally got established at Harvard and everything was going well, and she had organized a feminist cell that met twice a week in our living room, and when it wasn't the feminist cell it was

reggae singers. Toots and the Maytals and Jimmy Cliff jumping up and down in our apartment. I knew things were drifting. I mean, I cared about her a lot, but she needed to be in a place where she could feel more important, I guess. I don't know. We're still in touch. We're still close.

DR. KIRWIN: And when did you split up?

MR. KASS: When I came to Virginia Tech for the visiting artist job.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh, that was '76?

MR. KASS: I arrived in Blacksburg January 1st, 1976—it was zero degrees! She came down to visit me a few times later that spring and it's complicated. We had both had recent affairs.

And I didn't care particularly about monogamy or exclusivity. But then it became clear to me that she had fallen in love with Harvard and out of love with me, basically, for that period of time. I could see where she needed her independence. I mean, she had turned her life completely around. I was stressed-out by it all and when we first split back in Boston I was at loose-ends and slept under newspapers on my friend, Dick Stroud's floor for a few days, and then I lived in my studio at South Station. I had a gigantic studio at South Station in Boston. We all had gigantic studios in Boston. They were like \$100 a month including heat and electric! The whole area has been gentrified. All of that's been torn down. Everything with all new buildings, you know? But when I lived in Boston and Cambridge, we had an apartment in Cambridge right on, it was on Mason Street, I guess is it—I have to remember now. Right across the street from Matina Horner's house, and she was President of Radcliffe. Diagonally from us lived Al Capp, and four doors down from us was Edwin Land of Polaroid. So was that Mass Avenue or Mount Auburn Street?

DR. KIRWIN: I don't know.

MR. KASS: I'll have to remember that. Mason Street was the technical street address. We were told that it was a house that Henry James had once owned. He didn't—it wasn't his principle residence. It was a really great, unique, Victorian gothic house, in-which we rented a little tiny apartment in the very upper floor. I had to be careful going near the window in my underwear in the mornings because tour groups and things like that would sometimes be gathered downstairs. The house was on the historic tour.

DR. KIRWIN: Henry James' house?

MR. KASS: Yeah, it was just down the street. People go from Longfellow's house down to our house and then, you know.

DR. KIRWIN: That's fantastic. That's a fantastic place.

MR. KASS: It was. Nearby to cemeteries where distinguished people were buried. It was two blocks from Harvard Square, yeah.

DR. KIRWIN: Why did you apply for the job, the visiting artist job at Virginia Tech?

MR. KASS: Well, after we separated I really needed the job at that time. I was living in my studio or crashing in people's apartments, and this came along at the right time. After being offered jobs for years, like at USC or my old job at Humboldt which they offered back to me. Suddenly I wasn't being offered any jobs. Maybe that's something that happens if you don't work for five years or something. When I went to Chicago to interview at the CAA, I thought I was going to get hired by the University of Iowa and/or the University of Georgia, and all the interviews went great, and I didn't get either job. And that's when Tech turned around and had created a full-time position in the humanities program, and I was hired for it. But when I saw someone from the Iowa committee a few years later, I said, "I thought I did well at that interview." And he said, "You did, but your clothes looked too expensive, we didn't think you would ever be interested in being here."

DR. KIRWIN: How weird.

MR. KASS: I said, "What do you mean?" Well, I had this suit that I wore to, you know, the interview. I wasn't wearing dungarees or anything like that, and it was a tweed suit I bought in England. And I guess it made me stand out negatively. One of the problems my first wife and I had was because of her family's wealth. She never really worked, and because of that she missed out on a great deal in life, which she later came to understand. She realized, gee, by not working I missed all that discourse with people that comes through having a job. I said, "Yeah, I mean, you've got a PhD from Harvard. You could have had a terrific job. You would have friends in the office. You'd have disputes. You'd have, you know, professional jealousies and all kinds of things happen."

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah, you learn how to negotiate things differently.

MR. KASS: Yeah. And so that's—not everybody's ready, you know, to be completely self-actualizing. That's what I think the idea of education and going to college and domesticity brings about, right? But so she missed that, and maybe it's because their parents gave them too many trust funds?

DR. KIRWIN: Well, it sounds like you were very supportive, to come back to the East Coast and—

MR. KASS: Yeah, I supported her back to the altar twice with other people, but both of those guys didn't pan-out.

DR. KIRWIN: That's being very supportive.

[Laughs.]

MR. KASS: One them she was married to for seven years, and then it got complicated and she divorced him, to his astonishment. And I said to him, "Well, you know, Jonathan, Laurie doesn't want to be married to anybody, really." A close friend of mine recently had a couple-year affair with Laurie and called me up and said, "I didn't want to upset you because I know you were married to her," and I said, "Andy, you're not upsetting me at all. I'm overjoyed." I said, "But be careful because, you know, Laurie has a blind spot in her brain that just rolls around like a marble."

DR. KIRWIN: [Laughs.]

MR. KASS: Andy's a good guy though. They're still good friends. Laurie's accomplished some serious things, I think. She's written a couple of books. She's a very idealistic person.

DR. KIRWIN: When did you begin showing with Allan Stone?

MR. KASS: I met Allan, I guess, through de Kooning, who gave me an introduction there around 1969 or '70, when I was still living in California. And I had met de Kooning at Knoedler at one of his exhibitions when I had an appointment with Xavier Fourcade to show him my watercolors that I was doing in California. And de Kooning was there. Fourcade introduced me to him, and de Kooning looked at my work Fourcade and liked it. I was originally supposed to have a show with Knoedler that they were going to introduce some young artists. This was when Fourcade and Donald Droll were handling the contemporary Knoedler, you know? My friend Susan Shatter, who I met indirectly through that connection, actually did get in a group show at Knoedler. Neither of us ever were really represented or shown at Knoedler—

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—because they went into a financial crisis after that and had to have a meeting of the Art Dealers Association to bail them out. You know, Knoedler was trying to handle de Kooning and Barnett Newman on the top end. And they didn't really have a client base for them so it was hard.

So de Kooning for a while had been with Allan Stone in the late '50s, late '50s early '60s, yeah. So that's how that connection got started.

DR. KIRWIN: Did you meet when Wayne Thiebaud through that, too?

MR. KASS: Yeah, yes, yeah. And I met Wayne Thiebaud through Allan and also then in California because I was living there for a couple of years.

DR. KIRWIN: Where's Humboldt?

MR. KASS: Humboldt's almost 300 miles north of San Francisco on the coast.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh.

MR. KASS: Beautiful area. Its 90 miles south of Crescent City in the Oregon line. It's the fog capital of the United States.

DR. KIRWIN: Really? Okay.

MR. KASS: Right. So they built the airport in the foggiest part, and they had a fog testing center there, but it meant we could hardly ever fly in and out.

DR. KIRWIN: What was Virginia Tech like when you first got there?

MR. KASS: I liked it because it was—it had recently been repurposed and redirected by T. Marshall Hahn, who was the important president that we had at that time. He had just stopped being president around the time I

arrived. And he moved it from really being an engineering military school to what it has become today. He moved it strongly in the direction of becoming the highest state-funded school in Virginia and a comprehensive research-one university. He lives nearby in the valley a couple of farms away.

And I came originally for a position that was sponsored by the Division of Humanities, or was associated with that. Victor Huggins, who was a good friend of mine from Chapel Hill from graduate school days and he taught here. He had been at Vanderbilt, before he came here. Victor recommended that I be hired at Tech for a temporary visiting artist position. I had already been showing with Allan Stone and I had a fine art delivery business. So I was working between Boston and Washington. I could work a few days a month and make enough money to live on. That's before there was an organized fine art delivery and rigging business.

DR. KIRWIN: Okay, you were doing that while living under the newspapers and the—with your friends?

MR. KASS: Yes. I had started that.

And Glenn McMillan, one of the owners of CRG Gallery in New York, he was working as an assistant gallery manager as a kid. We knew each other through the University of New Hampshire from jogging, on the jogging track. He wanted to be an art restorer and a conservation person. But then he began working for—it was Joan Sonnabend of Harcus Krakow Rosen Sonnabend Gallery on Newbury Street in Boston, and then evolved into being a full blown dealer, I mean, in New York. He worked for Marisa Del Rey—in the Fuller Building and a succession of places before going in with Richard and Carla on CRG, which was been very successful for them. They have to work really hard, you know. Running a gallery in New York now seems impossible to me. They do all the art fairs. We're still friends. He got me involved with some art rigging jobs through Al Lenk, I think, for Grahman Gund and for Stephen Paine, important collectors in Boston. Also, they were very close to Allan Stone.

So a little small world all kind of tightened up.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah. So you had moved the art and installed the art?

MR. KASS: Yeah, I would bring—go over to Grahman's house and hang paintings, a big Wayne Thiebaud of a watermelon stand, stuff like that, or take things down. Because I had Allan as a referral, I had very good clients right away. Everybody always wanted to know what other people had and what they were doing. And Allan kind of trained me to conduct little disinformation campaigns with whoever was talking to me.

So I'd go to Harold Diamond's and I would be delivering, you know, some Eli Nadleman's and Joseph Cornell boxes or some, you know, rare American folk art or some de Koonigs, and I'd be ideally picking something up that they would be trading on. No paperwork.

DR. KIRWIN: Lovely.

MR. KASS: Yeah. Well, they were so enthusiastic as collectors and dealers, but they were dealers because they were collectors. So, you know, it was really like exciting for them. It was exciting knowing them and working with them because they're not all like that. It wasn't the art world like we have today.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah.

MR. BISESE: This was you driving a green van?

MR. KASS: I had a green van, yeah, and I had little—

MR. BISESE: Letters "Alarm" on it?

MR. KASS: Yeah, and I had little blankets in it and all, and I would wrap Brancusi heads up in blankets, and I didn't have any special insurance or anything. I was just trusted. And I'd bring them over and deliver them and pick them up.

And then one day Allan asked me, he said, "What does Diamond have over there?"

Diamond had a butler and a cook and everything. And whenever I arrived, he'd have his cook make me lunch and I'd be eating at a little table in the kitchen, and he'd come in, and he just kind of go, "What does Allan have? What have you been working with, with Allan?"

So I'd have to talk to him. I don't remember all the details of the conversations, but I never went into specifics.

Diamond had incredible things. I mean, he had a big apartment with Légers and all sorts of stuff hanging in it. He's passed away a long time ago.

He was a very important private dealer in the United States. And if we had to compare him to anybody, who was this Swiss dealer who died recently? Fabulous collection. He has an institute in Switzerland, you know. We'll think of it in a minute. Beyeler, Ernst Beyeler. Yeah. He [Diamond] was like the American Beyeler, yeah.

Beyeler had great stuff. I never worked for Beyeler, had any connection, but the idea he owned the last big Monet water lily panel, that he could afford to make gifts of paintings, like the 36 million dollar Kandinsky he bought and then just gave to a museum.

Glenn [McMillan] once said to me about Beyeler, "How can you get that rich dealing art?" Just amazing.

I loved working for Allan because I got to see a lot of great private collections. I went into the Rockefellers' apartment when Steve Ross owned it. I got to do deliveries to fantastic collectors. I didn't know there were 20 room apartments on 5th Avenue that sometimes had their own entryways and their own lobbies.

DR. KIRWIN: Wow, wow. It's another world, isn't it?

MR. KASS: Another world, right.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah. Well, who were some of those people other than the few you named? Can you name some of the other collectors that you—deliveries that you made?

MR. KASS: Ted Pillsbury, among others, and sometimes I'd be called into interesting situations of domestic-discord, like married lawyers who would be planning a divorce, and I'd get a phone—this is—I would get a phone call at, oh, 10:30 or 11:30 at night, saying, "You have to be at this apartment in New York City by four in the morning to take somebody's big Friedel Dzubas painting apart and roll it up or get some other things out of the apartment."

And, I mean, one of the—the husband would be stalking around, pushing me to get it done. "Hurry it up, you know, get this out of here before my wife wakes up."

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah.

MR. KASS: That was funny.

DR. KIRWIN: Wow. Did you just kind of ply the East Coast with your business, this delivery—

MR. KASS: Yeah, I worked with other clients I had from Allan were, you know, Robert and Arlene Kogod in Washington. They lived in Bethesda then.

And when I delivered to Kogod, I'd have—Allan would say, "Hang around. He'll call up." There were no cell phones and things in those days. "He'll come home from work early because he'll want to just drink bourbon with you and talk about his collection." I was the par excellent delivery boy because I could be the dumb delivery boy, or because I knew all about the art, I could also talk about it.

So I would stay at the Kogods'. I mean, they would put me up and and we would talk about art and his collection. He was ardent.

In Boston I worked with Steven Paine, Louis Cabot, Louis Kane, and others. There were a lot of them. It was fun.

Now when I took the job at Tech I had to leave Boston and my art-installation/delivery job. I was then away for a quite awhile. Virginia Tech was on a quarter system back then. And I made trips back to Boston and New York intermittently, and I picked it up and moved art works a little bit, but a lot of competition was coming on. I wasn't really that threatened by it because I was really working for just a handful of dealers and collectors at that time, but the writing was on the wall that this was going to be a big industry, especially based in big cities on the East coast. I knew Bobby Lennon in Washington; he had started Art Transport, even though they never did things exactly right they were the best and were on top of a new industry.

DR. KIRWIN: Artex?

MR. KASS: No, Art Transport. Bobby wanted me to become a partner in his company just because of my connections. And I really thought about it as it wasn't clear if I was going to stay at Tech. But it's a full time job. When you have to start hiring trucks and hiring drivers and bonding everything and getting up in the middle of the night to work out a dispute on the Jersey Turnpike where a truck's broken down or something, it's a lot of work.

DR. KIRWIN: That's a huge empire now.

MR. KASS: It's a huge empire that makes a ton of money. I mean, the part of it that would have been interesting to go into would just be, like, just making the crates. Like Frank Stella had one person, or one company, that just makes his crates, and that's a living for them.

And Art Transport, about 1980 Bobby Lennon made a crate for that big Rothko. I mean, the crate cost \$25,000, which was startling.

DR. KIRWIN: The crates can be beautiful.

MR. KASS: Pardon me?

DR. KIRWIN: The crates are beautiful.

MR. KASS: Yeah. I have some in storage in one of my storage buildings. We actually saved a crate just so I could show students what a world-class crate looks like.

Now to ship overseas, you have to be using the special treated plywood and all. So they made it really hard.

The crates I used to use to send Cage paintings out to Europe, can't use them anymore. I mean, they made it really complicated, and bills of lading and getting things through customs can be complicated.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah, but we're trying to get something from Zurich right now, and I'm wondering if it's just easier to get on a plane and go get it than deal with the crating.

MR. KASS: Call it wall decoration it can save you headaches!

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah.

MR. KASS: Yeah. If you follow all the rules perfectly—it seems like customs people were born just to tie things up.

DR. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm [Affirmative], that's their job. So when you came to Virginia Tech, you were on a quarter system, and you were just visiting at first but then they offered you a tenure track position?

MR. KASS: One year job, and then at the end of that year, before that year was up, they converted that into a full time position. And, of course, my fine art delivery business and rigging business had gone to the weeds. Plus, I liked—this wasn't as much money, you know, as I could make, but it seemed so easy, yeah, and secure. I didn't have to go through all these ever changing anxieties, you know, and challenges.

I never liked going to faculty meetings where some of the younger faculty would complain about their circumstance and say that they weren't being paid enough or they weren't—they said, "If I was in the private sector I could be making a lot more." Well, I could have said, yes. But they could not have.

I said, "If you were in the private sector, you wouldn't last a day." It was the wrong thing to say probably. Yeah, most of the time I said, "It's just so competitive and terrible! What are you talking about?"

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah.

MR. KASS: You know, when you're in business for yourself you can work a hundred hours a week and lose money, be losing money, and still working a hundred hours a week.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah, very unpredictable, yeah.

MR. KASS: Yeah.

DR. KIRWIN: Were there other—what was the—they had a studio art department then? Were there other—

MR. KASS: There was an art department that had just left the College of Architecture the year I arrived, and moved into the College of Arts and Sciences. And the year I retired in 2003, the School for Visual Arts, or what became the School of Visual Arts, moved back into the College of Architecture and Urban Studies.

And I did a great deal with architecture students over the years, and I did a lot with their programs, but I was never a member of the College of Architecture. I mean, I am now technically as an emeritus, but we joke about that. They were critical to support for the Mountain Lake Symposium and my criticism conference. They were critical to providing smart students and interested students, project oriented. Much harder to do that today because of the way they organized their labs. Students are like confined territory now, and it used to be very unstructured, but now it's hard for the students to cross pollinate in common grounds.

DR. KIRWIN: That's a shame.

MR. KASS: I think so, too. But it has something to do with the administrative modeling that, you know, involves the budget. The provost has been trying to change that. I would let students into my classes no matter what college they were in if they were interested. And sometimes I'd have to ask the students if it was okay, because we were supposed to have no more than 20 students in the class and I'd have 32, and there would be a kid from the business college and students from architecture and students from other programs, particularly biology. A number of my students became very successful artists, teachers and gallerists, but they were biology majors. A lot of affinity there, for some reason, great affinity between biology and art.

One in particular, Bruce McClure, quit biology to major in architecture, but kept taking art courses. Bruce has been in a couple of Whitney Biennials and things. He lived in my apartment in New York for about five years.

And Liz Mayer who became a senior sales analyst for Arne Glimcher at Pace. She's semi-retired now, but that was—I keep the development people away from her.

And Bill Gorcica who's head of the art department at one of the University of Minnesota campuses. Another biology student. He also lived in our building in New York.

I say "our building." It's 1715 Lexington Avenue, where one of my first students had an apartment, and then I rented an apartment downstairs. He's moved out years and years ago. And I still just rent my place, but all the other floors of the building are now occupied by former Virginia Tech students. My apartment is still used by students to get started in New York. And my rent is really inexpensive, so.

DR. KIRWIN: Well, that's great.

MR. KASS: It's survived several near losses where, you know, the building was going to be sold or torn down or whatever, but the succession of recessions has helped us stay put.

DR. KIRWIN: That's good.

MR. KASS: Yeah, I can't imagine not having it. I mean—

DR. KIRWIN: When did you get that?

MR. KASS: Well, I've always had a place to stay in New York since I came to Tech.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh.

MR. KASS: The entire time—you don't mind if I finish this, do you? The entire time I've been here, but I should have kept them, you know, starting with the lower east side where we could rent an apartment in the '60s just—we'd rent them for the summer as a place to change our clothes and go to parties, use them like beach cabanas. They were \$60 a month.

DR. KIRWIN: Wow.

MR. KASS: The same ones that are often still un-renovated are high end now. And then I had a—I was in Tribeca at the very beginning of that neighborhood on Vestry Street in the same building where Marisol and Chamberlain and Robert Wilson lived. It was the first artist loft building in Tribeca.

DR. KIRWIN: Tribeca.

MR. BISESE: '67?

MR. KASS: No, this was in the later 1970s—

MR. BISESE: Where Marjorie [Portnow] is?

MR. KASS: Yes, where Marjorie is.

MR. BISESE: That's '67.

MR. KASS: Yeah. Well, yeah, and I would rent a room from Marjorie, then—when I was doing the Graves book I rented her place for the better part of two years between 1979 and 1982. She was gone a lot. Jack Beal lived upstairs. I remember that once Jack and I fixed the radiators together. The landlord did not take very good care of the building. He wanted us all out.

And you know that building well, yeah. So that's seven—that's in the latter part of the '70s into '81.

Then I was on Broadway on West 110th Street for a while [in a big apartment that Katherine Portwer had rented]

and that was not for very long. That was a great place, except for the wind on the west side.

It's up near where Rackstraw Downes lived at that time when he was painting cityscapes. He'd be painting on the street in Tribeca. You could see him looking down from Marjorie's place. Rackstraw would be painting right on the corner in freezing weather, just drawing, standing out there.

Marisol would go out and feed the wild cats when they still had the loading dock awnings, little yellow light bulbs, like something in an Edward Hopper painting. She was very nice.

DR. KIRWIN: Were you friends with all these artists in these buildings?

MR. KASS: I met them. You couldn't talk to John Chamberlain because he was always on the phone. He would love it when I came down, but he'd be on the phone the entire time, almost every time. I visited him he would be very welcoming but he'd stay on the phone.

DR. KIRWIN: That's funny.

MR. KASS: Yeah, people were friendly in the building. Nobody was famous. Fame didn't exist that way. People were famous in the sense Chamberlain Wilson and Marisol were very well-known artists, you know, but if you went to Max's Kansas City, and Jim Morrison was in there, he'd just be sitting at the end of the bar, drinking. It wasn't a celebrity culture. Warhol would come in and he would always go with Lou Reed and his people to the backroom, you know, to a more secluded area. He always exhibited to me more of an air of intentional exclusivity.

That's not a criticism. It's just, you know, probably with good reason.

It's different now because, one; Allen Ginsberg and Cage were people I considered artist of stature. They were conscious of their social role in the larger society. They could take a seat beside business people, other kinds of community leaders, and share in the conversation and the discourse, you know. They saw that as part of their responsibility.

I don't know how many artists feel that way. You know, it's a consciousness of sort of taking care of the larger enterprise that you're in and representing it in society like William Carlos Williams did or something like that, you know. I think that there were more artist like that then.

Barnett Newman was always very kind to young artists and very supportive. He saw that as important.

DR. KIRWIN: How did the symposiums begin? You had—when was your first one?

MR. KASS: They began out of necessity because one of the conditions of being at Virginia Tech at the time without—before modern communications, was that it was kind of isolated. And I thought the art program would be helped by doing something that really distinguished it, and I was interested in these things, so I proposed doing a theoretical art-criticism conference. I had met Donald Kuspit in Chapel Hill when I first arrived here in '76, and so we became friends, went back and forth.

I really thought art criticism was a special kind of inquisitive literature—it sort of re-kindled my interest in philosophy.

DR. KIRWIN: What did Kuspit have a background in?

MR. KASS: Oh, yeah, his first doctorate is in philosophy. And then he has another—he's also a licensed psychoanalyst.

DR. KIRWIN: So it was your idea to kind of create an intellectual center to bring the people to this area?

MR. KASS: Yeah. The first symposium was my idea, definitely. I worked it out with, John Link at the time, he was head of the art department. It was moral philosophy and contemporary art.

I have all the posters. There's one right near you there, the green rolled up thing.

We began doing a fall conference. I had met Mary Moody Northern, who owned Mountain Lake Hotel. The hotel was desperately trying to think of ways to revitalize itself.

DR. KIRWIN: Here it is. I'm looking at the poster. "May 23 to 26th."

MR. KASS: Yeah, what's that, Clement Greenberg and Anthony Caro?

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah, Anthony Caro, Clement Greenberg, Charles Millard, Walter Darby Bannard—

MR. KASS: Bannard.

DR. KIRWIN:—Terry Fenton.

MR. KASS: Yes, Terry Fenton, yeah. I have all of the posters for the conferences some place. Sending out posters was how you advertised something then. Eventually we built a following and a lot of the audience came every year.

DR. KIRWIN: And here's Marjorie Portnow, we just talked about.

MR. KASS: Oh, yeah. No, I had—

DR. KIRWIN: Marjorie.

MR. KASS: I began to have artists down, and that's already by 1983. I started doing artist workshops sometimes concomitantly with the conference—or right before it. Wayne Thiebaud did one, and Jane Freilicher with Susan Shatter, and Marie Cosindas, Marie came for three years.

The spring conference, we did—I did a conference in the fall and a conference in the spring. I have no idea how we could undertake something like this now, but we mostly filled the hotel. And it was an audience that came from Davidson or University of Richmond, the Virginia Museum Virginia Commonwealth University and Carnegie Mellon, sometimes Cornell partnered with me to some degree. I had about 10 different small contributors. Mrs. Northen gave me a substantial amount of money, which I gave to the Tech foundation, and saw that it was equally distributed to music and theater, one of my great mistakes.

DR. KIRWIN: Why is that?

MR. KASS: Because later when I ran out of money, they wouldn't give me a dime.

DR. KIRWIN: They didn't give you anything.

MR. KASS: But I didn't need money from Virginia Tech. I always raised all of my own money for the conferences, or the partners did. We got—I think there was only one year we didn't get whatever grant we applied for.

DR. KIRWIN: Wow, that's a great success rate.

MR. KASS: Well, there was nothing else quite like it at that time. And it went on for 10 years. We convened at least 20 conferences.

DR. KIRWIN: How did you find this hotel to begin with?

MR. KASS: Well, I was painting up there, and I loved the area, so I would go up and paint. Mountain Lake was full of water. I'd trespass onto the property, and Mr. Dollinger, the caretaker, would find me and have to kick me off the property because it was only open in the summer, and no trespassing allowed. Josephine Dollinger advised me to get in touch with a gentleman in Galveston, Texas, who was the president of Mrs. Northen's hotel corporation, Gal-Tex.

DR. KIRWIN: That's the name of the hotel corporation, Gal-Tex?

MR. KASS: Yeah, and it was Gene Lucas who helped me, he was the president of Gal-Tex and he was from Pembroke, Virginia, right nearby, so he personally cared about the place.

So I did, and Mr. Lucas arranged for a letter to be written for me and all, and then I had permission to paint on the grounds. And then at one point, I even went down to Galveston. Mrs. Northen would come up to the hotel. Her married name was originally Northern, but she had the R taken out of the last part. She told me, "I'm the most southern person who ever lived. I'm not going to have a name like Northern."

She was a big benefactor to VMI, Virginia Military Institute. And in getting acquainted with her I went up to visit Joe Niekerk, who was the development officer for VMI. He was very close to her. And he helped me enormously.

I was surprised because I thought, "VMI isn't going to help me. I'm from Virginia Tech," you know. The opposite was true.

He said, "I care about Mary Moody Northen so much." He said, "We can't really do anything to help her with that property, but you can."

Now he was a little bothered because I guess Marshall Hahn had approached her once in Galveston, and did it in a manner that she didn't like. He wanted to take the property over. It's thousands of acres of land and the facility and all that. So I was warned I'd have to tread lightly.

I eventually met a lot of people who were close to her, and she became my first benefactor. She gave us over \$300,000. So I could fund the conference and fund—I was trying to instigate programs in music and theater and related interdisciplinary things.

It did help the theater department because they used that as seed money to start their art administration program, which I ended up in right close to the years to which I retired, and had graduate students for the first time, but they were arts administration students, although they were my students. And that got pulled when we had a big budget recession, and the theater used positions I had been assigned to pay part of their levy for the budget recession.

So I retired. Arts and sciences wouldn't approve of my retirement. They said I was too valuable to the college.

Then I got reassigned briefly to the College of Architecture. And they were more democratic. You wouldn't have expected that, but they were much more democratic. Dean [Paul L.] Knox took me out to lunch and said, "We don't want you to retire."

And I said, "I'm finished." I said, "How can I possibly run the programs I've created and all this without these graduate students?" It was like a little pyramid, you know.

And he understood. It was the best thing I could have done at that point. I had three or four days of adjustment, I guess.

DR. KIRWIN: And then it was over.

MR. KASS: And then after a month, I couldn't imagine ever doing it again teaching regular classes full-time. Yeah.

DR. KIRWIN: That's a lot of work to run the programs that you ran.

MR. KASS: I was never head of the art department. I just always—you asked why I started the symposium. Something that was written in my scout camp evaluation where I got a job as an underage kid my supervisor wrote: "seems to suffer from acute superficial boredom."

And I had look up what that meant, you know. I liked the "acute superficial boredom." I liked that, yeah.

But I needed to be stimulated, and then I could bring people down here. And they loved it. I discovered something essential about artists, especially artists in European centers or New York City. They love being invited to these types of places.

DR. KIRWIN: It's very different for them. You think differently when you're in a whole new environment with a different group of people.

MR. KASS: Oh yeah. We had Laurie Anderson come do performances right when she was just beginning to happen.

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DR. KIRWIN: So we were talking about Morris Graves and what you learned from him. No, we'll get to the kicking people out, but what you learned from him.

MR. KASS: What I learned from him was just about having confidence in going in my own direction in art. He was truly, legitimately off beat. He was part of the art world and had quite a bit of recognition fairly early on, but he wasn't really outside of the vagaries of the Pacific Northwest mystic movement, which would include him, Mark Tobey, Kenneth Callahan, Guy Anderson, and isn't really a particularly coherent movement, you know. He was just a very independent American original. And particularly did drawings. I have some of his pieces. There's one hanging in the living room. I used to have more. Sometimes I'd sell one when I needed money. Yeah, but I still have four or five little pierces by him. My first wife, Laurie, has some of them too.

DR. KIRWIN: Did he talk to you about your work?

MR. KASS: Yes. Yeah, he would look at what I was doing. He was, like, he could be very opinionated about art. He tended to have a very—I didn't think his taste in art was wide or eclectic. I think he adhered to this notion that it was very important to him that you had to let the painting paint itself in the most ideal circumstance, and the

painting had to breathe, which means he didn't like flat, congealed, hard surfaces. Glenn Berry, for instance, whose work I admired a lot and I have a very nice painting, but seems all I'm hanging on the walls these days are Japanese scrolls. Everything else is in the storage building, or in storage at the Taubman Museum of Art.

And he was admirable in his unique Bohemian independence. You couldn't separate the different facets of him. If you got invited out there, you couldn't separate him from this environment. He was truly reclusive but he was also very worldly and sophisticated. He could be very courtly. He was essentially self-educated. He knew he had a mesmerizing effect on people. He was very tall, you know. He was handsome, kind of heavy browed. You've seen pictures of him? The Imogene Cunningham photo?

DR. KIRWIN: Oh, yeah.

MR. KASS: Yeah. He didn't like to be photographed. He was very tough about that. He always had an assistant who more or less took care of him completely. It wasn't always a boyfriend, necessarily. And when I wrote the book, I had to be very careful to avoid any talk about his personal life or the personal lives of his friends. It was long enough ago and his generation, was older enough than ours that you just didn't discuss those things.

And I was making headway in my research about Morris's early life in San Francisco and Seattle, whether it was Guy Anderson or some of his other friends, you know. Some were very political. They thought I should write the book in a way that made his relationships to some of his assistants who were lovers of his—

DR. KIRWIN: Explicit?

MR. KASS:—Yes, challenging me on that, saying, you know, "Why are you cooperating his repressing this culture?" I said, "I don't even know if he thinks of himself this way, you know. You're assuming I know a great deal more about him than I do." Of course, if I had gone into details of Graves's personal life. I would certainly have lost access to him and it would have probably been the end of the project.

DR. KIRWIN: When you put the show together, did you have everything you wanted for the show or—

MR. KASS: Yeah, it was a real learning experience for me because I found in approaching people—I mean, I literally did it from scratch. Marian Willard helped me as much as possible by giving me access to correspondence and access to Willard Gallery records of where things had been sold. But I found out how quickly paintings just disappear from one owner to another and then are gone, you know. But I got almost everything that I wanted for the show, and the Phillips was just great about borrowing works from so many individuals and sources. Borrowing from a lot of sources is expensive. Not as expensive as it would be today. Today it probably wouldn't be possible.

Luckily there are museums and depositories that have bunches of them, like Seattle and MoMA. Well, MoMA's making it difficult to borrow anything now, because Graves's work is almost all on paper which raises conservation and preservation issues. Well, I said, "You're making it difficult to borrow anything, and you're not showing it. That's just dandy!

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah [Laughs.].

MR. KASS: That's just great. Perfect. Gone. A new way of being lost." [Laughs.] Ceased to exist. But I got to visit a lot of collections. I got into a lot more of those Fifth Avenue and Park Avenue apartments, too, like the ones I was delivering to or hanging art in.

DR. KIRWIN: [Laughs.] Were there particular collectors who have Graves in depth?

MR. KASS: Yes. Well, there was Marshall Hatch in Seattle who had probably the most extensive collection. There's a fellow Rubenstein in Portland who has a very significant group of Graves's paintings. The Hazeltine collection at the University of Oregon, and the Vellitini collection in Eureka, California. Those are a few of in-depth Graves collections. Marshall and Helen have passed on, you know. Their collection in particular was something I could fall back on, but I wanted really good ones. Nancy Wilson Ross was still alive. She had a great one, which she gave to the University of Oregon, which was really nice. She was a Buddhist. I got to visit her on the Mellon's estate in Old Westbury, Long Island, where she was sort of taken care of by—she was part of a Buddhist order or some group like that. So she had some younger assistants who looked after her.

I had great stories from her, too, and I probably have notes on these. "Morris hasn't been very good to his friends, you know." Well, that's like Bagley Wright drove up to Marshall Hatch's house in the morning. I had just barely gotten up, and the Hatches weren't home. Pounded on the door, and he said, "Are you the guy doing this work on Morris Graves?" And I said, "Yeah, I guess so." And he goes, "I'm Bagley Wright. Do you know what he did to me?"

[They laugh.]

DR. KIRWIN: It sounds like you heard that from a lot of people.

MR. KASS: Yes, I visited Prentice Bloedell and his wife, Virginia. They were Virginia Wright's parents. I think that he owned a Canadian timber company, Bloedell MacMillan, which owned Weyerhaeuser and things. In other words, it was a Canadian holding company for timber holdings. And they lived in a French chateau that Prentice had had shipped over from Scotland or from wherever they got it, or Burgundy. Yeah, it was from French. Literally dismantled, shipped to Bainbridge Island, resurrected on their estate.

And they were patrons of the arts. They had a beautiful swimming pool as you came in to the front of their property with a beautiful cabana house and all. And that's the pool that the poet Theodore Roethke drowned. I went down to the house, got out of my little rented car. It was like going into a castle!—it was like one of these Masterpiece Theatre shows on PBS, you know. And they're both sitting in the foyer lobby in little chairs waiting for me. He had a smoking jacket on and wore a little bowtie. And they were quite old. And he showed me several of their Graves paintings, which were things I wanted for the show. And then we had lunch, and then he took me out to show me his wildflower garden, which he had worked on himself, it was a beautiful wild field full of color. It looked great. I was admiring it. I said, "Well, sir, you're very into this, and I love that it's just natural like this. And Prentice said, "I really love it, too, but I didn't make my money by growing things. I made money by cutting things down." That was incredible!

DR. KIRWIN: [Laughs.]

MR. KASS: Then we went downstairs and everybody was saying goodbye. I was going to see Virginia Wright later that evening, to tell her how visiting her parents had gone. And then Prentice said to me, "You know we never loan anything out?" I said, "No, I didn't know that. You sure you're not going to loan these?" And he goes, "Never do it." It was—

DR. KIRWIN: Oh, no.

MR. KASS: It was really special. You know, they just wanted to meet me and they wanted me to look at their paintings. And they had many other things, too, some beautiful paintings.

The other visit I had that was very special—that really whet the imagination of everybody in Seattle from Bagley Wright to John Hauberg and all of the old society bluebloods, was I got invited to the Boeings' house, and apparently no one had been there since the Lindbergh kidnapping.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh.

MR. KASS: Their daughter, Gretchen Boeing socially engineered the visit. I think that she wanted me to break a spell or something, because after the Lindbergh kidnapping, they felt so paranoid in general that they wanted to live in a completely sequestered way. They saw people outside of their residence, but no one had seen their artwork, their collections, anything. And then I got invited. I had to meet Gretchen in a parking lot in Seattle near the university where I got picked up by her in one car. I got driven to another parking lot across town where we got into another vehicle.

DR. KIRWIN: Wow.

MR. KASS: Then I got driven out to this gated community where they lived, and taken to the house, and she said, "You have no idea what this means to me. Nobody has been here for years. I've never been able to bring anybody here. And my parents agreed to this. It's very, very, important." So I go in, and there's all kinds of things in there. There beautiful Graves paintings, which we couldn't borrow. A couple of Van Goghs that aren't in the catalogue raisonné. There's a big bassinet that all the Boeing kids were rocked in that was Louis XIV's, Louis XIV's bassinet.

Yeah, it's just amazing. And she's describing it. She saying, "This is just so exciting for me." I said, "Does anybody know you have these things?" And she went, "No." No, and when they're purchased they're kind of washed through a—so they just disappear. They go on a train through Transylvania or something. So I get back to Marshall and Helen Hatch's house, and the dining room and living room are packed with people.

DR. KIRWIN: They want a report.

MR. KASS: It's the Wrights and everybody. Right. It's quiet and Marshall mixes me a big bourbon, and he says, "Well? What did they have?"

DR. KIRWIN: [Laughs.]

MR. KASS: Just like that. And Allan's face came into my mind in a cameo like when I was a delivery boy, right, because Allan sort of coached me in how I can always talk about something interesting, but something different. But I told them, because I thought that it was what Gretchen wanted, and some of the things were important enough. I said, "You know, there are a couple of Van Goghs out there you should probably know about it." And I told them about the bassinet. And the Graves paintings.

Allan wanted to know one day what Diamond had and I did the same thing with Allan that he taught me to do with anybody. He goes, "Wait a minute. You're not telling me anything." I said, "I'm doing what you taught me to do."

DR. KIRWIN: [Laughs.] He taught you too well.

MR. KASS: I said, "If I told you, you could never trust me again, right?"

DR. KIRWIN: Well, that was quite an adventure to put that show together then.

MR. KASS: It was. I got to visit a lot of places, you know.

DR. KIRWIN: And did you like writing the catalog and that whole experience?

MR. KASS: It was a nightmare. I'd never written anything. John Ashbery was originally just going to write an essay for it. He got really sick. And I was with Harper and Rowe back then, and then they backed out of the book, and I don't know why exactly. I had to write it five times. What I did was I just kept—I wrote two versions of it at Marjorie's, piles of handwritten paper. I have it all. And I had a system, no computer, piling them up on the floor, using that studio for locations where I moved the pages around and try to get things where they seemed to be addressing topics that were happening, you know? I'd read it, I'd then crawl around, read the piles of papers into a dictaphone and send the little tape to a lady in Pilot, Virginia, who would type it. And that's how I did the various versions of it.

Then we decided to try to hire a copy editor. So through the library here, I got a local copy editor who ended up rewriting the book like a child's story, saying things like "little Morris when he was sick," you know, just—Morris had terrible childhood illnesses that were probably very formative on his personality and also on the inwardness of his art. You ever see my Graves catalog?

DR. KIRWIN: I don't think I have.

MR. KASS: The sad thing, the Phillips didn't put an index in it, which would have been helpful, but it is a good narrative, and I really did write the final last version of it. It was one of the hardest things I've ever done, but it worked out. And I got a good copy editor in New York, who this time was a real copy editor. Just got everything consistent just like in the Cage book, which I'll give you. Monica Rumsey did the copy-editing on the Cage watercolors book and she was great! What a lot of people don't understand about books is, well what is not good if design layout and format elements don't corresponds and are inconsistent. Jane Farmer, Howard Risatti and I have been working on a book about Jiro Okura's work that he was planning before he died in 2014. He sent it to us as a PDF file for our input. His concept for the design is really very good but all of the details are in chaos! None of the typefaces, none of the ways that notations are made are consistent, and none of the texts have been edited. Of course, it's Japanese. Beautiful presentation and confusing details! It's like Jiro's attempt to "fruit a big apple." As he used to like to say about a big effort! I know that he cared a lot about this project because I worked with him for so long on some really amazing things. He was working with some of his former students.

And, you know, they're Japanese very tolerant of these types of awkward expressions. You see it on road signs in China and Japan, you know. But it can't really be that way for this book, so we'll get it fixed, you know. And of course there are lots of digital images, and texts by Howard Risatti, Jerrie Pike, included and no footnotes, no credits! It can all be done. It's just we're going to meet—I am going to be in Washington on the 25th to be presiding for his memorial service at the Restaurant Tono on Connecticut Avenue. It's a Japanese restaurant that his sister is going to do for a celebration of his life on July 25th, which is a Saturday. Peter [Lau] his principle Mountain Lake Workshop assistant, has moved back from Qatar, is going to be there. Peter was also Cage's principal assistant in our workshops along with Bob Camicia, who can't make it down to the event. There's not going to be that many. People like Helen Frederick, who worked with him closely on papermaking at Pyramid are going to be out of town.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh.

MR. KASS: And they want me to bring one of the documentary videos that we made of Jiro at the workshop. I have a very good movie I made of Jiro that's half an hour long. The problem is they're say, "Oh, bring the projectors and bring screens." And I said, "All these things are available in Washington. Why would I drive from Christiansburg, Virginia with all this heavy equipment? I am going to stay in a hotel on Woodley Park because

it's right by Taka's apartment, and I'll be having meetings with her and Jane Farmer and Taka between this. But then, depending how long I'm in town, I'll be in touch with you because I'm not going to come back until the next day, a Sunday at the soonest. I don't know. You want to go to his memorial? You didn't know him, I guess that's the thing, but you know all about his workshops and a lot of the people.

DR. KIRWIN: I didn't know him, so that's—

MR. KASS: I know. Well, we're having a—I was surprised to learn that some of the Tech students who worked with him and are not that far from Washington, and are actually going to go. It's not going to be somber. It's a luncheon. It should be happy and upbeat. And the video that we are showing is on YouTube! We made a short version of the Jiro Okura video for the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco. One of the assistants here took the half hour version and made it—

DR. KIRWIN: Why don't they just play it on YouTube at the memorial? Why do they need a—

MR. KASS: Because in Japan there's something known as MOP, and that means "make other people."

DR. KIRWIN: Sure. That's right. That's simple.

MR. KASS: And if you can't do that, I'm not going to lug this stuff three blocks on a July day.

DR. KIRWIN: In Washington D.C. It's going to be miserable.

MR. KASS: This is all getting into this interview. Kvetching.

[They laugh.]

MOP, "make other people." You like that? I miss Jiro a lot, though. I got some major pieces by him, too, and I have to figure out where to give them. The six minute version of the video for the Asian Art Museum is really popular. It was for an exhibition the Art Institute of Chicago put together with the Saint Louis Museum of Art called *Beyond Golden Clouds*. They own some of the screens from one of our workshops, the first workshop, and the St. Louis Museum owns more of them.

DR. KIRWIN: These are beautiful ones that are in here.

MR. KASS: The gold ones, yeah.

DR. KIRWIN: These, yeah.

MR. KASS: Tech has eight of them. Chicago and St. Louis have some. And I think the Asian Art Museum has one, but I'm not sure.

DR. KIRWIN: So when you were doing the Graves project, that's when you met Cage for the first time?

MR. KASS: I met Cage in 1976 in Chapel Hill when a friend invited me to come over and play chess with him. But, Yes, I got to actually know him much better in New York because I had to interview him on 17th Street where he lived with Merce Cunningham. And I conducted several interviews with him. And he was always very helpful and cooperative and also well-organized. I would make an appointment, and I would plan for the whole morning, and I'd get there at like nine a.m., and I'd have my questions, and he would answer them. And sometimes by 9:30 the interview would be over and I'd be back out on the street. He was very focused. It was disarming. I'd always arrive exactly on time, sometimes there would be a German internist or someone working there. Merce would be there sometimes, but he would usually be working somewhere else in the apartment. And John would usually even show me what he was working on after he answered the questions, and it still would all happen so quickly.

DR. KIRWIN: Fifteen minutes [Laughs.].

MR. KASS: We joked about that years later. I'd say, "I would plan—I would set three hours aside for this, thinking, 'wow, this is great. I'm going to get to hang out with you and talk about stuff.'" He'd be very concise and you would have his complete attention. And I was simply not used to anybody paying that close attention to me. He knew exactly what he was doing, because when he would be at the workshop, we'd have sometimes a public day, and he would switch into form, where he would be very focused working, and very focused at answering a question. And you'd just know after a few minutes you would just know that the visit was over, that there was no reason for you to be there any longer. And you'd leave. And I watched it happening with one visitor after another at John's Mountain Lake Workshops. We were painting, and I said to him, I said, "I remember when I used to visit you in New York and I'd allow the whole morning for it, and I'd be back on the street in 20 or 30 minutes, and you'd have even shown me the prints you were working on." And he looked up at me, and he said,

"See, now you get to be here all day and other people get to be here for fifteen minutes."

[They laugh.]

That's a quote, literally. He was completely aware of it. The nicest thing about his workshops is the way I organized it with the workshop volunteers and the students so that they had four hour shifts. It went on for almost a week. So some of the very interested students would work with him with some regularity and then other people could come in and just have the experience of being assistants working with moving the things around and cutting the papers, moving the rocks. They got to spend enough time around him to get a real sense of him.

DR. KIRWIN: When he first came down here, was it the lure of mushrooms?

MR. KASS: Yes, Orson Miller was a famous name in the field. And I called John up and went to visit him, and said, "Would you like to do a mycological foray with Orson Miller?" They had never met. They both knew each other. They were both reputable in the field of Mycology. And Orson was not particularly involved with art and didn't know a great deal about Cage's particular kind of experimentalism and avant-garde art, you know. But they became very good friends, and whenever John came we'd all go mushroom hunting until the last time he visited in 1990 when he had kind of a bad spill, a bad fall. And after that he really stopped going out on forays.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh.

MR. KASS: We would have like a macrobiotic mushroom dinners at Orson and Hope Millers's house. He would also come down to the College of Architecture in the evenings, and he gave a long reading once in the Cowgill Hall lobby. I have that all on video and audio tape. He would visit students' desks and look at the work they were doing. You know, he had studied architecture early on. He was interested in that. But he made himself available almost to the point of exhaustion, I thought sometimes. And would get back to the Horton residence quite late. They had a guest apartment in their compound. And I would drive up to the Horton Studio with the students as early as I could get up there. I would usually get up there by 8:30 in the morning, which is the time I now get up, right. And he'd already be in the studio!

We'd leave one little sliding door ajar so he could slide in. And he would look at everything he had done the previous day. He really paid very close attention to it all. And he was aware of his own progress and little nuances of painting. If he had lived, he planned to come back within two weeks, three weeks of his dying, and he was going to develop some new ideas about format—and mixing more of the colors and things. I always did that.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah? Were you—you were the catalyst though for him painting, though, is that true?

MR. KASS: Yeah—I guess so. But the work that he had done at Crown Point Press was a guide for me.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah?

MR. KASS: It was part of the format we tried to do with the workshops. We wanted to invite an artist to do a different kind of work. So it was obvious. We didn't actually do an art workshop with him at the Mycological Foray, though Marie Cosindas wanted to and we were going to try. He went through her book, which had just come out from Aperture or whatever, page by page, very carefully, and got to the photograph of Andy Warhol sitting on the fire escape behind the Silver Factory, and he said, "Well, look at this now, Ray. What do you think of this?" And I said, "Well, it's kind of a classic picture of Andy Warhol, looking through his somewhat—his sort of flashy, somewhat swishy but anonymous persona, you know." And he said, "It seems very superficial to me." And I said, "I guess it is. I mean, she's a good portrait artist." And he goes, "But what would I do with Marie? Why would I want to do this?" Oh. And I felt like "oops, wrong direction." And I said, "Well, we don't have to do anything."

And that's what happened. You know, it wasn't a judgment of her. It's just we had mushrooms, we had things from the foray. We had—I guess we could maybe use chance operations. But this workshop was the mycological foray. What he did do in that workshop is that the end of it is when he came to my studio, and I'd prepared the studio completely with all the papers I had, brushes, rocks. They were all organized by group and numbered because I kind of figured out how he worked with his computer generated I Ching, you know. And he looked at all of that quietly for about 10 minutes, and then he pulled out his computer pages of the I Ching random numbers and set to work, and we made his first complete painting.

DR. KIRWIN: That first time?

MR. KASS: 1983, yeah. He actually worked on three things, but he completed one complete painting. And that's what got him interested in painting watercolors. He liked the studio set up, too. I said, "Well, the only thing is—" because I'd asked him, I said, "Have you ever considered painting?" He said, "How would I do that? My friends who are painters like Rauschenberg or Johns have all these assistants." And I figured—I thought what he needs is a studio practice. What he needs is a room he walks in—and all of the materials necessary are organized for him.

DR. KIRWIN: He needed you to be his assistant, to figure it out.

MR. KASS: Yes—and everything in my studio was already in sync or correspondent to how he works and that room has all been prepared. And he liked that, and he used it.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah. Well, you knew the way he worked well enough to be able to set it up in a way that allowed for him to engage with it.

MR. KASS: Right. Yeah, I had the benefit of being able to study his Crown Point Press prints, and I looked into how he worked at Crown Point. I'm not sure that Kathan Brown liked me at first, because I came along and made these paintings, and paintings are like this in the art hierarchy and prints are like this, you know. And yet when she began years later coming to some of my lectures, she realized I always talked about Crown Point Press and how without the precedent of that, the example, I wouldn't have gained enough insight in how to organize a studio project for him, or a studio practice. And then she would—and then we became very good friends. She's remarkable, I mean, look at what she's accomplished. She's 75 or 77 now and still going strong at Crown Point.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah.

MR. KASS: Now what?

DR. KIRWIN: [Laughs.] You mean "now what, she's she 75"

MR. KASS: No, I mean we're all at the "now what" moment. We're drifting deeper into the "now what."

MR. BISESE: Well, Ray, what is your story about being called to play chess with someone, with an artist?

MR. KASS: Oh, I met him in Chapel Hill, yeah, and—

MR. BISESE: Was it John Cage?

MR. KASS: Yeah. It was 1976.

MR. BISESE: So this was before California?

MR. KASS: It's after California, but it's before my interviews with him, yeah. And, that's actually right, you're right. I was in Chapel Hill for the Spring Arts Festival, and he was performing at it, Stan Brakhage, Meredith Monk. And I was staying at Dennis Zaborowski's house, who was a professor at UNC in the art department. And he got a phone call at about 11:30 at night from the house where Cage was.

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And John wanted to play chess but no one at the gathering wanted to play. He was with Grete Sultan, the pianist—a great pianist, and Cage interpreter. I guess no one there could play chess. And I'd been on the chess team in high school. I wasn't a good chess player. John wasn't that great a chess player either, in some ways, but—because he loved the game but didn't particularly care about winning—He told me that Duchamp got angry with him once because he wasn't trying to win. You know? But I went over to Dennis's house in the middle of the night. And, in fact, he wanted to play chess. But I played chess with Grete Sultan, and he watched. And I thought this was very strange, but, later I learned that when he played chess with Marcel Duchamp, he would often play with Teeny, and Marcel would watch. And he also would play with Marcel occasionally. And I did play with him occasionally.

And Bruce McClure, some of the Diggy Boys—we called them Diggy Boys—the principal Mountain Lake assistants, would play chess with him. And every day, after an exhausting 10 or 12 hours of painting, everybody would have a scotch or something like that, and then play chess for a few more hours.

[They laugh.]

Then after that, sometimes, he'd want to go to the college of architecture. In those days the students would be working all night.

DR. KIRWIN: All night long?

MR. KASS: Sleeping under their desks. Yeah.

MR. BISESE: So, you have to explain what Diggy Boy means.

MR. KASS: Jerrie invented that word when we were putting in gardens at the other house, the first house on Yellow Sulphur. And then, this house—I always had to hire students who did nothing but dig and move heavy rocks. And the gardens around here that you'll see are all built by student interns and assistants who I paid but they were really volunteers, or they might as well have been, who loved the work. And they were called Diggy Boys. Girls were called Diggy Boys, too. They're our Diggy Girls, I guess. But, it's a notorious term now. But—doing anything in the world always gathers notoriety. Doing nothing is the only way to stay out of trouble with the community gossipers.

DR. KIRWIN: I wanted to talk some more about the symposia that you put together, and what do you think—they seem to have a—build on one another, from one—

MR. KASS: Yes. That was the idea.

DR. KIRWIN:—year to the next. And so—

MR. KASS: We tried to do that create an evolving progression of topics. Yeah.

DR. KIRWIN: There seemed to be a great sense of assessment or evaluation after these to think through what you were going to do next.

MR. KASS: Yes. The group of people, who are the people who were backing it and attending it regularly—we would meet. And then, we would talk out how it had gone, or what we thought. And where was it going? When it—when it came to an end, several things were happening. One of the things that was happening was public funding for things was getting harder to get. And I'm not—I guess by 1990—I suppose the Mapplethorpe show and the big fuss that caused in Congress—all those things had happened. Yeah.

DR. KIRWIN: I can't remember when that—when that was.

MR. KASS: And the—we had been through a whole cycle of these consecutive conferences. And my principal support that had come from Mary Moody Northen was almost depleted. And there were cutbacks from granting organizations, financial stress put on the partners I had, like Carnegie Mellon and Cornell University. The Virginia Museum had a big budget cut. Places that were giving \$1,000 or sometimes \$2,000—Carnegie Mellon, suddenly couldn't give it. So, I was running out of money at the same time as we, who had been part of organizing the conference year after year, were moving on in life. This was a critical activity, and a very critical personal activity for us. And people change. They develop in other directions. You know? And it seemed—the budget cuts coming along were almost a convenience.

DR. KIRWIN: A way out?

MR. KASS: Yes. A way out. Because I was also having—people who had been participating and supporting it wanted to change the direction it was moving in—weren't happy that something they were doing wasn't happening at the conference. And, that's inevitable, you know?

DR. KIRWIN: Who was the group that you say would meet, and assess, and figure out the next year?

MR. KASS: Julia Boyd and Margo Crutchfield from the Virginia Museum, Howard Risatti from VCU was a co-organizer and an institutional supporter. We had a dean at VCU who attacked the whole project because he was—had some personal vendetta with Howard Risatti, who was at that point head of the art history program there. And that didn't help because he took that up with the Virginia Museum, I think to deliberately stir trouble. It all turned out to be found-less, and that's not a problem, but—like any organization or group of people you get—you know, the organizational structure can come apart at some point. It didn't exactly come apart. I was ready to do something else, and continued doing Mountain Lake workshops. I was already getting much more interested in doing the collaborations with artists than doing the criticism conference, I feel that I might have been greatest beneficiary of the conferences, and they certainly made living here very interesting.

DR. KIRWIN: So, when did the workshops kind of begin to be—

MR. KASS: Workshops?

DR. KIRWIN:—take precedence?

MR. KASS: Starting with 1983 with Cage—implicit in that one is already an interdisciplinary focus on art, and science, and stuff like that. By 1985, when we invited Howard Finster, we really brought in the community in actively making the work—the idea that the community participants can make their own community artwork that they sort of psychologically own. And all of the work produced in Finster's workshop went into the Roanoke Museum, where we did a big Finster show—one of his first big shows.

DR. KIRWIN: Was that your idea to bring Howard here?

MR. KASS: Yeah. I was on the board of the—of directors of the Jargon Society, a small press that was founded by Jonathan Williams, and that was an outgrowth of Black Mountain College. And I was one of three people—after Buckminster Fuller died Jonathan added three people to the board, not implicitly to replace Bucky, but just because he needed people. And so, I did—I had done that southern photography show with him. And that was when I began working with him—

DR. KIRWIN: So that was Roger Manley and the other people with the Jargon Society—

MR. KASS: Philip Hanes.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh, Philip Hanes was the—was the—

MR. KASS: Philip Hanes was my first benefactor in the sense that he really underwrote the "I Shall Save One Land Unvisited" project. And he helped book the opening at The Corcoran. And it closed at the International Center of Photography. But then it went to about a dozen more places.

DR. KIRWIN: Well, how did that project start?

MR. KASS: That's a project I started because I wanted to do something with photography.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh. And you were—

MR. KASS: We thought we were going to instigate a photography program here, which we never really did.

DR. KIRWIN: So—and then you—then you brought in Jonathan Williams as the—as an author?

MR. KASS: I had known Jonathan Williams since I was editor of *Carolina Quarterly* in 1965, or 6. I was the last undergraduate editor. I was relieved by the publications board of North Carolina after Jack Kerouac visited me in North Carolina and stayed at my house for 10 days. And it was—it was—it was rumored that we were going to publish a text of the Diamond Sutra that Kerouac had written that Barney Rosset would not publish at Grove Press because it was too pornographic.

DR. KIRWIN: And so, you were relieved of your duties at the—at that publication?

MR. KASS: Yes. Well, I had an adversary who was the student representative at Chapel Hill on the North Carolina Publications Board.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh.

MR. KASS: He wasn't a personally enemy—Hugh Blackwell—he just didn't—he didn't think I was running the *Quarterly* right. And I didn't know how to run a magazine. I had been the distribution manager for subscription—and subscriptions manager. And I volunteered for this. And I was drinking beer with my friends at the Tempo Room one night, which was the catch all bar for every kind of outsider, demonstrator, civil-rights person, gay person, whatever in Chapel Hill. It was owned by—oh, Pete Galifianakis. Zack Galifianakis's uncle. Right.

DR. KIRWIN: Such a network here [Laughs.].

MR. KASS: Yeah.

MR. BISESE: It's a small world.

DR. KIRWIN: Such a small world.

MR. KASS: The small world.

DR. KIRWIN: We've got—

MR. KASS: And—

MR. BISESE: Jack Kerouac [inaudible]

DR. KIRWIN: Jack Kerouac—I know. I just—

MR. KASS: Suddenly, Wade Marlette or somebody came into the Tempo Room and asked me if I would be willing to be editor in chief of the *Carolina Quarterly*, which was one of the oldest university literary magazines, you know. And I said, "Yes." And I know Russ [Banks] was there. So, Russ became my fiction editor—Bill Matthews and Robert Morgan worked with me on poetry. And Lucius Shepard, science fiction writer who died last year, my friend, he—I guess he was poetry editor first. Yeah. I had a very distinguished staff. In fact, well, I've been back to Chapel Hill and they still wonder about that since it's the last it was referred to as—

DR. KIRWIN: Just legendary.

MR. KASS:—the last literary—the most important literary movement since the Fugitive poets. Right?

[They laugh.]

But it was—and I'm the—more anonymous person in it. But I was at the center of it simply by having agreed to do it. But that—they all became my—

DR. KIRWIN: Friends and—

MR. KASS:—a great staff.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah. And your staff.

MR. KASS: Yeah.

DR. KIRWIN: Wow.

MR. KASS: And that didn't last that long before I was relieved after two issues. No—Kerouac came through town and got literally dumped at my house.

DR. KIRWIN: How'd that happen?

MR. KASS: Marshall Hay was hitch-hiking back from the Meher Baba Center in South Carolina and was hitch-hiking, and the two kids from St. Petersburg who drove Jack around picked him up—he was in the back of a Chevrolet—not in a back seat, but on a mattress that replaced the seat. He was being driven up to Lowell, Massachusetts, and to Cambridge, where, ideally, he was supposed to give a paper on Melville at Harvard—or give a talk, which he never made it to. He did make it to Lowell, and that's where he met the Greek laundress who became his last wife, that was the last complete nightmare of his existence.

[They laugh.]

Yeah. It was an adventure. I got a letter from his mother. He sent his cousin, Paul Bourgeois, down, who stayed with us then for a week. He had a campaign he was working on. Paul had recently been released from prison. I mean they were real French-Canadian and Native American—and kind of had a rough side to the family.

DR. KIRWIN: Sounds like it.

MR. KASS: But he had a great heart and he wanted to—he was—he had—some Native American background in his family. And he wanted to save his family's tribe—I think they were located in Nova Scotia or someplace like that—by training them to be guides—by getting them into the tourist industry.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh.

MR. KASS: Yeah. But it was—he had—

DR. KIRWIN: So you were—

MR. KASS: All of his books were out of print except *Satori in Paris*, that had just recently come out—and he was—he was in not such great shape. He only—he only lived, you know, four more years or so.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh.

MR. KASS: He had a couple of medical incidents at my house that I took care of him by giving him real home remedies for ulcers and things, you know?

DR. KIRWIN: Oh.

MR. KASS: Well, he drank [and he didn't eat properly], you know. Yeah.

MR. BISESE: It's not a rumor?

DR. KIRWIN: [Laughs.]

MR. KASS: He was very kind and good-natured—I thought—Russ had a party out of his house one evening during the visit. Russ has written about the Kerouac visit, though Russ spent very little time with Kerouac. He did have this big event at his house which was the party where a couple of people sort of verbally attacked Kerouac—Robert V. N. Brown, who edited Reflections Magazine and the Carolina Anvil. And Robert V. N. Brown was trying to have a serious talk with Kerouac, who was just sitting in a rocking chair enjoying himself. And he asked Kerouac what he thought of Arthur Miller. And Kerouac said, "Arthur Miller killed Marilyn Monroe." And Robert V. N. Brown just flipped out at him. And I thought that was inappropriate because I didn't think it was—you know, you don't have to agree with that. You know? Some of it—there's a reference to it in the Ann Charters biography of Kerouac.

DR. KIRWIN: Of him—

MR. KASS: The Chapel Hill visit.

DR. KIRWIN: Of the Chapel Hill incident.

MR. KASS: I don't know how detailed it is because I haven't read it. You know, Russ later wrote a shooting script about Kerouac for Francis Ford Coppola, and it was *On the Road*. But there's really not been a way to make it into a successful movie, which has since happened. But it was a dud. But Russ' take on it—his idea for it was very good. But he got it wrong, in my opinion. This is my opinion—just because he didn't know Kerouac well enough. He didn't spend enough time with him to get the real—his real feeling, and his generosity, and vulnerability into it, you know? But the idea was—Russ repositioned himself as me, essentially—a college student taking care of Kerouac after, what? Twenty years—or less than 20 years after *On the Road*. So, it was like a double story. It was—it could be built out of flashbacks, and then current moments. And—

DR. KIRWIN: Was—what was Russ' last name?

MR. KASS: Banks.

DR. KIRWIN: Banks.

MR. KASS: Russell Banks.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh, Russell Banks.

MR. KASS: Yeah. And he sent me two shooting scripts of it. And I wrote back to him and I really talked to him. I said, "I think the idea's great. But he didn't behave like this. He didn't do that. What really happened at the Dobb's house, or at the Waffle House in Durham is way more interesting—the way he handled a potential assault by a couple rednecks in the Waffle House, you know, the way—the way he could disarm people with his innate intuitive charm. You're not getting at that. You're dramatizing him as a mean drunk, an out of control bully. And he could be drunk, but he was poetic and insightful, and intuitively very sensitive. And if you get that—why don't you use the real incidents instead of making incidents up like belly bumping contests that didn't happen?" You know? "Or throwing up all over the place, which didn't happen."

DR. KIRWIN: And can you remember the real incident?

MR. KASS: Yeah.

DR. KIRWIN: Can you tell me that?

MR. KASS: I—not only did I remember them well, I wrote them all down and sent them all to Russ, who will not now send them back to me. I'm assuming they're in the Ransom Library with his papers someplace.

DR. KIRWIN: Okay.

MR. KASS: I'm going to see him—we're going to talk about this a little because I want to reconstruct them. I lost everything on my computer that I wrote them all on. And I have them—because, you know, it's like small things, like riding around with him on Sunday trying to buy beer in North Carolina.

DR. KIRWIN: You can't do that? Can you?

MR. KASS: You can, but you have to know where to go. And going into the Waffle House, and him attracting the attention of the drunk rednecks, and them getting engaged in conversation with him, and that sort of going south a little bit, and then began to get aggressive—we looked like hippies, you know. And he said, "Do you guys—do you really want to fight? You want to fight with me?" And he said, "Okay, I'll fight you right now in nine feet of water." And it was just ad-libbed. You know? It took them aback completely. Anyway, he had a way of turning these things around to where people would become friends with him. And he loved my car. I had a 1951 Chrysler Imperial, which he liked. And we spent an awful lot of time driving around with people, without people—I couldn't get him to go to the doctor. He—I had a huge Billie Holliday collection, and Lester Young, and Mozart—he loved Mozart's Requiem. He would do Lester Young impersonations—like, he could imitate Lester Young's saxophone position, kind of moonwalking on one foot holding the sax out sideways. And he loved my jazz records. He just kept playing them. He never played Ella Fitzgerald. Russ always had him signed off as listening to Ella Fitzgerald in his script—which was not the case. He only played Billie Holliday and Mozart. And that's a big difference. I'm a big Ella Fitzgerald fan. But it's perfection though. And Billie Holliday is a whole other matter. He was very drawn in by it—there was something beautifully melancholic about him, you know, a melancholy that was just there.

DR. KIRWIN: And he just hung with you for all that time? Just—

MR. KASS: Yeah. I didn't go to class. Dave Forester, my roommate went to school—it was almost ruinous for me. I felt like he just stayed.

[They laugh.]

It was at least a week.

DR. KIRWIN: Okay.

MR. KASS: Yeah. I guess—I think of it as ten days because of the recovery time, the avalanche it was.

DR. KIRWIN: That can be a movie right—that is the movie. Why doesn't he—why doesn't he do that movie?

MR. KASS: Well, they figured into Russ' version of the movie because after he was there for one day people began showing up at the house. At one point he gave me \$100 and said, "Buy as much wine as this will buy for all the people will end up coming here."

DR. KIRWIN: He knew that—

MR. KASS: And the two kids who were driving him around said, "Get ready for the circus." Yeah. They were right. Well—

MR. BISESE: Where did these kids go during this?

MR. KASS: Oh, they just neighborhood kids who lived near him in St. Petersburg.

MR. BISESE: I mean, did they drive off [inaudible]—

MR. KASS: They were living in my house—

MR. BISESE: Oh. Everybody was there.

MR. KASS:—eating food and hanging around, sleeping on the porch. It was a real house. I had a guest room in it—he enjoyed visiting with Suzi Byer who lived next door. It was—very moving. I should have had a picture taken with him.

DR. KIRWIN: Gosh, yeah.

MR. KASS: I didn't. I had a shirt—because he left a flannel shirt there. I don't know where that is now. I would correspond with people for Russ' magazine, *Lillabulero*. He founded a magazine with Bill Matthews, Newt Smith and David Mallison, post *Carolina Quarterly* experiments—*Lillabulero*. Its name came from Thackeray or Lawrence. I think that it's from *Vanity Fair* I think. You know, it's a musical term.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh.

MR. KASS: And I was the—supposed to be the New York editor of *Lillabulero*. So, I would get letters from Norman Mailer. I would write to Mailer asking if we could publish poetry of his, or something that wasn't—and Mailer would write back. It amazes me now. You know, I'd write to Gary Snyder wanting him to do something and he'd say, "Why are you asking me? Ask Wendell Berry. He lives close to you." I wanted Snyder—I met Snyder in

California. I wanted him to do something at Mountain Lake.

DR. KIRWIN: So, getting back to Finster—

MR. KASS: Howard was great, because it went on for days. Ann Oppenheimer and I met at that time. She showed up, literally, when Howard arrived, and took care of him.

DR. KIRWIN: And somebody brought him up [unintelligible]—

MR. KASS: With Susan Hankla for the whole week. And I didn't—I never would have gotten through it without their help, because he didn't sleep. He slept in little catnaps. He never stopped talking.

DR. KIRWIN: Yes.

MR. KASS: And he never stopped working on things. He brought suitcases of his dimensions. We spread them all out over the floor.

MR. BISESE: Dimensions are the patterns for the pieces?

MR. KASS: Yes, patterns. Which kind of—those—using patterns, using stencils, stuff like that—the workshops caused me to completely reinvent myself. Before I painted with Cage I began experimenting using chance operations, breaking down my own watercolor process into specific moves, numbering my brushes, going out to California to stay at Glenn's house, using the trees and things that I would make tracings of, and drawings of, and then letting chance select them and decide where they'd go on the paper and what scale they'd be, and whether they got a body wash, a surround wash, an outside highlight—about eight or ten different painting moves. And so, I—it helped me reorganize my whole way of understanding my working procedure.

DR. KIRWIN: And what did you take away from the Finster experience?

MR. KASS: Well, the Finster experience was important in a lot of ways, because what we made an exhibition out of it—then several of the workshop participants and myself brought it together in these vision boxes, with Howard's input. And that's what's at the Taubman Museum—that and the big cut-out lifesize plywood figures. I interviewed Howard in Summerville, Georgia, for a video documentary and we interviewed kids—we did interviews with kids at the junior high school. I wanted to know what people thought of him in Summerville. And most people thought he was a nutcase. The mayor thought he was the most famous person there—he was beginning to be famous. The mayor was really becoming aware that Howard was important.

DR. KIRWIN: He was a—he was a draw.

MR. KASS: Paradise Garden was a draw. And—but he had been doing stuff like this for years. And he'd been locked out of a couple of his churches for creating environments around them. And, finally, his folk art, his outsider art, and his Paradise Garden environment became his personal evangelism. And we have all that footage someplace.

DR. KIRWIN: How many people did you involve in that Finster Project?

MR. KASS: In his workshop?

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah.

MR. KASS: At Horton Center at Mountain Lake, we probably had at least 30 people or so. Going down to work with Howard in Pennville,—first I brought four people I think. We would make regular trips down to see him and I'd always bring people. Back in that day—you could say to the students, "You want to go to New York with me and visit John Cage?" And they'd—they would talk to their teacher and the teacher would say, "Do it." It's different now. Yeah. I mean, I still have—occasionally a student will go with me to New York, but you have to do so much preparation for it. Like, the classes are all real serious matter, you know?

DR. KIRWIN: When's the first time you went to see Howard in Pennville?

MR. KASS: I—

DR. KIRWIN: Was it before he came here? Or after?

MR. KASS: After. So, I met him in 1985 when Brian Sieveking picked him up in Georgia and brought him to the Horton Studio at Mountain Lake. Then I drove with Brian to take Howard back to Summerville. I remember Howard asked us to turn the gas pilot light on under his gas heater in a flooded basement. And this is a real swampy part of Georgia. Brian and I went down into his basement and there were six inches of standing water in

it. And we lit this pilot light. And I mean, the mildew and the—alone. And—although, we began collecting his art at that time. And he would offer us—I was always loaning money to the students I was with so they could buy pieces. And then I would buy pieces myself. But—and I have some nice ones. But I never got as much as I could have because I—and this is true of Cage too.

I mean, I could have had one of these really great Cage Ryoanji etchings. But Peter wanted it so bad that I loaned him the money to buy it at the time. And I didn't buy it for myself. Although, John later gave me a Ryoanji drawing. I'd have to have meetings with students out on the street in front of Merce's and John's before we went in to visit saying, "You can talk about things you like, and you can admire them and all that, but don't carry on too much because he'll try to give it to you. And I—you're not allowed to take it." Well, John would give everything away. And I was pretty good at not taking things, you know? I mean, I have an iron teapot and I have a drawing. And then I bought other things. But, we'd actually have to have little meetings about that. He was very unusual. And he always was—everything John earned from his touring, his readings and all that, went to the Cunningham Dance Company. Everything. And Merce's dance company was a very expensive operation to run. And he had the good fortune of having real benefactors, like the Menils and, you know—top tier—

DR. KIRWIN: Support.

MR. KASS:—patrons. But, still, every three years or so John and Merce practically had to reinvent the wheel. I realized this too, even like with Philip Hanes, who was wonderful. But—and this is not to be critical of rich people, but they lose interest in things in three to five years and then you have to find new patrons.

DR. KIRWIN: So true.

MR. KASS: Yeah. They get interested in something else.

DR. KIRWIN: Yes. We could talk about that subject, but I—talk about our philanthropists.

MR. KASS: Well, we've all had—I guess we've all had some shared experiences.

DR. KIRWIN: It's—yeah. You have to—you think you figured him out and—

MR. KASS: Right.

DR. KIRWIN:—they're not—yes. They've moved on to something else.

MR. KASS: Yes.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah. [Laughs.]

MR. KASS: like Antique cars.

DR. KIRWIN: [Laughs.] Is that Philip Hanes? No?

MR. KASS: No. No, it's not. No. Philip Hanes was pretty reliable—his interest in arts just changed. And Don Anderson for Jonathan Williams was very reliable over the years

DR. KIRWIN: Was the Finster one the first time that you had a lot of people working together on a project?

MR. KASS: Yes. The Mycological Foray was the first workshop that included a lot of people, and a very diverse group of people, and the papers that were given, and the presentations were all very different. And I did have artists there, Robert Berlind and Marie Cosindas. So, that was—made it interesting. And the Finster workshop was the first big collaborative workshop where we made a lot of art. I'm trying to think what we would have done in 1984. What's in the catalog there? '84 I might have had another meeting with artists that didn't go anywhere, or not quite—oh. '84 I did Technicron. Right. Frank Kelly Freas, who used to draw for *MAD Magazine*—he's a—was—I don't know if he's still living, a sci-fi illustrator. You know, this is a conference of super-techi art type people. It wasn't our audience, really. But I liked Frank Kelly Freas a lot.

DR. KIRWIN: And how about the work—

MR. KASS: And then I did something very conventional. I did this art recertification workshop for teachers with two local people. And that was interesting, because that interfaced with Technicron a little bit. I did an artist conference called "Environmental Variations"—with Mary Miss, Nancy Holt, and Mary Beth Edelson. Yeah. We had Nancy Holt here a number of times over the years. She just died last year.

DR. KIRWIN: Right.

MR. KASS: Mary Beth Edelson was terrific. We took Carrie Rickie to the movies every night.

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DR. KIRWIN: You did?

MR. KASS: Well, she was a movie critic.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh. [Laughs.]

MR. KASS: Went to see that David Bowie/Catherine Deneuve movie with about vampires.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh.

MR. KASS: *The Hunger*.

DR. KIRWIN: Have you seen that Eddy? I have not.

MR. KASS: Yep. Howard Finster is the—really, the first big community participation event.

DR. KIRWIN: Did you have any problem with—I mean, I'm just thinking about—the ownership of the work? Or giving it away? Or placing it in a museum? Or—

MR. KASS: Well, my general rule of thumb was the artwork—the artwork was first be owned by the artist. The understanding we had is any participating artist would gift something to the workshop that had enabled the art. John didn't want any of his art, so I had to insist that he accept the art. And then, in 1988, I was personally given about 25 percent of his paintings. In 1990 I was supposed to own half the paintings. Well, things never worked out that way, because things get confiscated by the John Cage Trusts and stuff. But I did receive financial remuneration from the 1990 sale of paintings. And I have three of them. I settled up with the John Cage Trust. The John Cage Trust took 16 paintings from 1990, and technically, according to John, I was supposed to have half of the paintings. But they exercised their prerogative—being his legal entity.

DR. KIRWIN: Executors?

MR. KASS: Yeah. To take what they wanted from it. And that's okay, because I didn't think of things quite that way at the time. Now, I have the responsibility to dispose of them. And I already gave seven of my Cage paintings away. I gave one to the Hortons for hosting us, and three to the Phillips Collection. I gave a major painting to the Virginia Museum—a really important one. I gave two paintings to the Roanoke Museum, Taubman Museum of Art at the time. And I guess Virginia Tech received the Horton painting. Later I came to think sometimes it was a mistake to give these things away, but not the Phillips Collection, because the Phillips Collection has shown their paintings quite frequently—

. The Virginia Museum didn't show theirs for years, until—is it Richard Freedman who came down from Detroit and he told them it was one of the best contemporary pieces of art they had. Now, they show it more. You know, if you give something to a place, they don't always appreciate it.

DR. KIRWIN: No. And, museums have limited wall space too. It makes you understand that.

MR. KASS: Well, I've learned that working at the Taubman. There's so much of their collection in storage—

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah. I mean, you just can't—they just can't. That's why it's always ridiculous when people try to make a gift and say that it must remain on view in perpetuity. No museum will take that, because it's not possible. They don't have the capacity, usually, to keep something on display permanently. They have to—

MR. KASS: Or even to show it very periodically.

DR. KIRWIN: Right.

MR. KASS: Like, I tried to use—I mean the paucity of contemporary art in their collection at Roanoke—I tried to come up with interesting theme ideas for shows that would give me the excuse to use disparate things, you know, just to show some things that had never been shown. Then they wouldn't show something if it had a scratch on it.

DR. KIRWIN: Wow.

MR. KASS: And, I said, "Well, everything in Italy has a scratch in it." "Well, but this is like"—"Well then, have it repaired." "Well, we can't afford to have it repaired." I said, "So, that's it—another dead painting."

DR. KIRWIN: There's a strong current in a lot of the workshops in the symposiums of art and social change, and active in the present, and making art relevant in everyone's life. And, is that something that you think is a lasting legacy of the workshop?

MR. KASS: Well, I don't know if it's a lasting legacy. The credo was that every community should have the ability to make its own art, and provide its own meaningful context for that art. And that—and part of that was a response to the commodification of art that was increasingly happening during those years. And, also it—to me it wasn't any issue of whether art was abstract or representational, narrative or non-narrative. It was an issue that—of being able to take ownership of it, identify with it. So, we could make brooding abstraction, for instance. But if the participation was right then the community loved it.

And they—the participants in the community who were the participants and makers—they're the—they're a first audience as well as have some ownership of it that way. And then, the next ring is the people they know, their friends. We tried to create shows out of everything we did right away. And there were—there were preparatory programs for workshops, like Mierle Laderman Ukeles, or M.C. Richards, where I'd have them have meetings or give readings. So, the reason we would be doing their workshop or discussions would be known to the community. The participants in the workshop would be sort of brought along into what we were going to do and why we were going to do it. And then we retained a good deal of it. And that's what's all under question right now—whether it will all reside in one place. Some of the best workshop things—Jiro Okura and Finster, the particular Cage paintings, the big Dorothea Rockburne performances of *Steps*—they're at the Taubman Museum. Dorothea thinks she owns the painting 100 percent. That was never the agreement with the National Academy. But I'm not worried about that because we have possession of it and she's certainly entitled to it, you know? But it's—

DR. KIRWIN: Is that contested? I mean, she—

MR. KASS: We—no, it hasn't been contested—I'm asking for a finding to come. I want the Taubman Museum Registrar to write to me to help straighten this out. Marshall Price will participate in this from the Nasher too, at Duke—to establish that there was a discussion at the time the painting was made, since we didn't have time to do the property agreements and waivers. You know? Copyright type stuff that we often used. But you don't have to do those things if you meet with the group and you make an announcement saying, "This is what we're going to make today and the terms."

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah. That's public intention. Yeah.

MR. KASS: "Does everybody understand this?"

DR. KIRWIN: Right.

MR. KASS: "This will be a collaborative piece between Dorothea Rockburne, the John Cage trust, and the Mountain Lake workshop, hosted by the National Academy, who will be, essentially, the heirs and successors to the piece." Well, the National Academy said they didn't want their part, which was fine. The Cage trust will only want their part if a great deal of money gets involved with it, because that seems to be what their thinking is, often. Not that—not that they're not, you know, promoting John Cage. I think they are. My interest was trying to give the painting to the Taubman Museum of Art. At the time I thought all the Mountain Lake collections were going to transition to the Taubman. But Dorothea didn't want to do that. And, as it turns out, in doing one of the shows I curated for the Taubman, where we showed her gigantic performance of *John Cages's Steps: A Composition For A Painting*, the registrar at the Taubman decided only to send a loan form to Dorothea Rockburne's secretary. So, she sort of de facto established ownership as being exclusively with Dorothea Rockburne.

DR. KIRWIN: Well, that's unfortunate.

MR. KASS: Well, it can all be straightened out. But—it probably should be straightened out, but the way the Taubman initially straightened it out is, I have possession of the painting. They backed away from the ownership issue. But it will have to be dealt with at some point.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah.

MR. KASS: I tried to give it away. I went up to see Dorothea and I said, "I'd like to just give this to the Taubman Museum, and they'll show it periodically with the other Mountain Lake things." And she, "Oh, I don't want to give anything away yet. I own it. I may need the money." And I didn't—I didn't get into it with her. Because I like her, you know?

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah. That's kind of what I was getting at with kind of—the collaborative work and ownership and whether there's any problems with that.

MR. KASS: The Finster things we gave away.

DR. KIRWIN: Well, how—

MR. KASS: That makes it easy [Laughs.].

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah. And Howard has a different kind of spirit, often, in those kinds of—

MR. KASS: Oh, Howard didn't care. In the second workshop we did with him, the big one, down in Pennville—in Summerville, which was sponsored by Peter Paul, who had a Spirit of America foundation that he'd gotten Gene Autry to fund for him. And it was a—Peter Paul was a Caribbean Basin specialist for the CIA, who was an attorney who worked for the Trujilos.

DR. KIRWIN: I don't—who is—I don't know that.

MR. KASS: He was a shady character.

DR. KIRWIN: Okay [Laughs.].

MR. KASS: Yeah. And he used this Spirit of America foundation for—to, like—

DR. KIRWIN: It sounds like a right wing, Christian—

MR. KASS:—super right wing purposes, not very Christian. He ended up attacking Hillary Clinton, incredibly, and trying to expose some fraud. I don't know the details of what the—when—so, when he was in Brazil, Bill Clinton had him arrested. And he ended up—this is when Clinton was president. He ended up spending five years in a Brazilian prison. Nice.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh. And what—and so, he was sponsoring a Finster thing?

MR. KASS: Yes. He's living in North Carolina some place now.

DR. KIRWIN: Okay.

MR. KASS: But, yeah. He underwrote the second workshop. He ended up never really paying Howard for all of it. We never received any of the principal pieces. I got one little piece. What was great for the students is that they got to go out to Beverly Hills. They got to spend a lot of time with Howard. They drove all the work out to Rodeo Drive. And Ann Margaret ran the event, and the opening. They—and they—

DR. KIRWIN: Oh. He must have loved that.

MR. KASS: They were tech students. Yeah. And I—I got pneumonia and couldn't go. Peter Paul was angry about that, but I—Howard loved it. And Howard had never flown before, so this was like a big breakthrough. One of those things. It was nice. I always—I considered this part of my teaching, creating these kinds of experiences for them.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah.

MR. KASS: Eric is in the attic.

DR. KIRWIN: Okay.

MR. KASS: Checking the air conditioning unit.

DR. KIRWIN: What has been your involvement with the Taubman Museum? That's a fairly recent—

MR. KASS: It is the former Roanoke Museum—I was always involved in giving them things. We'd given them a lot of artworks, and given them things from the workshops, and given them things from our personal collection. And I think, since they're in such financial straits it has become complicated, it was finally being presented to the board what will happen with the rest of the Mountain Lake workshops. There are still quite a few pieces that I have. There are pieces they have in storage at the Taubman, like the Ukeles installation—Mierle Laderman Ukeles, some of the Okura folding screens from the Nisso Screen that we made in Osaka in 1997, the Appalachian Trail Frieze, which was done by Joe Kelley, a local artist, but a really nice thing—big photographic installation with drawings.

And there are other things. But then the Board wanted me to give them a big endowment to take it. And I said, "Well, I might be able to do that, but you have to wait until I die. I mean, we don't have enough money to where I can disenfranchise Jerrie completely if I get hit by a car, you know." She would be able to live off the trust, I

think, but it's like I can't guarantee that. We don't know. If we both need 24 hour nursing, you can go through a couple million dollars really fast. We see it. We see what a friend of ours is going through with \$400 a day for 24 hour nursing.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah.

MR. KASS: Yeah. But how long can that go on? I know. But we're also hoping we'll get lucky.

DR. KIRWIN: Are you on—[Laughs.] you're an—

MR. KASS: I'm not feeling particularly [Laughs.]—

DR. KIRWIN:—an adjunct curator there, or administrator—

MR. KASS: I was Adjunct Curator for Southeastern Contemporary Art for four years. I volunteered when their contemporary curator quit because he would have to take a substantial salary adjustment. One of the best ideas that David Mickenberg had—who was then director of the museum, was to create a group of adjuncts who would have specialty areas. So, I was a contemporary art person. Brian Sieveking, my former student, who worked closely with Howard all those years—Brian was their folk art specialist. And we made great shows. And they didn't—first year they didn't pay us anything, or give us anything. Then, after that, we got modest little stipends when we finished an exhibition, and a little bit of travel expense money.

Then they got rid of all the adjuncts when they hired Amy Moorerfield, who now has to take care of eight galleries for two or three exhibition rotations a year. As a solitary person I don't see how it's possible. It's just too hard to make shows.

DR. KIRWIN: I've never been there.

MR. KASS: David appointed Leah Stoddard the chief adjunct curator. She had been director of Second Street Gallery in Charlottesville. She was good, and I like her okay. David wanted to work with one person who would work with the other adjuncts. But she often took packaged shows. They could be good shows, but it was really the artist's galleries that did all the work—Nick Cave's show was terrific, Jack Shainman Gallery really put it together, you know? The current director, Della Watkins, had been in charge of education at the Virginia Museum. And I think that the Board hired her because they believed Alex Nyerges was going to take the museum over, the Taubman Museum, as part of the Virginia Museum. And that's probably never going to happen, in my opinion, which is too bad.

Then it looked like Virginia Tech was going to take the museum over and undertake the nearly \$3 million annual expense. And it was going to be—I shouldn't get into these details, because we're recording this.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh. Okay.

MR. KASS: There was—there was going to be some financial arrangements made, which in my opinion wouldn't amount to a sufficient endowment. But that opportunity was mishandled somehow. And that was their best shot to date. Now, I don't know what will happen, except they're probably working on it—I'm sure—Mr. Taubman is a responsible person who has consistently stopped by the museum. They're probably trying to work out some terms for an endowment.

DR. KIRWIN: What is—

MR. KASS: They would need a big endowment.

DR. KIRWIN: It's not related—that Taubman is not related to Al Taubman?

MR. KASS: No.

DR. KIRWIN: No. Okay. It's a different—No relationship. Nicholas Taubman's grandfather began what became Advance Auto.

DR. KIRWIN: Okay.

MR. KASS: And Nick was the CEO and owner of Advance Auto Parts for a long time. And that's where his—the family—that's where the money comes from.

DR. KIRWIN: Okay.

MR. KASS: Haywood Frahlin family money comes from a medical equipment company, the Frahlins are not quite

in the same financial league as the Taubman—it'd be like comparing Philip Hanes and Don Anderson. You know, the guy with \$500 million sitting next to the guy with \$4 billion. But you always want guys like that on your board, and you don't want school teachers and artists on your board. I really did learn some things about a board. And everybody said, "Well, we want the community to participate in the board."

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah.

MR. KASS: I said, "Well, just the people who can afford it."

DR. KIRWIN: You need—you need deep pockets.

MR. KASS: You need deep pockets. You need to be able to do your budget presentation and proposal and say, "I'm going to leave the room now and when I come back in I want to see the checks." Well, if you really are—doing your part of it and all, and they are the right people they'll let—

DR. KIRWIN: Yes. If they're involved.

MR. KASS:—you leave the room, because let them sort it out in their egotistical way between each other. You know, they're not going to like each other.

DR. KIRWIN: Did you have any involvement with Penland or other kinds of enterprises around this?

MR. KASS: Sometimes people, like through M.C. Richards, that were at Penland. I can't think of all their names now. Because I did workshops in other places, like the North Country Studio Workshop at Bennington, where sometimes the Penland people would do things. I did the exotic workshop, and whatever the "drawing" workshop was going to be that year.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh, yes. Yeah. That would be very odd there.

MR. KASS: Yeah. Everybody else at Penland was learning how to make a specific kind of earrings or or craft technique—right.

DR. KIRWIN: Right.

MR. KASS: Yeah.

DR. KIRWIN: Did you—I'm just wondering about, like, the financing of these workshops and things. Did you pay an honorarium to the people that came and all of that?

MR. KASS: Yes. We paid \$1,000, back when that was good money. Like, if you were a critic and you came and gave a paper, you got \$1,000. If you were a visiting artist and participated in other workshop activities you might get more than that.

DR. KIRWIN: And then, the people who stayed at the hotel, they paid to attend the workshop?

MR. KASS: Yeah. But the hotel was almost free in those days. When we started the conferences at Mountain Lake Hotel, the food was terrible. It was like cafeteria food when we went to college in the 1960s—different than college today. The room was like \$32 or \$34 a night. It included three meals. I provided the open bar. The conference fee was only \$50 or something. We used that to buy liquor and pay for video documentation. I had the Mrs. Northen's modest endowment, and I applied for grants that we got that—to pay the artists and all. My conferences never lost any money—never made any money, really. When the Virginia Museum would do it, and when Carnegie Mellon did it one year, it was much more expensive. And I could never figure out why they couldn't do it as tightly as we did at Mountain Lake. But then, slowly, over the years Mountain Lake changed and it wouldn't be affordable to do it there now. I mean, the Texans spent a ton of money on the hotel in renovating it, and built a lot of auxiliary buildings. The lake went almost dry about ten years ago.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh.

MR. BISESE: The lake went dry?

MR. KASS: The lake has been dry for quite a while. The art conferences ended. The lake began disappearing.

MR. BISESE: I thought it was 300 feet deep.

MR. KASS: No. If you walk way into it and then in the middle there's this a small lake at what was the deepest part—a little bigger than the footprint of this house—a big puddle of water.

MR. BISESE: Oh. That's what it's like—

MR. KASS: There's a fissure at the bottom of the lake at that point that apparently opened a little wider due to seismic activity—then they tried to close the fissure—we were trying to environmentally protect it because they wanted to stuff it, fill it with concrete, set dynamite off. I said, "Look. You're talking about a natural lake in Virginia. This has happened before." We were finding remnants of 600-year-old trees. The lake has gone dry before—seismic activity related to the cascades and all that has happened before. I said, "You can't just fiddle with an environmental feature like this. Start advertising the hotel as a natural environment destination." There are so many relic habitats in the area around Mountain Lake. It's such a valuable natural site. And they are slowly coming around to using that, though they've slipped a little bit lately I think. They let their person go who was the director of the wilderness conservancy, which is the reason they're a non-profit, you see.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh.

MR. KASS: We did—we did succeed through the programs in attracting enough interest from the Texans, the Moody family, that they made a major investment in the property, and Mrs. Northen, in her lifetime, with Ed Protz, her legal representative on Earth—who everybody was always trying to sue or get dismissed—moved the entire 3,500 acre property and all into non-profit public trust status. Ed Protz made it happen. I personally feel, having played a small role in that, that that's so far the greatest thing we've achieved—

[They laugh.]

—from a geodetic point of view.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah. Well, look at that. Yeah.

MR. KASS: Yeah.

DR. KIRWIN: That's pretty amazing.

MR. KASS: Yeah. Art can do things.

DR. KIRWIN: [Laughs.] You made a big difference.

MR. KASS: Even if sometimes the people doing it—

DR. KIRWIN: Don't have the same intentions.

MR. KASS:—right. Like, when they had the Beowulf project going on up there. And they were essentially training mercenaries. Right. It was—real mercenaries, like guests at the hotel would run into them on the trail by—

DR. KIRWIN: Oh, my—

MR. KASS:—people weren't supposed to go to certain areas at Mountain Lake because the Beowulf project training would be going on. That was a—might have been a—might have been, you know, a money cornucopia for the hotel, but it was wrong, you know. Then they almost introduced artificial ski slopes and all that stuff, which never would have climatically worked out here. Ed Protz did succeed in getting all pollutants and everything removed from the vicinity of the lake, anything draining into it. That's before the lake disappeared. The lake will come back. I said that to the manager, "You got to wait 300 years."

DR. KIRWIN: [Laughs.] It'll come back. Yes.

MR. KASS: What's the problem?

MR. BISESE: That's bizarre. It's—that's bizarre to hear.

MR. KASS: It's like the Hanford Base where they've stored a lot of nuclear waste, right? That's so incredibly dangerous. There's—I went to the Waste Policy Institute at Virginia Tech with Mierle Ukeles who burst into tears when all these Washington Atomic Energy Commission guys showed up. They wanted our advice from the workshop's perspective with her about waste remediation, which was an aspect of what we were doing, and how to work with the public over the potential crisis of all this atomic waste. And they said to us—they said, "We have been doing nothing but lying to the public all these years. Anything that you could do with art or any public activity that could bring people into acquaintance with this, that—where it could become open—more open." Well, I think through many alternative media things now, people tend to know about it. Tech has a Waste Policy Institute that had a single client, the Department of Energy. Yeah.

DR. KIRWIN: Does Ukeles have any thoughts on how one might accomplish that?

MR. KASS: She completely broke down. She couldn't function much at the meeting. I don't blame her. I did my best—I raised my hand. They all had their blue overcoats on. They had all come down from Washington for this. I said, "We just have to create a society that's capable of waiting half a million years, and discipline centered activities can be part of that, like the most advance yoga, Buddhism." Half a million years and the threat of radiation contamination will go away.

[They laugh.]

They actually—they said, "What happens if civilization comes to an end? What happens if the planet gets hit by a meteorite, which is highly likely in that time period, and everything dies off? How"—I said, "You just have to develop the systems and structures to retain the knowledge. You can't"—"You mean—you mean, people will forget it's there." The debate was "put it in those salt lines, or leave it out in the open?" Leave it out in the open? I mean, it just would take one really loony terrorist to take the whole planet out.

DR. KIRWIN: And where is this stored?

MR. KASS: It's in Washington State.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh.

MR. KASS: It's at the Hanford Military reservation. You can see it. It's drums and stuff like that. Yep. But, you might want to leave this part out of the—I don't want, you know, somebody in Al Qaeda or something to be reading this—say, "Great. We can all go to Allah together."

DR. KIRWIN: "There's the target." Wow.

MR. KASS: Yeah. How could we have invented and procreated and kept developing something so dangerous? They wanted—Greg Ferry, who I was working with—the scientist at Tech, who is one of the leading anaerobic microbiologists in the country. He had developed a microbe that would eat petroleum products in ground water. And they wanted to know if he could develop a microbe that could remediate atomic energy pollution. And he said, "No. It's impossible. It's the most unstable element in the table of elements. I can't help you with this." It was like a grim scene in the Godfather. And, you know, their eyes just glazed over.

DR. KIRWIN: Hi. How are you?

DR. KIRWIN: Okay, this is Liza Kirwin again, second day interviewing Ray Kass for the Archives of American Arts, Smithsonian Institution. It's July 9, [actually July 10] 2015 and we're in Christiansburg, Virginia, beautiful place, in Ray's studio. This is so loud I'm going to—maybe I'll turn that down a little.

MR. KASS: Yeah, I think I might turn those lights off again, they're kind of glaring. We're going to have very [inaudible].

DR. KIRWIN: Okay.

MR. KASS: Also sometimes fluorescent lights create static.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh, okay. I'm going to wear these because it's right in my head. Okay, well I did want to ask you about your father's painting, Jacob Kass, and when did he begin painting and how did—how were you involved in his painting on saws and other kinds of like that?

MR. KASS: [Laughs.] How did I become his manager?

DR. KIRWIN: That's—yes, that's basically the question, how did you become his manager?

MR. KASS: Yeah, well my father retired from his paint shop in Brooklyn after he had a couple of heart attacks. And he had a little place in Vermont where he built a house around a trailer, essentially, and had a little sugarhouse that he'd moved onto the property that he used as a junk store and he refinished furniture in it—

DR. KIRWIN: Oh.

MR. KASS: He began by painting on milk cans and—because the public seemed to like that, it was one of the things they sold in their little roadside antique store. He would paint little emblems or things on them and he—got him milk cans from various places—

DR. KIRWIN: You said your—know what a milk can—

MR. KASS: A milk can is about almost two feet high—

DR. KIRWIN: For milking—

MR. KASS: Yeah, like that and it has a metal lid on it—

DR. KIRWIN: Tin?

MR. KASS:—the metal milk cans, old ones. He refinished them and then he'd paint the American flag or something on it or an eagle. And I went on some—was visiting with Susan Shatter, my friend and we went out making drawings—we were going to go painting together in Vermont. This is near White River Junction where my parents lived in the summer time, and he came along with us and we made our landscape paintings, you know drawings and then a painting on paper—watercolor. And he made a drawing on pieces of paper bags that he'd taped together that he then applied to a saw blade that he'd refinished. He liked collecting antique tools and old tools and he knew all about metal because of all the work he'd done in the truck, painting field. He would—

DR. KIRWIN: So he knew how to prepare the surface?

MR. KASS: He prepared the steel surface and he would refinish that and get that just right. He knew a high quality saw from a low quality saw, you know and how the saw edge was tempered. He liked the older saws that had the brass imprimaturs and fixtures on the handles.

DR. KIRWIN: Some are quite fancy.

MR. KASS: Yeah. So, he re-spawned it to the object and instead of painting his landscape on paper, he made a drawing on a piece of paper bags really that were taped together—this is very much the way he would have designed a stencil pounce for, say, a fleet of milk trucks. We had—unfortunately when the paint shop burned down all of this was lost. But we had a huge amount of large full scale prick wheel paper pounces. A pounce was something that you made the drawing on for the design on—these were taped outside of the truck and then blue chalk powder was tapped on it so the design transferred—like a little girl holding eggs in her apron and maybe a big carton of eggs and all that. My brother and I would tape one of these on to the side of Queen's Farm Dairy truck—for instance and then we would pat on it with a—like an eraser with chalk on it—to transfer the design.

DR. KIRWIN: Chalk.

MR. KASS: The basic design of what was going to be painted on the truck would be there. Well, my father just carried an aspect of that over when he laid-out his paintings on saws, and he would draw on whatever paper was available. So, a lot of his drawings, which I have 300 and something are on connected pieces of paper, you probably saw this in the kitchen in some of his drawings.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh that's what that is. Okay, I didn't know what that was.

MR. KASS: I only discovered the drawings—he had all the drawings folded up and compacted in a little box and I only found the drawings after he had died. I had seen a couple over the years because he made this first drawing and the paper he cut—he traced around the saw and cut it out so the drawing was in the shape of the blade of the saw and the handle. And he put his landscape on it. He didn't use it as a ponce, he just used them as a design. In other words, it didn't have prick wheel holes, and he didn't use chalk to transfer the design like we would've in the William Kass and Sons Paint Shop. His paintings on saws really looked good. So I went to visit him a few months later and found out that he had continued making paintings on saw blades. Now, this was an evolution from what was first tin milk cans, you know, or frying pans which were kind of inert and he would paint something in a frying pan—

DR. KIRWIN: Like an iron—

MR. KASS: Skillet.

DR. KIRWIN: Skillet?

MR. KASS: Yeah. They're a little heavy and cumbersome but they didn't have any dynamism with them whereas with the saw blades he—there was a like a double entendre involved—he responded to the shape of the blade which was streamlined—sort of, so—and he responded to the landscape because Susan and I were both painting panoramic—kind of wide horizon landscapes. And then he'd paint the bucolic scene on a saw. So you had this double imagery happening—in a sense. Now, painting on saw blades was a genre in the 19th century, but he wasn't aware of it. It wasn't original to him, but his saw blades, his paintings on saws were uniquely responsive to the blades and the shapes and forms he used followed something of the spirit of that shape or whatever—so he was—they were very good. He began taking them to flea markets near Vershire, Vermont, and White River Junction and all and he set up a little board on two—with like two little milk crates or something and he was

selling them for like \$12, \$15. I mean the saw itself as a vintage tool was close to being worth that much, though. And Vermont in those days, you could buy old tools really inexpensively. And I found him sitting there in his lawn chair behind his thing and I said, "Wow, you're selling these?" And so I took him home and I took them—I took them down to New York to my dealer, Allan Stone. Allan loved them right away and so we began having—we had a few father-son shows. And he was a big hit right away and started selling saws, instead of selling them for \$12 we were selling them for like \$1,000, you know? My mother liked that.

Eventually they got to as much as \$10,000 and things, but that's how it started so where's—you know we were getting along pretty well by this point and he was older, but we hadn't always had the easiest relationship because I was self-involved and an artist. He wanted me to be much more practical and down to earth. My brother always listened to my father and I never did. And I was a handful in high school and all of that. But suddenly, we created a new dynamic relationship where I was essentially introducing him in show business. He got to tell all of his stories about the paint shop, about signed painting, lettering. He knew everything about that—it was really—he enjoyed his receptions. My mother loved it—although my sister-in-law and other people, some neighbors and the family said, "Well you're just doting on your father and not spending enough time paying attention to your mother," and I would say, "Yes I am." I've done her an enormous service.

DR. KIRWIN: Just residual benefits.

MR. KASS: Yeah she had been in Vaudeville as a kid and she hated show business. She thought the artworld world was one of the lowest drums of show business compared to, you know, like—things like Fred Astaire did, you know? And she called it exactly right, she said, "Raymond this thing that you love is kind of like show business." And I would agree with her. But she also could be very complimentary—she was the first person in my family to say to me, "I really understand that you're a serious artist." Well that's an important piece of recognition to come from a parent. Because I always—you know you feel sort of bad about it because you feel like you're preoccupied with something that's taken you away from many of the things that they care most about, you know?

DR. KIRWIN: When did she give you that?

MR. KASS: When I was about 45.

DR. KIRWIN: 45?

MR. KASS: Yeah, maybe 45 or 46, sometimes then, because I did a lot of things with my dad and for my dad then, I had spent my life working the art world and I knew very well that my vision of the bucolic kind of romantic art was not in step with the direction the art world was going. I saw what was happening in the—certainly in the 1970's, it was the last of the "isms", you know, minimalism and conceptual art and I had a great deal of respect for Judd and Smithson and people like that. I just didn't want to make that kind of art. But that's really the last art world that has that kind of seriousness you would associate with Kline and de Kooning or Newman, you know nobody ever talked about money. Nobody talked about wanting fame or success, it was just the work itself that mattered. And since then I think art has definitely become show business of a certain sort.

DR. KIRWIN: Did Allan continue to show your father's saws?

MR. KASS: Yeah, until Nancy Hoffman had a show of them, yeah. And then we—I stopped showing with Allan and began showing with other galleries periodically. I did six shows or something with Allan over the years, but Allan was a very interesting kind of dealer—I mean he didn't push for anything, so it was like—just like this group of people who'd inspired him, I mean his hero was de Kooning—you didn't have to try to sell Richard Estes or Wayne Thiebaud, people waited online to buy them, right? And he showed Barnett Newman when Barnett Newman was doing those mystical—kind of ink mandalas and things. He didn't particularly care for the *Blue Zip*—although the *Blue Zip*—well it's not hanging in the house I have a Barnett Newman that I got from Allan, it's in the storage building. But he liked the idea that you couldn't sell a minimal Newman. And that was one of the problems Knoedler got into, I mean, Knoedler found out that you could barely sell a de Kooning in those days—de Kooning told me, he said, "People buy my paintings now, sometimes," he said, "But Allan Stone was buying my paintings when he was a student at Harvard—this kid, nobody was buying my paintings. Edwin Denby and Rudy Burkhardt would buy a painting from me and now people are beginning to buy them because they think they have to." That's what he said, it was very interesting, he was always—I'm segueing again now.

Allan liked my father's work and so we sold a lot of saws, and I organized the exhibition with Ramon Osuna in Paris at FIAC and he was a big hit there. He didn't recognize that people were speaking French. He talked with his hands and he would just talk about his saws and he was like a paradigm of "art brut" to them. So he got into the newspapers and all sorts of things.

DR. KIRWIN: And where's his show in Paris?

MR. KASS: In the Grand Palais, yeah it was a part of FIAC in 1983, it's a huge art fair—

DR. KIRWIN: Oh okay.

MR. KASS: It's before the era of the—what art fairs are now. There was only Art Basel and then Venice Biennale and FIAC and a few things like that.

DR. KIRWIN: And was this—

MR. KASS: My parents went to Europe for the first time and they were in Paris for three weeks and my mother decided she hated it and she took the train every day to Antwerp to visit our relatives in Belgium. Almost everyday—

DR. KIRWIN: Gosh.

MR. KASS: My mother—I could never change her critical attitude about the French or Parisians, I don't know why it was an idea she'd received.

DR. KIRWIN: Maybe it's genetic, yes.

MR. KASS: It's a cultural thing.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah.

MR. KASS: Well she was part French, I mean—

DR. KIRWIN: But she didn't like Paris.

MR. KASS: She's at least a quarter French. No, she liked my father being a little celebrity in Paris, she figured I could take care of him, so she snuck away most days to visit family members in Antwerp.

DR. KIRWIN: And is that to—as that connected to your involvement to the Folk Art Society in any way?

MR. KASS: Yes—

DR. KIRWIN: What's the time line for your father—

MR. KASS: That's a good question. My father started painting saws in 1965, no not 1965, when he was 65, that would've been 1975. And I guess I had an exhibition with him at Allan's maybe around 1977, something like that. The FIAC, was in 1983, then Ramon Osuna had an exhibition. We did a big exhibition with a catalog at the Lowe Museum of Art in Florida, where my father had a show with Carl Andre. Carl Andre loved my father—we've talked about this and he remembers this well. And my mother knew there was supposed to be a sculptor having a show with my father whose show was a big buzz. That was organized and instigated by Richard Shack. Richard Shack was a collector in Miami—

DR. KIRWIN: I know him, yes. I have been to his penthouse.

MR. KASS: He was on the board of the Whitney, yeah he's passed away.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh.

MR. KASS: Yeah.

DR. KIRWIN: Ruth and Richard?

MR. KASS: Yeah Ruth ran for mayor of Miami Beach.

DR. KIRWIN: They were great, yeah, wonderful collections.

MR. KASS: Yeah they were generous to artists and did all kinds of good things. But anyway, they had bought—Richard Shack had bought some paintings of mine in New York and then through that discovered my father. And so he was a real booster for my dad. My dad had a few museum shows in Florida, Tampa Museum with Sally Mann of all people. So my mother is having lunch with Carl Andre and my dad and the museum director and she says to Carl Andre, "Well there's supposed to be sculpture in this show, where is it?"

DR. KIRWIN: [Laughs.] Was it like these plates on the floor?

MR. KASS: It was those plates on the floor! And he loved that, and then I guess James Rosenquist must come

down to see it and joined them at the luncheon, he was there. And my father and Rosenquist talked the whole lunch about sign painting.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah, because he was in—

MR. KASS: Because Rosenquist knew all the tricks.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah he did all the billboards and things like that—

MR. KASS: Yeah and he knew about how to add a little bit of white to a bright red to make it jump and they talked a lot about perspective tricks and heights and how to make it look like a beer bottle got a streak on the side of—

DR. KIRWIN: Oh, interesting.

MR. KASS: Yeah it was really interesting.

DR. KIRWIN: I'm sure they had a lot to connect on.

MR. KASS: Yeah, they knew nothing about these people as artists—zero, which was refreshing. Alfred Leslie was a fan of my dad too, and came to show at Allan's and talked to my dad a long time and sort of loved it that my father had never heard of anybody. He didn't know who people were, original innocence.

DR. KIRWIN: That's wonderful.

MR. KASS: I protected him from all that too, so he got to meet everybody. Princess Margaret came to one of the exhibitions with—I guess it was with David Niven, Douglas Fairbanks Jr. people like that. My mother knew who they were. My father never went to movies. It was exciting.

DR. KIRWIN: That's incredible. Was that kind of the way that you got into looking at other kinds of --

MR. KASS: Well, the Finster workshop in 1985 and my, you know engagement with my father who was a classical folk artist really, not an outsider artist because you can see his one painting in the living room which I bought recently. I bought it a few years ago, it had been in the centerfold of the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Miami Herald* and it was in a show called *Diamonds are Forever*. A show about—

DR. KIRWIN: Uh-huh [Affirmative]. Baseball. Uh-huh [Affirmative].

MR. KASS: Baseball. And he sort of got a lot of attention in that because his work was very original looking. That had belonged to the McCalls and he was a—like a founder of a product branding, public relations company. I can't remember the name of it now, they were great philanthropists and they got killed in an accident doing social work, philanthropic work in the Balkans. That many years ago, we couldn't borrow that piece for the show because we couldn't locate it and then I found it in an online auction so I bought it for a few thousand dollars. My brother thought, oh that was idiotic. I haven't done enough for my dad in the past decade. I have almost 100 saws and I have the 350 drawings. Since my father passed away—my mother and father both died in 2000—the social energy to do all of this was for them. And of course, it created some difficult situations because they were getting checks and stuff, you know? But I'd visit my mother and she'd say, "I don't have any money," you know so I'd go out and get one of her little pocket books and I'd put a thousand dollars—I'd put it in it and she'd be so happy. This is like when they were really getting on, you know?

DR. KIRWIN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative].

MR. KASS: And I'd hire a house cleaner so she wouldn't have to worry about cleaning the apartment. She always saved early bird coupons and we've have to go to dinner—Jerrie and I would have to go to dinner at 3:30 in the afternoon usually at terrible places. We could never go to a really good restaurant, my mother just couldn't justify it, even though they now had plenty of money. And I'd go back to Florida a couple of months later to see them and she'd say, "I just don't have any money." I'd say, "Well what did you do with that money in your pocketbook?" And she would say, "Oh, I think I got a CD." "You think you got a CD?" So that's when I began to realize that in a couple places—like in a dresser in their house and in a little jewelry box—I hope not a lot of other places, there would be these certificates of deposit for small deposits—there were about 50 of them, in different banks. She'd drive around Clearwater and Largo and drive up to a little trailer park bank and take a CD out in it. She didn't have any of this written down anywhere. So eventually we found a whole pile of them and we hope we found them. We don't know if we found them all. My family is famous for doing things like that, like hiding a big—

DR. KIRWIN: Pile of money?

MR. KASS: Hiding a stash of cash some place and so well that—when Grandpa Kass died, he was trying to point toward the floor somewhere in the bathroom to Uncle Charlie, and we're sure it's probably where he had money hidden. And the house was sold and when the people remodeled it they probably just had their lucky day.

DR. KIRWIN: [Laughs.]

MR. KASS: Yeah, I know contractors, good friends of ours who said we'd find money. We'd find \$5,000 sometimes in a ceiling duct.

DR. KIRWIN: So when he died, it kind of took the wind underneath you?

MR. KASS: Well, I was working very hard on a lot of projects and I was devoting time to my own work and I haven't kept it up with my father now, after he died, we did the retrospective at the American Folk Art Museum that was up for a year and two weeks on Broadway by Lincoln Center, which was open all the time free to the public. And it was hugely popular and he got a very good review in the *New York Times*. He wasn't—I had done a show in the windows at Tiffany's, which my mother really liked and I got the local police precinct to cooperate with us on letting us have some stretch limos curbside that to serve food and booze, right on Fifth Avenue, right there at Tiffany's.

DR. KIRWIN: Fabulous, that was the opening?

MR. KASS: Yeah John Cage came, Nancy Hoffman came and Paul Cummings came, John had a great talk with my father.

DR. KIRWIN: Right on the street, on Fifth Avenue?

MR. KASS: Right on Fifth Avenue, and some people coming down the street just joined-in. Two German exchange students walked by and recognized Cage and joined in, We we're all drinking champagne and the police let us do this.

DR. KIRWIN: Wow, do you have photographs of any of that?

MR. KASS: I have some photographs of it, yeah. Some of them are double exposed with Howard Finster. So, I have some interesting photographs. We have Finster down in Pennville sleeping in a lawn chair with Cage and my father superimposed on him. Somehow in those days you could accidentally use a roll of film twice.

DR. KIRWIN: Twice.

MR. KASS: Twice and then I have photos of my father's paintings installed in the windows at Tiffany's, and he's in the book *Windows At Tiffany's*. It's a black and white photo of one of the windows at Tiffany's. Gene Moore did that. Gene Moore was the great window dresser of New York City and I went to see him with some of my father's saw paintings—and he had hired Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns. And early on even de Kooning had done some of that work, and it was a beautiful display. Though my mother thought that was over the top, the best thing I'd ever done, from her sensibility—

DR. KIRWIN: That's pretty amazing. So was it your idea to go to him and say do—

MR. KASS: Paul Cummings suggested it.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh, Paul did, okay.

MR. KASS: Yeah and I called Gene Moore up and he said, "Come on over." And I came over, had some saws and he loved them and he said, "Well, we'll do this." And then Mountain Lake Hotel Assistants organized the party.

DR. KIRWIN: That's great.

MR. KASS: Yeah, it was fun, talking about it makes me miss all that.

DR. KIRWIN: And what year was that?

MR. KASS: Maybe 1988.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh, that's fantastic. That's fantastic.

MR. KASS: I have a resume for him and all of that. I kept decent records for him. I haven't done that as much for myself, I mean, I'm doing it now but—unless the galleries keep record of things, I don't have a good accounting of all the paintings I've sold. Some artists have meticulous records. Well, they'll find out, like when I did the

research on Morris Graves or my father's saws like the one that that the McCall's owned—things get given away or they get sold. They're no longer where they were. Dad's case has been interesting in that nothing has really come up at a public auction. This particular piece was something I found on eBay, but the guy knew that my father had some important exhibitions. You know, he wanted \$4,000 for it. I think I bought it for 2,000 finally. I was worried about not getting it. Because, I really wanted it.

DR. KIRWIN: How many of them are there out there?

MR. KASS: In the world?

DR. KIRWIN: Yes.

MR. KASS: About 200, I think, are out in the world. He sold maybe 200 saws and I have about 80 or so and they're not the dregs necessarily. I always kept certain very good things back. I gave some to museums over the years—The American Folk Art Museum owns about 16 pieces, drawings and paintings, and they have shown them a couple of times in different group shows since his 2002 traveling retrospective, and I'm sure I could re-launch him. I want to go to the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Museum in Williamsburg with this family collection and I thought for a while I'd be able to place him with another dealer. And I drove to New York in 2006 to make a presentaion to a gallery that Lee Kogan had recommended. I won't name the gallery. They wanted to see it a lot, so I made the presentation, it was pouring rain and the guy is a very nice guy. But he's very moody and kind of—and he shows basically hard-core outsider art—not my father's more classical folk art.

DR. KIRWIN: It wasn't Calvin Morris, was it?

MR. KASS: Oh no, I know them though, you know, and is it wasn't Galerie St. Etienne or whatever, because they don't look at anything. You know, they show Grandma Moses and things. My father would be perfect.

DR. KIRWIN: That would be perfect.

MR. KASS: Well you can't get access to them. It's really interesting, I've gone in and said my father did this and is that. They show Horace Pippin, you know, but dad would require a venue like that. What I'm thinking of doing is just approaching Garvey Simon, my own gallery with it because they're popular. And towards the end of his life they were fetching between \$5,000 and \$10,000 for them. He's in museums. Now Nancy Hoffman recently made a gift to the Butler Institute of American Art of four or five of dad's pieces. He's in a little gaggle of museum collections. But what I really did—because he had a completely different life for the last 20 something years of his life. He'd sit down with me and say, "You know Raymond, we're not really like other people, we're like artists and artists are different." And I had figured out how to accomplish this, this is an amazing conversation to be having with the man that I used to do nothing but argue with, as a kid.

DR. KIRWIN: It's really satisfying—I would think—

MR. KASS: Yes it was. He crossed the river, yeah.

DR. KIRWIN:—that you came together and had a connection through art in his later years.

MR. KASS: I think he could've kept painting longer but the particular type of dementia he was developing—and it wasn't Alzheimer's—he'd think he was painting, but he'd be sitting in his little studio room with the saw in front of him and not painting—and my mother would—really fretted about him, you know? But if I was visiting and sat next to him, and I happened to pick up a brush up and I started moving it, then he'd pick a brush up and he'd start painting something. And so, there are some things that I actually have a little bit of a hand in that way—a first smudge and then he wouyld get going. So I wanted to hire a kid to do this, sit with him and play with the brushes—not an artist. Because it's sort of like fixing a car, he knew all about the nuts and bolts—but he forgot about getting started—he'd be painting but he'd be painting the picture in his head. He'd talk to me on the phone about things he was painting when he wasn't really painting, yeah.

DR. KIRWIN: What were the subjects that he kept coming around to?

MR. KASS: All right there were three important themes in my father's work, the one that was the most popular would be urban themes of memory painting. That would be old New York, Delancey Street, East New York or the push-cart culture. And some of those saws are really wildly popular, I have very little of that material. The other thing would be the bucolic landscapes of New England and Virginia, then paintings of Florida, water paintings, which my mother liked. They've never been that popular, but you know the point of it all for me was it gave him another life which he richly deserved. I mean, my Grandmother Rose Kass was a real primary figure in our family—she knew how to hold the family together, you know? I mean if grandpa who played chess and played the

zither and everything wasn't making ends meet at the business, she would go to wherever my father was working in New York—and he tried to work on Wall Street and he tried to study electrical engineering on his own. She'd pull him out and get him and his brothers together and put them back in the paint shop, because she knew that was the only way to survive. So he didn't get to have his own life, he was a really wonderful person but he always had other people to take care of since he was a kid—and he got this other amazing late life. My mother fretted about his memory loss. When he had his show at the Tampa Museum, they wanted him to give a talk in an auditorium—and she called me and said you have to fly down here immediately and do this for him—so I flew down there and I was ready to give a talk about his work and I had visuals and everything. And the Director of the museum, Peter Maas, I think, yeah, was giving the introduction and I was all ready to get up on the stage like my mother wanted and suddenly my father gets up—the introduction hasn't finished yet, and he runs up the steps to the stage, and the Director's like, "here he is!" And my mother just gasps and grabs my arm, like, "What's going to happen now?" Well he gave a 45 minute talk, getting outbursts of laughter and applause from the audience, talking with his hands and just brilliantly free associating, remembering everything about the paint shop and his paintings and how he prepares his surfaces and what he does to it. He—and Mr. Maas leaned over to my mother and me and said, "You know, you're both entirely too protective of him, you're suffocating him."

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And I said, on my mother's behalf, "I appreciate how you must feel but you don't understand." Yeah, he got wild applause, that they didn't record it is too bad. So when we're leaving to go home, we're out in the parking garage—we're in the car, and I'm driving home, he's sitting in the backseat and says, "Where are we going?" I said, "Dad we're going home, we're just going home from your show at the Tampa Museum of Art." And he says "I have a show?"

DR. KIRWIN: Oh, yeah.

MR. KASS: I know.

DR. KIRWIN: Wow.

MR. KASS: But when the spotlight was on him, he came to life, everytime. It was like, I told my mother hire a kid just to—a kid from high school who will sit next to him just picking up the brush because then he'll keep painting.

DR. KIRWIN: Keep him painting. [Laughs.]

MR. KASS: [Laughs.] He would have bad days where he would say, "You're giving me another job!" He loved the idea of retiring after the hard work he did all his life at the paintshop doing work he wasn't interested in. He was positively challenged by the idea of doing nothing. He was completely accepting of that idea. "I'm retired! I'm not going to do anything." But he did do art, and he did initiate that and he did love it. And it gave him a new identity, and he forgot about the old one.

DR. KIRWIN: Well there's so—there's a neo-nineteenth century history of sign painters and itinerant painters throughout America and it's really—its right in line with the history of American Folk Art.

MR. KASS: Going on from being a teenager, he had done self-taught master reproductions of things—he'd copied paintings—and he was really trying to do that. Here let's turn this off for a second. Be right back, I want to show you something.

DR. KIRWIN: Okay, all right. Oh, well I could say that Ray has gone onto his porch to get something to show us—it's brown paper. Be back in a minute. Oh it's a painting.

MR. KASS: My father—[inaudible]

DR. KIRWIN: Oh!

MR. KASS: My father painted this in 1939.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh my goodness. This is a copy of a *Constable*.

MR. KASS: Yep.

DR. KIRWIN: It's quite good.

MR. KASS: Yeah he liked *Constable*. I have a picture of *The Hay Wain*. I have an old picture of the hospital where my mother went when she had tuberculosis right after they got married. So he made a little painting of the Stoneybrook Sanatorium that she was in. That's why we were born later because she had been ill.

DR. KIRWIN: So he copied paintings, so this was a—

MR. KASS: He basically copied paintings or worked from photographs of pictures in books—which is also how he developed his designs for fleets of trucks, yeah.

DR. KIRWIN: So this was a latent artistic flowering—

MR. KASS: He had one big ship scene on the ocean like we've all seen—sort of generic. He had a very good version of that so of course he had to paint one of those for all the neighbors. This is all before he became, quote, an artist, though. He knew had to handle the materials and he was never free to paint. He was not good at people, but of course, that's what I think makes them good. They were little stumpy people.

DR. KIRWIN: His little figures on the saws.

MR. KASS: Yeah. Lee Kogan wrote a very nice catalog for the American Folk Art Museum exhibition that she curated. And I can show it to you and you get to see good examples of his people—interesting. Lee describes him as Jewish in the catalog and that was very interesting because only recently has it come to light that his mother probably was Jewish—although he was raised a Catholic. And dad had great stories and memories about all the shopping areas of old Brooklyn in New York, and the breweries and the stables.

DR. KIRWIN: So he became Jewish.

MR. KASS: Yes. The Folk Art Museum sort of decided that. My brother has always been annoyed about that but I didn't argue with it at all because it corresponded with all of my positive memories. Without the help of the Jewish families on our street I never would've amounted to anything. My mother used to say to me, "Don't you feel Jewish?" She felt Jewish.

DR. KIRWIN: It's your community.

MR. KASS: Yeah. Our people.

DR. KIRWIN: Well that's unusual though for him to have made copies of paintings. Don't you think?

MR. KASS: Yeah, oh yeah. They weren't—you know he didn't like Van Gogh, he thought it was too sloppy. But he made a good copy of a Van Gogh. He didn't like Einstein because he thought that he didn't comb his hair! He wasn't prejudiced towards them he just thought—I said, "Well I really like Van Gogh," he goes "I don't know, he didn't—he goes, it seems like they're just too crude." You know so he wasn't—my mother had a terrific eye and when they went to Europe the first time and then to art museums in Germany—they went a couple of times, she saw the relationship between say Pieter Bruegel and my father's paintings right away. And my father wasn't really particular aware of that type of narrative painting but there are associations like that in his work. And she loved going into museums and loved antique painting particularly.

DR. KIRWIN: So I have that you began your involvement with the Folk Art Society in 1988?

MR. KASS: Well since it was founded—Ann and I became friends in 1985—she saved me by taking care of Howard Finster, the man who never slept and stopped talking, you know, wonderful man.

DR. KIRWIN: Okay, yes.

MR. KASS: She showed up with Susan Hankla at the 1985 workshop—

DR. KIRWIN: Ann Oppenheimer.

MR. KASS: Ann Oppenheimer was part of the 1985 workshop and cooked meals and took care of Howard, essentially for a whole week. And thank God! Jonathan Williams came to visit the workshop at that time, and I think that John Yau might have come down. There was a lot going on, John Yau might have come a couple of times and Jonathan Williams and Thomas Myer came to visit periodically.

DR. KIRWIN: Did Tom Patterson come?

MR. KASS: Tom Patterson came, yeah. Yeah, I used to see Tom Patterson regularly because of the Jargon Society Board, you know? We are friends. He stayed at my house the night St. Eom committed suicide. That was terrible because he was just finishing a book on Eddie Martin, St. Eom, yeah, and because we all knew James Harold Jennings and a lot of the original "Outsider Artists."

DR. KIRWIN: And so did Ann then say "Oh, you should be good on this board or"—

MR. KASS: I was a founding member.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh, you're a founding member. Okay

MR. KASS: Yeah, I think I'm the only remaining founding member other than William Oppenheimer, or Boo, Ann's husband. And I said she—Ann always needed a sort of local pocket board to some degree because, the in early years, they did everything themselves and we just needed to okay it, you know?

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah, Ann and Boo. B-O-O.

MR. KASS: Yeah, she got really involved. William Oppenheimer, he was a gynecologist, her first husband Frederick, you know, was also a doctor. He was apparently a really strict disciplinarian from what I've heard from some of his doctor friends I have in Richmond that knew them. You know, she came from Norton, in Wise County, Virginia. Hardscrabble mountain coal country, tough.

DR. KIRWIN: And what—so, how often would the board meet and what was your role—as really just kind of rubber stamp what Anne wanted to do or—

MR. KASS: Not at all—I wrote things for the messenger and the whole thing was just beginning to come into formation, you know? There were good people involved with it.

DR. KIRWIN: Were you also involved in their—they would have annual conferences?

MR. KASS: Yeah, I'd try to go to one every few years. What I'd always try to convince Ann and Boo of is that everybody is like older, we were not for getting any young people involved. Everything costs so much that a lot of non-retired people simply can't afford it and that we should waive the conference fee for students. Now they do waive the fee for students, and now that it's going to be headquartered at Longwood University, I'm sure they'll be more of that. But, to attend a Folk Art Society of America conference costs a minimum of \$1,200, and that's a minimum. So, I'm going to try to go to Memphis this year because it's the first year that Longwood University is involved. Rachel Ivers, director of the Longwood Center For The Visual Arts is going and I feel like I need to go to support Longwood, and Brian and have a fantasy about trying to visit Jerry Lee Lewis, who is now completely Evangelical again and—doesn't drink, and won't talk about anything—his wicked past.

DR. KIRWIN: Really?

MR. KASS: But Brian is a complete Jerry Lee Lewis freak and has some connection there, so we are trying to figure out how we can socially engineer a visit, getting to see the killer.

DR. KIRWIN: A visit? Okay.

MR. KASS: Yeah, now that he feels the breath of the next world. On the drive home we'd like to visit Little Richard, he's is living in Nashville on the top floor of a Holiday Inn.

DR. KIRWIN: Huh? [Laughs.]

DR. KIRWIN: So what do you think is the future of the Folk Art Society, you're trying to recruit or reach out to a younger generation of—are there—is there a younger generation of interested enthusiasts and collectors?

MR. KASS: I'm sure there is. Well, that's the thing. It's been very oriented toward folk art collectors, although I think that was just an unconscious effect of the enthusiasm of the people who originally got involved in it. I gave a lot of my folk art away. I still have outsider art, but I noticed my students who I used to take to James Harold's place in Pinnacle or to Howard's garden, all have collections. You know it's like with students, you have to teach them how to collect art, and I did that with "looking in the mirror exercises." I said "stand in front of a mirror and say 'How much do you want for that?'" Things like that that are borderline uncomfortable, borderline impolite remarks—but it's art—I would say it isn't like other commodities, you know, if you go back tomorrow it may not be there. I encouraged them to trade with each other and they start by getting work from each other. We used to take the watercolors after class and put a wash line out by the art department and clothes pin the paintings on it and sell them for a dollar and two dollars or 50 cents—then they'd have a little bit of money to buy paint with or whatever. We did other art exercises about money. We used to make a sort of fake ten dollar bill on the copie machine and wrinkle it all up and put it beside the curb under some leaves and all that and I'd say is, "Well you know, people usually look down when they are walking and it's kind of funny when they see even a little piece of something in the gutter that looks like like money, they'll spot it instantly." So we'd all stand behind the glass doors of the art department and the fake pieces of ten dollar bill would be in the gutter and somebody would come along and see it almost right away—and dive on it.

DR. KIRWIN: [Laughs.]

MR. KASS: Teaching about seeing, we went to visit RV's—when they had an RV convention in Blacksburg, my aunt—she's not really my aunt, Aunt Edith from Clearwater—organized an RV, Land, Yacht Regatta, you know these big rolling houses on wheels? Somehow Tech got involved with being the host place for this massive event, so the whole football parking field and everything open space nearby was covered by these behemoth's running their engines 24 hours a day parked eight feet apart with all the lawn furniture squished between them—it was a nightmare, I thought. Aunt Edith and Uncle Walter loved it, in-laws of mine, she was the organizer of it. I didn't dare tell anybody—they actually stayed out here on the farm by the river. They parked their big giant RV in the lower field and I ran electric cord down to them and they actually didn't stay with this morass of people who parked on campus. She did bring a whole bunch of them out here once to visit our house to show—I had more of my art collection on the walls in the house then, and Edith got fascinated by the Newman *Blue Zip* and that Anne Truitt painting in the living room called *Turn*, the title comes from the title of one of Anne's biographies. Her show and tell was, "See I told you he owns a painting that's completely black." And I thought, "Aunt Edith is the high school principal in Clearwater."

DR. KIRWIN: [Laughs.]

MR. KASS: I know, it was like just an amusement. However, I took my students to visit this big regatta. The people were very friendly and welcoming—and I—their assignment was, "Well these are people who probably don't own art, so go inside, let them welcome you in to see their land yachts, you know and look for spaces where art could fit in and then make things that will fit in those spaces." We did things that all the time, I would say, "People don't put art over their door very much, but if you make something long and skinny and suggest that to them, they'll love it." I've actually sold a lot of things that run around the edge of ceilings. So we would look at houses or look at trailers or look at RVs and we would look at them with the idea like if there were art in this where would it go? Because they were like me when I was in graduate school, we were all painting eight foot paintings, like, "Get rid of your children, empty the living room, just put some cushions for mediation in there and don't—and just devote yourself to my painting."

DR. KIRWIN: You have a pretty extensive collection—very diverse. And I wanted to ask you about Finsters as well as Graves and other things like that. Can you talk a bit about what it is you acquired, trade or how to live with these objects?

MR. KASS: I traded a lot. When I was the art delivery business not everybody would pay me or could pay me. The Jake Berthot I got from his first show with Ivan Karp. I swapped it out against what Ivan owed me. And I should've even done more of that—but you know I had to eat too.

DR. KIRWIN: You needed some cash.

MR. KASS: Well remember I had worked for an insanely ambitious, rabid collector Allan. Allan—I drove Allan home from the city once and we' chased a garbage truck over the—what was the Willis Avenue Bridge, because in the back of it he could see a frame of an English sofa hanging out of it and he wanted it. We ended up not getting it but it hadn't been crushed up yet. He wanted to go right to the landfill. And Allan's house, you couldn't move from room to room there was such much stuff everywhere, and Allan owned the Ophir Mansion across the street from Manhattan College in Purchase New York, a 60 or 70 room house. The large public rooms in the house, you couldn't even walk through them there were little paths through stuff, and all the stuff was amazing. And a lot of it would get damaged, he wasn't good about taking care of things so we'd try—

DR. KIRWIN: He has—does he have five daughters?

MR. KASS: Yeah. Five I think—I remember Posi, Jessica, Jermy, Allison and Claudia—

DR. KIRWIN: Claudia running—Claudia's still running the business—No?

MR. KASS: No, but you know some problem with Allan's estate and I don't know what happened, whether work's disappeared or mishandled—not by Claudia. Claudia wanted to own her own gallery but has not done so yet. You can still google her. The oldest daughter had a gallery in San Francisco where Allan had bought the former Rudolph Schaeffer School of Design and converted it into a home.

DR. KIRWIN: Rudolph Schaeffer, he was a design—

MR. KASS: Allan bought that school and remodeled it completely as a personal home so he could spend time in San Francisco and have more time to play tennis with Wayne Thiebaud. Allan was almost a billionaire, I mean the family had owned S. Klein on the Square so they had a big chunk of real estate on Fourteenth Street on Union Square, among other things. His father was a banker and a banking lawyer and didn't approve of Allan going into the art business at all. I don't know how they've coped with it because of all the stuff was incredible.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah, I've talked to Claudia because I was—we were interested in his papers. Allan's papers and—

MR. KASS: Did he ever write anything down?

DR. KIRWIN: Well the records—well if there were records of the gallery, more like that. There are things—

MR. KASS: Oh I'm sure there must be things.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah. But as I understood it, it was complicated because of all that was left.

MR. KASS: Well it probably doesn't include any receipts for deliveries or pickups from me—

DR. KIRWIN: [Laughs.]

MR. KASS: His little pack of art enthusiasts—his cohort—didn't seem to believe in that—nor did they ever think that the mere exchange of a half a million dollars in objects—

DR. KIRWIN: Required a receipt—

MR. KASS: Right

DR. KIRWIN: Oh, yes.

MR. KASS: Yeah.

DR. KIRWIN: [Laughs.]

MR. KASS: I understand it, they weren't phonies—they were really serious people who loved art and were always trading things. Also Marian Willard, you know Max Ernst called her gallery a Sunday school because she was always trying to show spiritual transformative art like Mark Tobey or you know art that has some cosmic or mythic vibe in it or at its essence, Morris Graves, David Smith when he did the *Metals of Dishonor*. And she had trouble selling things and could really not sell Smith in particular. But I don't think that they weren't trying to sell things, I mean Marian came from a background similar to Duncan Phillips you know, they were old steel and glass families who had fortunes behind them. Enough money in say Duncan's case to start a great private museum but really not enough to run one indefinitely. So it was like when Richard Fuller was director of the Seattle Art Museum. John Hauberg told me that Fuller didn't really want a board of directors, he wanted to do what he wanted to do. It was Fuller who hired Graves and Anderson and other artists to be guards and work there as his way of supporting them. Duncan Phillips did the same thing—hired artists. Well there was a whole group of American museum directors of their generation who that were like that. They were mavericks in their own right.

DR. KIRWIN: Uh-huh [Affirmative].

MR. KASS: So when Laughlin Phillips came back to save the Phillips Collection—which looked like it couldn't be saved—he really did save it as a private museum. Laughlin passed away a couple of years ago, which is sad, I really liked him.

DR. KIRWIN: How did you know Willem de Looper?

MR. KASS: I met Willem de Looper when Willem was working for Jim McLaughlin, when John was the curator, before Willem was curator. I was invited to be a guest curator and Willem was going to help me on the Morris Graves exhibition.—

DR. KIRWIN: Oh, okay.

MR. KASS: And we also worked on some other projects together. We did the first Cage watercolors show there you know? I enjoyed the Phillips Collection, there was a very casual atmosphere then. Willem invited me to bring the Cage paintings to the museum so I brought 30 paintings and put them on the floor and unrolled them and Laughlin came out of his office, looked at them, and decided to take the show right there. Well, I don't think things happen like that—

DR. KIRWIN: You can't—

MR. KASS: Eliza Rathbone and I were talking about that, Eliza is still Chief Curator there.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah.

MR. KASS: She said, "Yeah in the past we just let the cats out at night in the museum which didn't have the air

conditioning, and the cats would take care of the mice."

DR. KIRWIN: That's wild.

MR. KASS: When we were about—when I was working with Willem on doing a Guy Anderson show and that would've been an important and right show for the Phillips Collection to do. Willem was very European in a way that if there was a resistance or something didn't go—or wasn't going easily. He would walk away from it, you know? And if I'd been more hands on in that they probably would've had that Anderson show. They had written to Guy saying they were going to do the show and everything—it was all done and then, after the economy went into a tailspin, they wrote to him and said that because of the financial downturn they just couldn't do it. That was in part because the new, young, museum staff put enormous budgets on everything. I couldn't send a truck out with my own kids to pick it all up from Francine Seders in Seattle with John Hauberg and Marshall Hatch paying for it—and drive it back, that was not—not professional enough for the new generation of university trained museum specialists. Even if it was a climate controlled truck, it had to be a legitimate, bonified, bonded company, everything had to be wrapped and properly crated a certain way. And I said, well we've never done anything like that, how can we afford to do that. Willem and I estimated a budget of \$40,000, the museum's new staff's estimated budget was \$280,000, and that would be considered inexpensive now. The Rauschenberg Foundation made a serious contribution to the Cage exhibition that was recently at the National Academy—and that show cost at least \$200,000. And we basically, kind of delivered that to their doorstep.

DR. KIRWIN: I want to talk about your work for a while. What were you doing before watercolors?

MR. KASS: I painted in oil. And in acrylic and I made my own paints sometimes out of hardware store things. Things I could buy, things I concocted.

DR. KIRWIN: Can you explain that?

MR. KASS: I like stains, I liked different preservative materials like copper naphthenate, which I probably shouldn't have been using but it's just a very intense green and it can be used a wood preservative. It's now banned—

DR. KIRWIN: Toxic?

MR. KASS: Yeah. And you know they—I was started out as an oil painter. But then I studied with Keith Crown one summer in 1966 or 1967, he came to be a visiting artist at Chapel Hill. He was president of the California Watercolor Society, and we painted outdoors, every day. We would go out every day for eight hours, the class that he taught. We all got sunburned, it was North Carolina in the summer time, stinky and sweaty. But I really—and it really took me a while to get the hang of it—but I liked his attitude—he was an abstract painter. There's one hanging in the hallway of Manhattan Beach Pier upstairs, it's the big-framed light blue watercolor, it's underneath the Gene Davis. And I really liked doing that kind of outdoor work, so I had rented—for \$20 a month I had rented half of a farmhouse from David Honigman on a 25-acre farm in Whitecross North Carolina with an old un-insulated farmhouse that didn't have a bathroom in it. David just put a bathroom in it, you know without realizing it would've helped to have insulation. The first winter was really hard. I put a wood stove in it and I painted outside in the fields and all around it. And there were falling down agricultural buildings—really wonderful stuff—

DR. KIRWIN: This was when you were in graduate school, or?

MR. KASS: Yeah, when I had just—I think it was the summer of my junior year. I lived there for the three years that transitioned between undergraduate and my graduate work—

Liz Kirwin: Okay.

MR. KASS: So I was making these large color field—I had studied one year with George Birlane and I met Sam Gilliam around that time. I was making large post Washington Color School stain paintings, some with my own paints and some with other stuff. They weren't bad. And I was then making funky little scribble drawings and sloppy little intense kind of Nolde like watercolors, I was going in two different directions.

Liz Kirwin: Uh-huh [Affirmative].

MR. KASS: Really different bodies of work going on simultaneously, one in a formal studio and one working outdoors—for my work outside I had a little box with all my stuff in it. A little backpack—

DR. KIRWIN: And that was the Keith Crown—

MR. KASS:—Yes, his influence.

DR. KIRWIN:—influence?

MR. KASS: Yeah, Keith got me started doing that, working out in nature, and I was taking my work to New York with a couple of the other students. The faculty wasn't doing much exhibiting it seemed to us, but we'd go see John Weber at Dwan and we would go to visit Ivan Karp, we'd see Dick Bellamy, we'd talk to Leo Castelli. We'd put our paintings out on the street leaning against parked cars and Ivan would come down and look at them. There's a different art world from the one today.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah, well I see like we just got O. K. Harris's records—

MR. KASS: He was fantastic and Marilyn worked with the Folk Art Museum, you know Marilyn Karp. Ivan bought my father's paintings and then gave it to the Folk Art Museum years later, because of Marilyn, he complained to me that they never even wrote him a letter of thanks, that's strange.

DR. KIRWIN: So Ivan was at—you know I've heard great stories about him and his generosity in—with artists just looking at things.

MR. KASS: He was wonderful that way, he always called me "Slim," or "Tex, he never called me by my name. And I would visit him when he had his little cigar store toward the end and he'd just hang out there in his velvet smoking jacket smoking cigars. And you know you go into his gallery and they would have "Please smoke" you know. Yeah, that's really sad, I wish he'd lived forever. Allan Frumkin and Ivan Karp and Allan Stone were all friends. And you can see a sort of connection in their interests, Ivan being the most eclectic, I would say. Ivan and Allan and Dick Bellamy went into business in the same year in 1960 and they used to be called "the Three Eyes" by the Abstract Expressionists group. Allan had a shot at showing Warhol, Rosenquist—it's interesting, he'd deal—there weren't that many galleries then, it was hard to talk to Charlie Egan because he could be such a sour grape. He used to get annoyed sometimes when we came into the gallery when we were students, and years later Egan was sort of a silent partner with Allan on some things, people didn't know that.

DR. KIRWIN: With Allan Stone?

MR. KASS: Yes. I would see Egan later after he'd shut his gallery, but he and Allan still owned *Labyrinth*, that big de Kooning that was stored rolled-up against the ceiling in Allan's gallery. I think it's in the National—it's been restored and is in the Museum of Modern Art or the National Gallery now.

DR. KIRWIN: Ivan—1968—

MR. KASS: Yeah when he opened his gallery in SoHo, but he was working for Leo long before that—

DR. KIRWIN: Oh, yes, before that, he had—right—

MR. KASS: So when I say going and getting involved with business together—Ivan didn't have his own gallery until he opened OK Harris, the second gallery after Paula Cooper in SoHo.

DR. KIRWIN: Right. The Green Gallery.

MR. KASS: The Green Gallery was Bellamy—it was uptown.

DR. KIRWIN: Bellamy, right.

MR. KASS: And then Klaus Kertess—

DR. KIRWIN: Park Place and then Paula Cooper.

MR. KASS: Yeah and you could, you know Klaus would also look at our artwork—

DR. KIRWIN: 112 Greene Street—

MR. KASS:—John Weber told me when I started doing my funky little watercolors, he said, "Well why are you doing this, you're going backwards." See I was moving in the opposite direction of being a reductive minimalist—which was how I was working when he first saw my work.

DR. KIRWIN:—watercolors and—

MR. KASS: Yeah, we walk around with a roll of our paintings—that's how Xavier Fourcade—he did invite me to go to Knoedler but I guess he'd asked de Kooning to wait there. That's how I met him.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah, I was recently going through Ivan's papers and he's a wonderful writer and he talks about it

to—there were ten—maybe ten galleries.

MR. KASS: Right, there was Betty Parsons, Sidney Janis, Martha Jackson, Terry Dintenfass, Poindexter—

DR. KIRWIN: It's not like it is today where there's about 300 venues, there's just a handful of people and he felt that OK Harris was equal to a contemporary museum. That the amount of energy they put into showing—

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exposing artists, in the art world was equal to what the Whitney was doing. And I think in some respects he's right, that they operating on a very high level.

MR. KASS: Yeah—and they could have strong opinions about the curators of the museums.

DR. KIRWIN: Well he always shut out of the Biennial and that's funny. All those people were routinely not included in the Biennial.

MR. KASS: Even Duane Hanson?

DR. KIRWIN: For a very long time. When people showed with him they stayed with him for a very long time. He had people like Duane Hanson who just showed with him forever.

MR. KASS: Duane Hanson came to one of the pre-Mountain Lake Symposium criticism conferences that I organized.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh did he?

MR. KASS: I brought him together with Clement Greenberg and Donald Kuspit. And it was really interesting because Clem and Hanson really got into it. I have a good video documentary, we have a digital copy of that actually. I invited him to what was the prototype for the Mountain Lake Symposium. I organized a program called "The Realist Panel" for SECAC [Southeastern College Art Conference] in 1977, I guess. When I was first here, being a visiting artist, Dean Carter had too much to drink at the SECAC meeting in Charleston, South Carolina, and got himself elected president of SECAC which back then meant you had to host the conference the following year. So Victor Huggins and I had to basically do the whole conference program. So I had Janet Fish, Duane Hanson, Richard Estes, together with critics Clement Greenberg and Donald Kuspit—that was also their initial big first encounter. Robert Porter was the panel moderator. Janet Fish felt like an unlikely person to be there, she didn't see how she fit into it and I said, "Well, you do fit into it. You know, you're sort of a conceptual painter, a conceptualist who paints your glass subjects as patterns—very much like Estes's vision of the city as surfaces." And Greenberg asked Duane Hanson, he thought Duane Hanson's work was too literal. He said, "Have you ever just thought about making them a little bigger than life-size, or a little smaller?" And Duane Hanson thought Clem Greenberg just didn't get it. He said, "I don't think you understand my work is sociologically oriented and it's conceptual in that, in that kind of direction and in the commentary it's trying to make." That wouldn't have any interest to Clem at all—I think. Then Clem turned to Estes at one point and said, "I really love your work and I have always preferred realism over abstraction," at which the audience gasped.

DR. KIRWIN: He said that?

MR. KASS: Yeah. I have it on tape. I'll see that you get a copy of the DVD.

DR. KIRWIN: That's why.

MR. KASS: And Francis Lewis, a big collector of Richard's work, was sitting right in the first row, you know there were a lot of people at this—

DR. KIRWIN: He did?

MR. KASS: This SECAC is memorable because of that panel.

DR. KIRWIN: Now did they support—

MR. KASS: SECAC didn't customarily do this.

DR. KIRWIN: Did the Lewises support the symposium or—

MR. KASS: No—but they gave me all my kitchen appliances for my house in trade for paintings.

DR. KIRWIN: Wow, okay.

MR. KASS: I knew them from Richmond, through my first wife and George Bireline was one of my teachers whose work I vaguely mimicked. The Lewises were good friends with Bireline and my paintings somewhat resembled Bireline's paintings when he showed at Emmerich. I see now how derivative I was as a kid. Just like coming home from MoMA the first time and making my paintings that look like Pollock and Kline.

DR. KIRWIN: Well I wanted to talk about this early—

MR. KASS: Bad Pollock and Kline!.

DR. KIRWIN: Just like your father and Constable. When you were living in New York, was New York then your subject? Did you respond—

MR. KASS: Yes.

DR. KIRWIN:—to your environment. In what way?

MR. KASS: I did a whole series of paintings over a number of years in the early eighties that were painted from the tops of buildings in New York. And they were my way of uniting the landscape, bucolic transcendental kind of interest I had with the built environment of the...I wanted to paint the city as if it were part of the natural world. I didn't paint specific people—I painted streams of traffic. And I painted some giant ones. Some of them are more than 20 feet long and I would paint them on top of—I got permission through Barnibus McHenry, have you heard of him? He was the, he was the chairman of the Lila Acheson Wallace Foundation. *Reader's Digest* people. He, they had their offices at the top of the Pan-Am building, when it was the Pan-Am building, so I had permission to paint on top of the Pan-Am building after a helicopter fell off of it and they didn't use it for the helicopter pad anymore. Seemed crazy to ever use it for that.

DR. KIRWIN: I remember when it was a helicopter pad.

MR. KASS: Yeah, it wasn't, it was not a very big building, it's a Gropius building or something. It's a very elegant building with beautiful scale to it—but the flat roof has surprisingly small footprint.

DR. KIRWIN: I don't know who—

MR. KASS: I can't get over them changing the name. It's now the MetLife or whatever they call it, they never should have changed the name. That should have been part of the landmark status. You could look right down on Grand Central Station.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah, I bet. I've never been up there. So—

MR. KASS: I would hang on the roof there painting things. I had several good spots. Penn Plaza, and on lower Broadway near my studio on eighth street, you know right around the corner from Scholastic. I painted on top of their building. I never painted on top of the World Trade Center—it was too high feel the pulsing stream of life that I wanted -but I painted a building diagonal from the Flatiron building that Rudy Burkhart got me into, where he said, "You know if you just go up to this floor, it's never locked. You go into one of these side chambers and then you're looking directly at the Flat Iron building. And I, I can show you later because these have already been scanned. I could show you some images of my very loose expressionist New York paintings. Which Allan thought were corny, but he showed some of them. Nancy Hoffman really liked them. That's when I should have tried to make maybe a transition in galleries,

DR. KIRWIN: To Nancy Hoffman:

MR. KASS: [coughs] Yeah maybe if she would have had me. She was very particular. We are good friends. I think that Nancy likes more sharp color and angular activity than is characteristic of my landscape abstractions. I really like the mix in her gallery and the West coast artists that she shows. But you can't show everybody!—right? Leo Castelli and de Kooning were very good friends. But Castelli never, he never showed a different generation of artists. De Kooning was a god, who, he didn't care about having shows. He only had that show with Janis to settle that litigation because Sidney Janis had cheated him so badly. But then de Kooning wrote a self-implicating letter, "I've always thought of you as my dealer" and all this stuff and it ended up, that Janis was able to turn that around and do that exhibition after de Kooning hadn't had a show in years anywhere, that big show back in the 70s. Before his shows at Knoedler.

DR. KIRWIN: So I just want to get a sense these various environments, the kinds of paintings you were making, the kinds of materials you were using to [inaudible] you had that, you were painting landscapes which you were doing watercolor and—

MR. KASS: I was painting on canvas.

DR. KIRWIN: And stained paintings.

MR. KASS: More or less stained paintings that I would build up some of them, and some of them would be in an alkyd I would make out of my little hardware store acquisitions—and then I was also painting outdoors, a completely different appearing kind of work that engaged me with drawing a lot more too. And I was not painting landscape realistically. That only happened quite a while later. After I had moved to New Hampshire I began drawing outdoors in the winter in New Hampshire, birch trees in the winter; now this is 1972.

DR. KIRWIN: Well let's go from '60, the; 60s then to California.

MR. KASS: Yeah. In the '60s I'm in Chapel Hill, and then I live on Honigmann's farm in White Cross. In 1969 I get hired by Humboldt State University I drive myself cross-country and I start painting on the ocean, outdoors. Very expressionistic, very loose watercolors that eventually evolve into these five by eight foot pattern paintings that I also painted outdoors on big flat sheets of Homasote I put on the ground. The paintings are in parallelogram shapes and that's the first exhibition I did with Allan Stone. Those four little oil paintings that are in your living room were in that show. John Canaday reviewed it for the *New York Times*, and he liked those little oils. And then in some of the smaller watercolor abstractions he says in those I begin to lose control and that the large paintings crudely designed and painted. There were like zig-zag patterns, they were probably inspired by Native American art and ocean patterns and things that had so impressed me in Northern California. The Uruk and Karuk baskets that I collected and things like that. Those designs are all an evocative nature imagery distilled down to abstraction. Canaday didn't like that at all, other people did but he didn't. So my mother called up and said, "Oh my god, you've gotten this bad review in the *New York Times*." It's the only time I really got reviewed until years later they wrote something about a show I was in with Cage and works related to the Mountain Lake Workshop.

But Philip Guston called me up—I was in touch with him because I had, I was very interested in the paintings he was beginning to do. Those painterly cartoon figures, the "Klans people" and all. And he had literally just broken off, with or sort of been kicked out of Marlborough. He was briefly at the bottom of his career and he knew I was going to the gallery where David McKee was at that time and another fellow, I'm trying to think of his name, he died a long time ago. They told Philip, "So there's this young artist who comes in here, he's always asking to look at your work." And they had little backroom and would take out a couple paintings and show them to me. They were almost giving them away at that time. They were not well received at first. I couldn't get my first wife to even consider it. I could have bought a big Guston head laying on the ground for \$2,000. I regret that but I did buy a really good ink drawing later—a head lying under a light bulb.

DR. KIRWIN: So they told him that he had a fan?

MR. KASS: Yes. And he, they told them to have me get in touch with them. So he liked it that, my god, he said the only good review is a bad review. You just want them to pay attention to your work. Klaus Kertess told me the same thing. My mother was heartbroken, I was really reacting to that. Klaus said, "What, you want them to like your work?" Bruce Marden actually might have said that to me because they were working together on installing a show at Bykert Galley. I didn't know that as a young artist you were supposed to do what John Waters just told the graduating RISD class to do. "Go out and fuck the world up."

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah, who cares right? They will come around to you eventually.

MR. KASS: I was never that kind kind of a radical in my art—working all the time in nature. But these paintings, they were really strong I thought.

DR. KIRWIN: And you were, when you got to California then you, you, you were—

MR. KASS: My work outdoors quadrupled. I was incredibly prolific.

DR. KIRWIN: Because it was so sunny and you had the—

MR. KASS: No, it wasn't sunny. It rained a lot.

DR. KIRWIN: It's a fog area, that's right.

MR. KASS: The north, Pacific Northwest coast, very wild and foggy. And I started becoming involved with Native American culture. I loved their artwork and you know, Northern California was one of the parts of the United States that the, the white domination of Native Americans didn't completely succeed. They never made a treaty.

DR. KIRWIN: So how were you exposed to that? Their baskets—

MR. KASS: One of my students, who also helped me as a studio assistant, Robert Benson was a part of the Tsnungwe of the Athabaskan language group of Native people. So I began to learn about native culture from him. He looked completely Scandinavian when he was a student but his father looked very Native American—and his grandmother. We are still friends and now he looks very much Native American and is active in the important ceremonies that have undergone an important revival in recent decades. I don't think that his father approved of him studying art at all. But he got to be an art professor, and he's a good artist, so he got away with it. That's what I always thought about it myself, "Getting away" with this. Well Keith [Crown] helped Bob too because he got a full scholarship to the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana through Keith's recommendation to Jerry Savage. He deserved it—he had good work. His wife, Becky Evans, another art student at Humboldt who was also part native-American, went to Illinois for graduate work too and has taught for years. They live in Arcata and have both kept on working as artists. I used to visit them almost every year to paint together.

DR. KIRWIN: Where was Keith in California?

MR. KASS: University of Southern California. And that's how I sort of had a connection there with Peter Plagens who then came to the Mountain Lake Symposium. Glenn Lowry came to the first conference at Mountain Lake. When he was the director of the Muscarelle Museum we did a big workshop at the Mucarelle with Jiro Okura—eventually, but not when Glenn was there. Mark Johnson was director when we had the Mountain Lake exhibition and the workshop there.

DR. KIRWIN: So how would you describe, again, the character of your work and how it changed from North Carolina to, California and the Humboldt area?

MR. KASS: Well the inspiration went to being water, and this very dynamic ocean. And I didn't have a problem connecting the nature of that with the nature of the Native American semblance. And so that sort of mended the dichotomy in my two kinds of work in North Carolina, the two directions. I still have a tendency to work in two different manners, but they're related. And I think you can see that after a while. After California, I was in New Hampshire living on the Banks' commune, going out in the freezing winter and drawing blue chalk and charcoal birch trees on mulberry paper.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh I missed the commune area because you did talk about this—

MR. KASS: That was Russell and Mary Banks [Gunst]—

DR. KIRWIN: It was a big Victorian house—

MR. KASS: Right.

DR. KIRWIN: But that's, the commune is before that?

MR. KASS: No. I left my position at Humboldt State College, now Humboldt University or whatever, and I moved to Northwood Narrows, New Hampshire, between Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and Concord, New Hampshire. And that was the house that Russ Banks, my friend who'd been fiction editor at the *Carolina Quarterly* and his wife Mary bought with 25 acres of land or something around it. And it became a real salon of sorts, the *Boston Globe* actually wrote about it that way once. A lot of artists visited, mostly from Boston but New York as well. Morris Graves came to see us, and writers like Mark Strand and Robert Creeley, other Black Mountain people would visit. And you know Russ was an aspiring young novelist who went through a big crisis at the time and stopped writing for years. We were all close friends, you know. It fell apart, like things like that always do. I'm still close to Russ and Mary.

DR. KIRWIN: How many people were living there?

MR. KASS: Peggy Mallison and her son Laurie and I, Russ, Mary and their three kids, and usually between one and three other full time people, and whatever guests were around—they were coming and going constantly. I mean, a lot of Boston literary people you might not have heard of. Paul Hannigan and Bill Corbett were regulars. Bill is a poet and a publisher who was very close friends with Guston. You know Guston has a great body of work that's just kind of a cartoon book of Richard Nixon and I think that Bill may have published some of those.

DR. KIRWIN: And what work, kind of work were you doing when you were at the commune?

MR. KASS: I began drawing on mulberry paper and outdoors it got me interested, I was trying to make abstraction out of birch trees. I was caricaturing characteristics of birch trees. And I liked that because I felt some parallels with what Guston was doing at the time, being a big fan of his abstract figuration. My Boston artist friends all hated what Guston was doing then. This is very interesting, because now they will say that they always loved it. I mean 5 years later maybe that began to be true. But they didn't always love it. That's when I

got serious about drawing—not academic drawing—but I did begin drawing the figure with Sigmund Abeles and I learned a lot from him. I bought a small a Burchfield drawing back then. Burchfield wasn't that popular with my young artist friends then either, but he became very popular now with that same group of people. But it's interesting how artists in your little friend group of artists assimilate things. And you know if you're one of those two or three people in a group of younger, emerging artists who by liking something other people don't like will start them liking it too. It's interesting how things can turn around.

DR. KIRWIN: So what about the sensibility of Guston came into your own work at the time with the paintings of the birch trees?

MR. KASS: Well I went backwards with that. I started making paintings that were, I wish I had some close by. They would be a line of cartoon-like birches, or caricatures of stumps a big hornet's nest, or things with the birch trees in or around them. I titled two of them "A place in the Woods I Sometimes Go." Russ and Chase have one of those in their house in Miami Beach., I took the patternization that had started with the sea-wave patterns and had turned them it into kind of image patterns in my drawings and paintings. About Around that time I was given some good advice by a Brittish curator I met who was a Jackson Pollock and David Hockney scholar and who had director of Whitechapel in London, Brian Robertson—I think. He was looking at my paintings and he said well, you know, you should really draw, you should really kind of learn to draw. And he said" this work is really very interesting and you, this could come to something. And you don't want decisions you make as a maturing artist that might be important to your developing work, you don't want those decisions to be governed by incompetence." Very interesting and very good advice—I thought. Yeah no one had ever talked to me quite that way before. So I went out and began drawing with Sigmund and taught myself to paint landscape. Susan Shatter and I were friends. Marjorie Portnow and I were friends. So we'd go out to paint landscape together. And I worked on mulberry paper, I liked working on that paper because it would absorb the paint and I could paint into the mixed colors I was laying down. My first landscapes looked like Grandma Moses! I mean they looked flat and without spatial proportions everything kind of tipped up free of gravity! The water in a lake would feel like it was about to spill out of it! They looked like folk art. I sort of cherish those. But I quickly figured out how to design more realistic space in my landscapes, because I had been handling the materials for so long, I sort of could draw. You know, how to get proportion, how to get certain essential characteristics say of a landscape to lay down right and hold together in proportion on the picture plane. How to work with the intensity of light and dark, contrasts, as they usually occur in nature. It didn't take me long to realize that the tops of trees were much bigger than the bottoms of trees.

DR. KIRWIN: And did you that just through observation?

MR. KASS: I did it through observation and through painting with Susan and Marjorie who'd studied with Gabriel Laderman and Alex Katz. , I can't think of all their names right know, you know. I think that it was a transition that Jake Berthot went through alsoat about that time. Because soon after I got his painting, I met him through Marjorie Portnow, and went to the Met together and ran into Laderman there. We really got into critiquing landscape and looking hard at things, and Jake was becoming much more interested in the nature imagery, and that really engaged him with the drawing that's so important in his later paintings. This seems quite opposed to the way Ivan characterized his work when I got my painting in 1972. Ivan said, "This is the flat dumb look. It's the new thing." I loved that expression. "The flat dumb look."

DR. KIRWIN: And did you draw though?

MR. KASS: Yes. I made drawings on the mulberry paper and I made, I began keeping some sketchbooks and in about 6 months I got to where I could paint at a pretty decent, straight-on landscape. And for two years I was involved with painting through the four seasons so I would understand the transition of colors. I tremendously expanded my color vocabulary. And that was a very important experience. By the time I got down to Virginia, I was painting cascades and rock forms, and movemed water, and saw that they could correspond with each other. In my cascade paintings in the mountain gorges I didn't care about the realistic color at all. I wanted an enegized surface to unify things, I was using watercolor in an unusual way, I was washing things off a lot and breaking up the surface paper, working on distressed, sometimes even ripped paper. And still do that to some degree. You see a painting over there that has marks all over its surface and blue ropey forms in it? Before I even paint on that, the wet paper was wrinkled up into a ball.

DR. KIRWIN: You wet the paper and wrinkle it?

MR. KASS: Then I paint it and dampen the backside and stretch it over a panel and it flattens out. I just popped that off the stretcher bar yesterday, I needed to use the panel. .

DR. KIRWIN: So then you went to Boston? Or Cambridge?

MR. KASS: I moved from Northwood to Boston and had a gigantic studio at South Station. 3,000 something square feet.

DR. KIRWIN: And how did that environment—

MR. KASS: Sixteen foot ceiling.

DR. KIRWIN: enter into you're—

MR. KASS: I began painting these gigantic waves that started with collages of cut up pieces of paper based on my little birch tree things. And I'd build a wall for a big painting that might be 12 feet high and when I finished that one, they took a long time, I'd build another wall and have another big painting so I'd have these little angled walls all around. Jim Monte came down from the Whitney to look at them. He was really impressed with them. He said, "I don't know what we would do with this? It's like this is too big." I thought—It's not too big, I mean I don't think it's too big. Look what Ann McCoy was doing.

DR. KIRWIN: Twelve feet tall?

MR. KASS: Well they would be 12 feet—

DR. KIRWIN: Twelve feet by 15?

MR. KASS: Maybe. Or 16 or more.

DR. KIRWIN: Was it because you had this space available? And you're space?

MR. KASS: Yeah—in part I was just using the space. I had made a 20 foot long drawing of a wave in my Portsmouth studio and a couple big wave paintings. But in Boston I had so much more space! I wanted to make these really big paintings—I just didn't have anyplace to do it before. I had a bicycle you could ride around, and play basketball.

DR. KIRWIN: And that allowed you to go big?

MR. KASS: I was a like a regular working man. I lived in Cambridge on Mason St. and I'd get up in the morning and get on the red line and get off at South Station and go to work. And I'd come home in the evening even if I didn't do anything. I'd just stay in there all day. And the whole building was artists: Greg Amenoff, Connie Nelson, Carter Stanton-Abbott, Liz Dworkin, Andy Tavarelli, Carl Pallazollo, Stony Connelly, all lived at one time or another at 655 Atlantic or were nearby in that neighborhood.

DR. KIRWIN: So these were colleagues—

MR. KASS: Yes—the Boston art scene of the early 1970s was dynamic—but everybody was afraid of anybody stealing anybody else's idea.

DR. KIRWIN: Really?

MR. KASS: Oh the artist fights were incredible. Shatter didn't speak to me once for two years because I was really successfully painting panoramic landscape paintings outdoors. She thought she owned that. I have a nice letter from her, it's anguishing. But we eventually got past it and remained very close friends. Chris Sproat and Greg Amenoff stopped speaking to each other over something like that after they had done so much stuff together just over the idea that well, "That's my idea," "But it wasn't." I never even saw, in some of these arguments, a reasonable resemblance. Susan was so upset with me that she went to Alex Katz to complain, asking him what should she do about this "friend" who she thought was just copying her work. And she later told me that Alex, instead of talking to her about her problem with me, began complaining about Fairfield Porter. He said, "Do you know what Fairfield did to me?"

Do you get it? I don't get it. I mean I really loved things in Fairfield Porter's work. How he'll just have half of a dog coming into a painting. And he was obviously, despite the fact that he's somewhat contemporary with Katz, but I think the influence might have gone the other way because Fairfield was trying to incorporate aspects of say de Kooning.

DR. KIRWIN: De Kooning. Definitely.

MR. KASS: And Kathy Pourier was in Boston. You know, she was doing terrific paintings—

DR. KIRWIN: Were you all talking about the death of painting anymore? Was that at all a conversation in those years—

MR. KASS: You mean was painting dead?

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah.

MR. KASS: That would come up periodically. Except we were all addicted to doing it.

DR. KIRWIN: Right.

MR. KASS: And then painting by the '80s was back in full force, at the time. I don't think painting will ever go away. I'm, but the character of it is changing. So my work remains focused on, in some real way the natural environment. Even when I was painting New York, I was trying to paint it as though it were part of the natural world. That was a very important personal experience for me. It also introduced a kind of geometric element back into my work that layered that hadn't been apparent in my work since my Chapel Hill/Washington color School formal days and maybe the abstract California patterned landscapes. They had a real, sloppy wonderful geometry in them, and so did the New York things. Later I developed this elliptical format.

And this was when I had met Cage, and I was already thinking, I was reorienting my work a lot. I was trying to use chance just to experiment with my own paintings, which caused me to break down my habits and styles. Also, I was painting through things like fabric scrim. I was painting through soap paper. Stuff like that because I was trying to change my mark—my gestures, I always have touch but that could be a problem too. I realized Chuck Close, and Jennifer Bartlett and everybody at Klaus Kertess' showed wasn't trading on personal touch. If they were using touch, it was very, it was almost mechanistic.

DR. KIRWIN: Explain what you mean by that?

MR. KASS: Like Chuck Close was avoiding expressionist, stylistic licks, for a more anonymous constructed character to the painting. I wasn't exactly trying to mimic that, because I still loved the de Kooning—but I wanted to deflect my reflexive signature gestures.

DR. KIRWIN: Without the hand art?

MR. KASS: Yeah without the hand art.

DR. KIRWIN: The gesture.

MR. KASS: Yeah, without the gesture being such a presence or making the gesture into something more like an extruded pattern. It's interesting now that we're in the digital age how Chuck Close and Jennifer Bartlett sort of prefigured that before the digital age. That's like Jackson Pollock's idea has something to do with cybernetics, you know. I heard a Daniel Robbins lecture once and he said about, about Pollock's painting *Number One*, "this is what an idea looks like." You know, because computer science is beginning to emerge over here and Pollock is doing that over there. How do we grasp that, you know? And remember, ever since the Impressionists, artists have always been appropriating values systems from other disciplines like, you know, associating themselves with science or politics. That's why I loved coming to Tech because they treated me like a scientist.

DR. KIRWIN: Well let's talk about when you started there. What was, did your work at first change in any—

MR. KASS: Yes. I didn't have a studio, so my studio was my van. So for the first year and a half I was here, I painted a whole series of straight-on landscapes, bucolic, serene landscapes with the oldest of all mountains in the world as my subject matter. And I would do them right on site. And I would also hike up into the details of these panoramas and explore the gulches, which were loaded with raging steams and waterfalls coursing down between boulders and all like at the Cascades. If you ever come down here with a little more time to spend we should take that hike. It's one of the beautiful walks in all of America, the trail to the Cascades, it is right near here. It leads up to a big waterfall, but getting there is stunning.

DR. KIRWIN: There's a trail?

MR. KASS: Yeah there's a trail. It's reasonably well known. It's never really crowded. It's a jewel.

DR. KIRWIN: And these were watercolors, again?

MR. KASS: Yes. They were watercolors about this size [gestures with hands], often just washed off in the stream to get the textures of the rocks.

DR. KIRWIN: So how big is that?

MR. KASS: They're about 23 by 29 and a half inches. I had bought a lot of Whatman paper from the 1940s and early '50s that was that size from Arthur Brown—it was a great paper and he gave me a really good deal.

DR. KIRWIN: So that's something pretty easy to transport outside?

MR. KASS: Yeah, I would paint on one of those pieces of Celutex you see out there. I'd paint kneeling down on the ground. I wasn't doing the big things like I was doing on the Pacific bluffs in California. Or some of the big panoramas in New York of the Hudson River the old World Trade Center in them. Those big NYC paintings are pretty wild. They really look like romantic transcendental paintings.

DR. KIRWIN: Do you have any affinity with somebody like Marin and some of his watercolors?

MR. KASS: I loved that work for a time, back then. I tired of it though in a strange way. The thing with Marin is it's sort of like de Kooning, you love discovering that influence in your work but you've got to break out of it, somehow. And, yeah Marin was Keith Crown's favorite artist. I got to see his house in Maine but I didn't get to go in it.

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Because Norma Marin is still lives up there—I'll think of it in a minute—Cape Splitt.

DR. KIRWIN: So, how long were you, know of, working in that vein of these landscapes when you came to North Carolina?

MR. KASS: You mean when I came to Virginia?

DR. KIRWIN: That's what I mean, yes Virginia.

MR. KASS: Well, there's a big one hanging right now in the Taubman Museum on the second floor and next to it is what it transitioned into. So one is big, washed, colorful cascade painting that I can show you an image of and the other is called *Winged Earth* and it's two big inverted triangles that are almost black. You can just see all the layers, layer after layer, but no texture, just a smooth surface, and the paper's mounted on canvas in both of those. And that one is eight feet long by five feet high and the other is, like, six-foot square or something like that. They just put those up.

DR. KIRWIN: Do these have the wax surface in—

MR. KASS: Yes, both of these have shaved beeswax surfaces. I began putting bees wax on the surfaces of my large paintings in California. Morris Graves suggested that technique to me. Because they were so big, I didn't want to glaze them and frame them. Figuring out how to present them wasn't easy. De Kooning suggested that I stretch them somehow over homosote panels so—I left borders on the paper and hung them with grommets—and the mounted some on canvas—until I began just stretching them on primed wood panels.

DR. KIRWIN: Do you wrap, wrap the—

MR. KASS:—there'd have to be some way via, like, wrap them around the edge so they'd have some kind of backing. Morris wrote me a long letter about how to mount paper in the Chinese tradition, which I realized he didn't actually know how to do. I have that letter someplace.

DR. KIRWIN: [Laughs.]

MR. KASS: And I didn't want to glaze them because Alan had taken two of my big eight foot-long California painting and put them in gold frames under Plexiglas. I was just too cumbersome. They didn't quite breathe that way. So Morris said there was this ancient Egyptian technique of covering paintings with wax—not really accurate -, right? His mistaken information about encaustic, you know. But I found it a useful idea and experimented with it. If I started with paraffin, which is a petroleum based product—but then I used bees wax and got bteer results. And the bees wax didn't darken the paint or the paper because it's completely organic. It didn't, it didn't have an oil base to it like paraffin. If I, if the wax wasn't too hot, if I didn't scald the wax, you know, I could paint it right over my paintings with a four inch bristle brush from a heated double boiler. And then I used to get naked in a really hot room and tape the painting on a smooth wall—but this is how stupid artists are, right? And arduously scrape the wax off with a blade in this heated up room—which was really hard to do. I wouldn't be able to do it now. And I did that for a few years, even after I first got to Virginia, where I had a special oil burner and everything to get the room up to 120 degrees or more.

DR. KIRWIN: Like, what do you mean? I'm not understanding—

MR. KASS: Well, the wax would be—

DR. KIRWIN:—you scrape it off of what?

MR. KASS: The paper—unless it was warm it wastoo hard to scrape it off—

DR. KIRWIN: Oh.

MR. KASS: I, I would put the wax in a double boiler, melt it—

DR. KIRWIN: Right.

MR. KASS:—put in a four and a half inch bristle brush, paint it over the whole painting and then take the wax painting with its encrusted wax on it into a very hot room, put it on a sanded sheetrock wall and scrape it off like this.

DR. KIRWIN: Okay, so you have like a really fine wax—

MR. KASS: A smooth wax surface. Yes.

DR. KIRWIN:—cut.

MR. KASS: Like these have, these are waxed. But now, of course, after many years of doing this, this idiotic way! It finally occurred to me could just make a little heat lamp. Like I could put some bulbs on a little piece of wood and slide it back and forth and I could remove the wax on a table much more easily, even on a big piece of paper. Or I could take a heat gun—but that is riskier.

DR. KIRWIN: It's, kind of, like a—

MR. KASS:—You don't want to apply too much heat because you can—because if you really heat the wax up too much, then it will be absorbed into the paper. You want the wax to lay on the surface of the paper and the paint—not be absorbed. The wax can really enhance the transparency.

DR. KIRWIN: And the wax doesn't change the color?

MR. KASS: No, doesn't change it, it doesn't darken it.

DR. KIRWIN: And it lasts?

MR. KASS: Yes. So, I'm the only person who does this. Yes, it lasts. The conservation—

DR. KIRWIN: It's not a conservation problem?

MR. KASS:—A restoration conservationist in Washington, DC, looked at it years ago and said it was fine. And now I mount them on double primed panels—there is no glue involved and if you take all the staples off the back, it will pop off the panel,

DR. KIRWIN: Oh.

MR. KASS: So there's no glue. I realized that glue of primed canvas can be a problem if there are any impurities in either. And they could be damaged more easily.

DR. KIRWIN: How interesting.

MR. KASS: And now a little kid can hit it with a tennis ball and not break it. Whereas the ones we were mounting on canvas, something hitting the surface would cause damage to the paper because it would make a break in it. They could even fall over or be bumped into something and that could make a break in the paper. So I stopped mounting paintings on canvas, I began using plywood panels instead of—these you see here are all plywood panels. There's a real story to that. That's a chance operations painting [referring to a painting mounted on a wood panel]. The design elements are based on drawings of vines done on location. I did those drawings at Ripplemead where John's New River rocks came from—and the I Ching would pick which elements of the vine patterns would be placed where, and on what panels, and how many washes that it would receive. Unlike John, who purely stuck to chance-operations and implicit elements of indeterminacy, my use of chance was less rigorous, less consistent. Many people think that "indeterminacy" is the most important contribution of his work. You know, I like to think that chance made him sensitive, chance made him sensational, and indeterminacy made him great. You know, in terms of his continuing influence in art and as a composer, I think it is because he gives so much back to the performers. He gives back to other people a big part of the primary experience of making the art.

DR. KIRWIN: Explain how you mean that?

MR. KASS: Well, John always said it didn't matter who held the brush and it didn't matter to Howard Finster either. When they finally met, even though Howard talked all the time, they loved each other. John, and Jasper

Johns I think, went to Howard's show, and I don't know what Johns thought of it. But, I mean John—

DR. KIRWIN: Jasper Johns was there too?

MR. KASS: Well, they were good friends.

DR. KIRWIN: Okay, but—

MR. KASS: Margarete Roeder told me that Johns didn't particularly like the idea of John [Cage] painting.

DR. KIRWIN: I didn't know that Finster had an encounter with Jasper Johns.

MR. KASS: Finster wouldn't have known who Jasper Johns was. No, Howard, Howard didn't know who John [Cage] was except that he knew he knew me and that we was working in the workshop. And John called me up later that night and said how much he loved Howard. He said that he thought Howard a completely real, authentic guy. And in both their cases it didn't matter who held the brush.

DR. KIRWIN: Yes.

MR. KASS: Howard didn't care who painted the image. Once an image is realized in a vision, then it had a message that had to go out in the world—and Howard made a "demention," or a stencil of it so it could be applied to surfaces and the more people who painted it however they wanted to paint it—the better.

DR. KIRWIN: So it becomes, you become part of the authorship of the work in that sense, I guess.

MR. KASS: Yeah.

DR. KIRWIN: You're involved in its creation, that sense.

MR. KASS: Yeah, the spirit of it is in John's statement: "I am for the birds, not the cages people keep them in." Of course, this doesn't—

DR. KIRWIN: That's very much, that's a very though it could be Howard Finsterism. Yeah.

MR. KASS: Yeah.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah. Now he wouldn't have said it so poetically I don't think.

MR. KASS: John used panelization in his music composition. He thought of music, he thought of the landscape as being horizontal or painting that derived from landscape, but he said but more important than much is the vertical, but he was talking about time, see. And so I literally developed these polyptics and showed them to him. He liked that format and he was very interested in it because he realized since we were using invisible panels in how we would divide the paper and how he made his paintings. I developed this format, which was an important midlife development for me, so John would maybe have a new direction to go when painting. John would paint if I could come up with ideas that would make it different. He didn't want to keep repeating himself. Although, he realized once you choose the materials, there's going to be a certain kind of repetition, that's just implicit. But, he wanted change, and he didn't make things out of concepts, he's considered a founder of conceptual art -but he made art out of things, not concepts. He disliked theory.

DR. KIRWIN: When you say used the I Ching, could you explain how you—

MR. KASS: Well, with the I Ching you access it through the throwing of stones or yarrow sticks—

DR. KIRWIN: Do, so you have, you threw something?

MR. KASS:—and coin-throws lead you through the various pages in the text—building connections between things that then you, I guess, can interpret so it's like a, it's like an ancient Chinese book of wisdom that you access through chance. It's completely contrary, I mean—to the Western mind—the Aristotelian mind. And when Carl Jung wrote the introduction to the Richard Wilhelm translation he said this flies completely in the face of, you know, western rationalism, it's intimidating. Oh, John picked it up for exactly that reason, you know. And—

DR. KIRWIN: Intimidating because it's not controlled?

MR. KASS: That's right or, at least, that's—yeah. It seems to open the door to anarchy or chaos or something like that.

DR. KIRWIN: To all possibilities?

MR. KASS: Right.

DR. KIRWIN: To indeterminacy.

MR. KASS: Yes, insofar as the freedom to interpret the texts. So at Cornell they, they were able to make a computer program out of the 64 hexagrams of the I Ching, and I can show you a page. When we do exhibitions we show some of his printed-out pages that have the crossed out number in them that were used in making paintings. When a number is used then it is crossed-out and then you use the next number, and so on. So let's say we're dealing with 16 brushes, we'd go to page 16 of random numbers, that is 640 random numbers between 1 and 16, and the next available number would be used and then crossed-out. So if it's number three and that was the medium size brushes it would be medium brush number three that would be used.

DR. KIRWIN: So that was actually computer generated?

MR. KASS: Yes, I think that Andrew Culver did that for John—

DR. KIRWIN: Okay.

MR. KASS:—It was developed for him because it was taking him so long to do anything using the coins to access the I Ching. Andrew developed two computer programs of random numbers derived from the I Ching, ick and tick, so it's at the. One was for time and one was for things and spatial form, I guess, location. Andrew Culver, sort of, interfaced with Cornell when developing those. And John loved that because he was particularly busy with big compositions. We never actually used a hard copy of the I Ching, or read the I Ching at the workshop—or discussed its philosophy, but he didn't, philosophize about things—he was a real Zen. We never talked about Zen, never. That's something that, that helped me find a good zinger for the audience in China too. I said he's, sort of, like Han Shan, the forest-hermit who's the mythic poet of Cold Mountain.

So I attribute an important development in my work to having had the opportunity to work with him. John died before doing anything with the panelization format—and we probably would have used panelization if he had returned in fall of 1992. He liked the multi-panel paintings that I'd shown him, he liked it that in a painting like that you can't tell if something is intentional, if something is supposed to connect between panels,,and what's just accidentally connected. You start to make associations between what's in the panels and it makes you look closely, starting anywhere in the painting. It has a little bit of an edge because, well, you ask yourself, is that line, is that blue line supposed to connect to that red line over there?

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah.

MR. KASS: And sometimes that's just the brush having done that.

DR. KIRWIN: That's just, that is, that is, that is by chance that that's the arrangement?

MR. KASS: Yes, and, and it's an expression of the tools. The first big brush that I built for John began to wear out so it began to make these little lines automatically where the hairs would separate. We still have the brush. I built him brushes that were various widths. Eventually there were 5 or 6 of them. They're in the storage building, you need to see them before you leave. There's a six-foot wide brush with handles, a brush that you sort of have to wear, you know.

DR. KIRWIN: [Laughs.] You mean on your feet?

MR. KASS: No—but you step into it like a hang glider. John used it in River Rocks and Washes and when we perform *Steps* we use these big brushes. Now in the catalog, yeah, you'll see there are pictures of wooden mixing troughs and big brushes.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh, okay.

MR. KASS: So when we began doing exhibitions we'd often show all the stuff. We'd show the troughs, the rocks, the brushes, the scores, the feathers, some try-out sheets, etc. He painted with feathers, there's some of his feathers up there. The rocks became wildly popular.

DR. KIRWIN: I wanted to ask you about that because you also exhibit your paint trays, these—

MR. KASS: Yes, well I did a series of Tono Polyptychs. When I was working on the [unintelligible] beginning with these, but then I did a hundred and something of these somewhat circular format tondos, there's one hanging in the living room, I began saving the trays in which I mixed the paint. And we've found an adhesive that was strong enough to hang the trays on. Then I had the Lexan caps made for them. So what the tray is, is what the

paint was and the residual effects are paintings that painted themselves. So there again you get that, you get a tondo that Justin Nissley, my studio assistant in 2005 and 2006, would help me with and if the circle connected, great. If the circle didn't connect, great. You know, it made it different. And Beverly Reynolds, my dealer, who really did a lot for and has recently passed away, really tragically last year. She didn't show the tondos, that's interesting, but she wanted to show the trays, but I said I wasn't sure it would make sense to show the trays without the tondos. But when we did that it looked fine. So anyway. So that's a whole body of work that followed the earlier polyptychs of 1988 to 1995. Then I began painting movement of water subjects again. Not particularly realistically, but I also began working with heavy impasto oil over the, over the watercolor under shaved beeswax. The painting in the living room is like that then I'd squeegee it down. There a big painting in the living that's oil over water mediums under wax on paper.

DR. KIRWIN: Okay, so that, so then you have the layering of the watercolor, wax and then—

MR. KASS: Yeah, I was mixing the mediums up and they go back to this very, kind of, transcendental, rocks and water sort of imagery. I just found one online in a gallery in Santa Fe that's from a Washington collection—some of my paintings from that time were stolen from a warehouse in Washington, DC. I thought it might have been a painting that my friend Glenn Barry owned for sale. They wanted \$28,000 for it. I was impressed.

DR. KIRWIN: Wow, yeah.

MR. KASS: 'Cause I'd never really sold anything from that period. And then they and more than \$20,000 on it. But I guess it's old. I guess, you know, they were painted in 1983 or something. And then I went to a wave form, there were extrapolations that had to do with the *Winged Earth* that had to do with these wave like forms that looked like Native American masks.

DR. KIRWIN: I wanted to ask you about the series that you did as one of the workshops with that water creature, Vorticella.

MR. KASS: The, yeah. They're a, that's a gigantic polyptych that's in the Nevada Museum of Art now. It's name the [unintelligible] because I had a patron, Miles Horton, who's R.J. Reynolds grandson, and I used the Horton's studio up there and I made that gigantic painting for a site specific work in the Newman Library on Virginia Tech. It was going to go in a particular area of the public space with angular walls. And I also made those Riding on the River polyptych that were all pieces made by the workshop participants connecting dots that were determined by chance just on a piece of paper. And then two or three people would paint on one each. We could put a little bonding agent into that paint and then it would get all the glazes that went into the big polyptych so you almost couldn't see what was there until it was washed off then you get that, in in there. That painting is in entry. It's in the computer science department where it just got left hanging years ago.

DR. KIRWIN: I want to read something that, that you quoted in your Morris Graves catalog that seems so much connected to that work and it's about his painting *Trout* and you quote Morris Graves saying, "It is an imagine of the visual experience that is submerged, present and not present, seen and unseen, an area where it could not have been more distinct, elusive once again like a 'journey' of stuff of what it is". Does that resonate with you in terms of what you thinking about or doing or connecting with between your work and Morris Graves's work?

MR. KASS: Yeah, I have great sympathy with a remark like that. Morris would say we are moving through the stuff that we are, you know.

DR. KIRWIN: Thinking of things that are not able to be seen, but making seen and having that part of the process of your experience of the work and your making of the work and making something present that isn't present and understanding this experience of art making that way.

MR. KASS: Yeah. Yeah, I don't feel like I was, Morris could be, he didn't like being called a mystic and things like that. But I said, "Well, you, sort of, made the bed, now you have to lie in it Morris." I mean, you know, coming out of the fog on the lake in a canoe wearing a hooded jalava to greet guests on the shore, and describing things as "jemmy," and talking about paintings that paint themselves, and talking about seeing the things that can't be seen. My vaudevillian mother would have called that "shtick," you know.

DR. KIRWIN: [Laughs.]

MR. KASS: But—

DR. KIRWIN: Well the Vorticella—

MR. KASS: It was real for him.

DR. KIRWIN:—are, I mean, those are little microscopic—

MR. KASS: Yes. Okay—

DR. KIRWIN:—things.

MR. KASS: It's a little single cell, very common aquatic life feature that Miles Horton looked at under with a microscope and studied all the time. So to really get back to what you asked I—I called that the *Vorticella Polyptych* because we Vorticella, we have illustrations of them. We done the crust extrapolated them from into view forms and other things. We have a lot of source material for the imagery that is both buried in subliminal and happens in *Broad Channel*, that painting. The gigantic painting, which I call the *Vorticella Polyptych* was—you have the picture of it there?

DR. KIRWIN: Yes, it's in this catalog, which is the Mountain Lake workshop.

MR. KASS: I did some—

DR. KIRWIN: I may need some [unintelligible].

MR. KASS: I do a, yeah, I did some [unintelligible]. Like any workshop we sort of built up to it with introductory sessions. In the studio the Yellow Sulphur House I painted with people and made s couple prototypespaintings that relate to the *Vorticella Polyptych*. I invited other people to put elements of the underpainting in those paintings, and then I apply the washes in it. I was trying to operate with a few participants in a peer situation like John would. I used chance operation. I continued to use chance operations in my work for a number of years to get started in a lot of things.

DR. KIRWIN: These are some of—

MR. KASS: Then once the painting felt like it was started—

DR. KIRWIN: That big piece is there but there's some of the works about it.

MR. KASS: Yes, that, this is be one of the student drawings, the participant drawing in the Vorticella. "Writing on the River" we called that group of polytychs. Yeah, these would be an example of something that several people might haven painted on, each connecting points on the paper using a different colors, then the panel would have just gotten many dark glazes from the big brushes. Then it would be, have been rinsed off, then these got assembled in this way. So this is, these are the signature works that were made by volunteers in the workshop who had actually painted something in the underpainting of the gigantic painting. But these also were designed to fit the space in Newman Library in a particular way. "Many paneled," that is what the word polyptych means. And I have some of these and some of these are, yeah. Yeah, *Broad Channel: The Vorticella Polyptych*. is the complete title of the work. That's because in working with the tangled vine images from Ripplemead, we just decided we'd baptize them Vorticellas because that's what they reminded us of.

DR. KIRWIN: Okay.

MR. KASS:—they were beautiful ragged tapestries hanging out over the Winter River. And Miles loved that because he loved the microcopic life forms that live in water, it was like dedicating the painting to him. And it and the "Writing on the River" pieces were installed in the Newman Library for more than ten years. These [pointing at the painting in the catalog], all of these zigarat shapes, those simply occurred in the desgn according to the chance operations that we used to determine the overall layout of the panels. It just happened to come out looking like this, which gave the picture a wonderful internal rythm—

DR. KIRWIN: Really.

MR. KASS:—a really strong element of the work. They've shown it quite a bit in Nevada.

DR. KIRWIN: [Laughs.]

MR. KASS: Here it is in the museum photographed with a big Donald Judd—

DR. KIRWIN: [Laughs.]

MR. KASS:—next to it. I think win.

DR. KIRWIN: That's great.

MR. KASS: I'm [unintelligible] who painted this, you know. So I'm very appreciated.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah.

MR. KASS: I don't know if they've shown it just lately, but this Muscarelle polyptych is the same thing. It's the Muscarelle family who endowed the Muscarelle Museum at the College of William and Mary who sponsored the Mountain Lake exhibition and the workshop that I did with [unintelligible] there. And this now hangs in the Presidents Board Room at Longwood University in Farmville, Virginia.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh.

MR. KASS: It's the only art work hanging in this elegant Georgian room with a high ceiling. And through a succession of president's now they've all kept it that way.

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DR. KIRWIN: Okay, we're back again, and it's the disc four, July 9th [actually 10th] continuation from disc three.

And we were—we went to the very end of the tape and missed a little bit, so now we're going to backtrack and talk about another project—at another workshop, a very fascinating event with methane gas.

MR. KASS: Yeah, one of the most important workshops in my opinion from every point of view, and in particular the collaborative aspect of the workshop, was in 1994 with Mierle Laderman Ukeles, the artist in residence at the New York Sanitation Department, who came down to work with us and the Anaerobic Lab at Virginia Tech with Dr. Greg Ferry, my colleague, who is an eminent scientist in microbiology. And this involved a performance at the outset of a lakeside ceremony at nearby Pandapus Pond, and really engaged the community in some basic lessons in Biology and the history of Biology as a science.

Methanogenesis, which is what it we called the workshop, is the process of how methane gas is generated, and in particular, how anaerobic microbes, play a critical role in the global carbon cycle. Greg Ferry initiated this workshop by doing a reenactment at Pandapas Pond, near to of Count Alessandro Volta's 1776 experiment that resulted in the discovery of methane gas, and changed thinking about invisible, essentially biological life that had been place since Aristotle's time.

And this was a performance that the community—well, about a hundred people in the community participated in. And Greg Ferry first gave a lecture on microbiology, on the global carbon cycle, on Count Alessandro Volta and how this experiment is the foundation of modern microbiology, standing waist deep in water in Pandapas Pond like John The Baptist, at the mucky end of the pond, where he then took a stick and a copper cone that we had made for him.

The cone was made of copper to look intentionally kind of antique because of Count Alessandro Volta's original experiment. And the cone had a tube on the end with a clip that sealed off the tube. He placed the cone in the water, let it partially fill, pushed the stick into the muck at the bottom of the pond that released bubbles. The bubbles displaced water in the cone, and indeed the bubbles were methane gas, produced by microbes, essentially. And then we could open up the clip on the top of the cone and light the gas.

And this experiment proved that these previously thought to be dead, inert areas, and always associated with foul things, were full of life and were essential contributors to the invisible life world of microbiology and how it contributes to our life.

Everybody then went into the pond with cones that they'd been instructed how to make at home from mostly refuse materials that they'd found around their own property. This was an important part of this workshop. Everone was in the water collectiing methane gas, and lit the flames to it. So it almost had a religious kind of connotation. "Shall we gather at the river," you know?

DR. KIRWIN: That must have been spectacular to see all those flames.

MR. KASS: And people loved it, yeah. And Greg said he felt that he had taught more biology by participating in that workshop than he had ever done in a classroom.

DR. KIRWIN: Wow.

MR. KASS: That was moving because it took more than two years to bring him around to be willing to do the workshop with Mierle. He ran a very advanced anaerobic microbiological lab at Virginia Tech, and had a lot of graduate students and post docs. And sadly, shortly after this experiment, Penn State hired him, and took him, and the post docs, and the entire lab with enhancements away. We was in a situation at Tech where he felt that the new provost wasn't supporting his area sufficiently, and scientists are more nervous about support and get more easily upset than artists even. So that was another kind of affinity. He hated having to make that decision because he loved it here but Penn State made his program a much better deal. And we're still in touch.

DR. KIRWIN: And what did Ukeles contribute to the event in terms of the design of the project?

MR. KASS: Well, Mierle had met with Greg Ferry and we acquainted her with anaerobic microbiology and its role in the global carbon cycle and essential waste remediation, and that was all new to her. She had been doing performance art and installations, covering garbage trucks in New York with mirrors, doing installation pieces at the transfer station in New York City, trying to do things out on the Fresh Kills landfill in Staten Island, you know. And this was new for her, and of course it was a further probe by the Mountain Lake Workshop into scientific collaboration and the emerging theme of invisibility.

So we took her through the labs and showed her everything. She then developed a number of performance pieces, somewhat ritual performance pieces that involved us building a blind-drawing screen for her, so that participants could reach through holes in blue rip-stop nylon barriers and make drawings they couldn't see.

The "blind drawing-screens" were intended to support this idea of separation between the brain our ego is housed in, and that's rational, and the body that has brains essentially all over it. At the core of Greg Ferry's research is amino acid chains and the study of those peptides, and the audience got a deep understanding of that. I mean, it was—the science is sort of amazing. Greg Ferry's the man who developed the microbe that would remove petroleum products from ground water.

I believe I may have told you yesterday that we had this really tragic kind of meeting when Mierle was here with the Waste Management Institute, the Waste Policy Institute at Virginia Tech that has a single client, the Atomic Energy Commission. And they were hoping somehow through an interactive community education project we could engage public and understanding the diabolical proportions of atomic waste disposal or lack thereof that's going on in the country. They actually asked Greg if he could develop a microbe that could eat it, and of course he said, "That's completely impossible. This is the most unstable material on the Table of Periodic Elements, you know."

What we did do as the centerpiece of the workshop, though, is we worked with bentonite [clay], vinyl clad bentonite, or vinyl clad with bentonite clay landfill liner that had been donated to us by a Texas company, Gunseal, I think. They delivered it at the loading dock, at the general loading dock at Virginia Tech. It weighed two tons. Bentonite is very viscous. It has number 10 rating in permeability on a scale of one to ten for slipperiness. It's even more impervious than, like, polymers. So most landfill liner in the United States is coated with bentonite clay, which is used to some degree by potters, usually as an add mixture in their clay. But if you were walking on a concrete floor that even has a small amount of and bentonite clay powder on it, a little water, like, you would start sliding, you would have trouble standing up. Yeah.

DR. KIRWIN: Slippery.

MR. KASS: Very, very slippery. So everybody thinks that in their garbage dumps and, you know, landfills, that all of their disposed of things are happily decaying and decomposing, and they're not. They're sealed in these big burritos of Gunseal bentonite clad vinyl wrappers. Just unbelievable.

DR. KIRWIN: Whoa.

MR. KASS: So the loading dock was quite upset with me because there was this giant roll of nearly immovable stuff, you know. We had access to the old printing plant then, which was just abandoned. So we did most of the workshop performances in there. One of the things, we set the blind drawing screens up and people inscribed on the softened bentonite clay with their fingers, just identifying personal calligraphic mark making while supposedly concentrating on this idea of what the body does that is outside of our awareness.

We also made a steel cart, that is a really rather beautiful object out of steel pieces that were found, and fabulous wheels, steel wheels and all, just found in a vacant lot. Everything that was used in the workshop was essentially made out of discarded things. We did that with Jiro Okura quite a bit, too, with *Souls on Garbage*. When people open their eyes and look at what's lying right around their property or in the vacant lot next to them, they're stunned at how much stuff is there. Of course, people couldn't bring soft garbage in.

We developed the blind drawing screens for her to kind of dramatize this firewall between the body and the mind. The body keeps us locked out of it because we would definitely screw it up, you know. It means you can eat a pickle and follow that with a scoop of ice cream and somehow survive the experience. What happens is these little barrel shaped amino acid chains immediately transform to remediate the new material, immediately adopt to handle what you've just swallowed, otherwise it would take maybe years to digest the pickle and you'd never get to the scoop of ice cream.

I mean, as Greg pointed out, digestion would happen anyway. But it just wouldn't happen in this extraordinarily

designed way that it happens. It makes sense that we aren't aware of these things because so much of this is going on in our body in different ways all the time. This workshop really changed the audience's mind about how they felt about the mind/body distinction.

DR. KIRWIN: Well, that's also in keeping with the idea of chance and indeterminacy, that inability to control in a way because you can't know exactly what you're—

MR. KASS: It's for our own good that the body keeps the door locked to its intelligent sub-systems. Yeah. So the blind drawing screen was the metaphor for that—and what people were instructed to do, what Mierle did is first they washed their hands in a cleansing ceremony. We had soaked planks that we cut out of this bentonite material and put those two-at-a-time in the two blind drawing screens.

DR. KIRWIN: So what was the result of that—

MR. KASS: We used the screens and the cart to inscribe the wet bentonite with our hands and with sticks, like to see this boy doing. This steel cart that the little boy is lying on here [pointing to a photo in the catalog], everything in this was completely found in a vacant lot.

DR. KIRWIN: What was the—you inscribed these marks, and then did it dry? I mean, what was the result?

MR. KASS: Yes. What happened is because we had the use of this big vacant space we could just leave it on the floor and in enough days it would dry, we would roll the blind drawing cart over it, and people could reach through it with their hand. Again, they couldn't see what they were doing easily. The idea was to make it somewhat away from you and also make it somewhat uncomfortable, you know? Because after all, this is the muck of the dead, rank part of the pond, but we're having now to concentrate on it and to try to relate to it.

The object of this workshop wasn't to get people to love microbes, necessarily, because they can be dangerous things, too. It was to get them involved with what is going on in nature at this level that is customarily beyond their perception, not normally involved with their perception.

Also, once this all dried, we were able to build a wall out of the bentonite planks, which had the real kind of resemblance to a primitive hut, and we were able to exhibit the blind drawing cart and blind drawing screens in proximity to it with one rolled out piece of the bentonite, of the larger bentonite that had been inscribed. We had an anaerobic chamber and a tank of nitrogen there, which in Greg's labs, you stick your hands into these long globes and you work in an oxygen free environment, thus another concept we associated with the design for the blind drawing screen was to mimic that.

It's quite a nice Joseph Beuys-ian sort of object, and we've used it for other things because the whole idea of drawing things you can't see or even touching people or shaking hands with them and you see their head over it, but it's just useful to have a blind drawing screen around. Yeah. And it's a nice object. It's made of that ripstop nylon, bright blue, you know, with aluminum tubing and all. It sort of imitates a pseudo-scientific looking object.

Not long after the workshop we exhibited all that in the Armory Gallery at Tech. As soon as everything was dried we went right into the second summer arts festival and created the next exhibition out of it. We've also done Mierle's workshop as a run-out. We met Mierle in North Carolina did it at Appalachian State University, and it's all in storage at the Taubman Museum right now until it's decided what to do with it. It's quite beautiful. I think that she loved the experience.

And we also made paper, dark blue leaves. We made paper out of intense blue pulp. Paper, the way it's made, is implicitly anaerobic, you know, oxygen free. So we did a number of things, and that involved people drawing on shellacked Masonite with water-soluble crayons, and using a vacuum table to transfer that imagery onto the blue paper that was made in paper molds and screens. All of this tried to demonstrate imagery made by withdrawal of oxygen, the anaerobic world.

And we exhibited those, and the Volta experiment cones. We were increasingly now exhibiting everything that was part of the workshop. And the community really identified with this one. It was also critical because so far this was the most advanced in terms of penetrating a community of scientists, you know, the technological communities of specialized value and interest at Virginia Tech. And it was successful, and they liked it, and their graduate students and post docs really liked it.

But, as I mentioned, unfortunately, we eventually lost that great lab—this was a potential Nobel laureate program, you know. Penn State knew exactly what they were doing. They'd been trying to do this on and off for

years. Universities do this to each other. It's amazing. Pennsylvania, you wouldn't think they would have the money, you know. But that was exciting. We kept up with Mierle for years.

Ronald Feldman took the cone that Greg Ferry used to lead the Volta experiment and put it on his desk at the Feldman Gallery, Ronald Feldman Gallery in New York, and I never got it back. I should still get it back one of these days.

DR. KIRWIN: Now I'll know what that is if I go in there.

MR. KASS: Well, if he still has it in there. He thought it was such a beautiful object. Yeah, I agreed with him. It wasn't his object, but anyway.

DR. KIRWIN: That was the copper one that the—

MR. KASS: Yeah, we took everything up there and showed it to him because she wanted him to see it. It's funny.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh, yeah, he—

MR. KASS: I think that he had identified Mierle as a particular kind of individual artist, and he didn't want—he didn't like the collaborative aspect of it. He was a big fan of Beuys and all that and I had acquired a Beuys piece from him. This is also another completely contradictory aspect of him and what people like to think about art and artists. I don't mean Ronald Feldman in particular.

We ran into this often in the art world. We were suddenly dismantling the idea of authorship, mitigating it, possibly spreading Mierle's work into too many hands, which she was already doing herself. I mean, if you put mirrors all over a garbage truck, you can say, "I thought of that," but what about the people reflected in the mirrors? But I liked her workshop a great deal, and that led directly, eventually, to Art Volant and the projects that we did in virtual reality and physics with Jackie Matisse.

DR. KIRWIN: Can you talk about that a little?

MR. KASS: Yeah. That's not part of the Mountain Lake catalog because it happened in 2002, and it was in supercomputing engineering and physics. And I had to outsource—I had to organize the technical resource for that one everywhere.

Jackie is an artist who made kites and is interested in movemented form. She'd been very close to Calder, very close to Tinguely, Jean Tinguely, and Niki Saint Phalle. They were like very best friends. Jackie was Marcel Duchamp's stepdaughter.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh.

MR. KASS: So Duchamp had a family, a secret family. When he married Teeny—the way it all went down, you know, Teeny was married to Pierre Matisse. In 1947 in the great blizzard in New York, they decided they would all go into Manhattan to the gallery, and Duchamp, Max Ernst. And his wife, I can't think of her name.

DR. KIRWIN: She was over a hundred and she just died last year.

MR. BISESE: Mary Oppenheim?

MR. KASS: No. No, she was more like a surrealist. She was married to—

DR. KIRWIN: I know who you mean.

MR. KASS:—Ernst at the time. We'll just have to put that in the notes. I'll be able to look that up.

DR. KIRWIN: I'll think of it.

MR. KASS: All packed into this car in the course of the nine hours it took them to get to the gallery, first trying to go over the—

DR. KIRWIN: Dorothea Tanning.

MR. KASS: Dorothea Tanning—right!

They couldn't—they simply couldn't get access. They tried three ingresses to New York, and ironically they didn't go in through the tunnels. I don't know why it didn't work out. They were all together in the car for so long that people broke up, other people fell in love, Teeny ended up with Duchamp—leaving Pierre Matisse. I can imagine this could have been one of the backseat driving situations of all time. And she married Marcel, who had really

never been married to before. So he immediately got Jackie and her brothers as a little family, and they'd go out and live at Villiers Sou Gres outside of Paris.

So Jackie had an interesting family. I mean, she had worked on the paper cuts for her grandfather, and, you know, helped him when he made that work late in life. He had several people who painted the paper blue and did all the cutting-out. And she made the *boîte-en-valise* with Marcel. But she told me that she didn't know anything about *Étant donnés*, even though she was working so closely to Duchamp on other projects. Only Teeny knew about that. So he kept that a complete secret for 20 years.

DR. KIRWIN: Wow.

MR. KASS: Yeah. So it was natural because of her interest in movement and form to ask her if she would want to do a project in virtual reality in light and that kind of gossamer visual imagery. And virtual reality seemed to follow nicely onto another variation on reality, like moving in the direction of invisibility, you know.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah. What type of audience did you have for that?

MR. KASS: That was very interesting because we couldn't really have just the local audience. You needed to have a CAVE, and we did have a CAVE, a virtual reality chamber at Tech. And we had some commissions and contracts, like from the Department of the Navy and things for certain things they used the CAVE to simulate—certain situations, motion platform for rough seas, and that kind of virtual imagery.

I had to organize the technical resource for Jackie's project by going to the electronic visualization lab in Chicago, which had the University of Illinois behind it, and recruiting their researchers and scientists to actually create the code for this. No one at Tech would do it. I don't think anybody at Tech actually could do it at the time. And the University of Buffalo came in on it with Dave Pape—one of the top "coders" in the country. And I went to supercomputing engineering conferences to kind of meet people, to meet mega-nerds, you know.

The University of Illinois is where the CAVE started—the CAVE was actually invented by artists. And virtual reality and the early technological investigation of it was artists who were interested in the physics of it as well. A little known fact, but then it quickly became a supercomputing engineering thing, and there are still artists interested in it. And Illinois still has an interface program in super computing and the arts, so does the University of Buffalo—and now Virginia Tech does too. We have the Interdisciplinary Center for Art and Technology at Virginia Tech in the Moss Art Center. We'll talk about that later.

But I was able to organize the technological resource to construct this piece, and we could show it on the platform we had in our local CAVE. Tech traded on the success of our project very heavily at the time with certain sponsors and patrons they had who were really engineering people. But this was the huge step forward in the idea that art could instigate new research at Tech.

Then the formal showings of it were broadcast over the World Wide Web, which back in 2003 and 2005 that was still a big deal, who could go to a supercomputing engineering conference in Amsterdam and use the most bandwidth. So we had nine or 10 places around the world who would all be streaming a kite tail, a kite tail completely constructed in virtual reality that could be operated with a wand. And the piece eventually had a flat screen adaptation that was shown in a Chelsea gallery in New York.

Now Tech doesn't have a platform that *Art Volant* can even be shown on, but we still have the piece, but the kind of platform we were using for it, the SGI Platform was dismantled.

We showed it in France and we showed it in Italy and in Belgium. And it was really fun because I got to travel with my last remaining graduate students and other people to these supercomputing and engineering conferences where the people I found were mostly obsessed researchers in flat-screen and CAVE virtual reality, or bankers, since it interfaced nicely with security interests that the bankers had. They'd be headhunting for people with cutting-edge skills in these things. And the medical community that was always looking into these things as a way of bringing doctors and scientists together to share in consulting, mutual consulting.

The problem with CAVE technology is the resolution isn't really good enough for detailed medical display. So if you're projecting a big jawbone out with 12 people being able to look at it together, they can't get finely resolved enough where they can do that kind of research yet, at this point.

DR. KIRWIN: Is this sort of thing where you would have different experts in different parts of the world looking at the same—

MR. KASS: Yes.

DR. KIRWIN: —thing and consulting in that way?

MR. KASS: Yeah. And a lot of it has now moved to high-res flat-screen, which has gotten much more sophisticated and can be quite three-dimensional.

DR. KIRWIN: So the piece, it only exists in code or something like that?

MR. KASS: Yes. The code still exists, right. Dave Pape, the maestro code master, worked with Shalini Venkataraman, they did the code.

DR. KIRWIN: So it's kind of like a dance was performed, and you'd have some sort of record of it.

MR. KASS: Yeah, it's like all infinite, infinite, infinite sequences of zeroes and ones and things where you have to have the kind of mind that can pick out a glitch. It's like looking at everything at once, yeah. So it actually had a nice connection with anaerobic microbiology in that way.

You know, the interface of these things is eventually going to happen, and the basis of DNA research is anaerobic microbiology. And they'll eventually figure it all out. And just like in that movie *The Imitation Game*, where he really builds, you know, Turing builds the first computer. It completely changed the world. I mean, I love it how Winston Churchill said that Alan Turing made the single greatest contribution to the Allied victory in World War II.

DR. KIRWIN: By breaking the code.

MR. KASS: Clear as a bell. Of course, then they more or less tortured him to death—socially. Right?

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah.

MR. KASS: Anyway, *Art Volant* was an exciting workshop. Jackie Matisse loved it, and it had legs, and Harvard said it was the best project at the Amsterdam conference. I got, you know, paid some respectful attention. And the university kind of—that and Mierle Laderman Ukeles's *Methanogenesis*, the *Ki No Ichiku* project that we did with the Woods Product Research Center, which we did with Jiro early on.

There was always that little—from the mycological foray on, we were trying to reach into, oh, a technological or science discipline that had a value orientation of its own that we could parallel with our aesthetic value orientation, you know, bring them together. It worked.

DR. KIRWIN: It sounds like the last two really, really worked on a much more elemental level of being on equal footing, art and science.

MR. KASS: Yes, I think they did, and I think, without being fully aware of it, it was basically a model for ICAT, and that was useful. The art department that had always failed to define itself had finally defined itself.

DR. KIRWIN: Can you explain what that is? That's an acronym?

MR. KASS: Interdisciplinary Center for Art and Technology. It's a graduate program.

DR. KIRWIN: Okay.

MR. KASS: Where they have five or six scholarship lines, and where I think what they need to have now is a highly specialized graduate faculty. Right now, it is very art oriented, but we don't really have the—we don't have the people on board yet who create programs. We have people on board who use programs.

DR. KIRWIN: When did that start at the--

MR. KASS: Two years ago.

DR. KIRWIN: Two years ago.

MR. KASS: Two or three years ago. I guess its nascence was about three years ago. It started when the new Center for Creative Arts opened at Tech where the facilities for the Cube where things can be shown, and the workrooms and classrooms that are used by the graduate students in that program are located.

DR. KIRWIN: Well, it sounds very much like your work was fundamental to the establishment of that program.

MR. KASS: That's what people have said. I gave it a talk at the 50th Anniversary of the College of Architecture, and one of the former department heads stood up and said, "Did you realize you were providing the model for this program?"

This was now at least long after that period during which the art faculty always felt threatened by anything like

that. They thought it would be the end of the art department. Well, I think that the end of the art department would have eventually happened if the art department not changed.

DR. KIRWIN: Not doing anything, yeah, exactly.

MR. KASS: Yeah, change is a good way not to go away.

DR. KIRWIN: Right.

MR. KASS: So a huge part of our effort in the workshops paid off. I loved it.

DR. KIRWIN: Well, it just seemed so natural for Virginia Tech to, you know, play to its strength, and to bring together the best of what the university has to offer in a collaborative kind of program like that.

MR. KASS: Yeah, they're definitely trying to do that now. And I think it's just, you know, what they have to do is just keep it up, keep going on with it. And I'm optimistic, but. So it sort of had a little happy ending. Now, in retirement, I get to wobble around in a completely different academic environment.

Now they want to build a visual arts center. That wasn't really a principle component of the new Center for the Arts. There are three galleries in the Moss Center, but they're smaller galleries. It's a huge building on the campus that had been a cafeteria before it was remodeled and expanded. It is right on Main Street.

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I mean, you won't believe the campus when you see it. And it's the Moss Center, because the artist Pat Buckley Moss ended up giving them \$10 million.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah.

MR. KASS: After the deal with Heywood Fralin and the Taubman Museum fell apart, Buckley Moss just gave them \$10 million. So it's the Moss Center for the Arts at Virginia Tech.

DR. KIRWIN: Wow. That Buckley Moss.

MR. KASS: She's a wonderful person. My graduate student and I worked on this with Francis Thompson, who runs the art collections at Capital One, they're good friends. And she—

DR. KIRWIN: Is she still living?

MR. KASS: Yes—very much so. Her life story is quite amazing. She was severely handicapped with—what is it that she had? Dyslexia. I mean, really, like couldn't read and things, and she reinvented and re-directed her life through art.

And, you know, some people are very critical of her work—Peter Rippe probably lost his job at the Roanoke Museum because some of the board members so resented him doing a retrospective of her work. And I said to them "Well, it makes complete sense to me that she should have the show. I mean, you know, her work is serious work. You don't have to collect it or like it, but it's not without genuinet merit of its own." And then he became director of the Buckley Moss Museum in Waynesboro. She's very philanthropic, and really generous person.

DR. KIRWIN: Fantastic.

MR. KASS: So he suffered for quite awhile because of their bias. Though, Peter accomplished a lot during his time in Roanoke because he took the Art Center out of a house on Cherry Hill and got it into center in the Square, and got museum accreditation from the Association of American Museum Directors. Peter Rippe did only good things for the museum over a 10-year period, and his reward for that was they ousted him. No good deed goes unpunished—huh? Well, they wanted the museum to be sexier or something. A museum is always going through changes. It's probably going to be going through some more soon, so.

DR. KIRWIN: I wanted to ask you about teaching. You talked a little bit yesterday about the very beginnings of teaching and how tongue tied you might have gotten at the prospect of addressing a class of students.

MR. KASS: Yeah, as a young teacher I was really nervous in the classroom—kind of afraid.

DR. KIRWIN: Afraid? How has your teaching philosophy changed over the years or your interactions with students?

MR. KASS: Well, I told you I stuttered terribly as a kid, and I had to develop performance techniques to overcome that. So as long as I didn't have to read anything didactic or whatever, I could work around it. And I just got so comfortable working around it that I just stayed in perpetual mode, which means there's a real chance I don't know who I am. Yeah. I got interested in Buddhism. That could be true of everybody. I'm not worried about false self anymore. I've moved into a more advanced existentialism. What happened never happened. Yeah.

DR. KIRWIN: Well, I can speak from Eddie's [Bise] experience that he says you were a wonderful teacher and a great raconteur in the classroom.

MR. BISE: The painting classes that I took were wonderful. It was two and half hours to paint, and the teacher never asked you to remember anything. It was just that you were doing and—

MR. KASS: You were doing things Eddie! And we were always critiquing and doing stuff all the time that, but they liked going over to the slide library. I'm not sure the slide library liked it, but

MR. BISE: And you would walk around and you would see a certain color and you would relate it to someone else in the room or someone else in the art world, and just on and on. And just being in the room listening to you talk, I'm getting very nostalgic hearing you, listening to this. I feel like I should be painting.

MR. KASS: What we did later as I became the senior painter eventually was we would start every class with students doing short presentations on artists that had come up in the previous class, and they would go do the research on that artist who they usually would never had heard of, but it would come up in a critique in relation to something that somebody was doing, and then they would take five minutes and show images and something about that person. So everything would get contextualized.

And students did that, and they liked that. You know, you'd think they would have balked at doing that kind of research but they'd get their slides pulled, and then they'd find out "Oh, this is what Adolph Gottlieb did," you know.

Very interesting. They were interested in it. And then they would key off each other and all be working in different directions. Little movements would get started. So you'd get little clusters of two, three, sometimes four people whose work had a relationship.

DR. KIRWIN: But they didn't have a graduate program then, right?

MR. KASS: No, the only graduate program was in Art Administration, and that was only for the last five years that I taught, and I only had three or four students in it, and then that got squashed and it precipitated my early retirement, which wasn't done in anger at all—it was just that common sense prevailed. It's just as I explained to Dean Knox, I said, "I'm finished. I can't do anything because you've taken the resources that it took me years to develop to do it away." You know, I didn't really need the money from teaching at this point—not because I was rich particularly. I just never spent any money. I mean, I didn't have time. We'd drive 15 year old cars, you know.

DR. KIRWIN: How do you think art education, studio art has changed in the university setting or college setting since you've been teaching?

MR. KASS: Well, as we said yesterday, I don't think the MFA program is rigorous enough to produce people who are necessarily prepared say to be in academic life, which is the real purpose of that degree. Just like any academic degree, PhDs and things, it's really a try-out to see if you can manage the disciplines that are required to do good scholarly documentation, do good citation. Your PhD dissertation is like an exercise. You're supposed to go on from that and do reliable research.

The MFA degree used to require language and more art history study, and used to require a real written documented dissertation that was put on file. And I have one at Chapel Hill that talks about the importance of the Washington color school to me and various things that influenced what I was doing, and still it was only 20 pages long.

For some reason studio people seemed to resent that requirement, and the foreign language requirement, and over the years have kept chipping away at it to where it's now "all I do is my work," you know. I think that since an MFA is really a degree to prepare you to participate in an academic setting it should be more rigorous, I guess you could say it's really an excuse to have two years to work on your own art, but there have got to be other ways you can get that experience, you know. So that's my only criticism of it.

DR. KIRWIN: Have many of your students gone on to MFA programs?

MR. KASS: Yes—and some are teaching at universities. Three of my students got full scholarships to Skowhegan—and all kinds of—my students did very well in general. I was happy about. Again, not wanting to go to college,

but, you know, deciding to be an artist is such a desperate decision. I was always very careful to tell my students "Only do this if you can't be happy any other way, but if it's really true that you can't be happy any other way then definitely do it." And that would lead to the advice about oh, how to manipulate their parents, how to, you know, how to get the family just to be happy they still have a functioning kid. Yeah. It was very hard with the Korean kids particularly because the families are so driven for them to do—to be successful.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah, I just ran into David Chung. He's a friend of ours from Washington and he's gone off to teach at Michigan, Korean artist, but he was talking to me about how he dropped out of school, and how this was a tremendous disappointment for—the family was just devastated.

MR. KASS: What did they want him to major in, though?

DR. KIRWIN: Gosh, I don't remember. He told me that it was simply he couldn't—

MR. BISESE: They wanted him to be a doctor.

DR. KIRWIN: He couldn't finish school. He did ultimately finish, but it took him a very long time.

MR. KASS: Yeah, a couple—

DR. KIRWIN: Is that Cardinal keep—[A Cardinal if flying into the glass window of the studio.]

MR. KASS: It just loves the glass.

DR. KIRWIN: He wants to come in.

MR. BISESE: He was at the door over there and it came around.

DR. KIRWIN: It's a pretty bird.

MR. KASS: I had to council a young Korean boy who loved art and said, "My father will kill me if he finds out I'm taking art courses." And it was really serious.

DR. KIRWIN: David is tremendously successful. Chung. And—

MR. KASS: Well, that's good. I mean, maybe having that kind of push-back actually helps. It's not easy, so maybe your family's helping you if they're not amking it easy, right? So I enjoyed my teaching life a lot, and I still get to enjoy it in that I have interns that come out to the studio. They still ask me to give lectures occasionally. I'm worried they're going to ask me to go on these graduate committees. That'd be a lot of work. I mean, they don't have to pay me anything. Yeah. But it's fine, and I'm not looking to be paid for anything.

I think that just having a good background in theater and performance, as well as visual art, would help the graduate students today. Knowledge about that would have made a contribution to some of these graduate presentations that this current crop of students recently did, and it seems to me you'd have to know a good deal more about the modern history of technology in art, you know,—is it Oskar Fishinger? Yeah. People in the first half of the twentieth century, who were already experimenting with new technologies—people who Cage was very interested in.

DR. KIRWIN: How many people were in teaching in the department, in the art department?

MR. KASS: Well, I'm not sure, but we have five historians now, which seems miraculous to me given that we had only one when Eddie was here.

DR. KIRWIN: Wow.

MR. KASS: And then it was two when Jerrie joined the faculty in 1978, the other art historian was Bob Porter, a wonderful teacher who was also a sculptor. Jerrie was assigned to the Division of Humanities, a program that doesn't exist anymore.

DR. KIRWIN: Was it art history and art together or separate?

MR. KASS: It was studio art and the extra wheel of art history to load up with these huge cattle call classes to build our numbers. Some members of the art department did not want an art history program because that wouldn't help. They just wanted them to teach one section of survey or art appreciation after another. Now Derek Meyer had gone to Iowa. I'd gone to Chapel Hill, and Dean Carter had gone to Indiana. All of those schools had real art history programs.

Victor Huggins had gone to Chapel Hill, too, but he didn't really support the art history program. I mean, he supported all of the changes that watered down the MFA degree. And he was my good friend and I liked him a lot, but we had some disagreements at different times over the years. But that's a different story.

DR. KIRWIN: Was he at—

MR. KASS: Tech.

DR. KIRWIN: He was at Tech then?

MR. KASS: He brought me here.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh, and then didn't he go to—I guess—

MR. KASS: No, he just retired. He had been at Vanderbilt before coming to Tech.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh.

MR. KASS: Victor was critically important to the growth of the Studio program, but he was always dissatisfied by the administration and things. He was open to a lot of different things.

But Derek and I always, coming from studio perspectives, supported art history. Also, in a long range view, it was essential for the program if it was ever going to have any credibility. So now they have a Material Culture degree. That is a graduate degree.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh, they do?

MR. KASS: Yes. That's what art history, I think, is increasingly being called now, Material Culture. And there's a renewed interest in some of the Mountain Lake things as well as other objects and collections because they want material for the Material Culture program.

DR. KIRWIN: They have to look at objects.

MR. KASS: Well, I think that it attempts to integrate exhibition with the study of objects, too. And they're trying to regain the Art Administration program, which makes perfect sense.

One of the kids who's working for me this summer goes to George Mason University, Clayton Willis. He got in touch with me through the Taubman Museum because of my work with Merce Cunningham. He's studying classical ballet at George Mason University, and has wanted to be a ballet dancer since he was a kid growing up in Roanoke since he was six. He comes from a very religious family. What do you do when you live in Roanoke and have a kid who wants to be a ballet dancer and he really means it? There aren't many resources. But Clayton is making it work. He's very athletic. He's the one who's resizing all these images. He's also double majoring in Art Administration, which I think is very smart. And he's actually in New York right now performing with a company in Brooklyn. George Mason University has a serious dance program.

DR. KIRWIN: Yes, they do.

MR. KASS: And he just wanted to work with anybody who had worked with Merce, you know? When I interviewed him he sat right there in Merce's wheelchair.

DR. KIRWIN: He got a vibe?

MR. KASS: Well, you know, with Merce, Baryshnikov was often around. And I mean, he really had the respect of the Cunningham Dance community. And students loved going up there with me when I would visit Merce at Westbeth. The dancers are inspiring. I mean, you can imagine. Spending a decade around modern dancers was really interesting. They usually all smoke. They can have dreadful lifestyle habits. Their feet are often all bandaged-up because the training is so hard on them. Merce used to say: "It's not natural you know!" There are physical therapists on call all the time.

DR. KIRWIN: Well, could you talk a little bit about your current work?

MR. KASS: I make these works using stencils the designs for which I derive from my drawings or from actual things that I find outdoors or in the studio—like sycamore bark or my Chinese carvings. Well, you know, my use of patterns isn't new. They seem to just be a development from my use of paper towels and pieces of paper and things that I'd throw down on the paper sometimes to establish just simple geometries. I cut out shapes that I would define on a viewfinder. I like drawing on Plexiglas.

When I developed this—drawing on large sheets of plastic—I was teaching *plein-air* painting, painting out of doors, you can't get students to realize there aren't rectangles in space, you know, trees don't really have lines on them and stuff. So if you teach them to draw with a viewfinder instead of just doing, this looking at open landscape, they kind of get it. They get the idea of it's just putting a window around it—it's like theater. And getting enough of the illusion of a real space that that we suspend disbelief, we think it is the real thing. We participate in that fiction or illusion, you know.

Well, I would take the class to Smithfield Plantation on the Tech campus, and I would make a quick sketch, which was important for them to see me do in a few minutes because otherwise they'll take a couple hours doing this, you know, and if you take five minutes outlining a foreground, a middle ground, a background, the furthest background of a scene as simplified considerations you impose on the scene you're looking at—and just get those simplified elements in proportion, as just four lines crossing the paper. These are fairly developed drawings that I'm showing you, but closer to what I'm describing would be a piece of Plexiglas that might just have four lines surrounding the outlines of the edge of everything that you think is in the foreground, and then another line connecting everything you decide is in the middle ground, and similarly a line joining everything. Everything that is in the background, and the finally the furthest background, which may be an independent shape like a cloud.

And then you put the piece of plexiglass up against a window and trace the lines crossing it on a piece of paper and draw a rectangle around the plastic. And then my advice would be finish the five or so of the most important shapes that you think are in the scene, just draw around those shapes, you know. And so they may draw the outline around a house, a fire hydrant on a curbside, the frontend of an automobile, something like that, maybe a particular tree.

And then I would have them take that group of lines and shapes and quickly trace that onto another piece of paper, and working with four or five grey tones between white and almost black, and I'd ask them to squint at the scene again, saying, "Ninety percent of this is going to be in some shadow or grey tone. Only about 10 to 15 percent might be in bright light or the white of the paper. And starting with the lightest grey tone—I'd ask them to fill everything in with the lightest tone that they feel has any shadow on it at all, and put the next shadow tone in those areas that are the next darkest in value value, you decide—and so on, finally putting in the very darkest shadows."

Well, this is causing them to make a lot of abstract considerations about the scene. It's like looking at contrasting areas of light and dark patterns, you know, instead of subjective things like trees and houses, the things they're accustomed to identifying in their field of vision. The range of light and dark pattern is much greater than most people realize. And that pattern of contrasting values, that's what you have to aim at if you want to create an illusion on a two-dimensional surface. This exercise allowed students to quickly derive good proportions from space in the natural world and contain it in a rectangle and establish a very simplified pattern of contrasting gray tones, or values. Suddenly they would see that they'd made a quick sketch drawing of a place that looks locked like a drawing of the place. And sometimes they'd be shocked.

I said, "Well, now you have a quick sketch. And I'd joke, so, now when you're at a party, you can just draw something." I did this exercise with M.C. Richards and I did this with Cage. I gave John Cage little drawing lessons. He was getting interested in stuff like that. Well, he said, "I can't draw at all." I said, "But you really can. It's just a matter of learning to make something by breaking it down—like you already do in your work."

So I would get a long piece of Plexiglas, and I could quickly make a relatively proportionate quick sketch of the landscape around Smithfield Plantation, and then, if it was a sunny afternoon, I'd put a big piece of paper down on a piece of cardboard or foam core. I would tip up the plastic on the end of the paper so the shadow of my black lines would cast along the whole length of the paper, and I'd work with a pencil and quickly lay-out the drawing on the paper in the late afternoon sunlight. And of course, it's distorted, right, but that it isn't the way it's going to look when it's painted. Our perceptive consciousness will correct for that, or overcome that.

And the students would watch me doing this, you know—which was my idea to begin with. And so the idea of doing it was so that then they could do it. In two and half hours I would layout and paint an entire watercolor painting, on a five- or six-foot long piece of paper. That would really get them past the idea that they can never get anything done!

So it was fun. At very least they would learn something about how to take that big, open space out here and put it into a rectangular format. At very best, they would really feel comfortable about taking ideas like this and going to town with them in their own work.

DR. KIRWIN: So when you were working on a piece of Plexi like that, you're literally holding it up to the—

MR. KASS: If it was a small piece of plexi like the students usually had I hand-held it. But if it was a larger piece of acrylic, I put it on an easel when I worked on something like that.

DR. KIRWIN: On an easel.

MR. KASS: We used to work on glass years ago. Then I switched over—because of safety.

DR. KIRWIN: So you're looking through it, and making those decisions.

MR. KASS: Yeah, when it's hand-held you had to practice a little to get used to doing it. You don't need to make the whole design at once. I'm looking through it, moving it close-up or at arm's length—taking in the scene that it frames for me. And then I'm making where I'm standing, so as I begin drawing the elements of the visual field that I've selected in the viewfinder—I can stop and rest when my arm gets tired—and then—keeping my position—resume making the design for the drawing by fitting the lines on the plastic back into place. An enormous amount of selection is happening when you're doing that—but most of it is simply just following what your eye is drawn to. A group may make such studies in the same place—but they will all be different because of individual interest and selection. It's like if you take out a group you will get amazingly unique results. What I did at Bennington for the North Country Workshop was we pick one place in the back of that big studio building that had big glass windows and I had 10 pieces of Plex about this size for 10 people, and they all looked out, standing near each other, they looked at the same general scene and all made their drawings at the same time. They couldn't look at each other's, and they all drew it. And they were all different. Yeah, because they each followed their own visual interest in the space.

Female Speaker: The selection.

MR. KASS: So that was very revealing to them. And then, you know, I would keep encouraging them to, like, for strategies for them how to add elements. And then we put them all together and frame them in one frame with a backing. So you get this really interesting black labyrinth of tangled lines that's all of the same place. And I said, "This is just as good as a representation of this place, maybe more so, because it's 10 hearts and lives making this interesting layered image." And they loved that.

DR. KIRWIN: That must have looked great.

MR. KASS: And we gave it to the school.

DR. KIRWIN: The big 10 pieces of Plexi together in a sandwich.

MR. KASS: Right.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah.

MR. KASS: Like in Jiro's workshop, the participants will pick up sticks and stones and then throw them on paper, and then Jiro would lead them in a single-brush painting exercise called "Zen Breathing Lines." It was a great introduction to traditional Asian single-brush painting,

Participants would make their ink by grinding ink sticks on slate inkstones and then paint repetitive lines around the sticks & stones, following one after another so everyone painted on all of the papers that were set out on tables all over the room. Their exercise was simple to hold the brush properly and move it gently up and down while keeping the tip on the paper. Their lines soon become very natural and even in sync with the other participants—and in that way they resemble breathing. And we have done this workshop a lot sometimes when we are also performing *John Cage's STEPS* or at public, charitable events usually. We did one with Anne Holton once in Roanoke for CASA, (Special Court Appointed Child's Advocate. It's a charity that gets lawyers for kids. And we were asked to do a workshop that would engage the public at the Jefferson Center then would be included in an art auction. They wanted me to go over and paint something that they then could sell. I said, "I would rather do this thing that involved your whole constituency, Judge Trumpeter, everybody, Senator Warren."

They were a little intimidated at first and didn't want to touch the brushes. They didn't want to get ink on their hands. We arranged it so they wouldn't do that. There were a lot of really pretty girls in my class and in the workshop at that time. And the boys couldn't get them to do it. The boys could handle the tables with the stuff, but the girls would go out get these guys, businessmen and lawyers and all, and get them to paint the *Breathing Lines*.

So we made like 10 or 12 on Mulberry paper and everyone who painted signed them in pencil at the bottom of the sheets. We dried them with hair driers, you know, and then they auctioned them off. And the option at auctioning them off was if you bought one, for a very small cost of materials and fee, we would mount it the traditional Asian way for you, and also I brought a charcoal-color plain wood frame stock. I had a wholesale framing account. And we framed them for the purchasers at cost. We'd add a little bit on to all of that, to cover our gas and lunches but it was still not very much. They would all get sold. They would sell for \$400 and \$500—it was a really successful event for the charity auction.

DR. KIRWIN: Nice fundraiser.

MR. KASS: Yes. Nice fundraiser.

DR. KIRWIN: And great performance.

MR. KASS: A really great performance. It was great for the student workshop assistants. They learned how to hustle. Right? They learned how to go on the floor and work in teams, things they would need to know as an artist.

DR. KIRWIN: Great learning experience.

MR. KASS: Flirt. Yeah, they really did—Ann Holton really liked it. I always wanted her to run for governor. She's great. You know, she has a, what, she went to Princeton. She has a Yale law degree and has been a judge. She's, like, incredibly qualified. I had the temerity to ask her that. I said, "When are you going to run for governor?"

She said, "Oh, I spent too much time in the Governor's Mansion already. I can't do that." Judge Trumpeter said, "I'll quit the bench and I'll campaign for you if you do that." Yeah. She's an expert on sort of children and the law. She's really, you know, I wish more people like that would take up bigger leadership roles. She sort of has in having to be married to the Governor, you know, a governor and then a senator. That must be terrible lot of work.

DR. KIRWIN: Do you think ahead for—do you have in your mind, like, some series or thing you want to do in the future?

MR. KASS: Yeah, I'm working with these ideas I get from looking at the shedding sycamore bark along my river walk, and these drawings that I'm doing now that are pinned-up over there., I'd like to do another, big multi panel painting. And I'll probably start by trying to do, like, a smaller one that's maybe 40 inches high, maybe in 50 or 60 inch segments, and just see what that would look like. I'd like to try to use both water media, somewhat resembling the way these are done, and then in the oil-emulsion and pigment that I'm currently working with.

DR. KIRWIN: Do you ever work in—do you ever make sculpture or work in other media? Photography or?

MR. KASS: Yes, I've done some digital photographs. I showed photography in my show at ZONE: Chelsea Center for the Arts. I had more than 200 works in that show.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah, I meant to ask you about that.

MR. KASS: It was a huge gallery.

DR. KIRWIN: You photographed the works in—the works that were in the show in your home. Is that correct?

MR. KASS: Well, we showed the tondos and trays, but we showed them all over the walls, up and down, a very bad strategy for selling anything because it's like—

DR. KIRWIN: People don't want to go, "I want that one"?

MR. KASS: Allan Frumkin used to say "Show people as little as possible. If you show them too many things, they won't make a decision." So when I did the trays and tondos together with the scrim, with photographs, with a lot of layered acetate drawings I'd done in Japan and places, it was just overwhelming. It was like a group show of my own.

DR. KIRWIN: I would think there would be the opposite of effect, like somebody would come in and go, "I need to pick one. I need to pick which one I'd buy."

MR. KASS: Well, we sold some trays. We have sold trays, and we sold some tondos and drawings. So, you know.

DR. KIRWIN: But you used photography in that, and the photographs were—

MR. KASS: I took the tondos out and around this property, and I would dislocate them by putting them on a steel easel. And then I'd photograph them just in some natural setting that intuitively appealed to them. So they looked like dislocated train signs or traffic signs. And it was just a dumb idea, and that's what I would print up and show. Or I'd lean one against—next to one of the Chinese scholar stones in the living room with the blue rug, and we had blue chairs at that time, and photograph that. So they would be habituated or set into an environmental location.

And that started by accident because I was always photographing things in this garden, and sometimes I would really just like the photograph of the painting with all the greenery and stuff behind it. So essentially I was doing that. Down by the river I'd put the easel in the middle of the river and put a tondo on it and photograph it. And the giant tondos. There are some that are 100 inches. We developed a way of hanging those two sided, so they'd hang from the ceiling in the middle of a room.

We did a big show at the Appalachian State University—the Turchin Center for the Arts. Hank Foremen organized it. That was almost 200 pieces, too, but that was an art center show, so it really made sense.

But since then I've been showing in situations that we've tried to focus on succinct groups of works, like I'd make these silk collages like you see over the fireplace upstairs. There are a lot of those. And there—when Morris Graves died in 2001, I made those as a sort of homage to him because they remind me of his spirit birds and his masked birds, particular formats.

He has a painting I really liked that's based on *The Vedas*. It's called *Each Time You Carry Me This Way*. And I build up to writing about it in the book about why I think it's a great master work, you know. It's a very straightforward painting that has its basis in Hindu mythology, which I describe in the catalog. You can have that if you don't have one.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh, thank you. Okay, great. Well, what else would you like to talk about? I've think we've pretty much covered the waterfront. You've been a very good talker. I think there are some wonderful insights to your work and your life. Do you want to talk about—

MR. KASS: We did ask Jack Kerouac if—because he had an affair with Diane di Prima, and he also kind of hung out with Leroy Jones before he was Amiri Baraka, you know, and he became very militant. I went to hear him once in Raleigh and took a date, and I mean, it was the most scathing attack—

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—on white America I've ever heard, and we were about the—there were about three white people in the audience—

DR. KIRWIN: White people.

MR. KASS:—in the huge audience, but we asked Kerouac if he ever have had an affair with Leroy Jones, you know, the kind of thing a college kid would say. And he goes, "No, but I suck spirit cock." I always loved that. Yeah, I'm not gay, but I suck spirit cock. I thought that was terrific. He was a natural, yeah. I think if Russ had just—I sent all that material to him and if he had just picked up on that and kept it more in tune with what Kerouac was like, it would have really worked. I've never seen the movie that I think the Brazilian guy made out of it, but it didn't go anywhere.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah, there was. Was it just recently there was a movie about—

MR. KASS: Fairly recent, it was "On the Road," fairly recently. It's been, yeah, it's too bad. Russ's considering doing it as a play. You can make money off plays apparently, but then I said well then you should collaborate with me because I had to undergo the whole thing and I think it's a great idea. Russ doesn't collaborate that well. I'm still his little brother. He still picks on me and stuff like that and steals my cookies. I would love to see him do it just to do it, to document that period. It was a great format for retelling "On the Road" would be to do it as a flashback and add something it sort of needs. Did you ever meet Allen Ginsberg?

DR. KIRWIN: No.

MR. KASS: I would take the—if Ginsberg was anywhere in proximity, I would take the students or if they were with me in New York. He was there with Gary Snyder once and they were doing readings and I took the kids that were up in the city with me to meet them, and Allen was the least paranoid person I've ever met. I mean Allen always in love. He was always in love with a new person. He'd always have some kid in tow or somebody that he was completely over the moon about. Just amazing and he'd go to VMI and give passionate antiwar talks to the cadets in auditoriums and get invited back and get standing ovations. How did he do that? Talk about artist of stature.

So Cage developed all these little families, little colonies all over the world of—not because he was looking for devotees. He just felt he was climbing such a glass mountain, you know, that he needed to create his own culture which he did and he's a good model for creating culture. And in some ways that was a strategy of the Mountain Lake workshop to create a community that could make its own art, you have to instigate creating a culture. And for a time, we had that and did that. We had that in the anatomy at least of the past. I think it'll be much more a part of the future because the technology looks like it's implicit in it.

DR. KIRWIN: Seems like it, yeah, that it exists just to do that, to create a community of interest around things.

MR. KASS: Yeah.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah, except you never actually see the person in the flesh.

MR. KASS: No, but you're doing it with that crowd sourcing project.

DR. KIRWIN: That's right, that's true. Yeah, that's, yeah.

MR. KASS: That's freely given from the heart. That has the conditions of the beginning. You know, that's why we—everybody had to volunteer to be in the workshops and we—I wouldn't give credit for anything for a long time. Retroactively, the College of Architecture wrote it up as Independent Study and some students did get credit and stuff for things they had done, but if it had been officially for credited study—they would have treated it differently. So—

MR. BISESE: Come in with that resignation of being obliged.

MR. KASS: Yeah, they had to do it because they really wanted to and the environment was much more supportive of that though, and the university was to some degree on my side. I mean we took—a lot of students went to Europe and would go on these big projects, went to China and Japan with me. I wished I had known me when I was a kid I mean. We'd get anxious. Parents would be flocking out here all the time to see what their kid was getting involved with, big house at the end of the road, strange old, odd couple. Well you're taking my son to Vienna. I just wanted to meet you. Yes, I'm going to feed him to the devil. Actually they really liked it and we were friends with a lot of the parents of the people who went on the workshops.

MR. BISESE: This year?

MR. KASS: The last workshop that we completed was the one with Jessie and Sally Mann and Liz Ligouri called *Three Graces*, and that's a—the first—it's a two part one. The first part of it was called *Metempsychosis* which was a mother daughter workshop with the daughter's close friend Liz Ligouri who's a laser light artist. I worked with Sally some years ago when she was trying to develop a new way to present her photographs so we beeswaxed some. When Justin was my assistant, she would send these big prints down here and we'd destroy them essentially by trying to figure out how to maybe distress them. She ended up using diatomaceous soil to coat them and give them that matte finish like the one up in the hallway has. Unfortunately, it's a very delicate finish, and then she likes showing them with no glazing where anything can scratch that. I don't know how it will be cleaned in time, but what we finally came up with that she was interested in doing was Jessie, after having been her model for so many years, wanted to paint over her mother's photographs. And we ended up working with these giant dyptichal of Sally's and Jessie painting on them, and we showed these at the Taubman Museum and we had a big show at Capital One of everything from that workshop. We got support from photographic paper companies and things. Liz Liguori would create laser imagery on the paper as well, and so that was—there was a lot of interest in that collaboration just because of the dynamic relationship between mother-daughter, model and artist, and then the artist deconstructing the mother's work.

DR. KIRWIN: How old was Jessie?

MR. KASS: About 30. We made a very interesting video documentary of that too. It was only a few years ago. We did it in 2011 and 2012, and showed it in 2013. I haven't started anything new since then—except we have continued to perform John Cage's *STEPS*. I wanted to do a workshop with John Waters that would have involved the university and hopefully would have resulted in making a full length feature film called *The Lyric*, based on a small town in a rural area of the South trying to save its old vaudeville/movie theatre. We proposed that the university give Wayne Newton an honorary doctorate degree from Virginia Tech. Wayne Newton is from Roanoke. But when Wayne Newton tried to buy a farm in Charlottesville, he was denied because he's Wayne Newton because he was considered too shady, or something. Debbie Reynolds when she lived in Roanoke for a while. We opened a car dealership together where I provided the exhibition and the art activity and she—

DR. KIRWIN: You and Debbie Reynolds?

MR. KASS: Yeah, she—

DR. KIRWIN: Just more stories.

MR. KASS:—she provided the entertainment—as a hostess. Right after that—

MR. BISESE: At a car dealership?

MR. KASS:—she got—she was married to a real estate developer here the car dealership belonged to Bob Bell, a

brand new Nissan dealership, a big place, and I staged a big exhibition for it and Debbie hosted the reception. You know, you've got to keep trying new things. Well after she got divorced, she went out to Las Vegas and bought, you know, got that casino that she ended up selling to the American Wrestling Association and made \$50 million or something.

DR. KIRWIN: I didn't—I don't know—I didn't know, did not know that.

MR. KASS: She would be wonderful for this film, see because she has—and Tab Hunter is still alive and is raising appaloosa horses though he's getting old, and Debbie's apparently not that well, but is—see she's saying don't count me out. And John Waters was approached with this idea by Julie Huntsinger who used to be a casting agent for films like *Hairspray* for him. He doesn't like doing anything that's not completely his idea, but I gather he liked the idea. So it's an idea to give away. Now with our new president, it's feasible. I tried to talk to Charlie Steger about it, but I realized it was a step too far with Minnis Ridenour and the old guard still in place they weren't going to give Wayne Newton a real honorary doctorate. And Wayne Newton would do it—

DR. KIRWIN: Think of all the money he would give—

MR. KASS:—for an honorary doctorate.

DR. KIRWIN: Think of all the money Wayne Newton could give to Virginia Tech.

MR. KASS: Well yeah, he's gone—he's been bankrupt a couple times, but apparently he's back and he's still—

DR. KIRWIN: He bounces back.

MR. KASS:—one of the last Mr. Las Vegases.

DR. KIRWIN: Yes, he is.

MR. KASS: Right, Siegfried and Roy have kind of bit the dust.

DR. KIRWIN: Bits the word, yeah.

MR. KASS: That would be just fun to do and it has a little perversity about it, you know, and I could see where he could put the extra kink in it. And frankly with the changed culture at Tech, they might really like that. So there, that's the idea. I'm ready to take the lunge, and the Lyric Theatre still needs saving because we're running out of time. Yeah, John Waters is about 75, I think or 74.

DR. KIRWIN: I guess he is. I don't know how old he is.

MR. KASS: Did you see his commencement speech to RISD?

DR. KIRWIN: I watched it, yeah, I watched it on YouTube.

MR. KASS: It's fun to see it once the first time, and then showed it to somebody else and I said it's not that interesting, yeah.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah, it was a good—it was good.

MR. KASS: It was upbeat. It was good. I liked his brief biography. I liked it that his father paid for making *Pink Flamingos*. His father must have been dragged, as James Joyce would say, as far through the garden as he could go. That's standing by your son. So you're going to make the filthiest movie imaginable, you know. I did like his comment about *Hairspray* being his Trojan horse. They accepted it. I was in the gates. I was in the city now.

DR. KIRWIN: Now it's a film and a Broadway—I mean he's total crossover.

MR. KASS: Oh yeah, the theatre part, he must be making really good residuals. That's why Russ wants to do the potential play. He said, "I don't know, I found out there are all these ways you can really make money with theatre and if I wrote this as a play, it would be picked up on."

DR. KIRWIN: Well he could do it as a play and then the play is successful and they turn the play into a movie. I mean there's all kinds of reinventions like that.

MR. KASS: He's got to just, you know, he's a good screenwriter. A couple of students were reading the versions of the screen script we're studying here and said this is the best shooting script I've ever read, but he just got the personalities wrong and the details wrong, wasn't going to be interesting enough I thought. It wasn't a vulnerable enough character like he really was. Yeah, and innately kind, not a mean spirited character at all.

Kind to the point where it hurt him, and he'd say things that, you know, can't be an artist of stature and say Allen Ginsberg wants to be the Jew Commissar of beat. It's incorrect, but it was said lovingly. I told that to Ginsberg and he laughed. He loved it. Ginsberg just had unmitigated love for Kerouac.

William Burroughs retired and then went to live in Lawrence, Kansas. He wrote all those interesting little stories about his cat and things, but when they were drifting around New York, it was a different New York. It was a lot more fun, and I guess it's almost complete now, only Gary Snyder is still alive, right. Lawrence Ferlinghetti, he must be in his 90's.

DR. KIRWIN: He's still alive?

MR. KASS: I think so. I guess he can still afford to live in San Francisco. Did you ever go to San Francisco long ago before it became the way it is—

DR. KIRWIN: No.

MR. KASS:—when it was like the men's rescue mission was this second impression that you sort of got at south of the slot on Mission Street.

DR. KIRWIN: No.

MR. KASS: Really seedy. You felt like San Francisco was, in Steinbeck terms, a place people stopped and stayed there because they hit the ocean. It wasn't a boutique city at all back then, yeah. It was gritty. That's what Kuspit was saying to me about New York when Ronnie Cutrone recently died. Oh, he was a go-go boys for the Velvet Underground, Ronnie. He was an artist, sort of a graffiti artist. He used to round up transvestites for Andy Warhol to photograph and stuff. And one of his last interviews, and Kuspit went up to visit him. He said, "New York needs its crime rate back. The city is so sanitized." It's like, you know, he was talking about the '70s. The city was really falling to pieces. It was when Mayor Koch sort of saved it. You could—it was just dirt everywhere and before SoHo really got cooking, you couldn't go down Crosby Street. There was so much garbage on Crosby Street, you couldn't drive down it. And Donald said, "Well we don't need the old John Recky Times Square city of night back." You know, I mean, Times Square, when you, you know, you knew it was dangerous when you were a kid. All those game arcades and all that stuff, you knew if you went there as a little 14 year old, you could just never be seen again. Now it's chichi, but what Donald said is right. The city needs its grittiness back, but if Russian oligarchs keep buying everything and being absentee, you know, the Plaza Hotel is half unoccupied with all those apartments all the time. There's still a little bit of a hotel there.

So that's that. I can't think of any late anecdotal material, other than we talked about how Morris would periodically throw me out and then weepingly would welcome me back X years later. The longest he—

DR. KIRWIN: Didn't know that you mentioned it was weeping. I didn't—

MR. KASS:—didn't speak to me was 17 years. Yeah.

DR. KIRWIN: Well that's a—

MR. KASS: Well during—that was during the most active period when I was useful to him—it was useful to have me being the person authenticating his work and being out there while he could stay behind his myth you see. Then we had the great reconciliation. Then I gave the talk at the Tacoma Museum of Art that he had his people at and which I was told I should show slides during it. So I showed slides of some of his houses in Ireland and places like that and he felt utterly betrayed.

DR. KIRWIN: Because you had exposed his life in that way?

MR. KASS: Yes, and he was just, he was just ranting at me constantly and yelling about Marshall and Helen Hatch and how they were just status seekers who used him. Marshall paid his taxes, things like Morris could be too bohemian to do and, you know—

DR. KIRWIN: Was this before or after the—he took you back? Is this—

MR. KASS: Right after he took me back, right before I got thrown out again. And then had to work in the archive at the house upstairs with Robert for a whole week in preparing Robert to give his first ever public talk which he completely collapsed in which I was sitting with him on the dais and had to get him through it. He honestly sobbed. He has since become a good presenter who has made a number of public appearances.

DR. KIRWIN: Who's Robert?

MR. KASS: Robert Yarber was the Vedanta monk who took care of Morris and was devoted to him for many

years.

DR. KIRWIN: And he had to speak on a panel discussion?

MR. KASS: We were at an environmental conference at College of the Redwoods and I was there to present on Cage and Graves, and some—I have a good talk I can give about Morris's artistic development and background, and Robert was then going to, with me on stage, talk about Morris. We were going to have a conversation, and we worked on this for a whole week after I'd been thrown out. I got thrown out when Morris stopped his rant for a minute and said, "So what do you think about all this?" And I looked at him and I said I think you're crazy and you cannot tell your friends from your enemies Morris. And he seized up, he stood up and he said, "Out." So I went out the side door of the kitchen and Robert ran around the other side of the house and let me in the back door of the house. Morris knew I was there for the entire week because he knew the purpose of why I was there, and that I was working on this. And then he even hosted an event at the end of the conference where everybody was just teary eyed over being in his beautiful environment at The Lake. I just watched him at work again doing that voodoo he did so well, you know.

DR. KIRWIN: He invited people to his house for this reception?

MR. KASS: Yes, and it had—it was like even though he wasn't officially talking to me, I had to work this out and negotiate it with Robert. Robert thought it would be a really good thing to do because he thought Morris was really depressed. Morris didn't want anybody to come out to the The Lake. Then Morris agreed to have people come out to the house for an hour. Then he agreed maybe people could come out to the house for an hour and a half after the conference, and just the principle speakers and there were some very distinguished environmentalists and well-known people there, you know. And then of course once we got out to the house, Morris began enjoying the attention and the company, and this often happened. I'd witnessed this on other occasions. Then he didn't really want people to leave, but people were afraid to stay because they'd all been so instructed, you know, and—

DR. KIRWIN: That's funny.

MR. KASS: I know. He didn't want to be photographed, but he had gotten photographed quite a bit over the years. He knew he was a natural. That painting you might want to read about, *Each Time You Carry Me This Way*. That's Vishnu in his boring incarnation, being carried from river to river at the end of the cycles of the universe. It starts everything over again. It goes from everything being like complete illumination to complete bereft.

DR. KIRWIN: It sounds like your relationship with him.

MR. KASS: Oh yeah. No, he came in from LaGuardia Airport when he came to the Whitney opening. He was picked up by Rob Kanak who was one of my former students and a member of the Mountain Lake Workshop, and Morris is in the back of the car saying, "Some people think Ray Kass is the real Morris Graves. Well I'm a living artist!" Then he went into Tom Armstrong's office and burst into tears out of gratitude for his show—he was so moved. I mean I was just sitting there. I wasn't even invited to the after party that Marion Willard hosted for him, you know, the ostensible reason he came to New York was Blanchette Rockefeller was having a special party honoring Marion Willard and of course he had come for that. He really wanted to go to his opening at the Whitney and, you know, it was a wonderful evening. I John and Merce showed up and were in the *New York Times* the next day in photographs with him and everybody made nice, you know. And he spoke to me briefly at the opening, mostly for decorous purposes. He didn't want it to be conspicuous that—

DR. KIRWIN: That he wasn't speaking to you which would have been—

MR. KASS:—he was—had no intention of ever speaking to me again—I thought.

DR. KIRWIN:—really odd, okay.

MR. KASS: A few years later he said, "I am so sick of people telling me how much they like your book." He didn't have, you know, he—Laughlin Phillips and Willem had decided that they only would give Morris a week to look at the book before it went to press—Morris had shown signs of being so difficult that.

DR. KIRWIN: That's smart.

MR. KASS: And well, if they had let him see it earlier, he would have wanted to be totally immersed in it, but I was begging them to show it to them. They said, "It doesn't matter, you're already a burnt effigy." It's like, you know, I have a letter here from Graves saying he doesn't even know you, yeah. I enjoyed it in a perverse way—what choice did I have? And later I really got into role of I got ofing be the real Morris Graves in some ways because Morris would never answer letters fro museums about his work. The Carnegie Institute wrote to him

about one of his paintings in their collection. Morris wouldn't answer any letters. I'd have to go to the Hirshhorn and look at their works to answer questions or sometimes authenticate them. He would deny having painted things he definitely painted. He was truly an *enfant-terrible*. He could do it. But he was also being genuine, you know. It all came from his childhood—you can read a good accounting in my text of his childhood illnesses, his mother's, you know, Christian evangelism. His mother believed that he was born under a sign from God. Guy Anderson's mother ended up having a big influence on him as well, because Guy—that's how he ended up living at the Father Divine Mission in New York. They were the real progressives. Morris, at the point he met Guy Anderson, knew everything about all things British in furniture, all things English in propriety and things. He got that from his mother. Guy Anderson knew all about art and before Guy, Morris wasn't really yet an artist. So as an older friend when Morris was still very young, it was Guy Anderson's influence that led him in the direction of fine art in which Guy had some education and experience. Maybe Guy saved him from being a, you know, an irritable antique dealer. He was like six foot four and a half inches tall as a young teenager—

DR. KIRWIN: You said irritable artist.

MR. KASS:—Antique dealer.

DR. KIRWIN: And you feel like you've—you reconciled in your relationship with him?

MR. KASS: Oh yeah. I think he, and Robert told me this, he was actually grateful for the book. He came back from being a nearly-forgotten artist. I arranged for John Huston to visit him up there when I was interviewing Huston on the set of "Annie" for the book because Morris when he lived in Ireland was very close to Huston's wife, Ricki Huston, and also close to Angelica when she was a child. So I would have, I would have phone calls with Angelica Huston who had very great memories of him. Jack Nicholson would answer the phone. It was when they were living together. Yeah, and Huston went up to visit him in Northern California with the photographer Eve Arnold. He took this famous fashion photographer to Morris' compound, and Morris hadn't seen John Huston in years. Of course, she took photographs of the house and the property and Morris and everything, and he allowed all this, right. So John published an article about it in *Paris Vogue* that's a big center feature article about Morris Graves's extraordinary private environment with lots of photographs which of course I got blamed for. Yeah, my fault—

DR. KIRWIN: Because you connected him.

MR. KASS:—Yeah, I guess—this is what Huston did and I guess Morris decided I somehow facilitated it. I wasn't even there, you know, just a whipping boy par excellent.

DR. KIRWIN: Boy, yeah.

MR. KASS: Yeah, and I mean he got sent five copies of the magazine or something, they cost \$35 a copy, you know. Morris burned them—he was enraged by it. I bought one copy which got absorbed by the Phillips Collection—I think that Willem borrowed it. I never saw it again. It's somewhere in their archive. They have letters too that I should really have, but like I had letters with drawings in them from Angelica Huston I would bring in. There all somewhere at the Phillips Collection, but I don't know how good account they kept of these things. I have Graves's letters to me which you'll get those I guess.

DR. KIRWIN: That's interesting because that would be so great.

MR. KASS: I only have a couple of letters from John Cage. Most of our correspondence was done differently, you know, but I'll show you. You need to—we'll have to look at what's in that file cabinet that's all the Mountain Lake Symposium correspondence and the letters from Russ, I told you are at the University of Texas. But I have some other—I have a nice correspondence with Michael Tarachow over illustrations I did for a book of poetry by William Matthews, *Sticks and Stones* drawings that are in the Boston Public Library archive. Sinclair Hitchings collected a lot of drawings when he was at the library. And I've been—I was thinking I'd probably give Bill's letters to Chapel Hill, but I don't know where his son—what his son, Sebastian, has done with his literary estate. Unlike Russ, he wasn't being collected by the Ransom Library in Texas which is I get what all novelists want, but he was an important poet and won a National Book Award. And it might be that they went to Cincinnati or Yale, wherever he went, but I suppose if you have them, they'll have more public access. This is a nice correspondence just about putting an illustrated book together.

DR. KIRWIN: Well it's about your papers though and so it's his letters to you that really belong in your papers because they—that's—

MR. KASS: Yeah, it's a correspondence with me and with and of course correspondence from him. I just found a bunch of Russ' letters I didn't know I still had. He advised me I sell them to Texas rather than give them to them

—  
DR. KIRWIN: Well—

MR. KASS:—but I'm going to give them these I think. I copied them. I copied the last ones.

DR. KIRWIN: Yeah, I know some of those things go to Ransom Center.

MR. KASS: I guess that covers it all. I can't think of anything really racy. I'm trying to think.

DR. KIRWIN: Racy, oh yeah, can you think of anything?

MR. KASS: Oh, I gave Ava Gardner a couple drawing lessons. They weren't racy!

MR. BISESE: [unintelligible]

DR. KIRWIN: All right, there we go.

MR. KASS: That's right. It was in London.

DR. KIRWIN: How'd that come about?

MR. KASS: My first trip to Europe. I went with Laurie and we arrived in London and it was indirectly through my friend Daniel Lang and Sylvia Guirey—an artist and sculptor who we met with Daniel when we arrived.

DR. KIRWIN: I don't know who that is.

MR. KASS: She was a friend of Suzi Gablik's and Jackie Matisse—but I couldn't have known that at the time because I didn't know them at all at that time. I was in my mid twenties, and Daniel Lang was an artist friend of mine, who—had rented a house in Chelsea I guess. It belonged to Samantha Eggar, right. She was in residence. She was living there with Ed Ruscha, the artist, who I had never met who was a very interesting person, and Daniel—

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—was taking Ava out. Essentially squiring her around to events in London. He was 10 or 12 years older than I was. And Daniel and Laurie both got very bad colds and Daniel asked me to step in for him. I had met Ava at Ronnie Scott's, a night club in London. That was sort of a hip club to go to. And then next thing I know Daniel is calling up saying, "Will you take Ava to Covent Garden because it's like I can't take her anyplace." So I guess I saw her about three times to go to events. Laurie was sick in the hotel and couldn't go out. I would go over to Ava's apartment. She was taking care of Jack Hawkins at the time—British actor who was in *Bridge on the River Kwai*. Really wonderful British actor who was dying of cancer upstairs. She was like a saint. She was taking care of him literally. And I would take her out to something at Covent Garden or some place else for a play, and, you know, I got to spend time with her. I didn't know a thing about her really. I had heard that she—she came from a farm in North Carolina so I asked her about that. And she said, "You mean Grabtown?" Her father was a subtenant farmer. I think that there's a little Ava Gardner museum there now.

DR. KIRWIN: Really?

MR. KASS: Yeah. I awkwardly asked her if she knew Frank Sinatra and she said, "I was married to him." That's how naive I was!

DR. KIRWIN: One of his many wives [Laughs.].

MR. KASS: Well, she was married to Mickey Rooney and Artie Shaw and Frank Sinatra twice I think. I took George Melly over to visit Ava one afternoon. He was a writer and newspaper critic who was also a popular jazz singer who was performing to Ronnie Scott's. She had a busy social life.

DR. KIRWIN: Going on on the side?

MR. KASS: Oh, I don't know. I think that Ava was in the category of "*some people do what they want.*" Yeah. A free spirit. And she was still working in films and could manage her career, you know? Unlike some of her contemporaries. I took her to Rita Hayworth's birthday party. I forget where that was. It was outside of London a little bit. This is all because of Daniel getting sick, you know?

DR. KIRWIN: How long were you in England?

MR. KASS: For a couple of weeks. A few weeks and then we went to Paris. We were in Europe for the better part

of that summer.

DR. KIRWIN: So when were you—you taught her—did you give her drawing instructions?

MR. KASS: Yeah, Ava wanted to learn to draw her father looking like Jesus Christ. So I had already had some of my viewfinder techniques, you know? And I tried to get her to draw a face using a viewfinder like on a piece of glass or something like that. But she had very specific objectives in wanting to do it. She had dreams of her father being Jesus.

MR. BISESE: [inaudible]

MR. KASS: Yeah, and I met a lot of—she—I took her to a command performance of *The Wild Duck* that Ingmar Bergman was directing for I guess Princess Margaret or someone and met Ingmar Bergman and met Tevor Howard—

DR. KIRWIN: So, did you get—yeah, did you get to go back stage because you were with her?

MR. KASS: Oh, you could do anything if you were with her, right -- and people were usually very respectful of celebrities in public in London then. I said, "Why don't you live back in the United States?" She said, "I can't. Here I can go shopping and I can go out and I can have a life." I'm not sure she could now—I'm not sure it's the same London now, you know? This is in 1974. She said, "And if I were in the United States I would have to disguise myself or I wouldn't really be able to be in public." You could see Greta Garbo in New York and in the East 50s over near where she lived and all but she didn't look like Greta Garbo, so people usually didn't know. You would have to know that that was her and then people wouldn't talk to her naturally. But only one person, a Japanese man ever asked Ava for an autograph while I was with her. The only time I saw her get a little bit flustered was when Ingrid Bergman arrived at this ballet that we went to and her arm was in a sling. She was already having the difficulties that eventually took her. But there was a bit of diva- "dingst" [unintelligible] going on there because sort of—

DR. KIRWIN: Between the two of them?

MR. KASS: Yeah. When Ingrid Bergman arrived, and people did talk to her in the lobby. It was like a bigger movie star—or a peer movie star had suddenly shown up. So we left the opera at the intermission. Ava was very bored by it. She said, "They're wearing too many clothes."

DR. KIRWIN: What a strange complaint.

MR. KASS: Yeah. Sometimes I would say something inappropriate like I asked—Morris had been at dinner at Houston's in Ireland with Montgomery Clift when Houston was shooting *Freud*

I was taping this and talking to him and I said, "Yeah, Morris kind of told me that you had a really intense relationship with Montgomery Clift and like he kept breaking down." And Houston said, "Turn that recorder off." And I turned it off. And he goes, "I don't have anything to do with any of that, their personal dispositions you know? Monty in those days just didn't have a full hand of cards." And I said to myself, "How have I wandered into this."

I made one contribution to that film in that the dog Sandy was supposed to jump over a seat in the theater—the dog was so trained that it was like a person. When we would all have lunch sitting at the big table the trainer would come over and Ray Stark, who was the producer of the movie would come over and talk to Houston and say, "Well, you know, the shot with the dog doesn't look right." The dog—the dog took commands like it understood English. It was bizarre. And later I said—when we were sitting way in the back and John was using a little black and white movie screen to direct this musical. And I said, "The dog doesn't look right because it's jumping right at you over the chair. The dog—you should arrange the shot that the dog jumps to the side. That would be diagonal composition." And he said, "You're right." He had studied art, you know? With Stanton MacDonald-Wright and Morgan Russell.

DR. KIRWIN: Oh really?

MR. KASS: Yeah. And he said, "You're absolutely right. I'm forgetting what I should have learned in drawing class and all that." And they did the shot one more time. Ray Stark was going nuts because they were on the 30th take on this. He went back and he said, "John, do you have any idea what it's costing me to rent Radio City?" We were in Radio City Music Hall, you know? And in the final take it looked right. Ended up not getting in the movie anyway, but that was my one little contribution to a Hollywood movie!

DR. KIRWIN: Why were you there?

MR. KASS: I was interviewing him because of his friendship with Morris Graves. I was writing a book.

DR. KIRWIN: Okay, but you happened to just be there?

MR. KASS: No, I wasn't at Radio City expecting to see the Christmas show! They were making this movie and Huston had invited me to meet him on the set.

DR. KIRWIN: They're making a movie and you contributed to the movie.

MR. KASS: Well, I don't know about that but it was fun. More people than just me would have trouble talking to him because they'd bring up something that he didn't want to talk about like Oleg Cassini came to visit the set and wanted to meet John and came over and wanted to reminisce with him about breaking up a fist fight between John and Errol Flynn. And John did not want to talk about this, right

DR. KIRWIN: That's funny.

MR. KASS: That's it. I think that's the end of the reel.

DR. KIRWIN: Well, thank you so much for all of your life story and I appreciate it.

MR. KASS: Thank you.

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[END OF TRANSCRIPT.]