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Oral history interview with Barney A.
Ebsworth, 2017 April 12-13

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Barney Ebsworth on April 12 and 13, 2017. The interview took place at Ebsworth's home in Hunts Point, Seattle, and was conducted by Mija Riedel for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution and the Center for the History of Collecting in America at the Frick Art Reference Library of The Frick Collection.

Barney Ebsworth and Mija Riedel have reviewed this transcript. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Barney Ebsworth at his home in—is it Seattle or Hunts Point?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, it's—technically, it's Bellevue.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But it's Hunts Point.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: We are a little town, very little.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. In Hunts Point, Washington, right across the bridge from Seattle—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: —for the Archives of American Art and the Frick Collection on March 12, right? 2017? I think that's right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Today—that's correct.

MIJA RIEDEL: March 12, 2017, and this is card number one. [Recording on April 12, 2017] First, thanks for making time to do this. Really appreciate it, especially given what's going on in your world these days.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Pretty busy. Let's—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: No, she's busy. I'm not busy—[laughs] at all.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Okay. I bet. So, we'll start with the simple questions. When and where were you born?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: My twin sister and I were born July the 14th—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —1934 in St. Louis, Missouri.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. And your father was British, yes? What was his name?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Alec. A-L-E-C, which is my middle name. He was British.

MIJA RIEDEL: And was there a—did you spend any time in Europe as a child? Was there a strong sense of British heritage?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Definitely a strong feeling. I grew up playing cricket, which is very unusual for an American boy.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: My family was very modest. So we did not go to Europe. We hardly went anywhere because we did—we didn't have the wherewithal to do it. But certainly, it's—I would say history is really

probably the beginning of the art. But history has always been of interest to me. So I think it probably peeled off from there somehow.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. And your mother, her name?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Her name was Berenice.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And what did they do? Was your mom a stay-at-home mother, and—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Mom was, like in the good old days—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —she was a stay-at-home mother. She had a spinster older sister who worked for the post office, and maybe half the time lived with us, which was like one and a half paychecks. And Dad did various sort of white collar jobs in the manufacturing—different manufacturing companies. So of course, he wasn't union. My friends'—most of my friends' fathers were union, like beer truck drivers or thing, and they all had their own homes, because they were protected by the union—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —whereas Dad wasn't protected by anybody. [Laughs.] And yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But it was a wonderful beginning. I mean, you know, I had a great sister, great parents, great aunt.

MIJA RIEDEL: So, strong family.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. Did your—what was your sister's name?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Muriel.

MIJA RIEDEL: Muriel. And did she get involved with the arts at all during her lifetime?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Not really. She was a—I was a good athlete, she was a super athlete. She—her first year, she lettered in eight sports—[laughs] at her college. And she was just a—in fact, at our 50-year class reunion in high school, I went up to the class bully, and I said, "You know, you beat up all the boys in the class except me. Why not me?" He said, "I was scared to death of your sister."

[They laugh.]

And that was true.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] That's a great story.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Because she didn't take grief from anybody, and of course the problem with a guy and a—and a gal is if the guy starts winning and the girl starts crying, you're in—you can't win.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: A guy can't win against a woman in a physical—I mean, not on that level.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Absolutely.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah [laughs].

MIJA RIEDEL: So he knew better than to go there.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah, he—I said, "Gee, I was always expecting to get it. Everybody else in the class did." [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. [Laughs.] So, you said that art was not a big part of your childhood, that you were a quote, unquote, normal kid. Clearly, you were very athletic. But you did collect stamps.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah? Was there anything aesthetic or—in particular about them that drew you, or was that also just a normal kid thing to do back then?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I think it was more geography and history—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —than art. I started collecting, and soon decided I wanted to collect American stamps. And my uncle had a collection that had been formed 30, 40 years earlier, and he gave it to me, which gave me some really great early stamps, primarily American, but also foreign.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And that was a big inspiration. I've always had a, what's-over-the-next-hill, feeling. I mean, so you had mentioned we couldn't afford to go to Europe, or really anywhere, almost. But the desire to do it was always there. And of course the only connection with art museum was my parents would say, "We're going to the art museum," and I said, "No." You know, I was—I wanted—I said, "No, I want to play baseball. I don't want to go to the art museum." [Laughs.] They said, "Well, you can see the 3,000-year-old mummy with the little brown toes showing."

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And I said, "Oh, that's sort of interesting."

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And of course I was somewhere between I wanted to see it, and then I didn't want to wake up at 3:00 in the morning and find the mummy chasing me. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: So it's a—and then of course, you know, when I became a collector, then I started looking for mummies for the museum.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Because I thought of it as—I call them kid catchers.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: You know, things that'll bring kids to the museum.

MIJA RIEDEL: Exactly.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Because it did me.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Was there a strong sense of philanthropy in your family growing up?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: We didn't have any money. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Was there volunteerism, or anything like that?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: No, but you know, Dad was—of all things, grew up in Buckingham Palace. And so he—there was always a, you know, there was always that English fair play and you know, I think I had a very English background that way.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: There was no philanthropy—[laughs] because there was no money.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But—and of course Dad was working and our mom was taking care of the family. So not really.

MIJA RIEDEL: But a strong ethical sense.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Very much fair play. 50/50. If you can't—you know, I'd be great as Solomon. Cut the baby in half, you know.

[They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah. No, I think I had a very strong English grounding.

MIJA RIEDEL: Now, he grew up in Buckingham Palace? How did that work?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: My grandfather was the commander of the Grenadier Guards.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And they—and everybody said, "Oh, how romantic and how wonderful." I said, "Well, they lived in something called the casements, and it's an 800-year-old castle, and a better word for it is cell."

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: You know, because it was stone or concrete, and it was—

MIJA RIEDEL: Damp and cold and—[Laughs.]

BARNEY EBSWORTH: It was—it was close, is the only advantage it had. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Reveille in the morning, you were right there to do it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Did you go to church?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I did. I was raised Christian Science—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —and went every Sunday until I went to college—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —and I did it maybe every other or every third. Then I went to the Army and stopped going. And really was—with Easter coming up, it was really an Easter—at best, Easter and Christmas guy. Until 1991, and I became an Episcopalian.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Interesting.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: My wife at the time one day turned to me and said, "I don't know if I'm in love, and I have to leave to find out." And she left. No fight, no warning, no nothing. And so I was in a pretty sad state.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And I thought I was Presbyterian. I didn't think I was Christian Science anymore. And the Presbyterian Church was—I went to it, and there was no God going on, [laughs] at that particular church. And George Bush's youngest brother, Bucky Bush, was a great friend of mine, and he took me to the Episcopal Church—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —and then I became an Episcopalian. And I think really—so I got a very strong feeling of my grandfather, who was a British officer. And that was a great comfort to me, and still is. I'm still an Episcopalian. I always will be. And I don't go at Christmas and Easter. I go every—all the rest of the Sundays. I do go there, too. But no, I'm a pretty devoted—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —you know, devout, I guess it is.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, there's such a strong sense of philanthropy that runs through your history as a collector that it's interesting to think about where that might have originated from. So and it is interesting that it—there was a strong sense of ethics and you grew up with that as a child.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Oh, fair play was—it all—it started and ended there. It was fair play. Don't—you know, really, the Golden Rule—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —was really what it was. And—yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: So did you attend public schools in St. Louis?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Pardon me?

MIJA RIEDEL: Did you attend public schools in St. Louis?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I did.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Sounds like no art classes, or you—art was not of real interest through college. You went to college in St. Louis as well, Washington University, and—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, no.

MIJA RIEDEL: —majored in—oh, please.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: No, I went to—actually, I went to college on every kind of scholarship you can get. I had freshman scholarship; I had a need scholarship; I had an athletic scholarship. I went to the University of Missouri on an athletic scholarship.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I was a sprinter on the track team. And I went the first two years, and you know, I was more interested in getting an education. I mean, the track was the scholarship. And I got—I'd make straight A's, and I got an academic [scholarship -BE] to Washington University—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —and left Mizzou and went to Washington U.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, fantastic.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. And were you—you were a business major, is that correct?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: That's correct.

MIJA RIEDEL: And you were clear that that was the goal from the start?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, yeah. I think I needed—I needed to find some way to make money so that my family wouldn't be as—oh, I knew this word would really—my dad was such a proud Englishman, impoverished. I think I said one time I grew up poor, and he was very offended—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —because I was never hungry. I always had clothes. I always had a roof over my head.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: We just didn't have anything else. We didn't have a car, or we didn't own a house, and rode the bus. And all of that is very good stuff to grow up with.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: It's just—it gives you great motivation to move past it.

[They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. Yeah. So did you—you went—what year did you graduate from college?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: 1956. Which is—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay, so straight into the Army.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, which is a story.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I probably shouldn't tell you this story, but I'll tell you this story. There's probably 20 million Americans lying about having a college degree that don't have one. And there's one that I know of, me—

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —that the college says I have a degree, but I didn't graduate.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: They graduated me. [Laughs.] Yes. It's funny. I was in a combined business/law program. Made straight A's—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —and the dean and—well, I won't go through the whole story, but what I decided to do, because I was—there was a draft and I was draft age, is I decided that now was the time to go in the Army, and then come back and finish the rest of my education. Because it seemed like a good break for me, and besides, I think I was ready to leave school. I was sort of—you know, the pressure of making straight A's gets to you after a while.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And so I petitioned out nine hours short of a degree, with the idea I'd come back and get the nine hours and the law degree. Well, of course, that didn't happen.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And I started a travel company, and we had a branch office at Washington University. And about three or four years later, I got a call from the chancellor of Washington U. He said, "Can I have—would you have lunch with me today?" And I said, "Gee, I'd have lunch with you anytime, but," I said, "I have a lunch date with somebody that I can't contact to change." And he said, "Well, how about after lunch?" And I said, "Fine. What time?" He said, "2:00." So I went to this lunch, and this was a man whose sons were running a travel program from Harvard, and he wanted to get them back to St. Louis. And he gave me a signed contract to sell the travel company. So I had that in my pocket, and I said, "Look, I'm going to Europe for two weeks, check out all my tours, and when I come back, I'll give you the answer."

So I went out and sat down with the chancellor, and he said, "This may come as a surprise for you, but I want to offer you the job as Vice Chancellor for Extracurricular Activities at Washington University." And I said, "Well, Chancellor, this is a little bit—first of all, it's very flattering, and secondly, it's very embarrassing, because I don't have"—I said, "You have Ph.D.'s and maybe a few masters here." I said, "I don't have a degree." And he said, "Well, don't worry about that. We can—I can take care of that." And I said, "But I own the travel company." He said, "Oh, we thought you were the manager." Well, I never—I wasn't the kind to go around saying I own the place. I did have a partner to start, and I think they think—thought he was still the owner. But I'd bought him out, but never told anybody.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And I started laughing. And he said, "What are you laughing about?" And I said, "Well, you know that lunch that I couldn't break? I have in my pocket a contract of sale for the travel agency, signed by the buyer." [Laughs.] In other words, I was offered a job that I would have liked to have had an hour after I had got an open contract to sell my company. And I said—you talk about unique.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And so I said, "Let me think about it." And I told—finally, I came back, and I said, "Look. I'm very flattered. It's very nice, but I'm going in the Army and get my two years out of the way, and I'll be back here to finish my degrees." [. . . -BE]And—wait a minute. Am I getting out of order? I'm out of order. No, I just turned him down. [. . . -BE]

MIJA RIEDEL: Because you started the travel business when you were in Europe in the Army, right?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: No, no.

MIJA RIEDEL: No.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: After I came home.

MIJA RIEDEL: After you came back.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And went to law school for two hours and petitioned out, went back, got married to my French fiancée. Came home, worked a year in insurance and liked it, but it didn't turn me on. And then I worked a year in the travel business, and then I was brought on as a potential partner of a one-year-old travel company. And I bought the one partner out at the end of that year, and the other one out about two years later.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And—

MIJA RIEDEL: Let's go back to France before we fast forward to that, because that was such—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Oh, well, that's where it started.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. Exactly. Let's talk about that. You've talked about, you know, your time in France as being foundational to your interest in art, really awakening the passion of the art. How did that come about, and why the sudden extreme interest in art?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, first of all, my whole class at the university were sent to Korea, and I was sent to France. And, you know, I sent them a Christmas card from Paris every year. You know, they got angry with me.

[They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: I bet they did. How did that happen?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Just serendipity.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's extraordinary.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah. And of course—

MIJA RIEDEL: So you enlisted and would go anywhere, and you happened to be sent to France.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah. No, I—when you enlist in the Army [laughs], you're—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: You're dog meat. You go wherever they want you to go. [Laughs.] And I went to France, and—

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you ever know why? Did you know why? Did you have a skill that they needed?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, theoretically, I did. I was not a typist. In fact, when I went in the Army, they put me in clerk typist school to learn how to type. Everybody at—there were about 40 in the class. All of them could probably type 35 to 45 words when they went in.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I couldn't type any.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: So they ran—typical Army. They ran the whole class for me, because everybody else [laughs] already knew how to type.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And I didn't get quite good enough to be a clerk typist, but I was a clerk. I mean, a typist. I was a clerk typist. And there was this place in eastern France that needed a clerk typist, and I was sent there.

MIJA RIEDEL: Extraordinary.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And I'm in the Ozarks of France—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —loving every minute of it. Mud up to our nose, rainy, wonderful. And of course, I ended up running the NCO clubs plus my—I had three French girls to do one job. I divided it into thirds. They thought I was a great boss, and I didn't do anything.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And so then I ended up running, for extra money, extra duty, the NCO Club, which then meant that I had really—well, the sergeant major of our company was my head bartender, and he was a smart enough man that we had an—we had an unspoken agreement. I signed his paycheck, and he signed my passes. And we had a wonderful relationship together. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: How fantastic.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: So I went to Paris every weekend.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And then I met Martine. And—but I got to Paris. After I turned Paris inside out and saw everything, I started going to the Louvre Museum. And I went to the Louvre Museum every weekend for a year. And then it was off to the races, you know, then.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was it Martine's influence, Barney, that showed you the Louvre? Or what all of a sudden awoke in you that was so intrigued by the museums? I mean, certainly in Paris there are many things to be intrigued by.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, but most of them are, you see them, and then that's it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But you know, let's see—Beaubourg. Did it exist? No, Beaubourg didn't exist, and neither did the—neither did the d'Orsay then. It was the Louvre.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: It was the Louvre and the little pavilion at the end or—yeah, next to the Concorde. I forget its name now. That's where the modern—the Impressionists and the Modern Art was. But it wasn't anywhere like Pompidou. And—oh, what were the names? I see all the—I wrote a guide book to Paris in 1980. Never published or never finished, but I mean, I knew it that well.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But you know, those things are starting to go away from me a little bit.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, the one was—the one on the south side is the l'Orangerie, and the one on the—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —north side is—seems to me it started with a P or a T. I think P, but I can't remember what it's called. [Galerie nationale du] Jeu de Paume]

MIJA RIEDEL: We can add that. No problem.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah. Yeah. And I got very good, you know. I got to the point where after a year, I could

walk into the south—you know, on the main—the main hallway, and before the—if I was giving you a tour, I could lecture you on every picture going down and back from memory without even looking at it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Wow.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And then that went on for about 10 years, and then the 11th year, I went over and they had rehung it.

[They laugh.]

And I never really got that good again.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But that came from a book going over on the troop ship. I read Somerset Maugham's book. It was about an Englishwoman who took her family to Paris every Easter, and how she had pretty well memorized the Louvre. I forget the name of that book. It was a great book.

MIJA RIEDEL: I'll look that up.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And that was it, you know. And then, you know, then it was there. Then it was waiting to earn some money that I could start collecting. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, you said you got the idea for the travel business by researching for your next art trip while you were still in Europe. And I'm wondering how that came about. How were you researching where you were going to go next? Were you going to the library? Apparently you were going to the library. Were you looking at art history? Were you looking at individual artists?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, you know, I think geography came before history.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And so I pretty well knew what was in Europe and what I wanted to see—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —which was all of it. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But you know, I started—my first major trip was a 10-day trip to Italy.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Which was really sort of incredible, because I was stationed, like I say, in eastern France, and this was 10 days, hotels, meals, sightseeing, bus transportation, \$99. So less than \$10 a day. Well, of course, that company, within two years, went bankrupt. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And—but it was—and then of course, I had already met Martine, and when I came back from that trip, I'd missed her so much, because I'd been going every weekend, that we got engaged.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And—yeah. So it was really—you know, it was really finding the time to do all these places, and of course when you go to Italy, you do the dell'Accademia; you do Peggy Guggenheim. In Florence, you do the Uffizi.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: In Rome, you do—you know, you just do it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And all of that was adding to the—I remember when I went to the Pitti Palace in Florence, and even the Uffizi, but more the Pitti, that here are these great pictures, four high. I mean, stacked four high.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And you're saying, "My God, that's a Raphael in the third level, you know, up about 12 feet off the ground." [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: It was just a banquet of perfect pictures.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah. And then of course, every place I went, it would—you'd go to Munich. You want to—went to Amsterdam to the Rijksmuseum. So it was off and running then.

MIJA RIEDEL: Did you have a master plan about where you wanted to go and would check things off, or did the whole thing evolve more organically, and one step would lead to the next?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: No, I knew where I wanted to go.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: It was a matter of getting the time to go. But being that, you know, I was the master—I mean, I was only at the time a PFC, and then I became a corporal. But I was really the master of my own [laughs] because the controller said, "I don't care what you do, as long as you get top grades on the headquarters inspections."

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And we had a unique way of doing that, and fortunately, we never got caught.

[They laugh.]

You know? And of course, in the meantime, I'm running the NCO Club as the controller, which I'm making extra money, so instead of waiting until I was getting out of the Army to buy my brand-new Volkswagen to go back to law school, I was able to buy it—because of Martine, I bought it in the spring of '57 and was able to go every weekend.

[Brief interruption.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Quick correction here. It's April 12th.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. April 12, 2017. So I wanted to talk a little bit—Barney, you've talked many, many times about the importance of looking.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Oh, yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: And—yeah. And you—and I just—I think about your art history background, and it strikes me that so much of your knowledge of art history comes from long, very close, very intense looking—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Absolutely.

MIJA RIEDEL: —and research.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Absolutely.

MIJA RIEDEL: And that you really cultivated, perhaps, such an independent point of view because you were, in many ways, self-taught. Does that seem accurate to you?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, I definitely was self-taught.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: You go to, like, say I have—I have taught art history—art history classes at the university level, but I've never taken one.

[They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Exactly. Exactly.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: It's—it just—it just became a passion. I think after all those weekends at the Louvre Museum, you know, I became—well, like I say, pretty involved with the history of art.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And in fact, if I had to pick an era, I mean, I would—I would always take the Renaissance.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I mean, that—I mean, I collected 17th-century Dutch—mainly because the Renaissance was—really, I mean, you have to ratchet up monetarily—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —to do all those.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And I mean, it's like today, it's—unless you're a billionaire, and if you're a billionaire, you probably aren't a connoisseur. You're just doing it for some other reasons. You can't—there's no way to build any great collection.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Any, in any field.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I mean, you know, when the great pieces of the 20th century are selling for 150, 200 million, 250 million, you know, for the real icons—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —I mean, you obviously—it's a money game. It's not an artistic game anymore.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And it's like with O'Keeffe. You know, I'm positive that I know more about O'Keeffe than anybody alive—professional or not. And I mean, I just—you know, you get a scholar that knows the dates and et cetera, but they haven't seen the pictures. And I've seen—they've learned them through slides.

But I've actually seen all the pictures. And I would say, out of 100 pictures, I would get 99 for sure—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —right on the button. I might occasionally—you know, I've always said she didn't—I've even said it in front of her, she didn't do 100 percent cutting-edge picture after 1932 when she had her nervous breakdown. But occasionally, a picture, like from '36, will pop up, and it'll come awful close.

And, you know, in a pop answer, you might say 1928, and then they say, "No, it's '36," and then you look at it again a little more closely, and you said, "Well, no, you're right, and I just"—but hardly ever.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And I mean, I've argued about O'Keeffe's life in front of her with Juan Hamilton.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And then when it's—[laughs] when it all got finished, Juan was exasperated, because I'd knocked down everything he said, and then he turns to Georgia and says, "Tell Barney he doesn't know what he's talking about." And Georgia looked up and she said, "Barney knows what he's talking about." [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And of course Juan was—I hope Juan eventually learned, but that wasn't Juan's forte either. But I don't think anybody—well, maybe Doris Bry when she was alive, because of course, she had lived with her

for 20 years.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But I have people call me on the phone, mainly dealers, and they'd say, "I've got this O'Keeffe." I say, "Well, tell me about it," and they'd describe it, and I said, "Well, it's not her."

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And I could do it on the phone most of the time, you know. And they're looking at the object. Of course, the funny one was one called me one time and he said, "Well, it's got to be by her. It's signed in the left-hand corner." And I said, "Well, then, for sure it's not an O'Keeffe, because she never signed anything on the front of a canvas." [Laughs.] You know?

MIJA RIEDEL: We'll definitely get to O'Keeffe. I definitely would like to spend some time talking about that.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Okay.

MIJA RIEDEL: But just before we jump—fast forward to that, I just want to spend a little bit more time in Europe, just because I do think that was such a foundational time for you.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: No question. No question.

MIJA RIEDEL: You also mentioned that—the importance of focus. I think of looking and focus when I think of two things that you've talked about in terms of being essential for collecting. And you said, "I came to realize that by focusing, you can understand something that nobody else understands."

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: Would you say more about that? And in the beginning at the Louvre, what were you focusing on?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I think starting at the beginning, well, probably more the history—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —than the—than the aesthetics. But then of course, the aesthetics has to come in. Otherwise, what are you looking at?

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And it just—you know, it's layer upon layer upon layer. I mean, and that's true with anybody. That's true with you, it's true—it's just a question of how good are the, maybe the foundational layers. And I would say—this is—I never said this before, and this is sort of corny, but I think my foundation was love. Was love of the—just what the artist did and how they did it. So I wanted to learn more about it. How do you do it? And I—you know, I pretty well understand why what we think of as great art started, let's say, with south of Florence. Started with Sienna—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —with those pieces that are very pictorial, but not technically so finished, I guess you'd say, and then the Renaissance came along, and then everything else that came after that. It's—and then of course the 20th century, when, you know, [Pollock, de Kooning, and Rothko -BE], et cetera, you know, got away from the representational and changed—that whole thing changed. You know, it's—I would—I would hate to say I really believe this 100 percent, but you know, it's almost like they exhausted the medium.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: The medium. It's like they've taken it as far as it'll go. And I know even in my own collection, I could see in the early '80s that painting was finished. And in fact, in a lot of ways, Richter, Hockney, uh, Kiefer, up to about that time, that the great painters—and you know, now, sort of you can almost put in the league Peter Doig, but no Americans. I mean, I happen to like Eric Fischl very much, and I liked his early pictures, you know, the *Visitors From Afar* [A Visit To / A Visit From / The Island, 1983], like that, Salle and Schnabel were the big three of the '80s for us.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But they're really—they really can't walk in the same shoes of the people that came in the

decades before them in America or in Europe. And, you know, now we're into the—into the Hirst and Jeff Koons, and you know,—God only, you don't know what—but I mean, to me, I just—I think I'm spoiled, because you know, I live with these paintings that are great from the great era of painting.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And the ones that are the so-called best today just don't do it. Richter still does it to me.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: [. . . -BE] But I'd gone to the Carnegie Gold Medal Award in '85 when it was—when I first saw Richter, and said, "Wow." You know? Here's a guy painting abstract and out of focus realism. That's a real talent. Both of them excellent.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And of course then Kiefer was doing his great things, and I think he's sort of watered down since then. [. . . -BE] But it was—to me, that was over. And of course, if I wasn't collecting, trying to focus just on American art, I would have bought Richter and Kiefer then. I mean, Kiefer's early pieces are unbelievable.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But he got watered down.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Richter is still painting A, if not A-plus pictures now. And so he'd be in—I think Peter Doig's the winner of now.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You said that putting—the same being that put the collection together was the same being that made the companies successful. What did you see as the parallels besides meticulous research and knowledge of the market? Pretty much that's it?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: That's a—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: That's a good definition.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: No more than anybody else.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: It was a lot easier in collecting than it was in business.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Because there were business people out there that were all, you know, motivated.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: A lot of collectors aren't motivated to buy the best. In fact, I can think of a very large collection that I know very well. The good news is, they bought the right artists in the right year.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: [And the bad news is, they seldom bought the best picture from the artist in their best year. -BE]

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: So they ended up with a lot of B, B-plus pictures but don't have a lot of A pictures, much less A-plus. So the good news is, they were buying Johns in the right year, and the bad news is, they weren't buying a target or a flag. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: You know?

MIJA RIEDEL: How did you decide or come to that concept of buying the A-plus painting by the A-plus artist?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, that's interesting. My—if I had—if I had a—people always ask you, "Did you have a mentor?"

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I would say I have two minor mentors. Not that they're minor.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But I think I was my own mentor, but I think the Louvre museum and Charles Buckley—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —the museum director at the St. Louis Art Museum were the two. Not mentors, I think influences. And Charles asked me when I was starting to collect—well, he's the one that pointed me at American Modernism. When I said, "Charles, I really want to have a great collection. I want to have pictures that I really respect. I want the very, very best."

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And he said, "Well, what about School of Paris?" And I said, "I'd love to collect the School of Paris." And there were still great pictures around, but I said, "I can't afford it." Even then, they were, you know—they were some good money. And he said, "Well, what about early American—or, about American Modernism?" And I said—oh, no, he said, "What about American Impressionism?" And I said, "What is it?"

[They laugh.]

"What is it?" And of course, he told me, you know, about Church, and Bierstadt, and et cetera. He said, "Or American Modernism." And he said, "Well, look, why don't you do this?" Because he heard me say, only A-plus.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Charles said, "Why don't you do this? Why don't you buy the 12 greatest American Modernist pictures you can buy? "And when you find one better than your 12th, sell the 12th and buy that one until you're on—standing on Mount Olympus."

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And I said, "Charles, I think that's a little bit like having 12 kids and saying you're only going to have 12 kids, and your wife gets pregnant again, and you take little Charlie behind the barn and shoot him. I don't think I'm going to [laughs] be able to do that." And so when I got to 12, I bought 13, 14, and 15 the same day.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And they were the three—the Bierstadt, the Sheeler and the—and the Davis.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And now, I said, "I got to shoot three, Charlie." I said, "I'm not going to shoot any of them." [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And just kept going.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: So that was important.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And I think a lot of times, you know, because it's a long time ago, that there's a tendency to sort of minimize it or forget it. I think that was very—I think those—of all things, Charles was a great friend

and a wonderful man. I hope he's getting—he has a smile today, wherever he is, thinking he's been rated with the Louvre Museum as the—

[They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: There you go. It was really important to you right from the start to build a significant collection rather than to just simply acquire paintings you loved. Why was that?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: No, no. I don't—no, I don't think that's necessarily true.

MIJA RIEDEL: No?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: No, I don't think at the beginning, there was a feeling of building a collection.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: It was a feeling of buying A-plus pictures that I really liked.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: When—I think it became a collection when—

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —maybe around 20 or 22, somebody looking at it said, "Boy, you have a great collection." And I said, "I have a great collection. I have a collection." See, I—no, I don't think collection really became cognizant to me in my case—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —until a little time after that. When it happened, I don't have the foggiest.

MIJA RIEDEL: I mean, because I think you could have bought a few 17th-century Dutch—you could have bought—gone on buying a little bit of Japanese, you could have bought some American Impressionism, some American Modernism.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Mm-mm [negative].

MIJA RIEDEL: But pretty quickly, you chose to focus. No?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I think focus rather than collection.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: You know? I focused on—yeah, that was going to be my area of expertise.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And why was it important to have that focus?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, because I think I—even then, I understood that the only way you were going to get more was—to keep looking at the same things.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: That, you know, you only learn by piling on the manure, you might say.

[They laugh.]

And I—and I—so you know, to a certain extent—and that's interesting, because I don't think that way—is it probably was right around the time that I started thinking of a collection—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —of American—early American—or American Modernist art.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: You know, it's not heavy in my memory, but now that you've triggered it, it probably was somewhere around that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I mean, when I look back at your chronology as I understand it, you took that fateful trip to Rotterdam in '72 and decided, "I'm never going to be able to own the great 17th-century Dutch paintings. Why go there?" That was '72. Came back and had that conversation with Charles Buckley in '72, I imagine, or '73 early, because by '73, you were buying O'Keeffe—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: —and '74 you're buying Hopper. So—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah. It was probably '72.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: In fact, it was '72.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I can remember it was in the owner of Holland America Lines' house, Nico van der Vorm. It was his uncle that was the Boijmans of the Boijmans Museum.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And he was the generation at least before us, see, so I could see—well, I knew, you know, great pictures, you could—you know, because we're already—I mean, the Mellons and the Fricks and the—and the—oh, you know, big king. Starts with an M. Has his own museum now. Morgan. Morgan. You know, were already—you know, who were the robber barons.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: They were already buying the great Renaissance pictures and other pictures—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —at that time. So it—that was a different—that was the billionaires' ballgame that's going on now, only in a different field with smaller zeroes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: This is fun for me, because you're making me think about things I haven't thought about in a long time.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Like, when did it become a collection?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. And it's the beauty of doing this over two days—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: —is that hopefully, we can plant some seeds today and they'll sprout overnight.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Weeds.

[They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: I hope not. Okay. Okay. So let's see. So was Charles Buckley significant to your collection over the years, or did he launch you on your way and you were pretty much off?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But he was the director there—well, no, soon after that—he bought a fabulous Mondrian for \$225,000, and the board fired him.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, dear.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's too bad.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But of course, museums were social things then, and you know, it's pretty hard to have your tuxedo on and going to dinner out at night with the—with the social elites without somehow offending somebody. It's just automatic.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And of course being my friend, I was very disappointed, but I wasn't even—I probably wasn't even on the board then.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And if I was, I would have been the peanut, you know?

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I wouldn't have been the big guy. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I mean, after all, that board had Joe Pulitzer, it had Buster May, it had the Shoenbergs. I mean, it had some real heavy hitters.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: After all, Buster and Joe were two of the great collectors of the 20th century, so.

MIJA RIEDEL: You had mentioned that Charles Buckley, you went to New York together.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: And that he introduced you to some of your—some of the best galleries and the best dealers.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Oh, yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: And are there—which ones were most important to you at the start? Were they—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, Joan Washburn has always been there. And she's still my, well, a best buddy.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I mean, Joan's just a—I doubt—I can't imagine Joan has any enemies. I mean, she's just that kind of person.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And her knowledge is good, and she's honest as hell.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Virginia Zabriskie, Antoinette Krashaar.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I haven't thought about them in a number of years. Let's see. Who else was—well, and of course, Stuart [Feld]—well, it was actually Fleishman at the time, who was just terrible. You know, at Kennedy Galleries.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Oh, he's—he was a bad character. Had great pictures, but a bad character.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And he—you know, he had been a rug salesman, and he loved to play all the dirty tricks, you know.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So were you going to New York often to look for paintings, and to look at

paintings?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah, I'd say at least a minimum of twice a year.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Generally spring and fall. In those times, the American Modernist sales were in spring and fall both.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: So, I'd generally get up there around the time of them.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Joan Washburn, I know one of the things that she was known for was mounting exhibitions that were devoted to unusual facets of an artist's career.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: I would think that that might have really resonated with you.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: It did.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And you know, Joan's got everything. She's honest; she's fair; she's fun; she's knowledgeable. You know, and she still—she'll always be a great friend. [. . . -BE]

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: You know, I haven't bought anything in that field. There's been nothing to buy—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —for me for a while. And—but I still see her every time I go to New York.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: She's sort of homeless right now. They kicked her out of her gallery—

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, right. I did hear that.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —because they're tearing that building down.

MIJA RIEDEL: You know, a quick question about Virginia Zabriskie. I know that she was noted for rescuing some early Modernists from neglect or oblivion, and I wonder where this idea of A-plus pictures by B-plus abstract artists that you've mentioned became interesting to you? Where did that concept come from? I sort of associated that sometimes with her way of thinking, but I'm wondering how that idea—[inaudible].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, I think it was just an extension of collecting American Modernism, you know, great painters, that after a while, as those things got harder to find or got very expensive, it was sort of easy to look at the American abstract artist group of paintings—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —and see that whereas, you know, it's pretty hard to argue against them being derivative —

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —from School of Paris.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But still, they were American, and they were still available to buy. And, you know, at a very small price.

MIJA RIEDEL: Perfect. We'll pick up tomorrow with the dealers, and then move on to O'Keeffe.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Sure.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And everywhere else.

MIJA RIEDEL: Thank you.

[END OF TRACK.]

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Barney Ebsworth at his home in Hunts Point, Washington on April 13, 2017, for the Archives of American Art and the Frick Collection. This is card number two. Good morning. And let's start today with Georgia O'Keeffe. I think we've been—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Okay. That sounds fair.

MIJA RIEDEL: —moving in that direction. So it would be really interesting to hear about your friendship. Would you say she was the artist you knew best?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Oh, for sure.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. Yeah. So how and—well, we know the story. She wanted to meet you after you bought *Black, White, and Blue*, is that correct? Or how did—how did you meet or how did that come about? I know she invited you, and you said no [laughs] quite a few times.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, I said no three times.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And the third time, I said, you know, "Barney"—[Laughs] talking to myself. "Oh, Barney, you know, someday you're going to open the *New York Time* obits and find out that"—even then, she was in her 80s. And so I called. The invitation had come via Doris Bry.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And I called Doris back, and I said—the next day. And I said, "You know, if that invitation's still open, I'd like to accept it."

MIJA RIEDEL: And Barney, this was early '70s, mid-'70s? You bought *Black, White, and Blue* in '73, I think. So—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I bought *Black, White, and Blue* on March 14, 1973—

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —at the Edith Halpert auction at about 9:00 at night.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Oh, no, it wasn't 9:00 at night, because those were day auctions. It was probably at 11:00 in the morning. Yeah. So, then I went down.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was it that year? Did she call fairly soon afterwards, or did it take a little while?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: No. The first invitation was pretty soon afterwards.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I think there's—well, I should tell you a story before that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: When I bought it, [it was -BE] certainly in my first 10 pictures. When I bought it, Charles Buckley was with me in New York, and he said, "Lloyd Goodrich would like to meet you." And I said, "I've read all of his books. He's my guru."

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And he said—Lloyd said to me, he said, "Young man"—I was young then, and he said, "In my opinion, you've bought Georgia O'Keeffe's greatest picture." I said, "Well, that's a heck of a thing." It's funny, I paid \$47,000 for it, and right before that, I had underbid—I didn't know it at the time—John D. Rockefeller when

they were building their American collection at \$47,000 for a Marin watercolor—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —which was a record that stood for, I think 40 years, because—

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah, because on the other hand, the O'Keeffe, you know—O'Keeffes sort of went in a different direction.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: So sometimes, you're lucky at auctions. And so then, I went down to visit her, and I rang her doorbell, and she—Doris and she came to the door. And so I'm thinking, you know, I'd met presidents, and dictators, and a lot of pretty important people and never been intimidated. But I was sort of intimidated [laughs] about going to meet Georgia O'Keeffe. And she came out. She always dressed in black or gray, you know.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, I never saw her—I don't think she ever wore colors, any color. And she's standing there with Doris, and I said, "Oh, I see you have your favorite pin on. And it's your initials. O.K." You know, because it was stylized.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And she said—let's see, how'd this go? Oh, and then Doris, who had taken all the pictures, said, "Oh, I never knew that were your initials." [Laughs.] You know, which is sort of funny that she'd only seen it from the beginning. And she said, "I bought it on my first trip around the world. I heard that the—Calder had made it for me in, like, bronze or something color. And when I was—went around the world, I heard they had great jewelers in India, and I had an Indian jeweler copy it in"—whatever this great metal was. I don't know what it was. Lead, tin, something. "And so this is really the copy of the one that Sandy made for me." And so [laughs] Doris said, "Oh, I didn't know those were your initials." I thought, "You've been looking at them ever since she's"—because she wore it all the time.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: So that was the beginning. And then the thing about O'Keeffe is that she really is a very short—a very little person, but she had this big aura. She had this big—I mean, she commanded the place. And you know, any time you were around her, she was it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I mean, she was the force. And that's how I met her.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And then we became—you know, over the years, we became great friends. I used to—I went down quite a few times and stay overnight with her for maybe two or three days.

MIJA RIEDEL: This was in Abiquiu?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: In Abiquiu.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: One time, we did go to Ghost Ranch together.

MIJA RIEDEL: So would you visit—do you think you visited half a dozen times?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Or more? Yes.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: That's probably about right.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. And between, say, mid-'70s and late '70s?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: When was I married? That's the middle part of my life, certainly. Yeah, I would say that's probably pretty accurate.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But of course what happened, that was the time that Doris was being kicked out of her life and Juan was moving in.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And so I really sort of got involved right from the beginning with that, because Doris was my friend. I didn't know Juan from anybody, and so—on my visits down there, she always invited me to have dinner with her. Well, I stayed with her, actually, at the house.

MIJA RIEDEL: That seems pretty unusual. You must have been quite close. I mean, she invited you.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I don't know anybody else—I'm sure she had other people there. I don't know if John Richardson or some of her other friends—I'm sure she's had other people there.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But you're right.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: She did not—she was queen, and she did what she wanted.

MIJA RIEDEL: What an exquisite house, too. She had the dirt floor, right?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: The pounded dirt floor in the living room, and all the incredible, very modern furniture, as I recall.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I'm not sure she had a dirt floor in the living room. She had dirt floors in the house.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But I can't—no, I don't have a feeling that she had a dirt floor in the living room. I think it was, you know, wood for the floor. It was probably on dirt.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I don't think there was any—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —there was any basement to it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But you obviously have been there.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. It's beautiful.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: It—you know, what are the stories? Well, of course, I always hoped that she would invite me to dinner by—without—and of course Juan always—Juan by that time didn't—he wanted to go along and monitor. He was afraid somebody else might start influencing her in a way that wouldn't be to his interests. And—oh, and I'm thinking of really a great evening. We were—it was after dinner, and we were sitting and talking. And of course, Juan was playing dealer now. He'd gotten Doris pretty well out of the picture. And we're sitting there, and he said, "Georgia's this great, great artist." He said, "She did great things in the '20s and better in the '30s and better in the '40s and better in the '50s, and she was doing her best work now." And he was really all lathered up about this, and I looked at him and I said, "Juan that is pure, unmitigated bullshit."

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

BARNEY EBSWORTH: With her sitting there. And he blew his top. He said, "You don't know what you're talking about. You don't know anything about O'Keeffe's work." He just turned to Georgia and he said, "Tell Barney he doesn't know what he's talking about." And she looked up and she said, "Barney knows what he's talking about."

[Laughs.] And that was the end of the conversation.

MIJA RIEDEL: You of all people. [Laughs.]

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: He had no idea the level of research that went into your collection.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah. Well, it's interesting. He ended up with my two favorite—I had a picture, my next picture I was going to buy from her, and I had it promised like Alfred Stieglitz did. It was—it was from 1932. It's one of her last great pictures, called *Nature Forms, Gaspé*. And—

MIJA RIEDEL: Sorry, what was it called?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: *Nature Forms, Gaspé*.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Gaspé is, you know, on the Canadian seaside.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And it's where she and I think it was Stieglitz's niece took a trip to Nova Scotia in the summer of '32.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And then I think she had her nervous breakdown right after that trip. Over—well, over two things. The obvious thing was that she had accepted a commission from Elizabeth Arden to do a big flower painting for their—for Elizabeth Arden's new facility.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And of course, Stieglitz said absolutely not. It's commercial. You don't do that, et cetera, and I think she was—and then of course, he had taken up with Dorothy Norman by then.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And between those two things, she had this nervous breakdown. And she didn't—she never finished the Elizabeth Arden thing. And of course, never ended the Dorothy Norman thing. [Laughs.] But that's—you know, I've never read anything about it, but that definitely happened.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: At that time, I'd never read anything about—

MIJA RIEDEL: No, I haven't either.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Mm-mm [negative]. It still, you know—it was sort of covered up in the—but she lost her ability to really do those lines that looked like they were going forever.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And occasionally, like in '36, I saw a landscape, and that was one of the few pictures I looked at, and I think because I looked at it too fast, and I said, "Gee, this was probably done about '30," which I think was her best year. '30, '31. And I'd looked at it too fast, because it was done in '36. But that was as close as she ever got to, in my opinion, of doing that really special line that she—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: It was sort of like she needed to be under that psychic pressure.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And when she lost that, after the—because nervous breakdowns do have good—you know, not most of the time, but sometimes you end up much better off, because you get off your own back—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —and start relaxing more. I mean, she did some—I mean, there's some pictures she did after that I liked very much. And then when Juan started with me, I said—I said, "She didn't do a cutting-edge picture—100-percent cutting-edge picture after 1932. In fact, the best picture, in my opinion, she did after was *Dark Place III*, which happens to be laying on the floor right behind you, Juan."

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh. [Laughs.]

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Then he looked at—and I said, "Turn around. You'll look at the best picture, in my opinion, she did after 1932." And let's see. What was the other picture that I—

MIJA RIEDEL: You said there was two that you wanted to get.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: *Nature Forms, Gaspé*, and there was *Dark Place*, the second one that you—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: No. What was the other one? Oh, no, the other one wasn't an O'Keeffe. It was a Dove she owned from 1937 called *Sunlight*. I think it's called *Sunlight*. It's a small picture, about this big.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And in fact, I told her that one time when I was there, and she said, "Well, why don't you keep it in your bedroom while you're here?" I was there two or three days. And she said, "It's sitting in the drawer over there." And here's this, oh, maybe four-drawer dresser. All right. I opened up the first one, and it was full of paintbrushes. And I closed it, and I tried the second one, same thing. And the third one, same thing. And the fourth one, I opened it up, it was full of paintbrushes, but on top of it was this wonderful Arthur Dove.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: *Sunlight*.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, in the—in the inheritance after she died, guess who got the two pictures? [Laughs.] Juan got both of them. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Did knowing O'Keeffe, visiting with her, change the way you saw her work or the way you thought about Modernism in general, abstraction, at all?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: No, I don't think so.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: No, I don't think so. I think—

MIJA RIEDEL: What did you discuss?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: We discussed—what did we discuss? Nothing like you would talk with a regular person.

MIJA RIEDEL: I'm sure.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: We talked like—oh, that's terrible. You know, when you called and said you wanted to do this, because I would say for about the last 12 months, my—I think I have a really good retention, memory, for things that are important to me like this.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And it's starting to fade away.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I mean—I mean, that's a very obvious question.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, I imagine it would have been exhibitions of the time, or books, or trips that either of you had

taken. The way the light fell around there.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Boy, that's funny.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I mean, because, you know, I was there a lot of times—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —and spent a lot of hours. What did we talk about? [Laughs.] I think we—no, I know what we talked—we talked about Stieglitz.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And we talked about 291, and we talked about Dove, and we talked about Hartley.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And yeah, those were the kind of things we talked about. Of course, you know, she was very close to Dove.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And she liked Hartley. Oh, she told a great story about Hartley. Stieglitz was doing a show about '25 at—was it—I don't know if it was 291. By then, I think it was American Place.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And she'd been hanging his show all day. And Marsden came in, and she's up on a stepladder, and she needed a hammer that was on the floor. And she said, "Marsden, would you hand me the hammer?" And he looks at her and he says, "But I'm the maître." [Laughs.] The artist. And didn't do it.

[They laugh.]

Georgia O'Keeffe hanging his show, and he wouldn't even pick up a hammer for her. "But I'm the artist."

[They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh my gosh.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Pardon me for a minute.

MIJA RIEDEL: Sure.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I had to go somewhere. Yeah, things are starting to remind me. I remember one time I was going somewhere in the house, and I got into a back room, and here is an enlarged version of—oh, it was a picture that's up in Minneapolis now that I think was badly damaged in a fire. [*City Night*, 1926] It's a city—a black—very similar to *Black, White, and Blue*, in so far it was black and white. It was buildings.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Not high rise, obviously, that period of time in the—oh, around '28. And then she was painting in the city.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And—pardon me. She—but it was about five, six times bigger. And I found out—you know, she was 90 percent blind when I knew her.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Oh, yeah. She—yeah. She was 90 percent. But she evidently had hired a young painter to paint for her, and she would take a pair of binoculars and get—so that she could see, and she was instructing him how to paint this—really, a giant copy of this picture from the—like, '28. About the same time as those paintings of the shell. And that was a little bit of a shock, to walk in that room and see this big copy being—you know, obviously no one was working on it then, but it was obviously in the process of being painted.

MIJA RIEDEL: Extraordinary. Do you know who the painter was?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: No. No, I—no, I don't.

MIJA RIEDEL: And she said that she—what was the reason for it, do you think?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I think she just wanted to keep her hand in.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But she—of course, she was down to the point she couldn't do it—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —because she couldn't see that well. And in fact, that was the reason for—supposedly, for Juan coming in her life, because he was a potter.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And he taught her how to pot.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And she could do that with her hands—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —and she didn't have to see that well.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: It was funny, because years later, after I'd done a number of favors for her—well, it was after I'd mediated the lawsuit—Doris said, "I want to give you—I mean, you did so much for me." Well, I'm sort of skipping ahead because I want to tell you the story about that, but I—

MIJA RIEDEL: We'll do that, and we'll circle back.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah. And she said, "Well, I want to give you 10 Stieglitz photographs. You know, mainly the *Equivalents*, and like that." And I said, "Look, Doris, I can't accept that. I mean, I did this because I'm friends with you and Georgia. And that's—no, I can't accept it." And she said, "Well, what if I gave them to the St. Louis Art Museum in your honor?"

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I said, "Yeah, I'll accept that. That would be very nice." So there's a number of Stieglitz photos in the St. Louis Art Museum that were given by Doris Bry in actually, thanks—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —for mediating the lawsuit. Because she would have been—

MIJA RIEDEL: So what happened there, Barney? They had a big falling out. Doris Bry had been representing Georgia for a long time.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: They had a big falling out. Do you know what happened? And how did you come to mediate that?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, what happened was Juan had gotten far enough in that he had—you know, he was there right on the spot. He's a nice-looking young man. And here's this fussy New Yorker, and Doris could be a pain in the rear. I liked her because she was, you know, authentic. And had been there.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: You know.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But I could see how she was difficult.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: In fact, you know, when I bought *Music: Pink and Blue*, she had it—she lived on the—in the fourth floor of the Pulitzer mansion on 73rd Street.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And Charles Buckley said to me, "When you go home"—because we were very—we were all very close friends with Joe, I mean, Charles and I. And he said, "When you get home, call Joe and have him over to see the O'Keeffe and say you found it in his grandfather's attic."

[They laugh.]

Anyway. It was the end of a romance. I mean, you know, she had gone through—you know, like all human—not all, but most human beings, and you know, Doris had gotten to be a little bit of a pain in the rear.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And you know, Georgia wasn't going to New York very much, and Doris would come out and, you know, here's this young, good-looking guy who was there saying, "I'll take care of you." And it was—Doris was making it easy for him to move in, because she was getting testy with O'Keeffe. And that's—and finally, it just broke.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Do you know what they were arguing about, or what the tension was?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Sure. It's all in those papers I sent to somebody.

MIJA RIEDEL: I think they're at the O'Keeffe Foundation.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Audrey?

AUDREY O'LEARY: Yes?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Can you go into the O'Keeffe files? And I gave all my papers to either the Archives of American Art or to the O'Keeffe Foundation. And would you see if you can say which one?

AUDREY O'LEARY: Sure.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I know they were [laughs]; it was about six feet high.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: There were a lot of papers.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And—yeah.

AUDREY O'LEARY: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Thank you. And let's see, where—the story's going all over. Well, did I—did I tell you—I'm really spilling a lot of it. I said, "Someday, I'm going to—when they're both gone, I'm going to write a book called *Black and White*."

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Because they were total opposites. O'Keeffe got up at the crack of dawn her whole life. She was a farm girl. And this is where I got the *Black and*—finally got a confirmation. She said to me—and she said, "That Doris, you know, I'd be feeding her breakfast in bed at 11:00 in the morning." And I'm saying, "She's feeding her assistant breakfast in bed at 11:00 in the morning? That does not sound like that's just an assistant [laughs] situation."

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: There was something going on between them.

MIJA RIEDEL: So, you think there was some sort of romantic relationship between the two?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I mean, it might have been dead for years.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But certainly, there had been at some time. And but, you know, now, as they'd gotten older, they were both getting fussier, and it just—you know.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But that was—I would bet that happened. Now, that's really the closest to confirmation.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: So anyway, I tried to talk—

MIJA RIEDEL: Did Doris ever say anything—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: No.

MIJA RIEDEL: —that alluded to it at all?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: No.

MIJA RIEDEL: No. Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But Doris was three strikes and you're out. I mean, you could—Doris would make a great book, because she was—well, the difference between the two was, you know, O'Keeffe was very independent, very rural, or outdoorsy, or whatever you'd want to say. But Doris was very dependent, a real New Yorker.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I know when the lawsuit started, I mean, she'd call me at 1:00 in the morning, which was 2:00 in New York, so she—no wonder she slept until 11:00.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] That's right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But you know, I had a lot of sympathy for both women. I liked both of them, and so, you know, now they're down to, you know, lawsuit. And I begged both of them. I says, "Please don't sue each other." I said, "What you don't understand and most people don't understand, when you hire a lawyer, and particularly a New York lawyer—when you hire a lawyer, he's your hired assassin. He's your gunman, and it's easy to put him on and very hard to take him off."

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: "And you're going to—you're not going to like what's going to take place." Well, of course, it took place. And I believe it was June of whatever year that was, I got a call, and—

MIJA RIEDEL: It was '77. Does that sound right?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: That could probably be in the—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah, around there. But it was June, I remember. And Georgia and Juan called. Georgia called—Juan was on the phone—and said, "We can't get our lawyers—we can't stop our lawyers [laughs] from running up bills and suing each other. And we were—you're the only person that we trust that we think Doris would trust. Would you mediate the lawsuit?" And I said, "Well, first of all, I'm not a lawyer. Secondly, I've never mediated anything in my life." But of course, I ran a lot of companies, and you are mediating, it's just not under the threat of law. And if it hadn't been—I don't know if I would have done it for Doris, but when O'Keeffe asked, anything that O'Keeffe asked, I was going to do.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: So I said, "Okay, I'll try." Well, it was not a good summer. And I have a very strong stomach, but I was taking Gelusil and everything. And you know, the art of mediation, even though I'd never done it, is to talk both sides—get both sides' picture—and then try to see what is the—what is the most you can get out of both sides to try and—what you do is, you're trying to pull them together like this, and then you—ooh, you got a handshake. And you say—and I did, you say, "I'm out of here. I just did it."

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: You know, I got them to compromise.

MIJA RIEDEL: And what were their two points of view, Barney?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: The lawsuit was really breach of agency contract.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Doris said she had a lifetime contract to sell all of O'Keeffe's pictures that she owned at a 25 percent commission. And of course, Juan was throwing her out to take it himself. So it was—the legal lawsuit was breach of agency contract. The real lawsuit was alienation of affection and divorce. And you know, so it had an emotional side. Well, they were both emotional, but it had a dollar sign side, and an emotional side.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And it was not fun. It was interesting, but it wasn't fun.

MIJA RIEDEL: What was interesting?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, to go through the—I'd never gone through the process. That was interesting. And it was sort of interesting—I could have almost predicted it, but it was interesting to see, you know, what their positions were going to be.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And of course, I learned some things in the—and of course, Doris is dead now, so maybe I can say this. Eh, I don't—I learned where people were hanging back and put things away that were never, ever disclosed. [Laughs.] I don't know whether I should go on the record on that, because with—everybody's gone now except Juan, and he wasn't involved in that. But anyway, I got that done, and that's when—

MIJA RIEDEL: Did you gain any insight into O'Keeffe out of that experience?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: No. It just confirmed, you know, that she was tough.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: She was—I don't think she was willful. I think—I mean, this is what she wanted to do, and when O'Keeffe wanted to do something, that's what she did.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. And Bry?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Huh?

MIJA RIEDEL: And anything about Bry?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Oh, yeah, I was going to tell you a story about it which is sort of funny, but it's really bad. It's—the book would be called, *One, Two, Three—Strike One, Strike Two, Strike Three, You're Out*. She was very, in my opinion—I mean, she's very shrewd and very tough, but she was dependent.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And she had a rich uncle.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And she was going to inherit a lot of money from her rich uncle who, very late in life, married a very young woman. And there goes strike one. What was strike two? Well, one of the strikes was, of course, 25 percent. And so she had income there. Now she was—that's strike two. What was strike three? There was a third strike. So she had three ways to end her life in comfort.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And she lost them all. I can't right now remember what the third one was. [Laughs.] But you know, it would have been a tragedy, but in some ways, sort of a humorous tragedy. [Laughs.] I mean, because I sort of sat there and said, "This poor lady." And then I thought, "But it's sort of funny [laughs] in some ways." You know, because she had—first of all, that she—that anybody would allow their self to only be taken

care of by somebody else, because that's what it was all about.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, except the 25 percent. She thought she had—I mean, he really screwed her out of it. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And so that was the lawsuit. It was done. And let's see. So they all said they wanted to do something for me. So I told you about Doris. What did Georgia do, or ask to do? Well, Juan, Juan was a sculptor. And he said, "I want to give you one of my—" and he was a good sculptor. And so I said, "Well, next time I come out to Abiquiu, I'll come up to your place, and I'll look at what you've got."

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: So I came up, and he must have had 60, and they were all over the house. And finally I said, "I want that one." And [laughs] Georgia said, "You can't give Barney that one. That's mine."

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I picked hers [laughs] out of all the 60. So what did he do? He made another one just like it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, really? That's hard to do.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Audrey's—

AUDREY O'LEARY: Hi.

MIJA RIEDEL: Hi.

AUDREY O'LEARY: Sorry to interrupt. Lost my train of thought going back to the files. What did you need from Georgia O'Keeffe files again?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Who did I give my six-foot-high stack of papers to? Either it's—it's almost certainly either the Archives of American Art, or the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum or Foundation.

AUDREY O'LEARY: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I want to know which one.

AUDREY O'LEARY: Okay. And—

MIJA RIEDEL: Should be letters and correspondence, I think between you and maybe Georgia, and also Doris Bry, and then also involving the litigation between—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, this was after she was dead.

MIJA RIEDEL: —the two of them. Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: This was after she was dead, so Georgia wasn't involved in the—in the—I gave the papers after—she was already dead.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Right. I think—I thought the papers had gone to the O'Keeffe Foundation. But they might be elsewhere, so we're just trying to pin that down.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And she's with the Archives, so she's probably right. I would have thought it went—they went to the Archives.

AUDREY O'LEARY: Okay, I will—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But they were definitely all given to somebody.

AUDREY O'LEARY: Okay, I will dig into the paperwork and try to find that out. [inaudible]

MIJA RIEDEL: Thank you. So Juan Hamilton. You picked the piece that he made for Georgia, or that was Georgia's piece, and he made another one identical do it.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: And it—did it hold up? Oftentimes, that doesn't work so well.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Oh, no, it did.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah, it did.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And I ended up giving that to the St. Louis Art Museum.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Georgia. What did Georgia do? I don't know. I think Georgia's friendship—I don't remember. I remember that the two parties—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I don't remember. But I think Georgia did something. Now, I'm thinking—you want all these stories? I'm thinking of things that happened now.

MIJA RIEDEL: If it adds any insight to O'Keeffe, it's certainly more than welcome.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: One of the—it might have been the first trip, but I think it might have been the second.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Georgia and I went out to Ghost Ranch together. And we sat out on the patio, and it was a beautiful day, and we were talking. And I said to Georgia, I said, "Would you mind if I took some pictures of you?" And she said—it was probably the first trip. She said, "Well, I would just as soon you didn't, but if you want to, go ahead." And I said, "Well, if you'd just as soon I didn't, I won't." And I didn't.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: You know? I mean, she was the kind of person that if you didn't read her, despite what she said, I mean, I thought that could have changed our relationship, which I didn't want to gamble on.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And so I said, "Well, you know, it's the gentlemanly thing to do. If you don't want it, I certainly won't do it."

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: That, and then what was the other story about O'Keeffe? It'll probably come back. Oh, she was wonderful, though. Well, and then, of course, now, this is—oh, what did Georgia do? [Laughs.] That's the story, what Georgia did. About—some time later, I don't know if it was a year or two years later, I had been living with this young lady, and one of the many—few times in my life where I probably should have kept my mouth shut, I said, "Well, why don't we get married?" [Laughs.] Because she was—she was very happy the way she was.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And I mean—or, she was unhappy. I wasn't going to change anything. And so I said, "But let's—small wedding."

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: "Let's just have my family and your family, and you know—" well, it was 10. You probably—everybody probably goes through—we're just going through it now. Ten, then it was 20, then it was 50, then it was 100, then it was 200, [laughs] then it was 300.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh my goodness.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And I said, "But just—we've got to run away someplace. Where could we go where we can say nobody's invited?" And so I called Georgia, and I said—told Georgia the whole thing. And she knew—she knew Trish. And she said, "Barney, if that's what you'd like, fine." So we went—we went to the chief judge of Tierra Amarilla, the county that Abiquiu was in.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: It was funny, because here we are in New Mexico, and the whole town spoke Spanish. I mean, it was a Mexican town. [Laughs.] It wasn't American. I mean, it was the capital of the county, but it was totally Mexican. It was everybody speaking Spanish. And I think the reason the judge agreed to marry us at her home was because nobody was ever—certainly, none of the locals were ever allowed in her house. I think he wanted to see the house.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: [Laughs.] So now we're on wedding day, and we go to the house, and she has on her black knit long dress, and he comes in, and he starts to put on his black polyester robe. And she walks up to him and she says, "Well, I thought I was the only one wearing a black dress today." [Laughs.] So she had a good sense of humor. And so the judge says, "Well, who are the witnesses?" And she said, "I'm a witness, and my secretary, Pita Lopez is the other witness."

MIJA RIEDEL: Pitha?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Pita.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: She's the president of the Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation now.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah. She's a neat lady. The Lopez family took care of her.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: The mother—the mother was the cook—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —and somebody else was the laundress. The brother, Maggie, was the gardener, and the father, and she was the secretary. I mean, the Lopez family ran Abiquiu.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And of course, I knew Pita well. And he says, "No, I need a male witness and a female witness." And she said, "I told you who are the witnesses." [Laughs.] I mean, she—"I'm the queen in here, and you're not going to tell me who the witnesses are."

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And I realize that I'm not about ready to get—I'm not about ready to get not married.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: So I looked out, and there's Maggie Lopez, who I'd really never met, up to his ankles in horse manure in the garden.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And I said, "Pita, would you ask Maggie to step in here for a minute?" Maggie came in, and I said, "Maggie, what are you doing for the next half hour?" And he says, "Whatever you'd like, Mr. Ebsworth." And I said, "You stay here. You're my best man." So Maggie Lopez was my best man.

[They laugh.]

Or I wouldn't have been married. And that was—that was the wedding.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's an extraordinary story.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: What year was that?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I was—it could have been '80.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: '77 to '80. In that—in that range. I could look it up, of course.

MIJA RIEDEL: And so this was your second wedding, to Trish.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Trish.

MIJA RIEDEL: What was her last name?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Kloeffer.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. And you two got married in Abiquiu in Georgia O'Keeffe's home.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: She had only been to two weddings in her life, and you need four people to get married. You need a justice of the peace, you need a groom, you need a bride, and you need—

MIJA RIEDEL: A witness, and that's the least for—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yes, you need five.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: You need—and of course, in '24—let's see. It was Arthur Dove and Georgia Engelhard, Stieglitz's niece was the maid of honor. And she's, I think, the one that went to Gaspe with, I think she was a good friend of Georgia's. And I think Arthur Dove—no, John Marin. John Marin drove over. John Marin was the best man, and Stieglitz and O'Keeffe got married—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —in New Jersey.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Five people.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Same as—so she'd been to two weddings. Ten people is the max—the minimum number you could have to be in two weddings. [Laughs.] So in fact, our wedding was, in some ways, a duplicate of hers to Stieglitz. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: That's a great story.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah. And [laughs] oh, my.

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you—I know you've had a long, ongoing interest in American naturalism. Do you think O'Keeffe was—or was O'Keeffe a start of that, a primary foundation in your thoughts on that?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, define it for me, what you're saying.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, you've talked about American naturalism and your interest in seeing a show about that, and how American Modernism, in particular, if I'm understanding—I'm not meaning to put words in your mouth—has a lot to do with sense of place. And I think of, certainly Dove, and Marin, and O'Keeffe, and what's evoked in their work, how they—where they start and what the focus is, what the content is, and how that's something that's distinct to that—if I'm understanding correctly what I've read about your thinking is how that's a distinct part of the early stages of American Modernism, and one of the catalysts for the work. And that was one of the defining factors that made it distinct, especially from European painting.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, I'm not exactly sure I fully understand your question.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But are you meaning the subject matter was American rather than European or intellectual, or—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, and that, you know, O'Keeffe was much more independent. She was on her own, she was figuring things out as she went. She was not necessarily following any single school.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Other than maybe seeing shows at 291.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I've always said that O'Keeffe was the first real American painter that had no nod to Europe.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I mean, whether it's—certainly Hartley, certainly Dove. They all had some nod—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —or certainly more of a nod to European—well the School of Paris, basically. But I always felt she was the real American, that she didn't—that her abstractions, her subject matter, everything was not reflective of anything that was coming out of Europe at that time—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —that she was the real American.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

[Recorder stops, restarts.]

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —the Archives, and then somebody maybe—I don't know what's—the fellow that is there now was not there. It was probably—might have been Liz Grossman [ph]. But anyway.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Well, the museum says that they have them, so [laughs] we'll trust that they do. But it sounds like it is quite an archive there.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Oh, it's big.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I mean, mine was big.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: So whatever else that you have—well, I think they have all of her papers, probably, so—

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, I'm sure. Yes. Any further thoughts on O'Keeffe, or shall we move on to some questions about philanthropy?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Let's stay on it for just a minute.

MIJA RIEDEL: Great.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Because, I mean, it was so important to me.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And then I was just flashing on something else that I thought was—have we talked about—just flashed through my mind, you know, something else that I thought was important to get down. Oh, about the Dan Terra Museum, that—

MIJA RIEDEL: We have not.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Oh. I got—that was—that was a memorable day in my life, when the Terra Museum opened.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Let me see if we—well, you know, there's a lot more O'Keeffe. We could probably spend the whole day on O'Keeffe, other stories. But the Terra Museum. This was funny, because you know, obviously—well, Dan Terra turned out, and Dick Manoogian, Richard Manoogian from Detroit were the under-bidders on the Stella.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative]. The Joseph Stella.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And I didn't find that out—

MIJA RIEDEL: *My Tree of Life*.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —until about five or six years later. It scared the hell out of me, because, you know, [laughs] they were both big guys. I mean, big wallets.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Big wallets.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative]. But also, I mean, no—well, like I said, the record for Stella when I bought that picture was \$56,000, and I paid [laughs] \$2.2 million for it. But I mean, it's the difference between the greatest and everything else.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. You were saying yesterday the only thing that compares is the *Brooklyn Bridge* piece, and *My Tree of Life* is spectacular here in your hall.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And maybe—and maybe *New York Interpreted*.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Those would be there. And then early, maybe the *Coney Island—Lights of Coney Island*. But those would be the five.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And I would really say *Brooklyn Bridge* is the only one that's—*New York Interpreted* is a pretty dynamic piece of art. I think it's, what, four or five pieces, paintings.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Anyway, so now Dan Terra is opening his museum. And this has got to be in the Archives somewhere, so maybe I'm going to put it in, because it was—it was memorable. And so he had been a big contributor to—I always want to say Eisenhower—Ronald Reagan's presidency. And Ronnie had made—created the job that he was the Ambassador-at-Large for Art. He was the only—first and only.

[They laugh.]

And so he had gotten sort of—done things sort of like they do in the embassy. So, now here's the opening day of the museum, the big party's that night, and I'm taking Trish through the collection. And of course, half of the pictures, I'd probably been in the auction when they were being bought. So I knew the collection well, and we're standing in front of a picture that—from the Edith Halpert auction, by Arthur Dove. It's a pastel from 1919 called *A Walk: Poplar*. And we're standing in front of it, and because it's pastel, it's in glass. And I'm explaining to Trish about the picture, when all of a sudden, I get a tap on my shoulder. And I turn around, and it's Dan Terra, and he said, "Oh, I see you're looking at that picture. That's by Arthur Dove, painted in 1919 called *A Walk: Poplar*." I said, "Yes, and it was sold at 9:15 on March 14, 1973 in an Edith Halpert sale for \$19,000." [Laughs.] He said, "Do you have a card?" And I gave him the card, and I went back talking to Trish, and he backed off, and he's looking at the card, and he says, "Who the hell was that?"

[They laugh.]

Because everything he told me was on the label.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But I—because I had wanted to buy it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And another funny—with that same picture, I was offered it for \$40,000 years later, and

considered buying it. And a couple weeks later, I get a call from Joe Pulitzer. And Joe says, "Emmy says you know a lot about American Modernism and Arthur Dove." And I said, "I think I do." And he said, "I've been offered a picture from 1919, it was called *A Walk: Poplar*." [Laughs.] And I said—I told him the story. And then he said, "Well, I've been offered it for \$45,000." And I said to him, "Look, it's a great picture. And I would certainly buy it if you—if you want to." Well, the funny thing is two weeks earlier, I'd been offered the picture for \$40,000. But Joe always negotiated, and wanted at least 10 percent off, and I just chose because it was art. And I'm not—I'm not really particularly a haggler, or a negotiator. And so I got a reputation that if the price—if I think the price is fair—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —and I really want the object, I say, "Okay, I'll take it." I've never—the only time I ever negotiated was by accident. It was when I told Bill Zieler [ph] that I thought I couldn't really see paying \$200,000 for the Hopper, *Chop Suey*.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And he said, "Well, let me call the—let me call the owner and see if the price would come down." And of course, it came down 10 percent, but I wasn't negotiating, [laughs] I was just telling him how I felt.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And of course, that is a great negotiation tactic, but I didn't put it out for that. And I still had to get creative in order to buy the Hopper anyway, even on top of it. But anyway, so that's Dan Terra. Well, and of course, I'm chuckling,—[laughs] because I knew so much more about that picture than he did, you know?

[They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: I was going to ask you if there were ones you'd regretted not getting. So that certainly—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Oh, there's a lot of them I've been—

MIJA RIEDEL: I would imagine.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: *Hot Still-Scape for Six Colors* from the great Stuart Davis.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I would have bought—I mean, as an alternate, *Pochade*, which Baron Thyssen bought. But you know, there's always a limit to—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Oh, and hindsight. You know, hindsight's always 20/20. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. And when we were talking when I arrived, you said that you had bought the Stella, you'd been emboldened to buy the Stella because you had stopped bidding at the last auction and given something up, and so you were willing to bid a little bit more this time so as not to—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I wasn't—2 million didn't faze me.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Because it had fazed me the month earlier—for *F111* which was the big Rauschenberg.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. There was a real pragmatism to your collection. You've talked about that a few times, that you'll figure out what seems a fair or reasonable price, and then you often will tend to stop there.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, and like in the case of *Chop Suey*. I mean, I thought 200,000 was a fair price. It was—it was in my head that it was, you know—like if today, if something came up that I really wanted and it was 10 million, I might buy it just because I've never paid \$10 million for a picture.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And you know, it doesn't mean that it's not a fair price.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Of course, anybody—everybody except me would be trying the technique to get the price down anyway. [Laughs.] But no, I still haven't—I've never negotiated the price of a picture. Oh, yes I did.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yes, I did. And I got caught. I did. Because I—you know, that was sort of a badge of courage. And my good friend, Jeff Agnew of Agnew's in London, I bought my first picture from his gallery, not from him.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really? Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: That's that little Jan van der Heyden in the bathroom.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And he had the Zurbarán.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And I really bought the Zurbarán because it had been so highly recommended by a writer for the *Herald Tribune*, an Armenian. What was his name? Who always seemed to be so bright about everything. I mean, he wrote on all kinds of art. I never met the guy. And this picture had come up, and it was actually printed in the paper, and said—he said, "It's been for sale for two years. It's been in Maastricht twice." He said, "And someday, many curators are going to kick themselves for passing on it." And I said, "You know what? That is a great picture." And I think it was 4 million or something. Well, to make a long story short, 4 million and something—I somehow got the picture down to 4 million. [Laughs.] So I did negotiate with—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I said Jeffrey. Anyway, with Agnew. And then in the end, he pulled the trick which I've heard a couple of times when he'd say, "Well, Barney, there's nothing in it for me anymore. Could you put 100,000 more in for me?" And I did.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Okay? Now, a couple years had gone by, and Kelly, Frank Kelly—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —Frank Kelly is taking the trustees through the Hopper show. And I was tagging along with them, and we got up to *Chop Suey*, and he looks up, and he says, "Oh, there's the owner there. Barney, you come up and talk about it." So I came up and talked about it. And somehow—well, because the price had come down, I said, "I'd never negotiated, but I just didn't want to pay that much money."

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: "And I'd never negotiated a piece of art." And I look—this was the trustee of the National Gallery. And right in the middle of them is Jeffrey Agnew. [Laughs.] Caught me in a bare-faced lie.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I said, "What the hell are you doing in the trustees' lecture? And you caught me in a bare-faced lie."

[They laugh.]

Oh, yeah. And then he said, "Oh, thanks, Barney. You had to just start negotiating on me." [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] That's right. "I had to be where it all began." Barney, you've talked about the fact that your collection really was intended, from very early on, to be a museum collection.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: And I wonder how you think that affected it? Did it bring another level of rigor? It's sort of hard to imagine that, because you were so rigorous from the start. But did it bring another level of rigor, and do you think it made it in any way less personal?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: No.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I think no in certainly less personal, but more rigor? Well, it couldn't have been less.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: No, I think, you know, my modus operandi was, find the best artists, find the best thing the best artist did, and hopefully you can purchase it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: That's—it was always about the—I mean, even with Charles Buckley and the little boy behind the barn, it was always about the very best. And you know, I can't say that every picture I own is the very best of that artist because I bought sometimes—well, I always bought the best that was available. But a lot of times, things aren't available.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I mean, you know, it's—try to—try to buy a great Homer—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —or a great—in fact, my neighbor bought the last great Homer. Bill Gates. And well, great. It's not one of my favorites, but it was the only large oil left in private hands. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And see, in his case, he wanted a Homer, I would suppose. And if that's the only one, [laughs] then that's it.

AUDREY O'LEARY: I found something.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I think we beat you to it.

AUDREY O'LEARY: I bet you did.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: What's it say?

AUDREY O'LEARY: It's from the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Thank you. We found that out. [Laughs.]

[Cross talk.]

Thank you.

MIJA RIEDEL: Thank you very much.

AUDREY O'LEARY: [Laughs.] You're welcome.

MIJA RIEDEL: I was looking at that photo of you and Bill Gates, and it looks like you're whispering in his ear. I wondered if perhaps [laughs] you were advising him.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I was. Read it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah? It looks very much like that. It looks like you're—"Happy birthday, Barney, and many more. The next big tech idea is smoke signals. Forget Windows. [Laughs.] Think blankets." Very good.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I always say I'm so un-tech—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —that I'm still using my smoke signal.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I don't have a telephone.

MIJA RIEDEL: You don't have a—you don't have a cell phone?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: No. I had one for about two weeks, and I decided I didn't—and then I met someone on the golf course. He said, "How do I reach you?" I said, "You don't."

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: I think they've been around long enough now, there are a few people [laughs] who are starting to think that's a wonderful idea.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah. No, I had it for two weeks. I—you know? I tried all my life to be a renaissance man, and I'm certainly not going to become a tech man now. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, at this point. That's a fantastic photo.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah. We were—what was I—I'll tell you, I think I was telling him then, and—

MIJA RIEDEL: Where was that taken?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I think this was taken—it probably was taken at his house. No. I'm trying to read the background. I don't know. I was going to say that Bill—the guy that—their lawyer, when he was in London, he stumbled into this place and bought a picture by this new young artist, Peter Doig. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And I was at his home, and I said, "Oh my God, where did you get that? That's a great Peter Doig. And he said, "Well, it was the year he won the Turner Prize." And he was negotiating—he was Microsoft's chief lawyer, and he was negotiating something in London, and he bought it there. And I said, "Well, let me tell you something. You bought a hell of a picture for a hell of a low price." [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And Bill—anyway, what I was telling him there is, I said, "You know, newspapers are ruining us, because everybody thinks the world's going to hell in a hand basket. And the truth of the matter is, the world has never been in better shape than it is right now. People are coming out of poverty, they're being educated. It's not going to hell in a hand basket. But the newspapers—" I always kid about, because I read the *New York Times* every day—is I want to see a newspaper someday that says, "Man kisses dog, dog kisses man," and then there's nothing on the paper.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

BARNEY EBSWORTH: It's because, you know, newspapers aren't sold on—the basis of good news. It's the basis of bad news. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And yeah, I always say smoke signal. And I said—I've had to stop it, because quite frankly, nobody knows what they mean anymore.

[They laugh.]

And that's—that card, that was Rebecca. Who's very clever, as you probably found out.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely. Your wife to be in two weeks.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Two weeks.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah. Let's see. We were—there was another subject I wanted to cover. Oh, well we—oh, I didn't finish Dan Terra.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: So now, we're all lining up in a long line to get photographed with Dan and—Janet? Anyway, with his wife. Just like you were at an embassy.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: No one ever got a copy, and I said there's—

[END OF TRACK.]

BARNEY EBSWORTH: There's two answers, possible answers. One is, they didn't have any film. [Laughs.] Or the other is, nobody knew who was invited [laughs] and they didn't know who to send them to. But nobody ever got a copy of—and we all stood in line, you know, for a half an hour to get our pictures taken with Dan and his wife.

Now, we've gone to the Drake Hotel, and I'm sitting at a table with Stuart Feld from Hirschl & Adler and Warren Adelson—both of whom are friends of mine—from Adelson Gallery. And the requisite three people, VIPs from Chicago get up and talk about how great a man Dan Terra is, how wonderful he is for Chicago and all that kind of stuff. And they had a—probably a 35-, 40-piece band for dancing afterwards. Well, the lights dim and the band strikes up "I'm a Yankee Doodle Dandy," and Dan Terra tap-dances onto the stage dressed as Uncle Sam singing "I'm a Yankee Doodle Dandy." It blew my mind. I look over at Stuart Feld, who's like this, like, "Oh, that's so—" and I said, "What's wrong, Stuart?" He says, "You wouldn't do that at your opening night." I said, "If I could sing and dance, I certainly would.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

BARNEY EBSWORTH: That's one of the most memorable things I've ever seen in my life.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And it still blows my mind just thinking about it. I said, "Oh my God, that is so wonderful."

[They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Definitely not your typical wedding.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: No. No, it was the opening—

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, the opening.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —of the—of the museum.

MIJA RIEDEL: Of the—yes. Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: [Laughs.] Oh, that—it was wonderful. Yeah. I mean, it was worth the whole evening just to see that. [Laughs.] But he had been a side man in Vaudeville when he was a youngster, so I mean, he had some experience.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. Yes.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Oh gosh. I mean—

MIJA RIEDEL: You never—go ahead.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: The side—the side bars from collecting—I mean, the collecting's what it's all about. But the people, the stories the things that happen, the other things that you—you know, like this. You know, that would have never happened if I hadn't been a significant collector.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And yeah. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: It's just—it seems like it really has, as much as your business, if not more so, really defined your life, to be sure.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah, I think so.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: You know, the other thing that's funny, you probably know Liz Glassman, the president of the Terra Foundation.

MIJA RIEDEL: I don't, no.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, Liz—Liz was the president of the O'Keeffe Foundation.

MIJA RIEDEL: Ah. Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And then she left there when it went into a—you know, into the—it was time for her to move on.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And she became the president of the Terra Foundation. And I always kid her, because she's one of these—you'd like her very much. She's a wonderful lady. I always say, "You were the president of the O'Keeffe and the Terra Foundation, and I knew both of them. You didn't know either one of them."

[They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: You have had extraordinary and numerous relationships with, certainly dealers, and artists, and critics, and curators.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Oh, I mean, the freebies were almost worth the ride.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But of course the real—the real joy was—the real joy wasn't the acquisition. You know, somebody asked me one time, "If you had to choose between your experience and owning the pictures, which would you?" I said, "That's easy. I'd take the experience every day." Because I can always go see the pictures, you know. Owning the pictures and being able to see them when you want, including every day—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —that's a wonderful benefit. But it's nothing compared to—well, like what we're being—I'm interviewing for.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Like O'Keeffe.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I mean, those are treasures.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Those are treasures.

MIJA RIEDEL: I was going to ask you that later, but let's just jump to this now, since we're on the—you talked about—the quote I think was the emotional and the intellectual experience of collecting has been the most rewarding aspect of your life, other than of course family and close friends.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: And you never were interested in hiring a curator.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Oh, no.

MIJA RIEDEL: That was not—perish the thought. [Laughs.]

BARNEY EBSWORTH: No, I mean, why would I—why would give up the—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: You got a beautiful chocolate cake. Why would you give up the chocolate icing to somebody else? [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. The most important thing was understanding the art.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: Now, I was going to ask, does this way of thinking seem very different to you than what you're seeing from younger collectors or collectors in general?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yes. I think it was always there. I mean, in the '60s, before I had any money or bought anything, I mean, the young inheritors, let's call them, you know, all had the Stella, they all had the Kelly, they all had the Judd. And you know, you could go to any of these newly-inherited collectors, they all had the same thing.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And to a certain extent, it's—we joined the club. And I think collectors today are—that's still a very strong motivating factor. Which is very sad.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But then on the other hand, maybe you're better off to buy them for the wrong reason and maybe learn from them than not to buy them at—not to have them at all.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

[recording stops, restarts]

BARNEY EBSWORTH: There is one cynicism that I think is more prevalent today than it has ever been, and that is, it's not only social status, but I think a number of people are collecting because they think that art's going to appreciate. And I didn't—like in the '60s, when everybody had the Judds and the Stellas, I think it was—it was joining the club. And you know, it wasn't totally cynical, but it was joining the club and maybe rubbing off a little—I hate to use the word class—a little social something.

MIJA RIEDEL: Cachet, perhaps.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah. But now, I think there's—there may be the, you know, people that are building collections of these things being hyped by Gagosian, et cetera, or spending a lot of money—and they are rich people. I think some of it down deep said, "Well, gee, everybody like Barney Ebsworth, look at the—he bought these things for \$180,000 that are worth 80 million now, and boy, maybe we're going to do the same thing." Well, I think they're going to be disappointed. And that was certainly never a motivation [laughs] in my life. I never even thought about it. I think what I thought about was, these darn things are getting awful expensive, and it's crimping my ability to buy more.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It's interesting that we talked a bit yesterday about how there really is a love. You have a real love for your paintings.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: And it seems that you have a broad ability to love, because you started off in love with Dutch 17th century. Then you were a little bit in love, maybe, with American impressionism. But you were able to transition pretty quickly to a very different kind of painting.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: How did that come about? Was that really due to researching and looking and beginning to see it in a different way?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Looking always more than researching.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Because researching, you're just reading books.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, I think it's easy to go from da Vinci, and Rembrandt to Manet—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —and Picasso and then to O'Keeffe, and—I mean, it's—you know, there's—I don't—particularly using O'Keeffe when I just said that I thought she had less influence from outside herself or the United States.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But I mean, one of the reasons I don't own anything painted since 1980—'70 was the

cutoff. Even in '70, late '70, I said, you know, because then the—since I collected American, the Americans were Schnabel, Salle—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —and my friend—well his early pictures, *Visitors from Afar* [Eric Fischl]—oh, what's—and I—this is the artist I know very well myself.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Anyway, I just felt—and it was about the time that American museums stopped—or schools stopped teaching drawing. And it just seemed to me the quality of the paintings weren't there. Wasn't there. And really, in the period of time, the people who I would have been buying other than, by then I'd committed to just American, would have been Richter.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I think Richter is still—I mean, if I had to take the people that are doing real art, to me, I mean, I would say definitely Richter, Peter Doig, Harpress [ph], all the new Americans, most of the British. I'm trying to think if there's anybody—I certainly—you know, I think, oh, the wild man with the [\$50 million skull - BE]. Damien Hirst.

MIJA RIEDEL: Hirst. Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And Jeff Koons. I think there's some real genius there, but it's not very interesting to me. Not \$40 million worth of interest.

[They laugh.]

That's for sure.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And that may be my limitation, you know? I may—I may not be able to go into the 21st century. You know? But I look at, you know, all the painters now that are bringing \$10, \$15 million, and say, "I just don't see it."

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: What I see it is a big collusion among dealers and—you know, to promote rich people to buy this art, and then tell them how smart they are and jack up the prices. But you know, I think there could be some day when there was a real wholesale collapse. Well, a great—God forbid, but a great world depression. I think you might find the prices of some of these things crashing mightily over a very short period of time.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Let's hope that doesn't happen.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. Shall we talk about the exhibitions?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Sure.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. There have been two major traveling exhibitions of your collection, of course in '87.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: [One in '87, one in 2000 -BE]. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: St. Louis Art Museum, Honolulu Academy of Art, Boston Museum of Fine Arts. And then in 2000, of course, the National Gallery and the Seattle Art Museum. So you've talked about how you might have been inspired to purchase a major piece or two right before an exhibition.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Absolutely.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: That's where the Stella came from. That's—the *F111* was going to be the cornerstone of my—the rest of the 20th century.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: So yeah, those were the times I was motivated by that.

MIJA RIEDEL: But I wanted to ask you how those—you've had two exhibitions of your collection. Not one, two, and traveling—did those exhibitions change the way you've thought about the collection, either before, during, or after? Did they impact—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, before—

MIJA RIEDEL: Certainly. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —it was—it was always a sudden sprint to the finish line to—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —add one or two more good things.

MIJA RIEDEL: Foundational elements.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. What about afterwards?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, I think that there was a certain feeling like I had priced myself out of the market. [Laughs.] That between—and that's both a combination of great art becoming more popular, which means more bidders or more buyers, but it's also—it was sort of like what I always say, "Going, going, gone." I mean, it wasn't that many—the *Classic Landscapes*, the *Chop Sueys*—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —you know, they weren't around.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Because—and then somebody one time said to me, "Yeah, because you bought them all."

[They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: That's right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, that's true. My good late friend, Mike Kunin [Myron Kunin] up in Minneapolis, he was the only person in American Modernism I felt was competition. And of course I love going to exhibitions with him, because you know, it's like going—it's like going with your twin brother. And I miss Mike. Mike was—did you know him or know of him?

MIJA RIEDEL: Mike—sorry, Mike who?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Kunin in Minneapolis.

MIJA RIEDEL: No, I didn't.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: He had—he was in the—he owns the clippery or whatever it is. His company, it's called Regis. They made beauty—you know, mainly things for beauty parlors.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: You know, the soaps and stuff like that. And of course, he was—he wasn't quite a cue ball, but he was pretty bald, which always was funny. But the other thing, and I don't know anybody that's done this, he bought and sold his company three times. He took his company public three times and then when the stock went down, [laughs] he bought the company back. And then ran it five or six years, and then took it public again when he—but what a passion. I would—I would say in all immodesty, he was my equivalent. And I just loved going to shows with him. And I mean, and he had a great taste and a great eye and great knowledge. And was a dealer twice, actually. He had a place on—I think it was on 72nd—it was called Park Avenue—that actually sold German Expressionist pictures. And then he did another—I mean, he was, you know, obviously anybody that buys and sells their own company three times is a hell of a businessman. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But he—but he sure bought good.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And he's been gone now a couple of years, and I know his wife. I often wondered what would happen. It looks like—and I'm happy about it—it looks like maybe she's, over a period of time, for tax reasons, has given it to the Minneapolis Art Museum. I don't know if it's the Walker—I think it's Minneapolis. And that's fine. Although there were a few pieces in there I would have loved [laughs] to have bought.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But—

MIJA RIEDEL: You said the '87 exhibition really freed up your hands, that now you were able to expand beyond Modernism. So this was a huge shift for you, after focusing exclusively pretty much on Modernism for—since '73 or '72.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: '72.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. Almost 15 years.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But I also realized that it was pretty well over.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I mean, you know, there were—you know, and I always say it was pretty well over, but fortunately, it was—I was part of the reason it was over, [laughs] because I had bought—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I mean, there's only so many masterpieces by any artist at any time.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And once they've gone into museums or, you know, collections, that's it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. We've talked about how important focus was to your collection. Once you took those parameters off, how did you navigate? Was it more difficult to find your way, or had you been chomping at the bit [laughs] to expand, and now you were set free to—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah. I realized there was almost nothing left that I could do in American Modernism.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And it was really—I sometimes described it as the last train leaving the station. I said that I really did have a very small window of opportunity to buy a great Pollock, a great de Kooning, a great—but that's gone now.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And that's—well, of course, that's probably been—oh, it's been more than—well, it's been 20 years. Yeah. And so that's when I did the second exhibition, because then I realized that the doors were closing all over the place. And of course, what it did, it freed me up to be able to go back to my first passion, which was Old Masters.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: With knowledge that that'll never be a collection. That'll just be great paintings by great painters as sort of standalones. Yeah. And took me out of the 10 to 20 million range and put me back in the \$5 million range, which was painful enough, but at least I would consider doing it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But—or 4 million, in the case of the picture that I never negotiated, that I got caught telling a bare-faced lie.

[They laugh.]

I mean, can you imagine? One person in the world knows that it's a lie, and they live 5,000 miles away, and they're standing right in front of me [laughs] to tell them. I said, "What the hell are you doing on a trustees' tour?"

[They laugh.]

"You of all people."

MIJA RIEDEL: Here to hold you to account.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. How did the 2000 exhibition compare for you with the '87 exhibition? Did it have—I know you got—I think you got your Rauschenberg right before the 2000 show, but was there anything that came out of that exhibition that was different than the '87 exhibition?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, it was definitely more prestigious.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Certainly.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I mean, although there's certainly nothing wrong with the MFA or the St. Louis Art Museum.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But I mean, to be at the National Gallery—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —other than Chester Dale—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —and the Mellons, I don't think they've ever had a single collection at the National Gallery. So I mean, it was—it was an awful—it was a third-party kudo that was pretty terrific.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And I must say, the show looked good there.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah. And of course, you know, because of the price of these, you know, you don't see—well, I guess my friends Peter and Paula Lunder, they let—they had a—I think they went somewhere other than Colby College. And then—and then they turned around and gave their whole collection, which is basically 19th-century American, to Colby College.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And they're great friends and wonderful people. But it—the era of—well, the concept of single-collector exhibitions at major museums never was very big.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But it's—I mean, I'm sure there'll be one or two more. You know, there could—like for instance, there could be a David Rockefeller memorial show.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I mean, I hope there is.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And, you know.

MIJA RIEDEL: I was talking with Virginia Wright, and she was saying how much she enjoyed seeing her collection installed by a different curator, because it helped her to see—or it enabled her to see her collection or certain

paintings in ways that she hadn't seen them before, and I was wondering if either of the exhibitions had that effect for you?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: She's more generous than I am.

[They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And a lot less complex.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Actually, well, I probably shouldn't even—I mean, we—there's never more than a third of the Wright collection up at the museum—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —because we don't have the space.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I've given them some things that people always ask me, "Why aren't they up?"

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But that's one of the things I say. I'm not going—even if I disagree with the director and curator, because in my days, I saw too many personality conflicts where the professionals got ground up in them, you know, because maybe two, maybe two or three, or maybe just one important trustee decided to impose or say, "Why not this and this?" And if you don't, you're gone."

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And I just—I probably shouldn't even put this on record, but I've seen a—well, it's an end of an era. I don't see the same level of connoisseurship. I mean, if I have one standard, it is quality. And I don't even—a lot of curators today don't even hear them—even use the word quality. Like, it's not even part of the discussion. And of course, that's—it's sad. But you know, I think it's the future. It's—things are changing. And after all, this thing we call high art has been around a long time.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And I think we're going to be doing low art from here, and I think it's been going that way. That could be labeled an old man cynic. [Laughs.] But that's my actual observation, and I mean, I wish I didn't see it that way. But that's the bad news. The good news is, look at all the centuries of great art that's still there to be discovered. And I think I've done more than my share, but I'm still willing to learn some more [laughs]—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —and see some more. I still—the Renaissance is still where I would love to own 10 great Renaissance pictures.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But I'd sure make at least seven and a half museums very unhappy. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you have—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Because I'd be taking their stars.

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you have them in your mind's eye?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Oh, sure. Sure.

MIJA RIEDEL: You want to go on record?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Sure. Well, let me—let me just say, the greatest room of art that I ever saw, single room, was the room at the National Gallery in London, and I used to be able to recite it. You'd walk in the room, and on the left-hand side, let's see, there was a—there was a pope, I think *Leo X*, by Raphael. There was the only great

—15th-century artist. Starts with a V. There were two of them. There's one that was privately owned, which I told the director there one time that I was going to buy it, and he kind of—he really got very angry with me. [Laughs.] Because I think he's been—had been, you know, hoping they could get it—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —all this time. And then of course, it's the other—what is—one of my favorite artists. Starts with a V. Not Velato. Well, the *Daphne*, the—and this was on the other side of the wall.

MIJA RIEDEL: We can add that later. No problem.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: We can add all of this when we get the transcript.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And of course, *Madonna of the Rocks*.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, unfortunately, despite its popularity, I'd have to take the *Mona Lisa*.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I mean—yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, you visit frequently, no? You say you're frequently in London and Paris.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah. I haven't missed a year in Paris in 62 years.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah. So you can tell how much I love Paris.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But I love London. I love New York, too. Those are my big three.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Because why? They're the three greatest museum cities.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Plus a lot of other things.

[Side conversation.]

MIJA RIEDEL: So you served as a trustee at multiple museums, at the St. Louis Museum of Art, the St. Louis Art Museum, the Seattle Art Museum. You were a commissioner at the American Art Museum and the Smithsonian Institute. Definitely a member of the National Gallery's Arts Trustee Council and co-chair of the Collectors Committee. Did you have specific goals at all when you were serving as trustees, and do you regard some of those tenures as more successful or more personally rewarding? You were a trustee, you said, for 40 or 50 years, yes?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: 85, I think.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Because, you know, there were overlaps.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: You know, I was on the National Gallery—I was co-chairman of the National Gallery in Washington at the same time I was commissioner of the American Art Museum, Smithsonian.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And probably—and would have been at the same time either a trustee of the—St. Louis Art Museum or the Seattle Art Museum, and then—and then the Honolulu Art Museum.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, as well?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And if you—I said one time to somebody, I said—that I'd just met, that I had been a trustee for 85 years. He said, "Oh my God, how old are you?"

[They laugh.]

And I said, "Well, there were multiple years."

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Oh, yeah. But I'll tell you, I'm just about retired.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I mean, I've done—I've done my service. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And things—I mean, they're all—all of those positions are different now than when I started.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah, what changes have you seen? I mean, you've sat on numerous boards over the years. What changes have you seen, and how has philanthropy changed in relationship, do you think, to museums and collecting?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Oh, boy. The last part of that is a gigantic topic that I really have to think about. But how's it changed? Well, my first one was at the St. Louis Art Museum. And I was on it with Joe Pulitzer—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —Buster May—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —the Shoenbergs, who gave a lot of money for things, and other people. And they were all—they were all passionate, they were all knowledgeable, they were all available. They all had great collections. And were generous. Today, well, I think we have—we have generous trustees today. They're not as knowledgeable, because they aren't as great of collectors, and they haven't been really involved as much. In our museum—well, generally, the major collectors in almost all cities, unless you're a total hermit, are members of the board of their museums—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —which is good, after all. Because they've got—they've got the outside knowledge. And the outside money, which is—I would never kid myself that it was my baby blue eyes that they were interested in.

[They laugh.]

REBECCA AMATO: That's—I'm interested.

[They laugh.]

That's what I'm interested in.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: My baby blue eyes?

REBECCA AMATO: That's right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Oh.

[recording stops, restarts]

MIJA RIEDEL: So we were talking about as a—as a trustee and collecting and how philanthropy has changed and what you've seen over the course of these 40-plus years you've—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I don't—I don't see philanthropy changing.

MIJA RIEDEL: In relationship to museums or collecting? No?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I don't—well, you know, there's—after all, the museums are the ultimate depositories. And if there's a limited amount of great art, then there's obviously going to be less to come in.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And there's less great collections, so yeah. I hadn't really thought about it, but there probably has—there certainly has been less. I mean, I was the chairman of the acquisition committee at the St. Louis Art Museum when I got to—Buster May was—as Joe Pulitzer, well, we were really great friends, and treated me like sons, like a son.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And when Buster died, I got to accept his collection for the—on the benefit of the museum, and he had 46—I think it was 46 Max Beckman. He had the biggest Max Beckman collection of any—of any museum or anybody in the world. I mean, those kind of—those kind of things just don't exist anymore. And I think the Mellons' Rothkos, I think they had more Rothkos than anybody else, you know. It's changing like that, because there just aren't those—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —many collections like that anymore. And I would—this is somewhat cynical, but I would think that these billionaires that are buying these, certainly, they're buying the collections for the same old reason, social prestige. But a lot of times, they're hedge fund guys, and they see it as an alternate investment.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And you know, what's going to happen there? But you know, it still comes back to the museums are full of everything that's been created for the last, let's say 10,000 years. Maybe even more. But as the treasure gets bigger and bigger in public museums, and smaller and smaller in private hands. And that's going to—by definition, that has to continue.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And philanthropy? I feel there's more philanthropy now than before, but there's less gigantic. In other words, the Morgans and the Rockefellers, and you know, in that era, that stands out—the Fricks. That stands out more than today, but I think the volume and the quality overall is bigger today than ever.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But that, somewhere in the not-too-distant future, will start to change, because again, there won't be the things there.

MIJA RIEDEL: There certainly has been an increasing trend towards private museums, and you said that's something that you never considered. Would you—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Oh, considered, you know.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But every time I considered it, you know, it's like—what is it? What's the old joke? Oh, every time I got the urge to exercise, I'd lay down until the urge went away.

[They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, if anybody had a home and a collection that would be suited to a private museum, it's this. I mean, the house—you have designed the house in collaboration—you worked with Jim Olson—but very much around the collection, and also based on a museum you'd seen someplace, the floor plan, right?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah, yeah, Louisiana, north of Copenhagen.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And yeah, but then there's the—I can't—he was the founder of Geico in Washington, D.C. I think his name was something like Gary, or I can't remember. But he left his collection in his house as a private museum. It ain't the Frick, and it ain't the Gardner. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: It's—I mean the pictures they owned were—these pictures were A minus, B plus pictures. And as a home, it was very nice. But it's not a good museum. It'll never be a good museum, because it doesn't have the very best pictures.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Because even at the time he was collecting, he couldn't buy them—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —or didn't buy them, or didn't pay for them.

MIJA RIEDEL: But that's not the case for you.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: No, but I don't—I mean, when you—these other things that I've said, I can see one that might happen. It's my friend that identified, stayed here with his wife and came out and said, "Have you ever been to Louisiana in Denmark?" I said, "You see what the inspiration was?" Oh, gosh, and I can't—it's called Glenstone.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And he had—oh, the great architect who passed on about five years ago [Charles Gwathmey]. Built this house for him. This was, I think, an old horse farm, and it's probably a couple hundred thousand acres. About 30, 40 minutes from Washington, D.C. And then he—now he's built a museum, same architect, and now he's—I think he's adding on. And we were talking about private—this was—this is connected to the house, and it is probably one of the ones that people complain about, but he married—his wife is—she's Chinese ancestry. [Emily Wei Rales] She probably is American. And she's an art scholar, and they're doing interesting things.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But in some ways, he's collected more in-depth, which he can do shows.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And then he's got his own grounds. Now, of course, me being in the travel business, I said—and of course, this is a private lane. They would never allow a public—

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, it's a private lane.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —a public thing. But I thought, "A-ha, the travel guy. The tour of the museum starts over there on an Argosy boat, and you take a trip around the lake, and then you come here and then you go back."

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I mean, it's beautifully sited. The house was—you said the house really was completed in 2004, and I think you've talked about it as a culmination of your life looking at art and architecture.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, because the soffits are Frank Lloyd Wright. The layout is Louisiana. What else are the—and I wanted it semi-grand—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —but not grand-grand. And the houses, the art houses that Jim does, and they're great houses, are grand-grand. I mean, they're—all the rooms are—well, except maybe the first one, but the rest of them are all two-story-high rooms.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: All the rooms are—the only two-story I have is the entrance here. None of the rest—the rest of the rooms are room-size.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah, but the door is so—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And the—

MIJA RIEDEL: How tall is the door? Is that 20 feet?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I don't know.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But I did—I told him I wanted a big door.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. But then the dining room is lovely and intimate, so the rooms themselves have a lovely, intimate scale to them, but the entry is spectacular.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: They're regular house-size.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: But never was—no interest in—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: No. Thought about it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But discharged it.

MIJA RIEDEL: And why?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I think they need a new home somewhere else.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Was it important to be part of a bigger picture, a larger picture? To be part of a larger collection?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: No.

MIJA RIEDEL: No?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: No. I think they will be.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Certainly going to Seattle Art Museum. They'll be part of a much larger picture.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, yeah, but you know.

MIJA RIEDEL: And I mean, they're—having had two major exhibitions [laughs] they're already part of a much larger picture. Wanted to talk about 2007, when you were co-chair of the Seattle Art Museum's 75th anniversary. And that was the year, also, I think you donated or announced that you were going to donate the majority of your collection to the Seattle Art Museum, yes?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: That has never been announced.

MIJA RIEDEL: It hasn't been announced?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Mm-mm [negative]. It has never been announced. It was—it was mentioned to Jinny Wright [Virginia Wright], and probably Mimi Gates, but it's never been announced. And it—and it isn't in concrete, by the way.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, it's not?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Mm-mm [negative]. But that's between us.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh.

[They laugh.]

And anybody else who's listening to this, but—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah. No, I don't—no, it's—I mean, there's some things that are promised to the National Gallery, and some things that are promised—I mean, the ones that are partial and promised, they belong to it when I go.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I mean, they're legally gone.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Everything else is still in float.

MIJA RIEDEL: I wanted to ask how you decided who was getting what, because things are promised to multiple museums. And was that a curator's wish list? Do you have any concerns about breaking up the bulk of the collection, or some of the seminal foundation pieces?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, it's already broken up—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Yes.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —by definition, because two museums have things.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: So by definition, it's already broken up.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I mean, it—partially.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, the National Gallery and Seattle Art Museum.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: What I would do—what I should have done, and I don't—I can't get in my head totally, except I was very thankful to the National Gallery and the Seattle Art Museum for being sponsors of it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And what I did, I gave—see, I didn't know at the time—I guess I could have known, but I didn't know that Georgia had given the National Gallery the *Jimson Weed* series.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Which is—particularly the last painting, is very related to *Black, Blue, and White*. And right now, I would prefer that *Music: Pink and Blue* was going to the National Gallery, because it fits in their collection better. And of course, either one of them would be terrific in Seattle.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: So I really wish *Black, White, and Blue* was coming here and *Music* was going there. But you know, they're legal documents, and I'll just leave it alone. The truth of the matter is, the National Gallery probably doesn't have any of the [laughs]—you know, because they're so tight for space.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And I wish that I had given my Arthur Dove *Moon* and *Classic Landscape* partial and promised to the National Gallery so I could have lived with them [laughs] during my lifetime.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And the truth of the matter is, you know, I'm close enough to the Gallery that I could probably go to Rusty and say, "Rusty, if you're not—if you don't have them up, can I—"

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: "—put them up here?"

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But legally, those two pictures belong to the National Gallery. Now, I don't have any ownership interest in them. And as much—particularly—well, both of them. I was going to say particularly *Classic Landscape*, but even the Dove, I'd love to have lived more time with those two pictures, and I don't know—you know, they're so tight of space, you never—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And I haven't been to Washington in five years, so I don't even know if they've been up for five years, or any of the five years. I try to keep things simple. My life has been very complex, but I try to keep it simple. [Laughs.] If I hadn't tried to keep it simple, it'd be probably chaos, you know? [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. Well, what motivated you to donate them ahead of time and to not make it part of a will after the fact?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, I think they were—it was small gifts.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: For sort of thank you, sort of like, "Thank you for throwing the engagement party, and here, I'll leave you a gold spoon or something."

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah, I think that's what it was. But like I say, I wish I had—particularly with those two that went to the National Gallery. I think it was such a—you know, I mean, they just haven't done a single collection—owner collections. And I think I was so—and they did a wonderful job. Oh, and that was a thing I was going to mention. You know, the reason I did the first—well, there's lots of reasons, but one of the reasons was I really wanted to see what was involved in it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: It's a little bit like in second year accounting, when they give you a problem set to solve, and it was always a week away from being finished. I mean, it was just one of those things that went on and on and on and on and on. And I really wanted to see what a curator went through to do a—because Barbara Haskell was one of—is probably my longest-term friend. And I'd always admired what she did. In fact, I called her a hero. She said, "Why am I a hero?" I said, "Because you write the essay—you write the definitive book, and then all the pictures come in, and then you see whether you were right or not." [Laughs.] Because not even a great curator like Barbara had seen all the pictures. And then what happened—well, like when Barbara—[laughs] I'll tell you, this time when my friend Barbara Rose wrote about Georgia O'Keeffe's new patio pictures, and she was looking at them upside down. [Laughs.] And you know, I mean, and I—when you think about it, a curator that does a show of one artist is—they've done their scholarship and done their writing before—because I don't think anyone has ever seen every picture.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And that's one of the reasons why I think, in certain artists like O'Keeffe and a lot of artists, I know more than the so-called experts, because I've seen all the pictures.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And they've seen all the slides.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And that isn't the same thing.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Oh, well. It's okay.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah. But no, it's—no, there's no—there's no public announcement.

MIJA RIEDEL: I thought I'd read something in a—in an article in the Seattle newspaper.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Paper?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Who says the newspaper is accurate on information? I find newspapers are very inaccurate [laughs] about this.

MIJA RIEDEL: So do you have alternative plans, or are you just not—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I'm not committing.

MIJA RIEDEL: You're not committing.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, I—I'm not even committing to say I'm not committal.

MIJA RIEDEL: Not committing. I understand.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I understand.

[Side conversation.]

[END OF TRACK.]

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Barney Ebsworth at his home in—on Hunts Point in Washington on March—sorry, April 13th. Why do I keep doing—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: April 13, 2017 for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art and the Frick Collection. This is card number three. So Barney, I know you need to wind up, so we have maybe four final questions here, and then I'll hand you back the rest of your day. I wanted to talk briefly about the Tadao Ando chapel that you've tried to—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Oh, yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: —build here. And this is something that you started, I think back in 2007, 2008, with the idea of donating a chapel—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: —that—to either Seattle or Bellevue, and—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, the area.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. The area. And it seemed that there were a couple of different sites that might work at some point, but it seems to have run into some of the problems that you run into with public sculpture at some points, which is some people are not keen on the idea.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, and this town's particularly tough on it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: They're doing it right now to the Asian Art Museum. I think it's part of the rugged Western influence, you know, where everybody's got to get their six-shooter out and protect their property or whatever. [Laughs.] I don't—well, they—I had—let's see. One, two—I had two sites that NIMBY got me.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Not in my backyard.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: It was—it was a contemplative chapel, Episcopalian.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, we never quite solved the legality of that. It might—it was—it would be Episcopalian, but maybe not under the jurisdiction, and certainly available to anybody—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —for a holy service. And it's funny, because when I first met Ando, and I have—he designed—did maquettes for three different—[telephone ringing]—three different—junk call.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And I said to him, I said, "It's a shame when a great architect like you gets a project and does it and then gets it all ready and then the funding doesn't show up."

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: "But this one will, because I'm funding it." Well, I was the co-founder of a company called Build-A-Bear Workshop.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And the stock was worth \$40 million, and by the time we got ready to do it, the market had collapsed, and the stock was worth about \$9 million. And I—and after—we actually had four different sites. I mean, that we tried. And then I finally said, "Well, God's telling us he doesn't need another chapel."

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

[telephone ringing]

BARNEY EBSWORTH: That's my lady.

MIJA RIEDEL: We can pause this.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: She can—

MIJA RIEDEL: So this is something that you've decided to let go for now, or let go—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Oh, no, it's gone.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's done. Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I mean, I've got all the plans and I got two maquettes. I got the—I could show you the models. [Laughs.] I got them put away somewhere.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah, now it's—no. So I've gotten more active in my Episcopal church, and to a certain extent, you know, it wasn't to be.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: It wasn't to be.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But I was inspired by the Steven Holl chapel at Seattle University. St. Ignatius, I think it is. And—because it's a little jewel. Might be the best thing he did. He was from here. Or he is from here. And so—but didn't happen.

MIJA RIEDEL: That one didn't work. Is there anything else you'd like to say about this house and building it, designing it to accommodate your collection? I know you wanted each major piece to have its own wall.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: We've talked about the lighting.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: We've talked about the floor plan.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: It seems like it—it seems like it came together fairly quickly. It's as you say, it was the culmination of a lifetime of looking at architecture and art, so you'd probably been thinking about it for decades, and—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah, but I think, you know, it was this piece of property and all the trees and the 300 feet frontage on the lake. And you know, I think when you've had the experience—not practical, because of course I've never designed anything—you look at the situation, it doesn't take you too long to figure it out.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Right. Was there a structure on the property when you bought it?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Oh, there was a beautiful 1918 Pacific Northwest, you know, three-story mansion. Great big wooden windows like when we were kids and you could go like this and it—you go right out. I mean, I mean, the house was—and it was—it belonged to Craig McCaw at the time. And it—what was I going to say about Craig McCaw? Oh, he hadn't lived there for a number of years, but you could have eaten off the floor. The house was immaculate, was in perfect shape.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But there was room for about two pictures. [Laughs.] It was not a good picture house.

MIJA RIEDEL: It was not going to work.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And so we tore it—well, I tried to give it away, you know. I tried to give it to somebody to float it off and—they used to do that. For some reason, I couldn't, so I gave it to Habitat for Humanity, and they came in it and salvaged whatever they could use.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, that's terrific.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah. And then they—then they tore down the rest of the house.

MIJA RIEDEL: So, I just wanted to go back to the Seattle Art Museum for a minute, because you were co-chair of the committee for the 75th anniversary celebration, right, that brought in—you were not?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: No, I don't think so.

MIJA RIEDEL: That brought in all those 50 collectors donating all that work?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: No, I don't think—

MIJA RIEDEL: No, you weren't part of that? I thought you were for some reason.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: No, I—no, I was really—I think Jinny Wright and Charlie, her son—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —were the—were the biggies in that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And no, I don't—because I was still pretty new in Seattle at that time.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You moved here in 2002?

BARNEY EBSWORTH: No, I moved here permanently in 2003, into this house.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I'd had a condo here with my ex-wife.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And had been here for maybe 10 years before—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: —in a—on a part-time basis.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right, going back and forth.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: You've talked about—I just wanted to talk briefly about your collection, and you've mentioned friends who enjoy trying to decide where their collection's going to go, and you said, "I'm too private. To me, it's much more about what I need to do for myself." Is there anything else you want to say about that? It seems like

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Did I say that?

MIJA RIEDEL: You did. You did. In—there was an article. I can't remember which one now. But it did—when I read this the first time, it sounds to me like—it sounded to me like the collection was just so personal to you, almost like those 12 children that you talked about way back when.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Well, that's true.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.—[inaudible]

BARNEY EBSWORTH: But you know, the things I've read about me in the newspapers—

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] That's right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I don't—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay, well, somebody—we're cross referencing right here, and—[laughs] but it is a very personal collection to you.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Oh.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Absolutely.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Absolutely.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: And in fact, somebody said, "Would you—if you had to have a disaster happen to you, would you prefer that the house burnt down and the pictures were gone, or they were stolen and you couldn't get them back?" I said, "Absolutely that they were stolen and I couldn't get them back, because the pictures would still be there."

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BARNEY EBSWORTH: "The disaster would be knowing that they were destroyed."

MIJA RIEDEL: What an interesting question.

[They laugh.]

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. So I have one more quote question for you, because I love this quote in a story about you, and I—and it made me think about the impact that your collection has had on you.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: And this was in reference, I think, to a 1962 article in *Time*, raving about the arrival of Andy Warhol's Campbell's Soup cans, and Wayne Thiebaud's bakery paintings, and you're quoted in this article as saying, "I remember wondering what kind of an idiot would buy those pictures. Of course, I'm the idiot that owns both the pictures."

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah, that's right. I said that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. And I just—I love that, because to me, it felt like your collecting had gone 180 degrees, and I have heard that from other people who are deeply engaged with arts. I think of Steven Oliver, the collector in the Bay Area—

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: —Jim Melchert, the artist, also of the Bay Area. Something about collecting art—one of the most satisfying or gratifying aspects of it is to see your own ideas turned upside down.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: I'd agree with that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: It is—it's a—it's not only a—it's not only an intellectual process. It's an aesthetic process. And it's so rewarding. That's why, you know, the question, would I rather—would I rather lose the collection or the experience, and I said I'd rather lose the collection than the experience.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. Yeah.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Because you can't take that away. Well, eventually, [laughs] you'll get—it'll get taken away from me. But that's a different story.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, I know you have a 1:00, so we can stop right here.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Thank you. This has been great fun for me, because it allows me to stretch that rubber band in my head, you know, and keep it active. Because if you don't talk about it or think about it, you lose it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: That's why I can't remember if it's Jeffrey Agnew or—[laughs] and he's a good friend.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Good. Well, I'm glad we stretched it. So thank you.

BARNEY EBSWORTH: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]