



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Interview with Giorgio Cavallon

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

Transcript

Preface

This interview is part of the *Dorothy Gees Seckler collection of sound recordings relating to art and artists, 1962-1976*. The following verbatim transcription was produced in 2015, with funding from Jamie S. Gorelick.

Interview

DOROTHY SECKLER: This is Dorothy Seckler interviewing Giorgio Cavallon in Provincetown on August 28, 1966.

Giorgio, I wanted to ask you first about your early life in Italy and the kind of town you came from, the kind of family you grew up in, what traditions there were in your native, in your hometown of any kind of craftsmanship, what kind of paintings you saw as a child, and so on.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Well, I was born in Sorio, province of Vicenza. I came to this country in 1920. When I came to this country, first I land in Worcester and I was doing labor work. And then after I got—in the meantime when I was in a resting period I used to do drawing, copying calendars and things like that, you know.

And finally, after—when I went back to Springfield where my father was living, and I tried to find some teacher who would teach art because it was quite interesting. And so finally I found one. The name was Margaret Noonan. She was sort of a—well, it was simple but very direct, drawing from still life. And she was quite—even now I think she was quite good.

When I think about it, she was probably one of the—principal's very—son [ph]. And had to stay drawing for about a year or two. And I just take two lessons or three lessons a week, and after that she put me to start painting. In the beginning, and then I worked color to mix between one another, what makes black, and to make green you use black and yellow. So, I had started to find my way out. I shared often. During, I was working at Westinghouse winding motors, electric motors for automobiles.

And then finally she talked a lot about the academy in New York. So I fixed a date after three years of studying with her to come to New York. And I asked my father if he'd lend me money to take a train and he refused, so I had to somehow by saving, week. No, weeks. They gave me five dollars a week. But I was able to come here. And then after I got here in New York I was able to get a job, and then I studied at National Academy at night. Then the following year I went to daytime and night. And I just worked six months a year, and six months. Then I was doing carpentry myself also. So, I was in the union.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Was there anyone that you studied with at the academy that had any real effect on your way of thinking about painting?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Well, I think, yes, the one that I thought of at that time was Charlie Hawthorne. But when I got to the first year that was his last year teaching there. But the following year, 1927, I came to Provincetown and I studied with him here. I admire him very much, the way he taught. His method of teaching. And he was quite—also [inaudible] to the same time. But just the same, I liked his principle.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What kind of things struck you most about his method? Was it his way of handling color?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Color. The way—in a broad way, in a broad sense that he used color and masses of color and structure. And he never wants you to put details on it, just paint with a palette knife, which was good. Of course, we were doing that for every day, about two sketches a day. And then at the end of the week he'd criticize in a group. And from the criticism I think you got quite a lot. Also by listening to other people, you know. So you judge between your work and the others, and so you.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Were there any other artists here at that time who have since become, you know, your associates that were interesting? Whose work you felt sympathetic to? Studying with Hawthorne.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Well, you mean the artists that are still existing now, that are alive?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. Or.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Well, I don't know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: There was no one that was too important to you, then?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No, no, somehow no.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What year would this have been, Giorgio?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: '27. '27 and '28 I come back again. But then I stay with David Garfunkel. He was opposed to Hawthorne's idea, and his idea, he said it was better, which was different but was not much better.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Between these two summers you were in New York, right? What were you doing in New York at this time? Were you still working as a carpenter?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes, I was working as a carpenter. Yes. And then I quit in the winter and went to the academy. I went there for five years. I quit in 1929, the beginning of 1930. And then I felt I had enough of the Academy. Then I went—my father lent me some money from a post office in Italy. It just wasn't enough, and the Depression came so I had no way to get a job. So I decided to go to Italy, and I stayed there three years, which I worked.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You went back to your hometown in Vicenza?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes and I had a studio there.

[Audio break.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: Turning it on now. While you were in Europe you told me you had been not only working in Vicenza, but traveling throughout?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes. By the way, Vicenza was not actually Vicenza. My hometown was in Lonigo, which is a province of Vicenza. It's about 22 kilometers from Vicenza, between Verona and Vicenza. And then I traveled through Italy in 1931. I went through all different—you know, everywhere that I could: museum, church, and so on. But I was very impressed on Masaccio and

Giotto.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Where did you see Masaccio? In Florence?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: In Florence. Chiesa de –Santa Carmine.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes, the Carmine chapel.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Carmine chapel, yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Santo Spirito wasn't it?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes, something like that but I don't know exactly. And then Giotto in Padua and also in Florence. But Masaccio impressed me mostly because of his severity in the structure. And his—it was just the pure—there are no decorative qualities. Just the essential thing, the essence of painting to me, the structure. And very powerful in a sense. Also in composition. And he really did—well, it's very hard.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You mentioned before the quality you felt is something very human. Only the most—

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes. It's quite human. In the plastic, what is it—this plastic business, I don't know. It's always too overdone.

[They laugh.]

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Sometimes I don't understand myself what plastic is. Right now it has a double meaning. You use plastic and neoplastic.

[They laugh.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. But you found the same quality of this kind of strength and simplicity in Giotto.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes, in Giotto about the same. And also another painter I admire very much is the modernist [Paul] Cezanne. He has a certain—about the same quality in the way. Which I think these three painter mostly was the pivot.

[Audio break.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: —you know, were so important.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: That were important.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Would you say that your main ideas about painting grew out of this triumvirate of painters? Giotto, Masaccio and Cezanne, and that that was already pretty much in your mind when you came back to New York.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Well, I think these painters was the sort of pivot. Each one turned, twisted things around, what was happening, that all what's happening after, it just changed. Like Giotto did it, and Masaccio did it. Now Cezanne did it. And which I think that's the most important point. I mean, they are very serious painters that's just pure artist. Nothing, you know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Nothing literary.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No frill, no decoration, no sentimentality. You know, it's just there. It's just the real thing. That's my most strong impression I get from them.

DOROTHY SECKLER: When you said they all twisted things around do you mean they reorganized?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Not that they reorganized, it just happened that the people saw after they did it that it was something—other way to express. I suppose, that's probably it—I don't know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Now, I just wanted to be clear about that one word.

Well then, when you did come back to the United States what year—would that have been 1933?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: 1933, yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You had a stronger feeling about your direction in painting because of your —

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Well, when I came back in 1933, no, I didn't have a stronger direction. Because I was doing sort of a—I thought I was doing modern painting. Then I was sort of academic, you know. I didn't know exactly until I saw abstract or something.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You had not been abstract until this point?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No, no, I didn't know, I didn't know much about those. As a matter of fact, I didn't see any up til then.

DOROTHY SECKLER: When did you first see abstract painting that impressed you?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: It was after—well, it was 1934-35 I begin to see it. I think maybe the very first show I saw was a [Paul] Gauguin one, that on Fifth Avenue was showing which I was very impressed. Which at present I don't think much of Gauguin. You know, I like it but it doesn't move me much. But that day it did. And then I began to see gallery shows and I began to—but then after, as I was saying once, I said about that—now, when I got back and I had to get a job to do my living. I did carpenter work.

So Father Alan Jewel [ph] used to be a student at the academy when I was there. He, associated with Hans Hofmann and opened a school of college arts association, 57th Street, corner of Lexington. And one day he called me up and says that he needs something to be done, a couple of screens and some kind of racks. So, when I went there to see and he told me, he says "You can either get paid, "or else he says, "I can exchange a lesson if you want to." Then I felt that I had enough school so what I want to do was to paint, you know. And I thought I need money.

DOROTHY SECKLER: So you needed money.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes. Then I did finish the job and I didn't bother to collect. You know, I just forgot it. Not forgot it, but I just let it go. Then after a few months I thought it over and I thought maybe I should have some lesson. Just see what's—if there's something different, new. So I call Jewel at Hans in the studio, but he was not there anymore. They had a fight between the two and they separated, split up.

So Hans answered the phone and I explained to him who I was, because I didn't know if he would remember me. He said, Oh yes, yes, yes. So I says, I never got paid for the job that I did. I said, And I wonder if I could take a lesson in exchange. And he said, Oh sure. He said, Yes, yes. He says, I'm very happy. He said something like that. Come over, he said. I have something else I want you to do, he says. So he wants me to see him.

So I went there and he showed me he had some other racks to build. So I kept taking lessons for about two or three nights a week for about two or three years till I felt that—I was timing myself, how much. But then I asked, one day I said, I think I'm finished now. Oh no, he says, You come always. He says, Keep coming. So I felt somewhat embarrassed, in a sense. But then he had to move from 57th Street. He moved to 9th Street and he got another school there. And then we had to do quite a lot of work between students, we were about three months. So I felt a little better so I kept going to school there.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Giorgio, what was the—

GIORGIO CAVALLON: But only went at night only.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What was your feeling about the things that Hans was teaching? I mean, did you understand the principle he was trying—

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No, I did not understand at all. No.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What impression did it give you?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Well, I was sort of confused. And I thought—I mean, in painting everything has to have a certain meaning, you know. I could not see it. But I got mostly, not from Hans Hofmann, but mostly it was from the students that would study with Hans. And I just questioned them quite often. We'd get in Washington Square Park and talk about it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What students were there?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: George McNeil, Albert Swindon, and then—which is dead. He died. And then another was Baldwin, Harry Baldwin, which also died a few years ago. And by talking they sort of clarified the point, you know. Then after when I got the thing clear in my mind I felt quite free. You know, I felt quite happy about it, because I felt it was a new channel that—there was no limit about one. You didn't feel like you had no boundary around you. You could put dots of paint whenever you felt like it. Or even change the shape or anything. There was no—so I thought it was very freedom.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You were painting from the model in Hans' class?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes, from a model. Yes. And then of course—and it was quite difficult to paint from a model and then trying to cut the model up, you know, in different directions to make an abstract out of it. So that I find difficult even now to do it. Now, if I work from a model I feel I stick to the model more. I try to be a little free, but at the same time it's very difficult to make something else, you know, when you have it.

You want to do landscape. Well, there I used—I can do sketch watercolor now. I use a sateen [ph] to get the colors right but I cannot follow the landscape now. Now, if I do follow the landscape it has to be a copy almost of the landscape. If I try to do abstract the landscape, then I take the essence out of it, the way I feel about it, and arrange the thing the way. But on the watercolor it's quite a

problem, because once you put the wrong thing down then you're just cooked.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But you were not using watercolor that time.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No, no.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You're doing that now.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No, I'm just doing—I'm talking about I'm just working from nature now, doing sketches.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Here in the summer in Provincetown.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes, in the summer. Yes. And that's—

DOROTHY SECKLER: But to get back to that time you gradually began to understand what he meant about cutting up the space into planes and reorganizing the figure?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes. But then after I had to find out the thing mostly—well, through your own feeling in yourself somehow, you know. And it takes a long time to get it, because, to me, a painting doesn't matter, abstract or realistic, whatever. A good painter has no—it's just good, you know. It doesn't matter. And you apply the same thing to a realistic paint if you're a painter, or abstract. It has the same—the feeling is about the same, I think. Do you understand what I mean?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes, I think so.

[Audio break.]

Giorgio, at the time you were studying with Hans Hofmann had you—how were you making your living?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: I got in the WPA. It was 1935 then and I was there till 1942 I think. It was 1942.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And you were on the easel project?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: It was on the easel project until 1939. Then, automatically, all the painters were laid off in 1939 except those artists that got a job in the World's Fair. Because they left the job there, and then they got back automatically without going through home relief, which we had to go through home relief then.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But you had mentioned before that although most of the time you were on the easel project, you also worked with Arshile Gorky.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Well, and then after I got back, when I was rehired again in 1939, then the easel project was filled up somehow. I don't know. And Diller, Burgoyne Diller was there. He was the head of the project with the mural project and asked me what I'd like to do, what project. So, if I want to be assistant to the mural. I said I prefer to be on an easel, but he can put me there. So I asked to be put with Gorky, Arshile Gorky.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Had you made friends with Gorky at that time?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Well, I went with Gorky there. And Gorky, when I got in the studio he looked

me up and down and didn't say anything. So I sat on the couch there all day and I just talked a little bit. Fundamentally I don't think he liked the idea at all, see. He wanted to be alone anyway. But he had to accept something like that, because everybody had to have an assistant. Anyway, so then finally we became very, very good friends. You know, we got to like each other very much.

But with Gorky he was a very peculiar person. He always felt that he had to be always the prima donna, in a way. He had a certain quality like that. And so you had to—you could never challenge him in any way, because he had a way that he would cut you down very quickly. And he did that whenever we went to—outside a jumble shop, or anyplace we got among artists. If you didn't have the table or the floor, you know, he just lost interest and just walked away.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What kind of a mural was this that you were painting? What was the subject of it?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: It was a stained glass window.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: I don't know for where, what it was for. So we worked on it but it never came through, I don't think. I heard that it never was made. Because the war broke out. Then I was taken off from there and I was put on the ship models.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Before we get to that episode though, during the years when you were on the easel project, did you meet any other artists who became your close friends and associates on the easel project?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Oh yes. [Willem] de Kooning was one that I always knew. We used to visit him quite a lot on 21st Street in his loft.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What was his work like at that time?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: He was painting more sort of [Piet] Mondrian-ish type.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Abstract painting?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Abstract, yes. It was quite a good time.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Absolutely severe, no figurative references at all in de Kooning?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: At that time, no.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I'm speaking of de Kooning now, right?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes, yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's interesting.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes. And George McNeil was doing—there was quite a small—and Gorky was doing that, was abstract. There was a few people doing abstract work. David Hernando [ph] was doing abstract in those days.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, George McNeil's abstractions would have been from still life, wouldn't they?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Well, they were sort of—I was doing the mural still life. I don't know. Yes, he always did work—there was a Hofmann's idea, you know, the still life.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Starting from something and reorganizing.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Something, yes, and then reorganizing.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But not de Kooning. That was absolutely abstract, as you recall?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: As far as I remember, no. It was sort of a—yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How did that impress you? Did it affect you in any way? Did you dislike it?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No, it didn't affect.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It didn't?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No, it sort of—no. As a matter of fact, I don't know, in those days a lot of people were affected by [Pablo] Picasso, and especially Gorky.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Were you?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No, Picasso did not affect me somehow. I don't know. I think I admire [Henri] Matisse more in a way. Mondrian I got to like more, I know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You did?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, your paintings on the easel project you had said were—

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Well, they were sort of semi, you know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Semi-abstract?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes. I was quite, I would say, sort of confused. You know, neither here nor there. I did try to do my best, in that sense.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Would they have been abstractions that had some suggestion of landscape or a figure?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Sometimes a suggestion of a still life or something, you know. An object painted in some abstract way. And it was in 1936, I think, Harry Holtzman started the abstract group, the American Abstract Group and asked me to join. So we had to submit work and I was accepted. And so the group started. And we had the first show at the Squibb building.

And that was my first painting in abstract, really. I worked day and night and then finally it came out. It was from a still life. It came out very well. Even now that I have it I liked it because it has a very fresh and still has—it has a little bit, you know, you could maybe find what—I don't know. Well, it's very hard to explain.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But you were very happy with it.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes. Still now when I look. My sister has it and it still looks very good.

DOROTHY SECKLER: So was this an important new association, the American Abstract Artists? Was that it?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes, that was the American Abstract Artists. I think that was quite an important group, which I don't think that never got credit. Up to now, I mean. I think in those days we were only few and everybody was doing realistic work. And all of a sudden, after so many years, all of a sudden everybody starts painting abstract. And the artists that were painting up till that time, they never got any credit for. Never—just ignored, was completely ignored. The whole group had been ignored. I think that's sort of—something should be done about it.

I will say in those days they called that school. You know, everybody was painting like—they were, what do you call it? Not germ-free. [Laughs.] Sterile. But not sterile in a sense, you know, but like sterilized. There's no germs in it. Because everybody was painting sort of very clean, sharp-edged, you know, something like that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And you were too?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No, I never was sharp-edged. I was—sharp. I never was—that always had been my problem whenever I was at school that my edge always did vary. It's always been rough all the time. Even now I just don't go for sharp edge. Because I think, I don't know, something is wrong.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But you were accepted by the group in any case as being an abstract artist. And this was pretty much—

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes. It went on—I stayed with the group until 1957. Then I decide there was no point to be in a group anymore so I quit. But the group is still going on. But it has no meaning now anymore.

DOROTHY SECKLER: So around 1940 when you were—after the Gorky experience with this window your work was pretty largely abstract at that point?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes, yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And this was the point at which you got a different job with ship models.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes. What happened to me after was every summer we came to Provincetown and I did watercolor sketches. What happened, one place there was a bunch of barns and I was called—doing there. And I was doing patch, one on top of the other.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Doing what?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Patch. You know, like a square.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: One on top of the other. And that gave me the feeling, after I start painting square, rectangular, you know, arranging things. Which, it doesn't look like Mondrian, but it looks like the same principle, I will say. And that went on for about 10 years, which I was with Charlie Egan in those days.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You were showing with Charlie Egan at that point?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: When did you have your first show?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: 1946. Charlie Egan.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And that was the first show anywhere?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Oh, no. My very first show, I had it in Vicenza in 1931. Figure work. And then the first show in this country was ACA gallery, 8th Street. I had two shows there, as a matter of fact.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What year would that have been?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: 1934 I think, or '35. I forgot.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But you couldn't have been too abstract then.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No, I was realistic. All this work, the show there was realistic work that I did in Italy.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I see.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes. Now, I just had one show there.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What kind of realistic work were you doing in Italy?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: It was figure, landscape, you know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Very precise, very meticulous?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Not very precise, but in a rough sense they were—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Very realized.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: It was really very influenced on some of the figure by [Amedeo] Modigliani, especially one I did. Modigliani impressed me very much.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Were they elongated somewhat?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: I only have one elongated figure. Not that long, but.

DOROTHY SECKLER: So you showed those at ACA?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: The ACA.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Was that two years in succession?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No, no. No, I think it was only one show there. Then I had a watercolor show in the 8th Street Playhouse, also that I did in Italy. That was some—I don't know. Not important anyway. But then 1946 I had the first show with Charlie Egan.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Where was his gallery at that time?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: 57th Street. I had four shows there, four or five shows.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What did your work look like in that first Egan show?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: It was always square, rectangular.

DOROTHY SECKLER: No figurative reference whatsoever?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No figurative at all, no.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And were you painting large at that time?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Well, the largest was about 48 by 40 [inches], something like that. I think 48 probably was the largest. Maybe some was 51, [5]2.

DOROTHY SECKLER: When you were beginning a painting in that period, would you have worked from nature at all in the beginning? Or did you start immediately breaking up the canvas?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: In the beginning I start working, taking interior room or sink, you know, things like that, and cutting it up and trying to. And then after slowly I just—then I did just a, you know, paint awhile on the canvas and start off that way.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Was there anything distinctive about your color at that time? As I recall when I first saw your paintings there were a great many whites and some browns and blacks.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes. I had—the first I had, with Charlie Egan I had this sort of little more range of color. They went down deep and they were cut up in small sections. But then in 1952, then I began to be much broader and more white. So the whole thing was to me much more open. And it had a different atmosphere which, while I like those better, some of them, earlier I like it just as well in a different way too. But then from there I broke off again when I was—I had two show at Stable when I was doing white work. Because Charlie Egan closed up in 1954.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But you had shows there every year, or every other year between—

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Every three years. Always every three years. I never had a show every year.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Beginning in—what was the date?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: '46

DOROTHY SECKLER: '46 through '54?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: '54, yes. Every three years.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Did your work change a good bit during that time, or did it stay right, constant?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No, it stays right along. And it begins to change in '54. It begins to change. Begins to be more bigger shapes, more simplified.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Were you selling at that time?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Nobody was of course at that time, I imagine.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: I start selling when I went to the Stable Gallery. The first show I didn't sell any to Stable, just the small one. The second show I practically sold the whole show.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Really? What year would that have been, Giorgio?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Gee, I forgot now. It was '58, something like that. And then after that I could once again—

[END TAPE 1.]

GIORGIO CAVALLON: —Kootz called me up and asked me if I want to join his gallery. So I was quite surprised and I didn't know what to make of it. So I went to see him. And he was quite happy about it. And I said, Well, my problem is just how to get away, to get out from the Stable now. He said, Oh, that's simple. [Laughs.] Just—well, that's your problem, he says anyway.

Anyway, so he just gave me some time to think it over about it. And I was sort of in a daze when I walked out of the place in the whole downstairs and I didn't see—it was a big glass on the side of the door, and I walked right in it, smacked like broke my nose. Anyway, when I got home and I thought it over. And then I went to the Stable and I told her. I think I did it on the same day. She was —

DOROTHY SECKLER: You told Eleanor Ward?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes. She was going to a dentist and she was flabbergasted, you know, what to make out of it. And I felt quite sheepish about the whole thing, you know. I didn't know what—so strange. Anyway, so that was it. And then I finally got my work back after. And I think Kootz himself went and selected the work that he wanted. He had no—I mean, it was quite—well, unscrupulous about the whole thing.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Unscrupulous about it?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes. Well, I mean that he went there—to go to a place and you take an artist away, you know, and then go there and just select the work that he wants to get into his gallery.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I suppose it's done all the time. [Laughs.]

GIORGIO CAVALLON: I suppose so, yes. It's one thing I couldn't understand.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well then, was there any real break in your work, a change in your work at this time?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No, there was no break. I just kept doing for—I had a show there, all light painting. And I had one or two shows of light painting. The first show was sold. I had two shows of light painting. The first show I practically sold everything. The second show I sold quite a few. But then it began to bother me when I saw all the painting on the wall. As a matter of fact, whenever I have a show I always feel sick about it. I feel bad, you know. Because I feel it never is up to what I think it should be.

So, then from there after the show I began to—right, the first painting I began to change completely. As a matter of fact, I took one painting back because there was one green spot that I didn't like. And Kootz agreed to take that spot off. And I finally end up to paint the whole thing over. And got very dark. So I did. And after that I just—sales went down completely because people were sort of—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, that was a change, no doubt, in the whole art scene. But before we get to that—

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes. But the principle was the same thing. In the beginning, I mean, it was the same way, except I wanted to get a little more weight on the paint, you know, on the color or something. I don't know, to get a little more punch or something. It's very hard to. And the other has just the same, just as much, but I felt it was a little bit too, I don't know, I was sort of a little puzzled by it. And yet when I look back now those paintings are very nice, very good.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I'd like to go back a little bit to the period when you were, well, let's say, getting into the Stable. We were discussing the other evening a very—what period that you thought was very exciting in the '40s when the club was beginning, and when you were meeting artists there, and everyone was very excited about the ideas that we now call Abstract Expressionism. And I wondered if you could think back to, well, some of the aspects of those discussions that entered into your work that affected the way you thought about painting at that time.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Well, I don't think that the discussion there never affect my painting you know, I don't think. It was very broad in a way since I get into understanding more. But I don't think it helped my way of painting somehow.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Maybe not to make it better, but would it have affected your way of—what you thought a painting should do, or how it should be? For instance, were you at all affected by the idea of painting, as what we call action painting, in the sense that you should work, let it flow very freely and so on?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No, I don't think the club never had any of that. And as a matter of fact, the principle of the club to me was more or less our place to meet, and talk, and discuss a problem technically or anything. And then also the essence of meeting other sort of artists, you know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Whom did you meet that impressed you?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Well, I met—well, there was quite a lot of people there. I'm a charter member of the club. And it was [Philip] Pavia was the one that started this which I think was very good. It was too bad that there's not such a thing now. Which in Europe you can go to a café or something. Here there's no place to go. And so the only thing one can do is to invite people to your house and so on.

DOROTHY SECKLER: So Pavia and who else would have been among the group that you saw a good bit of?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Oh, it was Loyton [ph] was quite, and de Kooning was in. It was many others.

DOROTHY SECKLER: [Franz] Kline?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Kline. At that time Kline was just—was not even known, nothing. He was

just a very quiet person drinking his beer. And he was a very charming person. And then, well, all the group, you know, there's hundreds of them. In the beginning it was very nice, and then it got so big that it got out of hand, in a way.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Do you remember any particular topics or subjects of discussion that were especially vivid, or that made—

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Well, I think it was once they called it Studio 35. That was not a club. But that was run by Motherwell.

DOROTHY SECKLER: There's another one now.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: And Barney Newman, I think [Mark] Rothko was in, Vicente, was the teacher.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. Robert.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: But at that time [Robert] Motherwell I admire very much those days because he brought out things and he was quite good at asking questions. And de Kooning was on the panel many times. And then other—

[Audio break.]

GIORGIO CAVALLON:—which very rarely at the lecture the club did they have any meeting. In a sense it was art as a teaching, as an instruction about art.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You think that the Club 35 really had a little more—

GIORGIO CAVALLON: I think the Club 35 had a little bit better in a way that the lecture they had was quite lively or something. Of course the club had a lot of good lectures too. We had sometime a priest or Jesuit that was quite good. A composer. I don't remember.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Did you get involved with the ideas of Zen Buddhism at that time?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No, no, I don't know what Zen Buddha, no.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You didn't get involved with all that?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No. There was quite a group of that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You found out about that later, but it wasn't until—

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, the companionship with other artists was pretty important to you.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: It's important to have a place to go there and relax and be social. To me I think that was the most important thing. Because, I don't know, you talk, you know. Then you sometimes like a battery discharged, and you sort of recharge yourself. Then you can go back in the studio and work. Even if there was nothing said important you know, but really just a relation.

DOROTHY SECKLER: The idea that art might have something to do with the unconscious, or that through automatic drawing you could get out certain things from—that you know, you didn't think about consciously. Would that have been a part—

GIORGIO CAVALLON: It's possible. I've heard the same thing.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Did you experiment with that at all?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No, no.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You always felt that you controlled each thing that you put down very consciously, right?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes. I feel—

DOROTHY SECKLER: You knew what you were doing.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Maybe I'm sort of a peasant type, you know. [They laugh.] Just I only believe what comes out. I mean, just try to—never take any chances. Although sometime you do a thing in your sketch, you know, you do something. Sometimes something comes out, a chance, and you see it more. It's the only thing to know when you have it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You never got involved with the idea of beginning a painting through a kind of free doodle, just a wandering line—

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No.

DOROTHY SECKLER:—in any way?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No. It always came out, you know, I always believe the paintings come out very spontaneously. Even if you work months and years, it should be spontaneous like if it was done in a short time.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How did you manage that?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Well, just by keep working and sometime you'll work a whole day and just paint a few inches, you know, one square or little things. And then next day maybe you'll go there and you cancel it out. And then you just sit and look at it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Would you tend to work all over the painting at the same time, or to finish one?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Totally depends on the day. Sometimes you just get stuck which a lot of the time, most of the time you get stuck. And then after so many days looking at it, or trying to, then all of a sudden you come to a conclusion. Then you work the whole thing over. Then the whole thing's changed. And as a matter of fact, whenever I start painting, change something, you have to change something else, you know.

But they always happened that the painting is good except in one spot. And that spot just keeps you there, bogs you down for a long time. And then sometimes you have to destroy things which you like in order to make—to balance the thing out. That's happening in color. The color, the drawing, the form, everything has to work together.

So, when you look at a painting, something has its life its own. It's something in itself. And the whole thing is there. So, when you look at painting, the painting should be you're not conscious that anything is disturbing you. Everything just flows. And at the same time that it has a certain

magnetic quality. It holds you.

The next day when you look at it, if it has the same thing you leave it alone and it keeps doing that. And then sometimes you look at a painting. You feel it's very good. And then you go back the next day, something drops down. Then you have to work. You think it's no good at all. There's some painting that—I think a good painting always, it gets better as a matter of fact. When you look you never get tired of looking at it. Every time you look at it it's sort of like fresh or something.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And nowadays, the way you're working right now, would you want to talk a little bit about the way you would characteristically begin a painting? I know of course up here in Provincetown you do some quick little—

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Sketches, yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —sketches from—well, actually you've been working in the old cemetery out here in Provincetown.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Would you—is this an exceptional thing? In New York would you tend to make sketches before beginning a painting?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No, no. When I do watercolors here I don't even look at them. After a few weeks, I'm back in New York, then I open it up and I look at it. And then that's all I do.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You don't use it?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: I don't use them at all. Never, never go over, never touch them. Just what happens there. I never show them.

DOROTHY SECKLER: When you're in New York and you're beginning a new canvas, what would your procedure be? How would you begin? What would you set down first on the canvas?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Well, I like the empty canvas very much. And then I have to start—

[They laugh.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: How do you dirty it up?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: —to dirty it up.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Do you begin with a broad line of color? Somewhere broad?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No, I draw. I draw until I get something interesting. Drawing looks good, you know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Draw a line, you mean?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Well, either—now I use circles, quite a lot of circles. Before I used the straight line. Now I'm getting, last year I got more in the circle, in the broader sense. Bent line and all. But then when I start putting one color over it the whole thing just goes, just change.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You mean you would tend to put color over –

GIORGIO CAVALLON: The theme of the whole thing. I use the color then. All the drawings that's there don't follow at all. Then you—as I put the color on that thing changed my feeling and everything, see. Sometime I follow certain ways, but then the white canvas, the color begins to protest. Then you have to work according to it. So, what I do sometimes is just work over the whole canvas, then wipe it out. Then I go back next day. Then I begin to work free which I enjoy when I be free, when I don't care what's happening.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You've already messed up the canvas and now you can be free.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes. Then I begin until I get close to done again. Then it gets close and then still it's not right. So then to change some places, you change it, but then it doesn't work, you know, something doesn't. So I go on there for a long time until I change the whole thing over again. So it goes on that way constantly.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How long would you—might you work on a painting? What would be an average?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: I don't know. I did a painting, I start a small painting in North Carolina three years ago, and I just finished this summer. And it came out very nice. Of course I didn't work steady, you know. I just picked it up.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You keep a number of paintings going at the same time?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No, no, I don't. I go according to what—to try to make the painting itself.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Just one major painting at a time?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes, one major painting at a time. Well, I work in two or three, maybe. I have two or three that I'm looking around. Then when I see something that's not working, that doesn't, then I take it down and I work over. Then I get it to a point that it begins to look all right. But then I put it away and then I work on some other one. And then, until—then sometimes it happens also that just a little stroke or something, just the thing pops out, it comes out.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That millimeter that Hans Hofmann talks about. [Laughs.]

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Well, yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's very interesting. You always, of course, work in oil. I mean, just for the record.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Just oil.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Never anything in pens.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Never try any other medium. I have a lot of respect for oil, and I think it's a very difficult medium. I don't take any shortcuts. I don't believe in them anyway. I never made collage, anything like that. As a matter of fact my method is very—it's an old-fashioned way, I suppose.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Old-fashioned in what sense?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Well, I just don't try to take shortcuts. I don't use a sponge. I just use a small

brush, as a matter of fact.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You do?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: For most of the paintings you use small brushes?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Well, I use a half-inch let's say.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That is small.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No. 12, you know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes, very small.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: I never use house paintbrushes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You never do.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, I mean, would you use a paint that wasn't a house paintbrush, but was about an inch, or an inch and a half more?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You never do.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: I have a two [inch]. I very rarely use it. About this wide.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: I think it's a matter of learning how to use it, you know. I find the small brush make him go fast enough he can cover this.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And you never use a palette knife?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Then I mix my painting as—no, not palette knife. I just use it when I went to Hawthorne, and I gave it up. Because a palette knife gives you—well, very good texture. But I think it's very hard anyway. I like brush the best. And the oil paint.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I have the impression that in the last year or so your paintings have involved a more intense kind of color, almost Matisse-like color at times. Very rich oranges and reds.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No, I don't think I'm like Matisse, but I don't know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, a color that has a great glow and radiance to it is what I have in mind. In contrast, let's say, to the paintings of your perhaps earlier Kootz shows where the whites and browns and blacks would have been more.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: I don't know what to say about it. I don't think what I'm doing now I would associate with him.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You're not aware of it being different in color. I don't want to—

GIORGIO CAVALLON: They're different in color, but I don't think they are not Matisse.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, I mean let's take Matisse out of it.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Matisse is more transparent. There's something different, you know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. No, let's not confuse the picture. Forget about Matisse.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How has your feeling about color changed, or are you aware of it's being?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: I'm trying always to do something, to feel there's a presence of today. But somehow I suppose I'm traditional too. I have some connection which I cannot escape. I always liked the Venetian painting. And I have a feeling I'm quite attached to that in a way directly. Maybe in the color too, I don't know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, it certainly has—the recent things have a richness of color and I—

GIORGIO CAVALLON: To me, the Venetian paintings, I think they are—the method of painting they do today still, you know. The Florentine painters, there's something, they're—

DOROTHY SECKLER: They're glazing—

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes, but tempera, they're more precise, more—and what you see in the Venetian, it's more.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Particularly Titian and Tintoretto.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes, Titian. [Diego] Velazquez I would say. Velazquez is in Venice, you know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, in a way. He comes out of it anyway.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's interesting. But so that you, really, from having begun with this strong constructional idea from Cezanne and Masaccio—I put them in the wrong order. We could say Giotto, Masaccio and Cezanne.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Well, I don't think I—I mean, I guess all these, you know, I suppose gets behind your way back, you know, that you maybe have some sort of influence.

DOROTHY SECKLER: At what point would you have become aware of this feeling for the very rich Venetian color? Was that something that was always there?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No, probably it was always there. I don't know. I have a great admire for the Venetian painters. Like Carpaccio, you know. But not that I—I don't want to be. I guess there is something, it's possible, that comes through. I believe in color somehow. But then the color also can be—the color has to be balanced. It can be mud. It can be balanced. Each color, black, whatever it is.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You don't have any color theories of the type that [Josef] Albers does?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Of the one color affecting another, particularly, in a specific way?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: No, that's just sort of—I don't know, like a mathematic almost.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Giorgio, would you want to say anything about your feelings about changes in the art world in the last few years and how it affects you and so on?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Well, that I'm quite puzzled. [Laughs.] Very confused and very, also, depressed at the same time. I just believe in art, you know. I don't want to see a hamburger, you know. I can see it in a restaurant. I don't have it hung on the wall. I think that painting should—it's something like poetry. You take the essence out of something and trying to make it something. I don't believe everything should be beautiful and all that, but it should have—not show the gutter. [Laughs.] You know what I mean?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, go ahead and explain it, anyway, if you want to. [They laugh.]

GIORGIO CAVALLON: I don't want to see things on the street, you know, and all the worst part of it. I don't see any point in it. The whole thing is so commercial now. Everything. No one knows what's what anyway.

DOROTHY SECKLER: When you say that you mean in the art galleries, the picture-selling itself?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: The art gallery, picture-selling.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Or do you mean the subject of the paintings is commercial?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: The thing you're painting. Yes, everything. So, I think a real painter now has become sort of a—is going to become something outside. He has to be probably—go underground almost like it was about 30 years ago.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, in what sense do you mean go underground?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Well, it becomes isolated. You know, you just work. If a person believes in it he just keeps doing it the same way with difficulty, you know. Because all this stuff is going on it's always interfering. It's possible that something come out of it would be—

[Audio break.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: Giorgio, is there anything you'd like to say about—I know you already implied some of the things you believe about the work of art. I wonder if you'd like to add to that about what your general outlook and philosophy is today, having started off early in youth with having three great masters who were kind of the keystones—Giotto, Masaccio and Cezanne—and then having also the feeling for Venetian light and color, meaning the Venetian old masters.

You've made a kind of synthesis, apparently, of—and you know, brought this into your work in terms of modern times and a more abstract structure. But where do you go from here? Do you feel, as life has changed, the last decade, everything in our world has changed very—you know, the speed has been overwhelming of all kinds of change. Does this seem to you to require changes in your art of

any kind? Or do they seem entirely separated things?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Well, I don't know. It's very hard to answer. I'm always ready to change, you know, to go. If I feel something new, you know, something always to break through different approach. But at this moment, I don't know, it's quite a problem there.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But in your own work at the moment—

GIORGIO CAVALLON: My own work at the moment I just keep going—I can keep on painting the way—I just like to paint and I'm just purely painting art. I don't want to go for sensation or for anything. I mean, trying to be in the limelight some way or other which I don't think—if you try sometimes that doesn't work anyway. So, I just sit tight and just keep going.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Are there any important friendships with artists that you would like to mention, or that have come in whose ideas and so on have played an important part in your work? I think we haven't, of course, mentioned your wife Linda, who is also an artist.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Oh yes, Linda, she's a very good judge. Has a very good eye.

[They laugh.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: But do you influence each other in any way?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Well, she's the one that she has more sight. Sometimes she helps me by—she's much more help to me than I am to her. [Laughs.] Yes, that's true. She has—I don't know, she sees painting much more clearly.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You also, of course, have bought a house in New York now.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You've become a vested interest, in a sense. [They laugh.]

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes, and that's the problem. This misfortune is about that I like to do fixing things, you know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You get involved in the house a great deal. [Laughs.]

GIORGIO CAVALLON: I get involved in the house, involved in the car. I enjoy very much to do it. And sometimes it is a recreation from painting, but sometimes it gets me. I can easily get off from painting.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Of course, in the old days, we already talked about artists getting together in clubs and so on. Nowadays there's very little of that kind of thing.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes, there's none at all.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You have to see your friends socially.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes, the only time you meet artists now is at the party or else in the opening show. And then at the opening everybody wants to keep repeating the same thing. And so you get bored by the end so you like to go home. [They laugh.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, now you're getting ready to go off on another trip to Europe. Is there anything particular that you would be looking for in Europe, or that interests you very much in the way of what's going on over there?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Well, I'm sort of impressed and interested—I'm quite interested in architecture. I like the architecture in Europe very much.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Which particular things? Can you mention any of it?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Well, in Italy and France, you know. But also would go to see museum, to see if there's anything. But as far as—well, I don't know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: When you speak of architecture are you thinking there of traditional architecture like the palaces and churches? Or are you thinking of modern architecture?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Well, not modern, but sometimes simple architecture. Just a simple old building has a certain quality. Not big things.

DOROTHY SECKLER: The quality of the place itself.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I know what you mean.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: In France a few years I enjoyed the Trullo section and those beehive houses. That's something fascinating. And there's some in Sicily. There's a lot of beautiful simple houses. To me that's just as important as painting too. And then also see the landscape, you know, the people, and so on. I like Palladio very much.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, you seem to have an ability to kind of keep on your own, into your own orbit and not be disturbed too much by what's going on around you.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Well, not true. I keep my orbit, but I'm disturbed. And then after I can retreat myself in the shell again, sort of a protection in a way. But at the same time you get sort of—although also it's bad to be too much on the other way too, to be too confident about it, to be—so there is good and bad in both, both ways.

DOROTHY SECKLER: About how many paintings do you produce a year?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: About I would say about 10, something like that. Eight or 10.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's work over a fairly long time.

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And of course you've never done any teaching?

GIORGIO CAVALLON: Except two months in North Carolina. I was a visiting artist there. And it was quite of an undertaking because I never taught before. But it seemed people liked it.

[END TAPE 2.]