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Oral history interview with Joseph H.
Hirshhorn, 1976 Dec. 16

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

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Joseph H. Hirshhorn on December 16, 1976. The interview was conducted at Joseph Hirshhorn's apartment in New York by Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's December 16, 1976-Paul Cummings talking to Joseph Hirshhorn in his apartment in New York City-820 Park Avenue. Well, having seen the calendars and things that got you interested, what I find intriguing is what interested you in the calendars, in the pictures and the prints and all--?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Well, you have to understand my background. In the first place, you know, we were very, very poor. I'm the twelfth of thirteen children. When my father died there were ten of us alive, and my sister was born just two or three days before. So my mother came over to the United States. She was highly educated, came from a very fine family, married my father because she loved him. He died young of the thing that I have-diverticulitis. Some people it affects. They didn't know what the hell it was in those days. They didn't understand what it was. But I know what it was. I inherited it. And many people have diverticulitis and it doesn't bother them. Every now and then mine gets an infection. I have twelve feet of it in my lower bowel so every now and then I have an infection. Anyhow, he died of that and, of course, in those days-this was in Latvia-they didn't know what it was all about. I'm leading up to that point. Anyway, we came over. My mother worked in a ladies' bag factory to feed ten children and herself. We lived in a railroad flat. There were ten of us, four boys and six girls. Three of the boys slept on folding beds. The walls of our room were a dirty green.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I know that kind of calcium green.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: A green green. And of course I hated it. The first thing my mother did was to insure all the kids for \$500 so that in case the inevitable happened she'd have enough money to bury us. We used to get calendars. The calendars came out of the Barbizon School-Landseer, Bouguereau, Israels, Nasmyth, all those people. I used to cut up those pictures and put them on that green wall. I was very young and so I kept dreaming about them, looking at them morning and night. It intrigued me. I think this is how my art world started.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But then when you were working on Wall Street you started buying prints from --?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: No—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Or was that later?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: When I was working on Wall Street I was a curb broker. I was a kid seventeen years old. I went out of there with \$255 that I saved. I'd buy nine-cent lunches at a place where Max used to be. There was a place on Ann Street and there was a place New Street. At Max's in those days you get a frankfurter for three cents, a glass of orange juice for three cents and two rolls for three cents. I saved up \$255. And the first things that I—

PAUL CUMMINGS: That was a lot of money in those days.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Yes, it was. The first thing that I bought were two Durer engravings from people who are still in the business on New Street. My wife and I went down there about three years ago- in the same place. And the daughter who must be seven years old now remembered my as a little boy in short pants. In those days kids didn't wear long pants until they were eighteen or nineteen years old. I was short anyway. I'm trying to think of the name-oh, Assenheim (A-s-s-e-n-h-e-l-m). They're still in business there on New Street. So that was my first art purchase. I paid \$70 apiece, \$140. I still own them. That didn't go to the museum. They're probably worth \$1500 apiece now.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's fantastic. But, you know, what the appeal, what interested you in looking at pictures then?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Well, it was intriguing. I can't tell you what. Look, in the first place I was a curious kid. I was interested. I can't tell you what else.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you read books? Or go to the library?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: In those days, oh, sure.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The Metropolitan was the only museum around.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: In those days there were only about twelve galleries. When I was seventeen, eighteen, twenty years old, no. It wasn't until I was about twenty-four or twenty-five that I started to read books. The Phaidon Company in England. In those days illustrations were only in black and white.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. They were beautiful big books.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Yes. I used to go around to Third Avenue-no, I went to Park Avenue- I'm trying to think of the - in the summertime they had a big stand outside with all kinds of books-in those days you could buy a book for two or three or five dollars. So I started to get exposure. But I didn't know anything about the arts. I was curious. I had no formal education. I learned the mining and oil business in the same way. I was working and looking and thinking and reading.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You didn't have any friends who were interested in art, did you?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: No.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it was really your own thing all the way through.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: On my own all the way through.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's fascinating. Once you started reading books, say, at twenty-four or twenty-five, which was in 1925 or 1926, you were already in business and very busy—

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: I made a lot of money very early. Of the \$255 that I saved that I started with I made \$167,000 in eleven months.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That was trading on the curbs?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: I was trading on the curb. I lost all of it. I bought my mother a house. I sent her \$500 a month. I bought her a house in St. Albans, Long Island. It was country in those days. I think I paid \$4,500 for it. I made her quit working. I sent her \$500 a month. She had a servant, a black girl. And then I was working at night, too. I used to work for Cyrus J. Lawrence and Son. They're still in business. Have been in business for over a hundred years. They're at 115 Broadway. At that time they were at 15 Wall Street when I was a little boy. I used to go there from eight to nine in the morning and from five to six at night to keep up the stock charts. I formed a chart room for those people. I worked for a fellow by the name of William J. Hutchinson who was the son-in-law of Harry Lawrence, the son of Cyrus J. Lawrence.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you get interested in the market?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: It's a long story. Wait a minute.
[Interruption]

PAUL CUMMINGS: I wanted to ask you how did you get interested in the market at that age?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Well, let me tell you. I went to Public School 145 in Brooklyn, Williamsburgh, Brooklyn. I wasn't far from the Overmyer & Evins Brewery. The neighbors were Irish kids, Jewish kids, Italians, all kinds of children. I was on a raley team at school. Anyway, we had a meet at school on Staten Island. We had to take a Myrtle Avenue train-that was in Williamsburgh in those days-to get on the Brooklyn Bridge. From the Brooklyn Bridge on the Manhattan side you had to walk from Nassau Street to Broad Street to take the Staten Island ferry at Bowling Green. Well, we walked down Broad Street. I saw a lot of people in a crowd with red hats and green hats. I stayed there. I was plastered. I never got to Staten Island. And when I got back to school the next day I got hell from my friends, from the team because I wasn't there to run. I made up my mind that some day I was going to come back and be a stockbroker. It was that simple.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Just like that.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: All that excitement gave me a real incentive. I was terribly excited by it. I didn't have any lunch. I was plastered there. I think we got up there about ten thirty; I stayed there until the market closed at three or three thirty.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The curb was a very different kind of trading?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: It is now the American Stock Exchange. In those days you used signals, you see. I became

a stockbroker very early and I was very successful down there. As I told you, I made \$167,000 in a short time. In World War I there was a false armistice which came two weeks before the real one and the market busted wide open. And I lost everything but \$4,000. And I'll tell you why. I've told you that I was working for Cyrus J. Lawrence and Son. I started their stock charts. I worked there and I used to get \$25 a week and also got their business on the curb which was a great deal. It was very high-class firm. Mr. Hutchinson, the fellow that hired me and who was one of the senior partners, was a friend of Mr. Robert Standart of Nickel Company. He was a very high type of man, a very fine man. So I used to like to work there. And also he had a partner named George M. Bartman. Millman and Bartman are still in business. They're in the grain business, a big firm, very rich. Mr. Bartman happened to be married to the daughter of the president of Lackawanna Steel. When I worked at night at Cyprus J. Lawrence's I got acquainted with all the boys. I would go over there, once in a while I stayed late, and we'd go out and have coffee at the Automat and all kinds of things. They had a cashier named George Wise. I'll never forget it. One day George said, "Joe, let's have coffee. Joe, I want to tell you something confidentially. George Bartman is married to the daughter of the president of Lackawanna Steel and he's buying Lackawanna Steel." Well, I had inside information; what better information could you get than from the horse's mouth. The stock was selling at 62 so I started buying 200 shares at 62, when it went down to 58 I bought 500 more shares, and I kept buying scale down. When the false armistice came along two weeks before the real Armistice the market; busted wide open. They sold me out and I was left with \$ 4,000. But that was after I bought my mother a house. Now this is a fact; there's no hokum about what I'm telling you. So I had to start all over again. Here I was thinking my mother had to work for twelve dollars a week in a sweatshop, a ladies' bag factory, and here I lose a hundred thousand and some odd dollars. It took me a long time to get over that one. In those days \$100,000, \$167,000 was like three or four million dollars today. It was a lot of money.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What were you charting in the stocks-the trading up and down?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: All the fluctuations. Before I went down on the curb I worked for a man by the name of Richard de Mille Wykoff, a cousin of Cecil B. de Mille. Well, that's another story. I went down on Wall Street because I wanted to go back to Wall Street. I just went to high school for six months and then quit. I said I'm going on the Street. This was 1914. and the Stock Exchange was closed. In those days most of the members of the Stock Exchange were wearing derbies in the summertime. Everyone was busted. The Stock Exchange was closed for about three months. So I started to look for a job. I went from building to building and from office to office. One day in the Empire Building I started on the thirty-fourth floor. The Guggenheim Brothers had three floors and they had one man who was interviewing all the help. I was a little bit of a boy, I think I was maybe four feet eight. I had one suit that my mother bought me. I had to cry for three months to get a four-dollar suit because we didn't have any money. It was a green suit with short pants. I'll never forget it. But I was a cute kid. What are you laughing at? Finally this man at Guggenheim Brothers who was interviewing the people...For example, there was Guggenheim Brothers, there was Asago, there was Pentico, there was Chino-these are mining companies-copper-there was Alaska Gold. And there was a new name on every door. Hell, I didn't know what it was all about. I was a kid. Well, the fellow finally said, "Listen, Mr. Hiershorn, we have no place for you here. We're not stockbrokers, we're in the mining business." But on the twenty-ninth floor there was a company called Emerson Phonograph Company. I went in there and asked for a job. Billy Colen was a brother-in-law of Richard D. Wykoff. They had married sisters, two girls out of Detroit, their name was Sherer, two Jewish girls. This was Richard Wykoff's fourth wife. But anyway they hired me as an office boy. When Mr. Colen interviewed me he asked, "Do you know how to run a switchboard?" I said, " Yes." I had never seen one in my life. He said, "Well, you come back on Saturday." So I went to the American Telephone Company and they showed me how to run a switchboard. In those days you plugged in the thing. It was easy. So went back there and got this job. I was an office boy there. Finally I discovered that Billy Colen, Wykoff's brother-in-law, was watching the market downstairs. There was a small office on the twenty-eighth floor with a stock ticker and Billy Colen was running stock charts. So anyway, I wanted Mr. Wykoff and the gang to know that I was there. I came back before I started on a message; I never walked, I ran. They knew my presence. There were three other office boys. One day Mr. Wykoff wanted to know who would come in on Labor Day because he wanted to do some work. By the way, he owned the *Magazine of Wall Street* at that time. He also owned Ticker Publishing Company. *The Magazine of Wall Street* was very successful. Ticker Publishing was a trend letter; they sold this trend letter like Babson's and other people send trend letters now about the market, giving advice on the market. Anyway, I was there about four months and I was getting six dollars a week. One day I knocked on Mr. Wykoff's door. He was a good guy, a Yankee. I said, "You know, Mr. Wykoff, I don't like to be an office boy. I want to be a stockbroker." He said, "Joe, you don't want to be a stockbroker! That's a terrible business! I was once with Mercer and Company on the Stock Exchange. That's no business for you. You stay here and you'll be all right." I said, "No, Mr. Wykoff, I'm sorry; I want to be a stockbroker, I want to be on Wall Street." You know, I used to go to people like Schuyler and Chapman. He used to trade in the market himself and I used to run errands and all that. I said, "Why can't you get me a job at Schuyler and Chapman?" He said, " Oh, that's no good. I can't do that." About a week later Billy Colen said, "How would you like to watch the market and I'll show you how to run the stock charts?"

PAUL CUMMINGS: What chart system were they using?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: They used great big charts and line charts and their tape. When I quit I was getting fifteen dollars a week and they put on one man at fifty dollars and two other girls. Of course, I worked like a dog. But I learned a great deal. Stock charts are a tool in the market and you have to know how to read them. One point charts can only give you accumulation and distribution. Line charts are another thing. But I did all this on the tape; I watch the tape like—In this days we if we had 350,000, 400,000 shares a day- but during the war we used to have about 800,000 to a million shares a day. In those days a million shares day was a big day. But I used to run these things off from the one-point charts or from the tape.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think it was easier to watch the market in those days with the smaller volume than it is now?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Well, look, if you're interested, it's the interest. I used to have a stock ticker in my office- I had an office at 70 Pine Street- I made a lot of money. I had a stock ticker and it used to drive me crazy because you're glued to that ticker all the time. Then I had an office in Toronto, I had a stock ticker there. I finally decided I didn't want a ticker; it was no good.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: I like stock charts. I get turned on by them like everything else. I have them on my desk. You have to know how read them. And no matter how you read them sometimes they fool you. But I've learned a great deal about this business. And I've made a lot of money. I've made big money. It helped me in my own business, my mining business.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Oh, really. In what way?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Hmmm.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: I like the way you say "hmmm". What does that mean?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what do you mean by what you just said- "it makes you shrewd?"

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Yes, because, you see, the stock charts and if you read the tape properly those are what I call technical studies of the stock market. You know a stock can earn 12 dollars a share and it may be selling at 70 and it can go down to 30 and it doesn't mean anything. Technical studies are important. I've learned a great deal about this business. For example, I remember now that Lackawana Steel deal; I learned never to buy stock on a scaledown unless you're an insider. Do you know what I said? I'm chairman of Callahan Mine. So I get a report every week or I can call up a friend and say what the hell's going on and blah, blah, blah, and so on and so forth. I'm also chairman of the board of Algoma Rainey, and Rio Tinto in Canada and so I get all the information; I get reports all the time. So you can buy stocks on a scaledown only if you are an insider.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. You don't really know what's happening otherwise.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Well, otherwise you're guessing. You see, I want to be on the inside looking out instead of on the outside looking in. All right?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Absolutely. Now after World War I through the twenties did you buy much art then? Or not?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: I bought art with very little knowledge of it until 1930 when I was thirty-one years old. I was stabbing in the dark. And then I started to learn a great deal. I bought the Barbizon School. I bought the pictures that I used to put on the walls of my bedroom-Bouguereau, a Landseer, Masmyth, Israels. Israels is a painter who is very "schmaltzy"-I want to use the proper word-well, for example, a picture of a little crib with a doctor examining a baby and so on; it's very sympathetic, very sweet. Well, I bought things like that. But I didn't know much. And then I really started to get serious and I went around a great deal to the Whitney Museum. The Museum of Modern Art was not opened until 1933. I went to the galleries. In those days there were maybe twelve or thirteen galleries. And I read a great deal. I was terribly interested. I was very curious. If you're not curious about anything you're a dead cookie. I mean that. You have to be curious in order to learn something.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, were there any dealers that got interested in you, or helped you? Or did you just—

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Yes, there was one dealer whose name was John Levy. John Levy has a daughter who has a great collection. I have known her for years, a very lovely woman. John Levy told me that I ought to buy all these Barbizon School. I bought all these things from him. Then all of a sudden I went to a gallery-I forget which one-Durand-Ruel or somebody-and all of a sudden I saw Picasso and I saw Rouault. I went to John and said, "What about Picasso, what about Braque, what about Rouault?" He said, "Joe, they're no good. Stay away from them." I knew then I was in the wrong church and the wrong pew. That was the end of John Levy.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So what happened to all those paintings?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: I sold the. And let me tell you what happened: I was married to a woman, my first wife, and she threw me out. I had gone to school with her. I left the house. I was buying first editions and also art. And I left them. She was hoping I'd come back. I didn't. And she sold all those things at Parke-Bernet.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, right. How did you start collecting books?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Well, that's another story.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, it's all part of the—

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Because I was curious. I bought first editions. I had the Coventry Bible, a great book, the first Bible printed in English. Did you know that-the Coverntry Bible? I bought it for \$5,000. I think she sold it for about \$12,000. Today it would probably cost about \$40,000. But she sold those things. She waited until I married someone else before she sold them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But you married her early, in 1922?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: I married her in January 1922. She was six months older than I was. I went to school with her. One day she said, "Why don't we get married?" I said, "That's a good idea." That's exactly what it was not.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So the decisions were all very quick? I mean there's a history of quick decisions?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Well, that's my history. I'm a little man in a hurry. That's why I always wanted to make an awful lot of money. When my mother went to work it used to kill me. I was seven or eight years old. She used to get up at six o'clock in the morning, she'd put on coffee. In those days butter cost ten cents a pound, eggs cost two for a cent, bagels and rolls were two for a penny. She'd put the food on a big table, everybody would get up and help themselves. I made up my mind that Goddamnit, one day I'm going to make a million dollars or more just like that. And this is what happened.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What about your brothers and sisters? What did they think of you running around the world doing all these things?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Well, I think they thought I was an oddball. The fact is that they didn't amount to anything. I used to send my mother \$500 every month. She couldn't spend more than a couple-she owned the house-she couldn't spend more than a hundred dollars a month. I mean in those days you could get a servant for twenty-five or thirty dollars to live with her. I always used to say, "Momma, what are you doing with all your money?" she'd say, "What do you care? It's none of your business." She was giving it to the other kids. I have a sister eighty-nine years old and I have a younger sister 363 days younger. My mother gave birth to a child-she could be pregnant when my father waved his trousers. She had a child almost every year.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's fantastic. That's a lot of children.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Thirteen children.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But that was fairly standard though in those days. Almost everybody had huge families. But, you know, one thing you said was that 1931 was an important year in the collecting.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Well, no, I said I didn't really have any knowledge until I was thirty-one years old, that was 1930 and that I learned a great deal more and I bought art with some knowledge.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But now that was the Depression.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Yes, it didn't matter. I bought things very cheap.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So the business was still making money? But you had gotten out of the business?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: I was a big money maker. I quit the market in 1929 with \$4,000,000. I sold out in August 1929.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What gave you the clue?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: My charts. Well, everybody and his brother-doctors and dentists didn't pay any attention, everybody was in the stock market. Sooner or later something had to happen because everybody isn't right. It's impossible.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Anyway, the charts indicated that you had to make--?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: The volume was tremendous and the market didn't get anywhere. In those days when you had two million, three million share days those were big days and they moved up and back with wide fluctuations. I was a student of the stock market, a student of charts. I knew that sooner or later this thing was going to bust wide open. And it happened. My first wife used to listen to me trade. I was in London on business for International Nickel Company, actually indirectly for one of the partners of J.P Morgan-I'll tell you his name in a minute-Mr. Hutchinson did all the business for him. Another man who lived in the same town, Englewood; a very high type of man. As a matter of fact, one of his sons turned into a lefty-can you think of the name? Lamont, he had a lot of money. He was the smartest man that old Mr. Morgan had as a partner, he was a brilliant man, a great man. He lectured at one of the big halls with his son. The father was a capitalist; the son was not a capitalist, he was not a communist but he was very liberal. The son is still alive.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So you were involved with lots of people all the time.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: I was an interesting little boy, I was interesting, people liked me and I also like people. I was anxious to learn. I did the same thing in the oil and mining business. I had no formal education.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Now the oil and mining business started-when-in the thirties?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Well, I had another friend who was a fellow by the name of Walter Case, of Case Farm Implements. They're still in business. Hadley Case runs the company, a very smart, very bright man. But the old man, Walter Case Senior, was a genius. He came from the Middle West. He was teaching English and something else at Cooper Union. And then he got mixed up with a fellow by the name of Pomeroy who was a brother-in-law of the Millbanks. Do you know the Millbank family? They're an immensely wealthy family-Borden Milk and all kinds of products. A great family. You know the Millbank Estate in--? What's the boy's name that's around now?

A voice: Jeremiah.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Jeremiah Millbank is a grandson of the Millbank I'm talking about. Jeremiah Millbank, incidentally sent me a very nice letter. I gave \$2,000 to the Republican Party. So anyway, Mr. Case and Mr. Pomeroy formed the Case Farm Implement Company. And Walter Case like me. He used to let me sit in with the people. And his partner was a man like Walter Stewart who was Treasurer of the United States. I'm going back to 1927, 1928, 1930, 1932. These were brilliant people. Mr. Case bought control of Southern Railway in the open market for \$22 up to around \$40. The stock went up to \$135 and he sold it out. He went up to J.P. Morgan&Company, to the old man, he said, "Listen, Mr. Morgan, I control Southern Railway and I want to put it on a different basis." Mr. Morgan said, "You do like fun." He said, "No, I control it." I don't know-he bought about sixty per cent of the company.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Just in the openmarket.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Open market. He was a very smart man, a very brilliant man, a genius. Unfortunately, he had cancer and jumped out of a twenty-ninth floor window at 120 Wall Street and landed between two buildings. A charming man, wonderful, sweet. He was a big tall man six feet four married to a tiny woman, she couldn't be more than five feet two. And his son is very bright; not the genius that his father was. I'm a very good friend of Hadley Case. He lives in Naples, Florida where we have a house.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You were doing all this business, carrying on in the market, interested in mining, and buying art. Where did you go in the 1930s? What galleries interested you?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Where? What do you mean? All over to the galleries that had art that I bought. Well, I bought a lot of people. There was the Kleener Gallery. My first big love in art was Elshemius. I think I gave the museum 325 Elshemius's and I may own another 200 myself. I gave the museum 6,503 items. I still own 61 or 62.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Still the many? And you keep acquiring--?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Well, not as much as I used to because I'm running out of three items: I'm running out of time, I'm running out of money, and I'm running out of medicine. I'll be seventy-eight on my next birthday. I can't work like I used to. Now I'm going to sell apples. In May of this year I spent \$172,000 in one afternoon, or in one night. You were with me, weren't you, Jack?

JACK: Yes, at Parke-Bernet.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: At Parke-Bernet. I bought a great Gorky. I knew a lot of these artists like Gorky, one of the greats. Gorky was a darling human being, a big Armenian six feet four, always looking sad. He had an apartment at 15th Street a block away from Klein's.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, on Union Square?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Yes. I went into his place one day. I bought twenty-two Gorkys for \$200 apiece. The museum has them all.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Now how did you start meeting the artists? That started early on.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Because I like them. You know, if you're interested, you meet this one and that fellow says: you ought to meet that one, and so on. And I had a club, I ran a collector's club from 1939 to 1946.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Now what's that about?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Well, a lot of very rich fellows. We used to have lunch early at the Sherry Netherland or at the Plaza—we'd get through at one o'clock and then I could take them with me to all the artists. I knew all of them. You see, after the breakup with my first wife I moved to Number One Fifth Avenue. I had a suite of rooms there. I got through very early, I mean the stock market closed around three or three thirty in those days. So I was free from four o'clock on. I used to go around to galleries. And on Eighth Street there were two very interesting places. The Whitney Museum was there; and the A.C.A Gallery run by Herman Baron who loved artists and starved and gave them money. Well, I met Milton Avery there one day. I had bought one Avery for \$400 or \$300- I don't remember. At that time I had only one Avery. I got very intrigued with Avery and one day Avery said "Gee, why don't you come up and see me sometime at my house?" He lived on the West Side. Well, one Saturday I went up there and I had to walk up five flights. I bought forty Averys for \$12,000-\$300 apiece. Two weeks later I bought twenty-five more for the same price. And I gave all my friends- I was so excited about Averys- I gave away about ten of those Averys. Mr. Baron got one of those Averys. A fellow by the name of Bernard Look got one of those Averys.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yes, the painter.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Yes. I wanted to share. I bought a lot of Averys. Avery tuned into one of the greats. Two years later he had three dealers: he had Rosenberg, he had Durand-Ruel, he had the Valentin Gallery which was run by Valentine Dudensing. He had three or four dealers at one time. I went to Durand-Ruel and I saw a big picture of March on the telephone. I paid \$1,500 for it. I gave the museum, I think, sixty-five or seventy Averys. I still have two or three.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I was going to ask you about that club of collectors. How did you find those people? Or did they find you? How did it evolve?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Well, I knew some of the people. Eddie Cook is still alive-Century Lighting Company. Morris Haft was a big clothing manufacturer, a multi-millionaire. And there was a chap who was in a big advertising business, a very nice man, he was one of the boys. There were six or seven of us. We'd have lunch together every Saturday and then we'd go out and see all these artists. Well, like Avery would say: you ought to go and see this fellow Soyer. Soyer would say, "Why don't you go and see Eilshemius?" They passed the word around, "There's a little crazy guy buying art like a madman." So I went to see them. And I used to buy from them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you ever become particularly friendly with any of the artists?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Oh, sure. All of them. Those artists were in bad shape. They were all starving. You know, times were very bad. A number of these artists even back in 1940, 1944, 1945 when the war broke out they were in bad shape. As a matter of fact, about fifteen years ago I tore up, I think, either \$88,000 or \$92,000 in notes that they owed me. I knew I wouldn't be able to collect anyway so I wrote the whole works off. A lot of them starved. They didn't have money to buy food. I used to take some of these artists down to a very famous place on Second Avenue where all the actors used to eat-I'm trying to remember the name of the restaurant. We used to get a steak-a seven-course meal for a dollar twenty-five, real steak. No, I'm not kidding.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That was in the thirties, though, wasn't it?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: That was from 1939 to 1945 or 1946. I remember David Burluk couldn't pay his rent many times. Often, I had to slip him fifty dollars, eighty dollars.

PAUL CUMMINGS: To go back again to this group of collectors, it intrigues me that you were one of the few collectors who hasn't come out of other collectors.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: I never called anybody. I never asked anybody whether I should buy this or that. As a matter of fact, when I got going I never called Alfred Barr or-what's this fellow's name that used to be at the Whitney?-he writes books--? He's a wonderful guy.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Lloyd Goodrich.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Lloyd Goodrich, a darling man, a darling human being. Every now and then if I wasn't sure of a picture I'd call up Lloyd—we became very, very friendly—I'd say, "Lloyd, is this the right picture?" I never asked him what to buy. Sometimes I bought a phony, because, you know, you have to learn about this. I had to learn the hard way. Anyhow, I bought only two phonies in my life. One I destroyed and on I think I still have—no, wait a minute—I bought a phony Eilshemius and I bought a young kind of Pop and I couldn't get the right provenance and it wasn't right. I lost \$400. They didn't charge me for selling the picture. And only about three years ago I bought a phony. I have it here in the office. [speaking to someone] There's a picture in the back—in my office—I'm trying to think of the name, it's against the settee.

Someone: It's a phony?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: It's a phony, yes.

Someone: Shall I get it right now?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What intrigued you about Eilshemius? Because there are so many that you bought.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: What intrigued me? I knew him. About Eilshemius I want to go on record with you: He was the most poetic, lyrical, beautiful painter in America. I'm repeating: he's one of the most poetic, lyrical, wonderful painters in America. The trouble is he didn't destroy. You know he came out of a very rich family. Way back the family was Dutch. They had a big estate in New Jersey. He and his brother were left millions. And the two brothers were oddballs. They lost all their money. They had a beautiful house on 57th Street. I used to meet Eilshemius. Eilshemius was hit by an automobile.

[The phony picture has been brought]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Blakelock.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Blakelock. And it's a phony, see. Lloyd Goodrich told me it was a phony. I'm keeping it. Somebody wanted it. I said, no, because they'd sell it and I didn't want that. I'm just keeping it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: We were talking about Eilshemius.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: He's a great artist. The trouble is that he didn't destroy. Nobody can paint 3500 or 4000 paintings they are great. It's impossible. But he never destroyed anything. So you have some good ones and some bad ones. Now here I just bought this one two years ago, that's an Eilshemius, it's a great picture. Look, it's there and it's poetic and it's beautiful. I think it's beautiful. I paid \$2,200 for it. It's great. I saw it in a window a couple of times and, God damn it, I'm going down and but it. I'm going to have it. I don't know why you're laughing. Why are you laughing?

PAUL CUMMINGS: It intrigues me that there are certain artists that you have so many of.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: There are too many Eilshemius's around here.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: I love his work. I love art anyway.

PAUL CUMMINGS: We keep running around from topic to topic, but to go back to those collectors, did they buy very much on those Saturday trips? Or did they look--?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Some did and some didn't. They all bought Averys. I made them buy Averys. And they bought a few other people. One or two bought Burliuks. I'm trying to think of all—oh, a lot of old-timers some of them are still alive, they're very old. You see, at that time I was thirty-two. These artists were forty-five, forty-six, forty-eight. David Burliuk died a long time ago, he was about eighty-five when he died. And most of these collectors—Eddie Cook is the only one that's alive. I'm trying to think of another very fine man, he had one of the biggest advertising—he had the Kaiser contract, he did all the advertising for the Kaiser family. A very nice man. All of a sudden he died.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Another thing that intrigues me, did you ever start collecting books or anything else? You have a great furniture collection?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Yes, I collected first editions.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But I mean after 1947 when you broke up with your first wife?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: No, I didn't. The art world and my business consumed my time. I worked very hard. You

know, I don't sleep much. I was up this morning-my wife was up early-I was up this morning at five thirty or a quarter to six. I did some work. I called this fellow up-what time did I call you?-a quarter after seven?

Voice: Yes.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: I sad, "Do me a favor. Come over here." Is that right?

Voice: Right. Here I am.

PAUL CUMMINGS: At the crack of dawn.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Take you time because I may buy your lunch. Can we eat lunch around here some place?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, sure, absolutely.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: I'll take you to a fancy place.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You've been very busy, you know.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: No, I haven't been, I was only interrupted once or twice.

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, but I mean all the activities of the last several decades. Another thing, during the 1930s and the Depression years up to World War II, that seems to have been a kind of different or changeable point in your collecting. You bought the work of John Flanagan who is a sculptor.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: John Flanagan was the first sculptor I bought.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Up to that time it was all painting?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: It was all painting. But, you know, you have to wake up some time. I discovered that sculpture has a third dimension and I was intrigued with it. Most people think that I only bought sculpture then. I bought paintings at the same time. I gave the museum 2,000 pieces of sculpture and 4,500 paintings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Now what intrigued you about the Flanagan sculpture? I mean that was the first three dimensional—

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Well, I bought a piece and it was a snake and it was interesting. I can't tell you why. I buy if I get a gut feeling. It starts with the head, then the gut, and the heart and I want to choose everything in life that way. Things should start with the head and the heart and then the gut. That's the way I buy. Now of course, you have to afford to buy.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's part of it.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: You can't buy with conversations; you have to have dollars.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. There are very few people who have collected as much sculpture as you have and such a broad range.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: I can't help it. They were stupid.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The A.C.A Gallery with Mr. Baron seems to be a place you frequented a great deal.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Well, because it was near where I lived. I lived at Number One Fifth Avenue. It was right around the corner so I spend a lot of time there. They used to give food sometimes. Mrs. Baron was a terrible cook; she didn't know how to cook. But I used to take them out. They were very nice people. Mr. Baron was terribly interested in the artists.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I knew him slightly. He was a marvelous man.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: He wouldn't eat himself but would give money to the artists. Most of them were busted and most had children and all that kind of business.

PAUL CUMMINGS: One other thing that intrigues me, you bought a lot from Edith Halpert over the years, didn't you?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Oh, yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you find her as a dealer?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: She was tough. She had a great eye. She was very knowledgeable. But she was tough. But even so I bought a great many things. I used to get a big discount. I'd buy them and I'd pay right away. For example, yesterday for my foundation I bought something the price of which was \$30,000; I paid \$15,000. They were glad to sell it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But, you know, it has always intrigued me several dealers I know over the years have said, "Oh, Hishhorn is going to come in today."

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: They get scared.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes, they don't know what to do.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Why? Because I buy very fast.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, they can't understand that, for one thing.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Well, it's too bad if they can't understand that. Do I have to be constipated? I can see very quickly. You know, a picture, a painting is like a man building-like an architect. It has to have a foundation, everything has to be in the right place. Now that knowledge comes with time and looking a great deal. But once in a while something may be out of place and it doesn't matter; if it holds together I will buy. I will go into a gallery sometimes and see thirty-five or forty paintings. I'll walk around once or twice and I'll say: gee, that looks interesting, that looks interesting, and that and so on. Maybe I'll select five or six and they'll take them out and put them aside. Then I'll start to talk and I'll say, Well, what's it going to cost me, how is this, what do you want for the whole works? And then I'm not sure whether it's very hard for me to select one or two out of the six or eight that I've looked at that I've set aside. Sometimes I'll buy the whole works set aside. And they get paid the next day.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have you always bought that quickly? I mean buy a series?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: No. I just see quickly and I see a great deal.

PAUL CUMMINGS: To go back to the sculpture again because there's so much it's one of the largest sculpture collections assembled-

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: There's no sculpture collection like it in the world. I haven't said that but Herbert Read made that statement. Other people have said that. We have great sculpture really; we have great things, really great. I never said that until Read...I always said we had good things but I didn't want to sound like a braggart. But we have great art. That means even with great art there are mistakes. And I've lived with these mistakes. For example, when I was buying Masson nobody was buying Masson, they were buying Mattas. They said I was crazy. Matta is one the greats. So is Masson. But I've lived with it, you see.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What do you think is what you would call a "mistake" that you've had for five years, seven years?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Well, I've looked at a picture and the young artists has great promise and it looks like he's a very great talent and I'd buy one or two things. You never know with artists when something will happen. Sometimes they have an emotional upset or they start to drink or take drugs and so on-I don't know-and it doesn't work out. Sometimes it does. I've known Bill De Kooning since 1947. We have become wonderful friends. I love Bill de Kooning and he loves me. A great friend. He loves my wife. Bill is a very generous man. He has given Mrs. Hirshhorn three or four great things. He has given me a couple of things for the museum. But one day I went there to East Hampton-we used to go there about every four months-he was a little haughty that day and he was painting Doors—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, right. The—

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: I got very excited about them. I bought three of them. Bill had never sold a picture, not one picture for more than \$12,000 or \$15,000. Unfortunately, Bill was high that day, somewhat cock-eyed and I said, "Bill, I want to buy that Door. How much is it?" "Joe, it'll cost you \$25,000." I said, "Bill, you've sold it to me. How about the other two?" That's the way he talks. [imitating Dutch accent] He said, "Joe, it'll cost you \$25,000." I bought those three for \$75,000 from him. He's never forgotten it. Do you know why? I bought a piece of sculpture about three weeks ago. The price was \$60,000. Greenwich had a big show with a lot of artists.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, right.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: And I liked The Clamdigger. I went to his dealer. I said, "Listen, I want to buy that." He said, "Joe, it'll cost you \$60,000. Maybe we'll see it to you for \$45,000." I said, "I'm going to pay you \$30,000." He called up Bill. He said, "Sell it to Joe." I called up Bill the next morning and I said, "Bill, I want to thank you for

selling me that.” He said, “Joe, I should have given it to you. I should have given it to you for nothing.” He remembered what I did for him. The museum owns thirty-five de Koonings—that’s what I gave them—thirty-five Calder, twenty-eight Matisse, thirty-two Giacometti. We have great art there. But this helped Bill. And now I want another thing, the Sitting Lady. So I called up Bill. He said, “Joe, I’m giving it to you. You pay for the casting.”

PAUL CUMMINGS: That’s great.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Well, he remembered, you see. Of course, I can afford it, otherwise I wouldn’t have done it. But he’s a great man. Bill de Kooning is one of the great artists. Louise Nevelson is a great artist, a tremendous artist. I’ve known Louise Nevelson since 1930.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really? That early?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: She was a lousy painter. She was buying Eilshemius when I was buying Eilshemius.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That’s right. She had lots of those.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: She’s a great sculptor, she’s a great artist. Oh, she’s developed. She’s a great lady, very bright.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Very unique—

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Well, yes. But she’s a nice woman. That’s the important thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. One thing that I guess is obvious and intriguing is that as you’ve collected over the years your office is filled with works of art.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Well, this is an office.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: This is an office in an apartment.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. But I mean down on Broadway, for example, and various places.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Oh, yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What about you business associates when they came in, what did they think of all this? What kind of reaction?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: They didn’t pay attention to it. This is my personal business. They thought I was crazy. No. As a matter of fact, I’ve given some of my associates some great things. When I was mixed up with the Rio Tinto group I had to go to a meeting in London. I took Henry Moore to lunch there. I went out and bought eight or ten Henry Moore maquettes and I gave a maquette to each one of them. I think I paid \$600 apiece for each one. Today they’re worth \$35,000 to \$40,000 apiece. I’m getting it back.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did they know what they were getting?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: They didn’t know then but they know now. All of the still own them. With Henry Moore at lunch I wasn’t talking business. I was talking about art. That’s a true story. I’ve been buying art for sixty—yes, sixty-one years.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have you learned a lot from the artists that you’ve known about buying or looking? Or has that been a kind of separate--?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Well, any artist will tell you that his art is great, that they’re wonderful pictures, that they’re great pictures. “This is wonderful.” I listen. I don’t pay attention. I usually don’t ask but they’ll tell you. Now Bill de Kooning will never talk to you that way. Some people will. I bought something from somebody who gave one to the museum and I promised I’d buy one. What I bought I thought was great. And one of the curators in Washington bought it I didn’t think it was so good. Well, that’s the way they do it. And all these artists—I won’t mention any names a very nice man, very talented.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think that the books you’ve read and the dealers have had much influence on you?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: The books that I’ve read are fantastic. They have the most beautiful reproductions. You know what the colors are and sometimes it’s great and sometimes it isn’t. But from books today it’s easy to

learn about art if you want to learn. There are wonderful books just published that you've got to read; unless you're not interested. I'm interested. If you want to—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Have you had collectors seek you out for advice ever? Ask you about "what should I buy?"

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Yes. I made some people buy Pascin. I think Pascin is one of the great artists of the world. I think he's underpriced. I buy him when I see they're right. A great artist, a great artist, very sensitive, very beautiful. Wonderful drawings of Pascin.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yes, that marvelous line.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: And his lines are so wonderful. Great, just great. Just the other day I bought a great Joan Mitchell. I saw her the other day. I got it for half the price. She loves me. She grabbed hold of me. I'm giving it to the museum. It's a beautiful thing. Get *New York Magazine*, an article written by Tom Hess. She's one of the great artists, one of the greatest artists in the world.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You haven't ever sold anything really, have you?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Once in a while, yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: A little?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Yes, I have. I mean I had eighteen Stellas and eighteen Nolands and I think I sold one or two Nolands-I don't even remember. I have sold a few items, but rarely; rarely.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was there a reason for selling those?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Well, I don't know, maybe I exchanged something. I can't really tell. I wasn't broke. I was broke once. When I lost a lot of money in 1943-44 I had a great collection of Impressionist pictures—a couple of Monets, four or five Rouaults, four or five Chagalls. I sold, I think, twenty-eight or thirty items at Parke-Bernet. Even two beautiful Eilshemiuses for no reason. I took the money and went to the Philippines Islands and lost it all in the mining business. The most corrupt people in the world, the most corrupt people in the world are Filipinos. I spent three years there and it broke my heart. The word of a Filipino wouldn't mean a damn. Awful people, terrible from the President down. You know when you go over there as an American—I belonged to the American Club—you have to have a chauffeur and a car and so on, and the chauffeur had a wife and a bunch of kids and three girls on the side. Awful people. I had a syndicate and we lost a million three hundred thousand dollars—\$300,000 of my money. All those people were millionaires. Even Edward Stettinius was in the deal. He used to be Secretary of State. His father was a partner of J.P. Morgan.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What intrigues me is the contrast between the business and the art collecting because it's almost the same. I mean—

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: What do you mean?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, in terms of the energy that goes into each one. You kind of bounce from one to the other.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Well, I like what I'm doing in the art world and I like what I'm doing in the business world. And also in my business in the oil game and the mining game you're really crating, you know. I hated to be a broker.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really: Why?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: What is a broker or a banker? What do they produce? They're parasitical people.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see. A piece of paper that goes back and forth.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: But if you're in the mining business, if you develop an oil field you're creating wealth. You're creating work. In my day at the top when I was in the uranium business I had seventy-two engineers working for me and 12,000 people. We developed mines that will be there for the next two hundred years at the reserves in the world are up there. I sold out for \$48,500,000. As a matter of fact, it was worth \$62,000,000. I cut some off the top so they wouldn't make money. As a matter of fact, somebody dug up the certified check that I got.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's fantastic.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Also I worked very hard in my day.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, I t takes both, doesn't it?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Yes. You can't do it otherwise.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Let me turn this over.

[End of SIDE 1]

[SIDE 2]

PAUL CUMMINGS: This is side 2.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: The opportunities for young men are greater than every except that the government take more in taxes. But the opportunities are fantastic. Listen, we have 220 million people; and the world population comes to 50 billion. And if you work hard and if you concentrate on what you're doing you can't help but be successful. You always have to love what you're doing. If you don't love the work you're doing you're never going to make it; it's impossible. You have to love what you're doing and you have to love it very much. And then you've got to work and you've got it made.

PAUL CUMMINGS: One thing that has always intrigued me about watching your collecting and activities over the years is that—

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Why did you watch it?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, for a lot of reasons. First of all, you bought all the way through the market, different ideas, different things.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: I never stopped. In good times, bad times, I never stopped.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And you bought things that were abstract, figurative, this and that, modern.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: That's right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You bought Daumier one day and de Kooning another day and Kenneth Snelson who is very different from all the others.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: That's right. He's very different, a very talented man, wonderful, beautiful, a great talent.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But there is always the thing that so few collectors seem to have is the jobs de vivre and the guts that's involved in all this. So many collectors say: oh, I bought one picture and it's a struggle and—

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: I did it with ease and pleasure. I enjoyed it. As a matter of fact, I'm going back to Floucade and I want to buy a Mitchell that I want to keep. She's so exciting. And I'll probably get it at half the price that he's asking. I usually make my own prices but no dealer has lost money from me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How do you decide on your own prices?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Well, I can't give you all the answers. There are some things I want to keep to myself.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But I mean you know what the market is about?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Well, I'm in touch with the art world. Some of these artists would drive you crazy. I get all kinds of calls. I'm trying to be kind to them; I don't try to hurt them. But they insist and , you know, they think all I have to do is listen to them. I'm sympathetic to them. A woman came in there, she was staying at the Chelsea Hotel. She bothered me for six months. I said I'll bring your things up. I looked at them. There was nothing. She started to cry, she owed the Chelsea Hotel \$4,000 or \$3,000; she said "they're going to put me out. I said, "I'm sorry. Here's \$400." This happened two weeks ago. I said , "Some day I'll see a picture of yours and maybe I'll buy it." She took the \$400. I don't know what happened.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What about dealers? Do they try to sell you things? Do they call you up and say, "I've just got a great this or that in?"

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Yes, they call. I listen to them but I don't go. I got a couple of calls yesterday. But I don't always go. I got a call yesterday from Denise Rene Gallery. They got it bad. They wanted to sell me a Soto. I want to buy it from someone else. I have a lot of collectors that I try to help if I think they're right and if I like them. There's a chap in Mexico who wants to buy a Soto very badly. But I didn't have time to go there. What

else do you want to know?

PAUL CUMMINGS: When you travel-you've bought things in London, Paris?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: All over.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Everywhere. Have you ever had—

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: In fact, I'm going to China. I'm planning on buying art in China. My wife and I are going on a world trip and I'm going to buy Chinese art. We own some Chinese things. We have some great Japanese things. We have a new collection of Japanese dolls of the Edo (E-d-o) Period; three hundred years or more. Great things. We have a picture here of some of these dolls. Somebody took it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You've never had a plan, though, in building the collection, have you? I mean this, this, this.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: No, I never had a plan but I'll tell you what happened. About 1964, 1965 I knew that this collection didn't belong to a man, it belongs to the people, too. Then I started to look for a spot. Al Lerner-he was curator then-and I went to London and to Zurich-he was with me then. Then I went myself to Italy and other places. The best offer we had was from London: ten acres in Regent Park, they would build a building for about twelve or fifteen million dollars; Lerner was going to be the director; they were going to move trees, they were going to build a lake. You know, there are no public buildings in Regent Park. That came from a relative of the Queen. I was sitting at 277 Park Avenue one day about eleven o'clock and a man called from the British Embassy in Washington. His name, I think, was Martinson or Martin-I don't remember the name but Mrs. Hirshhorn can tell you-my memory has gotten bad, I'm repeating myself. He said, "Can I come over to see you tomorrow? Will you be in your office?" I said, "Sure. What can I do for you?" "Well, the Queen of England wants me to talk to you." I said, "I'll be glad to talk to you." That's exactly what happened on the phone. He came in the next day and he told me that the Queen would like to have the Earl of Perth see me; they would like the collection of England. I said I would be glad to see the Earl of Perth. This was on a Monday or Tuesday. The Earl of Perth was supposed to call me on Friday. The Earl of Perth called me on Wednesday. He was in New York. His name is David Drummond, he was married to a girl of the Clark Das family, the bankers, an American, very lovely people. He came in. I invited him out to Greenwich on a Thursday. On Thursday he came. We sat down and talked. We had dinner. He said, "You know, Mr. Hirshhorn, we'd like to have your collection. We'd like to have you come as a guest of ours to England, you and your wife; and we'd like to have it." I said I'd be glad to come. So we set up a date and everything was fine. They threw a big dinner at one of these big places there and-I don't know-the footmen used to footmen what Mr. Hirshhorn was wearing. Anyway, to make a long story short-we were staying at the Savoy Hotel-one morning they came over with a model of the museum they were going to build-we own the model, it's here somewhere-and David Drummond, a darling human being said, "Listen, Hirshhorn, I'll give you the two. We had lunch at his home and then another man had a great Renaissance collection if you bring the museum here, if you leave you things; everything is fine." The morning before we left they came over to see me again. I said, "Listen, Gentlemen, I'm an American. Let me think about this." Roger Stevens was at that hotel. The newspapers were full of "Hirshhorn gives his collection to England." So when we got back about two weeks later, Roger Stevens was in Greenwich with a Mrs. Reid, Mrs. Joseph Vernor Reid, a great lady. Joseph Vernor Reid died here about seven years ago. She called up one day, she said, "You know, Roger Stevens is having lunch at the house. Can we come over with Roger Stevens to look at your sculpture?" I said "Sure. Come on over." He was very nice and so on. He walked around. And I think two weeks later I got a call from the President's office-Mrs. Johnson-I don't remember-Stevens was visiting with the Johnsons. That's how that started.

[machine turned off]

And we stayed good friends. The Earl of Perth-his name is David Drummond-a darling man, sweet, lovely. My wife and I when we go to Scotland we stay there. Lovely people, and very nice. So we have wonderful friends. Some day they want a loan of this collection. I said sure, but you'll have to talk to the museum. Anyway, I have to go-- [interruption]

PAUL CUMMINGS: You never had a plan in building the collection? I mean it was just—

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: No, except that I was an American and I knew I wanted to buy American art.

PAUL CUMMINGS: One other thing: to go back to Roger Stevens, what was his interest in all this? I mean was he looking, around for things? For the Johnsons?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: No. I learned later-and only in the last six months-that Mr. Dillon Ripley, the Secretary of the Smithsonian, wanted a very important American collection. And there was only one really great American collection. I have, through another source, read some of the correspondence. They were very anxious to get it. This was a whole plan to get my collection. And I'm delighted.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I have recently read all the legislation involved with it.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: But there's something more than that. You haven't seen a lot of confidential letters.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, obviously.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: These are letters that I have read, I don't have copies of them. They're all confidential. You may read it some day in a book or I don't know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Now Mrs. Johnson came to see you in Greenwich-right?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: It was all planned.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was all part of the ritual.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Yes. Mr. Dillon Ripley went to Mrs. Johnson and to Mr. Abe Fortas who is a friend of mine and used to be my attorney—"You have to get Hirshhorn's collection. It's a very important collection. We want it." There was a weakness in that whole setup and they laid a plan. I didn't know about it. I only learned about it this year.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really? Oh, that's fantastic. But I got the feeling from reading the legislation—

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: I'll tell you why—if I had known about it...I had to pay for the moving. Moving my collection from the apartment, from Greenwich, and from the office on Broadway cost me \$242,000. I wouldn't have made a commitment like that. It came at the wrong time. It was a lot of money. I didn't realize it. The government would have paid for it. If I knew what I know now that's what would have happened. I would have insisted on it. I also gave them a million dollars, you know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Now at the time you were looking in England and Italy and Switzerland and elsewhere, what were--?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: I was going to build this museum. You see, this was early in the game, it was around 1960, 1961, 1962. And I knew the thing was big. And, for example, I loved the place. There was a place in Florence that I wanted to live in Florence in the first place. I was living alone, I wasn't married, I didn't even know this girl I'm married to now. I wanted to live in Florence because Florence is a beautiful city, fine, elegant, quiet. I'm trying to think of the name of the area where they were going to rebuild a while building, it has a very famous name.

PAUL CUMMINGS: By the lake? Or—

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: NO, it's not on the lake at all. It's very famous place that they were going to give me; they were going to rebuild. Listen, the Italian story is another story by itself. Al Lerner and I were invited to come to Rome to see Giacoli who runs the Marlborough Gallery in Rome and also there was a chap who was the Minister of Art. Anyway, they showed us the Borghese Palace. But it wouldn't have worked out. But in Florence a fellow by the name of Piera, a very nice man... They wanted to get this collection very badly. So I was going to put up this building and everything else. We had lunch, there were 200 Florentines present, beautiful people, very elegant, wonderful, very refined, really beautiful. And he made a speech and so on. I made a little speech and everything was fine. Then we went upstairs to Mr. Piera's office. He said, "Now, Mr. Hirshhorn, you know that when you bring your art into Italy you will have to pay fifteen per cent duty." No way. I said, "Wait a minute, just a minute, what did you say?" He said, "Yes, this is the law in Italy. When you bring in your art you will have to pay fifteen per cent duty." I think the collection was worth forty million dollars. I thought: what the hell is this? I'm giving this thing away and I'm putting up a building and I'm going to maintain it and I'm to give them six million dollars. I said, "Mr. Piera, you're a very nice man. I like you very much." And I said goodbye. That was the end of the Florence story.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Now when did you get the idea that it should be in a museum, that it should have its own museum?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Well, it happened around 1961 or 1962.

PAUL CUMMINGS: From just the size of it and what you were going to do with it?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Well, we were going very fast. You know, there was a great show for sculpture. The Guggenheim Museum had that show, you know; they extended it for six months. I only had 640-odd pieces of museum. There was tremendous, tremendous attendance.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Now the first public showing of the collection was at Brandeis-right-in 1955?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Brandeis?

PAUL CUMMINGS: They showed some things.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: No, that wasn't the first. The first show was in Detroit.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that one. That was the sculpture.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: The sculpture. If Brandeis showed in 1955 I don't remember.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, they had a few paintings

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: I don't remember. Well, we always loaned things. I wouldn't remember. Al Lerner came to me as a curator in 1956.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You had known him for years though?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Al Lerner?

PAUL CUMMINGS: From A.C.A Gallery

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: I had known him since about -let's see-A.C.A., yes. Before A.C.A. there was another one. It was a man and wife that ran a gallery. I can't remember the name. My memory has gotten bad. I'm trying to think of the partner of J.P. Morgan, he was a great man, a brilliant man. [Machine turned off]

PAUL CUMMINGS: You knew Lerner and you hired him because you needed somebody to keep track of the collection?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Well, I had a girl who was a curator. She wasn't so good, she left a lot of things in very bad shape. Then Al-I'll tell you what happened: Before Al became curator he was a painter. He wanted to go to Italy to study. I financed Mr. Lerner's trip for him, his wife and daughter for two years. I did that for some other artists, too, I want you to know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really. That's good. That's right. He went over and when he came back he had an exhibition. The other thing that intrigues me is there are very few people in this country who have built a collection that has become a museum and—

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Oh, yes, what's his name-no, I'll tell you who did it-Freer.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yes, Freer and—

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Freer and also Phillips.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. But there aren't very man.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Phillips has a great collection.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, marvelous.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Oh, great. He started very early. Listen, God he bought masterpieces for two or three thousand dollars. That's a great museum, the Phillips Museum.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But what's your attitude toward the museum now? I mean there it is in Washington—

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: I'm very happy about it. People enjoy it. They love it. They love it. It has tremendous attendance. Last week they had 27,000 people there in three days. It's tremendous. They love it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But what do you feel? Has that been you accomplishment and activity?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Listen, what I did in America, in the United States I couldn't do anywhere else in the world not even in England. I come from nowhere with very little education. Of course, I've learned a great deal by reading, I'm worldly, I'm sophisticated. But I wouldn't have had a chance. Here you can go anywhere. If you do the right things you can become president. Who the hell heard of-what's his name-Carter? I didn't hear of him-he came out of the woodwork eleven or twelve months ago. I gave him \$5,000 I thought he was so great. I was at the Arthur Crim party, you know, where they invited a lot of men. They raised \$575,000 that night. I was one of them. This is America. So I'm happy about it. I'm giving back some of the fruits that I earned in the United States and that I've enjoyed to the people of the world.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why did it never work out in Canada, though because you wanted to do something there?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: I'll tell you why. They didn't want to build a building. The Art Gallery in Ottawa wouldn't even build an extension.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Of course. Vincent Massey invited me. I stayed at his home overnight. Vincent Massey is a great man, cultured, very fine.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why wouldn't they do it?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Well, listen, this is going back a lot of years. They're not spenders. Now they are spending. Third generation artists, third generation Canadians are more sophisticated. Most of them go down South, they have places in Ft. Lauderdale. They have made a lot of money, you see. In those days it was tough and they were close. I bought a Duer for the Art Gallery in Ottawa. I think I paid \$28,000 or \$30,000 for it; it's probably worth a quarter of a million dollars today. I put up \$5,000 and I went to some of the people I do business with and they put up the rest. And we gave it to them. It's that picture The Dealer. This is a drawing. It's in Ottawa. It's a great picture.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's fantastic. Your collection is so enormous that when you were living with it in the house, in the offices, the home, the apartment and you moved things around how would you pick things? Did somebody--?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: No. For example, once things were there I didn't move them very much. I didn't change them. You can't change things. I don't want to change them here because then the walls-I mean you have to have a sense of balance when you hang pictures, a sense of balance. Things have got to be in the right spot. Otherwise it looks cockeyed. For example, come over here and I'll show you. See there's a little Rouault over there. Now that looks cockeyed because that little picture that's below there is off balance. I haven't bothered changing it because this apartment is going to be sold so I didn't bother changing it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You also have a foundation-right?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Now I couldn't understand the relationship between you and the foundation and the museum?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Well, you see, the foundation-after a certain amount of money-the thing has changed, but in the old days you could take a certain amount of your profits-ten per cent or whatever at that time-and you put in a foundation. Now that foundation bought things and gave away. When I give something away it's entirely different. For example, I've been buying a lot of things for the foundation. I bought five Loren MacIvers last week. They're being delivered to Greenwich and going back to the warehouse. The five MacIvers the foundation is buying are going to the museum. Loren MacIver is one of the great artists of the world bar none. And we have three or four MacIvers. She's great. She's very sick.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes, I know.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Nine months ago I heard from a very good friend of mine that Loren MacIver is in very bad shape. And from Mrs. Bliss Parkinson and other people. So I said to Loren, "I'm giving you five thousand on account. When I come back from France I'll buy something." This is exactly what happened. And I've made my own price. And that's gone to the museum through the foundation.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Great. Great. Do you continue giving things to the museum?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: I'm planning to give them a very big gift before this year is out.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So you constantly think about more things?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: Yes. Listen, you know, the museum is great and I want it to be great. After I'm gone a lot of people will say this guy was crazy but he was generous.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Are you active in any--?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: No. I'm the donor. I only suggest. I don't even go to meetings. They invite me to the meetings. Sometimes I go sometimes I don't.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it really operates by itself?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: They've got a director and trustees and they operate it. I can suggest that's all. And I don't

bother them very much.

PAUL CUMMINGS: One thing I guess that goes through all of this—

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: All you fellows, you interviewers they're always smiling and laughing. Meanwhile they're getting all their information, they pump you dry. It's all right. that's you business.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You keep saying you make your own prices—

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: I'm fair. I want to tell you something: I'm always fair. Nobody has lost money on my buying art. Do you know what I've said: no dealer or artist has lost money. Because I'm not dealing in art; I'm giving it away. It makes a big difference. If I sold a few things it was by accident, I can't tell you why-where I bought something else. I think I sold a Stella and I bought another Stella or some kind of-I don't remember that details.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But, you know, as the collection grew and became more valuable in terms of the market, what does the money value of the collection mean? I mean is there a value--?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: I don't know. All I can tell you-what I gave to the museum in Washington cost me 32 million dollars, what I gave. What it's worth today I can't tell you. I mean, for example, you couldn't buy a good Bacon for less than \$200,000. I gave seven Bacons. There's a triptych that's worth a million dollars.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, Eakins and all those—

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: I don't know what it's worth-it must be worth-I don't know-maybe 125, 150 million dollars. I don't know. It doesn't matter. But that's what I spend 32 million dollars.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's incredible in that period of time.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: In my day I've made a lot of money. I'm giving a very big gift to the museum. I can't tell you right away. I'm giving-I own a very important royalty that's worth-I don't know-seven or eight figures. The museum is going to get twenty-five per cent, Israel is going to get twenty-five percent, Mt. Sinai Hospital is going to get twenty-five per cent, and I haven't made any decision on the balance. And if I don't do it-it's in my foundation that I'll do it-if I drop dead my estate will be busted.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's all that.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: It's a great gift. I've been a starter in a lot of things. I start.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That appeals to you-I mean getting things going?

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: I start personally. When I get some ideas I start.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Okay. Well, why don't we stop on that.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN: You've finished?

END OF INTERVIEW

Last updated... *May 19, 2005*