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Oral history interview with Lewis Iselin, 1981 September 30

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Lewis Iselin on September 30, 1981. The interview took place in Camden, ME, and was conducted by Robert F. Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

LEWIS ISELIN: —have a show at the [inaudible]—

[Audio break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: This is an interview with Lewis Iselin in Camden, Maine, September 30, 1981, Robert Brown, the interviewer. When you were last interviewed by us in 1969, and one of the things you discussed at great length in that previous interview was your involvement as a, with various foundations that worked with the arts. For example, one was the Guggenheim Foundation, which you continued into the 1970s.

LEWIS ISELIN: I continued into the 1970s, I was their––a juror for them for a total of, I think it was 11 years. And the policy of the Guggenheim Foundation, which was set by Henry Moe, who first set the thing up, was he believed that if you took, or believed in the taste of a man, there's no reason to get another one the next year. And that there should be a continuing sense of taste while the jurors go on. And slowly with time, one would stop off, and a new one would come on. And finally in––I had been there obviously long enough, and should be replaced by someone else. And it was perfectly agreeable. I was––felt that I had done enough, and that I should stop. And I really enjoyed, in the end, working with people who were completely differently trained than I was, notably Henry Geldzahler and Bob Motherwell. And that was the replacements that came in and towards the end, I worked with them. Then I've gone on—

ROBERT F. BROWN: What did your work consist of for the Guggenheim [cross talk]?

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh, the Guggenheim, we would have an—well in the very early days, we had literally pictures to look at. And then in the latter part of the thing, it was done from slides. But the Guggenheim had a policy that you would select. You'd refine it down to about 20 people, and then they would ask for objects. And the jury would reassemble a month later, and look at objects, real paintings and sculptures by the people that they had this smallish group. And from that, they would cut back again, and talk to cut it down some. But the fallacy in this was––or the failure towards the end, when I was there, and I do not know whether they're still doing this, that no one could afford to send the big pictures. And you would like Mr. So-and-so's work, but the––and the slide that you would like was owned by somebody, and was unavailable. You couldn't look at it. And so what you got was what the dealer had on hand, basically, and they were small, and very often uninteresting works, because they were available. And they were badly lit, and if your piece looks well in the seven Santini Brothers storage warehouse, believe me, it's a masterpiece. And I––the answer to this subject of how you select, is after considerable, many years of experience, I am in an absolute quandary as to how to do it. We are now faced with a problem of doing it entirely from slides.

And the Tiffany Foundation, of which I was the president until last year, had recently held two national competitions. They are bi-annuals. We––the reason we did the bi-annual was because its cost so much to have a competition that by doing it; we saved money by doing it bi-annually. And we asked for slides. We had the first competition; we had 2,000 applicants. The second one, a few hundred less than that; I've forgotten exactly what it was. But the point is, if you look at 9,000 slides, it's an impossible situation. You can only ask the jurors to come and devote their time for a—I mean you can't ask too much of them. Their eyes go crazy. You suddenly realize, after a very short period of time, you're not looking at the artist's color at all; you're looking at Eastman color. Which is very limited. All the pictures are the same size in your mind, no matter how often you're told this is an eight by 10 picture, it's how it's projected on the screen is what it is. And my summation of my experience in this is that the man who makes––who gets the prize is the man who hires the best photographer. And the fellow that takes a picture of his painting being held up behind a barn by his wife, forget it. He's never going to get it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Doesn't have a chance.

LEWIS ISELIN: He doesn't have a chance. And this is unfair.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And this was happening in the Guggenheim as well?

LEWIS ISELIN: As well, it was happening in the Guggenheim, and under the Guggenheim setup, they had a machine, which projected nine slides at once on a big screen. And so, what do you call it?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Of the same person's work, you mean?

LEWIS ISELIN: Yeah, so this is Joe Zilch's work. And you've got to look at all of his nine slides at the same time. So you got a picture of what kind of thing he did. And of course, some of the artists would do––send in pictures in nine different techniques, hoping that one would pick––would appeal to one of the jurors. But in fact, they did not. But we tried the same thing at the Tiffany Foundation when we started to do the national competitions there, and unfortunately, the excellent machine that the Guggenheim had was no longer being manufactured, because it was too expensive. And the––when it's projected, and this is what they call a stereopticon, it's a mirror situation is how it projected. But the––what would happen is that the central picture would be in focus, and the ones on the edges were very blurred. So we decided, in the course of doing this, that the best technique was to have a slide, a light table, and the artists sent in their slides in a folder, which you could look at at one time. We passed these folders around, and then those folders which were of interest would be projected, ultimately, on the screen.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But not––neither of the foundations had money enough to send say, one juror out to look at the work?

LEWIS ISELIN: Neither of them had that kind of money, and that is a whole other technique. Which we at the Tiffany Foundation, under my concept, tried. And we are going to try it again this year. When I did it, we invited––I think it was five regional referees, we called them, to submit eight—I think it was eight artists whom they had visited. And we paid them to go visit the artist, and select which ones of their work they thought were the most interesting, and send in the slides. Then, under the laws of Uncle Sam, the ultimate responsibility of giving away individual grants rests with the trustees. The jurors can advise the trustees, but it is the trustees' responsibility to give it away. So I selected––got these slides from the five regional people.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Jurors?

LEWIS ISELIN: Jurors. And then, the ultimate horror was that the trustees selected all of one juror, and none of another one. So I had to write the most embarrassed letters back, and they were furious, you know. They'd gone to a lot of effort, and their young man in Tulsa, Oklahoma, not getting anything. They were cross; there's true stakes. Well now, we're going to go at it again this year. And how it's going to work out, I'll be very much interested to see. Or the––well I'll keep on going on the subject with the expense of this thing. The Tiffany Foundation found itself in the embarrassing position of giving—it costing a dollar to give away two dollars. Because it's a small amount of money that they have, it's about a million and a quarter dollars, and the expense of the banks, and the certified public accountant, and the secretary, and the office, and the whole thing became more, and more, and more, and more. So last year––and I decided that I didn't think that this was wise to go on this way. And my inclination was to give the money—for the trustees to give the money to institutions who were in need of scholarship money in the teaching institutions. And in that case, we would cut our overhead down to minimal, and we wouldn't have to have an office, and a secretary, and the whole business. It was, as it is now––we get over 700 letters a year unsolicited. Which all have to be answered, and which all cost now quite a bit of money to answer them. But, the new president, Angela Westwater, she and her––the people, the other trustees, decided to go ahead and go back to this technique, which we had once tried. And we have invited people to nominate people, and all the trustees have the right to nominate. And then, we're going to have––the jurors are going to be partially trustees, and partially invited jurors, and then the money will––we'll see. I don't know. And the first of December—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You're still going to have the expensive overhead problem.

LEWIS ISELIN: We still have the expensive overhead problem, but it is less so, because of the fact that we do not have to hire an office. Because Angela has a––she is the owner of the Sperone Westwater Fischer Gallery in New York, and so that we can keep our files, and so on in her gallery. And this cuts down on the overhead.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were the, was the outlook and standards of the Guggenheim and the Tiffany more or less the same? Have they been––or it depends, I suppose.

LEWIS ISELIN: Yeah. And historically, when I was first involved with both of them, the Tiffany, or the Guggenheim Foundation was for––I don't know how to describe. More advanced people is not so much so, but see the Tiffany––the Guggenheim grant, in the old days, was a fair amount of money. The Tiffany––when I first was on the Tiffany, was very little. They had––their policy was many small grants; the Guggenheim was for fewer, larger grants. The Guggenheim Foundation people, they were judged by categories. Not that they weren't all judged one against the other, but you knew their ages. And it turned out that the age group in the

Guggenheim that won most of the awards would be in their thirties and forties, whereas in the old days, the Tiffany was rather for younger people. But I would say that now––they were involved with exactly the same group.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And what about the kinds of jurors? Was the Tiffany jurors—

LEWIS ISELIN: —the Tiffany jurors were the trustees, and our––there was rotating––they would be asked, for each year they would have a different group. And whereas the Guggenheim, as I explained before, had this concept of consistency, and going along with the same jury.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And the Tiffany is a much older foundation, isn't it?

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh no, I do not think so. I think that the Tiffany, well, the Tiffany Foundation was founded by Louis Tiffany in the late '20s, but it was set up as an art school to begin with. And it didn't become a national competition award situation until after the Second World War.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, so it's really about the same age as the—

LEWIS ISELIN: —as the Guggenheim.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The Guggenheim.

LEWIS ISELIN: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: How––you mentioned at the Guggenheim, then Geldzahler comes on.

LEWIS ISELIN: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And then Motherwell.

LEWIS ISELIN: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did they affect the attitudes at all?

LEWIS ISELIN: Very muchly, they were very much more in favor—the flavor became much more avant-garde. It had been rather conservative. The Guggenheim was the invention, if you will, of Henry Allen Moe. And Henry Moe, I believe, was of an old school who believed in––you––if you knew somebody very well, and trusted his judgment, you should trust it. And he was a––what we would call the old grad situation. They were the—particularly in––I'm told, although I know nothing about it in the selection of science and so on. It was a very in group selecting committee. And when Henry Geldzahler and Bob Motherwell came on, they immediately shifted the focus towards much more of what you might call the New York school, or whatever you want to call it. And you get––right now into—then you're now right involved with another whole problem, which is to do with this jurying and world. And that is––the complete difference in taste between the curatorially trained person, and the art school trained person. In other words, the artist's taste is completely different from the—

ROBERT F. BROWN: How would you compare them? What is the curatorial taste? What Geldzahler was looking––you served with him [inaudible].

LEWIS ISELIN: Well Geldzahler, of course, even invented the art, so that's another—see, he, he specifically invented Pop art, so he was rather keen on it at that time. Now he has shifted away from it. But uh, the curatorial taste is for a finished object, which is in a recognizable style, which can be defended because somebody else has liked it. Whereas the artistic taste, or the taste of the artist, is more inclined to be what I call talent, is what he's interested in. That this is an interesting picture. And I all—I noticed that very often, when someone would––an artist would think of––see a picture that he liked. He would get up, and go and look at it close, too––in some part. Well what he was actually doing was interested in the technique, and he was stealing from that artist in that time. And then he would go back and sit down. And this is an entirely different way of looking at it than the one who knows this in terms of how it's going to hang in the museum.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But they were good to have the two, were they?

LEWIS ISELIN: Well, I thought so. In fact the last time I ran the Tiffany Foundation, we had––we invited a dealer and curatorial people. And it was a disaster; in the end we had a knockdown, drag out fight, which turned out to be the boys against the girls, which made it even more complicated. And we spent uh––in the final judging, jurying, we spent about a half an hour selecting the first 15 of 20. And three hours selecting the last five, because everybody wanted to get their boy in. And then there's this other whole aspect, which is to me, even more complicated from the point of view of the applicant. The curatorial people have seen a great many more works of art than the artist has seen, contemporary works. It is their business to go and search around, and go to

people's studios, and see all kinds of things. So you see, you're presented with a group of slides, which are not very interesting. And one of the curatorial types will say, "Well I went to his studio in Milwaukee, and they really are fascinating pictures," and tell you a whole lot of stuff. Well, do you admire her judgments from working on something else? Or should the judgment of the jury be entirely upon the slides that are presented to them? I do not know the answer.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I suppose it should be a bit of both, if you could actually view the thing that she is telling you about.

LEWIS ISELIN: If you could, but the other jurors are very much influenced by anyone who says they actually know the guy, or know the work. And to my mind that should not be. It should be entirely on the evidence of the objects in front of you. But this is very difficult.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This is one reason you suggested to the Tiffany that they provide money for art schools for scholarships.

LEWIS ISELIN: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: To get out of this business.

LEWIS ISELIN: Get out of this business, because I didn't think at the present time there was any really fair way of running a competition.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But this has been a uh, an obligation you've carried out very conscientiously for what, 20-some years now?

LEWIS ISELIN: Twenty-five years, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This has been a––you felt a very important duty.

LEWIS ISELIN: Well I felt it was very important for, not only that it should be done, but that it––I got a great, great deal out of it, because I have never taught, and this put me in connection with current––what currently was going on, and what is in the minds via the objects of the younger people. And I––so I got a great deal out of it. Although I've given a great deal of time to it, I did get a great deal out of it. And I'm––the reason I got involved in it was, first I was involved with the Chalmers Foundation, because of the––I knew the other people involved. Then, I got a Guggenheim Award.

ROBERT F. BROWN: That was about '52 or so.

LEWIS ISELIN: Fifty-two, something like that. And that, then I became friendly, because of that, with Henry Allen Moe. And he elected––nominated me to, or asked me to become a trustee of the Tiffany Foundation. And I said to Henry, "Why me? I don't know anything more than anybody else." And he said, "No, but you're a natural born revolutionary and you wear a blue suit. I can get you in." Because at that time, the Tiffany Foundation was very conservatively minded, and very academically oriented. And I guess that's been the history of the thing. Although I wear a blue suit, I have a fairly liberal mind.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But it took them a while to realize that.

LEWIS ISELIN: [Laughs.] Yeah, that's right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well other foundations which you've been involved with, which you, one other that you've discussed in a previous interview is the Saint-Gaudens Memorial.

LEWIS ISELIN: The Saint-Gaudens Memorial—

ROBERT F. BROWN: What has happened there over the last decade?

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh, that has, that has—the Saint-Gaudens Memorial has––I think it––we had given it to Uncle Sam when I talked last, but I'll go ahead and repeat in case I didn't. No, what happened was that the history of the Saint-Gaudens is very briefly––is when Saint-Gaudens died, his friends got together and bought the house, the land, the contents of the studios, the whole works, in Cornish, New Hampshire, and set it up as a foundation so that Mrs. Saint-Gaudens and Homer Saint-Gaudens could live there as long as they wanted. And when they didn't want to live there anymore, it was opened to the public. And this went on until, well, about 10 years ago. And which––at which time, we didn't—the endowment was not quite enough to keep the place up. So that all of the plant was beginning to deteriorate. And we moved heaven and earth, and managed to give it to Uncle Sam. And it is now a national historic site, which means it's under the National Park Service. And they have done an absolutely crackerjack job. And with a very—they're a wise group, because when we gave them the money, and

the property. We had about $600,000 worth of capital, and the property. And they took half of it, and the trustees of the Saint-Gaudens Memorial retained half of it: $300,000. And they are the advisors to the Park Service on artistic matters, and in other ways, too.

And we meet with the National Park Service two or three times, twice a year, and we meet as trustees one more time. And we are, in effect, advisors to the Park Service, and the Park—the Saint-Gaudens Memorial is the only national historic site which has anything to do with the arts. So they were very green on how to go about it. And so we––on the board of trustees are several sculptors who could actually help them on the technical sides of the thing. Because we were all trained in the same tradition as Saint-Gaudens. But, it turned out that they had the wisdom, the Park Service, to appoint young John Dreyfus [ph], who has devoted his life to this project, and he now knows more about Saint-Gaudens than Saint-Gaudens did. And the—we're, between Uncle Sam and ourselves, we're going to put out, this year, a catalogue raisonné with the––all––a total output of Saint-Gaudens in photographs, and so on. The site has been finally––the money has been spent. It has been restored, and it is in fine fettle, and they did a—Uncle Sam put up a large fireproof building to store the countless, uh, bits and pieces of casts and molds, and things which were left in the studios. And they have all been cataloged. And uh, I would say it was in absolute fine, crackerjack shape. [Inaudible.] And more people come, and more—and it's in a very remote place, unless you—and the only trouble with it is that Saint-Gaudens has been forgotten by contemporary people. They don't know who he is. But I think that that will not be, because, in the future––because the Metropolitan is going to do a vast Saint-Gaudens show in, I think it's 1984. So our dragon will come back into his––into the sun.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes. Well the Smithsonian had one on the medallions piece.

LEWIS ISELIN: They did one on the medallions, right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Ten years ago.

LEWIS ISELIN: About 10 years ago. But this is going to be the whole works.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LEWIS ISELIN: Of the big pieces, now Metropolitan has a vast collection of Saint-Gaudens.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So this has been a happy field of work for you.

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh I, I have enjoyed it a lot. And the lovers of Saint-Gaudens are, are an ancient group who have a hardcore—he's our hero. I, I once asked Mahanra Young [ph] why Saint-Gaudens was the best. And he said, "Oh, he had an unattractive wife and he lived in the country, so he spent his life in the studio."

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.]

LEWIS ISELIN: But he was an extraordinary man.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So what do you feel you have up there in New Hampshire now? His home and studio—

LEWIS ISELIN: We have his—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —parts of that are burned, or gone.

LEWIS ISELIN: Part, part was burned in his lifetime, and then rebuilt in his lifetime, and then subsequently burned again after he died. So there are no––very few large casts of the big pieces. Those, the original molds, the originals have been lost. But there is a mold, or a plaster original of the Shaw memorial. There is a Lincoln, and Diana, and—but the most important thing from––to my mind, which no one would see in public, we have an almost complete collection of the low relief portraits that he did, which are in plaster. And in the––when they were cast into bronze, and they're Edwardian patinas, so on––they are very difficult to see in the bronze, to read. Because they are in such low relief. But in the plaster, they are absolutely ravishing, and they're very well shone with a slanting light on them. And so you really feel the sensitivity of the man's hand. Because as you know, Saint-Gaudens started out as a cameo cutter, and low relief was what he was really good at.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LEWIS ISELIN: And no one could surpass him. Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So this way is bringing back reflections, drawing on the past; I mean this involvement in contrast with your––the two other foundations.

LEWIS ISELIN: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And also now, you've been involved what, some years––several years now with the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts.

LEWIS ISELIN: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: How did that come about?

LEWIS ISELIN: That came about because of the fact that the Tiffany Foundation is the only private foundation that gives any money to the craft world. I mean, over a period of time. Now there are small ones that do it. But it was a pioneer, because of Mr. Tiffany's involvement with the crafts. And so from the very beginning, one third of the income has gone to the craft world. And in one form or another––and that made me become interested in the craft world.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were they––did they tend to give to young up and coming art—craftspeople?

LEWIS ISELIN: Well, we have given it in many different ways. And I––this is about the only really smart thing I ever did in this foundation business: About 10 years ago in the Tiffany, I hit upon the idea that to––a return to the apprentice system in the arts would be a good thing as an antidote to the technique of teaching art in art schools. In other words, after the person has come out of the studio, the teaching studio, it would do them good to get into a shop situation with a senior artist, and to find out what the other side of the business was about. And this was such a success that even Uncle Sam is now taking it on, and the idea of apprentices is––has taken hold in the country––teaching by an apprentice technique.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Can you give some examples that you––your––the foundation pioneered?

LEWIS ISELIN: We pioneered completely in, in this return. What we did was, we picked artists, painters, and sculptors, and craftspeople, and we wrote them a letter and said, "Would you be interested?" And if they said they were interested, then they selected the craftsperson––I mean the apprentice.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right.

LEWIS ISELIN: So we had no, no worry about that. Because the selection of the apprentice should––it would be very bad if the apprentice was forced upon the senior craftsman. In other words, it must be very much of a personal rapport. In painting, it was a failure. Because the contemporary painter doesn't need a studio assistant, other than to do anything but uh, stretch canvas, and so on. And in fact, one of the disasters was uh––oh God, well I'll have to come back to that. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well.

LEWIS ISELIN: One of our first recipients of a grant was Mark Rothko, and after we, he had selected as an apprentice a young man from the Rhode Island School of Design who had worked with him in the summer on Cape Cod. And after about three months, I got a letter from the apprentice saying that he quit, and was going back to the Rhode Island School of Design. The apprenticeship was for a year, and he was going back to the Rhode Island School of Design because all he had learned from working for Mark Rothko was how to be a bartender, and he didn't think that that was going to be really very much an advantage to his career. Well, I got in touch with Rothko, who was uh––didn't realize the situation at all, and actually it worked out very well in the end, because he was so embarrassed that he called the boy—young man back, and they became good friends on an entirely different level. And, and ultimately the young man wrote me a letter saying that he'd really gotten a lot out of it, but not as he had originally thought. The—in sculpture, it was somewhat of a success, but the number of sculptors who have big commissions in which they really need a working assistant is again, not, not—there's not much of that. But in the craft world, it was an absolute wow success. Because we believe in the Tiffany Foundation too that it's very much––very important to support the production craftsmen, as opposed to the teaching craftsmen. The teaching craftsmen are supported by the teaching institution that hires them. But the production craftsmen do not have that kind of support. And this was a way of helping them. And it has––was a great success. And then, we decided at the foundation that having instituted this thing, and other people, the government, state—whatever you call it, fine arts groups and so on, have taken it over. Uncle Sam has taken it over. So we got out of it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Can you give some examples of the Tiffany Foundation supporting apprentices?

LEWIS ISELIN: Who—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —who are some examples, and how it worked?

LEWIS ISELIN: How it worked. Well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: I mean that you were––happen to know about.

LEWIS ISELIN: Huh. Well, Ron Pearson was a very, very distinguished silversmith. He was one of the first to be getting an award. I mean, to have an apprentice. And then, subsequent to this, there was a seminar at Haystack Mountain with Uncle Sam's participation, about the whole apprentice approach. And I will always remember Ron Pearson saying the only trouble with taking on as an apprentice a boy who has been to art school, or at least craft school, is he comes primarily to steal your designs, and will walk––will go down the street a little ways, and set up shop selling the same thing cheaper. Whereas he said, I think I find it more successful to teach a lobsterman how to be a silversmith, because it's a lot nicer in the wintertime pounding a hammer than it is out there in the lobster boat. But then there was a potter whose name I've gone out of my head, who lives up in Warren, Maine, up here, who I went up to interview, or to see, because I was interested to see who, what was all about. And um, I was greeted in the studio by the prettiest girl you ever saw in your life, and I thought to myself, oh, that's what it's all about. Then after I had talked to him for a while, and his name has gone out of my head, but I went upstairs where his wife was working in her studio. She's a weaver, and it turned out she was prettier than the apprentice, so I fell over. I said all right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.] But it did work out in some ways [inaudible].

LEWIS ISELIN: It worked out almost in every case to be a success in the craft world. But it was not a success as I explained in the painting and sculpture, because the studio life has changed in that respect.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. And on the other hand, there Pearson's—

LEWIS ISELIN: Right. Oh yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —fear that they would steal his ideas and run down the street.

LEWIS ISELIN: That's right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you—

LEWIS ISELIN: —that is common.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LEWIS ISELIN: That's something that you have to watch out for, apparently.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And these are for only one year, though.

LEWIS ISELIN: That's right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And then in crafts, traditionally, apprenticeship was over several years.

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh, absolutely. And the––we also ran into a basic problem, which I do not know how it has been solved by, nowadays. But you ran into the minimum wage law. And our apprentice awards were $4,000 was given to the senior craftsman, of which $3,000 would go to the apprentice. And $1,000 he could use to buy equipment that the apprentice would use. In other words, if he wanted to enlarge his shop so that the apprentice could help out. In most cases they gave all of the money to the apprentice. The arrangement of how the money was to be given to the apprentice, and how many months he was to work for him, was between the two of them. But the budget was $4,000. And as I say, we got immediately into a conflict with Uncle Sam as to––on the minimum wage situation. And how that has been thrashed out, I do not know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because the program still does continue?

LEWIS ISELIN: Right. They still do it. Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What about repeating the apprenticeship over several years, the same person? That—

LEWIS ISELIN: Well, we never tried that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You tried to go in and out, and hope that the master might pick that person—

LEWIS ISELIN: —pick [inaudible].

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did they occasionally pick them up?

LEWIS ISELIN: They did. Occasionally the master would go into this and pick up other people, and take them in as apprentices. But I still think that it's an essential part of the training of an artist to at least become so friendly with the teacher that he is working––with whom he is working, that he gets invited into his home, and gets to

see the problems of being a self-employed artist and craftsman. The craftsman is a small businessman, and the artist has to scratch around one way or another to try to make a living, and that aspect of it is not taught at all. I want to have a course given annually at Haystack, or at least a seminar of some kind on the––exactly how to set up a small business. Because when the younger people are going to start out, even just to do with bookkeeping and where responsibility, what forms you have to figure out, how you handle the IRS, and the whole business.

ROBERT F. BROWN: There have been some––well there was a government-sponsored conference in '79, I think, in Boston.

LEWIS ISELIN: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And back to apprenticeship, there was a––I think partly government-sponsored conference at Purchase, the state university, a couple of years ago.

LEWIS ISELIN: That's right. That was the result of this original interest in the Tiffany's thing. Then there was a, before the Purchase one, Jerry, who is the potter?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Williams?

LEWIS ISELIN: Williams.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LEWIS ISELIN: He was very much involved in that, and he was one of the first people who got a Tiffany grant. And he––this stimulated him to become interested in the whole thing. And the first grant––the first conference on apprentices, was over at Haystack. And the highlight of that to me was, there was a woman from Washington who I have no idea who it was, but she represented the National Endowment. And she said to Jared Caucus [ph] who was a blacksmith, a huge mammoth guy. She said to him, "Mr. Jared Caucus, what is it in blacksmithing that brings you all so much together?" And the blacksmiths more than any other craft seem to all know each other, and to communicate with one another. "What is this bond in common you have?" And this huge guy gets up and says, "Well, I guess we just like to smack hot iron." [Laughs.] Which is absolutely the truth; nothing more complicated than that. That's what it's all about. I mean you like, people like to paint, some people like to model, and some like to smack hot iron.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And then they get together and trade, trade ideas, or—

LEWIS ISELIN: Trade ideas, yeah. But the blacksmiths are very, very keen on getting together and discussing technical sides of things. Same thing is true of metalsmiths—goldsmiths and silversmiths. They're more—well we––lately, in the Tiffany Foundation, have been, because our budget is very, is comparably small. And the idea––the problem with the art going on with the apprentice thing, which it so limited what we can do. In other words, we could only give around four or five apprenticeships a year, and that's just pepper and salt in this business. So we have been attempting to unsuccessfully, I may say, to devise some scheme among the crafts for the dissemination of technical information. Because craftspeople are not as um—well, artists don't like to tell you how they do anything. But craftspeople are much more willing to discuss technical things with one another. And share—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Why do you think they are?

LEWIS ISELIN: I think it's because of the nature of their training and most artists are shy about talking about their work, because of the fact that I don't think any artist actually knows what he's doing. And this—

ROBERT F. BROWN: They just do it a lot, and it happens.

LEWIS ISELIN: And right, it just happens. Whereas to—in making or throwing a pot, why there's a much more technical side. The fact that it's perfectly beautiful when it's done, something to do with the concept––that is the magic. But there is a technical side to it. Whereas, and this is also true of painting, but art is––was invented by illiterates to communicate with one another. And it's very tricky stuff.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Whereas a craft you can't get anywhere, and they might as well share that technical knowledge, knowing that the difference between the good and the mediocre is––comes out. They can't teach that. That won't happen.

LEWIS ISELIN: They can't do—that's not happening. That's right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because traditionally, in the old days, the old crafts––they had so-called mysteries or secrets, didn't they?

LEWIS ISELIN: Right. Well they were very—but that is all—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Very close to the chest.

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh, very much so. But I––Paul Smith told me––who runs the Museum of Contemporary Crafts, he said there's a young man someplace in the United States now who knows how to make absolutely anything. In other words, all the secrets of the past have been delved into, and rediscovered, and this––the—that secret enamel that was put on in the Renaissance, then forgotten; they know how to do it now. It's been delved, been rummaged out. And the secret, the idea that there's a––one of the stupidest ideas around is that the craft technical manual dexterity or whatever, is a lost art. To my mind, that's absolutely baloney. I think that there's only so much skill loose in the world at any one time. And it goes into different ways. If Benvenuto Cellini came back and saw a modern set of false teeth, he'd blow his top. I mean, that's absolutely fantastic, and the work is done in an old lady's mouth. I mean this is really superb. And this is why we can go to the moon on a rocket. Those guys are––who make––who are involved in space––this is high-grade work. And if you look at the Renaissance woodwork and jewelry, a lot of it really wasn't very well made.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They could cut corners.

LEWIS ISELIN: Right, that's—oh yes, very much so. Had to, and they didn't have the tools.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. And also though, if he came back, he would see revival of the crafts, and an awful lot of very fine, technically very fine work now, doesn't he?

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh absolutely.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And do you think that foundations, such as the Tiffany, have played a role in this?

LEWIS ISELIN: I think they have played a great role. And in fact this, to me, is the––one of the mysteries of Louis Tiffany which has never been explained––is here's this man who got together all these craftsmen, and supported the craft world, and was mad for it, and then when he and his things went out of fashion, he abandoned the whole thing. The factory was stopped, everybody just said goodbye, and went away. And the––they're still loose in the hands of now––the families of the craftsmen that worked for Louis Tiffany, formulas, which they no longer know how to do. This was––grandpa had this formula for favrile glass, or for whatever it was, and how he completely lost interest. And abandoned the whole thing. I don't––I know––that's never been, to me, explained. Except change of fashion, and he was very bitter, I think, in the end. That he was out of fashion.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well we know those things still happen, [inaudible].

LEWIS ISELIN: Yeah, yeah. Well the young, his nephew, grandson, great-grandson is now very much involved in going around, trying to get the stuff back together again. But the Tiffany, the Tiffany Foundation, I think has been, has helped a great many people over the years, as they have—

ROBERT F. BROWN: It's pulled away from its conservative bias?

LEWIS ISELIN: Even so, even including that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I mean, you pulled away [inaudible].

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh, we very much have pulled away. Oh yes, now in fact I feel like the old guard. They're, they're way far ahead of me by now. Which is as it should be. I believe that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: To come back to my question I asked a while back was about how you got involved in Haystack, and got on their board.

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh, that was via, via Paul Smith.

ROBERT F. BROWN: By Paul Smith. Is Paul someone you've known for a number of years?

LEWIS ISELIN: Yes, he used to have been a trustee of the Tiffany Foundation. That's how I got to know him. As a––I cannot remember who suggested him, or how it happened, but it was some, oh 10 years ago. I should think he's been involved. And we have become close friends. And he asked me to become a member of the Haystack board. And then, we at Tiffany wanted to––thought we ought to have a craftsperson as a trustee, which we had not had for some time. And we, both Paul and I liked––get along very well, and uh, admire Ron Pearson, who is also knowledgeable in the––in this world. He is now the chairman of Haystack. So we have sort of an interlocking director, which is good, except for the fact that it means that we cannot give Haystack any money, because Uncle Sam would think there was something fishy about this. [Laughs.] But we have in the past.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well when you came to Haystack then as a trustee, was this the mid-'70s? Was that––

LEWIS ISELIN: No, no, just three years ago.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And how did you find it to be? What did you know of it before you came on?

LEWIS ISELIN: Well, very little. I knew very little about it. I went over there, and––which I was asked to do before I would accept the idea, and I went over and snooped around, and uh, and then I went over again in the wintertime, and talked to Howie Evans, the director. And uh, and I was elected, and I started to become closely involved with them. And in my experience now, to this part, is that the difference between craftspeople and artists is that craftspeople actually like each other. Whereas artists are apt to be a little bit suspicious of one another, and think you're trying to get something out of me, and this and that. It makes it very difficult serving on boards with them, and that kind of thing. On the other hand, the craftspeople talk endlessly about philosophical problems to do with the crafts, which to my mind are, for the most part, garbage. The meetings are endless. Craftspeople like long meetings.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Like what sort of concerns do they have? [Inaudible.]

LEWIS ISELIN: Well they're all––they're worried. They're worried about the future of the craft world. The craft world has blossomed so quickly, and so well, that I think they're all worried about where they're going to go from here. And this is particularly true with the trustees of Haystack, as to whether––how––what the future will bring for the Haystack, and the fact that the enrollment of all art schools, and Haystack included, has now reached a peak, and in fact, gone off. And this means, from the trustees' point of view, problems. Are we––is the competition doing something better than we're doing? Or attracting better students, and so on. Whereas a few years back, there were so many people who were clamoring to get into any first-class art school that you didn't have any problem; you could turn them away. And this is––and then the art: one of the ongoing arguments in the craft world is between those who make useful objects, and those who make *objet d'art.* And there's a conflict between the two of them, and the trend is now more towards, it's more trendy if you make objet d'art than if you make casseroles. And I think this is too bad, myself.

ROBERT F. BROWN: That's a controversy that goes back at least 30 years, I know.

LEWIS ISELIN: Right. And also, there's—the craft people have a chip on their shoulder a little bit, because the art, the fine arts people, sort of look back on––down on them. I have a feeling that there are two really evil people in the 19th century, whose name is unknown. The first was the one who called a second-class opera singer a great artiste. And the general public had never been able to differentiate between performing arts and the creative arts. And the other person was the glib guy who first said "artsy-craftsy." And that has been––made it very difficult for the creative artist and the craftsperson, as far as their public image is concerned. They're still worried about it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I mean one is arts, and the other is, or one is—

LEWIS ISELIN: Well in, in the—

ROBERT F. BROWN: What is the—

LEWIS ISELIN: —performing artist is not the same thing.

ROBERT F. BROWN: As a creative artist.

LEWIS ISELIN: As a creative artist.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What about the artist––you've been talking about artists, as opposed to the craftsmen. [Inaudible.]

LEWIS ISELIN: Well the craftspeople had the—the artists looked down on the craftspeople, a lot of them do. And this puts a chip on the shoulder of the craftspeople.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes.

LEWIS ISELIN: And it's just––this is something which I hope in the next generation will sort of be eased out. And the craft, the craftsperson is slipping into the fine arts field. I mean most of the––a great deal of the clay work now is sculpture, and a great deal of the weaving is painting. And the metalwork is, the difference between jewelry and black, and silversmithing is very––they're blending together. And they're—of course the hottest thing in the grant world now is this blacksmithing and glass. And the only trouble with the glass business that I'm worried about––we are worried about this, is because of the energy crunch. Or that's getting to be astronomically expensive to run, to teach glassblowing, and to run a kiln, glass furnaces, and all that. The amount of gas that

they use is just appalling. And we have just set up at Haystack, you know, a hot shop, which is teaching––a place to teach both blacksmithing and, and glassblowing.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do you find that—it's a summer session school. Do you find––what is the effect––I mean the students are there only for a fairly brief time.

LEWIS ISELIN: Well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —what––how much can be done?

LEWIS ISELIN: Well I think that this is a good thing because—well, at Haystack we have a problem; there are two groups coming. One are beginners, and one who are skilled. So skilled people. And this I think is a good mix. But basically, the philosophy of Haystack is somewhat similar to that of the Skowhegan Art School, in which you come to suck somebody's brains. In other words, you know what kind of work such and such a craftsperson does. You sign that because you know his work, you want to get as much out of him as you can, and presumably you have the skills which you will be able to learn from him. You, in other words, you have elementary skills. And it's a very intense situation. You're there for three to four weeks, and you can––the studios are open 24 hours a day; the instructor is available all day long. The instructor is there, which is unlike most art schools, where you see the instructor once a week, or however it is. This is––it's a very intense situation. And what the students like about Haystack, and which is the good part about it, is the interdisciplinary disciplines. In other words, you may come as a potter and leave, and decide that really what you want to do is be a metalsmith. Or you might be a weaver, and end up that you want to do: be a woodworker. Because the shops are right together, and all the people are in such an intense and close environment that it's a wonderful experience for everybody.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do you have the problem you mentioned earlier of imitation of the newer people––of the students of the masters?

LEWIS ISELIN: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do you get that much? Have you noticed?

LEWIS ISELIN: That unfortunately, I think, in the craft world, is even more so than in the fine arts world. But that, that I think will, they will drift away from that. I mean when you've been studying so intensely with Mr. So-and-so, you make it like he does. Then it's––but it's the––what you're really interested in is how you can––it can help your work.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because at Haystack, much of the time the master craftsman is there doing his or her thing as well; you're watching the right way.

LEWIS ISELIN: As well, you're watching. Right. That's right. Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But basically it's a pretty healthy curriculum.

LEWIS ISELIN: I think very, to my—as far as I know. And we––of course they––everybody's always worried about that, that aspect of it. But one of the basic problems is that—well, the best teacher is a proven teacher. And he––I mean he's a man who teaching you, in say the University of Wisconsin or wherever it is, so you invite him to come. The kids all know about him, and they all want to study with him. It's fine. And he can afford to come because of the fact that he's on vacation. And we can only afford to give a very modest honorarium to him. Whereas a production craftsman, he is loath to come and spend a month of his life teaching, because it's cutting back on his income. He's––and particularly in the summertime, which is a big production period for most people, and he doesn't want to take a month off and come. And so, we're—that's a little bit of a problem.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So––and many of those production craftsmen, or freelance artists, craftsmen, whatever, are the very ones who are perhaps, in some cases, the leading figures then.

LEWIS ISELIN: Right. In some cases the leading figures, and also would, in many cases, help—they're less theoretical, and they're more practical. This is what their world is. Which is the two sides of the craft world.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do you find, based on your to now, fairly brief experience with the crafts world that those that teach, are they apt to be more advocating crafts as an art form, objet d'art, as opposed to production? Or can you generalize? You really can't?

LEWIS ISELIN: I think that they're––I think that they––that's about even, half and half. But all of them, particularly the older ones, view the craft world––this is another conflict within it; the older ones view it as a sacred calling. And it's an experience; it includes their food, their clothing, their way of life––they're into crafts. Whereas I think the younger generation take it more for granted, and don't feel quite as intensely about that. I think the younger generation wouldn't think it was a sin to go out and have a Big Mac every once in a while,

whereas the older people think the granola bar is the only thing. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.] Is the current director [inaudible] does he represent the newer tendency?

LEWIS ISELIN: Well, yes. He––Howie is––he was a potter himself to begin with. But only on a rather elementary situation. He is more of a school administrator, which is a very good thing. And he is very good about the financial side of the thing, and keeping within the budget, and––or being a––what are you going to call it? A leader among the various cliques, and keep them from getting at each other's throats. He is very much interested in the other sides of the craft world, like dancing and things of that kind. I'm not too sure that that's a very good idea.

ROBERT F. BROWN: That, you think it might thin it out too much?

LEWIS ISELIN: Yeah. They do that in the evening. They have music and dance groups come over, and I'm doubtful about that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You talked earlier about financial problems, and whether among other effects might be that say, Haystack could become more of a regional craft school. Simply the cost of getting people here—

LEWIS ISELIN: —yes. Very much so.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —from Europe and Asia, or the western United States—

LEWIS ISELIN: —this is the original concept of the place, being over on Deer Isle was to be––to get away from it all. And the isolation and all that was very much wanted, and the people who come love it. They love the––it's the most beautiful setting in the world, and that all is perfectly fine. Except now, with the high cost of inflation and so on, the expense of getting to Haystack by air from various parts of the country becomes more and more, and the isolation is sort of in a sense working against us, and we don't wish to become a regional situation at all. But we do notice that the numbers from California and Tokyo—and Japan and Europe are lessening, which is a sad effect of inflation. And we are thinking of next year, in order to attract more people, perhaps chartering a bus situation whereby they could come to New York and Boston. And then we could bus them straight from there to the school, as opposed to going to Bangor, and then having to bus them down.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. Now I know the school is now reaching a senior status in a way, because older craftsmen came and had a conference here last summer—

LEWIS ISELIN: —yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —and there's another one upcoming.

LEWIS ISELIN: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Is––do you sense in the school a beginning––there's beginning to be a look backwards to a degree?

LEWIS ISELIN: Well I think they're very conscious of their past, and very proud of it. They should be. Or, I think—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —but there's a continual renewal, so they won't become conservative.

LEWIS ISELIN: Yeah, but I think the part of the trustees is very much to keep their eye on that, that element. I––they have a rule in their bylaws, which I think is a very wise one, and should be in the bylaws of any institution. And that is the trustees can only be a trustee for a limited length of time. Then they go off, and they can ask them back again. But it's a nice way of saying thanks a lot, because I—unfortunately, the type of people that become trustees are generally older people who have time and the money to do, to devote to it, and so on. But the––to my mind, the trustees in any art institution should be as young as you could possibly get them. And there's always the old banker who can tell you about the budget and that kind of thing.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Now in the '70s, did you––you kept right along with your own work, your own sculpture.

LEWIS ISELIN: I did. I kept right on with my own work. And uh, I—that was during that period; I developed the technique of working directly in wax, and doing large pieces which were modeled directly in wax.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Had you not worked with wax very much before?

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh, I had. I started working in wax in, oh, about 15 years ago, and now I do it almost exclusively. This has been a good thing for me, because it would be almost impossible to describe it in words, but it allowed

me to make objects which were––had a black and white effect, or chiaroscuro, which is what interests me. I started out as a draftsman; the black and white design thing is something that interests me. These are open work figures. They're not––they're full of space and air, and all that kind of thing. But technically––and I would very much like to say this so that for the future, it would have been entirely impossible, if it was not for an invention of Calvin Albert who taught for many years. In fact he may still be teaching at Pratt Institute. And he invented a synthetic wax, which has what's known in the plastic trade as memory. You bend it, and it'll flop back. Wood has memory; metal does not. And this rubbery consistency made it possible to make a large framework of a large object, which would be sufficiently rubbery to withstand the trip from the studio to the foundry. The first things I did, which were made out of dental wax, or using dental wax, well I had lost one on the Triborough Bridge; it just fell apart. There, there is––this technical side of it is one of the few things that I have developed in the last 10 years. I did—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —the use of that?

LEWIS ISELIN: —I did four, um, very large masks for Columbus, Ohio––the Midland Mutual Life Insurance Company. They're seven feet high, and were made directly in wax.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And this, um, aside from this––the development of the wax, of the fact that you had this, what has it allowed you to do? I mean apart from it, you can get to the foundry, why do you use wax?

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh, it, what it does for me is––because one of the things that interests me increasingly over the years is the textural quality of the art. I believe that what you're really interested in, in the artist's work, is his fingerprint, his––what he puts into it manually. And this is why certain painters are of such fascination, because of their—you can see the––feel the paint brush. And in the classical tradition of sculpture, there are so many molds, and so many hands are involved in it, that it's a little bit like a photograph of a photograph of a photograph. It loses that sharpness, and working directly in wax, which is then turned into bronze, you get a much––you can do things with the surface texture that are simply impossible in a, in the classical techniques of it. This is, it's––what it amounts to, with using this kind of a technique: you're sort of bridging the gap between the classical modeler in clay, and the modern construction, Constructivist artist who's making forms out of metal and that kind of thing. It's sort of halfway between the two.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now for example, you said you admired Saint-Gaudens.

LEWIS ISELIN: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Uh, and aren't, aren't there some tracks, doesn't he leave some tracks behind? Or—

LEWIS ISELIN: Well, Saint-Gaudens, where you see the real Saint-Gaudens is in the low reliefs. The big classical pieces of monuments and so on, oh my, the number of people that worked on them was—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —it required too intermediate, intervening steps.

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh yeah. And in fact, he didn't work on the big ones at all. There's a wonderful story of *The Pilgrim*, which is one of his great pieces: a huge, twice life-size Pilgrim, which is in Philadelphia. He, Adolph Weinman, who ultimately went and did all the stuff on the Supreme Court in Washington, he was hired to model up in Cornish, and he was to do the stockings on *The Pilgrim*. And he––it was terribly laborious to do all of this. So he made a roller––so the––which he carved so that he could roll the texture onto the stockings. And Saint-Gaudens came down to the studio and found him doing this, and he said, "Adolph I hired you to model those legs. Model them." Back to the drawing board. [Laughs.] But that's the truth. The number of people that worked on those monuments, and the number of intermediaries and the classical technique––one of the things that we are doing at the Saint-Gaudens, which I hope will happen, and that is we're making a––we're in the process of writing a movie and getting it, the original scenario and the whole thing together. The focus will be of the––it's to be an hour-long movie to be shown hopefully on educational TV and that kind of thing. But what we want to bring out in it is that in the old days, monumental sculpture—and this is true of painting too—was a group activity. There's the architect, the artist, his assistants, the patron; everybody is working involved with this thing together. Which is now misunderstood, now the artist works in his studio, takes it down to this––to the gallery, who sells it to somebody.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Or even if there's a commission—

LEWIS ISELIN: —it is.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —it's apt to be, you know, a sculptor is brought in after the building's already—

LEWIS ISELIN: —oh, invariably he's brought in after it started.

ROBERT F. BROWN: How did it work out with you at Columbus? I remember looking at—

LEWIS ISELIN: —that, with Columbus was the best I've ever had in involvement. Because I––my name was suggested by Mahanra [ph] Young––Bill Young, who's my oldest friend. And uh, I went out there and looked at the designs, and so on. But when I brought up––I brought out two different scenarios, two different kinds––two different maquettes, one of which interested me, and one of which I thought would be easier to sell. And much to my surprise, the president of the insurance company liked my idea, and from then on, we were off to the races. And it was easy, and then the most extraordinary thing happened. Because ordinarily, the architect has very much got his finger in it. But in this case, what had happened was that the Midland Mutual Life Insurance Company had a small building which was on the back of a very large lot. And they uh, put up a high-rise apartment in front of the small building, and then tore the small building down to make a plaza behind, which is where my work was eventually displayed. But the architect had long since gone on to make seven other high-rise buildings, he was not—couldn't be interested in it at all. And in fact, I only had two conversations with him. One on the telephone, in which he said, "This wall you want to put the sculpture on, I think it's a good idea. How much, how big should it be?" I said, "Well, it should go across the entire lot, and be 15 feet high." And he said, "Well that's awfully expensive. I don't think we can go across––the budget wouldn't allow for that. How about 12 feet high?" I said, "No." He said, "Well then 3 quarters of the lot, and 15 feet high." I said, "OK." That was design conference number one. And then design conference number two was when it came to the selection of the quality of the slate. And there are many different—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —the wall.

LEWIS ISELIN: The wall or beyond. And I wanted––I was going to go for the expensive slate, and he wanted to go for a cheaper slate, but he finally allowed it, us to have the expensive slate. And that was my––I never saw him. I didn't have anything to do with him at all.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you knew the site. You knew where this wall was going to be.

LEWIS ISELIN: This wall, oh yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So it wasn't as though the [inaudible].

LEWIS ISELIN: Oh no, no, no, I was very much involved in the––with the concept of it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now you mentioned the president of that company was in accord with your idea.

LEWIS ISELIN: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Is that on unusual, in your experience?

LEWIS ISELIN: Well usually, usually in my experience in dealing with industry is that it's a committee is what you're involved in. In this case, it was very much a––there was a committee, but the president was the one who was in charge, which is as it should be. A committee is the most terrible thing to have to work with. Because they are––they don't have any head at all. It's, you don't know where you're at, and you're trying to please everybody, and ultimately pleasing no one. So I think that a good Medici is first class.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm.

LEWIS ISELIN: I believe that it––that the—in public sculpture, or public art of this kind, we have lost sight of the fact that there should be three people involved. The sculptor, the architect, and the patron. And they should start out together. But very often now, the architect assumes much of the patron's prerogatives, and the, basically the sculptor thinks that the architect is making a background for his sculpture, and the architect thinks that the sculptor is making ornament for his building. And the conflict there is generic to it. And when you are, I don't know whether I talked about this before or not, but I was involved with a high school in Brooklyn called the General George Wingate Memorial High School, and the architect there wanted four pieces of sculpture in the high school to illustrate the four different approaches: the carver, and the modeler, and the Constructivist, and so on. And we were summoned down to his office for a design conference. The building was already built, and we had to find a place to put the sculpture.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This was—this would be four sculptors involved?

LEWIS ISELIN: Yeah. Four sculptors involved. And uh, what happened was that we spent an hour, two hours trying to find someplace to put it. Which is exactly the wrong thing. You ought to design the place for it. But he didn't, he did not think of this, or perhaps on purpose, because he might have had trouble with the board of education and so on, had he suggested it. I said, "Where'd you get the money from to do this?" And he said, "Oh, it's perfectly simple, we used a cheaper grade of tile in the toilets." [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Comparing your—

LEWIS ISELIN: —right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

LEWIS ISELIN: [Laughs.] Yeah, it didn't cost anything.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Wow. But the, the traditional, at least in the 20th century, earlier architectural sculptor was simply ornamenting an architect's building, wasn't it?

LEWIS ISELIN: Right, very much so. That's exactly what his job was.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And that's made it hard for the sculptor in recent times to have his piece stand out on its own.

LEWIS ISELIN: Right. And the architect did not design the building to have the front—the piece standing on its own in front of it. It's––that's why it always––it very often looks like a, uh, just something that's been left there, and not exactly in the right place. One of the––to me, one of the most interesting phenomena is to do with exactly this. Years ago, at the time of the World's Fair, the Mexicans sent up a huge pre-Columbian head, a mammoth thing, looked like a man in a football mask. One of the most wonderful things I've ever seen. And the only place that was sufficiently strong to hold it, in front of the Seagram building, was not in the middle. And so this was the only place they could put it, and it was exactly the right place, by look. Had they been doing it, they would have put it in the middle, and no, that wouldn't––it wouldn't have––it wouldn't have been. But the fact that it was slightly off-center just made it––just exactly right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: That of course proves the point, that if they had their druthers, it would have been the wrong place.

LEWIS ISELIN: The wrong place, right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well have you taken on other commissions in this last 10 years or so?

LEWIS ISELIN: Yeah well, the General George Wingate thing is the last, is the last uh, big job I've had to do. In fact, I'm getting––finally now getting to the point, I remember asking Mahanra[ph] Young one time what he was doing as an older artist. He said, "I'm doing nothing but repair work now." I had an absolute disaster with––I did a large memorial piece for St. Mark's School in Southborough, Massachusetts, and it's been vandalized twice, and I've had to go to repair it. But I take this as somewhat of a compliment that if the kids get mad enough to tear it apart, well, perhaps that's all right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.] Well what sort of thing are you doing now? You look [inaudible].

LEWIS ISELIN: Well I've been doing a lot of jewelry lately, and small pieces. I got––actually to be frank with you, the expense of big bronzes has gotten to the point where it's practically priced me out of existence. And the––well, my wife Sally went––was––once we were staying with Sandy Calder, and this is before he went over to France. It was in Washington, Connecticut, and he had been doing mobiles, and we looked at them all, and everything was great. My wife, she said, "Sandy, what are you doing now?" And he looked at his vast collection of mobiles just hanging in the—from the ceiling of his studio, and he said, "I've got a lot on hand." And I feel a little bit that way. I've got a lot on hand. [Laughs.] And so I'm sort of more interested in smaller things. I had a—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —meaning you worked them up from wax?

LEWIS ISELIN: Yeah. Well it's more doing jewelry and wax, and that kind of thing.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LEWIS ISELIN: But uh, we had a disaster this summer—this is not really of any real [inaudible] interest, but it is in some ways. I had a big piece which I worked on all last year, which was a––the cast was a failure. It was a nude, uh, the back part––I mean she was lying down. Supposed to be on the ground. And Sally suggested that we take it down and take photographs on the beach. And I got a young sculptor friend of mine to help me with it, and we carried it down there. It weighs 150 pounds, and took it down and put sand around it so it would cover up the bad parts. And uh, take—she took some photos, because she's a very good photographer, and then we wanted to do it, the light there, the morning light we thought would be better on it. And we went down in the morning, and it was gone. So somebody walked away with 150 pounds, and the ledge is very––it's a hard thing to get it up to the road. You couldn't put it in the backseat of an automobile; you had to have a camper. And the number of people that wander around on this beach is very slim.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This wasn't the wax?

LEWIS ISELIN: No, this was a full bronze. This was a big bronze.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LEWIS ISELIN: Yeah. And uh, of course we went to the motel next door and said sort of what about it. And they said, "Well there are nothing but old people there." It was gone. But it reminds me of when I was in art school, Mahanra[ph] Young had a show, and a drawing was stolen out of the show, and I said to him––I was terribly upset. I go, "This is a terrible thing." And he said, "Oh no," he said, "it's a great compliment. It means it's beyond price."

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.]

LEWIS ISELIN: So, there we are.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]