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Oral history interview with Charles E.
Buckley, 1980 June 18-Sept. 19

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Charles Buckley on June 18, July 17, and September 19, 1980. The interview took place in Boston, Massachusetts, and was conducted by Robert Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The Archives of American Art has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. 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

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Say anything at all? Oh, I—

[Audio Break].

ROBERT BROWN: This is an interview with Charles Buckley, in Boston, and the date is June 18, 1980. Robert Brown, the interviewer. Perhaps you could begin, maybe, talking a bit about your childhood. You were born in South Hadley, Massachusetts. Anything that sticks in your mind from childhood that you think was important and significant?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: That has any bearing on my—

ROBERT BROWN: Sure, particularly any bearing on your future career.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No, I can't really say that that period of my life is one that I remember especially, in terms of my future interest in art.

ROBERT BROWN: Was your family in the arts at all, or in education?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No. No, not at all. My father worked for a large insurance company. My mother was interested in art, in painting, and she painted herself. Like a lot of ladies, painted sunsets and things of this kind. Not very competently, but nevertheless, she did that sort of thing.

ROBERT BROWN: Did she encourage you, ever, to go along with her—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. Oh, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: —and sketch?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No, she never went out and sketched. I think she copied things, that kind of thing. We didn't live in South Hadley Center long enough for me to have any really vivid memory and so on. I think that—the early years, I lived in Holyoke, Mass, which was—Massachusetts—which was just a stone's throw away from South Hadley Center. I think it was there that my first interest in, well, some aspect of the arts really began. [00:02:00] We lived on one corner, and my father's sister lived on the other corner, and she was an inveterate auction-goer, so she would drag me along to auction sales out in the country. That was the first time that I became aware of anything you could call the decorative arts. They were called just plain old antiques in those days.

ROBERT BROWN: And there was a good deal of interest—this would be in the '20s? There was a good deal of interest—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: This would be in the '20s.

ROBERT BROWN: —even then, beginning then?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Twenties and '30s, especially the '30s. But by that time, we had moved down to the Midwest. We would come back every summer, and it was then, really, that my Aunt Gertrude would take me around to all these things. Her children were never interested in anything of this kind.

ROBERT BROWN: But you were?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I was. I was the only one in the family, I guess, who was.

ROBERT BROWN: What especially intrigued you about the auction?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I think, really, the—I didn't know what I was looking at when I looked at a table or a chair or a painting or anything like that. I had no discrimination, but I'm sure I had some sense that this was of more than passing interest, what I was seeing. I'm sure that that really stuck in my memory, became very much embedded. There's one interesting and rather amusing early incident that took place, a memory that I have. My parents used to go up to Maine in the summertime, and we would go to a little town called West Lebanon, Maine, and they had some friends with whom they stayed there for a short time. In those days, West Lebanon was a very tiny place, a hamlet, really, with a church and a tiny library. The roads were still gravel roads and whatnot. In the town lived an old lady called Chrissie Matthews, who was a friend of ours. [00:04:04] I was a mere child. Hanging in Chrissie Matthews's living room was a watercolor, which I used to go and look at every time I'd go to the house. It represented a man and a lady, sitting left and right, with a table in between, and with a banjo clock on the wall behind. Well, of course, this was a Joseph Davis watercolor. That was the exact area where Joseph Davis painted. This must have been about 1928, I suppose. So I must be one of the first people to have looked at it [laughs] in modern times, at a Joseph Davis watercolor. I was drawn to that picture. Every time I'd go to the house, I'd go and look at it. Years later, many years later, I tried to track it down and see what had happened to her watercolor, and she had died, and it vanished. That's an early moment in my life, when I saw a work of art, as it surely would be.

ROBERT BROWN: You were really somewhat excited?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, I was. I really was. It really fascinated me. It was many years later—in fact, it was when the Museum of Modern Art had its *Art of This Century* show, which I think was 1940, and in that show, there's everything you could think of. In the catalog was reproduced a Joseph Davis watercolor, and I remember looking at that catalog and making the connection between that and the picture that I had seen in my early childhood. It was kind of interesting, because nobody knew anything about that artist at that time.

ROBERT BROWN: Did your parents encourage you? Did they share some of this interest as yours developed?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, they did. My father especially got interested in works of art and antiques as time went on. [00:06:02] But not seriously, not in any scholarly way, but just from an enjoyment point of view.

ROBERT BROWN: Did your brothers and sisters—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I have no brothers and sisters. No. When we moved to the Midwest, my father's company transferred him to this new location, and in that town, I decided I would—I wanted to learn something about painting. I was still in grade school at that point, my last year in grade school, I guess. There was a—we found—my mother must have found, for me, an artist who lived with his sister, and he taught watercolor painting. What he taught was the Victorian style of watercolor painting—he must have been in his 70s at that point—but in a very detailed way, in the old English style, or Anglo-American style of watercolor painting.

ROBERT BROWN: Was there some outline beforehand?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. Oh, yes. His method was to—there were only two or three pupils who would go there on Saturday morning, and he would have a whole raft of reproductions that you could copy from. [Laughs.] He never encouraged creativity at all.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you go out and paint with him?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No. No, no.

ROBERT BROWN: It was in his home?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: It was always in the apartment that he had, in the studio. We would work away at these things with washes and so on. I got very good at this, and some of them still survive, and they're really not bad. They look as if they'd been painted about 1820 [laughs] and one day, I suppose, they'll pass as watercolors from the '20s, maybe.

ROBERT BROWN: But did you enjoy doing this?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: To a point, yeah. It was kind of boring. [00:08:00] He was an interesting man, because he was a survivor from a much earlier period, and I didn't realize that, I suppose, at the time, that his training must have been in the 1880s, you know, and probably in Chicago, where he very likely went to school, and was not a successful painter in his own right, and he just fell back on this small town and taught painting, as I'm sure was the case for many, many artists who didn't make the grade, and who did this sort of thing for a living.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this small town near Chicago?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: It was south of Chicago. It was called Ottawa, Illinois. Interestingly enough, that is the town where—I believe I'm right in saying this, that Doris Lee, who painted those sort of regional pictures, you remember, of the farmers having dinner—there's one in the Art Institute by her. I remember my mother telling me once that she used to buy her gloves from Doris Lee's father in the local department store. I never met her. She never came back to town. We lived in a number of towns in Illinois, and I think my real interest in painting began when we lived in Bloomington. That's the place where Adlai Stevenson's forebears came from. There was a college there. It was called Wesleyan. There was an art department, and I went to painting classes in the evening there. That was the first time that I had painted from a model, or painted from a still life or something like that. At that time—I guess I was a sophomore or a junior in high school—that's when I became seriously interested in painting, and began to know the names of painters. [00:10:00] You know, Monet and Renoir and whatnot.

ROBERT BROWN: The teacher at Wesleyan was—allowed you some freedom?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Oh, yes. Yes, he was a very good teacher. Very good. We saw good reproductions of things and so on. In the mid-'30s, you weren't dragged to museums the way kids are today. You simply didn't have the chance to go, and there weren't that many exhibitions going on in museums at that time.

ROBERT BROWN: Had you been to the Art Institute of Chicago yet by that time?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I'm coming to that in just a second, because it's very interesting, I think. One of my friends in Bloomington was a girl named Eleanor Coen, and Eleanor and I were sort of the leaders. We represented—what shall I say?—the advanced thinking in painting. She was ahead of me, you know. She knew Picasso, and Paul Klee, and whatnot. [Laughs.] We were always trading this information back and forth, and we listened to music, and we went out in the country and we painted. We did all kinds of things like this. This was very exciting for a young kid, to be involved with—I think Eleanor was maybe two years older than I. She knew all—she had actually met some real live painters from Chicago, and that made a big difference, because she could tell me things I didn't know anything about. She went on to marry a painter named Max Kahn in Chicago, and is still married to him, I guess, and has had a minor career of her own in the Chicago area. She was a conduit, you see, into the larger field of interest, and was really very good and very helpful. Anyway, the World's Fair came along just about this time in Chicago, and you remember, the Art Institute, or at least the—yes, the Art Institute arranged a big exhibition of masterpieces of modern art, I guess. [00:12:06] So my mother took me up to Chicago to see the show, and that was really something, because I had never seen—I had never seen paintings until that time, paintings of any consequence or importance, and as far as I know, I had never set foot in a museum. So here was the Art Institute. The picture that I remember most vividly, for obvious reasons, I suppose, because it's so powerful and so brightly colored, is the wonderful van Gogh pool room interior, you know, at Arles. The one that's now at Yale, I think. Brilliant red walls. There was that painting, and that really knocked me for a loop to see that. We spent the day in Chicago, and came back home again on the train. So I had got my foot into the door of a museum, at least.

ROBERT BROWN: Did this inspire you in your own painting?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Well, yes, but—I'm sure it did. It must have had an effect. I was, by that time, becoming fairly serious about the whole thing. Then my last year in high school, we lived in Elgin, which was just to the west of Chicago, and I commuted to Saturday classes at the Art Institute. Then I got a scholarship to go full-time when I got out of high school.

ROBERT BROWN: Were the Saturday classes taught by full-time teachers at the institute?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No, part-time, part-time teachers. They were full staff members, but they—

ROBERT BROWN: Who were—do you recall any of the names of any of them?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, there was one man named Kenneth Chopin, who taught on Saturday, and he was very good. He ended up teaching, I think, at Dartmouth, or at least living in the Dartmouth area, and is now dead. [00:14:00] He was a very good teacher, and he also taught in the first year in the department of drawing, painting, and illustration. I think I drifted into all of this. My parents didn't quite know what my interests were, or whether I ought to go on to university, or college rather, or what to do with me. I insisted on going to art school, because I thought this was the most fascinating thing in the world. I managed to get a full-time scholarship for the first year, and so joined the department of drawing, painting, and illustration, and studied with some very good people. It was an excellent school in those days. My time was from 1936 to 1940. Kathleen Blackshear was one of my teachers. She came from Texas and spoke in a nice, soft, dreamy Texas way. She was very interested in modern art. Anything before 1930 was antiquity to Kathleen Blackshear. She taught the history of art, along with Helen Gardner, who did the famous *Art Through the Ages*. They would alternate. I know that Kathleen Blackshear hated to talk about anything except art forms that had some relation to modern art. If you were going back into the past, then you had to look for an antecedent to, let's say, Picasso. I remember when we got

into the Baroque period, we got through it in about 30 minutes, because [they laugh] she didn't like any of this at all. This was an area that didn't interest her.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you fairly much feel that way yourself at the time?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I didn't know what I was supposed to feel. I had no idea. [00:16:00] You can imagine the Art Institute in the mid-1930s, the late '30s, you weren't likely to see many great Baroque masterpieces hanging there. As you know, the strong interest in Baroque painting came much, much later in this country, in the 19—late '40s and '50s. The '30s, too, I think, but only among very specialized people, probably, in New York, but it hadn't penetrated to the frontier in those days.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you feel you had, as you look back, an interest in the history of art?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No. I didn't really—those classes that I took with Gardner and Blackshear were almost a nuisance for those of us who were intending to be painters. It was something that interrupted our day, that we had to go through. I don't think we ever looked intelligently at the collections. It was a hit-or-miss proposition. We would find a painting we liked, but we'd never put it in context, in historical context, which was really too bad. There wasn't anybody on the staff of the Art Institute school who would help in that respect. You were sort of left adrift.

ROBERT BROWN: You had your lecture, and then you were on your own.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: And you went back to your classes again.

ROBERT BROWN: Was Helen Gardner a good teacher?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Probably. Yeah, she was a little more—she took in a great deal more, and with a great deal more interest, than did Kathleen Blackshear. Blackshear taught in the school itself. She taught design, I think it was, or drawing, or something. I don't remember exactly. That was really what interested her. The teaching of art history was something else, again. But there were people on the staff of the Art Institute itself who made a great impression on me. [00:18:01] The person who made the strongest impression of all was Hugh Edwards, who worked with Carl Schniewind in the print department. Hugh was assistant curator, I think, of prints and drawings. That was in the days when the print and drawing rooms of the Art Institute were on the north side, sort of underneath that arcade that you see as you walk south on Michigan Avenue and see that north facade of the Art Institute. Hugh was a remarkable person. First of all, he knew the collections from A to Z, and was always showing me, and some of my colleagues in the school, very interesting things. He'd say, "Look, you must look at this. You must look at that." He would bring out a print or a drawing. That was really very illuminating for us. Also, he was interested in all kinds of things that nobody else seemed to be terribly interested in. He made friends with all sorts of people, out in the outside world. I remember once he told me that he had sat through I don't know how many dozen concerts by, or recitals by, Helen Morgan, who was the blues singer in the '30s, and that she had finally realized that he was in the audience practically every night, and they became very good friends. He would do that kind of thing, reach out and talk to people. He introduced me to books, to novels, and to all sorts of things I had not known about. He really was a formative influence.

ROBERT BROWN: He was one of your teachers, then?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Not really. No, no. He was simply the assistant curator of prints and drawings, under Carl Schniewind. Schniewind was always much too grand and too busy. At least it seemed that way to students, you know. [00:20:00]

ROBERT BROWN: What did Edward particularly stress? What did he like, particularly, to show you among the prints and drawings?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: It was modern things, primarily. Things that the museum was intent on buying at that time and so forth. I can't remember any certain object that he showed us, but it was always—the important thing, I think, is that it was always done with a great deal of excitement, that this is something you should know about. Believe me, that was enormously helpful, because there was nobody else around the Art Institute doing that kind of thing at that time.

ROBERT BROWN: Would you question him, or he would explain it to you, why it was important, or why—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. He was very interested in what I was doing, in my work, and I would always take him and show him things. So he was a good critic for me. The principal teacher that I had at the Art Institute was Boris Anisfeld, Boris Israelevich Anisfeld. He had designed for the Imperial Ballet in St. Petersburg, and he had also worked in Stockholm, I think, after he left Russia, and he had worked in New York with the opera, and he had then gone on to Chicago, always stepping down, rather than stepping up. He was a very good ballet

designer, and many of his things exist at the Goodman Theater now, or at least they did, in years gone by. Not long ago, I noticed that the National Collection of Fine Arts devoted a small show to Anisfeld's work, so he was sort of revived again. Even within the last year, I think Abe Adler, who used to be Hirschl & Adler, has given a small show to Anisfeld's work. [00:22:04] He was a very dramatic personality. Strikingly handsome man, and authoritative, and I think all of us who worked with him were really quite frightened by him, because he was fierce. He would come stamping into class, and he would grab a brush out of your hand and simply work over your picture and whatnot, which, of course, no teacher today would even think of doing. At that time, you were going to paint the way Anisfeld thought you should be painting. Of course, a lot of us hated this, but we couldn't do anything about it. If you were in his class, you were in the top class in the Art Institute. There was another man, called Louis Ritman, and Ritman was the second level. If you were Ritman's student, you weren't considered to be quite as—

ROBERT BROWN: Was this an informal ranking by the students?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: By the students. Oh, sure.

ROBERT BROWN: And no—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No, no, it had nothing to do with hierarchy at all in the structure of the school.

ROBERT BROWN: But it was felt by the students that Anisfeld was a more advanced person than Ritman?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, he was.

ROBERT BROWN: How did he want you to paint? Was this oil painting, watercolors?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No, oil. Oil. Well, we had life drawing in charcoal. We drew five mornings a week from the model, and then every afternoon we painted the model. He wanted you to get the right color, the right tone, the right proportion, the stance of the figure, and so on. We, of course, all wanted to express ourselves in various ways. With the growing interest in modern art, as it—you know, Picasso and Matisse. Everybody wanted to be influenced, to some extent, by those painters and the others around them, and perhaps paint a cubist nude or something, but that wouldn't go in Anisfeld's class at all. [00:24:09]

ROBERT BROWN: He wanted rather just literal transcriptions of what you saw?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yeah. He said, "You can do what you want after you get out of my class, but meanwhile, you're going to learn how to relate one tone to another," and so on. He was a fascinating man.

ROBERT BROWN: Were those good lessons, do you think, as you look back?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Uh, yeah, I think so. I think they were. Yes. I learned a lot from him. Absolutely. But we never got to the point where we called him by his first name. That was absolutely verboten. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Which you did with others? Is that correct?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No, not in those days. Everybody was Mr. and Ms. and Mrs., and you, as a student, had your first name. That's the way that was. [Laughs.] I can't think of anybody in my class who came out as a really important painter, someone who has since gone on to be major. After my time, and certainly before, there were very good people who emerged from the Art Institute classes. I think Diebenkorn, for example—I believe he studied at the Art Institute, so on.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you ascribe that to anything, or just—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No, I think it was just—

ROBERT BROWN: Particular group of—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Just the particular group. There were very good people in my class, as I remember. Well, the one person who is sort of a standout these days, I think, is Emerson Woelffer. Woelffer went to live in California, around Los Angeles, in the '50s and '60s, I think. Was fairly important personality in the California scene. But when he was at the Art Institute, I don't remember that he had any particular standing. We all knew him and so on, but I don't think anybody looked upon him as an artist of major consequence at all. [00:26:05] There was Florence Saltzman, who went out to live in—where did she live? Somewhere in Oregon. Where do you live in Oregon?

ROBERT BROWN: Portland?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: In Portland, yeah. Her husband taught at the art school. I think she had some standing in the Portland art scene. Was a very good artist. Excellent. David Lemon, who was also very good, and who has gone to California, and I don't know what happened to him at all. Nobody else that I remember of major stature.

ROBERT BROWN: Was the curriculum at the institute fairly fixed? You came in after having had Saturday classes.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Well, yes, it was. In addition to life drawing and life painting, I took design courses. But mostly we wanted to get into this kind of studio setup, which was a real hangover from a much earlier period.

ROBERT BROWN: Where you'd be working under a master?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Under a master, and you'd work from the model. Then you could paint on your own, on weekends and so on. I went through all of that for four years, and I went to the downtown campus of the University of Chicago every afternoon and took academic courses, so that I graduated with a bachelor of fine arts degree from the Art Institute. Also, the James Nelson Raymond Foreign Travel Fellowship, which was the—

ROBERT BROWN: Otherwise, you would not have had a bachelor's degree? By going to the downtown campus of the university—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yeah. That's the bachelor of fine arts. You got that if you went to the downtown campus of University of Chicago. [00:28:02] It was a joint program.

ROBERT BROWN: Where you had a humanities course?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, exactly.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you remember, before we move just beyond your time there—that was in 1940, you were —

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I got out.

ROBERT BROWN: Various exhibitions and the like during your time, which was 1936 to '40 in Chicago. I think you mentioned Arts Club.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. Let me just tell you, first of all, about the major show at the Art Institute that I remember, and that was the Picasso show, which I think was 1937 or '38. It was the one from the Museum of Modern Art, and it went to Chicago. That really was a formidable experience, because it filled all the upper galleries of the Art Institute, where, subsequently, the American paintings collection was installed, and those galleries over the Illinois Central tracks that connect the old building with what goes on on the other side, the lake side. That was a tremendous show. I remember going through it for the first time. I went through it dozens of times on my own, but I remember, vividly, going through the first time with Ivan Albright, who was then a great personality in Chicago. Did not teach at the Art Institute, so far as I know.

ROBERT BROWN: Someone you had known earlier?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No, I don't know how I came to know him, but I did, in a casual kind of way. He took me through. The only thing he was interested in, going through that show, were the picture frames. Beautiful 18th-century frames that were on some of the Picassos. Albright would get very excited. "Look at this frame," he would say. "Oh, it's so beautiful. Look how intricate it is, and the carving, and the gilding." Inside the frame was a marvelous '20s Picasso [laughs] and we weren't even looking at the picture. [00:30:01]

ROBERT BROWN: He was indifferent to that?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: More or less, I think, yeah. I don't think it made any impression on him, but he was very, very impressed by what Picasso had put on the pictures, or at least the owners, the dealers, had put on the pictures. I thought that was really very entertaining. I remember that, for some reason, very well.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he a very giving person to an art student?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: That's really my only memory of Albright, was that particular day. I saw him after that, but I don't remember any words of wisdom, especially, at all. His pictures were not talked about in the Art Institute. I never heard anybody mention Ivan Albright as an artist at all. I think his father taught there at one point, many years before.

ROBERT BROWN: Was the Picasso exhibition talked about by your teachers at the institute?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Oh, yes. Oh, sure. That was the great event of the year. We went up often to look at it while it was there.

ROBERT BROWN: Even Anisfeld, say, would—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. Oh, yes, he was interested, very much so. He had very broad vision, and he would accept many kinds of painting. He just didn't want you doing anything like that in his classes, that was all.

ROBERT BROWN: What in Picasso's oeuvre, to that point of '37 or '36, whatever the latest work, particularly struck you, do you think, as you think back?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I think I looked—the thing—the kind of painting that I admired most was the recent work of Picasso. In other words, the work of the '30s. The works that are more expressionist in character, that had a certain vitality and strength, and were non-cubist, or non-surrealist. I think there was a reason for that, because at that time, I was beginning to be very interested in German expressionist painting, and particularly in Oskar Kokoschka. [00:32:06] I don't know how this came about, but I must have seen a painting by Kokoschka somewhere. While obviously he's Austrian-born, I think of him in terms of this whole expressionist movement in a broad sense. It may be because the Layton Art Center in Milwaukee, that may not—or the Layton Art Gallery—I can't remember the name—actually arranged, sometime in the late '30s, a large exhibition of German expressionist art. I remember I begged my parents to drive me to Milwaukee to see this show, which we did. I remember that as a great experience, because there were people like Nolde, and Kokoschka, and Pechstein, and so on, and so on. I thought that was really remarkable, that it would be there at that small gallery in Milwaukee, and not shown at the Art Institute, where such—

ROBERT BROWN: Some particular patron or curator in Milwaukee—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I don't know how it came about. I have no idea, and I don't—if there was a catalog, I certainly didn't see it, because we were so busy just looking at pictures.

ROBERT BROWN: What was it in such pictures that struck you at that point, do you think?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I think the whole expressionist fervor, the intensity of what was being said within the rectangle, as opposed to the wonderful classicism, let's say, of Picasso as a cubist painter, which was cerebral and intellectual, and that was not my interest at the time. I think my interest really did move quickly into German Expressionism, and then, I think, even, not illogically, into being interested in Baroque things, which came on a little later. [00:34:00]

ROBERT BROWN: When you could, in your own work, you were working—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Well, I thought I was a true expressionist painter, I suppose. [Laughs.] I have a few of the old things, and I'm rather stunned when I look at them, because I think how dreadful they really are, but that's what I suppose any student was doing at that time, fairly dreadful stuff. The Arts Club was very active. It was in the Wrigley Building, just north of the Chicago River there. They did a whole series of shows, which I cannot bring to mind now. Small exhibitions—drawings, small paintings, small sculpture, and so on—but always so beautifully installed, so tastefully installed. The Arts Club was a very private kind of place in those days, in the '30s. It really was very much of a club, and you sort of had to seek admission to it. If you went and said you wanted to come in, they would let you, but it wasn't something that advertised itself in a very outgoing way and attempted to get large numbers of people to come to see the exhibitions. It was very private. Selective.

ROBERT BROWN: Was it supported by patrons as well as artists?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, I think it must have been in those days. Chicago patrons must have got behind it and provided the money for it. There were a series of rooms. Some were in the Arts Club. It was really a very beautiful experience to go there and to see what was on the walls.

ROBERT BROWN: These were contemporary things, for the most part?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Twentieth-century. Almost entirely 20th-century, because I think that was the emphasis, was modern art. Between the Picasso show and what went on at the Arts Club—and there weren't many dealers in those days. [00:36:00] I'm trying to think of the dealer who used to be on North Michigan Avenue, in one of those buildings, who—and it won't come to mind at the moment, but who showed fairly advanced stuff at that time. We would go up there to see what was really new.

ROBERT BROWN: It wasn't that the community was especially conservative. Perhaps did they buy elsewhere? If they were interested in—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I think that, in Chicago, in those days, Post-Impressionism was the big thing, because that's

what those early collectors had gathered together. Picasso, Renoir, so on. Not—yes. Cézanne, and early Picasso, and Renoir. There was no interest in, really, up-to-the-minute modern art, as far as I could see, except in one person, a man who had an influence on me similar to that of Hugh Edwards, and that was John Thwaites, John Anthony Thwaites, who was, at that time, vice counsel for the British Consular Service in Chicago. I didn't—I knew about John Thwaites, and I knew about him through Hugh Edwards, but I didn't really meet him in those years. I would see him. He was one of these exotic figures that, one day, you were going to meet. But I knew that he was interested in anything that was very contemporary, up-to-the-minute. When I got out of school and this fellowship thing came along, I couldn't go to Europe, so I chose to go to Mexico, which was not very daring, but I didn't know where else one could go. [00:38:04] I went to Mexico City, and set myself up in an apartment in September of 1940. John Thwaites had become vice consul in the Mexico City office, at almost the same time. He had been there maybe six months before I arrived. So I trotted down to the British consul's office and presented myself to Thwaites, and we just hit it off, and we got on marvelously. We saw each other almost every day when I was in Mexico. We lunched together, dined together. He had just divorced and was alone. His colleague, the other vice consul in the office, was a man called Cecil [ph] Taylor, and Cecil Taylor's wife was the secretary to Josephus—had been secretary to Josephus Daniels, who had been American ambassador in Mexico. I guess he was—was he still there? I can't remember in those years. But in any case, she was still the secretary to the ambassador—that's the point I'm getting at—in the embassy. The four of us became very good friends, and on weekends we'd hire a taxi and we'd go off, on Saturday in one direction, on Sunday another, just looking at things. Baroque churches, and to small towns. We'd go to festivals, and we'd go to markets, and see folk art and whatnot. John came to know everybody in the art world in Mexico. He was a very great friend of Carlos Mérida, who was a Guatemalan painter, but who lived in Mexico. John was terribly interested in what I was doing as a painter.

ROBERT BROWN: What were you doing? When you weren't running around, you were painting?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I was free of art school now. [00:40:01] Now I was going to develop on my own. I got terribly interested in the whole subject of Baroque sculpture, as it was conceived by the Mexican/Spanish/Indian tradition, and the architecture, the 18th-century and 17th-century. I made drawings from those sculptures, and I—this all became a part of my painting experience at that time.

ROBERT BROWN: What do you suppose there was in those things that—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Well, again, related to the excitement of Expressionism, in a way. Entirely different, but not totally opposed.

ROBERT BROWN: It was the Baroqueness, rather than the—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: It was the Baroqueness.

ROBERT BROWN: Rather than, say, the Indian-ness in them that appealed to you?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, it was that. It was very much that. Not so much the Indian quality as the European element. It's funny, I think, what interests you when you go to a foreign country for the first time. Mexico, in 1940, was still a fairly foreign place. You know, tourists were going, of course, in droves, and had for decades, but it wasn't overwhelmed the way it was in the '50s and '60s and is now. It was a relatively small city, and it was very clear. I came across, the other day, in the attic, some watercolors that I had done from the roof of the house where I lived—a flat roof, terrace up there—of the volcanoes, of Iztacihuatl. You can't see Iztacihuatl from Mexico City anymore. It's gone, in smog, you know.

ROBERT BROWN: Horribly polluted place now.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: The watercolor, if it has any truth in it, was conceived in a very Baroque way, but there is all the green trees, and the intense blue sky, and the white volcano rising up. [00:42:00] I thought, my heavens, from right in practically downtown Mexico City, in 1940, this is what one saw. John and I saw Carlos Mérida, and he knew Wolfgang Paalen, who was the Austrian painter and writer, who lived in Mexico City. Paalen's wife, Alice Paalen, was quite a good painter, and Paalen himself was a fascinating artist, and a surrealist painter. Living in the household was a Swiss photographer named Sulzer, Eva Sulzer, S-U-L-Z-E-R. It was a funny household. It was very, very, to me, different kind of experience than any that I had ever had in my life here. It was this superb photographer, and the other two artists. Paalen was a very intellectual person, and he published a magazine called—I'll have to spell it for you—D-Y-N, *Dyn*. I don't know how many copies of that survive. It went on for two or three years, I think. He would get people in Europe, and this country, and Mexico, to write for it, poetry or whatever they wanted to do. And criticism. We would go up there and spend time with the Paalens.

ROBERT BROWN: What would you discuss with them? What was your—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I don't know. I think I kept my mouth pretty well shut, because this was fairly fast-flowing

water for me. I would just listen to this brisk conversation between John Thwaites and Paalen. [00:44:02] Because after all, John had been a collector of pictures. He had bought Paul Klee. He fascinated me, because he owned one of the most beautiful pictures by Arthur Dove. Now, you know, this is interesting. Here, he bought that sometime in the '30s, and here is an Englishman, not supposed to know anything about American art, who buys an absolutely superb Dove picture.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you ever come to understand how he acquired his taste for modern things?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No, I never probed. I never really asked, because I just knew him as someone who was always vitally interested in what was going on around him, discovering things.

ROBERT BROWN: And as you imply, he had a very good eye.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Oh, marvelous. Absolutely marvelous.

ROBERT BROWN: Would he discuss things with you? Say, "I like this because of this," or "This is something important"?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. Oh, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Much as Hugh Edwards had.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Oh, yes, very much so. He was always teaching, and he was always interested in the formal content of a picture, what the elements of the painting were doing and working together. The subject, as such, didn't mean a thing to him, I don't think, but he was interested in how a painting would work, how it would be constructed. This is something that we'll talk about a little later on, because he is someone who continues in my life to the present moment. We went, once, to watch Orozco working on his fresco cycle in Mexico City. I can't remember the building that it's in. It's right in downtown Mexico City. But somehow, we gained access to this building, and Orozco was up on the scaffolding, working. [00:46:03] The fresco series was very far along at that point. I think Kathleen Taylor was with us, and she was bilingual. She had lived in Mexico since she was an infant, and so I think she finally called up to him and asked him if he'd come down, and he did. I think he spoke a little English, as I remember, but not a great deal.

ROBERT BROWN: Of course, he'd already been at Dartmouth.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: He'd already been at the Baker Library at Hanover, yeah. That was a tremendous experience, to see this man climbing down from the scaffolding and talk to us for a few minutes.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you impressed by his work?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Oh, yes, very much so. Again, there was this tremendous drive, this sort of great Baroque style, you might say. So I was, indeed, impressed by what he did. There were two painters, Carlos Mérida—no, three—Wolfgang Paalen, and Orozco. I never met, but I used to see regularly, Frida Kahlo, who was Rivera's wife. She used to come to the apartment building, the house where I lived, to call on people. She would always come in her remarkable Tehuantepec costume which she wore in Mexico City. Was a very dramatic-looking person. But I never met her. I was always so intimidated by somebody like that. [Laughs.] I never did anything about it.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you get to know Carlos Mérida a bit?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, a little bit. Not a great deal. One memory of Carlos Mérida is that he and John Thwaites came to see me, to pay a call, just to see what I was doing as a painter. John, I'm sure, said, "Come and let's go see this young student's work," and so they came along. Mérida brought with him a marvelous jade, Pre-Columbian sculpture that he had just bought, a small piece, but absolutely wonderful. [00:48:07] I don't think I'd ever looked at anything Indian before, and then suddenly he was showing this and talking about it. So that kind of opened my eye to that side of Mexican life. You know, in 1940, I won't say you couldn't see things in Mexico City, early Indian material, because you could, but you couldn't see it as you do now. There was none of this wonderful order that you get in the great archeological museum in Mexico City. You really didn't know what you were looking at, the tribe—or not the tribe, but the culture—that a piece was coming from. You could find things, certainly, scattered around in the antique shops, but whether they were good or not, I certainly wouldn't have known at that time.

ROBERT BROWN: What was Mérida like?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Again, no vivid memory of him, because it was relatively brief. He stood out as a real personality. He was very interested in what I was doing, and as I say, he talked about this sculpture.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you go, ever, to see him working?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No. No. I was perplexed by his pictures. I didn't quite understand what he was doing. I understood the roots that went back to Indian life and all that, but as I say, all of that was a good deal less important to me than the 17th, 18th, and early 19th-century side of the total Mexican culture was. So I wasn't as responsive to what he was doing.

ROBERT BROWN: What in the Baroque, for lack of a more detailed word—what in that art in Mexico stood out, do you think, to you at that time? You've mentioned making drawings and paintings inspired by, what, the lyricism of the work, the dramatic force? [00:50:04]

CHARLES BUCKLEY: The dramatic force, yes, and the—

ROBERT BROWN: The architectural sculpture?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: The color, the wonderful color that would appear, that the artisans, craftsmen, sculptors, builders used in the churches. The pinks and the blues and the golds in particular. I think that was the thing. Also, the rather horrifying quality of some of the sculpture, the brutality of it. That sort of was a whole side of Mexican life that existed time immemorial, and I'm sure, in country districts, still exists. The force and the terror and the blood, and all this sort of thing that you will find in the sculpture of that period. I suppose I was looking at it almost in a picturesque kind of way, and if I had had any sense, I could have gone to any number of people in Mexico City and learned an awful lot about it, in detail. Who the sculptors were, and who the architects were, in a more scholarly way, but I didn't approach it in that way.

ROBERT BROWN: What about in a religious way? Were you at all swayed in that—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Oh, no. No, that meant nothing to me at all. Except that the religious fervor and the incense, watching a church service in progress—which was not as easy to do, because as you know, the Catholic Church, in those days, was not all together the most popular thing in Mexico. It had been rather suppressed. You didn't see the clergy at all. Let's see. There was one other experience that was memorable for me in that time in Mexico City, again through John Thwaites, and that was meeting Josef and Anni Albers. [00:52:12] They were in Mexico for a time. They had an apartment—lived in a small apartment house not too far from me, and I remember John and I went there one day and sat up on the roof and talked with the Albers. That started a friendship that lasted, really, for many, many years with them. Then I traveled all over Mexico, or at least a good part of the country.

ROBERT BROWN: Were the Albers very outgoing?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. Oh, they were marvelous. They were very nice. Very, very nice. They were there just, really, as tourists, I think, spending a matter of weeks, I presume.

ROBERT BROWN: You were there for almost—well, until June of 1941.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: You say you traveled quite a lot on your own.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: On my own, yes. I would go off for maybe a week at a time, to different parts of the country.

ROBERT BROWN: Be sketching or painting?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. Yeah, exactly. Just experiencing the country. Oh, it was such a marvelous place to be. I just fell head-over-heels in love with Mexico, and it was a country that meant nothing to me until the time I went. It was almost by accident that I went there, but I came to be very, very fond of Mexico, and everything finally. Then I began looking at Indian stuff, and became more and more aware of that side of the culture of the country.

ROBERT BROWN: This was really your first experience of being extracted from your own culture.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: A very powerful—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: It was.

ROBERT BROWN: —in that respect.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: It really was, to suddenly be uprooted and thrown into a country like that. [00:54:02] I was 21, I think, and given a certain amount of money to live on, and having to fend for yourself and try to strike out as an artist. That's done very commonly these days, but I don't think it was quite as much at that time. At least it didn't seem so to me. None of my friends did anything like that. They were—

ROBERT BROWN: Most of them—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: —pretty conventional and whatnot.

ROBERT BROWN: —stayed back home, or most went to New York?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yeah. Of course, now, by the time you're 21, you've been to God knows where. You've spent a year in Nepal, and Tierra del Fuego, and whatnot. [Laughs.] And Europe, you know like the back of your hand. But not then, quite as much.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you aware of the poverty or any sordid aspects of society there? Again, was it—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Oh, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: —picturesque to you?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No, no, no, no. You had to be, because there it was. It could be fairly grim at times.

ROBERT BROWN: You had mentioned suppression, at least of the clergy and religion. Some of those things, you couldn't help but be aware of, or they were called to your attention?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: It didn't interest me as a sociological phenomenon too much.

ROBERT BROWN: How about your own—as you look back on the work you did there, were you coalescing into some sort of style, or were there so many new experiences that this was simply a year of learning?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I think my whole life was changing during that year. I think I was—whether I knew it or not, I was moving away from the desire to be a painter, and moving toward the desire to be something else, which hadn't quite gelled, you see. Because if you think about it, this interest in architecture, and in sculpture, and then, as my time in Mexico went on, this growing awareness of Indian cultures, and my interest in the decorative arts, was still sort of percolating along at that time. [00:56:01] I used to go into all the antique shops in Mexico City. In fact, I'm afraid I spent far too much time going through the antique shops than I ought to have done, but they so fascinated me, the things that I would see. The antique shops in Mexico City were really extraordinary in those days, because all kinds of things—Spanish things, French things, in profusion—would be there in the antique shops, sort of hand-me-downs from the time of Maximilian, practically. All that was very interesting to observe.

ROBERT BROWN: But as you look back on that time, too much time, say, it was an education of great importance, wasn't it?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: It was indeed, very much so. Then, you see, having known Thwaites, who was very scholarly in his approach to anything, this was a conditioning for what came later on in my life, the turning toward the history of art. So he was a major influence. I left Mexico before he did. He was then transferred to Panama. He married again in Panama, and then he went back to London as the war progressed. We'll pick him up a little later on, because he, as I say, was a very major person.

ROBERT BROWN: He made your thinking systematic. Like when you would talk about what you had seen in an antique shop, he would relate that to other things you'd seen, and things you might also be looking for?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yeah. He wasn't at all interested in the decorative arts. That meant nothing to him. He was intrigued by what I was doing.

ROBERT BROWN: Because then, when you came back from Mexico, had you plans of what you would be doing next? [00:58:03] Had you—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: —developed something while you were in Mexico?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I wanted—I felt that I really did need some better academic support. Something—

ROBERT BROWN: What, at that point? For being a painter, you thought, or just—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Well, no, I didn't really know. I didn't know. I came back, and I think I spent the summer with my parents, and I said, "I'm going to Boston. I've got enough money left, and I'm going to go there." They said fine, in their usual way of not caring especially whether I—what I did along these lines, as long as it produced something sensible, from their point of view.

ROBERT BROWN: But they weren't ever that demanding?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No. I think they were mystified. They didn't quite know what you did with somebody who'd gone through art school, and who thought about being a painter. That just, I'm sure, baffled both of them. But anyway, they didn't say, "No, no, you can't do that" or "Don't go to Boston. You're going to do this" and so on. Anyway, I came here, and I lived down on Charles Street, on the water side of Charles Street. I had an apartment there. So I brought all my painting stuff, and I set myself up as a painter again. While I was in Mexico, I had gone to the graphic arts workshop, because I had been very much interested in printmaking, particularly lithography, which I had learned to do at the Art Institute under Francis Chapin, who was a very good teacher of lithography. I had made prints in Mexico City, and so when I came here, I decided I would do the same thing, so I went to the Museum School. Tory Banks [ph] was then, I think, teaching printmaking. [01:00:00] I remember I must have been an awful snob, because I didn't like what Tory Banks did, and I wasn't going to have anything to do with him at all. When I think what he could have taught me about the methods of lithography, added to what I already knew, I regret that I didn't pay attention. In any case, I persuaded him to let me take the lithographic stones to my apartment. So I dragged these enormous stones in a taxi down, and then dragged them up to the third floor, where I lived, and I would work on them, and then I'd take them back again, to the Museum of Fine Arts School, and print them.

ROBERT BROWN: You were working as a special student, or—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: As a special student at the Museum School at that time.

ROBERT BROWN: Would you have crits, or critiques, from Banks?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: He would look at what I was doing. I think he was very interested, because I did, really, some very good prints, if I say so. Some of them survive, that are really quite, as I look back on them, quite marvelous. I think he didn't quite know what to make of me, and since I was pushing him on one side, literally, and saying, "No, no, I know what I'm doing. I've been trained as a printmaker" and so forth, he just backed off, very sensibly [laughs] and said, "Okay, go ahead. Hang yourself if you want." I enroll—I went to Harvard as a special student for the whole year, and not in—I had one fine arts course at that time, and the rest of the courses I had in the college itself, in English and history and so on. Do you have to stop?

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT BROWN: To go back just a little bit, what kinds of things were you doing, lithographs?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: They were related to Boston. I remember I did a lithograph that I liked then, and still like, of the facades of houses on Commonwealth Avenue, under a particular lighting condition. [01:02:02] I remember I got very interested in the railroad yards out beyond the North Station, and I would walk out on the tracks out there. I don't know why railroad activity interested me, but it always did, so I did a number of things that had to do with that kind of almost Charlestown experience. There was a church, a wonderful 19th-century granite church, out there that became sort of interesting for me as a design element. So did the church of the Cowley Fathers here on Beacon Hill. The facade of that church became an element in some of the things I was doing at that time. Those got worked into various paintings or prints or something. And—you were going to ask me something?

ROBERT BROWN: How did this relate to the interests you developed in Mexico, in expressionistic and Baroque things? Were these facade and railroad yard designs related?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, they were. There was still—a lot of that general, collective Mexican experience came out through these things that I did here. They're really not bad, some of them, as I look back on them. I've also just junked a lot of the stuff, but some of it I've kept, because I think it's kind of interesting.

ROBERT BROWN: And there was dramatic quality to them.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. Then, at Harvard, the person who made a very strong impression on me was Frederick Deknatel. I took a course in modern art under Fred Deknatel that year, '41 and '42. [01:04:00] Okay.

[END OF TRACK AAA_buckle80_2847_r.]

ROBERT BROWN: —side two. We were talking about your course in modern art with Frederick Deknatel—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Fred Deknatel.

ROBERT BROWN: How did that go? What was it—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I thought he was a marvelous teacher, but I—some people wouldn't agree with me, because he approached everything in a very casual kind of way, and a very personal way. This is what I think was so important in his—in the way in which he talked about pictures. He had great feeling for them. He didn't dissect them the way it became fashionable to do.

ROBERT BROWN: And which, to some extent, Thwaites had done, hadn't he?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, far more intellectual. Far more intellectual. I remember once, we were looking at the Matisse *Blue Nude*, with the arm up raised. Marvelous picture. This came on the screen. It was a large class that Deknatel taught at that time. I remember he said, "This is the Matisse *Blue Nude*." We all looked at it, and there was total silence. He sort of walked closer to the screen, and he said, "You see her arm is up raised. Wonderful picture. Next slide, please." And that was that. He was so overcome, I think, by the power and beauty of that picture that he didn't know what to say. I think this is what—I liked him for that, because he could do that. He could go into something else. It isn't that he didn't know what the *Blue Nude* was all about, because he certainly did. He just did this periodically, and I know it irritated a lot of people, because they couldn't get notes down. [00:02:01] There wasn't a page and a half of stuff to read. He assumed you'd go and do the work yourself, afterward. Which was nice. Then I came to know him very well. He once said he knew I was painting and so forth, and why couldn't he come and see what I was doing? So one afternoon, we took the subway from Cambridge and we came back to Charles Street, and he spent a long time looking at my things, which was very nice for a full professor at Harvard to take the time to do that. No one else on the teaching staff there was remotely interested in what I was doing.

ROBERT BROWN: He was?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: He was. He was. And so anyway, that whole year went by. It was a very exciting year. I had a marvelous time in Boston.

ROBERT BROWN: Including other courses, or that was the particular—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: That was the particular course.

ROBERT BROWN: That, and doing your lithographs?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: And what other aspect was so nice?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Well, the library. The library. Getting into the Fogg Library, and getting into Widener Library. This was my first experience with major libraries, and books that you could just bury yourself in. That had never happened before. I'm trying to think of some of the other people with whom I had courses. Oh, heavens. Well, we'll let that go, because it won't come to mind at the moment, but this is within the university, outside of the fine arts department. Spencer, for instance. I can't remember his first name. Then—

ROBERT BROWN: This was preparation, you thought, for a BA, or graduate work? [00:04:00]

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I still didn't know exactly what I wanted to do with all of this, and I knew perfectly well that this year was more or less marking time until the army business came along. That was inevitable for everybody at that stage.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you develop any friends among your contemporaries that year in Boston, Cambridge?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Not really. No, I can't remember anybody from the Fogg side of it, except Deknatel.

ROBERT BROWN: What was he like? What was your impression of him that first year, just as a person?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: He was so easy to talk with. If you're coming to Harvard for the first time, especially pre-World War II, or the beginning of World War II, the old Harvard sort of hierarchy was still very much in place, intact, and you were very respectful. This is a great experience that you're having, and all that kind of thing. You don't really make an effort to become friendly with your professors, if you're a little bit shy and backward. You just don't. At least I didn't, and I'm sure there were many people who would feel as I did at that time. Certainly, you didn't call anybody by his first name at that time. I have no memory of anyone else, but I have vivid

memories, of course, of Boston as a physical place. The architecture, the ambience of Boston. I used to go walking, night after night, through all parts of this city, because it was so intriguing to me, the architecture and—

ROBERT BROWN: What about it, do you think, intrigued you?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I had gotten very interested in the whole idea of Boston as a 19th-century city. The early 19th-century architecture fascinated me. [00:06:02] Boston was not all torn up the way it has become. A lot of Boston has disappeared in the last 30, 40 years. So you could see a lot. I can't tell you exactly what it was that I was looking at. I can't bring it to mind now.

ROBERT BROWN: It's so different from the bright colors and the Baroque style of Mexico.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Completely. Completely. Yeah, completely.

ROBERT BROWN: And yet, both you liked.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. Yeah, very much so. Then, of course, along came the war years and all of that.

ROBERT BROWN: That was—were you drafted then, in '42 or so?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, I think it must have been—let's see, I came back from Mexico in—yes, I was drafted in the fall of '42, and shipped off to the usual training camp. Everybody went through basic infantry training, and that's what I did.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you put in for any special schooling or—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No, I didn't know enough to. I didn't know enough to, and again, nobody told me what you could do or couldn't do.

ROBERT BROWN: There was no one in your family or your friends who—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No, and I didn't have enough sense to ask, I suppose. I was just engulfed in this thing, drawn along, the way [laughs] millions of other people were.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you feeling somewhat patriotic as well at that time?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No, I don't think so. I think everybody thought that this was just inevitable, and this is what's going to happen to us, and away we go. And also rather curious to see what would come out of it. So—

ROBERT BROWN: How did it suit you?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Hmm?

ROBERT BROWN: How did it suit you?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I thought I would just probably expire in the middle of all this, but I didn't. I really had a perfectly wonderful time out of it. I went through all this infantry basic training, and I think I went through with considerable distinction, because I was made an instructor in close order drill and all that kind of nonsense. [00:08:09] When I think back over that, I break out laughing, but I can still see myself drilling recruits at Camp Robinson, down in Arkansas. So anyway, that went on and on, and that was quite boring, because nothing really happened. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: You were in that camp, or equivalent places, for—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, for quite a while. Then I went overseas. Then I—we arrived at a time when the war was going very well, and everybody thought, well, we're just here because we're here, and presently everybody will go home. This thing will end.

ROBERT BROWN: When was this, and where was that?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Let's see, this must have been—this was in the early fall of 1944.

ROBERT BROWN: This was in Europe?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: We were deposited in England, and transferred immediately to Normandy, and we lived in a camp in Normandy. It was all kind of fun. You would wander around and see the Normandy farms, and visit the cafes, and so forth and so on. You had a certain number of obligations, but you weren't in any real organization. You were replacement people, you see, for anything that they needed in the battle zone, I suppose. Anyway, the

thing that happened was, of course, the Battle of the Bulge, and then I was really drawn into that. Suddenly they needed a lot of extra bodies. So off I went, into the thick of all of that, the shelling and machine gunning and all that sort of thing.

ROBERT BROWN: What was your reaction? Were you frightened, because you hadn't had battle experience? [00:10:00] Or were you—this is what you thought you must do?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: There's nothing I could do about it.

ROBERT BROWN: You had no choice.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: You just did it. It was, I thought—it wasn't exactly amusing. It was terrifying, because you really were in the danger of something happening to you. Then, in due course, when it was finally over, I had decided that—first of all, I became quite sick with hepatitis, and was carted away to a French—a hospital in the French zone. While I was there, I protested to one of the Red Cross workers. I said, "I really shouldn't be in the infantry, for heaven's sake," and I made quite a case for myself as to why I should be in something more glamorous. She said, "Oh, I think it's a good idea. I'll help you." I thought, well, that's very entertaining to think that somebody is going to help me get out of this mess. [Laughs.] Well, I don't know, maybe two months or three months went by, and lo and behold, she had helped me, and I did get out of the infantry, and I got into military government. I was shipped from my hospital down toward Czechoslovakia. I can't remember the name of the town or exact area. I hadn't been there two or three days before it was announced that I was out of the infantry, and I was going into military government. Well, that just dazzled everybody in my group. I was put into a Jeep and rushed all the way up to Bremen, and introduced to the military government office. I wasn't an officer. I was a noncommissioned officer. I stayed there, and I was supposed to be the monuments, fine arts, and archives person in the military government office at Bremen.

ROBERT BROWN: Very good. This person somehow had gotten you attached to something you had actually had some training for.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: She said—it all began, she said, "Write me a letter—write a letter to so-and-so." [00:12:03] I forgot to whom, which officer. She said, "I'll see that it gets through." She did, so it worked. This is one of the funny things of the war. [Laughs.] Anybody could get out of something and into something they really wanted to be in. There was practically nothing for me to do in the military government office in Bremen, almost nothing.

ROBERT BROWN: There was nothing for you to survey or hunt for?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Not really, no. I had contacts with the man who was director of the Bremen Kunsthalle, and I don't think I could help him in any particular way. He already had the wreckage of the museum. The museum was badly damaged, under complete security. There was nothing I could do. One day, I remember, someone from higher up arrived on the scene that was going to see what we were up to, and that higher up turned out to be James Rorimer, who was then a second lieutenant. I know—I remember going around town with him. We went down to the bank, one of the banks, in Bremen, to the vaults, to look at some pictures and so forth. I'm not sure I really knew what I was looking at, but in any case, there I was. Then, in due course, I came back home. Then I decided I would go to New York, that that would be the scene for all future activity, and I would go to Columbia.

ROBERT BROWN: This was in, what, 1945?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Forty-six now.

ROBERT BROWN: You were there in the occupation, after the war?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yeah, for a while.

ROBERT BROWN: So that was really marking time. As you say, you didn't have, really, that much to do in Bremen.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: One got passes and went off in various directions. I saw things I wouldn't have seen otherwise. [00:14:00] I went to England on a pass, and there, began my friendship with John Thwaites once again.

ROBERT BROWN: He was in the foreign office then?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, he was. He and his new wife and I went out to call on Henry Moore, which was a great experience. This was 1945, the summer of '45, I think, the war having ended by that time, obviously. We had a wonderful time with Moore.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he a very good host? Liked having you there?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. We went out in the sheds where Moore was working. He was, at that time, working on that large figure that is now in Buffalo, carved from Elmwood. He was busy carving that. At that time, he wasn't surrounded by assistants, as he is now, in a great operation. It was pretty much a one-man deal. Here was the sculptor, there was the sculpture, and that was that. I remember I took—I had been to Zvemer's [ph] bookstore in London, to buy a number of books that I wanted to take back to Germany with me when I went back at the end of my pass. It was the day that we were going out to Moores, and on sale, or available, at least, at Zvemer's, was the facsimile of Henry Moore's London sketchbook, so I bought a copy of that. As we got near the Moore's house, I said to John, "This is ridiculous. He'll think I'm bringing this book out for him to autograph." So I tucked it up under my battle jacket, and it sort of rested on my belt. We had marvelous times throughout the day, and we had tea and whatnot. As we were standing at the door, saying goodbye, as I put out my hand to shake hands with Moore, this thing cascaded right out from my battle jacket and landed, literally, on Moore's toe, and he bent down and picked it up. [00:16:12] "Oh," he said, "I suppose you'd like me to inscribe this for you." And he did. [They laugh.] I had gone to such pains to conceal this thing, so he wouldn't think I had done this awful thing, bringing him his own sketchbook, but it worked out anyway. Years later, when I saw him again at the house in England, I reminded him of this, and he said, "Oh, yes." He said, "I do remember that."

ROBERT BROWN: Were you quite taken by his work?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Oh, yes. Oh, very.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you know him before? Had you—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. Yes, I had. I had known Moore's work from my student days in Chicago. I really did look at an awful lot of stuff during that time, outside of class and whatnot.

ROBERT BROWN: In England, did you also get to see, say, Francis Bacon or—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Oh, no. Bacon comes later, you see. This is—we're still—we're 1945.

ROBERT BROWN: In Germany, there wasn't much chance to run down anybody then, was there?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No one to see in Germany. I went out from Bremen to Worpswede, the colony, where Paula Modersohn-Becker had worked, and others as well. I knew that that was something I wanted to see then, and did.

ROBERT BROWN: You had known that because she had worked there?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. This was—again, I knew this from the time when I was seriously interested in German Expressionism, and so I knew that when I got there, I would inevitably have to go out and see Worpswede colony. Not much was going on, because the war was just over, and it was just the houses and the countryside. [00:18:00]

ROBERT BROWN: Were there any artists still there or no?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: There may have been, but—

ROBERT BROWN: But they were—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No one of any stature, as far as I can tell.

ROBERT BROWN: So you came back and were mustered out where, in Illinois?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: In Illinois, yes. Then I decided, as I say, I would go to New York and enroll in Columbia. I came here to Boston on my way to New York, and I went out to see Fred Deknatel, and he said, "Why do you want to do that?" He said, "That's ridiculous." I said, "Well, because I really want to live in New York." This was the place. So I went down to New York, just so confused. I kept thinking, no, no, no, this is the wrong thing to do. So I turned right around and I came back, and Fred got me to enroll in the graduate school of arts and sciences.

ROBERT BROWN: You never did enroll at Columbia, then?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Never. No, no, but I had accumulated enough academic credit so I could do this. I had, if not the exact equivalent of a BA, it was very close to it. I then started in graduate school, with all of my work being done at the Fogg. I started in the summer of 1946. My first class there was in the small lecture hall on the third floor of the Fogg, and the teacher, the instructor, professor, was Charles Kuhn. It was a course on Northern manuscript illumination, about which I knew absolutely nothing. I'm not sure I can tell you why I even took the course, but it was a way to get started into this thing.

ROBERT BROWN: Was Deknatel advising you on the sequence of things?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No. This is one thing that Deknatel never really did. He never really offered you any advice. Perfectly charming company, and you learned a lot just from being with him, but he didn't say, "Do this and do that." I think that Charles Kuhn, quite rightly, had thought that we knew something. [00:20:04] That's why we were there. We had some background. Well, most of us didn't who were in that room that summer. He began right in the middle of the subject, presupposing that there was background. We were all involved in books of ours, and missiles, and this school, and that school, and whatnot. Well, it was splendid, because you really got right down to business, and you had to get all of that straightened out quickly, so you could understand what he was saying.

ROBERT BROWN: You found that you could master the literature fairly quickly?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: You had some languages by then, and things like that?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Well, yes. I had—when I was in the hospital, in military hospital, in France—I had had French in high school—I had decided that I had nothing else to do, so I would really work on French. And I did. I worked like a demon every day, because I had nothing else to do. I really did get to the point where I could read French very well. So that was a start, anyway. German, I had none of. That was difficult, because German would have been very useful in that course. Dek—rather, Kuhn, knew that most of us didn't know German, and helped us steer around that. So that was a marvelous course, because he was a splendid teacher. Very thorough, very exacting, and whatever he was discussing was very, very well-developed. He was a fine teacher.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you come to have quite an interest in the subject, too?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Not especially. Not in manuscript illumination, but certainly that was a steppingstone into my interest in North European painting, without any doubt. Without that, perhaps I wouldn't have been. I became extremely interested in the whole fanning out of painting in Northern Europe. [00:22:00] Not as a speciality, but just as something I happened to be interested in, all the way from the 15th century right straight through the 17th century. So I stayed through the summer, and then I picked it right up again in the fall, and I went right on through the fall until the next summer, and then I got my MA I worked with Deknatel, and with Wolfgang Kerler [ph], in earlier manuscript illumination, and also in—I'm just trying to think whether it was a 17th-century course that he taught or not. I worked with him, and had great admiration for him, and became one of his—oh, heaven's, what do they call them?

ROBERT BROWN: Tutor?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Tutor, working with Kerler. When he wasn't—he would give the major lectures, and his assistants would fill in with other lectures. So I would do a number of those for him.

ROBERT BROWN: On 17th-century?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I can't remember, now, exactly what it was that I did—how I worked with him.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he, likewise, a very good teacher?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. Very Germanic, and quite withdrawn. I never felt at ease with Wolfgang Kerler.

ROBERT BROWN: What about Jakob Rosenberg?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Well, Jakob Rosenberg, I worked a lot with him. Came to know him very well, and on best of terms, always, with Jakob Rosenberg, and had tremendous admiration for him. He was superb, absolutely superb, and you could always talk with him. He was a little formal, but again, this was the German background, and the old-schooled way of dealing with a student. [00:24:04] But if you wanted to talk with him, you could always go to his office and talk. But he never got terribly excited or wound up in something, and would never rush around, dragging out prints and drawings and books, but he would guide you a little bit. He was a very good teacher. His assistant was Ruth Magurn [ph], who has been, really, a lifelong friend of mine. Then I worked also with Hanfmann, George Hanfmann, and with—

ROBERT BROWN: In ancient or—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, I did a classical course with him. Classical art never interested me deeply.

ROBERT BROWN: Why do you suppose not?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I can't think. I just didn't—I just don't know why, but it was too close to the whole matter of archeology, and that is something that has always, if not exactly bored me, it has never excited me [laughs]. You know, the digging and whatnot. I've never cared a bit about it. I think that may have something to do with it. And I had never been to Greece, and have never been to Greece, still. To this day, I have never been. And Egyptian art never interested me. Hanfmann was a very fine teacher, and I certainly enjoyed the course and learned a great deal, but no—

ROBERT BROWN: Chandler Post was still there, wasn't he?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, he was. I took his Renaissance course. He was, again, splendid. Superb teacher. Rather a frightening personality. Very—really quite formidable, and perfectly capable of overwhelming a graduate student if he felt inclined to do so, because he had tremendous erudition. He was really an extraordinary man. [00:26:00] I took this course, and I got through it, and so on. I came to know Chandler Post, really, after I had finished all my work at Harvard, or at least toward the end. Then I became very friendly with him. There were a group of us who knew him extremely well, and he liked to be called, by his close friends, Uncle Chandler. So he was always known as Uncle Chandler. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: How would that change come about? There were certain students he particularly liked?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I guess he thought, toward the end of the course, that I had at least a brain or two floating around, and it wasn't too tiresome to have to talk to me. So we just—I don't know how this happened, but we got to be awfully good friends, and would talk about every conceivable subject. I would go over to his house on Hilliard Street, number 11, Hilliard Street, his apartment, on the second floor of a two-family house, and sometimes had dinner with him, or talked with him for an evening. Other people did the same. Sometimes we were alone, and sometimes there were others. He lived alone. A house strewn with books. He had one very beautiful picture, a Salvator Rosa, absolutely superb, that he had bought. I think either underneath the Salvator Rosa, or not too far away, was a framed, autographed portrait of Mae West, for whom he had great admiration, almost as much as he did for some of the Renaissance painters. He would talk about Mae West at great length [they laugh] as an artistic personality. He had a housekeeper, Margaret, who was an Irish maid, who sort of took care of him, so on. [00:28:00] He was a fascinating man. I knew him right up until the end of his life, and I went to his funeral service at the church of the Cowley Fathers on Memorial Drive, which was a very impressive funeral service, as I remember. Just the style that Chandler Post would have liked. [Laughs.] He was really a wonderful, wonderful man. Then, let's see, who else? Ben Rowland. The one course I took with Ben Rowland was a course in American art. You must realize that at the end of the '40s, American art at the Fogg was almost as bizarre as Benin Bronzes. "American art," they would say. "Good heavens, you mean Sargent?" Something like that. "Or those portraits that people have in Boston by Copley." There was American art in the Fogg, and a few things hung, but you would have to go into the racks to find most of it. This was a little sort of quirky to have Ben Rowland teaching American art, but he did, nevertheless.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he cover modern at all?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. He came up to the present. It was a general survey course. We would gallop along from John Smibert on, you know. For some reason, Rowland detested the work of John Marin, and he would spend rather a lot of time explaining all of this, saying why he detested it. Maybe he was right, I don't know [laughs] but in any case, I thought it was an odd thing to spend so much time doing, when there were other things to talk about.

ROBERT BROWN: Of course, he himself was a considerable watercolorist.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: He was a very fine watercolor painter. The St. Louis Art Museum has a superior study of birds, crows, that Rowland did. Altogether, a remarkable man, when you think of his principal interest being in Indian art, and then this knowledge in the field of American art, and then the time to paint, as he did, all the way along. [00:30:12] Really quite an astonishing personality. Let's see. Agnes Mongan was floating around in those years.

ROBERT BROWN: What do you mean by that? She was still assistant, more or less, to Paul Sachs?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, she was. When I say floating around, I mean she would appear and disappear on my horizon, but I didn't really know Agnes Mongan until later.

ROBERT BROWN: What of Paul Sachs? Did you have any work with him?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, I took the museum training course with Paul Sachs, and we met in the—I think it's the Naumburg Room, which was his office upstairs.

ROBERT BROWN: Rather baronial office.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: As you undoubtedly interviewed dozens of other people, I'm sure you had dozens of comments on the Sachs training program and what went on in those afternoons. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: What do you recall going on?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I think we met on Friday afternoons. It was practically an all-afternoon session, maybe from 1:00 to 4:30 or 5:00 or something like that. I think there were probably about maybe 12 of us would rather. Sachs was, again, a very formal personality, really quite withdrawn. Always immaculately dressed, beautiful suits, handsomely turned out. He would appear with his secretary, Mary Wadsworth, who was secretary to the department and to Paul Sachs. Mary Wadsworth, from almost the time I went to the Fogg, became a friend. I admired her greatly. She came from a small town in Illinois, and eventually went back there to live. [00:32:03] She could manage Paul Sachs. She was the only one, I think, on the staff who could.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean it was a problem?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Well, she could speak up to him. Not many people were about to speak up to Paul Sachs. He really was formidable. He would talk to us about his experiences in the world of—the dealer world, the collector world, the outer world that we were going to go into. At this point, I had no idea that I was going to go into the museum field. I was still intent on collecting enough background so that I could perhaps teach the history of art. The more one became involved with Sachs, and at the same time, with Rosenberg in his connoisseurship course, the more I realized that the object, the work of art itself, was the thing that interested me, and less the imparting of knowledge about it to somebody, as one would have had to do had one taught the history of art. This, again, goes all the way back to my childhood, if you recall what I said earlier, my interest in things. So this is what Sachs did, I think, for me, and for many others as well, was to make us aware of things, their presence. Up until that time, it had always been a rectangle on the screen, and usually in black-and-white, because the Fogg Museum, at that stage, almost all the classes were taught with three-by-five, black-and-white slides. Color was not—yes, works of art had color, but you really weren't supposed to look at them. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: This must have been one of the things you didn't like there, because you said earlier you didn't like—if you have no color, then they could talk simply about composition, and to some extent, lighting.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, and that's what they did talk about.

ROBERT BROWN: This whole analytical approach, you hadn't cared for earlier, at least. [00:34:03] I recall your saying earlier—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yeah. No, because I didn't understand it, really. But now—

ROBERT BROWN: But now it was beginning to make sense.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Now it begins to make sense. Now it begins to fit into my spirit influence, and I begin to be aware of it. But to Sachs, you were always involved with an object. He would hand you something, a small bronze. He would walk across to you and say, "Now, Mr. Buckley, take this and look at it, and I'll be back in a minute, and tell me what it is." This was terrifying. My God, you know, you didn't know what this thing was. I remember once, he singled out a girl named Nanette Rodney, and Nanette was interested in classical art. He knew that I was interested in 18th-century, or beginning to show an interest in 18th-century art. He put an object, a large vase, a krater, on the table, and he called us up. He said, "Talk about this for us, for the class." Well, we were dumbfounded. We didn't know what in the world we were looking at. Nanette went on at great length about whether it was or it wasn't a classical vase, and I don't know what I said. In the end, of course, it was a Wedgwood vase. Today, I'm sure anybody would know that, but not at that time.

ROBERT BROWN: It was a wonderful way of making you see—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Oh, it was superb. It was superb. You absolutely had to react, or he would put a fake drawing in front of you, and a real one, and you would have to work back and forth between these two drawings.

ROBERT BROWN: That was the heart of his course, wasn't it? This kind of arguing for it.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, this kind of arguing. This was really the essence of it. [00:36:00] He would—also, what he had to say about his own role as museum director, and his own role with dealers, and his own role with museums. He liked to talk in this way, and he could say a great deal, because goodness knows, the man had had tremendous experience in going around and people he knew. He knew everybody. He handed us, at the beginning of the course, I think two books, mimeographed. One contained the names of people he knew in Europe and the United States that might be of use to us later on. Knew everybody. The other one, the names of dealers. [Laughs.] It was a wonderful thing to have. It came out of his files, and it had been done up in these mimeographed lists.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you ever get a little closer to him after—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No. He rather—he really did intimidate me, and I know he intimidated other people. He held everybody at arm's length. I really think—I don't know what it was. I think he was something of a snob, and I think he liked to know where you came from, what your background was. This really did mean something to Paul Sachs, I think, and I have heard others say the same thing. In other words, the world should be somewhat limited and not too many people should be allowed to mill around in it. Obviously, this was changing very, very fast, as you know.

ROBERT BROWN: In these particular years, weren't some of you students coming back on the GI Bill?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Exactly.

ROBERT BROWN: They were getting a variety they had never dreamt of at the Fogg.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I would say probably three quarters of us at the Fogg, at that time, were back on the GI Bill, and had had military experience, and were slightly older. [00:38:01]

ROBERT BROWN: You weren't as moldable as the usual younger—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: —student.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: The people who came were people who came from families of great means and great position, and there were people who came from families who had nothing and no position, who came from the Far West, or wherever, you know. This was something that I think slightly mystified Paul Sachs. It didn't bother Jakob Rosenberg at all, but it did Sachs. You remember, Sachs came from a family of tremendous, tremendous wealth, position, and all. Anyway, I then decided I would go on, and after I got my MA, I would work my way through another year, and take my PhD generals, and get that out of the way, and write my thesis, and be a PhD I did do all of that. I took all of my coursework, and I finally took the written exam, and eventually I took the oral exam. Then I never finished my thesis.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT BROWN: This is the second interview with Charles Buckley, in Boston. Robert Brown, the interviewer. This is July 17, 1980.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT BROWN: Mr. Buckley, we've been talking about your graduate study at the Fogg, 1946 to '48, and you have discussed, at some length, various of your teachers there. I wondered if you could, perhaps, now talk a bit about some of your classmates. You've explained that you were a bit older than some of them, having been away during the war, and many of these people were simply going fresh from undergraduate school into graduate school. [00:40:00]

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Not really. No, the people I knew there were more or less like myself, who had had war experience, or something of that kind, and had come to the Fogg after the war, and they, too, were—we were all more or less the same age. There were some really marvelous people there when I was a graduate student. I remember, for example, Richard Wonder [ph], who turned out to be a very fine collector of drawings, and who recently has gone down to Christie's to work, as you know. There was John Leeper, who married Blanche Magurn. John is now director of the McNay Art Institute in San Antonio, and has been there, in one museum, for 25 years. He's done a marvelous job. And Jim Fowl [ph], who has been at Rhode Island School of Design, teaching the history of art, for a long time. Then, leaving the Fogg, just, I think, a year ahead of me—well, let's see. Gene Boggs [ph], for example. Gene was just about to go, I think, off to California, to start teaching. And John Maxin [ph]. I remember meeting both Boggs and Maxin on the same day, and what an impression that made on me.

ROBERT BROWN: Why was that?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: [Laughs.] You would have had to know John Maxin. Did you ever know him, by the way?

ROBERT BROWN: I met him once.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I remember it took place in one of the smaller galleries of the Fogg, upstairs. John was busy going on about one of the paintings, a French 19th-century picture. I thought, my heavens, what erudition, and so forth. Later, I came to know him, and Gene, very well. They both became good friends of mine. I followed Maxin all the way along to the end of his—very sad end of his career. [00:42:02] Then there was, of course,

Hedley Rhys, who went to Swarthmore to teach. He was very much interested in American art at that time, and beginning to do his work on Prendergast. There were others, too, whose names elude me now.

ROBERT BROWN: The study of American art was only a minority taste at that time?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I think very much so, yes. I think Rhys was something of an exotic, showing interest in Prendergast. You have to remember when this was. Here we are in 1948, and someone is being serious about Maurice Prendergast, really for the first time in modern times, you might say, since Prendergast's death. It was really a remarkably stimulating group of people, because everybody was very eager to get into the history of art, and very interested in the museum world, and the teaching world. There was enormous amount of discussion that went on. A lot of excitement. It was quite exciting to be at the Fogg, I think, at that time, because people were coming out of these war years and getting re-involved in life.

ROBERT BROWN: They had felt deprived for several years.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Very much so. Very much so.

ROBERT BROWN: Could you perhaps remember some of the chief things you discussed, what would be the kinds of things you might discuss?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I think it—well, everybody was sort of wrapped up in the move toward their general examinations. They were getting ready for their generals. At least it seemed that way, that they were all heading in that direction. So we would simply discuss all the possible questions that could be asked of anybody on the general examination. That sounds kind of childish in a way, but on the other hand, it made everybody think and kind of interact. [00:44:02] I found that to be very interesting.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you a fairly congenial group?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Very, yes. Very much so, I think. I made—many of the friends I have now are friends from the days at Fogg.

ROBERT BROWN: Was there any division among you, or between those who would go on to museum careers, and those who were going to go on for their doctorate and be strictly research and teaching?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, I think so. I can't remember exactly what it was, what character it assumed, but there was certainly a difference. The people who were heading into the museum field were—I don't know whether we considered ourselves superior, or slightly lacking in substance, but in any case, there was that difference. Because I think that probably most people who went to the Fogg thought of their careers as they would be in the teaching field, and not so much in the museum field. There was a great deal of difference, I think, between people who at least professed to like objects, and the people who liked slides. I think this is really a mark that divides the academic from the museum person, without any doubt. I think there are any number of people in the academic world who have no idea what a work of art is all about. They do know its history from A to Z. They know every blessed thing about it, except what it really is. This is my reaction, anyway, to many people who are in the academic field. They have no particular feeling for a picture or a sculpture or a piece of furniture. [00:46:02] I don't want to cite any names, but I can think of a couple of people at Fogg who had any number of opportunities to involve themselves with works of art, but who would prefer to do it through a slide. Until well into the '50s, if not later, the teaching at Fogg was done on the basis of black-and-white slides. Color was suspect. These were three-by-five, black-and-white slides that were used in lectures. I don't ever remember seeing a color slide on the screen in my time at Fogg. That's partly a technological reason, I'm sure. The film wasn't very good, or it wasn't true to the painting itself, and so on.

ROBERT BROWN: But being at Fogg, couldn't the teachers have bridged that quite easily? They could have brought all of the students face-to-face with a number of objects, which would represent quite a few of the leading art historical eras.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. They did, to some extent, but again, that business of bringing a student in direct contact with a work of art was done through the museum training class. Basically, Jakob Rosenberg and Paul Sachs. I don't recall seeing works of art brought into class by Chandler Post, or Kerler, or any of the other people teaching there.

ROBERT BROWN: Because their lectures were rather formal lectures, they didn't take you on walks through the museum or anything?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Never. I don't recall ever doing anything of that kind. No, no. It was based entirely on the literature, and on the slide, and you could go and look at the work of art on your own. I think that tells us rather a lot, you see, because you would have thought that they would have brought paintings into class and discussed

how, let's say, a Florentine panel picture was put together. [00:48:05] Nothing of that kind ever happened that I can recollect. The conservation department—we managed to get into that, but we did it more or less on our own, simply because we knew people in conservation, and we'd kind of sneak up the back stairs and go in and see what was going on. Also, when you think of Arthur Pope, who was teaching there at that time—was a fine art historian, and highly trained in the craft of painting—he lived, more or less, on the periphery of the Fogg teaching staff. At least that's my reaction.

ROBERT BROWN: Why do you suppose he did?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Well, I don't know, but I suppose he was regarded as someone who actually made a painting, and his students made paintings. And that was fine. Go and do it, but do it upstairs, out of the way, where we won't see you, was sort of the attitude.

ROBERT BROWN: Was probably thought to be an inferior occupation to the more cerebral—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yeah. I remember that Paul Sachs was totally uninterested in the fact that I had been a creative artist, I had painted myself. This did not interest him, not so that I could feel interest radiating from him to me on that level. I think he never said, "Oh, I'd like to see something that you've done." It was not that kind of interest. Deknatel, as I told you before, was the only person who showed that kind of interest.

ROBERT BROWN: This, then, as far as you look back then, really affected the careers, the two main streams, of these students. [00:50:01] Those of you who went on particularly to museum careers, working with objects, and those who went on to the more secondhand work with slides and academia.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Well, for example, Hedley Rhys went straight to Swarthmore. I don't think there was a step in between. I think he went right to Swarthmore. Hedley was—he is now retired—was, I'm sure, a first-class teacher throughout his entire career. But I don't think that he ever really warmed up to a picture. I don't think he ever collected anything for himself, not so far as I know. Now, I have to admit, I didn't follow his career closely after he left Fogg, but you can sense when someone is involved with works of art, and you can sense how they are reacting, and with Hedley, I never felt that he really cared all that much about it. It was something that was on the screen. The same, I think, was true of Jim Fowl, who was, again, a marvelous teacher. But somehow, the curtain seemed to come down when he left the lecture room. Neither one, so far as I know, ever cared to sort of search out works of art for themselves. The rest of us, I think, in the museum world, tended to do that.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you the—were there very few with a background like your own, as a painter?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I think—as far as I know, I was probably the only one at that time. There may have somebody there, but I—

ROBERT BROWN: That would have given you a difference from the others who were interested in objects, because you had actually created.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Whereas they were approaching it more as connoisseurs alone. You were that, but you were also—wouldn't this give you—[00:52:03]

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Oh, indeed it did.

ROBERT BROWN: —a richer background, as you think about it?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: As I look back on it, it most certainly did. There was a time when I was almost embarrassed by the fact that I had gone to an art school. I used to say I would never allow anyone to go to an art school. I would plunge them immediately into the academic milieu. I think that was much too strong a reaction. It certainly helped me to know what the mechanics of picture-making were all about. Yes. That came in very, very handy many years later, particularly when I became more interested in conservation, which I certainly did in time. Of course, I didn't mention Betty Jones, and I should, because Betty was also at Fogg at that time, and was already becoming deeply involved in the conservation department. I learned a great deal from her about the whole question of conservation. As you know, she went on, in time, to become head of the Fogg conservation department, and then to become head of the conservation department at the Museum of Fine Arts.

ROBERT BROWN: But you'd also had the experience of creating, as well as being aware of the technique of—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. Yes. I think that did help. I think it—without a doubt, I think it sharpened my eye, and made me more aware of how a painter might approach a subject, and what was likely to have been in his mind as he started something.

ROBERT BROWN: Then you received the Edward Bacon Foreign Travel Fellowship to Europe in 1949 and '50. [00:54:04] Could you perhaps discuss that a bit? What was that given to you for?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: There were a number of fellowships given out that year, and I presume before and since. I think my academic average was sufficiently high to allow the faculty to give me the fellowship. It meant I could have a year abroad, which I—I had never been abroad, up until that time, except during the war years. Obviously, that's being abroad, but in the sense of going and seeing things and being completely free, I had not been abroad. So I went, in the early fall of that year, and spent a long time in London, up until December. Jim Fowl, who received a foreign travel fellowship, joined me, and he and I then continued together until, I guess, May of the following year. We had a car, which was a little unusual in those days, to have a car to run around in. We simply explored in every conceivable direction. Not so much in Germany, but all through France, and into Spain and Italy. Did the ritual call on Berenson, and had lunch with him and so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: Was that a memorable high point?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Oh, yes. Yes, it all comes back quite clearly. [Laughs.] I can't remember anything memorable that he said, but the whole ambience was quite splendid.

ROBERT BROWN: Looking back on that year, on the fellowship, what did you particularly derive from that, do you think? [00:56:00]

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Of course, I was trying to get my bearings in regard to a possible thesis, because I had left Cambridge without any real idea of what I wanted to do. As I became interested in the influence of Rembrandt and his circle on later paintings, after Rembrandt's death, and particularly in the 18th and early 19th century, and I thought this might make a good thesis, how the whole Dutch influence, particularly from Rembrandt, affected French painters in the 18th century, and certain English ones in the first part of the 19th century. I discussed this with Jakob Rosenberg through the mail. I remember I wrote to him and told him what I was going to do, and he thought it was an interesting idea, but he thought it was diffuse. That it would be very difficult to bring it into any kind of focus for a thesis. But in any case, I went ahead and I made innumerable notes, and looked at every blessed picture that had any possible Rembrandt influence [they laugh] and tried to sketch out, in my mind and on paper, how this thing would develop and so forth. Finally, I thought, oh, this is really hopeless. There's too much in it. So I gave it up. I think, now, as I look back on it, that it would have made a very good thesis subject, and I wish that I had been closer to Rosenberg physically at that time, where we could have really ironed out the problem, and he could have helped me narrow it. Because I still think it's a perfectly fascinating subject, and there's a great deal there to be explored. But anyway, that went by the board, and then I came back.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you rather chagrined, then, that you—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Well, not—yes, a little bit. I was kind of upset, because I had spent a whole year abroad, and I hadn't really—I had done a lot of work on a possible thesis subject, but nothing had come of it. [00:58:07] You know, you come back with your colors drooping, because you were supposed to come back with great stacks of information, and millions of photographs, and your thesis seven-eighths written and whatnot, but that wasn't what happened in my case. So I returned without—

ROBERT BROWN: Some good, I suppose, just going around and seeing so many things.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Oh, yes. Oh, heaven's, indeed.

ROBERT BROWN: Further activated your feeling for objects and so forth.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Every single day, when I was, let's say, in London, I was out looking at museums, or creeping around dealers, or going into secondhand shops and so forth, which I always think is a very good thing to do. In Paris, I spent a lot of time in the Bibliothèque Nationale and so on. I was very busy, sort of rummaging around in what I thought would be my material, and at the same time, trying very hard to see as much as I could in other areas. After all, that's what the grant was for, so that you could broaden yourself and you would see things. Again, people have to keep the time in mind. People go abroad now at the drop of a hat. It's as if you were going to Cambridge. It means nothing anymore. But golly, in 1949, it was still something of an experience to go abroad and be able to spend nine or ten months just looking at things that were of interest to you. In any case, before I left, there had been some indication that I would probably end up at the Museum of Fine Arts, as W.G. Constable's assistant. We had talked about this. [01:00:01] It was sort of a semi-verbal agreement that I would go there when I came back from—

ROBERT BROWN: You had talked with—you had gotten to know him before you had left?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I had gotten to know W.G. Constable before I left, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: He seemed like someone you'd want to work for?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. When you're leaving graduate school, and jobs aren't all that plentiful, you'd like to get in almost anywhere, any good spot. The Museum of Fine Arts seemed to me to be absolutely ideal. In any case, when I came back, the whole thing collapsed. There was no job. There were no funds. There'd be nothing doing at the Museum of Fine Arts. John Leeper, who, meanwhile, had married Blanche Magurn, had gone on to the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, and was assistant director there. He persuaded me to come down and take the job of keeper of the W.A. Clark Collection. Well, I didn't know anything about the Corcoran. I didn't know anything about W.A. Clark, and nothing about the collection. But in any case, it developed that this would be not only the Clark material, but any European object in the Corcoran's collections would fall into my area of responsibility. So I took the job in the fall of 1950, I guess it was. No, wait a minute. I'm getting mixed up here. Must have been a little earlier than that, because I was there a year and a half, and I know that I left Washington and the Corcoran in the latter part of January of 1951. Well, there's a little confusion in sequence here, but let's not worry too much about it. [01:02:02] So I went down and was interviewed by Hermann Warner Williams, who was the director of the Corcoran at that time, and he was very much interested in American art. I'm not sure whether his book on Mount had come out at that point or not, but I rather think it had. In any case, he was agreeable. He hired me. I remember he took me around to meet his predecessor, a man named C. Powell Minnigerode. You remember the name?

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: [Laughs.] I remember we went to this Washington townhouse, and the door was opened by a butler, or a man servant, in any case, and we were ushered to the first floor [inaudible] those rather nice Washington townhouses were laid out. C. Powell Minnigerode was standing at the top of the staircase. We sat down and chatted. He was a pleasant, withdrawn man. Rather vague, I thought. I remember vividly that he was wearing spats, which I thought was just almost unbelievable in that day and age, but there he was, all dressed up, wearing spats. So we sat and talked for a while. I guess he thought it would be all right if I went to work at the Corcoran. So that's what happened.

ROBERT BROWN: He was a formidable presence around there?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: He was, yes. Washington was pretty small in those days. The Corcoran was still a museum of some standing in Washington. The National Gallery hadn't really developed as since.

ROBERT BROWN: What was your first impression of the Corcoran yourself?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Very old-fashioned, very dim, and a wonderful collection of pictures. The Clark material was splendid. Fine Dutch pictures, Flemish pictures, some French paintings, and some earlier material as well. [01:04:08] It was in its own section of the museum, so I started in on that.

ROBERT BROWN: How was—

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ROBERT BROWN: —side two. We're discussing your time at the Corcoran.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Okay. Well, you know, being a graduate student at the Fogg was one thing, but actually working in a museum, where you were responsible for the collections, is quite something else. Hermann Warner Williams, who was known as Bill, was a very able scholar, good researcher, terribly interested in American art, but slightly withdrawn from the problems of the museum. He would tend to sort of retire into his office. He was very easygoing. I don't ever recall that he got agitated or upset about anything. He was very nice to work for, but not all that concerned about the museum. Now, you know, museum directors today are constantly beating a drum, and making their museums relevant, and so forth and so on. It's a very different situation. So the pace at the Corcoran with Williams as director was fairly slow. I think, in those years, even with the limited funds that the Corcoran had, that he could have done a great deal more, had he been absolutely on top of the market in New York, and even works of art turning up in Washington, as they surely did in those days. Simply could have been—it could have been a great deal more action, and interaction, than there was. John Leeper was an excellent administrator, and helped Bill a great deal. [00:02:05] Then the other curatorial person on the staff was Eleanor Swenson, and Eleanor was in charge of American art, so she saw a good deal more of Bill Williams, perhaps, than I did, at least because they had this interest in common. But the Corcoran is a large museum. The rooms are large. They're tall-ceilinged. It was difficult to do much. There wasn't much support staff, workmen, to help you do things that needed to be done. The Corcoran was a real problem to work with, and Bill was not all that interested in installation. He didn't care if a picture got up on the wall. Well, fine. But John Leeper and I were very much interested in how the place looked: the housekeeping, the labels, the lighting, the colors on the wall, the cleanliness of it, and so on. I think we had kind of a struggle with Bill on that level. Just about this time, soon after I arrived, it developed that this was the 150th anniversary of the founding of the city of Washington.

Therefore, the government put up a certain amount of money—I think it was \$100,000—to create an exhibition, and the Corcoran would do the exhibition. The Corcoran could do any show it wanted, as long as it had something to do with the history of—it touched on the history of Washington in some way. So it was decided that we would do 150 years of American art and American history, all kind of interwoven. I remember, in staff meetings, this discussion about how we would proceed, what kind of organization we would have, and who, ultimately, would do the exhibition and the catalog, particularly the catalog. [00:04:09] From my youth, I remembered that Elizabeth McCausland had been a very good writer, and interested in American art and so forth. So I simply popped up in one of the staff meetings and said, "Let's get Elizabeth McCausland." Well, Bill really didn't know too much about her. He said, "Fine. We'll telephone her." So he went right out of the staff meeting and to his desk, and he phoned. Elizabeth happened to be at home, and said yes, she'd love to talk about it, and she would come the very next day, or two, or whatever it was. So down she came, and she and Bill got on very well, and she was hired to do this exhibition, which was eventually called *American Processional*. Frightful name for an exhibition. [Laughs.] Nevertheless, there it was.

ROBERT BROWN: Who lit on that?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I don't know, but I know I protested that. Anyway, that's what it came out as. It would be kind of a march through American history, you see, up to—World War I, I guess it was, was going to be the cut-off date. The office was set up with Blanche Leeper as in charge of the various secretaries, and sort of gathering all the material, and Elizabeth would do all of the intellectual work, and Eleanor Swenson and Bill Williams and I would do the legwork. We'd go around, visit the museums and the historical societies and so forth. I think Bill really loved the idea that he had \$100,000 to work with. After all, that was a fortune in those days. [Laughs.] So he decided that he would go to Europe to see what there was, and off he went. I was sent off to the Midwest, and to Texas, and to Mexico. [00:06:01] I don't remember where Eleanor went. In any case, we rounded up a great deal of material. As you realize, there were, at that time, not that many exhibitions of American art, so a lot of fresh material, material that is now very well-known, was discovered, or rediscovered, in historical societies and private collections and the like. I won't labor this exhibition too long, but I do want to say that Elizabeth McCausland took hold of this thing, and she forged ahead, and she wrote the text for this catalog, and she did an absolutely superb job. If you've ever seen the catalog, I think you will probably agree with me.

ROBERT BROWN: What is it that stands out in her work, in your opinion?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I think just her style of writing. Her intelligence shines through on every page. She steeped herself in the history of the country. She read, and she knew a great deal. Elizabeth was a highly intelligent woman, and she had the ability to say fairly complicated things in a rather condensed way, and in relation to the work of art that was under discussion or being used to illustrate a point she was making. Because this was a sort of backwards/forwards exhibition. It was part serious painting, and part works of art that would illustrate concepts, ideas, and so on. It was a major show. It opened with great fanfare, and was really very, very exciting. It was my first major show to be involved in. I was given the responsibility of compiling the catalog part of the catalog. Measuring, and making—checking on dates and signatures, and examining the paintings, and so on. That was a tremendous experience in itself. [00:08:01] But—

ROBERT BROWN: Had you been somewhat prepared by—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Oh, yes, somewhat prepared. But Elizabeth, I must add, was a terribly demanding person. She simply ruled that staff, and eventually she ruled the director. She'd speak up very sharply if she thought things weren't going as they ought to be going. She did expect the staff to work on Saturday, and she herself worked on Saturday, and on Sunday morning. She would take off Sunday afternoon. She was always in her office in the museum, working, and I think that is really extraordinary, the way she started from scratch and pushed this whole thing through, and got it through on time. The catalog went to the printer, and the catalog was ready for the exhibition. Something that doesn't happen much anymore, as you probably know. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: How long did it take to—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I can't remember, but I think we worked on this for the better part of a year. We had to, because it was a big show, and it was very difficult to do.

ROBERT BROWN: Could we go back just a bit to your researches. You're in the Middle West, Texas, and Mexico. Were there any highlights of that? Can you recall any exciting discoveries? Because as you said, many of these things weren't that well-known at that time.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. If you do—you said you had the catalog here. Let me look at it, and I can—

[Audio Break].

CHARLES BUCKLEY: —there were many interesting pictures that simply came to light, that were tucked away in

odd places. For example, when I went looking for things that had to do with Mexico, particularly the Mexican-American War, I came on this quite marvelous picture by Antonio Gualdi, which is in the Louisiana State Museum in New Orleans. This grand plaza in Mexico City, with a U.S. flag flying over the palace. [00:10:02] A picture which was, really, totally unknown, I think, at that time, at least among art historians. I'm not sure it's terribly well-known now, but at least it came out of hiding, and added a great deal to the exhibition.

ROBERT BROWN: A painting like that would be what you would describe—as you described earlier, would make a point. Something that made an impact.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, exactly.

ROBERT BROWN: Not necessarily as a work of art in itself, but as a document.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Right. Then, here, for instance, was a painting called *Splicing the Cable* by Robert Dudley, which came out of the storage at the Metropolitan Museum. Had to do with the laying of the cable in 1866. Marvelous picture, which I think is still in storage at the Met, if I'm not mistaken. There were many, many other paintings that came out of the small museums and historical societies. Also, a painting which is quite well-known now, this painting by Edwin R. Elmer, which is at the Smith College museum, called *A Lady of Baptist Corner, Ashfield, Mass*, painted in the 1890s, which was not known at that time. That was, I think, an exciting painting for people to see, which now, of course, many people know that picture.

ROBERT BROWN: How had that been come upon, do you recall?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I imagine—I'd suspect that Elmer Swenson came on that, because that would have been in the area, the part of the country, that she explored on her trip.

ROBERT BROWN: What was the reception of the exhibition?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: It was tremendous. It was very well-attended. We knocked ourselves out installing it, because John Leeper and I absolutely insisted that it have as elegant an installation as possible. We painted, and we were meticulous about hanging the pictures and so on. [00:12:04] I don't think, again, Bill particularly cared about this. The work was done, the pictures were going to go up on the wall, and that was—he had done his job, so to speak. We saw it as something else, an opportunity for people to really come to know more about American art, and to know it in Washington.

ROBERT BROWN: What, by the way, had he found in Europe?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: He found a number of early paintings. The John White watercolors. I think that was principal contribution, if I'm not mistaken, that were in the British Museum. He found an interesting 16th-century picture, which presumably relates to this country, by Jan Mostaert, in the Frans Hals Museum, and—oh, many—I don't know whether he found other things or not, but those finds were important in terms of the exhibition.

ROBERT BROWN: So there was—this made quite an impression in Washington. What about—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Not only in Washington, but elsewhere. I remember we had a very large symposium, and all the scholars at that time came to the symposium. It did create a stir.

ROBERT BROWN: This was, what, scholars of American art, or generally art historians?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Scholars of American art, and there were not that many at that moment. People—well, I remember Ted Richardson came, and George Gross came. I can't remember, but there were certainly other people who came down. Some of the dealers who were handling American things at that time came down from New York and so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: As you look back on it, what was the effect, the short-term effect, of this large exhibition? [00:14:00]

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I don't know. I suppose it was one of the first important exhibitions having to do with American paintings and American painters other than Copley, Homer, and Eakins. In other words, filling in many of the gaps in between, and suggesting to people that there is a good deal more to be looked at. I think that is what—is why the exhibition was important, because it really did do that. I'm sure it was one of the exhibitions that certainly stimulated interest in American painting as a whole, because as you know, by the end of the '50s, it was beginning to develop very rapidly. So this was really kind of a cornerstone, I think, in the growing—the soon-to-be-growing interest in American art.

ROBERT BROWN: How did this affect the relative position of the Corcoran Museum among museums?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I think it certainly focused a lot of attention on it, without any doubt. The Corcoran had been a very sleepy place. The Corcoran didn't have much money to work with. The Corcoran was a fairly poor museum. I think our purchase funds were—oh, were nonexistent for the Clark Collection. We couldn't buy a thing. I believe that for the—for American art, I don't suppose it exceeded \$5,000 a year. But you could do a lot of buying with \$5,000 a year. [Laughs.] You could buy one good picture at that time, good American picture. Bill managed to find a few things. However, I still maintain that had he worked harder, he could have interested people in Washington to give him money, and he could have developed those purchase funds. I think he ought to have done that, particularly then, because the museum really was in a position to buy, and buy well, because the director did know the field. [00:16:08]

ROBERT BROWN: You said people in Washington. Were there certain collectors, or would-be patrons, potential patrons?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Washington was then, as it is now, full of people who were interested, or could have been interested, in the Corcoran and in developing the Corcoran's collections. John Leeper and I cultivated Emily Crane Chadbourne, who lived in Washington at that time. Mrs. Chadbourne had many interesting American pictures in her house, and I think had the director worked with Mrs. Chadbourne, that she might have done more for the Corcoran. She didn't really do very much in the long run. The money eventually went, I think, to the Art Institute in Chicago, because the Crane family came from Chicago, and I don't know whether she benefited the Metropolitan or not. There was a lot of money there, you see, that could have been tapped, and she was interested. I knew her, really, at the end of my time in Washington. I simply felt I couldn't do more than the director was doing. There was a hierarchy, and I simply, as a junior curator, felt I couldn't intervene, let's say, and try to coax people to give works of art. The odd thing is that the trustees of the Corcoran were, at least it seems so to me, a fairly mysterious lot. We didn't see the trustees. When there was an exhibition opening, I don't think I ever met a trustee at an exhibition opening. It was a small board, tightly held. [00:18:00] They were not, as far as I could see, vitally interested in the museum, seeing it develop. They were interested in sitting on that board, and in keeping the status quo, more or less, as it was. They didn't see a special reason why the museum should develop. That's my own personal impression of the Corcoran board. I think it's very odd to have been on the board for a year and a half, and to have met only one or two of the trustees. Very odd.

ROBERT BROWN: What do you suppose they thought was okay about the Corcoran?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Again, remember the times. I think museums were tending to drift along, and a board of trustees was simply that. They met in the boardroom with the director. They conducted the business. They read through the financial report. The director read through his report, and they went home. There was no need on their part—I'm sure they saw it this way—to meet the staff, or be involved with the staff in any way. I think that's very different. I think trustees, now, perhaps, involve themselves far too much in the activity of the running of a museum. But I think in those days, in the Corcoran, they were pretty isolated, behind closed doors, and you didn't see them at all.

ROBERT BROWN: Could you say a bit more about the Clark Collection, which you said there was no income for?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No.

ROBERT BROWN: What could you do with it, and—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: You could rehang it if you wanted to. [They laugh.] Goodness knows, I rehung it I don't know how many times during my time there. Also, the paintings could be cleaned. I remember—I can't remember the name of the man now, but I remember there was a conservator there, and I remember taking one of the Dutch landscapes down to the conservation department. [00:20:02] It wasn't really a department. It was this individual who had his work room down in the nether regions of the Corcoran. He was a perfectly competent man, but I think I waited something like eight months to get the picture cleaned. I would go down periodically to check, and he would say, "Oh, yes, I'm working on it," and you would see that he had cleaned another square inch. I thought, that isn't the way conservators work. You don't have to proceed at that pace. You can clean a picture. I got very agitated with him, and in due course, he withdrew from the Corcoran, and Russell Quandt took over as conservator. Russell was superbly trained, and was a very different kind of person. Pictures came and went at a normal rate of speed.

ROBERT BROWN: What was his background? Where had he been trained?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I'm sorry, I can't tell you, but I—

ROBERT BROWN: But he was very—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Was a very good, very thorough training, yes, and Quandt was one of the best conservators on the East Coast at that time.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you, in your short time there, ever try to get patrons for the Clark Collection, people who would be interested in European painting?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No, I didn't, because this exhibition that I have just told you about, *American Processional*, involved every member of the staff. We simply stopped—I simply stopped being curator, or keeper, of the Clark Collection, to any particular degree, and devoted myself almost entirely to this show.

ROBERT BROWN: You had said earlier that the National Gallery of Art hadn't come into its own completely by then, and yet I suppose—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Well, it was only, what, eight or nine years old at that point.

ROBERT BROWN: I suppose people were thinking, for European art, you would think in terms of the National Gallery.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Whereas—rather than the Corcoran. [00:22:00]

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, indeed. The Corcoran was on the downward path, and the National Gallery was on the upward path. I still think, if I had stayed longer at the Corcoran, and if Bill Williams had come around to a more aggressive stance in the city of Washington, that we could have done a great deal, but that didn't happen. That didn't happen. In any case, I then decided that I didn't want to stay too long at the Corcoran. John Leeper was about to leave, and was going off to California, to the Pasadena Art Museum. My interest in the decorative arts was developing rapidly at this time.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, it was? Were you going around, looking at collections?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, in Washington, and to all the auction galleries—not all the auction galleries. To the one auction gallery in Washington, which was Sloan [ph]. I didn't have a chance, really, to go to dealers in New York. Bill Williams evidently thought there was no reason to take me along, because my responsibility there was primarily European, except for the *American Processional* show, and in that regard, he was in touch with the New York dealers. But my private interest in the decorative arts was growing. I had, by this time—I must fill this in, because it's of some interest—I had, by this time, decided on my thesis subject. It was going to be an in-depth study of the English painter, Joseph Wright of Derby. I was devoting as much of my free time as I could to that subject. That subject, interestingly enough, had been proposed to me by Chandler Post, Professor Post at Harvard. [00:24:01] He came, one day, with a photograph, and he said, "Now, here's an artist you should work on," and he showed me a photograph of a male portrait, which was in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. He said, "No one has worked on Wright, and he's an extraordinary painter." Well, this stirred some interest, and I began looking around, and became more and more interested in Wright. But now, before I say any more about that, I think the next move was to the Atheneum in Hartford.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this a job you had heard about?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, I had heard about this job, and I can't think how I heard about it now, but the curator was retiring, and that curator was Florence Paul Berger. It was a German name, but she preferred to pronounce it "Bear-jey." She had been there since, I think, around 1917, at the Atheneum, and was now retiring because of age. So the job of being general curator of the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford was open, so I applied for it, and I went to see Charles Cunningham. My first experience with him. He had been director since, I think, 1946, and had succeeded A. Everett Austin, who had gone onto Florida and had become director of the Ringling Museum there. I talked with Charlie Cunningham about the possibility of taking over as general curator, and in time, he hired me. I moved to Hartford at the end of January 1951. That, I know, as clearly fixed in my mind.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you feel that going to Hartford would be an advance from being at the Corcoran?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, I did, because first of all, I would be chief curator, so to speak, and I would be involved with the decorative arts. [00:26:08] Very large collection of European and American decorative arts at the Atheneum. The Atheneum had had, as you probably know, a very brilliant history under A. Everett Austin, who was known as Chick Austin. He had come down to Hartford in, I think, 1929, and had married Helen Goodwin, who was member of a very prominent Hartford family, and had proceeded to develop a whole series of extraordinary exhibitions, including the first Picasso show I think ever held in this country, and had had the world premiere of *Four Saints in Three Acts* at the Atheneum, and had done a number of really extraordinary—carried out a number of extraordinary projects that were really way above the level of Hartford in those days, that were really international and exotic in their flavor. If you can imagine, the world premiere of *Four Saints in Three Acts*, with Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas present in the audience. The review that Virgil Thomson wrote for the New York paper—I think the *Herald Tribune*—is really something to read, what he has to say about the museum, and

Austin, and the opera itself, and all of the excitement that went on around it, and so on. He also did something that startled Hartford, because there was a great ball that was held at the museum for the elite of Hartford. It was called the Paper Ball, and Tchelitchew designed the costumes and designed the setting for it, all made out of newspapers. [00:28:04] It was a fantastic event. I was not there, but I certainly was aware of it. People told me about it. I remember the lady who was on the committee for the ball told me one day that the fire marshal had come to call the day, or a day or two before, because her husband, who was in the Hartford Fire Insurance Company, had said to her, casually, "By the way, have you checked with the fire marshal?" She said, "No, we haven't. Why should we do that?" He said, "You are having newspaper all over the place." So anyway, the fire marshal came and took one look at the decorations, and was simply horrified. Just the touch of a match, and this whole place will go up in flames. In any case, they sprayed the decorations with some fire-retardant spray, and they sprayed all the costumes, and the ball went forward. It was a great social event in Hartford at that time, and Hartford society. There was really very much of a society in Hartford in those days when Chick Austin was there. It was quite small, but rather glamorous, and they reacted to something like this with a great deal of enthusiasm. But I'm sure the rest of the city of Hartford, which was very conservative, must have been appalled at the goings-on at the Atheneum in those days. Then, too, Chick began the collection of Baroque pictures, which are now there, and a very important part of the collection. Anyway, when Charles Cunningham went there, this all had to change, because it had been very much a one-man show with Austin as director. [00:30:00]

ROBERT BROWN: Why had Austin, by the way, gone to Florida?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I think the trustees, and I think the mood in the city among the powers that be—the trustees felt, and the mood was, that perhaps too much had gone on. The war years had come along, or were about to come along, just before he went off to Hartford—rather, to the Ringling Museum—and it was just—he was just doing too much. It was sort of out of step with the mood of Hartford, and it was costing too much money. I'm sure that was a factor in it. Chick had bought, had acquired—I don't know how, in some extraordinary way—that remarkable theater, a Rococo-style theater, from the town of Asolo in Northern Italy, and had brought this whole thing back to this country, the interior, and was hoping to install it in the Atheneum. And if it couldn't be installed there, he would install it on the grounds of his house in Hartford. As you know, that theater is now installed at the Ringling Museum, where it's very much of an attraction. But he had daring, he had great flair, he had courage beyond belief to do some of the things that he did, and it all crumbled, finally. Too exotic a person for the city of Hartford. So Charlie had to lay a foundation, you see, for the museum, again, when he came as director. When I joined him, he had struggled along with Mrs. Berger, who was getting on in years, and she was the curator, and there was no one else in that enormous museum. So Mrs. Berger became curator of textiles, costumes and textiles, and I became chief curator. [00:32:03] You can imagine having, across the hall from you, the lady who had been chief curator since 1917, and it is now 1951. Here she is, in her 80s, and here is this youth who has arrived, and is going to wave a magic wand and transform the museum. Well, for a long time, getting on with her was extremely difficult. She was a very testy elderly lady. But we became friends in time, and we got along splendidly. Then she retired from the museum, and really did leave, which was, I suppose, a blessing for her and [laughs] for the rest of us as well. I was involved with all of the Morgan porcelains, and with the Morgan furniture, and with some of the paintings. I remember my first experience at seeing a new picture arrive at the Atheneum. I think it was arriving the day I came to take over, or at least the day I was there being interviewed by Charles Cunningham. That was the large Trojan horse by Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo, which was being trundled up the staircase and into one of the galleries to be hung. Charlie, who had a great flair for Dutch painting, and for pictures in general, and really did react to paintings—he loved them. He was a private collector, and bought some beautiful things for himself. So he was very eager to see the museum develop, and to see paintings come. The Sumner Fund was the principal fund. It yielded about \$75,000 a year at that time. [00:34:00] He was able to make that go quite a long way. Some good pictures came during Charles Cunningham's time.

ROBERT BROWN: Had you known him much before then?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No, I didn't know him at all. We got on very well. It was a happy time. I was there four and a half years, and it was a very happy time with him, although he was not a very good administrator. Here's my second time with a man who was not a good administrator. Charlie was, again, fairly easygoing. He was far more interested in doing research than in pulling that museum together. Here's another situation very much like the Corcoran, of a large building that desperately needed to be pulled together, and to be presented properly. It was comprised of the—or consisted of the Morgan wing, and there was another small wing called the Colt wing, the Colt family in Hartford, and then there was the Avery wing. The Avery wing was a very modern wing, built in the early '30s, when Chick Austin was there. The Morgan wing was more or less in Renaissance style, and the Colt wing was in sort of an Elizabethan style. Then there was the old Atheneum building, which Ithiel Town and A.J. Davis had designed, and that was pure Gothic. The museum did not use any part of the old Atheneum building, except for storage. The public library was installed there, and the upper section, I think we did use partly for storage, too.

ROBERT BROWN: So it was a very rambling, disconnected—[00:36:01]

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Oh, my heavens, it was indeed.

ROBERT BROWN: It should have been pulled together physically? Collections should have been one leading to another.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. There was no hope of doing that, because the director himself, I think, although he—I'm sure he wanted to see something done, but was just unable to see to it that it was done. So we lived with these segments. American art over here, European art over there, but some American art up here, and some European art over there. The storage areas were really deplorable. Simply dreadful. It was sort of a cellar arrangement, where all these things were tucked away. The original curator of the Atheneum, the first curator, curator-director, was a man named Edward Sheffield Bartholomew, who was a sculptor in the 1840s and 1850s. He had gone to Italy, leaving behind the Atheneum to sort of coast along on its own. He died in Italy, and several Hartford citizens decided that they would bring back the remains of the studio, whatever there was in Edward Sheffield Bartholomew's studio in Italy, and they did. They had the sculpture crated and brought back to Hartford, and put underneath in the cellar in the old Atheneum building. There, those crates remained, until the early 1950s. You can imagine that. Over a hundred years. He died, I think, in 1850 or 1851, so for a century, those things were there in storage in the cellar. We finally got some of them out and moved upstairs. This was really a sad situation because of the remarkable collections at the Atheneum, but Cunningham, unable to somehow grasp the extensive nature of the problem, allowed the thing to drift, to a certain extent. [00:38:10] As I say, he was more interested in building the collections, he was more interested in the scholarship end of it, and that he kept up very well indeed. But the rest of it sort of went along as it had gone along, and there was no real staff to cope with that building. There were no—there were two carpenters, but they were both men in their 70s. There was a building superintendent, who was absolutely hopeless. Building superintendent, and sort of assistant to the director. There was Mrs. Berger, who was curator of textiles. There was William G. Wendell, who sort of looked after drawings and prints, but he was there only part-time. There was an education department. There was no conservator on the staff in those years. And that was it. If you can imagine coping with anything that size, and trying to make it into the art museum for Hartford, because now we're at a time when we are trying to reach out more through exhibitions and lectures and events, and attract the public, and develop a membership program. It was extremely difficult to do it, and no money with which to work.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you think that Cunningham thought that things were going pretty well?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No, I think he was concerned. I think he was disturbed by his trustees, a very amiable group of people. Many of them I knew, and knew well. They did take an interest in the museum, and there were one or two collectors among the trustees. But that kind of—a feeling, almost, of exhaustion, as if all this is too much to cope with. Working against that was extremely difficult. [00:40:02]

ROBERT BROWN: Cunningham had given them what they wanted, sort of a rest period after—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I won't say it was a rest period with Charlie Cunningham. It wasn't that, because he really did do a great deal. But he couldn't do, during his time there, what was really needed, and that was to pull it all together, at least not until the end of his career, when architectural planning began, and fund-raising began, and I believe work went ahead on the Atheneum during his time, to change it. The architectural firm of Huntington and Darby [ph], in Hartford, carried out this work. I think it was either complete when Charlie left to go to Chicago, or nearly complete. So in the long run, he did pull it together, in part.

ROBERT BROWN: While you were there, you didn't—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No.

ROBERT BROWN: You said you were trying to work against this exhaustion and—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. We all were. Charlie was, too, and so was I, but he was a rather distracted administrator. You know the kind of person who, if you go and speak to him, and you say, "Look, I want your attention for five minutes," will willingly give you five minutes, and ten minutes, and fifteen minutes, even though he happened to be busy with something else when you interrupted. Well, this was the kind of person that Charles Cunningham was. This was really a very serious flaw, in my opinion, because it meant there was no continuity of thought to go from one problem to the next, without any sort of sustaining of what you had started out to do when you came to work in the morning. That was very bad, I think. Very bad, because it meant that the museum didn't have a kind of sustained flow to it, and constant development. [00:42:03] I remember he got very angry with me once, because I was—I had been assigned the job of installing the small collection of ancient art, which ran along a series of small galleries on one side of the old Morgan Memorial, as it was called, the Morgan wing. The collection wasn't large, but in any case, it was frightful before I started in on this. Dirty. The cases had not been cleaned. It was just indescribable. So I took it all apart, and got all the material put away so we could go to work and paint the walls, and paint the cases, and re-light. Well, it took an interminable length of time to do this, mostly because there was no support staff. I remember Charlie getting very angry with me and

saying, "Why isn't this work done? Why are you taking months to do this?" It was—I said, "Look, we don't have anybody here to help." A lot of the physical work, I know I had to do myself. I know I painted walls, and washed cases, and so on. But I think that burst of anger came about because he himself was so frustrated by the demands that the place made on him, and on me, and on all of us working there. Now, I think the Atheneum's problems are not, by any means, solved to this very day. I think the situation is pretty much what it was 30 years ago, which again is a great tragedy, in spite of the fact that they raised I don't know how much money, and rejuvenated the building in part. To a large extent, it was rejuvenated.

ROBERT BROWN: You were chief curator, but it's during this time that you began developing a special interest, or continuing your special interest, in the decorative arts. [00:44:02]

CHARLES BUCKLEY: In the decorative arts.

ROBERT BROWN: Does that stem from when?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: From my childhood. I told you earlier about going to auction sales with my aunt, and becoming interested in antique shops and secondhand stores, and so forth. I was always interested in furniture, and in ceramics, and silver, and so on. But now, with the Atheneum, and this chance to work with the Atheneum collections, it became very important. I learned a tremendous amount at the Atheneum, just from handling the objects. But you know, it's fascinating, because the collection of American decorative arts was strong in the 17th century because of the Morgan bequest. There was some 18th-century furniture there, but there was practically nothing from the 19th century, except for a room, a period room—in fact, the only period room, I think, in the Atheneum—which was called the Goodwin Parlor, on the second floor of the Morgan Memorial. It was used primarily for the display of Mrs. Berger's costumes. She would regularly set up exhibitions in the Goodwin Parlor. The Goodwin Parlor was handsomely furnished, in the style of the 1870s and the 1880s, but we never thought of the furniture in that room as being serious in terms of the decorative arts. It was an old-fashioned Hartford interior, and that was its—that's the role it played in the Atheneum in those days. I don't recall ever being aware that the furniture was by the Herter Brothers. I know Charles Cunningham never mentioned that to me, if he knew it, or if anybody knew it, at that time. Nobody really looked at the Goodwin Parlor for what it was, and nobody paid any attention to 19th-century decorative art in the Atheneum in those days. [00:46:08]

ROBERT BROWN: That was fairly uncommon anywhere, wasn't it?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Oh, indeed it was. I don't think the Metropolitan—well, I'm sure—I know the Met had things in storage, but there wasn't the great interest that came along, let's say, in 1965 and later. I find, as I look back, that this is a—it's very amusing, because there was that marvelous Herter furniture, I think in its original upholstery, up there in the Goodwin Parlor.

ROBERT BROWN: The parlor was simply sort of a sociological exhibit?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Precisely. Precisely. The one collector that I knew well in Hartford, and kept on good terms with until the very end of his life, was Philip Hammerslough. Phil came into my life almost by accident, turning up in the museum one day and wanting to see a piece of silver in our collection. He and I began to talk about silver, and he said he collected, and I said, "I'd love to come and see what you have." We became very close friends, and his collection was, I won't say, at the very beginning, but it wasn't as developed as it was later on. He taught me everything I know, I think, about silver. He encouraged me to go ahead and do an exhibition of Connecticut silver, and he and I went to all—not all, but many of the historical societies and museums, looking for Connecticut silver by Connecticut makers, and we put the show on. As time went on, I persuaded Phil to put his collection into the Atheneum, or at least a substantial part of it, which he did. [00:48:05] He then became very close to the Atheneum, and I then proposed to Charles Cunningham that he be made a trustee, and he was. Not very happy as a trustee, because he discovered that trustees didn't talk about works of art, necessarily, and certainly not about silver. They were more interested in money. So he was a little disappointed that the trustees didn't go up as a body, every time there was a trustees meeting, to genuflect in front of his cases of silver. [Laughs.] But he was a marvelous man. He was very kind, and terribly enthusiastic about what he was doing, and certainly one of the best authorities on American silver, and built one of the most tasteful collections of American silver. He explored into the 19th century, long before this was the thing to do. He was buying things from the 1820s, the 1830s, even the 1840s.

ROBERT BROWN: What were some of the things you learned from him about silver?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: All the technical information. Marks, and weight, and design. Not that that's a technical matter, but—and who the makers were, and where you could do research on them. All this kind of thing was the kind of thing that he was constantly talking about. And the ability—the opportunity to handle the silver was very exciting. I would go out and see Phil and Minna Hammerslough quite often. He collected not only silver, but some fine furniture. An awfully nice man. I believe I am the person who suggested to Phil that, in the long run, the collection should remain at the Atheneum. [00:50:05] I know, long after I left the Atheneum, I would come

back to this point, that this was the thing he must do in the long run, that it must go to the Atheneum, and it was the only thing to do. It must not be put on the auction block and divided and so forth. Happily, this is how it worked out. The collection did go to the Atheneum.

ROBERT BROWN: Because Hammerslough's collection had a unity within itself?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Well, yes. It was extensive. The quality was very high. It represented so many makers. He didn't just concentrate on Connecticut. The collection really has tremendous breadth to it, and it's interesting also because it has so many varieties of form in it. Not just hollowware, but clasps, and lockets, and wine siphons, and fish servers, and all the smaller things that many collectors might want to overlook. That was all of interest to Hammerslough.

ROBERT BROWN: Through him, did you meet other collectors?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: There weren't many in Hartford. There weren't many. We tried to stimulate collecting by developing a collector's gallery, and both Charlie and I found things in New York for the collector's corner, I think we called it. Collector's corner. That continued for a long time. Maybe it still goes on. I don't know. Many things were bought from the collector's corner.

ROBERT BROWN: You would have things sent up?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Sent up from dealers and sold from the Atheneum, in order to stimulate collecting. It worked quite well. I think many watercolors and drawings and prints and small objects were acquired by people in Hartford. [00:52:00]

ROBERT BROWN: Aside from the Hammerslough things, were you able to do much with their other decorative arts collections? Rehanging or remounting them and so forth?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. The French and German porcelains in particular, because they disturbed me so. They were filthy dirty. They hadn't been cleaned in heaven knows how many years. Hadn't been washed, hadn't been touched. The cases hadn't even been opened. They were lined up, in a kind of—on one wall of a corridor-like arrangement on the second floor of the Morgan Memorial. No one opened the cases. Mrs. Berger didn't do it. She couldn't at her age, and Charlie was too busy. I decided one day that the thing to do was to open those cases and start in on the German porcelains, and simply make my way from object to object to object, until I had washed every single one. I had a volunteer, a lady who came in and helped me. She and I lugged buckets of water upstairs, and set up our tables, and we went to work. I'm sure a ceramics conservator would have been absolutely horrified to see us at work, but we did it, nevertheless, as carefully as we possibly could, and we got off all the dirt, and we cleaned the glass shelves and the cases, and then we painted the backgrounds. Then we reinstalled the porcelain, so that it made some sense. It developed chronologically.

ROBERT BROWN: Which it hadn't before.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Which it hadn't before. It was all just—

ROBERT BROWN: It was not only dirty, it was a jumble.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: It was simply awful, because it was a very, very important collection of German 18th-century porcelain. I know Charlie Cunningham made a great deal out of it. Whenever he talked about the Atheneum, he always referred to the great Morgan porcelains. [00:54:02] Well, heavens, if he was going to do that, the least we could do would be to present them to some style, some feeling, some sensitivity. Then we continued on around, and finally, I think, we did the French porcelains as well, and installed those.

ROBERT BROWN: So you provided—when you wanted something done, you would generally have to do it yourself, but at least you got certain things greatly improved.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: In the physical appearance.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Oddly enough, I think that was very important for me, the personal involvement in the work. It was necessary, because there wasn't anybody there who would work with you. I couldn't trust any of the two elderly carpenters to come and help me. The building superintendent and the assistant to the director was beyond the pale. He wasn't interested at all in any of this. So it was simply finding a volunteer or doing it myself. There it was.

ROBERT BROWN: You mentioned, I guess, during the time you were at Hartford, your acquaintance with several artists. Naum Gabo?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. Charlie and I hit on the idea of doing a series of exhibitions of the work of prominent artists living in Connecticut, and so we decided to do Gabo and Calder together, and we did. Charlie went to Europe toward the end of that period, when the show was being installed.

ROBERT BROWN: When was this, in the mid-'50s?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, '54, '53, somewhere around there. It couldn't have been a more awkward moment to decide to go abroad, because I was left sort of running the museum and trying to install the Calder/Gabo exhibition, getting the pieces moved. [00:56:06] We had a registrar. We had Marjorie Ellis, who had been there since 1917 as well. She knew where everything in the Atheneum could be found, she knew the records, but she was not a trained registrar, working with a packing-room crew. We had no packing-room crew. So I'm not sure how all these things got to the Atheneum, but they did, in any case, all the Gabo sculptures, and Calders, and whatnot. Then came the problem of setting them up. We had the—the largest Calder was the mobile which now hangs in the staircase of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, that enormous mobile, which looks rather small in the Philadelphia staircase area. But in the Atheneum, it was gigantic. I was determined to have that hanging from the skylight of Avery Court, which would hang down, and it would hang just so it came above the head of the great Francavilla sculpture, which stands in the middle of the fountain in Avery Court. Well, to put that thing up was a frightful undertaking, and to make sure that it stayed up there, so that it wouldn't fall and damage the Francavilla. But that was the only place to put it. It had to hang there. It was the only free space where it would move. And getting that assembled, and getting it up, and getting the other Calders assembled and up—they weren't nearly as difficult as that one was.

ROBERT BROWN: In this, were you working with Calder on this?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: We began by working with Calder, but then he went to India, which of course was a great blessing as far as getting the show installed was concerned. [00:58:01]

ROBERT BROWN: Because he could be very interfering?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Well, let me tell you why I think it was a great blessing, in any case. We did work closely with Gabo. Toward the end, we got everything in place, and the sculptures by Gabo, his constructions, were to go in the small galleries on one side of Avery Court, leaving the great space, the big space, for Calder. This was a lesson in how to move diplomatically, for me, because Gabo had been in and out of the museum several times as the installation progressed, and he saw where the sculpture was going. The afternoon of the opening night, he appeared, and he walked all around, and he saw everything, with the lights, and the painted walls, and he saw the Calders. He came up to me and he said, "Well, clearly, you have given preference to Calder." He said, "I have been moved into these little rooms, where my sculpture doesn't show at all." He said, "It looks dreadful." I was absolutely crushed to have Naum Gabo say this to me. I remember, at that moment, I was up on a step ladder, trying to attach a wire, which had been attached to the top of the construction that Nelson Rockefeller owned, and take that wire up to the ceiling, to steady it, so it could be attached to a screw eye in the ceiling, so this sculpture would stand and be absolutely secure. I looked down on Gabo and I thought, I just can't believe what I'm hearing, because I thought it looked absolutely marvelous.

ROBERT BROWN: He was given quite a lot of prominence—[01:00:00]

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I thought so.

ROBERT BROWN: —in a smaller room?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I thought so.

ROBERT BROWN: Equal prominence.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, because his pieces were smaller, and they needed this compression. On the other hand, with Calder, this great swinging things, you had to have them in a large space. He was staying—Gabo was staying in town that night with some people who lived out in West Hartford, and they were having a party beforehand, and I was invited. I went, and I thought, oh, what is he going to say now? He's had time to think about it. Well, anyway—

ROBERT BROWN: He was a pretty outspoken man?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, he was. Anyway, he came downstairs, and I had just come in, and I was standing in the hallway of the house, and he said, "Oh." I can't even begin to imitate his accent. He said, "Oh, Charles, you mustn't worry." He said, "It's just like opening night at theater." He said, "It really looks wonderful." Then he was so excited. He took me around and he told everybody at the party, he said, "He has installed it so beautifully, with such taste." I was treading on air at this point. He and I were really very good friends. I think he was so

tense, and this thing suddenly struck him, that he ought to have had a better place. But anyway, it was a wonderful show that he had, and that was quite exciting.

ROBERT BROWN: Why were you glad that Calder wasn't around?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Because I thought if Calder had been there, perhaps demanding the smaller rooms, and Gabo demanding the larger ones, I would never have been able to get the show installed.

ROBERT BROWN: Cunningham was gone?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Cunningham was gone, and I had to—it was going to be a big opening. It was a black-tie opening. The talk on the exhibition, I believe, was to be given by none other than Wallace Stevens, and I had never met Wallace Stevens, and I had to introduce him. [01:02:01] With all of this going on, introducing the great poet, and Gabo in the audience, feeling slightly touchy and so forth, I thought, if I ever get through this evening, I will retire from the museum field. [Laughs.] Anyway, Stevens was introduced, and the whole thing went forward, and it was fine. No wonder Charlie went to Europe, to get away from all this.

ROBERT BROWN: Because he knew there'd be great turmoil likely?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: [Laughs.] I don't know. I think he just assumed that the staff would cope, and he had to go, and he went. We managed. Then we also did Yves Tanguy and Kay Sage. That didn't produce fireworks. Except one rather entertaining story that had to do with Tanguy. We went down to see—

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ROBERT BROWN: —side two of tape two.

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CHARLES BUCKLEY: I remember we went down to the Tanguy's house in Woodbury, I think it was.

ROBERT BROWN: Woodbury, Connecticut?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Woodbury, yes. It was a day more or less like today, terribly hot, in July, and we were going down to go over certain paintings and so forth. Charlie Cunningham had discovered that his car had to go in the garage. His wife was using the other car. There was no transportation. This is before the days when you could just pick up a phone to get a rent-a-car situation and go off. So he had great difficulty finding a vehicle, and he finally turned up a truck, a panel truck. It said on the side, in great block letters, something about an egg farm. The truck was delivered, and we set off in this thing. I was wearing light, summer, clean clothes, and I discovered there was no seat for me. Charlie said, "Oh, well." He said, "Drag that spare tire up in the front seat, and you can sit on that." Being a dutiful curator, I did. Off we went. I couldn't even see out of the truck. I was absolutely furious, because I thought, this is another example of your inability to organize things. This all ought to have been done the day before. Finally, he said, "You're not comfortable. I'll stop at the roadside furniture place and buy a chair." So we did. We got toward Farmington, and he bought one of these folding chairs, and off we went. Of course, every time he stopped at a stoplight, or for any reason, the chair would fall backwards. [00:02:01]

Needless to say, by the time we got down to the Tanguy's, I was not in a very good humor, and I was getting slightly soiled from having been batted about in this vehicle, and furious with Cunningham, because he had done this so badly. We also got lost, because he didn't allow enough time, and we arrived very late, something like 45, 50 minutes late, at the Tanguy's. Tanguy was pretty—slightly miffed about this, and Kay Sage was trying to calm him down. She said, "You know, when you drove up in the yard, or the driveway, and Yves saw this panel truck, you know what he said?" "No." He said [inaudible]. They then decided that this was so entertaining that we had arrived in this egg truck, they were going to photograph us. So there's a wonderful photograph of Tanguy and Sage and me, standing in front of this van. Anyway, that has nothing to do with the exhibition, but it is amusing. We ended that day, I'll have you know, by trap shooting, clay pigeon shooting, out back of Tanguy's house. He had a terrace, and he had a clay pigeon setup. He made us select a rifle from the case that he had in the house, and we went out and we fired at these ridiculous clay pigeons, on a hot day. It was completely surrealist, this thing. I've thought of that so often, because many years later, this was how Kay Sage took her life, is with one of those rifles. [00:04:00] I keep think—I've often thought back to that day, when we were all out there doing that ridiculous thing.

ROBERT BROWN: What were they like?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: He was very friendly. He was very nice. I first met the Tanguys at Nelly Silvie's [ph] house in Hartford. She had divorced from Jim Silvie and was living alone at that time, and had not remarried yet. She had

a little luncheon party—the Tanguys, and Nelly, and I was the fourth guest. Conversation sort of crept along for a while, and I thought, well, this isn't getting anywhere. We've got to do something that will pep this thing up. So I suddenly said I had been to see a perfectly extraordinary horror movie. Well, this just set Tanguy off, because this was a passion of his. He loved horror movies. He wanted to know what it was, and when I told him, he said, "Oh, I know it well." He described all the terrible scenes in it. We then got on just wonderfully well. We talked about horror films all the way through lunch. That was sort of the beginning of the show, that we would then go ahead and do a show of their work. They were very cooperative, very helpful. They were marvelous people. Very self-contained. Lived in a beautiful house. Were really quite reserved and withdrawn, but awfully nice people.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you do a catalog, extensive catalog?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No, not an extensive catalog. For the Calder/Tanguy show, we did a small catalog, and we did the same for the Tanguy/Sage show. In each case, incidentally, I designed those catalogs. I designed the covers for each of them. And they're rather good. You must—sometime. [00:06:00] They're not bad at all. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: [Inaudible.] You were the chief graphic designer of the Atheneum, too?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Chief graphic designer, too. I was. I was indeed. Yes. We finished that, and then we also did Anni Albers and Josef Albers.

ROBERT BROWN: For that purpose, did you go down and get to know them a bit?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. I just renewed my acquaintance that began in Mexico, on that rooftop. They lived in a house utterly different from the house lived in by the Tanguys. The Tanguy's house was really rather grand. It was a beautiful yellow farmhouse, but handsomely done. Josef and Anni lived on a little street, little circular street. It was called North Forest Circle, if I remember correctly. It was a little ordinary house, a little five-room house. Nothing stylish about it at all. Inside, there was absolutely nothing except white walls, polished floors, and a few, but very few, pieces of furniture. One couldn't imagine lounging around in the Albers' house with your feet up. That would be quite impossible. I think this was Anni's doing more than Josef's. Then he worked. He had a room, or I think he worked down in the converted cellar, where he had his studio. Of course, they were very cooperative and helpful, and were very special people, too.

ROBERT BROWN: Were they very warm to you?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. Oh, yes. We got on very well indeed. I liked them both. They were not, to me, formidable people.

ROBERT BROWN: What did they like to talk about?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Well, there wasn't much in the way of small talk. [00:08:03] They were primarily interested in what they were doing. Anni liked to talk about her own work, and wasn't all that interested in talking about Josef's work. He was always concerned with his pictures, and with the mechanics of making a picture, and so on.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you, in fact, like his work?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, very much. Very much, yeah. I liked all of the artists I worked with, all six of those artists. I thought they were—

ROBERT BROWN: How did their show proceed, the Albers' show at the Atheneum?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I don't know which one came first. I can't remember whether Albers came first, and then the others. I don't remember the sequence here. There was no problem there. It was simply a straightforward installation, and the show opened.

ROBERT BROWN: What was the reaction in the Hartford area to these shows?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Hard to tell. I think it's very hard to tell what the reaction is to any exhibition anywhere, if you're thinking in terms of a public reaction.

ROBERT BROWN: Although you had mentioned the reaction at the Corcoran to the *American Processional* show.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. Yes, but don't forget, that would have been an easier show for the public to like, because we were dealing with a subject exhibition, and now we're dealing with something else entirely. However, the Atheneum had had a long history of dealing with modern art, from a very early period, ever since Chick Austin took over. I don't think that people in Hartford were interested in contemporary art. At that time—here we're talking now about the mid-'50s—while Calder was certainly a real personality, and so was Gabo, not

that many people were aware of Yves Tanguy. [00:10:06] He was known to a select group of dealers in New York, a few collectors, and known abroad, but not widely known in this country, and certainly not Kay Sage, his wife. I think Josef Albers was beginning to be known, but not the way it was in the '60s, when Albers became a real hero for a time. So that was sort of the end of exhibiting, or my involvement, with the American artists who lived in Connecticut. The one big show I did on my own, which was a frightful undertaking, was an exhibition which reviewed 110 years of the Atheneum's history. Charlie simply dumped that whole problem in my lap.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this something that had been cooking for some time? The trustees liked the idea?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. Well, it was the 110th birthday of the Atheneum. It was 1952. Something had to be done. So we conceived the idea of trying to show the Atheneum all the way from the days of Ithiel Town and A.J. Davis, right straight up to 1952, in terms of the collection, what had been acquired over the years, and then to try to do a history of the Atheneum. Not, again, in depth. I know I wrote and wrote and wrote and wrote after doing vast research into the history of the Atheneum, and produced a, I don't know, maybe 15 or 20-page catalog. A leaflet, really, more than a catalog, which is still, I think, used as the basic history of the Atheneum, almost 30 years later. Goodness knows it needs to be done away with, and researched, and corrections made, and new material added. [00:12:05]

ROBERT BROWN: But you were given at least trustee support on that kind of project?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Oh, yes. All the trustees supported the exhibitions, yeah. It's just that I think they let—they sat quietly in their chairs and let Charles Cunningham run the museum, which was, in one sense, very good. I'm sure appreciated by him. In another sense, not so hot, because there were all these problems of, where will money come from? Charlie could not do that on his own, and run the museum at the same time, and do all the other things he was involved in.

ROBERT BROWN: In the course of your assembling the history exhibition, did you pull things out that had been relegated to storage and the like? Were there—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: —a great many, in that sense at least, discoveries made by you?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Well, yes. Marjorie Ellis, the registrar, was very helpful, and Mrs. Berger, the former curator, was very helpful. Everybody worked on it, but it was basically, more or less, my responsibility to get it all pulled together. There wasn't much time to do it. I'm not sure it was the most brilliant exhibition in the world, but at least it did something, because it did bring the history of this institution together, the first 110 years of it.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you allowed to make at least clean-cut displays and freshly painted—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Oh, yes, we did a lot with that, because I was more and more interested in how you presented something, and really very concerned about how something would look. Installation became extremely important to me during those Atheneum years.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you able to at least perhaps travel, but even look at publications or illustrations of how other people were—to get ideas for installations? [00:14:02]

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, sure. I worked with Henry Darby, who was the partner in the firm of Huntington and Darby, the architects who ultimately did the building over. Henry was a great personal friend, and he and I would talk about installation and how things could look. No one in the museum cared especially about this. I don't think Charlie was all that intrigued by it. Henry was a good ally, and was very much involved in the museum, and had a good sense about where you—how you could do things practically, in a practical way.

ROBERT BROWN: At that point, what do you think your aesthetic in terms of exhibitions or display boils down to?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Oh, I'm sure it was very much related to the whole Bauhaus, clean-cut look. The precious object, presented in a precious way.

ROBERT BROWN: In a neutral setting?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: In a neutral setting. I think that was the common style of setting up exhibitions in those days.

ROBERT BROWN: No, what later was called, environmental—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No, nothing like that. No, no. That's unfortunate, I think, because there were so many more

possibilities that I didn't know—really wasn't aware of, and how to cope with them.

ROBERT BROWN: But you were having the added experience of actually carrying through completely many of these installations?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. Of necessity, you see, because the fact that the director was busy with other things.

ROBERT BROWN: But isn't this analogous to the value of your experience as a painter in studying painting?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, I think so.

ROBERT BROWN: You've been through the whole process.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yeah. Now, I was also involved in the acquisition of a number of works of art. Not a great many, because we didn't make a great many, but I remember I was very much involved in the buying of the Delacroix Turkish lady—*Turkish Women Bathing*, which we bought. [00:16:02] Let's see, where did that come from? Was it Knoedler, or from Rosenberg & Stiebel? Rosenberg & Stiebel, I think. I remember going with Charles Cunningham to see that picture. We went to New York fairly often together, did the dealers, and I remember we paid \$30,000 for that great, great Delacroix, which is one of the most beautiful pictures by him, I think, in this country. I bought only a couple of things on my own. I am directly responsible for the Stuart Davis landscape that is there, which we bought for, I think, 50—a little over \$5,000, which came up from the Downtown Gallery. I remember John Marin Jr. brought the picture up on the train, and said he would stay around until the board meeting was over to make sure it was bought. If it wasn't, he'd take it back. So we bought that. Another picture that I bought, which was of tremendous personal interest to me, was the painting by Joseph Wright of Derby, *The Old Man and Death*. I don't know whether you know that picture or not. This is—I thought it was a superb picture. My thesis was moving ahead by leaps and bounds at this point, and that picture was available. Came on the market, was in private hands. Had been sent down to London to be cleaned, or to be reframed or something, and the owner decided to sell it, and I think the owner got in touch with me. Because at that point, I think I knew more about Wright of Derby than anybody in the world. This very [laughs] minor subject. They said they were going to sell it, and they named a price that was so absurd, I can't even believe it. [00:18:01] So I went to Charles Cunningham and said, "Why don't we buy it?" It came out to, I think, \$650, delivered, transportation charges included, to the Atheneum. That wonderful, very important painting by Wright of Derby on the early 1770s. So I consider that a great triumph. I think Charlie was amazed that such a picture was available at that price. I was so stricken by guilt and so forth that before we bought it, I wrote to Arthur Thorpe, who was then director of the museum in Derby, to see if Derby Museum would like to buy it. I told him where it was, and how much it cost, and so forth, and he wrote back and said they weren't going to buy it, which I thought was absolutely madness not to buy it for the Derby Museum, the town where Joseph Wright had lived. So it's in Hartford now. I was involved in other acquisitions, but those are particularly important. Well, then—do you have any more you want to say about the Atheneum?

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. You weren't—Cunningham was more involved in acquisitions than you were? That was only one facet of his work [ph]?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Well, you know, very small staff, one curator, and the director, and Charlie loved the dealer world. He was passionately devoted to visiting the dealers in New York. I can understand this, because he loved works of art so deeply.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you get to know some of the dealers quite well at this time?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Oh, yes. He took me to all the dealers and introduced me, and always involved me in the discussion of pictures. That was always done—or objects. He never left me out.

ROBERT BROWN: Perhaps you could discuss some of those you got to know particularly well at that time. [00:20:03]

CHARLES BUCKLEY: At this time, I came to know the people at Rosenberg & Stiebel, Eric Stiebel and Saemy Rosenberg, who was Jakob Rosenberg's brother, as you probably know. We saw wonderful pictures there. As I think back on it, it's only a comparatively short time ago, but what was available. Never mind the price, just what could have been bought at that time through a dealer like Rosenberg and Stiebel. Beautiful pictures. But we didn't have the cash to buy as aggressively as we would liked to have done. We knew the people at Knoedler. It was Ms. Claire [ph], whom I remember very well, and Bill Davidson, who is the father of Peter Davidson, who is a dealer in New York now. Bill Davidson, I got to know very, very well. There were a couple of other people whose names escape me now, but Knoedler was always a wonderful place to go, and it was a nice, old-fashioned firm, and the people were gentlemanly, and kind, and interested in what you were doing, and willing to show you good pictures, and courteous, and all that. The nice things. You weren't made to feel as if you were either going to have to buy right on the spot or somebody else would get the picture. That was very nice. We knew the people

at Buildingstein [ph]. They were very kind, too, and helpful. Let's see, who else?

ROBERT BROWN: These large, established dealers were, then, fairly—they didn't pressure you?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No.

ROBERT BROWN: What about downtown? What was that like?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: The Downtown Gallery?

ROBERT BROWN: With Edith Halpert.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: She was then on, I think, maybe 54th Street, somewhere—52nd, 54th, somewhere there. [00:22:02] I can't remember her address. She was marvelous. She was a very tough cookie when she wanted to be, and could be very snappish. But I got to the point where I got on just splendidly with Edith Halpert. We were on a first-name basis for a long time. She was just fine.

ROBERT BROWN: What did it take to get on well with her?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I think buying a picture helped. Eventually, you could get into the back room. If you liked pictures, if you liked American pictures, and particularly if you liked her artists, with genuine enthusiasm, then you were okay. That was very important for Edith Halpert. We saw Victor Spark, a great deal of him. He was a remarkable dealer, and he's still going strong.

ROBERT BROWN: What do you mean by remarkable?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Remarkable in that he went anywhere at all to look at pictures. Anywhere. Attics, cellars, historical societies. Wherever a picture might be available, he would go. He always carried his flashlight. He bought American pictures probably as early as anybody, and he had very, very interesting American pictures, and European pictures, too. He dealt from his apartment. He was really a private dealer, he and his lovely wife. There was always something special at Victor Sparks, and something cheap, too. You'd find all kinds of things. Some of the pictures weren't any good. Some were sort of so-so, and others were just first-rate. He was a fine dealer. I can't think where else we went, but we went around town to some of the dealers who dealt in medieval and Renaissance objects, and one in particular whose name won't come to mind, and who dealt from his apartment. [00:24:12] I can't remember who it is.

ROBERT BROWN: What about the decorative arts? Were you making any purchases in the decorative arts?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No. [Laughs.] We bought—well, we bought certain small Renaissance objects, or Baroque objects. I remember once, Charlie allowed me to spend the magnificent sum of \$75 in London, in the early '50s, on a boxwood, German boxwood, carving. Just beautiful. I was buying from very good dealers in older material. It came out to \$75, more or less. The kind of thing that you would pay a thousand for now.

ROBERT BROWN: Had you left Hartford, then, on good terms with Charles Cunningham?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Oh, the best. Absolutely the best. No, no, I always got on well with Charlie, and with his first wife, Ellie, Eleanor Lamont, and with his second wife, Elinor Gregory, who had been his secretary at the Atheneum, and who he married after Eleanor Lamont Cunningham died. I kept up my friendship with the Cunninghams right through to the end. Then I went to the Currier, because I thought there's no reason in the world why I couldn't run my own museum. I felt I had been doing it, to some extent, at Hartford from time to time, when Charlie went away. I was in charge of the museum. I thought the Currier was a splendid opportunity, and I came up and talked with Gordon Smith about the possibility of being interviewed by the trustees, and he said, "Fine. [00:26:01] We'll see to it that you are." So I got on the list.

ROBERT BROWN: Smith was leaving or—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. Gordon Mackintosh Smith. He was going to be the director of the Albright Gallery, before it was known as Albright-Knox. I was interviewed by the full board of trustees, and in due course, I was hired, so I came to Manchester. Gordon had been there nine years, and I was there nine and a half.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you know much about the Currier before that?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No, practically nothing. Practically nothing. I was very impressed by what Gordon had bought, and the Currier had a certain amount of money that could be spent. The opportunity to take over and to do with the Currier pretty much what I wanted to do, what I thought was proper to do with that gallery, there it was, so there was no reason in the world not to go. The board seemed to me to be comprised of very intelligent, if rather conservative, people. The president of the board was a man called Peter Woodbury, who came from a

very old New Hampshire family. He was a federal judge. He was the presiding judge of the first federal court of appeals here in Boston, and he commuted. He was an absolutely ideal board president. He was simply marvelous, because he let me run the museum, and I went to him only when I had problems, and then he would help me solve them. The end result of that, the outcome of that, was that I went to him often, because I wanted to talk with him about things, and he was always helpful. He never encroached, but he always gave excellent advice. [00:28:02] The rest of his trustees were very much the same. It was the best board I had had any experience with up to that time, and as I look back now, it's the best board I ever had, was the Currier board.

ROBERT BROWN: When you came to Manchester, what did you think could be done with it?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: By this time, my interest in decorative arts was very strong, and my interest in American painting had developed considerably. So what I wanted to do then was to continue what the Currier had set out to do, and that was to acquire, selectively, fine-quality European pictures. Then I wanted to add American pictures and American decorative art. As I saw the Currier with those three areas being strong, I didn't care particularly about developing any drawings or prints at that stage of the game, or moving in any other direction, such as buying European decorative arts. So I set out to do that, and I bought a number of European pictures. The first picture I bought was the Joos van Cleve, *Holy Family*, which had been in the Holford [ph] Collection in England, and is still, I think, the most beautiful Joos van Cleve in this country, to my way of thinking. It's a variant of the holy family subject, which you see in the Metropolitan. He repeated that subject a number of times, but I really think this is almost the most beautiful. Certainly, I think it's equal to the Met's picture by Joos van Cleve. I bought a—I have to think for a minute, because I got—a Spanish still life. [00:30:06] The artist is unknown. A 17th-century Spanish still life, which is sort of in the general area of Zurbarán, but it is not by Zurbarán. It's a long, horizontal picture. It's, I think, a very important still life, by an as yet unidentified Spanish painter.

ROBERT BROWN: So you wanted to purchase first-rate European paintings, American paintings, and American decorative arts.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: It's a rather small, but elegant, building.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. I thought that the Currier's collection would develop fast enough if one tried to get top-quality things, and to resist the secondary material which might be offered as gift, or might be tempting on the market because it was less expensive.

ROBERT BROWN: And your trustees sustained you in your program?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Oh, yes. Peter Woodbury was adamant. He simply insisted that that be the way the museum developed. He was very concerned about that.

ROBERT BROWN: And backed you in your resistance to inferior things.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I think they would have been very critical of me had I allowed all sorts of things to slip into the collection. I bought, also, the Jan van Goyen landscape, which I'm very pleased with, and the Tiepolo, which is a study. The Giovanni Battista Tiepolo study for a ceiling in a house in Verona. Then, in the American field, I bought the—one more European picture I want to mention, because I'm quite proud of it, and that was the very beautiful and very large Rouault called *The Wounded Clown*, painted, I think, in 1938. [00:32:08] It's one of the big Rouaults. I bought that from a collection that had been formed by a man named Keith Warner, who had lived in New York for a long time, and had then moved to a town just across from Hanover, Vermont. I never remember the name of it. Hanover—

ROBERT BROWN: Norwich?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Norwich. In Norwich, Vermont, just across from Hanover, New Hampshire. Keith Warner had taken his Picassos, and his Brocks, and his Myal [ph] and so forth, and gone up there. Here was this spectacular Rouault. I had come to know him rather roundabout way, and he was a very brusque man. We talked, and I said, "I wish you'd let the whole collection come down to the Currier." He said, "I will not. I have no intention of letting it go down there." He said, "I don't even know your museum." I said, "Why don't you stop and see it?" "Well, someday I will come down that way." That was that. Anyway, within a matter of months, Keith Warner died, and his—I got in touch with his widow again and said, "I hope you will consider allowing the collection to come to the Currier." Well, she didn't know. One day, I had a call, or a letter, from her. She said, "On my way back from Boston, I stopped, and I was very impressed. I had no idea you were talking about a serious museum. Since I'm going to be away this winter, I would be delighted to have you take the whole collection." So down it came. We had a wonderful time installing that. I said to her, later on, I said, "Edna, if you ever sell the Rouault, will you please give us first refusal?" She thought that was rather amusing. She said, "Oh, do you think you could afford to buy it?" [00:34:03] I said, "Well, try us. Try us sometime. Let's see."

Anyway, a year or so went by, and one day she telephoned and said, "The Rouault is about to be sold to Knoedler's. They're coming up to make a final decision. But since you asked me, I'll let you have first refusal, provided you can make up your mind in a hurry, and can pay the price." She said, "It's \$110,000. That's the price that Knoedler will pay. You have to decide right away." I said, "Give me 10 days." "No. You must decide immediately." I said, "Give me a week." "No. You must decide within two days, because they're coming." So I got in touch with the board, individually, and they met. They said, "Fine, let's buy it." So we bought it. I called her up, said, "We bought the picture." She was rather startled by this. [They laugh.] She didn't think we would come up with the money, and so fast, but we did. I remember, sometime after that, I was in New York, in the Whitney Museum, and I ran into Coe Kerr, who was then president of Knoedler. He said, "Well, you certainly lopped off my head with the Rouault." I was slightly ruffled by that, because I didn't mean to be nasty to him. I simply said, "Well, there we were. The picture was available, and we had to do it." That's how we acquired that.

ROBERT BROWN: In Manchester, you really had a committed group.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. This is what was so nice about them. They could act. They were not all in love with the Rouault, or with modern pictures, by any means, but they would go ahead with it, as long as they knew it was fine, or you could convince them that it was fine. Then, in the American field, I bought the Cropsey, and the Thomas Birch, and the Martin Johnson Heade, the Childe Hassam watercolor. [00:36:13] I bought the Edward Hopper, the O'Keefe, the Marsden Hartley, and other pictures as well. They were all available for relatively modest amounts of money at that time. The Martin Johnson Heade, which I think is a pretty fine picture, was bought for \$2,500, from a little picker who came in one day with a picture under his arm. This is how we proceeded. Then, also, in the decorative arts field, I bought a good deal of the furniture that is there and on view now.

ROBERT BROWN: Through dealers, mainly?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Through dealers, yes. The most dramatic acquisition, I suppose, it was the great Dunlap Chest-on-chest-on-frame, which I bought from Sachs in New York. We paid \$10,500 for that piece of furniture, which everybody thought was absolute madness, but here was—I said, "No, this is the great Dunlap object. You've got to buy it." Being a New Hampshire cabinetmaker, of course. When I saw it on view earlier this summer at the National Gallery, in Wendy Cooper's exhibition there, I was absolutely, again, dazzled by its beauty. I thought we had done exactly the right thing to buy it. Anyway, the Currier was a one-man band. I had a secretary. I had a very good building superintendent, whose job was merely keeping the building in order. [00:38:00] I had a good curator in Melvin Watts, who had been there for years and years. I had no registrar. I had no membership secretary. I finally had someone who handled education.

ROBERT BROWN: Was that a fairly important aspect of the museum? Children tours [ph] and—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: It had begun to be. This whole question of museum education is one that, I regret to say, puts me to sleep faster than anything that I know. I accept that it has to be done, that it's something that must be done, I suppose, but I have never liked the way in which it is done, or is being done. I've always hated it, and I've always felt very sorry for all those kids being dragged around through museums. If anything will kill a joy in works of art faster than that, I don't know what it is. But anyway, we took someone on the staff to develop education, and primarily to develop contacts with the schools in Manchester, which had been totally nonexistent during the Gordon Smith regime, because Gordon wasn't interested in education, especially.

ROBERT BROWN: You had, primarily, a blue-collar community. It was an immense, aging New England mill town.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Oh, yes. Yes. I think that this is one of the rather sad aspects, I think, of the Currier in Manchester, because there is this museum, with so many first-rate works of art, and then there is the community at large. I know Gordon found it difficult to reach the community. [00:40:01] I found it very difficult to reach them. We tried and tried and tried. We would try to work with the French community, the Greek community, and it simply didn't come off.

ROBERT BROWN: How would you try? You would have open house?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: For instance, we were trying to encourage—at least when we decided to reach out a little bit from the museum, we wanted to encourage the Greek community to involve itself, and we arranged a large exhibition of Greek island embroideries and costumes that had come from the Benaki Museum in Athens. Beautiful show, marvelous material. We set it up with great style. We worked ourselves to the bone putting that material up so that it was vivid and meaningful. We managed to get some of the leaders in the Greek community interested, particularly the priest of one of the Greek churches, who helped. We had a tremendous Greek turnout the evening of the show, but then it ended. This was also true of the French community. You would do something that was specifically French in meaning, or in French leaning, and it would not, somehow, do anything beyond that particular moment. This, I think, is true even now. I think this reaching out in an ethnic sense is very, very difficult. It doesn't really come off the way it should. One always thinks that if you prime the

pump, and if you show people that the museum is a human kind of place, and that you're interested in their culture, that they will come and be interested in the culture of other people. Well, that doesn't work at all in my view. It hasn't so far. It didn't in Manchester. That is not to say that we didn't have people coming on their own, regularly, from those ethnic groups and because they were interested. [00:42:02] We certainly did. We had many French Canadians who came, but didn't announce themselves at the door as being French Canadian, or Greeks as Greeks. They came as people, which of course, is the obviously—is the obvious way to do it. Anyway, the education department went along, and the person who ran it did a pretty good job on the whole, and there we were.

ROBERT BROWN: But the herds of schoolchildren going through the museum aren't—was neither here nor there, right? As far as you can tell.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Not from my mind, no. No, I'm not at all—I do think there is a role for education in a museum, but I think we have not—we haven't really come to grips with this yet. So much emphasis is put on children, or high school students, and comparatively little for the adult population, even today.

ROBERT BROWN: You think that education in the sense of at least maybe developing gradually an appreciation and excitement about art?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. Well, I think—

ROBERT BROWN: Among adults?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Sure. Take a small example. We've never yet licked the problem of how to develop a label for a museum object. What should be on the label, how high it should be from the floor, or where it should be in relation to the picture. I went to the Metropolitan the other day to see the American wing, and I was highly entertained to see an older man step up on one of the platforms and walk in a little bit, so that he could read the label, which was four feet back from the edge of the platform. He couldn't see it, poor man. [00:44:01] He wanted to find out what the object was. His glasses wouldn't accommodate him. And so on.

ROBERT BROWN: What do you think should be on a label, by and large? What do you think should be most visible?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I'm not sure exactly what it should be. It's a long and very involved subject, I think. I'm stunting now, like I'm being critical of label-writing, but I think I have not found the definitive way of handling this. I think if someone walks up to a work of art, they would like to know what is this thing, first of all. The vast majority of people are not sure whether they're looking at a painting, oil painting, watercolor, drawing, print. It would help to say what that is, first of all. It might help to say that it's on canvas or on panel.

ROBERT BROWN: What about a subject? Should that be explained?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: It might help.

ROBERT BROWN: If it's got a subject.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: It might help, yes. It would help to say something. I don't think a label should run on forever, but some of them, I think, are so brief they're absolutely without meaning, as far as the general public is concerned. I think this is where you start to educate people, is with the label, how you present the object, and then how it looks. At what height does it hang, how is it illuminated, how comfortable are you in front of the picture or work of art, et cetera. I think, far too often, people don't really care about this. Curators are arch offenders, in my book, on this matter. They are indifferent, by and large. [00:46:01] I think they should not be. It takes, I think, common sense, more than anything else, to know how you want to show something. But then, I think, a work of art which is surrounded with all sorts of gimmicky things, explaining it, that's frightful, too. I think, first of all, you want to walk up to the object, and there it is, and you're not even aware, perhaps, that there is information about it. Then, in some subtle way, whatever that way is, you discover there is information, after all, in close proximity. Then you learn something about what you're looking at. Anyway, that—the Currier experience was a very, very happy one for me. I really enjoyed it enormously. I would have stayed at the Currier long beyond 1964, had it not been for the fact that the board president, Peter Woodbury, whom I greatly admire, declared that he would not be at all interested in seeing the museum go out on a fund drive in order to enlarge it, which I felt it needed desperately in 1964. Once he had made this clear to me, I thought, well, if that is how it's going to be, then I really can't remain. I've got to start figuring out how to get away.

ROBERT BROWN: Beginning to be dreadfully crowded?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. We need—

ROBERT BROWN: Very many things had to be kept in storage?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. We needed space in which to work. There was no space. We needed additional personnel. [00:48:00] We had to have a registrar. We needed a proper building superintendent. We needed to develop this end of the museum. The library, which was useful, was stored in another building, on the grounds, but still in another building. So therefore, I felt we had to go—I had gone so far as to get Henry Darby, from the firm of Huntington and Darby, to come up from Hartford and to propose a way in which the museum could develop physically, just so the board could get something to think about. Not that I intended him—that firm to be the architects, but at least it would begin to get the board thinking. It did, but then Peter Woodbury said, "No, we're not going to go to all this trouble." He said, "I won't do it." If he wouldn't do it, that was the end of it.

ROBERT BROWN: He gave no reason? He was just—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Too much trouble. He was getting on a little bit, although he wasn't an old man, and he simply didn't want to be bothered. He had been used to having the *Currier* run like a Swiss watch, and that's what he wanted. So in that sense, he was a bad board president, because he didn't see the future, or wouldn't see it. The *Currier*—the whole town of Manchester has suffered terribly from the dominance of that newspaper, the *Manchester Union Leader*, and Mr. William Loeb, because it has done so much damage, I think, to the whole community, to people growing up, reading no other paper but that one. They become hostile toward anything like the arts, just by a process of osmosis, reading the terrible stuff that appears.

ROBERT BROWN: Loeb was already in there by the time—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Oh, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: What was his attitude toward the arts?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I think he probably thought they were perfectly silly. [00:50:00] I don't think the *Currier* meant anything to him at all. I never met the man. I wrote to him once and had a reply, which was perfectly proper. I sent him an exhibition catalog and suggested that this was the kind of exhibition—this was an exhibition that he would probably enjoy. It was an exhibition of 19th-century American art. I didn't mean to offend him. I sent him the catalog of 19th-century American art, but I thought, well, let's try this and see what happens. Perhaps he'll come to the museum, and let's see if he enjoys it. It was a beautiful show. I didn't arrange it. It was a prepared show, and it had been traveling around the country. Well, he didn't do that, but he sent a reporter, who came on opening night, and who ridiculed the opening, the people who were there, and gave them front-page coverage on the Sunday edition of his newspaper, which was frightful. Just dreadful.

ROBERT BROWN: What did they say, this was very effete or—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Effete, elite.

ROBERT BROWN: Waste of money?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Waste of money. Oh, it was a perfectly frightful article, written in a funny kind of way. It was meant to be amusing. Ha-ha, here are these silly people involved in the arts. That taught me a lesson about that man and his paper.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you find that that—your later years there, that that newspaper's effect and other signs of hostility were beginning to—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I don't think it ever—it hasn't really harmed the gallery as such. What it has done is to, I think, do a great deal of damage to people growing up in Manchester, and people who have read no other newspaper but that one. They have always taken press releases from the museum, and they have printed them just as they have come from the *Currier*, but still, that isn't enough. [00:52:00] If you have a newspaper that is constantly pressing down on a community, you do a lot of damage.

ROBERT BROWN: One last thing. You had mentioned you had involvement with the League of Arts and Crafts, the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: The League of New Hampshire Arts and Crafts, as it was known, and I did that through David Campbell. David Campbell, at that time, was director of the league, and I went on his board, and in fairly short order, I became president of the league.

ROBERT BROWN: About when was this, 1950-something?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, the late '50s.

ROBERT BROWN: You had come in 1955 to Manchester?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Probably about 1958.

ROBERT BROWN: Under Campbell, the league was a very active thing, wasn't it?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Very. Very. He was terribly interested in the museum. He had very high standards of craftsmen, and was a good leader.

ROBERT BROWN: How was he securing high-standard work from New Hampshire people?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: He encouraged many craftsmen to move to New Hampshire, and he would always encourage young craftsmen to develop. He just helped them in so many ways to improve their work. But then he became so involved in so many things. He was trained as an architect. He went to New York. He designed the Museum of Contemporary Crafts. He worked very closely with Mrs. Vanderbilt Webb, and so forth. In any case, I worked closely with him, and I worked closely with the league, and I gave, I think, many league craftsmen an opportunity to show their work at the Currier.

ROBERT BROWN: Was that considered a pretty good outlet for their showing?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Oh, yes. They were delighted when they could show at the museum, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Who would come to such exhibitions at the Currier?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Many people. [00:54:00] My theme, all the way along, from the moment I went to the Currier, was that the Currier Gallery of Art is not solely a Manchester institution. It is the art museum for the state of New Hampshire, basically for the southern half. I said that over and over and over again, and I think it's in print, many times, too, in my annual reports. That we must always look beyond Manchester. That was not our constituency alone. The whole state was. Therefore, I tried always to appeal to the state.

ROBERT BROWN: At Dartmouth, there was no comparable—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No. Jan van Mark [ph] wasn't there at that time.

ROBERT BROWN: There was no comparable scale of operation to what they have today?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Nothing, and the little gallery over at Keene wasn't even in existence when I was starting out to make the Currier a real state-oriented museum. We did a lot with music, a lot with lectures. We tried always to present the best, and I think we did. I think we did some remarkable things in the realm of music. Betty Allen, for example, who is now such a personality at the Marlboro Festival, came and sang. And the Wallfishes [ph], who went down to Smith College, were there. Alfred Deller, the famous countertenor, came and sang. People of that degree of eminence were there.

ROBERT BROWN: You were drawing upon a wide range of audience, then?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Because the university down near the coast didn't yet have much of an art center or anything.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No. But we never compromised on the quality of our musical programs. We never did anything that would entertain, as such. It was always serious music. The best music. [00:56:00] So anyway, it was with a great deal of reluctance that I decided that my time at the Currier had just about run its course.

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ROBERT BROWN: —this is September 19, 1980. The third interview, in Boston, Massachusetts, with Charles E. Buckley. Robert Brown, the interviewer.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT BROWN: Mr. Buckley, you went to St. Louis, to the City Art Museum there, as its director, in 1964. What led you to go there? Could you describe the series of events that may have—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: It was really almost by accident, I suppose, or maybe by design on the St. Louis end, but accident on my side. I had been at the Currier then almost nine and a half years. I was very happy at the Currier. However, I came to realize that the building had to expand physically. We simply couldn't go on the way we were. This was in 1964 now that this thought occurred to me, that something drastic had to occur. I remember

talking to a number of the trustees about it, and not getting much reaction. Finally, I went—I asked for an appointment with the president of the board, Peter Woodbury, who was an excellent president, and who was a federal judge here in Boston. He was the presiding judge of the—whatever it was, first or second circuit court. First, I think it was. A remarkable man. A very intelligent and supportive man. However, he was not remotely interested in seeing the museum go off on a fund drive. We talked in his office, and I vividly remember that Peter Woodbury said, "No, not as long as I'm board president. [00:02:02] I'm not going to exert myself and go through all that." He was very firm about it, and that was disheartening, of course, because the Currier, I thought, was at the moment in its career when it could have expanded, and done so quite easily. It was a good time in the economy and all that. So I came away feeling very downcast about that, and I suppose that interview, or discussion, with Peter Woodbury took place in the late winter of 1964. Well, in any case, in late April, or maybe early May, I had a telephone call from the man who was then president of the board of the City Art Museum. His name was Henry Flager. Mr. Flager talked to me about St. Louis and the possibilities and so on. It was—it came about that I would go out later in May and have a talk, which I did.

ROBERT BROWN: How had they heard of you?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I think, as I reflect on this now, I think that after that rather ill-fated interview with Peter Woodbury, that I probably—in fact, I know I went down and talked to John Coolidge at the Fogg about what my future might be, and to alert him to the fact that the time had come when I felt I would be leaving the Currier. Had to leave, because I couldn't put up with this anymore, this refusal, or reluctance, to go ahead with what was so important. I presume, then, that Henry Flager probably talked to John Coolidge, and that is exactly how it came about. Because I remember, in talking with John, he had mentioned the fact that St. Louis was about to fall vacant, the post there. In any case, I went out to St. Louis in May and had a very nice time with Henry Flager, and with other members of the board. [00:04:00] Somehow, I knew, even after that first interview, that that job would come my way, and I thought, oh my, I'm not exactly sure I want to uproot myself and move to Middle West. But in any case, I did. I agreed to go. I resigned from Currier in August of that year, and went to St. Louis on the first of November. That was the beginning of a very long and very happy period, and I think a very productive one for me, and I think for the museum.

ROBERT BROWN: Was Mr. Flager a considerable art patron himself, or what—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Not really, no. He was something of a collector. If you sort of put something in his path, he might buy it, provided it wasn't too expensive. He didn't really want to put lots of money into works of art, and he didn't think of himself as a collector. He was a lawyer, and a man who had inherited, I think, a considerable amount of money. At least he was very, very comfortably off. He was a widower. His first wife had been very active in St. Louis, in many ways, and he was more or less at loose ends. The fact that he was then the chairman of the board was important to him. We got on extremely well right from the start and during the rest of Henry's life. We were very good friends. He was not a man who was universally admired in St. Louis. People seemed to think that he was rather bumbling and ineffective, and was not a member of the absolute top echelon in the business world and the leadership world of St. Louis. People treated him in a rather patronizing way. There were a number of people who, unfortunately, were almost rude, even in his presence. [00:06:02] My view of Henry Flager, as I think back on it, is that he was a very good board president. He did everything he possibly could to support me in the early stages of my time as director. He was determined to see the museum move ahead. I give him very high marks for what he accomplished. I say this now to many of my St. Louis friends when we talk about the museum during my time, and they still rather laugh. They think this is terribly funny that I would see Henry in this particular light, but I do. He was interested in art, and interested in having the museum be absolutely first-class. That's what he wanted. He didn't always know how to go about it. But this was what he wanted to see accomplished. He had a certain tenacity about him that I greatly admired. You'll remember there was a rather famous terracotta sculpture at the museum, an Etruscan figure of Diana. It had been acquired during Perry Rathbone's time, and it was a much published terracotta. I remember the first time I was aware of it was in seeing a full page in the *Illustrated London News*. It was considered to be a great object at that time. But anyway, there was some cloud of suspicion that suddenly appeared on the horizon, and Henry Flager decided that he, personally, would follow this thing through, and prove that sculpture to be either right or wrong. So against a lot of opposition, he did exactly this, and he involved himself in the whole process of thermoluminescence, which was then just becoming a tool with which to examine ancient, especially ancient, objects, and more recent ones as well. [00:08:07] He corresponded with the various people in England, and in this country, and he kept nibbling away at that, and finally he got that whole problem straightened out, that the sculpture was definitely wrong. He then pursued the dealer from whom it had been acquired, and he got a certain amount of money back from the dealer. It was difficult for me to do, because it was an object acquired by one of my predecessors, and I was brand-new on the job, and I simply didn't have the time to worry that thing through, you see, whereas it was the kind of little legal problem that Henry, with his particular mind, would enjoy tackling.

ROBERT BROWN: It's not only supporting generally, but he would really tackle particular things himself.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: He would. He somehow cleared the museum of rather shady reputation at that moment, in terms of that object. I don't think he ever got enough credit for that.

ROBERT BROWN: It's a city art museum, so what was the role?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: It's a city art museum, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: What was the board's role?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: The board had a curious name. It was called the administrative board of control, and there were nine members on it, and they all came from the city. Now, even in 1964, the county of St. Louis was already very large, and it surrounded the city of St. Louis on three sides, a great sort of arc all the way around, from the river on the north to the river on the south. In the middle of all that, the center of that sea form, was St. Louis itself. The board represented the city. Money came to the board from city property tax, and the museum was administered by the board, so to speak, or at least the policies were established, as a regular board of trustees would do. [00:10:06]

ROBERT BROWN: Did it have to include certain city officials?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No. Oddly enough, it didn't. There was a lot of discussion about whether the mayor and the controller should be ex officio on the board and so forth. Henry took the position that if we could keep the politicians at arm's length, so much the better, and let the museum go on as it had always gone on. Now, this is where he really did get himself into a funny situation, because he wasn't hostile toward the mayor and the city officials, but he simply didn't want to have much to do with them. He thought if they got stirring around in the museum, trouble might develop. Well, of course, that's a point, but I don't think it was the right decision to have taken at that time.

ROBERT BROWN: Were there times when there was some tension with the city, on account—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No, never, because the city was simply—it was aware of the museum, but it didn't take a serious interest in it at all. The zoo, the St. Louis Zoo, also had money from property taxes in St. Louis, the mill tax that had been established in the first part of the 20th century. The zoo was more outgoing. It reached out to the politicians and drew them in, and the zoo was a much more popular attraction, because it had—well, it had a railroad, a little miniature railroad that ran around in it, and it had a couple of chimpanzees that roller-skated and entertained the crowd, and so forth and so on. The museum had none of that glamour. In fact, in 1964, the museum was still—it had something of a country club about it, atmosphere, you know. It was still something that the elite of St. Louis went to, and other people—well, maybe they went to it, but they didn't feel a part of it. [00:12:08] It had always had a reputation of drawing in lots of people, but still, one felt it more or less belonged to an elite. Belong with quotation marks, because obviously it was always a public institution, a tax-supported institution.

ROBERT BROWN: What was its history as it related to the atmosphere you found when you came? The history of the institution. What bore on your tenure there, would you say, in its past? It was set up as a city museum at the time of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, just after that. The whole thing goes back, really, to the late '70s or early '80s, when a museum of sorts was first identified with Washington University, and it evolved through a series of turns, particularly through this 19[0]4 exhibition, into a city-supported museum, tax-supported museum, in the building that it occupies now, on the top of Art Hill. That, of course, was the center of the World's Fair of 19[0]4, and the building designed by Cass Gilbert was the fine arts building for that fair. It had two—three—wings attached to it, which were constructed basically out of cheap materials. They were temporary wings, although designed in the style of the building, and they were torn down after the fair. The center part, designed by Gilbert, of course, was retained as an art museum. So it evolved from that kind of a history, and—[00:14:04]

ROBERT BROWN: It was separate from the university, then, following 19[0]4?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, it gradually separated itself from the university. However, the university collections—we're talking about Washington University now—the university collections remained in the museum. This is a long, tangled history here, and we can't go too deeply into it. The university continued to acquire works of art, and they were then sent to the museum, and hung in the museum galleries.

ROBERT BROWN: You found that when you came in '64?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No, I didn't. I'll come to that in just a minute, because that's quite interesting, I think, how that all came about, and why those works of art were not in the building when I arrived in 1964. The presiding genius, really, of the museum, in its early stages, was a man named Halsey Cooley Ives. Mr. Ives had a lot to do

with the 19[0]4 World's Fair, with the art exhibition end of it, and also with the 1893 fair. He was the first director of the museum, and he was a man of—it must be true—of enormous energy and great vision for the museum, how it should be. I went out of my way, time and again during my tenure, to give Ives credit, because he really deserves it—he was a remarkable man—in fighting this whole museum situation through to the proper conclusion. In other words, establishing the museum as a city museum. In those days—we're talking now about 19[0]4 and shortly thereafter—St. Louis was, as a city, concentrated on the riverfront. [00:16:02] The county didn't exist as such to any appreciable degree. There was no real development in the county. Halsey Cooley Ives was a very major personality.

ROBERT BROWN: Did acquisitions begin under him, or—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, they began under him, and continued, of course, all the way along. The museum, really up until, I would say, 1950, the collections were there, but they hadn't really been built upon in any sense. There were sort of moments when things would come to—works of art would come to the museum, and then there would be periods when nothing happened, and so on. It was really after the Second World War that the museum began to develop and to change, and become what it is today.

ROBERT BROWN: As you look back at the dates of acquisitions and all, could you discern, in its history before 1950, any packets of collecting? Were they aiming to be one of the—have a bit—representative of each art historical period?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. I think the intent, right from the start, was to have a general art museum, on the plan of the Metropolitan or Boston. Therefore, Far Eastern art began to come fairly early. Classical art, Renaissance art, and so on. Some very good things were bought early in the game, no doubt about that. But what I'm trying to say is that the museum was small, in terms of its collections and its activities and so on, and it did not make any strong effort to reach out into the community, until, really, after World War II.

ROBERT BROWN: That was the time when Perry Rathbone was director.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. Actually, Perry came before the outbreak of the war, and was there a very short time. [00:18:05] Then the war began, and he went off to do his duty. So his time, his real period at the museum, begins after the war, when he came back. He did many interesting things, many fine exhibitions. He acquired some important works of art, including this unfortunate Etruscan sculpture, and did a great deal to bring the museum to the attention of the community. He also had quite a lot to do with stimulating collectors, particularly Richard Weil and his mother-in-law Etta Steinberg, and he had, certainly, some influence as far as the Schoenberg family is concerned, and several others as well. He interested them in what was important at that time. Major pictures of the French Impressionist period, and Post-Impressionist period. Those were acquired by these very fine collectors. And so Perry did have quite a lot to do with that, and deserves a lot of credit for it.

ROBERT BROWN: Were these apparently a new group of collectors? Were the older St. Louisianians—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. At that time, they were the people who were arriving. Now, that would be more true of Mrs. Steinberg and the Weils than it would be of the Schoenbergs, who were more deeply rooted, or whatever you want to call it, in St. Louis. People like Joe Pulitzer were very young in those days, and Joe had already begun collecting. He began when he was at Harvard, as a student. And Buster May was very young. Buster May and Joe Pulitzer were sort of self-starters in a way, although Perry certainly worked with them, and they were good friends of his, without any doubt. [00:20:06] You were asking about the university collections. As I said, they were in the museum. It was a fine collection of 19th and 20th-century European and American art. Not large, but neither was it a tiny one. It was a first-rate collection. That collection remained in the museum until the early '60s, maybe '63 or thereabouts. I don't remember the exact year. At that time, William Eisendrath, who was very much involved in the museum as assistant director during Charles Nagel's years—Charles Nagel succeeded Perry Rathbone, and was my predecessor—Bill Eisendrath was very close to the Weils and to Mrs. Steinberg, and becoming somewhat dissatisfied with the museum and the administration. I don't think there was ever open hostility with Charles Nagel, but there was some tension, in any case, and the end result was that Mrs. Steinberg agreed to put up a museum, a college museum building, at Washington U, which she did, now known as Steinberg Hall. This was probably done through coaching through her son-in-law, Dick Weil, and others.

In any case, the entire collection was taken out of the museum, and transferred, I would say a quarter of a mile, to the university, into a new building over there, to give the museum its own collection. This was a slightly awkward situation for me when I arrived, because everybody would say, "What do you think about Steinberg Hall? Don't you think paintings ought to stay at a museum?" or so forth. [00:22:03] It was a very touchy situation, because clearly, there was a kind of polarizing here. There were people who were very pro-university, pro-Steinberg Hall, and there were people who were very pro-museum and anti-Steinberg Hall. [Laughs.] So I simply had to say, as I did on any number of occasions, that I thought the university ought to have its own collection there, on its own premises, and just let it go at that. That seemed to me to be the safest thing to say

at the time, instead of wandering around town, waving a red flag, and saying, "I think it's dreadful the pictures have been removed, and they ought never to have done it," because that would have—

ROBERT BROWN: That seemed quite pointless to begin with.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: To remove them, you mean?

ROBERT BROWN: Yes. Well, I mean it was already—it was water over the dam by then, wasn't it?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Water of the dam, yes. But in retrospect, I think it was unfortunate, because the building that was built at Washington University is, I believe, a disaster. It was never thought through intelligently as an art museum. The collection never looked well. It was always either in storage or on the walls. It was constantly moving back and forth, and it took away from the museum something that was really very, very important. The museum had comparable pictures and sculpture, but to remove the university collection from it really did quite considerable damage to the whole sense of the collection as it had been for many years at the museum. It really didn't add anything to the university. It gave the university a headache in the long run, because there was always the question of money for Steinberg. The personnel was constantly changing. The art department was not particularly responsive to the museum, and so on. [00:24:00] Had the collection remained at the museum, I think it would have been much better, because the students have only to come a quarter of a mile, and if they wanted works of art, which they certainly ought to have wanted, they would have been right there at the museum. And particularly in view of the fact that the museum has since developed so remarkably in terms of its physical plant.

ROBERT BROWN: So you came into a rather mixed situation here?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. Yes, and—

ROBERT BROWN: And as genial you found Mr. Fler [ph] to be, there was this recent gutting of a good part of the collection.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Actually, you know, if you pause too long before you go into a situation, you might never go. If you think through what it's like at that moment, you might say, "Oh, no thank you, I don't want any part of that." But fortunately, I didn't, because being in New Hampshire, and just catching occasional glimpses of the museum as I went out, I wasn't aware of all of this, and so I had to go there and become involved. I remember one particular—the awkward moment when I first went to St. Louis to be interviewed. I was taken through the building by Henry Flager, and I fault him for this now [laughs] what I'm about to say. I thought it very odd that the director wasn't there, Charles Nagel, and I kept wondering when I was going to see Charles Nagel. In any case, as we went through our—went along on our tour, we finally made our way to the lower level, and we came to the administrative offices. I remember Henry knocking abruptly on Mr. Nagel's door, and just opening it, and there was Charles Nagel, sitting at his desk, and looking very surprised to see me. [00:26:02] He knew me, but not very well. I realized, in a flash, that he was only dimly aware that I might be his successor. It was a very embarrassing moment for him and for me. Henry introduced us, in a rather—or said, "Surely you two know each other," in a very awkward kind of way. We had two or three minutes of conversation, and that was that. I didn't see Charles again until long after I had taken office. It made for a certain—not tension exactly, but a certain feeling between us, between Charles Nagel and me.

ROBERT BROWN: Was Nagel moving on to another place at that point?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, but I didn't know it. I'm not sure he knew it at the time. In any case, he became the founding director of the Portrait Gallery, the National Portrait Gallery, in Washington, and went there and helped them with the building and so forth. But I want to say one thing. Charles Nagel and I soon became very good friends, and I have the highest admiration for him, and for what he did during his time in St. Louis. He was a perfectly amazing man. Highly intelligent, and someone who has not received anywhere near the credit that he should have for the work he did in St. Louis.

ROBERT BROWN: What are some of the particular things you recall that you know that he did in St. Louis?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I suppose what I'm trying to say is it was just his balanced attitude toward the museum and the community. [phone rings] Shall we answer that?

ROBERT BROWN: No.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No? [Laughs.]

[Audio Break].

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I can't say any one thing that Nagel did, but he kept—except the most important of all, and

that is that he kept the museum, really, afloat during a very difficult financial period. [00:28:10] Because toward the end of his regime, the museum was in very sad state. It was only a modest amount of money coming in from the city, and that was the bulk of what the museum had by way of funds.

ROBERT BROWN: The city was going into a depression at that time, wasn't it?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: It wasn't in very healthy condition. That's perfectly true. It was not.

ROBERT BROWN: It was at that time that the county expands and the city begins to—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Exactly. Exactly. The county was expanding rapidly, and it was Charles's job to keep the museum more or less on keel, and keep it moving, which he did do.

ROBERT BROWN: But he—let me understand. When you were interviewed for the job, Mr. Nagel had told people there he was leaving? They knew he was—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, they knew he was leaving. That was quite clear in everybody's mind that—

ROBERT BROWN: He was just—the interviewing of people for his successor, he had not been involved—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Exactly. Exactly, and he did look surprised when he saw me, and I thought it would have been a nice thing if someone had said to Charles Nagel, "Now, Charles Buckley is coming this morning, and we're all going to have lunch," and so forth. Something like that, but nothing of that kind happened. That's what sort of distressed me a little bit.

ROBERT BROWN: What was your agenda when you got there? First, you have—there's a financial crunch going on. That was obvious. Fund-raising was going to have to be a major thing.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Well, at the start, let me tell you, there was practically no staff. When I went there, Thomas Hoops, who had been curator, had retired, and had withdrawn. [00:30:00] I had to find a curatorial staff. The registrar left within a matter of two or three months. We had to revise the guard system from top to bottom. The building superintendent had been around the museum for years, and was totally ineffective. There were practically no members of his workforce. Two or three people tottering around the building. The education department was more or less intact. It just meant taking each department step by step, and rebuilding. The library was in deplorable condition.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean way out-of-date and—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Well, it was under the guidance of a lady who had no real sense of what she was doing at that time. She had to go, and she did go, in due course. It was this way all the way through the museum. We had to replace each body with another body. The curatorial offices were tucked away in rooms that were hopelessly out-of-date. It was almost impossible to function in those rooms. So it was a matter of doing everything right at the start. Because of money, everything had gone downhill. With a new regime coming in, it was the hope that maybe if we got the staff, or a staff, pulled together, we could begin to find some money. I think my first appointment was Emily Rauh, who came from the Fogg, and who had been John Coolidge's assistant, and like me, was ready to leave. Emily, who came from Cincinnati, and who knew something about the Midwest, came and took over as curator of the museum. [00:32:01] Then we hired—the next person that we hired was a kind of combination curator for Far Eastern art and registrar, and we got Richard Cleveland, who had been at Asia House, and had had some experience as a registrar at the Museum of Modern Art. He wasn't the registrar, but he worked in the department for a while. Then we hired various other people who came along. I remember seeing the chief guard on my first week in office, a man who looked as if he were about to collapse at any minute. He wore a kind of stiff guard's hat. In fact, it said "guard" on a badge at the top, with a visor. The rest of his costume was simply indescribable. A shirt and ragged pants. I thought, this can't really be the chief guard of the City Art Museum of St. Louis, but it turned out to be. So I had to get rid of him in a hurry, or else we would have lost half the collection, I think, in no time. [Laughs.] And so it was that kind of a problem, of building, and then also introducing exhibitions as quickly as possible .

ROBERT BROWN: Because there had been a hiatus in those?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. For months, there had been, yeah. During that long, hot summer of 1964, when I was in New Hampshire, the museum literally drifted, you see. Bill Eisendrath was acting director, but he had gone to northern Michigan, to his summer house, and was not there. He had taken on a young man, who was a designer, to act as assistant director, and he had simply taken over the museum, and literally, on his own, had proceeded to strip off the wall coverings in many of the galleries and put on new wall coverings, and so forth, so that when I arrived, on November 1st, a great deal of, let's say, work, in quote marks, had been accomplished, and I was absolutely appalled at what I found, because it all had to be undone, because it had been done in a way that I

could never accept. [00:34:22]

ROBERT BROWN: Was Eisendrath someone who stayed on while you were there at all?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: He had agreed to act as acting director, and then he had gone across the way to be the director of Steinberg Hall after I arrived. So all of this coalesces. It's a little hard to describe it, but it all comes about in a kind of 1963, '64 period, when Steinberg is being built, and the museum changes its director, and so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: These were all people you really weren't going to be working with at the museum, because they were either going elsewhere, or they were temporary?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: In fact, the man going—Eisendrath going to the university might have been, in a way, rivalry to—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, exactly.

ROBERT BROWN: —the museum.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Exactly. This was another reason why I could say nothing about the Steinberg situation, because I simply did not want to get into a sort of loggerhead situation with Bill Eisendrath. He and I got along very well during my entire time. I had great respect for him. But I just, as I look back, and as I have already said, I think the university collection ought to have remained at the museum. You know, when I went there, the museum was still being heated with soft coal. Now, you come from Oklahoma, you say, so you know what soft coal meant to heating systems in the Midwest. Everybody heated with soft coal. At least many, many people did, all the way up through the '40s and '50s. [00:36:00] By the time the '60s came along, most people had switched to oil or gas, but here was this museum with coal-fired furnaces, with great smoke belching out of the chimney. I had taken an apartment on Skinker Boulevard, which was just across the way from the museum, and my apartment was on the 19th floor, so I could look right down on the museum. While I was having my morning coffee, I would look down and see this column of black smoke coming up out of the museum, and I thought, my heavens, what are we going to do? We can't go on like that, because that produces a dust and fine ash, which had worked its way into glass cases, and which had caused, I think, a great deal of difficulty within the museum, just in the sense of making it dirty and grungy. So, very shortly after my arrival, we managed to get rid of the coal-fired furnaces and switch to gas. Many things happened in a short time. It's rather difficult to remember them step by step.

ROBERT BROWN: And even something as fundamental as that was important at that time?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Had to be done. Had to be done. We managed to get the mill tax increased slightly, so we had a little more money coming into the museum, and we could use that for these changes that they were beginning to make.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you also have to scramble, in your first months, in terms of exhibitions?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, indeed.

ROBERT BROWN: Nagel had not left behind—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I won't say he hadn't left an exhibition schedule, but I just don't remember what it was. I think the first important exhibition that came during my time was the Edward Hopper exhibition that the Whitney had put together. That was the beginning of a series of shows that we did, some of which came to us from other museums, and some that we put together ourselves. [00:38:08] The important thing now, I think, is the fact that I, at least, was aware that the museum simply had to have a major overhaul. It could not go on as it was. Therefore, I began my campaign, talking to members of the board, and particularly to Henry Flager, and saying that we must do something about this. Toward the end of the '60s, maybe almost 1970, we came to accept that as a fact, that that had to be done. But where would the money come from, and what would we do about that? Then, simultaneously, a plan was hatched to bring the county into a supporting role for the museum. One of the leaders, probably the leader in all of that activity, that preparatory preparation that went into what we were aiming for, was Howard Baer. Howard Baer was president of the St. Louis Zoo. He did not have much respect for Henry Flager. He thought that Henry did not know how to cope with some of these major problems. I suppose there was some truth in that. Howard was a very dynamic, aggressive, abrasive, difficult man, who could be, alternately, extremely nice, sweet, and kind, and then quite brutal on the other hand. Howard went to work on the problem of creating what would become to be known as the zoo museum district, in which the county would participate in supporting the museum at the same rate that the city itself had done over so many

years. [00:40:06] That took a frightful amount of effort, and Howard was forever accusing Henry and the board of control of dragging their feet. He would say publicly to people around St. Louis, "The museum doesn't want any part of this. The museum isn't helping. The museum doesn't support me in this." That was not true. That was not true at all, in my opinion.

ROBERT BROWN: Where did the major opposition really lie? With the towns of the county?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: At the start, there wasn't any real opposition to this idea, but it was in—

ROBERT BROWN: It was a matter of inertia, and—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Exactly. Henry wanted to think through the legality of all of this. For example, he was very concerned that we would lose two of our modest purchase funds, if we included the county. Exactly what his thinking was in this, I've rather forgotten, but I remember there were problems of that kind that disturbed him. He felt that if that happened, if the museum should, in any way, alter the control that it had had over many, many years, that the museum would lose certain works of art. He would point out, in various wills that had been drawn up in the early part of the century, that very statement, that if the museum is not always under the control of a board of control, then the residual rights would go elsewhere, either back to a family, or sometimes to the university, and so forth. He thought the museum might actually be pulled apart by this process.

ROBERT BROWN: I see. The board of control would have to be expanded or altered in this process.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Absolutely. Yes. In other words, the board of control now would have to be divided evenly between city and county. I think Henry wanted to see a museum district created, but he was fearful of it. [00:42:02] He didn't quite know what it would bring, what problems would arise, whereas Howard Baer, I think, didn't give a damn. He wanted simply to bulldoze ahead and get this thing done.

ROBERT BROWN: What did he mean by museum zoo district?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: He wanted to—what Howard Baer had in mind was to bring the county into supporting the museum, and a district would be created which would become known as the zoo museum district. There's a longer title to it, but I can't remember exactly what it is. His theory was that we would include in our plans the Museum of Science, which was a very small operation, but it was in the county. It already belonged to the county, so that would sweeten the whole process up as far as county people were concerned, because one of their museums, and a museum which was gradually growing in popularity, would become a part of what would become the zoo museum district.

ROBERT BROWN: Sort of a matter of dressing it up in clothes.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Exactly. It was a two-fold problem, because not only was it necessary to get county support, and to convince the voters in the county that this was the right step to take, but one had to convince the residents of St. Louis that it was a wise thing to bring the county in. By law, a bill had to be created in the legislature of Missouri to enable this. An enabling act to get this whole thing started. Howard Baer saw that process right straight through. He did it brilliantly, and then began this long campaign to convince St. Louis and St. Louis County that this ought to be done. I can't even begin to go into all of that, but it took an enormous amount of time on the part of the museum, and the zoo, and the science museum, and the county, on the part of the staffs of those museums, their boards, their supporters. [00:44:07] Missionary work.

ROBERT BROWN: And a great deal of your time was spent in this?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: A vast amount of my time went into this. It was difficult working with Howard Baer, because he simply ordered people around, and he knocked heads together. He would say, "Oh, you're not doing things the right way at all." He was really rather insulting to people. Perhaps it had to be done in that way. I'm not exactly sure. For example, let me give you one illustration. The museum had a membership program, and the money raised through membership provided, at that time, our principal acquisition fund, our largest acquisition fund. It had to be—the money had to be spent on works of art. It couldn't accumulate over too long a period of time. It had to be spent. Therefore, there came on the market a particular work of art, a Salvator Rosa, that we wanted to buy. This was at the height of the zoo museum district campaign. I could see no reason why the museum should stop collecting and simply go into retirement until this thing had been thought through, because it wasn't tax money that would be spent on the work of art. It was, in effect, private money. Well, this was something that Howard Baer could not get through his head. He insisted that the museum stop everything until this battle had been fought. We decided we would go ahead and acquire the Salvator Rosa in any case, and we did. Well, it was like putting a match to gasoline as far as he was concerned. He really was dreadful as far as we at the museum were concerned, and he considered us a pack of fools for doing this. He made more out of it than was necessary, because had we even allowed, or had we simply acquired the work of art, and he had kept silent on the subject, nothing would have happened. [00:46:07] I don't see why a museum has to come to a grinding

halt when it's fund-raising. After all, it's supposed to continue to collect. We had made it crystal clear where the money was coming from.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he turn this into adverse publicity?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: He tended to, yes. Yes, he did, because he could not stop talking in the St. Louis community. He told every business leader what we had done around town, which was totally unnecessary, to make such a fuss over something that was part of our regular operation of acquiring works of art. In any case, we went ahead, and this whole thing got thought through. Then it came to a point where the voters would be allowed to decide on which of the three institutions would be a part of the zoo museum district. In other words, if you cast your vote, you did not vote for all three at once. You voted individually for the zoo, the science museum, for the art museum. It was all sort of predicated on which is the most popular, which is the beauty queen. This, of course, was very difficult. I remember that on the day when voting took place, we had a party at the museum for all the people who had worked so hard on this campaign. Howard Baer was there, and everybody came. We were all on speaking terms all the way through, but it got a little testy at times. I remember we had rather a lot to sit on and to eat, and we had quite a good time while we waited for the returns to come in late in the evening. I vividly remember that Joe Pulitzer, who had been sipping as much, if not more, than the rest of us [laughs] said, "Charles, don't worry. [00:48:02] The museum is probably going to lose. But he will fight this through in another year or two." My nerves were really just ready to snap at that point, and I think I did snap at him. I said, "Joe, no." I said, "We're going to make it tonight. We have to do it. We can't go through this again." I said, "You have no idea what this has cost the museum in time and difficulty to get this thing established." Anyway, it came about that the next morning, I was on my way to Washington on a very early plane, and I still didn't know the outcome. When I arrived at the airport, there was a headline in the morning paper which said that the zoo, science museum win, museum in doubt—art museum in doubt. I couldn't believe it. I was just beside myself. I got on the plane, and I must say I had a very unhappy hour and forty-five minute flight to Washington. When I got to National Airport, I was first off the plane. I literally fought my way to the head of the line getting out. I ran up the stairs to a telephone, and I called my secretary, and I said, "What has happened?" She said, "I really don't know." I thought I'd go mad. I said, "For heaven's sake, find out right now." In about two or three minutes, she came back and said, "It's all right. Don't get hysterical. We won. We got in." [Inaudible.]

[Audio Break.]

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Well, with the zoo museum district a reality, this meant that the museum's financial picture was vastly improved, literally overnight. We had received—

[Audio Break.]

CHARLES BUCKLEY: —this meant that, in the past, where we had received around \$750,000 a year from the city, we would now, in the very next year, receive, between city and county, about \$1,950,000. [00:50:09] So we went ahead very rapidly there. That meant that we could now go ahead and really think seriously about the building, what to do about that. This was terribly exciting, because people, many people, thought the zoo museum district would never come into being. They laughed. They thought this was hilarious that anybody would try such a thing, to get people in the rich county to tax themselves in this way. It was a modest amount of money. It was a nine-cent tax rate, of which four would go to the zoo, four to the museum, and one cent would go to the science museum.

ROBERT BROWN: This was nine cents on the dollar?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: A hundred dollars.

ROBERT BROWN: The tax—on a hundred dollars.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I think it was a hundred dollars, yes. So it was really very, very modest, actually, but people bridle at the thought of paying anything at all for cultural institutions, as you know. So it helped us. It kept us from really sinking almost out of sight. We could now go ahead with our plans for the building. I had been in California at the time that the Oakland Museum opened. You know, the Oakland Museum is part art museum, part California history, and I think part science. It was designed by Kevin Roche and—Roche and Dinkeloo. I was very taken with the way that that building related to the park area around it. I think it was a block of land, or maybe a larger piece of land. I don't really remember now, but it seemed to flow very nicely, and it had character. So I decided that I would go and talk with Kevin Roche, who had his offices in New Haven, and I did this, I think, in the late summer of 1969, even before the zoo museum district was a reality. [00:52:11]

ROBERT BROWN: When was that—would have been, probably?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I think—let's see, when was this? I think it didn't happen until April of 1971, actually, so I

was sort of ahead of my time there. Maybe I went to see Kevin Roche a little later than that. I don't remember exactly when I did it, but it was either '69 or '70. That was summer. I talked with him at length about the St. Louis Art Museum, and I showed him photographs inside and out. He listened patiently for an hour or so. He felt that Roche and Dinkeloo would not be the firm to take on this job, he said, because he saw it, basically, as a renovation of an existing building. I said, "What would you do? Which way would you turn?" He said, "Do you know Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer, the firm in New York?" I did not. He said, "Go and talk with Hugh Hardy." I think that fall, maybe '70 or whatever, I did. I had a long conversation with Hugh Hardy, and liked him very much, and liked what they were doing, and I liked his attitude toward an old building, and he agreed to come out to St. Louis, which he did in 1971, early, I guess. We started in. We decided we'd try this firm and see what would happen.

ROBERT BROWN: Had you gone to see Roche, and then Hardy, with the backing of the board of control? Were they also in agreement that—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. Oh, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: —you explore renovation and possibly—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: All of this had to be discussed at length by the members of the board of control. [00:54:05] Indeed. Hugh Hardy was asked to come out and to begin thinking about the building, and he did an immense amount of time to the philosophy that he would like to see established as far as the original building was concerned. He was at great pains to research the building, and explore the park around the building at great length, and the various ideas that Cass Gilbert had had at the start, and how the park would be very closely related to the building itself, and the plan that Cass Gilbert developed in 1916 to extend the museum and to develop it, which was an enormously complicated project, which, of course, never came to anything at all, but the original drawings exist for it. From 1971 until I left in '75, the firm was very much involved in St. Louis. It was back and forth between St. Louis and New York, and drawings and models came out, and we worked on people to see if we could get them interested in giving money. Because now we were into a full fund drive to raise the money for the renovation of the building and the new section that was to be built.

ROBERT BROWN: The funds you were now getting from the city and county were simply for operational—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No. We earmarked a certain amount from those funds for the renovation and repair of the old building, because the voters were not sympathetic to the idea of spending their tax money on new construction. New construction would come from money that we raised. [00:56:01]

ROBERT BROWN: What was the philosophy, or at least your thinking, in terms of what you needed?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: At the start, I don't think any of us really knew. I think we were very much in the dark. We knew we needed everything.

ROBERT BROWN: You knew every facility—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Every facility.

ROBERT BROWN: —was inadequate.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Totally inadequate, from the leaking skylights to the electrical system. It had to be changed. Hugh was very helpful in all of this, because he, early in the game, said, "Look, what we must do is to go back to the thinking of Cass Gilbert." Now, the renovation, as it was carried out, included the main hall, which was known then, and I think still is, as Sculpture Hall, and all the galleries to the east of Sculpture Hall. The galleries to the west had been, in part, renovated during the Nagel years. This is one area where I disagree with Charles Nagel, because I don't think it was very well done.

ROBERT BROWN: In what respect?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: It wasn't carefully thought through. What they tried to do on the west side in the 1950s was to simply carve out a certain space for special exhibitions, basically, and for the display of American pictures. It didn't work very well. It wasn't done—the thinking wasn't carried right to the outer walls, so to speak. They established something in the middle, which—

ROBERT BROWN: A little pod set in.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: A little pod set in, exactly.

ROBERT BROWN: What did Hardy discover had been the thinking of Gilbert that he stuck with?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: It was a very classical plan, you see. The galleries were of various sizes. They were beautifully related, with one door leading logically into the next. [00:58:03] The height was good. The light, as it had been in Gilbert's day, was very good, and so on. If the Gilbert plan had remained intact, the museum would have been better off, but what happened over the years was that the galleries were tampered with. For instance, the major gallery, to the left—on the east side, had been cut by about 25 percent. The whole east end had been simply hacked off, which did serious damage to the really majestic character of that gallery. That end that was cut off was transformed into a kind of gallery for late medieval art. Beyond that, continuing east, other galleries had been tampered with, and had been turned into a medieval chapel for the display of sculpture, stone sculpture, and stained glass, tapestries, and so on. The museum never did have a strong medieval collection, but it had some very fine works of art from the period. But the setting was basically false. It was made of modern stone. It never looked well. And other changes of that kind, not as drastic as those two that I've just mentioned, but closing up doors and so forth, had taken place.

ROBERT BROWN: Did Hardy suggest ways of salvaging what was left, and perhaps repairing some of those—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: He said we—well, what happened was that the east side was literally stripped back to the walls. Skylights were removed. It was a shell. He simply went back to the old pattern of the galleries, and recreated the Cass Gilbert floor plan, at least, and then introduced all the modern facilities that one could hope for into those galleries. [01:00:12] It was superb new skylights, and so on and so forth. One of his strong points was that, since we are surrounded by the beautiful park, that the thing to do was to connect the museum visually with the park. So now when you stand in Sculpture Hall and look east, you can look straight through the park. If you walk east through that main gallery that I spoke of, which is now restored to its original scale, original fittings and so on, you can stand at the end of that gallery and look to your left and right, and again connect with the park. So you have an axial principle at work here, and it's absolutely beautiful. Can you see out of the museum, which you could never do before. You simply shuffled along. Even in Gilbert's day, you couldn't do that. You would shuffle around from box to box, so to speak. Now, Hardy gives us this flow from box to box, or gallery to gallery, but every now and then you see the park, which is absolutely lovely, and at night you look in. You see all the lights inside. Anyway, he planned to do that kind of restoration, and tax money would support that. Then he was to go on and do more, to add new construction. What he did was to create a plan, which would last the museum over a 25-year period. Over a 25-year period, the museum could do whichever phase of the plan it could afford to do, and as much as possible at the start, but certain things would not necessarily be done. It ended up with quite an elaborate plan, including a superb elliptical parking space around the museum, because now the park was going to be drawn very much into the museum. [01:02:13] We knew that we would have great difficulty getting some of this done, because it meant relocating a roadway, and you would run into environmentalist problems at that time. Even though you were vastly improving the park, people would complain that you were taking more land, which, in effect, was not really true. You were returning land and taking different land, taking other land.

ROBERT BROWN: The elliptical form suggested itself as a way of drawing the surroundings toward the museum, its buildings?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, indeed. When you came up, the road would flow gracefully and attractively around the museum, and you would park on this ellipse. You would enter the museum primarily from the south side, rather than from the north.

ROBERT BROWN: The 25-year plan called also, then, for a rather large diamond—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: There was a great diamond-shaped structure there.

ROBERT BROWN: Structure, or right against the west end of the main hall at the old building.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: That's right.

ROBERT BROWN: Was that built?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: That was not built. That was not built. Because, first, there was some objection to this. People thought that this was not very handsome. But I think if you relate it to the photographs of the plan, which we happened to be looking at at the moment, you get a pretty good idea of how it would have worked. This whole diamond section was to have been given over to contemporary art, 20th-century art, and I think, had that been built, the museum would have had a marvelous display area for 20th-century painting and sculpture. To the left of that, looking to the south, was another section, which was to have been used for temporary exhibitions, taking them out of the west galleries and moving them over to this section that I speak of now. [01:04:15] Then, beyond that, was a rectangle, which is the auditorium section, which remains today. That's still in place, although it has been refurbished. Connected with that would have been the entire education department, which was going to be quite elaborate. Then—

ROBERT BROWN: A series of shed roofs.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: A series of shed roofs. Yes, exactly, with light.

ROBERT BROWN: That was done? The auditorium was—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. Then there would have been the administrative offices abutting the auditorium, in between the old building and the auditorium, and a round restaurant overlooking the park, one of the most beautiful parts of Forest Park, so the people would have this splendid view. At the end of my time, it was obvious that the fund drive was not going to bring in as much money as we had hoped. The original goal for all of this, the original target, financial target, was, I think, [\$]19.5 million. Had we had that much money in hand at the start, we could have built all of this. But by the time I left the museum, we weren't anywhere near that. We were up around, I don't know, [\$]10 million, maybe. So it was decided that—including renovation, I might add. It was decided that the museum would cut back. Toward the end of my time, Hardy did away with the diamond shape, he did away with the would-be education department, and the new exhibition area, and revised the restaurant, library, and administrative offices. [01:06:01] So therefore, what he would have accomplished was the renovation of the old building, two thirds of it, plus the renovation of the auditorium, plus building administration, library, and restaurant. That's important to remember that, because what followed was a slight upheaval, and Hugh Hardy and his firm left the museum.

ROBERT BROWN: This was after your time?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: After my departure, yes. Soon after my departure. Because there had been a considerable amount of undermining on the part of the man who was the head of the architectural committee, who was a trustee, not a member of the now-museum district board, the museum board.

ROBERT BROWN: But the head of a special—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: But the head of a special committee, and a trustee, because meanwhile, the board of trustees had been created to go along with the controlling unit. Also, the controller of the museum, who was in close alliance with him. They felt that this wasn't working out, and the only thing to do was to somehow ease Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer out of the picture. With my departure, this became an easy thing to do, because the board was rather disgusted with the slow progress of the drive, and the expense involved in building what HHP wanted to build, and so forth. So everybody lost their nerve, and the thing fell apart. There wasn't any great blow-up. It just ended. HHP then showed the museum how administration, library, and restaurant could be built according to a different pattern, which would connect it with the old building, and then they withdrew, and an engineering firm from Kansas City took over. I, myself, do not believe that the new construction, which does include restaurant, library, and administrative offices, is very successful. [01:08:08] I think if they had only hung on to HHP, and if the board had not lost its nerve, that they could have come up with something vastly superior to what they have now. It's all bright and shiny and wonderful now, and everybody is delighted to have it, and it's done. That's probably the main thing. But it could have been better, in my opinion.

ROBERT BROWN: In terms of design, particularly?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: In terms of design. This is not sour grapes on my part, but I think that, in any kind of enormous fund drive, there comes a point where everybody gets frantic and tired, and sick of raising money. If a solution is proposed that seems to be within grasp, then people are likely to take it. I think that is what happened in St. Louis. It would have taken a very strong person to say to everybody, "Calm down. We're going ahead with HHP, and they are going to design this connecting unit, which will include restaurant, library, and so forth."

ROBERT BROWN: Because they had, after all, offered you a scale-down?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Oh, indeed they had. Indeed they had.

ROBERT BROWN: But even that seemed too extravagant, or was? It would cost more?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Had they simply gone ahead with it, it would not have cost any more than the present structure has cost. That was that, and I think rather sad.

ROBERT BROWN: This whole building expansion campaign, plus the political undertaking, were major parts of your—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Absolutely.

ROBERT BROWN: —eleven-year tenure there.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I want to say, now, one more thing about personalities. Henry Flager stepped down as board chairman, and George Rosborough, who had been on the board, was made the chairman of the museum. George was the president of Measuregraph Company in St. Louis, a small but very productive business. [01:10:03] He and his wife are good collectors. They are very intelligent. George turned out to be a superb board president, and he saw a lot of this through to completion. If anybody deserves credit, I think George does, because he had imagination, and the desire to see it done. But he, too, lacked the will to take this final step with HHP, Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer. He probably was simply carried along by the other members of the board. Also at that time, there was a change in the board, too. The whole thing was in a state of flux. When I left, I asked the board if they would be willing to put the registrar in as acting director, a lady named Mary-Edgar Patton. Mrs. Patton had a good head on her shoulders, and could cope with all the various personalities on the staff. So she was acting director from the time I left until late December, when the new director came, and she held the museum together. She was a very strong and able person. She is now registrar of the museum, back to her former job. It was an exhilarating time, and a sad time, in a way, because we came so close to getting the absolute ideal in terms of museum, and then we had to fall back. I had made up my mind, when I went to St. Louis in '64, that I would stay 10 years, and I said as much to Henry Flager. I said, "I will be here exactly 10 years, and if I haven't done what seems necessary to do at the end of that time, I will depart." [01:12:03] At the end of 10 years, I—in fact, a little in advance of that, I had lunch with George Rosborough one day, and I told him what I was planning to do. I said I would leave. He said, "Please do not, at least for another year. You must stay." I agreed to do that. I stayed another year, which made it 10.5, or a little bit better than that. I wanted to leave, because I was really getting very tired. If the board was sick of all the fund-raising, and all the chaos, and the churning about, then think of how the director must have felt. I was heartily sick of it by that time. Because I think if we had moved with more force, and we had not embroiled ourselves in so many petty arguments, we could have done more than we did do. So I left, more or less, on schedule.

ROBERT BROWN: Had you thought, though, when you first came, of 10 years because you felt, in that time, you would have perhaps lost your challenge in a particular position?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No, there were a number of reasons. I was 45 when I went to St. Louis, and I thought, if I can possibly step out of the museum world toward the end of my 50s, I would like to do it. Also, there were other personal reasons for wanting to do this, or having to do it, I suppose. I just felt that the time had come, that I had done almost everything I could do. I didn't want to get to the point where I was sort of the person around whom all the storm would gather if this thing didn't go exactly the way I wanted it to go. I thought, if I'm getting so tired now, and this does begin to develop as an awkward situation, pretty soon we'll be yelling and screaming at each other, and it won't work. [01:14:04] I had been saying all along, "Please move on this thing." Because time is going on, and the amount of effort that had gone into trying to get people to make funds available from private sources was really considerable. Everybody was involved in this. The fund drive went on long after my departure. In fact, it is just now ending. Really, last year, I think, it came to an end. Then Jim Wood came to take over, and he saw all the new construction built, and he saw the renovation built. I saw it all pulled apart, and I saw all the plans develop, and they were carried through exactly as I had hoped they would be in this renovation.

ROBERT BROWN: With all of that going on, that physical dismemberment, what of your exhibitions during these times?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: We kept up an exhibition schedule. We did many, many shows. When all of this change began, this physical change, we had to move out of the building, and all of the collections on the east side of the building, first floor and lower floor, had to be put in storage. Most of them. That was very awkward. But we did keep up an exhibition schedule, even though most of the staff had moved nearly a mile away to an office building, and we simply went back and forth. We kept up an exhibition schedule in the special exhibition galleries.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you plan out a fairly long-term schedule? Did you have certain things in mind that you thought would be of interest to the general public in St. Louis?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. Oh, yes, we did. [01:16:00] We did exhibitions in the field of American art. We did many exhibitions of drawings, because we had a very good curator of drawings, Nancy Nielsen [ph]. We did a lot with contemporary art, because our curator, Emily Rauh, was very much interested in contemporary art. We did decorative arts exhibitions, because again, we had a very good decorative arts curator in Lynn Springer. The building of the staff, the curatorial staff, was important for me.

ROBERT BROWN: You were able to continue with that throughout—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. By the time I left, I think we had a first-class staff, and that staff is still there. It's the mainstay of the museum. Lee Parsons, who handles all of the material, ancient material—Pre-Columbian material is what I'm trying to say—and Dick Cleveland doing the Far East. Then we began, of course, to get a

great deal of support as this project came to completion, or at least advanced. We got an awful lot of support from people like Buster May. Buster then saw that his collections should really go to the museum, and he began to refine those collections, his Pre-Columbian material, his South Pacific material. With Lee Parsons joining the staff, he and Lee worked together. They worked together just superbly. So that, in time, Buster began to give very heavily, turning over, in fact, practically all of his South Pacific material, and practically all of his Pre-Columbian material, which was a tremendous shot in the arm for the museum. That's how that went along.

ROBERT BROWN: What was—today, I suppose, called outreach—but what was the out there, the mass of people in St. Louis—here's a city that itself was somewhat dying. [01:18:06] A county which was growing, suburbanization. Were these people coming in great numbers? Was there some interest?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Oh, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you make appeals to certain ethnic groups, or the black community?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, we did. We did, I hope, a great deal. At least we got a lot started in relating to the black community, making the black world of St. Louis, which is large and important, and with many, many first-rate people in it, vividly aware of the museum. During my time, I persuaded women's committee to take on several black members, which, of course, doesn't sound like anything now, but in the early '60s, with that tight group of women, it was really opening a door. They, of course, agreed immediately, so it wasn't as difficult, but just the idea hadn't been put to them, to bring black women onto the women's committee. I think several black women came, and were very active in the women's committee. When we created the new board of trustees, we had two or three black trustees, and we were moving in the direction of black staff. I think we had pretty good relations with the black world.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you attempt exhibitions?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, we did. We did. I had many personal friends in the black world in St. Louis. There were people with whom I could talk quite frankly about the museum, who could say things about it that they might not say to a member of the board. We had many heated discussions. I think my entire staff was very sympathetic to—aware. [01:20:00] Not sympathetic. That's probably the wrong word. But very aware of the need to do this, to break down this barrier. I, myself, felt very keenly about this, that we had to do it.

ROBERT BROWN: What were some of the ways in which you did break down this barrier?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: As I say, through the women's committee, through the trustees, through exhibitions, through acquiring black art, and not necessarily African art. They also bought work by black artists. We gave a very important show to Jacob Lawrence, for instance. I think that kind of step forward, you see, into the black world. I remember we had a pretty good collection of African material, and one of my black friends, who was quite prominent in St. Louis, said, "Yeah, you've got black stuff here. But where do you have it?" He said, "You've got it in that nasty little corridor just outside the restaurant. Who sees it there?" He said, "We think you should move it to the main floor." I said, "All right, we will do it, and we will do it almost immediately," and we did. I think within six months, we had that material in a brand-new gallery on the main floor, a refurbished gallery, which is handsomely done by Dick Cleveland, who was not only our curator of Far Eastern art, but the presiding genius when it came to displaying works of art, and who, I must say, could display a work of art with more taste than practically anyone I know in the entire museum world. He did over this gallery, and we installed a black—African material, and it looked just smashing. Everybody was delighted. We got a real response from the black community on that. We did make a real effort, and I think that effort goes on, and I think, now, there is far more give and take, in a normal way, between St. Louis blacks and the museum. There's no sort of hurdle to get over. [01:22:00]

ROBERT BROWN: And a good many who come to visit?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Oh, yes. That had been traditional in the museum. I think that black people always felt very much a part of the museum and would come. Oh, yes. It wasn't a strange experience for them, I don't think, and it wasn't a strange experience for the people who were working at the museum.

ROBERT BROWN: In fact, the City Art Museum had—sounds as though you had been founded to have a rather large turnout of people from the community.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. We always did.

ROBERT BROWN: It never was something special.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No, never.

ROBERT BROWN: Such as the Met or the Boston museum, to which the bulk of the community does not go.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Don't forget, though, the St. Louis—as it is now called—the St. Louis Art Museum—this was the new—the title given to it after the zoo museum district was created—it is in a park, and the park is heavily used by both blacks and whites. Many people simply drift in from picnics and whatnot. That kind of an audience, we have hoped we could, more or less, control, although we knew we couldn't put up any barriers. We didn't mean that. We had hoped we would get people who didn't come to the museum simply because they were in the park and the restrooms were handy. I think we did finally strike a balance, where many of the people—most of the people who came to the museum, whether they were black or white, came because they were coming to an exhibition, or they were coming to the restaurant, to lunch, or to use the library, or to do something like that, and so on. Anyway, throughout all of this, the collections grew, and they grew, I think, in a rather important way. Somehow we found money, and we bought some very fine pictures. I mentioned the Salvator Rosa. One of the last pictures I bought was a very beautiful Mondrian. We bought Giacometti. We bought a wonderful sculpture by Giacometti. [01:24:00] And Joan Miró. We also did a great deal in the field of American art, particularly early 20th-century and 19th-century American art, which interests me a great deal. I more or less acted as curator of the American collections, paintings at least, and sculpture, although I—

ROBERT BROWN: You were able, in large measure, to repair the loss of those things to Washington University?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, gradually, we were able to do that. I think the collection of American art is now very fine. During my time, we established three study groups. The women's committee was very active, and they always wanted projects. This is one of the—at least, I found, one of the most difficult aspects of being a museum director, when you have a women's committee that wants to be involved in projects. They were enormously helpful to begin with. That's the most important thing to bear in mind. At the same time, they took a lot of attention, from me and from other members of the staff. But when it came around to establishing something like the Decorative Art Society, which I wanted to see done, there they helped right away, and we got the Decorative Art Society started. Mrs. John Broadhead was one of the people who—in fact, the person who sort of got it off the ground.

ROBERT BROWN: And their purpose was to raise funds for the department?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: To be—no. Not first of all. The main reason was to form a study group, based more or less on the pattern of the Antiquarian Society at the Art Institute. They would be a study group that would work with the curator of decorative arts. They would have speakers. They would have members. Any money they raised, through membership or in other ways, would form a purchase fund for American and European decorative art, of any period, including right up to the present moment. [01:26:15] This has turned out to be enormously successful. I can't tell you how successful this has been for the members of the society, and for what that has done for the museum. Then it was proposed by Emily Rauh that we have a Contemporary Art Society, and that, too, got off the ground in a very successful way, and they, like the Decorative Arts people, have done a super job. Speakers, helping with exhibitions, raising money, and so forth. Then, toward the end of my time, a Prints and Drawings Society was established the same way. Finally, since my time, a society for the study of primitive art of all kinds has come into being under Lee Parsons. These four groups, independent of each other, and they really do a wonderful job for the museum. I suppose other museums have done this, but I think St. Louis is one of the few museums I know that has four solidly based groups, in these four separate fields.

ROBERT BROWN: Also, during this time, you had time, apparently, to become increasingly involved with the American Association of Museums. You were its president, in fact, from, what, '72 to '74?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. How this came about, I often wonder. [They laugh.]

ROBERT BROWN: That was at the height of your fund-raising effort.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I know, but you get sort of drawn into these things. [01:28:00] I had been a member of the American Association of Museums for quite a long time, and at one stage, I found myself invited to become a member of the council. From there, it was an easy step to become one of the vice presidents, and then, suddenly, would I be the president of this thing? I said yes, because by then, I was really very much interested in the AAM, and I wanted to see what could be done.

ROBERT BROWN: What did you think needed—what did you think they could do, or it should be doing?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Well, it's a large and rather ungainly organization, because it has people interested in art, people interested in history, people interested in science, and they don't always pull together. It seemed an awfully weak kind of organization, and I had hoped that, in some way, perhaps I and others could begin to give this a little more—somewhat more concrete shape. Which didn't work out, of course, and I ought to have known that, but I tried, bravely, to have some influence in this direction.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you see, perhaps, the beginnings of—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I don't know.

ROBERT BROWN: —of the strength and—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I don't know. I hope so. Also, I got interested in it because the Association of Art Museum directors always took a somewhat dim view of the AAM, sort of throwing up their hands at having anything to do with this bunch, and that their interests couldn't possibly be the interests of the AAMD. There was a kind of exclusion. It used to worry me, because after all, we all belonged to the museum field. I thought, well, why can't we have a really strong central body from which the arts and sciences and history sort of radiate out like spokes? [01:30:08] So I got all mixed up in that. That was very difficult, because I had to go to Washington all the time, and other people who were on the executive committee had to come from all over the country. It was only a day or two when we could talk. The director, at that time, was Kieran McGrath, who had been a lawyer, and Kieran was very good, except he had a kind of desire to perhaps overbuild, and to push the AAM too rapidly, although he did struggle manfully to pull it together, to give it focus, and so on. It was also a difficult time because, in the late '60s and early '70s, everybody was milling around, and yelling and screaming, and everything was getting sort of beaten on, and the AAM was no exception. I remember when I was first become a member of the executive committee, as the vice president, we had a meeting, and I think we met at the Waldorf Astoria, and we were invaded by a takeover group, who sort of marched into the hall and began chanting, and moving as a body, slowly, toward [laughs] the executive committee, which was sitting on a desk at the end of the room. Before we knew it, they were completely surrounded by people chanting and so forth. The aim was to break up the meeting, and to show how foolish AAM was, and how foolish the museum field was, and how unaware they were of the problems of race and women, and so forth and so on. This was brand-new to me. I hadn't had any experience like that. [01:32:00] They did break up that meeting on that particular day. Anyway, I was elected in Mexico City, and took over. I didn't run into my first serious problems until the next year, Milwaukee, when there were various people who seized the microphone and demanded all kinds of changes, immediately, within the AAM. It became almost a chaotic situation during the business meeting. Finally, I just said, all right, we will simply have to form a special committee, seek special funding, and go into conference and see if there is something that we can do to get hold of some of the problems that people were discussing, rather wildly, from the floor. That's exactly what we did. We had a big meeting in Colorado, at—not Colorado Springs—at Aspen, the Aspen conference. It was funded by Nancy Hanks's group. We did try to bring together people who had a conservative point of view, and people who had an absolutely radical point of view. We got about 20 people, or more, to come, and we talked without stop for three days, and tried to come up with some point of view that we might be able to introduce into the AAM, and to make it—to improve it. I think we made some progress—I really do—with that. Since then, there have been many changes, and I think for the better.

ROBERT BROWN: What, in the areas of women's rights?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Minority—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, very much so. We dealt with the governance of the AAM. How could we make this thing function in a better way. I don't think too many of those ideas have become embedded in the AAM, but perhaps a few have. [01:34:02] When you're president of that organization, you're president for a couple of years, and you're carried into office, and then you're swept out of office, and you don't know what happens after that. Joe Nobel [ph] took over after I left, and I don't know exactly what any of us has accomplished over the years. It is still—it is an organization, as of now, 1980, that I think needs a great deal of attention to strengthen it. I think the same kind of vaguely distrustful relationship exists between the AAMD and the AAM.

ROBERT BROWN: But the AAM itself, you feel, is still too amorphous, too—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: It lacks some kind of real central feeling about it, some way to administer properly the interests of the museum field. It was still rather weak. Because members of the AAMD, representing major museums in this country, usually won't work through the AAM, if they have any Washington problems that they want to be interested in. They'll work directly with their own people in Washington, their own senator, their own congressman. They'll go straight to the endowments. Maybe that's the best way after all, I don't know, but it does make for a certain amount of chaos and strong-arming, because after all, if Tom Hoving called Nancy Hanks, that would cut a little more ice than Tom Hoving trying to work through the AAM. After all, as the director of Metropolitan, why should he bother, when he has a direct route to the halls of Congress, or the endowments? I think that's all part of that problem. It's a very difficult, complicated problem. [01:36:03]

ROBERT BROWN: Are you glad you went, eventually, into museum work as a career?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yeah. I—yes.

ROBERT BROWN: You dropped your painting and your interest in—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, did all that. I am very glad that I did go into the museum field. I want to mention one thing about the AAM before we stop and veer away from that, and that is that, during my time, accreditation became a part of the AAM, and I was chairman—

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ROBERT BROWN: —side two, September 19, 1980. The committee on accreditation, you were chairman for the AAM.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Okay. As I was saying, I was chairman for the accreditation committee, and Kieran McGrath had asked me if I would do this. We got together a really superb group of people, and we worked and worked and worked at hammering out an accreditation system.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this a need that had just grown and grown? People agreed—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, it certainly had.

ROBERT BROWN: —by the mid-'70s that you had to have standards?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, earlier than the mid-'70s. This was still in the '60s, I think. Yes, because it was made blindingly clear that many museums had no real standard from which to operate. By many museums, I mean scattered all over the map. Museums that called themselves museums, but had no paid employees, that had no funds to work with.

ROBERT BROWN: Which areas were they generally glaring up [ph]?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Well, we were all guilty: science, history, and art. All of us.

ROBERT BROWN: I mean, in museums generally, which were the areas that were areas, often, of weakness, or shoddy standards?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: All right. Easy. The relationship between the staff and the trustees. Chaotic in many instances. Just housekeeping in a museum, often, unbelievable. I can think of going into museums or historical societies, quite well-known, and seeing rather appalling storage systems—if you call them systems—at work. [00:02:01] Every area of the museum was examined by visiting teams that, in due course, went out to the museums. Now accreditation is very much established and ongoing, and I would say most museums of any size, and many, many smaller ones, are now accredited by the AAM. The whole point was to establish a minimum standard. Not to establish the highest standards, but to establish a minimum standard that everybody could reach. But you would be surprised how many fairly well-known institutions had difficulty reaching even that minimum standard, because there were many areas which were pretty shaky in American museums in the '60s and earlier.

ROBERT BROWN: Was the thought to save their collections, among other things, from the effects of shoddy conditions?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Oh, yes. Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Was there also a thought—you mentioned staff-trustee relations. The thought to better—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: To better, to improve. To try to make a director understand what his responsibility is, and to make a board understand what its responsibility is, instead of having this meshing all the time, and this pulling, which in the past certainly had, and still have today. But now, with accreditation, there is some kind of leverage that can be brought to bear on a museum that is a little unwilling to shape up.

ROBERT BROWN: Was accreditation quite controversial in the association?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: No. I think people welcomed it. I think many museums feared it, because it would expose their operation.

ROBERT BROWN: What of the large museums, the great, prestigious ones? [00:04:02]

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I think they were faintly amused that anyone was going to come and examine their premises. On the other hand, the large museums frequently said, yes, we want to be accredited, and they were right at the head of the line. I think we were able to make, through accreditation, a number of suggestions to even large museums, and they were grateful for them. Once this accreditation system was developed—it was a

printed system. It was quite formalized. A committee was set up at AAM headquarters, with a secretary and so forth, and a review board. The committee that had developed the plan, my committee, simply went out of existence. Now here we are, 10 years later, and the whole thing is running along with considerable success, I think, and the system has been somewhat modified. Not a great deal, but somewhat, because of necessity, the need for change and so on. The central idea remains exactly the same, and I think it has been a tremendous success. It's a tool and device and means whereby you can say to a board, look, you must do something about this aspect of your museum, or that aspect, or you simply won't be accredited. This does strike fear into the hearts of many museums, because they have difficulty now, you see, in getting grants, and people can say—if they're planning to leave an important work of art, they can simply say, casually, "By the way," to the president of the board, "are you accredited?" If he said, "No, we're not," then you can say, "Well, that's interesting. Why not?" It does—it's a little flag that pops up. It's a little warning flag.

ROBERT BROWN: So in terms of policing itself, AAM has served the American museum?

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes. [00:06:00]

ROBERT BROWN: Simply in terms of clout with Washington, that it's still a bit—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, and I presume it's amorphous, primarily, I think, because it's not a heavily funded organization, and it has these free areas that sometimes don't always pull together. But I think it's in pretty good shape, even though it kind of floats and wobbles about from time to time. It's not so bad. [Laughs.] Certainly a lot stronger than it was when I first came into the museum field, 30 years ago or more.

ROBERT BROWN: Since you're leaving your last museum post, have you occupied yourself with research? Been able to go back to your older interest in collecting? You mentioned that even as a child, you were—

CHARLES BUCKLEY: I've gotten interested—

ROBERT BROWN: —an inveterate collector.

CHARLES BUCKLEY: Yes, yes, I'm afraid that goes on. I've worked with my former museum, the Currier, because now the Currier is just completing its fund drive, and has broken ground for the addition that ought to have been built 16 years ago [laughs] and is costing I don't know how much more money. But it's at last being done. Interestingly enough, the architect is Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer, and I suppose I have little influence there, but I think that they're pretty good. I've been doing a little research. I have interested myself in 19th-century American art more than ever, particularly in the decorative arts. This has become almost a new field for me to explore, and I've done quite a lot of work there. I miss being out of the museum field, of course, but too late to worry about it now. I am out and free. [Laughs.] I think it's a marvelous field to be in, but it has its difficulties, I think, in many ways. [00:08:03]

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