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Oral history interview with Garo Zareh Antreasian, 1974 March 29

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Garo Z. Antreasian on March 29, 1974. The interview took place in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and was conducted by Paul Cummings 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

PAUL CUMMINGS: The 29th of March 1974. It's Paul Cummings talking to Garo Antreasian in his office in Albuquerque on in the university campus. Well, as we were just saying, why don't we start, sort of, at the beginning, and you were born in Indianapolis, right?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And, basically, your early education was in—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Was in Indianapolis, yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Uh, what kind of schools did you go to before you started going to the Herron?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: I was in a technical high school, a very large high school. Is that picking up?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: And, uh, the thing that was awfully nice about it is it had a very large art department. From the beginning, I was interested in art.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Had you drawn as a child at home?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: I always have drawn as a child. Never really thought much about it, it was just a natural activity. I was encouraged to do so by my family but not in any formal sense. At the high school where I went, there was a very large art department composed of at least 20 instructors all of whom were actively engaged in the profession. They—several were exhibiting artists in New York and were fairly well-known, and they were quite well-known within their region.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who were some of those people?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Sara Bard was the principal artist there, and she was quite an elderly lady by that time who had, uh, developed her work, sort of, in the orbit of the Kennebunkport's artist groups, and there were close associations to New York. She was constantly—her forte was watercolor painting, and she exhibited at the National Academy quite regularly. Some had gotten to club with exhibitions and things like that. But the spirit and the focus of all that training in the high school was with a professional attitude. [00:02:02] It was quite different than what we think of as our education in the high schools today. And so that while I was in my junior years in the high school, we were encouraged to subscribe to the art journals of the time, *the Magazine of Art*, *Art News*, and *Art Digest* in those days. We were quite well aware of what was going on in the profession of art at quite an early age so to speak. And Ms. Bard had a way of—for senior students of encouraging them to explore projects that they have no familiarity with and—

PAUL CUMMINGS: In terms of what?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Well, for example, she might have you write a report on some current artist of the time. You're going to have to go and look up material and make interpretations of whatever you think the significance of that was—actually, the sort of thing that college-levels students are asked to do, but this was occurring at this particular high school. She—

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was the name of the high school?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Arsenal Technical High School. At that time, there happened to be an old lithography press and some metal plates that had been left over from years and years. No one in the high school knew the process, and I don't—really don't know the history of how those things came to be there. But that was the

project she assigned to me and one of my fellow students, uh, and together, we began to explore lithography with no extant literature available, trial and error, great agony. Throughout a whole year, I don't think we produced one print, but we were hooked from that point. [They laugh.] And, curiously enough, in that city—in Indianapolis, there was a very large lithographic firm that used to print color calendars and so on. [00:04:00] The president of the firm was an old, blind German hand lithographer that learned the trade in Germany and so my friend and I would go down and talk with him to give us advice periodically. We bought our first stones from him. They still had some stones in the factory at that time. And he would spin these romantic yarns of the profession, and that too in a kind of grandfatherly way had a way of attracting our—the interest of young kids.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how did you get to that high school in the first place?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Well, in those days, the city was regionally divided, and that was the high school of our region. And happily, it was the largest high school of the city and so that was simply the natural course.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's where you went, yeah.

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Yeah. The other aspect of Ms. Bard's attitude was to encourage a great sense of competitiveness—the whole idea of preparing work to exhibit, the critical process of analyzing, making judgmental values about things. We talked about art a great deal in the class as well as doing it. And the culmination of all of this was to put together a portfolio so that you could submit to an art school with the hope of getting a scholarship. And for many years, that high school maintained a high record of—in national competition of placing its people in the major art schools of the land at that time. I remember very clearly my goal then was I wanted very much to go to Rhode Island School of Design and—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why was that?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Well, they had a pretty good lithography program in those days. The other alternative was Cleveland Art School. Well, as it happened, I didn't get scholarships in either of those places, but I got a scholarship to John Herron, which was the high school in—uh, the art school in Indianapolis, and that's how I came to go to Herron. [00:06:08]

PAUL CUMMINGS: I see, I see.

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: And, again, my frustrated history, when I got to Herron, there also was lithography equipment. Formerly, Max Khan and Francis Chapin from Chicago used to come down in alternate semesters to offer in the spring term a lithography program to the students. At that time, they were connected with Chicago Art Institute. By the time I got there, the program had been discontinued, the equipment was there, but again, no one to teach. But Donald Mattison who's the director of the school was awfully kind to me, and he would let me go in in the evenings and on the weekends even as a freshman student and just fool around. Again, by trial and error and little by little, I taught myself, so to speak, and proceeded to 1943 and then the war caught me up and—

PAUL CUMMINGS: What else did you study at the Herron Art?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: At Herron, the—it was a traditional art school process of the times. Mattison had come out of the Yale school and the focus at—in those days was to prepare a student to go for the Prix de Rome prize. And, again, Herron had a very good reputation that for three or four consecutive years, their students had won the Prix de Rome prize. So all the preparation from the moment you're a freshman and they began to single you out, you began to be molded for that goal. It's one of those peculiar circumstances. But the training was very, very academic, very, very traditional—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Plaster cast drawing?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Plaster cast drawing and then, of course, also a good deal of live drawing, classes in composition. [00:08:04] Art history as such was not taught, but it occurred in the classroom. Each of the instructors had tremendous fondness for the tradition of art so that in the studio class, you were constantly being made aware of the Renaissance tradition, and in a sense, it was rooted in Renaissance tradition—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative], right.

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: —as well in its—

PAUL CUMMINGS: The Prix de Rome.

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: —direction, right. And in Mattison's case, while on the Prix de Rome, somehow he had discovered postimpressionism. And breaking out of the Renaissance mold, he had gravitated towards Renoir in his own painting. You would remember also, about that time was the tail end of the Federal Works Project, so

there was a lot of mural painting going on, and again, returning to Renaissance notions because all of the mural painting in the '30s was based on old Renaissance concepts anyway and, and also American Scene Painting. And so I—when I was looking at the journals of arts, I was being made aware of all of the American Scene painters and those were the people—

PAUL CUMMINGS: The Mexican murals—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: —and the Mexican murals as well. So those were the people I cut my teeth on in my early training, and those were the early ideals that we aspired to. And it wasn't until, uh—when the war came along in '43, I went into the service, into the US Coast Guard, and the big goal for art students then was to try to figure some way to get into combat art and—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, so you could be a war artist?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Right. So it took me about 18 months to figure out how to manage that and I—

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you do it?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: —became the—well by, again, trial and error [they laugh] until you found the right guy to talk to and the right office in Washington to go to. And I ended up then as being a combat artist for the coast guard on the landing ships that did the Pacific invasions. [00:10:02]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Which ones were you on?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Well, we did the Iwo [Jima] invasion and also the Okinawa invasion and then we're preparing to do the Japan invasion, and the war ended, but I did get to Japan. But in the—

PAUL CUMMINGS: What did you do—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: —meanwhile—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —in the—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: —I wanted to say that during this period of—of three years in the war effort, a ship would often dock in big, metropolitan ports of this country when it did come back. And my taste then of the big museums of the country was then, for the first time, I had the opportunity to really look at the great collections. And because of this fondness that I had for prints as well as paintings, when I would be in Philadelphia, Carl Zigrosser would be so kind to a young man in uniform to break out the whole collection to show me. I've never forgotten that. Una Johnson of Brooklyn Museum is the same way. They didn’t know me from Adam, but their enthusiasm and love for prints just spilled over to anybody who would come and look, you see? And so then, I became aware of other things taking place in printmaking. I was exposed to the big Rualt Misvaire [ph] series, which was only in its proofed state at that time. It had never even been published, but that was a very great revelation to me. And consequently when the war was over and I eventually returned to art school to complete my studies, my interest had elevated way past American Scene Painting, and I was much more interested in what we think of as the modern movements in art at that time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What did you do during the coast guard days though an artist?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Well, it was simply a matter of going where the ship took me, and if we made landings, I'd go ashore and make drawings, and usually in the heat of action, you can't just sit still and make a—[00:12:00]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's right.

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: —a painting. What you do is I ended up simply writing dairies of impressions. Then when we pulled off of the beach and would, sort of, regroup, then I would begin to develop the paintings and more involved works of art while we would be underway going someplace else. And I—

PAUL CUMMINGS: You made little sketches on the sea or—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Oftentimes little sketches. Some of the other artists used to have cameras. I never had a camera with me that could quickly snap action and use that for reference, but most of mine, I referred simply to diary notes. I found that was the quickest way to record impressions and to get the flavor of what I wanted to recall. I remember also all kinds of peculiar incidents. In those days, the transmittal of the art was a very complicated thing. When you were in a forward area, you'd have to do the pictures, you'd wrap them up as best you could. And when you joined the flotilla, there usually would be a press ship that—and your work would have to be transferred to the press ship, then it would be examined, and if there was a censoring problem, it would be censored and then transmitted back to the States. In the late years of the war when the kamikaze actions were

taking place, I had done a number of pictures of kamikaze actions where there was great damage to our fleet. And in the first weeks of that, the press position was not to release that information to the States. By consequence, many of those pictures were destroyed since they got to the press ship, and I always regretted that—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that's terrible.

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: And then they decided several weeks after that it would be advantageous to let this condition be known. The pictures were—

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's too late.

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: —gone by then. [Laughs.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that's terrible.

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: That's curious, isn't it?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Wow.

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: I remember that I'd made a picture of one of those dive bombers hitting a hospital ship, which was—to me it was one of those memorable occasions, but they destroyed that one. [00:14:10]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Anyway, it must have been incredible [inaudible]?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Yeah, yeah. And, of course, obviously, when I think back on this, it seems that whole war thing is—has all kinds of surrealistic implications too. In any case, no art came out of that period—that is, we think of it as important art. It really was documentary and most of the—the most successful of the wars were what we could call very sophisticated illustrators, you know?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right, right. Because they were used to handling all of the material, ideas.

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Right, right, right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what did you do when you came back to Herron because it's—you are now older and—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Well, I was—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —[cross talk]?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: —older. I had—

PAUL CUMMINGS: You've seen a lot .

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: —intentions of getting married. I—there was a great deal of economic pressure on me, and I had decided, well, I want to get married and I want to get a job. And I had, while I was in art school, studied advertising art and so I thought I'd get a job in an advertising agency. So the first year after I'd, uh, got married to a local girl who's a classmate at Herron and got a job in an agency and worked for one year, and I hated it. I hated the whole purpose behind it and determined that I'd go back and finish school. Meanwhile, again, Mattison was very good to me, gave me a scholarship to come back, and they skipped me a grade on the basis of what I had done during the war efforts and so I ended up in the school being a senior and having one more year to go. In those years, it was a five-year program for B.F.A. And so then I began to refine my studies, leant in a little more heavily into lithography at that time, and came into contact with [R.] Maxil Ballinger who was a printmaker working at Indiana University that was 50 miles down the road from us. [00:16:08] And Ballinger was a strong influence on me more in terms of an intensity of purpose than any technical expertise, and introduced me to German Expressionism, which was a great interest of his and the expressionist printmakers. He would come up like once a week from Bloomington and give instruction to printmaking students. So that was an important focus for me at the time. Meanwhile, I was exhibiting in both the regional and national shows. In those days for print shows, the Philadelphia Print Club shows were among the largest, and I had recently good success both being accepted and winning awards while I was still a student. And so I proceeded that way, got my degree, and began to worry about finding a job teaching. I thought I would want to teach—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you always have the idea to teach or was that—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: No, but in the—in my final years at the school, the notion came to me. Also, in those days, the proceeding to graduate-level instruction in art was still not necessarily the usual practice. There were very few strong graduate-level programs in those days. Iowa was one of the strongest in the Midwest. And the—

in other words, the universities hadn't entered into the teaching of art in such a big scale. It happened a few years back—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Just beginning.

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Right. Right. So happily, the matter was cleared up for me because one of the instructors left Herron, and they invited me to replace him the year before I graduated. [00:18:00] So I simply stayed on for 17 years. [They laugh.] And I had the opportunity to develop new courses that they had not taught.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how did you like the transition of having been a student there for so long to becoming a faculty?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Well, I liked it fine. I suppose it has something to do with an ego system. I, all of a sudden, felt that I had information I wanted to impart to others, and once I opened my mouth, it just came—started coming out. I had a—I found I had a lot to say, and you know with the foolishness of youth when I think back on it, I really thought I was superb. I'd deliver lectures, the kids would like it, I would get results, and I thought I knew all the answers. Now, I don't really where the question is all the time, [they laugh] you know? But I—it was a very good period for me, and I felt I had support from my—the administrators. I felt the students were very eager and excited about what I was talking about, which was quite different than what a lot of the other instructors were talking about.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What were you teaching then?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Well, I taught—I started for them what became later known as a design course—things that had to do with perception. I tried to introduce what I thought were 20th-century ideas as I had interpreted them to be. I introduced the very elementary course in what you'd probably call a survey of contemporary art starting with Cézanne and coming forward. And then—

PAUL CUMMINGS: They do not have that?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: That had not happened before, no, no. They're—they did have an art history program that probably went up to about David, and that was the extent of it. So, actually, what art history I had learned, I sort of taught myself just simply from reading.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, you did something that I found very interesting. In 1948, you had a grant or something? [00:20:00]

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You did a museum tour?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Right. In the year of my graduation at that time, they had a marvelous award that they gave to an outstanding student, and prior to the war, that award was principally for European exposure—one would do the grand tour. And when I received it in '48, it was still too close to the end of the war to encourage European travel. Europe was still all torn up then and so I elected to split it into two summers of traveling in the United States. And the more I thought about it, I've never regretted that. I always really thought of myself as an American product anyway. I felt that the things I understood best were here and that anything that I would contact in Europe would be romantic and beautiful but not usable to me in a direct way. So that was the reasoning to go to the museum tour in the first summer and in the second summer to go to work with Bill Hayter who I had heard about that was doing something new in intaglio. And so I gravitated to Atelier 17 and got my contact with that great, dynamic man, and also at the same time began to see what was going on in the museums and galleries, which was the public exposure of Abstract Expressionism for the first time. You know—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, that was your first time to spend time in New York, wasn't it?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: In any professional sense, yes. As a youth, I'd gone back and forth to New York. We had relatives in New York but not in any contact with the art world. So I spent a good deal of time, uh—

PAUL CUMMINGS: What did you do with Hayter?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Hayter again was very good to me. At that time, he was beginning to back away from Atelier 17, looking forward to going back to Paris, which he really always wanted to do as all of his money was tied up there. [00:22:02] The New York Atelier was hard put for money. I remember one time they were printing silk neckties for some fancy haberdasher just simply to make money to keep the Atelier going.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, Karl Schrag was there in—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Schrag was not there. For some reason, I never made contact with him, though [ph] I imagine in later years, but I'm trying to think of the people who were there then. Warden Day was there, and I have forgotten the name of the South American fellow who was sort of the shop manager. I just don't recall his name.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You can't think of his—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: But in the summer months, there was no formal activity going. People would start to drift in and drift out. Some of them I never even got to know. It was that kind of a place where a person would walk through the door, get his materials out, and start working, and you might not even talk to you all the day, and the two of you would be working intensely side by side and scarcely exchanging conversation. Hayter would then pop in once every two or three days. He gave me a key; I could come and go as I wanted. And because his time there was very brief, I'd usually write up a whole bunch of questions so that when he would come in, I'd put—pulled him over in the corner, and we'd sit down for 20 minutes, and I'd trap him there until he replied to the questions. I found that was the most efficient way to deal with the short time situation that he had. Thus, I was able to extract from him the principle—technical things I needed to know. But my real reason for going there was not the technical things but something about the attitude that he was generating towards prints as a medium. And, occasionally in the evenings, people would gather around or we'd go out to have dinners all together at some point, and those were the conversations that I remember that made such an impression on me. [00:24:01] It was—you see, my tradition in printmaking in a sense had grown up around the orbit of the AAA [Associated American Artists] gallery artist, with the American Scene printmakers, print as a democratic process —

PAUL CUMMINGS: Little black-and-white prints.

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Little, black-and-white, $10 prints that had to do with what you know in your own backyard, so to speak. And, of course, all of Hayter's message was the 20th-century attitude as it came out of Europe, and that was a total new revelation to me and also, too, the thought of the potential of the print as becoming a major vehicle of expression again. So that one didn't have to constantly make comparison to higher art forms, so to speak .

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: That—excuse me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —you spent some time with Will Barnet at the [Art Students] League.

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Also the same—during that same summer, I'd schedule myself, so pretty much I'd be in the mornings at the Atelier because I wanted to learn more about lithography, and in my mind, Will was the one that was doing the interesting things in lithographs at that time. I'd got into the art—to the League in the afternoons, and again, Will was quite busy. That particular summer, I think he was teaching three classes [they laugh] simultaneously. So I did the question-and-answer process with him too. Get him over in a corner, and we'd go through my little roll of questions, and he'd give me the replies as best he could, and then when he was gone, I'd generate one or two prints. In those days, Arnold Singer used to be printer there, and what I couldn't learn from Will, I'd talk to Arnold about. Both of these experiences with Will and Hayter were really very short term, compressed periods of time, and yet they left a lasting impression on me. They were just, I think, probably the encouragement I needed to go back then Indianapolis and begin to forge in directions that I felt came from my—[00:26:04]

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you like the League as a place to study? Did you like the atmosphere, the people—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: The Atelier atmosphere?

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, Art Students League.

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: I didn't like it at all.

PAUL CUMMINGS: No?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: No, people were coming and going, I never really got to know anybody. There was a great kind of bustle about it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mostly of them were GI Bill people at that time, wasn't it?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Right. And there may have been an intensity there that I wasn't aware of because, in general, the G.I. period was a tremendous period of art in America, but I wasn't conscious of that. They're more —I had the feeling of noncommitment, partly because people weren't in any one place for a long period of time.

You know, they'd come to their class, and after class was over, they'd disappear, so I really didn't know how involved they were. In my background of art school experience, a kid was there eight hours a day. I saw him all eight hours. He was there every day for five days. You got some sense of something happening, but the Art League isn't that kind of a situation and coming into it as a sort of an outsider for such a short period, I never really felt I had the feel of it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How long were you there at those two places?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: It couldn't have been more than two months.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It was just for some—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Very—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —part of the summer?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Yeah, yeah, a very short period of time. As I say, it was not so much to get the nuts and bolts of things but just to get a flavor of it. And in whatever other spare moment I had, I was going to the museum studying the print collections or looking at the gallery shows or just observing the field of—the feel of that professional atmosphere.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But you were painting at the same time or were you not?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: I was not painting when—

PAUL CUMMINGS: I never heard that stand out.

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Right. You know my basic tradition was as a painter. All of the focus of my studies in the art school was just a painter principally because there was no lithographer to teach me lithography. [00:28:00] So I was simply doing the lithography on the side, so to speak. When I came back from that New York experience, I talked them into letting me start a lithography course for the school where I taught both lithography and that intaglio simultaneously. And having to teach it, I had to become more observant too and so gradually then that increased, but still not to the extent it became in later years. I think—

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did that affect your painting if you had—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Well, uh, the painting obviously was the principal focus for the imagery that came out of the prints. I was painting pretty good-sized paintings. In those days, what we would call cityscapes, storefront art, so to speak, and taking direction from certain things Guston was doing in those days. Remember, those like figure pictures he was doing and so on?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: And then gradually became—under the influence of Ben Shahn who I was very much interested in. I was interested in the notion of the distortions coming out of photography, what it did in certain aspects of reality and—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you use photographs then or did you—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Well, I used it as only a recording device rather than—I'm lazy—rather than going to the site and sketching which takes so long—I simply detest that—but a photograph to get whatever architectural detail I needed find for reference. I remember taking innumerable photographs around New York of East Side material, things that had to do with hells and structures. And then when I went back to Indianapolis, I developed a lot of those into paintings. At that time, they were raising the site that they eventually built the UN building on. That—there were blocks of rubble all around, and that kind of debris, which translated into paint, I could put a lot of patina on and do a lot of textural, tactile things interested me. [00:30:08] It was just kind of a very romantic painting of the American Scene. Then that gets all mixed up, you see, because the notions of abstraction and surrealism that came out of the Hayter orbit began to interfere, and I had a very hard time for a couple of years after I returned from New York trying to sort all that stuff out. And my work at that time, there were all kinds of influences of Hayter and Shahn, which are funny combination to begin with [they laugh] you know? And so I preceded all through the '50s then, kind of, meandering to try to find my way. Until the tail end of the '50s, I was becoming more and more heavily involved in prints. The prints had the very heavy favor of the School of Paris arts in printmaking. In those days. I was interested in Chagall. I became quickly interested in colored lithography. Being a painter, I gravitated towards color. I went at the print as a painter would go to the print rather than as a draftsman and so School of Paris was a natural reaction, [Alfred] Manessier, [Gustave] Singier, all of those artists were some kind of an influence in my ability.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But the abstract ones rather than the figurative ones?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Yes. Gradually becoming more and more abstract, and Picasso obviously, as soon as the catalogues—the definitive catalogues and these lithographs were published those were a tremendous inspiration. Suddenly, I realized all of the things this medium could do, and the earlier notion that you did the drawing and then you printed it was dispelled quickly because it was easy to see. These went from many, many states so the manipulation towards developed—towards an emerging image, which is the way a painter works anyway, I could see it suddenly. This medium had to be potential of doing that—[00:32:05]

PAUL CUMMINGS: You could do it on the stones, too.

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Yeah, yeah. And prior to that, I hadn't the technical knowledge to deal with it, but once I focused that that this was a possibility, I found how to do that, so to speak. Meanwhile by the mid-'50s, [Gustave] von Groschwitz was beginning to have the color lithograph biennials at the Cincinnati Art Museum. Those were the first big showcases of lithography in this country, and people came from all over the country to see those things there, and for me, I was 70 miles down the road, I could go over there, and really see what this medium was being used for all over the world. And I—when you—they became like the Carnegie annuals of lithography. And they continued on it for about 1958, [19] '59 or so, and I was exhibiting in each of them, and often I'd take my students over to see the material. And so that brings me pretty close to what I think is more—my more mature attitude about lithography, and it's just that the—uh, precedes the Tamarind period of activity.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, one thing that interests me is the fact that you went to school and then taught so many years in one place, but yet have these outside—you know, you could go to Bloomington and other places that did have the—the Herron has—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: The Herron has a good museum collection.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Not—at that time, it was not heavy in 20th-century material, but it in later years, it began to develop 20th-century material particularly in prints. But my notion partly because of the way I educated myself through literature, through the journals, I was aware that lots of things were going on in the outside world that weren't happening where I lived. [00:34:13] And yet, I'm a very conservative person, I need to have a stable base from which to operate. I felt it was much easier to go someplace, learn something, come back to my—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Way—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: —familiar ways, so to speak, to do my work. And I continue to feel that way very strongly.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you visit Chicago often?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Chicago at least a couple of times a year. The great art institute collections, I know by heart, so to speak. And that was a—and also, the notion of where the great repositories of art were in this country. That's always been something very important to me—that there are these houses where you can go to find the riches of the world, and it's always meant a great deal to me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You know it's interesting, say, through the years that you taught there, you didn't exhibit in New York very often with a dealer or anything, did you in particular—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: I had no dealer contact, so I guess my first New York show was—I'm just very vague about the date—maybe 1950, '51. In those days, Esther Gentle had a gallery in New York and—who was kind to printmakers. There really weren't many places where you could exhibit prints—

PAUL CUMMINGS: That was downtown, wasn't it?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: It was downtown. The Weyhe Gallery was the only other gallery to my knowledge that was showing—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Showing color—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: – prints and AAA, yeah, through Silva. And so, Esther Gentle gave me my first show of prints in New York and then shortly afterward, Margaret Lowengrund had—opened up a gallery that became—

PAUL CUMMINGS: The Contemporaries.

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: —a print gallery that subsequently ended up being Pratt, the Pratt [-Contemporaries Graphic Art] Center. When she died, Pratt took it over and made it then a making center. [00:36:02] So Margaret then became my first dealer and then after hear death, Martha Dickinson of Weyhe Gallery took my work on—this would've been all through the '50s—and that was the exposure of my work at—in New York galleries. But within my region, my vehicle was exhibitions, and I was always lucky enough to win awards in exhibitions, and somehow then, I suppose my name became known through that process.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Were they useful to you as far as, what, public response, some kind of feeling that you were doing things, going out into the world, and there was some feedback there? Was that—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Well, perhaps in a small way. I guess—

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Inaudible.]

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: —probably in a more important way, it was an ego thing to feel that my work would find acceptance somewhere in the outside world, or that—in the competitive sense that my work would win an award in an exhibition, which there were prominent names. And it was a very material kind of reaction I had actually and then probably a very immature reaction to it. But, as I say from the early days, that sense of competitiveness wasn't instilled—partly it's my heritage too. I was the only foreign kid on the block when I was growing up, I couldn’t speak English till I was six years old, and all of the things developed whether you wanted or not an instinct of the competition.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What language did you speak—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Armenian. And also in sports, I was very active in tennis. I always wanted to be a tennis champion, and that tournament competition develops that kind of an instinct too. I don’t know what that business is about champions. There's something special about champions. I don’t know whether it's a champion in character or—yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Straight ahead, line—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Right, right. And so these would have been perhaps the early reactions to professional activity on the outside world. [00:38:08] Then by that time, the Print Council had been formed in the late '50s in New York, and their journal was coming out, and at one point, I felt clear eyed enough to understand what the problem with lithography was because in those days—

PAUL CUMMINGS: In terms of what?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Well, in terms of where it was in this country—it was really in a bad way. I realized the limitation of a fellow exploring through his own resource. This is a very complicated medium. It has no literary background that you can refer to if you need technical information or a very limited literary background.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Four books or something.

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Yeah, so to speak. And, meanwhile on my right-hand side, I can see what intaglio was doing as a result of Hayter's influence. By that time, Lasansky was in Iowa, Hayter, they had gone up to the Northeast, and their disciples were beginning to fan out. And whenever one spoke about the print Renaissance, they were really talking about intaglio printmaking, and there was some woodcut work being done, you know?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: And I kept thinking, well, where's the lithographs, and it was the same old guys doing the lithographs out of the AAA concept, you know? And then when I saw what the Europeans were doing with lithography and compared it to what the Americans were doing, it was very bad. So, in one heated moment, I wrote a long article the *Print Collector's Quarterly* about the sad state of this medium in the country and made suggestions of how I thought it could be improved, which was some massive educational effort, which would take a lot of money, and which only I could see could be funded by foundation support. And felt that somehow the process had to be brought up to the 20th century to use the technology and the tools available in the 20th century. [00:40:03] Well, I didn’t know it at that time, but June was preparing her pitch to Ford Foundation along very similar lines. And shortly after my article was published, Ford sent me June's proposal to give opinion on, and I was astonished. It was just right down the same track

PAUL CUMMINGS: There it was.

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Yeah. And I had—I didn’t know her at that time—I had known her work in a vague sort of way—and I wrote a glowing report, said it was just the ticket. Shortly after that, I got a note from her and said that—she said, "I hear you're interested, and could we arrange to meet sometime?" On her way to New York, she

arranged to stop in Chicago, and I flew up to Chicago, and we had an all-day meeting at Chicago Art institute where she told me more about her project. And at that time, she was really sizing me up, and we really hit it off, saw eye to eye on so many things, and so she made a proposal that would I be interested in becoming the technical director of the project. And so I was very interested, I wanted to talk to my wife about it, and so on, and so she said, "Well, if you do think you're going to be interested, I'd like to come out to Indianapolis and work with you for a week or so." I said, "Fine." I went back and when I got back, there was a letter from New York from Pratt, and they were looking for a director of their workshop. And so here are these two proposals from opposites posts, both extremely attractive propositions. But the moment we thought about it, we thought we'd go to the west post, one—partly because of the children. The children were quite small, and New York at that time was already beginning to be an ugly place to raise a family and so I said to June, "I'm interested." She came out in January, and we worked for a week together. [00:42:00] Again, she went to see what my work habits and abilities were, and that went very well, and so she offered the job. I accepted, and we ended up, and—I took a leave of absence from Herron, and in 1960 went out set up the shop, and simultaneously, she had been in correspondence with Clint Adams who was chairman of the art department at Florida at that time. And Clint came up to set up the administrative apparatus of project. So the three of us worked as a triumvirate, so to speak, to get the thing underway. Now, my commitment was for a year and then I felt obligated to go back to my institution. In that years' time, I felt that the thing was very firmly established, and they then invited both of Clint and I to remain as advisors to the board of directors, which meant that about four times a year, we'd fly back out and review the program and the progress of the operation and give her our advice.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How much of that program was preplanned, or was it a fairly rock program and then evolved?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: It was planned in stages. Each plateau that you reached raised new questions. For example, the principal task was: first of all, to regain the lost knowledge of the process; second, to transmit that to artisans who could carry it forward. So the training of the printers was paramount. In order to train the printers, you had to introduce artists to the medium who had had no introduction. When these things began to happen, all of a sudden then pieces of paper with pictures on them began to be produced. The next question to address was what's going to happen to those pieces of paper?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. You can't pile them up.

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Right. So then one began to go outside—well first of all, before that happened is, in order to continue producing the pieces of paper, what kind of economics are involved and then how do you operate a workshop in an American economic situation? [00:44:09] And then when you have the answers to those then what happens to the paper when it goes out into the outside world? So there were studies made on the economics of operating a workshop, there were then studies made then about the marketplace, what the potential of the market was at a time when there was tremendous resistance in the marketplace about handling paper. Many of the artists that would come with it were invited to come with—would come already with built-in prejudices instilled by their own dealers about it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, most of the big dealers hated prints.

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: They hated it and—

PAUL CUMMINGS: They'd rather sell paintings or drawings.

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Right. And our purpose was to show them that by hiring a second man only to deal with the print, he would quickly pay for his own way. Most of the dealers at that time were single men, entrepreneurs, so to speak, and they want the control of their whole operation and—but they were quick—as soon as one did it, they were quick to see what the potential was, and not everybody has a second man in their gallery just to specialize in prints.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Now—so that each plateau produced a new study and a new response to the issue.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where did Goodman come from? Was it some of the economics—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Calvin was always in—a Los Angeles man, and he was a management consultant, sort of like an efficiency engineer. So he addressed himself to these problems in the same sense that the business world addresses themselves to problems of management.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you find though that looking back at some of those reports that they were useful in the business?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Yeah, very much so. [00:46:00] Useful if for no other reason than to form a perspective

to produce your own different way of doing it. Well, it was the first time hard data was presented, you see? And I—I'd be the last to say that those predictions were accurate, but they were clear enough that one could take a position against them. It's more than just a subjective kind of thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The first signposts into that [ph]?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Yeah, yeah, so to speak, yeah. We used to fight with Cal all the time, and a lot of the ideas and conjectures and suppositions he put forward simply went against our grain. We had no tradition by which to establish ourselves to in that context. But I would say that 50 percent of it was right, and the idea behind it was right. Now, a lot of times that gets very subverted. You can't think about business every second if you're going to produce great art. And, yet, if you don't pay some attention to it, the great art can't be produced anyway. The shop is doomed to failure. So there's a very fine rub there that you've got to find the correct balance for, and there's a half dozen different ways to do it. All of—along the way, other things that took place there was an establishment of standards that have never existed before and what the quality of an impression should be like, or the more—

PAUL CUMMINGS: The testing—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: —hiding all of the ugliness under that, you know?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. The testing materials and tapes and things—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: All of that and the development of materials that hadn't existed before.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When did the idea of doing a book appear?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Well, I had had that even before I went to Tamarind but in a very unrealistic sort of way—the kind of a romantic notion that—simply because I had needed a book desperately when I was learning and there wasn't one and I knew that one was necessary. And not the kind of book that had been devoted to printmaking in the past, which is a little how-to-do-it recipe book, but something that was a substantial study. [00:48:06]

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Inaudible.]

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Yeah. And so we first began to talk seriously about the book when I left, which was '61. And my mission was to go back and start drafting up the first drafts for it. And that went from '61, and we didn't end up with the final manuscript until '68 or '69. It took that long, and I was gradually beginning to pick up photographic documentation that we would want to include. There was a tremendous amount of material that we were not able to include in the book that never got published.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How'd you like the experience of having to write down all of these things and—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: I'm not really a writer. I hate writing. I can't type, so much of it was long hand, laborious. I have to rewrite many, many times before as sentence even becomes clear.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I mean—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Well I've—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —they do—make you rethink technical situations in the—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Yes. In the same way that being forced to teach does. You have to be rather specific about what you're talking about. You've got to go back on things that you had talked generally about. You've got to go back and find exactly what you're saying, or if there's a formula involved, you can't be just general about it, you've got to be quite specific. And when we got into the whole business of the chemistry of it, because I have no chemistry background, I just started to teach myself fundamental chemistry to understand what my instinct had told me was taking place. So that on the whole, that was good. It was a clarification of things that subjectively or instinctively or by habit I'd learned to do to really find out what works, you know? So all that—

PAUL CUMMINGS: All that informs your teaching again.

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: It would, informs the teaching and that deal, yeah. Well, all of those things after I returned from Tamarind had a profound effect on how I talked about prints because I learned enormously in that process. [00:50:05] And after that point, I considered myself then as a mature printmaker, a mature artist, and the formative years were over by that time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How—now—but you were still painting through this or what was—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: I was painting through that, but after the Tamarind thing, the intensity of what needed to be done was really taking up most of my attention. Painting gradually gave way more and more and more. And whereas the paintings originally influenced the imagery of the prints, gradually the prints then—when I was painting, the print imagery was beginning to influence the direction of the painting. And then after I came here in '64, there was a continual diminishing of the painting, and to a point a few years ago, I was not painting at all. Now, last year, I felt the need again to get involved in painting, and I've just began to start painting again. And my reason for that is printmaking is an enormously time-consuming process. It's much faster to do a painting than it is a print. I need now to reexamine the—my ideas, my imagery. Painting is going to be a much more conducive tool to do that than printmaking.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Because you can do more in the same amount of time?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Right, or I can take greater risks and cover them up by correcting, whereas in lithography, it's sometimes irreparable you know?

PAUL CUMMINGS: I'm curious about a couple of things because I see the time is—we've only got about 10 minutes left on here anyway. How did you come to the University of New Mexico?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Well, as I say, when both Clinton and I separated in '61, Clint came here to accept the deanship of the college of fine arts. [00:52:01] We would see one another at Tamarind about four times a year to review programs. And in an ensuing conversation, Clint more and more wanted to begin a lithography program here. There wasn't one here at the time. And so in '63, he invited me to consider coming out to set up a shop here. And at about the time when we felt if we were ever going to move out of Indianapolis, we better start thinking about it, and so he had asked at the right time. I was interested, came out, and was interviewed. It looked promising, and I came, and we set up the shop following the same guidelines as the Tamarind purpose but devoted to students with some degree programs here.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: And continued because that was started in '64 up till '70. And by that time, the project in Los Angeles had terminated and the notion of whether to continue that under some other guise or to collapse it came up, and the foundation at that time was very much interested in continuing. If it felt it had gotten tremendous mileage out of the project—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, it's just—I think one of the things about that project is that it formed the basis for the whole print market. It exploded in the '60s, so—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Right. And in the '70s was just the emergence of the real promise of what that market was so that there was continued clamor for more and more trained artisans, and that was the principal justification for continuing it. So then many of us felt if it were to be continued, it could no longer be continued under artificial subsidy. And the logical thing then was to connect it to university systems so that would become a permanent institute. [00:54:00] Further logic said bring it here because the two people closest to it were already here. Our university declared that it was interested in having it and made the proposition of what kind of funding it could offer. Ford then put up a five-year de-escalating grant to continue it, after which the university would observe it for—and that year is rapidly approaching. It's about a year or two away. So when that deal was made, Clint then assumed the directorship of it, and I was the technical director in 1970 while I was still teaching here in the department too, kind of a joint appointment. And I continued till '72, at which time I felt that the demand of my time between there and here was simply too much and I then wanted to pull away so that I would have at least a little time for myself and so then I resigned from the institute to come back to full-time teaching here.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Were you the one who started making things on silver foil, doing prints on the foil?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Yeah, I don't know if I was the first, but I surely was among the earlier ones. That too was—

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did that—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: —was this instinct toward utilizing 20th-century products. The traditional notion that the print had to exist on paper was fine, but I wanted to explore what other possibilities there were. I have found in my development where I got most of my technical information were out of the commercial technical books of the time as related to lithography. Well then, I quickly found that lithography was just for team printing. It was just for all kinds of commercial application on surfaces that were not what the artist always used. Now, also at the same time, when I go through a grocery store, I see the products of the commercial industry of printing, and I'm entranced by the expertise that they have. [00:56:11] My notion was, can those be translated to aesthetic

purposes of the artist—so foils, cloth materials, all of that kind, special inks. Now, at that point, I'm somewhere close to what you call a process-oriented art where the process itself creates its own aesthetic, and I've been, sort of, interested in that. And I'm also interested in what we can do for lithography that will make it produce something that it hadn't produced before.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In terms of what? You mean imagery?

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: In terms of imagery, in terms of flavor, perhaps even in terms of purpose. Now, some people interpreted that to say, "Well, we'll make bigger prints." That was one direction printmaking took. All sorts of other additions, why does it have to be flat, can it be shaped, so the notions of embossing and so on take place. When I did the prints on foil, other things that I hadn't anticipated occurred. The reflectivity of the foil itself does a very funny figure drawing things optically.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Through the colors.

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Yeah, through—yes. And so that opened up whole sets of other possibilities in terms of the expression of the work. And then after doing that for a while, you began to say, "Well now, what is my feeling about printing on paper again?" So you have to return the paper to see what that [inaudible]. So it's back and forth, so—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Then there's your famous blended roller—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: That too—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —activities [laughs].

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Right, right. Well I was always interested in the notion of how one can make continues color blend. And we know how they'd look by halftone photography and the air brush, and that was one of those things that was just sort of a quirk, and all of a sudden, the light bulb flashed on my head—it would be so easy to do. [00:58:04] You know, it's—just came to my head how it's done, and I really thought I had invented something. Well, afterwards, we learned that in the 19th century, they did quite that often in poster art, and of course, obviously much earlier than that in Japanese woodcut prints and so on. And my first notion of the possibility of it came through a misinterpretation of a Toulouse-Lautrec Jane Avril poster where she has the black dress with the snake twined around it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Got it, yeah, yeah.

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: The snake has a gradation of color, which I had only seen in reproduction, and it made me think that was like what we called a blended roll. So the minute I saw the effect, I liked it, I wanted a bigger way of doing that, and blender roll came in my mind after I saw an original of the Jane Avril. It really is spider work that's been blended together by separate printings. But through a faulty reproduction it gave me an idea—you know inventions misapplied so to speak. That was another one of those things and then that—ever since I have maintained use of that in some way in my work. I realized all of its dangers, not everybody does it, and so now it presents another interesting kind of problem as how to deal with that without all of the bad effects that come—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Within your own aesthetic.

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Within my own aesthetic and as a counterpart to whatever else is existing like it somewhere else. It's a little bit the kind of the game I always felt Picasso played is always just somehow to be a little ahead of the game.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, [inaudible] keeps it going.

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Okay. Well, I see the time is this—

GARO Z. ANTREASIAN: Right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why don’t we—

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]