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Oral history interview with Paul Burlin, 1962

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Paul Burlin on December 5, 1962. The interview was conducted by Dorothy Gees Seckler for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

This is track number one of five, side A.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: This is Dorothy Seckler interviewing Paul Burlin on December 5, 1962.

PAUL BURLIN: Am I to say anything?

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Paul, uh, I'd like to go back to the very beginning, uh, of your earliest recollections of your life and what was important or unimportant about it. Uh, where you were born, and any part that was played by your, uh, family or the surroundings of your early boyhood. Uh, would you just fill in a few of those facts to begin with?

PAUL BURLIN: My early boy, uh, boyhood was really, uh, spent in New York, where I was born.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes, uh—

PAUL BURLIN: And, uh, the, probably the, the business of your questions is probably is related to what makes a young man desire to become an artist. Um, if I speculate for one moment on the relationship of family and to this growing-up young man, I would say that, uh, whatever the unconscious rebellions are, and they exist of course, one is never so sure to, to really feel that they are precisely—will bring you to a stage of becoming the artist. I think, as a matter of fact, it has nothing to do with becoming the artist. I think, what I think is probably a passion, is the all-important thing is the rebellion against something. I think that is a *raison d'etre* of its own, of some very important inner expression. Because we can easily see, just to speculate, [00:02:00] a little bit afar from this field, immediate field, and that is to see that fathers, distinguished fathers, whose sons have nothing to say, though they try to carry on the particular creative profession of papa. And I think the set, the setting is too acute for them, and there's no rebellious urge to do the same. It can't be. And so, the—this is probably, uh, so mixed-up with the young man rebelling against, probably, family, probably, um, the conditioning of its surroundings, the—even the conditioning to the point of feeling a complete separation, and rather no relationship to them at all, as it would be in my case. In my case, it was very decidedly something as if I rebelled that I existed amongst them.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Did you come from a large family, Paul, or were you an only child?

PAUL BURLIN: No, uh, there were three. I was the youngest. No, the family was an extremely limited one. And during the very early stages of, say, uh, something like five or six years old, we—the family had gone to—I had gone with the family to England. Where we spent about six years or so, or more, something like that. And where I went to school. So that I had, uh, five or six years of, uh, London, English public-school education.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Do you still recall that time, did it seem to you that going to England made sort of a difference in your, uh, outlook?

PAUL BURLIN: I think going to England has a memory which even carries out into memories of song of the period. I, uh—the great star of the period [00:04:00] in Vaudeville was a fabulous woman called Mary Lloyd, as they called her, Mary Lloyd. Mary Lloyd was really marvelous. And so, um, just to reminisce in a little bit about it, when a couple of years ago at some university, an English chap was singing some of the musical songs, I remembered the songs and sang with him. So that is sort of a curious thing, to remember that.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes.

PAUL BURLIN: I remembered it in such a way that the whole rhythm cadenzas [ph] of the thing, I joined as if the whole thing had repeated itself in actuality. So, uh, it had left maybe something about which I consider myself, a kind of an international speech for me, too.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Wonderful. I'm going to stop right here and play back the—

PAUL BURLIN: Does it sound good?

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Um, about how old were you when you returned from England—

PAUL BURLIN: Well—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —and what happened next?

PAUL BURLIN: [Laughs.] Well, obviously, it was five or six years, I was about 11 years old when I returned—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: —to New York.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: And you were going to school?

PAUL BURLIN: I then went to school here in New York.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yeah?

PAUL BURLIN: Now, uh, I don't have any memory—well, yes, I do, in the sense of being interested in a—not a very articulate way, of drawing. And, uh, drawing, for a curious reason, was mainly of ships, see, so that's odd. And, uh, and there was no such thing as a feeling or the desire or a need to be an artist in any way. That, uh, that was a veiled atmosphere for me—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: —in every way.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: What were you in, what kind of, of activities did you go in for as a, you know, boy?

PAUL BURLIN: Oh, the usual boyish activities, [00:06:00] whatever they were at the time, you know. Um—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Did you have any close friends?

PAUL BURLIN: In school, in school, it was always, uh, receiving a rubber, a pencil, a pad, or something, for the, uh, the ability to draw.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: And, uh, as I remember it now, the—a similar sort of thing would—had taken place in England, in the London school, in the English school. I would receive some kind of childish prize for drawing. But painting, as such, painting never took place until many, many years later. Perhaps I was well in the 20s before I ever thought of painting, because I think, uh, I was the least educated, aes—aesthetically speaking, of any young man. And I think this is a period now, we think about, so many years ago, when young men were not talking about painting, were not interested in the arts.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: I don't remember, and think in any concrete way, what they were interested in. I don't know. But it certainly wasn't that the young man in, uh, simple circumstances, that has the parenthesis when I say that, uh, were thinking about, uh, doing something creative. I became employed with that strange magazine called *Delineator*—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: —and where I was doing what I called stinkweed decorations. Which is nothing more than making, um, designs around photographs, in contrast to the use of photography today, where [inaudible] used frankly as such. And then it was always on manual wave [ph] anyway as I call it. The—[00:08:00] some, some leaves of some sort, in order to make it pleasant, and, uh, that was that.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Well, when did this take place? Did you finish high school and then go—uh, have any other in—uh, schooling at all?

PAUL BURLIN: Yes, yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: This is right after high school?

PAUL BURLIN: No, I didn't go to college. And—and I found there was a need to make money, and so I became employed at this magazine.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Did you have any associates there, or did anything happen to expose you—

PAUL BURLIN: Yes. My associates were all—were all gentle pot-boilers, who also had no idea there was such a thing as art, though they wore big hats and Windsor ties.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: But you didn't make any friends at that time who were influential or even—[cross talk.]

PAUL BURLIN: I think I made friends, not with such fellows—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But outside—

PAUL BURLIN: —because they didn't necessarily interest me.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: They were—in some unconscious way, I was aware that, uh, commercial art had no particular attraction to me. And so I'd forfeit the—more or less, I would dismiss the environment. But then I found myself interested in the desire to study, to draw, from the figure, or whatever. And, uh, and so in a very naïve way—I say naïve because it wasn't as if I had a very decided idea how to do it—I went up to the National Academy of Design. And the usual procedure, of course, the good old-fashioned way, was to put you in the, uh, where they had cash where you were making drawings.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: And that bored me quickly enough. And so the encouragement was when I was permitted to go into the life class. And that, uh, gave me a great deal of interest, but, uh—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. [00:10:00]

PAUL BURLIN: —but I found that, as far as the instructor was concerned, it was so, uh, so utterly boring. But not on the basis of superiority on my part, but because the, uh, the teaching, the character of teaching was so noncommittal—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: There were—

PAUL BURLIN: —that I'd—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —no concepts there, uh, that there—

PAUL BURLIN: None whatsoever.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: It—there was no speech on the part of the instructor to show that he had an attitude.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: And that this attitude was something that he hoped you would understand. So he contributed nothing. And I was quickly aware this was not the place for me.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Uh, you didn't, uh, there, discover any other artists that were in the same boat there? Uh, or make any—struck up any friendships?

PAUL BURLIN: I think I—I began to speculate about studentship here, though it was slight enough, and though it was carried on in a more complicated way as the teacher, when I became the teacher, that the confraternity of studentship then, at night—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: —um, was all conservedly [ph] conceived of each one on his own. So there was no feeling that there was—was camaraderie [ph] of some kind—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yeah.

PAUL BURLIN: —related to young artists or young people doing something called art, and, uh, therefore there was conversation about it. I found that in later years in Paris. Into one of, uh, much speculation, much critical speculation. And so, uh, here, there wasn't any of it.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yeah.

PAUL BURLIN: None whatso—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: So you were going to school at night, working for *Delineator* during the day, and roughly how old were you by this time, Paul? In your early 20s? [00:12:00]

PAUL BURLIN: Oh, in the 20s. So in something in the 20s.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Then—and you left the National Academy, I take it, after you became bored, and then did you go on—

PAUL BURLIN: No, I, uh—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —and study somewhere else?

PAUL BURLIN: —I went on and then found the opportunity. I say I went on, on the basis that I was looking for a place to continue to draw, and joined up with some other young artists, where a model was hired and then where we made drawings at night. And, uh, there was this place, on Third Avenue, many years ago, lower Third Avenue. Um, very close to a sympathetic place called a beer hall.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Were you, uh, seeing any paintings? Did you, uh, go to the Met, or were there places where you looked at things in the way of painting or drawing?

PAUL BURLIN: To repeat, I had, uh—I had very little, uh, very little or none, no, uh, art atmosphere. Uh, very little that was said to me about it, and that, uh, it was—it was speculation about it on my part. It was the most incoherent, I would say, and had very little decision—[Audio break.] [00:14:00]—young artist.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: When did it begin to be interesting to you? When did you first feel something really vital happening? Or meet someone that opened up a new area for you?

PAUL BURLIN: It's very hard to remember that, you know, it's so much—so many years—years—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: You said you—you mentioned going to Paris. Is that a good bit later, or did you go to Paris—

PAUL BURLIN: Oh, that's much later. Going to, going to Paris, going to Paris is, uh—creates an atmosphere of strange happenings, where, at one time, all within this early, early stage, being invited to join a, uh, brilliant group of young anthropologists, who, uh, who were doing some work for the immigration commission, under the guidance—[Audio break.] So, uh—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: But this was, uh—

PAUL BURLIN: The—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —was this, uh, in the period—I'm sort of pegging this around the Armory Show period, 1930—[Audio break.] [00:16:00]

PAUL BURLIN: And, uh, then found Santa Fe the most unfashionable, primitive little town, which made an enormous hit with me, [inaudible] the intimidating nature.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Do any painting in that locale?

PAUL BURLIN: Yes, I did. I—I found it, uh—and I say intimidating in the sense of the things of—for a young man coming from New York City, the most ferocious atmosphere I'd ever been in. Aside from meeting Indians, which had strange, uh, atmosphere and intimidation, the erosion, the land and this erosion was a frightening thing. I probably learned how to sing out of doors just to keep the demons away.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: [Laughs.] That's a wonderful observation. Uh, was it a very rough, tough atmosphere in terms of, you know, uh, very hardened types of men hanging around in the town and that sort of thing?

PAUL BURLIN: No, I had received some—some exciting, romantic ideas from other people about the importance of, uh, being on guard with these tough characters you're going to meet. And someone presented me with a .45,

and which to me was the most [00:18:00] gingerly thing that I'd ever touched. And, uh, even to think about it, you know, I'm thinking how, uh, how brave was I with a gun? In any case, I found it—I found it the most charming place to be in. And if there were tough characters, they were damn well hidden. And, uh—but I painted it with a great deal of enthusiasm, because it was the first time I saw a primitive—a simple, primitive people. Um, I heard their music, which was—which fascinated me, though I hadn't the slightest idea what it was all about. Um—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: What kind of music was that? Uh, from Mexico?

PAUL BURLIN: Well, American Indian music.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Oh, Indian.

PAUL BURLIN: American Indian music.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes, yes.

PAUL BURLIN: And there, and within that time, met a distinguished, uh, woman, Natalie Curtis, whom later on I married.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You met her in Santa Fe?

PAUL BURLIN: Yes. A distinguished woman who really wrote the, uh—who wrote, not really, but who wrote the fabulous book called *The Indians' Book* with the music of the Indians. Probably the first recording of American Indian music that had been done. Published by Harper's for 40-odd years.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Did you get married while you were out there?

PAUL BURLIN: Yeah, not the first year. Second year.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What—uh, can you remember roughly the dates of, uh, that time? This was still before the Armory, so it must have been 1912, or something like that?

PAUL BURLIN: 1911, something like that.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: 1911 or 1912?

PAUL BURLIN: 1911 or '12, yeah, that's right.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: That time.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: And then what year did you marry, just for the record?

PAUL BURLIN: Oh, I—it's—it's hard to say. I—I, um—right now it would be difficult for me to remember.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: It was a year later, or so, [00:20:00] or two years. I—I don't quite remember.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Was it these paintings that you made in the Southwest that brought you to the attention of the artists who were assembling the Armory Show?

PAUL BURLIN: Well, I—it, uh, it brought considerable attention. I'm trying to think of the critic at that time, who was no common critic, uh—and I can't think of his name—who wrote, uh, the book called *The Seven Veils*, and who was probably one of the very early perceptive writers about—about, um, the great Romantics of Europe, the great Romantic painters, and, uh, the great Romantic musicians, or composers. I can't think of his name, the most important—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Reeshman [ph]?

PAUL BURLIN: What?

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Reeshman?

PAUL BURLIN: Yes, he wrote about Sechman [ph], he wrote about Reeshman. He wrote about—he wrote about Redon. Uh, and this man, these pictures, he painted the—[cross talk.]

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Was he an American critic?

PAUL BURLIN: Yes. Yes, he was [inaudible]. Why it escapes me, this was that—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Not Fred Croent [ph], no, no.

PAUL BURLIN: No, it's—no, it's a—it's a date about that time—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: —and, who, uh, who wrote about music—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Huneker?

PAUL BURLIN: Hmm?

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: No?

PAUL BURLIN: Huneker!

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Huneker? Was it Huneker?

PAUL BURLIN: James Huneker.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Oh.

PAUL BURLIN: This—this attracted the attention of James Huneker, that show, and it received considerable praise.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. How did they get to you for the Armory Show? Uh, you—Huneker came to see you—

PAUL BURLIN: I don't know. I one day received, one day I, uh, I was—one day, William Glackens came over to the studio—I was at 51 West 10th Street, the old studio building that existed for many years down in the Village.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: And, uh, Glackens invited me just like that.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: And what kind of a selection, uh, did you—of your paintings, did you make [00:22:00] for the show? Uh, I suppose it's a matter of record.

PAUL BURLIN: It's a matter of record, but they were not paintings, they were drawings.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: They were drawings.

PAUL BURLIN: Yeah. There were four drawings.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: That's a matter of record because it only was brought to my attention recently, with those who were arranging the show up at, uh—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yeah.

PAUL BURLIN: Proctor [ph].

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Did they get the originals from you for the show? Can—

PAUL BURLIN: No, they couldn't get it. It's—it was bought by Jacob Schiff, the distinguished financier at the time.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: And some ways, it's either hidden in the family, though the correspondence has been written about—about him, but we've had no results.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Were they, uh, drawings of the Southwest?

PAUL BURLIN: They were drawings of the city. Large drawings of the city.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Of the city? Of San—

PAUL BURLIN: New York.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Of New York City. [Audio break.] Well, just before we stopped, we were talking about your impressions of the Armory Show, what things you saw, particularly, I would assume, that the European painters might have been the ones that would have been—

PAUL BURLIN: To—to reminisce about the Armory Show, which happened 40 years ago, is to—we mustn't forget, we see it with modern eyes. At that time, we saw it with a very commonplace eye. We had no, uh, experience with it whatsoever. [00:24:00] Uh, I'm talking mainly about American—not about American, but about European. And so it was the first time that one saw, uh, Cézanne, one saw Gauguin, one saw Picasso, and so on. And, uh, we were all young in our conceptions of these paintings. And I think even the pros, the very professional ones, had too little experience with such men anyway. Therefore, my memory is, uh, can only be spoken about in the most, um, acute and smallish manner. And my memory is—is very distinctively aware of the *Old Woman with the Rosary*, by Cézanne struck a note of extreme interest to me. And all the other pictures diminished in size and also in memory. But the Cézanne was—to this inexperienced young artist—was an ex—struck an extraordinary note. And I remember it to the present time, the mood of the picture.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes. It's one of the most—most romantic—

PAUL BURLIN: And, uh, the most romantic—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —paintings [ph].

PAUL BURLIN: —in a way, for Cézanne—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: —and at the same time, the most structural of all pictures that were shown there. I have a memory of many pictures that seemed to be, uh, basically as if technique was a very important thing. And it struck a fancy for me, because this was not the kind of métier—métier a young American would be aware of at all. It was all new. But—and then I have a memory of such pictures which were the more startling ones. Like the showpiece, called, uh, *Nude Descending the Stairway*.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes. And how did that—[laughs]—

PAUL BURLIN: And it struck a great fancy for me. I was bewildered, but attracted to the whole thing. And thought, uh, Duchamp was quite an original personality.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Did you have a chance to meet him at that time, or even likely [ph]—

PAUL BURLIN: I didn't meet him then, but I met him years later in Paris, when he wasn't playing chess.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: [Laughs.] And did any of this affect your work immediately after it?

PAUL BURLIN: I would say no. Since there was no previous speculation about these things, uh, it would be hard to say whether they had any effect whatsoever.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Did they give you a more [inaudible]—

PAUL BURLIN: But they stimulated.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yeah, they—yeah.

PAUL BURLIN: Oh, they were fabulously stimulating because I had never seen anything that—the whole idea of the structure of painting, which, as I say, to the uneducated, aesthetically speaking, young man, uh, it was—it would be impossible to say that its contribution wouldn't be immediate. If it was the young man living in Europe a greater part of his life, where he was brought up where aesthetic was—aesthetics were the philosophy, where it was the most interesting thing for him, sitting at the café, or the forum at the café, for him to speculate about with his cronies. But not so in America. We have no such forum. There never was such a forum. It would be just extraordinary that you met a young man who had the ability, articulately speaking, and who was aesthetically aware of a philosophy about it. That we have an—we have a, uh, an austerity, a childish austerity, and so primitive, we have no such influences. Then. Today, of course—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: I wondered if you had met some of the younger, uh—some of the artists, uh, around Stieglitz, at 291—[00:28:00]

PAUL BURLIN: I met them later on. Yes, I did. And, uh, I wouldn't say that they were so communicative, because probably it could have been, uh, basically one of friendship. And, uh, I had no such friendship with these men, though I'd frequently visited the gallery in order to see their work.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: And, uh, the fact that I came there frequently was a proof that had interest for me. And then—and later in life, when I got to know a man like Stieglitz, who was extremely articulate, and had much to say about the aesthetics and the philosophy of the European and its effect on America, and also the individualistic character, uh, which Americans were striving for, and he had some very concise opinions and point of views about that. So how do we know, we—we still think about this amorphous young American—I can only consider it that way—who receives its impressions in this new direct manner, but most indirect manner. While the European young man would receive it, I think, in a much more direct manner. And that probably is still the fabulous attraction of Europe. The environment, the philosophy of aesthetics, against the primitiveness of a more outward-going, less knowledgeable American. Outward-going in the sense of, some ways, the mystic is related to the landscape of his country. And that isn't the landscape, physically speaking, at all.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: But also, the things that were happening to him, I mean, the Americans—yeah—

PAUL BURLIN: Oh, the—I think the things that were happening were continuous—uh, almost unbeknownst [00:30:00] to him. Just because of this inarticulate atmosphere that he lived—was—is living in.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Well, you said when you came back from Southwest, you were drawing the city and perhaps painting it too, were you? Uh, New York City?

PAUL BURLIN: Yes, yes, I did.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: What things about the city interested you that—or made you want to paint it? Uh, streets? Was it something—something—

PAUL BURLIN: Well, I think the streets of—they were not just streets. I think the streets of poverty interested me. I think the streets of the slums interested me, the streets of the—of, uh—the life, putting it much more appropriately.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

PAUL BURLIN: The life of the streets. And, uh, there is the—in those days, there is the particular character, and, uh, I call it the prisonlike something of American streets. Of New York. The big city streets. The doneness of it. The, uh—and the life activity nevertheless. And so once I painted a picture down there, called, uh, *Street Scene*.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Down on the Lower East Side—

PAUL BURLIN: Yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —in that general area?

PAUL BURLIN: Yes. Yes, I did.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Did you get to know any of the group like—around Stuart Davis and those, the artists that had been newspaper reporters who had—were somewhat interested in the same general kind of idea?

PAUL BURLIN: No, I didn't meet them until later on.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So you were a loner. You were down there drawing by yourself, working, uh, during the day, or what you—what were you doing now to make a living at this point?

PAUL BURLIN: Well, see, that the, uh—well, I was doing sort of freelance commercial art, uh, and treated it all was, uh—was just a job. And I had very little interest to, uh, to be a proficient commercial artist.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

PAUL BURLIN: Not the slightest. It was just to get by.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Then you came home and, uh, and drew and, uh—

PAUL BURLIN: Yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —uh, did—were you in—[00:32:00] associated with any group of artists painting from

a model or anything like that?

PAUL BURLIN: Oh, in sort of a—sort of a helter-skelter group who drew at night, or some class who got together and, uh—and, uh, got a model and drew from nature. And, uh, it all interested me in, uh, that way, and, uh, that there was, uh, some specific mentor, there was no such fellow around.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Meanwhile—

PAUL BURLIN: And so I didn't at all—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —you were married by this time.

PAUL BURLIN: Yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: And, uh, your wife was interested in Indian music and, uh—

PAUL BURLIN: My wife was writing articles for—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —she must have brought certain friends.

PAUL BURLIN: Yes. Writing articles. And, uh, I had already had that big, uh, show at Daniel's Gallery.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: No, you hadn't mentioned that.

PAUL BURLIN: Oh, well, you see, Daniel's Gallery is where the—that show that I had, uh, which were paintings of the Southwest.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: And it was—you probably remember, I don't know, about Daniel's?

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes. I understand he's still alive. I would like to get in touch with him, actually, if you know where one could find him.

PAUL BURLIN: I haven't the slightest idea where he is. I'd like to know.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: But he is still alive and—

PAUL BURLIN: Yeah.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —and I—I'd like—

PAUL BURLIN: I would be—

[END OF TRACK.]

This is track number two of five, side A.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: This is Dorothy Seckler, continuing an interview with Paul Burlin on December 6, 1962. Paul, we were discussing the, uh, your ex—your having had an exhibition at the Daniel Gallery of your paintings of the Southwest. Uh, could we, uh—could you date that show roughly? Would—would it have been 1911? Right after you came back from your first trip to the Southwest, or was it 1912?

PAUL BURLIN: It was a year later.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: About 1912.

PAUL BURLIN: I think so.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Just before the Armory Show, yeah—

PAUL BURLIN: Yeah, I think before the Armory Show.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —yes. So that, um, to come back to the period of the Armory Show, and we were, uh—I had been asking you about your associates at this time, and you were, uh, you had said, uh, working, making your living by doing freelance commercial work, studying and painting at night. You were married, your wife was writing articles on music, and particularly—

PAUL BURLIN: Um, um—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —American Indian music.

PAUL BURLIN: —American Indian and Negro Spirituals.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: I think was the first, uh, writings, really active writings on the Negro Spirituals, and also that were published.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: And your wife's, uh, associates—

PAUL BURLIN: Yeah, they could've.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —in music must have been, uh, must have provided some new friends and interests?

PAUL BURLIN: Yes, yes. We, uh, the association was with musicians, at the time, and Negro musicians.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: Their names at the present time escapes me, [00:02:00] and, uh—unfortunately.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Would they be men like Earl Hines, or, uh, that—I mean—

PAUL BURLIN: No—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —I remember him from Stuart Davis, he was—

PAUL BURLIN: Well, that's—that's a—that's a different type of musician.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: I think it was those who were still interested in Negro Spirituals.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Oh, I see. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: Yeah. And, uh, the—Earl Hines' music would come to me much later.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you, uh, get to know some anthropologists? I was—I know that later on you were associated with Franz Boas, and I wondered if your wife's interests had brought you in that—

PAUL BURLIN: Well, she—she was in—Franz Boas was acquainted with her work, and was friendly with her, very much so. Uh, admiring the distinctively personal work that she was doing. And, uh, I had the friendship of two or three anthropologists, men. As a matter of fact, the, uh—that's at a good starting point, because they got me interested to go to Europe. They spoke of its, uh—how the need for the artist to enlarge his vision with a historical background and, uh, newer and older patterns of civilization.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: And they would come in contact with, in an immediate way, with all of this sort of thing. And it was the first time I'd heard aesthetic—philosophical, aesthetic conversation about the fine arts. And, uh, that carried on more ideas and interest for me to go abroad.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: When did you actually go to, uh, France for the first time?

PAUL BURLIN: It's a pity that I have such a poor memory of dates.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: [Laughs.] Well, was it a long while after the Armory Show, or rather soon after?

PAUL BURLIN: I think it—it wasn't a long while after. [00:04:00] Uh, it was a trip I had gone to, I went—I'd gone to Italy.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: The war came in 1914, so was it before the war began?

PAUL BURLIN: It was before. It was before the war, yeah—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes. Well, then, you must have gone—

PAUL BURLIN: —it was before the First World War, yes. So that the, uh—I spent some time in Florence, about

three or four months, and then visited, uh, and painted up around Florence, Fiesole, up in the hills. The hill towns. And then visited, uh—because, after all it was the students, visitation in some of these old places. And, uh, the gallery was like the gallery of Pitti [ph] and Uffizi, struck strange, uh, surprises to this young man.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes, well, tell me about that. I think that's very interesting, that here you were really in—

PAUL BURLIN: Well, there was the, uh—I'd heard—I'd seen some reproductions of painters that struck a very distinctive note for me, such as, um—it wasn't Piero della Francesca. It was, uh—it wasn't Mantegna. Seems to me I have a photograph of it in there. Can I—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Giotto? No.

PAUL BURLIN: Well, Giotto came, uh—it was in this—Masaccio and Giotto—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yeah.

PAUL BURLIN: —it was all in this studentship of mine. But, uh, there's one man, who, at this moment, I have a block about.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: [Laughs.]

PAUL BURLIN: Which I can't think of. Which was in Orvieto, and where I've seen pictures of, paintings of—of powerful things. Which would usually make a potboiler of one, like heaven and hell. And this man painted it with a—with a frenzy and excitement that carried over an enormous conviction for me.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Piero di Cosimo [ph]?

PAUL BURLIN: Piero della Francesca. [00:06:00]

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Well, you thought it wasn't he. But it was he.

PAUL BURLIN: Yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: He—he was the one you did like.

PAUL BURLIN: No, Piero della Francesca. No. Wait a minute, wait a minute. I got that right, wrong. That's right. That was the man, that was not the man. [Inaudible.]

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: [Laughs.] Go ahead. I'll turn it off for a second. Rest it.

[Audio break.]

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: So now we, uh, recall that the artist—

PAUL BURLIN: The extraordinary, uh—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —that you found so interesting—

PAUL BURLIN: —the extraordinary, uh, and volatile character of Signorelli, who was anything but soft. Whose—whose form was the most extraordinarily imaginative one, and, uh, I've always had powerful memories of the paintings, of the frescos. And then of course, as a student, who was at—other things, and it would be made up of such contradiction, like a period of the Renaissance. Uh, the pictures of the Renaissance that struck a fancy, like the young man with the gloves, like tissue.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes, yes.

PAUL BURLIN: And, uh, the Uccello, the horses, the Uccello.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes, mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: And then, of course, by that time, there was a whole phantasmagoria of all sorts of paintings, uh, probably a complete contradiction to each other. But they meant something to the growth of this young man, undoubtedly. And then, in succeeding visits, my complete enthusiasm for a man like Rubens, and I've never forgotten it. And so, even to the present day, when I go to Europe, I look to see these strange, magical paintings [00:08:00] as paintings of Rubens. So that I find myself always—that the trend of the times makes no great hit with me. In some ways I even feel myself against it.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: Against the—the trend.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: And feel the need that, against the trend, instead of accepting all the things that are said, it's rather considering them off in an aloof way. I still go on having that sort of feeling.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: That's most—most characteristic of all, I suppose, of your work. That, sort of, well, uh, that's my—[laughs]—I don't want to interrupt, us, either.

PAUL BURLIN: No, go ahead. That's quite all right.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Uh, but, uh you were mentioning Rubens, and you must have gone to the north then, too, I assume, uh, after—

PAUL BURLIN: Yeah.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —you were in Italy, of course, in the hill towns, and then you talked about Rubens. So did you then—

PAUL BURLIN: He went to Antwerp.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Afterwards, you went to Antwerp.

PAUL BURLIN: Yes, with the [inaudible], yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes.

PAUL BURLIN: Oh, while, then, making my periodic trips to Europe, I'd—in those early days, the Flemish painters interested me a great deal. Oh, ever so many. And such a great variety, and for various reasons. But I—perhaps that was all what I call the telltale evidence of distinguished painters from all different countries. That these—this evidence was very important for the growth of knowledge.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: So you were able to make several trips, not just one?

PAUL BURLIN: Oh, I made so many. I made frequent trips, really. And then I—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: The first time with Franz Boas?

PAUL BURLIN: —and then before—yeah. Well, the Boas business was not before this—uh, the acquaintance with Doctor Boas. This came after, then Doctor Boas.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Oh, I see.

PAUL BURLIN: Yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Uh, how did you manage to pay your way to Europe, uh, while you were—

PAUL BURLIN: Well, that's a very delicate question, and a very profound one. [00:10:00] Um, someone offered, one of these anthropologists offered to pay my way. That it was a need for me to be there to study, and, uh, that I—he would supply me with an income. Which failed to materialize after one month or two months. So I was left stranded.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Was your wife with you at the time?

PAUL BURLIN: No.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: But you managed, nevertheless, to get back. Several times. You—you were back and forth during this—this was the period of the war years, so how did you do this?

PAUL BURLIN: I'm—kind of think that we've snarled—I've snarled this thing up a bit, about the date of marriage. Because my first trip to Europe, I was not married.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: And that would sound, from what I said, that it was after the marriage. Well, it was not so

because—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes, it was not, yeah.

PAUL BURLIN: No. Uh, therefore, as I said, I'm—I'm a real profound fool—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: [Laughs.]

PAUL BURLIN: —when it comes to dates. So something is radically wrong about that. But, uh, it's a certainty that when I went abroad for the first time, I was not married.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes. That was just before the war. Then did you make another trip right after the war, or you—probably didn't—[cross talk]—

PAUL BURLIN: I—I made a trip, uh, not right after the war, but years—some years later. And then I did go over at the—at—in 1921.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: That's right.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes.

PAUL BURLIN: That was after that war.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And then you were married by that time.

PAUL BURLIN: I was—I was married by that time. And, uh, had lost Natalie in a motor accident while we were in Paris.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Oh dear. In that year?

PAUL BURLIN: She was killed in—around 1921. [Inaudible.]

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Did you then, uh, stay and live in Paris for a while?

PAUL BURLIN: I stayed—I stayed in Paris for 12 years, having—coming back a few times to America and having shows here, and then returning.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Where were they? Uh, the shows?

PAUL BURLIN: Well, one or two [00:12:00] of them were at the Kraushaar Gallery.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Hmm. Was Mrs. Annette [ph] Kraushaar the, uh—

PAUL BURLIN: No, she was not.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: It was her father's gallery.

PAUL BURLIN: She was merely—her father, yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes. In New York?

PAUL BURLIN: In New York City.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: Well, I didn't know she had a—had a gallery anywhere else.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: No, well, her family had, uh, in Chicago, I think, and that's what I—

PAUL BURLIN: Really?

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —just wanted to be sure about that.

PAUL BURLIN: I'd no idea. Right.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: So you had shows in New York. And how were they received? Uh—

PAUL BURLIN: I think, uh, my memory might be faulty about it. I think they were not too actively received. Not bad, but neither were they very good.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: What kind of things did you show? Were they paintings you had done abroad this time?

PAUL BURLIN: Pictures I had done abroad, yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Uh, what kind of—what sort of subjects were interesting you when you were painting in your—besides, you mentioned, painting some of the things—[cross talk].

PAUL BURLIN: Well, they were interested in abstract ideas. And so, uh, subject matter were not of great importance.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: So you were abstracting at this point?

PAUL BURLIN: Yes, in 1921 and '22, it's in the catalogue—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes.

PAUL BURLIN: —there's a picture of Negroi [ph].

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: *Negro*.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes.

PAUL BURLIN: And that was '21.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. This had begun then, during the war years. Well, your first trip to Europe, you were still painting, I take it, rather representationally.

PAUL BURLIN: Rather representationally, yeah.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: And then by '21, you had begun to respond to the abstract idea.

PAUL BURLIN: I was very much interested in the atmosphere of what Cubism had done, the—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes.

PAUL BURLIN: —left to orphan [ph]. While I was not bribed by—I was fascinated by it, but I wasn't bribed enough to do a Cubist picture. Though characteristics of it, uh, were—were things that I used. Characteristics—[cross talk].

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: You never considered yourself an actual Cubist, then?

PAUL BURLIN: No, I don't think so.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: It was a matter of an emphasis on structure, of simplification.

PAUL BURLIN: An organic character to the thing, and—and the interest in painting itself. So it was—as a matter of fact, that particular picture that I'm alluding to is painted with sand. [00:14:00] And so all the—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Was that an American Indian, uh, idea?

PAUL BURLIN: No, I don't think so. No, it was simply the idea that, uh, sand gave color, as it was—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: I mean, mixed with the oil paint, though?

PAUL BURLIN: With the oil paint.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Oh, I see. Yes. Right.

PAUL BURLIN: Gave a certain kind of texture.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: That's right. Braque was doing it—

PAUL BURLIN: Yes, that's right.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —at that time too, of course, yes.

PAUL BURLIN: That's right. And, uh, the sand was, uh, made more delicate by, uh, filtering it through a set of stockings. [Inaudible.]

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Uh, in the past, did you, uh, look up the—I mean, did you come to know any of the artists, the group around Picasso, or did you know some of the—[cross talk].

PAUL BURLIN: I—I became, uh, acquainted with some. I met, uh, quite a few of them. I became a good friend of, uh, Albert Gleizes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: The Cubist. In fact, uh, he asked me to share a studio with him, up in the area of—of, uh, Waterbalon [ph], where he was living, where he had a studio.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: And did you?

PAUL BURLIN: Yes, I did. And this was a close friend.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. He was also quite a theorist of Cubism.

PAUL BURLIN: Strong—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yeah.

PAUL BURLIN: —powerful.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: Uh, what would be the word for—to be such a specific exponent of —

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: [Laughs.] I don't know if I could help you out there.

PAUL BURLIN: A certain kind of a classification. Of where it meant to—the theory of Cubism was the all-pervading idea, and I think maybe that was, uh —

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: He might be called an apostle of it, perhaps. I don't know.

PAUL BURLIN: Well, he was, yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: But I think at a—at a certain period, uh, later he was doing remarkably beautiful things. And then later on, in some strange way, became, I don't know, mystical, or something like that. They lost their identity. [00:16:00] But he was an extremely sympathetic and highly intelligent man.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: So during this period when you shared the studio, your own work reflected, to some extent, this abstraction, but you still did not become really a Cubist in your own—[cross talk].

PAUL BURLIN: No, and the theory of Cubism was sort of—it hit me in the head very hard. No. I liked it. But I thought it was, uh, a manner. And, uh, manner in art has always intimidated me.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That's well expressed. Had you become at all interested in—in any of the work of the, uh—well, it was—that we now label under Fauvism and Expressionism at all?

PAUL BURLIN: Oh, yes. I was interested—oh, heavens, I was interested in all the things that were being done. Yes. And I'd seen numerous shows of the Fauvists, you know. And, uh, admired the, uh, the powerful use of color, the intensity of it, and it probably played a part in liberating myself from what are generally known as tonalities. I'm sure.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: What was your, um, color like at this point? Uh, I can follow it through the show, but for the record, uh, the Cubists, of course, had started off using rather gray color that was very—

PAUL BURLIN: But it wasn't brilliant color, but it was—uh, it was liberated from tonalities and nuances of color, and that liberation was very authentic. But it wasn't brilliant like it is—like I use today. But it was a direction.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Did you get to know any of the, uh, group around Matisse personally, or—

PAUL BURLIN: I met Matisse down in Nice, and visited him in his studio [00:18:00] several times. And—and in my halting French, uh, we became acquainted. And so he was—cordially invited me to come, any evening, to his studio, where he was drawing at night.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: This is during the period of the '20s, when you were, uh, over there?

PAUL BURLIN: Yes, yes, yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Uh, how did you happen to leave, uh, France? I mean, I don't want to rush you back to the United States again—

PAUL BURLIN: Yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —but this period seems to have been a fruitful one in painting well.

PAUL BURLIN: Well, I think there became—I think there was a—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Sorry.

PAUL BURLIN: —I think there was a desire to return, this expatriate's desire to return to America. That I felt one remained an alien and, uh, I was fed up.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: How did you make your living over there, that's another question for you.

PAUL BURLIN: I had an income.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Oh, I see, you—

PAUL BURLIN: I had a, a limited income, which enabled me to make do.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But, uh, what—

PAUL BURLIN: Then I married again, yeah—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: You did. Oh, I see.

PAUL BURLIN: Yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Well, tell us about that, um, as much as you want to.

PAUL BURLIN: Yes, yes, I married again, and, uh, again, I'm sorry I can't bring up the dates. And then—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: During the '20s some time, at least?

PAUL BURLIN: Yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Uh-huh [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: And then, uh—perhaps '26, and then I had a daughter.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Did you marry an artist? Uh—

PAUL BURLIN: No, I married, uh—no, I married a businesswoman.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And you had a daughter by that marriage?

PAUL BURLIN: Yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: Barbara. She lives out in Sausalito. California.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Then, uh, was it at about 1929 or '30 that you decided to come back here?

PAUL BURLIN: '32—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: '32. That was a—

PAUL BURLIN: —I think [inaudible].

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —bad time to come. Right in the middle of the Depression. [Laughs.]

PAUL BURLIN: Fearful time. It was without intelligence.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Were—did you regret it very much after you got here?

PAUL BURLIN: Well, I was in a hopeless [00:20:00] condition.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: [Laughs.] Yes.

PAUL BURLIN: I found everything, uh, intimidating. And I had lost some of my income, too.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes.

PAUL BURLIN: Due to depreciation of stocks.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: So how did you make out?

PAUL BURLIN: It was a fearful time.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Did you get—go into commercial art again for a while?

PAUL BURLIN: No, I didn't. No, I lost all contact with that, uh, I forget. I really have forgotten. It's all a blank.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Did you go on WPA at that point?

PAUL BURLIN: Oh, yes. Yes, that's right. That's true. We were all on WPA. And at that time, it started with the, uh, with the Whitney Museum under Mrs. Force.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: And were a, um, a limited group of artists that were invited by her to work on the WPA.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Was that about 1932 or '[3]3, or—

PAUL BURLIN: In '33, was it?

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Uh, were—

PAUL BURLIN: When was the WPA starting? Was it about that time?

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Well, it seems to me that, uh, the begin—that might not have been called WPA, but it was a—a federal project at the beginning, yeah.

PAUL BURLIN: That's right, it was a federal project. That was the title of it, I think.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: It wasn't called WPA. And we were on it, like so many of all the painters. We were on it until, uh—it changed hands after a certain period, from the Whitney into a larger project. And, uh, my income was cut off, because they made it more difficult for, unless you signed the Pauper's Oath, to function [inaudible]. But we were on it for some time.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Uh, in the beginning, uh, we're particularly interested in studying this period of WPA right now, for the archives. Can you recall how that, uh, how you, uh, received that message to come to, uh—or to join this Whitney group? How it was extended, or who was there, and how it was—began to operate, [00:22:00] how you were assigned to any kind of work?

PAUL BURLIN: I'm afraid I really—I can't give you much of its atmosphere. I know that, uh, it was a liberal one. You were permitted to do what you had been doing. And that there was no censorship, which was one of its great advantages, because later on one saw the inkling of censorship all around. They didn't like abstract art, there was—the overseers were critical about it, and expressed their own, uh, foolish opinions. And so there was discourse, and there had to be a battle about it. The battle broke out in the open, I think some of the organizations that were at the time like Artists' Union and the American Artists' Congress, who are since called subversive, or were called subversive later on, uh, played a part in giving its free—free, freedom.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: You feel they played a constructive part, then?

PAUL BURLIN: I think they did.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: In trying—yes.

PAUL BURLIN: I think for a time they did, until they, until the social and political note was impinged on this sort of thing within their groups, and, uh, then there was a great deal of discord. It was no longer the free, harmonious background at all.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Do you remember some of the artists who were associated with you in the early period when you were working through the Whitney?

PAUL BURLIN: No, except that, uh, we would—not in any close way.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Did you, were you, uh, did you come to meetings and all talk things over? Or did you have committees—

PAUL BURLIN: I think we came to meetings when we were—I was a member of the American Artists' Congress. I think we had practically all the pages of any account, even those who were not considered, uh, radical in any way were members of the American Artists' Congress. And—and for that reason, at that time, that was a fairly harmonious group constructively, and gave some sort of backbone [00:24:00] to the fact that they were—were artists. And, uh, also, an attitude towards government support. Some sort of an attitude was against the willy-nilly one, which one didn't know whether they ought to continue doing what they wanted to do. I think this stiffened one's attitude about the whole thing, though, uh, it became a jumble later on. The discord that happened amongst them, amongst each other, on the basis of whether they were abstract, or whether they were political, or whether they were doing realistic work, so—I think the period of the '30s, in America, is where the artist was discovering himself through social ideas.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: Other countries have done it 25 years later. But I think that really, in the '30s, whether they were writers or painters, were functioning that way.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: How did you feel about it? I mean, how did you feel about this thing of reflecting the social scene—

PAUL BURLIN: Well, I was aware of the social ideas and participated in it, and even, I think, painted some pictures. Uh—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: But you did this freely, you were not, uh, there was—was there someone, sort of—or any feeling that it would be rather a good idea to do it to please people, or—

PAUL BURLIN: No, I was very skeptical about the, about the influence of the political ideas. I was skeptical on the basis of that you had to do business,that it was, uh, a loss of pride in being in artist and not being—and not being conscious of the social and political ideas. And so I think that always left me very skeptical about the whole sort of thing. Though I was interested in political ideas at the time.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: To what—

PAUL BURLIN: In a—in what, I would say, in a naïve way.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yeah. Uh, to what—in what way did it influence your subject matter? Uh, you had already been painting scenes on the [00:26:00] Lower East Side earlier in your life, and you had then, of course, been in abstract, painting more abstractly.

PAUL BURLIN: Yes. Well, it made me feel as if I ought to be aware of some of this sort of thing, you see?

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: And, uh, there was great deal of conflict of—of emotion about the thing. And, uh, the final solution was when I was—had some clear ideas, politically, what it was about, and then denounced the whole thing for myself.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Denounced what?

PAUL BURLIN: The—the, uh, the politically conscious paintings.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes. Now how—what kind of political ideas, uh—when you say you had clear political ideas, what—

PAUL BURLIN: That meant that I had certain ideas that politically, the artist, uh, is divorced, in his own work, from it. The important—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: From social struggles, you mean.

PAUL BURLIN: Social—social characters, yes. That, uh, the importance is the—for the painting to be free in its own way. And that if there are any, uh, emotional tie-ups, those are something that will come through in an unconscious way. But they will not be imposed upon. And, uh, and I say, again, that was one of the ways that I had a conclusive idea that I had no interest in that kind of thing, that kind of painting, at all.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you feel—did you try it a couple of times, and said—

PAUL BURLIN: I did, yeah.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: But you felt the pictures themselves were, in some way, not free, and—

PAUL BURLIN: They were, no, they—they—they gave me no pleasure.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: The subject matter interfered in some way.

PAUL BURLIN: They gave me no pleasure whatsoever.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: And—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: In the beginning, however, this was not true. You were still painting abstractly, in the beginning, under the Whitney.

PAUL BURLIN: I was painting abstractly and found this confusion for me. And, uh, it settled itself in a fairly short time when I denounced, or renounced, the whole idea. [00:28:00]

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Uh, when you renounced the idea of having to have any social, uh, obligation, did you suffer from this in any way on the project? Or were you censored for it? Or did you then turn your back on it in some way?

PAUL BURLIN: I think, uh—I think most of the artists was—who were doing abstract work were being censored in some way by—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: How did that work? I mean, by whom, or—

PAUL BURLIN: These—they—there were certain overseers who, uh, handled the different areas. And they sort of, uh, insisted that some ideas, politically, had to come into the picture.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: They did?

PAUL BURLIN: But there was a great deal of conflict about that, because in some areas, there was no such thing at all. They—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: You were on the easel project—

PAUL BURLIN: Yes—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —at this point?

PAUL BURLIN: —on the easel project.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes, yeah.

PAUL BURLIN: But I think, uh, it had the very excellent support of, uh, what's the name of, uh, who had charge of the whole thing?

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Um, Dorothy Knowre's [ph] husband, I don't [inaudible].

PAUL BURLIN: Dorothy, Dorothy.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Uh—

PAUL BURLIN: What's her name?

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: [Inaudible.]

PAUL BURLIN: [Inaudible.]

[Audio break.] [00:30:00] [00:32:00]

[END OF TRACK.]

This is track number three of five, side A.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: This is Dorothy Seckler, continuing an interview with Paul Burlin, on December 5th, 1962. Paul—

PAUL BURLIN: Where were we?

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —we had just been discussing the, uh, the WPA years, and, uh, you had been recalling the pressures on the artist to handle a more definitely social subject matter, and your feelings about them. The fact that there were certain supervisors who, uh, exerted those pressures on the artist, and the artist, on the other hand, uh, you felt, uh, tried to resist this. Uh, would you like to develop that a little bit, since we're interested in this WPA thing? The way that operated, and the way the artists, uh, to the—any extent, that the artist was able to lift this situation?

PAUL BURLIN: What's left, uh, it's a—is a void for me today, and it probably was pronounced enough at that time, it is completely, uh, so much out of the picture.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Did you stay with the Artists' Congress, or did you leave the Artists' Congress?

PAUL BURLIN: I—I left the Artists' Congress as a protest.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes.

PAUL BURLIN: Against the, uh, machinations that were taking place on the basis of their, uh, the influence that political ideas were affecting them.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Did you leave at the same time that Stuart Davis did?

PAUL BURLIN: As a matter of fact, that was part of the protest on my part. When he had his difficulties with them—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes.

PAUL BURLIN: —I left at that time. I resigned.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yeah. Had you been a member of the Artists' Union at any point?

PAUL BURLIN: I hadn't been a member of the Artists' Union. I'd go occasionally to listen to them, and, um, I suppose they had values. They—they had some—some contribution to make, but certainly not on any aesthetic [00:02:00] grounds, none whatsoever. At least, not from my point of view.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: The—did you feel that they were, uh, plugging a strongly Marxist, uh—

PAUL BURLIN: Oh, I don't think there was any doubt about that. And I thought that so much of what was called "bad artists" were part of the association. And, uh, poor ones who, who carried, or followed the extravagant tail of good artists who were doing other things and making good art out of free and instinctual character, you know, uh—and I thought the Artists' Union played no part on any aesthetic grounds whatsoever. None.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: You thought perhaps it played a part in, uh, securing more economic benefits for the artists? [Cross talk.]

PAUL BURLIN: I thought that was the main idea. The economic benefits for the artists. But on grounds that, uh, the larger the amount of people working on it, irrespective of their ability, was an important concept on their part.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Uh, how long did you go on working on the project?

PAUL BURLIN: I forget, I—but, uh—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Was it—

PAUL BURLIN: —but soon after when all these things became more and more, uh, a job for the—the paupers'—paupers' point of view.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Around 1936 to '37, were you off by that time, do you think?

PAUL BURLIN: I think definitely that I was off, yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: When you got off, uh, how did you make your living? Wasn't it quite a wrench to go back and find jobs at that time?

PAUL BURLIN: Oh, it was a hell of a place, a hell of a place, to live in, altogether. It seems as if the whole thing is a—is a blank now. Just what did happen to me? And how did I manage? I don't know. [00:04:00]

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: You remember the paintings you were doing on the project just before you left? Does any—any one of them stand out in your memory?

PAUL BURLIN: I don't think any of them did, no. I think this is all a part of what I call the, uh, the experience of the young artist, you know? The opportunity to do work—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: —and, uh, have support, uh—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Well, had you stuck to your guns pretty steadily as far as working abstractly is concerned? You were still, uh, distorting and abstracting, not being—

PAUL BURLIN: I don't think I—I don't think I ever left off from that idea. The direction. Never departed into other things again.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm. [Inaudible.]

PAUL BURLIN: I think just having a sense of continuity, for me, and, uh, I think the struggle to exist was all in the picture.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Uh, did you have any, uh, shows other than whatever was connected with the projects at this time?

PAUL BURLIN: Oh, I had shows there at the Downtown Gallery.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: You did?

PAUL BURLIN: Yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: During the '30s?

PAUL BURLIN: Yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: During this period?

PAUL BURLIN: Yes. I had shows—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Downtown Gallery.

PAUL BURLIN: Yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: When did you start your association with the Downtown Gallery, Paul?

PAUL BURLIN: I wish I could tell you in a definite way.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: It was, uh—

PAUL BURLIN: She would know it.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —probably the mid '30s, or about that time, would you guess?

PAUL BURLIN: I think it was closer to the '40s.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Oh, was it? Later '30s?

PAUL BURLIN: I think—I think so, yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did that bring any new associations, or, uh—

PAUL BURLIN: Oh, yes. I met a new group of artists at the time, uh, before she broke up and —and it became more of a disintegrating one. Uh, so I met a group of artists that she had, which was—gave me a clearer inkling of what was going on.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Was that—

PAUL BURLIN: She was—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —when Davis was there, and, uh, and O'Keeffe? Uh—

PAUL BURLIN: O'Keeffe was living amongst [00:06:00] her horses' heads out in Southwest. Among carcasses. Um, but it was a period of association with Davis here.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Uh, any other, uh, people that you met at that time that, uh, were interesting to mention?

PAUL BURLIN: Well, now that you mention it, Ben Shahn, but not with any pleasure.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: No, you were disagreeing with him then, so—

PAUL BURLIN: Well, I had no interest, not my dish of tea what he was doing in any way. I thought he was no painter whatsoever, that he had no point of view in it that he could do. And he had enough chic ability, he could make a tough-looking workman. He also could make a pretty girl with little—little tendrils in her hair. So I think he was a, at heart, a buffoon. A very bright buffoon. A heavy-handed buffoon, but bright.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: And you never did become friends personally?

PAUL BURLIN: [Inaudible] say the least.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: [Laughs.] Well, uh, how about after you, uh, left the project, you don't recall how you made a living. Where were you—where were you working, where did you have a studio? Perhaps that will bring back a bit.

PAUL BURLIN: I had a studio around 939 Eighth Avenue.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Did you share it with anyone, or was that your own, uh—

PAUL BURLIN: No.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Well, what kind of subject matter, uh, was of interest to you at this time? Were you, uh—the last time we discussed what you were painting—

PAUL BURLIN: Well, you see the pictures that were done at that time, that was 939 Eighth Avenue—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes.

PAUL BURLIN: —uh, do you recall in any way the, uh, the catalogue? The book on Paul Burlin, the Ford Grant [ph] catalogue?

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes. Not well.

PAUL BURLIN: Well, there's a picture called, um, *Tiger Tiger*. [00:08:00]

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: That was painted at that time. Uh, some pictures were painted up in Woodstock, which were—which were free and, uh, extravagant paintings. Where color was becoming more and more brilliant. That's right, I was—I was up there [inaudible].

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: When did you start going to Woodstock?

PAUL BURLIN: It was 20-odd—20-odd years ago.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: So it was in the '40s. Of course the war came along—

PAUL BURLIN: Yeah.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —back in this period. Did you ever get involved in any kind of war industry or jobs, uh, doing anything in connection with the war?

PAUL BURLIN: I think I did in the First World War, when I was out in the Southwest, which was when they asked me to paint, um, pictures for target practice.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: [Laughs.]

PAUL BURLIN: It sounds terrific. What they really meant—it was some mathematical adjustment through wire machinery that they could gauge, don't ask me how, by having a big picture that you would paint, of, say, anything you wanted, but they could mathematically find the distances. How or why, it's a great enigma. In any case—[Audio break.] [00:10:00]

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Going back to Woodstock, Paul.

PAUL BURLIN: We were talking about, uh, just reminiscing a bit about Woodstock's, uh, which I found—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: [Inaudible] the concert.

PAUL BURLIN: —uh, in spite of the fact that it was charming enough, landscape-ly speaking, and I found it was a fairly dull place. Uh, it might have been exciting at one time during the period of what was called the Sheriff. Who was the Sheriff at the time? This millionaire who corresponded—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Oh, yes.

PAUL BURLIN: —with his brother when he married Lina Cavalieri, in which he said, Who's looney now? But the Sheriff used to have—what was his name?

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: You mean the man that founded the colony?

PAUL BURLIN: No, not the man who founded the colony. The man who founded the colony had ideas of, uh—social ideas. [00:12:00] And his name was Hervey White, who was a charming man, and he was a poet, and a very sympathetic man. But I think those are the—and they founded this place called the Maverick.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes.

PAUL BURLIN: Which was—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes.

PAUL BURLIN: —which was like living on the rocks, exposed in the rear somewhere. But, uh, nevertheless, a worthwhile sort of place, and an idea that was even more worthwhile. But I painted—coming back to myself, I found myself—maybe you have to live in a place—[laughs]—that's boring in order to have some kind of continuity in one's work. I think it was too contemptible [ph] to do less. But I found it a damn boring place, but I did a lot of work. And so, I think the pictures like *Useful Home*, 1944, *Reminiscing about the War*, uh, a prizewinner, the Pepsi-Cola one, *Soda Jerker*, 1939. '39 was a fair-sized picture, that—that *Soda Jerker*.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes [inaudible].

PAUL BURLIN: And then also, tiger turner—*Tiger Tiger Burning Bright*, which was '41, '42, uh—that was part of the—of this whole painting episode. And, uh, many other ones. I think I painted this picture called *Young Man Alone with his Face*, which is a—which is in a collection at the Whitney, bought by Mrs. Force.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Oh, yes. That's a strange one.

PAUL BURLIN: Isn't it. It's a great favorite of theirs, it's shown all the time.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: It's a very powerful painting.

PAUL BURLIN: Hmm. But you see, that's the child-artist period of mine. I—I think always, the art, my art, was really nonintellectual. Therefore, I never found myself intrigued by—by the art of contrivance. I found that was a futile [00:14:00] sort of thing for me, for me. And, uh, the child artist, though I never would give myself credit for

that, it seems to be true, because it never speculated about things that way in art, intellectually. It had, uh, the importance of spontaneity, intuition in speaking, more than any intellectual attitude. And I think that this has always been characteristic of, of—so the, um, the uh, that art had [ph] attitude of some painters that would have toward the doctrinaire character, and the speculation upon it, paid very little part with me. It's true I was aware of it.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: [Inaudible.]

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: It protected you.

PAUL BURLIN: Yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: All your life, not to have that—

PAUL BURLIN: In all the pictures, yes. I think like shelter bay [ph] was painted up there, it was a big canvas. Shelter bay [ph]. It's hard to see, it's all in red. See?

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes, yes, mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: It's hard to see it, a big canvas. It was brilliant. I honestly want [ph] to look up the date in which it was painted. What?

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Fifty—'34.

PAUL BURLIN: '34.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: '34. Amazing.

PAUL BURLIN: '34.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: It must have been very difficult to find an audience for paintings that were so strange and so un-ingratiating at that time.

PAUL BURLIN: No audience, briefly. No audience. Admired professionally, very much, but no audience.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: No shows at that time?

PAUL BURLIN: Yes, I had shows, yes. But shows—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Come a bit closer to [inaudible]—

PAUL BURLIN: But the shows, I have a vague memory about its effect. It's—I always have a memory about my peers and its attitude, which was, which was, uh, one of great respect if not enthusiasm. [00:16:00] This one, owned by the, uh, by Washington University, which has a crack collection.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Strange.

PAUL BURLIN: Powerful picture in color [ph]. Brilliant colors.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: What you were doing with that color?

PAUL BURLIN: Yeah. And when was that done?

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: That seems to be '53.

PAUL BURLIN: That's it.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: But Paul, you had—had you left the Downtown Gallery at this time?

PAUL BURLIN: Well, no, the Downtown Gallery had some sort of, uh, arrangement, in which it broke up and kept a few of the very older people associated with the Gallery at one time, and the rest went over to Alan. I didn't.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: So you just left, uh—

PAUL BURLIN: Yeah.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —at that time?

PAUL BURLIN: Yeah. I didn't. I didn't find my way long [inaudible]. They're very friendly today, but I had no association [inaudible]. He's a great admirer now, he understands, and he didn't then. He had no idea—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Alan had no idea?

PAUL BURLIN: No, none whatsoever.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: How about Edith? Edith Halpert?

PAUL BURLIN: I think Edith, later on, began finding out. She didn't at the time, either. But I think now she's a great admirer.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: And will say extravagant things about it.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: It must have been a very difficult struggle during those years, when you had only the recognition of a very few, uh, knowing artists, and, uh—

PAUL BURLIN: Not easy to put it in words.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm. How about any recognition from people who came here from abroad? Uh, did you have any shows during this period, or did you go to Europe again at all after having come back in the early '30s?

PAUL BURLIN: I had a—a show in Berlin in '27, at a gallery connected to, I would have to get out a magazine called Kuntzplat [ph], and, uh, had a show there. Attracted attention. [00:18:00] Very good attention.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: In '27, did you say?

PAUL BURLIN: Yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: But, uh, here, it's still the same powerful work, you know, except for the audience is getting—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Is growing up to it.

PAUL BURLIN: —is—yes, is a little less timid about—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: It was crowded, the show in the Whitney, quite along. And—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Well, the artists were looking at it with great interest.

PAUL BURLIN: Oh, yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Some of the younger artists, particularly, I remember, at the time.

PAUL BURLIN: Oh, yes. A great deal.

[Audio break.]

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Erase, erase. [Audio break.] That's as close as we can get it, I think, Paul. [Inaudible.]

PAUL BURLIN: Well, I'd like to call your attention to something that led this particular drawing, which is enigmatic. And so enigmatic that it only, relatively speaking, expresses itself through the form of the thing. Because color in the thing is only the slight, uh, accent that will bring meaning [ph]. But it's so enigmatic that it would be the most difficult thing to describe [00:20:00] on the basis of what the sensation would be, if one of the star composers saw it who's up at Brandeis, he said could he have it. Because this, to him, he said, was just like some musical thing, in an organic structural way, and yet, you know, it's extremely simple.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: But it—it is musical, but it is extremely powerful. Also, its space, Paul, I mean, there's something really beautiful [inaudible]. And it's very evocative, poetically.

PAUL BURLIN: That's right.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: But I was asking you before, when you began to trust your intuition, I mean, at what point did you really begin to know not to rely on knowledge, but only to really rely on what you feel?

PAUL BURLIN: But I think I—when I use that expression, child artist, I think that it comes to a, uh, a recognition that, uh, that trust is the, uh, most, uh, evocative thing that you could express yourself with. Because that's you, this is not a man who works with formulas. Under no circumstances. Couldn't do it. And, uh, but there comes a time with maturity, to have complete trust. But I think the maturity is an important asset. That is to say, I think without it, you don't know, you might continue that way for a while, and then suddenly say, Well, I don't know where I'm going, and I don't know what will be the next step. And I have a feeling we all knew about the insecurity about just where you actually are going, but it always moves in this instinctual way towards the sort of thing that carries on, the same sort of thing that's been going on for years.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: So one needs a certain amount of knowledge, or just a certain amount of experience, in order to have something to grow on and move forward.

PAUL BURLIN: We don't leave out—we never leave out experience, we never leave that out at all. The, the, uh, you couldn't do this sort of thing to start out with. [00:22:00] Uh, the young artist who'd start out this sort of way, all he would do is be imitating what he saw. Because he couldn't do that. He has—this comes from a long experience. These organic things that are put together this way, and look as though they were all juggled, and juggled swiftly and surely, certainly come from—from deep experience. Because it couldn't be done. It would have always the feeling as if, now, what will I do? How can I think this thing out? Do I think it out as kind of a structure only? And do I add some mannerism in order to make it exist? And I say, no, it has nothing to do with any of these things in the slightest degree. It, it, uh, it always looks as though it just happened.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: It does.

PAUL BURLIN: But since it happens this way, it shows that it's a structural thing, that it's something you thought about a good deal, and felt. I say this, that the total involvement, and that's a complete feeling, is what I do. This kind of artist is. Which doesn't take it out, protect itself, by subtly being intellectual about it.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: You're probably painting all the time you're living, actually. You're always, uh, really involved with it. And then when you go to the canvas, out of your experience—[cross talk].

PAUL BURLIN: I don't know the time when I—I've left that off. I don't know the time when I've ever left that off. Uh, if it gets too powerful, it affects me physically, in the sense that I—I don't sleep, so.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: You have to paint—paint it out before you can really—[cross talk].

PAUL BURLIN: Yes. Yes. And there comes a time where there is a release from this, all this thing, like this huge picture, you know? And then there comes a release when you really begin to unwind. But when you look at, one day, coming in from out of doors, and suddenly being confronted with these pictures on the wall, and I said, Crazy. Crazy. I don't think I really, did I really do it this way? Why did I do it this way? [00:24:00]

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: So it is mysterious to you as much as it is to me? In a different way, obviously—

PAUL BURLIN: Yes—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —from what it is to me.

PAUL BURLIN: —because I, I'm conscious of various things, uh, what I call the know-how. The very important thing of the know-how. And if the know-how isn't there, you're just like an incoherent, emotional person who is stammering.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: These drawings are, do you, uh, recall how you used them? The, uh, way in which you were talking about them when you were in, uh, St. Louis?

PAUL BURLIN: I didn't talk about the drawings. I only brought the drawings because they are the first, uh, what do we call, *anglich* [ph], the first look that one has, the first spontaneous thing that you do about this thing called art.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: And so, I merely show the things itself that I'm talking about it. Because they were—they're not, so to speak, the blueprint, but they are the spontaneous, evocative thing right from the start, you see?

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Because I think we didn't, we weren't recording before when you mentioned that you had not, uh, ever made paintings by blowing up drawings or following them exactly in any way.

PAUL BURLIN: No, I think that could be made into a great decided emphasis. That I have never, rarely taken a drawing and blown up—blown it up and made a painting. It happens occasionally I use part of it, but sometimes I might combine three or four drawings, so to speak. In which, actually, there is no one drawing at all. And in some of these things, there's no drawing that has any relationship whatsoever. I haven't got any drawing of this. And many others, many other paintings, I haven't got any drawings. So these drawings are truly irrelated [ph], and only have something to do with this spontaneous, uh, perceptive thing, [00:26:00] which is the first thing that you want to do, uh, at all times, you know. At all times, meaning at all times in which somehow a painting comes out of this whole evocation that you're working around with.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: That's a particularly beautiful one. Does it have a name? This one?

PAUL BURLIN: Oh, no. None of them have a name. Oh, no.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: You don't have any way of—[inaudible]—

PAUL BURLIN: No, I have no names. No, no.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Well, I'm awfully glad you said what you did about your drawings, and about the way this comes to you, and the part that's played by knowledge, the part that's played by intuition. Because the balance of the two is always such a mysterious one in the development of an artist.

PAUL BURLIN: Well, it's mysterious to the artist himself, because oftentimes it's said, "Now, logically, I couldn't have done this drawing. I couldn't have put in this particular passage. I couldn't have reasoned this thing out and have gotten a result." Anyway, the process is not that way, I would say.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Does it ever happen that you lose the thread, and then have to let time go by—

PAUL BURLIN: Oh, yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —before you can come to it again?

PAUL BURLIN: Oh, heavens yes. Yes. Else you would lose it completely, and just—it would be anonymous, yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: But then you come back at some other, uh—

PAUL BURLIN: [Inaudible.]

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —again and it's there. What is it, uh—oh I suppose there isn't any title to the picture, uh, or is there?

PAUL BURLIN: This?

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: Yes. This is called, uh, *Route 66 Nowhere*.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: [Laughs.] That's a wonderful one for this particular painting, too. Well, I'm glad that I had a chance to see this one, Paul. So this will be in your '62 exhibition at the [00:28:00] Grace Borgenicht Gallery in, uh, what, February?

PAUL BURLIN: February 11—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Great.

PAUL BURLIN: —something like that.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Wonderful. Well, I think we're almost [inaudible] the tape, here.

[END OF TRACK.]

This is track number four of five, side A.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: This is Dorothy Seckler, preparing for an interview with Paul Burlin, testing to see whether the machine is in good order. Paul, I'm looking at some of your recent paintings from '61 and '63 in the studio today. Uh, I'm very much impressed by the richness and complexity of imagery in these paintings, and I wondered how it's possible that you have so far avoided the insistent pressure that most artists feel to drastically simplify to a very few elements.

PAUL BURLIN: You mean why I've done it?

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Well, how, uh—

PAUL BURLIN: How did I come about it?

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes. How did you come about it and—

PAUL BURLIN: Well, I found that in order to avoid what is ordinarily known as a species of decorative acts in painting, I've come to the conclusion that the—that the only way that interests me, as painter, is to organically, uh, understand what I'm trying to say with it. And that means it reduces all the extraneous elements into the simplest characteristics that emphasize a few things, which become very important for you. Now you can always, in a decorative way, make little emblematic things here and there, and so the picture looks as though it was stepped upon in a nice way, by stepping on I mean touched upon. The business of just [00:02:00] touching the painting, as it were. But for me, an organic painting means that the simplest elements are used in order to, uh, to be confronted with the most emphatic kind of a statement. And of course that has nothing to do with the general terminology about, uh, how charming, or how pleasant, or how any one of these things, because it evolves on a totally different, uh, point of view or aspect. And that is, how do you make an organic type of painting? How do you make a feeling of substantiality, that at the same time, is labyrinthine and mysterious?

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Well, now you're taking up my role. How do you? [Laughs.]

PAUL BURLIN: Well, I've—I've explained it as much as possible, you know. The other is part of the mystery of trying to be—the—to paint it. We—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Well, last time, we talked a little bit about the way you had, um, of beginning work. And we saw that sometimes you work by sitting down and certain ideas and drawings, but you didn't transfer those to painting. But, uh, sometimes some of the imagery, uh, reentered or was recombined in paintings, reappeared in various ways. I wondered if you could come a little close to some of the kinds of things you were thinking about, or feeling, or concerned with, let's say even at the stage of the drawing. What kind of thing would set you off to do a series of drawings?

PAUL BURLIN: I think if you observe—I will show you some drawings in the book here. I think you'll—all we see at that, that aside from being interested, at a certain period in drawing, in the calligraphic character of the thing in itself.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Calligraphic—

PAUL BURLIN: Character.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: And how, uh, a line would appear, a black line would appear on a white sheet of paper. Uh, that itself had an elementary [00:04:00] and, uh, specific character in its own. Like Oriental writers and painters, you know? Because in itself, it has a—an element of design, uh, an element of touch, which is very specific, and the precision in which it's done, in which, also, as if the corner of your brain said, only these few elements exist and all the rest are extraneous. Now this, I find that my paintings, uh, are very much characterized by the things I do in drawing. They're not—they're similar. They belong to the same category. They're not, uh, drawings as drawings of something, and then painting of something else. They really characterize the, uh, the emotional attitude that exists right in the drawing. This same kind of, uh, I might put it, conservative way of saying a few elements, that's the reason I said, well, a corner of the brain has precisely anticipated a few things that you want to do with it. And that's that. And nothing extraneous can take a—take the place of these few elements that are even parsimonious in this attitude. And never elaborated into something in which you say, Oh, this is very pretty, or, This is very charming, or something like that. Doesn't interest me. Therefore, these paintings, uh, belong to the same sort of category that exists in the drawings. In the very, very beginning of the drawing, always the drawings have that sort of idea. Now, if the image takes on something plus than what I anticipated, that's only something by chance. And I'm, uh—I accept it—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes.

PAUL BURLIN: —as if it was something that [00:06:00] I was looking for it, and perhaps not looking for it.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Suppose you're just making, setting down a certain number of block strokes in your drawing stage, and then one of them takes on the character of, let's say a, oh, a part of an animal, or a demon face, or something of the sort. Would your tendency be to destroy it or to entertain it?

PAUL BURLIN: Oh, no. I take anything that seems to assert itself. I never impose to the extent that there's some kind of an arbitrary will that it ought to be this and nothing else. I think the principle that I'm talking about is something precise. The business of some kind of, uh, imagery, that is a plus in the thing is never something that I will ignore, or say, Well, that isn't what I want.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: But you would not tend, on the other hand, to complete it. Seeing, let's say, a shape that might look like part of a kangaroo, let's say, you would not then think, uh, of relating other things to that shape. You would continue with the—the more abstract formulation of strokes, spaces, and rhythms?

PAUL BURLIN: I never object to what I would call, the—somehow, the emotional, uh, contribution that comes in that could be talked about as an image. I never would object to it. I never would say, Well, now, look, this ought to be destroyed because it suggests something else. As long as it characterizes the things I'm talking about in the very beginning, that there is a, uh, parsimonious attitude towards the material that is being used, so that the greatest emphasis is being made on how the structure of the picture looks. And, uh, if it turns to something that has the feeling of an animal or a human being, I don't care. [00:08:00] In fact, it's been often spoken about that I paint devils and angels and all that kind of thing. I'm not very conscious about it.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But sometimes you see this, out of the corner of your eye, essentially, it doesn't affect you—

PAUL BURLIN: Sometimes I see it in a wry way.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yeah.

PAUL BURLIN: Not directly. I'm always surprised when my attention is called to it, but I consider it sort of wry that I've done it.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Uh, to get back to the beginning of what you called the parsimonious use of the lines and shapes, we once, I remember in Provincetown, said that perhaps the way this comes out has something to do with the nervous system. Uh—

PAUL BURLIN: [Inaudible.]

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —in your case, it's so unornamental. I mean, it isn't, uh, just graceful or fluid or related to things that we are already familiar with in any category. And it comes out with a kind of, very often, a series of staccato bursts, uh, that seem as if something were moving, uh—[inaudible]—

PAUL BURLIN: I think I've expressed by what I call a wry humor or attitude. And I think—I believe that is always true with me. I have, since I don't have a formula about what I call, or what is generally known as, abstract art, that I might even have a great boredom about most of it. Because, uh, since it has so little to say to many people who do it, uh, I find that in a rather precise way, I have to have something that is associated with my personality and not merely the ornament, which abstract art can easily be—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: —and nothing else. Therefore, uh, what is the point of view of this personality, which to me, plays a very important part. And without it, it seems to me as if you were just making, uh, [00:10:00] nice paintings or decorative paintings or charming paintings. And it seems to me that this is our age. I might even say, added to all of this, because while I do something called abstract, I am not, uh, one who holds it as a, a most important attitude in this business of painting. Because it seems to me that so much of what is being done today, I'd call an extremely low ebb. I think we just live, right now. And I can't make it with any greater emphasis in the way I feel about it. This is the lowest ebb of painting today. Since it—since it exists around the commonplace, since it exists around something that is artifacts, artificial—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: You're now speaking of the new Pop art, is that right?

PAUL BURLIN: I think it all, I think it's all part and parcel of the same idea.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Uh, your—I'd like you to go on with that. I mean, express that a little bit more. I think what you were saying was very interesting. That we're at a very low ebb. You feel that the fact that the artist is using, uh, commonplace objects and artifacts and advertising and that sort of thing—

PAUL BURLIN: I think we're using—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: So that [inaudible]—

PAUL BURLIN: Yes. I think it has a kind of, uh, a kind of laissez-faire or exhaustion about what painting seems to have as a great pulsating thing, and it's as if it has divorced itself entirely to what is called a tradition or a pattern of civilization. The patterns of great painting, it seems to me, is like, uh, [00:12:00] one should not talk about it except in a whisper. And so I say, uh, I can't see it in any other way, that it is completely of a low ebb. And that what remains are the few distinguished painters who carry on in their way, soundly or otherwise, something that which has nothing to do with the formulas of things, but the direct and important expression as an individual.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Who would you count among those few important painters right now?

PAUL BURLIN: Well, I, I, I don't think it's, uh, I don't think it's something I'd like to—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Write down?

PAUL BURLIN: Yes. I don't think I care about that.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Don't you think that there's, uh, well, I mean, whatever this sense of the art impulse being perhaps a low ebb, it might be expressed also in a number of imitators of a few great, uh, outstanding artists. I mean—

PAUL BURLIN: Well, I think art has always had—the painting of pictures always had too many artists, distinguished ones. Uh, a—the memory of a great museum, in which all kinds of paintings interested me. And, uh, they made their personal choice, in which influenced them, which they attached importance to. Uh, this seems to be a historical fact.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: Uh, until they attain an individual scope and understanding, in which they feel that this category is most emphatic one. And within it they say things they can't say any other way, and is no longer reminiscent of anybody but themselves.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: You didn't talk very much last time about the artists that were, uh, important in your particular museum. [00:14:00] Uh, you know, I imagine that Goya must have been one of them, and I can guess at a few of the others—

PAUL BURLIN: There's a host of them that I—that I loved as a person who loves good painting. There's a host of, uh, distinguished artists, probably in great counter-distinction against, let's say, you just specifically mentioned Goya. There are others that have nothing to do with such point of view. I—I, um, happen to be an admirer, a great admirer, which might even be blasphemous today to mention it, of a man like Rubens.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Oh, yes, I [inaudible]—

PAUL BURLIN: I think it's great painting. But then since we, since we have a perverse eye about painting today, you see, it becomes sort of fictitious to mention a man like that. It seems odd. It actually isn't odd.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Not at all.

PAUL BURLIN: Because when you think about 50 years ago, when you think of men like Courbet, and Renoir, and, uh, Delacroix, and all these men, Delacroix copied Rubens.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes. The whole chain has led to your kind of color, came from Rubens, to Delacroix, then to the Impressionists, then Post-Impressionists and so on down. [Laughs.]

PAUL BURLIN: You're quite right. So they were artists, this great historical museum that I'm speaking about, and artists have used it, have touched upon these kinds of things, with their particular personal appetite towards that and the other and something else. So that it still remains, for me, this extraordinary something called painting, which, as I say, seems to approach, uh, a period in which, uh, one looks at it as if it, as if it didn't belong. And, uh, to cite an example, a collector in Chicago, who mentioned when he was shown important pictures of 30, 40 years ago, [00:16:00] said, "You know, I'm bored with beauty."

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm. [Audio break.] Going back to our earlier discussion of the, some of the younger artists, and particularly those in the Pop art movement. Uh, I was mentioning the, uh, artist Rosenquist, who seems to me to have something in his personal outlook that is not entirely antagonistic to some of the feelings

that you've had. I mean, feelings particularly about, uh, about the world we live in. One of the strongest feelings, for instance, that Rosenquist has is a, uh, sensitivity and anger, I would say, at the feeling that we live lives in which we're completely manipulated. And I think almost the central drive of his work, as I see it, is to find ways of giving an image to this—to these forms that manipulate our sensibilities so that, uh, we are—become prefabricated.

PAUL BURLIN: Well, um, I don't know, I thought sensibility would be completely trampled upon with, uh, Pop art. So I'm a little amazed that sensibility, and the word sensibility is used, because if you are—in order to attain freedom in the arts, and as you and me, and you make bigger and bigger hamburgers, and this is your outlet, it seems to me that we're just entering into the world of complete grotesqueries. So I don't know. I am skeptical about what the word sensibilities mean, then. It seems to me as if sensibility, uh, in contrast to Pop art, [00:18:00] has, uh, an ignominious aspect. As if it didn't belong. I can agree—I think you just mentioned before we were talking out in the open, so to speak, uh, that this is an appeal to a middle class —

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: No—

PAUL BURLIN: —to a new middle class—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Not an appeal to the middle class.

PAUL BURLIN: But to a—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: But using the—

PAUL BURLIN: To popularize it.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —middle class, uh—using the, uh, whatever is valued by the middle class as a new kind of exotic material. In other words, the one area—

PAUL BURLIN: Well, then—then—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: That hasn't been touched by the artist.

PAUL BURLIN: Okay, now—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: [Inaudible.]

PAUL BURLIN: —I don't know about not been touched. Then I—then I agree that the word sensibility is only, uh, a theme that is confused. Middle class and sensibility, seems to me, is a completely ironic terminology, because middle class has not developed its sensibility. Because we're talking about *le petite bourgeois* with comfort, whose sensibility has not been developed. Certainly not—not developed towards the arts, poetry, or any of these things that we're—uh, we as professional people, think about. But I can agree that its appeal, and I have used that word before, to—or rather it, uh—it meets the comprehension of the middle class, whose, whose, uh, whose vulgarization could easily understand this thing that they do, these Pop artists do, as a means of transforming their vision into the greatest—I don't know any other way of talking about it—form of comfort that they understood it.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: As a matter of fact, I think the middle class people that I've had a chance to [00:20:00] talk to about it, uh, they're the ones that now feel that fine arts should be fine and lofty and beautiful and—with a capital B. And they are more irked by Pop art than the sophisticate. It's the sophisticate that recognizes the sort of wit of using the middle class, uh, you know, rubbing its nose in its own love. [Laughs.]

PAUL BURLIN: Well, I think that's a, that's a plausible theme that you just mentioned, Dorothy. I agree with you. I think this is, really, as if it had, uh, the ultimate of, uh, a titillating, sophisticated audience, who likes the idea that, uh, since—it seems to be the age of boredom. The age of boredom about fine art. And I think the sophisticated would know more about it than the middle class. And I think it's quite right to say what you say. Uh, but then—then we can't meet them on grounds that I would understand as a fine artist, how they think. Because it seems is that over their cigars and their brandies, to say, come, I'll show you—to use the English terminology—the latest in the fine art—in art, not fine arts. Because, uh—the question might arise, always, how can you like this kind of thing? Well, it's the latest thing. It seems like what we were talking about in the last confessional, so to speak, at the modern museum, is that actually the fine arts play no part in this whole procedure. It seems, though, the—those who, uh, professionalize this Pop art business use all the clichés of the fine arts. This is something I object to. They ought to have [00:22:00] invented, they should have invented something that was a little bit more spectacular. But they don't. They—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: You're speaking now of the museum people or of the art—

PAUL BURLIN: Well, not only—I think the artists, they talk about sentiment, and they talk about, uh, sensibility, and they talk about all these sort of things which are malapropos, has nothing to do with what they're doing whatsoever. This is—this is, uh, as long as you're perfectly willing to accept the, the popular version around the TV—uh, TV audience, obviously—in which the very objective thinking and feeling could be called art. Which nobody knows what that would really mean. But which they could call art, because in some way they have a kind of enjoyment of this sort of thinking. There is, I think we've left out, out of all of this sort of thing, that there's a TV audience, and the TV audience is a large, middle class. I, I, I, what I just heard from you, in which you said, uh, they say that the fine arts should go on. Seems to me that's all, um, double-talk. I think it's double-talk. I think what the middle class likes is an extremely objective thing, which no metaphor, no labyrinthine ideas, enter into their thinking. That a purely visual, objective idea is the only category they understand. No matter what they say about fine arts. I'm suspicious of what they say about the fine arts.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: They like it with a little romance, and, you know, a little some of that [ph] glow—

PAUL BURLIN: Yes, but this is the, this is the words of those who make this kind of art. As I say, use the cliché of the fine arts, because there's no other way—[00:24:00] They ought to invent, from my point of view, an arrogant, crude, brutal interpretation of what they're trying to do. Which they haven't done yet. So they use all the clichés of the fine arts. I object to that, just whimsically, I object to it.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Some of them, of course, seem to feel that what they're trying to do is to provoke a kind of, uh, reaction through the, uh, familiar images. It's not that, you know, to look at the Oxydol box, but to look at the Oxydol box and get from that a shove into some other kind of reality. We're back into looking at what, you know, what your world really is. So if your world's not, you know—

PAUL BURLIN: Well, you—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —a box, don't pretend it's an English countryside, you know?

PAUL BURLIN: Well, you—well, you could be easily cynical about, also, an idea of which you mustn't lose sight of. Since we—since we've expressed—since it has been expressed through the collector who said, the fine arts, he's bored with what is called beauty. We could also think that, in opposite terms, that there is such a thing as, uh, cynicism and the need for shock. And let's not delude ourselves that the young man isn't aware what shock could mean in order to attract attention.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: Uh, if the billboard is the fine art, then we may as well fold our tents and bury ourselves.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Uh, speaking of shocking reminds me of Marcel Duchamp, and of course he is kind of the patron saint of a great deal of what's going on today. What's your own feeling about Duchamp? Was he a destructive influence on contemporary art, Paul?

PAUL BURLIN: Oh, I don't think so. I think he was of—I think of the period that I remember so well, the—which I was a member, an exhibiting member of the, uh, Armory Show. I think his, uh, [00:26:00] *Nude Descending the Stairway* was characteristically a good painting. And, uh, how can we enter into the mental thinking of a man except by what he did via good painting of something authentic?

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: But if in the course of years, the man, for reasons of his own, has not painted any longer, and—and might even be, uh, anti-art, who knows. And therefore, in a derisive manner, whatever is against the fine arts, you might be Pop art, standing there, applauding, who knows. But, uh, he wasn't destructive when he was doing his painting. The—he wasn't destructive before he stopped painting. Not—I don't think so.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: He was interested in the idea of shocking, of course. Which you assume the younger artists are also. He was interested in the idea of shocking. And you said the picture wasn't much if it didn't shock.

PAUL BURLIN: But those are categories that very good artists have had in mind. I like that myself. I like what I call the bombardment. That the onlooker must have a shock. Oh, I like that. But that's not a cynical idea, that is, I don't accept what I call an audience who is completely lethargic and looking at a painting in which they have a titillating feeling of comfort. I detest it. I, too, detest that.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Um—

PAUL BURLIN: I'm thinking about remarks made by Miró—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes.

PAUL BURLIN: —who said something similar: I want to, I want to shock them. I think it's a legitimate idea, artists have—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Well, of course, artists have been trying to shock [00:28:00] the bourgeoisie [ph] ever since 1850—

PAUL BURLIN: There—I think there are two kinds of artists. There are those who are perfectly aware that there is an audience, uh, behind their shoulder, listening in and applauding or making comments, contrary. And there is the kind of artist who says, "I deny your validity, you don't exist."

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Who's your audience, Paul? Who's looking over your shoulder when you paint?

PAUL BURLIN: Nobody that I'm aware of.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: You don't address yourself to anyone? Even a small handful of friends or artists? So many artists admit that they sort of think of another artist, or a few artist friends, or a [inaudible]—

PAUL BURLIN: It could be. But I—but you're talking about something as if it was very conscious. I think the—I think the most important thing for the artist is to be aware of his potentiality. Which takes very little cognizance about an audience, because if you—talking about an audience, you have to specify for yourself, what kind? And to say that you have a few friends who would like what you do, seems to me that this is a kind of dilettantism—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yeah.

PAUL BURLIN: —you know? I don't see it in any other way.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Do you think possibly you imagine an audience of the future? [Cross talk.]

PAUL BURLIN: I don't even think about that. I don't know, I don't know. Maybe I do. Maybe somewhere it's in the back of my mind, unknown to myself. That when we get rid of all the tastemaking, and all the banality, and the low, low ebb of painting today, maybe there is a change. I'm willing to believe that there is a change. I'm willing to believe in that.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Do you think this is a passing phase? We're just now in this low trough, and that it's a specific spot in history, which is unfortunate, and that your general point of view is of seeing a recovery and a different culture.

PAUL BURLIN: I agree.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: I agree. Yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: That's good. [Inaudible.] [00:30:00] Uh, so no one is looking over your shoulder, then? No one is, uh, you're not aware of thinking that, uh, you know, so and so, uh—

PAUL BURLIN: I can't accept that.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Even a poet or—no—

PAUL BURLIN: Well, I mean, in retrospect, I could think about it, but in the process of creating, I am unaware, and, uh, it's a non-existing audience. I've been asked as a young man just that sort of a question. Who are you painting for? And I said, I'd be damned if I knew. Except, potently, for myself. Potently, I don't know anything better than to feel that. How else would you know what you're talking about? Unless you are a person of facility, a decorator, an artist to be employed, an artist to be employed for a certain kind of audience, which pays, and pays well. You might have a cynical idea that your facility is of such, uh, exuberance, and so characteristically sharp and amusing, that you can count on your audience. And there will be people around you who will say, I will bring you such-and-such person who loves this kind of thing. And I'll tell you another thing, you'll be in *Glamour*.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: [Laughs.]

PAUL BURLIN: Or some other magazine.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Well, I remember that Norman Rockwell spoke of—he addresses himself to an audience very specifically, and he's a typical example—

PAUL BURLIN: Well, well, well, that—that's a commercial background.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes, of course—

PAUL BURLIN: Here's a man of commercial training—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes.

PAUL BURLIN: —background, who understands that sort of thing in the—in the most specific way, counting his dollars. Now he knows what that means. He can count on the time, and how much he'll bring in, and the audience that looks at it [00:32:00] and says, "Gee, how clever." But you know—

[END OF TRACK.]

This is track number five of five, side A.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Paul, we were talking before about the fact that some of the younger artists today seem to be pursuing a kind of painting which rejects the idea of *matière* [ph], of the richness and expressiveness of the quality of paint itself, and you had—

PAUL BURLIN: I think it has—specifically it has no understanding in the slightest degree about painting. Painting in the great tradition of which the French speak and think about, which no matter what you said, or rather no matter how you said it, you thought about that the primary importance was *le matière*, which was the most significant way of, if in an analogous way, you spoke about writing. That you, uh—I can't speak about literature in—with the same kind of comprehension. But surely there must be a comparison or an analogy. Because as long as these men who are bad painters, and that the word painting, which has a great, uh, a great profundo [ph], a great stance, these things that they're talking about have no analogy whatsoever to painting. These are, if you want to use the terminology, these artifacts, these are the junk of today, that one says, the junk of today is the gentleman's for usage. And that you could say something about it because you, we have a favorite terminology today. Psychology will explain everything. And so psychologically we'll explain it. And, um, it's the vulgarization, it has a damage, [00:02:00] I think I used the word in the damaging sense as if all art was to be damaged or profaned in the process of doing, uh, this sort of thing. A bigger and larger hamburger in order to be free as an artist. And the whole thing is that mish-mosh of words and has no sense whatsoever. But as long as this has all this miserable, un-meaningful character, here we are, talking about something which I detest, and trying to say something sensible about, but refuses to be sensible whatsoever. From my point of view [inaudible]—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Let's talk about the way that your painting has developed out of this particular sense of *matière*, the character of paint—

PAUL BURLIN: Yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —as affecting the way the image evolves.

PAUL BURLIN: Yes, yes. Well, I, uh, I'm intrigued by the mystery of being a painter. I'm intrigued by, uh, the kind of things that are nuances, are a sense of stance in the attitude of being a painter. In the sense of being a colorist. In the sense of using forms that have an innate relationship to your feeling. And out of which you make painting. These are, these are not, uh, arbitrary, sociological things. They are not, uh, they are not right or wrong. They have the great mystery of being a painter. In the sense, we're talking about, that the Rubens was, that, uh, the Giotto, on the basis of, uh, emotional and strange [00:04:00] simplicities and feelings. These seem to have an historic background in which, due to the age, whether it was religion or no religion, or the Renaissance, was a great skepticism, where the portrait of a man was an extraordinary ideal because it idealized him. Because it had a regard about this man's face, in a period in which man was something extraordinary and something to be talked about with great respect. While, today, we've lost our face, so that there is no such thing as a portrait of a man. We're skeptical about him, we have an answer about him, we know how he thinks, we have measurements about it, pardon me. We have, um, we have a belief that he's only, uh, standing on one leg and not two, that he has so many misgivings, that he's no longer this kind of an ideal. While the Renaissance had a great ideal about a man. That he was something extraordinary to think about. And so they painted him as such. And therefore, there were these great portraits. They've never been duplicated, and never will be. There is only one kind we can do today. If it wasn't the commission, we'd have to, so-called, psychoanalyze him, sterilize him, and we have a kind of a joke of a man. We have no regard about him. We never could paint a portrait like that any longer. It's finished. And even though we were clever painters, we never could paint it that way. It would always remain commission. So, in truth, we've lost our face.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Well, we have the concept of the organization man, or man as a statistic. How does that express itself? [00:06:00]

PAUL BURLIN: Don't mean a thing to me. He's an automaton. He, uh, he thinks like it's a group feeling. He's not distinctive as an individual because he would not dare to be. He'd no—no longer could be considered a younger executive or an older if he thought as such. He's an automaton. He believes in which the machine could produce an answer. I don't understand him. He means nothing to me. I don't understand him. I can look at him, and he's an enigma. I have no interest in him.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Paul, a few years back, you painted, uh, a picture called *Portrait of a Young Man Alone with his Face*.

PAUL BURLIN: Yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Was that a kind of attempt at psychological portraiture? What were you thinking about at that time?

PAUL BURLIN: Well, I think I was aware that, uh, man was this enigma and this, uh, and this mysterious being who had no great validity. And I don't know that I thought about it in any such psychological terms, but when I was finished with this painting I thought, Why, this is a young man alone with his own face. That is a commentary, my commentary, of something that is lost.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: A great many of your—when you were painting the figure, the figures are—well, they—they seem to have a kind of, uh—I'd rather not characterize them. What were you thinking about when you did paint figures? Beyond—let's say *Tiger Tiger Burning Bright* has a curious combination of the voracious tiger figure and, and a sort of sense of, uh, [00:08:00] he's spewing out, uh, fragments of—[Cross talk.]

PAUL BURLIN: Well, I think the tiger to me was, I always, uh, I've always had a kind of playful idea, that when I've been asked, what would you like to be as an animal, I said a tiger. I think it starts with the playful idea that being a tiger was, uh, a powerful, individualistic cat. And one of great character, just to look at it. I think I identified myself as an artist as a tiger, and, uh, everything was—what is the word? Fuel? No, what's the word, the word for—everything is feed for him? Everything that he can use is food?

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Fuel for his fire?

PAUL BURLIN: Well, that's probably—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Fuel for his fire?

PAUL BURLIN: Yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: [Laughs.]

PAUL BURLIN: And so I had, uh, so I had, in painting the tiger, was first the artist, who uses, um, anything and everything as fuel for his feelings or ideas. That's all. And, uh, it always had a—a playful analogy, that I was the tiger.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Very good. I like that interpretation. Well, I was wondering if we'd like to—would you like to talk about any of the paintings we have around, right here today? How about the latest one?

PAUL BURLIN: I think what we're, I think what we see is a kind of a synthesis, more and more, of this, um, what we talked about before, about this, uh, this austere [00:10:00] relationship to the few elements that go to make the painting. And they are precise, and not to be diversified by little ornamental sayings and thinking. So that it has more and more this feeling of a great austerity in order to say what I want to say.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: I think—

PAUL BURLIN: More than that, I have, uh, I have very little ability to, uh, to think of what images mean. The iconography, I have no understanding about it. And probably, uh, since I would care less, I would merely be an onlooker.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: Or listening in. But I wouldn't understand it. Because I don't think the artist understands it anyway. I think, uh, I think there are always a telltale evidence that through this mysterious *metie* [ph], or *matière*, and his sense of form and shape and color, extraordinary things are said of which he is quite unaware. Because there it is, and I think that's the specific terminology. There it is, more than that, you know nothing about. Others, who have interest in literature, can talk more about it. But you, uh, you've done your job as painting it. Beyond that you know nothing about it. I—I venture to say, you know very little about it after that.

It's left into the hands of people who are interested in the literary, uh, interpretation that comes, somehow, in the picture. Which I'm not sure that it does come into it, because, uh, I've never heard, [0:12:00] in recent years, anybody say, "That's a wonderful painting." I did hear a student speak about a picture of mine, he was breathless. The big one, the big one. A student of mine. An adult student. But generally speaking, I think they're interested in something entirely different, which they've learned today. Uh, all kinds of things, you know, what they've heard, what they've read about, psychology, um, uh, art for the people, art for the middle class. Art for the people used to be a very general term, which we say in great profusion, in Russia. And the most ignominious kind of thing that's ever been done. I don't think there's anything more appalling than what is done since the revolution in Russia. Previous to that, before it was, uh, congealed, so to speak, there were the Kandinskys, and there were the—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Malevich?

PAUL BURLIN: —Malevich, and there were the Chagalls, and the others who were told it's high time to leave. But you see, there was a great deal of experimentation, which was, uh, analogous to all the things that are being done in the rest of Europe. And I remember a show in Paris that came from Russia, before this thing happened in this specific way, an exciting exhibition of modern painting from Russia. In which were there were Kandinskys and Malevich and, uh, all these other men that I have mentioned, and others that were all, uh, all excitingly aware. So, you know, to think that there's, uh, surreptitious art today in Russia, you can't help thinking about that. Because, for some strange reason, I've been communicated with from Russia. Yes. Someone unknown to me who [00:14:00] has seen reproductions of mine, and so has communicated with me. But, uh, you cannot lose it. It is not lost. It is, uh, bootlegged art that's being done. And I'm sure being done in a considerable manner. It won't earn its cuppex [ph], but it certainly will go on. Because one thing can't be killed, is an idea. Against all the odds. So I'm sure there's a great deal of art, contemporaneously speaking, that's being done. How good or bad it is, I don't know. But it's being done. Which has nothing to do with any official, uh, appreciation, but rather, maybe, not in the same degree of censure, as it was some years ago, but still being censured.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes. [Inaudible.]

PAUL BURLIN: So I mentioned that I just had communication—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes.

PAUL BURLIN: —with Russian art, artists, who have seen reproductions of mine, produced—uh, reproduced in Germany, and communicated with me, and, uh—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: What did they want to know about [inaudible]—

PAUL BURLIN: They wanted to know, wouldn't I send them some more things, reproductions. So I sent them a book of the, of the *Ford Retrospective* [ph]. Which I got an enthusiastic reply. And they're sending a book of art of Russia today, God help us.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: They recently had a very bad setback.

PAUL BURLIN: Yeah.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: I think Khrushchev put thumbs down on some of the new experimentation.

PAUL BURLIN: So you see—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Eventually, it probably has to—

PAUL BURLIN: Pop [ph] through.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes.

PAUL BURLIN: I think so. Because I'm sure it's going on. And I'm sure they haven't accepted—I have a feeling they haven't accepted the official edict in any complete, intimidating terms.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Well, the young poet, uh, whose name escapes me, something like Kimischanto [ph], [00:16:00] uh, came out in support of that—

PAUL BURLIN: In support of that. Yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: There must be quite a [inaudible]—

PAUL BURLIN: It's all been a background. They've had it, you know. It isn't as if they started with official art.

They started with contemporary art.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: They had less of a development in the—

PAUL BURLIN: I remember it very well.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —nineteenth century than Western, or [ph] they only had—[Cross talk.]

PAUL BURLIN: I remember it very well. In the '20s when I saw it in Paris, it was shown in Paris. So, you know—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: The Russian collectors were among the first to collect some of the moderns, and—

PAUL BURLIN: Well, of course, well, this was one of the —

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —Shchukin, and [inaudible]—

PAUL BURLIN: —earliest, like Shchukin—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes.

PAUL BURLIN: —collected, collected, uh, Matisse and met Matisse and Cézanne, and, uh, there was no question about the pictures of Matisse, *The Dance,* which were of a superlative time. But still—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: They can be seen—

PAUL BURLIN: —never been sold by the Russian.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —they can be seen in the modern art [ph] museum.

PAUL BURLIN: Oh, marvelous pictures. Wonderful pictures, which they have.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: So those ideas are roots. [Laughs.]

PAUL BURLIN: So they're rooted. They're rooted.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: If you could do one thing right now, if you had some power. Suppose you were Mr. Kennedy for a day, to do something for the arts, um—

PAUL BURLIN: Well, that would interest me enormously.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: What would you do?

PAUL BURLIN: Well, I would first, uh, make the government responsible for the support of it. And, uh, I would never be worried about whether bad ones got into it, too. Because the machinery might work that way, too, but I would, uh—I would allow, first, for the apprenticeship that took place for the support—uh, the government support of art. And then, I would also see that, that America, instead of falsifying the picture that they're interested in culture, that they would really buy, for the government, [00:18:00] distinguished paintings. Maybe it's the only country in the world that is detached from such point of view.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: Maybe our fastidious Congressmen, who know everything, would give us an answer.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: I was just going back over the notes, and I finally found the notes to our Provincetown interview. I'm noticing that, that time, you had gone to Washington, uh, with the—was it Dreiser and Laurette Taylor [ph]?

PAUL BURLIN: Yes. Yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: And, uh, met with Harry Hopkins—

PAUL BURLIN: Yes, yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —at the time of the WPA project.

PAUL BURLIN: We haven't lost sight of that task, and you know, it's, uh, we've always used—we've popularized the word culture in America as if it's something you just play with and dismiss at any time. There is no—apparently there is not a great need. I don't know if there's a need at all for Americans. I am rather skeptical

about it.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Do you think that the, uh, development of the film has, um, taken the place of what might have been art, development in art?

PAUL BURLIN: No, I think the film is another kind of graphic art. I think maybe it supplanted the ordinary graphic art, because I think it's done a superb job with documentaries in a graphic sense. And I think, uh, that's its value. And I think it, uh, what else does it mean, graphic art? The thing of the moment, done with, uh, instantaneous awareness. And I think, uh, much of it has a lot of character and are very important. That documentary art is, to me, and the whole television process, a most important [00:20:00] contribution. The word art is, uh, to me, is not necessarily something you haul out of a little plush lining.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: The word art has a lot to do with people. And it has a lot to do with, uh, an appetite of the people. Uh, one, the graphic point of view is something to see and to be aroused by. And that's value. And that has a value, and a great value, I think. And, the other, the fine art, is something to do—if I may permit—be permitted to make a slight translation on it—is, uh, the kind of thing of the metaphor and the, uh, the mystery, the subterranean character that creative things have.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: It's generally assumed that the background of thought that moves many of the younger artists is Existentialism, plus perhaps a dash of Zen, that—

PAUL BURLIN: What do you mean by that? I think you ought to make that a little clearer. A dash of Zen sounds like a bad Bacardi.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: [Laughs.] Well, I suppose there was more of Zen awareness among the Abstract Expressionists, actually. The feeling of the instant, the feeling for paradox, uh, to act, uh, rather than to work rationally towards a solution. I mean, something of the quality, you've got in quan [ph] in Zen, I'll look. Uh, general feeling that among some of the younger artists included in these, uh, *enfant terrible* in the Pop art, that their basic outlook is simply existential. Here we are, and the point of the art is simply to make you [00:22:00] become more self-conscious of whatever you're doing. Suppose you're just putting a subway token in a stile and walking through that stile. The job of the artist, is, in whatever way he can, to make you see this as an expressive, um, experience and gesture. That you are, uh, acting out something which—

PAUL BURLIN: Well, it's a kind of—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —is self-significant, without any reference to God, or to anything beyond that.

PAUL BURLIN: Well, I think it's a kind of cinematograph. I—that's the reason I call it television audience. I think it is the actuality and the visualization of the thing of the moment, you see? And the fine art has nothing to do with that. And I think it's quite right to speak of it that way. I, I, I would assume that we couldn't have a television audience without having what I call a television art. This, I call a television art. The magnification of the ordinary into, into extraordinary size to feed your appetite a piece of pie, a hamburger, a piece of machinery, anything, or nothing. That's a televised point of view, as I see it. It is non-intellectual, it is essentially graphic, and it's a thing of the moment. It's evanescent, disappears too. Of course, you can repeat the pattern that you had mentioned about the, the person going through the turnstile and dropping its, its token in, and might repeat the common pattern of that sort of thing. But I think the common pattern is what we're coming to all the time in this thing. If the fine art is one of nuances and this idea of the metaphor, and this idea of a meditation, [00:24:00] then this other, which is in search, contradistinction, the one of the moment, this is where I find it has an analogy to the television of today. In other words, a television audience. This kind of art, televised audition of something, of the thing of the moment. Well, then, they're all cockeyed if they used fine-art terminology, which has no analogy whatsoever to it. Therefore, good painting is a joke. Therefore, nuances are a joke. Therefore, an organic idea, which means meditation, which means stability, is a joke. And it is a thing of the moment, it's an evanescent idea, it's a thing of the moment. A large, magnifying, pure monstrosity. I can't say any more.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: You've mentioned, of course, a great deal, the role of metaphor, the, uh, this has always been present in your work, certainly.

PAUL BURLIN: Yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: But I'd like to go back to the period in your work when you were, uh—let's say the '40s. When you, uh, were adopting the way of thinking about the painting that you—that is still important in your work. Did it seem to you that by, uh, doing away with the specific reference to particular things or people, that you were therefore able to enlarge your metaphor, but each shape, in other words, would be functioning in several different ways at once?

PAUL BURLIN: That's right.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Was it different layers of reference?

PAUL BURLIN: Yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Was this something that was extremely desirable from your point of view?

PAUL BURLIN: I think it was always desirable. I didn't find how I could utilize, uh, [00:26:00] what appeared to me as the content, and what appeared to me as the form. I couldn't combine them. I either would pin the form to a specific thing, and then the content would be congealed as I see it. And now—and now—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: And before you had adopted [inaudible]—

PAUL BURLIN: Yes. And now I've allowed another element to come into it, which is that all form, for me, is a purely spatial relationship. And if it is nonexistent within the space, it has no meaning as form. And on that ground, on those grounds, I find myself, uh, inveigled into creative manipulating, having something to say. But first I'm aware that the form exists within a certain space. If it were merely a scribble, it has nothing to do with space. It is—perchance, it's in space, but in actuality it has no such meaning. But I think the whole great reality of today is to find within your space, and the strange word space and time, which is an adjunct I quite don't know. I don't quite know its meaning in relationship to it. But I do know, not in a physical sense, in a metaphoric and creative sense, that space has a great validity. That it gives the form the chance to breathe and exist within the area that you have placed it. I don't know how to explain it in any other way.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: So that the space becomes the essential [inaudible]—

PAUL BURLIN: The all-embracing, yes—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —of the metaphor, actually.

PAUL BURLIN: —the all-embracing thing.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: If I make a horizontal form against what I would call a time-worn idea that a vertical is [00:28:00] near it. That if it didn't exist within its space, and not by the fact that it was just there by chance, why, it had no meaning at all to me. So then I have, uh, an understanding of what that means first. Like, as an example, that fairly spherical—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes.

PAUL BURLIN: —shape in there, within that area, that floating, spherical thing. That's an existing thing. You've never seen it, I don't think, have you?

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: No.

PAUL BURLIN: The painting?

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: No.

PAUL BURLIN: On that wall. [Inaudible] there the other day, I expect. I'd have to move everything around, oh, Lord.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Oh, I see. That—this one you're speaking of, this—

PAUL BURLIN: Yes. Right. Yeah.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Now, it takes its place within a space which is not defined, of course, in any terms of perspective. Only by—

PAUL BURLIN: Well, it's not defined in terms of physical space.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: No, it's, it's—

PAUL BURLIN: Its term is, um, well, I can't call it in any other way but a creative space. A space that has no further logic than the fact that it is intuitively and instinctually existing in a certain area and couldn't be in any other place. And therefore, under such circumstance, it has whatever you give its impetus things to say. If that wasn't true, it wouldn't stay there at all. You—no matter what you tried to say, it would not be said, because it

was all wrong from the beginning. The fact that it was completely asymmetrical in its existing space was already, from my point of view, some kind of an audacity. And that the fact that all the areas that are around it received it [00:30:00] was the most important thing against this enormous, even grotesque object.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And it doesn't remain on top of it, it's into the space.

PAUL BURLIN: It's in and floats. Seems to float.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative]. And yet it doesn't seem to be falling. It seems somehow to maintain itself. Perhaps because of that—[cross talk.]

PAUL BURLIN: Well, I wasn't aware—so I didn't care about that. I knew that if it was in its proper space, it would float and stay there. You know, you can't, uh, you know that certain time, in a creative way, an object exists because you have intuitively found its area where you want to project it. And that at another moment, with any kind of rationalization, it would fall apart. You couldn't do it. You simply can't do it. However, I must remind you about something that happened to me the other day. The other day, walking down the avenue leaving my studio, I was working on a big picture, and the thing offered complexities. And then suddenly, in one of the windows, I saw a large shape, and it was fairly, uh, definite. But it had such an impression on my mind, that in order to verify it, I walked back a few blocks to see it. And it was not there.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Was it something actually in the window?

PAUL BURLIN: Yes, well, so I thought. So it appeared to me.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: It was just a—

PAUL BURLIN: It defined itself with the greatest accuracy. With the other things subordinate to this large shape. And I thought, Well, I saw this. I'm going to verify it.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: But I never saw it.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: You think it may have—it must have been a projection.

PAUL BURLIN: Oh, of, uh—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Of your intent.

PAUL BURLIN: —of my own intent.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes.

PAUL BURLIN: Intent, in—in the strongest way. [00:32:00] Now, you know that's what I mean by the finally [ph] —the need, or the seeking—not the need—of a rationalization which is nonexistent in the whole process of this creative thing. It's nonexistent. You cannot verify it for one moment, and that's the reason [ph] I'm citing this example.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Do you find that you're, in that sense, always painting the picture, even when you're not painting it? It's your—your whole imagination is sort of obsessed with the, uh, the shapes, or the life of the picture that you've been working on?

PAUL BURLIN: Oh, heavens, it's so much so that, uh, it can keep me awake for hours. Reiterating something. Changing as if I was changing it. Adjusting it from one center to another center. Uh, adjusting other things near it until either I would collapse or, if I touched the picture that time, that might collapse. I don't know.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL BURLIN: Anyway, it goes on. It goes on continuously.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]