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Oral history interview with George D. Culler, 1974 October 29

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with George D. Culler on October 29, 1974. The interview took place in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and was conducted by Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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

Interview

PAUL CUMMINGS: This is the 29th of October 1974, and it's Paul Cummings talking to George Culler in his office in the Philadelphia College of Art. You're from McPherson, Kansas, correct?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, I was born in McPherson, Kansas. We moved to Ohio when I was six. My father took a job as dean of Hiram College outside of Cleveland about 30 miles and then from there when I was 15, we moved into the suburb of Cleveland so that I suppose I'm as much in Ohio. I mean, my background is anything. I went to the Cleveland School of Art, which is now the Cleveland Institute of Art, and also got my BS in education from Western Reserve University in 1936.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was your father then? He was an administrator or—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well he was—he was dean of men at Hiram College. He was a minister, and when we moved to Cleveland, he took a church in Shaker Heights so that—but I have a very academic background. My father was in college work, his brother was in college work, my uncle on my mother's side is in college work—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, goodness, yeah.

GEORGE D. CULLER: —my brother's the chairman of the English department at Yale, so we seem to be very active. Anyway, I probably bothered my family more than anybody else because I was determined to be a painter and—

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did that come about? Were there art interests in the family or friends?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, no. I—you know, it's just one of those things. I was drawing from a very early age and that sort of thing. I remember one instance that while we were at Hiram, I think I was about 12 when Henry Turner Bailey who was then the dean of the Cleveland School of Art came to lecture chalk talk, which was a great thing in those days at Hiram. [00:02:09] He stayed overnight, and I was tremendously impressed by the chalk drawings that he'd made. I don't know whether that had an influence [they laugh] or not. My parents had been interested in art. They have, I think somewhat unusually for that time in Kansas, bought original things—for the most part, works by Birger Sandzén who was, what, I suppose not much known now but a great name in Kansas in those days. And we always had original works in the house actually. Anyway, I graduated from the Cleveland School of Art in 1936. I taught for one year in a junior high school in—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Who were your instructors there? Were there any particular ones that—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —you remember?

GEORGE D. CULLER: The art school was a very provincial school at that time, and that has been one of its troubles up until recent years. There was a tendency for the so-called Cleveland School to regard itself as complete within itself. The people who particularly influenced me: Certainly, in the area of drawing, my mentor was Paul Travis who is retired now but still living in Cleveland, one of the really great draftsmen of that time and Henry Keller. I think these were perhaps the two most influential figures as far as my work in art school was concerned.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Keller seems to have had a tremendous influence on a lot of people.

GEORGE D. CULLER: You know, Keller at that time was kind of the dean of the Cleveland artists [ph]. He was a marvelous draftsman, quite a traditional muralist, a most irascible figure and—but a very vigorous and challenging guy. [00:04:15] The school was, as I look back on it, a very pleasant environment, very unstressful environment. It was relatively small. I think there were perhaps 60 of us in the freshman class at that time, and

that had dwindled to perhaps 35 or 40 when we graduated. But it was run with the minimum of formality, and it was certainly a marvelous life as far as I was concerned. I was getting just exactly what I wanted. I wanted to be a painter, and that was exactly what the school was up to. And, of course at that time, none of these art schools was accredited either regionally or professionally, which was part of my father's concern. He felt being an academic that I should go to college and get a degree and then if I wanted to take some art classes, all right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Proper education.

GEORGE D. CULLER: So this was—this was the major battle at the end of my senior year, which I went out on because he was too kind to insist otherwise. He was much better satisfied, of course, when I decided I was interested in teaching and went to take the additional work at the school of education of Western Reserve.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Now, when did you do that? What years were that?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Concurrently.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, it's—I see.

GEORGE D. CULLER: It was possible at that time for someone to work full time at the art school and also take the additional courses, the academic courses that Western Reserve to qualify for certification and get the BS degree. [00:06:00]

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you like the two activities simultaneously?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, I—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Very busy day.

GEORGE D. CULLER: —[inaudible] no particular.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] Very busy.

GEORGE D. CULLER: Things weren't—I don't think we were demanding or I don't think they were demanding as much from students at that time, certainly, as we do in the school here today. I have sometimes felt that if I were—if I had it to do all over again, I couldn't get admitted to the art school of which I'm now president.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] Well, were there any instructors at Western Reserve that you remember particularly or—

GEORGE D. CULLER: No, not at that time. When I came back a few years later to work on my master's degree, I took my master's in aesthetics and art history with as much other humanities work as I could manage because I hadn't had any of this to speak of at the undergraduate level. At that level, I certainly had a few people that I felt were very important to me. William Toisch [ph] who taught creative writing was a very important influence at that time. He later became dean at Wooster College here in Cleveland. At any rate, I—I taught a year in the Cleveland public school system at one of the most difficult junior high schools, earned, as I remember, $960 that year, and went to Europe the following summer on the proceeds. And—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Had you decided to be—to be a teacher at this point? Was that—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yes. I—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —the general direction?

GEORGE D. CULLER: —liked teaching, and I was interested in teaching, and I felt that, you know, teaching and painting worked together. [00:08:00] And my experience as long as I was a teacher was that this was so. Um, I continued to paint and exhibit professionally as long as I was teaching and felt that, in a way, they really reinforced each other. Now, I did not feel that teaching at the junior high school level was something that I wanted to continue indefinitely, and when I came back from Europe all fired up, I resigned and did the usual thing in those days—made the trip to New York with another guy. We lived in an old, oh, tenement over at East 63rd Street and 1st Avenue, and this was to be the year I was really going to get somewhere in my painting, and so on. This was in the '37-'38, and it wasn't an easy time to be in New York. I picked up a little work selling cartoons, doing plant sketches for a Madison Avenue decorating shop, and things like that, but it was kind of then really—

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was right at the end of the Depression.

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yeah. And so after a year in New York, I came back to get my master's and then in the fall

of '39, I got married and got a job at—[coughs] excuse me—as the junior instructor in a three-man art department at Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia. That's a period that both my wife and I look back upon with great fondness. It was a school of about 200 students at that time with quite a good art department. I, naturally as the junior instructor, inherited all the work that the two senior members in the program didn't want to do including running the ceramic department, and I had never thrown a pot in my life in my mind there. [00:10:07]

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

GEORGE D. CULLER: But I was doing pretty well by the time I was through. And I had charge of the other teacher training work, supervising the practice teaching for the student art teachers. I was there three years, and of course, the war started, and at the end of three years, the enrollment of the college was disappearing very rapidly. I remember that the college farmed me out to teach a class down at the local high school to fill my schedule. At that point, I was asked to come down to do, um, technical illustration, production illustration at Boeing in Wichita. I ended up as kind of a crew chief in charge of a group of about 40-some artists who were, um, doing technical illustrations that assisted the men on the line to put the airplane together. This was the B-29 program, and I kind of got locked into that. It was quite toward the end where I was one of a group of 60 who were deferred by the state board out of a plant of 30,000 people because my particular position was viewed as essential in some way or other. It was an interesting period.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What actually was that? You would, what, draw blueprints or plans or—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, our—you know, our job, these were realistic drawings, exploded drawings very often. We used various techniques to show how an assembly should be put together and they were used in place of blueprints. [00:12:00] We would take the engineering information and break it down according to production so that we would supply a drawing or drawings for each shop showing them just what they had to do and only what they had to do and showing it in a form that people who were not trained in the reading of blueprints could readily understand and follow. Our work was primarily with what was called in that plant B-29 changes. These were changes in the design of the airplane. The men on the line would learn how to do a job, and the—they were putting five planes a day out of the plant so that as long as it was repetitious, they—they did it from memory so to speak. But when there was some redesign of some part, let's say redesign of the mechanism to crank down the landing gear, this would create a great deal of confusion in the line, and our drawings were used to teach the new technique.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I see.

GEORGE D. CULLER: They would work from our drawings until they were familiar with the new process and then that will go obsolete. So we were constantly making these drawings that referred to new kinds of installations in the airplane.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's a good experience for a teacher to have, isn't it?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yeah, it was—

PAUL CUMMINGS: And everything had to be clear and explicit—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —in a way, it was—it was a teaching situation. The ability to draw very accurately, the ability to read blueprints and understand the whole thing was important, but also it was a challenge in visual teaching. You had to organize your visual material in such a way that it would lead a person through a process and be sure not to mislead him in any way. In the latter part of the war, I was doing a lot of work between the Boeing plant in Wichita and the modification center in Denver. [00:14:09] I would fly out to the modification center and study the redesign that was being worked out on the—on the mock-up airplane, and make my drawings and take all the information and then come back to Wichita. And I would be the source of information for the production people and for the tooling people and for all of the others who were concerned until the engineering information finally caught up. It was—it was very interesting work, but, um, I was very happy as a lot of other people were, of course, when the war ended, and that plant was virtually disbanded in a week's time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really? That fast?

GEORGE D. CULLER: And at that—uh, at that point then, we happily headed back for Cleveland. I had been on leave from the college in Emporia but, um, felt that I really didn't want to go back there, so I went back to Western Reserve to do some more graduate work. Spent a year during which time, I also did some teaching at the Cleveland Institute of Art and some work at the art museum. At the end of that year then I was hired in the education department of the Cleveland Museum of Art. The following year, I became assistant curator of education. So I was the art museum in Cleveland from 1946 to [19]49.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So that was really the beginning then of the whole museum—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yes. Uh, I have never had any idea of getting into the museum field, but it happened that my advisor for graduate work, Thomas Munro who was the head of the graduate school, art department at Case—at Western Reserve was also curator of education at the Cleveland Museum of Art. [00:16:14] So I was working directly under him, and he convinced me that, um, it would be interesting to work at the museum. That work, of course, was very much the traditional museum educational plan.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What kind of program did you work on there? What role—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, Cleveland—the Cleveland Museum was one of the pioneers in using the museum for educational purposes, and Tommy Munro had done a great deal for this . He's been one of the major developers of this concept that is now, of course, very common for us in the country. We—essentially, it falls into work with public school classes and other secondary school classes and various forms of adult informal adult education. So we had a staff, as I remember, of half a dozen people who were professionals prepared as teachers, very often, they had come out of the school teaching. In other instances, they were gals with majors in art history from Smith or Vassar or something of this sort, well prepared generally in art history, but spending most of their time taking school groups through the museum and engaging in, I suppose, you'd say art appreciation. I was in charge among other things of the film program, which of course, was an adult program, and the museums at that time were about the only institutions looking at the film as an art form. Since then, this has moved on—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Everybody. [Laughs.] [00:18:01]

GEORGE D. CULLER: —to much larger fields. But in Cleveland, my program was about the only way you could see classic films or anything of that sort. We were very dependent as almost everyone was at that time on the Museum of Modern Art Film Library, and most of my programs came from there or from a few of these 16 and 35 mm commercial people.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right, right.

GEORGE D. CULLER: But we did the usual things. We would—we would have adult classes that we would dream up and offer, and some of them filled and some of them didn't. We would have gallery talks. They made quite a feature of Sunday afternoon gallery talks, which I always found one of the more harrowing aspects of the thing—not that I disliked public speaking; I loved it. I'll talk in front of a group of any size with no problem whatsoever.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

GEORGE D. CULLER: But there's something tough about walking into a gallery that has a dozen or 15 people in it quietly looking on their own. And standing at some point and announcing that you're going to talk, and people turn and stare at you kind of strangely assuming that you must be some nut from the outside and—

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

GEORGE D. CULLER: —that sort. In the first few minutes, you have to convince them that you are a museum person, and that you have something to say, and that it might be possibly be worth listening to, and you attract your crowd in this way. And then when you have a group of people, you can perhaps really do something. I've never been convinced that this was the proper way—

PAUL CUMMINGS: To start?

GEORGE D. CULLER: —or at least not a humane way to—as far as the performer is concerned to operate, and I think we've developed some better techniques since then. [00:20:08] But, at that time, the charge was go into the gallery and start talking, and people will gather and listen, and to be truthful, they usually did.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How many people would you have in a normal day like that—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —around Sunday?

GEORGE D. CULLER: —of course, you'd be doing this on Sunday afternoons when the galleries were fairly well filled. The Cleveland Museum had a very good attendance at that time—it was well used by the public—so there was–usually an audience there. As you—um, as you got smarter on this sort of thing, you would avoid very small galleries and very specialized kinds of material. Because you'd find that you were scheduled to start talking at, say, three o'clock—I don't remember what the usual hour was—and you'd go into this little gallery where you'd scheduled yourself, and there wouldn't be anybody there. I have—I can remember starting a gallery talk with only two or three people around. And this for someone with perhaps some tendency towards shyness is a really

very difficult experience, but others would gather somewhat.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How many galleries would you go through, or would you generally after a while, take one large—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, this—this would vary. The talks were usually done in relation to a temporary exhibition of some sort. If the exhibition were on that gallery, I preferred usually to do quite an intensive job with a relatively small body of material so that if I had a single gallery, let's say, of Renoirs, this would be just about ideal. You'd have—sometimes, you could have a great deal of fun. [00:22:03] We had, I remember, a Salvador Dali show, and Dali was more looked at then than perhaps now. The material was very new to a lot of people and lent itself to drama, and so on, and you could have yourself a ball just with a dozen Salvador Dalis. It was a good experience, you know. I'm so glad—

PAUL CUMMINGS: How long would you talk generally in the course—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Oh, half, three-quarters of an hour. But the department did a great many things. It was one of the first—one of the first departments to develop a major resource in circulating material. We had detached from the primary collection a great many objects and paintings and a lot of decorative objects that were not considered primary material quality and made them a lending collection. As a matter of fact, the first thing I did when I got to Cleveland was go with another guy in a truck and one case after another just sorted material. You'd make the rounds of all the public schools that put a case at your disposal and make little case displays in the public schools. And we had, I suppose, 40 or 50 outlets through Cleveland at that time where these shows would be rotated every two or three weeks. And, um—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Hmm, what kind of things would go into an exhibition like that?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, the cased things were usually three-dimensional materials. So you would have, let's say, European peasant material, fabrics, hard wood, pottery, all this sort of thing. We did quite a lot, as I remember, with what I suppose now you'd call third world material. [00:24:04] There had been a lot of things brought back from the Orient so that you could put together a small case of, oh say, a violent [ph] bronzes or things of this sort with explanatory labels. There was a great deal of exposition done with these. There were small collections of, oh, Cleveland watercolor school for example, or collections that would demonstrate the processes involved in making a lithograph, ending up with a group of finished lithographs, the usual—oh, I'm tempted to say at least, the usual kind of educational exhibition. And we tended to—we tended, in those days, to be quite didactic. And this was the—we had, in a way, just discovered that you could teach with original material, and we were, I'm afraid, being very teach-y. I remember that I succeeded in those three years in getting the director of the museum, William Milliken to give me a little niche up in the main exhibition galleries, a little gallery that was about, oh, I suppose, 10 by 14 feet in which I could run a continuing series of explanatory exhibitions. I had access for that exhibition to any material in the museum that I wanted that the curators weren't using someplace else. I could go into the stacks, or I could take things off the wall and assembled material for the purpose of giving some people some ideas about how artwork—you would do the obvious thing of doing a whole exhibition online and finding different things that illustrated the—make a comparison between a geometric line and biomorphic line, you know? [00:26:24]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE D. CULLER: And, um, doing an exhibition to try and explain what happened in sculptural form and comparing different kinds of things so that, in a way, it was a great excuse to combine material from different ethics, different cultures, and so on. If you're talking about a line, you can use a Pandiski here, and you can use a Japanese print here, and you can use—you know all that sort of thing. We kind of, I suppose, ran it into ground, but it was fresh at that time. Very little of this sort of thing had been done, and I think it really did cultivate some greater awareness—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was there ever any notable response from the public to these—you know the small exhibitions that you did?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Oh we—they were well patronized in terms of use. I would very often try to relate them in some way to a major exhibition if you were having an exhibition that—where, in my opinion, a certain kind of perception was needed. I tried to develop something that I hope would show—would give people a better chance to see what was really there in the major show.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well you know that's interesting. How much free rein did Munro allow you? [00:28:02]

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, that was one of the great things about the job. Tommy, I think, has—was probably the foremost person worthy in aesthetics at that time, and this is, to most people, is a very offbeat kind of proposition. But he'd written a little book called the *Scientific Method in Aesthetics*, which is still an important

document in developing a position relating to the study of the—apparent study of the art. He was working on his book called *The Arts and Their Interrelations* at that time. Now, Tommy had an interesting way of working. He was teaching aesthetics in the graduate school, and I was taking all of his courses. He'd have a secretary in the back of the room, and he would lecture, and the secretary would take down everything and develop a complete transcript. These days, you took the tape. He'd refined that, and the next year when he taught that course, you'd get a mimeographed book, an inch and a half thick, which represented all of his lectures up to that point, and he'd keep on going from there. He didn't retrace for the course. And then these—this accumulated material, reworked and condensed and refined and so forth would become his book so that it in a sense his writing grew out of his lectures. He was a very methodical guy this way. And it was—uh, it was extremely interesting. To come back to your question, he—it was understood in the museum that his primary commitment was to his writing, and in sense, he was a research scholar and supported on that basis. [00:30:05] So that as assistant curator of education, I was de facto in charge of the department. We'd confer once in a while, but he was quite fair that he wanted someone to run the department, and he wanted to stay up at his—in his nook up above and write. It was very satisfactory for both of us then.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So you really had very broad, day-to-day—

GEORGE D. CULLER: So, yes, I had.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —experience?

GEORGE D. CULLER: I had the administrative work of running the department. It wasn't a large department. In addition, I had my own lecturing and my own program and my exhibition work and so on. It all went very well.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Would he suggest topics or discuss things with you, or how involved would he become in the programs you were planning?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well not—um, yes, in the broad sense of looking ahead through the year and determining what kind of adult lectures we wanted, what kind of gallery talks we wanted, who should do what, and so on. We looked the year over and get a broad frame of organization then I'd go ahead and work it out and in detail. It was very good experience. I still feel very much indebted to Munro. In a sense, those three years were my training ground in museum work from an educational point of view under Munro and from a curatorial and administrative point of view under Bill Milliken. Bill Milliken, he was the director of the museum at that time, and I still feel that in terms of curatorship, there was probably no better person to study under than Milliken. [00:32:02] He—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why do you say that? In terms of like what?

GEORGE D. CULLER: —well he was—he was, in a sense, the last of that generation of the great, German-trained museum directors who were thorough curators who had worked out and refined the criteria of assembling and caring for a collection, using it, and so on. He had a—he had a tremendous eye and a very exacting and very demanding set of standards. And when you'd worked for Milliken for a while, you knew what your responsibilities were in terms of caring for works of art and in terms of techniques right down to the techniques to be used by the workman in dealing with them and in hanging them, and so on. There's a wealth of finicky material there without which things get damaged, you know?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE D. CULLER: Now, that seems somewhat pedestrian, but in a sense the—

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's very practical—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —the job of curatorship starts with development of techniques that recognize the obligation to preserve and pass on to the next generation these things that are heritage from the past, and it's not a simple matter. I mean a lot of people can get into trouble in this way. So Milliken was a great technician in addition to being, in my view, one of the—one of the great curators in terms of his eye and his judgment about works. [00:34:00] I think, at least, the solid base for the quality of the collection of the Cleveland Museum was established pretty much by Milliken. He thought very, very well, very astutely. He had a strong feeling for the decorative arts and may—some may say somewhat had pushed the museum in that direction more than other people would have. But by the same token, Sherman Lee since then has pushed the Oriental. So I suppose successive directors made have—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —balanced out.

GEORGE D. CULLER: —balanced each other out—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —at least in the history, sure.

GEORGE D. CULLER: Milliken was not an easy man to work with. He was a very personal kind of director. He was very poor at delegating responsibility and authority. He really felt that he had to run the whole museum himself, and if he could only be 10 people, he could do a good job. But when he was away, and everybody—and people knew he was coming back, there would be a frantic kind of scurrying around to tighten everything up before he arrived, and he could still walk in and walk right straight through the gallery and find a piece of paper on the floor and pick it up, you know? And—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —there it was. [Laughs.]

GEORGE D. CULLER: Not good. He was a marvelous man. Well, to move on—

PAUL CUMMINGS: I'm curious, uh, about Munro because he was there, again, for so many years.

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yes, he was, great many years.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you ever—did you ever pursue his interest in aesthetics or is that not—?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, I was—uh, I was very much interested in aesthetics period of the arts and so forth at that time, and my graduate work had been done in the field. [00:36:07] During the period I was there, Tommy was the editor of the *Journal of Aesthetics* [*and Art Criticism*], and I became his assistant editor, which again, meant that most of the donkey work, I had to do. I read all the submissions and passed on to him those that I thought we possibly could use for his final decision. And there was a very active society for his chapter of the [American] Society for Aesthetics in Cleveland at that time, and we were—I was very much involved in that. I have felt that the work that I have done since being a great deal from that days in the philosophy of the arts that there's a way of thinking about the arts. I suppose in the classical sense, it's somewhat similar to people who say, "Well, I have never regretted a thorough study of Latin because it supplied a base for everything I've done since even though you don't really use Latin," you know?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE D. CULLER: Aesthetics, you're trained in a kind of thinking and a way of analyzing the creative process and the nature of art objects and the differences among them that I have felt always has been very useful because it promotes clarity in it and still eliminate a lot of the confusion. I would venture to say that if we could give everyone that's going to be art critic or a writer or a whatever, a good grounding in aesthetics before they start out, we could probably reduce the amount of verbiage by three-quarters. [00:38:07] Because so much that goes on is simply a continual rehashing of old arguments that—and a perpetuation of confusions that come from unclear thinking about the nature of the arts and what these processes are and what they mean in human terms and how they are classified. Now, what Munro was trying to do at that time was essentially lay groundwork in the creation of a kind of a morphology of the arts.

[Audio break.]

GEORGE D. CULLER: Tommy was trying to lay really a solid groundwork in a field that had permitted too much general vague philosophizing after that time, and he states this very clearly in his *Scientific Method in Aesthetics*. So that what he was interested in was to develop a kind of a morphology of the arts—simply a means of inspecting the—well, the field from a standpoint of classification. He viewed himself as kind of a Linnaeus just as botany had to be organized as a science so as aesthetics would have to be. And he made the point, which I think many people missed, that aesthetics is not an art. It is a discipline, a humanistic or even perhaps a sign of a scientific discipline—that discipline which has as its field of study the arts. So that an esthetic studies the arts—painting, music and all the rest of it—in exactly the same way that the botanist studies plants—here is a phenomenon and you try to understand what it is. [00:40:01] So his primary concern, his first concern at that time was classification. And it is still useful, particularly in these days when people get all hung up in arguing about whether something is a painting or a sculpture or whatever to know that you don't have to argue about these things. That essentially the artist does what comes to him to do, and it is only a classification problem afterwards to locate this somewhere. So that the sculptor doesn't go to the dictionary and look up sculpture before he starts to work.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

GEORGE D. CULLER: That's the problem for the art historian after the fact. And they can entertain themselves all over the places hunting for objects that are similar and giving them a common label and other objects that are similar and giving them a label. It's simply a tool proposition.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think aesthetics is useful in the—I mean, the qualitative judgments on art, what

should depend [inaudible] paintings is the best or the worst, middle or is that an eye or something else that influences that?

GEORGE D. CULLER: This kind of thinking can be useful in making judgments in the sense that it sorts out phenomena and enables you to know more clearly on what basis you are judging things. Much so-called judgment and much criticism in the arts to this day is simply saying, "This thing, which is of a certain nature, ought to be of a different nature," you see?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. [00:42:00] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE D. CULLER: One of the great problems that we've had with the introduction of new forms in contemporary art has been in a perpetual hang-up with people who say, "If it isn't realism, it isn't art" or whatever. I think aesthetics is very useful in clearing the mind to recognize the difference between nonevaluative understanding and evaluation. I think many professional critics get hung up in this area. So that in the literal sense, I suppose, that no amount of study of the arts from this point of view will give one increased sensitivity or increased perception or intuition kind of things. No. So that—and Tommy himself had very poor judgment about art objects in many instances. There are certain sorts of things that he knew very well, but I certainly wouldn't rely on him to determine which of a group of contemporary paintings were the most promising. So that in that sense, no. This is the—the—the faculty to look at a group of works and select those things that have the greatest aesthetic quality is not necessarily improved by aesthetics. But it does clear your head so that you can—that you know what you're trying to evaluate and when you're making evaluations. [00:44:01]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Hang on.

[Audio Break.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: You were up at Cleveland for three years till 1949. How did you come to go to Akron [Art Institute] as the director?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, I've never known exactly the usual answer on any of these things, and it's been true all my life. I've worked halfway in some places when someone came along and tapped me on the shoulder and say, "Hey, how about coming and doing this?" and then I—if I thought that was more interesting thing to do, I'd go do it. And this was the situation at Akron. At that time, I was—I've been approached by Bill Toisch who I mentioned earlier to come on the art faculty at the College of Wooster, and I was considering that position, and at the same time, I was approached by the trustees at the Akron Art Institute to ask if I'd come down as director. I believe that they—I—my name was given to them by Paul Travis, but I'm not entirely sure about that. Paul had been down in Akron and had lectured and talked down there and so on. And so I did the usual thing. I looked at those situations. I have to confess that the Wooster thing intrigued me very much until I found that one of my duties would be to teach a round-robin humanities course with a philosophy man and a religion man. And the then president of the college, Lowry indicated to me very clearly that this would be taught from the point of view of the Christian ethic, and I said, "How do you teach Aristotle from the point of view of a Christian ethic?" [00:46:12] And there were silly little things like this, and you were not supposed to smoke on the campus and I smoked, and you were not supposed to drink in Wooster, but everybody went up to Cleveland and went and had cocktails. I thought this was a little hypocritical, and I really—I suppose as a rebellious minister's son, I've been through this scene, but I really couldn't see buying that sort of campus life at that point. I—it inhibited me in a way. And the situation in Akron, on the other hand, was very interesting. Akron had had an art institute before the war. There had been a fire that the organization had gone out of existence. Immediately after the war, there were a group of women, Frances Herron and one or two others who decided that something had to be done, and they did a very interesting thing. They formed themselves into a committee, asked the still existing board of trustees to appoint them as trustees, and then they went around and got all the rest of the trustees to resign and then they built a new board of people who were really interested and concerned. They persuaded the public library to let them have the top floor of the library building, which wasn't used, and in 1946, they opened up the new Akron Art Institute on the top floor of the library with the—such collection as had been saved from the fire. [00:48:00] They got Charles Val Clear to be director in '49, and he left to go to Clearwater, Florida, and they were seeking a new person. There was a staff of about five people at that point, and it looked like way of a lot of fun for me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's almost a brand new adventure—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Also by '49, they had acquired the old library building, which has been sitting vacant for some years a square Stone Carnegie Library right on Market Street.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I wonder if they're all square like that.

GEORGE D. CULLER: And they—you know—

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

GEORGE D. CULLER: And they had raised enough money to go ahead and completely renovate that building. When I went on the job, the building was due for completion and a grand opening in about three months. I have never spent such three months in all my life—I had to get that building finished. I had to master all the problems of running a staff. I had to get off to New York and borrow material for all of the opening exhibitions, design the exhibitions, meet with all the trustee committees to plan the grand opening and all the rest of it. And I think I averaged about four hours of sleep a night for the whole three months that we were down there. In the last week before we actually had the grand opening, we were hanging exhibitions all through the building and lifting our feet at the same time to let the workmen lay the tile—the rubber tile on the floor. It was absolutely wild, but we got the building open with great excitement in town, and a very nice, a very nice building with a great deal of opportunity to do all kinds of things in it. [00:50:00] A marvelous board of trustees who were—since they were all new at the job, they and I, kind of, learned how the professional trustee relationship operates together. I had just tremendous six years in Akron. I enjoyed every bit of it. We loved the people there. There's a tremendous sense of building things up and moving things along, and I had the problem of trying to move the collection ahead. We operated the museum very much as an art center—a great deal of emphasis on changing exhibitions. At that time, we were very much into the design movement, and we related to the Museum of Modern Art and the Walker as being really about the three museums in the country that were doing this. There was a wonderful gal named [Lucille Martha] "Luke" Lietzke who was my creator of design, and she's still active in the area. She was a nationally known person among the designers of that time. And, of course—

PAUL CUMMINGS: What stimulated, do you think, the interest in design in those years?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, you know, it's—

PAUL CUMMINGS: How—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —that's a very good question. I don't know. This was at a time when, in a sense, the larger public scarcely knew that there was such a thing as a designer when—the problem of getting even any kind of acceptance of contemporary furniture, for example, was very, very difficult. When we were trying to improve the visual qualities of magazines and graphic materials, generally, we were trying to sell the idea that there was such a thing as visual communication, and it was a very, very exciting time. There wasn't any question about it. [00:52:00] I suspect that we rammed more design exhibitions down the throats of the Akron public than they wanted, but it was a crusade, and we were very much into it. Now, not that alone because I was doing—trying to do the same thing with contemporary painting and sculpture with the print processes and so on at that time, and I was also trying to build a substantial education program and get the schoolchildren involved. I—after my experience in Cleveland, I recognized that in Akron, I had almost nothing to work with. I made a trip and came to —

PAUL CUMMINGS: In terms of, what, a collection or—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Oh well, in terms of any kind of historic material, study material of any sort. I went to see Sterling Callisen at the Metropolitan Museum, and he went through their reserves up there and gave me a marvelous case that went to that wall of smaller medieval and early Renaissance materials, sculpture and decorative objects and manuscripts and a few small paintings and this sort of thing. I came to the university museum here in Philadelphia and talked them into some Near East, the Syrian, Babylonia, Greek, Roman material. I also got from the Metropolitan a tremendous amount model of a pyramid. Why I got it, I don't know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

GEORGE D. CULLER: One of the great, big plaster models that they used out in the Met way, way back of one of the pyramids in Egypt, and that sat in the building for quite a while. But this was the way in which you had your work. You were a small struggling institution, and you went to big brother, and they helped, and they did. [00:54:06] I've remained very grateful to Callisen who didn't know me from Adam when I walked in there. I was 34 years old and scared to death and—but I knew I had to have something to work with and so I said, "You've got to help. We are trying to do this thing, and I know things that are not being utilized," and so forth, and he agreed. So we have—we had a marvelous time, and I have always felt that I was particularly lucky from the standpoint of museum administration or any kind of organizational administration that I happen to start my relationship with the board of trustees in that situation where it was a very good group of people. As I think I said, we, in a sense, worked the thing and the relationship out together so that by the time I put in six years there, I was a reasonably seasoned administrator and developed skills in working with trustees that have been helpful to me ever since. As you were going to say?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how would—how were the people in the community approached to support what was basically a brand-new institution again after a disaster and the war and the shift of trustees and location?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, um—

PAUL CUMMINGS: I mean was it helpful, or did your trustees work a lot or—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yes—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —were you in—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —in certain ways—in certain ways, that's a good situation because there, it takes on a crusade aspect. These women particularly who got into this thing, got into it because they felt there ought to be an art museum in Akron, and there wasn't, and they were damned well going to see that something happened. [00:56:08] So they were—they really worked. They worked terribly hard. I never had a group of trustees that worked as hard as that group did with a well-established organization and so forth. There is not the same pressure. I think also that there's a certain advantage to a town in having a cultural inferiority complex, and Akron was a very good case in point. They simply felt that no one will know or have any respect for Akron unless we do something outstanding and prove that it's worthy of being looked at. I just returned last week from Minneapolis, and I think one of the reasons that so much wonderful stuff is going on up in Minneapolis is that there's a very real sense up there of being isolated, of being way up north, and a sense that if they don't do it for themselves, nobody is going to do it. Now, a city like—a city like Philadelphia or a city like San Francisco does not feel this pressure. We tend to say we have everything. Like the old lady from Boston, "I have no need to travel because I'm here."

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

GEORGE D. CULLER: The underdeveloped city, so to speak, has and can utilize emotion pressures that are very difficult to generate in a major metropolitan area. That doesn't mean you can't get deeply excited about what you're trying to do.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's more difficult though.

GEORGE D. CULLER: But there is not the urgency because most people feel culturally Philadelphia is pretty well-off. [00:58:01] They've got all these institutions, they're doing great, et cetera, et cetera, what's the big excitement, what's the pressure? In Akron, there was very a real feeling that a one-industry town, a rubber town, 375,000 people, and if we don't do something, we're just going to sit here and lean over. So that was very good and—

PAUL CUMMINGS: What did you do about things like acquisitions because there obviously wasn't a great deal of instant money to buy—

GEORGE D. CULLER: No, and the development of the collection went very slowly. There had been some collection. There was very little money to buy. And we felt that we were going to keep working on it, but that we were not going to be in a position to rival the Cleveland Museum or whatever. And, therefore, our particular niche in the scheme of things in northern Ohio was to do things—um, do things particularly in the way of temporary exhibitions that the big places could not or would not do.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE D. CULLER: And we go the reputation as the place to go and see new things, the place to go where there are always interesting shows on, all this kind of thing. I think we—I think we pretty well deserved it. I was particularly pleased after a few years when I found that we were attracting increasing numbers of the art crowd from Cleveland down to our openings and to see our shows. Because at that time, Cleveland was doing almost nothing with contemporary art except for the annual *MAY SHOW*, which was this tremendous extravaganza that happened once a year, and that was their sole—their sole vow to the area artists, the working artists in the area. [01:00:16] We were showing local people all the time, including Cleveland people of course so that, in a certain sense, it's the difference between the—that center-oriented idea and the traditional museum idea, which was more separate at that time than it is today.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, was there much patronage of exhibitions where you exhibited local artists and people—local people buying them or—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —was there very little of that collecting going on?

GEORGE D. CULLER: —a certain amount, not a great deal. We always pushed it, and we would sell, and we had a rental gallery, which was successful to some extent in promoting purchases. But that was—that was difficult, and I wouldn't say that we revolutionized the industry by any means.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It's always difficult, don't you think, to sell artists like that to their hometown people you might say because they don't get the publicity and they're not written up on books. They don't have exhibitions—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yes, it is—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —around the country and—

GEORGE D. CULLER: And the people who were able to buy were relatively uninstructive in the sense of viewing an interesting kind of collective. We had a few collectors of sorts in Akron, and perhaps one or two that would stand up in some listing of national lifters, but that group is very small. [01:02:12] Most of the executive people, Firestone executives, this sort of thing were very naïve about this and thus saw very little in it. They didn't feel they needed to have anything important in their house. So it was—it was pioneering in a very real way.

[END OF TRACK AAA_culler74_3280_r.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: This is side two. Oops. In the years at Akron, were there any major exhibitions that you remember or were particularly satisfied with?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, the—oh, my God—the exhibitions have become a blur, you know?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

GEORGE D. CULLER: We literally did not have the means to do the spectaculars. I worked very hard. We did get good cooperation from the Museum of Modern Art, and we had—uh, we got in on some of their fairly major things. We organized shows that were locally of importance. One of the things—and I suppose this is a digression, but one of the things that was very interesting and have considerable import on what I have been involved in that happened because of the design program in Akron was that I got involved in the International Design Conference in Aspen. That was in its very early stages in '49 when I went down there. I went to Aspen the next year, and I got involved with people like Saul Bass and Wilbur and then Edward Henski [ph] and Bob Middleton from Chicago and Dave Chapman and that crowd. Well, they were quite a group. Now, the design conference was a great concept, which had been suggested originally by Walter Paepcke who was interested in Aspen. In the first few years, it had been done strictly by one of the guys, Mike Wilbert and taking it on and organizing it. The year I got there, there was a feeling that some more substantial structure was needed, and I found myself working with a few of these guys on that, became a member of the committee that was asked to create this more substantive structure. [00:02:14] And so we worked for the better part of the year and then, in a sense, set ourselves up as the executive committee. So I served on the executive committee of the design conference from, I think, 1950 to about 1960. And in '57 or '58, I was the general chairman, and a year or two later, I was the program chairman. By that time, I was out in San Francisco and busy, and I felt that I had maybe done my stint, and the conference have grown tremendously, and I became less active and got off the board. But that was a great association for me during those years. We went to Aspen every year. I was on the program in some instances sometimes as a moderator, sometimes as a panelist. But the initial concept, which we carried out was the—to put together the humanists and the designers in a kind of dialogue that was not aimed at practicalities, at techniques, at whatever but at concepts and ideas. Our hope was to take the design fraternity, architects, graphic designers, industrial designers and give them a week away from the shop where they'd stop thinking about their immediate problems and start to see the design movement in relation to society and to the culture. [00:04:07] So that we got great people in there not only from the design group but from the humanities, philosophers, psychologists, mathematicians, people like Bronowski, and it was a tremendously exciting proposition—

PAUL CUMMINGS: What made Aspen—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —and I enjoyed it thoroughly.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —work so well for so long?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well—

PAUL CUMMINGS: And it is—was it the money put into, the number of people—

GEORGE D. CULLER: There wasn't—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —or the idea?

GEORGE D. CULLER: —much money put into it. We were pretty much hand to mouth. I think it was the right time for that group to, essentially, make a retreat, and it was almost a retreat in the sense that we would speak now. You went up into the mountains isolated yourself from the hurly-burly and you thought and so on. I think

we developed some techniques that were quite advanced for that time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In terms of what?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, in terms of the way in which we would use, what you would now call, resource people and the idea of flexible and changing patterns. We developed a group of people. One of the—one of the things that I remember most particularly during the time that I was general chairman, we would organize a group of people who were—each of whom had a job in running the conference. I mean people in charge of the sound and people in charge the light, people in charge of the panelists themselves, people in charge of the duplicating services, and so on so that you had a task force running the thing. [00:06:04] We would insist always that anyone coming as a resource person, as a panelist would write what he had to say ahead of time, and that would be duplicated, and the conference people would pick these things up when they came. And it was understood that they were supposed to read them—that they would not be read from the platform, but that the panel people would then be free to go on into discussion based on the papers having been read and on they're having to—having read each other's papers. But from an organizational point of view, we would have an early breakfast meeting of everybody responsible for running the thing, at which time, we would analyze what had gone on in the previous day and often made quite major changes in the way that the program was to run that day based on possibilities that we saw emerging. We would even stick somebody from a previous panel in a panel here because something that he'd said indicated the he could give somebody on the panel a lot of trouble, you know, or something of that—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Keep t it liable.

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yeah. So that—and this was very difficult to do in this kind of a planned mobility proposition through the three or four days of the program. And avoided a lot of the stagnation that you're apt to get in these things or to set up everything up tight and simply run it. I was really very much impressed with that function.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And—

GEORGE D. CULLER: And the other thing was I think that in the earlier days, our attendance was about 300 to 350, and we were able to be quite maneuverable. [00:08:04] As it got on, the conference got, in my mind, very large. I don't know how you can work with this, but when you started getting up to 5[00] and 600 and beyond that, it becomes a different kind of thing. It lost some of the simplicities—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Spontaneity—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —and the spontaneity, informality that we had enjoyed, and I became frankly less interested. I also thought that, in certain ways, it had done the humanistic thing that we valued so much and was tending to become more technical, more sexual, more specialized for architects here and designers here and this sort of thing. Now, that maybe unfair, and I haven't been back in recent years. But again, it was part of this exuberance of the design movement in asserting itself and trying to find a definition of design as a discipline, which was necessary at that time, to realize the professional nature of this, which isn't just involved in finances and so forth, but also tends to spell out the obligations of a designer and his responsibilities and his social concerns and so on. I think the design is different today than it might have been if some of that work hadn't been done.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, have you been able to see the results of those conferences over the years and—or is it rather tentative?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, in certain ways, yes. I certainly think that the role of the designer in society today is much more widely recognized, and the designer is very, very much more substantially used. [00:10:02] We don't get the black incomprehension from a corporation head when you talk about design that you're used to. Now, this may seem very mundane, but I think it's indicative of a wider recognition of the visual—the importance of visual order in the environment. I think we are certainly much more aware of the urban environment and its needs and its drawbacks than we would've if this hadn't taken place. I think there's been a very, very definitive improvement in the nature of printed materials. It's commonplace that you expect that the things that come in these days are going to be designed not always well but—the quality problem, of course, is always with us. But that there will have been a substantial concern on the part of almost anybody that produces a pamphlet or a brochure or whatever to utilize a designer and get the best result possible. Now, this simply wasn't true 20 years ago. It just was not true, and all you have to do is go back and look at the material, and you can see. There is, of course, there is the entropy problem, and it may very well be that while the designers are being much more thoroughly utilized than they were a generation ago, the nature of the problem has gotten even further ahead of us. That we're creating clutter and creating problems faster than we're solving them. I don't think that that invalidates what we have done. [00:12:00] It is—we would've lost the battle even more if this design movement had not taken place.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Don't you think though one of the, I suppose, less obvious aspects is just people from different disciplines getting together for a while and talking about various topics of mutual interest or topics—

GEORGE D. CULLER: This is—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —that they don't have—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —an intrinsic good. You don't have to have a lot of justification for it. And much of—much of what we accomplished in all kinds of areas are, um, simply based on the opportunity for people to talk it up with each other, and we do it here in the college repeatedly. I sometimes think it takes a lot of time because faculty are notorious for spending forever on something. But on the other hand, there is—there are understandings that are developed that would not have been developed without this time, and it's worth it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So the years in Akron led to many other things besides just the museum?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, oh yes. After six years at Akron, I was then offered a job as educational director at the Art Institute of Chicago. And this was an interesting three years, much more complex and more complicated than I thought they would be because of very grave internal problems at the art institute at that point that I simply didn't see before I went. Dan Rich had come and asked me to come as a—not as a curator of education but as a director of museum education. [00:14:00] The theory being that the educational person should be put at a point in the administrative structure where all of the resources of the institution could be available including territorial contributions and so on. I rather quickly found that this was a great theory, but that it was more difficult in practice. There were—

PAUL CUMMINGS: For what reason?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, when you suppose the—the curators of a major museum like the art institute to be resources for working on education of the public, you have to realize what a curator is, and that you're dealing with people—some of whom may feel that this is an important direction for the museum and others who feel that it's not. So I very quickly found that there were—that there were curators who would accept this dictum and others who simply would not. Katharine Kuh is a marvelous example. She was the curator of contemporary painting at the Art Institute of Chicago at that time, enthusiastic about reaching the public and educating the public and fell right in and worked hard to try and make this, particularly adult education, program work. She and I had a marvelous time during those three years. One of the things that we used to do was—that was the most fun, we'd schedule sessions in the gallery on a Sunday afternoon, have chairs where people would sit down, and it was announced, and they came for it. Katharine and I would go in together, and, um, we would argue like hell about what we had there. [00:16:07] She had her point of view; I had mine, and these were very exciting things, and she was willing to lecture and do all kinds of things. A man like Carl Schniewind who was one of the greatest print curators the world's ever known simply said to me, "I have no truck with that sort of thing. If some of my boys wanted to talk for you, okay, I won't stop them, but that's not my proposition," and he was quite right. He had no feel for dealing directly with the public in an educational way so that—and others were somewhat in between so that I found that in order to do what I was challenged to do at the art institute—to build really important adult program. And I also had—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did they have a program? They've had a—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Hmm?

PAUL CUMMINGS: They have had an adult program there, have they?

GEORGE D. CULLER: They had some and I had a—I inherited a staff that was carrying on a public school program. But they had not—they had kind of a routine, pedestrian adult program up to that point. Well, they hadn't—worse than that. They had a man Dudley Crafts Watson who was my predecessor there who was a hangover, from God knows when, years and years and years, and when he finally retired, this gave them the opportunity to bring in a new person. But Watson had very, very popular lectures in Fullerton Hall week after week, which were really not art lectures at all. They were travel lectures with, what, looking at a little art alongside, and his information was inaccurate. It was just unbelievable sort of thing that you'd get. [00:18:03] It was the old emote-and-exclaim school. He made himself a damn fortune every summer taking crowds of these old ladies through Europe, so he was sort of a tour man. And then in the winter, he would run one slide lecture after another—you know beautiful Bulgaria or, sweet Sweden or whatever ostensibly in our tour and with slides of the major masterpieces to be seen on the road but—you know?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

GEORGE D. CULLER: So that's about what it had been, and I had the job to create a different kind of a program. I

found then very quickly that my best way was, in a sense, to build the faculty—to use certain curators then beyond that, to build a faculty, an adjunct faculty of people in the area—and fortunately Chicago was very rich. I had people like Joshua Taylor and Alan Fern down at the University of Chicago and George Cohen up in Northwestern and some of the other Northwestern people who would teach courses for me or give lectures on some of your gallery thoughts or whatever so that the thing went that way. But it was an unhappy period for the art institute. Dan was—Allan McNab had come in as assistant director and had—for administration. And he—he'd taken over the fiscal and business management of the place and found all kinds of problems and so forth. As he got these things uncovered and out in the open, the board lost a great deal of confidence in Dan Rich, the director who they thought had been running things efficiently, and he hadn't been. [00:20:13] And so I found increasingly that there was a real mishmash, which didn't affect me directly. I could run my program separately from that, but that I was operating in a situation of real political turmoil and a great deal of upset on the part of the board, and I have to say that I believe the board was a very poor board there at that time. This was—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, they had a few people who've been on that board forever, haven't they?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yes. And most of them were, as I see it, the sons and daughters of the great entrepreneurs of Chicago, second-generation people who were cautious and conservative and expedient and not vigorous people really. They made a lot of heavy weather of this whole business. Just to be blunt about it, if they have confidence in a director, they should thank him, and if they lose confidence, they should fire him, and they wouldn't do either. We ended up for—well, the last crazy year I was there with an internal arrangement where the board insisted that Rich and McNab and I become a directorial committee of three. And we said, "You can't run it this way," and they said, "You've got to run it this way," and to give us credit, we did for a year. We ran it quite well because we had to. There was no option—

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you decide things? I mean—

GEORGE D. CULLER: We'd meet as a committee and delegate among ourselves and so forth. But that was the—that was the year of the great Seurat show at the Museum of Modern Art, and the year of fire that spring. [00:22:10] And, uh—

PAUL CUMMINGS: I'm just noticing here while we—

GEORGE D. CULLER: And so that I had gotten an offer from the San Francisco Museum of Art to go there. I told Dan that I was going to go because—

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you know—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —I could see the future of this thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —apropos Seurat, how did they decide to lend that, because it was a—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, yeah, that's the only time it had ever been lent. There was a great deal of soul-searching. There was a great deal of pressure brought by the Museum of Modern Art, and of course, we were getting the show, you see? It was—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

GEORGE D. CULLER: So that it, in a sense, it was the—the usual trade-off proposition where the Museum of Modern Art had control of many of the Seurats that we would want for the show in Chicago, and the condition was that the *Grande Jatte* had to go, and it did, and, thank God, nothing happened to it. But anyway—

PAUL CUMMINGS: What happened when the fire took place? That must have been—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —and I told Dan that I wanted to—that I was going to go to San Francisco. He'd ask me not to tell the trustees right at that point. He went to New York in relation to the Seurat, and after this went up to Wooster and came back with his announcement of the Wooster job so that he was able to tell the trustees simultaneously that he was going to Wooster and I was going to San Francisco. It was a very strange period. At any rate, I went to San Francisco, and I had seven years at the San Francisco museums from '58 to '65, which again, was a very interesting challenge. [00:24:01] San Francisco has a lot of problems. It's a small city with the image of the big city. It's 750,000 people, it's smaller than Milwaukee, but it's trying to support three museums, which if they were combined would make one pretty good museum.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They have now in some way combined, right—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Oh, the de Young and the Legion are administratively one museum now. They are municipal museums, and there was—there came a period after I left when it was possible to merge those and appoint one director, and I'd always thought that would make sense. I don't know just how it's working out, but

I'm sure that administratively, it's a sounder proposition. The collections complement each other rather than duplicate each other. And if the San Francisco Museum, which is a contemporary museum were in there too, it would make one pretty good museum in the city. But the support problem in San Francisco was very difficult because your support group is a relatively small group. San Francisco is a very conservative town fiscally. It's very sophisticated in its taste, but it's the insurance and banking center of the West Coast. There's very little new industry, new money, and a great many things that are clamoring for support—the opera and the symphony and the museums, and so on, and so on

PAUL CUMMINGS: And these things seem to get good support out here that—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Which?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Music and opera.

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well I—they, of course, had always prided themselves on their opera. I'm not enough of an opera goer to judge really, but it was a very important social thing, and I guess it was good.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Why—[00:26:00]

GEORGE D. CULLER: And that kind of takes us up to—

PAUL CUMMINGS: To San Francisco—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —there.

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PAUL CUMMINGS: Side three. A couple of things I want to ask you about Chicago before we get into San Francisco: One is that this—this was really the first enormous institution you went to in terms of size and—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Relatively bigger than Cleveland that's—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —right.

GEORGE D. CULLER: —I suppose I—yeah, I have to—at Cleveland, after all, I was in a rather modest situation, and I wasn't really on the administrative firing line, so yes, I think that's fair. Chicago was the first big institution.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I'm curious about what you would say of that public school program. How efficient was it? What—do you think things were accomplished in that?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well—

PAUL CUMMINGS: I mean I always wonder about those things of—

GEORGE D. CULLER: No, I think, um—I think in a very major—in a major metropolitan area like that, there are real logistical, physical problems that begin to sap the vitality of a public school program. A very substantial percentage of the public school kids that we were bringing in—and we were bringing in great numbers of them—were from the suburbs, from Evanston, Winnetka, all the way up to Lake Forest, Homewood-Flossmoor down at the other end, Oak Park-River Forest out to the west so that in contemporary terms, we were doing a hell of a lot of busing. The schools were doing a hell of a lot of busing

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

GEORGE D. CULLER: This worried me a good bit at that time. [00:02:00] With the inner city schools, and we were getting considerable numbers for them, there was not so much of a problem there. Their trip would be relatively short, and not some—there wasn't so much time utilized nonproductively. But essentially for a northern suburb school, it was pretty well a day's—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —trek.

GEORGE D. CULLER: —trek for an hour or so in the museum. And I developed a proposal. I spent a lot of time on it, which in a sense, advocated the—a major museum of that sort located in the center of the city, as the art institute was, moving toward the pattern established by the public library. It was sort of a branch library proposition. I ascertained that there were groups on the north shore that would form organizations, museum-related organizations where, let's say, in Evanston when that peer group would undertake to obtain space and maintain it as a north shore branch. I visualized initially three, one down in Homewood-Flossmoor, one in Oak Park-River Forest, and one up in the Evanston-Winnetka area where the local committee would undertake to

maintain a facility, which would be staffed by, in a sense, a branch curator. And the program would be supplied by the main museum developing circulating exhibitions that they would rotate through these three outlying centers, which would be a very simple thing to do. [00:04:01] And that with the provision for specialized material very, sort of, being brought out on occasion or the schedules and so forth. And that the bulk of the work with schoolchildren would be done in the areas where they were. I still think that this was something that should've been done at that time, but it suffered the fate of so many of these plans—it was studied and filed. And I could've pushed further, but about that time, I moved to San Francisco, and nothing further was done. Now, since that time, we've seen some moves of this nature, although translated into more contemporary terms in relation to urban neighborhoods and so forth—various kinds of outreach programs, branch museums, and—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think that's a practical thing for a major museum like that now, today, say, as opposed in the '50s and have a—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —suburban branch in effect?

GEORGE D. CULLER: —yeah. I still think it would work. Although from a sociological point of view at the present time, I think the climate is not ripe for extending advantages to the suburbs particularly. The current is against it at the moment.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So rebuilding the center city idea—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yeah. I mean if you're going to be socially more responsible today, you look to the inner city, to the urban neighborhoods and to work with that sort. And I think it would be—I think it would be very difficult to expend the major funds on affluent neighborhoods in the suburbs. [00:06:06] It's a shame really in a way because there's a very major audience there, and I'm quite convinced that a museum like the Philadelphia museum is not really reaching a lot of its greatest potential audience because people out on the main line stay out there and it's—

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, they just never come in—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —as if they just don't come in. They—if they're really interested, they'll come in on occasion having heard about a special exhibition or something of that sort, but they don't really use the museum freely and easily because they get stuck in the centers and then—

PAUL CUMMINGS: How much do you find the museum should go after an audience like that? I mean how far should—how far should they go to try and bring them into the through the turnstile, you know? [Laughs.]

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, I don't know that there's an answer to that, just—

PAUL CUMMINGS: I mean some people—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —much a matter of how much energy do you have, how strongly do you feel your obligation, and what—how have you defined your objectives which—

PAUL CUMMINGS: I mean some people have said to me that "Well, you don't have a good job when you're there, those who are interested will seek it out, and they will come, and they will hopefully support you too" but—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, um—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —the support doesn't seem to reflect the numbers of people at—here at the door?

GEORGE D. CULLER: I maybe a little idealistic on this. I think that a great deal of this question of audience, in a sense, relies on something that awakens an interest first. [00:08:08] Sure, you can—you can take a position that you create a fine museum and you put a very good program in. You organize excellent shows, and you publicize it properly, and so forth and then it's—it's up to the individual whether he decides to come or not. And if he's sufficiently interested, he will come. I, however, worry about the question of whether you were not denying people opportunities because they have not yet had a chance to learn that they're interested. And whether this is wholly the problem of the museum or whether it's the problem of our public schools or whatever combination it maybe, I think it's a hard fact that there are great numbers of people in any urban area, in any great metropolitan area who have the capacity to gain a great deal experientially from an art museum who don't know that this—that they would enjoy it, who have not been awakened to this, and so on. Now, whose obligation is it to reach this group? I have tended to feel that the museum can't really escape the obligation. If you're going to put this much money and effort and so on into an organization to serve the public, I think that simply a cost-benefit study would indicate that you need to put substantial effort into awakening the public to the opportunities that exist. [00:10:08] If they are exposed, and they find that this is not something that enhances

their life, fine. I'm not saying that everybody ought to live their lives in art museums.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

GEORGE D. CULLER: I don't live my life there myself as far as that's concerned.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But do you think—do you think, for example, the admissions situation, which has changed so much in the last few years, um, inhibits people? I mean, now, many museums charge a dollar, a dollar and a half in the weekends, some two dollars, some pay what you will. They suggest figures in that area.

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, I'm—I've been really, in a sense, too long out in the museum business, but I think this should be said at this point that I was—

PAUL CUMMINGS: There were no entrance fees when you were there—

GEORGE D. CULLER: No.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —in California, was there?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, nine years ago, at the time I left San Francisco, there were very, very few museums across the country that charged. It was being talked about at that time. They were first beginning to feel the real pressure. I know my board talked about it and decided at that point that it wasn't a desirable thing to do. So that you had the Museum of Modern Art—there were a few others I suppose—but it was generally considered that museums were open free. Now, there had been times in the past when museums—there were museum charges, which were generally dropped. I think I can remember back to a time when the Cleveland Museum was open free on certain days and had other days that were paydays. And so that not having been involved in art museum work from 1965 on, I really am somewhat handicapped in terms of commenting on this particular thing. [00:12:14] But my impression has been that it's been very much a decision imposed by sheer financial necessity. I tend to view it as discriminatory towards people of a more modern means. I've heard people arguing, "Oh, those people still go to a movie"—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —and save three dollars—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —and so forth.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —or whatever, so.

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yeah. And if they pay, they'll appreciate it more and all the rest of it. But I think it's—I don't know, from a philosophical point of view, it's a problem that's unresolved in my mind. I'm a little puzzled as to how I feel about t it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. You moved to San Francisco from Chicago in 1958.

GEORGE D. CULLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL CUMMINGS: This now brought you all the way across the country.

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And [laughs] you were there for a while. What state was the museum in when you arrived?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, it was a very interesting situation. I followed one of the almost legendary people in the museum field, Grace McCann Morley. She was, at that time, one of the few women museum directors. She had international reputation, and she was certainly considered one of the major senior art museum people in the field. She was a very interesting woman. I never really got to know her well. [00:14:00] The board—[clears throat]—the board had arranged that her tenure of office and my beginnings overlapped by about two weeks—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, I would think so. [Laughs.]

GEORGE D. CULLER: —which was a wild two weeks.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's a lot to be up into—

GEORGE D. CULLER: She had a small office, and she had an old beat-up desk that, and she found an even more decrepit desk that she moved in and placed abutting hers so that when we sat, we faced each other across these two desks. And it very quickly became apparent to me that she felt in kind of a desperate way that she had just these two weeks to teach me how to run the museum or to run any museum. Right?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

GEORGE D. CULLER: There was this kind of, um, sensation that no one but I can do it. And here, they brought this unknown young man in here, and he's going to take over my museum and I—it's a losing battle, but I've got to do everything I can.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Well, she was going off to someplace else, wasn't she—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —or very soon thereafter?

GEORGE D. CULLER: —yeah, she was being retired against her will. She had been there—She's the only director of the museum it had since its inception. When it started, the very modest beginnings, she was a young art history major known to some of the trustees and brought in to run their new little operation. And she had built the museum, built the collections, built the reputation of the place, and had been its only director for, I think it was, 23 years and had never been any place else. In that period, of course, she had worked closely with some of the major figures around the world. Increasingly, her problem was that she was involved in international museum affairs and away a great deal and the board had begun increasingly to feel that her interest had gone in a sense beyond the organization itself and that the museum was starting to suffer because she was there too little. [00:16:20] I think there were some other problems too. She was a really wild administrator and had a concept of fiscal management that was unbelievable. She was absolutely strictly honest. She never misappropriated a penny, I'm sure, but she had—what I'm tempted to say is—a very female idea of how you managed money, and she really tried to spend it in two places at once very often. She would, uh, do all kinds of internal manipulations of the budget to squirrel away and hide money knowing that there's something that she wanted to buy that she wouldn't be able to unless she accumulated the funds for it. So she was always protecting her or trying to build her accessions fund. And the books—in spite of the fact that she had a very good comptroller, the books were in a state of unbelievable confusion, and it took me about a year working with the comptroller to get everything straightened out from that point of view.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Because of moving money from one place to another?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yeah, and to begin to give the trustees good, clear, simple financial reports, which when I did begin to, they couldn't believe they were getting because they had never gotten any such thing, you see. But these are things we're trying to buy the way, but she was a marvelous woman—

PAUL CUMMINGS: But I think that—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —and she'd done a great—in all the really important areas, she had done a great deal for the museum, made a rather small museum, one that was recognized nationally for its work in the contemporary field. [00:18:03] And it was, in a sense, quite an honor, but as I say, those first two weeks were very taxing and—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, would she—would she lecture you about things or just—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —talk to you?

GEORGE D. CULLER: The moment I'd come in, she would pick right up where she left off and—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —keep right on going—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —try to teach me the fundamentals of museum operation, which [laughs] she simply assumed I didn't know. It got to the point that in order to be able to study material that I really wanted to study, at that time, I would take things and take them into the men's john and spend the morning reading in there—

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

GEORGE D. CULLER: —because I knew that was one place she couldn't go. [They laugh.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Anything for peace and quiet.

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yeah. But she then left. She had a year, as I remember, as assistant director to Sweeney at the Guggenheim, and that didn't work out. I couldn't conceive that two such virtuosos could possibly get along, and this proved to be the case. And then sometime after that, she went to India where she has been ever since, New Delhi. And someone told me a marvelous story about her—running into her at an international museum's conference in Belgium, I think it was, where she was scurrying around like mama duck with a half a dozen of the

Indian museum directors following her like so many baby ducks, you know?

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

GEORGE D. CULLER: Because she had a complex of museums there, you see.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

GEORGE D. CULLER: I don't know all the whole details. But that was my start in San Francisco.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But, now, this was a museum that was quite specific. I mean, it was a contemporary museum —

GEORGE D. CULLER: It was a museum of modern art. Mm-hmm.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —much simpler in definition.

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yeah, and a very nice sized museum. [00:20:01] Now, it was not too—it was not well located. The cultural center there in San Francisco opposite the city county building was conceived originally as the opera house and the art museum, two twin structures. But this was in the early '30s, and they were afraid that the bond issue to authorize all this construction for culture wouldn't pass. Someone got the apparently brilliant idea of bringing the veterans into the complex—housing the veterans as a mean of passing a bond issue.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I see.

GEORGE D. CULLER: And as the result, the two buildings became the opera house and the Veterans Building, and the museum got moved up to the top floor of the Veterans Building with the veterans taking over the bulk of the space. Now, since my time there, the museum has been able to, with the dwindling of activity on the part of the veterans, to get some additional space in the building. I think they've gotten some of the lobby and gotten their store downstairs and some of the third floor. But we had the handicap first of being in a part of town that wasn't too heavily trafficked, the civic center there, and second of being on top of an elevator shaft, a side entrance and you had to go up in the elevator to get up in the museum conference. We then had quite good space, which was the entire top floor of this large building with skylighted galleries, very large galleries, and a great central rotunda, and so on, so that it was—it was good enough space to work with. But the difficulty was to draw people there to an area that they didn't come to naturally. [00:22:00] But I had seven very good years there. I enjoyed it thoroughly. As I was saying earlier, there are difficulties in running nonprofit organizations in San Francisco, which are not too different from other cities but perhaps a little more extreme. And the trustees were—well, I don't know—generally a good group, generally interested, included couple of the people who were perhaps the most important collectors, Elise Haas who has great things and Helen Potter Russell. These—uh, they were not the easiest two elderly gals to work with. And Helen Potter Russell died while I was there. Elise Haas became really, in my view, more difficult to work with. She really wanted to be the director of the museum, which is one of the fundamental problems that you always have. It's a very understandable problem. I think it's almost built into the museum work. The board must discipline itself to recognize that certain of the things that are the most fun about the museum operation are those things that they must delegate to a professional—the leadership in developing the collection and in the judgment about selecting works for the collection and in the conceiving and creating of exhibition and exhibition programs. It's precisely these two things that a trustee—

PAUL CUMMINGS: They all want to get into it.

GEORGE D. CULLER: —most interested in the arts feels they'd most like to be involved in. [00:24:03] Fundraising is a drag, finances are a bore, overall policy is a vague proposition, but selecting pictures is a lot of fun.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right. Okay.

GEORGE D. CULLER: And so I think a director has a real problem—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you find they're more inclined to want to do that if they're collectors themselves in a major way?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Generally speaking, yes. And the women on the board, the women collectors particularly, are more inclined to do this than the men. Although that isn't always true.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, they, sort of, have more time to—

GEORGE D. CULLER: And—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —too though.

GEORGE D. CULLER: —yeah, they had more time. Your men are usually people who are in decision-making positions themselves, used to an organizational structure, aware of the delegation of authority and responsibility, and they tend to have a better notion of what a trustee professional relationship should be, which doesn't mean that they always follow. I had one trustee in San Francisco who came on the board saying, "Well, I'm glad to help, but I know absolutely nothing about art," and six months later, he was in an instant expert ad just trying to make aesthetic decisions all over the place. But all those things have and—

PAUL CUMMINGS: But I think in a way that's one of the hazard of keeping them enthused is getting involved, you kind of have to—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —wheel and deal with their own—

GEORGE D. CULLER: And—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —shifting into it.

GEORGE D. CULLER: —of course, it's interesting in this regard to study the organizational differences of museums and psychologist. [00:26:01] I've always felt that one of the—one of the problems of the art museum directors and one of the reasons why there is—there does tend to be such a musical chair situation in the direction of these things is that the museum has not developed the traditions and has not built in the safeguards that established the position of the chief administrative officer that the colleges have. In the college situation, you have accreditation primarily, which museums are now trying to achieve. But a long tradition of accreditation, the inspection of your operation by a monitory body that has real authority and that can make some very strong statements about if the organization is being run properly or not. You also have a much longer tradition that the college president is hired to run the institution. And, in many charters, he's set up in a more substantive position really in—well as a specific example here, I am the president of the corporation and the president of the college.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see. So double—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Now, that's a formality. The corporation meets once a year at the annual meeting, and I preside for five minutes to elect the trustees and the officers of the board. And then the trustee, regular trustees' meeting is chaired by the chairman of the board of trustees who is, in fact, my superior to whom I report. But just the format of placing the—making the president actually the president of the corporation in they say kind of authority that is not ordinarily given to the director of the museum. [00:28:05] The director of the museum, they're purely at the pleasure of the board, and there is not anything that restrains the board from even a rather precipitative action in the case of a director where a board malfunction in a college can bring questions and perhaps even action from a regional accrediting bodies. So there may not be a big difference, but it's a noticeable one. So that, in a way, neither of the respective roles of the trustees and the director nor a tradition of stability in this regard has been as much developed in the art museum field as it has in the college or the university. Yes?

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE 1: Hi.

PAUL CUMMINGS: One thing I wanted to ask you about with having worked in the various museums, what do you think about the training of curatorial people? Did you find it difficult to find people to work with new things, the practical things or history or—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Oh, um, no, I really didn't. I think we're—I think the field has been pretty fertile, and a lot of very bright young people have been going through very good schools with majors in art history and various specializations. In the museum education thing in Chicago particularly, I tended to look not for people who were trained in education but for people who had gone to—bright gals particularly who had gone to good schools and taken an intensive art history major and with an interest in studio and some studio work, but who had never been to a class in how to teach kids or anything of that sort. [00:30:28] I strictly avoided that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Why was that?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Because I think that the kind of teaching that we were trying to develop in the museum situation is so different from the problem of the public school art teacher, which is a studio thing. That what they've learned in the public school business is really not only not useful but an actual detriment to—I—well, I'll put another way. I wanted these people where I could start with them from scratch and, in a sense, say, "Look, our problem is that we have a bunch of children coming and we want to get them active. We want to get them aware. We want to get them responsive. I want you to invent new ways. You are not to lecture to them. The kids

are not to be lectured to. I want you to invent ways of getting them to explore an object, of getting them to find out things for themselves, develop a question technique, develop a play-acting technique, develop a role technique."

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it was a creative activity for them rather than—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —application of a formula.

GEORGE D. CULLER: In other words, I said and I think it was true at that time, there is no well-developed way to utilize original works of art to teach to—with young people or children. [00:32:01] What we can do is try to determine what we want to happen to children, what kind of excitement we want to create, what kind of response we want to create, what kind of pleasure. If you—you will succeed if the kid is so turned on that he makes his mother and father bring him back on Saturday. This was one thing I developed as a kind of a test thing. Now, how are you going to do it? Start from scratch. Figure out your own ways, compare notes, and try different things, and so on. In a sense to do that, you need people who know a great deal about the work, who have an awareness of it themselves and are excited by it themselves, who don't have to falter to try and remember some factual material about the [inaudible] or the great late El Greco or whatever, know the collections well and absolutely that that's easy to them and who then become people oriented in this sense. I was very thrilled with the results I got. These gals were very bright, and once they were convinced that they didn't—that they were to originate, to create rather than to learn so to speak. They went—they went in great shape.

But, now, I have to say if you turn to the question of the preparation of curatorial people, I frankly know less about that. I had no—I had—in a small museum, in the San Francisco Museum, I was partially my own curator. [00:34:01] I had a very good man who had been there for years who was the curator of painting and a woman who've been there for years that was a curator of prints, and among the three of us, we were the curatorial staff. I never had to hire anybody. Well, I'd trade notes with colleagues in other museums and that sort of thing. I think the—even today, it seems to me that the staffing situation is sufficiently small-scale on all of the art museums together so that we do not have a formidable problem that can't be, perhaps, just as well or maybe even better managed by in-house training. If I were director of the Cleveland Museum right now and I had a curatorial situation—I wanted to hunt for a young guy to bring in to start, I think I'd simply look for the brightest young man or young woman I could find with a very good background and from Vassar, Princeton or Columbia or wherever in the field and figure on an apprenticeship situation. It would be the obligation of the museum to prepare these people in curatorial procedures. There'd been a lot of talk about the museum training programs and this sort of thing. New York started one at one time, and I don't know what eventually happened to it. I don't think it's a very—I don't think it's a very pressing problem, but even so.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There are—

GEORGE D. CULLER: What perhaps is a little more pressing is general arts administration. Because we're getting so many organizations of the art center type and state arts councils and all of this sort of thing—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Two thousand of them in the country—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —that—where I do believe the staffing problem is a very real one. [00:36:05] In fact, if I were to get in a position where I could get away from this desk and go back to teaching, I think one of the things I'd be interested in doing right here would be to set up something in arts administration—both from the standpoint of the fact that we're graduating bright young people who want to be painters who are going to have to earn a living in an arts-related field and for whom arts administration in this kind of art center, arts council area is a very distinct possibility. And these—um, we have suffered from inadequate preparation, all of us to administer these organizations. My generation has had to learn by doing, and some of us learned fairly well maybe, and some of us never really did learn. We're being talked to a good bit in recent years about techniques that are developed in the industry that could be utilized here, and we're still doing it all by hand and so forth.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you find much transfer and slide back?

GEORGE D. CULLER: You have to take these things with a grain of salt, yes. But there's also—there's also a certain amount of transfer that can be done. An organization is an organization. It has a budget. It has, what—it has administrative process, and it has to be done. And I think this is true both at the colleges at the museums. It has personnel problems. It has unions to deal with or may have in certain instances so that many of the administrative problems that exist at least on a commercial corporation will exist in a nonprofit corporation too. [00:38:16] And we have not been too good about getting on with this kind of thing. I think we've done much better in recent years, and we are managing more efficiently as a result of some borrowings. In this place here for example, we just within the last couple of years gone to computer to data processing, and it more than

justifies. We're able to do all kinds of—generate all kinds of information that we can make sharper decisions on in terms of the effective use of resources, and resources are always scarce everybody knows. So yes, there is—there is a technique. There is something that you learn called administration. I think it would be better if it could be taught in terms of a certain kind organization, of arts organizations rather than as a purely theoretical subject or as a subject relating to commercial people.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, let me ask you, was, somehow, the College Art Association useful in that way, or is that too involved with other things?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, the College Art Association has become more and more the slave market of course. I send my dean every year on the assumption that he has some faculty to find, and he usually does have some. [00:40:02] Even he is finding it less and less useful in this regard and—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Because of the sheer numbers of people or—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, yeah, it's gotten awfully big and awfully cumbersome. And, of course, the other thing in terms of hiring is that the—with the need for observance of equal opportunity, the actual procedures, you have to do so many other things in hiring that the College Art Association standard technique really—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —doesn't work anymore.

GEORGE D. CULLER: —it doesn't work as well as it used to. It's still being utilized, but I have never found the College Art Association particularly useful to administrators in terms of—in terms that we're speaking. There are other much more effective things that, in recent years, have been devoted strictly to this. Columbia University started about four years ago, a presidential management conference kind of thing, a seminar, an intensive five days up at Harriton House where they get 65 or so of college presidents together. And you really spend five days with the best experts they can bring in working on exactly these things and updating your antiquated procedures and all the rest of it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What about the museum directors associations? Was it—were they—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —practical o—

GEORGE D. CULLER: No, no, you're—they're two different things there. The American Association of Museums is the big organization, and all of us usually went to that. And this would have a registrar section and a superintendent section and an art education section and all of the rest it, and you could run around and sample what you wanted. [00:42:02] The other organization, which I still say was the most exclusive club that I ever belonged to, was the Art Museum Directors Association, which is the—about 65 of the middle-sized to big art museums in the country where the directors themselves simply meet for three to four days. Usually, it was always—I don't know how it is now but used to be—I suppose still, it is right after the American Museums Association meeting and usually in a nearby city. So that if you—if the American Association of Museums meeting were in Kansas City, the art museum directors would meet a few days following in St. Louis or something of this sort. It usually meant that all 65 of us were on the same plane. We used to have—

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] Going somewhere—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —macabre speculations about what would happen to the museum field if the plane went down.

PAUL CUMMINGS: A big crowd.

GEORGE D. CULLER: It might have been a very salutary purge.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] But did—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yeah?

PAUL CUMMINGS: —did you find that useful, just an annual get-together like that where you could—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Oh yeah—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —the other one, the museum directors and talk about—

GEORGE D. CULLER: I think there was always some use. You get a little jaundiced about these things sometimes, but in fact, there is usually something worthwhile that came out of it. And the American Association

Museums meetings was a very informal way of reining staff from other places if you needed somebody. You could go there and look at the registrars if you were interested in a registrar and so on. The Art Museum Directors Association was a very different kind of organization. This was much—much tighter. It's an exclusive group. [00:44:00] And, for the most part, what was done there besides just general socializing and being entertained was real trade-offs on exhibition organizing. If you had, um—if you wanted to put together some great formation, you would go there and quietly look for the other two or three people that you had to have in order to do it and sound them out or somebody else would be sounding you out on something else. You-all had your exhibition schedules for the next three years along with you and would be filling in slots and say, "Well, yeah, I'd love to take that and—" or you'd get wind that somebody was doing something, and you'd go around and try, which was more often in my case as a smaller museum, try to hitch on to the [inaudible]. And I'd then say, "Well, we've got three people on there already, and I don't know whether the lenders are going to stand for more."

PAUL CUMMINGS: —that length of time.

GEORGE D. CULLER: That length of time. "But let me sound it out. I'd like to get you in and so forth if I can." And then you give them a big pitch about how important it was for San Francisco to be included and after all geographical representation. Or you'd say, "Well, now look, I've got something out there that I think you will want in the show, and I think I can get it for you if you're included" a real horse-trading proposition you know?

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

GEORGE D. CULLER: And that got pretty rough at times.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In terms of what? In—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, just trying to fight your way into. People really do not realize how much pressure there is on a museum director to buy his trustees and his most interested collectors, to get certain kinds of exhibitions that they feel are the most spectacular. [00:46:03] They're always seeking for the most spectacular show, and this usually means that they want something in the most difficult area, the French moderns at that time in particular. And why can't we have a major show with Monet?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Cost you a $1 million—

GEORGE D. CULLER: And the answer is—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —or something—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —one, it's very expensive. Two, we would have to be in cooperation with several other museums who can bring their collectors in in order to get the loans. No single museum can swing this sort of thing by itself, et cetera. And, um—but—and very often, these things are not what you yourself feel are the most important for your program. But to some extent, you're under very considerable pressure to exert—to somehow or other grab things or organize things that are going to be the most spectacular in the program of the museum. I suppose our greatest coup out in San Francisco was the late cut gouaches, the Matisse of the show, which was organized initially by the Museum of Modern Art in Chicago. And this was—there was a great deal of work done with the heirs and people in France to get those things pried loose and all. They were making very severe restrictions on like the time they can be over, et cetera. And we talked and talked, and finally, we're told by the people of museum of modern art that if we convinced the people in Paris, okay. [00:48:00] In this case, Elise Haas was primarily responsible through the connections that she had for persuading the French interest to extend the time enough so that San Francisco could have that show. It was a great show but very, very difficult to get. Now, this was the nitty-gritty kind of thing, the infighting that went on. And that was a period in which we were building up to a real crunch that hadn't existed so much 10 or 15 years before where the—the owners of these things were being over pressed, pressed too hard for loans, and they were beginning to shut off.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Now, it's very difficult.

GEORGE D. CULLER: And it's gotten still more difficult. A little earlier or with other kinds of material, you'd have people anxious to lend.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

GEORGE D. CULLER: If the material is something that they were trying to get greater attention for and so that it could increase in value then they were—they'd be pestering you to have a one-man show, have a big catalog, and all the rest of it because it'll enhance the value of the collection. But then they got to the point where they didn't need that, and the demand on the material, the practicals [inaudible]. So the—in some [inaudible] of what you had to do was getting more and more hectic. I enjoyed very much working with exhibitions. It seemed to me

the most creative thing that you can do—the old originating of exhibitions. [00:50:07] But I felt that our greatest opportunity in San Francisco was exploratory in terms of newer things. That where we weren't simply playing the same record of the French moderns over and over again, you know?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

GEORGE D. CULLER: That we had a move—that the art directory was to go on from that and to work in areas where we could recognize emerging tendencies and emerging excellence and bring it to life and show it and this kind of thing. Now, the added advantage, of course, of that sort of material presented no difficulty in terms of getting it. It was—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you also have—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —an essential problem.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —a very lively art scene in—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, yes, and—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —San Francisco.

GEORGE D. CULLER: —San Francisco, at that time, was a great attraction to really exciting, producing people. They were there in very considerable numbers quite out of proportion from anything San Francisco did for them, you know?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE D. CULLER: If they had had any sense, they would've been in New York, but they stayed in San Francisco and worked in San Francisco because they liked the place. It was an affirment that was very exciting to them. And the same thing was true, and it's becoming increasingly more true in Los Angeles so that we had two marvelous centers to draw from in terms of emerging and exciting new things going on in the visual arts. The conflict that inevitably developed to some extent was between the major collectors on your board who didn't dislike this stuff but really weren't—didn't feel that it enhanced the prestige of the institution or their prestige and who wanted the Monet show and the Matisse show—[00:52:14]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, blue chips, yeah—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —and the blue chip things. And I found it, particularly in the last couple of years, increasingly difficult to keep a balance that suited me between the kinds of programs that I thought were our obligation and the kinds of pressures that were developing from the part of some of the people on the board. When they made Elise Haas chairman of the board, I pretty well felt that it was only a matter of time before she would assert her right as chairman to run the museum and that the director would become a kind of a man Friday to run around and do the chores. So that about at that time, this place came to me and asked me if I'd consider the job here at, um—

PAUL CUMMINGS: I'm curious about a couple of exhibitions you did there. One was the *Man: Glory, Jest, and Riddle*—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Oh, yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —which is always to me a rather fascinating idea. How did that come about to happen?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, Tommy Howe and I were—Tommy was the director of the Legion. He and I were quite good friends. Walter—isn't that terrible—I've forgotten his name. The director of the de Young at that time, chairman. Well, I'm sorry, I can't just get.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, Heil, wasn't that the—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Heil.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Heil? Yes.

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yeah. [00:54:00] We were friends. We saw each other very regularly. We'd all talk about the idea that there should be some ways for the museums to do more work cooperatively. And that it—that at some point, we should try to do something that, in a sense, would involve the whole city in a demonstration of what the three museums could do. So we simply said, "Well, let's do something," and we kicked around a number of different ideas. The idea simply was one, in a sense, major show that you'd have to go to all three

museums to see in its totality. I don't even remember who initially decided that the theme should be man. It seemed an obvious first kind of thing to do because it was so broad and offered plenty of scope to all three of us in our respective fields. It was clear right from the start that the de Young would—if this were a historical survey kind of thing that the de Young would do the—up to Renaissance or through the Renaissance, and that the Legion would do the 18th and 19th century, which is its field, and that we would the 20th. So the theme of man lent itself very well to that. I thought of the title from Pope, you know, glory, jest and riddle of mankind because I've always been a Pope fan I guess. And that was the basis and then we each went to work independently and organized our own exhibition, borrowed from wherever we felt we needed to. [00:56:02] I think it was a successful show. It—what it ultimately proved, I don't know, because it didn't lead on to a lot of other things, but it got the town excited for a while. That was the story of it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Would you get fairly good attendance? When you had a major exhibition like that, would it go off?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, the—the attendance for that show was very good. Our attendance with—at the San Francisco Museum would vary considerably because we did depend so much on the major-show thing. And so that when we'd get to the late cut gouaches of Matisse, we'd break all records and that sort of thing. But in spite—in spite of our difficulty in location and the elevator shaft and so forth, we had pretty good attendance figures there. I was shocked when I came here and found that the Philadelphia Museum's attendance at the 1965 when I arrived here was less than my—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really?

GEORGE D. CULLER: —little old museum in San Francisco. But that wasn't because mine was so great . It was simply because was way down at that time. It's come up since considerably.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But was there a great deal of interest in showing local artists? I know, over the years, they would—many of them would have one-man's exhibitions there or three-men?

GEORGE D. CULLER: We did a lot of it, and I've always thought it was one of the strongest parts of our program. My curator, John Humphrey was a new—knew the artist very well and was assiduous in exploring and getting into the artists' studios in the area and to the extent we've cut down on Los Angeles too. [00:58:12] And, um, so that we did a great deal of work with that. We did a lot of work with photography and a certain amount of work with the design field, not too much there because it didn't seem as necessary anymore at the time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. But you didn't have a great acquisitions program, right, did you?

GEORGE D. CULLER: No, we didn't.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I mean, again, it was mainly exhibitions.

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Um, did you make use of the AFA [American Federation of Arts] exhibitions very much or were they not quite useful to you?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Not much, not much, no.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They were too small or not—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —in your interest generally?

GEORGE D. CULLER: —we would find certain of them useful. But the AFA things—and we originated some for AFA. I can't remember what ones anymore. But that exhibition both the federation and the Smithsonian [Institution] Traveling Exhibitions Service were really designed more for the smaller museums, for the college of museums, and this sort of thing, and we'd always look that over but—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Twenty-five items wasn't really—

GEORGE D. CULLER: No.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —enough.

GEORGE D. CULLER: In our situation, we tended pretty much either to originate our shows or to work them out

in collaboration with two or three other museums. I suppose the largest show that we really originated was the British Art Today show. I don't even remember the date anymore, but we undertook to develop this and shared it with Los Angeles and Houston. And—or Los Angeles would develop something and share it with us. We'd get it on one of the shows that the Museum of Modern Art was doing not as a circulating show but as a so-called major kind of a show. [01:00:16]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right, right.

GEORGE D. CULLER: And we saw ourselves operating at that level rather than relying on the touring things—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —smaller package shows.

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yeah, the smaller packages. We also had the Western Association of Art Museums, which we were active in, again, more in terms of originating material that would build the others than in taking material from them. That was a good organization, and it functioned quite well and served the museums up and down the coast.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. How many members did that have? It was just really from—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yeah, well—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —Washington and California—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —it was Seattle, Portland, the three museums in San Francisco, the various—Santa Barbara, Pasadena, Los Angeles, Long Beach, San Diego, La Jolla, plus then the college museums like Hayward and some of the others Redland, the University of Redlands had a museum. Occidental College I think had one—

PAUL CUMMINGS: So there were quite a few—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —this kind of thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —people.

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yeah. And while it was Western Association, I think it went as far east as Utah, so there were some of the inland places that were involved. I think maybe Santa Fe was, as I can remember.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE D. CULLER: Gee—

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PAUL CUMMINGS: This is side four. So that by 1965, you came—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —here.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —to—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —to Philadelphia.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —Philadelphia. It's going from one coast to the other, isn't it? [Laughs.]

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yes. Let's—

PAUL CUMMINGS: One big jump. How did—you know, I think it's very interesting that there was this, uh, apparent shift, but actually, you'd had a great deal of educational activity prior to San Francisco. Was this the most interesting situation, and what was it like when you came here?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, yeah, it's hard to explain these moves. In a curious way, my—my sense of how one operates in the field of art administration essentially is that to advance to positions of more responsibility and so forth, you have a kind of a diagonal move always. It's—particularly in art museums, it's not often that you can progress up through an organization because the organizations are too stable. It's too static perhaps is the better term—not static program-wise but static in terms of static. As I said, I was assistant curator at the Cleveland Museum of Art, and Tommy Munro was curator. He retired from that position four, five years ago. Obviously, if I wanted to move up, I could've moved up in the museum. [00:02:03] In other words, the position was open, right, if I moved, by—I moved to a smaller museum of my own and then problem solved. But this move back here, while I liked the art museum work very much, I found in San Francisco that there, I was being

increasingly subject to great enthusiasm about some aspects of the work and increasing difficulty with other aspects. Not difficulty as much as just dislike of the social and the non-artistic aspect, so to speak, of operating a museum. Some of the problems that I've obliquely referred to before the—of the difficulty of establishing sound based on which program could be determined and keeping trustees and enthusiastic and in accord with your programs. I, also, in San Francisco found myself increasingly impatient with a board that was very conservative in its policies as far as future plans for the museum are concerned. Now, that wasn't true of the whole board. It was true of part of the board. I'll give you an example or two examples. I became convinced fairly early that the future of the museum was limited because of a poor location, as I've indicated. At the time, the Golden Gateway Project was being developed in San Francisco, which is a tremendous thing down the waterfront. A few of the trustees and I got to work on this and engineered a deal whereby we could relocate the museum on to the Alcoa Plaza down there with an entrance directly from the street, an entrance from the plaza. [00:04:08] Where Alcoa would actually build the shell of the building for us as part of its construction, and we would simply have to raise the funds to complete the building in terms of its interior furnishings and so on like the actual structure. This involved, at that time, raising really just a few hundred thousand dollars, and there were some trustees that were very gung ho about this and thought that this was an important movement for the museum. But the idea was killed completely at the board level after I put in a year of hard work on this proposition, really brought it right up to the point where it was ready to go. And it was killed because of essentially a few of the senior trustees recognized that this would involve effort on their part in fundraising and, of course, a major contribution of their own, and they were simply unwilling to do it. I thought this was very bad judgment on the part of the trustees; I still do. I think that the museum would be an important museum today if we had made that move, and it's certainly much more accessible both to the community itself and to tourists. But their judgment was that they would not—it was essentially even worse than this. One of the trustees who believed in this, had spent his one money to have McKinsey & Company make a feasibility study and an attendance study. And this study, which I think was very well done, indicated that our attendance would double if we moved. The trustees accepted all this, accepted the study, recognized it, agreed that this was a desirable move, but that they didn't want to do it. [00:06:05] And this was kind of a facer. So, I tried again. I got trustee, a man by the name of Iver who was a major developer, a residential developer, Iver Holmes and interested in real estate and this sort of thing. At the time that the Ghirardelli Square project was being developed, we could see that Ghirardelli Square was going to be a tremendous attraction, a very attractive place both for visitors and for the community. And we —Iver with his own money took options on the land adjacent to Ghirardelli Square, the next block east so that—and we even had preliminary studies and drawings made of a museum that could be built there where you would be in the Ghirardelli Square complex looking out over the Golden Gate, just—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Fantastic.

GEORGE D. CULLER: —absolutely super. The same feasibility applied, and again, there wasn't any question that this was a magnificent idea and would open up all kinds of new possibilities for the museum. But it involved raising money and a few senior people who really controlled that board put the fix on it. And, at that point, I said, two tries is enough.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They're not going to do it no matter how many—[00:08:01]

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yeah. The first one, they—it was conceivable that they didn't think that the Golden Gateway was quite right, but the second one next to Ghirardelli Square—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why did they not want to do that? I mean—

GEORGE D. CULLER: They didn't want to give the money—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —just the money on their part?

GEORGE D. CULLER: They didn't want to give the money, and they didn't want to—they didn't want to undertake the effort of raising money. And this was, unfortunately, just a very few people.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Could that have brought in new trustees or new—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Oh, I think—yeah, I don't know. I think it would've done all kinds of things. I—

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it might have rocked—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —think—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —the boat from their point of view?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, this is—this is a possibility too and—but essentially, these people who vetoed it were elderly. They didn't want—they liked things the way they were. They may not have really wanted the museum to

be that much more of a thing. It was nice the way it is, this kind of feeling. And if we get down there, it's going to be a bigger operation, it's going to cost more money, we're going to have lots more people in all the time. It won't be our little museum in the same way it has been. I think it was a combination of several factors,

PAUL CUMMINGS: People get protective of—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —the organization sometimes.

GEORGE D. CULLER: But, to me, it indicated that at least as far as my ability to conceive is concerned, I had done about the kinds of things that I could do in exhibition. There was not a great deal of opportunity to expand the collection. But, again, this was a funding problem, and you are limited in terms of—if I had that new building, there were collections on the West Coast that I could've gotten—

PAUL CUMMINGS: And lots of things.

GEORGE D. CULLER: —and do that. I'm sure that there were Los Angeles collectors that would've given those things, important things. [00:10:05] But you have to show—you have to create excitement in order to attract these kinds of things so that essentially my position was, at that point, all right, I've—there's kind of a natural—a natural cycle that you go through. You come in as a new person, you try your ideas, some work, some don't, and you develop the lines that you can—that you can develop. And, at a certain point, you begin to sense that the—that you've made the major moves that you can make, and you've realized the important things that you then realized, and that you begin to move into a holding operation where you're not really doing important new things. You're tending the store.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

GEORGE D. CULLER: And so I've been there seven years. It began to seem to me, particularly in relation to having failed in these two efforts, that I was being forced into a tend-the-store operation, which I could've accepted for a period if it had been necessary, but which didn't excite me. And it was at that point that the people in Philadelphia came to and said, "We want you," you know?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE D. CULLER: And all my life, I have simply figured that just when—well, when I needed a new challenge, something would show up, and I'd wait and see what it was. It's a kind of arrogance I suppose—I'm not going to go looking for a job, I have to be invited. [They laugh.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's the best way they tell me.

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yeah, it's the best way. It puts you in the best position because then you can interview the organization much more than they interview you. [00:12:01] So that when I first got the question from Philadelphia, I said, "Well, if you decide that I'm the person that you want, let me know, and I'll come and see if I want to come." And it sounds arrogant, but it is the best way to do it, I think, both for the organization and for the individual. Now, just to be really mundane, there was also a financial concern, which is San Francisco is notorious for low salaries. They argue up there that it's such a benefit to live in San Francisco—

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

GEORGE D. CULLER: —that you ought to be really paid minimum for the opportunity to work in there. And I will say that one of the things that most impressed me about this board when it decided that it wanted me to come was that they knew exactly what I was being paid in San Francisco, and they offered me almost twice as much as that. On the basis that that was what they decided to pay their president, and it didn't matter whether I was good enough for them I think.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see, yeah.

GEORGE D. CULLER: They—any reasonable person would've said, "Well, I'd certainly come for less than double this salary out there." So that this was a very attractive offer from a financial point of view, but it was even more attractive from the standpoint a of new field and a return to higher education, which is where I've started out. And the whole change from product-oriented concept to a process-oriented thing, which is the fundamental difference between an art school and a museum that people often do not realize. [00:14:00] I was also tremendously impressed by the accomplishments of the trustees here. This place was founded in Philadelphia College of Art. It's founded under the name of the Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Art as an outgrowth of this—of the centennial, 1876. Its original charter was to train artists to design products of industry. You know the centennial was the great awakening of this country to the realization and we were moving from an

agrarian to an industrial economy, like more or less steam engine, all this sort of thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right, everything.

GEORGE D. CULLER: And people in Philadelphia were very excited about this and began to see that attention should be paid to the industrial thing. So that was the start of the Philadelphia Museum and of the school. Originally, the Pennsylvania Museum School of Industrial Art with a home after the centennial was over in Memorial Hall up in Fairmount Park. Now, the museum stayed there, but very quickly, the educational aspect moved downtown to temporary quarters on Buttonwood Street, one place or another. And then in 1893, the museum corporation bought this property here at Broad and Pine [Streets], which had been an institution for the deaf and dumb. The school took it over, and we have been in these quarters ever since. There were a number of name changes and—but the last and most significant one, the one that impressed me was that in 1964, as the result of major studies that the trustees had had [inaudible] McCormick make, they determined that the college's future would be better served by separation from the museum. And in the 1974, the two organizations were separated under very amiable terms. [00:16:00] Even to a splitting of the endowment, the whole thing was managed in a beautiful, you know, Quaker fashion, and that's not an easy thing to do, particularly when you start dividing up and down. So I had become familiar with this whole history, and I felt that this was—that this showed thought for the future of the organization, which I had not found in San Francisco. That it showed a concern on the part of the trustees, and that in general, the signs were very good. I happen to believe very strongly that art schools and art museums shouldn't be together.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why is that?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, because—

PAUL CUMMINGS: So many are around the country though.

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, not too many anymore, you see?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

GEORGE D. CULLER: The ones that remain are the School of the Art Institute of Chicago as part of the Art Institute, the Boston Museum School, which is part of the Boston Museum. John Herron used to be, but it's become part of Indiana University now.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really? Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE D. CULLER: In Atlanta, the school and the museum are separated, but they're housed in the common new memorial complex. And there are—there are smaller ones, but the—it's very easy to understand how the founding fathers thought that a school and a museum should be together and saw a concern with art, we want an art organization, it should be exhibiting NTG and so on. But actually, as I say, the functioning, the purposes of the two organizations are very different. And the simple way that I express it is that the museum is concerned with the work of art itself, with the product and with the relationship primarily of the work to the experiencing person. [00:18:05] Your problem is a perceptual problem you see, and you're dealing with hopefully great works of art as objects that are potential sources of experience for people, and your problem is how to generate this experience. Here, we're—in an art school, we're concerned with process. We're concerned with the people who have an impulse to create art and with the problem of how to equip them with the perceptions and scales and insights that will enable them to be creative people. And the product is almost beyond our concern at this point.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That goes someplace else?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yeah. And what we're concerned with is the process. What is the creative process or how do you think, how do you feel, how do you act, what skills do you need, et cetera. I can drive a drawing curator crazy in any museum by taking them through the live classes up here where you can see a student do a damn good drawing and tear it off and throw it on the floor. To the drawing curator, that thing shouldn't be on the floor. That's a valuable object, that's a good drawing, and it should be picked up and cared for and not stepped on, you see?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE D. CULLER: But to the student, the drawing is very often almost nothing. What he's concerned about is how he realized that drawing and what he didn't quite get, so he tears it off n tries again.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Go to the next one, right, right.

GEORGE D. CULLER: He's process oriented. Now, that doesn't mean that artists don't get concerned with their products, but after they do them usually. Then being as mercenary as anybody as else—

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

GEORGE D. CULLER: —they'll turn around and say, "Hey, maybe I could sell that thing" then they'll pick it up instead, frame it and polish it off and—[00:20:04]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do what has to be done [laughs].

GEORGE D. CULLER: —trot it down to the galleries if they have a gallery to trot it out to, but that's afterwards. I really don't know any first-rate painter or sculptor or whatever that at the time he's involved in the act of making is attaching value to the object per se—

PAUL CUMMINGS: No. Because of—

GEORGE D. CULLER: It's what he's trying to do that's important, what he's thinking, and so on. So, in a sense, from a conceptual point of view—and this in a way is where, as I say, simply for aesthetics, it enables you to get your head clear on these things to know that you have a ABA relationship here where you have the conceiving, the conceptual, or creative process resulting in an object, and the apperceptive process in terms of what somebody can do looking at that time and responding to it. While it is hopefully part of a continuum, the two phases are quite different kinds of creative actions. Now, I think looking at a painting is a creative act too. The painting doesn't do it to you. You do it by taking the cues of the painting and doing something inside yourself with them, but it's not the same as painting them. Well, there are practical things too, and the practical aspect that an administrator has to be concerned with is that in most instances that I know of where these two are within a single corporation, under a single board of trustees, one of the two functions gets the small end of the stick, and its' almost always the school. [00:22:05] Because the museum is glamorous, it holds big exhibitions, it produces beautiful catalogs, it—

PAUL CUMMINGS: The school has all those—yes.

GEORGE D. CULLER: —and see openings. And the school has all those goddamn grubby kids—

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

GEORGE D. CULLER: —that look like hell with long hair that you can't stand and the whole bag, you see? So that even if trustees try very hard to be fair if they're—if they've got both of these things and they have the control of the money that's going to be allocated to them, there is the constant temptation to buy that beautiful Passano that's just come on the market and squeeze something out of the budget of the school—they don't need all that much anyway. Now, this was particularly pointed to me during my years at the art institute because the school of the art institute was in very bad shape at that time. The dean of the school reported to the director of the museum, to the director of the institute literally, but Dan Rich was an art museum director—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, not the school—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —and had no interest in the school, and yet, the dean reported to him, and he reported to the trustees. So the guy that knew what the school did was two steps away from power and going through someone who is highly museum oriented. Now, they have changed that situation at the art institute now, and they changed it as a result of a lot of hard work by a lot of us. In my last year there, they asked me to take over responsibility for running the school after being retired as well as doing the museum operation, and I said, "I wouldn't touch it with a 10-foot pole because it was not set up properly." I said, "I will do a study, and if you adopt the program that I recommend then perhaps I would." I did the study, but before it was accepted, I was on to San Francisco. [00:24:02] But that was the first of a series of four or five studies that had been made in that school by qualified art museum people. Andrew Morgan came up from Kansas City and looked at it, Arnie Herstan came down from Minneapolis, and the board got voluminous reports from each of these people. And in particular, the National Association of Schools of Art [and Design], which our professional accrediting body began to come down pretty hard on that thing, and I was a member some years ago of the visiting team of the National Association. And we went into the office of the chairman of the board and simply laid down the law that if—that this school had to be improved, upgraded, that it had to be given direct access to the board. That they had to have a president as well as a dean of faculty, and a whole bell of particulars so that we now have the school of the art institute in good shape. It's, again, one of the major art schools in the country, which it was at one time back in the old days and ceased to be for a period. But it's taken that kind of pretty rough work to get this thing together. Now, I've been very active. Since I returned to Philadelphia, I've been active in the National Association of Schools of Art because I recognize the standard problem that exists, and the voluntary professional accreditation is our best way of seeing to it that these schools are enabled to maintain quality and do a good job.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How do you define that? I mean, that's a very, you know—

GEORGE D. CULLER: It's—

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's, well, one thing in mathematics where you can say next question—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —it operates in several levels. But you see, the principle—the principle of accreditation both the big regional accreditation, which applies to colleges and universities generally, and the professional accreditation, which operates in more specialized ways within a particular discipline. [00:26:03] Both are voluntary efforts by the institutions themselves—going together to try to determine basic criteria and standards for effective performance and assist schools to achieve these things. It's been particularly important for us in the visual arts because of the subjective nature of much of that material and—but even more so, because the regional accreting bodies, which also accreditors are simply not equipped to bring the professional expertise to the institution to determine whether it is doing a good job or not. So that—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —quite honestly, the only way to do it is—nobody says it's perfect—is by a judgment of the peers, you know?

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

GEORGE D. CULLER: When we are up for accreditation, we ask for two or three of the best other art school people in the country, in our judgment, the most able, most qualified to be our visiting team, and come and give us our thorough going over.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Now, what do they actually do? I mean like—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, accreditation operates at two levels. You—there are things that you can determine that, in a sense, have a certain degree of objectivity to it—whether you have adequate space for the size of program that you have; whether your library contains as many books as an institution of this size should have. Whether you have the equipment to do a job in photography that you advertise that you're going to do or not, and the same in ceramics and the same in sculpture and so on. So that you can pay particular attention to the measurable aspects, and this is always where you start with accreditation. [00:28:05] The measurable aspects include faculty-student ratio. If—this can vary considerably because there are other factors too, but if you're trying to teach students on a 25 to one ratio, there are an awful lot of kids in that place that are not getting real attention from a faculty member.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Not like George Richmond at the League, right?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yeah. Now, this too, for example, we've been operating for a number of years here on about just under 10 to one ratio, which is a very, very good ratio.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Good, yeah.

GEORGE D. CULLER: We're moving away from that a little to about 12 to one, which I think is first-rate but not wasteful. On the other hand, I know schools that are 17 to one, 20 to one where while the fact they maybe first-rate and they may still be getting a good education, they're straining in terms of the amount of actual attention students can get from faculty. It's simply a numerical problem at some point.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. With so many hours and so many people.

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yeah. And the same thing is true of space. An art school is very space oriented. It's a physical activity proposition. If you're going to make a big piece of sculpture, you've got have enough—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Big space.

GEORGE D. CULLER: —to be able to do it. And all the kids are painting bigger and bigger. So space can be measured. These things can be measured. And—but then you can look at qualifications of faculty and so forth. And in the last analysis, the visiting team will talk to students and have a long bull session with students without the faculty being there. They'll have a bull session with faculty without administrators being there. And, of course, the school has prepared—spent a year preparing an intensive self-study and self-criticism, which is helpful. And these things then all kind of—it's a very sophisticated process and the report of the visiting team then goes to a commission, which reads the report and reads the self-study, reads any response that the school makes to the report of the visiting team and comes to a judgment. [00:30:17] And—

PAUL CUMMINGS: How much time would a team spend in an institution this size?

GEORGE D. CULLER: It'll depend on the size of the institution, two, three, four days. Now, at this point, I'm—one

of the reasons that I 'm speaking, I suppose, so much about this is that I'm president of the National Association at this time. I went on the board when I came back here, and I 've been on the board for nine years now, and I've got this year still to go as president and then I'm through. But we have, at that this juncture, not only the important problem of credibility of these schools determined by at least people that are most able to do this but also a very important problem of withstanding the intrusion of federal and state attempts to accredit. And this is a movement that's been increasing with those whole accountability kick and—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Because where they give money, they want to—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yeah. The office of education is giving—is giving some money to all of us, and they begin to feel increasingly that they have to inspect themselves if they're going to give money. The working system has been that they recognized our ability at accrediting and accept the specialized and regional accrediting as validating the school as a legitimate institution of higher education.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think the federal government eventually will pursue that to a great length?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, there are lot of things developing. [00:32:02] There is certainly at this point the increasing pressures both from state and federal sources to exert some degree of direction and control over our education. It's a growing movement. Every piece of legislation that is passed develops then into a set of directives, a manual issued by the office of education and therefore—

PAUL CUMMINGS: If you have certain courses, you can apply for certain funds?

GEORGE D. CULLER: And, yeah. In one way or another, these things tend to try to steer you. Now, it's the old problem with the king's shilling, you know?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

GEORGE D. CULLER: So that we can't—I don't say that we can complain about this. If you take the king's shilling, you must be prepared, at least, to dance to the king's tune. We could—you can always escape by saying, "Well, no, we won't take any money from you," and there are two institutions in the country that are doing this. They're usually doing it for a very poor reasons. You know places like Bob Jones University that does not want to conform to nondiscrimination requirements or something of that sort can escape control by not accepting any federal funds. The most of us see realistically that there has to be a kind of partnership worked up if we are to continue to fund these institutions adequately for other purposes. So I visualize the great administrative challenge of the next decade is to get an adequate reciprocal dialogue going between institutions and the government where we can tell them what the important criteria are better than they can tell us. [00:34:07]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That'll be an accomplishment. [Laughs.]

GEORGE D. CULLER: And that is going to be very difficult, but I see no alternative, and I'm preaching this at this point in these organizations. That we must accept that there will be a relationship with the office of education. There are people down there who can be talked to. They must accept our—that we are not stupid, that we have knowledge and skills, that we're on the cutting edge, that we can put in information on the basis of which a mutual agreement can be arrived at. But it involves understanding the pressures that they're under, and these are very considerable, no question about it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They shift with every election.

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yeah. They have problems, and they have real problems with accountability.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But, what, a school like this that has such a long program course and has many students, all the things, where does your finding come from? I mean as you've mentioned an endowment, which is—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yes. Well, we have—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —you have right there.

GEORGE D. CULLER: —we have $1 million of endowment, which is very little. We are as active as we can be in fundraising, but a school like this has very modest fundraising capacity so that, really, a little over 70 percent of our income is from tuitions. And the—and we are, in addition to that, a state—what is called in Pennsylvania a state-aided institution. This is an old peculiar Pennsylvania thing. There are 13 schools that—although independent and private, nonprofit—get an annual appropriation from the state in support of their work.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really? [00:36:00]

GEORGE D. CULLER: Ours is about eight to nine percent of our budget. We are getting this year, too, $352,000 from the state. It's a difficult thing. We've been state-aided since 1887, and we've never lost it, but your bill has to be introduced and passed in both houses of the legislature by a two-thirds vote and signed by the governor every year in order to get your money.

PAUL CUMMINGS: My goodness.

GEORGE D. CULLER: And this is not a simple thing. It's helped by the fact that there's now a long tradition of this funding so that the legislatures kind of recognize that these nonpreferred appropriations have to be passed —

PAUL CUMMINGS: But still—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —but we have to—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —all the ritual and the activity and—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —we have to maintain a representative in Harrisburg to be sure that our political fences are met and that we do not run into trouble in getting the appropriation passed. So that's about nine percent of the budget. Our fundraising and so forth is a couple of hundred thousand dollars a year, and some money from [inaudible] enterprises and so on. But it means that a place like this a high-tuition school. Our students are now paying around [$]2,700 a year to come here. And the relationship between this and a school like Tyler, which is part of Temple University, and it has a $650 tuition simply indicates that we have to be damn good. We really have to see to it that our programs are clearly the best that's around in order to attract and hold our student body, and we do.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It is interesting because there a number of famous, old, established art schools in the Philadelphia area, do you find that competitive among one or the other?

GEORGE D. CULLER: No, no. The professional programs in the arts are not really competitive because the potential there is greater and has been particularly in this last day greater than we can meet. [00:38:12] We, for example, through the '60s and on into the early '70s were experiencing applications of around—well, we'd stopped taking applications in March when we got up to around 1,300 for a freshman class of 300, and we stopped taking them at that point because there was simply no processing anymore. We couldn't afford to do it. So that the great problem, at that point, was you end up with 600 well-qualified kids, and you've got—you can take 300 in a class, what are you going to do?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

GEORGE D. CULLER: And we have—we are part of a group of independent art colleges across the country, the Union of Independent Colleges of Art, which is a consortium we formed about seven years ago that was frankly self-selective there. Simply the schools that we thought were the leading independent schools, and we've done a real job of working very closely together. And immediately in the field of admissions where this gave us the opportunity to deal with students nationally to present very honest profiles of the originally six schools, now nine, and say to the student, "Test yourself against these schools, what kind of person that you"—

PAUL CUMMINGS: See what you what are, right.

GEORGE D. CULLER: —"where would you best be suited." And it has given us the opportunity with this kind of pressure to place students in other schools that we felt that were well-qualified to deal with. Now, that pressure is less now but still not to the point where we are not getting our class. [00:40:02] We're as full as we can be.

And so that that one of the advantages of a nonprofit situation, of course, that is that, you can work in terms of an objective that is framed in terms larger than simply serving your own institution. So that these kind of schools can say and honestly do believe that "Our job is to do the best we can for the potential art students in this country, people who want professional programs. And that we can do this better by working together than by working competitively." We've gone on from the initial beginning to create a great deal of flexibility within the schools. The students who complete their first year in any of these schools can move to any of the others without loss of credits. We have what we call a student mobility program where the student can stay enrolled in your institution and get this financial aid from your institution. And if there is something going on at one of the other places that will particularly benefit him at a particular time, he simply goes there for a semester or a year, does the work, and comes back, and there's no bookkeeping involved for the student and this sort of a thing. We're now moving on from that to a kind of a national inventory of program strengths in these schools where we're trying to go much beyond the catalogs to determine in the craft, say, just what this school does in ceramics that nobody else does, right?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

GEORGE D. CULLER: What skills are taught here that are not duplicated elsewhere to create a kind of a national curriculum that will be the basis for advising students in very meaningful ways not—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, so then we could—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —all chasing around the country all the time. [00:42:01]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. But that will also be an advantage in dealing with the government.

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yeah. So that we can begin to show that we're using our resources very, very well in this relationship. By the same token, the nine schools agreed that Philadelphia College of Art was the logical place to do a concentration in art therapy, which is an emerging field but a very small one. We have the advantage of being in a great medical and mental health center with—and we've been able to affect relationships with Hahnemann [University Hospital] and with [Philadelphia State Hospital at] Byberry so that we can mount this kind of a program, and none of the other schools will. If they get a student that in his junior year decides he wants to do some work in art therapy, he'll come here. On the same token, Cleveland Institute of Art in conjunction with Case Western Reserve is developing a specialization in medical illustration. That means I don't have to do it, and none of the other schools have to do it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So instead of everybody having 20 percent, one has 100 percent, and that's very—

GEORGE D. CULLER: And, now, we'll all be teaching painting, we'll all be teaching sculpture, we'll all be teaching graphic design, all the—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —those special little—yeah.

GEORGE D. CULLER: —but these more intensive, specialized areas will be handled—

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's terrific.

GEORGE D. CULLER: —in this way, and the student will move rather than everybody trying to do a little something of everything. And so it's the—this has been a very interesting development and a lot of fun to work with. I'm convinced that it is the thing that will ball mark the independent art school for the next decade or so against disappearing under the pressures of finances and simply the growth of the big institutions and so on.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, speaking of growth, you just acquired a new building today. How did that come about the whole—[00:44:01]

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, uh, this has been a long and checked proposition, and we're not—we haven't—we're not at the solution yet. As a matter of fact, we just acquired a new building. Starting in 1959 with the Middle States accreditation, the board realized that we were coming toward the end of the line with these old buildings back through here. All the major buildings are more than a hundred years old. They're obsolete and antiquated and held together by a string and baling wire, terrible to maintain, and they never were designed for art purposes. So that the decision was made that the school would have to be rehoused. When I came on the scene, they had Louis Kahn engaged in a study, which developed a monumental piece of architectural sculpture that was to go on the block next to us here. A tremendous, a 14-story proposition that would—at that time in '65, '66 have cost about $18 million to build. And the rest had been built in two sections of about $9 million each. And I couldn't find any fundraising outfit in the country that could tell me—that would tell me that a small independent art school with no great visibility could raise that kind of money. So there had to be an alternate way to go, and at that time, we got wind of the fact that Atlantic was thinking about moving to a new headquarters building and would have to do something with this building, which practically right next to us. And so I got the notion that maybe there might be something there, and I had been telling the board that we needed a very astute trustee who is an expert in real estate. And I found a guy, Ron Porter who was at that time president of Jackson-Cross. [00:46:05] It's one of the big real estate organizations. He's a very able guy and a very good trustee type who's interested in the college. I won't say that this was deliberate, although it wasn't undeliberate. It so happened that the real estate advisor to Atlantic Richfield [Company] was a man named Boyd Barnard who was chairman of the board of Jackson-Cross, so these two guys sat in offices next to each other and, of course, were in the same company. So that we were able to work out an arrangement whereby Atlantic would turn this building over to us under a gift sale arrangement originally where they've been depreciating the building for tax purposes versus they've been in it. And the good—the value, the residual value would be a million dollars at the time that the transfer would take place. It's actually the land value; it was a completely depreciated building. So a contract was drawn up that at the time they moved out, they would sell them to us for a million dollars. Well, everybody thought that was pretty good. The only trouble is that a good many years went by between the time we made that arrangement and the time just a few months ago when they finally got moved in. The Center

Square building was subject to massive delays—one damn thing after another, which of no consequence, happened. In the meantime, fundraising became more difficult, and we began to experience fantastic escalation in construction cost and this sort of thing. [00:48:00] So our rather simplistic view that we could take a few million dollars and just remodel that building a little bit and move everybody into it—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —changed enormously in that—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —changed enormously. And then last spring, I got to the notion that the one positive factor in this whole inflationary situation was that Atlantic Richfield was making a hell of a lot of dough, and they might even be embarrassed by it. So we wrote Robert Anderson, the chairman of the board of Atlantic and said, "We're looking forward to acquiring this building, but it occurs to us in this situation that Atlantic might like to make simply an outright gift of the building to the college rather than the gift say arrangement under which we are presently anticipating acquisition." And they thought about it a couple of weeks ago and wrote back and said okay. Well, for us, that was a million dollars in cash, which we had raised that we would have to pay Atlantic that now—

PAUL CUMMINGS: You had raised that money—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —we—pay—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —on—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Hmm? Yeah, we've raised about a million and a half by the time, and we were facing having to spend the million just to acquire the building. All right. Now, we get it as an outright gift, so in terms of value of the college, that was a million-dollar-cash proposition, which is the biggest score I've ever made in this whole thing was to get by—

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's fantastic.

GEORGE D. CULLER: —about 1000 percent. So that is what has occurred today. The building has been turned over to us as an outright gift. Now, we've been making intensive studies of how this building can be best utilized —

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's a large building too.

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yeah it's a 21-story skyscraper, 265,000 square feet of space. But the problem that has complicated things is that to convert that building either for our purposes, and educational code is much different than commercial code, or to convert it entirely to first-class, completely remodeled office space for leasing purposes, it would cost about $6 million. [00:50:21] While the figures indicate that if we were to regard it simply as an income property and want to spend that kind of money to convert it and then lease it, that we would make out all right. And, of course at the time, none of us can see this kind of plunge into the real estate business as being proper for the college. If we were Yale with many millions of endowment, this would be just a small part of a total investment picture. But for a college with $1 million of endowment to buy six million bucks and go in the real estate business—

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's a new business.

GEORGE D. CULLER: —a little scary.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

GEORGE D. CULLER: And equally, we don't have the $6 million to convert it for college use. So we're studying several possibilities. There are no strings on the gift. If we had a good corporate buyer tomorrow who would pay —the building is appraised for their purposes at $7 million. If we had a good buyer tomorrow that would pay us—give us $4 million for the building, we'd sell it like a shot. And we own land right next to us there, and we'd put the four million with the money we have and immediately plan a modest new construction and then the renovation with our properties here and we'd be in pretty good shape. So we're pursuing three different courses of actions simultaneously in trying to get this building handled: one, to sell it, take the money, and re-plan how we're going to house the college, two, an absolute net-net lease through a corporation, which would do the same thing for us, or three, a joint operation with a major developer where we would have the building. [00:52:13] He would have the money, he would redo the whole thing including doing several floors for the way we went them, and we would own those seven floors, and he would own the other 14. And that seems to be a possibility too. So we're simply sitting at this point to try and see what our future course of actions might be. And we'll take any of the three deals that comes—

PAUL CUMMINGS: That works—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —first and looks good. In any event—

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —we are not where we wanted to be when we originally started out with the complete solution to the space thing of the college. But if we were to get seven floors there, the 80,000 square feet, that would be enough additional space to meet our present space needs plus release space so that we could free up progressively various sectors of the building back here in order to remodel. But these are the kind of things you have to keep finding these days. It was not our original plan, and it's not as good as what we had hoped to be, but it in this changing economic climate, it is about what we're able to achieve at this juncture, and we regroup and continue.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why do you think they gave the building to the school rather than selling it or—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —leasing it or doing something else? I mean, that's an extraordinary example of corporate patronage but—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —why.

GEORGE D. CULLER: It is, and I don't discount it. Now, it's not as—um, there are, of course, very, very substantial tax advantages. If Atlantic had sold it, it would have to—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Pay taxes on the—

GEORGE D. CULLER: —take half the gains on it. [00:54:00] This way, it can reduce its taxes, and at this juncture, it's in a hell of a high corporate tax bracket so that it really is not a bad deal for them. But it is the most substantial utilization of tax advantage that I've seen, and it is certainly the most major corporate gift to an art school that's ever taken place.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's unbelievable, absolutely.

GEORGE D. CULLER: And that's good. Now, we have the problem of—

PAUL CUMMINGS: What do you with it?

GEORGE D. CULLER: —what do we do with it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] Well, but that old—you know, those things always fund themselves—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Oh right, we'll get it worked out. Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know in the, what, nine years almost now that you've been here, have you seen a great shift in what the students are interested in and the demands made of the school? Or is still pretty much—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Oh—it's not—not major, no. One of the advantages of a school like this is that it takes its programs very clearly and we don't get students in here that don't know why they're here. During a period of unrest is, we must refer to the same a few years ago. This place and really none of the art schools experienced any differently whatsoever because unlike the big universities, we didn't have a lot of bright kids on the campus that either didn't want to be there at all or didn't know why they're there. The only kids that came here knew that they wanted to be painters or sculptors or—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, this was it.

GEORGE D. CULLER: —just about whatever. One of the great advantages of a place like this—and we're one of the largest with 1,100 and some students, 11,029. But still one of the great advantages of a place like this is that it really is small. It's not a great big factory. The kind of teaching that goes on in an art school is a very close relationship kind of teaching. [00:56:07] The faculty and the students know each other well, and they are in fairly intimate teaching situations. And you don't get the big professor and the little students syndrome, you know?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Right.

GEORGE D. CULLER: You're all artists together so that we can be quite flexible and quite responsive to student

interest. And sure, things change, certain departments expand, others contract. We had a situation a few years ago where a bunch of students began to feel that they wanted a much stronger concentration in drawing than what we had before, and we thought this was great, and we set it up. It's not all that difficult, you know?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Right.

GEORGE D. CULLER: It's one of the things that I like so much about an art school is that there is this kind of organic process planning thing that can go on all the time. And you do keep your programs under study almost constantly. You don't—you try to keep them from ossifying or whatever.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, do you have a problem with faculty, or do you have people who have been here for years and years, or some of them people who teach elsewhere or professionals who are here part time?

GEORGE D. CULLER: We're—well, you're always watching your faculty. Your faculty is the most important single thing in the college in terms of resource. I think we've been very fortunate in having first-rate people who have lent stability and continuity to the place. We've had a reasonable amount, a fairly good amount of turnover in terms of younger people that come in and go on. [00:58:03] We rather pride ourselves on being a place that is related considerably for deans of other institutions and things like this, you know?

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

GEORGE D. CULLER: But it's—again, it's a continuing kind of challenge to regard this whole thing as a human pattern that you have to keep studying. You have to keep aware of how people interact with each other, how you keep the thing alive. From an administrative point of view, we are a little concerned at this point where we have been shrinking our faculty down somewhat. We've gone from 110 full-time equivalent faculty two years ago to 93 this year. And this has been done inevitably by a reduction of the number of part-time people we have and nontenured people because the tenured ones, you have to hang on to. So that we've—we've asked the faculty to take this year to study the whole tenure situation recognizing that they have as much stake as the administration does in keeping the door open for new blood coming in, for younger guys and prevent the faculty from getting static, from getting stale.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What is the tenure situation—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Hmm?

PAUL CUMMINGS: —here? Are many of them tenured?

GEORGE D. CULLER: Well, we've moved from about 38 percent tenured up to about 65 percent, and this has come about for the reasons that I've just stated, and we think that's high. Now, there are any of a number of things that you can do. Some of the institutions are taking quite drastic measures to buy people off or get them early retirement and this sort of thing, open the faculty up this way. [01:00:00] There's been talk of tenure being a commitment to a certain amount of work but necessarily full-time work. The faculty seems to be taking the line that we should go to a much tighter tenure system where tenure is not achieved as easily and not nearly as soon. Plus, a contract system where someone teaches on annual contracts for the first three or four years and then is evaluated and gets perhaps a three-year contract and then gets a five-year contract and then gets tenured. So that there are a number of—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —steps and levels, yeah.

GEORGE D. CULLER: —steps where you can make a judgment and decide that a person has the potential to continue or not. It's a complicated thing. It's worried people all over the country, and it's a new worry because in the '60s with all these institutions expanding, you have lots of room, no pressure. Now, it's different. A steady-state economy is—if that's indeed what we have and not a shrinking one—poses a different set of problems.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But you still see a demand on the students' part? I mean in—

GEORGE D. CULLER: Oh, yes, yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —the can be the shrinking number of applications that—

GEORGE D. CULLER: I don't—no, I don't think so. Some people are concerned around the country, and certainly, the liberal arts institutions are having some problems, some of them, a considerable number of them. But the art—in the professional programs in the arts, we found for example among the UICA schools that all but two are at the same level or increasing precinct, and the two of the nine have experienced some drop-off, and I think I know why in both cases. [01:02:00] There is—there is an increasing interest. There's, in a sense, a change in value structures on the part of young people that may be temporary or may represent a fairly permanent shift in

how we see our society. And the change, while it may not be great, is toward a higher valuation of the cultural and the sense of devaluation of technology and digitization and big business and so on. Now, the next—the next bunch along may all want to be stockbrokers, I don't know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] Right. One never knows. Well—

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]