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Oral history interview with Herbert Ferber, 1968 Apr. 22-1969 Jan. 6

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Herbert Ferber on April 22, 1968. The interview was conducted by Irving Sandler for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

IRVING SANDLER: This is the first tape with Herbert Ferber April 22, 1968. I thought we might just start, Herbert, with kind of you talking a little bit about your very early career, like how did you become an artist.

HERBERT FERBER: Yes. Well, I became an artist because I was interested in literature particularly and not primarily in painting and sculpture. But then while at college along with my interest in literature I developed an interest in the history of art. And I went to museums in New York city as much as I could. This was in the late 20s. And then I went from college to dental school. And while at dental school I had to make anatomical drawings, and discovered that I had some talent for making that kind of naturalistic drawing. And I was encouraged by a teacher of min, who was a collector of Walkowitz particularly I remember, to spend more time at drawing or something of that order, although he wasn't specific. He simply encouraged me have what he thought of as an extra-dental interest. So after a year of dental school I began to go to art school at night. And I went to what was called then the Beaux Arts Institute of Design, which was affiliated in a kind of loose way with the Beaux Arts in Paris. I went there at night for three years working first form plaster casts and then from the model, and maintaining as much as possible by that time an interest in going to art galleries, of which there were very few.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: And to the museums in New York. But I think I never got beyond the Metropolitan and the Museum of Natural History. When I finally left dental school, I mean when I was graduated, I had to make a choice. Because I had gotten a fellowship from the art school to the Tiffany Foundation. And I also had gotten a job as an instructor in dentistry and I was supposed to start the dental career immediately. However, I postponed it long enough to take advantage of going for two months to the Tiffany Foundation where I met for the first time some other artists. At the Beaux Arts Institute of Design there were a few men who later became artists but who were just as much neophytes as I was, with the exception of one man whose acquaintance I never made, but later discovered that he was a fellow student. His name is, just refresh my memory will you, what's the name of the fellow who lives up in woodstock and does wood carving?

MR. SANDLER: Hague?

MR. FERBER: Hague, yes. hague was then a recent immigrant from Armenia, I suppose, or some place; he's an Armenian, isn't he?

MR. SANDLER: I think so, yes.

MR. FERBER: I discovered that some other artists in my generation had gone to that school; Milton Hebald, and Lassaw; well, that's enough, I can't remember. I'm still looking for something myself. Just a minute.

MR. SANDLER: That would have been about what year, that you were at the Beaux Arts?

MR. FERBER: 1927-1930. I never got to know any of the artists then, that is, the men who later became artists. The others were really what we might think of as commercial artists. They were learning how to become assistants to some of the architectural sculptors like McCartan.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: And Leo Lentelli, and so on. And their job was to learn how to make a figure very quickly in clay from anywhere from 2 feet to 3 feet or 4 feet, and then it was pointed up larger for a building and then they worked on it again and they learned various tricks and how to make groupings of figures and so on. That was what the school was all about. It was really an architectural sculpture school.

MR. SANDLER: Well then, your training would have been very academic in this school?

MR. FERBER: Extremely academic. The instructor came presumably once a week on Fridays. And very shortly I learned that it was better for me to stay away on Friday nights sot hat I wouldn't have the benefit of his instruction. Because I found that it was too academic. On the other hand, it was the cheapest school in New

York. I had inquired at the Art Students League and I couldn't afford to go there. So I continued. I thought at the time that learning from the model was about what I needed at that period. Then when I got out of school I worked without any instruction or without any school. I taught dentistry part-time and did some painting and sculpture on my own. And after about a year of making figures without a model I suddenly realized that there was a man around who was doing woodcarving whose name was Zorach. I also saw some woodcarving by Chaim Gross but I never got to know him. I called Zorach and asked if I could come over and see him; and which he allowed me to. And I wanted to know if I could study with him. I had brought some photographs of the figures that I'd done form the model and he said, "If you've gone this far without much help you can certainly do woodcarving without any instruction. Why don't you just buy yourself some woodcarving tools and some wood and start to carve?" And this is what I did. Prior to that while I was school I was also supporting myself to some extent by making etchings and selling them. so really my first professional work as an artist was as an etcher. And these were very academic things and I used to exhibit them at the Academy, or what was equivalent to the academy of etchers, and so on. They used to have annual shows, juried shows. And I used to send them in and exhibit them. And this was a great gratification to me since I had never studied etching with anybody. When I began to carve in wood I still continued to do etchings. But it was soon superseded by the wood carving. This brings us to about 1931. And then a man by the name of David McCosh, who is a painter and who had studied at the Art Institute of Chicago, and whom I had met at the Tiffany Foundation at Oyster Bay, came to New York and looked me up and suggested, or I suggested that we find a studio together and live together. Which we then did. And this began to increase my knowledge of what art was about because here was a man who had really studied in a good art school and who had been in Europe for a year and was a follower of Cezanne. And he opened my eyes to a great many possibilities in painting and sculpture which I wasn't even aware of.

MR. SANDLER: You mean modernism?

MR. FERBER: Yes, a sort of modernism. And through McCosh I met some other artists. We lived on 14th Street. And we met some other artists who were studying at the League and also another artist by the name of -- who is now quite well known: Theodore Roszak who was an old friend of McCosh. And we all got to know each other very well and saw a good deal of each other for a couple of years. I went on for another two or three years making wood carvings and finally began to look for a dealer in a very ambitious way, and there were very few galleries to canvass. But I finally found a dealer by the name of Clayman who was a German and ran a kind of combination print framing and art gallery on 57th Street. You've never heard of him?

MR. SANDLER: I've heard the name. I've never met him, no. Is it still, or was it until very recently in existence?

MR. FERBER: Well, I think he went out of business maybe ten years ago. He had opened up another shop in an apartment but he was really out of it longer ago than that.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: But it was through David McCosh and Roszak and people who were studying at the Art Students League, a girl who later became McCosh's wife, that I began to meet artists who introduced me to what was more contemporary than even Cezanne at that time, such artists as De Chirico and so on. Now let's stop for a minute and see how much more we want of this kind of thing.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. Well, this is just fine. Because, you know, I'm sure a lot of this just isn't knowledge; probably nobody even knows it. But I wanted to know a few things around that period just as well. You weren't on the Project?

MR. FERBER: No. I was earning a small living as an instructor in dentistry and didn't feel any need for going ont he Project. but also about that time there was a John Reid Club and there was an Artists Union. I joined both of those and got to know more artists. But I never really got acquainted in an familiar way with any of these people, with the exception of Roszak and McCosh and two or three others; especially not with people who were on the Project. It was almost a kind of closed circle if you remember. It was very strongly under the influence of the Communist Party.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: People like Crozco and Siqueiros would come to New York and visit the Club and the Artists Union and of course emphasize the necessity for a social realist kind of art.

MR. SANDLER: Did your work lean in that direction at the time?

MR. FERBER: I think it leaned in that direction for a very short time. I mean sympathetic, yes. I even did a few wood carvings which had a kind of Barlach and, what's the name of the woman who does graphics . . .

MR. SANDLER: Kathe Kollwitz?

MR. FERBER: Kathe Kollwitz. That kind of feeling in that direction. but the influence was more a primitivism which came from the wood carving when wood carving was such a fetish, and stone carving was such a fetish, when people were talking a great deal about the truth to materials; not of the Bauhaus variety but just the kind of thing that one technically developed in conversations with other woodcarvers or stonecarvers and Ad Reinhardt and Baziotes and Stamos and that group when I went to Betty Parsons Gallery about 1946, or 1947 I think it was. And I think I had my first show with Betty in 1948 or 1949, I've forgotten the date, but hat can be verified in one way or another. And Mark and I became very close friends. And I met Tomlina nd we became very close friends. It was with that group around the Betty Parsons Gallery that I began to fell as if I were part of an American scene. And those were the days int he late 40s and early 50s when what later became known as the New York School began to mature or develop.

MR. SANDLER: You didn't have any contacts with, say, the Peggy Guggenhein or the Surrealists scene?

MR. FERBER: No.

MR. SANDLER: Well, let's pick up your work again then rather than to jump to that and work through your own development as to that point?

MR. FERBER: Yes. Well, the first show that I had with Betty Parsons was already a kind of surrealist abstraction.

MR. SANDLER: How did you come to that?

MR. FERBER: This was a combination of two things: I discovered that in wood carving I was tied to a block of wood or a block of stone. And just from looking around at what was happening in America, since that was when many of the surrealists and other European artists had arrived in New York and were living here, I began to see a kind of sculpture which wouldn't easily be made in wood. it would have to have been joined like a piece of furniture in order to get eh extensions and thinness which I became interested on 66th Street and Broadway. And it happened that Hebald had a studio there; and another sculptor. And we would talk but these people were mainly interested in social realist art. And I was diverging already by that time because of the nature of politics in Russia the very famous trials and so on.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: And I was very much disenchanted with the whole Communist movement by that time and veered very strongly away from any kind of American group. And also I realized that many of the artist who were so strongly tied to the Party and to the principles of social realism were doing a kind of art which I found to programmatic, to put it mildly. And so my work moved away from that. So I kept on making wood carvings and had a couple of shows at the Midtown Gallery. And long before that I had changed my name. Actually my name on my etchings when I was at dental school and selling then was still Silvers. Which is my family name. Mu middle name is Ferber. And when I went to find a gallery about 1933 or 1934 I realized that I didn't want to be mistaken for and amateur sculptor, a dentist who was doing sculpture on the side, so I changed my sculpture name to Ferber. And two or three of my dealer never even knew that I was a dentist in addition. And I never practiced dentistry full time. I only did it about half time and then less.

MR. SANDLER: Herbert, what about The Ten? Did you know them at that time?

MR. FERBER: No.

MR. SANDLER: So then you would have met Gottlieb and Rothko later?

MR. FERBER: Yes. I met Gottlieb and Rothko and Motherwell and Clyfford Still about the material and about not doing certain things because it was too much like modeling and doing other things which were closer to the nature of the material. And I was caught up in that mystique for a short time but I realized very soon that it really wasn't my cup of tea. And then in 1938 my first real experience with other forms of art outside of what was going on in New York and the social realist camp and so on, occurred when I had the chance to go to Europe for a summer. And I went to Europe and because of my reading I knew pretty much what I wanted to see. And I went to all the cathedrals that I could manage in France and in Italy. I was very, very much taken with Romanesque sculpture. And a good deal of my work in both wood carving and stone carving for some years was influenced by the distortions and the kind of false perspective or perspective that occurs int he capitals of columns in Romanesque churches. This was later interpreted as expressionism. Actually I was very much more interest din the possibility of crowding into one block of wood or one block of stone a figure or a group of figure s which if done in a naturalistic fashion wouldn't fit into the block at all, but by means of foreshortening and a kind of trompe l'oeil managing to make the figure look as if it belonged in that block.

MR. SANDLER: Before this time there were several groups that had emerged in Ne York. for instance, the American Abstract Artists; did you have any contact with this group?

MR. FERBER: No, I never had any contact with it. I didn't even know of the existence of the American abstract Artist until much, much later. And in the course of finding a studio I found a place, a studio up in. So I switched very quickly first to concrete which I developed by using an armature of iron rods. But I found that impracticable. And then I went to lead.

MR. SANDLER: Not pouring? But building?

MR. FERBER: Building, yes. Building it up as in the time-honored fashion that plaster is often built up by sculptors. But I found that this was not flexible enough for the kind of thing I wanted to do. And I realized that metal of some form, or some kind of metal, would be the most malleable, the easiest to manage for what later became known as open form sculpture. Which I was then beginning to move into. That was about 1946 or 1947. I had gone through a period of being very influenced by Henry Moore. Although I didn't do any sculpture, maybe one or two small things, which might be considered to have been influenced by Moore. In fact, I spent a whole year, I think it was from 1946 to 1947, doing no sculpture at all but just doing drawings, working my way out of the Henry Moore influence. It was such a strong influence that I realized that if I were to make any sculpture it would look too much like his work. And I simply made drawings so that I could use those as a kind of catharsis, cathartic in order to get rid of the Moore influence.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: And with the help of the lead, I say with the help of lead because it wasn't the lead which influenced my ideas, but I think, as I've always maintained, that ideas have to influence the material. And that's why I'm always so opposed to exhibitions which have to do with welding or books which have to do with welding, or anything of that sort. Although I was one of the first men in this country to work with welding metal.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: But by using lead I was able to make thin shapes and open forms so that, as we've often said, the space and the forms became equally important. And so then to repeat, these were the first things that I showed at Betty Parsons. These were things which were more open structurally and which had a strong surrealist influence. Which I think is still present in a good deal of my work.

MR. SANDLER: Well, the surrealist influence in large measure seems to have come in because of a tendency to abstraction in your work at the time, too.

MR. FERBER: That is not exactly true. Many of the surrealists were not abstract. I mean Dali was not an abstract painter.

MR. SANDLER: That's true.

MR. FERBER: And Max Ernst could hardly be called an abstract artist. They were tied to a fantasy world which realized itself on the canvas in a three dimensional and representational way. Fanciful and erotic and dreamlike and so on, but nevertheless tied to a semi-realistic framework. Whereas the sculpture I was doing moved away from that so that it was interpretable as having biomorphic forms certainly. But more of the forms could be easily identified as being arms or legs or any parts of the body.

MR. SANDLER: Yet they had that kind of gesture to them.

MR. FERBER: Yes, I think my work has always been gestural or largely gestural. Although there is much of it which is not. This may be true. And, as Wayne Anderson tried to point out, my wood carvings, which were naturalistic or semi-naturalistic had a kind of gestural arrangement. Now what else?

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Well, technically I found that lead was too soft and too difficult to maintain in its shape once it was made. And I then moved to copper and brass and worked for quite a while in brass and copper and I'm still working in those materials. Now let's pause for a minute and see if we can get a new direction.

MR. SANDLER: Well, perhaps at this point why don't we just pick up, because we'll probably go back and forth, pick up the Betty Parsons scene. You had been showing up to this time, you said at the Clayman Gallery, and then after that at the Midtown.

MR. FERBER: That's right.

MR. SANDLER: Then how did you get to Parsons?

MR. FERBER: Well, this was about 1944 or something, I think 1944.

MR. SANDLER: She would have been the Wakefield Gallery then?

MR. FERBER: Yes. And I didn't join her group until she had moved to 57th Street. Her quarters at 15, before she moved to her present quarters. But I realized that once I had stopped woodcarving and had moved into a more surrealist-abstract direction that the Midtown Gallery was no longer a very hospitable home. And I simply began to look. And it was interesting that Sylvia Marlowe, the harpsichordist, was a friend of mine at that time and she was also a friend of Betty Parsons. And she showed Betty Parsons some photographs of my work and Betty took me on as one of her group. As everybody knows, the Betty Parsons group and the Kootz Gallery, which was across the hall, were a kind of center for the New York School as it began to develop. And we were a very close knit group. Very shortly thereafter, I've forgotten the year, Bob Motherwell and Clyfford Still and Rothko and Barney Newman organized the Club.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. Well, first it would have been the school that had the Friday night evenings.

MR. FERBER: That's right. Yes, it was the New York School, what was . . .

MR. SANDLER: Subjects of the artist.

MR. FERBER: Subjects of the artist. Yes, that's right. And they had those Friday evenings. You went to some of those, didn't you?

MR. SANDLER: No, that was before my time.

MR. FERBER: Well, those Friday evenings and dinner parties that we always had after an opening at Betty Parsons or at the Kootz Gallery, which became a kind of ritual; every time a man had a show there was a dinner at one of the restaurants in town. But we all got to know each other and visited each other frequently. We were constantly in each other's homes. The conversation was always about art, but not a kind of shop talk. At that time the movement, or the school, or the milieu was so full of electricity that we didn't talk the kind of shop that I hear nowadays, which is where you're showing or what you're selling, or what commissions you've gotten. But it was always about the ideas involved in the breaking away from or developing towards a new form or a new idea. And these were very, very exciting and very stimulating and very sparse days for all of us. Nobody was making any money except the boys at the Kootz Gallery who were getting a yearly stipend until Kootz closed up as a result of his going broke. And I think there's no doubt that we all learned from each other, that conversations and discussions late into the night were very productive for all of us of the tendencies and the forms which later became quite well known.

MR. SANDLER: Well, there was a good deal of talk then about a kind of myth-making in art. Do you remember anything about that? Newman was very much involved. And Rothko's imagery.

MR. FERBER: Yes. I many not be exactly right about this but Betty Parsons had given a show of Pre-Columbian sculpture which Newman helped install. He was a very important adjunct to the Betty Parsons Gallery at that time. He was not a painter yet; that is, he didn't begin . . .

MR. SANDLER: When did he begin, around 1946? 1947?

MR. FERBER: Well, I think the best way to find that out is simply to examine the dates on his paintings. He certainly had always been a painter. he had even taught art in the high schools for a short time. But he never showed any work. Although he had one or two things in group shows at Betty Parsons.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: But he was not know as an artist. He was know n as a kind of spokesman for the artists. And he was very important to Berry Parsons , I think, in directing her attention to artists and to movements and to ideas about art. And when she put on this show of Pre-Columbian art he became very interested in the idea of myth, I think, at that time. Now this may not be exactly right. It appeared to me that that was the impetus which started him on his interest in myth. Several of the artists objected to the idea of being included in any kind of group which revolved around the mystique of myth. One of these was Rothko. I think there was one group show that Berry Parsons put on which had to do with this idea.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. I can't think of the name now. Icono? Oh, I forget now. But she did. And Newman wrote the catalogue for that.

MR. FERBER: That's right. What was the name of that show?

MR. SANDLER: Not the Iconograph?

MR. FERBER: "Graph" was in it but not "Icono".

MR. SANDLER: No, not "icon", you're right. I forget now. Well, you also got to know Pollock then probably around that time.

MR. FERBER: Yes. Everybody knew everybody because there were only about a dozen people to know each other. There weren't really more people. There was an older group of artists such as Stuart Davis and some others who were violently opposed to what later became known as abstract expressionism. There were all kinds of forums at the Art Students League and other places. There was one very famous one at the Art Students League called the "Schism between the Artist and the Public," at which I gave a talk which was later reprinted in the Art Students League Bulletin. And then gradually of course the museums and the critics became interested and began to write about it and the museum began at least to show it and then even to buy some it.

MR. SANDLER: but in those years, say, roughly from I guess 1946 to 1948, perhaps even later, most of the activity of the artists, say, in the Parsons and the Kootz Gallery would have been visits to studios, home. It was a sort of informal, non-public thing?

MR. FERBER: Exactly. As the title of that forum indicates, the Schism between the Artist and the Public was a very great one. And our audience was primarily amongst ourselves. We were each other's audience. And we gave each other a good deal of criticism and a good deal of conversation about the work. I remember Barney Newman would come to my studio and talk for hours about a single piece of sculpture.

MR. SANDLER: he wrote a catalogue for . . .

MR. FERBER: And he wrote the introduction or the foreword tot he first show that I had at Betty Parsons, in which he used the word "heroic" about my work. And I would say he even encouraged me to make larger things. He felt that the things I was making at the time, which were never more than two or three feet high, were too small for the idea. And if I may say so, I think it turned out to be true. The big things I've made have always been at least , if not more successful than the smaller ones. Now of course there's no limit to size. And size has become a thing in itself, I think unfortunately. Motherwell was an extremely important influence in his organizational ability, in his willingness to get people together, to publish, to organize the school and then the Club. And the Club in those days was really a kind of second home. It actually came about because we talked for . . .

MR. SANDLER: Well, other things around that period slightly, say, before the Club that I was just curios about. Tony Smith was also around the gallery I guess in a sort of similar way that Newman was, not as much as an artist but as a friend?

MR. FERBER: That's quite right. Tony Smith installed my second show i thin it was. Yes, the second show I had at Betty Parsons, Tony Smith installed. And he was a fantastic man. Very modest and self-effacing, devoted to the painters and sculptors at Betty Parsons particularly, but also those at the Kootz Gallery. And he spent a good deal of time then just talking to us about our work. He himself was not doing any sculpture that I knew of. Although recently I've been told that he was painting at that time.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. He was painting.

MR. FERBER: But certainly he never showed it to anybody that I know about. Stamos may have seen some because they were close friends. But Tony was involved with architecture. And, as you know, he built a house for Stamos out on the Island.

MR. SANDLER: That's right.

MR. FERBER: And designed Fred Olson's house in Connecticut, and the house of his son. I don't remember the dates but I think it must have been in the early 50s. Yes, Tony Smith certainly was an important member of the group without participating as a practitioner.

MR. SANDLER: At that time, too, guys like Still, Rothko, and Newman, I guess, were close. This was far before they fell apart from one another?

MR. FERBER: Yes. Still and Rothko were very close friends. Rothko and Gottlieb were very close friends. They wrote an article together, as you know, for the New York Times.

MR. SANDLER: That's right.

MR. FERBER: Clyfford Still and Rothko had been invited by McAgy to teach out in California. So they were very good friends. And Motherwell and Baziotes and Gottlieb, all of us knew each other as intimately as it was possible for grownup persons to know each other.

MR. SANDLER: Reinhardt would have been there, too, but he was somewhat younger.

MR. FERBER: Reinhardt was a little younger although I don't know that that was the criterion because Stamos was really the youngest of all.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: He was a kind of child prodigy. Nevertheless he was a very intrinsic part of the group. But I don't know why Ad Reinhardt didn't become a close part of it. Perhaps because even int hose days he had a kind of purist idea about it. I know he was very much opposed when I made my first architectural sculpture in 1951 for Percy Goodman for a synagogue. He was very much opposed to the idea that I should do anything as commonplace and public as a sculpture for an architect. Barney Newman, on the other hand, encouraged me. This really sounds ridiculous now but at that time this was really an ethical question that we faced and tried to solve. I think of it as being naive now but it was then a very serious problem. Since we had certainly been rejected by the largest part of the public, and that included the museums and the collectors, we felt considerable antagonism to the outside world as we looked at it. So that when an architect such as Percy Goodman, who was really the first architect in America to face up to the problem of using abstract art on his buildings, when he came along everybody began to discuss it as if it were a questionable thing to do. And various strong sides were taken. I won't forget a cafeteria lunch at which Tomlina and Ad Reinhardt and Barney Newman and Rothko and I, and perhaps Motherwell, were present where Ad said, " You just can't do that kind of thing." and Barney Newman said, "The only way to do it is to get your art out in the public, I mean in the public eye." At any rate, I must admit that my reason for doing it was very simple. The only chance I hade to make a large sculpture was for a place that was set aside for it. And I was so enthusiastic about it that although I had been asked and given a fee for making a six-foot sculpture. I made a twelve-foot sculpture for the same price. And what moved me really was the possibility, the chance of making a large sculpture so that it would be give a home and could be seen. I think we all felt at that time that museums were a kind of tomb, that once a think became a museum property it lost a good deal of its vitality and became simply another object in a collection.

MR. SANDLER: Then there was considerable interest in the idea of outside art? A kind of art which wasn't over the mantel place or a coffee table thing?

MR. FERBER: No, I don't think so. I don't think so. Barney spoke of it as an idea. That is, he said we must get out work into the public eye. And the chance of making a sculpture for a building seemed to be a kind of obvious way of doing it. But the big pictures that were being made by Hark and Jack Pollock and Clyfford Still were not intended for a large audience. They weren't intended as murals. In fact, they were not intended for any place because, if you remember, the galleries were hardly large enough to show these things. And many of the dealers objected strongly tot he idea of making such big pictures or sculptures because they couldn't sell them. And it was really over their violent objections, not Betty Parsons, she was very openminded about such things, but I think there's no doubt that Kootz would tell his artists that they should do saleable pictures; by which he meant smaller things which could be sold for lower prices, but particularly for people who wanted to put more than one picture on a wall.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. This didn't apply though as much to the Parsons group because there you really at one point have . . .

MR. FERBER: Yes. Well, as I say, I think that the Parsons people more than the people at Kootz, although this is not so important, felt freer, for one reason or another. Perhaps because they weren't being supported by a dealer. And perhaps because betty was very, very liberal and open minded and never thought in her modest way of suggesting any size or content or anything else to an artist.

MR. SANDLER: Around that time, too, there's a publication call the Tiger's Eye.

MR. FERBER: Yes.

MR. SANDLER: Which was edited by Stephan, I guess, of Stephan.

MR. FERBER: Yes. John and Ruth Stephan. Ruth Stephan is a poet and she had considerable wealth. And John Stephan, her husband, was a painter who showed at the Betty Parsons Gallery several times. And they decided to publish a literary and plastic art magazine. And they went about in a very generous fashion. You've seen the issues?

MR. SANDLER: Yes, I've gone through them.

MR. FERBER: Well, that was a kind of flattering and interesting adjunct and we all wrote one or two things for a few of the issues. We all had our work published in those issues. I suppose there weren't more than a dozen issues altogether, not even that many.

MR. SANDLER: Not that many, no. Eight, I think. But his would have been one of the very early times that your

work would have been published in a sympathetic place where artists had some say?

MR. FERBER: yes. And it was modelled to some extent along avant garde European lines. they used richer paper to print on and different colored paper for each page. They put the table of contents some place in the middle or at the back of the magazine so that it was always difficult to find your the idea being that you were to look at the work or read the poetry before you discovered who did it. this was a kind of device for making not he artist less important but at least to make the work account more than a name. What else about that period?

MR. SANDLER: What about critics of the time? What was the response that you generally go? There would have been Jewell on the Times. And there would have been Genauer . . .

MR. FERBER: No, it was McBride on the . . .

MR. SANDLER: McBride. And Genauer on the World Telegram. And in the magazines there was occasionally Manny Farber in the New Republic, and Clem Greenberg in the Nation. Was Clem fairly close to, or did he know the artists at the time?

MR. FERBER: Well, Clem, as you know, was the most vociferous and the most intelligent and the strongest critic in favor of the work of two artists: Jackson Pollock first David Smith second. And he paid absolutely no attention to any of the other artists. We knew him because he was close to Jack; he became a friend of Jackson Pollock's and a friend of David Smith's. We knew him because of that. I knew Clem through a literary friend of mine, the editor of Partisan Review, William Phillips. Because Greenberg was then very close to Partisan Review and was at one time one of the editors of Partisan Review. And even for a short time Clem persuaded Partisan Review to print one black and white drawings by various artists. I think at that time he looked with considerable favor on Roszah's work. But I have never had any word in print from Greenberg. I've been told, you know, seconhanded that he likes this piece or that piece. but I've never had any support from him. The other critics of the time, such as McBride and Jewell were simply antagonistic or neutral. I wasn't acquainted with Manny Farber's writings nor with Genauer's until much later. Actually there were only two or three places that people looked to, and those were the Times and McBride's paper, what was that?

MR. SANDLER: The Tribune.

MR. FERBER: The Tribune. And the Nation. And certainly Clem wrote some very fine pieces at that time. But he openly objected tot eh work of Still and Rothko when I saw him at the galleries. Alfred Barr and Dorothy Miller, however, in the museum world, of course it's true after the museum had been picketed by part of this group in order to get them to open its doors to American aft, but Alfred Barr became one of the first major forces to be interested very much in Pollock and also in the others. And he was very important and influential in persuading the museum to buy the first piece that they bought from me, for which it was extremely difficult to raise a few dollars.

MR. SANDLER: Around 1943 there seems to be, you know, a tendency on the part of many of the artists at I guess Kootz and Parsons to attempt to present themselves and their work to the public. There was a protest then in 1948. I guess it had to do with the change of the . . .

MR. FERBER: Policy at the Metropolitan?

MR. SANDLER: No, that was later in 1950. but his had to do with the Boston Institute of Contemporary Art. There was a meeting at the Museum of Modern Art. Paul Burlin, Bradley Walker Tomlin were involved with that.

MR. FERBER: Yes.

MR. SANDLER: Did you attend that ? Were you involved with that thing?

MR. FERBER: No.

MR. SANDLER: But you were involved in 1950 with the Irascibles?

MR. FERBER: Yes. Before that, however, . . . when was the Metropolitan?

MR. SANDLER: That was 1950.

MR. FERBER: Bob Mother well organized a group, a roundtable.

MR. SANDLER: That's right. That was in 1952.

MR. FERBER: That was also in 1950. To which he invited Alfred Barr as a mediator. You know about that thing?

MR. SANDLER: Yes. The revised minutes came out in the Modern Artists in America that publication . . .

MR. FERBER: Yes, which Motherwell and Reinhardt worked on.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Yes. I vaguely remember something about the Museum of Modern Art in Boston changing its name to Museum of Contemporary art, or vice versa.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: That created a small stir. I know that Bradley had something to do with that; maybe Burlin. I don't remember anything about that. The roundtable was very important, I think. It got a lot of people to talk freely in an associative fashion about themselves in a place where they knew a stenographer was taking down what they had to say, nevertheless they spoke very freely, and there was a lot of discussion. That was the meeting at which Alfred Barr tried to find a name for this kind of art.

MR. SANDLER: That's right. And everyone stomped on him.

MR. FERBER: And nobody knew the name to give it. I don't remember what name he proposed. There have been many claimants for the title of the originator of the word "abstract expressionism." I thought Goldwater was the first man to use the concept at a forum which was held at the Art Students League. Goldwater got up and said, "Isn't this kind of work closely related to the abstract painting and sculpture in Europe, and the Expressionist painting and sculpture in Germany, and couldn't it be called a kind of Abstract Expressionism?"

MR. SANDLER: Do you remember the date of that?

MR. FERBER: I don't remember the date but I could give it to you within a year if I would look at some papers I have, I think.

MR. SANDLER: What do you remember about the Irascibles?

MR. FERBER: I remember that very clearly, I think. I think there was something that either preceded very shortly, or succeeded very shortly . . . An issue of Harper's Bazar had the Betty Parsons group photographed each with a piece of his work.

MR. SANDLER: Would that have been Soby? I can check that out.

MR. FERBER: It's funny, I was up in Cambridge this weekend and an old friend of mine brought out the clipping and showed it to me. And I remembered it suddenly. I forgot to look at the date but she's sending me a Xerox of it so I'll know more about it the exact time. The Irascibles, well, what happened then was simply that, as you know, the Metropolitan had decided to change its policy. Somebody discovered that there was a lot of money available for purchasing American art, and that this money had never been used. And some pressure was put on the Board of Trustees to buy it. And they decided on a way of doing it which we felt was very amateurish, to say the least, although it sounded professional; which was to organize regional juries all over the country which were to choose works of art, they were then to be sent to a jury in New York which was to eliminate further, and the work remaining was to be shown. The artists of both the Betty Parsons and the Kootz galleries, this group of artists of which I've been talking, had decided earlier on never to submit their work to juries. They felt that this was no way to decide. That juries were either inexpert or resorted to logrolling and favoritism, or that the juries would be prejudiced in one way or another; and that was the only way to show this kind of work was to have an expert who would be responsible for choosing and then writing about, if necessary, but a single person who would be responsible for the showing instead of having a jury each member of which could easily avoid responsibility by putting it on the other man's shoulders. So that when the Metropolitan decided to have, first, juries in the back country which was very far from developed, much less developed than it is now, and then to have another jury in New York City we all object violently. And a group of painters, eighteen of the, who are now, of course, well know, decided to boycott the show. They had many reasons. One of which was that this was the best way to get a kind of cross-section of bad art mostly with maybe a few inclusions, or maybe the best art excluded. And the idea of submitting to a jury was also unpleasant. And I insisted that some sculptors be included in this because while this was a painting show but I insisted that since they would most likely have a sculpture show later on and the sculptors should make their position known. I canvasses some of the sculptors, David Smith and David Hare and . . .

MR. SANDLER: Lassaw.

MR. FERBER: And Lipton. And I think that was it. I don't remember if there were . . .

MR. SANDLER: No, I think Rosazk and Bourgeois.

MR. FERBER: Very possibly, yes. We went along and signed our names. but, of course it was a painting show and so the painters received the attention that was focused on it. By accident more or less because Barney newman wrote a letter to the New York Times which appeared on the first page on Monday morning because there wasn't anything else to print, I think.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Ordinarily it would never have gotten on the first page. And it raised a tremendous furor. When the sculpture show was put on a year later I tried to organize the sculptors to boycott it and I was completely unsuccessful. We had several meetings and I never was able to get more than one or two men to agree with me to stay out of it. but hey did, so they didn't. And the show went on with those refraining from participating in it, as I did. There was another show at the Metropolitan which you may remember. It was called Artists for the Victory.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: That must have been in 19--, that was during the war so it must have been . . .

MR. SANDLER: 1942.

MR. FERBER: 1942, was it?

MR. SANDLER: Yes. They may have had others because I think there was some connection between those show and the later Pepsi Cola shows.

MR. FERBER: Oh, yes, that's right. Yes.

MR. SANDLER: But I think the first one at the Met was in 1942.

MR. FERBER: Yes, that's right; it must have been because I remember I was very naive about the whole business at that time. Actually I think that my relation to the art world was a very unprofessional one until I got into the Betty Parsons Gallery and met these pros. Because I was really at that time still half dentist and half artist. And, as I pointed out earlier, I never got to know any artists really until I got into the Betty Parsons Gallery. I knew one or two but we didn't express opinions of a social nature so much at that time. I did submit a piece to that Artists for Victory show and I won one of the prizes, the purchase prize. It was a group of three figures in granite. Which is now in the Metropolitan and I don't think has ever been shown since. Calder won one of the prizes at that time, too. Already in 1942 he was acceptable enough to win a prize at the Metropolitan. Ivan Le Lorraine Albright won one in 1942 in that show but refused to accept it because the price of the picture was I think more than $3,00 or $1,500 or something like that. The idea of the Irascibles and the publication of their names and the publication of their reasons for objecting became a very important cause, or very important, I should say, in the development of their careers. Because it focused the public's attention for the first time on . . .

MR. SANDLER: On a group?

MR. FERBER: On a group of artists who felt related to each other, if not in style at least in purpose. And the fact is that their work did not resemble each other's very closely. One of the remarkable things I think about those eighteen people and about the half-dozen sculptors involved was that their work did not look like each other's. There were occasional pieces, occasional paintings which resembled each other. but I think as time went on the work of each became highly distinctive, and they had followers. but I think it's interesting that the work of eighteen painters and half a dozen sculptors should look so different.

MR. SANDLER: Herbert, this raises another and to me very interesting problem, the whole problem of community. but before we get involved in that, because I don't want to break once we start, I'll just run this side out.

MR. FERBER: Now maybe we can get something to . . .

[Interruption]

MR. SANDLER: The last thing we were talking about was you called attention to the fact that although you knew one another, there were these very wide divergences in the work.

MR. FERBER: Yes.

MR. SANDLER: And you couldn't really call it a movement or an ism or a style or a group. And yet there was always a question of community, whether these artists did in fact constitute some kind of group. do you recall any of the ideas about that?

MR. FERBER: Objectively one has only to examine the work of people as divergent as Lippold and Lassaw or Rothko and Motherwell or Clyfford Still. No doubt there has been what might be thought of as what could you call superficial resemblances. There's no doubt that one or two sculptures by somebody else, or one or two of mine can be mistaken for somebody else's work if you're not familiar with the work of each. but I think that in general the work has moved in different directions. And I suppose also that at some point in the future much of this work will look more cohesive than it does at the moment.

MR. SANDLER: But you felt sympathies and affinities?

MR. FERBER: We certainly felt, and the sympathies and affinities which we felt for each other I think were based upon a sense that we were all outside of the art world, the official, the institutional art world. Don't forget the universities with the exception of places such as Sarah Lawrence or Bennington weren't interested. The museums were largely uninterested. The Whitney Museum of course since it was showing American art did show some of this work. And finally the Museum of Modern Art. But we were united against the world and the world was more or less united against us. furthermore, we were all of the same age more or less. We all began to think in terms which were somewhat different from those which preceded us in Europe at about the same time. So that it was natural for that, say, dozen people to meet and talk. Also it was fortuitous that the two galleries were so close to each other physically. Now this kind of thing didn't obtain in England at that time, or even later. I remember when David Sylvester came, I think it was to Motherwell's or to Rothko's, I've forgotten, he walked into the room and he said, "My God, I would never meet a group of artists of this kind in England in one room. They simply would never meet, would never be interested in seeing each other, or might hate each other." Now what else about the group.

MR. SANDLER: Did you want to tell your wife about Art?

MR. FERBER: No, I'll tell her later. Edith, were you here when Mel called?

EDITH: No, I tried to reach her.

MR. FERBER: Oh, you did. I see. All right. Good. Forget it.

MR. SANDLER: Just continuing on the idea of community, Herbert, you indicated that there was a kind of common feeling about European art at the time, or it wasn't that common, a lot of guys had changed their mind about French painting.

MR. FERBER: Yes, that's true. Certainly the strongest influence at the moment when I arrived on the scene was not for sculpture but for painting . . . seemed to be Impressionism and not Cubism. The artists were already feeling that they had to break away from Cubism.

MR. SANDLER: Really! In 1946 is that . . .

MR. FERBER: Well, I would say within a year or two of that, that is 1947 or something like that. In conversations with people like Bradley Tomlin or Mark Cubism was an anathema. For several reasons: one, the kind of rigidity which can describe its format; the color, which is dull . . . I mean earth grays and things of that kind. These artists were moving toward bright colors, light colors. Or if not, as in the case of Baziotes, so light they had a kind of veil like quality instead of a dense quality. In other words, they might not have been so high in key but they were thin in substance.

MR. SANDLER: Atmospheric in a sense?

MR. FERBER: Yes. "Atmospheric" is a word that I think can be used. But even at least as unpleasant as a concept for these artists was the notion of the Bauhaus. A whole sense of rigid use of modules of a rectilinear structure as in Mondrian. Although the artists admired Mondrian they also objected tot he idea of placing any value on materials. In other words, a kind of expressionism combined with an Impressionist color sense was very important. And surrealism certainly. The automatic way of beginning or using automatic writing or automatic starting on a work was important. Amongst the sculptors I think the weight of surrealism was even stronger. If I think of Lippold I have to exclude that. but if I think of Lipton and, not Lassaw but . . .

MR. SANDLER: Roszak?

MR. FERBER: Roszak and David Smith and David Hare and myself, I think that Surrealism had a strong hand. Lassaw was really the first abstract artist in America in a way. He preceded David Smith. He never did anything which was vaguely representational in his life. And he was outstanding in that regard. Lippold of course wa younger and was really part of the Bauhaus tradition. What was your question again?

MR. SANDLER: About the attitudes to the French?

MR. FERBER: Yes, about the attitudes to European art. As I say, I think there was a strong reaction against the density, the solidity, the rigidity or Cubist painting and sculpture. I always felt that Cubist sculpture was a kind of weak takeoff on cubist painting, that it lacked the color and, well the kind of illusionism which the Cubist paintings had.

MR. SANDLER: Would this also have applied . . . you're thinking of, say earlier guys like Lipchitz. What about someone like Gonzalez? Would that also apply?

MR. FERBER: I'm talking about the cubist work particularly of Lipchitz which really had cubistic shapes, you know. Gonzalez presumably came out of Cubism but I don't see it. I mean I've heard this said, but I don't see it. I think Gonzalez comes out of naturalism, naturalistic sculpture with a trend toward abstracting from nature; not abstract, not non-representational ever, but a kind of abstracting from nature. I fail to see why it's Cubist. And I fail to see why this term is used in relation to, well, even to Jackson Pollock. I know my friend Rubin and Greenberg make a strong case for this. But it's difficult for me to see. I think some of the notions of surrealism and some of the notions of Impressionism are very strong.

MR. SANDLER: But I'm curios about one thing, you know, and this again would bring Rubin in. Mark didn't begin to cut out the calligraphy and become involved with that sort of diffuse color until about 1948. And he was still writing at the time. So was Barney. Jackson made statements, 1947 I guess was his last. But the word "Impressionism" doesn't come up in anything that I've been gathering. And you're probably the first who says it was talked about reasonably early and I'm just curious about how early was that?

MR. FERBER: Well, when did Tomlin die? It was long before Tomlin died. When did he die, in 1954?

MR. SANDLER: 1953, 1954, yes.

MR. FERBER: As early as that?

MR. SANDLER: Applying to not Tomlin's kind of calligraphy by applying to . . .

MR. FERBER: No, applying to his own interest in color and his own interest in the plane. Although his work has depth. All of these people have a certain Cubist depth if you think of that as a criterion. Edith, could we all have a little something like liquid.

EDITH: Oh, sure.

MR. FERBER: We've been talking and I've been too painful to get up . . .

EDITH: Would you like a drink like what?

MR. SANDLER: Scotch and anything.

EDITH: Soda or ice? I mean water?

MR. SANDLER: Soda, if you have it.

EDITH: Sure. And you? This?

MR. FERBER: I'll have one of those, yes. What is that? Compari or Cinzano?

EDITH: Cinzano.

MR. SANDLER: Well, that to me is interesting because I've been trying to sort of track this down.

MR. FERBER: Well, there's another influence. And that's Matisse don't forget.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Don't forget that Rothko made a painting called Homage to Matisse. And he wasn't only interested in Matisse as a character. He was interested in Matisse as an artist, in the color of Matisse. And early on Greenberg, I must say, was one of the first to say that Matisse was really a greater painter that Picasso because of his color.

MR. SANDLER: Yes, he was.

MR. FERBER: And his use of the plane?

MR. SANDLER: No, that's curious. He did it on the basis of his quality. He really didn't come around to Matisse's

ideas until fairly late. he always made an exception of them but as an artist, not on the basis of his ideas. He holds on the Cubism very long. A very interesting thing about . . .

MR. FERBER: Clem does?

MR. SANDLER: Clem does, yes.

MR. FERBER: Well, I see a closer relationship between Rothko and Impressionism and Monet and Matisse than I do to any cubist painting.

MR. SANDLER: Oh, definitely. Avery, too.

MR. FERBER: Yes. In spite of the fact that there is this rectilinear shape plus . . . well, that's all.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: The diaphanous quality relates, I think, to other people, certainly not to the Cubist painters. Anyhow that's a digression I suppose.

MR. SANDLER: But do you remember any specific attitudes about French painting? I know this comes up in those three-day conferences. And as early as 1949 there were a couple of panels up in Provincetown where that was discussed.

MR. FERBER: Yes, that's true. I didn't go to Provincetown so I missed those. But I heard about them. Well, I think it was twofold; one was the reaction against Cubism , against the Bauhaus, against object making. One of the crises seems to have centered around the idea that European artists were making objects of art and American artists were making something else which was hard to define.

But they were not objects of art; they were works of art; or they were expressions of feeling. There was on one hand a kind of anti-professionalism, anti-institutionalism as exemplified by the European artists and opposed by a sense of freedom, of opposition to the Establishment, of making things for taste, for reasons of taste, of being willing to break all the rules. As if Picasso hadn't, you know. This kind of attitude was an anti-European one. Now, on the other hand, there was a very favorable attitude towards the surrealists because I think they felt that for the first time they had met artists who felt that their whole life was an art. somehow an artists like Monet or Picasso or Matisse seemed to be in business; that is, they produced, they sold, to a dealer, and although they may have spent fifteen hours a day painting, it didn't seem to involve the whole life quality of the artist. In other words, it wasn't a gestalt including his whole psyche. The surrealists seemed to have given this idea to the American artists: that art was something you not only lived twenty-four hours a day but without which you couldn't live, not a s a job, not as something to go to in your studio but something to be a form of expression at all times, you know, while eating, while making love, while doing anything; one was constantly an artist. Now for Americans this was an extremely expressive concept, or interesting concept, because most of them were semi-professionals. they taught or they lived off their wives or they had jobs in other professions, as I did. So that the idea of being wholly and completely an artist and nothing else was very attractive. And they took that over wholeheartedly. That aspect of European art was attractive. Then, of course, the size of the picture as if Courbet or Monet or any academician had not made big pictures, they all began to think of big pictures even before, I think the sculptors began to think of big sculptures as an anti-Establishment idea. It was really, I think, not only an aesthetic expression but a kind of epator le bourgeoisie expression to make things so big that they couldn't be handled.

MR. SANDLER: Was there also some disappointment, I gather there was when the first shows of the School of Paris art came over to this country I guess around 1947 after the war?

MR. FERBER: I don't remember any opposition to that.

MR. SANDLER: It was just disappointment, a feeling that the School of Paris wasn't what it used to be.

MR. FERBER: Oh, I know people said, "Oh, Picasso is not really a good artist." But I think this kind of thing was said tongue in cheek almost like a mischievous boy. I really don't think that Miro and Picasso and Matisse and others were thought of as not good or great.

MR. SANDLER: But there was a feeling that what the guys were doing here . . .

MR. FERBER: There was a feeling that what we were doing here was more free, more expressive, less, not less disciplined but less organized.

MR. SANDLER: I know on the part of Clyfford Still some notion of a kind of the Americanness of this American art although I would imagine most of the other guys were still very internationally-minded. do you remember

anything about that issue?

MR. FERBER: Well, clyfford Still very likely would have had that attitude, but I think he's the only one who would have had it. Occasionally somebody like Motherwell or somebody else might say that first, all that counts is whether it's good or not whether it's made in France or italy. There was a tremendous admiration for De Chirico, for example, or for Miro. And there were nationalists in that group and chauvinists but I think they were put down, to a large extent. Also I think many of the things they said were, as I've suggested, said in a mischievous fashion, not in any considered way.

MR. SANDLER: I wonder, because one of the things I'd like to do next week, or next time is maybe get involved with reminiscences of a particular artist. But where does the Egan group fit in?

MR. FERBER: Of course Egan had certainly three or four artists who have made their place. One was Guston. One was a de Kooning. One was Kline. Almost one of the fist swaps I ever made in my life, which was in I guess 1949 or 1950, was with de Kooning. And I saw his show at Egan. Yes, of course. It's just that perhaps just because he had only three artists, the ones I've mentioned, who seem to fit into our group. The others, such as McNeil and, who else?

MR. SANDLER: Cavallon.

MR. FERBER: Yes, he had Cavallon. Were more Bauhaus-type artists at the time. I think even McNeil was, wasn't he?

MR. SANDLER: Well, that was a little bit later than what you're talking about. I don't think McNeil really showed until about 1950 or 1951, several years after this period. Cavallon was still working in a kind of geometric loosening it up.

MR. FERBER: Yes. But certainly that was the period when de Kooning was doing black and white pictures. And Kline had begun to do some slightly larger ones, I think.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Guston came in a little bit later because he had been in the Midwest.

MR. SANDLER: Right. And then he showed first with Peridot.

MR. FERBER: Yes. That's right. He showed first with Peridot and then switched to Egan later. And we didn't get to know Guston until I think he got to Egan or even after that. But we did know Kline and de Kooning. The kind of life I led, just to be personal for a moment which was much more rigid than the lives these other men led, was simply due to the fact that I was teaching dentistry and had a small practice going in the evening. I had to get up early in the morning so I couldn't go down to the Cedar Bar and stay up until three or four in the morning. And I couldn't drink because I wouldn't have been able to function the next day.

MR. SANDLER: Would there have been any animosity, not animosity but coldness between, say, the Parsons and the Kootz group that you remember?

MR. FERBER: No.

MR. SANDLER: What about between uptown and downtown artists, say, the group around The Club?

MR. FERBER: Well, The Club really didn't begin to function as a downtown group until much later.

MR. SANDLER: It really began around 1949, the thing itself.

MR. FERBER: Yes, but by that time, I mean later on the artists whose names we've mentioned were practically out of it. Then it became a downtown group. Actually I think with the first Tenth Street Show.

MR. SANDLER: The Ninth Street Show.

MR. FERBER: The Ninth Street Show. That was the kind of statement of a downtown group. And then The Club began to get bigger and so on.

MR. SANDLER: One guy whose name is sort of forgotten, I wonder if you remember him, he was one of the Irascible Eighteen and he wrote occasionally, I believe, The Nation, Weldon Kees.

MR. FERBER: Oh. No, he wasn't one of the Irascibles. Weldon Kees was a poet.

MR. SANDLER: He also apparently painted.

MR. FERBER: Yes, he did. But he really didn't show that I know of, he may have shown but I don't know anything about it. He was really a poet. We all knew him slightly. I knew him by having met him a half dozen times at some friend's house in a different category because he lived out in Brooklyn Heights, I think. He disappeared. They say he committed suicide.

MR. SANDLER: Yes, nobody seems to know what happened to him.

MR. FERBER: Well, I mean his body disappeared. He's supposed to have jumped off the San Francisco Bridge.

MR. SANDLER: Yes, that's right.

MR. FERBER: Oh, he was floating on the periphery. A poet.

MR. SANDLER: His name keeps coming up occasionally and I'm trying to find out . . .

MR. FERBER: People admired his work I think, or his figure, his personality, his kind of intense . . .

MR. SANDLER: He's had a comeback among poets I think and I was just curios as to whether you remember him at all. Do you remember a show at Kootz called The Inter-Subjectives?

MR. FERBER: That was at Better Parsons, wasn't it?

MR. SANDLER: No, Betty Parsons was this show that Barney wrote that . . .

MR. FERBER: The graph.

MR. SANDLER: Yes, with the graph.

MR. FERBER: Did Kootz do a show called The Inter-Subjectives? Yes, of course, that's right.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. And Harold wrote an introduction to that catalogue. It was a painting show. Harold and Kootz did it. I think Baziotes and Hofmann maybe designed the brochure. Because there seems to be at the time, you know, sporadic attempts on the part of the artist to point to some kind of identity. Newman did it in his catalogue at Parsons. And apparently Harold did it in this show.

MR. FERBER: The Inter-Subjectives?

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: I remember that. Was that a Kootz Gallery group? Or was it . . .

MR. SANDLER: They brought in some other people. But I guess it would have been mostly Kootz. Yes. But they still hadn't broken down that idea that if you show in one gallery you don't show in the other. That was broken down later. Because Barney's show was all Parsons people.

MR. FERBER: Yes, I remember the title. I don't remember who was in it and I don't remember even whether I was in it.

MR. SANDLER: No, I think it was painting not sculpture. Your work switched from lead to welded metal when? Around 1949? 1948?

MR. FERBER: I can look it up, but I would say about 1949 or 1950.

MR. SANDLER: Why did the switch take place form the lead?

MR. FERBER: Well, lead was too soft. You know, very soon we began to discover that sculpture was going to be sent not from you studio to the gallery and hopefully to a collector or back to your studio; but to exhibitions. It was being invited to museum shows. And they didn't know how to handle sculpture very well. They still don't. it would just get bent and battered. I discovered that the lead pieces suffered. So I just decided I'd have to have a stronger metal.

MR. SANDLER: But the work in a sense also changed when you move into the new medium. It becomes in a sense . . . I wouldn't want to call it more linear but some of the more massive elements, it became changed in that respect, it no longer conveyed the kind of massiveness, say, of this piece.

MR. FERBER: Well, you know, I was wondering, this was modelled in plaster and cast, this is a casting. It's

actually not one bit more bulky than this, than either of these two pieces; is it? For its size?

MR. SANDLER: No.

MR. FERBER: In fact, it's less bulky in cross section. I think what's more important about it is that it really has a linear quality or a gestural quality, which is perhaps better; but it's open; the fact is that the space is very important, just as they are here. So here's an example, to my way of thinking, of a piece which was made in plaster model and then cast in a traditional fashion. This, which is made of sheet metal and welded, which has a resemblance based upon an ideology, I mean a formal ideology, formally speaking, and not upon the procedure.

MR. SANDLER: But still the idea of directness would have entered in?

MR. FERBER: I don't think so. I always have made drawings. I'm not an abstract expressionist. I'm not an action sculptor. I don't know anybody who can be. And the idea of directness may be more applicable to stone or wood carving where modifications are difficult to make once you've made a mark it's difficult to change. There your direct approach is very formidable and unmodifiable. And I mae many of my wood sculptures and stone sculptures without even a drawing to go by. Just started to carve. Now that's really direct. And once you've made a cut or a stroke or an indentation you can't eradicate it. Now this one is perhaps the most indirect procedure because you can modify this without end. You can take it apart, you can unweld it and put it together again.

MR. SANDLER: Well, that what I would call direct because . . .

MR. FERBER: Well, that simply means that it's . . . I don't see that, it's just capable of being modified. Afterthoughts can be used as a painter does when he's working on a canvas. The only direct thing I can think of as a direct approach is one in which a gesture is made and stays there, as when Picasso or somebody else has made a drawing in light and had it photographed. That's unmodifiable; that's very direct.

MR. SANDLER: But one of the things that would attract you to . . .

MR. FERBER: What does indirect mean in painting?

MR. SANDLER: Well, the way I would interpret it would be an artist who will make sketches and then transfer the sketch in the painting so that the painting isn't the direct thing itself.

MR. FERBER: Well, you know, I think that's kind of a rather superficial distinction. First of all, any artist who makes paintings nowadays and during the so called New York School period made many paintings. Every painting was a statement derived from a prior painting. Sometimes they were small paintings which were in a way enlarged. It's possible to make sculpture directly without every thinking of something in advance. It's possible to make paintings that way, too. Only if you define your terms in the way you have; but nothing works that way.

MR. SANDLER: You're suggesting then that, say, Harold's ideas int he article on Action Painting you wouldn't be very sympathetic to?

MR. FERBER: No, not at all.

MR. SANDLER: But you do like this medium because it enables you to almost improvise much more than you could in, say, either stone or even in lead?

MR. FERBER: No, it's not easier than in lead. I improvised in working in stone, too. You can improvise as you go along in stone. In other words, you have to go very slowly, and think what your next cut it going to be; are you going to make this shape or not? But that's improvisational too. Provided that you're not actually following a model to, you know, copy. When I make a sculpture of this size, which is the first size, I have first made a drawing. I have then to translate it into three-dimensional terms. That's not exactly improvisation. That's thinking very hard about how to do something, how to translate something. Accidents may occur but one has to examine them, especially in sculpture as to whether they're going to stay or not. Now in painting the consideration of an accident may take less time because it takes less time to make it and to eradicate it so you can make an instantaneous decision. In sculpture you just can't work that way; nobody can work that way. I mean you can if you're sort of dripping some unnameable material, I don't know what material it would be, sort of dripping it off your fingertips. But then I don't know any sculpture that's made that way. But if you're making another one, which is twice or three times as large as that, which comes out of this very, very directly. This is almost a model, or it is a model. There are subtle changes because of the scale. I don't think any sculptor can improvise at all in the sense in which you're speaking.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Improvisation occurs. You make a shape and you decide instantaneously that it needs another

shape near it. But I'm sure that's exactly what Rubens did when he was painting a landscape. He painted a series of trees and then the shape of the sky and clouds was constantly being modified and the trees' edge being modified in relation to each other. It isn't that he painted this and they painted something to fill in.

MR. SANDLER: So really you're suggesting that the reason you changed to this medium is because it's a tougher medium, it holds better?

MR. FERBER: The medium itself is stronger, more durable material. I has considerable flexibility, which is I think a term more useful. One can modify one's ideas more easily here than in stone or in wood. Also you can achieve shapes which you can't achieve in stone or wood. I mean artists have done it in Italy, you know. Mannerists artists have made marble carvings which were fantastically delicate. But they usually break. I think Mondrian improvised. It doesn't look like an improvised painting, does it?

MR. SANDLER: No. Until you see the unfinished ones.

MR. FERBER: Until you realize where the tapes were, where the paintings were left with tapes, his later unfinished ones. You realize he was constantly improvising or manipulating. But none of this is action painting. And I'm sure that de Kooning and Mondrian both spend the same amount of time in deciding where the next thing goes, or what color the next is going to be. In Mondrian's case either by sitting and deciding and then trying; or in de Kooning's case by sitting and trying and then scraping it off.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: I think we ought to quit now.

[Interruption]

MR. SANDLER: This is the second interview with Herbert Ferber on December 31, 1968 at his studio.

MR. FERBER: Gee, David Hare disappeared, hasn't he?

MR. SANDLER: Yes, I see him occasionally because he lives close by, but you know not really, one just doesn't see him much any more. Herbert, last time we kind of got up into the latish forties. But I thought we would just start talking about your work. There are certain things that I just wanted to ask. Your earlier work tends to be rather more linear than, say, what you're doing today. Much of it also tends to be rather more suggestive of landscape, nature, than your work today. Just to begin with, because I want to go into all sorts of other things, I wonder if you would talk about those two changes in your work. They take place in the fifties, you know, one sort of to massiveness; the other perhaps to abstraction.

MR. FERBER: Well, you know, Irving, this business about linear sculpture and so on as being different from the massive sculpture is something that has entered into literature. Again, I wrote articles about sculpture, in fact I originated the terms of the forms penetrating space and holding space intention, the phrase I used originally had been quoted.

MR. SANDLER: Yes, I swiped it from you.

MR. FERBER: Yes. And not only you. I said that the spaces and the forms were equally important. Which I think was the first definition of that kind of sculpture that was published. Now it's true that my sculpture was massive in that it was monolithic. But that stopped actually about 1945, as I look at this catalogue. Because if you look at this photograph here's a sculpture of 1944 and 1945, and this is 1945, it's still the monolithic kind of thing and certainly these earlier ones are. But in 1946 a figure in a surrealist fashion but very linear. So that a change occurred certainly in 1946, if not earlier in drawings. And, as you see sculpture of 1946, 1947, 1948 are linear.

MR. SANDLER: Now just one thing, Herbert. You're referring to the catalogue of your show at the Whitney Museum.

MR. FERBER: Yes, the show which originated at the Walker Art Center.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. That's the catalogue written by Wayne Anderson.

MR. FERBER: Yes. Now my sculpture is not, did you say you thought my sculpture was more massive now?

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Well, I don't think so. I wouldn't think that these circular pieces, or this one that you see here, or this one on the table, or the big circle are more massive then, or in any way resemble monolithic sculpture, and they're certainly not more massive than my earlier work.

MR. SANDLER: I was think of the individual elements but that would have to do with size, increased size I guess.

MR. FERBER: Yes. As you make things larger and as you are close to them of course any individual element seems more massive in cross-section. Now some works have a linear quality, such as The Flame of 1949 and this Game, as I call it, of 1950. They are linear. But I don't think they're thinner without being linear. and the main intention was to make use of space as of equal importance to the forms which penetrate the space. The earlier work, and by earlier work, certainly from 1930 to 1945, I was doing figures, more or less expressionist kind of figures, as many of us were doing. But beginning about 1946 or 1947 or 1948 in that period I began to do abstract sculpture, or what I would prefer to call it, non-representational. Because I would use the term "abstract" to refer to the kind of sculpture which was originated by the Russians and which is Constructivism and is really abstract. You know Cubism is not really abstract. It's even representational but it's often called abstract, and it isn't. Abstract, I suppose, should be a term applied only to things which have no reference to human, plant, animal, and such forms. And it's true that much of my work in the surrealist phase, which was about in the forties and fifties, had a surrealist tinge and could perhaps be related to animal and plant forms. And now perhaps the work is more abstract in that it is not referable to plant or animal forms but which still is largely a sculpture of gesture. I think the calligraphic idea which I've used in my sculpture for many years now beginning, when?, let's say perhaps one of the first calligraphs was done in 1954, well, no, earlier, I'm just looking at this catalogue. I think the first sculpture that I called a calligraph was this one done in 1953. This is just a part of it. Yes, here this one. This is the first sculpture I called a calligraph; 1953. And, as you see, it has thrusts which can be thought of as gestural. And I think Barbara Rose made use of that term referring to me as a sculptor who had regenerated the use of gesture. I think she discovered it right away. Now does that answer your question what I've just said about figurative and so on?

MR. SANDLER: Yes. Oh, sure.

MR. FERBER: Now we were talking a moment ago off the record about bases and the idea of getting away from the base. And I would like to refresh my memory by looking at some manuscripts in which I've made statements about the idea of getting away from the kind of base that was used for monolithic sculpture, sculpture without spaces but which displace space. You know the old Archimded principle of a solid object begin measured in terms of its volume by displacing water can be used with regard to monolithic sculpture which displaces the space and sort of in a figurative sense metaphorically pushes it aside. Now I think one of the first good examples of this idea of getting away from the base is this Flame which belongs to the Whitney, which was done in 1949. And about which I wrote, later it's true, not at the moment, not in 1949 but later, wrote later of my attempt to make the base as unimportant as possible. And that's why this stands on a point. And in the Game, which is a group of three forms, all standing on points but which can be moved around by little holes in the base, makes the base impermanent, as it were. And the volume of the sculpture in the Flame and in other of the possibility of the base holding up that sculpture, so it's a kind of trompe l'oeil concept.

MR. SANDLER: Well, the idea was to get away from the base as a dead form of sculpture?

MR. FERBER: To get away from the base as an anchor to the earth; yes, perhaps as a dead form. Now in this sculpture called The Cage, which was done in 1954, all the forms are suspended on wire and the base is there to support the wire and the wire supports the sculpture. Now it's an indirect way of avoiding the base. And then when I began to do the roof sculptures you might say I had two bases but the idea was simply to make the base, the bottom base, unimportant int hat the suspension from above was equally important. And then when I moved on to making sculptures which had a roof, and then later on the Environments, which developed out of the roof sculptures, in other words, I had sculptures with two walls and three walls which support the work, and then moved to using four walls some of which supported the sculptures, some of which were supported by the roof, some by the base, and some were supported by each other. I have always tried to make the sculpture as airy as, almost floating as possible. And when I moved into the concept of The Cage sculptures, which really came after the Environments and after the roof sculptures, I was trying to use a support which would not be the kind of massive base that traditional sculpture has. Now a good many contemporary sculptors, that is in the sixties, have made use of another kind of base, I mean they have made use of the floor. In other words, a sculpture unless it's hanging as a Calder is, and in a sense that's using the ceiling as a base, I mean everything depends on gravity or needs except that in outer space now we can have sculpture that floats. But everybody has to use a base. and I may be attached to the sculpture, or may not be. But the important thing is that a plinth or rectangular or circular and so on base was always for me a limitation which I tried to avoid. You know, for this spherical sculpture the only purpose of this base to which it's attached is to keep it from rolling because it really can be seen or placed in any position almost, some of which are much more satisfactory than others. It can roll around but in order to keep it from being rolled I attached it to something to hold it down. But I've done other spherical sculptures. You may remember that at the time of the project for An Unknown Political Prisoner which the English instituted not long after the war I made a spherical sculpture which stood on a point, that is just take a look in the other room and you'll see one similar to it right around the corner here there's a spherical sculpture.

MR. SANDLER: Oh, yes.

MR. FERBER: Which of course eventually refers tot the ground to keep it from rolling or falling over. But it stands on a point. So the idea of the base has always been of extreme importance to me as something that one must get rid of.

MR. SANDLER: Well, two things that do happen in your works during the fifties: one, the simplification of the elements in the work; and, two, the enlargement of scale. What leads to that?

MR. FERBER: Yes. Well, it's true that as I think with most artists as they get older, it seems to have been true for centuries, that unless simplification was a basic concept of the culture many artists who were rather complicated in their compositions and their forms were unsimple have gotten as they get older to simplify the forms in the paintings or the sculpture. And that's true I think of my work, too. I think that I began to move away from surfaces which had facture. The earlier the work even though done by welding out of metal certainly still suffered in a sense in relation to what I'm doing now. And to use a harsh work, suffered from the surface which was achieved in modeling. Now it's true that in many sculptors model out of wax or plasterer clay and achieve an extremely smooth surface almost in imitation of marble. But many bronzes certainly in the Renaissance and before the Renaissance and Greek sculpture had smooth surfaces. but part of the Impressionist impetus in painting carried over maybe that's it, carried over into sculpture and the broken surfaces, the surfaces with pronounced facture I think was a result of modeling of attempting to avoid an academic look.

MR. SANDLER: A polish?

MR. FERBER: A polished academic look. right. Now as I became more respectful, you might almost say, of the copper in which I work largely I thought of it as a material which could be left untouched except where it has to be joined together. But this is a complex cultural and almost metaphysical problem to which I don't have all the answers. I suppose most sculpture today has a polished look, some of which doesn't look academic, and of course some of it does. It depends on the sculpture.

Now moving in the direction of larger sculptures I suppose really came to me when I first made the roof sculptures, which was a device, as I said before, to avoid the base. And when I discovered that a roof sculpture could be supported in such a way that it never even touched the ground I could see the possibilities of walking under it. Now walking under it meant that it had to be in places at least sufficiently high so that you wouldn't hit your head against it. And this really started me in the direction of making larger things. Don't forget, too, that size as distinguished from scale was something that none of us could practice because of the expense involved. And as we became more successful we could afford to invest our effort and our materials and our time in larger pieces which we might have just instinctively avoided doing because of the immense cost. It isn't that it's cheaper to make things now. It's more expensive than ever. We were free to think in larger terms perhaps simply because of our success or subsidies of various kinds. Certainly an environmental sculpture demands large size. Although I remember Philip Johnson saying when he looked at the first one at the Whitney that he would like to see it so small that he would trip over it because this is something that is his hangup to be involved in some kind of contiguity and contact with works of art.

MR. SANDLER: I want to hold till later . . .

MR. FERBER: Excuse me, Irving. That machine works very well doesn't it?

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Is it yours, or do you rent it?

MR. SANDLER: No, no, it's lent to me by the Archives. I wanted to hold the problem of environmental sculpture until either later today or possibly if we can do one more quick hour because I really would like to explore just that one thing. I've drawn up a long questionnaire. But I wanted to ask about one more thing while we're on it. Your conception of color in sculpture. I guess what really kicked the thought off in my mind was the piece that you put out in front of the Plaza Hotel, actually to the side.

MR. FERBER: Oh, yes. Right.

MR. SANDLER: How have you thought about that throughout your career?

MR. FERBER: Well, early on when I began to make welded sculpture, and I'm looking here for an example of it, I think it was about 1954, I made these and another one which I don't think is illustrated here but which belonged to Adolph Gottlieb until it was burned up int he fire in his studio. And I would say that was 1954 because it was a roof sculpture, on of the first roof sculptures. And it was painted yellow.

MR. SANDLER: It was painted?

MR. FERBER: It was painted yellow because it was made of copper and I saw it as something which had to be applied tot he surface instead of incorporated in the surface or incorporated in the material. The application of the color was necessary because working with metal one couldn't do anything but paint it. And of course it's an old tradition. The Greeks and Egyptians and Romans painted their sculpture. Now I only mention 1954, this sculpture which was done in 1954 was painted too. It was painted red. I have since removed the color from it and then re-applied it and so on. I haven't used color in my sculpture until, oh, I don't know, four or five years ago when I made some roof sculptures out of fiberglass. And then I could incorporate the color directly in the material. And that seemed somehow a more rational approach or more integral approach. I think color is something that has not exactly been solved. If you paint a sculpture or color a sculpture all one color it's not a hell of a lot different from leaving it bright bronze color or bright copper color; nobody thinks of sculpture being colored when it's black. And a good deal of bronze sculpture is just black or such a dark brown it looks black. So I suppose what I'm really think of is multiple color. Four or five years ago I made several pieces one of which is here in two or three colors. It hasn't been one of my strong points. I haven't worked at it. But I would say certainly beginning in 1954 it was something that I have been thinking about seriously.

MR. SANDLER: Do you use different kinds of metal to achieve color or do you use acids and alkalis?

MR. FERBER: No, I've never done what Lassaw did which was to ariegate the color of the metal by using acids or various chemicals. No, I haven't done that. I've colored sculpture in order to give it a more uniform shade or color so that it wouldn't have an impressionist surface. Because variegated color on a surface, although charming as in many patinas of old marble or bronze sculpture is extremely fetching because of just the beauty of color.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: And the idea of patina and so on which recalls age and antiquity. But I think that variegated color on a surface destroys it. As a matter of fact, in wood sculptures which I did until about 1944 the surface is often varied by the grain of the wood. And although very beautiful, whenever anybody talked about the grain of the wood I had a feeling they weren't even looking at the sculpture. So I've never approved of what Lassaw had done in sort of beautifying the surface.

MR. SANDLER: You think that an emphasis on surface incident can detract form the apprehension of the total form?

MR. FERBER: Yes. After all, sculpture is an art of form. If it doesn't exist as form it doesn't exist. One of the stupidities of contemporary critical writing about painting is that they talk about painting as consisting of color. Well, except for monochromatic painting, of which there's very little, painting has always existed in terms of color. That's what differentiates it from a pencil drawing or an etching or something of that kind. Color is what painting is about. In addition to many other things. But without color painting is a kind of non-existent enterprise. And I think in a sense form is what we're concerned with whether it's thin form or thick form or monolithic form or open form. That's what sculpture is about. And I think anything that destroys the possibility of seeing that form can invalidate the sculpture.

MR. SANDLER: One small thing: when you use the work "calligram" or calligraphy is there any connection at all to oriental calligraphy?

MR. FERBER: No. They're not, as oriental calligraphy was essentially an ideogram. I think much calligraphy developed out of ideograms representing in Chinese calligraphy, you know, something like a house. Of course as the script or calligraphy became more complicated there were signs which represented more abstract ideas than a house or a tree. But the term calligraph as I use it represents the action of the eye or the hand, or both, or the mind that occurs in following the direction of the calligraph whether it means anything or not. That is whether a calligraph is meaningful in terms of ideas one always admires it in terms of its sweep, of its movement, of the direction of the hand in making the brush stroke. Now in a way this is what I meant by gesture. And the word "calligraph" in my sculpture simply means that it has a movement instead of being static and has a kind of gesture which is expressive and doesn't depend, and depends to some extent upon its meaning, or for its meaning upon the gestural or calligraphic movement of the piece. But it is not related in any one to one, or two to one or one to five way with calligraphic writing.

MR. SANDLER: When we were talking before about color in painting . . . You are a painter . . .

MR. FERBER: Yes. I've done quite a bit of painting.

MR. SANDLER: And I just wonder about how that happened because if my information is right it happened a number of years after you had been a sculptor.

MR. FERBER: No, that's not true. When I went to art school, which was until 1930, I went to Woodstock int he summer and did no sculpture at all but began to paint. And I painted a considerable number of works that summer and for a year or two afterwards, some of which were exhibited. Actually, I started my career, I think I mentioned to you earlier, as an etcher and thought in representational and illusionistic terms. And my early paintings were representational and had the illusionistic quality of perspective and so on. So I may say I began as an etcher, turned sculpture, then painted for a year or two and then went back to sculpture and then I didn't do any serious painting although I did many watercolors and colored drawings all the time concomitant with the sculpture.

MR. SANDLER: How does the painter experience differ for you?

MR. FERBER: Well, the painting experience is, one might say, largely more satisfying i the process than sculpture. Sculpture is except for the small things which one makes rather quickly, the realization of sculpture as it becomes larger is a very slow and unrewarding procedure in my eyes. It's laborious, it takes a tremendous amount of time to achieve one idea. And if there's any excitement in the sculpture it comes with the original concept and with seeing the finished work. But in the course of painting, and this is true even though you change the sculpture as you work and modify it, everything is rather slow. Painting at lease the way I've done it the changes that one can achieve are rapid in terms of time and one can realize many ideas almost a the same time by working on four or five paintings at the same time. It's more exciting, too, in that the achieving of an idea in painting is more elusive; you can lose it very quickly. You don't ever lose your idea in sculpture. I may not come off as well as you'd expect it but you can't actually lose it. In painting a surface or an area may destroy the whole painting. But one of the wonderful things about painting is that you can rectify your errors. You can scrape, wash off, and start over again ont he same canvas leaving parts of it untouched. So for me it's much more satisfying than making sculpture. But I got hung up, you might say, on doing sculpture. My major reputation is based on my sculpture and it's difficult to drop it. I suppose I don't really want to drop it, but I would like to do more painting and, as you know, I've had two painting shows and for several years did almost nothing but painting. That was, oh, when was that?

MR. SANDLER: 1957? 1958?

MR. FERBER: 1957? Yes, in those years. Well, what's the date of that? No date.

MR. SANDLER: This is 1960.

MR. FERBER: Yes, 1960. That was the second show I had. So it must have been around 1955, 1956, 1957 that I did a lot of painting and up to after the sixties.

MR. SANDLER: Are these for you independent activities or do you find interconnections and interchange? Do you pick up ideas in painting and move them back into sculpture and vice versa?

MR. FERBER: It's hard for me to answer that. I know that many people looking at my paintings say that there's a strong relationship, as in this one which was used on the poster for the Emmerich show. It's a kind of calligraph. But the one in the other room which you can see, that ochre and white, doesn't look very calligraphic to me. It doesn't look very sculptural. It seems a more painterly thing. A good many of my paintings although they consist of discreet forms they're not abstract expressionist paintings in that they're not swirls of paint. The forms are discreet. I don't think they're sculptural.

MR. SANDLER: but in other words, what you're suggesting is that they tend to be rather independent form one another except that you're the artist doing both?

MR. FERBER: Yes. Well, I think there's an ambiguity and an overlap. I think that some of the paintings have forms which I've used in sculpture, as in this one, which is close to a sculpture I made. But in general I think they're pretty independent.

MR. SANDLER: A more general thing, and this of course has happened to some of your recent work, and I was just curious about the circular pieces, this one here, the very large one that's going into, that's a Mies building?

MR. FERBER: No, it's a Gropius building.

MR. SANDLER: A Gropius building, I'm sorry. Or the one you have at the Whitney tend to be essentially, I'm using this in quotes, a "silhouette;" in other words, they're flat sculptures. And this tends to be a very difficult realm for an artist who supposes his piece of sculpture to be involved in the round to move into. Could you talk to that point for a minute, these flat sculptures . . .

MR. FERBER: Well, I recognize what you mean and at the same time that I'm doing relatively flat pieces I'm also doing three things which have more space, occupy more space. As, let's say, The Cage sculpture like that

which is recent and circular sculpture which looks flat except that it has a considerable spread.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: You know, I don't think that the question is of great importance, Irving. Sculpture consist of form. Now I know that there's a relatively close relationship between low relief and painting. I mean that really in terms of low relief. but you may remember that I did several sculptures for architectural purposes which were fastened to walls. Now they were very high reliefs such as this one, or the one on the synagogue in New Jersey. The sculpture like the on in New Jersey on that wall stands something like tree feet, projects three feet from the wall. Now in looking at it your eye tends to flatten it out against the wall. But it actually has very high three-dimensional quality. It's true that a sculpture such as this calligraph is most likely best seen from one side. But I don't think that that relates it to painting nor does it make it less sculptural. It simply is a flat sculpture instead of a round one.

MR. SANDLER: The reason I raised the question is that something flashed into mind that had to do with David Smith who among other things made a great many silhouette or flat sculptures. And several times he complained to me about the adverse reaction he had gotten on the part of sculptors who insisted that sculpture had to be in the round, and that his work wasn't. And I just wondered if you had come up against this or had thought about it at all.

MR. FERBER: Yes, I've noticed that people have mentioned it's flat instead of round. It seems you can see it better from one side rather than from the end. Here's an example of a fairly flat sculpture which was done in 1948, this one called, Hercules. This one is sort of taken from a three-quarter view. It's certainly much flatter than many of my other sculptures. I don't know, here's another one: this portrait of David Hare, for example, is certainly quite flat. but it doesn't look less sculptural to me and I think the academic argument that a sculpture has to be something that you walk around is simply and academic statement. Don't forget that Donatello's sculptures and the Michelangelo sculptures in the Medici Chapel are best seen from the front. The Donatello sculptures on the tower of the church in Florence are in niches against the wall. You look at them from the front. Are they less sculptural than something which you have to walk around and look at from behind? Actually in most figurative sculpture, you look at the sculpture from the front or the side or the back since you can't look through it. You're always looking at a profile. And one of the ways in which sculpture used to be taught was to talk about the profiles. In other words, they used to think of sculpture as a combination of thousands of drawings all in profile.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: If you look at a monolithic sculpture from the so-called front you're not surprised by what you find in the back. I don't know if this answers your question.

MR. SANDLER: It answers it fine. I just wanted to get your sense of this, you know, because I had a reaction that you had heard this about your work and I know that other artists have also sort of been put down or questioned when they moved sculpture towards . . . the relief was accepted. If it hung on the wall that was okay. But if it was free standing and moved towards the flat sculpture then there were all sorts of questions asked.

MR. FERBER: Yes. Well, you know I think there's an old truism: art is as good as it is, or art is what you make of it, or art consists of surprises. I think really what's important is whether it comes off or not. And I've heard this kind of sotto voce criticism of flat sculpture, I've always considered it completely unimportant.

MR. SANDLER: I'd like to swing over to something else for a little while, Herbert. You joined the Parsons Gallery in about when? 1946? 1947?

MR. FERBER: No, I think it was a little later about 1948; I think; I'd have to verify it. I was there about year when I had my first show and I don't remember that whether it was 1949 or 1948.

MR. SANDLER: Well then, when does Barney Newman write the catalogue?

MR. FERBER: He wrote the introduction to the first show I had at Betty Parsons, and that is just a question of documentation. I can look it up.

MR. SANDLER: Oh, sure. But I wondered a little bit about that scene at the Parsons Gallery because at that point Parsons along with Kootz I guess and then a little bit later but not so much Egan also was sort of a center, one of the centers of vanguard art in New York. And what was happening then? What were things like in 1943 and 1949? Recognition certainly had not been achieved.

MR. FERBER: No, recognition was limited to recognition of and by each other as artists and a few critics or patrons, but very few of those because it was pretty much an enterprise that was self-supporting.

MR. SANDLER: You mean supported by artists?

MR. FERBER: Yes, by the artists. And whoever had a space in which to show the works. Betty Parsons was independently wealthy enough to run a gallery without depending upon selling very much. And Kootz actually, as you know, subsidized his artists to a small degree and went broke doing it. Which was heroic of him. but he sold. Well, what was the attitude? You know the names of the people who were in each gallery. We were all pretty friendly with each other because altogether there were only maybe a dozen or fifteen of us. The sculptors hardly counted, as you know. David Smith was showing. I was showing. Lipton began to show a little later at Betty Parsons. Lassaw was showing some place on Eighth Street, you know that club. But we knew each other. There was a constant communication between us about the problems of what later became known as the New York School. What it meant to be an artist who was doing non-figurative painting or sculpture, or painting or sculpture which had other motivations than representation. And, as you know, the concept of the ideogram was considerably touted by Barney Newman, and Adolph Gottlieb did pictographs.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. He had what he called an idographic picture show.

MR. FERBER: Yes. And these were new forms at least for American art and perhaps even for world art. At least the emphasis was new. And there was very little or no understanding or approval. As a matter of fact, I met Mocsanyi the other day in Bloomingdale's and he remembers a forum which was given at the Art Students League. I don't know whether you were there or not. It must have been about 1950 or 1951. And it was called The Schism Between the Artist and the Public was of extreme importance, that it represented the gap between the avant garde and the rear guard or the status quo, and that only by the continual existence of such a schism could an active and avant garde art develop and continue to develop and continue to have a viable form. And Mocsanyi said, "What do you think of that now?" because he got up at that forum and said, "If abstract expressionism is around long enough we'll all understand it." And I said to him, "Well, I'm still misunderstood." And he said, "But you're sell! You're selling." And with that we shook hands and departed. Mocsanyi was always a kind of a thorn. He attended those forums int he early fifties and one of the things that he couldn't tolerate was when I did the sculpture for the synagogue, which was in 1951. Actually it was commissioned earlier, I think in 1949 or 1950. I spent a year making models and drawings and another year making the sculpture, so I suppose it was about 1949. And when he finally saw the sculpture he said, "How could you as an abstract artist do a sculpture called The Burning Bush?" And I said, "Mocsanyi, it's not called The Burning Bush. That's what it was named." And that's true. I had done and I can prove with drawings that I had done some sculptures quite similar to it motivated, it's true, by plant forms such as cactus and so on and made use of those drawings to make a sculpture which somebody wanted to call The Burning Bush because it was going on a synagogue.

MR. SANDLER: But what happened? There must have been a very short period of time, say, from 1947 or around that to 1950, what happened in American art because something very big happened. How would you account for that?

MR. FERBER: Well, I think I can account for it much in the same way that everybody else accounts for it because it seems to have been pretty factual, and I suppose there will be esoteric or individualistic memories about it. But we began to be uninterested in representation and in expressionism. I think expressionism was important. The possibility of distorting the human or landscape form into a recognizable but unphotograph, not naturalistic, was one of the earliest impetuses. Then Surrealism. Now when did Surrealism become important? It became important, I think, when Berton and other European painters, particularly French, came to America because of the war in 1940, 1942 and so on. And those refugees very few of whom became acclimatized permanently, actually lived as a very separate group with patrons that American artists didn't have, nevertheless influenced American art to the extent that Russian constructivism, which was earlier, never influenced it except for, you know, a few people. I think Lassaw was influenced by Constructivism. But very few.

MR. SANDLER: De Rivera.

MR. FERBER: De Rivera and some of the painters.

MR. SANDLER: Lippold.

MR. FERBER: Yes. And some of the painters in Brooklyn, you know, the guy who died recently.

MR. SANDLER: Reinhardt?

MR. FERBER: No.

MR. SANDLER: Diller?

MR. FERBER: Diller, yes. Reinhardt was a more abstract expressionist.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: But Diller was pretty pure all the time. but as I mentioned, I think, if I remember our last interview, the Surrealists, I mean generally the European artists gave us a sense of what it was really to be an artist and not just a teacher who did art, or a dentist, as I am, who does art, but somebody who, not to use a hackneyed phrase, dedicated himself to art, but whose life is art, whose most important enterprise is art, something on which he lays down all of his efforts so that if, as some of our friends have become somewhat irrational and monomaniacal about their work, it's not too difficult to understand what caused that. When a man puts all of his efforts and all of his physical strength and his marriage and his children down on the line it's not surprising that they should become jealous of what happens to it. So I think those European artists gave American artists, except for the old time professional, you know, academicians, gave us a sense of being artists and the influence of Surrealism was very strong. I think it influence all the artists I know who have since moved away from it or continued something of that tradition. Certainly it influenced Clyfford Still and Barney Newman and Rothko and Reinhardt was perhaps influenced by it at the beginning.

MR. SANDLER: And Motherwell. And Baziotes.

MR. FERBER: Certainly Motherwell. And certainly myself. And Baziotes, I think I mentioned him. Adolph Gottlieb although he was doing pictographs they had a strong surrealist flavor.

MR. SANDLER: Is there a conscious turn from surrealist ideas?

MR. FERBER: I don't think there was a conscious turn except in a few cases. I think that certainly Reinhardt moved consciously away from it. And Barney Newman certainly did. At least to look at his work in an objective fashion one gets that impression. I think most likely Newman may still talk in mystical or metaphysical terms about the meaning of his art which may give it a surrealist flavor. But objectively his work is certainly based upon a very abstract and constructivist Mondrianesque tradition. What was beautifully sentimental in those days, was the lack of obvious jealousy or competitiveness amongst the artists that except for a very few cases there were no enmities, and although we were in different galleries we never thought of those galleries as being more important than another one, as anyone of them being more important than another. They were all simply a stage where our works could be displayed, a showcase. And we cut across gallery lines in a way that doesn't seem possible any longer, or at least is often not possible. I remember one of my contemporaries, a sculptor, when I had a show recently, said, "Oh, the Emmerich Gallery. Oh, yes, I know that one. That's just on the floor below mine." I mean this way of describing another gallery is really funny. But what was terribly important was the constant exchange of ideas. And as you know, the school which Motherwell and . . .

MR. SANDLER: That's right. The subject of the Artists School.

MR. FERBER: Yes. And Rothko. But principally Motherwell as far as I could gather. Remember I was never a teacher in that school but I was friendly with all the people who started it. I think it was principally Motherwell's idea. Although Clyfford Still claimed to be one of the originators. I think it's not true. I think Clyfford Still's statements about his ideas and his work simply have to be open to examination.

MR. SANDLER: What was his role in that?

MR. FERBER: Well, he participated in one or two discussions. According to Motherwell, I think just one discussion but before the school started.

MR. SANDLER: No, I mean also at the Parsons Gallery because he was friendly then with Newman and Rothko.

MR. FERBER: Well, he had very little role at the Parsons Gallery because he was living in California and teaching there. And he sent his paintings to be exhibited several times and appeared on the scene for brief moments. His closest friend was Rothko, who had been brought out to California by McAgy to teach for a summer occasionally. But I think Clyfford had very little role. I think the principal role in that gallery was played by Newman who was Betty Parsons's sort of close adviser before he became an active painter.

MR. SANDLER: About when was that?

MR. FERBER: When he became an active painter?

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Well, I don't want to give a date because that's another documentary question.

MR. SANDLER: Yes, it is.

MR. FERBER: He had a show at a certain date. That was his first show.

MR. SANDLER: In 1950.

MR. FERBER: 1950. Well, it must have taken him a couple of years to paint those pictures. On the other hand, when he had his first show, I'm surprised that you say 1950 because it seems later to me, because already in 1950 he was considered to be a latecomer. And when he first gave a talk at the school, the subject of the Artists, he was introduced by Rothko who gave a very laudatory introduction to bring Newman to the podium. but he was at that time already considered a latecomer on the scene in terms of Rothko, Motherwell, Gottlieb, myself, Clyfford Still, and Baziotes.

MR. SANDLER: So would you say he was rather known for his writing and his polemical activity?

MR. FERBER: Yes, you know, Newman used to be described certainly before his first show as the spokesman of the artists. And he did a lot of talking. Reinhardt was a figure in those days in the Betty Parsons Gallery. I knew him slightly at that time, enough so that when I did that first public sculpture for the synagogue in 1951 he protested against it as a commercial job. Which was to be his line from there on, as you know.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Although he departed considerably from the purity of that line to sell his work, which he used to say was not really the object of his enterprise. Well, it isn't the object of any artist's enterprise. And he did a lot to make himself a figure int he art world, you know, for the few years before his death.

MR. SANDLER: Pollock was with the gallery.

MR. FERBER: Pollock was with the gallery.

MR. SANDLER: And where does Tony Smith figure in the situation?

MR. FERBER: Well, Tony Smith was a peripheral figure, a friend, particularly of Pollock's. He most likely was one of the first people to ever buy a Pollock. He was not wealthy but he had enough money to think of buying. And he was an architect.

MR. SANDLER: Was it known that he was painting at the time?

MR. FERBER: Yes, it was vaguely known although he never showed his work. And I visited Tony Smith at his home in New Jersey but he never showed his work. He had bought at that time Pollock, I think Rothko, Stamos. And he had a group of young men around him, young architects and painters or craftsmen who were devoted to him. And I would say Smith was one of the greatest talkers, sort of private lecturers about abstract expressionism that I've ever met. Much more lucid and much more imaginative in an understandable way in the sense that he hewed to the line about the work he was examining or talking about then Barney Newman who indulged in rich fantasy which was valuable but which had fantastical and very loose relationship to the work he was looking at. Tony Smith installed the second, I think, or third show that I had at Betty Parsons. He wanted to set it up in such a way that there were avenues divided by sheets of plastic film in such a way that there were kind of streets sos that as you walked down around the gallery you weren't able to see more then one or two sculptures at a time. And it was a very good idea except that we didn't have the money to install it properly and when it was finally installed and these low partitions were put up in such a way that you could only see one or two sculptures at a time it looked flimsy and sort of amateurish. We took it down before the show opened. But Smith was very vocal and verbose and convinced supporter of abstract expressionists paintings and sculpture.

MR. SANDLER: Was Pollock around much? Or was he mostly out in the country then?

MR. FERBER: Well, Pollock of course was living int he country but he was around enough to leave an impression on everybody. He was drinking very heavily at that time. Although he would go on the wagon and vegetable juice cures for periods. He was very important to a few artists. He was extremely important to Tony Smith who thought of him as very great, recognized him as very great from the beginning, and who had a close relationship with him. Even though Pollock lived on the island . . .

[Interruption]

MR. SANDLER: This is the second side of the second interview with Herbert Ferber on December 31, 1968. You were talking about Pollock.

MR. FERBER: Yes. And about Tony Smith. Well then, Tony Smith was a very important critic but in a favorable way of abstract expressionism. And Pollock was already, even in 1943 and 1949, a figure with a myth because of his drinking, his violence. And his violence was very impressive. It was something that you could easily be frightened by; and many people were. And he went, you know, the Existential limit more than any other artist. But actually that's a romantic way of talking about him. He went the limit as any alcoholic does. People who are

addicted to the bottle drink until they pass out. Which is what he did. Then people would have to carry him home or get him into a taxi and get him home and so on. What was most impressive about him when he was sober was his reticence and sometimes his astute statements about painting. I know Bill Rubin has quoted him and thinks of some of the statements he made as being particularly brilliant or perceptive. And I take that on faith. I've read the quotations and they are sort of impressive. But in many conversations and times that I had been with Pollock I was not more impressed by what he had to say than by, let's say, what Rothko or Barney Newman or Baziotes or Tomlin had to say about the world of art or about anything else.

MR. SANDLER: What role did Rothko play?

MR. FERBER: Well, Rothko was very much a part of that scene. As you know, he wrote some kind of a manifesto with Gottlieb which was published in the New York Times. He showed with the rest of us. He was a close friend particularly of Still at that time and Barney Newman. Then later when I came to the Gallery, I came into the Gallery a few years after they were with it, Rothko and I became extremely close friends and also I was very close to Barney Newman. Those two men, Rothko played the role, well, I would say primarily of an artist. Although he is an intelligent man and often had very perceptive, bright things to say about any problem at the moment, he also took stands which were maybe a little more radical than the stands that other people took in relation to institutions. But I'm not even sure of that. We were all rather against the Establishment. So it's sort of rather surprising now to hear that term used by the hippies and the yippies in 1968 and 1969 as being against the Establishment. We were violently opposed to the Establishment. And, as you know, Adolph Gottlieb organized a picket line around the Museum of Modern Art to protest the fact that they didn't buy American Art.

MR. SANDLER: And then the Irascibles.

MR. FERBER: And there were the Irascibles. I've forgotten the date of that.

MR. SANDLER: 1950.

MR. FERBER: Is that 1950? yes, a lot happened between 1947 and 1951 I guess. A great deal.

MR. SANDLER: You know, this is such a sticky thing I don't even think it's sort of one really can't get into it but, you know, there has recently been a lot of antipathy or hostility among certainly Newman, Still, Rothko sort of stayed out, he comes in peripherally, and now Newman and Motherwell.

MR. FERBER: Well, not exactly peripherally. Don't forget that Newman . . .

MR. SANDLER: He comes peripheral in to the hostility. He sort of stays out of that. That's what I meant.

MR. FERBER: Well, he tries to stay out of it. But Newman attacked him publically and in writing. I think it's principally Clyfford Still who has, in my opinion, falsified the dates of his work in an attempt to show that he was the first to do this or the first to do that. It's a childish activity. It has some historical importance but qualitatively it doesn't seem to me to be of great importance. but you were going to say something about the stickiness of . . .

MR. SANDLER: No. I wanted to ask you about that particular what your reaction to that situation when, you know, Newman and Still sort of turned on one another.

MR. FERBER: Well, they not only turn on each other. But Newman turned on me. He turned on me because he felt that I was too close a friend of Rothko's. So he sort of stopped talking to me. It's true that I was a very close friend of Rothko's. But I was also a very close friend of his. But he couldn't stand, well, I don't know what he couldn't stand, I guess what he couldn't stand was anything less than a complete devotion to himself. Clyfford Still is another story. He's most likely more paranoid than any of the others. My reaction to it is that it is just plain tragedy. It's sad that a group of artists who loved each other and supported each other should have been influenced for one reason or another, none of those single reasons is sufficient, it's certainly not money, it's certainly not priority, it's certainly not, well, whatever it is, there are many reasons; and it's sad that these artists no longer talk to each other.

MR. SANDLER: Several people have mentioned to me, I think Stamos was one, that during this period after you joined the Gallery there used to be meetings at your place, a salons, I don't know what one would call it, parties, or a kind of salon, where you became one of the sort of focal points where artists met.

MR. FERBER: Yes, it is true that in those years, I would say from 1947 to the late 50s we used to meet at my home very frequently for dinner, drinks. In those days it was somewhat different from now. It seems to me different. People used to come to each other's homes or we came to each other's homes after dinner. We didn't come for dinner. Because nobody could afford to supply dinner for everybody. But we were always able to manage drinks after dinner. We used to meet, you know, around 8:30 or 9:00 after dinner and sit around until

the earlier morning hours talking, talking, talking about each other's work, about European art, about ideas, about books, about everything. It was a free-wheeling, open forum. And my home, which was up on Riverside Drive at 116th Street, 117th Street was somehow a focal point. Perhaps we had a little more money and it was a little more stable matrimonial situation at that time. Motherwell had enough money to entertain but he was having a broken marriage and another marriage and so on at that time. And so it wasn't so congenial. But at my home we had a sort of stable atmosphere. And it became a meeting place and sort of well known. And perhaps the fact that I was a dentist, a doctor at columbia University, people used to ask me about their medical problems. I don't know, not really, but we . . .

MR. SANDLER: consultations on the side, huh?

MR. FERBER: Yes, not exactly, I didn't mean that. What I really meant is it perhaps gave them a sense that I was more stable because of my somewhat rational life. At any rate, it was those were very beautiful years when we were all friends and all felt able to discuss all kinds of problems openly and without very much rancor.

MR. SANDLER: Were there other people aside from artists involved?

MR. FERBER: Oh, yes. Writers like George Denison who has become sort of well known now. And some of the museum people. Alfred Barr and Dorothy Miller used to come. Those were the days when Alfred Barr and Dorothy Miller didn't know very much about what was going on and they were eager to learn. It's interesting, you know, that since they were devoted to Matisse and Picasso and European art that when they finally became aware that something was happening in America they were quite eager to learn about it. And so they used to come.

MR. SANDLER: What about critics? did Clement Greenberg come, for instance?

MR. FERBER: Well, I knew Clement through my old friend, William Philips at Partisan Review. And Clement came occasionally. But we weren't very close friends. And what's his name? oh, at the Jewish museum . . .

MR. SANDLER: Hunter?

MR. FERBER: Hunter. But that was later. He came back from Europe, as you know, where he had been writing for the Tribune, I suppose. And he wanted to learn all about American art. So he came fairly frequently. But I would say yes there were writers. There was a couple of my friends at Columbia University who were, well, more interested int he social sciences like Leo Lowenthal and Herbert Marcus were there occasionally and met some of these artists. Then, as you know, my wife Ilsa at that time was an art historian and a few art historians came, people from NYU and Columbia. But that was more unusual. And particularly the art historians didn't get along well with the artists.

MR. SANDLER: Who were the people, would Schapiro have been one? Or Goldwater?

MR. FERBER: Oh, yes. Well, Schapiro was very sympathetic and he was a very close friend, not a close friend, he was a very close acquaintance of mine at that time and of several of the other artists. He admired their work; I think particularly he admired Rothko's work. But I had long talks with him about my own work. He used to come for lunch frequently. But he spent an occasional evening. As you know, he's not very much of a nighthawk. Never wa.

MR. SANDLER: No.

MR. FERBER: but he used to come for lunch frequently from Columbia which was around the corner. The names of those people, there were some people from NYU.

MR. SANDLER: Goldwater?

MR. FERBER: Oh, yes. Goldwater came frequently, fairly frequently, yes, every once in a while and Louise Bourgeois came.

MR. SANDLER: What about de Kooning? Was he part of . . .

MR. FERBER: I didn't know de Kooning very well. I knew him well enough so that in 1949 we knew each other well enough so that I gave him a piece of sculpture for painting.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. I stored that for him for a couple of years.

MR. FERBER: Oh, yes, you had that piece of sculpture.

MR. SANDLER: Because he was in between studios and everything. He's got it back now I think.

MR. FERBER: Yes, it's out in East Hampton.

MR. SANDLER: What about people like Harold Rosenberg? Was he involved?

MR. FERBER: I knew Harold in those days through William Phillips.

MR. SANDLER: That's right.

MR. FERBER: William Phillips and I went to high school together and lived int he same neighborhood in the Bronx and we went to college together. We're still friends. He's my oldest friend. My God! Since we were twelve years old. That's a hell of a, over fifty years. But I got to know Harold and Clem and other writers, particularly those who contributed to PR through William. And when Clem was doing the art consulting for PR he ran drawings by artists. I had one done.

MR. SANDLER: What was the nature of the talk? Was it about formal things? Or more physical or content things.?

MR. FERBER: I don't think the painters really ever discussed things in a formal way. That was left to the simple minded sculptors. And it's interesting that all through those years I never made a friend amongst the sculptors. I had friends who were writers and I had friends who were painters, social scientists, and philosophers, and art historians, and so on. I never really had a friend who was a sculptor. I think perhaps David Hare and I were fairly friendly for a short period of time. But I really couldn't stand the sculptors because they talked about, you say "formal," I would say "technical" things. And it was a terrible bore. So in contrast to the sculptors, the painters talked about ideas, ideas of art and about art, about criticism, about literature in relation to questions of art, about the artist's role in society. Because don't forget that was shortly after socially committed art when we were all opposed to something, to which we were all opposed.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. But it was still a problem?

MR. FERBER: It was still something which we perhaps felt guilty about. Because don't forget the Surrealists were terribly concerned with Marxism.

MR. SANDLER: What about Existentialism? Was there much awareness?

MR. FERBER: I don't think there was any interest in that until much later.

MR. SANDLER: By "much later" you mean into the fifties?

MR. FERBER: I would say in the late fifties. I've forgotten when, what the hell is his name? that philosopher at NYU.

MR. SANDLER: Berrett?

MR. FERBER: Yes. What's his first name?

MR. SANDLER: William.

MR. FERBER: William Barrett. Who I knew quite well wrote that book about What Is Existentialism. That sort of started it in America. Although Kierkegaard and Kaftka and Sartre were . But that was all very much I think much later. I can't remember dates very well. But, you know, Surrealism was a constant source of discussion. Because Baziotes was always a surrealist artist. And Motherwell was always deeply interested in Surrealism both as a painter and as a philosopher and writer.

MR. SANDLER: But was there a reaction against it? At one point did people just . . .

MR. FERBER: I don't think there was ever a reaction against Surrealism.

MR. SANDLER: The point Philip Pavia makes . . .

MR. FERBER: I think Philip Pavia is completely wrong, to put it mildly, and for some reason, which I haven't been able to understand, he has some kind of animus against Surrealism and its manifestations in American art. And, as you know, he makes a kind of sculpture which is, you know, Primitivistic or something.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: But there was never a reaction against Surrealism. I think that Newman, Gottlieb, Clyfford Still, Rothko, Motherwell, I, I don't know about Lipton, I haven't had much to do with him, David Hare, and possibly wit

the exception of Lippold and some of the painters who were connected with Brooklyn College school, all of these men I've mentioned were indebted to, and acknowledged their debt to Surrealism. I don't think there was ever a reaction against it. We turned slowly to other fields. Because, as you know, Surrealism never invented any procedures in painting or in sculpture which were inventive enough to transcend the literary. And by "literary" I include Freudian and subconscious and unconscious ideology, motivation. They never invented any procedures. Their sculpture was traditional. Their painting was traditional. The subject matter was less so. But one of the things that I think that the painters and sculptors of my generation who became known as the New York School, one of the things they did was to invent formal ideas. And my conviction is that without the invention of formal ideas art remains static. And then the question is whether the ideas are good enough to have validity.

MR. SANDLER: Did you know Gorky?

MR. FERBER: I knew Gorky slightly, very slightly, enough to stop and talk to; but I never knew him well. I think that de Kooning knew him best perhaps.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: And David Hare knew him very well. you see he was part of that Surrealist group of European artists which Motherwell and Baziotes were attached to through Peggy Guggenheim. Marekeen and Hare. Although Rothko and Clyfford Still were showing at Peggy Guggenheim's they never became as closely attached to the Surrealist group as Gorky and Baziotes and Motherwell.

MR. SANDLER: Tomlin is a curios figure because he sort of comes rather late, too.

MR. FERBER: Yes.

MR. SANDLER: And yet seems to have bee around and also I understand was admired, or people like him.

MR. FERBER: Well, Tomlin was a fantastic figure. He was extremely successful doing a kind of Cubist painting and he showed that for years in new York. And sold it very successfully. He was, I suppose, most successful financially of anybody until he decided that he had to make a change of some kind in his work. And did so. And moved into Betty Parsons. He was accepted readily by everybody because he was very modest, very straightforward and honest, extremely intelligent. but a very irrational person in his beliefs, well, in his beliefs. I mean he believed in ghosts. And he lived a long time in England, or a year or two in England, and had lived in a haunted house or castle or something. And he really believed in that kind of thing. But he was one of the few artists who had a sharp interest in poetry. One of his friends was Jenn Carrig, the poet. And I was able to talk to him. And Ilsa and he were very fond of each other and talked a good deal about literature, more so with each other than was possible with most artists except in a very limited way; except for Motherwell who knows a good deal about French literature.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: but most of the artists had a smattering. I suppose Newman has read a good deal. Rothko has read a good deal. But it wasn't something that they were involved in. Tomlin was really very interested in literature. And also he was a strange character in that he was perhaps the only gentleman amongst all of us. He always gave the impression of having been born into the English aristocracy. Actually he was the son or brother of a presbyterian or Anglican minister in New England. And nothing could be plainer than his background. But he'd lived in Europe and in England and had acquired a manner and a nonchalant way of dressing which somehow impressed everybody as being very English gentleman.

MR. SANDLER: Did you know Roland Crampton at all?

MR. FERBER: Very slightly. Just enough to say hello.

MR. SANDLER: He's a very shadowy figure.

MR. FERBER: Yes.

MR. SANDLER: One day I sort of mean to look into him. One of the things, because we're talking about Parsons, was that around 1951-1952 most people left the Gallery. And at that point, too, it seems as if people sort of began to pull apart from one another. What happened there? Why did it happen? There was a show also at the Museum of Modern Art, on of those American shows that seems to have . . .

MR. FERBER: You mean the one that Dorothy Miller put on?

MR. SANDLER: Yes. That Still, Rothko, Pollock, Tomlin, and a few other people were in and it all happened sort of at once. People left the Gallery . . .

MR. FERBER:

MR. SANDLER: Yes. I think so. They leave the Gallery. They sort of pull apart. And I've always been curious about what happened at that moment.

MR. FERBER: I wish I could remember the date of the . . . on which I left Parsons. I left before Rothko did actually. What happened simply was that for years we were dissatisfied with that aspect of the Betty Parsons Gallery which was the business or financial one. She couldn't have been less interested in money. She often would since she belonged to a wealthy social group, she would often leave the Gallery at crucial moments such as the day of, or the day after the opening of a show. She had routinized, as most galleries now have, but which wasn't so common in those days, she routinized the business of showing so that everybody had three weeks or a month; and then another artist was shown. Many of whom were unimportant in our terms simply because, not simply because, but they were unimportant because I don't think they ever panned out as good artists.

MR. SANDLER: Not respected by . . .

MR. FERBER: They weren't terribly respected by some of us. But they were in the Gallery because they were close friends of Betty's, and this included both men and women. And the Gallery became a strange place in which a group of some of the most important artists in America and some of the most unimportant were showing at the same time. And everybody in Betty's opinion, a woman who loved art, capital letters for Love and Art, was indiscriminating. I mean it's even hard to know why she took some of us into the Gallery because I don't think she had that good an eye. I think she was influenced by Newman, by other artists, by Rothko, and others; or by friends on the outside who'd simply say, "you must . . ." I mean actually I came into the Gallery not because Betty found me but because the harpsichordist friend of mine, Sylvia Marlowe, knew Betty very well and said, "You must have Ferber he's so good." And she took me. It meant nothing for her to take an artist in. And now a dealer thinks 45 times before he takes an artist in. But of course the stakes were very low. And so the Gallery became crowded with people and the attention that she could give to any one person was very limited. She also frightened away prospective customers in that she had such a standoffish and aristocratic way of handling customers that they were hesitant to ask the price of anything that seemed to be for sale. And then as Kootz or Janis and others come on the scene again, or more importantly, they made offers because they were really more interested in business and art instead of just art. And since these artists had to think of where their next meal was coming form they began to drift. Some never made the break, as you know. And $Reinhardt used to inveigh against her but he never actually made the break. Newman did but in a kind of ambiguous way.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. Well, he just stopped showing for a period of time.

MR. FERBER: Yes.

MR. SANDLER: As you remember, were there expectations that possibly just . . . You know, I'm still wondering why this group of artists that was so close should, you know, at one point react so violently. I know that paranoia is the occupational disease of artists today.

MR. FERBER: I don't think it is. I don't think that artists are more paranoid that other people.

MR. SANDLER: That's probably true.

MR. FERBER: It would be, you know, against my training as a scientist to think so. And I'm sure it isn't. I don't think stockbrokers break down or become paranoid any less frequently than artists. You know, I was talking to a woman the other day, she's a typical middle-class woman, and she told me that her friends as they got older began to be less tolerant of each other. I think it's a hazard of age. And we live in a period which is extremely unsettling and difficult and I guess artists succumb to it, unfortunately, as much as other people do. That's all I would say about that.

MR. SANDLER: A couple of other things. Before you were talking , you had mentioned that some of the talk at your place and at other place where you met was about European art. What was the reaction as you remember it at that time? Because this was after the war. There had been a period of time that Paris was isolated. Suddenly around 1946, 1947 that work begins to appear again. Do you remember . . .

MR. FERBER: Yes. I would say that in general the American artists with the exception of people like Motherwell who has a strong bias in favor of France, Baziotes who had a strong Surrealist inclination which he never lost; except for those two I suppose primarily, and myself, I never became part of that group who berated or tried to put down European painting, particularly Picasso, particularly cubism because of what appeared to them to be number one, a rational approach to art, and abstract expressionism was not "rational" (in quotes), although it was just as "rational" in my opinion as Cubism; and, secondly, because of the color question, the question of color which I talked about earlier. Cubist painting tends to be gray and brown and muddy. And what attracted American painters was brilliant color. Although Rothko claims not to be a colorist one of the most important

things about his work is its color. Otherwise the later artists such as Noland and Louis would not have been indebted to him.

MR. SANDLER: Particularly Olitski.

MR. FERBER: Yes. But you see that's interesting that Rothko was one of those people who objected to describing art in terms of color or form alone, you know, which are simply the basic, the ground on which you stand but no necessarily the most evocative or the most interesting areas. It's interesting that Rothko always claimed that he was not a colorist, that there was a great deal of content in his work. And this was the big problem for all of those critics and the public who objected to abstract expressionism because although we talked about the content it was difficult to describe it.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. Then Clem, too, even then took a rather formalist position. His point of view would not have been shared by the artist although I guess they . . .

MR. FERBER: No, his position was not shared by the artists then. In fact it was antagonistic to that of most artists. I think that Pollock whose work he praised most, well almost exclusively, and David Smith whose work in sculpture he certainly praised exclusively always took his writing and speaking and talking about them with their tongues in their cheeks. I know this for a fact because they were convinced that the formal qualities of their work were not the most important. Or, let's leave out the question of what's more important or less important, it wasn't the only element. And Clem Greenberg certainly emphasized the purely formal as is true now amongst some of the most dominating and domineering critics of our time.

MR. SANDLER: He's become the influence on criticism in this decade unquestionably.

MR. FERBER: Yes.

MR. SANDLER: What role did the forums at The Subjects of the Artist School play? Because prior to that time it seems that most of the activity would have been rather private, artists meeting at your place, at studios, other places. And then suddenly with The Subjects of the Artist School and those Friday sessions in the later Club the talk tends to get rather more public, or quasi-public.

MR. FERBER: What is your question?

MR. SANDLER: Just what role did this school play?

MR. FERBER: I think primarily the School gave us all a sense of having a place in the public eye. It was an egocentric enterprise to a large extent I believe. It was of course started to help some of the artists concerned with teaching there to make a living. I mean they couldn't sell their work. And by giving salaries, which never materialized, by the way, they thought they could live. But the Friday evenings gave all of us a feeling that we were engaged in an active, public, successful, or becoming successful, enterprise which was becoming noteworthy, more weighty in the public's eye. Now, as for its influence on the artists themselves, well, in addition to what I've just said it gave each of us who spoke, you know, the evenings were spent by introducing an artist who gave some kind of talk and then there was discussion. So that even if you didn't give a talk you could discuss. It gave each of us a chance to face a critical audience. Because the audience was critical. Although critical, it was numerous. And because it was numerous it gave the impression that it was interested enough to come and pay a dollar or fifty cents or whatever it was to get in. So it gave each of us a chance to face a critical audience and to justify the activity in which we were engages. Which was a kind of bonus in addition to the annual or biennial exhibition of one's work. It gave the sense of there being a community which was recognized by the public as important. And of course undoubtedly occasionally ideas were stimulating enough so that one felt excited and gave.

MR. SANDLER: This poses two problems: what was the function of . . .

MR. FERBER: What was the function of it?

MR. SANDLER: Yes. As you felt it? Why was it important? Because there seemed to have been such a need to participate?

MR. FERBER: I think the function was a desire to justify in verbal terms in addition to the formal painting, I mean to the plastic terms an attempt and a need for justifying what we were doing. All new art forms have required some kind of verbal explanation and communication about them to a smaller or larger audience. Appolinaire was one example of a man who devoted his life to explaining what cubism and so on was about. And certainly Breton with Surrealism was involved in verbalizing a plastic enterprise. And there have been one after another. In this case it was the artists themselves although a few critics spoke, if I'm not mistaken, I can't remember any who spoke to be honest, can you?

MR. SANDLER: Who spoke at the Studio 35? No. It was all artists I think. I think the only non-artist may have been Levy.

MR. FERBER: Yes. Julian Levy gave a talk. That's true.

MR. SANDLER: But the rest were artists.

MR. FERBER: Yes. It always has been a source of amusement to me that literary people, let's say, an example would be Kunitz, the poet, who at various times said, "You do your painting or your sculpture and we'll explain it or we'll do the writing." As a matter of fact, at that time people like Baziotes, and Tomlin, and Motherwell, and Rothko, and I, and . . .

MR. SANDLER: Gottlieb.

MR. FERBER: Gottlieb did very well at writing and verbalizing and speaking about what we were engaged in. I think Baziotes published or wrote or spoke from notes in a style which was extremely beautiful and provocative. And Gottlieb in a more rational and hardheaded way was very pungent and to the point about what he was engaged in.

MR. SANDLER: You were talking about the way in which artists could express themselves well, and did.

MR. FERBER: Yes. Well, I think they did. There are plenty of examples of it. which have been published. The Museum of Modern Art has published examples. The Whitney Museum has reprinted examples. And there have been tapes and whatnot. I think artists express themselves with considerable insight.

MR. SANDLER: And style.

MR. FERBER: And style. And event he ones who don't write like de Kooning in conversation . . .

MR. SANDLER: He's written a couple of things that are very . . .

MR. FERBER: I don't know whether he's written them or not but . . .

MR. SANDLER: Well, they've appeared in his name.

MR. FERBER: They appeared above his signature.

MR. SANDLER: And I think the ideas were his.

MR. FERBER: Yes. That's true. But he has spoken, of course I've known him fairly well, I didn't know him as well in the late forties and early fifties as I got to know him later because he had a studio next door and I got to know him a little bit there and also at other times. But, you know, he had very sharp things to say. De Kooning is a very acute, very, how shall I put it?, we, very acute observer. He has a way of putting things which is acute and cute at the same time. It's fetching. They're not so profound but they show there's an intelligence at work. But I think some of the other people like Baziotes and Tomlin and Newman and rothko and some of the others have written some, have stated some more remarkable ideas about painting and sculpture.

MR. SANDLER: There was always a sense, or an anti, well, or an idea that, how shall I word it, an antipathy against the idea that a community existed. Certainly there was an anti-label feeling among artists. But there was a community.

MR. FERBER: Well, there was a very tangible and viable community to which we all subscribed by being there in bars, in peoples' homes. And there's not doubt that that community existed. What people object to was being classified as abstract expressionists. And I think justifiably so. I don't know what is meant by abstract expressionism except that in my mind perhaps there are two painters who belong to that school. One is de Kooning and the other is Pollock. Or to use another term such as action painting perhaps, those two people belong to that school. But I really don't think, you know, de Kooning has denied it. Because he says he paints very slowly and scratches out and so on. And Pollock although he worked in what looked like an action-like procedure was certainly thinking in the terms of, what's his name?, the great educator at Columbia who wrote, you know, the man who started progressive schools.

MR. SANDLER: Dewey.

MR. FERBER: Dewey. What's the name of his book, Art . . .

MR. SANDLER: Art is Experience.

MR. FERBER: Yes, that's right. Dewey pointed out that the artist is thinking as profoundly as anybody else when he is at work. Now, in other words, I would say that Pollock, although he was jumping around his canvases, was thinking and, as has been pointed out by many people, but particularly by Bill Rubin in those articles that appeared in Artforum, the revision or the examination of each preceding instant's work constitutes active thought about his work. So anyhow the fact is that of the half-dozen or dozen painters and sculptors who belong to that generation, there's considerable difference, much greater difference in their work than, let us say, between Picasso and Braque at any give moment, at certain given moments. I don't think Rothko's work ever looked like Still's and I don't think that Still's ever looked like Newman's or de Kooning's and so on. And I think that although at a certain period there was a superficial resemblance between the work of Roszak and Hare and min that was only for a very short time and I can't imagine anything more divergent in style and subject matter or content than has been true for the last 15 or 20 years.

MR. SANDLER: Did you go to The Club much?

MR. FERBER: Yes, I used to go to The Club. I was one of the charter members, I suppose. I used to go. I gave a couple of talks there. I gave a talk at a forum in which John Cage and I were engaged in which he advocated the necessity for gratuitous murder as in The Caves of the Vatican by Andre Gide, and in which I took, just for the sake of argument, a very puritanical and moralistic ethical position, you know, against it. But there were attempts at The Club to carry on the tradition of the Friday night Subjects of the Artist and Tony Smith's school which took over from . . .

MR. SANDLER: Yes. Studio 35.

MR. FERBER: But, you know, there was this Roundtable organized in 1948? 1949?

MR. SANDLER: 1950.

MR. FERBER: 1949 I think. I know I went to Europe in 1948 for the first tim after the war. And Rothko went in 1949 or maybe early 1950 and he wasn't present.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: But the other artists were, with the exception of Rothko. So it was 1948 or late . . .

MR. SANDLER: No, it was 1950. It was the spring of 1950.

MR. FERBER: I see. Well anyhow, that's where Alfred Barr kept asking for a name or designation for the New York School. Which I think was the invention of Motherwell. I think he was the first man to realize that it was like the School of Paris. And I think, I mean to my knowledge he was the first man to use the term New York School, first and most frequently. But Alfred Barr kept asking for a term to describe it. And Abstract Expressionism was rejected. And other names which people suggested were rejected. And I don't think we ever came to any conclusion. So I think there was a strong sense of individual independence of each other at the same time that there was a community which was opposed primarily tot he Establishment which meant, as you know, social realist and academic painting, and to European art. I think I mentioned this earlier, there was a strong reaction against Cubism and a strong reaction in favor of Impressionism.

MR. SANDLER: When did that Impressionism idea really come in, Herbert?

MR. FERBER: I would say about 1951.

MR. SANDLER: But it would have been after, say, Rothko's show of the style, you know, his An Afternoon show. In other words, while . . .

MR. FERBER: Not Afternoon. Before Noon.

MR. SANDLER: It was Before Noon.

MR. FERBER: Because you see nobody's color had very little to do with Impressionism. It was stark color. It wasn't color ameliorated by atmospheric qualities or suggestions. You know, even though Pollock used pure color out of the tube the general impression is a misty and atmospheric tone.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Because in a way it's like Seurat who used distinctly pure color but which merged in your eye. And also in terms of Matisse's color. I suppose, although I don't like Greenberg's formalistic approach to art, he was one of the first people to point out to me at least or in my hearing that Matisse was really a great painter in contrast to Picasso and that Picasso had other qualities, I'm not talking about painting as if it were the only

quality, certainly Picasso . . .

MR. SANDLER: No, the reason I asked this question is because talk about Impressionism doesn't really begin into the fifties, after these guys have shown in print, that is, writing about it. And I just wondered if there was talk.

MR. FERBER: I'm sure that writing and talk are separated by at least two or three years. Certainly Tomlin was able to verbalize quite well, and Rothko talked about Cubism as anti-paint because of the color.

MR. SANDLER: But did they talk about Impressionism?

MR. FERBER: Oh, yes.

MR. SANDLER: See, the talk really doesn't come in as far as print is concerned until, say, after Guston.

MR. FERBER: Oh, really? Who was a latecomer, too.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: And whose early work is obviously influenced by Monet.

MR. SANDLER: The early . . .

MR. FERBER: Oh, yes.

MR. SANDLER: Which are not shown until 1951.

MR. FERBER: 1951?

MR. SANDLER: Yes. It's curious that, because like Tiger's Eye, you know, I read through just about everything there and, you know, not much about, well, a couple of things about Impressionism, most of them unfavorable. Well, what role does Tiger's Eye play?

MR. FERBER: Oh, I don't know what role Tiger's Eye plays. You know, Tiger's Eye was financed by a wealthy woman married to a poor artist who . . .

MR. SANDLER: Who was in the Gallery?

MR. FERBER: Who was in the Betty Parsons Gallery, for . . . yes. They both needed a forum. She was a poet and he was a painter. They both needed more of a forum than was open to them through professional means. so the idea of a magazine was extremely attractive. And they were obviously influenced by the Dada idea of a magazine. Because the magazine had various colored papers and textures and so n. But it's prime quality was that it was devoted to art. I mean to what artists had to say, to reproductions of their work, and to poetry and a few other things. I don't think it had much of a role. I think its main role was, as the school, I mean as the Subjects of the Artist had, its main role was to make it appear as if, and in fact it was true, the New York School was really becoming important enough so that it had to have not only painting shown in galleries but a magazine to explain and to exemplify and so on, as the school had a role in bringing a public to the Subjects of the Artists.

MR. SANDLER: We probably wouldn't have too much time to deal with this because that tape is running out. But you've lived through three sort of changes, very drastic changes in public reception of art. I mean you come up in the late 1930s where social realism, regionalism, name it, abstraction is in sway. And then you live through the abstract expressionist era. And now in the sixties something entirely different is happening. What is your reaction to that? To, say, the new minimal which seems to be the most dominating style today?

MR. FERBER: Well, you know, Irving, everybody in the art world speaks of me as being too rational, too logical, and too objective.

MR. SANDLER: They do?

MR. FERBER: Yes. Motherwell said to me last night, "The trouble with you, Herbert, is that you act as if everybody is as rational as you are." Now I preface my comments to your question by saying that simply in order to say that my attitude about minimal art and coloristic art, or pure color painting is to begin with tolerable, simply because I remember that those terms which are used to denigrate it are exactly those terms which were used against abstract expressionism and the New York School. I mean the works are the same, to describe different painting and sculpture. It's also interesting to me that some of the critics and artists who are even twenty years younger than I am, like in their forties, are as intolerant of the new art form which is being shown

in reaction to minimal art, I mean the art of materials.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. This anti-form.

MR. FERBER: Yes. That was shown at Castelli's warehouse. They're just as antagonistic to that, although in favor of the color field painting and minimal sculpture as artists and critics of my generation had been opposed to minimal sculpture and color field painting. So with those prefaces to my attitude I would say I can see how one's commitment to any group or form or period leaves one a little blind to what comes next and just does happen. Now what do I think of minimal art? Is that what you'd like to know?

MR. SANDLER: Well, yes.

MR. FERBER: I find some minimal art, you know, the good minimal art in painting, I want to distinguish between painting and sculpture in this case, the good minimal or color field painting is extremely beautiful and committed to, as Noldan has said, to color. Which seems to me a simplistic and simple-minded attitude about art, or simple-minded commitment to art. I recognize that I belong to a different generation and my thinking about art is more complex, not necessarily more valid, but certainly more complex. I think it's so beautiful that once one transcends the sort of lack of content or subject matter which older art had, I mean by "older art" anything before it, you know, going all the way back. Once one transcends looking for that subject matter . . .

[Interruption]

MR. SANDLER: This is the third conversation with Herbert Ferber on January 6, 1969, in his studio. You were one of the first artists in the fifties, probably the first, to work in terms of environmental sculpture, Herbert. And just to start off, because I want to talk to you about these problems, do you prefer to work large or small? Is there any preference there? I mean why do you work large? Because you often do.

MR. FERBER: Yes. Well, it's difficult to give you an answer to that, Irving, simply because, I think we went into it a little bit earlier, in the sense that I'm able to afford to work large now. It becomes a concomitant to my thinking. I can afford to work large, I think. And so I begin to think in terms of size and scale, if there's any different between those terms.

MR. SANDLER: Let me put the question another way then: What is the value of size to you? I mean aside from the fact that you can do work on a large scale. Does it have any special attraction for you?

MR. FERBER: yes. I always think that you can see the sculpture better. I don't know whether it's true of monolithic sculpture, but sculpture of this kind where spaces are important, spaces between the forms are so important I think that if there's more space, that is, more space in simple geometric sense, you know, when you make something larger in sculpture it doesn't increase in two dimensions, it increases in three dimensions so there's a geometrical change. It's in terms of solid geometry.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: It isn't like enlarging a painting. The spaces between the parts of a painting become larger only in a linear sense. Whereas in sculpture they become larger in a three-dimensional sense. So that when you make a piece, make a model that's 12 inches high, make a sculpture that's 8 feet high more or less form it you are able to see the sculpture better. Now this may be some kind of mystification or sounds like a mystification but it really is true that . . . You'd better cut the tape off because I'd really like to think about this. [MACHINE TURNED OFF] I've noticed in making things from models that because of the spaces which increase, and of course the reforms of the sculpture increase, too, in size, nevertheless you can read it more easily. Now that's one thing. I also have no doubt, and I can't give you an answer for it at all, that larger things, given an equal quality, are more impressive than smaller things. This has something to do with our scale, the scale of the human body. I think we've talked about this, or perhaps I mentioned it the other day: if you look at a pair of dice, did I mention this to you?

MR. SANDLER: No.

MR. FERBER: Well, if you look at a die of a pair of dice it's not very impressive. I you look at Noguchi's Cube, more or less a cube, down on Broadway it's very impressive simply in terms of size. Because, after all, it's just a cube painted. Even if you don't look at it in relationship to the building, its large size is in relation to the human body an extremely impressive thing. This must be a kind of dynamic and psychological problem. It's a problem that has to do with the distances that you can reach which de Kooning mentioned. When people asked him why he paints a painting a certain size, he said, "It's as far as I can reach." It's a sort of joking answer but it suited his idea of what his work should be like. But that's a digression. The same thing is true of the pyramids. What is so impressive about the pyramids is their simple size. Because if you think of a small pyramid two inches high it doesn't mean very much. And I'm ruling out all the questions of antiquity and surfaces that have changed with

antiquity and so on.

MR. SANDLER: So part of the idea of the kind of gesture you want to make has to do with a sort of heroic gesture as well?

MR. FERBER: Well, it interesting you should use that term "heroic gesture" because that's a term that Barney Newman used.

MR. SANDLER: I know.

MR. FERBER: You read that?

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: He used that term many years ago about my work, that it has heroic gesture. But then I was working rather small and he saw in it a large scale gesture. But I'm trying to be very objective about this, enough so to say that a good many sculptures by other sculptors look more impressive when large. This certainly doesn't hold true for some that I've seen which have been blown up to tremendous proportions without being impressive.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: So that I believe that one has to think from the inception of the sculpture in terms of its being larger than the model you make. If you don't do that then it never works large.

MR. SANDLER: You're suggesting then that you can conceive in a small work from the model other than on a large scale. Perhaps to put it another way: Do you conceive a large work differently from a small work? Or do you conceive a small work always having the potential of being a large work?

MR. FERBER: Well, let's put it this way. I usually make small sculptures to start with, some of which I perceive as being possible of enlargement, of becoming bigger sculptures with more or less the same forms. Some of the small ones I reject immediately. I know they will not work big. Now this is just an aesthetic judgement, a judgment which I've perhaps learned over the years to make more or less accurately. but when I'm making models now I know that what I'm aiming for is something larger than one foot or two feet, usually int he neighborhood of six or eight or ten feet. That's what I'm aiming at. And some of them will look better at six feet than they will at three feet. And also i don't think my eye is as good as all that so that I can tell immediately. i often make a sculpture, say, a foot high and then make it three feet high, and if it seems to be working at that size then I'll try it at six feet. And I can fail, too.

MR. SANDLER: Well, working large presents all sorts of problems, not the least one of which is the exhibition problem. Have you thought about that particular thing? Where does one show big work?

MR. FERBER: Well, that's become more or less of a joke now, you know. When we first began to show our painting and our sculpture int he late forties and early fifties anybody who made a large painting or large sculpture was thought to be a fool. Nevertheless we all moved and kept moving in that direction both painters and sculptors. Then the museums began to accommodate themselves to this idea. And the Whitney top floor is I don't know, what?, fifteen? twenty feet high, or something like that. And I see in the last Whitney show that one of the sculptures practically reaches the ceiling.

MR. SANDLER: That's right.

MR. FERBER: What does that mean? That we're going to have to make museums with higher ceilings? Or just show the work outdoors?

MR. SANDLER: Well, what is your attitude towards exhibiting or putting your work either in architectural settings or in public places?

MR. FERBER: Well, there you get into a question of scale. If you put your work in a part with gigantic trees around it and if the relationship between the sculpture and the trees is such that the sculpture is dwarfed simply by the relationship in their sizes you've defeated your own purpose. If you put your sculpture in a small space surrounded by large buildings you've accomplished the same defeat. So that the size of the sculpture if it's put outdoors has to be related to what is close to it. It's not necessarily architecture. If you put a sculpture in the middle of a baseball diamond it would look small if it were less than twenty feet high. Just because of the space around it. Even though, you know, you don't look at any architectural problems. You know, for the last few hundred years painters and sculptors have been working in a kind of vacuum in that sense, in the sense in which we're now talking, in that the painters began to do easel pictures, the sculptors began to do chamber sculpture but when it began to get larger there simply was no place to put it. Putting the sculpture around the

city as has been tried here in the last few years . . .

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Is only a very limited kind of experiment because it's obvious that as soon as you put a large piece of sculpture out, as mine was in front of the Plaza Hotel, it looked to me very small simply because of the size of the buildings.

MR. SANDLER: But you don't object tot he idea of your piece being in a public setting?

MR. FERBER: Oh, no. No.

MR. SANDLER: Because there is some objection to that. Adolph Gottlieb said he would never do that again.

MR. FERBER: He would never do what again?

MR. SANDLER: He would never place a work in a public setting, outside of a gallery, museum, or home.

MR. FERBER: Did he ever?

MR. SANDLER: He once did that synagogue thing I think, that mosaic, or glass.

MR. FERBER: Glass?

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: In New York here?

MR. SANDLER: Yes. And then there are other artists now who talk about getting away from galleries and museums. They want their work in public settings because they feel that the galleries and museums insulate the work from the public.

MR. FERBER: Yes. Well, those are not artists problems or aesthetic problems. Those are sociological problems. And I'm not particularly concerned with that. I think all exposure of one's work in museums or galleries or in a so-called public place is a question of degree. A gallery or a museum is a public place. It doesn't insulate or isolate it. Museums have a tremendous population now, form day to day and it certainly doesn't insulate it. It isn't, I think, any more artificial as a surrounding than a museum.

MR. SANDLER: I think really the question I wanted to ask, Herbert, is thMR. SANDLER: You're working large. It's obvious that some kind of more public space would be suitable for your work.

MR. FERBER: More public than what?

MR. SANDLER: Say, more public than the space in a home, because your work won't go in a home.

MR. FERBER: But it would go into some people's homes, and it certainly would go into some people's garden.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Which is a fine place to see it. And in museums which have larger halls or gardens the work will fit there, too.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. However, once you begin to work on a very large scale you also get into another problem where about the only people who might be able to afford your work would either be public agencies or corporate agencies.

MR. FERBER: Yes.

MR. SANDLER: And that also means a kind of . . .

MR. FERBER: Well, you would think that. But that's not exactly true. Obviously people are paying fantastic prices for painting and sculpture. I mean individuals are.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: The more famous paintings and sculptures go for $75,000, $50,000, $60,000. Well, you know, my sculptures are certainly within that range at the size I'm making them.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: So I don't think it prevents individuals from owning them.

MR. SANDLER: No. But still I guess the really potential purchasers of your work, of your large-scale works, would be corporate and public agencies.

MR. FERBER: Well, corporate or public, it's no great advantage to have one' work related to the kind of enterprise, much as an office building, or a factory building or, you know, something of that nature. I think that it may be there but it's not visible in that nobody looks at it. And I think a piece of sculpture placed in front of an office building, say on Park Avenue becomes invisible. It just is passed constantly. More so just because of the nature of our city life. I don't think it's true in a public square in Italy, or in France, particularly in Italy where the pace of life is slower. But these are sociological questions.

MR. SANDLER: Well, in a sense they are; and maybe in a sense they're not. for example, just to get back to that idea again: you're in you studio working on a large-scale sculpture. Now at one point some of these works, because they're so large, chances are they will go into public places rather than, say, private homes, etc. Now under what conditions would you prefer to work? For example, would you prefer to work in the studio and take the work out, or sell it to whoever buys it, or maybe if a public agency wants it find a place for it? That would be one possibility. That in a sense was the original idea of sculpture in Environment show. they initially tried to have artists find places, they didn't succeed, that they thought their sculpture would best go into.

MR. FERBER: Oh, yes.

MR. SANDLER: Then another possibility would be to actually work in a specific space. Would you like to do that?

MR. FERBER: Given the kind of city New York is, and if I had complete freedom of choice, I think I could place almost all my sculptures in a satisfactory position outside. For example, the one that was on the Plaza I wanted to place in front of the Seagram Building because it was a few steps, it was against a series of vertical columns and windows and the contrast would have been great between this rather baroque sculpture and the vertical and horizontals of the Seagram Building. Paced where it was in the Plaza where you had continual activity of automobiles all around it, buses, and those horse-drawn carriages, and so on, it was often difficult to see it. I also thought of placing it in Lever House garden. That would have been a good place. So i think that if I had complete freedom of choice I could place almost anything satisfactorily. But don't forget that there are sociological and ego questions that come in. For example, what's the use of placing a piece down in Battery Park? It'll hardly every be seen by anybody, or by anybody who's interested in painting or sculpture. It isn't terribly satisfactory to do a work for a place where it won't be seen. I know in talking about such problems with a sculptor I know, he said of course every work of art has its own life and is autonomous and so on. But somebody else said at the moment, "If you take the sculpture and put it in a closet and shut the door it might just as well not exist." So that's one aspect of the problem. Now would I like to work for a given place, make a sculpture for a particular pace? Yes, I would. And I have, as you know.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: I've made several. And it became a problem as to how to relate the sculpture to the space on which it was to fit, or work. And I think that's a fairly satisfactory way of working. but, you know, there's no tradition of this kind of thing in our modern civilization, contemporary civilization. Many periods in the past have had almost automatic relationship between the work produced and the place it was going to go. Not so much work was made for home consumption. It was made for public places. But we don't have that kind of tradition. So it's a constant problem and, given the kind of society we have, it's not easily solved in a satisfactory way for anybody.

MR. SANDLER: Tell me, when your work was at the Plaza I saw it a couple of times there and people climbed over it, and pushed it, kicked it, wanted to see how tough it was. What was your reaction to that? Did that upset you at all? Because one of the things about putting works in public places would be the danger of, say, vandalism like the Tony Rosenthal has become a billboard. It doesn't bother him too much. He goes down every couple of weeks and paints it again. How did you . . .

MR. FERBER: No, I wasn't disturbed by it. The surfaces didn't lend themselves particularly to putting posters on them. And since it was only a painted sculpture the paint chipped off where kids climbed on it. But that didn't bother me because I knew that could easily be repaired. But if it had been made of a permanent material, which it could, I wouldn't have minded people climbing on it. No, that doesn't bother me. I mean that again is something that has nothing to do with the work of art.

MR. SANDLER: Yes, but this is interesting, Herbert, because your attitude now is that your primary concern is

with the making of the work of art, and that when you're finished making it, well then the way it's presented to the public or as seen by the public is out of your .

MR. FERBER: Well, I'm not attached to the sculpture with an umbilical cord that can't be broken. Nevertheless, recently when my sculpture was placed in the basement of the Whitney Museum I objected because it couldn't be seen, and I insisted that they move it. And they did. So that I'm concerned to the extent, as I said before, that unless the sculpture is visible there's no use showing it at all.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. However, just to push that question one step further: do you ever think about, say, art in public places, do you ever think how it might affect the response of people who look at it? You indicated before that you thought that most people would just not even look at it, would walk by, would be indifferent to it.

MR. FERBER: Yes. Look, I'm sure you've had the same experience I've had. You've gone to Europe or Mexico or some other place where there are works of art to be seen, buildings or murals or frescoes, and so on. Unless you bring with you a body of knowledge you get very little out of it. The simple, visual impression may be, and usually is, insufficient. In other words, I don't mean that you have to have historical knowledge or art historical knowledge about the work. Although that is not irrelevant. But you have to know what you're looking at. You have to have had the experience of looking at other works of art for comparative purposes and you have to know something about why and how these things were made. Otherwise they become passing impressions. Part of the scenery. Now the reason I've talked about that is to say that when people look at contemporary paintings or sculpture in so-called public places a lot depends on what they bring along in their own minds about art. And unless they have some knowledge they can form no opinion. In fact, they're on the same level as children in this regard.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: You know, I think that the idea of putting sculpture around the city was good in order to get people acquainted with modern sculpture, is just about that. It gets them acquainted with seeing strange new forms instead of figurative sculpture. But beyond that it means nothing because most of the people who see these things are unprepared.

MR. SANDLER: So you don't think that art in public places would really in any way affect the lives of people or their attitudes to art?

MR. FERBER: No, I don't think it does. Just as I don't believe that publishing large numbers of paperbacks has increased the cultural level of our society. People either don't read them, or if they do read them, they don't comprehend them. Because they're not prepared for it.

MR. SANDLER: Well, the reason I'm asking many of these questions is it seems on the basis of not only the Sculpture In Environment show, but other shows throughout the country and particularly when the war was over, the attitudes not only of the federal government which just gave 60 artists $5,00, you know, a check in the mail; and that was that. But also, you know, corporate interests that there's going to be an upsurgence of this kind of activity on the part of artists. In other words, artists will be asked and commissioned to do works for public places.

MR. FERBER: And a lot of bad art will be made, just as happened during the federal support of art, WPA days.

MR. SANDLER: WPA, yes.

MR. FERBER: roughly I would say that about nine-tenths of that work was discardible.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: It merely supported people who said they were artists. And I think federal support, government support unless it's screened very carefully by qualified people will result in a tremendous amount of bad art.

MR. SANDLER: But at this point a kind of screening seems to be, I don't know how, but it seems to be taking place, either corporate executives or government officials seem to be rather sophisticated.

MR. FERBER: I don't think they're more sophisticated. I think they're more influenced by questions of taste, style, public relations, all kinds of things which have nothing to do with the real subject of art. Of course I realize that banks put paintings and sculpture in their office spaces and in their business spaces. And I can't see any reason for it. I don't think that the officials of the bank are in any sense or any way more sophisticated than when they didn't have the sculpture or painting there.

MR. SANDLER: But aren't you almost in a sense in a kind of futile position because the thrust of so much of your recent work has been to environmental spaces? And yet you indicate that you don't expect that the work

there will have any particular effect.

MR. FERBER: No, no, I didn't say that. I think that in the proper place, for example, the environment which is at Rutgers University is in a place where it can be used, appreciated, understood to a much greater extent than if it were in a bank building. Largely because you have an academic environment, people are taught about art. They bring then to it, to the work, a greater knowledge of what the history and development of modern art has been. Also they tend to lead perhaps a more contemplative life. They don't rush in and out. And actually in that room where the environment is at Rutgers, I've been there and I've been told that students walk in, sit down on the floor or on the hassocks which are there, and read or talk and sort of look around at the sculpture while they're doing that. Well, there's a great deal of difference between putting a sculpture in a lobby or in front of a building on Park or fifth Avenue, or even in such a place as a park. I think the place in which the sculpture is put has a good deal to do with how much it will be looked at and appreciated. I can't imagine having a worse place than an office building lobby. Although, you know, Hans Hofmann did a mosaic of one, I'm sure nobody ever looks at it. After the opening when his friends and other artists came to look at it that was the end. And perhaps a few art historians will go to see it. But it's not in a place where it can even easily be seen. Well, even that isn't a question because the frescoes int he churches in italy are not easily seen. You have to carry binoculars with you. But at least people aren't rushing around and jostling you and so on.

MR. SANDLER: So, in other words, what you're suggesting is that the thing that would sort of concern you most about putting work in public spaces is having a place where you know a sophisticated, aware, and more or less sympathetic audience will be there? And that would be . . .

MR. FERBER: Well, I would say sophisticated and aware, knowledgeable.

MR. SANDLER: And sympathetic in that sense.

MR. FERBER: Yes, yes, not necessarily sympathetic.

MR. SANDLER: In that they're aware an sophisticated.

MR. FERBER: you know I heard recently of an industrial complex which is being developed some place in the South. There will be something like a hundred factories or office buildings, something of that kind. And somebody has been designated to choose a hundred sculptures for this area, which covers several acres I suppose. I can't imagine a worse place to put a work of art. You know, what use to anybody will it have?

MR. SANDLER: There are people there.

MR. FERBER: Yes, but what kind of people? People who are not, to begin with, interested in art, who never asked for it but who had it foisted upon them. don't forget that art no longer has religious or historical or such associations for people. So it's much more difficult to have a relationship with a work of art than it used to be. It requires in addition now a considerable deal of knowledge about art as a discipline. Just as one doesn't start to read philosophy and expect to understand or get much out of it without having disciplined oneself and having been disciplined in that area.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. You see there were others of us like myself, for example, because I was rather excited by the possibilities of the Sculpture In Environment show because, you know, it opened up . . . to me it suggested an opening up to the use of artists of a tremendous, very myriad number of spaces in the City. It also prompted thoughts about not only highering the quality of, say, people's life in a specific place but also helping in a way to renew the City.

MR. FERBER: No, that's like starting at the top and working down. What the City needs obviously is more beautiful spaces, parks, avenues, less traffic, less pollution. Putting sculpture around the City isn't going to solve those problems. And just having to cross a street to get to look at a piece of sculpture becomes a problem in logistics and tactics, which, you know, is not to the benefit of the work of art. So i think it's a little bit like putting labels on works of art in museums so that people can read the labels and feel that they know something. They actually don't. All they know is what the few lines on the label tell them. The place to begin is with children . . . to teach them about art. It's very difficult to teach adults about art unless they're dedicated.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: And so the large crowds that go into museums mean very little. They simply go for, as I said, for questions of prestige and social intercourse and because they feel it is the right thing to do, but not because they're impelled to know about art in a profound sense.

MR. SANDLER: So at this point you would not be very optimistic as to the possibilities of public art really having any effect, any important effect?

MR. FERBER: I don't think public art will have an important effect on the population. Because, look, it's an old adage, "poverty does not lead to culture." And in a large sense this city is poverty-stricken. that is, it's poverty-stricken in the people. A large proportion of the population has no time to look at art. Ont he other hand, that portion of the population which has time to look at art is so ensnared in the business of living in a difficult city that they just can't be bothered. I really believe that art has a, art usually has lived in a culture which has leisure. Well, our society hasn't that kind of leisure. We have affluence but we have no luxury. This is a country and a civilization, it's true in Germany and Russia I suppose or in France that everybody has money to spend on things. But they have no sense of luxury in that they are willing to buy or have some kind of work of art just to look at it. I mean obviously there are many collectors but one often wonders why they collect.

MR. SANDLER: To get off to another point: when you make your environments and you've made them since then there's always the problem of the environment and the architecture, the surroundings it's in. For I guess up to this point you have been given a space and decided whether you want to work in that space, and then you worked in it.

MR. FERBER: Yes.

MR. SANDLER: Well, what about things like collaboration between art and architecture? Or artist and architect?

MR. FERBER: Well, that's an old problem. I finally had to solve that problem by designing my own architecture because, you know, in this sculpture, environmental sculpture, I had to design the walls. In other words, I had to do the architecture. This is something that was never done except in the form of a model, but it was commissioned to be made large, and fell through. But I think it's very difficult. Most architects are not interested in this collaboration. And since we live in a time when architecture is more important than painting and sculpture, the architects have the upper hand. They make the space. They tell people where to live and how to live and where to put the works of art, if any. Don't forget Louis Kahn at a seminar in which I participated simply said, " I don't want sculpture around or in or near my buildings. I believe that the joints, the materials, the surfaces, the way in which my buildings are put together is of sufficient aesthetic interest to obviate the need for sculpture." Now this is a pretty fair statement of the point of view of a great many architects. I don't know how Philip Johnson feels right now. But he once told me that he would never commission an artist to do a sculpture for one of his buildings because he couldn't trust the artist to do the right thing. And I said to him, you know, "How cant he artist trust you to do the right building?" But he said he would not even commission Lipchitz whom he admired most of all among artists or sculptors, he would not even commission Lipchitz to do a sculpture. He would rather take something already finished in the hope that it would work. Well, this is largely the position of architects. Very few of them, such as Percy Goodman, have been willing to ask artists to improve their spaces and their walls and so on.

MR. SANDLER: Would you, because I'm sure you've thought about it, like to be in a situation where you could have an organic relation where, for example, you could ask an architect and expect, because it is an organic relation, that he would do this kind of space for you?

MR. FERBER: I certainly have no a priori reasons for not discussing such possibilities with an architect provided of course that he had some understanding of my sculpture, and provided that I could have some understanding of what his aims as an architect are. And I think this kind of collaboration is a possibility. But it must be a rare one. And don't forget that a great many buildings in Europe which we thing of the collaboration between artists and architect were not collaborations at all. First of all, some of the buildings were done by the sculptor who was also an architect. Like many of the churches in Italy. Well, Michelangelo designed St. Peter's.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: And I've forgotten the names but there are several others.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: That's one case where there's a collaboration between a man and himself. And then there's the kind of architecture which has been embellished for hundreds of years after it was constructed or made, by the addition of frescoes, the removal of frescoes, the addition of sculpture of different periods. Notre Dame has sculpture of many different periods around it. So collaboration is in a sense a modern idea. For one reason, because the buildings go up so fast and unless you get the painting in or the sculpture in right away you're liable not to have any there because the building comes down in twenty-five or thirty years. When a building is permanent it can be improved or embellished or ruined by the addition of good and bad works or art later on. Collaboration is a good idea but it's not by any means the only possibility.

MR. SANDLER: I think I may have started this whole discussion at a place where we possibly should have finished. Let me try and entirely different track. Very early, in the middle fifties, you begin to think of your sculpture no longer as a piece but rather as an environment. The whole work actually becomes a space that the

viewer walks into, into the piece itself.

MR. FERBER: Yes.

MR. SANDLER: Now let's start there.

MR. FERBER: I would say that was when, about the middle fifties?

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Yes. Go ahead.

MR. SANDLER: And, well, what were your ideas at that point? I mean we talked a little about this last week but I don't think really enough. What prompted that move in your sculpture?

MR. FERBER: Well, what prompted it was sheer accident. That is, I made some roofed sculptures, which had a roof, a wall, two walls, and I think we discussed this question of the base last time . . .

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: And that's what led me to make roofed sculptures. It took me several years to suddenly realize that by adding more walls, in other words, by closing this up completely, one had a room or an architectural space. And then I began to see very simply that if one walked into such a space it was containing a sculpture, that is, containing a sculpture which was integrally related to the space, that one looked at this sculpture as sculpture has never been looked at before.

MR. SANDLER: From within?

MR. FERBER: yes. Not from within as one looks at the Statue of Liberty from within, at a hollow shell, but that one walks around within a sculpture as one walks around within the interior of a cathedral where there are columns and where the columns support the ceiling, and there are arches. And one gets a sense of space which every part of which is made, supported, and purposefully supported and made for a kind of function. I don't mean necessarily religious function. but a function of some kind of possibility for seeing spaces and forms, which is quite different from walking into a cave hollowed out of a mountain where the supporting walls are simply the mountain and you have only a hole. When you go into a cathedral you begin to realize that this was planned in such a way that things helped each other to support each other and to grace the space. Well, this is just a rough way of describing what environmental sculpture began to seem to me to be. That is, that you could walk into such a space and you would never see the whole sculpture as a unit, as you could if you looked at a sculpture from the outside in traditional fashion, but that you saw the parts of the sculpture, you were enveloped by an ambience containing a series of sculptural forms within a space. And that this would be simply a new experience in the visualization of sculpture, in the understanding, the relationship of a person, a man with a work of art.

MR. SANDLER: Now this specific space could be any space? It could be gallery space? You built the model of one of these works at the Whitney Museum and then it became a space in a museum. Did you begin to think about the kinds of spaces you would put these works in? In other words, did you conceive of this as just a kind of work, that space, or total space? Or did you begin to think of where this space should be? Should it be a gallery or a home or a museum or what?

MR. FERBER: Well, number one, it has to be a permanent installation; I mean ideally. Of course you may make a mock up as one does for a stage set. One may make a mock up but the ideal possibility would be a permanent place into which people could come to contemplate the sculpture and the space and to get the kind of experience which I think they cannot get from looking at a sculpture from the outside. Now the kinds of spaces, well, we discussed the places, that is, I think certainly not in an office building, not in a factory. In a park, yes. In that kind of public place where actually this model was supposed to be in the middle of a large field in the country so that people could drive up to it, get out and walk in and look around. Now the shape of the space. Of course I design many shapes and I have many drawings in which the space is cylindrical like a tower, or in which the space, as this one, is oval, you know, the model is over there, it's an oval space; there's a wall missing. Open to the sky, in some cases, as is this one, closed with a roof. You know, there are many possibilities. And I think I could be given a tower, I mean a cylindrical space which is higher than its diameter and make something for that. Or I could design such a place, the architecture for such a place; or the oval in this case, and so on.

MR. SANDLER: Now the next question would be: where should this space exist, you know, this tower?

MR. FERBER: Well, look, you've been to the Frick museum?

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: You know there's a garden some place?

MR. SANDLER: That's right. In the center.

MR. FERBER: In the middle. Fine. Well, that's a place for an environmental sculpture. Why not in the garden of any museums, such as the Museum of Modern Art?

MR. SANDLER: you mean it would have to be a place where people would come in a contemplative frame of mind?

MR. FERBER: They would come to see a work of art.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Now that would be one possibility. It could also be, as I mentioned, at a university where they don't come to see a work of art but they come to do something else, such as read or talk while sitting or standing surrounded by a work of art. Well, that's the kind of thing I would think of.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. Well, that's pretty clear. So the idea of the Sculpture In Environment show, or event he idea of your placing a piece as you did outside of the Plaza there isn't something that you feel very strongly for?

MR. FERBER: No, I do not. Look, I think since I invented the term "environment" about works of art, about sculpture and it can be about painting, I'd like to make clear what I mean by it.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. Good.

MR. FERBER: And I do not mean sculpture paced in an environment as was done by the City Parks Department in New York. That is simply an old idea revived in order to give a kind of kick to the City pride, a kind of life, I should say. It's very little different from putting sculpture around in public places in Europe which has been done for centuries. That's putting a sculpture in an environment. When I use the term "environmental sculpture" I meant to create a sculpture which resulted in an environment. Therefore, you had to have a given space and a sculpture which was so related tot he space that one could not exist without the other. In other words, if you took the space away the sculpture would collapse, and if you took the sculpture away you just have an empty space. And this isn't true of any public square monument or any sculpture placed around the City. The sculpture is put there. The life of the City goes on around it. You take the sculpture away the life of the city goes on without the sculpture. There have been sculptures placed all over the world in likely places, sometimes as designed by Michelangelo in Rome, what's it called? I've forgotten. Well, well, where he designed the Square and had a sculpture to, it was a Roman sculpture if I'm not mistaken . . .

MR. SANDLER: Yes, that's right.

MR. FERBER: Which had to fit.

MR. SANDLER: The Campodoglia.

MR. FERBER: The Campodoglia. That's right. And if you take the sculpture away there's an empty feeling about that Square or place because there are radiating lines of pavement which bring your eye to the sculpture and so on. This is not what happens, say, in Florence where if you took the David away from in front of the Bargello it wouldn't make any difference. You know, the building would exist. People would walk in and out. That's it. So environmental sculpture is quite different from putting sculpture in an environment.

MR. SANDLER: I see.

MR. FERBER: The other thing about it which I can't emphasize too much is that no matter how large the sculpture, let's say, the Sphinx on the sands of Egypt, if you get a half-mile away it becomes quite a small object. And environmental sculpture is one in which you don't get out of the environment, you can't leave it. I mean you can only walk out an leave it but not see it. Once you're in that space, that environment, that ambience you're in contact with the sculpture. And you can only change you way of seeing it. But it's not the same as simply putting a large sculpture some place on the street.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. So either you would have to have total use of a closed space . . .

MR. FERBER: More or less closed space.

MR. SANDLER: More or less closed space or work in some kind of organic collaboration, or do the building yourself, or work in some sort of organic collaboration with an architect, where if you remove your part of it, his part of it also is . . .

MR. FERBER: That's right.

MR. SANDLER: And the kind of, say, thing like Tony Rosenthal's piece outside of Cooper Union, that is something that in terms of your own work you're not interested in?

MR. FERBER: I'm not seriously interested in it. I would be happy to put a sculpture of mine in a public place provided that they didn't put posters on it. but I don't think it's any kind of solution. It's just a way of exhibiting your work.

MR. SANDLER: That's the way I meant to ask that question: Is it any kind of solution?

MR. FERBER: I think Rosenthal's sculpture suffers from the fact that it's only, what? I don't Know, ten feet high? The buildings, which are also cubicle around it, make that cube look small. If that cube were as big as the Noguchi cube it would be much more successful because it could compete with the building. But it's dwarfed by the building. And if they put higher buildings around it, it'll be even worse. Sot hat the sculpture is the victim of its environment in that case. When I talk about environmental sculpture I would say that this cannot happen. And, as you know, in museums a work of art can be placed advantageously or not depending upon where it is. In other words, its visibility and its relation to what stands around it is quite important. Although we like to think of paintings and works of art as being autonomous, as this man said, they're not. Which is why some painters are so terribly worried about how their pictures will hang or where they will hang, whether they're high or low, whether the light is bright or dull, and so on.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. This to me is very interesting because I've asked these questions of a great many sculptors. And many of the younger ones are very much interested in environment. And to me it's interesting because their point of view is far different from yours.

MR. FERBER: Well, I think their point of view, if I can judge by when I see form a show such as this recent Whitney show is that they simply want to make big things. They have a desire to make things large.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Which is fine. You know, in a way it's a slap at connisseurship . . .

MR. SANDLER: Precious object.

MR. FERBER: And the precious object. It's a kind of way of saying to the public, which is not really interested in art, as, let us say, witness the Life article on Picasso which was a kind of crime, saying to such a public, "Here is something so big you will have to see it.: Now with things of that size naturally quite obviously they have to be interested in finding a place to put them and show them. Most galleries can't handle them and most museums are not willing to take the trouble to house them permanently because they take up too much space for both showing and storage.

MR. SANDLER: do you have a few more minute, Herbert, Because I just wanted to raise . . .

MR. FERBER: You know, we need to stop it long enough to have a drink.

MR. SANDLER: Okay. Oh, that's fine. This tape is just about to run out so let me just . . . This is the end of the first side of the third interview with Herbert Ferber.

[Interruption]

MR. SANDLER: This is the second side of the third interview with Herbert Ferber. One of the things that we just began talking about last week, Herbert, that we want to go into a little more now, we talked about the changes that took place in art, say, in the thirties and forties and the fifties. We began to talk a little bit about the changes in art from you vantage point because you've lived through these other three decades almost that have taken place int he last ten years and into the 60s. Some changes have taken place. I just wondered what your conception of that . . .

MR. FERBER: In what sense do you mean, Irving?

MR. SANDLER: Well, possibly in a variety of ways: a) the art itself; b) the condition of the artists, changes in the art scene, things just about in every aspect of art in the world would seem to have been undergoing some drastic changes.

MR. FERBER: Yes. Well, I've already indicated what I think of our affluent society. And I think that the consumption of art is just about on the same level as the consumption of fur coats and trips to the Caribbean and, you know, automobiles, stylish clothing and so on. People have a great deal of money and they must do

something with it. And one of the things they do is buy art. And it amazes me very often when I talk to the collectors to find out what the basis of their knowledge is. Now there are certainly some fine collectors who have a good eye who know exactly what they're buying and why they're buying it. but I think the impetus given to the sales of art by the upsurge in our economy is questionable as to its effects and what essential good it will do.

MR. SANDLER: Well, it has changed one thing. When we were talking about the middle and late forties one of the things I think, if my memory holds that came up, was that the idea of success certainly wasn't on that, you know, wasn't, in other words, success was not a consideration. The audience that you guys had was your own. Now the situation sort of seems changed, where success most certainly is a consideration not only for, you know, the men of your generation but also for the very young artists.

MR. FERBER: Yes.

MR. SANDLER: Now does this affect art? Has it affected art?

MR. FERBER: I think it has affected the product to some extent. And it's a kind of one to one or two to one relationship along with the increase int he number of people who go to college, increase in the number of people who go to museums, and the increase int he number of people who are therefore interested in art, there has to be a source for this art in which they're interested. There aren't enough old masters and certainly the prices are too high. And there aren't enough even recent masters around. I'm sure I'm telling you things which you already know but I suppose for the record you want to hear what I have to say about it.

MR. SANDLER: No. I'm just interested because this is a historical document. I may know it, but ten years from now . . .

MR. FERBER: Yes. And so you now have art schools in every small town, medium-size town, and in larger cities there are several art schools, either museum schools or university schools where painting and sculpture are taught as if they were trades, much in the same way a graduate student in physics or chemistry or biology is taught his profession. Most of these people go into teaching themselves because there's an ever-increasing demand for teachers for more students for more production of art. And there just can't be that much good art. Because, first of all, this whole thing is only about ten years old and one might say that Egypt or Pre-Columbian in America had produced millions of art objects. But don't forget that they produced them over centuries and that a tradition of art was inherent. I certainly is not true in america, or even in Europe. But certainly in America which is the leading art world now, one doesn't have a tradition which is more than ten years old really of large interest. Now with this increase in the production and interest in art naturally there goes a good deal of sale of art. And students who are learning to be artists can learn very quickly how to make a work of art; I mean what looks like a work of art. There are courses in design, in three-dimensional design, in two-dimensional design, there are courses in etching, there are courses in everything. And very quickly, because of the way in which these things are taught by some kind of experienced person, a student can learn to produce a verifiable work of art, at least verifiable in the sense that it has appearance.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: It may not have any originality. I think perhaps this is one of the reasons for the development of minimal art. I think minimal art has also developed as a reaction against the more complicated art of the abstract expressionists. Which is natural. And I think there's even a change now towards a more complicated art.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: As a result of the surfeit of minimal art. But I think minimal art is simpler to make, and easier to make. First of all, it can be made because of its shape and material by craftsmen. It doesn't have to be made by an artist. Now this was true in other periods of art. In the Renaissance Rubens, for example, had half a dozen or a dozen, I don't know how many, people working in his studio. Rodin had twenty people, craftsmen, carrying out his ideas, I think it's legitimate, but more or less under his supervision. But minimal art doesn't require that. It can be made form a blueprint, from a drawing. And I think a good deal of it shows a kind of banality which is inherent in the method of its production. but his is based on the need for what is called art. And it's a very integral relationship between the art, the society which consumes it, and the people who produce it.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. Certainly fashion might enter here. It;s got to be this one year; it's got to be that the next.

MR. FERBER: Yes.

MR. SANDLER: but last week you did indicate that you found yourself in terms of, say, the art world a little bit more open to certain artists that have emerged in some of these tendencies because of the nature of the criticism levelled against them.

MR. FERBER: Yes. Well, simply that I think I can recognize good art in many of its manifestations. I think that some of the so-called minimal art which I've seen is very good. Of course it's always interesting that the next new thing is frowned upon by the young people who are now making minimal art. In the same way that the abstract expressionists were frowned upon by the generation earlier than they.

MR. SANDLER: What about the state of culture today? I mean you just saw the Whitney Annual. What was your reaction to that as a show. And I think it is fairly representative of, you know, what artists who are in their thirties and forties are doing. What was your response to that show?

MR. FERBER: Well, I have to beg that question on that particular show because I saw it only on opening night and I haven't gone beck. You know, as one gets older one seems to have less time for looking at other people's work, except the people who are in some way close. But my general impression of the show was very much what I gathered from going to galleries and seeing more than one work by each of some of the people. You know, I saw a work at the Whitney which I thought had a simplicity and simpleness which was very fetching, but ruled it out as a serious work of art. Now this kind of opinion or statement is so subject to interpretation even by myself because some of the simplest statements by artists, I mean in their own media, are often their most successful ones. Nevertheless, this piece of minimal sculpture looked to me to be very empty of any serious contemplation by the artist. I think my guess of what my opinion was after the first viewing of the show was that it was extremely repetitious from one piece to another, given the variety of shapes admissible. but I'm sure that abstract expressionist paintings on the whole look very much like each other except for the half-dozen leaders whose work is entirely different from each other. I recognized occasionally something which I thought was good. But also I think I ought to be willing to state that I'm in the position that T.S. Eliot once found himself in which was to say that he was under no obligation to enjoy the work of the younger generation; he was sufficiently satisfied with exploring the work of his own generation.

MR. SANDLER: I want to ask a tricky question now however. I really don't even know how to ask it. I don't even know whether you want to answer it. It may be just a peculiarly American phenomenon. but when you take the so-called great abstract expressionist revolution, I'm using that term because it's the term which involved maybe 15 to 20 painters and maybe 10 sculptors; that was it. Now I know about . . .

MR. FERBER: Do you think there were as many as 15 painters?

MR. SANDLER: Oh, yes. I can name them. There were about 15 or 16 painters beginning, say, with Gorky. but, well, whatever the number was, whether it was a dozen or 15 painters, and 5 or 10 sculptors.

MR. FERBER: Yes, it was a dozen or 15.

MR. SANDLER: And, you know, this is the movement that put abstract expressionism on the map, and yet I know that there is a good percentage of these artist who now find it very difficult, if not impossible, some have gone back to teaching, to live, and by "live" I mean in the vicinity of being able to earn, say $10,000 a year, to live on the proceeds of their work. Which is to me appalling.

MR. FERBER: Yes. Well, this is what I mean by living in a superficially-cultured affluent society which moves from style to style according to the dictates of culture magazines such as Esquire, which has some good articles. After all, Esquire has printed Norman Mailer who is, I think, one of the great American writers; or Life magazine, and what's the other fashion magazine that has . . .

MR. SANDLER: Vogue.

MR. FERBER: Vogue. I mean these magazines don't dictate but they certainly suggest to many people what is the right thing to buy. Therefore, if you haven't, for some reason, because of a mystique built up by the artist or a mystique built around him by critics or museum people, and there are 4 or 5 such people who are either good public relations men, and I'm not using the pejorative sense, they just simply know how to handle people and what move to make as the right one from time to time; unless one is in that category, I'm talking about artists in my generation now, it's very difficult to really make a living, I mean a decent living. And, as you know, although I'm a famous sculptor I still keep a dental practice going because I don't trust the market for my sculpture. Now I don't trust it because although I've done very well from time to time I also realize that in a month or in a year something will come up which just causes the kind of thing I do to be forgotten. One of the obvious tragedies of this kind of thing we're talking about is a sculptor belonging to another generation earlier than mine, but just the one before I guess, Gonzalez. Who every talks about Gonzalez? Except, you know, in reference in a slighting or small way tot he fact that another artist or 2 or 3 other artists have used his material to develop their own styles. You know, there was the retrospective show at the Museum of Modern Art. There was a show at some gallery.

MR. SANDLER: Chalet.

MR. FERBER: Chalet. That's it. Now I don't know what it would cost to buy a Gonzalez. most likely a lot of money. But I don't think anybody is buying them. Nobody really wants them. But if you look through a catalogue of Gonzalez it is so close to what has sold by American artists or by some European artists that one wonders why they didn't buy Gonzalez, or aren't buying him. I think some of the prices I saw seem not higher than Henry Moore's.

MR. SANDLER: Less.

MR. FERBER: Less. But people are buying Henry Moore. It is tragic. And that's why I'm so pessimistic about the solution. Now it's true that especially amongst the painters it's been much simpler, as you know. In any collector's home or in any museum the number of paintings in relation to the number of sculptures is like 40 or 50 to one. Unless a man is particularly interesting in sculpture he has 2 or 3 pieces and maybe 50 paintings.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: And in addition to the cost of making sculpture which is much greater than for making paintings, sculpture is much more difficult to sell.

MR. SANDLER: He, Herbert, it's getting kind of late . .

MR. FERBER: Okay. Yes, I guess it is.

MR. SANDLER: Let me just run this . . .

[Interruption]

MR. SANDLER: Irving Sandler

MR. FERBER: Herbert Ferber

MR. SANDLER: This is the first tape with Herbert Ferber April 22, 1968. I thought we might just start, Herbert, with kind of you talking a little bit about your very early career, like how did you become an artist.

MR. FERBER: Yes. Well, I became an artist because I was interested in literature particularly and not primarily in painting and sculpture. But then while at college along with my interest in literature I developed an interest in the history of art. And I went to museums in New York city as much as I could. This was in the late 20s. And then I went from college to dental school. And while at dental school I had to make anatomical drawings, and discovered that I had some talent for making that kind of naturalistic drawing. And I was encouraged by a teacher of min, who was a collector of Walkowitz particularly I remember, to spend more time at drawing or something of that order, although he wasn't specific. He simply encouraged me have what he thought of as an extra-dental interest. So after a year of dental school I began to go to art school at night. And I went to what was called then the Beaux Arts Institute of Design, which was affiliated in a kind of loose way with the Beaux Arts in Paris. I went there at night for three years working first form plaster casts and then from the model, and maintaining as much as possible by that time an interest in going to art galleries, of which there were very few.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: And to the museums in New York. But I think I never got beyond the Metropolitan and the Museum of Natural History. When I finally left dental school, I mean when I was graduated, I had to make a choice. Because I had gotten a fellowship from the art school to the Tiffany Foundation. And I also had gotten a job as an instructor in dentistry and I was supposed to start the dental career immediately. However, I postponed it long enough to take advantage of going for two months to the Tiffany Foundation where I met for the first time some other artists. At the Beaux Arts Institute of Design there were a few men who later became artists but who were just as much neophytes as I was, with the exception of one man whose acquaintance I never made, but later discovered that he was a fellow student. His name is, just refresh my memory will you, what's the name of the fellow who lives up in woodstock and does wood carving?

MR. SANDLER: Hague?

MR. FERBER: Hague, yes. hague was then a recent immigrant from Armenia, I suppose, or some place; he's an Armenian, isn't he?

MR. SANDLER: I think so, yes.

MR. FERBER: I discovered that some other artists in my generation had gone to that school; Milton Hebald, and Lassaw; well, that's enough, I can't remember. I'm still looking for something myself. Just a minute.

MR. SANDLER: That would have been about what year, that you were at the Beaux Arts?

MR. FERBER: 1927-1930. I never got to know any of the artists then, that is, the men who later became artists. The others were really what we might think of as commercial artists. They were learning how to become assistants to some of the architectural sculptors like McCartan.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: And Leo Lentelli, and so on. And their job was to learn how to make a figure very quickly in clay from anywhere from 2 feet to 3 feet or 4 feet, and then it was pointed up larger for a building and then they worked on it again and they learned various tricks and how to make groupings of figures and so on. That was what the school was all about. It was really an architectural sculpture school.

MR. SANDLER: Well then, your training would have been very academic in this school?

MR. FERBER: Extremely academic. The instructor came presumably once a week on Fridays. And very shortly I learned that it was better for me to stay away on Friday nights sot hat I wouldn't have the benefit of his instruction. Because I found that it was too academic. On the other hand, it was the cheapest school in New York. I had inquired at the Art Students League and I couldn't afford to go there. So I continued. I thought at the time that learning from the model was about what I needed at that period. Then when I got out of school I worked without any instruction or without any school. I taught dentistry part-time and did some painting and sculpture on my own. And after about a year of making figures without a model I suddenly realized that there was a man around who was doing woodcarving whose name was Zorach. I also saw some woodcarving by Chaim Gross but I never got to know him. I called Zorach and asked if I could come over and see him; and which he allowed me to. And I wanted to know if I could study with him. I had brought some photographs of the figures that I'd done form the model and he said, "If you've gone this far without much help you can certainly do woodcarving without any instruction. Why don't you just buy yourself some woodcarving tools and some wood and start to carve?" And this is what I did. Prior to that while I was school I was also supporting myself to some extent by making etchings and selling them. so really my first professional work as an artist was as an etcher. And these were very academic things and I used to exhibit them at the Academy, or what was equivalent to the academy of etchers, and so on. They used to have annual shows, juried shows. And I used to send them in and exhibit them. And this was a great gratification to me since I had never studied etching with anybody. When I began to carve in wood I still continued to do etchings. But it was soon superseded by the wood carving. This brings us to about 1931. And then a man by the name of David McCosh, who is a painter and who had studied at the Art Institute of Chicago, and whom I had met at the Tiffany Foundation at Oyster Bay, came to New York and looked me up and suggested, or I suggested that we find a studio together and live together. Which we then did. And this began to increase my knowledge of what art was about because here was a man who had really studied in a good art school and who had been in Europe for a year and was a follower of Cezanne. And he opened my eyes to a great many possibilities in painting and sculpture which I wasn't even aware of.

MR. SANDLER: You mean modernism?

MR. FERBER: Yes, a sort of modernism. And through McCosh I met some other artists. We lived on 14th Street. And we met some other artists who were studying at the League and also another artist by the name of -- who is now quite well known: Theodore Roszak who was an old friend of McCosh. And we all got to know each other very well and saw a good deal of each other for a couple of years. I went on for another two or three years making wood carvings and finally began to look for a dealer in a very ambitious way, and there were very few galleries to canvass. But I finally found a dealer by the name of Clayman who was a German and ran a kind of combination print framing and art gallery on 57th Street. You've never heard of him?

MR. SANDLER: I've heard the name. I've never met him, no. Is it still, or was it until very recently in existence?

MR. FERBER: Well, I think he went out of business maybe ten years ago. He had opened up another shop in an apartment but he was really out of it longer ago than that.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: But it was through David McCosh and Roszak and people who were studying at the Art Students League, a girl who later became McCosh's wife, that I began to meet artists who introduced me to what was more contemporary than even Cezanne at that time, such artists as De Chirico and so on. Now let's stop for a minute and see how much more we want of this kind of thing.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. Well, this is just fine. Because, you know, I'm sure a lot of this just isn't knowledge; probably nobody even knows it. But I wanted to know a few things around that period just as well. You weren't on the Project?

MR. FERBER: No. I was earning a small living as an instructor in dentistry and didn't feel any need for going ont he Project. but also about that time there was a John Reid Club and there was an Artists Union. I joined both of those and got to know more artists. But I never really got acquainted in an familiar way with any of these people, with the exception of Roszak and McCosh and two or three others; especially not with people who were on the Project. It was almost a kind of closed circle if you remember. It was very strongly under the influence of the Communist Party.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: People like Crozco and Siqueiros would come to New York and visit the Club and the Artists Union and of course emphasize the necessity for a social realist kind of art.

MR. SANDLER: Did your work lean in that direction at the time?

MR. FERBER: I think it leaned in that direction for a very short time. I mean sympathetic, yes. I even did a few wood carvings which had a kind of Barlach and, what's the name of the woman who does graphics . . .

MR. SANDLER: Kathe Kollwitz?

MR. FERBER: Kathe Kollwitz. That kind of feeling in that direction. but the influence was more a primitivism which came from the wood carving when wood carving was such a fetish, and stone carving was such a fetish, when people were talking a great deal about the truth to materials; not of the Bauhaus variety but just the kind of thing that one technically developed in conversations with other woodcarvers or stonecarvers and Ad Reinhardt and Baziotes and Stamos and that group when I went to Betty Parsons Gallery about 1946, or 1947 I think it was. And I think I had my first show with Betty in 1948 or 1949, I've forgotten the date, but hat can be verified in one way or another. And Mark and I became very close friends. And I met Tomlina nd we became very close friends. It was with that group around the Betty Parsons Gallery that I began to fell as if I were part of an American scene. And those were the days int he late 40s and early 50s when what later became known as the New York School began to mature or develop.

MR. SANDLER: You didn't have any contacts with, say, the Peggy Guggenhein or the Surrealists scene?

MR. FERBER: No.

MR. SANDLER: Well, let's pick up your work again then rather than to jump to that and work through your own development as to that point?

MR. FERBER: Yes. Well, the first show that I had with Betty Parsons was already a kind of surrealist abstraction.

MR. SANDLER: How did you come to that?

MR. FERBER: This was a combination of two things: I discovered that in wood carving I was tied to a block of wood or a block of stone. And just from looking around at what was happening in America, since that was when many of the surrealists and other European artists had arrived in New York and were living here, I began to see a kind of sculpture which wouldn't easily be made in wood. it would have to have been joined like a piece of furniture in order to get eh extensions and thinness which I became interested on 66th Street and Broadway. And it happened that Hebald had a studio there; and another sculptor. And we would talk but these people were mainly interested in social realist art. And I was diverging already by that time because of the nature of politics in Russia the very famous trials and so on.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: And I was very much disenchanted with the whole Communist movement by that time and veered very strongly away from any kind of American group. And also I realized that many of the artist who were so strongly tied to the Party and to the principles of social realism were doing a kind of art which I found to programmatic, to put it mildly. And so my work moved away from that. So I kept on making wood carvings and had a couple of shows at the Midtown Gallery. And long before that I had changed my name. Actually my name on my etchings when I was at dental school and selling then was still Silvers. Which is my family name. Mu middle name is Ferber. And when I went to find a gallery about 1933 or 1934 I realized that I didn't want to be mistaken for and amateur sculptor, a dentist who was doing sculpture on the side, so I changed my sculpture name to Ferber. And two or three of my dealer never even knew that I was a dentist in addition. And I never practiced dentistry full time. I only did it about half time and then less.

MR. SANDLER: Herbert, what about The Ten? Did you know them at that time?

MR. FERBER: No.

MR. SANDLER: So then you would have met Gottlieb and Rothko later?

MR. FERBER: Yes. I met Gottlieb and Rothko and Motherwell and Clyfford Still about the material and about not doing certain things because it was too much like modeling and doing other things which were closer to the nature of the material. And I was caught up in that mystique for a short time but I realized very soon that it really wasn't my cup of tea. And then in 1938 my first real experience with other forms of art outside of what was going on in New York and the social realist camp and so on, occurred when I had the chance to go to Europe for a summer. And I went to Europe and because of my reading I knew pretty much what I wanted to see. And I went to all the cathedrals that I could manage in France and in Italy. I was very, very much taken with Romanesque sculpture. And a good deal of my work in both wood carving and stone carving for some years was influenced by the distortions and the kind of false perspective or perspective that occurs int he capitals of columns in Romanesque churches. This was later interpreted as expressionism. Actually I was very much more interest din the possibility of crowding into one block of wood or one block of stone a figure or a group of figure s which if done in a naturalistic fashion wouldn't fit into the block at all, but by means of foreshortening and a kind of trompe l'oeil managing to make the figure look as if it belonged in that block.

MR. SANDLER: Before this time there were several groups that had emerged in Ne York. for instance, the American Abstract Artists; did you have any contact with this group?

MR. FERBER: No, I never had any contact with it. I didn't even know of the existence of the American abstract Artist until much, much later. And in the course of finding a studio I found a place, a studio up in. So I switched very quickly first to concrete which I developed by using an armature of iron rods. But I found that impracticable. And then I went to lead.

MR. SANDLER: Not pouring? But building?

MR. FERBER: Building, yes. Building it up as in the time-honored fashion that plaster is often built up by sculptors. But I found that this was not flexible enough for the kind of thing I wanted to do. And I realized that metal of some form, or some kind of metal, would be the most malleable, the easiest to manage for what later became known as open form sculpture. Which I was then beginning to move into. That was about 1946 or 1947. I had gone through a period of being very influenced by Henry Moore. Although I didn't do any sculpture, maybe one or two small things, which might be considered to have been influenced by Moore. In fact, I spent a whole year, I think it was from 1946 to 1947, doing no sculpture at all but just doing drawings, working my way out of the Henry Moore influence. It was such a strong influence that I realized that if I were to make any sculpture it would look too much like his work. And I simply made drawings so that I could use those as a kind of catharsis, cathartic in order to get rid of the Moore influence.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: And with the help of the lead, I say with the help of lead because it wasn't the lead which influenced my ideas, but I think, as I've always maintained, that ideas have to influence the material. And that's why I'm always so opposed to exhibitions which have to do with welding or books which have to do with welding, or anything of that sort. Although I was one of the first men in this country to work with welding metal.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: But by using lead I was able to make thin shapes and open forms so that, as we've often said, the space and the forms became equally important. And so then to repeat, these were the first things that I showed at Betty Parsons. These were things which were more open structurally and which had a strong surrealist influence. Which I think is still present in a good deal of my work.

MR. SANDLER: Well, the surrealist influence in large measure seems to have come in because of a tendency to abstraction in your work at the time, too.

MR. FERBER: That is not exactly true. Many of the surrealists were not abstract. I mean Dali was not an abstract painter.

MR. SANDLER: That's true.

MR. FERBER: And Max Ernst could hardly be called an abstract artist. They were tied to a fantasy world which realized itself on the canvas in a three dimensional and representational way. Fanciful and erotic and dreamlike and so on, but nevertheless tied to a semi-realistic framework. Whereas the sculpture I was doing moved away from that so that it was interpretable as having biomorphic forms certainly. But more of the forms could be easily identified as being arms or legs or any parts of the body.

MR. SANDLER: Yet they had that kind of gesture to them.

MR. FERBER: Yes, I think my work has always been gestural or largely gestural. Although there is much of it which is not. This may be true. And, as Wayne Anderson tried to point out, my wood carvings, which were naturalistic or semi-naturalistic had a kind of gestural arrangement. Now what else?

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Well, technically I found that lead was too soft and too difficult to maintain in its shape once it was made. And I then moved to copper and brass and worked for quite a while in brass and copper and I'm still working in those materials. Now let's pause for a minute and see if we can get a new direction.

MR. SANDLER: Well, perhaps at this point why don't we just pick up, because we'll probably go back and forth, pick up the Betty Parsons scene. You had been showing up to this time, you said at the Clayman Gallery, and then after that at the Midtown.

MR. FERBER: That's right.

MR. SANDLER: Then how did you get to Parsons?

MR. FERBER: Well, this was about 1944 or something, I think 1944.

MR. SANDLER: She would have been the Wakefield Gallery then?

MR. FERBER: Yes. And I didn't join her group until she had moved to 57th Street. Her quarters at 15, before she moved to her present quarters. But I realized that once I had stopped woodcarving and had moved into a more surrealist-abstract direction that the Midtown Gallery was no longer a very hospitable home. And I simply began to look. And it was interesting that Sylvia Marlowe, the harpsichordist, was a friend of mine at that time and she was also a friend of Betty Parsons. And she showed Betty Parsons some photographs of my work and Betty took me on as one of her group. As everybody knows, the Betty Parsons group and the Kootz Gallery, which was across the hall, were a kind of center for the New York School as it began to develop. And we were a very close knit group. Very shortly thereafter, I've forgotten the year, Bob Motherwell and Clyfford Still and Rothko and Barney Newman organized the Club.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. Well, first it would have been the school that had the Friday night evenings.

MR. FERBER: That's right. Yes, it was the New York School, what was . . .

MR. SANDLER: Subjects of the artist.

MR. FERBER: Subjects of the artist. Yes, that's right. And they had those Friday evenings. You went to some of those, didn't you?

MR. SANDLER: No, that was before my time.

MR. FERBER: Well, those Friday evenings and dinner parties that we always had after an opening at Betty Parsons or at the Kootz Gallery, which became a kind of ritual; every time a man had a show there was a dinner at one of the restaurants in town. But we all got to know each other and visited each other frequently. We were constantly in each other's homes. The conversation was always about art, but not a kind of shop talk. At that time the movement, or the school, or the milieu was so full of electricity that we didn't talk the kind of shop that I hear nowadays, which is where you're showing or what you're selling, or what commissions you've gotten. But it was always about the ideas involved in the breaking away from or developing towards a new form or a new idea. And these were very, very exciting and very stimulating and very sparse days for all of us. Nobody was making any money except the boys at the Kootz Gallery who were getting a yearly stipend until Kootz closed up as a result of his going broke. And I think there's no doubt that we all learned from each other, that conversations and discussions late into the night were very productive for all of us of the tendencies and the forms which later became quite well known.

MR. SANDLER: Well, there was a good deal of talk then about a kind of myth-making in art. Do you remember anything about that? Newman was very much involved. And Rothko's imagery.

MR. FERBER: Yes. I many not be exactly right about this but Betty Parsons had given a show of Pre-Columbian sculpture which Newman helped install. He was a very important adjunct to the Betty Parsons Gallery at that time. He was not a painter yet; that is, he didn't begin . . .

MR. SANDLER: When did he begin, around 1946? 1947?

MR. FERBER: Well, I think the best way to find that out is simply to examine the dates on his paintings. He certainly had always been a painter. he had even taught art in the high schools for a short time. But he never

showed any work. Although he had one or two things in group shows at Betty Parsons.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: But he was not know as an artist. He was know n as a kind of spokesman for the artists. And he was very important to Berry Parsons , I think, in directing her attention to artists and to movements and to ideas about art. And when she put on this show of Pre-Columbian art he became very interested in the idea of myth, I think, at that time. Now this may not be exactly right. It appeared to me that that was the impetus which started him on his interest in myth. Several of the artists objected to the idea of being included in any kind of group which revolved around the mystique of myth. One of these was Rothko. I think there was one group show that Berry Parsons put on which had to do with this idea.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. I can't think of the name now. Icono? Oh, I forget now. But she did. And Newman wrote the catalogue for that.

MR. FERBER: That's right. What was the name of that show?

MR. SANDLER: Not the Iconograph?

MR. FERBER: "Graph" was in it but not "Icono".

MR. SANDLER: No, not "icon", you're right. I forget now. Well, you also got to know Pollock then probably around that time.

MR. FERBER: Yes. Everybody knew everybody because there were only about a dozen people to know each other. There weren't really more people. There was an older group of artists such as Stuart Davis and some others who were violently opposed to what later became known as abstract expressionism. There were all kinds of forums at the Art Students League and other places. There was one very famous one at the Art Students League called the "Schism between the Artist and the Public," at which I gave a talk which was later reprinted in the Art Students League Bulletin. And then gradually of course the museums and the critics became interested and began to write about it and the museum began at least to show it and then even to buy some it.

MR. SANDLER: but in those years, say, roughly from I guess 1946 to 1948, perhaps even later, most of the activity of the artists, say, in the Parsons and the Kootz Gallery would have been visits to studios, home. It was a sort of informal, non-public thing?

MR. FERBER: Exactly. As the title of that forum indicates, the Schism between the Artist and the Public was a very great one. And our audience was primarily amongst ourselves. We were each other's audience. And we gave each other a good deal of criticism and a good deal of conversation about the work. I remember Barney Newman would come to my studio and talk for hours about a single piece of sculpture.

MR. SANDLER: he wrote a catalogue for . . .

MR. FERBER: And he wrote the introduction or the foreword tot he first show that I had at Betty Parsons, in which he used the word "heroic" about my work. And I would say he even encouraged me to make larger things. He felt that the things I was making at the time, which were never more than two or three feet high, were too small for the idea. And if I may say so, I think it turned out to be true. The big things I've made have always been at least , if not more successful than the smaller ones. Now of course there's no limit to size. And size has become a thing in itself, I think unfortunately. Motherwell was an extremely important influence in his organizational ability, in his willingness to get people together, to publish, to organize the school and then the Club. And the Club in those days was really a kind of second home. It actually came about because we talked for . . .

MR. SANDLER: Well, other things around that period slightly, say, before the Club that I was just curios about. Tony Smith was also around the gallery I guess in a sort of similar way that Newman was, not as much as an artist but as a friend?

MR. FERBER: That's quite right. Tony Smith installed my second show i thin it was. Yes, the second show I had at Betty Parsons, Tony Smith installed. And he was a fantastic man. Very modest and self-effacing, devoted to the painters and sculptors at Betty Parsons particularly, but also those at the Kootz Gallery. And he spent a good deal of time then just talking to us about our work. He himself was not doing any sculpture that I knew of. Although recently I've been told that he was painting at that time.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. He was painting.

MR. FERBER: But certainly he never showed it to anybody that I know about. Stamos may have seen some because they were close friends. But Tony was involved with architecture. And, as you know, he built a house for

Stamos out on the Island.

MR. SANDLER: That's right.

MR. FERBER: And designed Fred Olson's house in Connecticut, and the house of his son. I don't remember the dates but I think it must have been in the early 50s. Yes, Tony Smith certainly was an important member of the group without participating as a practitioner.

MR. SANDLER: At that time, too, guys like Still, Rothko, and Newman, I guess, were close. This was far before they fell apart from one another?

MR. FERBER: Yes. Still and Rothko were very close friends. Rothko and Gottlieb were very close friends. They wrote an article together, as you know, for the New York Times.

MR. SANDLER: That's right.

MR. FERBER: Clyfford Still and Rothko had been invited by McAgy to teach out in California. So they were very good friends. And Motherwell and Baziotes and Gottlieb, all of us knew each other as intimately as it was possible for grownup persons to know each other.

MR. SANDLER: Reinhardt would have been there, too, but he was somewhat younger.

MR. FERBER: Reinhardt was a little younger although I don't know that that was the criterion because Stamos was really the youngest of all.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: He was a kind of child prodigy. Nevertheless he was a very intrinsic part of the group. But I don't know why Ad Reinhardt didn't become a close part of it. Perhaps because even int hose days he had a kind of purist idea about it. I know he was very much opposed when I made my first architectural sculpture in 1951 for Percy Goodman for a synagogue. He was very much opposed to the idea that I should do anything as commonplace and public as a sculpture for an architect. Barney Newman, on the other hand, encouraged me. This really sounds ridiculous now but at that time this was really an ethical question that we faced and tried to solve. I think of it as being naive now but it was then a very serious problem. Since we had certainly been rejected by the largest part of the public, and that included the museums and the collectors, we felt considerable antagonism to the outside world as we looked at it. So that when an architect such as Percy Goodman, who was really the first architect in America to face up to the problem of using abstract art on his buildings, when he came along everybody began to discuss it as if it were a questionable thing to do. And various strong sides were taken. I won't forget a cafeteria lunch at which Tomlina and Ad Reinhardt and Barney Newman and Rothko and I, and perhaps Motherwell, were present where Ad said, " You just can't do that kind of thing." and Barney Newman said, "The only way to do it is to get your art out in the public, I mean in the public eye." At any rate, I must admit that my reason for doing it was very simple. The only chance I hade to make a large sculpture was for a place that was set aside for it. And I was so enthusiastic about it that although I had been asked and given a fee for making a six-foot sculpture. I made a twelve-foot sculpture for the same price. And what moved me really was the possibility, the chance of making a large sculpture so that it would be give a home and could be seen. I think we all felt at that time that museums were a kind of tomb, that once a think became a museum property it lost a good deal of its vitality and became simply another object in a collection.

MR. SANDLER: Then there was considerable interest in the idea of outside art? A kind of art which wasn't over the mantel place or a coffee table thing?

MR. FERBER: No, I don't think so. I don't think so. Barney spoke of it as an idea. That is, he said we must get out work into the public eye. And the chance of making a sculpture for a building seemed to be a kind of obvious way of doing it. But the big pictures that were being made by Hark and Jack Pollock and Clyfford Still were not intended for a large audience. They weren't intended as murals. In fact, they were not intended for any place because, if you remember, the galleries were hardly large enough to show these things. And many of the dealers objected strongly tot he idea of making such big pictures or sculptures because they couldn't sell them. And it was really over their violent objections, not Betty Parsons, she was very openminded about such things, but I think there's no doubt that Kootz would tell his artists that they should do saleable pictures; by which he meant smaller things which could be sold for lower prices, but particularly for people who wanted to put more than one picture on a wall.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. This didn't apply though as much to the Parsons group because there you really at one point have . . .

MR. FERBER: Yes. Well, as I say, I think that the Parsons people more than the people at Kootz, although this is

not so important, felt freer, for one reason or another. Perhaps because they weren't being supported by a dealer. And perhaps because betty was very, very liberal and open minded and never thought in her modest way of suggesting any size or content or anything else to an artist.

MR. SANDLER: Around that time, too, there's a publication call the Tiger's Eye.

MR. FERBER: Yes.

MR. SANDLER: Which was edited by Stephan, I guess, of Stephan.

MR. FERBER: Yes. John and Ruth Stephan. Ruth Stephan is a poet and she had considerable wealth. And John Stephan, her husband, was a painter who showed at the Betty Parsons Gallery several times. And they decided to publish a literary and plastic art magazine. And they went about in a very generous fashion. You've seen the issues?

MR. SANDLER: Yes, I've gone through them.

MR. FERBER: Well, that was a kind of flattering and interesting adjunct and we all wrote one or two things for a few of the issues. We all had our work published in those issues. I suppose there weren't more than a dozen issues altogether, not even that many.

MR. SANDLER: Not that many, no. Eight, I think. But his would have been one of the very early times that your work would have been published in a sympathetic place where artists had some say?

MR. FERBER: yes. And it was modelled to some extent along avant garde European lines. they used richer paper to print on and different colored paper for each page. They put the table of contents some place in the middle or at the back of the magazine so that it was always difficult to find your the idea being that you were to look at the work or read the poetry before you discovered who did it. this was a kind of device for making not he artist less important but at least to make the work account more than a name. What else about that period?

MR. SANDLER: What about critics of the time? What was the response that you generally go? There would have been Jewell on the Times. And there would have been Genauer . . .

MR. FERBER: No, it was McBride on the . . .

MR. SANDLER: McBride. And Genauer on the World Telegram. And in the magazines there was occasionally Manny Farber in the New Republic, and Clem Greenberg in the Nation. Was Clem fairly close to, or did he know the artists at the time?

MR. FERBER: Well, Clem, as you know, was the most vociferous and the most intelligent and the strongest critic in favor of the work of two artists: Jackson Pollock first David Smith second. And he paid absolutely no attention to any of the other artists. We knew him because he was close to Jack; he became a friend of Jackson Pollock's and a friend of David Smith's. We knew him because of that. I knew Clem through a literary friend of mine, the editor of Partisan Review, William Phillips. Because Greenberg was then very close to Partisan Review and was at one time one of the editors of Partisan Review. And even for a short time Clem persuaded Partisan Review to print one black and white drawings by various artists. I think at that time he looked with considerable favor on Roszah's work. But I have never had any word in print from Greenberg. I've been told, you know, seconhanded that he likes this piece or that piece. but I've never had any support from him. The other critics of the time, such as McBride and Jewell were simply antagonistic or neutral. I wasn't acquainted with Manny Farber's writings nor with Genauer's until much later. Actually there were only two or three places that people looked to, and those were the Times and McBride's paper, what was that?

MR. SANDLER: The Tribune.

MR. FERBER: The Tribune. And the Nation. And certainly Clem wrote some very fine pieces at that time. But he openly objected tot eh work of Still and Rothko when I saw him at the galleries. Alfred Barr and Dorothy Miller, however, in the museum world, of course it's true after the museum had been picketed by part of this group in order to get them to open its doors to American aft, but Alfred Barr became one of the first major forces to be interested very much in Pollock and also in the others. And he was very important and influential in persuading the museum to buy the first piece that they bought from me, for which it was extremely difficult to raise a few dollars.

MR. SANDLER: Around 1943 there seems to be, you know, a tendency on the part of many of the artists at I guess Kootz and Parsons to attempt to present themselves and their work to the public. There was a protest then in 1948. I guess it had to do with the change of the . . .

MR. FERBER: Policy at the Metropolitan?

MR. SANDLER: No, that was later in 1950. but his had to do with the Boston Institute of Contemporary Art. There was a meeting at the Museum of Modern Art. Paul Burlin, Bradley Walker Tomlin were involved with that.

MR. FERBER: Yes.

MR. SANDLER: Did you attend that ? Were you involved with that thing?

MR. FERBER: No.

MR. SANDLER: But you were involved in 1950 with the Irascibles?

MR. FERBER: Yes. Before that, however, . . . when was the Metropolitan?

MR. SANDLER: That was 1950.

MR. FERBER: Bob Mother well organized a group, a roundtable.

MR. SANDLER: That's right. That was in 1952.

MR. FERBER: That was also in 1950. To which he invited Alfred Barr as a mediator. You know about that thing?

MR. SANDLER: Yes. The revised minutes came out in the Modern Artists in America that publication . . .

MR. FERBER: Yes, which Motherwell and Reinhardt worked on.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Yes. I vaguely remember something about the Museum of Modern Art in Boston changing its name to Museum of Contemporary art, or vice versa.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: That created a small stir. I know that Bradley had something to do with that; maybe Burlin. I don't remember anything about that. The roundtable was very important, I think. It got a lot of people to talk freely in an associative fashion about themselves in a place where they knew a stenographer was taking down what they had to say, nevertheless they spoke very freely, and there was a lot of discussion. That was the meeting at which Alfred Barr tried to find a name for this kind of art.

MR. SANDLER: That's right. And everyone stomped on him.

MR. FERBER: And nobody knew the name to give it. I don't remember what name he proposed. There have been many claimants for the title of the originator of the word "abstract expressionism." I thought Goldwater was the first man to use the concept at a forum which was held at the Art Students League. Goldwater got up and said, "Isn't this kind of work closely related to the abstract painting and sculpture in Europe, and the Expressionist painting and sculpture in Germany, and couldn't it be called a kind of Abstract Expressionism?"

MR. SANDLER: Do you remember the date of that?

MR. FERBER: I don't remember the date but I could give it to you within a year if I would look at some papers I have, I think.

MR. SANDLER: What do you remember about the Irascibles?

MR. FERBER: I remember that very clearly, I think. I think there was something that either preceded very shortly, or succeeded very shortly . . . An issue of Harper's Bazar had the Betty Parsons group photographed each with a piece of his work.

MR. SANDLER: Would that have been Soby? I can check that out.

MR. FERBER: It's funny, I was up in Cambridge this weekend and an old friend of mine brought out the clipping and showed it to me. And I remembered it suddenly. I forgot to look at the date but she's sending me a Xerox of it so I'll know more about it the exact time. The Irascibles, well, what happened then was simply that, as you know, the Metropolitan had decided to change its policy. Somebody discovered that there was a lot of money available for purchasing American art, and that this money had never been used. And some pressure was put on the Board of Trustees to buy it. And they decided on a way of doing it which we felt was very amateurish, to say the least, although it sounded professional; which was to organize regional juries all over the country which were to choose works of art, they were then to be sent to a jury in New York which was to eliminate further, and the work remaining was to be shown. The artists of both the Betty Parsons and the Kootz galleries, this group of

artists of which I've been talking, had decided earlier on never to submit their work to juries. They felt that this was no way to decide. That juries were either inexpert or resorted to logrolling and favoritism, or that the juries would be prejudiced in one way or another; and that was the only way to show this kind of work was to have an expert who would be responsible for choosing and then writing about, if necessary, but a single person who would be responsible for the showing instead of having a jury each member of which could easily avoid responsibility by putting it on the other man's shoulders. So that when the Metropolitan decided to have, first, juries in the back country which was very far from developed, much less developed than it is now, and then to have another jury in New York City we all object violently. And a group of painters, eighteen of the, who are now, of course, well know, decided to boycott the show. They had many reasons. One of which was that this was the best way to get a kind of cross-section of bad art mostly with maybe a few inclusions, or maybe the best art excluded. And the idea of submitting to a jury was also unpleasant. And I insisted that some sculptors be included in this because while this was a painting show but I insisted that since they would most likely have a sculpture show later on and the sculptors should make their position known. I canvasses some of the sculptors, David Smith and David Hare and . . .

MR. SANDLER: Lassaw.

MR. FERBER: And Lipton. And I think that was it. I don't remember if there were . . .

MR. SANDLER: No, I think Rosazk and Bourgeois.

MR. FERBER: Very possibly, yes. We went along and signed our names. but, of course it was a painting show and so the painters received the attention that was focused on it. By accident more or less because Barney newman wrote a letter to the New York Times which appeared on the first page on Monday morning because there wasn't anything else to print, I think.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Ordinarily it would never have gotten on the first page. And it raised a tremendous furor. When the sculpture show was put on a year later I tried to organize the sculptors to boycott it and I was completely unsuccessful. We had several meetings and I never was able to get more than one or two men to agree with me to stay out of it. but hey did, so they didn't. And the show went on with those refraining from participating in it, as I did. There was another show at the Metropolitan which you may remember. It was called Artists for the Victory.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: That must have been in 19--, that was during the war so it must have been . . .

MR. SANDLER: 1942.

MR. FERBER: 1942, was it?

MR. SANDLER: Yes. They may have had others because I think there was some connection between those show and the later Pepsi Cola shows.

MR. FERBER: Oh, yes, that's right. Yes.

MR. SANDLER: But I think the first one at the Met was in 1942.

MR. FERBER: Yes, that's right; it must have been because I remember I was very naive about the whole business at that time. Actually I think that my relation to the art world was a very unprofessional one until I got into the Betty Parsons Gallery and met these pros. Because I was really at that time still half dentist and half artist. And, as I pointed out earlier, I never got to know any artists really until I got into the Betty Parsons Gallery. I knew one or two but we didn't express opinions of a social nature so much at that time. I did submit a piece to that Artists for Victory show and I won one of the prizes, the purchase prize. It was a group of three figures in granite. Which is now in the Metropolitan and I don't think has ever been shown since. Calder won one of the prizes at that time, too. Already in 1942 he was acceptable enough to win a prize at the Metropolitan. Ivan Le Lorraine Albright won one in 1942 in that show but refused to accept it because the price of the picture was I think more than $3,00 or $1,500 or something like that. The idea of the Irascibles and the publication of their names and the publication of their reasons for objecting became a very important cause, or very important, I should say, in the development of their careers. Because it focused the public's attention for the first time on . . .

MR. SANDLER: On a group?

MR. FERBER: On a group of artists who felt related to each other, if not in style at least in purpose. And the fact is that their work did not resemble each other's very closely. One of the remarkable things I think about those

eighteen people and about the half-dozen sculptors involved was that their work did not look like each other's. There were occasional pieces, occasional paintings which resembled each other. but I think as time went on the work of each became highly distinctive, and they had followers. but I think it's interesting that the work of eighteen painters and half a dozen sculptors should look so different.

MR. SANDLER: Herbert, this raises another and to me very interesting problem, the whole problem of community. but before we get involved in that, because I don't want to break once we start, I'll just run this side out.

MR. FERBER: Now maybe we can get something to . . .

[Interruption]

MR. SANDLER: The last thing we were talking about was you called attention to the fact that although you knew one another, there were these very wide divergences in the work.

MR. FERBER: Yes.

MR. SANDLER: And you couldn't really call it a movement or an ism or a style or a group. And yet there was always a question of community, whether these artists did in fact constitute some kind of group. do you recall any of the ideas about that?

MR. FERBER: Objectively one has only to examine the work of people as divergent as Lippold and Lassaw or Rothko and Motherwell or Clyfford Still. No doubt there has been what might be thought of as what could you call superficial resemblances. There's no doubt that one or two sculptures by somebody else, or one or two of mine can be mistaken for somebody else's work if you're not familiar with the work of each. but I think that in general the work has moved in different directions. And I suppose also that at some point in the future much of this work will look more cohesive than it does at the moment.

MR. SANDLER: But you felt sympathies and affinities?

MR. FERBER: We certainly felt, and the sympathies and affinities which we felt for each other I think were based upon a sense that we were all outside of the art world, the official, the institutional art world. Don't forget the universities with the exception of places such as Sarah Lawrence or Bennington weren't interested. The museums were largely uninterested. The Whitney Museum of course since it was showing American art did show some of this work. And finally the Museum of Modern Art. But we were united against the world and the world was more or less united against us. furthermore, we were all of the same age more or less. We all began to think in terms which were somewhat different from those which preceded us in Europe at about the same time. So that it was natural for that, say, dozen people to meet and talk. Also it was fortuitous that the two galleries were so close to each other physically. Now this kind of thing didn't obtain in England at that time, or even later. I remember when David Sylvester came, I think it was to Motherwell's or to Rothko's, I've forgotten, he walked into the room and he said, "My God, I would never meet a group of artists of this kind in England in one room. They simply would never meet, would never be interested in seeing each other, or might hate each other." Now what else about the group.

MR. SANDLER: Did you want to tell your wife about Art?

MR. FERBER: No, I'll tell her later. Edith, were you here when Mel called?

EDITH: No, I tried to reach her.

MR. FERBER: Oh, you did. I see. All right. Good. Forget it.

MR. SANDLER: Just continuing on the idea of community, Herbert, you indicated that there was a kind of common feeling about European art at the time, or it wasn't that common, a lot of guys had changed their mind about French painting.

MR. FERBER: Yes, that's true. Certainly the strongest influence at the moment when I arrived on the scene was not for sculpture but for painting . . . seemed to be Impressionism and not Cubism. The artists were already feeling that they had to break away from Cubism.

MR. SANDLER: Really! In 1946 is that . . .

MR. FERBER: Well, I would say within a year or two of that, that is 1947 or something like that. In conversations with people like Bradley Tomlin or Mark Cubism was an anathema. For several reasons: one, the kind of rigidity which can describe its format; the color, which is dull . . . I mean earth grays and things of that kind. These artists were moving toward bright colors, light colors. Or if not, as in the case of Baziotes, so light

they had a kind of veil like quality instead of a dense quality. In other words, they might not have been so high in key but they were thin in substance.

MR. SANDLER: Atmospheric in a sense?

MR. FERBER: Yes. "Atmospheric" is a word that I think can be used. But even at least as unpleasant as a concept for these artists was the notion of the Bauhaus. A whole sense of rigid use of modules of a rectilinear structure as in Mondrian. Although the artists admired Mondrian they also objected tot he idea of placing any value on materials. In other words, a kind of expressionism combined with an Impressionist color sense was very important. And surrealism certainly. The automatic way of beginning or using automatic writing or automatic starting on a work was important. Amongst the sculptors I think the weight of surrealism was even stronger. If I think of Lippold I have to exclude that. but if I think of Lipton and, not Lassaw but . . .

MR. SANDLER: Roszak?

MR. FERBER: Roszak and David Smith and David Hare and myself, I think that Surrealism had a strong hand. Lassaw was really the first abstract artist in America in a way. He preceded David Smith. He never did anything which was vaguely representational in his life. And he was outstanding in that regard. Lippold of course wa younger and was really part of the Bauhaus tradition. What was your question again?

MR. SANDLER: About the attitudes to the French?

MR. FERBER: Yes, about the attitudes to European art. As I say, I think there was a strong reaction against the density, the solidity, the rigidity or Cubist painting and sculpture. I always felt that Cubist sculpture was a kind of weak takeoff on cubist painting, that it lacked the color and, well the kind of illusionism which the Cubist paintings had.

MR. SANDLER: Would this also have applied . . . you're thinking of, say earlier guys like Lipchitz. What about someone like Gonzalez? Would that also apply?

MR. FERBER: I'm talking about the cubist work particularly of Lipchitz which really had cubistic shapes, you know. Gonzalez presumably came out of Cubism but I don't see it. I mean I've heard this said, but I don't see it. I think Gonzalez comes out of naturalism, naturalistic sculpture with a trend toward abstracting from nature; not abstract, not non-representational ever, but a kind of abstracting from nature. I fail to see why it's Cubist. And I fail to see why this term is used in relation to, well, even to Jackson Pollock. I know my friend Rubin and Greenberg make a strong case for this. But it's difficult for me to see. I think some of the notions of surrealism and some of the notions of Impressionism are very strong.

MR. SANDLER: But I'm curios about one thing, you know, and this again would bring Rubin in. Mark didn't begin to cut out the calligraphy and become involved with that sort of diffuse color until about 1948. And he was still writing at the time. So was Barney. Jackson made statements, 1947 I guess was his last. But the word "Impressionism" doesn't come up in anything that I've been gathering. And you're probably the first who says it was talked about reasonably early and I'm just curious about how early was that?

MR. FERBER: Well, when did Tomlin die? It was long before Tomlin died. When did he die, in 1954?

MR. SANDLER: 1953, 1954, yes.

MR. FERBER: As early as that?

MR. SANDLER: Applying to not Tomlin's kind of calligraphy by applying to . . .

MR. FERBER: No, applying to his own interest in color and his own interest in the plane. Although his work has depth. All of these people have a certain Cubist depth if you think of that as a criterion. Edith, could we all have a little something like liquid.

EDITH: Oh, sure.

MR. FERBER: We've been talking and I've been too painful to get up . . .

EDITH: Would you like a drink like what?

MR. SANDLER: Scotch and anything.

EDITH: Soda or ice? I mean water?

MR. SANDLER: Soda, if you have it.

EDITH: Sure. And you? This?

MR. FERBER: I'll have one of those, yes. What is that? Campari or Cinzano?

EDITH: Cinzano.

MR. SANDLER: Well, that to me is interesting because I've been trying to sort of track this down.

MR. FERBER: Well, there's another influence. And that's Matisse don't forget.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Don't forget that Rothko made a painting called Homage to Matisse. And he wasn't only interested in Matisse as a character. He was interested in Matisse as an artist, in the color of Matisse. And early on Greenberg, I must say, was one of the first to say that Matisse was really a greater painter that Picasso because of his color.

MR. SANDLER: Yes, he was.

MR. FERBER: And his use of the plane?

MR. SANDLER: No, that's curious. He did it on the basis of his quality. He really didn't come around to Matisse's ideas until fairly late. he always made an exception of them but as an artist, not on the basis of his ideas. He holds on the Cubism very long. A very interesting thing about . . .

MR. FERBER: Clem does?

MR. SANDLER: Clem does, yes.

MR. FERBER: Well, I see a closer relationship between Rothko and Impressionism and Monet and Matisse than I do to any cubist painting.

MR. SANDLER: Oh, definitely. Avery, too.

MR. FERBER: Yes. In spite of the fact that there is this rectilinear shape plus . . . well, that's all.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: The diaphanous quality relates, I think, to other people, certainly not to the Cubist painters. Anyhow that's a digression I suppose.

MR. SANDLER: But do you remember any specific attitudes about French painting? I know this comes up in those three-day conferences. And as early as 1949 there were a couple of panels up in Provincetown where that was discussed.

MR. FERBER: Yes, that's true. I didn't go to Provincetown so I missed those. But I heard about them. Well, I think it was twofold; one was the reaction against Cubism , against the Bauhaus, against object making. One of the crises seems to have centered around the idea that European artists were making objects of art and American artists were making something else which was hard to define.

But they were not objects of art; they were works of art; or they were expressions of feeling. There was on one hand a kind of anti-professionalism, anti-institutionalism as exemplified by the European artists and opposed by a sense of freedom, of opposition to the Establishment, of making things for taste, for reasons of taste, of being willing to break all the rules. As if Picasso hadn't, you know. This kind of attitude was an anti-European one. Now, on the other hand, there was a very favorable attitude towards the surrealists because I think they felt that for the first time they had met artists who felt that their whole life was an art. somehow an artists like Monet or Picasso or Matisse seemed to be in business; that is, they produced, they sold, to a dealer, and although they may have spent fifteen hours a day painting, it didn't seem to involve the whole life quality of the artist. In other words, it wasn't a gestalt including his whole psyche. The surrealists seemed to have given this idea to the American artists: that art was something you not only lived twenty-four hours a day but without which you couldn't live, not a s a job, not as something to go to in your studio but something to be a form of expression at all times, you know, while eating, while making love, while doing anything; one was constantly an artist. Now for Americans this was an extremely expressive concept, or interesting concept, because most of them were semi-professionals. they taught or they lived off their wives or they had jobs in other professions, as I did. So that the idea of being wholly and completely an artist and nothing else was very attractive. And they took that over wholeheartedly. That aspect of European art was attractive. Then, of course, the size of the picture as if Courbet or Monet or any academician had not made big pictures, they all began to think of big pictures even before, I

think the sculptors began to think of big sculptures as an anti-Establishment idea. It was really, I think, not only an aesthetic expression but a kind of epator le bourgeoisie expression to make things so big that they couldn't be handled.

MR. SANDLER: Was there also some disappointment, I gather there was when the first shows of the School of Paris art came over to this country I guess around 1947 after the war?

MR. FERBER: I don't remember any opposition to that.

MR. SANDLER: It was just disappointment, a feeling that the School of Paris wasn't what it used to be.

MR. FERBER: Oh, I know people said, "Oh, Picasso is not really a good artist." But I think this kind of thing was said tongue in cheek almost like a mischievous boy. I really don't think that Miro and Picasso and Matisse and others were thought of as not good or great.

MR. SANDLER: But there was a feeling that what the guys were doing here . . .

MR. FERBER: There was a feeling that what we were doing here was more free, more expressive, less, not less disciplined but less organized.

MR. SANDLER: I know on the part of Clyfford Still some notion of a kind of the Americanness of this American art although I would imagine most of the other guys were still very internationally-minded. do you remember anything about that issue?

MR. FERBER: Well, clyfford Still very likely would have had that attitude, but I think he's the only one who would have had it. Occasionally somebody like Motherwell or somebody else might say that first, all that counts is whether it's good or not whether it's made in France or italy. There was a tremendous admiration for De Chirico, for example, or for Miro. And there were nationalists in that group and chauvinists but I think they were put down, to a large extent. Also I think many of the things they said were, as I've suggested, said in a mischievous fashion, not in any considered way.

MR. SANDLER: I wonder, because one of the things I'd like to do next week, or next time is maybe get involved with reminiscences of a particular artist. But where does the Egan group fit in?

MR. FERBER: Of course Egan had certainly three or four artists who have made their place. One was Guston. One was a de Kooning. One was Kline. Almost one of the fist swaps I ever made in my life, which was in I guess 1949 or 1950, was with de Kooning. And I saw his show at Egan. Yes, of course. It's just that perhaps just because he had only three artists, the ones I've mentioned, who seem to fit into our group. The others, such as McNeil and, who else?

MR. SANDLER: Cavallon.

MR. FERBER: Yes, he had Cavallon. Were more Bauhaus-type artists at the time. I think even McNeil was, wasn't he?

MR. SANDLER: Well, that was a little bit later than what you're talking about. I don't think McNeil really showed until about 1950 or 1951, several years after this period. Cavallon was still working in a kind of geometric loosening it up.

MR. FERBER: Yes. But certainly that was the period when de Kooning was doing black and white pictures. And Kline had begun to do some slightly larger ones, I think.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Guston came in a little bit later because he had been in the Midwest.

MR. SANDLER: Right. And then he showed first with Peridot.

MR. FERBER: Yes. That's right. He showed first with Peridot and then switched to Egan later. And we didn't get to know Guston until I think he got to Egan or even after that. But we did know Kline and de Kooning. The kind of life I led, just to be personal for a moment which was much more rigid than the lives these other men led, was simply due to the fact that I was teaching dentistry and had a small practice going in the evening. I had to get up early in the morning so I couldn't go down to the Cedar Bar and stay up until three or four in the morning. And I couldn't drink because I wouldn't have been able to function the next day.

MR. SANDLER: Would there have been any animosity, not animosity but coldness between, say, the Parsons and the Kootz group that you remember?

MR. FERBER: No.

MR. SANDLER: What about between uptown and downtown artists, say, the group around The Club?

MR. FERBER: Well, The Club really didn't begin to function as a downtown group until much later.

MR. SANDLER: It really began around 1949, the thing itself.

MR. FERBER: Yes, but by that time, I mean later on the artists whose names we've mentioned were practically out of it. Then it became a downtown group. Actually I think with the first Tenth Street Show.

MR. SANDLER: The Ninth Street Show.

MR. FERBER: The Ninth Street Show. That was the kind of statement of a downtown group. And then The Club began to get bigger and so on.

MR. SANDLER: One guy whose name is sort of forgotten, I wonder if you remember him, he was one of the Irascible Eighteen and he wrote occasionally, I believe, The Nation, Weldon Kees.

MR. FERBER: Oh. No, he wasn't one of the Irascibles. Weldon Kees was a poet.

MR. SANDLER: He also apparently painted.

MR. FERBER: Yes, he did. But he really didn't show that I know of, he may have shown but I don't know anything about it. He was really a poet. We all knew him slightly. I knew him by having met him a half dozen times at some friend's house in a different category because he lived out in Brooklyn Heights, I think. He disappeared. They say he committed suicide.

MR. SANDLER: Yes, nobody seems to know what happened to him.

MR. FERBER: Well, I mean his body disappeared. He's supposed to have jumped off the San Francisco Bridge.

MR. SANDLER: Yes, that's right.

MR. FERBER: Oh, he was floating on the periphery. A poet.

MR. SANDLER: His name keeps coming up occasionally and I'm trying to find out . . .

MR. FERBER: People admired his work I think, or his figure, his personality, his kind of intense . . .

MR. SANDLER: He's had a comeback among poets I think and I was just curios as to whether you remember him at all. Do you remember a show at Kootz called The Inter-Subjectives?

MR. FERBER: That was at Better Parsons, wasn't it?

MR. SANDLER: No, Betty Parsons was this show that Barney wrote that . . .

MR. FERBER: The graph.

MR. SANDLER: Yes, with the graph.

MR. FERBER: Did Kootz do a show called The Inter-Subjectives? Yes, of course, that's right.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. And Harold wrote an introduction to that catalogue. It was a painting show. Harold and Kootz did it. I think Baziotes and Hofmann maybe designed the brochure. Because there seems to be at the time, you know, sporadic attempts on the part of the artist to point to some kind of identity. Newman did it in his catalogue at Parsons. And apparently Harold did it in this show.

MR. FERBER: The Inter-Subjectives?

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: I remember that. Was that a Kootz Gallery group? Or was it . . .

MR. SANDLER: They brought in some other people. But I guess it would have been mostly Kootz. Yes. But they still hadn't broken down that idea that if you show in one gallery you don't show in the other. That was broken down later. Because Barney's show was all Parsons people.

MR. FERBER: Yes, I remember the title. I don't remember who was in it and I don't remember even whether I was in it.

MR. SANDLER: No, I think it was painting not sculpture. Your work switched from lead to welded metal when? Around 1949? 1948?

MR. FERBER: I can look it up, but I would say about 1949 or 1950.

MR. SANDLER: Why did the switch take place form the lead?

MR. FERBER: Well, lead was too soft. You know, very soon we began to discover that sculpture was going to be sent not from you studio to the gallery and hopefully to a collector or back to your studio; but to exhibitions. It was being invited to museum shows. And they didn't know how to handle sculpture very well. They still don't. it would just get bent and battered. I discovered that the lead pieces suffered. So I just decided I'd have to have a stronger metal.

MR. SANDLER: But the work in a sense also changed when you move into the new medium. It becomes in a sense . . . I wouldn't want to call it more linear but some of the more massive elements, it became changed in that respect, it no longer conveyed the kind of massiveness, say, of this piece.

MR. FERBER: Well, you know, I was wondering, this was modelled in plaster and cast, this is a casting. It's actually not one bit more bulky than this, than either of these two pieces; is it? For its size?

MR. SANDLER: No.

MR. FERBER: In fact, it's less bulky in cross section. I think what's more important about it is that it really has a linear quality or a gestural quality, which is perhaps better; but it's open; the fact is that the space is very important, just as they are here. So here's an example, to my way of thinking, of a piece which was made in plaster model and then cast in a traditional fashion. This, which is made of sheet metal and welded, which has a resemblance based upon an ideology, I mean a formal ideology, formally speaking, and not upon the procedure.

MR. SANDLER: But still the idea of directness would have entered in?

MR. FERBER: I don't think so. I always have made drawings. I'm not an abstract expressionist. I'm not an action sculptor. I don't know anybody who can be. And the idea of directness may be more applicable to stone or wood carving where modifications are difficult to make once you've made a mark it's difficult to change. There your direct approach is very formidable and unmodifiable. And I mae many of my wood sculptures and stone sculptures without even a drawing to go by. Just started to carve. Now that's really direct. And once you've made a cut or a stroke or an indentation you can't eradicate it. Now this one is perhaps the most indirect procedure because you can modify this without end. You can take it apart, you can unweld it and put it together again.

MR. SANDLER: Well, that what I would call direct because . . .

MR. FERBER: Well, that simply means that it's . . . I don't see that, it's just capable of being modified. Afterthoughts can be used as a painter does when he's working on a canvas. The only direct thing I can think of as a direct approach is one in which a gesture is made and stays there, as when Picasso or somebody else has made a drawing in light and had it photographed. That's unmodifiable; that's very direct.

MR. SANDLER: But one of the things that would attract you to . . .

MR. FERBER: What does indirect mean in painting?

MR. SANDLER: Well, the way I would interpret it would be an artist who will make sketches and then transfer the sketch in the painting so that the painting isn't the direct thing itself.

MR. FERBER: Well, you know, I think that's kind of a rather superficial distinction. First of all, any artist who makes paintings nowadays and during the so called New York School period made many paintings. Every painting was a statement derived from a prior painting. Sometimes they were small paintings which were in a way enlarged. It's possible to make sculpture directly without every thinking of something in advance. It's possible to make paintings that way, too. Only if you define your terms in the way you have; but nothing works that way.

MR. SANDLER: You're suggesting then that, say, Harold's ideas int he article on Action Painting you wouldn't be very sympathetic to?

MR. FERBER: No, not at all.

MR. SANDLER: But you do like this medium because it enables you to almost improvise much more than you could in, say, either stone or even in lead?

MR. FERBER: No, it's not easier than in lead. I improvised in working in stone, too. You can improvise as you go along in stone. In other words, you have to go very slowly, and think what your next cut it going to be; are you going to make this shape or not? But that's improvisational too. Provided that you're not actually following a model to, you know, copy. When I make a sculpture of this size, which is the first size, I have first made a drawing. I have then to translate it into three-dimensional terms. That's not exactly improvisation. That's thinking very hard about how to do something, how to translate something. Accidents may occur but one has to examine them, especially in sculpture as to whether they're going to stay or not. Now in painting the consideration of an accident may take less time because it takes less time to make it and to eradicate it so you can make an instantaneous decision. In sculpture you just can't work that way; nobody can work that way. I mean you can if you're sort of dripping some unnameable material, I don't know what material it would be, sort of dripping it off your fingertips. But then I don't know any sculpture that's made that way. But if you're making another one, which is twice or three times as large as that, which comes out of this very, very directly. This is almost a model, or it is a model. There are subtle changes because of the scale. I don't think any sculptor can improvise at all in the sense in which you're speaking.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Improvisation occurs. You make a shape and you decide instantaneously that it needs another shape near it. But I'm sure that's exactly what Rubens did when he was painting a landscape. He painted a series of trees and then the shape of the sky and clouds was constantly being modified and the trees' edge being modified in relation to each other. It isn't that he painted this and they painted something to fill in.

MR. SANDLER: So really you're suggesting that the reason you changed to this medium is because it's a tougher medium, it holds better?

MR. FERBER: The medium itself is stronger, more durable material. I has considerable flexibility, which is I think a term more useful. One can modify one's ideas more easily here than in stone or in wood. Also you can achieve shapes which you can't achieve in stone or wood. I mean artists have done it in Italy, you know. Mannerists artists have made marble carvings which were fantastically delicate. But they usually break. I think Mondrian improvised. It doesn't look like an improvised painting, does it?

MR. SANDLER: No. Until you see the unfinished ones.

MR. FERBER: Until you realize where the tapes were, where the paintings were left with tapes, his later unfinished ones. You realize he was constantly improvising or manipulating. But none of this is action painting. And I'm sure that de Kooning and Mondrian both spend the same amount of time in deciding where the next thing goes, or what color the next is going to be. In Mondrian's case either by sitting and deciding and then trying; or in de Kooning's case by sitting and trying and then scraping it off.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: I think we ought to quit now.

[Interruption]

MR. SANDLER: This is the second interview with Herbert Ferber on December 31, 1968 at his studio.

MR. FERBER: Gee, David Hare disappeared, hasn't he?

MR. SANDLER: Yes, I see him occasionally because he lives close by, but you know not really, one just doesn't see him much any more. Herbert, last time we kind of got up into the latish forties. But I thought we would just start talking about your work. There are certain things that I just wanted to ask. Your earlier work tends to be rather more linear than, say, what you're doing today. Much of it also tends to be rather more suggestive of landscape, nature, than your work today. Just to begin with, because I want to go into all sorts of other things, I wonder if you would talk about those two changes in your work. They take place in the fifties, you know, one sort of to massiveness; the other perhaps to abstraction.

MR. FERBER: Well, you know, Irving, this business about linear sculpture and so on as being different from the massive sculpture is something that has entered into literature. Again, I wrote articles about sculpture, in fact I originated the terms of the forms penetrating space and holding space intention, the phrase I used originally had been quoted.

MR. SANDLER: Yes, I swiped it from you.

MR. FERBER: Yes. And not only you. I said that the spaces and the forms were equally important. Which I think was the first definition of that kind of sculpture that was published. Now it's true that my sculpture was massive in that it was monolithic. But that stopped actually about 1945, as I look at this catalogue. Because if you look at this photograph here's a sculpture of 1944 and 1945, and this is 1945, it's still the monolithic kind of thing and certainly these earlier ones are. But in 1946 a figure in a surrealist fashion but very linear. So that a change occurred certainly in 1946, if not earlier in drawings. And, as you see sculpture of 1946, 1947, 1948 are linear.

MR. SANDLER: Now just one thing, Herbert. You're referring to the catalogue of your show at the Whitney Museum.

MR. FERBER: Yes, the show which originated at the Walker Art Center.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. That's the catalogue written by Wayne Anderson.

MR. FERBER: Yes. Now my sculpture is not, did you say you thought my sculpture was more massive now?

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Well, I don't think so. I wouldn't think that these circular pieces, or this one that you see here, or this one on the table, or the big circle are more massive then, or in any way resemble monolithic sculpture, and they're certainly not more massive than my earlier work.

MR. SANDLER: I was think of the individual elements but that would have to do with size, increased size I guess.

MR. FERBER: Yes. As you make things larger and as you are close to them of course any individual element seems more massive in cross-section. Now some works have a linear quality, such as The Flame of 1949 and this Game, as I call it, of 1950. They are linear. But I don't think they're thinner without being linear. and the main intention was to make use of space as of equal importance to the forms which penetrate the space. The earlier work, and by earlier work, certainly from 1930 to 1945, I was doing figures, more or less expressionist kind of figures, as many of us were doing. But beginning about 1946 or 1947 or 1948 in that period I began to do abstract sculpture, or what I would prefer to call it, non-representational. Because I would use the term "abstract" to refer to the kind of sculpture which was originated by the Russians and which is Constructivism and is really abstract. You know Cubism is not really abstract. It's even representational but it's often called abstract, and it isn't. Abstract, I suppose, should be a term applied only to things which have no reference to human, plant, animal, and such forms. And it's true that much of my work in the surrealist phase, which was about in the forties and fifties, had a surrealist tinge and could perhaps be related to animal and plant forms. And now perhaps the work is more abstract in that it is not referable to plant or animal forms but which still is largely a sculpture of gesture. I think the calligraphic idea which I've used in my sculpture for many years now beginning, when?, let's say perhaps one of the first calligraphs was done in 1954, well, no, earlier, I'm just looking at this catalogue. I think the first sculpture that I called a calligraph was this one done in 1953. This is just a part of it. Yes, here this one. This is the first sculpture I called a calligraph; 1953. And, as you see, it has thrusts which can be thought of as gestural. And I think Barbara Rose made use of that term referring to me as a sculptor who had regenerated the use of gesture. I think she discovered it right away. Now does that answer your question what I've just said about figurative and so on?

MR. SANDLER: Yes. Oh, sure.

MR. FERBER: Now we were talking a moment ago off the record about bases and the idea of getting away from the base. And I would like to refresh my memory by looking at some manuscripts in which I've made statements about the idea of getting away from the kind of base that was used for monolithic sculpture, sculpture without spaces but which displace space. You know the old Archimded principle of a solid object begin measured in terms of its volume by displacing water can be used with regard to monolithic sculpture which displaces the space and sort of in a figurative sense metaphorically pushes it aside. Now I think one of the first good examples of this idea of getting away from the base is this Flame which belongs to the Whitney, which was done in 1949. And about which I wrote, later it's true, not at the moment, not in 1949 but later, wrote later of my attempt to make the base as unimportant as possible. And that's why this stands on a point. And in the Game, which is a group of three forms, all standing on points but which can be moved around by little holes in the base, makes the base impermanent, as it were. And the volume of the sculpture in the Flame and in other of the possibility of the base holding up that sculpture, so it's a kind of trompe l'oeil concept.

MR. SANDLER: Well, the idea was to get away from the base as a dead form of sculpture?

MR. FERBER: To get away from the base as an anchor to the earth; yes, perhaps as a dead form. Now in this sculpture called The Cage, which was done in 1954, all the forms are suspended on wire and the base is there to support the wire and the wire supports the sculpture. Now it's an indirect way of avoiding the base. And then

when I began to do the roof sculptures you might say I had two bases but the idea was simply to make the base, the bottom base, unimportant int hat the suspension from above was equally important. And then when I moved on to making sculptures which had a roof, and then later on the Environments, which developed out of the roof sculptures, in other words, I had sculptures with two walls and three walls which support the work, and then moved to using four walls some of which supported the sculptures, some of which were supported by the roof, some by the base, and some were supported by each other. I have always tried to make the sculpture as airy as, almost floating as possible. And when I moved into the concept of The Cage sculptures, which really came after the Environments and after the roof sculptures, I was trying to use a support which would not be the kind of massive base that traditional sculpture has. Now a good many contemporary sculptors, that is in the sixties, have made use of another kind of base, I mean they have made use of the floor. In other words, a sculpture unless it's hanging as a Calder is, and in a sense that's using the ceiling as a base, I mean everything depends on gravity or needs except that in outer space now we can have sculpture that floats. But everybody has to use a base. and I may be attached to the sculpture, or may not be. But the important thing is that a plinth or rectangular or circular and so on base was always for me a limitation which I tried to avoid. You know, for this spherical sculpture the only purpose of this base to which it's attached is to keep it from rolling because it really can be seen or placed in any position almost, some of which are much more satisfactory than others. It can roll around but in order to keep it from being rolled I attached it to something to hold it down. But I've done other spherical sculptures. You may remember that at the time of the project for An Unknown Political Prisoner which the English instituted not long after the war I made a spherical sculpture which stood on a point, that is just take a look in the other room and you'll see one similar to it right around the corner here there's a spherical sculpture.

MR. SANDLER: Oh, yes.

MR. FERBER: Which of course eventually refers tot the ground to keep it from rolling or falling over. But it stands on a point. So the idea of the base has always been of extreme importance to me as something that one must get rid of.

MR. SANDLER: Well, two things that do happen in your works during the fifties: one, the simplification of the elements in the work; and, two, the enlargement of scale. What leads to that?

MR. FERBER: Yes. Well, it's true that as I think with most artists as they get older, it seems to have been true for centuries, that unless simplification was a basic concept of the culture many artists who were rather complicated in their compositions and their forms were unsimple have gotten as they get older to simplify the forms in the paintings or the sculpture. And that's true I think of my work, too. I think that I began to move away from surfaces which had facture. The earlier the work even though done by welding out of metal certainly still suffered in a sense in relation to what I'm doing now. And to use a harsh work, suffered from the surface which was achieved in modeling. Now it's true that in many sculptors model out of wax or plasterer clay and achieve an extremely smooth surface almost in imitation of marble. But many bronzes certainly in the Renaissance and before the Renaissance and Greek sculpture had smooth surfaces. but part of the Impressionist impetus in painting carried over maybe that's it, carried over into sculpture and the broken surfaces, the surfaces with pronounced facture I think was a result of modeling of attempting to avoid an academic look.

MR. SANDLER: A polish?

MR. FERBER: A polished academic look. right. Now as I became more respectful, you might almost say, of the copper in which I work largely I thought of it as a material which could be left untouched except where it has to be joined together. But this is a complex cultural and almost metaphysical problem to which I don't have all the answers. I suppose most sculpture today has a polished look, some of which doesn't look academic, and of course some of it does. It depends on the sculpture.

Now moving in the direction of larger sculptures I suppose really came to me when I first made the roof sculptures, which was a device, as I said before, to avoid the base. And when I discovered that a roof sculpture could be supported in such a way that it never even touched the ground I could see the possibilities of walking under it. Now walking under it meant that it had to be in places at least sufficiently high so that you wouldn't hit your head against it. And this really started me in the direction of making larger things. Don't forget, too, that size as distinguished from scale was something that none of us could practice because of the expense involved. And as we became more successful we could afford to invest our effort and our materials and our time in larger pieces which we might have just instinctively avoided doing because of the immense cost. It isn't that it's cheaper to make things now. It's more expensive than ever. We were free to think in larger terms perhaps simply because of our success or subsidies of various kinds. Certainly an environmental sculpture demands large size. Although I remember Philip Johnson saying when he looked at the first one at the Whitney that he would like to see it so small that he would trip over it because this is something that is his hangup to be involved in some kind of contiguity and contact with works of art.

MR. SANDLER: I want to hold till later . . .

MR. FERBER: Excuse me, Irving. That machine works very well doesn't it?

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Is it yours, or do you rent it?

MR. SANDLER: No, no, it's lent to me by the Archives. I wanted to hold the problem of environmental sculpture until either later today or possibly if we can do one more quick hour because I really would like to explore just that one thing. I've drawn up a long questionnaire. But I wanted to ask about one more thing while we're on it. Your conception of color in sculpture. I guess what really kicked the thought off in my mind was the piece that you put out in front of the Plaza Hotel, actually to the side.

MR. FERBER: Oh, yes. Right.

MR. SANDLER: How have you thought about that throughout your career?

MR. FERBER: Well, early on when I began to make welded sculpture, and I'm looking here for an example of it, I think it was about 1954, I made these and another one which I don't think is illustrated here but which belonged to Adolph Gottlieb until it was burned up int he fire in his studio. And I would say that was 1954 because it was a roof sculpture, on of the first roof sculptures. And it was painted yellow.

MR. SANDLER: It was painted?

MR. FERBER: It was painted yellow because it was made of copper and I saw it as something which had to be applied tot he surface instead of incorporated in the surface or incorporated in the material. The application of the color was necessary because working with metal one couldn't do anything but paint it. And of course it's an old tradition. The Greeks and Egyptians and Romans painted their sculpture. Now I only mention 1954, this sculpture which was done in 1954 was painted too. It was painted red. I have since removed the color from it and then re-applied it and so on. I haven't used color in my sculpture until, oh, I don't know, four or five years ago when I made some roof sculptures out of fiberglass. And then I could incorporate the color directly in the material. And that seemed somehow a more rational approach or more integral approach. I think color is something that has not exactly been solved. If you paint a sculpture or color a sculpture all one color it's not a hell of a lot different from leaving it bright bronze color or bright copper color; nobody thinks of sculpture being colored when it's black. And a good deal of bronze sculpture is just black or such a dark brown it looks black. So I suppose what I'm really think of is multiple color. Four or five years ago I made several pieces one of which is here in two or three colors. It hasn't been one of my strong points. I haven't worked at it. But I would say certainly beginning in 1954 it was something that I have been thinking about seriously.

MR. SANDLER: Do you use different kinds of metal to achieve color or do you use acids and alkalis?

MR. FERBER: No, I've never done what Lassaw did which was to ariegate the color of the metal by using acids or various chemicals. No, I haven't done that. I've colored sculpture in order to give it a more uniform shade or color so that it wouldn't have an impressionist surface. Because variegated color on a surface, although charming as in many patinas of old marble or bronze sculpture is extremely fetching because of just the beauty of color.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: And the idea of patina and so on which recalls age and antiquity. But I think that variegated color on a surface destroys it. As a matter of fact, in wood sculptures which I did until about 1944 the surface is often varied by the grain of the wood. And although very beautiful, whenever anybody talked about the grain of the wood I had a feeling they weren't even looking at the sculpture. So I've never approved of what Lassaw had done in sort of beautifying the surface.

MR. SANDLER: You think that an emphasis on surface incident can detract form the apprehension of the total form?

MR. FERBER: Yes. After all, sculpture is an art of form. If it doesn't exist as form it doesn't exist. One of the stupidities of contemporary critical writing about painting is that they talk about painting as consisting of color. Well, except for monochromatic painting, of which there's very little, painting has always existed in terms of color. That's what differentiates it from a pencil drawing or an etching or something of that kind. Color is what painting is about. In addition to many other things. But without color painting is a kind of non-existent enterprise. And I think in a sense form is what we're concerned with whether it's thin form or thick form or monolithic form or open form. That's what sculpture is about. And I think anything that destroys the possibility of

seeing that form can invalidate the sculpture.

MR. SANDLER: One small thing: when you use the work "calligram" or calligraphy is there any connection at all to oriental calligraphy?

MR. FERBER: No. They're not, as oriental calligraphy was essentially an ideogram. I think much calligraphy developed out of ideograms representing in Chinese calligraphy, you know, something like a house. Of course as the script or calligraphy became more complicated there were signs which represented more abstract ideas than a house or a tree. But the term calligraph as I use it represents the action of the eye or the hand, or both, or the mind that occurs in following the direction of the calligraph whether it means anything or not. That is whether a calligraph is meaningful in terms of ideas one always admires it in terms of its sweep, of its movement, of the direction of the hand in making the brush stroke. Now in a way this is what I meant by gesture. And the word "calligraph" in my sculpture simply means that it has a movement instead of being static and has a kind of gesture which is expressive and doesn't depend, and depends to some extent upon its meaning, or for its meaning upon the gestural or calligraphic movement of the piece. But it is not related in any one to one, or two to one or one to five way with calligraphic writing.

MR. SANDLER: When we were talking before about color in painting . . . You are a painter . . .

MR. FERBER: Yes. I've done quite a bit of painting.

MR. SANDLER: And I just wonder about how that happened because if my information is right it happened a number of years after you had been a sculptor.

MR. FERBER: No, that's not true. When I went to art school, which was until 1930, I went to Woodstock int he summer and did no sculpture at all but began to paint. And I painted a considerable number of works that summer and for a year or two afterwards, some of which were exhibited. Actually, I started my career, I think I mentioned to you earlier, as an etcher and thought in representational and illusionistic terms. And my early paintings were representational and had the illusionistic quality of perspective and so on. So I may say I began as an etcher, turned sculpture, then painted for a year or two and then went back to sculpture and then I didn't do any serious painting although I did many watercolors and colored drawings all the time concomitant with the sculpture.

MR. SANDLER: How does the painter experience differ for you?

MR. FERBER: Well, the painting experience is, one might say, largely more satisfying i the process than sculpture. Sculpture is except for the small things which one makes rather quickly, the realization of sculpture as it becomes larger is a very slow and unrewarding procedure in my eyes. It's laborious, it takes a tremendous amount of time to achieve one idea. And if there's any excitement in the sculpture it comes with the original concept and with seeing the finished work. But in the course of painting, and this is true even though you change the sculpture as you work and modify it, everything is rather slow. Painting at lease the way I've done it the changes that one can achieve are rapid in terms of time and one can realize many ideas almost a the same time by working on four or five paintings at the same time. It's more exciting, too, in that the achieving of an idea in painting is more elusive; you can lose it very quickly. You don't ever lose your idea in sculpture. I may not come off as well as you'd expect it but you can't actually lose it. In painting a surface or an area may destroy the whole painting. But one of the wonderful things about painting is that you can rectify your errors. You can scrape, wash off, and start over again ont he same canvas leaving parts of it untouched. So for me it's much more satisfying than making sculpture. But I got hung up, you might say, on doing sculpture. My major reputation is based on my sculpture and it's difficult to drop it. I suppose I don't really want to drop it, but I would like to do more painting and, as you know, I've had two painting shows and for several years did almost nothing but painting. That was, oh, when was that?

MR. SANDLER: 1957? 1958?

MR. FERBER: 1957? Yes, in those years. Well, what's the date of that? No date.

MR. SANDLER: This is 1960.

MR. FERBER: Yes, 1960. That was the second show I had. So it must have been around 1955, 1956, 1957 that I did a lot of painting and up to after the sixties.

MR. SANDLER: Are these for you independent activities or do you find interconnections and interchange? Do you pick up ideas in painting and move them back into sculpture and vice versa?

MR. FERBER: It's hard for me to answer that. I know that many people looking at my paintings say that there's a strong relationship, as in this one which was used on the poster for the Emmerich show. It's a kind of

calligraph. But the one in the other room which you can see, that ochre and white, doesn't look very calligraphic to me. It doesn't look very sculptural. It seems a more painterly thing. A good many of my paintings although they consist of discreet forms they're not abstract expressionist paintings in that they're not swirls of paint. The forms are discreet. I don't think they're sculptural.

MR. SANDLER: but in other words, what you're suggesting is that they tend to be rather independent form one another except that you're the artist doing both?

MR. FERBER: Yes. Well, I think there's an ambiguity and an overlap. I think that some of the paintings have forms which I've used in sculpture, as in this one, which is close to a sculpture I made. But in general I think they're pretty independent.

MR. SANDLER: A more general thing, and this of course has happened to some of your recent work, and I was just curious about the circular pieces, this one here, the very large one that's going into, that's a Mies building?

MR. FERBER: No, it's a Gropius building.

MR. SANDLER: A Gropius building, I'm sorry. Or the one you have at the Whitney tend to be essentially, I'm using this in quotes, a "silhouette;" in other words, they're flat sculptures. And this tends to be a very difficult realm for an artist who supposes his piece of sculpture to be involved in the round to move into. Could you talk to that point for a minute, these flat sculptures . . .

MR. FERBER: Well, I recognize what you mean and at the same time that I'm doing relatively flat pieces I'm also doing three things which have more space, occupy more space. As, let's say, The Cage sculpture like that which is recent and circular sculpture which looks flat except that it has a considerable spread.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: You know, I don't think that the question is of great importance, Irving. Sculpture consist of form. Now I know that there's a relatively close relationship between low relief and painting. I mean that really in terms of low relief. but you may remember that I did several sculptures for architectural purposes which were fastened to walls. Now they were very high reliefs such as this one, or the one on the synagogue in New Jersey. The sculpture like the on in New Jersey on that wall stands something like tree feet, projects three feet from the wall. Now in looking at it your eye tends to flatten it out against the wall. But it actually has very high three-dimensional quality. It's true that a sculpture such as this calligraph is most likely best seen from one side. But I don't think that that relates it to painting nor does it make it less sculptural. It simply is a flat sculpture instead of a round one.

MR. SANDLER: The reason I raised the question is that something flashed into mind that had to do with David Smith who among other things made a great many silhouette or flat sculptures. And several times he complained to me about the adverse reaction he had gotten on the part of sculptors who insisted that sculpture had to be in the round, and that his work wasn't. And I just wondered if you had come up against this or had thought about it at all.

MR. FERBER: Yes, I've noticed that people have mentioned it's flat instead of round. It seems you can see it better from one side rather than from the end. Here's an example of a fairly flat sculpture which was done in 1948, this one called, Hercules. This one is sort of taken from a three-quarter view. It's certainly much flatter than many of my other sculptures. I don't know, here's another one: this portrait of David Hare, for example, is certainly quite flat. but it doesn't look less sculptural to me and I think the academic argument that a sculpture has to be something that you walk around is simply and academic statement. Don't forget that Donatello's sculptures and the Michelangelo sculptures in the Medici Chapel are best seen from the front. The Donatello sculptures on the tower of the church in Florence are in niches against the wall. You look at them from the front. Are they less sculptural than something which you have to walk around and look at from behind? Actually in most figurative sculpture, you look at the sculpture from the front or the side or the back since you can't look through it. You're always looking at a profile. And one of the ways in which sculpture used to be taught was to talk about the profiles. In other words, they used to think of sculpture as a combination of thousands of drawings all in profile.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: If you look at a monolithic sculpture from the so-called front you're not surprised by what you find in the back. I don't know if this answers your question.

MR. SANDLER: It answers it fine. I just wanted to get your sense of this, you know, because I had a reaction that you had heard this about your work and I know that other artists have also sort of been put down or questioned when they moved sculpture towards . . . the relief was accepted. If it hung on the wall that was okay.

But if it was free standing and moved towards the flat sculpture then there were all sorts of questions asked.

MR. FERBER: Yes. Well, you know I think there's an old truism: art is as good as it is, or art is what you make of it, or art consists of surprises. I think really what's important is whether it comes off or not. And I've heard this kind of sotto voce criticism of flat sculpture, I've always considered it completely unimportant.

MR. SANDLER: I'd like to swing over to something else for a little while, Herbert. You joined the Parsons Gallery in about when? 1946? 1947?

MR. FERBER: No, I think it was a little later about 1948; I think; I'd have to verify it. I was there about year when I had my first show and I don't remember that whether it was 1949 or 1948.

MR. SANDLER: Well then, when does Barney Newman write the catalogue?

MR. FERBER: He wrote the introduction to the first show I had at Betty Parsons, and that is just a question of documentation. I can look it up.

MR. SANDLER: Oh, sure. But I wondered a little bit about that scene at the Parsons Gallery because at that point Parsons along with Kootz I guess and then a little bit later but not so much Egan also was sort of a center, one of the centers of vanguard art in New York. And what was happening then? What were things like in 1943 and 1949? Recognition certainly had not been achieved.

MR. FERBER: No, recognition was limited to recognition of and by each other as artists and a few critics or patrons, but very few of those because it was pretty much an enterprise that was self-supporting.

MR. SANDLER: You mean supported by artists?

MR. FERBER: Yes, by the artists. And whoever had a space in which to show the works. Betty Parsons was independently wealthy enough to run a gallery without depending upon selling very much. And Kootz actually, as you know, subsidized his artists to a small degree and went broke doing it. Which was heroic of him. but he sold. Well, what was the attitude? You know the names of the people who were in each gallery. We were all pretty friendly with each other because altogether there were only maybe a dozen or fifteen of us. The sculptors hardly counted, as you know. David Smith was showing. I was showing. Lipton began to show a little later at Betty Parsons. Lassaw was showing some place on Eighth Street, you know that club. But we knew each other. There was a constant communication between us about the problems of what later became known as the New York School. What it meant to be an artist who was doing non-figurative painting or sculpture, or painting or sculpture which had other motivations than representation. And, as you know, the concept of the ideogram was considerably touted by Barney Newman, and Adolph Gottlieb did pictographs.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. He had what he called an idographic picture show.

MR. FERBER: Yes. And these were new forms at least for American art and perhaps even for world art. At least the emphasis was new. And there was very little or no understanding or approval. As a matter of fact, I met Mocsanyi the other day in Bloomingdale's and he remembers a forum which was given at the Art Students League. I don't know whether you were there or not. It must have been about 1950 or 1951. And it was called The Schism Between the Artist and the Public was of extreme importance, that it represented the gap between the avant garde and the rear guard or the status quo, and that only by the continual existence of such a schism could an active and avant garde art develop and continue to develop and continue to have a viable form. And Mocsanyi said, "What do you think of that now?" because he got up at that forum and said, "If abstract expressionism is around long enough we'll all understand it." And I said to him, "Well, I'm still misunderstood." And he said, "But you're sell! You're selling." And with that we shook hands and departed. Mocsanyi was always a kind of a thorn. He attended those forums int he early fifties and one of the things that he couldn't tolerate was when I did the sculpture for the synagogue, which was in 1951. Actually it was commissioned earlier, I think in 1949 or 1950. I spent a year making models and drawings and another year making the sculpture, so I suppose it was about 1949. And when he finally saw the sculpture he said, "How could you as an abstract artist do a sculpture called The Burning Bush?" And I said, "Mocsanyi, it's not called The Burning Bush. That's what it was named." And that's true. I had done and I can prove with drawings that I had done some sculptures quite similar to it motivated, it's true, by plant forms such as cactus and so on and made use of those drawings to make a sculpture which somebody wanted to call The Burning Bush because it was going on a synagogue.

MR. SANDLER: But what happened? There must have been a very short period of time, say, from 1947 or around that to 1950, what happened in American art because something very big happened. How would you account for that?

MR. FERBER: Well, I think I can account for it much in the same way that everybody else accounts for it because it seems to have been pretty factual, and I suppose there will be esoteric or individualistic memories

about it. But we began to be uninterested in representation and in expressionism. I think expressionism was important. The possibility of distorting the human or landscape form into a recognizable but unphotograph, not naturalistic, was one of the earliest impetuses. Then Surrealism. Now when did Surrealism become important? It became important, I think, when Berton and other European painters, particularly French, came to America because of the war in 1940, 1942 and so on. And those refugees very few of whom became acclimatized permanently, actually lived as a very separate group with patrons that American artists didn't have, nevertheless influenced American art to the extent that Russian constructivism, which was earlier, never influenced it except for, you know, a few people. I think Lassaw was influenced by Constructivism. But very few.

MR. SANDLER: De Rivera.

MR. FERBER: De Rivera and some of the painters.

MR. SANDLER: Lippold.

MR. FERBER: Yes. And some of the painters in Brooklyn, you know, the guy who died recently.

MR. SANDLER: Reinhardt?

MR. FERBER: No.

MR. SANDLER: Diller?

MR. FERBER: Diller, yes. Reinhardt was a more abstract expressionist.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: But Diller was pretty pure all the time. but as I mentioned, I think, if I remember our last interview, the Surrealists, I mean generally the European artists gave us a sense of what it was really to be an artist and not just a teacher who did art, or a dentist, as I am, who does art, but somebody who, not to use a hackneyed phrase, dedicated himself to art, but whose life is art, whose most important enterprise is art, something on which he lays down all of his efforts so that if, as some of our friends have become somewhat irrational and monomaniacal about their work, it's not too difficult to understand what caused that. When a man puts all of his efforts and all of his physical strength and his marriage and his children down on the line it's not surprising that they should become jealous of what happens to it. So I think those European artists gave American artists, except for the old time professional, you know, academicians, gave us a sense of being artists and the influence of Surrealism was very strong. I think it influence all the artists I know who have since moved away from it or continued something of that tradition. Certainly it influenced Clyfford Still and Barney Newman and Rothko and Reinhardt was perhaps influenced by it at the beginning.

MR. SANDLER: And Motherwell. And Baziotes.

MR. FERBER: Certainly Motherwell. And certainly myself. And Baziotes, I think I mentioned him. Adolph Gottlieb although he was doing pictographs they had a strong surrealist flavor.

MR. SANDLER: Is there a conscious turn from surrealist ideas?

MR. FERBER: I don't think there was a conscious turn except in a few cases. I think that certainly Reinhardt moved consciously away from it. And Barney Newman certainly did. At least to look at his work in an objective fashion one gets that impression. I think most likely Newman may still talk in mystical or metaphysical terms about the meaning of his art which may give it a surrealist flavor. But objectively his work is certainly based upon a very abstract and constructivist Mondrianesque tradition. What was beautifully sentimental in those days, was the lack of obvious jealousy or competitiveness amongst the artists that except for a very few cases there were no enmities, and although we were in different galleries we never thought of those galleries as being more important than another one, as anyone of them being more important than another. They were all simply a stage where our works could be displayed, a showcase. And we cut across gallery lines in a way that doesn't seem possible any longer, or at least is often not possible. I remember one of my contemporaries, a sculptor, when I had a show recently, said, "Oh, the Emmerich Gallery. Oh, yes, I know that one. That's just on the floor below mine." I mean this way of describing another gallery is really funny. But what was terribly important was the constant exchange of ideas. And as you know, the school which Motherwell and . . .

MR. SANDLER: That's right. The subject of the Artists School.

MR. FERBER: Yes. And Rothko. But principally Motherwell as far as I could gather. Remember I was never a teacher in that school but I was friendly with all the people who started it. I think it was principally Motherwell's idea. Although Clyfford Still claimed to be one of the originators. I think it's not true. I think Clyfford Still's statements about his ideas and his work simply have to be open to examination.

MR. SANDLER: What was his role in that?

MR. FERBER: Well, he participated in one or two discussions. According to Motherwell, I think just one discussion but before the school started.

MR. SANDLER: No, I mean also at the Parsons Gallery because he was friendly then with Newman and Rothko.

MR. FERBER: Well, he had very little role at the Parsons Gallery because he was living in California and teaching there. And he sent his paintings to be exhibited several times and appeared on the scene for brief moments. His closest friend was Rothko, who had been brought out to California by McAgy to teach for a summer occasionally. But I think Clyfford had very little role. I think the principal role in that gallery was played by Newman who was Betty Parsons's sort of close adviser before he became an active painter.

MR. SANDLER: About when was that?

MR. FERBER: When he became an active painter?

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Well, I don't want to give a date because that's another documentary question.

MR. SANDLER: Yes, it is.

MR. FERBER: He had a show at a certain date. That was his first show.

MR. SANDLER: In 1950.

MR. FERBER: 1950. Well, it must have taken him a couple of years to paint those pictures. On the other hand, when he had his first show, I'm surprised that you say 1950 because it seems later to me, because already in 1950 he was considered to be a latecomer. And when he first gave a talk at the school, the subject of the Artists, he was introduced by Rothko who gave a very laudatory introduction to bring Newman to the podium. but he was at that time already considered a latecomer on the scene in terms of Rothko, Motherwell, Gottlieb, myself, Clyfford Still, and Baziotes.

MR. SANDLER: So would you say he was rather known for his writing and his polemical activity?

MR. FERBER: Yes, you know, Newman used to be described certainly before his first show as the spokesman of the artists. And he did a lot of talking. Reinhardt was a figure in those days in the Betty Parsons Gallery. I knew him slightly at that time, enough so that when I did that first public sculpture for the synagogue in 1951 he protested against it as a commercial job. Which was to be his line from there on, as you know.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Although he departed considerably from the purity of that line to sell his work, which he used to say was not really the object of his enterprise. Well, it isn't the object of any artist's enterprise. And he did a lot to make himself a figure int he art world, you know, for the few years before his death.

MR. SANDLER: Pollock was with the gallery.

MR. FERBER: Pollock was with the gallery.

MR. SANDLER: And where does Tony Smith figure in the situation?

MR. FERBER: Well, Tony Smith was a peripheral figure, a friend, particularly of Pollock's. He most likely was one of the first people to ever buy a Pollock. He was not wealthy but he had enough money to think of buying. And he was an architect.

MR. SANDLER: Was it known that he was painting at the time?

MR. FERBER: Yes, it was vaguely known although he never showed his work. And I visited Tony Smith at his home in New Jersey but he never showed his work. He had bought at that time Pollock, I think Rothko, Stamos. And he had a group of young men around him, young architects and painters or craftsmen who were devoted to him. And I would say Smith was one of the greatest talkers, sort of private lecturers about abstract expressionism that I've ever met. Much more lucid and much more imaginative in an understandable way in the sense that he hewed to the line about the work he was examining or talking about then Barney Newman who indulged in rich fantasy which was valuable but which had fantastical and very loose relationship to the work he was looking at. Tony Smith installed the second, I think, or third show that I had at Betty Parsons. He wanted to

set it up in such a way that there were avenues divided by sheets of plastic film in such a way that there were kind of streets sos that as you walked down around the gallery you weren't able to see more then one or two sculptures at a time. And it was a very good idea except that we didn't have the money to install it properly and when it was finally installed and these low partitions were put up in such a way that you could only see one or two sculptures at a time it looked flimsy and sort of amateurish. We took it down before the show opened. But Smith was very vocal and verbose and convinced supporter of abstract expressionists paintings and sculpture.

MR. SANDLER: Was Pollock around much? Or was he mostly out in the country then?

MR. FERBER: Well, Pollock of course was living int he country but he was around enough to leave an impression on everybody. He was drinking very heavily at that time. Although he would go on the wagon and vegetable juice cures for periods. He was very important to a few artists. He was extremely important to Tony Smith who thought of him as very great, recognized him as very great from the beginning, and who had a close relationship with him. Even though Pollock lived on the island . . .

[Interruption]

MR. SANDLER: This is the second side of the second interview with Herbert Ferber on December 31, 1968. You were talking about Pollock.

MR. FERBER: Yes. And about Tony Smith. Well then, Tony Smith was a very important critic but in a favorable way of abstract expressionism. And Pollock was already, even in 1943 and 1949, a figure with a myth because of his drinking, his violence. And his violence was very impressive. It was something that you could easily be frightened by; and many people were. And he went, you know, the Existential limit more than any other artist. But actually that's a romantic way of talking about him. He went the limit as any alcoholic does. People who are addicted to the bottle drink until they pass out. Which is what he did. Then people would have to carry him home or get him into a taxi and get him home and so on. What was most impressive about him when he was sober was his reticence and sometimes his astute statements about painting. I know Bill Rubin has quoted him and thinks of some of the statements he made as being particularly brilliant or perceptive. And I take that on faith. I've read the quotations and they are sort of impressive. But in many conversations and times that I had been with Pollock I was not more impressed by what he had to say than by, let's say, what Rothko or Barney Newman or Baziotes or Tomlin had to say about the world of art or about anything else.

MR. SANDLER: What role did Rothko play?

MR. FERBER: Well, Rothko was very much a part of that scene. As you know, he wrote some kind of a manifesto with Gottlieb which was published in the New York Times. He showed with the rest of us. He was a close friend particularly of Still at that time and Barney Newman. Then later when I came to the Gallery, I came into the Gallery a few years after they were with it, Rothko and I became extremely close friends and also I was very close to Barney Newman. Those two men, Rothko played the role, well, I would say primarily of an artist. Although he is an intelligent man and often had very perceptive, bright things to say about any problem at the moment, he also took stands which were maybe a little more radical than the stands that other people took in relation to institutions. But I'm not even sure of that. We were all rather against the Establishment. So it's sort of rather surprising now to hear that term used by the hippies and the yippies in 1968 and 1969 as being against the Establishment. We were violently opposed to the Establishment. And, as you know, Adolph Gottlieb organized a picket line around the Museum of Modern Art to protest the fact that they didn't buy American Art.

MR. SANDLER: And then the Irascibles.

MR. FERBER: And there were the Irascibles. I've forgotten the date of that.

MR. SANDLER: 1950.

MR. FERBER: Is that 1950? yes, a lot happened between 1947 and 1951 I guess. A great deal.

MR. SANDLER: You know, this is such a sticky thing I don't even think it's sort of one really can't get into it but, you know, there has recently been a lot of antipathy or hostility among certainly Newman, Still, Rothko sort of stayed out, he comes in peripherally, and now Newman and Motherwell.

MR. FERBER: Well, not exactly peripherally. Don't forget that Newman . . .

MR. SANDLER: He comes peripheral in to the hostility. He sort of stays out of that. That's what I meant.

MR. FERBER: Well, he tries to stay out of it. But Newman attacked him publically and in writing. I think it's principally Clyfford Still who has, in my opinion, falsified the dates of his work in an attempt to show that he was the first to do this or the first to do that. It's a childish activity. It has some historical importance but qualitatively

it doesn't seem to me to be of great importance. but you were going to say something about the stickiness of . . .

MR. SANDLER: No. I wanted to ask you about that particular what your reaction to that situation when, you know, Newman and Still sort of turned on one another.

MR. FERBER: Well, they not only turn on each other. But Newman turned on me. He turned on me because he felt that I was too close a friend of Rothko's. So he sort of stopped talking to me. It's true that I was a very close friend of Rothko's. But I was also a very close friend of his. But he couldn't stand, well, I don't know what he couldn't stand, I guess what he couldn't stand was anything less than a complete devotion to himself. Clyfford Still is another story. He's most likely more paranoid than any of the others. My reaction to it is that it is just plain tragedy. It's sad that a group of artists who loved each other and supported each other should have been influenced for one reason or another, none of those single reasons is sufficient, it's certainly not money, it's certainly not priority, it's certainly not, well, whatever it is, there are many reasons; and it's sad that these artists no longer talk to each other.

MR. SANDLER: Several people have mentioned to me, I think Stamos was one, that during this period after you joined the Gallery there used to be meetings at your place, a salons, I don't know what one would call it, parties, or a kind of salon, where you became one of the sort of focal points where artists met.

MR. FERBER: Yes, it is true that in those years, I would say from 1947 to the late 50s we used to meet at my home very frequently for dinner, drinks. In those days it was somewhat different from now. It seems to me different. People used to come to each other's homes or we came to each other's homes after dinner. We didn't come for dinner. Because nobody could afford to supply dinner for everybody. But we were always able to manage drinks after dinner. We used to meet, you know, around 8:30 or 9:00 after dinner and sit around until the earlier morning hours talking, talking, talking about each other's work, about European art, about ideas, about books, about everything. It was a free-wheeling, open forum. And my home, which was up on Riverside Drive at 116th Street, 117th Street was somehow a focal point. Perhaps we had a little more money and it was a little more stable matrimonial situation at that time. Motherwell had enough money to entertain but he was having a broken marriage and another marriage and so on at that time. And so it wasn't so congenial. But at my home we had a sort of stable atmosphere. And it became a meeting place and sort of well known. And perhaps the fact that I was a dentist, a doctor at columbia University, people used to ask me about their medical problems. I don't know, not really, but we . . .

MR. SANDLER: consultations on the side, huh?

MR. FERBER: Yes, not exactly, I didn't mean that. What I really meant is it perhaps gave them a sense that I was more stable because of my somewhat rational life. At any rate, it was those were very beautiful years when we were all friends and all felt able to discuss all kinds of problems openly and without very much rancor.

MR. SANDLER: Were there other people aside from artists involved?

MR. FERBER: Oh, yes. Writers like George Denison who has become sort of well known now. And some of the museum people. Alfred Barr and Dorothy Miller used to come. Those were the days when Alfred Barr and Dorothy Miller didn't know very much about what was going on and they were eager to learn. It's interesting, you know, that since they were devoted to Matisse and Picasso and European art that when they finally became aware that something was happening in America they were quite eager to learn about it. And so they used to come.

MR. SANDLER: What about critics? did Clement Greenberg come, for instance?

MR. FERBER: Well, I knew Clement through my old friend, William Philips at Partisan Review. And Clement came occasionally. But we weren't very close friends. And what's his name? oh, at the Jewish museum . . .

MR. SANDLER: Hunter?

MR. FERBER: Hunter. But that was later. He came back from Europe, as you know, where he had been writing for the Tribune, I suppose. And he wanted to learn all about American art. So he came fairly frequently. But I would say yes there were writers. There was a couple of my friends at Columbia University who were, well, more interested int he social sciences like Leo Lowenthal and Herbert Marcus were there occasionally and met some of these artists. Then, as you know, my wife Ilsa at that time was an art historian and a few art historians came, people from NYU and Columbia. But that was more unusual. And particularly the art historians didn't get along well with the artists.

MR. SANDLER: Who were the people, would Schapiro have been one? Or Goldwater?

MR. FERBER: Oh, yes. Well, Schapiro was very sympathetic and he was a very close friend, not a close friend, he was a very close acquaintance of mine at that time and of several of the other artists. He admired their work; I think particularly he admired Rothko's work. But I had long talks with him about my own work. He used to come for lunch frequently. But he spent an occasional evening. As you know, he's not very much of a nighthawk. Never wa.

MR. SANDLER: No.

MR. FERBER: but he used to come for lunch frequently from Columbia which was around the corner. The names of those people, there were some people from NYU.

MR. SANDLER: Goldwater?

MR. FERBER: Oh, yes. Goldwater came frequently, fairly frequently, yes, every once in a while and Louise Bourgeois came.

MR. SANDLER: What about de Kooning? Was he part of . . .

MR. FERBER: I didn't know de Kooning very well. I knew him well enough so that in 1949 we knew each other well enough so that I gave him a piece of sculpture for painting.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. I stored that for him for a couple of years.

MR. FERBER: Oh, yes, you had that piece of sculpture.

MR. SANDLER: Because he was in between studios and everything. He's got it back now I think.

MR. FERBER: Yes, it's out in East Hampton.

MR. SANDLER: What about people like Harold Rosenberg? Was he involved?

MR. FERBER: I knew Harold in those days through William Phillips.

MR. SANDLER: That's right.

MR. FERBER: William Phillips and I went to high school together and lived int he same neighborhood in the Bronx and we went to college together. We're still friends. He's my oldest friend. My God! Since we were twelve years old. That's a hell of a, over fifty years. But I got to know Harold and Clem and other writers, particularly those who contributed to PR through William. And when Clem was doing the art consulting for PR he ran drawings by artists. I had one done.

MR. SANDLER: What was the nature of the talk? Was it about formal things? Or more physical or content things.?

MR. FERBER: I don't think the painters really ever discussed things in a formal way. That was left to the simple minded sculptors. And it's interesting that all through those years I never made a friend amongst the sculptors. I had friends who were writers and I had friends who were painters, social scientists, and philosophers, and art historians, and so on. I never really had a friend who was a sculptor. I think perhaps David Hare and I were fairly friendly for a short period of time. But I really couldn't stand the sculptors because they talked about, you say "formal," I would say "technical" things. And it was a terrible bore. So in contrast to the sculptors, the painters talked about ideas, ideas of art and about art, about criticism, about literature in relation to questions of art, about the artist's role in society. Because don't forget that was shortly after socially committed art when we were all opposed to something, to which we were all opposed.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. But it was still a problem?

MR. FERBER: It was still something which we perhaps felt guilty about. Because don't forget the Surrealists were terribly concerned with Marxism.

MR. SANDLER: What about Existentialism? Was there much awareness?

MR. FERBER: I don't think there was any interest in that until much later.

MR. SANDLER: By "much later" you mean into the fifties?

MR. FERBER: I would say in the late fifties. I've forgotten when, what the hell is his name? that philosopher at NYU.

MR. SANDLER: Berrett?

MR. FERBER: Yes. What's his first name?

MR. SANDLER: William.

MR. FERBER: William Barrett. Who I knew quite well wrote that book about What Is Existentialism. That sort of started it in America. Although Kierkegaard and Kaftka and Sartre were . But that was all very much I think much later. I can't remember dates very well. But, you know, Surrealism was a constant source of discussion. Because Baziotes was always a surrealist artist. And Motherwell was always deeply interested in Surrealism both as a painter and as a philosopher and writer.

MR. SANDLER: But was there a reaction against it? At one point did people just . . .

MR. FERBER: I don't think there was ever a reaction against Surrealism.

MR. SANDLER: The point Philip Pavia makes . . .

MR. FERBER: I think Philip Pavia is completely wrong, to put it mildly, and for some reason, which I haven't been able to understand, he has some kind of animus against Surrealism and its manifestations in American art. And, as you know, he makes a kind of sculpture which is, you know, Primitivistic or something.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: But there was never a reaction against Surrealism. I think that Newman, Gottlieb, Clyfford Still, Rothko, Motherwell, I, I don't know about Lipton, I haven't had much to do with him, David Hare, and possibly wit the exception of Lippold and some of the painters who were connected with Brooklyn College school, all of these men I've mentioned were indebted to, and acknowledged their debt to Surrealism. I don't think there was ever a reaction against it. We turned slowly to other fields. Because, as you know, Surrealism never invented any procedures in painting or in sculpture which were inventive enough to transcend the literary. And by "literary" I include Freudian and subconscious and unconscious ideology, motivation. They never invented any procedures. Their sculpture was traditional. Their painting was traditional. The subject matter was less so. But one of the things that I think that the painters and sculptors of my generation who became known as the New York School, one of the things they did was to invent formal ideas. And my conviction is that without the invention of formal ideas art remains static. And then the question is whether the ideas are good enough to have validity.

MR. SANDLER: Did you know Gorky?

MR. FERBER: I knew Gorky slightly, very slightly, enough to stop and talk to; but I never knew him well. I think that de Kooning knew him best perhaps.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: And David Hare knew him very well. you see he was part of that Surrealist group of European artists which Motherwell and Baziotes were attached to through Peggy Guggenheim. Marekeen and Hare. Although Rothko and Clyfford Still were showing at Peggy Guggenheim's they never became as closely attached to the Surrealist group as Gorky and Baziotes and Motherwell.

MR. SANDLER: Tomlin is a curios figure because he sort of comes rather late, too.

MR. FERBER: Yes.

MR. SANDLER: And yet seems to have bee around and also I understand was admired, or people like him.

MR. FERBER: Well, Tomlin was a fantastic figure. He was extremely successful doing a kind of Cubist painting and he showed that for years in new York. And sold it very successfully. He was, I suppose, most successful financially of anybody until he decided that he had to make a change of some kind in his work. And did so. And moved into Betty Parsons. He was accepted readily by everybody because he was very modest, very straightforward and honest, extremely intelligent. but a very irrational person in his beliefs, well, in his beliefs. I mean he believed in ghosts. And he lived a long time in England, or a year or two in England, and had lived in a haunted house or castle or something. And he really believed in that kind of thing. But he was one of the few artists who had a sharp interest in poetry. One of his friends was Jenn Carrig, the poet. And I was able to talk to him. And Ilsa and he were very fond of each other and talked a good deal about literature, more so with each other than was possible with most artists except in a very limited way; except for Motherwell who knows a good deal about French literature.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: but most of the artists had a smattering. I suppose Newman has read a good deal. Rothko has read a good deal. But it wasn't something that they were involved in. Tomlin was really very interested in literature. And also he was a strange character in that he was perhaps the only gentleman amongst all of us. He always gave the impression of having been born into the English aristocracy. Actually he was the son or brother of a presbyterian or Anglican minister in New England. And nothing could be plainer than his background. But he'd lived in Europe and in England and had acquired a manner and a nonchalant way of dressing which somehow impressed everybody as being very English gentleman.

MR. SANDLER: Did you know Roland Crampton at all?

MR. FERBER: Very slightly. Just enough to say hello.

MR. SANDLER: He's a very shadowy figure.

MR. FERBER: Yes.

MR. SANDLER: One day I sort of mean to look into him. One of the things, because we're talking about Parsons, was that around 1951-1952 most people left the Gallery. And at that point, too, it seems as if people sort of began to pull apart from one another. What happened there? Why did it happen? There was a show also at the Museum of Modern Art, on of those American shows that seems to have . . .

MR. FERBER: You mean the one that Dorothy Miller put on?

MR. SANDLER: Yes. That Still, Rothko, Pollock, Tomlin, and a few other people were in and it all happened sort of at once. People left the Gallery . . .

MR. FERBER:

MR. SANDLER: Yes. I think so. They leave the Gallery. They sort of pull apart. And I've always been curious about what happened at that moment.

MR. FERBER: I wish I could remember the date of the . . . on which I left Parsons. I left before Rothko did actually. What happened simply was that for years we were dissatisfied with that aspect of the Betty Parsons Gallery which was the business or financial one. She couldn't have been less interested in money. She often would since she belonged to a wealthy social group, she would often leave the Gallery at crucial moments such as the day of, or the day after the opening of a show. She had routinized, as most galleries now have, but which wasn't so common in those days, she routinized the business of showing so that everybody had three weeks or a month; and then another artist was shown. Many of whom were unimportant in our terms simply because, not simply because, but they were unimportant because I don't think they ever panned out as good artists.

MR. SANDLER: Not respected by . . .

MR. FERBER: They weren't terribly respected by some of us. But they were in the Gallery because they were close friends of Betty's, and this included both men and women. And the Gallery became a strange place in which a group of some of the most important artists in America and some of the most unimportant were showing at the same time. And everybody in Betty's opinion, a woman who loved art, capital letters for Love and Art, was indiscriminating. I mean it's even hard to know why she took some of us into the Gallery because I don't think she had that good an eye. I think she was influenced by Newman, by other artists, by Rothko, and others; or by friends on the outside who'd simply say, "you must . . ." I mean actually I came into the Gallery not because Betty found me but because the harpsichordist friend of mine, Sylvia Marlowe, knew Betty very well and said, "You must have Ferber he's so good." And she took me. It meant nothing for her to take an artist in. And now a dealer thinks 45 times before he takes an artist in. But of course the stakes were very low. And so the Gallery became crowded with people and the attention that she could give to any one person was very limited. She also frightened away prospective customers in that she had such a standoffish and aristocratic way of handling customers that they were hesitant to ask the price of anything that seemed to be for sale. And then as Kootz or Janis and others come on the scene again, or more importantly, they made offers because they were really more interested in business and art instead of just art. And since these artists had to think of where their next meal was coming form they began to drift. Some never made the break, as you know. And $Reinhardt used to inveigh against her but he never actually made the break. Newman did but in a kind of ambiguous way.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. Well, he just stopped showing for a period of time.

MR. FERBER: Yes.

MR. SANDLER: As you remember, were there expectations that possibly just . . . You know, I'm still wondering why this group of artists that was so close should, you know, at one point react so violently. I know that paranoia

is the occupational disease of artists today.

MR. FERBER: I don't think it is. I don't think that artists are more paranoid that other people.

MR. SANDLER: That's probably true.

MR. FERBER: It would be, you know, against my training as a scientist to think so. And I'm sure it isn't. I don't think stockbrokers break down or become paranoid any less frequently than artists. You know, I was talking to a woman the other day, she's a typical middle-class woman, and she told me that her friends as they got older began to be less tolerant of each other. I think it's a hazard of age. And we live in a period which is extremely unsettling and difficult and I guess artists succumb to it, unfortunately, as much as other people do. That's all I would say about that.

MR. SANDLER: A couple of other things. Before you were talking , you had mentioned that some of the talk at your place and at other place where you met was about European art. What was the reaction as you remember it at that time? Because this was after the war. There had been a period of time that Paris was isolated. Suddenly around 1946, 1947 that work begins to appear again. Do you remember . . .

MR. FERBER: Yes. I would say that in general the American artists with the exception of people like Motherwell who has a strong bias in favor of France, Baziotes who had a strong Surrealist inclination which he never lost; except for those two I suppose primarily, and myself, I never became part of that group who berated or tried to put down European painting, particularly Picasso, particularly cubism because of what appeared to them to be number one, a rational approach to art, and abstract expressionism was not "rational" (in quotes), although it was just as "rational" in my opinion as Cubism; and, secondly, because of the color question, the question of color which I talked about earlier. Cubist painting tends to be gray and brown and muddy. And what attracted American painters was brilliant color. Although Rothko claims not to be a colorist one of the most important things about his work is its color. Otherwise the later artists such as Noland and Louis would not have been indebted to him.

MR. SANDLER: Particularly Olitski.

MR. FERBER: Yes. But you see that's interesting that Rothko was one of those people who objected to describing art in terms of color or form alone, you know, which are simply the basic, the ground on which you stand but no necessarily the most evocative or the most interesting areas. It's interesting that Rothko always claimed that he was not a colorist, that there was a great deal of content in his work. And this was the big problem for all of those critics and the public who objected to abstract expressionism because although we talked about the content it was difficult to describe it.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. Then Clem, too, even then took a rather formalist position. His point of view would not have been shared by the artist although I guess they . . .

MR. FERBER: No, his position was not shared by the artists then. In fact it was antagonistic to that of most artists. I think that Pollock whose work he praised most, well almost exclusively, and David Smith whose work in sculpture he certainly praised exclusively always took his writing and speaking and talking about them with their tongues in their cheeks. I know this for a fact because they were convinced that the formal qualities of their work were not the most important. Or, let's leave out the question of what's more important or less important, it wasn't the only element. And Clem Greenberg certainly emphasized the purely formal as is true now amongst some of the most dominating and domineering critics of our time.

MR. SANDLER: He's become the influence on criticism in this decade unquestionably.

MR. FERBER: Yes.

MR. SANDLER: What role did the forums at The Subjects of the Artist School play? Because prior to that time it seems that most of the activity would have been rather private, artists meeting at your place, at studios, other places. And then suddenly with The Subjects of the Artist School and those Friday sessions in the later Club the talk tends to get rather more public, or quasi-public.

MR. FERBER: What is your question?

MR. SANDLER: Just what role did this school play?

MR. FERBER: I think primarily the School gave us all a sense of having a place in the public eye. It was an egocentric enterprise to a large extent I believe. It was of course started to help some of the artists concerned with teaching there to make a living. I mean they couldn't sell their work. And by giving salaries, which never materialized, by the way, they thought they could live. But the Friday evenings gave all of us a feeling that we

were engaged in an active, public, successful, or becoming successful, enterprise which was becoming noteworthy, more weighty in the public's eye. Now, as for its influence on the artists themselves, well, in addition to what I've just said it gave each of us who spoke, you know, the evenings were spent by introducing an artist who gave some kind of talk and then there was discussion. So that even if you didn't give a talk you could discuss. It gave each of us a chance to face a critical audience. Because the audience was critical. Although critical, it was numerous. And because it was numerous it gave the impression that it was interested enough to come and pay a dollar or fifty cents or whatever it was to get in. So it gave each of us a chance to face a critical audience and to justify the activity in which we were engages. Which was a kind of bonus in addition to the annual or biennial exhibition of one's work. It gave the sense of there being a community which was recognized by the public as important. And of course undoubtedly occasionally ideas were stimulating enough so that one felt excited and gave.

MR. SANDLER: This poses two problems: what was the function of . . .

MR. FERBER: What was the function of it?

MR. SANDLER: Yes. As you felt it? Why was it important? Because there seemed to have been such a need to participate?

MR. FERBER: I think the function was a desire to justify in verbal terms in addition to the formal painting, I mean to the plastic terms an attempt and a need for justifying what we were doing. All new art forms have required some kind of verbal explanation and communication about them to a smaller or larger audience. Appolinaire was one example of a man who devoted his life to explaining what cubism and so on was about. And certainly Breton with Surrealism was involved in verbalizing a plastic enterprise. And there have been one after another. In this case it was the artists themselves although a few critics spoke, if I'm not mistaken, I can't remember any who spoke to be honest, can you?

MR. SANDLER: Who spoke at the Studio 35? No. It was all artists I think. I think the only non-artist may have been Levy.

MR. FERBER: Yes. Julian Levy gave a talk. That's true.

MR. SANDLER: But the rest were artists.

MR. FERBER: Yes. It always has been a source of amusement to me that literary people, let's say, an example would be Kunitz, the poet, who at various times said, "You do your painting or your sculpture and we'll explain it or we'll do the writing." As a matter of fact, at that time people like Baziotes, and Tomlin, and Motherwell, and Rothko, and I, and . . .

MR. SANDLER: Gottlieb.

MR. FERBER: Gottlieb did very well at writing and verbalizing and speaking about what we were engaged in. I think Baziotes published or wrote or spoke from notes in a style which was extremely beautiful and provocative. And Gottlieb in a more rational and hardheaded way was very pungent and to the point about what he was engaged in.

MR. SANDLER: You were talking about the way in which artists could express themselves well, and did.

MR. FERBER: Yes. Well, I think they did. There are plenty of examples of it. which have been published. The Museum of Modern Art has published examples. The Whitney Museum has reprinted examples. And there have been tapes and whatnot. I think artists express themselves with considerable insight.

MR. SANDLER: And style.

MR. FERBER: And style. And event he ones who don't write like de Kooning in conversation . . .

MR. SANDLER: He's written a couple of things that are very . . .

MR. FERBER: I don't know whether he's written them or not but . . .

MR. SANDLER: Well, they've appeared in his name.

MR. FERBER: They appeared above his signature.

MR. SANDLER: And I think the ideas were his.

MR. FERBER: Yes. That's true. But he has spoken, of course I've known him fairly well, I didn't know him as well

in the late forties and early fifties as I got to know him later because he had a studio next door and I got to know him a little bit there and also at other times. But, you know, he had very sharp things to say. De Kooning is a very acute, very, how shall I put it?, we, very acute observer. He has a way of putting things which is acute and cute at the same time. It's fetching. They're not so profound but they show there's an intelligence at work. But I think some of the other people like Baziotes and Tomlin and Newman and rothko and some of the others have written some, have stated some more remarkable ideas about painting and sculpture.

MR. SANDLER: There was always a sense, or an anti, well, or an idea that, how shall I word it, an antipathy against the idea that a community existed. Certainly there was an anti-label feeling among artists. But there was a community.

MR. FERBER: Well, there was a very tangible and viable community to which we all subscribed by being there in bars, in peoples' homes. And there's not doubt that that community existed. What people object to was being classified as abstract expressionists. And I think justifiably so. I don't know what is meant by abstract expressionism except that in my mind perhaps there are two painters who belong to that school. One is de Kooning and the other is Pollock. Or to use another term such as action painting perhaps, those two people belong to that school. But I really don't think, you know, de Kooning has denied it. Because he says he paints very slowly and scratches out and so on. And Pollock although he worked in what looked like an action-like procedure was certainly thinking in the terms of, what's his name?, the great educator at Columbia who wrote, you know, the man who started progressive schools.

MR. SANDLER: Dewey.

MR. FERBER: Dewey. What's the name of his book, Art . . .

MR. SANDLER: Art is Experience.

MR. FERBER: Yes, that's right. Dewey pointed out that the artist is thinking as profoundly as anybody else when he is at work. Now, in other words, I would say that Pollock, although he was jumping around his canvases, was thinking and, as has been pointed out by many people, but particularly by Bill Rubin in those articles that appeared in Artforum, the revision or the examination of each preceding instant's work constitutes active thought about his work. So anyhow the fact is that of the half-dozen or dozen painters and sculptors who belong to that generation, there's considerable difference, much greater difference in their work than, let us say, between Picasso and Braque at any give moment, at certain given moments. I don't think Rothko's work ever looked like Still's and I don't think that Still's ever looked like Newman's or de Kooning's and so on. And I think that although at a certain period there was a superficial resemblance between the work of Roszak and Hare and min that was only for a very short time and I can't imagine anything more divergent in style and subject matter or content than has been true for the last 15 or 20 years.

MR. SANDLER: Did you go to The Club much?

MR. FERBER: Yes, I used to go to The Club. I was one of the charter members, I suppose. I used to go. I gave a couple of talks there. I gave a talk at a forum in which John Cage and I were engaged in which he advocated the necessity for gratuitous murder as in The Caves of the Vatican by Andre Gide, and in which I took, just for the sake of argument, a very puritanical and moralistic ethical position, you know, against it. But there were attempts at The Club to carry on the tradition of the Friday night Subjects of the Artist and Tony Smith's school which took over from . . .

MR. SANDLER: Yes. Studio 35.

MR. FERBER: But, you know, there was this Roundtable organized in 1948? 1949?

MR. SANDLER: 1950.

MR. FERBER: 1949 I think. I know I went to Europe in 1948 for the first tim after the war. And Rothko went in 1949 or maybe early 1950 and he wasn't present.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: But the other artists were, with the exception of Rothko. So it was 1948 or late . . .

MR. SANDLER: No, it was 1950. It was the spring of 1950.

MR. FERBER: I see. Well anyhow, that's where Alfred Barr kept asking for a name or designation for the New York School. Which I think was the invention of Motherwell. I think he was the first man to realize that it was like the School of Paris. And I think, I mean to my knowledge he was the first man to use the term New York School, first and most frequently. But Alfred Barr kept asking for a term to describe it. And Abstract Expressionism was

rejected. And other names which people suggested were rejected. And I don't think we ever came to any conclusion. So I think there was a strong sense of individual independence of each other at the same time that there was a community which was opposed primarily tot he Establishment which meant, as you know, social realist and academic painting, and to European art. I think I mentioned this earlier, there was a strong reaction against Cubism and a strong reaction in favor of Impressionism.

MR. SANDLER: When did that Impressionism idea really come in, Herbert?

MR. FERBER: I would say about 1951.

MR. SANDLER: But it would have been after, say, Rothko's show of the style, you know, his An Afternoon show. In other words, while . . .

MR. FERBER: Not Afternoon. Before Noon.

MR. SANDLER: It was Before Noon.

MR. FERBER: Because you see nobody's color had very little to do with Impressionism. It was stark color. It wasn't color ameliorated by atmospheric qualities or suggestions. You know, even though Pollock used pure color out of the tube the general impression is a misty and atmospheric tone.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Because in a way it's like Seurat who used distinctly pure color but which merged in your eye. And also in terms of Matisse's color. I suppose, although I don't like Greenberg's formalistic approach to art, he was one of the first people to point out to me at least or in my hearing that Matisse was really a great painter in contrast to Picasso and that Picasso had other qualities, I'm not talking about painting as if it were the only quality, certainly Picasso . . .

MR. SANDLER: No, the reason I asked this question is because talk about Impressionism doesn't really begin into the fifties, after these guys have shown in print, that is, writing about it. And I just wondered if there was talk.

MR. FERBER: I'm sure that writing and talk are separated by at least two or three years. Certainly Tomlin was able to verbalize quite well, and Rothko talked about Cubism as anti-paint because of the color.

MR. SANDLER: But did they talk about Impressionism?

MR. FERBER: Oh, yes.

MR. SANDLER: See, the talk really doesn't come in as far as print is concerned until, say, after Guston.

MR. FERBER: Oh, really? Who was a latecomer, too.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: And whose early work is obviously influenced by Monet.

MR. SANDLER: The early . . .

MR. FERBER: Oh, yes.

MR. SANDLER: Which are not shown until 1951.

MR. FERBER: 1951?

MR. SANDLER: Yes. It's curious that, because like Tiger's Eye, you know, I read through just about everything there and, you know, not much about, well, a couple of things about Impressionism, most of them unfavorable. Well, what role does Tiger's Eye play?

MR. FERBER: Oh, I don't know what role Tiger's Eye plays. You know, Tiger's Eye was financed by a wealthy woman married to a poor artist who . . .

MR. SANDLER: Who was in the Gallery?

MR. FERBER: Who was in the Betty Parsons Gallery, for . . . yes. They both needed a forum. She was a poet and he was a painter. They both needed more of a forum than was open to them through professional means. so the idea of a magazine was extremely attractive. And they were obviously influenced by the Dada idea of a

magazine. Because the magazine had various colored papers and textures and so n. But it's prime quality was that it was devoted to art. I mean to what artists had to say, to reproductions of their work, and to poetry and a few other things. I don't think it had much of a role. I think its main role was, as the school, I mean as the Subjects of the Artist had, its main role was to make it appear as if, and in fact it was true, the New York School was really becoming important enough so that it had to have not only painting shown in galleries but a magazine to explain and to exemplify and so on, as the school had a role in bringing a public to the Subjects of the Artists.

MR. SANDLER: We probably wouldn't have too much time to deal with this because that tape is running out. But you've lived through three sort of changes, very drastic changes in public reception of art. I mean you come up in the late 1930s where social realism, regionalism, name it, abstraction is in sway. And then you live through the abstract expressionist era. And now in the sixties something entirely different is happening. What is your reaction to that? To, say, the new minimal which seems to be the most dominating style today?

MR. FERBER: Well, you know, Irving, everybody in the art world speaks of me as being too rational, too logical, and too objective.

MR. SANDLER: They do?

MR. FERBER: Yes. Motherwell said to me last night, "The trouble with you, Herbert, is that you act as if everybody is as rational as you are." Now I preface my comments to your question by saying that simply in order to say that my attitude about minimal art and coloristic art, or pure color painting is to begin with tolerable, simply because I remember that those terms which are used to denigrate it are exactly those terms which were used against abstract expressionism and the New York School. I mean the works are the same, to describe different painting and sculpture. It's also interesting to me that some of the critics and artists who are even twenty years younger than I am, like in their forties, are as intolerant of the new art form which is being shown in reaction to minimal art, I mean the art of materials.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. This anti-form.

MR. FERBER: Yes. That was shown at Castelli's warehouse. They're just as antagonistic to that, although in favor of the color field painting and minimal sculpture as artists and critics of my generation had been opposed to minimal sculpture and color field painting. So with those prefaces to my attitude I would say I can see how one's commitment to any group or form or period leaves one a little blind to what comes next and just does happen. Now what do I think of minimal art? Is that what you'd like to know?

MR. SANDLER: Well, yes.

MR. FERBER: I find some minimal art, you know, the good minimal art in painting, I want to distinguish between painting and sculpture in this case, the good minimal or color field painting is extremely beautiful and committed to, as Noldan has said, to color. Which seems to me a simplistic and simple-minded attitude about art, or simple-minded commitment to art. I recognize that I belong to a different generation and my thinking about art is more complex, not necessarily more valid, but certainly more complex. I think it's so beautiful that once one transcends the sort of lack of content or subject matter which older art had, I mean by "older art" anything before it, you know, going all the way back. Once one transcends looking for that subject matter . . .

[Interruption]

MR. SANDLER: This is the third conversation with Herbert Ferber on January 6, 1969, in his studio. You were one of the first artists in the fifties, probably the first, to work in terms of environmental sculpture, Herbert. And just to start off, because I want to talk to you about these problems, do you prefer to work large or small? Is there any preference there? I mean why do you work large? Because you often do.

MR. FERBER: Yes. Well, it's difficult to give you an answer to that, Irving, simply because, I think we went into it a little bit earlier, in the sense that I'm able to afford to work large now. It becomes a concomitant to my thinking. I can afford to work large, I think. And so I begin to think in terms of size and scale, if there's any different between those terms.

MR. SANDLER: Let me put the question another way then: What is the value of size to you? I mean aside from the fact that you can do work on a large scale. Does it have any special attraction for you?

MR. FERBER: yes. I always think that you can see the sculpture better. I don't know whether it's true of monolithic sculpture, but sculpture of this kind where spaces are important, spaces between the forms are so important I think that if there's more space, that is, more space in simple geometric sense, you know, when you make something larger in sculpture it doesn't increase in two dimensions, it increases in three dimensions so there's a geometrical change. It's in terms of solid geometry.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: It isn't like enlarging a painting. The spaces between the parts of a painting become larger only in a linear sense. Whereas in sculpture they become larger in a three-dimensional sense. So that when you make a piece, make a model that's 12 inches high, make a sculpture that's 8 feet high more or less form it you are able to see the sculpture better. Now this may be some kind of mystification or sounds like a mystification but it really is true that . . . You'd better cut the tape off because I'd really like to think about this. [MACHINE TURNED OFF] I've noticed in making things from models that because of the spaces which increase, and of course the reforms of the sculpture increase, too, in size, nevertheless you can read it more easily. Now that's one thing. I also have no doubt, and I can't give you an answer for it at all, that larger things, given an equal quality, are more impressive than smaller things. This has something to do with our scale, the scale of the human body. I think we've talked about this, or perhaps I mentioned it the other day: if you look at a pair of dice, did I mention this to you?

MR. SANDLER: No.

MR. FERBER: Well, if you look at a die of a pair of dice it's not very impressive. I you look at Noguchi's Cube, more or less a cube, down on Broadway it's very impressive simply in terms of size. Because, after all, it's just a cube painted. Even if you don't look at it in relationship to the building, its large size is in relation to the human body an extremely impressive thing. This must be a kind of dynamic and psychological problem. It's a problem that has to do with the distances that you can reach which de Kooning mentioned. When people asked him why he paints a painting a certain size, he said, "It's as far as I can reach." It's a sort of joking answer but it suited his idea of what his work should be like. But that's a digression. The same thing is true of the pyramids. What is so impressive about the pyramids is their simple size. Because if you think of a small pyramid two inches high it doesn't mean very much. And I'm ruling out all the questions of antiquity and surfaces that have changed with antiquity and so on.

MR. SANDLER: So part of the idea of the kind of gesture you want to make has to do with a sort of heroic gesture as well?

MR. FERBER: Well, it interesting you should use that term "heroic gesture" because that's a term that Barney Newman used.

MR. SANDLER: I know.

MR. FERBER: You read that?

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: He used that term many years ago about my work, that it has heroic gesture. But then I was working rather small and he saw in it a large scale gesture. But I'm trying to be very objective about this, enough so to say that a good many sculptures by other sculptors look more impressive when large. This certainly doesn't hold true for some that I've seen which have been blown up to tremendous proportions without being impressive.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: So that I believe that one has to think from the inception of the sculpture in terms of its being larger than the model you make. If you don't do that then it never works large.

MR. SANDLER: You're suggesting then that you can conceive in a small work from the model other than on a large scale. Perhaps to put it another way: Do you conceive a large work differently from a small work? Or do you conceive a small work always having the potential of being a large work?

MR. FERBER: Well, let's put it this way. I usually make small sculptures to start with, some of which I perceive as being possible of enlargement, of becoming bigger sculptures with more or less the same forms. Some of the small ones I reject immediately. I know they will not work big. Now this is just an aesthetic judgement, a judgment which I've perhaps learned over the years to make more or less accurately. but when I'm making models now I know that what I'm aiming for is something larger than one foot or two feet, usually int he neighborhood of six or eight or ten feet. That's what I'm aiming at. And some of them will look better at six feet than they will at three feet. And also i don't think my eye is as good as all that so that I can tell immediately. i often make a sculpture, say, a foot high and then make it three feet high, and if it seems to be working at that size then I'll try it at six feet. And I can fail, too.

MR. SANDLER: Well, working large presents all sorts of problems, not the least one of which is the exhibition problem. Have you thought about that particular thing? Where does one show big work?

MR. FERBER: Well, that's become more or less of a joke now, you know. When we first began to show our painting and our sculpture int he late forties and early fifties anybody who made a large painting or large sculpture was thought to be a fool. Nevertheless we all moved and kept moving in that direction both painters and sculptors. Then the museums began to accommodate themselves to this idea. And the Whitney top floor is I don't know, what?, fifteen? twenty feet high, or something like that. And I see in the last Whitney show that one of the sculptures practically reaches the ceiling.

MR. SANDLER: That's right.

MR. FERBER: What does that mean? That we're going to have to make museums with higher ceilings? Or just show the work outdoors?

MR. SANDLER: Well, what is your attitude towards exhibiting or putting your work either in architectural settings or in public places?

MR. FERBER: Well, there you get into a question of scale. If you put your work in a part with gigantic trees around it and if the relationship between the sculpture and the trees is such that the sculpture is dwarfed simply by the relationship in their sizes you've defeated your own purpose. If you put your sculpture in a small space surrounded by large buildings you've accomplished the same defeat. So that the size of the sculpture if it's put outdoors has to be related to what is close to it. It's not necessarily architecture. If you put a sculpture in the middle of a baseball diamond it would look small if it were less than twenty feet high. Just because of the space around it. Even though, you know, you don't look at any architectural problems. You know, for the last few hundred years painters and sculptors have been working in a kind of vacuum in that sense, in the sense in which we're now talking, in that the painters began to do easel pictures, the sculptors began to do chamber sculpture but when it began to get larger there simply was no place to put it. Putting the sculpture around the city as has been tried here in the last few years . . .

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Is only a very limited kind of experiment because it's obvious that as soon as you put a large piece of sculpture out, as mine was in front of the Plaza Hotel, it looked to me very small simply because of the size of the buildings.

MR. SANDLER: But you don't object tot he idea of your piece being in a public setting?

MR. FERBER: Oh, no. No.

MR. SANDLER: Because there is some objection to that. Adolph Gottlieb said he would never do that again.

MR. FERBER: He would never do what again?

MR. SANDLER: He would never place a work in a public setting, outside of a gallery, museum, or home.

MR. FERBER: Did he ever?

MR. SANDLER: He once did that synagogue thing I think, that mosaic, or glass.

MR. FERBER: Glass?

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: In New York here?

MR. SANDLER: Yes. And then there are other artists now who talk about getting away from galleries and museums. They want their work in public settings because they feel that the galleries and museums insulate the work from the public.

MR. FERBER: Yes. Well, those are not artists problems or aesthetic problems. Those are sociological problems. And I'm not particularly concerned with that. I think all exposure of one's work in museums or galleries or in a so-called public place is a question of degree. A gallery or a museum is a public place. It doesn't insulate or isolate it. Museums have a tremendous population now, form day to day and it certainly doesn't insulate it. It isn't, I think, any more artificial as a surrounding than a museum.

MR. SANDLER: I think really the question I wanted to ask, Herbert, is thMR. SANDLER: You're working large. It's obvious that some kind of more public space would be suitable for your work.

MR. FERBER: More public than what?

MR. SANDLER: Say, more public than the space in a home, because your work won't go in a home.

MR. FERBER: But it would go into some people's homes, and it certainly would go into some people's garden.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Which is a fine place to see it. And in museums which have larger halls or gardens the work will fit there, too.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. However, once you begin to work on a very large scale you also get into another problem where about the only people who might be able to afford your work would either be public agencies or corporate agencies.

MR. FERBER: Yes.

MR. SANDLER: And that also means a kind of . . .

MR. FERBER: Well, you would think that. But that's not exactly true. Obviously people are paying fantastic prices for painting and sculpture. I mean individuals are.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: The more famous paintings and sculptures go for $75,000, $50,000, $60,000. Well, you know, my sculptures are certainly within that range at the size I'm making them.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: So I don't think it prevents individuals from owning them.

MR. SANDLER: No. But still I guess the really potential purchasers of your work, of your large-scale works, would be corporate and public agencies.

MR. FERBER: Well, corporate or public, it's no great advantage to have one' work related to the kind of enterprise, much as an office building, or a factory building or, you know, something of that nature. I think that it may be there but it's not visible in that nobody looks at it. And I think a piece of sculpture placed in front of an office building, say on Park Avenue becomes invisible. It just is passed constantly. More so just because of the nature of our city life. I don't think it's true in a public square in Italy, or in France, particularly in Italy where the pace of life is slower. But these are sociological questions.

MR. SANDLER: Well, in a sense they are; and maybe in a sense they're not. for example, just to get back to that idea again: you're in you studio working on a large-scale sculpture. Now at one point some of these works, because they're so large, chances are they will go into public places rather than, say, private homes, etc. Now under what conditions would you prefer to work? For example, would you prefer to work in the studio and take the work out, or sell it to whoever buys it, or maybe if a public agency wants it find a place for it? That would be one possibility. That in a sense was the original idea of sculpture in Environment show. they initially tried to have artists find places, they didn't succeed, that they thought their sculpture would best go into.

MR. FERBER: Oh, yes.

MR. SANDLER: Then another possibility would be to actually work in a specific space. Would you like to do that?

MR. FERBER: Given the kind of city New York is, and if I had complete freedom of choice, I think I could place almost all my sculptures in a satisfactory position outside. For example, the one that was on the Plaza I wanted to place in front of the Seagram Building because it was a few steps, it was against a series of vertical columns and windows and the contrast would have been great between this rather baroque sculpture and the vertical and horizontals of the Seagram Building. Paced where it was in the Plaza where you had continual activity of automobiles all around it, buses, and those horse-drawn carriages, and so on, it was often difficult to see it. I also thought of placing it in Lever House garden. That would have been a good place. So i think that if I had complete freedom of choice I could place almost anything satisfactorily. But don't forget that there are sociological and ego questions that come in. For example, what's the use of placing a piece down in Battery Park? It'll hardly every be seen by anybody, or by anybody who's interested in painting or sculpture. It isn't terribly satisfactory to do a work for a place where it won't be seen. I know in talking about such problems with a sculptor I know, he said of course every work of art has its own life and is autonomous and so on. But somebody else said at the moment, "If you take the sculpture and put it in a closet and shut the door it might just as well not exist." So that's one aspect of the problem. Now would I like to work for a given place, make a sculpture for a particular pace? Yes, I would. And I have, as you know.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: I've made several. And it became a problem as to how to relate the sculpture to the space on which it was to fit, or work. And I think that's a fairly satisfactory way of working. but, you know, there's no tradition of this kind of thing in our modern civilization, contemporary civilization. Many periods in the past have had almost automatic relationship between the work produced and the place it was going to go. Not so much work was made for home consumption. It was made for public places. But we don't have that kind of tradition. So it's a constant problem and, given the kind of society we have, it's not easily solved in a satisfactory way for anybody.

MR. SANDLER: Tell me, when your work was at the Plaza I saw it a couple of times there and people climbed over it, and pushed it, kicked it, wanted to see how tough it was. What was your reaction to that? Did that upset you at all? Because one of the things about putting works in public places would be the danger of, say, vandalism like the Tony Rosenthal has become a billboard. It doesn't bother him too much. He goes down every couple of weeks and paints it again. How did you . . .

MR. FERBER: No, I wasn't disturbed by it. The surfaces didn't lend themselves particularly to putting posters on them. And since it was only a painted sculpture the paint chipped off where kids climbed on it. But that didn't bother me because I knew that could easily be repaired. But if it had been made of a permanent material, which it could, I wouldn't have minded people climbing on it. No, that doesn't bother me. I mean that again is something that has nothing to do with the work of art.

MR. SANDLER: Yes, but this is interesting, Herbert, because your attitude now is that your primary concern is with the making of the work of art, and that when you're finished making it, well then the way it's presented to the public or as seen by the public is out of your .

MR. FERBER: Well, I'm not attached to the sculpture with an umbilical cord that can't be broken. Nevertheless, recently when my sculpture was placed in the basement of the Whitney Museum I objected because it couldn't be seen, and I insisted that they move it. And they did. So that I'm concerned to the extent, as I said before, that unless the sculpture is visible there's no use showing it at all.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. However, just to push that question one step further: do you ever think about, say, art in public places, do you ever think how it might affect the response of people who look at it? You indicated before that you thought that most people would just not even look at it, would walk by, would be indifferent to it.

MR. FERBER: Yes. Look, I'm sure you've had the same experience I've had. You've gone to Europe or Mexico or some other place where there are works of art to be seen, buildings or murals or frescoes, and so on. Unless you bring with you a body of knowledge you get very little out of it. The simple, visual impression may be, and usually is, insufficient. In other words, I don't mean that you have to have historical knowledge or art historical knowledge about the work. Although that is not irrelevant. But you have to know what you're looking at. You have to have had the experience of looking at other works of art for comparative purposes and you have to know something about why and how these things were made. Otherwise they become passing impressions. Part of the scenery. Now the reason I've talked about that is to say that when people look at contemporary paintings or sculpture in so-called public places a lot depends on what they bring along in their own minds about art. And unless they have some knowledge they can form no opinion. In fact, they're on the same level as children in this regard.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: You know, I think that the idea of putting sculpture around the city was good in order to get people acquainted with modern sculpture, is just about that. It gets them acquainted with seeing strange new forms instead of figurative sculpture. But beyond that it means nothing because most of the people who see these things are unprepared.

MR. SANDLER: So you don't think that art in public places would really in any way affect the lives of people or their attitudes to art?

MR. FERBER: No, I don't think it does. Just as I don't believe that publishing large numbers of paperbacks has increased the cultural level of our society. People either don't read them, or if they do read them, they don't comprehend them. Because they're not prepared for it.

MR. SANDLER: Well, the reason I'm asking many of these questions is it seems on the basis of not only the Sculpture In Environment show, but other shows throughout the country and particularly when the war was over, the attitudes not only of the federal government which just gave 60 artists $5,00, you know, a check in the mail; and that was that. But also, you know, corporate interests that there's going to be an upsurgence of this kind of activity on the part of artists. In other words, artists will be asked and commissioned to do works for public

places.

MR. FERBER: And a lot of bad art will be made, just as happened during the federal support of art, WPA days.

MR. SANDLER: WPA, yes.

MR. FERBER: roughly I would say that about nine-tenths of that work was discardible.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: It merely supported people who said they were artists. And I think federal support, government support unless it's screened very carefully by qualified people will result in a tremendous amount of bad art.

MR. SANDLER: But at this point a kind of screening seems to be, I don't know how, but it seems to be taking place, either corporate executives or government officials seem to be rather sophisticated.

MR. FERBER: I don't think they're more sophisticated. I think they're more influenced by questions of taste, style, public relations, all kinds of things which have nothing to do with the real subject of art. Of course I realize that banks put paintings and sculpture in their office spaces and in their business spaces. And I can't see any reason for it. I don't think that the officials of the bank are in any sense or any way more sophisticated than when they didn't have the sculpture or painting there.

MR. SANDLER: But aren't you almost in a sense in a kind of futile position because the thrust of so much of your recent work has been to environmental spaces? And yet you indicate that you don't expect that the work there will have any particular effect.

MR. FERBER: No, no, I didn't say that. I think that in the proper place, for example, the environment which is at Rutgers University is in a place where it can be used, appreciated, understood to a much greater extent than if it were in a bank building. Largely because you have an academic environment, people are taught about art. They bring then to it, to the work, a greater knowledge of what the history and development of modern art has been. Also they tend to lead perhaps a more contemplative life. They don't rush in and out. And actually in that room where the environment is at Rutgers, I've been there and I've been told that students walk in, sit down on the floor or on the hassocks which are there, and read or talk and sort of look around at the sculpture while they're doing that. Well, there's a great deal of difference between putting a sculpture in a lobby or in front of a building on Park or fifth Avenue, or even in such a place as a park. I think the place in which the sculpture is put has a good deal to do with how much it will be looked at and appreciated. I can't imagine having a worse place than an office building lobby. Although, you know, Hans Hofmann did a mosaic of one, I'm sure nobody ever looks at it. After the opening when his friends and other artists came to look at it that was the end. And perhaps a few art historians will go to see it. But it's not in a place where it can even easily be seen. Well, even that isn't a question because the frescoes int he churches in italy are not easily seen. You have to carry binoculars with you. But at least people aren't rushing around and jostling you and so on.

MR. SANDLER: So, in other words, what you're suggesting is that the thing that would sort of concern you most about putting work in public spaces is having a place where you know a sophisticated, aware, and more or less sympathetic audience will be there? And that would be . . .

MR. FERBER: Well, I would say sophisticated and aware, knowledgeable.

MR. SANDLER: And sympathetic in that sense.

MR. FERBER: Yes, yes, not necessarily sympathetic.

MR. SANDLER: In that they're aware an sophisticated.

MR. FERBER: you know I heard recently of an industrial complex which is being developed some place in the South. There will be something like a hundred factories or office buildings, something of that kind. And somebody has been designated to choose a hundred sculptures for this area, which covers several acres I suppose. I can't imagine a worse place to put a work of art. You know, what use to anybody will it have?

MR. SANDLER: There are people there.

MR. FERBER: Yes, but what kind of people? People who are not, to begin with, interested in art, who never asked for it but who had it foisted upon them. don't forget that art no longer has religious or historical or such associations for people. So it's much more difficult to have a relationship with a work of art than it used to be. It requires in addition now a considerable deal of knowledge about art as a discipline. Just as one doesn't start to read philosophy and expect to understand or get much out of it without having disciplined oneself and having been disciplined in that area.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. You see there were others of us like myself, for example, because I was rather excited by the possibilities of the Sculpture In Environment show because, you know, it opened up . . . to me it suggested an opening up to the use of artists of a tremendous, very myriad number of spaces in the City. It also prompted thoughts about not only highering the quality of, say, people's life in a specific place but also helping in a way to renew the City.

MR. FERBER: No, that's like starting at the top and working down. What the City needs obviously is more beautiful spaces, parks, avenues, less traffic, less pollution. Putting sculpture around the City isn't going to solve those problems. And just having to cross a street to get to look at a piece of sculpture becomes a problem in logistics and tactics, which, you know, is not to the benefit of the work of art. So i think it's a little bit like putting labels on works of art in museums so that people can read the labels and feel that they know something. They actually don't. All they know is what the few lines on the label tell them. The place to begin is with children . . . to teach them about art. It's very difficult to teach adults about art unless they're dedicated.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: And so the large crowds that go into museums mean very little. They simply go for, as I said, for questions of prestige and social intercourse and because they feel it is the right thing to do, but not because they're impelled to know about art in a profound sense.

MR. SANDLER: So at this point you would not be very optimistic as to the possibilities of public art really having any effect, any important effect?

MR. FERBER: I don't think public art will have an important effect on the population. Because, look, it's an old adage, "poverty does not lead to culture." And in a large sense this city is poverty-stricken. that is, it's poverty-stricken in the people. A large proportion of the population has no time to look at art. Ont he other hand, that portion of the population which has time to look at art is so ensnared in the business of living in a difficult city that they just can't be bothered. I really believe that art has a, art usually has lived in a culture which has leisure. Well, our society hasn't that kind of leisure. We have affluence but we have no luxury. This is a country and a civilization, it's true in Germany and Russia I suppose or in France that everybody has money to spend on things. But they have no sense of luxury in that they are willing to buy or have some kind of work of art just to look at it. I mean obviously there are many collectors but one often wonders why they collect.

MR. SANDLER: To get off to another point: when you make your environments and you've made them since then there's always the problem of the environment and the architecture, the surroundings it's in. For I guess up to this point you have been given a space and decided whether you want to work in that space, and then you worked in it.

MR. FERBER: Yes.

MR. SANDLER: Well, what about things like collaboration between art and architecture? Or artist and architect?

MR. FERBER: Well, that's an old problem. I finally had to solve that problem by designing my own architecture because, you know, in this sculpture, environmental sculpture, I had to design the walls. In other words, I had to do the architecture. This is something that was never done except in the form of a model, but it was commissioned to be made large, and fell through. But I think it's very difficult. Most architects are not interested in this collaboration. And since we live in a time when architecture is more important than painting and sculpture, the architects have the upper hand. They make the space. They tell people where to live and how to live and where to put the works of art, if any. Don't forget Louis Kahn at a seminar in which I participated simply said, " I don't want sculpture around or in or near my buildings. I believe that the joints, the materials, the surfaces, the way in which my buildings are put together is of sufficient aesthetic interest to obviate the need for sculpture." Now this is a pretty fair statement of the point of view of a great many architects. I don't know how Philip Johnson feels right now. But he once told me that he would never commission an artist to do a sculpture for one of his buildings because he couldn't trust the artist to do the right thing. And I said to him, you know, "How cant he artist trust you to do the right building?" But he said he would not even commission Lipchitz whom he admired most of all among artists or sculptors, he would not even commission Lipchitz to do a sculpture. He would rather take something already finished in the hope that it would work. Well, this is largely the position of architects. Very few of them, such as Percy Goodman, have been willing to ask artists to improve their spaces and their walls and so on.

MR. SANDLER: Would you, because I'm sure you've thought about it, like to be in a situation where you could have an organic relation where, for example, you could ask an architect and expect, because it is an organic relation, that he would do this kind of space for you?

MR. FERBER: I certainly have no a priori reasons for not discussing such possibilities with an architect provided of course that he had some understanding of my sculpture, and provided that I could have some understanding

of what his aims as an architect are. And I think this kind of collaboration is a possibility. But it must be a rare one. And don't forget that a great many buildings in Europe which we thing of the collaboration between artists and architect were not collaborations at all. First of all, some of the buildings were done by the sculptor who was also an architect. Like many of the churches in Italy. Well, Michelangelo designed St. Peter's.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: And I've forgotten the names but there are several others.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: That's one case where there's a collaboration between a man and himself. And then there's the kind of architecture which has been embellished for hundreds of years after it was constructed or made, by the addition of frescoes, the removal of frescoes, the addition of sculpture of different periods. Notre Dame has sculpture of many different periods around it. So collaboration is in a sense a modern idea. For one reason, because the buildings go up so fast and unless you get the painting in or the sculpture in right away you're liable not to have any there because the building comes down in twenty-five or thirty years. When a building is permanent it can be improved or embellished or ruined by the addition of good and bad works or art later on. Collaboration is a good idea but it's not by any means the only possibility.

MR. SANDLER: I think I may have started this whole discussion at a place where we possibly should have finished. Let me try and entirely different track. Very early, in the middle fifties, you begin to think of your sculpture no longer as a piece but rather as an environment. The whole work actually becomes a space that the viewer walks into, into the piece itself.

MR. FERBER: Yes.

MR. SANDLER: Now let's start there.

MR. FERBER: I would say that was when, about the middle fifties?

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Yes. Go ahead.

MR. SANDLER: And, well, what were your ideas at that point? I mean we talked a little about this last week but I don't think really enough. What prompted that move in your sculpture?

MR. FERBER: Well, what prompted it was sheer accident. That is, I made some roofed sculptures, which had a roof, a wall, two walls, and I think we discussed this question of the base last time . . .

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: And that's what led me to make roofed sculptures. It took me several years to suddenly realize that by adding more walls, in other words, by closing this up completely, one had a room or an architectural space. And then I began to see very simply that if one walked into such a space it was containing a sculpture, that is, containing a sculpture which was integrally related to the space, that one looked at this sculpture as sculpture has never been looked at before.

MR. SANDLER: From within?

MR. FERBER: yes. Not from within as one looks at the Statue of Liberty from within, at a hollow shell, but that one walks around within a sculpture as one walks around within the interior of a cathedral where there are columns and where the columns support the ceiling, and there are arches. And one gets a sense of space which every part of which is made, supported, and purposefully supported and made for a kind of function. I don't mean necessarily religious function. but a function of some kind of possibility for seeing spaces and forms, which is quite different from walking into a cave hollowed out of a mountain where the supporting walls are simply the mountain and you have only a hole. When you go into a cathedral you begin to realize that this was planned in such a way that things helped each other to support each other and to grace the space. Well, this is just a rough way of describing what environmental sculpture began to seem to me to be. That is, that you could walk into such a space and you would never see the whole sculpture as a unit, as you could if you looked at a sculpture from the outside in traditional fashion, but that you saw the parts of the sculpture, you were enveloped by an ambience containing a series of sculptural forms within a space. And that this would be simply a new experience in the visualization of sculpture, in the understanding, the relationship of a person, a man with a work of art.

MR. SANDLER: Now this specific space could be any space? It could be gallery space? You built the model of one of these works at the Whitney Museum and then it became a space in a museum. Did you begin to think

about the kinds of spaces you would put these works in? In other words, did you conceive of this as just a kind of work, that space, or total space? Or did you begin to think of where this space should be? Should it be a gallery or a home or a museum or what?

MR. FERBER: Well, number one, it has to be a permanent installation; I mean ideally. Of course you may make a mock up as one does for a stage set. One may make a mock up but the ideal possibility would be a permanent place into which people could come to contemplate the sculpture and the space and to get the kind of experience which I think they cannot get from looking at a sculpture from the outside. Now the kinds of spaces, well, we discussed the places, that is, I think certainly not in an office building, not in a factory. In a park, yes. In that kind of public place where actually this model was supposed to be in the middle of a large field in the country so that people could drive up to it, get out and walk in and look around. Now the shape of the space. Of course I design many shapes and I have many drawings in which the space is cylindrical like a tower, or in which the space, as this one, is oval, you know, the model is over there, it's an oval space; there's a wall missing. Open to the sky, in some cases, as is this one, closed with a roof. You know, there are many possibilities. And I think I could be given a tower, I mean a cylindrical space which is higher than its diameter and make something for that. Or I could design such a place, the architecture for such a place; or the oval in this case, and so on.

MR. SANDLER: Now the next question would be: where should this space exist, you know, this tower?

MR. FERBER: Well, look, you've been to the Frick museum?

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: You know there's a garden some place?

MR. SANDLER: That's right. In the center.

MR. FERBER: In the middle. Fine. Well, that's a place for an environmental sculpture. Why not in the garden of any museums, such as the Museum of Modern Art?

MR. SANDLER: you mean it would have to be a place where people would come in a contemplative frame of mind?

MR. FERBER: They would come to see a work of art.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Now that would be one possibility. It could also be, as I mentioned, at a university where they don't come to see a work of art but they come to do something else, such as read or talk while sitting or standing surrounded by a work of art. Well, that's the kind of thing I would think of.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. Well, that's pretty clear. So the idea of the Sculpture In Environment show, or event he idea of your placing a piece as you did outside of the Plaza there isn't something that you feel very strongly for?

MR. FERBER: No, I do not. Look, I think since I invented the term "environment" about works of art, about sculpture and it can be about painting, I'd like to make clear what I mean by it.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. Good.

MR. FERBER: And I do not mean sculpture paced in an environment as was done by the City Parks Department in New York. That is simply an old idea revived in order to give a kind of kick to the City pride, a kind of life, I should say. It's very little different from putting sculpture around in public places in Europe which has been done for centuries. That's putting a sculpture in an environment. When I use the term "environmental sculpture" I meant to create a sculpture which resulted in an environment. Therefore, you had to have a given space and a sculpture which was so related tot he space that one could not exist without the other. In other words, if you took the space away the sculpture would collapse, and if you took the sculpture away you just have an empty space. And this isn't true of any public square monument or any sculpture placed around the City. The sculpture is put there. The life of the City goes on around it. You take the sculpture away the life of the city goes on without the sculpture. There have been sculptures placed all over the world in likely places, sometimes as designed by Michelangelo in Rome, what's it called? I've forgotten. Well, well, where he designed the Square and had a sculpture to, it was a Roman sculpture if I'm not mistaken . . .

MR. SANDLER: Yes, that's right.

MR. FERBER: Which had to fit.

MR. SANDLER: The Campodoglia.

MR. FERBER: The Campodoglia. That's right. And if you take the sculpture away there's an empty feeling about that Square or place because there are radiating lines of pavement which bring your eye to the sculpture and so on. This is not what happens, say, in Florence where if you took the David away from in front of the Bargello it wouldn't make any difference. You know, the building would exist. People would walk in and out. That's it. So environmental sculpture is quite different from putting sculpture in an environment.

MR. SANDLER: I see.

MR. FERBER: The other thing about it which I can't emphasize too much is that no matter how large the sculpture, let's say, the Sphinx on the sands of Egypt, if you get a half-mile away it becomes quite a small object. And environmental sculpture is one in which you don't get out of the environment, you can't leave it. I mean you can only walk out an leave it but not see it. Once you're in that space, that environment, that ambience you're in contact with the sculpture. And you can only change you way of seeing it. But it's not the same as simply putting a large sculpture some place on the street.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. So either you would have to have total use of a closed space . . .

MR. FERBER: More or less closed space.

MR. SANDLER: More or less closed space or work in some kind of organic collaboration, or do the building yourself, or work in some sort of organic collaboration with an architect, where if you remove your part of it, his part of it also is . . .

MR. FERBER: That's right.

MR. SANDLER: And the kind of, say, thing like Tony Rosenthal's piece outside of Cooper Union, that is something that in terms of your own work you're not interested in?

MR. FERBER: I'm not seriously interested in it. I would be happy to put a sculpture of mine in a public place provided that they didn't put posters on it. but I don't think it's any kind of solution. It's just a way of exhibiting your work.

MR. SANDLER: That's the way I meant to ask that question: Is it any kind of solution?

MR. FERBER: I think Rosenthal's sculpture suffers from the fact that it's only, what? I don't Know, ten feet high? The buildings, which are also cubicle around it, make that cube look small. If that cube were as big as the Noguchi cube it would be much more successful because it could compete with the building. But it's dwarfed by the building. And if they put higher buildings around it, it'll be even worse. Sot hat the sculpture is the victim of its environment in that case. When I talk about environmental sculpture I would say that this cannot happen. And, as you know, in museums a work of art can be placed advantageously or not depending upon where it is. In other words, its visibility and its relation to what stands around it is quite important. Although we like to think of paintings and works of art as being autonomous, as this man said, they're not. Which is why some painters are so terribly worried about how their pictures will hang or where they will hang, whether they're high or low, whether the light is bright or dull, and so on.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. This to me is very interesting because I've asked these questions of a great many sculptors. And many of the younger ones are very much interested in environment. And to me it's interesting because their point of view is far different from yours.

MR. FERBER: Well, I think their point of view, if I can judge by when I see form a show such as this recent Whitney show is that they simply want to make big things. They have a desire to make things large.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: Which is fine. You know, in a way it's a slap at connisseurship . . .

MR. SANDLER: Precious object.

MR. FERBER: And the precious object. It's a kind of way of saying to the public, which is not really interested in art, as, let us say, witness the Life article on Picasso which was a kind of crime, saying to such a public, "Here is something so big you will have to see it.: Now with things of that size naturally quite obviously they have to be interested in finding a place to put them and show them. Most galleries can't handle them and most museums are not willing to take the trouble to house them permanently because they take up too much space for both showing and storage.

MR. SANDLER: do you have a few more minute, Herbert, Because I just wanted to raise . . .

MR. FERBER: You know, we need to stop it long enough to have a drink.

MR. SANDLER: Okay. Oh, that's fine. This tape is just about to run out so let me just . . . This is the end of the first side of the third interview with Herbert Ferber.

[Interruption]

MR. SANDLER: This is the second side of the third interview with Herbert Ferber. One of the things that we just began talking about last week, Herbert, that we want to go into a little more now, we talked about the changes that took place in art, say, in the thirties and forties and the fifties. We began to talk a little bit about the changes in art from you vantage point because you've lived through these other three decades almost that have taken place int he last ten years and into the 60s. Some changes have taken place. I just wondered what your conception of that . . .

MR. FERBER: In what sense do you mean, Irving?

MR. SANDLER: Well, possibly in a variety of ways: a) the art itself; b) the condition of the artists, changes in the art scene, things just about in every aspect of art in the world would seem to have been undergoing some drastic changes.

MR. FERBER: Yes. Well, I've already indicated what I think of our affluent society. And I think that the consumption of art is just about on the same level as the consumption of fur coats and trips to the Caribbean and, you know, automobiles, stylish clothing and so on. People have a great deal of money and they must do something with it. And one of the things they do is buy art. And it amazes me very often when I talk to the collectors to find out what the basis of their knowledge is. Now there are certainly some fine collectors who have a good eye who know exactly what they're buying and why they're buying it. but I think the impetus given to the sales of art by the upsurge in our economy is questionable as to its effects and what essential good it will do.

MR. SANDLER: Well, it has changed one thing. When we were talking about the middle and late forties one of the things I think, if my memory holds that came up, was that the idea of success certainly wasn't on that, you know, wasn't, in other words, success was not a consideration. The audience that you guys had was your own. Now the situation sort of seems changed, where success most certainly is a consideration not only for, you know, the men of your generation but also for the very young artists.

MR. FERBER: Yes.

MR. SANDLER: Now does this affect art? Has it affected art?

MR. FERBER: I think it has affected the product to some extent. And it's a kind of one to one or two to one relationship along with the increase int he number of people who go to college, increase in the number of people who go to museums, and the increase int he number of people who are therefore interested in art, there has to be a source for this art in which they're interested. There aren't enough old masters and certainly the prices are too high. And there aren't enough even recent masters around. I'm sure I'm telling you things which you already know but I suppose for the record you want to hear what I have to say about it.

MR. SANDLER: No. I'm just interested because this is a historical document. I may know it, but ten years from now . . .

MR. FERBER: Yes. And so you now have art schools in every small town, medium-size town, and in larger cities there are several art schools, either museum schools or university schools where painting and sculpture are taught as if they were trades, much in the same way a graduate student in physics or chemistry or biology is taught his profession. Most of these people go into teaching themselves because there's an ever-increasing demand for teachers for more students for more production of art. And there just can't be that much good art. Because, first of all, this whole thing is only about ten years old and one might say that Egypt or Pre-Columbian in America had produced millions of art objects. But don't forget that they produced them over centuries and that a tradition of art was inherent. I certainly is not true in america, or even in Europe. But certainly in America which is the leading art world now, one doesn't have a tradition which is more than ten years old really of large interest. Now with this increase in the production and interest in art naturally there goes a good deal of sale of art. And students who are learning to be artists can learn very quickly how to make a work of art; I mean what looks like a work of art. There are courses in design, in three-dimensional design, in two-dimensional design, there are courses in etching, there are courses in everything. And very quickly, because of the way in which these things are taught by some kind of experienced person, a student can learn to produce a verifiable work of art, at least verifiable in the sense that it has appearance.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: It may not have any originality. I think perhaps this is one of the reasons for the development of minimal art. I think minimal art has also developed as a reaction against the more complicated art of the abstract expressionists. Which is natural. And I think there's even a change now towards a more complicated art.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: As a result of the surfeit of minimal art. But I think minimal art is simpler to make, and easier to make. First of all, it can be made because of its shape and material by craftsmen. It doesn't have to be made by an artist. Now this was true in other periods of art. In the Renaissance Rubens, for example, had half a dozen or a dozen, I don't know how many, people working in his studio. Rodin had twenty people, craftsmen, carrying out his ideas, I think it's legitimate, but more or less under his supervision. But minimal art doesn't require that. It can be made form a blueprint, from a drawing. And I think a good deal of it shows a kind of banality which is inherent in the method of its production. but his is based on the need for what is called art. And it's a very integral relationship between the art, the society which consumes it, and the people who produce it.

MR. SANDLER: Yes. Certainly fashion might enter here. It;s got to be this one year; it's got to be that the next.

MR. FERBER: Yes.

MR. SANDLER: but last week you did indicate that you found yourself in terms of, say, the art world a little bit more open to certain artists that have emerged in some of these tendencies because of the nature of the criticism levelled against them.

MR. FERBER: Yes. Well, simply that I think I can recognize good art in many of its manifestations. I think that some of the so-called minimal art which I've seen is very good. Of course it's always interesting that the next new thing is frowned upon by the young people who are now making minimal art. In the same way that the abstract expressionists were frowned upon by the generation earlier than they.

MR. SANDLER: What about the state of culture today? I mean you just saw the Whitney Annual. What was your reaction to that as a show. And I think it is fairly representative of, you know, what artists who are in their thirties and forties are doing. What was your response to that show?

MR. FERBER: Well, I have to beg that question on that particular show because I saw it only on opening night and I haven't gone beck. You know, as one gets older one seems to have less time for looking at other people's work, except the people who are in some way close. But my general impression of the show was very much what I gathered from going to galleries and seeing more than one work by each of some of the people. You know, I saw a work at the Whitney which I thought had a simplicity and simpleness which was very fetching, but ruled it out as a serious work of art. Now this kind of opinion or statement is so subject to interpretation even by myself because some of the simplest statements by artists, I mean in their own media, are often their most successful ones. Nevertheless, this piece of minimal sculpture looked to me to be very empty of any serious contemplation by the artist. I think my guess of what my opinion was after the first viewing of the show was that it was extremely repetitious from one piece to another, given the variety of shapes admissible. but I'm sure that abstract expressionist paintings on the whole look very much like each other except for the half-dozen leaders whose work is entirely different from each other. I recognized occasionally something which I thought was good. But also I think I ought to be willing to state that I'm in the position that T.S. Eliot once found himself in which was to say that he was under no obligation to enjoy the work of the younger generation; he was sufficiently satisfied with exploring the work of his own generation.

MR. SANDLER: I want to ask a tricky question now however. I really don't even know how to ask it. I don't even know whether you want to answer it. It may be just a peculiarly American phenomenon. but when you take the so-called great abstract expressionist revolution, I'm using that term because it's the term which involved maybe 15 to 20 painters and maybe 10 sculptors; that was it. Now I know about . . .

MR. FERBER: Do you think there were as many as 15 painters?

MR. SANDLER: Oh, yes. I can name them. There were about 15 or 16 painters beginning, say, with Gorky. but, well, whatever the number was, whether it was a dozen or 15 painters, and 5 or 10 sculptors.

MR. FERBER: Yes, it was a dozen or 15.

MR. SANDLER: And, you know, this is the movement that put abstract expressionism on the map, and yet I know that there is a good percentage of these artist who now find it very difficult, if not impossible, some have gone back to teaching, to live, and by "live" I mean in the vicinity of being able to earn, say $10,000 a year, to live on the proceeds of their work. Which is to me appalling.

MR. FERBER: Yes. Well, this is what I mean by living in a superficially-cultured affluent society which moves

from style to style according to the dictates of culture magazines such as Esquire, which has some good articles. After all, Esquire has printed Norman Mailer who is, I think, one of the great American writers; or Life magazine, and what's the other fashion magazine that has . . .

MR. SANDLER: Vogue.

MR. FERBER: Vogue. I mean these magazines don't dictate but they certainly suggest to many people what is the right thing to buy. Therefore, if you haven't, for some reason, because of a mystique built up by the artist or a mystique built around him by critics or museum people, and there are 4 or 5 such people who are either good public relations men, and I'm not using the pejorative sense, they just simply know how to handle people and what move to make as the right one from time to time; unless one is in that category, I'm talking about artists in my generation now, it's very difficult to really make a living, I mean a decent living. And, as you know, although I'm a famous sculptor I still keep a dental practice going because I don't trust the market for my sculpture. Now I don't trust it because although I've done very well from time to time I also realize that in a month or in a year something will come up which just causes the kind of thing I do to be forgotten. One of the obvious tragedies of this kind of thing we're talking about is a sculptor belonging to another generation earlier than mine, but just the one before I guess, Gonzalez. Who every talks about Gonzalez? Except, you know, in reference in a slighting or small way tot he fact that another artist or 2 or 3 other artists have used his material to develop their own styles. You know, there was the retrospective show at the Museum of Modern Art. There was a show at some gallery.

MR. SANDLER: Chalet.

MR. FERBER: Chalet. That's it. Now I don't know what it would cost to buy a Gonzalez. most likely a lot of money. But I don't think anybody is buying them. Nobody really wants them. But if you look through a catalogue of Gonzalez it is so close to what has sold by American artists or by some European artists that one wonders why they didn't buy Gonzalez, or aren't buying him. I think some of the prices I saw seem not higher than Henry Moore's.

MR. SANDLER: Less.

MR. FERBER: Less. But people are buying Henry Moore. It is tragic. And that's why I'm so pessimistic about the solution. Now it's true that especially amongst the painters it's been much simpler, as you know. In any collector's home or in any museum the number of paintings in relation to the number of sculptures is like 40 or 50 to one. Unless a man is particularly interesting in sculpture he has 2 or 3 pieces and maybe 50 paintings.

MR. SANDLER: Yes.

MR. FERBER: And in addition to the cost of making sculpture which is much greater than for making paintings, sculpture is much more difficult to sell.

MR. SANDLER: He, Herbert, it's getting kind of late . .

MR. FERBER: Okay. Yes, I guess it is.

MR. SANDLER: Let me just run this . . .

[END OF INTERVIEW]