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Oral history interview with John Gernand, 1979 Jan. 18-Feb. 14

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Contact Information
Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington. D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with John Gernand on January 18-February 13, 1979. The interview took place in place, and was conducted by interviewer for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

JULIE HAIFLEY: We're here at Mr. Gernand's apartment, 2122 Massachusetts Avenue, in Washington, D.C. Mr. Gernand is Registrar and Archivist at the Phillips Collection and has been working there for 40 years. Mr. Gernand, before we start talking about the Phillips Collection, let's look back to your early days in Washington. What do you recall about growing up here?

JOHN GERNAND: Many pleasant things. It was a quiet city. I was born in 1913 and of course my first memories of adult talk were "the War." But I loved to have Mr. .... come around with his horse and wagon. My two sisters and I would give the horse cubes of sugar. The wonderful display of vegetables and fruits, and the clop-clop-clop of the horses .... And then there was a little doughnut man. He came on foot, sort of a wheeled cart, and he had freshly baked doughnuts. Ice was delivered to "iceboxes," 100 lbs., you know, that was from an alley cart.
There was a Corcoran Gallery of Art. I was not conversant with art very much at all. I didn't find it until later, I guess around 7th or 8th grade. I was able to buy the old Vanity Fair magazine at times, and I believe the first contemporary things I saw in color were in the old Vanity Fair. I had the usual reproduction chromos in my room -- "The Blue Boy" by Gainsborough, which I didn't pick out. I would cut out Maxfield Parrish reproductions in ads. I thought Joseph Urban, who was on from Ziegfeld was just wonderful. He used to paint Packard car settings -- trees and pillars and..... Of magazines and so forth there was still .... Vogue in the decoration of pages, the layouts.
In high school I had the good fortune to have an art teacher who would let me have old copies of Theatre Arts magazines. I was taken to the theater when I was seven. On my first day it was the old B. F. Keith's ..... four a day. That was the theater here except for the National. My parents went with another couple nearly every Friday either to Keith's or to whatever was playing at the National. But there was a Poli's Theater, which was where the Department of Commerce is now, diagonally across from the Treasury. There was the Belasco Theater, on Lafayette Square. And there I saw some of the .... theater, I think the last where a large company was involved was when I was in high school and went with my sister and some school friends from Marjorie Webster School and we saw "The Mikado" with ..... pretty much on his last legs, but also Mme. Schumann-Heink, and nobody believes this but they were in a very good production of "The Mikado" and of course [same proper name mentioned three lines above] was a legend, so was Schumann-Heink.
My first memories of good music came from radio. I had a little crystal set. We had a larger set and I used to listen with the family. We were five: two sisters, mother and father, and we would listen to Amos and Andy. You see, there was nothing visual then, television has brought it, and also popular magazines didn't reproduce such graphic art as Time magazine has done for years and a page of the Ben Nicholson show would appear as color. I think if the communications has some disadvantages, I do think that the advantage to today's children and their knowledge of and interest in all sorts of things, I think television has been a great boon, selectively, of youth.
I don't watch any of the soaps, I don't watch any of the sitcoms. (laughter) I have Channel 26, our own [public TV] station and I subscribe my membership but to see and hear a symphony orchestra or some of the theatrical things. Last night the first episode of "Edward the VII," and "Upstairs, Downstairs." Not only that but one-hour specials on Maria Callas or Rubinstein -- all sorts of things are offered, and ..... much more sophisticated in the arts and music.
My little crystal set brought me my first taste of Bach, of ... and Mozart. I was able with my allowance to go to the National or sit up in the balcony. I remember the early days of the Theatre Guild -- they did come here to Washington, and I saw an important "Ethan Frome" with a young -- hard to believe this -- Ruth Gordon, a young Raymond Massey, and a young Pauline Lord, who disappeared in the oblivion of alcoholism, whom I saw years later as the mother in "The Glass Menagerie," of course. Oh and then I thought Ziegfeld was just wonderful. I saw everything -- "Rio Rita," "The Vagabond King," "Rose Marie." I just loved what was spectacle, and elaborate settings, and lots of movement. I didn't much care for Sigmund Romberg and "The Student Prince."
But I think I started going to concerts, then at Constitution Hall, and I did develop very gradually in the late [unspecified time] a love of music if not a great deal of knowledge about it. But then I found the visual arts so exciting. We had no galleries except the Corcoran, and I didn't discover the Phillips until about 1927 or 28, because we were a middle-class family and my mother and father weren't particularly interested in music. They had had some early sort of routine of going to the theater, and I would ask them all about it if it wasn't too late when they came back. They saw John Drinkwater's "Abraham Lincoln," they saw, well I guess Joe Jefferson in "Lightnin'" and I would hear all about it. The maid we had, Katie, Katie Sabby [phon.sp.] would read us "Uncle Remus." Since she was black, it was wonderful to have her read him.
We grew up in the usual fare of "Wind in the Willows," "Little Women." That was a hangover from my mother's

schooldays. She used to read that out loud to us in the afternoons in summer. There was no air-conditioning, so there's the loud sound of electric fans, and we all had a .... and put on our pajamas and she would read out loud from "Little Women," "Little Men," the whole business, -- "Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch." I loved Gentleman Rabbit and Nurse Fuzzy Wuzzy. But then I also liked romantic things -- "The Little Lame Prince." I loved the fairytales of Grimm and Hans Andersen, and I always, I suppose, was a romantic.
I remember being taken to the Corcoran to a biennial during grade school but this was very infrequent. I guess in 7th and 8th grades once a year you'd go to an art gallery. I remember to Smithsonian once and all I can remember about that is that we were shown an .....[obscured by loud noise of car starting up]. There were other things but in a group of kids who were disorderly -- they're out of school and they're ... naughty, but there were infrequent trips to museums and the one gallery, the Corcoran. I do know that in grade school some reproductions were along the ledge of the blackboard which were lent from the public library. And one, I didn't know until a few years later that it was a Phillips picture of Puvis de Chavannes' "....." before I ever knew the Gallery.
About once a month an art teacher would come visit and bring watercolors and showcard colors, and there used to be a still life -- a rose, or something she brought with her -- but they were so brief and the children mostly were inattentive. Watercolor is one of the hardest media to handle and I don't know why they -- it's just an audacity for teachers to go around proud to whip up a little interest. We had more music, actually, in grade school. We had an "assembly" and every once in a while there would be some musical treat.
I think it was really in high school and due to two very fine teachers in the art department that I got the first glimmerings of what the fine arts could be, because they were very generous with their magazines, with their knowledge. There was an Arts Club of Washington. It was not a place where a high school person would go. It was mostly art teachers, and some musicians. They had exhibitions, also concerts. It's still standing there on Eye Street. And I know at least one very lovely person and musician, Margaret Poston, [phon. sp.] who lived there for a long time and could practice on their piano -- it's very hard to find places where pianos are welcome. Well now, I'm rambling. Have you another --

JULIE HAIFLEY: I was wondering where your family lived during that time.

JOHN GERNAND: We were in what has become again a fairly fashionable part of the city but we were over near Lincoln Park, it was one on East Capitol past midway on Lincoln Park. It was an old house, spacious. My mother and father came here from Illinois. My father had been to the University of Illinois, my mother had gone to a little teachers college in Vishnu, [phon.sp.] Illinois, but they weren't at all aware of social climbing; that was farthest from their thoughts, and so I'm only a first generation Washingtonian. We did pleasant things. We went on summer vacations, always a family, in the automobiles; Buicks, mostly; some of them were .... to go down.
The vacations were always very pleasant. They ranged from New Hampshire and so forth. In later years we went for about seven successive summers to Cooperstown, New York on Lake Oswego. My father worked for the Patent Office. He thought of studying law to be a patent lawyer but it wasn't his metier. He had some investments, he'd inherited a lot of fertile Illinois farmland and he didn't have to live on his income.
We were neither rich nor poor. We were like many, many families at that time. I think we saw or heard the comments on the change in Washington with what my mother rather conscendingly called "war workers." And war workers, you know -- ! But it was the time of short skirts, rouged knees, and permanents that made crinkles in the hair that were most unattractive. But a lot of people did come here to work in War. All of this was very mysterious to me, but then I saw the sort of temporary buildings that grew up on the Ellipse and nearby. I don't think the ones in front of the Corcoran were torn down until after World War II! These temporary things became permanent, they were just wooden structures.
One of my father's relatives, Jeanette, came from Illinois, worked in the government. She was very pretty and I liked her a lot. And then our first experience of romance was that she fell in love with a young businessman here in Washington and married here; they live in Atlanta, I guess, I haven't been in touch with them for years, they had a son who probably is 50 by now. But I thought it was sort of glamorous, part of the excitement: just the conversation about the War and the newspapers, and President Wilson. And the little I could grasp seemed to me quite exciting.
Once with the family we went to visit a neighbor who was in the Army, a Major, and we went to one of the camps and I think we ate in the mess hall that day. I thought Sam S.....was wonderful, the uniform, his beautiful wife. They lived in an "apartment" in Washington and I thought an apartment was just wonderful. I didn't want a house, I wanted one of these wonderful apartments. Well, I've changed my mind a little since then.
We moved away from Southeast. There was no boom on Capitol Hill until after World War II, and during WW II we moved out to a suburb closeby in Virginia, ... about a mile from the Chain Bridge. That subdivision had only three houses when we bought one of them. There my father was about ready to retire and he had a vegetable garden and I had a flower garden, over here, suburbanites. I was going to art school then. I'd been at the University of Illinois. Struggling to study architecture really wasn't my choice, it was my family's choice, and I gave up [auto engine obscuring phrase] trying to make it.
I loved the watercolor classes and the drawing, mostly from the casts but still that was the part I liked. And in my third year there I developed anemia. They didn't have all the vitamines [?] and so forth, they hadn't discovered the use of them, and the doctor in Champaign, Illinois suggested that I go home for the rest of the

year and not follow that study -- since I wasn't very clever at architecture I'd have to study much harder than anybody else. But I went home and that was a quiet winter and spring.
And then I decided I for good would like to study painting. For as much as my parents disliked the idea, they finally agreed, and I was going to the Corcoran. During this year I didn't want to always be idle and eating liver and all the..... but I asked around and find that there was a new school which had opened on Connecticut Avenue next to California Street and it was called Art League of Washington. Two of the teachers: one was Helen Raney [phon. sp.] who was teaching watercolor, Bob Gates was teaching woodblock and ..... So I got to know those two people pretty well.
I would make the trek over there with I guess a briefcase with my painting things in it. I met Margaret Casey, who had not yet married Bob Gates, and I remember very distinctly that she was skilled in ..... This was some of Bob's pictures. They later were married and I remember instead of a class Bob said the class will go to the Phillips Gallery and hear a lecture by Duncan Phillips.
We went and I think it was a lecture on Georgione. Anyway, it was the first time I'd seen Duncan Phillips, heard him speak. I hadn't really gone to the Gallery earlier, I was one of these people who didn't go independently around the city there.... kind of scared. So, I jumped at this chance to go with people that knew it. I loved the surroundings, so some of what Duncan Phillips was saying. I was very impressed.
Then I told Bob and Margaret that I wasn't going to the university. In the fall I would probably go to the Corcoran to study painting. Well, they didn't comment on this but later that same year, in the summer I was on a streetcar platform at Dupont Circle and I saw Bob Gates. He greeted me and asked me how I was and what I was going to do. And he said, "Why don't you come to a new school that's opening and connected with the Phillips Gallery?" He said, "I'm going to teach there, and there's a man who's going to direct it I think is very good."
So I found out about it and I was the third person enrolled in the school. It was in a house across the alley from the Gallery, an old townhouse, four stories, a .... studio house, and the painting rooms weren't terribly large but ..... offices on the first floor and there were some galleries which had run shows from time to time, not actually connected with the Gallery but the school was supposed to earn its own keep but the building was given for the school. And Lowell Watkins, who had been a friend of the Phillipses from Yale days, stopped his ... and steel business and came to Washington to be the director of the school at Duncan Phillips' invitation.
He turned out to be an inspired teacher and a perfectly delightful person -- he had a sense of humor, he taught in such a way that you would retain it, you wanted to because he made everything so interesting. Oh, I'd gone to summer school, I think I must have gone in spring, and taken some courses and straightened up my credits from Universit of Illinois, and then taken a ..... back. But I got fascinated .... practice of hanging in all its features and every time a painter would come and many did to see the Gallery and Duncan Phillips, he would have him come to the school to ..... That was the first time I met him, and .... Weston, Walt Kuhn, John Marin.
And then another thing which I liked was when the fourth floor of 1600 had been remodeled to accommodate a skylight, part of the ..... over there at the Phillips, and one .... every week we would meet, before the Gallery opened -- in those days it was 11 till six -- people at the school would congregate in the main gallery -- it wasn't a large school -- and pictures would be brought from the storeroom as Lowell Watkins talked about them. So we saw the originals there, and the Renoir was up there.
I remember one morning when Lowell was talking about the Renoir and the flesh tones, and he asked me to come up and stand in front of the man on the right to see how the flesh tones Renoir had gotten through both direct painting and painting in the glazes was very close to the real appearance. I thought that was great fun.
Then we had other pictures brought out and this was the first time that I got to know Jim Stockton. He came to the Gallery three years earlier than I did, he came in '35 when I was still studying in the school. I enrolled in 1933 when it opened and I was there studying with Lowell Watkins and later I would take the .... course, a special guest instructor's course, in March and April. But Jim and I were to be very close colleagues in the futuree.
I had a scholarship the last two years Mr. Phillips gave, and then I felt that I must do something about a job and earning money. It just happened that Bob Gates thought his painting wasn't really supporting both him and his wife -- who was secretary of the school, by the way -- so he started to train some and asked me if I'd like to come in with him. So it was in the basement of Studio House and I helped ..... for a year, so it was my first job. And then it was at the beginning of '38 that I got a phone call from the secretary of the Gallery,....., whom I knew ..... to come over, Mr. Phillips would like to see me. I took off my apron and told the people upstairs -- Margaret Gates and .... Smith to hand over Gallery things and go volunteer for ..... with Miss Perkins, Secretary of Labor under Roosevelt.
Anyway, I went over and went into Duncan Phillips' office and he said that Laughlin needed some help, the Gallery was busier, and would I like to work half a day, one to six, and told me the salary and said, "You'll still have your mornings to paint." And I jumped at it of course. I told Bob and he said, "Sure, go ahead. ... somebody else, I'll keep the frame shop going." And so it was February '38 that I ..... I could put it in a capsule: I've been there for 40 years! (laughter) I found it so ..... that I was working for a great man. Duncan and Marjorie Phillips were perfectly wonderful, they treated .... and myself and later on Hal ..... like the family.
I was absorbing from Duncan Phillips ..... not every day ..... life but always he was directing the rehanging, he had the most wonderful eye and of course the relationship of paintings. And of course he taught ..... what he would like to get for the collection. He never did find a Pissarro at the right time with funds, and he told me once that "I was born to snap up all the good ones." He had them as a matter of fact because we still have three. .....

come into the collection, the latest one being "The Dead Pheasant" which at the moment is ..... All of the painters, the ....., owned each others' works and the Gauguin still life was a painting that Gauguin gave to Monet. Of course the Pissarro that Duncan Phillips would like to have found but didn't was one near to the period when he and Gauguin worked together; for several years, I think, Gauguin and Pissarro painted the same motifs and a little bit of Gauguin crept into Pissarro.

Funds were not unlimited. The original fund for the Gallery was set up in 1918 after Duncan's father and brother both died in the 1918 flu epidemic worldwide, and the Gallery was the direct result of the desire to have a fitting memorial. In the early days the gallery was called the Phillips Memorial Gallery, and then some years later at the time of the catalogue of ....., the title became the Phillips Collection and it still is that. Duncan Phillips' reason was, he said, "I don't want the 'Memorial' in there -- every time people see it say, 'Well, who was Mr. Phillips?' I don't want to be considered dead." (hearty laughter)
Anyway, the growth of the collection was so exciting. But we always loved the times when the Phillipses would go to New York for perhaps a week and we wouldn't know what would come in in crates after one of those trips to New York. In the early days they'd gone most every other year to Europe but in later years they'd make about five trips a year to New York, stay at the old Plaza, and see friends -- Cornell, Guthrie McClintic, many friends there -- and always something new would come back. Not necessarily for -- Duncan Phillips very wisely always had a .... sense on approval for him to see the relations to the whole collection.
A painting would go right up on a wall in a group to which it might be related. Sometimes it in itself would be the prime picture ..... in the spirit of ..... of the collection or ..... There was a little ....we had for a week one time one of the mezzotints of ..... Pantaloon. It couldn't stay because, I guess, of an advance commitment at that time but I remember unpacking for myself one of the big ..... later ..... I remember unpacking the de la Fresnaye ..... while Jim was at lunch and I was very excited about it, you know. Of course it went up right away. It stayed.
There were some other pictures which we hoped would stay but they were still unpacked. So a selective eye is the first thing that I realized that Duncan Phillips said he had "a .... but impeccable taste." He was a gentleman of the old school of what he thought was never conservative, and he embraced so many interests. He was interested in statesmanship, not the politics but the state of the world. He probably would have made a very good ambassador. The Walter Lippmans were among his closest friends. He loved music as well. I wouldn't get to any of the music salons they gave but often in the earlier days they had music salons at home in the evening. Frances Perkins, whose daughter I knew when she worked at Studio House, said, "When I go to the Phillipses' music salons, it's the only time I can get to sleep for a while" -- she's working so hard. (laughter) But in 1940 the Gallery began to have regular concerts. And [proper name] who was a musician got very good advice from people who were wonderful persons who supported music in Washington. The Winslow sisters, one of them married Winslow of the painting classes at the Gallery, but in other..... She also worked for Frances Perkins of the Roosevelt years but she knew music and I learned a lot through talking to her.
The candlelight concerts were the first concerts, I think, held in the Gallery for the benefit of the National Symphony and were invitation things; sort of like the Dumbarton Oaks concerts are now, except they were approved benefits for the National Symphony.

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BEGINNING SIDE 2

JULIE HAIFLEY: If we could backtrack a bit, there was a summer, I think in 1937, that you spent at the Bruces'? Could you tell me how that came about.

JOHN GERNAND: Yes. I was still in art school and heard of the Edward Bruce as a Public Works of Art project and the Bruces were friends of Lowell Watkins. They were going to Vermont that summer which had been left to them before and they asked Lowell Watkins if there were any art students there who mignt be interested in coming with them to do some chores and who would have some time free to paint, and so forth. Lowell Watkins told them they might like me, and I was told this by Lowell, then I talked to Mrs. Bruce on the telephone and they came to my family's house in Arlington and met my parents, and met me. They said their Packard was an old open tourist car, and the man at the garage would meet me and we could drive just a little around the city to get the feel of it, and I would go and fetch the mail, and this and that, take out Eleanor the maid to the grocery store in Manchester, Vermont,.....
Anyway, it sounded like fun. It would be WPA, let's see: at $30 a month, it was not the painter part of the program but the CCC, the Citizens Conservation Corps for young men who worked on the stone walls up there and the Skyline Drive. This is all fine, and then I got a call from Olin Dows, who was a great friend of the Bruces, and he said, "The trip to Vermont is off, Ned has had a stroke. I am his friend, and thank you." I'd met Olin before, he was a painter, he'd bought one of my pictures, actually, from my first show.
Peggy asked me if I would come to the hospital to talk to her, and I was a little bit at a loss to know how I should act but she put me at ease and said, "My husband still wants to go to Vermont. It may not be very much fun but we've arranged to have a nurse come along and stay the rest of the summer. Do you want to go under those circumstances?" I just had a feeling that they were wonderful people and I said I would, I'd still like to go if they'd have me. So it turned out that Iona and I drove up in the big old Packard with some luggage; they came

on the train. Iona was a perfectly wonderful member of the household, she could do anything -- she was a good cook, she had ....., she loved the Bruces. Anyway, we got there, opened up the house, got groceries there, and then the Bruces came.
It was a wonderful summer because of them, in the first place; beautiful countryside, with a long low house set among fields outside of the little town of Therou [phon.sp.] where the mail came. There were big hotels in Manchester. I could pick up guests out of Therou or wherever they were to come and either spend the day or spend the night with the Bruces. I first, I think, heard about Ned Bruce's own painting and the hard work he had done to get the Public Works of Art program started for painters, there are so many well-known painters now who were on this project; I think it was something like $100 a month and you painted pictures -- before the murals part, which came later.

Well, there was a steady stream of wonderful people coming to visit Ned and Peggy, who dropped off on their way to Breadloaf sort of writers' or painters' places, you know, and the Maurice Sterns came, I got to know both of them better, and by then the Francis Biddles came; the Mexican painter Leon Kroll came but he was awfully nice; Forbes Watson, editor of ..... Arts magazine, came and also active in the .... program of administration. Oh, there were just dozens of people who were perfectly fascinating. William Zorach came with some small models of his statues for the Jefferson Memorial competition. There were people who were not painters -- Robert Frost came by. Let me see: several other writers whom I didn't know so well.
But the stimulus of all of these people who were in the arts, really, and who helped about the project, and I was treated as a member of the family and the chores were very simple. I did have to go out in the morning and put chunks of wood in a little old stove which heated the limitless hot-water supply and get that going each morning. I chopped a little wood, sawed a little wood. Went and got the mail. I telephoned New York from a wall phone with a crank. Oh, the Lily Sterns, collectors, I saw later in New York. At that time they owned Rousseau's "Night of Carnival" and ..... Maurice Stern's painting and Leon Kroll's. For a while she was connected with a commercial gallery. I met Antoinette Kraushaar, I think.
At the end of all this summer was a sad time, of course, but Ned had a great deal of courage and the nurse was very attentive. A little later an orderly from the hospital came and he would wheel the wheelchair around, we took turns, I did that. The studio was a distance from the building. It was an old schoolhouse which Rockwell Kent converted into a studio in an early period when he painted the deer in the snow and several pictures in museums now. And I had to go over to Londonderry or East Londonderry to the carpenter's to see about the building of a ramp up the steps for the wheelchair.
I got some insight into New England, Vermont natives. They always, I think, thought city people were a little bit ridiculous but even when twice President Roosevelt wrote to Ned Bruce and they would hand me letters with the White House seal, not a comment, never a comment, from the man who ran this little post office, and there were some grocery stores and so forth in Manchester, which was a resort. We went to see a summer exhibition, naturally, in Manchester, Vermont, but we were really pretty much country, Therou was several miles away. But the people who came visiting were also interesting, you know. I had done practically nothing, I was just a student at the art school and here I found something of what makes art work exciting.
For one thing, people meet on common ground in the arts, I think. There's very little of social ....., you know, anybody who's active in the arts and is serious is accepted almost in any sense. But I went back at the end of the summer leaving Ned and Peggy with cold weather coming to the house in Middlebury, Vermont, a lovely town, and I was there for several days and then forced to go on back to Washington in school again. The Bruces gave me a bonus which would make a trip of some days in New York possible and I had a letter to the Lewisohns to see their collection in their house on Fifth Avenue.
I didn't need a letter to the Milch Gallery, which was Ned's gallery. I didn't know where to stay so I stayed at the Hotel Grand Northern which is just a step from the Milch Gallery and I saw a lot. I went to the Sterns' apartment to see that wonderful Rousseau and other things. I did go to the Lewisohn mansion. I talked to her on the phone, they wouldn't be present but the butler would show me through. I had a great problem of etiquette after I'd been taken through, with the butler right beside me, of course. I was, you know, impecunious, and I didn't know quite what to do for a butler but I finally decided I would just see what would happen and I gave him $5, which was quite a bit of money in those days. He didn't refuse it, he thanked me for it and I was pleased that that little etiquette problem had been solved. But it was so exciting, you know, and I spent a week in New York. I felt like an "old hand" by that time. I was more conversant with the arts than I had been before the summer began. I also was fonder of the Bruces.
Ned died a few years later, in Florida, but I had been a close friend with her for many years and right now she's seriously ill and bedridden, in her 91st year. I went there Christmas Eve, and I always do flowers. One of the nurses that ..... me that she'd had a crisis, they thought she was dying then, but .... leveled out apparently and I keep in touch with the nurse. But she's so different from her -- Peggy was entertaining, she had the most interesting people to her house for dinner, and she didn't rest to any extent of ..... or tailspins, she liked young people, she liked people her own age, you'd meet the most interesting people at her apartment and she bought pictures from Washington, all the young artists. And of course I'd had this taste of the realization of greatness before, Duncan Phillips and Marjorie Phillips, and found it once more in Ned Bruce and Peggy. I found people of great depth, of great flexibility, and exciting minds. And though I painted some and did keep on for quite a while, I finally realized that the arts are.... and started painting as a full-time profession.

I was very happy at the Gallery but we got busier and I got older and so, gradually, weekend painting sort of tapered off. But my reward has been to be in the arts all my mature life and to absorb from Duncan Phillips, from Lowell Watkins and later Carl..... everything I know about painting. And I feel very, very fortunate, because I was a student and a student painter who'd been asked to help in the everyday things that have to be done in the gallery -- exhibitions, ... and the records kept. And I wouldn't trade for anything else particularly the 25 or 28 years with Duncan Phillips and Marjorie.

I was often asked to their house for dinner. I happened to be at only one other's to have dinner clothes, and anyway I also met some fascinating people. At the Phillipses' dinner party I sat next to at that time the wife of John Walker, director of the National Gallery. His wife still posed as Lady Margit and here I was at a dinner party next to Lady Margit and somebody ..... on my right and I think divided up the ..... pretty well but I'm no one to talk of that. And all of a sudden I mentioned Graham Greene and Lady Margit Walker..... , so we had a wonderful -- and so I got fond of people ..... like Francis Biddle very much. I never got to know Walter Lippman, but the people who would come there. John Marin came often and I got to know him well and I was there when Dylan Thomas came since he was reading at the Gallery and Duncan Phillips hadn't come in yet and Jim was some place and anyway I had Dylan Thomas for half an hour. He didn't react very much to paintings, I must say, but I don't think he was going through part of that deterioration and part of that being lionized which killed him, of course. But still it's exciting to try and get a little bit of the thought and feeling of a person that you read, read about.

Nadya Boulanger was one of the most wonderful people that I met there in the war years. She was in America and was teaching up and down the East Coast -- up at Smith College and in Baltimore. And then here there was at that time the Washington College of Music and Robert ..... asked Mme. Boulanger to come down for advanced courses. Well, Mme. Boulanger got to know the Gallery because we lent the lower gallery to the Washington College of Music, they were ties there with our concert program. And the inspiring way that this amazing woman would talk about Mozart. Two evenings I heard her. There wasn't a huge crowd because there was so much going on in Washington in the war years but these were actually lectures prepared for the Washington College of Music.

But one evening I heard her speak on Pelleas and Melisande. Another evening I heard her talk on Boris Goudonov. And then the Phillipses asked her officially to give a lecture for our Gallery and she chose to talk about her great friend Stravinsky and the lecture was called "Apropos Stravinsky," and part of it was so amazing because she was always at the piano, you know, and would pick out a little motif, then she would talk of harmony. She was playing, I heard from some musicians later, from handwritten scores of Stravinsky that hadn't been published yet. She was amazing. And of course her choral direction is well-known, this is what she did up at Smith.

Later, when I was taking instruction in the Anglican faith, the voice of the young curate who was giving it said, "Oh yes, I signed under Nadya Boulanger, Miss, you know." But she was an exciting person. When she left I had the pleasure of going through photograph files which I kept at that time with her and she took a hundred photographs of things at the Phillips as a souvenir and grateful. You know, the great people are simple people, direct. They're complicated in their and inspiration but simple in manner, no airs and affectations.

I found this again. About 20 years ago I met Henry Moore very briefly. Well, he came back 20 years later to see to the placement of his big gold sculpture and to receive two Orders from the Queen at the British Embassy. These were Orders which are the highest you can give after knighthood which he had rejected 20 years ago. He said he couldn't do sculpture and have a title (Haifly laughs) but he accepted these.

But the ..... great artist and friend and teacher, and when I think of the paucity of the art in my childhood, the ..... , the ....., the fellowships, the chain of students that there are now, you felt you almost had to go to New York if you were really to be in the art the rest of your life, a painter for the rest of your life. And you would have the peer competition and I think it's probably good that I didn't try to continue to be a painter, showing exhibitions and having a dealer, because perhaps not in Washington but in New York there's so much clawing behind one's back and cliques and influences in fashions.

And Duncan Phillips didn't care about fashion. And here I was seeing the collection grow, which had no relation to the scramble in New York and fashion of this dealer, that dealer; a great deal of the politics of art which I find I would be unfitted for and that would be distasteful to me. All right, I've had a protected life for the most part and I think now that I'm 55, [this figure sounds very similar to 65] I feel that although I stay pretty much in place, through really Duncan Phillips primarily, I have lived a rich interior life. I think my appreciation is much keener for Duncan Phillips and the people that he has known and always introduced to other members of the staff but his paintings..... Once when I had been in a sanitarium in Baltimore for a couple of months, ill, and I moved, and Marjorie Phillips had the chauffeur bring that little picture to me for a housewarming. And then after I had been working there about 25 years, there was just ..... and Harold Levy and myself and ..... and whatever young secretary she would have, and ..... Duncan Phillips said, "We have so many beds [?], I think it would be nice to give one to each of you on the staff." So a group was put out and we took turns in order of seniority -- Jim was first, I was second, Harold was third, and Jim's wife at that time would need also to choose one for herself. And things like that don't happen on Wall Street or in the government, this is just a whole different existence which I've been fortunate enough to be a part of. I've watched many commercial galleries spring up, I've seen Jefferson Place begin and end, I've seen the Washington Gallery on 21st Street across the Avenue begin and change to part of the Corcoran, I've known a good many of the Baltimore and Washington painters of an earlier

generation or two generations, and ..... Rosenfeld over in Baltimore, the Bader --

JULIE HAIFLEY: I wanted to ask you about that trip you took to the Virgin Islands.

JOHN GERNAND: Oh yes. This was part of the art project that sort of shifted over to the Treasury which commissioned murals for the post offices but also Forbes Watson and Olin Dows were still with the project and they thought that part of it could be painters painting certain places which were owned by the United States, really governed by, and could whip up tourist trade. Well, it seems so ridiculous now that you start to whip up tourist trade for any islands anywhere -- the Indies or the Lesser Antilles or what -- but I was still studying in the school and very close to Bob Martin Gates and to a New England couple like Hal Williams, he had come here and had an independent income and wanted to study painting, and they were wonderful people, not painters; Prentiss Taylor was a painter and a ..... whom I got to know and several others went along for the ride paying our own expenses, but our own expenses so amazingly little at that time, I think that whole summer with many of the privileges of the actual group picked by the Treasury, anyway I was included sort of in the things that the governor of the Virgin Islands did for the .....
We all stayed, at first, at the Grand Hotel right in the town on the harbor, you know, with ..... hanging over the stairs and everything a little run down and a little mossgrown. But the governor decided we should stay at the Castle, so we all moved up to the Castle. ..... there was a terrace under the mahogany trees, a wonderful view of the harbor, and then apart from the main building there were units of rooms with a common arched veranda and I got sort of all privileges and ..... And we painted a lot, all of us that summer. I worked in watercolor pretty much.... We got to see some .....out of sketching.
We had our little .... campstools. We could walk down and up the mountain but sometimes we would be very luxurious and get one of the sort of battered American cars that were taxicabs there and the governor invited us to Government House for dinner, invite us over to Caneel Bay to swim. There weren't any hotels! (laughter) And then we got some abalone shells and were told to put them in the sun until the live creature sort of shrank and dried up. We found they smelled so bad that we could wait for the process but we had a good time there. I got to know artists from other parts of the country and different kinds of artists, like Steve Dohanos, who has done designs for postage stamps for ..... and for the Saturday Evening Post; a great miniature painter, actually; and Avery Johnson, who was .... watercolor technique that Mitchell Jamieson who died so tragically a couple of years ago; he was a marvelous technician. And also he preferred to stay down in the town, he didn't stay at the Grand Hotel but rented a pension with a courtyard, and Mitch was getting everybody worried -- he'd turn out about three watercolors a day. But it was a beneficent sort of fine arts project that was just for people who ran it and people who were part of it.
So that was the first taste of exotic, one of the last in a ..... little tub, little Porto Rican boats that we thought would sink before they got there but they didn't. Then the actual people of the project, they were there until Christmas they went over to St. Croix and got their imported market and Margaret and I had to get back to school for different reasons -- she was secretary, and I guess it was going to be my last year.
We came back on a slightly larger boat. The rest of the people stayed until about Christmas. And I think Bob Gates did some of the most beautiful painting of his whole life. He was working exclusively in watercolor then and he later went to oils and then acrylics and taught technique and materials at American University for many years until he retired; I'm sorry to say he's in a nursing home now. His first wife I see, she lives out near Great Falls where I lived for a few years, and occasionally comes into town to see exhibitions and so forth, but pretty much out there near Great Falls Difficult Run.
I'm not a great figure at all in art, that's not my ambition, but I think because I found a place I'd rather work in than any place I can think of, at 55 though I have a lot of achievements I could write down, I think a good deal of the time behind the scenes has been just as satisfying or nearly as satisfying as if I was making a great contribution in my work. My thesis ..... maybe one of the best American painters, would be terrific, to really be an artist and achieve this but I think I realized early on that I wasn't an innovator and I also realized that it's a real and serious thing which you must dedicate your life to.

JULIE HAIFLEY: I wonder when that change came for you, because you had a few --

JOHN GERNAND: Yes, and I enjoyed them. I think during the war years when we got very skeleton -- ... and Laughlin was in the Pacific Theatre, it was pretty much myself who'd been rejected by the draft and Harold Levy, who's always had a limping knee and was rejected and ..... who was the new director and a really marvelous person, we made the Gallery run. It was awfully ..... and we met lots of fascinating people in the Gallery....
I think then I began to realize that if I were going to make a change right as soon as the war ended and it wasn't crucial to the exhibitions and so forth that I stick to the job, I think I decided that all right, I want to get further into the hierarchy of museums work, which means eventually being director, I would need to study.... and do an awful lot of that that's required if you're going up the ladder in museum administration. I wouldn't be a good administrator -- I think I can follow directions very well and I think I have some talents which do suit the Gallery and suit me.
I think it was right at the time when if I were going take the step away from this wonderful place where I could never, I knew, become director, it was a one-man thing from the very beginning when Duncan Phillips was the.... as the unity of the collection is such that he has an incredibly gifted insight that Duncan Phillips had into

painting and made unified, coherent, very rare collection with such beautiful taste, with so many great paintings around me, I think I realized that this would be really beyond my capacities to make the kind of contribution that some of the younger painters have made, were making, had made; that I'd better stick to the thing I enjoyed, which I knew was absolutely the Gallery, than to live the life of dedication, of ups and downs, a lot of nitty-gritty, I think. I chose to stay, I downplay it, I did and -- well, there it is. (laughter) Is there anything --

JULIE HAIFLEY: There are lots of other questions I want to ask you about the way the Gallery operated.

END OF THIS SIDE, 2 of TAPE 1
BEGINNING SIDE 1, TAPE 2

JULIE HAIFLEY: (on 2nd session in G.'s apt.) The last time I was here we talked some about your early childhood in Washington, your years at the Phillips Collection and your aspirations as a painter when you were young. I wondered if today you could talk some more about your friendships with various people, certain other art activities that were going on in Washington, and your recollections of this period of time in the city. Could we start with ..... because I know that you met him, in 1937?

JOHN GERNAND: 1938. Carl was a wonderful friend as well as a very fine painter. He was invited to come as guest instructor at the school, which was then in operation for five or six years. He arrived in March 1938. I'd always admired his paintings and it turned out that he was one of the friends who became very important in my life. I have said to colleagues at the Gallery, "everything I know, I learned from Duncan Phillips, Carl ..... and Lowell Watkins who directed the school until his death in '45.
Carl was a rugged person, no pomp or ceremony. He was the first person I heard who called Duncan Phillips "Dunc." (laughter) I never could ..... but he virtually lived all his adult life in Provincetown. He went there in 1919 and was there ever since until his death a few years ago at age 80. Carl came every year and he would talk to Jim and to .... and me and to ...., the secretary of the Gallery, and he always offered directions, simple, and he was so full of enthusiasm for the things he had seen in New York where he'd go about a month before he came to us -- his dealer was Paul Rosenberg in the latter years.
And he would tell about the shows he'd seen. He haunted the Museum of Natural History in New York. He knew Max Weber and Marston Hartley, two Americans, along with Carl, that Paul Rosenberg handled in the later years; Rosenberg still handles ..... Earlier there had been a very wonderful man, J. P. Neumann [phon.sp., German], ... but he wasn't a terribly good businessman and then Curt Valentin [phon.sp.] of the Buchholz Gallery offered to take on Carl and that went on for a couple of years. Curt Valentin was one of the truly discriminating dealers, he was a connoisseur, and you could see Henry Moore and ..... and Klee at his gallery when they weren't found any place else.
Carl finally got an offer from Paul Rosenberg that he could not refuse, that is, an annuity: all he had to do was paint the pictures and Paul Rosenberg did the rest. I think Paul knew exactly how much work he could do and he didn't interfere. Rosenberg wanted 20 of 30 paintings a year, and at the very beginning Carl said, "I can't do more than 15, you'll have to be satisfied with that." And he did.
Then -- this is the beginning of a series of summers, not consecutive, when Carl and Helen invited me to Provincetown to stay practically rent-free in a little driftwood cottage on his property. I didn't learn the ..... that finally obtained. I went there first in 1940 and then in '41 I wasn't there and Carl came to teach and he said, "Oh, you know last summer the cabin had a real nice fellow rent it, a writer by the name Tennessee Williams." "The Glass Menagerie" had opened in New York but to Carl this was just another artist with a typewriter. And then once when I was up on the Cape, I said, "Oh, I'd like to drive over to Dennis and see Katherine Cornell in something-- " And Carl said, "Who's she??" (laughter)
But finally those New York sojourns, seeing all ..... and then seeing artists in residence at Bennington..... coming to the Gallery in March. His terminology became much better after Bennington. It was the first time he had had daily contact with historians, with poets, with Martha Graham, and the ideas that he had, many of them, were expressed much more freely during and after the Bennington artists-in-residence.
Carl had a personal integrity. As I say, he was direct, he could never use euphemisms, and I felt very lucky to have so much contact with him at the Gallery and I must confess these seven summers in Provincetown I got to love it. I met some interesting people through Carl, notably Hans Hofmann, who .... some of the criticisms of ..... Carl's sister Agnes Weinrich was extremely nice to me. She lived with Helen ..... who was married to Carl and she had been to Paris and had studied diplomacy .... the Cubist ..... but she did ..... wemt abroad. But Agnes finally passed on some of the Cubist traditions she had learned. Helen her sister had studied music in ..... I think it was, in Germany anyway. They were two sisters in a prominent well-to-do Iowa family. Helen always wanted to study ..... but nice young girls didn't study ..... in those days, so she settled for music and she had had a..... invalid.
In the earlier days Carl would go along to the beach with me and there were a couple of younger painters that we got to know, and people came to see him. I remember meeting ..... I never read any of her work. But there was a young painter named Lee Bell whom I'd known in Washington and he'd gotten to know [person just named two lines above] So when the diaries came out I harked back to this cabin on the wharf -- [same woman] had three or four of us to spaghetti dinner, nets dragging from the ceiling, so she was obviously ..... She made celery rings and ..... and elaborately ..... She was quite annoyed that New Directions magazine wouldn't publish

her work. ..... who was the editor was a cousin of some kind of Duncan Phillips but it was nothing I could do anything about, but she was writing all the time.
Then I had [same woman] and Lee Bell and Robert De Niro -- the painter, not the actor -- and his girl friend, and I simply had hamburgers, potato salad, old fashioneds, coffee and ice cream and cake. Anyway..... There were interesting people in Provincetown. ..... just before the ..... began and he held onto a large cottage so that each had its own privacy. Across the road one of the real estate people had built guest cottages, elaborate guest cottages where old Helena Rubenstein would.....
The painters would have, well, there was a Provinceton organization and then there were shows in the courthouse as I remember. There was a vacant room where they often had symposiums. I really wasn't a part of that scene -- I was painting but I didn't have certainly a New York dealer and never did but I did show when I got back to Washington again.
There weren't a lot of places to show. The Corcoran had its biennial..... and everybody got into evening clothes and went. They were rather conservative, for the most part. Sales galleries were almost non-existent. There was a Mrs. ..... had a little bookstore and gallery on O Street in a Georgetown in a little church. ..... But it wasn't until the White brothers came from London and started their gallery and bookshop here with the assistance of the Sorbonne and they had to leave Vienna, and it was there he had to guarantee his work, ... James White, and .... very active and more or less was able to take over the gallery management and sold Washington painters. That really was the liveliest place. I think after that it was many years until the ..... Pace Gallery started and that I think was the most interesting and exciting new sales gallery because Nesta ..... encouraged younger painters. She had a high level of exhibitions and she held on although she was losing money until she finally had to close. But then the galleries sprang up like mushrooms on P Street. I think on .... some of the galleries which are there now, oh, the Max Protech and the others ..... idea things.....
I don't understand the conceptual art. I can appreciate some things like laser [?] ...as valid forms. I don't think there's any such thing as "avant garde" any more. I think even in 1915, Marcel Duchamp said there was no shock value left..... They ..... catalyst, I think, is when he came to New York, this group of artists around him, that they did learn .....in some ideas. In some ways it is like ..... The Plaza Hotel practically boasts that it ..... [a couple of sentences "lost"]..... But he had a self-effacing quality and humor.
I think later people tried to shock -- I'm thinking of some of the younger Chicago painters -- but they seem so infantile when you consider really witty exceptionally ..... showing of the realist painting to be good modern art. "The Fur-lined Teacup" -- I think that's really witty, and furlined food, I can't remember the name of ..... but I don't think any thriving pornography is worth-while. Carl would often ..... criticisms at the end of the session. I remember often he'd say, as we were all holding our breath, "Now, look at this, this is just novelty, this was done just to be novel. Novelty is not good." That was it.

JULIE HAIFLEY: What were his classes like?

JOHN GERNAND: Well, he'd learned the rules; Hans Hofmann ....setting up a still life, which would be very hard to paint realistically. Hans Hofmann would always have some crumpled cellophane in his still life, which ..... Carl didn't do that but he'd have a still life set up that he thought interesting. He could reserve his ...., he wanted to use physical elements as much as he wanted to. But he was talking about sculpture [?] and then he was talking about progressions. After criticism at Hans Hofmann's school I asked Carl what he thought of it, the criticism. He said, "Oh, he's good but I've missed in him the idea of progressing the shapes and progressing the colors." Hofmann was always ..... and the opposing of forces but the idea which you see in Braque of a circle turning into an oval and the oval turning into a rectilinear plane or the transparent planes that Braque sometimes used, and then a color progression that's very easy to see in Braque, and indeed in Renoir, because they're two very -- I've talked about them enough -- two color movements that start from the linear movement in Renoir which are easy to pick out. But .....treated in a ..... farther over on the right, and then coming through the figures of the young poets with ..... and then you see a little red ..... on a dress and then you go to the right-hand, left-hand side and see the poppies on the ..... of Renoir's ..... white. And then there's a yellow progression in the hat, and there's one ..... together.
Carl insisted on this progression. He used to draw on graph paper with charcoal and chalk and he would draw in crayon and then he'd put black circles in the middle and said, "This is your basic picture. "Now if you move that circle to another place, you set up an imbalance." And he'd .... illustrate it.... In .....pictures you set up non-equilibrium and then you're always balancing it until it comes into equilibrium, at least in classical pictures.
In the romantic painters such as Delacroix, Jackson Pollock, the patterns [?] just go on and on and on, like tree branches growing outward, but the classical structures self-contained within this rectangle or oval or whatever of the canvas, you have a theme and a development and a conclusion, really like classical..... Anyway, [noisy automobile again, several sentences obscured] .....the only..... picture in the collection, just because ... a still life, they're hung up .....
Then you have Van Gogh, Soutine, ... romantic.... heightened emotion before the Matisses. And they're equally valid and of course I remember when Duncan Phillips had a problem: there was a beautiful little cabinet ... on the market.... and there was a ..... and .... commit both. Well, we had some ..... on the romantic side of the picture and we didn't have any from the ..... and their ..... So he decided ..... [heavy auto noise continuing].....

.....

Duncan Phillips always was looking for pictures that would be pretty much on the scale of the house, the house he grew up in, at least from the time he was six or seven, his father and mother came to Washington and built a town house. The intimate setting both he and Marjorie Phillips tried to carry out in their rooms, and ..... draperies, the idea of formalism ..... furnishing ..... enjoyment of pictures to them. They only wanted to show their home, they did it, ... from 1921 to early 1930s. They had built the house on Foxhall Road I think just before the cottage and moved back there in the early 1930s and then ..... over the whole house over to galleries and offices.
I think the idea of sharing the enjoyment of both of them having pictures were part and parcel of their idea of a memorial to his father and brother. And Marjorie Phillips being a painter could..... perfect companion in this lifetime venture.

JULIE HAIFLEY: She was very involved, too.

JOHN GERNAND: She was, yes, she was always. ...her insight as a painter, she always let him make the final decisions. Then she became director, the first, at his wish, after his death, for several years. She did some selecting ..... were not essential. Also, she didn't ..... on the completely rounded quality of Duncan Phillips' collecting. There were some gaps in which she was captive. She never found the right time or when there was enough..... never found the desire at the right time.
She had never really seen much of Mark Tobey, so until Tobey had a show in Paris, and..... anyway, we looked for a Tobey and found a very handsome one. We had a small show of Tobey and .... said at the time this was one of the gaps in the collection and fortunately ..... had a very handsome Tobey that was not privately owned. There was some painters he wouldn't have added it to the collection in any case, though people would ask, "Do you have a Pascin [?]?" Or do you have a ....?" And of course we never had, we never had those. Pascin [?] had a .....with the gallery to show them to.
Really, it is not ..... for art. I think the idea of fashion, of ....., these are all very foreign to the Phillipses.

JULIE HAIFLEY: Did one of them disagree on --

JOHN GERNAND: Once in a while, during the hanging I've heard them ..... Well, one example is, we had a very exciting show ..... and Toulouse-Lautrec prints and posters. And there's one very well-known of "The Troupe of Mlle. Eglantine" ..... Well, Marjorie wanted it over the little fireplace in the second room. I don't think Duncan Phillips liked it that much, and he ..... school.....I don't think he was particularly fond of the can-can [Julie laughs] over the fireplace, but he said, "All right." .....But there was never any basic disagreement. [auto noise a constant] I remember when the Braque was new, and in looking ..... oh, this is at the same time the Matisse ..... and one day the two were hanging in adjoining rooms and the Braque was quite new. Marjorie Phillips picked up the ..... she said, "Oh, the Matisse is heavy, like a cocktail, and the Braque is like ....." I like that! [Julie murmurs agreement] Well, I always enjoyed being with the Phillipses and hearing their reactions to not only pictures but to people and to events.
I remember the late morning ....., the days at the French Embassy and the ....., Chevalier and the Legion of Honor, and it was .....And they both stayed at the French Embassy to receive this . And he was pleased. But you know accepting it I'm sure he enjoyed having but it wasn't all that important that he should receive it.

END OF INTERVIEW

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